

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN MELBOURNE

Ernest Healy

Robert Putnam has recently published research showing that, in the United States, higher levels of ethnic diversity are associated with lower levels of social capital. Volunteering is a key indicator of social capital. Data from the 2006 Australian census show that, in Melbourne, migrants from non-English-speaking countries (NESCs) are less likely to have volunteered in the previous 12 months than are migrants from the main English-speaking-countries or people who were born in Australia. This association holds when income, time of arrival and English proficiency are controlled for. But in areas that are very ethnically diverse levels of volunteering are not only low for the NESC-born, they are also low for the Australia-born.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, there has been an orthodox view amongst Australian government, political and intellectual leaders that promoting Australian society as multi-ethnic or multicultural is beneficial. The benefits are variously identified as economic, cultural and humanitarian in nature.

Multicultural advocates frequently imply that ethnic diversity, if managed positively through a pro-active multicultural policy, will result in a socially cohesive, harmonious society. The view that ethnic diversity and multicultural policy provide a sound basis for social cohesion in a rapidly changing and increasingly unstable global context continues to have wide support amongst Australian intellectuals.¹

But does Australia's ethnic diversity lead to a stronger, more cohesive society? This article explores one aspect of social cohesion—volunteering. It has been prompted by the availability of data on volunteering provided by the 2006 census. This was the first Australian census to include questions on unpaid work, including a question on voluntary work. Census respondents were asked to indicate whether they had, in the previous twelve months, spent 'any time doing voluntary work through an organisation or group'. Respondents were instructed to exclude

any paid work, work done for a family business, or work done in order to qualify for a government benefit.

RELEVANCE OF VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY TO THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL COHESION

Robert Putnam's work highlights the relevance of voluntary work as an indicator of social capital. He posits a strong relationship between a community's sense of solidarity and the vibrancy of associational life or patterns of civic participation.² A central concept in Putnam's social research is 'social capital', the capacity of communities to benefit from the social networks and norms of reciprocity and trust that are generated from the daily experience of social interaction between individuals.³

He focuses on volunteering because it involves direct social engagement with others and goes beyond impersonal philanthropy, such as donating money. In the US context, however, Putnam notes that these two forms of altruism are linked; people who volunteer also tend to give money for charitable purposes. Volunteering is '... among the strongest predictors of philanthropy and vice versa'.⁴ In turn, volunteering is also associated with other altruistic activities, such as donating blood.

Based on research conducted during the

1990s, Putnam concluded that the quality of public life and civic engagement in the US was in a state of serious decline. On a range of indicators of civic engagement, both political and private, such as involvement in local clubs, religious organisations and grass roots political activism, community participation was waning. His research pointed to changes in family structure, suburban sprawl, the privatisation of leisure activity and the passing of the generation of people who were brought up during the intensely patriotic era of World War II and its immediate aftermath, as the underlying causes of this decline. He also speculated that a similar decline of social capital may be underway in other advanced democracies.⁵

Putnam's most recent research highlights an additional and controversial dimension of the decline in social capital—ethnic diversity. Contrary to the expectation of those who argue that contact between people from different cultures overcomes initial disquiet and engenders trust, Putnam's evidence suggests that ethnic diversity and social solidarity are negatively correlated. He writes that: 'immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital', at least in the short to medium-term.⁶ This does not mean, however, that cultural heterogeneity is likely to engender overt inter-ethnic hostility directly. Rather, what he observes is a 'withdrawal from collective life', a 'distrust' of neighbours, less volunteering, a decline in charitable behaviour and less propensity to work on community projects—even within one's own ethnic group.⁷ It follows from Putnam's observations that an absence of overt conflict between different ethnic groups cannot be taken as evidence of social cohesion as some commentators have recently suggested.⁸

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH ON SOCIAL COHESION AND VOLUNTEERING

There has been increasing interest in Australia in volunteering as a potential indicator of social cohesion and well-being, by academics and by government authorities at local, state and national levels. For example, in 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) published *Voluntary Work, Australia*, which consisted of an extensive range of statistical information based on a survey included as part of the 2006 general social survey. The ABS recognised the significance of volunteer work in relation to social cohesion in the following terms:

Most states and territories are encouraging engagement in voluntary work in their strategic plans for social development.

Voluntary work meets needs, expands opportunities for democratic participation, personal development and recreation within a community and helps to develop and reinforce social networks and cohesion.⁹

The survey defined voluntary work similarly to the 2006 census and found that about 34 per cent of the Australian population aged over 18 years volunteered during the twelve months prior to the survey. The survey also found that volunteering was more common outside of capital cities and that this tendency was more marked between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan populations in Victoria and New South Wales. It found that differences in volunteering rates were linked to life stage, labour force status, occupation, level of educational achievement, income and birthplace. With regard to birthplace, the survey found that Australia-born persons were more likely to volunteer than overseas-born persons. Amongst the latter group, however, persons born in the main English-speaking countries (MESCs) were more likely to volunteer than those born in non-English-speaking countries (NESCs).¹⁰ The

respective rates of volunteering round for persons from these three birthplace groups were 36.2, 28.9 and 25.9 per cent.¹¹

In a 2004 statewide survey, entitled Indicators of Community Strength at the Local Government Area level in Victoria, the Department of Community Services (DVC) explored volunteering rates in the context of its agenda for ‘building and supporting’ communities that:

... encourage participation: creating opportunities for increased participation and volunteering in community activities—social, recreational, sporting, cultural, learning, economic and civic.¹²

The Department, however, chose to ignore the implications of its findings, one of which was that areas with high concentrations of persons born in NESCs showed low volunteering rates.¹³

