

Chapter Twenty-Six

Ethnicity and immigration

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Ever since the election of Pauline Hanson in 1996 commentators have been waiting for a “race” election. In 1988 John Howard promised that he “would never get into an election campaign on anything that could be remotely related to racial issues” (Channel Ten, 31 July 1988). After the result in 2001 he was quick to play down the impact of the Afghan war and the *Tampa* crisis. This flew in the face of all the evidence. Polling showed a massive shift towards the Coalition during the *Tampa* crisis, which only slowly reduced, leaving Labor still behind on polling day. Liberal election posters quoting Howard’s promise to protect our borders were everywhere on polling day. Full page advertisements quoting the same speech were in all major newspapers in the last two days before the election. Liberal director Lynton Crosby claimed on the basis of post election polling that “only” 10% of voters were primarily influenced by the asylum seeker action. This is greater than any gap between the two major sides in any post war election. The importance of this issue was later emphasised by ALP secretary Geoff Walsh in his address to the Canberra Press Club on 3 December.

The most important reason for voting Liberal was “leadership”, a code word for firm action on the border protection issue. If this was not a “race” election it was certainly a “refugee” election with xenophobic undercurrents. Hanson claimed credit for the Government’s action: “It has been widely recognised by all, including the media, that John Howard sailed home on One Nation policies. In short if we were not around John Howard would not have made the decisions he did” (One Nation, 19 November 2001). It did her no good. Her Senate vote in Queensland dropped to 9.2% and the One Nation vote halved over the country as a whole.

Labor's ethnic heartland

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (23 November 2001) wrote of Labor's western Sydney heartland becoming "solidly Liberal", disregarding the fact that only Lindsay, Parramatta and Macarthur were likely to have been won in more favourable circumstances and that Labor held all its heartland seats in Sydney and Melbourne. This repeats claims made in 1996 that Howard had won over the "battlers" because Labor catered to special interest groups including "multiculturalists". The heartland was assumed to consist of ordinary Australians, not necessarily manual workers or unionists but still battling along on a wage, social conservatives aspiring to a better living standard for their families. This approach draws heavily on American experience and ideology and is not necessarily based on local analysis. It ignores the "ethnic" character — defined as first and second generation Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) — of most Labor electorates in Sydney and Melbourne. The "little Aussie battler" was rarely conceptualised as a "little migrant battler". In 2001 there were references to the support which NESB Australians were giving to the asylum seeker policy and evidence that in a few areas this might have swung votes away from Labor. Larger swings were recorded in many instances in working class electorates which had an Anglo-Australian and British preponderance.

Labor has two heartlands geographically. One, returning 20 MPs in 2001, is in the "NSW belt" which includes Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. This also returned 16 Liberals and embraces 36 seats or 24% of the total (and of the total Australian population), a metropolitan concentration greater than in most developed societies. The other heartland is in the "MG belt" which stretches from Melbourne to Geelong and includes 28 seats or 19% of the total. Labor holds 17 electorates. These two areas, with 43% of the population, hold 56% of all Labor seats.

Heartlands might further be distinguished between those Labor or marginal electorates which have a large ethnic/immigrant population and those which do not. Nearly all of the former lie in the NSW and MG areas, adopting a level of 20% born in a non-English speaking country (NESC) or using at home a language other than English (LOTE). These benchmarks are not identical but are similar. There are 29 NESC electorates in the NSW/MG areas. Of these 24 are Labor and only 5 Liberal — a veritable heartland. Their degree of ethnicity ranges from 47.8% NESC and 60.4% LOTE in Fowler down to 20.2% NESC in North Sydney.

