



It Is All About the Numbers of Immigrants: Population and Politics in Australia and New Zealand

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1 INTRODUCTION: RECENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Australia’s rate of population growth was relatively constant from 1992 to 2005, averaging about 1.2% per annum. Subsequently, its rate of growth shifted to a higher plane, averaging 1.7% in the decade, 2007 and 2016. The rate of population growth in New Zealand has fluctuated much more widely being as low as 0.5% in 1999 and 2000 and in 2011–2012, but as high as 2.2% in 2016 (Fig. 1). In recent years, both countries have had population growth rates that are on the high end among OECD countries (UNPD, 2017). In both countries, the annual rate of natural increase has fallen from 1992 to 2016, from 0.9% to 0.6% in New Zealand and from 0.8% to 0.6% in Australia.

In both countries, the wide fluctuations in the rate of population growth after 1992 have been due almost entirely to changes in rate of

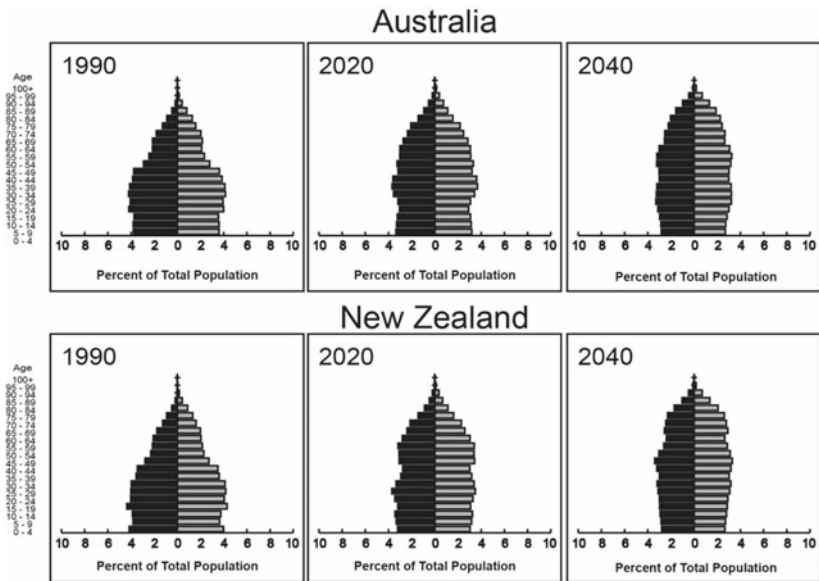


Fig. 1 Age pyramids in 1990–2020–2040 in Australia and New Zealand (*Note* Males are to the left [black], females to the right [grey]. *Source* Computations by Richard Cincotta)

international migration. Political debate has therefore been focused upon levels of migration except for a short period in the early 2000s, when declining fertility was a topic of political conversation in Australia (see Fig. A.11.1 in the online appendix for details).

As debate about population growth in the two countries has been confined largely to changes in the level of international migration, this chapter focuses on the politics of international migration. Other issues that have drawn attention but with less controversy include population distribution, population ageing and ethnic composition. In relation to population distribution, the recent debate is about the concentration of 10 million of Australia's 25 million population in just two cities—Sydney and Melbourne. Australia's two largest cities have grown rapidly on the back of strong labour demand. Melbourne's growth has been particularly rapid in recent times, growing at around 2.5% per annum. Not only does Melbourne attract large numbers of international migrants, it experiences net positive migration from its hinterland in the State of Victoria and from every other state and territory in Australia. Sydney, in contrast, experiences a net loss to the rest of Australia from internal migration but slightly higher international migration than Melbourne (ABS, 2019). The current debate on population distribution is considered at the end of the chapter.

If present demographic trends continue, Australia and New Zealand will be two of the youngest countries in the OECD with their age structures still concentrated in the working ages long into the future (see the age pyramids in Fig. 1). If net international migration continues at 200,000 per annum and the fertility rate remains around 1.8 births per woman, 20.5% of the Australian population will be aged 65 years and over in 2051, a level below that applying today in some OECD countries (McDonald, 2018a). The age composition of Australia and New Zealand in 2020 was not typical of other OECD countries with the centre of gravity of the distribution still clearly in the lower half of the pyramids and is projected to remain relatively young for the year 2040.

Population ageing is an important issue in Australia and New Zealand but the capacity to deal with its consequences is better than in most other higher-income countries (in contrast to other OECD countries, see Vanhuyse & Goerres, 2012). In the past decade in Australia, the labour force has been growing faster than the population. The essential issue with the ageing of the population is not the rate of growth of the

older population but the rate of growth of per capita government expenditure on aged persons. In Australia, between 1980 and 2010, per capita public expenditure on health for persons aged 75 and over increased six times in real terms while the population aged 75 and over increased less than three times (Australian National Transfer Accounts). Population ageing enters political debate about population mainly through the deflating impact that international migration has upon population ageing and, hence, upon the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018; McDonald & Temple, 2009, 2010, 2014).

Australia and New Zealand both have very high and increasing proportions of their populations born in another country. In the case of New Zealand, at the 2013 Census, 25% of the population was born outside of New Zealand, compared to 19% in 2001. For Australia, the equivalent percentage at the 2016 Census was 27% compared to 23% in 2001. Over 15% of New Zealand's citizens live in another country with 13% of its citizens living in Australia.

