



# mapping social cohesion

the scanlon foundation surveys  
summary report **2010**

Professor Andrew Markus



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# Foreword

The Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Research Program was launched in 2006 by the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser, AC.

A joint initiative with the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements, the central plank of the Scanlon research is a set of longitudinal surveys of indicators of social cohesion in Australia, undertaken by Professor Andrew Markus, of Monash University.

We are pleased to welcome the third segment of the survey, following those published in 2007 and 2009, under the title *Mapping Social Cohesion*.

As in his earlier surveys, Professor Markus has produced a work of careful, balanced scholarship, and has shown – through the richness of intertemporal comparisons – the importance of longitudinal analysis.

In 2007 and 2009, the most compelling finding of Professor Markus's survey was the lack of change in attitudes to immigration. Both surveys indicated a 'high level of positive outcomes, fostering a sense of belonging, social justice and worth.'

How have the indicators of social cohesion in Australia changed over the year to June 2010? According to Professor Markus's findings, many positives remain – for example, 95% of those surveyed expressed a strong sense of belonging to their country; and 91% take great pride in the Australian way of life. However, the 2010 survey showed a substantial shift in attitudes to immigration and the prospect of a 'Big Australia'. Those who consider the immigration intake too high rose from 37% in 2009 to 47% in 2010; and there was much negative sentiment towards the lack of infrastructure availability to cope with population growth. In addition, special challenges for future social policy are revealed in responses in this survey showing rising levels of mistrust and experience of discrimination.

The earlier results of the survey have aroused keen interest among governments at all levels in Australia, and have been instrumental in helping shape policy and funding decisions. We confidently expect this interest, and the policy relevance of the current survey, to be sustained.

We wish, therefore, once more to thank Professor Andrew Markus and his colleagues for their excellent work, and the Scanlon Foundation for its continuing commitment to this hallmark and influential survey.

Professor John Nieuwenhuysen AM  
Director, Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements

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Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation

## Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the third Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Survey conducted in June 2010. It builds on the knowledge gained in the two earlier Scanlon Foundation surveys conducted in 2007 and 2009 to provide a broad insight into Australian attitudes at a time of widespread discussion of population issues. It includes new modules to explore attitudes to future population growth and asylum issues.

The survey was conducted at a time of improved economic activity, with a decline in the level of unemployment from 5.6% to 5.2% between December 2009 and June 2010. The survey context was also one of rapid population growth, with annual population growth at historically high levels of 2.2% in the year ended December 2008 and 2.0% in the year ended December 2009.

There are many positives in the findings of the 2010 survey. **General questions relating to national life and levels of personal satisfaction elicited the high levels of positive response** that have been evident not only in the Scanlon Foundation surveys, but also in other Australian surveys over the last 20 years. Almost unanimously (95%) Australians express a strong sense of belonging in their country, 90% take great pride in the Australian way of life, and 91% believe that maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important. 88% of respondents indicate that 'taking all things into consideration', they are happy with their lives.

With regard to **issues of population growth**, there has been much media discussion of future targets, polarised advocacy and claims that a substantial majority of public opinion does not support the concept of a 'Big Australia'. The Scanlon Foundation survey found that 51% of respondents considered a projected population of 36 million in 2050 as 'too high', 42% 'about right' or 'too low'.

The 2010 survey registered a marked shift in **attitudes to immigration**, but the level of negative sentiment remains relatively low when considered in the context of polling over the last twenty years. Those who agree with the view that the immigration intake is 'too high' increased from 37% in 2009 to 47% in 2010, while 45% consider the intake to be 'about right' or 'too low'.

There is, however, a high level of negative sentiment towards the **adequacy of government infrastructure provision** for future population growth. Only 24% rated infrastructure provision as 'good' (2% 'very good'), 52% as 'poor' (20% 'very poor'). Highest negative sentiment was found in New South Wales, where 59% respondents gave a 'poor' rating.

On the issue of **asylum seekers arriving by boat**, a number of surveys have found negative sentiment in the range 60%-70%. The findings of the Scanlon Foundation survey are at that level and higher, depending on the indicator used. A majority of respondents considered that asylum seekers arriving by boat were attracted by the prospect of a better life in Australia and were succeeding in avoiding immigration controls. When asked, however, for views on the government's humanitarian program there was strong positive sentiment: 67% of respondents were positive (14% negative) towards the entry of refugees who have been assessed overseas and found to be in need of help. This indicates an Australian attitude which on the one hand is positively disposed to a humanitarian program where refugees are assessed overseas, while on the other negatively disposed to refugees arriving by boat on the country's north-western shores.

The 2010 survey also considered the issue of **priorities**. There has been much media discussion of population issues, but how significant are they in the outlook of Australians? In the ranking of issues considered the most important facing Australia today, population and asylum may have shifted from a low to a medium position, but are not at the top level of concern.

The **2010 Scanlon-Monash Social Cohesion Index**, developed on the basis of the 2007 survey, **registered decline in positive sentiment in all five domains of social cohesion** considered. The decline was most evident in the domains of Social Justice and Equity (down 21 percentage points) and Acceptance and Rejection.

Two indicators were of particular note. **Experience of discrimination** (measured over the preceding twelve months) was reported by 14% of respondents, up from 10% in 2009, and there was a sharp fall in the **level of trust in the federal government**. In 2009, 48% of respondents indicated that they trusted the federal government 'to do the right thing for the Australian people' 'almost always' and 'most of the time'. In 2010 this proportion had decreased to 31%. The decline in trust is associated with the loss of confidence in the Rudd government, with the survey recording a 14% fall in the level of support for Labor between June 2009 and June 2010.

A final key finding relates to a significant long-term shift in Australian opinion, identified by a set of new questions in the 2010 survey. The survey registers **broad support for a non-discriminatory immigration program** that is perceived to be furthering the national interest.

