

Bounce in polls for new Australia PM
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The deposing of Australian leader Kevin Rudd by his female deputy appears to be paying off, with the first polls suggesting new Prime Minister Julia Gillard would win an election with a commanding lead.

Gillard became Australia's first female PM on Thursday after disposing of Rudd in a bloodless party-room coup prompted by his massive slump in opinion polls ahead of elections expected this year.

A Nielsen poll published on Saturday showed a 14-point jump in the ruling Labor Party's primary vote to 47 percent under Gillard, compared with 42 percent for the conservative opposition.

With preference votes from the left-wing Greens party, Labor would storm to power with 55 percent of votes to the opposition's 45 percent, Nielsen said.

Gillard's rating as preferred prime minister was a commanding 55 percent to rival Tony Abbott's 34 percent, a six-percentage-point jump on Rudd's final polling. Voters preferred Gillard by 44 percent to Rudd's 36 percent.

Labor's primary and two-party preferred vote both polled higher than before the 2007 election which Rudd won by a landslide, and Labor stood to gain 11 more seats if the polls translated into votes on election day, the Sydney Morning Herald said.

A second poll, conducted by Galaxy and published by the Daily Telegraph, also showed a boost in Labor's fortunes under Gillard, with 58 percent preferring her as prime minister to Abbott's 32 percent.

Labor's primary vote grew four percentage points to 41 percent versus the opposition's 42 percent, but on Greens preferences the ruling party held 52 percent of the vote to the conservatives' 48 percent.

More people thought the change of leadership was a bad decision (48 percent) than a good one (45 percent), and a majority (59 percent) thought Gillard should delay the election rather than calling it as soon as possible.

The Daily Telegraph tipped an election for either October 23 or 30, with the earliest likely dates August 21 or 28. The latest it can be held is April 16, 2011.

Polling by McCrindle Research published in The Australian newspaper also showed Labor leading the opposition, 54 percent to 46 percent on Greens preferences, and Gillard as preferred leader 65 percent to Abbott's 35 percent.

Gillard said she would call an election this year, acknowledging Thursday that she had not been elected by the Australian people and wished to seek their endorsement "in the coming months."

Abbott was quick to dismiss the bump in Labor's popularity and insist he was on track to return the conservatives to power.

"Right now the new prime minister is enjoying a predictable bounce in the polls, that was to be expected," he said.

"We can (win) again because the Australian people are wondering why the Prime Minister of this country should be chosen by the unions and the factional warlords rather than by the people themselves."

Meeting with military chief

Gillard on Saturday sought a briefing from the chief of Australia's military, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, a day after assuring US President Barack Obama that she stood by Australia's troop commitment in Afghanistan.

Speculation mounted in the national media that Gillard would offer major mining firms a compromise on key elements of the so-called "super tax" on their profits which led to a row that some regard as key to Rudd's undoing.

After taking power Gillard moved swiftly to end the stalemate between the government and key mining industry, withdrawing official advertisements to promote the tax and urging the resources lobby to call off their own campaign.

BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and the powerful Minerals Council of Australia have all complied with the request and cautiously welcomed Gillard's appointment and her promise of "throwing open the government's door to the mining industry".

On Friday Deputy Prime Minister Wayne Swan refused to declare any aspect of the tax off-limits for negotiation, a marked shift from the rhetoric of the Rudd government.

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