



**ELECTORAL REGULATION RESEARCH
NETWORK/DEMOCRATIC AUDIT OF AUSTRALIA JOINT
WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS FROM THE WORKSHOP ON THE INFORMED
VOTER: IMPROVING THE POLITICAL LITERACY OF YOUNG AUSTRALIANS¹**

Dr. Tracey Arklay (Griffith University)

WORKING PAPER NO. 67 (NOVEMBER 2019)

¹ This paper outlines the agenda for the ACU Workshop on Improving the Literacy of Young Australians held at the ACU in August 2019 which was co-sponsored by the ERRN. With acknowledgement of support from the Academy of Social Sciences Australia, Electoral Regulation Research Network, Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University and The Australian Catholic University.

Abstract

This paper outlines the agenda for the ACU Workshop on Young Voter Engagement held at the ACU in August 2019 which was co-sponsored by the ERRN.

On Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd August 2019 the Australian Catholic University hosted and co-sponsored a workshop titled ‘The informed voter: improving the political literacy of young Australians.’ The workshop was funded by grants from the Academy of Social Sciences, ERRN, the Centre for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University and the ACU. On the first day the workshop had approximately 20 participants. On the second day this number grew as representatives from Electoral Commissions participated in panel discussions.

The academic participants for the two-day event were as follows:

Convenors: Zlatko Skrbiš, ACU; James Walter, Monash University; Zareh Ghazarian, Monash University; Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ, ACU and Tracey Arklay, Griffith University.

Contributors: Clive Bean, Queensland University of Technology; Bruce Tranter, University of Tasmania; Jonathan Smith, ACU; Anita Harris, Deakin University; Nick Economou, Monash University; Joshua Roose, ACU; Caitlin Mollica (ECR) Griffith University; Peter Chen, University of Sydney; Adam Brodie-McKenzie, University of Melbourne; Zaahir Edries, GetUp; Judith Bessant, RMIT; Zareh Ghazarian, Monash University; Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ, ACU and Tracey Arklay Griffith University.

Also attending the workshop for both or the final day were representatives from the Australian Electoral Commission and the NSW, Victoria, and Queensland Commissions.

Day One: Thursday 22nd August.

The first day’s session began with a opening address by Antony Green, a prominent electoral analyst and the ABC’s electoral commentator. Antony Green’s presentation raised an issue that the workshop returned to repeatedly – the fact that young people are not taught in school about the mechanics of voting. He suggested simple communication to confused voters – such as be sure to number the candidates in the order you’d like to see them elected. Mr Green also recommended that the voting system needs to be made as easy and consistent as possible.

Panel 1 chaired by Tracey Arklay explored the young voter. The panel featured the following papers:

- 1) The voting behaviour of young Australians Clive Bean, QUT
- 2) The young non-partisan voter, Bruce Tranter, University of Tasmania
- 3) A new participatory landscape? Jonathan Smith, ACU
- 4) Changing forms of young people’s politics, Anita Harris, Deakin University.

Panel 2 chaired by Zareh Ghazarian continued on with the theme of the young voter. The panel featured the following papers:

- 1) Electoral engagement and the inner metropolis: The affluent, well-educated voter and the incidence of voter apathy, Nick Economou, Monash University
- 2) Young Muslim Australians and political literacy, Joshua Roose, ACU.

Day Two: Friday 23rd August.

Panel 1 chaired by Zareh Ghazarian explored the theme of engaging youth in politics. The panel featured the following papers:

- 1) Engaging youth: Strategies for creating interested and informed voters, Caitlin Mollica and Tracey Arklay, Griffith University.
- 2) The role of new media in increasing youth political engagement, Peter Chen, The University of Sydney
- 3) Engaging young people in politics: Insights from GetUp! Zaahir Edries, GetUp!

Panel 2 chaired by Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ explored the theme of Young people and political knowledge. The panel featured the following papers:

- 1) Conceptualising political knowledge* Zareh Ghazarian, Monash University, Jacqueline Laughland-Booÿ, ACU and Zlatko Skrbiš, ACU
- 2) Civics and citizenship education in Australia: a teacher's perspective, Adam Brodie-McKenzie, University of Melbourne/ Social Education Victoria
- 3) Lowering the Voting Age? Judith Bessant, RMIT

Panel 3 chaired by Tracey Arklay heard from Electoral commissions and their role in informing young citizens: The panel consisted of representatives from the AEC, VEC, NSW and ECQ.

Special note on panel session with Electoral Commissions.

On the final day a panel that consisted of electoral commission representatives from AEC, VEC, NSW and ECQ provided delegates with insights into what work they had undertaken to engage with young voters as well as some of the difficulties they encountered. As this final session was run using Chatham House rules, no further information regarding the discussions held will be documented. Suffice to say youth engagement continues to be an area of concern for electoral commissions around the country. They are keen to hear and collaborate with researchers about possible ways to engage with and encourage young people to enrol to vote and to understand the mechanics of voting.