

Unit 1 Government and democracy

The identity of a nation

Australia is a nation with an identity that is difficult to define. It had been inhabited by Indigenous Australians for tens of thousands of years before the British arrived, causing a massive shift in population and, therefore, identity. Australia has experienced many changes to its identity ever since. The Australian identity is one that is shaped by its people through their values and beliefs. It is these values that will determine the future of the nation.

Australia is a nation with an identity that is difficult to define. It had been inhabited by Indigenous Australians for tens of thousands of years before the first British fleet arrived, causing a massive shift in population and, therefore, identity. Ever since this time, Australia has experienced many changes to its identity. But, in many ways, it is because of these changes that



chapter 20

Australia is a multicultural nation that is home to people from many different backgrounds.

20A

What are Australian values?

- 1 What do you think are the three most important values that Australians should have?
- 2 Why do you think it is important to respect other people's beliefs?

20B

What is the Australian identity?

- 1 How many of your five favourite foods originate from other cultures?
- 2 Why do you think Indigenous Australian culture is such an important part of this nation's identity?

20.1 Australian values

Values are the beliefs, ideals and behaviours that we consider important. While we each have our own personal beliefs, our society as a whole has values that guide our behaviour. As Australia has developed, its people have fostered values such as freedom, equality, compassion, inclusion, responsibility and giving people ‘a fair go’. These values are reflected by our laws, and the ideals of the majority of people within our society, allowing us to live in harmony.

Freedom

Freedom is being able to make our own decisions, without being controlled. In Australia, we can make decisions about our lives such as where we will live or what job we will do. Australians enjoy freedom of speech, whereby people can openly express their

thoughts and opinions. However, this freedom is not protected by law in Australia; it is a privilege rather than a right written into the **Australian Constitution**. Australia also promotes the freedom of religion, allowing people to practise their religions within the boundaries of the law. Unlike freedom of speech, this freedom is protected by our laws.

Yet we are not completely free to do anything we like. There is a lot of debate about what freedoms we should be allowed so that we do not harm other people. For instance, even though we are free to get new clothes for summer, we are not allowed to steal those new clothes from someone else. While Australians enjoy many freedoms, we have laws to guide us that help us live together in peace.

Equality

Equality is when we treat everyone the same. It is an important part of any fair society that cares about making sure no one is discriminated against. Yet equality is difficult to achieve. While the government tries to treat all of its citizens equally in the eyes of the law, it has received criticism for discrimination against certain groups of people, such as same-sex couples. Economic inequality has increased in Australia as fewer and fewer people control more and more of the country’s wealth. Nevertheless, giving everyone an equal opportunity to succeed is a value held dear by many Australians. This is why the government and many organisations aim to help the disadvantaged in our society.

Source 2 Each year on 21 March, Australians celebrate Harmony Day. On this day, we celebrate our diversity and send a powerful message that everyone belongs in our society regardless of how different they are.

A ‘fair go’

A ‘fair go’ means that everyone deserves a fair chance to succeed. It is meant to apply to all people. This applies to access to education and health care, and the opportunity to work and earn a sufficient living, regardless of gender, race or socioeconomic status. It means that discrimination on any of these grounds is not acceptable.



Source 1 In November 2015, anti-racism protestors clashed with anti-Islam protestors in Melton, Victoria.

Compassion

Compassion is a human response to the suffering of others that makes us want to help or relieve that suffering. As people living in ‘the lucky country’, the majority of us live very comfortable lives compared to most of the world. Some Australians feel a responsibility to help those less fortunate and pressure the government to fulfill its responsibilities to people suffering in Australia and overseas. Our government can assist Australians in need by providing accessible medical services, education and aged care and disability services.

People’s different levels of compassion and willingness to act on it have sparked great debate over what Australia’s responsibility is in the global community. For instance, there are opposing views about how Australia should manage **asylum seekers**, people in extreme poverty and others in similarly desperate situations. Compassion is perhaps the most important value of any healthy society, as it influences people to help others who are experiencing extreme suffering.



Source 4 Many people risk their lives to come to Australia, but can then spend years in detention centres.



Source 3 Rallies against discrimination are often peaceful protests for a fair go for all people regardless of race, gender or socioeconomic status.

Inclusion

Everyone is different, but some people’s differences are more noticeable, or harder for others to understand. Unfortunately, it is easy to fear what we do not understand. Failing to overcome such fears can cause us to exclude people simply for being different, leaving them feeling isolated and ashamed of their uniqueness. It is important to celebrate our differences and include all kinds of people in our society, no matter what they look like or how differently they might choose to live. By including everyone, we are able to live in harmony together rather than in conflict or isolation.

