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Level 2, 410 Collins St. Melbourne ph: 03 9600 4744 ipa@ipa.org.au www.ipa.org.au

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NEWSPOLL FINDINGS SHOW SUPPORT FOR ELECTORAL REFORM

A Newspoll survey commissioned by the Institute of Public Affairs has found that Australians have an appetite for substantial electoral reform.

"The so-called 'new paradigm' is an opportunity for our national leaders to embrace substantive electoral reform," according to Tony Barry, Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs.

Conducted by Newspoll over the period of 8-10 October 2010, this survey found that 57% of Australian voters support a 'first past the post' voting system whereas just 37% support the current preferential system.

This research also reveals that fully 69% of Australian voters prefer the compulsory voting system compared to 29% in favour of a voluntary voting system.

Australians were evenly split (48% apiece) on the question of fixed three year terms versus the current system where the Prime Minister effectively nominates the election date.

"The 'first past the post' system would have delivered a very different result at the 2010 Federal Election. Under 'first past the post', 11 seats would have changed hands giving the Coalition a total of 81 seats in its own right.

Electorate	Two Party Preferred winner	First Past the Post winner
Banks NSW	Daryl Melham (ALP)	Ron Delezio (LIB)
Corangamite VIC	Darren Cheeseman (ALP)	Sarah Henderson (LIB)
Deakin VIC	Mike Symon (ALP)	Phil Barresi (LIB)
Denison TAS	Andrew Wilkie (IND)	Jonathan Jackson (ALP)
La Trobe VIC	Laura Smyth (ALP)	Jason Wood (LIB)
Lilley QLD	Wayne Swan (ALP)	Rod McGarvie (LNP)
Melbourne VIC	Adam Bandt (Green)	Cath Bowtell (ALP)
Moreton QLD	Graham Perrett (ALP)	Malcolm Cole (LNP)
O'Connor WA	Tony Crook (NAT)	Wilson Tuckey (LIB)
Reid NSW	John Murphy (ALP)	Peter Cooper (LIB)
Robertson NSW	Deborah O'Neill (ALP)	Darren Jameson (LIB)

“Fixed terms are often put forward as an off the shelf panacea for better government. But the experience of fixed term jurisdictions like New South Wales and Victoria shows that fixed terms have done nothing to improve the quality of government.

“Whilst voluntary voting currently doesn’t appear to have much public support, these findings suggest the public has an appetite for reforming our voting system. Voluntary voting needs to be a part of that debate.

“This isn’t a new idea. Of the 33 OECD countries, 27 have adopted a voluntary voting model.

“A benefit of a voluntary voting system is that it encourages major political parties to earn votes by offering bold policies and reforms.

“A problem with compulsory and preferential voting is that it lends itself to political parties adopting a small target strategy in an attempt to be the ‘least worst’ on offer.

“When voters are dissatisfied with what’s on offer from the major parties, voluntary voting gives them a powerful form of political self expression – withholding their vote. Nothing could send a clearer message to political parties that they need to lift their game,” said Tony Barry.

Media contact

Tony Barry

Research Fellow

0419 600 879