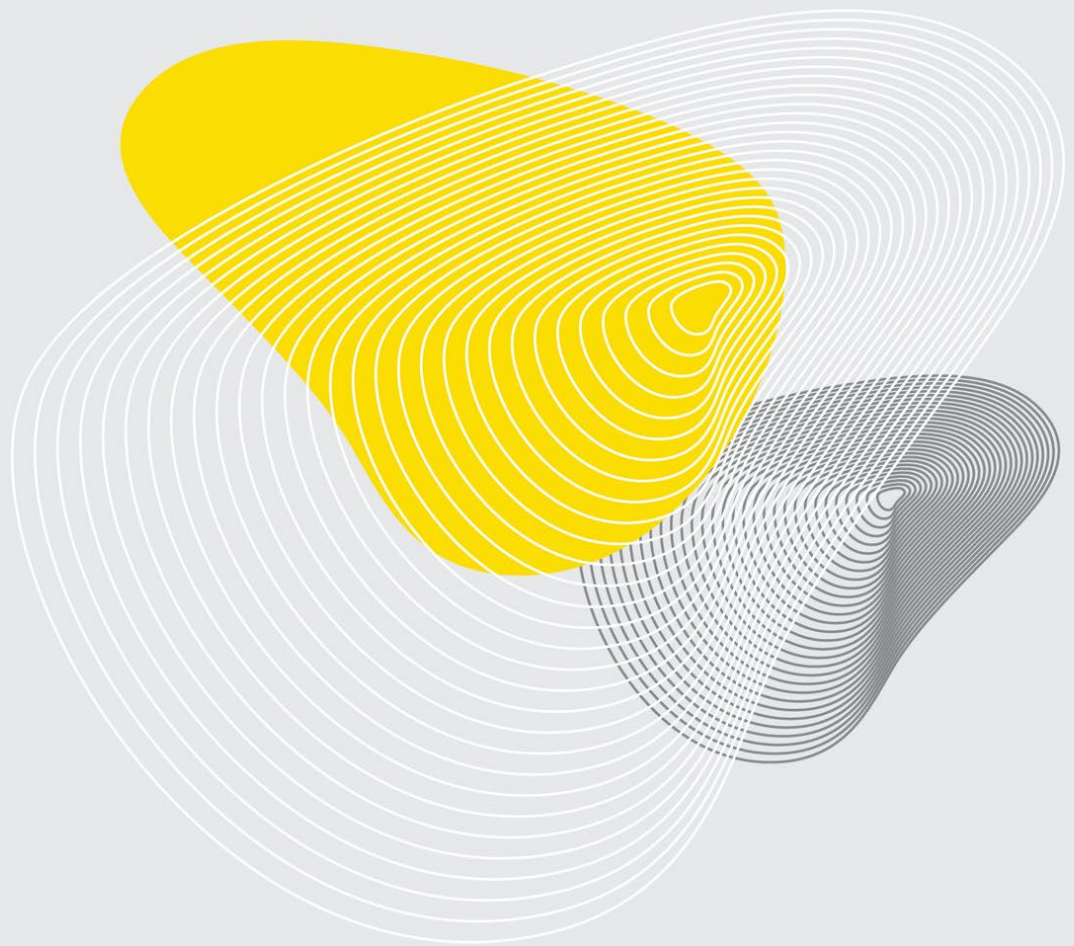


Addressing Challenges Faced by Chinese and South Asian- Origin Communities in Political Participation and Media Literacy

A Toolkit of Recommendations
for Australian Public Services
and Institutions



**MEDIA
FUTURES
HUB**



UNSW
SYDNEY

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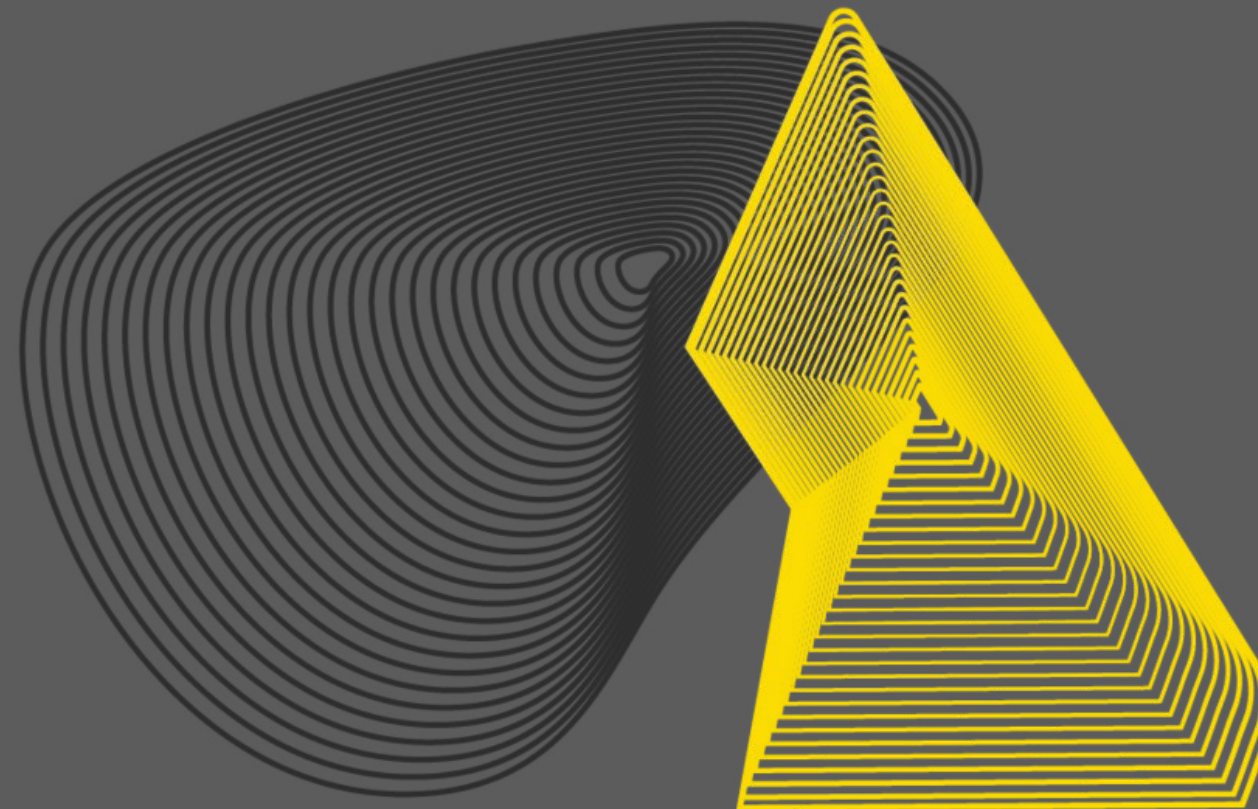
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This research was conducted by researchers living and working on unceded Whadjuk, Dharug, Bedegal, and Wurundjeri lands. We acknowledge ourselves as migrant-settlers and pay our respects to elders past, present and future.

