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Media Release

**Professional politicians at heart of 'dirty politics'**

**A study released today showing almost one third of sitting MPs have worked mainly in politics throughout their lives reveals why 'dirty politics' has become more prominent, according to study founder, Mark Blackham.**

The study, undertaken by Geoffrey Miller at the University of Otago, shows that the main careers of up to a third of sitting MPs before they entered Parliament were political.

Mark Blackham, who conceived the research, said the era of career politicians was partly responsible for a new era of dirty politics.

“Politics is now a professionalised game, with a major speciality being digging dirt. Politics has always been a dog fight but underhand denigration of your opponent is now considered part of the job description; it makes up for absence of real policy differences.

“Career politicians find it easier to be against something than for it – so it is essential to demonise your opponents,” Mark Blackham said.

The study reveals that differences in the careers of MPs in each political party are very small. For example, 18% of National MPs have worked in a business background, compared to 12% in Labour.

Geoffrey Miller said the results showed a flattening out of differences between working histories of MPs in each party.

“We're seeing people enter Parliament because of their own self-interest, not their life experience. In the past, the differences between parties were starker. For example, there were more business people in National, and almost none in Labour.

“Labour and National are now almost interchangeable in terms of policy, which is why some are keen to distract voters with scandal,” Geoffrey Miller added.

“In 2014, it would be difficult to imagine National repeating its famous 2005 billboard campaign in which it directly contrasted its policies with Labour’s - because there is now so little difference.

“Working for Families, Kiwisaver and subsidising first-time home buyers are all examples of policies which Labour and National now largely agree on.“

Some notable differences between parties include:

* National MPS had the most experience in Agriculture and Business or Property Development with 12 MPs in each category
* Labour MPs were most likely to have had no single dominant career, or to have worked for the government in some way
* National is stronger on health backgrounds than Labour (6 MPs vs 3), and in legal experience (6 MPs vs 2)
* NZ First party has proportionately the most MPs with business backgrounds, particularly small business (3 from 7 MPs). So NZ First appear to be dominantly the party for small business.
* The dominant working history of Green Party MPs is in unions or activist agencies (6 MPs)

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