Political Parties and Australia’s Migration Program, 1972-2010: A Partisan Difference?

Shaun Crowe

Word Count: 19,720

Department of Government and International Relations,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Sydney
Australia
Declaration

This work is substantially my own, and where any part of this work is not my own, I have indicated this by acknowledging the source of that part or those parts of the work.
Abstract

This thesis examines the historical relationship between political parties and Australia's permanent migration program. Whilst the existing empirical literature has often compared the decisions of specific, consecutive governments (for instance, the work comparing the Fraser, Hawke-Keating and Howard administrations) it has not yet viewed the parties themselves as central units of analysis. In practice, this means that it has not yet explicitly tested whether, over multiple administrations, the Labor and Liberal parties have supported distinct or coherent permanent intakes.

This thesis explores this precise question. From 1972-2010, it examines whether Australia's major parties have promoted programs of a different size or composition. Throughout this analysis, the paper recognises the influence of external factors in limiting and framing party autonomy. In particular, it acknowledges employment's historical impact on migration decisions. Because of this, the thesis' empirical analysis attempts to both acknowledge and control for the labour market. Ultimately, whilst not suggesting one single, overarching narrative about specific parties and migration outcomes, the paper emphasises the often distinct ways in which (because of both different responses to economic imperatives and different partisan motivations) Australia's political parties have shaped the migration program's size, composition and trajectory.
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Introduction

When viewed from a certain angle, the history of modern Australia has been a history of permanent migration. From British colonisation and settlement, to Gold Rush-inspired arrivals, to the nation’s post-War expansion, Australia’s population has been fundamentally shaped and augmented by immigrants (Caldwell, 1987, pp.23-26; Markus and Semyonov, 2010, pp.8-9). Indeed, even amidst the ‘White Australia Policy’ (whereby the criteria for entry was restrictionist in its racialism [Jupp, 2002, p.7-9]) the country’s size and demographics were still heavily influenced by people entering Australia on a permanent basis (Kippen and McDonald, 2000, p.14).

In a more contemporary setting, this has also been somewhat of a political question. Implicitly and explicitly, members of both major parties have discussed the migration program as if their partisan agendas have guided policy. Malcolm Fraser claims to have expanded the program he inherited from Gough Whitlam (Fraser, 2011, p.421); Bob Hawke publically professed a preference for high migration levels (Ahluwahlia et al, 2009, p.23; Alsop, 2008, p.23); senior members of the Howard government, despite their reputation for being ‘tough’ on certain modes of immigration, have asserted that they ‘rehabilitated’ support for large migrant targets (McNamara, 2009, p.230; Daily Telegraph, 2010). Even in the country’s most recent election, both parties engaged with the migration program’s size: in the process of campaigning, both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott argued that their partisan decisions would shape a more ‘sustainable’ population future (SMH, 2010a; Tony Abbott MP, 2010).

This thesis wants to scrutinise the historical relationship between partisanship and the migration program: it wants to test whether, between Australia’s two major parties, there has been a substantive difference in policy. Whilst the existing scholarship has frequently compared specific, consecutive governments (for instance, the work comparing the relative
approaches of the Fraser, Hawke-Keating and Howard administrations [Patience, 1989; Betts, 2003]) it has not yet united and analysed multiple governments under the one ‘party’ umbrella. Because of this, it has not yet tested whether the Labor and Liberal parties have possessed longer-term, distinct or coherent policy preferences (see: Chapter One). This paper will examine this precise topic. Across the nation’s post-White Australia history, it will analyse whether there has been an observable difference in the Labor and Liberal parties’ approaches to the migration program.

Within this broad conceptual question, the thesis will ask two specific sub-questions. This is because there is the potential for partisan variation in both the program’s ‘size’ and ‘composition’. Firstly, ‘size’ is referring to the total number of people allowed entry under Australia’s migration program. In a direct numerical sense, this is concerned with whether either party has promoted higher (or lower) permanent intakes. Secondly, within this measurement of size, there is also the question of who exactly comprises the program. This means asking whether either party has disproportionately supported a certain type of immigrant: in essence, whether there has been a partisan distinction in the balance between skilled and family reunion migrants. Ultimately, applying its broad question to these two sub-questions, the thesis will ask whether there has been a partisan cleavage in either the ‘size’ or ‘composition’ of Australia’s migration program.

However, before this is commenced, the paper should first acknowledge its scope: it should make clear what it will and will not be examining. The thesis will be searching for inter-party distinction in Australia’s ‘migration program’. When discussing the nation’s ‘migration program’, we are referring to visas issued in Australia for permanent residence. Whilst later chapters will expand upon this in greater detail, this program officially comprises three ‘streams’: it contains ‘skilled’, ‘family reunion’ and ‘special eligibility’ migrants (DoPS, 2010a, p.1). It does not, however, include humanitarian or temporary arrivals. Whilst, to different degrees, these both represent politically significant areas of partisan contention (especially...
the humanitarian program and the processing of asylum seekers [see: MacCallum, 2002; Manne, 2004; Crock et al, 2006]) the paper will, as much as possible¹, treat them as discrete areas of public policy. This is partly to keep the thesis’ topic manageable and partly to avoid re-articulating well established debates. But, more than this, it is also to avoid conflating issues with potentially unique intellectual and political imperatives. Whilst not discounting the possibility of philosophical and electoral overlap, a party’s approach to permanent migration does not necessitate a certain approach to accepting (and, more importantly in the partisan debate, processing) asylum seekers. Because of these reasons, we must make clear that, rather than discussing all modes of immigration, the paper is solely engaging with permanent arrivals and Australia’s ‘migration program’. 

Secondly, the paper has temporal parameters. As will be explained in the relevant chapters, because of both conceptual and data-based considerations, the thesis will cover fixed time periods. Chapter Two, which examines the question of size, will study party policy in the post-White Australia era, from 1972-2010; Chapter Three, which applies the same logic to the program’s composition, will examine partisanship from 1984-2010. These different time-frames are largely due to the different amounts of available evidence in the two sub-questions (DoPS, 2010b, p.10, and p.13). However, despite these temporal restrictions, both periods still represent relatively substantial lengths of time; moreover, they are lengths of time in which the two major parties have enjoyed roughly similar lengths of governance. As a consequence, they both offer an opportunity to examine the existence of inter-party distinction and to broadly answer the paper’s question.

¹ At certain points, the policy areas do intersect. For instance, in 2008-09, a third of permanent visas were issued for onshore migrants that had originally entered Australia under the temporary program (DIAC, 2009, p.30). However, even if the applicants began as temporary arrivals, they were still, like those coming from offshore, only counted as permanent when they became permanent visa holders; that is, even if there as some transition between temporary arrivals and the longer-term permanent intake, it was already accounted for in the ‘migration program’ figures (DIAC, 2009, p.30). This means that, whilst there is some relationship between the policy areas, the migration program sufficiently controls for that to the extent to which permanent migration statistics can be read as relatively discrete.
Structurally, the thesis has three chapters. Chapter One will provide a background for the paper’s original analysis. Using the 2010 election as a case study, it will highlight the ostensible interaction between parties and the migration program. By doing this, it will attempt to prove that the paper’s question (about the existence of an historical partisan difference) is of academic and practical significance. Following this, it will illustrate the empirical and theoretical literature which has previously engaged with the topic. Chapter Two will apply the paper’s broad question to the issue of size. This will involve three sub-sections and attempt to go beyond a blunt, variable-free analytical method: in other words, it will acknowledge the external environment that frames party decisions and attempt to control for it. Chapter Three will apply a similar logic as Chapter Two, but this time to the topic of composition. Like the analysis of size, it will control for the external climate and examine whether, between the Labor and Liberal parties, there has been a difference in the compositional balance of migrants granted permanent entry. Ultimately, through these three chapters, the thesis will question whether the nation’s partisan clash (in many ways, the public face of Australian democracy) has also represented divergent approaches to its migration program.
Chapter I
The History of Party Politics and Australia’s Migration Program: Context and Literature

In order to provide the necessary background for the thesis’ empirical research, this chapter will do two main things. Firstly, it will contextualise the paper’s research topic. Using 2010’s federal election as a case study, it will illustrate how, in a recent period of inter-party competition, the major parties have publically engaged with the migration program. As a consequence, it will attempt to prove that, rather than originating in a vacuum, the question is of practical and academic concern. Secondly, it will highlight the literature that has previously examined the topic. This encompasses both the existing empirical and theoretical work: work which has examined how the major parties have historically approached the migration program and also why they could be motivated to behave in distinct ways. Ultimately, Chapter One will ask: why is the topic important and who has previously asked a similar question?

1.1 Context: the 2010 Election, Migration Policy and the Rhetoric of Difference

This thesis is only of interest insofar as partisanship relates to Australia’s migration program. Indeed, if the institutions and policies were completely unrelated, the piece would be a rather long exercise in redundancy. Thus, before going on to analyse the question empirically, we should first make some of this context clear: to show how, in the process of inter-party competition, the former has engaged with the latter. If we use 2010’s federal election as a case study, this overlap can be observed in at least three main ways: the parties’ rhetorical attempts to create distinction, the popular perception of partisan distinction and the program’s influence on other policy areas of potential partisan distinction. Thus, by looking at the country's most recent election (and drawing attention to its ostensible interaction between partisan actors and the migration program) this section will attempt to prove that the paper's central question is worthy of our attention.
Firstly, the relationship between parties and the migration program has been visible in the rhetoric of politicians. In Australia's most recent election, representatives from both major parties sought to articulate normative stances on the migration program. Indeed, according to Williams, these issues came to ‘dominate’ the campaign's second week (2011, p.320). We witnessed both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, as respective leaders of the Labor and Liberal parties, using the ‘size’ of the program as a party-political tool. On the Right, Abbott announced that, if elected, he would cut the annual migrant intake to 170,000, down from its earlier peak under Rudd (SMH, 2010b). He stated that many Australians thought that immigration was ‘out of control’ and that he would, in response to their concerns, seek to make the program more ‘sustainable’ (Reuters, 2010). And whilst the statistical basis of these claims was criticised as both dubious and disingenuous (Treasury projections confirmed that the country was already headed toward that figure [Williams, 2011, p.320]), the Liberal Party's arguments remain illuminating for this paper. The party, if not entirely veracious, was still attempting to create the perception that partisan differences would dictate policy: it was implying to the electorate that, if elected, it would act in a substantively different fashion to Labor.

Under Julia Gillard, the Labor Party also sought to construct an image of prudence. Upon her ascension to the party's leadership, she explicitly stated that, rather than allowing the country to 'hurtle' towards a population of 36 million or 40 million, she supported a 'sustainable Australia' (SMH, 2010a). And whilst this was ostensibly a statement on population policy, it was unavoidably linked to the size of Australia’s migration program (Murray, 2010, pp.6-7). Because population growth is a product of natural growth (the difference between births and deaths) and migratory growth (the difference between immigration and emigration), a ‘sustainable’ policy would inevitably involve some form of revision of the migration program (Hugo et al, 2010, p.21). Partly because of its refusal to explicitly link these statements to immigration (or, for that matter, fertility), Labor’s policy was criticised for not expanding on how ‘sustainability’ would be achieved (Brisbane Times,
2010). Indeed, apart from announcing a cabinet portfolio for ‘Sustainability’, the party’s commitment to a more cautious population policy was promoted with relatively little detail: it presented a vague goal, rather than a strategy of how it could be reached. But like with the Liberal Party, even if Labor’s comments were verging on vacuity, they still provide useful context. By engaging in both direct and indirect debates over Australia’s migration future (in a sense, a rhetorical ‘race to the bottom’), politicians from both parties were suggesting to the public that partisan factors would drive policy (Aulich, 2010, p.11). This paper wants to scrutinise the implications of such discourse: it wants to ask whether, at the historical nexus between parties and public policy, this partisan dynamic has actually exerted a meaningful influence over the migration program.

Secondly, if the relationship between parties and migration policy is important insofar as leaders have attempted to construct the perception of difference, so too is the way that the public has received such rhetoric: in other words, the extent to which Australians believe this partisan distinction to be true. If we examine recent public polling, there is evidence which suggests that many Australians do perceive some form of inter-party division. Amidst 2010’s electoral dispute, Essential Polling asked Australians who they ‘trusted most to handle the immigration issue’. Explicitly worded to reference the program’s size, as opposed to the equally sensitive asylum seeker question, 35% indicated faith in the Coalition, 23% preferred Labor, and 31% perceived ‘no difference’ (Essential Media, 2010a). Whilst it is difficult to draw obvious partisan lessons from such a poll, one implicit point seems relatively clear: for a sizeable portion of the community (in this poll, over half of it) there exists the perception that partisan differences influence migration outcomes. By ‘trusting’ one major party more than the other, respondents to Essential’s poll presented the implicit belief that the major parties would behave differently. If politicians had attempted

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2 The question was prefaced with the statement that: ‘Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000’ (Essential Media, 2010a).
to rhetorically construct distinction, their success was tacitly reflected in the popularity of these partisan notions of 'trust'.

Furthermore, in terms of actual policy preferences, the polling registered a solid difference along party-lines. The sample was asked: ‘Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000. Do you approve or disapprove of this cut to immigration?’ In response, 91% of Liberal-National voters approved, whilst decidedly less Labor voters, at 52%, agreed with the proposition (Essential Media, 2010a). Whilst, again, we should acknowledge the poll’s limitations (the question referred explicitly to partisanship, so we cannot be overly surprised that it came to a partisan conclusion), we should also recognise its implications. At least during the 2010 election, Coalition voters were more likely to advocate a smaller migration program than those supporting Labor. Like the aforementioned political rhetoric, this thesis wants to interrogate the relationship between popular sentiment and policy substance: it wants to test whether this perception of difference has been matched by historically partisan policy decisions and whether this disaggregation of voter preferences has been reflected in the major parties’ traditional behaviour. Ultimately, is this ‘trust’ grounded in historical reality?

