

HOW  
AUSTRALIANS  
IMAGINE  
THEIR  
DEMOCRACY:  
**THE “POWER OF US”**

Mark Evans, Max Halupka and Gerry Stoker



MUSEUM  
OF AUSTRALIAN  
DEMOCRACY  
OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

DEMOCRACY  
**100**

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



## CONTENTS

4	Forward
6	Summary
8	How satisfied are you with democracy in Australia and how does this compare with the national picture?
10	How does this compare internationally?
12	What do you believe to be Australia's core democratic values?
14	What do you like/dislike about democracy in Australia?
20	Is declining political trust a problem?
22	How does political trust manifest itself?
24	Low trust and confidence in federal government
26	How does political trust matter?
28	But what do Australians believe the ideal politician looks like?
30	What reforms to our democracy would Australians like to see?
34	What do you believe are the responsibilities of a Democracy 100 champion?
40	References

## FORWARD

In 2016 and 2017, the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) and the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA) at the University of Canberra conducted quantitative and qualitative surveys on the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy in Australia. This built upon earlier work conducted by the Institute on political engagement in Australia (Evans et al., 2013). The recent research included a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 1244 Australians and 10 focus groups with various 'slices of Australian life': mainstream Australians (recruited at random, mix of age, gender, family and socio-economic status); older Australians (over 65, not working); young Australians (under 23); new Australians (migrants to Australia that became citizens within the past 10 years); rural and regional Australians (living outside metropolitan Australia); LGBTQI Australians; and, Australians with disability (and their carers). We called it *The Power of Us Survey* and the findings will underpin the content of a new exhibition to be launched in Old Parliament House in March next year.

This Democracy 100 brief compares our findings with data derived from the pre-event survey of what you think about Australian democracy, its core values, strengths and weaknesses and areas requiring renewal. The data will help inform our deliberations on the responsibilities of a democratic champion at the Democracy 100 You Can Make a Difference event on 16<sup>th</sup> August.

*Please note that illustrative verbatims (presented in italics) used in this report have been edited for brevity and/or sense.*



“

*What does Australian democracy mean to me? It means a second chance for a peaceful life for my family. We will always be grateful for this opportunity. I don't think Australians know how lucky they are. But I guess they don't know. You only know how good something is when you haven't got it.*

”

**NEW AUSTRALIAN**

## SUMMARY

*This Democracy 100 brief reports that Australians should rightly be proud of their hard won democratic traditions and freedoms and the achievement of stable government which has delivered social and economic wellbeing for its citizens. However, the findings herein should give all democrats pause for thought.*

*There is compelling evidence of the increasing disconnect between government and citizen reflected in the decline of democratic satisfaction, trust in politicians, political parties and other key institutions and lack of public confidence in the capacity of governments (of whatever colour) to address public policy concerns. Indeed we are currently experiencing a culture shift from an allegiant to a divergent democratic culture.*

*Nonetheless, Democracy 100 champions remain confident in the adaptive capacity of Australian democracy to renew itself through the “Power of Us”. With this aim in mind they present a compelling canvass of the constituent elements of a Charter for Democratic Practice based on authentic democratic values, which can enable all Australians to participate and meet the challenges of 21st century governance.*





“

*We should be proud of what we've achieved. When we were kids we had nothing new. I was the youngest so everything was handed down to me. I didn't have my own pair of shoes until I went to war. The church picnic, chicken at Christmas, sharing a bar of chocolate – these were our luxuries. The stuff kids get today; they have no idea. Democracy has given us so much but we need to remember where we have come from; remember our history.*

”

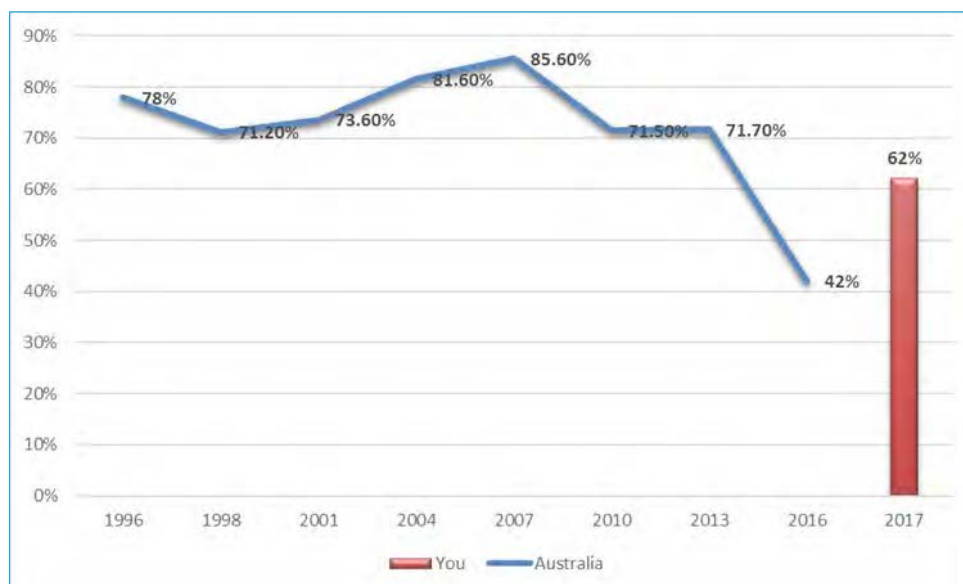
**ELDERLY AUSTRALIAN**

## HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA AND HOW DOES THIS COMPARE WITH THE NATIONAL PICTURE?

The Australian economy has experienced twenty years of economic growth. A remarkable performance that is unprecedented both historically and in comparison with other OECD countries over the period. Yet, during the same time Australia has suffered a period of democratic decline and the depth of that decline has increased dramatically since 2007. The level of democratic satisfaction has decreased steadily across each government from 85.6 percent in 2007 (Howard), to 71.5 percent in 2010 (Rudd), 71.7 percent in 2013 (Abbott) and 42 percent in March 2016 under Malcolm Turnbull. In contrast, Democracy 100 champions exhibit greater satisfaction with Australian democracy although, as we shall see later, appear committed to renewal.

