'I am, you are, we are un-Australian': National identity, political discourse and use of the term 'un-Australian' in Federal Parliament

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Abstract

The term 'un-Australian' has long been a rhetorical device used in Australian politics and media to identify 'in-' and 'out-groups' within our society. Australia's journey to develop a cohesive national identity, or 'in-group', following waves of colonial settlement and migration was utilised by political actors to formulate a sense of 'Australianness' that could trump the national, ethnic, or religious ties that its various citizens held. This article therefore seeks to uncover what meanings the term 'un-Australian' possesses in our political parlance, if its usage reflects that contention that Australian identity is partially based in an otherisation of non-white nationals and if the term's connotations are influenced by a speaker's political affiliation.[1] A random sampling of 50 uses of 'un-Australian' in Parliament between 1 May 2000 and 1 May 2020 were coded for this essay. Ultimately, this data reveals that while frequency of the term 'un-Australian' does not increase with a speaker's political conservatism, there is some evidence to suggest that such political actors use the term with more xenophobic or racist connotations. Moreover, an unforeseen correlation between gender and frequency was observed, suggesting that women parliamentarians are less likely to employ the term 'un-Australian', possibly due to their own experiences of 'otherisation'. While no single meaning of 'un-Australian' was revealed, it is perhaps the breadth and non-specificity of the term that is most thought-provoking, suggesting that it may simply be a catch-all pejorative used by political actors seeking to present themselves as Australia's patriotic defenders.

> What's a real Aussie? There is none. There's no such thing as an actual Australian these days except for the bald-headed fuckwit politicians that actually believe they're *it*.
>
> — Anonymous Respondent Seven[2]

Introduction

Attempts to define the term 'Australian' and its contents have a long and varied history in Australian journalism and politics. As a national entity born out of colonisation, made home by convicts, and followed by successive generations of foreign immigration, 'Australia has long since supported a whole industry of image-makers to tell us what we are'.[3] The term 'un-Australian' has been utilised by politicians in Parliament since 1903, with its first recorded mention by Mr Henry Higgins. He argued it would be 'un-Australian' and 'most derogatory to the dignity of Australia' to create a High Court only to allow litigation to be appealed to the British Privy Council.[4] In a more recent parliamentary hearing in May 2022, Liberal MP Gladys Chiu called out racism against Chinese-Australians in discussions of foreign policy as 'offensive, divisive and un-Australian',[5] suggesting that the use of the term in conversations around xenophobia and racism is likely to continue. The term has long played a role in political discussions within Australia, and reflects a continued

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[1] Jehonathan Ben, et al., 'Racism in Australia: A Protocol for a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis', *Systematic Reviews* 11, no. 47 (2022): article 47.

[2] Kate O'Toole, 'Vox-Pop: UnAustralian', *Triple J* (ABC radio), 7 December 2006, quoted in Alice Brennan, 'UnAustralia', *Continuum* 21, no. 4 (2007): 513–17. Italics in original.

[3] Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), 160.

[4] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 8 July 1903, *Judiciary Bill: Third Reading* (Henry Higgins).

[5] '"Offensive and Divisive": Gladys Liu Calls Out "Un-Australian" Attitudes', *Sky News,* 13 May 2022.

struggle with the nation's self-professed 'multicultural' identity.[6] This essay seeks to determine if the adjective 'un-Australian' has any singular definition, or if it is a catch-all pejorative used by political actors seeking to paint themselves as protectors of some unspoken national identity.

The manner and undertones with which 'un-Australian' is used in the country's highest political body is critical, because it reflects its speakers' self-perception of Australian national identity. If it is used in racially motivated or otherwise xenophobic contexts, it suggests a deep-seated discomfort with Australian multiculturalism and an institutionalisation of the kind of racist rhetoric non-white Australians face daily.[7]

My initial hypothesis centred on the frequency of usage by conservative politicians, and whether they are more likely to employ the term in a xenophobic manner. However, additional research on the role of Australian political discourse in the formation of our national identity (discussed below) has illuminated the use of coded language in such discussions. Therefore, this essay also considers the frequency and correlation of the term 'un-Australian' with politicians' characterisations of Australian 'values' and 'identity'—masking terminology that is used to disguise more overt xenophobia in discussions of Australianness.

National identity and parliamentary discourse: Linguistic trends in defining 'Australian'

David Lowenthal proposed that a combination of Australia's fascination with military victories (and defeats) and predilection to paint colonialists as intrepid discoverers conquering the outback has led to a national obsession with the 'heroic and anti-heroic'.[8] This normalisation of binary judgements has predisposed us to accept the characterisation of people and events as either 'good or evil, fit to praise or blame' and, consequently, Australian or 'un-Australian'.[9] This is supported by Richard White's contention that while 'most new nations go through the formality of inventing a national identity', Australia relied on commentators 'throughout its white history' to curate and capture its national identity.[10] As discussed throughout this essay, there is huge diversity in the topics, items, and actions that have been called 'un-Australian' by federal politicians. If the Australian public is the consumer in this equation (and politics the industry), it is perhaps telling of our own uncertainty of what is 'Australian' that political actors feel comfortable in declaring any and everything its opposite. If the Australian public were more certain of their own definition of the term, they may not be so accepting of the frequency and randomness with which politicians employ it.

