

'Stop the Boats!' Opposition to asylum seekers at Australian elections: Principles or Prejudice?

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Abstract

I investigate the relationship attitudes towards race and ideological principles have in determining if someone wishes to 'turn back the boats'. I use data from the Australian Election Study and employ latent variables constructed from the general ideological dispositions. They include spending on defence and policing, attitudes towards Asia, immigration, Aboriginal Australians and income distribution. They form three component ideological parts: race, individualism and order. These are employed in a multinomial logistic regression to determine the relationship between attitudes towards asylums seekers and race, controlling for a policy preference for order and individualism.

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Australian politics for the last two decades has involved racial issues but Australian political science has by and large neglected the role of race in party electoral competition. Australian politics endured a flurry of electoral research with the sudden rise of Pauline Hanson and her start-up One Nation. Research into race and Australian elections turned out to be a false start with One Nation disappearing into electoral irrelevancy. Since the abrupt disappearance from debates within Australian political science, little scholarship has been devoted to the topics. There is a compelling research question in where race as a disruptive ideology component to the Australian party system has gone. Whether race has been subsumed into major party competition since One Nation's demise is a long ignored gap in Australia electoral studies. One Nation has become a footnote revealing little information of the modern Australian party system.

One Nation's electoral relevance to political science has had a precipitous decline in line with its electoral performance since it was established. Its initial shock to the expected stable party system lent to the discovery that racism was key component to Australian ideology (Jackman 1998). One Nation voters were distinguished by their opinions on racial policy issues (Goot and Watson 2001). What is unknown to this point is how racial ideology impacts Australian elections beyond One Nation's demise.

More than a decade ago, Jackman (2003, 282) commented that as One Nation became an irrelevancy and 'border protection a central issue' that there is a compelling research question on racial issues and major party competition (Table 1). Asylum seekers have conspicuously featured in election campaigns (Johnson 2007, 2015, McAllister 2003, Simms 2002, Wanna 2010, Warhurst 2002).

[Figure 1 about here]

The overt politicisation of the 2001 Tampa incident and the children overboard scandal (Warhurst 2002) through to Tony Abbott's repetitive 2013 sloganeering to 'Stop the Boats' carrying asylum seekers prompt questions (Johnson 2015). These vital descriptive analyses of political activity in election campaigns but lack fallshort of an explanation for this political behaviour. This article posits that race as a component in Australian ideology is key to explain the prominence of asylum seeker politics at recent federal elections.

Jackman (2003, 282) foreshadowed the potential voter realignment along racial issues and the temptation for the Liberal-National Coalition to 'play the race card' given electoral strategy within a compulsory voting system where party identification has an enduring explanation for behaviour which necessitates appeals to present crosscutting issues (Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg 2000, Jackman 1998, McAllister 2011, 37).

Johnson (2015, 35) proposes in the 2013 election, Abbott's repetitive slogans was to 'evoke fear and anxiety' towards refugees and 'garner support for tougher border security measures'. This article sets out to empirically test whether these fears and emotions Coalition strategy sought to evoke, according to Johnson, were based on racial prejudice or rather based on other components of conservative ideology.

Politicians have been quick to claim, and legitimise their position to 'stop the boats' within conservative ideology. Kevin Rudd justified the hard-line public policy to process and resettle asylum seekers offshore asserting the Australian government had a responsibility to 'have a robust system of border security and orderly' (Anonymous 2013). In the lead up to the same election, Abbott invoked an implicit unorderliness as a faulty quality of the migration programme: 'If a country cannot control over who enters the country, it is [a] peaceful invasion' (Bourke 2012). Notions of

order in conservative ideology justifies punitiveness in policy along almost Burkian ([1790] 2009) grounds, the preservation and security of a similar future to the present.

Politicians may appeal to voters in terms which are made in purely conservative ideological terms towards maintaining order within the nation. However as race is known to have a central component within Australian ideology this article discerns which components of conservative ideology determines policy preferences on asylum seeker processing and settlement. Following determines whether implicit racial ideology predicts both attitudes towards ‘turning back the boats’ and whether such ideology is successfully employed in Coalition strategy to encourage Labor partisan defection.

This article presents three models which analyse data from the Australian Election Study (AES).