Figure 1: Levels of democratic satisfaction in Australia

Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?







“

*I don't care about Australian democracy because it doesn't care about us. It's your democracy not ours.*

”

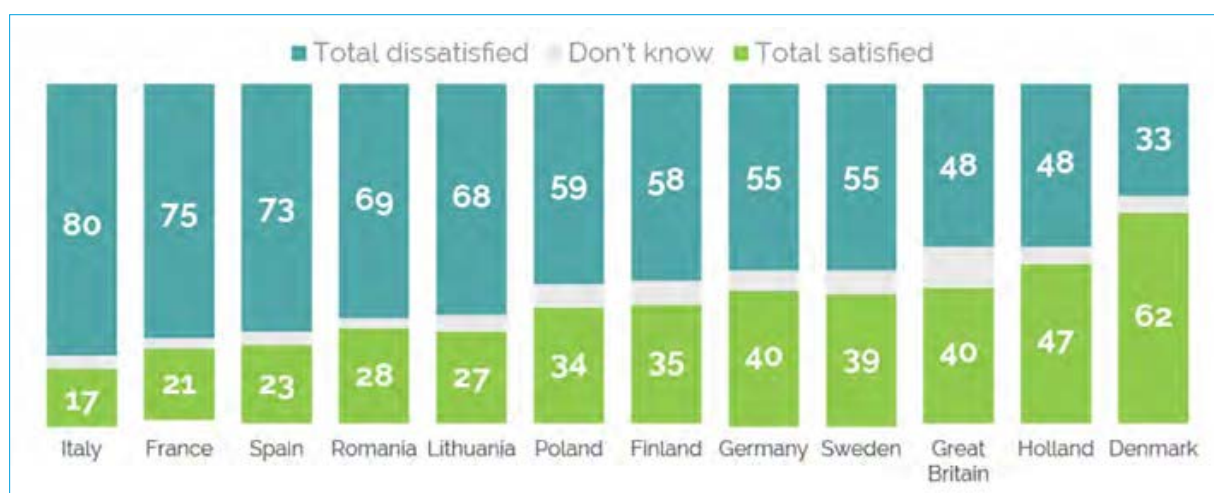
**INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN**

## HOW DOES THIS COMPARE INTERNATIONALLY?

The decline in democratic satisfaction is not peculiar to Australia but what is peculiar is that it is occurring in a period of affluence. It is unsurprising, for example, that European countries impacted by the worst excesses of the Global Financial Crisis and austerity politics should turn away from the established political order and look for a new form of populist politics. But apart from the rise in citizen expectations of government, why is this happening in Australia?

Figure 2: Democratic satisfaction in Europe

Q: On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in your country?





*Australia has come a long way for a young country. We are a great democracy but I think we take a lot for granted. I do think democracy is under attack. If you look at all the democracies in our backyard with the exception of New Zealand they are all vulnerable. It's our responsibility to make our democracy stronger.*