While not a political scientist, van Dijk's 'ideological square' theory provides an explanation for the manner in which politicians utilise language to discredit and 'other' their rivals (whether they be political opponents, foreign immigrants, unions, etc.) through the employment of 'us versus them' tactics. [11] His thesis, put simply, is that actors wish to present themselves (the 'in-group') favourably, and in order to do so, use linguistic tools to demonise or ridicule their opposition (the 'out-group').[12] This is referred to as the ideological 'square' because it comprises four key behaviours: 'emphasizing our good properties/actions; emphasizing their bad properties/actions; mitigating our bad properties/actions; and mitigating their good properties/actions'.[13] In the context of this essay, the term un-Australian is used to emphasise the 'bad actions' of the speaker's opponents—for example, 'Prime Minister Howard has turned his back on Australian workers … [as] part of a warped ideology … to destroy unions … Those attacks were un-Australian and Australians knew it'.[14] In using the term in this way, MP Tony Zappia sought to diminish the ruling Liberal–National Party and paint himself as a protector of workers, while simultaneously asserting that the defence of unions was something fundamental to Australia itself.

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[6] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 'Our Policy History', *Multicultural Affairs*, 17 March 2020. Accessed 11 October 2022, https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs/about-multicultural-affairs/our-policy-history.

[7] Ben et al., 'Racism in Australia'.

[8] David Lowenthal, 'Australian Images: The Unique Present, the Mythical Past', in *Readings in Australian Arts*, ed. M. Quatermaine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1978), 86.

[9] Lowenthal, 'Australian Images', 91.

[10] White, 'Inventing Australia', 160.

[11] Teun van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', *Discourse and Society* 4, no. 2 (1993), 249–83; Teun van Dijk, 'What is Political Discourse Analysis?', *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11, no. 1 (1997): 11–52.

[12] Teun van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 23.

[13] Sai-Hua Kuo and Mari Nakamura, 'Translation or Transformation? A Case Study of Language and Ideology in the Taiwanese Press', *Discourse & Society* 16, no. 3 (2005): 410.

[14] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 15 February 2012, 1451 (Tony Zappia, Member for Makin).

Australian identity, as 'constructed for voters by political leaders', has long been 'a story of inclusion and exclusion'.[15] Younane Brookes and Wirth-Koliba have both identified a pattern of Australian political actors inciting fear or hatred of an 'other' in order to bind together a disparate national population.[16] During the nineteenth century, that 'other' was 'the Yellow Peril';[17] in World War I, the Central Powers; under the White Australia policy, non-white immigrants, and so on.[18] Struggling to create a unique identity in the aftermath of achieving statehood, politicians and other actors fought to establish a sense of 'Australianness', creating a nationalist identity with 'its roots in fear and hatred of the "Other"'.[19] In the absence of uniting features of race or religion, 'the myth of national homogeneity [was] sustained through … the explicit expulsion or rejection of difference'.[20]

Every and Augoustinos argue that in modern Australia this rejection of difference or 'un-Australianness' has become less explicitly racist, but remains racially motivated beneath the surface.[21] This has resulted in most major political parties adopting a 'categorical denial' that they possess racist motivations, while facilitating 'the simultaneous exclusion, oppression and demonization of minorities',[22] such as asylum seekers[23] and Indigenous Australians.[24] Consequently, any attempt to identify the frequency or connotations of the term 'un-Australian' must acknowledge and contend with the disparate forces that make up 'Australian' identity.

My hypothesis that conservative politicians (from parties such as the Liberals, Nationals, and One Nation) more frequently utilise the term 'un-Australian', and do so with racist undertones, is supported by Younane Brookes, and Every and Augoustinos' studies.[25] With the former focusing on election campaigns and the latter on parliamentary debates, both studies use mixed methodologies to identify Australian politicians' historical tendency to utilise language of 'exclusion and national identity' in the context of immigration policy, in order to strengthen their visage of patriotism and effective political action.[26] As Younane identifies, historically, the Liberal Party and its antecedents have been somewhat more concerned than their political opponents with the 'dangers' of racial diversity and immigration.[27] Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister and member of the Liberal Party's oldest ancestor, the Protectionist Party, called on voters in 1903 to 'exclude undesirable and coloured aliens'.[28] Deakin and many of his contemporaries utilised a definition of 'Australianness' that was 'reliant on "whiteness"' in their attempts to create a cohesive national identity through 'a clear construction of what it is not'.[29]

In the small pool of literature dedicated to usage of the term 'un-Australian', no academic, commentator, or journalist has even attempted to attribute a single distinct meaning to the word. Building on the above theories, 'un-Australian' could thus simply be a linguistic technique by which politicians are able to identify and decry an 'other', without having to define the indefinable, that which is 'Australian'. With our national identity being so mutable, usage of the term presents individuals (or their parties) an opportunity to define what is 'Australian'—if only in opposition to some perceived threat—and play a role in shaping that identity into the future.

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[15] Stephanie Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity: The Language of Immigration and Border Control in Australian Federal Election Campaigns* (University of Melbourne, 2012), 1.

[16] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 1; Victoria Wirth-Koliba, 'The Diverse and Dynamic World of "Us" and "Them" in Political Discourse', *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 8, no. 1 (2016): 23–37.

