IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC OPINION: UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT

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Opposition to immigration has declined since 1996. This paper examines reasons why this has occurred. It finds that most Australians do not want population growth but a number of factors which previously fed opposition to immigration have declined. Unemployment has fallen; migrants can no longer access social welfare on arrival; family reunion has shrunk while skilled migration has grown; and structural multiculturalism is no longer promoted. It is also probable that most Australians think that the cuts made to the program after 1996 were larger than they actually were and that they do not understand the implications of the recent increase.

But opinion is not uniform. Residents of outer Sydney are more concerned about immigration than others and a majority of Australians want fewer migrants from the Middle East.

Since 1996 opposition to immigration has softened in Australia and support for a larger intake has grown. This support is still low but by 2001 and 2002 only 35 to 41 per cent of Australians thought the current intake too high, compared to at least 70 per cent in the early 1990s. Immigration is a crucial determinate of Australia's demographic future: whether the population stabilises somewhere between 20 and 25 million by mid century or rises to 36 million (and then to 50 million in 2001) depends mostly on immigration.[1] The questions of what Australians think about it and why they hold their opinions are important. But though the trend towards lower levels of opposition is unmistakable, the reasons for it are not.

THE SHIFT

Two different data sets confirm the trend towards diminished opposition: a series of opinion polls taken by commercial companies since 1954 and the Australian Election Study (AES) surveys, conducted after federal elections since 1987. Table 1 sets out the poll data. It is restricted to polls which asked the same sort of question: respondents were usually told the number of migrants arriving and were then asked whether that number was, in their opinion, too many, about right or too few.[2]

Table 1 shows that in the 1950s, around 45 per cent of respondents thought 'too many' migrants were arriving but, by the 1960s, the proportion who held this opinion dropped to well below 30 per cent. Also, the proportion saying that the numbers were 'too few' grew from 10 per cent or less in the 1950s to as many as 36 per cent in 1967. If those saying 'too many' migrants are coming are taken as opponents of the size of the current intake, while those saying 'too few' are taken as enthusiasts who would like an even larger intake, the 1960s is a period when immigration enjoyed a fair level of public support.

However, this did not last. Opposition grew during the 1970s and 1980s and, by 1991, 73 per cent said the number of migrants was 'too many'. A major public policy was being conducted in the face of widespread opposition. But as Murray Goot has already pointed out, that opposition declined in the latter half of the 1990s.[3] In 1997, a year after John Howard's Coalition Government was elected, opposition had begun to fall and, by 2001 and 2002, only 41 per cent of respondents found the numbers to be 'too many'.

Table 1: Attitudes to the number of migrants arriving as measured by opinion polls, 1954 to 2002 (per cent)

Year	Too many	About right	Too few	Don't know	Total
1954	44	40	9	7	100
1955	45	39	10	6	100
1956	45	40	8	7	100
1964	21	41	30	8	100
1967	18	36	36	10	100
1968	26	45	19	10	100
1970	38	45	12	5	100
1971	53	34	11	2	100
1977	43	40	14	2	100
1981	45	37	11	7	100
1984 May	60	28	5	8	100
1984 June	64	25	5	6	100
1988	68	22	8	2	100
1990	65	24	8	4	100
1991	73	16	9	2	100
1996 June	65	29	3	3	100
1996 Sept	71	20	2	7	100
1997	64	26	2	8	100
2001	41	44	10	6	100
2002	41	35	19	4	100

Source: see note 2

The AES series (shown in Table 2)[4] is more consistent than the poll series shown in Table 1. All of the surveys were based on random samples of voters who were sent questionnaires after the relevant election. From 1990 the same immigration question was asked in each survey: respondents were presented with the statement 'the number of migrants allowed into Australia at the present time [has]…' and were invited to complete it by circling one of five responses: gone much too far, gone too far, about right, not gone far enough, and not gone nearly far enough. If the responses are collapsed from five categories to three (gone much too far or too far, about right, not gone far enough or not gone nearly far enough), we have a format similar to the poll series.

Unfortunately, the non-response rate to the AES is high; in 2001, for example, only 50.5 per cent of the original sample of 4000 returned their questionnaires. This matters because those who do return them tend to be unlike those who do not; the AES is biased towards older, more educated people. Though they do not publicise it, commercial polls also have a non-response rate. However, as an interviewer asks the questions (either face-to-face or on the phone), literacy, education, age and an interest in public life are less likely to bias the response rate, and non-respondents are normally replaced by other randomly selected persons. This means that respondents to commercial polls are probably quite like non-respondents in terms of socio-economic background.

Despite the non-response problem the AES is a valuable series. It often repeats questions so that trend data can be established and it asks a range of background questions. This allows users to analyse opinion in greater depth than is possible with most opinion polls. But it is important to allow for the response bias. For example, we know that educated people tend to be less opposed to immigration than others.[5] Consequently we would expect the responses from the AES to be more favourable to immigration than those in the poll series. Table 2 shows that this is so; the proportions saying that the number of migrants allowed into Australia has 'gone too far' or 'gone much too far' in Table 2 are consistently lower than the proportions saying the numbers are 'too many' in Table 1. Nevertheless, since 1990, the two series have moved in a consistent fashion. They both show high proportions saying that the intake is too large up until the mid 1990s and they both show reduced opposition after Labor's defeat and the election of the Coalition in 1996.

