

## ATTITUDINAL DIVERGENCE IN A MELBOURNE REGION OF HIGH IMMIGRANT CONCENTRATION: A CASE STUDY

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*Dingley Village and Springvale are two suburbs in South-Eastern Melbourne that are geographically close but socially distinct. The first contains high proportions of relatively-affluent Australia-born residents, and the second high proportions of less-affluent overseas-born residents, amongst whom the Viet Nam-born constitute the largest birthplace group. This article draws on survey data to chart the differing attitudes of Australia- and Viet Nam-born people in the two suburbs to immigration and ethnic diversity since the early 1990s. While the data show support for non-discriminatory selection policies, many respondents are opposed to current levels of immigration and to aspects of multiculturalism. However, attitudes diverge widely between the two suburbs and the Australia-born are not as concerned about immigration issues as they were in the late 1990s.*

This paper reports the findings of a 2006 survey conducted in south-eastern Melbourne. The 2006 survey builds on surveys conducted in the 1990s and forms part of a larger research program into social cohesion in Australia funded by the Scanlon Foundation. It explores attitudes at a time of increased immigration in a region of high immigrant concentration, characterised by its large Indo-Chinese community. The survey is concerned to explore and contrast the attitudes and values of Australia-born respondents in the suburb of Dingley Village and Viet Nam-born resident in nearby Springvale. Its objective is to further understanding of the impact of immigration at the community and local level.

### THE SURVEY

The survey was administered in the suburbs of Springvale, Dingley Village and Keysborough during August–September 2006, close to the time of the census. Data collectors visited homes to invite participation and where agreement was obtained respondents were left a questionnaire for completion. These were either collected on a return visit or mailed. Where requested, respondents were assisted to complete the questionnaire. Data collectors were recruited from the local community, some chosen for their fluency in community languages.

In all 1169 questionnaires were completed: 505 in Springvale, 330 in Dingley Village, 310 in Keysborough, and 24 in other locations. The survey replicated three earlier studies, undertaken in 1992 (981 respondents), December 1993 to February 1994 (499) and May to August 1998 (485).<sup>1</sup> The survey comprised 37 questions, 12 of which required multiple responses, and 11 demographic questions. The results presented in this paper are confined to those for Springvale and Dingley Village and have been adjusted for the sex and age composition of the sample. Weights were developed to adjust for under/over representation in terms of age and sex in the sample. The 2006 census counts by age and sex for Springvale and Dingley Village were used to compute the weights for the 2006 survey. Similar data from the 2001 and 1996 censuses were used to derive the weights for the 1998 and 1993–94 surveys respectively.

### THE REGION

The region studied has a relatively high proportion of overseas born, with the major exception of the suburb of Dingley Village, located some five kilometres from the Springvale shopping hub. In Dingley Village 74 per cent of the population were Australia-born at the 2006 census, a slight decrease over the last ten years (77 per cent

in 1996). Of the overseas-born component, England was the most common birthplace (4.7 per cent). Eighty four per cent of the residents reported that they speak only English in their homes.

To the north (and east and south-east) of Dingley Village are areas of significant immigrant concentration: immediately to the north are the suburbs of Clayton South and Springvale, in which the overseas-born constitute a majority of the population (57 per cent and 60 per cent respectively), and Springvale South (overseas-born 54 per cent), to the north-east.<sup>2</sup>

Dingley Village, Clayton South and Springvale South have populations in the range 10,000–12,000, while Springvale itself has in excess of 18,000. Springvale has experienced continuous growth of the overseas born in recent decades; the overseas born comprised 32 per cent of the

population in 1971, 38 per cent in 1986, 46 per cent in 1991 and 60 per cent in 2001, a level maintained in 2006 (see Figure 1). While the overseas-born proportion has stabilised, there is continuing entry of new arrivals—25 per cent of the Springvale population has moved to the suburb since 2001, including 10.7 per cent who came from overseas. This compares with 1.9 per cent recent overseas arrivals in Dingley Village and 6.1 per cent in the Melbourne statistical region as a whole.