Responsibility

Learning to be responsible means we must take ownership of our decisions and ensure that others do not suffer as a result of our behaviour. This is what holds people accountable for their actions. In Australia, the legal system is one way in which people are made to act responsibly. If a person commits a crime, they are likely to be fined or imprisoned. But often, it is our own understanding of what is right and wrong that makes us act responsibly. For example, after eating our lunch, if we throw our rubbish on the floor for someone else to pick up, we would feel guilty, so we place it in the bin. This is an example of being responsible, as we are considering the effects that our decisions have on others as well as ourselves.



Source 4 The failure of people to take responsibility for their effect on the environment is causing a great many problems for the planet and its people.

Check your learning 20.1

Remember and understand

- 1 What are values, and how are they reflected in our society?
- 2 Describe three values that are important to Australian society.

Apply and analyse

- 3 Why do you think Australia is called ‘the lucky country’?
- 4 Do you think people should be free to do whatever they please? Why or why not?
- 5 How might values such as freedom, equality, a fair go, compassion, inclusion and responsibility make it is easier for us to live together?
- 6 Which Australian values do you think might also be valued by the rest of the world? Why?
- 7 a In source 1, what freedom are these people exercising?
b What freedom are they fighting for?
- 8 a People are different in many ways. Describe one difference that you have often observed.
b How do you think you can help to make all kinds of students feel included at school?
- 9 a Why do you think responsibility is such an important value for our society?
b List five things that you are responsible for at home and at school (such as making your bed or bringing the correct books to class).
c For each of the responsibilities mentioned above, write what you think would happen if you did not fulfil your responsibilities.

Evaluate and create

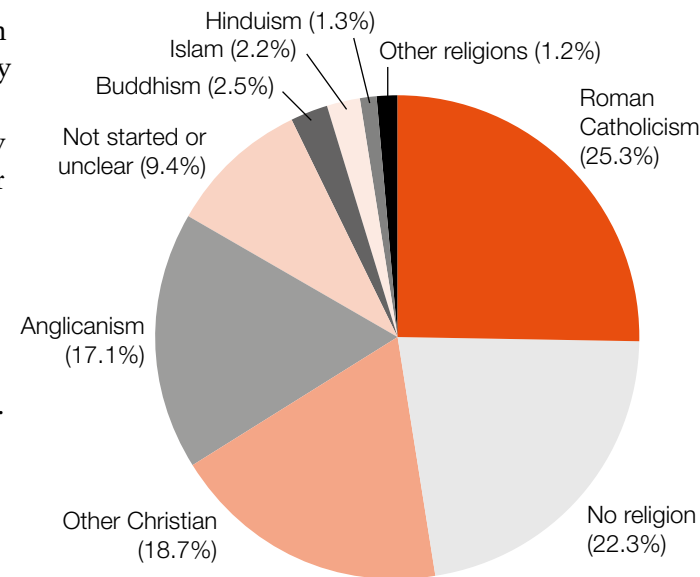
- 10 Source 3 shows a detention centre for asylum seekers, many of whom have fled from war zones. Write a short story about the journey of a boy or girl your age who has fled from war-torn Syria in an attempt to start a new life in Australia.

20.2 Australia as a secular state

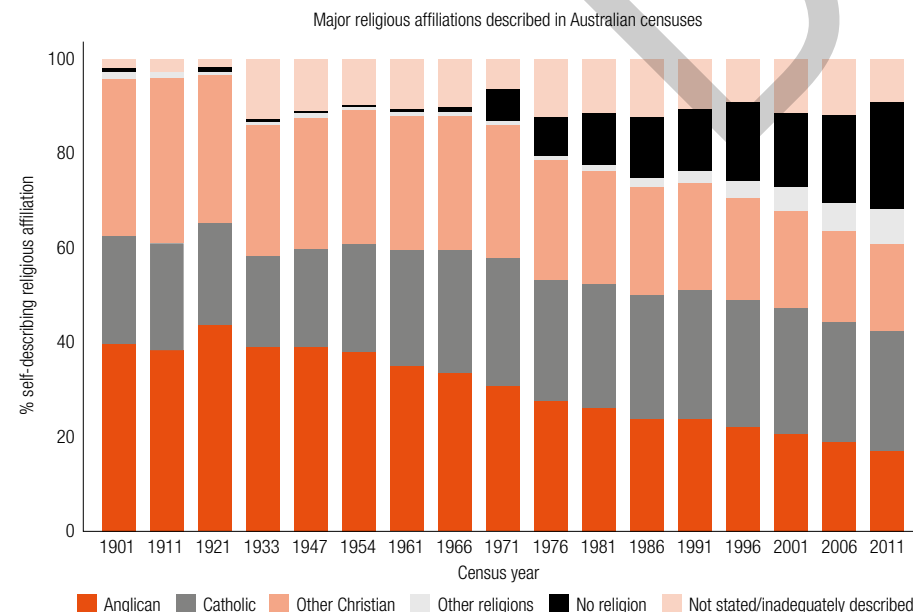
While Christianity is the most widespread religion in Australian society, the church has never been directly involved in running the country. This separation of church and state is known as **secularism** and is a key feature of Australia's identity as a nation. As a secular nation, Australia is able to encourage a diverse society that gives its people the freedom to choose their religious beliefs. However, while most nations around the world today adopt a secular system of government, some nations, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, base their legal system on religious teachings.