[17] Multicultural Australia, 'Yellow Peril', *Multiculturalaustralia.edu.au*, 26 November 2004, http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/hotwords/unpack/Yellow.Peril.

[18] 'White Australia Policy', *National Museum of Australia*, accessed 6 May 2020, https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/white-australia-policy.

[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 129.

[20] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 12.

[21] Danielle Every and Martha Augoustinos, 'Constructions of Racism in the Australian Parliamentary Debates on Asylum Seekers', *Discourse & Society* 18, no. 4 (2007): 411.

[22] Every and Augoustinos, 'Constructions of Racism', 411.

[23] Bianca Hall, 'Lawyers Representing Asylum Seekers are "Un-Australian": Peter Dutton', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 August 2017.

[24] Staff Reporter, 'Australia Remains Racist, Says Academic', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 15 June 2007.

[25] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 1; Every and Augoustinos, 'Constructions of Racism', 411.

[26] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 1.

[27] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 5–6.

[28] Alfred Deakin, Policy Launch Speech, Her Majesty's Theatre (Ballarat, Victoria, 29 October 1903).

[29] Younane Brookes, *Exclusion and National Identity*, 7–8.

Methodology and data

As this essay sought to determine both the frequency and connotations of the term 'un-Australian' in a parliamentary context, a mixed methodology was employed in the form of qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The primary source was parliamentary Hansard, a transcription archive of all speeches made in Federal Australian Parliament, with additional secondary sources utilised to contextualise comments made by individual MPs.

Over the last 20 years (between the firsts of May 2000 and 2020) there have been 368 recorded usages of either 'un-Australian' or 'unAustralian' in Federal Parliament. For this report, a randomised selection of 50 sources was made. A combination of discourse and narrative document analysis was conducted. Discourse document analysis was used to decode the 'values, norms, ideologies, and other contextual factors' relevant to politicians' linguistic choices.[30] Narrative document analysis was employed to determine the 'story' that individual politicians sought to construct, identifying 'specific heroes, villains, and plotlines', particularly relevant in politicians' discussions of national identity and their protection of it.[31]

The speaker's name, political affiliation, and date of discussion were noted and helped contribute to the triangulation of each source, which helped to 'identify, explore, and understand different dimensions of the units of study, thereby strengthening [one's] findings'.[32] In the case of this essay, additional media and academic sources were used to contextualise the statements made by parliamentarians, especially where that context impacted their usage of the term in question. As Hansard provides only transcripts of the statements made, these additional sources were of utmost importance in developing 'thicker' characterisations of the MPs and their motivations.[33]

The Australian Electoral Commission's register of political parties and their party platforms was used to situate each party across a political spectrum.[34] It was concluded that the conservatively aligned parties in Australian politics include the Liberal Party, the Country Liberal Party, the National Party, One Nation, and the Bob Katter Party (with some combination of these parties often forming the governing bloc), while the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Greens, and other minor parties formed the progressive minority for most of the period in question.[35]

While my hypothesis was based on a deductive methodology—attempting to determine if conservative politicians use the term 'un-Australian' more often, and/or with more racial connotations—during the process of coding, I was mindful of 'staying alert' to other, more inductive, insights.[36] As will be discussed below, the data revealed interesting correlations in regards to gender and other considerations that were unanticipated.

Results and discussion: The political weaponisation of Australian identity

In addition to determining the political alignment of each speaker, every use of the term 'un-Australian' was coded on two different axes. Firstly, what the subject being referred to as 'un-Australian' was: a (1) behaviour/action, (2) value, or (3) specific piece of legislation (see Figure 1). Secondly, the rationale behind the usage, or why the subject was denoted as 'un-Australian': the five major categories identified being (1) discriminatory, (2) anti-business, (3) anti-worker/anti-union, (4) criminal, or (5) a threat to Australian values

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[30] Jared J Wesley, 'The Qualitative Analysis of Political Documents', in *From Test to Political Positions: Text Analysis Across Disciplines*, ed. Bertie Kaal, Isa Maks, Annemarie van Elfrinkhof (Amsterdam, John Benjamins), 137.

[31] Wesley, 'The Qualitative Analysis of Political Documents', 138.

[32] Paulette Rothbauer, 'Triangulation', in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa M Given (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 892.

[33] Joseph A Maxwell and Kavita Mittapalli, 'Thick Description', in Given, *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, 880.

[34] 'Current Register of Political Parties', *Australian Electoral Commission*, accessed 5 March 2023, https://www.aec.gov.au/parties_and_representatives/party_registration/Registered_parties/.

[35] 'Current Register of Political Parties', *Australian Electoral Commission*, accessed 5 March 2023, https://www.aec.gov.au/parties_and_representatives/party_registration/Registered_parties/.

[36] Lucia Benaquisto, 'Codes and Coding', in Given, *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods,* 86.