Of an additional seven electorates where the LOTE level exceeds 20% but the NESC level is below that, 3 are in South Australia (Port Adelaide, Sturt and Adelaide) and 1 (Stirling) in Western Australia. The other three are in Sydney (Banks, Sydney and Werriwa). It is often argued that ethnic areas vote Labor because they are poor and disadvantaged. On a scale devised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 1 (lowest status) to 150 (highest), Fowler certainly stands out as the most disadvantaged electorate in Australia. But of 29 electorates with more than 20% born in NESC, only 6 others are in the bottom two deciles of disadvantage while 7 are in the top two deciles. Ethnic voters are widely spread in the two major cities (Zappalà 2001a, Table 4). Table 26.1 shows relevant results from ethnic electorates, defined as those in which over 20% were born in a non-English speaking country (NESC) and spoke a

Table 26.1: Results in “ethnic” electorates

Electorate	ALP %	+/- 1998	2PP ALP	2PP swing	Green	OneNat
Fowler	60.7%	-1.6%	71.5%	-4.5%	2.5%	3.5%
Watson	56.8%	-1.1%	67.3%	-0.3%	3.5%	3.1%
Prospect	55.4%	-1.2%	62.8%	-4%	4.6%	4.5%
Reid	57.1%	-1%	66.9%	-5.3%	3.0%	5.4%
Blaxland	54.1%	-6.4%	65.2%	-6.5%	2.8%	6.1%
Maribyrnong	59.9%	-4.7%	67.4%	-4.7%	3.9%	0
Grayndler	49.2%	-6.6%	71.3%	-1%	13.1%	2.0%
Gellibrand	60.4%	-7.1%	71.8%	-4.1%	6.3%	0
Holt	56.5%	-3.3%	63.9%	-1.8%	2.7%	0
Hotham	54.5%	-2.5%	61.0%	-2.6%	4.4%	0
Lowe	44.8%	+8.6%	53.8%	-0.9%	4.2%	1.9%
Bruce	48.6%	-0.1%	55.6%	-1.2%	4.3%	0
K'ford-Smith	47.9%	-3.7%	58.9%	-4%	7.3%	4.9%
Calwell	51.9%	-10.5%	67.7%	-1.3%	2.4%	0
Batman	58.7%	-7.1%	75.1%	-1.3%	11.6%	0
Barton	48.1%	-1.7%	56.0%	-3.8%	2.9%	3.7%
Scullin	63.1%	-4.8%	69.2%	-2.7%	3.0%	0
Wills	56.0%	-7.9%	69.4%	-1.5%	7.8%	0
Melbourne	49.4%	-9.4%	71.9%	+0.1%	15.8%	0
Menzies*	30.2%	+0.3%	41.1%	-3.5%	5.5%	0
Bennelong*	30.9%	-1.4%	42.3%	-2.5%	4.0%	2.7%
Chisholm	42.4%	+0.1%	52.8%	+0.7%	6.1%	0
Parramatta*	41.4%	-0.3%	48.9%	-3.8%	3.1%	3.0%
Greenway	42.7%	-3.3%	53.1%	-6.4%	2.6%	5.5%
Chifley	58.3%	-3.5%	65.3%	-6%	1.7%	6.2%
Melb. Ports	39.4%	-4.7%	55.9%	-0.1%	11.3%	0
Wentworth*	29.5%	-3.5%	42.1%	-0.5%	9.8%	1.6%
Lalor	58.1%	-3.1%	65.6%	-4.2%	4.1%	0
North Sydney*	24.5%	-1.3%	36.8%	-0.6%	7.6%	0

* held by the Liberals.

language other than English (LOTE) at home, in descending order of NESC percentage (1996 Census).

