
http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/5674

Copyright © Centre for Social and Community Research, Murdoch University
It is posted here for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted.
Prejudice against asylum seekers and the fear of terrorism: The importance of context
Anne Pedersen, Susan E. Watt and Brian Griffiths

Abstract
Australia has a rich history of immigration. Historically, immigrants have often met with negativity and distrust (for example, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese immigrants). Evidence is now accumulating that many Australians also are critical of the latest ‘wave’ of asylum seekers. In the present study, we were interested in the effect of the wider society on the social inclusion (or not) of asylum seekers using an ecological framework and in particular focusing on the ‘macrosystem’ and ‘location’. To do this, we examined negative attitudes toward asylum seekers as well as their correlates collected from 649 members of the West Australian community. Our results indicate that participants who reported more negative views about asylum seekers were also significantly more likely to report a fear of terrorism. Additionally, there were significant location differences in the strength of this relationship. Together with past research, our results indicate that context can greatly impact on the well-being of new Australians.

Introduction
Australia has a long — and some may say ‘chequered’ — history of different cultural groups settling in, and many newcomers have found the process difficult. In the past, people from Greek, Italian, and Vietnamese backgrounds, to name just a few, have faced a great deal of prejudice and discrimination (Manning 2006). Have things changed in recent years? Evidence is accumulating that although prejudice against the groups named above may be decreasing, there is a great deal of prejudice against Indigenous Australians, those from a Muslim background and the Middle East and those from Asia (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, and McDonald 2004; Forrest and Dunn 2006).

A great deal of prejudice is directed against asylum seekers — those people who do not have official authorisation to come to Australia (Klocker 2004; Pedersen, Attwell and Heveli 2005; Saxton 2003). It is also argued that this ‘wave’ of prejudice is different because it is officially sanctioned by the Federal Government (Lawrence 2006). Results of a recent Western
Australian study examining community attitudes toward Indigenous Australians, asylum seekers and Asian Australians indicate that people were most negative toward asylum seekers, followed by Indigenous Australians and then by Asian-Australians (Pedersen 2004). Clearly, more work is needed to examine causes of such negativity.

As shown by previous research, some correlates of prejudice against asylum seekers are lack of education, high levels of national identity and self esteem, being male, and the acceptance of incorrect information about asylum seekers, sometimes called ‘false beliefs’ or ‘myths’ (Pedersen et al. 2005). Other research has also found that prejudice is linked with notions of illegality (Augoustinos and Quinn 2003; Klocker 2004; Hartley and Pedersen under review; Saxton 2003) and ‘queue jumping’ (Klocker 2004; Pedersen et al. 2005). However, a vast majority of asylum seekers who have arrived since 1998 have eventually been recognised as refugees: in 1999-2000 95 per cent of asylum seekers from Afghanistan and 90 per cent of asylum seekers from Iraq (the main groups arriving in the ‘busy’ years) were found to be genuine refugees. Also, the main category of ‘illegals’ in Australia are visa-overstayers (Crock, Saul and Dastyari 2006). As noted by Einfeld (2002), asylum seekers have broken no laws and are therefore not entering Australia illegally. Klocker (2004) further found that participants saw asylum seekers as potential terrorists. This brings us to the main focus of this paper: the effect of perceptions of the threat of terrorism on attitudes toward groups stereotypically associated with such attacks. We now discuss four studies which examined this issue post-September 11, 2001.

Certainly, terrorist attacks can increase prejudice against groups seemingly associated with them. For example, Bar-Tal and Labin (2001) found that Israeli adolescents showed increased anti-Arab prejudice and increased social distance from this group after conflicts between Israel and Palestine. Events such as these, the authors argued, can serve as a ‘seismograph’ to intergroup relations. In the US, Oswald (2005) examined the perception of threat with respect to terrorist attacks on attitudes toward Arabs. They found that prejudice against Arabs was significantly related to the perception of threat. In another study, Persson and Mushzer-Eizenman (2005) examined the effects of news coverage on attitudes toward Arabs in the United States. The researchers
found higher levels of prejudice against Arabs than against black Americans immediately after the September 11. They also found that more news exposure related to more prejudice against Arabs. Finally, Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede (2006) examined attitudes toward Arabs after the March 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid. Their participants also showed higher levels of prejudice against Arabs after this attack.

