



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
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Draft submission to the
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

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This submission deals with the following matters: optional voting, optional preferential voting, "above the line" voting in Senate elections; primaries and branch stacking; proportional representation in Senate elections and in the House of Representatives; the Prime Minister's power to call an election short of term; "deliberative polling".

The point of the suggestions made below is not to design a perfectly representative voting system—there is no such thing, given the multiplicity of functions elections perform—but to encourage a deeper public discussion of the issues facing Australia, and at the same time reduce the bitterness of partisan and factional conflict.

CHANGES TO BALLOT PAPERS AND COUNTING

(1) The ballot paper should give the option of not voting.

At the top of each ballot paper there should be a box beside the statement "I do not wish to vote for any candidate". (In election statistics these ballots should be distinguished from informal votes.)

This change would give more respect to the voters' right not to make choices they do not wish to make and may not believe they are in a position to make. Going to the polling place should still be obligatory (for reasons see below), but voters who do not really have a preference should not be pushed into voting.

(2) The ballot paper should invite a comment.

On the ballot paper should be a box (large enough for a comment) with the caption: "You may write into this box any comment you wish to make. Comments may be read by candidates or their scrutineers and researchers."

Voters' opinions should be invited, as well as their votes, and citizens who choose not to vote should be given an opportunity to make their comment. Voters may wish to "send a message" not simply by voting but explicitly; in fact, if they can send a message in this way they may vote more with an eye on who should govern.

(3) "Optional preferential voting"¹ should be adopted for both House of Representatives and Senate elections.

¹ That is, the rule that a ballot is formal even if only the top preference or preferences is/are indicated. There might be a requirement that the voter must express preferences equal in number to the number to be elected, to prevent "plumping"; but this is not essential. Elections for the legislative assemblies of NSW, Queensland and the ACT have optional preferential voting. The ACT electoral system combines optional preferential voting with proportional representation.

In federal elections at present we have “compulsory preferential voting” (i.e. the ballot is informal unless all the boxes are numbered – see below on “above the line” voting). Many voters resent the compulsion to order all the candidates, believing very reasonably that only the top preferences have any real meaning.

In some cases voters would rather vote informal than give their second or third preference to certain parties.² Voters should not be put in such a situation. It should be possible to cast a vote that will be counted for one’s preferred candidate without being compelled to give an alternative vote to someone else.

(4) “Above the line” voting in the Senate should be abolished.

“Above the line” voting allows the political parties to fill in all the preferences for voters who vote “above the line”. This leads to “preference deals” that distort the expression of voter opinion.³ Although it is in theory possible for voters to find out what the party’s preference order is, and it is usually reported in the media, in fact most voters do not know how their party will transfer their vote.

Voters for major parties often do not realize that their party’s “surplus” votes may go to a minor party.

Preference deals have led (for example in the 1999 election of the NSW Legislative Council) to the election of candidates with very little genuine public support.

With optional preferential voting, the reason often given for “above the line” voting, namely that numbering so many squares correctly is too difficult for many voters, would no longer apply, and therefore “above the line” voting should be abolished.

(5) If, however, compulsory preferential voting and “above the line” voting are both retained, then the voter should be asked to number all the “above the line” boxes in order of preference.⁴

(6) If optional preferential voting is introduced but “above the line” voting is retained, then a vote above the line should be a vote only for that party’s candidates, without any further flow on of preferences.

The point of proposals 5 and 6 is to take away from the political parties the power to fill in preferences for voters, and therefore the power to make preference deals. If a party wants its supporters to give a preference to another party, or if it wants to receive the second preferences of supporters of another party, it should have to persuade them by a public campaign. (There might of course still be “deals” between parties agreeing to advocate such exchanges, but whether there was a preference flow would be up to individual electors.)

² Public opinion polls in this country are usually interpreted favourably to the Labor Party if it is ahead, or close, in the “two-party preferred” vote, on the assumption that Democrat and especially Green preferences will almost all go to the ALP. But in fact in recent elections many voters have voted informal rather than give their preferences to the ALP. In the 2001 election “Labor lost because it could not even win the votes of people who were refusing to vote for the Coalition... a massive number of (previously) Labor voters chose to spoil their ballots, rather than cast a valid vote”; Nicholas Stuart, *Canberra Times* 27 Nov 2001

³ See <http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au/abovetheline.pdf>, and <http://www.prsa.org.au/viclc/submission/sub/node16.html>

⁴ See Anthony Green’s comments, <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1227221.htm>, and <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/10/28/1098667909035.html>.

