

The Liberal brand is damaged, but Berejiklian has to wear some blame

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On the night the Liberals suffered a spectacular loss in a byelection in Wagga Wagga, Gladys Berejiklian personally briefed journalists that her federal colleagues were to blame.

Just a fortnight earlier, the former prime minister [Malcolm Turnbull had been politically assassinated](#) by his own people, sparking an internal civil war still being fought in the party.

There was widespread anger at the Liberal Party and there is little doubt the federal leadership spill played a significant role in [the NSW Liberals losing Wagga after 60 years](#).



Premier Gladys Berejiklian. CREDIT: JAMES ALCOCK

But the brawling federal Liberals could not take all the blame. The byelection only came about because the sitting Liberal MP had to resign after being embroiled in a corruption inquiry.

And then there was blatant pork-barrelling, which saw the government hand over millions of dollars day after day to buy the votes of their once loyal Liberal supporters. The voters saw through it.

Less than a month later, the Coalition was neck and neck with Labor in a *Herald* poll.

Since then, the fortunes of the state government have worsened. Labor is in front in the *Herald's* latest poll.

Brand Liberal is severely damaged. Berejiklian knows this.

After her Victorian counterpart's [big state election loss last weekend](#), Berejiklian gave a clear indication that she would want to keep damaged goods away from her campaign.

"We stand on our own two feet in NSW," she said. Wise move.



Prime Minister Scott Morrison CREDIT: MARK METCALFE

Berejiklian will have to fight an election campaign while her increasingly unpopular federal colleagues are still hanging around in Canberra.

Even her final week of the campaign is likely to be overshadowed by the federal Liberals, who will be in budget spruiking mode before their final pre-election budget scheduled for April 2.

Senior NSW state Liberals are quick to point out the brand damage is centred around their federal colleagues but clearly they fear the damage will filter down.

"You will see us campaigning on Brand Gladys," one senior Liberal told the *Herald* this week.

"Of course you will see the Liberal brand on our posters, but we will make the most of our strong candidates because that's what will make our brand strong."

But the question is, how strong is the Berejiklian brand and would it win them a third-term on the backdrop of a party seriously on the nose across the country?

State election: who would win if it were held today - two-party preferred result

	Total
Liberals	49%
Labor	51%

Source: ReachTEL; Survey carried out on November 29, 2018

In a surprise outcome in today's *Herald* poll, the virtually unknown new Labor Leader is well ahead as preferred premier. This cannot be because [Michael Daley](#) has made a spectacular impression in three weeks.

It is more likely that the Liberal brand in NSW, and also the Berejiklian brand, is also on the nose. The federal Liberals are not helping, but all the blame cannot be levelled at them.

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