

BIRTHPLACE: THE NEW POLITICAL DIVIDE

■ Bob Birrell

It is well known that the result of the Federal elections in 1996 and 2001 were influenced by voter attitudes to 'vision' and security issues and that the Coalition was the main beneficiary. This article shows that the swing to the Coalition associated with nationalistic attitudes on these issues was particularly strong amongst Australian-born voters. As a consequence, birthplace appears to have been a significant factor in shaping Federal electoral outcomes in 1996 and 2001.

In 1996 the Coalition finally broke the electoral stranglehold Labor had held for 13 years. The Coalition received 53.6 per cent of the two-party preferred vote, well above what it received in the six federal elections from 1983 through to 1993. Labor lost heavily in regional areas, particularly in Queensland and New South Wales. Thus one theme in subsequent analysis has been that the election represented a regional revolt against Labor. The fact that most of the seats Labor held on to were in the major metropolises supported this interpretation.

However other factors were involved. Katharine Betts has argued that the Coalition also benefited from a significant shift in the votes of blue-collar and lower white-collar voters away from Labor. Analysis of the Australian Electoral Survey post election results indicated that more of such voters gave their first preference vote to the Coalition than to Labor.¹ Andrew Scott presents similar findings which show that Labor's support from manual workers fell from 50-65 per cent in elections during the 1980s and early 1990s (61 per cent in 1993) to just 44 per cent in 1996.²

Betts argues that the main reason for this outcome is that the old left/right dimension with its emphasis on economic issues no longer explains contemporary political divisions. The Coalition is not

just about defending the privileges of the better off or about constructing an environment in which capitalist enterprise can flourish. Likewise, Labor is concerned about far more than protecting the interests of workers and about redistributing the fruits of economic growth to the less affluent.

Over the past couple of decades the Labor party leaders have been heavily influenced by the social and cultural values of Australia's professional classes. The latter values include taking a progressive 'social justice' position on issues concerning women, Aboriginals, migrants and multiculturalism as well as the promotion of Australian participation within the Asian region. The combination of these objectives will subsequently be referred to as Labor's 'global' vision.

Consistent with this vision, Labor has also sought to broaden its political constituency beyond the working class by cultivating support amongst the minorities whose cause it has embraced. These include environmentalists, feminists and non-English-Speaking-Background (NESB) migrants. The latter constitute a sizeable potential voting block likely to be attracted by policies supporting high migration and multiculturalism, policies which simultaneously fit with the values of the professional classes.

This strategy dates to the Whitlam era. Whitlam took a progressive stance across

a wide spectrum of social issues and on this account made major inroads into the professional vote. Whitlam also wooed NESB community leaders, most of whom returned his affection wholeheartedly.

Under Hawke this strategy moved to a new level. Labor's effort to attract environmentalists was quite systematic, beginning with the Hawke government's nullification of the Franklin Dam proposal in Tasmania, then subsequent support for the cessation of logging in certain rain forest areas and elsewhere. In the case of the NESBs, Labor was well aware of its voting support within this constituency by this time.³ Partly because of this Labor pursued high migration levels (including widening family reunion privileges), put the welcoming mat out for new migrants by increasing the welfare and educational benefits they received and championed multiculturalism.

At the same time, successive Labor governments under Hawke and then Keating turned away from support for the traditional Australian working class agenda, with its emphasis on tariffs and close control over the workplace through centralised arbitration. Instead Labor embraced the open international market place and the benefits it allegedly generated through increased competition within Australia. This global strategy reflected a genuine belief that Australia's economic development was being hamstrung by the traditional policies. While there was always concern that the embrace of competition might threaten the traditional working class base, Labor leaders could draw comfort from the well-known fact that the Coalition took an even more extreme line on challenging the traditional arrangements.

By the end of the 1980s it seemed that Labor's cultivation of new constituencies, along with its apparent hold on the

working class, promised continued dominance within Federal politics. The wild card here was the possibility that Labor's blue-collar constituency might rebel against its global vision. But in an era of bipartisanship on the need to open the economy to international competition and on migration and multicultural issues, this seemed a remote possibility.