(7) In Senate elections, for candidates to be “grouped” and (if “above the line” voting is retained) to qualify for an “above the line” box, the party should be required to nominate at least as many candidate as there are positions to be elected.

This requirement would exclude micro-parties from “above the line” preference dealing. It would also require the larger parties to field enough candidates for the preferential vote to be also a “primary” – see below.

(8) The “Robson rotation”⁵ should be adopted for the printing of ballot papers and (if “above the line” voting is retained) for the distribution of “above the line” votes among the party’s candidates.

If a party wants voters to support the party organisation’s preferred top Senate candidates, it should persuade them to do so, e.g. by an advertising campaign or by “how to vote” cards. It should not rely on the silent channeling of votes by an ordering of names on the ballot paper. Many voters support a party but do not have any particular preferences between its candidates. (Support for a party as such is perfectly reasonable: one of the most significant thing most voters can know from voting distance about a politician is who he/she associates with politically.) Voters who have no preferences among the candidates of a party (or perhaps even among the parties) and simply vote down the party list of Senate candidates should not be counted as if they had expressed a preference among those candidates. The “Robson rotation” distributes such votes equally among the candidates.

(9) In House of Representatives elections there should be a rule that a party identifying label will not be printed on the ballot unless the party nominates at least two candidates for the seat.

This proposal is an attempt to get for single-member constituencies one of the benefits of multi-member constituencies, namely the possibility for party supporters to make a choice among endorsed candidates. A safe seat would still be a safe seat for the party (since voters who vote for either of its candidates would normally give the next preference to the other), but not for the sitting member—members of Parliament would know that, no matter how safe their seat may be for their party, they would have to keep in close touch with their electors, at the risk of being replaced by the party’s other nominee. Each election would be a primary. (In view of reduced job-security, there should be a review of Parliamentarians’ “termination” entitlements.)

An objection that has been made to this proposal is that it would lead to an outbreak of “Wentworths”, i.e. to bitter contests similar to the one that occurred recently in the Wentworth constituency between Peter King and Malcolm Turnbull. My answer is that the truth is the exact opposite – the provision of a routine “primary” mechanism (see below) would keep conflict between rival aspirants to a moderate level and within the party.

Proposals 7, 8 and 9 would mean that an election would include an equivalent of the “primaries” of the US system. Party supporters satisfied with the incumbent would give their top preference to the incumbent, those dissatisfied would give their top preference to another candidate of the same party. The votes of voters who

⁵ For explanation see <http://www.prsa.org.au/viclc/submission/sub/node15.html>.

deliberately preferred one or other candidate would decide the outcome, because Robson rotation would distribute equally among the candidates the votes of supporters who had no preference among the party's candidates and simply voted down the list (or "above the line"). Candidates of the same party would have every reason not to use "negative" campaigning against one another (since they would want the next preference of voters who supported the other candidate); they would recommend themselves by achieving a positive public profile, e.g. by service in their occupation, or in unions, business groups and other voluntary organizations or by making a significant contribution to public discussion. In achieving a public profile incumbent members would obviously have an advantage, unless they proved in fact unattractive to the public.

It would be up to each political party to choose its candidates by the party's own internal processes. There would be contests within each party for endorsement (i.e. for the two positions), not only when a sitting member in a safe seat is retiring, but before each election. Presumably such contests would not be serious if the incumbent is considered to be doing a good job, and in normal circumstances the second candidate would not be trying to replace the incumbent; but at any time a serious contender might emerge. "Branch stacking" would be pointless, since disgusted party supporters would not give first preference to a candidate who had achieved endorsement by unfair practice.

Final choice between the party's endorsed candidates would be made by the electors on voting day. Including an equivalent of primaries in the election itself, rather than holding primaries beforehand within the party or among the party's registered voters (as in the US), has the advantage that the choice would reflect voters' assessment, at the end of the campaign, of the relative importance of the issues and of the candidates' contributions on those issues (rather than an assessment made before the campaign of a candidate's likely electoral success). It would also eliminate fraudulent practices that can creep into primary elections (e.g. when people who are not really supporters of the party register and vote in a primary to select the party's candidate).

