



The divide between elites and the electorate: Australians get ready to vote – Report No. 2

Based on the Tapri survey of voters in late December 2024

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The Tapri election survey: Report no. 2

The political consequences of the divide between the elite and the electorate

After Labor's success at the May 2022 election its future domination of Federal politics looked secure. It was cruising on a globalising economic agenda. This seemed to be working. It was propagated by an economic technocracy.¹ It was also well embedded in the education system and embraced by many of the young, especially the university educated. This particular group also endorsed a set of progressive values hinging around racial, gender, and ethnic diversity.

But then the post-covid economy stalled. This followed massive government expenditures and borrowing, while inflation rose as did interest rates, courtesy of the Reserve Bank. The economic technocracy advised that what was needed was a dose of austerity, and both Labor and Coalition parties responded accordingly.

We showed in Report No. 1 that most voters do not share this view. They want help, not austerity, and they are also uncomfortable with a range of progressive values.

A further rupture in Labor's supposedly secure electoral pathway occurred with the failure of the voice referendum. This was a referendum to accept or deny the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined voice both to parliament and the executive for Indigenous Australians.² The outcome showed that most voters (60.1 percent) did not share Labor's keenness in advancing Australia's multicultural agenda, especially not when it involved increasing Indigenous community autonomy at the expense of national solidarity.

This is the context of our inquiry. Labor's voting constituency has been bleeding.

The Tapri survey, like Newspoll, showed that as of December 2024 Labor's primary vote had fallen to just 34 percent of voters.³ This primary vote plus the 12 percent intending to vote Greens adds to 46 percent of voters in the centre-left camp. The Coalition has advanced to a primary vote 38 percent. With One Nation recording a seven percent vote, this adds to a 45 percent vote for the centre-right.

Table 1 shows the changes in voting intentions in Tapri surveys from September 2022 to December 2024. The early support for Labor has ebbed, while the Coalition's support has improved.

Table 1: Tapri surveys on voting intentions, 2022, 2023 and 2024 %

	<i>September 2022</i>	<i>December 2023</i>	<i>December 2024</i>
<i>Coalition</i>	28	34	38
<i>Labor</i>	40	34	34
<i>Greens</i>	14	14	12
<i>One Nation</i>	6	6	7
<i>Other</i>	12	12	9
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	3019	3001	3023

Note: The question in all three surveys was: 'If a federal election for the House of Representatives were held today, which one of the following would you vote for? If 'uncommitted' to which one of these do you have a leaning?' The data are from the Tapri surveys run in the relevant years.

Since December 2024 the polls have shown a further loss of primary support for Labor, such that the Coalition is within sight of a 2025 electoral victory.

Or perhaps not. This is because the Coalition has presented Labor with a gift from the Gods. They have done this by pitching their electoral program to voters around an orthodox neoliberal, Back to Basics platform.

Why is this a gift from the Gods to Labor? Most election commentators assume that concerns about cost-of-living will determine the 2025 election outcome. It follows that the Coalition will have to attract additional votes from those voters who are most feeling the pinch.

Our analysis shows that there is indeed a large chunk of voters (around 50 percent) who are feeling financially insecure. However, a negligible number of these voters will choose the Coalition. Many more will be attracted to politicians and parties offering a caring response. This will include the Labor party.

Such a situation presents risks for the Coalition. But if the 2025 election focusses on issues concerning the progressive values agenda, this may not matter. Most voters dislike this agenda and some of them could swing to the Coalition, in spite of their economic hardships. The Labor Party does not appear to understand the threat that this implies.

This was vividly illustrated on Australia Day when Prime Minister Albanese highlighted multiculturalism as our great achievement. We are, he said, a great multicultural nation... 'where our diversity is, of course, a strength'.⁴ And again, on February 28, when the Minister for Home Affairs, Tony Burke, told a Citizenship ceremony composed of new citizens from some 60 countries that they were about to make Australia 'an even better country than it is right now'. Why? Because they were adding new history and heritage to the Australian story.⁵ Most voters do not agree, including most of the overseas-born voting constituency. See Table 11.

Evidence from the Tapri survey

The cost-of-living issue

The commentators are right. Concerns about the cost of living are affecting a huge chunk of voters. We base this assertion on what voters told us about their own perception of their financial situation. We are talking about what voters actually feel, not what commentators think they might feel on the basis of statistics concerning movements in real wages or the like.

Here is what they said about their financial situation as of December 2024.