There has been some debate about the extent to which international migration alters the ethnic composition of the two countries, but this debate does not extend to the fertility rates of international migrants. On average, the fertility rates of immigrants have been very similar to those of the native-born population. This is largely because immigrants to Australia and New Zealand are skewed to the skilled, more highly educated end, different from many European countries that took up refugees in large numbers on humanitarian grounds with larger shares of low-skilled individuals. Changes in the ethnic composition of births are not due to differences in fertility rates across ethnic groups but due to the young age distribution of immigrants. Immigrants to Australia and New Zealand have their children soon after they arrive (McDonald, 2018b). In 2016, about 25% of all births in Australia had at least one parent born in Asia. Furthermore, the increment to the non-Australian-born population between 2011 and 2016 was 100% Asian because the numbers of persons born in most European-source countries in Australia, except the UK, are declining as deaths exceed new arrivals. Thus, the composition of the Australian population is shifting relatively rapidly towards Asian-origin countries. In 2006, 5.5% of the Australian population had been born in Asia; in 2016, this percentage had risen to 13.5% (McDonald, 2019). Political debate related to the origins of the Australian population and attitudes and opinions are discussed below.

The chapter begins with a historical review of population and politics from the 1940s to 1991. This is followed by analysis of formal immigration trends and policies from 1991 onwards and political debate about these policies. As irregular migration has been an important aspect of Australian politics since 1991, the politics surrounding irregular migration are then discussed. Then, the chapter examines public opinion on population and migration in Australia based on opinion polls. The chapter ends with a review of contemporary opinion on population policy, still fluid in the context of the 2019 federal election.

2 BACKGROUND: THE PERIOD TO 1991

During the first 200 years following the European settlement of the Australian colonies, concern arose from time to time about the viability of Australia and New Zealand given their small populations. Assisted migration programmes began in the 1830s, there was a royal commission into the decline of the birth rate in 1903, and, in the 1930s, the phrase ‘populate or perish’ was coined by William Morris Hughes, a former Prime Minister. Following the Second World War, the population of Australia was around 8 million and official projections showed it would be still 8 million in 2000 given the relatively low levels of migration and fertility that had prevailed since the 1930s (Borrie, 1948). In this situation, the then government of Australia embarked upon a vigorous post-war migration programme (Calwell, 1949). Later, following the increase of the birth rate in the 1950s, there was an implicit policy target of two percent per annum for the rate of population growth, half of which would be contributed by international migration (APIC, 1977). On average, for the years 1949 to 1972, this target was met. Nation building was the main rationale for the post-war migration programme. The levels of annual net migration to Australia from 1947 onwards are shown in Fig. 2.

The vertical line shown at year 2006 delineates a change in the definition of the Australian resident population that made it more likely that temporary migrants would be counted into the population. Prior to 1 July 2006, a person was counted into (or out of) the Australian population if he/she had been resident (not resident) in Australia for a continuous period of 12 months. From 1 July 2006, this criterion was changed to being resident in Australia for a total of 12 months in the previous 16 months, irrespective of any absences during the 16 months.

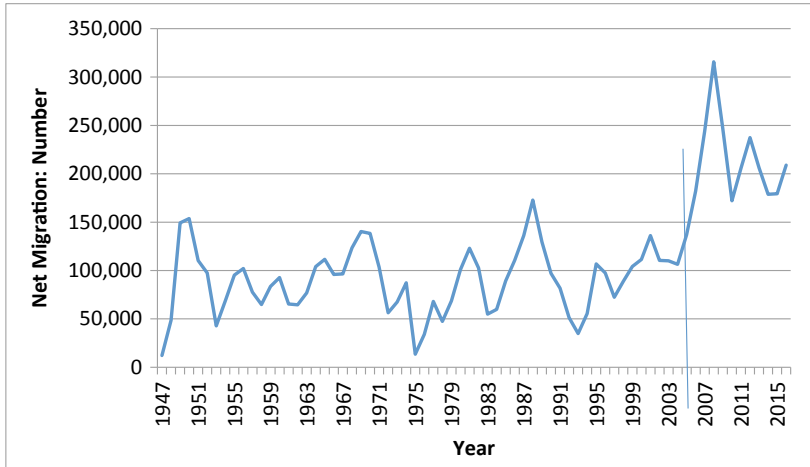


Fig. 2 Net International Migration to Australia, 1947–2016, numbers (*Source* Australian Bureau of Statistics [2019])

In the 1970s, following a quarter of a century of rapid population growth and with the emergence of the ‘limits to growth’-movement, for the first time in earnest, voices emerged in opposition to rapid population growth and hence, to the size of the migration intake (Betts, 1999). However, not in response to the ‘limits to growth’ argument, the Australian birth rate fell in the 1970s from its relatively high ‘baby-boom’ levels to around replacement level and the Australian Government cut the migration intake in response to worsening economic conditions. Throughout history, even back into the nineteenth century, migration intakes were reduced in consequence of economic downturns and reductions in the demand for labour and boosted in the good times.