The level of negative sentiment towards **immigrants from English-speaking countries and Europe** is under 5%. Negative sentiment towards immigrants from China and Vietnam is around 10%. Immigrants from Asia, whose entry was much questioned in the 1980s and earlier decades, are now seen in a positive or neutral light by a very large majority of Australians. There is a higher level of negative sentiment towards **immigrants from the Middle East**, but those who are positive or neutral form a substantial majority, over 70% of respondents.

In conclusion, the 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey confirms the strength of personal satisfaction and positive attitude to national life, identifies a significant (and negative) shift in indicators of social cohesion, particularly in trust and confidence in government, and provides **the basis for a nuanced rather than simplistic, one-dimensional understanding of attitudes** to Australia's future population growth and issues of asylum.

# Project objectives

The Scanlon Foundation was established in June 2001 with a mission 'to support the creation of a larger cohesive Australian society'. The Foundation believes that Australia's future prosperity depends on the ability to maintain social cohesion while significantly increasing population through immigration intakes which will involve greater cultural diversity than ever before. In other words, not only has migration been historically critical to Australia's population growth, this dependence is unlikely to diminish. One simple but critical question arising from this future scenario is whether in the next five decades 'Australia can repeat the immigration and social cohesion success story of the past five decades?'

In order to answer this question, the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements and the Australian Multicultural Foundation, with Scanlon Foundation funding, commissioned Professor Andrew Markus from Monash University to design and undertake a benchmark measure of social cohesion, with the aim of repeating the study every two years. The benchmark survey was undertaken in June-July 2007 by the Melbourne-based research company The Social Research Centre.

It is important to note that rather than look at social cohesion in the abstract, the benchmark survey was designed to examine it within the context of the social impact of a prolonged period of sustained and significant immigration intake. Towards this end, the focus was to establish a national measure of social cohesion and to underpin it with a series of comparative surveys undertaken in areas of high immigrant concentration where, it is hypothesised, 'the potential for social tension is higher.'

The Foundation continues to create awareness and stimulate knowledge-based discussion about Australia's population growth and the relationship between immigration and social cohesion. Since the results of the benchmark survey were published, it has also initiated on-the-ground action programs designed to address factors which affect social cohesion in areas where the potential for tension is most evident.

The Foundation continues to provide significant funding towards on-going, independent, primary research which can continue the development of our knowledge about social cohesion. This work continued with the commissioning of the 2009 *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey. The Foundation has since made a commitment to undertake these surveys each year and this report presents the survey results for 2010.



# Scope and methodology

The first Scanlon Foundation social cohesion survey in June–August 2007 was completed by 3500 Australians aged 18 years and over. It comprised a national survey of 2000 respondents, stratified by geographic location, and five local surveys with a total of 1500 respondents, two each in Melbourne and Sydney and one in Brisbane, conducted in areas of high immigrant concentration.

The design of the questionnaire was informed by a review of international and Australian research and included questions used in earlier surveys to enable identification of change over time.

Interviews were conducted by telephone (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing), utilising a list-assisted Random Digit Dialling (RDD) sampling frame with respondents selected using the 'next birthday' method. In addition to English, respondents had the option of completing the survey in one of eight community languages.

The 2009 survey (conducted in June–July) adopted the same approach, with some minor modifications to improve data yield. The national survey with 2000 respondents was directly replicated. The local surveys in areas of high immigrant concentration were undertaken in four Local Government Areas in Melbourne and Sydney, with two additional local area surveys designed to explore attitudes in outer-urban regions characterised by a high proportion (greater than 85%) of Australia-born residents.

In 2010, following review of previous findings, it was decided to change the frequency of surveys. The change entailed a shift from a two year cycle to annual national surveys, supplemented by local surveys every third year (to be next administered in 2012). This change provided the opportunity for annual tracking of Australian public opinion at a time of heightened public discussion of population issues.

The content of the 2010 questionnaire was modified, in light of findings of the first two surveys on the degree of consistency (hence predictability) of response to some survey questions.

The 2010 survey contained the core questions required for calculation of the Scanlon-Monash Social Cohesion Index. In addition to core questions, it was decided to include new modules in each survey to enable detailed exploration of specific issues. The 2010 survey included additional questions on immigration, as well as new modules covering population and asylum.

The 2009 questionnaire comprised 62 questions (38 substantive and 24 demographic) and took on average 16 minutes to administer. The 2010 questionnaire comprised 74 questions (52 substantive and 22 demographic) and took on average 18 minutes to administer.

## Weighting of survey results

In 2007, the survey was stratified by geographic location and weighted to bring the achieved respondent profile into line with ABS data on population distribution, age and sex – the standard procedure adopted in surveying. To make for greater precision, in 2009 and 2010 a rim weighting procedure was used to provide for the incorporation of two further weighting variables – educational attainment and country of birth. The weights applied to the samples were:

**National: state population** (NSW, VIC, QLD, SA, WA, TAS, NT, ACT); **sex** (male, female); **age** (18–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55 plus); **education** (university graduate, not university graduate); **country of birth** (Australia, overseas English-speaking country [Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States], overseas non-English-speaking).

The new weighting criterion was re-applied to the 2007 data to provide for direct comparability of results across the three Scanlon Foundation surveys.

# The survey context

## Economic conditions and the labour market

The first social cohesion survey in 2007 was undertaken in an environment of sustained economic growth, high employment and a steadily increasing immigration intake. For over a decade, Australia's economy had experienced strong growth, with a marked decline in unemployment which, by 2006, had reached the lowest levels since the early 1970s. Unemployment as a proportion of the labour force averaged 7.2% in the 1980s, 8.6% in the 1990s, and 6.6% during 2000–02. In January 2005 it stood at 5.1%, in July 2007 (the time of the survey) at 4.3%.