However, since the late 1980s the Coalition has moved on social and cultural issues. It has staked out a nationalistic stance on migration, multiculturalism and minority issues. By the mid-1990s the legacy of the early 1990s recession, plus hardship in regional Australia as a consequence of low international commodity prices and the contraction of state regulatory protection had begun to bite politically. Disaffection from Labor's global vision had also extended across both regional and metropolitan Australia, including within Labor's working class constituency.

The Coalition was able to exploit this disaffection at the time of the 1996 election by de-emphasising (though never denying) its support for further deregulation and competition and instead focussing on a critique of Labor's global vision. This strategy appeared to work, to judge from Labor's precipitous loss of votes amongst manual and lower white-collar voters indicated above. Betts argues that these voters had tuned out on the traditional left/right political dimension and instead were responding to the Coalition's stance on social and cultural issues. They felt threatened by Labor's embrace of minority interests, by the challenge of multiculturalism, the rhetoric of joining Asia and other doctrines which seemed to challenge their identity as Australians. Labor party research in the run up to the 1996 election appears to support this contention. As Don Watson,

Keating's speechwriter at the time puts it, Keating had,

seen the ALP's research and it showed we were playing too much to the left, too much Aboriginal stuff and too much republic. Out in white heterosexual Australia where Labor's traditional support was, folks were dropping off like flies, apparently — as if we hadn't known for years.⁴

Voters whose economic position had deteriorated under Labor may also have responded in this way. It has been well established that the strongest nationalist sentiments are to be found amongst the blue collar and lower white-collar segments of the community. It is partly a matter of education, in that such people are less exposed to social justice and internationalist values, but partly a consequence of the economic reality for lower skilled citizens. They are more likely to feel threatened by the open marketplace, to conclude that they have much to gain through a strong and protective nation-state and thus to embrace a nationalist identity themselves.

It seemed that after the 1996 election Labor had been reduced to a rump based on the Canberra/ Melbourne/ Sydney triangle, in which regional Australia had turned on the party and on the heartland of the professionals who had driven its internationalist vision. Labor's loss was stunning in NSW, where the party lost 14 seats to the Coalition and was left with no seats outside Sydney and Newcastle. The massive defeat of the 1999 Constitutional Referendum in electorates outside the major cities added weight to this interpretation.⁵

This understanding of the events is consistent with outcome of the November 2001 election. The focus of the election was on security issues, though this time on the challenges presented by unauthorised

boatpeople. The Australian Electoral Study results show that those electors who most strongly supported a tough line on turning back asylum seekers were much more likely to have voted Coalition than those who did not support such a policy.⁶ They also showed that the Coalition received a higher proportion of the first preference votes than did Labor from advanced clerks, intermediate clerks and tradespersons, though not from production workers, elementary clerks or labourers.⁷ Apart from the latter three groups the only other occupational group which delivered clear support for Labor in 2001 were social professionals.

Alternative explanations for the decline in Labor's blue collar constituency

The long-term decline in union membership helps explain Labor's loss of support from some tradespeople and other former unionised workers. So too does the decline in the proportion of the unskilled component of the blue collar working class as a proportion of the workforce in favour of sales and service workers. The spread of property and share ownership may also have helped detach the working classes from Labor.

Another explanation for Labor's loss in 1996 has to do with the political cycle (as Party fortunes wax and wane with economic events and time in power). This can be seen in the mood for retribution fuelled by the early 1990s recession and a general disaffection with Keating's leadership.⁸ This is a plausible idea. Again, to quote Watson on Labor research before the 1996 election:

The people were sick of him [Keating]. They didn't like the way he behaved when he was abroad. They didn't like the way he behaved in the parliament. They didn't like his arrogance.⁹