(see Figure 2). These categories were formulated inductively, in reaction to the particular connotations and terminology employed by MPs in the sample selection.
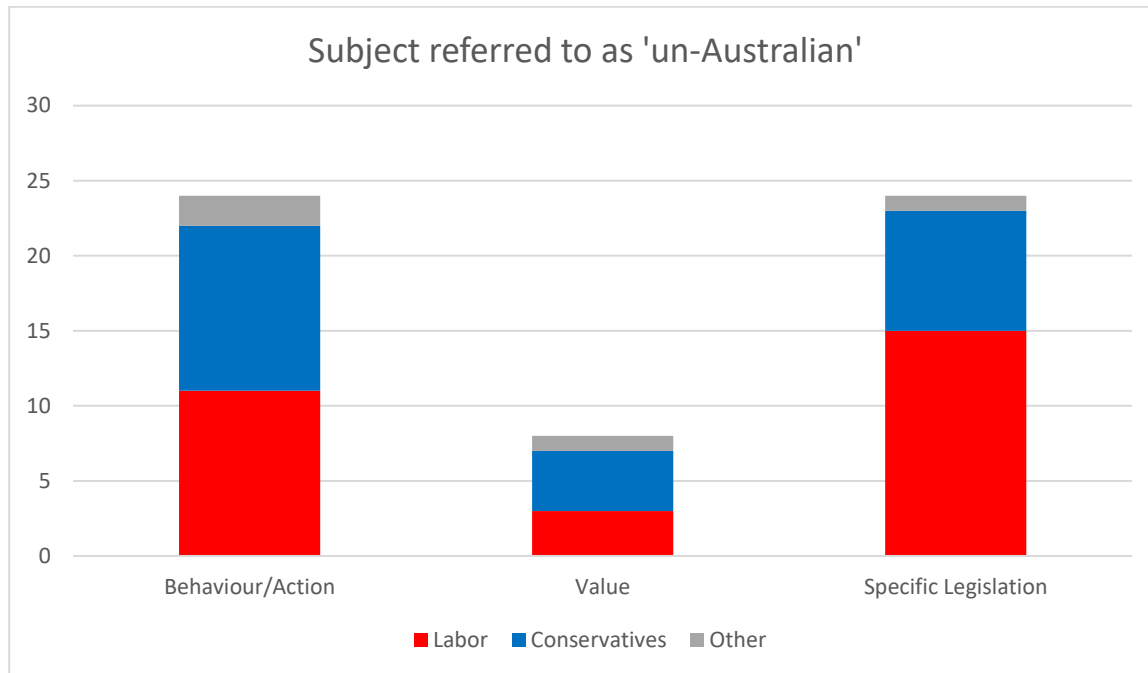

Figure 1: Subject referred to as 'un-Australian'
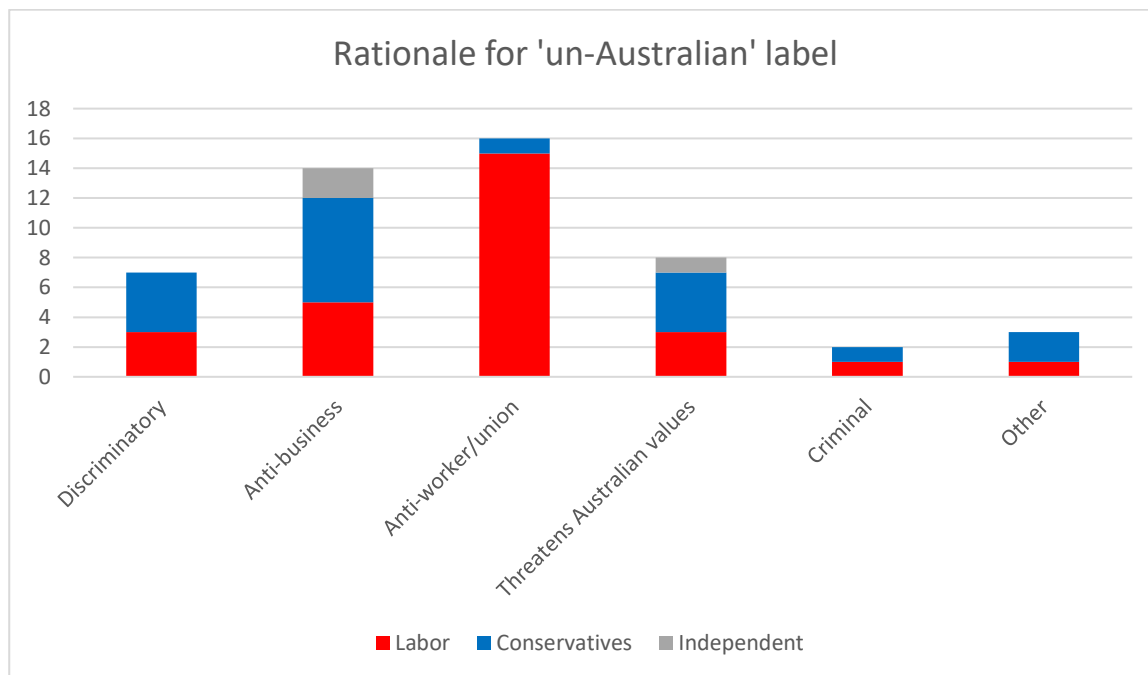
Source: Author's summary of findings.

Figure 2: Rationale for 'un-Australian' label.

Source: Author's summary of findings.

The contention by Neumann that 'un-Australian' is nothing more than a synonym for another popular Australian colloquialism, 'bloody awful', is largely supported by the data.[37] Subjects of politicians' accusations of 'un-Australian'-ness included: vegetarianism,[38] not eating pie,[39] overly powerful unions,[40] attacks on

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[37] Klaus Neumann, 'Unaustralian', (Presentation, Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Annual Conference, 2007), 6.