Unpublished Liberal Party polling showed a large majority of NESB Australians supporting the stand against asylum seekers. It may be that several ethnic groups, mostly bound together by Christianity and originating in the Balkans and Middle East, have collective memories of persecution by Muslim authorities. This did not seem to have a substantial impact on voting behaviour. As Labor took precisely the same stand on the predominantly Muslim asylum seekers, this may not be surprising. The Labor ethnic heartland was largely unmoved. No seats were lost and Lowe, always the most difficult, was retained. Despite a two party preferred swing against of 3.8% in Parramatta, the Labor primary vote stood at almost exactly the same level as in 1998. Apart from Adelaide, where the result was extremely close, this is almost the only ethnic seat that Labor might be expected to gain other than in quite exceptional circumstances. This loyalty remains despite Labor having no distinctive policy on immigration, multiculturalism or refugees. Howard launched his multicultural policy in Hindmarsh (Adelaide) at an Italian club, earning a front page report in *La Fiamma* (17 October 2001: "Howard: rafforzare il multiculturalismo"). The majority of Adelaide Italians live in the safe Liberal electorate of Sturt. Most of the rest live in Hindmarsh and Adelaide, two marginal seats also containing a large Greek population, which the Liberals held despite there being a Greek ALP candidate in Hindmarsh.

Other parties, whether Unity, the Democrats or the Greens, are unlikely to break the pattern of Labor loyalty. The worst result for Labor in an ethnic electorate was in Paul Keating's old seat of Blaxland, with strong One Nation support in the Bass Hill area, a relatively salubrious part of Bankstown wedged between the Lebanese concentration in Lakemba and the Vietnamese in Cabramatta. Bankstown had a long dispute about building a new mosque and is almost the only metropolitan council with a One Nation member. There were remarkably high Green votes in a number of ethnic seats, the three highest nationally being in Melbourne (15.8%), Sydney (14.7%) and Grayndler (13.1%). These contain or are adjacent to four of the largest universities in Australia, with Kingsford Smith, containing the University of New South Wales, also returning a high vote of 7.3%. The largest Jewish population in Australia is in Melbourne Ports, with a Green vote of 11.3% and the second largest in Wentworth with a vote of 9.8%. These results lend credence to the notion that some Labor voters moved to the Greens in disgust at Beazley's position on asylum seekers. They do not suggest a similar move by ethnic voters, except in Batman (11.6%) and Wills (7.8%), which do not have large tertiary institutions

and where the Green vote also seems to have come from Labor. Overall the Green vote was below their national average in most ethnic electorates.

Sample surveys never catch the indigenous vote, which is too small to show up, but this is assumed to be pro-Labor. Booth totals for isolated Aboriginal communities confirm this, with such large concentrations as Cherbourg (Wide Bay) or Palm Island (Herbert), recording Labor levels of 65-80% or more, as do mobile polling stations. Labor was also well ahead in the Torres Strait, Christmas Island and Cocos. All of these ethnically distinct districts show exceptional degrees of Labor solidarity. These small but solid votes were not large enough to help Labor win Kalgoorlie, Solomon or Leichhardt, but were certainly vital in Lingiari.

Heartland losses

Large swings against Labor were recorded in two types of heartland seats — those industrial and working class areas which were not markedly ethnic and those where a border-line between ethnic and “Anglo” areas ran across the electorate. These latter also showed stronger support for One Nation or anti-immigration candidates than in most other metropolitan areas. Anglo heartland seats include Newcastle, Hunter, Shortland, Charlton, Throsby, Cunningham, Werriwa, Lindsay, Dunkley, Rankin, Bonython, Fremantle and Brand. “Border-line” seats include Parramatta, Banks, Macarthur, Hindmarsh, Oxley and Moreton. Some, such as Cunningham or Fremantle, contain substantial ethnic enclaves but are not nearly as statistically ethnic as many imagine. These are rather subjective categories but produce some interesting results, as shown in Table 26.2.

In all but four of these contests the ALP vote was above the national level. In the majority of cases their loss was of primary vote and of two party swing. In only 4 electorates from 19 was the One Nation vote below the national average, despite considerable losses since 1998. In Banks there was also an Australians Against Further Immigration candidate, adding 3.4% to One Nation’s 6.3%. There is an urban working class vote for One Nation showing up in predominantly Labor Anglo heartland and border-line areas. It is in virtually all cases markedly higher than in ethnic heartland electorates. Labor did not lose any of these seats. It could have won all six of those held by the Liberals in more favourable circumstances.