Table 2: Attitudes to the number of migrants arriving as measured by the Australian Election Study (AES), 1990 to 2001 (per cent)

	The number of migrants allowed into Australia at the present time [has]:					
	Gone much too far or gone too far	About right	Not gone far enough or not gone nearly enough	No response	Total	(Total number)
1990	57	33	8	2	100	(2037)
1993	67	24	6	4	100	(3023)
1996	62	30	6	2	100	(1797)
1998	41	44	10	5	100	(1897)
1999	44	41	12	2	100	(3431)
2001	34	45	18	4	100	(2010)

Source: see note 4
Note: The migration question was not asked in 1987.
The AES is based on written questionnaires; consequently there is no provision for 'don't know'.
People without an opinion are included in those who left the question blank.

EXPLAINING THE SHIFT

There are a number of possible explanations for the shift, most of them related to Government policy. After the March 1996 election the new Government reduced the intake; it restricted newly arrived migrants' access to social welfare; it moved the balance of the program away from family reunion and towards skilled immigrants; and it stopped promoting multiculturalism.

Other changes are less directly related to policy. Unemployment fell and, not only were Government voices muted on multiculturalism, so too were those of ethnic lobbyists and public intellectuals. A number appeared to lose interest; others shifted their focus to different causes such as Aboriginal rights, the Republic, or asylum-seekers. As some aspects of multiculturalism had fuelled opposition to immigration this change could have reduced negative feelings to the program.

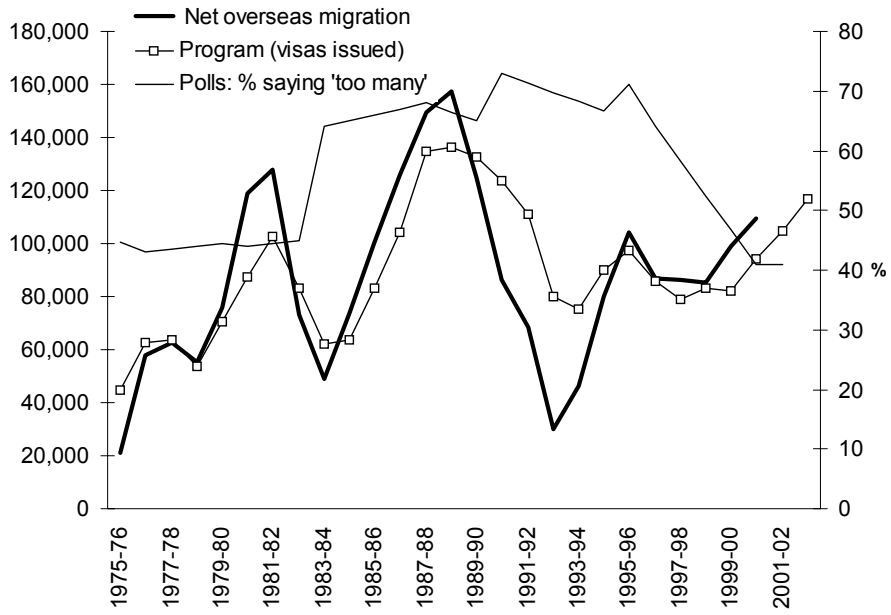
A lower intake

The new Government reduced the planned intake of permanent immigrants from over 97,000 in 1995-96 to 85,000 for 1996-97 and it kept the figures at around this level until 2000-01 when it began a substantial planned increase. The decrease was not large and it only lasted a few years. It did, however, attract a barrage of criticism from business groups, including media outlets,[6] and from many State Governments, especially Victoria. Premiers of Victoria, both Liberal (Jeff Kennett, 1992-1999) and Labor (Steve Bracks, 1999-), have been especially vocal. (Bob Carr, Labor premier of New South Wales since 1995, is an interesting exception.)

While some pro-immigration lobbyists base their case on defence, international relations and humanitarianism, most assert that immigration-fuelled population growth means more economic growth (either gross or per capita). These assertions have been made continuously, loudly, and vigorously. They may have convinced some Australians that higher immigration was in their interests (though Table 3 below shows that converts must have been a minority). But the effect of this activism on public opinion may have been less direct. Rather than convincing Australians that immigration would make them rich, it may have persuaded them that the cuts were more dramatic than they actually were.

As Figure 1 shows, the drop in planned migration was small and relatively

Figure 1: The immigration program, net overseas migration and public opinion, 1975-76 to 2002-03



Source: Net overseas migration, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Australian Bureau of Statistics Catalogue No. 3101.0 (various issues); Program data, *Population Flows*, DIMA, Canberra, December 1999, pp. 15, 22, and 2000, pp. 16, 24, and, for 2000-01, DIMA Media releases MPS 045/2001 and MPS 046/2001; 2001-02 (likely outcome) and 2002-03 (planning figures) DIMIA, Media releases MPS 31/2002 and MPS 30/2002; Public opinion, Table 1

transient. It was also accompanied by a much more laissez-faire approach to temporary migration, including that of people on four-year business visas[7] and international students. Because of this, net overseas migration did not fall much and by 1999-00 it was rising again.