The 2006 census reports that a language other than English was spoken in 74.3 per cent of Springvale homes (but in only 16 per cent in Dingley Village). Of those who provided details of ancestry, only 11.9 per cent indicated that both of their parents were born in Australia (55.7 per cent in Dingley Village). The main overseas birthplaces of Springvale residents were Viet Nam (21.3

**Figure 1: Proportion of overseas born at the 2006 census, Springvale**



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per cent) and Cambodia (5.8 per cent). The Viet Nam-born population was consolidated in the 1980s and, since 1995, has experienced a relative decline. In the five years from 1991 to 1995, 55.5 per cent of the overseas arrivals settling in the suburb came from Vietnam, in the years 2001 to 2005 21.2 per cent. Over the same five-year periods Chinese arrivals as a percentage of the overseas-born arrivals increased from eight per cent to 13.8 per cent and Indian arrivals from 2.3 per cent to 9.7 per cent.

With regard to economic indicators, Dingley Village is above the average for the Melbourne statistical region while Springvale is significantly below. At the 2006 census, the median household income for Springvale, at \$695 per week, was 64.4 per cent of the Melbourne average (\$1079) and 58.5 per cent of the Dingley Village average (\$1189). Unemployment in the Melbourne region stood at 5.3 per cent, 2.5 per cent in Dingley Village and 12.1 per cent in Springvale (down from 16.2 per cent in 2001).

The following discussion focuses on two birthplace groups, Australia-born residents of Dingley Village with one or both parents born in Australia (henceforth referred to as the Australia-born), and Viet Nam-born residents of Springvale. The 2006 survey yields 206 of the specified Australia-born respondents in Dingley Village and 174 Viet Nam-born respondents in Springvale. The following analysis is concerned to explore two dimensions: attitudes to immigration, settlement policy and immigrants in 2006; and trends in the attitudes of the Australia-born across the three surveys, 1993–94, 1998 and 2006.

#### **AUSTRALIA-BORN VIEWS OF IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT POLICY**

In response to questions of a general nature, the Australia-born respondents in Dingley Village indicate a large measure of

support for non-discriminatory policies with respect to race, ethnicity and religion.

In response to the proposition that ‘so long as a person is committed to Australia it does not matter what ethnic background they are from’, 92 per cent agreed and only 5.2 per cent disagreed. When presented with the proposition that ‘Asian migrants have much to offer Australia’, 68.5 per cent agreed, 16 per cent were unsure and 12.3 per cent disagreed.

In relation to settlement policy preferences, 83 per cent of respondents in Dingley Village favoured a policy which ‘encouraged’ immigrants ‘to fit into the community as soon as possible’; 7.1 per cent supported a *laissez-faire* approach (‘left to fit in at their own pace’), and only 2.6 per cent agreed with the view that there should be government funding for cultural maintenance ‘during their first years in Australia’.

In response to the proposition that ‘multiculturalism makes Australia a better country to live in’, there was a measure of reserve: 55.6 per cent were in agreement, a relatively large proportion, 30.3 per cent were unsure, and 13 per cent were opposed.

Respondents were asked to rank their preferred criteria for the selection of immigrants. No respondent (of the 206) opted for the criterion of religion as the first relevant consideration, and two respondents (0.9 per cent) selected race. A third option, ‘culture similar to Australia’, less overtly discriminatory, was more popular but still very much a minority option. This was selected by 6.4 per cent of respondents as their first option (see Table 1). Neutral criteria that did not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity received majority support, including qualifications and skills, health, refugee status and family reunion. In total, these criteria were the first choice of 52.4 per cent of respondents. But ‘ability to speak English’, the most popular option at 31.3 per cent, potentially cloaked a preference

for discrimination on the basis of ethnicity.

