



## Is Australia ready for a Political Realignment?

*Bob Birrell, Katharine Betts and Ernest Healy*

### Contents

Summary .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Temporary entry migration is driving Australia’s NOM surge .....	2
The size of the migrant vote has been exaggerated .....	4
Will a populist agenda alienate most voters? .....	6
Voter insecurity – a potential trigger for a realignment .....	10
The bottom line .....	16
Appendix A1 .....	18
Appendix A2 .....	19
Notes .....	21

## List of tables

Table 1: Numbers of persons by selected countries of birth, by time of arrival, total arrived, and total who had become citizens by 2021 .....	5
Table 2 : What is your opinion about immigration? % .....	8
Table 3: ‘The share of manufacturing in Australia’s economy is less than half of what it was forty years ago. Do you think...’ % .....	9
Table 4: ‘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 % .....	10
Table 5: ‘How well are you getting on financially these days? 2022 to 2024 % .....	12
Table 6: ‘How well are you getting on financially these days?’ by ‘Do your (or you and a partner) own the place where you usually live?’ % .....	14
Table 7: ‘Overall do you think that Australia needs more people?’ 2022 to 2024 .....	15
Table 8 ‘Adding more people will push up the cost of housing,’ December 2024 % .....	15
Table 9: A1 Temporary visa holders* (numbers) by country of citizenship by percent of Australia’s employed labour force, selected years and percent change 2012 to 2025 .....	18
Table 10: A2 Temporary entrant visa holders (numbers) who are employed, by visa subclass, by occupation, and as a share of total employed persons in Australia, 2021 .....	19

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## Is Australia ready for a Political Realignment?

*Bob Birrell, Katharine Betts and Ernest Healy*

### Summary

Most commentators think there is no prospect for a realignment based on a populist challenge to Labor and the Coalition's policies on immigration, cultural diversity, net zero and free trade. Yet both parties are in defence mode, behaving as though they fear such a challenge. They are right to be fearful.

Most Australian voters support key elements of the populist agenda. True, these issues are not currently at the top of their concerns. Financial security dominates. However, the huge influx of temporary-entry visa holders under Labor's watch has produced an underclass nearly two million strong. This underclass is a major contributor to Australia's housing and urban crises, as well as being a ferocious competitor for entry level jobs.

These outcomes have increased voters' sense of insecurity, thus laying the groundwork for a populist challenge.

### Introduction

Political realignment means a successful challenge to the globalist agenda which has gone mainstream, as has occurred with Reform in the UK, National Rally in France, and Trump in the US.

'Mass immigration' has been at the core of these challenges. What does 'mass immigration' mean in the Australian context? There is no formal definition. However, participants in the debate seem agreed that it refers to the 1.2 million net overseas migrants (NOM) that have been added to Australia's resident population over the years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Politicians and public are, however, being told by academic experts that there is nothing to worry about. The surge in NOM is said to be merely a recovery from the migration hiatus in Covid years 2020 and 2021.<sup>1</sup>

This advice is misleading. The experts don't acknowledge that the NOM surge is not about migrants being granted permanent resident visas but about a surge in temporary visa holders.

### *Temporary entry migration is driving Australia's NOM surge*

The NOM surge since 2022 is due to a huge influx of people on temporary visas. Most arrive on student visas. This is their ticket of entry. Most then stay on after their courses for as long as possible. They move from one temporary visa to another so as to prolong their stay. Their motive is to access the Australian labour market because the income here is vastly greater than that in

home labour markets such as India and Nepal.<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions, notably students from China. Most of these have wealthy backers who can afford the huge fees charged by the Group of Eight universities where they predominantly enroll. After graduation they mostly return home quickly.

The overall result is that the numbers arriving on temporary visas vastly exceed departures of those holding temporary visas. This is why NOM has increased so much. Furthermore, because the NOM influx is dominated by temporary entrants, the numbers staying on in Australia are accumulating. We remind readers here that the Australian Bureau of Statistics counts persons on temporary visas as residents (a part of NOM) if they stay on in Australia for twelve of the sixteen months after their arrival.

The outcome is breathtaking. As of June 2021 there were one million migrants holding temporary visas in Australia. As shown in Appendix 1A, by June 2025 their numbers had risen to 2 million. This growth of one million means that most of the post-2022 years of ‘mass migration’ (around 80 percent), was composed of a huge excess of those arriving on temporary visas over those departing on temporary visas.