Table 2: How well are you getting on financially these days? %

	%
<i>Living comfortably</i>	13
<i>Doing alright</i>	36
<i>Living comfortably or doing alright</i>	49
<i>Just about getting by</i>	30
<i>Finding it quite difficult</i>	13
<i>Finding it very difficult</i>	7
<i>Just about getting by or finding it quite, or very, difficult</i>	50
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Note: Totals may not add to 100 because of rounding.

The share of the electorate ‘just about getting by’ or finding it quite difficult or very difficult is extraordinarily high. Half the electorate now report being in these three categories and, as Table 3 shows, the situation has been getting worse.

Table 3: ‘How well are you getting on financially these days? 2022 to 2024 %

	2022	2023	2024
<i>Living comfortably</i>	15	14	13
<i>Doing alright</i>	40	37	36
<i>Total living comfortably or doing alright</i>	55	52	50
<i>Just about getting by</i>	29	28	30
<i>Finding it quite difficult</i>	10	13	13
<i>Finding it very difficult</i>	6	8	7
<i>Total just about getting by or finding it quite, or very, difficult</i>	45	48	50
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	3019	3001	3023

Note: Totals may not add to 100 because of rounding.

How could the situation be so bad after years of strong economic growth, supposedly putting Australia within the top echelon of rich countries?

Much of it has to do with Australia’s housing crisis, a crisis that developed in tandem with the increase in the cost of living. The housing crisis has exploded since Labor came to office in 2022. This is because demand for housing has shot up, largely because of a surge in the net overseas migration intake. (Net migration is the difference between the number of new arrivals of people counted as residents minus the number of people counted as departures.) At the same time as this influx has occurred, the annual supply of new housing has fallen.⁶

Over the years 2022-23 and 2023-24 an unprecedented, near one million extra residents were added to Australia’s population through net overseas migration (NOM).⁷

Most voters (78 percent) do own their own home though, for a high share, the property is mortgaged. As Table 4 shows, most of those who are financially insecure either own a home, but with a mortgage and, for those without a dwelling of any sort, such is the price of housing that most can’t afford to buy one, and rents have become a struggle.

The consequences are seen in Table 4, which sets out voters' financial situation by housing tenure. Those who own their dwelling outright are doing well, those with a mortgage much less so, and those who are not homeowners are, overall, very much worse off.

Table 4: 'Do you (or you and a partner) own the place where you usually live?' By 'How well are you getting on financially these days?'

Housing situation	How well are you getting on financially these days?					Total
	Living comfortably	Doing alright	Just about getting by	Finding it quite difficult	Finding it very difficult	
Yes, I/we own a house outright	56	40	26	17	11	33
Yes, I/we own an apartment outright	5	5	3	2	2	4
Yes, I/we own a house with a mortgage	18	29	32	32	24	28
Yes, I/we own an apartment with a mortgage	2	3	3	2	1	3
No (not a homeowner)	19	23	36	47	62	32
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	406	1102	893	397	227	3023

This means that for most of the financially insecure voters, their difficulties are closely tied up with the housing crisis. When they think about voting they are likely to be linking their worries about financial insecurity to the housing crisis as well as the overall stress of increases in the cost of living.

In this light we asked respondents which party they thought would be most likely to offer financial assistance or help when times are tough.

Table 5: 'When times are tough which political party do you think is most likely to provide financial assistance and government help?'

	%
Labor	39
Coalition	26
The Greens	10
Don't know/no opinion	25
Total %	100
Total N	3023

Some 39 percent thought that Labor would be the most likely to offer support, and another 10 percent The Greens. This compares with just 26 percent of voters who thought the Coalition would be the most generous.

As indicated, we assumed that any vote switch prompted by the cost of living would occur among voters who were financially insecure, and that their vote would be directed to the parties they thought offered the best prospect of support.

As of December 2024, those who were financially insecure were much more likely to think that the Labor party or the Greens would help them than the Coalition.

Table 6: ‘If a federal election for the House of Representatives were held today, which one of the following would you vote for? If “uncommitted” to which one of these do you have a leaning?’ by ‘How well are you getting on financially these days?’ %

<i>Which party would you vote for?</i>	<i>Living comfortably</i>	<i>Doing alright</i>	<i>Just about getting by</i>	<i>Finding it quite difficult</i>	<i>Finding it very difficult</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Coalition</i>	44	43	37	28	26	38
<i>One Nation</i>	4	4	5	11	20	7
<i>Coalition or One Nation</i>	48	47	42	39	46	45
<i>Labor</i>	34	35	35	36	24	34
<i>Greens</i>	13	10	12	15	11	12
<i>Labor or Greens</i>	47	45	47	58	35	46
<i>Other</i>	5	8	10	9	19	9
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	406	1102	893	396	225	3023

Table 6 shows that the Coalition is doing relatively well amongst those living comfortably or doing alright but much less so amongst those ‘just about getting by’ or ‘finding it quite difficult’. However, for those ‘finding it very difficult’, the Coalition appears to have little attraction. But this is compensated for by strong support for One Nation. Their votes may well bleed back to the Coalition via preferences, but not because of what they think the Coalition is likely to offer them.

