Resilient Democracy for Resilient Communities

Conference Program

Introduction

Liberal democracy recognises and safeguards individual rights and freedoms. The operation of liberal democracy especially in multicultural societies like Australia is essential to ensure the same rights and freedoms for the people of different cultures, ethnicities, faiths and worldviews. In recent years, our democracy and communities are being challenged by natural disasters, pandemic and debates over policies. Populist ideologies and conspiracy theories spread distrust and misinformation testing the resilience of our democracy and its institutions. A stronger and resilient democracy leads to socially cohesive society resilient to such challenges.

This conference brings community representatives and key stakeholders together to improve our understanding of these challenges, provide critical perspectives on defending and strengthening social cohesion and our democracy, and promote collaborative networks. The conference will explore:

- How can communities strengthen democracy in an era of it being undermined or threatened?
- How can communities safeguard their resilience and capacity building through democracy?

Endorsement

Australia is celebrated as a beacon of multicultural success. This success primarily rests on the confidence Australians have in its democracy. The nature of Australian society and its democracy bring with it a number of needs and issues.

There is a need to ensure all parts of Australia unify in a socially cohesive way to ensure they function as a single society to prosper as a nation. At the same time, a large number of minority communities need to have a voice within the democratic spirit of Australian society. They need specific protections to ensure their voices are not drowned in the majority voice.

This is only possible if different segments of Australian society talk to one another in dialogue, and engage in social interactions to ensure there is intercultural understanding and acceptance. Only then, communities in Australia can build trusting relationships that would reinforce the resilience of democracy against forces that threaten it.

This conference is a step in the right direction to encourage such a dialogue and relationship building takes place.

Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp

Director

Centre for Islamci Studies and Civilisation

Charles Sturt University

Key Terms for the Conference

Capacity building: According to the Western Australian Department for Community Development (2006) community capacity building is about promoting the 'capacity' of local communities to develop, implement and sustain their own solutions to problems in a way that helps them shape and exercise control over their physical, social, economic and cultural environments.

Constitutional democracy: In a constitutional democracy, a constitution outlines who will represent the people and how. Australia is a constitutional democracy.

Deliberative democracy: According to Encyclopedia Britannica, deliberative democracy claims that citizens should arrive at political decisions through reason and the collection of competing arguments and viewpoints. Deliberative democracy shifts the emphasis from the outcome of the decision to the quality of the process.

Monitory democracy: According to Prof John Keane, the evolving form of democracy is monitory democracy in which the government is constantly monitored in its exercise of power by a vast array of public and private agencies, commissions and regulatory mechanisms. (See *Life and Death of Democracy* by John Keane, published by Simon and Schuster UK in 2009.)

Participatory democracy: The United Nations defines participatory democracy as a process emphasising the broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political systems. Participatory democracy tends to advocate more involved forms of citizen participation and greater political representation than a traditional representative democracy.

Populism: In his book *The Life and Death of Democracy*, Prof Keane defines populism as an auto-immune disease of democracy. Populism highly regards "the people," but the dangers rise because they refer to only one people, thus only one opinion. Populists are self-appointed as the only ones to know and understand this opinion and the only ones who can stand up for the needs of the people.

Resilient: In physics, resilience is the ability of an elastic material (such as rubber or animal tissue) to absorb energy (such as from a blow) and release that energy as it springs back to its original shape. The recovery that occurs in this phenomenon can be viewed as analogous to a person's ability to bounce back after a setback.

Resilient community: According to the Local Government Association (alga.com.au), "community resilience is the sustained ability of communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity." Accordingly, the infrastructure and capacity embedded in resilient communities provides consolidated effort for resistance and smooth recovery.

Resilient democracy: According to the National Democracy Institute (ndi.org), resilient democracies safeguard peace and prevent violence, especially in times of crisis. Resilience of a democracy is embedded in its capacity to manage conflict (through democratic means) and negotiate solutions to political and social disputes. Democratic recession (i.e. lacking peaceful democratic means) leads to fractured communities, political exclusion and violence.