[38] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 March 2014, 2796 (Andrew Broad, Member for Mallee).

[39] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 31 May 2018, 5248 (Stephen Jones, Member for Whitlam).

[40] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates,* House of Representatives, 11 September 2018, 8699 (Llew O'Brien, Member for Wide Bay).

unions,[41] insurance discrimination against truck drivers,[42] getting involved in the Iraq War,[43] arson,[44] and many others.

The connotations of the term do correlate with a speaker's political alignment, but seemingly reflect the major policy motivations of their respective parties (see Figure 2). Labor MPs were overwhelming more likely to refer to attacks on unions or attempts to lower wages as 'un-Australian' (these being major tenets of their party platform),[45] whereas conservative MPs were more concerned with bills being 'anti-business'[46] or activity which threatened key Australian 'values', such as protecting the rigorous process for gaining Australian citizenship,[47] or welcoming people of all faiths and races[48] (see Figure 3).

In regard to particular behaviours, all major parties identified discrimination as being 'un-Australian', and there is no evidence that conservative MPs were less likely do so. In fact, four of seven declarations of discriminatory behaviour as 'un-Australian' were made by Liberal or National MPs. Moreover, while I initially assumed Labor would be more aware of discrimination on the basis of certain disadvantaged identities, both Labor[49] and Liberal MPs[50] stated that religious discrimination was 'un-Australian', and the sole objection on the grounds of homophobia was made by a Liberal minister, Bruce Billson.[51]
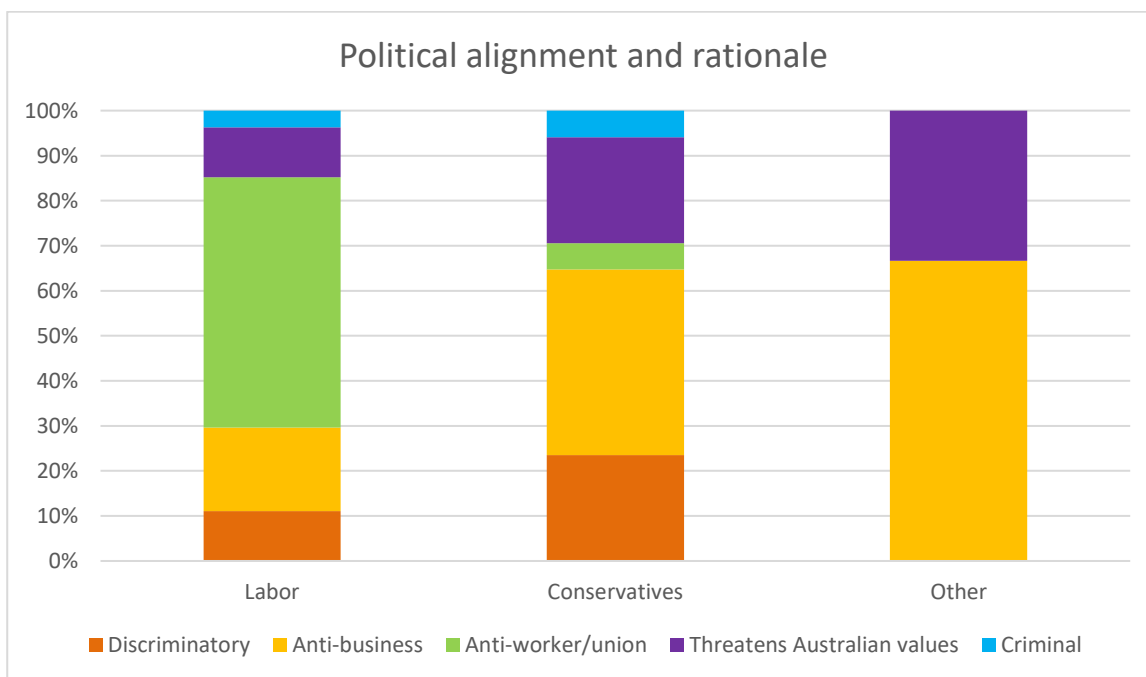

Figure 3: Political alignment and rationale for 'un-Australian' characterisation.

Source: Author's summary of findings.

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[41] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 15 February 2012, 1451 (Tony Zappia, Member for Makin).

[42] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 18 April 2016, 3679 (Christopher Pyne, Member for Sturt, Leader of the House).

[43] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 6 February 2003, 11110 (Anthony Windsor, Member for New England).

[44] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 23 February 2009, 1402 (Robert McClelland, Attorney-General).

[45] Australian Labor Party, *48th National Platform*, accessed 1 May 2020, http://web.archive.org/web/20211120033231/https://www.alp.org.au/media/1539/2018_alp_national_platform_constitution.pdf.

[46] Liberal Party, *The Federal Platform of the Liberal Party of Australia*, accessed 6 May 2020, https://cdn.liberal.org.au/pdf/FederalPlatform.pdf.

[47] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 17 September 2009, 9925 (Barry Haase, Member for Kalgoorlie).

[48] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 2 October 2014, 11181 (Dan Tehan, Member for Wannon); Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30 November 2015, 14130 (Mal Brough, Member for Fisher, Minister for Defence Material).

[49] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 14 March 2002, 1342 (Dr Carmen Lawrence, Member for Fremantle).