The main point of proposals 7, 8 and 9 is to weaken the influence of factions (which is based on patronage) and give more say to ordinary voters. A faction could no longer guarantee a Parliamentary job to faction members by nominating them to "safe" House of Representatives seats or by putting them at the top of the Senate list. Factional "heavies" could win and keep a place in Parliament only if they also established a positive public profile.

(10) The present practice in Senate elections of treating each state as one electorate returning several members by proportional representation should be retained.

From time to time people suggest that for Senate elections each State should be divided into smaller electorates. This would wipe out minor party representation in the Senate. Such suggestions should be rejected. If electors wish to support minor parties, or if they wish to vote for a major party in the House of Representatives but prevent major party control of the Senate, their right to choose (however misguided) should be respected. If a minor party behaves in an obstructive way, it will be punished by the electorate. It is for the electors, and not for members of the major parties, to judge whether minor party behaviour is unreasonably obstructive.

An electoral system based on single member constituencies is inherently unrepresentative, and therefore alienates people whose viewpoints have been unfairly left without representation. If we suppose (1) that there is no gerrymander, and that electorates are equally winnable, and (2) a nationally uniform swing of public opinion, then a party that gets just over 50% of the national vote will get 100% of the seats. The only reason why any opposition exists at all in an assembly elected by single member constituencies is that seats are not equally winnable—because of the fact that people who support certain parties are concentrated in certain areas, those parties keep some seats even when there is a landslide against them. (In fact, what counts as a landslide in a single-member constituency system is generally only a small shift of public opinion.) To elect the Senate on the basis of single member constituencies would be a seriously retrograde step.

(11) Consideration should be given to the introduction of proportional representation into the House of Representatives.

I do not ask the Committee to recommend PR for the lower house, but to recommend to the Parliament that it should commission research to determine how much public support there would be for such a move.

Proportional Representation in the House of Representatives would further weaken factionalism within political parties and would discourage branch-stacking, since the present distinction between safe and marginal seats (already weakened by proposals 7, 8 and 9 above) would be abolished.

The case in favour of Proportional Representation is well known and very strong (for a statement see <http://www.prsa.org.au/earc/>). The usual objections against it are (1) that it would lead to some very large electorates, putting too much distance between representative and voters, (2) that it would lead to weak government, and (3) that it would lead to shifting coalitions.

The remedy to the first problem is to prescribe maximum and minimum geographic areas for an electorate, and adjust the number of members to be elected by an electorate according to its population—there is no reason why all the electorates must return the same number of members. Existing urban electorates might be consolidated into fewer electorates each returning, say, five members, whereas at the other extreme the least densely populated electorates might keep their present boundaries and return just one member, as at present.⁶ The presence of some single member electorates would somewhat reduce the representativeness of the election outcome, but a moderate number of single-member constituencies would be an acceptable price to pay to accommodate Proportional Representation to the low population density of some areas of the country. The consolidation of urban electorates would not make members of Parliament appreciably “more remote” from their electors: as it is, each member of the House of Representatives represents tens of thousands of people.

The second objection to Proportional Representation in the lower house (which determines government) is that it might lead to weak government. The answer to this

⁶ The vote would be counted in the election of a single member by the same rules as apply if there are several members to elect. The quota would be one vote more than — the total number of votes divided by the number to be elected (i.e. one) plus one: that is, one vote more than 50%. (The present preferential voting system for the House of Representatives is mathematically equivalent to the proportional representation system used for the Senate.)

objection is that as long as the Prime Minister has the power to call an election if vital government legislation is defeated or there is a vote of no confidence (see below), there will be no weakness in government. "Balance of power" parties will be cautious if they may have to face a short-of-term election. A minority government should press boldly ahead with the program it believes the public supports, with the threat of an appeal to the electorate if its program is blocked. If it does call an election and its program indeed has public support and the minor parties have been obstructive (in the opinion of the electors), then it may be returned as a majority government.

The third objection is a version of the second -- coalition government is supposed to be weak government. Australian experience shows that this is not true. As it is, the major parties are unacknowledged coalitions. Proportional representation might lead to the coalitions becoming explicit, making the relations between the cooperating groups more transparent and more open to the influence of electors. There would be no loss to the effectiveness of the parliamentary system if there were one day explicit coalitions on both sides of politics.

