



Half of all Melbourne voters and most young voters don't feel very Australian

Katharine Betts

Bob Birrell

John Masanauskas

Table of Contents

Survey results.....	1
Why is Melbourne different?.....	2
Consequences.....	5
Notes	7

Index of Tables

Table 1: Sense of belonging to Australia by capital city and region (all voters) %	1
Table 2: Sense of belonging to Australia by capital city and region (voters aged 18-29).....	2
Table 3 The progressive/conservative scale by capital city and region (all voters) %	3
Table 4: Intended vote in December 2023 by capital city and region (all voters) %	4
Table 5: Intended vote in December 2023 by capital city and region (voters aged 18-29) %...5	5

Report authors

Bob Birrell (mobile 0413 021 126) is head of the Australian Population Research Institute. Email:

Bob.birrell@tapri.org.au

Katharine Betts (mobile 0412 214 820) is deputy head of The Australian Population Research Institute. Email:

Katharine.Betts@tapri.org.au

John Masanauskas, john.masanauskas@bigpond.com

Articles published by The Australian Population Research Institute may be republished provided the Institute and its writers are appropriately credited, and a link is made to our website <tapri.org.au>.

Any articles reproduced cannot be edited or any material sold separately.

Half of all Melbourne voters don't feel very Australian

There are more voters in Melbourne than elsewhere in Australia who do not feel very Australian. This is especially the case for young voters aged 18-29.

This statement is based on the question Tapri asked in its December 2023 national survey of voters about respondents' sense of belonging to Australia. Voters were given four options, to 'a great extent', 'a moderate extent', 'only slightly' or 'not at all'.

Our judgement was that if voters whose well-being will be largely determined by Australia's progress don't feel 'a great extent of belonging' then they can hardly be said to feel very Australian.

The finding that just 26 percent of young voters in Melbourne felt 'a great extent' of belonging (much lower than elsewhere in Australia) is especially striking. Most of these voters were raised and educated at public expense in Australia and will live and die in Australia. Their life chances will be determined by Australian outcomes.

Yet, on our measure, most don't feel very Australian.

One response may be that young voters' feelings reflect a healthy scepticism about patriotism, perhaps a consequence of an education encouraging them to challenge prevailing views.

Perhaps. But even so, that young voters are launching their lives with little feeling for their country they will live in, is arresting. Furthermore it has political consequences which are explored below. Foremost, it is contributing to a political swing to the Greens that could have national political significance.

Survey results

As noted, the December 2023 Tapri national survey of 3001 voters asked respondents about their sense of belongingness to Australia. Here is their response.

Table 1: 'To what extent do you have a sense of belonging to Australia?' by capital city and region (all voters) %

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Other capital cities</i>	<i>Regions</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>A great extent</i>	49	56	59	54	62	57
<i>A moderate extent</i>	38	34	30	35	29	33
<i>Only slightly</i>	10	7	8	9	7	8
<i>Not at all</i>	3	3	3	3	2	2
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	580	621	288	503	1009	3001

Table 1 shows that only 49 percent of Melbourne voters said ‘to a great extent’. This compares with 56 percent of Sydney voters, 59 per cent of Brisbane voters, 62 percent of voters in regional Australia and 57 percent of all Australian voters.

Table 2 shows that only 32 percent of all 18-29 year old voters have a feeling of belonging to Australia to ‘a great extent’ and, that just 26 per cent of this age group in Melbourne feel this way.

Table 2: Sense of belonging to Australia by capital city and region (voters aged 18-29)

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Other capital cities</i>	<i>Regions</i>	<i>Total aged 18 to 29</i>
<i>A great extent</i>	26	33	33	35	33	32
<i>A moderate extent</i>	53	52	45	54	55	53
<i>Only slightly</i>	17	10	17	9	12	12
<i>Not at all</i>	5	5	5	2	1	3
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	133	140	66	102	179	620

Why is Melbourne different?