By the time of the 2009 survey there was a marked deterioration in the economic environment. Financial commentators portrayed the Global Financial Crisis as posing the most severe economic challenge for industrialised economies since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Australian government, in alignment with the policies adopted by G20 countries, invested heavily in measures to support the economy on the basis of deficit financing, while the Reserve Bank cut the prime lending rate to the lowest level in 40 years. In a climate of economic uncertainty there were projections of a significant increase in unemployment and at the time of the 2009 survey, unemployment had risen from a low of 4.3% in 2007 to 5.9%. Contrary to dire predictions, this was a relatively low level (for example, in the United States unemployment at the time was 9.5%). Further, Australia was one of a handful of industrialised countries to avoid a recession, defined as two consecutive terms of negative economic growth.

In contrast, the 2010 survey was undertaken at a time of improved economic conditions. Unemployment had fallen to 5.6% in December 2009 and in June 2010, the month of the survey, it was 5.2%. On the negative side, bank interest rates increased; in July 2009 the Reserve Bank of Australia cash rate was at a low 3.0%; by June 2010 it was 4.5%, with higher rate increases in variable interest housing loans by leading banks. House prices in the twelve months to June 2010 rose 24.3% in Melbourne, 21.4% in Sydney, 13.0% in Perth, 11.6% in Adelaide and 8.5% in Brisbane.

## Population growth

Over the last four years there has been rapid population growth in Australia. Whereas annual population growth averaged 1.4% between 1970-2010, since 2006 annual growth has been at or above 1.8%, with a peak of 2.2% for the year ended 31 December 2008. For the year ended 31 December 2009 annual growth was 2.0%. In June 2004 the Estimated Resident Population was 20,127,400, in June 2009 21,955,300, an increase in five years of 1.83 million.

There are two components of population growth: natural increase and Net Overseas Migration (NOM).

Natural increase (net gain of births over deaths) contributed one third (approximately 150,000) of annual population growth in recent years, immigration two-thirds. The measure of immigration, Net Overseas Migration, has caused confusion in public discussion of the rate of immigration.<sup>1</sup> Since 2006, Net Overseas Migration (net gain of immigrants arriving less emigrants departing) has included all who maintain residency for 12 months in a 16 month period, irrespective of resident status. It thus includes both permanent and temporary (long-term) arrivals.

Preliminary data for 2008-09 indicates that there were 530,000 arrivals and 231,000 departures, producing net gain (NOM) of 299,000.

In 2007-08, those on temporary visas made up two-thirds of NOM, permanent entrants one third.

Overseas students were the largest category of temporary entrants, followed by long-stay business visa (subclass 457) holders. Over half of the student component of NOM was made up of students who were citizens of India (33,300) and China (25,600).

Within the permanent immigration program, Skill and Family visa categories contributed the greatest numbers, with most immigrants from China, India and the United Kingdom.

On 30 June 2009 there were an estimated 1.24 million temporary residents in Australia (up from 780,000 on 30 June 2004); the largest categories were New Zealand citizens (548,000) and overseas students (387,000).

<sup>1</sup> For discussion of change in Australia's immigration policy, see Andrew Markus, James Jupp and Peter McDonald, *Australia's Immigration Revolution*, Allen & Unwin, 2009.

**Table 1: Population growth and components of growth, Australia 2000-2009**

Year	Natural Increase	Net Overseas Migration	Growth on previous year	Growth on previous year
	'000	'000	'000	%
2000-01	118.6	135.7	259.9	1.4
2001-02	117.0	110.6	238.2	1.2
2002-03	114.4	116.5	244.0	1.2
2003-04	115.9	100.0	231.9	1.2
2004-05	124.6	123.8	267.4	1.3
2005-06	129.5	146.8	303.1	1.5
2006-07	141.7	232.8	374.6	1.8
2007-08	148.8	277.3	426.1	2.0
2008-09 (est.)	157.8	298.9	456.7	2.1

**Source:** Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Population Growth: Past, Present and Future*, 4102.0 Australian Social Trends, June 2010 (released 30 June 2010).

## Ethnic diversity in the Australian population

At the 2006 census, 23.9% of the Australian population was born overseas. Of the capital cities, the largest proportion of overseas-born resided in Sydney (34.5%), followed by Perth (33.7%), Melbourne (31.0%), Adelaide (25.1%), Brisbane (23.2%) and Hobart (12.8%). The proportion of overseas-born in the mainland capitals is unevenly spread, with concentrations above 50% in some Local Government Areas (LGA). In Melbourne, the largest concentrations of overseas-born are located in the central, south-eastern and western regions of the city; in Sydney they are located in the central and western regions. The extent of diversity that characterises areas of high immigrant concentration is evident in the profile of Greater Dandenong LGA.

**Greater Dandenong**, in the south-east of Melbourne, had a population of 125,520 at the time of the 2006 census, comprising some 150 national groups. The proportion born overseas has risen from 38% in 1991 to 56% in 2006, with an overseas-born concentration in the 80–100% range in parts of the LGA. 82% of the population have one or both parents born overseas; 19% of the overseas-born arrived between 2001 and 2006; 62% speak a language other than English in their homes; 26% (16,480 persons) speak English not well or not at all; and 10% speak Vietnamese and 4% Khmer.

# What is social cohesion?

As a concept, social cohesion has a long tradition in academic enquiry. It is of fundamental importance when discussing the role of consensus and conflict in society. From the mid-1990s, interest in the dynamics of social cohesion grew amid concerns prompted by the impact of globalisation, economic change and fears fuelled by the 'war on terror'. There is, however, no agreed definition of social cohesion. Most current definitions dwell on intangibles, such as sense of belonging, attachment to the group, willingness to participate and to share outcomes. They include three common elements:

**Shared vision:** Most researchers maintain that social cohesion requires universal values, mutual respect and common aspirations or identity shared by their members.

**A property of a group or community:** Social cohesion tends to describe a well-functioning core group or community in which there are shared goals and responsibilities and a readiness to co-operate with the other members.

**A process:** Social cohesion is generally viewed not simply as an outcome, but as a continuous and seemingly never-ending process of achieving social harmony.