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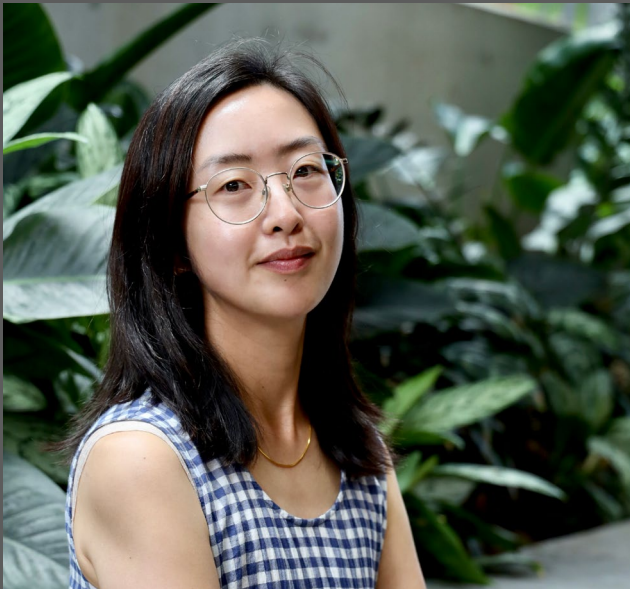


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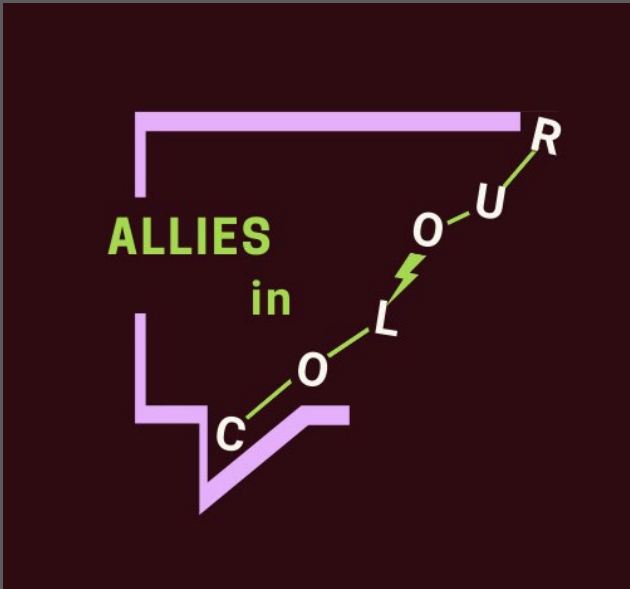
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Allies in Colour



Allies in Colour is the National, Non-governmental, Peak body for Multicultural Australians, Expats, and New-citizens, dedicated to empowering culturally and racially marginalized (CARM) Australians in governance, politics, and entrepreneurship. Through initiatives like COMPELL, CARM Board List, and MARI, AIC drives representation and leadership, by connecting diverse talent with opportunities and conducting evidence-based research. Focused on education and advocacy, AIC works to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Summary



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This toolkit summarises the five main challenges encountered in meaningful political participation and media literacy by Chinese and South Asian-origin research participants resident in Australia for at least 2 years. It also presents evidence-based recommendations to address these challenges for a range of stakeholders such as political representatives, political party branches in culturally diverse electorates, electoral agencies, migrant community associations, diasporic media outlets, as well as mainstream national media. This document is informed by research findings from 192 quantitative survey responses and seven focus groups conducted with participants identifying as having South Asian or Chinese cultural ancestry. Survey findings have been presented in our submission to the ‘Parliament Inquiry into Civics Education, Engagement and Participation in Australia’ ([Yang and Khorana, 2024](#)).

Migrants face cultural, social, and linguistic barriers hindering their political participation.

In response, we recommend that Australian public agencies prioritise genuine engagement by avoiding tokenism, implementing systematic and sustainable communication strategies, and developing tailored, platform-specific civic education programs for those with English as a second language or non-English speakers from diverse political backgrounds. Agencies should conduct post-implementation evaluations to assess community responses and feedback, enabling continuous improvement of communication plans.

Race, gender, and immigration status are the compounding structural barriers hindering migrants’ full political engagement.

Australian political systems are generally more accessible to individuals who are non-Asian, male, and hold Australian citizenship, while being less accessible to those who do not fit these categories.

We recommend shared responsibility among public agencies and relevant stakeholders to combat structural and everyday racism across all sectors, aligning with the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Anti-Racism Framework. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of promoting civics education focusing on racial and gender equity, implementing mechanisms to ensure equitable government decision-making, and collaborating with academic researchers to inform policies.

Misinformation and disinformation targeting migrant communities are often overlooked by public monitoring systems, tech companies, and Australian media and authorities.

We recommend that genuine inclusivity and diversity be achieved within Australian newsrooms and national media organisations. Public services and relevant stakeholders must adopt preventative measures to prebunk misinformation and disinformation, thereby mitigating the harm caused by their further dissemination. Community-based approaches both within Australia and internationally in combating non-English-language misinformation and disinformation circulated across private channels are valuable to draw lessons from.

Tokenism in Australian democracy’s representative structures leads to distrust towards Australian institutions among migrants.

We recommend that diversity of political representation shift from merely the proportion of diversity to the political interests that candidates represent. On the one hand, it is important to evaluate the experiences of politicians from migrant backgrounds to ensure their political advocacy is not hindered by their race or gender. On the other, for migrant voters, comprehensive information should be included in civic education curricula at the local, state or territory, and federal levels to ensure they understand the resources and support available from Australian government systems, as well as the significance of political representation. Migrants also need to be more fully and meaningfully represented in the nation’s mainstream media to build trust and avoid tokenistic representation that stereotypes their cultures of origin.

Migrants are largely reliant on their immediate family and friends for civic education, with gender, social class, and immigration status shaping their political decision-making.

We recommend that Australian public services and relevant stakeholders recognise the diversity within migrant cohorts and ethnic communities, tailoring inclusive and accessible civic education to enhance political literacy and advocacy of their collective interests.

Challenge 1: Culture of Origin Barrier

Culture of origin barrier—cultural, linguistic, and socio-political barriers faced by migrants in political participation

In our study, although over 90% of participants actively engage in political activities, including following political news and running as candidates, Chinese and South Asian-origin communities in Australia encounter significant barriers. These barriers include cultural, linguistic, and socio-political challenges, which collectively limit their ability to fully participate in Australia's democratic systems and civic life.

"Lack of generational wealth makes it quite hard for people to go into spaces like investigative journalism, journalism in general, even politics, like crowdfunding is hard. You know, often people who are migrants will come from communities that don't necessarily have the funds anyway. So you're fighting against the big leagues. It's quite hard to do it. So I think the economic opportunities need to be made available as well" (Sahana FG5).

"I think that is because political activity sounds kind of scary or sounds a little bit distant from our daily life. We tend to focus on our daily work. You know, work-life balance...And culturally, I can feel it's different from where I grew up. And politically, I think I'm really new. So that's why I would like to step out of my comfort zone and learn a little bit more about Australia, the political system, or the society" (Lili, FG6).



