

Australia has a strong and resilient democracy. Discuss.

Australia Embraces Diversity, Really!

Australians are showing less interest in mainstream politics around the nation due to the misrepresentation and marginalisation of various demographic groupings in Australia. Australia's federal government is more resilient in comparison to other countries globally, providing freedom of choice. Whilst the 47th Australian Parliament has been named 'the most diverse' in history by political commentators, Australia's growing and diverse population is still not being mirrored in political representation.

A strong and resilient democracy requires equal opportunity for all citizens regardless of gender, race or beliefs. Women are well-represented in Australian politics, more so due to the inclusion of contentious gender quotas. Quotas should not be required, yet they provide a structure to building a more inclusive parliament and society. Data suggests that women are more likely to live in poverty due to reliance on employment that does not pay adequately; often women are relegated to industries that are lower-paying (Equality Rights Alliance, 2022). As at the 2022 election, the Australian Labor Party has approximately 50% female representation which sufficiently represents the Australian population, however, employment laws do not reflect equal opportunity (Palmieri, 2022). If equal representation correlates to all political parties which is not currently the case, Australia's democracy will only be strengthened as it will reflect the gender-balance in society. Representation is not limited to gender. Today, 4.8% of Australia's democratically elected representatives are First Nations persons, compared to only 3.5% of the Australian population as First Nations persons. The treatment of First Nations persons can be perceived as biased, with 30% of the Australian prison population; a blight on Australia's strong and resilient democracy (AHRC, 2018; Cahill-O'Callahan & Roberts, 2021). This reinforces the need for improvements to diverse representation.

Australian democracy has led to radical change. In 2017, the Australian people, by postal vote, were given the choice to have their say on the rights of LGBTQI+ people and marriage (McAllister & Snagovsky, 2018). Overwhelmingly, 61.6% of Australians voted in favour (McAllister & Snagovsky, 2018). This was then replicated in government. Consequently, the outcome represents a strong and resilient democracy. Yes, this change was seen as radical by religious groups as it meant changing the concept of marriage from between man and women to between two people, regardless of gender. Australia's strong and resilient democracy allowed debate to occur, especially in the context of interfaith dialogue to develop unity on how they approached the issue of marriage equality (Rodd, 2020). By exercising debate, fair and equitable outcomes were sought, in favour of change. Without debate, democracy would not be possible (Rodd, 2020). The steady progression towards diverse political representation was a leading factor in the outcome of marriage equality (McAllister & Snagovsky, 2018).

Resoundingly, the evidence provided strongly reinforces the claim that Australia has a strong and resilient democracy. However, Australia's democracy does face hurdles to better reflect a diverse Nation (Remeikis, 2022). Improved diversification in politics paves the way for Australia to build: the *world's* most diverse parliament.



References:

- Cahill-O’Callaghan & Roberts. (2021). Hidden depths: diversity, difference and the High Court of Australia. *International Journal of Law in Context*, 17,1, 494-511. Doi: 10.1017/S1744552321000471
- Chowdhury, I. (2021). Are young Australians turning away from democracy? *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 56,2, 171-188.
Doi: 10.1080/10361146.2021.1899131
- McAllister & Snagovsky. (2018). Explaining voting in the 2017 Australian same-sex marriage plebiscite. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 53,4, 409-427.
Doi: 10.1080/103611346.2018.1504877
- Palmieri, S. *Our new parliament will have record numbers of women – will this finally make it a safe place to work?*. The Conversation. (2022). Retrieved 11 August 2022, from <https://theconversation.com/our-new-parliament-will-have-record-numbers-of-women-will-this-finally-make-it-a-safe-place-to-work-181598>
- Remeikis, A. (2022). *The 47th parliament is the most diverse ever – but still doesn’t reflect Australia*. The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/25/the-47th-parliament-is-the-most-diverse-ever-but-still-doesnt-reflect-australia>
- Rodd, R. (2020). Democracy without citizens: Australian citizen agency and the symbolic significance of not having rights. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 33,1, 459-476.
Doi: 10.1007/s10767-020-09353-9
- (2022). Retrieved 10 August 2022, from <https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/who-we-are/gender-equality-in-australia/>
- Indigenous Deaths in Custody: Arrest, Imprisonment and Most Serious Offence* | Australian Human Rights Commission. Humanrights.gov.au. (2022). Retrieved 11 August 2022, from <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/indigenous-deaths-custody-arrest-imprisonment-and-most-serious-offence>.