How could this be? It is because the net influx of those holding permanent entry visas has been small by comparison. The permanent entry program for the last decade or so has been about 180,000 a year. But some one half of the permanent visas issued have been to temporary migrants already in Australia (and therefore do not add to NOM). Also, a small number of migrants holding permanent entry visas leave Australia each year.

We do not include New Zealanders in the one to two million build-up in temporary visa holders. There were 782,000 New Zealand citizens in Australia as of June 2025. This number has not increased much since 2021. New Zealanders have little in common with other temporary visa holders. They can come and go from Australia as they please. If they want to become permanent residents here, since 2023 they can do so as of right after four years residence.

The accumulation of temporary residents will continue as long as the Labor Government sustains its policy of high overseas student numbers. They are the main feedstock for the subsequent expansion in temporary visa holders resident in Australia. Their growth is not just a passing reflection of the recovery after the Covid years. The number of student visa holders reached a high point of 486,934 in June 2018. Though it had fallen to 374,056 in June 2021, by June 2025 it was 592,342, well above the 2018 peak.

Most of these students come from low income countries, the largest of which is India. As of June 2021 there were 206,000 Indians holding temporary visas in Australia (Appendix A1). By June 2025 this number had increased to 392,000. For Chinese citizens the growth was from 123,439 in June 2021 to 226,625 in June 2025.

We can best convey the dynamics of this accumulation with data on the various temporary entry visas that former students move to. The case of bridging visas illustrates the point. Bridging visas

are allocated (with work rights) to temporary migrants who are appealing against a rejection of an application for another temporary entry or a permanent entry visa. As of June 2025, there were 369,627 people on bridging visas. Of these, 80,085 were Indians.

The two million temporaries constitute a vast underclass. Their stay in Australia is precarious, they have little access to Australia's welfare benefits and they are vulnerable to exploitation by employers. As Appendix A2 shows, most work in sub-professional and sub-trade jobs despite their university and vocational college credentials.

From the point of view of Australian residents this underclass is having a huge impact on their lives, especially on those who are young adults. The underclass is the main cause of the deepening of the rental crisis since 2022. This is because they make up most of the rapid growth in demand for rental accommodation. This growth is occurring at the same time as the supply of new rentals has fallen way behind what it was in the late 2010s.<sup>3</sup> The underclass is also a ferocious competitor for low skilled entry levels jobs.

For other Australian residents the impact of the underclass is mainly on urban quality of life. They are adding to urban congestion and competition for urban services and, for some, a disturbing transformation of the ethnic make-up of their city.

Our subsequent argument is that the surging underclass is adding fuel to resident voters' concerns about overseas migration and thus to the prospects of a political realignment.

The Labor Government is unmoved by these developments. From its point of view, the student influx is a good deal. The impetus to Australia's population is seen as helping to promote economic growth on the cheap, in part because those holding temporary visas are largely ineligible for Australian residents' welfare, health or educational entitlements, and in part because the federal government does not have to pay for the infrastructure costs. The states bear these costs.

After a scare in late 2023, when the Government declared that it would reform the overseas student industry by limiting the intake to 'genuine students', Labor backed off. They junked this policy during 2024.<sup>4</sup> In September 2025, the Government announced that universities could expand their international student recruitment in 2026.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile leaders of the Moderate faction within the Coalition are fearful that any dallying with what they see as populist agitation could be electorally damaging.

Their fears stem from two main sources. One is that the surge in the number of migrants resident in Australia is feeding into a rapid growth in migrant voters who are seen to be mostly Labor voters. The Coalition's Moderate faction leaders appear to think that they will never return to office if they alienate the Asian voter constituency such as by advocating a sharp reduction in immigration levels.

In September 2025 many people joined in the March for Australia anti-immigration rallies. Some participants (and onlookers) asserted that the Labor Government was deliberately encouraging

Asian migration in order to shore up its electoral position. In response, both the Labor Government and the Coalition opposition led by Sussan Ley went out their way to reassure these communities of their continued support for existing immigration policy.

The other source of the Coalition's fears is concern that any challenge to existing migration and multicultural policies will alienate most centre right and left-leaning voters.

