



Last days to sign up for by-election study

Voters in the five by-election seats of Longman, Braddon, Mayo, Fremantle and Perth have until this Saturday, June 30, to register for the Voter Choice Project, a national study investigating how voters decide who to vote for.

Project director Raphaella Kathryn Crosby says the results coming in from the by-election seats are already very interesting, but more participants are needed.

“I know voters in the by-election seats are sick of being phone polled, but the Voter Choice Project is more than a poll.

“It is an opportunity for them to say why they are voting the way they are; to say what’s on their mind, what issues they care about, and what they’re happy or angry about.

The Voter Choice Project surveys have been designed with open text boxes so participants can say as much or as little as they like about what is concerning them and their reasons for voting. This results in a very broad list of issues and other factors voters are considering.

“Because the study investigates the why behind people’s votes, rather than just asking who they will vote for, the results are richer than polling numbers, telling the story of what is on voters’ minds” Ms Crosby said.

Analysis of early responses generally confirm what other reports and polls have indicated, with the exception of Braddon.

BRADDON

- Braddon voters have so far responded with a significant level of negative comments about both Justine Keay and Brett Whiteley.
- A significant proportion of respondents don’t know who they will vote for, or have said they will vote for an independent candidate should one come forward, indicating the seat is still up for grabs.
- Performance and personality of the candidates is the basis for most voters’ decisions, along with jobs and local issues (e.g. The Tarkine, local businesses, and local tourism).

MAYO

- Rebekha Sharkie will hold Mayo comfortably due to her strong performance as the local member over the past two years.
- Mayo voters are engaged and some are quite passionate about the by-election. Significant levels of praise for Sharkie is matched by intensely negative comments about Georgina Downer.

- A catalogue of local issues from mobile phone coverage to community bus services have been nominated as evidence of Sharkie's performance. Few national issues are raised.
- Sharkie is the only candidate of the four who resigned due to section 44 concerns who is not being negatively affected by the citizenship issue.

LONGMAN

- Longman is too close to call, with significant apathy towards all candidates and anger at the by-election happening.
- One Nation voters are the least committed to their vote choice, indicating some may shift their support during the campaign.
- No local issues other than funding of the Caboolture Hospital have been mentioned by Longman participants, with most voters raising immigration and pensions or other retirement and welfare issues as the basis of their decision.

PERTH AND FREMANTLE

- Voters in Perth and Fremantle are largely disengaged with the election, unhappy with having to vote again, and that there is no Liberal candidate.
- Liberal voters are strongly indicating they will vote informal or for conservative micro parties, but preference Labor over The Greens.
- Some undecided Perth voters who normally support Labor indicate Patrick Gorman is not their ideal candidate, or are angry over Tim Hammond quitting. 'Trust' of both the candidate and the party is frequently mentioned as a concern.
- Some local issues have been raised by Fremantle voters with references to 'Freo culture'; however, values, national policies and jobs dominate the responses from both seats.

It is important to note that this assessment may change as the sample increases, particularly if more Coalition voters join the study. While there are a significant proportion of conservatives in the panel, they are largely minor party and swinging voters, while party loyal Liberal, LNP or National Party voters are currently under-represented.

The Voter Choice Project is being conducted as part of Ms Crosby's PhD through the University of Technology Sydney. Participants are asked to complete a monthly survey, and short weekly surveys once the general federal election is called. By-election voters have different questions in June and July, and an exit poll on July 28, and can opt out of the study at that point if they wish. Voters in the by-election seats must sign up by June 30 to be included in the by-election study. Recruitment of the main panel for the federal election will continue throughout July.

Any registered Australian voter can take part in the Voter Choice Project by signing up at www.voterchoice.com.au.

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