As we detail shortly, the Coalition’s ‘Back to Basics’ priority precludes any direct intervention in the marketplace, such as with government construction of housing. But this is exactly what most voters think governments should be doing.

The survey questions on housing policy began with this statement: *All sides of politics agree that we have a housing crisis. What do you think of some of the solutions?* The second policy offered, that Governments themselves should build a large number of homes, both for rent and for sale, attracted widespread approval (Table 7).

Table 7: 'Governments themselves should build a large number of homes, both for rent and for sale' %.

	%
<i>Strongly support</i>	28
<i>Support</i>	42
<i>Strongly support & support</i>	70
<i>Oppose</i>	12
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	7
<i>Oppose & strongly oppose</i>	19
<i>No opinion</i>	11
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Table 8 shows that, support for this direct Government action in the housing market was strong across the board but, as expected, strongest amongst voters who were the more financially insecure.

Table 8: 'Governments themselves should build a large number of homes, both for rent and for sale' by 'How well are you getting on financially these days?' %

<i>Governments themselves should build...</i>	<i>Living comfortably</i>	<i>Doing alright</i>	<i>Just about getting by</i>	<i>Finding it quite difficult</i>	<i>Finding it very difficult</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Strongly support</i>	30	24	28	29	48	28
<i>Support</i>	41	45	41	45	31	42
<i>Total support</i>	70	69	69	74	79	70
<i>Oppose</i>	15	14	11	9	7	12
<i>Strongly oppose</i>	7	6	7	8	5	7
<i>Total oppose</i>	22	20	18	17	12	19
<i>No opinion</i>	8	12	13	9	9	11
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	406	1102	892	396	227	3023

Readers may be surprised that there is such strong support for Governments to build new homes. Those who are the most badly off (those 'Finding it very difficult') are the keenest. Nevertheless, large majorities of those who are 'Living comfortably' or 'Doing alright' are also enthusiasts. They may not need help with housing for themselves, but could well be worrying about prospects for their children and grandchildren, as well as showing concern for unrelated members of the Australian community.

Political party platforms

The Coalition released its electoral strategy early in January 2025, entitled Let's get Australia Back on Track, The priorities of a Dutton Coalition Government.⁸

Peter Dutton and his leadership colleagues have since described this strategy as a 'back to basics' approach which Dutton asserts most people will understand.⁹

The Strategy manifesto states that a Dutton Coalition Government will implement:

Responsible budget management [that] will take pressure off the Reserve Bank, creating an environment for much needed interest rate relief for Australians.

To this end a Dutton Coalition Government will 'Rein in government spending that is fueling inflation and get interest rates down'.¹⁰

Consistent with this focus, unlike Labor and the Greens, the Coalition's manifesto is mute on any government responsibility to fund additional housing supply.

Coalition leaders have, since the release of this manifesto, been keen to contrast their commitment to curb inflation against Labor's willingness to offer more government financed caring subsidies and, in consequence, promote more inflation.

For its part, Labor is now portraying itself as a guardian of the electorate's economic well-being. It is promising a softer economic strategy, one in which a Labor Government will assist voters, via subsidies, to meet medical, energy, child-care and age-care bills, as well as housing needs.

In a sign of what is to come, in mid-February Albanese portrayed himself as prioritizing looking after people:

I regard kindness as something that is a characteristic that Australian have for each other. It's not a negative. Its strong to be kind.¹¹

The Greens and One Nation have also ramped up their public expenditure promises.

The contrast with the Coalition 'back to basics' strategy is stark. As noted, Dutton thinks voters will understand the rationale for this policy.

Results from our survey show that he is wrong. Voters neither understand nor support the 'back to basics' agenda.

A key indicator is a question on what voters thought about government handouts and subsidies.

As Table 9 shows, a far higher proportion of Coalition voters (47 percent) thought subsidies should be curbed, but only 15 percent of Labor voters and 13 percent of Greens voters agreed.

