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Mapping Social Cohesion in Australia: A Decade of Research on National Attitudes and Values

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Abstract

Existing evidence regarding Australian attitudes and values relating to social cohesion has yet to be comprehensively reviewed. Therefore, there is little understanding of how various programs of research relate to one another, how the information is used, where the data gaps are, and which questions remain unanswered. Drawing upon a scoping review of published research between 2012 and 2022, this paper is a first step towards mapping the extent, range, and nature of the body of national-level research on contemporary Australian social values and cohesion. The review found that there is a dearth of peer-reviewed academic research and what is available focuses on six themes: 1) multiculturalism, cultural diversity, immigration, and racism; 2) Reconciliation; 3) national identity; 4) trust; 5) democracy; and 6) young people. Filling the research gaps will allow better understanding of how macro-level processes may affect intergroup relations and Australians' attitudes towards issues relating to social cohesion.

Keywords

Social Values; Social Cohesion; Attitudes; Australia; Cultural Diversity

Introduction

Australia's social and geopolitical landscapes have seen unprecedented change over the past decade. The nation's place in the world has been renegotiated alongside changing administrations in the United States of America, shifting political contexts in Britain and the European Union, and the economic and political rise of the Asian region. Such shifts have occurred in tandem with the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing natural disasters, and strident national and international movements for social and institutional changes that support the human rights and life outcomes of all members of society.

Demographically, data from the 2021 Australian National Census ([ABS 2022](#)) indicate that Australia is socially and culturally transforming at a rapid rate. The population is continuing to become more secular, with those having no religion or secular beliefs such as atheism and agnosticism comprising 39 percent of the population (an increase of 9 percent since 2016) and Christian adherents (while still the most populous group) continuing to decline. At the same time Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism have all experienced continued increases in adherents. Despite stagnations to immigration during the pandemic, for the first time Australians born overseas or with at least one parent born overseas comprise more than half the population. The United Kingdom remains the leading overseas country of birth, but India has surpassed both China and New Zealand, now being the second largest overseas country of birth. China is now the third largest country of birth outside Australia (and Mandarin remains the leading language spoken at home after English). The population identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander has increased by 25 percent since 2016, now comprising 3.2 percent of the total population. And there has been a significant generational shift. 'Baby boomers' (those born between 1946 and 1965) had previously been the largest generation. 'Millennials' (those born between 1981 and 1995) are now on-par with the 'boomers', each accounting for 21.5 percent of the population.

The existing body of research reports a movement towards broader support of multiculturalism and diversity, however, it also unearths continuing, though eroding, support for assimilation and ongoing anxieties about immigration intakes, 'out groups' of society, cultural diversity, and the impacts it has on Australian national identity and culture ([Markus 2016](#); [Kamp et al. 2018](#)). Such attitudes continue to culminate in racism, extremist ideology and hate crimes, among other forms of discrimination and abuse that have devastating effects on individuals and communities ([Peucker & Smith 2019](#); [Dunn et al. 2021](#); [Kamp et al. 2023](#); [Vergani et al. 2023](#)).

It is within this context that it has become urgent to examine Australians' social values, attitudes, and how they relate to social cohesion¹. Such examinations allow us to better understand how local, national, and international processes and events may affect intergroup relations and Australians' attitudes towards issues such as cultural and social diversity, Reconciliation and First Nations constitutional recognition, trust in institutions and each other, the environment, and democratic ideals. Organisations and research institutes such as the Scanlon Foundation, Edelman, Reconciliation Australia, and Roy Morgan have provided regular and ongoing national insights on Australian values and attitudes over the past 15 years, with Edelman's contribution covering more than two decades. These studies have provided insights to government, industry, and other stakeholders on the changing face of Australia and what matters to the Australian population.

1 There are many definitions of 'social cohesion' that have emerged in academic and policy contexts. 'Social cohesion' has been used and defined in the reported research in broad terms in line with established national and international literature. This includes the definitions provided by [Maxwell \(1996, p. 13\)](#), [Stanley \(2003\)](#), the [Council of Europe \(2008\)](#) and the [OECD \(2011, p. 17\)](#). The framing of 'social cohesion' in this article also aligns with the broad definition provided by the [Scanlon Foundation \(n.d\(a\)\)](#) that includes the provision that 'social cohesion crosses different spheres of public life, such as economic, political, and socio-cultural'. Within these expansive definitions of 'social cohesion', issues relating to democracy and government (and other state institutions), youth, trust, social and civic capital, poverty and income inequality, and other factors relating to the successful functioning of society (i.e., maximising wellbeing and minimising disparities and marginalisation), are included.

Smaller studies have also proliferated, from research and industry organisations, and within the academy. The appetite for such insights remains strong across all sectors as it becomes increasingly evident that the challenges and concerns identified by Australians need to be understood via robust research and high-quality data.

Despite the ongoing efforts of large and small research programs, the overall existing evidence-base regarding Australian attitudes and values (particularly as they relate to social cohesion) at the national level has yet to be comprehensively reviewed, and data gaps have yet to be identified. While there is decades-long history of this research in Australia—within the academy, industry, and government — which in some instances is well coordinated and resourced, there is little understanding of how the various programs of research ‘speak’ to one another, how the information is used, where the data gaps are, and which questions remain unanswered.

This paper is a first step towards mapping the extent, range, and nature of the body of national-level research (academic, industry, and government authored) on contemporary Australian social values and social cohesion. Drawing upon a scoping review of published research, and following the approach of [Arskey and O’Malley \(2005\)](#), this paper aims to identify the type of published evidence available, examine how the existing research has been conducted, summarise existing research findings, and identify knowledge gaps. It should be noted that this review does not include quality assessment of the existing research ([Arskey & O’Malley 2005](#), p.22).

The structure of this report is as follows: 1) the method used to conduct the review of Australian attitudes, values, and social cohesion research; 2) an overview of the characteristics of the included studies; 3) findings of the review organised via key research themes; 4) study limitations and, 5) concluding thoughts for further research in this area.

Method

The scoping review presented in this paper followed the methodological framework for scoping studies outlined by [Arksey and O’Malley \(2005\)](#). [Arksey and O’Malley \(2005\)](#) provided the first methodological framework for conducting scoping studies and this framework continues to be the standard foundation for scoping study methodology. In their framework, [Arksey and O’Malley \(2005\)](#) provide the following steps which have been adhered to in the research reported in this article:

- Stage 1: Identifying the research question. This includes setting parameters such as inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure consistency in decision making.
- Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies. A search strategy is developed in line with the research question and parameters set out in Stage 1, and time and budget constraints. The strategy may involve searching for research evidence in multiple sources e.g., electronic databases, reference lists, hand searching key journals, and existing networks, relevant organisations and conferences. The identification of relevant studies at this stage may rely on basic bibliographic information and abstract details.
- Stage 3: Study selection. Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search results are manually appraised for inclusion in the final study selection, often with the assistance of bibliographic software packages such as Endnote. At this stage, reviewers read the full text to make the final decision on the study’s inclusion in the review.
- Step 4: Charting the Data. A data-charting form is developed and used to extract data from each study. A ‘narrative review’ or ‘descriptive analytical’ method is used to extract contextual or process-oriented information from each study.

