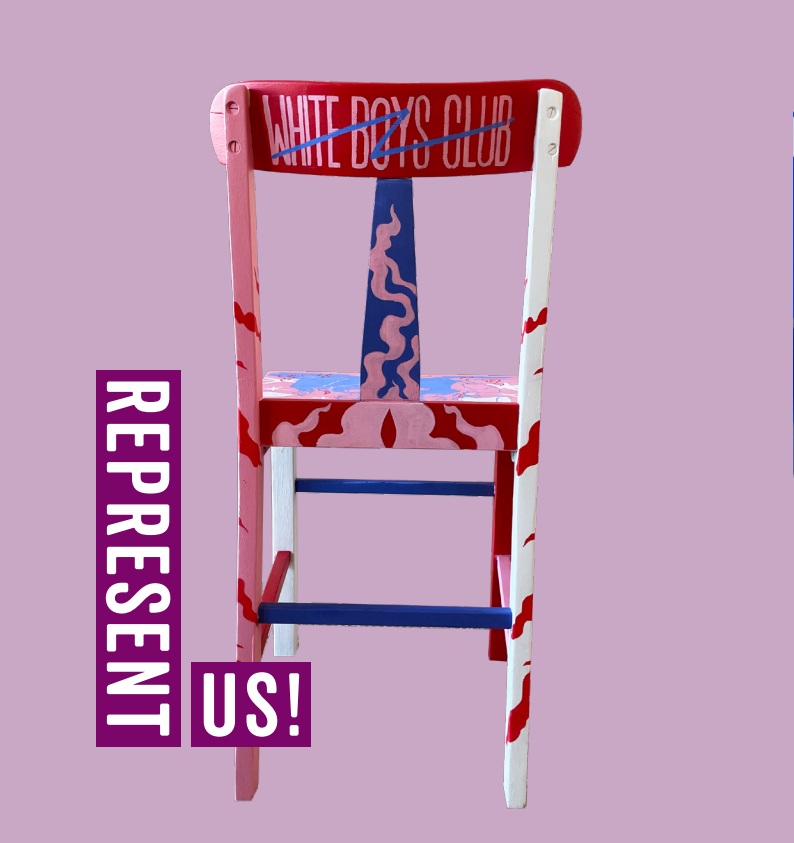




The charity for girls' equality

REPRESENT

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REPRESENT

US!

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

We have a dream. She has a plan.

Put simply, we're the charity for girls' equality. We tackle the root causes of poverty, support communities through crisis, campaign for gender equality, and help governments do what's right for children and particularly for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world; a world where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls can take their rightful place as equals.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Plan International Australia, in collaboration with YouGov, conducted a poll with a representative online sample of 1,034 Australian young women aged between 18 and 24 to gauge their views on the culture and diversity of representation in Australian politics. Around 26% of respondents identified as being from a Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) background, around 24% identified as LGBTQI+ and around 14% identified as having a disability. The theoretical margin of error on a sample of this size is ± 3.05 percentage points. Due to rounding, totals for results may not add to 100.

FOREWORD

In February of this year, I sat in an audience at the National Press Club to witness two incredible people deliver one of the most powerful and courageous speeches I've ever witnessed. Nestled in the heart of Canberra's parliamentary hub, this was the nation's most iconic forum for discussion and debate. The atmosphere was electric. I watched as Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins took to the stage – two young women, two survivors. It finally felt like the power of young women was being recognised in this country.

But that day, I also looked around me and realised that the room did not look like the diverse society that Australia is. From journalists, to politicians, to feminist advocates and supporters, the room had very few women of colour, First Nations women, women living with a disability, gender diverse people and other marginalised groups.

As a university student, the clear lack of diversity was jarring compared to the vibrant and multicultural campus I was used to being in. It was a reminder that spaces of power reflect who is born with power, where some can easily rise to the top while others may never have access.

Parliament is one example of who holds power and who does not. Federal Parliament

was entirely controlled by men for four decades until the first women were elected in 1943. First Nations women were only able to vote in 1962. These unhealthy foundations created an unhealthy system, and the legacy of this exclusion continues to this day.

Young women have plenty of examples of the price of speaking up, from the backlash Grace and Brittany have experienced to the exclusion of Dhanya Mani in the national coverage of sexual assault in politics. We've also seen what happens to women in the political system. Former Liberal MP Julia Banks' experience of sexual harassment

and bullying reveals the ongoing culture of silencing women who dare to say "no". Brittany Higgins' alleged rape in Parliament House exposed politician after politician who could have done something but turned away.