Conference Program

Time	Item	Purpose	Approach
9.00 9.15	**Welcome**	*Welcome to the conference*	● Welcome to Country ● Welcome by the Conference Convenor Dr Derya Iner, Charles Sturt University ● Welcome by NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet Pia Van De Zandt, Director, Connected Communities
9.15 10.10	**Community stories**	*Understand community struggles, strengths and resilience*	**Indigenous communities** **Professor Sue Green**, Course Director Wiradjuri Language, Culture and Heritage **Jewish communities** **Darren Bark**, CEO, NSW Jewish Board of Deputies **Muslim communities** **Rita Markwell**, Advisor AMAN **Asian communities** **Benjamin Oh**, Co-founder of Asian Australian Alliance
10.10 10.30	**Break**		
10.30 11.20	**Vision for democracy** (Part I)	*Hear expert academic suggestions as to how we might strengthen our democracy*	**Academic Panel** **Prof Mark Evans**, The state of Australian democracy: 'Culture of contentment' or the 'end of complacency'? **Prof Tim Soutphommasane**, The intersection between human rights, disadvantaged communities and resilient democracy **Dr Peter Balint**, Learning democratic resilience: Public sphere responses to extremism

			Dr Derya Iner, Research-based community activism to save democracy from elitism and nativism
11.20 11.40	**Break**		
11.40 12.10	**Vision for democracy** (Part II)	*Question academic experts as to how we might strengthen our democracy*	Facilitated panel Q&A
12.10 12.30	**Democracy in action** (Part I)	*Share examples of democracy successfully building community resilience and serving their needs*	Small group activity to generate three examples that will be stuck to a wall for all to peruse during lunch
12.30 1.30	**Lunch**		
1.30 1.45	**Democracy in action** (Part II)	*Share examples of democracy successfully building community resilience and serving their needs*	**Iain Walker**, Democratic innovations and case studies
1.45 2.50	**Solutions from civil society** (Part I)	*Generate and test initial ideas for further strengthening democracy*	**Scott Lappan-Newton & newDemocracy**, Facilitation
2.50 3.10	**Break**		
3.10 4.20	**Solutions from civil society** (Part II)	*Refine and prioritise final ideas for further strengthening democracy*	**Scott Lappan-Newton & newDemocracy**, Facilitation
4.20 4.50	**Each playing our part**	*Understand how each stakeholder could help contribute to the top ideas for further strengthening democracy*	**Scott Lappan-Newton & newDemocracy**, Facilitation
4.50 5.00	**Concluding remarks and vote of thanks**		• **Prof Mark Evans,** Concluding remarks and vote of thanks • **Pia Van De Zandt,** Observations and thanks

Short Bios

Professor Sue Green

Yindyamarra Winhangahna

The presentation explores how Wiradyuri people are working to ensure that Yindyamarra Winhangahna (the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in) is enacted. The discussion focuses on the Wiradyuri cosmology and how it gives reasons for and directions to Yindyamarra Winhangahna. The current crisis that the world is experiencing is directly related to the lack of Yindyamarra and disconnect from Ngurambang (Country). Without enacting Yindyamarra Winhangahna, we will not be able to turn around the damage that is and continues to be done.

Bio

Yuwindhu Dyudyan Garbargarbar, Galari Wiradyuri yinaa, Biira-gu-bu Yilaaydya-gu-bu Yuluwidya-gu-bu garingun, Bala-dhu ngama Yandru-gu-bu Danyal-gu-bu Yalidya-gu-bu. Bala-dhu gunhinarrum-bu badhiin-bu galingabangbur-guliyagu. Baladhu Girramaa Marramaldhaany. Ngadhu yalmambili Wiradyuri-dyi gari-dyi.

My name is Susan Green, Galari (Lachlan river clan), Wiradyuri (nation) woman, granddaughter to Vera, Eliza and Louisa and mother to Andrew, Daniel and Alicia, and grandmother to their children. I am a social worker. I teach Wiradyuri truth.

Rita Markwell

Disrupting the drivers of misinformation about Muslims and Islam

Misinformation and disinformation about Islam and terrorism are significant barriers to social inclusion and anti-racism efforts. For many years, the conflation of our religion and terrorism increased engagement in racist nationalist and far-right populist movements in Australia. It also spurred presumptuous commentary from political leaders. It has created an unyielding image of Muslim identity that, research shows, diminishes the cognitive ability of individuals to overcome racist ideas.

This problematic information environment was shaped not only by illiberal bad actors online but also by Australian official language and law. Australian law provides that a terrorist act must be intended to advance a religious, ideological or political cause. As a result, Al Qaeda and ISIS are labelled as religiously motivated rather than ideologically motivated. Homogenously characterising a range of ideological and political motives and actors as 'religiously motivated' is harmful. One such harm is

that it centres Islam, rather than violent propaganda, as a force of radicalisation and enmity – reinforcing the false idea of a clash of civilisations.

Organisations like the Australian Muslim Advocacy Network (AMAN) are expressly formed to strengthen democracy and safeguard the resilience and capacity of the Australian Muslim community. For example, Australian Muslims are impacted by the threat of terrorism, terrorism-related media coverage, terrorism laws and terrorism policing. Therefore, Muslim civil society is driven to deeply analyse threats to democracy in a way that finely balances security and freedom, and recalibrates policy objectives towards prevention and restoration, rather than remedy and reaction.