3 FERTILITY AS AN OBJECT OF POLICY SINCE 1991

Falling fertility was one of the main policy issues at the 2004 federal election at which the main parties had similar but competing policies to support families with children. The then conservative government won the election by winning the outer suburban seats in the big cities where families with children predominate. The policies introduced at the time

provided substantial income support for families with children and a major subsidy to childcare costs. Subsequently, the total fertility rate rose and remained well above its 2001 level until 2017. While there is debate about whether the policy changes stimulated the increase in fertility (McDonald, 2015b), the level of the fertility rate has remained off the political agenda since the 2004 election.

3.1 *The Rationale of Australian Migration Policy Is Changed—The 1990s*

The formal Australian programme of permanent migration is divided into two streams: the Skilled Stream consisting of people selected on the basis of their employment skills and the Family Stream that consists of family members of Australian citizens or permanent residents. In the early 1990s, the Family Stream, which had little relationship to labour demand, constituted two-thirds of the permanent migration programme (Department of Home Affairs, 2018: Table 3.1). Also, in 1991, the unemployment rate of immigrants was 3.3% points higher than that of the Australian-born population (Productivity Commission, 2006: Table 4.7). These circumstances led the then Labor Government to instigate a major reassessment of policy towards migration that was in the interests of Australia's economic development targeting occupations where skill shortages were impeding productive investment.

Following a review of the system, two radical changes of direction took place in 1995. First, the existing points system for the selection of new permanent residents was revised with the points being determined by the skill level of the applicant, and entry was limited to those with higher-level skills as defined by a list of eligible occupations. Points were awarded for qualifications, work experience, age and English proficiency (Boucher, 2016). Second, in response to the increasing internationalization of the Australian economy and to assist international companies to move their workers from country to country, the view was taken that a more comprehensive and efficient form of temporary skilled migration was required (Khoo et al., 2007; Roach, 1995). Thus, temporary migration served as an incentive for such companies to have a base in Australia. The permanent migration process and the then existing forms of temporary migration were slow, cumbersome, sometimes complex and somewhat unpredictable. Later, the temporary skilled migration scheme provided a central role for employer sponsorship in the migration programme by

providing a streamlined approach in a market where speed plays an important role. Only managers, professionals, para-professional and skilled trades occupations were included on the list of allowable skilled migration occupations. Workers without these skills could enter Australia only as New Zealand citizens (who have had free entry to the Australian labour market since the early 1980s), as humanitarian migrants or through the now much more restricted family stream (for more detail, see McDonald, 2015a).

The new policy approach had relatively broad political appeal as employers were more able to deal with their skill shortages and had a major role in the selection of at least temporary skilled workers. Unions also saw the new direction as offering them the opportunity to argue, if necessary, that there were already sufficient workers available in Australia in certain occupations and, hence, that these occupations should not be included on the list of allowable occupations for skilled migration. Since the mid-1990s, there has been continuing debate in Australia, especially between employers and unions, about which occupations to include on the list of occupations eligible for migration, either permanent or temporary. The temporary skilled migration programme (until 2017 designated as the '457' visa sub-class), which covers a much wider range of occupations than the permanent skilled programme and, on the margins, is open to nefarious practices by employers, has been particularly prone to such debate. Successive governments have dealt with this debate through relatively frequent independent or parliamentary enquiries into the organization and operation of the 457 visas.¹ This debate about the inclusion or exclusion of occupations tends to occur mainly at the higher levels of policymaking and political lobbying rather than at the level of the broader population, although both major political parties, in tweaking migration policy, will state that they are doing so in order to prioritize 'jobs for Australians'.

3.2 *Formal Migration Since 1991*

These major policy changes were instigated by a Labor Government soon before they lost government in 1996 but were operationalized by the

¹ See Azarias et al. (2014) for the latest of the independent enquiries and a history of previous enquiries.

new Coalition Government led by John Howard. The new conservative government supported the change in policy direction but initially restricted immigration to a relatively low level (72,000 net in 1997, Fig. 2). Howard's opposition to Asian migration expressed in 1988 had been subject to public criticism before his election in 1996 and had not been in evidence at the time of the 1996 election. By 1996, his own middle-class electorate in Sydney had become heavily Asian. The non-discriminatory foundation of Australian migration policy that came into being in the 1970s remained in place under the new government and the conservative Liberal-National Coalition Party has never returned to the idea of a racially, discriminatory migration programme. Indeed, it has defended non-discriminatory immigration against the more extreme right-wing groups that have emerged in the past 20 years (discussed below).

Importantly, from the inception of the post-war migration programme in 1947 until today, Australia has had a Department of Immigration (under various names across time) and a Minister for Immigration. Although the intake levels in the annual Migration Programme are determined by the Cabinet with input from many sources, public and private, the Minister for Immigration and the Department of Immigration have played a central role in the development of migration policy. This concentration of power over the directions of migration has tended to yield a more coherent approach to migration than is the case in many other countries where debate about migration has no centroid where decisions are taken. It has also helped to generate largely bipartisan support for migration policy across the two major political parties.