FIXED TERMS

The suggestion is often made that the Parliamentary term should be fixed. There might be some advantages in setting a fixed term for the House of Representatives. However,

(12) if the term is fixed, there should nevertheless be provision for an election short of term under two circumstances: (a) If some piece of legislation that the government designates (beforehand) as an issue of confidence is defeated, either in the House of Representatives or in the Senate; and (b) if the Parliament, or the government party room, carries a motion expressing no confidence in the Prime Minister.⁷

In the first case, there should be a time limit, so that an election can be called only within a definite short period of time after the defeat of the legislation (to prevent a government from nullifying the fixed term by arranging a "dissolution trigger" to hold in reserve).

(13) In both of these cases, it should be up to the Prime Minister personally to decide to call an election (i.e. to recommend the calling of an election to the Governor-General).

Even a Prime Minister who has just lost the confidence of the Parliament or of his/her party room should **personally** have the power to call an early election. This is the existing convention, and it should be upheld. The argument for this convention is that it makes sure that a party does not win an election under one leader and then replace

⁷ The legislative assemblies of NSW, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT all have either fixed terms or some restriction on the government's power to call an early election. However, all of them (except the ACT) have provided for the possibility of an early election if the government loses the confidence of the assembly and in certain other defined circumstances. For a survey see <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/cib/1998-99/99cib08.htm>. In the ACT an early election can be called by the Governor-General on the advice of the Federal government. One day this may lead to the dissolution of an ACT legislature in which one party has a majority by a federal government of the opposite political persuasion.

that leader by someone the public would not have supported. For example, opponents once suggested that Cairns might replace Whitlam in a post-election coup, so that electors would vote for Whitlam but get Cairns: Whitlam was able to say that that would not happen (meaning that if it were attempted, he would call another election). A Prime Minister sure of public support and with the personal power to call an election can put down a party-room revolt or an opposition motion of no confidence, though of course a Prime Minister will go quietly if the public is believed to support his or her opponents. This is part of what makes our system democratic: disputes among politicians can be resolved by appeal to the electorate, or by threat of such an appeal. This should remain possible even if the Parliamentary term is fixed.

WHY ATTENDING THE POLLING PLACE SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE OBLIGATORY

As is often pointed out, voting cannot be made strictly compulsory, since an elector can always spoil the ballot paper. But why should it be compulsory to go to the polling place and have one's name crossed off the list?⁸

(1) One reason is that this obligation makes more people listen seriously to the election campaign and follow politics between elections, since they recognize that they have a civic duty to try to decide. The existence of the obligation seems to move many people to seek information. It helps toward a better informed electorate. When voting is voluntary many people simply tune out from politics altogether – until something arouses them and they return to vote in anger.

(2) Another reason is that with voluntary voting a party that does not really have majority support can accidentally win. If a party is confidently expected to win, many of its supporters may leave voting to the others. Going out to vote is some trouble. If you believe that your party is sure to win even if you don't vote, then you may not bother – and if enough people think this way, the expected election outcome may be reversed.

(3) A third reason is that if voting were voluntary, the political parties would organize to “get out the vote”, as they do in Britain, Canada, USA and other countries where voting is voluntary. The purpose of election time door-knocking in those countries is not to persuade electors to change their minds, but to find out how they intend to vote, so that canvassers can visit supporters on election day to remind them to vote (perhaps

⁸ There has been speculation recently that the government might legislate to end compulsory voting. The suggestion has been rejected by the Prime Minister. See http://www.seven.com.au/sundaysunrise/politics_041121_howard. The following is an excerpt: “John Howard: Well, as a matter of pure theory I support voluntary voting. I think I was the only person from the New South Wales delegation at a Federal council meeting of the Liberal Party years ago to vote in favour of voluntary voting, but we have had compulsory voting for a long time and I want to make it clear there will be no attempt made by this Government in this term to change that system. Mark Riley: Alright, not in this term but your - you speak from principle...John Howard: But I speak from term to term. Look, we have got used to compulsory voting. My view is a minority view in the Liberal Party, and it is not something that I intend to have an argument about. I want to make that very clear. Mark Riley: Understanding that though, your minority view and the evolution of the political dynamic, do you think the future for Australia at some stage... John Howard: No. Look, I think, actually, we will stay with the present system.”

offering help with transport etc). A door-knocker who stops to discuss politics with a likely voter for another party is actually wasting time: the job is to move on quickly locating as many probable supporters as possible.

