SESSION 3

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF MIGRATION

10 Immigration and public opinion

Andrew Markus
Monash University

The issue of a sustainable population for Australia is in part one that relates to the social impact of immigration. What level of population increase can be accommodated with minimal impact on social cohesion? Are there indicators that point to a level at which immigration would cause significant threat to social cohesion?

10.1 Lack of systematic research in Australia

These questions are not amenable to simple and unambiguous answers — but they are made particularly difficult to explore in the Australian context as a result of the limited availability of quality survey data. There is much polling for the media, but relatively little serious social science surveying on population issues. We are not even close to a comprehensive understanding of the outlook and experiences of recent immigrant cohorts, or of the dynamics of population interaction in areas of high immigrant concentration.

Researchers at the Australian National University (ANU) conduct the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA), which is presented as 'Australia's major academic social survey'. AuSSA has been conducted every two years since 2003 and contributes to the International Social Survey Program and the World Values Survey. It is a mailed, self-administered survey that achieves some 4000 completions. In recent years it has been partly funded by the selling of space — that is, outside interests are given the opportunity to pay for the inclusion of questions. In the 2009 survey, the only questions bearing on population issues were paid for by researchers external to the ANU, and the chosen wording was contentious (a point discussed below). The commercialisation of this leading survey threatens its integrity and points to research funding issues in Australia. This observation is not, however, to question the significance of AuSSA and of important analyses of

population issues that have been produced using its data, notably the analysis of the 2003 survey by Murray Goot and Ian Watson (2005).

A significant recent development is the initiative of the Scanlon Foundation to establish an ongoing social cohesion research and action program, which has so far yielded three national polls (2007, 2009 and 2010) and two surveys (2007 and 2009) within Melbourne and Sydney local government areas. These substantial surveys, employing 62 questions in 2009 and 74 questions in 2010, with a combined total of more than 9000 respondents, provide scope for detailed analysis of trends in opinion on population issues (Markus and Dharmalingam 2008; Markus and Arnup 2010; Markus 2010a).

Australia, however, lacks surveys to match the reach and longevity of leading overseas research. The British Social Attitudes survey is the primary social research survey in Britain. It has been administered annually since 1983 to monitor and interpret the British public's changing attitudes towards social, economic, political and moral issues. It uses a comprehensive questionnaire, reaches a sample of 3000 respondents, and is administered by trained interviewers. New questions are added each year to reflect current issues. Its coverage has included a broad range of questions on race relations and immigration, and specialist reports have been prepared using British Social Attitudes survey data, including 'Trends in racial prejudice' (Rothon and Heath 2003) and 'Understanding the rising tide of anti-immigration sentiment' (McLaren and Johnson 2004).

In addition, wide-ranging citizenship surveys in Britain have been conducted biennially since 2001 and on an ongoing basis since 2007. The first three citizenship surveys were each administered to some 15 000 respondents in face-to-face interviews taking approximately 60 minutes to complete. The surveys reached a representative core sample of almost 10 000 respondents aged 16 and above, with a minority ethnic boost of 5000 and scope for additional surveying in key areas (ESDS 2011).

The Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration has for more than 20 years undertaken annual surveys to track attitudes to immigration. The Ethnic Diversity Survey, conducted in 2002 by Statistics Canada in conjunction with other departments, set a benchmark with the interviewing of 42 500 respondents, utilising a rigorous sample based on the 2001 Census (Statistics Canada 2011). Within the European Union, major surveys include the annual Eurobarometer, established in 1973, with a minimum of 1000 respondents in each member state, and the biennial European Social Survey, which reaches more than 30 000 respondents. Data relevant to population issues is analysed by various European agencies, including

the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, established in 1997 (European Commission Public Opinion 2011; European Social Survey 2011).

10.2 Media coverage of polls

Australia lacks a culture in which social science research is valued as an important public resource. In public discussion, Australians are much more likely to ridicule government funding of research than to welcome authoritative national polling. Public opinion research is a field (and there are many others) in which there is no critical mass of researchers; nor is there a research culture in which work is constantly held up to scrutiny. Opinion polls become the plaything of the media; reporters are simply required to generate provocative headlines; there is no requirement that they have capacity to interpret survey findings.

