

# Supplementary submission. Senate Inquiry in nationhood. Professor Greg Melleuish.

Following the roundtable on 7 February, I should like to make a couple of observations regarding some of the discussion that occurred during the course of the day

## **Trust in Government:**

Many of the participants at the roundtable on 7 February had a very pessimistic view regarding 'trust in government' and how it had declined in recent times. So I went and had a look at the 'facts', in this case the graph on page 99 of the *Trends in Australian Political Opinion* by Susan Cameron and Ian Mcalister.

There are some interesting aspects of that graph:

- It begins with the 1969 election with trust at 51%.
- The next election surveyed is 1979 by which time trust has dropped to 29%. Hence the crucial 1975 election is not included.
- The next election is 1993 election with 34%. This is the only election survey of the Hawke/Keating government and so there are no figures for the 1983, 1987 or 1990 election.
- The next election surveyed is 1996 with a 48% level of trust. Every election since that time includes a survey.
- There was a drop during the Howard years followed by an increase to 43% in 2007 followed by a decline since that time.
- The current level of 25% is not that much lower than the 29% of 1979.

What do we make of these 'facts'?

- Incumbency, in the case of John Howard appears to have led to decreased trust but, as there are no figures for the Hawke/Keating years we cannot know if that also happened during that period.
- There has been a decline in trust since 2007 and it can be speculated that this is related to the instability in political leadership. If this is the case, one would expect that trust will increase with increased stability in leadership.

In other words, gaps in the data means that there is no clear pattern, primarily because we simply do not know the pattern regarding trust in government during the Hawke/Keating years. 25% in 2019 is not that much lower than 29% in 1979.

## **Emotionalism in political argument amongst the young:**

So far as I know there is no comprehensive study of this matter in Australia. The one well known study is *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff. Haidt is, in

American terminology, a liberal, not a conservative. Haidt and Lukianoff discuss the recent rise of emotional reasoning amongst young Americans and its negative consequences.

I have personally experienced this emotional reasoning. When a group of young people discovered that I was a climate sceptic they became quite abusive towards me. They told me, for example, that as an older person, I had no right to a view because they were the future. They hectorated me. They were fearful that the world would soon come to an end. Their knowledge of science did not strike me as particularly great. For example, they did not appear to understand photosynthesis. One of them told me that the movement of Genghis Khan with his armies had somehow brought about climate change. In this regard, Professor Chubb is correct. Students need better scientific education but this means being able to deal critically with methods, facts and conclusions and to appreciate the importance of such things as control experiments. There is a current a reproducibility crisis in many areas of science and students need to understand the limits as well as the achievements of science.

Haidt and Lukianoff establish that emotional reasoning is an issue among young people of the current generation and they also point out that this generation is the first to have grown up using social media. The ramifications for both trust and democracy could be immense.