

Culture and its Role as Foundation for Australian Politics: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract. Culture plays a significant role in shaping national identity, political values and beliefs in Australia. In Australia, a multicultural society with a diverse range of ethnicities and cultures, the role of culture in shaping political ideologies and policies cannot be ignored. This paper aims to provide a critical analysis of the extent to which culture provides a foundation for politics in Australia, its influence on political institutions, policies and processes, and the challenges that arise from cultural diversity. It is argued that culture can provide a foundation for politics in Australia, but this is not without complexities and challenges. This paper critically analyses the relationship between culture and politics in Australia, examining the impact of cultural factors such as Indigenous heritage, multiculturalism, and globalization on political discourse and policy making. Through an exploration of relevant literature and case studies, this paper argues that while culture can be a foundation for politics in Australia, it must be balanced with other factors such as economic interests, social justice, and international relations.

Keywords: Australia; Politics; Culture; Economic; Multiculturalism; Cultural Diversity.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Motivation

The relationship between culture and politics has been debated by scholars for decades. While some argue that culture provides a foundation for politics, others emphasize the importance of economic or institutional factors. In the context of Australia, culture has played a significant role in shaping political discourse and policymaking since its inception as a nation. Australia is a nation built on immigration, with a history of colonialism and indigenous displacement. Today, it is a diverse multicultural society, with over 300 different ethnicities represented. The integration of various cultures has resulted in unique social dynamics and political landscapes that are shaped by cultural values and beliefs. Culture, as a foundational aspect of national identity, plays a crucial role in informing political ideologies, shaping policy development and implementation, and influencing political processes. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the extent to which culture functions as a foundation for politics in contemporary Australia, using a historical and comparative approach and critically analyze the role of culture in providing a foundation for politics in Australia, exploring the complexities and challenges associated with this relationship.

Cultural factors such as language, religion, customs, and traditions can play a significant role in shaping political attitudes and behavior [1]. For instance, in countries where religion is an essential part of the culture, it often plays a central role in political debates and policymaking. Similarly, historical events such as wars, revolutions, and social movements can shape the culture of a society and the way people view the political system.

On the other hand, politics can also influence culture in various ways. Political leaders can use their power to promote certain cultural values, beliefs, and practices, or suppress those that people deem undesirable. Governments can also control the media and education systems to shape the way people think about politics and culture. Culture and politics are intertwined, with each influencing and shaping the other. A society's culture can affect the political system, while political decisions can impact the cultural norms and values of a community.

1.2. Research Significance

The significance of this research lies in its ability to provide a better understanding of the relationship between culture and politics in Australia. By examining the role that culture plays in shaping political ideologies, policies, and processes, this research can contribute to improving policy-making that is more culturally sensitive and inclusive. This research can also help to identify challenges associated with cultural diversity and inform strategies for addressing them, promoting social harmony and racial equity. Ultimately, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the political landscape in Australia and contribute to a more informed discourse about the role of cultural factors in politics.

1.3. Literature Review

Bostock's 2017 report, *A Review of Australian Statements and Recent Debates in Australia and Overseas*, examines the concept and practice of multiculturalism in Australia, focusing on policy statements and recent debates both within Australia and internationally. The report provides a comprehensive overview of multiculturalism as a policy framework in Australia, discussing its history, evolution, and key principles. Bostock also examines current debates surrounding multiculturalism, including critiques of the policy framework and arguments for its reform or replacement. The report is well-researched and provides an extensive range of sources, including policy documents, academic articles, and media reports. Bostock's analysis is clear and concise, providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with multiculturalism as a policy framework. While the report is primarily descriptive, rather than evaluative, it provides valuable insights into the shifting landscape of multicultural politics in Australia and the ongoing debates surrounding cultural diversity and integration. Overall, Bostock's report is a valuable contribution to the existing literature on multiculturalism in Australia and provides a useful resource for researchers and policymakers interested in this topic [2].

Mansouri and Lobo's book provides a comprehensive overview of the cultural diversity in Australia and its impact on social, economic and political spheres of life. The research examines the historical context of immigration and settlement, government policies towards multiculturalism, and the various ethnic groups that have contributed to Australia's cultural landscape. By providing case studies and examples, the authors demonstrate the ways in which cultural diversity shapes Australian society, from language and religion to food and fashion. People also explore the challenges and opportunities presented by diversity, such as social cohesion, citizenship, and intercultural communication. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and those interested in understanding contemporary Australia's cultural dynamics. Its strengths include its interdisciplinary approach, clarity of writing, and engagement with empirical evidence [3].