- The first model tests whether order as an ideological component, when controlling for racial ideology, is a key determinate in producing policy preferences on asylum seekers.
- The second model tests whether racial ideology predicts attitudes towards asylum seeker boat turn backs pooling data from the 2001, 2004, 2010 and 2013 AES.
- The third model tests whether racial ideology predicts Labor partisan defection and affords the Coalition the power to exploit racial ideology within the two-party electoral competition which determines Australian government.

Each model contains measures constructed with principal component analysis using the Kaiser (1958) criterion and based on the operationalisation of an implicit racial ideological measure in the AES by Jackman (1998).

Policy Preferences

There is much negativity in Australian political discourse on asylum seekers (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007, Every and Augoustinos 2007, Hastie and Augoustinos 2012, Klocker and Dunn 2003, Klocker 2004, Martin 2015, McKay, Thomas, and Kneebone 2012, O'Doherty and Augoustinos 2008, O'Doherty and Lecouteur 2007, Simms 2002). The political rhetoric of many Australian politicians has asserted that order in the migration programme is a chief ideal to strive for (McKay, Thomas, and Kneebone 2012, McKenzie and Hasmath 2013, O'Doherty and Lecouteur 2007). Australian political ideology contains a distinct racial component (Jackman 1998) and there is the distinct possibility that it could be a factor in determining the electorate's policy preferences on issues tainted with race. This is all too pressing a question with significant Australian political psychology that indicates, on some measures, that prejudice is present in the asylum seeker policy debate (Hartley and Pedersen 2007, Pedersen and Hartley 2015).

To discern which component of Australian political ideology – race or order – is most powerful in determining preferences data from the 2013 AES is analysed. Principal component analysis with the Kaiser (1958) criterion is employed to create three components to Australian political ideology (see Table 1). These components are conceptually distinct and relevant to asylum seeker public policy preferences. A racial component along with order and individualism components are extracted to predict policy preferences. Individualism is extracted and controlled for since the measures used to produce the implicit racial ideology component must leave room for a non-racial individualism, a desire for a small state should not be conflated with racial prejudice (Feldman and Huddy 2005).

[Table 1 about here]

The three operationalised distinct components to Australian ideology of interest to this analysis have been placed into a multinomial logistic regression. The three ideology components are entered as

linear terms. To discern whether extent to which the order or race components to Australian ideology have power in determining policy preferences they are entered as linear terms along with an interaction effect. The interaction effect is designed to whether an ideological preference for is present only when racial ideology exists. The individualism component is entered to ensure non-racial policy preferences based on ideology are not picked up in the model since the racial component to ideology is constructed from some measures a person with a non-racist ideology would disagree with.

The returned predicted probabilities indicate that racial ideology is a strong predictor of policy preferences on asylum seekers, predicting offshore and onshore settling and processing well.

. Order as an ideological component itself predicts reduced support for offshore processing and settlement

[Figures 2, 3, 4 & 5]

[Table 2]