Civil society representing the community must be included in dialogue on terrorism definitions, discrimination, online safety and media laws, and foreign policy. These higher-level settings have flow-on effects for our community and are integral to safeguarding resilience.

Bio

Rita Jabri Markwell is a lawyer, scholar and community advocate. A solicitor with Sydney law firm Birchgrove Legal, her pro bono work with the Australian Muslim Advocacy Network has given her broad and deep insights into community experience.

On behalf of AMAN, she brought successful action against former Senator Fraser Anning for vilification in Queensland and has current actions against Twitter and Facebook. She is published in the areas of dehumanisation of minorities online, and has facilitated critical research into terrorism law and extremism definitions within the Global Internet Forum to Counter-Terrorism. In previous lives, Rita has worked as a secondary teacher and ministerial adviser in the Rudd-Gillard governments. Her greatest joy was working on the Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples and the events surrounding that day.

Darren Bark
Three main components of resilience – challenge, commitment and control.

These three components are the foundation to supporting the safety, wellbeing and cohesion of all resilient communities. Safety, security and wellbeing are the most fundamental of human and community needs. We meet these necessities by increasing the physical and psychological safety of our communal institutions, by advocating on pressing issues, supporting ourselves and others, mobilising during times of crisis and concern, and building capacity to ensure strong community and social cohesion within our ecosystems.

The challenge of resilience is reframing or redefining the narrative of resilience. Isolation, fear and rapid global and local changes have impacted the ability for individuals and communities to cope with existing and newly emerging stressors.

The commitment to resilience – we build resilience by supporting each other. Engaging, educating, mentoring and cultivating new generations of leaders capable of taking on future challenges shaping our communities and supporting each other.

The importance of control in resilience – we cannot control the difficult circumstances that come our way; however, we have the capacity and ability to lessen the impact and intensity. The degree to which communities believe they are in control significantly influences our attitudes toward difficult circumstances, affects resilience and determines the actions we take.

Bio

Darren Bark is the CEO of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and Deputy Chairman of the Biometrics Institute. Darren worked for the NSW Government for over 10 years, including as Executive Director of the NSW Police Force, Director at the NSW Department of Justice and Chair of the NSW Identity Security Council. His responsibilities included independent oversight of law enforcement activities and strategic leadership, including managing performance across multiple disciplines such as policy, legal, projects, digital transformation, artificial intelligence and business analysis.

Benjamin Oh

Intersectional Justice, anti-racism solidarity and universal human rights as the foundations for democratic organising

Asian Australians have a long history with this country we now come to call – Australia. The connection to First Nations peoples of these ancient lands predates white-settlement. There has been systemic editing out and erasure of the history, experience, connection and contribution Asian Australians, including Chinese-Australians in this country. Asian Australians continue to face systemic racism in many areas of our national life, including the underrepresentation on decision making tables be it in parliament and other places of governance, on boards, in the judiciary, in our cultural and media sectors, etc. Anti-Asian racism is prevalent in many parts of our Australian communities in manifests itself in different ways, including the continual 'othering' of us as not being 'Australian' enough. Whilst our Asian Australian communities have been able to overcome some of the challenges put to us throughout Australia's history since white-settlement, our communities are often used as backdrops or weapons for 'otherness' and xenophobia. Unless Asian Australian history, stories, experiences and learnings are being told more fully, modern Australia will fall short of being who we truly are as a cosmopolitan member of a fair and just global community.

· Challenges as Asian Australians to consider how and what role we can play through the truthful telling of our long history that can help us define racial justice in this new chapter where we honour our Aboriginal heritage whilst charting a way forward for a confident country that moves beyond white-nationalism, xenophobia, racism, exclusion and discrimination.

· Tensions interfacing: integration, assimilation, model-minority and internalized racism.

· Self-reliance as modes of survival, trust deficits, decoloniality-decolonization and movements towards solidarity as modes of strengthening democratic organizing.

· Building beyond self-reliance towards creating mutual interdependence and solidarity, parochialism vs. cosmopolitanism based on universal human rights and interfaith-intercultural dialogue.

Bio

Benjamin Oh works and teaches in areas intersecting cross-cultural education, interfaith and intercultural dialogue, human rights, racial justice, international aid development, sexual and gender diversity and cultural violence. He is one of the National Convenor of the *Asian Australian Alliance*, currently the National co-Chair of Equal Voices. As an accredited Pastoral Supervisor, Benjamin also supervises leaders and community organizers from faith-based and not-for-profit organization. Benjamin is an active community organizer in his faith and cultural communities, he is of Malaysian-Peranakan-Chinese heritage.

