

Awakening Democracy

CAPaD – the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy

JANUARY FEBRUARY 2021

G'day members and friends

Welcome to 2021 and we hope it is a better year than the last one for you all.

In this ***Awakening Democracy***: some insights into CAPaD's theory of change; more about the link between low levels of trust and inequality (and loss of wellness); Can we mend democracy; Demfest 21, and lots to read on citizen participation.

Why focus on candidates to bring about political change?

Conversations over the holidays have helped refine ideas about how CAPaD seeks to achieve change in the political system and why we focus on candidates. In brief a focus on selecting good candidates is:

1. Practical, because it requires minimal change to our existing system,
2. So it is less contested and avoids having to invest in a big change,
3. It is still transformative because it can radically alter how the representative parliamentary system functions, and
4. It is the vehicle for getting the legislative changes necessary to mend that system.

There is a [more detailed piece on our website](#).

We are working up a more complete statement of our theory of change which we will share when it is finalised.

COMING UP

Our Democracy in Canberra

CAPaD continues to support the set up of the national Our Democracy organisation which held its inaugural general meeting of February 2nd. We are well represented on the Committee. Plans are in the early stage of development for initiating an electorate action group in at least one of the ACT federal electorates. In the next little while we will be calling for interested people to join in once the national organisation and the website have been launched.

Demfest 21

With Our Democracy, we want to bring the diverse players in the Voices for and similar groups together with other national and local players in the Australian Democracy ecosystem to share experience and ideas around being active in their electorates. The plan had been for a late 2021 event, but the timing of the federal election is likely to affect the dates as most electorate groups including ours may be actively campaigning and that would be the priority. More as we develop plans.

New stuff to read and look at

Mending democracy

Democracy Sausage with Mark Kenny: [Can democracy be mended?](#)

I really love the fabric of democracy framing. A good listen.

Democracy without Shortcuts

Mini-publics are becoming more talked about this year. Here is [a great summary of Cristina Lafont's take on the use of mini-publics](#) to enhance democracy and links to a commentary.

Are deliberative minipublics acceptable democratic shortcuts in building a participatory deliberative democracy? [Here's a roundup of this debate](#), by Julien Vrydagh, (in

Journal of Deliberative Democracy's special issue on Democracy without Shortcuts (Volume 16, Issue 2, Dec 2020).

Of course, [sometimes governments use minipublics as a political ploy](#) not as they are most meaningfully deployed for genuine citizen participation (an example from France).

Trust and inequality

Here are a couple of impressive articles from recent weeks establishing the correlation between low levels of trust in society and inequality – [one from *The Conversation*](#) and the other [from *the Atlantic*](#). The extension of this confluence is that we know [inequality is a driver of poor health and poor wellbeing](#), particularly inequality of power, resources and wealth.

The Atlantic article observes:

“Social trust is a measure of the moral quality of a society—of whether the people and institutions in it are trustworthy, whether they keep their promises and work for the common good. When people in a church lose faith or trust in God, the church collapses. When people in a society lose faith or trust in their institutions and in each other, the nation collapses.”

Perhaps the real Scott Morrison just stood up?

Mark Kenny from the ANU Australian Studies Institute [discusses Scott Morrison's response](#) to the storming of the Capitol in Washington DC. Canberra Times 13 January 2021.

Australia's corruption ranking is slipping

This article spells out why we do what we do.; that is we are becoming more corrupt even though still relatively good by international standards. We don't want to get worse, so we?

[Australia is out of the top ten in global anti-corruption rankings — why? \(theconversation.com\)](#)

Scottish “House of Citizens”

Citizens assemblies are definitely becoming a thing internationally. John Dryzek, at Canberra Uni [Centre for Deliberative Democracy](#), is supportive of one in the ACT. CAPaD would be supportive of such an idea as long as it was designed well and fitted our and the OECD criteria.

Now there is talk of [a permanent Scottish citizens' assembly](#). The idea for a House of Citizens, populated by members of the public selected by lottery, was supported by 83% of the delegates in Scotland's citizens' assembly.

73 delegates would serve two-year terms at a rate of pay “comparable” to that of Members of Scottish Parliament. Their role might include serving as an advisory body to Parliament at the early stage of legislation and powers of review at the final stage of legislation, similar to the UK's House of Lords.

Voice to Parliament

Given international approaches to getting citizens participating more in the governance process, the Australian government's intransigence over an Indigenous Voice to Parliament again demonstrates its lack of vision.

From your committee, with best wishes for 2021

Contact us: secretary@canberra-alliance.org.au

Keep up to date: <https://canberra-alliance.org.au/>

Share ideas: [Twitter](#) @CAPADACT

Find us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1487360858250888/>

© 2021 Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD). All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of CAPaD.