Attitudes

Voting Behaviour

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Figure 1

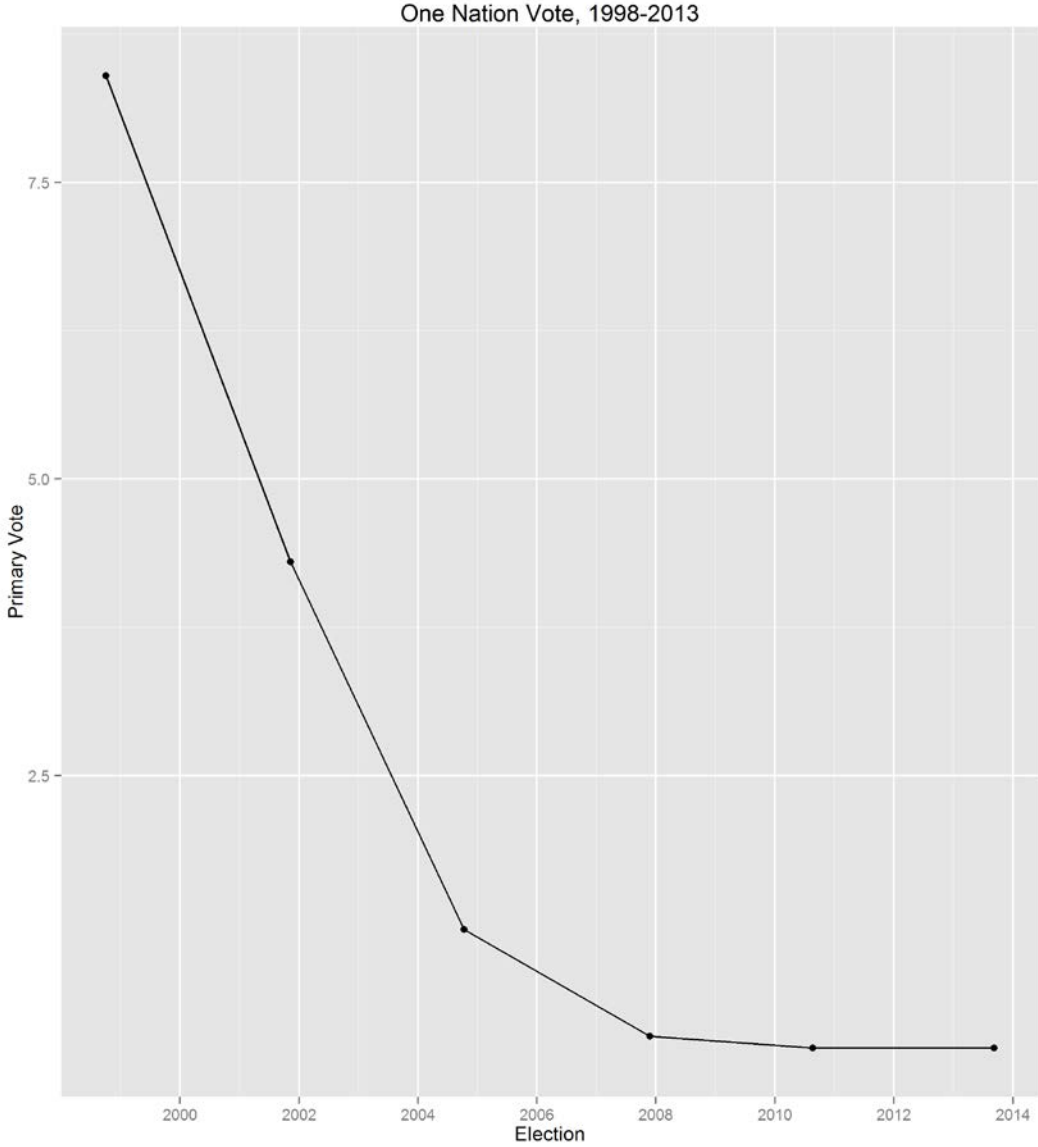
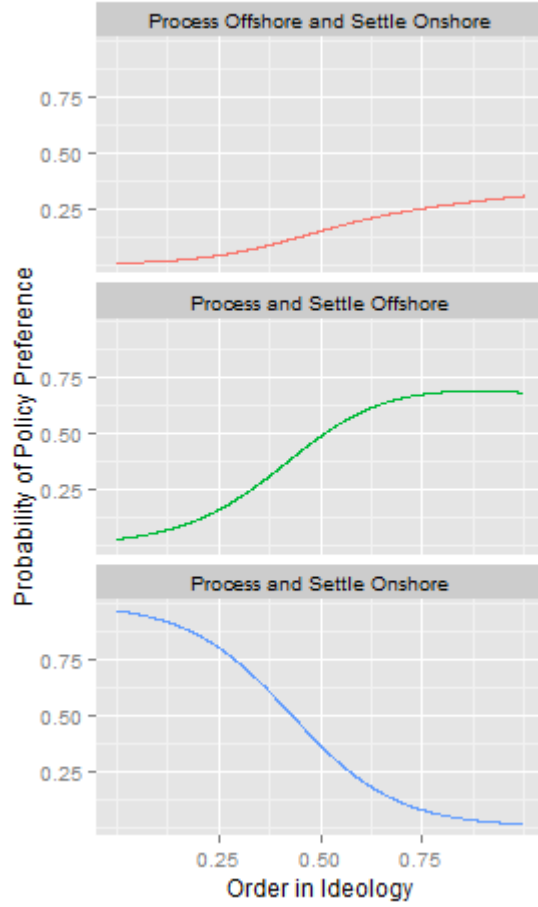
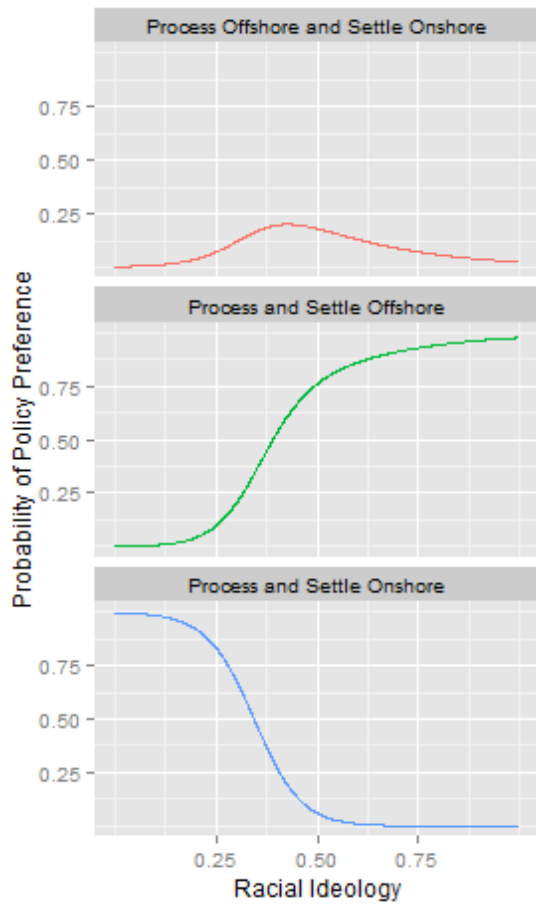