Reynolds' article focuses on the concept of truth-telling as a necessary step towards achieving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The article provides a critical analysis of the challenges faced by Australia in addressing the historical injustices committed against Indigenous peoples, including forced removals from their families and lands, cultural genocide and ongoing discrimination. Reynolds argues that truth-telling is crucial for both acknowledging the past and ensuring a more equitable future and examines various methods and approaches to truth-telling, including formal apologies, reparations, and memorialization. Overall, the article provides a thought-provoking and insightful analysis of the complex issues surrounding reconciliation in Australia [4].

Taylor's book explores the politics of recognition in Australia, specifically focusing on the challenges and pitfalls that arise from efforts to recognize Indigenous Australians within a non-Indigenous political system. The author examines the historical, legal and political context of recognition, and evaluates various approaches to recognition that have been attempted in the past. Taylor also offers critiques of common assumptions and limitations in recognition politics, providing insights into how a more inclusive and equitable form of recognition could be achieved. Overall, the book provides a thought-provoking analysis of the complexities involved in recognizing Indigenous Australians within the Australian political system [5].

Hunter, Smithers et al. argues for the necessity of Indigenous decision-making in Australian politics. The authors examine the historical and contemporary issues facing Indigenous Australians regarding their lack of agency in political decision-making processes. Homosapians argue that Indigenous people have unique perspectives and knowledge systems that are essential to making informed decisions about their communities' futures. Drawing on case studies and research, the authors highlight successful examples of Indigenous decision-making in Australia and argue for its more widespread implementation. Overall, this book provides a compelling argument for greater Indigenous representation and decision-making power in Australian politics and serves as a valuable resource for anyone interested in exploring issues of Indigenous rights and sovereignty [6].

2. Basic Theoretical Analysis

2.1. Indigenous Heritage

Australia's Indigenous heritage is an essential component of its cultural identity. The legacy of colonialism forced removal, and discrimination has resulted in ongoing disparities in social and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights and their unique cultural heritage has become a key issue in Australian politics, with debates on constitutional recognition and treaty negotiations. The 2020 Black Lives Matter movement brought renewed focus to the systemic racism experienced by Indigenous Australians and highlighted the urgent need for meaningful reconciliation efforts [7]. Historically, Indigenous Australians have been excluded from mainstream political participation, resulting in marginalization and disadvantage [6]. The recognition and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and voices are crucial in building a foundation for politics in Australia.

2.2. Multiculturalism

Australia's multiculturalism policy reflects its diverse cultural heritage and commitment to social inclusion. Multiculturalism has been a key feature of Australian society since the 1970s, with policies aimed at promoting diversity and harmony among different cultures [1]. However, multiculturalism has also been subject to criticism, particularly concerning issues relating to integration and identity. Debates on immigration, refugee resettlement and border protection have been prominent in Australian politics, often linked to questions of cultural identity and belonging. This has resulted in political polarization, with some groups advocating for assimilation and homogeneity, while others defend cultural diversity and inclusion [4]. Australians support action to tackle racism is up to 86% as shown in Figure 1. Also shown in Figure 1 is that about 26% of Australians were born overseas which links to how 46% Australians have an overseas-born parent and nearly 20% of them speak another language than English at home. This relates to how Australia has become to have the most migrants in all countries [8].

