

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: A RE-AWAKENING OF XENOPHOBIA?

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*This article reports on surveys of attitudes to migration and identity issues in the Springvale region of Melbourne in 1993-94 and 1998. There has not been an increase in xenophobic attitudes between the two surveys. Most respondents believe discriminatory behaviour is improper. However, there is strong support for the ideal that Australia should be 'one community'.*

This paper reports the findings of two surveys concerned primarily with issues of immigration, immigrant settlement and national identity conducted over the last five years. It provides quantitative data of relevance to the much discussed issue of attitudinal change in Australian society. In the context of the emergence to national prominence of Pauline Hanson the notion of a significant attitudinal shift, the product of heightened economic insecurity and the impact of globalisation, was highlighted in the Australian media. As one — admittedly limited — test of such interpretations a survey was conducted in the period May-August 1998, a high point of media frenzy in the context of the One Nation's spectacular Queensland electoral success. This survey replicated an identical survey conducted during December 1993-February 1994 on the periphery of a major centre of immigrant settlement in suburban Melbourne. Contrary to the thesis that there has been a significant heightening of xenophobic attitudes, the 1998 survey points to a large measure of continuity.

### THE SURVEY

The Springvale region is an area of highly visible immigrant settlement, with Indo-Chinese managed businesses dominating the large Springvale central shopping precinct. At the 1996 census 61 per

cent of the population in the Springvale postcode area was overseas-born, only a small number of whom were born in the main English-speaking countries (see Table 1). This compares with around 30 per cent overseas-born in the Melbourne region and 23 per cent in Australia. Vietnam-born people, the largest overseas-birthplace group in the Springvale postcode, comprised 21 per cent of the population compared with 1.7 per cent for all Melbourne.

As part of a long-term project, the Springvale area was first surveyed in 1992, utilising a detailed questionnaire of over 50 questions. In this first survey, in which many of the questionnaires were distributed through welfare and other organisations, 981 questionnaires were completed, some 435 by Australia-born respondents. One particular focus of the first survey was school-age teenagers and almost 300 of the respondents were aged 13 to 19. The survey found that few respondents expressed strongly prejudiced attitudes. Thus 65.4 per cent of all respondents and 64 per cent of the Australia-born agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that 'Asian migrants have a great deal to offer the Australian way of life', while only 15.6 per cent (16 per cent Australia-born) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Eighty-two per cent (76.1 per cent Australia-born) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that

‘so long as a person is committed to Australia it does not matter what ethnic background they are from’ and, when presented with a list of possible selection criteria for immigrants, almost no one was of the view that ‘race’ should be the first factor in selection.<sup>1</sup>

To gather additional data on attitudes the questionnaire was re-administered in December 1993-February 1994 and in May-August 1998 in two suburbs on the margins of Springvale — Keysborough and Dingley which are located some five kilometres south-east and south-west of the main Springvale shopping precinct respectively. These areas were chosen for their relatively high Australia-born populations to test attitudes of the native-born to the continuing growth of a major area of migrant settlement in their region. The findings of these surveys have not been previously reported.

The second and third surveys were administered to householders. Data collectors visited homes to invite participation and, where agreement was obtained, questionnaires were left for completion. These were either collected on a return visit (1993-4) or sent by return mail (1998). Almost 500 responses were obtained in both surveys, with a slightly larger number from Dingley residents. A majority of the questionnaires were completed by women: 62 per cent in the first survey, 54 per cent in the second. The average age of respondents was 41 in the first survey, 44 in the second, with Dingley respondents older by some six and a half years in the first survey and three years in the second (see Table 2).

#### **SPRINGVALE, KEYSBOROUGH AND DINGLEY**

At the 1996 census, 36.5 per cent of the population of Springvale postcode area was born in Australia, compared with 52

per cent in the census collection districts surveyed in Keysborough, and 77 per cent in Dingley. Of those completing the 1998 questionnaire, 56 per cent in Keysborough and 77 per cent in Dingley were Australia-born. The number of immigrants from Asian countries resident in Keysborough and Dingley was small: in the census collection districts surveyed, the Vietnam-born comprised 7.9 per cent in Keysborough and 0.2 per cent in Dingley, closely matching the representation in the survey (see Tables 1 and 2).

