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Multiculturalism Discussion Paper

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Foreword

Australia's diverse culture is one of its most defining characteristics. In an era of globalisation, where 'global citizens' are on the rise and immigration continues to be a prominent issue in the news cycle, it is timely and important to consider public attitudes about a changing and increasingly diverse society, and how this affects our social cohesion.

Produced in partnership with Monash University and the Australian Multicultural Foundation since 2007, the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion Research series tracks public attitudes on important issues affecting our social cohesion, including immigration, multiculturalism, discrimination, and belonging.

Surveying a collective sample of more than 25,000 respondents over the last decade, the research provides a strong, factual basis for broader analysis of key issues affecting our nation at government, business and community levels.

From this comprehensive research series, we know that Australians are generally very accepting of cultural diversity and immigration – especially compared to populations in other parts of the world – however, this level of support varies across generations, geographical locations, and particular demographic groups.

This discussion paper builds on the national Mapping Social Cohesion Research series, with the aim of encouraging thoughtful debate about the concept of multiculturalism, and to better understand the nuances of our attitudes.


Continuing to explore and discuss these issues is critical as we grow and build cohesive communities that successfully welcome new migrants, for the benefit of all.

Anthea Hancocks



CEO, Scanlon Foundation

Introduction



Multiculturalism in Australia is unquestionably a success story.

This sentiment has been echoed by many including Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane, who in 2013 said that there was strong agreement with the notion that we should be emphatically proud of our achievements as a multicultural society. Rupert Murdoch has made observations of Australia as being 'a great model for the world – a prosperous, multicultural society of people living together in peace and freedom'.¹

Today, Australia's diverse culture is one of our most defining characteristics. In fact, we now have the largest overseas-born population of all large OECD nations, with nearly half of our population either born overseas, or with one or both parents born overseas.

Since 2007, the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion Research series has recorded and analysed public attitudes to issues relating to the impact that our broad immigration program has made on Australian society, and our social cohesion.

Over the course of the ten years since this research began, acceptance of multiculturalism has been consistently high. The 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Research found that 86% of Australians either agree or strongly agree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia, and this view has remained constant over the last three surveys.

This discussion paper sets out to explore the complexities beneath this support, and reflect on why Australian multiculturalism has succeeded.

What exactly is multiculturalism as practiced in Australia? Is it a concrete concept of different cultures and backgrounds living together cohesively, or simply a way of describing our diverse society? And who is responsible for making multiculturalism a success – should new migrants adapt to fit Australia, or vice versa?

These questions are vital for all Australians, old and new, to consider at a time of great global change, and when the European experience and attitudes towards integration of migrants has become so widely discussed in the media.

¹ Tim Soutphommasane, 'Racism laws show society's strength', *The Age*, 9 November 2013.

What is multiculturalism?

Debate over multicultural policies – their relevance and application – has continued to grow in recent years, particularly in the context of changing global dynamics, economic developments, and an increase in conflict and social disintegration in particular areas of the world. However, a disconnect remains as to its definition, with multiculturalism meaning different things in different countries.

In a 2014 article in the *Journal of Sociology*, Jan Pakulski helped to clarify the concept. He suggested that the term is multilayered, meaning socio-demographic and socio-cultural diversity in a descriptive sense, approval of such diversity in a normative sense, and in an ideological sense, meaning the promotion of cultural diversity, tolerance of diversity and the policies that support both. He suggested that critics, by contrast, skew the meaning and use of ‘multiculturalism’, and see it as the superficial celebration of cultural difference for its own sake.²

The differences in how multiculturalism is understood are highlighted when comparing its interpretation in Australia, Canada and the United States.

Australian multiculturalism policy traces its origins to Canada in the 1970s with the Whitlam government adopting both the Canadian name and policy of catering to a multilingual population.³ Yet the

Canadian meaning of multiculturalism did not translate to Australia. According to James Jupp, being a bi-cultural and bi-lingual nation, Canada had a sound basis for adopting an approach that recognised the continuation of cultural inheritance. However, in Australia, ethnic minorities were not based on long-resident settlement groups – instead, they comprised newly arrived immigrants. As such, in Australia, less emphasis was placed on cultural maintenance.