Our democracy pays the price. Just 1 in 10 (10%) young women felt Parliament was a safe place for them to work when Plan International Australia surveyed them in 2021,

right after Brittany Higgins bravely came forward. And despite a number of reviews into the culture of Parliament and promises to fix things – 60% of young women surveyed again last month said they do not believe Parliament has become any more safe or equal in the last year. An unsafe political

Women – and especially women and gender diverse people experiencing multiple intersections – are not adequately represented in Parliament. And for those that have worked so hard to get there, to take that seat – it's not even safe.

culture means we lose out on the bright and powerful voices of young women who should be in politics and could change this country for the better.

On an intersectional level, the perceptions of safety and equality in politics is even bleaker. Almost three quarters of young women in Australia do not believe politics is an equal space for those of diverse cultural backgrounds. One third of CALD young women said they would not ever consider politics because of their cultural or ethnic background and because our Parliament is not diverse enough.

Almost half of those who identified as LGBTIQ+ said that their reluctance to seek a political job stems from perceived homophobia and transphobia in Parliament. The same amount of young women with a disability said the lack of inclusive practices for people living with a disability is a reason they would not pursue a career in politics.

Yet despite these problems, our system is not set in stone. This report shows that there are clear and tangible ways we can fix it all. Firstly, all parties must commit to implementing the transformative suite of recommendations in the Sex Discrimination Commissioner's 'Set the Standard' report in six to 18 months. All political parties must also set targets for the representation of women and people of different ethnicities as a first step towards ensuring our Parliament represents all people across the diversity of our country. All parties must also commit to introducing mechanisms to report back to survivors on the implementation of the 'Set the Standard' recommendations.

I refuse to turn away from democracy and politics despite seeing inequality and violence play out. As a young woman of colour, I see how doing this would only reward those who want us to remain silent. That does not mean I will pretend this systemic injustice does not exist. It does. Women across Australia

recognise this too. At the March4Justice rallies around the country, women across generations screamed for justice at Parliament House until our lungs hurt. In Melbourne's protest, girls as young as 12 took to the stage in their school uniforms sharing their experiences of sexual assault. We listened, we cried, and we demanded change.

I see how my generation is willing to resist formalities to speak truth to power. Now, more than ever, we need young people in all their diversity to give a voice to our experiences in a way that other generations could not capture.

The burden weighs heavy on our shoulders. We need you to make equality and representation a defining issue for this federal election in the name of safety and respect.

Our demands are clear. It is time that we reimagine and create a better, fairer, and inclusive Parliament. Our representatives should represent us.

Yasmin Poole

Plan International Australia
Ambassador



INTRODUCTION

All children and young people should grow up believing anything is possible – that they have opportunities in their lives to shape the world they live in. This isn't the reality for girls, young women and gender diverse people in Australia.

After a spate of reports of sexual misconduct throughout our democratic institutions, many young people are forced to abandon their leadership aspirations out of concern for their own safety.

More than 90% of young women believe that our national Parliament should reflect the reality of diversity of Australia. With Australians heading to the polls in less than a month – and with a record number of first-time voters now enrolled to vote – young people are telling us, loud and clear, that they do not see themselves or their values represented.

Without genuine diversity in Parliament, valuable perspectives are not being included in decision-making and as we have seen over the last year, a dangerous culture is allowed to run rampant.

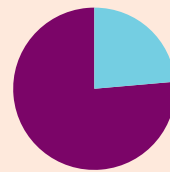
Power, privilege and disadvantage go far beyond gender

But how does this lack of diversity impact how young people engage with democracy in Australia?

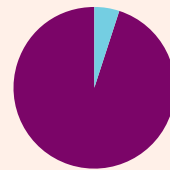
In more ways than you realise...

We surveyed more than 1000 young women aged 18-24 – most of them voting for the first time – and asked them about the key barriers to entering politics. We asked our youth activists why diversity and safety was important to them, and drew on their insights on improving the culture of politics throughout this report.

Take a look at the current representation of decision makers in Canberra:



**WOMEN MAKE UP ONLY 31%
OF THE 151 SEATS IN THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES**



**LESS THAN 5% OF PARLIAMENTARIANS
COME FROM DIVERSE ETHNICITIES**

6

**THERE ARE SIX INDIGENOUS
PARLIAMENTARIANS**

0

**THERE ARE ZERO PARLIAMENTARIANS
WHO HAVE SHARED THEY ARE TRANS,
NON-BINARY OR GENDER DIVERSE**

WHAT THEY TOLD US:

1
IN
10

young women felt Parliament was a safe place for them to work when we surveyed them in 2021, after former political staffer Brittany Higgins came forward with allegations that she was raped in Parliament House.

