Compulsory voting – Does it keep the community at large more connected? Have First World countries forgotten the value of the vote?

Compiled for Hon. Alyssa Hayden MLC

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to analyse the effect of compulsory voting on connecting and engaging the Australian electorate with their political duty. It examines the philosophical justifications for mandatory electoral activity, low voter turnout in the democracies of the United States and the United Kingdom, and the demographics where Australian democracy continually experiences political apathy and disconnection.

The major findings of the report indicate that modern democracies are experiencing a devaluation of, and disconnection from, conventional electoral activity. In the United States and United Kingdom low participation is concentrated among the young, the poor, the uneducated and the ethnic minorities. Arguably, compulsory voting ‘protects’ the representation of the wider Australian community, through political voice at the polls. Yet, despite this sanction, Australian citizens are not exempt from a wider phenomenon of apathy and disengagement.

Particular groups within society are less engaged than others, through under-enrolment and continually low turnout. For young Australians, there is vast evidence of a ‘civic-knowledge deficit,’ fostering a wider apathy and disconnection from the voting process. Indigenous Australians continually experience a much lower electoral participation rate than non-Indigenous citizens. For new immigrant citizens it is confusion of the electoral process, rather than a disengagement from ‘democratic values,’ that promote disconnection through informal voting.

While it is clear that compulsory voting has helped ‘safeguard’ vast numbers of Australian citizens from avoiding the polls, this report recommends further initiatives to connect and engage the citizenry. This paper firmly endorses the implementation of automatic enrolment legislation in the Western Australian context, to enhance the integrity of the State electoral roll and connect citizens invisible from the process. Yet, it is stressed that placing citizens on the roll will not cure disengagement. Thus, this report largely promotes programs that connect young adults, Indigenous Australians and new citizens to the ‘value’ of their vote and greater understanding of the electoral process. Greater implementation of initiatives that engage and educate all Australian citizens is pivotal, compulsory voting does not guarantee a populace aware of the inherent value of their political voice.
Section One:

Compulsory Voting: Justifications

The Value of the Vote

Political participation is the ‘lifeblood of democracy,’ representative government proves obsolete without the consent of the citizens through their electoral voice: the vote. The struggle for universal franchise utilises a long history, with battles continually fought in several corners of the world today. The franchise is the first ‘liberty,’ “failure to exercise our voting rights imperils all of our rights including the right to vote itself” (Hill, 2010, p.921). Consequently, through voting, democratic ideals of freedom, liberty and equality are continually sustained. In 1965, upon enfranchising African Americans, President Lyndon B. Johnson emulated the vote as “the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men” (in Garrow, 1980, p.138). Universal franchise protects rights, yet only through its exercise does the impact of the vote materialise.

The value of the vote may appear insignificant, subsequently deterring individuals from believing they have any ‘actual’ impact on political outcomes. The solitary “say that the franchise represents may just be a drop in the ocean in a mass electorate, but it is the core from which other rights of citizenship and community flow” (Orr, Mecurio & Williams 2003,2). An individual’s voice is pivotal, not merely because it expresses their own political interest, but when connected to the wider electorate aids in protecting a society where electoral participation is sustained.

The vote is an instrument of political power, instigating a ‘check’ on the supremacy of elected officials. British novelist, C.S Lewis (1944) stated “mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows” (p.17). Voting not only exists to allow individual’s to choose representatives, but as a means of confiscating authority. In turn the franchise not merely allows the community to determine who governs it, but consequently, who does not (Orr, Mecurio, Williams, 2003).

A Unique Context

Compulsory voting is a distinct component of Australian society, enriching the political and cultural fabric of the nation. Australian democracy occupies a rather distinct position on the international stage. It is the only English speaking country to compel its citizens to the polls.
Former Liberal Senator, Chris Puplick upholds that compulsory voting has manifested into “one of those unique local practices which contributes so much to the fairness of Australian elections” (p.22). Such ‘uniqueness’ emerged among the Parliaments of a young nation, through arguments for universal participation in the realm of politics.

The implementation of compulsory voting is a reflection of Australia’s political culture; its existence largely rests on national perceptions of democracy. Ultimately Australian political culture is avowedly utilitarian; state ‘maintenance’ of equality is pivotal (Mackerras & McAllister, 1999, p.231). In 1924 as Senator Herbert Payne proposed a Private Members Bill to introduce compulsory voting, he urged that “our laws are enacted by a majority of electors represented by a majority of the members in this Parliament” (Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Senate, 1924). Federally, compulsory enrolment and voting legislation was enshrined in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 proceeding amendments in 1924.

In Western Australia, mandatory voting became an ‘inevitable’ extension of enrolment; in 1921 the first woman of national politics, Edith Cowan stated “it seems… an absolute farce to make people place their names on the roll and not to follow it up by making voting compulsory” (Parliamentary Debates, 1921, p.261). By 1936 Western Australia implemented compulsory voting in the Legislative Assembly, yet not until 1964 were such concessions transgressed to the electors of the Legislative Council.

Indigenous enfranchisement was an overdue process, “a most obvious denial of representational rights befell Aboriginal people for a considerable time” (Phillips, 2008, p.14). The 1962 amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 granted all Aboriginals the ‘option’ to vote, by 1984 this provision was transformed to include mandatory franchise (in Alport & Hill, 2008, p.242). In the twenty first century, Australia has maintained an electoral system where almost all voices are heard (Birch, 2009, p.23).

The mandatory characteristic of voting is often described as a misnomer, all citizens are compelled to the polls, yet their decision to vote remains their own. The ‘secret ballot’ ensures no one is forced to mark the ballot paper, merely to have their name ticked off the roll and place the ballot in the box (Jaensch, 2005). Under the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 s.245 (1), it is “the duty of every elector to record his vote at each election.” Whilst, the Western Australian Electoral Act 1907 s.156 (1) enforces the “the duty of every elector to record his vote at any election for the region…for which he is enrolled.” Both Federal and
State legislation require “valid and sufficient” reason for abstaining; otherwise a penalty fine is issued by the appropriate Electoral Commission.

