

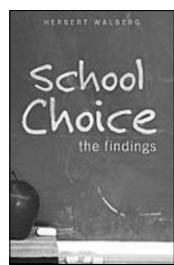
education authorities. Structures differ on a state-by-state basis, but many allow significant latitude with curriculum; empower principals and school boards to hire, fire, and pay teachers as they see fit; and to make operational decisions such as whether to have a compulsory school uniform. Walberg's research indicates that these schools outperform traditional public schools even in their first years of operation, and that this gap grows the longer the school is established. Yet the policy debate in Australia is heading rapidly in the opposite direction. Moves towards a national curriculum and the mandatory teaching of Australian history are the most recent egregious examples. Walberg's research shows the folly of this path.

Unfortunately, the book reads more like a literature review for a PhD thesis than a cogent policy argument. The text is rather dry, and devotes much time and space to discussing less-interesting topics such as the methodologies of the research examined. Though little more than a hundred pages long, the book can be tedious. In fairness, it does not attempt to emulate earlier texts advocating school choice, such as Milton Friedman's seminal paper 'The Role of Government in Education' (which became a chapter in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*), and it produces exactly what it sets out to—a comprehensive summary of the research into school choice programs.

*School Choice* is most appropriate for those already familiar with the arguments in favour of school vouchers who are interested in the detail of competing choice proposals. The book could serve as a particularly valuable tool for those engaged in public debate to promote school choice. Though Australia already has high rates of private-school education, particularly at

the secondary level, support for vouchers to fund education and school autonomy is very low. If vouchers or charter schools are ever to be established in Australia, it will require a well-articulated campaign based on solid, verifiable evidence that choice improves performance. Opponents of school choice—most commonly teachers' unions and politicians keen to assert central authority over curriculum—are well-resourced, and determined to prevent the expansion of choice for parents.

The recent failure of the Utah voucher referendum is a case in point. After the state legislature passed a law giving Utahns a means-tested education voucher worth US\$500–3000, Utah's teachers' unions mobilised to defeat a statewide, petition-initiated referendum, with significant financial and logistical support from unions interstate. They argued that Utah's scheme—which was among the first universal voucher schemes in the United States—would benefit wealthy and middle-class students at the expense



of poor and minority students. An interstate union, opposing the ballot, admitted 'We are fighting them in Utah so we don't have to fight them here.' One study cited in *School Choice* might point to the reason: parents, students, and the public have much higher expectations of the education system than public educators do. Therefore, a scheme that facilitated choice would allow students and their parents to seek schools with similar aspirations, leaving the unambitious public educators behind.

Given the style of the book, it is unsurprising that Walberg appears reluctant to detail his personal opinion on school choice at length, or to make a persuasive case for the

adoption of any of these measures beyond summarising the collected results. This is unfortunate, because although the bulk of the research points in this direction, failing to make the case forcefully weakens the book's impact.

Readers who are unfamiliar with the school choice debate are unlikely to gain from this book an appreciation of the topic or of the values and logic that underpin the argument for choice. Such readers would do better to start with a more accessible text, like Friedman's education chapter in *Capitalism and Freedom*, which makes the case for vouchers in a less formulaic fashion. On the other hand, *School Choice* will serve as a perfect reference guide for those engaged in policy debate about school choice, and would make a perfect gift for your local Shadow Minister for Education and Training.

**Reviewed by  
James Paterson**

*Australian Social Attitudes 2: Citizenship, Work and Aspirations*  
edited by David Denemark,  
Gabrielle Meagher, Shaun  
Wilson, Mark Western, and  
Timothy Phillips

UNSW Press, Sydney, 2007  
\$59.95, 320pp  
ISBN 9780868408613

This is the second instalment in a series on Australian public attitudes. It is based on data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2005 (AuSSA 2005). The editors' intent in *Australian Social Attitudes 2* is to deal with issues of currency during the 2004–2007 electoral term. Accordingly, the book presents AuSSA 2005 data on attitudes to the Coalition government's WorkChoices

legislation, the role of the unions, financial and time pressures on families, the composition and mindset of 'aspirational' voters, 'Howard's welfare state,' financial investment and the superannuation funds industry, and the Iraq War.

