



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**25 November 2024 - For Immediate Release**

## **Is Australia at Risk of US-Style Polarisation, or Could It Be Turned to Our Advantage? Experts Warn of a Growing Divide**

Today, (Monday, 25 November), a non-partisan organisation focused on empowering Australians to shape national policy through community engagement, [AMPLIFY](#) will host a pivotal conversation in Sydney to answer the most pressing questions of our time; is Australia at risk of a US-style polarisation, can we turn this into our advantage, or is there a united path forward?

Some of Australia's most prominent thinkers and community leaders - **Claire Lehmann**, **Bill Kelty** and **Waleed Aly** - will be examining the potential polarisation crisis in Australia, including economic inequality, media dynamics, dis/misinformation and identity politics, to uncover answers to what will determine our future as a country.

Recent research, revealed ahead of the next election, shows **two-thirds (65 per cent) of Australians feel the country is becoming more divided<sup>1</sup>**, and **over half (53%) now trust community-based decisions** more than those made by government bodies. Lehmann, Kelty, and Aly will tackle the key drivers of division while exploring what this means for community, corporations and society.

"Australians are deeply worried about the growing fractures in our society. This isn't just about understanding the causes of division – it's about identifying the solutions to rebuild our sense of unity for a better Australia. The time to act is now." said **Dr Rory Gallagher, Chief Policy and Research Officer, AMPLIFY**.

### **Why This Timely Conversation Matters**

Social, political, and economic challenges are creating new divisions, but experts agree these divides can still be bridged, "The growing divides in Australia, driven by a range of domestic and international factors, are eroding trust in our institutions and each other. What we are doing is creating space for tough but constructive conversations on key issues that affect Australians every day. We need to see meaningful change." explains **Georgina Harrisson, CEO, AMPLIFY**.

"Having differing opinions isn't a problem. Robust debates and constructive disagreement can be healthy. But what is concerning is a growing inability to engage with different perspectives. Our research shows that only 1 in 5 frequently look for opposing points of view on an issue, and less than 1 in 1 add opposing perspectives to our social media feeds. Growing echo chambers, plus mis and disinformation is making it difficult for people to find the common ground needed to make progress on the major challenges facing us in Australia. We must act now to avoid these divisions becoming more entrenched." continued **Dr Gallagher**.

The event comes at a critical moment in Australia's political and social landscape:

#### **Media Dynamics:**

- **Misinformation Bill** - The Australian Senate has been debating a bill addressing the spread of false information, balancing free speech with combating division and distrust. These issues with false information were notable during the 2023 Indigenous Voice referendum on social media, intensifying tensions

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<sup>1</sup> Conducted by independent polling research organisation Resolve on behalf of AMPLIFY, 4,000 Australian representative sample, asked closed/open-ended questions on a range of policy & systemic issues Jul–Aug 2024 (AMPLIFY National Research)



- Under-16 Social Media Ban - A proposed Government bill seeks to restrict social media access for children under 16, citing mental health concerns and misinformation
- Trust in Media - Surveys reveal declining public trust in news outlets, perceived as biased and untrustworthy, deepening societal divides<sup>2</sup>

#### **Identity Politics:**

- Influence of International Figures - The impact of figures like the U.S. President Elect Donald Trump has permeated Australian politics, fueling divisions on issues such as climate policy and national sovereignty, potentially contributing to broader societal polarisation
- Welcome to Country Debates - The growing adoption of Welcome to Country ceremonies has sparked discussions about their authenticity, reflecting deeper debates around cultural identity and inclusivity
- Gender Identity and Women's Rights - Discussions around gender identity have become increasingly polarised. These debates have sparked public contention and dissent

#### **Economic Inequality:**

- Housing Affordability - Soaring house prices and unaffordable rents lock many, especially younger Australians, out of the housing market, fueling frustration and generational divides
- Stagnant Wages - Wage growth has failed to keep pace with inflation, eroding purchasing power for low and middle-income households
- Rising Inflation - Higher costs for essentials like food, utilities, and healthcare are leaving many struggling to make ends meet
- Interest Rate Hikes - Increased borrowing costs have intensified financial strain on mortgage holders, further dividing society into those who feel secure and those at risk

#### **Political Landscape:**

- Electoral Reform Bill - The Australian Senate is discussing the merits of a bill that proposes major changes to Australian elections, including more taxpayer funding of political parties, limits on donations and caps on election campaign spending. Concerns focus on loopholes in the bill that seem geared towards the two main parties, and unfairly dock independents and challengers.