Unemployment

Figure 1 also suggests that opinion does not simply respond to the size of the intake; other factors must be at work. One that suggests itself is unemployment. Opposition to immigration grew after the increases instituted by the Fraser Government in the late 1970s and then remained high, despite a subsequent drop in the intake. But the increase in opposition was also associated with the economic recession of the early 1980s. Opposition remained strong during the large intakes of the Hawke years and continued to be strong during the recession of the early 1990s, despite a second drop in the intake.

In 1993 unemployment was very high; for much of the year it stood at 11 per cent of the work force. By the 1996 election it had fallen to 8.6 per cent, still a high figure for the Australian labour market. But in November 2001 it had fallen to 6.4 per cent. High unemployment may cause people to question the migrant intake, irrespective of its actual size. But the per cent saying the intake was too large did begin to fall in the late 1990s as unemployed decreased and as the program dipped.

For some years Newspoll has regularly presented respondents with a series of issues (education, health, unemployment and so on) and asked if each of these issues 'is very important, fairly important or not important on how you personally would vote in a federal election'. In June 1994, 77 per cent of respondents said unemployment was a very important issue but, in October 2002, only 61 per cent were of that opinion.[8] This supports the theory that better employment conditions after 1996 help explain the change in attitudes to immigration.

Population growth

In 1977 a Saulwick *Age* poll found that 50 per cent of respondents would not be concerned if population growth were to slow down, but 49 per cent wanted growth.[9] By the late 1980s concern about population growth had increased. The 1988 FitzGerald report on immigration commissioned research on attitudes to immigration and population growth and found widespread dissatisfaction:

> Inflation, unemployment and population pressures in major cities are troubling to the community. Many of the people we spoke to seemed bewildered by the changing face of Australia and did not feel they understood or could influence this change. In that context they felt besieged by immigration.[10]

By 2001 a subsequent Saulwick *Age* poll found that the proportion who actively wanted population growth had shrunk to 36 per cent, while 65 per cent wanted stability or a reduction (see Table 3).

Environmentalists concerned about population growth have been active critics of high immigration since the 1980s[11] but no published commercial polls measure support for population stability on environmental grounds. However, the 1990, 1993 and 1996 AES surveys did ask respondents if overpopulation was an urgent environmental concern in this country. By 1996 54 per cent were concerned and this feeling was highest in Sydney's outer suburbs, where 63 per cent were concerned. (But the small numbers in the sub-sample in outer Sydney mean that this difference is not statistically significant.)

Reduced anxiety about unemployment is a plausible source of the change in public attitudes to immigration but an active desire to increase the population is not. There is now only minority support for population growth. However a perception that immigration is not making much of a contribution to growth may be a factor.

Australia does not have a population policy. Because of this most journalists are ill informed about demography and many Australians may be unaware of the recent increases in the intake. Paul Kelly, senior columnist and former editor of the *Australian*, reported in August 2002 that Howard and the Minister for immigration, Philip Ruddock, were 'relieved that the recent announcement of an expanded program won little negative publicity. They describe their approach as managed gradualism'.[12]

Migrants and social welfare

Table 3: Attitudes to population growth, 2001 (per cent)

Should Australia increase, maintain or reduce its population?	
Increase	36
Maintain	58
Reduce	7
Total	100

Source: Saulwick poll published in 'Election 2001, Snapshot of a nation', a liftout in *The Age*, 8 October 2001

Note: The poll was based on a national random sample of 1000 voters interviewed by telephone. Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding.

Public opinion polls have not asked about attitudes to new migrants receiving social welfare and neither has the AES. However, immigrants' use of social welfare has been an issue in other Western countries.[13] It was picked up as a focus of disquiet by the FitzGerald report in 1988[14] and came through strongly in research published by the advertising and market research company, Clemenger BBDO, in 1997. The Clemenger study focussed on social questions that generated high levels of concern among Australians; it found that migrants using the welfare system as soon as they arrived constituted the question that concerned the largest proportion of respondents. Seventy per cent of their respondents were very concerned about this, while 52 per cent felt that migrants 'take from Australia and give nothing back'.[15]

One of the Howard Government's first reforms was to restrict migrants' access to welfare benefits during their first two years of residence.[16] Media reports of the hardship this caused to particular individuals may have ensured that the new policy was widely known. Presumably Kim Beazely, then leader of the Labor Opposition, was aware of the unpopularity of the previous arrangement because, prior to the 1998 election, he said that if he was elected he would not repeal the policy.[17]

The Government also shifted the focus of the intake from family reunion to skilled migration. This reduced the proportion of new arrivals likely to need welfare support and, together with the new restrictions on access to welfare, may have helped calm public opposition to immigration.