Three recent examples illustrate the Australian context. Associate Professor Katharine Betts (Swinburne) and Dr Bob Birrell (Monash), both of the Monash Centre for Population and Urban Research, provided funding for the inclusion of one key and three subsidiary questions in the 2009 AuSSA survey. They presented respondents with the statement 'In 2008-09 immigration to Australia was higher than in any other year' and then asked in blunt terms, 'Do you think Australia needs more people?' Only two response options were provided, yes or no, with no middle ground.

This was a strange way to conduct academic research: surveys usually serve the function of measuring attitudes held by respondents, not the response that can be elicited by a contentious statement.[1] In response to this statement and question, Betts reported that 69 per cent (subsequently revised to 72 per cent) of respondents indicated that they did not believe that Australia needed more people. Those findings were then released by the Swinburne University Media Centre under the headline 'Voters against population growth' and won two rounds of uncritical media attention (Curtin 2010; Lazzaro 2010; SUMC 2010; see also Betts 2010a and 2010b). Interestingly, when exactly the same question was asked in June 2010 in an ANU Poll, but without the contentious preamble, a markedly lower 52 per cent were of view that Australia did not need more people (McAllister 2010).

[1] The level of immigration needs to be considered in the context of population size; two million immigrants arriving in China would have markedly less impact than the same number arriving in Australia; when immigration is considered on a per capita basis, the level of immigration in 2008-2009 was far lower than, for example, many years in the 1950s and 1960s – as its peak in those years the migration program size as a percentage of Australia's population was closed to 1.4 per cent, in 2009 it was close to 0.8 per cent.

In June 2010, in the context of much negative reporting of 'boat people', the Australian Red Cross apparently decided that it would affect public debate with its own survey. It included just seven questions, several of a hypothetical nature and of a character designed to maximise positive responses: 'If you and your family lived in a conflict zone and were under threat, would you seek to flee to a safe country?'; 'Would you use all the money and assets you have to get to a safe country?'; 'How much do you agree or disagree that people fleeing persecution should be able to seek protection in another country?'; 'How willing would you be to assist a refugee in your community to settle in Australia?'. It also asked 'Do you believe asylum seekers who have arrived by boat are acting illegally?'

The Red Cross release of findings was headlined 'Australians show sympathy with refugees'. It was reported that a large majority of Australians (86 per cent) would flee to a safe country if they lived in a conflict zone; would use all of their money to get to a safe country; agreed that people fleeing persecution should be able to seek protection in another country; and were willing to assist a refugee. But its media release omitted the question of most immediate political bearing — public views on the legality of asylum seekers arriving by boat. Rather than precise results, as presented for all other questions, there was a brief reference in the organisation's press release to a 'lack of public understanding about the law concerning refugees'. The omission passed without media notice (Australian Red Cross 2010; SBS World News 2010).

A last example concerns the Challenging Racism project. This project, led by Professor Kevin Dunn of the University of Western Sydney, conducted surveys in 2001 and 2006 to 2008 with funding from the Australian Research Council, a number of human rights and equal opportunity commissions and VicHealth. Some 12 500 respondents completed surveys, and the results were presented as the largest project of its kind undertaken in Australia. The project received extensive coverage in February 2011, most of it focused on negative findings (ABC News 2011; Barry 2011; Challenging Racism; Griffin 2011; compare Johnston 2011).

Although little noted in the media, at least some findings were open to serious question. The project simply added data from surveys conducted at different points in time. It presented data for regions (in some cases with fewer than 100 respondents and, in the case of the Eyre statistical division, comprising 11 local government areas, with 19 respondents) in tables headed 'Racist attitude indicators'. The tables included findings on the level of negative sentiment towards specific groups: nearly half of Australians (49 per cent) were indicated to be 'anti-Muslim', nearly a quarter 'anti-Indigenous' (28 per cent), 'anti-Asian' (24 per cent) and 'anti-Semitic' (23 per cent).