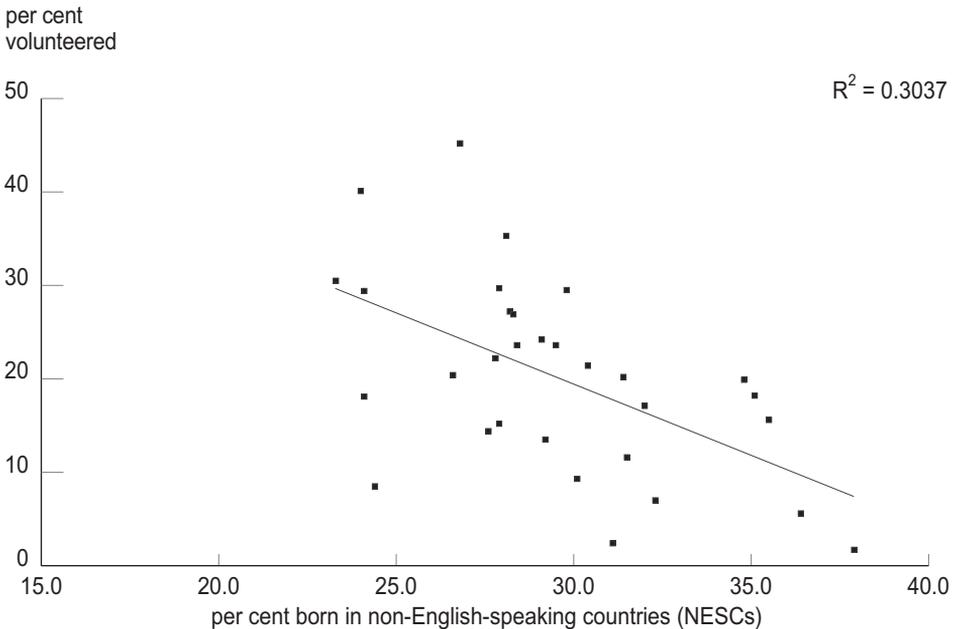
Figure 1 (prepared by the author) shows this relationship. It plots the proportion of

DVC survey respondents in Melbourne local government areas (LGAs)¹⁴ who answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘do you help out as a volunteer’ against the proportion of persons born in NESCs (as at the 2001 census).

Although recent Australian research challenging the idea that cultural or ethnic diversity is conducive to social cohesion has been scant, it has not been absent. In 2006, Australian National University economist, Andrew Leigh explored the relationship between ethno-linguistic diversity and social trust at the neighbourhood level in Australia and found that ‘trust is lower in linguistically diverse neighbourhoods’.¹⁵ These results led Leigh to argue that Australia ‘should not gild the lily’ by simply assuming that multiculturalism was beneficial:

Unless we find better ways of building trust in immigrant neighbourhoods,

Figure 1: Melbourne LGAs, proportion of residents born in non-English-speaking countries (2001 census) by proportion who volunteered (DVC survey), 2004



Sources: ABS 2001 census basic community profiles; DVC 2004

higher diversity will most likely lead to lower levels of interpersonal trust.¹⁶

This article explores the relationship between volunteering activity and the concentration of overseas-born persons and ethnic diversity at the local level within Melbourne. This is done in order to see whether the relationship Putnam found between ethnic diversity and lower levels of volunteering in the United States holds in the Melbourne context.

2006 CENSUS DATA ON VOLUNTEERING

The data set used is a customised 2006 census unit record file for individuals within Melbourne statistical local areas (SLAs).¹⁷ Melbourne is an excellent case study because nearly 30 per cent of residents are overseas-born and its suburbs feature varying degrees of ethnic diversity. These data indicate whether individuals volunteered or not, as well as providing information relating to their sex, age, place of birth, time of arrival in Australia (if born overseas), individual weekly income, citizenship, English proficiency and place of usual residence (SLA). The data facilitate an exploration of possible linkages between volunteering activity and other attributes of individuals. A limitation at the time of writing was that only first release census data were available. Therefore, information relating to individuals' occupation and labour force status could not be included.

The flexibility of this data set allows a degree of control for potentially confounding variables and, therefore, a higher degree of confidence in developing explanations of any variation observed in volunteering behaviour across Melbourne SLAs. In addition, ABS basic community profile data were used to create an index-of-diversity variable based on language spoken in the home. Language spoken in the home provides a meaningful indication of ethnic diversity within the population

because it encompasses second generation persons born in Australia to migrants from NESCs. The index used is the Simpson's diversity index.¹⁸ Borrowed from ecology, this measure not only takes account of the number of languages spoken (in the home) within a given location, but the share of cases that accrue to each language.¹⁹ This is a more sophisticated proxy for ethnic diversity than a simple measure of either the proportion of persons who speak a language other than English within a given population or the proportion of persons born overseas.

Volunteering rates by birthplace

The analysis begins with an examination of overall volunteering rates of Australia-born persons, persons born in the MESC's and persons born in NESCs within the Melbourne statistical division.

Table 1 shows the respective volunteering rates for persons born in Australia, in the MESC's (U.K., Ireland, Canada, the USA, South Africa and New Zealand) and NESCs. The results are presented by age and income, for persons over 15 years.

The volunteering rates of those born in Australia and in NESCs were 18.8 and 10.4 per cent respectively. When this relationship is disaggregated by income, the results show that volunteering rates increase with income, but that a significant gap between the Australia-born and persons born in NESCs is preserved. By contrast, the volunteering rates for persons born in the MESC's are often only marginally less than those of the Australia-born.

Among the Australia-born, the data show an increase in volunteering with increasing age. Apart from those in the <\$399 income group, Australia-born persons aged 65 plus exhibit particularly high volunteering rates: between 27.4 and 32.6 per cent. This pattern is not repeated for those born in NESCs.

Table 1: Persons usually resident in Melbourne¹ who volunteered in the previous 12 months by birthplace, individual weekly income and age, 2006 (per cent)

