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Border Protection, the 2001 Australian Election and the Coalition Victory

IAN MCALLISTER

Australian National University

While the issue of refugees and asylum-seekers has preoccupied many European countries, until the November 2001 federal election Australia had largely been immune from the problem. In the election, border protection—combining the Tampa crisis with the 'war against terrorism'—were central electoral issues. Analysis of the 2001 Australian Election Study shows that border protection cost Labor the election. Labor suffered defections to the Democrats and Greens over its position on refugees and asylum-seekers, and defections to the Coalition on terrorism. Negative public attitudes towards asylum-seekers rested on opposition to immigration, but also on a particular dislike of arrivals from the Middle East. By contrast, support for the 'war on terrorism' was based mainly on notions of fairness and democracy. Of the two border protection issues—asylum-seekers and terrorism—terrorism was the more important of the two in shaping the election outcome. If 11 September had occurred but the Tampa crisis had not, the Coalition would in all probability still have won the election.

In recent years, popular concerns about immigration and the influx of asylum-seekers have made them major election issues in many of the advanced democracies. Recent elections in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland have all shown gains for anti-immigration parties. Partly in response to these electoral gains, and partly because of the large numbers of asylum-seekers arriving in their countries, many governments have introduced legislation to try and limit the flow of illegal migrants. Until 2001, Australia had been relatively immune from these international trends. Although the electoral success of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in the late 1990s had popularised the immigration issue in general,[1] bipartisan support for Australia's long-standing immigration and asylum-seeker policies remained largely intact.[2] This situation changed at the November 2001

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[1] Although the focus of One Nation (and of its leader, Pauline Hanson) was on Asian immigrants rather than Middle Eastern asylum-seekers, the immigration debate placed the general issue of who should be allowed to settle in Australia on the political agenda.

[2] See Denemark and Bowler (2002), Gibson, McAllister and Swenson (2002), Goot and Watson (2001) and Leach, Stokes and Ward (2000) for interpretations of the electoral bases of the One Nation Party.

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federal election when, for the first time since the Vietnam War, border protection was a major issue and, it is argued here, determined the outcome of the election.

The election resulted in the return of a Liberal–National Party Coalition government led by John Howard. The election was the third election win for Howard, a record matched only in the post-war years by three other Prime Ministers: Sir Robert Menzies, Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke. Indeed, until the emergence of the border protection issue it appeared that a Coalition win was highly unlikely, and for the first six months of 2001 Labor enjoyed a comfortable poll lead over the Liberals of up to 13 percentage points and seemed set for victory.[3] By midyear, the asylum-seeker crisis saw that poll lead dissipate and for several months the parties were running neck and neck. Following the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, public opinion again shifted and the Liberals achieved a dramatic 15-point lead over Labor, a position they maintained almost to polling day.

The 2001 federal election was therefore unusual for the context in which it was held. Since the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, economic issues have predominated, most particularly in the form of labour market deregulation and, during the 1990s, reform of the tax system. In 1998, the introduction of a goods and services tax (GST) was the central issue. But for the first time in three decades an election was fought mainly on two non-economic issues, both reinforcing one another: first, there was the issue of asylum-seekers, exemplified most dramatically in the 'Tampa Crisis'; and second, the events of 11 September and the 'war against terrorism'. For the first time in four decades, the main issue in a federal election was border protection, not the economy. Using the 2001 Australian Election Study (AES), this paper examines the role that border protection played in shaping the result.[4]

The Campaign and the Result

Throughout 2000 and early 2001, it appeared that the Coalition would find it difficult to win a third term. The GST, the Coalition's centrepiece in the 1998 election, had been introduced and almost immediately encountered difficulties and much criticism in its implementation; the net effect was that by mid-2000 just one in three voters said they favoured the tax, compared with more than half of the electorate just one year before (Newspoll 2000). There was also a widely held view that the government had lost touch with ordinary voters; this was expressed most pointedly by the party's president, Shane Stone, who in a leaked letter said that there was a view that the 'government is dysfunctional, out of touch and hurting our own' (*Weekend Australian* 17–18 March 2001). In response to these criticisms, the government abandoned plans to tax family trusts and took steps to stabilise petrol prices.

The Coalition's policy travails meant that for most of 2000 it trailed Labor in the

[3] Two of the polls, Newspoll and ACNeilsen, showed a safe Labor lead, but the third poll, Morgan, did not.

[4] The 2001 Australian Election Study survey was a random sample of the electorate, representative of all States and Territories, conducted immediately after the November 2001 federal election. The survey was based on a self-completion questionnaire, yielding 2010 completed responses, representing an effective response rate of 55.4%. See Bean, Gow and McAllister (2002) for further details.

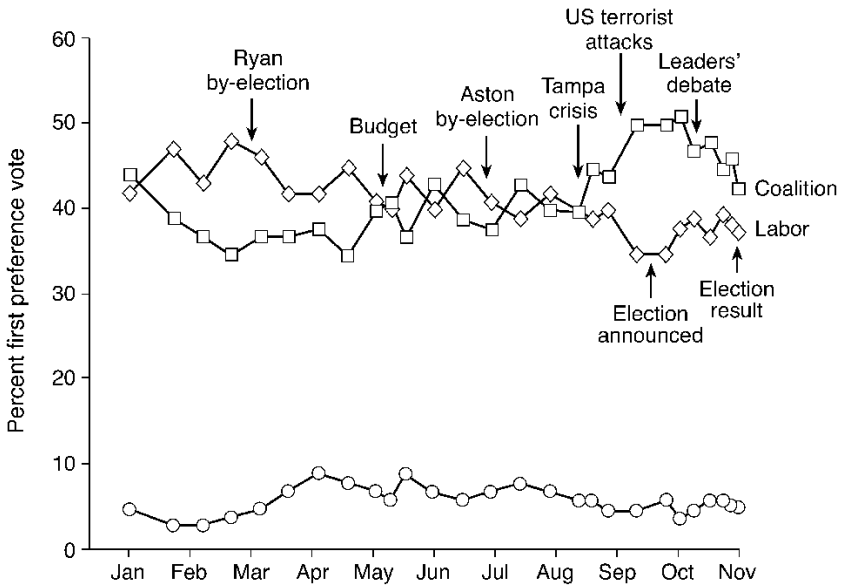

Figure 1. Voting intention, January–November 2001.
Source: Goot (2002).

