

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## Trial by Jury

**Professor David Tait from the Justice Research Group is collaborating with Professor Stephen Parker from the University of Canberra, Professor Terry Carney from the University of Sydney, and Professor Jane Goodman-Delahunty from Charles Sturt University to explore how the use of juries contributes to democracy and justice through a three year Australian Research Council Discovery Project grant.**

'Sitting on a jury can be a transformative experience' says Professor Tait. 'Studies have shown that jurors develop increased confidence in justice, including the jury system, courts and judges, and that few other experiences have such a lasting impact on forming active citizens. It can have a significant effect on other aspects of a person's participation in civil society, including attendance at political events and being involved in political groups. However, we don't know what it is about the jury experience that produces such apparently impressive effects. In this project, we will explore whether these effects are related to a heightened understanding of democracy in people who serve on a jury or whether there are other factors at work.'

The research team will conduct experiments that simulate court-room and jury settings in a controlled environment where factors can be manipulated such as juror interactions, the court and jury room set-up, as well as the levels of authority and formality, the language used, and the sort of clothing worn by court officials. This will allow the investigators to measure the effect on people of changes, for example, their response to "authoritarian" settings compared to more "democratic" settings. Researchers will be able to evaluate how these different court-room factors may change the levels of confidence that jurors have in the justice system.



A better understanding of how jury participation contributes to changed levels of confidence in justice will provide an insight into how court processes can better contribute to the regulation and control of crime. This may lead to a safer and more egalitarian Australian society and greater confidence in legal systems by its citizens.

**Project Title:** Juror confidence in justice: democratic participation or deference to authority?  
**Funding has been set at:** \$245,000  
**Contact Details:** david.tait@uws.edu.au  
<http://www.uws.edu.au/arts/coa/research/justice>  
**July 2009**