This finding does not mean that the less than 10% of participants who are not currently engaged in Australia's political system lack interest in this space. In our survey, research participants indicated that a lack of political participation stems from their disappointment and distrust in the global political landscape which is often seen as marked by corruption. In Australia, frustration with the perceived ineffectiveness of Australia's major political parties and their failure to effectively engage with migrant communities, fear of speaking out due to one's visa status, and the difficulties of balancing work and life as first-generation migrants contribute to this disengagement.

While barriers to political participation exist, they do not deter participants from engaging with Australia's civic life. Some participants view Australia's democratic system as offering greater autonomy and freedom for political engagement, particularly when compared to authoritarian regimes like those in China, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka, as well as liberal democracies such as the United States and India, where political polarisation is currently more pronounced.

"I participated in the 1989 students' movement. You know that I was in my 3rd year in University. So I was part of the hunger strike... because people in Australia, in America, really take this right to vote for granted. But people, you know, after you go through 1989, you really appreciate, you know, there's so many people dying for it" (Lucy, FG2).

"And I believe Australian politics is a lot better than a lot of political systems including America. I don't like the presidential system and the college system in the US. And I think our representative government is actually better. And also our system is actually more modern than the American system. So in a way, that is where I am coming from" (Peng, FG2).

Recommendations

We suggest that government agencies incorporate the social and cultural norms of migrant communities into their communication strategies. To achieve this, public agencies should continuously develop and refine communication strategies for migrant communities, moving beyond mere information translation, tokenistic gestures, and one-way broadcasting.

→ **Designing tailored communication strategies for different audience groups.**

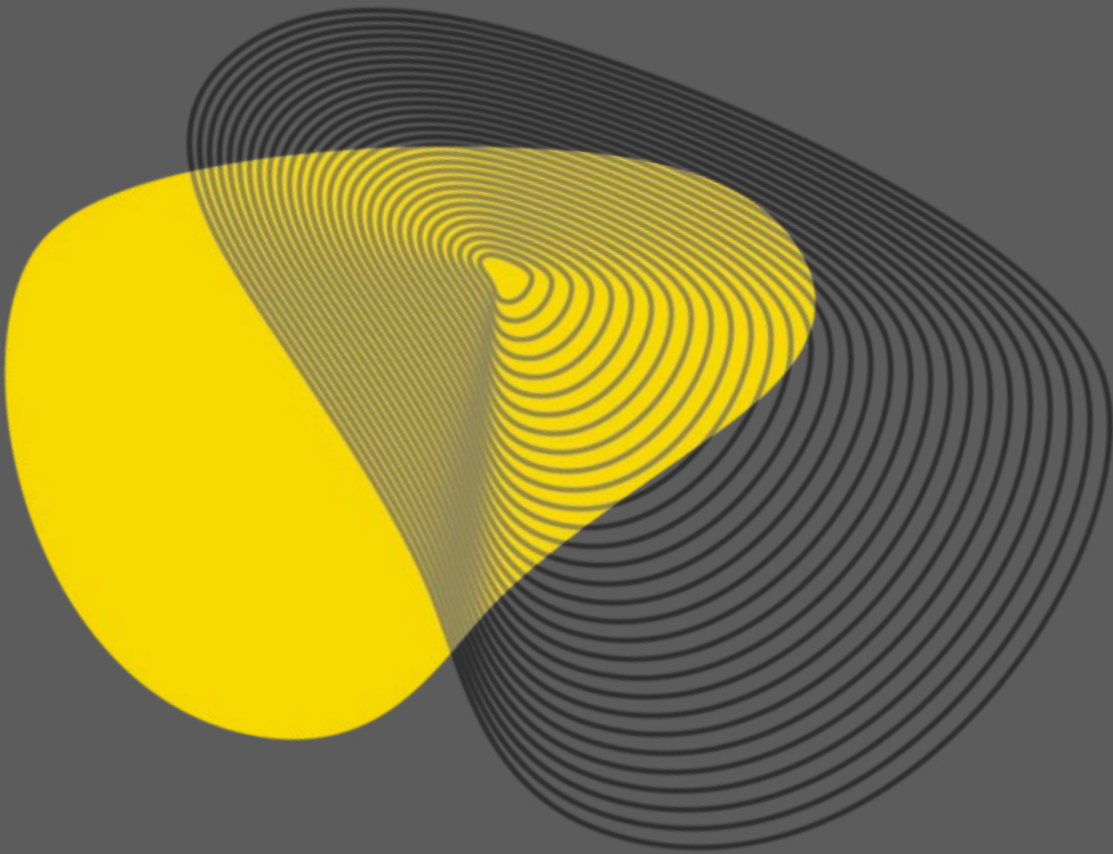
Our research noted the centralised distribution of government-translated content across a limited number of national and ethnic digital media channels, particularly during elections and referendums. However, migrants’ information consumption habits are diverse and can evolve alongside the emergence of new digital media platforms and features. The selection of specific digital media platforms or features excludes audiences with low digital literacy or those who are not the target audience of these platforms from accessing translated content. Further, the focus on selected media channels creates opportunities for other platforms, including individual or organisational online content producers / influencers, to exploit these gaps for misinformation and disinformation production and distribution.

We need more research to identify the specific communication platforms and platform features used by ethnic communities, as well as the factors—such as gender, social class, age, political and ideological stance, and profession—that

influence their information consumption habits. For example, the rising popularity of short-video platforms and features, such as TikTok, Red or Xiaohongshu, WeChat’s Channels, YouTube Shorts, and Instagram Reels, may require agencies to shift from traditional text and image-based, broadcasting-style communication to more resource-intensive and dynamic short-video communication formats to effectively compete for public attention in the digital economy.

→ **Evaluating the effectiveness of outsourcing communication strategies to third-party marketing agencies.**

Public agencies must assess the effectiveness of outsourcing non-English-language communication to third-party marketing and media agencies when compared with managing these communications in-house. We recommend that managing communication in-house can provide significant advantages, including the ability to obtain timely and authentic feedback from target audiences, foster ongoing engagement, and timely adjustment of communication strategies in response to user feedback.



Challenge 2: Country of Settlement Barriers

Country of settlement barriers—race, gender, class, and immigration status as the compounding structural barriers hindering migrants’ full political engagement

Our research highlights that factors such as race, gender, social class, and immigration status significantly shape individuals’ access to Australia’s political system. Existing studies have also demonstrated that factors such as age and physical or mental capacities can significantly influence an individual’s political engagement and the opportunities available to them ([Burden, et al., 2016](#)).

Given the influence of government and tech companies in shaping access to the internet and social media services, we also anticipate that Australia’s social media ban for children under 16 could adversely affect young people’s participation in political and social activism, much of which is organised on popular platforms such as Facebook and Instagram ([Varghese, 2019](#)).

