

ACADEMIC ACTIVISM AND ARMENIAN GENOCIDE RECOGNITION IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

This article draws on the author's firsthand experience of lobbying the Australian federal government to recognize the Armenian Genocide. The article explores the history of Armenian Genocide recognition in Australia and the issues surrounding such recognition. It analyzes the geopolitical and historical issues that seem to present a barrier to the Australian federal government recognizing the Armenian Genocide, such as the specifics of Australia's relationship with Turkey, which date back to World War I and the Gallipoli campaign of 1915. The significance of Gallipoli in Australian military history and culture and how it impacts Australian recognition of the Armenian Genocide will be examined. The article also discusses the work being done to overcome these barriers through the "Joint Justice Initiative" that the author participates in. This paper highlights how academic research and scholarship contribute to this work, situating this advocacy in the realm of academic-activism, demonstrating that academia is a crucial and active participant in activism that seeks to bring about social and political change.

Keywords: Armenian Genocide; recognition; Australia; academia; activism

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Introduction

This article is based on a conference presentation at the conference titled *The International Recognition of the Armenian Genocide: Memorial, Political, and Geopolitical Stakes of a Decades-Long Unfinished Struggle*, held in Yerevan in October 2024. 109 years after the Armenian Genocide of 1915, this conference brought together scholars from all over the world to discuss genocide recognition in their countries. Despite being 109 years after the genocide, this conference highlighted the challenge of recognizing the Armenian Genocide, which may be a given to scholars but is far from a standard response from governments. Scholars detailed years of struggle and lobbying from Armenian diaspora communities around the world for recognition of the Genocide from their governments. While some of these communities have been successful, with their governments uttering the term “genocide” instead of something more generic such as “atrocities,” “crimes,” or “massacres,” for others, the struggle and lobbying continue.

My own country, Australia, falls into the latter category. This article will discuss Armenian Genocide (non)recognition by Australian governments. In doing so, this article draws on the author’s firsthand experience of advocating for the Australian federal government to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The article explores the history of Armenian Genocide recognition in Australia and the issues surrounding such recognition.¹ It analyzes the geopolitical and historical

¹ This article will not delve into broader discussions of recognition or denial, which have been well covered in other literature, for example, Bedross Der Matossian, ed., *Denial of Genocides in the Twenty-First Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023); Clotilde Pégrier, “Speech and Harm: Genocide Denial, Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression,” *International Criminal Law Review* 18, no. 1 (2018): 97–126; Edita Gzoyan, “Genocide Denial under Constitutional Law: Comparative Analysis of Spain, Germany and France,” *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 73–87; Henry R. Huttenbach, “The Psychology and Politics of Genocide Denial: A Comparison of Four Case Studies,” in *Studies in Comparative Genocide*, ed. Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 216–229; Henry C. Theriault, “Denial and Free Speech: The Case of the Armenian Genocide,” in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 231–261; Henry C. Theriault, “Universal Social Theory and the Denial of Genocide: Norman Itzkowitz Revisited,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3, no. 2 (2001): 241–256; John Cox, Amal Khoury, and Sarah Minslow, eds., *Denial: The Final Stage of Genocide?* (London: Routledge, 2022); Julien Zarifian, *The United States and the Armenian Genocide: History, Memory, Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2024); Luigi Daniele, “Disputing the Indisputable: Genocide Denial and Freedom of Expression in *Perinçek v. Switzerland*,” *Nottingham Law Journal* 25 (2016): 141–151; Paul Behrens, “Genocide Denial and the Law: A Critical Appraisal,” *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review* 21, no. 1 (2015): 27–52; Rezarta Bilali, Yeshim Iqbal, and Samuel Freel, “Understanding and Counteracting Genocide Denial,” in *Confronting Humanity at Its Worst: Social Psychological Perspectives on Genocide*, ed. Leonard S. Newman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 284–311; Sévane Garibian, “On the Breaking of Consensus: The *Perinçek* Case, the Armenian Genocide and International Criminal Law,” in *Denialism and Human Rights*, ed. Jan C. M. Willems, Hans Nelen, and Roland Moerland (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2016), 235–250; Sévane Garibian, “Taking Denial Seriously: Genocide Denial and Freedom of Speech in French Law,” *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution* 9, no. 2 (2008): 479–488; Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Türkay Salim Nefes, Doğan Gürpınar, and Özgür Kaymak, “Turkish Parliamentary Debates about the International Recognition of the Armenian Genocide: Development and Variations in the Official Denial-

issues that currently represent a barrier to the Australian federal government recognizing the Armenian Genocide, such as the specifics of Australia's relationship with Turkey, which date back to World War I (WWI) and the Gallipoli campaign of 1915. The significance of Gallipoli in Australian military history and culture and how it impacts Australian recognition of the Armenian Genocide will be discussed. The article will also provide an overview of the work being done to overcome these barriers through the "Joint Justice Initiative," in which the author participates. This article will position this discussion in the frame of academia as activism, showing how academic research and scholarship contribute to advocacy for social and political change. It will demonstrate that academia is a crucial civil society participant in activism, with the work of an academic making a difference in what may be perceived as a non-traditional method of impact in academia.

Australian Governments and Genocide Recognition

A Brief Overview of Australian Government Structure

To enable a non-Australian reader to understand the multi-level lobbying for recognition that is outlined in this article, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the Australian government structure. Australia is a federal commonwealth of states and territories, comprised of two territories: the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT), and six states: Queensland (QLD), New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (VIC), Tasmania (TAS), South Australia (SA), and Western Australia (WA). It has three levels of government: local, state, and federal. This article will focus only on state and federal governments. The remit of the state and federal governments is set out in the Australian Constitution,² and each state has its own constitution, and territories have self-government acts.³ Some federal powers of note relevant to the discussion in this article include trade and commerce with other countries, naval and military defense, and external (foreign) affairs.⁴

ism," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23, no. 4 (2023): 883–899, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2149042>; Vahagn Avedian, *Knowledge and Acknowledgement in the Politics of Memory of the Armenian Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2018); William R. Pruitt, "Understanding Genocide Denial Legislation: A Comparative Analysis," *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences* 12, no. 2 (2017): 270–284; and Yair Auron, *The Banality of Denial: Israel and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

2 *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900*, <https://www.aph.gov.au/constitution> ("the Constitution"). The Constitution sets out the powers of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary.

3 See https://unimelb.libguides.com/constitutional_law/australia_state for a list of all the state constitutions and territory self-government acts. "Australian and Comparative Constitutional Law," Library Guides, The University of Melbourne, last modified November 12, 2025, https://unimelb.libguides.com/constitutional_law/australia_state.

4 Legislative powers of the Parliament are detailed in Article 51 of the Constitution; for the listed powers, see Article 51(i), (vi), and (xxix).

Do Australian Governments Recognize the Armenian Genocide?