Finally, looking again at the 2010 election, the paper is significant because the migration program has influenced other policy areas of potential partisanship: in other words, it has overlapped with policies that also feature open inter-party debate. The most obvious of these, and one to which was previously alluded, is ‘population’ policy. As stated, because populations grow and recede by natural change (the difference between births and deaths) and migratory change (the excess of incoming migrants over outgoing migrants), ‘size of country’ debates are inevitably linked to migration policy. In fact, as Graeme Hugo’s recent ‘Demographic Change and Liveability Panel Report’ argued, when compared with the relative stability of natural increases over recent decades, ‘there has been considerable volatility in net migration, reflecting its greater susceptibility to being influenced by
economic trends and policy intervention’ (2010, pp.22-23). This ‘greater susceptibility to intervention’ (in other words, active changes to the nation’s intake) has meant that, when the major parties normatively debate population, they are at least partially debating migration policy. Because of their overlap, it is almost impossible to divorce a discussion of the former from the latter.

Looking at the 2010 federal election, representatives from both the Liberal and Labor parties implied that their partisan agendas would substantively influence Australia’s population strategy. For instance, on the Right, Tony Abbott promised to ‘cap’ the populace at 29 million (Herald Sun, 2010). Whilst this exact number experienced some revision and obfuscation, the Liberal Party did consistently commit to ‘reducing Australia’s annual rate of population growth’ (Tony Abbott MP, 2010). Abbott even explicitly linked the party’s population policy to migration: he argued that ‘a fair dinkum debate about population cannot avoid immigration, because that’s what’s driving the increase’ (Daily Telegraph, 2010b). Similarly, Labor also insinuated that its conscious choices would influence Australia’s policy. As alluded to earlier, without going into specifics, Gillard promised that she would not oversee a ‘big Australia’, instead preferring to focus on ‘sustainability’ (Hundt, 2011, p.281). Again, at this stage, the veracity of such rhetoric is not necessarily important: what is important, and what contextualises the thesis, is that both parties have told the electorate that their active, often partisan decisions would shape the nation’s population policy. And with population being another area of ostensible partisan division (in 2010, more voters thought it was ‘highly important’ than did ‘global warming’ [ANU, 2010])³, the paper’s question carries another layer of significance. Because of population’s ineluctable relationship with migration, partisan engagement with the former’s size implies indirect partisan engagement with the latter: if we want to understand the first historical relationship, we have to also understand the second.

³ Before the election, Essential Media found that 36% of voters thought that ‘population policy’ was ‘highly important’, whilst only 30% thought the same about ‘global warming’ (ANU, 2010).
These points are not necessarily suggesting that open partisanship has been a feature of every federal election. What they are suggesting is that the migration program has been treated as a partisan issue and that we should, as political scientists, seek to scrutinise the implications of such rhetoric. The ostensible interaction between parties and permanent migration (in 2010, being evident in politicians’ statements, public perception and related areas of partisan policy) warrants systematic analysis. This is what this paper wants to do: it wants to test whether, historically, there has been a meaningful difference in the actual behaviour of the Labor and Liberal parties. However, before the paper commences this empirical analysis, it should first acknowledge the existing literature that has (both directly and indirectly) already engaged with the question.

1.2. Australia’s Empirical Literature: Parties and the History of the Migration Program

Empirically, the Australian literature has not yet attempted to find a coherent, overarching relationship between specific major parties and permanent migration: it has not sought to explicitly test whether, over an extended period of history, the Labor and Liberal parties have preferred programs of a certain size or composition. This is largely because, rather than viewing parties as single units of analysis (insofar as they tend not to conflate multiple administrations, such as Fraser and Howard, under the one ‘Liberal’ umbrella), previous work has largely focussed on specific, transitionary periods of governance (see: Price, 1979; Patience 1989; Betts, 2003). This research has often asked similar questions to this paper (about whether different governments, representing different parties, have promoted distinct migration policies), but has not yet searched along party-lines for longer-term patterns. This is the precise hole that this paper seeks to fill. However, even if these existing, transitionary sources have not attempted to uncover broader inter-party tendencies, they are still helpful for this thesis: they provide a foundation for understanding how the Labor and Liberal parties have interacted with the program and, when viewed together, also allude to certain trends and hypotheses for the paper’s own original analysis.
When studying the first transition after White Australia's abolition (that is, from Whitlam to Fraser) various commentators have observed a relationship between the program's size and the party in office. For instance, whilst acknowledging continuity in the dismantling of racial selectivity, Charles Price has argued that the Fraser government promoted a comparatively expansionist program. Finding a meaningful difference in both philosophy and policy, he asserted that the Liberal Party's migration targets were consciously and substantively higher than their predecessor's (Price, 1979, p.212-213). This was also echoed by Birrell and Freeman, who argued that, as the parties changed, so too did the mentality of the Australian state: after the Liberal Party's election, the migration program was ‘restored as an important national priority’ (Freeman and Birrell 2001, p.532). Indeed, this general conclusion has received broad academic support, with numerous sources asserting that the Liberal government’s policy decisions actively drove a larger migrant intake (Tavan, 2005, p.427; Allsop, 2008, p.22). Thus, at least during the period’s first partisan transition, the existing empirical research has implied a link between different parties and different policies: according to the bulk of scholarship, the Fraser government endorsed a more expansive migration program than Whitlam’s Labor Party.

Focussing on the following election, there is similar literature analysing the nexus between Fraser and Hawke. Some of it, like Allan Patience’s work, begins to form the basis of a potential cross-party trend. Patience has argued that, once elected, the Hawke government acted to reduce the country’s overall quota for immigrants. Moreover, these reductions coincided with a realignment of the program’s composition: the percentage of family reunion visas increased, whilst skilled permits registered a decline (Patience, 1989, p.419-420). In short, where Fraser’s Liberal Party sought to expand the program it inherited from Whitlam, the Hawke government moved initially in the opposite direction. As a caveat, Patience acknowledged that these decisions were made in the context of rising unemployment, adding another, non-party, cause of change (1989, p.420). However, despite
the qualifier, Patience’s analysis did assert that partisan differences were an important factor in changing policy. From Fraser to Hawke, he argued, politicians made conscious decisions to both reduce the program’s overall size and alter its composition.

However, if we examine the literature that has taken a longer-term perspective, then these conclusions have been tentatively refuted. James Jupp has argued that, following the initial revision discussed by Patience, the migration program ‘built up steadily’ to a peak in 1990. In fact, because of both its numerous ministers and the period’s economic context, the government’s policy was actually quite difficult to ‘distinguish’ (Jupp, 2002, p.47). This argument was also mirrored by Collins, who has emphasised this gradual rise in intake, pointing to the problems associated with clearly classifying the Hawke-Keating administration's policy position (1995, p.2). Indeed, this period’s literature highlights the difficulty of categorising consecutive governments in clear binaries (that is, whether they preferred large or small, skilled or family reunion intakes), especially without considering the economy’s influence. Accordingly, and as will be later explained in greater detail, the paper’s empirical analysis will both acknowledge and attempt to control for this economic variable. As Patience, Jupp and Collins have all implied, the decisions surrounding migration policy cannot be read in an economic vacuum. Moreover, this literature also suggests that, to truly understand the relationship between parties and the program, it is necessary to go beyond looking at immediately transitionary years. Whilst they represent one useful methodological tool, partisan cleavages could also result from later-term, rather than initial, policy decisions.

The literature comparing Hawke-Keating to Howard also engages with both the intake’s composition and size. In terms of the former, as with Patience’s post-Fraser analysis, certain researchers have asserted that the transfer of executive power dictated a shift in who comprised the program: that is, that it changed the existing balance between skilled and family reunion migrants. Betts, for instance, has argued that the Howard government
'sharpened the program's economic focus and reduced the size of its family-reunion component', disproportionately promoting the skilled stream (2003, p.169). This conclusion has been reinforced by other scholars, who have also asserted that Howard's program was founded on a more explicitly economic rationale than Labor's was (Higley et al, 2011, p.3; Collins, 2008, p.254). When viewed alongside the Fraser-Hawke literature, these sources point to a potential inter-party trend and, for the paper's later empirical analysis, a possible hypothesis to test: looking purely at these two transitionary periods, the existing literature implies a link between Liberal governance and a preference for skilled migration.

On top of changing the compositional balance, much of the era's research also argues that Howard expanded the program's overall size, increasing the sheer number of people entering the country with permanent visas. Embodied in the work of Higley, this scholarship has argued that, ‘during the Howard government’s long life’ ... [the program’s] aggregate intakes rose’ (2011, p.3; Betts, 2010, p.49). To some observers, these arguments (asserting a gradual growth in permanent migration) might seem curious, especially in the context of John Howard's popular reputation for being 'tough' on certain modes of immigration (McNamara, 2009, p.230). Indeed, the period’s literature shows why we must be mindful to disaggregate the relevant from both the superfluous and superficial: why we must separate the empirical reality of the ‘migration program’ from other discrete policy areas and also from the popular myths surrounding parties and governments. However, beyond these observations, this literature does somewhat conform to the earlier, potential transitionary patterns. Like with the Whitlam-Fraser and Fraser-Hawke periods, politicians representing the Liberal Party did, according to much of the relevant literature, initially act to promote both higher and more skills-focused intakes. Although, as previously implied, such literature should be read with a degree of caution and informed scepticism, in that some of it does not engage explicitly with the influence that economic context has played in migratory decisions (see: Betts, 2003).
However, insofar as these trends in the literature exist, they do not conform to the work which has examined Australia’s most recent administration. Instead, the early research concerning the Rudd-Gillard Labor government points to an aberration. If the contours of the aforementioned literature have hinted at certain inter-party trends (that is, that the Liberal Party has promoted both higher and more skills-focused intakes), they are largely refuted by the work which analyses Australia’s most recent transition. Birrell and Healey, for instance, have argued that, since Rudd came to power in 2007, the government has ‘pursued a record-high migration policy’ (2010, p.39; Betts, 2010, p.49). Stutchbury has made a similar assertion, arguing that the government has overseen ‘the nation’s most rapid immigration expansion since the 1960s’ (2011, p.46). Moreover, these intakes have maintained the program’s economic focus: according to Birrell and Healy, they have ‘privileged the delivery of migrant skills over all other factors in setting immigration policy’ (2010, p.40). Whilst the history of this particular government is still being written, the burgeoning literature does imply that, contrary to the material on other transitions, the Labor Party has actually expanded the program’s size and its proportion of skilled migrants. Ultimately, because of this, any attempt to bluntly unite the disparate literature into one explanatory theory (in terms of the major parties’ distinct policy preferences) will find it difficult to adequately account for such a seemingly anomalous administration, especially if it refuses to acknowledge and incorporate further variables into its analysis.

Therefore, for this paper’s precise question, the existing Australian literature provides some important allusions, without ever presenting a clear and explicit answer. This is primarily because it has tended to examine the relationship between specific governments and the migration program, rather than searching further for partisan patterns. As a start, though, it does offer both significant lessons and potential hypotheses. Firstly, because governments face different economic climates (which, as will later be expanded upon, carry different migratory imperatives), it suggests that we should not simplistically compare them without acknowledging the influence of context (Jupp, 2002, p.47). Secondly, it suggests that, in
order to gain a more holistic and accurate picture of party behaviour, we should not rely solely on examining the narrow transitionary years of governance (Collins, 1995, p.2). Beyond these two observations, when pieced together, this historical literature also hints at certain testable theories. Whilst not reflected unanimously, much of the work implies that the Liberal Party might prefer both larger and more skills-focussed intakes. Ultimately, in its own empirical analysis, this thesis will both heed these lessons and scrutinise these hypotheses.

1.3. Theories of Distinction: Why Would Parties Behave Differently?

If the aforementioned historical research has not yet asserted an overarching relationship between parties and the migration program, there is still a body of theoretical literature which argues why they could possess distinct and coherent policy preferences. Often designed for different national settings, but largely applicable to Australia's political context, these theories examine the structural reasons behind any cross-party cleavage. Whilst certain arguments are contradictory (in that some assert that Labor benefits from higher intakes, whilst others argue the opposite) they are all trying to explain how parties themselves could be meaningful causal agents. These theories are necessary for the thesis’ later analysis, insofar as they provide a conceptual framework for understanding its empirical results: by analysing ‘motivation’, they present reasons as to why the parties could have shaped the program in certain, and potentially different, ways. These theories can be separated into those relating to ‘constituents’ and those relating to ‘ideology’.

The first of the theories concerns the electoral impact of future residents. This examines the way that newly-arrived Australians, as a voting bloc, influence the major parties’ political capital. This is the idea that, because migration decisions affect a potential electoral group, the major parties could face unique political incentives. As Breunig and Luedtke suggest, parties of the Left could view immigrants as a potentially favourable constituency and, from a rational, vote-maximising perspective, be more likely to perceive electoral gains from a
larger intake (2008, p.128). Because, on top of the principles unifying economic policy, Left-wing parties tend to support certain progressive ideals (such as multiculturalism) that often align with the preferences of immigrants, their policy-decisions could be shaped by a desire to expand a favourable voter-base (Birrell, 2002, p.38). In other words, they could be motivated to increase the percentage of Left-leaning immigrants voting in elections.