The literature reviewed above gives some insight into some relevant social psychological research regarding attitudes toward asylum seekers as well as the relationship between the fear of terrorism and attitudes toward Arabs. Clearly, however, societal forces relate to the issues at hand. One societal/contextual issue which we consider important is location. Although little research has looked at location differences with respect to attitudes toward asylum seekers, it is worth examining because previous research has found such differences when investigating attitudes toward Indigenous Australians (Dunn and McDonald 2001; Pedersen et al. 2000). This is an important point: if there are different reasons for prejudices in different locations, this must affect any anti-racism strategies.

In short, the research has indicated that individual factors are important when looking at intergroup relations (e.g., high levels of national identity). But we have also shown that societal factors are also important (e.g. world events such as September 11). One useful framework for examining these different causes of prejudice against asylum seekers may be the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) who proposed that an individual is a dynamic and evolving being who interacts with many different environments or systems. Individuals are affected by such systems, and the systems are affected by individuals, and these systems range from the individual to the societal (see Dalton, Elias and Wandersman 2001's interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's framework, Figure 1).
against Arabs than against blacks after the March 2004 terrorist attack. Fernandez-Guede (2001) also showed higher levels of prejudice against Arabs than against blacks after the March 2004 terrorist attack.

This gives some insight into some possible triggers regarding attitudes toward asylum seekers. Clearly, however, societal factors also play a role. One societal/contextual issue is the date of September 11. Although little research has been conducted with respect to attitudes toward asylum seekers because previous research investigating attitudes toward asylum seekers was conducted before 9/11, if there are different reasons for increased prejudice, it is important to consider how these factors can influence attitudes toward asylum seekers. For example, it is important to consider how different systems that individuals interact with can influence attitudes toward asylum seekers. First, we look at available research on this topic. In the innermost circle in Figure 1, there is the individual (in this case, the asylum seeker is the target person — we are interested in how the asylum seeker is affected by the wider system). With regard to *microsystems* (the layer immediately outside the individual), this connects to the dynamics of the individual within her or his immediate circle such as families, friends, and work groups. We use work groups as an example. It is very difficult for asylum seekers to get work, and therefore to be members of work groups. Initially, many asylum seekers who are not detained are on ‘bridging visas’. These give no working rights, welfare rights or public medical insurance (McNevin and Correa-Valez 2006). In addition, the majority of asylum seekers who are recognised as refugees and are consequently allowed to work, nonetheless often experience employment difficulties due to problems with recognition of qualifications and discrimination (Colic-Peisker and
This often results in low status jobs (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006). Given the amount of prejudice directed toward asylum seekers (Pedersen et al. 2004), their work life may not be easy when they do find work. Clearly, the microsystem affects the social inclusion of asylum seekers even when they are accepted as refugees.

With regard to organizations (Figure 1), as pointed out by Dalton et al. (2001), these can be smaller microsystems or part of larger social units such as religious organisations. One can see the relevance of the church in issues surrounding asylum seekers. Not only do many church representatives attempt to help asylum seekers (e.g. by visiting detention centres and/or providing funds for asylum seekers who are in the community but have no access to work), but at times church leaders act collectively regarding asylum seeker policy. After what was seen as draconian legislation (a Bill designed to process all ‘boat people’ offshore) passed through the House of Representatives on 10th August 2006, church leaders strongly lobbied members of the Senate to block such legislation. The legislation was in fact blocked on 14 August 2006 (three Coalition politicians crossed the floor and two abstained).

With regard to localities (Figure 1) some research finds location differences in levels of prejudice against other marginalized groups, such as Indigenous Australians (e.g., Dunn and McDonald 2001; Pedersen et al. 2000). Groups may be differently represented in different locations, as factors such as broader socio-demographic mix and political issues vary across location. One focus of this paper is to examine whether there are any location differences with regard to issues surrounding asylum seekers.