polls, though by a small margin. Using Newspoll estimates, Figure 1 shows that in early 2001 Labor's lead increased, reaching its peak in March 2001, when it led the Coalition by more than 10 percentage points; this followed the Queensland State election on 17 February, which saw Labor returned in a landslide, and the Coalition's first-ever defeat in the Ryan electorate at a by-election on 17 March. But by mid-2001 Labor's lead had largely dissipated. In part, this was due to government actions to improve its standing among voters: in May, the budget tried to remedy some of the major criticisms of its policies, including the introduction of a one-off payment to reduce the impact of the now unpopular GST. In June, the government's improved popularity was demonstrated by its retention of the Aston seat in a by-election, albeit with a reduced majority.

But Labor's declining fortunes were also a consequence of its own strategic decision to criticise government policies but not to provide any detailed plans of what it would do in place of those policies if it were elected. This was exemplified by Labor policy on the GST. Party policy in the 1998 election had been to oppose the introduction of the tax, but after its implementation any move to abolish it became impractical; instead, Labor prevaricated up to the election, taking the view that the tax could be made less regressive by removing it from certain items, but without specifying in detail what those items would be.[5] The net effect of Labor holding back on policy detail was that by the time the party was ready to launch its proposals international events were overshadowing the domestic economic agenda. In short, Labor had lost control of the electoral agenda.

The two events which changed the course of the federal election were the Tampa crisis in late August and the associated debate about how to deal with asylum-seekers;

[5] Labor identified funerals and women's sanitary products as examples of goods that would be tax exempt, but it was not until their policy launch that they specified domestic gas and electricity supplies, and caravan and boarding rentals, as other tax-exempt items.

and the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States and its implications for defence and foreign policy. The Tampa crisis began on 26 August when a Norwegian freighter, the MV *Tampa*, responded to an Australian request to rescue 430 mainly Afghan asylum-seekers from a sinking boat bound for Australia.[6] On the grounds that the incident took place in Indonesian waters, the government refused the *Tampa* permission to land on Australian territory; after a stand-off lasting several days, a compromise was reached by which New Zealand agreed to take 150 of the asylum-seekers, with the remainder being sent to the Pacific island of Nauru to have their claims for political asylum evaluated (Suter 2001).

Immediately following the incident, the Newspoll survey registered a 5% Coalition lead in the polls.[7] The issue was further fuelled, to the government's advantage, by allegations, first aired on 8 October and subsequently found to be false, that asylum-seekers in another incident had attempted to throw their children overboard in order to avoid being turned back by the navy. Labor's response to these dramatic events was muted; it agreed with the government on the basic tenets of the policy on the processing of asylum-seekers (which a previous Labor government had largely established). Their only substantive point of difference was to point out that continued illegal arrivals vindicated their policy of establishing a coastguard with specific responsibility for border protection.

The terrorist attacks in the United States focused public opinion on the issue of national security for the first time since the 1960s. There is little doubt that the issue benefited the incumbent party, as it did in the United States: when faced with a perceived external threat, voters tend to rally around the government, regardless of partisanship. In Australia, as in the United States, all of the polls found that popular approval ratings for the government and its leaders increased significantly following the attacks (Goot 2002, tables 6.1–6.3).[8] The attacks also came at a time when public perceptions of national security were that the region was more unsafe than at any time since the collapse of communism; the 1991 Gulf War, the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s and the 1999 East Timor crisis, all served to emphasise the necessity of strong defence.[9] This point was not lost on the government, which sought to link the terrorist attacks with asylum-seekers by stressing the need to screen asylum-seekers for possible terrorist connections.[10] Once again, Labor had no substantive differences with the government in how to respond to this changed situation.

In the light of these momentous events, domestic economic issues received relatively little attention. In part, this was due to the fact that the economy had been performing well for some years, which underpinned the public's general preference

[6] For the legal implications of the Tampa crisis, see Thompson and Pringle (2002). On the legal status of recent boat people more generally, see Wells and Esmaeili (2000).

[7] A survey conducted by Newspoll immediately after the incident found that 50% believed that all boats should be turned back, 38% that some boats should be let in, dependent on the circumstances, and only 9% that all boats should be allowed in (*Australian* 3 September 2001). See also Betts (2001) and Goot (2002).

[8] In the United States, popular approval for George Bush increased by almost 40 percentage points, levels unprecedented apart from major international conflicts such as the Second World War and the Korea War (*The Economist* 12 January 2002).

[9] The 1990 AES found that 33% wanted to spend more on defence, the lowest point since surveys first asked the question in 1975. In 1993 this increased to 42%; in 1996, 38%; in 1998 52%, and in the 2001 AES, 60%.

[10] Examinations of the boat-people issue from a security perspective can be found in Maley (2001), McMaster (2002) and Wesley (2002).

