

Who is worried about immigration in Australia?

The environmental and demographic predictors for opposition to new arrivals.

Shaun Ratcliff, *Monash University*
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Who is worried about immigration in Australia?

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Immigration policy has been a divisive political issue in recent decades.

Australia is no exception, despite what can be considered its highly successful national immigration program (Council, 1960; Khoo et al., 2002).

However, there has been limited research into who is most concerned about immigration to Australia on different dimensions. Notable exceptions include Denis Muller (qualitative) and Andrew Markus (quantitative).

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We are interested in:

- ▶ Which socioeconomic groups of voters are most concerned about immigration, and what theories best explain concerns about immigration?
- ▶ Is concern about immigration driven by economic concerns, or is it primarily about social/ cultural anxiety?

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- ▶ Which socioeconomic groups of voters are most concerned about immigration, and what theories best explain concerns about immigration?
- ▶ Is concern about immigration driven by economic concerns, or is it primarily about social/ cultural anxiety?
- ▶ Test several theories using multiple dimensions of immigration.
- ▶ Use a large data set collected in 2013, with multilevel models and census data to examine individual and environmental factors that influence voter preferences.

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- ▶ Which socioeconomic groups of voters are most concerned about immigration, and what theories best explain concerns about immigration?
- ▶ Is concern about immigration driven by economic concerns, or is it primarily about social/ cultural anxiety?
- ▶ Test several theories using multiple dimensions of immigration.
- ▶ Use a large data set collected in 2013, with multilevel models and census data to examine individual and environmental factors that influence voter preferences.
- ▶ Provide new insights into what might contribute to negative and positive perceptions about immigration, and potential political and policy implications.

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Material (or realistic) threat

Based primarily on work by Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues (1953; 1961), and named by Donald Campbell (1965).

In this framework, inter-group relations are characterised as being motivated by rewards, which in this case are generally scarce resources:

- ▶ Political power.
- ▶ Public resources.
- ▶ Employment opportunities.

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- ▶ Political power.
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Opposed group interests in obtaining these resources create competition. Conflicting interests develop, through competition, into overt social conflict.

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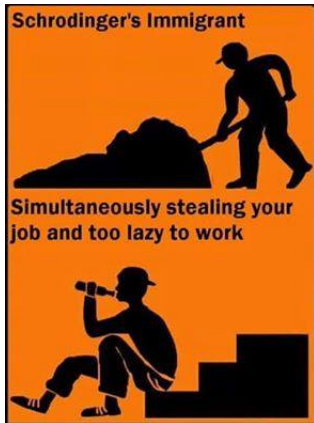
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Material (or realistic) threat

Another view of material threat.



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Symbolic threat

Greater exposure between members of different races will worsen race relations (Key, 1949; Blalock, 1967).

- ▶ Based on preference for conformity to common values and norms. Non-conformity as threat.

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- ▶ Related to inter-group anxiety: feelings of uneasiness and awkwardness related to inter-group interactions.

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- ▶ Based on preference for conformity to common values and norms. Non-conformity as threat.
- ▶ Related to inter-group anxiety: feelings of uneasiness and awkwardness related to inter-group interactions.
- ▶ Negative immigration attitudes are triggered by perceptions of profound value differences, rather than by any objective difference.

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Greater exposure to members of different groups will improve relations.

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Contact hypothesis

Greater exposure to members of different groups will improve relations.

- ▶ However, this is only under certain ideal conditions of equal status and shared objectives (Allport, 1954; Welch et al., 2001).

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Contact hypothesis

Greater exposure to members of different groups will improve relations.

- ▶ However, this is only under certain ideal conditions of equal status and shared objectives (Allport, 1954; Welch et al., 2001).
- ▶ Appears to be context specific: Effect of education on feelings of threat (Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000); different effects at the neighbourhood and regional levels (Oliver and Wong, 2003).

