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Democracy
2025

HOW AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLITICIANS WOULD LIKE TO REFORM THEIR DEMOCRACY

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Australian Democracy
Old Parliament House



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ABOUT DEMOCRACY 2025

Across the world trust in institutions has been in decline. This matters. Trust is the basis of institutional support. It is the glue that facilitates collective action for mutual benefit. Without trust we don't have the ability to address complex, long-term challenges or build integrated and cohesive communities.

Trust is closely tied to satisfaction; it is an indicator of the health of democracy. The Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD)'s recent research, *Trust and Democracy in Australia*, shows that satisfaction in our democracy has more than halved over the past decade and that trust in key political institutions and leaders recently reached its lowest level since measurements began. In response to this, MoAD, together with the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra (UC-IGPA), established *Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide*. Its purpose is to ignite a national conversation on how we can bridge the trust divide, strengthen democratic practice, and restore the confidence of Australians in the performance of their institutions. Achieving these goals will require us to understand why trust has declined, and what will need to be done to rebuild it.

MoAD holds a unique position on the frontline of democracy, civic agency and change. We are a museum not just of objects but of ideas. We seek to empower Australians through exhibitions, schools' learning programs and events that both stimulate and inspire. Trusted by the public, government, public service and business alike, we are uniquely able to advance national conversations about democracy, past, present and future.

Members of parliament have key voices in this debate. This report examines the problem of declining trust from the perspective of parliamentarians – adding fresh and unique insights to the growing body of applied research that underpins our activities and helps us drive a process of national reflection, understanding, and renewal of Australia's democratic practice. Find out more at: democracy2025.gov.au.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the responses of 98 members of Parliament (out of 226) to a survey co-designed with the Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters (JSCEM). These responses are not representative of the 45th Federal Parliament as a whole, but they nevertheless provide a – sometimes surprising and indicative – set of perspectives from a substantial set of representatives. The survey responses establish that while many of Australia’s federal politicians are more satisfied with the way democracy works than samples of their fellow citizens, they are sufficiently concerned about evidence of a trust divide between citizens and politicians to favour substantial actions to improve confidence in our institutions. How they believe this might be done is one of most interesting aspects of this report, and provides important information to inform future debate.

The report is framed by an understanding of the critical role of political parties in Australian democracy. Citizens’ ability to choose between political parties with distinctive policies, leaders and performance, has long been seen as fundamental to holding governments to account. Parties make it possible for voters to determine responsibility for government actions and to award office to a broad yet coherent entity.

Parties, and the politicians who represent them, have three overlapping roles: providing representation and ongoing linkages to the community, organizing to deliver effective government, and supporting the principles of good governance within our parliamentary institutions. Evidence of disaffection with major

parties, and the rise of minor parties, from Australia and other democracies, suggests it is the first role that is most in decline, but problems are also observed regarding the other roles. The survey evidence in this report shows that elected politicians recognize these concerns and are prepared to do something about them. On balance their preference is not to rush to forms of participatory citizen-centred democracy but instead to adjust and strengthen the way that representative democracy works; to make parties better at performing their three roles in providing community linkages, effective governance and democratic integrity.

There remains room for debate whether the reforms favoured by politicians will work but it’s encouraging to see such appetite to address the problem. It may also be that there are major issues that are not yet as high up the change agenda of our politicians as they could be such as: the impact of the digital transformation of society and politics; how to give citizens a stronger sense of empowerment over their lives; or re-examining relationships with, and the effectiveness of, the Australian Public Service. Most reforms suggested are not particularly new in the context of contemporary processes of democratic modernisation (Smith 2009 & Alonso et al., 2011). Indeed, this very observation brings into sharp focus Amartya Sen’s (1999) argument that “formal rules are not enough without good democratic practice”. In other words, reform is as much about improving existing democratic practices than designing new ways of doing democracy.

In sum, this report suggests that there is considerable vitality and capacity in our system of political parties and elected politicians. Recent calls for government by direct democracy or selecting citizens by lot in a 'sortition' democracy miss the potential and desire for reform within the existing system.¹

There is much life in Australian democracy yet and this report tells us how those who know the system best would reform and improve it. Their ideas are central to the national debate that we need to have as a matter of urgency.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters of the 45th Australian Parliament for their support and assistance in coordinating the survey to federal parliamentarians from December 2018 to February 2019. In particular, we would like to thank Senator the Hon. James McGrath for his support as Chair of the committee.

1 See Deborah Richards, "Does Australian democracy need a reboot?" 1 February 2019. Retrieved 22 July 2019 from: <https://aicd.companydirectors.com.au/membership/company-director-magazine/2019-back-editions/february/democracy>

1. INTRODUCTION

The health of a liberal democracy can be measured by the quality of its political parties. Political parties aggregate people's demands, formulate policy choices and represent peoples' interests. They also play a fundamental role in recruiting, selecting and developing political leaders for government. Yet despite their central position in the liberal democratic system of government, the popular legitimacy of political parties and the politicians that run them are being challenged world-wide. The Edelman Trust Barometer (2019) reports "a world of seemingly stagnant trust" with 80 per cent of the world's governments being distrusted by the majority of their citizens.

