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# **Democratic Participation in a Globalised World: Immigrants in Australia in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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This study considers patterns of political participation in Australia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, using recent data from the Australian Election Study. The paper reassesses how Australia fits within broader patterns of political participation and investigates major predictors of participation in Australia to see how these have or have not changed in a globalised era that has brought new challenges. Factors considered include socio-demographic variables, such as education, age, gender, birthplace and place of residence and also attitudinal orientations towards politics, such as political interest, efficacy and trust. The paper pays particular attention to those who have moved to Australia from other countries. One of the most important findings is that immigrants show little or no sign of any participatory disadvantage and indeed tend to participate more than the Australian-born in some modes of participation, such as campaign activities. The analysis also identifies a clear participatory divide within a number of socio-demographic groups in use of the internet for gaining election information.

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## **Introduction**

One of the striking things about the early studies of democratic political participation was the similarities that emerged in many different national contexts. Apart from turning out to vote in national elections, most citizens in most countries did not engage in political activity in any great measure and there was a tendency for the activities that did attract participation to be much the same and similarly patterned in socio-structural and attitudinal terms even in quite disparate political systems (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Verba, Nie and Kim 1978). Conducted mostly in the 1950s and 1960s, this pioneering research self-evidently came well before the appearance of the contemporary focus on globalisation, signalling that global patterns of political behaviour should not automatically be assumed to be a response to very recent global developments. More recent cross-national research has reinforced the picture of participation being more similar than different across many countries of the world (for example, Dalton 2008).

Studies in Australia that followed the early international work showed that by and large Australia fitted comfortably into the cross-national mainstream, albeit with some variations (Wilson and Western 1969; Aitkin 1982; Bean 1989; McAllister 1992). Political participation in Australia has typically been characterised by an emphasis on voting and working cooperatively with others, while there has been less of a tendency for Australians to work for political parties or candidates than in some other countries. Some, but not all, of these tendencies reflect structural features of Australian politics, such as the system of compulsory voting, as discussed below. This paper aims to update the study of political participation in Australia, using recent data from the Australian Election Study (AES) to consider patterns of political participation in Australia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the challenging times that have accompanied it. The paper will both reassess how Australia fits within broader patterns of political participation and

investigate major predictors of participation in Australia to see how these have or have not changed in a globalised era that has brought new challenges.

A brief consideration of the broad contours of political attitudes and behaviour in Australia will help set the context for a contemporary analysis of political participation. Australia has long been viewed as an essentially class-based polity, but with the impact of social class and the broader social structure having declined in recent decades (Aitkin 1982; McAllister 1992). In this respect it is much like other English-speaking democracies and indeed like many other advanced democracies across the world (Franklin, Mackie, Valen et al. 1992; Dalton 2008). There is little to suggest thus far that globalisation has driven changes in the political party system or the nature of political support (Vowles and Bean 2006). While having a party system based on socio-economic cleavages may seem of only marginal interest in a study of political participation as such, it has more relevance than it may initially seem in light of the argument of Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) that social structure has weaker effects on political participation in countries that have strong cleavage-based political party systems and stronger effects where socio-political cleavages are weaker, because the mobilisation of the disadvantaged that comes with class-based politics is absent in the latter systems.

One particular way in which the challenges of globalisation have been reflected in Australia is in the proportion of immigrants now living in the Australian community. With around 25 percent of the population now born overseas, Australia has become one of the more multicultural nations of the world. With this diversity comes a variety of challenges to the Australian political culture. New migrants bring new and different sets of orientations to the political realm. They are not familiar with the political party system or the wider political system in general and are thus not bound by the party loyalties and orientations towards political

practice that the Australian-born take for granted. But how distinctive are their attitudes and orientations towards politics and participation? Citizens are socialised into the world of politics as they grow up within their national settings. We might expect that those who have grown up under the influence of different political cultures and have not experienced political socialisation within Australia in this sense would have distinctly different political outlooks and participatory inclinations. But is this in fact the case?

Since the Second World War there have been significant influxes of migrants from northern, eastern and southern Europe and more recently from Asia, including countries such as Vietnam, China and India. As many of the donor societies do not have the strong democratic traditions of Australia, one of the issues this paper considers is the extent to which those born overseas differ from those born in Australia with respect to political participation and in particular whether there might tend to be a certain degree of participatory deficit among immigrants compared to the Australian born. Another issue considered is whether the same or different causal factors drive the participation of immigrants by comparison with those born within the country.

