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Population, immigration and asylum seekers: patterns in Australian public opinion

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Executive summary

Surveys show that issues to do with population—migrant numbers, asylum seekers and, to a lesser extent, population size—are matters of growing concern, though whether opposition to a bigger Australia is greater now than twenty or thirty years ago is doubtful. While the majority of respondents over the last thirty years have opposed the idea of a bigger population, the extent of the opposition reported in the surveys also reflects the way questions are framed, the kinds of questions that precede these questions, the range of possible responses the questions allow, and so on. They may also reflect mode effects, especially differences between online polls and polls conducted face-to-face, by telephone or via the mail. Opposition to population growth reflects environmental more than economic concerns; economic concerns are the main reason for supporting population growth.

In responses to the question of whether migrant numbers should be increased, maintained or reduced three things stand out. First, since 2005, the proportion of respondents saying too many migrants are coming to Australia has increased. Second, while opposition to immigration may be on the increase, levels of opposition in recent years have been lower than those recorded in the first half of the 1990s or in the 1980s. Third, the polls reporting the highest levels of opposition—all conducted online—have framed the questions in ways that appear to encourage responses opposed to immigration.

If one reason why the level of opposition to the immigration program is relatively low is that unemployment is relatively low, the level of opposition to the program may be on the rise because of the growing concern about the government's handling of unauthorised boat arrivals. The proportion of respondents wanting drastic action taken about 'illegal immigration' is high and growing, but this is partly an artefact of the narrow choices posed by some questions. Less brutal questions sometimes generate less brutal responses.

Modelling data from the latest Australian Survey of Social Attitudes suggests that opposition to having more people in Australia is greater among respondents who are: women, rather than men; born in Australia, especially compared with those born in Non-English Speaking Background countries; without post-school qualification, especially when compared to the university educated; and not high income earners. Respondents who lived in public housing were more likely than those in other kinds of housing to oppose population growth. But respondents in outer metropolitan areas were no more likely than those in inner metropolitan areas to oppose population growth.

In terms of party preferences, the patterns are more complex. Respondents who voted Liberal (though not National) were more likely than those who voted Labor to oppose a bigger Australia. Those who voted for one of the minority parties—the Greens on the Left or One Nation/Family First on the Right—or who voted for Others, voted informal or didn't vote were more likely than Labor voters to oppose a bigger Australia, but not more likely to do so than Liberal voters. Distinctively, those who voted for the Greens had a higher probability of citing environmental reasons for opposing a bigger Australia, and humanitarian/cultural reasons for supporting a bigger Australia.

In addition to these more current trends, we conclude with some reflections on how the polls on population size have changed since the Second World War, what the data mean in political terms and the ways in which this challenges some of the received wisdom.

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Population papers series

Population related issues were among the most contentious areas of public debate prior to and during the recent election period. Given its enduring and multifaceted nature, the debate on population is likely to be of continuing policy interest to senators and members of the 43rd Parliament.

The Parliamentary Library commissioned a series of papers from leading authors on a range of aspects of population including the environment, the economy, demographic trends, public opinion, urban transport and international comparisons. The views expressed do not reflect an official position of the Parliamentary Library, nor do they constitute professional legal opinion.

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Introduction

Contention over the size of Australia's population, its migrant intake and its policies on asylum—in different forms and in diverse combinations—is not new. Over the last thirty years these issues have frequently punctuated political debate and featured prominently in the opinion polls as well. In 1979, three years after the arrival of the first 'boat people' from Vietnam and shortly after these unauthorised arrivals had become a political problem for the Fraser Government, the published polls paid more attention to the issue of asylum seekers than they had paid to any issue to do with immigration in any year since the start of polling in 1941. Even though the argument about whether the government was 'losing control' was a key concern, these polls focused on the number of Indo-Chinese refugees Australia should accept.[1] From 1984, in what started off as the 'Blainey debate' and went on to cost John Howard his leadership of the Liberal Party in 1988, the size of the 'Asian' component of the immigration program was in contention—as were the polls.[2] In 1998, the rise of Pauline Hanson on a platform that focused variously on Indigenous Australians and immigrants cost the Coalition a significant part of its electoral support, and generated a new wave of polling.[3] In 2001, the 'Tampa crisis' and Hanson's switch of focus from immigration to unemployment helped the Coalition win much of this support back and hold on to office.[4] Subsequently,

1. On the key concerns and the solutions canvassed, see: M Fraser and M Simons, *Malcolm Fraser: the political memoirs*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Vic., 2010, p. 416ff. For the polls, see M Goot, 'Migrant numbers, Asian immigration and multiculturalism: trends in the polls, 1943–1998', *Australian multiculturalism for a new century: towards inclusiveness*, Statistical Appendix, National Multicultural Advisory Council, Canberra, 1999, p. 56, viewed 12 April 2011, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/nmac/statistics.pdf

2. M Goot, 'The Australian party system, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, and the party cartelisation thesis', in I Marsh, ed., *Australian parties in transition? The Australian party system in an era of globalisation*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2006, p. 186; M Goot, 'Public opinion and the public opinion polls', in A Markus and MC Ricklefs, eds., *Surrender Australia? Geoffrey Blainey and Asian immigration: essays in the study and use of history*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, 49-62.

3. M Goot and I Watson, 'One Nation's electoral support: where does it come from, what makes it different, and how does it fit?', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 47 (2), 2001, p. 173; M Goot, 'The perils of polling and the popularity of Pauline', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 73 (4), 1996/97, pp. 8–14.

4. I McAllister, 'Border protection, the 2001 Australian election and the Coalition victory', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 38 (3), 2003, pp. 459–61; M Goot and I Watson, 'Explaining Howard's success: social structure, issue agendas and party support, 1993–2004', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 42 (2), 2007, p. 267; M Goot, 'Pauline Hanson's One Nation: Extreme Right, Centre Party or Extreme Left?' *Labour History*, no. 89, 2005, p. 106; M Goot, 'Turning points: for whom the polls told', in J Warhurst and M Simms, eds., *2001: the Centenary election*, University of Queensland Press, 2002, pp. 71–80. G Megalogenis, *Faultlines: race, work and the politics of changing Australia*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2003, p. 184.

polling on immigration and refugees subsided. Since 2009, a surge in the number of asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, plus population projections forty to fifty years hence of 35 or 36 million, have caused fierce political debate and trouble for successive Labor prime ministers. These issues, in turn, have generated another spike in the number and variety of questions about population, immigration and boat people asked in polls, academic surveys and other forms of opinion research. At every turn, the intensity of the polling has scaled new heights.

Apart from the ever-increasing number of polls, there are three differences between the latest rush of polling and the polling conducted on earlier occasions when issues of this kind were both high on the political agenda and contentious.[5] First, the most recent polls have included questions on the size of the population as well as on immigration. This is a consequence of the debate from October 2009 when Kevin Rudd, under pressure to respond to a Treasury report in which Australia's population was projected to grow to 35.9 million by 2050, acknowledged that he believed in a "big Australia".[6] Second, questions about the nationality or ethnicity of the migrants Australia should take have gone largely unasked. This, too, reflects a change in which issues of immigration have come to be framed publicly as matters of 'border security', not necessarily changes in the ways in which most Australians actually think about the issues. And third, recent polling has focused not on the number of asylum seekers or 'illegal immigrants' Australia should accept but on how well the government has managed to control the number of asylum seekers; more precisely, on whether its policies have been too 'hard' or too 'soft'. Here, again, the ways in which questions in the polls have tracked the state of political debate, and fed back into it, is clear. It was the Rudd Government's difficulties over the asylum seekers aboard the *Oceanic Viking* between

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5. Bob Hawke's tearful announcement, after the Tien-an-men Square repression of June 1989, granting temporary protection visas to 20 000 Chinese students studying in Australia may have put the issue high on the political agenda but appears to have not been contentious. Apart from a poll in Western Australia, it occasioned no polling. See B D'Alpuget, *Hawke: the Prime Minister*, Melbourne University Press, 2010, p. 240; J Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, second edition, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 178, 187; and M Goot, 'Reverberations of Beijing: Australian public opinion towards China before and after the June 4 massacre', *Australian Quarterly*, 61 (3), 1989, pp. 402–3.

6. 'Rudd welcomes "big Australia"', *ABC News*, 23 October 2009, viewed 12 April 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/10/23/2721924.htm; K Rudd, 'Kevin Rudd's speech in full', *The Advertiser,* 20 January 2010, viewed 12 April 2011, http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/kevin-rudds-speech-in-full/story-e6freo8c-1225821744119; 'Rudd on a 'Big Australia'', *The 7.30 Report*, 28 January 2010, viewed 12 April 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2010/s2804229.htm; The political trajectory of the issue can be tracked, from January 2010, in B Cassidy, *The party thieves: the real story of the 2010 election*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 2010, pp. 76, 140, 150–1, 155, 241. For the Treasury's projection, see: The Treasury, *The 2010 intergenerational report*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, viewed 12 April 2011, http://www.treasury.gov.au/igr/igr2010/report/html/02_Chapter_1_Economic_and_demographic.asp

October 2009, when they were picked up, and November 2009, when they finally agreed to disembark in Indonesia, which heralded the start of Rudd's electoral troubles. These troubles were reported by both public and private polls and noted on all sides of the political divide, and became the point of departure for further public policy development and political skirmishing.[7]

The polls provide answers to a number of important questions to do with the state of public opinion on issues of population, immigration and asylum seekers. They can tell us how highly Australians rate issues of this kind compared with other issues they think governments need to address, and whether they think that Labor, the Coalition or some other party is best suited to deal with these issues. They can provide some insight into what Australians think about the substantive issues involved: whether the country needs more people, whether the number of migrants coming to Australia should be increased or reduced, and so on. And they allow us to interrogate the answers to these questions with questions of our own. For example, how might the political debate have elevated the importance or affected the distribution of opinion on such matters; in what ways do the survey questions themselves shape what we understand public opinion to be; and do characteristics such as gender, education, where the respondents were born, where they live or how they vote help structure the views these surveys report?

In this paper we look for answers to these questions by reviewing survey data generated over the last ten or so years by a variety of market research firms including AGB McNair, Auspoll, Essential Research, Galaxy Research, Ipsos, Ipsos Mackay, Newspoll, Nielsen (formerly ACNielsen), Quantum Market Research, the Roy Morgan Research Centre, and Irving Saulwick & Associates. Some, though not all, of these polls were commissioned by the press. We also look at academic surveys, including the most recent iterations of the Australian Election Study (AES), the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), the ANUpoll, the Scanlon Survey, and the new Global Index of Fear—an initiative of King's College, London. We examine surveys commissioned by Amnesty International Australia, the Benevolent Society, the Lowy Institute and the Property Council of Australia. The surveys were conducted using a range of modes— predominantly phone, but also mail, online and face-to-face. Almost all were conducted nationally. We have been able to reanalyse two surveys that deal explicitly with attitudes to the size of Australia's population—the latest AuSSA and the most recent Lowy poll. The AuSSA provides the basis for our modelling.

These surveys show that issues to do with population are matters of growing concern, though whether opposition to having a bigger Australia is greater now than twenty or thirty years ago is doubtful. While the majority of respondents over the last thirty years have opposed the idea of a bigger population, the extent of the opposition reported in the surveys also reflects the way the questions are framed, the questions that precede questions on population, the range

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7.   D Shanahan, 'Rudd's reversal of fortune still shrouded in myth', *Australian*, 10 December 2010, p. 12; P Coorey, 'Arbib goes quiet, but many are talking', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December 2010, p. 8; P Kelly, 'A dismal stand, driven by polling', *Australian*, 26 July 2010.

of possible responses the questions allow, and so on. They may also reflect mode effects, especially differences between online polls and other polls conducted face-to-face, by telephone or via the mail.

In responses to the question of whether migrant numbers should be increased, maintained or reduced, three things stand out. First, since 2005, the proportion of respondents saying too many migrants are coming to Australia has increased. Second, while opposition to immigration may be on the increase levels of opposition in recent years have been lower than those recorded in the first half of the 1990s or in the 1980s. Third, the polls reporting the highest levels of opposition—all conducted online—have framed the questions in ways that appear to encourage responses opposed to immigration.

If one reason why the level of opposition to the immigration program is relatively low is that unemployment is relatively low, the level of opposition to the program may be on the rise because of the growing concern about the government's handling of unauthorised boat arrivals. The proportion of respondents wanting drastic action taken about 'illegal immigration' is high and growing, but this is partly an artefact of the narrow choices posed by some questions. Less brutal questions sometimes generate less brutal responses. Modelling suggests that opposition to having more people is greater among respondents who are: women rather than men; born in Australia, especially compared with those born in Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) countries; without post-school qualification, especially when compared to the university educated; and not high income earners. Respondents who lived in public housing were more likely than those in other kinds of housing to oppose population growth. But respondents in outer metropolitan areas were no more likely than those in inner metropolitan areas to oppose population growth.

In terms of party preferences, the patterns are more complex. Respondents who voted Liberal (though not National) were more likely than those who voted Labor to oppose a bigger Australia. Those who voted for one of the minority parties—the Greens on the Left or One Nation/Family First on the Right—or who voted for Others, voted informal or didn't vote were more likely than Labor voters to oppose a bigger Australia, but not more likely to do so than Liberal voters.

Opposition to population growth tends to reflect environmental more than economic concerns; economic concerns are the main reason cited for supporting population growth. Distinctively, those who voted for the Greens had a higher probability of citing environmental reasons for opposing a bigger Australia, and humanitarian/cultural reasons for supporting a bigger Australia.

We conclude by challenging some of the received wisdom about what the data mean for the political parties, about the ways in which public opinion has affected immigration policy since the War, and about the positions held by voters of various kinds on the question of population growth. In particular, we emphasise how the framing of poll questions can affect public opinion, leaving dominant readings of public opinion at risk to alternative framings. We show that the idea of poll-following—which can also be framed as political

responsiveness—is not new, certainly in relation to the immigration program. Lastly, we offer some explanations for recent views about the level of Australia's population that draw attention to the importance of nativist beliefs, labour market vulnerabilities, and border security.

Population, immigration and asylum seekers as issues of concern and as election issues

The size or composition of Australia's population has rated relatively highly as an issue of importance in recent surveys. This is true whether the responses were top-of-mind, given in response to an open-ended question, or prompted by questions that offered a series of possible responses. Concerns about population are sometimes expressed directly, as a concern about over-population; sometimes indirectly, as a concern about immigration.

Issues of concern

Concern about immigration, as reported by the ANUpoll (a phone poll) rose in 2009 and reached a peak around the middle of 2010 before falling back slightly in December (see Fig. 1).[8] Between the first ANUpoll in March 2008 and March–April 2009, no more than six per cent of those asked about 'the most important issue facing Australia today' nominated anything to do with immigration. A year later this figure had doubled to 13 per cent (March–April 2010); in the most recent poll (December 2010) it stood at 12 per cent. There was no prompting. If we add those who nominated 'immigration' as 'the second most important issue facing Australia today', the jump was from 11 per cent (March–April 2009) to 24 per cent (March–April and June–July 2010), dropping back to 19 per cent in December. Not only was there a rise in the proportion expressing concern about the issue, there was also a rise in where the issue ranked. Whereas it once ranked seventh or eighth—a long way behind 'economy/jobs' during the 'global financial crisis'—from 2009 it ranked in the top three. In June–July 2010 the only issues to be mentioned by more respondents as the most important issue facing Australia today were the 'economy/jobs' (nominated by 17 per cent) and 'environment/global warming' (15 per cent). Although the number of direct references to 'population' remained small, it seems reasonable to suppose that immigration, far from being considered something distinct, was widely if implicitly recognised by these respondents as the principal driver of population growth—as indeed it is.[9]

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8.   The coverage of immigration issues in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* was greater between January and August 2009 than for the corresponding period in 2007. However, in the absence of data for the whole year, a longer time-series (including data for 2008), and some differentiation between coverage of asylum issues and coverage of other immigration issues, it is not clear what we should make of this; see A Markus and J Arnup, *Mapping social cohesion 2009: the Scanlon Foundation surveys, full report*, Monash Institute for the Study of Social Movements, Caulfield East, Vic., 2009, pp. 16–17.

9.   I McAllister, personal communication.

Figure 1: Immigration as the most or second most important issue facing Australia, *ANUpoll*, 2009–10 (percentages)
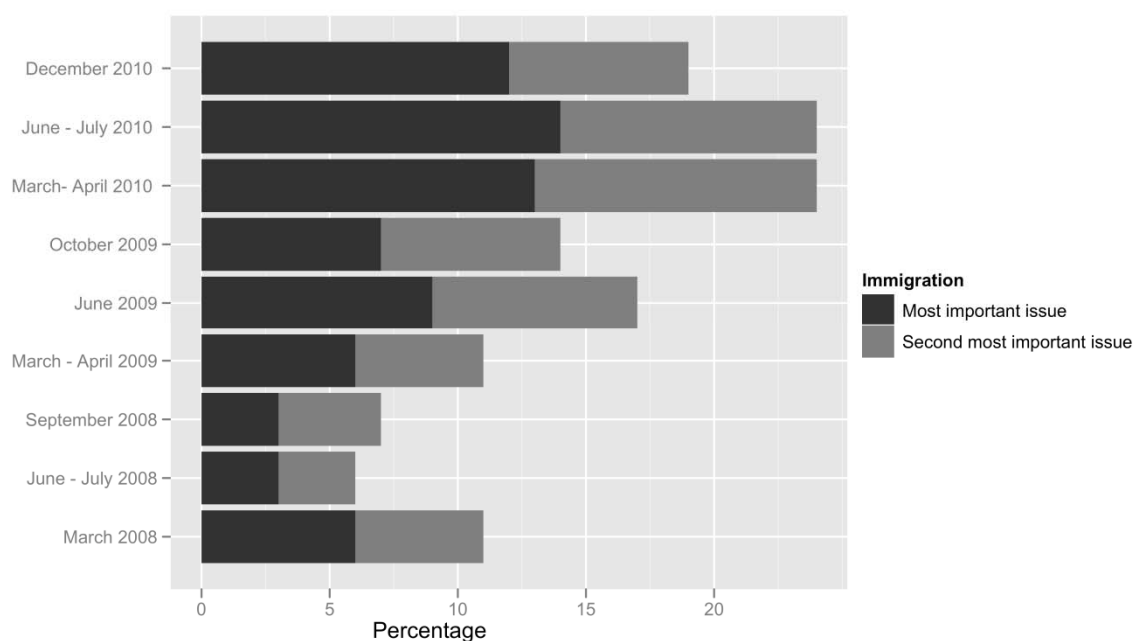
Note: All surveys conducted by phone