- Step 5: Collating, Summarising and reporting results. An analytic framework or thematic construction is used to provide an overview of the breadth of the literature but not a synthesis. A quantitative analysis of the extent and nature of studies using tables and charts is presented (see also [Levac, Colquhoun, Colquhoun & O'Brien 2010](#)). A thematic analysis is then presented.

The adoption of [Arksey and O'Malley's \(2005\)](#) scoping review framework in the reported study is detailed in the following sections.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Published studies were included in this review based on the following criteria:

1. Explicitly investigating Australians' self-reported² values and attitudes (studies investigating Australians' *experiences* were excluded, unless they also investigated attitudes and values)
2. Based on primary empirical research (i.e., the following types of literature were excluded: literature reviews, theoretical/conceptual papers, summary papers, and papers based on secondary data)
3. Self-reporting qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies that included Australian research participants
4. National sample/focus (National was defined as including locations in at least 3 states i.e., those studies focusing on individual states or cities were excluded)
5. Published in the decade 2012–2022
6. Published in any format, e.g., industry or government reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, books/book chapters, press/media releases
7. Published in English
8. Studies that focused on particular occupational groups were excluded (e.g., attitudes/values of nurses, teachers, social workers, construction workers)

SEARCH STRATEGY

To obtain the most comprehensive set of published studies for this review, a strategy was utilised that involved searching for studies via Google Scholar, Google, Scopus, the Western Sydney University Library Database, and hand-searching reference lists, and university, industry, and government websites. The search was limited to studies published in the decade 2012–2022, published in English, and available online. A list of primary search terms was devised based on the aim of this review and included the following terms: 'social values'/'values'; 'social cohesion'/'cohesion'; 'Australian attitudes'/'attitudes'. Secondary search terms such as 'Australia', 'social research', 'industry', and 'report' were also included where relevant.

The search parameters were refined by excluding irrelevant subject areas, such as nursing, computer science, and biochemistry. Based on this search strategy, 10,681 references were generated from Scopus alone. The results were further refined using the Boolean search command "NOT" to exclude common terms irrelevant to the search criteria, such as "forensic", "ecology", and "pedagogy". The titles and abstracts of accumulated search results were also checked for relevance throughout the search process. Backward and forward citation searching (by hand) was employed to identify further relevant literature. These items were then entered into Endnote and screened by hand using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Pilot screening of titles and abstracts and application of the exclusion/inclusion criteria was conducted by two independent

2 'Self-reporting' methods are those that involve asking participants about their feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and so [\(Fielding 2006\)](#).

reviewers to establish intercoder consistency ([Arksey & O'Malley 2005](#); [O'Connor & Joffe 2020](#)) and therefore maximise the reliability of the sampling strategy ([Leung 2015](#)). Once consistency was established, full reading of texts and application of exclusion/inclusion criteria were conducted by a single reviewer.

CHARTING THE DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data extracted from relevant studies included: year of publication, type of publication (report, peer-reviewed article etc.), accessibility of publication (e.g., open access journal, journal subscriber only access, company website), research aim and intended audience, year(s) of data collection, research design (data collection and analysis), sample size and demographic characteristics, and key findings. Extracted data were recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Where a particular study characteristic could not be ascertained, the marker 'unknown' was used.

Due to the heterogeneity of research design, methods, and outcomes, it was not possible to conduct a meta-analysis of quantitative studies and/or a metasynthesis of qualitative studies. Instead, a narrative synthesis ([Lucas et al. 2007](#)) was conducted where both qualitative and quantitative data from each study were tabulated together and categorised according to key themes. These themes were not pre-defined but were recorded as they emerged from the data following a reflexive or inductive thematic analysis approach ([Braun & Clarke 2006](#)). Studies reporting on the same theme were compared, with similar and divergent scope, methods, audiences, and findings reported. The narrative synthesis, presented in this paper, includes the textual description of individual studies as well as textual descriptions of groups of studies based on the emergent themes. It should be noted that in the write-up of this paper, additional material relating to the studies to be included was utilised, including technical/methodological reports and study websites.

Summary of characteristics of included studies

The search strategy and application of the inclusion/exclusion criteria identified a total of 98 publications to be included in the review. A summary of the characteristics of these studies, based on data extracted from these publications is presented in [Table 1](#).

Prior to 2020, there were fewer than 10 publications each year (sometimes as few as 3), except for 2017 where 12 studies were published. Again in 2020, 12 studies were published. In 2021 this almost doubled to 21 studies, and in 2022, 15 studies. Most studies were authored by research organisations (57 percent), followed by cross-sector collaborations (22 percent) and then academics (13 percent). Correspondingly, the research was predominantly published in reports (68 percent) rather than academic journal articles (21 percent). This points to a keen appetite for social attitude research outside the academy, and potentially a gap in the peer-reviewed academic research.

Most studies employed quantitative methods (69 percent). Mixed-methods were employed in one-fifth of the studies, while solely qualitative research was only utilised in 5 percent of studies. It is therefore not surprising that survey instruments for data collection dominated (66 percent of studies). Given the national scope of the studies reviewed here, it is to be expected that quantitative methods, especially surveys, would be most frequently used. Quantitative survey methods (especially when conducted online) provide efficient and cost-effective means of obtaining data from large numbers of individuals across vast geographic regions that can be systematically analysed and replicated if necessary.