| | | 15-24 | 25-44 | 45-64 | 65 plus | 25-64 years | 15 years plus | Total** |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------------|---------------|-----------|
| Negative to \$399 | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 16.8 | 21.3 | 23.1 | 18.2 | 22.1 | 19.4 | 658,055 |
| | main English-speaking | 20.1 | 25.5 | 23.5 | 15.9 | 24.3 | 20.7 | 83,148 |
| | non-English-speaking | 12.2 | 11.8 | 9.9 | 6.0 | 10.7 | 9.5 | 396,617 |
| | Total* | 15.8 | 18.3 | 17.2 | 12.5 | 17.7 | 15.9 | 1,174,155 |
| \$400-\$799 | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 11.3 | 14.9 | 20.3 | 27.4 | 17.0 | 17.0 | 438,127 |
| | main English-speaking | 12.0 | 16.8 | 18.4 | 24.9 | 17.7 | 18.4 | 57,029 |
| | non-English-speaking | 10.4 | 9.7 | 9.9 | 11.2 | 9.8 | 10.0 | 171,141 |
| | Total* | 11.1 | 13.6 | 16.6 | 22.9 | 14.9 | 15.2 | 684,778 |
| \$800-\$1299 | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 14.4 | 16.0 | 22.2 | 31.3 | 18.2 | 18.5 | 327,219 |
| | main English-speaking | 17.4 | 16.1 | 19.6 | 29.8 | 17.8 | 18.4 | 46,696 |
| | non-English-speaking | 15.0 | 12.9 | 13.4 | 13.9 | 13.1 | 13.2 | 96,310 |
| | Total* | 14.6 | 15.4 | 19.6 | 27.3 | 17.0 | 17.3 | 479,886 |
| \$1300-\$1,999 | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 15.1 | 19.4 | 26.5 | 32.6 | 22.1 | 22.4 | 137,536 |
| | main English-speaking | 19.8 | 18.2 | 22.5 | 30.6 | 20.2 | 20.6 | 22,806 |
| | non-English-speaking | 14.2 | 15.2 | 17.5 | 15.4 | 16.2 | 16.2 | 34,722 |
| | Total* | 15.1 | 18.6 | 24.1 | 28.5 | 20.8 | 21.0 | 198,438 |
| \$2000 or more | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 22.0 | 23.7 | 31.5 | 31.3 | 27.3 | 27.5 | 79,832 |
| | main English-speaking | 14.3 | 21.1 | 26.5 | 28.1 | 23.9 | 24.0 | 16,651 |
| | non-English-speaking | 16.0 | 17.8 | 20.7 | 16.4 | 19.3 | 19.1 | 16,565 |
| | Total* | 20.0 | 22.5 | 29.0 | 27.8 | 25.6 | 25.7 | 114,774 |
| Not stated | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 6.8 | 10.4 | 14.7 | 6.3 | 12.2 | 9.1 | 74,526 |
| | main English-speaking | 5.4 | 13.2 | 12.6 | 5.6 | 12.9 | 9.0 | 9,164 |
| | non-English-speaking | 5.2 | 6.3 | 5.9 | 2.7 | 6.1 | 4.9 | 34,921 |
| | Total* | 3.5 | 3.5 | 4.9 | 3.0 | 4.1 | 3.7 | 263,833 |
| Total | Australia (incl. ext. terr.) | 14.8 | 17.6 | 22.9 | 20.6 | 19.7 | 18.8 | 1,715,295 |
| | main English-speaking | 16.9 | 18.9 | 21.2 | 18.0 | 20.1 | 19.4 | 235,494 |
| | non-English-speaking | 11.6 | 11.6 | 11.1 | 6.7 | 11.3 | 10.4 | 750,276 |
| | Total* | 13.4 | 15.4 | 17.9 | 14.1 | 16.5 | 15.6 | 2,915,864 |

Source: ABS, customised 2006 census data set, held by CPUR

Notes: ¹ Melbourne statistical division, plus Yarra Ranges, part B

* Total includes inadequately described, at sea, not elsewhere counted and not stated; ** includes volunteering not stated

SLA-level analysis

For each of the 79 SLAs within Melbourne, data were generated which compare the volunteering rates of persons who were Australia-born, born in the MESC and in NESCs. These data were also disaggregated by income group. The results show that the marked differences in volunteering by birthplace and income noted above have a strong spatial dimension.

Figures 3 to 6 show the proportions of persons aged 25 to 64 and born in Australia and in NESCs, respectively, aged 25 to 64 years, who volunteered during the 12 months prior to the 2006 census. Each

figure presents information relating to selected SLAs of a distinct socio-economic character and represents varying degrees of ethnic diversity and volunteering activity. Figure 2 shows the locations of these SLAs within the Melbourne metropolitan area.

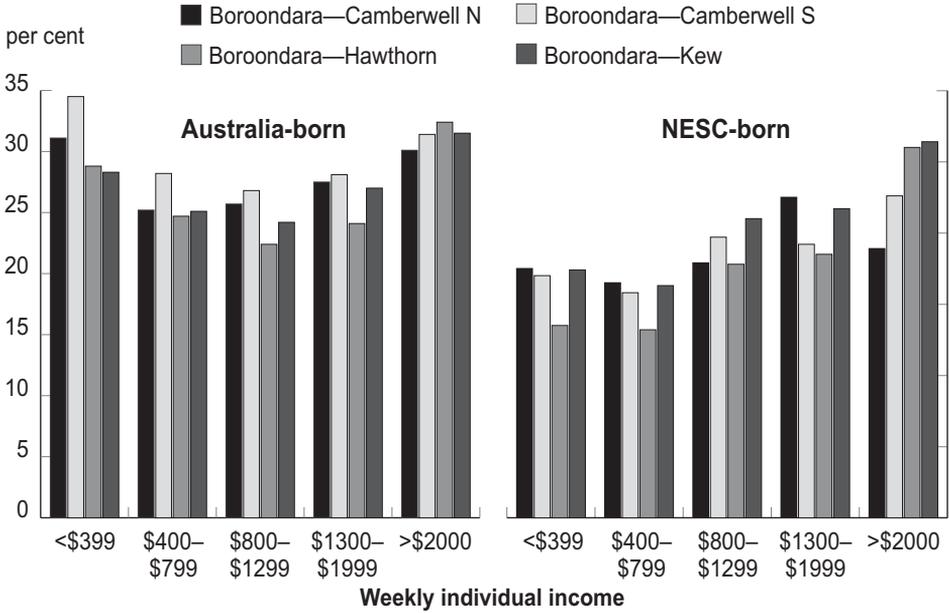
Figure 3 compares the volunteering rates of the two birthplace groups in the SLAs comprising the City of Boroondara, an affluent near-city area with a high proportion of managerial and professional residents. The proportion of persons with individual weekly incomes at the high end of the income scale is well above the