Finally, with regard to macrosystems, government institutions have a significant effect on the well-being of asylum seekers. In 1999, the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) was introduced so asylum seekers who are officially recognised as refugees are permitted to stay in Australia for three years after which time their situation is re-examined. They are banned from returning to Australia if they leave the country during this time (Marr and Wilkinson 2003). It has been shown that TPVs have an adverse effect on the mental health of asylum seekers (Steel et al. 2006). Furthermore, asylum seekers can be detained indefinitely while their claims are processed, seven years. The Australian government adopted the ‘Pacific solution’ where asylum seekers deemed not to be ‘Australian family members’ are taken to other countries while their status is determined. Additionally, asylum seekers do not have access to Australian tribunals. This is the only Western nation with such a policy (Crock et al. 2006). This has an adverse impact on the well-being of asylum seekers.

In the present study, we focus on four aims regarding prejudice against asylum seekers.

1. Our first aim was to determine whether location differences influence prejudice toward asylum seekers or the fear of asylum seekers or the fear of asylum seekers. Social contact theory suggests that there should be a positive correlation between the two constructs.

2. Our second aim was to investigate whether there is a positive correlation between attitude toward asylum seekers and fear of terrorism. The findings of Klocker (2001) suggest that there should be a positive correlation between these two constructs.

3. If our expectation concerning the correlation between attitudes toward asylum seekers and fear of terrorism is confirmed, we will investigate whether there is a positive correlation between pre-existing negative attitudes and the perception that asylum seekers are a threat to the community. Research suggests that there should be a positive correlation between these two constructs.

4. Again, if our hypothesis concerning the correlation between attitudes toward asylum seekers and fear of terrorism is confirmed, we will investigate whether there is a positive correlation between pre-existing negative attitudes and the perception that asylum seekers are a threat to the community. Research suggests that there should be a positive correlation between these two constructs.

Procedure and participation
A sample of 2,400 residents was selected, with 800 from each, was drawn.
their claims are processed; some were detained for as long as seven years. The Australian Government has also implemented the ‘Pacific solution’ where some offshore Australian territories are deemed not to be ‘Australian’ for immigration purposes. Therefore the asylum seekers intercepted by authorities in those territories are taken to other countries such as Nauru while their refugee status is determined. Additionally, they do not have the right to access Australian tribunals if their case is unsuccessful. Australia is the only Western nation to adopt such hardline asylum seeker policy (Crock et al. 2006). Clearly, this macrosystem has a huge adverse impact on the well-being of asylum seekers.

In the present study, we attempted to answer four questions regarding prejudice against asylum seekers.

1. Our first aim was descriptive: to ascertain whether location differences influenced either the attitudes toward asylum seekers or the fear of terrorism. We were also interested in how much contact participants had with asylum seekers, as theory suggests that this might influence their attitudes.

2. Our second aim was to examine the relationship between negative attitudes and fear of terrorism. We would expect a positive correlation between the two constructs given the findings of Klocker (2004) and others.

3. If our expectation of a significant correlation between the two constructs were confirmed, our next aim would be to investigate whether there were location differences with respect to the correlation between the attitude toward asylum seekers and fear of terrorism.

4. Again, if our hypothesis were confirmed (see Aim 2), our fourth and final aim would be to investigate whether any link between attitudes toward asylum seekers and terrorism was publicly endorsed by representatives of the federal government. We concentrated on the federal government as they hold the power, and are primarily responsible for the legislation surrounding asylum seekers.

**Procedure and participants**

A sample of 2,400 residents from Albany, Kalgoorlie, and Perth, 800 from each, was drawn randomly from the 2004 phone book,
and a questionnaire was mailed to each person. Two weeks after the initial questionnaire was sent, a reminder letter was sent. The response rates from Albany, Kalgoorlie and Perth were 35, 21 and 30 per cent respectively. After cross-checking the sample’s characteristics, we found no significant difference between the three locations with respect to such variables as education and gender. The only demographic that varied was age (respectively, the average ages in Albany, Kalgoorlie and Perth were 57, 46, and 54, with a range from 16-88 years). All these differences are statistically significant but because age was not correlated with attitudes when education was taken into account, no adjustments for age were made in the analyses. There were no location differences with respect to formal education; 35 per cent of participants held a bachelors degree or higher which is higher than the 18 per cent in the general population (see ABS 2001). Regarding sex, although there were slightly more females (54 per cent) than males (46 per cent), this difference was not statistically significant. Thus, our participants seemed fairly representative of the community in general: they came from all walks of life and there was little difference between participants in the three locations.