The composition of the program

The move from family reunion to skilled migration not only reduced the potential need for migrant welfare it also suited the preferences of most voters.

Since the early 1980s the immigration program has consisted of three main categories: skilled migration, family reunion and humanitarian migration. The skilled category includes spouses and dependent children migrating at the same time as the principal applicant, and the humanitarian category includes refugees. (In the 1980s there was a separate Business Migration category; this is now part of skilled migration.)

In November 1981 a Saulwick *Age* poll asked four questions about different types of migrants. It found that 44 per cent of respondents said we should accept migrants 'who have skills we need', 32 per cent that we should accept people 'who already have relatives here', 23 per cent that we should accept refugees, and 19 per cent that we should accept 'people who have money to invest here'.[18]

Table 4 sets out responses to a similar set of questions in the 2001 AES on skills and family reunion. It shows relatively strong support for skilled migration (in 2001 51 per cent want more skilled migrants, compared to 44 per cent in 1981) while only 34 per cent want more family reunion (a similar proportion to the 1981 poll). The AES did not ask about business migrants and it did not ask about the humanitarian intake in this set of questions.

It did, however, ask about asylum-seekers arriving by boat and found strong resistance to them; 62 per cent wanted the boats turned back.[19] This suggests considerable antipathy toward refugees but Irving Saulwick's research shows that this is not so. He has not repeated a poll with the same multiple response format as the 1981 poll (and the 2001 AES) but he has conducted two others, the 1991 and 2002

polls shown in Table 1 above, which also asked respondents which type of migrant they preferred. Here they had to chose just one of four categories, but Table 5 shows that the proportion choosing refugees increased between 1991 and 2002. The public makes a distinction between refugees selected under the off-shore program and self-selected asylum-seekers;[20] hostility to boatpeople does not mean hostility to refugees.

Both Tables 4 and 5 show a strong preference for skilled migration and since 1996 the Howard Government has increased the skilled intake and cut back family reunion. In 1996 58 per cent of the program was devoted to family reunion and 25 per cent to skilled migration; in 2001-02 these proportions had changed to 36 per cent family reunion and 51 per cent skilled migration.[21]

Table 4: Preferred types of immigrants, 2001 (per cent)

	Migrants who have a skilled trade	Migrants who have relatives in Australia
Accept a lot more or some more	51	34
Stay about the same	35	47
Accept some less or a lot less	10	15
No response	5	4
Total	100	100
(Total number)	(2010)	(2010)

Source: AES 2001 (see note 4)

Table 5: Type of migrant preferred, 1991 and 2002 (per cent)

	1991	2002
Those with money to invest	15	8
Those with skills we need	56	56
Those with family in Australia	14	13
Refugees	10	15
Don't know	5	8
Total	100	100
(Total number)	(1002)	(1002)

Source: Saulwick polls reported in a press release by Job Futures: the National Employment Network, 23 September 2002. The 1991 sample consisted of voters; the 2002 sample was restricted to employed people or people actively looking for work.

The Government's policies on unvisaed asylum-seekers have proved popular[22] and the greater weight given to the skilled category also accords with public preferences. Unemployment is lower, access to social welfare is restricted, and the program appears to be more focussed on Australia's interests. All of these changes create a more favourable public climate for immigration.

Multiculturalism

But there is a further change, one that affects public expressions of national identity, and this is the changing position of political and cultural leaders on multiculturalism. The term *multiculturalism* has at least two meanings in Australia: tolerance for people of different backgrounds and active government support for separate ethnic identities and institutions.[23] This second variant, structural multiculturalism, has been unpopular in Australia since at least the late 1980s. Indeed, the FitzGerald report considered it the major source of opposition to immigration. (It also found that, for many Australians, the themes of family reunion and support for 'the "cultural maintenance" element of multiculturalism' were linked.)[24] Consultants for the report said that 'not only Anglo-Celtic Australians but also immigrants of many years standing are "very angry" about multicultural policy'.[25]

Some supporters of immigration argue that racial intolerance explains hostility to immigration. But where polls on multiculturalism can be interpreted as simply meaning tolerance of difference (or even active appreciation of difference) support for the concept is high. For example, in June 1994, Irving Saulwick found that 65 per cent of Australians thought that Australia was a better place to live in 'now that people from so many countries live here' and only 28 per cent thought that it was a worse place,[26] and in 1997 a Newspoll found that 78 per cent thought that multiculturalism had been good for Australia.[27]

But structural multiculturalism with its emphasis on cultural maintenance is different; various polls in the late 1980s and early 1990s show growing dissatisfaction with it.[28] Unfortunately the AES does not have a consistent series of questions on this theme but, in 1987 and 1990, it asked voters if support for migrants keeping their ethnic identity had gone too far, was about right, or had not gone far enough. And in 1998 and 2001, it asked two questions which were similar to each other on whether it was better for migrants to learn to be Australian rather than clinging to their old ways. Table 6 shows that, if these questions are taken as

Table 6: Attitudes to structural multiculturalism (per cent)