The answer to this question is yes and no. The first recognition came from the NSW state parliament in 1997, in which NSW also called for the federal government to “officially condemn the genocide of the Armenians.”⁵ NSW has since reconfirmed this recognition in 2013.⁶ It was not until 2009 that the SA state parliament was the next to recognize the genocide.⁷ There was again a lengthy period until the third recognition in 2023, by the Tasmania state parliament.⁸

There was movement from some states in 2024 towards recognition, with a promise from the Queensland opposition leader to recognize the genocide if they were elected in the 2024 election. It remains to be seen whether this campaign promise will be carried out. In Victoria, a motion was due to be introduced in late 2024 by Victorian Greens leader Samantha Ratnam. This motion was met with “accusations from Turkish Labor politicians and various Turkish community organizations of fostering anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish sentiment, and of damaging social cohesion.”⁹ Consequently, the Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan confirmed that the state government would oppose the motion, with a spokesperson stating that because of the “war in the Middle East... this is not an appropriate time for the motion.”¹⁰ The motion was therefore not put forward by the Victorian Greens party, being formally withdrawn due to the lack of support from the government.¹¹ However, ethnic and religious community leaders maintain their strong support for the Victorian government to recognize the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian Genocides.¹²

5 “Armenian Genocide Commemoration,” Parliament of New South Wales, Archived April 17, 1997, https://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.75/current_category.13/affirmation_detail.html. See also the archived version of the state Hansard transcript of the Armenian Genocide Commemoration: New South Wales Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debate*, April 17, 1997 (“Armenian Genocide Commemoration”) 7737-7742, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120204134838/http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA19970417004>.

6 New South Wales Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debate*, 8 May 2019 (“Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Genocides,” moved by Mr. Barry O’Farrell, Premier), <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/permalink?id=HANSARD-1323879322-52555>.

7 “South Australia State Legislative Council Resolution,” Armenian National Institute, archived 25 March 2009, https://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.404/current_category.13/affirmation_detail.html.

8 Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Australian State of Tasmania Recognizes the Armenian Genocide,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, 11 May 2023, <https://en.armradio.am/2023/05/11/australian-state-of-tasmania-recognizes-the-armenian-genocide/>.

9 “Greek Organisations Urge Victorian Politicians to Support Motion on Greek, Assyrian, and Armenian Genocides,” *Neos Kosmos*, 21 October 2024, <https://neoskosmos.com/en/2024/10/21/news/australia/victorian-leaders-urged-to-recognise-greek-assyrian-and-armenian-genocides/>.

10 “Victorian Premier Faces Greek Voter Backlash over Stance on Genocide Motion,” *The Greek Herald*, 24 October 2024, <https://greekherald.com.au/news/politics/victorian-premier-faces-greek-voter-backlash-over-stance-on-genocide-motion/>.

11 “Victorian Greens Backflip on Motion to Recognize Greek, Armenian and Assyrian genocides,” *The Greek Herald*, 2024, 24 October 2024, <https://greekherald.com.au/news/politics/victorian-greens-backflip-on-motion-to-recognise-greek-armenian-and-assyrian-genocides/>. The Victorian Greens recognize the Armenian Genocide; see the “Statement on Armenia,” The Greens Victoria, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://greens.org.au/vic/statement-on-armenia>.

12 Bill Giannopolous, “Community Leaders Across Australia Support Motion to Recognize 1915 Genocides,”

Unfortunately, no other state or territory parliaments have recognized the genocide, and more importantly, neither has the federal government (executive) or parliament. On 24 April every year, the Prime Minister issues a statement, but to date, no such statement has used the term “genocide,” even if a Prime Minister had previously used the word “genocide” in their capacity as a Member of Parliament (MP).¹³

Do Australian Governments Recognize Other Genocides?

While this article will not go into detail about Australia’s recognition of other genocides (the author has discussed this elsewhere),¹⁴ it is worth at least noting that Australia has an inconsistent and weak practice of acknowledging genocides generally. This begins with the lack of recognition of genocide against Australian Indigenous peoples due to colonial violence and cultural erasure.¹⁵ The author’s previous research has determined that Australia has strong rhetoric around preventing atrocities, including genocide, and supporting doctrines such as the Responsibility to Protect¹⁶ and notions such as “Never Again,” but such “rhetoric does not always translate into action,” nor into a willingness to use the word “genocide.”¹⁷ Thus, non-recognition of the Armenian Genocide is not necessarily uncharacteristic of Australian governments.

An exception is the Holocaust: Australia definitively recognizes the Holocaust. There is strong engagement with Holocaust remembrance and education. Australian curricula include Holocaust education, there are Holocaust museums and memorials around the

Greek City Times, 7 November 2024, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2024/11/07/community-leaders-across-australia-support-motion-to-recognise-1915-genocides/>.

13 E.g., Michael Koziol, “Armenian Leaders Snub Scott Morrison over ‘offensive backflip’ on genocide declaration,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), 23 April 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/armenian-leaders-snub-scott-morrison-over-offensive-backflip-on-genocide-declaration-20190423-p51gg0.html>.; “PM Anthony Albanese Bows to Turkey Despite Record Number of Australian Parliamentarians Calling for Federal Recognition of Armenian Genocide,” *Armenian National Committee of Australia*, 25 April 2023, <https://www.anc.org.au/news/Media-Releases/PM-Anthony-Albanese-Bows-to-Turkey-Despite-Record-Number-of-Australian-Parliamentarians-Calling-for-Federal-Recognition-of-Armenian-Genocide>.; Armenian National Committee of Australia, “Armenian-Australians Slam Prime Ministerial Candidates on Cowardly Armenian Genocide Statement Ahead of 2025 Election,” 25 April 2025, <https://www.anc.org.au/news/Media-Releases/Armenian-Australians-Slam-Prime-Ministerial-Candidates-on-Cowardly-Armenian-Genocide-Statements-Ahead-of-2025-Federal-Election>.

14 Melanie O’Brien, “Australia’s Response to Contemporary Genocides,” in *The Palgrave Handbook on Australia and the Holocaust*, ed. Avril Alba and Jan Lanicek (Palgrave, 2025).

15 Jennifer Balint, “Too Near and Too Far: Australia’s Reluctance to Name and Prosecute Genocide,” in *Genocide Perspectives V: A Global Crime, Australian Voices*, ed. Nikki Marczak and Kirril Shields (Sydney: UTS ePress, 2017), 51-67, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/978-0-9945039-7-8>; Tony Barta, “After the Holocaust: Consciousness of Genocide in Australia,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 31, no. 1 (1985): 154-161, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1985.tb01330.x>.

16 See “About the Responsibility to Protect,” the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/responsibility-protect/about>.