Source: J Pietsch and I McAllister, *Public opinion on internet use and civil society*, ANUpoll, Australian National Institute for Public Policy and ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, April 2011 (for 2-16 December 2010), http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/anupoll/documents/2011-04-28_ANUpoll_internet.pdf; R Lamberts, WJ Grant and A Martin, *Public opinion about science*, ANUpoll, no. 8, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, December 2010 (for 15 June – 2 July 2010), http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/ANUpoll_on_science.pdf; I McAllister, A Martin and J Pietsch, *Public opinion towards population growth in Australia*, ANUpoll, no. 7, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, October 2010 (for 15 March – 1 April 2010), http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/content/publications/report/public_opinion_towards_population_growth_in_australia/; I McAllister, *Public opinion towards rural and regional Australia*, ANUpoll, no. 6, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, October 2009 http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/0907029_Frequencies_2_2009_WEBFA2.pdf; I McAllister, *Public opinion towards the economy and the global financial crisis*, ANUpoll, no. 5, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, July 2009 (for 17–30 June 2009) http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/ANUpoll_Frequencies_July_09.pdf; I McAllister, *Public opinion towards defence foreign affairs*, ANUpoll, no. 4, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University, April 2009 (for 17 March – 1 April 2009) http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/0904019_Frequencies_1_2009.pdf; I McAllister, *Public opinion towards the environment*, ANUpoll, no. 3, Australian National University, October 2008 (for 5–21 September 2008); http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/ANUpoll_freq_october2008.pdf; *Public opinion towards higher education: results from the ANUPoll*, ANUpoll, Australian National University, July 2008, http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/images/uploads/080804frequencies.pdf; *Public opinion towards governance: results from the inaugural ANU poll*, Australian National University, March 2008, (for 16–30 March 2008); http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/anupoll/documents/2008-04-16_ANUpoll_governance_report.pdf

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Poll question: figure 1

'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today? And what do you think is the second most important problem facing Australia today? (Open-ended)

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As well as the size and/or composition of the immigration program, concerns about immigration encompass concerns about 'boat people', 'unauthorised asylum seekers' or 'illegal immigration'. In 2007 and 2008, according to Quantum's face-to face interviewing for AustraliaSCAN, 'illegal immigration' had faded as one of the top five issues on which the government needed to act 'straight away'. Presented with a list of nearly thirty issues, only seven per cent and eight per cent respectively put it in their top five —down from 17 per cent in 2003, the year the series started. But in October–December 2009 'illegal immigration' was nominated by 17 per cent, and by no fewer than 23 per cent in late 2010.[10]

In the Lowy Institute's phone poll the level of concern with 'unauthorised asylum seekers' also rose in 2010. Asked whether they were 'concerned or not concerned about unauthorised asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat', or had 'no view on this', three-quarters (78 per cent in 2010 and 76 per cent in 2009) of those interviewed in 2010 said they were 'concerned' – the proportion of respondents who were 'very concerned' rising from 43 per cent in 2009 to 52 per cent in 2010. In terms of 'what Australian foreign policy should be trying to achieve' the proportion that thought 'controlling illegal immigration' was 'very important' (rather than 'fairly important, not very important or not at all important') increased from 55 per cent in 2007 and 59 per cent in 2008, to 60 per cent in 2009 and 62 per cent in 2010.[11]

While the use of the phrase 'illegal immigration' or the word 'illegals' to describe 'boat people' (as they are known colloquially) or 'unauthorised arrivals' (as they are known officially) may be incorrect, it is a description that has caught on. Asked in September 2003 whether it was 'all right or not all right' to use the term 'illegals' 'to describe the people who have attempted to come to Australia as refugees', opinion among members of the workforce interviewed by Saulwick was evenly split: 47 per cent said it was 'not all right', 51 per cent said it was 'all right'. But asked in November 2010 whether it was 'legal or illegal for asylum seekers to arrive by boat', no fewer than 85 per cent of those interviewed by Galaxy for Amnesty International said it was 'illegal'.[12]

What about concern with immigration more generally? In a survey conducted by phone in June 2010 on behalf of the Scanlon Foundation, issues to do with immigration also rated

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10. David Chalke, personal communication. Interviewing in rural areas was conducted by phone.

11. F Hanson, *The Lowy Institute poll 2010: Australia and the World: public opinion and foreign policy*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 2010, pp. 17, 23, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1305

12. Amnesty International, '*Topline data from Galaxy Omnibus (5-–7 November 2010)*', media release, 2010.

highly. Asked what they thought were 'the most important issues facing Australia today', 13 per cent nominated 'immigration/population growth' as either the most or second most important issue, while 10 per cent mentioned 'asylum seekers (negative comment)/illegal immigrants'. In aggregate 23 per cent mentioned something to do with population. Taken together this put issues of this kind into the top three.[13]

Data gathered by Roy Morgan Research tell a similar, if less dramatic, story. In June and September 2010, when Morgan asked respondents (via the phone) to nominate 'the most important problem facing Australia today', problems to do with 'immigration/immigration policy' were mentioned, unprompted, by between six per cent (June) and four per cent (September), and 'over-population' by two or three per cent. Again, to put these figures in context we need to note that in neither of these surveys was any issue nominated by more than 10 per cent of respondents—a reflection, possibly, of the narrower categories under which Morgan aggregated the disparate responses.[14] Asked in May and June 2010, and again in July, what the federal government could do 'that would most benefit you and your family' only one or two per cent said they could 'limit immigration'.[15] There are two ways of reconciling these divergent findings in the Morgan polls: by assuming that in answering the question about 'the most important problem facing Australia' respondents were thinking not about what was good for themselves but about what was good for the country; or by regarding responses to the second question as underreporting the number of respondents concerned for themselves or their families. Either way, issues to do with population rated relatively highly.

When Ipsos MORI was constructing its Global Index of Fear via an internet poll in September 2010, it presented respondents with a list of fourteen 'challenges' that face the world and/or Australia. 'Over population' was rated in the top four as a 'world' issue and in the top six as an issue for Australia. It was seen by a third of the respondents (35 per cent) as one of the 'two or three greatest challenges that face the world', and was rated as highly as 'poverty' (35 per cent) or 'global warming' (37 per cent). The only issue to clearly trump 'over population' was 'war and terrorism', which was mentioned by 54 per cent of

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13. A Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010: the Scanlon Foundation surveys: summary report*, Monash Institute for the Study of Social Movements, Caulfield East, Vic., 2010, p. 18, viewed 19 April 2011,
http://www.globalmovements.monash.edu.au/socialcohesion/documents/Mapping%20Social%20Cohesion%20Summary%20Report%202010.pdf

14. Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4583*, media release, 21 September 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4583/; The difficulties of recording, coding and especially aggregating responses to open-ended questions of this kind are discussed in M Goot, 'The forests, the trees and the polls', in C Bean, I McAllister, and J Warhurst, eds., *The greening of Australian politics: the 1990 federal election*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 115–20.

15. Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4541*, media release, 27 July 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4541/

respondents. Of the top 'two or three greatest challenges' facing Australia, 'overpopulation'—as one might expect—figured less prominently, nominated by a quarter (26 per cent), as was 'cancer' (26 per cent). 'Overpopulation' was slightly less likely to be nominated than 'ageing' (31 per cent), 'mental health' (35 per cent) or 'global warming' (37 per cent). Most prominent among the 'two or three greatest challenges' facing Australia was 'the economy' (44 per cent).[16]

Election issues

How important was the population issue during the 2010 election campaign? Certainly, in the media it loomed large. From the first week of the campaign (17–23 July) to the last (14–20 August), 'population/overall immigration levels' was never out of the 'top ten' topics aggregated by Media Monitors Australia-wide across all media (press, radio, television and the internet). On radio, including talkback, it was the third most frequently mentioned topic in week one (climate change was mentioned on 9282 occasions, Kevin Rudd on 6699 occasions, and 'population/overall immigration levels' on 6036 occasions), and it was the fourth most frequently mentioned topic in week two (after paid parental leave, Rudd and climate change), before sliding to tenth (1934 mentions) in week three, rising to ninth in week four (1484) and slipping back to tenth in week five (1292).[17] According to Barrie Cassidy, Rudd's 'backing the concept of "a big Australia"' meant that '[s]uddenly immigration and asylum seekers had converged as an issue'.[18] But Media Monitors, which distinguished between the two, had 'population/overall immigration levels' running ahead of 'border protection/boat arrivals' in all media in the first four weeks (the only exception was television in week one) and 'border protection/boat arrivals' running ahead of 'population/overall immigration levels' across all media in week five.

Despite its high profile in the media, the population issue does not appear to have loomed quite as large for electors. At the end of the first week of the election campaign, on 23–25 July, when Newspoll, which polls by phone, took respondents through a list of issues and asked which of them was 'very important, fairly important or not important on [sic] how you personally will vote in the federal election', exactly half the respondents (50 per cent) said 'asylum seekers arriving in Australia' would be a 'very important' issue. This was the first time 'asylum seekers' had appeared on Newspoll's list during a campaign or at any other time. 'Immigration', as an issue that might impact on how 'you personally will vote in the federal election', had last appeared in February 2004. Even if one accepted a figure of this kind at face value—and we shouldn't—it's important to bear in mind that still larger proportions rated 'health and Medicare' (79 per cent), 'education' (72 per cent), 'the economy' (70 per cent), 'leadership' (62 per cent) and 'national security' (54 per cent) as

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16. C Wyld, *Global index of fear*, Foreign Press Association, London, 3 November 2010, http://www.fpalondon.org/showarticle.pl?id=888

17. Media Monitors, personal communication.

18. Cassidy, op. cit., p. 76.

'very important'; and that 'interest rates' (45 per cent), 'inflation' (43 per cent), 'climate change' (43 per cent) and industrial relations' (42 per cent)—all the other issues on the list— weren't far behind.[19]

When Essential Research, in an online poll conducted from 13–18 July 2010, presented respondents with a list of sixteen issues and asked them to indicate 'the three most important issues in deciding how you would vote at a federal election', the issue of 'managing population growth' (mentioned by 12 per cent) ranked well below 'management of the economy' (63 per cent), 'ensuring the quality of Australia's health system' (55 per cent), 'Australian jobs and protection of local industries' (24 per cent) and 'ensuring a quality education for all children' (24 per cent). It also ranked below 'ensuring a fair taxation system' (18 per cent) and 'protecting the environment' (15 per cent), was on a par with 'addressing climate change' and 'controlling interest rates', and was marginally ahead of 'treatment of asylum seekers' (11 percent) and 'a fair industrial relations system' (11 per cent). It ranked slightly higher than 'security and the war on terrorism' (eight per cent) or 'ensuring a quality water supply' (six per cent).[20] In May 2010, 14 per cent of respondents had rated 'managing population growth' as one of the top three issues shaping their vote. In October, the corresponding figure was 10 per cent. The 'treatment of asylum seekers', not listed in May, slipped from 11 per cent in July to five per cent in October.[21]

Of those in late May 2010 whose 'view of Kevin Rudd and the Labor Government' had become 'a little less favourable in recent weeks' (25 per cent) or 'much less favourable' (33 per cent), 15 per cent nominated as their main reason, unprompted, a belief that Rudd and his government had become 'too soft on asylum seekers'; only four per cent gave as their reason the idea they had become 'too tough on asylum seekers'. Conversely, of those whose view of Tony Abbott and the Liberal Party' had become 'a little more favourable in recent weeks' (19 per cent) or 'much more favourable' (seven per cent), 12 per cent nominated as their main reason, unprompted, that Abbott and the Liberals would be 'tough on asylum seekers'; no one ventured as a reason the idea that they would be soft on asylum seekers.[22]

After the election more than a third (36 per cent) of the AES respondents, in a mail survey, said that 'population policy' was 'extremely important' when deciding how they would vote and a similar proportion (37 per cent) said that 'refugees and asylum seekers' were

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19. Newspoll, 'Importance and best party to handle major issues', *Australian*, 27 July 2010, available at: http://www.newspoll.com.au/cgi-bin/polling/display_poll_data.pl

20. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 19 July 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-19th-july-2010/

21. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 11 October 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-101011-11th-october-2010/

22. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 24 May 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-100524-24th-may-2010/

'extremely important' when deciding how they would vote. But asked to rank the issues that were 'most important to you and your family during the election campaign' from a list of twelve, the issue of 'refugees and asylum seekers' was mentioned as the most or second most important issue by no more than 14 per cent—behind 'heath and Medicare' (44 per cent), the 'management of the economy (31 per cent) and 'education' (20 per cent). The issue of 'population policy' was mentioned by just five per cent—behind 'taxation' (11 per cent), 'interest rates' (11 per cent), 'the environment' (10 per cent), 'global warming' (10 per cent), 'unemployment' (seven per cent), 'the resource tax' (six per cent) and alongside 'industrial relations' (five per cent).[23]

The Coalition enjoyed an advantage over Labor as the party closer to the views of respondents on 'population policy' (where it led 29 percent to 21 per cent—the remainder of respondents saw no difference between the parties, did not know, or did not respond). It was also regarded as the party closer to the views of respondents on 'refugees and asylum seekers' with a very substantial advantage of 39 per cent to 20 per cent—a margin equalled only by Labor's advantage on 'education' (23 per cent to 42 per cent).

The AES data suggest that if either 'population policy' or 'refugees and asylum seekers' had an impact on the vote, the issue of 'refugees and asylum seekers' had a bigger impact than the issue of 'population policy'. Refugees and asylum seekers ranked higher than the issue of population and it served to differentiate the parties more sharply—an important dimension that the other polling does not address. In the absence of detailed modelling, however, we cannot tell how much either issue mattered.

Polls and the measurement of public opinion on population growth

The importance of an issue to an election outcome is one thing; the distribution of opinion that helps spur public jousting or political decision-making—the proportion in favour of a particular policy compared to the proportion against—is another. A series of polls on whether Australia needs more people, dating from 1979 (see Table 1), shows three things. First, the polls indicate a very wide range of responses, with one poll reporting just 20 per cent in favour of having more people, other polls less lopsided, and the remainder showing opinion quite evenly divided. Second, since 1979 the majority of respondents encouraged to express a view one way of the other have opposed the need for a bigger population.[24] Third, there is

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23.   I McAllister et al., *Australian election study, 2010*, Australian Social Science Data Archive, Australian National University, 2011.

24.   Betts argues for including in this series a 1977 Saulwick poll in which respondents were asked to think whether 'over the next few years' Australia 'should not be concerned if growth slows down' (endorsed by 50 per cent), 'encourage couples to have larger families' (22 per cent), 'encourage more migrants to come' (10 per cent) or 'encourage both migrants and larger families' (17 per cent). While the inclusion of this question would not affect any of our conclusions, we do not accept that it is 'sufficiently similar' to the other questions to warrant inclusion: a lack of 'concern' with a 'slowdown' in growth is not the equivalent of saying Australia needs no more people; nor is anyone who would like to see a bigger population

more widespread opposition to a bigger population in the 21st century than there was in the twentieth century.

Table 1: Opinion poll responses to whether Australia needs more people, 1979–2010 (percentages)

Poll	Mode	Date	Yes	No	DK	n
Auspoll	Online†	Sept–Oct 2010	23	45	33	(4072)
ANUpoll	Phone	June 2010	44	52	4	(695)
ANUpoll	Phone	March–April 2010	34	61	5	(1200)
AuSSA	Mail	Dec 2009–Feb 2010	30	68	2	(3243)
Essential	Online	July–Aug 2008	20	72	7	(1013)
Saulwick	Phone	Sept 2001	36	58	7	(1000)
Reark	Face-to-face*	Nov 1986	45	50	5	(2512)
McNair	Face-to-face#	July 1979	45	51	4	(2100)

†Capital cities, including Canberra and Darwin; *Respondents aged 15+; # Respondents aged 13+

Source: Auspoll Campaign Intelligently, *My City: the people's verdict*, prepared for the Property Council of Australia, 22 January 2011, http://www.propertyoz.com.au/mycity/; I McAllister, A Martin and J Pietsch, *Public opinion towards population growth in Australia*, ANUpoll, Australian National University, 2010, p.17 http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/content/publications/report/public_opinion_towards_population_growth_in_australia; I McAllister, *ANU poll 2010: Australia's future*, Australian National University, 2010; A Evans, *Australian survey of social attitudes, 2009*, Australian National University, 2010; Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Research, 4 August 2008, p. 5; '*The Age* manifesto project: a quantitative study of voter attitudes on social and political issues', Irving Saulwick & Associates in collaboration with Denis Muller & Associates, and H Mackay, August 2001, p. 49; 'Election 2001 snapshot of a nation – population', *The Age*, 8 October 2001, supplement, p. 15; Reark Research, *Attitudinal survey on population issues in Australia*, a research report prepared for the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Sydney, December 1986; McNair Anderson, *Report on a survey of community attitudes to Indo-Chinese refugees*, prepared for the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Sydney, August 1979.

committed to endorsing government efforts to 'encourage' it. See K Betts, 'Population growth: what do Australian voters want?' *People and Place*, 18 (1), 2010, p. 61.

Poll questions: table 1

Auspoll: 29 September – 5 October 2010
'And do you support the Federal Government taking the following actions? ... The Federal Government developing a plan to stop population growth in Australia?' Strongly support [18%], support [27%], neither support nor oppose [33%], oppose [16%], strongly oppose [7%].

ANUpoll: 8–24 June 2010
'Do you think Australia needs more people?'

ANUpoll: 15 March – 1 April 2010
'The Government has recently spoken of its aim to increase the population from 21 million today to 35 million by 2050. Do you think Australia needs more people?'

AuSSA: December 2009 – February 2010
'The next few questions are about population growth. In 2008–09 immigration was higher than in any other year. Do you think Australia needs more people?'

Essential: 29 July – 3 August 2008
'In general, do you think Australia's population is too small [20%], too large [18%], or about right [54%]?

Saulwick: 9–15 August 2001
'In your view, should Australia increase, maintain or reduce its population?'

Reark: 8-16 November 1986
'Overall, do you think Australia has too many people [10%], about the right number [40%], too few people [45%]?'

McNair Anderson: 7–15 July 1979
'The latest estimates indicate that our present population is just over 14 million. Looking ahead to the future, do you think Australia will need more people [45%], fewer people [6%], or about the same number as we have now [39%]?'

The range of opinion warrants closer examination. The distribution of opinion in a poll can be affected by a number of factors, especially by:

· how the question is framed, including any information respondents are given

· the nature of any question that precedes it, and

· the range of possible responses the question allows.

Responses to some of the questions in the polls about the size of Australia's population are almost certainly an artefact of how the issue has been presented even if they are not an artefact of the order in which the questions are asked—about which we are normally told nothing. The majority of respondents in recent years have said that Australia does not need more people when asked simply whether Australia 'needs more people' or has a population that is 'too small'—a question that may be simplistic given the consequences of affirming

either of these alternatives.[25] In the ANUpoll, conducted by telephone in June 2010, 52 per cent said Australia did not need 'more people' while 44 per cent said it did.[26] In 2008, in an online poll conducted by Essential Research only 20 per cent of the respondents thought Australia's population was 'too small' as against 'too large' (18 per cent) or 'about right' (54 per cent). Majority opposition to having 'more people' is certainly not of recent origin. In September 2001, a Saulwick poll conducted by phone, reported a clear majority (65 per cent) wanted Australia's population to be maintained or reduced, not increased.[27] And as early as November 1986, half of those interviewed face-to-face, on behalf of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs by Reark Research, said that Australia had 'about the right number' of people (40 per cent), even too many (10 per cent) rather than too few (45 per cent).[28]

In each survey, questions about the size of Australia's population were preceded immediately by questions that may have affected the answers. In the case of the ANUpoll, the preceding question was on 'the most important' and the 'second most important problem facing Australia', to which (as we have seen) a relatively large number of respondents mentioned things to do with immigration.[29] In the case of the Essential poll, the preceding question was on the Rudd Government's decision to increase 'Australia's refugee intake to 13 500 per annum' (52 per cent were opposed). In the case of the Saulwick poll, the preceding question was on the refugee intake post-*Tampa*, another hot-button issue.[30] In the case of the Reark survey, the preceding question was about how many people were living in Australia (a larger proportion underestimated the figure than overestimated it) and what the 'ideal (or optimum) population size' might be (of those with an opinion—just 43 per cent of the sample—the median figure was around 20 million).[31] To what extent, if at all, any of these questions affected responses to the questions that followed we cannot tell.