There is also significant variation in the socio-economic profile of the three areas. In 1996 the level of unemployment in the Springvale postcode was 19.1 per cent, but in the Keysborough census collection districts it was 9.9 per cent and in Dingley 4.9 per cent. Of the 1998 Keysborough survey respondents, 9.7 per cent described their employment status as in search of full-time work compared with 1.2 per cent of Dingley respondents (see Tables 1 and 2).

In the Springvale postcode, excluding those with negative income, 51 per cent of adults had a weekly income between nil and \$199, in Keysborough collection districts 39.1 per cent, and in Dingley 32.1 per cent; at the other end of the income spectrum, 15.3 per cent of Springvale postcode residents earned weekly incomes over \$500, 23.1 per cent in Keysborough collection districts and 37 per cent in Dingley (see Table 1).

#### **EVALUATION**

This analysis will consider attitudes in 1998, then the extent to which these attitudes have undergone change since the previous survey in 1993-4, and lastly the significance of gender, locality, age, and place of birth in shaping respondents’ views on the issues surveyed. The

**Table 1: Census 1996: selected demographic characteristics of Springvale and of localities surveyed in 1998**

	Springvale postcode 3171		Keysborough (10 collection districts)		Dingley (7 collection districts)	
Total persons	19,526	100.0	8,164	100.0	5,392	100.0
Australia-born <sup>a</sup>	7,127	36.5	4,242	52.0	4,167	77.3
Overseas-born: MESC	756	3.9	566	6.9	550	10.2
Overseas-born: other	11,120	56.9	3,145	38.5	526	9.8
Total overseas	11,876	60.8	3,711	45.5	1,076	20.0
Residents aged 5 yrs and over						
Speaks only English (aged 5+)	5,629	32.0	4,347	57.7	4,537	90.6
Speaks other (aged 5+)	11,976	68.0	3,181	42.3	473	9.4
Same address 1991	10,236	59.5	5,226	70.3	3,488	69.4
Different address 1991	6,978	40.5	2,206	29.7	1,540	30.6
Residents <sup>a</sup> aged 15 yrs and over						
Employed	6,721	43.8	3,793	59.3	2,839	66.6
In labour force	8,305	54.1	4,208	65.8	2,985	70.0
Not in labour force	7,038	45.9	2,184	34.2	1,279	30.0
Unemployment rate		19.1		9.9		4.9
Income <sup>c</sup> Nil-\$199	-	50.5	-	39.1	-	32.1
Income \$500 +	-	15.3	-	23.1	-	37.0

<sup>a</sup> The percentages and numbers of Australia-born and overseas-born do not add to the total because some people did not state their birthplace.

<sup>b</sup> excludes those who did not state their details and overseas visitors

<sup>c</sup> excludes those with negative income

**Table 2: Demographics of surveys**

	1993-4	Keysborough	Dingley	1998	Keysborough	Dingley
Respondents (no.)	499	233	266	485	231	254
(%)	100.0	46.7	53.3	100.0	47.6	52.4
Male (%)	37.9	37.7	38.2	46.4	45.6	47.1
Female (%)	62.1	62.3	61.8	53.6	54.5	52.8
Age (mean)	40.7	37.2	43.8	43.8	42.1	45.3
Unemployed, looking for full-time work (%)	9.1	9.5	8.7	5.2	9.7	1.2
Country of birth (%)						
Australia	72.8	61.9	82.2	67.2	55.9	77.4
Italy	1.2	1.3	1.2			
New Zealand	1.2	1.8	0.8	2.5	3.5	1.6
Sri Lanka	2.1	4.5	0.0	2.5	3.5	1.6
United Kingdom	9.6	9.4	9.7	6.9	6.6	7.1
Vietnam	1.2	2.7	0.0	3.5	7.0	0.4
Yugoslavia		1.3	0.0	2.3	3.5	1.2

analysis will be concerned primarily with responses to twelve questions which deal with the importance attached to national identity, general principles to be applied in the selection of immigrants, attitudes to specific aspects of government policy,

and attitudes to the presence of immigrants in the local area. Questions which elicited the strongest level of agreement are considered first.