The back cover blurb commends the book for challenging 'conventional wisdoms about Australia' and assessing 'the impact of John Howard's eleven years in office.' Whether it adequately achieves these goals is questionable, but it is valuable for the data and commentary it presents on the issues to which the Howard government's electoral defeat has since been attributed.

Although AuSSA 2005 was conducted two years before the 2007 federal poll, the data suggests that the Labor Party was able to campaign on the unfairness of WorkChoices and the pressures on working families from a solid existing base of public support. The Howard government's attack on unions—and Labor's union connections—may well have been a non-issue for the electorate.

Brigid van Wanrooy's chapter on WorkChoices notes that the legislation was a polarising issue in AuSSA 2005. Among respondents claiming they were familiar with the proposed changes, opposition outweighed support, as it did for claims that unions should have less say in how wages and conditions are set and that a lower minimum wage is the best way to solve unemployment. The government's main pitch on WorkChoices—that further deregulation of the labour market would lead to a fall in unemployment—was difficult to sell to the electorate. As Judith Brett recently observed, it was a macroeconomic argument up against people's negative perceptions and actual experiences with loss of working entitlements.

If WorkChoices was one of the main reasons for the Coalition's defeat, it is

clear that the 'Fairness Test' and its accompanying advertising campaign failed to gain traction. But it is worth noting that a post-election Newspoll found that only 52% of respondents nominated WorkChoices as an issue that was very important to the way they voted.

Gabrielle Maher and Shaun Wilson look at the survey evidence that unions may be 'regaining popular legitimacy' in Australia. They contend that the general trend of falling union membership has not resulted in a loss of popular support for unions. AuSSA 2005 found that 46% of satisfied non-union members agreed with the proposition that 'without trade unions, the working conditions of employees would be much worse than they are.'

Opinion polling over the past decade has shown weakening support for propositions such as 'Australia would be better off without unions' (Labor Council of NSW, 1996–2002) and 'trade unions in this country have too much power' (Australian Election Survey, 1990–2004). Maher and Wilson speculate that improving perceptions of unions, coupled with negative attitudes to WorkChoices, may explain a June 2006 ACNielsen poll showing that a majority did not believe Labor's relationship with the unions is too close (205). Still, they note that AuSSA 2005 found that only 30% of respondents expressed quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in unions (202). The corresponding figure for major Australian companies was 41%.

Mark Western, Janeen Baxter, and Jenny Chesters write on families' preferences for paid work, leisure, and family time. They argue that current institutional structures—such as childcare facilities and schools—are unfavourable to families with two parents working full-time, and that the survey results reflect the resultant time pressures (241, 258). AuSSA 2005 found that at least 80% of

both males and females in families with two full-time incomes wanted 'more leisure time' and 'more time with family.' Within these families, 51% of males and 66% of females identified a preference for 'less paid work' (249).

The survey then asked respondents to nominate whether they were prepared to accept a trade-off between paid work, family time, and leisure time, or whether they wanted more or less of each. For both males and females in households with two full-time incomes, there was a strong preference for 'more time with family' and 'less work,' and both 'more leisure time' and 'more time with family' (252). Interestingly, when asked 'how happy are you with your life these days,' families with two full-time incomes averaged 7.5 on a scale from 0 ('extremely unhappy') to 10 ('extremely happy'). The average happiness rating for all respondents was a healthy 7.3.

AuSSA 2005 found the suitability of child care to be a polarising issue. Respondents were asked whether it is fine for children under three to be placed in full-time child care, provided the care is good. This was agreed to by 34% of male and 44% of female respondents; 46% of male and 41% of female respondents disagreed. Women in dual-income families registered the highest level of agreement (58%). Respondents were also asked their opinion of the statement that 'a preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works'; 40% of male and 26% of female respondents agreed, while 34% of male and 52% of female respondents disagreed (247).