Key themes emerging from the analysis

MULTICULTURALISM, CULTURAL DIVERSITY, IMMIGRATION AND RACISM

Several studies specifically investigated 'social cohesion' via a focus on (or inclusion of) Australian attitudes towards cultural diversity and multiculturalism. In some studies, investigations of Australian attitudes

Table 1. Selected characteristics of included studies (n: 98)

		N:	%
Year of publication	2012	5	5.1
	2013	3	3.1
	2014	4	4.1
	2015	6	6.1
	2016	3	3.1
	2017	12	12.2
	2018	9	9.2
	2019	8	8.2
	2020	12	12.2
	2021	21	21.4
	2022	15	15.3
Author type	Academic	13	13.3
	Government	3	3.1
	Industry	3	3.1
	NGO/Charity	1	1.0
	Research organisation	56	57.1
	Cross-sector collaboration	22	22.4
Publication type	Report	67	68.4
	Academic journal article	21	21.4
	Media release	10	10.2
Research type	Quantitative	68	69.4
	Qualitative	5	5.1
	Mixed methods	20	20.4
	Unknown/not clear	5	5.1
Data collection method	Survey	65	66.3
	Interviews	8	8.2
	Mixed methods (e.g. survey, interviews, and focus groups)	15	15.3
	Unknown/not clear	10	10.2
Year(s) of data collection	Pre-2012	5	5.1
	2012	1	1.0
	2013	4	4.1

Table 1. continued

		N:	%
	2014	5	5.1
	2015	4	4.1
	2016	3	3.1
	2017	13	13.3
	2018	6	6.1
	2019	4	4.1
	2020	13	13.3
	2021	14	14.3
	2022	4	4.1
	Multiple years	14	14.3
	Not stated	8	8.2
Recurrence of study	One-off study	12	12.1
	Repeated study (e.g. annually)	49	49.5
	Longitudinal	5	5.1
	Unknown	32	32.3
Sample size	<1,000	18	18.2
	1,000 – 3,000	33	33.3
	3,001-6,000	6	6.1
	6,001-10,000	4	4.0
	10,001-20,000	6	6.1
	>20,000	5	5.1
	Unknown/not stated	26	26.3

towards specific cultural and ethnic groups, attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers, and attitudes towards racism and anti-racism were included. These studies included the ongoing, and multi-themed Scanlon Foundation *Mapping Social Cohesion Research*, the one-off large scale Challenging Racism Project's national survey 2015-2016 (reported in [Blair et al. 2017](#); [Kamp et al. 2017](#); [Kamp et al. 2018](#); and [Dunn et al. 2021](#)), and smaller scale projects such as [Dandy & Pe-Pua's \(2015\)](#) investigation of the refugee experience of social cohesion in Australia. The [Australian Human Rights Commission's \(2021\)](#) survey study *Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims* is unique in this thematic area as it focused on the attitudes and values of a specific cultural group at the national level, i.e., Australian Muslims. The majority of these 'social cohesion' studies involved quantitative survey design, which, as noted above, is not surprising given the national-level research scale. However, [Dandy & Pe-Pua's \(2015\)](#) work provides important qualitative insights via focus group data.

The Scanlon Foundation has been conducting annual *Mapping Social Cohesion* surveys since 2009 (benchmark survey in 2007) and reporting corresponding findings via publicly available reports. According to the [Scanlon Foundation \(n.d\(b\)\)](#), the annual project provides ‘a series of detailed surveys on social cohesion, immigration and population issues’ with a prime objective ‘to further understanding of the social impact of Australia’s increasingly diverse immigration program’. Since 2012, the annual surveys have been conducted via a combination of telephone (landline and mobile) questionnaires (up to and including the 2019 study), internet/online questionnaires (from 2017), and focus groups (from 2015–2017). From 2019, the surveys have only been administered online. Reported sample sizes have ranged from approximately n: 1,200 (in 2013) to n: 3,572 (in 2021)³.

In line with the overall aim of the study, the Scanlon surveys have included (although not always consistently) questions relating to multiculturalism, Australia’s multicultural policy (in 2013 only), Australia’s intake of migrants, attitudes towards ‘ethnic minorities’ maintaining customs and traditions, attitudes towards migrants from particular countries and individuals of different religious groups, attitudes towards asylum seekers and Australia’s policies regarding asylum seeker arrivals. Over the 10-year period with which this review is concerned, the Scanlon surveys have found that there are consistently high levels of endorsement of multiculturalism, yet a substantial proportion of the annual samples believe that Australia’s intake of immigrants is ‘too high’. However, positive attitudes towards multiculturalism are, according to the Scanlon surveys, increasing over time. Those who are younger, have high education levels, higher incomes, from non-English speaking backgrounds, or who vote for The Greens, are more likely to have positive attitudes towards multiculturalism ([Markus 2021](#), p.57).

The Scanlon surveys have also found that despite strong support for multiculturalism, there remains some concerns over particular cultural and ethnic groups in Australia. Over the 10-year period (when relevant questions were included in the annual survey), negative attitudes towards those from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, in addition to those of the Muslim faith, have been most frequent. These findings parallel those found by the Challenging Racism Project’s 2015–2016 Survey. In this national survey of n: 6,001 Australians, it was found that most respondents were pro-diversity and pro-immigration yet there were conflicting findings such as strong support for assimilation and identification of ‘out groups’ ([Kamp et al. 2017](#)). Like the Scanlon surveys, there were substantial proportions of respondents that had negative attitudes towards or concerns with Middle Eastern Australians, Muslim Australians, African Australians, and Asian (particularly South Asian) Australians. The collaborative ANU and Social Research Centre *Australian Values Study* ([Sheppard et al. 2018](#)) also provides corresponding, although briefer, insights into Australians’ values and attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism, and cultural diversity.

Both the Scanlon studies and the Challenging Racism Project study (reported in [Blair et al. 2017](#) and [Kamp et al. 2017](#)) offer demographic analyses of these attitudes. [Dunn et al.’s \(2021\)](#) deep dive into the Challenging Racism Projects’ survey data goes further and utilises Latent Class Analysis to uncover segments or attitudinal groups specifically pertaining to Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiment. Through this analysis, [Dunn et al. \(2021\)](#) found that respondents could be placed into one of four categories based on their perception of Islam: 1) Islamophobes who have negative attitudes towards Muslims and negative dispositions towards cultural diversity; 2) those who are unsure about diversity and have some concerns about Muslims; 3) those with progressive attitudes about diversity but with concerns about Muslims and; 4) progressives who have no concerns about Muslims and are pro-diversity. According to these researchers, the findings ‘offers a pragmatic enablement of the diverse work of those anti-racist practitioners who undertake the day-to-day work of challenging Islamophobia’ ([Dunn et al. 2021](#), p.2).

3 In 2018 the combined telephone and online sample was n: 3,760, however, only the telephone sample was reported.

Unlike the Scanlon studies, the Challenging Racism Project's 2015–2016 survey also asked respondents if they believed there is racism in Australia, if they are prejudiced against other cultures, if they believe something should be done to minimise/fight racism in Australia, and if they would take personal action against racism⁴. Most participants agree that there is racial prejudice in Australia ([Kamp et al. 2018](#)), although only a minority self-identified as racist ([Blair et al. 2017](#)). In addition, a similar number of participants that identified racism in Australia also support anti-racism initiatives in Australia and purported that they would take action if they were to witness someone being discriminated against because of their culture, ethnicity or religion ([Blair et al. 2017](#)). The study found Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely to agree that there is racism in Australia ([Kamp et al. 2018](#)), while individuals born overseas and those who spoke a language other than English were more likely to believe that something should be done to minimise or fight racism in Australia ([Blair et al. 2017](#)).