'Migrants keeping their ethnic identity [has]':			'It is more important for new migrants to learn what it is to be Australian than to cling to their old ways':		
	1987	1990		1998	2001
	%	%		%	%
Gone too far	36	43	Strongly agree or agree	67	63
About right	56	49	Neither agree nor disagree	19	24
Not gone far enough	9	8	Disagree or strongly disagree	14	13
Total	100	100	Total	100	100
(Total number)	(1741)	(1964)	(Total number)	(1776)	(1898)

Sources: AES 1987, 1990, 1998 and 2001 (see note 4) People who did not answer the questions are excluded from the analysis.
Note: The question on migrants keeping their ethnic identity had three response categories in 1987 (those shown above) but in 1990 it had five (gone much too far, gone too far, about right, not gone far enough, and not gone nearly far enough). These have been collapsed into the three shown.
The question in 1998 read: 'While it's good to celebrate one's heritage, it is more important for new migrants to learn what it is to be Australian than to cling to their old ways'; in 2001 it had the wording shown above.

Table 7: Opinion about the number of migrants allowed into Australia by attitude to structural multiculturalism, 1990 and 2001

	1990		2001	
Number of migrants allowed into Australia [has]:	Migrants keeping their ethnic identity has gone too far:	Whole sample	It is more important for new migrants to learn to be Australian, strongly agree or agree:	Whole sample
Gone much too far or gone too far	75	58	43	35
About right	22	34	45	47
Not gone far enough or not gone nearly enough	3	8	12	18
Total	100	100	100	100
Total number	(841)	(1964)	(1189)	(1898)

measures of attitudes to structural multiculturalism, hostility to this policy grew between 1987 and 1990 and that in recent years it has been high.

When attitudes to the migrant intake are analysed by attitudes to structural multiculturalism FitzGerald's findings are confirmed. Table 7 shows that people who are dissatisfied with structural multiculturalism are more likely to be dissatisfied with the size of the migrant intake than those who are not. However, by 2001, those concerned about structural multiculturalism were less likely to feel that immigration was too high. This may reflect the degree to which this form of multiculturalism has been de-emphasised in public life.

When the Howard Government was elected it disbanded the prominent Office of Multicultural Affairs, and journalists began to remark on the fact that Howard himself did not use the word *multiculturalism*.[29] Indeed, one commentator claims that the word was banned within the public service.[30] In consequence, Australians have had fewer lectures from public figures about the need to appreciate migrants' continuing cultural distinctiveness and to recognise how impoverished and inward-looking they were before the migrants came.

It is not just that political leaders have turned down the volume on this question. Lobbyists and public intellectuals are now less likely to talk about the virtues of migrant-induced diversity and we hear less about the debt that the old Australia owes to the new. For the left-liberal intelligentsia the burning questions no longer focus on rights for migrant minorities but on the need to apologise to Aborigines for past wrongs and to support reconciliation and Aboriginal self-determination. They are still concerned about immigration but they now concentrate on the rights of asylum-seekers and the wrongs of the Government's detention policy. Structural multiculturalism is passé.

SYDNEY, MIGRANTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, AND NEW THEMES IN IMMIGRATION POLITICS

The 1996 AES found that people living in outer Sydney were the most likely to say that overpopulation was an urgent environmental problem (though small numbers in the sub-sample mean that the difference between them and all Australians was not statistically significant). Since the mid 1980s Sydney has been an increasingly favoured destination for immigrants. House prices have risen and, alone among state premiers, Bob Carr has taken a strong environmental stand against further growth for his metropolis.[31]

If the data from the four most recent AES surveys (1996 to 2001) are combined we can get larger numbers in the regional subcategories. In this combined sample the proportion in outer Sydney saying that immigration has gone too far, or much too far, is higher than in any other metropolitan area. However, many of the respondents are migrants themselves and their attitude is unlike that of the Australia-born. (Fifty-seven per cent of Australian-born people in outer Sydney say that migration has gone too far or much too far but only 35 per cent of migrants in outer Sydney from non-English-speaking-backgrounds agree.) If the regional analysis is restricted to the Australian-born the difference between outer Sydney and other regions is starker.

Table 8 shows attitudes to immigration by region for the Australian-born in the combined sample. It shows that the proportion of Australian-born people in outer Sydney who take the

strongest position (that immigration has 'gone much too far') is 33 per cent. This is higher than in any other region shown. It is, for example, twice as high as the proportion who hold this opinion in outer Melbourne, and more than three times as high as the proportion in Canberra. (All of these differences are statistically significant at either the 0.05 level or the 0.01 level.)[32]

But migrants do not just bring population pressure, they bring cultural diversity as well. Sydney is not only a Mecca for migrants in general, it also attracts many people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, especially from Asia and the Middle East.[33] There is a long history of Australians being asked about their preferences for migrants from different regions of origin.[34] The 2001 AES also has questions on this theme, asking whether Australia should accept more or fewer migrants from particular areas.

Table 9 shows that, as far as Britons, Southern Europeans and Asians are concerned, most respondents want either to accept some more or to keep things as they are. But the situation is different with migrants from the Middle East. A majority (53 per cent) want Australia to accept fewer immigrants from the Middle East.