**COASTAL AUSTRALIAN**



## WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE TO BE AUSTRALIA'S CORE DEMOCRATIC VALUES?

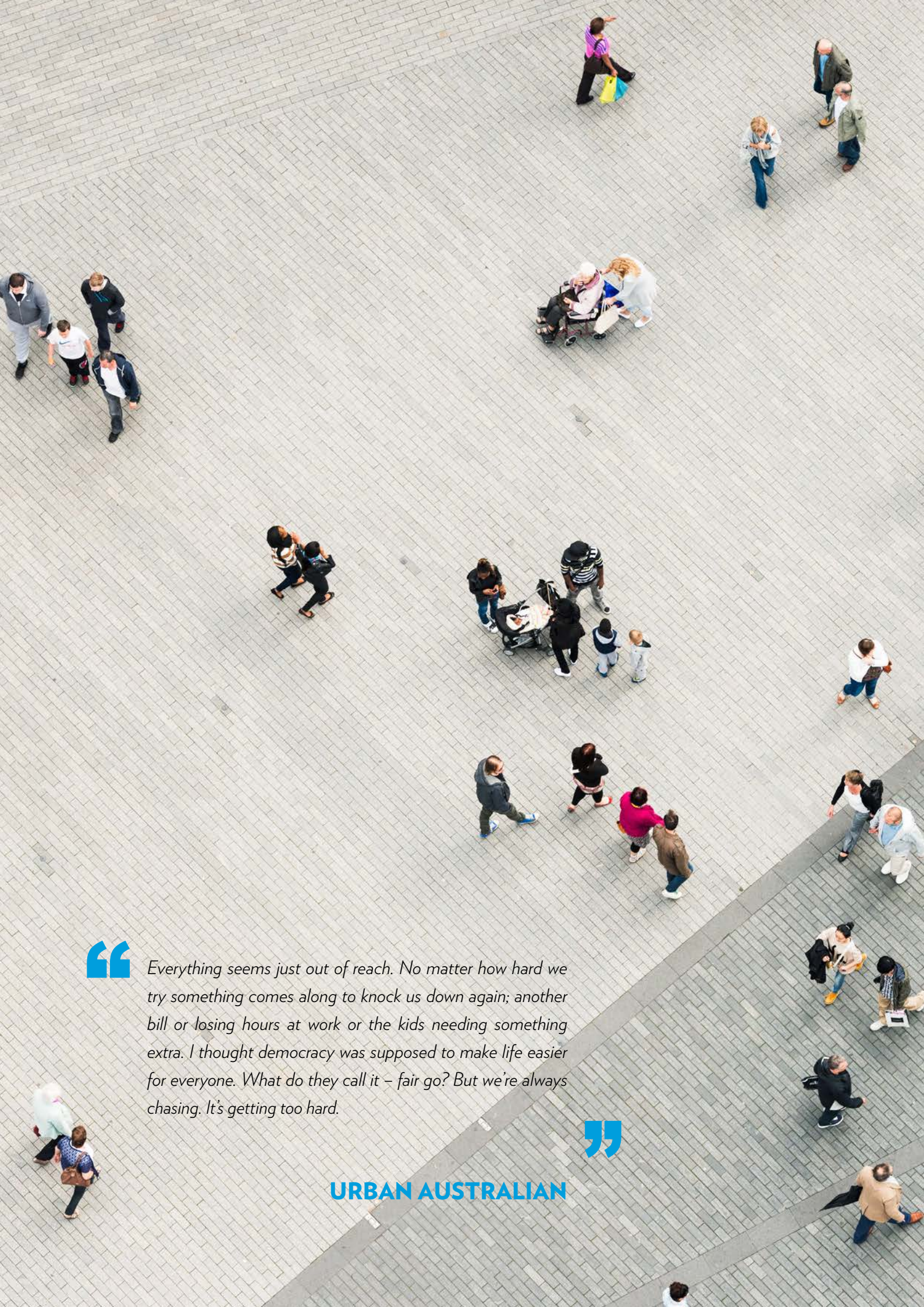
The majority of the top 10 core democratic values selected by our Democratic Champions would probably be on the list of most committed democrats in Western liberal democracies. Freedom of speech and assembly, free and fair elections, the rule of law, the separation of powers, a parliamentary system and provision for the protection of human rights (variously defined) although subject to ongoing social and political challenges feature in all mature liberal democracies. The distinctive Australian democratic values would include the concept of “fair go” which represents both a symbolic historic break from the class based nature of British imperialism and the driver of a cultural perception of all party commitment to social equality. This is epitomised in the notion of “Howard battlers” and reflected in relatively stable patterns of education, health and welfare expenditure over the past three decades. Possibly the most distinctive Australian democratic value is compulsory voting; if, of course, this is unpacked as the recognition that individuals have both rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens. Religious tolerance is also generally viewed as the “Australian way” and has helped to stimulate successive waves of immigration which have made a huge contribution to national prosperity and the quality of Australia’s democratic culture. However, it is presently the most fragile of our democratic values given the need to heighten domestic and international security arrangements in response to the war on terror.

Figure 3: Your Top 10 Democratic Values

Q: What do you think are Australia’s most important democratic values?







*Everything seems just out of reach. No matter how hard we try something comes along to knock us down again; another bill or losing hours at work or the kids needing something extra. I thought democracy was supposed to make life easier for everyone. What do they call it – fair go? But we're always chasing. It's getting too hard.*



**URBAN AUSTRALIAN**



## WHAT DO YOU LIKE/DISLIKE ABOUT DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA?

There is an interesting contrast between our national survey respondents and our Democracy 100 Champions on the capacity of the political system to affect change. Democratic Champions recognize the social and economic gains that democracy has afforded delivered through stable government. Responses on their likes/dislikes about democracy in Australia appear to reflect a genuine belief in the “Power of Us” to adapt to new challenges and renew democracy accordingly (see Figure 5 overleaf). Hence they are less fearful of barriers to change and exhibit greater passion for reform. This is the stuff of genuine Democratic Champions.

The national sentiment is somewhat different. The findings of successive surveys show that citizens view themselves to be observers of, rather than participants in, formal politics (see: Evans et al., 2013, 2016a & b; Martin, 2010; Stoker et al., 2014 & 2017). Crucially, 9 out of 10 regard themselves as without influence over the federal level of government and 7 of 10 come to the same conclusion about other levels of government.

There are therefore elements of malaise in Australian democratic culture, but the core concern of citizens appears to be with the type of politics currently on offer. The research shows that most Australians do not hold the ideals of the democratic political process in contempt. There is strong support for the processes of representative democracy, such as consultation, compromise and democratic judgement, and citizens display a considerable understanding of its complex processes. Our findings also indicate that citizens could be up for a more extended role if a different politics was on offer.

Reflecting on the results from our last three surveys then; the fundamental cause of democratic entropy in contemporary Australian politics is increasingly attributed to the role of mainstream political parties and politicians and the personalisation of politics by the media. This has, of course, been reflected in the increasing number of Australians that are turning away from main-stream political parties (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Perceptions of party loyalty in Australia over time

Q: Before the most recent Federal election for the House of Representatives, had you always voted for the same party, or had you sometimes voted for different parties?



“

*I have a full life. I go at it hard because I want to show everyone that my disability won't hold me back. Not for one second. It's partly because of that, that I get the idea about active citizenship. The great thing about Australian democracy is that there are so many ways in which we can participate. But you have to go for it. I am doing democracy differently to most people and loving every second.*

”

## AUSTRALIAN WITH DISABILITY



Figure 5: The Top 10 Democratic Likes

Q: What do you like about the way democracy works in Australia today?