17 O’Brien, “Australia’s Response to Contemporary Genocides.”

country, and politicians and other prominent persons participate in annual Holocaust remembrance events.¹⁸

The Campaign for Recognition

In the broader context of continued genocide denial by Turkey,¹⁹ the Armenian community in Australia has, comparable with all Armenian diaspora communities, been advocating for recognition of the Genocide for decades.²⁰ In 2022, the Joint Justice Initiative (JJI) was created.²¹ This is an initiative spearheaded by the Armenian National Committee of Australia (ANCA), alongside the Australian Hellenic Council and the Assyrian National Council (Australia). The JJI brings together the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities in Australia to advocate together towards federal recognition of the “1915 Genocides of the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek populations of the Ottoman Empire, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish Government.”²² The JJI also has members who support recognition and the initiative but come from outside these three communities.

18 See, for example, the special issue on Holocaust education in *Australian Humanities Review* 63 (November 2018). Holocaust education is mandated at a national level. See “F-10 curriculum (version 8.4),” *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority*, accessed 18 January 2022, <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/>. The Sydney Jewish Museum has a significant portion of its content devoted to the Holocaust, “Our Museum for the Future,” Sydney Jewish Museum, accessed 24 October 2025, <https://sydney-jewishmuseum.com.au/>; and there is a Melbourne Holocaust Museum, “Hear a Witness. Become One.” Melbourne Holocaust Museum, accessed October 24, 2025, <https://mhm.org.au/>. See, for example, the contribution of a remembrance message from Prime Minister Anthony Albanese for International Holocaust Remembrance Day; Anthony Albanese, “International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2023 (Livestream),” *Melbourne Holocaust Museum*, 30 January 2023, 12 min. 55 sec., <https://mhm.org.au/event/international-holocaust-remembrance-day-2023/>. In 2025, the federal government committed \$6.4 million for two Holocaust education centers in Canberra and Perth; “Albanese Government to Help Deliver National Holocaust Education Centers for Future Generations of Australians,” Prime Minister of Australia, 27 January 2025, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/albanese-government-help-deliver-national-holocaust-education-centres-future-generations>. See O’Brien, “Australia’s response to contemporary genocides.” for more examples, see footnotes 7, 8 and 9.

19 Of which much has been written. See, for example, Alexis Demirdjian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide Legacy* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), Part III *A Century of Denial*, 165-226; Turkey Salim Nefes, Gurbinar Dogan, and Ozgur Kaymak, “Turkish Parliamentary Debates about the International Recognition of the Armenian Genocide: Development and Variations in the Official Denialism,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 23, no. 4 (2023): 883-899, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2149042>; Vahagn Avedian, “State Identity, Continuity, and Responsibility: The Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide,” *European Journal of International Law* 23, no. 3 (2012): 797-820, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chs056>.

20 Maria Koinova, “Conflict and Cooperation in Armenian Diaspora Mobilisation for Genocide Recognition,” in *Diaspora as Cultures of Cooperation: Global and Local Perspectives*, ed. David Carment and Ariane Sadjed (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 111-129. For Australia more specifically, see Francois Adriaan Wolvaardt, “Genocide, Diasporic Identity and Activism: The Narratives, Identity and Activism of Armenian-Australians and Turkish-Australians Regarding the Recognition of the Deaths of Armenians during First World War as Genocide” (PhD diss., University of Western Australia, 2013), <http://research-repository.uwa.edu.au/en/publications/record/9f1bf95e-598d-4c93-8619-d7b59835c47d>.html.

21 Armenian National Committee of Australia, “Joint Justice Initiative,” accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.anc.org.au/joint-justice-initiative>.

22 Joint Justice Initiative *Information Kit*, 2024, on file with author.

These persons may be politicians, journalists, academics, or other prominent community leaders.

The JJI works throughout the year on various initiatives. An annual March for Justice is held in Sydney on a date around 24 April, with the aim of calling for recognition by the Australian government.²³ An advocacy week is held each year, which involves a group of representatives from each of the JJI main constitutive groups visiting federal Parliament House to meet with federal politicians to advocate for recognition. A briefing kit is printed and provided to each politician. This kit covers several main subjects: the JJI; an overview of the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocides; Australia's response to the Genocides and Australian eyewitness accounts of the Genocide; international and Australian recognition and acknowledgment of the Genocides. Thus, the campaign seeks to educate politicians about what happened during the Genocides, provide information about the Australian connection with the Genocides, and inform about recognition and acknowledgement of the Genocides by other countries and Australian individuals.

Highlighting the Australian connection is particularly important and relevant. In WWI, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps ("Anzacs") were part of an allied expedition tasked with capturing the Gallipoli peninsula in Ottoman Turkey. On 25 April 1915, the Anzacs approached from the water (at a location later named Anzac Cove) and were on the receiving end of a substantial attack from the cliffs above the beach and on the land. The battle stagnated until December 1915 when the allied troops were able to evacuate.²⁴ Over 8,000 Australian soldiers were killed in the Gallipoli campaign.²⁵ Australia had only become a nation in 1901. Gallipoli is significant in Australian culture and history because this campaign founded the Australian military legend, wherein the Anzac spirit of endurance, discipline, and courage was formed.²⁶ Australia's military commemoration day is known as Anzac Day and is held on 25 April 1915—incidentally, the day after the Armenian Genocide commemoration, which marks the day that Armenian intellectuals were targeted in Constantinople. Therefore, what Australia sees as a significant military campaign in Australian history took place at the same time and in the same place as the Armenian Genocide—which, unsurprisingly, meant that some Australians were witnesses to the genocide of the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire.²⁷ This Australian presence

23 "Sydney's Greeks, Armenians and Assyrians Unite to Demand Recognition of 1915 Genocides," *The Greek Herald*, 12 April 2024, <https://greekherald.com.au/community/sydneys-greeks-armenians-and-assyrians-unite-to-demand-recognition-of-1915-genocides/>.

24 For an overview, see "Understanding Gallipoli," Australian War Memorial, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources/understanding-gallipoli>.

25 "Understanding Gallipoli: The Cost," Australian War Memorial, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources/understanding-gallipoli/cost>.

26 "Gallipoli Campaign: Forging the Nation—Federation: The First 20 years," Australian War Memorial, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/forging/ww1/gallipoli>.

27 See, for example, David W.G. Treloar and Panayiotis Diamadis, *From Genocide to Regeneration: The Photographs of George Devine Treloar* (Unity in Philia Press, 2025), which publishes for the first time the photographs of Treloar, who served as the League of Nations Commissioner for Refugees in north-eastern Hellas, the frontline leader of the international relief effort on behalf of the survivors of the Hellenic, Armenian, and Assyrian

meant that Australians at home were aware of the genocide through eyewitness accounts, either from personal communications or in the media. The Australian presence was in fact so significant that by 1922, relief committees operated in every state of Australia, and an orphanage was established in Lebanon, named the Australasian Orphanage, which provided shelter for 1,700 Armenian Genocide orphans. An image of this orphanage, including the Reverend James Cresswell, who was the national secretary of the Armenian Relief Fund of Australia, is even part of the permanent exhibition at the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute in Yerevan. Promoting this connection is thus important to demonstrate that the Armenian Genocide is not something that is far removed from Australians in time and space, but that there is a direct connection between Australians and this Genocide—therefore, it is crucial that Australia recognizes the Genocide, including to honor those Australians who were eyewitnesses, rescuers, and aid providers.