Elections are complex beasts. No one theory can possibly hope to explain outcomes. However the preceding discussion suggests that it is reasonable to explore the Coalition's successes since 1996 around the assumption that social and cultural issues may be reshaping voting outcomes. The objective is to shed further light on these influences by exploring the ways they are mediated by birthplace. The approach taken is to examine the extent to which attitudes plausibly linked to birthplace appear to be shaping voting outcomes even when class, residence, age and other likely influences are taken into account.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIRTHPLACE

Birthplace does not feature prominently in the Australian political literature. Ethnic leaders have from time to time sought to alarm mainstream politicians who contemplated challenging Labor's global vision by asserting that there would be an ethnic backlash at the polls.¹⁰ James Jupp (amongst others) has highlighted how heavily Labor depends on seats at the Federal level with high proportions of NESB voters. He notes that in the 2001 election there were twenty federal electorates in which more than 30 per cent of residents spoke a language other than English at home. All but one (Menzies in eastern Melbourne) were held by Labor.¹¹ NESB-born persons do disproportionately vote Labor (though not if they are Eastern Europeans).¹² Indeed one of the contributing factors to the finding noted above that Labor held on to the less skilled fraction of the working class in 1996 is that most NESB-born persons are located in this class fraction. But Economou argues that this is not necessarily due to Labor's support for immigration and multiculturalism. Rather, it has more to do with the blue-collar make-up of NESB voters. As he puts it 'ethnic voting is in fact a subset of

blue collar voting'.¹³ In any case his analysis suggests that, in the electorates in question, Labor's dominance is so strong that it is in no danger of losing the seats and that therefore the seats do not influence election outcomes.¹⁴

Economou's arguments are well taken. However they ignore the other side of the birthplace coin. The electoral impact of Labor's social and cultural agenda may be much more serious on sections of the Australian born electorate, many of whom do live in swinging electorates. There are several reasons for this expectation. First, those who were Australian born would be more likely to have a stronger sense of Australian identity than their overseas born counterparts within the same age group, location and occupational position. They could therefore be expected to be more sensitive to the alleged challenges that federal Labor leaders mounted against the traditional ways Australians have imagined themselves. Such voters are also the most likely to react against some of the consequences of the migration program, particularly the transformation of parts of the metropolises where 'visible' minorities tend to concentrate. For voters holding a nationalistic position any evidence of ethnic concentrations is likely to constitute a challenge to notions that Australia should constitute 'one' community.

Second, to the extent that Labor's minority agenda involved concessions from the mainstream to accommodate the job aspirations and resources demanded by Aborigines or migrants it is the Australian-born who would be the most likely to feel that it was they who had something to lose from such concessions. Third, there is the possibility of relocation of Australian-born voters out of areas of NESB migrant concentration into marginal outer suburban electorates.

For their part, the overseas-born might be expected to be on the other side of the fence, as beneficiaries of the minority agenda and supportive of an Australian identity which gives greater weight to the multicultural presence. But within the overseas-born those from Britain could be expected to be less enamoured of the minority agenda, since they are not usually seen as needing protection or celebrated as part of the new multicultural mix.

These hypotheses imply that birthplace will cut across class and location. If correct, they mean that analyses of Australian voting behaviour based on such variables will give, at best, an imperfect explanation of electoral outcomes. The implication is that Australian-born persons would favour the Coalition, especially in the elections of 1996 and 2001 where 'vision' and 'security' issues were important. Overseas-born voters would be expected to favour Labor, though not necessarily those born in Britain, New Zealand or other countries not associated with the 'ethnic' constituency.

These issues are explored initially through the Australian Electoral Survey (AES).¹⁵ The AES provides information by detailed birthplace and location within Australia and by party choice. It also provides a wide range of information on respondents' economic, social and cultural attitudes. Thus it is possible to explore whether their voting patterns are linked to attitudes which are consistent with the theories just outlined.

In order to minimise sample size problems, birthplaces were categorised into

Australian-born, UK/NZ/ Ireland-born (labelled as Main English Speaking — MES), and other overseas-born (subsequently referred to as non-English-Speaking-Background — NESB).