Australian democratic institutions are not immune from these trends. Despite twenty-seven years of economic growth, the level of democratic satisfaction (41 per cent) and trust in politicians (21 per cent) and government ministers (21 per cent), political parties (19 per cent) and federal government (31 per cent) in 2018 was at an all-time low (Stoker, Evans and Halupka, 2018a).²

The purpose of this report is to explore how this trust-divide between politicians and citizens can be bridged. If you want to make change that is durable one important step is to ask those actively involved in the system. That's what we did in this case; we asked federal politicians. We draw on the findings of an attitudinal survey that evaluates the quality of democratic practice in Australia through the lens of federal parliamentarians in both the Lower and Upper houses of the 45th Federal Parliament. The survey was sponsored by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) and was completed by 98 out of a possible 226 respondents

(43.36 per cent). Where possible, the findings are compared with the general public to identify areas of common concern and potential reform.³

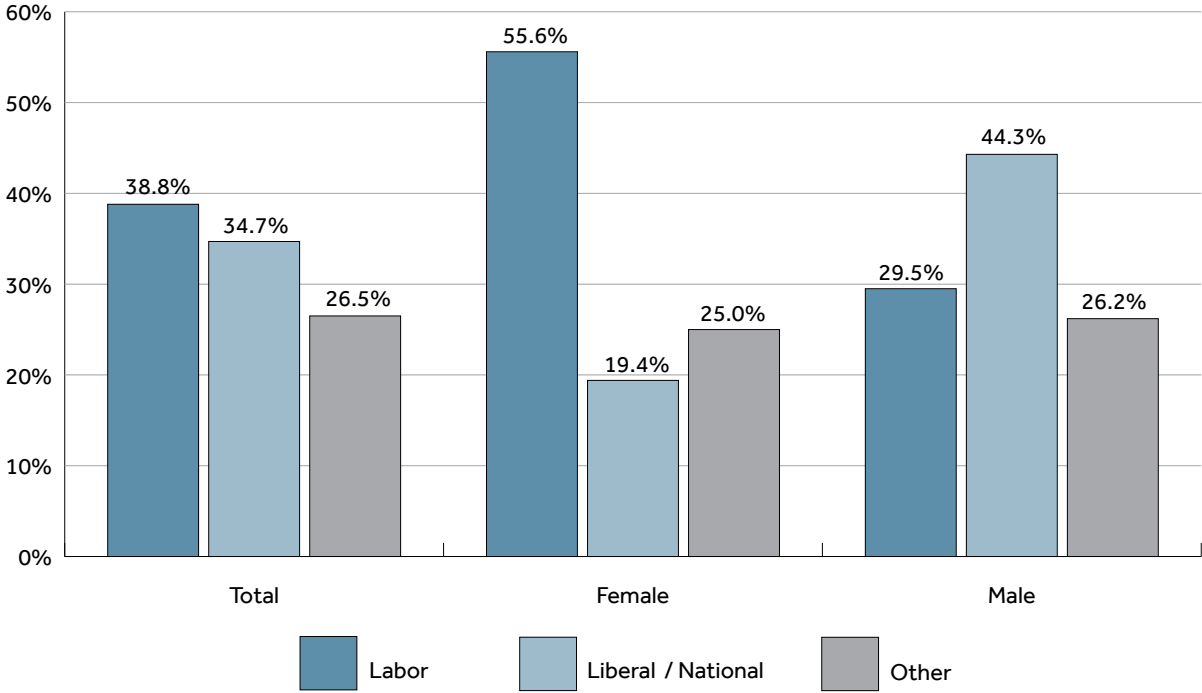
Three caveats must be made at the outset. Firstly, the questionnaire was co-designed with the JSCEM and was informed by two principles: 1) brevity and 2) the deliberate inclusion of open-ended questions to canvass a broad range of ideas about reform. Secondly, the findings are not representative of the 45th Federal Parliament as a whole in terms of gender or party.⁴ The sample is skewed towards women and Labor and cross bench respondents and may therefore be more critical of the status quo because in general partisan loyalty is known to colour the way that government performance and action is viewed (see Figure 1). We attracted more women (37 per cent), Labor (39 per cent) as opposed to Coalition (35 per cent) members, and crossbench respondents (27 per cent). This will need to be taken into account in any interpretations. Thirdly, we asked our federal politicians to consider a list of institutional reforms drawn from the international literature, but we deliberately left out reference to highly politicised reforms such as Indigenous constitutional recognition and the case for an Australian republic so as not to be seen to be mobilising bias. However, respondents were provided with an open response question to report 'other democratic reforms' that they would like to see.

2 These results are in keeping with the most rigorous academic survey of opinion the 2018 World Values Study. See: <https://www.srcentre.com.au/ausvalues>.

3 Here we draw on the findings of Stoker, G., Evans, M. & Halupka, M. (2018a), Democracy 2025 Report No. 1. Trust and Democracy in Australia, Canberra, MoAD, available on-line at: <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/documents/Democracy2025-report1.pdf>. Retrieved 17 June 2019.

4 For the most up to date data see: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3681701/upload_binary/3681701.pdf. Retrieved 17 June 2019.

Figure 1. The sample by party and gender



The findings are presented in four parts:

PART ONE: presents a detailed assessment of why political parties remain the cornerstone of Australian democracy.

PART TWO: compares the perceptions of politicians and citizens in terms of what they like and dislike about Australian democracy.

PART THREE: compares the perceptions of politicians and citizens in terms of the reforms they would like to see.

PART FOUR: identifies two gaps in the reform agenda that need to be addressed – the importance of exploiting the potential of digital politics and building an effective working relationship with the Australian Public Service to enhance the performance of government.

In conclusion, we identify a range of reforms that politicians believe will both help bridge the trust divide and strengthen the role of political parties in discharging their traditional and new functions in democratic politics.