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25. For example, in the absence of falling fertility and a program of zero net migration Australia's population cannot stabilise: J Brown and OM Hartwich, *Populate and perish? Modelling Australia's demographic future*, Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney, 2010, p. vii; for a recent statement against population growth see: M O'Connor and WJ Lines, *Overloading Australia: how governments and media dither and deny on population*, Envirobook, NSW, 2008.

26. I McAllister, A Martin and J Pietsch, *Public opinion towards population growth in Australia*, ANUpoll, no. 7, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, October 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/anupoll/documents/2010-10-26_ANUpoll_population.pdf

27. 'Snapshot of a nation: election 2001: population', *The Age*, 8 October 2001.

28. Reark Research, *Attitudinal survey on population issues in Australia*, a research report prepared for the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Sydney, December 1986, pp. 15–22.

29. McAllister, Martin and Pietsch, Public opinion towards population growth in Australia, op. cit.

30. 'Snapshot of a nation: election 2001: population', op. cit.

31. Reark Research, op. cit.

However, where respondents were cued directly, by being informed either about the way the population had risen or about the way it was likely to rise, the proportion opposed to a bigger population appears to have jumped. In the ANUpoll that went into the field in March–April 2010, respondents were told that 'the Government has recently spoken of its aim to increase the population from 21 million today to 35 million by 2050' before being asked whether they thought 'Australia needs more people'. The contrast with the responses three months later when a sub-set of these respondents were re-interviewed and asked simply whether they thought 'Australia needs more people' is striking. Among the respondents reinterviewed, the proportion saying 'Australia needs more people' rose by ten percentage points from 34 per cent in the original interview to 44 per cent in the subsequent interview.[32] Earlier, in the AuSSA, after being informed that the intake of migrants 'in 2008–09 was higher than in any other year', less than a third (30 per cent) agreed that Australia needed 'more people'; two-thirds (68 per cent) said Australia did not.

The discrepancy between the two sets of results is very likely due to the way the full ANUpoll and the AuSSA allowed the questions to be framed. While perfectly legitimate for some purposes (building multi-item scales, for example) and widely used for others (to test different ways of presenting a political message, for example), this technique is problematic when the number of versions skewed in particular ways is reduced to one.[33] Our assumption here, that better informed respondents are less likely to support a 'big Australia', fits with other evidence: in the Scanlon survey respondents claiming to have 'seen or heard' something 'in the media about the size of Australia's future population' were more likely to think 'an Australian population of 36 million by 2050' was 'much too large' than those who did not make this claim (24 per cent to 16 per cent) although we cannot be sure which came first—attention to media or opposition to a big Australia.[34] It is conceivable that part of the discrepancy between the results is due to differences in the mode of interview, with respondents feeling freer to report their views in the AuSSA, via the anonymity of a mail survey, than to an interviewer on the phone (the ANUpoll).[35] But as we shall see, when we turn to time series data on attitudes to immigration, it is unlikely that the mode of interview accounts for much of this discrepancy.

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32. McAllister, Martin and Pietsch, Public opinion towards population growth in Australia, op. cit.

33. Responses to the AuSSA question are discussed by the sponsor of the question in Betts, 'Population Growth', op. cit., pp. 56–58; and K Betts, 'A bigger Australia: opinions for and against', *People and Place*, 18 (2), 2010, pp. 25–33. However, her claim that the wording of the AuSSA question was based on questions asked by Saulwick in 1977 and 2001 is misleading: neither of the Saulwick questions was prefaced by any statement about immigration numbers or trends.

34. Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010*, op. cit., p. 26.

35. For a suggestion along these lines, see K Betts, 'Attitudes to immigration and population growth in Australia, 1954 to 2010: an overview', *People and Place*, 18 (3), 2010, p. 47.

Response options can have an even more dramatic effect than the framing of questions. In the most recent poll, the online Auspoll, respondents were asked whether they supported or opposed 'the Federal Government developing a plan to stop population growth in Australia'. However, rather than being invited to choose only between 'support' and 'oppose' they were invited to consider the option 'neither support nor oppose', and no fewer than a third (33 per cent) availed themselves of it. The consequence was that less than half the respondents (45 per cent) said they were in favour of the government having such a plan (18 per cent 'strongly'), but less than a quarter (23 per cent) said they were opposed to the government having such a plan (and only seven per cent were 'strongly' opposed).[36] The 'neither support nor oppose' option not only hugely boosted the proportion normally categorised as 'undecided' or 'don't know' but, if the ANUpoll reinterviews are any guide, it also substantially deflated the number of respondents opposed to the idea of developing a plan and slightly inflated the level of support for developing such a plan.

We can get another view of the way opinions come to be expressed—more precisely, of the way they can be formed by the very questions asked to elicit them—by contrasting responses to questions that refer to the size of the current population with responses to questions that mention not only the current population size but also the way the population has grown in the last twenty years (see Table 2). Where respondents were given no information about population trends, a greater proportion appears to have supported the idea of the population growing to 35 million or more than when respondents were informed about population trends. Thus, in March 2010, when the Lowy Institute asked whether 'the best target for Australia in the next forty years' should be 'less [sic] than the current size of 22 million people' (a proposition supported by four per cent of the sample), 'around the current size of 22 million' (22 per cent), '30 million' (43 per cent), '40 million' (23 per cent) or '50 million' (six per cent), 29 per cent opted for 40 million or more.[37] However, when Morgan explained that Australia's population had 'increased by five million from 17 million to 22 million over the last twenty years', in another phone poll conducted in March, and went on to ask what population 'we should aim to have in 30 years time' only nine per cent chose a figure in excess of 35 million. A similar question, asked in July, generated a similar pattern of response with just 13 per cent wanting 35 million or more.[38] While it is true that respondents in the Lowy poll were asked to think 40 years ahead rather than 30 years (and were given no

36. Auspoll Campaign Intelligently, *My City: the people's verdict*, prepared for the Property Council of Australia, 22 January 2011, http://www.propertyoz.com.au/mycity/

37. Hanson, *Lowy Institute Poll 2010,* op. cit., pp. 17–18, 31; Compare the curious claim that '[d]epending on how you grouped the responses, the survey either showed that 72 per cent wanted the population to rise to fifty million, or that 69 per cent wanted a population of thirty million or less'; J Schultz, 'Confusion with numbers: striving for balance in population growth', *Griffith Review*, no. 29, 2010, p. 9.

38. Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4482,* media release, 8 April 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4482/; Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4536,* media release, 22 July 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4536/

number in between 30 million and 40 million they might have endorsed) it is difficult to imagine that this explains as much of the difference as the figures respondents were given by Morgan about the rate at which the population had grown.[39]

Table 2: Views about various targets for the size of Australia's population, 2010 (percentages)

Targets	Lowy March 2010	Roy Morgan March 2010	Roy Morgan July 2010
Less than 22 million	**[4]**	**[6]**	**[6]**
22 million [current]	22		
22 - <25 million		20	18
Current level - <25 million	**[22]**	**[20]**	**[18]**
25 - <30 million		35	32
30 million	43		
30 - <35 million		21	22
25 - <30 million	**[43]**	**[56]**	**[54]**
35 - <40 million		5	
≥35 million			13
40 million	23		
40 - <50 million		2	
≥50 million	6	2	
35 million or more	**[29]**	**[9]**	**[13]**
None of the above	*		
DK	1	9	9
n	(1001)	(<670)#	(719)

Note: all surveys conducted by phone; *<0.5%; # n = 670 for sample as a whole (aged 14+); results reported here are for 'electors'

Source: F Hanson, *The Lowy Institute poll 2010: Australia and the World: public opinion and foreign policy*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney, 2010, pp. 17–18, 31, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1305; Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4482,* media release, 8 April 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4482/; Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4536,* media release, 22 July 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4536/

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39. The fact that relatively few were unwilling to answer weakens Betts' claim that when it comes to 'numerical trends' or to 'what constitutes a high or low number' in relation to the population there are 'likely to be [m]any people' with only a 'foggy idea', hence a high proportion registered as 'don't know'; Betts, 'Population growth', op. cit., p. 55.

Poll questions: table 2

Lowy Institute: 6–21 March 2010
'Now about the size of Australia's population in the next 40 years or so. Which one of the following do you personally think would be the best target for Australia in the next 40 years? Less than the current size of 22 million people; around the current size of 22 million people; 30 million people; 40 million people; 50 million people or more; none of these'

Morgan: 16–17 March 2010
'Australia's population has increased by 5 million from 17 million to 22 million over the last 20 years. What population do you think we should aim to have in Australia in 30 years – that is, by 2040: under 22 million; 22 to under 25 million; 25 to under 30 million; 30 to under 35 million; 35 to under 40 million; 40 to 50 million; 50 million or more.'

Morgan: 20–21 July 2010
'Australia's population has increased by 5 million from 17 million to 22 million over the last 20 years. What population do you think we should aim to have in Australia in 30 years – that is, by 2040: under 22 million; 22 to under 25 million; 25 to under 30 million; 30 to under 35 million; 35 million or more'.

A question that projected a population of 36 million by 2050—without mentioning either the size of the present population or existing trends—generated responses closer to the Lowy figures than to Morgan's in Table 2. In February 2010, a poll conducted online by Essential Research showed that a quarter of the respondents thought 36 million by mid-century would be 'good' (19 per cent) or very good (five per cent) rather than 'bad' (30 per cent) or 'very bad' (18 per cent) with close to a quarter (23 per cent) thinking it 'neither good nor bad'.[40]

The way questions are written can influence the results both ways. If questions that educate respondents about population trends boost the level of opposition to a big Australia, questions that encourage respondents to admit that they have no opinion reduce the proportion that would otherwise be reported as in favour. Confronted by population projections that are too abstract or to which they have given little if any thought, and invited to plead ignorance if they wanted to, about a quarter of the respondents to a Nielsen poll admitted they had no clear preference. Asked in November 2009, a couple of months before the Essential poll, whether they thought an increase 'from 22 million people now to 35 million in 2049' would be 'too many people, too few people, [or] about right', 40 per cent of those interviewed by Nielsen said 'too many' and 30 per cent said 'about right'; but almost as many (27 per cent of the sample) accepted the pollster's invitation to say that this was 'something' they didn't 'have an opinion about'. Asked a similar question in April 2010, 21 per cent again accepted the invitation to say that this was 'something' they didn't 'have an opinion about'. The contrast with the response to a Scanlon question posed a couple of months later is striking. Without an invitation to opt out, only seven per cent of respondents to the Scanlon survey did so. And the proportion recorded as saying 36 million by 2050 would be 'about right' was

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40   Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 15 February 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-15th-february-2010/

recorded as 37 per cent—not 27 per cent as it had been some weeks earlier in the Nielsen poll (Table 3).

Table 3: Attitudes to Australia's projected population by mid-century, 2009–10 (percentages)

Poll	Mode	Date	Too many	About right	Too few	DK	n
Scanlon	Phone	June 2010	(21/31)* 51	37	(1/4)# 4	7	(2021)
Nielsen	Phone	April 2010	51	27	2	21	(1400)
Nielsen	Phone	Nov 2009	40	30	2	27	(1400)

* (much too large/too large); # (much too small/too small)

Source: A Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2010: the Scanlon Foundation surveys: summary report*, Monash Institute for the Study of Social Movements, 2010, p. 26 http://www.globalmovements.monash.edu.au/socialcohesion/documents/Mapping%20Social%20Cohesion%20 Summary%20Report%202010.pdf; Nielsen, 'National report', 8 November 2009, 18 April 2010.

Poll questions: table 3

Scanlon: 1–28 June 2010
'In your view, would an Australian population of 36 million by 2050 be too large, about right or too small?'

Nielsen: 15–17 April 2010
'Recent population projections suggest that the Australian population will grow from 22 million people now to 36 million people in 2050. If Australia does reach a population of 36 million people in 2050 do you think this will be too many people, too few people, about right or is this something you don't have an opinion about?'

Nielsen: 5–7 November 2009
'Recent population projections suggest that the Australian population will grow from 22 million people now to 35 million people in 2049. Do you think 35 million people in 2049 is [sic] too many people, too few people, about right or is this something you don't have an opinion about?'

Respondents with no clear opinion to express at the beginning of a debate are open to opinion leadership as the debate unfolds. Following the prime minister's intervention on 20 January 2010—in which Rudd 'not only predicted that the population would grow from 22 million to 36 million by 2050, but conceded such a population explosion would put "enormous pressure on towns and cities"'—support for a 'bigger Australia' declined.[41] In November 2009, in the Nielsen poll, 40 per cent said '35 million in 2049' would be 'too many people'; by April 2010, 51 per cent of the respondents averred that '36 million people in 2050' would be 'too many'. About half this shift appears to have come from those who said, initially, they didn't 'have an opinion'; about a third appears to have come from those who said, initially, that 35

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41.   Cassidy, op. cit., p. 76; According to Betts, '[w]hile the [Treasury] projection was for 35.9 million in 2050 most speakers have rounded it down to 35 million'; Betts, 'Population growth', op. cit., p. 23.

million would be 'about right'; the rest being due to rounding errors (see Table 3). Still, the level of opposition remained below that suggested by the responses to the Lowy question in March 2010 and by Morgan in both March and July 2010.

How measures of 'concern' map on to questions of this kind is unclear. Asked in July 2010 about an Australian population projected to grow to 36 million by 2050, 31 per cent of the respondents in a Galaxy phone poll said they 'very concerned', 33 per cent said they were 'quite concerned', while the rest were either 'not concerned' or expressed no opinion.[42] No doubt the 'very concerned' would have been most unlikely to have supported the idea of the population growing to 36 million in 40 years. But the same cannot be said with any confidence about those that were 'quite concerned' who may well have been split—not necessarily in equal parts—between those opposed, those in favour and those without a view either way.

Attitudes to immigration

While we do not have a regular series of polls on the size of Australia's population on which to draw, we do have several series on the size of Australia's migrant intake. On questions to do with increasing, maintaining or reducing the number of migrants, stopping immigration or welcoming it, there have been a large number of polls. In addition to the surveys conducted by AustraliaSCAN every year since 1996, the year Howard came to office, there are half-a-dozen post-election surveys conducted by the AES and a large number of polls conducted at various times by others.

On the basic question of whether migrant numbers should be increased, maintained or reduced—asked in slightly different ways at different times by various researchers (see Table 4)—three things stand out. First, in recent years the proportion of respondents saying too many migrants are coming to Australia has increased. The increase appears to date from around early 2005. In the AES (mail-out), the proportion of respondents wanting a reduction in the 'number of immigrants allowed into Australia nowadays' was 53 per cent after the 2010 election, having stood at 39 per cent after the 2007 election and 34 per cent after the 2004 election; after the 2001 election it was 36 per cent and after the 1998 election, 47 per cent. The same trend is evident in response to an AES question about whether the 'number of migrants allowed into Australia at the present time' has 'gone much too far, too far, about right, not gone far enough' or 'not gone nearly far enough', with 53 per cent in 2010 saying it had 'gone much too far' or 'too far', 46 per cent saying this after the 2007 election and 30 per cent after the 2004 election; after the 2001 election it was 34 per cent and after the 1998

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42.   Galaxy Research, *Coping with the impacts of our growing and ageing population: a universal concern*, prepared for The Benevolent Society, July 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.bensoc.org.au/director/newsandevents/mediareleases.cfm?item_id=0C3DD19D022 045F43413D1F48EB5B640

election it was back up to 41 per cent.[43] Across the five phone polls taken in 2010 (by Morgan and Nielsen and for Scanlon) the proportion wanting immigration reduced averaged 46 per cent, compared to an average of 40 per cent in the two phone polls taken in 2009 (Nielsen and Scanlon) and 33 per cent in the two taken in 2007 (Newspoll and Scanlon). The polls taken in 2002 (Saulwick) and 2001 (ACNielsen)—the only phone polls taken before 2007—report higher figures than the 2007 average.

Second, while opposition to immigration may be currently on the increase, the proportion wanting immigration reduced in 2010 was still well below the levels of 70 per cent or more recorded in the first half of the 1990s and below the levels recorded through much of the 1980s when figures in the 60s were not uncommon.[44] In the AES taken after the 1993 election the proportion thinking the 'number of migrants allowed into Australia at the present time' had gone 'too far' or 'much too far' reached 76 per cent.[45] As Table 4 shows, in 1996 this figure had dropped to 62 per cent and in 1998 to 41 per cent.

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43. McAllister et al., *Australian election study, 2010*, op. cit.; C Bean, D Gow and I McAllister, *Australian election study, 2001: user's guide for the machine-readable data file*, Social Science Data Archives, Australian National University, Canberra, 2002.

44. According to the position advanced as axiomatic by Markus, 'questions dealing with politicised issues necessarily elicit divided responses, in the 30–70% range, mirroring the division evident in support for the major parties'. The trouble with this position is that: (a) political parties can 'politicise' issues by their joint actions—the complaint, for example, of those who see the parties defying public opinion on immigration—not just by acting in an adversarial way; (b) it's not difficult to imagine issues, including immigration issues, 'politicised' by a party or group other than the major parties; and (c) if the major parties' vote share is to be the bench-mark then either the figure of 30 per cent is way too low (since the combined ALP-LNP vote is around 80 per cent) or the figure of 70 per cent is way too high (since no party on its own gets even 50 per cent of the vote). In any event, if 'politicisation' entails divided opinion it doesn't follow, as Markus assumes, that divided opinion—on migrant numbers, for example—entails politicisation. See A Markus and A Dharmalingam, *Mapping social cohesion: the 2007 Scanlon Foundation surveys*, Monash Institute for the Study of Social Movements, Caulfield East, Vic., 2007, pp. viii, 69.