## WHAT AUSTRALIA THINKS

- Australia has had a peaceful and stable political history
- Australian elections are free and fair
- The battle between the two main political parties makes politics fun
- There are a range of political parties which represent different points of view
- Minor parties and independents often hold the balance of power
- My local member is a good representative for my community
- Politicians are accountable to the people
- Politicians usually find a good middle ground on policy
- I don't have to pay much attention to politics except at election time
- Big corporation and wealth people don't have too much influence
- I have the chance to participate in decisions that affect me and community if I want to
- Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle
- Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens

## WHAT YOU THINK

- Compulsory voting
- Social Equality ("fair go")
- Free and fair elections
- Free press
- Freedom of speech and assembly
- Relatively free from corruption
- Representative government
- Rule of law
- Separation of powers and other checks and balances
- Stable government



“

*We expect a certain level of accountability from most people in the spotlight whether they're a politician or a celebrity but politicians especially. It seems when they do something in Australia, when they do something considered slightly scandalous that overshadows everything else, like their policies and ideals.*

”

**LGBTQI AUSTRALIAN**



Figure 6: The Top 10 Reasons for Distrust

Q: Why do you think there has been a steady decline in citizen trust in our governments since 2007?

## WHAT AUSTRALIA THINKS

- We don't get much choice; political parties are too similar
- Big business has too much power
- The media has too much power
- Women are not well represented within politics
- People from diverse cultures are not well represented within politics
- Young people are not well represented within politics
- Too much compromise and not enough decisive action
- Minor parties and independents hold too much power
- The battle between the two main political parties puts me off politics
- The media focuses too much on personalities and not enough on policy
- Politicians don't deal with the issues that really matter
- Politicians can't be held to account for broken promises

## WHAT YOU THINK

- Lack of action by governments of all persuasion on key public policy problems
- The decline in the quality of public policy debate
- The personalisation of politics by the media and decline in media standards
- The poor behaviour of politicians
- Narrow parliamentary representativeness in gender, ethnic and class terms
- Australians dislike adversarial politics
- The major political parties are undemocratic and broken
- Poor leadership
- Weak economic conditions in the global economy
- The rise of the career politician





*In the election I hated both leaders so I did a dummy vote. I voted for the person with the most comical name and just numbered random ones. It's kind of stupid. My reasoning behind it is I'm only one person. My vote's not going to change anything. It's out of my hands what the current leader decides to do. I don't feel like I can control whoever gets in power. I didn't like either of them so regardless of the result, I was going to hate them, kind of thing and what they choose to do I can't control.*



## MIDDLE CLASS, REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN



## IS DECLINING POLITICAL TRUST A PROBLEM?

Levels of trust in government and politicians in Australia are at their lowest level since 1993. Only five percent of Australians exhibit strong trust in government with 74 percent displaying a critical perspective. 25 percent trust government ministers in contrast with 72 percent who trust the police and 56 percent the judiciary. The most remarkable finding from our survey work and a measure of the degree of discontent is that the majority of Baby Boomers (citizens born between 1946 and 1964) who have benefited most in economic terms from a period of affluence no longer trust their politicians.


However, it is equally evident that Australian citizens are still interested in politics. Hence the level of partisan dealignment is a reflection of the inability of mainstream political parties to capture the political imagination. In particular, mainstream political parties are clearly failing to engage with young Australian citizens in ways that are likely to attract attention and ultimately support. These are very fertile conditions for independent candidates and minority parties with ambitious political agendas.

Among the institutions listed, trust was highest for the police and civic wellbeing organisations and lowest for the federal government. The politically engaged were significantly more likely to trust the federal government, while those on low incomes and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were significantly less likely to do so. Trust in individuals was lower than trust in institutions. Judges were the most trusted and trade unionists were the least trusted. People were more likely to trust their local MP than MPs in general or government ministers.

The majority of survey respondents described the standards of honesty and integrity of elected politicians in Australia as low, and this proportion increased with age. Those aligned to the political right, those more politically engaged and those who speak a language other than English were significantly more likely than others to rate the standards of elected politicians as high, while those on a low income were significantly more likely to rate these as low. The majority also felt that the standards of honesty and integrity of elected politicians in Australia have been declining in recent years. Younger people tended to be more optimistic than older people, and those aligned to the political left were more likely to think standards were improving than the right-aligned. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those who speak a language other than English were also significantly more likely to describe standards as improving.

These trends are in keeping with the international evidence. The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer reports that trust in government has further declined around the world. Government is now distrusted in 75 percent of countries.





*We have moved beyond the point of trust being simply a key factor in product purchase or selection of employment opportunity; it is now the deciding factor in whether a society can function. As trust in institutions erodes, the basic assumptions of fairness, shared values and equal opportunity traditionally upheld by “the system” are no longer taken for granted. We observe deep disillusion on both the left and the right, who share opposition to globalization, innovation, deregulation, and multinational institutions. There is growing despair about the future, a lack of confidence in the possibility of a better life for one’s family. The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer finds that only 15 percent of the general population believe the present system is working, while 53 percent do not and 32 percent are uncertain.*

*(2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, Executive Summary).*

“

*Well I think multiculturalism has been very good for Australia, I think it’s been the backbone for Australia and I think the fact that we have so many different races in Australia has given us an extremely good view of what is fair, so I think while there are moments, different governments, maybe different directions, I think generally Australia is a very fair country and I think that’s largely down to the diverse range of people who live here. Most of us came from a migrant background.*

”

**REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN**

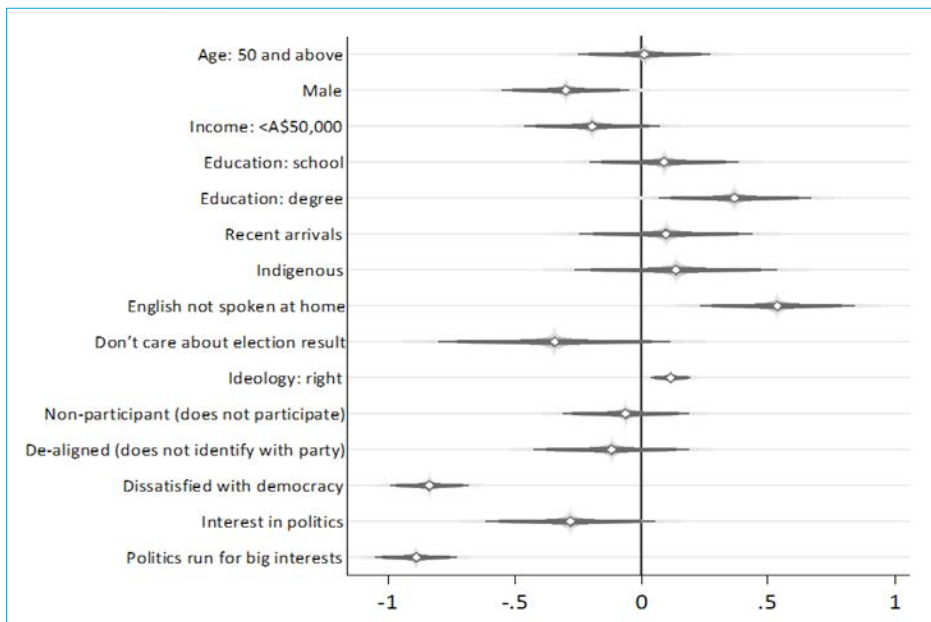


## HOW DOES POLITICAL TRUST MANIFEST ITSELF?

Drawing on our latest quantitative survey research from 2016 in Australia, we can see how the drivers of trust reflect particular stages in the life journey of the individual and their wider attitudes to the political system (see Figure 7). Australian male citizens and citizens on low incomes appear less trusting of federal government; while citizens experiencing higher education, indigenous communities, and new arrivals to Australia appear more trusting. So, the picture on trust and life experience is complex. As for attitudes, the analysis appears more straightforward: those who tend not to trust have stronger general fears about the state of democratic politics in Australia. They either don't care or they think the system is in decline or run for big interests. All of which suggests a strong connection between disaffection with politics and lack of trust in government.

Figure 7: The Drivers of Distrust

(ordinal logistic regression)





*Your voice is heard in Australia. You're not living in a country like Iraq where it gets fabricated. So it's all quite open-minded here compared to other countries so we're quite lucky. We probably should take advantage of it, but we're not.*



## **YOUNG URBAN AUSTRALIAN**





## LOW TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

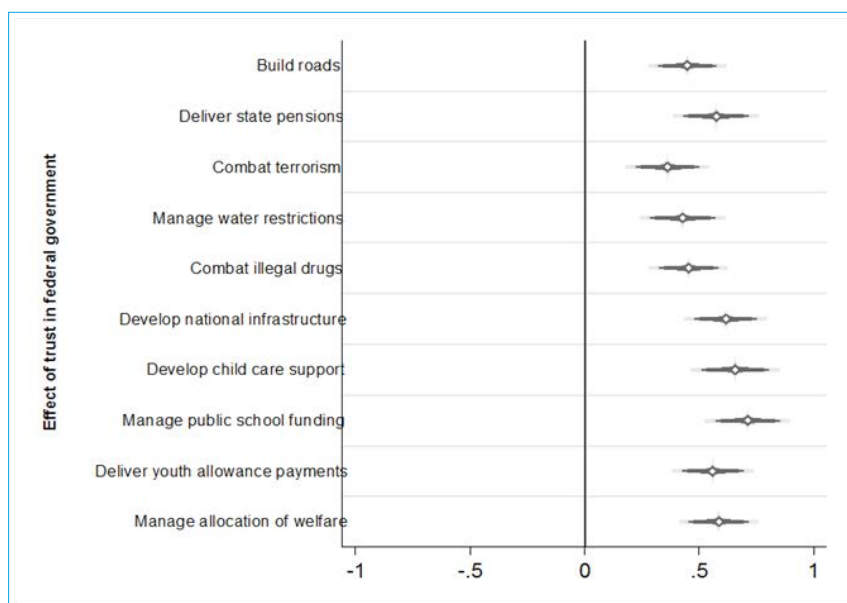
Confidence in the ability of government to deliver key functions and tackle major public policy problems is by no means high, given that at best only half of respondents indicated they were “very confident” or “somewhat confident” in government (see Figures 8 and 9). Citizens did appear to be especially sceptical about government capacity in respect of most wicked tasks or issues and also doubted the capacity of government to undertake certain routine tasks. Citizens appear to be judging their confidence in government to undertake various tasks or issues not by a forensic dissection of the challenges involved but more by their own experience of government effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