Table 1. The result of the 2001 House of Representatives election

	% Party vote	Change	Seats	Change
Liberal Party	37.4	+ 3.2	69	+ 5
National Party	5.6	+ 0.3	13	− 3
(Total Coalition)	(43.0)	(+ 3.5)	(82)	(+ 2)
Australian Labor Party	37.8	− 2.3	65	(− 2)
Australian Democrats	5.4	+ 0.3	0	0
Pauline Hanson's One Nation	4.3	− 4.1	0	0
Greens	4.4	+ 2.3	0	0
Others	5.1	+ 0.3	3	(+ 2)

Notes:
The party vote is the first-preference vote. The change columns show the change in the percentage first-preference vote and seats, respectively, from the 1998 federal election. In 1998 there were 148 House of Representatives seats, in 2001, 150 seats.
Source: Australian Electoral Commission.

for the Coalition on matters of economic management. The midyear economic forecast, published on 17 October, announced a government surplus of $500m and predicted that the economy would grow by 3%, less than the previous year but still ahead of most other OECD countries. Even the financial collapse of the second largest domestic airline, Ansett, the day after the terrorist attacks in the United States, failed to become an election issue, beyond the more general question of guaranteeing workers' entitlements in the event of employer bankruptcy. The only event which appeared to arrest the Coalition's major campaign lead over Labor was the televised debate between Howard and Beazley, on 14 October, which was generally viewed as resulting in a win for Beazley.[11]

The result of the election—summarised in Table 1—was a decisive victory for the Coalition, winning 82 seats to Labor's 65, with three seats being held by independents. The Liberals themselves gained 3.2% of the vote compared to the 1998 election, and five extra seats. Overall, the swing to the Coalition was the largest to an incumbent government since 1966 when Harold Holt, who had succeeded Sir Robert Menzies as Prime Minister just nine months earlier, won a landslide victory against a Labor Party that opposed the then popular Vietnam War. Among the minor parties, the Australian Democrats' vote was stable, but their support for the GST alienated some supporters who defected to the Greens. The Greens also benefited from Liberal/Labor bipartisanship on the asylum-seeker issue, with the Greens' sole senator, Bob Brown, being particularly vocal on the issue. Overall, the Greens attracted 4.4% of the first-preference vote, their largest lower house vote to date.

By any standards, the Coalition won a decisive victory in the election. Using the 2001 AES,[12] what does the turnover of the vote between 1998 and 2001 tell us

[11] Among the AES respondents, 45% said they viewed the debate, and of this group, 55% thought Beazley had performed best, 21% Howard, and 24% declared it a draw. For contemporaneous data which come to the same conclusion, see Goot (2002).

[12] The 2001 AES was a national random sample of the electorate using a self-completion instrument conducted immediately after the federal election. A total of 4000 voters were contacted, resulting in 3631 voters who were in scope. Of these voters, 2010 valid responses were received, representing an effective response rate of 55.4%. As with all self-completion surveys, there is a small sample bias towards better-educated, older respondents and this should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Table 2. The turnover of the House of Representatives' vote, 1998–2001

	1998 Vote						
	Lab	Lib–Nat	Dem	Green	ONP	Other	Non-voter
2001 Vote							
Lab	80	6	19	21	11	8	42
Lib–Nat	7	85	20	14	33	32	39
Dem	5	3	42	9	3	3	4
Green	6	2	15	54	2	10	7
ONP	1	2	1	0	49	18	6
Other	1	2	3	2	2	29	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(705)	(826)	(69)	(43)	(63)	(38)	(82)

'In the federal election for the House of Representatives on Saturday 10 November, which party did you vote for first in the House of Representatives?' 'In the last federal election in October 1998, when Labor was led by Kim Beazley and the Liberals by John Howard, which party got your first preference then in the House of Representatives election'?
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

about the causes of this victory? Table 2 suggests that the Coalition parties were the most effective in retaining their vote between the two elections, with 85% of their 1998 voters remaining loyal.[13] This compares with 76% who remained loyal to the Coalition between the 1996 and 1998 elections. Defections from the Coalition went primarily to Labor (6% of its 1998 vote defected to Labor) and to a lesser extent to the Democrats and the other minor parties. Labor did less well in retaining its 1998 vote, with 80% of its 1998 voters remaining loyal in 2001. Most of the defections from Labor were shared almost equally between the Coalition (7%), the Democrats (5%) and the Greens (6%). The Coalition therefore gained almost half of their additional vote from previous Labor voters.

In contrast to the major parties, the levels of vote retention among the smaller parties were substantially less.[14] The Democrats retained just 40% of their 1998 vote, the Greens did slightly better with 54%, and One Nation recorded 49%. Non-voters in 1998 split almost equally between the major parties in their 2001 vote. Overall, the Coalition's electoral success in the 2001 election can be attributed to two factors. First, the Coalition managed to retain a comparatively large number of its voters between the two elections and significantly improved its retention rate compared to the 1998 election. Second, in all previous elections Labor has experienced defection of its voters to the Democrats; in 2001, in addition to Democrat defection, the party experienced significant defection to the Greens as

[13] As with all election surveys, support for the winning party is slightly overestimated, generally at the expense of the minor parties. For example, the AES estimate of the Coalition first-preference vote was 46.4% compared to an actual vote of 43.0%; the Labor estimate was 37.2% compared to an actual vote of 37.8%. The minor parties were as follows: Australian Democrats 5.4% (actual 5.5%); One Nation 3.6% (4.3%); and Greens 5.3% (4.4%). The biases towards the winning party and away from the minor parties are more marked with voting recall, as we would expect, and these should be borne in mind when interpreting the results in Table 2.
[14] The small numbers of respondents in the minor party categories mean that the results should be treated with caution.

well. This is a pattern of voter defection Labor had not experienced since the 1990 federal election, when Democrat and Green candidates won almost 15% of the first-preference lower house vote (Bean, McAllister and Warhurst 1990).

The Election Issues

While international events formed a constant backdrop to the campaign, both of the major parties announced extensive socio-economic policy launches across a range of areas. The Coalition promised to extend grants for new homeowners, and major changes were proposed to the superannuation provisions of high income earners and to permit partners to redirect superannuation contributions between them. There was also a pledge not to privatise the remaining government-owned parts of Telstra until telecommunications in rural areas reached an acceptable level. The centrepiece of Labor's campaign, as reflected in its advertising focus, was its *Knowledge Nation* policy, which identified education as the key to Australia's future economic prosperity. The policy committed a future Labor government to allocate major resources to establish programs in education, technology and communications.