One of the reasons why it is so crucial to feature this connection is that the Gallipoli legend is a contributing factor (and likely the most significant factor) in Australia's lack of recognition. Anzac Day is commemorated in Australia, but significantly, it is also commemorated at Gallipoli, with many Australians traveling to Turkey to commemorate fallen Anzacs *in situ*. The Anzac Day Service at Gallipoli is something that many Australians consider a pilgrimage and part of "being Australian."²⁸ Many tour companies run tours to Gallipoli and Anzac Cove.²⁹ Turkey is aware of the importance of Gallipoli and the Anzac legend to Australians and uses this as leverage over Australia's potential recognition of the Armenian Genocide. After the NSW recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Turkey "made it clear that NSW MPs are not welcome to attend the [Anzac Day] ceremony" at the time of the centennial anniversary of Gallipoli (and the Armenian Genocide), threatening to ban members of the NSW Parliament from attending the 2015 centenary commemorations.³⁰

ian Genocides who had flooded into Greece and other countries. This book publishes the complete collection of photographs taken by Treloar, illustrating the arrival and re-settlement of the genocide survivors.

28 The Anzac Day Service is an official event between the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and Turkey. See Department of Veteran Affairs, "Anzac Day - Gallipoli, Türkiye," Australian Government, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.dva.gov.au/recognition/commemorations/commemorative-services/overseas-commemorative-services/anzac-day-gallipoli-turkiye>.

29 See, for example, "Tours to Gallipoli and ANZAC Cove," *On the Go Tours*, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.onthegotours.com/au/Türkiye/Best-Places-To-Visit/Gallipoli-and-Anzac-Cove>; Emma Calley, "What Visiting Gallipoli Meant to Me, a Young Aussie Traveller," December 25, 2018, <https://www.intrepidtravel.com/adventures/travel-to-gallipoli-as-a-young-australian/>.

30 Anna Patty and Judith Whelan, "MPs Warned off Armenia with Anzac Threat," *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), 16 November 2013, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/mps-warned-off-armenia-with-anzac-threat-20131115-2xmcc.html>; Colin Tatz, "Turkey, the Armenian Genocide and the Politics of Memory," *The Conversation*, 19 December 2013, <https://theconversation.com/turkey-the-armenian-genocide-and-the-politics-of-memory-20747>; Helen Davidson, "Gallipoli Service: O'Farrell Attacks Turkish Threat to Bar NSW MPs," *The Guardian*, 22 August 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/22/gallipoli-ofarrell-turkish-bar-mps>; "Turkey Threatens to Ban MPs from Gallipoli Centenary over Genocide Vote," *ABC News*, 21 August 2013, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-08-21/turkey-threatens-nsw-parliament-over-armenian-genocide-vote/4903444>. While not related to recognition of the Armenian Genocide, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has also used Australians' travel to Gallipoli for other threats, such as in 2019, when he threatened

Thus, it can be assumed that Turkey's threats to prevent Australians from visiting Gallipoli to commemorate Anzac Day are a factor, if not the most significant factor, in the federal government's refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide.³¹ Albeit with a specific focus, this would be consistent with Turkish lobbying of other states to discourage recognition of the Armenian Genocide.³² It is interesting to note, however, the responses from politicians during our conversations in Canberra. Most politicians expressed surprise that such recognition had not already happened. Many could not understand why recognition had not happened. Some suggested possible reasons, such as Gallipoli, or the unwillingness of the government to "turn off the tap" of intelligence from Turkey. Thus, even after discussions with politicians across all political parties, it ultimately seems unclear why recognition has not occurred, but certainly pressure from Turkey is the reason.

Politicians from the sitting government listened but engaged less than others, all determining that they would have to consult the Foreign Minister. A prior study found that the Department of Foreign Affairs pressured sitting government politicians not to recognize the Armenian Genocide, even if they had made recognition an election promise, as "it would be viewed as criticism of Turkey which is contrary to Australian foreign policy."³³ Yet it is unclear why Turkey's pressure is so powerful for Australia, which does not have a significant trade relationship with Turkey, nor a substantial Turkish population,³⁴ and that same prior study found that the Turkish community in Australia does not significantly mobilize or advocate against recognition.³⁵ As part of its advocacy, the JJI informs politicians that Turkey's previous "retaliatory" conduct against states that have recognized the genocide has been minimal and short-lived, if there was any response at all.

As part of the advocacy week, there is also media and social media engagement. Live Facebook streams are made in situ at Parliament House to promote the work,³⁶ and the

to send any anti-Muslim Australians "back in coffins" like their grandfathers in WWI; "Australian PM Denounces Erdogan for 'Reckless' NZ Attack Comments," *AlJazeera*, 20 March 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/3/20/australian-pm-denounces-erdogan-for-reckless-nz-attack-comments>.

31 Armoudian and Smits concur that the Anzac myth is also the current principal reason for non-recognition by New Zealand, in which Turks are now positioned as "fellow victims of the evils of war and imperial invasion, and modern-day Turkey as the sacred 'home' of New Zealand's war dead." See Maria Armoudian and Katherine Smits, "How Soon We Forget: National Myth-Making and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 27, no. 1 (2025): 91-112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2268483>.

32 See, for example, Julien Zarifian, "The Armenian and Turkish Lobbying, and the (Non-) Recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the United States," in *Congress and Diaspora Politics*, ed. James A. Thurber, Colton C. Campbell, and David A. Dulio (SUNY Press, 2018), 117-138.

33 Wolvaardt, "Genocide, Diasporic Identity and Activism," 286.

34 For population statistics, see Department of Foreign Affairs, "Türkiye Country Brief," accessed 24 November 2025, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/t%C3%BCrkiye/t%C3%BCrkiye-country-brief>. For top trade relationships (which does not include Turkey), see "International Trade: Supplementary Information, Calendar Year," Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed 25 November 2025, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/international-trade/international-trade-supplementary-information-calendar-year/latest-release>.

35 Wolvaardt, "Genocide, Diasporic Identity and Activism," 282-3.

36 For an example of a Facebook live video, see Armenian National Committee of Australia, "Genocide denied = Genocide repeated Today, marks 100 days of the #ArtsakhBlockade orchestrated by Azerbaijan and President

activities are reported in the diaspora Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian media.³⁷ This is public activism to promote the issue of recognition, and to provide accountability to the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities for the activities undertaken on their behalf.