Previous research has indicated that migrants take time to become familiar with their new political environment and that they may tend to have fewer socio-economic resources than those who were born and have grown up in the nation in question (McAllister and Makkai 1991; 1992). As a result, their capacity to participate in political activities in their new country may be diminished. Evidence from studies in other societal settings, such as Canada and the United States, suggests that in some instances immigrants exhibit a tendency towards non-participation (Harles 1997; Bueker 2005). Such a reluctance to participate has also been observed in Australia with respect to protest forms of political action (Bilodeau 2008). By contrast, however, when the

focus has been on conventional electoral activities, a number of previous studies in Australia have produced results suggesting that immigrants participate at least as much as the native born (McAllister 1992, 60; McAllister 2011, 137-38; Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji 2010). Such findings are consistent with the longstanding tradition in the United States of political parties encouraging the participation of immigrants (McKenna 1976, 180-81). So the evidence is not all one way.

More generally, Australia has also been characterised as a political system in which participatory values are low, although this does not necessarily set Australia apart from other Western democracies but rather leaves it much in the mainstream (Aitkin 1982). And indeed Australia is in the mainstream, or at least not terribly distinctive, in a range of attitudes and orientations towards politics and government (Bean 1991a). Australia, however, does have one major distinguishing feature of its political structure that has clear implications for some aspects of political participation. This is the institution of compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is not only the reason why Australia has extremely high levels of voting turnout at national elections but also has implications for participation by citizens in some forms of election campaign activities. Political parties have much less need to 'get out the vote' than in countries with voluntary voting and thus relatively few people are drawn into service to work for political parties in election campaigns (Aitkin 1982; Bean 1989; McAllister 1992).

### **Political Participation and its Causes**

The seminal work by Sidney Verba and his colleagues published in the 1970s (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie and Kim 1971; 1978) advanced the understanding of political participation by showing that it tended to occur in related but distinctive 'modes' rather than being hierarchical or interchangeable. To participate in one mode did not necessarily imply participation in others.

Among other things, this interpretation implied that different types of participation might have different causal antecedents. This set the scene for most of the work on political participation that has been done since. Verba et al. identified four modes of political participation, namely voting, campaign activity, communal activity and personalised contacting.

Others have since argued that these four modes constitute a somewhat narrow definition of political participation, focusing on conventional or orthodox political activities that generally indicate support for the political system and omitting more system-challenging acts of political protest, such as petitioning the government and participating in protest marches and demonstrations (Barnes, Kaase et al. 1979; Bean 1991b). There is little good reason to assume that such activities should not also be considered legitimate styles of democratic participation and therefore they will be included in the analysis in this paper. One further development of significance, which can reasonably be connected to globalisation processes, is the growing use of the internet as a medium for political participation and this is an additional avenue of participation that will be explored in this analysis (see also Dalton 2008). It is possible, also, that immigrants might be more inclined to be politically active in system-challenging forms of action, since they do not have the historical and cultural ties and the experience of socialisation in their new nation that would tend to orient them towards system-supporting attitudes.

As well as establishing the modes of participation, the work of Verba and colleagues also forms the basis for current theoretical understanding of the causes of political participation. As with the explanation of party political choice, both social and psychological factors play a role. In a nutshell, the causes of political participation comprise several sets of variables, namely socio-structural factors, such as education, age, gender, place of residence and so on, subjective orientations towards the political system, such as interest in politics, political trust and efficacy

and group affiliations, such as identification with a political party. Socio-economic status provides resources that give people the capacity to participate, certain political attitudes generate a desire to participate and affiliations provide an incentive to participate (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

The explanatory model used in this analysis is based on variables drawn from this theoretical conception of the underpinnings of political participation. The study uses data from the 2007 Australian Election Study, which is both recent and has a wider range of participation variables than most of the other surveys in the AES series. The data are deployed first to summarise patterns of political participation and second to evaluate predictors of different aspects of participation in a multivariate analysis. The 2007 AES is a nationally representative sample survey of voting and political behaviour conducted after the Australian federal election of that year (Bean, McAllister and Gow 2008). Various considerations limit the extensiveness of the analysis, while the desire to evaluate changes in political participation in Australia through direct comparisons with earlier data is hampered by the lack of comparability of survey items. This complication also affects international comparisons. Some assessments are possible, especially with respect to the changing influence of certain variables on participation, but these need to be made with great care.