45. See Goot, 'Migrant Numbers, Asian Immigration and Multiculturalism', op. cit., p. 38. See also the graph of changing attitudes to immigration, based on some of the polling, in Betts, 'Attitudes to Immigration and Population Growth in Australia 1954 to 2010', op. cit., p. 36. In compiling the graph Betts deliberately ignores those respondents who said the number of arrivals was 'about right', often the most frequent response, on the grounds that 'people who have no clear opinion, or are simply confused by the question, are likely to pick the "about right" response'. For someone who has long made clear her own preference for lower immigration—and there are certainly more respondents who think Australia takes too many migrants rather than to few—this is a little too convenient. Subsequently, Betts poses this question: 'How can we ask … about numbers when many people, who may know what they think about growth, do not know how to express their opinions in terms of numbers, and may be too frightened to try?' (pp. 41–2). This question, a perfectly proper one about population numbers, sits oddly with her views about what to do with respondents asked to make sense of

Paul Kelly's lament at the end of the century that there had 'been a collapse in support for immigration' missed this change. So too did Andrew Markus who insisted that 'the broad pattern of findings does not support the case for a recent shift in public opinion'.[46] Given the connection between levels of unemployment and attitudes to immigration, and the fact that unemployment was generally higher in the 1990s than in the 1980s and higher in the 1980s than it has been in recent years, lower levels of opposition in the first part of this century compared to the final two decades of the last are not altogether surprising.[47]

immigration numbers. The implications for any theory of democracy of effectively silencing the voices of those who, for whatever reason, seem happy with the status quo should be clear. The implications for our understanding for how democracies actually work should also be clear. McAllister, too, claims that 'in most cases it was impossible to discriminate between these respondents [who described the current level as "about right"] and those who said they did not know'. But he offers no evidence for this; given the nature of the data collected by the polls, it's not clear what evidence he could offer. In addition, it's difficult to square with his observation that respondents take such a 'decisive view of immigration policy' that it 'produces the lowest proportion of non-committal answers of any contemporary political issue'. See: I McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', in J Jupp and M Kabala, eds., *The politics of Australian immigration*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1993, pp. 161, 170.

46. P Kelly, *Paradise divided: the changes, the challenges, the choices for Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2000, p. 257; A Markus, *Race: John Howard and the remaking of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 2001, p. 207. Compare D Horne, *Looking for leadership: Australia in the Howard years*, Viking, Ringwood, Vic., 2001, p. 234, who somehow manages to interpret a poll at around this time as showing 'that a [sic] majority of those interviewed believed that Australia's level of immigration had dropped too far'.

47. For unemployment rates mapped against the view that too many migrants are coming from 1974–2007 see: A Markus, 'Public opinion and social cohesion', in A Markus, J Jupp and P McDonald, *Australia's immigration revolution*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2009, p. 127; updated to 2010 in Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010,* op cit., p. 21. For a modelling of the relationship, see McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', op. cit., pp. 172–3.

Table 4: Support for immigration, 1996–2010 (percentages)

Poll	Mode	Date	Increase/Maintain*	Reduce#	DK	n
AES	Mail	Aug–Oct 2010a	(9/34) 43	53	3	(2003)
AES	Mail	Aug–Oct 2010b	(12/32) 46	53	2	(2003)
Essential	Online	July–Aug 2010	22	(22/42) 64	14	(1655)
Morgan	Phone	July 2010	(11/47) 58	40	2	(719)
Nielsen	Phone	July 2010	(5/45) 50	47	4	(1356)
USSC	Online	July 2010	25	(33/36) 69	6	(1000)
Scanlon	Phone	June 2010	(10/36) 46	47	7	(2021)
Nielsen	Phone	April 2010	(6/38) 44	54	2	(1400)
Morgan	Phone	March 2010	(9/45) 54	41	5	(670)
Nielsen	Phone	Nov 2009	(9/43) 52	43	4	(1400)
Scanlon	Phone	July 2009	(10/46) 55	37	7	(2019)
AES	Mail	Dec–Jan 2008a	(15/38) 53	46	2	(1873)
AES	Mail	Dec–Jan 2008b	(13/45) 58	39	3	(1873)
Scanlon	Phone	June–July 2007	(12/41) 53	36	11	(2012)
Newspoll	Phone	Jan–Feb 2007	(23/43) 66	29	5	(1401)
AES	Mail	Feb–Oct 2006a	(19/47) 66	30	4	(1769)
AES	Mail	Feb–Oct 2006b	(23/40) 63	34	2	(1769)
AuSSA	Mail	Aug–Dec 2005	(23/33) 56	39	6	(3902)
AuSSA	Mail	Aug–Dec 2003	(26/31) 57	38	5	(2064)
Saulwick	Phone	Sept 2002	(19/35) 54	42	4	(1000)
AES	Mail	Nov–Apr 2002a	(18/45) 63	34	4	(2010)
AES	Mail	Nov–Apr 2002b	(25/37) 62	36	2	(2010)
ACNielsen	Phone	Aug–Sept 2001	(10/44) 54	41	6	(2058)
AES	Mail	Oct–Jan 1999a	(10/44) 54	41	5	(1795)
AES	Mail	Oct–Jan 1999b	(13/38) 51	47	2	(1795)
Newspoll	Phone	April 1997	(2/26) 28	64	6	(1200)
AGB:McNair	Phone	November 1996	32	62	6	(2060)
Morgan	Phone	October 1996	≤30	≥66	4	(1215)
Newspoll	Phone	September 1996	(2/20) 22	71	7	(1200)
AGB:McNair	Phone	June 1996	(3/30) 33	65	2	(2063)
AES	Mail	Mar–June 1996a	(6/30) 36	62	2	(1795)
AES	Mail	Mar–June 1996b	(8/28) 36	63	1	(1795)

Note: National surveys of residents aged 18+ except for Saulwick which is restricted to 'people who are either in the workforce or looking for work or would like to work'. Excludes a 2010 Galaxy question on 'capping immigration' (favoured by 66%); *(increase/maintain) total; #(strongly/not strongly) total.

Poll questions: table 4

AES: August–October 2010a, December–January 2008a, February–October 2005a, November–April 2002a, October–January 1999a, March–June 1996a
'The number of migrants allowed into Australia at the present time [has] gone much too far, too far, about right, not gone far enough, not gone nearly far enough'

AES: August–October 2010b, December–January 2008b, February–October 2005b, November–April 2002b, October-January 1999b, March–June 1996b
'Do you the number of immigrants allowed into Australia nowadays should be reduced or increased? Increased a lot; increased a little; remain about the same as it is; reduced a little; reduced a lot'

Essential Research: 27 July – 1 August 2010
'Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000? Do you approve or disapprove of this cut to immigration?'

Scanlon: 21 June – 1 August 2007, 22 June – 31 July 2009, 1–28 June 2010
'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present? Would you say it is too high, about right or too low?'

Roy Morgan: 16-17 March 2010, 20-21 July 2010
'Over the last year (2008/09) about 170,000 immigrants came to Australia. Do you think the number of people coming here to live permanently should be increased, or reduced, or remain about the same?'

Nielsen: 5–7 November 2009, 27-29 July 2010, 15-17 April 2010
'Do you feel that the current level of immigration is too high, too low or about right?'

USSC: 14–22 July 2010
Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement 'Right now, Australia is taking in too many immigrants'

Newspoll: 31 January – 9 February 2007
'Thinking about people from other countries coming to live in Australia. Do you think the number of immigrants allowed into Australia nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, reduced a little, reduced a lot?'

AuSSA: 3 August – 24 December 2003, 31 August – 29 December 2005
'Do you think the number of immigrants to Australia nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is, be reduced a little, be reduced a lot, can't choose'

Saulwick: 3–15 September 2002
'Over the past four years, Australia's intake of immigration has averaged about 91,000 a year. The target for this financial year is 117,000. Do you think Australia should take more, about the same or less than 117,000 immigrants this financial year, or take no immigrants at all?'

ACNielsen: 31 August – 2 September 2001
'Do you think the current level of immigration is too high, too low or about right?'

Newspoll: 18–20 April 1997
'Thinking now about immigration. Do you personally think that the total number of migrants coming into Australia each year is too high, too low or about right? [IF TOO HIGH] Is that a lot too high [45%] or a little too high [19%]? [IF TOO LOW] Is that a lot too low [1%] or a little too low [1%]?'

AGB McNair: November 1996
'In her maiden speech to Parliament, Pauline Hanson set out her policies on a number of topics. I am now going to read out a number of the [policies Pauline Hanson outlined in her speech. Could you please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of them? Do you agree or disagree that ...there should be a short term freeze in immigration?'

Roy Morgan: 23–24 October 1996
'Thinking of Independent MP Pauline Hanson. In her maiden speech to Parliament, Pauline Hanson called for immigration to be stopped in the short term so that Australia's immigration is not added to. Do you agree or disagree with stopping immigration in the short term? Strongly agree [43%], mildly agree [23%], strongly disagree [16%], mildly disagree [14%]

Newspoll: September 1996
'Thinking now about immigration. Do you personally think that the total number of migrants coming into Australia each year is too high, too low or about right? [IF TOO HIGH] Is that a lot too high [52%] or a little too high [19%]? [IF TOO LOW] Is that a lot too low [1%] or a little too low [1%]?'

AGB: June 1996
'This year about 100,000 migrants will immigrate to Australia. Do you feel that the current level of immigration is too high, too low or about right?'

Third, the level of opposition recorded in 2010 by the two online polls (one by Essential Research, the other conducted under the aegis of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney) was much higher than that recorded by the phone polls. Online, opposition averaged 67 per cent, 21 percentage points greater than the average for the five phone polls and 14 percentage points higher than the two questions asked in the AES mail-out. One explanation for this is that the questions in the online polls, unlike the questions in the phone polls and the mail-outs, cued support, however unwittingly, for lower immigration: Essential Research, by telling respondents that 'Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000' and then asking whether they 'approve[d] or disapprove[d] of this cut to immigration'; the USSC, by asking respondents whether they 'agree[d] or disagree[d]' that 'Right now, Australia is taking in too many immigrants'. Differences in sampling frames—sampling based on people who self-select to take part in online surveys versus random dialling of the much larger (if declining) proportion of the population with landlines—might have played a part as well, notwithstanding data post-weighted to match some (though by no means all) of the population parameters. Another possibility is that the online polling, having no interviewer to offend, generates responses that are more honest.[48] The implications of this possibility, if true, would be far-reaching for research on issues of this kind and for our reading of the historical record.

AustraliaSCAN confirms that levels of opposition to immigration in 2010 were high, albeit in somewhat muted terms. In its annual surveys, established in 1996 and conducted nationally between October and November using face-to-face interviews, respondents are asked to respond to two contrasting propositions: 'Our population is large enough and we should stop all further immigration' (Stop); and 'We can accommodate a lot more people here and should welcome more immigration' (Welcome). The published data show the proportion that

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48. There is a comprehensive review of the evidence bearing on the last two possibilities in relation to online polls in general, in R Baker et al., 'AAPOR report on online panels', *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 74 (4), 2010, pp. 735–6 (social desirability) and 749–51 (post-survey adjustments).

'strongly agree' with each proposition (scores of 5 of 6 on a six-point scale) and the proportion that 'strongly disagree' (scores of 1 or 2).

As Figure 2a shows, in 2010 the proportion agreeing 'strongly' with the 'Stop' proposition (36 per cent) was higher than it had been in any year since 1997; the 15-year average is 32 per cent. Conversely, the proportion disagreeing 'strongly' (27 per cent) was lower than it had been at any time since 1996; again, the 15-year average stood at 32 per cent. The proportion agreeing 'strongly' that 'we should stop all further immigration' was nine percentage points greater in 2010 than the proportion disagreeing 'strongly'.

Figure 2a: Attitudes towards stopping further immigration, AustraliaSCAN, 1996–2010
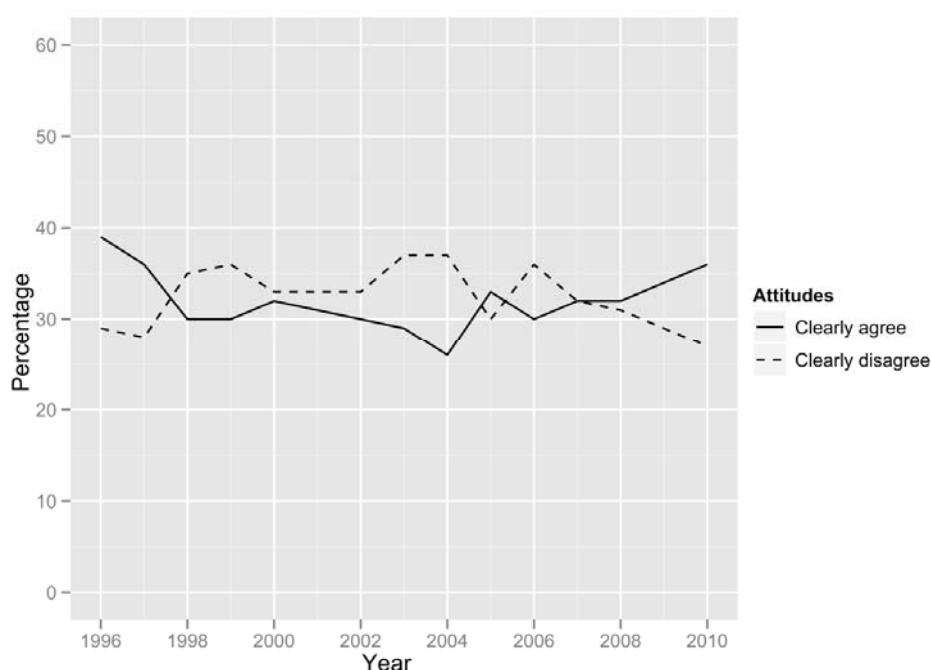
Sample: n = c.2000 each year during October and November; Face-to-face interviews except for rural respondents interviewed by phone.

Source: *AustraliaSCAN*, Quantum Market Research, various years.

Poll question: figure 2a

'Our population is large enough and we should stop all further immigration'

Respondents were asked to respond to each proposition using a six-point scale, where 6 meant 'strongly agree' and 1 meant 'strongly disagree'. 'Clearly agree': proportion who scored 5 or 6; 'clearly disagree': proportion who scored 1 or 2.

Turning to the proportion 'strongly' opposed to welcoming 'more immigration' we find a similar pattern. In 2009 and 2010 the proportions strongly opposed were 47 per cent and

44 per cent, respectively—a greater level of opposition than at any time since a dramatic decline (from 56 per cent to 39 per cent) at the end of 1998, after the Howard Government changed the nature of the intake by addressing public concerns about there being too many arrivals under the family reunion program and too few skilled migrants.[49] The long-term average (1998-2010) for 'strong' opposition is 40 per cent. Conversely, those 'strongly' in favour of welcoming 'more immigration' represented a smaller proportion of the sample in 2009 (15 per cent) and 2010 (16 per cent), than at any time since 1998—the same year the proportion 'strongly' in favour jumped from 12 per cent to 21 per cent. The long-term average for 'strong' support for 'more immigration' is 18 per cent.

The response to 'Welcome' was more one-sided than the response to 'Stop'. The difference between the proportions 'strongly' in support and 'strongly' opposed to 'Welcome'—32 percentage points in 2009 and 28 percentage points in 2010—easily exceeded the difference between the proportions 'strongly' in support and 'strongly' opposed to 'Stop'—four percentage points in 2009 and nine percentage points in 2010. The way the questions are framed makes the difference.

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49.   For some of the factors that might have built support for immigration in Howard's first term, see M Goot, 'More "relaxed and comfortable": public opinion on immigration under Howard', *People and Place,* 8 (3), 2000, pp. 46–60; also K Betts, 'Immigration: public opinion and opinions about opinion', *People and Place,* 8 (3), pp. 60–7, which stresses cuts to the immigration program and Howard's downplaying of multiculturalism. Kelly, *Paradise divided,* op. cit., p. 157, lists factors that in his view far from building support for the program undermined it.

Figure 2b: Attitudes towards welcoming more immigration, AustraliaSCAN, 1996–2010

Poll question: figure 2b

'We can accommodate a lot more people here and should welcome more immigration'.

Respondents were asked to respond to each proposition using a six-point scale, where 6 meant 'strongly agree' and 1 meant 'strongly disagree'. 'Clearly agree': proportion who scored 5 or 6; 'clearly disagree': proportion who scored 1 or 2.
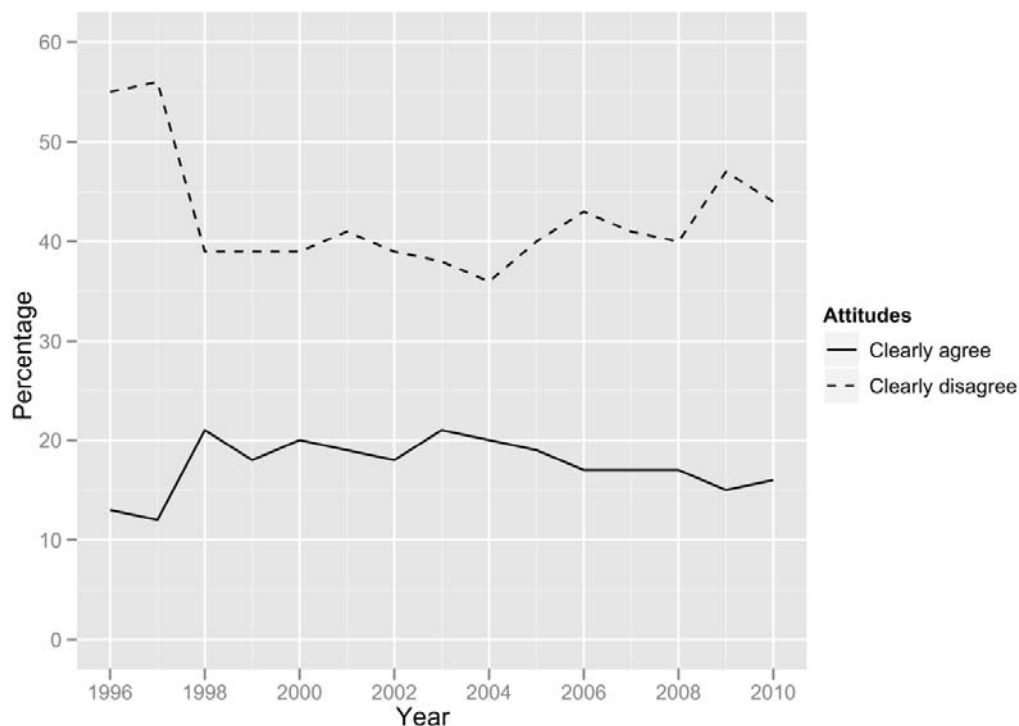
Sample: n = c.2000 each year during October and November; Face-to-face interviews except for rural respondents interviewed by phone.

Source: *AustraliaSCAN*, Quantum Market Research, various years.

Attitudes to asylum seekers

The former Minister for Immigration, Phillip Ruddock, has argued that 'to maintain public confidence in immigration programs, you need to be able to demonstrate that the people who get here are those who come essentially through the front door and not through the window.'[50] John Howard went further in a recent interview. His policy on asylum seekers, he

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50. 'Australia talks back with Sandy McCutcheon', *ABC Radio National*, 5 December 2002. Our thanks to Justin States, from Philip Ruddock's office, who located this source.

argued, saw 'a sharp increase in support in the community for orthodox immigration'.[51] While it may not be entirely accurate to say that after the Pacific Solution had been in place for four years and no boats had arrived 'Howard's Australia ... had never been more accepting of the regular immigration program', one does have to look back a long way to the period between 1963 and 1968 to see a set of polls in which the level of opposition to 'the regular immigration program' was consistently lower than it was in the wake of the *Tampa*.[52]

While a causal relationship is always difficult to establish, a number of things seem clear from the data. As with immigration more generally, concern about illegal immigration has increased since 2008 with fewer respondents expecting 'illegal immigration' to be better rather than worse in ten years time. Also, while support for immigration has declined, opposition to asylum seekers—and disquiet about the government's handling of the problem—has increased; and there is widespread support for the boats that bring them to be turned back to sea.

