

MEDIA RELEASE

Three-quarters of Australians think politicians are focussed on the short term, but there is hope for democracy: report

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Australians think our democracy is faring better than most countries', but they want changes to combat misinformation and keep money out of politics, a new report shows.

Last year's McKinnon Index found that while three-quarters (76%) of Australians support democracy, only around half (54.5%) are satisfied with how it functions.

Now, new research by Democracy Counts – a new campaign being launched today at an event featuring politicians from across the political spectrum – which surveyed more than 4,000 Australians found:

- More than three-quarters (76%) of Australians think state and federal politicians are more focused on short-term gains and re-election rather than addressing long-term challenges
- More than half (51%) of Australians do not think politicians understand and represent the interests of people like them

Of the potential solutions to protect Australia's democracy, the new research found:

- 85% of Australians think we need more education around Australia's preferential voting and political system
- 81% support a legislated requirement that political advertisements meet standard of truthfulness, and only 5% oppose
- 67% support introducing a 5-year ban on politicians becoming lobbyists after their political career, and only 8% oppose
- 67% of Australians support the government establishing an agency that has the power to track and remove disinformation campaigns, including foreign interference, from social media platforms, and only 12% oppose
- 64% of Australians support imposing a tax on large social media companies to fund public interest journalism and re-establish local media, and only 10% oppose

Former NSW Premier Mike Baird is CEO of McKinnon, the non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation funding the Democracy Counts campaign.

"As democracy is undermined around the world and rapid technological changes alter the way citizens get information, there is an urgent need to protect Australia's democracy," Mr Baird said.

“Our democracy is the envy of the world, it was built to ensure the Australian people have real power over the decisions that impact our lives. But the rules around politics have not kept up with today’s reality.

“We need to start a serious conversation about updating the rules around politics so truth and the public interest win.

“One thing politicians could do now is invest more in civics education and media literacy. Many young Australians heading to the voting booth for the first time tell us they don’t have the confidence and reliable information to cast an informed vote.

“That can be turned around by having great civics and media literacy resources for teachers. There is an opportunity for this in this federal budget and our research shows the overwhelming majority of Australians see the need.”

The Democracy Counts campaign will bring together and support organisations and Australians who care about the way democracy functions in Australia.

Initial partners include the Centre for Public Integrity, Digital Rights Watch, the Local and Independent News Network, Sentiment, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Alliance for Journalists’ Freedom, Constitution Education Fund, Democracy Matters, Menzies Leadership Foundation, Next 25, Rule of Law Education Centre, and the News and Media Research Centre.

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