

Australians' views on opinion polls & voting

McCrindle Research conducted a survey on the voting patterns of Australians. Rather than focus on which party people intend to vote for, this research focused on Australians' approach to the voting process and their feelings towards its compulsory nature?

Opinion Polls versus Election Vote

There has been a lot of talk lately about the accuracy of the opinion polls and in response to this issue we researched the question, if you were approached for an opinion poll prior to an election, how do you think your answer would correspond with your final vote? Although the majority were adamant that their opinion poll answer would not change in their final vote, more than 1 in 4 (26%) stated that their poll answer may be different to their final vote.

'The research methods of opinion polls are representative samples and robust in their implementation however they can never measure voters true voting intentions but only their stated voting intentions,' writes Mark McCrindle. 'The problem with political research today is that a sizable proportion of people polled do not behave as neutral respondents but as poll manipulators. Even in focus groups we find people are more aware of the research process and move from giving their personal opinions to social commentary and offering strategy.'

Australians love a competition with 79% of people stating that they watch the result unfold on television either sometimes or always.

Swingers and Underdogs

Although 40% of respondents steadfastly supported the same party every election, a substantial 45% classed themselves as swinging voters. This was typically in relation to which party had the best policies at the time, however 16% said they sometimes intentionally vote for a less popular or underdog candidate. And when it comes to the promotional material handed out by supporters at voting booths on Election Day, only 17% paid attention to the information on preferences while 81% paid no attention at all.

There is much political positioning to gain the coveted 'underdog status' said Mark McCrindle. This research shows what is known anecdotally: that many Australians enjoy a close contest, and have some empathy for candidates, and so will sometimes use their vote in the name of charity or competition.

Donkey voting

Although the overwhelming majority of those surveyed took their vote seriously (81%), 9% of those surveyed admitted to having ever registered either a donkey vote or an informal vote. Similarly, 71% of all participants believe that voting should remain compulsory in Australia, this despite the fact that only 43% enjoyed voting.

Can you keep a secret?

For some, their vote is a well-guarded secret. Roughly 1 in 5 people will not talk to others about their vote while 3% said they would discuss their vote with anyone who asks. Meanwhile, for those who like to share, the most common confidant was one's partner/spouse (58%). Interestingly, 8% of those who were in some form of relationship did not discuss their vote at all with their partner. Additionally, Australians are more likely to discuss their vote with their friends (43%) than they are with their parents (36%), siblings (22%), work colleagues (16%) or their kids (5%). Over two-thirds of respondents discussed their vote both before and after filling in their slip, while 5% elected to keep the secret until they had voted.

Australians are largely conscientious in their voting duty. While we don't all enjoy the process, we believe in its purpose, and more than 7 in 10 hold to its compulsory nature, stated Mark McCrindle. That it is taken as a personal civic duty is highlighted by the fact that 8% of respondents who are married/de facto do not even discuss their vote with their partner.

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