

Strengthening Australia's National Integrity System: Priorities for Reform

Australia's 2nd National Integrity System (NIS) Assessment (2016-2019)

Overview

Since 2001, [Transparency International](#) has conducted National Integrity System (NIS) assessments of over 100 countries, including more than 45 countries since a new methodology in 2009.

'[Strengthening Australia's National Integrity System](#)' is an [Australian Research Council](#)-funded Linkage Project conducting our second National Integrity System assessment. Coordinated by Griffith University's [Centre for Governance and Public Policy](#) and led by Professor A J Brown, it involves a team of independent experts including researchers from Flinders University and the University of Sunshine Coast, and partner investigators from [Transparency International Australia](#) and leading integrity institutions throughout Australia (see below).

The project is assessing the Purpose, Capacity, Governance, Relationships and Role Performance of our federal and state systems for public integrity, accountability and anti-corruption, to identify **strengths, weaknesses, gaps and reform opportunities**. **Table 1** below sets out the 15 functions that are assessed, and the associated key institutions.

The project will report in two phases:

- Interim findings and options for strengthening the Commonwealth integrity system, released at the national symposium: **Australia's public integrity institutions: strengths, weaknesses, options** (Canberra, Tuesday 21 August 2018)
- A draft report of the full assessment, presented to the **National Integrity Workshop** as part of Transparency International Australia's 2019 National Conference (Sydney, March 2019).

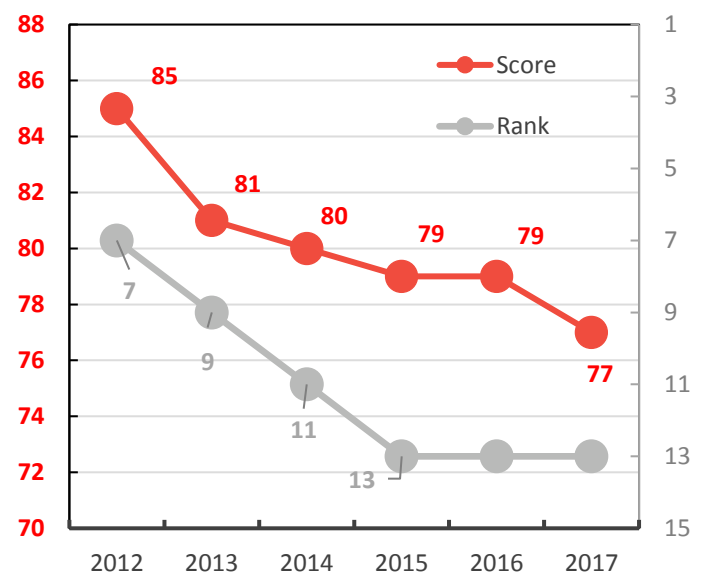
Any expert, professional, organisation or concerned citizen with experience or views about our national integrity system can contribute by completing the **National Integrity Survey** (see below).

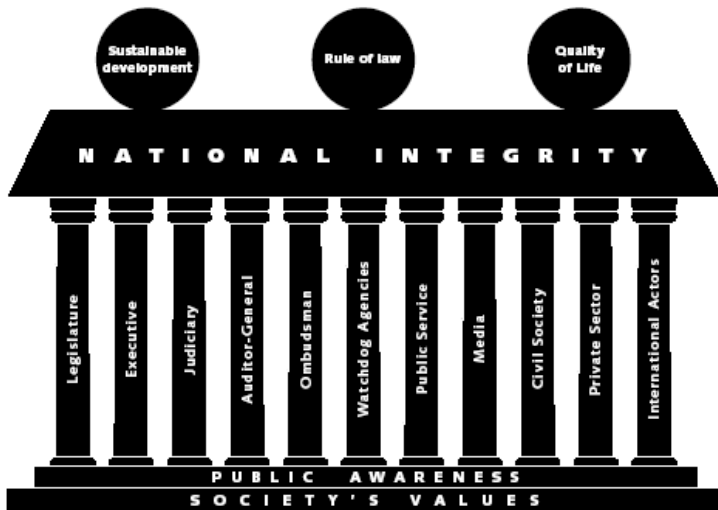
Why is the assessment needed?

Australia needs the strongest possible system to safeguard integrity in government, and identify, deal with and prevent official corruption. But despite leading in many areas of democracy, public and international confidence in Australia's institutions is now slipping.

From 2012 to 2017, Australia **fell 8 points** on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (from 85 to 77, or 7th to 13th position).

Australia's Corruption Perceptions Index score (2012-2017)





Transparency International's most recent Global Corruption Barometer (2016) also found that 34% of Australians believed corruption had increased in the previous year, and 41% that the fight against corruption is being **badly handled**.

It doesn't have to be this way. Over the same period, the United Kingdom rose 8 points (from 74 to 82 out of 100), replacing Australia in the top 10 'cleanest' countries. New Zealand is perceived as the least corrupt country in the world, at 89.