The principle of taking asylum seekers, the data suggest, is one Australians do not widely endorse. In polls conducted by Morgan in March and July 2010, barely half the respondents (50 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively) said they supported 'asylum seeker immigration'; roughly two-in-five (41 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively) said they opposed it.[53] While this hardly suggests that 'refugee has become a dirty word', as some have claimed, it is hardly a ringing endorsement.[54] The answers may have been different had the question been about 'refugees' not 'asylum seekers' and more sympathetically written. Certainly, when the Scanlon survey, in June 2010, asked respondents whether they felt 'positive, negative or neutral about refugees who have been assessed overseas and found to be victims of persecution and in need of help coming to live in Australia as a permanent or long-term resident', two-thirds (67 per cent) said they felt 'somewhat positive' (35 per cent) or 'very

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51. Quoted in G Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit: leadership and the end of the reform era', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 40, 2010, p. 22. For an earlier articulation of the view that '[a] tough stand on border control *increases* support for the official migration program', see J Hirst, 'Girt by sea: correspondence', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 6, 2002, p. 91; emphasis in the original. A more extreme position, that '[o]nce people become insecure about border protection...voters will use the ballot box to stop immigration altogether', is argued in W Kasper, *Sustainable immigration and cultural integration*, Centre for Independent Studies, NSW, 2002, p. 27.

52. G Megalogenis, 'Mixed race, mixed messages', in N Cater, ed., *The Howard factor: a decade that changed the nation*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 2006, p. 122; for the polling, pre-1996, see: M Goot, 'Migrant numbers, Asian immigration and multiculturalism', op. cit., p. 38.

53. Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4482*, media release, 8 April 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4482; Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4536*, media release, 22 July 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4536/

54. M Crock, B Saul and A Dastyari, *Future seekers II: refugees and irregular migration in Australia*, Federation Press, Leichhardt, NSW, 2006, p. 245.

positive' (31 per cent); only 14 per cent said they felt 'somewhat negative'(eight per cent) or 'very negative' (six per cent).[55]

But how many actually think 'the majority of those who arrive by boat' are 'genuine refugees'? In a survey conducted in November 2010 for Amnesty, only 40 per cent of respondents thought most were 'genuine refugees'.[56] Asked in June, on behalf of Scanlon, what they thought was 'the main reason asylum seekers try to reach Australia by boat', less than a third of respondents thought they were 'facing persecution' (12 per cent), were 'desperate' (11 per cent) or were 'in fear of their lives' (seven per cent).[57] In the 2001 AES, the proportion agreeing that 'most of those people seeking asylum in Australia are political refugees fleeing persecution in their homeland' was little greater than a third (35 per cent, including the nine per cent that agreed 'strongly').[58]

While respondents might support 'asylum seeker immigration', they do not necessarily feel obliged to do so. Asked online in October 2010, for an SBS series on the history of Australian immigration, whether 'Australia has a responsibility to accept refugees' no more than 39 per cent agreed that it did—with just 10 per cent agreeing 'strongly'.[59] In September 2003, Saulwick found respondents in the workforce were evenly divided between those who agreed that 'because Australia took part in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq we have a special responsibility to accept refugees from those countries' (47 per cent) and those who thought that 'even though Australia took part in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq we have no special responsibility to accept refugees from those countries' (49 per cent).[60]

Whatever the extent of the support in principle, in recent years there has been a growing sense that the number of refugees coming to Australia as part of the planned migrant intake— not smuggled ashore in boats—has been too large. In an online poll conducted by Essential Research in April–May 2009, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) of the respondents thought the '13,000 refugees per year' that Australia had 'accepted ... [o]ver the last few years' should be decreased. Less than a year earlier no more than half (52 per cent) had said 13 000 refugees was 'too large'.[61] By contrast, in October 2001, after being informed of 'the drowning of

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55. Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010*, op. cit., p. 37.

56. Amnesty International, op. cit.

57. Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010*, op. cit., p. 37.

58. Bean, Gow and McAllister, *Australian election study, 2001,* op. cit., pp. 108, 187.

59. Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute, *The Ipsos Mackay report,* SBS Immigration Nation Thought Leadership Research Final Report, Ipsos Eureka Social Research, Sydney, December 2010, p. 13

60. *JOB*futures*/Saulwick employee sentiment survey*, op. cit.

61. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 4 August 2008 and 4 May 2009.

around 350 asylum seekers', the proportion of respondents in an ACNielsen poll wanting Australia to take 'fewer refugees' was no more than half that number (26 per cent).[62]

In recent surveys, respondents have been less inclined than they were in earlier surveys to see 'illegal immigration' in the year ahead getting 'better'. According to AustraliaSCAN more respondents in 2009 (73 per cent) and 2010 (83 per cent) than in any year since 2003 thought 'illegal immigration' would have become 'worse' rather than 'better' in ten years time, with nearly half (47 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively) expecting things to become 'a lot worse' (Figure 3).[63]

Figure 3: Whether illegal immigration will have become better or worse in ten years time, AustraliaSCAN, 2001–2010
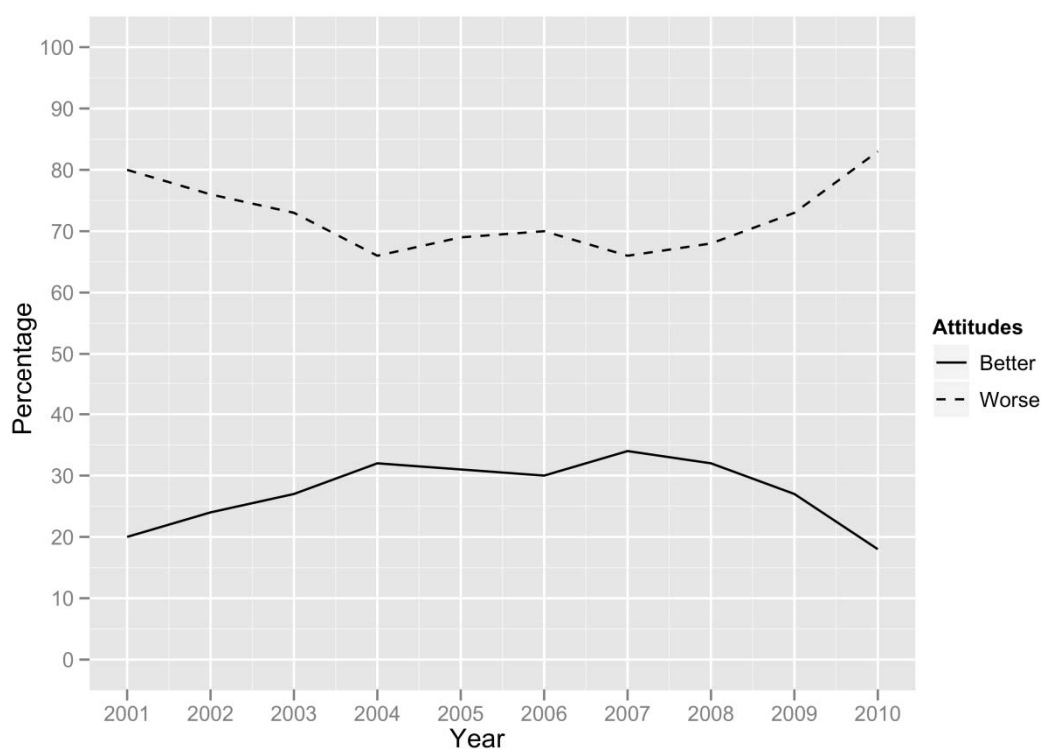
Sample: n = c.2000 each year during October and November; Questionnaires left with respondents and returned by mail, except for rural respondents interviewed by phone.

Source: *AustraliaSCAN*, Quantum Market Research, various years.

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62.   *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 October, 2001.

63.   See also the conclusion, drawn from a review of its qualitative work over the previous ten years, that there had been a 'gradual demise in sympathy for asylum seekers'; *The Ipsos Mackay report*, op. cit., p. 3.

> **Poll question: figure 3**
>
> 'How do you think the following [illegal immigration] will have changed in Australia in ten years time? Circle ONE code for each item. Six point scale from 1 "Get a lot worse" to 6 "Get a lot better"'.

The proportion of respondents that think of immigration or asylum seekers as a 'threat'—a question that made its way on to the pollsters' agenda after the events of 2001—has long been substantial. In May 2002, a survey of 13 to19 year-olds conducted by Newspoll reported that half (52 per cent) saw 'immigration and boat people' as a 'serious threat to Australia's way of life'.[64] And asked in September 2003, whether 'taking all things into account … would you say that over the past two or three years the number of refugees has represented a very serious threat, a quite serious threat, not a very serious threat or no threat at all to the country', more than a third of those in the workforce sampled by Saulwick said the number of refugees represented either a 'very serious threat' (10 per cent) or 'a quite serious threat' (26 per cent).[65]

In recent years the idea that refugees represent a 'threat' appears to have spread. Asked by Lowy whether they saw 'large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into Australia' as a 'critical threat', 'an important but not critical threat' or 'not an important threat at all' to 'the vital interests of Australia in the next ten years', the proportion of respondents who said it was a 'critical threat' grew from 31 per cent in 2006 and 33 per cent in 2008 to 39 per cent in 2009.[66] While it is unfortunate that the question effectively rolled two questions into one—a question about immigrants and a separate question about refugees—it has to be acknowledged that survey researchers are not the only ones to think the number of refugees coming ashore in Australia is 'large'. Asked by Galaxy in November 2010 whether 'there are huge numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat or only small numbers', nearly half (45 per cent) said there were 'huge numbers'.[67] In an online poll conducted at the beginning of June 2010, respondents said that from 'what they had read or heard' the

64. Newspoll, 'Youth social issues poll', *Australian,* 19 May 2002, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.newspoll.com.au/image_uploads/cgi-lib.21541.1.0505social_issues.pdf

65. *JOB*futures*/Saulwick employee sentiment survey*, op. cit.

66. F Hanson, *The Lowy Institute poll 2008: Australia and the World: public opinion and foreign policy*, Lowy Institute for International Affairs, Sydney, 2008, p. 20 for 2006 and 2008, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=895; F Hanson, *The Lowy Institute poll 2009: Australia and the World: public opinion and foreign policy*, Lowy Institute for International Affairs, Sydney, 2009, p. 25, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1148; in 2007, 26 per cent said they were 'very worried' about 'illegal immigration' as one of the 'potential threats from the outside world'; A Gyngell, *The Lowy Institute poll 2007: Australia and the World: public opinion and foreign policy*, Lowy Institute for International Affairs, Sydney, 2007, p. 21, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=660

67. Amnesty International, op. cit.

'percentage of Australia's annual immigration intake' constituted by 'asylum seekers arriving by boat' was about 5% (15 per cent), about 10% (13 per cent), about 25% (15 per cent) or at least 50% (10 per cent); only 18 per cent said 1% or less—the nearest correct answer. Nearly a third (30 per cent) wouldn't pick a figure.[68] Nor is the public's propensity to vastly overestimate the number of asylum seekers at all new. Asked in June 1997 for their 'best estimate' of the number of 'boat people on average' that had 'arrived in Australia each year' since 1990, three-quarters (78 per cent) of those interviewed by AGB McNair in Sydney and Melbourne overestimated the number.[69]

Increasingly anxious about 'illegal immigrants', respondents were more inclined to see the government's response to asylum seekers as inadequate. In late 2009 and late 2010, various phone polls conducted by Galaxy, Newspoll and Nielsen showed 44 to 46 per cent of respondents thought the government's policy was 'too soft'. These figures were lower than those produced by Essential Research online—these ranged from 52 per cent (November 2009) to 63 per cent October 2010)—but they were distinctly higher than the corresponding figures (20 to 24 per cent) produced by Saulwick's phone polls in 2003 and 2004 when the Howard Government's Pacific Solution was in place and there were no unauthorised boat arrivals.[70] In July–August 2009, the proportion of respondents (28 per cent) in an Essential Research poll that looked back and agreed that 'in the past, Australia's policy towards asylum seekers ha[d] been... not tough enough' was similar to the proportion recorded by Saulwick in 2004 when the policy was in place (see Table 5).[71]

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68. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 7 June 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-7th-june-2010/; While the report draws readers' attention to the proportion saying 10 per cent or more, total permanent migration for 2009–10 was 169 000 and in 2010, 2008 visas were granted to boat people; thus asylum seekers constituted just over one per cent of the total intake. For the figures, not the conclusions, see: P Taylor, 'Christmas Island becomes a de facto detention centre', *Australian*, 4 January 2011, and R Gittins, 'A few facts would be useful in the immigration debate', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11–12 December 2010.

69. AGB McNair for Uniya, reported in T Vinson, M Leech and E Lester 'The number of boat people: fact and fiction', *Uniya Brief Research Report,* no. 1, 1997. According to one report, a '[p]ublic survey in 1998 showed that the average respondent mistakenly believed that 70 times more boat people came to Australia each year than actually arrived'; Crock and Saul, *Future seekers*, op. cit., p. 22. If there is such a survey we have been unable locate it.

70. On the Pacific Solution, see J Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: the story of Australian immigration*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 193–6, who argues that its 'effectiveness' was 'highly questionable', a claim omitted in the second edition; compare: J Howard, *Lazarus rising*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2010, pp. 403–4, who thought it a 'stunning' success. Official figures on unauthorised boat arrival and asylum-seeker arrivals, 1996–2010, are reproduced in L Vasek, 'Ruddock slams asylum policy', *Australian*, 24 November 2010.

71. Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 4 August 2009; Nonetheless, asked between 31 January and 6 February 2006 whether 'Mr Howard' had 'looked after Australia's interests well or not' in relation to 'refugees and asylum seekers',

Table 5: Whether policy towards asylum seekers has been too soft or too harsh, 2003–2010 (percentages)

Poll	Date	Mode	Too soft	About right	Too harsh	DK	n
Galaxy	Nov 2010	Phone	44	32	19	4	(1100)
Essential	Oct 2010	Online	63	18	7	12	(1002)
Essential	July 2010	Online	56	21	10	13	(1128)
Essential	Mar/Apr 2010	Online	65	18	6	11	(1009)
Essential	Nov 2009	Online	52	28	9	11	(1105)
Newspoll	Nov 2009	Phone	46	29	16	9	(1203)
Nielsen	Nov 2009	Phone	44	37	13	5	(1400)
Essential	Apr-May 2009	Online	55	26	4	15	(1066)
Saulwick	July 2004	Phone	20	42	35	3	(1000)
Saulwick	Sept 2003*	Phone	24	37	32	7	(1002)

* Sample consists of people who are either in the workforce or looking for work or would like to work.

Source: Amnesty International, 'Topline data from Galaxy Omnibus (5-7 November 2010)', media release, 2010; Essential Media, *Essential report*, 4 May 2009, 9 November 2009, 6 April 2010, 12 July 2010, 25 October 2010, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/essential-report/; Newspoll, 'Asylum seekers', 9 November 2009, http://www.newspoll.com.au/image_uploads/091102%20Asylum%20Seekers.pdf; Nielsen, *National report*, 8 November 2009; *The Age*, 9 September 2004; I Saulwick and Associates with D Muller and Associates, *JOB*futures*/Saulwick employee sentiment survey*, no. 10, October 2003.

50 per cent of those interviewed by Saulwick said he had 'not'; Irving Saulwick & Associates for the *Age*, unpublished.

Poll questions: table 5

Galaxy: 5–7 November 2010
'In general do you think Australia's treatment of asylum seekers who arrive by boat is too soft, too harsh or about right?'

Essential Research: 29 March–5 April 2010, 6–11 July 2010, 19–24 October 2010
'Do you think the federal Labor Government is too tough or too soft on asylum seekers or is it taking the right approach?'

Essential Research: 28 April–3 May 2009
'Do you think the Rudd Government's policies on asylum seekers are too tough, too soft or about right?'

Essential Research: 2–8 November 2009
'Thinking about the way the federal government has handled the asylum issue recently, do you think they have been too tough, too weak or have they taken about the right approach?'

Newspoll: 6–8 November 2009
'And would you say the federal government has been too hard on asylum seekers, too soft on asylum seekers or do you think it has got it about right?'

Nielsen: 5–7 November 2009
'Do you think Australia's current policies on asylum seekers are too soft, too harsh or about right?'

Saulwick: 8–19 July 2004
'Would you say that over the past few years Australia has been too generous in the way it treats people who claim to be refugees, too harsh in the way it treats people who claim or has its treatment of people who claim to be refugees been about right?'

Saulwick: 22–29 September 2003
'Thinking more generally about this matter of refugees, would you say that over the past few years Australia has been too generous in the way it treats people who claim to be refugees, too harsh in the way it treats people who claim or has its treatment of people who claim to be refugees been about right?'

If the government is 'too soft' should 'compulsory detention' be encouraged and should the government turn the boats back? Given the chance to say so most respondents think it should. Indeed, the evidence suggests that majority support for both measures long predates the latest wave of anxiety about asylum seekers. Asked to choose between saying that the 'compulsory detention for illegal migrants' should be 'encouraged' and saying that the 'compulsory detention for illegal migrants' is something that 'should not be acceptable in today's society' the majority of respondents in surveys conducted by AustraliaSCAN say the 'compulsory detention for illegal migrants' is something that should be 'encouraged'—and the majority has said so (save for 2004) every year since the question was first asked in 2002. In 2009 and 2010 the level of support rose to 55 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively—higher than the long-term average of 52 per cent.[72]

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72.   David Chalke, personal communication; A 'significant hardening of Australians' attitudes...towards asylum seekers' was recorded by *The Mackay Report*, in a qualitative study conducted in July 2001, before the arrival of the *Tampa:* H Mackay, *Advance Australia...Where?*, updated edition, Hachette Australia, Sydney, 2008, p. 257; Robert Manne detected an 'unremitting hostility', unprecedented in his experience and shaped by the government's rhetoric, earlier in December 199: R Manne, 'Middle-Eastern boat refugees', in

While the meaning of 'compulsory detention' may be somewhat vague—detention under what conditions; for how long; and what then—putting boats back to sea carries with it possible consequences for large numbers of people that are not only potentially dire but also possibly fatal. Yet in the AES conducted after the 2010 election, the majority (55 per cent) of respondents agreed that 'all boats carrying asylum seekers should be sent back'. In the AES after the 2001 election, the '*Tampa* election', 61 per cent of respondents agreed that 'all boats carrying asylum seekers should be sent back'. In both surveys roughly a third (31 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively) agreed 'strongly' with sending the boats back—three-to-five times as many as disagreed 'strongly'. After the 2010 election, Essential Research reported that two-thirds (66 per cent) of its online respondents supported the federal government's efforts, in concert with the Indonesian Government, aimed at 'discouraging people-smuggling and turning back all the boats'. In 2001, after the *Tampa* rescue, Morgan reported that two-thirds (68 per cent) of its respondents wanted the boats carrying refugees put 'back to sea', while in March and July 2010 two-thirds (64 per cent) of Morgan's respondents agreed that rather than 'be allowed to apply for immigration as now' those 'asylum seekers arriving by boat' should 'be returned and told to apply through normal refugee channels'. At the height of the crisis, ahead of the 2001 election, when ACNielsen tested opinion on stopping the boats, the proportion in favour of the policy was even higher—three-quarters (73 to 77 per cent), with half of the respondents (49 to 55 per cent) 'strongly' agreeing' (Table 6a).