Since 1995, this centralized policy-making has led to the gradual transition of the permanent and temporary skilled migration programmes, initially quite separate, into a more integrated system in which permanent migration is most often preceded by a period of temporary residence and application for permanent residence on-shore by temporary skilled migrants, international students and even working holiday makers. Thus, the broad story of policy change in Australia over the past 20 years is one of movement from a cumbersome, inflexible, untargeted migration programme to one that is highly flexible based on initial temporary residence and responsive to shifts in labour demand both in terms of numbers and occupations. The shift to temporary residence in Australia has meant that 4.6% of all employed persons in Australia were temporary residents,

excluding New Zealand citizens (ABS, Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset, 2016 Census).

Debate about population growth in the two countries is dominated by debate about the number of immigrants. As is evident from Fig. 2, annual net international migration increased in the years of the Howard conservative government from 72,000 in 1997 to 244,000 in 2007. This occurred without opposition from the Labor Party. In 2008, the first year of the new Rudd Labor Government, net migration rose to the unprecedentedly high level of 316,000, that is 1.5% of population (see Fig. A.11.2 in the online appendix). This was caused by a sudden increase in the numbers of international students in the Vocational and Further Education sector (53,000 increase in grants in one year from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009) consisting mainly of persons from South Asia taking short courses in the hope of qualifying for permanent residence in Australia (Department of Immigration & Border Protection, 2014), aided by less-than-honest migration agents in South Asia and unscrupulous education providers in Australia. This strategy was scotched in February 2010 through a revamp of the skilled migration occupation list. Since then, net migration has fallen back to an average of around 200,000 per annum (about 0.8% of population).

Since 2012, the Australian Government has set the Migration Programme at 190,000 per annum every year, two-thirds being skilled migrants and one-third being family migrants very largely consisting of spouses and partners of Australian citizens and permanent residents. On top of this, there has been an intake of between 13,000 and 22,000 humanitarian immigrants, the highest level being set to accommodate Syrian and Iraqi refugees in 2016–2017 (ABS, 2019). The 190,000 level is in the centre of a range that economic-demographic modelling has shown produces the most favourable effect on the age distribution of the population defined by the impact of the level of net migration on GDP per capita (McDonald & Temple, 2009, 2010, 2014).

New Zealand's skilled permanent and temporary migration policies have been broadly similar to Australia's, although certain outcomes differ. Hawthorne (2011) provides a detailed comparison of the skilled migration policies of the two countries and the outcomes. At the time to which she referred the first decade of the twenty-first century, New Zealand's skilled entry consisted largely of persons already working in New Zealand as temporary skilled workers, and the largest source country was the UK. A smaller percentage of the skilled stream entry in Australia

applied on-shore and consisted mainly of former students. Because of this emphasis on students, the main source countries were India and China. New Zealand and Australia also have similar Family and Humanitarian programmes. In numerical terms, net migration to New Zealand has been subject to much greater volatility than has been the case for Australia. While net migration to Australia from 1947 onwards has never been negative and rarely even close to zero, in New Zealand, negative or near-zero net migration has been a common occurrence since 1992 (see Fig. A.11.3 in the online appendix). On the other hand, in 2016, net migration rose to 1.52% of the total population, a level above any level reached by Australia since 1991. In recognition of this very high level, the New Zealand Labor Party introduced a policy to reduce migration by 20,000 to 30,000 to the 2017 election and was duly elected (Trevett, 2017).

The fluctuations in net migration to New Zealand are to a large extent the result of the number of New Zealand citizens that move to Australia. Under the long-standing Trans-Tasman agreement, Australian and New Zealand citizens are free to move between the two countries. At times when economic conditions are favourable in Australia, migration from New Zealand to Australia tends to be high. In 2001, Australia moved to restrict movement from New Zealand by excluding New Zealand citizens from eligibility for Australian social security benefits and simultaneously making it difficult for New Zealand citizens to obtain Australian citizenship. Despite this policy shift, New Zealanders moved to Australia in very large numbers during the economic boom of the 2000s. In September 2016, there were 677,000 New Zealand citizens in Australia, equivalent to about 15% of the total population of New Zealand. Despite the continuing concerted efforts of the New Zealand Government to convince the Australian Government to provide New Zealanders in Australia with Australian citizenship, the Australian Government resisted until July 2017 when a pathway to citizenship was opened to New Zealand citizens of 'good character' who had lived in Australia for five years and had an annual income above \$53,900.

4 THE POLITICS OF REGULAR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1991

4.1 *Discrimination on the Basis of Race*

As already observed, the conservative government of Howard transformed both the level and composition of migration to Australia in its 11-year term (1996 to 2007). Despite an earlier objection (1988) by Howard to the level of migration from Asia, the majority of migrants during this period came from Asia, especially China and India. These two countries are by far the main source countries of international students and the transition from international student to permanent resident (often via periods on other temporary visa types) has been a major reason for the high proportion of new permanent residents coming from these countries. Between 2006 and 2011, 87% of the increment to the overseas-born population of Australia was Asian-born. This percentage rose to close to 100% in the 2011–2016 period with 59% of the increase in the Asian-born component of the population coming from China and India (McDonald, 2019).