Differences in definition concern the factors that enhance (and erode) the process of communal harmony, and the relative weight attached to the operation of specific factors. The key factors are:

**Economic:** Levels of unemployment and poverty, income distribution, population mobility, health, life satisfaction and sense of security, and government responsiveness to issues of poverty and disadvantage.

**Political:** Levels of political participation and social involvement, including the extent of voluntarism, the development of social capital, understood in terms of networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.

**Socio-cultural:** Levels of consensus and divergence (homogeneity and heterogeneity) on issues of local and national significance.

The present survey has adopted an eclectic, wide-ranging approach, influenced by the work of social scientists Jane Jenson and Paul Bernard, to incorporate five domains:

**Belonging:** Shared values, identification with Australia, trust.

**Social justice and equity:** Evaluation of national policies.

**Participation:** Voluntary work, political and co-operative involvement.

**Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy:** Experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers.

**Worth:** Life satisfaction and happiness, future expectations.

# The logic and consistency of public opinion

A simplistic reading of survey results considers findings against the yardstick of a majority – whether 50% or more respondents endorse a specific proposition, and the extent of variation above or below the 50% mark. The approach adopted in this study is grounded in an understanding of the logic of public opinion, the types of questions that elicit near consensus (whether positive or negative) and those that divide opinion. For example, a question on sense of belonging will produce a strong positive response in the Australian context, in the range 80%-99%. A positive response at the level of 82% will be interpreted differently if contextualised in the range 0%-99% or 80%-99%. In the first context, 82% would be regarded as very high, in the second as near the bottom of the range.

In the following analysis, survey results are interpreted within three categories:

Strong positive – above 70%;

Polarised or divided opinion – in the range 30–70%;

Strong negative – below 30%.

**The greatest change over time is expected within the category of polarised or divided opinion.** In the following overview, results from the 2010 survey are indicated alongside those from 2007 and 2009.

## Strong positive

General questions relating to national life and levels of personal satisfaction elicited the high levels of positive response that are evident in Australian surveys over the last 20 years. In terms of **identification with Australia**: the overwhelming majority of Australians – 95% (95% in 2009, 96% in 2007) – express a strong ‘sense of belonging’, 90% (92%, 94%) ‘take great pride in the Australian way of life’, and 91% (93%, 95%) believe that ‘maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important.’

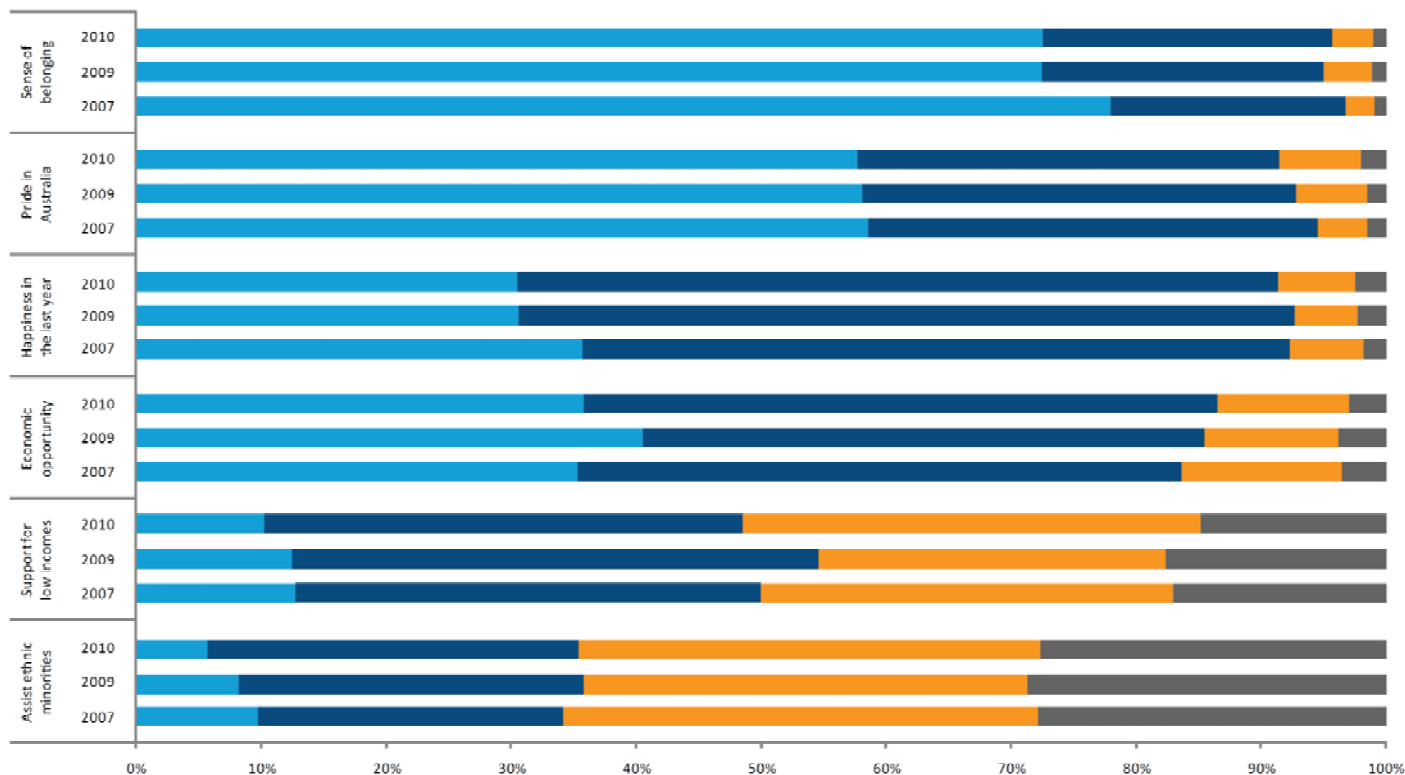
In terms of **life satisfaction issues**, 88% (89%, 89%) indicate that ‘taking all things into consideration’, they are happy with their life, while 82% (82%, 85%) expect their lives to be the same or improved in three to four years’ time; 74% (72%, 73%) express satisfaction with their present financial situation (23% indicated dissatisfaction in 2009, 24% in the two earlier surveys).