[50] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 30 November 2015, 14130 (Mal Brough, Member for Fisher, Minister for Defence Material).

[51] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 4 December 2017, 12315 (Warren Entsch, Member for Leichhardt).

Relative frequency of use and political alignment

Based on this small-*N* study, there is no relationship between conservative politicians and more frequent usage of the term 'un-Australian'. Of the 50 randomly selected mentions of the term, there were 41 unique speakers: 53.7 per cent from the ALP, 41.5 per cent from a conservative party (Liberal, National, One Nation, or Bob Katter) and 1 per cent Independent. While making up 41.5 per cent of speakers, conservative MPs were under-represented, with 38.8 per cent of total uses of the term. In contrast, independent politicians (Anthony Windsor and Rebekha Sharkie), while making up only 4 per cent of speakers, used the term in over 8 per cent of the samples. These relationships could be more firmly defended if the selection was replicated. Moreover, over the 20-year period in question, six of eight Parliaments have been controlled by the Liberal–National Coalition. Consequently, those parties are likely over-represented in Hansard, due to having more members on the floor. This would need to be controlled for in a larger study. Finally, as each parliamentarian holds their position for a different period of time, a regression model would be necessary to determine average annual usage by each actor, rather than total usages across their career, as this obviously biases the results of long-standing MPs.

Interestingly, there are only three MPs who used the term more than 10 times across the entire 20-year period: Michael McCormack (a National MP), Graham Perret (Labor), and Martin Ferguson (Labor). This suggests the term is of limited popularity generally, is only popular among a limited set of individuals (seemingly not linked to their conservatism), or is reserved for matters of particular importance to MPs (although its use in the context of vegetarianism[52] and meat pies[53] belies this somewhat.).

Racial implications of the term 'un-Australian'

Of the sample selection, only six uses of the term explicitly refer to race, religion, or immigration, with four of those arguing racist or discriminatory behaviour itself is 'un-Australian' (twice by Liberal MPs, twice by Labor). Only Don Randall and Barry Haase (both members of the Liberal Party) use the term with arguably racist and/or xenophobic undertones. Barry Haase stated that:

> Australian citizenship [is] earned … by newcomers to Australia after a reasonable period of time, after having gained an understanding of our history and culture, after having qualified through a rigorous test in that regard and having an understanding of the English language so that they can attend to their responsibilities at law as Australians—is the most paramount value to maintain. If the passage of this legislation dilutes in any way the value of Australian citizenship or if it encourages values that I see as un-Australian, then it will be bad legislation.[54]

This is the most explicit definition made within the sample selection of what it takes to be 'Australian': time, understanding of history and culture, and a rigorous English language test. Haase fails to define what he deems as the type of 'un-Australian' values that endanger this process, but rather focuses on outlining those characteristics which are required to 'deserve' citizenship, implying that individuals who cannot/do not meet that bar are in some way 'un-Australian'. It is important to note that in 2009, discussion of the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship test Review and Other Measures) Bill was politically fraught. Many humanitarian organisations submitted recommendations and queries, concerned the amendments would harm already 'disadvantaged' groups.[55] Barry Haase argued that the then-Labor government was 'making a mockery of [Australia's] so-called border security',[56] and has repeated similar comments in the years since.[57] While this may suggest the term is used racially by certain individual politicians, rather than by parties as a whole, evidence suggests that progressive parties like Labor are more likely to demand retractions or punish members who express such sentiments.[58] The unwillingness of conservative politicians to call out their colleagues suggests an acceptance of, if not alignment to, those values.

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[52] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 March 2014, 2796 (Andrew Broad, Member for Mallee).

[53] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 31 May 2018, 5248 (Stephen Jones, Member for Whitlam).

[54] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 17 September 2009, 9925 (Barry Haase, Member for Kalgoorlie).

[55] Susan Kneebone, Laura Healy, and Marisa Money, *Submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee: Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill 2009* (Castan Centre for Human Rights: Law Monash University, 2009), 2.

[56] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 23 November 2009, 12590 (Barry Haase, Member for Kalgoorlie).

[57] Jane Kennedy and Glenn Barndon, '"Protection Policy Not Coping with Asylum Seeker Influx"—Barry Haase', *ABC News*, 10 April 2013.

[58] Annah Fromberg, 'Labor Senator Pulls "All Lives Matter" Post After Social Media Backlash', *ABC News*, 8 June 2020.

Academics like Condor,[59] Reeves[60] and Wetherell and Potter[61] argue that 'new racism' in political discourse has normalised the technique of using discussions of national identity or immigration to conceal racial discrimination. Following accusations of racist fear-mongering post-Tampa in 2001, then-Prime Minister John Howard 'reject[ed] completely the inference that the whole policy is racially based', and instead focused discussion on issues of security and maintaining 'Australian' values.[62] This mirrors the language and terminology used by Barry Haase and Don Randall, evidencing that racial discrimination in Australian politics has continued to develop a coded language of its own.[63]

However, while it would be easy to assume this is a problem reserved for conservative parties, during their own election campaigns, both Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd used similarly coded language to refer to 'boat people'. Gillard's assessment that unchecked immigration could result in Australia's 'way of life' being 'under threat',[64] and Rudd's promise to develop an 'orderly migration system' preyed upon similar societal fears.[65] This may suggest that discussions of Australian 'identity' and the dangers to it are more a political tactic used to win votes, than evidence of a particular party's predilection towards racism.

