

AUSTRALIAN POPULATION: ETHNIC ORIGINS

■ Charles Price

Australia's ethnic make-up has changed sharply over recent years as a consequence of the new and diverse source countries feeding Australia's migration program. New estimates of 'ethnic strength' for 1999 show that Australia's people remain predominantly Anglo-Celtic in origin. However, the Anglo-Celtic share has fallen from 90 per cent in 1947 to 74.5 per cent in 1988, and to 70 per cent in 1999. Projections for the future indicate that if recent immigration trends are maintained the Anglo-Celtic share will fall to 62.2 per cent in 2025.

In multicultural Australia there is much interest in the ethnic composition of the population. There are many statistical sources for estimating this: citizenship; language spoken at home; religious affiliation (for groups such as the Jews, Assyrians and Sikhs); racial origin (from colonial records 1861-1891 and Commonwealth records 1901-1976); ancestry (from the 1986 census); naturalisation records (these give town and village of birth); distinctive surnames (for Armenians, Sikhs, Scots, Irish, Cornish).

Combining these statistics with Commonwealth statistics of deaths and birthplace, and of births by birthplace of parents, enables the demographer to estimate the nation's ethnic composition. Such estimates cannot be exact but do give a general picture of the nation's ethnic makeup.

INTERMIXTURE

Over the two centuries since 1788 there has been much ethnic intermixture. At present at least 60 per cent of the

Australian people are ethnically mixed while about 20 per cent have at least four distinct ancestries. In fact, the fastest growing ethnic group is not the Chinese, Lebanese, Filipino or any other rapidly growing immigrant group, but the category of people who are of mixed ethnic origins. Those concentrating on separate ethnic affiliations in Australia should note and remember this carefully.

ESTIMATES OF ETHNIC STRENGTH

The concept of 'ethnic strength' allows for intermixture. For example, a person with a Greek father and English mother counts as one half in the total for Greek ethnic strength and one half in the English. A person with one Aboriginal, one Irish, one Pacific Island and one Lebanese grandparent counts as one-quarter in each group.

The ethnic strength totals set out in Tables 1 and 2, therefore, do not represent separate individuals but the 'strength' of any particular ethnicity in the total population. The 1999 'German' total of 670,000 does not mean there are

Table 1: Ethnic strength, 30 June 1999

Origin	No.	%	Origin	No.	%
Anglo-Celtic			West Asian & North African		
English	8,277,310	43.61	Iraqi	19,000	0.10
Irish	2,292,400	12.08	Syrian	12,000	0.06
Scots	2,165,100	11.41	Lebanese	270,670	1.43
Welsh	240,000	1.26	Egyptian (Arab)	7,000	0.04
Cornish ¹	271,500	1.43	African (Arab)	8,000	0.04
Manx	15,000	0.08	Arab Other ¹⁰	27,000	0.14
Breton ²	1,000	0.01	Turk	47,000	0.25
Total Anglo-Celtic	13,262,310	69.88	Iranian	15,100	0.08
Aboriginal/T.S.I.³	287,000	1.51	Armenian	22,000	0.12
North and West European			Assyrian ¹¹	16,000	0.08
Channel	24,000	0.13	Kurd ¹²	2,500	0.01
French	86,330	0.46	Copt ¹³	20,000	0.11
Belgian	10,000	0.05	Total West Asian & North Africa	466,270	2.46
Netherlander	258,610	1.36	South Asian		
Swiss	32,850	0.17	Nepali	3,000	0.02
Austrian	45,530	0.24	Afghan	9,000	0.05
German	670,000	3.53	Pakistani	14,000	0.07
Dane	66,700	0.35	Indian	126,100	0.66
Norwegian	32,850	0.17	Sikh ¹⁴	14,000	0.07
Swede	53,760	0.28	Tamil ¹⁵	20,800	0.11
Finn	25,020	0.13	Bengali	9,000	0.05
Other ⁴	1,300	0.01	Sinhalese	53,000	0.28
Total North and West European	1,306,950	6.88	Other	500	0.00
Southern European			Total South Asian	249,400	1.31
Albanian	10,150	0.05	(Gypsy)¹⁶	(2,000)	(0.01)
Greek ⁵	345,000	1.82	South East Asian		
Italian	644,970	3.40	Burmese	14,000	0.07
Maltese	145,000	0.76	Thai	28,000	0.15
Spanish	130,000	0.69	Malay	18,000	0.10
Portugese	45,000	0.24	Indonesian	50,000	0.26
Other ⁶	500	0.00	East Timorese ¹⁷	8,000	0.04
Total Southern European	1,320,620	6.96	Filipino	145,600	0.77
East European			Kampuchean	27,000	0.14
Estonian	9,700	0.05	Lao	11,000	0.06
Latvian	27,000	0.14	Vietnamese	176,000	0.93
Lithuanian	13,600	0.07	Hmong ¹⁸	2,600	0.01
Pole	168,300	0.88	Other	1,100	0.01
Russian	76,000	0.40	Total South East Asian	481,300	2.54
Ukranian	32,000	0.17	North East Asian		
Belo-Russian ⁷	10,600	0.06	Chinese ¹⁹	438,500	2.31
Slovak ⁸	7,500	0.04	Japanese	35,000	0.18
Czech	31,000	0.16	Korean	43,000	0.23
Slovene	20,000	0.10	Mongolian	300	0.00
Croat	160,000	0.84	Total North East Asian	516,800	2.72
Bosnian-Herz	22,000	0.12	Pacific		
Serb	51,480	0.27	Maori	35,000	0.18
Montenegrin	5,000	0.03	Samoan	15,000	0.08
Macedonian	98,000	0.52	Tongan	10,500	0.05
Bulgarian	5,000	0.03	Other Pacific	22,500	0.12
Hungarian	70,000	0.37	Aust South Sea Islanders	18,200	0.10
Romanian	20,000	0.11	Total Pacific	101,200	0.53
Total East European	827,180	4.36	African²¹	25,000	0.13
Jewish⁹	126,000	0.66	American (Indigenous)²²	10,000	0.05
			Total	18,980,000	100.00