We start with the migrant vote issue then move to the attitudes of resident voters.

*The size of the migrant vote has been exaggerated*

If the huge growth in the Asian community in Australia were to be translated directly into voters it would indeed be formidable. In the case of the Indian community, it has grown from 375,480 in June 2013 to 845,800 in June 2023.

John Black, a frequent contributor on these issues, makes this flawed assumption in his recent piece in the Financial Review entitled 'Why politicians are obsessing about the India vote.' He writes that 'The Indians are coming alright. They're settling in Labor electorates and the growth in numbers is huge, by historical standards'.<sup>6</sup>

But changes in the electorate can only occur if these people obtain citizenship and are thus able to vote. To do so they must have had four years residence in Australia, including one year when they were holders of a permanent residence visa. Just over half of migrants arriving in Australia between 1951 and the 2021 census had become citizens. As we show shortly, for arrivals since then the share obtaining citizenship has contracted sharply.

Table 1 shows that most migrants who arrived before 2010 have obtained citizenship. However, the proportion shrinks for those arriving during the 2010s. In the case of Indians, only a small share of those arriving since 2011 had obtained citizenship. As a result, of the 655,172 India-born residents here by the time of the 2021 census, only 340,535 were citizens.

Table 1: Numbers of persons by selected countries of birth, by time of arrival, total arrived, and total who had become citizens by 2021

<i>Country of birth</i>	Total persons arrived				Total who arrived 1951 to 2020
	Arrived 1951-1980	Arrived 1981-2000	Arrived 2001 - 2010	Arrived 2011 - 2020	
<b>Bangladesh</b>	513	7,190	19,412	23,205	50,320
<b>India</b>	20,585	54,695	209,935	369,957	655,172
<b>Nepal</b>	59	2,290	24,088	93,315	119,752
<b>Pakistan</b>	1,280	8,824	18,542	58,114	86,760
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	9,595	34,876	36,001	48,214	128,686
<b>Other</b>	1,337,301	1,468,239	1,245,363	1,647,961	5,698,864
<b>Total (all sources)</b>	1,369,333	1,576,114	1,553,341	2,240,766	6,739,554

**Number of persons who are citizens by 2021**

<i>Country of birth</i>	Arrived 1951-1980	Arrived 1981-2000	Arrived 2001 - 2010	Arrived 2011 - 2020	Total citizens who had arrived 1951 to 2020
<b>Bangladesh</b>	507	7,086	17,890	8,665	34,148
<b>India</b>	20,025	52,326	178,992	89,192	340,535
<b>Nepal</b>	58	2,029	16,721	6,790	25,598
<b>Pakistan</b>	1,255	8,671	16,604	20,535	47,065
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	9,445	33,336	30,741	13,129	86,651
<b>Other</b>	1,149,780	1,257,330	839,758	409,526	3,656,394
<b>Total (all sources)</b>	1,181,070	1,360,778	1,100,706	547,837	4,190,391

Source: Dataset, ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, TableBuilder

What about the migrants who have arrived in Australia since 2021? As indicated above, there were some two million people holding temporary resident visas (not including New Zealanders) as of July 2025.

People holding temporary resident visas can easily meet the four-year residence requirement. It is the attainment of a permanent residence visa that is the barrier. Temporary migrants can apply for a permanent residence (PR) visa on the grounds of skill, family ties, or as asylum seekers. Their best chance is via a skilled visa since most, as international students, have been trained in Australia.

Few are likely to achieve permanent residence status. This is for two reasons. One is that the number of temporary visa holders has amplified since 2022, and the other is that those in this enlarged stock are competing for a limited number of permanent residence visas. As noted, the number of permanent entry visas available has stabilized at around 180,000 since the 2010s.<sup>7</sup>

In 2023-24, about 60 per cent of the 180,000 permanent resident visas allocated went to onshore applications. This amounted to 108,730 places.<sup>8</sup> Keep in mind that former students on temporary visas are competing for these places with other temporary visa holders, including Working Holiday Makers and those on skilled temporary-entry visas. In 2023-24, of the 108,730 who succeeded in gaining a permanent resident visa onshore, 26,892 went to temporary-entry skilled visa holders.<sup>9</sup>

One indication of just how difficult it is to make this permanent resident transition comes from statistics on the number of Indians who have recently obtained citizenship. Only 28,369 Indians did so in 2023-24 and 23,015 in 2024-25.<sup>10</sup> At this rate, the eligible Indian-born electorate may have increased from 340,000 in 2021 to around 450,000 in 2025.