Australian multiculturalism also differs from its definition in the United States, where multiculturalism was largely driven out of civil rights and constitutional protections. In the United States, multiculturalism included ethnic quotas in public appointments and redrawing electoral boundaries to take into account ethnic distribution.⁴

In Australia, we strive towards a model of multiculturalism that assumes migrants can belong to Australia while also keeping their birth country’s customs and traditions. Our model of multiculturalism acknowledges that social exclusion – which can result from a more assimilative model or a society that does not actively embrace a welcoming and caring approach to new arrivals – can significantly reduce the opportunities and benefits that migration can bring to a country. In doing so, it also recognises the myriad of economic and civic contributions migrants have made to Australia.

2 Jan Pakulski, ‘Confusions about multiculturalism’, *Journal of Sociology*, 2014, vol. 50(1), pp. 23 – 26.

3 James Jupp, in *Australia’s immigration revolution*, 2009, p. 94.

4 James Jupp, in *Australia’s immigration revolution*, 2009, p. 4.



But, not all Australians share this view. Opponents of multiculturalism view the term as a synonym for ethnic tribalism, where tight-knit groups based in a geographical area do not engage in mainstream life, or consciously reject it, and where a single national culture risks being replaced by one or more clashing minority cultures. This remains one of the most enduring fears around multiculturalism, both in Europe and Australia.

Across much of Europe, multiculturalism has typically been premised on absorbing migrants into an existing strong national culture, and in these areas, multiculturalism has been written off as a failure. Leaders in Germany, the UK and France have publicly rejected the policy in recent years.

So although there is no agreed definition of what multiculturalism is, and whose responsibility it is, in Australia there is general recognition of some common elements, including that successful multiculturalism is based on a readiness to cooperate, mutual respect, and an understanding that achieving successful integration and social cohesion present ongoing challenges. Across the developed world, Australia stands out not only for our approach to multiculturalism, but for our levels of comfort with the idea that migrants can hold on to their culture and still be part of mainstream society.

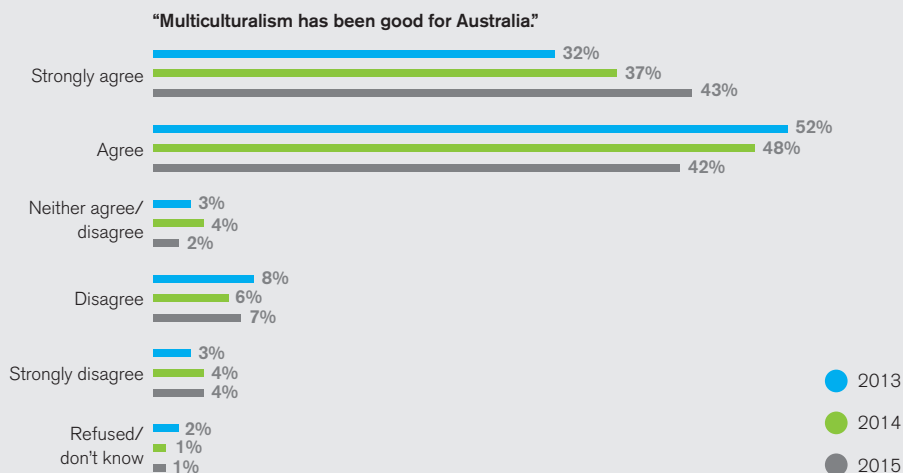
What surveys tell us

Multiculturalism, in general terms, has attracted a long record of positive public response dating back to the late 1980s. For example, in 1988-89, when a survey presented respondents with the statement that 'multiculturalism is necessary if people from different cultures are to live in harmony' – 77% of people agreed.⁵ In 1997 another survey asked whether 'multiculturalism has been good or bad for Australia'. This found that 78% of people agreed that it had been good. In 2005, a survey asked respondents if they supported or opposed 'a policy of multiculturalism in Australia', and 80% of people were in support.

This positive sentiment is also reflected in the more recent findings of the Scanlon Foundation's 2013-15 Mapping Social Cohesion Research, with agreement that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia', at close to 85%.

Our most positive associations of multiculturalism are with its contribution to our economic development (75% agree) and encouragement for migrants to become part of Australian society (71% agree).

Based on this, we can see that multiculturalism – as a general concept – is a strong brand in Australia. However, a closer examination of attitudes shows more complexity.



Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

⁵ Andrew Markus, 'Attitudes to Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity', in James Jupp and Michael Clyne, *Multiculturalism and Integration: a Harmonious Relationship*, 2011, p. 93.

