

Suburban Affairs: Political Communities across Sydney

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Abstract

Recent literatures explore aspects of political organisation at the local level. These include studies of social capital where such issues as the effects of diversity, the relevance of political opportunity structures and government facilitation all figure. A complementary literature explores new patterns of citizen engagement. Finally there are a number of earlier studies of local community organisations in Australia. This paper reports the preliminary findings of a survey of community organisation in six diverse state electorates in Sydney. Our methodology involved a three month time frame that utilised local newspapers, newsletters and websites of local organisations, local council information and websites, and interviews with prominent political actors, including candidates in state election. The three month period purposefully covered the following events: NSW state election March 24, Harmony Day March 21, Youth Week April 14-22, and Anzac Day April 25, that may have led to one-off examples of community organising. Contrary to expectations the study found broadly similar numbers of organisations were active in these communities. However, the types of organisations, the populations they represented and their strategies of advocacy and mobilisation differed. Issues to be explored in future work are also foreshadowed.

Introduction

This research broadens the empirical examination of political activity undertaken by local groups to enumerate lobbying, advocacy and community organising in distinctive, geographically dispersed political communities within Sydney. It does this by bringing together the study of citizen engagement with recent research on locally active interest groups. As acknowledged by many (see Jordan and Maloney 2007 for a survey) clearly empirically defining groups that seek to influence political processes is problematic and difficult. Some research focuses on how groups are constituted: this work seeks to establish levels of membership and internal democratic processes; other research focuses on the actions of groups and the arenas in which they try to influence and affect political change.

In the present case we identified a range of organisational types that had acted politically in some way by lobbying government to create change, advocating on behalf of a section of the population, or organising and mobilising community groups. We broadened traditional approaches to auditing political action by interest groups to include community service organisations for whom acting politically and influencing others was not their primary goal. The paper is in four main sections. First an outline of recent literature on citizen engagement and localised political mobilising; second a detailed introduction to our methodology; third a thorough overview of the six state electorates of Sydney in which this study took place; fourth, a selective overview of individual groups and their activities; and, lastly preliminary findings from the study into the total number and categorical differences between political organisations across the six electorates.

Literature

• Patterns of citizen engagement

Participation and citizen engagement in Australia is changing. In recent decades there has been a decline in membership in many traditional collective action oriented organisations such as political parties (see Wilson et al 2005) and trade unions (see Barnes 2007). Simultaneously there has been an increase in involvements with local community, environmental and human rights type organisations that reveals a shift in approach to long-term allegiances and membership. Organisations that do not necessarily intend to influence electoral politics are often more attractive to individuals interested in political and social change (Papadakis 2001, pp. 47–50).

For example, Passey and Lyons (2005) found that the types of groups that Australians join vary widely, and that the most popular are those that are the least recognised as overtly political actors (such as consumer organisations, sporting and recreation groups, and religious groups). Twenty percent of their respondents were members of a local community group. All of these groups had the potential to act on behalf of their members in trying to create policy or political change, and most did at some point. Further, the vast majority (86%) of the population were members of at least one of these community groups, with 70% being a member of two or more groups (Passey and Lyons 2005, p. 66). One limitation of this data is that it focuses only on ongoing membership not on a broader notion of occasional involvement. Other scholars argue that including this mode

of engagement would be more inclusive of the ad hoc, issue-inspired political activity that characterises the participation of women and young people (see Vromen 2003a and 2003b). There is no existing, large-scale research on the reasons some Australians find community groups based on values and identity more appealing than the more traditional political organisations such as parties and trade unions. Some have argued this is due to a shift in values from material and economic concerns toward post-materialism that emphasises social issues and quality of life (Inglehart 1990; Papadakis 2001, p. 41; Western and Tranter 2005). Nevertheless, Passey and Lyons (2005) found that there is a direct relationship between community group involvement and individual political participation, in that members are more likely to have also acted politically in individual kinds of activities such as volunteering, donating money and boycotting. This suggests that not only are Australian joiners but that their collective involvements also enhance their capacity to express their individual points of view (can we really claim there is a direction of influence?).

A second concern of research on citizen engagement is whether certain demographic factors or life experiences are related to participation. Three recurring facets examined in research are the influence of lifecycle; class; and diversity on political engagement (education?).

In considering lifecycle effects, recent research has questioned the previous assumption that young people are not politically involved and it is older generations that maintain associational involvements (Zukin et al 2006; Dalton 2007; Norris 2002; Li and Marsh 2008; Vromen 2003a). Rather, patterns of involvement may change over the lifecycle. People may become more embedded in their local communities as they age and have families (Verba et al 1995; Burns et al 2001) but overall all age groups participate. There are well established findings that women are actively involved in community associations and politics (Naples 1998), and social capital formation and generation (Lowndes 2004); and that this is shaped by gendered practices including family responsibilities (Chapman 1991; Vromen 2003b). There is also research suggesting that older, retired members of communities are most likely to engage in volunteer work (Pusey 2000), and that 'baby boomers' will amplify this tradition (see Einolf 2008). However, other studies have found that some of these lifecycle factors, and age in particular, are often mitigated by class, especially higher levels of education (see Tang 2008).

Thus proxies for class and measurements of socio-economic status have become central in explanations of political participation and engagement. Rising levels of education within an overall community are often tied with rising social and political engagement. For example, one recent article commences with: 'Education is one of the most important predictors—usually, in fact, the most important predictor—of many forms of political and social engagement—from voting to chairing a local committee to hosting a dinner party to trusting others' (Helliwell and Putnam 2007, 1). An examination of education levels attained, coupled with subsequent paid work, finds that once in the workforce educated young people become more politically engaged (Jarvis et al 2005). Other research contends that while general resources such as work and income are important, it is education that is paramount for predicting political engagement (Verba et al 1995). Newer studies also look at access to the internet as a socioeconomic political resource and find that it enhances the capacity to participate (Gibson et al 2005; Stern and Dillman

2006; anything on Korea here). However, some authors question solely socio-economic explanations of political participation and suggest there may be intervening variables such as cynicism about individual capacity to make a difference to community and political affairs (e.g. Henn et al 2007). This research has fostered a deeper consideration of how diversity and life experiences influence individual community and political engagement.