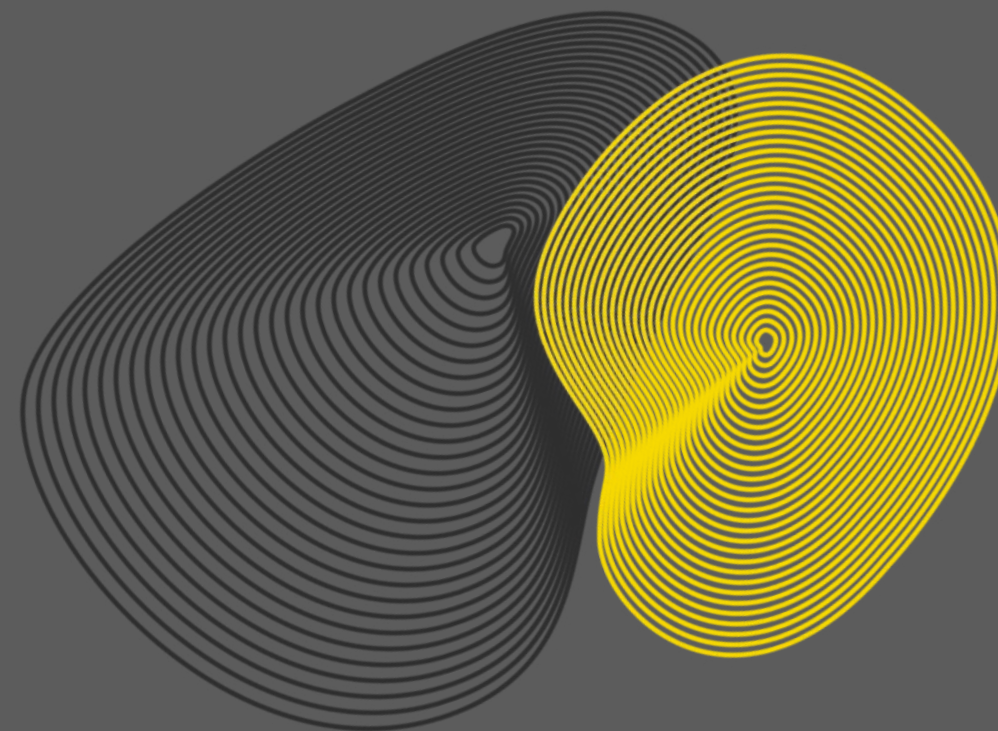
In our study, male participants with Australian citizenship are more likely to take on formal political leadership roles, such as running as candidates in electoral campaigns or organising political events and grassroots communities, both online and offline. However, the politicisation of migrants and the securitisation of ‘Chinese influence / threat’ in the Australian media and public institutions have linked Chinese migrants to concerns over suspected infiltration at all levels of the nation’s political landscape. Australia’s foreign influence panic has impeded the ability of Asian Australians, particularly Chinese migrants and their offspring, to assume a more prominent role in Australian politics.

“I kind of stepped back from [a climate change movement], and because I had to reassess what I wanted to do. I felt like it wasn’t the right fit for me, and a big part of it was because it’s mainly a white, quite a white movement...No, it’s not like they did anything to make me feel unwelcome. But then I still didn’t fit. They’re nice enough. They’re nice people, good people. But then maybe just from the cultural perspective. Yeah, I don’t know. Like when I’m with them, I feel like I need to show my more Australian side to fit in” (Connie, FG7).

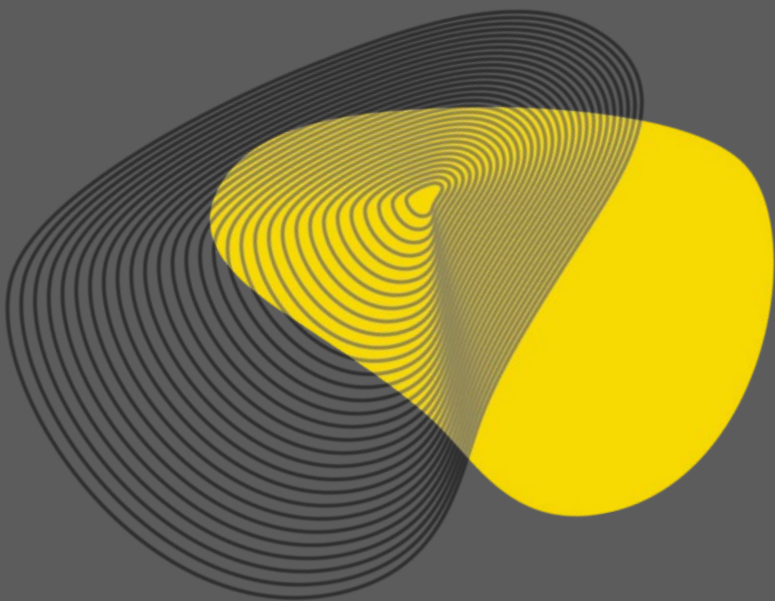
“I wanted to go back in and work inside the party as a volunteer, and so I asked to join [a major political party] in the [inner city suburb of Melbourne], and they told me that I would not be welcomed because of the colour of my skin. [The name of a politician] was the sitting member of [of the named electorate] at the time. I went to him personally, one on one, and I said, This is what I was told. Is this true? And he says, Well, look! Just because of the nature of some of the members, then yes, it is true” (Cathy, FG6).

We have identified a complex interplay between patriarchal structures and women’s participation in Australia’s civic life. These patriarchal norms are not confined to Chinese and South Asian-origin communities, which are the focus of the present study, nor to any specific ethnic group. Rather, they profoundly shape the extent of women’s involvement in political power brokerage and decision-making across both domestic and public spheres in the broader Australian context, which has been reflected in existing studies ([Gale, 1990](#); [Bean, 1991](#); [Ara and Northcote, 2023](#)).

Our research reveals that immigration status is another underlying factor, intersecting with one’s race and gender, and influencing individuals’ decisions regarding political participation or their comfort level in engaging with politics in a public manner. Research participants expressed that they felt a stronger sense of belonging and tended to engage more with Australian politics after acquiring Australian citizenship. For migrants on temporary visas or with permanent residency, concerns about the potential revocation of their visa due to political expression have acted as a significant barrier to their active participation in political life.



Recommendations



The responsibility for addressing racial and gender equity continues to fall predominantly on the individuals and communities directly affected by these social injustices. To drive systemic change, we align with the National Anti-Racism Framework released by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2024), which focuses on seven priority areas: legal protection and reform, workplaces, education, justice, media, health, and data. In line with this framework, Catherine Gomez and colleagues (forthcoming) have proposed a set of ‘Dos and Don’ts’ for employing respectful methods to understand and engage with Australia’s non-white migrant communities. Additionally, we propose the following key sites for structural reform based on our research:

→ **Providing ongoing civics education**
We must acknowledge the subtle and diverse manifestations of social injustice.

Our research reveals that participants from socially marginalised groups often experience subtle or overt exclusion on the basis of their race, ethnicity, and gender, but feel unable to address these incidents via official complaints processes. Explaining experiences of any kind of social injustice can be emotionally taxing, inherently inequitable, and may even provoke backlash or further victimisation.

We suggest that for Australian public services and community organisations, it is vital to effectively communicate the complexities of social injustices and their profound impact on individuals and our society. This education must be ongoing. We recommend that critical race studies and gender studies should be integrated into foundational courses and programs at various educational levels, establishing a more nuanced and critical understanding of these issues across society. A current example involves Black students using critical race algorithmic literacies to challenge and

navigate AI-mediated racism within educational settings (see more in “We are changing the system with this one” by [Tanksley, 2024](#)).