Overall, the compulsory nature of Parliamentary electoral law is largely celebrated by the Australian community. Public support for compulsory voting is persistently high, according to the *Australian Election Study*. Between 1996 and 2010 compulsory voting is favoured over voluntary systems by 70 to 77 per cent of the population (McAllister & Pietsch, 2011, p.39). Overall, it appears it “is in no sense seen as an imposition on the electorate and resented by it” as a whole (Aitkin, 1992, p.31)

**Connecting the Community**

Compulsory voting ‘connects’ the wider community equalising the electorate through near universal representation at the polls. Democracy is as a governance system where “every citizen participates in the political process that shapes society’s fate and, through it, his or her own” (Moon, 2004, p.4). By legally enforcing citizens to have their say, Australian democracy is upheld by a diversity of voices who consequently earn political response and representation. Australians are confronted to consider their political interest, persuading “all citizens – even the least motivated among them, to be informed and voice their opinion” (Lacroix, 2007, p.193). Ultimately, compulsory voting forces Australian parliaments to safeguard the concerns of the whole community, and in turn wards off ‘extreme’ political agendas dictating the course of the nation (Healy and Warden, 1995).

The Australian electoral system embodies a ‘social leveler,’ all groups of society at the polls counteract the political advantage of the privileged few. It is perceived as a ‘complex raft’, which removes “obstacles normally experienced by abstainers in voluntary systems…so that every Australian – regardless of circumstance, restrictions and contingent status, is entitled to vote” (Hill, 2001, p.29). Those who would not ‘normally’ vote in a voluntary system are ‘coerced’ to express their equal voice. ‘Typical abstainers’ are concentrated in the less privileged cohorts of society: the poor, the uneducated, the young, and the ethnic minorities (Lijphart, 1997). Additionally, for naturalised immigrants compulsory voting is “a symbol of the integration of new arrivals into the Australian way” (Frankel, 2005, n.p). Compulsion contributes to equality, connecting all aspects of the community, despite circumstance, through political voice.
A ‘Civic Duty’

Compulsory voting classifies universal suffrage as not merely an equal right, but as a civic duty responsible to the political community. The ‘duty’ to vote has transformed from a philosophical question, to an icon “ingrained in our political tradition” (Georgiou, 1996, p.6). Legal sanctions have generated cultural values; the 2005 *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* concludes that Australians place the greatest emphasis on the duty to vote as a mark of citizenship. Since its conception, mandatory franchise has nurtured feelings of responsibility among the populace. In 1911 Senator Bill Payne upheld that “in a country like Australia, where we recognise that every man and woman should have the right to vote, that right becomes more than a privilege – it becomes a duty” (p.1179).

A legal duty to attend the polls is often rejected as a severe contradiction of individual liberty. Yet, a minor burden on autonomy can serve the wider community. As philosopher John Stuart Mill (1861) stated:

> “His vote is not a thing in which he has an option… It is strictly a matter of duty; he is bound to give it according to his best and most conscientious opinion of the public good” (p.121).

Mill’s ideal suggests the duty of voting sustains the ‘good’ of a democratic, and just, society. Article 29 of the United Nation’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* upholds that freedoms are subject to “duties to the community,” that maintain the welfare of democratic society. Arguably, compulsory voting creates social ‘norms,’ ensuring “the civic responsibility of all Australians, to actively shape and participate in democracy, is met” (Gauja, Gelber & Vromen, 2009, p.114).

Lastly, voting can be seen as parallel to other duties, society requires of its citizens (Phillips, 2001, p.13). As citizens pay taxes, serve on juries and attend school, compulsory voting is perceived as another responsibility of the polity.
Turnout and Legitimacy

A significant function of compulsory voting is the ability to maximise voter turnout, which, in turn, mirrors the ‘will of the people’ (Lijphart, 1997). As an average of 95 per cent of enrolled voters ‘turnout’ in federal elections, results reflect a great majority and variety of the electorate. Following the implementation of compulsory voting in 1925, federal election turnout rose from 58.7 to 91.3 per cent of enrolled Australians (Mackerras and McAllister, 1999). Similarly, in 1939 Western Australia’s State Election saw 90.1 per cent turnout, compared to 70.1 per cent at the previous ballot (Hughes & Graham, 1968).

Graph 1: Turnout in Federal and State Elections: Before and After Compulsory Voting

High turnout has remained a feature federal and state elections, and acts as an important indicator of the health of Australian democracy (Lundell, 2012). In the 2007 and 2010 federal elections, electoral turnout ranged from 94.97 and 93.52 per cent, respectively. Conversely, in 2005 89.84 per cent of enrolled Western Australians participated in predicting the future of the Legislative Assembly, and 90.1 per cent of the Legislative Council (WAEC, 2005).

Whilst in the 2008 State Election, 86.55 per cent participated in the Legislative Council ballot and 86.48 per cent for the Legislative Assembly (Western Australian Electoral Commission, 2008, p.8).

Political systems that attract high levels of participation are perceived as more legitimate and representative of the electorate (McAllister, 1999). Arguably, without compulsory voting “Australian democracy would likely be experiencing the same crisis of citizenship experienced in most other advanced democracies,” where low, and often unequal, turnout...
predicts governance (Louth and Hill, 2005, p.30). Thus, it appears the pivotal justification for compelling the electorate to the polls is the guarantee of a government ‘representative’ of a wider political preference.
Sections Two: Forgotten Values in the First World

The United Kingdom

As compulsion safeguards Australia from suffering the same fate as modern democracies, the United Kingdom is continually experiencing low turnout. Whilst other democracies experienced downturn from the 1980s, the British population stopped attending the polls a decade later. In 1992, 77 per cent of the U.K electorate had their say, down to 71 per cent in 1997, and by 2001 this number substantially dropped to 59.6 per cent (International IDEA, 2002, p.154). The 2001 and 2005 (61 per cent) General elections produced the lowest turnout since 1918: the first year of universal franchise and a few months after the atrocity of World War One (Straw, 2006). In 2010, the result was a little less bleak, as 65 per cent of the constituency pledged their political voice. Yet, a slight increase fails to camouflage an increasing inequality between the groups that choose to turn out, suggesting that “certain parts of the electorate do not feel they have a stake in democracy” (Keaney & Rogers, 2006, p.10).