Table 6a: Whether to turn back the boats carrying asylum seekers, 2001–10 (percentages)

Poll	Mode	Date	Agree	Disagree	DK/ Neither	n
Morgan	Phone	July 2010	64	26	10	(670)
Morgan	Phone	March 2010	64	26	10	(719)*
AES	Mail	Aug–Oct 2010	(31/24) 55	(11/15) 26	20	(2003)
Essential	Online	Oct–Nov 2009	(40/14) 66	(5/9) 14	20	(1122)
AES	Mail	Nov 2001–April 2002	(36/25) 61	(7/12) 20	20	(2010)
ACNielsen	Phone	Oct 2001a	(49/24) 73	(11/11) 22	5	(1925)
ACNielsen	Phone	Oct 2001b	(55/22) 77	(10/8) 18	4	(2068)
Morgan	Phone	Sept 2001	68	20	12	(853)
ACNielsen	Phone	Aug–Sept 2001	(54/23) 77	(10/10) 20	3	(2058)

Brackets: strongly agree (disagree)/agree (disagree); *Respondents aged 14+

Source: Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4436,* media release, 22 July 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4536/; Roy Morgan Research, *Morgan poll: finding no. 4482,* media release, 8 April 2010, http://www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4482; I McAllister et al., *Australian election study, 2010: user's guide for the machine-readable data file*, Social Science Data Archives, Australian National University, Canberra, 2010; Essential Research, *Essential Report*, 2 November 2009; C Bean, D Gow and I McAllister, *Australian election study, 2001: user's guide for the machine-readable data file*, Social Science Data Archives, Australian National University, Canberra, 2002.

The barren years: John Howard and Australian political culture, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 78–9, also reprinted in *Left Right Left: political essays, 1977–2005*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2005, pp. 386–88.

Poll questions: table 6a

Morgan: 16–17 March and 20–21 July 2010
'Should asylum seekers arriving by boat should be allowed to apply for immigration as now, or should they all be returned and told to apply through normal refugee channels?'

AES: 12 November 2001–5 April 2002, 26 August–October 2010
'Here are some statements about general social concerns. Please say whether you strongly agree, agree [neither agree nor disagree 18%], disagree or strongly disagree with each of these statements. …All boats carrying asylum seekers should be sent back.'

Essential Report: 27 October–1 November 2009
'The federal government is currently working with the Indonesian Government to stop asylum seekers entering Australian waters. For each of the below [sic] statements that have been made about current incident[sic] of asylum seekers, please indicate your level of agreement...The federal government is doing the right thing in discouraging people-smuggling and turning back the boats'

ACNielsen: 26–28 October 2001a, 9–10 October 2001b

'The Australian Government's policy is to prevent boats carrying asylum seekers from entering Australian waters. This means that they are turned away by the Australian Navy. Do you agree or disagree with this policy on asylum seekers? Is that strongly agree (disagree) or agree (disagree)?'

Morgan: 15–16 September 2001
'Recently there has been a lot of discussion about the refugees arriving in Australia by boat. Do you feel the Australian Government should accept those refugees arriving in Australia by boat, or put those boats back to sea?'

ACNielsen: 31 August–2 September 2001
'Last Monday the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, refused to allow a ship carrying over 400 asylum seekers to enter Australian waters. Do you agree or disagree with Mr Howard's decision? Is that strongly agree (disagree) or agree (disagree)?'

If the answers are brutal, so are some of the questions. Questions couched in different terms or that offer more humane alternatives sometimes—not always—produce less brutal answers. In June 2010, when the Scanlon survey offered respondents three alternatives to turning the boats back including allowing those arriving by boat to 'apply for permanent residence' (supported by 19 per cent), allowing them to 'apply for temporary residence' (37 per cent), or keeping them 'in detention until they can be sent back' (27 per cent), support for having the boats 'turned back' dropped to just 27 per cent.[73] In the same month when Essential Research offered a different set of options for dealing with asylum arriving by boat, just four per cent agreed they should all 'be allowed to stay', but less than a third (31 per cent) wanted them sent 'back to the country they came from even if they are genuine refugees' while the majority (59 per cent) said that 'if they are found to be genuine refugees' they should 'be allowed to stay in Australia'.[74] The picture painted by these results inverts the pictured painted by the recent polls reported in Table 6a.

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73.   Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010*, op. cit., pp. 37–8.

74.   Essential Research, *Essential report*, Essential Media Communications, 15 June 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.essentialmedia.com.au/category/essential-report-15th-june-2010/

Questions that offered a wider set of choices generated a more diverse range of responses even during the crisis over the *Tampa*. As we can see from Table 6b, given the opportunity to choose between sending back all the asylum seekers, sending back some and sending back none, barely half the respondents (48 to 56 per cent) interviewed by Newspoll between August–September 2001 and August–September 2002 wanted to 'turn back all boats carrying asylum seekers'.[75] In 2004, long after the boats had stopped arriving and asylum seekers had become less prominent an issue, the proportion in favour of sending them all back dropped to a third (35 per cent).[76] If we compare the responses in Table 6a with those in Table 6b for August–September 2001 and October 2001, it is clear that the question that offered a wider choice reduced the proportion in favour of turning the boats back by 17 to 27 percentage points.

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75. As evidence of 'support among Australians for turning back boats', S Metcalfe, *The Pacific Solution*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2010, p. 53, cites these data rather than the data in Table 6a; Arguing that the episode had been a 'big win for Howard', Switzer cites these data as well but he can only do so by eliding the distinction between 'turning back all the boats' and 'allowing some': T Switzer, 'John Howard and the media', in K Windschuttle, DM Jones and R Evans, eds., *The Howard era*, Quadrant Books, Sydney, 2009, p. 363.

76. Discussing the significance of the shift between 2001 and 2004 in the Newspoll data, George Megalogenis refers to the 'majority' of respondents in 2001 being 'firmly the other way'. But while the balance of opinion had shifted, along with views about the governments' handling of the *Tampa* issue, Newspoll made no attempt to measure the firmness of these responses. See G Megalogenis, *The longest decade,* revised edition, Scribe, Melbourne, 2008, p. 263; Metcalfe notes that the proportion in 2004 'who believed all boats should be turned around...would likely increase again in line with any new arrivals': Metcalfe, *The Pacific Solution*, op. cit., p. 195; And drawing on his qualitative research, Mackay argues that by 2005 there was 'a hardening of attitudes'—a claim that is vague (what's the comparator?) and for which there are no surveys to provide any sort of check: Mackay, *Advance Australia...Where?,* op. cit., p. 260; David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, note that in 2001 and 2002 only nine or ten per cent of respondents agreed that 'all boats carrying asylum seekers should be allowed to enter' before going on to remark that 'Australians were saying the same thing when the first boats appeared in 1976' and concluding that 'nothing has changed': D Marr and M Wilkinson, *Dark victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, p. 292; However, the first poll on 'the hundreds of refugees from Vietnam', conducted by Morgan in December 1977, focused on whether to 'allow any number of them to live permanently here' (13 per cent agreed with this way of putting it) not on whether to 'allow all boats carrying asylum-seekers to enter Australia', the Newspoll option to which they refer says nothing about the granting of permanent residence; Morgan Gallup Poll, Finding no. 519.

Table 6b: Whether Australia should turn back all, some or none of the asylum seekers, 2001–2004 (percentages)

Date	Allow all	Allow some	Allow none	DK	n
Aug 2004	14	47	35	4	(1200)
Aug-Sept 2002	10	38	48	4	(1200)
Oct 2001	8	33	56	3	(1200)
Aug-Sept 2001	9	38	50	3	(1200)

Note: phone polls.

Source: Newspoll Market & Social Research, 'Latest polls', Newspoll website, http://www.newspoll.com.au/cgi-bin/polling/display_poll_data.pl

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Poll questions: table 6b

Newspoll, 31 August–2 September 2001, 26–28 October 2001, 30 August–1 September 2002, 13–15 August 2004
'Thinking now about asylum seekers or refugees trying to enter Australia illegally. Which one of the following are you personally most in favour of with regards to boats carrying asylum seekers entering Australia? Do you think Australia should: turn back all boats carrying asylum seekers; allow some boats to enter Australia depending on the circumstances; allow all boats carrying asylum-seekers to enter Australia?' [Rotated]

A similar story can be told about attitudes to detention, though the variety of data here is much more limited than that generated by the issue of whether to allow asylum seekers to enter the country in the first place. Asked by AustraliaSCAN whether the 'compulsory detention of illegal immigrants' should be encouraged the majority (57 per cent) of respondents towards the end of 2010, as we have seen, said it should be encouraged; only 26 per cent thought such a policy 'should not be acceptable in today's society'. However, when asked by Nielsen, at roughly the same time, about 'the policy of allowing asylum families and children to live in the community while their claims are processed', 42 per cent—not 26 per cent—said they supported it and 44 per cent—not 57 per cent—said they opposed it.[77]

Reasons for supporting or opposing population growth

Why have some respondents in recent surveys said Australia needs more people? And why have others said it doesn't? Both the 2009–10 AuSSA and an ANUpoll conducted in March–April 2010 sought to answer this question by presenting respondents with lists of some of the reasons they might have either for thinking the country needed more people or for believing it did not. In the AuSSA respondents were asked to nominate, from a list of nine, their first and second reasons. In the ANUpoll respondents were taken through a list of eight possible reasons for their views and asked whether they (strongly) agreed or (strongly) disagreed with each of them; the eight were a subset of AuSSA's nine. For ease of comparison we have taken the responses to each item in the ANUpoll, noted the proportion in 'strong' agreement, and recalculated the figures so that the item scores add to 100, as they do in the AUSSA

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77. David Chalke, personal communication; Nielsen, *National report*, 24 October 2010.

results. This enables us to compare data that are less disparate. It also enables us to compare the distribution of responses rather than the distribution of respondents.[78] We have grouped the reasons respondents were offered under three heads—economic, environmental and cultural/humanitarian (for not wanting more people); and economic, demographic, and humanitarian/cultural (for wanting more people).

Focusing first on those who said Australia does not need more people (Table 7a) we can see both similarities and differences in the patterns of response. In both surveys the proportion of responses to reasons categorised as 'environmental' is almost identical (47 per cent in AuSSA, 48 per cent in the ANUpoll) and the proportion of responses to reasons categorised as 'economic' is similar as well (35 per cent and 41 per cent respectively). The proportions in the 'cultural/humanitarian' categories, while almost identical on the one item they have in common, ultimately are not comparable since one of the items in the AuSSA is omitted in the ANUpoll.

However, if we look more closely marked differences appear in the responses to some questions in the mail survey compared to the phone poll:

- 'We should train our own skilled people, not take them from other countries' (24 per cent in the AuSSA compared to 15 per cent in the ANUpoll)

- 'The natural environment is stressed by the numbers we have already' (18 per cent in the AuSSA compared to 13 per cent in the ANUpoll)

- 'The cost of housing is too high' (three per cent in the AuSSA compared to 16 per cent in the ANUpoll)

- 'Population growth makes it harder to cut greenhouse gas emissions' (four per cent in the AuSSA compared to nine per cent in the ANUpoll).

There is not much evidence that any of this had to do with the reluctance of respondents to nominate either environmental or economic reasons on the phone rather than via the mail, or vice versa, since items with discrepant endorsements were drawn from the economic and environmental categories in equal number.

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78. These data were originally analysed in Betts, 'Population Growth' op. cit., and Betts, 'A bigger Australia', op. cit.

Table 7a: Reasons for saying Australia needs more people, 2009-2010 (percentages)

	Dec 09–Feb 10 AuSSA*	March 2010 ANU#
Reasons (closed-ended)	**Mail**	**Phone**
Economic		
We need more people for economic growth	36	22
We need skilled migrants for the workforce	15	19
More people could boost the housing industry and help support property prices	1	9
[TOTAL]	[52]	[50]
Demographic		
Having more babies and/or migrants could counteract the aging of the population	22	12
A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia	5	6
[TOTAL]	[27]	[18]
Humanitarian/Cultural		
Having more people means more cultural diversity	8	19
We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants	3	5
We may need to increase total migration so that we can take in more refugees	4	na
A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs	4	6
[TOTAL]	[19]	[30]
Missing	3	?
n	(937)	(305)

Note: Since respondents were able to (strongly) endorse more than one reason, this table shows the distribution of (strong) endorsements not the distribution of respondents; *Respondents that said Australia needs more people (n = 937) were asked to nominate, from a list of nine, their first and second reason. Of those who gave one reason (920) almost all (907) gave a second reason; # Respondents that said Australia needs more people (n = 305) were asked about eight possible reasons for holding this view. On average, for every 100 respondents one or other of these reasons was 'strongly' supported 171 times; na: not asked.

Source: I McAllister, A Martin and J Pietsch, *Public opinion towards population growth in Australia*, ANUpoll, Australian National University, 2010, p.5, http://www.anu.edu.au/anupoll/content/publications/report/public_opinion_towards_population_growth_in_aust ralia; A Evans, *The Australian survey of social attitudes, 2009*, Australian Social Science Data Archive, Australian National University, 2010.

Not surprisingly, respondents who said Australia needs more people prioritised economic reasons (Table 7b). But again there were differences between the two surveys in the patterns of response. In the AuSSA the argument that 'We need more people for economic growth' (which garnered 36 per cent of all first or second nominations) stood out as the number one

reason. The argument that 'Having more babies and/or migrants could counteract the aging of the population' (nominated by 22 per cent) came next. None of the other reasons made it to double figures. In the ANUpoll, the argument that 'We need more people for economic growth' (22 per cent compared to 36 per cent in the AuSSA) was only slightly more popular than two others—that 'We need skilled migrants for the workforce' (19 per cent) and that 'Having more people means more cultural diversity' (19 per cent). The idea that 'Having more babies and/or migrants could counteract the aging of the population' (nominated by 12 per cent compared to 22 per cent in the AuSSA) came well behind the other options.

Table 7b: Reasons for saying Australia does not need more people, 2009–2010 (percentages)

Reasons (closed-ended)	Dec 09–Feb 10 AuSSA* Mail	March 2010 ANU# Phone
Environmental		
Our cities are too crowded and there is too much traffic	12	13
Population growth makes it harder to cut greenhouse gas emissions	4	9
The natural environment is stressed by the numbers we already have	18	13
Australia might not have enough water for more people	13	13
[TOTAL]	[47]	[48]
Economic		
The cost of housing is too high	3	16
Having more people could make unemployment worse	8	10
We should train our own skilled people, not take them from other countries	24	15
[TOTAL]	[35]	[41]
Cultural/Humanitarian		
We have too much cultural diversity already	10	9
We could still take refugees without high total migration	5	na
[TOTAL]	[15]	[9]
Missing	3	?
n	(2115)	(362)

Note: Since respondents were able to (strongly) endorse more than one reason, this table shows the distribution of (strong) endorsements not the distribution of respondents; *Respondents that said Australia does not need more people (n = 2115) were asked to nominate, from a list of nine, their first and second reason. Of those who gave one reason (2057) almost all (2035) gave a second reason; # Respondents that said Australia needs more people (n = 362) were asked about eight possible reasons for holding this view. On average, for every 100 respondents one or other of these reasons was 'strongly' supported 337 times; na: not asked.
Source: As for Table 7a

Modelling the responses

Did support for, or opposition to, a bigger population vary according to the demographic characteristics of respondents—their gender, age, education, the country in which they were born, where they lived, their housing tenure or their income? Were their views a function of the party for which they had voted? And to what extent were their reasons for wanting—or not wanting—a larger Australia a function of these kinds of differences as well?

In her analysis of the 2009–10 AuSSA, Betts uses bivariate data (simple cross-tabs) to argue that 'graduates and migrants from a non-English speaking background (NESB), especially if they are from high-income households' were 'the most likely to favour growth' while 'Australia-born non-graduates and people living in non-metropolitan areas' were 'the least likely to do so.' In addition, she found more men than women and more of those living in 'inner-metropolitan areas ... than in the sample as a whole' wanted Australia to have more people, but 'only a slight difference in attitudes by age'. Respondents who intended voting for Labor or the Greens at the 2010 federal election also were more likely than those who supported 'the conservative parties' to want a bigger Australia, though not by much; those who were 'alienated from politics' were 'strongly [sic] in favour of stability'. As to the reasons for opposing population growth, while graduates 'emphasise[d] environmental stress', those from a NESB countries 'focus[ed] on the risk of growth making unemployment worse'. Along with 'all of the non-graduates', the most common reason chosen for opposing population growth by those from NESB countries was 'the need to train our own skilled workers'.[79]

To find out whether these answers hold true in a multivariate environment, we use logistic regression—a form of analysis which allows us to examine the net effect on the dependent variable (here, opposition to a 'bigger Australia') of a particular variable of interest when all other variables are held 'constant'. The presentation of the results makes use of predicted probabilities, first for each of the demographic and political variables, then for each cluster of reasons (economic, environmental and so on), modelled as 'opposition to a larger Australia'.[80] Some of the modelling confirms Betts' conclusions, some of it does not.

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79. Betts, 'A bigger Australia', op. cit.

80. Those who did not answer were omitted, giving us an initial sample size of 3177. Missing observations on one or more of the variables used in the modelling reduced the final sample size to 2947. Subsequently, another five disproportionately influential observations were removed to give the final model a sample size of 2942. The birthplace variable was reduced to three categories: Australia; other countries where English was the dominant language (ESB); and countries where English was not the dominant language (NESB). Votes for very small parties and Independents in the 2007 election for the House of Representatives were re-coded as One Nation/Family First (two small groups with high standard errors that shared a right-wing orientation) or as Other.

First, our modelling confirms that the gender of respondents matters, as does where they were born, their education and their income. As we can see from Table 8, with each of the other variables set at their mean values, the probability of respondents who were women being opposed to having more people (77 per cent) was significantly greater than the probability of men being opposed (64 per cent), taking into account the upper and lower bounds of the standard errors with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Among those born in Australia the probability of being opposed to having more people was higher (75 per cent) than it was among those born in other ESB countries (64 per cent); predictably, the probability of those born in NESB countries opposing a bigger Australia (55 per cent) was lower still. Among those with no post-school qualification or with no more than a trade qualification the probability of being opposed to Australia having more people was higher (78 per cent and 77 per cent, respectively) than it was among those with a TAFE certificate (70 per cent), those with TAFE qualifications being more likely, in turn, to be opposed than those with a university degree (62 per cent).[81] And high income earners were significantly less likely to oppose the idea of having more people (62 per cent) than were respondents in any of the other income bands (72 to 74 per cent).

Table 8: Predicted probabilities of opposition to 'larger Australia' (percentages)

Variable	Estimate	Lower bound	Upper bound
Gender			
Male	63.7	60.8	66.6
Female	76.9	74.6	79.0
Age group			
Aged 15-24	70.5	62.2	77.6
Aged 25-29	76.0	67.8	82.7
Aged 30-34	74.0	66.4	80.4
Aged 35-39	76.1	69.2	81.9
Aged 40-44	78.3	72.5	83.1
Aged 45-49	76.8	71.2	81.6
Aged 50-54	72.5	67.4	77.1
Aged 55-59	67.6	62.0	72.7
Aged 60-64	63.3	57.5	68.7
Aged 65-69	68.6	61.5	75.0
Aged 70-74	67.5	59.3	74.8
Aged 75 plus	69.7	62.7	75.8
Educational level			
None	76.5	73.4	79.3

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81. There are similarities here regarding gender, ESB/NESB and university education with the odds ratios generated out of the 2007 Scanlon survey questions on whether the 'number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present' is too high and whether 'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger'; Markus and Dharmalingam, op. cit., p. 74.