Taking into consideration the impacts of 'new racism' on political discourse, the category 'threatens Australian values' may be assumed to have some of the xenophobic/nationalist undertones identified in the above discussions. While conservative MPs were marginally more likely to identify a 'value' as 'un-Australian' (see Figure 1), it was only Barry Haase's characterisation that possessed such undertones. Independent Tony Windsor—who was instrumental in the formation of both the 1991 Liberal–National coalition government and the 2010 Labor government[66]—used the term 'un-Australian' to refer to any subservience of the Australian government, in the context of aiding US forces in Iraq.[67] Labor MP (and now Prime Minister) Anthony Albanese expressed sentiments that bowing to the monarchy is 'un-Australian' as it goes against Australia's 'egalitarian principles'.[68] This republican sentiment was shared by then-Labor MP Mark Latham.[69] Overall, language identified in this category was only marginally more likely to be used in a xenophobic manner than in the sample as a whole (that is, at a rate of 1/5).

Impact of gender on utilisation of the term 'un-Australian'

While Federal Parliament was made up of between 28 and 39 per cent women over the 20-year period in question,[70] women comprise only 12.2 per cent of speakers (5 of 50) in the sample selection. This is supported by evidence which suggests women are often less vocal in parliamentary discussions and avoid discussion during particularly aggressive debates.[71] Four of the women speakers were members of Labor, with the fifth being the lone representative of the Centre Alliance. While Labor had more women representatives in Federal Parliament (both in raw numbers and as a percentage of total representation) over this two-decade period,[72] the unequal presence of Liberal women in the sample limits the breadth and accuracy of this paper's discussion. In general, women MPs were far more likely to refer to a particular value as 'un-Australian' (see Figure 4),

[59] Susan Condor, 'Pride and Prejudice: Identity Management in English People's Talk About "This Country"', *Discourse & Society* 11 (2000): 193.

[60] Frank Reeves, *British Racial Discourse. A Study of British Political Discourse about Race and Race-related Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[61] Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

[62] John Howard, interview with Tony Jones, *Lateline* (ABC Television, 8 November 2001).

[63] Every and Augoustinos, 'Constructions of Racism', 431.

[64] Julia Gillard, Press Conference, Labour Caucus Room (Parliament House, 24 June 2010).

[65] Kevin Rudd, interview with Neil Mitchell (Radio 3AW, 15 November 2007).

[66] 'Mr Tony Windsor MP', *Senators and Members*, accessed 1 May 2020, https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=009LP.

[67] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 6 February 2003, 11110 (Anthony Windsor, Member for New England).

[68] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 June 2003, 17321 (Anthony Albanese, Member for Grayndler).

[69] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 25 June 2002, 4373 (Mark Latham, Member for Werriwa).

[70] Dr Joy McCann and Janet Wilson, *Representation of Women in Australian Parliaments* (Politics and Public Administration Section, Australian Parliamentary Library, 2012).

[71] Elina Haavio-Mannila and Drude Dahlerup, 'Summary', in *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics*, ed. Elina Haavio-Mannila and T Skard (New York: Porgamon, 1985), 160–69.

[72] Anna Hough, 'The Gender Composition of the 45th Parliament', *Australian Parliament House*, accessed 10 May 2021, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament.

where their male counterparts prioritised specific pieces of legislation or actions. This is perhaps a result of women occupying issue areas which are seen as 'softer' (sociocultural over economic).[73]
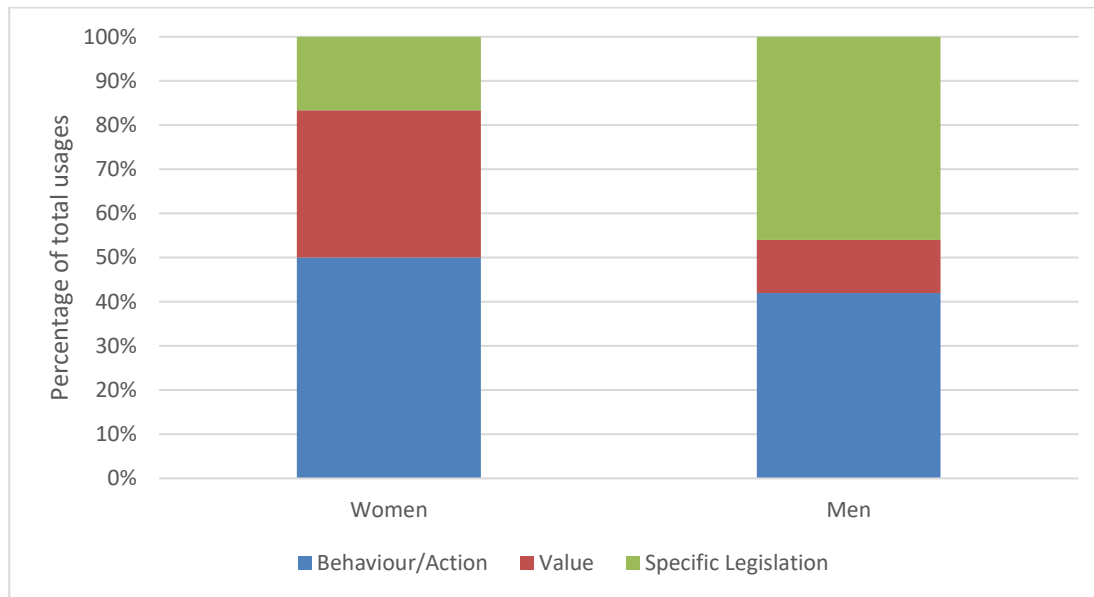

Figure 4: Gender and rationale for 'un-Australian' characterisation.