The implication is that the temporary migrant presence in Australia, including that from India, cannot translate into a commensurately large voting constituency in the near future.

### *Will a populist agenda alienate most voters?*

As indicated, the moderate leaders of the Coalition are fearful that any embrace of a realignment agenda would be electorally damaging. Most commentators share this view.

Yet, some politicians of stature are presenting themselves as leaders of just such a realignment. We refer here to Andrew Hastie and Jacinta Price, both of whom have resigned from the Coalition shadow cabinet in protest against the moderate leadership's refusal to take up the issue.

Hastie brackets his immigration stance within a broader agenda, including a more independent Australia featuring a restoration of advanced manufacturing. Their message is that the Coalition will only seriously challenge Labor if it takes up these causes. They appear to have the backing of some serious money.<sup>11</sup>

In launching this challenge they have breached the formidable barrier, long in place in progressive circles, that any criticism of immigration or multiculturalism is akin to a resurrected xenophobia and racism.

Perhaps the challengers are emboldened by the 2023 referendum on an Indigenous voice to parliament. Despite fervent support for a Yes vote in progressive elite circles, and the suggestion that to oppose the voice was racist, a majority of the electorate voted No.

The response from defenders of the status quo is that a political campaign based on populist issues is a fool's errand. They assert that the crucial centrist block of voters will not support the cause. Paul Kelly, *The Australian's* Editor at large is representative. Kelly asserts that, if the Coalition embraces a realignment on populist grounds, 'it will consign the party to permanent opposition, if not worse'.<sup>12</sup>

Kelly is dead-wrong in this assertion. We and other pollsters have shown that most voters support lower migration, less emphasis on diversity and more economic independence. They would not be repelled by such advocacy. This is not to say that they give such high priority to these views that it would translate into support for a political realignment. This is a much greater issue which we address below.

TAPRI has provided one source of evidence via a series of national opinion polls of voters. The latest poll was conducted in December 2024. It was a national poll of 3023 (double the size of the Newspoll sample). Here are our main findings on the populist agenda, starting with attitudes to migration.

Table 2 : What is your opinion about immigration? %

‘Since Australia’s borders were re-opened after the pandemic, net overseas migration has increased. From 1990 to 2019 the annual intake averaged just over 152,000.

‘In the year to March 2024 net overseas migration reached 509,700. This was more than the previous year to March 2023: 491,800.

‘These are the highest numbers on record. What is your opinion about immigration?’

	%
<i>I want the high numbers to continue</i>	11
<i>We should return to net migration at somewhat lower levels</i>	27
<i>We should return to net migration at much lower levels</i>	27
<i>We should keep migration low enough so that new arrivals just balance out departures</i>	27
<b><i>Subtotal for preferring lower numbers</i></b>	<b>80</b>
<i>Don’t know</i>	9
<b><i>Total %</i></b>	<b>100</b>
<b><i>Total N</i></b>	<b>3023</b>

Note: Numbers may not add exactly because of rounding.

Source: Data from the [TAPRI survey](#), report 1, p. 10, December 2024

It is notable that some 54 percent of voters wanted to see either much lower migration levels or nil net migration. Since our survey it seems that voters have firmed on this stance. Newspoll asked a similar question to the one we asked in its late October 2025 poll. Some 25 percent of voters wanted ‘fewer immigrants than now’, but strikingly another 39 percent of voters wanted ‘A lot fewer immigrants than now’.<sup>13</sup>

On industrial self-reliance, this cause is regarded by elites as implausible because it violates Australia’s free trade stance. Yet, most voters endorse it. See Table 3.