Table 9: ‘Some people think the current Labor Government’s subsidies (handouts) for energy bills, solar projects and the like are justified. Others think they push up government expenditure and contribute to the Reserve Bank’s high interest rate policy. What do you think?’ by ‘If a federal election for the House of Representatives were held today, which one of the following would you vote for? If “uncommitted” to which one of these do you have a leaning?’ %

Opinion on subsidies	‘If a federal election...which one of the following would you vote for?’					
	Coalition	Labor	Greens	One Nation	Other	Total
<i>I think these subsidies (handouts) are justified.</i>	39	71	62	41	37	53
<i>I think these subsidies (handouts) should be curbed.</i>	47	15	13	43	23	29
<i>Don’t know/no opinion.</i>	14	14	26	16	41	18
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	1155	1035	359	198	276	3023

On this result, the Coalition strategists are correct that a relatively high share of its own voting constituency agree with the ‘back to basics’ position. Nonetheless, some 39 percent of this Coalition voter support base (as of December 2024) did not. Thus some of these voters might switch their vote as Labor and the Greens ratchet up their ‘caring’ suite of policies.

As to the Coalition’s hope that it may attract Labor, Green and other voters via this strategy, this seems very unlikely. This is because most of these voters disagree with it.

The conclusion is stark. The Coalition is not going to attract the votes it needs on the cost-of-living issue. If this is correct, why is the Coalition taking this stance?

What was the Coalition thinking?

It seems that the Coalition has not had the resources to poll voters on these issues. When the Coalition crafted its election manifesto it was probably flying blind. The Liberal Party central office does do polling, but this is mainly directed at identifying which electorates could best make use of additional resources to shore up a seats under threat, or to win in seats from other parties where prospects are good.

The assumption that the Coalition was flying blind seems warranted because, with the election poised on a knife edge, you would not expect the challenger to concede such an advantage to its opponents. If nothing else, you would expect a tactical silence.

It may be that the Coalition strategists think that, by highlighting Labor’s inflationary record, voters worried about the cost of living will blame Labor and that this will be enough for the

Coalition to win the votes it needs. Some of the fall in Labor's primary vote (to 25 percent in a Resolve poll at the time of writing)¹² may be explained by this factor.

Whether this blame factor would lead to victory as the election heats up is another matter. Labor, in particular, is ramping up its promises on the caring front, seemingly regardless of the budget costs.

The Coalition strategists have chosen to repeat the John Howard era playbook. This was to take a tough line on neoliberal economic reform but to accompany this with opposition to the progressive values agenda, as had been embraced by the preceding Hawke and Keating Labor Governments. That playbook's contrarian stance on values, as well as a hard line on immigration (almost exclusively against illegal immigrants arriving by boat), helped the Coalition win the 1996 federal election as well as the elections of 2001 and 2004.

The current Coalition strategists may be assuming that any lack of appeal for its economic austerity policies can be overcome by a contrarian stance on progressive values. Is this strategy plausible?

Voters' responses on the progressive values agenda

As in the US, the progressive agenda has come to dominate Australia's cultural framework ever since the protectionist era of the 1950s and 1960s. This framework extols the way in which Australia has been transformed by an embrace of diversity.

This is embodied in praise for multiculturalism and support for high migration, especially from Asia, where our economic future is said to lie. More recently other themes have been emphasised, such as enhanced recognition of the gender diverse and other aspiring social groups. Until recently, there has been bi-partisan support for this agenda from political, economic and cultural elites.

Respect for, and welcoming of, Indigenous aspirations has been at its core. Labor's support for the October 2023 voice referendum, formally announced during the 2022 election campaign¹³, as well as subsequent support from business and cultural leaders, exemplified this commitment.

Since Dutton took over the leadership of the Coalition in late May 2022, he has shattered the previous bipartisanship on Indigenous affairs. His strong advocacy for the No case in the referendum generated severe censure in elite cultural circles. In an even more profound rejection, Dutton appointed Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price as the Coalition spokesperson to lead their opposition to the voice. She turned out to be a formidable opponent, because she provided a fundamental moral objection to the proposal. This was that the voice, if passed, would violate Australians' concerns about maintaining one community in which all could participate free of hereditary differences.

Voters' rejection of the voice in November 2023 by a decisive 60/40 majority horrified progressives. When given a chance to shape political outcomes the voters had decisively rejected the voice and, by implication, the progressive cultural values on which it had been based.

Our research showed that the main reason for this rejection was the principle that Price had asserted and, by implication, one that the Coalition now endorsed. Most voters rejected the voice because they did not like the abridgement of Australian sovereignty implied by granting the Indigenous community special and permanent political powers, recognised within the constitution.