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Social dominance theory

Based on assumption that hierarchies are natural in complex, surplus-producing societies, and these are the main causes of group conflict. This theory also:

- ▶ Asserts these hierarchies are composed of dominant and subordinate (usually immigrant or minority) groups.

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Based on assumption that hierarchies are natural in complex, surplus-producing societies, and these are the main causes of group conflict. This theory also:

- ▶ Asserts these hierarchies are composed of dominant and subordinate (usually immigrant or minority) groups.
- ▶ Dominant groups are characterised by possession of disproportionate share of positive social values: political authority, wealth and social status, and public resources.

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Social dominance theory

Based on assumption that hierarchies are natural in complex, surplus-producing societies, and these are the main causes of group conflict. This theory also:

- ▶ Asserts these hierarchies are composed of dominant and subordinate (usually immigrant or minority) groups.
- ▶ Dominant groups are characterised by possession of disproportionate share of positive social values: political authority, wealth and social status, and public resources.
- ▶ Maintained by individual acts of discrimination; legitimising myths; and the rules, procedures, and actions of social institutions.

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- ▶ Maintained by individual acts of discrimination; legitimising myths; and the rules, procedures, and actions of social institutions.
- ▶ Conflict around maintenance or change of hierarchies.

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Our data

Twenty per cent sample of Vox Pop Labs data collected during 2013 Australian federal election (Vox Pop Labs, 2016). N = more than 100 thousand observations, for each of four models.

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We look at four questions that explore different dimensions to attitudes towards immigration:

- ▶ 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.

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We fit four linear multilevel models. One for each immigration question. Variables are included that investigate these theories.

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Material (or realistic) threat

At the individual level: education, household income.

At the divisional level: proportion of overseas born in division, unemployment rate.

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Material (or realistic) threat

At the individual level: education, household income.

At the divisional level: proportion of overseas born in division, unemployment rate.

Symbolic threat

At the individual level: birthplace, religion (as a proxy for culture).

At the divisional level: population density, the proportion born overseas.

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Contact hypothesis

At the individual level: education.

At the divisional level: population density, the proportion born overseas, and an interaction between these.

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Social dominance theory

At the individual level: Birthplace and gender, religion.

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At the divisional level: proportion of overseas born in division, unemployment rate.

Symbolic threat

At the individual level: birthplace, religion (as a proxy for culture).

At the divisional level: population density, the proportion born overseas.

Contact hypothesis

At the individual level: education.

At the divisional level: population density, the proportion born overseas, and an interaction between these.

Social dominance theory

At the individual level: Birthplace and gender, religion.

Age and division are included as controls.

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Median household income

No relationship between divisional income and attitudes towards asylum settlement, turning back the boats, immigration in general.

Concern about temporary work visas declined slightly as income increased.

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First we examine the division-level predictors.

Median household income

No relationship between divisional income and attitudes towards asylum settlement, turning back the boats, immigration in general. Concern about temporary work visas declined slightly as income increased.

Unemployment rate

A very weak relationship between unemployment and asylum settlement, and turning back the boats, immigration in general and temporary work visas.

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A very weak relationship between unemployment and asylum settlement, and turning back the boats, immigration in general and temporary work visas.

Population density and diversity

As density increases, concern about asylum seekers, immigration in general declines. No real relationship with attitudes to temporary work visas.

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Unemployment rate

A very weak relationship between unemployment and asylum settlement, and turning back the boats, immigration in general and temporary work visas.

Population density and diversity

As density increases, concern about asylum seekers, immigration in general declines. No real relationship with attitudes to temporary work visas.

Greater diversity slightly increased opposition for accepting asylum seekers, immigration in general. No real relationship with attitudes to temporary work visas.

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Population density and diversity

As density increases, concern about asylum seekers, immigration in general declines. No real relationship with attitudes to temporary work visas.

Greater diversity slightly increased opposition for accepting asylum seekers, immigration in general. No real relationship with attitudes to temporary work visas. No interaction effect.