Figure 2: Melbourne SLAs by type



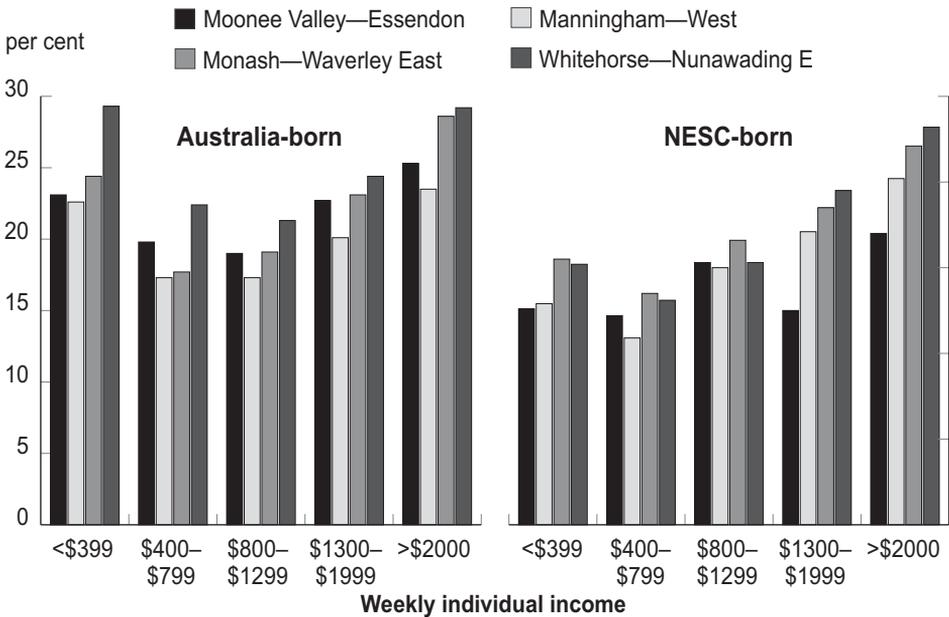
Source: ABS, Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) 2006

Figure 3: Proportion of Australia-born and NESC-born persons aged 25–64 who volunteered in the previous 12 months by income, selected near-city affluent areas, 2006



Source: ABS, customised 2006 census data set held by CPUR

Figure 4: Proportion of Australia-born and NESC-born persons aged 25–64 who volunteered in the previous 12 months by income, selected established middle-class suburbia, 2006



Source: ABS, customised 2006 census data set held by CPUR

Melbourne average in these SLAs. Boroondara also has a relatively low level of ethnic diversity (as measured by the Simpson's diversity index) and a relatively low proportion of persons born in NESCs. Overall volunteering rates in Boroondara are high relative to other areas in Melbourne. They are particularly high amongst the Australia-born. In Camberwell South (within Boroondara) for example, the overall volunteering rate amongst the Australia-born was 30 per cent compared with 18 per cent for persons born in NESCs. The gap in volunteering rate is maintained between Australia-born persons and persons born in NESCs when income level is held constant. Nevertheless, as Figure 3 shows, volunteering rates tend to increase with income for both birthplace groups.

The outcome is similar for the SLAs shown in Figure 4. These SLAs are representative of established middle-class, mid-suburban areas that, for the most part, were built between the 1960s and 1970s. Although the volunteering rates in these SLAs are relatively high compared with many other areas within Melbourne, they tend to be lower than in the affluent near-city area of Boroondara. Taking Waverley East in the City of Monash as an example, the overall volunteering rate amongst the Australia-born was 21 per cent, compared with 16 per cent amongst those born in NESCs. Similarly to Boroondara, when income level is held constant, the marked difference in volunteering rates between the two birthplace groups is maintained.

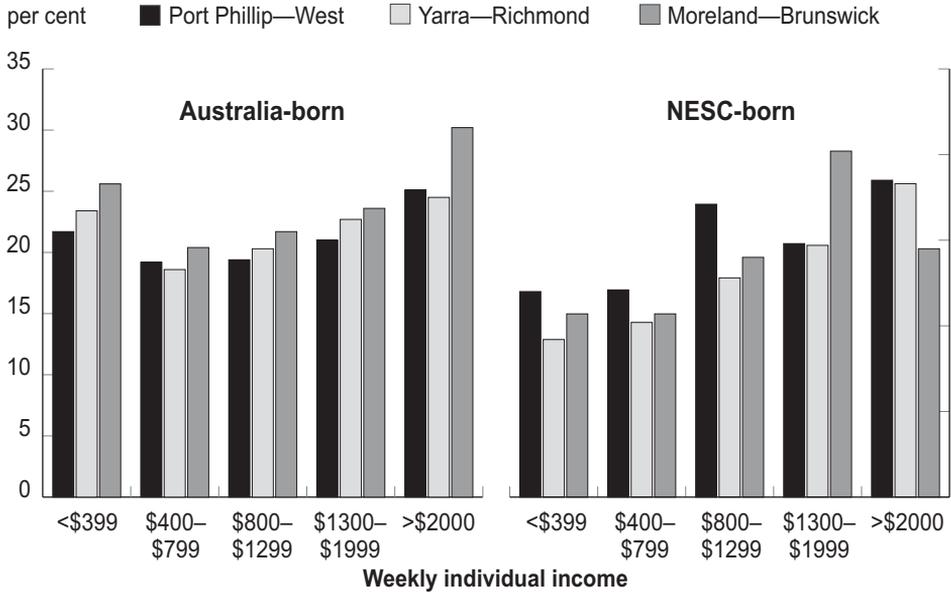
Figure 5 shows the respective volunteering rates for three gentrifying inner suburbs of Melbourne. Over the past twenty years or more, these areas have had a sustained influx of middle-class professionals who have been attracted to the inner-city location of these suburbs, including their close proximity to the job-rich inner-city job market. These areas are

transitional in that ageing remnants of the former working-class populace co-exist with the relatively new middle-class population. In Richmond, Brunswick and Port Phillip West, the proportions of the Australia-born who volunteered were 21, 23 and 21 per cent, respectively. By comparison, the respective proportions of persons born in NESCs were 11, 12 and 14 per cent. As with the SLAs examined in Figure 3 above, significant differences in volunteering rates between these two birthplace groups are observed when controlling for income, particularly for the low-income level of <\$399 per week, where the difference is between 10 and 15 percentage points.