As mentioned previously, [Dandy and Pe-Pua's \(2015\)](#) study is unique in this group of studies as it utilised a qualitative research approach – focus group interviews with 138 residents across three communities (Mirrabooka and Balga in Western Australia, Blacktown in New South Wales, and Murray Bridge in South Australia), alongside interviews with 54 representatives from local government, key service providers, schools, health and employment agencies, business groups, legal services, the police, community workers, and ethnic community representatives. Given the parameters of this review, findings from the former research strategy only will be included here. Focus group participants were 16 years of age or older, of diverse backgrounds, and included immigrants, refugees (approximately 50 percent of the sample), Anglo-Australians, and Indigenous Australians. The focus groups included discussions regarding positive and negative aspects of living in their culturally diverse community; belonging to the community; intercultural relations; access to employment, health, education, and other services; community/social and political participation; recognition, including respect and trust; legitimacy or confidence in institutions; the roles of mass media and social media; and factors that lead to social cohesion, social division, and conflict. These focus groups, like the quantitative Scanlon and Challenging Racism Project studies, unearthed participants' strong negative attitudes about refugees and similar misunderstandings around Muslim Australians. Participants also highlighted a belief that the media's use of stereotypes and focus on crime (particularly targeting Muslims, African groups, and/or refugees and asylum seekers) leads to social conflict and division within communities. Participants, however, also understood that the media can be powerful tool for developing cultural awareness and education.

Roy Morgan is an independent Australian social and political market research and public opinion statistics company that has, for the past two decades, surveyed 1,000 Australians in a continuous cycle (in addition to other regular polls). Findings are not publicly available (due to firewalls requiring payment), with general findings openly accessible via media releases. In this review, media releases spanning from 2017 were identified and included. While Roy Morgan studies do not specifically investigate 'social cohesion', the studies need to be acknowledged here for the regular insights they provide on Australians' perceptions of 'the most important problems facing Australia' and the world, which have often included immigration, religion and human rights, and refugee/asylum seeker issues. For example, in early 2018, a Roy Morgan survey found that 14 percent of respondents mentioned concerns related to religion, immigration and human rights which includes issues relating to asylum seekers and Australia's treatment of refugees ([Roy Morgan 2018](#)). This was second only to concerns relating to 'economic issues' (32 percent).

⁴ The Challenging Racism Project 2015-2016 survey and Scanlon studies also asked questions relating to experiences of racism, but those findings are beyond the scope of this review which is focused on attitudes/values rather than experiences.

Other studies that fall into this thematic area prioritised the values and attitudes of specific cultural and ethnic groups in Australia, in particular, the perspectives of Muslim Australians⁵. For example, the Australian Human Rights Committee's (AHRC) *Sharing stories of Australian Muslims* included a national survey of 1,017 Australian Muslims in 2019 (alongside community consultations in Sydney) with the aim 'to collect data about Islamophobia, racism, and related intolerances, and sought to understand Australian Muslim community strengths, concerns and needs' (AHRC 2021, p.19). Including both quantitative and qualitative questions (enabling participants to share their views and experiences in their own words), the survey found that many respondents held concerns regarding the rise of right-wing ideology and the ongoing de-humanising and 'othering' of Muslims in Australia. Participants were concerned about the normalisation of anti-Islamic commentary by political and public figures within the media, with nine in ten (86 percent) respondents agreeing that the Australian media paints an unfair portrayal of Muslims. A majority also did not believe that public figures, such as politicians, consider the interests and needs of Australian Muslims. Over 90 percent of participants agreed that the general population has a limited understanding of Islam, 56 percent of participants felt relations between Muslims and non-Muslims were friendly, and many pointed to community programs and activities as important initiatives to connect with and educate non-Muslims about Islam.

RECONCILIATION AND INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

Reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives do not feature strongly in the studies. However, Reconciliation Australia have been conducting research on the progress of Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians since 2008. It is one of the longest running national level studies in Australia (alongside the Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion studies), and as such, warranted inclusion in this 'key themes' section. Conducted biennially, the Reconciliation Australia research program has resulted in the Reconciliation Barometer, a publicly available tool to measure such progress. Informed by the 'South African Reconciliation Barometer' (Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, South Africa), the Reconciliation Barometer is the only study of its kind in Australia.

In 2012, the survey included a sample of n: 1,012 'General community members' and 516 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander respondents who completed the same questionnaires online (Auspoll 2013). By 2020 (the latest Reconciliation Barometer report available at the time of preparing this review), the sample of 'General community members' had increased to n: 1,998 while the sample of Indigenous respondents was n: 495 (Reconciliation Australia 2020). Since 2014⁶, the Reconciliation Barometer has investigated attitudes and experiences that fall under five thematic areas: race relations, equality and equity, unity, institutional integrity, and historical acceptance. The 2020 Reconciliation Barometer has highlighted key trends in these thematic areas since 2014. One such finding is that the importance of the relationship between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is increasing. Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is also on the rise as is the perceived importance of knowing about these cultures. There is increasing awareness of past injustices and the impacts they have had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of disadvantage. The notion that Government and businesses should support reconciliation is gaining significant traction, and there is an increasing appreciation for diversity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants are more likely to agree that education and employment are becoming more equitable, and that Australians are more trusting of them (they are also becoming more trusting of groups of professions). It is important to note that while there is majority support on key issues

5 A following section in this paper is dedicated to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander attitudes.

6 Due to a review and extensive revisions of the Reconciliation Barometer methodology in 2014, tracking comparisons between and pre-2014 data and data obtained from 2014 – 2020 is not possible.

identified as central to Reconciliation, this research has found that fewer non-Indigenous Australians are supportive compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents.

Launching in the same year as the Reconciliation Barometer, the annual Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion study has, in contrast, provided minimal insights on Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives. Since 2008, the Mapping Social Cohesion survey has included the question 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?' with one response option being 'Indigenous issues'. Up until 2021, no other question has been included in the research pertaining specifically to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives or experiences. In 2021, the Scanlon Mapping Social Cohesion study ([Markus 2021](#)), for the first time reported on Australians' perspectives on: 1) The importance of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community for the nation; and 2) Inclusion of 'Indigenous histories and cultures' in the school curriculum. It is important to note that the Scanlon studies do not report the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants included in the study (see also [Dove 2021](#)) and do not report the views and attitudes of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants specifically.

