

Rejoinder to commentary on Chapter Two and a note for the release of Chapters Four, Five and Six

Many thanks for the thoughtful feedback to Chapter Two – “Can Democracy be Saved?” We have received a broad range of comments which we will integrate into final copy.

In general, the forum is happy with the approach taken in this chapter. Criticism tends to focus on the need to emphasize specific problems in liberal democracy or ways forward.

Sarah Barter, for example, identifies two problems that need to be addressed. First, the need to define what we mean by ‘democracy’ and ‘politics’ more clearly as “most people do not understand the difference between the two and when asked what they think of democracy their answer is actually to what they think about politics”. This is a great point and our survey research supports this observation. Australians like democracy but don’t like the conflict-driven, adversarial politics displayed in Question Time. But they often conflate the two which creates risks for democratic governance. There is also World Values Survey data that support this observation in other countries. See our latest report on *Political Trust in Times of Coronavirus* at:

<https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/documents/Is%20Australia%20still%20the%20lucky%20country.pdf>

where we conclude:

The critical insight then is clear: Australia needs to embrace this new style of politics – one that is cleaner, collaborative and evidence-based – to drive post-COVID-19 recovery and remain a lucky country (see: <https://theconversation.com/australians-highly-confident-of-governments-handling-of-coronavirus-and-economic-recovery-new-research-142904>)

We will pick up on this observation in several reform chapters which focus on the need to challenge adversarial politics.

Second, Sarah also makes the crucial point that:

...it would be helpful to acknowledge that the political system is designed to keep ordinary voters out and to make understanding it as difficult as possible. Some examples are the lack of education - in a country where voting is compulsory, why are citizens not required to understand how the system works before they leave school?

This is a comparative book so unfortunately we need to pitch this book at quite a high level of generality. However, we do agree that the evidence suggests that Australia appears to have an elitist democracy which is founded on a historic division of labour between an insulated political elite which governs and a passive citizenry which is governed (see: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26902426?seq=1>). Hence the need to use participatory democracy reforms to make our representative system more robust, and responsive through active citizenship. Better life-long civics education is one of a range of mechanisms for achieving this. It is currently missing the mark for young Australians (as our survey data suggests) but a civics education that is co-designed with young Australians in a way that makes politics fun

and encourages rather than discourages active citizenship is a way forward. We discuss this issue in Chapters 11 and 12. It is also a key concern of Democracy 2025's ignite learning program. See: <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/.../ignite-learning...>

Drew Wolfendale rightly notes that different electoral systems facilitate different models of democracy and forms of representation. See:

<https://docs.google.com/.../1ooIIVHF8Y5UNZsvZICRT.../edit...>

We will explore this observation in more detail in Chapter 6 on *The Good Politician and Equal Representation*.

Dr Bronwyn Kelly has developed a unifying theme in her (and Australian Community Futures Planning) elegant account of the future of Australian democracy – *By 2050* – that Australia requires a shared national community futures plan and a national integrated planning and reporting system to achieve it. We agree with the core insight, particularly in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery (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/>) and can see how the democratisation of national planning systems geared towards long-term problem solving would be a major advance. However, opening-up hitherto closed systems of government will be a challenge, as will be the inclusion of citizens beyond the usual suspects in decision-making processes. It will also require political parties to abide by the outcomes of the shared national community futures plan which “will take precedence over their party political platforms”.

We also concur with Bronwyn’s observation that – “Representative democracy in advanced countries like Australia needs to find a way to get over its ancient embedded fear of rule by the mob or, more accurately, rule by the majority”. John Stuart Mill was never able to resolve this fear of the dictatorship of the majority – like Athenians before him he viewed political participation beyond voting as a preserve for the educated elite.

These are challenges that both of our accounts seek to address but through different methods.

As the book progresses, we use terms developed in the governance literature to tackle similar issues such as participatory design or co-design, participatory governance, participatory localism etc. We also look at various international case studies that use different engagement methods to tackle wicked or intractable problems.

The next section of chapters, for example, look at how you can construct participatory governance systems to build trust systems between government and citizen. In addition, Chapter 9 evaluates how public service systems can ensure a focus on publicly valued outcomes and Chapter 10 examines the lessons (positive and negative) that we can draw from the political management of COVID-19 for future governance. And Chapter 11 focuses on how we can embed long-term thinking in governance systems.

Although this rejoinder does not close-off further discussion on Chapter Two, our next chapters can be found here: <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/programs/save-democracy-post-covid-19.html>

We have decided to release the second section of the book next to generate comment on what we need to do to strengthen democracy in a post-COVID-19 world. Part two focuses on inputs.

It is organized into three chapters, each representing a mode of governance for framing political demands, and, institutionalizing and embedding new forms of citizen voice into the practices of democratic governance.

This includes direct democracy in Chapter Four and, deliberative democracy and digital democracy in chapters five and six. The three chapters review the most common engagement methods used in different sites of decision-making (noting that they are applicable to more than one site) through the review of a range of case study illustrations that illustrate the methods in action.

We provide a section introduction to help guide readers to the chapters that follow. This introductory section won't be in the final book.

There are three key questions that we would like your help with:

Does the idea of a participatory governance system make sense?

Are the methods of citizen engagement comprehensive?

And, are there better case study illustrations available to illustrate the methods in action?

Many thanks for all your help!

Mark and Gerry

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