Graph 2: Turnout in British General Elections (1983-2010)

The explanation for the growing disdain of the British populace for their political system is complex, largely credited to a transformation of culture. There is a common misconception “that people are retreating from politics…rather than…more accurately, retreating from conventional politics” (Sloan, 2007, p.552). A general process of individualisation of culture has contributed to less ‘faith’ in the capacity of the State. ‘Apathy’ is widespread, culminating in the absence of a duty to participate. The British Social Attitudes Survey reveals that in 2010 17.84 per cent of the U.K felt there was no ‘value’ in their vote, doubling from 8.4 per cent in 1991 (Park & Clery, 2010). The Audit of Political Engagement 2010
exposes that whilst three quarters of the public still uphold a ‘duty’ to vote; only 54 per cent are certain to practice this privilege (Hansard Society, 2010, p.75). General trends of disengagement are evident, yet actual motivations are more contextual. Increasing apathy is concerning, as “only through dialogue and participation... are societal goals are defined and achieved in a democracy” (Kolovos, 2005, p.2).

**Demographics of Disengagement**

**Socioeconomic Status**

The recent phenomenon of low turnout in British General elections is largely contextual; certain group are devaluing their vote more than others. Historian, Barrington Moore exemplified elections as an instrument of “the poor and the many against the rich and the few” (in Sharpio, 1999, p.30). Yet, recently the more privileged the citizen the more likely they will project their political voice. Seemingly in the U.K, ‘non-voting’ marginalises already vulnerable social groups (Hill, 2001).

Electoral participation is significantly dependent on socioeconomic circumstance, “people with high socioeconomic status are more likely to turn out than those with low status” (Heath, 2005, p.499). This notion is evident in recent statistical evidence, between 1960 and 2005 the difference in turnout between top and bottom quartile of earners rose from 7 per cent to 13 per cent (Keany and Rogers, 2006). Undeniably, the power of the middle class has risen in modern democracies, acquiring a new majority. Yet, “those left behind by the new affluence… lost their access to political power” (Pattie & Johnston, 2007, p.257).

Demography of electorates largely affects turnout, poor inner city constituencies continually produce low numbers at the polls. In 2005, the lowest turnout was practiced by Liverpool Riverside and Manchester Central, according to the *Index of Multiple Deprivation* the poorest and second-poorest areas in the U.K at the time (in Keaney & Rogers, 2006, p.15). These inequalities are further exaggerated in the 2010 election, 44 per cent offered political voice from inner city Manchester Central while 77 per cent voted in the affluent and rural, East Renfrewshire (Electoral Commission, 2010, p.48). Ultimately, turnout is disproportionately low among those who would gain the most from representation (Black, 1991).
Youth

The highest determiner of political participation is not socioeconomic status, but age. The British youth are increasingly reframing from practicing their voice. *The Audit of Political Engagement* (2012) states “older age groups are more likely to be engaged than younger people; they are more interested in politics…[and] are more likely to vote” (p.30). The apathy and alienation of youth is established in turnout, in 2005 37 per cent of young people voted, compared to 75 per cent of the British over 65 (Electoral Commission, 2005). Furthermore, in 2010 66 per cent of 18-24 year olds abstained, while 73 per cent of 55-64 year olds voted (Ipsos MORI, 2010). Generational replacement of voters is depleting, younger people are less likely to ‘develop’ into a habitual voter as they have in the past. Thus, the ‘life cycle’ theory is in jeopardy, those unlikely to vote in their first few elections sustain disengagement for life (Franklin, Lyons & Marsh, 2004, p.115).

The disengagement and disillusionment of the U.K’s youth is expressed through alteration in culture, voting becomes irrelevant to their political identities. The 2006 *Power Commission* report on political participation in Britain reveals that “young people may…feel more comfortable using pressure rather than electoral activity,” they are more likely to advocate non-government organisations than political parties (p.59). Conventional politics are increasingly irrelevant to many youth: “politics is something that is done to them, not something they can influence” (Sloan, 2007, p.550). Alienation from the political process feeds a vicious cycle; as youth are less likely to vote, politicians are less likely to represent their issues, in turn attracting less voters from young people in the future.

Lost Values

The low sense of duty and efficacy of youth contributes to their devaluation of the vote. In 2005 Lord Privy Seal, Geoff Hoon called for compulsory voting in Britain, stating “as the older, more regular voters die, we will be left with a significant number of people for whom voting is neither a habit, nor a duty” (in Bennet, 2005, p.15). Seemingly, unless youth are socialised into habitual voting, their turnout levels will continually drop. In 1998, 36 per cent believed they had a duty to vote, in 2003 less than one third held this same value (Keaney & Rogers, 2006, p.18).

Socioeconomic status contributes to disillusionment; those young and poverty stricken are least likely to believe in the power of their political voice. A 2004 *Young People’s Social Attitudes Survey* reveals that older working class people tend to believe in their duty to vote
but do not believe they have power to change politics (Park et al, 2004). Whilst young wealthy voters are more likely to believe they have influence, yet possess no duty. Ultimately, the report upholds that the young and poor are most disengaged: youth from underprivileged families possess little belief in their affect on politics, and feel no obligation to have their say (Park et al, 2004).

The British government has attempted to reinforce electoral values and reengage their youth population, yet progress is sceptical. In 2002, Parliament introduced statutory citizenship education in the English National Curriculum, and the electoral process has been modernised to ease involvement, yet turnout remains proportionally low (Macfarlane, 2005). A 2011 Nottingham Trent University survey of British 18 year olds reveals they have vast political interest, yet majority feel disempowered by traditional institutions (Henn & Foard, 2011, p.54). Lowered sense of power, engagement and duty are disconnecting British youth from their representative government. However, youth disengagement is not entirely dependent on their changing culture, but evidently is affected by an ongoing “failure to engage with young people and with the issues that affect and concern them” (O’Toole et al, 2003, p.563).
The United States

American political culture is exemplified by notions of liberty and freedom; however, electoral participation is continually low. In the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville commended the American system of universal suffrage, “neither party can reasonably pretend majority is never doubtful, because neither party can reasonably pretend to represent the portion of the community which has not voted” (p.174). Ironically, high levels of participation do not occur in the United States. Since 1900 no more than two thirds of the electorate have turned out (Kornbluh, 1999, p.xi). In 1996, the Clinton administration rested on a turnout of 49 per cent of the voting age population, and in 2000 the Bush presidency was determined by 51.3 per cent (MacDonald, 2012). Whilst the 2004 election drew a higher 55.4 per cent and Barack Obama’s presidency attracted 56.9 per cent of the voting age population. These two elections were underpinned by highly charged and polarised campaigns, and not necessarily an alteration in political culture (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Ultimately, the phenomenon of ‘nonvoting’ “sheds a strange light on American democracy because it points out a profound contradiction between theory and practice” (Shattschneider, 1960, p.102).