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Variable	Estimate	Lower bound	Upper bound
Trade qual	78.2	73.7	82.1
TAFE	69.8	66.3	73.2
Uni	62.3	58.4	66.1
Location			
Rural village	76.7	71.3	81.4
Small country town	77.9	72.3	82.7
Large country town	78.3	71.7	83.7
Large town	74.8	69.7	79.3
Outer metro	68.6	65.5	71.7
Inner metro	66.4	62.8	69.8
Housing tenure			
Own	74.9	71.9	77.6
Mortgage	68.0	64.4	71.4
Private rent	64.7	59.0	70.0
Public rent	82.7	70.8	90.4
Other	70.9	63.9	77.0
Income			
Low income	72.3	68.3	75.9
Lower middle	73.6	69.6	77.2
Middle income	73.6	69.7	77.2
Upper middle	72.9	68.1	77.1
High income	62.1	56.6	67.2
NA	70.9	64.0	77.0
Birthplace			
Aust born	74.7	72.7	76.5
ESB	63.8	58.3	69.0
NESB	55.1	49.4	60.6
Reps Vote in 2007			
Liberal Party	71.8	68.7	74.7
Labor Party	65.1	62.1	68.0
National Party	76.8	66.2	84.8
Other	74.8	67.2	81.2
Greens	77.3	72.1	81.8
One Nation / Family First	82.9	72.8	89.8
Informal / did not vote	82.5	75.3	88.0

Notes*:* Predictions based on a discrete change in each category within a variable, with all other variables set at mean values; 95% confidence intervals shown; All respondents, n = 2942.

Source: A Evans, *Australian survey of social attitudes, 2009,* Australian Social Science Data Archive, Australian National University, 2010.

The model also shows that where respondents lived mattered as did the nature of their housing tenure—a variable not addressed by Betts. Respondents residing in inner

metropolitan areas had a relatively low probability (66 per cent) of opposing the idea that Australia should have more people; but though they were significantly less likely to oppose the idea than those who came from country towns (small or large) or villages, they were not significantly less likely—contrary to Betts—to oppose the idea than those in outer-metropolitan areas (a probability of 69 per cent). They were also less likely to oppose the idea than those who came from large towns (75 per cent)—a difference that fails the significance test by the smallest of margins. Housing tenure also mattered, with those renting from a public authority being significantly more likely (83 per cent) to oppose a larger Australia than those who rented in the private market (a probability of 65 per cent), had a mortgage (68 per cent) or were owner occupiers (75 per cent). Age was the one demographic variable that had no impact.[82]

In addition to showing relationships between respondents' opinions and a range of demographic variables, the model shows that the party for which respondents voted mattered, though in ways that are by no means straightforward. Respondents who had voted for either of the 'parties of government' on the Right had a higher probability of opposing a bigger Australia than those who had voted for the party of government on the Left.[83] Respondents who had voted National had a 77 per cent probability of opposing a bigger Australia and those who had voted Liberal had a 72 per cent probability of doing so, while those who had voted Labor had a 62 per cent probability of doing so—the difference between Labor and Liberal respondents is statistically significant, although the difference between Labor and National Party respondents is not (the difference between Liberal and National respondents was not addressed in Betts' analysis). Respondents who had voted for one of the minority parties, whether to the Right of the Coalition or to the Left of Labor, were also more likely than Labor voters to oppose a bigger Australia: the probability of One Nation/Family First respondents doing so was 83 per cent and the probability of those who had voted for the Greens doing so was 77 per cent—the differences in both cases was statistically significant when compared to Labor respondents but not in comparison with Liberal or National Party respondents (findings, again, which either are not apparent from Betts' analysis or run counter to it). Among respondents who had voted informally or not voted at all the probability of their opposing a bigger Australia was 83 per cent—significantly greater than for either Liberal respondents or Labor respondents.

There were some, but not many, relationships between these variables and the arguments the majority (69 per cent) of respondents chose as their first or second most important reasons for opposing a bigger Australia, which were predominantly environmental. As Table 9a shows,

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82.   There is a contrast here, not only with the results of Betts' bivariate analysis but also with the odds ratios in Markus and Dharmalingam, op. cit. Compare also the wild claim that 'the needs of baby boomers collide with those of Generation Y across every conceivable policy challenge facing Australia'; Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op cit., p. 68.

83.   So far as we can tell the felicitous phrase 'parties of government' was first used in JDB Miller, *Australian government and politics: an introductory survey*, Gerald Duckworth, London, 1954, p. 56.

the probability of men prioritising environmental considerations was significantly greater than the probability of women doing so (65 per cent to 55 per cent), with the probability of women nominating economic reasons (34 per cent) significantly greater than the probability of men doing so (23 per cent). The probability of those born in Australia emphasising environmental considerations was significantly greater than the probability of respondents from NESB countries doing so (59 per cent to 53 per cent), though the probability of those born in other English-speaking countries emphasising environmental considerations was not significantly greater than the probability of respondents from NESB countries doing so (62 per cent to 53 per cent). The probability of those with a university education emphasising environmental considerations was significantly greater than the probability of respondents without tertiary education doing so (73 per cent to 53–56 per cent).

Table 9a: Reasons for not wanting 'larger Australia', predicted probabilities (percentages)

Variable	Environmental			Cultural			Economic		
	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB
Gender									
Male	64.8	60.9	68.6	12.1	9.7	14.9	23.1	19.9	26.6
Female	54.5	51.3	57.7	11.2	9.3	13.5	34.2	31.2	37.4
Age group									
Aged 15-24	51.3	41.2	61.3	12.3	7.1	20.3	36.4	27.4	46.5
Aged 25-29	45.9	35.0	57.2	6.5	2.9	14.1	47.6	36.6	58.8
Aged 30-34	50.7	40.2	61.2	8.2	4.0	16.0	41.1	31.2	51.7
Aged 35-39	62.9	53.0	71.8	3.1	1.1	8.2	34.0	25.4	43.8
Aged 40-44	53.2	44.9	61.3	10.5	6.5	16.3	36.3	28.8	44.6
Aged 45-49	54.5	46.8	62.0	12.3	8.2	17.9	33.2	26.5	40.7
Aged 50-54	53.9	46.8	60.9	14.6	10.4	20.1	31.5	25.4	38.4
Aged 55-59	57.4	50.1	64.4	14.7	10.4	20.4	27.9	21.9	34.7
Aged 60-64	60.0	52.7	66.8	13.9	9.8	19.5	26.1	20.3	32.8
Aged 65-69	64.5	55.9	72.2	16.4	11.0	23.6	19.2	13.5	26.6
Aged 70-74	64.1	54.4	72.7	13.5	8.3	21.3	22.4	15.4	31.3
Aged 75 plus	73.3	65.6	79.8	11.4	7.3	17.4	15.3	10.5	21.8
Education									
None	53.5	49.3	57.7	14.2	11.5	17.3	32.3	28.6	36.4
Trade qual	52.8	46.3	59.1	14.2	10.5	19.1	33.0	27.1	39.4
TAFE	56.2	51.6	60.7	13.6	10.8	17.0	30.2	26.2	34.5
Uni	72.8	67.8	77.3	5.8	3.8	8.7	21.4	17.3	26.0
Location									
Rural village	55.1	47.9	62.1	14.1	10.0	19.4	30.8	24.5	37.8
Small country town	62.8	55.8	69.3	11.2	7.6	16.0	26.0	20.4	32.6
Large country town	59.6	51.1	67.5	11.3	7.2	17.3	29.1	22.1	37.2
Large town	55.6	49.0	62.0	12.7	9.1	17.5	31.7	25.9	38.1
Outer metro	57.9	53.7	62.1	11.6	9.2	14.6	30.4	26.7	34.5

Variable	Environmental			Cultural			Economic		
	Est	**LB**	**UB**	**Est**	**LB**	**UB**	**Est**	**LB**	**UB**
Inner metro	61.6	56.7	66.3	10.4	7.7	13.8	28.0	23.8	32.7
Housing									
Own	61.0	56.9	64.9	11.0	8.8	13.8	28.0	24.5	31.8
Mortgage	58.7	53.9	63.3	12.4	9.6	15.9	29.0	24.9	33.4
Private rent	55.5	48.3	62.5	10.5	6.8	15.7	34.0	27.7	41.1
Public rent	56.4	42.9	69.1	12.3	6.0	23.5	31.3	20.5	44.4
Other	54.9	46.0	63.4	13.4	8.5	20.5	31.7	24.3	40.2
Income									
Low income	62.4	57.5	67.0	9.4	7.1	12.5	28.2	24.0	32.8
Lower middle	61.0	55.8	65.9	10.9	8.2	14.4	28.1	23.7	33.0
Middle income	56.4	51.0	61.6	13.6	10.4	17.7	30.0	25.4	35.0
Uppermiddle	53.9	47.1	60.4	11.4	7.8	16.5	34.7	28.7	41.3
High income	60.6	52.5	68.2	15.5	10.4	22.5	23.9	17.7	31.5
NA	53.7	45.3	62.0	11.9	7.8	17.7	34.4	26.8	42.8
Birthplace									
Austborn	59.1	56.4	61.7	12.2	10.4	14.2	28.8	26.3	31.3
ESB	61.8	54.4	68.7	9.5	6.2	14.3	28.7	22.4	35.9
NESB	53.2	45.2	61.0	9.9	6.2	15.3	36.9	29.6	44.9
Reps Vote									
Liberal Party	55.2	51.1	59.2	14.4	11.8	17.5	30.3	26.7	34.2
Labor Party	60.4	56.4	64.2	10.4	8.3	13.2	29.2	25.7	33.0
National Party	53.6	42.0	64.8	12.4	7.0	21.1	34.0	23.8	45.9
Other	44.9	35.5	54.7	15.6	9.9	23.7	39.5	30.4	49.4
Greens	81.0	74.8	86.0	4.4	2.2	8.7	14.5	10.2	20.2
ONP/Fam First	43.8	32.6	55.5	19.7	12.1	30.4	36.5	26.3	48.1
Inform/novote	51.9	42.9	60.8	11.7	7.2	18.5	36.4	28.4	45.2

Predictions based on a discrete change in each category within a variable, with all other variables set at mean values. 95% confidence intervals shown; Est = estimate; LB= lower bound; UB = upper bound; N = 1907 (Respondents who answered No to the question: 'Do you think Australia needs more people?')

Source: As for Table 8

The party for which respondents voted mattered, too; though, again, in ways that are by no means straightforward. The probability of Liberal respondents or of National respondents prioritising environmental issues (55 per cent and 54 per cent respectively) was not significantly different from the probability of Labor voters doing so (60 per cent). Respondents who had voted Labor had a greater probability of nominating environmental reasons than did those who had voted either One Nation/Family First (whose probability of doing so was 44 per cent) or Other (a probability of 45 per cent). But those who had voted Labor, like those who had voted for anyone else, had a much smaller probability of nominating environmental reasons than those who had voted for the Greens (a probability of 81 per cent).

Finally, there were some relationships between these demographic and political variables and the arguments—predominantly economic—prioritised by the minority (31 per cent) who said they wanted a bigger Australia. As Table 9b shows, the probability of men citing economic concerns was significantly greater than the probability of women doing so (76 per cent to 66 per cent). The probability of respondents who had come from NESB countries citing economic concerns was significantly greater than the probability of respondents born in Australia doing so (83 per cent to 69 per cent). And the probability of those living in outer-metropolitan areas citing economic concerns was significantly greater than the probability of those in living in inner-metropolitan areas doing so (76 per cent to 66 per cent).

Table 9b: Reasons for wanting 'larger Australia', predicted probabilities (percentages)

Variable	Economic			Demographic			Humanitarian/ Cultural		
	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB
Gender									
Male	75.9	71.6	79.8	17.0	13.7	20.9	7.0	5.0	9.8
Female	66.1	60.6	71.3	17.9	14.1	22.6	15.9	12.1	20.6
Age group									
Aged 15-24	45.5	29.2	62.8	18.7	8.4	36.4	35.9	20.6	54.6
Aged 25-29	67.5	49.9	81.2	21.5	10.5	39.1	11.0	4.8	23.5
Aged 30-34	65.9	50.7	78.4	25.0	14.3	40.1	9.1	3.9	20.0
Aged 35-39	70.0	55.5	81.3	22.7	12.7	37.0	7.4	3.1	16.4
Aged 40-44	72.3	59.9	82.0	18.7	10.8	30.4	9.0	4.2	18.1
Aged 45-49	70.8	58.7	80.5	23.0	14.4	34.7	6.2	2.6	14.1
Aged 50-54	65.6	55.7	74.3	23.2	15.9	32.5	11.2	6.6	18.4
Aged 55-59	74.2	64.9	81.7	14.3	8.9	22.2	11.5	6.7	19.1
Aged 60-64	81.7	73.7	87.6	10.6	6.3	17.4	7.7	4.2	13.8
Aged 65-69	72.7	59.5	82.8	19.4	11.1	31.6	8.0	3.1	18.8
Aged 70-74	82.9	70.6	90.7	11.4	5.4	22.5	5.7	1.9	15.6
Aged 75 plus	71.1	57.1	82.0	13.6	6.8	25.4	15.3	7.6	28.3
Education									
None	79.3	72.7	84.6	12.9	8.7	18.8	7.8	4.8	12.4
Trade qual	71.6	60.7	80.5	18.0	11.1	27.7	10.4	5.1	20.1
TAFE	71.3	64.7	77.0	20.0	15.1	26.0	8.7	5.7	13.2
Uni	67.8	61.7	73.2	19.1	14.7	24.3	13.2	9.5	18.0
Location									
Rural village	65.7	53.1	76.4	25.8	16.5	37.9	8.5	3.8	17.9
Small country town	78.8	65.6	87.9	9.6	4.2	20.5	11.6	5.3	23.6
Large country town	73.1	57.1	84.7	15.5	7.3	30.0	11.4	4.6	25.4
Large town	75.4	64.9	83.6	14.0	8.0	23.2	10.6	5.7	18.9
Outer metro	76.8	71.5	81.4	14.8	11.2	19.5	8.3	5.7	12.1
Inner metro	65.3	59.3	70.9	22.6	17.9	28.1	12.1	8.7	16.6

Variable	Economic			Demographic			Humanitarian/ Cultural		
	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB	Est	LB	UB
Housing									
Own	69.1	62.9	74.6	20.1	15.5	25.7	10.8	7.5	15.3
Mortgage	73.7	67.8	78.9	17.3	13.1	22.6	8.9	6.0	13.1
Private rent	75.1	65.8	82.6	13.4	8.1	21.2	11.5	6.8	18.8
Public rent	56.5	26.5	82.4	30.9	10.0	64.3	12.6	2.7	43.3
Other	75.8	62.7	85.3	13.5	6.6	25.4	10.8	5.4	20.4
Income									
Low income	64.1	55.2	72.1	21.1	14.7	29.3	14.8	9.7	22.0
Lower middle	72.8	64.4	79.9	20.3	14.1	28.4	6.8	3.8	11.9
Middle income	70.8	62.9	77.6	18.4	12.9	25.5	10.8	6.8	16.6
Upper middle	75.9	67.5	82.6	13.3	8.5	20.2	10.8	6.5	17.5
High income	75.7	68.3	81.9	15.5	10.8	21.8	8.8	5.3	14.3
NA	72.4	58.0	83.4	16.3	8.2	29.9	11.2	5.1	23.0
Birthplace									
Aust born	69.2	64.9	73.2	20.3	17.0	24.1	10.5	7.9	13.7
ESB	69.2	60.1	77.0	18.0	12.0	26.1	12.8	7.9	20.1
NESB	82.7	76.1	87.8	9.8	6.1	15.4	7.4	4.4	12.3
Reps Vote									
Liberal Party	81.3	76.1	85.5	14.3	10.5	19.0	4.4	2.6	7.5
Labor Party	67.4	62.4	72.0	18.4	14.8	22.6	14.3	11.0	18.3
National Party	60.8	36.7	80.6	35.0	16.3	59.8	4.2	0.5	25.9
Other	71.6	55.4	83.6	19.7	9.9	35.5	8.7	3.1	22.1
Greens	48.3	36.1	60.6	20.9	12.7	32.2	30.9	20.6	43.5
ONP/Fam First	70.2	40.9	88.9	18.3	4.4	51.9	11.5	3.4	32.5
Inform/no vote	78.2	59.3	89.8	9.1	2.8	26.1	12.7	4.7	30.3

Predictions based on a discrete change in each category within a variable, with all other variables set at mean values. 95% confidence intervals shown; Est = estimate; LB= lower bound; UB = upper bound; N = 894 Respondents who answered Yes to the question: 'Do you think Australia needs more people?'

Source: As for Table 8

Again, voting behaviour makes a difference. The probability of those who voted Liberal citing economic reasons was significantly greater than the probability of those who voted Labor (81 per cent to 67 per cent), though the probability of those who voted National citing economic reasons was not significantly greater than the probability of those who voted Labor (61 per cent to 67 per cent).[84] The probability of those who voted Liberal or Labor citing economic reasons was significantly greater than the probability of those who voted for the

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84.   For an analysis of Labor and Coalition candidates' reasons for preferring more or fewer migrants, based on the 1990 AES, see McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', op. cit., p. 166.

Greens (48 per cent). What made the Greens quite distinctive, however, was not their failure to cite economic reasons for wanting a bigger Australia; it was the probability of their citing humanitarian/cultural reasons (31 per cent), which was significantly higher than for those who voted any other way.