Another study in this review that included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' values and attitudes towards issues central to Reconciliation was the smaller scale Challenging Racism Project's National Study (see [Kamp et al. 2018](#)). [Kamp et al. \(2018\)](#) examined the views and attitudes of the 135 survey participants who identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (2.3 per cent of the total sample of n: 6,001). Key attitudinal themes included: attitudes towards 'race' and racism (including belief in 'race', belief in racial inequality, attitudes towards inter-racial marriage, and recognition of racism); attitudes towards multiculturalism and cultural diversity; attitudes towards migration and asylum seekers; and attitudes towards anti-racism. Similar to the Reconciliation Barometer, [Kamp et al. \(2018\)](#) found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents 'were overall very positive about diversity and the benefits it brings' (p.65). However, there was a 'significant minority' that was not positive, and this was 'likely explained by the unease with multicultural policy, the way it positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the commitment it requires to the colonial nation-state' ([Kamp et al. 2018](#), p.65).

It is important to include the Mission Australia *Youth Survey Report* ([Tiller et al. 2021](#)) in this section of this review as the survey comprised a national quantitative sample of 20,207 young Australians (15-19 years of age), including 952 (4.8 percent) who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The findings for this sizeable cohort of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people is reported in a separate section of the published report, providing key insights into their values, concerns, and experiences; how they compare to non-Indigenous respondents; and how they vary according to gender. The study found that a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people had high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study or work goals. The majority of those who were studying were satisfied with their studies, however this was a lower proportion compared to non-Indigenous respondents. The four most highly valued items for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were family relationships, friendships, physical health, and mental health. The next most highly valued item was getting a job. The study also importantly measured areas of personal concern. The five most frequent areas of concern for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were mental health, coping with stress, body image, school or study, and physical health. In terms of gender differences, in general, higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, compared to males, placed high value on school or study satisfaction. Females were also more likely to be concerned about body image (44.3 percent females compared with 19.1 percent males), mental health (50.3 percent females compared with 26.6 percent males) and coping with stress (48.5 percent females compared with 26.1 percent males.). In contrast, higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males, compared to females, rated physical health as extremely or very important.

NATIONAL IDENTITY

There is a small number of studies that overtly and specifically investigated Australians' values and perspectives as they related to national identity. For example, [Plage et al.'s \(2017\)](#) peer-reviewed academic study *Australianness as fairness* aimed to gain insight into 'what values were shared by and considered constituent of the national community', what were considered 'Australian traits', and how these 'relate to a cosmopolitan disposition of openness and inflect everyday encounters with diversity' (p.319). This was operationalised via interviews with 84 individuals and 17 focus groups with 96 participants in 10 'cosmopolitan' locations across Australia. Unlike many of the other studies (except for [Dandy and Pe-Pua's \(2015\)](#) study), [Plage et al.'s \(2017\)](#) utilised a purely qualitative methodology. Participants were asked about their understanding of Australianness and what it means to be Australian, and what were considered Australian traits. Almost all participants identified themselves as Australian and felt a strong sense of belonging to Australia, with many also identifying other cultural/ethnic identities that were important to them, providing qualitative evidence of Australians' value of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. However, 'Australian values' were predominantly framed in economic, cultural, and civic terms – as fairness, egalitarianism, and equal opportunity. Migrant participants and those born to migrant parents particularly identified Australia as a land of opportunity, prosperity, and high living standards, as well as a safe and fair country. 'Australian traits' were identified as friendliness, tolerance, openness, camaraderie, and generosity, and like the studies discussed in previous sections, the positive aspects of multicultural Australia, 'a cultural blend of generations of migrants' (p.324), were highlighted.

The Social Research Centre's study on Australians' attitudes to Australia day ([Pennay & Bongiorno 2019](#)), provides further although very different insights into Australians' understandings of national identity. Drawn from the broader 'Life in Australia' study which surveyed 2,752 Australians (over 18 years of age), the purpose of the research was to explore whether Australians are in favour of or opposed to changing the date of our national day and, importantly, to 'try to better understand the aspects of our culture and heritage that are most strongly associated with Australia Day' ([Pennay & Bongiorno 2019](#), p.3). Key findings included that the clear majority of Australians support January 26 as the best date for Australia day; there is a gap between official declarations and everyday understandings of the meaning and significance of Australia Day; and a substantial minority acknowledge that the current arrangements are either not inclusive of, or are offensive to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to note that demographic analysis of the survey data, according to Indigeneity, was not included and inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants in the study is not detailed.

TRUST

Trust was a key theme that emerged in the review. Most significantly is the USA based Edelman Trust Barometer which has been measuring trust globally for over 20 years. Australians' trust in NGOs, media, government, and business has been included since the initial study (in 2000), originally measured against four other nations – the USA, the UK, France, and Germany. In the 2022 report, whose survey was conducted in November 2021, ([Edelman 2022b](#)), 28 countries including Australia were investigated. The Edelman Trust Barometer is therefore the longest running study reporting on Australian's trust, and social values and attitudes more broadly. The specific Australian 'country' reports ([Edelman 2012](#), [2014-2015](#), [2017-2022a](#)) were included in this review rather than the broader Global reports (although these are referred to), as the latter provide limited detail on the Australian results.

Between 2012 and 2017, Edelman reported that Australia's overall trust was ranked as 'neutral'. By 2018 this had shifted, with Australia ranking among the 'distrusting' nations. In 2019, Australia was one of the nations most distrustful of the media (behind only Russia, UK, France, Ireland, and Japan), reporting a 'neutral' standing in its trust towards NGOs, and was also 'neutral' in its trust towards business ([Edelman](#)

2020). In 2019, the Edelman Trust Index also ranked Australians as distrusting of government – being five points below the global average. During the pandemic period (2020–21), the Edelman Trust Barometer saw Australians’ trust in all institutional sectors increase after a 5-year decline (Edelman 2021). In fact, Australia was positioned as the international leader in trust gains during the pandemic years (Edelman 2021, p.4). However, the 2022 Barometer report indicates that ‘Australia’s trust bubble has burst’ as trust declined for all institutions and no institution fell into the ‘trusted’ category in Australia (Edelman 2022a, p.8).

The Edelman Trust Barometer also allows us to understand some demographic variations in Australians’ trust towards key institutions. The barometer divides the sample demographically into two groupings: ‘informed public’ and ‘mass public’. The ‘informed public’ are defined by Edelman (2021) as individuals that are: 25–64 years of age, College (or equivalent) educated, in the top 25 percent of household income per age group in each market; and report significant media consumption and engagement in public policy and business news. ‘Mass public’ are the remaining participants who do not meet the ‘informed public’ criteria. Edelman measures the differences in trust displayed by these two groups and identifies any gaps as a ‘trust inequality’. There has been a sustained ‘trust inequality’ between the ‘informed public’ and ‘mass public’ (the mass public continually being less trusting than the informed public) in Australia over the past decade (Edelman 2022). Beyond this demographic assessment between the informed public and mass public, Edelman provides minimal insights on other demographic indicators in the Australian context⁷.