Birthplace and voting behaviour

Table 1 shows the overall pattern of voting by birthplace recorded by the AES after the elections of 1990, 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2001. The numbers in this Table are restricted to the proportion of all voters who indicated that their first preference vote in the House of Representatives was to the Coalition. Those voting One Nation are included in brackets for the elections in 1998 and 2001.

The pattern is clear. Beginning first with Coalition voters, some 46-47 per cent of the Australian-born and MES voters supported the Coalition in 2001 compared with just 37 per cent of the other overseas-born. This gap is similar after the 1998 election, though somewhat smaller after the 1996 election than would have been anticipated given the hypothesis under review. This latter result is attributable to a quirk in the AES sample in 1996.¹⁶ The divergence in voting patterns is even more accentuated if the One Nation party is included. Australian-born and MES voters were far more likely to support One Nation than NESB voters. When the Coalition and One Nation votes are added the gap between Australian-born, MES-born and NESB-born voters in support for these two

Table 1: Proportion of residents voting Coalition by birthplace, by election year, 1990 to 2001. Bracketed figures for 2001 and 1998 include One Nation

Birthplace	2001	1998	1996	1993	1990
Australia	47 (51)	44 (51)	52	46	44
MES	46 (48)	45 (52)	53	47	40
NESB	37 (38)	33 (37)	48	33	38
Total	46 (49)	43 (49)	52	45	43

parties widens from around 10 points to 13-14 percentage points in 1998 and 2001.

It is noticeable that the proportion of Australian-born voters supporting the Coalition jumps in 1996 and stays high (relative to 1993 and 1990) especially if the One Nation vote is included in 1998 and 2001. This is consistent with the hypotheses outlined above since, given the 'vision' and 'security' oriented nature of the elections in 1996 and after, it would be expected that the strongest response to the Coalition's position would come from the Australian-born. On the other hand, apart from the anomalous result in 1996, the NESB vote for the Coalition (and One Nation) has remained fairly stable since 1990. This too is consistent with earlier argument. Other factors may also be involved in the relative stability of support for the Coalition amongst NESBs over the decade of the 1990s, including an increase in the proportion of the Asian-born (who give little support to the Coalition).

These findings suggest the conclusion that the Coalition won the elections in 1996 and 2001 and to a lesser extent in 1998 because of its appeal to the Australian-born and MES voters.

Appearances may be deceptive. The fact that Australian-born voters supported the Coalition and One Nation more than they did Labor could reflect factors other than birthplace. One is age. It is well known that the Coalition does far better with older voters than amongst younger voters. The AES survey confirms this expectation (see Table 2). Thus it might be said that the Coalition's recent successes are attributable to its attractions to older

voters. The proportion of Australians aged 45+ has increased from around 31 per cent to 36 per cent over the 1990s, and this has contributed to the growth in the Coalition vote over the decade. Nevertheless it is only a marginal factor since, as Table 2 also shows, the Coalition's share of the total older vote is only 52 per cent. Far more striking is the 14 percentage point gap in the Australian-born and NESB support for the Coalition amongst voters aged 45 plus. Thus the problem remains, why do Australian-born voters hold such preferences?

Another possible factor which might explain the high Australian-born propensity to vote Coalition, is residential location. As noted, regional voters turned on Labor in 1996. Since a much higher proportion of regional voters are Australian-born than are metropolitan voters, this could be behind the jump in Australian-born support for the Coalition in 1996 and after. The issue was explored with reference to voters living in Melbourne/Sydney/Canberra 'triangle'. This group was chosen because these three locations cover the heartland of the ideologues who propagate Labor's global vision, as well as those most likely to be beneficiaries of it. In these circumstances we would expect to find relatively weak support for the Coalition in the metropolitan triangle regardless of birthplace.

