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Information about authors

Paul Boulus is a student in the Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours) program majoring in Political Science at the Australian National University.

Jane Bullen is a Research Officer at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Dr Bullen's research interests include homelessness policies and services, homelessness and mental illness, women's homelessness, youth homelessness and welfare reform.

Natasha Cortis is a Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. She has broad expertise relating to the organisation, delivery and evaluation of human services, with special interest in paid care work; the community services workforce; the role of the non-government sector in policy development and service delivery; and welfare reform.

Susan Dennison is an ARC Future Fellow and Associate Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University. She is concerned with social justice issues and the importance of using evidence-based research to inform policy change and prevent crime. Her research interests include developmental risks for youth offending and the effect of parental incarceration on the developmental outcomes of children.

Keith Dowding is Professor of Political Science at the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University. He has published widely in comparative politics, Australian politics, public administration, public policy and in political philosophy.

Kathleen Flanagan is a PhD candidate in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. She previously worked in research, policy and advocacy for a major non-government organisation.

Kate Freiberg is a Senior Research Fellow at the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University. Her research on the implementation of preventive interventions in community settings includes a particular focus on the development of integrated systems of support for children and their families.

Myra Hamilton is a Research Fellow at the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. She researches retirement incomes policy, welfare reform, the service needs and experiences of people with caring responsibilities, and the perceptions and management of social risks over the life-course.

Keith Jacobs is an ARC Future Fellow and Professor of Sociology in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Tasmania. He is currently writing a monograph titled *Housing: a Post War History* for Reaktion Books.

Weiping Kostenko has a doctorate in econometrics from Monash University. She has been working in areas such as Aboriginal health, labour market and wellbeing assimilation of Australian immigrants, youth school-to-work transition, location economics, social exclusion and nurse retention.

Juliet Pietsch is a senior lecturer in Political Science at the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University. Her research interests are focused on comparative political behaviour and migration politics in Europe and the Asia-Pacific.

Rosanna Scutella is a Senior Research Fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. Her research focuses on inequality, poverty and social exclusion with a particular interest in homelessness.

Anna Stewart is Professor and former Head, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. She is also the founder and co-Program Leader of Justice Modelling at Griffith. Using government administrative data, she has examined the longitudinal contacts individuals have with child protection, youth justice and the adult criminal justice system. Her research also includes system responses to youth offending and domestic violence, management of risk, diversionary responses and system modelling.

Roger Wilkins is a Principal Research Fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne, and is Deputy Director (Research) of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. His research interests include the nature, causes and consequences of labour market outcomes, and issues of income inequality, poverty and welfare dependence.

Intensity and persistence of individuals' social exclusion in Australia

Rosanna Scutella, Roger Wilkins and Weiping Kostenko

Abstract

We construct a measure of social exclusion that recognises its multidimensionality at the individual level, including its potential variability in intensity at a point in time and in persistence over time. We distinguish seven dimensions or domains of social exclusion: material resources; employment; education and skills; health and disability; social; community; and personal safety. For each of these seven domains, several indicators of social exclusion are produced. Our exclusion measure identifies 20 to 30 per cent of the Australian population aged 15 years and over as experiencing 'marginal' or worse levels of exclusion at any given point in time. However, there is considerable variation in both the extent and persistence of exclusion among the excluded. We further find that, although there are commonalities in the demographic composition of the socially excluded and the income poor, there are also some important differences. For example, persons 65 years and over represent a much smaller share of the most 'excluded' group than they do of the 'poorest'; and – adopting a household-level measure of exclusion – children represent a larger share of the excluded than they do of the poor.

Keywords: poverty and social exclusion, multidimensional measures of disadvantage

Introduction

In recent years there has been heightened interest in empirical approaches based on broader concepts of disadvantage than narrow income-based measures. One of these approaches is the social exclusion approach adopted by the European Union, the UK government and, more recently, the Australian government. One of the key advantages of adopting such an approach is that it explicitly identifies disadvantage as multidimensional in nature.

In this article we investigate social exclusion in Australia, employing a multidimensional measure that recognises the potential for exclusion to differ across individuals in terms of both its intensity at a point in time and its persistence over time. Developed through consultations held in 2008 and 2009 with a wide range of social researchers, community groups and government agencies, the measure identifies seven dimensions or domains of exclusion: material resources; employment; education and skills; health and disability; social; community; and personal safety. We apply the measure to a nationally representative household panel survey – the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey – which provides data that are relatively rare internationally for being both longitudinal and rich in covariates. In particular, the richness of the data allows construction of several indicators of exclusion for each of the seven domains, while the panel structure facilitates analysis of the persistence of each indicator at the individual or household level.

Our approach is premised on the multidimensionality of social exclusion, but our purpose is to produce a single aggregate measure of the level of exclusion experienced by the individual. The rationale is that, while knowing the particular dimensions of exclusion experienced by an individual is critical to addressing that exclusion, it is also important to simply identify the most excluded members of the community. This is best achieved by some kind of aggregation of the dimensions of exclusion into a single index. The approach we take to estimate the extent or intensity of exclusion is a type of 'counting' or 'sum-of-scores' method, with the level of exclusion a function of (1) the number of domains in which exclusion is experienced, (2) the number of indicators of exclusion present within each domain, and (3) the length of time the indicators are present for the individual.

Our key contributions to the literature are fourfold. First, we are one of only a limited number of studies that estimate social exclusion using a multidimensional approach at the *individual* level, which allows us to examine the extent or intensity of social exclusion of individuals and to compare people who are socially excluded with those who are only measured as income poor. Second, the richness of the HILDA Survey data allows us to incorporate a wide range of economic, social and health related dimensions into our overall measure of exclusion. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the longitudinal structure of our data allows us to examine the *persistence* of social exclusion. Finally, our focus on the situation in Australia provides new information on trends and persistence in social exclusion in a developed country with a quite

distinct institutional setting. In particular, Australia has a large-scale and well-targeted welfare system – benefits represent the primary income source for approximately one-quarter of all adults – but entitlement levels are low and are essentially flat-rate (Whiteford 2010). Examination of Australia can therefore provide insights into the implications for social exclusion of such a well-targeted, but low-level, social safety net.¹

The plan of the paper is as follows. First we briefly summarise previous research on defining and measuring social exclusion. We then explain our approach to measuring social exclusion, which follows with a description of the HILDA Survey data we use and the individual indicators used to construct our measure. Cross-sectional results on exclusion measured at both the individual and the household level are then presented respectively, followed by a brief examination of the persistence of poverty and social exclusion over time. Conclusions are provided in the final section.

Defining and measuring social exclusion

Social exclusion is a somewhat elusive concept, subject to numerous definitions and interpretations. Nonetheless, consistent across studies and policy discussion of social exclusion is the notion that it refers to the range of dimensions which marginalise people and reduce their opportunities to engage in social or political life. The UK government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), for example, defines social exclusion as 'a short-hand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, high crime environment, bad health and family breakdown' (SEU 2001: 10). The EU Task Force has similarly called for social exclusion to be analysed as 'the problem field determined by the link between low income position, bad labour market position and disadvantages concerning non-monetary aspects of life' (Eurostat 2000: 33). Clearly evident in these definitions is inherent multidimensionality of any measure of social exclusion.

There have been a number of studies focused on 'operationalising' the concept of social exclusion. This literature has addressed two broad questions: (1) the dimensions or indicators that should form part of the measure of social exclusion; and (2) how to construct overall measures of the level of exclusion from its many dimensions.

Literature addressing the first question has been dominated by government and non-government agencies, sometimes drawing on a wide body of opinion among policy makers, academics, community sector representatives and others. This includes work in the United Kingdom since the mid-1990s by the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (Burchardt et al. 1999), the New Policy Institute (see, for example, Palmer et al. 2007) and the UK government itself (see, for example, Department of Work and Pensions 2006) producing various indicators of social exclusion. As part of the Lisbon Agenda in 2000, the European Union has developed the European Social Inclusion Strategy, likewise resulting in a series of indicators, known as the 'Laeken' indicators. These comprise 10

'primary' indicators and a range of 'secondary' indicators based around the four domains of material resources, economic participation, education and health, and are constructed from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) database.

The UK Millennium Survey of Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) was the first attempt at conducting a nationally representative survey with the specific aim of measuring social exclusion. Conducted in 1999 as a one off cross-section, respondents were surveyed about an extensive range of aspects of social exclusion, including the necessities of life and whether they went without items and social activities through choice or lack of money. Described by Gordon and colleagues (2000) and Pantazis and colleagues (2006), the PSE approach distinguished four dimensions of exclusion: income or resources; the labour market; services; and social relations.

In Australia, the main studies with a specific focus on measuring social exclusion in the community as a whole comprise the Community Understandings of Poverty and Social Exclusion (CUPSE) study undertaken by the Social Policy Research Centre (see Saunders 2011 and Saunders et al. 2007) and work by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Social Inclusion Unit (SIU) (see Vinson et al. 2009 and Australian Social Inclusion Board 2010). CUPSE followed the approach of the UK PSE, directly collecting from survey respondents' information on poverty, deprivation and social exclusion in Australia. Research by the SIU has resulted in 24 'headline' indicators and 22 'supplementary' indicators across 12 domains. Still under development, estimates have not been produced for 10 of these indicators because of a lack of suitable data.

Studies addressing the methodological issue of aggregation across dimensions include several that advise against any form of aggregation on the basis that this undermines the very notion of multidimensionality that is core to the social exclusion concept (Atkinson et al. 2002; Bourguignon & Chakravarty, 2003; Bradshaw et al. 2004). However, most researchers on social exclusion (or multidimensional poverty more broadly) recognise the need for some form of aggregation. Alkire and Foster (2011), Chakravarty and D'Ambrosio (2006), Levitas and colleagues (2007), Whelan and colleagues (2008) and Halleröd and Larsson (2008), among others, have suggested various forms of what Atkinson (2003) refers to as 'counting' approaches. In essence, these approaches involve literally counting up the number of indicators of exclusion experienced by an individual. Atkinson (2003) notes that an alternative, although less popular, approach is the 'social welfare function' approach, for example as proposed by Bourguignon and Chakravarty (1999, 2002) and Duclos and colleagues (2006), whereby information on exclusion in each dimension is combined via a welfare function to produce an overall measure of exclusion, be it at the individual level or the societal level.

All approaches to measuring social exclusion confront, either explicitly or implicitly, the issue of how to weight individual dimensions of exclusion when producing an overall measure. In the absence of clear criteria for assigning weights, a common approach is to simply assign equal weight to

each dimension. Decancq and Lugo (2009) consider in some detail alternative weighting regimes for indices of wellbeing and/or deprivation, including various data-driven schemes as well as normative approaches to assigning weights. A notable example of a data-driven approach is the item response model method proposed by Capellari and Jenkins (2007), in which the data structure corresponds to a panel, but where repeated observations for each individual come from the different indicators rather than from different points in time. Significantly, Capellari and Jenkins find in their application of the item response models that inferences are little affected compared with an equal-weights regime.

Approach

A framework for identifying social exclusion

Our framework and subsequent measures build on work by Headey (2006) and Saunders and colleagues (2007) for Australia and are strongly influenced by recent international work on social exclusion, including Atkinson and colleagues (2002), Burchardt and colleagues (2002), and Levitas and colleagues (2007). Fundamentally motivating our approach is the goal of a better measure of the *extent* of social exclusion in Australia. Thus, the focus is on measures that capture participation in society or the ability to participate. We emphasise that we are not aiming to understand causal relationships in this analysis, although we hope that the results help facilitate analyses of these causal relationships in the future.

The seven 'life domains' for the measurement of social exclusion in our framework comprise (1) material resources; (2) employment; (3) education and skills; (4) health and disability; (5) social; (6) community; and (7) personal safety. Within each domain are several components, which are listed in Table 1. The selection of these domains and their respective components was partly influenced by the approach taken in the development of the Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix described in Levitas and colleagues (2007). Consideration was also given to features including measurability, objectivity and parsimony. In addition, consideration was also given to community notions of social exclusion. In 2008 and 2009, the authors consulted various community groups, government agencies and social researchers, in part to ascertain community notions of social exclusion. Further details about these consultations are provided in Scutella, Wilkins and Horn (2009).