Acknowledgement

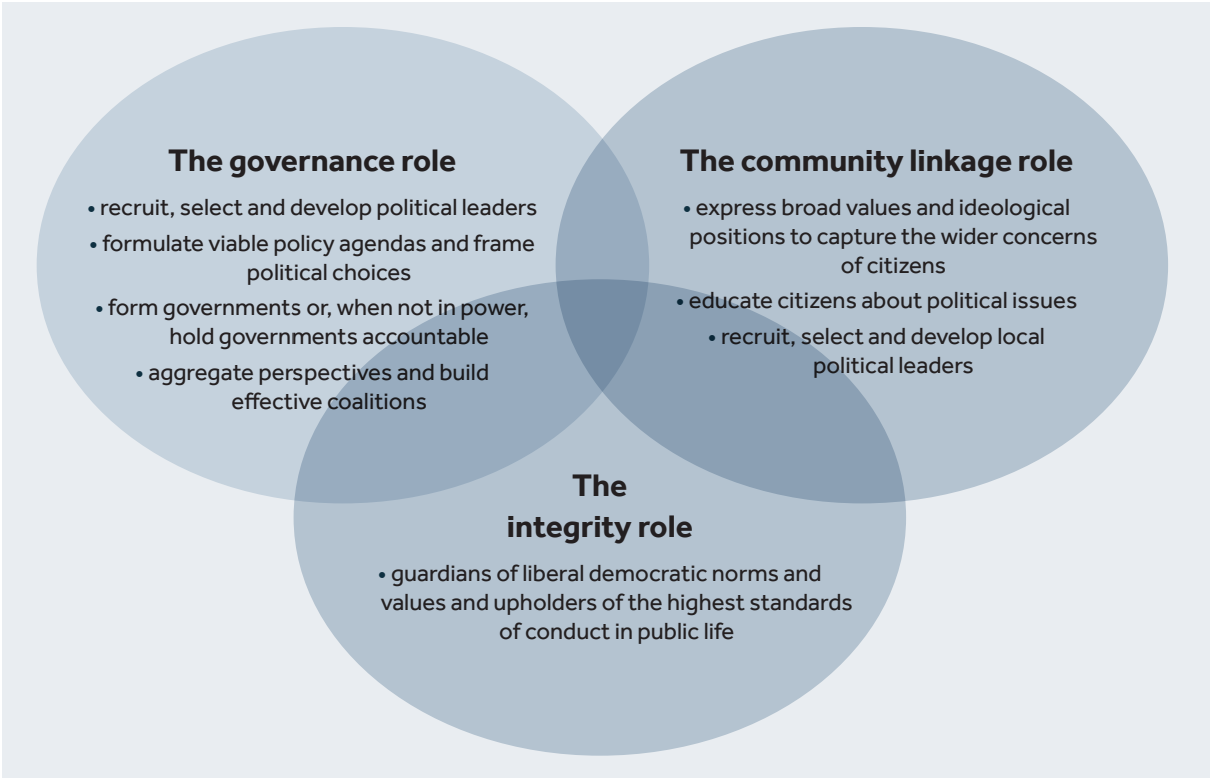
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2. WHY POLITICAL PARTIES MATTER BUT NEED TO ADAPT TO NEW CHALLENGES

In theory, political parties can perform three sets of overlapping and reinforcing functions in a democratic political system – governance, community linkage and integrity roles (see Box 1). In terms of their governance role: they support the recruitment, selection and development of political leaders for government; formulate viable policy agendas and frame political choices; and, form governments or, when not in power, hold governments accountable. The community linkage role involves expressing broad values and ideological positions to capture the wider

concerns of citizens and educating citizens about political issues. Traditionally (and prior to the era of the party machine) this role would also include supporting the recruitment, selection and development of local political leaders. And, probably most significantly, political parties are guardians of liberal democratic norms and values who should uphold the highest standards of conduct in public life.⁵ This is termed the ‘integrity’ role and it plays a crucial role in linking national and local politics, and maintaining trust between government and citizen.

Box 1. The role of political parties in the liberal democratic model



⁵ See, for example, the “seven principles of public life” enunciated by the original Nolan Committee which have become the gold standard for public conduct and in some parts of corporate life. They promote selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Retrieved 18 July 2019 from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

Since the nineteenth century parties have seen mass membership as the way to deliver their functions. Party members make several potential contributions. They can provide finance, volunteer labour for campaigns and can connect the party leadership to the public mood through engaging in party debates. They can also act as ambassadors for the party's ideas, by their numbers and behaviour enhance the legitimacy of the party and of course vote for the party or even stand for election under its banner.

However, parties increasingly have to undertake these tasks with fewer members. A detailed study of party politics in advanced liberal democracies concludes that most political parties have seen a decline in membership and a greater degree of public scepticism about their role, which in turn is reflected in greater electoral volatility and weaker partisanship and identification with a particular party (Webb et al., 2002). The researchers conclude it is "undeniable that [the] popular standing [of political parties] has been weakened in most Western democracies" (Webb et al., 2002: 442).⁶

Parties do not have the depth of connections into their communities that they once had and as a result they cannot act so easily as a 'transmission belt' of citizen concerns and interests to government. The issue is not just that they have struggled to recruit members; there is evidence of a long-term decline in activism within parties (Boswell, 2018). Parties find it difficult to recruit officers for their branches and, in many cases, candidates for elections. Many members are willing to pay their dues but do little else.

6 The 2008 Victorian Liberal Party's report Liberal Renewal (the final report of the Party Futures Committee) made a similar observation: 'our consultations have shown that members of the party expect to be personally involved in the main activities of the Party, but that at present many feel excluded (2008: iii)'.

Those that might be more actively inclined to engage are constrained by party decision making structures that give them restricted influence.

Parties have responded to this new situation by offering multi-speed memberships. Susan Scarrow (2014) suggests that parties are offering up to six other membership options beyond the conventional 'full membership'. The first option is a trial membership that can be turned into a full membership. The second is a 'membership lite', where supporters can join but for a reduced fee. Parties sometimes offer this option so that citizens can vote in a leadership election or other big internal party decision. The third option is a 'cyber membership' recruited through the party's website and register as supporters with the national party. The fourth option is to be a 'sustainer' offering financial support to the party and the fifth is to be a web-based follower, joining through social networking sites debates and discussions about party positions and ideas. The sixth option is to be an audience for the party by signing up to receive newsletters and other communications. In short, within parties full membership has declined and been replaced by a range of more indirect engagements with citizens (Faucher, 2015: 405-429).

Professionalisation and the personalisation of parties

As party membership patterns have changed then the importance of leadership has come to the fore (Norris and Inglehart, 2018). Leaders have found their position enhanced by the role of the modern media, and the way that TV and print coverage is given to leaders and their positions rather than to those of parties. Parties whether conventionally aiming for the middle ground or pursuing more populist or polarizing strategies have come to rely on leaders and their appeal to voters.