*Table 3: ‘The share of manufacturing in Australia’s economy is less than half of what it was forty years ago. Do you think...’ %*

	%
<i>We should protect Australia’s manufacturing, using tariffs if necessary</i>	67
<i>We should get rid of all tariffs so that we can buy goods more cheaply from overseas</i>	15
<i>Don’t know</i>	18
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Source: K. Betts and B. Birrell, ‘The divide between elites and the electorate Australians get ready to vote – Report No. 1’, [TAPRI](#) February 2025

As to diversity, when asked whether they support multiculturalism, most voters say ‘yes’. We think this is because they believe it would be impolite to answer otherwise: to do so could imply hostility to migrants already here. However, when voters are asked about their attitude to diversity, free from any implication of such hostility, the result is quite different.

Table 4: ‘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 %

	<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
<b>Total No</b>	67	74	74	50	59	66
<i>Don't know</i>	12	6	11	8	14	11
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Total N</b>	2480	208	81	145	87	3001

Note: The data in Table 4 are from the [2023 TAPRI survey](#), p. 9.

ESB stands for English speaking background.

#### *Voter insecurity – a potential trigger for a realignment*

For most voters the highest priority in shaping their political choice is their employment and financial security. They know little about the global economic setting or about Australia’s prospects of flourishing in this setting.

However, if for some reason voters’ security outlook is under threat they may respond to a populist appeal. In the UK, most voters want an end to high migration. Their attention is drawn to the issue by a very public ‘invasion’ as asylum seekers cross the English Channel in rubber dinghies. But it is another matter whether the issue is sufficient to promote a political realignment. In Britain it clearly has.

The near stagnant British economy and the apparent inability of centrist parties to cope, has laid the groundwork for the Reform party to capitalize on this insecurity. Reform may, in fact, have no workable solutions for this stagnation. Nevertheless, the party has hung out an alternative banner focused on opposition to ‘mass migration’ and has cloaked it in nationalist garb. The result at present is that Reform’s support in the polls exceeds that of either Labour or the Conservatives.

In the UK it’s a question of any port in a storm. Our view, following the best scholarship on the populist challenge, is that such a realignment won’t happen in Australia unless a large number of voters feel that their government has failed to provide a secure outlook for them.<sup>14</sup>

Many observers in Australia have been probing this issue. One of the more astute is Tarric Brooker, a regular contributor on the MacroBusiness blog.<sup>15</sup> Brooker thinks a realignment has not happened here because the continuing demand for Australian resources has contributed to a relatively strong economy with low unemployment levels. Tax revenues from extractive industries have also added to government revenue. Partly as a result, the debt to GDP ratio for Australian federal and state governments is around half that in France, the UK and the US. The current Labor Government can still shell out big sums in welfare benefits and in support of its ‘net zero’ greenhouse gas commitments, without the same government debt implications as in Europe.

Nevertheless, though unemployment is low in Australia, a large share of voters indicate that they are feeling financially insecure. This is a consistent finding from TAPRI’s polling.

In the December 2024 national survey of voters, as in previous TAPRI polls, we asked about their financial situation.<sup>16</sup> As Table 5 shows, the proportion feeling financially insecure reached an enormous fifty percent in December 2024.

Table 5: '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

Source: K. Betts and B. Birrell, 'The divide between elites and the electorate: Australians get ready to vote – [Report No. 2](#)', p. 3

Note: Totals and sub-totals may not add exactly because of rounding.

Most of the fifty percent feeling insecure looked to government for help in the form of subsidies. Most thought that such help would be more likely to come from a Labor government. During the 2025 election campaign, the Labor Party aggressively pursued this constituency with multiple promises of subsidies and other assistance. In other words, Labor has found a way to deal with insecurity, facilitated by the relatively low debt to GDP ratio in Australia.

The Coalition tried to compete but was unsuccessful. This was because its campaign was founded on the slogan 'Let's get Australia back on track', and because of Peter Dutton's reputation as a 'hard man'. On this basis, we predicted that Labor would win the 2025 election even though, at the time, the Coalition was closing on Labor in the opinion polls.

On this evidence, and Labor's continued high standing in the opinion polls since the 2025 election, Labor seems impregnable.

However, this ascendancy is more brittle than the Labor leadership appears to imagine. Australia does not have an unemployment or government debt crisis. However, it does have a severe housing crisis. Because home ownership is so central to long-term economic security in Australia, this crisis is generating a level of insecurity that could provide the basis for a political realignment.