In contrast with the responses to questions of a general nature, when specific issues were raised respondents were more divided in their views. A key attitudinal question concerns the current immigration

intake. This question has been a staple of opinion polling, providing a useful barometer for tracking public opinion. Here 48.3 per cent of the specified Australia-born respondents in Dingley Village were of the view that the current intake was too high, a

**Table 1: Views on migrant selection, Australia-born, Dingley Village 2006 (per cent)**

Important selection factors:	1st option	2nd option	3rd option
Ability speak English	31.3	16.7	13.3
Qualification/ Skills	22.2	25.6	19.2
Health	9.2	14.6	16.3
Refugee status	11.6	4.3	11.0
Relatives live in Australia	9.4	10.4	14.5
Come from a culture similar to Australia's	6.4	12.4	8.1
Age	1.2	5.6	6.0
Race	0.9	0.0	0.0
Wealth—amount of money able to bring to Australia	0.5	2.0	2.4
Religion	0.0	0.9	1.8
Don't know/ refused	7.3	7.5	7.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	206	206	206

*Question: 'What factors should be given weight when deciding which people are allowed to migrate to Australia? Number three (1, 2, 3) of the most significant factors from the following list, in order of importance'.*

**Table 2: Views on the number of migrants in Springvale, Australia-born, Dingley Village, 2006 (per cent)**

It's a good thing. I think it has made this a better area in which to live	5.1
It is alright, I don't see any problems with it	36.0
It's nothing to me. I do not think about it.	18.9
I am not very happy about it.	17.3
There are too many. It should not be allowed	21.0
Don't know/ refused	1.7
Total	100.0
Total N	206

*Question: 'What is your view of the number of immigrants in the Springvale area? Indicate which of the following comes closest to your view'.*

combined 59.2 per cent that it was about right (32.8 per cent) or too low (6.4 per cent), while 12.6 per cent expressed no opinion.

Although the majority view was that the intake was too high, only around five per cent had even an approximate idea of the size of the actual intake; presumably their views were formed on the basis of observation of the neighbourhood or general impressions. When asked to specify the size of the current intake two out of three respondents (66 per cent) indicated that they had no idea; 31 per cent hazarded an estimate, and of these more than four out of five did not get close to the actual level. When asked specifically about their view of the number of immigrants in the Springvale area, 98 per cent of respondents were willing to express an opinion. A combined 38.3 per cent indicated a negative valuation—with a high proportion (21 per cent) in agreement with the extreme position ('There are too many. It should not be allowed', see Table 2).

As noted, in response to the proposition that multicultural policy made Australia a better country in which to live, 55.6 per cent agreed, 30.3 per cent were unsure, and 13 per cent disagreed. In apparent contrast, when respondents were asked to respond to the proposition that 'Australians are justified in thinking that their way of life is threatened by multiculturalism', 41.9 per

cent agreed, 18.9 per cent were unsure and 36.5 per cent disagreed (see Table 5). In other words, those who may be said to hold a negative view of multiculturalism increased from 13 per cent to 41.9 per cent. This apparent discrepancy may in part be a function of the strongly worded proposition—'threatened by multiculturalism'—but close analysis points to a level of equivocation and negativity which is consistent with responses to other questions. This is clarified by an analysis of responses to the two questions where the strongly worded negative question is cross-tabulated by the positive question (see Table 3).