Wilson and Maher's chapter on social policy argues that the Howard government 'has tracked quite closely to Australian expectations of the welfare state' (280). The cuts in direct assistance for migrants and the young have been popular, as has been the broad-based support for middle- and

lower-income families. AuSSA 2005 found that 49% of respondents agree that 'all families deserve payments to help with the cost of raising children.' Support was higher (58%) among respondents who indicated they had received family tax benefits A or B in the past five years (269). More might have been made of this finding. Although past federal governments have administered family payments, the Howard government is distinguished for its large transfer of benefits from single people and childless couples to parents with dependent children. While there is evidence that majority public opinion has long supported family assistance payments, AuSSA 2005 does indicate that policy may have strengthened the public's expectations.

AuSSA 2005 continued the general trend since the late 1980s towards majority opinion favouring 'increased social spending on services like health and education' (47%) over 'income tax cuts' (34%). However, the proportion of respondents preferring tax cuts had increased from 28% in AuSSA 2003 (264). Wilson and Maher speculate that this increase may be due to less dissatisfaction with health services. Indeed, although 52% of those surveyed in AuSSA 2005 believed the standard of health and Medicare had decreased either a little or a lot, this was down from 58% in 2003. They suggest that the Howard government's 'Strengthening Medicare' package, which arrested the decline in bulk-billing rates, may have influenced public opinion (266).

On the issue of Australia's involvement in Iraq, AuSSA 2005 found another case of public opinion split along party lines. Among Coalition partisans, nearly three quarters strongly approved of the government's handling of the war, with only 12% strongly disapproving. Among Labor partisans, 45% strongly disapproved, while 12% strongly approved. Rachel Gibson and Ian McAllister conclude

'It is rare for a war in which Australia is involved ... to generate such distinct opinions along party lines' (46). Still, they note that relatively few voters rated Iraq as their first or second priority in the 2004 election. In the 2007 post-election Newspoll, only 38% of respondents identified 'national security' as an issue 'very important' to the way they voted. Neither of the major parties focused on national security issues during the 2007 campaign.

*Australian Social Attitudes 2* is well worth a read, but mainly for the survey data. While there are passages of astute commentary on that data, as a whole it falls well short of a proper analysis of the policy-opinion interface during the Howard government's term in office. As with the first volume, the chapters are too loosely connected, with insufficient cross-referencing. The book would have benefited from a short concluding chapter connecting the evidence and summarising the possible links and tensions between public policy and public opinion.

**Reviewed by  
Richard Grant**

*The Age of Turbulence:  
Adventures in a New World*  
**by Alan Greenspan**

Allen Lane  
Melbourne, 2007  
\$59.95, 544pp  
ISBN 9780713999822

Alan Greenspan's memoir was released the day before his successor as Federal Reserve chairman, Ben Bernanke, presided over a reduction in US interest rates of 0.5 percentage points, the first easing in US monetary policy since 2003. In the following months, the Fed reduced interest rates a further

1.75 percentage points in an effort to prevent a possible economic downturn.

Many have argued that current US economic problems are attributable to Greenspan's legacy as Fed chairman. In this book, Greenspan defends the policy actions of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) during his tenure, but does not fully engage with his critics. This is unfortunate, because it could have served as a much-needed corrective to those who argue that monetary policy is the principal driver of the business cycle and asset price dynamics. This view has almost no empirical support, but has popular appeal as a simple, monocausal explanation for economic developments that are not otherwise well understood.

Under Greenspan and his predecessor, Paul Volcker, US monetary policy focused more successfully on anchoring the long-run price level of the US economy than had been the case in earlier decades. Greenspan and the other members of the FOMC did not and could not aim to eliminate the business cycle or asset price inflations and deflations, which are a normal part of the functioning of the economy and financial markets. Those who argue otherwise are effectively calling for a kind of central planning via monetary policy that is likely to be far more destabilising than the current focus on long-run inflation control.

*The Age of Turbulence* covers Greenspan's life before he became Fed chairman, but the early autobiographical material at the beginning of the book contains little that has not been covered in previous biographies, in particular, Justin Martin's *Greenspan: The Man Behind Money* (2001).

We learn of Greenspan's somewhat unconventional dating techniques, including inviting Andrea Mitchell back to his apartment on the pretext of showing her an 'essay I'd