### **Patterns of Participation**

The starting point for the analysis that follows is the modes of participation identified by Verba et al., plus indicators of protest activity and use of the internet as a mode of participation. We concentrate initially on voting and campaign activities, with internet use included. As measured in the AES, campaign activities range from the virtually ubiquitous act of discussing politics with others during an election campaign to the very rare act of contributing money to a political



party or election candidate. The tabular presentation (Tables 1 to 3) shows results for the whole sample in the first column, then for those born within Australia in column two. The third and fourth columns show results for respondents who were born outside Australia and have since immigrated to this country. The overseas born are divided into two groups, those from English-speaking backgrounds (ESB) and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB), given the evidence from previous research that people who come from different political cultures and political traditions tend to differ in their attitudes and orientations towards politics and political participation (McAllister and Makkai 1992; Bilodeau 2008; Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Initially we look at voting itself. In one sense compulsory voting in Australia renders the analysis of turnout virtually redundant, a situation amplified in sample survey data, where almost no respondents admit to being non-voters. For example, in the 2007 AES only 1% of the sample claimed not to have voted, or to have voted informal, in the federal election. This compares with the true level in the electorate of around 5%. Even if the sample did reflect the true level accurately, 5% non-voting still gives little scope for finding differentiation within the electorate on this measure. To give some sense of the basis for turnout in Australia, however, we can turn to a question in the AES that asks whether respondents would have voted in the election if voting had not been compulsory. This variable then allows us to generate predictors of (potential) voting turnout in Australia in order to provide some basis for comparative purposes. The first line of Table 1 shows the percentages of AES respondents saying they would definitely have voted if voting had not been compulsory. Some 73% of the sample said they would definitely have voted under voluntary conditions. When we add those who said they probably would have voted, we get an estimated turnout in Australia of 88%. These figures, taken at face value, put

Australian turnout in a hypothetical voluntary voting regime towards the top end of turnout in other Western democracies, but not entirely out of line with other countries (Dalton 2008, 37).

Table 1 about here

The second line in Table 1 shows that when asked how often they discussed politics with others during the recent election, three-quarters of the sample said they did so either frequently or occasionally. More dedicated forms of campaign activity, however, generate very much lower numbers. Less than two in ten said they frequently or occasionally talked to other people to persuade them to vote for a particular party or candidate, 12% said they showed support for a particular party or candidate by, for example, attending a meeting, putting up a poster, or in some other way, 5% said they went to political meetings or rallies and, least commonly of all, 4% indicated that they contributed money to a political party or election candidate. To the extent that data comparability can be stretched, these findings are reminiscent both of previous findings for Australia from around 20 years ago (Bean 1989) and of recently observed patterns in various other Western nations (Dalton 2008, 41-3).

With respect to the newest mode of political participation, internet use, 11% of respondents to the AES said they made use of the internet to get news or information about the 2007 federal election either many times or on several occasions. The numbers using the internet for the purposes of gaining political information have risen rapidly since this question was first asked in the AES in 1998 (Bean and McAllister 2002; 2009) and we could presumably expect it to keep increasing for some time to come.

The second, third and fourth columns of Table 1 show that responses for the Australian and non-Australian-born are remarkably close, suggesting in the first instance that immigrants are certainly not a breed apart when it comes to political participation. There are some

differences worth noting, however, albeit small. In a number of cases, the main distinction that does emerge is between the NESB immigrants and the remainder. This is certainly the case for the only two instances in the table where differences are statistically significant. NESB immigrants are less likely to discuss politics with others than either the Australian born or ESB immigrants and more likely to talk to other people to persuade them how to vote. If anything, NESB immigrants also appear to be somewhat less likely to vote under voluntary voting conditions than the Australian born or immigrants from English-speaking countries. When it comes to providing support for a party or candidate and use of the internet for election information, immigrants generally are more likely to participate. On first reading there is little sign in these data of the participatory deficit among immigrants predicted by theory. In contrast, with respect to some types of campaign activity it is the Australian born who appear to have a participatory deficit compared to immigrants.

Next we look at the modes of political activity that are not necessarily related to voting and election campaigns. The 2007 AES has data on the conventional participatory modes of citizen contacting and communal, or community, activities and also on two styles of protest activity, taking part in a protest, march or demonstration and signing a petition, either written or electronic (Table 2). Respondents are asked whether, over the past five years or so, they have done any of the following things to express their views about something the government should or should not be doing. Within the whole sample, just under a quarter of respondents said they had contacted a politician or government official either in person, or in writing, or some other way. Fewer engage in protest events like marches and demonstrations, with 13% saying they had engaged in such activities over the past five years, while working together for the good of the community attracts a similar number of participants to contacting, with 24% saying they had

engaged in this activity. While this appears to be something of a reversal from previous findings for Australia (Bean 1989), where communal activity stood out as being the most common activity after voting, there is again nothing in these patterns that sets Australia significantly apart from other countries (Dalton 2008, 43-51).

Table 2 about here

Signing a petition is broken up into two variants in the AES data. Signing a written petition in hard copy is the most frequent of all these activities, with 44% having done so in the past five years. Signing an electronic petition is much less common, but probably on the rise. The 17% who said they had signed an electronic petition in 2007 is 5% higher than recorded in the 2004 AES, while over the same period signing a written petition decreased in frequency from 56 to 44% (Bean et al. 2005, 57). It will be interesting to see how long it is before the new technology overtakes the old as the preferred method of organising petitions. The electronic version is of course another indicator of political activism via the internet, making it of additional interest.