670,000 ethnic Germans in Australia but that there are approximately 1,670,000 or so persons with some or all German ancestry who, counted in fractions, make up the equivalent of 670,000 persons of German origin.

The measure is thus more like a genetic measure indicating the strength of a particular gene in the population. The totals, indeed, have been used by medical researchers interested in the transmission of genetic blood diseases.

For details of the methods used see my *Immigration and Ethnicity*,¹ and my forthcoming *Australians All: Who on Earth are We?* Tables 1 and 2, published here, are from this monograph. Some explanatory notes to the more complicated ethnic groups are given in

the endnotes, the note numbers being marked on each table.

Table 1 shows the estimated 'ethnic strength' of the resident Australian population as at 30 June 1999, that is, the total of persons whose homes are in Australia, both Australian citizens and non-citizens with right of permanent residence. The figures exclude Australians living permanently abroad, and also non-citizens (including illegal overstayers) who are in Australia for limited periods before moving overseas again.

It is interesting to see that, after the English, Irish and Scottish, the German ethnic strength is fourth, the Italian fifth, the Chinese sixth and the Greek seventh. This is because German settlers first

Table 2: Ethnic strength, 1947 to 2025, percentages

Origin	1947	1978	1988	1999	2025
Anglo-Celt	89.82	76.61	74.51	69.88	62.24
(English)	(54.27)	(46.29)	(45.96)	(43.61)	(38.84)
(Irish)	(19.12)	(14.78)	(13.98)	(12.08)	(10.76)
(Scottish)	(12.87)	(12.50)	(11.61)	(11.41)	(10.16)
Aboriginal & T.S.I. ²³	0.78	0.98	1.00	1.51	1.60
North and West European	5.74	7.49	7.39	6.89	5.84
(German)	(3.70)	(3.91)	(3.75)	(3.53)	(3.10)
South European	1.50	8.06	7.37	6.96	5.66
(Italian)	(0.93)	(4.17)	(3.72)	(3.40)	(2.76)
(Greek) ²⁴	(0.30)	(2.35)	(1.98)	(1.82)	(1.48)
East European	0.61	3.85	3.86	4.36	4.10
(Pole)	(0.15)	(0.81)	(0.82)	(0.88)	(0.83)
(former Yugoslavia)	(0.22)	(1.55)	(1.72)	(1.78)	(1.77)
Jewish ²⁵	0.92	0.74	0.74	0.66	0.45
West Asian and North African	0.15	1.13	1.36	2.46	4.85
(Lebanese)	(0.10)	(0.56)	(0.77)	(1.43)	(3.00)
South Asian	0.11	0.28	0.59	1.31	2.14
(Indian)	(0.08)	(0.18)	(0.40)	(0.66)	(1.08)
(Sinhalese)	(0.01)	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.28)	(0.46)
South East Asian	0.03	0.27	0.16	2.54	5.48
(Indo Chinese)	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.62)	(1.14)	(2.76)
(Filipino)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.30)	(0.77)	(1.70)
North East Asian	0.23	0.33	1.46	2.72	6.62
(Chinese) ²⁶	(0.22)	(0.27)	(1.29)	(2.31)	(5.62)
Pacific			0.40	0.53	0.84
African ²⁷	} 0.11	} 0.26	0.12	0.13	0.13
American ²⁸			0.04	0.05	0.05
Total %	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Total No. ²⁹	7,640,400	14,263,100	16,538,200	18,980,000	22,700,000

arrived in Australia in numbers in the 1830s and have been contributing strongly to population growth ever since. The Italian and Greek contributions have been more recent, mainly 20th Century, and have recently been slowing down because many Italian and Greek families have been returning to Italy and Greece. In many recent years emigration of people of Italian and Greek ancestry has exceeded immigration.

Note also that the ethnic strength of Australia's indigenous population is only 287,000 compared with the 430,000 or so total I have estimated from projections made by the Australian statistician² This is because nearly 60 per cent of the indigenous population are mixtures of indigenous and other peoples and, in ethnic strength calculations, are counted fractionally. The mixture is often with the Irish, as is clear from the ancestry of some of our most outspoken indigenous leaders.