In the Australian context, derivations of this argument have been made about the Labor Party. Both Birrell and Jupp have analysed the voting pattern of immigrants, highlighting significant trends in electoral preferences. Birrell has shown that, between citizens who are either born in Australia or come from a non-English speaking background, there is a meaningful difference in voting tendencies. The former disproportionately vote Coalition, whilst the latter are more likely to vote Labor (2002, p.38). Based on a similar principle, Jupp has pointed out that, in 2001, there were twenty seats in which over thirty percent of residents spoke a language other than English at home. In that year's election, all but one was held by the Labor Party (Jupp, 2002, p.33). And whilst permanent migrants and those from non-English speaking backgrounds are not necessarily synonymous, their overlap does lend credence to the theories linking immigration and the Left. Of course, in a relatively zero-sum electoral system, the inverse implication is that parties of the Right (in Australia, the Liberal Party) could have a motivation to minimise the intake of a potentially adversarial voting bloc. Thus, in the context of this thesis, this theory offers one plausible cause of partisan difference: because of the electoral tendencies of future residents, Labor could possess a greater political incentive to maximise the country's migrant intake.

However, these constituent-based arguments are not simply about the voting intentions of future residents. They are also about the way that migration policy interacts with the desires and demands of existing electoral blocs. In Australia, the two major political parties have relationships, established either formally or informally, with groups that have distinct interests in the country's migration program. On the centre-left, the Australian Labor Party
has an historically developed and institutionally entrenched affiliation with the union movement. Indeed, as its name suggests, the ALP was initially designed to function as the political arm of organised labour (McMullin, 1991, pp.1-14). In a contemporary setting, the party continues to explicitly acknowledge this relationship, clearly stating its commitment to a ‘future partnership with trade unions’ (ALP, 2011). And in terms of the party’s modern structures of governance, unions remain institutionally significant: despite recent attempts to dilute their influence, they still account for fifty percent of its federal conference delegates (Allan, 2002, p.50; Kuhn and Bramble, 2007, p.7).

Because of immigration’s impact on labour markets, migration scholars have tended to assume that these unions have an interest in supporting ‘selective, exclusionary and restrictive policies’ (Avci and Mcdonald, 2000, p.198). As Freeman argues, a higher immigrant intake has the capacity to undermine the bargaining power of labour. Because labour’s ability to demand better pay and working conditions is partially dictated by the state of unemployment (in other words, how ‘tight’ a labour market is; the size of its ‘reserve army of labour’), an expanding labour pool both increases competition for jobs and, according to classical economic assumptions, tends to exert downward pressure on wages (Freeman, 1997, p.47). Whilst this characterisation of unions has faced certain recent challenges, with some work suggesting a gradual change in perspective and a need for greater conceptual nuance⁴, the common scholarly assumption is still that large migration programs skew labour markets against the interests of unions and are generally perceived as threatening (Donnelly, 2011, p.6). Moreover, this threat can be seen to heighten in periods of rising unemployment, where the labour market conditions challenging union interests are broadly intensified (Haus, 1999, p.683). Here we can see that, at least for the

⁴Watts, for instance, has argued that union leadership in France, Italy and Spain have moved towards supporting more open immigration policies (2002). However, as Donnelly points out, her argument focuses on countries in which there are large numbers of undocumented workers. Watts suggests that the nation’s inability to formally regulate immigration encourages a more pragmatic stance by labour (Donnelly, 2011, p.5-6). With its unique geography, this particular argument (assuming a critical mass of undocumented workers) does not seem as applicable to Australia.
Labor Party, constituent-based imperatives are not necessarily coherent; whilst the migrant community may comprise a potentially significant and favourable electoral bloc, so too does a trade union movement with an economic interest in smaller migration programs.

We can apply a similar, but inverted, principle to the Coalition. Whilst the links might not be as formal as Labor’s ties with the unions, the Liberal Party has maintained a political relationship with the business community. As both Betts and Irving have argued, Coalition governments have tended to grant privileged access to business groups, who are generally considered to be one of the party’s key constituencies (2006, p.40; 1980, pp.289-91). In contrast to the union movement, these commercial interests are often assisted by larger migration programs. Because they largely benefit from an increased pool of workers (on top of the added, capital-biased impact on wages), business groups have tended to endorse higher intakes, especially in those categories covering skilled migrants (Freeman and Kessler, 2008, p.667). Indeed, as Betts has shown, important elements of Australia’s business community have provided powerful support for the country’s migration program: they have constituted, in her words, a significant portion of Australia’s ‘growth lobby’ (2006, p.43-46). The Australian Industry Group, for instance, one of the country’s largest employer associations, has consistently and vocally backed the expansion of Australia’s intake (Mackinnon, 2009, p.351; The Australian, 2011). Thus, like Labor, the needs of large electoral and financial supporters are not always in line with other constituent-based concerns; large intakes might facilitate a potentially adversarial voting bloc, but they also tend to be supported by the business community, one of the party’s traditionally vital constituencies. Ultimately, though, regardless of motivational contradictions, the key point here is that, because of migration’s relationship with certain electoral blocs, there are reasons why the parties could behave differently. The desires of key constituent-groups create distinct and partisan political imperatives.
The other side of these theoretical differences concerns ‘ideology’. Whilst a potentially more difficult term to quantify, it refers to ‘purer’ motivations. These are the motivations that stem from normative stances on the role of the state, relatively free from the aforementioned electoral calculations. For instance, Lahav has argued that, because the Left is philosophically inclined towards using state power to amend disadvantage, it is ‘more likely to extend immigrant rights ... and be more open to increased immigration than its colleagues on the right’ (2004, p.133). Ireland has echoed this argument, asserting that, because of these principles, we should ‘expect to see Left parties systematically advocating policy preferences that are more pro-immigrant in nature’ (2004; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129). This is one ideological reason as to why the two major parties could engage with the migration program differently: based on the philosophical aspiration to spread opportunity and actively redress disadvantage, the theory suggests that the centre-Left would be more likely to extend migratory rights (and all of their corollary benefits) to a greater number of people.

The converse point here is that, because of certain ideological positions, we could expect parties of the Right to be more anti-immigrant in disposition. On top of conflicting ideas over the state’s relationship with disadvantage, it has also been argued that an aversion to multiculturalism could push the Right towards more restrictionist policies (Van Der Valk, 2003, p.335). Because modern migration invariably involves the partial importation of non-Western culture (especially in a post-racialist context, where less than a quarter of Australia’s immigrants are sourced from Europe and North America [DIAC, 2011a]), a party’s stance on multiculturalism has been linked to its stance on the migration program. Indeed, whilst the extent to which this is applicable to Australia has been debated, there have been arguments that link a greater belief in cultural homogeneity to anti-immigrant politics (Diamond, 1999, p.175; Lewins, 1987, pp.261-273). In France and the US, for instance, the Right has cited the need for cultural ‘harmony’ as a reason to restrict arrivals (Van Der Valk, 2003, p.335). Again, these ‘ideological’ theories do not necessarily cohere
with all the arguments concerning constituent-groups, but they do present further plausible motivators of distinction. Because of their different philosophical assumptions about disadvantage and cultural homogeneity, parties of the Left and Right could potentially react differently to migration policy.

Thus, as emphasised, the existing theories on political parties and migration do not conform to one clear narrative. Certain constituent and ideology-based imperatives suggest that Labor could prefer larger intakes, whilst others assert that the Liberal Party could benefit from increased permanent migration. However, accepting this inconsistency, the key point here is that there are cogent, theoretical reasons as to why the major parties could behave differently. Moreover, these theories are important insofar as they provide a conceptual framework for understanding the paper’s later empirical analysis: they present reasons to explain why the parties could have guided the program in certain, and potentially distinct, directions.

1.4: Conclusion

With the aim of providing background for the paper’s more original analysis, this chapter has had two primary functions. Firstly, it has contextualised the research topic. Looking primarily at 2010’s federal election, it highlighted how, in a recent period of inter-party competition, partisan actors have openly engaged with issues surrounding the migration program. The significant implication of this analysis being that, because this interaction has at times existed, the paper’s question is of some practical and academic concern: that is, if there has been an outward and rhetorical relationship between parties and the migration program, we should scrutinise the extent to which there has also been a substantive one. Secondly, it has reviewed the topic’s existing literature. Empirically, it illustrated the considerable work which has analysed the historical interaction between parties and Australia’s migration program; theoretically, it highlighted the literature which has suggested why they could be motivated to behave uniquely. However, for the thesis’ specific
question, this review found that Australia’s literature has not yet searched for longer-term inter-party tendencies. It has not yet united multiple Labor and Liberal administrations and examined whether, over an extended historical period, the major parties have possessed distinct dispositions. In terms of both size and composition, the paper’s subsequent analysis will attempt to answer this precise question.
Chapter II
The Size of the Migration Program, 1972-2010

When discussing the politics of the migration program, size matters. Indeed, in both popular and academic debate, much of the existing rhetoric and analysis has concerned the sheer number of people entering the country. For instance, in our 2010 case study, Tony Abbott explicitly promised to reduce the annual migrant intake to 170,000. In professing a preference for a more 'sustainable' policy trajectory, Julia Gillard's statements on population were, if they were to possess any substance, also at least partially referring to the program's size (Tony Abbott MP, 2010; SMH, 2010; Murray, 2010, p.6). This numerical focus has also been a feature of the existing theoretical and empirical literature: as discussed, scholars have frequently defined governments' policy stances by the amount of people they annually admit (Price, 1979; Patience 1989; Higley et al, 2011; Birrell, 2010). This chapter will share this emphasis. It will ask whether, between Labor and Liberal governments, there has been a substantive difference in the number of people granted permanent entry into Australia.

To measure this, the thesis will use data specifically from Australia's 'migration program'. As stated, the 'migration program' contains visas issued solely for permanent residence, encompassing the family reunion, skilled and special eligibility streams (DOPS, 2010a, p.1). Using this as our primary evidential source of party behaviour carries two clear methodological strengths. Firstly, the program's size has a direct relationship with the executive decisions of partisan actors. As enshrined in 1958's Migration Act, the relevant Minister is granted the power to 'cap' the number of permanent visas that can be granted each year (DIAC, 2011e). When compared with the other main measurements of migration (primarily Net Overseas Migration [NOM] and the temporary intake) ministerial discretion

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5 Net Overseas Migration (NOM) covers both long-term immigration and emigration: it refers to the difference between the amount of people entering and leaving the country for an extended period of time. Because governments have a negligible influence over the country's emigration levels, it is an inappropriate measurement for analysing partisanship (DOPS, 2010b).
plays a much more direct role in dictating the program’s size. Because of this, it is more likely to reflect the existence of any partisan distinction. Indeed, when studying the way that different governments have influenced migration levels, much of the existing literature has used this as its statistical basis (see: Patience, 1989; Betts 2003; Birrell, 2010).

Secondly, the other major measurements carry data-based limitations. With temporary arrivals, the available data describes elements of the intake (in particular, students and business 457s visas) going back to 1996 (DoPs, 2010b, p.14). However, as these reflect only two parts of the overall temporary migrant-pool, the evidence only presents a limited picture of impermanent migration. Furthermore, by describing a fourteen year window with just a short period of Labor governance, the data only provides a narrow opportunity for inter-party analysis. For Net Overseas Migration (NOM), there are figures that go back to 1925 (DoPS, 2010b, p.1). However, because these numbers encompass both immigration and emigration (they refer to the difference between those entering and leaving Australia for an extended period of time [see: fn.5]), they are unsuitable for a paper focussing on partisanship’s interaction with immigration levels. When compared with the temporary and NOM figures, the ‘migration program’ (and the preceding information on permanent ‘settler arrivals’) offers a longer-term\(^6\) and more appropriate data set for examining party distinction (Betts, 1999; DoPS, 2010b, p.13). Ultimately, it contains both the requisite information for genuine inter-party analysis and a closer relationship with the active decisions of executive government.

\(^6\) The temporary intake is comprised of tourists, students, short-term business people, skilled temporary residents and diplomats (DIAC, 2011). Unlike permanent migration, the level of temporary migration to Australia is not usually determined by government, but is more explicitly demand-driven (DoPS, 2010b, p.11).

\(^7\) Data specifically describing the Migration Program begins in 1984. However, there are relevant figures on ‘permanent settlers’ that begin earlier. For this paper, however, we require information on where these settlers specifically originated: because the Migration Program does not include New Zealand arrivals, we must subtract these from the overall ‘permanent’ figures. Katherine Betts’ book ‘The Great Divide’ (1999) includes this information from 1972 onwards. Hence, in order to create an applicable data-set, we must subtract the ‘New Zealand’ settlers from the ‘total’ column.
In terms of length, the chapter will confine its examination to the period from 1972-2010. Whilst this is partially due to data-based considerations (see: fn.7), it also carries certain conceptual benefits. This is primarily because 1972’s election of the Whitlam Labor government signalled the official end to the ‘White Australia Policy’ (Jupp, 2002, p.220). Whilst the racialist criteria had been gradually dismantled in the years preceding (the Holt government stated that applications would be accepted from ‘well-qualified people on the basis of their suitability as settlers, their ability to integrate readily and their possession of qualifications useful to Australia’ [Jordan, 2006, p.240]), the last vestiges of the policy were finally abolished by the Labor government (Tavan, 2004, pp.109-125). This situates the paper in the ‘modern’ era of migration policy, insofar as government decisions were no longer dictated by explicitly racialist imperatives. Furthermore, in a more practical consideration, the period also possesses an analytically useful inter-party symmetry: over the thirty nine years, Labor held government for twenty years, while the Liberal Party was in power for nineteen.

To answer its question, Chapter Two will use a three-step method. Firstly, it will cross-analyse the permanent data against the party of government. In a relatively blunt, numerical sense, this will uncover whether either party has promoted disproportionately high (or low) migrant intakes. Secondly, to add a degree of explanatory nuance, it will study this relationship in the context of the labour-market variable. This will attempt to control for unemployment and test whether, when placed in similar economic climates, the parties have behaved differently. Finally, it will test these results against periods of inter-party transition. By allowing a more in-depth focus on specific governments, this will do two things: it will analyse whether a change in party has signalled a change in policy and, more significantly, it will examine how the evidence reflects the complex motivations of party behaviour discussed in Chapter One. Ultimately, these three steps will each answer the paper’s central question from slightly different, but largely complementary, angles.