Session II (Academic Panel) - Vision for democracy and social cohesion we aspire as a nation

Prof Mark Evans

The state of Australian democracy: 'Culture of contentment' or the 'end of complacency'?

This presentation draws on institutional analysis conducted for the 2022 Democratic Audit of Australia and survey and focus group research to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on democratic governance in Australia. We identify examples of advances in governance and democratic backsliding observing that the "Corona-coma" has had positive and negative impacts. The evidence also suggests that Australian citizens think a combination of participatory and integrity reforms can be used to bolster the legitimacy of representative democracy and enhance trust between government and citizen. However, despite rhetorical commitment to a new politics, there is only limited evidence so far to suggest the pandemic and associated economic peril are compelling Government or Opposition to end the age of complacency and challenge the established culture of contentment.

Bio

Professor Mark Evans is Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) at Charles Sturt University in Australia. Mark was the CEO of Democracy 2025 – a joint initiative between the University of Canberra's Institute for Governance and the Museum of Australian Democracy – focused on strengthening democratic practice. Prior to Democracy 2025, Mark was Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra. His recent books include: *Evidence-based policymaking and the social sciences: methods that matter* (Policy Press, 2017), *From Turnbull to Morrison. The Trust Divide* (Melbourne University Press, 2019), *Saving Democracy* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022) and *The Democratic Audit of Australia* (LSE Press, 2022).

Prof Tim Soutphommasane

The intersection between human rights, disadvantaged communities and resilient democracy

COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerability of minority and disadvantaged communities, especially to government interventions. The pandemic has challenged democratic practices and stability. As societies look to rebuild from the pandemic, how must they also rebuild their civic cultures? I'll touch on some of what we cover in the *Great Australian Renovation Report* from the Sydney Policy Lab.

Bio

Tim Soutphommasane is a political theorist and professor at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney. He is also Director, Culture Strategy at the university and in that role helps lead the university's efforts to build a culture that supports its teaching, research and service to society.

A human rights advocate, from 2013 to 2018 Tim was Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner. His thinking on patriotism, multiculturalism and national identity has been influential in debates in Australia and Britain.

He is the author of five books: *On Hate* (2019), *I'm Not Racist But …* (2015), *Don't Go Back To Where You Came From* (2012), *The Virtuous Citizen* (2012) and *Reclaiming Patriotism* (2009). He is also the co-editor (with Nick Dyrenfurth) of *All That's Left* (2010).

Dr Peter Balint*
Learning democratic resilience: Public sphere responses to extremism

Violent extremism threatens human life and safety, but often overlooked is how extremists endanger the public sphere (comprising the practices, institutions and actors that sustain communication about matters of common concern). Violent extremists seek to undermine the public sphere by sowing division, distrust and fear to radically redraw the boundaries of liberal multicultural societies. When the public sphere is fractured and polarised, it loses the capacity to generate the deliberation on which democracy depends. Acts of violent extremists alone cannot undermine the public sphere. Their impact on the public sphere depends in large part on the responses of the key public sphere actors including citizens, government and the media.

How the public sphere responds to extremist acts and threats matters deeply for democracy. We introduce a framework of democratic resilience that can be used to assess and address the impact of violent extremism on the public sphere. The most defining characteristic of a democratically resilient public sphere is its capacity to sustain integrative and tolerant public discourse when subjected to external shocks, such as violent extremist threats and acts. *Resilient* public spheres can contain and process provocations in a fashion that maintains or even strengthens democratic integrity. In contrast, *fragile* public spheres descend into polarisation, fragmentation and lose their capacity for the inclusive and cross-cultural deliberation on which a functioning democracy depends.

* The project is conducted with Selen A. Ercan, Jordan McSwiney, and John Dryzek.

Bio

Dr Peter Balint is a Senior Lecturer in International & Political Studies at UNSW Canberra and convenor of the International Ethics Research Group. His research is primarily focussed on the principles for diversity, including respect, toleration, neutrality and social cohesion. His books include *Debating Multiculturalism: Should There be Minority Rights?* with PT Lenard (Oxford University Press, 2022) and *Respecting Toleration: Traditional Liberalism and Contemporary Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 2017), which was awarded an APSA CRISP Prize in 2018. He is currently working a project with Selen Ercan and John Dryzek (UC) on Democratic Resilience, the

Public Sphere and Extremist Attacks funded by the Australian Research Council (DP) and the NSW Government.