This sort of campaigning represents a massive redirection of resources away from persuading people toward finding the people who already agree. It would be better if parties concentrated, as they do now in Australia, on persuasion.

“Turnout” campaigning also involves serious violations of privacy. Door-knockers carry a list which they mark (after the door has closed) to indicate whether the householders are supporters, judged from their reaction to the visit. Voters would resent the collection and recording of information about their voting intentions, if they knew it was being done. It can also lead to fraudulent practices—if parties gather information about householders’ political attitudes, they may be tempted to try to prevent or obstruct registration or voting by people known not to be supporters, or categories of people known to include a high proportion who are not supporters. There have been many accusations (perhaps true, perhaps merely partisan) of such obstruction in the 2004 US Presidential election.⁹ Such manipulations, or the suspicion that they may take place, are damaging to democracy. It should therefore continue to be compulsory to register to vote and to vote, to prevent political parties and other interest groups from involving themselves registration and trying to influence turnout.

The reason why “get out the vote” campaigning would inevitably follow if voting were not compulsory is that such campaigning is effective. In a voluntary voting system, the party with more enthusiastic volunteer supporters gets a greater proportion of the vote, because the volunteers encourage less enthusiastic supporters to vote.

“Turnout” campaigning does have its attractive side. It leads to a high level of enthusiastic public involvement, it gives political parties a strong motive to keep in touch with their branch members and galvanise them with messages that express the party’s philosophical position. Voluntary voting would certainly strengthen the bargaining power within each party of branch members in relation to the party’s professional politicians. However, highly partisan public involvement has serious costs: it polarizes the electorate in an ideological way, and it inevitably results in angry disappointment for the enthusiastic workers for the party that has been defeated. It is no accident that when voting is voluntary the winner’s victory speech always includes an appeal for national unity, since the campaign has done so much damage to it. It is desirable (in my opinion) to involve more people in politics, but not through the kind of electoral campaigning we have seen recently in the United States. For other methods of getting people involved, but in a friendlier way, see proposals 14 and 15 below.

For the three reasons above it seems better to keep the obligation to go to the polling place and take a ballot paper, while opening the option of checking the box “I do not wish to vote for any candidate” and adding a comment (proposals 1 and 2 above).

⁹ See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uselections2004/story/0,13918,1340190,00.html>.

A MORE REASONABLE POLITICS

(14) Consideration should be given to the regular commissioning of “deliberative polling”¹⁰ on issues suggested by the government, the opposition, and public organisations.

Deliberative polling polls a representative sample of citizens before and after discussion, in which the members of the sample hear and discuss the views of advocates of various positions. The discussion may involve several sessions (and perhaps an email discussion group), with a face-to-face meeting at the end. The proceedings may be broadcast on radio or television, but in any case the “before” and “after” poll results are published. There is often a measurable shift of opinion as a result of the discussion.

The benefits of this process are: (a) the advocates of the various positions get an attentive audience for their views and find out how citizens react; (b) some members of the public are motivated to look carefully into the issues, exchange views with one another, and gain a sense that someone cares what they think; (c) people who watch or listen (if the process is broadcast) or read of the results are alerted to issues on which things are not as they seem, i.e. issues on which people like themselves change their minds when they look carefully into the matter.

A deliberative poll is in some ways like focus group research, except that the information gained is not restricted to the people who commission the research, and it gives information on how people think when they look into a matter carefully, not just on their “off the cuff” opinion.

The Parliament should commission deliberative polling and should make money available to defray the cost of conducting frequent between-election deliberative polls.¹¹ Parliament, the government, the political parties and individual parliamentarians should refer matters to deliberative polling, and members of parliament should take part as advocates. It would be good if polls took place often enough that a significant proportion of the electorate could at some time take part.

Australia would benefit from more communication between professional politicians and public-spirited non-politicians who try to inform themselves on public affairs and try to form a realistic assessment of the performance of governments. As it is, election campaigns are too much focused on undecided voters in marginal seats, many of whom are undecided largely because they are uninterested, and uninterested largely because they do not believe that politicians will take their views seriously. Such voters are often very distrustful of politicians and are unwilling to spend much effort

¹⁰ On deliberative polling see <http://thataway.org/resources/understand/models/polling.html>. See also <http://cdd.stanford.edu/> and <http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol/>.

