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**UWA**  
Public Policy  
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# Senate Inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy

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## University of Western Australia Submission

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The University of Western Australia welcomes the Senate Inquiry into nationhood, national identity and democracy and offers the following submission. UWA's response focusses in particular on the nature of nationhood, the nation state and citizenship, civic engagement and democracy, trust and diversity, dual citizenship, the role of the internet, and the need for coordinated research.

We make the following recommendations:

1. Rebuild a positive national identity framed around inclusion rather than exclusion through active political leadership and local engagement.
2. Establish a national research centre focussed on Migration and Social Cohesion. This could be similar to the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, disestablished in 1996, but distributed across a range of urban and rural centres Australia-wide to ensure it is not East-coast and capital city -centric.
3. Improve the civics and citizenship module of the Australian National Curriculum, including resources available for teachers and the time dedicated to it.
4. Initiate or support organisations that monitor online hate speech such as the Online Hate Prevention Institute; and those that support democratic engagement.
5. Support global initiatives that recognise the interconnectedness of the contemporary world system.
6. Support grassroots initiatives that promote civic engagement and intercultural interaction.
7. Recognise Australia's Indigenous peoples.
8. Repeal Section 44 (i) of the Constitution, allowing dual citizens to serve in parliament.

## Preamble

The University appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry. We recognise the Inquiry's concerns about disenchantment with and manipulation of the political process, the spread internationally of authoritarian populism and the 'strong man' leader, right wing nationalism, and real world and online activism pushing harmful ideologies. As one of the country's foremost tertiary institutions, we acknowledge the concern identified in the Discussion Paper that lack of confidence in expertise and evidence has given rise to a 'post truth' media and political environment. This has generated a public disillusioned with the current situation, but unclear where to turn for a solution, often turning to apparently 'democratic' forums online which actually may manipulate and polarise.

Public universities offer the foundation of educated, thoughtful, critical, decision-making that should be at the core of democratic engagement – both for the one quarter of the population who are educated in them, and for the teachers we train who educate the next generations of citizens. Australia is a diverse society, one of the most diverse in the world. It is an acknowledged model for successful multiculturalism – successful, rather than divisive, due to effective government policies valuing diversity and supporting communities to retain aspects of their culture while offering an inclusive national identity with which to align themselves (Jupp, 2007; Moran, 2017). In recent years the ability to retain dual citizenship has recognised that migrants may maintain a connection with their country of origin while also being loyal to Australia. However this is not reflected in their ability to serve in the Australian parliament, excluding a significant proportion from the highest level of civic contribution.

At UWA we are committed to promoting global citizenship with a range of courses and activities associated with this goal. For example the McCusker Centre for Citizenship offers a number of internships and exchanges dedicated to raising awareness of the value of civic engagement locally, nationally and globally. Annually we host the Migration and Mobilities Update bringing researchers, communities and policy makers together to share the latest research, policy and experiences related to social inclusion and migrant engagement. These are just two of many examples of the work tertiary institutions are doing to create an educated and engaged population and civic environment.

We value the opportunity to offer responses below to some of the issues outlined in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference and Discussion Paper.

## Nationhood and the Nation-state

The ToR ask about the changing nature of the nation and citizenship. Despite processes of globalization that have enabled increasingly unfettered movement across national borders of material goods, capital, ideas, and risks such as pollution, climate change and terrorism, the nation remains the key geo-political entity that provides individuals with rights, as well as a sense of identity and emotional connection (Calhoun, 2007; Skey 2013). While there has been growing interest in recognition of postnational or global citizenship, this concept remains in the realms of theory, to a large extent, and is rejected by much of the general population (Fozdar. 2017, 2018). Even for committed cosmopolitans, such as Appiah (2006), there is recognition of the need to be rooted in the nation state, to be 'cosmopolitan patriots'.

National citizenship has a number of elements. It is often understood as consisting of the *civil* (individual rights such as freedom of speech, property ownership and equality in law); the *political* (the right to vote and participate in political decision making); and the important *social* aspect (the opportunity to participate in civic culture more broadly, and the provision of health, education and welfare in order to do so, as well as connections to others) (Marshall 1964). 'Cultural citizenship' is also important - the celebration of and engagement with elements of culture, including diverse cultures and those of Indigenous peoples (Banks, 2008; Gunstone, 2016). Each is important for a functioning democracy. There is a danger, however, that 'cultural citizenship' may manifest in conservative ways, promoting a singular ethnic culture, set of values, identity and skills' set. Australia

has seen elements of this over the last two decades particularly, with an emphasis on a stereotypical Australian identity, to the exclusion of others (cf 'Team Australia'). The promotion of cultural citizenship, for example in the form of notions such as 'Australian values', must therefore be undertaken with great care to ensure it doesn't become a means by which to exclude certain members.