Reflections: public opinion and political responsiveness in historical perspective

In the course of the 1943 election, John Curtin talked of Labor's 'plan for ensuring the future defence of the country', a plan 'centred upon doubling or tripling the population' of just over 7.2 million. This would be achieved by policies to boost the birth rate—'full provision for social security' and 'full employment'—and by mass migration from Britain, including assisted passages.[85]

After the Second World War, when respondents were first asked in a national opinion poll what they would like Australia's population to be some time in the future, the 'average answer' for the ideal population in ten year's time was 14.8 million, though it is not clear how many came up with a figure from which this average was calculated. Since Australia's population at the time was just shy of 7.5 million (respondents were told it was seven million), the 'average' figure reported in the poll would have seen the population by 1956 more than double. The impetus for an immigration program seemed clear. Roy Morgan, the Director of Australian Public Opinion Polls (The Gallup Method), noted sardonically 'if this figure is to be attained, there will have to be some quick shipbuilding'; he calculated that while natural increase might add a million, a massive immigration program would have been needed to generate the rest. Not that there was any chance of so ambitious a target being reached. As Morgan noted, a program of the appropriate proportion would have required 'about 100 ships' bringing '1000 passengers five times a year'. Six months later, in his policy speech for Labor's 1946 campaign, Ben Chifley committed the government to an immigration policy of a comparatively modest kind which would 'build up a net gain of 70 000 a year'. By 1956, on the back of what was still a large immigration program, the population had reached not much more than 9.4 million.[86]

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85. D Day, *Curtin: a life*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1999, p. 510; D Black, ed. *In his own words: John Curtin's speeches and writings*, Paradigm Books Curtin University, WA, 1995, p. 226; J Edwards, *Curtin's gift: reinterpreting Australia's greatest Prime Minister*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2005, p. 139. For the population figures, see: 'Australia: historical demographical data for the whole country', Populstat website, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.populstat.info/Oceania/australc.htm

86. The poll was conducted in March 1946: 'Australian Public Opinion Polls – Nos. 345–354', published May–June 1946; For Chifley's pledge, see I McAllister and R Moore, *Party strategy and change: Australian political leaders' policy speeches since 1946*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991, p. 29; For the population figures, see: 'Australia: historical demographical data for the whole country', op. cit., http://www.populstat.info/Oceania/australc.htm

In 1956, respondents were told the population had increased by two million to 9.5 million in the last ten years and asked what population they thought 'we should aim to have in Australia in 30 years – that is, by 1987?' Excluding those (33 per cent) who had 'no idea', the 'average' answer was 22.5 million—a target that would have required, as Morgan noted, an increase of around 400 000 a year. In fact, by 1987, thirty years on, the population reached just over 16 million. If this figure dashed the hopes of those (17 per cent of the sample) who looked to a population of 10 to 15 million, it may also have disappointed an equal number that looked to a population of 30 million (8 per cent) or even 40 to 50 million (eight per cent).[87]

Now that the population has passed 22.5 million, talk of doubling it over a similar time span, without a powerful reason, would meet with widespread opposition. The evidence for this conclusion comes both from responses to questions about whether Australia needs more people and responses to questions about population targets, thirty to forty years out. Whether opposition is strong as well as widespread is less clear. None of the polls on attitudes to population growth purports to measure the strength as against the distribution of opinion—a fundamental distinction routinely elided, often by those who should know better.[88] The two series on immigration that do provide measures of strength, both generated by AustraliaSCAN, illustrate very well how different ways of expressing the same proposition can draw rather different responses. Looked at together, they suggest that it is easier to mobilise feelings against immigration—and demobilise pro-immigration sentiment—by decrying the need for more people and a welcoming mat than by declaring the population large enough to warrant the stopping of any further immigration. In recent years the gap between these two sets of responses has become bigger.

Even where opinions seem strong, this does not tell us anything about what might happen to political parties that choose to heed them—or not to heed them—or the conditions under which they might change. Betts' view, expressed prior to the 2010 election, that '[a]ny party that can present plans that capture these concerns [about population growth] should do well'

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87. The poll, conducted in December 1956, is reported in 'Australian Public Opinion Polls – Nos. 1217–1228', published December 1956 and January 1957; For the population in 1987, see: 'Australia: historical demographical data for the whole country', op. cit., http://www.populstat.info/Oceania/australc.htm

88. In setting out his views about '[t]he logic and consistency of public opinion', Markus insists that where a proposition is supported by 70 per cent or more—or opposed by 30 per cent or less—public opinion is '*strong*': Markus, *Mapping social cohesion 2010*, op. cit., p. 9 (emphasis added); McAllister refers repeatedly to views on immigration that are 'strongly held' although the AES data do not allow him to say that: McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', op. cit., p. 165; Megalogenis thinks that the 59.4 per cent willing to accept migrants from France, in a 1951 poll, 'recorded *strong* yes votes': Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 18 (emphasis added); Betts concludes that 'by late 2009 and mid 2010 there was a *solid* core of Australians (40 to 51 per cent)' who were 'opposed to growth': Betts, 'Attitudes to immigration and population growth in Australia 1954 to 2010', op.cit., p. 41 (emphasis added).

ignores not only the possibility of a counter-mobilisation (a strange oversight for someone who stresses the power of business in driving a bigger Australia) but also the possibility that the polls themselves might provide the terms in which such a counter-mobilisation might be organised.[89] A striking omission from the polls, and not just in recent times, is any attempt to gauge reaction to the idea that Australia needs to 'populate or perish'; but any attempt to cut back severely on migrant numbers would very likely goad powerful interest to commission polling along these lines, among others.[90]

Survey evidence shows that issues to do with population are rated relatively highly as problems facing Australia, even if respondents do not rate them highly as issues on which they cast their votes. For an issue to shift votes it has to be seen as more than an issue of importance. It has to be seen as an issue on which one party is better than any other (otherwise there is no basis on which to make a choice), and it has to be an issue on which the distribution of opinion is fairly lopsided (otherwise votes going in one direction are likely to be cancelled out by votes going in another). The idea that population was an issue that resonated with voters during the election campaign is widely attested;[91] but this, in itself, does not tell us very much. Evidence from the post-election AES suggests that if attitudes to a big Australia cost Labor votes—and this would need to be modelled—opposition to refugees and asylum seekers very likely cost it more.

Megalogenis writes in his recent *Quarterly Essay* that 'immigration is the defining issue in the battle of wills between politicians and the polls, because voters, if given the chance, will always prefer fewer new arrivals.'[92] The idea that when it comes to bringing migrants to the country voters are to be feared or sidestepped is one that should be familiar, if not from the times of 'populate or perish' then certainly in more recent times. For example, at the turn of the century Donald Horne observed that 'immigration has not usually been unqualifiedly popular in Australia—a fact that governments get around until it becomes politically too risky.'[93] But the evidence of the polls suggests that for large stretches of the last sixty years

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89. Betts, 'A Bigger Australia', op. cit., p. 37. It's not clear what sort of evidence Betts would see as counting against her advice to political entrepreneurs; a party's failure to 'do well' might simply be taken as evidence that it had failed to comprehensively 'capture these concerns'.

90. Australia's best-known social demographer argues not only that 'astute politicians understand both that the centre of gravity of the Australian community remains averse to the further ramping up of immigration' but also that 'Australians have always been insecure about the size of our population relative to the scale of our claimed land': B Salt, *The big picture: life, work and relationships in the 21st Century*, Hardy Grant Books, Pahran, Vic., 2006, pp. 80–1, 127; According to Megalogenis '[t]he threat today is not invasion, but ageing': 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 25. Here, it is the power of these ideas not their truth that matters.

91. See, for example: Cassidy, op. cit., p. 140, on Labor Party research.

92. Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 20. Further on, however, he 'suspect[s] the impulses to xenophobia...are over-amplified by polling techniques that ask people what they don't like and what they want': Ibid., p. 27.

93. Horne, op. cit., p. 199.

most respondents did not want 'fewer new arrivals'. From 1953 until as late as 1981, and again from 1998 until quite recently, the view that there were too many migrants coming to Australia was a minority view; the majority supported the immigration program or wanted it expanded.[94]

What Megalogenis means to convey by calling immigration 'the defining issue in the battle of wills' is difficult to discern. For voters, the number of migrants (as against the number of asylum seekers) has rarely, if ever, been an issue of high priority; as we have noted, it hasn't appeared on Newspoll's list of important issues since early 2004. The preferences of most voters in relation to migrant numbers, far from representing some sort of 'will', may be so weak as not to matter—and that is true whether voters favour more migrants, fewer migrants, or things as they are (the large group that Betts' and McAllister single out). Nor does it follow that if politicians lack the will to defy the public on this issue they must necessarily lack the will to defy the public on every other issue. If politicians failed to defy the public over immigration in the last election, they may well have defied it on other issues ranging from the balance between tax cuts and spending on public goods to Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan.[95]

Another way of thinking about public opinion is not as a force that might or might not shift votes and defeat politicians but as pointing 'responsive governments'—to use a term common in contemporary American analyses of polled opinion—in a particular policy direction.[96] A key assumption in attempts to determine the health of a democracy by measuring the gap between public policy on particular issues and the preferences expressed in public opinion polls–the smaller the gap, in this view, the better the democracy—is that polling can establish the distribution of opinion on any particular issue in a reasonably straightforward way. This assumption is highly problematic. In relation to population policy, as this paper shows, some ways of presenting the issue (the AuSSA survey, for example) suggest high levels of opposition to population growth, while others (in particular, the ANUpoll) suggest much lower levels; statistically, the proportion in the ANUpoll against having 'more people' is not significantly different from the proportion in favour. The same is true in relation to questions about large population increases sometime in the future. By not framing the question in terms of how large Australia's population already is or how rapidly it has grown—indeed by not framing the question at all—the question asked in the Lowy poll appears to have produced a

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94. See M Goot, 'Migrant numbers, Asian immigration and multiculturalism', op. cit., p. 38 and Table 4 above. If one only compares those who said there were 'too few' with those who said there were 'too many' then for all of the 1950s—not, as McAllister says, 'most of the 1950s'—those who wanted fewer migrants outnumbered those who wanted more migrants 'by anything up to five to one'; McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', op. cit., p. 171. But McAllister's warrant for doing so is not persuasive (see note 37 above).

95. On taxation, se: McAllister et al., *Australian election study, 2010,* op. cit.; on Afghanistan see: Hanson, *The Lowy Institute poll 2010,* op. cit., p. 26.

96. LR Jacobs and RY Shapiro, *Politicians don't pander: political manipulation and the loss of democratic responsiveness*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000.

more sympathetic response to the prospect of a 'big Australia' than the questions asked by Morgan.

How questions are framed, the nature of any earlier questions, and the range of responses the question allows—all of these, and more, can shape the patterns of opinion the polls report. This is not to say that all political leaders need to do is pick a form of words that suits their purpose and run with it. On the contrary, some terms, understandings and framings have a much wider public circulation than others, attain a greater dominance, and are harder to shift—assuming voters are prepared to listen—however easy it is to show the possibility of such a shift by sifting through the polls, testing propositions in focus groups or doing experiments in a social psychology lab.[97] However, to operate politically one needs to attend to the language or languages in which politics is, or might be, conducted.

For Megalogenis, the fact that both Labor and the Coalition, during the 2010 campaign, trimmed their policies on population to the dominant electoral mood, as they saw it, is a matter not for celebration but for despair. 'The temptation to follow the electorate was resisted by both sides of politics for sixty-five years, so what transpired in 2010 demands careful scrutiny.'[98] But while we might agree that a poll is not something a politician should always follow—and not just because different questions can generate different answers—to suggest that until the most recent election politicians were impervious to public opinion on population is to misread the record. Writing nearly fifty years ago, at a time when the polls showed more respondents saying there were 'too few arrivals' rather than 'too many', and immigration numbers were soaring, James Jupp observed that 'Australian politicians have been extremely sensitive to what they imagine public opinion on immigration to be'.[99] Modelling the data from public opinion polls conducted between 1947 and 1990, McAllister found polled opinion had a bigger impact on the annual intake of migrants than any of the

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97. 'The Cameron formula', Rod Cameron remarks of his days as Labor's pollster, 'was repeat, repeat, repeat the message, and when you are sick of it repeat it some more. The assumption was voters will only ever see it once because they only get their political information on the Channel Nine news'; quoted in Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 26.

98. Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 20. Megalogenis fails to mention that the departure of international students and skilled workers on 457 visas—long term visitors not permanent migrants—meant migrant numbers were projected to fall to 175,000 in 2010/11 and 145,000 in 2011/12; if so, the 'decisions' by both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott were not poll-driven. For the projections, see: BIS Shrapnel, 'Slower population growth to ease upward pressure on interest rates', *Building in Australia 2010,* 17 May 2010, viewed 19 April 2011, http://www.bis.com.au/verve/_resources/Rel_PopulationGrowth_FINAL_file.pdf.   Cassidy acknowledges the projection but insists that Gillard was poll-driven for raising it as a counter to Abbott's use of; Cassidy, op. cit., p. 155.

99. J Jupp, *Arrivals and departures*, Cheshire-Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1966, p. 164; For the intake, see: *Australian immigration: consolidated statistics*, no. 3, Department of Immigration, Canberra, 1969, p. 9.

other variables he modelled (unemployment, trade union membership and the terms of trade).[100]

Megalogenis insists that 'no self-respecting leader would believe that public opinion is sufficiently informed to set the immigration intake'.[101] Yet in 1984, influenced by his reading of public opinion, Howard called for a slowing down of Asian immigration.[102] In 1996, when the Howard Government 'trimmed back' the immigration program, and shifted the 'balance' from family reunion towards migrants with skills, the Minister for Immigration noted publicly that 'community confidence in the program' had 'reached an all-time low'.[103] And in 2001, without the groundswell of opposition to asylum seekers, 'popular fears of immigration and multiculturalism', and the need to win back voters who had shifted to One Nation, the *Tampa* incident may never have happened.[104]

In searching for an answer to his question, 'when did polling gain the right of veto over policies such as immigration', Megalogenis might work back from here. Of course, the question itself is an exercise in bad faith: 'polling', including focus groups and other means of gauging public opinion, doesn't exercise a 'veto'; political leaders do. To think that the party operatives believe everything the polls tell them is naive; those who interpret poll data come to the job with preconceptions that incline them to accept some results and reject others not on the basis of what is practicable but on the grounds of what is plausible. After the 2001 election, Megalogenis reports, 'Labor people' often told him that 'the mob were intolerant'; in the wake of that campaign it's difficult to imagine any poll data persuading them otherwise. Megalogenis also notes that while Ken Henry, the head of Treasury, advised the incoming Rudd Government that the 'best way to return the surplus to the public was in the form of lower taxes ... the public didn't see it that way, telling the pollsters they preferred increased spending to tax cuts'. [105] What he doesn't ask is whether anyone in the Labor Party secretariat believed these polls.

The recent population debate shows not only politicians seeking to be responsive, tailoring public policy to match what they see as the most important block of voters, but also how

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100. McAllister, 'Immigration, bipartisanship and public opinion', op. cit., p. 172.

101. Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 24.

102. See Howard, *Lazarus rising*, op. cit., p. 174. Megalogenis, who acknowledges Howard's intervention, saves his hypothesis here by referring to 'social cohesion'—not public opinion— as an influence on Howard's decision and by maintaining that Howard's decision didn't break 'the bipartisan agreement on immigration'; Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 20.

103. Cited in Kelly, *Paradise divided*, op. cit., p. 264.

104. See Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, op. cit., pp. 195–6; Megalogenis offers a back-handed recognition of this when he opines that the GST was 'the last significant piece of policy that was pursued in defiance of the opinion polls' and regrets that 'the war on boatpeople' was one of the voter-influenced policies that followed: Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., p. 37.

105. Megalogenis, 'Trivial pursuit', op. cit., pp. 41, 51.

politicians themselves may help shape public opinion. This they did not just by elevating the importance of the issue—and of issues to do with immigration and asylum seekers—or by helping frame the terms in which the issues are discussed, but also by shifting the distribution of public opinion. Certainly, the opinions registered in some of the polls on the population question, on the government's handling of asylum seekers and on how many immigrants Australia should take shifted in the course of the debate. With better polling, and the opportunity to disentangle the forces shaping the debate, the evidence of the impact of political interventions of the kinds made by various political leaders—state and federal— might have been more plentiful. In this domain, as in others, the idea that 'political leadership' is dead may be more than a little exaggerated.

Opposition to current rates of immigration, while not at levels that are high by the standards of the 1980s or early 1990s, have certainly increased since 2008. To what extent the rise in the level of opposition to immigration is a function of increasing concern about asylum seekers is unclear. Although trends in the polls support the idea of an 'iron law of Australian politics', with lower levels of opposition to 'orthodox immigration' when unauthorised arrivals are low and higher levels of opposition to 'orthodox immigration' when unauthorised arrivals are high, we need to recognise that we don't have the same sort of data over time on attitudes to unauthorised arrivals that we have on authorised arrivals. The lack of data on asylum seekers for the first and second terms of the Howard Government is particularly noteworthy. Of course, the fact that other things influence attitudes to immigration—most obviously, unemployment rates—does not invalidate the claim that control of asylum seeker numbers is a factor as well.[106]

What is clear is that opposition to immigration, to refugees and to asylum seekers under Rudd and Gillard have all been on the rise as has a sense that the government's response to 'illegal immigration' has been inadequate. The proportion of respondents wanting drastic action, while high and growing is partly an artefact of the narrow choices posed by some questions. Less brutal questions sometimes generate less brutal responses.

Modelling of the 2009–10 AuSSA survey suggests that people born in Australia are less likely to support a bigger population than those born elsewhere, whether they were born in English-speaking or non-English speaking countries; and that women, the less well-educated and respondents whose incomes are not high are less likely to support a bigger Australia. Nativism—the belief that the only 'true Australians' are those whose ties to the country are of long-standing—may be at work here.[107] Labour market vulnerabilities are also likely to have played a part. Although this was not true of high-income earners when compared to lower income earners, it was certainly the case that men were more likely than women and the

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106. The idea that one invalidates the other is argued in A Markus, 'Public opinion divided on population, immigration and asylum', *Policy*, 26 (3), 2010, p. 12.

107. M Goot and I Watson, 'Nativism as citizenship: immigration, economic hardship and the politics of the right', in C Slade and M Mollering, eds., *From migrant to citizen: testing language, testing culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, Bassingstoke, 2010, pp. 217–2.

university-educated more likely than the less well educated to offer an environmental reason and less likely to have offered an economic reason for their opposition to Australia's taking more people. Nor should we overlook another sort of vulnerability: although housing tenure did not show up in relation to the private rental market in the modelling it did show up in relation to public housing.

The fact that respondents living in outer-metropolitan areas were not significantly more likely than those living in the inner-metropolitan areas to oppose a bigger Australia—Betts' analysis notwithstanding—confounds the notion that concerns about population and immigration are particularly acute among the 'battlers' and 'aspirationals' in outer suburban seats where voters are more likely to suffer from poor public transport, pay large petrol bills, and endure long journeys to work. Although respondents in outer-metropolitan areas who favoured a bigger Australia were more likely than those in inner-metropolitan areas to advance economic reasons for doing so, the fact that respondents in outer-metropolitan areas were not significantly more likely than those living in the inner-metropolitan areas to oppose a bigger Australia runs counter to the view that it is Labor rather than the Coalition that has to cope with two very different kinds of supporters—the latte-drinking, high income earners, on the one hand, and the traditional heartland on the other. If opposition to a bigger Australia is structured by location the fault-line runs between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas—non-metropolitan areas having experienced relatively low population growth, whether from internal migration or arrivals from overseas—not between the inner cities and the outer suburbs whose politics has been widely misunderstood.[108]

Finally, the electoral aspects of the pattern of opposition to a bigger Australia suggest three other things. First, the parties of government continue to have electoral bases that are distinguishable, with those respondents who voted Liberal (though not National) more likely to oppose a bigger Australia than those who voted Labor. Second, those who voted for one of the minority parties—the Greens on the Left or One Nation/Family First on the Right—or who voted for Others, voted informal or didn't vote were not wholly distinctive; while more likely to oppose a bigger Australia than Labor voters, they were not more likely to do so than Liberal voters. Third, that what makes those who voted for the Greens distinctive was the probability of their citing environmental reasons for opposing a bigger Australia, and humanitarian/cultural reasons for approving a bigger Australia.

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108. M Goot and I Watson, 'Are "aspirationals" different?' in D Denemark et al., eds., *Australian social attitudes: a second report*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007, 217–40.