Dr Derya Iner

Research-based community activism to save democracy from elitism and nativism

All societies have gone through significant challenges in the last two years of the COVID-19 era. Regardless of the dangers of coronavirus, many people opted to attend mass demonstrations and protests when they felt threatened by social viruses such as injustices, discrimination and racial hate. The killing of George Floyd by a police officer ignited worldwide anti-racism movements like Black Lives Matter and Lives in Custody. The other by-products of the COVID-19 pandemic were anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests and conspiracy theories. These led to the spread of misinformation, disinformation and distrust under the state of emergency. It was a deliberate strategy by extremist groups to shake the trust in democracy and social cohesion.

Research shows that democracies in fragmented communities with fragile cross-community relations provide a ground only for polarisation, dissolution and distrust especially in times of social unrest. In such times, populism operates as an "auto-immune disease of democracy." This presentation focuses on how to turn fragility into immunity and triggers of polarisation to the triggers of collaboration through resilient democracy and discusses some pillars of a resilient democracy.

Bio

Derya Iner is Senior Lecturer and Research Coordinator at the Centre for Islamic Studies (CISAC), Charles Sturt University, teaching and researching subjects on contemporary issues related to Islam, Islamic cultures and Muslims. Iner is also the course coordinator of Contemporary Islamic Studies at CISAC. Iner completed her PhD in Cultural Studies and Gender Studies at Wisconsin-Madison (USA). Her research focuses on Islamophobia, especially women and children's experience with Islamophobia, Western Muslim youth and their religious identity and women in Islam and Islamic cultures. Iner is the chief investigator and editor of the Islamophobia in Australia Report I, II and III, which drew worldwide attention by reaching over 1 million international audiences (according to CSU's media metrics report). Iner's recent publications include a co-edited volume with John Esposito *Islamophobia and Radicalisation: Breeding Intolerance and Violence* (Palgrave, 2019) and recent research focuses on the mosque attacks and their impact in the aftermath of the Christchurch attacks. Also, Iner is heavily involved in community work and serves as the director of Islamophobia Register Australia.

Afternoon Session - Facilitated Roundtable Discussions

Iain Walker (Co-Facilitator, Speaker)

Democratic innovations and case studies

This presentation focuses on giving participants a framework of why democracies function the way they do, and what innovation opportunities exist to deliver better results for all sorts of communities. The innovation examples are drawn from Australian and international case studies.

The talk aims to encourage participants to focus on the underlying problem that needs to be solved to better enable potential solutions to be discussed. Democracy practitioners rarely have the lived experience of a problem, while those with experience of a problem often lack information concerning where different democratic approaches have addressed the problem elsewhere. This session aims to take a first step toward bridging that gap.

The session covers the differences between agenda-setting and decision-making processes, between public opinion and public judgment, between active interests and the wider community, and the importance of considering the incentives for people to participate.

Bio

Iain Walker is Executive Director of the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) in Australia, a role he has held since 2011. The work of the Foundation is simply to find ways to do democracy better. While many complain about problems with the system, nDF aims to research, trial and implement processes which will result in trusted public decisions.

The methods used focus on exploring a complementary role for randomly-selected everyday people (much like a criminal jury) alongside elected representatives. nDF's processes involve giving citizens vastly extended time and access to multiple sources of information to see if they can find common ground.

Iain has led over 25 trial projects at local government and state government level including projects for State Premiers on both sides of politics. The topics have ranged from long-term budgeting for the $4bn City of Melbourne Financial Plan to the potential for a high-level nuclear waste storage facility in South Australia. nDF has also contributed to the OECD's 'Deliberative Wave' reports and produced a Handbook on 'Democracy Beyond Elections' for the UN Democracy Fund.

Research notes and case studies can be found at www.newdemocracy.com.au

Scott Lappan-Newton (Facilitator)
Scott Lappan-Newton is a facilitator and stakeholder engagement expert with a firm belief that genuine, well-designed processes lead to better decisions and project outcomes that all can support. He has designed and run wide and deep engagement for a range of stakeholders, from executives and subject matter experts to end users and grassroots communities. He enjoys facilitating a broad range of conversations that matter across planning, health, education, energy, the arts, HR, legal, political, technology and other sectors.

Scott makes use of deliberative, user-centred and participatory decision-making models and draws on knowledge in design thinking, systems thinking and structured problem-solving to drive a group to actionable solutions.

His clients have included the Greater Sydney Commission, NSW Information & Privacy Commission, Ausgrid, Western Sydney University, Deloitte, Student Voice Australia, local councils and many more.