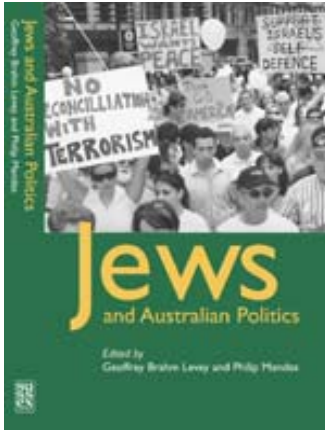


*Jews and Australian Politics* edited by Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Philip Mendes. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2004, pp. viii + 262, AUD \$49.95 Paperback, ISBN 9781903900727.



So much has been written about Australia's Anglo-Celtic culture and Aboriginal traditions that it can be conveniently forgotten Australia also possesses a rich multicultural heritage. Levey and Mendes note that 'Judged by numbers alone, the Jewish presence in Australia has always been miniscule, consistently hovering under one percent of the total population ... Numbers alone, however, belie the Jewish impact on Australian life' (p.1). Indeed, despite its modest size, the Jewish community has produced a Prime Minister, two Governors-General, and several state Premiers. That members of such a small minority could rise to the highest echelons of Australian society underscores the significance of

this book of essays, which adds to the Australian multicultural literature by exploring the general patterns of the Australian Jewish community's voting behaviour and its influence on the course and development of Australian politics.

Chapters describe Australian Jewish demography, revealing a non-homogenous community that is ethnically and religiously diverse. The interconnections among Australian Jews, ideologies, and political party support are explored in chapters on the relations between the Jews and the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party of Australia, the far Left, and political conservatism. The effects of Anti-Semitism (and anti-Zionism as the 'new anti-Semitism') on Australian Jewry, and how attitudes towards Israel have affected Australian Jewish political attitudes and behaviour, are also considered. The book concludes with chapters devoted to various contemporary issues and controversies: Jewish women and Australian feminism; relations between Jews and Aborigines; Jews and Australian multiculturalism, a policy that Levey argues 'held out an opportunity' for Australia's Jews 'to exchange their traditional quest for "invisibility" before the law for group visibility and a public profile, which, in Jewish historical experience, had been associated with persecution and invidious discrimination' (pp.184-5); the Australia Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, a Jewish lobby group; and its role in the Hanan Ashrawi affair, a controversy, argue Levey and Mendes, confirming 'that Australian Jewry is not altogether politically monolithic' (p.225).

The editors concede omissions, including 'Chapters on War Crimes legislation, Jews and the media, marginalised Jewish groups, and the academic boycott of Israel' (p.2). Other areas that remain unexplored include the impact of Jews in business and the judiciary, and local religious leadership among the various streams of contemporary Judaism. For example, the influential long-time spiritual leader of Sydney's liberal Temple Emanuel, the late scholar of 'origins', Rabbi Dr Rudolf Brasch, is neglected. Yet despite such omissions, this is a very satisfying book. It covers much detail and is a pleasure to read. Anyone with even a passing interest in Australian politics and society might study this comprehensive volume better to understand the Australian Jewish community and its socio-cultural impact on the development of Australia.

Overall, this book is a useful and necessary contribution to Australian Jewish scholarship, as the Australian Jewish population has not been studied to the same extent as American, British, and Canadian Jewish communities, yet the societal impact of Australia's Jews has been exemplary and their community influential beyond its modest numbers.

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