These policies were not lost on the electorate and while international issues appear among those with at least 5% mentions among voters, the top three issues—education, taxation, and health and Medicare—are all long-standing domestic preoccupations (see Table 3).[15] The major changes from the 1998 federal election were the demise of the GST as a major electoral concern; most voters had become reconciled to the new tax and while 42% of voters in 1998 saw it as the issue of most concern to them, the same figure in 2001 was just 13%. Education grew in importance, from 6% to 17%, as did, more modestly, health and Medicare, from 10% to 16%. Nevertheless, almost one in four voters mentioned asylum-seekers, defence or terrorism as their major election concern, an unprecedented situation for any federal election since the 1960s.[16] If second mentions are included, then almost half of the electorate mentioned one of the border protection issues.

With regards to two of the issues—education, and health and Medicare—the second part of Table 3 shows that Labor was easily the most preferred party in dealing with them. Indeed, on education policy, Labor was preferred by 21% more voters than the Coalition, an increase of 5% on the 1998 situation. Labor also maintained a substantial lead of 13% as the preferred party over the Coalition on health and Medicare, a drop of 1% from the previous election, but still a sizeable and important lead. But on taxation, and most particularly on the three border protection issues, the Coalition was by far the most preferred party—albeit with substantial proportions of voters either seeing no difference between the major parties or saying that they did not know. On refugees and asylum-seekers, for example, just 18% of voters preferred Labor, compared to 46% who preferred the Coalition, with the remaining 39% expressing no preference.

In terms of electoral support, which party benefited most from these seven issues,

[15] It should be noted that respondents were asked to choose their first and second ranked issues from a closed set of issues, and the list has necessarily varied from election to election. Neither terrorism nor asylum-seekers had been mentioned in a previous AES, and defence was asked only in 1996.

[16] The other issues mentioned by voters of most concern in 2001 were immigration, unemployment and the environment (each 4%), industrial relations and workers' entitlements (each 1%).

Table 3. The main election issues

	First- and second-mentioned issues		Party closest to own view		
	First	Second	Labor	Coalition	No diff, don't know
Education	17	16	48	27	25
Taxation	16	9	33	39	28
Health, Medicare	16	20	41	28	21
Refugees, asylum-seekers	13	12	15	46	39
GST	13	9	38	38	24
Defence, national security	6	6	18	41	41
Terrorism	5	5	13	42	45
Others	14	23			
Total	100	100			
(N)	(1849)	(1808)			

'Still thinking about the same 12 issues, which of these issues was most important to you and your family during the election campaign? And which next?' 'Still thinking about these same issues, which policies—the Labor Party's or the Liberal–National coalition's—would you say come closest to your own views on each of these issues?'
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

bearing in mind how highly voters rated each issue, and which party they preferred to handle it? Two calculations are important in arriving at this estimate: first, how important each voter considered a particular issue; and, second, which party the voter preferred to handle it. A useful summary statistic which takes into account these two aspects of each issue is to calculate the preferred party figures on each of these seven issues and to weight them by voters' overall concerns. The resulting statistic provides a rough estimate of each issue's impact. For example, in the case of education, its overall importance as an election issue is 0.17 (17/100) and Labor led the Coalition by 21 points as the preferred party on the issue; 0.17 multiplied by 21 gives a summary measure of 3.57.

Once these calculations are made for all seven issues and summed, the Coalition emerges as ahead of Labor by just over 2 percentage points. If the estimates are recalculated without the three border protection issues, then Labor would have enjoyed almost a 5 percentage point lead over the Coalition. In other words, if the policy debate in the election had focused on traditional economic issues only, and border protection had not entered the election agenda, Labor would have been a substantial net beneficiary. Indeed, the single most important issue in the election—taking into account importance and party preference—was refugees and asylum-seekers, with a score of 4.03, easily surpassing the second most important issue, education, with a score of 3.57.

By any standards, then, border protection had a major influence on the vote, at least judged against the other issues. But to what extent did it motivate voters to shift their allegiances between the parties? Table 4 addresses this question by presenting the results of three logistic regression equations, predicting defection between the major groupings from the seven main issues listed in the previous table. The seven issues are measured by the importance placed on them by the respondents, ranging from not important at all to extremely important. For example,

Table 4. Predicting major party defection

	From Lab to Coalition		From Lab to Dem/Grn		From Coalition to Lab	
Prefers Lab position on:	Est	(SE)	Est	(SE)	Est	(SE)
Education	− 1.13*	(0.60)	0.88	(0.68)	2.50**	(0.80)
Taxation	0.74	(0.50)	− 0.43	(0.40)	− 0.12	(0.53)
Health, Medicare	− 0.10	(0.74)	0.37	(0.63)	0.07	(0.71)
Refugees, asylum-seekers	0.32	(0.45)	1.63**	(0.41)	− 0.87*	(0.45)
GST	− 1.45**	(0.47)	− 1.11**	(0.40)	1.51**	(0.49)
Defence, national security	− 0.14	(0.60)	− 0.82	(0.45)	0.10	(0.59)
Terrorism	1.40**	(0.55)	− 0.64	(0.40)	− 1.65**	(0.45)
Constant	− 2.02		− 2.38		− 4.05	
Pseudo-R^2	0.07		0.12		0.14	
(N)	(615)		(638)		(760)	

Notes:
** Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.
Logistic regression analyses showing parameter estimates and standard errors predicting whether or not respondents shifted their vote from their 1998 party to another party or party grouping. The independent variables are the importance attributed to the issue.
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

in the case of defection from Labor to the Coalition, defectors thought that the most important issues (in rank order) were the GST, terrorism, and education,[17] with none of the other four issues reaching statistical significance.

The results in Table 4 show that the two groups of Labor defectors (those defecting to the Coalition, and those defecting to the Democrats and Greens) were motivated by different concerns, with the partial exception of the GST, which both groups saw as unimportant. For Labor defectors moving to the Coalition, the main motivation was rating terrorism as an important issue, and seeing the GST and education as relatively unimportant. By contrast, Labor defectors to the Democrats and Greens were motivated by seeing refugees and asylum-seekers as important, which is by far the most important predictor in the equation. For Coalition defectors to Labor, seeing education as important was the major motivation for their defection, followed by the GST; terrorism was seen by these defectors as unimportant. In general, Labor lost voters on different aspects of the border protection question, with the Coalition benefiting from those who thought terrorism was important, and the Democrats and Greens from those placing more weight on refugees and asylum-seekers. The Coalition lost voters to Labor mainly on education.