Beyond Recognition

There have been successes as part of the broader campaign, beyond executive or parliamentary recognition. In February 2024, the New South Wales Legislative Council unanimously passed a motion calling on the state government to expand Holocaust education and to include the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocides and establish a museum to create further awareness.³⁸ Statements were made “in support of expanding genocide education to incorporate the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide in the curriculum and establish a museum to create awareness about the genocide,” by representatives from all political parties.³⁹ Chris Rath MLC presented the motion to the Legislative Council and in doing so, acknowledged that there is a high level of Holocaust awareness in Australia,⁴⁰ but little knowledge of the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocides. Mr. Rath presented the motion with the goal of creating more awareness in Australia of these genocides: “They are still not well known and not well taught, which is a very sad thing and exactly what the motion is about.”⁴¹ Mr. Rath went on to specifically draw attention to the Australian connection with the Armenian Genocide, a statement that reinforces the need to use this connection as part of the reason why Australia should recognize the genocide:

of the International...” Facebook, 21 March 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1DvbWZTiZD/>. See also Armenian National Committee of Australia, “International Association of Genocide Scholars President Melanie O’Brien Headlines Inaugural Joint Justice Initiative Advocacy Week,” 20 March 2023, <https://www.anc.org.au/news/Media-Releases/International-Association-of-Genocide-Scholars-President-Melanie-OBrien-Headlines-Inaugural-Joint-Justice-Initiative-Advocacy-Week>.

37 “Inaugural Joint Justice Initiative Advocacy Week kicks off in Canberra,” *The Greek Herald*, 21 March 2023, <https://greekherald.com.au/news/inaugural-joint-justice-initiative-advocacy-week-kicks-off-in-canberra/>; TNH Staff, “Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Communities in Australia Call for Genocide Recognition,” *The National Herald*, February 28, 2020, <https://www.thenationalherald.com/armenian-assyrian-and-greek-communities-in-australia-call-for-genocide-recognition/>.

38 “Armenian Genocide Recognition and Education in the News in Australia,” *The Armenian Weekly* 2024, 20 February 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/02/20/armenian-genocide-recognition-and-education-in-the-news-in-australia/>.

39 Ibid.

40 As evidenced by the Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey, “Gandel Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness in Australia Survey,” Gandel Foundation, archived January 2020, <https://gandel-foundation.org.au/gandel-holocaust-survey/>.

41 New South Wales Legislative Council, Parliamentary Debate, 7 February 2024 (“Genocide Education and Awareness,” Chris Rath, MLC) 4:58 p.m., <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/permalink?id=HAN-SARD-1820781676-94610>. See also Armenian National Committee of Australia, “Armenian Genocide Recognition and Education in the News in Australia,” *Armenian Weekly*, 20 February 2024, <https://armenianweekly.com/2024/02/20/armenian-genocide-recognition-and-education-in-the-news-in-australia/>.

Educating our younger generations about the 1915 Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek genocides is also a way to honour our own history. It is a way to honour everyday Australians who rallied behind the Armenian people in our nation's first humanitarian relief effort. We should be proud of our nation's generosity and compassion... A substantial amount of aid was raised by the people of Australia and Commonwealth steamers were sent to the Middle East, which helped save the lives of many Armenian refugees fleeing the genocide... Australia's noble role during this dark period of history must not be forgotten, nor should the millions of innocent victims. Instead, it should be honoured. Many people from the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities in Australia are descendants of survivors of those genocides. They are proud of Australia and the humanitarian role it has played in the past.⁴²

In September 2024, the NSW history syllabus for years 7 to 10 was amended to include the mandatory study of "Australia's civic action and humanitarian response during World War I." Within the "Depth study (core)–Australia: making a nation—from Federation to WWI (1889–c. 1919)" component, teachers must guide their students through "Significant groups, individuals, ideas, beliefs, practices and events in Australia: making a nation—from Federation to WWI," including "Australia's civic action and humanitarian response during WWI."⁴³ All NSW students will learn about the actions of everyday Australians and New Zealanders who participated in humanitarian efforts during WWI, including in initiatives that saved survivors of the Ottoman Empire's Genocide of Christian minorities.

The Academic Contribution in this Context

How does an academic contribute to such advocacy? My contribution has been two-fold. Firstly, the nature of academic work means that academics have extensive expertise in our field, and this expertise can be used to educate others who do not have such expertise. Secondly, we may hold prominent positions that are useful in gaining an audience with people. For me, that position is as president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), an association of over 700 members worldwide, a "global, interdisciplinary, non-partisan organization that seeks to further research and teaching about the nature, causes, and consequences of genocide, and advance policy studies on

⁴² Hansard, "Genocide Education and Awareness."

⁴³ See History 7-10 Syllabus, "Depth study (core)–Australia: making a nation—from Federation to WWI (1889–c. 1919)," NSW Government, accessed 24 November 2025, <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/hsie/history-7-10-2024/content/stage-5/fa417f1d53>.

genocide prevention.”⁴⁴ This role provides visibility and a certain level of privilege that allows me to use my expert voice to support those advocating for justice, including for Armenian Genocide recognition.⁴⁵

With regard to using my expertise for education outside the university, the concept is that as an “objective” outsider (that is, someone with no Armenian, Greek, Assyrian, or Turkish background) and an Australian expert in the Armenian Genocide,⁴⁶ and in particular, an international law expert, my perspective is useful to demonstrate to politicians that the Armenian Genocide indeed was a genocide, even if no court had proclaimed it as such. My role is to help educate on facts about the Genocide. For example, I delivered a presentation at Parliament House in Canberra for the commemoration of the burning of Smyrna.⁴⁷ Many politicians and their staffers attended. The impact of this presentation was significant, with many expressing surprise at the content, in that they did not have prior knowledge of the Smyrna Catastrophe, nor did they realize that Turkey continues to reference the destruction of Smyrna in current times.⁴⁸ The emphasis of my presentation was to highlight that what may seem to be part of history is, in fact, current and relevant today, and that recognition of past atrocities contributes to the prevention of future atrocities.

Other scholars have published on the genocides, especially the Anzac and broader Australian connection to efforts to rescue survivors around the eastern Mediterranean. Such scholarship, including that by Peter Stanley and Vicken Babkenian, who co-authored *Armenia, Australia and the Great War*, has been a cornerstone of recognition efforts.⁴⁹ Panayiotis Diamadis has also published scholarship on the connection between Australians and the Greek Genocide.⁵⁰ These academics are also active with the movement for recognition in Australia, including Diamadis’ direct work as part of the JJI.⁵¹

44 IAGS, “About Us,” accessed 25 November 2025, <https://genocidescholars.org/about-us/>.

45 A title can add to the perception of credibility by policy-makers: “Perceptions of status, authority, and expertise are exceptionally strong filters to make processing of information easier for policy analysts and policy-makers.” Carey Doberstein, “The Credibility Chasm in Policy Research from Academics, Think Tanks, and Advocacy Organizations,” *Canadian Public Policy* 43, no. 4 (2017), 371, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/680376>.