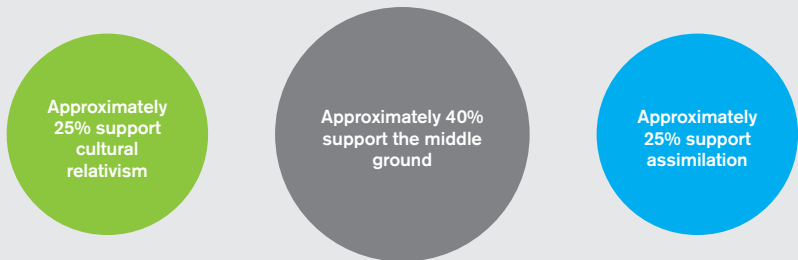
The 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion survey found public attitudes toward multiculturalism in Australia fall into three main categories. These are:

Assimilation – A view that Australians do not need to change to accommodate different immigrant cultures. Rather immigrants need to fit in to the Australian way of life. Around a quarter of the population holds this view.

Cultural relativism – A view that Australians should learn more about migrants and adapt to the cultural diversity, without pressure on immigrants to change. Around a quarter of the population holds this view.

Middle ground – A view that change should be a two way process, with Australians doing more to learn about the customs and heritage of immigrants and immigrants changing their behavior to be more like Australians. This is the position with the strongest public support, held by close to 40% of survey respondents.

How Australians view multiculturalism.



Ambivalence

Examining attitudes toward multiculturalism more closely finds a degree of ambivalence evident in a large segment of the population that remains to be fully convinced about the benefits of multiculturalism and what expectations should be placed on those arriving and those already here.

Fears continue to exist around the impact of perceived ‘new’ cultures entering Australia. The three Scanlon Foundation surveys – from 2013, 2014 and 2015 – found that between 32% and 43% ‘strongly agree’ that multiculturalism has been good, but a larger percentage – between 42% and 52% – only ‘agree’.

“Multiculturalism has been good for Australia.”

	2013	2014	2015
Strongly agree	32.2	37.1	43.3
Agree	52.2	47.7	42.4
Sub-total: agree	84.4	84.8	85.7

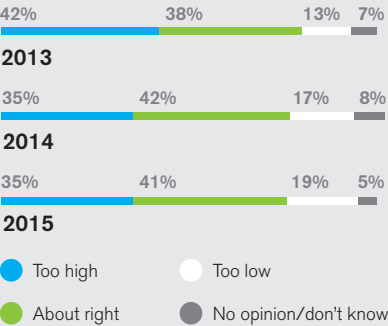
Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

There is evidence that amongst third generation Australians, the ambivalence is even stronger, with less than one third in ‘strong agreement’ that multiculturalism is good for Australia. The third generation are defined in the survey as people born in Australia with both parents born in Australia.

An important finding of the Scanlon Foundation surveys is that attitudes towards multiculturalism are not held in

isolation, but are consistent with views on immigration and cultural diversity. Concern over immigration in Australia is now at its lowest level since the surveys began in 2007, yet 35% of people still feel that our immigration intake is too high.

“What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia?”



Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

Those who ‘agree’ that multiculturalism has been good but do not ‘strongly agree’ are less positive in their support of a diverse immigration intake, of government assistance to ethnic minorities, in their attitude towards Muslims, and are less likely to agree that asylum seekers arriving by boat should be eligible for settlement in Australia.⁶

Since migration will continue to be a major component of our growth, we need to think about the ways in which we can ensure the successful integration of new arrivals and the genuine inclusion of emerging communities.

6 Scanlon Foundation 2014 Mapping Social Cohesion Report, p. 45.



Acceptance

From the Irish Catholics and Chinese goldminers of the nineteenth century, to the Southern Europeans after World War II, the Indochinese boat people fleeing the conflagration in Vietnam and neighbouring nations, the Chinese and Indian skilled migrants and the African refugees fleeing drought and war, new waves of migrants entering Australia have typically encountered initial opposition. But, as time has gone by, cultural fears appear to detach from one group and reappear around newly arrived groups.

Today, anti-Irish sentiment is all but forgotten, and the anti-Asian sentiment stirred up by One Nation in the mid-1990s has largely vanished. This is reflected in the 2013 Mapping Social Cohesion survey results, which showed more than 90% of respondents were positive or neutral towards Italian migrants, and 84% towards Chinese

migrants, for example. However, while these figures reflect broad support, the minority segment of our community that believes in assimilation continues to hold negative views and cultural fears continue to exist, particularly in relation to specific minority groups.

While 25% of 2014 Mapping Social Cohesion phone survey respondents felt negative feelings towards Muslims, the number was closer to 40% of third generation Australians who completed the Scanlon Foundation's 2014 online survey. Similarly, discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity or religion remained relatively high, reported by 15% of respondents.