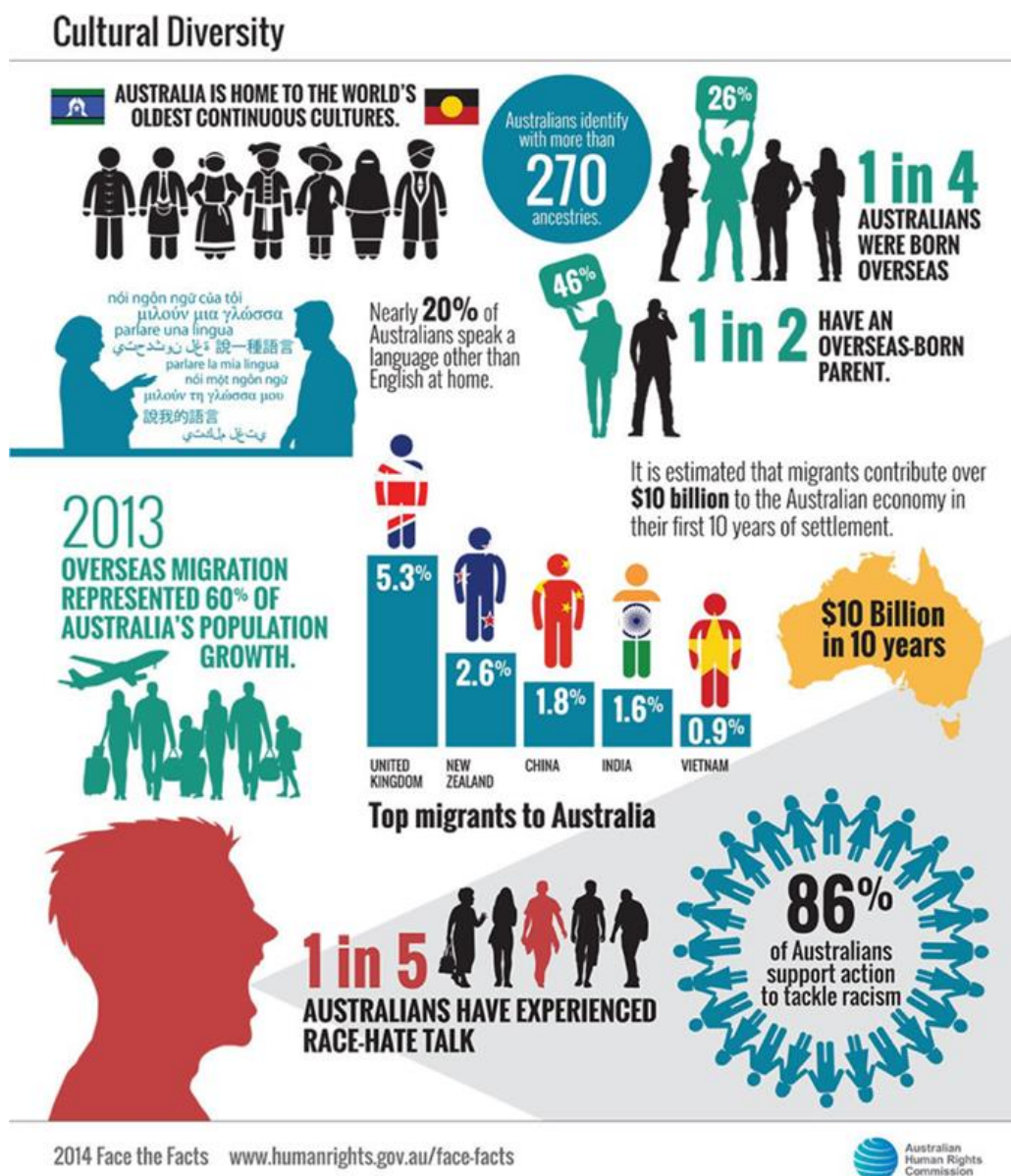


Fig. 1 Cultural diversity in Australia [8]

2.3. Globalization

Globalization has had a profound impact on Australia's cultural landscape and its relationship with global politics. Economic liberalization has led to increased trade and investment, resulting in new cultural influences and greater interconnectedness [9]. At the same time, globalization has challenged traditional notions of sovereignty and national identity. The rise of populist movements and nationalism globally has resulted in a backlash against globalization and a reaffirmation of national identity and cultural heritage [10]. Figure 2 below illustrates the close connection between Asia's dynamic economies and wealth creation in Australia. The Asia region is where a quarter of Australia's top 15 export markets are located, as shown. Exports worth \$472 billion were attracted to these export markets in 2021-22. This accounts for almost 80% of Australia's total exports of goods and services. Around 30% of our goods and services exports are currently being received by China. Japan, Korea, India, the US, Taiwan, and Singapore account for more than 40% of our exports. Australian trade is also influenced by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). 12% of Australia's total exports are accounted for by it [11].



Fig. 2 Australia's top 15 export markets, 2021-22 [11]

3. Cultural Influences

3.1. The Influence of Culture on Political Institutions

Australian political institutions, including the Westminster system of government, were inherited from Great Britain. However, these institutions have been shaped by the country's cultural landscape, particularly by Indigenous culture. The concept of consensus decision-making, for example, is an integral part of Indigenous cultures and has influenced political processes such as parliamentary debates and negotiations. Additionally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), founded in 1990, served as a platform for Indigenous representation in Australian politics, reflecting their unique cultural experiences and perspectives.