Respondents who said they had voted ‘No’ were given a list of reasons why a person might vote ‘No’, and asked to select their top three reasons. (A different set of reasons was offered to the ‘Yes’ voters.)¹⁴ The results for the first of the three reasons given by ‘No’ voters are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Most important reason for voting No (No voters only) %

	%
<i>1 We are one country, and no legal or political body should be defined only on the basis of race or ethnicity.</i>	53
<i>2 I don't think the idea of First Peoples makes any sense. We are all Australians. The country belongs to all of us.</i>	18
<i>3 There are other things such as the cost-of-living that are more in need of fixing in Australia.</i>	14
<i>4 I voted No because the party I usually vote for in Federal elections was backing No.</i>	5
<i>5 The Uluru Statement from the Heart indicated that this constitutional change was just the beginning. There would be treaties, truth telling, and costly reparations to be paid.</i>	5
<i>6 I didn't understand what this referendum was about.</i>	4
<i>7 The people backing No are the people whose values were closest to mine.</i>	1
<i>8 Voting No is what the friends and family who are closest to me are doing.</i>	1
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	1565

Source: Tapri survey December 2023

Note: Respondents were asked to number their reasons for voting No from 1 (most important) to 2 (second most important) and 3 (important, but less important). Table 10 presents the results for the most important reason (1) only. The responses in Table 10 have been reordered from most popular to least. For the original order in the questionnaire as presented to respondents, see K. Betts and B. Birrell, *Australian voters' views since the voice referendum: [main report](#) (Questionnaire, Q5)*, The Australian Population Research Institute, 2024

The responses in Table 10 are consistent with our hypothesis that ‘No’ voters were predominantly believers in one Australia and thus reluctant to support the advancement of permanently separate Indigenous-community rights. The great majority of No voters said that they viewed Australia as ‘one county’ or that ‘We are all Australians’ and, on these grounds, did not support separate minority communities. See the responses 1 and 2 outlined in Table 10: together they account for 71 percent of ‘No’ voters.

We also included an option about cost-of-living concerns. This was because a number of commentators at the time were arguing that such concerns were distracting voters from supporting the voice. Our results show that this argument was incorrect: only 14 percent of ‘No’ voters gave this as their foremost reason for voting No.

These attitudes have not proved to be a passing electoral fad. As the survey research detailed in Report No. 1 showed, most voters continue to support a one Australia priority.

They continue to do so because of a fundamental finding of our latest survey research. This was based on a new measure of patriotic attachment. Voters were asked about their sense of belonging to Australia. This sense of belonging turned out to be very strong amongst the great majority of Australian-born voters. It was also the case, indeed even more so, amongst

migrant voters, especially for those from European and English-speaking-background countries.

A startling flow-on from this finding was that most of these patriotic voters rejected the entirety of the progressive agenda. This included the priority it gives to multiculturalism, to diversity, to high immigration and to the emphasis on the gender diverse and other minority aspirations.

This applied to most migrant voters as well. As documented in Report no. 1, they prioritise integration. They want to be Australians free of any residual attachments to their cultures of origin that might interfere with their sense of belonging as Australians. Here’s an example of their views. Table 11 shows that most migrant voters are just as opposed to the promotion of diversity as are Australian-born voters.

*Table 11: ‘Some people argue we should increase immigration in order to increase our ethnic and other forms of diversity. What is your view?’ by country of birth %
(Full sample, 2023 Tapri data)*

	<i>Australia</i>	<i>ESB</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Yes, more diversity will give Australia a more vibrant society and economy</i>	22	20	15	43	28	23
<i>No We have enough diversity</i>	37	38	38	29	37	37
<i>No We need to encourage national unity and a shared Australian identity</i>	30	36	36	21	22	30
Total No	67	74	74	50	59	66
<i>Don’t know</i>	12	6	11	8	14	11
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total No	2480	208	81	145	87	3001

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries. ‘Other’ includes people from the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, plus unclassified.

Political implications

It is often argued that voters’ concerns about progressive issues are not likely to change votes in the way that cost-of-living issues are likely to do. This is usually true.