Graph 3: Turnout in American Presidential Elections (1988-2010)

The ‘value’ of the vote in America is a product of unique political culture, an emphasis on individual autonomy rather than civic duty. Political participation is culturally relative: “it matters whether one is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, interested in politics or not; but none of these things matters nearly as much as whether one is an Australian or an American” (Franklin, 2002, p.150). Nonetheless, similar to other modern democracies America has undergone a transformation of the ‘meaning’ of citizenship, “away from elections and party activity that are seen as institutionalised expressions of citizens duty, and toward individualised and direct forms of action” (Dalton, 2006, p.7). There is no obligation to
exercise the right to vote, only through socialisation is its value realised. A 2006 Pew Research Survey reveals that 88 per cent of habitual voters express civic duty, compared to 60 per cent of non-voters (n.p). Yet, nonparticipation does not equate contentment; three quarters of non voters are dissatisfied with their government (Pew Research, 2006). Strong sense of civic duty among voters aids in the polarisation of American voices, despite their discontent “if some citizens are invisible, one cannot respond to them” (Verba, 1996, p.1).

**Demographics of Disengagement**

**Socioeconomic Status**

Political participation in America is highly dependent on socioeconomic status; the most wealthy and educated of the constituency have a higher propensity to exercise their electoral rights (Lanning, 2008). Arguably “those who suffer most from current policies have the most to gain from change and should therefore be most likely to vote” (Lanning, 2008, p.433). Yet, as institutions represent the ‘privileged’ voter, they are less likely to attract the support of the underprivileged, ensuing a cycle of disconnection.

In the American political sphere, economic circumstance is a pivotal determiner of an individual’s propensity to vote. According to the U.S Census Bureau, in the 2004 presidential election 58.4 per cent of citizens earning $30,000 voted, compared to 81.3 per cent of those obtaining an income of $100,000 or more (p.4). Similarly in 2008, 76 per cent of voters earning a median income of $50,000 or more voted, whilst 59 per cent of American earning less attended the polls. In comparison those who accumulate $100,000 and over represent 16 per cent of the population, yet were 26 per cent of voters (Non-profit Voter Engagement Network, 2008, p.1). In this context “low turnout creates a bias in favour of the upper classes who are more likely to vote and, consequently, be represented” (Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2009, p.1319).

The power of education transfers into political voice, knowledge “not only tends to imbue persons with a sense of citizen duty, it also propels them into political activity” (Key, 1958, p.5). In 2008, 54.9 per cent of Americans with a secondary diploma voted in comparison to 77 per cent of those with a bachelor degree. Whilst a mere 39.4 per cent of Americans with less than a high school degree voted (File& Chrissy, 2008, p.4). Evidently, interest in political outcomes, political efficacy and civic duty are strongly connected to level of education (Lewis-Beck et al, 2008). Nevertheless, as America becomes an increasingly
educated nation, higher turnout should eventuate, this has not occurred. In turn, inequality of participation fosters “the suppression of the options and alternatives that reflect the needs of the nonparticipant” (Schattschneider, 1960, p.102).

**Ethnic Minorities**

Racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately under-represented in voting; social cleavages exacerbate the electoral inequality of some groups. The reality that ethnic minorities are often economically marginalised emphasises their misrepresentation (Piven, 1979). African Americans are over represented in the lowest income quartile in the U.S, whilst Latino citizens are proportionally undereducated (Schmidt et al, 2009, p.161). Thus, the disconnection of ethnic minorities from the electoral system must be analysed in a wider socioeconomic lens, race is not the only factor.

African Americans are the most politically energised of racial minorities in the United States, yet continually turnout at slightly lower rates than their white counterparts. In the 2004 Presidential Election, 60.3 per cent of African Americans voted, compared to 67.2 per cent of white Americans. Whilst the 2008 election successfully mobilised the ‘black vote,’ turnout increased to 65.2 per cent compared to 66.1 per cent of white Americans (Lopez & Taylor, 2009). Notably, the election of President Barak Obama saw the highest turnout of African American women compared to all other racial and gender groups, at 68.8 per cent (Lopez & Taylor, 2009). Arguably there is “incentive for political parties to concentrate mobilisation efforts on their most reliable and predictable voters,” the overwhelming propensity for African Americans to vote Democrat is a factor in their significant political turnout (Junn &v Haynie, 2008, p.17).

Latino and Asian Americans are underrepresented at the polls; in turn their political empowerment is under expressed. Political empowerment is exemplified as “the extent...a group has achieved significant representation and influence in political decision making” (Bobo and Jilliam, 1990, p.378). In 2004, 47.2 per cent of Latino Americans voted in the election, increasing to 49.9 in 2008. However, increasingly lower are Asian Americans with 44.6 per cent participating in 2004, and 47 per cent in the 2008 election. These numbers are further decreased in mid-term Congressional elections, with 31 per cent of both Asian and Latino Americans voting (Lopez & Taylor, 2009). Race is not the overriding determiner of voter participation in America. Yet, the reality that participation among certain ethnic
minorities is disproportionately low suggests that particular aspects of the community are disconnected, and underrepresented, through political voice.

**Youth**

Youth in the United States reflects electoral realities of several modern democracies; an alteration of civic culture revealing that younger voters are less politically engaged. Former U.S Senator, John Glenn remarked that “many young people...feel apathetic...and cynical about anything having to do with politics. They don’t want to touch it” (in Wattenberg 2002, p.87). The disengagement of youth may highlight an alteration in culture, where voting is less generationally relevant. A 2010 *Rock the Vote* national poll reveals that 47 per cent of youth believe “politicians don’t talk about issues that are important to” them (p.4). Whilst the Pew Research’s 2010 *Millennial Survey* illustrates that 60 per cent of Americans of Generation Y proclaim they will ‘always’ vote (born in the 1980s and 90s), compared to 91 per cent of Baby Boomers (p.81). Arguably, generational change is the cause, youth are less politically invigorated through voting, due to “changing attitude towards authorities... broader political participation, and more critical and less easily led publics” (Martin, 2012, p.5).