Despite a number of reviews into the culture of Parliament since then, 60% of young women we surveyed last month said they do not believe Parliament has become any more safe or equal

Almost
75%

of all young women in Australia do not believe women politicians are treated equally to men

of young women in Australia do not believe politics is an equal space for those of diverse cultural backgrounds

ONE THIRD (30%)

of CALD young women said they would not ever consider politics because of their cultural or ethnic background and because our Parliament is not diverse enough

But, 82% say there should be diversity targets to ensure that women and people across all ethnicities are being represented

41%

of young women with a disability say the lack of inclusive practices for people living with a disability is a reason they would not pursue a career in politics (compared to 12% for women without a disability)

Over 80% of young women have never aspired to be PM

“

Parliament must be diverse so that we can reduce bias and discrimination against diverse groups in Australia.”

– 22-year-old, Perth

58%

of young women say that they will be more likely to pursue a career in Parliament if it were more diverse. This is higher among those aligned with the Coalition (66%) than those aligned with Labor (54%).

Almost 50%

of young women said they would not consider a career in politics because they worried about being discriminated against because of their gender

“

We need better representation of First Nations people in politics, consulting with First Nations people during policy development, and respecting Indigenous perspective”

– 19-year-old, Perth

“

We can make Parliament more safe by ensuring we have better policies in place to make sure people are not harassed or assaulted at work. A federal ICAC [is important]”

– 23-year-old, Hobart

42% of those who identify as LGBTIQ+ said their reluctance to seek a political job stemmed from perceived homophobia and transphobia in Parliament

“

I wouldn't consider a career in politics because male politicians are aggressive.”

– 20-year-old, Brisbane

Almost

90%

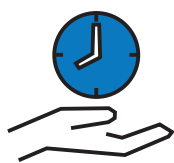
of young women feel it's easier for men to success in politics. This view is shared across the political spectrum (90% for those aligned with Labor, 90% Coalition, and 92% Greens).



**... ARE AT THE CENTRE OF
CHANGE-MAKING ALL OVER THE WORLD**

4 STEPS OUR LEADERS CAN AND MUST TAKE RIGHT NOW

All political parties must commit to a diverse, inclusive and thriving Parliament and a safer Parliament shaped by the voice of survivors



1. All parties commit to implementing all of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins' 'Set the Standard' report recommendations in 6-18 months.

The report makes clear through its recommendations that driving change in Parliament will require leadership, accountability and a focus on safety and wellbeing, including proactive policies to prevent abuse before it starts.



2. In particular, to support greater diversity in Parliament, the following recommendations should be implemented by the end of 2022:

- a. Develop and publicly release a strategy to increase gender balance and representation of people of different ethnicities among parliamentarians and staff. This should also include specific actions to increase the representation of First Nations people, people with a disability and LGBTIQ+ people (adapted from Recommendation 5 and 6).
- b. Table the first annual report to Parliament on diversity characteristics of parliamentarians, including across specific office-holders, ministerial portfolios and committee roles, and the diversity characteristics of Members of Parliament (Staff) Act employees (Recommendation 7).
- c. Introduce changes to Standing Orders and unwritten parliamentary conventions to enhance everyday respect (Recommendation 10).
- d. Establish the Office of Parliamentarian Staffing and Culture (Recommendation 11).



3. All political parties set targets for the representation of women, if they do not already have them, and targets for people of different ethnicities to ensure that Federal Parliament reflects the diversity of Australia.



4. All parties commit to introducing mechanisms to report back to survivors on the implementation of the 'Set the Standard' recommendations, and that this is reflected as part of the implementation plan.

WHAT'S THE CURRENT MAKE UP OF PARLIAMENT?

While there is currently no systematic review of diversity in the federal parliament, we do know that women and people from diverse ethnicities and backgrounds are underrepresented.

Women make up only 38% of MPs and Senators. And worryingly, we are falling behind the rest of the world: in 2006 Australia ranked 22 out of 155 countries on the World Bank's Gender Index for women's political empowerment. In 2021, Australia was ranked 54. Over the last 15 years we have dropped 22 places.¹

When it comes to representation of people from different ethnicities, we are even further behind.

