

Two new polls have Labor maintaining a commanding lead as the parliament goes into a fortnight that will see a flurry of new government legislation, including to outlaw the expulsion of gay students.

[Newspoll](#) shows another small improvement for the Coalition, which trails the ALP on the two-party vote 47-53%. This compares with 46-54% in the previous poll, and 44-56% immediately after the dumping of Malcolm Turnbull.

The [Fairfax Ipsos](#) poll has the ALP leading 55-45% in two-party terms, an improvement for Labor compared with 53-47% in mid-September.

Scott Morrison leads Bill Shorten as better prime minister 45-34% in Newspoll – a 2 point rise for Shorten. In the Ipsos poll, Morrison is also well ahead as preferred PM - 48-35%.

The latest national polls come just days out from Saturday's Wentworth byelection, which will determine whether the Coalition is forced into minority government.

Morrison [warned](#) at the weekend that the loss of Wentworth, which is speculated to be a tight contest between the Liberals' Dave Sharma and independent Kerryn Phelps, would create instability.

"If you don't vote for the Liberal candidate, then you risk a hung Parliament. You risk creating unnecessary uncertainty in our economy and the stability of our government more broadly".

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While he is trying to frighten Liberal voters back into the fold, Morrison runs a risk by talking up the stakes in Wentworth. If the seat were lost he would have to quickly change tack to play down the consequences.

Shorten accused Morrison of “being mischievous”, saying there was no way a Liberal loss would threaten the government, and this was an opportunity for voters to send a message.

Both Liberal and Labor parties are running TV advertisements directed at Wentworth voters, with the Liberals warning of a hung parliament.

Phelps countered by saying she wanted to be a stabilising influence. “I want to be the sensible centre and I want to be a moderating force,” she said.

With the byelection top of mind, the government is moving quickly to deal with the furore about discrimination against gay students, after the leak last week of part of the Ruddock religious freedom inquiry’s report.

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**Read more:** [\*\*View from The Hill: Discrimination debate will distress many gay school students\*\*](#)

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Morrison announced legislation would be brought in to prevent religious schools being able to expel gay students on the grounds of their sexuality.

“Our Government does not support expulsion of students from religious non-state schools on the basis of their sexuality. I also know that this view is widely shared by religious schools and communities across the country,” he said in a statement on Saturday. “Amending the legislation will give all students and parents the certainty they require.”

The inquiry recommended the continuation of the existing provision permitting discrimination in selecting students and teachers, although saying it should be codified.

But the leak prompted an immediate backlash against the present, little known, provision, forcing Morrison to say he would act in relation to students.

Although he denied his action has anything to do with the byelection, Wentworth has a large gay community and Phelps has a high profile in that community.

The Ipsos poll found that nationally, 74% oppose laws to allow religious schools to select students and teachers on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship. Support for such laws was 21%.

The government's legislation will only cover students – but the political argument is now moving to the issue of discrimination against teachers, and other staff.

Shorten said "I think it's probably time to have a conversation about what other exemptions to discrimination we provide against teachers in our schools system." He criticised the government's continued failure to release the Ruddock report.

Both Morrison and Shorten are trying to head off being wedged on issues. Morrison initially said the Ruddock review provision on gay students was simply a tightening of current law, giving no indication of wanting to scrap the discrimination. He then moved his position as the issue continued to escalate.

For its part, Labor quickly decided to embrace the government's announcement last week that it would fast track tax cuts for small and medium business with turnovers up to \$50 million. Their tax rate will be reduced to 25 per cent by 2021-22 in legislation to be introduced in this sitting.

The government will also bring in its legislation for the new carve up between the states of GST

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revenue. There is a row around this because the states want a guarantee in the legislation that they will be no worse off. The federal government says they will all be better off but does not want to formalise a guarantee.

Announcements are pouring out in what is already a faux election campaign, with the government at the weekend unveiling nearly \$52 million to Headspace for youth mental health.

In Newspoll, the Coalition primary vote rose a point to 37%; Labor fell a point to 38%. The Greens increased a point to 11%; One Nation was steady on 6%.

On net approval Morrison is plus 7, while Shorten is minus 16.

In the Ipsos poll, Morrison has a net approval of plus 17; Shorten's net approval is minus 8. Both Coalition and Labor are on 35% primary vote. The Greens were stable on 15%; One Nation was down 2 points to 5%.

The poll found nearly two thirds (64%) were dissatisfied with the government's handling of immigration.

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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**Read more** <http://theconversation.com/coalition-trails-47-53-in-newspoll-as-ipsos-finds-74-oppose-law-discriminating-against-gay-students-and-teachers-104906>