Material resources make up perhaps the most obvious domain, a lack of such resources having considerable overlap with a concept of income poverty. The components of this domain essentially follow Levitas and colleagues (2007), and include household income, household net worth, household consumption expenditure, and experience of homelessness and financial hardship. The employment domain could potentially be included as part of material resources but, following Levitas and colleagues (2007), it is treated as a separate category because it has importance to social inclusion independent of the financial

benefits. Most notably, unemployment is associated with adverse effects that extend beyond lack of income (Clark & Oswald 1994). For this domain, the components comprise measures of participation in both paid and unpaid work.

Education and skills (the third domain) provide information on an individual's human capital. Unlike Levitas and colleagues (2007), who view education and skills as an aspect of the way people participate in society, our human capital perspective treats education and skills as more of a resource. Nonetheless, we adopt similar components for this domain, reflecting the intent to capture educational opportunities across the life course, comprising levels of education attainment, basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Health and disability are not typically considered explicitly in measures of social exclusion. For example, they are not captured in Burchardt and colleagues (2002), while Levitas and colleagues (2007) treat them as components of quality of life rather than as inputs to or products of exclusion. However, we feel that it is important to include this domain. Not only can health and disability be conceived as representing forms of human capital, but they can contribute to social exclusion in other ways. For example, in addition to adversely impacting on productivity, disability can raise the costs of achieving a given level of inclusion because of the need for aids, equipment, medical services and so on. Health and disability can also be products of social exclusion. Specific components necessary to capture the various aspects of health and disability comprise measures of physical health, mental health and disability.

The social domain refers to interaction with and support from family, friends and society more generally, combining what Levitas and colleagues (2007) refer to as elements of either social participation or social resources. While the social domain is clearly an important dimension of social inclusion – indeed, it could be viewed as the *defining* dimension – it is somewhat more difficult to measure objectively than the first four domains. With this significant constraint in mind, only a limited number of components are specified. Specifically, individuals institutionalised or, in the case of children, separated from their families, are interpreted as having reduced social resources and thus being at greater risk of exclusion, while access to social support measures the individual's social resources more generally.

The sixth domain, community, has been defined broadly to encompass various aspects of what Levitas and colleagues (2007) refer to as access to community services, institutional resources, neighbourhood quality, and political and civic participation. In principle, this includes, among many other things, access to public infrastructure, legal rights and protections, the existence and exercise of voting rights, law enforcement, and public recreational facilities. In common with the social domain, many aspects of the community domain are not amenable to objective measurement. Indeed, it is our view that many elements of this domain, particularly in relation to institutional resources, should not be measured as part of an Australian social exclusion index. In modern-day Australia, meaningful, objective and/or time-varying measures are unlikely for many of the elements that make up institutional resources, such as legal rights,

which are better addressed in other ways. With regard to political and civic participation, the existence of compulsory voting means that commonly-used measures of voter turnout are not directly applicable to Australia. More relevant in the Australian context is voter enrolment. In light of these considerations, the components of this domain comprise measures of access to transport; access to health, utilities and financial services; neighbourhood quality; voter enrolment; civic participation; and voluntary activity/membership.

The last domain is labelled 'personal safety'. Here we have in mind both the actual experience of breaches of personal safety and perceptions of lack of safety. Being exposed to crime or discrimination can impact on a person's participation in a range of economic, social, civic or political activities, and thus, in contrast to Levitas and colleagues (2007), who interpret this as an aspect of quality of life, our framework positions this distinct domain as a resource required to establish social inclusion.

For each component, specific indicators of exclusion are produced which collectively provide a measure of the overall extent and nature of exclusion for each individual. The measures we create are all binary indicators of exclusion – for example, an indicator is equal to one if income is below a certain threshold and zero otherwise. This could be considered a limitation for the analysis of inherently continuous outcomes, such as income, but it is consistent with the notion that social exclusion represents a failure to achieve critical minimum levels of the various dimensions of social inclusion. The indicators we examine are dependent on the data source used, and so further discussion of them is deferred to a later Section, after first discussing our chosen data source, the HILDA Survey. We have, however, flagged in Table 1 the components for which no suitable measure is available in the HILDA Survey data.

Aggregation

To move from a number of separate indicators of exclusion across the seven domains to an overall measure of an individual's exclusion requires some form of aggregation across the indicators. As noted above, studies have proposed a number of alternative approaches to aggregation across dimensions. Our core approach is a simple summation – or 'sum-score' – approach that assigns equal weight to each of the seven life domains, on the implicit assumption that each is an equally important contributor to overall social exclusion. In a static or cross-sectional context, this is achieved by measuring the extent of exclusion of individual i within each life domain, x_{id} , as equal to the proportion of indicators within the domain that are present, and measuring the overall extent of exclusion, x_i^S , as the sum of these 'scores' across the seven domains, that is,

$$x_i^S = \sum_{d=1}^7 x_{id} \quad (1)$$

where $x_{id} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{K_d} x_{id}^k}{K_d}$, x_{id}^k is a binary indicator reflecting the presence of indicator k of social exclusion in life domain d for individual i , and K_d refers to the total number of indicators for domain d . Since the proportion of indicators present for each domain lies between zero and one, the measured extent of exclusion at a point in time has a maximum of seven and a minimum of zero.

The decision to give equal weight to each domain was based on the consensus view of the expert group consulted in 2008 and 2009, but nonetheless involves value judgements that are unlikely to be universally held. One alternative to choosing the weights is to adopt a 'data-driven' method for determining them. However, as Decancq and Lugo (2009: abstract) convincingly argue, since weights reflect important value judgements, they should be 'explicit and clear' to enable public scrutiny, should be 'set taking into consideration their role in determining trade-offs between dimensions', and they should 'respect people's preferences about these dimensions'. Existing data-driven approaches certainly do not satisfy the last two criteria and probably do not satisfy the first.

Nonetheless, to investigate sensitivity of inferences to different approaches, we examined the results of adopting different weighting regimes, including implementing the one-parameter item response model proposed by Capellari and Jenkins (2007). In common with Capellari and Jenkins, we find that inferences are relatively insensitive to adoption of item response models compared with our equal-weighting sum-score approach. We do, however, find that estimates of the incidence of social exclusion can be sensitive to alternative weighting regimes, highlighting the importance of making value judgements transparent in analyses of this kind. Further details and results are reported in Scutella, Wilkins and Kostenko (2009).

All indicators included in our measure are designed to be potentially inclusive, so that any number of indicators of exclusion – from zero through to all of them – could be in principle be present. For example, for the employment domain, we distinguish long-term unemployment, current unemployment, marginal attachment and underemployment, and define four indicators such that all four are present for a long-term unemployed person, three are present for a currently unemployed person who is not long-term unemployed, two are present for a marginally attached person, and only one is present for an underemployed worker.

Our approach is a 'counting' approach (Atkinson 2003) and indeed has strong parallels with the 'dual cut-off' approach applied by Alkire and Foster (2011) to multidimensional poverty measurement in developing countries. It also has elements of both the 'union' and 'intersection' approaches to capturing multidimensional deprivation described by Atkinson (2003), among others. It is a union approach in the sense that the presence of any indicator indicates some

degree of exclusion. However, it is the intersection of indicators – that is, the number of indicators simultaneously present – that determines an individual's intensity of exclusion.

Data and definitions

The HILDA survey

The data used for this study comprise the first seven waves of the HILDA Survey, providing information collected annually over the period 2001 to 2007. Described in more detail in Watson and Wooden (2010), the HILDA Survey began in 2001 with 13,969 respondents in 7,682 households. Of these, 8,409 were interviewed in all seven waves, although the number of respondents in Wave 7 was 12,089 due to re-entry of Wave 1 respondents as well as new entrants to the sample between Waves 1 and 7 (for example, because an individual has joined a household containing a sample member or because a child of a sample member has turned 15 years of age). Cross-sectional population weights are used in all of the analysis that follows, with the exception of the analysis of persistence, where longitudinal weights are used to better account for non-random attrition in the survey.

The HILDA Survey is very well suited to the measurement of social exclusion. Each year, it collects information from respondents on a wide variety of subjects relating to economic, health and social wellbeing. Subjects include labour market and education activity, family circumstances, income, expenditure, disability, health, significant life events, satisfaction with various aspects of life and experience of financial hardship. The survey also collects information less frequently than annually (generally four-yearly) on various subjects, including wealth, health, satisfaction with family relationships, social and community participation and neighbourhood characteristics. This richness of data, combined with its longitudinal structure and its nationally representative design, is extremely valuable for the study of social exclusion, yet is rare internationally.

Indicators of exclusion

In selecting indicators of social exclusion we follow the recommendations of Atkinson and colleagues (2002) that indicators be unambiguous, robust, responsive to policy without being subject to manipulation, consistent with international standards, balanced across the different dimensions and readily understood by lay members of the community. A further practical consideration is that the indicator actually be available in our data source. In particular, as Table 1 shows, no indicators are available for homelessness, institutionalisation/separation from family, internet access, access to transport, access to health, utilities and financial services, voter enrolment and experience of discrimination.

Table 2 summarises the final set of indicators constructed. Not all indicators are available in every wave and so we also provide information in the table on which waves the indicators are available. In total, there are 29 indicators across the seven life domains, although the number available in a given wave ranges

from 23 (in Wave 1) to 28 (in Wave 6). Twenty-two indicators are available in all seven waves. The number of indicators within each domain ranges from as low as one to as high as five.

Table 1: Domains of poverty and social exclusion in Australia and their components

Domain	Components
Material resources	Household income
	Household net worth
	Household consumption expenditure
	Homelessness*
	Financial hardship
Employment	Paid work
	Unpaid work
Education and skills	Basic skills (literacy and numeracy)
	Educational attainment
	Lifelong learning
Health and disability	Physical health
	Mental health
	Disability or long-term health condition
Social	Institutionalisation/separation from family*
	Social support
	Participation in common social activities
	Internet access*
Community	Access to transport*
	Access to health, utilities and financial services*
	Neighbourhood quality
	Voter enrolment*
	Civic participation and voluntary activity/membership
Personal safety	Victim of crime
	Subjective safety
	Victim of discrimination*

Note: * No indicator available in HILDA Survey data used for this paper.

Given the variation in the number of indicators available across waves, we produce two distinct series of estimates. The first uses all available indicators in each wave, and therefore provides for each wave the most complete information on poverty and social exclusion possible for that wave. Differences across waves in measured social exclusion for this first series will reflect not only real changes over time in the level and incidence of exclusion, but also differences in the indicators available across waves. We therefore also produce a series restricted to the 22 indicators available in all seven waves, thereby allowing investigation not only of changes over time in exclusion, but also of persistence over time of exclusion at the individual level.

Table 2: Indicators of poverty and social exclusion – HILDA Survey, Waves 1-7

Domain	Component	Indicator	Waves available
Material resources	Household income	(1) Income less than 60% of median equivalised household income	All waves
	Household net worth	(2) Net worth less than 60% of median equivalised household net worth	Waves 2 & 6
	Household consumption expenditure	(3) Consumption expenditure less than 60% of median equivalised household consumption expenditure	Waves 6 & 7
	Financial hardship	(4) Three or more indicators of financial stress	All waves
Employment	Paid work and unpaid work	(5) Long-term unemployed	All waves
		(6) Unemployed	All waves
		(7) Unemployed or underemployed	All waves
		(8) Unemployed, underemployed, or marginally attached	All waves
		(9) In a jobless household	All waves
Education and skills	Basic skills (literacy and numeracy)	(10) Low literacy	Wave 7
		(11) Low numeracy	Wave 7
	Educational attainment	(12) Poor English proficiency	All waves
		(13) Low level of formal education	All waves
	(14) Little or no work experience	All waves	
	Health and disability	General health	(15) Poor general health
Physical health		(16) Poor physical health	All waves
Mental health		(17) Poor mental health	All waves
Disability or long-term health condition		(18) Has a long term health condition or disability	All waves
		(19) Household has a disabled child	All waves
Social	Social support	(20) Little social support	All waves
	Participation in common social activities	(21) Get together with friends/relatives less than once a month	All waves
	Neighbourhood quality	(22) Low neighbourhood quality	Waves 1-4, 6
(23) Satisfaction with 'the neighbourhood in which you live' low (less than 5 on a scale of 0 to 10)		All waves	
(24) Satisfaction with 'feeling part of local community' low (less than 5 on a scale of 0 to 10)		All waves	
Community	Civic participation and voluntary activity/membership	(25) Not currently a member of a sporting, hobby or community-based club or association	All waves
		(26) No voluntary activity in a typical week	All waves
Personal safety	Victim of violent crime	(27) Victim of physical violence in the last 12 months	Waves 2-7
	Victim of property crime	(28) Victim of property crime in the last 12 months	Waves 2-7
	Subjective safety	(29) Satisfaction with 'how safe you feel' is low (less than 5 on a scale of 0 to 10)	All waves

Note: See the Appendix for definitions of variables used in the indicators.