Table 3 shows that this expectation is not correct. The linkage between birthplace and voting patterns in the 'triangle' is even stronger than was the case for all voters shown in Table 1. The AES survey

Table 2: Proportion of respondents voting for the Coalition in 2001 by birthplace and age

Age of voter	Birthplace			Total	Number
	Australia	MES	NESB		
17-44	40	33	30	39	839
45+	55	49	41	52	1,040

of voters after the 2001 election indicates that there is a very large 16 percentage points gulf between the propensity of Australian-born and NESB voters to give their first preference vote to the Coalition. There is a similar pattern for MES voters.

The reason why Labor did somewhat better in the 'triangle' in the 2001 election than in the rest of Australia is because that is where NESB-born voters are concentrated. Only 33 per cent of Australian-born voters resident in the 'triangle' gave their first preference vote to Labor, compared with 53 per cent of NESB-born voters. Even when voters for the Democrats and Greens are added to the Labor voters the combined total only reach 47 per cent of Australian-born voters living in the 'triangle' (see Table 4). This is less than the 49 per cent of Australian-born voters identified as giving their first preference vote to the Coalition (see Table 3).

BIRTHPLACE AND EDUCATION

As noted, Betts argues that many of the blue collar and lower white collar workforce have turned to the Coalition because they are discomfited by the challenge of Labor's global vision to their social and cultural values. On the other hand, as Betts, work also shows, some groups, including social professionals, appear to be attracted to Labor precisely because of the Party's vision. However, if birthplace is as influential a mediating factor in response to this challenge as hypothesised, those who are Australian-born should be the most likely to turn to the Coalition, regardless of education level.

Table 5 allows this proposition to be explored. It uses qualification levels as an indicator of occupation and thus of class. The table compares the proportion of AES respondents voting Coalition at the 2001

Table 3: Proportion of respondents voting Coalition in 2001, 1998 and 1996 by birthplace in the Melbourne/Sydney/Canberra 'triangle'

Birthplace	2001	1998	1996
Australia	49	44	49
MES	51	55	53
NESB	33	33	41
Total	45	42	48

Table 4: Proportion of respondents voting Coalition and Labor in 2001 by birthplace in the Melbourne/ Sydney/Canberra 'triangle'. Figures in brackets next to Labor include the Green and Democrat vote

Birthplace	2001	
	Coalition	Labor
Australia	49	33 (47)
MES	51	36 (43)
NESB	33	53 (60)
Total	45	38 (50)

election by qualification level. Consistent with Betts, findings, Australian-born respondents with bachelor degrees are much less likely to vote Coalition than those with diploma, trade, non-trade qualifications or no qualifications. However within each of these qualification categories the Australian-born are around 10 percentage points more likely to vote Coalition than their NESB counterparts except for the 'non-trade' group. Again, as with earlier findings, the MES born have more in common with the Australian-born than with the NESBs on this dimension.

The findings confirm the importance of birthplace as a factor mediating voting behaviour. In so doing they question the emphasis of commentators such as Economou who regard class as the dominant electoral factor. The Coalition was able to attract around half of all Australian-born respondents with diploma, trade or no qualifications. This is the inverse of what would be expected

if class prevailed in determining voting patterns. On the other hand the Coalition did relatively poorly amongst the NESBs in these qualification groups. This may be because they responded to Labor's traditional appeal as the party of the less affluent. But it may also reflect a positive response to Labor's cultivation of the ethnic constituency through its multicultural and immigration policies.

SOCIAL ATTITUDES, BIRTHPLACE AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

There is a strong prima facie case that electoral behaviour in the late 1990s has been shaped by attitudes to Labor's global vision and that such attitudes are linked to birthplace. To confirm this thesis requires evidence showing linkages between attitudes on the relevant social and cultural issues and voting behaviour. The AES information on respondents' attitudes to a variety of social attitudes permits this kind of analysis.

To assess the argument two questions have been chosen which relate to respondents' attitudes towards the Labor vision. They concern attitudes towards the rapidity with which migrants assimilate and about the ways in which boats carrying people seeking asylum should be

treated. The first issue concerns whether (as predicted) Australian-born voters hold more assimilationist and hard line control attitudes respectively on these two issues than their overseas-born counterparts. The second issue concerns whether, if they do take this stance, it translates into a high propensity to vote Coalition.