Meanwhile, addressing racism in Australia requires sustained, long-term educational initiatives across educational institutions, workplaces, and family settings. While the Race Discrimination Commissioner has proposed a 10-year plan to ‘end racism,’ these efforts must extend beyond this timeframe and geolocality and engage with transnational media and actors. This is particularly crucial in an era where digital technologies have diversified information sources and consumption patterns. Addressing structural social injustices calls for a comprehensive and enduring approach for meaningful change.

→ **Ensuring equity of government decision-making requires ongoing, rigorous, and meaningful auditing mechanisms in place.**

Australian media and public institutions must acknowledge and reflect on the country’s colonial history and examine the long-term impact of colonial legacies on all aspects of policy

development in this settler society. It is crucial for both Australian institutions and individuals to recognise the far-reaching impacts of colonialism, particularly in light of the increasing use of automation in government decision-making. Research has shown that automation reinforces social injustices, for example in the contexts of workplace surveillance, recruitment, and welfare provision ([Chen, 2023](#); [Toorn and Scully, 2024](#)). Migrant communities may be further marginalised, hindered, or scrutinised from political participation by automation systems.

→ **Establishing sustainable collaboration between public services and academic research is vital**

Addressing racial and gender injustices requires acknowledging the existing gap between research and practice. Long-term collaboration between researchers, public services, and community members is critical to ensure timely responses and the continuous refinement of engagement strategies. We recommend that government resources should be directed towards supporting critical, rigorous, and quality academic research that informs policy makers’ engagement with migrant communities.

In the instance of ‘foreign interference,’ the terminological opacity has been exploited by conservative media and think tanks. These entities shape public discourse by invoking ‘common-sense’ assumptions. In this context, they focus on security and military threats posed by non-liberal democratic nations. These ‘common-sense’ narratives also raise concerns about individuals from non-liberal democratic backgrounds, particularly regarding immigration which is framed as a threat to Australian democracy and national security. Such binary thinking reduces the complexities of individualities, communities, cultures, citizenship, and belonging to a simplistic view based primarily on one’s country of origin ([Landry, 2021](#)). As such, co-designed engagement protocols must be developed with experts and communities and followed to ensure respectful relationships that also improve public understanding of migrants’ lives.

Challenge 3: Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation about and targeted at Chinese and South Asian communities

Most focus group respondents across Chinese and South Asian groups reported being avid consumers of political news, using a range of sources, and being cautious about news stories encountered on social media. Research participants reported encountering misinformation in two ways: misinformation that misrepresents their identity, culture, and countries of origin in Australian national English media, and targeted misinformation and disinformation disseminated across non-English social media services or via private social media channels that is outside the purview of Australian public institutions.

Due to the lack of journalists from diverse backgrounds in Australian newsrooms, editorial decision-making or executive boards, research participants who highlighted the importance of meaningful representation for their communities identified a significant gap. They pointed to issues such as stereotypical portrayal and a general lack of understanding regarding the history and diversity of migrant communities in Australia.

“[...] the moment you’re a person of color, everyone thinks that you’re Chinese. And we do get painted with the same paintbrush. And it is very frustrating, because we also know of like, you know, people who are 3rd 4th generation Australian-Chinese, you know, Australian born Chinese” (Connie, FG7).

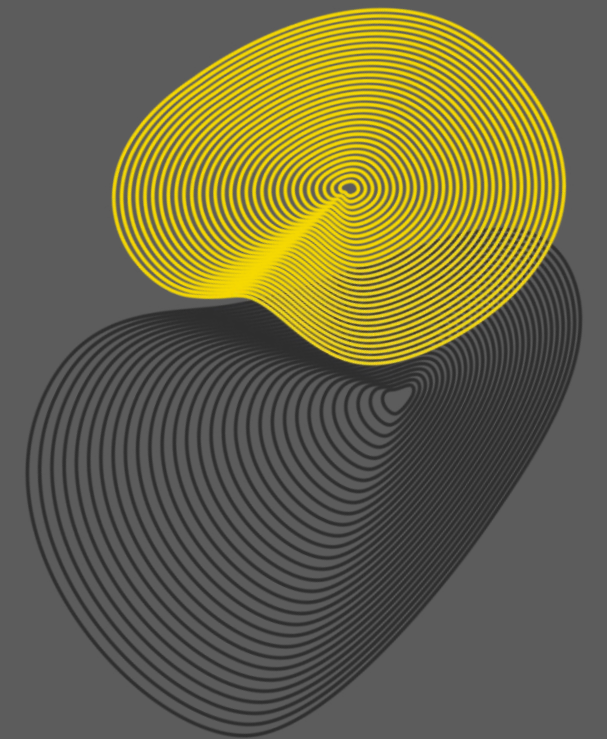
“Sri Lanka usually gets in the media for cricket mainly, and travel and tourism. So apart from that, there’s not a lot of deep insight. I think it was last year or the year before—where the Sri Lankan population took to the streets against the government. I’ve never seen anything like that before, and it kind of let you know what the sentiment was in the population. But, you know, apart from the news coverage when that was going on, there hasn’t really been much” (Meeta, FG2).

“The TV shows, you know, everything is negative about China. Every time there’s a report on China, there’s negativity. You know, there’s nothing good about China, nothing good about the people. So I think that actually creates a very bad impression in society or in the general population” (Jay, FG2).

Migrants can be uniquely vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation originating from diverse sources and disseminated in multiple languages, often bypassing the monitoring and reporting mechanisms of Australian institutions (Renaldi and Fang, 2020; Dalzell, 2020; Lusted, 2024). Platforms’ automated disinformation detection tools often face challenges in identifying or blocking disinformation presented in non-English languages or non-text formats such as photos, videos, and memes. Many of these materials are circulated through private channels and shared in formats like PDF documents, further complicating automated detection attempts. The encrypted nature of platforms such as Telegram or WhatsApp, designed to ensure information security, has inadvertently facilitated the proliferation of disinformation within undetectable spaces. Efforts to surveil private communications for disinformation raise significant concerns regarding the violations of privacy, human rights, and freedom of speech (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). On these platforms, disinformation shared within trusted and often enclosed social networks tends to be especially persuasive. The interpersonal trust in these exchanges lends credibility to false information—a persistent challenge before Meta’s decision to end its fact-checking program on Facebook and Instagram (Huo et al., 2025).

Research participants shared their own or their family members’ experiences of encountering misinformation and disinformation online. Despite facing misinformation, politically-motivated focus group participants expressed little trust in both social media and Australian national media, describing the latter as resembling marketing materials.

“I don’t really like reading Chinese social media, even though I’m very active on WeChat and subscribe to some news just to see what’s going on. I don’t rely on them because I usually don’t trust them and can often spot mistakes and opinionated editorials rather than actual news” (Peng, FG2).