By the late 2010s, housing in Australia's was close to being the most expensive in the world.<sup>17</sup> This has been catastrophic for new entrants to the rental market and for aspiring first-home buyers. It is also impacting those young adults who have to take out the enormous mortgage needed to make their purchase.

Since Labor came to power in May 2022, the housing situation has worsened. Labor has pursued policies guaranteed to produce this outcome. It has massively increased the size of the temporary-entry underclass, who comprise most of the growth in the numbers seeking rental accommodation. At the same time, it has assumed that pumping up housing supply will deal with shortages. This is mistaken. New housing starts are now lower than they were in the late 2010s. This is primarily because the costs of building new dwellings have escalated to the point that developers cannot make a profit except at the high end of the housing market.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile Labor is adding further fuel to demand by providing subsidies for new home buyers as well as maintaining its very high immigration policies. It is hard to imagine a set of policies more likely to deepen the housing crisis.

There is a direct link between the housing crisis and financial insecurity. Of those reporting that they were financially insecure as December 2024, most also indicated that this was attributable to their parlous housing situation. Most voters who owned their homes outright were doing fine. However, those who owned a dwelling with a mortgage, and those who did not own a dwelling are not. This is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: 'How well are you getting on financially these days?' by 'Do your (or you and a partner) own the place where you usually live?' %

How well are you getting on financially these days?	Yes, I/we own a house outright	Yes, I/we own an apartment outright	Yes, I/we own a house with a mortgage	Yes, I/we own an apartment with a mortgage	No	Total
Living comfortably	23	17	9	12	8	13
Doing alright	45	48	37	42	26	36
Living comfortably or doing alright	68	65	45	54	34	50
Just about getting by	23	25	34	32	33	30
Finding it quite difficult	7	7	15	11	19	13
Finding it very difficult	3	4	6	4	14	8
Just about getting by or finding it quite or very difficult	32	35	55	45	66	50
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	989	113	858	84	981	3023

Source: Previously unpublished data from the December 2024 TAPRI survey.

Note: Sub-totals may not add exactly because of rounding.

It is true that housing crisis pain is concentrated amongst the young, including young adult voters, most of whom are rusted on left-of-centre voters. Thus, although it may appear that Labor does not have much to worry about, it is nevertheless placing downward pressure on the life chances of these young voters.

Labor does, however, have something to worry about with other issues linked with rapid population growth. These affect most voters. We refer to urban congestion and competition for services. Federal Labor has left the states to provide health, transport and educational services for the migrant influx, but it is not providing the funds the states need to do the job.

One indicator is that big majorities of voters think that Australia does not need more people.

Table 7: 'Overall do you think that Australia needs more people?' 2022 to 2024

	2022	2023	2024
	%	%	%
<i>Yes</i>	35	29	27
<i>No</i>	65	71	73
<i>Total %</i>	100	100	100
<i>Total N</i>	3019	3001	3023

Source: Data from the [TAPRI survey](#), report 1, p. 10, December 2024

Most voters also agreed that migration contributes to the housing crisis, as well as to urban congestion and competition for services. Here is their view about this link with the housing crisis (Table 8).

Table 8 'Adding more people will push up the cost of housing,' December 2024 %

	%
<i>Agree strongly</i>	41
<i>Agree</i>	35
<i>Agree strongly and agree</i>	76
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	17
<i>Disagree</i>	6
<i>Disagree strongly</i>	1
<i>Disagree and disagree strongly</i>	7
<i>Total %</i>	100
<i>Total N</i>	3023

Source: Data from the [TAPRI survey](#), report 1, p. 11, December 2024

## **The bottom line**

What does all this add up to for the prospects for a political realignment in Australia?

The answer is necessarily speculative given that the Australian situation has so little in common with the countries that have seen a major political realignment. Australia has not experienced a migrant *invasion*; newcomers have come in legally, with various temporary entry visas.

Nevertheless, as indicated, some political figures of substance do appear intent on attempting such a realignment.

Our view is that, if a challenge does eventuate, it will attract a large following. We have shown that most voters hold attitudes supportive of any such challenge.

The important caveat is that such attitude symmetry is not enough. Most voters prioritise their financial security. They are unlikely to shift their voting allegiance unless their sense of financial security is at serious risk.

Our analysis indicates that there is such unease. It does not stem from unemployment, but from the housing crisis. The very basis of Australians' way of life is under challenge.