In terms of national commitment, again there are a number of models of nationalism which are useful. One is the ethno/civic distinction. Given its history and nature as an immigrant nation, with an Indigenous foundation, '*ethno-nationalism*', which focuses on shared history and culture (and often race), is likely to be divisive. *Civic nationalism* is a more appropriate model. This is a commitment to a common destiny and government through shared civic institutions, a more appropriate model to build a cohesive nation in a globalized world (Brown 1999; Smith 1991; Fozdar and Spittles 2010). This 'community of choice' model of belonging in the nation-state is appropriate for Australia.

An important feature of the nation is its existence in members' imaginations – the 'imagined community' of the nation-state as Anderson ([1983] 2006) called it. Usually this imagined component is based on the ethno-national concept described above, a shared system of beliefs and practices, history, and sense of shared ancestry, associated with a geographic space. This is the cause of some of the xenophobic nationalism in Australia lately, but there are alternative versions of an imagined community that are possible, including civic and multicultural versions. The media has a critical role to play in the creation and perpetuation of the national imagination, and a flourishing free press is vital.

The nation-state is potentially a powerful force for political action at a domestic and international level (Calhoun, 2007) and additionally provides the foundation for an emotional attachment to place and people (Skey, 2013). But the idea of the nation is frequently captured by/hostage to narrow, parochial interests, including far right, ultra-nationalist movements (eg Reclaim Australia, Rise Up Australia, the Australian Defence League, the United Patriots Front, True Blue Crew and Antipodean Resistance). While these movements represent a small minority of Australians, their influence is growing, and there is always a risk that mainstream politics will 'dog whistle' to these constituents to shore up their own political position. This is why it is so important for political leaders to frame the national identity as fundamentally diverse and inclusive, and to channel nationalist sentiment into positive and inclusive outlets.

Andrew Markus, in the annual Scanlon Social Cohesion survey (see Markus, 2017), has demonstrated that there is generally goodwill in Australia towards multiculturalism, with around 85% of Australians consistently supporting multiculturalism (this varies by age). But while research consistently shows vague support for Australia's growing diversity, migration generally, and specific multicultural policies, are viewed with suspicion (Bean 2002; Goot and Watson 1995; Markus 2012, 2017; Moran 2005: 208). This sort of negativity has been mapped in many countries, and has led, in many cases, to a retreat from multiculturalism (see Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010; Joppke 2004; Jupp 2007). Migrants and refugees in Australia experience this as a sense of unbelonging (Markus, 2017; Fozdar and Hartley, 2013a, 2013b) which can lead to alienation, and its attendant problems. The work of the UWS *Challenging Racism* team demonstrates the importance of, and strategies useful for, challenging everyday experiences of racism (see <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism>) and these include encouraging the general population to call out racism and exclusion when they see it.

It should not be forgotten that there is strong evidence that Australians are positive about multiculturalism and that it remains an important, indeed vital and unique element of Australian identity, with everyday Australians seeing it as fundamental to their sense of themselves (Brett and Moran, 2011; Moran 2017). The public needs to be made aware of this, and it should be supported through positive leadership.

Additionally, recognition of Australia's Indigenous peoples is vital. Without this, the legitimacy of the nation-state itself is at risk. New Zealand has created a national identity based on its relationship with its indigenous peoples – the Maori. Australia could learn from this example. One reason for the strength of the Maori relationship is the Treaty of Waitangi. This could be explored as a model for recognition of Australia's Indigenous peoples in the Constitution, as a first step towards developing a Treaty.

Finally on this topic, Australia's treatment of asylum seekers who arrive without visas, usually by boat (as opposed to those who arrive by plane), is undertaken in the name keeping the nation and its borders secure. A proportion of the population strongly feel that this treatment goes against the values that Australia is trying to promote, and actually weakens the element of compassion in the national character (see Austin and Fozdar, 2018b).

### Civic Engagement and Democracy

The Discussion Paper identifies declining levels of public trust as a concern, potentially weakening liberal democracy. A Pew survey from 2017 found Australians had much more negative views of their democracy than Canadians. 30% of Canadians were dissatisfied with the working of their democracy, compared to 41% of Australians. Trust in the national government was at 67% in Canada, but only 48% in Australia (quoted in Markus, 2017:3). The Scanlon Monash Index of Social Cohesion, a measure combining sense of belonging, worth, social justice and equity, political participation and feelings of acceptance/rejection, is also dropping (Markus, 2017: 24). These statistics should be cause for concern.