Upon his rise to Prime Minister in 1996, Howard was confronted by the election to the House of Representatives of an independent, disendorsed member of his own party, Pauline Hanson, who, for the past 20 years, has attempted to position herself and her One Nation Party as the voice of the radical right. In her maiden speech in 1996, Hanson said that Australia was in danger of being “swamped by Asians” (Hanson, 1996).

Howard set out to distance himself and the government from these views essentially by ignoring Hanson. In his first term of office, Howard and the then Leader of the Labor Opposition, Kim Beazley, led a successful bipartisan motion in the Australian Parliament against racial discrimination and reaffirming support for a non-discriminatory immigration policy. In 1988, Howard had voted against a similar motion brought to the parliament by the Hawke Labor Government.

In 2018, organized opposition to Asian migration tends to be confined to the electorally unpopular, extreme right, especially the Australia First Party. Being on the fringe, this party expresses its views very forthrightly calling for the reinstatement of the White Australia Policy and inviting all non-White Australians to leave Australia permanently (Australia First Party, 2019). At the 2016 federal election, it did not run any candidates

and, in 2018, its leader ran for the federal seat of Longman (Queensland) in a by-election and won 0.3% of the vote.

4.2 *Environment, Infrastructure and the Economy*

The level of immigration in Australia rose during the 2000s because of very strong labour demand during the long, economic boom that was centred primarily upon mining development (Fig. 2). In this period, there was a considerable increase in migration to then mining boom state of Western Australia while the traditional centres of Australian immigration, Sydney and Melbourne, continued to receive large numbers. The opening of new onshore pathways to permanent residence was supported by both major political parties during this time and net migration from New Zealand to Australia ballooned reaching a peak of around 40,000 in one year.

There has been no major increase in unemployment in Australia since the early 1990s and the country has gone without an economic recession for over 26 years. Even during the global financial crisis commencing in late 2008, the Australian economic growth rate never dropped below zero for two consecutive quarters and the increases in unemployment were moderate. For the first time in an economic downturn, the Australian Government did not cut the migration intake and there is a belief in government circles that that decision coupled with the economic stimuli put in place by the then Rudd Labor Government saw the country through the crisis. This perceived success has seen subsequent governments maintain a relatively high and constant level of migration; that is, the economic imperative has prevailed in immigration decision-making.

This constancy of migration policy occurred despite occasional blips along the way. Following the release of official population projections by the Australian Treasury showing a population of 36 million people by 2050, in October 2009, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd welcomed this future saying that he believed in a “big Australia” (ABC, 2009). The broad sentiment was supported by the then Leader of the Opposition (later, Prime Minister) Malcolm Turnbull, but he added that this result was good “so long as we have the infrastructure to enable us to live here in a sustainable way” (ABC, 2009). This statement, echoed by a number of other commentators at the time, is typical of the tension in the Australian debate between the negative effects of immigration on infrastructure in

cities and the positive effects on productive investment through facilitation of the entry of skilled labour. The debate received further impetus in 2010, when Julia Gillard, wishing to establish differences between Rudd and herself in her successful attempt to unseat Rudd as the Labor Prime Minister, distanced herself from the ‘big Australia’ position (cf. Gordon, 2010). Gillard also launched an attack upon the temporary skilled visa scheme saying that it was taking the jobs of Australians. When she became Prime Minister, however, there was substantially no change to migration policy and there was an essentially bipartisan approach to immigration at the 2010 federal election.

Since the decline of construction activity in the mining industry, international migration to Western Australia has fallen away to a low level and instead has been concentrated heavily on Australia’s two major cities, Sydney and Melbourne. Both cities, especially Melbourne, have been experiencing rapid population growth. In 2015–2016, Melbourne had net positive migration from the rest of the State of Victoria and from every other state and territory in Australia, besides considerable international migration. Its population grew by 120,000 in one year (2.7% per annum) (McDonald, 2018b). This very high level of growth put pressure on urban infrastructure, especially on transport and upon the housing market. Consequently, the anti-migration lobby that has continued to operate at a low level since the early 1970s has been given new impetus (ABC, 2019).

Concern has been expressed about the emergence of ‘two Australias’, Sydney and Melbourne, on one hand, and the rest of Australia on the other, with Sydney and Melbourne being affluent and Asian and the rest of the country being non-affluent and non-Asian (Megalogenis, 2017). However, since Australian federation, Sydney and Melbourne have always been considered to be different worlds compared with much of the rest of Australia. This is the reason that the National Party exists—to look after the interests of ‘country’ people. Continued and very strong support for multiculturalism with 83–86% agreeing that multiculturalism has been good for Australia (see discussion below) tends to argue against adding a new racial dimension to this very long-term political reality.

So far, the relatively high and constant intake of migrants has not encountered major opposition from the main political parties including, importantly, the Greens Party, which says little about regular migration. Even Hanson’s One Nation Party is sitting on the fence in stating in its

aims that migration should take economic investment into account while not overloading infrastructure or creating unemployment.