What was missed in the media coverage was that these results were obtained from a single question: 'In your opinion how concerned would you feel if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of Muslim faith', Jewish faith, Asian background, Aboriginal background, and so on. The potential meanings of such a question were not explored; rather, a straight line was drawn to 'Racist attitude indicators'. Furthermore, the question was asked with an uneven response frame, providing respondents with one positive and four negative response options (all four indicating 'concern'). The four negative responses were then simply tallied without the application of weights for strength of opinion to provide the indicator of 'racist attitudes'. Using this procedure, an indication of 'slight' concern was given the same weight as 'extreme' concern.

Public opinion polling is a 'science' fraught with difficulty. Poll results are affected by the specific wording of questions, the placement of questions within a survey, sample size and methodology, mode of administration and timing. The pattern of response is in part dictated by the type of question asked. Majority opinion on many issues is vague, half-formed and inconsistent, and only to be placed in dichotomous categories with caution. On population issues a survey respondent may typically support both assimilation and multiculturalism, and both favour cultural diversity and indicate concern over the division that it produces (see, for example, Goot 1999, p. 31; Goot and Watson 2005, p. 185).

Best practice in surveying requires substantial attention to questionnaire design, with reference to wording, response frame, reliability checks, question order and rankings of relative importance. A survey may find negative views at the level of 70 per cent or 80 per cent, but unless there is evidence to establish strength of opinion the finding is incomplete. Where possible, there should be pretesting of the survey instrument and enough questions to enable the development of attitudinal scales (see, for example, Rea and Parker 2005; DeVellis 2003). Finally, results should be considered in the context of other relevant survey research.

10.3 Key indicators of Australian opinion

The following discussion presents my interpretation of some key indicators of Australian opinion.

Australians are among the most open to immigration

There is evidence to indicate that Australia and Canada rank as the most receptive to immigration among western countries, although the level of support over time is

not consistent. A key source for cross-national comparison is the International Social Survey Program survey conducted in 2003. It ranks Canada and Australia at the top level: over 60 per cent of respondents support the existing intake or its increase, and the next level of support is below 50 per cent (see table 10.1).

Table 10.1 **Attitude to immigration intake, selected countries 2003**

	Number of immigrants coming to country			
	Increase	*Remain the same*	*Increase & remain the same*	*Decrease*
Canada	29	39	68	32
Australia	23	38	61	39
Spain	10	39	49	52
Denmark	10	39	49	51
United States	11	32	44	56
Portugal	3	41	44	56
New Zealand	16	28	43	57
Sweden	12	30	42	58
Ireland	9	32	41	59
Austria	7	32	39	61
France	8	26	34	66
Hungary	2	29	31	69
Germany – West	5	24	30	70
Netherlands	4	26	30	70
Norway	7	22	29	71
Great Britain	6	16	22	78
Russia	4	13	18	83

Source: ISSP 2003. The Australian survey was completed by 2183 respondents and was in the field from 27 August to 24 December 2003. The question employed a five-point response frame: Do you think the number of immigrants to [COUNTRY] nowadays should be increased a lot; increased a little; remain the same; reduced a little; reduced a lot. Subtotals may very +/- 1 per cent due to rounding. (ZA 2005)

Between 1998 and 2009, there was a high level of support for the immigration intake; support fell between 2009 and 2010.

Questions relating to the immigration intake have been a staple of polling for over 50 years and provide the most reliable basis for a precise understanding of trends in opinion. These questions produce volatile results. Whereas in the years from 1990 to 1995 a large majority (over 70 per cent at the peak) considered that the intake was too high, surveys after 1998 indicated a significant and consistent shift in opinion, such that opposition to the intake became the minority viewpoint and for eight years the level of those considering the intake to be about right or too low was in the 53–57 per cent range, in large measure consistent with the 2003 International Social Survey Program finding. Over the 12 months to June 2010, however, there

was a shift, with the result that the most recent polls indicate an even division of opinion (see table 10.2).

Table 10.2 **Attitude to level of immigration, Australia, selected years**

Year	*Too high* *%*	*About right / too few* *%*
1996	62	32
1997	64	28
2001	41	54
2002	41	54
2003	37	57
2005	39	56
2007	36	53
2009	37	55
2010	47	46

Sources: Various polls, 1996-2005 (Markus, Jupp and McDonald 2009, p. 126), Scanlon Foundation polls 2007-2010 (Markus and Dharmalingam 2008; Markus and Arnup 2010; Markus 2010a).