Table 1: Factor Loadings for three components to political ideology

Measures	Race	Individualism	Order
Immigrants good for the economy (Reversed)	0.81	0.01	-0.05
Number of immigrants increased (Reversed)	0.76	0.05	0.14
Immigrants take jobs from Australians	0.74	0.13	0.16
Immigrants increase crime	0.74	0.02	0.23
Immigrants make Australia more open (Reversed)	0.74	-0.03	-0.08
Government help for Aborigines	0.57	-0.18	0.13
Building closer links with Asia	0.55	0.08	0.12
Income and wealth should be redistributed	0.03	0.86	-0.04
Government should take measures to reduce difference in income levels	0.04	0.83	0.04
Big business has too much power	-0.01	0.68	-0.01
More or less expenditure - Police and law enforcement	0.1	0.04	0.84
More or less expenditure – Defence	0.17	-0.04	0.81
Eigenvalues	0.81	0.01	-0.05
Proportion of Variance	0.76	0.05	0.14
Cumulative Variance	0.74	0.13	0.16
Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser normalisation. Australian Election Study 2013.			

Table 2: Policy Preferences regression coefficients

Figures 2, 3,4 & 5



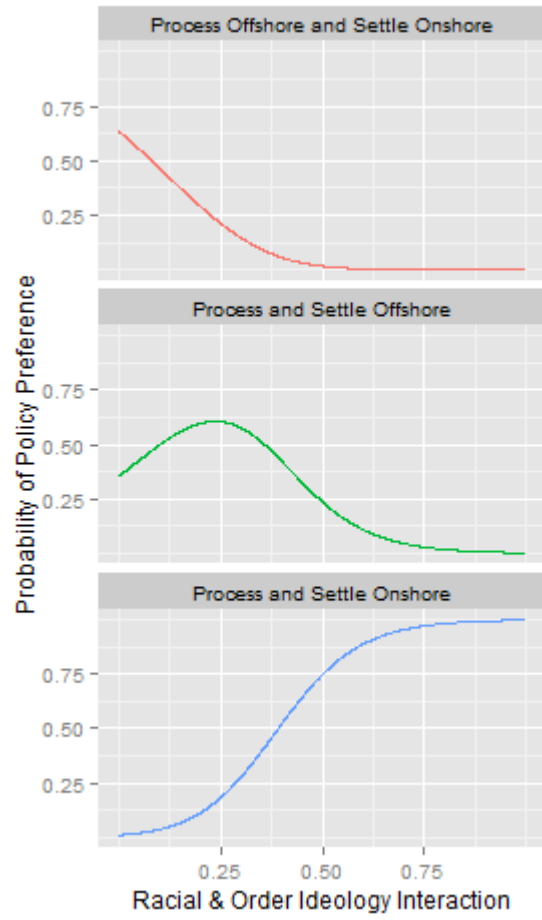
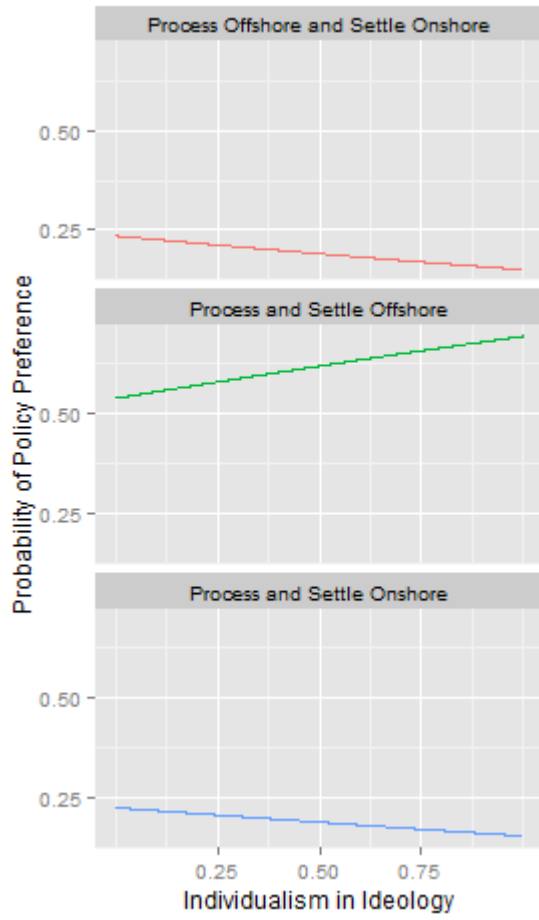