Other research finds that people build and join (or support) community associations, based on shared life experiences such as a shared identity, religion, or race and ethnicity. This is defined empirically as 'group based resources' as either a supplement or alternative to the individual level socio-economic and lifecycle resources explored above (see Leighley 1996). For example, Wong et al (2005) studied Asian Americans and found that, despite being a heterogeneous social entity within US society, groups are created at the community or local level that provide civic skills and mobilisation (thus political resources) in response to shared experiences of discrimination or racism. They do, however, suggest that group based resources are nuanced and state that 'identity alone may not prompt political action. Instead, identity may have to be actively mobilized and politicized before it becomes a force toward political action' (Wong et al 2005, 568). There have been similar findings on African Americans (Chong and Rogers, 2005) and politicised group solidarity; and immigrant groups in the Netherlands (van Heelsum 2005). However, other research on immigrants in European countries, such as Denmark and Belgium, suggests that the link between groups and political mobilisation differs dramatically between the different origins of immigrant groups, for example between Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, and suggest that other socio-economic resources remain important (Jacobs et al 2004; Togeby 2004).

- **Political groups and opportunities at the local level**

It has been argued that political groups or associations are located in 'specific cultural, economic, social and political contexts that impact on their shape, structure and modus operandi' (Maloney, van Deth and Robteutscher 2008, 263). Further, a strong link between associative culture and political culture means that 'associations are a microcosm of society at large' (Robteutscher 2002, 515). This implies that a vibrant and democratic mix of active groups reflects the availability of political opportunities in both the broader political culture as well as local political institutions. We could also expect this to work in the reverse, that is, a restrictive institutional and political culture means less political activity, or activity that is focussed inwards (locally?) rather than externally at political institutions. Correspondingly, local governments are seen to play a major role in creating a conducive political culture for association formation and cooperative relationships among associations, and between local government and associations. This can be done through consultation forums, outreach work by councils, and funding regimes (Smith et al 2004, 525). However this open and cooperative relationship rarely includes all groups and associations equally. Janet Newman suggests that privileging the role of local governments in creating participation brings forth an 'imaginary unity' underpinned by a 'communitarian ideal in which the production of social integration and cohesion are paramount goals. Thus disorder and dissent are not legitimate elements of participative governance'. She deliberately contrasts this form of cooperation and

political association with community development influenced organising of the past that attempted to democratise welfare and redress inequality (Newman 2005, 126).

Other research affirms that, when surveying the role of the state in fostering civil society organisations and political associations, the broad political context matters. Robert Lowry (2005) compared States in the USA to determine whether different numbers and types of groups were active. He found that there were not different organisations in different geographic locations, but that they differed in total numbers and that States with more groups had all types of groups in larger quantities. Lowry also concluded that 'the ability of state governments to promote or discourage organised civil society is slight' even when funding and regulations were taken into account (2005, 591). This is (no doubt?) partly attributable to the prolific philanthropy found in the USA context, which is not matched in Australia or the UK. When shifting to the local neighbourhood context researchers have found that geography matters in understanding political behaviour. That is, local political structures provide political opportunities for groups to mobilize. Baybeck and McClurg (2005, 495, 518) found that the local 'is one of the more stable social environments in which people interact' and provides the context for both how people understand politics and their place within it. However, in contrast Koopmans (2004) in comparative research studying cities within Germany, the UK and the Netherlands found that while there are differences between cities in the political opportunities they offer it is the overarching national policy framework toward inclusion and integration of immigrants that affects the likelihood for political mobilisation by ethnic groups.

- **Defining and counting group activity**

Increasingly research on interest groups, or pressure groups, focuses on the strategies groups use to gain political influence. Recent research has moved beyond the simple insider/outsider binary first introduced by Wyn Grant in the late 1970s (see Grant 2004) to show how groups use a range of both direct and indirect actions within their strategic repertoires (see McKinney and Halpin 2007). For example Anne Binderkrantz (2005) categorises direct strategies as administrative (including contacting Ministers; and responding to request for comment); or parliamentary (including contacting committees or party organisations) and indirect strategies are media (including writing letters and issuing press releases) or mobilisation (including public meetings, petitions and protests); and finds that groups use all of these to both gain influence and attract new members. All of these actions would be seen as part of the traditional terrain of lobbying and advocacy undertaken by interest groups aiming to create political change. However, concentrating on these facets of political action alone does not account for localised community development style organising techniques that underpin much service provision. For example, Debra Minkoff (2002, 377) identifies a local hybrid organisational type that combines advocacy and service provision as part of its core identity; and that these organisations develop out of a dual commitment to promoting the interests of and providing services to, for example, women and racial or ethnic minorities.

Existing research uses different classification of groups to understand what they do and who they represent. We started with influential Australian research that categorises the 'third sector'. Mark Lyons (2001, 5) defines this sector in terms of the voluntariness of individual involvement, the non-profit activity of organisations and the democratic

accountability and control of these organisations. The level of commitment to these facets may vary among different organisational types as the Australian community sector is incredibly diverse, and Lyons estimates that there are 700,000 community sector organisations and groups in Australia; but only 34,000 are employing organisations. Of course not all of these organisations will engage in lobbying, advocacy and/or community organising. However in this research we were interested in moving beyond standard definitions of political groups that focussed only on interest groups, and including a broader range of community organisations. Therefore in adapting Lyons' schema (2001, we have included a variety of organisational types for whom influencing politics is not their only or even primary goal, including: community, health and human services groups; religious groups; arts and culture organisations; sports and recreation; and educational groups. This is similar to the classification used by Robert Lowry (2005, 575) to understand civil society organisations; he has four categories of groups (cultural and educational; sport and recreational; civil rights; and environmental) but unfortunately overlooks community service organisations (although he acknowledges this omission in his conclusion, 2005, 591) and religious groups. Other research has highlighted the importance of local congregations, churches and mosques in community organising activities, especially in highly diverse and/or low socio-economic areas (Slessarev-Jamir 2004, 603; and Jamal 2005).