"The US has shown us the human cost of unchecked division. Broken communities, mistrust, and democratic dysfunction are lessons we cannot afford to ignore. Australia has a unique chance to learn from these mistakes and choose a different path." **explains Dr Gallagher.**

"This panel is about bringing together diverse perspectives to demonstrate that disagreement can lead to better understanding – and, ultimately, solutions." **says Harrison.**

**-ENDS-**

#### **Media Contacts:**

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#### **Panel of Experts:**

**Adam Spencer** is moderating the debate. Robust insights will be featured from:

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<sup>2</sup> [\*Digital News Report \(DNR\): Australia 2023\*](#) - University of Canberra



- **Claire Lehmann** (Founder, Quillette)
- **Bill Kelty** (Former Union Leader)
- **Waleed Aly** (Academic and Commentator)

### Event Details

- **What:** *The Great Divide: Is Australia at Risk of Becoming as Polarised as the US?*
- **When:** Monday, 25 November, 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM
- **Where:** Sydney Theatre Company | Wharf 2

### Media Opportunities

All panellists and contributors, including Dr Rory Gallagher and Georgina Harrison, are available for interviews before and after the event. Topics include:

- The role of polarisation in Australia's future - for society, communities and our economy
- Our current state of play for community, society, corporates and government ahead of the Federal Election, and what's at stake / what can we use to our advantage to ensure Australia thrives
- The role of dis/misinformation in shaping public discourse and civic engagement
- The risk of extreme polarisation at an individual, community and societal level, as well as Australia more broadly
- How a US-style polarisation can either hinder or help us
- How identity politics and cultural tensions impact national unity, including recent examples of racism and hate crimes
- Economic inequality and its influence on societal divides
- Plus, deeper dives on exact topics including housing, education, health, society and culture, gender politics and more

### About AMPLIFY:

Australia is a great country, but we know things aren't working the way they should. AMPLIFY has been born as a response. AMPLIFY is the place where people get to have their say and make a difference on the most important issues facing Australia. It is a community of Australians from all walks of life, and together we will find 'uncommon ground' on the issues we care about most. AMPLIFY is non-partisan and completely independent of all political parties. It will make a difference by amplifying the voice of the community to spark change and help build the policy blueprint for Australia's future: [amplifyaus.org](https://amplifyaus.org)

### Background for editors/producers:

**AMPLIFY's Mission:** AMPLIFY was founded to empower everyday Australians to have a meaningful say in the critical issues shaping the country. Through community-driven solutions, AMPLIFY aims to create a more connected and prosperous Australia by bringing diverse voices to the forefront of national policy debates.

### **Research Survey Highlights:**

- Over 84% of Australians believe the community should be more directly involved in policy decisions
- 71% feel that discussions about politics are commonly combative or confrontational
- 65% think Australia is more divided than it used to be, while 52% believe constructive conversations are becoming harder to have than ever before
- 53% of Australians say they trust community-based decisions more than those made by government bodies

*The nationally representative survey was conducted by an independent polling organisation, Resolve on behalf of AMPLIFY. The representative sample of 4,000 Australians were asked closed and open-ended questions on a range of policy and systemic issues in the period July – August 2024.*

**Deliberative Methods:** AMPLIFY uses deliberative democracy tools, which involve structured conversations, expert input, and collaborative decision-making processes. These methods have been proven to foster greater understanding across diverse groups and result in more innovative, inclusive solutions.



***Current State of Public Trust in Australia:*** Australia ranks 11th globally for citizen satisfaction with democratic processes, which has been declining steadily since 2010 according to the [Democracy Index](#).

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