Australia's many faiths

Australia is a multicultural nation that has attracted people from all over the world. These people brought with them their different customs, beliefs and religions. Australia's commitment to the freedom of religion has allowed people to practise whichever religion they choose, so long as it does not interfere with the rights of others or our laws. This tolerance for many people's beliefs is a core value of Australian society, one that allows us to live in harmony with one another.



Source 1 This chart shows the different religions or faiths of Australians according to the 2011 census.



Source 2 This chart shows how many religions and faiths have been practised in Australia since 1901.

Separation of church and state

One of the core principles of Australia's democracy is that it does not allow religious institutions to directly influence the decisions of government. Australia's public health, education and political institutions are all free from religious connections. This ensures that religious beliefs of one group of people are not forced onto Australians of other faiths. It also means that decisions about what is best for today's society can be made through open discussion. Despite being a secular nation, religions still influence the beliefs and decisions of many Australians who, as both voters and politicians, determine how the nation is governed.



Source 3 The flag of Victoria reflects Australia's loyalty to the British monarchy, which has a strong Christian identity.



Source 4 Unlike Australia, Saudi Arabia is a non-secular nation, in that their legal system is based on religious teachings.

Check your learning 20.2

Remember and understand

- 1 What is 'secularism'?
- 2 Which two nations are examples of non-secular states?
- 3 Describe two benefits of having a separation of church and state.
- 4 What is the religion of the British monarchy?

Apply and analyse

- 5 What do you think it might be like to live in a non-secular nation of a different religion to your own?
- 6 Look at Source 1. List the faiths in order of highest to lowest number of followers in Australia.
- 7 Look at Source 2.
 - a Which affiliation has been increasing over the years?
 - b What has been happening to the proportion of Christian followers (including Catholic and Anglican) over the years?
- 8 Look at Source 3.
 - a What elements of the flag show Victoria's identity as part of the British empire?
 - b What part of the flag shows a distinctly Christian identity?

20A rich task

Census

Every five years, the Australian government conducts a census of the entire nation. The census is a survey that tries to account for everyone in Australia.

The census is conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It gathers data about people such as their age, gender, income, occupation, type of home, languages spoken, ancestry and optional questions, including religion. This information helps the government understand the type of people living in Australia and can be a useful for assisting the government in decisions they make for and on behalf of the Australian people.

However, the data collected by the ABS isn't just used by the government. Individuals, businesses and private organisations such as research facilities can search the ABS data for specific information that would suit their purposes.



Census
search Q Census

OUR MOMENT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Source 2 These logos represent the government body in charge of collecting and analysing census data is the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

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Conducting a census survey

A census survey can be used to gather information about any population. The following steps can be used to conduct a survey. A census tries to gather information about every person in the population.

- Step 1** Think of some questions. It is easiest if you give people options to choose from when answering the question. Just make sure there is an option that suits each person's response.
- Step 2** Ask each person the questions.
- Step 3** Add up the results for each question.
- Step 4** Present the results. There are many different ways to present statistics, such as calculating percentages or creating graphs. A simple way to present results is in a table.

Apply the skill

- 1 Conduct a census of your class to find out information about their country of birth, language spoken at home, age and gender. As people might be sensitive to some of these questions, include an option to choose 'prefer not to say' for each question.
- 2 Present your findings in a table.
- 3 Use the results from your census survey to answer the questions below.
 - a Which language is most often spoken at home?
 - b How many of the participants chose Australia as their country of birth?
 - c Which is the most common gender in your class?

Extend your understanding

Use the Internet to find out information from Australia's most recent census.