Figure 6 provides a strong contrast in volunteering rates compared with the areas considered above. The low socio-economic SLAs represented in Figure 6 are among the poorest and most ethnically diverse in Melbourne. The proportion of persons aged 25 to 64 years, at the time of the 2006 census, who had a weekly individual income of less than \$799 was 71 per cent in Hume-Broadmeadows, 72 per cent in Dandenong-Balance, 70.5 per cent in Dandenong (Dandenong-Balance and Dandenong together comprise the City of Greater Dandenong), 71 per cent in Brimbank-Sunshine and 65 per cent in Moreland North. The percentage of persons in this income bracket (25–64 years) in the Melbourne statistical division was 55 per cent.²⁰ Further, the proportion of residents born in NESCs in these areas in 2006 was, 61 per cent in Dandenong-Balance, 54 per cent in Dandenong, 56 per cent in Brimbank-Sunshine, 45 per cent in Hume-Broadmeadows and 36 per cent in Moreland North. The corresponding percentage for Melbourne overall was 26.²¹

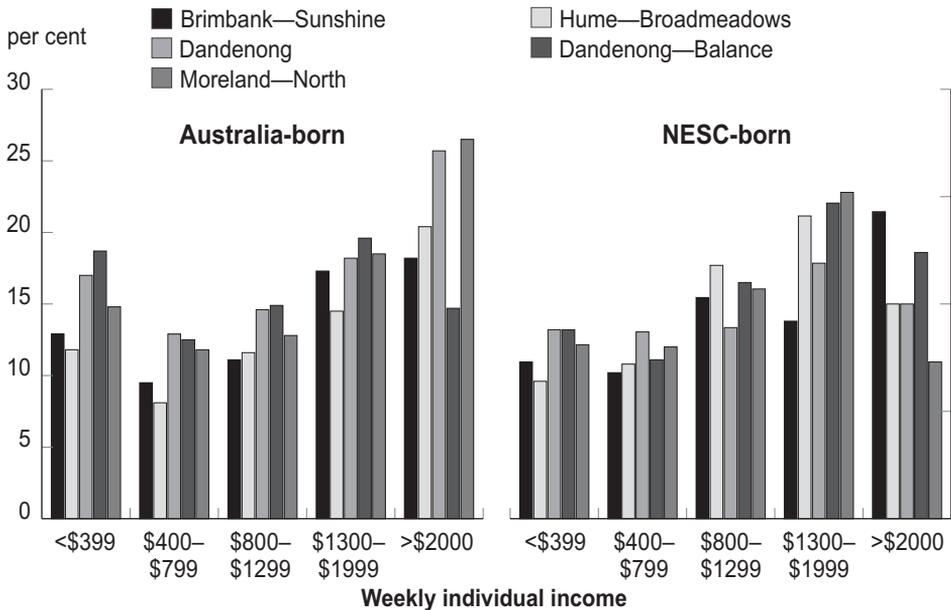
The proportion of persons who volunteered amongst the Australia-born in Hume–Broadmeadows, Brimbank–Sunshine, Moreland–North, Dandenong

Figure 5: Proportion of Australia-born and NESC-born persons aged 25–64 who volunteered in the previous 12 months by income, selected transitional near-city areas, 2006



Source: ABS, customised 2006 census data set held by CPUR

Figure 6: Proportion of Australia-born and NESC-born persons aged 25–64 who volunteered in the previous 12 months by income, selected low-socio-economic suburbia, 2006



Source: ABS, customised 2006 census data set held by CPUR

—Baiance and Dandenong was 11, 11, 13, 15 and 15 per cent, respectively. These rates are well below those observed in most other parts of Melbourne. Notwithstanding this, the gap between the Australia-born and persons born in NESCs is repeated. Among residents of these SLAs who were born in NESCs, the rates of volunteering were seven, eight, eight, nine and nine per cent, respectively.

The above analysis shows that, for persons aged 25 to 64 years, high-income SLAs characterised by low ethnic diversity and a low proportion of persons born in NESCs had markedly higher volunteering rates than did low-income SLAs with a high proportion of persons born in NESCs and high diversity. Further, volunteering rates are consistently lower amongst persons born in NESCs across areas which differ in socio-economic character while controlling for income level.

The relationship between high concentrations of persons born in NESCs and low volunteering is strong. But is this just a matter of the time spent in Australia or, perhaps, of limited English proficiency?

Time of arrival

The data in Table 2 facilitate an examination of whether migrants' time of arrival influences volunteering. Conceivably, recently-arrived migrants may not yet have had sufficient opportunity to join or participate in social networks linked to volunteer activity. If this were the case, one would expect that long-standing migrants would exhibit higher volunteering rates than the newly-arrived. Three arrival periods are provided in Table 2—prior to 1996, 1996 to 2000 and 2001 to 2006.

With migrants from MESC countries, the data suggest that length of stay in Australia may influence the rate of

Table 2: Overseas-born persons, per cent who volunteered in the previous 12 months, by year of arrival, age, and birthplace, Melbourne statistical division, 2006 (per cent)

| | | Age group | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|---------|
| | | 15–24 | 25–44 | 45–64 | 25–64 | 65 plus |
| Prior to 1996 | MESC-born | 18 | 21 | 21 | 20 | 19 |
| | NESC-born | 14 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 7 |
| | Total ¹ | 15 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 10 |
| 1996–2000 | MESC-born | 16 | 19 | 23 | 19 | 21 |
| | NESC-born | 12 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 7 |
| | Total | 12 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 9 |
| 2001–2006 | MESC-born | 16 | 15 | 19 | 16 | 13 |
| | NESC-born | 11 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 6 |
| | Total | 11 | 12 | 14 | 12 | 8 |
| Total ² | MESC-born | 17 | 19 | 21 | 19 | 18 |
| | NESC-born | 12 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 7 |
| | Total | 12 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 9 |

Source: ABS, customised 2006 Census data set held by CPUR

Notes: ¹ Total includes inadequately described, at sea, not elsewhere included and not stated.