Methodology

Our project differs from most analysis of political participation in that our unit of analysis is the group rather than the individual. We were interested to see how differences between communities within Sydney influenced the political groupings that developed. We were also interested in re-examining the nature of political activity itself. Would a broader conception of the 'political' result in a much wider range of groups being found to engage in this activity? Finally, were differences between communities reflected in different patterns of political advocacy? Thus based on the research cited above we moved beyond traditional understandings of interest groups in our mapping exercise to include a range of service providing, religious and cultural organisations. Our research emulated that of Maloney et al (2008, 265) who started with a detailed mapping exercise to identify as many local organisations as possible and in fact uncovered a wide variety of organisational types in Mannheim, Germany and Aberdeen, Scotland. They identified groups through local council lists, an analysis of local newsletters and newspapers, and a search of local telephone and online directories.

Our focus on political groupings, rather than individual action involved two significant methodological challenges. Firstly, we were not aware of any central database of relevant organisations. Secondly, we wanted to operationalise our broad definition of groups and organisations that act politically. The two issues are not entirely separate, in that the methods of searching are related to the types of organisations we were looking for.

We began with a traditional understanding of political organisations as interest groups that directly seek to influence governmental policy processes. This included social movement affiliated organisations that operate cross-nationally but with local groups (such as Greenpeace or Amnesty); and those such as local resident action groups that are

specific to a small geographic area. However, we wished to extend this to encompass our broader definition of the political. We did so by starting with Mark Lyons' notion of the Third Sector (2001), which includes all non-profit, non-government organisations. We then limited this definition to those Third Sector organisations where there was evidence that they had engaged in lobbying, advocacy or community organising in their local area. This resolved a key question for the project – whether to include all sporting clubs or all churches. Where there was no evidence that members had sought to act collectively or inculcate group resources for political engagement in any respect other than their primary non-political purpose (e.g. playing cricket or understanding the gospel) we excluded them from the final sample.

Similar to Maloney et al (2008) we initially choose two search methods for our mapping exercise in the six electorates– local papers and local councils. Both these institutions were likely to have connections to various local groups, particularly those involved in some form of political activity. We collected local papers in the lead up to the state election in March 2007, and around key dates likely to mobilise local groups – such as Youth Week and Harmony Day.

We attempted to capture two types of organisations – those that were regularly involved in non-political activities, but were occasionally involved in political action, and those where political action was central. Defining the first type, however, requires some time limit on when their political action took place. Here, our search of newspapers around key dates and over a specific timeframe was used to help define the timeframe. The use of council websites provided a broader catchment for other more specifically political organisations that may not have made it into the papers in the defined period. Finally we conducted web searches of both the organisations already identified and broader searches using key terms to identify additional organisations.

The three co-authors and two research assistants used and verified the coding system to ensure consistency. Throughout the mapping process we had regular meetings to discuss marginal cases where a researcher was unsure whether to include the group. This led to an evolving understanding of our categories and our population. As we gained more information about a group we also revised our decisions. However, while we conducted regular group meeting to discuss marginal cases and definitions, the bulk of the identification and coding of 398 organisations across the six electorates was undertaken individually by the two research assistants. On reviewing the data we identified a number of anomalous cases where organisations had been included that did not clearly fit the definitions of acting politically that we had decided upon. To resolve these issues we undertook a second round of coding to verify our data set. Two of the co-authors each independently reviewed the entire list of organisations and recoded them. Where the codes agreed (either both agreeing to include or exclude the organization) then the code was adjusted accordingly. Where there was disagreement the two coders met and discussed each case to arrive at an agreed categorisation. After this exercise 89 organisations were excluded as there was insufficient evidence that they had acted politically at any time. The final sample for most of the analysis is 309 organisations across the six electorates.

This joint coding exercise demonstrated the definitional issues and debates that are highlighted in the literature review above, and potentially raises broader issues for the categorisation and mapping of organisations, an issue discussed further below.

This study also required us to identify distinct ‘communities’. However, communities are not easily identifiable, bounded entities. Where and how you draw the line around a community is highly contested (Taylor 2003, 34-50). In this study we decided to use electoral boundaries for two reasons. First, this study was focused on political action, and electoral politics continues to structure political issues and opportunities. Second, electoral authorities are required to take into account notions of community and commonality when developing electoral boundaries (Cripps et. al. 2004).

We then decided to use state electoral boundaries as state government is responsible for those issues we thought most likely to be of local concern – service provision and planning and development. Also, unlike local boundaries, state boundaries deliberately include relatively similar populations, making comparisons easier.

Next we identified the specific electorates we would examine. Electorates were chosen to capture a variety of different types of communities. Drawing on the literature, we initially identified demographic factors likely to shape political action, especially indicators of class, such as education levels and income, and indicators of diversity, like ethnicity and religion. As shown above these have been identified in previous studies as effecting both individual participation in politics and the development of political groups. In addition, we identified political partisanship as an important variable and looked for electorates with diverse communities, and electorates with different voting histories (both in terms of which side of politics the electorate favoured and how closely contested or ‘marginal’ the electorate was).

In selecting the six electorates we used 2001 census data, compiled by electorate by the NSW Parliamentary Library (see Drabsch 2006), and electoral records which provided both prior results and histories for each electorate (see Green 2006).

Electorate Profiles

Our sample captures a high degree of diversity within Sydney. Here we give an overview of the political history and demographic make up of our seats, focusing particularly on our two materialist categories – class and diversity. In addition, two of the seats, Balmain and Manly, show significant electoral support for non-major party candidates associated with post-materialist values.