Only 4.1% of our federal parliamentarians have a non-European background, even though Asian, African, Middle-Eastern and Pacific Islander Australians account for 21% of the population.²

Our national Parliament should be reflective of our diverse communities across Australia. Setting targets for greater representation of women and people of different ethnicities is what major parties can do as a first step to transform Parliament into a safer and more inclusive democracy. It is also essential that our national Parliament represents people across the diversity of Australia, including the LGBTIQ community, people living with a disability and First Nations people, recognising that targets are not suitable for every group.

Put simply there is insufficient data and understanding about representation in Parliament. If we want equality and safety

we need to collect and act on data to drive and evolve how Parliament can be more inclusive, and safe as echoed in the *Set the Standard* report.



Not collecting data on the ethnic diversity of Parliament shows that politicians aren't seeing representation as a big issue. If there's no data, it shows that, in terms of priorities, the diversity of politicians is way down the bottom."

– Grace, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

First Nations people have been the custodians of the lands, seas and skies for more than 60,000 years with relationships, wisdom and connection to this country we all share. For First Nations people, a presence in Parliament has to focus on self-determination, respect and recognition; about what happens on their Land and in their lives. This cannot be achieved through representation alone, it requires Parliament to genuinely address systemic discrimination, racism and the ongoing impact of colonisation. First Nations people have called for Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling to acknowledge together past injustices, resolve differences, and work out how to create a shared future. Support and find out more - <https://ulurustatement.org/>

WHAT'S THE CURRENT MAKE UP OF PARLIAMENT?

Almost three quarters of the young women we surveyed think that politics is an unequal space for all regardless of gender or cultural backgrounds. Almost half of those surveyed would not want to pursue a career in politics because they think they would be discriminated against for being female. 58% of young women said they would be more likely to pursue a career in politics if it was more diverse.

Three in ten young women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds state that the lack of cultural diversity in Parliament is a reason they refrain from pursuing a political job. 41% of young women with a disability cite the lack of inclusive practices for people living with a disability.



If I wanted to enter politics, the reality is that it's not up to me trying my hardest. Political parties have the power to decide if I'm suitable to be in the public eye because of my race, even if I can represent the voices of my community"

– Janice, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

WHY IS DIVERSITY OF REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT IMPORTANT?

All communities deserve a seat at the decision-making table to ensure our laws and policies best meet the needs of people across the diversity of our country. People with lived experience of discrimination and self-empowerment are best placed to legislate for meaningful change for their own communities.

A Parliament that reflects the diversity of the community will lead to better laws and

policies for everyone and will help ensure our national parliament is a more inclusive and safer space.

When more women and people from diverse ethnicities and backgrounds are elected, they are automatic role models, and encourage young people to see a role for themselves in our democracy.

Here are some insights from young people about why better representation in Parliament is critical to strengthening our democracy:

“



It is so important that marginalised communities are the voices that are heard because these are the voices first drowned out by the rising water, silenced by the winds, starved by the droughts and burnt by unyielding heat. Issues like climate change will harm these communities disproportionately, and inclusion in all levels of policy making may begin to facilitate proper change. A diverse parliament inspires a diverse nation”

– Irehide, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

“



Diversity and representation in Australian politics ensures diverse voices and perspectives are included in decision making and gives a spotlight on intersectional issues that would otherwise be ignored. It empowers the next generation of young people to stand up for what they believe in and ensure their views are represented by political leaders”

– Grace, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

“



As a result of the lack of diversity in Australian politics women and minorities are consistently put last. We are systematically disenfranchised, traumatised and failed by the people who are supposed to look at for leadership and hope. Having genuine representation and diversity in Australian politics, beyond tokenistic stunts and symbols, means that all Australians will be looked after and represented by those we turn to for leadership - including those who live in the spaces and lines between what we see in the news”

– Dani, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

“



By having a diverse parliament - inclusive of people of various ages, genders, religions and ethnicities - we, as a country, may be also be able to formulate policies that are more informed and productive. Each and every one of us is different, so by embracing our differences and coming together, we have a better chance of bringing in new perspectives and solutions to issues that can be difficult to tackle”

– Janice, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022

THE EVIDENCE IS IN: WE NEED ACTION.

Targets work

The Australian Human Rights Commission found that “time alone won’t improve a lack of cultural representation”². This means that our leaders must prioritise improving the diversity of Australian Parliament by putting in place specific measures, and reporting against these.

One critical strategy is targets.