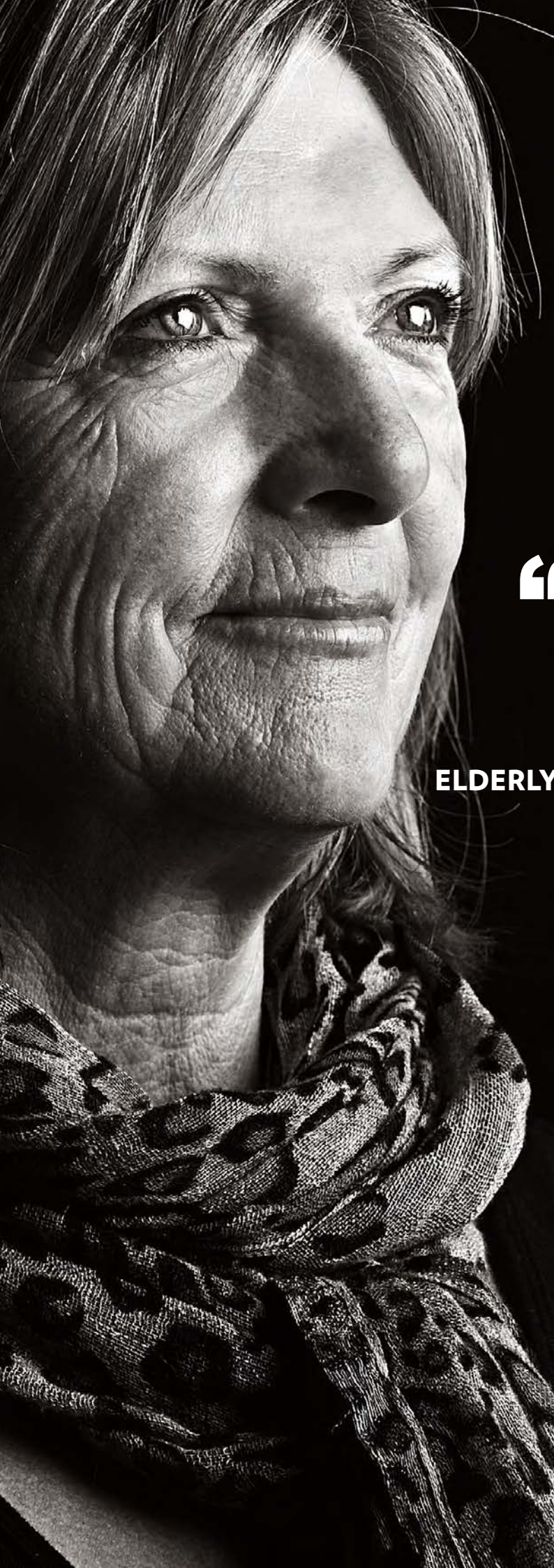
Confidence in the ability of government also reflects citizens’ own judgement about the difficulty of the task at hand. In our focus groups, for example, national security was considered an area of higher confidence in part because of Australia’s geographical isolation and lack of obvious immediate threats but as one respondent noted that confidence does not extend to all issues:

*Anything that requires a complicated national discussion is bound to fail. Governments consistently fail to persuade the public (Urban Australian).*

Governments are expected to deal with the basics but are viewed to be more likely to fail with challenging issues.

Figure 8: Effect of trust in federal government on confidence in ability of government to perform tasks (ordinal logistic regression)





“

*Keeping your word. That's a big thing with me. Don't tell me you're going to do something and not do it because I'll never trust you again.*

”

**ELDERLY REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN**

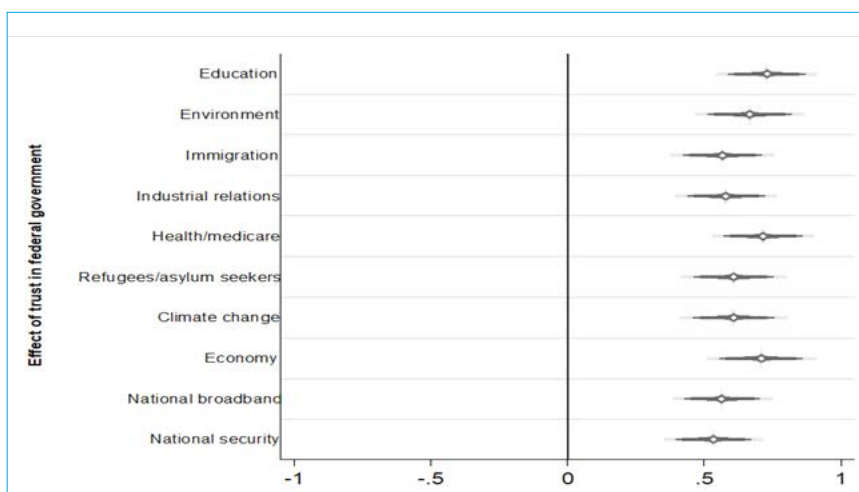
## HOW DOES POLITICAL TRUST MATTER?

There are at least three main reasons why a lack of political trust may be problematic. First, lack of trust undermines political engagement. Martin's (2010) pioneering work in Australia shows that lack of trust impacts on levels of confidence in democracy, willingness to vote and take up of protest style activities and concludes that 'the consequences of low levels of political trust may not be as dire as some feared... (but that) ... there are grounds for concern'. Lack of trust in mainstream politics is a key factor in pushing citizens towards more populist alternatives.

Second, lack of trust may make the general business of government harder to deliver. Marien and Hooghe (2011) using data from European countries, find that low political trust is strongly correlated with citizens' willingness to tolerate illegal behaviour and potentially commit criminal acts themselves. Hetherington has expanded on these concerns to explore the impact of lack of trust on limiting what policy issues government can effectively tackle concluding that 'scholars have demonstrated that declining trust has had important effects, mostly undermining liberal domestic policy ambitions.... Put simply, people need to trust the government to support more government'.

Third, lack of political trust may make long-term policy problems less likely to be addressed. Politicians may also feel they lack the legitimacy necessary to request sacrifices from citizens (of the kind often required to solve major policy problems).