The six seats represent very different parts of Sydney. Balmain and Vaucluse are near the CBD, Penrith is in the outer western suburbs, Cabramatta is in the outer south-western suburbs, Auburn is in the middle ring of suburbs to Sydney’s west and Manly is on the city’s northern beaches. Broadly, Sydney’s geography is organised so that areas north of the harbour and closer to the coast are more affluent than areas south of the harbour and further west.

The following table summarises the attributes we took into account in selecting our sample.

Table 1: Selected Electorates by Key Attributes

Electorate	Socio-economic status	Religion	Ethnicity	Party held	Contest
Auburn	Low-mid	High Muslim	High Asian and Middle Eastern	Labor	Safe
Balmain	Mid-high	High 'no religion'	High Australian/Anglo	Labor	Marginal - Green
Cabramatta	Low	High Buddhist	High Asian	Labor	Safe
Manly	Mid-high	High Christian/ 'no religion'	High Australian/Anglo	Liberal	Marginal - Independent
Penrith	Mid	High Christian	High Australian	Labor	Marginal - Liberal
Vaucluse	High	High Jewish	High Australian/Anglo	Liberal	Safe

Balmain has a long history of working class organization in unions, the labour party and the Communist party, particularly surrounding the wharfs. However, this has given way to a more gentrified population, dominated by professionals. The area, while small, has significant class diversity, with some waterfront areas featuring multi-million dollar properties, while the suburb of Glebe remains home to a large public housing community. Leichhardt, at the centre of the electorate, is also home to a significant Italian ex-patriot community. This traditionally safe Labor seat has recently become vulnerable to the Greens, a party advocating a left post-materialist platform.

Nearby Vaucluse has traditionally been home to some of Sydney's wealthiest and oldest non-Indigenous families. While including some of the most exclusive suburbs in the city, the south-eastern corner takes in Bondi, which contains a number student and alternative households. Vaucluse is also home to a vibrant Jewish community. It is the only Liberal held electorate in inner Sydney between the harbour and the Georges River – at either state or federal level.

There are two electorates in Sydney's poorer and more multicultural south-west. The first, Auburn, is relatively close to Sydney's CBD in the middle ring of suburbs. A traditionally white, working class electorate, it has increasingly become home to a number of ethnic communities, and is particularly well know, along with neighbouring Lakemba and Bankstown, for its large Middle-Eastern and Muslim populations. Manufacturing accounts for roughly a fifth of jobs, well above the state average. Like much of south-western Sydney, Auburn is a safe Labour electorate.

Further south-west is Cabramatta. In the outer suburbs of Sydney, Cabramatta is well known for its large Vietnamese population, which developed following Australia's intake of Vietnamese refugees during the 1970s and 1980s. The electorate has been the centre of a number of controversies and moral panics, particularly surrounding drugs and criminal gangs, as well as more recently attracting visitors to its restaurants. Cabramatta has an even stronger manufacturing base, and lower incomes than Auburn. This is one of the safest Labour electorates in the state.

Directly west of the CBD is Penrith. Like Cabramatta, Penrith is an outer-suburban electorate, however it remains largely Anglo and Christian. Penrith began as a separate urban centre, but has increasingly been incorporated into Sydney's suburban sprawl. It is home to one of the largest clubs in the country (Penrith Panthers). Traditionally working class, it has begun to develop greater class diversity as some families have become more upwardly mobile. It has increasingly become a barometer of broader electoral trends. During the 1990s a large gap opened up between the electorate's state and federal election results (Green 2002). This was closed in 2007, when Labor won back the area federally after a strong union campaign focused on the Conservative Government's industrial relations legislation, WorkChoices.

The one genuinely northern electorate in the sample is Manly. Manly is on the northern beaches, and is one of Sydney's main tourist attractions. The electorate covers a strongly Liberal area, although one with an equally strong tradition of independents and state and local levels, with both local environment and public transport issues featuring prominently. At the 2007 election the Liberals finally regained Manly after 16 years of independent representation.

These seats contain important differences and similarities from the perspective of our framework. Next we examine the demography of these six seats, focusing particularly on class and diversity.

All the data presented here is from the ABS 2007 census, and was organised into state electorates and purchased from ABS specifically for this project. In general each table presents the distribution for each of the six electorates as well as the state average, and in most cases the highest and lowest figure for any electorate within the state.

• Age Profile

All our electorates have relatively young populations by comparison to the state average. None has a concentration of people over the age of 45 – reflecting the generally younger, working age population of Sydney as a whole. The suburban seats of Auburn, Cabramatta and Penrith all have higher proportions of children and young people and families with children. Alternatively, Balmain, and to a lesser extent Vacluse and Manly, has a very high proportion of 20-44 year olds, the age group most likely to be engaged in paid work or study.

Table 2: Lifecycle Differences: age groups and family formation (%)

Electorate	<20 y.o.	20-44 y.o.	45-64 y.o.	65+ y.o.	Families with children

					<15 ¹
Auburn	29	40	21	10	17
Balmain	18	48	24	10	9
Cabramatta	29	36	24	12	22
Manly	23	42	22	13	11
Penrith	28	36	25	11	17
Vaughan	20	42	23	14	10
<i>State average</i>	27	35	25	14	15

- **Class (and Education?)**

Class is a difficult concept to operationalise directly. Here we use socio-economic data on income, education, internet usage and housing tenure to build a picture of class across our electorates. Table 3 reveals that residents in Vaughan, Balmain and Manly all have significantly higher incomes and face significantly higher housing costs. Home loan repayments in Vaughan are the highest in the state. The slightly lower rents in Balmain likely reflect the relatively high levels of public housing. Incomes and housing costs are lowest in Cabramatta and Auburn.