When asked what changes are needed to ensure politics is fair and equal to all, 82% of young people surveyed say there should be diversity targets to ensure that women and people across all ethnicities are being represented.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency defines targets as ‘specific measurable objectives, generally set by an organisation at their own discretion, with discrete

timeframes in which they are to be achieved’³. Targets can be adopted by all political parties to ensure better representation of women and people from different ethnicities and backgrounds.

Targets can put an end to the old boys' club and ensure people are no longer denied access to positions of power because of their gender, ethnicity or background. Targets are temporary measures, aimed at eradicating an inequality that has built up over time.

Targets work – we’ve seen it with representation of women:

- The Workplace Gender Equality Agency found that organisations that set targets are more likely to succeed at increasing their gender diversity³
- Targets make diversity and inclusion a priority for organisations - our national parliament is no different²

Plan International Australia youth activists and ambassadors attend the *March 4 Justice* in Melbourne.



- Globally, the evidence shows that targets and quotas increase the representation of women in national parliaments, and that countries with well-designed quotas elect more women than those without⁴
- Recent data from the IPU found that women were elected to 28.6% of parliamentary seats up for election worldwide in 2021, across 48 countries, a significant increase from 2020. Quotas were a determining factor in this increase; 30 out of the 48 countries that held elections in 2021 had some form of quota in place⁴.

Targets should also extend to diversity in our national parliament. Studies have shown the importance of gender and diversity targets working side by side in ensuring true representation for all parts of our society⁵.

found to effectively ensure representatives resemble the demographics, interests or experiences of their constituents. However, it is disputed whether this system achieves better policy outcomes for constituents by their representatives.⁶ This case study demonstrates the need to accompany targets with measures and mechanisms that go beyond representation and ensure a shift in the culture of Parliament to support Parliamentarians across their diversity.

This case study also demonstrates that it is essential for representation of First Peoples to facilitate self-determination. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, meaningful representation cannot be achieved through targets, it can only be achieved through implementing the calls of First Nations,

including for Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling.

People with a disability are severely underrepresented, however there is insufficient data about their current representation in Parliament. This means that another critical step to achieving equality and safety is to collect data on the broader diversity characteristics to inform how Parliament can be more inclusive,

as recommended in the *Set the Standard* report. Plan International Australia also recommends subsequent qualitative research in collaboration with diverse groups across the country to develop recommendations for the most effective ways to include diverse communities, recognising that targets are not suitable for every group and recognising that it may not be viable for Parliamentarians to disclose diversity characteristics given the stigma surrounding various experiences, including mental illness.



We can't address an issue unless there are groups of people who can share their lived experience with it. Having lived experience means we understand the complexity of these issues and can address it properly. That's why targets are important."

– Janice, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022



Targets are a first step. Our goal must address the intersections across gender, ethnicities and backgrounds – including people living with a disability, LGBTIQ+ communities and First Nations people, while recognising that targets are not a suitable solution for every group.

Targets for the representation of First Nations groups has been implemented in New Zealand, with seven seats in the New Zealand Parliament reserved for Māori representatives. This system has been

TARGETS ARE CRITICAL, BUT THEY'RE NOT THE ONLY THING:

Diversity targets are an important first step, but the culture in federal Parliament also needs to change, making it a safer and more inclusive space for all.

85% of young women surveyed would like to see a better culture for women in our Parliament. Personal safety is still of concern, with 59% saying that federal Parliament has not become a safer and more equal workplace for young women in the last year. This increases to 65%

amongst women aged 22 – 24, and 70% for those who identify as LGBTIQ+. 78% of respondents want more inclusive practices for people living with a disability, and 80% think that better consultations with survivors of sexual abuse or harassment is needed.

The Australian Government must implement the holistic, tangible recommendations in the Sex Discrimination Commissioner's *Set the Standard* report, to ensure we tackle discrimination and misogyny in Parliament.



“I want to go into politics. But I can relate to the feeling of looking at the representation we have currently and thinking ‘this is not representative of Australia in its diversity’. It feels unwelcoming.

– Jemma, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022



The toxic boys club and the treatment of women in politics in the media is why I feel scared about how I would be treated in politics. The typical leadership that is strongman or dominant is not me, so I don't know how much my voice would be heard.”

– Grace, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022



“Seeing the Sex Discrimination Commissioner write so many recommendations and only having a few implemented so far shows that not enough is being done. There is not enough prevention to make sure Parliament is safe.

– Janice, Plan International Australia youth activist 2022





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