The Liberal-National Coalition Government has recently merged immigration policy with homeland security and border control. Some policy directions give the strong impression that the border control authorities wish to subject new immigrants to greater scrutiny from the security perspective. This includes a proposal to introduce a provisional permanent residence visa for skilled immigrants—provisional until they have proven themselves to be good Australians—and a bill to make citizenship much more difficult to obtain. This latter bill proposed an English test at university entry level as a prerequisite for citizenship. This would have precluded a very large number of refugees from obtaining citizenship along with many partners of Australian citizens (Mares, 2017). The bill was opposed by the Labor Party and was defeated in the Senate. While these policy directions may not affect the number of people migrating to Australia because labour demand remains high, it could affect the quality of the skilled arrivals and be highly discriminatory in relation to refugees accepted into Australia whose levels of English language proficiency are very often low. By 2020, the Coalition Government appeared to have moved away from increasing the English language requirement as a condition of citizenship.

5 THE POLITICS OF IRREGULAR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

In Australia today, the general perception of migration policy is that it is policy on irregular migration, essentially people arriving by boat and claiming asylum. The two major political parties and Hanson's One Nation Party are in agreement that irregular arrival by boat must be stopped completely. This is based on a fear that very large numbers will arrive if the border was open, on the concern that asylum seekers will die while attempting to reach Australian landfall (and there have been some very graphic incidences of this), that this route may be used by terrorists wishing to infiltrate Australian society, that many people will arrive who are not political refugees, and that this route serves the interests of people smugglers and comes at the expense of already assessed refugees in UNHCR camps around the world. Based on polling, a majority of Australians are strongly opposed to irregular arrival by boat. The Liberal-National Coalition ran very heavily upon a 'stop the boats' agenda at the

2013 election and considers that this position was an important element in its resounding victory in that election. Since 2013, the government has implemented draconian policies that have indeed stopped the boats.

The approach has been to break the people smuggler business model and research among potential Afghan refugees in Iran has shown that this goal has been achieved (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2017). Before the flow of boats stopped, boats were intercepted on the high sea and sent back to Indonesia, sometimes by transferring the occupants to unsinkable life vessels. While the Indonesian Government expressed objection to this approach, there is also a degree of acceptance because the Indonesian Government does not want to deal with large flows of irregular migrants through its country heading for Australia. Most controversially, asylum seekers who arrived on Australian territory immediately after the crack-down were shifted off to processing centres on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and on Nauru. The number held offshore rose from 571 to 2,342 from July 2013 to February 2014 (Parliament of Australia, 2016). Women and children in these groups were gradually moved to Australia but many men remain in these dire circumstances. The Greens Party has been largely alone in promoting a softer policy on irregular arrivals by boat. This has not emerged as a major area of policy debate at the May 2019 federal election. Neither of the major parties wishes to be perceived by the electorate as soft on irregular arrivals by boat.

In 2018, it emerged that asylum seekers are arriving in large numbers by plane on tourist visas. Having arrived, they claim asylum and apply for residence usually on the ground they are unable to practise their religion in their own country. The largest group are Christians from Malaysia and China (Administrative Appeals Court, 2019). On claiming asylum, they are given a bridging visa and allowed to remain in Australia while their case is being heard. This process can last 2 to 4 years. During this time, they are permitted to work. As it is relatively well known that there is a low success rate for these applications and as the people concerned usually do not employ legal advice, there is a suspicion that this is a strategy for lower-skilled people to obtain temporary work rights in Australia. Cases are heard by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for which the caseload rose from 17,480 in July 2016 to 50,887 in October 2018. As the volume of cases is clogging up the court system thus extending the stays of the applicants, it can be expected that some action will be taken to restrict this activity (Crowe, 2018).

6 PUBLIC OPINION ON AUSTRALIA'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

There is substantial evidence to indicate that among Western nations Australia and Canada rank as the most receptive to immigration (Markus, 2012; Reitz, 2011). A major survey conducted between 2012 and 2014 in 142 countries by Gallup World Poll provides scope for comparison across regions. The aggregated results (see Table A.11.1 in the online appendix) indicate that support for immigration at current or higher levels was at 69% in the Oceania region (Australia and New Zealand), 57% in North America (Canada and the US), and at 38% in Europe (IOM, 2015). The Gallup 2016–2017 Migrant Acceptance Index found that Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) ranked first and North America second. In the ranking of 138 countries, Australia ranked seventh (Gallup, 2017).

Questions similar to North American surveys used in Australian polling provide the basis for cross-country comparison (see Table A.11.2 in the online appendix). 83% of respondents agreed that ‘immigrants are generally good for the Australian economy’, while only a minority at 29% agreed that ‘immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in Australia’ (ANU Poll, 2015).

The 2016 Lowy Institute Poll, an annual survey with a focus on foreign policy, found that just 24% of respondents disagreed with the proposition that ‘overall, immigration has a positive impact on the economy of Australia, while 73 percent agreed’; 25% disagreed with the view that ‘immigrants strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents, 72 percent agreed’. A larger proportion, but still a minority at 35%, were in agreement that ‘immigrants take away jobs from other Australians’ (Oliver, 2016). In 2018, the Scanlon Foundation survey found agreement with this proposition at 31% (Markus, 2018).