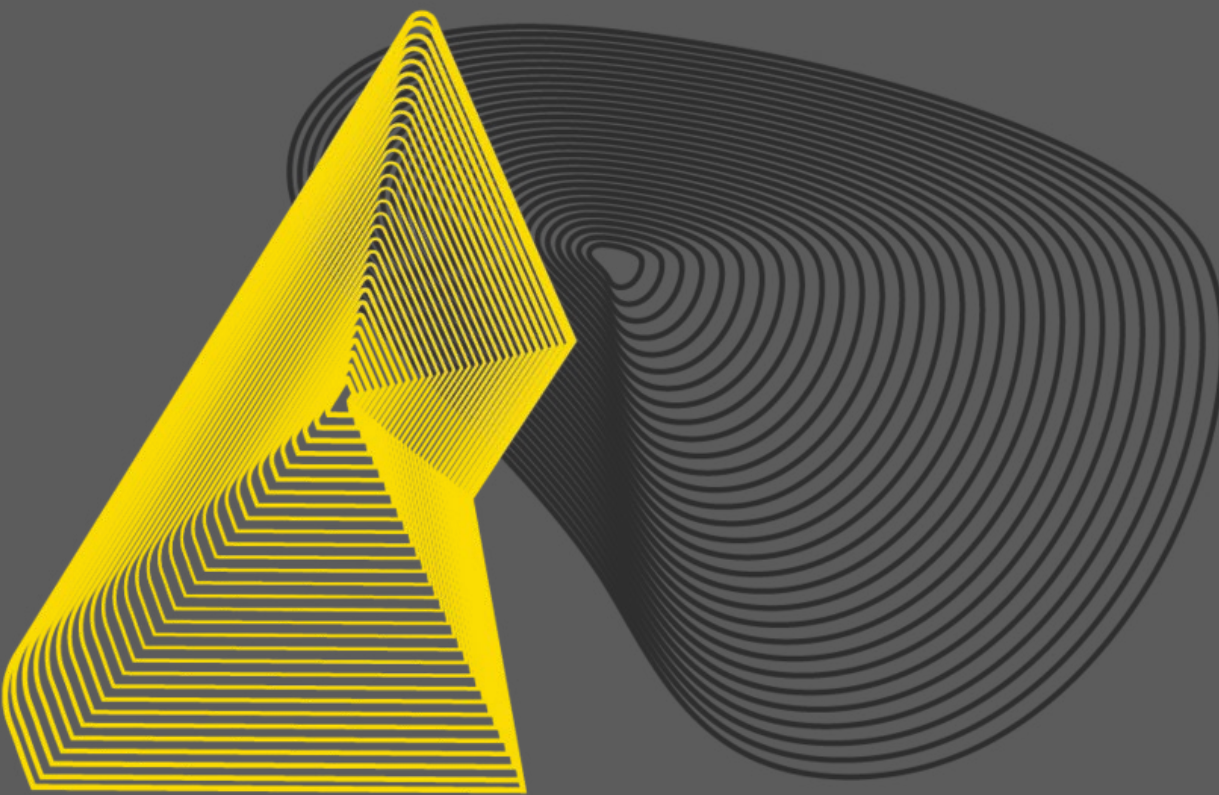
Challenge 3: Misinformation and Disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation about and targeted at Chinese and South Asian communities

Research participants observed that combatting online misinformation and disinformation is an emotionally taxing process, often involving interventions within participants’ immediate family networks. Family dynamics, particularly those related to gender and generational differences, can often hinder effective interventions against disinformation.

“I’m so tired of intervening to be honest, and mostly it’s family, you know, my parents and close friends and the like. I wouldn’t intervene, I guess, when it’s a wider friend circle or my wider family. [...] There is so much misinformation, especially passed around on WhatsApp and socials, like I’m saying. So when I do see someone take a very strong stand, usually my father or my mother, based on just a forward they’ve gotten, I step in” (Amrita, FG4).

“So for me, it’s primarily social media [for news and information consumption]. And what happens is the opposite—when I go and quote something, it’s my kids who come back and say, “Mom, do you know that’s not the real thing?” and they’ll be the ones correcting me” (Malini FG4).



Recommendations

To address the challenges of misinformation and disinformation about and targeted at migrant communities, we have summarised the following recommendations based on our focus groups:

→ Achieving genuine diversity and inclusivity in Australian national media

First Nations migrant communities must be meaningfully involved in newsrooms, editorial decision-making processes, and executive boards which is crucial for developing genuine diversity and inclusion within media organisations. This requires a top-down approach to promote diversity through prioritising structural changes over tokenistic gestures, and avoiding the superficial use of diversity in marketing material for the sake of appearances. Community-connectedness is essential for ensuring diverse and accurate representation of migrant communities. Leveraging ties with migrant communities, media organisations must genuinely engage with diverse migrant narratives, establishing accountable and nuanced storytelling that moves beyond racial stereotypes.

→ One of our research participants also highlighted:

‘Getting more First Nations or POC media representatives, or journalists doing the work. Because when you have people who can speak from lived experience and sort of have connections to the community, more people will

engage. The problem is with a lot of the news out there, a lot of people just don’t engage because the person doesn’t look like them, the person has no clue what their life experience is like’ (Sahana FG5).

→ Collaborating across disciplines to establish preventative mechanisms for pre-bunking misinformation and disinformation

Preventative mechanisms to combat misinformation and disinformation that anticipate knowledge gaps should be established and effectively communicated to migrant communities prior to significant political events. For example, government bodies such as the Australian Electoral Commission, the Australian Communication and Media Authority, and national media outlets, particularly the non-English arms of the ABC and SBS, could identify and report narratives of political misinformation and disinformation based on existing findings prior to significant electoral events. This would enable members of migrant communities to make informed judgements and critically evaluate misleading elements in the information they encounter. Moreover, experts from migrant communities could be more effectively consulted

and leveraged by political parties, electoral authorities, and national media organisations to understand how to identify and debunk misinformation in culturally resonant ways.

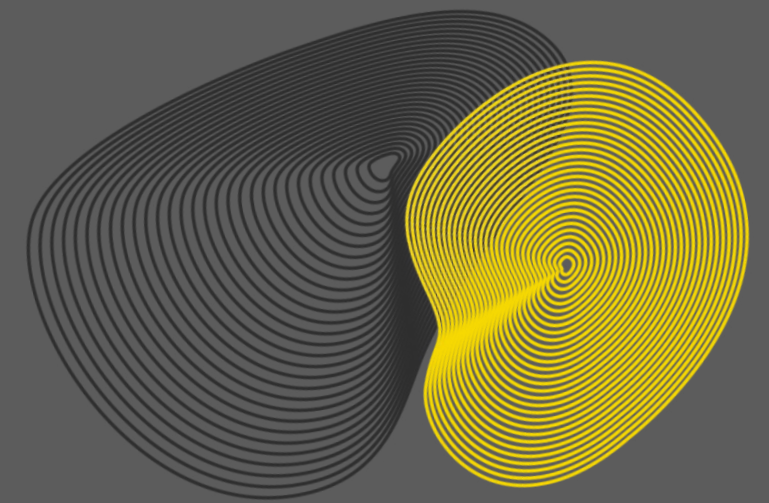
Jonathan Corpus Ong (2021) suggests comprehensive approaches through collaborations between human rights organisations, international funding, and local NGOs in the context of the Philippines. Addressing disinformation requires substantial human and financial resources with investments from local and international actors to develop sustainable communication infrastructures and equip local communication personnel with expertise tailored to the local information environment. In liberal democracies like Australia, support from public institutions is crucial for cross-disciplinary collaboration.

