

We will decide who comes to this country

Attitudes towards immigration and
voter behaviour at the 2013 federal election

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Introduction

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In Australia, as elsewhere, anti-immigration sentiment linked to populist right.

Since the 1980s it has also been increasingly associated with the Liberal-National Coalition parties, which is a change from the traditional party alignment on this issue. It was linked to Coalition election campaign in 2001.

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And more recently....



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- Which socioeconomic groups of voters are most likely to vote based on their attitudes towards immigration.
- What theories best explain their behaviour. Is the immigration-voting relationship driven by economic concerns, or is it primarily about social/ cultural anxiety?
- What this relationship says about the Australian party system, and the role of immigration in contemporary democratic politics more generally.

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- **Symbolic threat** Perceptions of difference drive rejection of out-groups.
- **Social dominance theory** Currently dominant groups prefer policies that retain their social position, subordinate groups support change.
- **Post-materialism** As lesser needs are met, others are pursued. In this case, politics over identity, social change and diversity may be between elites groups.

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Four models fit to four questions that explore different dimensions to attitudes towards immigration. N = more than 100 thousand observations for each of four models.

- Asylum seekers who arrive by boat should not be allowed to settle in Australia.
- Boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back.
- How many new immigrants should Australia admit?
- There should be more restrictions on 457 visas issued to temporary foreign workers.

These are all five item Likert scales. Coded on common scale from least concerned about immigration to most.

Immigration as an economic concern: Material (or realistic) threat

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A concern for the secure: Post-materialism

It is advantaged groups who care about immigration for reasons concerning social identity and cultural diversity: those with higher levels of educational attainment, and with higher incomes.

A social/cultural concern?

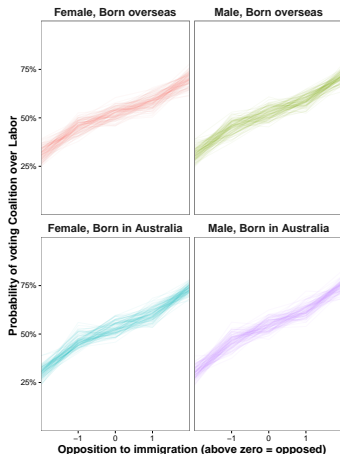


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on birthplace and gender, and attitudes towards asylum seekers.

Birthplace and gender

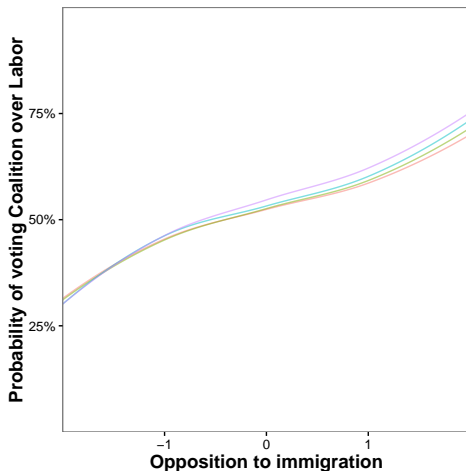


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on age and attitudes towards asylum seekers. Female, Born overseas = red, Male, Born overseas = green, Female, Born in Australia = blue, Male, Born in Australia = purple

Birthplace and gender

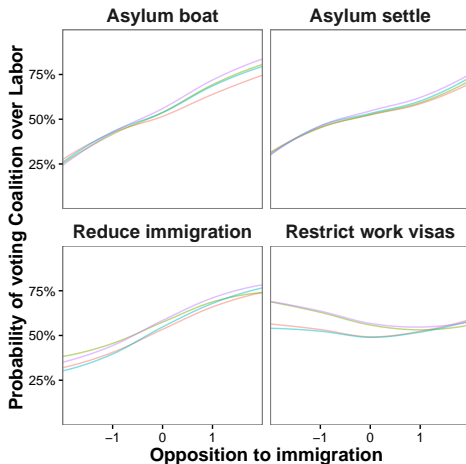


Figure: Birthplace, gender, attitudes towards immigration and vote. Female, Born overseas = red, Male, Born overseas = green, Female, Born in Australia = blue, Male, Born in Australia = purple

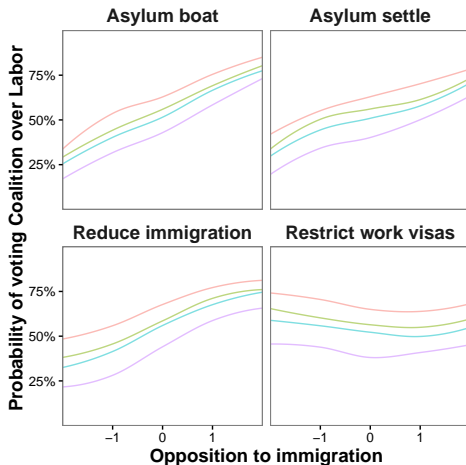


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on religion and attitudes towards immigration. Protestant = red, Catholic = green, Other = blue, None = purple

