

Democracy 2025 in focus

Established in the context of the lowest level recording of public trust and satisfaction with Australia's democratic arrangements in December 2018 and set against the global rise of debased semi-democracies, *Democracy 2025* audits the qualities of Australian democracy, investigates and experiments with what works in terms of renewing our representative system of government and facilitates non-partisan conversations on how to improve our democratic practice and be the best democracy that we can be.

By implication our activities focus on evaluation, democratic innovation and public engagement activities underpinned by evidence based research. We have also built world class partnerships with leading knowledge institutions at home and overseas to deliver on our ambitious agenda with limited resources. The highlights of *Democracy 2025's* successes in these areas are outlined below.

High impact evaluation of Australian democratic governance and delivery of innovation

Democracy 2025 has produced 9 high impact reports on different aspects of Australian democracy from 5 December 2018 to 21 November 2021 with over 20,000 downloads in collaboration with world leading scholars at Trustgov – a collaboration between the universities of Harvard and Southampton. Professor Stoker was awarded \$3 million for the Trustgov project by the Economic and Social Research Council. Although this award did not accrue directly to *Democracy 2025* it provided support for survey work, international travel and most significantly, the generation of international class outputs, dissemination, and network activities. These reports have received ongoing media coverage, significantly extending MoAD's audience reach.

We worked closely with various federal government departments delivering a broad range of projects and workshops to 16 Commonwealth and State agencies, including Finance, Industry, and Social Services, aimed at improving the quality of democratic governance. Professor Evans also designed and delivered a deliberative jury with the support of the APS Secretaries Board on the contribution of the APS to public trust building¹, and was invited to compile the public service's peak association (IPAA) submission to the Australian Public Service (APS) Review.²

¹ Democracy 2025 Report No. 4. Democracy 2025 Report No. 4. *Report from the Australian Public Service Deliberative Jury on Bridging the Trust divide: Defining the Challenge, making the change* (September 2019), supported by the Australian Public Service Secretaries Board. Retrieved 14 August 2020 from: <https://www.democracy2025.gov.au/documents/Democracy2025-report4.pdf>

² M. Evans (2018), Australian Public Service Reform: Learning from the past and building for the future. Retrieved 14 August 2020 from: https://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/magma/media/upload/publication/410_IPAA-Submission-to-the-2018-Review-of-the-APS.pdf

During its short life, *Democracy 2025* has become the 'go to' organisation for giving evidence at major public inquiries into different aspects of democracy at the Commonwealth and state levels in Australia including:

- The Committee on Procedure - Question time inquiry (August 2020)
- Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Nationhood, national identity and democracy (February 2020)
- Independent Parliamentary Expenses Inquiry (October 2019)
- New South Wales Review of Federal-State Financial Relations (October 2019)
- New South Wales ICAC investigation on lobbying conduct and regulation in New South Wales (July 2019)

A key final body of work, a comprehensive audit of Australia's democracy with research partners in every state and territory and the London School of Economics and Political Science is nearing completion. It bridges significant gaps in the evidence base on Australia's democratic practice, enhances debate on the quality of democratic governance and provides an invaluable resource to support better civics education in Australia. The Audit will be available for free download later in the year.

Capturing the public imagination

In broad terms, our work integrated with the activities of Museum of Australian Democracy, actively encouraging and empowering its visitors and audiences to become active citizens. There are several examples of where *Democracy 2025's* work has attracted broad public attention – from ABC Online Democracy Interactive which used a *Democracy 2025* survey instrument to engage with over 230,000 Australians,³ to *Democratic Fundamentals* podcast series in partnership with The Conversation, ANU's 'Democracy Sausage', IPAA's 'Work with purpose' series and 'Independents Can' series with combined downloads of almost 90,000 to December 2022, to lively interactive experiences within the *Democracy Are You In?* Exhibition where visitors are asked to respond to a provocation, and data gained from this is analysed and incorporated back into the exhibition.

Seven articles in *The Conversation*, *The Guardian* and *The Mandarin*, authored by Professor Mark Evans, elicited total reads to 30 Dec 2021 of 70,915. The *Democracy 2025* website, democracy20205.gov.au, generated 26,632 pageviews over the three years since launch on 5 December 2018. The e-news has an active subscriber base of 400 active users, with a click through rate of 26%.

Democracy 2025 staff have also been invited to present research and practice findings to: the APS Secretaries Board; Council of Museum Directors; Commonwealth Ombudsman Office; Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority; IPAA Future Leaders Program; Senate Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters; Doha World Forum; Australian Davos Leadership Connection (twice); National Schools Convention (twice); Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences; Canberra Writers

³ See: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-20/in-a-nation-of-cynics-we-are-flocking-to-the-fringe/10281522?nw=0> (updated 13 March 2019).

Festival (twice); International IDEA; Philanthropy Australia; National Election Commission of the Republic of Korea; NSW Legislative Assembly (twice); and Local Government Professionals Australia.

Building high impact partnerships

Democracy 2025 has forged a range of successful domestic and international partnerships to deliver key activities which has heightened its domestic and international profile:

- 1) **Institute of Public Administration Australia**, collaboration APS Future Leaders program delivered at MoAD; Democratic Fundamentals brochure for IPAA 40th anniversary event; the IPAA submission to the APS Review; Professor Evans elected a member of the IPAA-ACT Council.
- 2) **Philanthropy Australia** *Parliament Meets Philanthropy Summit*, September 2019. Professor Evans presented at the summit's opening session.
- 3) **Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters** – regular briefings to the Committee on MoAD/D2025 research and visitor voice; collaboration on Democracy 2025 Report No 5 (December 2018-March 2019).
- 4) **Australian Public Service Secretaries' Board** support for APS *Deliberative Jury on Bridging the Trust divide* (February 2019). See Democracy 2025 Report No 4.
- 5) **Trustgov** (Harvard University and the University of Southampton), collaboration on three major comparative reports on *Political Trust in Times of Coronavirus* – Democracy 2025 Reports No 6, 7 and 8.
- 6) **Multiple university partners** – collaboration on the Democratic Audit of Australia including the Australian National University, Canberra University, Charles Darwin University, Curtin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Melbourne, University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, the University of South Australia, the University of Sydney and the University of Tasmania.
- 7) **Democratic Audit of the United Kingdom** (London School of Economics and Political Science) – collaboration on the Democratic Audit of Australia to be published in 2022.
- 8) **Council of Australian Museum Directors** – *Guardians of our civic culture- what museums could and should do*, explores levels of trust in Australian Museums (see later in bulletin)

The work of *Democracy 2025* significantly enhanced MoAD's authority at home and overseas, and enabled the generation of world class research outputs on democratic theory and practice - including 31 international journal articles, 5 books and 13 book chapters with leading publishing houses.

Next Steps

Two exciting projects which will be delivered later this year:

1. The rolling publication of the findings from the Democratic Audit of Australia, which will be underpinned by a series of panel discussions, podcasts and blogs.
2. The international launch of *Saving Democracy* by Mark Evans and Gerry Stoker (Bloomsbury Books) which has received outstanding advanced reviews by key international commentators in the field of democracy research.