→ Recognising the root causes of misinformation and disinformation and addressing them through ongoing initiatives

Misinformation and disinformation are symptomatic of broader social injustices. These phenomena are perpetuated and normalised by entrenched social inequalities and power

imbalances, reflecting harms rooted in gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and human beings’ relationship with the environment. Addressing these challenges underscores the importance of incorporating critical gender and race studies into civics education, as recommended earlier. Meaningful engagement with critical race and gender studies fosters a deeper understanding of systemic inequalities and empowers individuals to critically engage with and combat the spread of harmful content. Policymakers must consider the full range of possible causes and responses to disinformation (see high-level recommendations by Bateman and Jackson, 2024).

Misinformation and disinformation often escalate and amplify during political events or times of crises. Political campaigns frequently mobilise disinformation and misinformation, where divisive narratives based on race, gender, and ethnicity are used strategically to sway public opinion or undermine political opponents. These falsehoods gain traction, as political actors, digital platforms, and media outlets amplify them for financial and political gain, benefiting from sensational content that attracts attention and engagement.



Challenge 4: Tokenistic Representation

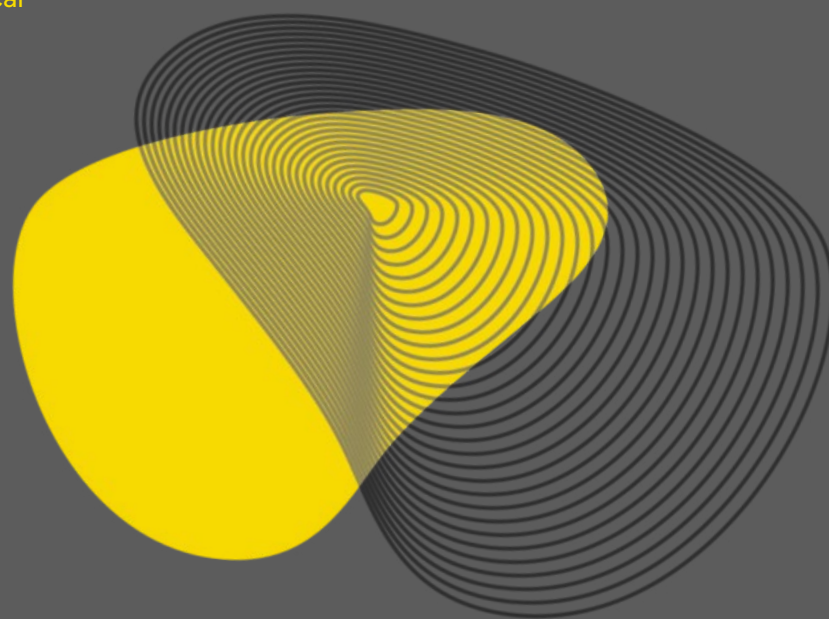
Tokenistic representation leads to migrants' distrust in Australian institutions.

A lack of cultural and racial diversity in Australia's political and media landscapes can lead to the exploitation and misuse of cultural and ethnic identities for political gain. A tokenistic approach may appear to fulfil the requirement for diverse representation, but it undermines the meaningful grassroots representation of ethnic communities' issues by prioritising certain candidates for their visible difference rather than their track record within an electorate.

Respondents in our focus groups also reported that they did not see Australian institutions such as electoral agencies understanding migrant communities well enough to provide tailored information during crucial times such as an election campaign. When issues with political advertising that did not represent migrants accurately were reported to them, these complaints were not taken seriously.

"That sort of messaging. Who is that helping? Who is that for? It's definitely not speaking to me. Do not want to see more of that. I have, in fact, complained to various authorities, including the AEC and Press Club about that kind of advertising, that kind of messaging...They have to be more responsible. They need to understand their audience.

First...who you're talking to? Who is in your electorate? What are the issues that matter to you" (Malini FG3).



Recommendations

→ Emphasising meaningful diversity

Meaningful diversity must be realised by listening to the voices of First Nations and non-white migrant communities. Migrant communities have a nuanced perception of who is representing them authentically (unless they are newer and not politically literate in the Australian context). This means that tokenism should be avoided by the major political parties and media institutions. Media in particular need to have a range of contacts within a migrant community and not be reliant on one individual only to have expertise on the entire community. A mix of lived experience and expertise on the subject should be aimed for. In addition to tapping on ethnic community associations, there is a need for national media in Australia to expand their stakeholder reach to understand newer and younger migrants. The grassroots work undertaken by funded migrant associations must also be closely evaluated for efficacy.

→ Implementing tailored, co-designed media literacy tools for migrants

Migrants' overall media literacy also needs to be addressed such that they understand the political economy of the Australian national media as well as what are considered trustworthy sources of news, the differences between the public broadcasters and commercial media, and the various genres in which news is presented. While there is a general push towards greater media literacy for the broader Australian population (see 'Notley et al, 2024'), this needs a targeted and tailored approach for newer migrants who

have not been exposed to media literacy at all in their formal education in other countries with substantially different national media ecosystems.

Countries in the European Union are known for having incorporated media education or media literacy into the formal curriculum from the primary schooling level. It is noteworthy that this means that they pay increased attention towards supporting 'critical thinking which leads to the exposure of media stereotypes, disinformation, hoaxes and other misleading contents' (Petranova et al., 2017). Such inclusion in the formal education process has been observed in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden'. Other projects in European countries are focused on young adults in addition to school-going children.

Finally, media literacy for migrants is increasingly viewed as a standalone project. In other words, international studies, such as one conducted with refugee youth in the Netherlands suggests that a westernised, one-size-fits-all media literacy curriculum and approach is not appropriate for migrants and refugees (Bruinenberg et al., 2019). Instead, they propose 'critical media literacy education for/with young migrants as a mindful practice'. What this implies is co-creating media literacy curricula with specific groups such that it is based on a recognition of agency, inclusion, engagement, cultural diversity and critical media making.

Challenge 5: The Lack of Effective Civic Education

The lack of effective civic education tailored to migrant communities, leading to community members relying on their immediate families and the internet for information.

As outlined earlier, one's perception and level of civic participation can also be influenced by conventional gender roles and political backgrounds. In conservative family cultures, women's or younger family members' involvement in politics or participation in public events such as strikes and demonstrations or even expressing their political opinions may be viewed negatively. For individuals coming from authoritarian political backgrounds, political engagement may be seen as either risky or futile. These factors impact how new migrants acquire information about political processes and systems in Australia.