Since 2007, the Scanlon Foundation has also been tracking Australians’ trust in government and each other as a cornerstone of their definition of ‘social cohesion’. In parallel to the Edelman research, the Scanlon surveys have found that Australians’ trust in the Australian government has been low for over a decade. Within the timeframe that this review is concerned with, the Scanlon studies have also introduced (in 2013) questions relating to Australians’ trust in key institutions and organisations, including hospitals, police, public schools, employers, the legal system, trade unions, federal parliament, news media, and political parties. Across the study years, low levels of trust in political institutions (e.g., the Australian Government, federal parliament, political parties, and politicians) are consistent and are positioned as a threat to a cohesive Australian society. However, like the Edelman studies, the Scanlon surveys saw a rise in trust towards the government during the pandemic period (Markus 2020; Markus 2021).

There are some demographic analyses of these ‘trust’ results in the Scanlon reports. In recent years (from 2017) the Scanlon studies have found a strong link between those who vote for the One Nation Party – a party associated with far-right populist politics – and lack of trust in key institutions of the state (including the criminal justice system [police excluded]; government, politicians) and media, as well as their fellow citizens. This distrust in fellow citizens, government and institutions sits alongside One Nation Party voters’ heightened concerns with immigration, their support for discriminatory immigration policies, and lack of support for multiculturalism (Markus 2019a, 2019b).

Although not a repeated project like the Edelman and Scanlon studies, Democracy 2025 have produced a report focused on Australians’ attitudes to trust and democracy (Stoker et al. 2018). Drawing on a study conducted in 2018 (a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 1,021 Australians and 20 focus groups), the Democracy 2025 report (Stoker et al. 2018) provides a snapshot of Australians’ trust in media, politicians, State and Federal Government, and social trust. The findings parallel those of Scanlon and Edelman (e.g., lack of trust in government and political institutions) with some demographic variations similarly identified. What sets this study apart from Edelman and Scanlon is the incorporation of qualitative methods. These are not presented extensively or analysed in detail in the report.

7 In 2022, Edelman provided insights into generational variations. For example, Australian ‘Millennials’ were found to be the most trusting generation, and ‘Gen Z’ Australians the least trusting (Edelman 2022a, p.9).

DEMOCRACY

Within the literature, trust in government is closely linked to the investigation of Australians' attitudes towards, and value of, democracy – with questions on each topic often included within the same body of questions and reported on within the same thematic area (see for example [Sheppard et al. 2018](#), and the Scanlon Studies). In fact, the Democracy 2025 study ([Stoker et al. 2018](#)) solely aims to examine the relationship between Australians' trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy.

There are, however, inconsistencies in how Australian attitudes towards democracy are measured in these studies. The Australian Values Study (reported in [Sheppard et al. \(2018\)](#)), drew upon the broader World Values Study, and explicitly asked respondents questions relating to democracy including preference for democratic government, importance of democratic government, and perceptions of the level of democracy in Australia. The study found that Australians 'remain committed to the concept of democracy and are broadly satisfied with how Australian democracy is functioning' (p.4). Almost 9 in 10 Australians surveyed believed that 'having a democratic political system' is either a 'very good' or 'fairly good' form of government and that this proportion has been increasing since the mid-1990s (p.9-10). The authors also note that 57 percent of surveyed participants believed it is 'absolutely important' to live in a country that is governed democratically (p.10).

In contrast, the Scanlon studies have tested Australian attitudes towards democracy since 2014 via the less specific survey question that asked if 'having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections' would be a good or bad way of governing Australia. Since the question was first reported in the 2019 report ([Markus 2019a](#)), it has obtained a largely consistent response—between 21 percent and 25 percent of respondents agreed that this would be 'good' (very good/fairly good), and a majority indicating that kind of system would be 'bad' (very bad/fairly bad).

The most detailed study of this thematic area – the Democracy 2025 report ([Stoker et al. 2018](#)) – asked respondents how satisfied they are with the way democracy works in Australia, what they like most and least about the way democratic politics works in Australia, and their appetite for various democratic reforms. The study's key findings were that Australians are happy with underlying democratic values and infrastructure yet are 'deeply unhappy with democratic politics' (p.9) and the appetite for democratic reform is strong (p.10). Therefore, while the Australian Values Study, Scanlon studies and Democracy 2025 report operationalise Australian attitudes towards democracy differently, the results are consistent – there is ongoing confidence in the democratic system despite low levels of trust in political parties/organisations and other key institutions such as the media and judiciary.

Demographic analyses reported on in these reports also provided key insights into Australians' democratic values. For example, [Sheppard et al. \(2018\)](#) found that older Australians, compared to younger Australians, were more likely to believe in the importance of living in a democratically governed country (p.11). [Stoker et al. \(2018\)](#) found that those with the lowest income, women, and older generations are least satisfied with how democracy works (p.25-27).

YOUNG PEOPLE

While several of the studies included analyses of demographic variations in attitudes and values, a key theme emerging from this review was the specific attitudes and values of young people in Australia. The *2021 Australian Youth Barometer* ([Walsh et al. 2021](#)), the *Mission Australia Youth Survey* ([Tiller et al. 2021](#)), and the *Next25 (2022) Navigator Survey*, focused on young Australians 'attitudes, feelings and opinions' ([Walsh et al. 2021](#), p.1) Coincidentally, published in the same year (2021), they provide insights during the pandemic context. All three studies utilised national quantitative surveys of n: 505 (*Australian Youth Barometer*/[Walsh et al. 2021](#)), n: 2,825 (*Next25 2022*), and n: 20,000 (*Mission Australia 2021 Youth Survey*/[Tiller et al. 2021](#)) combined with qualitative interviews and in the case of the *Australian Youth Barometer*

([Walsh et al. 2021](#)), the collation of existing data. The Mission Australia ([Tiller et al. 2021](#)) *Youth Survey* does, however, differ from the other two studies substantially. Firstly, it has been conducted annually for the past 20 years, with the 2021 survey and report being its latest iteration at the time this review was conducted. Secondly, the survey comprises a much larger sample of over 20,000 participants, one of the largest sample sizes of research in this review, with detailed state summaries of findings presented. And thirdly, the participants were 15-19 years of age – the youngest participants of all research included in this review⁸.