There are times, however, when such concerns can be vote-changers, even changes that realign the electorate towards a new set of priorities. The Trump victory in November 2024 is a case in point. Trump challenged the American Democratic Party’s deeply ensconced progressive agenda. The Democrats have been able to dominate recent elections by relying on a core graduate constituency, supplemented by big majorities of American Latino, Asian and black communities. Trump challenged this by appealing over the heads of the Democrats both to non-graduate white voters and to those minority voters who did not share the cultural

elite's progressive agenda. This agenda includes support for the rights of desperate migrants to move across America's borders illegally, then subsequently to remain in the US, in part via rulings from sympathetic courts. Trump, for the moment, has achieved an historic realignment of voters, one that is leaving the Democrats carrying a bagful of progressive commitments with little appeal to the wider electorate.

Could this happen here? A couple of years ago it would have seemed an unlikely outcome. But no longer. The Hamas attack on Israel, the subsequent war, and in Australia, the mobilisation of Islamic minorities supporting the Palestinian cause has changed the outlook. The publicity given to two Islamic nurses who proclaimed that they would kill Jewish patients if they came into their 'care' has turbocharged the resulting concerns.

For reasons explored shortly it is likely that this development will become an issue in the 2025 Federal election. But before providing the evidence we first need to outline the cultural setting that will frame the issue.

The citizenship framework

In Europe, citizenship has proved to be a potent moral framework in voter responses to previous progressive advocacy of generous immigration policies and encouragement of social diversity. Critics of this have based their stance on the overarching morality of citizenship. For them national unity and solidarity must be based on voters' sense of loyalty and belonging as citizens of the nation – over and above other sectional attachments.

To the extent this stance is shared by voters it constitutes a radical refutation of many progressive values. This is because these are based on the celebration of difference, as with ethnic communities, minority social communities based on gender fluidity and the like.

In Europe this stance has become politically potent because of the scale of immigration from Middle Eastern, mainly Muslim countries. Their very presence along with advocacy for religious sectarian causes has alarmed many voters. This is first, because of a belief that these migrants reject joining their new nation as citizens and second, because many are prepared to embrace causes such as those of the Palestinians against Israel, and in a few cases have resorted to domestic terrorism.

The result has been a surge of support for right-leaning or far right parties which have been able to mobilise a significant minority of voters with an anti-progressive platform. Here immigration has been a crucial catalyst.

Until recently, this possibility has seemed remote in Australia. This is despite the majority dissent amongst voters against high immigration (documented in report no. 1). Eighty percent of voters said they wanted lower immigration but, probably because illegal immigration is now quite rare, reducing immigration is not as high a priority for Australian voters as it is in the United States and Europe. Here, dissent against extraordinarily high numbers has not to date fed the popular concerns that, as in Europe, these new migrants will fragment the national community.

But the voting public's relatively passive endurance of unwanted congestion, escalating rents and overcrowding may not last. The situation here has changed since the beginning of the Israeli war with Hamas and its Palestinian supporters. As noted, there has been open and vocal mobilisation of Muslim migrants for the Palestinian cause and anti-Semitic denigration of Israel and its supporters, including indiscriminate attacks on Jewish people and their property. The shock has been profound, especially after the statements from two Muslim nurses who

threatened to kill any Jewish patients they encountered.¹⁵ These events have flagged that the cultivation of multiculturalism and diversity can fuel intolerant and disruptive outcomes.

Worse, from the point of view of progressives who regard high migration as central to their vision of Australia, these outcomes are unmistakably linked to recently arrived migrant communities. This has opened the door to electioneering based on combatting multiculturalism and immigration.

This mobilisation has not yet seriously begun. But in our view it will happen. And, as in Europe, it will be based on the moral core of citizenship.

Dutton has already shown that he will advocate for changes to Australia's accommodating laws on citizenship.¹⁶ The details have not been announced. However, they will surely be tough given his stance in the past.

In 2018, when he was a member of the Turnbull Coalition cabinet (as Minister for Home Affairs) Dutton won cabinet support for tough new laws. They included an elementary English test, a values test and the requirement of a long (eight-year) wait before a permanent resident could apply for citizenship.¹⁷

As it turned out, the proposed legislation never made it into the Parliament because Turnbull lost the Coalition leadership in favor of Scott Morrison in August 2018. Morrison decided to can Dutton's initiative, on the basis of the concerns from some members of caucus whose seats included many migrant voters.

Similar citizenships reforms are likely to emerge as the election unfolds. When they do, this will generate a shocked response from progressive elites. In doing so they will engage a wide spectrum of voters who are predisposed to support the proposals.

The following historical analysis is needed to help explain why this is likely to be the case.