It was the view of a large majority of the 1998 respondents that preservation of

Australian identity remains of major significance in the contemporary world and that schools should make more of an effort to impart knowledge of the Australian heritage (see Tables 3 and 4). Those of the view that preservation of Australian identity was of significance comprised nearly 80 per cent of respondents. Consistent with the significance attached to the Australian identity, a large majority (75 per cent) were also of the view that recently arrived immigrants should be encouraged to fit into the Australian community as soon as possible — only 17 per cent believed that immigrants should be left to fit in at their own pace and less than three per cent (a surprisingly low number) though that they should be assisted by government funds to maintain their own culture in their first years in Australia (see Table 5). This confirms other survey data which shows that most Australians believe in the ideal of an 'Australian' community which all should join. Those expecting such attitudes to be accompanied by discriminatory attitudes, however, receive little support from the surveys here considered.

With regard to immigration selection, very few favoured an openly racial discriminatory selection system. Of the almost 500 respondents, not one person was of the view that race should be the first factor considered in selection of immigrants and less than two per cent considered that it should be the second or third factor. Six per cent thought that 'culture similar to Australia' should be the prime selection criterion, although some 27 per cent gave first preference to ability to speak English. While open to interpretation, these findings may be best explained in the context of other indicators of strong support for a unified community.

Thus, when asked their view of the

general proposition that immigrants should be welcomed irrespective of ethnic background, so long as they were committed to Australia, 88 per cent of the 1998 respondents agreed, only seven per cent disagreed, while six per cent were undecided (see Table 6). When further questioned with regard to immigrants of specific background, a clear majority were of the view that both European and Asian immigrants had much to contribute to Australia, although there was stronger endorsement of Europeans; 78 per cent thought Europeans had a great deal to offer compared with 65 per cent in the case of Asians (see Tables 7 and 8).

The current immigration intake was thought by 51 per cent of respondents to be too high, although a large minority of almost 40 per cent thought the number was about right or too small (see Table 9). Recent national surveys have indicated that 60 to 70 per cent of people think the intake is too high. The more positive views of immigration policy expressed in this survey might suggest that close proximity to a major region of immigrant settlement leads to greater acceptance of immigration. There is evidence, however, that the level of opposition to the present intake is lower in Melbourne than Sydney and other regions. A 1996 AGB McNair poll found that in Melbourne 52 per cent wanted immigration cut and 43 per cent thought it should remain at present levels or increase, a finding very close to the present survey.<sup>2</sup>

Views on multicultural policy were split: some 43 per cent considered the policy to be a threat to their way of life but almost the same number disagreed with such a proposition (see Table 10).

## COMMUNITY ISSUES

When asked their views on the impact of

immigration in their region, with specific

**Table 3: In the modern world, preservation of the Australian identity no longer matters**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	2.9	3.6	2.3	4.1	5.8	2.4
Agree	6.7	8.6	5.0	7.9	8.5	7.3
Unsure	11.3	16.4	7.0	9.0	11.7	6.5
Disagree	32.6	34.1	31.4	34.8	33.6	35.9
Strongly disagree	46.4	37.3	54.3	44.2	40.4	47.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	478	220	258	468	223	246
<i>combined strongly disagree &amp; disagree</i>	<i>79.0</i>	<i>71.4</i>	<i>85.7</i>	<i>79.0</i>	<i>74.0</i>	<i>83.7</i>