Table 3: Class differences: Income and housing costs

Electorate	Median weekly house income	Median weekly rent	Median monthly home loan payment
Auburn	\$880	\$230	\$1,700
Balmain	\$1,590	\$325	\$2,385
Cabramatta	\$760	\$160	\$1,300
Manly	\$1,560	\$345	\$2,200
Penrith	\$1,105	\$205	\$1,520
Vaughan	\$1,690	\$360	\$2,515*
<i>State average</i>	<i>\$1,035</i>	<i>\$210</i>	<i>\$1,520</i>

Patterns of educational attainment broadly follow trends in income and housing costs. However, Balmain stands out with particularly high levels of university education (as well as a large student population). Manly is notable as a relatively affluent area with a high skilled trade population, reflecting a small business culture. Cabramatta has the state's lowest total rate of post-school educational attainment. Penrith has a better education population than either Auburn or Cabramatta, but reflecting the area's strong working class history, has a much higher rate of trade qualifications than university qualifications. Internet access follow the same pattern.

Table 4: Class differences: Highest level of formal education, internet access (%)

Seat	Proportion	Proportion	Proportion
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¹ Proportion of families with children under 15 as a proportion of all families.

	>15 university degree ²	with >15 trade certificate ³	with internet access
Auburn	15	10	37
Balmain	37	10	26
Cabramatta	6	11	46
Manly	30	14	25
Penrith	12	20	35
Vaughan	35	8	23
<i>State average</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>37</i>

All of our sample electorates have above average levels of home ownership, with Vaughan having the highest level in the state. Perhaps the most notable result here is Balmain, which stands out from the other high income electorates with relatively low home ownership and a high proportion of public housing tenants, reflecting the electorate's gentrification process. Penrith is the only 'mortgage belt' electorate, with an above average proportion of mortgage holders, while Cabramatta has the highest proportion of public tenants.

Table 5: Housing Tenure type (%)

Electorate	Owned Outright	Being Purchased	Public Housing
Auburn	41	28	6
Balmain	39	29	7
Cabramatta	38	30	10
Manly	44	30	2
Penrith	34	37	6
Vaughan	52	22	1
<i>State average</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>4</i>

As participation has been closely associated with class status, we might expect to find greater participation in the wealthier and better educated electorates of Balmain, Manly and Vaughan – particularly amongst the more explicitly 'political' interest groups.

² Highest level of education is a bachelors degree or higher.

³ Highest level of education is a certificate.

- **Diversity**

When examining diversity within the electorates, we look first at migrant populations⁴ and then religious affiliation. Reflecting Sydney's greater multiculturalism, five of our six electorates have fewer residents born in Australia than the state average. The exception is Penrith, which also has an above average number of migrants from predominately Anglo countries. At the other extreme, Auburn and Cabramatta have very few native born residents – both roughly 30 percentage points below the state average. Both have large Asian-born populations, with Cabramatta containing by far the state's largest Vietnamese-born population (22%). Auburn also contains a significant Middle-Eastern born population. Likewise, both electorates have a higher proportion of migrants with poor English proficiency.

Of the remaining electorates, Balmain, with the Italian district of Leichhardt, possesses the greatest diversity, with not insignificant Asian-born and Continental European born migrant populations. Both Manly and Vacluse have very large migrant communities from other Anglo counties, with Vacluse also having the state's second highest rate of 'not stated'. Of course, these figures only reflect country of birth, not ethnicity, but they are broadly reflective of wider ethnic and cultural diversity.

Table 6: Country of birth and language proficiency (%)

Electorate	Australia	Asia⁵	Middle East⁶	Cont. Europe⁷	Anglo Countries⁸	Not stated	Poor English proficiency (as % of all migrants)
Auburn	40	23	9	3	3	10	28
Balmain	62	5	<1	6	14	10	9
Cabramatta	38	28	3	7	2	8	41
Manly	64	4	<1	3	18	8	4
Penrith	77	3	<1	3	10	5	4
Vacluse	51	4	1	3	19	16	3
<i>State av.</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	

⁴ Unfortunately not all countries are listed in the census data used for this analysis. As such, it is possible that some of the following figures understate a population. We believe this potential is small, however, as all countries with significant migrant populations are included in the census data. A full list of countries included in each category is given in footnotes.

⁵ Includes China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

⁶ Includes Turkey, Lebanon, Iran and Egypt.

⁷ Includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland and South Eastern Europe.

⁸ Includes Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America.

The ethnic diversity of the south-western electorates is again reflected in the profile of residents by religious affiliation. Auburn and Cabramatta have particularly small Christian communities, in both cases dominated by Catholics. Auburn has the state's largest Muslim population, with significant numbers of Buddhists and Hindus. Cabramatta has the state's largest Buddhist population, reflecting the electorate's large Vietnamese population.

Alternatively, Penrith is the most Christian. Vacluse is home to the state's largest Jewish community, something for which it is well known. Balmain, and to a lesser extent Manly, stands out as the state's (equal) least religious electorate, with more than a quarter stating they identify with no religion.

Table 7: Religious affiliation (%)

Electorate	Anglican	Catholic	Total Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Muslim	Jewish	No Religion
Auburn	6	21	40	9	3	24	<1	11
Balmain	15	28	54	2	<1	1	1	26
Cabramatta	6	25	46	35	<1	2	<1	7
Manly	24	27	64	1	<1	<1	<1	21
Penrith	27	30	74	1	<1	1	<1	14
Vacluse	14	18	41	1	<1	<1	20	16
<i>State average</i>	22	28	68	3	1	3	1	14

Thus, we might expect different types of organisations to emerge in different electorates. Large religious or ethnic minority populations often lead to service providing and community development type organisations, and we may expect to find more of these in Auburn, Cabramatta and Vacluse. Taken as a whole, this analysis suggests that Vacluse, in particular, would be likely to have a large number of organisations as it is likely to mobilise group resources from its wealthier and more religiously distinct population. While Cabramatta and Auburn are likely to have higher numbers of religious or ethnically specific service providing groups. Manly and Balmain may also have higher numbers of interests groups, given their higher socio-economic status coupled with their relative lack of diversity.