Despite declining membership, the organisational strength of political parties in most mature democracies, in the sense of income and central party staffing levels, has increased (Webb et al., 2002: 442–4). Parties rely more on large private sponsors or state funding and less on the membership. The ability of leaders to operate with a greater degree of autonomy from members reflects:

the transformation of political parties from labour-intensive to capital-intensive organisations, controlled by professionalised campaigners directed from party HQ. (Lusoli and Ward, 2004)

Elections are increasingly fought, and campaign strategies decided upon, with advice from professional managers and advisors (Johnson, 2001); parties are now run for and by professionals and although party members remain important, they are not as central as they once were.

The general dynamic of the professionalisation of parties and their reliance on state and other non-membership sources of funding is known in political science as the ‘cartel party thesis’ (Katz and Mair 2016: 5–18). Broadly, instead of being rooted in civil society and taking citizens’ views to government, parties have increasingly become part of the *machinery of governance*, an indispensable mechanism for arranging elections and choosing political leaders, and in many instances are funded and supported by government.

As Peter Mair (1995: 54) observes:

On the ground, and in terms of their representative role, parties appear to be less relevant and to be losing some of their key functions. In public office, on the other hand, and in terms of their linkage to the state, they appear to be more privileged than ever.

Activists are fewer, and those that remain involved are often on the margins of party decision making. For many, activism remains based around a volunteer role for supporting others and a cause, but parties are also a recruitment agency for those that want to serve as elected politicians or be appointed as party representatives on various local and regional government boards and agencies. Parties remain central to the operation of democracies, but their role is more as a ‘feeder school’ for the formal institutions of governance rather than a training ground or base for active citizenship.

The good politician

In short then, the comparative literature on political parties tells us that while elected representatives are central to our democracy, they appear, in Mair’s terms, to be playing their governance role better than their community-linkage role. This observation is also supported by evidence generated from our nation-wide focus group survey. Over the past three years we have conducted 24 focus groups with different groups of Australians with the aim of exploring in greater detail trends emerging from our national survey research. A particular focus was paid to marginal constituencies where the prospects for evaluating a challenge to the established political order could be studied.

Within the focus groups, we asked participants to describe the characteristics of their ideal politician. They were fairly uniform in emphasising the importance of:

- honesty ('someone who does what they say', 'no broken promises');
- empathy ('a person who is approachable and accessible', 'who listens to them'), and,
- delivery ('who follows up' and 'delivers').

These features of a good politician reflect the centrality of the governance, community linkage and integrity roles to building and maintaining trust. However, they are not deemed to be very common:

At the moment a lot of politicians go into politics for advancement rather than service. Turning out clones of media-savvy people with sound bites and platitudes, not genuine responses. It feels like they're manufactured' (baby boomer, regional and rural Australian).

Trust above all is earned by keeping promises, and that is where democratic politics is seen as failing (Hetherington, 2005). As one older Australian put it:

Keeping your word. That's a big thing with me. Don't tell me you're going to do something and then don't do it because I'll never trust you again (builder, urban Australian).

To trust a politician would mean they were approachable, reliable and consistent and that their words lined up with their actions:

You're going to laugh at this from a male's point of view. When I shake hands with another male, I will know by his handshake whether or not I'm going to trust him. They look you in the eye (generation X, rural Australian).

These observations in part explain why independents that play the community-linkage role effectively can be successful. The rising minor party vote is a feature in other democracies as some voters search for alternatives to the mainstream (see Faucher, 2015 & Gerbaudo, 2019). If existing political parties are replaced by others that better reflect the popular will and public interest, then democracy is working. The rising minor party vote – properly understood – may also encourage existing major parties to enact reforms in their own long-term self-interest that would also be in the public interest.

3. WHAT POLITICIANS THINK: THE GOOD AND BAD IN OUR DEMOCRACY

We asked our sample of federal politicians to consider a list of democratic reforms drawn from the international literature (Smith, 2009), but we deliberately left out reference to highly politicised reforms such as Indigenous constitutional recognition and the case for an Australian republic so as not to be seen to be mobilising bias. However, respondents were provided with an open response question to report 'other democratic reforms' that they would like to see.

Parliamentarians (61 per cent) are generally (and not surprisingly) more satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia in comparison with the citizenry (41 per cent). Nonetheless, that leaves 38 per cent of parliamentarians

questioning certain aspects of Australian democracy (see Figure 2). Over a third of the elected politicians who responded to the survey are not satisfied with the way democracy works.

Q: How satisfied are you with Australia's democratic arrangements?

Parliamentarians share similar 'likes' about the nature of Australia's democratic arrangements as the general public particularly 'fair voting', 'stable government', and 'freedom of speech' (see Figure 3). Citizens are more appreciative of Australia's 'good economy and lifestyle' and the quality of 'public services' (Stoker et al., 2018a: 40); the governance dimension of Australian democracy.

Figure 2. Democratic satisfaction – federal politicians and citizens compared

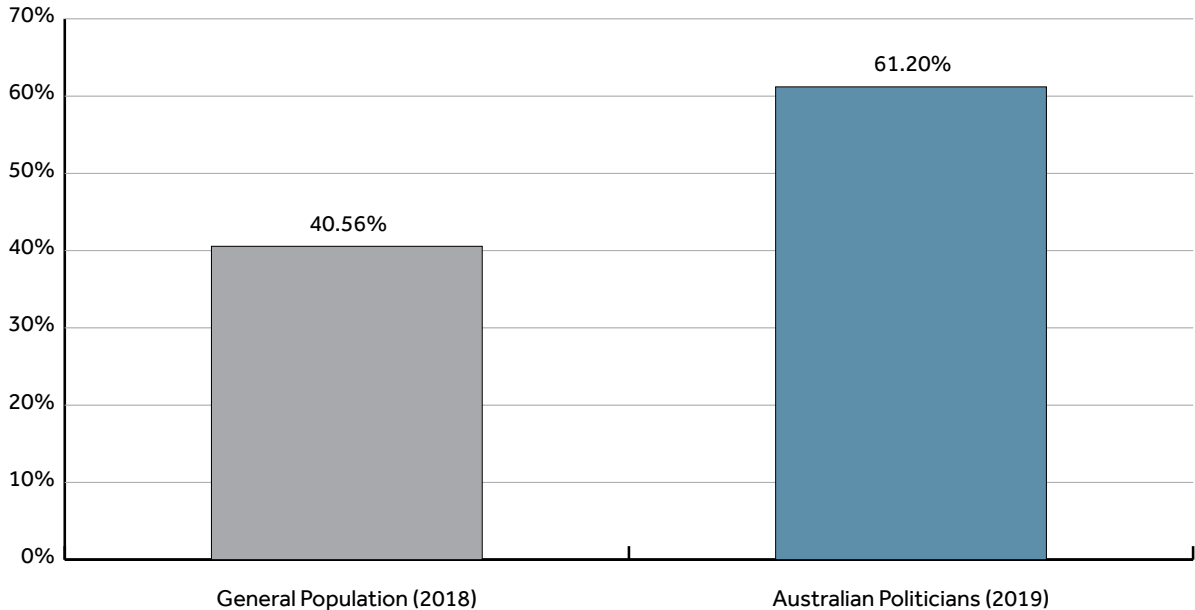


Figure 3. Top '3' likes about Australian democracy – federal politicians and citizens compared

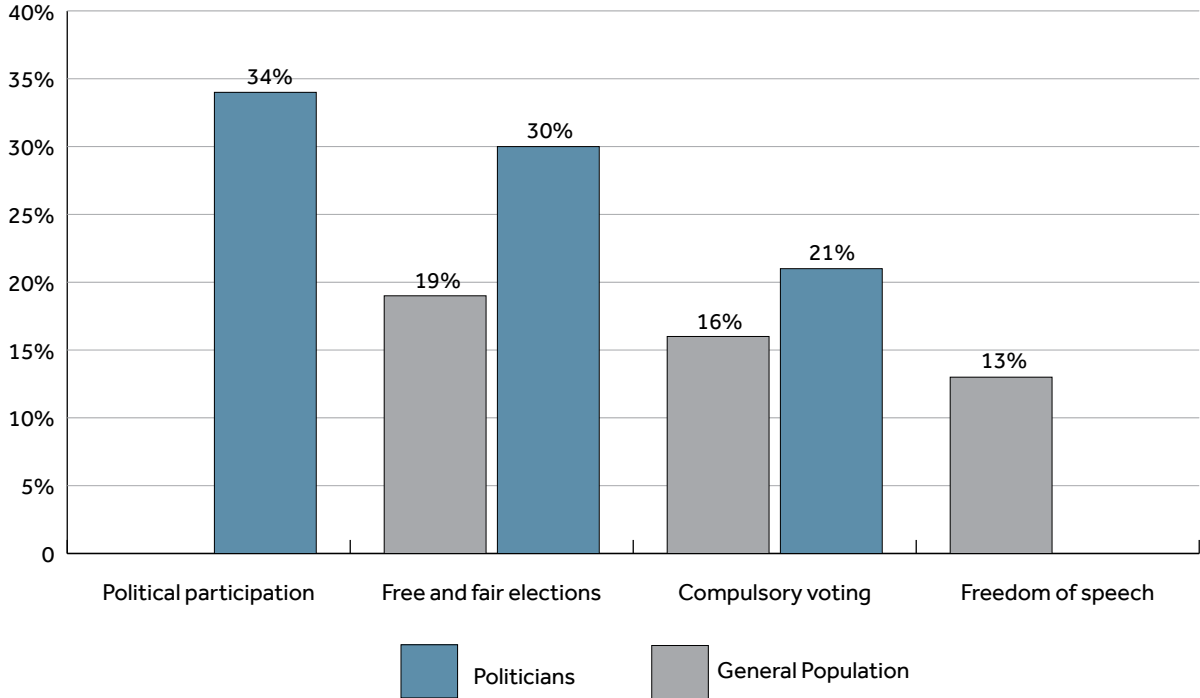
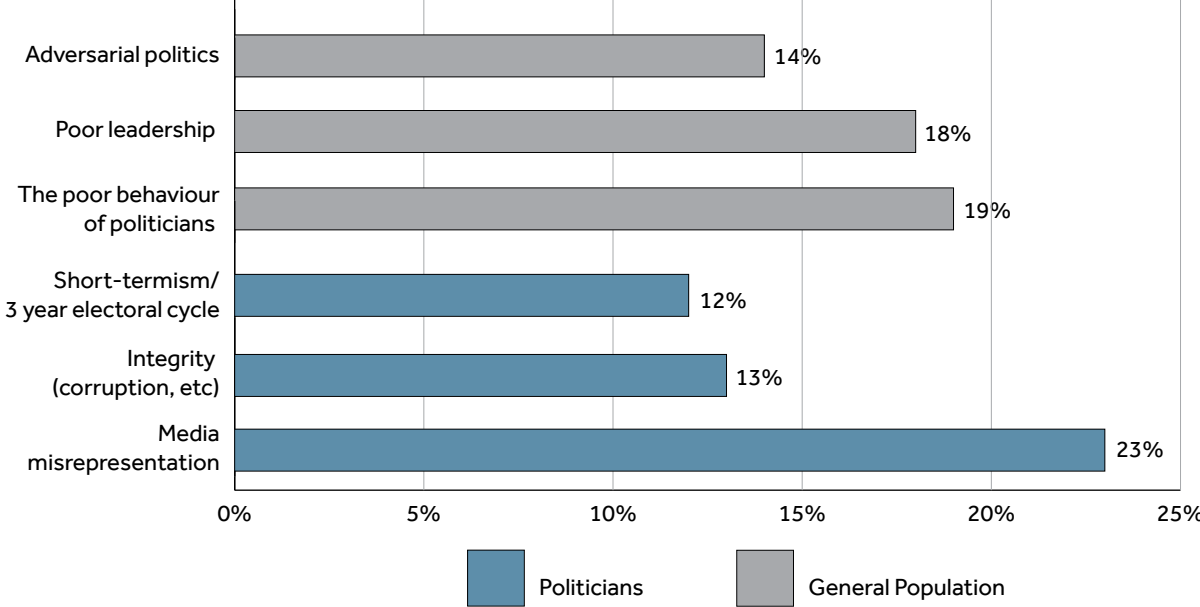


Figure 4. Top '3' dislikes about Australian democracy – federal politicians and citizens compared



Parliamentarians extol the virtue of the Australian political system in providing access for citizens to exercise their right to political participation.

Parliamentarians and citizens have certain differences in what they dislike about the nature of Australia's democratic arrangements; *however they still have much in common* (see Figure 4).

Parliamentarians focus on the lack of public understanding of how government works and the disproportionate power of minority representatives in decision-making. Citizens focus on "not being able to hold politicians to account for broken promises", politicians "not dealing with the issues that really matter", and the disproportionate power of big business or trade unions in decision-making (Stoker et al., 2018a: 40). However, they have a shared concern with the conflict-driven nature of two party politics and the media focusing too much "on personalities and not enough on policy" (Stoker et al., 2018a: 41).

Concern with media misrepresentation and the pressure of the media cycle is considered by parliamentarians to be the major weakness in Australian democratic practice (see Figure 4).

Remarkably, there are a broad set of issues pertaining to the role of political parties and the performance of politicians that also drive dissatisfaction with democratic practice (see Table 2). This auto-critique includes unease with: the dominance of party machines and the two-party system; lack of responsiveness to constituents and poor public engagement; limits of party representation; poor behavior of politicians; the low quality of parliamentary debate; and, a perception of the increasingly isolated career politician.

In sum, politicians appear to be genuinely concerned with the adverse impact of the professionalisation of the party machine on its community-linkage role. Perhaps the most damaging outcome of this development has been declining public trust which in turn has weakened the ability of political parties to perform their educative function through communities. Politicians are also concerned with the short-term nature of decision-making precipitated by the three year electoral cycle; which potentially undermines their role in democratic governance.

4. THE REFORMS THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE

The concerns about a weakening of the community-linkage role are reflected in parliamentarians' attitudes towards reform.

But there is also an interest in the reform potential of all three roles. Elected politicians want to focus on improving the way representative democracy works rather than citizens taking a bigger role.

Community-linkage reform

As Table 1 illustrates, unlike Australian citizens (Stoker et al., 2018a: 44) the majority of parliamentarians are against:

- the right to recall their Member of Parliament for a new election if they fail to provide effective representation during the parliamentary term (72 per cent);
- performance review for politicians (72 per cent); and,
- greater use of citizen juries based on the criminal jury system (64 per cent). See Box 2.

Although parliamentarians recognize the importance of the community linkage role, they appear to have limited desire to open up the system to direct influence from the public. At the same time parliamentarians embrace other reforms that enhance the community-linkage role including:

- ordinary party members and voters should have more say in choosing party leaders and election candidates (49 per cent);
- there should be provision to allow E-petitions to Parliament (54 per cent);

- dual citizens should be able to stand for election without renouncing their overseas citizenship (47 per cent); and,
- there should be less voting on party lines based on manifesto promises and more free votes (46 per cent).

When we asked parliamentarians what other reforms they would like to see (see Table 2), the responses highlighted a strong desire for improved publicly funded civics education and formal electorate forums for all parliamentarians. The former idea is a reflection of the existence of different approaches to civics education across states and territories and different patterns of funding. The general perception is there is a need for a national framework and funding commitment to ensure that the Australian electorate is politically literate. The latter idea is about introducing an element of public accountability through the establishment of public forums with standing minutes and reporting requirements to ensure that parliamentarians remain responsive to the interests of their constituents.

Table 1. The reforms that parliamentarians would/would not like to see

Innovations	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
Parties and candidates should be limited in how much money they can spend on election campaigning and how much they can accept from donors.	41.89%	33.78%	75.67%
During election campaigns prospective federal MPs should be required to provide electors with details of their federal and local campaign pledges to ensure commitment to supporting local needs and aspirations.	16.22%	41.89%	58.11%
Provisions should be made to allow Australian citizens the right to E-petition the Australian Parliament for public interest legislation to be debated.	21.62%	33.78%	55.40%
Ordinary party members and voters should have more say in choosing party leaders and election candidates	16.22%	32.43%	48.65%
Dual citizens should be able to stand for election without renouncing their overseas citizenship.	22.97%	24.32%	47.29%
There should be less voting on party lines based on manifesto promises and more free votes to allow each MP to make their own decision.	10.81%	35.14%	45.95%
Public services should be co-designed with Australian citizens.	6.85%	27.40%	34.25%
The size of electorates should be reduced (for example to the size of a local government area) to ensure that MPs are more responsive to their communities.	6.76%	21.62%	28.38%
The resignation of a Prime Minister should trigger a Federal election.	9.46%	9.46%	18.92%
Local communities should have the right to recall their Member of Parliament for a new election if they fail to provide effective representation during the parliamentary term.	2.70%	12.16%	14.86%
Performance review for politicians should be conducted biannually by a panel consisting of a senior parliamentarian and four randomly selected members of the MP's constituency.	2.70%	12.16%	14.86%
Postal voting – inviting all voters to choose between two options – should be used to resolve policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.	4.05%	10.81%	14.86%
Citizen juries based on the criminal jury system and comprised of a random sample of up to 15 Australian citizens should be used to solve complex policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.	4.05%	9.46%	13.51%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of gender.	1.35%	10.81%	12.16%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of ethnicity.	2.74%	5.48%	8.22%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of age,	1.35%	2.70%	4.05%

Box 2. What is a citizens' jury?

