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Malcolm Turnbull closer to the 'sensible centre' than Tony Abbott: JWS Research



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. AAP

The political leanings of the average Australian voter are much closer to those of Malcolm Turnbull than Tony Abbott, countering claims by some that the [Prime](#)

[Minister should lurch further to the right to save the government](#), according to exclusive new research.



by [Phillip Coorey](#)

The survey, conducted by JWS Research, also calculates that the sensible centre of Australian politics, so keenly fought over by those seeking to appropriate it to fit their own ideology, sits just right of centre, between the Turnbull government and Bill

Shorten's Labor opposition.

JWS Research surveyed the views of 1251 voters between July 6 and July 12. It coincided with a [controversial July 11 speech in London by Mr Turnbull](#) in which he said Liberal Party founder Robert Menzies never intended the party to be conservative and that its focus should be the "sensible centre".

"The sensible centre, to use Tony Abbott's phrase, was the place to be and it remains the place to be now," he said. The [speech sparked more unrest in the Liberal Party](#) as Mr Turnbull was under pressure from Mr Abbott and his media backers to be more conservative.

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How Australians rate themselves and politicians on political views and social issues (mean, 0-10)

Q. Where do you rate yourself and political parties on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'left' and 10 means 'right'

	L-R*	P-C
Self	6.3	6.0
LNP	6.7	7.0
Labor	5.5	5.7
Greens	4.8	5.3
One Nation	6.8	6.9
Xenophon Team	5.8	5.9
Malcolm Turnbull	6.4	6.8
Tony Abbott	6.8	7.5
Bill Shorten	5.3	5.7

* L-R: Left 0, Right 10 P-C: Progressive 0, Conservative 10

SOURCE: JWS RESEARCH

The JWS Research survey asked voters to grade themselves, the main political parties and the party leaders on a scale of zero to 10 on whether they were left leaning or right leaning, and whether they were progressive or conservative. Zero was left-leaning or progressive, and 10 was right-leaning or conservative.

Mr Abbott is seen as more right-leaning and more socially conservative than any other party leader tested, and his conservative rating on social attitudes is the furthest from how Australian voters see themselves.

The research found that voters gave themselves an average of 6.3 in terms of where they leant politically, meaning the sensible centre for the average voter was just right of centre. Mr Turnbull received a score of 6.4, meaning he was virtually the same as

the sensible centre whereas Mr Abbott was further away at 6.8. Mr Shorten was regarded as just right of centre with 5.3.

When it came to progressive versus conservative, the sensible centre was again just to the right with a score of 6.0. Mr Shorten was closest to this at 5.7, followed by Mr Turnbull at 6.8 whereas Mr Abbott was further off at 7.5.

Of the political parties Labor is rated at 5.5 and the Turnbull government at 6.7, either side of the average voter's political leaning of 6.3. The Greens are the only party deemed left leaning with a score of 4.8 while One Nation is close to the government at 6.8.

The findings are the first attempt to quantify both where the sensible centre sits as decided by voters and who is closest to it. They will be of some comfort to Mr Turnbull and his ministers who find themselves in an almost daily battle with Mr Abbott, a handful of MPs and an army of media clagues which claim the government is too left wing.

"When the Liberal base tries to pull Turnbull to the right, every time he goes conservative, he loses the more progressive voter. This is the crux of his problem," said JWS managing director John Scales.

Meanwhile, Mr Turnbull again fended off Mr Abbott after the former prime minister criticised this week's decision to [establish a new Home Affairs Department to oversee national security](#). Last month, Mr Abbott criticised Mr Turnbull for not making the change.

On Wednesday he [criticised him for making the change](#) and challenged the Prime Minister to produce the advise which warranted the move.

Mr Turnbull said the change was "absolutely consistent" with his department's advice and was not opposed by the key affected agencies, including the Australian Federal Police and ASIO.

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