There were, then, three 'swing' issues in the federal election. The first, the GST, was a residual issue left over from the 1998 federal election, and it demarcated party supporters in much the same way in 2001 as it did in the previous election, although with less impact. The size of the coefficients and the standard errors across the three equations suggest that defections between the parties on the GST largely cancelled each other out, resulting in no net gain to either side. Second, viewing education as an important election issue caused Coalition voters to defect

[17] The estimate of the relative net impact of each issue is made by dividing the parameter estimate by the standard error.

to Labor; in this case Labor appears to have secured a net gain. Finally, the major border protection issues—refugees, asylum-seekers and terrorism—worked in different ways, but all to Labor's disadvantage. Concerns over the refugee and asylum-seeker issue was the major motivation for defection from Labor to the Democrats and Greens, while a preoccupation with terrorism caused defection from Labor to the Coalition. Without border protection, then, Labor's electoral position would either have remained similar to 1998 or even improved slightly; but with border protection added to the equation Labor suffered a net electoral loss.

Explaining Border Protection Attitudes

Even a cursory observation of the survey results shows why border protection was so politically damaging to Labor. Across the electorate as a whole, those in favour of turning back boats carrying asylum-seekers outnumbered those wishing to accept them by more than three to one (see Table 5). Moreover, the largest group of voters, 37%, were strongly in favour of this view, and comparatively few voters took a neutral stance on the issue. On the question of military assistance for the 'war against terrorism', public views were even more skewed, with those in favour outnumbering those against by more than five to one, and again with comparatively few voters refusing to state a position either way. Overall, then, there was little ambiguity about the general views held by Australian voters on border protection in the election: they wanted asylum-seekers turned back, and they favoured providing military assistance to the 'war on terrorism'.

The differences between party supporters on these attitudes were greatest on the issue of asylum-seekers; three-quarters of Coalition voters wanted the boats turned back, compared to just over half of Labor voters and one-third of Democrat voters. Each of the three party groupings show a majority in favour of assisting the war against terrorism, though again partisan variations emerge, with Coalition voters being most in favour, and the Democrats least; indeed, just 3% of Democrat voters were strongly in favour of providing assistance, compared to a quarter of Coalition voters. In terms of the relationship between the two dimensions of border protection, Coalition voters were most likely to see them as related ($r = 0.32$, $p \leq 0.00$), and Labor voters somewhat less so ($r = 0.25$, $p \leq 0.00$).

A variety of explanations has been advanced to account for these opinions. The first is that public opinion was reacting in its traditional way to immigration (Suter 2001). For all but a short period in the mid-1960s, those opposing increased immigration have outnumbered those advocating more immigration, on average by three to one (McAllister 1993, figure 9.4). During the 1990s, opposition to increased immigration reached a post-war high of 70%, in parallel with the peak unemployment rate of 11.5% in February 1992.[18] However, since the early 1990s, the AES surveys have found that public opposition to immigration has declined substantially, to 63% in 1996, 46% in 1998, and 35% in 2001. However, the proportion in favour of increased immigration has remained relatively unchanged; the major difference has been the increase in the proportion who believe that current levels are about right. In 2001, almost half of all voters took this

[18] Averaged across the 1990s, unemployment stood at just over 8%, similar to the 8.6% recorded during the decade of the Great Depression.

Table 5. Border protection and the vote

	Turn asylum-seekers back				Assist 'war on terrorism'			
		Vote				Vote		
	All	Labor	Lib–Nat	Dem	All	Labor	Lib–Nat	Dem
Strongly agree	37	32	42	20	20	16	26	3
Agree	25	21	33	14	48	45	56	51
Neither	18	21	15	20	19	22	12	23
Disagree	12	15	8	29	8	11	4	13
Strongly disagree	8	11	2	17	5	6	2	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1967)	(673)	(845)	(103)	(1953)	(669)	(838)	(102)

'Please say whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements. … All boats carrying asylum-seekers should be turned back. … Australia should provide military assistance for the war on terrorism.'
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

intermediate view. Voters may therefore have linked border protection with the goal of reducing migration, or at least of maintaining it at its current level.

A second possible explanation for public support for border protection is racial and ethnic prejudice. In line with the relatively recent abolition of the 'White Australian Policy' in the 1960s, it has been argued that public opposition to asylum-seekers is based on prejudice, which in turn is seen as underpinning attitudes towards migrants and asylum-seekers in many apparently tolerant, advanced democratic societies (Pettigrew 1998; Togeby 1998). Moreover, it is argued that the Middle Eastern origins of many of the asylum-seekers—with distinctive cultural and religious backgrounds—serves to promote popular prejudice against them. Supporters of this argument compare the relatively sympathetic reception given to Vietnamese boat-people escaping communism after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, with mandatory detention for Afghan and Pakistani asylum-seekers arriving in the 1990s (Schloenhardt 2000).[19]

A third explanation focuses on procedural fairness. Some voters may see unauthorised arrivals as 'queue-jumpers' or 'rule-breakers', usurping the normal procedures by which Australia accepts an annual quota of refugees located in camps across the world. This is a view put forward most vigorously by the Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock.[20] Such arguments, it is suggested, may resonate particularly strongly among settled migrants and their children, who arrived after complying with official and often lengthy immigration procedures.[21] This view can

[19] The context of the arrivals is often contrasted: the Vietnamese arriving in small family groups in flimsy boats in the 1970s; and the more recent arrivals coming in large groups in comparatively well-equipped boats, predominantly made up of younger males (Millbank 1999). For a US perspective on illegal arrivals, see Espenshade (1995).
[20] See the Minister's Website: Ruddock (2003).
[21] The survey evidence in support of this proposition is, however, limited. In the 2001 AES, 64% of the Australian born wanted the boats turned back, compared to 59% of Northern Europeans, 61% of Southern Europeans, 50% of Eastern Europeans, and 51% of Asians. Neither was there any significant relationship

be linked to Australian political culture, which is utilitarian in nature and rule-based in operation, and eschews notions of individual freedom and liberty for the greater good of the collectivity (Collins 1985). Asylum-seekers are therefore undermining established immigration rules and procedures, imperilling the orderliness and egalitarianism on which the system is based.