Thus, the Scanlon Foundation survey in June 2010 found that 47 per cent of respondents considered that the intake was 'too high'. In seven polls administered by telephone in the period from July 2009 to July 2010, the highest proportion who considered the intake to be too high was 54 per cent, with an average of 46 per cent for five polls other than the Scanlon Foundation poll conducted between March and July 2010[2] (see table 10.3).

Majority opinion supports the view that the Australian Government does not provide sufficient infrastructure for future population growth

The Scanlon Foundation survey asked respondents to rate the record of the Australian Government in providing the infrastructure for future population growth. Only 24 per cent rated it as good (2 per cent 'very good'), 52 per cent as poor (20 per cent 'very poor'), and 21 per cent as 'neither good nor poor'. The highest proportion of those giving a poor rating were residents of NSW (59 per cent),

2 See Markus (2009); *The Age*, 10 November 2009 and 19 April 2010; Roy Morgan Research, Finding number 4536 (reporting polls in March and July 2010); Essential Report, 5 July 2010; Nielsen Poll in Crikey (Pollytics), 1 August 2010. This excludes an online poll conducted in July 2010 for Stanford University and the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, which found that, in response to a strongly worded negative proposition 'Right now, Australia is taking too many immigrants', 33 per cent 'agreed strongly' and 36 per cent 'agreed', a total of 69 per cent in agreement. In contrast, in response to a positive proposition ('Immigrants have a very favourable effect on Australia'), 9 per cent 'agreed strongly' and 49 per cent 'agreed', a total of 58 per cent in agreement (Iyengar and Jackman 2010).

Table 10.3 **Attitude to the level of immigration and population growth, July 2009 to July 2010**

Question	*Increase/ reduce immigration*	*Current intake*	*Increase/ reduce immigration*	*Current intake*	*Increase/ reduce immigration*	*Increase/ reduce immigration*	*Current intake*
Date	July 2009	November 2009	March 2010	April 2010	June 2010	July 2010	July 2010
Survey	Scanlon Foundation	*Age* / Nielsen	Morgan	*Age* / Nielsen	Scanlon Foundation	Morgan	Nielsen
Reduce	37%	43%	41%	54%	47%	40%	47%
Maintain or increase	55%	52%	54%	44%	46%	58%	50%
Uncertain/ don't know	7%	4%	5%	2%	7%	2%	4%

Source: Specified polls, 2009-2010 (see footnote 2).

Table 10.4 **'How would you rate the record of the current federal government in providing the roads, railways, and housing needed for future population growth? Is it …' (2010)**

Response	*Per cent*
Very good	2
Good	22
Neither good nor poor	21
Poor	32
Very poor	20
(Refused)	0.2
(Don't know)	3
Total	**100**
N (unweighted)	2021

Source: Scanlon Foundation poll, 2010 (Markus 2010a).

followed by Victoria (51 per cent) and Queensland (51 per cent) (Markus 2010a, pp. 28–29)

Immigration issues are ranked low to medium as issues of concern

On the available evidence, in Australia immigration issues are not ranked at the top level of issues of concern. At a time of heightened public discussion, as occurred in the first half of 2010, immigration issues occupy a medium ranking; at other times the ranking is low. This is in contrast with findings for a number of European countries — for example, late in the period of the Blair government, immigration and race relations became the top-ranked issue in England (IMSRI 2008, p. 19). The

Eurobarometer survey in 2006, a peak year for negative sentiment, indicated that immigration was ranked in Spain (64 per cent) and England (40 per cent) as one of the two most important issues facing the country. Across the European Union, immigration ranked fourth (21 per cent), after unemployment (40 per cent), the economic situation (23 per cent), and crime (23 per cent) (European Commission 2007).