Political organisations in Sydney: community-based service provision and interest group activity

How does the incidence and types of groups compare across the six electorates? Groups are classified following Lyons' categorisation of third sector organisations. This allows a more fine-grained analysis of the groups and their activities.

The results are displayed in Table 7. This covers the 309 organisations that were identified during the mapping exercise and subsequently coded as acting politically. This means 89 organisations were excluded from the analysis due to insufficient information. Two thirds of the excluded groups were either community service providers or sporting and recreation groups, and the majority were located in either Auburn or Cabramatta. There are at least two possible explanations. The first is that the search in these areas was too broad. One research assistant was responsible for both areas and may have applied a definition that counted all local associations. An alternative explanation is that we are less likely to be able to obtain detailed information about the groups in these electorates. Because of limited resources, some organisations may be unable to publicise themselves. In either case, our list of organisations in Auburn and Cabramatta may be incomplete, and this is something we plan to explore further in later stages of the study.

The incidence of organisations varied from a low of 47 in Manly to a high in Penrith of 59, with an average of 52 organisations per electorate. The differences in total numbers between electorates are not notably large, which contradicts our expectation that the three higher socio-economic areas of Balmain, Waverley and Manly would dominate the mapping exercise. If we had counted only interest groups, this would have confirmed our expectation of the largest number of groups being active in the higher socio-economic areas. This suggests that a broader definition of politically acting organisations increases overall numbers.

Table 7: Six electorates and six categories of political groups, n=309 (% of type within electorate)

Electorate	Community service	Education	Religious	Arts/ culture	Sport/Rec	Interest group
Auburn (n=48)	40	4	17	8	4	27
Balmain (n=54)	15	4	7	7	15	52
Cabramatta (n=51)	39	0	10	8	10	33
Manly (n=47)	9	0	6	4	23	58
Penrith (n=59)	37	2	3	3	19	36
Vaucluse (n=50)	14	2	8	4	12	60

Table 7 also demonstrates the great diversity of organisational types among the six electorates. For example, in each state electorate there are a wide variety of religious groups. A number of churches are associated with groups that focus explicitly on social justice and human rights. One example is provided by the Café Church in Glebe which is an off-shoot of the local Uniting Church. Another is the Manly Amnesty Group, which was formed in 2002 by parishioners of Mary Immaculate Church. This group mounted a local campaign on behalf of David Hicks. Yet another example is provided by Jewish community groups around Vaucluse. Like a social movement, there are a variety of subgroups with a variety of differing immediate concerns such as welfare and education. Others have explicit advocacy roles. Almost all these groups have web sites which report their advocacy activity, for example: JewishCare (web site: www.jewishcare.com.au) Jewish Children's Support Centre, Dayenu (Jewish GLBTs). Jewish Zionist organisation (Habonim Dror – www.hdoz.com), and finally a group entitled Independent Australian Jewish Voice (www.iajv.org).

Auburn Gallipoli Mosque plays a somewhat similar role for the Turkish and Middle Eastern communities around Auburn and Lakemba. 2000 people attended its 2006 open day. The mosque is staffed by an Imam (who is paid by the Turkish government) and a settlement officer (who is funded under a DIMIA grant). There are also 6-10 active volunteers who are routinely involved and a much larger pool of less frequent volunteers.

Groups can also form within broader movements to provide a focus for political action. Political action can of course take a variety of direct and indirect forms. The Solidarity Choir is an example of the latter. This was originally formed by the gay and lesbian community. The organisation is provided with office space by Leichhardt Council and functions are staged in Council facilities. Similarly, in the period in which this survey

was undertaken, the NSW Writers Centre launched a festival of verse aimed at the gay, lesbian, transgender and queer community (*The Glebe*, 1 February 2007).

Women's groups provide another example of a very diverse array of organisations. The following is a selected list of the women's service organisations in the Penrith electorate: Country Women's Association, Soroptimists International, Women with Attitude (which involves 40 members and aims to share business experiences), Women's Time Out Group (morning tea, childcare etc) and two branches of Zonta International, one based at Penrith with 30 members and the other at Blue Mountains with 22 members. A parallel organisation is represented by Asian Women at Work based in Auburn which organises newly arrived migrants. It has a membership of around 1100 including factory, restaurant workers, cleaners etc and offers English classes, support groups, social activities etc (www.awatw.org.au).

Environment groups are also ubiquitous, but their immediate agendas vary widely. For example, there is a large Landcare group serving the Hawkesbury-Nepean area with 2752 members and a smaller Garigal Landcare Group at Manly. This latter organisation has a particular role in raising consciousness on indigenous issues. Climate Change Balmain Rozelle is an independent group formed by mothers. The group has a web site (www.climatechangebr.org), it has lobbied local politicians and councillors, conducts a regular Saturday stall at a local market; launched a fund raising campaign for solar panels for local schools and during the state election hung a banner from a footbridge over a main highway.

Also during the state election, Climate Action Bondi and Grey Power Vaucluse teamed up to run a forum for candidates. Independently, the Climate Action group organised a climate action day at Bondi, which included a street stall and expert panels. This group meets monthly and the organisation maintains its own web site (www.climateactionbondi.com). For its part, GreyPower Vaucluse and Eastern Suburbs is a loose group composed of around 25-30 people who meet monthly. The hardcore membership is 6-10. In common with many local organisations, numbers fluctuate widely depending on the issue, the opportunities, and the networking capacities of core members. It campaigns and mobilises around environmental issues. Similar groups exist at Manly and Ryde. The former has about 12 active members and a mailing list of around 50. These organisations were initially formed by Greenpeace but the links are very loose, mainly confined to email information concerning issues and campaigns. Another environmental group is the Manly Climate Action Group with around 10 active members. Its activities included a walk against global warming in late 2006 and a stall at the annual Ocean Care Day event, which is sponsored by the council.