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Strongly agree	2.6	3.1	3.5	4.6	4.7	3.2
Agree	5.5	9.4	6.1	11.8	8.5	7.6
Unsure	7.9	20.3	7.1	13.2	8.5	9.2
Disagree	33.2	32	34.0	36.8	32.7	36.7
Strongly disagree	50.7	35.2	49.4	33.6	45.5	43.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	343	128	312	152	211	251
<i>combined strongly disagree &amp; disagree</i>	<i>83.9</i>	<i>67.2</i>	<i>83.4</i>	<i>70.4</i>	<i>78.2</i>	<i>80.1</i>

**Table 4: Schools should make a greater effort to teach a sense of pride in the Australian heritage**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	47.1	47.9	46.3	45.5	41.2	49.4
Agree	40.8	38.8	42.4	43.6	45.2	42.0
Unsure	7.4	9.6	5.4	6.2	8.1	4.5
Disagree	3.6	2.3	4.7	4.1	4.5	3.7
Strongly disagree	1.3	1.4	1.2	0.6	0.9	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	476	219	257	466	221	245
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>87.9</i>	<i>86.7</i>	<i>88.7</i>	<i>89.1</i>	<i>86.4</i>	<i>91.4</i>

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Strongly agree	48.5	43.7	46.9	42.4	46.2	45.2
Agree	41	39.7	42.4	45.7	45.8	41.1
Unsure	5.5	11.9	5.5	7.9	4.2	8.1
Disagree	3.8	3.2	4.2	4.0	3.8	4.4
Strongly disagree	1.2	1.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	344	126	311	151	212	248
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>89.5</i>	<i>83.4</i>	<i>89.3</i>	<i>88.1</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>86.3</i>

**Table 5: Migrants should be ...**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Encouraged fit in as soon as possible	77.3	77.4	77.3	75.0	71.7	78.0
Left fit in at own pace	14.4	13.0	15.5	16.7	17.8	15.7
Assist by govt funds to maintain own culture during first years in Australia	2.8	3.9	1.9	2.3	2.6	2.0
None of the above/unsure	5.5	5.7	5.3	6.0	7.8	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	494	230	264	484	230	254

	1993		1998		Male	Female
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace		
Encouraged fit in as soon as possible	77.9	76.7	78.9	67.5	75.6	74.5
Left fit in at own pace	13.5	16.3	12.7	24.2	16.3	16.9
Assist by govt funds to maintain own culture during first years in Australia	2.3	4.7	1.6	3.8	3.2	1.6
None of the above/unsure	6.3	2.3	6.8	4.5	5.0	7.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	349	129	322	157	221	255

**Table 6: So long as a person is committed to Australia it does not matter what ethnic background they are from**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	39.9	41.5	38.5	47.3	48.0	46.4
Agree	45.0	41.1	48.5	40.4	39.1	41.5
Unsure	9.1	11.6	6.9	5.7	6.2	5.2
Disagree	3.3	2.7	3.8	5.5	4.9	6.0
Strongly disagree	2.7	3.1	2.3	1.1	1.8	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	484	224	2601	473	225	248
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>84.9</i>	<i>82.6</i>	<i>87.0</i>	<i>87.7</i>	<i>87.1</i>	<i>87.9</i>

	1993		1998		Male	Female
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace		
Strongly agree	37.7	48.4	43.5	54.2	44.2	49.4
Agree	48.7	33.6	43.5	34.8	41.9	39.4
Unsure	9.6	7	5.8	5.8	7.0	4.8
Disagree	1.7	7.8	5.8	5.2	5.6	5.2
Strongly disagree	2.3	3.1	1.6	0.0	0.9	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	345	128	313	155	215	251
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>86.4</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>86.1</i>	<i>88.8</i>

**Table 7: Migrants have a great deal to offer the Australian way of life: European migrants**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	23.2	23.7	22.8	25.5	24.7	26.3
Agree	57.1	54.0	59.8	52.0	51.2	52.7
Unsure	11.9	14.0	10.2	13.3	14.0	12.8
Disagree	5.8	7.0	4.7	7.4	7.9	7.0
Strongly disagree	1.9	1.4	2.4	1.7	2.3	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	469	215	254	458	215	243
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>80.3</i>	<i>77.7</i>	<i>82.6</i>	<i>77.5</i>	<i>75.9</i>	<i>79.0</i>