Examination of the last three columns of Table 2 indicates that the differences between migrants and those born in Australia are slight, for the most part. The Australian born and ESB migrants appear a little more likely than those born in non-English-speaking countries to have contacted a politician or government official, but the relationship is not statistically significant. The only significant difference is for signing a written petition, where NESB migrants are less likely to have done so. Migrants appear about as likely as the Australian born to have taken part in a political protest, to have engaged in community activities and to have signed an electronic petition. Again, there is little sign here of any participatory deficit to speak of.

Table 3 contains data for indicators of key subjective political orientations expected to facilitate political participation. These are interest in politics, trust in government, political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy. Interest and efficacy in particular have long been seen as important precursors to political participation (Verba and Nie 1972). The first column shows that almost 40% of the electorate displayed a good deal of interest in politics, slightly more stated that the people in government can be trusted to do the right thing usually or sometimes, over a third displayed feeling of political efficacy (in that they believed that who people vote for can make a big difference to what happens) and 23% said they were very satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia.

Table 3 about here

Immigrants once more compare favourably in terms of these aspects of system support. Although the differences are again minimal, both ESB and NESB immigrants appear to be slightly more likely to display interest in politics, trust in government and satisfaction with democracy – particularly those from NESB origins. The latter instance is the only statistically significant relationship in the table. With respect to political efficacy, the very small differences suggest that ESB migrants may display slightly more and NESB migrants slightly less efficacy than those born in Australia.

### **Predictors of Participation**

Having mapped the broad contours of political participation and participatory attitudes in early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australia, we now turn to investigate the predictors of participation in the 2007 data, employing a model of 13 variables, representing the three sets of factors identified earlier, social structure, political attitudes and group affiliations. All dependent variables are scored as dichotomous and the analytic method employed is logistic regression. Table 4 examines results

for the application of the model to the voting and campaign activities from Table 1 (excluding discussing politics with others, which is near universal, has few predictors in the model and is on the margins of inclusion as true political participation). Voting turnout, via the hypothetical voluntary voting question (labelled 'voting potential' in the tables), is comparatively well predicted by the model, although only four variables have statistically significant effects. Those in non-manual occupations, the politically interested and efficacious and strong partisans tend to be more likely to vote than others. Interestingly, there are no signs of effects for variables such as education and age which have been shown to be important either previously in Australia or in other national settings (Bean 1989; Dalton 2008, 63).

Table 4 about here

Looking broadly at the various indicators of campaign activity, but excluding for the moment internet use, the results are generally quite consistent across the table. Two factors, political interest and strength of partisanship, have strong effects on each and every variable. Political efficacy is significant for voting potential and vote persuasion and trust in government is significant for contributing money. Of the social structural factors, men are more likely to contribute money to a party or candidate than women, but that is the only gender effect, while the sole effect for age sees younger voters more likely to engage in political persuasion than older members of the electorate, which is the reverse of the direction of age effects previously associated with political participation (see, for example, Bean 1989).

But the most consistently significant relationship among the social location variables is for birthplace: those born outside of Australia are more likely to participate than those born within Australia. All the coefficients point in this direction and, for NESB immigrants, the effects are significant for persuading others how to vote, supporting a party or candidate and

contributing money to help a party or candidate in their campaign. In contrast to the zero-order results in Table 1, in the multivariate context none of the campaign activity variables show immigrants participating less than the Australian-born. These results not only reinforce the key revelations in Table 1, they are considerably stronger analytically, because they take account of differences in education and occupation, age, gender and place of residence, as well as subjective political orientations, that may impact on the relative propensity of immigrants to participate. Importantly, these results suggest that NESB immigrants have a definite inclination to participate, net of other factors.

Let us now focus on the newest form of political participation, internet use. The first notable point is that this variable is the one most strongly predicted by the model of all the variables in the analysis. Of the social-structural variables, gender, age, education and occupation all have significant effects on use of the internet for political information and again birthplace is significant. Men, younger citizens, the better educated, those in non-manual occupations and people born outside Australia use the internet more for political information than women, older voters, the less well educated, those in manual occupations and the Australian-born.

Again, the raw data on birthplace in Table 1, showing immigrants more inclined to use the internet than those born in Australia, are reinforced and strengthened. In this case, however, it is immigrants from English-speaking countries who are significantly more likely to access the internet for political purposes than the Australian born. Attitudinal variables do not feature so strongly. Interest in politics is again highly significant and left-leaning citizens are more likely to engage in internet political activity than those on the right of the political spectrum. But feeling trusting or efficacious or being affiliated with a political party (which is significant for all the

other campaign activity variables) do not generate greater political use of the internet. Dalton (2008, 70) produced broadly similar findings for internet activism in the United States.

We have seen that immigrants have a greater predisposition towards political participation in election campaigns than non-migrants. But are the drivers of their participation similar or different? Tables 5, 6 and 7 allow us to assess this question. Table 5 presents logistic regression results for the Australian-born and Tables 6 and 7 the equivalent results for ESB and NESB immigrants, respectively. As could be expected, since they comprise nearly three-quarters of the sample, the results for the Australian-born closely mirror those for the whole sample, with only the occasional coefficient significant in Table 4 but not in Table 5, or vice versa. What is interesting, however, is that Tables 6 and 7 show that immigrants are not too different either. The small sample sizes (226 for ESB and 253 for NESB immigrants) mean these analyses must remain tentative, but they do show a broad picture of similarity, with occasional patterns of variation. Education and political trust feature more for ESB immigrants, for instance. Most interestingly, immigrants appear not to be as influenced by ties to political parties. Strength of partisanship has no significant effect on persuading others how to vote or providing support for a party or candidate among either group of the non-Australian born, a finding which is consistent with the argument that, just as with young voters entering the electorate, it takes time for immigrants to become socialised into the partisan politics of their new country (McAllister and Makkai 1991; 1992). But these differences do not overshadow the larger picture of similarity between immigrants and non-immigrants.

Tables 5, 6 and 7 about here

When we turn to consider the other forms of political activity in Table 8, in many respects the key predictors are not markedly different. Furthermore, protest activities do not, for



the most part, look particularly distinctive from the more conventional forms of participation. Interest in politics remains the largest and most consistent predictor, having a highly significant effect on every variety of participation in the analysis. Political efficacy is significant for three of the five variables, while a lack of satisfaction with democracy leads not only to protest activity but also to contacting of politicians and to working together with others in the community to address a political issue. Where political trust has an effect (on contacting) it is also in the negative. Those on the political left are more likely to participate and to protest, as are strong partisans, although not consistently across all the types of participation. Comparing these results with those in Table 4, it is clear that partisan affiliations are much more important for election-related activities than for other modes of political participation.

Table 8 about here

Social structure does not feature strongly. Education has the most consistent effect, making a difference for contacting, electronic petition signing and protesting. The impact, though, is not large in any case. Older people are more likely to contact politicians or government officials but less likely to sign electronic petitions or to engage in protests and demonstrations. Those living in rural areas are more likely to participate in community-type activities. Gender and occupation are notable for their lack of effect on any of the types of participation depicted in Table 8. With respect to birthplace, there is only one significant coefficient in the whole table: as hinted at in Table 2, NESB immigrants are less likely to contact politicians or government officials than the Australian born. Apart from that, however, once other factors are controlled for, immigrants appear to be neither more nor less likely to engage in these forms of political activity than the Australian born.

But again the question arises as to whether different factors drive political participation among immigrants. Tables 9, 10 and 11 contain the data for this assessment. Within a broad pattern of similarity, again, some differences do emerge. For example, NESB immigrants in particular appear to be less motivated by interest in politics and both immigrant groups are less motivated by their position on the political spectrum than the Australian-born. For NESB immigrants, a sense of political efficacy appears to be particularly important for contacting politicians or government officials. For ESB immigrants, education again emerges as a key factor in protest participation. Strength of partisanship does not feature at all for migrants, reinforcing the earlier findings in Tables 6 and 7 for this variable.

Tables 9, 10 and 11 about here

## **Conclusion**

In the globalised world of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Australia continues to fit into the mainstream of cross-national patterns of political participation. The big driver of participation, whether it be voting, campaigning, contacting politicians, cooperative acts with other citizens or protesting, is interest in politics. The finding of this consistent and large effect reinforces the results from earlier Australian studies (Bean 1989; McAllister 1992, 70-1). The message for politicians is clear: if they want to get people more involved in political activities, politics needs to be conducted in ways that will make citizens engaged and interested.

Social structure does not feature heavily in predicting political participation in contemporary Australia. To some extent this fits the expectations generated by the theory that cleavage politics generates participatory equality (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978). However, there remains something of a puzzle, because the decline of class-based politics in Australia may have led to expectations of an increase in social-structural effects on participation, whereas, to the

extent it is possible to judge, the suggestion is more of reduced effects. Gender, age, education, occupation and place of residence all appear to have less of an impact than previously in Australia (Bean 1989; 1991b) and possibly less than in other Western countries in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, although social-structural effects are quite variable from nation to nation and generally not large (Dalton 2008, 63-70). Where age plays a role its effect is for the most part a reversal of that of earlier decades, so that now young people rather than older people are more inclined to participate, especially in the newer forms of participation.