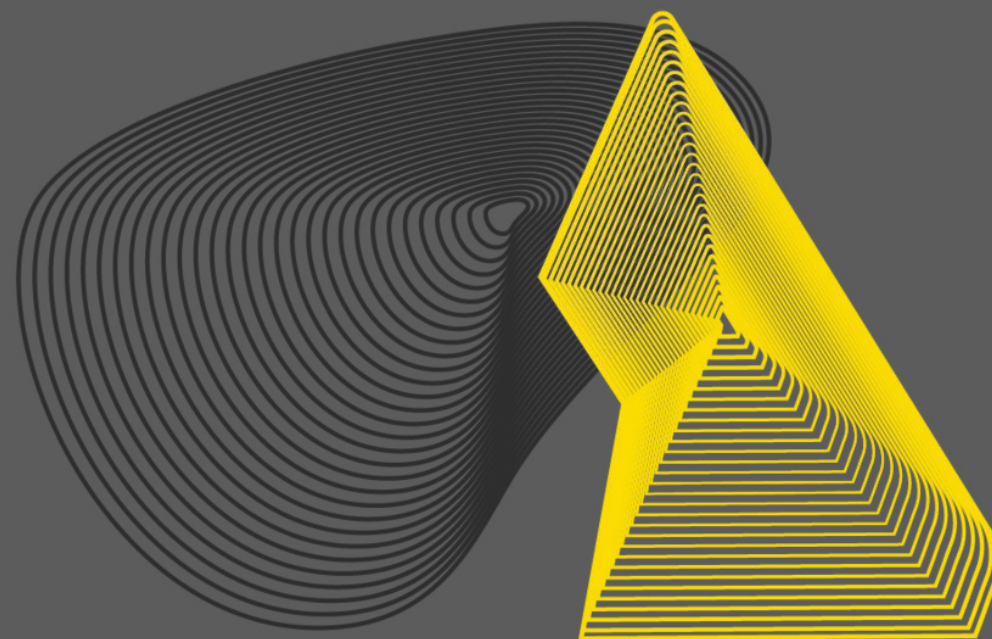
"I think at the time my ex-husband maybe, was his second time that he had voted. And so I was like, okay, I'm registered. I don't even know what to do. And he, he basically told me, just you can sort of Google find out where the ballot you know, where the voting places are. So I just went and he kind of gave me a very, very like, you know, 2 min brief run through on things like the political system and the political parties. I'm like, okay, all right. So I just went in and I don't know what to take. I didn't know the system?" (Connie, FG7).

A male participant Peng from FG2 – a case of both discouragement and encouragement in an intergenerational family dynamic.

Having been raised in a family environment where political discourse was discouraged, he attempted to shift this culture within his own nuclear family.

"She [my sister] and my brother in law hardly get involved in politics, and they are not interested. They are not concerned about what is going on, and they vote, but I vote they just follow me. And I always wonder why. I guess the main reason is I would say they don't, they were not brought up in a culture that the family, or rather the parents and children during dinner, they didn't talk about politics like my mom and dad never talk about that with me."

""But I guess I started to change it because my children in fact, my daughter was heavily involved in politics, and all the way to the Federal level, and my elder daughter in 10. She's 26 now, so and my younger children, every day we, we discuss a lot about all this legal and political ethical issues. Sometimes it's too heavy, you know, referendum issue. We have, like many debates, and so on."

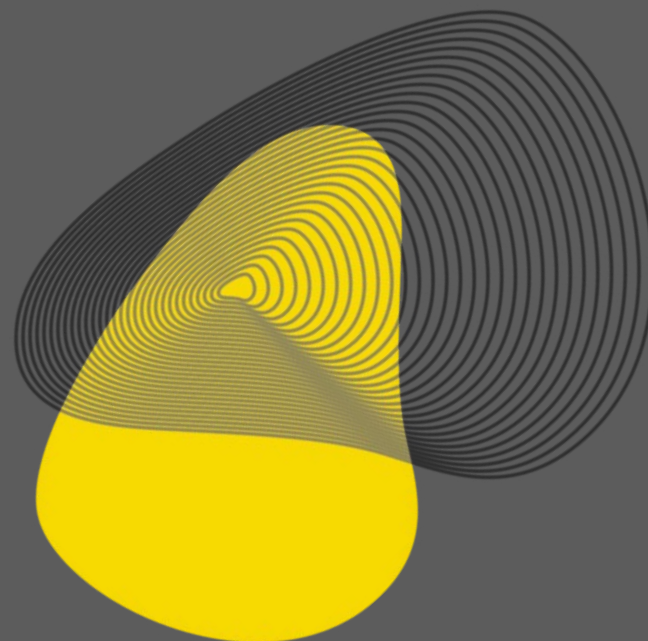


Challenge 5: The Lack of Effective Civic Education

The lack of effective civic education tailored to migrant communities, leading to community members relying on their immediate families and the internet for information.

Additionally, individuals from new migrant communities who have not received any primary, secondary, or tertiary education in Australia lack a critical understanding of colonial histories and Indigenous cultures. Therefore, they may be more susceptible to being influenced by misleading political and media narratives. For example, during the Voice referendum, Chinese and South Asian communities, like non-migrant settler communities, were influenced by the narrative that if one does not understand the premise of the Voice referendum, they should vote 'No' (Graham, 2024).

Current civics education for migrants is confined to the 'Common Bond' booklet made available before the citizenship test for naturalised citizens. This was seen by many in our focus groups to be inadequate and most respondents relied on self-education via the Internet to understand various aspects of the political process. It is worth noting that the focus groups attracted those who were already more politically engaged and media literate, so the sources of civic education for other newer migrants may be even less subject to reflection and scrutiny.



Recommendations

Civic education cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. Agencies must recognise and understand the diversity within migrant cohorts: Government agencies should recognise the limitations of viewing and communicating with each ethnic community as a homogeneous group. Even migrant cohorts hailing from the same country are diverse in terms of social class, gender, political beliefs, time of migration, and religion (among other factors). It is vital that official civics education curricula consider both intra- and inter-community diversity, use different strategies for different age groups, and tailor information for newer migrants versus those who have been in the country for longer.

→ Sourcing examples of best practice in comparable countries

The issue of an effective civics education is more pressing in Australia because of our compulsory voting system. In comparable jurisdictions such as the US, the Asian-American communities have a higher voter turnout than the average American-born population, possibly due to higher education levels. Research has found that naturalisation promotes migrants' interest in democratic participation and societal integration (source: Migration Policy Group). This was also the case in our focus groups where many participants mentioned an increased interest in a range of political processes in Australia (such as voting in a state or federal election) around the time of acquiring Australian citizenship. Countries such as the US have state-level adult immigrant programs to prepare migrants who will shortly be eligible for citizenship for political decision-making and civic participation by incorporating civics education into language classes and settlement support.

→ Using civics education as a trust-building step for migrants who have recently become Australian citizens

The move towards language and civics requirements for acquiring citizenship has been referred to as the 'civic turn' in the literature on citizenship. The 'civic turn' has been identified as a policy response to a perceived 'crisis of integration' in some European Union Member States. Most researchers do not propose going down the path of a 'deficit model' where civics education becomes essential for becoming a naturalised citizen (where civic education is linked to passing a test). Rather, civics education at this stage of a migrant's settlement journey could use a trust-building approach that is more likely to encourage integration, belonging and consequent political participation. In Belgium, a course rather a test is offered to migrants becoming new citizens which could be more appropriate in the Australian setting as well.

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