Newspoll for *The Australian* provides best long-run data on the ranking of issues. That survey indicates that from 2000 to 2006, when immigration was included as one of some 15 specified issues, it ranked near the bottom in most surveys. In the context of the 2010 federal election, Newspoll included the asylum issue: it ranked sixth of 10 specified issues. While it was well below the top-ranked issue, it was above interest rates, inflation, climate change and industrial relations (table 10.5).

Table 10.5 **Would you say each of the following issues is very important, fairly important or not important on how you personally would vote in a federal election?'**

Issues	*2000 Sept %*	*2001 Sept %*	*2002 Feb %*	*2002 June %*	*2004 June %*	*2006 June %*	*2008 July %*	*2010 Feb %*	*2010 July %*
Health & Medicare	74	77	74	77	82	83	79	82	79
Education	78	79	79	77	80	79	78	77	72
Economy						67	72	74	70
Water planning							74	66	
Welfare and social issues	60	61	58	60	59	59	61	59	
Family issues	63	61	63	59	61	59			
National security					66	60	49	57	54
Environment	64	61	63	60	60	60	63	57	
Leadership	61	62	59	57	65	55	57	56	62
Climate change							55	40	43
Defence		44	50	46	54	51			
Industrial relations	38	37	35	32	31	53	38	35	42
Unemployment	65	63	61	60	55				
Taxation	57	58	56	51	57	54			
Interest rates	53	43	46	44	50	51			45
Inflation	52	40	41	41	40	45			43
Women's issues	38	41	37	43	46	41			
Immigration	**36**	**50**	**49**	**43**	**35**	**43**			
Asylum									50
Aboriginal issues	34	28	25	27	26	27			

Source: Newspoll for *The Australian*.

Other survey findings indicate that immigration emerged as a mid-ranked issue during 2010. The 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey asked respondents in an open-ended question, 'What do you think are the most important problems facing Australia today?' The economy (22 per cent) ranked first, followed by the environment (15 per cent). Immigration and population issues ranked close to fourth (7 per cent). A similar proportion of respondents selected asylum issues (Markus 2010a, p. 18).

The ANU Poll conducted in March and June 2010 obtained a similar ranking. In both polls the economy ranked first, followed in March with a close to equal ranking of health care, immigration and the environment (12–13 per cent). In June, immigration ranked third, after the economy and the environment. Immigration was selected by 14 per cent of respondents, a relatively low proportion in the context of the 53 per cent who nominated the economy in March 2009 (ANU Poll 2009, 2010).