Of the respondents who had a positive view of multiculturalism in the positively worded question, 26 of 110 (23.6 per cent) agreed that it presented a threat to the Australian way of life. This inconsistency stands in contrast to the high level of consistency amongst those who had a negative view of multiculturalism. Of the relatively high proportion who were unsure of the value of multiculturalism, only one in five (20.6 per cent) maintained their uncertainty in the context of the more strongly worded question; a majority (57.1 per cent) agreed that there was justification in the view that there was a threat to the Australian way of life. These responses highlight the qualified nature of the general endorsement of multiculturalism and the

**Table 3: Belief that multiculturalism threatens Australians' way of life by belief that it makes Australia a better country to live in, Australia-born, Dingley Village, 2006 (per cent)**

		'Australians are justified in thinking that their way of life is threatened by multiculturalism'			Total	Total N
		Disagree	Unsure	Agree		
'Multiculturalism makes Australia a better country to live in'	Agree	55.5	20.9	23.6	100.0	110
	Unsure	20.6	22.2	57.1	100.0	63
	Disagree	3.7	7.4	88.9	100.0	27

way in which question wording can affect response patterns in the context of qualified endorsement.

In summary, the pattern of response revealed by close examination indicates that only a small minority of the Australia-born in Dingley Village with one or both parents born in Australia endorse open discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion—this group numbers at least five per cent and may rise to over 10 per cent, depending on the specific issue considered. But there is a large proportion, in the range of 35 per cent to almost 50 per cent, who are opposed to some aspect of current policy and who may not disclose their negative outlook in response to a general question. Up to 38 per cent favour selection criteria which may discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, 48 per cent oppose the current immigration intake, 38 per cent are unhappy with the current immigrant concentration in Springvale, and 42 per cent see multiculturalism as a threat.

**ATTITUDINAL DIVERGENCE**

When the views of the Australia-born residents of Ding-

ley Village and the Viet Nam-born residents in Springvale are contrasted a large measure of divergence is evident. Thus with regard to the current immigration intake (Table 4), 8.7 per cent of the Viet Nam-born agree that the current intake is too high, compared with 48.3 per cent of the Australia-born, and 68.8 per cent of the Viet Nam-born support the current immigration level or consider that it should be increased, compared with 39.2 per cent of the Australia-born.

**Table 4: Views on the number of migrants coming to Australia, Australia-born and Viet Nam-born, 2006 (per cent)**

	Australia-born (Dingley Village)	Viet Nam-born (Springvale)
Too high	48.3	8.7
About right	32.8	56.4
Too low	6.4	12.4
Don't know/ refused	12.6	22.4
Total	100.0	100.0
Total N	206	174

*Question: 'What is your view of the number of immigrants being allowed into the country at present?'*

**Table 5: Views on multiculturalism, Australia-born and Viet Nam-born, 2006 (per cent)**

	Australia-born (Dingley Village)	Viet Nam-born (Springvale)
Strongly agree	13.7	1.3
Agree	28.2	12.3
Unsure	18.9	28.3
Disagree	30.8	19.4
Strongly disagree	5.7	36.8
Don't know/ refused	2.7	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0
Total N	206	174

*Question: 'Australians are justified in thinking that their way of life is threatened by multiculturalism'.*

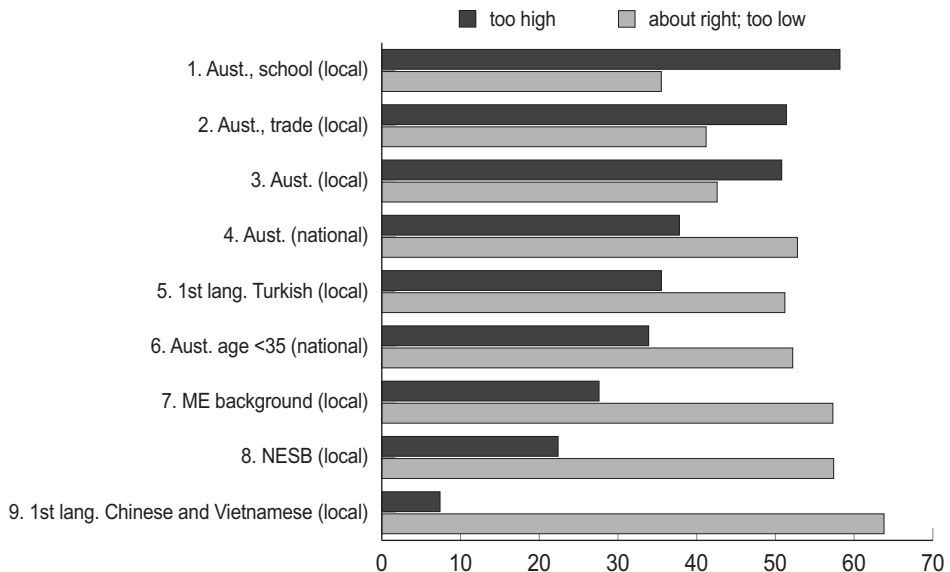
Divergence is reflected across the range of issues explored. Thus only 13.6 per cent of the Viet Nam-born agree that 'Australians are justified in thinking their way of life is threatened by multiculturalism', compared with 41.9 per cent of the