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Strongly agree	20.6	32.8	19.5	37.3	25.5	25.5
Agree	57.9	52.9	54.1	48.0	52.9	51.0
Unsure	12.4	10.9	15.8	8.0	10.3	16.2
Disagree	7.1	2.5	7.9	6.7	9.8	5.7
Strongly disagree	2.1	0.8	2.6	0.0	1.5	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	340	119	303	150	204	247
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>78.5</i>	<i>85.7</i>	<i>73.6</i>	<i>85.3</i>	<i>78.4</i>	<i>76.5</i>

**Table 8: Migrants have a great deal to offer the Australian way of life: Asian migrants**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	19.3	21.7	17.1	21.8	21.7	22.0
Agree	42.7	37.7	46.9	42.8	41.5	44.0
Unsure	19.3	21.7	17.1	18.7	19.8	17.7
Disagree	10.9	13.7	8.6	11.6	10.6	12.5
Strongly disagree	7.9	5.2	10.2	5.1	6.5	3.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	457	212	245	449	217	232
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>62.0</i>	<i>59.4</i>	<i>64.0</i>	<i>64.6</i>	<i>63.2</i>	<i>66.0</i>

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Strongly agree	16.7	28	16.4	32.0	21.5	21.8
Agree	43.6	38.1	45.0	38.8	42.5	42.8
Unsure	19.1	20.3	19.8	16.3	16.0	21.4
Disagree	11.2	10.2	12.1	10.9	13.0	10.7
Strongly disagree	9.4	3.4	6.7	2.0	7.0	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	330	118	298	147	200	243
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>60.3</i>	<i>66.1</i>	<i>61.4</i>	<i>70.8</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>64.6</i>

**Table 9: View of number of immigrants at present**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Too high	61.7	62.0	61.5	50.5	45.9	54.8
About right	25.7	24.0	27.1	31.4	33.6	29.4
Too low	4.1	3.9	4.2	7.5	8.7	6.5
No opinion/ unsure	8.6	10.0	7.3	10.5	11.8	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	491	229	262	477	229	248

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Too high	64.9	52.7	59.9	32.3	46.1	54.4
About right	27	21.7	27.8	38.1	31.5	30.8
Too low	2.9	7.8	4.4	14.2	11.9	4.0
No opinion/ unsure	5.2	17.8	7.9	15.5	10.5	10.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	345	129	317	155	219	250

**Table 10: Australians are justified in thinking that their way of life is threatened by multiculturalism**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
Strongly agree	17.7	19.1	16.5	18.3	18.7	17.6
Agree	31.1	34.0	28.6	24.7	22.2	26.9
Unsure	15.5	16.7	14.5	13.4	13.8	13.1
Disagree	28.7	24.7	32.2	30.2	28.9	31.4
Strongly disagree	7.0	5.6	8.2	13.4	16.0	11.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	470	215	255	470	225	245
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>48.8</i>	<i>53.1</i>	<i>45.1</i>	<i>43.0</i>	<i>40.9</i>	<i>44.5</i>

	1993		1998			
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Male	Female
Strongly agree	18.8	14.5	22.6	9.0	17.8	17.6
Agree	30.6	33.1	25.8	22.4	24.3	25.2
Unsure	13.5	21	12.9	14.7	12.6	14.4
Disagree	31.2	22.6	27.7	35.3	31.3	29.2
Strongly disagree	5.9	8.9	11.0	18.6	13.6	13.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	340	124	310	156	214	250
<i>combined strongly agree &amp; agree</i>	<i>49.4</i>	<i>47.6</i>	<i>48.4</i>	<i>31.4</i>	<i>42.1</i>	<i>42.8</i>

attention to Springvale, a considerable level of concern and opposition was evident. As noted, some 50 per cent were of the view that the immigration level was too high; an almost identical number (47 per cent) expressed dissatisfaction with the number of immigrants in Springvale. Of those who were of the view that the intake was too high, one per cent considered the number of immigrants in Springvale to be 'good', 13 per cent that it was 'all right', 16 per cent that it was of no significance, and 70 per cent were 'not happy' or stated that there were 'too many'.

