

**Submission  
No 34**

**PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND  
CONFIDENCE**

**Organisation:** Public Service Association of NSW

**Date Received:** 30 August 2024



**Public Service Association of NSW**

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Mr Peter Primrose MLC  
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney  
NSW 2000.

30 August 2024.

Dear Mr Primrose,

**Inquiry into proposals to increase voter engagement, participation and confidence.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry.

The Public Service Association (PSA) represents state public servants from across all government Clusters, Departments and State-Owned Corporations, inclusive of the tertiary education sector within NSW. In total we represent over 40,000 members across New South Wales. As a democratic organisation which is also a third-party campaigner – we have a vested interest in ensuring the integrity and veracity of the electoral process.

The security, integrity and veracity of the electoral systems and processes are of paramount importance. We note and support the general thrust of the recent Commonwealth publication *Strengthening Australian Democracy*. However, we feel that too little is being done to continually reinforce the message that citizens of Australia enjoy the benefits of living in a full democracy which few others have. Here we note that Australia is one of only 24 countries (out of 167) which is ranked as a full democracy by the Economist Intelligence Unit annual Democracy Index. We are disappointed that this fact receives little coverage – when it is something we feel should be celebrated.

Closely aligned to the theme of celebrating democracy is the need for enhanced civics education – something noted too in the *Strengthening Australian Democracy* report. The recent announcement of a significant revision of the curriculum for civics education in South Australia is something we would commend to the Inquiry. This is particularly pertinent when we consider that there is internationally peer reviewed evidence which illustrates that if young people do not vote in any of the first three elections they are eligible to participate in – then they are unlikely to ever vote. Despite voting being compulsory on local, State and Federal elections in New South Wales, young people need to be shown the importance and relevance to them of democratic and civic engagement, and the freedoms, entitlements, opportunities and privileges these bring.

In terms of enhancing the level of electoral engagement at the local government level, we attach two peer reviewed articles which clearly highlight measures to increase

citizen participation and the importance of explicit, as opposed implicit party-political engagement in council elections. Whilst both articles are written about elections in New Zealand, both are equally applicable here in NSW and elsewhere in Australia. We observe here the current debacle around the Liberal Party vis a vis candidates for the 2024 NSW local government electoral round – and the wider ramifications this will have. Elections to local government are the foundations of democracy across Australia, and as such need to be seen in such an important light.

We do have considerable concern around the use of technology to assist in voting. Here we note the significant body of work undertaken by academics at the University of Melbourne into the fragility of on-line voting systems – specifically the extent to which they are insecure. In addition, we attach as an appendix a report from New Zealand which highlights a number of issues around e-voting. In particular we note that an attempt in 2019 by several local councils to utilise e-voting in elections was effectively halted after concerns raised by the New Zealand security services.

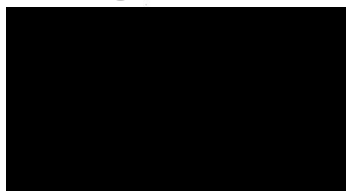
In previous submissions to a range of Parliamentary Inquiries we have made it clear our support for the need for greater transparency in terms of political donations. We would suggest that given the available technology, there should be no reason why information on who is funding candidates and political parties should not be available in real time before a vote is cast. It is imperative in a fully functioning democracy that citizens have full, transparent information on who is funding candidates seeking public office.

One particular aspects of elections (in NSW) which also causes us particular concern is the continuing use of misinformation and false messaging undertaken by many Political Parties – as well as by external third parties. This raises ongoing questions about the integrity of the electoral process, and unfortunately does little to challenge the general perception amongst the wider citizenry as to the motivations of all politicians.

Given the challenges we can see globally which both threaten democracy and the legitimacy of elections, we commend the Committee for holding this Inquiry. We would welcome the opportunity to expand on the contents of this submission (and the attachments) in order to ensure the on-going integrity and of NSW elections and the enhanced level of citizen engagement.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Dylan Smith, Manager Industrial Support, on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] should you wish to follow up on this submission.

Kind regards,



Stewart Little  
General Secretary.

Encs.

## Attachments

A Asquith, K Webster & A Cardow, '[Voting in New Zealand local government elections: the need to encourage greater voter turnout](#)', *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance (uts.edu.au)*, issue 24, June 2021.

K Webster, A Asquith, M Rohan, A Cardow & M Majavu, '[Auckland, New Zealand – fair game for central party politics](#)', *Local Government Studies*, vol 45, issue 4, March 2019, pp 569-592.

J Molineaux, '[Solving and creating problems: Online voting in New Zealand](#)', The Policy Observatory, Auckland University of Technology, August 2019.