In Australia, as elsewhere, young people are increasingly disengaged from the formal political process. Only 11% of 18-24 year-olds and 14% of 25-34 year-old Australians say they are very interested in politics (Markus, 2017:9), and only 10% of 15-18 year-olds report they are occasionally or regularly engaged in conventional political activities (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010), with the majority feeling disengaged or disenchanted by traditional or formal politics, despite a desire to be heard by the formal political establishment. Other polls suggest young people are less convinced of the benefits of democracy than ever before, with only a minority of respondents (41%) rating it "essential" (a rating of 10 on a 10-point scale) to "live in a country that is governed democratically." (World Values Survey 2014-15). This indicates a sharp decline from earlier decades.

At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that this level is significantly higher than the expressed support for democracy when identical questions are asked of young people in comparative countries such as the UK, New Zealand and the United States. And young Australians are engaged in the civic life of their communities, it is just they participate in different forms of activity. A majority report being involved in alternative, informal forms of civic participation (eg recycling, making donations, signing petitions, making statements through art/writing/music, and using the internet as a site of socio-political engagement) (Harris, Wyn, and Younes, 2010). But traditional forms of engagement with governance are declining.

In an analysis of the Australian National Curriculum and associated resources, Fozdar and Martin (forthcoming) found that some of this disengagement may be due to the traditional and proceduralist approach to teaching Civics and Citizenship at high schools across the country, as well as the very limited time (20 hours annually) devoted to this module. The focus of the module is on teaching students about the governmental system, rather than engaging them in creative ways to consider their relationship with the nation and beyond. A growing literature exists on transformative and global citizenship education (Banks, 2008; Gaudelli, 2016), and it is likely that reconsideration of the civics and citizenship module could improve young people's engagement and commitment. Thus we would argue for an urgent reconsideration of the content of the Civics and Citizenship module of the Australian National Curriculum, including the quantity and range of resources available for teachers. The module also needs more time dedicated to it.

However the problem is not just the result of insufficiently targeted education. Economic factors play a role. For example, Markus (2017:4) found that trust in the federal government is around 29%, but this is affected by socioeconomic status, with a much lower 13% of those 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor,' 23% of those who are 'just getting along' trusting government, compared to an above average 42% among 'prosperous' or 'very comfortable.' Likewise, support for major change or replacement of Australia's system of government averaged 41% but was at a much higher 68% among those 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor', 46% for those 'just getting along', and much lower (but still a quarter of the population) at 27% of those 'prosperous' or 'very comfortable.' So the state of the economy and distribution of wealth is a significant factor in trust in government.

But more generally, loss of faith in the democratic system, for example through corporations or well-resourced individuals manipulating public opinion, or the self-interested focus of the key political parties, is a very real threat. Declining trust and engagement with Australia's democracy may not be reversible in the absence of visionary leadership that transcends national issues and focuses on a longer time frame than the 3 year election cycle. Young people are aware that some problems are universal and some local, and that it is difficult to address these issues in isolation. Many problems are too complex for national policymakers to solve. A fundamental contradiction exists between national and international logics, and for international problems there is often no structure, let alone political will, to take action. What is needed is transnational cooperation for the resolution of collective problems; and future-oriented thinking in the collective interest that transcends national interest.

The Committee's Discussion Paper taps into a broader concern amongst political scientists about democratic deconsolidation – the fear that we are going through a period of unprecedented democratic regression worldwide that could affect even countries such as Australia.

It is important to remember that Australia has so far been less touched by the emergence of populist politics than many other Western democracies, a result of continuing economic growth (albeit built on population increase rather than productivity gains), our distinctive electoral institutions (particularly compulsory and preferential voting, both of which act as prophylactics against extremism), and a state-funded national broadcast media in the shape of the ABC and SBS (particularly important in this era of 'fake news'). These are real strengths of our existing system which distinguish Australia from many other countries.

It is also important to realise that those trends suggesting democratic deconsolidation in Australia are shared with almost all other Western democracies. This is not an Australian story specifically, it is a global one, so we need to look globally for causes too – particularly the impacts of social media, echo-chamber information sources, and closed-loop online networks. Another area is the changing nature of the labour market and the inability of political systems in Australia and elsewhere to address global collective action dilemmas such as climate change.

In terms of what action can be taken by governments or other relevant groups, clearly genuine engagement with a wider range of stakeholders is necessary, to ensure a broader range of voices are being heard; education about the realities of the contemporary world beyond Australia, particularly in the region; admission of the limitations of national politics as we have traditionally known it; a willingness to cooperate internationally and pool sovereignty where necessary (the EU is a moderately successful model, as are ASEAN and the African Union, but these need support, including a broadening of the general public's awareness of their value); and consideration of deliberative or participatory democracy and co-governance to empower citizens and respond to their need to have a voice, although these approaches may have limited reach, be labour intensive, and be slow or liable to being overtaken by rapidly unfolding events – however new technologies do offer interesting opportunities in this space, as a special issue of *The Atlantic* found in 2017 (see <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/05/the-next-great-experiment/523890/>, see also Coleman and Blumler, 2009)

As the impact of these problems, and the decline in support for democracy more generally, are particularly concentrated amongst the young, it makes sense to focus any ameliorative steps on young people, and on broader issues of inter-generational equity. There is a strong sense among many young people that they are losers from a political process that privileges the interests of older voters and neglects younger ones.

Primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions have a key role to play in addressing both the perception and the reality of this problem.

Australia also has the potential to play a useful international leadership role in questions of how to re-connect with the populace, and hear their concerns. But it is unlikely to do so if the political class and their advisors remain wedded to a view of the world that is closer to the nineteenth than the twenty-first century. This is another reason for some young people's turning away from mainstream politics and joining the 'more extreme movements' identified in the Discussion Paper.

### Trust and Diversity

Australia is a diverse society. In some areas there have been concerns about the development of ethnic 'ghettoes', although Australia is much more geographically dispersed than many other countries.

A positive national outlook and trust in the civic context is influenced by levels of diversity within a population. Some decades ago a large scale comparative study by Robert Putnam found that diversity reduces trust (whites in communities with higher levels of ethnic diversity have less trust on a range of dimensions). This finding left social scientists concerned about the implications. Indeed in Australia, Markus (2017:4) has found that "the impact of immigration is magnified through settlement concentrations in regions of the major cities, so the views of discontented minorities can be magnified by concentrations within sub-groups of the population and regions, with impact through the political process." However Putnam's findings have been challenged to some extent in a recent study by Kaufman and Goodwin (2018), who found that the size of the community matters – in smaller communities diversity and mixing actually reduce the sense of threat for whites. Rather than taking this an argument for dispersal of visibly different migrants to often less attractive regions, this suggests a need for more opportunities to interact at a close personal level.

Thus it would be worthwhile to support initiatives such as the 'Welcoming Cities' program, a growing network of over 135 municipalities globally which supports local governments to create communities focussed on belonging and inclusion in social, cultural, economic and civic life (see <https://welcomingcities.org.au/>). Among other projects, it promotes the Welcoming Cities Standard, a National Standard for cultural diversity and inclusion policy and practice in Local Government.

A range of grassroots, local government and international initiatives that promote civic engagement and intercultural interaction also exist, and wider promotion of these could generate a fundamental change in the mindset of the Australian population, young and old alike. See for example <https://www.kaleidoscopeinitiative.com.au/>; <https://www.unaoc.org/what-we-do/projects/>

### Dual Citizenship

It is an important aspect of Australia's democracy that dual citizenship is allowed. However the implications of this in relation to national identity have not been articulated adequately. Australian nationalism always is represented as exclusive, which diminishes the value of Australians' transnational connections. These connections are vital for economic development and entrepreneurial opportunities. Yet public discourse tends to focus on exclusive (and often exclusionary) national commitment, ignoring the large proportion of the population who maintain formal (and informal) connections with their countries of origin. Australia has an opportunity, as one



of the most migrant-dense countries in the world, to leverage these relationships for economic, social and cultural benefits, and generate an identity based upon these.

A step in the direction of recognizing the value of dual citizenship would be to repeal Section 44 (i) of the Constitution, allowing dual citizens to serve in parliament.

### The role of the internet in the reduction of civic engagement and promotion of extremist ideologies

There is no doubt that online communication has the potential to polarise and dehumanise, although it has been argued that it also enables 'public square' communication between those of differing viewpoints and could potentially change minds and moderate attitudes (Myers, 2010; Macgilchrist and Bohmig, 2012; Fozdar and Pedersen, 2013).

A range of organisations have developed tools and advice on how to prevent online hate speech (see for example Online Hate Prevention Institute <https://ohpi.org.au/> or Emore <https://www.emoreproject.eu>). Given large proportions of the population spend significant time on the internet, it is appropriate to target people, particularly young people, through these mechanisms. Thus we argue that support should be provided to organisations that monitor online hate speech; and those that support democratic engagement.

### Information and Research

There is currently no national research agenda in relation to immigration, multiculturalism, extremism, inclusion and exclusion. While there is a place for researcher-generated engagement with these difficult issues, there is also a place for an institutional coordination of efforts. We thus recommend the reinstitution and resourcing of a national research centre focussed on Migration and Social Cohesion to monitor the flows of migration, issues of diversity and cohesion, nationalism and national identity, evaluation of service provision, and identification of gaps in existing research. This could be similar to the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, disestablished in 1996 under John Howard. The BIMPR played an important research and consultative role, published independent findings, and built a strong network of research that involved committed engagement with ethnic communities (Moran, 2017). Ideally, a new research centre would have a distributed rather than centralised structure, ensuring representation and access across a range of urban and rural centres Australia-wide to ensure it is not East-coast and capital city -centric.

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