A fourth and final explanation relates to national identity. Australia exhibits one of the highest levels of national pride in the world; among 15 countries, levels of national pride among the population are surpassed only by Ireland and the United States, and then only by a few per cent (McAllister 2003). The two main components of national identity are shared national symbols and the inheritance of a cultural past, and an emphasis on an adherence to legal norms and conventions (Phillips and Smith 2000; Smith and Phillips 2001). It is clear from the popular reaction to the asylum-seekers that many Australians regarded these unauthorised arrivals as an affront to their sense of national pride. National identity is therefore a potential explanation for public attitudes to asylum-seekers, and to the war on terror.

To test these four hypotheses, Table 6 includes a range of variables representing each of these four explanations to predict support for returning asylum-seekers and providing assistance to the war on terrorism. Public opinion towards immigration in general is represented by a single item which asked the respondents whether they wanted to increase or reduce immigration. Racial prejudice is measured by two items: whether or not the respondent considered themselves to be in any way racially prejudiced; and if they believed that racial prejudice across the society as a whole had increased or decreased over the past five years. Procedural fairness is represented by questions concerning satisfaction with Australian democracy, and the importance of respect for authority. Finally, national identity is measured by the respondent's pride in being Australian, and by whether or not they believed that respect for Australia's political institutions and laws was important to feeling Australian.[22]

The results in Table 6 suggest that the predominant influence on attitudes to asylum-seekers is views about the level of immigration, followed by national identity (in the form of national pride), procedural fairness (respect for authority, rather than satisfaction with democracy) and, finally, racial prejudice. The strong link between asylum-seekers and immigration is notable, raising as it does popular concerns about migrants undermining material standards of living. By contrast, the main influence on attitudes towards the war against terrorism is procedural fairness; supporters of both Australian democracy and respect for authority are strongly in

[22] The questions were: 'How proud are you to be Australian?'; 'Some people say the following things are important for being truly Australian. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each thing is? … respecting Australia's political institutions and laws?'; 'Do you think the number of immigrants allowed into Australia nowadays should be reduced or increased?'; 'How would describe yourself–not prejudiced against other races at all, a little prejudiced, or quite prejudiced?'; 'Do you think there is generally more racial prejudice in Australia now than there was five years ago, less than there was five years ago, or about the same?'; 'On the whole, are you satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?'; 'The next few questions are about things some people consider important in life. We would like to know how important they are to you. How important is it to strengthen respect and obedience for authority?'

Table 6. Explaining support for border protection

	Return asylum-seekers		Support war on terror	
	Partial	Stand.	Partial	Stand.
Reduce immigration	0.48**	0.44**	0.06**	0.07**
Prejudice				
Personally prejudiced	0.31**	0.12**	0.12*	0.06*
Prejudice generally increased	− 0.02	− 0.02	0.04	0.03
Procedural fairness				
Satisfied with democracy	0.02	0.01	0.19**	0.14**
Respect for authority	0.31**	0.15**	0.30**	0.19**
National identity				
Proud to be Australian	0.35**	0.15**	0.26**	0.14**
Respect for law, institutions	0.05	0.02	0.11**	0.07**
Constant	0.91		1.97	
Adj. R^2	0.33		0.14	
(N)	(1967)		(1933)	

Notes:
** Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.
Ordinary least squares regression analyses showing partial (b) and standardised (beta) coefficients predicting attitudes towards asylum-seekers and support for the war against terror. The dependent variables are scored from 0 to 4. The independent variables are scored as follows: satisfied with democracy, reduce immigration (0–4), respect for authority, personally prejudiced, prejudiced increased, proud to be Australian and respect for law, institutions (0–2).
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

favour of assisting the war on terrorism. National identity is also important, especially in the form of national pride.

Similar concerns therefore underlie the two dimensions of border protection, but they differ in their magnitude. While traditional beliefs about immigration are significant in shaping views about asylum-seekers, support for the war on terrorism is more likely to be shaped by notions of democracy and order. The most consistently important effects in shaping both sets of beliefs about border protection are national pride and respect for authority. The results underline the connection between conceptions of nationhood and the composition of the population, and the means by which the population is altered through immigration. Regardless of the ethnic or racial origins of asylum-seekers, it is clear that many voters considered their unauthorised arrival to be a threat to national identity.

The major effect of attitudes towards immigration on beliefs about asylum-seekers, as outlined above, merits further examination. As many studies have demonstrated (see, for example, Quillian 1995; Pettigrew 1998), public opinion towards immigration is complex; underlying it are beliefs about the effects that migrants might have on the economy and the society more generally, as well as perceptions and stereotypical views of different ethnic groups. To what extent does opposition to asylum-seekers rest simply on opposition to more migrants per se, or is it based on more complex underlying beliefs and perceptions? The 2001 AES survey contained a battery of items designed to measure these underlying beliefs about immigration, ranging from links to crime and multiculturalism, to which ethnic groups are regarded as more acceptable than others as migrants. Table 7 shows the

Table 7. Attitudes to asylum-seekers and beliefs about migrants

	Return asylum-seekers	
	Partial	Stand.
Reduce numbers of migrants	0.21**	0.20**
Agree that immigrants …		
increase crime	0.22**	0.19**
are good for economy	− 0.03	− 0.02
take jobs away from Australians	0.11**	0.10**
make Australian more open	− 0.03	− 0.02
Accept more migrants who are from …		
Asia	− 0.03	− 0.02
Britain	0.03	0.02
Southern Europe	0.04	0.02
the Middle East	− 0.34**	− 0.29**
Constant	1.64	
Adj. R^2	0.41	
(N)	(1967)	

