

THE ASIAN ELEMENT IN AUSTRALIA: 1996

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There has been much public debate about the size of the Asian-born and Asian ethnic-origin population in Australia (unmixed). By combining these two elements, it is estimated that the total unmixed Asian component of Australia's population is 8.16 per cent.

There is much public interest in this and, now that the preliminary results of the 1996 Census are published, it is possible to make preliminary estimates. More precise estimates will be possible when detailed census cross-tabulations become available later this year.

The first step is to estimate the birthplace origins of the population. The immigrants themselves (the first generation or I's) appear in the Census statistics of birthplace; these exclude overseas visitors. Their Australian-born children (second generation or II's) come from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publications showing births in Australia by birthplace of parents. The Australian-born grandchildren and great grandchildren (the III's and IV's) are estimated by applying relevant child-women ratios to the female II's.

The I's, however, are understated because some 616,800 persons in the 1996 census did not give a birthplace. I have estimated a share of this 'Not Stated' total for each Asian regional group by examining the 1986 Ancestry and Birthplace Census Statistics, to see what proportion of each ancestry did not give a birthplace, and then using such proportions as a guide to the likely share each regional birthplace group should have of the 616,800 'Not Stated' birthplaces of 1996.

Table 1: Population estimates for Asian regions by generation, 1996

Region	I's	II's	III's and IV's	Total
Sth. West Asia ^a	157,000	114,000	5,600	276,600
Sth. Asia ^b	148,800	143,200	7,600	299,600
East Asia ^c	727,900	162,500	9,100	899,500
Total	1,033,700	419,700	22,300	1,475,700

^a South West Asia (U.N. usage) is sometimes, quite erroneously, called the Middle East.

^b South Asia runs from Afghanistan east to Bangladesh.

^c East Asia includes north-east and south-east Asia. It is easier to treat these two regions together as the large Chinese population in both regions remains undivided.

Additionally there is the problem of census under-count, that is, the number of persons who did not fill in a census form or were not mentioned on the form of parent, spouse or other person. This was 2.6 per cent in the 1976 Census but in subsequent censuses has been about 1.9 per cent for everyone in Australia on census night and 1.6 per cent for permanent residents. Analysis of census under-count by birthplace suggests the under-count varies between resident birthplace groups but not very much when these are combined in birthplace regions. I have therefore increased each regional Asian resident birthplace group by 1.6 per cent; for all categories - I's, II's, III's and IV's. This gives, for the unmixed Asian birthplace population (ie. persons of pure Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese and other Asian birthplace origin) the results for mid 1996 shown in Table 1.

Table 2: Persons of unmixed Asian origin				
Region	I's	II's	III's and IV's	Total
Sth. Asia	146,300	128,800	7,000	282,100
Sth. West Asia	168,200	120,100	8,000	296,300
East Asia	725,200	160,000	9,000	894,200
Total	1,039,700	408,900	24,000	1,472,600

Birthplace origins, however, are not the same as ethnic origins. In the birthplace totals are: all immigrants of British ancestry born in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia etc. (40,000 in 1986 according to the 1996 Census cross-tabulations of ancestry and birthplace); all persons of Dutch origin born in Sri Lanka, Indonesia etc. (9,000 or so in 1986); all persons of Russian origin born in China (6,000 or more in 1986); and so on. These and their Australian-born descendants should be deducted from the birthplace origin totals.

In compensation we should add all those of Asian ethnic origin who were born in non-Asian countries. Many Indian immigrants were born in Fiji, Africa, the U.K. and elsewhere (12,000 or so in 1986). Numbers of Chinese were born in Europe, America, Africa and the Pacific (over 7,000 in 1986, mainly in Papua New Guinea, Fiji and other Pacific Islands). Some West Asians were born in Europe, Africa, the Pacific and the Americas (nearly 3,000 Lebanese and 2,000 Americans in 1986), and so on. All these, and their descendants born in Australia, should be added into the total of persons of Asian descent.

Deducting non-Asian ethnics and adding Asian ethnics born outside Asia, and their descendants, gives the following estimates for mid 1996. (See Table 2 for persons of unmixed Asian origin.)

These results can be compared with those of Table 1. For those interested in proportions, the Asian regions above make up the following proportions of the total resident census population of 1996; this being some 18,036,000 when raised for under-count: South West Asia: 1.64 per cent; South Asia 1.56 per cent; East Asia 4.96 per cent and Total Asia 8.16 per cent.

The final calculations concern persons of mixed Asian and non-Asian origin, concentrating on those born in Australia, rather than undertaking the difficult task of estimating the ethnic mix of immigrants arriving. Using the same sources and methods as for those of unmixed Asian descent we reach preliminary estimates as in Table 3.

Table 3: Australian-born of mixed Asian and non-Asian origin			
Region	II's	III's and IV's	Total
Sth. West Asia	95,500	5,000	100,500
Sth. Asia	32,500	3,000	35,500
East Asia	129,000	7,000	136,000
Total	257,000	15,000	272,000

It is clear from Tables 2 and 3 that persons of mixed descent are less numerous than persons of unmixed descent.

When further census information is available I will refine the above tables. But I doubt if that will change the general picture very much.

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