**TABLE 0: VIEWS ON ASIAN MIGRANTS, AUSTRALIA-BORN AND VIET NAM-BORN, 2006 (per cent)**

	Australia-born (Dingley Village)	Viet Nam-born (Springvale)
Strongly agree	17.3	8.8
Agree	48.0	12.5
Unsure	16.8	17.2
Disagree	12.2	25.8
Strongly disagree	3.3	31.4
Refused	2.4	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0
Total N	206	174

*Question: 'Asian migrants tend to keep to themselves and don't make much effort to mix with Australians'.*

**Figure 2: Attitude to the immigration intake, benchmark survey, Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research Program, 2007 (per cent)**



Key	
1	Australia-born, one or both parents Australia-born; up to Year 12 education; survey in region of high immigrant concentration
2	Australia-born, one or both parents Australia-born; trade qualification; survey in region of high immigrant concentration
3	Australia-born, one or both parents Australia-born; survey in region of high immigrant concentration
4	Australia-born, national survey
5	First language Turkish, survey in region of high immigrant concentration
6	Australia-born, aged 18 to 34, national survey
7	Middle-East background, survey in region of high immigrant concentration
8	Non-English-speaking background (other than Middle-East background), survey in region of high immigrant concentration
9	First language Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, survey in region of high immigrant concentration

*Question: 'What is your view of the number of immigrants being allowed into the country at present?'*

Source: See endnote 3

Australia-born (Table 5).

More than four out of 10 (42.9 per cent) of Australia-born residents in Dingley Village agree that ‘Asian migrants are interested in personal gain, not in building a better Australia’ while another 35 per cent are equivocal; this compares with less than two of 10 (18.7 per cent) Viet Nam-born residents of Springvale in agreement, with 21.9 per cent equivocal. While only two out of 10 Viet Nam-born agree that Asian migrants ‘don’t make much effort to mix with Australians’, more than 6 out of 10 Australia-born Dingley Village residents are of this view (see Table 6).

**CONTEXT AND TREND ANALYSIS**

To what extent is it possible to establish trends in the region studied, and to what extent are local attitudes representative of wider currents of opinion? Detailed analysis of context and trend will form the subject of further research publications. In this article broad patterns are considered.