In terms of **equality of opportunity**, 82% (82%, 81%) agree that Australia ‘is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life.’ When **immigration is considered in terms of broad principle**, there is a high level of positive sentiment. Thus, in response to the proposition that ‘accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger’, 62% (68%, 67%) agree while 30% (27%, 26%) disagree. This last question registered the highest variation between 2010 and 2009 within the ‘strong positive’ category, a finding further discussed in the Index of Social Cohesion section.

## Strong negative

Questions related to policies that are seen to advantage minorities reveal the highest level of disagreement or opposition. This strongly negative response is inherent in the questions posed, for majority opinion rarely supports special benefits or advantages for minorities. Thus government assistance to ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions is seen as of benefit to select minorities, not as of national benefit, as indicated by the finding that 33% (33%, 32%) support such assistance, but 60% (60%, 62%) oppose it. The majority also consider that the distribution of income in Australian society is inequitable. When presented with the proposition that ‘the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large’, 78% agree (71%, 77%); only a small minority of 18% (22%, 18%) disagree.

**Figure 1: Patterns of response, selected questions**  
Response range: Strong positive to strong negative



Questions: •To what extent do you have a sense of belonging in Australia? Great, moderate, slight, not at all; •To what extent do you take pride in the Australian way of life and culture? Great, moderate, slight, not at all; •Taking all things into consideration, would you say that over the last year you have been... Very happy, happy, not happy, very unhappy; • Australia is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life. Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree; • People living on low incomes in Australia receive enough financial support from the government. Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree; • Ethnic minorities in Australia should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions. Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.

## Divided opinion

Questions dealing with politicised issues elicited divided responses, in the 30–70% range, mirroring the division evident in support for the major political parties, and may undergo significant shift over time, reflecting the changing political fortunes of political parties and the linked attitude to specific policies.

In 2010 there was a markedly lower level of support than in 2009 for government policy and for outcomes in the realm of social justice. Thus, in relation to **specific social justice issues**, in 2010, opinion was divided (44%: 46%) on whether government financial support to those on low incomes is adequate, but this finding represented a shift since 2009, when 50% agreed that there was enough financial support and 41% disagreed.

There was also a marked change in relation to **confidence in government**. In 2010, 31% of respondents indicated confidence that the federal government will ‘almost always’ or ‘most times’ do what is right for the Australian people, compared with 48% in 2009 and 39% in 2007.

Attitudes to current immigration policy also registered a marked change: 46% consider that the current intake is ‘about right’ or ‘too low’, compared to 55% in 2009 and 53% in 2007. Those who consider the intake to be ‘too high’ increased from 36% in 2007 to 37% in 2009 and 47% in 2010.

# The Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion

A nominal index of social cohesion has been developed using the findings of the 2007 national survey to provide baseline data. The following questions, validated by factor analysis, were employed to construct the index for the five domains of social cohesion:

**Worth:** Satisfaction with present financial situation and indication of happiness over the last year.

**Belonging:** Indication of pride in the Australian way of life and culture; sense of belonging; importance of maintaining Australian way of life and culture.

**Participation (political):** Voted in an election; signed a petition; contacted a Member of Parliament; participated in a boycott; attended a protest.

**Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy:** The scale measures rejection, indicated by negative view of immigration from many different countries; reported experience of discrimination in the last 12 months; disagreement with government support to ethnic minorities for maintenance of customs and traditions; feeling that life in three or four years will be worse.

**Social justice and equity:** Views on the adequacy of financial support for people on low incomes; the gap between high and low incomes; Australia as a land of economic opportunity; trust in the Australian government.

After trialling several models, a procedure was adopted which draws attention to minor shifts in opinion and reported experience, rather than one which compresses or diminishes the impact of change by, for example, calculating the mean score for a set of responses.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the index is to heighten awareness of shifts in opinion which may call for closer attention and analysis.

The 2007 survey provided evidence of a society that was managing to establish a high level of positive outcomes, fostering a sense of belonging, social justice and worth. There were, however, indicators of concern with regard to participation and acceptance, misunderstanding between birthplace groups and varying experiences of discriminatory and hostile behaviour.

Comparison between the 2007 and 2009 survey findings revealed slight change, with variation under 6 percentage points in four of the five domains of social cohesion. Variation was at its peak in the indicator of social justice and equity (up 12 percentage points); there was also indication of heightened participation.

In contrast, **the 2010 Index revealed lower scores in all five domains and a marked fall in the average score for the five domains.** There is minimal change in response to questions relating to personal life, with the exception of heightened reporting of experience of discrimination, but marked change within the domain of Social Justice and Equity (down 21 percentage points).

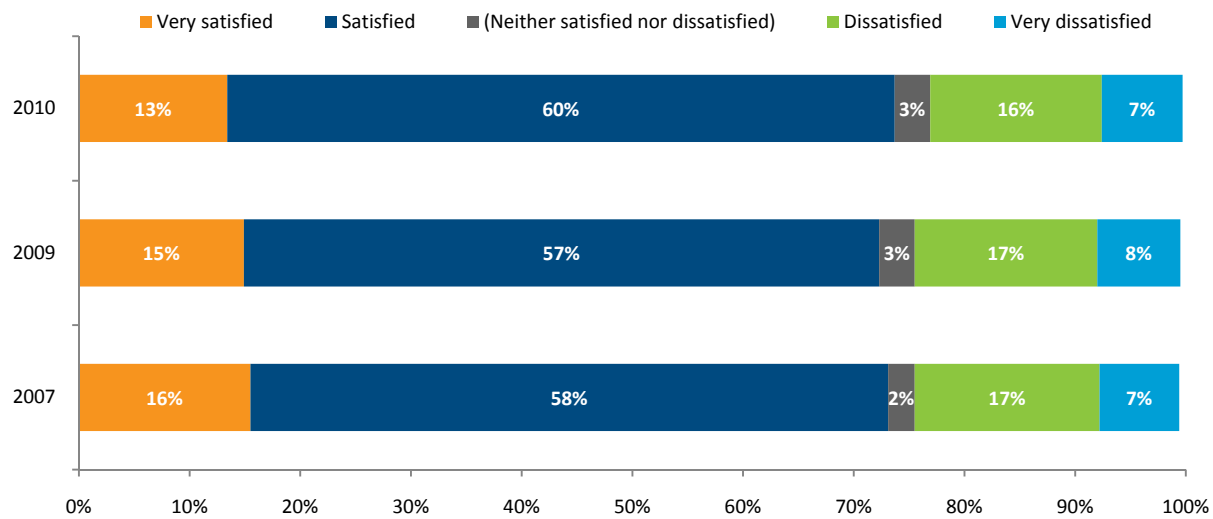
**Table 2: The Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion**