These are odd results. Melbourne voters are highly dependent on the benefits of living in Australia. Melbourne is a voracious importer, but a tiny exporter. Victoria’s huge indebtedness (needed to finance Melbourne’s city building and service expenditures – including care and education of young people) depends on Australia’s strong balance of payments position. Melbourne is increasingly dependent on tax flows from the Commonwealth and GST returns. These are delivered on the grounds of Victoria’s (read Melbourne’s) poor financial situation. Victoria, to use NSW Premier Chris Minns’ expression, is a welfare state.

So why are Melbourne’s voters so ungrateful?

The best explanation is that this sentiment flows from Melbourne being the most progressive, or woke,¹ location in Australia. The Tapri survey substantiates this assertion. The survey asked multiple questions about social and cultural issues. From these we constructed an index of progressive views based on a wide spectrum of voters’ attitudes about cultural and social issues (such as gender fluidity and changing the date of Australia Day).²

A full 35 percent of Melbourne voters were progressives, compared with 31 percent of Sydney voters. For other capital cities, except Brisbane, the proportion was 28 percent, and for Brisbane and the regions it was 23 percent. Melbourne was the most progressive city, or region, in the country.

Table 3 The progressive/conservative scale by capital city and region (all voters) %

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Other capital cities</i>	<i>Regions</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Strong conservative</i>	27	25	36	35	39	33
<i>Moderate, leaning conservative</i>	24	23	24	20	23	23
<i>Moderate</i>	14	21	17	17	15	17
<i>Moderate, leaning progressive</i>	15	14	10	14	11	13
<i>Strong progressive</i>	20	17	13	15	12	15
<i>Total conservative</i>	51	48	60	55	61	55
<i>Total progressive</i>	35	31	23	28	23	28
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	580	622	288	503	1008	3001

But how does progressivism influence a sense of national belonging? The progressive agenda prioritises ethnic and gender diversity, identity politics,³ open borders and the autonomy of minorities. It is hostile to any constraints on this agenda and, on this account, tends to distrust patriotic commitments. This is because such commitments are seen as constraining the autonomy of individuals and identity groups.

These outcomes are strong in Melbourne where a woke elite dominates cultural and political expression, and where such outcomes are being given political shape by the Greens party.

The Greens promote a highly progressive agenda which, of course, attracts progressives. They also proclaim a strong state interventionist platform on economic questions, one that is far to the left of the Labor Party (except in Victoria where Labor sees itself as in direct competition with the Greens for the progressive vote). This platform has attracted those voters who are feeling the pressure of the cost-of-living and housing crises and who want the state to intervene on their behalf.

The Greens do not assert that the state should act on the grounds that we, as part of an Australian community, have a collective responsibility to help all voters. Quite the opposite. They encourage resentment towards the nation/state and towards the incumbent Labor Government for being the tool of big business.

The Greens advocate higher taxes on big business. They propose to use this revenue to advantage the less well off, as by state funding for rental housing and the abolition of higher education fees.

Any mainstream reluctance to support this agenda is met with indignation and animosity. This stance encourages voters who are feeling resentful about the impact of the cost-of-living and housing crises to turn against the incumbent Labor Government. Melbourne leads the way.

At the time of our December 2023 survey, some 17 per cent of Melbourne voters said that they intended to vote Greens at the next Federal election. By comparison only 13 percent of Sydney voters intended to vote Greens and 14 percent of Australian voters overall.

Table 4: Intended vote in December 2023 by capital city and region (all voters) %

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Other capital cities</i>	<i>Regions</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Labor</i>	36	34	28	42	30	34
<i>Greens</i>	17	13	20	12	13	14
<i>Labor & Greens</i>	53	47	48	55	43	48
<i>Coalition</i>	31	40	36	30	35	34
<i>One Nation</i>	4	3	7	6	7	6
<i>Coalition & One Nation</i>	36	43	43	36	42	40
<i>Other</i>	11	10	9	10	15	12
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	580	621	287	502	1009	3001

We would expect young voters, who are the main economic losers, to be the most responsive to the Greens’ platform, especially in Melbourne where the relative dominance of progressive values also predisposes young voters to turn to the Greens.