A variety of groups are primarily focused on local government or local issues. At one level, local government can itself play an active role in fostering mobilisation and engagement. The Councils covered in this survey do this in a variety of ways, including the provision of physical facilities, grants, dedicated outreach staff, and more formal precinct or other regular or ad hoc citizen committees. For example, Leichhardt (four with meetings regularly reported in local press), Waverley (13 committees), Manly (12)

all have instituted a formal, precinct-based process. Penrith, Fairfield and Auburn have not. The Balmain and White Bay Committee (of Leichhardt Council) illustrates the kind of political role they can play. In the run up to the State election, this group initiated local consultations on the Liberal's Inner Harbour Vision and Strategy (reported *Village Voice*, February 4th, 2008).

By far the most common form of organisation is represented by local community action. For example, here are some of the groups in the Balmain electorate. The Friends of Whites Creek Valley Park meets four times a year and is concerned to ensure open space development occurs besides a local creek. The 4-Shores Committee focuses on the foreshore of Sydney harbour between the Harbour Bridge and Iron Cove Bridge. The Coalition of Glebe Groups is a loose umbrella organisation made up of the Chamber of Commerce, Glebe Society, and Glebe Community Action group. This enhances their negotiating capacity with Sydney City Council. Concerned Older Women (COW) is another Glebe group that agitates for improved amenities at local venues, for example more seating at the Broadway shopping centre, ramp access to a local bank, more bus stop seats. Concerned Resident for a Safer Haberfield (CRASH) lobby on road safety and other traffic problems, Community Action Rozelle (CARz) campaigned against a Multiplex development in Rozelle (Inner West Courier, 6 February). It also joined 50 other groups to campaign against Planning Minister Sartor's proposed changes to planning legislation which culminated in a 1000 strong march on parliament.

Community groups are also ubiquitous in Manly. The retiring state member identified the Residents and Friends of Manly as the main local body. This organisation promotes its candidates for Council. Developments in Manly illustrate the cleavages that can also arise at this local level. For example, Save John Fisher Park campaign involved an ad hoc group of local residents who wanted to stop the local Netball Association from converting part of the park to courts. A similar example occurred in Fairfield. The Community Centre joined the Uniting Church's Multicultural Family Centre in opposing proposed cuts to the Methadone Clinic, which was supported by Fairfield City Council and Chamber of Commerce (Fairfield Advance, 4 April 2007).

Residents action groups are also present in the Auburn area but their incidence is less than in Glebe or Manly. X – a loose coalition of local groups, campaigned successfully in 2006 against Auburn Councils plans to allow fifteen story buildings. Subsequently the group promoted candidates for council and currently 2 have been elected. Another community action group, No Dump was formed in 2003 to resist the development of a waste transfer station at Clyde. The initial group involved about 20 people. The group raised around \$30 000 for its campaign and took the issue to Land and Environment Court where it won. The state government subsequently passed new authorising legislation. The group persisted and a representative was elected to Auburn Council in 2004. It persists with about 10 core members who meet bi-monthly.

There are also special interest organisations such as the Leichhardt Bicycle Users Group which lobbies the local council and RTA for better conditions for cyclists.

Another group in the Vacluse electorate illustrates how the neighbourhood watch movement gained new impetus by extending its activity to local political advocacy. The Harbourview Residents Group started as a neighbourhood watch organisation based on a precinct of around 850 homes. Around 20 street coordinators maintain contact with individual residents. The coordinators meet quarterly. The group joined a broader coalition, the Battlers for Bondi Junction, to campaign against a Westfield shopping mall redevelopment. Apart from street stalls, lobbying and protests, the coalition funded three appeals to the Land and Environment Court, which resulted in some modification of proposals.

The most active campaign in the period in which this survey was undertaken was associated with Your Rights at Work. Its effectiveness on the ground was illustrated by the multiplicity of local groups. This suggests the union-orchestrated campaign touched a responsive local nerve. Illustrative of these activities was a local rally convened by the Inner West Your Rights at Work Group in March 2007 which was attended by 150 people. This same group signed up 16 small businesses on Glebe Point Road to the NSW Fair Employer Scheme. The Penrith group, YR@W, was particularly active. It was founded in 2005. In the lead-up to the State election, several candidates judged this to be the 'strongest' lobby group in Penrith. The group had attracted around 30-40 people to its monthly meetings. It is composed of a series of sub-groups: e.g. Retirees, Working families, Future for our Kids. Each sub-group initiates its own array of activities targeted at its particular constituency. For example, the retirees sub-group had gathered 10 000 signatures for a petition. The group also provided an umbrella for a variety of other organisations: for example, the Nepean Teachers Association launched a separate campaign aimed at local teachers and parents (Penrith Press, 13 March). In the Manly electorate, separate groups also organised around Manly and Northern beaches. This organisation was not present in Auburn or Cabramatta (?).

Other national issues around which local groups formed included refugees, indigenous issues and, in Vacluse, the ABC. Balmain for Refugees undertakes weekly visits and other assistance to individuals at Villawood detention centre. Illustrative of a number of groups concerned with reconciliation is the Blue Mountains-based Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation. A parallel group exists in Manly. Finally, the Friends of the ABC has an eastern suburbs branch.