At the top of possible reforms is a broad-based **Commonwealth anti-corruption agency**. In September 2017, the [Senate Select Committee on a National Integrity Commission](#) recommended careful consideration of a new Commonwealth agency with 'broad scope and jurisdiction to address integrity and corruption matters' – describing the current arrangements as 'complex and poorly understood... opaque, difficult to access and challenging to navigate' (pars 4.136, 4.141, Recommendations 1 & 2). In January 2018, the federal Opposition joined cross-bench parties in [committing to create](#) such a commission.

However there are many issues involved in getting such a reform right. The Senate Committee also called on all parties to **heed the National Integrity System Assessment** as a guide to how accountability systems should be strengthened (Recommendation 3).

This is because the assessment is a rare opportunity to take a holistic look at all relevant institutions, not just one option:

- **What kind** of new federal integrity commission would be the best "fit" for the Commonwealth, given existing agencies and processes, some of which also need improvement?
- What are the **best lessons**, and what **mistakes** need to be avoided, from the experience of anti-corruption agencies in Australia's states and internationally?
- What are the best models for the resourcing, coordination and accountability of all our **state** integrity institutions – including ombudsmen, auditors-general, information commissioners, whistleblower protection systems and the like?
- What should be done to ensure the **media, civil society and business** play their roles?

Table 1. Public integrity functions (and key institutions)

1	Financial accountability	Auditors-General
2	Fair & effective public administration	Ombudsman offices
3	Public sector ethical standards	Public Service Commissions
4	Ministerial standards	Cabinets / political executive
5	Legislative ethics & integrity	Ethics & Privileges, Expenses authorities
6	Election integrity	Electoral Commissions
7	Political finance & campaign regulation	Electoral Commissions
8	Corruption prevention	Anti-corruption agencies & other agencies
9	Corruption investigation & exposure	Anti-corruption agencies, police services
10	Judicial oversight & rule of law	Judiciary/Courts & DPPs
11	Public information rights	Information commissioners
12	Complaint & whistleblowing processes	Various integrity agencies
13	Independent journalism	Media
14	Civil society contribution to anti-corruption	Civil society / not-for-profit institutions
15	Business contribution to anti-corruption	Business

What's involved in the assessment?

The assessment identifies the strengths and weaknesses in how 15 different integrity and anti-corruption functions, or processes, are being organised and discharged across each jurisdiction (**Table 1**). Strengths and weaknesses are assessed using questions relating to *Scope & mandate, Capacity, Governance, Relationships and Role performance* in these areas.

Through the **National Integrity Survey**, experts, relevant agencies, clients, NGOs, professionals and interested/informed observers are able to contribute their evidence, data and assessment in response to these questions, for the functions, institutions and jurisdictions with which they are familiar (or in/with which they are engaged).

This evidence will be combined with the assessments of the project's expert team, moderated using a Delphi method, and analysed to identify strengths and weaknesses in these dimensions across and within jurisdictions. **Desktop research**, and **select interviews** of senior integrity agency personnel in case study jurisdictions, will supplement and support the analysis.

A particular focus of the assessment is to understand how **corruption prevention** is currently understood and practised throughout our integrity system, and how more strategic approaches to preventing corruption can be developed, institutionalised and resourced.

Finally, the assessment includes a better understanding of **citizens' experience and perceptions** with respect to corruption and integrity, through an expanded TI Global Corruption Barometer survey – especially to help identify what reforms are most likely to assist in supporting and rebuilding long-term public confidence in our institutions.

Who's involved?

The Australian Research Council Linkage Project 'Strengthening Australia's national integrity system: priorities for reform' (LP160100267) is led by Griffith University's [Centre for Governance and Public Policy](#). The lead partner is Transparency International Australia, with other partners and supporters including the NSW Ombudsman's office, Queensland Integrity Commissioner and the Crime & Corruption Commission, Queensland. The research team consists of:

Professor A J Brown (Project Leader)	Program leader, public integrity & anti-corruption, Centre for Governance & Public Policy, Griffith University; Boardmember, Transparency International
Professor Janet Ransley	Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University
Professor Adam Graycar	School of Social & Policy Studies, Flinders University
Professor Tim Prenzler	Criminology, University of the Sunshine Coast
Professor Jason Sharman	University of Cambridge
Ms Serena Lillywhite	CEO, Transparency International Australia
Mr Richard Bingham	CEO, Integrity Commission, Tasmania; former South Australian Ombudsman; former Queensland Integrity Commissioner
Professor John McMillan AO	Emeritus Professor, ANU College of Law; former NSW Ombudsman, Commonwealth Ombudsman and Australian Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner

How to participate

Complete the **National Integrity Survey**: <https://prodsurvey.rcs.griffith.edu.au/nisurvey>

Contact us by emailing nationalintegrity@griffith.edu.au; phone: +61 (07) 3735 3986.