² Total includes not stated.

volunteer activity. For these migrants, volunteering rates increase a few percentage points within the first five to 10 years after arrival. For example, for this group of migrants who were between 25 and 44 years of age in 2006, the volunteering rate was 15 per cent for those who arrived between 2001 and 2006, and 21 per cent for those who arrived prior to 1996. For those MESC-born persons aged 25 to 64 years and aged over 65 years the difference in volunteering rates between those who arrived between 2001 to 2006 and those who arrived prior to 1996 is also quite marked: four and six percentage points respectively.

However, this pattern is less evident for persons born in NESCs. For example, the difference in volunteering rates between migrants in this group who arrived prior to 1996 and those who arrived between 2001 and 2006 was less than one percentage point for those aged 25 to 44 years and 45 to 64 years. For those aged over 65 years the difference was only 2 percentage points.

Citizenship

Data on citizenship status were also analysed. Migrants who become citizens might be expected to be more likely to volunteer, if taking out citizenship expresses a strong commitment to Australia. The analysis (not shown in this article) indicated that citizenship status made little difference to volunteering rates among persons born in NESCs. However, for those born in the MESC volunteering rates were higher for citizens.

English language proficiency

One likely contributor to low volunteering rates amongst persons born in NESCs may be poor English proficiency. The inability to use a common language to facilitate collective action and shared purpose between persons of different ethnic

origins would likely suppress overall levels of volunteering within a community. Table 3 explores this possibility.

Table 3 shows volunteering by self-assessed level of English proficiency among Melbourne residents born in NESCs and time of arrival to Australia. The table shows that the proportion who volunteered in each arrival period did not vary greatly. It was 10, 11 and 11 per cent in the periods prior to 1996, 1996 to 2000 and 2001 to 2006, respectively.

There are marked differences, however, once English proficiency is examined. Volunteering rates are considerably higher amongst those who claim to 'speak English only' or to speak English 'very well' or 'well', compared with those who indicate that they speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'. This suggests that speaking English either 'not well' or 'not at all' presents a significant obstacle to volunteering.

Does this mean that the differences in volunteering rates shown in the 2006 census data largely reflect proficiency in English amongst persons born in NESCs? To some extent it does, since the overall volunteering rate for those who speak English only is well above that for those with less English capacity.

However, even among those persons born in NESCs, who 'speak English only', the volunteering rate is four percentage points lower than amongst Australia-born persons (see Tables 1 and 3). Furthermore, 62 per cent of persons aged 15 years or over, born in NESCs, indicated that they spoke English either 'very well' or 'well'. If their daily experience was one of difficulty in communicating through spoken English, then it seems unlikely that they would tell the census that they speak English 'very well' or 'well'. Only a minority of persons born in NESCs indicated that they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all' (17 per cent). In any case, English-language proficiency is less likely

to minor volunteering within ethnic groups. Despite government support for the creation of ethnic organisations over the past 20 years or more,²² the data suggest that ethno-specific volunteering activity is not occurring on a scale commensurate with the volunteering rates of the Australia-born.

THE IMPACT OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY

There remains the question of whether low volunteering rates in Melbourne SLAs are influenced by the degree of ethnic diversity within the SLAs. According to Putnam's work, this should be the case.

One way of exploring this issue is to select SLAs that have approximately the same proportion of persons born in NESC countries, but which vary in their degree of ethnic diversity (as defined earlier). Figure 7 provides the basis for this exploration. If volunteering rates are influenced by ethnic diversity, then differences in volunteering rates should be inversely related to the variation in ethnic diversity within these SLAs.

Three groups of SLAs with approximately equal proportions of residents born in NESC countries in each group by with different levels of ethnic diversity are identified in Figure 7. Information

relating to these SLAs is shown in Table 4.

The data in Table 4 show that, when the proportion of persons born in NESCs is held more or less constant, there is an inverse relationship between ethnic diversity and proportions volunteering. With few exceptions, this holds true for both Australia-born persons and those born in NESCs across income levels. Although it is difficult to control for all the variables which influence volunteering rates (such as religion, marital status, and the presence of school-age children), the data imply that ethnic diversity has a distinct influence over and above proportions born in NESCs.

Table 3: NESC-born persons aged 15 years plus by time of arrival in Australia and proficiency in English; percentage who volunteered, 2006

| | | Total (incl. not stated) | Per cent volunteering |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Prior to 1996 | Speaks English only | 116,827 | 15.0 |
| | Very well/well | 310,516 | 11.0 |
| | Not well/not at all | 96,476 | 4.0 |
| | Total ¹ | 527,719 | 10.0 |
| 1996–2000 | Speaks English only | 6995 | 16.0 |
| | Very well/well | 48,226 | 12.0 |
| | Not well/not at all | 13,087 | 6.0 |
| | Total ¹ | 68,892 | 11.0 |
| 2001–2006 | Speaks English only | 11,709 | 14.0 |
| | Very well/well | 88,252 | 12.0 |
| | Not well/not at all | 19,857 | 5.0 |
| | Total ¹ | 121,138 | 11.0 |
| Total ² | Speaks English only | 141,152 | 15.0 |
| | Very well/well | 463,821 | 11.0 |
| | Not well/not at all | 137,448 | 4.0 |
| | Total ¹ | 750,264 | 10.0 |

Source: ABS, customised 2006 Census data set held by CPUR

Note: ¹ Total includes English proficiency not stated.

² Total includes volunteering not stated.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Rates of volunteering are markedly lower in Melbourne amongst persons born in NESCs compared with the Australia-born and persons born in the MESCs. This outcome is observed across a range of different socio-economic contexts. Furthermore, these lower rates still held after controlling for income. The finding that the volunteering rates of persons born in the MESCs approximate the volunteering rates of the Australia-born indicates that low volunteering is not a characteristic of migrants per se.