Figure 9: Effect of trust in federal government on confidence in ability to address public policy issues  
(ordinal logistic regression)







“

*They don't seem to do much really. Spend a lot of time arguing and talking about what they want to do. But change seems a long time coming.*

”

**COASTAL ELDERLY AUSTRALIAN**



## BUT WHAT DO AUSTRALIANS BELIEVE THE IDEAL POLITICIAN LOOKS LIKE?

When asked to describe the characteristics of their ideal politician, our focus group participants were fairly uniform in emphasizing the importance of empathy (“approachable and accessible”, “who listens to them”, “who communicates and follows up”), honesty and trustworthiness (“sees things through”, “do what they say”, “no broken promises”), and the need for ethical leadership. That is not often what they find in the contemporary politician:

*“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” (Regional and rural Australian).*

Trust above all is defined as keeping promises and that is where politics is seen as failing. As one older Australian puts it:

*“Keeping your word. That’s a big thing with me. Don’t tell me you’re going to do some thing and then don’t do it because I’ll never trust you again” (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 (Regional and rural Australian).*



“

*I don't really know whether they consider people's opinions and voices.*

*When there are so many people out there voicing their opinion. And the majority of them have the same problem, but the government is just not wanting to listen to them. They want to do things their own way in the end. They don't really care about the people.*

”

**YOUNG AUSTRALIAN**



## WHAT REFORMS TO OUR DEMOCRACY WOULD AUSTRALIANS LIKE TO SEE?

So far we have established that lack of political trust is best understood by most citizens not as the product of a careful and considered calculation but rather as a constituent element of a wider sense of political disenchantment. Lack of trust is tied to experiences of politics that tell you that powerful interests, other than your own, dominate; that governments and governors do not perform to your satisfaction; and that political engagement seems a rather pointless activity. At the international level, different countries appear to have different experiences of democratic decline. Some have seen a steady decline from high to low trust environments. Others have seen change in trust levels stimulated by the negative impacts of the 2007 Global Financial Crisis. Some countries appear to have operated in a low trust environment for a long time but have witnessed increased measures of decline in the last decade. Others have experienced very little decline in political trust. Finally, we have seen that there are good reasons for being concerned about a democratic culture where lack of trust is widespread not least in its impact on public confidence in the capacity of government to solve or even stabilise public policy problems.

But what do Australians perceive to be the answer to the problem of political trust? There is a propensity in both democratic theory and practice to emphasize either representative or participatory roads to renewal in a zero-sum or binary game (see: Beetham 2002 & 2008; Held, 2006; and Stoker, 2017). This neglects three important factors: 1) that the involvement of politicians is integral to the long-term sustainability and legitimacy of democratic innovation; 2) that the evidence suggests that it is easier, not to mention more efficient, to build reform on stable, respected institutions; and 3) that the recent rise of populism is in part a product of the inability of mainstream political institutions and actors to reach out and empower disaffected citizens. Hence it appears rational to suggest that a sensible way forward would be for a new politics that places communication at the heart of political practice, moves beyond the zero-sum road to renewal and sees participatory modes of democracy as a methodology for reinforcing the quality of representative democracy. This perspective aligns with the views of our survey respondents and Democratic Champions. Figure 10 recommends a series of reforms to our representative system of government in which politicians will need to take the lead underpinned by a series of participatory reforms aimed at deeper democratisation, popular control and political equality.

These approaches reinforce one another and provide a language of reform. Participatory reforms can reinforce the quality of representative democracy and representative democracy can provide the basis for effective and legitimate public participation. It's about combining those things. It is the mix that matters.

“

*“We need to get more involved but they [government and politicians] don't have time for us and our views. Apart from election time. Then they're interested in us. Maybe that's what needs to change. They need to be as interested in our views when they've been elected.”*

”

## FIRST TIME VOTER



Figure 10: The Top 10 Democratic Reforms

Q: What could be done about it?

## WHAT AUSTRALIA THINKS

- Citizens' juries
- Online plebiscites
- Citizens' legislature
- A lower voting age
- A maximum voting age
- Optional preferential voting or a 'none of the above'
- Caps on political advertising and donations
- Party democratisation
- Increased role for local decision makers
- Right of recall for MPs
- Reducing the size of electorates
- Allowing all MPs a free vote in Parliament

## WHAT YOU THINK

- Longer parliamentary terms
- Abolish the states
- Become a republic with an Australian head of state
- Increase options for citizen participation in decision making
- Make 'civics' a compulsory subject from primary school onwards
- Introduce proportional representation based on background and real indigenous representation
- Abolish the senate and replace with a randomly selected House of the People
- Encourage more women to enter Parliament
- Introduce a Federal ICAC
- 30% of Parliament members should be under 35 years of age



“

*When I became a citizen, that was my decision to spend the rest of my life in this country. And so to give power to someone else to decide what potential things may affect my future... you need to be able to trust them. I need to trust someone to have any kind of relationship with them. And I know you don't have a relationship with your politicians, but you kind of do, because you need to be able to trust that they're going to do the right thing with your future.*

”

## NEW AUSTRALIAN



## WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DEMOCRACY 100 CHAMPION?

In Figure 11, our Democracy 100 Champions present a compelling canvass of the constituent elements of a Charter for Democratic Practice based on authentic democratic values, which can enable all Australians to participate and meet the challenges of 21st century governance.

Figure 11: The Top 10 responsibilities of a champion of Australian democracy

Q: What do you think the responsibilities of a champion of Australian democracy should be?







