

Real Electoral Reform Must Make Our Politics More Representative

Dear Parliament of Australia

Political finance reform is long overdue.

If done well, it would:

- boost voters' faith in Australia's democracy,
- reduce the influence of vested interests on politicians
- level the playing field for those outside the major parties

If done poorly, it could:

- make Australian elections less fair
- make our Parliaments less representative
- conceal rather than reveal the undue influence of corporate money over parties and politicians

Australia Institute research has identified 5 principles for fair political finance reform:

- 1 // Giving voters a range of choices about who represents them is critical for a healthy democracy and holding elected representatives to account
- 2 // Political finance reform should strive for fairness and increased transparency, and should not make it harder for new candidates to compete with incumbents
- 3 // Candidates standing for election should be able to compete on a level playing field regardless of whether they are members of a political party or running as an independent
- 4 // The significant taxpayer-funded advantages of incumbency need to be factored in when designing a 'level playing field' for political finance reform, with a view to reducing disadvantages already faced by challengers
- 5 // The focus of political finance reform should be on those who most clearly threaten democracy and accountability such as large corporate donors, and the various ways that they influence politicians through financial and other means.

Australians have waited long enough for effective and fair political finance reform.

However, changes designed and supported by incumbent politicians need to be carefully scrutinised. We need to ensure that, by accident or design, any changes to political donation rules do not lock out new entrants from Parliament, or create loopholes that perpetuate dark money while reducing the role charities and civil society play in our democracy.

If proposed changes have the net effect of excluding new entrants and civil society from participating in our democracy, they by definition cannot be considered as reforms to our current system, and ought to be rejected.

The guiding principle for any political donations reform should be:

"first, do no harm, do not make matters worse."



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