Table 3 presents the incidence of each of the 29 indicators for all waves (2001 to 2007) pooled, with rates calculated over only those waves in which the indicator is available. The table shows that the incidence of each indicator varies, with certain indicators such as long-term unemployment, little social support, low neighbourhood quality and being a victim of violence present for very small proportions of the population (0.6, 1.4, 1.6 and 1.6 per cent respectively), while others such as low wealth and low formal education are

present for more than one-third of the population. In the next section we examine the extent to which these indicators of disadvantage are concentrated amongst the same groups of people.

Table 3: Incidence of each individual indicator of poverty and social exclusion – All waves pooled – population aged 15 years and over (%)

Material resources domain		Health domain	
Low income	19.9	Poor general health	18.3
Low net worth	38.0	Poor physical health	10.9
Low consumption	12.8	Poor mental health	10.0
In financial hardship	6.3	Long-term health condition	26.2
Employment domain		Disabled child in the household	3.6
Long-term unemployed	0.6	Social domain	
Unemployed	3.4	Little social support	1.4
Underemployed or unemployed	9.7	Infrequent social activity	10.6
Marginally attached, underemployed or unemployed	16.5	Community domain	
In a jobless household	12.2	Low neighbourhood quality	1.6
Education and skills domain		Low satisfaction with neighbourhood	4.5
Low literacy	3.1	Low satisfaction with feeling part of community	13.9
Low numeracy	4.6	Low civic participation – membership	18.8
Poor English proficiency	2.7	Low civic participation – voluntary activity	23.3
Low formal education	36.2	Personal safety domain	
Little work experience	11.3	Victim of violence	1.6
		Victim of property crime	5.1
		Low subjective safety	4.3

Estimates of social exclusion

Overall extent of social exclusion

The distribution of our resulting 'sum-score' measure of social exclusion, for all waves combined, is presented in Figure 1. Here we restrict our measure of social exclusion to take account of only the 21 indicators available in all seven waves.²

The figure shows an intuitively sensible pattern of the distribution of the proportion of the population in each sum-score range declining in the sum-score, with the rate of decline itself declining as the sum-score increases. Most individuals have a sum-score less than 1 and few people have a sum score greater than 2. Almost no one has a score greater than 3.

Of particular interest is that less than one-quarter of the population experience no indicators of social exclusion. It would therefore make little sense to think of those with a sum-score of greater than 0 (as a pure union approach would) as being socially excluded. The figure shows, however, that there is no bunching

around the integer values of 1, 2 or 3. Therefore, if we were to set thresholds to identify the excluded around these values (which we do in the following analysis), we can be confident that resulting estimates of social exclusion will not be especially sensitive to small changes in the threshold.

Figure 1: Distribution of sum-score using indicators common to all waves (all waves pooled)

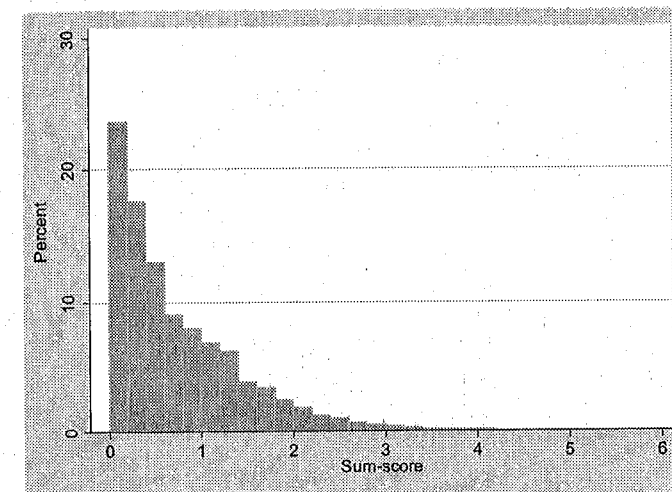


Figure 2 plots the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over that can be classified as 'excluded' in each wave (restricted to indicators common to all waves) for two alternative sum-score thresholds used to define exclusion – 1 and 2 – alongside relative income poverty rates over the same period.³ One interpretation of these thresholds is that they represent progressive increases in the intensity of exclusion. Thus, the proportion with a sum-score greater than 1 can be viewed as the proportion experiencing marginal or worse exclusion, while the proportion with a sum-score greater than 2 can be viewed as the proportion experiencing intense exclusion. These thresholds are of course arbitrary, but they are useful for characterising trends in exclusion over time.

The figure shows that, at any given point in time over the 2001 to 2007 time period, between 20 and 30 per cent of the population 15 years and over experience what we refer to as marginal exclusion or worse (that is, a score of at least 1). This compares with just over 20 per cent of the population 15 years plus in households with incomes below 60 per cent of median equivalised household income, and just under 15 per cent with incomes below 50 per cent of median equivalised household income. Those experiencing intense exclusion are the smallest identified group, representing between four and six per cent of the population aged 15 years and over.

present for more than one-third of the population. In the next section we examine the extent to which these indicators of disadvantage are concentrated amongst the same groups of people.

Table 3: Incidence of each individual indicator of poverty and social exclusion – All waves pooled – population aged 15 years and over (%)

Material resources domain		Health domain	
Low income	19.9	Poor general health	18.3
Low net worth	38.0	Poor physical health	10.9
Low consumption	12.8	Poor mental health	10.0
In financial hardship	6.3	Long-term health condition	26.2
Employment domain		Disabled child in the household	
Long-term unemployed	0.6		3.6
Unemployed	3.4	Social domain	
Underemployed or unemployed	9.7	Little social support	1.4
Marginally attached, underemployed or unemployed	16.5	Infrequent social activity	10.6
In a jobless household	12.2	Community domain	
Education and skills domain		Low neighbourhood quality	1.6
Low literacy	3.1	Low satisfaction with neighbourhood	4.5
Low numeracy	4.6	Low satisfaction with feeling part of community	13.9
Poor English proficiency	2.7	Low civic participation – membership	18.8
Low formal education	36.2	Low civic participation – voluntary activity	23.3
Little work experience	11.3	Personal safety domain	
		Victim of violence	1.6
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Figure 1: Distribution of sum-score using indicators common to all waves (all waves pooled)

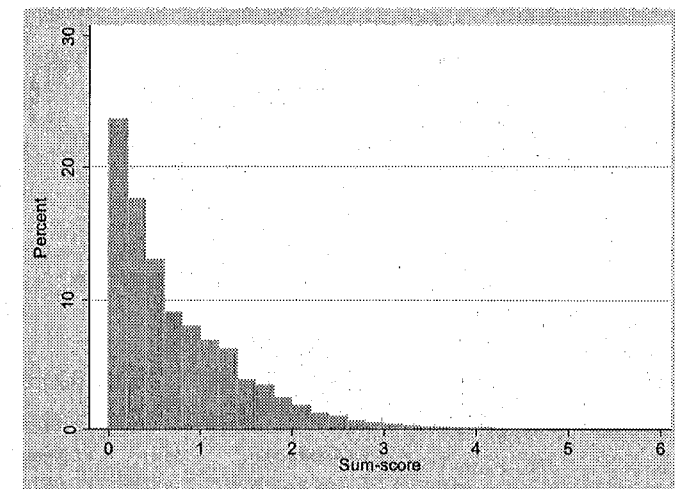


Figure 2 plots the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over that can be classified as 'excluded' in each wave (restricted to indicators common to all waves) for two alternative sum-score thresholds used to define exclusion – 1 and 2 – alongside relative income poverty rates over the same period.³ One interpretation of these thresholds is that they represent progressive increases in the intensity of exclusion. Thus, the proportion with a sum-score greater than 1 can be viewed as the proportion experiencing marginal or worse exclusion, while the proportion with a sum-score greater than 2 can be viewed as the proportion experiencing intense exclusion. These thresholds are of course arbitrary, but they are useful for characterising trends in exclusion over time.

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Also evident in Figure 2 is that the incidence of social exclusion declined over the seven-year period. This is perhaps unsurprising in the context of the strong economic and employment growth experienced by Australia over the 2001 to 2007 period. Income poverty rates, on the other hand, did not change appreciably.

Figure 2: Rates of social exclusion and income poverty, using indicators common to all waves, 2001 to 2007

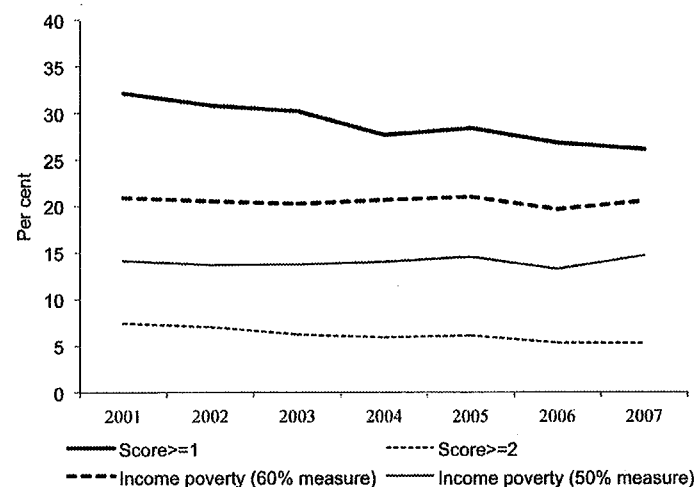


Figure 3: Rates of social exclusion using all indicators available each year, 2001 to 2007

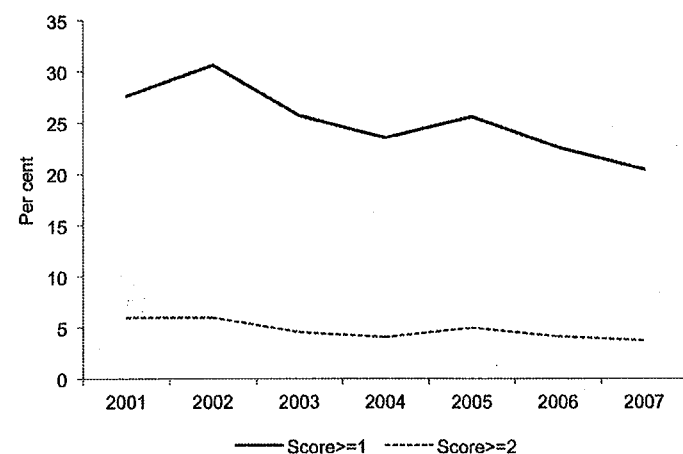


Figure 3 presents exclusion rates for the same two thresholds as in Figure 2, but includes all indicators available in each wave. Comparisons with Figure 2 provide indications of the effects of including the additional indicators available in specific waves. Notable is that the inclusion of wealth in 2002 and the lack

of neighbourhood quality information in 2005 appear to be responsible for the spikes in rates of exclusion in these years. However, a similar spike as occurred in 2002 did not occur in 2006, when information on wealth also appeared, most likely reflecting offsetting effects of the inclusion of an indicator for consumption expenditure in the material resources domain.

Comparing the excluded with the income poor

A key question for this study is whether people who are socially excluded are the same people as those who are income poor. If they are the same people, income poverty is a sufficient measure of socio-economic disadvantage and there is no need to adopt a different approach to look at those socially excluded. We have already seen that measured rates of exclusion differ from rates of income poverty. However, overall rates of exclusion and poverty depend on somewhat arbitrarily imposed thresholds and can vary considerably depending on where these thresholds are set. Of more interest is a fuller analysis of the empirical association between our measure of exclusion and incomes. Table 4 therefore presents a range of statistics on the association between these two ways of ranking people. The first panel simply presents the correlation coefficient for incomes and sum-scores. It shows that the correlations between our measured sum-score and income, while negative, are (statistically) significantly different from -1, and indeed, at -0.4, are considerably short of being perfectly correlated.⁴ The two measures are thus likely to carry different information.

Table 4: Association between sum-scores (using all indicators) and incomes

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Correlation coefficient	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4
<i>Worst-off 20% based on sum-score</i>							
Average score	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.6
Average annual equivalised income (\$)	11,309	11,762	11,217	12,117	12,757	15,926	15,921
Minimum score	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.1
Maximum income (\$)	64,237	63,226	62,916	72,461	74,538	137,255	107,226
<i>Worst-off 20% based on income</i>							
Average score	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.3	1.4
Average annual equivalised income (\$)	6,149	6,443	6,252	7,277	7,557	8,626	8,038
Minimum score	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.3
Maximum income (\$)	8,849	9,347	9,754	10,334	11,001	12,217	12,891

While income and social exclusion have differences in information content across the distribution, this may not translate to different inferences on who is at the bottom of the distribution, which is of course our primary interest. For example, even with a low correlation coefficient, it is possible that all low-income persons have high measured exclusion, and all people with higher incomes have the same, equally-low, measured exclusion. The lower two panels of Table 4 therefore examine the incomes and sum-scores of the bottom (worst-off) 20 per cent of the sum-score and income distributions. We see that

the mean sum-score is considerably higher among the worst-off 20 per cent based on sum-score than the mean score among the worst-off 20 per cent based on income. Likewise, the mean income among the worst-off 20 per cent based on income is considerably lower than the mean income among the worst-off 20 per cent based on sum-score. Furthermore, the minimum score among the bottom 20 per cent of the sum-score distribution is around 1.1-1.3, compared with 0-0.5 for the bottom 20 per cent of the income distribution; and the maximum income among the bottom 20 per cent of the income distribution is around \$10,000-\$13,000, compared with \$64,000-\$137,000 for the bottom 20 per cent of the sum-score distribution. Clearly, then, there are poor people who are not socially excluded and non-poor people who are excluded.

To shed further light on the association between our measure of exclusion and incomes we also compare the gender and age composition of those identified as the 'worst off' using each respective measure, presented in Table 5 using all indicators available in each wave. The table shows significant differences in the composition of the two groups. Persons 65 years and over represent a much larger share of the poorest 20 per cent than they do of the most 'excluded'. The most excluded group has a much more balanced age composition than that of the poorest individuals.⁵ The difference in the age composition of the worst-off is much starker in 2002 and 2006 when information on household wealth is taken into account. This highlights the importance of taking wealth into consideration when identifying who the excluded groups are in society.

Table 5: Composition of the worst-off 20 per cent, by measure of disadvantage – Sum-score based on all indicators – Percentage in each demographic group

	2001		2002		2003		2004		2005		2006		2007	
	Score	Income	Score	Income	Score	Income	Score	Income	Score	Income	Score	Income	Score	Income
Female	53.9	57.2	55.5	56.6	53.8	56.8	53.4	55.9	56.8	55.8	55.2	54.9	55.3	55.7
Age group (years)														
15-24	15.6	14.7	20.8	15.8	17.7	17.0	16.9	16.5	14.9	16.2	18.5	14.6	14.0	14.6
25-34	14.4	9.6	13.9	10.7	11.4	9.6	11.5	9.7	11.3	9.4	9.1	9.1	11.3	9.6
35-44	17.8	12.5	17.0	11.9	15.7	12.2	14.2	11.2	14.2	10.6	16.7	11.9	13.5	11.7
45-54	15.4	12.2	14.1	11.0	16.2	11.6	14.9	12.4	12.3	11.3	14.2	11.2	15.3	11.3
55-64	16.0	15.6	16.2	15.5	15.3	13.5	18.4	14.4	18.9	15.1	19.3	14.2	20.0	14.4
65 plus	20.9	35.4	18.0	35.1	23.8	36.0	24.1	35.9	28.4	37.5	22.3	39.1	26.0	38.4

Household-level measures of exclusion

An important limitation of the individual-level analysis presented above is that it excludes children under the age of 15. As is common in household surveys, relatively little direct information is gathered by the HILDA Survey on children in the household under 15 years of age. Moreover, several of our indicators, particularly in relation to employment, are not appropriate for children. However, social exclusion of children is arguably of greater importance than exclusion of older persons because of its potential long-term adverse consequences. To incorporate children into our analysis, we turn to an analysis

of household-level measures of exclusion, on the basis that, for children, it is exclusion of the household in which they reside that is the most appropriate focus. In particular, a child's ability to participate is critically dependent on his or her parents' fortunes.

We therefore construct a measure of household exclusion, defined as the average of the exclusion scores of all members of the household over 15 years of age. This measure is then assigned to every member of the household, including children, to examine the distribution of household exclusion across the entire population. Note that this approach has strong parallels with the approach taken in narrower income poverty analyses, in which it is the (equivalised) income of the household that is used to determine an individual's poverty status.

Figure 4 plots the percentage of the total population that can be classified as 'excluded' for three alternative household sum-score thresholds used to define exclusion (restricting to indicators common to all waves). Comparisons with rates of income poverty are also provided in the figure. The household measures tell a similar story to the individual measures presented earlier. Between 20 and 30 per cent of the population are marginally excluded (score ≥ 1) at any point in time, with approximately five per cent experiencing intense exclusion (score ≥ 2). Rates of income poverty lie between these two rates. As with the individual-level measure, household-level social exclusion declined over the 2001 to 2007 period.

Figure 4: Rates of household-level exclusion and income poverty, using indicators common to all waves, 2001 to 2007

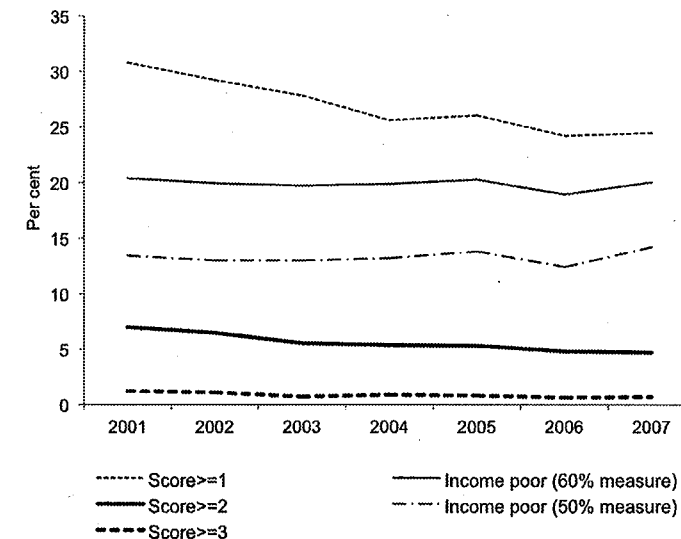


Table 6 presents rates of household-level exclusion for children under 15 years of age, and also for persons aged 15-24, many of whom will be dependent students. To assist interpretation, estimates are additionally presented for persons of all ages. Exclusion rates are presented for varying levels of intensity in the upper and lower panels (that is, for a sum-score greater than or equal

to 1 and a sum-score greater than or equal to 2, respectively). In the left-hand panels, estimates are presented when using all indicators available in each wave. Then, to enable comparisons of exclusion rates over time, the table provides estimates for 2001 and 2007 restricting to the 21 indicators common to all waves. Income poverty rates by age, based on a 60 per cent of median income poverty line, are also presented in the table.

Table 6: Rates of household-level exclusion and income poverty of young people (%)

	All indicators available in each wave							Indicators common to all waves	
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2001	2007
<i>Sum-score ≥ 1</i>									
Under 15 years	27.1	31.7	25.0	21.6	24.3	23.0	21.0	30.3	23.0
15-24 years	27.3	33.0	25.0	23.1	22.0	23.3	16.9	30.2	20.4
All persons	27.6	30.6	25.7	23.6	25.6	22.6	20.4	30.8	24.5
<i>Sum-score ≥ 2</i>									
Under 15 years	7.2	6.8	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.8	4.2	7.9	5.2
15-24 years	4.8	6.2	5.3	4.1	4.4	4.0	3.2	6.2	3.9
All persons	6.0	6.0	4.6	4.1	5.0	4.1	3.7	7.0	4.7
<i>Income poverty (threshold of 60% of median household income)</i>									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007		
Under 15 years	19.3	19.2	18.8	18.7	20.0	18.5	19.8		
15-24 years	17.1	18.9	19.6	19.0	18.7	16.5	17.5		
All persons	20.4	20.0	19.7	19.9	20.3	19.0	20.1		

Rates of marginal exclusion are in general quite similar for children and persons aged 15-24 as for the population as a whole. This represents something of a contrast with income poverty, where rates tend to be lower for young people than the population at large. Moreover, children under 15 years of age are somewhat more exposed to exclusion of a higher intensity than the general population. Examining the indicators common to all waves, the decline in marginal exclusion between 2001 and 2007 was similar for children under 15 as for the population, but was somewhat greater for persons aged 15-24, declining from 30.2 per cent to 20.4 per cent, compared with a decline from 30.8 per cent to 24.5 per cent for the population as a whole.

Persistence of exclusion over time

The total intensity of exclusion experienced by an individual can be thought of as both the extent of exclusion at a point in time and the length of time that exclusion persists. Exclusion experienced over a longer time frame is of much greater policy concern than that experienced for short periods. HILDA, being one of a limited set of nationally representative longitudinal data sources, allows us to investigate the extent to which an individual's exclusion persists over time.

Table 7 sheds some light on the persistence of exclusion by presenting information on the number of years an individual is classified as 'excluded' (necessarily restricting to the indicators common to all waves). Estimates based on both individual and household level measures are presented for all persons and also by gender and age. However, given the similarity of individual and household level estimates for persons aged 25 years and over, household-level exclusion estimates are only disaggregated by age for persons under 25 years of age.

Table 7: Persistence of exclusion by demographic group – Percentage in each category

	1 year plus	2 years plus	3 years plus	4 years plus	5 years plus
<i>Individual-level score ≥ 1</i>					
All persons aged 15 and over	52.5	36.8	26.9	19.3	13.0
Males aged 15 and over	47.5	32.2	23	16.5	11.2
Females aged 15 and over	57.2	41.2	30.7	22	14.7
Aged 15-24 years	64.8	39.7	26.5	15.4	8.8
Aged 25-34 years	43.6	25	17.3	10.6	6.2
Aged 35-44 years	44.5	28.4	19.8	13.7	9
Aged 45-54 years	45.2	30.1	21	14.5	9.5
Aged 55-64 years	52	38.4	28.8	22.3	15.6
Aged 65 years plus	70.6	59.4	46.7	36.2	25.6
<i>Individual-level score ≥ 2</i>					
All persons aged 15 and over	16.6	8.5	4.9	2.9	1.6
Males aged 15 and over	15.7	7.4	4.3	2.7	1.5
Females aged 15 and over	17.5	9.6	5.5	3.1	1.6
Aged 15-24 years	16.9	8.4	5.3	2	1.1
Aged 25-34 years	14.5	6.8	3.5	2.2	1
Aged 35-44 years	14	6.6	4.2	2.2	1.4
Aged 45-54 years	15.8	7.5	4.5	3.5	1.9
Aged 55-64 years	18.1	10.9	6.1	3.6	2.1
Aged 65 years plus	20.5	10.7	5.9	3.3	1.6
<i>Household-level score ≥ 1</i>					
All persons	53	37.7	27.3	19.9	14
Aged under 15 years	51.0	37.9	26.7	18.7	12.8
Aged 15-24 years	55.4	36.2	25.1	17.4	10.9
<i>Household-level score ≥ 2</i>					
All persons	15.9	7.8	4.4	2.9	1.7
Aged under 15 years	18.5	9.1	4.3	3.1	2.2
Aged 15-24 years	16.8	7.3	3.9	2.3	1.2

From the table we can see that over half of the population experienced marginal exclusion (a score ≥ 1) at some stage of the 2001 to 2007 period. A much smaller proportion of the population experienced intense exclusion at some stage over the seven years. As might be expected, short-term exclusion is more common than long-term or persistent exclusion. However, a considerable share of the population experiences exclusion for lengthy periods. For instance,

approximately 27 per cent of the population is marginally excluded for three or more years, and nearly five per cent experiences intense exclusion for three or more years.

Females are more likely to have experienced both marginal and intense exclusion at some stage over the seven-year period and are more likely to be persistently excluded than males. Younger and older people are the most likely age groups to be excluded at some stage over the time frame examined. When examining the marginally excluded, the young appear to have more transitory experiences of exclusion, whilst older people are more likely to be persistently but marginally excluded. However, when intense exclusion is examined, the differences in persistence across age groups are less pronounced, with the young and pre-retirement age groups exposed to intense exclusion experiencing quite persistent exclusion.

On the basis of the characteristics of their parents (and of other household members aged 15 and over), just over half of children younger than 15 years were marginally excluded in at least one of the seven years. Over one-quarter were marginally excluded for three or more years. Perhaps more concerning is that just under 19 per cent of children were exposed to intense exclusion at some point. While the proportions of children persistently experiencing intense exclusion are somewhat smaller, the rates are nonetheless a cause for concern. For example, 4.3 per cent of children are found to experience intense exclusion for three or more years.

Conclusions

Underpinning the analysis presented in this paper is the view that social exclusion is inherently multidimensional and is most appropriately measured at the individual level rather than at the societal level. Our 'sum-score' measure identifies that 20 to 30 per cent of the Australian population aged 15 years and over experience what we refer to as 'marginal exclusion' at any given point in time. Four to six per cent experience 'intense exclusion' and less than one per cent experience 'very intense exclusion'. Strong employment growth over the period 2001 to 2007 appears to have led to an associated fall in measured exclusion over this period.

While there is considerable overlap between people who are socially excluded and those who are income poor, it is clear that the composition of the two groups is far from identical. In particular, persons 65 years and over make up a much smaller share of the 'most excluded' group than they do of the 'poorest', while children account for a larger share of the most excluded than the poorest. Given our view that our multidimensional measure of social exclusion better captures overall levels of disadvantage in society than does a pure income poverty measure, the clear implication is that policy targeting those most disadvantaged will be misdirected when based solely on income. That relative

income poverty remained broadly unchanged over the 2001 to 2007 period, whereas social exclusion declined markedly, also suggests that monitoring progress over time requires a multidimensional measure.

Examination of the persistence of exclusion over time shows, as expected, that short-term exclusion is more frequent than long-term, persistent exclusion. However, there are significant sections of the population that experience exclusion for lengthy periods. For instance, we find that five per cent of the population face intense exclusion for three or more of the seven years to 2007. The proportion of children under 15 years of age persistently in intense exclusion is slightly smaller, but is nonetheless a cause for concern.

Social exclusion as a concept is obviously not the only approach that can be taken when considering who is the most disadvantaged in society. Indeed, we are not even making the claim that it is necessarily the best approach to take. Moreover, there are alternatives to our particular approach to the measurement of social exclusion, and we do not argue that alternative approaches will necessarily be inferior. Rather, our key contention is that the income-based poverty concept that has dominated studies of socio-economic disadvantage is too narrow and simplistic. Disadvantage is by its nature multidimensional, and its extent, nature, causes and consequences cannot be understood merely by looking to the cash incomes of individuals or households. By explicitly recognising the multidimensionality of disadvantage, a social exclusion approach is not only much better able to identify the most disadvantaged members of society, it also provides additional information on the nature and sources of their disadvantage.

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Endnotes

1. Other potentially relevant distinctive features of Australia include the combination of universal access to basic health care, a relatively regulated labour market with a high minimum wage, a generous system of cash payments to families with dependent children and (despite the preceding) a small government sector compared with other OECD countries. Note, however, that we do not undertake international comparative analysis in this paper and therefore do not directly investigate the roles of these institutional features.
2. Comparing across the seven waves when all available indicators are used, patterns are similar with the notable difference being that in Waves 2 and 6, the proportion with a sum-score in the 0.2-0.4 range is higher than the proportion in the 0-0.2 range. This reflects the effects of the 'low wealth' indicator, which is present for a relatively high proportion of the population and is only available in Waves 2 and 6.
3. Income poverty rates are calculated using the annual disposable income of the household, adjusted for household composition using the modified OECD equivalence scale.
4. Note that correlation coefficients with income were substantively similar for sum-scores calculated using all indicators and for indicators common to all seven waves.
5. In further analysis of the demographic composition of the 'worst off' we find that couple and single families with children represent a larger share of the most 'excluded' than they do of the poor and outright home owners a smaller share of the most excluded. Our measure of exclusion also captures a larger share of persons with a long-term health condition than an income measure does. These results can be obtained from the authors on request.

Appendix: Definitions of variables used for indicators

Household income: Annual disposable income of the household, adjusted for household composition using the modified OECD equivalence scale.

Indicators of financial stress: Because of a shortage of money, in the current calendar year:

- Could not pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time;
- Could not pay the mortgage or rent on time;
- Pawned or sold something;
- Went without meals;
- Were unable to heat the home;
- Asked for financial help from friends or family; and/or
- Asked for help from welfare or community organisation.

Unemployed: Has not worked in the last week, has looked for work within the last four weeks, and was available to start work in the last week.

Long-term unemployed: Has been unemployed for twelve months or more.

Marginally attached: Not employed and is either (i) looking for work and, while not available to start within one week, is available within four weeks; or (ii) available to start work within four weeks but is not looking for work because of the belief that he or she is unlikely to find work.

Underemployed: Employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week) and prefers more hours of work.

Jobless household: No member of the household is in paid employment and at least one member is aged 15-64 years.

Low literacy: Self-assessed reading skills are 'poor'.

Low numeracy: Self-assessed mathematical skills are 'poor'.

Poor English proficiency: Reports that does not speak English well, or does not speak English at all.

Low level of formal education: Is not currently studying full-time and has a highest educational qualification of less than high school completion.

Little or no work experience: Has spent fewer than three years in paid employment.

Poor general health: Score of less than 50 out of 100 on the SF-36 general health measure (Ware et al., 1993).

Poor physical health: Score of less than 50 out of 100 on the SF-36 physical health sub-scale (Ware et al., 1993).

Poor mental health: Score of less than 50 out of 100 on the SF-36 mental health sub-scale (Ware et al., 1993).

Long-term health condition or disability: Has a long-term health condition, impairment or disability that restricts everyday activities, and has lasted or is likely to last for six months or more.

Household has a disabled child: Household has a child under 15 years of age with a disability.

Little social support: Transformed score of less than 30 out of 70 on ten items that describe the amount of support received from other people: (1) People don't come to visit me as often as I would like; (2) I often need help from other people but can't get it; (3) I seem to have a lot of friends; (4) I don't have anyone I can confide in; (5) I have no one to lean on in times of trouble; (6) There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down; (7) I often feel very lonely; (8) I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me; (9) When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better; and (10) When need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone.

Low neighbourhood quality: Transformed score of less than 20 out of 50 on ten aspects of neighbourhood quality: (1) Neighbours helping each other out; (2) Neighbours doing things together; (3) Loud traffic noise; (4) Noise from airplanes, trains or industry; (5) Homes and gardens in bad condition; (6) Rubbish and litter lying around; (7) Teenagers hanging around on the streets; (8) People being hostile and aggressive; (9) Vandalism and deliberate damage to property; and (10) Burglary and theft.

No voluntary activity in a typical week: Spends no time on volunteer or charity work in a typical week and is not in paid employment or studying.

Policy agendas and immigration in Australia 1996–2012

Paul Boulus, Keith Dowding and Juliet Pietsch

Abstract

Immigration in Australia is inherently a controversial topic. Events such as the MV Tampa affair cause increased media and legislative attention but increased legislative attention in the policy area do not always follow such dramatic events. We analyse media and legislative attention in the area of immigration and show increased activity in parliament around both dramatic events discussed in the media and also over more technical issues. Increased attention within parliament sometimes occurs outside of the gaze of the media.

Keywords: Australia, immigration, migrants, policy, mass media

Introduction

Immigration is a highly salient policy issue in Australia, particularly since 2009 when Australia began to witness a significant increase in boat arrivals carrying asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. In 2012 alone, up to 17,000 asylum seekers arrived in Australia by boat. While the number of boat arrivals in Australia is comparatively small compared to countries in Southern Europe and Southeast Asia, the issue attracts a great deal of media and political attention (Goot & Watson 2011; Pietsch 2013). In this article, we examine the relationship between public and government attention on immigration policy and legislation at different points in time. While immigration policy covers a range of major programs including skilled and family migration as well as humanitarian migration programs, we focus particularly on three different areas including: asylum migration, skilled migration and student migration. Even though each migration stream involves different policy and media responses, they all share in common the capacity to generate spikes in public interest and political attention.

We note here that policy attention and policy content are two different things (Dowding et al. 2013). The fact that an issue is discussed in the public, or in parliament, or is subject to legislation increasing policy attention, does not mean that much changes in the content of policy. Conversely an issue that does not receive much attention might, with a simple piece of legislation, or even a change in the rules implementing legislation or through a judicial decision, lead to wide-ranging changes in the content of the policy. John and Bevan (2012) show that punctuations in the legislative agenda in the British parliament do not always correspond to what historians recognise as major changes in policy content. Some major changes in policy content on immigration in Australia are reflected neither in legislation nor in media coverage but through High Court activity. We are not concerned with that aspect of immigration policy, important though it is. Rather we examine the relationship of media and legislative attention showing that change in the attention in one does not always track that in the other.

A wealth of material demonstrates that public and government attention to policy issues can vary significantly. This has been demonstrated in the comparative Policy Agendas Project (PAP). The policy agendas project has shown that the policy agenda – what the media talk about, what government talks about and legislates for – may remain relatively stable for long periods, but at times is punctuated with much greater focus on certain issues (Baumgartner & Jones 1993; Jones & Baumgartner 2005; Baumgartner et al. 2009). PAP has shown that graphing changes in policy attention produces a high degree of kurtosis.¹ Jones and Baumgartner (2005) suggest the leptokurtic distribution of changes in policy attention can be explained by a number of factors, including the boundedly rational nature of human decision making, friction in the policy process, the framing of issues and exogenous shocks.

First, people can only process so much information at one time, so that even though government and the public might be aware that problems are emerging in a given issue-area, they do not engage with those problems until they hit some critical moment. Second, institutional processes also play a part. Even after an issue receives public attention or is discussed in parliament there are various institutional hurdles that need to be cleared in order for such notice to result in legislation. Formally, veto players are agents that can stop policy change and among the veto players are political parties, the bicameral nature of most legislatures, the public service to some extent, as well as those influential pressure groups or social elites that have access to the top echelons of the parties or can sway public opinion for or against action. In Jones and Baumgartner's account the retarding forces are the set of institutional rules that block change, the amplifying forces constitute political mobilisation.

Again government has only limited time and sometimes legislation has to wait until other issues have been dealt with, especially in established democracies where governments have to deal with an enormous range of policy issues in areas such as education, health, foreign affairs, defence and security. Governments cannot possibly give equal attention to all policy areas at the same time. In practice, a broad array of policy information is detected, filtered and prioritised (Jones & Baumgartner 2005: 10). Sometimes, however, an issue forces itself on to the agenda due to some crisis, or perceived crisis, that captures media and public attention. Where these exogenous shocks occur punctuations will result. Punctuation in this sense is massively increased by policy attention and/or legislative intent. Thus, according to Baumgartner and Jones, we can explain the pattern of agenda change over time through such mechanical processes or through exogenous shocks.

Recognising that the punctuated nature of policy agendas can be explained mechanically is one thing. Explaining why a particular issue surfaces at the time and place it does is another. We address these latter questions with regard to the issue of immigration in Australia. We focus on some of the underlying triggers that push immigration on to the political and policy agenda. Immigration policy is an issue that is both popularised and politicised, and hence gains significant public and political attention. What is often unclear is what determinants periodically push the immigration issue further up the hierarchy of issues on the national policy agenda. We first discuss some of the main theoretical approaches as to why issues emerge centre stage at particular times. Much of the literature is focused within a European and North American context. We build on this literature to see whether theories of policy agenda change can be similarly applied to the issue of immigration in Australia. We provide a content analysis of Australian newspaper coverage, of Hansard and of legislation over a seven-year period to examine empirically whether there is a correlation between coverage in the media and political attention in parliament and in legislation. We then examine the mediating effects of party competition on the policy agenda. We argue that public concern about immigration represented

in newspaper coverage and public opinion polls is correlated with increased parliamentary activity but not with primary legislative activity. We discuss the reasons for these findings.

Why do issues emerge when they do?

Taking the frictional account as the background to the emergence of issues, there are two general approaches to understanding the precise timing of their appearance on the policy agenda. The first approach concerns the external effects of the media and public opinion on the policy agenda. These can be seen in terms of a build-up over time of issues – a general frictional argument, but also including exogenous shocks or sudden events that rapidly fix attention on a specific issue. In some accounts (McCombs & Shaw 1972) the mass media are seen as the agenda-setter with the power to decide what issues are salient to voters and thus to set the tone for each political campaign. This approach is often referred to as the external pressure model of agenda setting (Walgrave et al. 2006). A second approach focuses on the role of political parties in setting the policy agenda. This approach is primarily concerned with the structure of party competition and the need for different parties to draw attention to particular policy issues (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008), and is often referred to as the party model (Klingemann et al. 1994). Political parties play little role in Baumgartner and Jones's policy agenda model, perhaps because of the weaker party structure in the United States where their original model was developed. It has proved important in the later comparative policy agenda projects within parliamentary systems (Green-Pedersen 2006; Green-Pedersen & Stubager 2010).

Both of these approaches attempt to predict the key variables that determine the political and legislative agenda. The external pressure model focuses on external *changes* as the main determinant of legislative activity, whilst the party model focuses on policy *priorities* as the main determinant of legislative activity. Overall, there is complex interplay between the effects of the media, the public and political parties on the policy agenda (Soroka 2001; Green-Pedersen & Stubager 2010). Each theoretical approach is discussed in turn.

Research has shown that external pressure indicators can often predict the political and legislative agenda (Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Vliegthart & Walgrave 2011). External indicators include heightened media and public activity on an issue or a sudden event or crisis. The media, for instance, can apply external pressure on political parties to respond to a particular policy issue. Alternatively, opposition parties may focus on media coverage and pick up on issues that are of concern to the public in order to pressure the government into action or expose the government's lack of action. This has been particularly evident in the asylum-seeker debate in Australia. Political parties on both sides of the political spectrum have raced to the bottom to implement tougher border control measures aimed at deterrence in response to media and public concern about boat arrivals.

Agenda-setting theory has shown that public concerns expressed in the media are not always an accurate representation of public opinion. Indeed, the media can use certain techniques to control the public agenda rather than simply reflecting public opinion. One such technique involves a transfer of salience or 'perceived importance' from the media to the public (McCombs & Shaw 1972; Dearing & Rogers 1996). According to this theory, the public perceives policy issues that receive most media coverage to be the issues of greatest importance. Therefore, by focusing on some policy issues more than others, the media have the power to set the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw 1972; Cobb & Ross 1997; Jones et al. 2003; Jones & Baumgartner 2005). In terms of immigration policy, each year nearly 16,000 migrants overstay their visas in Australia, representing a security concern for government officials. For example, in 2010, the number of migrants overstaying their visas and hence living unlawfully in Australia was 53,900. As a comparison, only 8,250 people applied for asylum, yet asylum seekers attract a great deal more public and political attention because of the perceived importance to national security (DIAC 2013).

Political parties may or may not respond to the issues discussed by the media. Electoral considerations will play a major part, as will the ideology of the party and the issues which government is most committed to addressing. Several studies have tracked the way the national policy agenda fluctuates with the volume of media attention to some issues but not others (for example, Dunaway et al. 2010). This evidence suggests that for some policy issues the 'party political' agenda may be influenced by the public agenda (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008). For example, public opinion may determine which issues receive more attention. When concerned about re-election, policy makers will seek to change policy to the position expressed by the public (Sulkin 2005; Mortensen 2010). When Australia was confronted by the high-profile *Tampa* asylum-seeker incident, six weeks before the 2001 Australian federal election, the Coalition, led by former Prime Minister John Howard, introduced immigration as a new issue into an election campaign that had previously been dominated by other policy issues such as health, jobs, education and the GST. This was in response to the fact that the issue of terrorism and asylum seekers received a disproportionate amount of news media attention (Denemark et al. 2007). Shortly after the 2001 election, the Howard-led government made substantial increases to the budget for its counter-terrorism strategy. As part of the counter-terrorism strategy, the government introduced new legislative measures aimed at expanding intelligence gathering and police powers (Pietsch & McAllister 2012).

Whilst the media and the public might affect what the legislature and government talk about and consider for new legislation, most government activity is inherited (Rose & Davies 1994). Not only is most activity of government officials concerned with implementing policy agreed by previous governments, much of the new legislation that government develops is generated by past legislation, eliminating loopholes that have emerged, amending where problems have been created, or changing aspects for ideological reasons. Most of these changes in legislation are minor and receive little public or media

attention. Such processes of 'path dependency' (Pierson 2000) are well known in the literature. Where previous legislation causes problems and needs to be repealed or part repealed, or loopholes emerge, increased attention is due to what Jones and Baumgartner (2005) refer to as negative feedback. They also argue that legislation creating new agencies often leads to more attention in that area, as the agency generates more legislation by finding new areas within its remit that require attention. They call this positive feedback. Positive feedback is an important process for political science, for it demonstrates the interaction of policy and institutions, institutions and policy.

Friction might explain why issues remain dormant for a long time and also why they can suddenly explode, since problems have been building whilst public and government attention has been focused elsewhere. For example, there were many warning signs of the global financial crisis from the unsustainable risk in asset prices, high levels of personal debt, banks over-extending their leverage, whilst banks trading in securitised assets had created new arenas for taking risk (Stiglitz 2010; Hindmoor & McConnell 2013). But hindsight is easy and before the global financial crisis broke issues such as terrorism, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and climate change seemed more urgent. With a booming economy, low inflation and historically low levels of credit default, and banks making record profits, regulating the financial institutions hardly seemed a policy priority.

It can be argued that the global financial crisis was not an exogenous shock to most economies but the result of lack of attention to a looming issue; and arguably, because earlier bank problems had led to tighter regulations, Australia had even less to invest in the issue. Indeed it might be thought that few crises are genuinely exogenous. A similar argument can be made in relation to immigration policy attention in Australia. The asylum-seeker issue is frequently viewed by the media and political parties as a contemporary crisis that has come about as a result of a combination of exogenous shock factors. Yet what we are witnessing across the world is widespread irregular people movement as a result of governments gradually tightening up their domestic policies on migration. This process of tightening border control has been occurring for decades in Southern Europe, Southeast Asia and more recently Australia. Of course, a major terrorist outrage using techniques not previously imagined, such as the events of 9/11, can be seen purely as exogenous and requiring legislative attention. However, there are relatively few of these examples, since it is the job of government to regulate risk. Many crises are simply due to the fact that government has not given enough consideration to a particular risk. In governments' defence, the distribution of the incidence of high-cost, low-risk events is itself leptokurtic, so we should expect government attention and activity with regard to such events to have that shape.

Jones and Baumgartner (2005: 51) suggest that governments might sometimes over-respond to an issue because of a disproportionate amount of public attention or collective action. Punctuations in the general level of attention paid to particular policies can be mapped where there is a sudden increase in media

activity associated with a perceived crisis or event (Baumgartner & Jones 1993). Sometimes the media can highlight a specific event which then seizes public and political attention even though it is not, in fact, out of the ordinary. Public outcry over a child murder or abduction, or an incident of bullying at school, might capture public attention and lead to new legislation even though the frequency of such events has been falling over time. The issue in question is in fact being dealt with, but a particular event is taken up and the public demands more dramatic action even if that action has few long-term effects.

Such outcries provide opportunities for lobby groups, the public and political leaders to focus public and political attention on previously dormant issues (Walgrave et al. 2006). For example, following a perceived crisis, interest groups representing a broad range of interests will mobilise in order to push for policies that will prevent or mitigate such a disaster in future. When public interest is high or easily mobilised it is more likely to have an impact on political activity. For example, with the GFC beginning to affect local employment conditions in Australia, trade union organisations were able to lobby for improved working conditions for local and temporary migrant workers. Opposing more scrutiny, business organisations also lobbied for more workplace flexibility. External pressure from lobby groups with particular interests led to an inquiry into temporary skilled migration programs involving 457 visas, Enterprise Migration Agreements and Regional Migration Agreements. This is just one example of the ways in which public interest can be mobilised and have an impact on political activity.

While the external effects of the media and public opinion can result in a disproportionate amount of political attention, there are notable restrictions on the impact of the media in shaping the political agenda. First, as previously discussed, it has been established that the extent of media coverage can shape the salience of policy issues during political campaigns. This can be achieved when the media suppress or skew information as a result of the ideological preferences of those in power (see Bernhardt et al. 2008; Anderson & McLaren 2009). However, while the media can influence the salience of issues, they are restricted in their capacity to change political attitudes towards these issues. This is because the media tend to reinforce rather than change pre-existing predispositions. Converse (1962), for example, argued that media effects on political attitudes are constrained by voters' existing political loyalties, beliefs and information. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, when elections are won by two to three per cent of votes and where many voters are dependent on news coverage during the campaign, the effect of the media in shaping the campaign can still be substantial (see Denmark et al. 2010).

Second, the impact of the media on setting the agenda may only have relevance for particular types of issues. Zucker (1978) first introduced the 'obtrusive thesis' – the more obtrusive an issue is, the more likely individuals experience it directly and the less likely the media will be able to shape the party political agenda. Issues are seen as obtrusive when individuals have a direct experience with them and as unobtrusive when individuals have not had direct experience and therefore must rely on the mass media for information instead of their own

experience (Birkland 1998). Therefore, the capacity of the media to influence the policy agenda may have more relevance for *unobtrusive* issues than for *obtrusive* issues (Winter & Eyal 1981; Lee 2004).

Third, party issue saliency may moderate the impact of the media, public opinion and sudden events on political attention (Hester & Gibson 2007). Since the decline of social structure and party identification as determinants of voting behaviour, policy agenda setting has become more important for political parties (Vliegthart & Walgrave 2011). In addition to the external and disproportionate effects of the media and public opinion, whether or not an issue makes it on to the political agenda has a lot to do with party priorities and governmental mandate. Previous research has shown that party manifestos are normally good predictors of future legislation (Klingemann et al. 1994). Such manifestos play an important role in electoral party competition. Therefore political activity may have more to do with the dynamics between party competition and voter preferences than with external effects or events (Thomassen 2005).

During election campaigns, focusing attention on a policy issue where all parties hold a similar position is not electorally beneficial. It is far more advantageous for a party to focus on a policy issue where there is a conflict with other parties. This is often referred to as 'issue ownership' (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008). Whether an issue makes it on to the agenda may depend on the extent of party conflict over it. Given that the public tends to have a short attention span, political parties may attempt to introduce new policies that inspire change among younger generations. It is likely that new policy domains are more punctuated than older inherited policy domains that are less easy to change.

Focusing political attention on issues where there is internal party conflict is similarly not electorally beneficial. This is particularly the case in countries where internal party discipline is not guaranteed. Internal party discipline is often necessary for the successful passage of legislation. A political party's reputation and chances of re-election often depend on its record of legislative accomplishment (McCubbins 2005). To address this problem, governments may prioritise some bills through positive agenda power and block other bills through negative agenda power or by keeping the issue off the policy agenda.

The existing theoretical literature on policy agendas shows a wide variety of factors that interact with each other in complex ways to affect what policies are placed on the national political agenda. In the next section, we focus on immigration, which national polls have shown is a salient public issue in Australia (see McAllister et al. 2010). Immigration provides an important case study to test some of the theoretical literature on agenda setting. It is a highly politicised issue that has become popularised and used competitively in political campaigns. Looking at the dynamics of immigration policy may help us to unravel the complexities of why some issues get on to the agenda while other, equally important, issues do not. In particular, we draw on a case study of immigration policy to test whether media and political activity is followed by corresponding legislation at different points in time.

Immigration policy as an empirical case study

First, to address whether media activity is correlated with political and policy activity, we conducted a content analysis drawing on relevant keywords in newspapers and Hansard. Before the mid-1990s, immigration was considered a bipartisan issue in Australia (McAllister 2003; Pietsch et al. 2010). Since then the issue of immigration has become increasingly polarised in the media and in political debates throughout western democracies. This is evidenced by increasing support for extreme right-wing anti-immigration parties in Europe and anti-immigration laws in Arizona. Much of this has been driven by concerns about asylum seekers, and about legal and illegal labour migration. Until the mid-1990s, electoral outcomes had been relatively immune from concerns about immigration and asylum seekers. However, the situation changed dramatically in 2001 when border protection became a major issue and determined the outcome of the federal election (McAllister 2003). The first stage of the empirical analysis examines the extent of newspaper activity in Australia on the issue of immigration between 1996 and 2012. To do this we examine the extent of newspaper coverage of the immigration portfolio using the online newspaper Factiva database (<http://www.nla.gov.au/app/eresources>). We note at this stage that there are limitations to Factiva searches, which rely heavily on keyword searches. A significant limitation is that computer programs such as Factiva do not search for meaning underpinning particular concepts. Terms such as 'refugee' or 'illegal boat person' may often change meaning over time. Nevertheless, such database searches are a well-used tool of modern communications and public policy research. Furthermore, whilst newspapers are not the only, nor for many people the main, way in which they access news, they do provide a ready source of data to examine peaks and troughs in media attention. We should therefore expect that the troughs and peaks found in newspaper coverage will correlate strongly with those on the television and radio. Indeed, Graber (2009) suggests that television tends to follow the trends that emerge in newspapers, as TV journalists, executives and producers are avid followers of the print media. Thus newspapers provide a ready source for the data in which we are interested. Newspaper hits for specified immigration policy keywords are measured on a monthly basis from January 1996. The keywords used in the Factiva database are: 'asylum seeker', 'refugee', 'boat people', 'boatpeople', 'immigration', 'migration', 'Minister for Immigration' and 'Immigration Minister'. We counted the total number of articles that included the keywords. The analysis does not include all words relevant to immigration policy, merely the keywords which would identify an immigration article. Our study is also limited to articles published in Australia. Figure 1 shows that between 1996 and 2012, the total number of articles on immigration increased significantly. However, during the same time period there is increased media activity. Therefore, we scaled the results of total media articles proportionate to the increase in total articles.

Figure 2 is a time series representation of the total number of articles identified in the database that matched the dictionary keywords on immigration. The data are grouped on a monthly basis, scaled to the total number of articles in the Factiva dataset. After scaling, the data reveals a general level of activity in the 2,000–4,000 articles per month range, with three clear periods of heightened activity occurring in the 8,000–10,000 articles per month range.

Figure 1: Total number of articles on immigration in Australia in the Factiva database

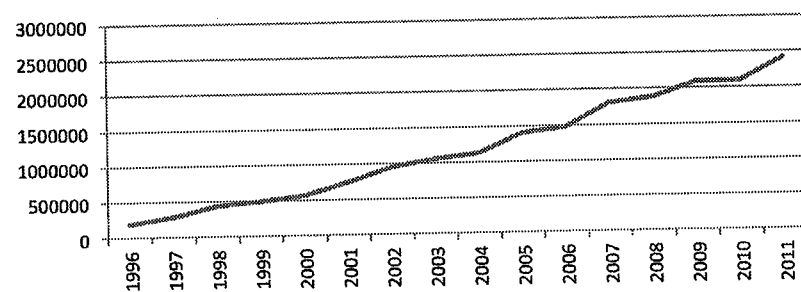
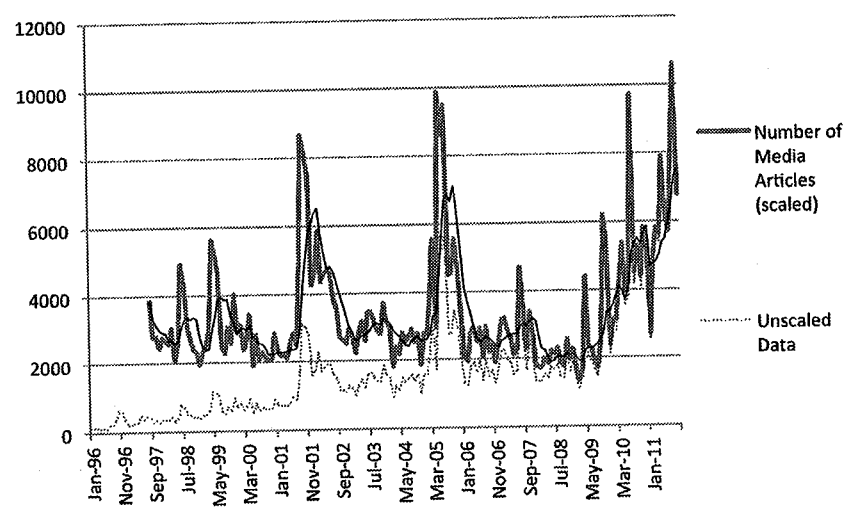


Figure 2: Time series of immigration articles in the media, scaled to total media articles in database. Data is aggregated on a monthly basis

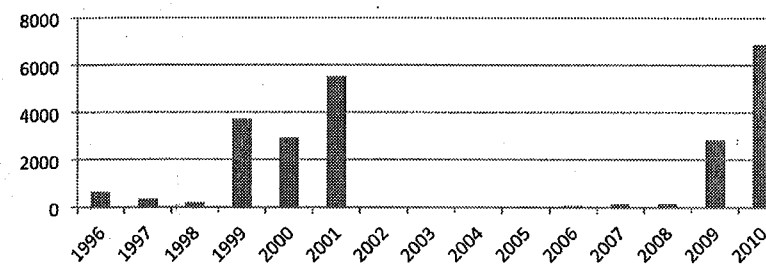


A qualitative review of the media content that falls within this period shows that the three spikes are driven by particular media events. The first notable spike is between August 2001 and June 2002. This media spike is related to the Tampa Affair of 2001, which was followed by an election in 2001 in which immigration was a central theme. The second spike occurs between March and November 2005. This is related to general scandal in the portfolio. A number of scandals in immigration detention emerged during this period in the media. The media focused on the Immigration Minister Senator Vanstone and her handling

of the wrongful immigration detention of Cornelia Rau in 2004. The episode resulted in the Palmer Inquiry of 2005, and exposed a number of other issues in the immigration detention system – particularly in the Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia (Palmer 2005). The third spike began in October 2009, prompted by a substantial increase in boat arrivals carrying asylum seekers.

Figure 3 represents the increase in boat arrivals carrying asylum seekers to Australia from 2009. This has led to a heightened prominence of the overall immigration portfolio in the media, with media attention focusing on immigration detention and the pressures on it, and on several government policies that have been announced to address increasing boat arrivals. This shows that increased media attention is strongly related to the number of boat arrivals.

Figure 3: Unauthorised boat arrivals (passengers) to Australia, grouped by year of arrival. Source: Parliamentary Library of Australia



The second stage of our empirical analysis looks at whether such spikes in media activity are correlated with political attention. It is important to distinguish policy attention from policy change. For example, Dowding and colleagues (2011: 4) observe that:

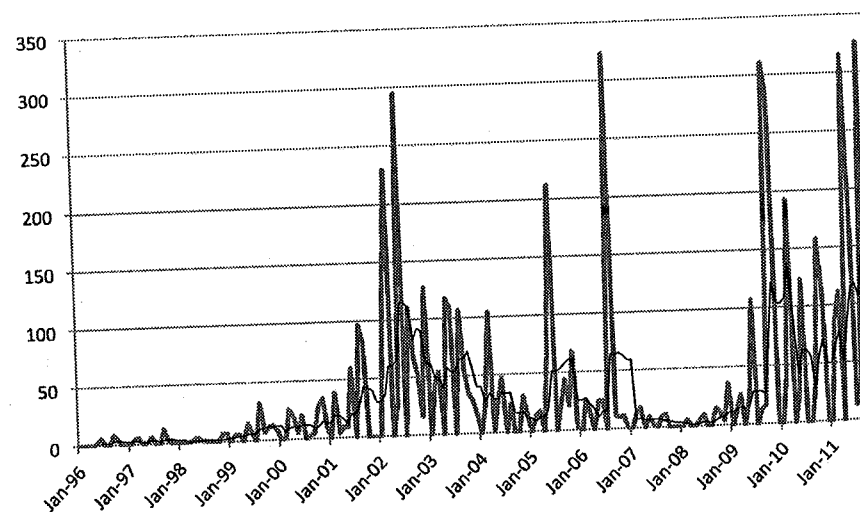
At times a significant policy issue may only be the subject of a few well-chosen words and a key policy announcement. On other occasions governments may deliberately downplay some issues in order to minimise political conflict. Alternatively, they may devote a great deal of attention to other more marginal issues if they are low cost and popular.

To illustrate this point in the context of immigration policy, a large change in the migration programme from skilled to unskilled immigration represents a large change in policy *content* with little budgetary effect, but potentially with little political *attention* on the part of decision makers. Conversely, political or media hysteria about immigration policy on refugees may generate substantial political attention without having a large effect on the budget for the portfolio or major changes to government activity related to the issue. Another indicative example would be substantial budget changes caused by factors outside the government's control. This is particularly possible in demand-driven programs such as immigration and healthcare.

We conducted a content analysis of Hansard from the House of Representatives to show the number of instances of the following keywords relevant to immigration policy: 'migration', 'immigration', 'asylum', 'boat people', 'boat person', 'refugee', 'Minister for Immigration' and 'Immigration Minister'. Understanding what is recorded in Hansard is fundamental to understanding what the data show. Hansard is the official record of Members' speeches during parliamentary debates on bills and several other items of business. Questions without notice (question time) and matters of public importance (hour-long debates usually based on the political issue of the day) are also included in Hansard, among other parliamentary activities. Therefore, the words related to immigration matters in Hansard are one indication of the level of parliamentary activity relating to immigration occurring in the House.

Figure 4 shows a time-series representation of the prevalence of the keywords in Hansard from January 1996. The data are grouped monthly. The line is jagged due to the fact that Parliament does not sit constantly and rises for several weeks at a time at various stages of the year – the line returns to 0 at these times. A six-month moving average is included in the chart to illustrate short-term trends and to reduce the influence of outliers. It is also necessary because, in the structure of a parliamentary day, debates on particular issues may either be spread over an allocated time over several days, or concentrated during a single day, depending on how the House wishes to order its business.