In terms of key areas of investigation, the findings across the three studies were fairly consistent. Common threads include young Australians' strong sense of civic awareness and concerns regarding social justice issues, concerns about the environment, and positive outlooks and hope for the future. For example, the *2021 Australian Youth Barometer* ([Walsh et al. 2021](#)) focus areas were education, employment and income; health and wellbeing; housing; youth justice, safety and risk; and citizenship, belonging and inclusion. Key findings included overarching concerns, anxieties, and uncertainties relating to the impacts of the pandemic on young peoples' lives; optimism and hope for the future (e.g., future relationships, meaningful employment, home security); pessimism and concerns about the environment/climate change; a strong sense of belonging at school; desire for more skills-based education that would help young people understand taxes, how to vote, and increased employability; a strong sense of job satisfaction across all sectors and job types; dissatisfaction with government and politicians who were viewed as not listening to young people's voices and not providing enough social services; and the importance of friendships (more so than family relationships).

The Mission Australia ([Tiller et al. 2021](#)) *Youth Survey* also found that young Australians have strong civic awareness and social justice values, indicating that the environment, and equity and discrimination, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic are the key issues that Australia needed to address. On a more personal level, the study found that coping with stress, mental health, and school and study problems, were the most important issues for young Australians. Like the *Australian Youth Barometer* ([Walsh et al. 2021](#)), [Tiller et al.'s \(2021\)](#) Mission Australia study also found that young Australians are generally positive about the future and confident about achieving their study or work goals.

With the ability to compare the younger Australian cohort with those over 30 years of age, the [Next25 \(2022\)](#) study found that 'Young people have significantly different priority aspirations from the nation overall, placing more value on the environment, First Nations culture, empathy for disadvantaged groups, willingness to talk out disagreements, and acceptance of those with different views' (p.4). Like the *Youth Barometer*, it also found that it was a priority aspiration for many young Australians for the government to listen to the future generation and take them into account in decision making.

Important demographic variations were also found across these studies' findings, primarily regarding gender variations and Indigeneity. [Cutler et al.'s \(2022\)](#) follow-up report took a deeper dive into the *Youth Barometer* data to present findings relating specifically to queer young people in Australia. The key findings were in relation to the thematic areas of education, citizenship and belonging, employment/work, and wellbeing. While the focus of this report was on experiential data, key insights were also presented in relation to queer young people's attitudes and values. For example, it was found that compared with the broader *Youth Barometer* sample, queer young people were more than twice as likely to believe that sharing a similar ethnic or cultural background with others is not at all important for them to feel like they belong, indicating an openness towards people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Queer participants were also more likely than the broader sample to want the government to provide more social services, were

8 The Next25 (2022) study does not provide the lower limit of the 'young people' cohort, defining them as 'under 30'.

eager for the government to listen to their needs and provide support and were critical of the governments' handling of key debates relating to the queer community.

[Tiller et al.'s \(2021\)](#) Mission Australia study found variations between male and female respondents – with young females generally having more heightened concerns than young males around issues such as confidence in achieving study or work goals, concerns about coping with stress, mental health and body image, and unfair treatment due to gender. Gender diverse respondents communicated even more heightened concerns in relation to these and additional areas (p.9). The heightened concerns of women, compared to men, was also a key finding of the [Next25 \(2022\) Navigator Survey](#). For example, women tended to be more dissatisfied than men with how institutions act in the public interest, and young women tend to prioritise acceptance of others and being willing to talk out disagreements more so than young men.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS REVIEW

Given that this review only includes published research that reported on primary empirical research, literature that drew only upon existing/secondary data have not been included. This includes [Maire's \(2021\)](#) examination of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 survey data on Australian young people, [Tranter's \(2015\)](#) examination of the Australian Election Study data, and the [Australian Social Inclusion Board's \(2012\)](#) synthesis of a range of data from multiple sources. While including these studies would provide a more comprehensive picture of the national-level data available to understand Australians' attitudes and values, for the purposes of this report it was important to focus solely on the reporting of primary research. The sheer breadth of research that reports on secondary data would also make a review that includes those publications insurmountable. Similarly, this review only included empirical research that utilised self-reporting methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys). Therefore, research that investigates Australian values and attitudes as demonstrated within cultural products – such as social media posts, news articles, advertising campaigns, political speeches, and government discourse – were not included. It is acknowledged that such cultural products do provide important insights into contemporary Australian values and attitudes, and the body of research on these products could be the basis of further review.

Throughout the review process, it became clear that some reports and publications were not being 'picked up' via the chosen search strategy. For example, Mission Australia have been conducting Youth Surveys for over 20 years, however, only the most recent report ([Tiller et al. 2021](#)) appeared in search results. Similarly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics social attitudes surveys (titled *General Social Surveys*) were not 'picked up' via the search strategies (see for example [ABS 2021](#)). There were also issues of access. For example, Roy Morgan press/media releases were included in this review, however, Roy Morgan 'State of the nation' reports were not. This is because the latter did not appear using the search strategy employed and are only available for purchase (i.e., they were not open access and not available via public institution repositories).

A final limitation is in relation to the collation of study characteristics. Some studies followed rigorous and robust research practice by detailing research aims, research methodologies, and sample sizes. Other publications were not as transparent and did not include such information. It was unusual for the publications to overtly state the intended audience(s) such as academics, policy makers, advertisers/marketers, industry, and/or government. In some instances, assumptions of intended audiences were made based on publication type and language/sections included. For example, where 'recommendations to government' were provided it was assumed that government was an intended audience, and articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals were assumed to be intended for academic audiences. What was, however, more difficult to ascertain was how the research has been used and if it is reaching the intended audience (or other audiences). These questions on impact and reach would be an interesting basis for further research.

Ideas for further research

There is a breadth of national-level research conducted on Australian attitudes and values as they relate to social cohesion over the past decade. This research has predominantly spanned the topics of multiculturalism, cultural diversity, immigration, refugees and asylum seekers, national identity, democracy, the economy, and trust. Some other topics have been investigated but are limited in scope and number. Surprisingly, these gaps and limited research are in relation to contemporary Australian social issues that need urgent attention.

For example, beyond the biennial Reconciliation Barometer studies and annual Mission Australia Youth Surveys, there are no national-level studies to the authors' knowledge that routinely investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' values and attitudes – either exclusively, or in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians. The Reconciliation Barometer is limited to questions relating to views and attitudes as they relate to Reconciliation. The Mission Australia Youth Surveys are limited to a specific age group (15-19 years of age). There is therefore much scope for research that includes larger numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (in isolation or alongside non-Indigenous Australians) and that investigates attitudes and values beyond Reconciliation.

Research into the attitudes and values of LGBTQA+ individuals and communities is also slight. Gender and sexuality are often used as demographic measures within national surveys and as such variations in attitudes and values within samples according to gender and sexuality are sometimes included. However, sub-samples of LGBTQA+ research participants are often too small for meaningful comparison in quantitative studies. Similarly, examinations of Australians' attitudes *towards* LGBTQA+ 'issues' are rare.