Notes:
** Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.
Ordinary least squares regression analysis showing partial (b) and standardised (beta) coefficients predicting attitudes towards asylum-seekers, which is scored from 1 (strongly agree, allow in) to 5 (strongly agree, turn back). 'Reduce immigration' is scored from 1 (increase a lot) to 5 (reduce a lot). The two sets of independent variables are scored from 1 (strongly disagree [first set] or accept a lot more [second set]) to 5 (strongly agree or accept a lot less).
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

results of a regression analysis using opposition to immigration, along with some of these items to predict attitudes towards asylum-seekers.[23]

Two main conclusions emerge from the results in Table 7. First, slightly less than half of the effect of wanting to return asylum-seekers can be traced to simple opposition to further immigration; the correlation between reducing the numbers of migrants in general and returning asylum-seekers is 0.52;[24] the equation shows that this is reduced to a partial coefficient of 0.21 when other beliefs about migration are taken into account. Second, while these other beliefs focus on the perceived negative effects that immigrants have on crime rates[25] and the economy, the

[23] The exact questions were: 'There are different opinions about the effects that immigrants have on Australia. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements … immigrants increase the crime rate … immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy … immigrants take jobs away from people who are born in Australia … immigrants make Australia more open to new ideas and cultures'; 'Do you think the government should accept more or less of the following groups of migrants …'

[24] The correlation coefficient is the same as the partial coefficient when there is only one independent variable in the equation.

[25] There is some difficulty in interpreting the substantive significance of crime in the equation. There is suggestive evidence that the public distinguishes between refugees who are part of the government's planned intake and asylum-seekers who arrive without permission and are therefore 'illegal' entrants. The survey instrument does not distinguish between these two groups. The significance of the crime variable may therefore reflect the illegal nature of this second group's arrival, rather than a perceived association with criminality per se. I am grateful to Murray Goot for bringing this point to my attention.

predominant impact is opposition to migrants from the Middle East. Respondents who want to return asylum-seekers are strongly of the view that fewer migrants from the Middle East should be accepted into Australia. By contrast, these same respondents are neutral about the levels of migration from Asia, Britain or Southern Europe. Attitudes towards asylum-seekers in the election are therefore associated with a general negativity towards migrants from the Middle East, a trend that has been observed across a range of countries over the past decade (Peach and Glebe 1995).

Border Protection and the Election Outcome

Border protection clearly raised strong emotions among voters in the election, and it generated distinct partisan divisions. But to what extent did it cost Labor the election, as is popularly supposed? The first step in testing this hypothesis is to calculate a logistic regression analysis using the six issues identified earlier as being the main preoccupations of voters, to predict the two party preferred vote (tax and the GST are collapsed into a single item for parsimony). In addition, partisanship is included as a control variable, which effectively also partials out the effects of any other major party-related influences on the vote, such as party leadership.[26]

The results of the analysis in Table 8 show that border protection (in this case assisting the war against terrorism) was the most important issue in shaping the vote, after partisanship. It was followed by taxation, then by the other two border protection issues—returning asylum-seekers and spending more on defence. Overall, the combined border protection issues were easily more important than the combined socio-economic issues in determining how the votes were cast in the election. In each case, voters supporting the strengthening of border protection were significantly less likely to vote Labor, and more likely to vote for the Coalition, net of other things (including partisanship). Among the main socio-economic issues, perceptions that the quality of education and health service provision had improved since the previous election in 1998 were important in predicting the Coalition vote, while a perception that taxation had increased (a major component of which was the GST) resonated with Labor voters.

Did border protection cost Labor victory in the election, as many commentators have asserted? An estimate of the effect of the asylum-seeker and 11 September issues on the vote can be made by recalculating the logistic regression equation in Table 8, to show the effect on the Labor two-party preferred vote if the border protection attitudes were different, while attitudes on the three socio-economic issues and defence spending, and the level of partisanship, remained unchanged. These calculations are made by re-estimating the regression equation in Table 8, but altering the mean values of the variables of interest. For example, re-estimating the equation by substituting a mean value of 4.0 on the war against terror (rather than the actual mean of 2.7) would reflect the level of Labor voting if everyone in the survey had given their full support to the war against terror. Similarly, estimating the equation with a mean value of 1.0 would reflect the Labor vote if

[26] The correlation between partisanship and the vote is 0.73, which is just below the accepted level at which multicollinearity in the model could potentially bias the estimates.

Table 8. Election issues and the two-party preferred vote

	Labor versus Lib–Nat two-party vote	
	Est	(SE)
Partisanship	4.49**	(0.23)
Border protection		
Return asylum-seekers	− 0.34**	(0.07)
Assist war on terrorism	− 0.55**	(0.09)
Increase defence spending	− 0.44**	(0.10)
Socio-economic issues		
Education quality increased	− 0.48**	(0.12)
Taxation increased	0.44**	(0.08)
Health services better	− 0.17	(0.11)
Constant	1.82	
Pseudo-R^2	0.43	
(N)	(1804)	

Notes:
** Statistically significant at $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.
Logistic regression analyses showing parameter estimates and standard errors predicting the two-party preferred vote, where Labor = 1 and Coalition = 0. Partisanship is scored Labor = 1 and Coalition = 0; the two border protection variables and defence spending are coded from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); and the education, taxation and health variables from 0 (fallen a lot) to 4 (increased a lot).
Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

everyone in the survey had opposed the war on terror. These estimates are shown in Figure 2.