Measures

Attitudes toward asylum seekers

Following an open-ended question on why people felt the way they did about asylum seekers, participants completed a quantitative measure of attitude, the Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers Scale (ATAS; Pedersen, Atwell and Heveli, 2005). Participants were asked to respond to questions such as ‘If asylum seekers need refuge, they should be granted refuge’ (positive statement) and ‘If asylum seekers are not happy, send them home’ (negative statement). Responses were on a scale from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’) with a neutral midpoint at 4 (‘neither agree nor disagree’); after recoding, the higher the score, the higher the negative attitude.

Perceived threat from terrorism

Participants completed a quantitative measure of perceived threat from terrorism (Terrorism-Perceived Threat, or TPT) which was constructed by the second participants to respond to today does not present a freedom and democracy ( fellow Australians will be statement). Responses were described above; after recode the negative attitude.

Contact with asylum seek

Participants were asked the how much contact you have answer from 0 (none) to 6 (Politicians’ statements lin

We relied upon media stat because these are partic large. We used the inter media statements released relevant key phrases ‘terror of pertinent Federal Govern

Socio-demographics

Respondents were asked education level (1 = prima orientation (high scores = sex (1 = female, 2 = male).

Results and discussion

Attitudes toward asylum

As can be seen in Table score for the ATAS was scale; in fact, there was clustered around the new TPT was a little higher.

We then separate accepting, indifferent, and under 30 per cent of partic
Two weeks after the letter was sent. The ages were 35, 21 and 36, respectively. The sample’s sex difference between the groups was education and political orientation (respectively, Nere 57, 46, and 50). Differences are correlated with no adjustments for multiple comparisons. We could not recode the positive statement, 'Terrorism as it is today does not present a very serious attack on our society’s freedom and democracy' (positive statement) and 'I worry that fellow Australians will be hurt by terrorist actions' (negative statement). Responses were made on the same seven-point scale described above; after recoding, the higher the score, the higher the negative attitude.

Contact with asylum seekers
Participants were asked the question: 'Now, we are interested in how much contact you have had with asylum seekers'. They could answer from 0 (none) to 6 (a lot).

Politicians’ statements linking asylum seekers and terrorists
We relied upon media statements released by Federal politicians because these are particularly accessible to the community at large. We used the internet search engine ‘Google’ to identify media statements released by Federal politicians searching for the relevant key phrases ‘terrorist’ and ‘asylum seeker’ and the names of pertinent Federal Government politicians.

Socio-demographics
Respondents were asked to state their age in years, their education level (1 = primary school only, 5 = university), political orientation (high scores = right wing; low scores = left wing), and sex (1 = female, 2 = male).

Results and discussion
Attitudes toward asylum seekers
As can be seen in Table 1, both scales were reliable. The mean score for the ATAS was just above the neutral midpoint of the scale; in fact, there was a significant minority of scores which clustered around the neutral midpoint. The mean score for the TPT was a little higher.

We then separated our sample into three categories: accepting, indifferent, and rejecting. As can be seen by Table 2, under 30 per cent of participants in all locations were accepting of
asylum seekers. Differences among the mean scores on the ATAS across locations were not significant \(F(2,588) = 1.45, \text{n.s.}\). Chi-square tests showed that the percentage of respondents within each of the three categories did not differ significantly across locations. Values of chi-squared for acceptance, indifference and rejecting were 1.04, 1.02 and 1.04 respectively.

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATAS</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPT</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scale reliability

**Table 2.** Scale descriptives by location for the Attitudes toward Asylum Seekers Scale (ATAS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean/SD</th>
<th>Accepting</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
<th>Rejecting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>4.44 (1.41)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>4.43 (1.32)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>4.27 (1.41)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>4.37 (1.38)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noteworthy that few of our respondents had experience with asylum seekers (56 per cent reported having no experience whatsoever with asylum seekers and 95 per cent scored below the scale midpoint of 3 on this item). Additionally, under 2 per cent of participants knew asylum seekers in detention. The question then arises where does this negativity originate from, given the lack of personal experience? Unfortunately, as outlined in full in Pedersen et al. (2006), much negativity and false information is stated by political leaders, and then spread through the mass media (also see Manning 2006 on this point).