	2007 Index	2009 Index	2010 Index	Change 2009–10 (percentage points)	Direction of change
Sense of worth	100	97.2	96.7	–0.5	Lower
Sense of belonging	100	96.9	95.0	–1.9	Lower
Participation	100	105.3	98.0	–7.3	Lower
Acceptance (rejection)	100	94.4	81.5	–12.9	Lower
Social justice and equity	100	112.4	91.9	–20.5	Lower
<b>Average</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101.2</b>	<b>92.6</b>	<b>–8.6</b>	<b>Lower</b>

<sup>2</sup> The nominal index scores the level of agreement (or disagreement in the index of acceptance/rejection). The highest level of response (for example, ‘strongly agree’) is scored twice the value for the second level (‘agree’). Responses within four of the five indexes are equalised; within the index of participation, activities requiring greater initiative (contacting a Member of Parliament, participating in a boycott, attending a protest) are accorded double the weight of the more passive activities of voting (compulsory in Australia) and signing a petition. See Andrew Markus and Jessica Arnp, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2009: The Scanlon Foundations Surveys Full Report* (2010), section 12



**Figure 2: 'How satisfied are you with your present financial situation?'**



There has been no statistically significant change in the domain of **Worth**:

- Financial satisfaction: ('very satisfied' and 'satisfied') 72% in 2009, 74% in 2010;
- Happiness: ('very happy' and 'happy') 89% in 2009, 88% in 2010.

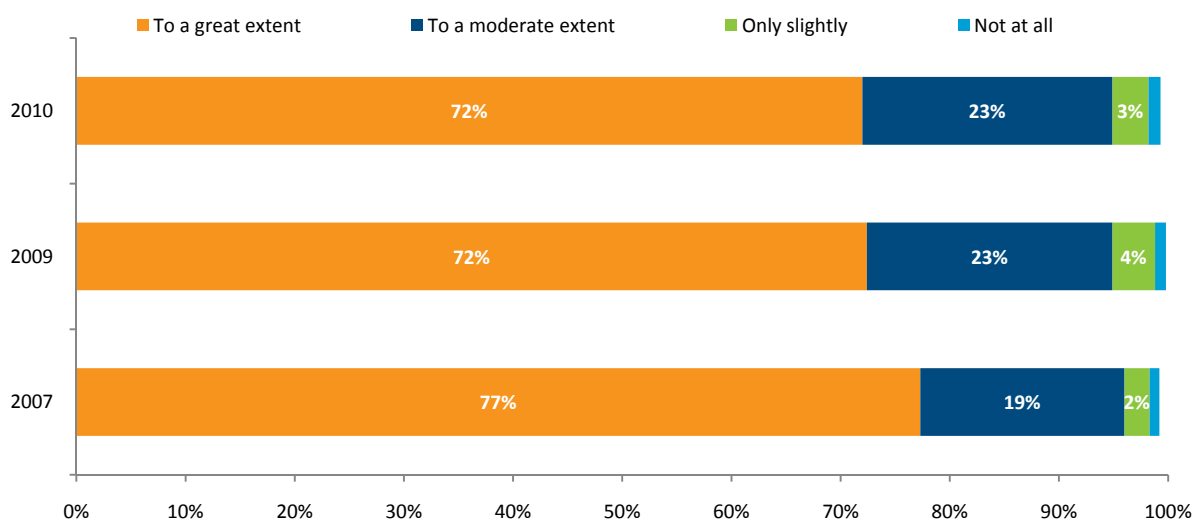
Within the domain of **Belonging**, two of the three questions indicated a marginal decline, but again not at a level of statistical significance.

- Sense of belonging: ('great' and 'moderate') 95% in 2009, 95% in 2010;
- Sense of pride in the Australian way of life and culture: ('great' and 'moderate') 92% in 2009, 90% in 2010;
- 'In the modern world it is important to maintain the Australian way of life and culture: ('strongly agree' and 'agree') 93% in 2009, 91% in 2010.

While almost no change was recorded within the domains of Worth and Belonging, there was a small but consistent downward trend in the domain of **Participation** (political), which may reflect a heightened negativity and decline in trust in the political process. Respondents were asked about their involvement in a range of political actions over the preceding three years:

- Voted in an election: 95% in 2009, 89% in 2010 (Australian citizens);
- Signed a petition: 56% in 2009, 54% in 2010;
- Contacted a Member of Parliament: 27% in 2009, 25% in 2010;
- Participated in a boycott: 14% in 2009, 14% in 2010;
- Attended a protest: 13% in 2009, 9% in 2010.

