

Possible measures to improve Australian democracy

There are many ways to improve our democracy, and the following are just some of them.

This information comes from a range of sources, but two that covered many of these were:

<file:///C:/Users/asus/Documents/Deliberative%20democracy/Reforming-our-Democracy-2019.pdf>, and <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/documents/Democracy2025-report1.pdf>.

CURB QUESTIONABLE INFLUENCES ON GOVERNMENT

1. Better regulate political donations:
 - a. Cap maximum donations from any donor
 - b. Cap a party or candidate's election expenses
 - c. Regulate sources of donations, e.g., not from overseas (done), not from companies
 - d. Lower threshold for size of donations required to be publicly disclosed
 - e. Require disclosure of donations in real time
 - f. Increase public funding of election campaigning expenses.
2. Better regulate the 'revolving door', politicians or political aides moving to positions with peak industry associations, lobbying firms or large corporations:
 - a. Increase mandatory period before this can occur
 - b. Better enforce the rules.
3. Better regulate lobbying and lobbyists, e.g., increase transparency of the process.
4. Have a Federal ICAC (independent commission against corruption).
5. Have more stringent transparency requirements for parties, so people can better understand how they operate, where they get money from, what they spend and on what, and how many members they have.

IMPROVE THE WAY PARLIAMENT FUNCTIONS

6. Have a truly independent speaker and Senate president.
7. Introduce fixed parliamentary terms.
8. Change seating arrangements in parliament, from party blocs to random or by region.^a
9. Encourage parties to allow more free votes in parliament (e.g., as per UK three-line whip system).
10. Introduce ongoing professional training in policy, ethics and procedures for Ministers, MPs and Ministerial staff.
11. Have requirement that all proposed legislation be considered by multiparty parliamentary committee, with the report from this publicly available.
12. Reform or abolish question time.

INFORM THE PUBLIC

13. Have AEC-issued candidate information packs at elections (electronic and hardcopy).
14. Introduce truth in advertising laws for election campaigns (like those for companies).
15. Provide more accessible evidence-based policy information and fact-checking for public.
16. Take measures to increase media diversity.^b

17. Make political education in schools more effective: covering not just the formal structure and how to vote, but also the ways in which it is currently working or not working, and how it might be improved.^c

INCREASE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

18. Conduct a citizen review process after each election, to come up with possible improvements.
19. Promote use of deliberative democracy by all levels of government.
20. Encourage national conversations about updating Constitution, improving federalism, etc.
21. Encourage Indi-style voter-led deliberations (e.g., through ‘kitchen table conversations’) at electorate level, in which voters consider their values, goals, concerns, and expectations of their MPs and of community input in candidate pre-selection processes.
22. Encourage Indi-style voter-led preselection of community candidate for parliament, if they consider that current candidates don’t meet their expectations.
23. Encourage initiation of voter-led ratings of all candidates standing in an electorate.
24. Introduce the option of voter recall of MPs if there is a sufficient level of dissatisfaction with their performance. (I’m personally doubtful about this, but it has a lot of public support.)
25. Increase support for civil society organisations, especially those representing low-income and disadvantaged groups, and encourage (rather than discourage) advocacy by such groups.

ENSURE THE INDEPENDENCE OF NON-PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL ROLES^d

26. Have selection processes for senior positions in public service, the judiciary and statutory bodies that are non-political, i.e., not made by politicians.
27. Return to having more permanency for senior public service positions.
28. Encourage greater reliance on senior public servants for policy advice and less on political aides or consultancy firms.

MAKE DEMOCRACY MORE INCLUSIVE

29. Consider an Indigenous voice to parliament, as well as a treaty and recognition in the Constitution, guided by the express wishes of Indigenous Australians.
30. Encourage parties to preselect MPs who ‘look like Australia’ according to gender, age, ethnicity, occupation etc., and who are known and respected in their local communities.

^a <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047272718301221>

^b https://cdn.theconversation.com/static_files/files/22/68437-2016-11-22-media-concentration-and-public-concern-in-australia-Research - Media concentration and public concern in Australia.pdf?1518059940

^c <https://theconversation.com/schools-are-not-adequately-preparing-young-australians-to-participate-in-our-democracy-88131>; <https://www.nap.edu.au/nap-sample-assessments/civics-and-citizenship> (see further links on this page).

^d <https://theconversation.com/review-political-amnesia-how-we-forgot-how-to-govern-50596>;
<https://theconversation.com/dont-practice-promiscuous-partisanship-former-public-service-commissioner-warns-bureaucrats-123181>