**Correlation between ATAS and TPT**

After controlling for age and education, our hypothesis of a significant correlation between attitudes toward asylum seekers and fear of terrorism was supported both when we examined the whole sample \((r=.41)\), and when we examined individual locations (this latter finding will be enlarged is, participants who scored high also scored high on the Terrorism relationship supports the findings (2005). However, there is no evidence of asylum seekers and terrorism (Pedersen et al. (2005), being locked in fact be counter-productive for to opportunity to carry out terrorist acts.

Following on from the previous elsewhere that many asylum seek public as primarily Muslim (Ped. Thus, one might also hypothesis between the fear of terrorism and has in fact been found to be the this recent Western Australian study found between the fear of terrorists Australians \((r=.47)\).

**Location differences regarding Fear of Terrorism**

As noted previously, there was no difference in either the ATAS or the TPT. However, whether the size of the correlation between asylum seekers and perceived across the three locations. We differences between the coefficient and examined the probability of

The correlation between the ATAS Albany \((r=.51)\), followed by Kalgoorlie \((r=.29)\). We then tested these coefficients for significance. We found that the differences were stronger compared to Kalgoorlie (there was a higher in Albany), and in Kalgoorlie a trend for the correlation to be higher importantly, however, we found with the correlation between compared with Perth. Specifi...
mean scores on the ATAS (2,588) = 1.45, n.s.). Chi-square of respondents within this latter finding will be enlarged upon in the next section). That is, participants who scored high on the prejudice scale (ATAS) also scored high on the Terrorism-Perceived Threat scale. This relationship supports the findings of Klocker (2004) and Oswald (2005). However, there is no evidence at all for a link between asylum seekers and terrorism (Mares 2002), and as noted in Pedersen et al. (2005), being locked up for years in detention may in fact be counter-productive for terrorists, as they would have little opportunity to carry out terrorist activity.

Following on from the present findings, it has been noted elsewhere that many asylum seekers are seen by the general public as primarily Muslim (Pedersen, Watt and Hansen 2006). Thus, one might also hypothesise a significant relationship between the fear of terrorism and prejudice against Muslims. This has in fact been found to be the case (Bellissimo et al. 2006). In this recent Western Australian study, a significant correlation was found between the fear of terrorism and prejudice against Muslim Australians (r=.47).

**Location differences regarding correlation between ATAS and Fear of Terrorism**

As noted previously, there was no significant location difference on either the ATAS or the TPT. However, we were interested as to whether the size of the correlation between attitudes toward asylum seekers and perceived threat from terrorism differed across the three locations. To achieve this, we converted differences between the coefficients of correlations into z-scores, and examined the probability of obtaining a difference of that size. The correlation between the ATAS and the TPT was strongest in Albany (r=.51), followed by Kalgoorlie (r=.41), followed by Perth (r=.29). We then tested these correlations for location differences. We found that the differences were marginally significant in Albany compared to Kalgoorlie (there was a trend for the correlation to be higher in Albany), and in Kalgoorlie compared to Perth (there was a trend for the correlation to be higher in Kalgoorlie). Most importantly, however, we found a significant location difference with the correlation between the ATAS and TPT in Albany compared with Perth. Specifically, the correlation between the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>ATAS</th>
<th>TPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-square of respondents within each location.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>ATAS</th>
<th>TPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-square of respondents within each location.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>ATAS</th>
<th>TPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chi-square of respondents within each location.**
ATAS and TPT was significantly higher in Albany as opposed to Perth.

Table 3. Location differences in correlations between TPT and ATAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany/Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany/Perth</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.003**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie/Perth</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation marginally different
** Correlation significantly different

Why might the correlation be significantly stronger in Albany than in Perth, and marginally stronger in Albany than in Kalgoorlie? It could be because the issue of asylum seekers/refugees was highly salient and politicized in Albany at the time of our survey. For example, there were divisive debates in the local council (see Tilbury, Toussaint, and Davis 2005). With such differences of opinion, it could be that anti-asylum seeker residents sought to defend themselves against the 'do-gooders' who accused the former of being heartless, selfish etc. One way of doing this was resorting to the terrorism argument (‘we’re the realists — we know…’). If one accepts that the asylum seeker issue was more politicized in Albany, then those who had negative ATAS scores would be expected to draw (even more heavily) on the postulated link between terrorism and asylum seekers than those in other locations. However, as noted in the previous paragraph, there was also a marginal difference in the correlations between ATAS and TPT in Perth and Kalgoorlie which leads us to speculate whether there may also be country versus city differences at play here. Future research should examine this issue — our data do not allow us to speculate further than this.