We begin with attitudes to assimilation. The AES asked respondents whether they agreed or not with the proposition that 'people who come to live in Australia should try harder to be more like other Australians'. To agree with this proposition is to disagree with a core component of multiculturalism — which is that Australia should value and maintain its cultural diversity. Since the purpose is to explore what is driving the political choices of Australian-born voters, the information in Table 6 is limited to Australian-born respondents. The Australian-born have been split into those with bachelor degrees and without bachelor degrees. This was done to allow further consideration of the implications of education for voting patterns (evident in Table 5). Table 6 shows that those with bachelor degrees (or above) were far more likely to disagree with this proposition than their non-graduate

Table 5: Proportion of respondents voting Coalition by education and birthplace, 2001, per cent

Birthplace	Bachelor degree	Diploma	Trade	Non-trade	No qualifications	Total
Australia	38	50	54	41	49	47
MES	43	47	57	44	38	46
NESB	27	41	45	45	36	37

Table 6: Responses to the proposition 'People who come to live in Australia should try harder to be more like other Australians', by education level, Australian-born respondents only, in 2001. Proportion of respondents who voted Coalition in 2001 in brackets

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total	Number
Bachelor degree	21 (54)	30 (49)	49 (25)	100	27
No Bachelor degree	54 (54)	28 (49)	18 (34)	100	1,022
Total	48 (54)	28 (49)	24 (30)	100	1,049

Australian-born counterparts. Indeed the gulf in attitudes on this issue is very wide. If voter preferences were influenced by such attitudes then the electoral impact would be substantial. Because there are far more voters without bachelor degrees, if these attitudes influence voting then the electoral impact would be significant.

In fact there is a strong association between party choice and such attitudes. Regardless of education level, 54 per cent of those who took an assimilationist stance and 49 per cent of those who were neutral indicated that they voted Coalition in 2001. On the other hand, only a minority of those who disagree with the proposition indicated that they voted for the Coalition. However, only a small share of those with bachelor degrees, could be said to be assimilationists. But most of this small minority, like their counterparts amongst those without bachelor degrees said that they voted Coalition.

It is not possible to say that the high propensity of these people who voted Coalition did so because of this attitude. Nevertheless the finding is consistent with the theory that such attitudes help explain why Australian-born voters are more likely to be in the Coalition camp, especially when elections are fought around 'vision' or security issues.

The findings are similar on asylum seeker policy. (See Table 7.) Respondents were asked their opinion on the harsh proposition that 'all boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back'. Nearly half the Australian-born respondents with

bachelor degrees disagreed with the 'turning back' option. However only 13 per cent of the far more numerous Australian-born voters without bachelor degrees disagreed. As with the preceding finding, the majority of those who agreed with the proposition (whatever their level of education) said that they voted Coalition. This finding too supports the theory under consideration.

THE ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF BIRTHPLACE VOTING

The AES survey data suggests that there has not been much change in NESB voting patterns during the 1990s. Analysis of electorates with high NESB-born voters is consistent with this finding. The swing to the Coalition in these seats was relatively small between 1993 and 2001. In any case, as Economou has argued, such is Labor's dominance in most of these seats that very large swings are required for any loss to occur. To the extent that there is an electoral impact of the birthplace voting patterns discussed above, it would be expected to occur in electorates with high shares of Australian-born and MES-born residents. These issues will be explored in reference to the NSW situation because that is where the greatest changes in the distribution of seats occurred over the 1993 to 2001 period. The ALP held 33 seats in NSW after the 1993 election. After the 2001 election it held just 20. Space also precludes analysis of every state.

