

## **Liberals adopt new rule to stop the revolving prime ministership**

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Scott Morrison has announced a major change in Liberal party rules to ensure a prime minister who wins an election serves the full term, unless two thirds of the party decides otherwise.

Morrison said the Liberal party had heard the public and was responding.

The entire party understood “the frustration and the disappointment that Australians have felt when governments and prime ministers that they have elected, under their authority, under their power, have been taken from them through the actions of politicians here in Canberra,” he said at a joint news conference with Liberal deputy Josh Frydenberg on Monday night.

This had happened with the Liberal party as well as Labor, Morrison said. “We acknowledge it and we take responsibility for it.”

The Australian people were “sick of it and we’re sick of it and it has to stop,” he said.

The Liberal party was “willingly and enthusiastically putting this constraint to return the power of these decisions about who is prime minister in this country to the Australian people.”

Morrison described the rule change as historic and the biggest in the 74 years of the party’s history.

Frydenberg said: “The changes in Australian prime ministers over the last decade has diminished the parliament and its representatives in the eyes of the public. The Liberal party has listened to the Australian people and the Liberal parliamentary party has responded tonight.”

Earlier, Liberal members of the ministry approved the new rule, before it went to an evening special meeting of the Liberal parliamentarians.

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Morrison discussed the proposed change with former prime minister John Howard, but not with Malcolm Turnbull.

He briefed Tony Abbott who was the first speaker from the floor. Strongly supporting the proposal, Abbott – who lost the prime ministership before he had served a full term - thanked Morrison for bringing him into his confidence.

Morrison said the change was carried by consensus. He declined to be drawn on differences expressed within the meeting.

He said he had asked the party whips, Nola Marino and David Bushby, to work up a proposal. He'd had a view for some time that something needed to be done.

The party meeting discussed whether the threshold should be two thirds or three quarters. There was some questioning about the position of a PM who had the weight of the party against them but was just under the threshold for change.

But speakers who had differences on the detail made it clear they would swing in behind what was finally decided.

The Labor party already has rules that restrain leadership changes including of an opposition leader, although they could be altered by a simple majority of caucus.

In August after the ousting of Turnbull, Kevin Rudd urged the Liberals to follow Labor's example "to prevent rolling political chaos."

Howard [said](#) then "I don't think changing the rules is a good idea", adding "What's the point of bringing in rules if, in any event, they can be set aside?"

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Morrison said the Liberal rule on prime ministers was tougher because it would take a two thirds majority to alter it. But it does not cover opposition leaders.

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

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