This turns out to be the case. See Table 5.

Table 5: Intended vote in December 2023 by capital city and region (voters aged 18-29) %

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Other capital cities</i>	<i>Regions</i>	<i>Total (18-29)</i>	<i>Total (30 plus)</i>
<i>Labor</i>	25	33	24	34	31	30	35
<i>Greens</i>	28	28	22	26	25	26	11
<i>Labor & Greens</i>	53	61	46	61	56	56	46
<i>Other</i>	17	8	10	9	15	12	11
<i>Labor, Greens & other</i>	70	69	57	70	71	68	58
<i>Coalition</i>	27	28	30	25	26	27	36
<i>One Nation</i>	3	4	13	5	3	5	6
<i>Coalition & One Nation</i>	30	31	43	30	29	32	42
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N (18-29)</i>	134	141	67	102	178	622	2379

A far higher proportion of young voters in Melbourne intend to vote Greens or Teal than elsewhere. Some 28 percent say they will vote Greens. Another 15 percent say they will vote Other – much higher than elsewhere. In Melbourne this tends to mean Teal. By contrast, in the Regions the high Other vote was mainly to the right, including the United Australia Party.

Our sample was too small to substantiate this judgement. It is based on analysis of the May 2022 Federal election results. These show that the Teal vote was relatively high in in Melbourne and that, in the electorates where the Teals did well, it was accompanied by a very low Greens vote. In other words, the Greens and the Teals are attracting a similar constituency.

Consequences

As the Greens flourish in Melbourne, and in pockets in other capital cities, so too do their prospects for taking additional federal and state seats. With Labor holding a two-seat majority, the loss of just two extra Federal seats in Melbourne alone would require Labor to govern in coalition with the Greens and/or the Teals.

This scenario is certain to intensify. This is because the housing crisis will worsen as very high immigration levels increase competition for the available housing stock, especially in Melbourne and Sydney. The Greens are feeding on the resulting animosity that this engenders.

As the Greens' influence increases in Canberra so will it become even more difficult for Labor to get immigration under control. To the Greens, any such efforts are seen as scapegoating migrants, even as racist.⁴ They claim that increases in housing supply, together with their redistributive policies, will provide all the housing needed both for residents and migrants. They will not support the obvious need to get the demand side of the housing market under control by reducing immigration.

Notes

¹ The Urban Dictionary defines '[woke](#)' as a condition where 'an individual become more aware of the social injustice' But it goes on to say that the term has now developed derogatory overtones among its critics, implying hypocrisy and a striving for moral superiority.

² The construction of this index, the progressive/conservative scale in Table 3, is set out in the Methods section of our [main report: Australian voters' views since the voice referendum](#).

³ Kel Richards draws on both the Merriam-Webster and Macquarie dictionaries to define identity politics as 'particularism' or 'tribalism'. It is 'a political theory or practice advocating a right and freedom for each politically conscious or organised group' as opposed to the common humanity and individuality of all. Kel Richards, 'Language', [The Spectator Australia](#), 6 April, 2024, p. 45. Paul Kelly writes that 'the power of identity politics rests in the tension between the individual's true inner self and how society and the world fail to honour or respect that identity.' Paul Kelly, 'Rising populist wave a test of nation's resilience', [The Australian](#), 17 April 2024, p. 11

⁴ See Leith van Onselen, "'Moral outrage' won't fix Australia's housing crisis", [MacroBusiness](#), 12 April 2024. He quotes Greens housing spokesman Max Chandler-Mather as having told ABC Insiders host David Speers in February that his party supports higher immigration levels, noting that 'more people coming to this country is a good thing.' Van Onselen reports that 'Chandler-Mather played the xenophobia card and refused to acknowledge any negative impact. He also suggested that talking about moderating net overseas migration to a historically high 300,000 a year represented a "race to the bottom"'.