The crossover phenomenon

We know that over an extended period voters' attitude to progressive issues have changed voting patterns. This has especially been the case for non-graduates. A few decades ago these people were predominantly Labor supporters. They have gradually changed their preferences, to the point that, as Table 12 shows, slightly less than half of non-graduates, as of December 2024, intended to vote for Labor or the Greens (37% for Labor and 12% for the Greens, excluding the 9% of those voting other). This reflects their predominantly anti-progressive values, together with their preference for lower immigration.

Table 12: Voting intentions for parties of the right and the left by educational status, Tapri surveys, 2022, 2023 and 2024 (those voting 'other' are excluded from the data) %

Year	% Non-graduates voting Coalition or One Nation	% Graduates voting Coalition or One Nation	% Non-graduates voting Labor or Greens	% Graduates voting Labor or Greens
Sept. 2022	41	33	59	67
Dec. 2023	47	40	53	60
Dec. 2024	51	46	49	54

Notes: Percentages are based on those intending to vote for either the Coalition, One Nation, Labor or the Greens. Those intending to vote 'other' have been excluded from the analysis. The proportions intending to vote 'other' range from 9.2% (in 2024) to 12.2% (in 2022). The sources for the data are Tapri surveys in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Similar data for 1966 to 2019 are set out in Table A7, p. 40, in K. Betts and B. Birrell, *A Big Australia: why it may all be over*, 2020, tapri.org.au p. 53.

On the other hand graduate voters, people who a few decades ago mainly voted Coalition, have moved towards Labor or the Greens. As Table 12 shows more than half (54 percent) intended to vote for these two parties in December 2024.

There is less likelihood of graduate voters moving back to the Coalition. These voters, in the main, support the progressive agenda and are also more comfortable with high immigration and, because of their exposure to these causes at university, are the least likely to change their vote. By December 2024 some 54 percent of graduates indicated they would support Labor or Greens, well above the 46 per cent of non-graduates. Nonetheless, the graduate share has been slipping, perhaps reflecting wider concerns about progressive commitments since the voice referendum.

The stance of non-graduate voters is important. There are many more of them than graduate voters. Though their support for Labor and Greens has slipped, as Table 12 shows some 49 percent of non-graduates still said that it was their intention to vote Labor or Greens. Their number amounts to 32.5 percent (just on a third) of the entire electorate (1007 out of the sample of 3023).

Our analysis below shows that a large share of these Labor and Green voters oppose much of these two parties' current progressive agenda.

If the 2025 election does revolve around progressive issues, these non-graduate Labor (and Greens) voters constitute an abundant potential source of moving to parties pitching for their support on migration and multiculturalism issues.

The following Tables (13 to 15) focus on respondents who intended to vote Labor or Greens in the upcoming Federal election as of December 2024, by non-graduate and graduate status. The tables then set out the views of these two sets of voters on a selection of progressive values and on the level of immigration.

Table 13: 'There should be a sharp reduction in the migrant intake, especially of temporary migrants' By graduate status (Voters intending to vote Labor or Greens only) %

	Non-graduate	Graduate	Total (Labor/Greens voters)	Total sample
Strongly support	26	16	23	35
Support	36	33	35	31
Strongly support & support	62	50	58	66
Oppose	15	22	17	14
Strongly oppose	5	9	6	5
Oppose & strongly oppose	20	30	23	19
No opinion	18	20	19	14
Total %	100	100	100	100
Total N	984	410	1394	3023

Table 13 shows that 62 percent of non-graduate Labor/Greens voters want a sharp reduction in the migrant intake.

Table 14: 'Overall, do you think Australia needs more people?' (Voters intending to vote Labor or Greens only) by graduate status %

	Non-graduate	Graduate	Total (Labor/Greens voters)	Total sample
Yes	30	39	32	27
No	70	61	68	73
Total %	100	100	100	100
Total N	984	410	1394	3023

Table 14 shows that, among those nongraduate Labor/Greens voters, 70 percent say Australia does not need more people.

Table 15: 'Some people argue that a woman is anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of their sex when born. What do you think' (Voters intending to vote Labor or Greens only) by graduate status %

	Non-graduate	Graduate	Total (Labor/Greens voters)	Total sample
Strongly agree	12	14	13	9
Agree	20	24	21	16
Strongly agree & agree	32	37	34	25
Neither agree nor disagree	24	25	24	22
Disagree	21	19	20	21
Strongly disagree	23	19	22	32
Disagree & strongly disagree	44	38	42	53
Total %	100	100	100	100
Total N	983	411	1394	3023

As can be seen there are double the number of non-graduate voters than graduate voters still in the Labor or Green camp by December 2024. Most of these non-graduates oppose high immigration and population growth and, as well, disagree with the argument that 'a woman is anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of their sex when born' (Table 15).

