



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on the Integrity
Commission and Statutory Office
Holders

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral Act 1992

Submission number: 022

Submitter: McKinnon

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Mr Ed Cocks MLA

Chair

Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders

Via: email

29 September 2025

Dear Chair

RE: MCKINNON SUBMISSION TO *INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION OF THE 2024 ACT ELECTION AND ELECTORAL ACT 1992*

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral Act 1992*, and I commend the committee for its interest in electoral administration.

This submission:

- provides an overview of McKinnon
- outlines some interim findings of research on public perceptions of Australian democracy that McKinnon has commissioned that may be relevant to the Committee's inquiry, including in relation to electoral misinformation and public support for 'truth in political advertising' laws (NB – the research is still in progress, but if it would be helpful to the Committee, McKinnon can provide a summary of the key research findings once the research is completed)
- provides an overview of a McKinnon-commissioned report into the operation and effectiveness of 'truth in political advertising' laws in Australia (including the ACT).

Overview of McKinnon

McKinnon was founded in 2015 by Dr Sophie Oh and Grant Rule, with the aim of strengthening Australia's democracy. McKinnon believes that better governments are the key to a stronger Australia. The quality of leadership and democracy has never mattered more, which is why McKinnon works to develop political leadership, strengthen institutions and solve the most pressing policy issues to create lasting outcomes that benefit all Australians.

McKinnon's work is focused on four key areas:

- strong and trusted democratic institutions that foster cohesion, constructive debate, and informed public participation in democratic processes
- exceptional political leadership, as positive leadership is crucial in a high-functioning democracy
- world leading policy, supporting innovative solutions to Australia's biggest problems such as education reform through leading pilot programmes
- a high performing public sector, with the right capabilities and institutions to produce high quality service delivery, evidenced based policymaking and long-term thinking.

McKinnon incubates, delivers and supports practical improvements that deliver tangible progress to the operation of government and supports initiatives including:

- the McKinnon Prize in Political Leadership, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, which was established to recognise political leaders at all levels of government who have driven positive impact through their vision, collaboration, courage and ethical behaviour
- the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership, in partnership with Monash University, is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation that provides outstanding professional development for members of Australia's federal, state and territory parliaments
- Australian Policy Online (APO), which curates and archives a free online library of articles, research reports, evaluations, policy briefs and white papers to help organisations including government, non-for-profits and think tanks access timely and reliable information on public policy
- e61, a not-for-profit, non-partisan economic research institute that analyses big data to help answer Australia's most pressing economic policy questions.

McKinnon is non-partisan and motivated only by the public interest.

For further information please visit our website <https://mckinnon.co/about-us>.

McKinnon's Democracy focus area

A resilient and vibrant democracy requires constant vigilance, engagement and renewal. With declining trust in institutions, global disruptions, and youth disengagement, supporting and strengthening our democratic foundations has become critical for Australia's future.

McKinnon's Democracy focus area includes supporting and strengthening:

- trusted democratic institutions, so that Australians trust our electoral systems and processes
- an informed and engaged electorate, to ensure that Australians have trusted and accurate sources of information and are motivated to participate in democratic processes
- a cohesive society, so that Australians can respectfully come together to solve common problems
- healthy public debate, so that debates are constructive and focussed on the most important issues.

McKinnon has supported a range of work as part of this, including research into public perceptions of Australian democracy and a report on the operation and effectiveness of 'truth in political advertising' laws.

Current McKinnon research on public perceptions of Australian Democracy

McKinnon has commissioned research involving focus groups and representative polling into public perceptions of democracy in Australia, including democratic institutions, systems, actors and norms.

Encouragingly, this research has indicated that participants are mostly positive and optimistic about Australian democracy, and that they broadly support Australia's electoral system. This research also indicates that there is a range of support for democratic mechanisms and reforms that support transparency, accountability, and public involvement, and this includes strong support for 'truth in political advertising' laws.

As noted above, the research is currently ongoing, but a summary of key interim findings that may be relevant to the Committee's inquiry is set out below.

Focus groups

The findings of the focus groups indicated that there is in principle support for reforms to the electoral process that enhance the truthfulness of political campaigning and increase transparency.

Key findings from the focus groups include that:

- Australian elections are viewed as largely free and fair, with adequate access and transparency in the voting process, but there is dissatisfaction with election campaign tactics (e.g. the overuse of negative messaging as a tactic, rather than focussing on their achievements and plans), and most participants believe that election campaigns are too focused on degrading other parties rather than articulating their policy platform
- there is strong support for compulsory voting, real-time disclosure of political donations, caps on political donations, and 'truth in political advertising' laws
- many participants supported reforms to election campaigning, seeing them as a mechanism to improve fairness and transparency in the election process.

Polling

The polling results indicate that there is support for key features of Australia's electoral system, as well as other mechanisms such as 'truth in political advertising' laws:

- 67% of respondents supported compulsory voting
- 81% of respondents supported 'truth in political advertising' legislation
- 74% of respondents supported restricting public funding from being used for attack/negative political advertisements
- 74% of respondents supported public funding going towards properly costed policy programs from political parties and candidates.

Report commissioned by McKinnon to examine 'truth in political advertising' laws in Australia

In 2024, McKinnon commissioned Associate Professor Yee-Fui Ng (Faculty of Law, Monash University) to examine the effects, operation and administration of 'truth in political advertising' laws in Australia. The 'Truth in political advertising laws: design, operation, effectiveness and recommendations for reform' report (Report) was published in December 2024 and is based on 34 interviews with relevant stakeholders (including interviewees from the ACT following the October 2024 ACT Election, which was the first ACT Election in which the ACT's 'truth in political advertising' laws were in effect (the report and interview summaries are available [here](#)).

We note that Associate Professor Ng has made a submission to this inquiry that outlines the key findings and recommendations from the Report (available [here](#)).

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry, and I wish you well in undertaking this important work.

Regards

Jay Weatherill
Executive Director
Democracy & Engagement