2.1 Size and Political Parties: the Immediate Picture

Ignoring the influence of external variables, this first section will cross analyse the migration program’s size with the party in office. This will attempt to provide an initial, relatively blunt picture of how parties have related to the migration program and examine whether, *prima facie*, there has been a partisan difference in the size of intakes. However, by scrutinising these results, the section will ultimately question the analytical value of such a direct, variable-free method.

**Figure One**: Australia’s Permanent Migration Program as Size and as Ratio of Population (1972-2010).

![Graph showing permanent arrivals and as ratio of population from 1970 to 2010.](image)


Figure One maps Australia’s migration program since 1972 and the election of Whitlam’s Labor government. The trends are disaggregated into both the gross permanent intake (signified by the black line) and as a ratio of population (shown in grey). To get this ‘ratio’, I’ve taken the gross data and divided it by each relevant year’s population figure. This chapter will use the relative measurement, as it allows a fairer quantitative comparison between different eras and more genuinely reflects the proportionate impact of respective programs. This is an attempt to overcome the difficulty of evaluating temporally disparate administrations. An intake of 100,000 under Whitlam, for instance, would hardly be comparable to a Howard government promoting a numerically identical program.
A cursory glance at the graph shows that, since Whitlam, the grey trend-line has experienced considerable oscillation: even within single party terms, like the Hawke-Keating years, there have been substantial differences between the peaks and troughs in permanent arrivals. However, for the paper's specific question, we must break the data down along partisan lines and question the extent to which these broader fluctuations reflect inter-party differences.

Table One: Individual Governments and the Average Permanent Intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Average Permanent Intake</th>
<th>Average Intake as % of Population</th>
<th>Range (largest intake – lowest intake)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitlam (ALP)</td>
<td>94,921</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0.37%-0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser (Liberal)</td>
<td>74,558</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>0.39%-0.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke/Keating (ALP)</td>
<td>90,994</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
<td>0.33%-0.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard (Liberal)</td>
<td>106,467</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
<td>0.36%-0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd/Gillard (ALP)</td>
<td>169,547</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>0.77%-0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table Two: Political Parties and the Average Permanent Intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Average Permanent Intake</th>
<th>Average Intake as Ratio of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>103,504</td>
<td>0.0061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>93,032</td>
<td>0.0052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table One disaggregates the post-White Australia permanent programs into the period's five separate governments. More specifically, it averages out the proportionate intake over the entirety of each administration's time in office. In a direct numerical sense, this is attempting to represent a government’s average approach to the program's size. Table Two
applies the same logic, but unites the results along party lines. In other words, all the Liberal data is grouped and then averaged, with the same method applied to Labor. In terms of a partisan difference, Tables One and Two do, at face value, present a degree of positive evidence. However, contrary to Chapter One’s hypothesis (the theory pieced together from the existing literature, suggesting that the Liberal Party might prefer larger programs), the descriptive data tentatively points to a relationship between Labor and higher intakes. As Table One suggests, since 1972, the two highest average programs were registered under Labor Prime Ministers. The Whitlam and Rudd-Gillard administrations supported intakes that respectively averaged 0.7% and 0.78% of population. This means that, when compared with the other three governments (which chronologically averaged 0.51%, 0.54% and 0.54%), these individual Labor regimes promoted historically higher proportionate targets. And with the period registering an overall mean of 0.56% and a standard deviation of 0.16%, the two governments were actually relatively significant outliers. Moreover, across the period’s five administrations, no Liberal government endorsed a higher average program than any of the available ALP administrations (despite the wealth of literature linking the period’s executive transition to different programs, Hawke-Keating and Howard’s averages, at 0.54%, were functionally the same [see: Patience, 1989; Collins, 1995; Betts, 2003]). Ultimately, with each consecutive administration, the program’s average size either rose or remained stationary under Labor.

If we take a further, more historical step back, then the ‘Labor supports more immigrants’ narrative is reinforced. Table Two, which highlights the total party averages across thirty-nine years of available data, implies a Labor Party disposition towards more expansive programs. Whilst an admittedly crude measurement, it shows that, since White Australia, the ALP’s total mean has outweighed the Coalition’s. The former has averaged a program of 0.61% of population, whilst the latter has averaged 0.52%. Indeed, across the entirety of the thirty-eight year period, Labor’s average intakes have been proportionately superior to the Liberal Party’s. Thus, ignoring the influence of other variables, these descriptive statistics do
lend some credence to the idea that Labor has aligned itself with higher permanent migration targets: at face value, there is an apparent link between ALP governance and larger proportionate programs. However, we should be cautious when accepting such a relationship on the strength of this evidence alone. Within the data-set, there are certain points which complicate the relationship, implying other important, unaccounted for variables.

The most compelling refutation to the aforementioned conclusion is that, accounting for all five administrations, there is not a clear, all-encompassing correlation between Labor governance and higher relative intakes. If we look at the middle three governments (which actually account for over four-fifths of the years in the data-sample), there was very little observable difference between the Labor and Liberal parties. The Fraser, Hawke-Keating and Howard administrations all promoted average relative intakes within 0.03% of each other. As stated, the Hawke-Keating programs were nearly identical to Howard’s, with Fraser’s regime registering only slightly less. In fact, in this thirty-two year period, the average party intakes were almost proportionately inseparable.

Contrary to these governments (which all occupied office for at least eight years), the periods that skew the data, covering 1972-75 and 2007-10, both represent relatively short administrations. As will be explored in the next section, it seems quite possible that these comparatively brief governments only faced certain external climates and, because of this, experienced situations more conducive to higher average intakes. Indeed, as Collins has argued, we should be mindful to only compare migration decisions made in similar contexts, especially considering the changing policy imperatives associated with different economic environments (1995, p.2). This suggests that measurements like Table Two (which assumes that each year’s migration program can be compared at face value) are misguided and of only limited academic use: they are too crude to reflect the material significance of economic context. Thus, because of both the lack of a comprehensive correlation and the relatively
short life-spans of the outlying administrations, the available evidence implies that, in order to gain a more accurate insight into partisanship’s relationship with the migration program, we require measurements that control for further variables.

The other important piece of conflicting evidence concerns intra-government fluctuation. As Figure One suggests, some of the most extreme examples of oscillation have existed within periods of uni-party governance. For instance, as Jupp has alluded to, in the Hawke-Keating years, the program varied from just above 0.3% of the population to almost 0.8% (2002, p.47; Table One). To differing extents, the Whitlam, Fraser, and Howard governments all experienced similar bi-polar swings (see: Figure One). If parties were stable variables in their own right (that is, if they possessed coherent preferences that transcended context), then we would not expect such substantial variations within terms: if the party in office was consistent, so too should have been the intake. Again, like the aforementioned points, this suggests that parties cannot be read in a vacuum. Their import can only be truly gauged in the context of further variables. Therefore, whilst not completely ruling out the possibility of a link between parties and particular policy preferences, both these points suggest that a simple cross-analysis of parties and migration size is too blunt to be analytically robust. If we wish to genuinely understand, and potentially even prove, such a relationship, we have to control for the external environment that frames these migratory decisions.

### 2.2. The Economy, Political Parties and Permanent Migration

As alluded to, the external variable which most seems to frame this debate is the economy. According to classical economic theory, a healthy economic environment is conducive to large migration programs. Because migration adds to the existing pool of workers, governments have often used it to fill gaps in a tight labour market. Conversely, periods of stagnancy and high unemployment have often pressured countries into minimising their intake (Simon, 1989: Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129). Indeed, in Australia’s empirical literature, both Jupp and Collins have argued that policy has been shaped by the different
imperatives associated with different economic climates (1995, p.2; 2002, p.47). Because of this, it seems disingenuous to divorce the behaviour of parties from the economic contexts in which they have governed: migratory decisions are not driven entirely by party autonomy and should not be treated as such.

Looking at recent examples of migration policy, this argument appears demonstrably true. As Labor’s Minister for Immigration, Chris Evans acknowledged that Australia’s migration program is partially dictated ‘on the basis of demand for labour … and that is obviously linked to our economy’ (Hansard, 2010, p.41). Moreover, when his government reassessed the intake’s annual size, he explicitly cited the influence of economic conditions: the move to reduce the intake, Evans argued, ‘reflects the economic climate’ (MIAC, 2009). Indeed, if we go beyond this particular example of party governance, we can see that the size of Australia’s intake has been historically reactive to certain, but not all, macroeconomic indicators (see: Figure Two and Three).

**Figure Two:** GDP Growth and Relative Intakes, 1972-2010

Source: for population and migration, see: figure one, for growth figures: World Bank (2011).
Respectively, Figures Two and Three chart the country's GDP growth and unemployment levels against its permanent intake. However, as we can see, the permanent program appears much more responsive to the latter than the former. As GDP has grown, there has not been a consistent or reliable rise in immigration; in fact, considerable GDP growth has often coexisted with a relatively small migrant intake (see: 1993-2000). On the other hand, as unemployment has fallen, the permanent program has tended to inversely rise. This makes intellectual sense, insofar as the classical economic arguments suggest that, as migration decisions directly interact with the labour market, they are more likely to be influenced by the state of employment than the nation's gross production (Simon, 1989; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129). Because of this theoretical and historic relationship, this chapter use Australia's unemployment rate as its economic variable. The section wants to control for the fluctuating imperative and test whether, when facing a similar economic climate, there has been an observable distinction in party behaviour.

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8 Beyond unemployment, there are further available labour market indicators. The unemployment rate does not tell us the composition of the labour force: importantly, it ignores the internal break-down between the Australians in full-time work and those that are 'underemployed' (Denniss, 2001, p.1-5). Since the 1970s, the balance between the former and latter has been increasingly skewed towards underemployment (ABS, 2010b). However, for this paper, unemployment is a more suitable variable for two main reasons. Firstly, we require a labour-market indicator that has been recorded stably since 1972 (ABS, 2010b). Secondly, and more importantly, the migration program has been more historically reactive to the overall unemployment rate than underemployment. Indeed, especially since the early 1990s, a relatively stable and comparatively high level of underemployment has existed alongside a range of different sized migration programs (ABS, 2010b; Figure One). This is perhaps due to 'unemployment's' greater visibility as a labour indicator, traditionally being the primary public measurement of labour market performance (Denniss, 2001, p.iv).
Table Three: Unemployment, Political Parties and Proportionate Intakes, 1972-2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unemployment Range</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;4%</td>
<td>0.78%</td>
<td>0.75-0.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0.38-0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>0.39-0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1-8.5%</td>
<td>0.59%</td>
<td>0.43-0.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>0.45%</td>
<td>0.36-0.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;8.5%</td>
<td>0.46%</td>
<td>0.33-0.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>0.56%</td>
<td>0.47-0.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: for population and migration, see: Figure One, for unemployment, see: Treasury (2000) and ABS (2010).

Table Three is an attempt to control for the economy. It sorts the data years into groups based on the range of unemployment in which it sat and the party that was in government; it then averages out each party's relative intakes. By only comparing governments facing similar levels of unemployment, it aims to reflect how the parties have acted when placed in a parallel economic climate. Granted, the specific brackets are somewhat arbitrary, but that seems like an unfortunate necessity for any study numerically delineating between different ‘environments’.

Table Three provides some empirical evidence for the classical economic theories linking the state of the labour market with migration decisions. As we can see, there has been an overall, but not quite unanimous, tendency towards promoting larger programs in periods of lower unemployment. However, for the paper’s specific question, it also provides a certain degree of support for the previous section’s conclusions. Indeed, the measurement suggests that, when faced with certain economic imperatives, the Labor Party has possessed...
a more expansionist disposition. In the periods when unemployment has sat between 4-6% and 6.1-8.5%, which actually account for over three quarters of our data set, the ALP has promoted higher relative intakes than their Liberal counterparts. In the 4-6% bracket, Labor averaged a program of 0.7% of population, whilst the Liberals' mean was 0.6%. This means that, in the shared context of a robust and relatively tight jobs-market, the Labor Party has been historically more expansionist in disposition. Similarly, when joblessness has crept higher, sitting between 6.1 and 8.5%, again the ALP's average program has been more generous, this time by a larger margin of 0.59% to 0.45%. This particular result seems both curious and potentially illuminating: considering the Labor Party's relationship with the union movement, we might theoretically expect organised labour's opposition to migration to rise alongside unemployment (Haus, 1999, p.683). Instead, the inter-party gap actually grew larger as joblessness increased. As we will expand upon in the next section, this specific result may help to disentangle the complex motivators driving the Labor Party's historical approach to the program. However, beyond this observation, the key point here is that, in the two economic brackets that account for the majority of the data-set, the Labor Party has promoted visibly higher intakes. When unemployment has sat between 4% and 8.5%, the ALP's migration programs have been proportionately superior to the Liberal Party's. Ultimately, by controlling for the external environment that has framed party decisions, this chapter can now lend the previous section’s suppositions (linking Labor with larger programs) a greater degree of nuance and explanatory muscle.

However, when gauging the strength of this conclusion and the extent to which it reflects party differences, we should acknowledge a few caveats. The first is that, despite Labor's average intakes being higher, the gaps between the parties have not been uniformly large. For instance, when unemployment sat between 4 and 6%, the ALP's average was 0.7% and the Coalition's was 0.6%. Statistically speaking, with a mean of 0.63% and a standard
deviation of 0.17%, the behaviour of the two parties, whilst different, was not enormously so: both parties’ average intakes were well within the one unit of deviation. The next bracket’s disparity was admittedly more meaningful, but, again, not by a great deal. With a mean of 0.52% and a standard deviation of 0.14%, the partisan distinction (of 0.59% and 0.45%) did again sit between the one unit of deviation. This point is simply attempting to place the differences in some sort of perspective. Whilst Labor’s proportionate intakes have certainly been more generous in these particular economic contexts, we should acknowledge that the results have not always been tremendously dissimilar.