Source: Author's summary of findings.

Notable is not only the frequency with which women MPs used the term, but also how it was employed. In three of the five uses of 'un-Australian', women used qualifiers in a manner that was not seen in their male counterparts. Annette Ellis 'suggest[ed]' the government's behaviour was 'un-Australian', and 'plead[ed]' with them to 'think carefully' on their actions.[74] Similarly, Deb O'Neill stated it was '*perhaps a little* un-Australian to crow about success [emphasis added]'.[75] Rebekha Sharkie couched her use of the term in a plural '*we* would go so far as to say it's un-Australian to take a free ride on the hard work of others [emphasis added]', referring to herself not as an individual but as a member of the Nick Xenophon Team.[76] Without further comparison, it is impossible to know if this is a general pattern in the gendered dynamics of parliamentary debate, or if the term 'un-Australian' carries a particular weight that results in such qualifications. Moreover, it is possible that as a group experiencing discrimination themselves, women politicians are more likely to paint an inclusive ideal of Australian 'identity',[77] but this too requires additional study.

Going forward

Ultimately, this essay was not able to prove that parliamentarians rely upon 'un-Australian' to denote any singular meaning. Indeed, it is perhaps the breadth and non-specificity of the term that is surprising, used to refer to anything from vegetarianism[78] to immodesty.[79] My hypothesis that conservative politicians utilised the term more frequently was not proven. However, the only two usages with arguably racist or xenophobic undertones were both made by conservative MPs, providing some support for my hypothesis. While this paper

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[73] Victoria L Brescoll, 'Who Takes the Floor and Why: Gender, Power and Volubility in Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2011): 625.

[74] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 8 March 2005, 127 (Annette Ellis, Member for Namadgi).

[75] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 25 May 2011, 4669 (Deborah O'Neill, Member for Robertson).

[76] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 19 June 2017, 6779 (Rebekha Sharkie, Member for Mayo).

[77] Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Women Parliamentary Leaders to Work for More Inclusive Politics', 23 April 2018, accessed 9 May 2021, https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2018-04/women-parliamentary-leaders-work-more-inclusive-politics.

[78] Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 March 2014, 2796 (Andrew Broad, Member for Mallee).

[79] Carole Vallone Mitchell, 'A Cautionary Tale for Tall Poppies and Women Leaders', *Huff Post*, 8 January 2016.

has failed to conclusively define 'un-Australian', Anonymous Respondent Six's characterisation may be closest to the truth, 'un-Australian' means whatever a politician needs it to mean.[80]

There are many pathways for improvement upon this research that could prove fruitful. This paper was limited by a small sample size and the non-replication of these findings. A rigorous assessment of a large sample of sources would likely reveal more reliable findings. Moreover, the randomisation of the samples used in this essay resulted in a large selection of sources from 2005, and very few from the years immediately following. Future studies could benefit from selecting a certain number of sources from each year, relative to the total number, to ensure a more even distribution. Finally, in order to determine whether or not women are less likely to utilise the term in question, a quantitative analysis over the entire time period would be necessary, so as not to bias certain genders through randomised selection.

Following in the footsteps of Every, Augoustinos, and Younane Brookes, comparing the term's frequency and subtext across election periods could provide additional insight, especially if mapped against major racially charged incidents in Australian history (e.g. the Tampa affair,[81] Cronulla riots,[82] and Lindt hostage crisis[83]). Additionally, charting frequency of the term's usage and its connotations in combination with the ethnic/familial background of parliamentarians could shed light on whether one's relationship with national identity impacts usage. Finally, Younane Brookes's method of assessing only policy launch speeches could be beneficial in ensuring stability of sources across a larger time period and ensuring that each source is equally representative of their party's opinions during that period.

Use of the term 'un-Australian' continued throughout the period of COVID-19, with everything from fraudulent pandemic leave payments to dobbing in your neighbour (or ex-PM) for not wearing a mask being slapped with the pejorative.[84] While this essay was unsuccessful in determining what, if any, is the real purpose behind politicians' uses of the term 'un-Australian', further study could help to clarify the impact and relevance of parliamentary discourse on a population whose national identity is as fluid as our own.

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[80] O'Toole, 'Vox-Pop: UnAustralian', 513–17.

[81] 'Tampa Affair', *National Museum of Australia*, accessed 5 March 2023, https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/tampa-affair.

[82] Paul Farrell, 'How Cronulla's Summer of Simmering Tension Boiled Over into Race Riots', *The Guardian*, 9 December 2015.

[83] Summer Woolley, 'Lindt Café Siege: A Look Back at Sydney's 2014 Hostage Crisis, Five Years On', *7 News*, 14 December 2019.

[84] Anthony Galloway, '"It's Un-Australian": Fraudster's Target $10 Million in Pandemic Leave Payments', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 2022.

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