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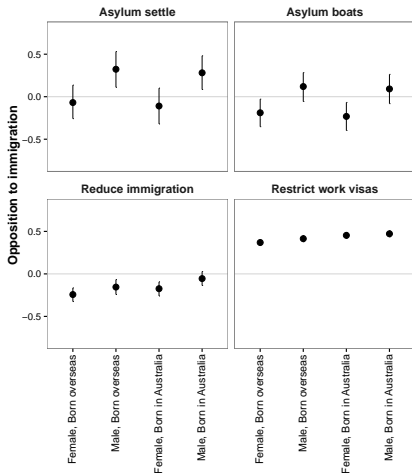
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Socioeconomic factors

Birthplace and gender

Estimated attitude towards immigration, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.



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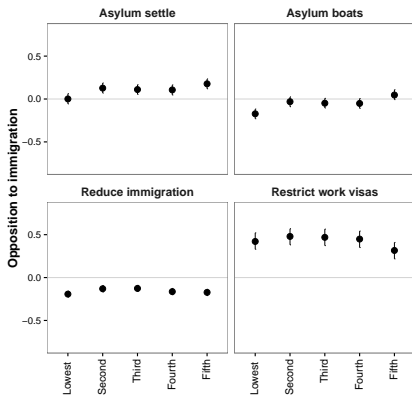
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Household income

Estimated attitude towards immigration, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.



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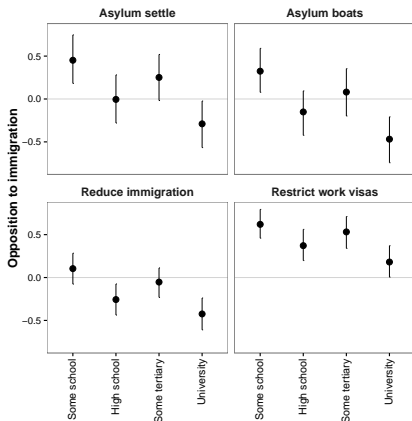
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Education

Estimated attitude towards immigration, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.



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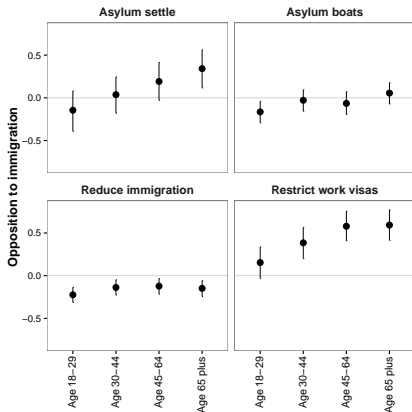
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Age

Estimated attitude towards immigration, with 95 per cent confidence intervals.



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Shaun Ratcliff,
Monash University
Andrea Carson,
University of Melbourne
Marija Taflaga,
Australian National University

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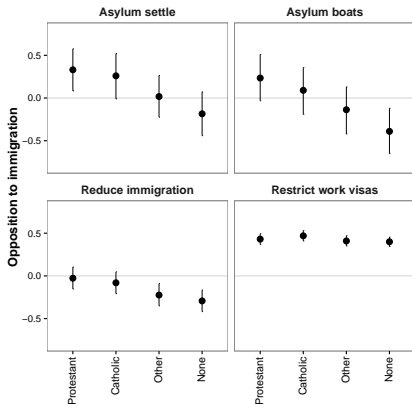
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- ▶ Environmental factors do not seem to play a major role in the formation of opposition to immigration.

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- ▶ Environmental factors do not seem to play a major role in the formation of opposition to immigration.
- ▶ There is stronger support for social dominance theory, some for material and symbolic threat theory, and little for contact theory.

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- ▶ Environmental factors do not seem to play a major role in the formation of opposition to immigration.
- ▶ There is stronger support for social dominance theory, some for material and symbolic threat theory, and little for contact theory.
- ▶ Of these, there appears to be more support for social rather than economic causes of opposition to immigration; although the widespread opposition towards temporary work visas indicates there is also an economic dimension.

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