This introduces a new theme in Australian immigration politics: the settlement of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East. Can such immigrants be integrated in the same fashion as Orthodox Greeks or secular Chinese, or is

Table 8: Attitudes to the number of migrants arriving by region of Australia, Australian-born only (1996, 1998, 1999 and 2001 combined) (per cent)

No. of migrants allowed into Australia [has]						
	Gone much too far	Gone too far	About right	Not gone far enough or nearly far enough	Total	(Total number)
Inner Sydney	25	23	40	12	100	(495)
Outer Sydney	33	24	34	9	100	(323)
Inner Melbourne	14	20	47	19	100	(331)
Outer Melbourne	17	26	44	13	100	(501)
Canberra	10	26	49	16	100	(115)
Other metropolitan	21	24	43	13	100	(1714)
Non-metropolitan	29	26	37	8	100	(3145)
Total, Australian-born	25	25	40	11	100	(6624)
Total, all respondents	22	24	42	12	100	(8801)

Source: AES 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001 (see note 4)

Table 9: Preferred types of immigrants by area of origin, 2001 (per cent)

	Migrants who are British	Migrants who are Southern European	Migrants who are Asian	Migrants who are from the Middle East
Accept a lot more or some more	28	18	12	10
Stay about the same	55	62	47	33
Accept some less or a lot less	14	15	36	53
No response	4	5	5	4
Total	100	100	100	100
(Total number)	(2010)	(2010)	(2010)	(2010)

Source: AES 2001 (see note 4)

the challenge qualitatively different?

Substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly from Lebanon, began in the late 1970s. As early as 1988 poll data showed that migrants from the Middle East were less popular than migrants from other areas, including Asia. Thirty-six per cent of respondents to a 1988 poll thought that Australia should 'prevent' migrants from the Middle East, compared with 27 per cent who wanted to 'prevent' people coming from Asia.[35] The AES data set out in Table 9 show an increase in opposition to immigration from Asia between 1988 and 2001, but an even greater increase in opposition to immigration from the Middle East.

The 2001 AES was held in the wake of vicious gang rapes in Sydney perpetrated by youths of Lebanese origin from the Western suburbs. (They targeted non-Muslim girls of Caucasian appearance and subjected them to ethnic abuse during the assaults.)[36] The AES also occurred after the September 11 tragedy in the United States (largely engineered by Muslims form the Middle East) and after the Tampa incident, when the first boatload of asylum-seekers from the Middle East was prevented from disembarking on Australian territory. Many talkback radio callers in Australia in August 2001 linked the Tampa boatpeople with the rape epidemic.[37]

Are such sentiments just a rerun of the old story of new immigrant groups taking time to adjust and of the host society over-reacting to the latest set of arrivals? It may be too soon to say. While Osama bin Laden has claimed responsibility for the Bali bombing in October 2002, the atrocity appears to have been carried out by Indonesian Islamic extremists. But regardless of the ethnicity of terrorists the fact that they act in the name of Islam makes settlement in Australia more difficult for peaceful Muslims. Strong statements by Muslim leaders rejecting integration and deploring the morality of Australian culture create further uncertainties.[38] Leaders of earlier ethnic groups may have made similar statements but, if they did, these went unreported in the English language media.

Table 10: Reasons for thinking the intake too high, 1991 and 2002 (per cent)

	1991	2002
Unemployment	76	50
Pressure on resources	13	26
Social tension	9	22
Don't know	1	2
Total	100	100
(Total number)	(731)	(416)

Source: see Table 5

The two Saulwick polls taken in 1991 and 2002 suggest that the environment and concerns about social tension are more likely to underpin opposition to immigration today than they were 11 years ago. Both these polls (set out in Table 10) asked people who wanted fewer migrants or no migrants this question: 'In taking this position, which of the following considerations concerns you the most: unemployment at the present time; pressure on resources; social tension?'

CONCLUSION

Opposition to immigration has diminished. But despite the urgings of business interests, few Australians are converted to the idea of population growth. If policy makers consider that the recent decline in opposition to immigration has given them the green light to increase the intake they are mistaken.

Lower opposition to immigration is most probably the result of some peripheral anxieties being assuaged. New migrants can no longer walk straight into welfare, skills are preferred to family

links in selection, and unemployment is lower. All of these factors are important. But two others may be more important. Most Australians probably believe than Howard's cuts were much deeper that they were and are unaware of the recent increase. And while most Australians were 'very angry about multiculturalism' in 1988, today there is less to be angry about. The reality of cultural diversity continues but the policy of structural multiculturalism is in eclipse.

Will the climate of opinion remain as a favourable to immigration as it is at present? Or will care for the environment and for social cohesion mean that Australians pay closer attention to the demographic implications of the intake? Sydney may be the city where these questions are answered first. Carr writes that, 'Any leader in federal politics who argues the case for rapid population build-up should prepare to lose votes in Sydney. Nobody who lives in the nation's biggest city thinks his or her quality of life is going to improve if immigration is ramped up markedly'.[39]

References

1 See Barney Foran and Franzi Poldi, *Future Dilemmas (Executive Summary)*, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, 2002 (http://www.cse.csiro.au/research/Program5/publications/future dilemmases.pdf accessed 23 November 2002). The outcome also depends on fertility and, to a lesser extent, on mortality. But without immigration no feasible level of fertility could take the population to 32 million by 2050.