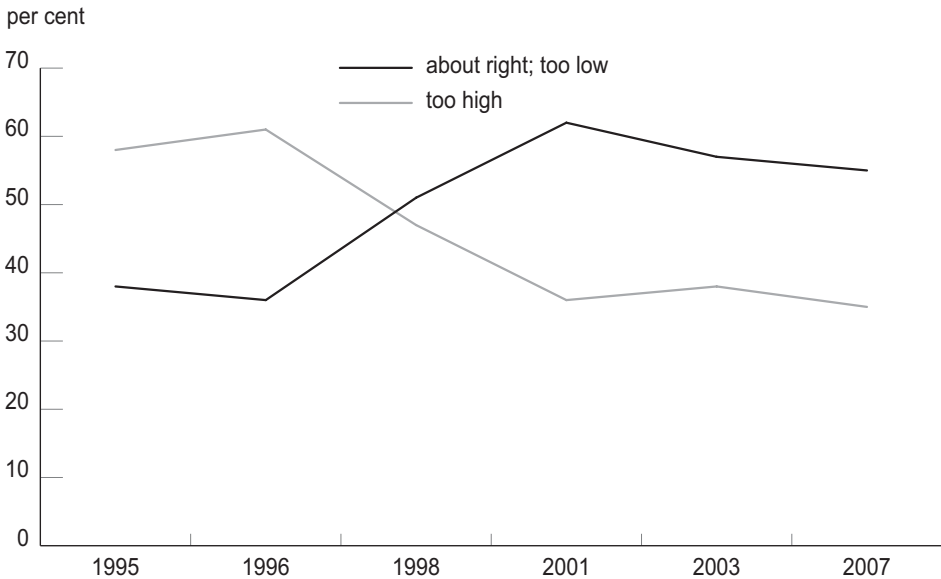
First, it is evident from surveys

conducted in 2007 as part of the Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research Program, and from other survey work, that the attitudinal divergence disclosed by the above analysis is replicated in other regions of high immigrant concentration.<sup>3</sup> To take one example, when respondents are grouped on the basis of birthplace and first language, with additional reference to educational attainment, those who consider the current immigration intake to be too high are in the range of under 10 per cent to over 55 per cent (see Figure 2).

With regard to the trend of opinion on the immigration intake, national surveys indicate that whereas in the mid-1990s the majority viewpoint was that the intake was too high, since 1998 this has been the minority viewpoint<sup>4</sup> (Figure 3).

The findings of surveys conducted among the Australia-born in Dingley Village parallel the trend of decreasing opposition to immigration evident in national surveys, although the view that the immigration intake is too high remains the majority

**Figure 3: Attitude to the migration intake, national surveys 1995 to 2007**





position. Those in Dingley Village who consider the intake to be too high declined from 62 per cent in 1993–94 to 48.3 per cent in 2006 (Table 7).

When Dingley Village respondents were asked for their view of the number of immigrants in the Springvale area, a more positive attitude is evident only since 1998, not across the three surveys. Those who agreed with the two negative positions declined from 47.4 per cent in 1998 to 38.3 per cent in 2006 (see Table 8).

There has been a steady increase across the three surveys in the proportion of respondents who favoured settlement policy which encouraged immigrants ‘to fit into the community as soon as possible’, up from 76.8 per cent to 80.4 per cent to 83 per cent; those favouring a laissez-faire approach declined from 15.1 per cent to 7.1 per

cent; government assistance to enable cultural maintenance during the early phase of settlement has consistently failed to attract support (1.5 per cent, 1.8 per cent, 2.6 per cent).

Finally, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of the Australia-born who agree that ‘Asian migrants have much to offer Australia’. Those in agreement have increased from 57 per cent to 59.3 per cent to 68.5 per cent across the three surveys, while those in disagreement declined from 18.9 per cent to 15.2 per cent to 12.3 per

**Table 7: Views on the number of migrants coming to Australia, Australia-born, Dingley Village, 1993–94 to 2006 (per cent)**

	1993–94	1998	2006
Too high	62.0	56.7	48.3
About right	27.6	27.8	32.8
Too low	3.2	4.0	6.4
Don’t know/ refused	7.3	11.4	12.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	196	171	206

*Question: ‘What is your view of the number of immigrants being allowed into the country at present?’*

**Table 8: Views on number of migrants in Springvale, Australia-born, Dingley Village, 1993–94 to 2006 (per cent)**

	1993–94	1998	2006
It’s a good thing. I think it has made this a better area in which to live	5.7	4.1	5.1
It is alright, I don’t see any problems with it	32.9	27.8	36.0
It’s nothing to me. I do not think about it.	11.8	16.6	18.9
I am not very happy about it.	21.3	22.6	17.3
There are too many. It should not be allowed	27.5	24.8	21.0
Don’t know/ refused	0.8	4.1	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	196	171	206

*Question: ‘What is your view of the number of migrants in the Springvale area? (Indicate which of the following comes closest to your view.)’*

cent (see table 9).