Given the large size of this non-graduate group of voters our point is that, should the forthcoming election focus on these issues, there is a big of reserve of voters predisposed to change their vote.

The same can be said for the much smaller number of graduate voters, though Tables 13-15 show that the share opposing progressive positions is somewhat lower for them than is the case for non-graduates.

Conclusion

At the time of writing (late February 2025) the thrust of election commentary was that Labor was on the ropes. Our analysis indicates that this judgement is premature. Labor and the Greens have the time and motivation to appeal to the large number of voters affected by the cost-of-living crisis. The Coalition, however, seems becalmed on the matter.

On the other hand, the same can be said of Labor and the Greens on progressive values and immigration. They are mired in stances that have lost their appeal for many, if not most, Australian voters.

The Coalition has established itself in a contrarian position on progressive issues and on immigration. Here, Dutton has been leading from the front. This is marked by his decision to henceforth only stand in front of the Australian flag at press conferences and the like. Dutton has also publicly stated he is opposed to transgender women athletes participating in women's sports. He, and a bevy of senior shadow ministers, have indicated that immigration levels will be lowered.

We speculate, though with some confidence, that the question of immigration is likely to be a vote changer if or when the Coalition advances major reforms to citizenship law. Such a move would attract voters concerned that the arrivals of minorities from Islamic countries has generated aggressive anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic advocacy. This could lead to a realignment of voters around these issues, as it has done across Europe and the US.

Notes

- ¹ See [Report 1](#) for a fuller definition of the economic technocracy.
- ² This was a referendum to change the Australian constitution to establish a body that would represent Indigenous Australians, as a voice both to parliament and the executive in perpetuity. It was held in October 2023 and defeated: 39.9 percent voted ‘yes’ while 60.1 percent voted ‘No’.
- ³ In an early in December 2024 Newspoll had Labor on 33 percent. See A. Beaumont, 'Newspoll returns to a tie after Coalition leads, but Labor has worst result this term in Resolve', [The Conversation](#), 9 December 2024
- ⁴ Anthony Albanese, [Doorstop interview](#) – Canberra, 26 January 2025.
- ⁵ Paul Garvey and Paige Taylor, ‘Tony’s tour’, [The Australian](#), 28 February 2025
- ⁶ These points are documented in David McCloskey and Bob Birrell, ‘Labor fails to control the overseas student intake. The rental crisis will worsen.’ [TAPRI Research Report](#), November 2024
- ⁷ In the year to June 2023 net overseas migration (NOM) was 535,320 and to June 2024, 445,640, a total of 980,960. Source, Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Overseas Migration](#)
- ⁸ [Let’s Get Australia Back on Track: The Priorities of a Dutton Coalition Government](#), January 2025
- ⁹ Simon Benson, ‘Albanese v Dutton: ideological fight for the country’s future’, [The Australian](#), 3 January 2025
- ¹⁰ [Let’s Get Australia Back on Track](#), op. cit., p.5
- ¹¹ The Albanese interview, [The Saturday Paper, Feb 8-14, 2025](#), p. 4
- ¹² David Crowe, 'Dutton leads, Labor on course for election defeat, according to shock poll', [The Sydney Morning Herald](#), 23 February 2025
- ¹³ He had made brief references to an idea of this kind before the election. See Kate Anderson, ‘Dutton wrong about Albanese's record on the voice’, [National Indigenous Times](#), 13 October 2023. And in a [televised address](#) in Western Australia spoke of it clearly during the election campaign.
- ¹⁴ For further details see K. Betts and B. Birrell, *Australian voters’ views since the voice referendum: main report*, The [Australian Population Research Institute](#), 2024. For the first most important reasons for voting ‘Yes’ given by the Yes voters, see Table A1, p. 41.
- ¹⁵ See Natasha May, ‘Sydney nurses stood down after claiming they would kill Israeli patients in social media video’, [The Guardian Australia](#), 12 February 2025.
- ¹⁶ See Sharri Markson, [Sky News video link](#), ‘“Vile”’: Call for antisemitic nurses from viral video to be stripped of citizenship’, 13 February 2025.
- ¹⁷ Information provided by sources present at the event. There is also published evidence for Dutton’s firmer approach to citizenship procedures. See for example Amy Remeikis, 'Peter Dutton: ‘pathway to citizenship’ should be examined after terror attack’, [The Guardian Australia](#), 11 November 2018; George Williams, ‘Citizenship changes sound right but are misguided’, [The Australian](#), 5 March 2018, p. 12