Secondly, within brackets of unemployment, the size of partisan programs have not always aligned or appeared coherent: when in similar economic environments, uni-party intakes have been often quite disparate. For instance, when unemployment has sat between 6.1 and 8.5%, the ALP and Liberal Party’s respective intakes have ranged from 0.43 – 0.76% and 0.36 – 0.65%. Similar spreads were registered in both the two other major brackets (see: Table Three). Whilst this partially reflects outlying years, the intra-bracket ranges do suggest that, across different periods, the parties have not always responded to the same environment with the same, or coherent, motivations and mindsets. At times their dispositions have been more expansionist and at times they have been more restrictionist. As the next section will explore, this could potentially reflect the contradictory nature (see: section 1.3) of motivations governing partisan behaviour.

The final important caveat is that not all economic brackets have conformed to this purported trend. When unemployment has transcended 8.5% (which has comprised less than one-sixth of the period’s years) the Liberal Party, rather than Labor, has implemented more generous programs. In this, the highest bracket of unemployment, the Liberal average has been 0.56%, whilst Labor’s average has been 0.46%. Again, this point is attempting to qualify the inter-party trend: even if the majority of evidence suggests a relationship between Labor and higher intakes, it has still not been unanimously reflected in all our measurements.
Whilst Australia's existing scholarship has often acknowledged the interaction between labour markets and parties' migratory decisions (Collins, 1995; Jupp, 2002; Simon, 1989; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129), it has not yet attempted to explicitly control for the former's influence. This section has designed and implemented one such method of doing this. However, contrary to both Chapter One's hypothesis and the theories relating the labour-movement to a more restrictionist disposition (Freeman, 1997, p.47; Donnelly, 2011, p.6), our measurements have found a tentative link between the Labor Party and more expansive programs. When unemployment has sat between 4% and 8.5% (the two brackets which account for over three quarters of the thirty-nine year period), Labor's average intakes have been larger than the Liberal's. The only bracket that coincided with a higher Liberal intake was when unemployment surpassed 8.5%, which, at less than one-sixth of the data-set, represented a relatively short period of history. When answering the paper's question (about the potential existence of a partisan difference), we should acknowledge both this positive evidence and these qualifiers. Ultimately, it seems reasonable to conclude that, controlling for unemployment, the period has registered an uneven, yet observable relationship between Labor and larger programs. However, we must concede that this inter-party distinction has been neither enormously large nor uniformly reflected across all economic contexts.

2.3. Transitionary Periods of Governance: Partisanship and Potential Motivators

Such a long-term, almost panoptical style of analysis does, however, carry one major limitation. Whilst giving an important overview of longer-term partisan tendencies, it only has a limited capacity to illuminate where these trends have stemmed from: in other words, it does not tell us the reasons why the parties have behaved as they have. With this in mind, the chapter's final section will take a closer examination of the period's governments. By focussing on the times where power was transferred from one major party to the other, it will do two things. Firstly, to further answer the paper's question, it will ask whether, as the
party in office has changed, so too has the program's size. This transposes much of the existing literature's implicit logic (that is, that if political parties were themselves important variables, we would expect a parliamentary change to coincide within a change in the volume of permanent arrivals [see: Price, 1979; Patience, 1989; Betts 2003]) to a longer historical period. Secondly, it will explore the ways in which individual governments have illuminated the tensions between the complex motivations of party behaviour (see: Chapter 1.3). Ultimately, it will argue that, rather than remaining static, the relative importance of these imperatives has fluctuated over time. Moreover, it will link these changing motivations with the previous section's findings, arguing that they have partially driven the period's lack of intra-bracket coherence (see: Table Three, 'range').

**Figure Four:** Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Whitlam to Fraser (1972–1983)

![Figure Four: Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Whitlam to Fraser (1972–1983)](image)


Figure Four maps the Whitlam and Fraser administrations’ intakes against unemployment. When comparing the two governments, Freeman and Birrell have argued that the Liberal Party ‘restored [the migration program] as an important national priority’ (2001, p.532). Indeed, a number of other commentators have observed a similar link between the Liberal administration and larger programs (Price, 1979, p.212-213; Tavan, 2005, p.427; Allsop, 2008, p.22). However, when attempting to understand the two governments’ migration policies, and also the reasons behind them, a more economics-conscious reading of the evidence seems necessary; indeed, some of the pieces appear too dualistic to provide an
accurate insight into the partisan dynamic (see: Price, 1979). Like the previous section suggested, rather than defining the regimes in numerical binaries (that is, irrespective of context, whether they have preferred either large or small intakes), what seems important is the parties' unique reactions to different economic climates.

Firstly, this seems true because the early Whitlam years coincided with relatively large migration programs. As Betts has pointed out, when the Labor Government was elected in 1972, it kept the intake high (2006, p.42). As we can see in Figure Four, the first two Whitlam years (which corresponded with the thirty-nine year period's lowest rates of unemployment) actually registered larger programs than at any time during Fraser's tenure. The program remained, in the words of Birrell and Freeman, 'an important national priority'. Consequently, any distinction between the governments did not appear to have stemmed from the parties' inalienable dispositions (that is, preferences which ignored context), but rather unique responses to different economic imperatives: in other words, there seems to have been a partisan difference in the parties' reactions to rising unemployment.

As Figure Four shows, after the government's initially high intakes, the Labor party cut the program quite drastically in 1975. This substantial reduction (the government actually halved the intake) was made in the direct context of a jump in unemployment (Allsop, 2008, p.22). Indeed, the timing of the cuts suggests that the era's Labor Party was highly sensitive to the caprices of the labour market: as Betts has argued, whilst partially influenced by concerns over urban and environmental pressures, these decisions were fundamentally driven by changing dynamics in the nation's employment (2006, p.42-43). If, as much of the literature suggests, the Fraser government was more expansionist in disposition than Labor, it was largely because of its response to this particular economic imperative. Whilst its rise was not as drastic as Whitlam's reductions (despite gradual increases in joblessness, the intake remained relatively stable until 1979 [see: Figure Four]) the government did meaningfully increase permanent arrivals during its final term. And as Foster and Stockley have pointed out, this expansion was particularly striking, insofar as it coexisted with a
relatively high, and broadly rising, state of unemployment (1988, p.12). Thus, if there was a partisan distinction between Fraser and Whitlam, it was not based on crude preferences for either higher or lower intakes: policy differences stemmed from conflicting approaches to certain labour market imperatives.

When attempting to understand the reasons behind the era’s partisan behaviour, these results appear quite illuminating. As Haus has argued, we would theoretically expect organised labour’s opposition to immigration (insofar as its interests are threatened by large intakes [Freeman, 1997, p.47]) to heighten in periods of increasing unemployment, whereby the labour market conditions challenging unions are broadly amplified (1999, p.683). Indeed, at least notionally, the interests of the labour movement appear particularly elastic: even more so than other partisan motivations (especially the relatively static imperatives associated with ideology and multiculturalism) the intensity of its preferences is shaped by the state of employment. Looking at Figure Four, Whitlam’s government did broadly reflect these theoretical assumptions. The party’s approach to the migration program closely followed economic trends; its policy became substantively more restrictionist as unemployment rose. And, as Warhurst has pointed out, it is impossible to divorce these active choices from the party’s relationship with labour: they were, in his words, largely due to ‘pressure from the trade union movement’ (1996, p.249). Indeed, at the time, labour took a largely restrictionist stance towards the program. The country’s largest peak body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, consistently expressed misgivings about the general size of permanent migration (Quinlin and Lever-Tracy, 1990, p.175-76). Thus, because its response to different economic climates was contextually congruous with and directly influenced by the interests of unions, Figure Four does suggest that, more so than the left-wing reasons for larger programs (such as the more constant ideological and political capital imperatives associated with multiculturalism [see: section 1.3; Borowski, 2000, pp.464-465]), the Whitlam government was primarily influenced by its formal and philosophical affiliation with labour.
Whilst gradual and not of a tremendously large scale, the era’s partisan difference seems to have primarily stemmed from this motivational disparity. Fraser’s Liberal Party shared Labor’s ideological support for multiculturalism (and, as some have cynically suggested, its desire to court ethnic voters [Birrell, 1995, p.3], but did not also possess the reductionist motivations associated with union-affiliation (Fraser, 1981, p.1-7; Lansbury, 1984, p.2). Indeed, if anything, Fraser’s government maintained a relationship with a business community whose support for immigration was much less elastic than organised labour’s opposition (Castles, 1992, p.57). Thus, whilst it is always difficult to disentangle and pinpoint the exact reasons behind executive decisions, a close reading of Figure Four does hint at potential partisan motivations. If the era’s Liberal Party supported larger programs, the evidence suggests that it was largely because of the parties’ different responses to rising unemployment, driven by their different relationships with labour.

Figure Five: Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Fraser to Hawke-Keating 1979-1996

![Graph showing migration and unemployment](image)


However, if we examine the next change of government, we can see that these motivations have not always defined the partisan dynamic (see: Figure Five). Unlike the previous transition, the literature comparing Fraser to the Hawke-Keating government features no single, predominant reading. Some, like Patience, have focussed on the initial contraction, whilst others, like Jupp and Collins, have emphasised the mid-term expansion in arrivals and the influence of the era’s economy (Patience, 1989, pp.419-420; Jupp, 2002, p.47; Collins,
1995, p.2). Whilst both analyses have merit (the program oscillated in size and the pieces all reflect certain, but not all, elements of Labor’s migratory record) the latter seems most relevant for this paper. Again, the most striking feature of the Labor administration’s migration program was the way that it responded to certain economic imperatives.

As the previous section found, when unemployment has sat between 6.1% and 8.5%, the Labor Party’s proportionate intakes have been historically high. Within this particular labour market context, the ALP has promoted programs averaging 0.59% of population, whilst the Liberal Party’s average has been 0.45% (see: Table Three). In light of both Whitlam’s policies and the aforementioned theories of union behaviour, this result appears curious: instead of becoming increasingly prudent in times of relatively high unemployment, Labor has actually been quite expansionist. A close reading of Figure Three and Five suggests that the Hawke years were chiefly responsible for this partisan difference. From the mid-eighties until the decade’s end (which coincided with both a recession-driven, sharp increase in unemployment and the transfer of party leadership to Paul Keating) the Labor Party promoted comparatively large intakes alongside comparatively high levels of unemployment (Withers, 2002, p.11). Where Whitlam was highly sensitive to the labour market, the Hawke-Keating government was less concerned with responding to these pressures with heavily restrictionist policies. This evidence suggests that, next to Whitlam, the Hawke-Keating government was influenced by a fundamentally different balance of migratory motivations.

As with the earlier period, unions still broadly opposed large-scale immigration amidst high unemployment. This was especially the case for those migrants serving primarily economic functions (Tsokhas, 1994, p. 445). Indeed, according to Freeman and Birrell, the party’s initial hesitancy towards the program was largely ‘owing to trade union concerns over migrant worker competition in the labour market’ (2001, pp.532-33). However, less like Whitlam, and more like Fraser, Hawke actually went on to grow the program in the context of high unemployment and these associated union desires. At least in terms of the program’s
size, this implies that, compared to the 1972-75 government, the Labor Party’s motivational balance was more skewed towards certain expansionist imperatives. In particular, it especially points towards those imperatives less reactive to the labour market. Whilst it is difficult to disentangle multiculturalism’s political capital and ideological motivations (that is, those imperatives related to electoral concerns and those related to more pure, philosophical considerations) they both appear to have played important roles in the government’s migratory decisions.

On one side, the Hawke-Keating government was deeply conscious of the ethnic bloc’s electoral weight (Betts, 2003, p.174). In response to the migrant lobby’s ‘vociferous criticisms’ of early migratory decisions, Borowski has argued that, towards the late 1980s, Labor became increasingly pliant to the electoral bloc’s demands, including their preference for more expansive programs (2000, p.467). Indeed, Peter Walsh, the administration’s one-time Finance Minister, has acknowledged that policy was often made in order to avoid ‘political backlash from ethnic leaders’ (1994, p.28). However, beyond these purely electoral concerns, the administration was also ideologically and rhetorically supportive of the multicultural project. Indeed, especially under Hawke, the party consistently advocated and defended migration’s role in Australia’s economic and cultural development (Mayne, 2009, p.100). Even in the context of 1988’s ‘Fitzgerald Report’ (which, in suggesting certain caveats, challenged more liberal definitions of the term) the government still strongly endorsed its ‘National Agenda for Multicultural Australia’ (Jupp, 1997, p.135). Whilst, again, assigning intent is an invariably imprecise process, the Hawke-Keating Labor government’s response to rising unemployment (in that it was not overtly restrictionist) implies a less labour-centric approach to the migration program’s size. Whilst more a matter of different balances than polar absolutes, the evidence suggests that, comparatively, the administration was more influenced by certain expansionist imperatives: in particular, it points to the importance of the less economically-elastic political capital and ideological motives relating to multiculturalism.
However, before going on, we should acknowledge a couple of caveats. The first is that, if the ALP was not as reactive to union concerns in terms of the program's size, it does necessarily mean that it was totally unresponsive. Indeed, as stated, the labour movement was particularly concerned with the influence of economic migrants (Tsokhas, 1994, p. 445). Because the migration program is comprised of the family reunion, skilled and special eligibility streams, it is plausible that, in terms of its internal composition, Labor was still conscious of union interests and favoured migrants without explicitly economic purposes. In fact, as will be examined later, this was largely the case (see: Chapter 3.3). The second qualifier is that, whilst the aforementioned trends were relatively representative, they still did not reflect the administration's entire period of governance. In the early 1990s, when unemployment was particularly high (the era registered the largest joblessness rate in modern Australian history), the party did act to reduce the intake (see: Figure Five). Ultimately, these caveats point to both the limitations of focusing solely on 'size' and the problems associated with classifying an entire government in a clear numerical binary.