The disengagement of youth from their electoral capacity is evident in turnout rates in the United States. Young people are not entirely invisible from the electoral process, yet, “the degree of volatility...in voting patterns means that in some elections young people are markedly absent” (Martin, 2012, p.135). Between 1972 and 2000 the participation of youth decreased faster than any other demographic by 13 percentage points (Lopez & Donovan, 2002, p.1). Similar to other demographics, the significance of the 2004 and 2008 election drew in higher numbers of youth 49 and 51 per cent. Nonetheless, the educationally privileged are disproportionately represented at the polls, in 2008 62.1 per cent of college youths voted, compared to 35.9 per cent of young Americans not in tertiary education (Nover et al, 2010, p.1). Overall, in 2008 youth made up one fifth the voting eligible population, yet are seemingly disconnected from their representative capacity in turnout (Marcelo, 2008, p.ii).

**Lost Values**

The decreasing participation of youth in the American electorate suggests that voting practice may no longer fit a ‘life-cycle’ phenomenon. A ‘generational’ change of culture may spark an occurrence where nonvoting transforms into the norm, despite the age of the citizen. Putnam
(2001) suggests “declining electoral participation is...the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life” (p.35). Thus, similar to the British context, American youth are increasingly forging political identities disconnected from partisan, electoral expression. Reflective of the challenge is the need to reengage youth into the conventional electoral process, as “politics is literally the personnel system for democracy” (Glenn, 1998, n.p).
Section Three: A Disengaged Australia

Disengaged Citizens?

Compulsory voting ensures a large majority of Australians attend the polls, and in turn confront their political preference; a deeper analysis of political engagement is less conclusive. In 1921, Edith Cowan hoped that compulsory voting would ensure Western Australian citizens would “value their votes,” an educative effect sustaining political interest and knowledge (Phillips, 2008, p.91). However, whilst compulsory voting ensures that the Australian community is connected through representation, it does not guarantee they are universally engaged with their political system. Voluntary advocates stress that mandatory voting may lead to “distaste for politics and an antipathetic attitude towards political and civic participation” (Lundell, 2012, p.222). Nonetheless, wide support for the institution, suggests that it is not the cause of strains of antipathy and alienation among the populace. Despite a phenomenon of a universal participation norm, not all Australians are projecting their political voice at the polls (Hill, 2006).

Electoral participation is not guaranteed for an Australian invisible from the process, situations of non-enrolment disconnect citizens from their duty to vote. As of July 2012, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) estimates that there are 1.5 million citizens who are not on the federal electoral roll, under-enrolled and uncompelled to participate (AEC, 2012). The Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) concurs that the State level is reflective of national trends, with 225,000 citizens missing from the roll (WAEC, 2012). Conclusively, these statistics suggest that 10 per cent of citizens are detached from Australian representative governments (AEC, 2012). Western Australian Electoral Commissioner, Warwick Gately states that “whilst an electoral event such as the 2013 State General Election will stimulate enrolment, it will not significantly reduce this number” (WAEC, 2012, p.3). In its current state, the phenomenon of non-enrollment appears immovable, stagnant by citizens apathetic to their vote.

The phenomenon of informal voting can highlight possible apathy among citizens, yet the extent that informality projects alienation or confusion is less conclusive. Federal Senator Nick Minchin (Lib) remarked that “the rising informal vote suggests that there are thousands of Australians who do not want to vote but are forced to” (in Dobson, 2005, n.p). In the 2010 Federal Election, 5.55 per cent of House of Representatives votes were informal, whilst 3.75 per cent of votes in the Senate were invalid (AEC, 2012). Similarly, in the 2008 State General
Election 5.32 per cent of Legislative Assembly, and 2.83 per cent of Legislative Council, votes were invalid (WAEC, 2012). Whilst informal ‘blank’ ballots are reflective of apathetic voters, disinterested in the outcome, the most common invalid votes are pledged incorrectly. Overall, ballots that only specify a number one preference represent the highest proportion of informality (Hill, 2011). In the 2008 State General Election, 32.66 per cent of informal votes in the Legislative Assembly were caused by voters only marking one preference (WAEC, 2009). Thus, the fact that 19,998 voices were unheard due to incorrect voting procedure highlights a conundrum; electors purposely pledged a null vote or were ignorant of the preferential voting system (WAEC, 2009). Ultimately, the phenomenon of invalid voting suggests a challenge of modern Australian democracy: to re-engage the apathetic, and educate the mistaken, voter.

‘Apathetic’ Youth

Australian youth are reflecting international trends through disengagement and disconnection from electoral participation. Youth exemplify “an increasingly larger segment of citizens ...electing, through electoral and non-electoral means, to stay out of politics altogether” (Hill, 2011, p.921). Whilst compulsion ensures more youth will eventually enrol and vote, it cannot construct the inevitability that they will ‘value’ that act. Furthermore, the conundrum of under-enrolment is concentrated among Australian youth. According to the AEC, in June 2012 73.3 per cent of 18 to 25 year olds were enrolled to vote, well below the national average (AEC, 2012). Whilst in Western Australia, ten per cent of all citizens are missing from the State electoral roll; over half are 18 to 19 year olds (Gately, 2012). Evidently, coinciding an election enrolment would increase. Yet, federally only 80.6 per cent of 20 to 24 year olds are enrolled, despite the fact that majority of this demographic were eligible to participate in the 2010 Federal Election (AEC, 2012). Ultimately, such statistics suggest Australian youth are increasingly apathetic of their duty to vote, and whilst many youth may possess strong political convictions, “by not being engaged through formalised activities… they have little ability to influence or change political decisions” (Print, 2007, p.327).