“

*Don't get me wrong, we need democracy. And I know and respect the fact that lots of Australians have died for what we have today. What did someone once say; Churchill or someone? Probably got it wrong but "democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others?" Problem is that it's out of touch with the people. We can't get excited about it because it doesn't work for us. Australian democracy is out of touch.*

”

**FIRST TIME VOTER, NEW AUSTRALIAN**



## PARTING SHOT – FROM AN ALLEGIANT TO A DIVERGENT DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

In their seminal work, Dalton and Welzel (2014) highlight the differences between allegiant and assertive civic cultures (see Table 1) in Western-style democracies. These two models of democratic culture provide a useful way for characterizing our discussion this evening about challenges to Australian democracy. In the allegiant model political trust in the form of deference to political leaders and trust in the institutions of politics matters, as it provides the glue that holds together the political system. In the assertive model it is lack of trust that matters as it provides the energy and commitment for citizens to engage in political activity and to hold politicians to account.

We are not in a position to conclude that a decline in political trust is putting Australia’s democratic future in jeopardy or that lack of political trust is driving a new assertive accountability from citizens towards government. Instead we have found a mixed pattern of evidence in relation to both the allegiant and assertive models of democratic culture. The allegiant model is challenged in that deference to politicians appears absent and trust in institutions has weakened. Yet citizens still appear to value the overall stability of their political system even if lack of political trust means they lack confidence in its ability to deliver especially on more challenging policy issues.

In Australia’s case, sustained affluence matched with a decline in political trust, has led not to the critical citizens envisaged by the assertive model but rather to a culture of citizen disengagement, cynicism and divergence from the political elite. Most Australian citizens are very clear that they do not like the character of contemporary politics on display in the Magic Kingdom (Canberra) and democratic renewal is required to address the democratic pressures that are threatening to undermine our core democratic values.

This suggests the need for a national democratic audit in which to pose three questions to the Australian citizenry – how would you imagine your ideal democracy? What should we expect from our politicians within it? And, how is the present system failing you?

These questions and many others will be further explored in MoAD’s exciting new exhibition in Old Parliament House, *The Power of Us*, which will be launched in March 2018.

Table 1: The features of allegiant and assertive democratic cultures

Allegiant	Assertive
Emphasis on order and security	Emphasis on voice and participation
Deference to authority	Distance from authority
Trust in institutions	Scepticism of institutions
Limited liberal view of democracy	Expanded democratic expectations
Limited protest/protest potential	Direct, elite challenging action
Traditional forms of participation	Mixture of traditional and new forms of participation

Source: developed from Welzel and Dalton (2014)



“

*I can't say it's giving voice to people who shouldn't have one, because everyone deserves a voice in a democracy*

”

**AN AUSTRALIAN**

## REFERENCES

- Beetham, D., Bracking, S., Kearton, I., Vittal, N. and Weir, S. eds (2002), *The State of Democracy: Democracy Assessments in Eight Nations Around the World*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Beetham, D., Carvalho, E., Landman, T., and Weir, S., eds. (2008), *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Dalton, R., & Welzel, C. (Eds.). (2014), 'The civic culture revisited. From allegiant to assertive citizens'. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), *2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, Executive Summary*. Available online at: <http://www.edelman.com/executive-summary/>
- Easton, D. (1975). 'A re-assessment of the concept of political support'. *British Journal of Political Science*, 5(4), 435–457.
- Evans, M. and Stoker, G. (2016), 'Political participation in Australia: Contingency in the behaviour and attitudes of citizens', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 51, 2, pp. 272-287.
- Evans, M., Stoker, G. and Halupka, M. (2016), 'A Decade of Democratic Decline: How Australians Understand and Imagine Their Democracy', in C. Aulich., ed., *From Abbott to Turnbull. A New Direction?* Canberra: Echo Books, pp. 23-41.
- Evans, M., Stoker, G. & Nasir, J. (2013), *How do Australians imagine their democracy? Australian Survey of Political Engagement 2013*. Canberra, IGPA. Available online at: [http://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/magma/media/upload/ckeditor/files/DEMOCRACY%20REPORT-%20final\(1\).pdf](http://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/magma/media/upload/ckeditor/files/DEMOCRACY%20REPORT-%20final(1).pdf)
- Held, D. (2006), *Models of Democracy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hetherington, M. (2005), *Why Political Trust Matter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hetherington, M. and Husser (2012), 'How Trust Matters: The Changing Political Relevance of Political Trust', *American Journal of Political Science*, 56, 2, pp. 312-325.
- Marien, S., & Hooghe, M. (2011), 'Does political trust matter? An empirical investigation into the relation between political trust and support for law compliance', *European Journal of Political Research*, 50, 2, pp. 267–291.
- Martin, A. (2010), 'Does Political Trust Matter?', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45, 4, pp. 705–712.
- Stoker, G. (2017), *Why Politics Matters* (Second Edition) London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Stoker, G , Li, J., Halupka, M. & Evans, M. (2017), 'Complacent young citizens or cross-generational solidarity? An analysis of Australian attitudes to democratic politics'. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 52, 2, pp. 218-235.
- Stoker, G. and Evans, M. (2014), The "Democracy-Politics Paradox": The Dynamics of Political Alienation. *Democratic Theory*, 1, 2, pp. 26-36.



## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Professor Mark Evans

P: (02) 6206 8622

[mark.evans@canberra.edu.au](mailto:mark.evans@canberra.edu.au)

[www.governanceinstitute.edu.au](http://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au)



MUSEUM  
OF AUSTRALIAN  
DEMOCRACY

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE



UNIVERSITY OF  
CANBERRA



INSTITUTE FOR  
GOVERNANCE  
& POLICY ANALYSIS

DEMOCRACY

100

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE