

Rejoinder to Chapter 1 – “Why “Saving” democracy?”

Many thanks for the rich feedback to the introductory chapter “Why “Saving” democracy?”. The book will be much better in consequence of your contributions.

We are delighted that (with some fine tuning) you are happy with the systems approach to politics that we are using; that you recognize the difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ power and its’ implications; and that you see merit in the global challenges to democracy that we have identified.

There are different views on the focus for reform but we are confident that these differences will be addressed in the chapters on reform to follow.

The key critique of the introductory chapter is the view that we are being too kind to politicians and political parties and too conservative on alternative forms of representation such as sortition. There have been some really powerful comments on these issues:

“I cannot shake the idea from my head that Citizens' Assemblies (or Juries, or whatever name they are given) are the only possible means of achieving genuine, truly representative, constant, and real-time democracy (Greg Flint)”.

“I’d like to add another perspective that, as far as I can tell, isn’t reflected in your introduction, and this is as follows. Systems are as they are because of the particular mixture of players operating in that system – in this case politicians, party operatives, public servants, lobbyists, donors, media, activists, voters etc – and the power and motives possessed by each of them. To bring about a change in this system you need to identify some ‘first changes’, some actions that particular actors have both the power and the motivation to implement. Moreover, these actions need to be such that they can then trigger further actions that will in turn significantly change the way the system functions... So who has the motivation to implement the ‘first changes’? Clearly not the main parties or the powerful players who support them (though this is less the case for the ALP). I would argue that it is citizens, operating in organised groups at the electorate level to get better representation, who have the motivation, and the power. As the final sentence in your introduction puts it, they can “work with the logic of new power to connect to old power...if we citizens can organise ourselves in each of our electorates, we can give this process more democratic substance. We have the motivation and the power to make the ‘first changes’ that can then precipitate further changes in the system” (Rob Salter).

We agree with Greg’s argument that citizens assemblies and juries have a fundamental role to play in renewing liberal democracy and have made this argument elsewhere and will restate our commitment in Chapter 4. See: <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6742271/is-our-democracy-due-for-an-upgrade/> and <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6775468/why-the-act-needs-a-participatory-budget-post-covid/>.

However, we do not see sortition as replacing representative democracy rather as a component of a broader participatory governance system where a variety of participatory methods can be used to solve governance problems, address deficiencies within the representative system of government and bolster the legitimacy of public policy-making. In addition to deliberative

democratic forums, this would include co-designing services with citizens, direct democracy innovations, and digital democracy innovations. We defend the representative role of politicians but think that it requires a serious redesign to address its dysfunctions and contradictions.

We deal with this issue head-on in the next chapter and hope that we get it right because it is a tricky argument.

Rob's argument is also spot on – we need to think about the sequencing of reform and 'first changes' and the role that citizens can play in making elections more competitive (as in the Indi example), political parties more democratic through grassroots activism and more responsive through civic action at the local scale. We will investigate the proposition that citizen-led first changes can precipitate changes to the wider system. We really like the idea that there can be some form of progressive spill-over from first changes.

Hendrik Wagenaar also makes the important point (and cautionary tale) that we need to address the democratic deficits that have emerged as a bi-product of managing the pandemic and we will focus Chapter 10 on this issue.

Richard Bull also rightly stresses the importance of addressing problems of representation, integrity, and capability as democratic fundamentals and we will pick-up on these issues in *Part 2 Interventions at the Throughput Stage to improve the quality and integrity of politics* and in *Chapter 12 – Changing the Communication and Consumption of Politics: old and new media*.

Sarah Barter also makes some really insightful comments about the need to demonstrate to our fellow citizens through evidence where our political system is failing and (in my view) where it is flourishing. In terms of the book, each reform chapter will start by addressing the problem that the reform will address using the latest evidence. But in terms of Democracy 2025, we have initiated the Democratic Audit of Australia project to ensure that we have a robust evidence base on the strengths and weaknesses of our democratic practices. See: <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/programs/public-trust-program.html>.

Sarah also reminds us that we need to be better at engaging with the silent majority on these issues. We have initiated engagement projects such as this one; but we need to do better. Any suggestions are welcome!

At the same time the book calls for more active citizenship. We get the governments, politicians and political parties that we deserve. As Rob suggests, if we are not happy with our political parties or representatives, we have a responsibility to our democracy to make the change. As this engagement suggests, there is no shortage of high-quality thinkers and leaders in all walks of life in Australia and elsewhere – we need to get them into politics.

Although this does not close-off further discussion on the introductory chapter, our next chapter can be found here.

The key questions that we are puzzling over are: have we focused on the central problems with democracy? Is the case for saving democracy clearly articulated? As noted above, we defend the representative role of politicians but think that it requires a serious redesign to address its dysfunctions and contradictions. Do you buy this argument?

Mark and Gerry
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