In addition, most voters, regardless of age, are having to cope with an urban crisis flowing from urban congestion and competition for services. Voters are aware that this is related to the surge in population and the inability of state governments to cope. They can see the results of the population surge directly.

These crises will get worse. Yet, Labor's response is to defiantly defend its existing, high population growth agenda.

Nevertheless, Labor cannot avoid the consequences for the underclass that its immigration policies have generated. The nearly two million temporary migrants that comprise this underclass will continue to provide fierce competition for the entry-level jobs that Australian-born non-graduates once readily accessed. These temporary residents will also remain potent competitors for rental housing and, together with New Zealanders, will compose most of the growth in urban population that is fueling the growing urban stress.

The ramifications of this challenge are becoming increasingly evident. As the housing crisis deepens so does the coercive character of the policy response. In Victoria and NSW, Labor governments are enforcing higher density in inner and middle suburbs. In Victoria, this is in part through weakening municipal controls over local planning and development. The Victorian Government is using the language of class war to justify this policy. They are saying that those living in these high amenity suburbs must be forced to both share and downgrade their amenity by facilitating high-density residential development. But the inference that such housing in these areas would be affordable and thereby lead to greater housing equity is fanciful. Developers can only make a profit in these suburbs at the high end of the housing market.

The Federal Labor Government is embracing this state policy. In October 2025, the Federal Housing Minister, Clare O’Neil told a Western suburbs development forum that:

We can’t leave all the hard work up to our newer suburbs... Because I want my children to have fair housing opportunities. And I want to live [in] a fair city. Where access to Melbourne’s incredible liveability and quality of life – in a growing city- isn’t just reserved for a lucky few.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever one thinks about the morality of this attack on high urban amenity suburbs, it is presenting a direct challenge to an electoral constituency likely to be supportive of a realignment - the financially secure populace affected by high density policies.

If a political realignment challenge were to occur, most voters would have little understanding of whether it would work or not. In this respect, Australia’s situation is not unlike that in the UK. There, as indicated, Reform has been able to capitalise on voter unease and to successfully link its resolution in voters’ eyes to a realignment clothed in nationalist garb. Nevertheless, Reform’s capacity, should it win government, to deal with the UK’s underlying economic problems is problematic.

The situation here is analogous. In Australia, realignment may be a long shot as far as generating sound economic management is concerned. But voters do not know this. If a serious realignment challenge were to be mounted, it would likely attract significant voter support.

Should the challenge arise, it would bring in its wake a self-reinforcing dynamic. Insecure voters do not know much about the larger causes of their situation. If realignment challengers were to succeed in making ‘mass immigration’ and its related issues a media focus, this would draw voters’ attention to the issues. Such a challenge would move these issues up the hierarchy of voters’ priorities. This dynamic is already in play. Recent debate about immigration has drawn voters’ attention to the situation. As indicated with the Newspoll on immigration levels as of late October, there are now much larger majorities in favour of lower immigration than media polls have shown in the recent past.

## Appendix A1

*Table 9: Temporary visa holders\* (numbers) by country of citizenship by percent of Australia's employed labour force, selected years and percent change 2012 to 2025*

Country of citizenship	June-2012	June-2015	June-2021	June-2025
China (PRC)	123,439	159,664	126,885	226,625
India	126,925	140,869	205,432	389,363
Other countries	729,710	765,451	685,242	1,413,625
Total	980,074	1,065,984	1,017,559	2,029,613
# Australian labour force	11,955,300	12,482,600	13,278,800	15,284,000
Temporary visa holders as % Australian workforce	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>13.3</b>

Sources: # ABS Cat. 6202.0, Labour Force Australia (Original data)

Australian government, data.gov.au, BP0019 Number of Temporary Visa Holders in Australia

\* Includes all temporary visa holders except Special Category – New Zealand citizens.

Counts include principal applicants and accompanying persons.