2 The exact wording varied, but this was the general format of the question. For details about polls from 1954 to June 1996 see K. Betts, *The Great Divide: Immigration Politics in Australia*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney, 1999, pp. 114, 350-352. The September 1996 poll is a Newspoll, conducted 27-29 September and published in *The Australian*, 4 October 1996, pp. 1, 4. It was a telephone poll, sample of 1200 adults aged 18 years and over in all States of Australia. This is all adults not all voters. The questions was: 'Thinking now about immigration. Do you personally think that the total number of migrants coming into Australia each year is too high, too low or about right? If too high - is that a lot too high or a little too high? If too low - is that a lot too low or a little too low?'. (No number was specified.)
The 1997 poll is a Newspoll published in *The Australian*, 3-4 May 1997, p. 12. It was based on a random national telephone sample of 1200 persons 18 plus. The question was: 'Thinking now about immigration. Do you personally think that the total number of migrants coming into Australia each year is too high, too low or about right. If too high — is that a lot too high or a little too high? If too low is that a lot too low or a little too low?' (No number was specified.)
The 2001 poll was an AC Nielsen poll, published in *The Age*, 4 September 2001, pp. 1, 4. It was based on a random national telephone sample of 2058 people aged 18 plus. The question was: 'Do you feel that the current level of immigration is too high, too low or about right?' (No number was specified.)
The 2002 poll is a Saulwick poll conducted for Job Futures: The National Employment Network, from 3 to 15 September 2002. A summary was published in *The Age*, 21 September 2002. It was based on a random national telephone sample of 1002 people across Australia who were either in paid work or actively looking for it. The question was: 'Over the past four years, Australia's intake of immigration has averaged about 91,000 a year. The target for this financial year is 117,000. Do you think Australia should take more, about the same or less than 117,000 immigrants this financial year, or take no immigrants this year?' For the full report see report no. 6, http://www.jobfutures.org.au

3 See M. Goot, 'More "relaxed and comfortable": public opinion on immigration under Howard', *People and Place*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2000, pp. 46-60.

4 AES 1987: I. McAllister and A. Mughan. Australian Election Survey, 1987 [computer file], data collected by A. Ascui, R. Jones, 1987, Canberra: Social Science Data Archives (SSDA), Australian National University (ANU), 1987;
AES 1990: I. McAllister et al. Australian election study, 1990 [computer file], principal investigators I. McAllister, R. Jones, E. Papadakis, D. Gow, Canberra: Roger Jones, SSDA, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU [producer], 1990, Canberra: SSDA, ANU, 1990;
AES 1993: R. Jones et al., Australian Election Study, 1993 [computer file], Canberra: SSDA, ANU, 1993;
AES 1996: R. Jones et al., Australian Election Study, 1996 [computer file], Canberra: SSDA, ANU, 1996;
AES 1998: C. Bean et al., Australian Election Study, 1998 [computer file], Canberra: SSDA, ANU, 1998;
AES 1999: D. J. Gow, C. Bean and I. McAllister, Australian Constitutional Referendum Study, 1999 [computer file], Canberra: SSDA, ANU, 2000;
AES 2001: C. Bean, et al., Australian Election Study, 2001 [computer file], Canberra: SSDA, ANU
All of these data sets are available from <http://www.ssda.anu.edu.au> The authors of the studies which

produced them bear no responsibility for my interpretation of their work.

[5] See data analysed in Betts, 1999, op. cit., pp. 119-128.

[6] See for example: Editorial, 'Economy needs more migrants', *Australian Financial Review*, 21 December 1999, p. 16; J. Koutsoukis, 'Double our migrants: industry', *The Age*, 8 February 1999; Reuters, 'Murdoch urges Australia to boost immigration', *Reuters*, 8 November 1999; C. Dore, 'Kennett in shot at PM on migrants', The Australian, 20-21 February 1999, p. 5; and bodies described in: M. Grattan, 'Keeping to a tight Australia policy', *The Australian Financial Review*, 16 November 1998, p. 21; C. Pyne, 'More migrants equals more respect', *The Australian*, 3 March 1998, p. 13; I. Henderson, 'Immigration is not a dirty word', *The Australian*, 16 July 1998, p. 32; W. Adams, 'Counting heads', *The Australian*, 4 May 1999, p. 32. The Australian Population Institute (Apop) was founded in 1999 to be a focal point for the growth lobby and a means of changing public opinion so that it would be become more open to immigration. See www.apop.com.au

[7] See B. Birrell and E. Healy, 'Globalisation and temporary entry', *People and Place*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1997, pp. 43-52.

[8] See Newspolls, published in *The Australian* (various issues) or available from http://newspoll.com.au

[9] See Betts 1999, op. cit., p. 119.

