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Submission on review of 2010 Federal Election

Voting by internet should be instituted as an alternative to postal voting or site voting.

A South Australian politician stated to me in June 2010 that his colleagues are concerned about the security of internet voting, but surely those same people would be unconcerned users of electronic banking. Already a number of institutions use electronic internet voting, including Engineers Australia and the Adelaide University Alumni Association.

In the 2010 SA state election, the SA Electoral Office posted individualised identification cards to each registered elector. It would be a simple matter to include an identification number, and separately also post out or email a password to these electors, as is done with banks. As with the passwords with other institutions that have electronic voting, the password would expire once the vote had been cast. This would make the internet vote more secure than booth voting, where the possibility of fraudulent multiple voting exists.

Of course, any email address provided to the Electoral Commissioner would have to remain confidential, especially not provided to politicians and political parties, so that it cannot be used for spamming. Deliverers of political junk mail are told to ignore "no junk mail" signs on letter boxes, as the political party considers their junk mail of crucial interest (those same parties will withhold crucial information in reports and deliberations once in power).

Electronic voting would enhance voting when overseas, for shift workers and for people with mobility disabilities. In the 2006 SA state election, I was denied a vote when I was overseas. The SA Electoral Office was unable to send out postal votes until a few weeks before the election, due to the SA Premier not calling for the timely issue of writs, despite the election date having been fixed in legislation years earlier. The SA Electoral Office sent the postal votes by ordinary mail (a competent organisation would have sent them by Diplomatic Courier, or at least by Courier or International Express Post). Consequently, the ballot papers were received by me well after voting had closed. Furthermore, the full information, that I had stated on the postal vote application was required on the address, was omitted. Moreover, the SA Electoral Office had not set up facilities to allow voting at the embassy in this country, although this would only be of use to those people in the capital city.

The denial of my vote through negligence by the SA Electoral Office could have been avoided with electronic voting. The SA Electoral Office's reply to my complaint was wholly unsatisfactory, as it did not address rectification of the problems inherent in their 19th century system, nor training of their staff on modern postal procedures, nor investigation of electronic voting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Institute voting over the internet;
2. Ensure email addresses used (if any) are not made available to political parties or politicians;
3. Make it an offence for a person, political party or organisation to lodge unsolicited propaganda in letterboxes labelled "no junk mail" or equivalent;
4. Ensure training of staff of electoral offices in the most expeditious means of delivery of votes, such as Diplomatic Courier, Courier, Express Post or Registered Post;
5. Make it a criminal offence for a person of an electoral office to negligently, by omission of an act or otherwise, or wilfully, deprive a person of his/her vote;

6. Legislate for a minimum period of time between issue of writs and the election day, as assessed is necessary by the Australian Electoral Commission, in consultation with Australia Post and the International Postal Union, for the dispatch, receipt and return of international postal votes.