The most interesting finding, though, is that, net of other factors, those born outside Australia in non-English-speaking countries participate in politics more than their Australian born counterparts --, at least in campaign activities like persuading others how to vote, providing campaign support and contributing money to parties and candidates. The rate of participation in these activities for immigrants from English-speaking countries is about the same as for Australian born respondents, except that they are more inclined to use the internet for political information. While perhaps somewhat counter-intuitive, these results are consistent with findings in earlier research on Australian political participation (McAllister 1992, 60; 2011, 137-8; Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji 2010). It would be interesting for future research to investigate the reasons behind these strong patterns of participation by immigrants and in particular whether it may relate to political parties fostering immigrant participation, as in the United States (McKenna 1976, 180-1). It is also interesting to speculate that migrants might use the internet more for electoral information because they have come to rely on it as a source of news about and communication with their homelands, which has in turn increased their comfort with the use of this medium. There is the additional question, however, of why this may apply more to migrants from English-speaking countries, though Norris (2000) has shown that, because the

internet is predominantly English-based, its usage is highest in English-speaking countries. Thus, lower levels of internet activity amongst immigrants from non-English countries may, in part, reflect the linguistic bias of the internet. If so, then this gap is likely to disappear amongst the children of immigrants, who are substantially socialized in English-speaking schools and social networks.

For less electorally-focused activities, such as protesting, petitions, and community activities, those born overseas are not significantly different from the Australian born (except that those from non-English-speaking countries tend to lag somewhat in the rate of political contacting). The important conclusion from this evidence is that there is little or no sign of any participatory disadvantage in Australian politics among those who came originally from different political arenas. The results suggest that immigrants can successfully engage with the political process through electoral participation. While the participation of citizens from diverse backgrounds is one of the challenges posed in the global era, the different perspectives and experiences that migrants bring must surely enrich the Australian polity. As theory would predict, however, immigrants are less tied in to partisan politics than those who have lived in Australia all their lives.

Finally, the most distinctive aspect of participation in the analysis is the one that is linked most obviously to globalisation, assuming we accept that the internet is one of the driving forces of the modern globalised world. Use of the internet for access to political information is the one form of political participation in Australia that does significantly reflect socio-structural inequality, between men and women, young and old, the highly and less highly educated and those in higher versus lower status occupations. Most of these divisions are present among immigrants as well as the Australian-born. While it is possible that such imbalances may fade

quite quickly as use of the internet becomes more and more pervasive, in the meantime it is a finding that invites further investigation.

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**Table 1.** Campaign Activity in Australia, 2007 (per cent)

	Whole Sample	Australian- Born	Overseas- Born (ESB)	Overseas- Born (NESB)
Would vote if not compulsory	73	74	75	65
Discuss politics with others	75	76	80	68*
Persuade others how to vote	18	17	19	24**
Support party or candidate	12	11	13	13
Go to political meetings or rallies	5	5	7	4
Contribute money to party or candidate	4	4	4	3
Use internet for election news or information	11	10	14	14
(N)	(1873)	(1352)	(226)	(253)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

*Source:* Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 2.** Varieties of Political Participation in Australia, 2007 (per cent)

	Whole Sample	Australian- Born	Overseas- Born (ESB)	Overseas- Born (NESB)
Contacted a politician or govt official	24	25	26	18
Taken part in a protest, march or demonstration	13	13	15	14
Worked together with people who shared the same concern	24	24	22	25
Signed a written petition	44	45	50	32**
Signed an electronic petition	17	17	20	16
(N)	(1873)	(1352)	(226)	(253)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

*Source:* Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 3.** Subjective Orientations towards Politics in Australia, 2007 (per cent)

	Whole Sample	Australian- Born	Overseas- Born (ESB)	Overseas- Born (NESB)
Good deal of interest in politics	39	39	40	43
People in govt can be trusted	43	42	45	46
Vote can make a big difference	36	36	38	34
Very satisfied with democracy	23	22	24	26*
(N)	(1873)	(1352)	(226)	(253)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