While fears related to migration and multiculturalism appear to shift over time, they remain a constant minority concern and this should not be dismissed.

If a large segment of the population 'agrees' that multiculturalism is good for Australia, but also indicates ambivalence, what are the implications of this for Australia?

Racism remains an issue for Australia, how do we reduce the prevalence of discrimination?

Attitudes around Australia

One positive sign for Australia's social cohesion is the fact that while there are different levels of support for multiculturalism across our communities, there is majority support across all regions.

In 2013 Scanlon Foundation surveys were conducted in three regional and rural centres and found 85% of respondents in South Australia's Murray Bridge were positive about multiculturalism, 82% in Victoria's Shepparton, and 75% in the hinterland of Cairns, the Atherton Tablelands. Interestingly, even in the staunchly Anglo-Australian region of the Atherton Tablelands – where there are very few recent immigrants and four-fifths of locals are Australian-born, and where the nation's longest serving One Nation member was elected to the State Parliament – support for multiculturalism was still high. However, in this region, there was also a majority belief that immigration levels are too high (59%).

Most migrants settle in our capital cities, where there are more jobs and where there are more likely to be people with different cultural backgrounds. Our regional demographics change more slowly as a result.

The Scanlon Foundation surveys highlight a gap in attitudes between capital cities and their regions. Here there is a pattern of lower support for immigration and cultural diversity in regional areas,

for example, though the drop is not enough to remove majority support for multiculturalism.

City vs. rural: support for multiculturalism

	Capital	Rest of state
Strongly agree	41.7	29.4
Agree	44.8	52.3
Sub-total	86.5	81.7

Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

If we examine attitudes in regional Australia, the aggregated result from 2013, 2014, and 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion survey data finds that 82% of respondents support multiculturalism (compared to 87% in capital cities), but the difference between 'strong agreement' and 'agreement' is in sharp contrast. For example, 'strong agreement' in the capital cities is at 42%, while outside the capitals, it is 29%.

Support for multiculturalism and immigration also varies between Australian states. Comparing the five mainland state capitals and Canberra gives three groupings: Melbourne and Canberra show the highest support with 48% in Melbourne and Canberra 'strongly agreeing' that multiculturalism has been good for Australia; Brisbane and Perth show the lowest support (35-37% strongly agree), while Sydney and Adelaide sit somewhere in the middle (39-42% strongly agree).

City vs. rural: support for multiculturalism - state by state

	VIC		NSW		SA		QLD		WA	
	Melb.	Rest of state	Syd.	Rest of state	Adel.	Rest of state	Brisb.	Rest of state	Perth	Rest of state
Strongly agree	48.1	31.2	41.7	30.9	38.6	19.7	34.7	29.0	37.2	26.7
Agree	39.8	53.5	44.0	53.4	50.4	57.6	50.0	49.9	48.0	52.5
Sub-total	87.9	84.7	85.6	84.3	89.0	77.3	84.7	78.9	85.2	79.2

Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report

Clearly, there is not just one view of multiculturalism in Australia. So what can we conclude? Even in more conservative areas, people recognise that multiculturalism has improved Australia – but they are more likely to be cautious about the pace of change.


We could also conclude that acceptance of unfamiliar cultures increases as an individual forms positive relationships and connections with individuals from those cultures. It is then that individuals begin to understand and appreciate that migrants are important contributors to successful communities, both socially and economically.

What drives these differences in attitudes towards multiculturalism between regional and capital cities?

How important is it to have a consistent, national narrative on issues relating to multiculturalism and immigration?

Should it be up to community leaders to explain the need for immigration, and the social, economic and civil benefits of multiculturalism?

Leadership



Multicultural policy in Australia is perhaps most remarkable due to its unremarkable history.

The Australian approach to multiculturalism has always been to encourage an integrated model where there are support services in communities, and where a sense of belonging is fostered locally. Traditionally, this support has largely been provided by ethnic, religious and civic agencies, but Government at all levels – local, state and federal – also have a key role to play.

It has been suggested that the willingness of Australian political leaders to date to acknowledge cultural diversity, has helped us as a society deal with social change better.⁷ In turn, this would suggest that the tone of political messaging matters.

This indicates that continuing to work positively towards a ‘whole-of-society’ approach and demonstrate bi-partisan support will ensure we can sustain the long-running success of Australia’s multiculturalism, while also creating a resilient nation capable of adapting and leveraging future dynamics.

What role should community leaders play in countering negative, fear-based narratives?

What role should government play in strengthening positive attitudes to multiculturalism?