Beginning in 2007, and on an annual basis since 2009, the Scanlon Foundation has conducted surveys of Australian attitudes to immigration, cultural diversity and social cohesion. Eleven national surveys have been conducted, with additional local area and experimental surveys to test the impact on results of different modes of surveying (Markus, various years). The Scanlon Foundation surveys include a question which has been a staple of Australian surveying since 1951, which asks respondents if they consider the immigration intake to be too high, about right, or too low (Goot, 1999). The record of polling indicates considerable volatility of

response. In periods of increasing or relatively high unemployment, there has been majority of support for the view that the intake is too high. In times of economic growth and low unemployment, there is majority support for the level of current immigration or its increase. During the recession of the early 1990s, a large majority (over 70% at its peak) considered the intake to be ‘too high’ while, since 2000, this has been a minority viewpoint in most surveys.

Over the years 2001–2009, most surveys found that the proportion who considered the intake to be ‘about right’ or ‘too low’ was in the range 54 to 57%. In 2010, in the context of the ‘big Australia’ debates, the Scanlon Foundation survey found that agreement that the intake was ‘about right’ or ‘too low’ fell to 46%, while the ‘too high’ response increased by ten percentage points to 47%. This finding was almost identical to the 46% average result from five polls conducted by survey agencies in the period March–July 2010 (The Age 2010 as cited in Markus, 2012; Roy Morgan, 2010). This suggests that public opinion is at least somewhat sensitive to fluctuations in the public debate.

The increased negativity towards immigration was temporary. Between 2011 and 2013, the proportion in agreement that the intake was too high was in the range 38–42% and, between 2014 and 2016, a lower 34–35%. In 2016, a substantial majority (59%) considered that the intake was ‘about right’ or ‘too low’ and, in 2017, a marginally lower 56% (Table 1). Since 2016, there has been an increase in the proportion who consider the intake to be ‘too high’, an increase of nine percentage points to 43% in 2018, although the finding of the Scanlon Foundation surveys is that

Table 1 ‘What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia?’ 2012–2018

	<i>Too high (%)</i>	<i>About right (%)</i>	<i>Too low (%)</i>	<i>Refused/Don't know (%)</i>
2012	38	42	14	7
2013	42	38	13	7
2014	35	42	17	8
2015	35	41	19	5
2016	34	40	19	7
2017	37	40	16	7
2018	43	35	17	4

Source Scanlon Foundation (Markus, 2012–2018)

the majority (52%) are of the view that the intake is ‘about right’ or ‘too low’.

Several surveys conducted in 2016 and 2017 support the pattern indicated by Scanlon Foundation surveys, with those who consider the intake to be too high being in the range 34–42%. Thus, the 2016 Australian Election Study found support for a reduction in immigration at 42%, the 2017 Lowy Institute Poll obtained agreement with the view that the intake was too high at 40% and the 2017 Life in Australia survey an identical 40%. In 2018, the October Fairfax-Ipsos poll found 45% in favour of a reduction in the intake and the Life in Australia survey 44%. But a number of other polls, using a range of questions and sampling methodologies, found 54% to 72% in support of a reduction in the intake, findings that received prominent attention in the Australian media (Markus, 2017, 2018).

In sum, majority public opinion in Australia, in contrast to a number of European countries, accepts the reality that Australia is a country of immigration. Thus, the eleven Scanlon Foundation national surveys conducted since 2007 have obtained a consistent measure of agreement, in the range 62–68%, with the proposition that ‘accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger’.

Also, in contrast to Europe, the concept of multiculturalism continues to obtain a high level of positive support. Since 2013, the Scanlon Foundation surveys asked for response to the proposition that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia’. Agreement has been consistent, in the range 83–86%. Of those who are favourable towards multiculturalism, the support of a substantial proportion is conditional on signs indicating a commitment to integrate, to accept what are seen as Australian values. For the majority, multiculturalism is understood as a two-way process of change, requiring adaptation by both Australia-born and immigrant. The 2016–2018 Scanlon Foundation surveys presented respondents with two propositions that ‘we should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this country’, and ‘people who come to Australia should change their behaviour to be more like Australians’. Close to two out of three respondents (in the range 60–66%) indicated agreement with both propositions. Immigration is an issue which can evoke very strong feelings, with entrenched negative views held by close to 10% of the population, indicated by the 10–15% who disagree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia. When those with strongly held negative views and those tending negative are

combined, surveys find that more than one-third of Australians agree that the immigration intake is too high (43% in 2018) and 26–30% disagree with the value of a diverse intake.

There are a range of views on immigration and cultural diversity, as on all issues within the political realm, and relatively high levels of negative opinion towards Muslims. Strident minority viewpoints are in evidence in social media, public campaigns and during elections. The populist One Nation Party, which received 4.3% of the national vote in the 2016 Senate election, but stronger levels of support on a regional basis, with voter support in excess of 25% in a number of Queensland state electorates, channels discontent with a particular focus on immigration. The 2017 Scanlon Foundation survey found that 78% of One Nation supporters ‘strongly agree’ with the proposition that ‘people who come to Australia should change their behaviour to be more like Australians’ and 82% disagree with the value of a diverse immigration intake (Markus, 2017).

Australia does as well as any country in its immigration and settlement policies—but there is no shortage of evidence of the challenges posed by immigration for host society and immigrant.

