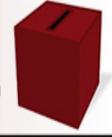


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**ELECTORAL REGULATION RESEARCH
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WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**OPENING REMARKS TO THE WORKSHOP ON THE FUTURE OF ELECTORAL
DEMOCRACY IN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA¹**

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As democracies, it makes sense to work together

As High Commissioner of Australia to India, the third week of May this year was a busy—but exciting—one. On Saturday 18th of May votes were tallied in the Australian federal election, and Prime Minister Morrison was returned to government. Five days later on the 23rd of May, votes were counted in the Indian General election with Prime Minister Modi and the BJP winning a resounding victory in the Lok Sabha.

Both the Indian and Australian Governments have come back into government with a renewed sense of vigour for the bilateral relationship which means we are moving ahead quickly on new plans and initiatives to bring our two countries closer together.

The election period provided a clear demonstration of why this is such a natural partnership. Despite differences of scale and process between our electoral systems, there was one clear commonality: the feat of democracy is truly celebrated by people in both our countries. In Australia, we have the tradition of a ‘democracy sausage sizzle’, which creates a carnival like atmosphere at the voting booth on election day. And in India the rallies and roadshows build a sense of excitement that cascades into election days across the country. It is easy to make light of these festivities. But what they show is the strength of democratic values in each of our political cultures.

Across the Indo-Pacific, it is these values that tie us together and underlie our shared vision for the kind of world we want to see. To quote Prime Minister Modi at the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue: ‘it is the ideals of democracy that define us as nations and shape the way we engage in the world.’

These democratic values have become more important in an increasingly volatile world marked by the emergence of major-power rivalries; deepening protectionism; challenges to international law and norms; and growing security threats such as terrorism, cyber-warfare and climate change.

As democracies, we want a world where the rule of law prevails over ‘might is right’ politics. We believe in the importance of maintaining and benefiting from diversity, and continuously promote the values of tolerance and pluralism.

Of course, democracy is not a faultless system. It was Winston Churchill who said ‘No-one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise... Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.’ There are many challenges which our democratic systems must address, from the increasing cost of political campaigns to the role of new technologies including the influence of actors on social media.

But our democracies are not static. In Australia, we are continuously making changes to our electoral system to be more inclusive, representative and transparent. From extending the right to vote in federal elections to women in 1902, to introducing compulsory voting in the 1920s, all the way through to changes to our system of distributing preferences in the last few years.

I welcome and encourage the exchange of ideas between officials and experts from both our countries through the Future of Electoral Democracy series. These debates are crucial to understanding the challenges our electoral systems must deal with, to learn from each other and continue to make advances to protect and enliven our democratic values.