Even within a single electorate the level of ethnicity was sometimes relevant. In Fowler the Cabramatta booths gave Unity nearly 10% for its Chinese candidate. But in the Liverpool booths One Nation polled ahead of

Unity. It is interesting to note that in Broken Hill, once a heartland all on its own as a completely unionised city, the eight booths reported ALP votes ranging between 48% and 58.3% and a One Nation vote ranging between 5.8% and 13.6%. Five booths showed a One Nation vote above the level in the otherwise rural and provincial National Party electorate of Parkes. Broken Hill has been completely isolated from post war migration and has a negligible Aboriginal or Asian population. Labor seems to have a problem with Anglo working class voters more than with its ethnic heartland.

Media appeal

SBS and an increasing number of community and special interest media broadcast in languages other than English. These are mostly neutral in their approach to Australian party politics. The print media, too, is not obviously associated with partisan positions. Reliance on advertising and community support tends to neutralise those loyalties which editors and proprietors might privately have. There are now several daily papers in Chinese, Vietnamese,

Table 26.2: Results in “Anglo” and “borderline” working class electorates

Electorate	ALP %	+/- 1998	2PP ALP	2PP swing	One Nation
<i>Anglo</i>					
Newcastle	41%	-8.1%	56.9%	NA	5.9%
Hunter	52.3%	-2.9%	60.6%	NA	10.3%
Shortland	49.2%	-2.2%	58.8%	-3.5%	4.7%
Charlton	46.1%	-2.5%	56.9%	-5.5%	7.7%
Throsby	54.9%	-6.3%	65.1%	-7.3%	6.5%
Cunningham	44.2%	-8.1%	60.7%	-7.1%	4.8%
Werriva	50.3%	-1.2%	62.8%	-4.1%	4.7%
Lindsay*	34.6%	-3.5%	44.5%	-2.4%	5.2%
Dunkley*	35.8%	-3.2%	44.6%	-3.4%	1.8%
Rankin	49.5%	+2%	56.7%	-2%	6.3%
Bonython	47.4%	-2.4%	60.4%	-2.9%	6.4%
Fremantle	47%	-2.3%	60.7%	-1.6%	6%
Brand	51.7%	-1.4%	60%	-3.3%	6.1%
<i>Borderline</i>					
Parramatta*	41.4%	- 0.3	48.9%	-3.8%	3%
Banks	44.3%	-0.3%	52.9%	-4.4%	6.3%+3.4%
Macarthur*	35.9%	-4.9%	43%	-8.7%	5.3%
Hindmarsh*	38.3%	-1%	48.1%	-0.8%	3.2%
Oxley	49.5%	+3.7%	58.1%	-0.1%	10.6%
Moreton*	36.3%	-3.6%	45.8%	-3.6%	3%

* held by the Liberals.

Greek and Arabic and the more common weekly or bi-weekly journals are also flourishing in a variety of languages. In 2001 the political parties, other than One Nation and the Nationals, used these outlets extensively. Full page messages were inserted by the Liberals and Labor in the two weeks before polling day in newspapers published in the following languages: Greek (2), Italian (1), Chinese (2), Vietnamese (2), Arabic (3), Maltese (1), Macedonian (3) and Croatian (1), but not in German or Dutch where readers are assumed to be fluent in English.

The Liberal message described Australia as “the best country in the world”, a sentiment not universally shared by immigrants. It made no reference to asylum seekers or the Afghan war except subliminally by urging that the country be left in “safe hands”. The Liberals did point out that the migrant intake had been raised, with an increased family reunion component. As with Labor, the emphasis was almost entirely on domestic issues. Labor focussed exclusively on health policy, education and a criticism of the GST. Neither major party mentioned multiculturalism in their final full page appeals. Ethnic voters were assumed to be as parochial as the mainstream. Communicating with the voters in other languages can have its pitfalls. The Liberal candidate for Melbourne Ports attempted to distribute a pamphlet to the large Russian Jewish population but his computer produced simple gobbledygook which nobody could understand. His vote increased very slightly.