Table 3: Asylum Policy Preferences and Political Ideology, Multinomial Coefficients

Policy		B	Odds Ratio
Process and Settle Offshore	Intercept	-2.29**	
	Racial Ideology	4.48***	80.721
	Individualism	.69*	1.837
	Order	-.76***	.490
	Racial Ideology X Order	6.51***	697.166
	Coalition Partisanship	.31***	1.373
Process Offshore and Settle Onshore			
Process and Settle Onshore	Intercept	6.96***	
	Racial Ideology	-14.19***	1.575E-07
	Individualism	.07	1.292
	Order	-8.38***	.000
	Racial Ideology X Order	15.91***	6.48e7
	Coalition Partisanship	-.66***	.538
(n)	2994		
Nagelkerge R ²	0.406		
Multinomial logistic regression analysing the Australian Election Study (2013) with weight			

Figure 6: Probability of attitude towards Boat turn backs and racial ideology

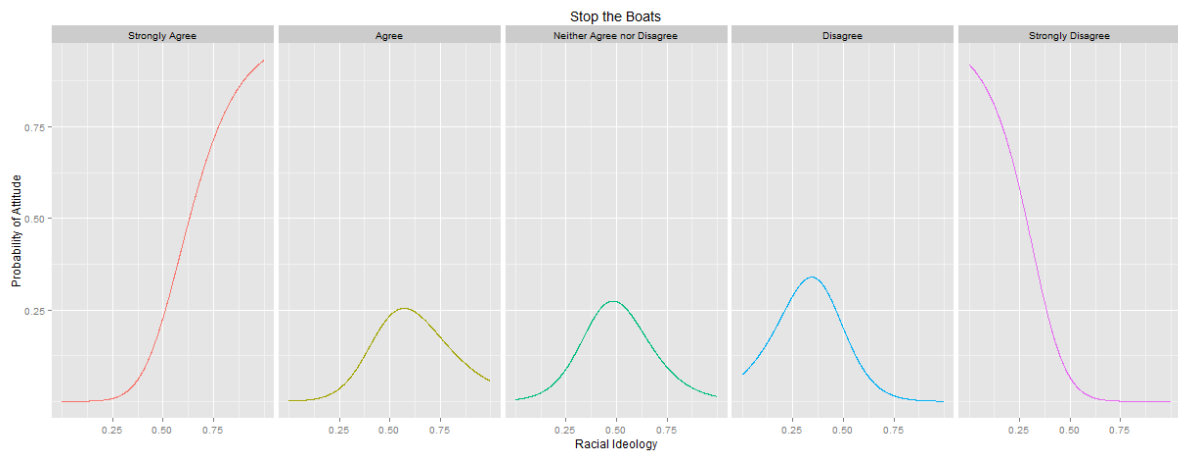


Table 4: Attitudes towards asylum seeker boat turn backs and Political Ideology, Multinomial Coefficients