Table 8: Comparing service providing groups with interest groups, n=309 (n and %)

Electorate	Community service	Interest groups	All other
Penrith	22 (37%)	21 (36%)	16 (27%)
Balmain	8 (15%)	28 (52%)	18 (33%)
Cabramatta	20 (39%)	17 (33%)	14 (28%)
Vacluse	7 (14%)	30 (60%)	13 (26%)
Auburn	19 (39%)	13 (27%)	16 (31%)
Manly	4 (9%)	27 (57%)	16 (34%)

<i>total</i>	<i>80 (26%)</i>	<i>136 (44%)</i>	<i>93 (30%)</i>
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Table 8 suggests another perspective on the differences in the pattern of groups between electorates. Affluent neighbourhoods house more lobbying and politically focussed interest groups than lower socio-economic and more diverse areas of Sydney. For example, Vacluse has over double the number of interest groups that Auburn has. However, this is only one side of the story as Auburn, Cabramatta and Penrith have about three times the number of community serving organisations that engage in advocacy and organising than are found in Balmain, Manly and Vacluse.¹⁷

A wide variety of service groups in Auburn and Cabramatta mobilise people of particular ethnicities. To note just a few: Association of Australian Arabic Welfare; Australian-Arabic Community Welfare League (4.5 paid staff and around 6 active volunteers); Turkish Welfare Association (2 paid staff and volunteers); Auburn-Asian Welfare Centre (3 ft staff. 20 volunteers); Australian Lebanese Welfare Group; Lao Community Advancement Group. Similarly, the Fairfield Seniors Network, which is located in a Council-funded community centre, is host to 15 distinct ethnic sub-groups. All these organisations receive funding variously from DIMIA, DoCS, Sport and Recreation and (on a more limited scale) local government.

No doubt reflecting the indirect links between groups and political engagement, three Muslim candidates stood for the Auburn seat in the 2007 NSW state election under the banner of mainstream parties (in two cases) or as an independent. These were: Silma Ihram (Democrat) who established the first Islamic School in Sydney; an Auburn Councillor and activist Malikh stood for the Greens. Mamdouh Habib stood as an independent on an anti-war and human rights platform.

Conclusion.

These findings have two implications. First, to understand political organising at the local level a broad definition of political activity is required. This results in the inclusion of a variety of organisations for whom advocacy is not their primary function. Second, class and diversity clearly intersect in some areas of Sydney making areas such as Cabramatta and Auburn unique areas for political mobilisation through group resources and community-based service providers. Further, Penrith is both interesting and important to this study. It has more community organisations that act politically than any other electorate but they are not serving a diverse population: instead, groups are being mobilised around the lifecycle including youth and family formation. This suggests that overall individual experiences of class (either privileged or disadvantaged) remain important to localised political mobilisation and that groups form to service and promote the needs of the local population.

¹⁷ Other kinds of organisations have been collapsed into the one categorisation and there is very little difference among the electorates in their proportion of these politically acting organisations.

Our research leads to two significant findings. The first is that the overall number of political organisations in each area is relatively consistent. This finding is in contrast to much of the literature that finds a positive association between various forms of class and the *level* of political mobilisation. The second, and related, finding is that the distribution of different organisational types does vary in ways that is arguably reflective of lifecycle, class and community diversity. One implication may be that the way we define political action has significant implications for what we find, and for how 'politicised' different communities appear to be.

What remains unclear is the exact nature of the relationship between the attributes of local communities and the types of organisations that develop within it. At first glance it appears that class is positively correlated with interest group organisations. However, the role of lifecycle and diversity is unclear. The diverse electorates of Auburn and Cabramatta contained large numbers of community service organisations involved in community mobilising. However, Vacluse, with its large minority religious Jewish population, did not. Alternatively, Penrith also had a high number of politically active service providing organisations, despite having one of the least diverse populations in terms of ethnicity and religion.

To explore these relationships we will further examine the organisations in our sample. In particular, how are the organisations related to our three factors of lifecycle, class and diversity? Do the types of community services and interest groups vary between different electorates? One possibility is that class is a stronger determinant of the category of group (service versus interest), but that lifecycle and diversity influence the nature of the group (for example being based on an ethnic membership or focused on advocacy for a particular group). It may also be that there are other factors, not captured in our overviews of the communities, that play an important role.

There are also likely to be differences in how the organisations are run, what resources they have access to, what tactics they use, what form their membership and/or mobilisation effort takes and how they engage politically. Again, each of these is likely to be influenced by the nature of the community in which they operate, but in what form is yet to be understood. Examining these questions will require a more systematic qualitative approach to our data.

Of course, groups are only one element in the chain of connections that create active citizenship. Local media are also important and these are present and active in all six electorates. There is also a vibrant ethnic media. For example Auburn is the base for 3 Turkish papers, a variety of Middle Eastern focused papers (for example, An-Nahar, Middle East YTimes, Al-Mustaqbal) and Nepalese, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, German, Urdu, Vietnamese papers. Local federal and state members of parliament and councillors also undertake extensive outreach and information programs to build their own recognition amongst constituents. Local radio stations are another source. Nevertheless groups are significant because of their distinctive roles in socialisation, mobilisation, organisation and advocacy. Through these roles, they constitute an essential medium for individual politicisation.

It is also hard to gauge the relative significance of group activity. For example, how does the incidence and reach of the groups identified here compare with that of the branches of the major parties? There are also exclusions that need more attention. For example, sporting clubs, through their poker machine and other revenues, are wealthy local activist organisations. They lobby vigorously at state level to defend their varied privileges. In addition, a variety of regional and national groups mobilise directly at local levels. Further, there are less formal groups like book clubs or neighbours who agree to support each other in (say) family activities. These all create sites for people to discuss current issues, which some suggest is the most powerful source of political attitudes (ref: e.g. Newton). To evaluate group activity comprehensively, these organisations would also need to be assessed.

So even within the limited compass of this paper, many questions remain concerning group organisation and governance, funding, longevity, and campaigning tactics. There are also specific questions concerning the extent to which the internet, email and other forms of communication have affected mobilisation and campaigning. Their impact and effectiveness is also unclear not least because the benchmarks by which these might be judged are obscure. Incidence of groups, scale of membership, level of locally raised funds, use of electronic communications, number of campaigns etc might all be proxies. The trend towards organisation on behalf of local issues seems to be clear in the proliferation of community groups. But in the process many also focus on broader questions.

A full picture of local political life requires intensive as well as extensive analysis. This present survey has exposed some contemporary forms of activism and provided some pointers to the incidence of organisation. To paint a more satisfying picture, more and more comprehensive evaluative studies are required.

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