The apathy of Australian youth towards their electoral voice is the product of a transformation of political, and cultural, identity. Ultimately, “for some young adults, compulsory voting acts as a rite of passage into politics” (Beresford & Phillips, 1997, p.12). Yet, for others traditional participation does not connect with their distinctive culture. A 2012 Lowy Institute Poll reveals that only 39 per cent of young people prefer democracy as
the best political system, insinuating that it is not reflecting the needs of youth (in Callik, 2012). Arguably, increasingly centrist political agendas are disconnected from young people who advocate single-issue interest. Thus, the episodic nature of political affiliation is “driven by the immediacy mantra of this generation” instead of long-term commitment (Print, 2007, p.327). Rather than all youth perceiving politics as completely irrelevant, several are disconnected from it in its ‘conventional’ form, advocating ‘issue’ by ‘issue,’ rather than committing to a political party at the ballot box (Print, 2007).

Youth disengagement from the political sphere can be attributed to lack of political efficacy and knowledge, misunderstanding of the system fosters disempowerment. In 1997, former Federal Minister for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Dr David Kempt stated “young Australians must gain a sound knowledge of the evolution of our pioneering democracy, if its success and vigour is to survive” (in Clark, 2008, p.26). A 2007 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) Inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education reveals that Australians between the ages of 15 and 35 possess little civic literacy: knowledge of political systems, history and interest in their importance (JSCEM, 2007, p.iii). Similarly, a 2004 Youth Electoral Study of Australian schools illustrated that students did not feel knowledgeable enough to make decisions about political and electoral matters. Youth “felt excluded from a political realm where they language was verbose and complex, and where they did not understand enough to…form opinions” (Edwards, 2006, p.21). Today, civics education is not a core scholarly subject and, consequently, there is no guarantee that young Australians will understand the importance of their place in democracy (Kennedy, 2008, p.58). A lack of knowledge breeds perceptions of political incompetence because individuals “are less likely to see this system as responsible and therefore less likely to give it their support” (McAllister, 1998, p.27). Without ample knowledge of an electoral system they are legally bound to attend, young Australians may become apathetic to the process.

Youth are experiencing a transformation of citizenship, as industrial democracies transcend from political notions of duty to individualistic ideas of belonging. Citizens who vote do not do so primarily through rational consideration, “but because of a less rational and more emotive belief that it is their duty to vote” (Edwards, 2006, p.4). Yet, despite compulsory voting, Australian youth are less bound to these feelings of duty. The Youth Electoral Study reveals that young people without compulsion have “no sense of voting as a duty, right or valuable exercise” (Edwards, 2006, p.26). The analysis reveals that in Australia, young people equate enrolment and voting as a ‘law,’ rather than a privilege and obligation of
belonging to the democratic community. Among students who said they would vote under the current system, 36.8 per cent said they would probably still vote without laws, whilst 12.4 per cent said they were not inclined to vote among a voluntary structure (Print, Saha & Edwards, 2004). Australian youth are conceptualising suffrage “in the light of ‘crime and punishment’ rather than in terms of … a democratic good or a valuable right” (Edwards, 2006, p.26). The challenge appears to reengage young people with the ideal of voting as an expression of political voice, not merely a legal sanction enforced on the citizen.

**Minorities**

**Indigenous Australians**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders express their political voice less often than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Ultimately, “formal equality in electoral terms has not translated into equal electoral participation for Aboriginal citizens” (Hill & Alport, 2010, p.242). Whilst ethnicity is not recorded on the electoral roll, low levels of voting among electorates with high proportions of indigenous citizens, suggests they are under-represented. In 2012, the Australian Electoral Commission estimates that less than 50 per cent of Aboriginal people are on the federal electoral roll (AEC, 2012). Disengagement is further exemplified by enrolled Aboriginal people that do not turn out. Whilst they do not represent the whole electorates, in the 2007 Federal Election lower turnouts were exemplified in electorates of higher Aboriginal populations, Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, and Lingiari and Solomon (Northern Territory), with 84.6 per cent and 86.5 per cent turnout respectively (JSEM, 2008).

In State elections the picture is similarly concerning, in 2008 the electorates of the Kimberley and the Pilbara produced turnouts of 62 per cent and 69.2 per cent (WAEC, 2008). The Kimberley is a region of where nearly half the population is Indigenous, and consists of nearly one quarter of WA’s unique Aboriginal population (Department of Indigenous Affairs, 2010). Thus, the under-enrollment and under participation of Indigenous Australians in regional areas suggests they are under-represented in democracy (AEC, 2012).

There is no one reason why Indigenous Australians are disproportionately under-represented at the polls. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) suggests that the boundaries between Indigenous Australians and electoral participation include “literacy and numeracy levels, cultural activities, school retention rates, health and social conditions, transience and remoteness” (n.p). Thus, socioeconomic factors hold negative effect on the likelihood of an
Indigenous citizen’s choice to vote. Political empowerment is considerably low in regional communities, “non-voting is a function… borne of the rational calculation that the Aboriginal vote is not general decisive at election time” (Hill & Alport, 2010, p.245). Consequently, low levels of efficacy are combined with ‘salience,’ how visible and meaningful an election is to the voters. For many Aboriginal people living in remote communities, voting is irrelevant to their daily and cultural life, exacerbating an existence “outside mainstream civic life” (Hill & Alport, 2007, p.6).

Immigrant Citizens

Australia is a widely multicultural nation; compulsory voting ensures vast projection of ethnic voices at the polls. For new citizens, mandatory voting prompts them “to acquire a political voice and to have their needs and demands adequately addressed, two cornerstones of democracy” (Bilodeau et al, 2010, p.142). Nonetheless, a complex electoral process such as Australia’s can have a detrimental impact on citizens from non English speaking backgrounds (McAllister & Makkai, 1993). Three quarters of informal votes at any election are believed to be unintentional through filling the ballot out incorrectly (Hill, 2011). Proportionally high levels of informality are concentrated in disadvantaged electorates of elevated immigrant populations; the 2004 Federal Election experienced an average informal level of 5.2 per cent, whilst the Western Sydney electorate of Greenway produced almost 12 per cent, an electorate with high levels of citizens from non-English speaking backgrounds (Sawer et al, 2008, p.119). Whilst previous electoral studies “suggest that immigrants participate at least as much as the native born,” the phenomenon of informality reveals that some ethnic votes are discounted (Bean, 2012, p.117). Furthermore, as 50 per cent of immigrants come from contexts of non-democratic regimes, the transition into an unfamiliar democratic system is imperative.