*Source:* Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 4.** Predictors of Voting and Campaign Activity in Australia, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Voting Potential	Persuade How to Vote	Support Party or Candidate	Attend Meetings	Contribute Money	Use Internet
Gender	.12	.15	.12	.20	.69**	.53**
Age	.00	-.03**	-.01	-.00	-.01	-.05**
Education	.05	-.14	.07	.36	.14	.80**
Occupation	.46*	-.12	.29	.22	.41	.57**
Rural residence	-.02	.14	.21	.01	.38	-.18
Born overseas (ESB)	.47	-.01	.25	.50	.34	.60**
Born overseas (NESB)	.08	.79**	.55**	.21	.83*	.11
Interest in politics	3.20**	1.24**	1.04**	2.00**	1.58*	2.93**
Trust in govt	.22	-.04	.30	.39	.99**	-.27
Political efficacy	1.33**	.73**	.24	.72	.21	.51
Satisfaction with democracy	.77	-.51	.10	.04	-.87	-.60
Left-right position	.03	-.00	-.03	-.06	-.02	-.09*
Strength of partisanship	1.49**	1.08**	1.24**	1.40**	2.12**	.37
Constant	-2.72**	-.87*	-3.26**	-5.52**	-6.08**	-1.81**
'R-squared'	.28	.14	.09	.14	.15	.29

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 5.** Predictors of Voting and Campaign Activity among the Australian Born, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Voting Potential	Persuade How to Vote	Support Party or Candidate	Attend Meetings	Contribute Money	Use Internet
Gender	.33	.27	.15	.23	.69*	.46*
Age	.01	-.03**	-.00	-.00	-.01	-.05**
Education	.19	-.17	.11	.33	.21	.66**
Occupation	.38	-.11	.44*	.31	.59	.53*
Rural residence	-.19	.10	.20	-.15	.36	-.16
Interest in politics	3.42**	.97**	1.15**	1.94**	1.23	3.09**
Trust in govt	.05	-.04	.18	.18	.42	-.41
Political efficacy	1.46**	.81*	.32	.82	.85	.74
Satisfaction with democracy	.89	-.52	-.03	.05	-.38	-.37
Left-right position	.03	-.01	-.03	-.08	.05	-.12*
Strength of partisanship	1.57**	1.39**	1.49**	1.55**	2.28**	.31
Constant	-3.39**	-.98*	-3.73**	-5.56**	-6.74**	-1.96**
'R-squared'	.30	.14	.10	.13	.14	.28

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 6.** Predictors of Voting and Campaign Activity among ESB Immigrants, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Voting Potential	Persuade How to Vote	Support Party or Candidate	Attend Meetings	Contribute Money	Use Internet
Gender	-.08	-.03	.03	.42	1.73*	.62
Age	-.06	-.04**	-.00	.02	-.01	-.05**
Education	.89	.45	1.11*	1.31*	.17	1.29**
Occupation	1.35	-.59	-.62	-.78	.02	.09
Rural residence	2.09	.62	.92	1.21*	.91	.15
Interest in politics	3.76*	2.47**	1.15	1.33	3.39	2.43*
Trust in govt	3.61*	-.02	1.21.	1.58*	4.37**	.78
Political efficacy	2.64	.25	.81	1.14	-1.07	.14
Satisfaction with democracy	.32	-.41	.13	.16	-.71	-.82
Left-right position	.00	.06	-.04	.01	-.15	.03
Strength of partisanship	.33	.20	1.02	3.13**	2.30	.11
Constant	-.97	-.46	-3.86**	-8.56**	-8.58**	-1.00
'R-squared'	.45	.18	.19	.33	.43	.29

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 7.** Predictors of Voting and Campaign Activity among NESB Immigrants, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Voting Potential	Persuade How to Vote	Support Party or Candidate	Attend Meetings	Contribute Money	Use Internet
Gender	-.78	-.41	.33	-.11	-.07	1.64*
Age	-.04	-.02	-.04**	-.03	.02	-.08**
Education	-1.93*	-.50	-.27	-.36	.32	.82
Occupation	1.37	.27	.13	.88	-.08	1.16
Rural residence	.99	-.11	-.86	-1.05	-.46	-1.30
Interest in politics	3.53**	2.03**	.56	3.34*	2.30	2.84*
Trust in govt	.36	.07	-.11	.05	.56	-1.45
Political efficacy	-.97	.47	-.32	-.27	-.51	.12
Satisfaction with democracy	-.18	-.14	-.01	-.49	-1.89	-2.20*
Left-right position	.13	-.06	-.05	-.15	-.15	-.07
Strength of partisanship	2.56**	.23	1.02	-.52	1.37	1.40
Constant	.91	-.22	.66	-2.34**	-3.80	.08
'R-squared'	.31	.14	.13	.16	.19	.48