Table 2 sets out ethnic strength over time, for the main ethnic groups and divisions only. It also gives a projection to the year 2025. This is not a forecast; it is simply a statement of what ethnic strength could be if the migration, fertility, mortality and intermarriage trends of the last ten years were to continue for the next twenty-six years (see Table note 29).

The most noticeable features of Table 2 is the decline of the Anglo-Celtic element from 89.82 per cent in 1947 to 69.88 per cent at present — and to 62.24 per cent in 2025 if recent trends continue. The English and Scottish elements have been declining more slowly than the Irish, largely because in recent decades immigration from England has been relatively much higher than that from Ireland, while the Scottish ethnic element in the large-scale New Zealand

immigration of recent decades is much larger than the Irish element.

CONCLUSION

Truly Australia is, in ethnic terms, a most fascinating multi-cultural nation. To be a peaceful and progressive society, however, it is important that every Australian try to show real understanding and tolerance to fellow Australians with different ancestries from their own.

References

- ¹ C. Price, *Immigration and Ethnicity*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Canberra, 1996, Part 3 and Table 3.4
- ² *Australian Demographic Statistics, June Quarter 1998*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Catalogue No. 3101.0, p. 6

Table notes

- ¹ The 'Cornish' have been estimated from colonial records of immigration by English counties of birth, combined with the distinctive surname method.
- ² The 'Breton' total is estimated from French census statistics, and from estimates of Bretons in Australia. This is then deducted from the French ethnic total.
- ³ 'Aboriginals' and 'Torres Strait Islanders': see paragraph in text on Indigenous population.
- ⁴ 'Other' North and West European = Luxembourg, Leichtenstein, Icelander.
- ⁵ 'Greek' includes 81 per cent of Cypriots, the remainder — apart from a few British and other — being in Turkish.
- ⁶ 'Other' Southern European includes families from Andorra, Gibraltar (excluding British), Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City.
- ⁷ 'Belo-Russians' — separated from Russians and Poles by naturalisation and ancestry statistics.
- ⁸ 'Slovak' includes some Ruthenians.
- ⁹ 'Jewish': estimated from religious statistics, surnames and special surveys.
- ¹⁰ 'Other Arab': estimated from language and religious statistics from various West Asian (Middle East) origins including Israel.
- ¹¹ 'Assyrians': from religious, language and survey material.
- ¹² 'Kurds': estimated from 1986 ancestry material, then deducted from Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese.
- ¹³ The 'Copts' are survivors of the pre-Christian and early Christian population dominant in Egypt before the seventh century Arab-Muslim invasions. Some 14,700 persons declared themselves to be members of the Coptic Orthodox church in 1996. Others have become agnostic or changed their faith.
- ¹⁴ 'Sikh': estimated from ancestry data then deducted from 'Indian'.

¹⁵ 'Tamil': estimated from 1986 ancestry data, deducted equally from 'Indian' and 'Sinhalese', then increased for recent immigration

¹⁶ The 'Gypsy' (Romany) people are originally from India. Gypsies have spread into so many countries that I have not deducted them from their countries of origin but given the total (estimated from 1986 ancestry material) in brackets.

¹⁷ 'East Timorese': estimated from 1986 ancestry material (3220 total) and increased for recent immigration. (In recent years the Australian Bureau of Statistics has put them in the Indonesian category but will from now on again show them separately).

¹⁸ 'Hmong': estimated from 1996 language statistics, increased for recent immigration, and deducted from Laos and Thailand.

¹⁹ 'Chinese' covers families from China, Macao, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (with persons of non-Chinese ancestry deducted) plus Chinese from other countries. In 1986 persons of Chinese ancestry were numerous among persons born in Malaysia (60%), Indonesia (27%), Timor (61%), Vietnam (33%), Kampuchea (40%), many of them were also born in P.N.G, Fiji, Xmas Island, the U.K, Africa and so on.

THE END

Following article begins here in print journal.

²⁰ The 'Australian South Sea Islander' total is my estimate of the descendants of the South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) brought to Australia in the 19th century for plantation and other labour.

²¹ 'African': estimate of African (Negro) population deriving from Africa and the Americas. It excludes North African Negroes.

²² 'American': estimate of Indigenous American Indians.

²³ See note 3.

²⁴ See note 5.

²⁵ See note 9.

²⁶ See note 19.

²⁷ See note 21.

²⁸ See note 22.

²⁹ Totals: 1947=1947 Census. 1978 and 1988=ABS estimates of resident population. 1999= my estimate, based on *ABS Population Projections: 1997-2051* (ABS 3222.0 of 14 July 1998) but modified for a fertility of 1.576 (mid-way between ABS high and low fertilities), and for a net total immigration of 77,000 a year, which is the actual net total immigration for the mid-year period 1990-1999. This is part-way-between the ABS high and low assumptions of 90,000 and 70,000 a year.