There are currently 50 federal House of Representative seats in NSW. In the case of the 25 with the highest share of

Table 7: Responses to the statement 'All boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back', by education level, Australian-born respondents only, in 2001. Proportion of respondents who voted

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total	Number
Bachelor degree	37 (44)	16 (39)	47 (20)	100	281
No Bachelor degree	70 (54)	17 (45)	13 (30)	100	1,105
Total	64 (55)	17 (44)	20 (25)	100	1,386

NESB residents, all but one started in 1993 in Labor hands and after 2001 was still held by Labor. The exception was Parramatta in western Sydney, which swung to Liberal in 1996 and has since stayed that way. In most of these 25 electorates there was a modest swing, usually not more than seven per cent in the two party preferred vote towards the Liberal party (when the vote in 1993 and 2001 is compared). In a few seats with very high NESB concentrations Labor actually gained in the two party preferred vote. As noted, this outcome is consistent with the AES findings that, over the period 1993 and 2001, there was not much change in the high propensity of NESB voters to support Labor.

The pattern changes dramatically in the other 25 federal electorates in NSW (that is those with a relatively low NESB presence). Labor held 16 of these 25 seats after the 1993 election, but only four after the 2001 election. We do not have access to survey data relating birthplace to voting in these electorates. Nevertheless, the presumption is that the links between attitudes and voting amongst Australian-born and MES voters shown above would apply in these seats. Other things being equal, the higher the proportion Australian-born and MES voters the greater the electoral impact would be. A more detailed examination of these 25 seats, however, reveals that the swing against Labor from 1993 to 2001 was strongest in the seats on the fringes of metropolitan Sydney. In Lindsay (on the western outskirts of Sydney) it was 15.6 per cent and in Robertson (centring on Gosford and Terrigal on the north coast) it was 12.5 per cent. Thirteen of these seats are identified in Table 8. The Table shows that Labor lost six of these 13 seats to the Liberals over the 1993 to 2001 period.¹⁷

Why was the swing so high in these fringe seats? In most cases the populations are changing rapidly due to movement into the areas, overwhelmingly from Australian-born and MES-born persons moving from elsewhere in Sydney. They could well include some of Mark Latham's aspirational voters — voters with enough capital to afford a new dwelling 50 kilometres or more from the centre of Sydney. Latham hypothesises that such 'people do not want the troubles of other areas to follow them to the fringe'.¹⁸ Given the attention paid in Sydney to social tensions associated with the city's changing migrant population it may well be that these people would be especially susceptible to negative messages about Labor's social and cultural vision.

CONCLUSION

It would be nice to have a dollar for every time a political commentator is asked why Labor cannot currently match its stellar State performances at the Federal level. The answer, as shown by Betts and other scholars, is that at the Federal level, identity and security issues are in play which cross the left/right or class dimension. At the time of the 1996 and 2001 federal elections 'vision' and security issues were at stake. Labor is severely disadvantaged in these circumstances because of the Hawke/Keating legacy outlined above. On the other hand, the Coalition under Howard's leadership has taken a strong nationalistic stance, which appears to be clearly understood by both friend and foe alike. Jupp insists that by 2001 Labor had 'no distinctive policy on immigration, multiculturalism or refugees'.¹⁹ This is a disingenuous comment

Table 8: Two Party Preferred vote of the winning party in federal electorates on Sydney's fringe, 1993 and 2001

Seat	1993		2001		Swing to LP 1993-2001	% NESB*
	Winning party	Two party preferred	Winning party	Two party preferred		
Shortland	ALP	67.33	ALP	58.78	8.55	3.80
Dobell	ALP	56.82	LP	50.38	7.20	4.10
Robertson	ALP	55.55	LP	56.98	12.53	4.60
Charlton	ALP	67.10	ALP	56.66	10.44	4.80
Macquarie	ALP	50.12	LP	58.67	8.79	6.40
Newcastle	ALP	66.88	ALP	56.91	9.97	7.70
Cook	LP	53.47	LP	64.0	10.53	9.40
Lindsay	ALP	60.22	LP	55.47	15.69	10.00
Hughes	ALP	56.42	LP	60.41	16.83	10.50
Macarthur**	ALP	51.28	LP	56.96	8.24	12.30
Cunningham	ALP	67.91	ALP	60.65	7.26	14.40
Throsby	ALP	74.02	ALP	65.10	8.92	15.60
Berowra	LP	62.20	LP	65.65	3.45	15.70

Source: Australian Electoral Office (AEO)

* Percentage of population in the electorate born in NESB countries according to the 1996 Census

** Swing to the LP is understated because of electoral boundary changes favouring the ALP prior to the 2001 election

Source: Parliamentary Library, Research paper Number 11

which ignores the build up of impressions associated with the two parties over the last two decades.