3.2. The Influence of Culture on Policy Development and Implementation

Cultural values and beliefs shape political policies, especially in areas such as immigration, education, and health. For instance, the debate about multiculturalism in Australia reflects the tension between preserving the heritage of immigrant populations and promoting social cohesion. The success of multiculturalism relies heavily on the government's ability to balance these competing interests. Cultural factors such as language, religion, and ethnicity play a significant role in shaping healthcare policies and services, especially for Indigenous Australians. The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organization (NACCHO) is an example of a culturally sensitive and responsive organization that delivers health services tailored to the needs of Indigenous Australians.

3.3. Media

The media plays a significant role in shaping cultural attitudes and beliefs, which then influence political discourse. The media is a powerful tool that disseminates information and ideas to the masses, thereby influencing public opinion and the values of society. Media outlets like television, radio, newspapers, and social media platforms shape cultural attitudes by promoting certain ideas and portraying certain groups or individuals in specific ways. For example, the way news outlets cover political events or social issues can influence public perception of those issues and shape their opinions on political matters. Additionally, the media can contribute to the formation of cultural norms and values through its representation of different social groups and their lifestyles or behaviors.

Communication scholars have shown that the media's depiction of certain groups can lead to the normalization of attitudes or behaviors, such as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Ultimately, these cultural attitudes and beliefs that are shaped by the media can have a significant impact on political discourse. Political candidates often tailor their messages and policies to align with prevailing cultural attitudes and beliefs, as these beliefs can greatly influence voter behavior and decision-making. Additionally, political parties and movements often utilize media platforms to spread their ideologies and mobilize support, thereby shaping cultural attitudes that ultimately dictate political outcomes.

In conclusion, the media's role in shaping cultural attitudes and beliefs cannot be underestimated, as it has a profound influence on political discourse. It is crucial for media outlets to carefully consider their representations of different groups and strive for accuracy and fairness in their reporting to ensure that their coverage does not perpetuate harmful cultural attitudes or biases.

4. The Challenges of Cultural Diversity

While cultural diversity brings unique perspectives and experiences to the political arena, it also presents significant challenges. One such challenge is the potential for cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. These conflicts can emerge when different cultural groups hold different views on social and political issues. For example, the debate over marriage equality in Australia highlighted contrasting viewpoints between conservative and progressive factions, with religious and cultural beliefs at the core of the disagreement. Another challenge is the dilemma surrounding the assimilation versus preservation of cultural identities. This dilemma speaks to broader questions about what it means to be an Australian, and how multiculturalism should be managed. The recognition and celebration of cultural diversity in Australia can also provide a foundation for progressive politics. Cultural values such as social justice, equality, and human rights are key components of many diverse cultures [12]. Diverse perspectives and experiences can lead to better policies that reflect the needs and values of all Australians.

5. Suggestion

A potential solution to the challenges posed by cultural diversity in Australia is to promote intercultural dialogue and understanding. This solution can be achieved through various means, including education programs, community events, and government policies and initiatives. Education programs can be designed to teach people about different cultures, their customs, values, and beliefs. These programs can be offered in schools and universities to help students understand and appreciate diverse cultures. Additionally, companies can offer diversity training to their employees to ensure workers have a deeper understanding of their colleagues' cultural backgrounds. Community events can also play a significant role in promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding. Festivals that celebrate different cultures can bring people from diverse backgrounds together, allowing them to share their cultural heritage and traditions. Cultural events such as music concerts, food festivals, and art exhibitions provide an excellent opportunity for people to learn about different cultures while having fun. Government policies and initiatives can also promote intercultural dialogue and understanding. Policies that encourage multiculturalism and inclusivity can help build a more diverse and tolerant society. For instance, the government can provide funding for cultural events, language classes, and other programs that promote multiculturalism. Another policy initiative could be to establish community forums or councils that represent different cultural groups. These forums would allow community leaders to meet regularly to discuss common issues and concerns affecting their communities. This type of forum would enable open dialogue between different cultures and promote mutual understanding.

In conclusion, promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding is a potential solution to the challenges posed by cultural diversity in Australia. By providing education programs, community

events, and implementing government policies, people can build a more inclusive and harmonious society where everyone feels valued and appreciated for their unique cultural heritage. A report by academics and Media Diversity Australia has found that employers must do more to ensure that newsrooms reflect Australian society. The 'Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories?' Report analyses 81 news programs over two weeks in June 2019, equating to approximately 19,000 news and current affairs items across free to air television. The study revealed that when it came to on-screen appearances, only 6% of reporters and commentators had either an Indigenous or non-European background, with more than 75% being of Anglo-Celtic background [13]. The exception was SBS, where 76.6% of on-air reporters, commentators, and presenters were non-European, according to Figure 3.