- 1 When was the census conducted?
- 2 What was Australia's population?
- 3 How much has the population increased from the last census?
- 4 In 2011, which state or territory in Australia had the highest population?
- 5 When is the next census scheduled to occur?
- 6 According to the ABS, how often is a new person added to the Australian population?

Source 1 Australia has a population of more than 24 million. Conducting a census of this many people is a difficult and expensive task, which is why it is only done every five years.



20.3 Multiculturalism

Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. It is made up of Indigenous Australians, **migrants** who were born overseas, and the descendants of those who migrated to Australia over the past two centuries. All of these people carry with them a rich heritage and culture that has helped shape Australia’s identity.

A history of multiculturalism in Australia

Up until the arrival of Europeans in 1788, Australia had been inhabited solely by Indigenous Australians for more than 50000 years. Since then, we have seen waves of migrants come to Australia from all over the world.



Source 2 This postage stamp was issued to commemorate Australia Day in 1982. It shows an Indigenous Australian, a British colonist, and a Muslim Australian.

1788	The first fleet arrives from Britain carrying Europeans to a continent inhabited by more than half a million Indigenous Australians.
1788–1868	Britain transports more than 160 000 convicts to Australia in order to ease their own overcrowded prisons.
1793–1850	Around 200 000 mainly English, Irish and Scottish people migrate to Australia voluntarily.
1850	The gold rush begins, attracting thousands of Chinese migrants.
1901–58	The ‘White Australia policy’ encourages migration to Australia from European nations (particularly English-speaking nations), while restricting migration from Asia.
1945	The government promotes the importance of migration through its ‘populate or perish’ attitude, under which it accepts more than 3 million European migrants in the fears that Australia will not survive with such a small population spread across an entire continent.
1970s	The first waves of refugees arrive from Asia, most of whom are people fleeing the war in Vietnam. To this day, the treatment of asylum seekers is a hotly debated political issue in Australia.
Today	There are more than 24 million people living in Australia, half of whom were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas.

Source 1 Timeline of migration to Australia

Expressing cultural identity

Australia’s core values of freedom and inclusion allow for people to respectfully express their cultural identity without being persecuted. This has resulted in vibrant cities and towns across the nation, bustling with a diverse range of music, food, beliefs and customs that one would otherwise have to spend several lifetimes travelling the world to explore. From pizza to pho, Australia has slices of culture from more than 200 nations. As a result of our diverse society, Australia is also given the opportunity to learn about other cultures through community events such as food festivals, film festivals and traditional celebrations from other countries like Lunar New Year. It is this ever-changing and exciting mix of cultures that forms the Australian identity. We live in a multicultural nation that people from all walks of life can call home.

Source 3 Each year, many Asian Australian communities across the nation celebrate Lunar New Year with colourful festivities that entertain large crowds of people.



Check your learning 20.3

Remember and understand

- 1 When did the first Europeans settle in Australia?
- 2 How long have the Indigenous Australians inhabited Australia?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Look at Source 2.
 - a How does the stamp portray the Australian identity?
 - b Why do you think the stamp shows the three individuals standing in that particular order?
 - c When was the stamp released? Do you think it is still representative of Australia’s multicultural identity?

Evaluate and create

- 4 Create a poster celebrating one of Australia’s many cultures. You could use the internet and the library to research information about the culture. You may wish to include the following:
 - customs
 - food
 - music
 - language
 - religion
 - famous Australians of that cultural background
 - significant historic events that caused that group of people to migrate to Australia
 - any other interesting information.

20.4 Indigenous Australians and the Australian identity

Australia’s national identity is one that is marred by controversy. While some celebrate the legacy of the first Europeans as **pioneers** and **settlers**, others are more disturbed by the crimes that these Europeans committed against the Indigenous populations of Australia.

Acknowledging the past

The saying goes, ‘History is written by the victors’. British Australia has often ignored the injustice done to the Aboriginal peoples through **colonisation**. Before the arrival of Europeans, Australia had long been inhabited by Indigenous Australians who were later killed or forced from their sacred lands and into servitude. Acknowledging this past has not been easy, while ignoring it has caused great suffering to the surviving Indigenous Australians. This has resulted in two very different perspectives on our nation’s identity.



Source 2 Since the arrival of the Europeans in 1788, police frequently used neck chains and other restraints to arrest the Indigenous peoples in the event of an offence. The use of neck chains was not completely banned until the 1940s.



Source 1 Governor Arthur Phillip hoists the British flag over the new colony at Sydney in 1788.

Reconciliation

For many people, truly recognising this part of our history is a necessary step towards properly defining the Australian identity. They argue that until we confront this issue, we will never be able to honestly promote the values that we want for our nation. In recent decades, efforts have been made by the Australian government, notably when former prime minister Kevin Rudd made a formal apology to the Aboriginal peoples on behalf of the Australian Government, to achieve reconciliation.

