

23 October 2019

Committee Secretary

legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

An inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy

L1 Endeavour House
1 Franklin Street
Manuka ACT 2603

+61 2 6130 0530
mail@tai.org.au
tai.org.au

ABN 90 061 969 284
ACN 061 969 284



Dear Committee,

The Australia Institute has prepared a submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy for your consideration.

With the inquiry's broad ambit, it is not surprising that The Australia Institute has done significant research into topics that might be of interest to the committee. This submission outlines how these research papers come under each of the committee's terms of reference.

The Institute would welcome the opportunity to discuss research findings in further detail at any committee hearing, should there be one.

b. rights and obligations of citizenship, including naturalisation and revocation, and the responsibility of the state to its citizens in both national and international law;

Trust in politics

The inquiry's discussion paper discusses declining trust in political institutions. Australia Institute polling research also shows declining confidence in politicians. Policies that could increase confidence in government include increasing the number of parliamentarians from their historic low (relative to population) so they are more available to their constituents, and bringing in truth in political advertising regulations.

Bill Browne (2018) *It's time ... for more politicians*,

<https://www.tai.org.au/content/its-time-more-politicians>

Most Australians have no direct contact with their local member or his or her electoral office. An increase in the number of parliamentarians would make politicians more accessible to the voters they are ultimately responsible to, improving confidence in politicians and the political process.

Bill Browne (2019) *We can handle the truth: Opportunities for truth in political*

advertising, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/we-can-handle-truth-opportunities-truth-political-advertising>

Regulating truth in political advertising works in South Australia and New Zealand, and it could work at the federal level as well. There are decisions to be made about what content is covered, who assesses complaints and what remedies are available, but some form of truth in political advertising should be implemented.

Compulsory voting

The right and obligation of every adult citizen to vote is a distinctive part of the Australian electoral process. It underpins our reasonably high participation levels, creates a critical mass for distinctive election day rituals (e.g. “democracy sausage”), makes it incumbent on the electoral commission to make voting quick and easy and removes the incentive present in other democracies to depress voter turnout of other parties.

Richard Denniss (2016) *The state of Australian democracy*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/state-australian-democracy>.

Denniss’ paper showed that a lower portion of eligible voters were enrolling, enrolled voters were turning out in lower numbers and increasing numbers of voters were casting invalid votes. These are the invisible forms of disengagement from which party forms government; contrasted to the more visible and discussed rising third-party vote.

Tony Shields and Rod Campbell (2019) *#democracysausage: Voting in Australian culture and the 2016 election*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/democracysausage-electoral-matters-inquiry-submission>

Shields and Campbell’s paper demonstrates how compulsory voting is foundational to Australia, discusses the benefit of expanding the franchise, demonstrates that compulsory voting has resulted in Australia’s voter turnout remaining significantly higher than Canada, the United Kingdom or New Zealand, and warns that voter turnout is falling.

The \$20 fine for not voting has not increased since 1984. An increase to \$70 would reflect the increase in average weekly earnings over that time.

The Australia Institute (2019) *Compulsory voting: Ensuring government of the people, by the people, for the people*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/preserving-australian-electoral-integrity-stick-needed-complement-carrot>

Updates elements of *#democracysausage* for 2019 and presents new information on the inadequacy of the \$20 fine for not voting.

Laboratories of democracy

Sometimes villainised as an anachronism or a fudge to make federation possible, the continued existence of states and territories offers Australia a major opportunity: to test policies in one state or territory, before other states and territories adopt the policies that are proven to work.

Bill Browne (2019) *Canberra: Laboratory of democracy*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/canberra-shows-australia-progressive-policies-nationally-popular-and-proven-work>

The ACT government has pursued a range of innovative, controversial policies – including pill testing, a stamp duty to land tax swap, a 100% renewable energy target and a ban on billboards. Most of these policies have majority support across Australia; now they have been proven to work, they could be adopted elsewhere too.

Accountability Project – National Integrity Commission

The Australia Institute's Accountability Project is an extensive body of work that makes the case for a National Integrity Commission with broad powers and jurisdiction. Having potential corrupt conduct robustly and fully investigated – and, where necessary, ventilated in public hearings – will help address declining trust in politicians.

National Integrity Commission (2018) *Implementation Plan*,
<https://www.tai.org.au/content/national-integrity-committee-calls-bipartisan-support-integrity-plan>

Recommendations for the National Integrity Commission, including suggested outcomes and objectives and the need for broad jurisdiction, public hearings and bipartisan appointment of commissioners.

The full collection of Accountability Project reports are on our website:
<https://www.tai.org.au/content/accountability-project>

c. social cohesion and cultural identity in the nation state;

Right-wing populism

The committee's discussion paper describes the rise of right-wing populism and its appeal to voters from both centre-left and centre-right parties.

In 2017, Phil Dorling joined The Australia Institute for a series of research papers analysing elements of One Nation's policies on religion, economics, multiculturalism and tax. Particularly notable is the influence of United States right-wing groups on One Nation's thinking.