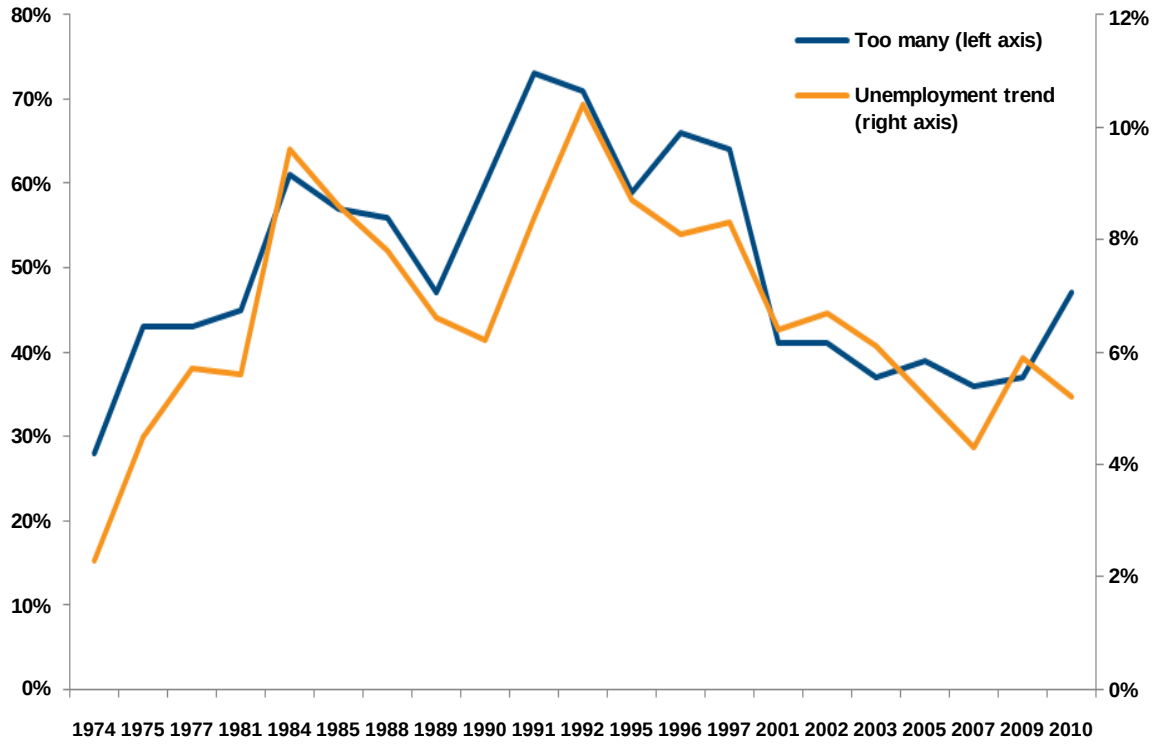
10.4 Explaining public opinion

Long-run survey findings indicate that attitudes to immigration closely correlate with the level of unemployment; a secondary correlation is with increasing political attention to immigration issues.

In the first half of the 1990s, the level of unemployment in Australia rose from 5.8 per cent to 10.7 per cent. In that context, over 70 per cent of respondents indicated that the immigration intake was too high. With the recovery of the labour market, negative sentiment towards immigration fell (as indicated in figure 10.1) and remained low until 2010. The impact of the global financial crisis on the Australian labour market was relatively minor, with unemployment increasing from 4.2 per cent in July 2008 to 5.8 per cent in December 2009. Despite uncertainties about the future, at that time there was no marked increase in the level of negativity towards the immigration intake.

The second factor that affects attitudes is the extent to which the issue receives political attention. Figure 10.1 indicates the impact of the 'Asianisation' debate in the mid-1980s, the rise to national prominence of Pauline Hanson in the period 1996 to 1998, and the Coalition critique of asylum and then immigration policy led by Tony Abbott from late in 2009. During the 2010 election campaign, Abbott undertook to put an end to the arrival of asylum seekers by boat and to substantially reduce immigration.

Figure 10.1 **Correlation between level of unemployment and those of the view that the immigration intake is 'too high', 1974 to 2010**



Data sources: Various polls, 1996-2005 (Markus, Jupp and McDonald 2009, p. 126), Scanlon Foundation polls 2007-2010.

There are two additional factors of relevance. First, a fall in confidence in the capacity of the government to resolve issues and to represent the interests of the majority is associated with heightened concern over a range of policies, including immigration. Second, there is evidence that even without increased political attention there is a decline in support following years of high immigration. That occurred in the late 1960s and may have also been a contributing factor in 2010.

10.5 Politics of immigration and race

What proportion of the Australian population is attracted by appeals to cut the immigration intake, to oppose the entry of diverse cultural groups, and to favour a harsh policy to curtail the arrival of asylum seekers by boat?

To quantify the distribution of opinion within populations, a typology employing four categories was developed by researchers at the European Monitoring Centre on

Racism and Xenophobia: the intolerant, ambivalent, passively tolerant and actively tolerant. The intolerant are characterised by strong negative views towards minorities, rejection of the value of cultural diversity and support for policies of assimilation. Analysis of the racism and xenophobia module included in the 2000 Eurobarometer survey (with more than 16 000 respondents) indicated that the proportion of the intolerant within the then 15 European Union countries ranged from a low of 4 per cent to a high of 27 per cent. Intolerant attitudes were most widely held in Greece and Belgium, and were at the lowest levels in Sweden, Finland, Portugal and Spain (Thalhammer et al. 2001).

Findings of surveying in Australia over the past 30 years indicate that the intolerant are close to 10 per cent of the adult population and the ambivalent are a further 30–35 per cent, providing a catchment for the politics of race of around 40–45 per cent.

