

From the Editor

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The articles in this issue of the *Australasian Parliamentary Review* continue its strong tradition of bringing critical and well-informed perspectives to bear on recent and current matters of importance to Parliaments in our region, scrutinising problems and drawing on Australasian and broader parliamentary experiences to suggest potential reforms.

The first two articles in this issue address different examples of toxic behaviour in Parliaments. Marian Sawyer considers responses to the February 2021 revelation that a young female member of staff had been raped in a Minister's office in the Australian Parliament House. This revelation provoked a wave of public protest against women's experiences of Parliament as an unsafe workplace, experiences which matched those of many women in Parliaments around the world. Sawyer argues that the unique structure and nature of parliamentary employment, coupled with dynamics of partisan competition, have often promoted silence when such abusive behaviour has occurred. The Parliament of Australia has lagged behind reforms in comparable Parliaments, including those in Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, to address this issue. Sawyer assesses steps taken by other Parliaments to deal with gender-based bullying and sexual harassment and concludes with some specific recommendations drawn from international experience.

In the second article, David Clune discusses the aftermath of the surprise resignation of the President of the NSW Legislative Council in February 2021. A deadlock between the Government and most of the non-Government MLCs meant that a replacement could not be elected. The Council could not function without a President, nor could the Parliament legislate without the Council. The article outlines the increasing partisanship surrounding the election of the President that has developed since 1991. It also analyses the more immediate controversy over the status of informal votes and the meaning of 'a majority' in the election of the new President in 2021. While the immediate crisis was eventually resolved, Clune concludes that none of the MLCs involved can escape blame for an unedifying spectacle likely to damage the standing of the NSW Parliament.

Partisan imperatives also feature in the third article by Martin Drum, Sarah Murray, John Phillimore and Benjamin Reilly, which provides critical commentary on four aspects of Western Australia's Electoral Act: district malapportionment, ticket voting, political financing and postal voting. The authors argue that WA lags behind best, or at

least better, practice found in other Australian jurisdictions, outline specific concerns in each of the four areas, discuss some potential solutions available to WA legislators and comment on their prospects of success in WA. This is another timely article, given the WA Ministerial Expert Committee review of the electoral system for the Legislative Council currently being undertaken.

As John Aliferis and Anita Mackay note in their article, scholars and practitioners have generally valued consensus in parliamentary committee reports and viewed minority reports as a sign of committee failure. Their article questions that view via an examination of minority reports generated by joint investigatory committees of the Parliament of Victoria between 2006 and 2018. The article presents an original taxonomy of minority reports, with four major categories relating to whether minority reports are motivated by a policy focus, political considerations, alleged malpractice or malfeasance in the committee process, or evidential concerns. They conclude that minority reports in Victoria generally serve constructive purposes and are mostly focused on policy issues. They suggest further research applying the taxonomy to other jurisdictions could expand our understanding of committee reports.

The last two articles in this issue both address public engagement with Parliament. Josephine Moa asks how referring petitions to parliamentary committees can best increase citizen participation. She draws on Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to evaluate the different models for handling petitions used in the ACT Legislative Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the New Zealand Parliament. The core of the article presents detailed evidence on petitions presented to the ACT Legislative Assembly between 2008 and 2018. Moa argues that reforms to the ACT Standing Orders, which mean that petitions with 500 or more signatories are now referred to a standing committee, have not improved the quality of citizen participation. Nonetheless, they have the potential to do so if some additional steps are adopted.

Finally, Sarah Moulds reports on an international conference on *Public Engagement and its Impact on Parliaments* that was organised by the International Parliamentary Engagement Network and held as an online event on 26 March 2021. The conference had two 'hubs'—one based in Australia that Moulds convened, and one based in Europe convened by Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira of the University of Leeds. The article introduces some of the latest theorising around public engagement, as well as some of the key practical approaches to deeper engagement that were discussed at the conference.