Whilst the conundrum of informal voting disproportionately affects immigrant citizens, their concepts of democracy, efficacy and civic duty correlate with the wider population. Supposedly, people socialised under authoritarian rule may have an altering view of the democratic political system. The 2007 Australian Electoral Study reveals that 74 per cent of native born Australians believe they would vote if it was not compulsory, whilst 65 per cent of citizens born overseas from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) acclaimed the same notion (Bilodeau et al, 2010). Furthermore, it appears that in the context of compulsory voting, immigrants express equal levels of political empowerment, with 30 per cent of
Australian born citizens trust that their “vote can make a big difference,” whilst 36 per cent of overseas born from NESB believe the same notion (Bilodeau et al, 2010). It appears that in this context, democratic apathy is not the problem; rather misunderstanding of a complex electoral system is restricting the ‘value’ of the non-English speaking citizen’s vote materialising.
Section Four: The Role of Civics and Citizenship Education

School Curriculum

The disengagement of many young Australians from the ‘value’ of their vote, and their place in democracy can be attributed to a deficit in civic education. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (2007) suggests “a healthy democracy needs citizens who are informed and who are involved and engaged in the issues that are important to them” (p.4-5). Political knowledge largely evolves from primary and secondary schooling; experiences that shape empowered and informed young citizens feel about their place in democracy. Formal, and consistent, teaching of civics and citizenship education has not existed in Australian curriculums since the 1950s (Mellor, 2007). Whilst federal and state legislation has established the importance of civics and citizenship education, it has not been consistently implemented in all schools, not all Australian children have received the same insight into their democracy.

The foundations have been laid for an improvement shaping informed and empowered citizens in Australian schools, yet it appears a generation may have been ‘left behind’. In 1995, Prime Minister Paul Keating proclaimed the need to “help young Australians to realise their civic potential, and enable them to participate full in the political life of the nation”. The next year, the Liberal and National coalition adopted the Discovering Democracy program, which included primary and secondary resources for Australian schools (McAllister, 1998). Despite these early implementations the political knowledge of young Australians was lacking. In 2001 the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Civic Education Study compared the civic knowledge of Australian pupils to the students of 28 countries, revealing that “only half of the Australian students [had] a grasp of the essential pre-conditions for a properly working democracy” (JSCEM, 200, p.27). Similarly, in 2004 the National Assessment of Civics and Citizenship Study of Year 6 and Year 10 students illustrated a ‘civic deficit’ among Australian children. This study revealed young Australians were “unable to deal with strategies that refer to how individuals can influence civic institutions for the benefit of societies .They didn’t understand it... or couldn’t see how they could exercise it” (Mellor, 2007,p.3). Prior to 2004, civics and citizenship education was not a core priority of Australian curriculums, and whilst alterations are eventuating, it is concerning that a generation may have accumulated little knowledge about their political system.
The implementation of an *Australian Curriculum* has prioritised civics and citizenship education as an objective in the education of future Australians. In 2008 the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* brought together State and Federal education ministers in agreement about the goals of national curriculum. The Second Goal of the *Declaration* aims to produce citizens who “are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate full in Australia’s civic life” (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). The Third Phase of the *Australian Curriculum*, when implemented, includes a focus on civics and citizenship education (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012).

Whilst the establishment of civics and citizenship as a core in the school curriculum is imperative, the focus should not merely be on ‘mechanic’ teaching of facts, rather an ‘active’ and engaging approach that will invigorate young citizens (French, 2007). As the new generation of children will have greater overall access to notions of civic engagement, the fate of the already disengaged young adults over 18 is less concrete.

**The Electoral Commission**

*Connecting Youth*

Federally and at the State level, electoral commissions hold an imperative role in educating citizens about their electoral responsibility and privilege. A pivotal goal of the Western Australian Electoral Commission is to “conduct effective education programs for primary and secondary schools and for the general public, recognising the diversity and geographical habitation of electors” (WAEC, 2010). The Electoral Education Centre exists to connect students and the wider community with their democracy. Additionally, the *Joint School Civics Education Program (Democracy in Action)* involved 7520 students at the Constitutional Centre of Western Australian in 2012 (WAEC, 2012). Nationally the Australian Electoral Commission promotes education resources to teachers through their *Democracy Rules* program, and *Get Voting* implications for school elections (AEC, 2012). Furthermore, the WA Civics and Citizenship Competition is a state-wide contest that engages “secondary school students in investigating and reporting on various aspects of democracy and Australia’s electoral systems” (AEC, 2012). Thus, in the Australian context, the Electoral Commission occupies an important, bipartisan, role in connecting young citizens with the value of their vote. Nonetheless, the disengagement of strains of youth from
their democracy questions the effectiveness of these programs for young people disconnected from the message.

_Closing the Gap: Indigenous Australians_

This year marks the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the right to vote for Indigenous Australians. As apart of reconciliation initiatives, several developments have eventuated to aid in making this universal privilege a wider reality at the polls. In conjunction with the Federal ‘Closing the Gap’ initiative, the Australian Electoral Commission established the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program (IEPP), to increase the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about the electoral system, and encourage their enrolment and engagement (AEC, 2012). The initiative works closely with WAEC’s _Reconciliation Action Plan_ to encourage enrolment, voting, and education close to remote Aboriginal communities. The cultural relevance of the program is imperative, utilising Indigenous field workers in local communities close to the land to conduct research and promote participation (WAEC, 2011). The AEC believes that the outreach program is already improving engagement of Indigenous Australians, increasing the integrity of the roll, whilst employing more Aboriginal staff to liaise closely with regional communities (AEC, 2012). Nonetheless, the overall success of these initiatives must be conclusively assessed among the participation of regional communities in the upcoming elections.

_Removal of Barriers of Culture and Language_

The cultural fabric of Australian society is constantly changing, and it is imperative new citizens are equipped to participate in their democracy. The Australian Electoral Commission utilises services to break down barriers of language and ethnicity, by producing electoral information in other languages, offering telephone translators and advertising electoral information through ethnic media (AEC, 2012). Whilst these initiatives are vital, further education for new citizens is equally as important. The Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment (2006) suggests “some migrant citizens…come from countries where there is no real democracy, language barriers may prevent acquisition of knowledge” (p.117). For some new citizens, the Australian election is their first experience of democracy. The Adult Migrant English Program offers a non-compulsory _Let’s Participate_ initiative to educate new citizens about Australian democracy and electoral participation (JSCEM, 2006). Arguably, whilst a compulsory citizenship test assesses immigrants’
knowledge of Australian institutions, greater effort could be made to engage new Australians with the importance of participation in a civic life.