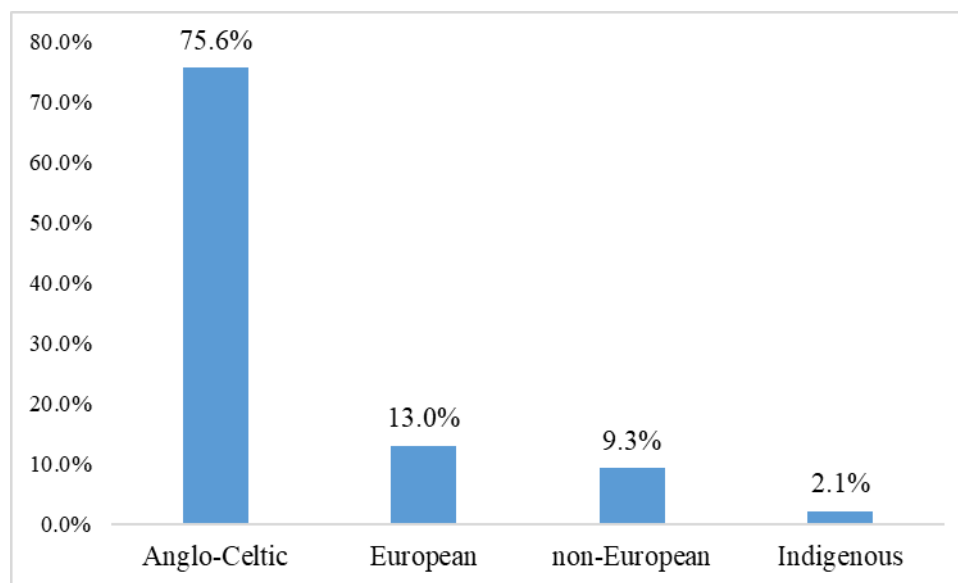


Fig. 3 Ethnicity of presenters, commentators or and reporters on Australian television [13]

Some more ways Cultural diversity in Australia can be solved are as follows: Promoting intercultural awareness and education: Organize workshops and training programs that focus on building intercultural awareness and understanding. These workshops should involve people from diverse backgrounds and help to promote a better understanding of different cultures. Foster social cohesion: Encourage community participation in activities that bring people together from different cultural backgrounds. These could include sports events, music festivals, or celebrations of cultural holidays and traditions. Engaging with communities: Consult with cultural leaders and community members to understand their unique needs and perspectives. This will enable policymakers to develop policies that take into account the diverse needs of all Australians. Developing policies that celebrate diversity: Develop policies and programs that celebrate cultural diversity and promote respect for different cultures. Policies and programs could include language support services, cultural festivals, and diversity awards. Addressing discrimination and racism: Take active steps to address discrimination and racism by developing anti-discrimination policies and promoting social inclusion. Through increased understanding and acceptance of diversity, people can work towards a more harmonious and inclusive society.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship between culture and politics in Australia, highlighting the impact of factors such as Indigenous heritage, multiculturalism, and globalization on political discourse and policymaking. While culture can provide a foundation for politics in Australia, it must be balanced with other factors such as economic interests, social justice, and international relations. Cultural diversity and inclusivity are important aspects of Australian identity, but cultural diversity must be accompanied by policies that promote social justice, equality, and respect for human rights.

Finding a balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing change, while promoting a shared vision of a just and inclusive society is the ultimate challenge for Australian politics. In conclusion, culture plays a vital role in forming the foundation of politics in Australia. Whether it is through influencing political institutions, shaping policy, or highlighting cultural differences and similarities, cultural values and beliefs are intertwined with Australian politics. While cultural diversity brings unique perspectives to the political arena, it also presents significant challenges. It is essential that Australian politicians actively engage with cultural issues affecting the country and adopt a cross-cultural approach to policy development and implementation. Multiculturalism must continue to evolve to promote diversity and social cohesion in Australia. By valuing and celebrating cultural diversity, Australia can build a strong foundation for progressive politics and brighter future for all Australians. Ultimately, the success of Australian politics will depend on how well the country's politicians navigate these cultural complexities.

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