1975

The Racial Discrimination Act is passed to help ensure Australians of all backgrounds are treated equally by the law.

1985

Uluru is handed back to its Indigenous owners.

February 1992

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation holds its first meeting in Canberra.

June 1992

The High Court hands down the Mabo decision, recognising the special relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the land. The Court rules that Australia was never *terra nullius* (land belonging to no-one).

1996

National Reconciliation Week is launched.

1998

National Sorry Day is marked on 26 May.

2004

A memorial is built for the Stolen Generations in Canberra.

2008

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologises on behalf of the Australian Parliament to the Stolen Generations.

Source 3 Timeline of significant reconciliation events.

Despite such efforts, many people have different opinions about what more needs to be done in the way of reconciliation. Some people believe that Indigenous people should receive **reparations**, or payment, for the crimes they endured, while others believe that today’s Australians are not responsible for these crimes and should not have to pay for them. There is a lot of debate around Australians icons, such as the flag and Australia Day, which ignore our nation’s pre-British history.



Source 4 Some people believe that the Australian flag should include Aboriginal symbolism. This flag, designed by Brendan Jones, is one example of what that may look like.

Check your learning 20.4

Remember and understand

- 1 What are the two different perspectives of our past that have affected our nation’s identity?
- 2 What was one significant event that helped move Australia towards reconciliation?
- 3 What was one significant event that helped move Australia towards reconciliation?

Apply and analyse

- 4 Compare the flag in source 4 to the official flag of Australia.
 - a What are the differences and similarities?
 - b Using the internet, research what the symbols used in the two flags represent.
 - c Which flag do you think better represents Australia today? Why?

Evaluate and create

- 5 Design an alternative to the Australian flag that you think best represents our nation’s values.

20B rich task

#ChangeTheDate

Australia Day is the most significant day of Australia's national identity. It is marked by a public holiday in all states and is a time when many people get together to celebrate the wonderful lifestyle this country has to offer. For some, however, celebrating Australia Day on 26 January is both offensive and wrong. They form part of a growing number of people who are demanding that we change the date of Australia Day.

The date, 26 January, is the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet of British ships at Port Jackson, New South Wales in 1788. It marks the beginning of British rule of the Australian continent, and as a result, it is a day of great sorrow for Indigenous people in Australia. It was first celebrated in 1934 when people of European ethnicity formed a vast majority of the Australian population. Today, however, Australia is a far more multicultural society and has recognised many of the injustices experienced by the Indigenous Australians as a consequence of the First Fleet's arrival. Many people believe that the date should be changed to something more respectful to the Aboriginal peoples. They also believe that celebrating 'Invasion Day' goes against the values we want for our society.

People opposed to changing the date argue that it has become an important tradition that forms part of the Australian identity. Many of them believe that the nation we live in today was shaped by this historic event and should be remembered. People across Australia are exercising their democratic rights to voice their opinion on this divisive debate.



Source 1 People who are sympathetic to the plight of Indigenous Australians feel that 26 January represents British invasion of the continent.



Source 2 Many Australians are happy to celebrate Australia Day public holiday on 26 January with a great sense of patriotism.

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Civic engagement: writing a letter to your local Member of Parliament or Prime Minister

In our democracy, the role of politicians is to represent the people's opinions, concerns and interests. One way of ensuring your opinion is heard is by directly contacting your local Member of Parliament or Prime Minister through an email or letter. Here are some tips:

- Before you write, research the topic that you are concerned about and make note of really important facts that will support your view.
- Make sure you use the correct title, for example, Ms Joanna Smith MP.
- Introduce yourself and the reason why you are writing.
- Politely write in your own words the main points you wish to share with the politician.

- Explain what you would like them to do about the issue.
- Sign off the letter with 'Sincerely', and your full name below it.
- Wait for a response and contact them again if you have not heard from them in more than a month.

Apply the skill

Write a letter to your local Member of Parliament or Prime Minister discussing why you feel that the date on which we celebrate Australia Day should or shouldn't be changed. You may also wish to include whether 26 January should be recognised as a day of mourning, or propose a new date on which to celebrate Australia Day.

Extend your understanding

- 1 Using the Internet or an Australian calendar, make a list of all of the public holidays celebrated in Victoria.
- 2 Research the historic significance of the days.



Source 3 Soldiers march through Melbourne on ANZAC Day in memorial uniform each year on 25 April, a public holiday that is celebrated nation wide.