A citizens' jury is a group of randomly selected members of a community convened to consider a given topic and provide a response or recommendation to a governing body. In Australia and around the world, juries have increasingly become recognised for their capacity to deliver outcomes that are trusted by the broader community.⁷

The key operational features of a jury are:

- *Random Selection* – drawing on the criminal justice system jurors assess evidence, discuss their views and reach a consensus recommendation because random selection generates 'people like us'.
- *Time* – is largely dependent on the nature of the task undertaken and the knowledge of the jurors but regardless of whether the jurors are lay-people or experts there should be sufficient time to meaningfully deliberate and find common ground without feeling pushed toward a pre-ordained outcome.
- *Information* – neutrality and accessibility of information is a core principle.
- *Clear remit* – a plain English question, phrased neutrally is essential.
- *Upfront authority* – to get everyday people in the room making a considerable time commitment, they need to know that the recommendations they reach mean something and won't be consumed within the bureaucracy.
- *Operation* – an 80 per cent supermajority is required for a final decision from the jury. In practice, they rarely need to go to a vote and decisions are frequently unanimous.
- Pre and post surveys are completed by participants to assess the impact of deliberation on preference formation.

Recent examples in Australia include Local Democracy in Geelong, Yarra Valley Water, and Nuclear Waste Management in South Australia (see: <https://www.mosaiclab.com.au/projects/>).

Integrity reform

In terms of the integrity role, the majority of parliamentarians agree with the majority of Australian citizens that:

- parties and candidates should be limited in how much money they can spend on election campaigning and how much they can accept from donors (75 per cent); and,
- federal MPs should be required to provide electors with details of their federal and local campaign pledges (58 per cent).

The latter reform demonstrates the importance of the 'integrity' role in linking national and local politics, and enhancing trust between government and citizen. When we asked parliamentarians what other reforms they would like to see (see Table 2), the responses recognised the need for integrity reform and commitment to more open government emphasising the 'public right to know'.

⁷ For further details, see *How a jury works* at www.democracy2025.gov.au and <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/library/what-is-a-citizens-jury> (retrieved 25 July 2019).

Table 2. 'Other' democratic reforms parliamentarians would like to see

Problem	Reform
GOVERNANCE REFORM	
Short-termism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four year fixed term parliaments (3)
Participation/representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affirmative Indigenous representation/constitutional guarantee for Indigenous input into legislation (3) • electronic voting (2) • reduce size of electorates in regional and rural Australia (3) • gender parity in party representation (1) • greater use of deliberative and direct democracy (2) • elected head of state (1)
Over-representation of minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • senate reform (1)
Poor parliamentary debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase procedural time for parliamentary debate (2)
Centralisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regional sittings of parliament and cabinet (3) • independent constitutional court to address issues on commonwealth-state powers (1), • reform of the Federation (1) • to two tiers of government (1)
Compulsory voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • end compulsory voting (2)
Dominance of the two party system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proportional representation (2) • voting reform (1)
COMMUNITY-LINKAGE REFORM	
Political literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • electorate forums (1) • life-long civics education (3)
INTEGRITY REFORM	
Political donations, campaign expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • federal ICAC (1)
'Public right to know'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open government (3) • greater access to information (3) • committee system reform (3)
MEDIA REFORM	
Fake news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact checking (1)

Governance reform

When we asked parliamentarians what other reforms they would like to see (see Table 2), a variety of governance reforms came to the fore; although few commanded very significant support. The most popular included: four year fixed term parliaments; affirmative Indigenous

representation/constitutional guarantee for Indigenous input into legislation; and, regional sittings of cabinet and parliament to enhance public accountability and connect-up Canberra with regional Australia.

5. COMMENTARY

We would argue that there are at least two significant gaps in the reform agenda that remain unaddressed – the importance of exploiting the potential of digital politics and building an effective working relationship with the Australian Public Service (APS) to enhance the performance of government.

The digital party

It is surprising that there is no mention throughout our survey findings of how digital politics can help bridge the trust divide. This is at the same time when there is increasing evidence of the need for government to respond to a culture shift in Australian society where the majority of citizens have become 'IT literate'. There were approximately 14.7 million internet subscribers and 27 million mobile handset subscribers in Australia at the end of 2018 (ABS 2018) with 1.3 million without access (Thomas et al., 2019). Consumerisation has heightened citizen expectation for quality on-line government interactions 'any time, any place, anywhere' and this is particularly evident in the uptake of smart phone technology. Furthermore, the concept of the 'digital party' has over the last decade become a new blueprint for political party organisation and has been behind the success of the Pirate Parties in Northern Europe, Podemos in Spain, the 5-Star Movement in Italy, and the movements behind Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the U.K.

As Paolo Gerbaudo, author of *The Digital Party* (2019) observes traditional forms of party organisation based on delegate democracy and

the establishment of mass party memberships are slowly giving way to digital movements in which we find younger political activists who have been politicised by events such as the 2010 student protests and the Occupy movement:

These people tend to be suspicious of delegate democracy, of the heavy intermediation that it involves, and of the cadres who carry out these tasks. They are less keen on endless physical meetings, when compared to older and more ideological militants, and believe that all members should be empowered to participate directly in important decisions whenever possible.⁸

These digital parties have developed on-line platforms or 'participation portals' to engage directly with their activists such as the U.K. Labour Party's *My Momentum*, *LiquidFeedback* for Pirate parties in Northern Europe, *Rousseau* in the Five Star Movement in Italy, and *Participa* in Podemos in Spain. These platforms allow party members to make decisions on party leadership, candidates and policies; create and join local groups; donate to the movement; download campaign material and attend online training sessions for activists and prospective candidates. They are often available via mobile apps, allowing easy access from any point and at any time:

...participatory platforms such as the ones listed above have become the 'digital heart' of new political organisations: the space in which the digital assembly of members is

⁸ See the interview with Paolo Gerbaudo at: <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/momentum-labour-online-digital-activism-social-media-party/> retrieved 17 July 2019.

periodically summoned to discuss and decide on important issues affecting their organisation. In this context, the platform comes to substitute the multi-tier bureaucratic structure of mass party of the industrial era, which in present digital times is perceived to be too heavy and convoluted to allow for effective organisation and mobilisation.