Candidates and parliamentarians

Slow progress is being made towards a more ethnically varied parliament, particularly by second generation candidates rather than immigrants. Seventeen Greek Australians nominated and three were returned (two of them born in Greece): Petro Georgiou (Liberal, Kooyong), Sophie Panopoulos (Liberal, Indi) and Maria Vamvakinou (ALP, Calwell) (*Neos Kosmos*, 5 November 2001). In Calwell there was an “all-Greek” contest between former Labor MP Andrew Theophanous, born in Cyprus, and Maria Vamvakinou, his former staffer and the first Greek born woman to be elected at the national level. Calwell candidates were mostly from an ethnic background although it is not a major area of Greek settlement. Elsewhere the Labor vote held in the middle class suburbs of Menzies, especially in the Bulleen area where the Greek and Italian population is concentrated and the Greek Australian ALP candidate lives.

The ALP, which holds nearly all the ethnic concentrations, is still reluctant to nominate many ethnic candidates, other than Greeks in Victoria (Zappalà 2001b). The resignation of Theophanous from the party in April 2000 removed

its most persistent advocate for multiculturalism and refugees, though he gained a respectable 10.5% of the vote. Unity, which has won eight municipal positions in the Sydney inner west, had attached its fortunes to opposing One Nation and went down to defeat like that party. It lost half its previous support despite a vigorous campaign by its most active figure, councillor Thang Ngo of Cabramatta (Ngo 2001). The Liberals proved that ethnicity was no barrier to success by securing election for Melbourne born Greek Australian monarchist, Sophie Panopoulos, in the thoroughly rural electorate of Indi. Nor was it a problem for Maltese born Christian Zahra, who held provincial McMillan for Labor. After a long wrangle in the local parties, Michael Johnson was eventually returned for the Liberals in Ryan, the first person of Chinese origin ever to sit in the House of Representatives.

Conclusion

Although refugee and international issues were abnormally prominent in 2001, this did not make much difference to the support for Labor in most ethnic communities and areas of concentration. However, Labor did very little for this constituency either in terms of attractive policy, special appeals or selection of candidates for winnable electorates. The slow progress of Unity at the Sydney municipal level was not rewarded and its future must remain in doubt. Reassuringly, racist and anti-immigration candidates, including One Nation, also made no progress. Their significant votes in urban areas were mostly in border-line districts of Sydney or in predominantly Anglo-Australian and British migrant districts. Beazley himself represented one of the largest concentrations of British immigrants in Australia in Brand, where the One Nation vote was 6.1%. Some other areas of above average British settlement also recorded high One Nation votes, including Canning (7.2%), Hasluck (7%) and Bonython (6.4%).

If Labor did lose some NESB support, this was probably less than its losses in other sectors. Over 40% of its seats are significantly ethnic, while another (Lingiari) has the highest proportion of Aborigines in Australia. The Liberals still return more first generation NESB candidates than Labor. Second generation candidates are advancing slowly in the Labor caucus, with two (Anthony Albanese and Daryl Melham) being elected to the shadow Ministry. Beazley seemed less engaged with multiculturalism than any Labor leader for a generation. He was the only such leader in forty years not to represent an ethnic electorate except for Bill Hayden, and normality returned with Simon Crean

(Hotham). Many second generation NESB Australians are suburban aspirational voters and may be less loyal to Labor than their parents.

Unexpectedly, Howard appointed Gary Hardgrave (Moreton) as junior Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. This was followed on 27 November by the extraordinary decision to amalgamate the Department of Reconciliation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs into a new Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Questioned earlier about his apparent conversion to multiculturalism, Howard simply remarked that “you have to go with the flow” (SBS TV News, 23 November 2001).