In short, our findings take further previous research on location differences with respect to other cultural groups (e.g., Indigenous Australians). They also support the importance of location with respect to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory of ecological development.
Albany as opposed to Kalgoorlie? It seems that residents sought to make decisions between TPT and ATAS scores more strongly in Albany than in Kalgoorlie. At the time of our survey, there were differences of opinion among the local council (see previous research on cultural groups), and it was the local council (see 1 such differences of opinion) who accused the realists — we refer to speculative residents — of queue jumping as an attempt to infiltrate our country. As the realists accused the seekers/refugees, the realists' theory of terrorism was more negative ATAS scores than those in other paragraphs. However, there was no such disagreement between ATAS and TPT scale scores, and we were unable to speculate whether qualitative responses were at play here. Therefore, our data do not support the idea that the politician endorsement of terrorism theme

Not only was there a significant correlation between the ATAS and TPT scale, but some participants (33 in all) also wrote qualitative responses that confirmed this link. For example: "asylum seekers are queue jumpers and should be treated with great caution, given the ability of terrorists to infiltrate our country." Where did these ideas come from? Unfortunately, they appear to be shared — and verbalised — by top Australian officials. For example, PM John Howard stated: "You can give no guarantees that asylum seekers are not terrorists" (Tan 2002). Some media lent support to Howard's assertions. For example, Sydney Daily Telegraph's editorial of 17 September 2001 stated:

With the threat of terrorist counter-attacks against any nation that aids the United States, Australia must be vigilant, particularly in maintaining the sovereignty of its borders. It is for this reason Mr Howard should reintroduce the Border Protection Bill ... many of the illegal immigrants [sic] come from Afghanistan ... these are unprecedented times and call for Australia to have the moral courage to make decisions that are in the best interests of the Australian people (MacMaster 2002:288).

Other politicians have also made the link between terrorism and refugees. For example, on the Sunrise program on Channel 7 in September 2001, the journalist made the comment: "And I know again, it's drawing a long bow but on the subject of possible terrorism does this just underscore how careful Australia needs to be in screening would-be refugees?" The then Defence Minister Peter Reith made the following response:

There's no doubt about that, absolutely no doubt about that. And one of the points that we will be making in the full court of the Federal Court which is sitting today is that a government does have and should have at law the right as a sovereign territory to protect its borders and to use its military to do so. Quite frankly, why else would you have a defence force if you are not entitled to use them to deal with illegal entries into your own country?
Is this explicit linking of asylum seekers with terrorism continuing? It would appear so. The examples given above outline politicians’ and media’s comments preceding the conduct of the present research. After the attempted border protection policy of processing all boat people on islands such as Nauru was scrapped due to the Liberal ‘rebels’ refusing to support such legislation, a number of other Liberal politicians who supported the legislation made similar claims. For example, WA MP Don Randall stated that the failure of the legislation would make it harder to fight local terrorism. Specifically, he said:

‘I think they (the rebel Liberals) are taking a very, very dangerous view of what we are trying to achieve here, given the fact that international terrorism is on the rise’ (Boat people security risk: MP 2006).

Given that Persson and Musher-Eizenman (2005) found that increased news coverage increased prejudice toward Arabs, such public statements by politicians are problematic. A link between asylum seekers and terrorism has entered the discourse of the Australian public; much of Australian talkback radio linked the September 11 terrorists with Muslim asylum seekers trying to push their way into Australia (Marr and Wilkinson 2003). These findings support the importance of Macrosystems with respect to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory of ecological development.

We are not arguing for a causal relationship between attitudes toward asylum seekers and the fear of terrorism. While it is likely that politicians’ endorsement of the link between terrorism and refugees affected participants’ responses, it may also be that participants who were negative about newcomers generally may be more accepting of such politician endorsement. It is clear, however, that public statements like this are inflammatory. At worst, they can put incorrect ideas into community members’ heads; at best they confirm some false beliefs already held (see Pedersen et al., 2006 for a discussion of the relationship between prejudice, government representations, and other false beliefs such as ‘boat people are queue jumpers’, ‘asylum seekers are illegal’ and ‘people who arrive unauthorised are not genuine refugees’).