In response to questions dealing specifically with the impact of Asian immigration, similar levels of concern were

voiced. When asked about levels of crime, almost a quarter of respondents (24 per cent) were of the view that the presence of Europeans increased crime, but over half (54 per cent) believed that Asian immigrants increased crime. A similar percentage (52 per cent) were concerned at the large number of Indo-Chinese businesses in the Springvale shopping centre, including some 36 per cent who agreed with the strong statement that such a concentration 'should not be allowed — no group should take over to such an extent' (Table 11).

#### OVERVIEW

In summary, 75 to 90 per cent of respondents were concerned with maintenance

**Table 11: Your view of the number of Indo-Chinese businesses in the Springvale shopping centre**

	93 total	Keysbor.	Dingley	98 total	Keysbor.	Dingley
It is a good thing.	8.9	6.3	11.3	7.5	8.4	6.6
It is all right.	26.0	26.3	25.7	25.2	25.7	24.8
It's nothing to me. I do not think about it.	14.6	13.8	15.2	15.8	12.4	19.0
I don't care for it - it excludes shops catering for Australians.	14.8	14.3	15.2	15.4	12.4	18.2
It should not be allowed - no group should take over to such an extent.	35.8	39.3	32.7	36.1	41.2	31.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	481	224	257	468	226	242
<i>combined 'don't care for it' &amp; 'not allow'</i>	50.6	53.6	47.9	51.5	53.6	49.6

	1993		1998		Male	Female
	Australia-born	Other birthplace	Australia-born	Other birthplace		
It is a good thing	8.6	9.4	5.4	11.3	10.3	5.2
It is all right	23.3	31.3	24.0	27.3	25.4	25.0
It's nothing to me. I do not think about it	15.3	12.5	13.4	20.7	15.5	16.1
I don't care for it - it excludes shops catering for Australians	14.7	15.6	17.6	11.3	12.7	18.1
It should not be allowed - no group should take over to such an extent	38.1	31.3	39.6	29.3	36.2	35.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n =	339	128	313	150	213	248
<i>combined 'don't care for it' &amp; 'not allow'</i>	52.8	46.9	57.2	40.6	48.9	53.6

of the Australian identity and encouragement of assimilation, supporting views which might have been strongly held in the 1950s. Yet understandings of Australian identity and the scope for pluralism may have shifted. Most clearly, support for a traditional 'white Australia' had passed, with more than 90 per cent favouring an immigration policy which does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. This contrasts with support of more than 50 per cent for the prohibition of Asian immigration in opinion polls conducted between 1943 and 1957.<sup>3</sup>

Views on the size of the immigration intake and multicultural policy were less defined: about 50 per cent thought that immigration was too high, 40 per cent that it was at the right level or too low; the issue of multiculturalism almost divided respondents between those who saw the policy as a threat and those who did not see it as of concern.

The core of opposition to non-discriminatory policies seems to be in the range five to ten per cent. Fewer than two per cent were strongly opposed to the principle that immigrants committed to Australia were welcome from any background and that European immigrants have a great deal to offer Australia. But five per cent strongly disagreed with the proposition that Asian immigrants have a great deal to offer and six per cent believed that the first factor in selection of immigrants should be their cultural similarity to Australia's. There was, however, a heightened non-response rate to such questions, which may indicate that some respondents declined to reveal views which may be considered extreme. The non-response rate to questions dealing with the level of immigration and policy towards newly arrived immigrants was less than two per cent; non-response to questions dealing with the potential

contribution of European and Asian immigrants was in the range of six to eight per cent.