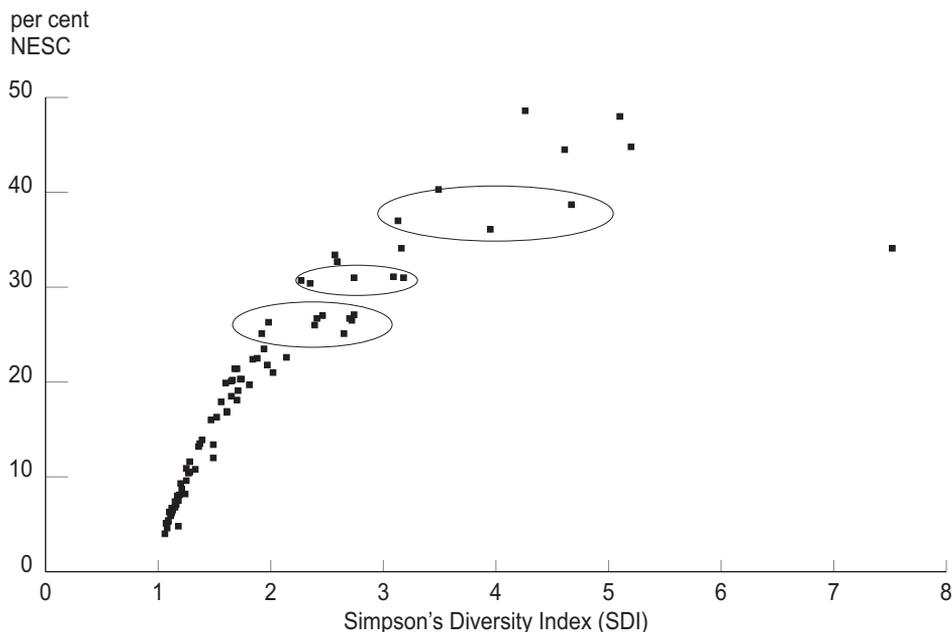
Ethnic diversity, as opposed to the simple concentration of persons born in NESCs, is shown to be associated with lowered levels of volunteering. The data also show that while the impact of ethnic diversity upon volunteering varies according to income, at all income levels

the NESC-born are less likely to volunteer than the Australia-born.

Nevertheless, we cannot assume that persons born in NESCs are less inclined to altruistic behaviour than the Australia-born. It is possible that persons born in NESCs are involved in altruistic behaviour, but that this may occur at an interpersonal level without the mediation of an organisation of community group. Further research is required into this possibility.

However, if the altruism of NESC migrants is not passing a threshold to the civic sphere, where the recipients of their altruism are anonymous, then a basic condition for the maintenance of social capital may be being diminished. Putnam holds that social capital formation involves a complex web of benevolent behaviour, progressing from acts of personal charity to the formation of networks and to an

Figure 7: Melbourne SLAs, Simpsons Diversity Index (SDI) by proportions born in non-English-Speaking Countries (NESC), 2006



Source: ABS, 2006 census, basic community profiles: SDI author calculation.

Table 4: Volunteering rates in the previous 12 months by Simpsons Diversity Index, birthplace, and income, selected Melbourne SLAs, persons aged 25 to 64, 2006 (per cent)

| | Simpsons diversity index | Per cent volunteering | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | NESC-born persons | | All persons | | <\$399 | | Australia-born | | NESC-born | |
| | | \$400-\$799 | \$800-\$1299 | \$400-\$799 | \$800-\$1299 | \$400-\$799 | \$800-\$1299 | \$400-\$799 | \$800-\$1299 | \$400-\$799 | \$800-\$1299 |
| Glen Eira (C) Caulfield | 1.98 | 26.3 | 19.6 | 26.7 | 21.3 | 20.9 | 30.4 | 13.0 | 11.3 | 15.7 | 20.7 |
| Whitehorse (C) Box Hill | 1.92 | 25.1 | 22.4 | 30.6 | 24.1 | 24.4 | 30.5 | 14.2 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 22.1 |
| Hobsons Bay (C) Altona | 2.39 | 26.0 | 12.3 | 17.1 | 12.6 | 13.7 | 21.9 | 8.5 | 8.4 | 11.1 | 17.3 |
| Moonee Valley (C) West | 2.46 | 27.0 | 12.9 | 17.2 | 13.0 | 14.0 | 20.1 | 8.7 | 8.3 | 12.2 | 17.2 |
| Moreland (C) Brunswick | 2.41 | 26.7 | 18.5 | 25.6 | 20.4 | 21.7 | 30.2 | 10.7 | 10.7 | 14.0 | 14.5 |
| Hume (C) Craigieburn | 2.65 | 25.1 | 10.2 | 15.5 | 9.7 | 11.3 | 22.8 | 6.7 | 7.5 | 11.0 | 12.1 |
| Whittlesea (C) SouthEast | 2.70 | 26.7 | 10.3 | 14.8 | 9.5 | 10.8 | 16.9 | 8.2 | 7.6 | 9.1 | 16.7 |
| Melton (S) East | 2.74 | 27.1 | 10.2 | 14.5 | 9.9 | 10.9 | 17.1 | 8.8 | 6.9 | 10.7 | 11.6 |
| Monash (C) Waverley West | 2.35 | 30.4 | 19.4 | 25.3 | 20.5 | 20.6 | 26.8 | 15.7 | 12.7 | 17.4 | 20.4 |
| Melbourne (C) Remainder | 2.27 | 30.7 | 19.6 | 28.1 | 23.7 | 22.6 | 29.1 | 16.9 | 15.4 | 16.5 | 18.9 |
| Manningham (C) West | 2.74 | 31.0 | 16.7 | 22.6 | 17.3 | 17.3 | 23.5 | 12.9 | 10.9 | 15.0 | 20.2 |
| Moreland (C) North | 3.09 | 31.1 | 11.1 | 14.8 | 11.8 | 12.8 | 26.5 | 8.1 | 8.0 | 10.7 | 7.3 |
| Darebin (C) Preston | 3.18 | 31.0 | 10.8 | 15.2 | 11.6 | 14.9 | 20.7 | 6.9 | 6.7 | 8.6 | 11.0 |
| Casey (C) Hallam | 3.13 | 37.0 | 12.5 | 18.8 | 12.3 | 15.7 | 21.5 | 10.6 | 9.4 | 12.6 | 17.1 |
| Brimbank (C) Keilor | 3.95 | 36.1 | 10.2 | 14.9 | 10.0 | 12.8 | 24.0 | 7.9 | 7.6 | 10.7 | 13.6 |
| Whittlesea (C) SouthWest | 4.67 | 38.7 | 7.4 | 11.1 | 8.0 | 10.9 | 21.8 | 5.3 | 4.5 | 5.8 | 16.4 |

Source: ABS, customised 2006 Census data set held by CPUR

ultimate enhancement of democratic involvement, including improved standards of governance. The above analysis suggests that persons born in NESCs are not engaging in higher-level civic altruism to the extent found amongst the Australia-born and amongst migrants from the MESCs.

