

Abbott hasn't convinced own electors on Senate curb

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Former prime minister Tony Abbott's proposal for a constitutional change to make it easier for a government to pass legislation blocked by the Senate does not have support in his own electorate, according to polling.

Abbott this year [re-raised a proposal](#) from John Howard's day that would allow bills rejected twice by the Senate, with a gap of three months, to be passed at a joint sitting without an election first. At present a joint sitting can only happen after a double dissolution, "triggered" by the bills in question.

A ReachTEL poll, commissioned by progressive think-tank Australia Institute in Abbott's seat of Warringah, found 41.6% opposed, and 39% in favour of the idea, with 19.5% undecided.

Opposition was particularly high among those aged 18 to 34, with 55% against. There was a sharp partisan divide: with 58.7% of Liberal voters in favour but only 9% of Labor voters.

The idea was more strongly opposed in Malcolm Turnbull's seat of Wentworth, where the question was also asked. Only 34.9% favoured it, while 47% were against. Again, the young and Labor voters registered much bigger proportions against.

The polling was done on February 1, with samples of 750 in Wentworth and 723 in Warringah.

Ben Oquist, the Australia Institute's executive director, said the Abbott proposal would "never fly. It would give voters less say at a time they are demanding more and would put more power in the hands of the executive. The Senate's rightful place as a watchdog and a check on government excess would be effectively destroyed."

The government has shown no interest in the idea, which on the past record of referendums would almost certainly fail.

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When he floated the proposal, Abbott said: "In the end, the government of the day has to be allowed to govern – and not with one hand tied behind its back because its legislation can't pass. It's time to reconsider the Howard proposal.

"The government should consider taking this reform to the people simultaneously with the next election.

"That way, if it's carried, the government will be able to reduce spending as well as raise it; to cut taxes as well as increase them; and to limit the size of government as well as boost it."

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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