Figure Six: Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Hawke-Keating to Howard, 1985-2007


Figure Six graphs the migration program Howard inherited from Keating and the trajectory in which he guided it. In terms of this specific transition, most of the relevant literature has

9 After all, this was the time of the ‘Accords’ and a particularly close institutional relationship between Labor and the ACTU (ALP, & ACTU 1983; Kenyon an Lewis, 1992, p.325).
argued that the intake grew under the Liberal Party. As Higley et al have asserted, and has Betts has echoed, ‘during the Howard government’s long life, aggregate intakes rose’ (Higley et al, 2011, p.3; Betts, 2010, p.49). And, at face value, this was certainly true. That the program grew from 1996 to 2007 is both self-evident and irrefutable. However, for this paper, we need to ask a more interrogatory question: we need to ask whether this expansion was attributable to the Liberal Party’s unique partisan preferences.

Whilst the program’s size grew steadily and consistently under Howard, it did so in the context of declining unemployment (see: Figure Six). Indeed, from 1996 to 2007, unemployment fell consistently (and, overall, substantially) from 8.6 to 4.5%. If we accept that policy decisions are framed by the state of the labour market (that is, that demand for labour can create different imperatives for governments [Simon, 1989: Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129]) then this expansion was not itself remarkable: theoretically, we would expect the migration program to grow alongside a strong jobs-market. For this paper, the pertinent question then becomes, not simply whether the program expanded, but whether the program expanded to a greater extent than other comparable periods.

From 1997 to 2003, the unemployment rate fell from 8.3% to 6%. At the same time, the intake grew from 0.36% to 0.57% of population. Whilst this reflected an overall expansion from the end of the Hawke-Keating years, it was not necessarily an expansion from the times in which Labor experienced a similar labour market. Indeed, if we look back to the mid-to-late 1980s, unemployment was of a very similar size and followed a very similar trajectory. In this particular context, the ALP also increased the program, but they actually did it to a greater extent than Howard: from 1984-1988, the program grew from 0.42% to 0.76% of population (see: Figure Six). In part, these comparable periods help to explain Table Three, which found that, when unemployment has sat between 6 and 8.5%, the Labor Party has promoted higher proportionate intakes than the Liberal Party (see: Chapter 2.2, ‘Table Three’). Ultimately, Howard only appears more expansionist than the Hawke-Keating government if we accept a misguided methodological premise: that is, that we should
compare years that are chronologically, rather than economically, similar. Indeed, if we take this into account, the opposite seems true. The governments’ overall average intakes were functionally the same (at 0.54% of population [Table One]), despite Labor experiencing labour markets far more conducive to restrictionist policies (on average, unemployment was 8.6% under Hawke-Keating and 6.2% under Howard).

In terms of explaining partisan motivation, Figure Six does not provide a great deal of stark evidence. Across its eleven years, the Howard government responded to gradually falling unemployment as we would theoretically expect, albeit to a slightly less expansionist degree than earlier administrations. Because of this, unlike the other governments, it is unclear how it would have reacted to the different imperatives associated with rising unemployment. However, if we take a broader, contextual look at the administration, its behaviour can still be partially understood. Indeed, the era’s Liberal Party experienced a significant tension between certain expansionist and restrictionist imperatives: in particular, between its relationship with the business community and its uneasy approach to multiculturalism. On one hand, the Howard government maintained strong ties with industry (Cooper and Ellem, 2008, pp.552-533). In terms of migration policy, this business community was vocally and consistently supportive of higher targets: as Betts has put it, it was an integral member of Australia’s ‘growth lobby’ (Betts, 2006, pp.40-52). And, as Betts has gone on to show, members of Cabinet were both conscious of these concerns and aware of their associated pressures (2006, p.49). On the other hand, Howard was notoriously mistrustful of multiculturalism (Johnson, 2002, p.178). When elected in 1996, he campaigned under the slogan of ‘For All of Us’, suggesting that, unlike the previous Labor government, it would not privilege minority interests, the ethnic community included, above other Australians (Ang and Stratton, 2006, p.24). And, in pre-executive statements, Howard even linked this scepticism with a normative approach to migration: in 1988, he suggested that he ‘wouldn’t want to see it [the rate of Asian migration] greater than it already is’ (Tate, 2009, p.110). Whilst admittedly and inevitably speculative, the Howard government’s migration program
(which grew very gradually alongside a considerable fall in unemployment) can perhaps be read as a product of these competing impulses: as a balance between the expansionary desires of key supporters and its restrictionist aversion to multiculturalism.

**Figure Seven**: Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Howard to Rudd-Gillard, 2000-2010.

![Figure Seven: Permanent Migration and Unemployment from Howard to Rudd-Gillard, 2000-2010.](chart.png)


Finally, Figure Seven maps the most recent transfer of executive government. Whilst the period is short, and the Labor Party is continuing to formulate policy, there are still existing analyses of the transition. For instance, Stutchbury has argued that the government has overseen ‘the nation's most rapid immigration expansion since the 1960s' (2011, p.46). Birrell and Healey have made a similar assertion, arguing that the Rudd-Gillard government has ‘pursued a record high migration policy’ (2010, p.39). Whilst these points are technically correct (the early Rudd intakes were numerically, but not proportionately, higher than the early Whitlam years [see: Figure One]) they again assume that party decisions can be divorced from economic context. The Labor government’s migration programs may have been historically high, but, especially in its first year, it has governed amidst unemployment rates that have been historically low (see: Figure One). And, even then, the proportionate sizes of its intakes have been only slightly larger than those it inherited from Howard (see: Figure Seven). When attempting to understand Labor’s nascent behaviour, and also the reasons behind it, a more illuminating question is, not whether the Rudd-Gillard
government has been different to the entire Howard administration, but whether it has been different to the governments facing similar labour market contexts. Surprisingly, the most instructive of the available comparisons is also the most temporally disparate: in terms of the labour market, the most contextually similar period of governance was the actually under Whitlam (see: Figure One). If we compare the migration decisions of the two Labor governments, then the Rudd-Gillard administration’s approach to the program (and also the way that the ALP has changed) becomes clearer. Like Whitlam, Rudd was elected alongside relatively low unemployment and a relatively high permanent intake; like Whitlam, Rudd initially maintained this large program; and, like Whitlam, after this initial period, Rudd faced a spike in unemployment amidst economic insecurity (see: Figure One). What separated these governments, and what most highlights their differences, was their response to this changing labour market. Where, as explained earlier, Whitlam cut the program drastically as unemployment rose (in 1975, the program was more than halved [Figure Four]) Rudd was much more prudent. The government did downwardly revise the program as the labour market worsened, but to a much smaller extent: instead of halving it, the previous year’s intake was reduced by less than 5%\(^{10}\) (MIAC, 2009; Figure Seven). Whilst still too early to make definitive statements, this behaviour places the government closer to the Hawke tradition, insofar as, whilst still conscious of economic pressures, the administration has been much less extreme in its sensitivity to rising unemployment. Ultimately, when experiencing a similar labour market to Whitlam, the Rudd-Gillard government has revised the intake, but to a much less drastic degree.

When read as a whole, these transitions do not point to one coherent, overarching narrative about specific parties and the program’s size. At certain points, the Labor Party has expanded the program it inherited from the Liberal Party and, at other times, the opposite

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\(^{10}\) This is slightly higher if we take into account government forecasts (against projections, the cuts were more like 10-15%). However, as this criterion has not been applied to other governments, it would be an inappropriate standard at which to judge this particular one (MIAC, 2009).
has occurred. As implicitly suggested throughout the section, this incoherence can be attributed to two primary causes. Firstly, the parties have governed in distinct economic contexts. As emphasised, because the state of the labour market has tended to frame migratory decisions, different administrations have responded to fundamentally different policy environments. This has meant that, across party history (see, for instance, Howard and Fraser’s distinct economic climates and their resulting decisions) neither has guided the program’s size in one single direction. Secondly, even acknowledging this, the major parties have often reacted differently to the same labour market conditions. Indeed, especially with the Labor governments, different administrations have responded distinctly to rising unemployment. As argued in the transitions’ analyses, this is a reflection of each administration’s unique motivational balance: it highlights the often competing impulses influencing both parties’ decisions and the different emphases placed by individual governments. Ultimately, largely because of these two reasons, the five governments have shaped the program in certain ways, but, when united, they have not done so in a single, coherent partisan direction.

2.4. Conclusion

Across its three sections, Chapter Two has examined whether the nation’s partisan clash has also reflected divergent approaches to the migration program's size. To do this, it has used methods with two distinct scales: a longer-term, more macroscopic approach (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and a more in-depth focus on specific governments and transitions (section 2.3). The latter, as just stated, did not find a consistent relationship between specific parties and the program’s size. Because of both economic contexts and transient motivations, governments representing both parties have not guided the program in a single, and certainly not coherent, direction. The former, however, did point to certain qualified inter-party trends. If we control for unemployment and analyse the period as a whole (instead of separating the data into specific administrations) there is some evidence linking the Labor
Party with proportionately higher intakes. Indeed, when unemployment has sat between 4 and 8.5%, which constitutes the vast majority of examined years, Labor has promoted larger programs than their Liberal counterparts. However, even within these results, some caveats are necessary: the partisan difference was neither registered in all economic climates nor always tremendously large. Ultimately, taking into account both methods, it seems reasonable to conclude that, in certain economic contexts, there has been a soft relationship between the ALP and larger proportionate programs, but that such a link has not been coherently or consistently reflected in the behaviour of each of the period’s five governments.
Chapter III
The Migration Program’s Composition, 1984-2010

When examining the migration program, size is not the only significant partisan indicator: equally as important is how governments have used that size. Because the intake is a composite measurement (insofar as it is the sum of different ‘streams’) there has also been considerable room for inter-party distinction within the broad category of permanent migration. By focussing on the relative size of the program’s streams, this chapter will question whether either party has disproportionately promoted a certain ‘type’ of immigrant.

In its totality, the migration program contains three streams, covering ‘skilled’, ‘family reunion’ and ‘special eligibility’ migrants (DoPS, 2010a, p.1). These streams are made up of different types of people, based on different governmental considerations. The two largest streams, and hence the two with the most potential to change the program’s compositional balance, are for ‘skilled’ and ‘family reunion’ migrants (DIAC, 2010, p.iv). On one hand, the skilled stream has an explicitly economic rationale. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the stream is designed to target ‘migrants who have skills or abilities that will contribute to the Australian economy’ (DIAC, 2011b). Whilst its specific dimensions have been dynamic (the targeted industries and requisite skills are somewhat malleable [DIAC, 2011d]), its overarching aim has remained distinctly material: that is, to meet shortages in the Australian labour market. On the other hand, the family reunion stream is not founded on nearly as economic a pillar. As its name suggests, its core aim is to reunite existing residents with their ‘partners’, ‘children’, ‘parents’ and ‘other family’. Unlike the skilled stream, those entering under this model are not forced to pass tests to prove their economic utility or aptitude in English (DIAC, 2011c). Because of both the relative dominance of these streams (as of 2010, they account for over 95% of Australia’s migration program [DIAC, 2010, p.iv]) and their conceptual differences (one being about Australia’s economic performance and the other being about meeting existing migrants’ cultural,
emotional and psychological needs) this chapter will use their relative sizes as a tool to determine whether different political parties have preferred different migrant compositions. Indeed, if we look at the existing literature on the question of partisanship and composition, most of it has also used this stream-based dichotomy as its evidential source (Patience, 1989; Betts, 2003; Higley et al, 2009).

In terms of length, Chapter Three will analyse a slightly shorter period of time than Chapter Two. Where the latter examined the program’s size from 1972-2010, this chapter will study its composition from 1984-2010. This restriction is an unfortunate necessity, insofar as the comparable data only goes back to the mid-1980s. The government only began keeping reliable records on these streams (that is, skilled, family reunion and special eligibility) in 1984-85 (DoPS, 2010b, p.10, and p.13). However, whilst this temporal limitation must be acknowledged (the evidence does not cover the entire post-White Australia era) the period still allows a relatively significant insight into the relationship between parties and composition: the period features a roughly even disaggregation of Labor and Liberal governance and still covers a quarter of a century of migration history.

Echoing Chapter Two, Chapter Three will explore composition in three steps. Firstly, it will directly compare each year’s ‘composition ratio’ (that is, of the skilled stream against the family reunion stream) to the party in government. However, like Chapter Two, it will ultimately question the strength of such a blunt, variable-free measurement. Indeed, by adding the factor of unemployment, it will proceed to test this party behaviour in the context of Australia’s economic climate. This will analyse whether, when facing similar labour market pressures, there has been a partisan distinction in the program’s compositional balance. Finally, it will examine transitional periods of government and ask whether a change in political party has tended to signal a change in composition. Like the previous chapter, by focussing on specific governments and their policy decisions, this final section will also examine the potential reasons behind any partisan difference.
3.1 The Composition Ratio and Political Parties

Figure Eight maps the composition of Australia’s permanent migration program since 1984-85. More specifically, it illustrates both the total annual intake and, within that measurement, the relative contribution of each stream. As an initial glance suggests, where the overall program has fluctuated, so too has the relationship between the family reunion and skilled streams. The program in 1994, which took in less than half a skilled migrant to every one family reunion migrant, was significantly different to 2008, which took in over two. A similarly initial assessment tells us that, over time, the historical trend has been towards a greater emphasis on skills. This becomes even more apparent when we map the progression of the skilled/family reunion ratio since 1984-85 (see: Figure Nine).

**Figure Eight:** The Migration Program’s Composition: 1984-2010.

Source: DoPS (2010a, p.13).