**CONCLUSION**

Three major findings are yielded by the analysis of attitudes to migration and settlement in Dingley Village and Springvale.

First, the Australia-born respondents in Dingley Village indicate a large measure of support for the principle of non-discrimination in policy with respect to race, ethnicity and religion. Only a small minority (around five per cent, marginally over 10 per cent on some issues) endorse overt discrimination. With regard, however, to the specifics of current immigration and settlement policy a substantial proportion, in the range of 35 per cent to almost 50 per cent, are opposed to the level of intake, the number of immigrants in the Springvale area, and aspects of multicultural policy.

Second, a comparison between the Australia-born residents of Dingley Village and the Viet Nam-born residents of Springvale indicates a large measure of attitudinal divergence across the range of issues explored. Significant differences are evident in attitudes to immigration and multicultural policy and in the perception of the contribution of Asian immigrants and their willingness to participate in Australian life. The survey highlights problems of communication which present a major challenge for the community.

Third, an analysis of trends amongst the Australia-born indicates a lessening of concern since 1998 over the level of immigration and

the number of immigrants in the Springvale area. This is coupled with a very high level of support for integration of immigrants. A comparison of responses in 1998 and 2007 indicates an increased proportion who agree that Asian immigrants have much to offer Australia.

While there has been a consistent pattern of change denoting lessening of concern, change has been within a narrow range. A more substantial shift could have been expected, given increased economic security and rising prosperity, and a political context in which the immigration issue has received little notice. In 2006 negative views of immigration and migrant integration continued to be held on some issues by a substantial proportion of the Australia-born.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Table 9: Views on Asian migrants’ contribution to Australia, Australia-born, Dingley Village (per cent)**

	1993–94	1998	2006
Strongly agree	14.5	16.0	19.7
Agree	42.5	43.3	48.8
Unsure	18.1	18.8	16.0
Disagree	7.0	10.4	7.9
Strongly disagree	11.9	4.8	4.4
Refused	6.0	6.8	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	196	171	206

*Question: ‘Asian migrants have much to offer Australia’.*

## References

- <sup>1</sup> For reports of these earlier surveys, see A. Markus, 'Racism and the recession', *People and Place*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 35–38; A. Markus, 'Identity in an ethnically diverse community', *People and Place*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1993, pp. 43–50; A. Markus, 'Attitudes towards immigration and national identity: a re-awakening of xenophobia?', *People and Place*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1999, pp. 39–52.
- <sup>2</sup> All 2006 census data are derived from census tables for the named suburbs, accessed at <<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/Home/census>>.
- <sup>3</sup> The Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research Program undertook a series of surveys in the period June to August 2007, with Andrew Markus as lead researcher. These included a national survey with 2000 respondents and five local surveys in areas of high immigrant concentration, each with 300 respondents. Two of the local surveys were conducted in Melbourne, two in Sydney and one in Brisbane. A comprehensive report will be issued in 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> Survey data for 1995 to 2003 are reported in M. Goot and I. Watson, 'Immigration, multiculturalism and national identity', in S. Wilson et al. (Eds), *Australian Social Attitudes: The First Report*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 184; the 2007 data are derived from the Scanlon Foundation benchmark survey (see note 3 above); see also M. Goot, 'More "relaxed and comfortable", public opinion on immigration under Howard', *People and Place*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 46–60; K. Betts, 'Immigration and public opinion: understanding the shift', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2002, pp. 24–37; K. Betts, 'Cosmopolitans and patriots: Australia's cultural divide and attitudes to immigration', *People and Place*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005, pp. 29–40; K. Betts, 'The ageing of the population and attitudes to immigration', *People and Place*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2006, pp. 26–38.