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 8.** Predictors of Contacting, Community Activity, Petition Signing and Protesting in Australia, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Contacting	Community Activity	Written Petition	Electronic Petition	Protest
Gender	.04	-.09	-.37	-.30	-.18
Age	.02**	-.00	.00	-.03**	-.01*
Education	.39*	.30	.10	.46*	.66**
Occupation	.26	.00	.23	.02	-.05
Rural residence	.24	.41*	.13	.13	-.39
Born overseas (ESB)	.02	.01	.11	.34	.18
Born overseas (NESB)	-.55*	.06	-.33	-.07	.29
Interest in politics	1.55**	1.79**	1.78**	1.41**	1.66**
Trust in govt	-.33	-.15	-.27	-.04	-.03
Political efficacy	1.33**	.71*	.57*	.55	.76
Satisfaction with democracy	-1.33**	-.73*	-.75*	-.72	-1.20**
Left-right position	-.01	-.13**	-.17**	-.14**	-.27**
Strength of partisanship	.26	.92**	-.07	.62*	.78*
Constant	-3.52**	-2.37**	-.34	-1.02*	-1.56**
'R-squared'	.13	.14	.13	.14	.21

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).



**Table 9.** Predictors of Contacting, Community Activity, Petition Signing and Protesting among the Australian Born, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Contacting	Community Activity	Written Petition	Electronic Petition	Protest
Gender	.07	-.14	-.54**	-.31	-.36
Age	.02**	-.01	.00	-.03**	-.02*
Education	.31	.18	.14	.45*	.48
Occupation	.26	.01	.21	.11	.05
Rural residence	.24	.55**	.07	.16	-.41
Interest in politics	1.97**	1.97**	1.80**	1.20**	1.83**
Trust in govt	-.44	-.30	-.33	-.33	-.06
Political efficacy	1.05**	.36*	.48	.56	.34
Satisfaction with democracy	-1.70**	-1.11**	-1.13**	-.45	-1.43*
Left-right position	-.02	-.15**	-.17**	-.17**	-.32**
Strength of partisanship	.20	1.04**	.13	.70*	.99*
Constant	-3.40**	-1.78**	-.02	-.69	-.93
'R-squared'	.15	.15	.14	.16	.22

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 10.** Predictors of Contacting, Community Activity, Petition Signing and Protesting among ESB Immigrants, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Contacting	Community Activity	Written Petition	Electronic Petition	Protest
Gender	-.29	-.14	-.04	-1.42	.47
Age	.00	-.00	.01	-.04	-.01
Education	.81	.87	.22	.76	1.65**
Occupation	.10	-.41	-.34	-.72	-1.10
Rural residence	.63	.50	1.11*	1.38*	.21
Interest in politics	.87	2.37*	2.33**	3.16*	2.38
Trust in govt	-.15	-.35	.14	.47	.43
Political efficacy	2.12*	2.52*	.45	1.24	1.66
Satisfaction with democracy	.91	2.11	.04	-.62	-.82
Left-right position	.01	-.18	-.22**	-.08	-.17
Strength of partisanship	.35	1.39	-.37	.01	.60
Constant	-4.91**	-6.36**	-.39	-1.35	-3.51*
'R-squared'	.16	.33	.20	.32	.27

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Table 11.** Predictors of Contacting, Community Activity, Petition Signing and Protesting among NESB Immigrants, 2007 (logistic regression)

	Contacting	Community Activity	Written Petition	Electronic Petition	Protest
Gender	.05	-.18	.06	.63	.04
Age	.01	.02	.01	-.00	.00
Education	.31	.72	-.21	.07	.88
Occupation	.38	.06	.88*	-.16	.09
Rural residence	-.07	-1.15	-.52	-1.84	-1.15
Interest in politics	-.02	1.69	1.72*	1.84	.83
Trust in govt	.61	.90	-.13	.37	-.56
Political efficacy	3.42**	1.78	1.49	.24	2.30
Satisfaction with democracy	-1.27	-1.12	.03	-2.11	-1.38
Left-right position	-.05	-.09	-.13	-.06	-.23*
Strength of partisanship	.66	-.24	-.78	.57	.19
Constant	-4.63**	-3.82*	-2.56*	-2.11	-2.25
'R-squared'	.18	.18	.17	.16	.23

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Source: Australian Election Study, 2007 (n=1873).

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The focus on immigrants raises the issue of the representativeness of the immigrants in the sample. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008, 210) data indicate that the proportions of immigrants in the 2007 AES conform closely to population estimates for 2006. Just over 26% of the AES sample were born overseas, compared to 24.1% in the Australian population. Proportions born in individual countries, for example New Zealand, China, Italy, Vietnam and Greece, also match the population estimates quite closely. Those born in the United Kingdom are somewhat over-represented in the AES (9% compared to 5.6% in the population). Even if the proportions of immigrants are reasonably representative, the possibility remains of the overseas-born respondents in the sample being skewed towards those who have good English language skills. To some extent, the same issue applies in relation to all respondents, since sample surveys tend to over-represent the better educated and more literate generally. The extent to which this may be a greater issue for immigrants remains unknown.