Figure Nine illustrates the period's 'composition ratio'. This is an attempt to represent a government’s approach to the program’s internal composition. To get this figure, I have simply divided the relevant year’s skilled intake by its family reunion intake. Whilst the existing literature on composition has often used such a ratio implicitly (see: Patience, 1989; Betts, 2003), it has not often been formalised. For the purposes of this paper, such a
measurement is somewhat necessary, insofar as we require a standardised figure to compare temporally disparate administrations.

**Figure Nine**: Ratio of Skilled Stream to Family Reunion Migrants, 1984-2010

Source: DoPS (2010, p.13).

Over this period, Bob Birrell has argued that Australia's migration program has been increasingly driven by 'labour market outcomes'. Indeed, he refers to them as the 'key determinants' of migration policy (2003, p.36). An analysis of Figure Nine does lend credence to his assertion. Especially since the mid-nineties, the skilled stream has progressively taken precedence over family reunion. However, for this paper, we have to ask a slightly more specific question: just how much of this trend can be attributed to the unique dispositions of the major parties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Average Skill Stream</th>
<th>Average Family Reunion Stream</th>
<th>Average Ratio</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawke/Keating, 1984-96 (ALP)</td>
<td>32, 167</td>
<td>58, 258</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.23-0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard, 1996-07 (Liberal Party)</td>
<td>58, 293</td>
<td>39, 237</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.62-2.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudd/Gillard, 2007-11 (ALP)</td>
<td>110,539</td>
<td>55, 259</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.82-2.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DoPS (2010, p.13).
Table Five: Political Parties and Average Skill/Family Reunion Stream Ratios.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Average Skill Stream</th>
<th>Average Family Reunion Stream</th>
<th>Average Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>51,258</td>
<td>61,777</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>58,293</td>
<td>39,237</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DoPS (2010, p.13).

Table Four averages out the three administrations’ compositional ratios; Table Five does the same thing, but, instead of focussing on administrations, it conflates the results along party lines. In terms of partisan distinction, these tables do present a degree of affirmative evidence. Like Chapter One’s hypothesis (that is, that the Liberal Party might prefer more skilled-focussed intakes) Table Five implies a relationship between specific governments and the program’s composition. If we compare the Hawke-Keating and Howard administrations, which actually account for over four-fifths of our data-set, it is clear that the Liberal administration promoted considerably more skilled-centric programs. Reflecting the period’s trend-line, Australia’s compositional ratio averaged 0.55 during former’s reign, whilst latter averaged a substantially higher 1.48: indeed, the Liberal government more than doubled the ratio of their Labor predecessor (see: Table Four). And with an overall mean of 1.10 and a standard deviation of 0.64, the two administrations’ compositional ratios were significantly divergent. As Betts has argued, the Howard government appeared to ‘sharpen the program’s economic focus and reduce the size of its family-reunion component’ (2003, p.169).

If we take a step back to Table Five’s more blunt inter-party measurement (that is, to the average ratio across each party’s total time in office), then this conclusion is, albeit to a less drastic degree, reinforced. As the table suggests, in their accumulative years in government since the data became available, the Labor Party has averaged a compositional ratio of 0.83 and the Liberal Party has averaged one of 1.48. This measurement tells us that, over the entirety of our data-set, the Liberal Party has sponsored programs that have, to greater extent than Labor, disproportionately emphasised permanent migration’s more economic
functions. Thus, if we interpret this particular evidence (alongside the Hawke-Keating and Howard comparison) in an immediate sense, and ignore the potential influence of context, then Chapter One’s hypothesis appears to be true: comparatively, the Liberal Party seems to have particularly preferred the skilled stream. The Betts narrative, of a Liberal government more concerned with economic migration, appears to contain a certain grain of truth. However, like the analysis of the program’s size, these tables also contain evidence which complicate this picture, implying that there are other variables that have influenced this compositional change.

If political parties were the sole dictators of the intake’s composition, and the Coalition had a greater intrinsic disposition towards skilled-based immigration, there are certain things which are unlikely to be observed. The first is a Labor government possessing the highest average composition ratio. However, as Table Four shows, this has been exactly the case with the party’s most recent, Rudd-Gillard administration. Since its election in late 2007, Australia has averaged two skilled stream migrants to each new family reunion arrival, a reasonably higher mean than the Howard government’s 1.48. Furthermore, the peak of the compositional ratio, at 2.18 in 2008, was also registered under Rudd. In fact, it was projected to be even higher, if not for financial crisis-driven insecurity and their associated labour-market strains: the skilled stream was revised down by the Labor government in the context of the GFC’s economic uncertainty (The Age, 2009). As Birrell and Healey have put it, the Rudd-Gillard administration has seemed to ‘privilege the delivery of migrant skills over all other factors in setting immigration policy’ (2010, p.40). Ultimately, rejecting the hypothesis that the Labor Party has consistently emphasised the program’s family reunion stream, the latest ALP government’s approach to composition has been fundamentally different to the Hawke-Keating years.

On top of this, if we look at intra-government fluctuation, then the notion that party autonomy has not been the sole determinant of migratory composition is reinforced. For instance, in the Hawke-Keating years, the skilled-to-family reunion ratio oscillated from 0.23
to 0.81. Indeed, within their period of party government, the program’s composition both rose and fell a number of times. Under Howard, the composition also experienced similar magnitudes of variation (Table Five; Figure Nine). Like the analysis of size, these internal ranges suggest that the composition has not been solely the product of the major parties’ stable dispositions: because the composition has often varied drastically within governments, migratory decisions have evidently been influenced by more than the parties’ constant policy preferences. This does not automatically disprove a link between political parties and migrant composition, but it certainly implies a meaningful flaw in their immediate causal connection. Like Chapter Two, these points suggest that such a simplistic interpretation of the data is misguided: that, in order to genuinely understand the phenomena’s relationship, we must account for the other variables guiding policy. As Chapter Two argued, the most important external variable framing the program’s size has been the labour market. If we also examine its relationship with composition, it becomes clear that the state of unemployment has enjoyed a similarly significant influence over the program’s internal balance.

3.2 The Economy, Composition Ratio and Political Parties

As much of the conventional theory surrounding migration policy argues, periods of economic expansion tend to stimulate demand for migrant labour. Because migration adds to a nation’s labour pool, it is often used to fill holes in a tight jobs-market (Simon, 1989; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, p.129; Chapter 2.2). Whilst these conditions have historically influenced the migration program’s overall size, they have also shaped its internal composition. As the skilled stream is Australia’s main source of permanent economic migration (DIAC, 2011b), periods of high unemployment (whereby, as argued, the demand for migrant labour is diminished) disproportionately reduce the demand for the stream. In other words, because, more so than with family reunion, the skilled stream’s raison d’être is
fundamentally tied to the labour market, their relative sizes cannot be divorced from the economic contexts that frame policy.

This was certainly true of Australia’s most recent period of economic insecurity. In 2009, when Chris Evans revised the migration program because of the ‘economic pressures’ associated with the ‘global financial crisis’, skilled migration was the only stream targeted: 18,500 spots were cut, a 14% reduction in the forecasted intake (MOI, 2009). In fact, this decision reflected a broader international trend, with the world registering an overall drop in the number of economic migrants going to major immigrant-receiving nations (Fix et al, 2009, p.1). According to Fix et al, when confronted with this recession, governments across the globe embraced policies aiming to ‘restrict [migrant] access to their labour markets’ (2009, pp.5-6). If we look at Australia’s longer-term history of both composition and employment, then this relationship becomes even clearer.

**Figure Ten:** Australia’s Unemployment Rate and Composition Ratio, 1984-2010.

![Graph showing Australia's Unemployment Rate and Composition Ratio, 1984-2010.](image)

Source: For migration, see: APH (2010, p.13) and for unemployment, see: Treasury (2010) and ABS (2010).

Figure Ten maps Australia’s unemployment rate against its composition ratio. As the trendlines suggest, there has been, at the very least, a striking correlation between the two indicators. As the unemployment rate has risen, the ratio of skilled to family reunion arrivals
have tended to fall. Conversely, low unemployment rates have been conducive to relatively high skilled streams. However, whilst the relationship is certainly strong, it does not completely rule out a link between specific parties and different compositions. Indeed, as the two lines are not completely inverted (there are certain points at which the ratio has not directly reacted to unemployment), the graph concedes the possibility of further causal agents. This section will control for this variable and determine whether, within the same economic brackets, either party has behaved differently.

Table six: Political Parties, Unemployment and Average Composition Ratios, 1984-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-6.5%</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6-8.5%</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6&lt;</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Migration: DoPS (2010, p.13) and for unemployment, see: Treasury (2010) and ABS (2010).

Table Six shows how both parties have reacted to similar economic climates. Like Chapter Two, it sorts the available data into groups based on each year's unemployment rate and party in office. Concededly, because of the smaller amount of available evidence, it does have comparative limitations: the economic brackets are slightly larger, but, with twenty-six years with which to work, longer groupings are somewhat necessary.

If we look at the table, unemployment’s historical relationship with composition is apparent. The overwhelming tendency in both parties has been to endorse skills amidst a stronger jobs-market. However, beyond this, it also contains some important evidence supporting the notion that the Liberal Party has been particularly aggressive in promoting the skilled
stream. When unemployment has sat between 6.6 and 8.5% (which constitutes over half of the period’s data) the Liberal Party’s average ratio has been considerably higher than the Labor Party’s. In this bracket, the Howard government promoted ratios with an average of 0.98, a relatively even balance between the two streams. Within the same labour market context, the ALP’s average ratio was 0.49, only half that of the Liberal Party’s (see: Table Six). This means that, when faced with these broadly similar economic imperatives, the Liberal Party has been more skills-focussed than Labor. And, with a mean of 0.69 and a standard deviation of 0.34, this partisan gap has also been a meaningful one.

However, again, not all evidence supports the one, coherent conclusion. In periods of greater economic security and a tighter jobs-market, the Labor Party has not appeared to disproportionately support the family reunion stream. In fact, when unemployment has sat between 4% and 6.5%, the major parties’ behaviour has been almost identical. In this bracket, the ALP and Liberal Party have promoted respective composition ratios of 1.69 and 1.72 (see: Table Six). Thus, like the broader analysis of the migration program’s size, our measurements do not cohere to a single narrative. When unemployment has been low, parties have acted similarly, but when unemployment has risen, the Liberal Party’s programs have been comparatively more weighted towards the skilled stream. Ultimately, the two contexts have provided fundamentally different results.

If we are to make conclusions based on this evidence, then, we necessarily have to be more nuanced. Table Six suggests that, in different labour market climates, the two parties’ approaches to composition have historically diverged. That is, that when unemployment has been low, there has been a partisan consensus over disproportionately supporting the skilled stream. Insofar as one has existed, the partisan distinction has instead stemmed from the opposite economic pole: it arisen out of insecurity and higher unemployment. Indeed, amidst a weaker jobs-market, our evidence suggests that Labor has been considerably more reluctant than the Liberal Party to promote skilled migrants (see: Table Six). Whilst the next section will explore the potential reasons behind these results (and also some of their
limitations) our measurements do imply a qualified relationship between parties and composition: when unemployment has been moderately high, and not comparatively low, the Liberal Party has been significantly more skilled-centric than Labor.

3.3. Transitionary Periods of Governance: Composition and Potential Motivators

As argued in Chapter Two, the aforementioned method (which provides an overview of compositional history) has only a limited capacity to illuminate both the specifics of governmental decisions and the reasons behind them. Accordingly, this section will more closely examine the relationship between consecutive governments and their migration programs. By doing this, it will, like Chapter Two, analyse two main things. Firstly, it will study whether successive administrations, representing different political parties, have promoted different compositional policies. Secondly, it will examine how these migratory decisions have reflected the intricate motivations of party behaviour. Across both of these questions, the section will argue that the transitions reveal an uneven relationship between the Liberal Party and skilled migration; moreover, it will argue that this has primarily stemmed from different historical relationships with both unions and migrant communities. However, it will also acknowledge that, because of certain features and restrictions within the available evidence, these conclusions are necessarily limited.

Figure Ten: Unemployment and Composition Ratio from Hawke-Keating to Howard, 1984-2007

Source: For migration, see: DoPS (2010, p.13) and for unemployment, see: Treasury (2010) and ABS (2010).
Figure Ten maps the composition’s trajectory from Hawke-Keating to Howard. When examining this transition, most of the relevant literature has asserted a link between the Liberal Party and more skills-intensive migration. For instance, Betts has argued that the program’s economic focus was ‘sharpened’ by Howard (2003, p.169). Both Higley and Collins have made similar observations (Higley et al, 2011, p.3; Collins, 2008, p.254). And, as Figure Ten suggests, these contentions have certainly appeared true: the program’s skilled-to-family reunion ratio rose consistently under the Liberal government. From the composition it inherited (at 0.43), to the end of its term (at 1.96), the program was increasingly skewed towards economic migration. However, we should not necessarily assume that changes that occurred under a government were completely because of that government. Indeed, these compositional trends also existed alongside a broadly falling rate of unemployment (see: Figure Ten). If, as argued earlier, party decisions are framed by the state of the labour market, then these changes are not themselves proof of a relationship between parties and composition. They could also be a product of the increased need for skilled workers associated with changing labour conditions. To ascertain the distinction between Hawke-Keating and Howard, we instead have to ask whether the parties have reacted uniquely to the same external environment.