¹¹ How much would it cost? I understand that the cost of such polls has varied from \$200,000 for a local poll to \$600,000 for a national poll. Some of the money could come from MPs’ “communications allowance” (and the organizing of the poll could involve the MPs and their staff – communications in this context would be likely to be more productive of good will than conventional campaign materials). Money could be found from existing public election funding. Deliberative polling would be a worthwhile investment in public education.

in trying to get to the bottom of the parties' rival claims and proposals, which are therefore often deceptive (or are alleged to be deceptive by opponents).

(15) Members of Parliament should do what they can to encourage dialogue between the branch members of the different political parties.

By "branch members" is meant the volunteers who belong to the local branches or sub-branches of the political parties. Political party membership has fallen off over the years and is now at an unhealthy low level.¹²

Non-professional members of political parties in this country, and still more in countries where voting is voluntary, spend much time and energy in activities that do not lead to any meaningful exchange of views, information and reasons between supporters of opposing parties. Doorknocking seldom leads to serious political conversation between people of opposing views, and in any case with compulsory voting there is little motivation for parties to do doorknocking. With the printing of party affiliations on the ballot paper there is no point in "how to vote" cards (though volunteers still hand them out—there is no other contribution they can make). Since they can make little real contribution to winning elections, volunteer party members have little influence on their party. Parties become over-professional and detached from ordinary people.

Although the non-professional members of the local branches of political parties are opposed to one another politically, they have something important in common, namely public spirit and an interest in politics. There is scope for something like the cooperation that now often exists among the churches. The parties could jointly canvass an area giving residents information about how to participate in the local branches of political parties. There could be occasional joint meetings in which they discuss public issues with one another, not in "public meeting" style but in seminar-style discussion groups. Local branches could organize joint inter-party "Yahoo groups" (<http://groups.yahoo.com/>) for email discussion. At election times there could be jointly-staffed "information tables" in public places (shopping centres etc), and there could be more "meet the candidates" joint public meetings. Churches and other community organizations could be asked to support such meetings. The effect of dialogue would be to make politics less partisan, less oppositional, and better informed.

Conclusion

If voters who remained undecided were clearly invited not to cast a vote (proposal 1 above), it would be rational for campaigns to be directed more to voters who seriously follow politics, since the "undecideds" might well choose not to cast a vote. Several of the other proposals would also broaden election campaigns. Proposals 3 (optional preferential voting) and 4, 5 and 6 (ending preference deals) would mean that parties would have to try to appeal to supporters of other parties who might be persuaded (but would no longer be compelled) to give their second preferences. Proposals 7, 8 and 9, establishing the equivalent of "primaries", would give sitting members a reason to campaign even in safe seats, and to address not only swinging voters but also their own party's regular supporters (since they might vote for another candidate from the same party). Proposals 1-9 would therefore correct the present narrow focus in

¹² Just 0.015 per cent of voters, according to a recent estimate. See <http://theage.com.au/text/articles/2004/12/14/1102787075757.html>

election campaigns on undecided voters in marginal seats. Proportional representation in the House of Representatives as well as the Senate (proposal 11) would do away with the distinction between marginal and safe seats, and would ensure that every vote would count fully and equally. All these measures would broaden political campaigning, so that the messages would be addressed to the whole electorate, with as much attention to the views of people who take public affairs seriously as to those of swinging voters in marginal electorates. Such a broadening, together with proposals 14 and 15, would raise the quality of political discussion in Australia.

From now into the future Australia faces some serious issues, some of which may require large changes of attitude and way of life – for example, **terrorism**, which raises difficult questions about the balance between security and traditional guarantees of personal liberty, and **environmental degradation**, which raises difficult questions about lifestyle. There are many others. Elections campaigns focused on undecided voters in marginal seats do not form a good framework for the public discussion of challenging issues. Politicians will not be able to risk proposing policies on difficult questions unless there is a strong framework that supports voters' serious engagement with one another in thinking such questions through. My proposals in this submission are not motivated so much by a desire for a more representative Parliament, but more by a desire for a more widespread and serious public discussion of political issues. The character of the electoral system has a major influence on the quality of political decision making.

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