Conclusion

How do our findings relate to Australian community-level prejudice being fuelled by Government election issues? For example, Lawrence (2006:126) put it, ‘fear sells – a fact the ALP recently attempted to learn the hard way as they lost the seats which were recently won back in the last election’.

Second, although fear of terrorism did not always translate into discrimination against asylum seekers, such prejudice may be that existing public sentiment has been re-energised. This can result in negative impacts upon the terrorism ecosystem of the macrosystem: Australian political organizations, local community groups, and other parts of this body of knowledge are important, and affect the macrosystem: Australian community-level prejudice was approximately 90% accepted as refugee
ers with terrorism continuing? Even above outline politicians’ the conduct of the present order protection policy of a
ds such as Nauru was’ refusing to support such politicians who supported the example, WA MP Don Randall would make it harder to
aid:

are taking a very, very trying to achieve here, terrorism is on the rise’ 36).

izenman (2005) found that prejudice toward Arabs, such problematic. A link between entered the discourse of the in talkback radio linked the asylum seekers trying to push
kinson 2003). These findings systems with respect to biological development.
causal relationship between the fear of terrorism. While it of the link between terrorism responses, it may also be that it newcomers generally may in endorsement. It is clear, this are inflammatory. At into community members’ false beliefs already held (see of the relationship between ns, and other false beliefs inpers’, ‘asylum seekers are authorised are not genuine

Conclusion

How do our findings relate to the social inclusion of refugees in the Australian community? They do so in two primary ways. First, prejudice was linked with the fear of terrorism, which appears to be fuelled by Government politicians. Many have argued that 2001 elections have been won on issues surrounding asylum seekers. For example, Lawrence (2006) suggested that asylum seekers were targeted in an attempt to distract the public from policy issues. Even some members of the Coalition admit that asylum seeker issues affected the election outcome. Some Liberal MPs recently attempted to silence the ten Liberal ‘rebels’ by saying that the seats which were won during the 2001 ‘Tampa crisis’ could be lost (Dodson and Coorey 2006). As Labor’s Carmen Lawrence MP put it, ‘fear sells – and it gets governments elected’ (Lawrence 2006:126). Unfortunately for the refugees, these community fears often translate into both negative attitudes toward them, and discrimination against them (see Manning 2006).

Second, although attitudes toward asylum seekers and the fear of terrorism did not vary across location, the relationship between prejudice and the perception of threat was stronger in Albany compared with Perth. Two processes may be occurring in Albany. First, as in all locations, there could well be an existing perceived threat of terrorism fuelled by Government rhetoric which ties into attitudes toward asylum seekers in Albany. However, it may be that existing attitudes toward asylum seekers may draw upon the terrorism threat rhetoric as a justificatory mechanism. This can result in a self-perpetuating circle. However, it is important to note here that this explanation is speculative: the correlations do not allow us to argue for a causal relationship.

How do our results relate to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory about the ecology of human development? Previous research demonstrated the link between asylum seekers and microsystems, organizations, localities, and the macrosystem. Our research adds to this body of knowledge by showing that location is also important, and adding further to knowledge regarding the macrosystem: Australia’s values and laws. This is highly relevant to the social inclusion of refugees within our society (as approximately 90 per cent of asylum seekers are eventually accepted as refugees). Not only must people working with asylum
seekers and refugees look at the social context surrounding refugees (e.g. the location), but we must work together in an attempt to change the social context surrounding refugee issues.

References


Manning, P. 2006. Us and them: A media, Muslims and the Middle House.


Hartley, L., and A. Pedersen. (Under review). Asylum seeker policy orientation: the role of self versus other-focus and the perception of consensus.


Sunrise Program. 13 September 2006, the Hon Peter Reith MP.


Authors’ note
Correspondence should be addressed to the Authors’ note: Murdoch University, Murdoch, WA, 6150. The authors gratefully acknowledge Prof. Peter Steel for help with the paper although the authors take full responsibility for any errors.


Authors’ note

Correspondence should be addressed to Anne Pedersen at the School of Psychology, Murdoch University, Murdoch, WA, 6150, Australia A.Pedersen@murdoch.edu.au. The authors gratefully acknowledge Prof. Patricia Harris for her helpful comments on this paper although the authors take full responsibility for the views stated herein.