This paper extends the argument by pointing to the importance of birthplace as an intermediary factor shaping voter responses when identity and security issues are high on the political threshold. The AES data indicates that Australian-born and, to a lesser extent, MES-born voters are much more likely to take conservative positions on issues of immigration, multiculturalism and national security than their NESB-born counterparts. The AES responses also indicate that these conservative stances tend to translate into preferences for the Coalition. These relationships were shown to be strongest amongst Australian-born voters without bachelor qualifications, that is the very voters who would be most likely to support Labor's

more generous welfare policies (at least relative to the Coalition's).

Only a few per cent of voters need to change their position on these security and 'vision' issues for it to be enough to shape Federal Electoral outcomes. The Coalition secured a national two party preferred swing of just 2.01 per cent between 1998 and 2001, giving it 51.03 per cent of the vote in 2001. The significant movement of the Australian-born constituency to the Coalition in 1996 and 2001 is enough to explain the Coalition's success.

This is not to argue that class is dead in Australian politics. A rise in unemployment could easily swing attention to bread and butter issues far more supportive to Labor's chances.

Note:

The author would like to thank Virginia Rapson and Lina Birrell for their help in processing the data for this article.

References

- ¹ K. Betts, 'Class and the 1996 Australian Election', *People and Place*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1996, p. 41
- ² A. Scott, *Running on Empty*, Pluto, 2000, p. 127

- ³ J. Jupp, 'Multicultural Public Policy', in C. Price (Ed.), *Australian National Identity*, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, Canberra, 1991, p. 142
- ⁴ D. Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*, Knopf, 2002, p. 563
- ⁵ B. Birrell, *Federation, the Secret Story*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney, 2001, p. 332
- ⁶ K. Betts, 'Boatpeople and the 2001 election', *People and Place*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2002, p. 44
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 50
- ⁸ M. Simms, 'Introduction', in C. Bean, et al., (Eds.), *The Politics of Retribution, The 1996 Federal Election*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p. xxi
- ⁹ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 563
- ¹⁰ For example see the list of broadsheet articles by Mary Kalantzis, Colin Rubenstein and others listed in N. Economou's article 'An overstated electoral importance? A note on "ethnic" voting and federal electoral outcomes', *People and Place*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1994, p. 51
- ¹¹ J. Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 33
- ¹² I. McAllister and C. Bean, 'Long-term electoral trends and the 1996 election', in C. Bean et al., (Eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 180
- ¹³ Economou, *op. cit.*, p. 51
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 50
- ¹⁵ C. Bean and I. McAllister, 'From impossibility to certainty: explaining the Coalitions victory in 2001', in J. Warhurst and M. Simms, (Eds.), *2001: The Centenary Election*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2002
- ¹⁶ For reasons unknown the balance of the AES sample of NESBs in 1996 favoured those living in non-metropolitan areas of Australia. Non-metropolitan voters are much less likely to vote Labor than their metropolitan counterparts, thus the relatively high overall Coalition vote of 48 per cent in 1996.
- ¹⁷ For more on regional seats in NSW, see E. Thompson, 'New South Wales', in J. Warhurst and M. Simms, (Eds.), *op. cit.* pp. 155-170.
- ¹⁸ M. Latham, 'Federal Responsibilities for Cities', Speech to the Evatt Foundation, 18 March 2002, p. 4
- ¹⁹ J. Jupp, 'Ethnicity and immigration', in J. Warhurst and M. Simms, (Eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 264