

Is australia
multicultural?



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Australia is often seen as a successful multicultural nation. Since 1945, around 7 million immigrants from over 150 countries have settled in Australia. Also, different religions and cultures are accepted, for example, Judaism and Islam. The governments that have ruled this country since the first white settlement in 1788, has passed legislations and policies that support multiculturalism. However, Australia hasn't always been successful in multiculturalism. Not all people have had equal rights, for example, the right to vote and some governments have not placed a large emphasis on multiculturalism.

Australia is one of the most multi-faith, multi-lingual and multi-cultural countries in the world. It is a diverse country that accepts people of different cultures and religions. With the increasing unrest in the world, more and more innocent citizens are fleeing from their war-torn countries, to countries where they will be accepted. People risk their lives and sometimes pay large amounts of money to come to a free and peaceful country that they can call home. Migrants come to countries that have the capabilities of helping other countries in times of distress or need and know that they will most likely be respected and received. According to the 2011 Census, approximately one quarter of Australia's population is born overseas with 43.1% of people having at least one overseas parent. This shows diversity and outlook of Australia. The 2011 Census Executive Director, Andrew Henderson, said: These results highlight the cultural diversity of Australia's population. Multiculturalism plays a big part in who we are as a nation, helping to create a brighter future for all Australians.[1]

A survey conducted in 2012, revealed a high support for immigration by Australians; a majority displaying a positive or neutral attitude towards people from different backgrounds. 38% of those surveyed believed that the immigration intake was too high against 56% saying it was about right or too low. Australians accept different cultures, religions and beliefs and very few criticise those that have different backgrounds, beliefs and practices. There are approximately 260 different languages spoken in Australia and 21 different religions practiced. Each religion has different underlying principles and values and all are respected. Australia has ties with countries such New Zealand and China, helping Australians to broaden their outlook and understand different cultures and religions and how they influence lives in many ways.

The past governments of this country and other non-government organisations have created many policies to give those from different backgrounds better lives. In 1989, the Hawke Labour Government continued to support multiculturalism, releasing the *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*. This policy contained the underlying values and principles of multiculturalism including “quote”. Australia’s Labour Government of 2007 led by Kevin Rudd, reversed the trend of the previous government led by John Howard (1996 – 2007), from a negative attitude to a positive attitude. Like the Hawke Government, Kevin Rudd showed its support for multiculturalism by creating ties with neighbouring countries and established a *National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC)* which was asked to give advice on “quote”. During April 2010, the NMAC released a report named ‘*The people of Australia*’. The council appreciated Australia’s multicultural

attitude and made ten recommendations which included “ quote”. The Australian government are not the only supporters of multiculturalism in Australia. There are also non-government organisations. Two examples of these non-government organisations are the *Australian Multicultural Foundation* (AMF) and the *Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations* (APRO). The AMF seeks to promote awareness and the importance and respect in relation to peoples’ cultures and how they help the diversity of our country. The organisation also conducts research about Australia’s diversity. The APRO is made of people from different ethnic communities and have different faiths, which work together to promote multiculturalism, social justice and democracy.

However, Australia is not as multicultural as it may seem. Asylum seekers are sometimes viewed as outcasts and people who do not deserve to live freely because of the trouble they cause. Migrants come from many places, risking their lives on boats that are hardly sea-worthy, to arrive in a free country, where there is democracy and peace. For many of these war-torn countries, Australia is their closest free country, with there only being approximately 93 miles between the most southern point of Papua New Guinea and the most northern point of Australia. The boats are usually intercepted by Australian Navy, Customs or Border Protection vessels on border security operations. The immigrants on these boats are taken to detention centres, for example, Christmas Island or Pontville (now closed), or are sent back to where the boat departed. Since December 8, 2013, the Australian Navy and Australian Border Protection vessels have turned back six boats, returning 249 people. Returning asylum seekers gives them a

limited chance to live a good life and create a living. A survey conducted in 2012 by *The Scanlon Foundation* found that only 23% of those surveyed agreed that asylum seekers who arrived on boats should be eligible for permanent residence.

Australia has not always been a successful multicultural nation. When Australia was first discovered by Captain Cook, he declared it belonged to Britain, despite the fact that the Aboriginals already lived on the land. He stated that the land was *terra nullius* (*a land belonging to no-one* .) This view has been carried down by a majority of the population ever since the first settlement of White people. The Aboriginals have always been the true owners of the land; their position as the fathers of this land has not always been recognised. They have been ignored and discriminated. Their views of the land and how to use it have disregarded and have not always had the same social rights as the rest of Australia. An example of this is the right to vote. Aboriginals had the right to vote for the state elections in all states apart from Queensland and Western Australia. However, very few Aboriginals knew their rights, and therefore, very few voted. In 1902, the Aboriginals' rights changed under the 1902 *Franchise Act* , excluding Aboriginals and any other coloured people from voting. It wasn't until 1962, when the Menzies Liberal and Country Party Government changed the law to allow the Aboriginals to vote in the federal elections. In the same year, Western Australia allowed the Aboriginals of that state to vote in state elections, which was followed by Queensland in 1965. The 1996 – 2007 Liberal Government, led by John Howard, did not place such great emphasis on multiculturalism as the previous governments. The government focused

more on “ Cultural unity, assimilation and integration.”[2]A NMAC council was set up in 1997 and in its report titled *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness* released in 1999, it mentioned diversity and acknowledged that those involved in making a multicultural nation. However, it was more focused on “ The heritage of Great Britain and Ireland from which our democracy has evolved and the special social values of mateship and a fair go.”

In conclusion, Australia is successful as a multicultural nation, accepting different cultures and making life as free as possible for those from different backgrounds. However, it cannot be said that Australia has always been multicultural. People are given limited chance to improve their life and the rights of those from different cultures are not always accepted. Overall, Australia is a successful multicultural nation despite the negatives.

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