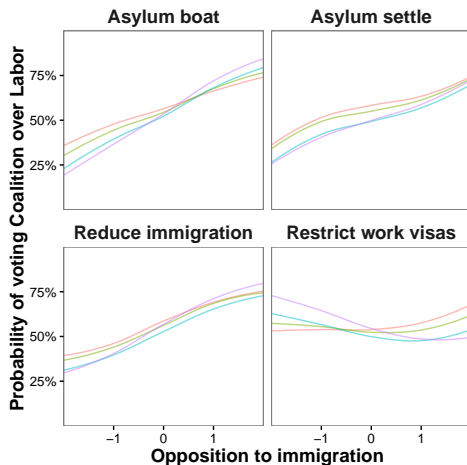


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on age and attitudes towards immigration. Aged 18-29 = red, Aged 30-44 = green, Aged 45-64 = blue, Aged 65 plus = purple

An economic or postmaterial concern?

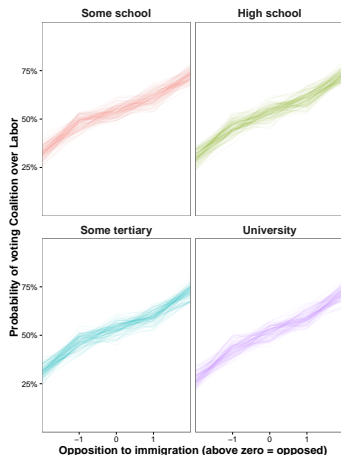


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on education, and attitudes towards asylum seekers.

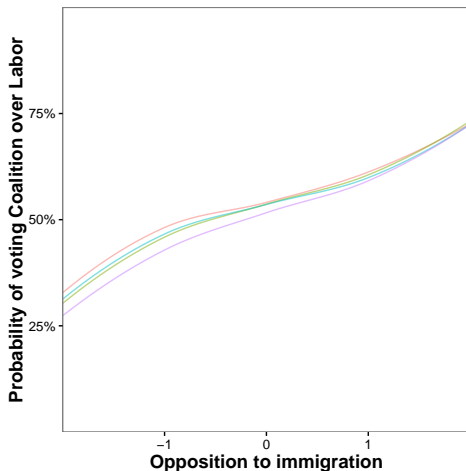


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on education and attitudes towards asylum seekers. Some school = red, High school = green, Some tertiary = blue, University = purple

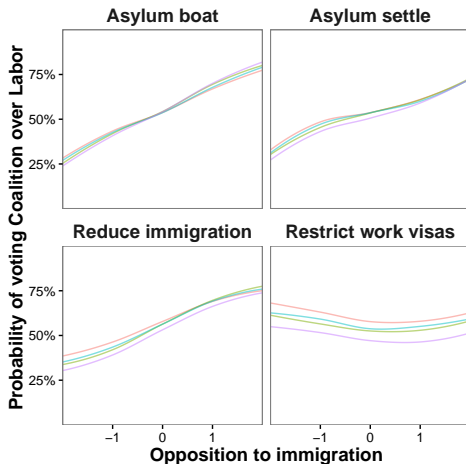


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Household income

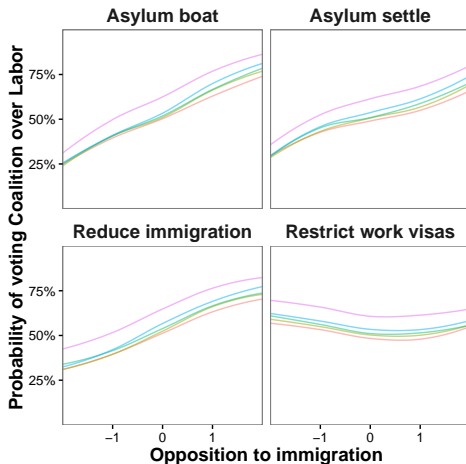


Figure: Probability of voting Coalition over Labor conditional on income and attitudes towards asylum seekers. Lowest quintile = red, second = brown, third = green, fourth = blue, highest = purple

Conclusion

- It appears there are mostly social drivers for voting based on immigration.
- However, it appears this is more the domain of the socio-economically secure.
- The Coalition appears to have secured cultural and social conservatives within its electoral alliance, perhaps limiting the rise of the rise of the populist right (until 2013 at least)
- We need to examine the last point further, looking at first preference voting.

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1960. First report on the progress and assimilation of migrant children in australia. Report, Special Committee The Progress and Assimilation of Migrant Children in Australia.

Khoo, S.-E., P. McDonald, D. Giorgas, and B. Birrell

2002. Second generation australians report. Report, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

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2016. Vote compass methodology.