7 THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

In response to the calls for lower migration from their Coalition colleagues, the two Ministers most involved in setting the level of the Australian migration programme, the Treasurer and the Minister for Home Affairs, in rapid-fire, made strong statements in support of current migration policy and their two departments published a joint report which supports the continuation of migration at its present level (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). On 4 May 2018, a *National Compact on Permanent Migration* (Migration Council of Australia, 2018) was issued with the signatories being the leading business organizations, unions including the Australian Council of Trade Unions and community organizations. This Compact is a powerful statement in support of current migration levels and of migration in general, stating:

Australia is a country based on multicultural values where migrants enjoy the equality of opportunity to participate and benefit from Australia’s social, economic and political life. As our economic opportunities in the Asia Pacific continue to advance and our population ages, Australia will need migrants to bring skills and youth to complement and develop our

domestic workforce and to help to grow the national income needed to support our high standard of living. (Migration Council of Australia, 2018)

The strength of this statement and the inclusion of several unions as signatories suggest that it is unlikely that Australia will move very far from its present migration programme targets in the short term. This conclusion is reinforced by a recent analysis of future labour demand in Australia that projects a 16% increase in the number of employed persons in the next eight years and little capacity to meet that demand from local sources (McDonald, 2018b; Shah & Dixon, 2018).

In the 2018 election in the State of Victoria, the Labor Party won with a massive majority while supporting the high immigration levels that have led to the rapid growth of Melbourne. Of the eight states and territories, only New South Wales has called for a lower migrant intake and six of the eight would like to see more immigrants coming to their jurisdictions.

In December 2018, the level of the migration intake was the leading agenda item on a meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) at which the Prime Minister meets with the Premiers and First Ministers of all the states and territories. At the invitation of the Prime Minister, an author of this chapter, Peter McDonald, was asked to present the argument to COAG on why migration should be continued at its present level. He focussed on two main arguments: (1) that at least for the next decade, labour demand will outstrip labour supply with migration as the only option for balance, and (2) that migration (as discussed earlier in this chapter) has a beneficial effect upon population ageing. At this meeting, it was agreed that the states and territories will have a greater role in setting the migration target and that efforts should be made to spread the immigrants more broadly across Australia.

The forces calling for much reduced levels of international migration in Australia rallied again with the 2019 federal election in view. Dissident members on the right wing of the ruling Coalition Government such as the deposed former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, were among those calling for a much lower migration level (a reduction from 190,000 to 70,000). The Premier of the largest state New South Wales, Gladys Berejiklian, called for a halving of net migration to that state in order to relieve pressure upon the city of Sydney. She set up a review panel to advise her on this strategy (cf. SBS Korean, 2018). The NSW panel's report was provided to the Premier but not published. Berejiklian and her party won the 2019 election in New South Wales despite taking no specific approach

to immigration, and she won the election. A prominent former retailer, Dick Smith, poured money into advertising to substantially reduce the migration intake on the grounds of congestion in the two major cities. He also intended to fund anti-migration candidates in the 2019 federal election.

Those opposed to present migration levels pointed to the recent lowering of the migration intake by the new Labor Government of New Zealand—without pointing out that, before it was reduced, the rate of net migration to New Zealand was almost twice the Australian rate and that the new, lower New Zealand target remains above the current Australian rate.

The new objections to the level of immigration have been based largely upon congestion and housing prices in the two large cities of Sydney and Melbourne. In announcing a small cut in the immigration programme (190,000 to 160,000), the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, referred to congestion in Sydney and Melbourne as justification for this cut (cf. Greene, 2019). The housing price argument, however, fell away in 2019 with substantial and continuing falls in prices in Sydney and Melbourne due primarily to more stringent lending restrictions by the banks. Both major political parties at the 2019 election supported the growth of the satellite cities surrounding Sydney and Melbourne through the construction of fast and connecting train services. For example, a new 32-minute service between the regional city of Geelong and Melbourne was proposed by the Coalition Party. And both major parties emphasized infrastructure spending to relieve congestion.

8 CONCLUSION

Australia has a long history of migration and, since the cessation in the 1970s of discriminatory selection, immigrants have come to Australia from all of the countries of the world. In particular, there has been rapid growth in the numbers of people with Asian origins. Opposition to regular migration on the grounds of race or religion exists in Australia but it carries very little political weight and has virtually no impact on election results. The policy of multiculturalism is supported by five out of six Australians. It could be said that as Australia has taken people from a vast array of cultures, it has become more and more accepting of multiculturalism. Opposition to undocumented migration remains very strong across the political spectrum in both Australia and New Zealand and, in

this regard, it has been argued that the cessation of irregular arrivals by boat has enabled successive governments to provide greater legitimacy to higher levels of regular migration. In the Australian case, very strict border controls have led to higher rather than lower levels of migration.

A majority of Australians consider that migration provides economic benefits to Australia and both the major political parties hold this view as well. There are pockets of opposition to the population growth that migration brings based on impacts to the environment and crowding in the major cities, but these objections do not feed through to a major impact on the ways that people vote. Improved economic well-being is one of the principal factors that influence the way that Australians vote and, from this perspective, migration and population growth are seen to be positives by most voters.

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