Turn Back the Boats	Intercept		Race		Individualism		Coalition Partisanship		Election (reference 2001)					
	Reference: Neither								2004		2010		2013	
	b		b	odds	b	Odds	b	odds	b	odds	b	odds	b	odds
Strongly Agree	-4.10		8.85	6980.08 ***	-.07	.93	.54	1.71 ***	-.18	.83	-.63	.53 ***	-.47	.63 ***
Agree	-1.54		3.13	22.88* ***	.40	1.49	.54	1.72 ***	.02	1.02	-.36	.70 ***	-.33	.72 ***
Disagree	2.50		-5.94	.00***	-.96	.38***	-.24	.78 ***	.36	1.44 **	.48	1.61 ***	.53	1.69 ***
Strongly Disagree	4.72		-13.24	.00 ***	-1.98	.14***	-.93	.40***	.36	1.43 *	1.00	2.73 ***	1.21	3.37 ***
(n)	9581													
Nagelkerge R ²	0.478													
AIC	23782.24													
Multinomial logistic regression analysing the Australian Election Study (2001, 2004, 2010 & 2013)														

Table 5: Time of Voting Decision and Ideology, regression coefficients

Time Decide Vote	b	B
Intercept	2.783	***
<i>Ideology</i>	-	-
Race	.376	.034***
Individualism	.127	.011
<i>Controls</i>	-	-
Coalition partisanship	-.803	-.216***
<i>Election</i>	-	-
2001 (reference)	-	-
2004	-.096	-.079
2007	-.476	-.043***
2010	.001	.000
2013	-.165	-.045***
(n)	11558	
Adjusted R ²	0.051	
AIC	46013	

Ordinary Least Squares Regression analysing the Australian Election Study (2001-2013). Dependent variable coded 1=decided a long time ago through to 6=on election day.