46 Melanie O’Brien, *From Discrimination to Death: Genocide Process Through a Human Rights Lens* (Routledge, 2023).

47 Armenian National Committee of Australia, “Joint Justice Initiative Hosts 100th Commemoration of the Smyrna Catastrophe in Australian Federal Parliament,” 22 March 2023, <https://www.anc.org.au/news/Media-Releases/Joint-Justice-Initiative-Hosts-100th-Commemoration-of-the-Smyrna-Catastrophe-in-Australian-Federal-Parliament>.

48 In 2022, Erdogan had threatened to “come in the night” and said that Greece should “remember its history,” which were references to the burning of Smyrna 100 years earlier; “Erdogan Repeats Threat against Greece during G20,” *Politico*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/recep-erdogan-turkey-threat-against-greece-g20/>.

49 Vicken Babkenian and Peter Stanley, *Armenia, Australia and the Great War* (NewSouth Publishing, 2016).

50 Panayiotis Diamadis, “Friends in Crisis: Anzacs and Hellenism,” *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 18 (2017): 211-237, <https://openjournals.test.library.sydney.edu.au/MGST/article/view/12688/11644>

51 See also the public advocacy of Colin Tatz, e.g., Colin Tatz, “100 Years On, Australia’s Still Out of Step on the Armenian Genocide,” *The Conversation*, 24 April 2015, <https://theconversation.com/100-years-on-austra>

As noted above, the overall advocacy work goes beyond the push for recognition, and that includes academic activism. For example, during the time in Canberra in March 2023, the ANC and I also met separately with politicians to discuss Nagorno-Karabakh. I have also advocated directly to the UK government to act on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, before the ethnic cleansing took place in late September 2023. Having been a research fellow at the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM) in 2022,⁵² I also connected the ANC with the Sydney Jewish Museum to enable the ANC to seek advice on setting up an Armenian Genocide Museum from those with experience in establishing and running a genocide-focused museum.

Academics as Activists

Academic activism is concerned with integrating academic scholarship with social and political activism. It is a critical movement that wants scholars to use their expertise, knowledge, and academic platform to engage in social issues actively... [Academic activism] posits... that academics bear an advantage—if not a responsibility—to employ their knowledge and expertise in non-academic projects that aim to improve life and society.⁵³

Many academics want to make a difference and contribute to the greater good, to have a sense of personal and collective purpose, and that desire may expand beyond the traditional concept of academia as represented by tasks such as teaching.⁵⁴ Consequently, academic-activists seek to bring themselves “into contact with social movement groups, and to participate with them in research, alongside being involved in social struggles themselves.”⁵⁵ “[A]ctivism exists in a continuum and is embedded to some extent in all our activity as academics,”⁵⁶ particularly for those who seek to create social and/or personal change or tackle injustices. For those of us working in fields that broadly fit

lias-still-out-of-step-on-the-armenian-genocide-39792.

52 “Research Fellows,” Sydney Jewish Museum, accessed 25 November 2025, <https://sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au/research-fellowships/>.

53 Ladan Rahbari et al., “Activism and Academia: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Academic Freedom and Social Engagement,” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 47, no. 1 (2025): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080x.2024.2390197>.

54 Although it is important to note that academics can also practice activism across their teaching and service as well as research (for example, by advocating for workers’ rights); Mantha Katsikana, “Feminist Scholar-Activism,” in *Doing Feminist Urban Research: Insights from the GenUrb Project*, ed. Linda Peake, Nasya S. Razavi, and Araby Smyth (Routledge, 2024), 68-69. See also, Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994); Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); John Smyth, *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

55 Kye Askins, “‘That’s Just What I Do’: Placing Emotion in Academic Activism,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 1 (2009), 6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.03.005>.

56 Askins, “‘That’s Just What I Do,’” 6, citing Rachel Pain, “Social Geography: On Action-Orientated Research,” *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 5 (2003), 649-657, <https://doi.org/10.1191/0309132503ph455pr>.

under the umbrella of “social justice,” and particularly for those of us working in human rights and/or genocide studies, we experience both “remarkable advances and horrendous persecution,”⁵⁷ out of which we are “motivated by a desire to achieve equality and acceptance”⁵⁸ for the communities with whom our research engages. In general, academic research is grounded in the idea of improving society: we seek to determine why X or Y happens, and how X or Y could be improved.⁵⁹ In law, we analyse whether existing laws are sufficient, effective and provide fair and just outcomes, and consider how laws could be changed or judicial decisions made to better support a just and fair society.⁶⁰

Academic work can influence policy and law without an academic necessarily being an overt activist. Our work can inform progressive social change, whether we actively seek it to or not, such as when governments use our research to underpin their policy and law decisions—and I advocate that important policy and law decisions should be based in research, and our research *should* help governments make fair, just and reasonable decisions in law and policy. Government representatives and public servants may even read and implement our research without our knowledge, thereby making us “secret activists,” whether we perceive ourselves as activists or not. Of course, academics may also make direct and open contributions to government policy and law, such as by making submissions to government inquiries, appearing before government committees, or providing expert advice to government departments or individual politicians, seeking to create social impact. Studies have shown that decision-makers perceive academic research as having high quality and credibility; thus, it is crucial to ensure that policy-makers can access academic research to inform their decision-making.⁶¹

There is a long history of academic work influencing social movements. As intellectuals, academics engage in critical thinking and analysis, and “[b]y actively and critically reflecting on the world and our place in it, we are more able to act in creative, constructive ways that challenge oppressive power relations rather than reinforce

57 Dennis Altman, “Academia versus Activism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Global LGBT and Sexual Diversity Politics*, ed. Michael J. Bosia, Momin Rahman, and Sandra M. McEvoy (Oxford University Press, 2019), 457.

58 Altman, “Academia versus Activism,” 450.

59 Johnston and Plummer define the research stage as “*Research*, as generally understood by academics, into the existence, causes, and potential solutions of problems and then, if a solution is implemented, into its impact.” They define the advocacy component as “involving arguments to various audiences (and in some cases, prior audience identification) regarding the existence and nature of a problem, the identification of viable solutions or resolutions, and the necessity of political action.” Ron Johnston and Paul Plummer, “Commentary: What is Policy-Oriented Research?,” *Environment and Planning A* 37, no. 9 (2005), 1523, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3845>. Here, this is obvious: the problem is the lack of Australian recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and the solution is for the government to do so, which can be easily executed through a Prime Ministerial statement on 24 April, or through a motion in Parliament.