While the core opposition is small, there is a clear potential to politicise the issue of immigrant settlement. This is evident in the milder levels of disquiet registered in response to a number of questions and in the very strong opposition to communal division. Some 36 per cent of respondents supported the strong proposition that clustering of the nature evident in the Springvale shopping centre 'should not be allowed — no group should take over to such an extent'.

#### **CHANGE OVER TIME**

There was a large measure of consistency between the attitudes of those surveyed in 1993-4 and 1998. Eighty-eight per cent in the earlier survey and 89 per cent in the more recent survey considered that schools should make a greater effort to teach a sense of pride in the Australian heritage (see Table 4); 77 per cent and 75 per cent respectively believed that migrants should be encouraged to fit in as soon as possible (see Table 5); and 51 per cent and 52 per cent respectively were opposed to the concentration of Indo-Chinese businesses in Springvale (see Table 11).

The major change recorded — contrary to the commentators who have argued that there has been a heightening of xenophobia — was an easing of tensions stemming from aspects of government policy. But as will be discussed below, changed attitudes were less in evidence amongst the Australia-born.

There was a substantial fall in the number concerned about the level of the immigration intake, down from 62 to 51 per cent (see Table 9). A shift in attitudes was also evident in responses to the sense of threat posed by multiculturalism. In

the earlier survey some 49 per cent had seen multiculturalism as a threat; in 1998 this figure was down to 43 per cent (see Table 10).

Evidence of a more relaxed attitude to aspects of government policy can be found in responses to other questions. Despite the high level of concern to maintain Australian heritage and identity, 35 per cent were prepared to endorse the idea that it was time to change the Australian flag, up from 27 per cent in 1993-4.

#### **VARIABLES OF GENDER AND LOCALITY**

In evaluating the findings, consideration also needs to be given to variables of gender, region, age and birthplace. Gender is of immediate significance because of the over-representation of female respondents in the survey. Were there significant differences in the attitudes of men and women, sufficient to require weighting of results obtained? The answer is that there was little variation — less than two percentage points for five of the nine questions considered (see Tables 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10). However, more men (92 per cent) than women (86 per cent) supported the need for schools to do more to teach a sense of pride in the Australian heritage. On the other hand, more women (54 per cent) than men (46 per cent) indicated opposition to the size of the immigration intake and to the number of Indo-Chinese businesses in the Springvale shopping centre (54 per cent women, 49 per cent men). (See Tables 4, 9 and 11.)

The comparison of the Dingley and Keysborough areas yielded surprisingly little variation given the difference in the socio-economic character of the two localities. There was almost unanimity (87 per cent and 88 per cent) in affirming

the view that ethnic background was of no significance if a person was committed to Australia (see Table 6). Positive views on the potential contribution of European and Asian immigrants varied some three percentage points (see Tables 7 and 8).

In response to a range of other questions the variation was more than five percentage points. Dingley residents were more concerned about national identity and immigration levels (see Tables 1, 2 and 7); in Keysborough there was greater opposition to the number of Asian businesses in the Springvale shopping centre (see Table 11). There were also some minor differences in the perceived impact of specific groups on the extent of neighbourhood violence, with Keysborough residents relatively more concerned with European immigrants, and Dingley residents more concerned with the Asian impact.

#### **AGE**

The analysis of different age groups yields no consistent overall pattern. However on issues primarily concerned with identity and assimilation the younger age groups were somewhat less concerned over change. Thus 86 per cent of those aged 60 and over disagreed with the proposition that Australian identity no longer matters, compared with 74 per cent of those in the 20-29 age group; 84 per cent aged 60 and over and 71 per cent aged 20-29 believed migrants should be encouraged to fit in as soon as possible; 65 per cent aged 60 and above and 49 per cent aged 20-29 were concerned at the number of Indo-Chinese businesses in Springvale.