As analysed in Chapter Two, from the mid-1980s until the decade’s end, Australia’s unemployment rate fell from just above 8% to around 6%; from 1996 to 2003, the labour market experienced a trend of a similar size and trajectory. These mirror environments provide a lens in which to compare the two governments’ policies. In this context of relatively high, but falling, unemployment, Hawke’s Labor Party did expand the program’s proportion of skilled migrants: from 1985 to 1990, the ratio rose from 0.23 to 0.80. In Howard’s equivalent period of governance, the Liberal Party also grew the percentage of skilled arrivals. However, significantly, the administration did so to a much greater extent than Labor did: in this labour market context, the programs’ ratio grew from 0.43 to 1.62 (see: Figure Ten). Indeed, this helps to explain Table Six, which found that, when
unemployment has sat between 6.6 and 8.5%, the Liberal Party has been considerably more aggressive in promoting skills. And, in terms of this particular transition, it also helps to explain why the Howard government was, as Betts, Higley and Collins have argued, genuinely more skills-focussed than its predecessor: whilst both administrations grew the ratio in this shared context, Howard did so to a far greater degree than Hawke-Keating.

When attempting to understand why the administrations behaved differently, these results also illuminate certain motivational disparities. Firstly, the distinction suggests that we should reconsider our earlier assessment of Hawke-Keating’s relationship with trade unions. Indeed, just because the government’s intakes were comparatively high, does not necessarily mean that it altogether ignored the interests of organised labour. As stated earlier, in this particular period, the union movement was specifically concerned with economic migration (Tsokhas, 1994, p. 445). And, as Birrell has argued, this makes theoretical sense, insofar as (considering their general interests in minimising the intake and how they are exacerbated by high unemployment [Freeman, 1997, p.47; Haus, 1999, p.683]) broader union reservations with migration are only intensified by the skilled stream: that is, the concerns over labour market outcomes are amplified when the arrivals are explicitly designed to enter that market (Birrell, 1984, p.72). For proof of these concerns, and to also illustrate how the era’s Labor Party was conscious of them, we only need to look at 1983’s initial ‘Prices and Incomes Accord’. The first ‘Accord’, the formal agreement between the ALP and ACTU, explicitly stated that ‘the family reunion [stream] and refugee intakes are of the highest priority’ (ALP and ACTU, 1983). Indeed, when explaining the reasons behind the period’s partisan distinction, this relationship (and its Liberal equivalent), seems crucial. Where the Labor Party had a formal agreement with the ACTU favouring the family reunion stream, the Liberal Party maintained the opposite: under Howard, the Liberal Party preserved a relationship with a business community whose support for migration was especially weighted towards commercially useful skills (Betts,
Thus, at least in part, the parties' different compositional balances reflected their different associations with economic organisations.

However, when explaining this distinction, these union and business affiliations tell only half of the story. Also significant were the governments' different relationships with actual migrant communities. Under Hawke, Labor (partially driven by its enthusiasm for multiculturalism and partially driven by more political concerns) fostered close ties with ethnic groups (Grattan, 1993, p.137; Betts, 2003, pp. 171-76). Whilst broadly supportive of expanded migration, these groups tended to be, for obvious reasons, particularly in favour of those spots relating to family reunion (Betts, 2003, p.171). And, in conjunction with the aforementioned union ties, the period's Labor Party was highly sensitive to these concerns (Birrell, 1992, p.36). As Peter Walsh has acknowledged, executive policy was conscious of outside pressure groups and specifically endeavoured to avoid the 'backlash of ethnic leaders' (Walsh, 1994, p.28).

Conversely, to the extent that this relationship existed, John Howard attempted to define himself in rhetorical opposition to such associations. As alluded to earlier, when elected, he distanced himself from the allegedly 'noisy' interests that, according to the Liberal Party, had come to dominate Australia's decision making (Sawer, 2004, p.8). Indeed, both the migrant lobby and the related 'multiculturalists' were cited examples of the supposedly symbiotic and corrupting link between minority groups and public policy (Brett, 2003, p.79).

Alongside the party's different relationships with economic organisations, these ties also help to explain why the administrations embraced distinct compositional policies: the two governments maintained different practical and rhetorical associations with a demographic whose preferences were especially met by family reunion. Significantly, unlike Chapter Two's analysis of 'size', these dominant partisan motivations (that is, those relating to economic and ethnic ties) actually aligned. Instead of competing, the transition's two primary imperatives pushed the Labor Party towards family reunion and the Liberal Party towards skills.
However, before going on, this trend requires one specific and important caveat. Whilst partisan factors certainly influenced the era’s composition, so too did definitional changes. Early in its term, the Howard government redefined who exactly qualified for each of the program’s streams. Specifically, by adding a ‘points-test’ and basic language requirements, the ‘concessional’ category was renamed ‘Skilled Australian Linked’ and reclassified (DIAC, 2000; ABS, 2007). This moved certain migrants that previously would have been classed as family reunion into the skilled stream. Because this happened concurrently with the change of government, it has to also be considered, alongside partisan factors, as a contributing cause behind the ascension of skilled migration. Ultimately, whilst parties were themselves important, we cannot ignore the impact of internal redefinition.

**Figure Eleven:** Unemployment and Composition Ratio from Howard to Rudd-Gillard, 1997-2010

![Unemployment and Composition Ratio from Howard to Rudd-Gillard, 1997-2010](image)

Source: For migration, see: DoPS (2010, p.13) and for unemployment, see: Treasury (2010) and ABS (2010)

Figure Eleven maps composition amidst the most recent partisan transition. When examining the move from Howard to Rudd-Gillard, Birrell & Healey have argued that Labor has continued to ‘privilege the delivery of skills’ (2010, p.40). Indeed, unlike the previous period, this transition has not seemed to coincide with an overly meaningful change in the program’s composition. Whilst Labor has marginally reduced the percentage of skilled migrants, it has done so in the context of rising unemployment (MIAC, 2009). In fact, looking critically at Figure Eleven, the ALP’s ratio is of a roughly similar size to what it was when the Liberal Party faced an analogous level of unemployment. This comparable behaviour
explains the other half of Table Six, which found that, when unemployment has sat between 4 and 6.5%, the two parties have supported almost inseparable average compositions. Contrary to when unemployment has been moderately high, the late Howard and early Rudd-Gillard years have reflected very little partisan distinction.

When attempting to explain these results, we have two options. However, with the specific years and evidence available to us, both are difficult to prove and both point to the data-set’s specific limitations. The first explanation is that, like with size, the imperatives driving the Labor Party have been economically elastic: that is, they have been felt more intensely when unemployment has been high. This argument specifically concerns the labour movement. As Haus has suggested, union concerns over labour outcomes theoretically heighten as the jobs-market becomes more competitive (Haus, 1999, p.683). And, in terms of Australia’s composition, these trade unions concerns have related particularly to the skilled stream (ACTU & ACTU, 1983). Whilst, in the Rudd-Gillard years, major unions still supported cuts to the skilled intake amidst GFC-driven insecurity, this potential explanation implies that such desires were not as strong as they were in other contexts (SMH, 2009; Herald Sun, 2009): because the ALP acted on a scale similar to the Liberal Party, it implies that, in a relative sense, the resonance of labour’s demands were weaker than the times when unemployment has been at a higher rate.

The other possible interpretation involves the nature of the Labor Party. If Rudd-Gillard’s compositions have differed with Hawke-Keating’s, it might not necessarily be because of the inherent elasticity of interest groups and the consequent vocality of their desires: it could also be based on changes in the way that the ALP has received them. In other words, the Rudd-Gillard government could be less receptive to unions and migrant groups than the earlier Labor administration. Indeed, especially under Rudd, certain commentators have observed a changing, if not weakening, tie between the labour movement and ALP policy (Cook, 2010, p.5-7; Hall, 2008, p.32). However, based on the available evidence, both of these explanations are very difficult to prove. The years at our disposal do not show how
Labor would have responded to the labour market conditions experienced by Hawke-Keating (DoPS, 2010b, p.10 and 13; Figure Eleven). As a result, it is hard to ascertain whether Rudd-Gillard’s early behaviour was representative of an intrinsic change in Labor’s disposition (that is, that it was generally less reactive to union and ethnic concerns) or the elastic nature of partisan motivation: it is difficult to tell, and both theories implicitly speculate, whether the party would have reacted to higher unemployment based on the earlier partisan trends or remained more aligned with era’s Liberal policy. Indeed, because of this, any attempt to build a coherent theory about parties, unemployment and composition is necessarily limited by information. Therefore, across the twenty-six years, the period’s transitions registered a relationship between the Liberal Party and skilled migration, but not that was reflected consistently; the compositional change from Hawke-Keating to Howard was not replicated in the transition from Howard to Rudd-Gillard.

3.4 Conclusion

As argued, this chapter has found a specific relationship between parties and composition. Rather than being represented across all years, this partisan distinction has been confined to certain economic contexts. As Table Six found, when unemployment has been higher (between 6.5-8.5%) the Liberal Party has been more aggressive in promoting skills. Conversely, when unemployment has been lower (between 4-6.5%) no great distinction has been registered: in fact, the parties have behaved in relative accordace.

However, due to certain features and restrictions within the available data, building an overarching explanation of these results is difficult. As the more in-depth analysis of partisan transitions showed, because the available years do not show how modern Labor would have reacted to higher unemployment, it is hard to tell whether this inconsistency was based on the economically-elastic influence of unions or changes within the actual party. Ultimately, this points to the limitations within the available evidence and the associated problems with creating a coherent theory about parties, employment and composition.
Conclusion

Implicitly, this thesis has been premised on a certain conception of structure and agency. In terms of both size and composition, it has acknowledged that structure (in this case, the labour market) has significantly influenced executive decisions. Indeed, as suggested, different states of unemployment have created very different migratory imperatives (see: Chapter 2.2 and Chapter 3.2). However, whilst accepting this, it has also argued that agency (that is, the conscious decisions of partisan actors) has continued to exist within these structures: ultimately, parties have still enjoyed the autonomy to react to these labour markets in their own unique ways, based on their own unique preferences.

Therefore, in order to determine the existence of any historical inter-party distinction (which, in essence, amounts to the difference between the two parties’ agencies) this thesis has attempted to control for the dominant structure. In practice, this has meant only comparing partisan decisions made in similar labour markets.

Chapter Two applied this reasoning to the issue of size. This examined whether, since White Australia’s abolition, either party’s permanent intakes have been disproportionately high. By sorting each year’s migration program into groups based on the unemployment rate and the party in office, the chapter’s longer-term analysis did find a certain, albeit qualified, relationship between partisanship and size (see: Chapter 2.2). When unemployment has sat between both 4-6% and 6.1-8.5%, which accounts for over three quarters of the analysed period, the Labor Party has promoted more expansive average programs than the Liberal Party. In terms of thesis’ question, this presented a degree of positive evidence: it meant that, in these shared contexts of moderately low to moderately high unemployment, Labor governance has actually tended to correlate with larger intakes (see: Table Three). However, even within these measurements, such a conclusion has possessed significant limitations and required important caveats. Firstly, contrary to these aforementioned trends, the
partisan difference has not been registered in every context. When unemployment has transcended 8.5%, the Liberal Party has instead been more expansive. Secondly, even in the brackets where the distinction has been found, the inter-party gap has not always been tremendously large (see: Table Three).

Moreover, when the chapter focussed on specific governments and their policies, it found further evidence of inconsistency (see: Chapter 2.3). Across the five governments, there has not been a coherent relationship between the major parties and the program’s trajectory: at certain points, Labor expanded the program it inherited from the Liberal Party and, at other points, the opposite occurred. As argued, this was largely because of two things. Firstly, administrations governed in unique economic contexts. Because the labour market has tended to frame policy decisions, different governments have reacted to fundamentally different policy environments. Secondly, even accepting this, the two parties have often responded distinctly to the same labour market. Influenced by the often competing motivations driving partisan policy, individual governments have reacted inconsistently to rising unemployment (see: Chapters 1.3 and 2.3). Taking both these approaches into account, the chapter ultimately concluded that, in certain economic contexts, there has been soft relationship between the ALP and larger proportionate programs, but that such a link had not been coherently or consistently reflected in the behaviour of each of the period’s five governments.

Chapter Three applied a similar logic and method, but this time to composition. Analysing a shorter period of time (that is, from 1984 to 2010) it examined whether either party has disproportionately supported the skilled or family reunion streams. In its overview of composition, unemployment and parties, the chapter did uncover a noteworthy inter-party trend (see: Chapter 3.2; Table Six). However, instead of being represented across all its evidence, this partisan difference was disaggregated along economic lines. When unemployment has been comparatively low (sitting between 4-6.5%) the two parties have
behaved in relative unison. However, when unemployment has been moderately high (sitting between 6.5-8.5%) there has been a clear historical difference. In this labour market, the Liberal Party has been considerably more aggressive than the Labor Party in promoting skills and minimising family reunion.

This inconsistency was again found in the chapter’s more in-depth focus on specific governments. On one hand, when executive power was transferred from Hawke-Keating to Howard, the program’s percentage of skilled migrants increased noticeably. Even controlling for the era’s falling unemployment rate, the Liberal Party still expanded the skilled/family reunion ratio to a much greater extent than Labor did. On the other hand, when Rudd-Gillard was elected to office after Howard, no great change ensued. In the context of the era’s labour market, the two administrations possessed very similar compositional policies. Ultimately, as argued in the chapter, attempting to coherently explain this inconsistency is an empirically difficult task. Because the available years do not show how Rudd-Gillard’s Labor would have reacted to higher unemployment, it is hard to tell whether the disparities between the results (that is, between high & low unemployment and Hawke-Keating & Rudd-Gillard governance) were based on the elastic influence of unions or internal, historical changes within the political party. Of course, in reality, the truth could sit somewhere between these two poles.

Therefore, across both its sub-questions, this thesis has found specific, albeit heavily qualified, relationships between the major parties and migration outcomes. Ultimately, these are the contexts and traditions in which contemporary political rhetoric (for instance, 2010’s cross-party suggestion that partisan decisions would dictate Australia’s migration policy) should be read. Not because they predict the future, but because, by examining the past, they help to explain the ways in which parties have historically shaped permanent migration policy and the reasons why they have acted as they have.
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