## Appendix A2

*Table 10: Temporary entrant visa holders (numbers) who are employed, by visa subclass, by occupation, and as a share of total employed persons in Australia, 2021*

	Temp- orary skilled	Student	Working Holiday Maker	Other temp- orary	Total temp- orary entrant. (not incl. NZ)	Total persons employed 2021*	Temporary entrant visa holders as % of total in occupat.
Managers	9,192	6,832	1,321	20,830	38,163	1,645,769	<b>2.3</b>
Professionals	29,136	21,034	2,655	54,198	107,027	2,886,921	<b>3.7</b>
Technicians and Trades Workers	14,580	28,473	2,751	43,464	89,310	1,554,313	<b>5.7</b>
Community and Personal Service Workers	3,063	50,409	3,716	38,471	95,671	1,382,205	<b>6.9</b>
Clerical and Administrative Workers	2,968	10,143	1,413	17,378	31,906	1,525,311	<b>2.1</b>
Sales Workers	1,566	22,221	786	18,236	42,800	986,433	<b>4.3</b>
Machinery Operators and Drivers	929	24,121	1,672	27,748	54,466	755,864	<b>7.2</b>
Labourers	4,036	51,217	11,588	56,619	123,442	1,086,120	<b>11.4</b>
Inadequately described	397	1,879	276	3,392	5,941	133,815	<b>4.4</b>
Not stated	388	2,639	234	3,888	7,157	92,659	<b>7.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	66,290	218,919	26,410	284,259	595,887	12,049,410	<b>4.9</b>

Source: ABS, 34190DO001\_2021, Temporary visa holders in Australia, 2021

\*ABS, TableBuilder occupation of all employed persons 2021 census.

NOTE: The statistics presented in this table are from the 2021 Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset (ACTEID).

Includes all temporary visas except the special category of New Zealanders.

The estimate for the number of temporary entry visa holders who are employed is likely to be understated because some temporary visa holders do not return a Census form and some are likely to be employed on a cash in hand basis and thus do not show up in administrative data bases like that held by the Taxation office

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Alan Gamlen and Peter McDonald, 'Who really wants a 'Big Australia'. Ignore the slogans, look at the evidence, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 8, 2025
- <sup>2</sup> For background on this issue, see Bob Birrell, *Overseas students are driving Australia's Net Overseas Migration tide*, [TAPRI research paper](#), April 2019
- <sup>3</sup> The evidence for this argument is detailed in David McCloskey and Bob Birrell, '*Labor fails to control the overseas student intake. The rental crisis will worsen*', TAPRI research paper, November 2024
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Ministers of the Education Portfolio, [Joint Press Release](#), *Managing a sustainable international education sector*, 4 August 2025
- <sup>6</sup> John Black, 'Why politicians are obsessing about the India vote', Opinion, [The Australian Financial Review](#), 8 September 2025
- <sup>7</sup> Average net overseas migration data from 1980-81 to 2009-2010 was 120,900, calculated from Demographic Statistics, ABS, Catalogue no 3101.0
- <sup>8</sup> Department of Home Affairs, [Australia's Migration Trends](#), 2023-24, p. 15
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 16
- <sup>11</sup> Patrick Begley and Natassia Chrysanthos, 'The senator, the ex-PM and the lobby group: Price's crusade to remake the Liberals', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 13, 2025
- <sup>12</sup> Paul Kelly, 'Conservative push will doom Libs to division and failure', *The Australian*, October 8, 2025
- <sup>13</sup> Geoff Chambers, 'Newspoll: Majority of Australians want immigration cuts', *The Australian*, 4 November 2025
- <sup>14</sup> Jonathon Hopkin, *Anti-System Politics*, Oxford, 2020, p. 249
- <sup>15</sup> Tarric Brooker, 'Australia's paralysed politics', 'Sept 18; Tarric Brooker, 'Things go from bad to worse for the LNP', Sept 19, [MacroBusiness](#).
- <sup>16</sup> The source of these and subsequent findings is Katharine Betts and Bob Birrell, *The divide between elites and the electorate: Australians get ready to vote – Report No. 1* Tables 2 and 3, [TAPRI](#), February 202
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Janda, 'Australian housing near world's most expensive but forecast to rise further', [abc.net.au](#), 15/1/2015
- <sup>18</sup> This argument is documented in David McCloskey and Bob Birrell, *The housing crisis in Sydney and Melbourne – new strategies to fix it*, [TAPRI research paper](#), November 2024
- <sup>19</sup> Clare O'Neil, 'Address to the West of Melbourne Economic Development Summit', [October 22](#), 2025, p. 7