[10] S. FitzGerald, *Immigration: A Commitment to Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), Canberra, 1988, p. 25

[11] Australians Against Further Immigration and Australians for an Ecologically Sustainable Population, now Sustainable Population Australia (www.population.org.au), were both formed in the 1980s.

[12] P. Kelly, 'Restocking the nation', *The Weekend Australian*, 3-4 August 2002, p. 28

[13] See G. Freeman, 'Migration and the political economy of the welfare state', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 485, May, 1986, pp. 51-63; D. Simcox, 'Public assistance to immigrants in the U. S.: a primer on eligibility and cost', *People and Place*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1996, pp. 11-15; G. Brochmann, 'Immigration policies in Europe: control of democracy or democracy out of control', 13th Congress of Sociology, Bielefeld, July 18-23, 1994.

[14] See FitzGerald, op. cit., p. 28.

[15] See S. White, S. Cummings and Roy Morgan Research, *The Silent Majority III*, Clemenger/BBDO Ltd, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 13, 25. The study was based on two stages — qualitative research in eight focus groups, leading to a questionnaire with 156 problems in 16 broad categories.The questionnaire was distributed to 1,938 people aged 18 plus; just over 61 per cent responded (1193 people).

[16] B. Birrell and S. Evans, 'Recently-arrived migrants and social welfare', *People and Place*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1996, pp. 1-11

[17] See F. Carruthers, 'Labor keeps migrant benefits freeze', *The Australian*, 30 March 1998, p. 6.

[18] Saulwick/Age Poll taken November 1981 and published in *The Age*, 18 January 1982, national sample of 2000. These questions were asked again in 1984; the hierarchy was the same but lower proportions wanted to accept people in each category. See *The Age*, 27 August 1984.

[19] See K. Betts, 'Boatpeople and public opinion in Australia', *People and Place*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2001, pp. 34-48.

[20] See the discussion of the reception of the Kosovars versus boatpeople in ibid.

[21] The balance consisted of 15 per cent humanitarian and two per cent special eligibility in 1995-96 and 11 per cent humanitarian and two per cent special eligibility in 2001-02: for sources see notes on program data at Figure 1.

[22] See K. Betts, 'Boat people and the 2001 election', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2002, pp. 36-54.

[23] John Hirst refers to these as *soft multiculturalism* and *hard multiculturalism*. See J. Hirst, 'National pride and multiculturalism', *People and Place*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1994, pp. 1-6.

[24] See FitzGerald, op. cit., pp. 10-11. 31, 59, 29.

[25] ibid., pp. 30-31

[26] I. Saulwick and Associates, *Opinions about Multiculturalism*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1994

[27] 'Poll highlights split views on immigration', *The Australian*, 3-4 May 1997

[28] See polls set out in Betts, 1999, op. cit., pp. 128-130.

[29] See G. Sheridan, 'Just don't mention the "M" word', *The Australian*, 12 December 1997, p. 13; Editorial, 'What's in a name? Cultural harmony', *The Australian*, 10 May 1999, p. 12; R. Manne, 'Centenary with nothing memorable to say', *Sydney Morning Herald: News And Features section*, 5 February 2001.

[30] A.-M. Jordens, 'Cosmopolitan Australia and the new citizen', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1997, p. 25

[31] See, for example, B. Carr, 'Small and well formed … let's leave it that way', *The Australian*, 18 March 2002, p. 13.

[32] As far as the 'gone much too far' response is concerned the only category where the difference between outer Sydney and any other region is not statistically significant is inner Sydney. Throughout Australia the only region showing higher dissatisfaction with immigration than outer Sydney is non-metropolitan Western Australia, where 34 per cent say 'gone much too far'.

[33] See B. Birrell and V. Rapson, 'Two Australias: migrant settlement at the end of the 20th century', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2002, pp. 10-25.

[34] For an excellent overview of polls on migration see M. Goot, *Migrant numbers, Asian immigration and multiculturalism: trends in the polls, 1943-1998*, National Multicultural Advisory Council , Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998.

[35] Saulwick/Age Poll February 1988, published *The Age*, 9 February 1988, national sample of 1000 voters interviewed by telephone. The question was: 'I am going to read out a list of countries and regions around the world where Australia gets its immigrants from. I would like you to say in each case whether you think Australia should: encourage immigrants from that place; neither encourage nor prevent them; prevent them coming from that place'.

[36] See M. Chulov, 'Rape menace from the melting pot', *The Australian*, 18-19 August 2001, p. 1, 4 ; M. Chulov and I. Payten, 'Crime against community', *The Australian*, 13-14 July 2002, p. 23.

[37] See the analysis of the Rehame report on talkback radio topics in M. Price, 'Talkback callers turn off sympathy', *The Australian*, 29 August 2001, p. 2.

[38] See J. Stapleton, 'Muslims told to avoid Jews, Christians and gays', *The Australian*, 4 November 2002, p. 7, and 'Zealots' quest for purity', *The Australian*, 19 November 2002, p. 13.

[39] Carr, 2002, op. cit.