If the link between volunteering and social cohesion is valid, then the spatial concentration of persons born in NESCs becomes an added source of concern. People from this birthplace category are disproportionately represented amongst those on low incomes and are heavily concentrated in particular areas within Melbourne. The analysis implies, therefore, that this concentration effect may be inhibiting the creation of social capital in many of the poor areas within Melbourne which most need it. The City of Dandenong, for example, which stands out in the above analysis as one of the most ethnically-diverse in the Melbourne metropolitan area is also one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged of Melbourne's municipalities. Forty-six per cent of its residents were born in NESCs in

2006. Its population is disproportionately low income. It is also host to a significant proportion of Australia's humanitarian/refugee intake. In 2005–2006, nearly 35 per cent of migrant settlers to Dandenong entered Australia through the humanitarian/refugee categories. Greater Dandenong alone received more than seven per cent of the national 2005–2006 humanitarian/refugee intake. Approximately 85 per cent of these settlers to Dandenong had either poor or no English.²³

The analysis here supports Putnam's finding regarding the negative impact of ethnic diversity on volunteering and, by implication, the formation of social capital. Caution should to be exercised, therefore, towards views on social cohesion which ignore this point. Some commentators on ethnic diversity imagine that social cohesion has only broken down if overt violence occurs.²⁴ Yet, similarly to Putnam's observations in the United States, the present analysis indicates that loss of social capital may not be obvious. The harm may be cumulative and pervasive, but fall short of social rupture.

References

- ¹ For example, in response to the recent inter-ethnic violence in First World countries, such as has occurred in France and the U.K., academic Jock Collins advocates an even stronger commitment to multiculturalism as a means of managing this risk. He suggests that multicultural policy had an ameliorating affect on the 2005 Cronulla riots in Sydney, in so far as they were not as serious as those that occurred elsewhere. In the early 1990s, academics Kalantzis and Cope went further in claiming significant economic benefits from multiculturalism. They argue that ethnic diversity, developed and maintained by an active policy of multiculturalism, enhances international trading links between Australia and the economies of origin of Australian migrants. This argument fell within the orbit of the 'productive diversity' policy of then Federal Labor government. See J. Collins, 'The land mark of Cronulla', in J. Jupp and J. Nieuwenhuysen (Eds), *Social Cohesion in Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2007 and B. Cope and M. Kalantzis, *Productive Diversity: A New Australian Model for Work and Management*, Pluto Press, Annadale, NSW, 1997
- ² R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions In Modern Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 91
- ³ *ibid.*, p. 173. Putnam contends that the patterns of community association that are the most effective in generating social capital are intensely horizontal in nature. Contrary to vertical relationships, horizontal networks of social engagement bring 'together agents of equivalent status and power'.
- ⁴ R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, Simon and Schuster, 2001, p. 118
- ⁵ M. K. Smith, 'Robert Putnam', *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education* <www.infed.org/thinkers/putnam.htm> accessed 8/8/2007

- ⁶ R. Putnam, 'E Pluribus Unum: diversity and community in the twenty-first century, the Johan Skytte Prize lecture', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 137–174 <<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2007.00176.x>> accessed 8/8/2007
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 145
- ⁸ For example see Collins, 2007, *op. cit.*, pp. 61–69.
- ⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Voluntary Work, Australia*, Catalogue no. 4441.0, Canberra, July 2007, p. 3
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 4–5
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 20
- ¹² Department of Community Services Victoria (DVC), *Indicators of Community Strength at the Local Government Area Level in Victoria*, Melbourne, 2005, p. 10
- ¹³ At the same time, the DVC takes the positive contribution of ethnic diversity to the local creation of community strength for granted. One objective of the research is to build and support 'Communities that embrace diversity: supporting and advocating for indigenous communities, young Victorians, women, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities'.
- ¹⁴ In the hierarchy of spatial units used by the ABS, the smallest is Collector District (neighbourhood scale units of 200–300 households on average), the next largest spatial unit being Statistical Local Area (SLA). SLAs are in turn constituent parts of Local Government Areas (LGAs). The number of SLAs which comprise LGAs varies from one to four within the Melbourne Statistical Division (which approximates the Melbourne metropolitan area).
- ¹⁵ A. Leigh, 'Diversity, trust and distribution', *Dialogue*, Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, vol. 25 no. 3, 2006, p. 44
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 48
- ¹⁷ There are 79 SLAs within the Melbourne statistical division.
- ¹⁸ The Simpson's diversity index (SDI) provides a summary statistic of the diversity of a community. The SDI is based on two assumptions. The first is that a community that has more subgroups on a given measure is more diverse (for example, birthplace or language groups). The second is that a community with a more even spread of cases (individuals) across subgroups is more diverse than a community where cases are heavily concentrated in relatively few subgroups.
- ¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Basic Community Profile data provide birthplace counts for 35 languages spoken in the home, plus the residual category 'other languages' where the counts are small. In practice, therefore, the Simpson's diversity index calculation used here is based on the distribution of residents across a fixed number of language categories.
- ²⁰ Data source: ABS, 2006 census, basic community profiles
- ²¹ These data are derived from customised ABS 2006 census data sets held by the Centre for Population and Urban Research.
- ²² E. Healy, 'Ethnic ALP branches: the balkanisation of Labor', *People and Place*, vol. 1 no. 4, pp. 37–42
- ²³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, migrant settler database 2005–2006, held by the CPUR
- ²⁴ For example, academic James Jupp argues that, unless we are confronted with overt social 'breakdown' or ethnic conflict the conditions of social cohesion have been met. He highlights Australia's status as '... an orderly, cohesive, harmonious and just society by world standards' and maintains that current concerns about the potentially negative affect of ethnic diversity on social cohesion are simply the latest manifestation of a long and largely unjustified preoccupation with imagined external threats. See J. Jupp, 'The quest for harmony', in Jupp and Nieuwenhuysen (Eds), 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 18