Enhancing government performance

With the exception of cyclical cuts in public expenditure and the ongoing pursuit of the performance dividend, there has been a general tendency for Australian government's to ignore the role that the APS plays in democratic governance in general and trust building in particular. This is in spite of a burgeoning evidence base demonstrating that public trust must in some way correspond with the trustworthiness of government and this includes the political and bureaucratic classes working to the same ends (see Stoker and Evans, 2018b). It is the performance (or supply) of government that matters most in orienting the outlooks of citizens, together with commitment to procedural fairness and equality. As David Thodey the Chair of the current Review of the Australian Public Service (APS) has highlighted "Trust is a foundation stone for good [APS] work".⁹

As we have seen, politicians are interested in supply-side interventions that seek to enhance the integrity of politicians, and the quality and procedural fairness of parliamentary processes, through open government including

transparency and accountability mechanisms. However, they appear less interested in the performance of the APS.

Performance legitimacy in this area of democratic governance arises from the public's assessment of their record in delivering public goods and services like economic growth, welfare and security (Boswell, 2018). If important, as commonly assumed, then public confidence should relate to perceptual and/or aggregate indicators of policy outputs and outcomes, such as satisfaction with the performance of the economy or the record on education and health care (Tyler & Trinkner 2017).

Furthermore, communication through the news media often shapes public perceptions of government performance, with lack of confidence in government linked with exposure to negative news critical of politics, government and public affairs, focusing on 'gotcha' scandals rather than substantive policy issues. These concerns have grown in an age of truth decay, social media bubbles, overseas meddling in domestic election campaigns, and suspicion of legacy journalism. Some argue (Zoizner 2018) that the media simply informs citizens or signals to them to pay attention to certain issues, but on balance, a review of the available research indicates that the way in which news is framed is having a negative impact on government performance and encourages public distrust.

We recently convened a deliberative jury with representatives from every member of the APS Secretaries Board on what the APS can do to help

⁹ See S. Easton, "APS Review update: panel leaning towards a small list of big ideas", *The Mandarin*, 7 November 2018. See: <https://www.themandarin.com.au/101037-aps-review-panel-update-panel-leaning-towards-a-small-list-of-big-ideas/>. Retrieved 21 February 2019.

bridge the trust divide.¹⁰ It was deliberately scheduled to coincide with the APS review.

The jury concluded:

Nine recommendations for bridging the trust divide have been tabled for consideration by the Secretaries Board stimulated by the desire of jury members to support the needs and aspirations of Australian communities.

Our recommendations focus on building trusting working relationships between the APS and Minister's offices, other jurisdictions of government, the media system and the Australian citizenry. In addition, an emphasis is placed on inclusive policy-making for the long term and building institutional capacity to adapt to longer term challenges beyond the short term electoral cycle.

This will require reaffirmation of some of the key features of the Westminster model of parliamentary government; in particular, the independent nature of the APS and its ability to recruit its leadership free of political interference, discharge its stewardship role and meet the terms of the *1999 Public Service Act*.

It will also require celebration of what is authentically Australian about our Westminster system and the central role of an independent APS in both maintaining and enabling public sector institutions and services to flourish (Democracy 2025 and MosaicGroup, 2019).

There is an overlap between these recommendations and those proposed by our sample of politicians in terms of community-linkage and governance reform. Moreover, it is anticipated that many of these recommendations will be consistent with the outcomes of the APS review.

10 See Mark Evans and Sean Innis, 'The APS's role in restoring public trust', *The Mandarin*, March 25 2019 retrieved 18 July 2019 from: <https://www.themandarin.com.au/106018-the-aps-role-in-restoring-public-trust/> and Mark Evans 'The public service warms to renewal' *The Mandarin*, January 30 2019 retrieved 18 July 2019 from: <https://www.themandarin.com.au/87882-public-service-warms-renewal/>

6. IN CONCLUSION: ENHANCING THE ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Politicians and the institutions through which they work – particularly the APS, political parties and parliaments – have the fundamental task of giving citizens a way into democratic politics. However, they are all failing to varying degrees in their ambitions to bring large-scale collective engagement to the political process.

Political parties are struggling to deliver the political functions of aggregating and cohering community interests. They have also neglected the role of talking directly to the public. The findings presented above reinforce the Mair critique of contemporary political parties identified in part two; that parties are good at the governance role and less good at the community linkage role. This observation provides a positive base for reform as it also aligns with community sentiment. It is also a shared experience with other democracies around the world (Norris and Inglehart, 2018).

We therefore identify a range of reforms that politicians believe will both help bridge the trust divide and strengthen the role of political parties in discharging their governance, community linkage and integrity functions in democratic politics.

Most of these reforms are not particularly new in the context of contemporary processes of democratic modernisation (Smith 2009 & Alonso et al., 2011) bringing into sharp focus Amartya Sen's (1999) argument that "formal rules are not enough without good democratic practice".

In other words, reform is as much about improving existing democratic practices than designing new ways of doing democracy.

But there is a twist to this tale. Historically, reform choices have been presented as a binary choice between reforms that strengthen the representative system of government and reforms that extend greater public participation. It is increasingly evident, however, that both Australian citizens and politicians think that participatory reforms can be used to bolster the legitimacy of representative democracy and enhance trust between government and citizen. It is the mix that matters.

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