60 Which ultimately produces social change. See Thomas B. Stoddard, “Essay: Bleeding Heart: Reflections on Using the Law to Make Social Change,” *New York University Law Review* 72, no. 5 (1997): 967-991.

61 Doberstein, “The Credibility Chasm,”; Carey Doberstein, “Whom Do Bureaucrats Believe? A Randomized Controlled Experiment Testing Perceptions of Credibility of Policy Research,” *Policy Studies Journal* 45, no. 2 (2017): 384-405, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12166>.

them.”⁶² Indeed, for “scholars who explicitly identify as activist-academics... there is a recognition that their research interests align with their political values and beliefs, resulting in advocacy being entrenched in their very approach to research.”⁶³ Universities have indeed often “been hubs for organizing of political movements, including as sites for the formation of political consciousness,” and “place[s] of knowledge production... at the intersections of activism, teaching, and transformative praxis, making knowledge production and its liberatory possibilities accessible to the world.”⁶⁴

In particular, being a legal academic and a lawyer significantly impacts my desire to engage in activism, particularly as my area of legal expertise is broadly human rights law and international criminal law (the latter being about justice and accountability for terrible wrongs). Law has a long history and active engagement as activism. Lawyers and legal advocacy can play a powerful role in social movements, including through lawyers embedded in social movement organizing.⁶⁵ Lawyers may make change through impact litigation, providing criminal defense for improperly arrested activists or for those arrested during protests, and offering legal services or representation for social movement groups or individuals such as those targeted by authorities.⁶⁶ To me, being a lawyer equates to being an activist (advocate), as it is the role of lawyers to ensure the rule of law is upheld, and that law is applied fairly, justly, and equally.

Another aspect of academic activism is that of being part of a community.⁶⁷ We can find pleasure and fulfillment in friendships and alliances with like-minded others and in participating in activist networks and communities, which is a positive social act that emerges from our desires to bring about social, political, and legal change. Indeed, it can otherwise be difficult to transmit our research to policymakers, who simply “do not have the time to cull the literature... and find items identifying potentially important issues which stimulate them into action,” and therefore this community advocacy creates interpersonal connections that enable academics as experts to inform policymakers what problems exist and present them with proposed solutions.⁶⁸ This aspect of advocacy and activism can create genuine and relational engagement, rather than transactional undertakings.⁶⁹

62 Ian Maxey, “Beyond Boundaries? Activism, Academia, Reflexivity and Research,” *Area* 31, no. 3 (1999): 201, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20003985>.

63 Nasreen S. Jessani et al., “Advocacy, Activism, and Lobbying: How Variations in Interpretation Affects Ability for Academia to Engage with Public Policy,” *PLOS Global Public Health* 2, no. 3 (2022) e0000034: 13, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000034>.

64 Katsikana, “Feminist Scholar-Activism,” 67.

65 See, for example, the extensive range of strategic litigation being brought against the Trump regime’s actions; “Litigation Tracker: Legal Challenges to Trump Administration actions,” *Just Security*, accessed 26 November 2025, <https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/>.

66 Kris van der Pas, “Conceptualising strategic litigation,” *Oñati Socio-Legal Series* 11, no. 6(S) (2021): 116-145, <https://doi.org/10.35295/osls.iisl/0000-0000-0000-1226>.

67 Feminist activists in particular seek to create communities at a grassroots level that involve marginalized groups such as women, LGBTIQ+ people, and minorities; Katsikana, “Feminist scholar-activism.”

68 Johnston and Plummer, “Commentary,” 1525.

69 Jessani et al., “Advocacy, Activism, and Lobbying,” 3.

The traditional academic model requires academics to produce traditional academic outputs, which may suffer if their time is given to other modes of activism.⁷⁰ An academic can use research for activism, but also vice versa, use their activism for research, to help minimize this disruption to expectations. Indeed, my own work demonstrates this relationship: I have researched and published on the Armenian Genocide (academia), which I have been able to use to argue for Australian recognition of the Armenian Genocide (activism), and am now writing about that activism for an academic publication (academia). It is important to remember that writing can be a form of resistance: academics can write for resistance and of resistance. Writing itself can be “a call to action, revolution and transgression.”⁷¹ In this sense, we position “writing as a tactic of subversion of the gap between the time and place of solidarity and the time and place of writing.”⁷² Indeed, while I write this as an academic publication, I also write this article as a call to action to the Australian government.

Academics should also embrace the new desire by universities for “non-traditional output,” which includes blog posts, and the emphasis on “impact” and “engagement,” which activism work can fall into, for example, giving talks to different public groups. This is also taking education outside the classroom, democratizing knowledge by sharing academic expertise with those who would not otherwise have such access. The concept of “impact” is difficult to define,⁷³ and some forms of measuring impact, such as citations of publications, have been criticized by academics, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, which of course are disciplines that have more apparent social and political aspects.⁷⁴ Criticism includes the position of citational “impact” as being part of the neoliberal institutional system that seeks transactional rather than societal or political impact.⁷⁵ Others have questioned how we are supposed to *prove* “societal relevance” in practice,⁷⁶ and indeed social impact can be difficult to definitively prove.

70 Michael Flood, Brian Martin, and Tanja Dreher, “Combining Academia and Activism: Common Obstacles and Useful Tools,” *Australian Universities Review* 55, no. 1 (2013): 20-21.

71 Askins, “That’s Just What I Do,” 6, citing Hélène Cixous, “*Coming to Writing*” and *Other Essays*, trans. Deborah Jensen et al. (Harvard University Press, 1991).

72 Paul Routledge, “The Third Space as Critical Engagement,” *Antipode* 28, no. 4 (1996): 402, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1996.tb00533.x>.

73 Rhodes et al. criticize neoliberal definitions of impact that focus on capitalist priorities such as economic growth, thereby resulting in funding given to science and engineering projects rather than projects on “critical social and political issues.” See Carl Rhodes, Christopher Wright, and Alison Pullen, “Changing the World? The Politics of Activism and Impact in the Neoliberal University,” *Organization* 25, no. 1 (2018), 141, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417726546>.

74 Andrew G. Bonnell, “Tide or Tsunami? The Impact of Metrics on Scholarly Research,” *Australian Universities Review* 58, no. 1 (2016): 54-61. For law specifically, see, for example, Kieran Tranter and Timothy D. Peters, “Benchmarks for Australian Law Researchers’ H-Index and Citation Count Bibliometrics,” *Law, Technology and Humans* 7, no. 1 (2025): 154-174, <https://doi.org/10.5204/lthj.3780>. For law academics, citation by courts is also a pressure; Katy Barnett, “Citation as a Measure of ‘Impact’: Female Legal Academics at a Disadvantage?,” *Alternative Law Journal* 44, no. 4 (2019): 267-274.

75 Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen, “Changing the World?”