Figure 7: Time of Vote Decision by Racial Ideology

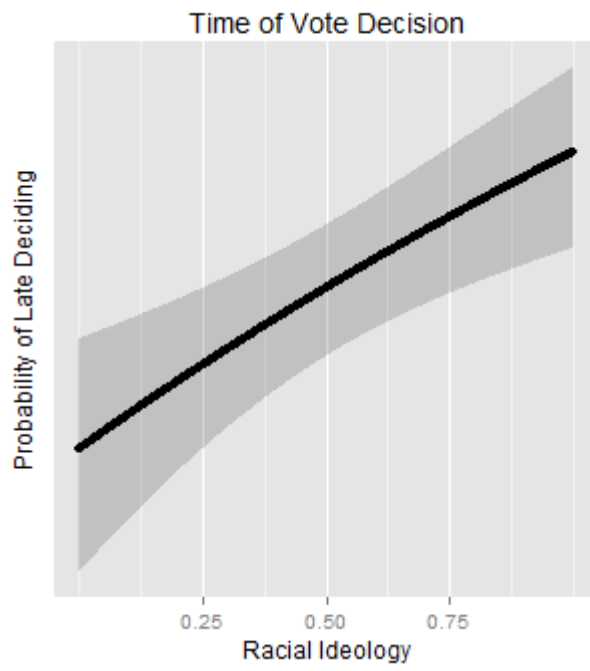


Figure 7: Labor Partisan Defection by Racial Ideology

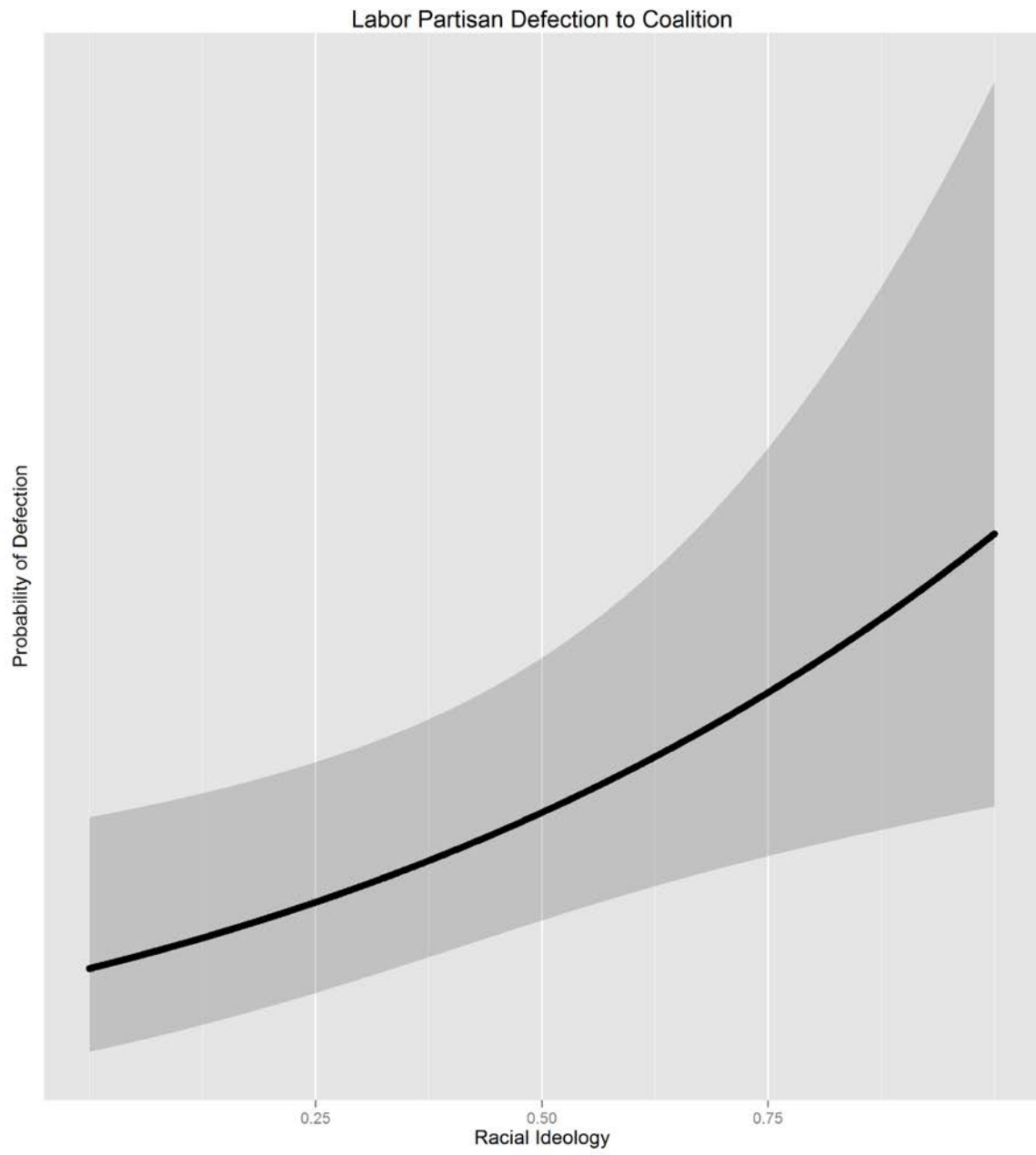


Table 6: Predicting Labor Partisan Defection with Racial Ideology

Labor Defection	B	Odds Ratio
Intercept	-6.45	
Feelings towards the Liberal Party	.46***	1.592
<i>Ideology</i>		
Race	1.07*	2.93
Individualism	2.07***	7.95
<i>Election</i>		
2001 (reference)		
2004	0.12	1.13
2007	-0.67*	.51
2010	.46	1.59
2013	1.18***	3.27
(n)	3992	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.265	
AIC	1351	
Logistic Regression analysing the Australian Election Study (2001-2013)		

Table 7: Principal Component Analysis Loadings

Measure	Race	Individualism
Income & Wealth Distributed		0.812
Big Business has too much power		0.780
Choice between taxes & social services	0.375	-0.346
Equal opportunities for migrants	0.741	
Number of migrants allowed into Australia	0.754	
Government help for aborigines	0.596	-0.212
Building closer links with Asia	0.592	
Immigrants increase crime	0.750	
Immigrants take jobs from Australians	0.736	0.150
Immigrants good for economy (reversed)	0.637	
Immigrants make Australia more open (reversed)	0.719	
Eigenvalues	3.999	1.465
Proportion variance	0.364	0.133
Cumulative variance	0.364	0.497
Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation using the Kaiser criterion.		