How should our leaders manage social cohesion given the diversity of attitudes in the community?

⁷ Tim Soutphommasane, *The realities and rhetoric of multiculturalism*, speech for the Australian Human Rights Commission, 1 October 2013.

Young people

Young people tend to be more accepting of societal change than their elders, and more open in their views. In part, this is a reflection of differences in life experience – young people today are more likely to mix with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in schools, universities, and their friendship circles.

Generational differences towards multiculturalism are analysed in the 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion report. Young people have the highest positive response to the question of whether multiculturalism has been good for Australia, with 91% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Similarly, young people strongly back the notion that Australians should learn more about migrant cultures, with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing. They also have the strongest negative reaction

when questioned about whether our immigration policy should discriminate against particular groups on the basis of ethnicity – 87% disagreed, compared to 71% of people aged 60-69. Almost two thirds of young Australians (aged 18-29) agreed that government should assist ethnic minorities to maintain their culture, compared to just 34% of middle aged, and 31% of older Australians.

These findings suggest that young people see multiculturalism as a central component of Australian life and see no contradiction between being Australian and maintaining immigrant cultures and identity. This reflects the reality of a globalised, fluid world, where people now expect to have multiple careers and live in different countries.

Should we strive to do more to make older generations feel comfortable with the real or perceived changes arising from our cultural diversity?

Young adults are consistently more accepting of immigration and cultural diversity than middle-aged and older respondents.

- 65% of respondents in their 20s agreed with the provision of government assistance to ethnic minorities to maintain customs and traditions, compared to 34% of middle-aged and 31% of the older respondents.
- In response to the proposition that immigrants should 'change their behaviour to be more like Australians', 17% of older respondents 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', compared to 23% of middle-aged respondents, and 43% of young adults.
- Close to 60% of young adults 'strongly disagree' with discrimination in immigrant selection on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion, compared to 38% - 39% of middle-aged and 30%-35% of older respondents.
- In response to the proposition that 'we should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different cultural groups in this country', 85% of young adults agree (41% 'strongly agree'), compared to 67% of middle-aged respondents (20% 'strongly agree') and 59% of older respondents (16% 'strongly agree').

Source: Scanlon Foundation 2015 Mapping Social Cohesion Report



Neighbourhoods

As it has been noted, a key defining characteristic of Australian society is its ethnic diversity, with close to half of the population born overseas or with one or both parents born overseas. The Scanlon Foundation surveys indicate a large measure of social cohesion at a neighbourhood level.

Only 2% 'strongly disagree' with the proposition that people of different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. And, only 3% 'strongly disagree' that 'the mix of different national or ethnic backgrounds improves life in my local area'.


This is consistent with the response to the question on the value of multiculturalism where just 4% of people 'strongly disagree' that multiculturalism has been good for Australia.

In areas of high migrant population, settlement services, literacy and education support, and employment pathways are essential – not only for the economic development of the community, but for creating a welcoming and caring environment. This is paramount to integration, resilience and economic success.

How can local communities play a stronger role in fostering understanding of multiculturalism?

How do we encourage every Australian to reflect their own cultural heritage and not assign multiculturalism to just new and emerging communities?

The Challenge



For more than 180 years, our concept of belonging to Australia was narrow – you had to be Anglo-Celtic. In recent decades, our migrant intake has broadened enormously, shifting from an originally narrow focus on the UK, then Europe, Asia, and now well beyond. Now, you can be from anywhere and maintain the traditions you grew up with – and still be Australian.

We've gone from one of the 'whitest' societies in the world to one of the most diverse. Our society has been stretched far beyond the imaginings of its founders, but has Australia fractured? Hardly. Instead, we're thriving.

Australians have a long history of disparaging our own achievements, but our success in building the world's best and most cohesive multicultural is something to take pride in.

Yet, we should not be complacent. While multiculturalism has consistently had majority support across the Mapping Social Cohesion surveys, there are

sections of our society who are less comfortable with the pace of change, and with government involvement in migrant services. For some people, comfort with cultural diversity is still limited to eating food from different cultures.

Our success to date has in part been due to the malleability of Australian culture and consistent economic growth, but will our strong level of social cohesion continue if the economy slumps?

Important questions remain. In our ever-changing globalised world, whose role is it to adapt in a multicultural society? With more people displaced by violent conflict across the world than any other time in the last half century, how can communities best continue to work together to successfully welcome new migrants and remove discrimination? Can we ever become more comfortable with cultural diversity and further improve social cohesion? What would that better society look like?



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