76 Ingo Venzke, “Against Impact,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 37, no. 4 (2024): 757-762.

For example, how can we know and prove that a government decision to change a law was a result (even in part) of *our* submission to the inquiry on that issue? Additionally, knowing and proving may be two different things, as, for example, I know from in-person conversations with government officials that my work has influenced significant decisions of multiple governments in the international law arena, but I have no *proof* of this other than my personal conversations. I would like to hope that if my research has in some way contributed to Australia's eventual (hopefully!) recognition of the Armenian Genocide, that would certainly be considered "impact." I have always advocated that the biggest impact of my work is that I am able to use my position of privilege to advocate for the needs of vulnerable people who may have no other way to do so, or at least to support them to advocate for justice and accountability. Indeed, this perception fits within the feminist activist practice of liberating institutions such as universities from their traditional masculine, transactional nature and now, from their neoliberal, masculine, transactional nature, and instead creating institutions based on relationships of "trust, reciprocity, collaboration, and friendship among scholars and the people they work with" such as research participants and communities that our research seeks to benefit.⁷⁷ Positively, there are many institutions that support their academics' activist work, including financially, deeming it to not be an unnecessary, unwarranted or unconnected part of academic work.⁷⁸

Activism may also include recognition, which is not the purpose of such work, but is appreciated when it happens, as it means that our work is valued (including by those whom we aim to help the most). Of course, our employers, the universities, see the honoring of an award, citation or other form of recognition for our work as recognition of that academic work and potentially representative of "impact," and this helps academics' career progression (in a system where promotions are an enormous amount of work and difficult to achieve⁷⁹).

It is, however, important to recall that activism may be unsafe. While it is outside the scope of this article to provide a full discussion of serious security and safety risks in many countries around the world,⁸⁰ it is necessary to recognize that even in "safe" countries like Australia,⁸¹ research that criticizes the government or produces a finding

77 Katsikana, "Feminist Scholar-Activism," 67.

78 Audrey Williams June, "When Activism Is Worth the Risk: Academics Who Champion Causes May Be Gambling with Their Careers. But for some dedicated activists, the choice is clear," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/when-activism-is-worth-the-risk>.

79 And contain unrealistic expectations that academics are already performing at the higher level; Troy Hefernan and Kathleen Smithers, "Working at the Level above: University Promotion Policies as a Tool for Wage Theft and Underpayment," *Higher Education Research & Development* 44, no. 3 (2025), 585-599, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2412656>.

80 For example, practicing feminist activism in countries such as China or Iran; Katsikana, "Feminist Scholar-Activism," 68.

81 I have been lucky enough that this part of my advocacy has not had significant negative repercussions. That said, I do not travel to, nor do I plan to travel to, Turkey or Azerbaijan, due to the potential safety risks. I have been targeted by the Azerbaijan authorities in online responses to a media story relating to Nagorno-Karabakh, in which I was quoted.

that the government does not like can be publicly denigrated by that government or have funding pulled.⁸² Academics who deal with controversial issues may also be targeted through their employer, for example, where contra activist groups write letters with false accusations about a researcher to an employer, a funding body or even the Minister for Education.⁸³ Some people who work in universities that discourage activism or any opinions other than the so-called “objective, unbiased” view may find their jobs at risk. Others work in the context of strongly neoliberal universities, within which research is “framed in terms of particular economic justifications” rather than “social and environment well-being,” and therefore research that does not satisfy commercial interests is deemed unimportant or even unnecessary.⁸⁴ Risk also exists for those whose activism work “threatens to destabilize the very power structures [and hierarchies] that the university guards, as a space of privilege.”⁸⁵ Therefore, academics may need to be cautious about their activism, as it may potentially jeopardize their safety and/or their job or career progression. However, of course, it is exactly such activism and advocacy that is crucial to make changes to unfair, unjust, unequal and imbalanced power structures, to push back against barriers to institutional change.⁸⁶ Hence, the balance between “creating and defending space from which to undertake activist scholarship”⁸⁷ and safety must be struck. Nevertheless, universities should all “adopt policies that, above all, democratize activism,” enabling academics to practice activism freely.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Academia is a career that often lends itself to activism, to the implementation of the knowledge and expertise earned over years of research into “projects that aim to improve life and society.”⁸⁹ Indeed, activism may be seen as “a public service inherent to academic citizenship.”⁹⁰ Academics should give thought to where they sit on the activist praxis, to “develop a critical position in relation to [their] choice of a research framework,

82 See, for example, Marian Baird, “The Academic as Activist: Managing Tension and Creating Impact,” *Community, Work and Family* 23, no. 5 (2020): 615, 617, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2020.1807915>.

83 Jules Boykoff, “Riding the Lines: Academia, Public Intellectual Work, and Scholar-Activism,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 35, no. 2 (2018): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2018-0017>.

84 Rhodes, Wright, and Pullen, “Changing the World?” 145.

85 Katsikana, “Feminist Scholar-Activism,” 69. See also Rahbari et al., “Activism and Academia.”

86 And of course, there is “the principle of academic freedom, a foundational tenet that allows scholars to pursue research and express ideas without facing restrictions or repercussions... essential for scholars to produce critical ideas without backlash, pressure, or persecution from governments, public interest groups, corporations, States, and other biased/positioned parties.” See Rahbari et al., “Activism and Academia,” 2-3. Academic freedom is a principle that should always be fought for.

87 Katsikana, “Feminist Scholar-Activism,” 72.

88 Rahbari et al., “Activism and Academia,” 14.

89 Ibid, 2.

90 Ibid, 13.

agenda, and ethics that align with [their] activist values.”⁹¹ Once this position is identified, communities and solidarities can be created, through connecting with groups or individuals with the same values, attending and participating in events or actions, and participating in projects that align with these values: in other words, bringing research and expertise to action.

As someone who has always felt the need to advocate for just causes, and who always wanted to be a lawyer, academia is another way that I can be an activist, in a manner that aligns with my feminist values of equality and justice. My research on the Armenian Genocide has led me to conclude, as it has for other scholars of this significant historical event, that it was, indeed, quite obviously a genocide.⁹² It has also led me to be ashamed that my own country has not recognized this, particularly when so many of our allies, including the United States, have done so. I am ashamed that my country has not done the right thing and supported a genocide survivor community, instead caving to pressures of an authoritarian government. I see it as part of my role as an expert in this field to help advocate to the Australian government to *do the right thing* and recognize the Armenian Genocide. On the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Australian scholar Colin Tatz wrote, “100 years on, Australia’s still out of step on the Armenian Genocide.”⁹³ Now, 110 years on, Australia is *still* out of step on the Armenian Genocide. As an academic-activist, I will continue to work with the Australian Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian communities to pressure the government to be in step, and I look forward to the day when we can appreciate and welcome that the Australian government has finally recognized the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian Genocides.

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