Statistical analysis of a range of demographic variables available in the 2009 Scanlon Foundation survey indicates that negative views towards immigration are most likely to be held by those:

- over the age of 65
- without post-school educational qualifications or with trade or diploma-level qualifications
- who describe their financial circumstances as 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor'
- whose profession is machinery operator, driver or labourer
- who indicate a religious affiliation, but attend a religious service infrequently
- whose material status is divorced or widowed (Markus and Arnup 2010, p. 72 ff.).

There is regional variation in attitudes, in part reflecting demographic differences in populations. The first two Scanlon Foundation surveys were designed to sample attitudes in areas of high immigrant population to explore the potential for hostile interaction of Australia-born and immigrant at a time of historically high levels of immigration.

In Melbourne and Sydney, the surveys explored four local government areas. Analysis was focused on three birthplace groups: the Australia-born with both parents Australia-born, termed 'long-time Australian'; Australia-born, without reference to birthplace of parents; and those born overseas and of non-English speaking background.

Responses to three questions were correlated to identify those who considered the current immigration level to be too high, disagreed with the proposition that

'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger', and disagreed with the proposition that 'ethnic minorities in Australia should be given government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions.'

The pattern of response indicates marked differentiation among the long-time Australians. At the national level, 21 per cent of long-time Australians responded negatively to all three questions, compared with 35 per cent in the regions of high immigrant concentration. In contrast, there was little variation between national and local findings among the Australia-born and non-English speaking background respondents in the four local government areas. The low level of negative sentiment among the non-English speaking background respondents sharply differentiates them from the long-time Australians (see table 10.6).

Table 10.6 **Ancestry and birthplace — three correlated questions, cross-tabulated by birthplace, national and four local government areas, 2009**

Long-time Australians (national)	*Long-time Australians (4 LGAs)*	*Australians (national)*	*Australians (4 LGAs)*	*Non-English speaking background (national)*	*Non-English speaking background (4 LGAs)*
22%	35%	21%	24%	8%	8%

LGA= Local government area.
Source: Scanlon Foundation poll 2009 (Markus and Arnup 2010, p. 71).

Supporters of the Liberal and National parties are the most attracted to calls to limit immigration and to adopt a harsher policy towards asylum seekers. Thus, in June 2010, 54 per cent of those who identified as supporters of the Coalition considered that immigration was too high, 38 per cent disagreed that accepting immigrants from many countries makes Australia stronger, and 36 per cent supported action to prevent boats carrying asylum seekers from landing. The largest differentiation with other parties was on the question of preventing boats from landing, which was supported by 21 per cent of those who would vote for Labor and 17 per cent of those who would vote for the Greens (see table 10.7).

Further indication of political division is provided by polls that asked respondents which party they thought would best handle asylum seekers arriving by boat, in the context of the increasing attention to the asylum issue since the second half of 2009. In April 2010, 44 per cent of Newspoll respondents indicated the Coalition, 26 per cent Labor (Newspoll for *The Australian*, 16–18 April 2010; Markus 2010b).

Table 10.7 **Selected questions, cross-tabulated by intended vote, 2010**

	'If there was a federal election held today, for which party would you probably vote?		
Question and response	*Labor*	*Liberal/National*	*Greens*
'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present?' — 'Too high'	43%	54%	36%
'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger' —'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree'	26%	38%	18%
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about the best policy for dealing with asylum seekers trying to reach Australia by boat?' — 'Their boats should be turned back'	21%	36%	17%

Source: Scanlon Foundation poll 2010 (SPSS data file).

10.6 Conclusion

This analysis yields four key findings:

- Australians over the past 15 years have indicated a positive attitude to immigration, although change is evident in the 12 months to June 2010.
- Attitudes to immigration are volatile. There is scope for a marked shift in attitudes, but, in Australia as opposed to some European countries, immigration and population issues are unlikely to assume importance of the first rank.
- Analysis of the print media indicates a consistent pattern of sensationalist reporting of survey findings. This form of reporting impedes rational discussion of immigration issues.
- There has been increasing attention to asylum and immigration issues by the Coalition since late 2009. The calls for a change in policy, involving a cut to immigration and a harsher policy towards asylum seekers, are supported more strongly by those indicating that they would vote for the Coalition.

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