**Automatic Enrolment**

In 2009 the New South Wales Parliament established legislation to automatically enrol citizens through access to government information that established they were citizens of voting age, yet remained hidden from the process. Additionally, the NSW Electoral Commission was granted power to change address information through access to similar information (NSW Electoral Commission, 2012). In 2010, the Victorian Parliament passed similar legislation allowing Commissioner’s provisions to automatically enrol those invisible from the electoral process. Both the NSW and VIC legislation allow for provisional voting on the day of elections, enrolling those missing from the roll and ensuring their vote counts. The latter provision has already proved successful, with 21,000 elector in NSW, and 30,000 in the Victoria, enrolling and voting on the day of their last State elections (NSWEC 2011, VEC, 2010).

Federally, changes have been made to increase the participation of all Australians in their electoral process. This year the passing of the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Maintaining Address) Bill 2011* amended the *Electoral Act* allowing the Commission to update enrolled addresses based on changes in other government agencies (AEC, 2012). Whilst the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Protecting Elector Participation) Bill 2012* was granted royal assent in July, and amends the *Electoral Act* and *Referendum Act* allowing the Electoral Commissioner to directly enrol citizens based on similar data (AEC, 2012). Arguably, such provisions will increase the integrity of the roll, ensuring a greater number of Australians practice their duty to attend the polls.

Federal provisions will also help the integrity of the Western Australian electoral roll, as under the *Joint Roll Arrangements*, the Australian Electoral Commission helps to maintain state electoral information (WAEC, 2012). Nonetheless, if similar provisions were implemented in Western Australia, it would add to an electoral roll that correctly reflected the citizens able to have their political ‘say.’
Section Four: Recommendations and Closing Remarks

Recommendations

Connecting the Disconnected: Automatic Enrolment

Recommendation One:

- It is recommended that Automatic Enrolment Legislation be considered by Western Australian Parliament. This would allow the WAEC to enrol those missing, and update information of citizens disconnected from the electoral process.

Re-engaging the Disengaged

Recommendation Two:

- It is recommended that a program to educate and empower all Australians of their democracy be widely implemented.

- Such an initiative should operate to reduce the apparent ‘civic knowledge deficit’ of many Australians. An emphasis on the complex mechanisms of the electoral system, including preferential voting is required. Whilst an overall coverage of the historical importance of electoral engagement will help re-engage citizens.

Cultural and Ethnic Considerations

Recommendation Three:

- Concerted efforts to remove barriers of Indigenous Australians in regional communities already implemented should be mirrored in metropolitan campaigns. These initiatives must be culturally sensitive, and focus on the engagement of Indigenous Australians irrespective of geographical location.

Recommendation Four:

- Ongoing efforts to educate new citizens of the Australian democratic context should be complimented by outreach programs close to ethnic communities, focusing on democracy and participation.
• An inquiry into citizenship test programs is recommended. For new citizens, a greater focus on civic engagement and involvement could be more beneficial than simply studying facts about Australian institutions.

Logging into Youth Culture

Recommendation Seven:

• An inquiry into the content of the civics and citizenship education in the Australian Curriculum is recommended, to ensure there is ample focus on engaging students with electoral participation.

Recommendation Eight:

• Effort should be made to connect the ‘lost generation’ of young adults who are excluded from the benefits of civics and citizenship education in the Australian Curriculum.

• It is imperative bipartisan campaigns targeting youth are culturally relevant. Whilst information on WAEC and AEC websites are extremely helpful to the youth actively looking for it, advertisement through social networking and television would be more effective as young people actively occupy these spaces.

Recommendation Nine:

• An inquiry into the possible effects of lowering the voting age to 16 or 17 years old should be considered. Such implementation may help connect young adults whilst they have the support of their school system to shape them into active citizens. Also, a ‘voluntary’ lowered voting age could aid the politically active youth to have their voices heard.
Closing Remarks

The phenomenon of compulsory voting has upheld an Australian democracy of relatively equal participation, connecting the national community through the ballot box. Ultimately “democracy can empower the individual and sustain the community only if its processes incorporate the participation of all those affected by it” (Moon et al, 2006, p.4). Emphasis on civic duty and political equality is ingrained in Australian political culture, largely due to laws that uphold voting as not merely a right, but a duty to be exercised by all citizens that benefit from society. Arguably, this legal sanction has ‘safeguarded’ Australian democracy from experiencing low, and unequal, participation reflected in the democracies of contemporary America and Britain.

Mandatory attendance at the polls may buffer further political isolation of certain demographics, yet it cannot ensure the engagement of all Australians. Philosopher, John Stuart Mill (1861) proclaimed “the rights and interest of every person are only secure from being disregarded when the person interested is himself able and habitually disposed to stand up for them” (p.22). Despite a legal requirement for participation, Australians are not universally engaged, empowered and convinced of the ‘value’ of their vote. For several Australian youth new ideals of civic culture has seen them disenchanted by the conventional processes, opting to instead avoid electoral participation altogether. Former Governor-General, Michael Jeffrey (2006) asserted “if we cannot find ways to spark their interest and involvement, we risk the consequences of more young Australians simply turning away” (n.p). Additionally, the disillusionment and disconnection of several Indigenous Australians from their electoral rights must be overcome to ensure increased representation. Whilst, for new Australians from diverse backgrounds education and engagement remains imperative to make their voices count.

Compulsory voting does not produce the perfect democracy, several components of society remain disengaged and apathetic to political representation that in the end they predict, and prove legitimate. Whilst mandatory attendance ensures vast numbers of Australians will show up on polling day to pledge their voice, the importance of that expression needs to be stressed. Australian poet, Les Murray described the act of voting as a ‘secular prayer’ where everyday citizens exert their supremacy in private (in Orr, 2011). It is imperative all future initiatives stress the ‘value’ of this action. As William Maloney (ALP) concluded in 1918, voting is “a sacred duty and democracy demands its performance” (p.7568).
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