On the question of the threat posed by multiculturalism there is a split between those aged above and below 40 — close to 50 per cent of those above 40 agreed

that multiculturalism presented a threat while the average for those under 40 was 34 per cent. One consistent feature, however, is the lack of support for assistance from government funds for cultural maintenance during an immigrant's first years in Australia, with support below 5 per cent for all age groups.

#### **BIRTHPLACE**

Separating the responses of those born in Australia and overseas yields the greatest divergence in attitudes.

Amongst Australia-born respondents there has been little shift in attitudes. Eighty-four per cent in the earlier survey and 83 per cent in the 1998 survey disagreed with the view that preservation of the Australian identity no longer mattered (see Table 3); an identical 89 per cent considered that schools should make more of an effort to teach a sense of pride in the Australian heritage (see Table 4); and 78 per cent and 79 per cent respectively wanted migrants encouraged to fit in as soon as possible (see Table 5). Small changes were recorded in attitudes to immigration, specific immigrant groups, and the clustering of Indo-Chinese shops. In 1993-4, 65 per cent of the Australia-born considered the immigration level to be too high, in 1998 this figure was down to 60 per cent (see Table 9). On the other hand, those considering that Europeans had a great deal to offer the Australian way of life fell from 79 per cent to 74 per cent (see Table 7) and concern at the number of Indo-Chinese businesses increased marginally from 53 per cent to 57 per cent (Table 11).

Amongst the overseas-born, on a few issues there was a consistency of view but marked shifts were recorded in response to a number of questions. In 1993-94, 67 per cent and, in 1998, 70 per cent of overseas-born respondents

disagreed with the view that Australian identity was no longer of significance (see Table 3), and 86 per cent and 85 per cent respectively agreed that European migrants had much to offer (see Table 7). In contrast with this consistency, support for encouragement of immigrants to fit in as soon as possible declined from 77 per cent to 68 per cent (see Table 5). Those agreeing that Australians were justified in seeing multiculturalism as a threat fell from 48 per cent to 31 per cent (see Table 10) and those who regarded the present immigration intake as too high fell by 21 percentage points, from 53 to 32 per cent (see Table 9).

The result of these shifts in attitude have left the Australia- and overseas-born with markedly different views on a number of issues. There is almost no difference (less than two per cent) on the issues of schools teaching a greater sense of pride and whether the background of immigrants committed to Australian was of importance. But on the seven other issues considered, the difference averaged 14 percentage points. Particularly marked was the difference in attitude towards the Indo-Chinese presence in the Springvale shopping centre (57 per cent Australia-born concerned, 41 per cent overseas-born, Table 11), the threat posed by multiculturalism (48 per cent and 31 per cent, see Table 10) and views on the current immigration intake (60 per cent and 32 per cent, see Table 9).

#### **CONCLUSION**

A key finding of this detailed analysis of attitudes is that there is no evidence of heightened xenophobia between the Keysborough and Dingley surveys conducted in 1993-4 and 1998.

Contrary to the assumptions often made that opposition to government immigration policy indicates the continu-

ing hold of prejudicial attitudes, the data here presented indicate widespread endorsement of non-discriminatory policies and willingness to accept immigrants of all backgrounds who make a commitment to their new homeland. However, the strength of the ideal of a united 'Australian' community continues unabated. A large majority of respondents believe that the preservation of the Australian identity matters and that schools should do more to teach a sense of pride in the Australian heritage. There is a very strong opinion, which holds good for the five variables considered, that immigrants should fit into the Australian community as soon as possible and there is almost no support for government funding of cultural maintenance in

THE END

Following article begins here in print journal.

the first years after an immigrant's arrival in Australia. Further, strong opposition is voiced to the ethnic concentration evident in the Springvale shopping centre, indicating the ever-present potential to politicise issues of immigrant settlement.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> *The Age*, 12 November 1996
- <sup>3</sup> A. Markus, '1984 or 1901? Immigration and some 'lessons' of Australian history', in A. Markus and M. Ricklefs (Eds), *Surrender Australia? Essays in the Study and Uses of History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 17