Despite 1.5 million Australians requiring assistance with core activities ([ABS 2022](#)), attitudes towards disability and attitudes and values of Australians of diverse abilities is missing from the existing literature. Similarly, children – their attitudes and values, and attitudes and values towards children – did not feature in any of the studies. Studies on 'young Australians' range from 15-24 years of age and thus research that focuses on children and their specific attitudes and values would address a key gap. And finally, Australians' attitudes towards and values regarding the environment are sometimes examined via one or two questions in national surveys. There is limited research that goes beyond nominal inclusions of those questions regarding the environment.

The ethical complexities of conducting research on some of these topics and with these groups are acknowledged. However, the research can be done and if we are to have a more holistic and robust understanding of Australian attitudes and values as they relate to social cohesion, these groups and topics must be included in national-level research.

Impacts of the pandemic on Australian values and attitudes is also an important thematic area that is understandably in its infancy. The Scanlon Foundation included some pandemic questions in their studies from 2020 onwards, and there is a scattering of other studies that deal with 'pandemic issues' or times (see for example [Colledge & Martyn 2020](#); [Carling & Cowan 2021](#); [Lake et al. 2021](#); [Tiller et al. 2021](#); [Walsh et al. 2021](#)), but these did not make a coherent thematic area to be included in the 'key findings' section of this report. An exception is the study conducted by [Huang et al \(2022\)](#) which examined the impacts of the pandemic on Australians' hopes and dreams (such as job stability, travel and connecting with family, concerns for young people and intergenerational impacts). Ongoing investigations of the COVID-19 context will help measure the impacts of the pandemic on Australians' attitudes, values, and social cohesion more broadly.

The quantitative studies reviewed here are largely 'variable centred'; reporting basic frequencies of Australian attitudes and values (univariate analyses) or correlations/relationships between attitudes or values and demographic indicators (bivariate analyses). While valuable, the variable-centred approach is limited as it assumes a homogeneity of the population (beyond demographic variations/groupings)

and is unable to reveal how multiple attitudes or values are combined within individuals and how individuals with similar attitudinal profiles are represented (adapted from [Ruelens & Nicaise 2020](#)). [Dunn et al.'s \(2021\)](#) examination of the Challenging Racism Project national survey data is an exception. By utilising Latent Class Analysis of the survey data, [Dunn et al \(2021\)](#) were able to develop a typology of Islamophobia in Australia based on segments or attitudinal groups specifically pertaining to anti-Muslim sentiment. Similar methods could be used more extensively to help identify groups in the population that share a similar response pattern on a series of indicators ([Ruelens & Nicaise 2020](#)).

However, even quantitative methods such as Latent Class Analysis fail to provide nuanced, individual, and personal insights to Australians' attitudes and values. Such limitations of quantitative surveys can be remedied via greater inclusion of qualitative methods, which are largely missing from the studies included in this review. The study by [Stoker et al. \(2018\)](#) included 20 focus groups in addition to a national survey, but minimal qualitative data was presented. This may reflect a challenge of mixed methods research, that is, balancing the reporting of both qualitative and quantitative results. The 2021 Australian Youth Barometer ([Walsh et al. 2021](#)) is a standout among the studies included in this review due the authors' extensive reporting of the qualitative findings (obtained from interviews with 30 young Australians) alongside quantitative data. Further research that collects and reports qualitative data (obtained from interviews, focus groups, or other qualitative methods) would help illuminate the complexity of Australians' attitudes and personal perspectives.

It is a common feature of the studies reviewed here to capture the cultural diversity of Australians via recruitment methods and evidenced in demographic data reported. However, it is not clear how many projects conducted research in multiple languages. The Scanlon Foundation provided information that multiple languages were available in some of their surveys, for example, in 2019 the Scanlon survey was available in English and six most spoken community language options. The consistency of these options is, however, not clear. Nearly one-third of people in Australia speak a language other than English at home ([ABS 2022](#)) so conducting research in multiple languages may allow the inclusion of Australians who are usually overlooked due to English language limitations and therefore provide more representative results. However, there are real challenges in utilising in-language options in research that must be acknowledged, the primary being question (and response) meaning being 'lost in translation' and therefore impacting data reliability.

Finally, peer reviewed national scale studies in this area of research are limited. Most publications sourced and reviewed were not peer-reviewed academic publications. There are benefits and limitations to academic and non-academic research/publication, however, if we are to ensure that national level studies on Australians' attitudes and values are rigorous and empirically robust, then greater engagement with academic peer-reviewed research practice is needed. Filling the research gaps will allow better understanding of how macro-level processes may affect intergroup relations and Australians' attitudes towards issues relating to social cohesion.

Conclusion

This scoping review is a first step towards mapping the extent, range, and nature of the body of national-level research (academic, industry, and government authored) on contemporary Australian social values and social cohesion. It has identified the type of published evidence available, examined how the existing research has been conducted, summarised existing research findings, and identified knowledge gaps. The review identified six key themes covered by the available literature in relation to social cohesion. They are: 1) multiculturalism, cultural diversity, immigration, and racism; 2) Reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives; 3) national identity; 4) trust; 5) democracy; and 6) young people.

While the review has highlighted significant knowledge gaps in the scholarship, there is consistent argument across the literature that work needs to be done to address the challenges and concerns identified by Australians and ensure the successful functioning of society. For example, there continues to be low levels of trust in political parties/organisations and other key institutions such as the media and judiciary (Edelman 2022a; Markus 2021; Stoker et al. 2018). There remain some concerns over particular cultural and ethnic groups in Australia such as Middle Eastern Australians, Muslim Australians, African Australians, and Asian (particularly South Asian) Australians, and refugees (Markus 2021; Dunn et al. 2021; Kamp et al., 2017; Dandy & Pe-Pua 2015). Young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have a particular set of concerns relating to their opportunities, health and wellbeing, and positioning within Australian national culture and identity (Walsh et al. 2021; Tille et al. 2021; Kamp et al. 2018). If not addressed, these key issues are threats to a socially cohesive society.

However, the review has also found that we can remain hopeful as there is strong support for multiculturalism and Australians have positive attitudes towards stronger movements towards Reconciliation (Reconciliation Australia 2020). There is also acknowledgement that there is racial prejudice in Australia and advocacy for government, business, and the media to lead anti-racism, Reconciliation, and pro-diversity approaches (Reconciliation Australia 2020; Kamp et al. 2017). There is also ongoing confidence in the democratic system (Stoker et al. 2018; Sheppard et al. 2018; Markus 2020 & 2021; Edelman 2021). And finally, looking to the future generations, young Australians have a strong sense of civic awareness, actively raise concerns about social justice issues, the environment, but have positive outlooks and hope for the future (Walsh et al. 2021).

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