Figure 4: Time series of instances of immigration policy keywords in Hansard, grouped monthly. Trend line is a six-month moving average



Two things are readily observable in the results presented in Figure 4. First, there is a clear baseline of general activity, with a notable tail to the right indicating substantial spikes from the baseline. Second, Figure 4 shows that there are three spikes in Hansard activity, which follow the spikes that occur in media activity, suggesting that there may be a relationship between media

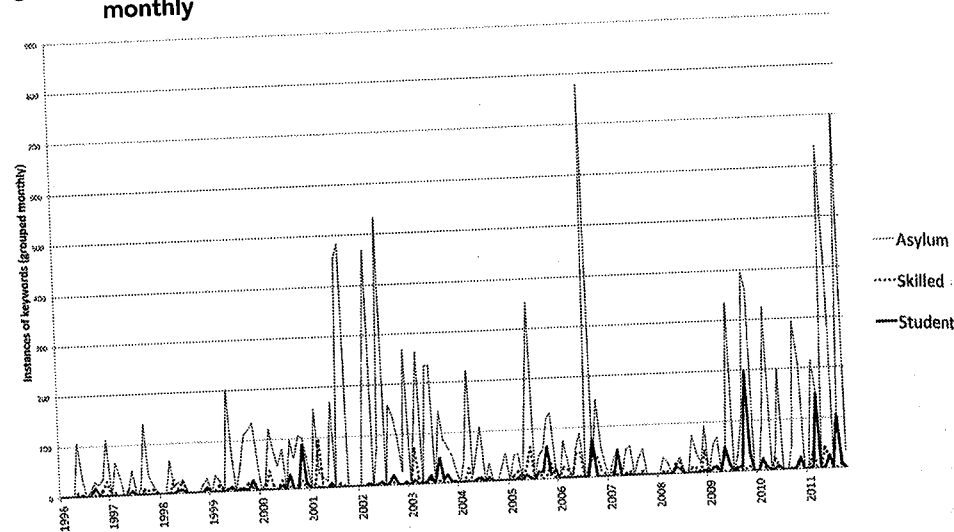
coverage and political attention. We note that Hansard activity is higher over the boat arrivals spikes than the Vanstone scandal; once the inquiry was set up, Hansard activity died down until the inquiry reported, when it spiked again. How far the Hansard activity results in policy change, as suggested in much of the policy agendas literature, is still unclear. Attention to immigration might be used as an electoral weapon with little actual change in policy. Below we try to examine the extent of legislative activity in the portfolio over the same time period. First we consider immigration as an electoral weapon.

In contrast to immigration levels more broadly, we expect to find a correlation between media coverage of and political attention to asylum seekers for a number of reasons. First, the asylum-seeker issue might be considered an unobtrusive issue, given that the majority of Australians have not personally experienced either fleeing persecution or seeking refuge in another country, nor knowingly have had contact with asylum seekers. On the other hand, it is an issue that can generate a great deal of fear in the public. It is therefore expected that on this policy issue the media are likely to have some impact, which may in turn trigger increased political attention and increased opportunity for political parties to exploit the situation for their own political gain. Second, the issue of asylum seekers exposes a political problem for the government in that it raises public concerns about border security and human rights. Given that the news media rely on conflict to draw in consumers, we would expect not only increased media coverage with each new boat arrival carrying asylum seekers, but also increased political attention – as opposition parties similarly gain from exposing a political problem for the government.

Figure 5 plots changes in political activity using a content analysis of keywords in Hansard on three different areas of the immigration program: asylum seekers; skilled migration; and student visas. While significant political attention is paid to the areas of skilled and student migration, it is the asylum-seeker issue that attracts the most political attention. Furthermore, the asylum series has the strongest relationship with the three spikes outlined in the previous section. The skilled migration and student migration data seem not to be anywhere near as influential. It appears, therefore, that it is the asylum-seeker issue, rather than concerns about immigration more generally, that is pushing immigration on to the policy agenda.

In Australia, political parties have been known to target their political campaigns in ways that gain favourable television coverage. Given that the asylum-seeker issue is an unobtrusive and divisive issue that attracts media coverage, the media are likely to have a strong impact on this issue. While the media may not significantly affect the majority of voters, the effect of the media on a small sub-section of the population can be substantial (Denemark et al. 2007). For example, in 2001, the media coverage on border protection during the political campaign was influential in deciding the electoral outcome that resulted in a Coalition victory (see McAllister 2003). However, increased media and political attention does not always translate into increased legislative activity.

Figure 5: Time series of instances of immigration policy keywords in Hansard, grouped monthly



Next we look at whether increased political attention to immigration matters is correlated with increases in legislation. Some bills which take up a lot of time are of little interest to the public or backbench MPs, and debates on these bills do not warrant large numbers of speakers (or, sometimes, any speakers apart from the government minister responsible for the bill and his opposition counterpart). Other bills, however, are controversial. They tend to attract large numbers of government and opposition speakers. Sometimes, debate on such bills will extend over the course of several parliamentary sitting days.²

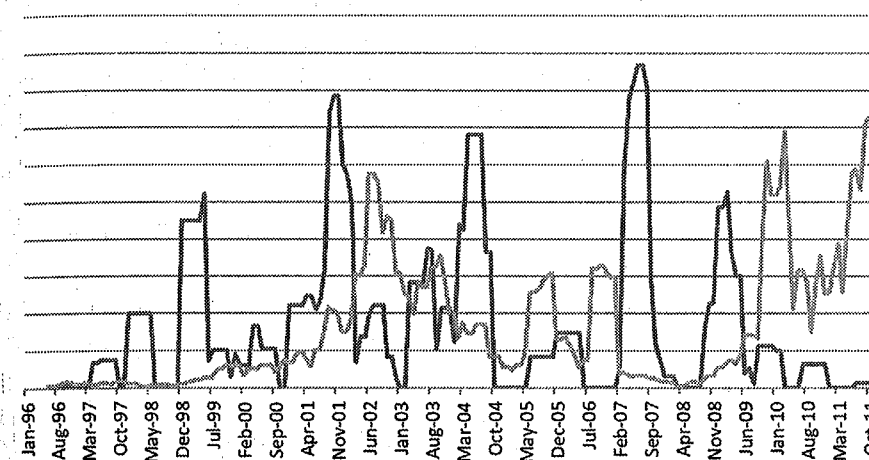
Sometimes the length of legislation may be due not to controversy and associated political attention but simply to the necessary legal requirements to address changes in policy.

Figure 6 plots the instances of immigration keywords in Hansard against the number of pages of legislation passed in the immigration portfolio. In terms of the legislation series as illustrated by the dark line, we grouped the data by the number of pages of legislation by month. The results are confined to the Acts of Parliament administered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. When assessed together, the data on parliamentary activity and legislative activity in the immigration portfolio demonstrate a number of conclusions.

The results in Figure 6 show four spikes in legislative activity over immigration. It should be noted that these findings do not attempt to account for all legislative activity, as some immigration laws are reformed through secondary or delegated legislation and exercises of ministerial discretion. Such secondary legislation usually does not involve extensive parliamentary debate. Furthermore, some laws come about as a result of judicial decisions, particularly in relation to laws impacting asylum seekers. Some immigration reforms are also achieved

through regulations, which are also not always captured in parliamentary debates (see Crock & Berg 2011). We can, therefore, only measure the relationship between media and political activity and primary legislation.

Figure 6: Time series of words of immigration legislation passed through the Parliament (dark) plotted against Hansard mentions of immigration keywords (light) as a six month moving average



The first spike is between 1998 and 1999. Following its election in 1996, the Coalition government initiated a major review of Australia's skilled migration program, introducing mandatory English language testing and rigorous qualifications screening. This involved significant changes to the points system for students and skilled migrants. Changes to visa requirements tend to receive little media or parliamentary scrutiny, which in this case may explain why the spike in legislation on immigration is not accompanied by an increase in Hansard mentions of immigration keywords. In 2001 there is another spike in legislation, which coincides with a smaller increase in Hansard mentions on immigration matters. In 2001, a great many amendments were made to the Migration Act 1958 and the Customs Act 1901, aimed at providing officials with increased powers to protect Australia's borders. In 2001, border protection was also strengthened by the excision of certain Australian territories from the migration zone. These measures received bipartisan support and, as such, were not subject to much in the way of parliamentary debate. The third spike in 2007 relates to the introduction of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007, which revised the citizenship process. It too was supported by both sides of the House and required little parliamentary debate. The final spike in 2008 and 2009 is again related to increased measures to strengthen border security. However, after the 2010 election, these changes were subject to far more scrutiny in the House and in the Senate, with the continued arrival of boats carrying asylum seekers and the need for the ALP to negotiate with the Greens in a minority government.

Conclusion

We have found spikes in the attention given to immigration both in parliamentary activity and in the newspapers, but these spikes in attention do not correspond precisely with each other. In parliament attention increased due to legislative activity that changed the immigration points system and introduced the Citizenship Act of 2007. There is some increase in media attention as these parliamentary activities are reported on both in news columns and in commentary. We can attribute this increase in government and legislative attention to the frictional nature of politics where pressures build up over time and government responds. Such pressures might be found through careful content analysis of the media stories but they are not immediately apparent within measures of relative attention. They are issues that are picked up by the relevant public servants and those working in those policy areas without attracting a great deal of outside attention.

We have also picked up spikes that are caused by external events impacting upon both the media and politicians. Moves to strengthen border security both in legislation and in implementation followed increased attention to the issue of boat people and asylum seeking, resulting in greater spikes in parliamentary and especially media attention. We have evidence, therefore, of government activity both as a result of the frictional nature of policy attention and of exogenous shocks. The latter motivate governments both directly through the attention given to issues by the media and public concern, and through the likely electoral consequences. Of course, not all media attention in an area leads to legislative activity. The scandal surrounding a number of wrongful detentions, notably that of Cornelia Rau, generated much media and parliamentary attention (though substantially less than asylum-seeking issues), particularly in parliament, with calls for two immigration ministers to resign, first Philip Ruddock in 2000 and later Amanda Vanstone in 2005. Whilst that did not lead to any legislation, Prime Minister Howard, though publicly absolving both ministers from blame, did eventually remove Vanstone from the cabinet (in 2009, giving her a diplomatic post soon after) and pledging \$230 million over five years to improve the Immigration Department's performance (Dowding & Lewis 2012).

We have shown evidence of legislation due to the frictional nature of policy attention and due to exogenous shocks in the area of immigration. Whilst the specifics of immigration policy and asylum seeking are party political and would be expected to appeal to the core base of party support, they do not impact on the public in the same way. Government agenda attention has both a standard operating side and a reactive aspect in the controversial area of immigration rules and regulations. Relatively technical changes to immigration legislation have little effect on media output or public opinion though they might have economic effects on the public every bit as much or more than more reactive legislation based on perceived crises.

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Endnotes

1. Kurtosis is a measure of 'peakedness' of the probability distribution of a real-valued random variable. The degree of kurtosis describes the shape of the probability distribution. It is interpreted in terms of the width of the peak, the tail weight and distribution between the peak and the tails (the nature of the 'shoulders'). A high degree means it has a sharp peak known as leptokurtic. Such distributions have higher peaks around the mean compared to normal distributions because the data have lower variation within observations and so are highly concentrated around the mean.
2. For example, the Native Title Bill 1993 was passed on 21 December 1993 with debate in the Senate lasting 51 hours and 49 minutes.

Public housing and the politics of stigma

Keith Jacobs and Kathleen Flanagan

Abstract

This paper considers the problem of stigmatisation towards tenants residing in public housing. It draws on the findings of a research panel investigation set up to explore the opportunities available for activists and campaigners to address stigma and engender a more positive understanding of public housing and its contribution to ameliorating economic disadvantages. The deliberations of the panel highlighted that, even within a forum sympathetic to the goal of addressing stigma, many conceptual, strategic and practical differences arise and need to be worked through. The paper reviews these challenges through a discussion of recent academic literature and a commentary on the contributions made by participants in the panel discussions. It concludes with the argument that the problem of stigma needs to be contextualised in a wider political setting that takes account of the contested aspects of the policy process and the role that powerful interest groupings have in agenda-setting, alongside material factors such as poverty. The stigmatisation of public housing tenants is best understood as a symptom of systemic forms of inequality and asymmetrical power relationships. These difficulties also apply to campaigns to tackle the problem. Supporting forums that allow these power relationships to be interrogated is the first step towards change.

Keywords: public housing, stigma, policy process, welfare, tenant participation