The survey estimated the Labor share of the two-party preferred vote at 47.3%, slight lower than the actual figure of 49.05%,[27] but nevertheless sufficiently close to enable accurate estimates to be made of the impact on the vote of changes in opinion on these issues. At the mean values of the two issues (2.7 in each case, on a scale of 1–4), the two-party preferred vote is also at the mean for the survey population, namely 47% Labor and 53% Liberal–National. As attitudes on the two issues strengthen in favour of more border protection, the Labor vote declines, markedly so in the case of the 'war against terrorism'. For example, if voter attitudes on the 'war against terrorism' had been around half of one point higher on the 0–4 scale than they actually were, then the Labor share of the two-party preferred vote would have declined to around 44%. A similar shift in attitudes to sending asylum-seekers back would have resulted in a Labor vote of just over 45%, again a substantial effect.

At the other end of the scale, weakening voter attitudes on the two issues would

[27] The question was: 'In the end, which of the two major parties, the Liberal—National Coalition or the Labor Party, did you give your preference to in the House of Representatives?' The asylum-seeker and war on terror questions were scored on 5-point scales (agree strongly, agree, neither, disagree, disagree strongly), but they were converted to 4-point scales by coding those in the 'neither' category to the mean value of each scale.

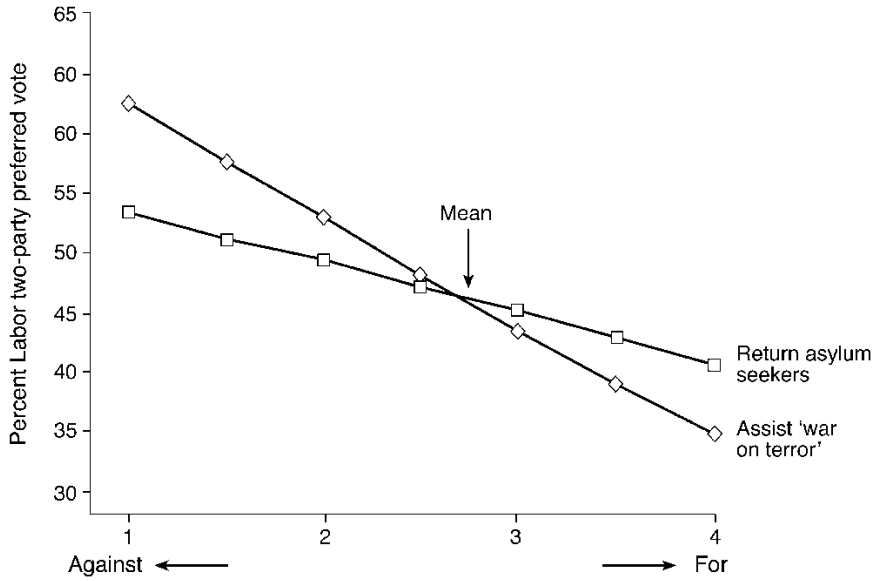

Figure 2. The hypothetical effects of border protection on the Labor two-party preferred vote.

Note: Estimates are based on the logistic regression estimates in Table 8, recalculating the equation for different values of the two independent variables.

Source: 2001 Australian Election Study (Bean, Gow and McAllister 2002).

have substantially benefited Labor. A half of one point shift in public opinion in the opposite direction would have given Labor about 50% of the vote in the case of asylum-seekers, and about 53% in the case of the 'war against terrorism'. There is little doubt that the intrusion of border protection into the 2001 federal election almost certainly cost Labor victory. And of the two dimensions to border protection—11 September and the 'war against terrorism', and refugees and asylum-seekers—it would appear that the former had the greatest impact on the vote. In other words, if the 11 September attacks had occurred but the Tampa crisis and subsequent events had not, then in all probability Labor would still have lost the election.

Conclusion

Two contiguous events—the terrorist attacks on 11 September and the Tampa crisis—reinforced one another and made border protection a central issue in the November 2001 federal election. Together, the two events turned what had appeared six months earlier to be an almost certain Labor victory into a decisive Labor defeat, though either event on its own would have resulted in a similar outcome. There are at least two main explanations for why these events had such a major impact on the result of the election, one focusing on the social context of the events, the other on party strategy and competition.

In terms of their social context, the two events occurred at a time when public unease about national security had been increasing, following the shocks to post-Cold War complacency induced by the Asian economic crisis and events in East Timor. Moreover, while the two events were discrete, many voters saw them

as different dimensions to a single underlying concern about border protection. Research in the United States has also shown that citizens are likely to bracket international issues and asylum-seekers together (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996). Public concerns about asylum-seekers had already been fuelled by the historically large numbers arriving by boat; between 1999 and 2002, as many asylum-seekers arrived by boat as in the previous 15 years combined. There is extensive research which shows that the perceived threat from a subordinate group in a society increases as their size is perceived to be growing (Quillian 1995). The perceived threat to the majority posed by the influx of asylum-seekers was undoubtedly one of the factors making it a major electoral issue.

Political issues, of course, do not get on to the electoral agenda unless the political parties place them there. Since Australia adopted a mass immigration program in 1947, there has been a bipartisan consensus not to make immigration an election issue, and in the few instances in which it appeared that this unspoken rule looked as if it might be broken, the party elites have taken steps to restore the status quo as rapidly as possible (McAllister 1993). Nevertheless, the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party placed severe strains on this consensus. Jackman (1998) has demonstrated that racial prejudice forms a core element of popular political views and that parties making anti-immigrant or racist appeals have considerable potential support; this was demonstrated dramatically by the One Nation Party's early electoral successes, particularly in Queensland. Undoubtedly, then, the Coalition had an electoral incentive to ensure that border protection became an electoral issue, in much the same way as race has been used in party competition across a range of countries (Thranhardt 1995).

The Tampa crisis and 11 September were discrete events, and any recurrence—at least in similar form and on the eve of or during an election campaign—is unlikely. Nevertheless, the terrorist bombing in Bali in October 2002 and the March 2003 confrontation with Iraq demonstrate, in dramatic form, that security events affecting Australia can occur at any time, and not necessarily within the country. While politicising border protection benefited the Coalition in 2001, such a strategy harbours major risks for any governing party. Experience shows that an unpopular or a badly managed international conflict holds more dangers for the government than for the Opposition.

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