Phil Dorling (2017) *The American far-right origins of Pauline Hanson's views on Islam*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/american-far-right-origins-pauline-hanson%E2%80%99s-views-islam>

Dorling assesses One Nation's policy that whether Islam is a religion should be investigated, and outlines One Nation's "intellectual debt" to US and European groups that first invented and propagated this idea.

Phil Dorling (2017) *Pauline Hanson's 'neo-Austrian' economic brain*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/pauline-hanson%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98neo-austrian%E2%80%99-economic-brain>

One Nation's economic advisor Darren Nelson worked with radical American free-market think tanks. Dorling investigates whether his appointment might represent a transition in One Nation from protectionism to free market policies.

Phil Dorling (2017) *Still Anti-Asian? Anti-Chinese? One Nation policies on Asian immigration and multiculturalism*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/still-anti-asian-anti-chinese-one-nation-policies-asian-immigration-and-multiculturalism>

One Nation's broad policies on immigration and multiculturalism remain essentially unchanged since the 1990s. Anti-Chinese thinking is a persistent subtext in One Nation's thinking and policy positions.

Other research by Phil Dorling on this topic is available on our website.

https://www.tai.org.au/author?combine=&field_section_tid=All&field_author_value=15

d. the role that globalisation and economic interdependence and economic development plays in forming or disrupting traditional notions of national identity;

Erosion of Australian manufacturing

The decline of Australia's manufacturing base has had a disproportionate effect on productivity, research and development and the pay and conditions of working class jobs. The Australia Institute's Centre for Future Work has written extensively on the possibilities for Australian manufacturing.

Jim Stanford (2016) *Manufacturing (still) matters: Why the decline of Australian manufacturing is NOT inevitable, and what government can do about it*,
https://www.futurework.org.au/manufacturing_still_matters

Manufacturing is not a dying industry. It is the most innovation-intensive sector in the economy, and accounts for two-thirds of world merchandise trade. Many high-wage industrial countries are expanding manufacturing output.

Jim Stanford and Tom Swann (2017) *Manufacturing: A moment of opportunity*,
https://www.futurework.org.au/manufacturing_a_moment_of_opportunity

Australia's manufacturing industry could be poised for a recovery. Australians see manufacturing as critical to our national economic prosperity, and are supportive of proactive, targeted policy measures to sustain and support manufacturing.

Inequality in Australia

Australia21 and The Australia Institute have held two roundtables on the topic of inequality in Australia. The findings of the most recent roundtable, held in June 2018, are captured in the report *A fair go for all Australians*.

Bob Douglas (editor) (2018) *A fair go for all Australians*,
<https://www.tai.org.au/content/inequality-getting-worse-aussies-say-report-lays-out-blueprint-change>

The roundtable brought together Liberal, Labor and Green politicians and former politicians; economists; academics; businesspeople; public servants; trade unionists; and other experts to identify the seriousness of growing inequality and the short- and long-term reforms required to address it.

e. contemporary notions of cultural identity, multiculturalism and regionalism;

Public broadcasting

The role of the ABC, SBS and NITV in informing, inspiring and uniting Australians should not be underestimated. Australia Institute polling consistently finds that the ABC is Australia's most trusted news source, with SBS close behind – both well ahead of commercial media and social media.

The Australia Institute (2018) *Independence of the ABC*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/majority-australians-want-abc-protected-political-interference>

Australians overwhelmingly agree that the ABC should be protected from political interference, and think that the ABC is facing more political interference than it used to. The majority trust the ABC and think it should do more to defend its political independence.

Bill Browne and Fergus Pitt (2018) *Depoliticising the ABC Board and appointment process*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/abc-board-appointments-process-needs-reform-protect-independence>

Five recommendations on how the appointment of the ABC Board chair and members could be reformed.

The Australia Institute (2018) *Attitudes towards the ABC*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/most-voters-oppose-cuts-abc-funding-poll>

The majority of Australians agree that a strong, independent ABC is critical to a healthy democracy and that the ABC needs a boost to long term funding.

The Australia Institute (2018) *Polling – ABC*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/abc-still-australia-s-most-trusted-news-source>

Recent polling showing that the ABC and SBS are more trusted than commercial media and social media, across all voting categories.

Uluru Statement from the Heart

Many Australians support key recommendations put forward in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The Australia Institute (2018) *Polling – Uluru Statement*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/majority-australians-support-uluru-statement>

More Australians support than oppose enshrining a First Nations Voice in the Constitution. The majority support a commission for truth-telling and starting a nationwide process of treaty-making between Australian government and First Nations.

f. the extent to which nation states balance domestic imperatives and sovereignty and international obligations;

Bipartisanship on security

While sometimes heralded as a positive example of cooperation in politics, the “bipartisanship” that the Coalition and Labor Party show on national security can be dangerous, and even make us less secure.

Andrew Carr (2017) *I'm here for an argument: Why bipartisanship on security makes Australia less safe*, <https://www.tai.org.au/content/i%E2%80%99m-here-argument-why-bipartisanship-security-makes-australia-less-safe>