**Figure 3: 'To what extent do you have a sense of belonging in Australia?'**





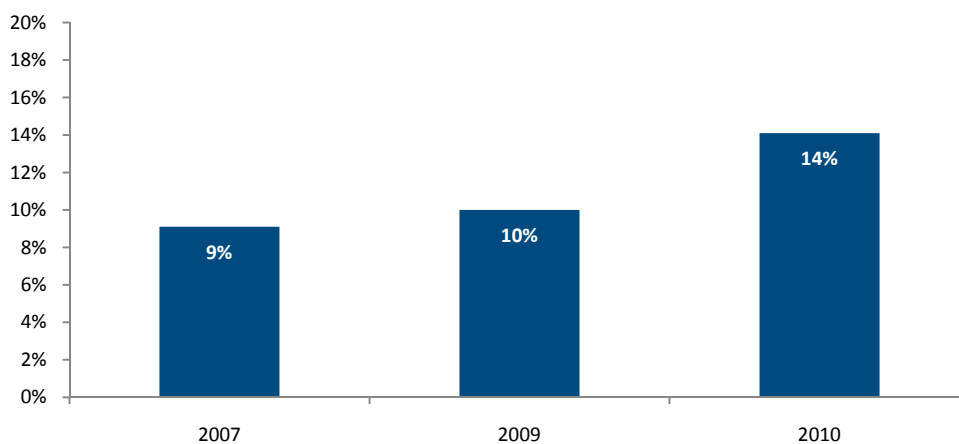
The domain of **Acceptance (rejection)** has recorded a decline in both 2009 and 2010 and the Index is at the lowest level of the five domains. In response to a personal question there was no statistically significant change. When asked concerning expectations of life in three or four years, 12% in 2009 and 13% in 2010 indicated that they expected their lives would be ‘much worse’ or ‘a little worse’. When asked if governments should provide assistance to ethnic groups to maintain their customs and traditions there was no change between 2009 and 2010 (strongly disagree and disagree, 60% in 2009, 60% in 2010).

In contrast, disagreement with the value of immigration ‘from many different countries’ showed increase, from 27% in 2009 to 30% in 2010. The most marked change was in reported experience of discrimination, in the context of heightened reporting in the months preceding the survey of attacks on overseas students and others, and extensive discussion of the issue of racism in Australia.

When asked if they had experienced discrimination in the preceding twelve months, 10% in 2009 and 14% in 2010 reported experience of discrimination because of their ‘skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.’

When respondents were asked in a question posed for the first time in 2010 whether, in their opinion, ‘the level of racial prejudice in Australia now is more, less or about the same as it was 5 years ago’, 40% considered it was at the same level, but those who considered that the level of racial prejudice was higher outnumbered those who considered it was lower by a ratio of 2.5:1 (40% compared to 16%).

**Figure 4: ‘Have you experienced discrimination in the last 12 months because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion?’**



**Table 3: ‘Do you think the level of racial prejudice in Australia now is more, less or about the same as it was five years ago?’**

Response	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	Total (Australia)
Much more now	13.5%	18.6%	15.9%	18.9%	11.2%	15.7%
More now	24.5%	24.3%	21.9%	27.7%	28.9%	24.7%
<i>Sub-total -more</i>	<b>38.0%</b>	<b>42.9%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>40.1%</b>	<b>40.4%</b>
About the same	37.8%	38.3%	46.8%	34.5%	43.4%	39.8%
Less	16.7%	12.6%	10.7%	15.5%	9.9%	13.6%
Much less	2.4%	1.6%	1.0%	1.5%	3.3%	1.9%
<i>Sub-total -less</i>	<b>19.1%</b>	<b>14.2%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>
N (unweighted)	378	317	297	253	203	2,021

The most significant change between the 2009 and 2010 surveys was in the domain of **Social Justice and Equity**.

In response to the proposition that ‘Australia is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life’, the level of strong agreement declined from 39% in 2009 to 34% in 2010, although this fall was partly compensated by an increase in the level of agreement from 43% in 2009 to 48% in 2010. Two questions relating to government action indicated a marked shift in attitudes, in all likelihood, more a reflection of changed attitude to government than changed conditions of Australian life. In response to the proposition that ‘in Australia today, the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large’, 71% were in agreement in 2009, 77% in 2010. In response to the proposition that ‘people living on low incomes in Australia receive enough financial support from the government’, agreement declined from 50% in 2009 to 44% in 2010.

There was a similar **sharp fall in the level of trust in the federal government ‘to do the right thing for the Australian people’** – those who responded ‘almost always’ and ‘most of the time’ fell from 48% in 2009 to 31% in 2010.

The key to interpretation of results seems to be the shift in attitude to the Rudd Labor government between the two surveys. In both surveys the final question asked respondents for their likely vote if a federal election was held on the date they were surveyed. In less than twelve months, support for Labor declined from 43% to 29%, those undecided on how they would vote increased from 14% to 19%. A similar fall in support was recorded by the *Age*/Nielsen poll over the same period, a slightly smaller fall by Newspoll for *The Australian*<sup>3</sup>.

The loss of confidence was evident across the political spectrum, least evident among the much reduced supporters of the Government and most marked amongst respondents who indicated that they would likely vote Greens – these voters would be expected to include respondents who had previously supported the Labor Party. Among supporters of the Greens, trust in the federal government was halved.

**Table 4: ‘If there was a federal election held today, for which party would you probably vote?’<sup>4</sup>**

Party	June-July 2009	June 2010
Labor Party	42.6%	29.4%
Liberal Party	27.8%	31.1%
National Party	1.6%	3.3%
Greens	7.3%	9.9%
Independents	1.7%	2.0%
Other	2.1%	3.1%
Don't know	13.7%	18.8%
Refused	3.2%	2.4%
Total	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	1,889	1,895

**Table 5: Intended vote cross-tabulated with respondents who indicated that they trusted the federal government ‘to do the right thing for the Australian people’ ‘almost always’ and ‘most of the time’**

	Labor	Liberal/National	Greens	Don't know
2009	61.4%	34.8%	45.2%	35.3%
2010	50.8%	20.1%	22.4%	25.7%

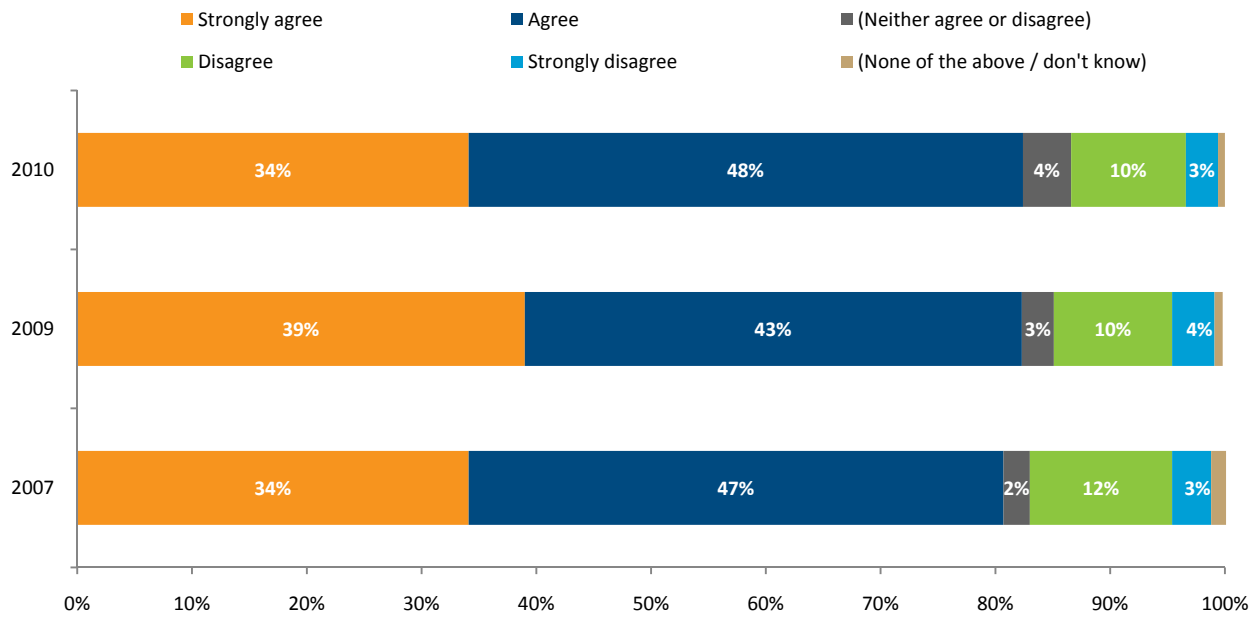
The Index of Social Cohesion draws attention to a shift in attitude and reported experience which is evident in much of the survey. In addition to the heightened reporting of discrimination and the loss of confidence in the federal government, **there was also change in personal trust, with those agreeing that ‘most people can be trusted’, falling from 55% to 45%**. There was also a reported decline in community involvement, as indicated by voluntary work.

Respondents were asked about ‘unpaid voluntary work’, which was defined as ‘any unpaid help you give to the community in which you live, or to an organisation or group to which you belong. It could be to a school, a sporting club, the elderly, a religious group or people who have recently arrived to settle in Australia.’ In 2009 38% of respondents indicated that they performed such unpaid voluntary work at least once per month, in 2010 this proportion fell to 32%.

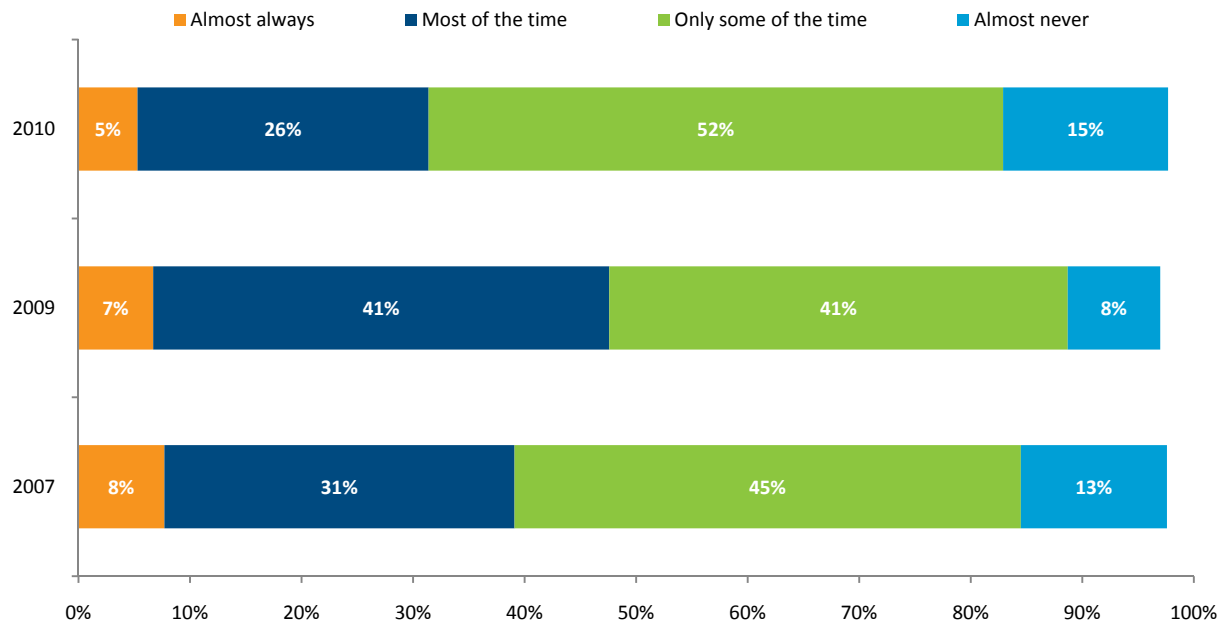
<sup>3</sup> Published polls for media agencies distribute the ‘Don’t know’ category, hence support for the major parties is indicated at a different level. The *Age*/Nielsen poll recorded a 13% decline in Labor support (from 46% to 33% from 25-27 June 2009 to 3-5 June 2010), Newspoll for *The Australian* recorded a 9% decline (from 44% to 35% from 26-28 June 2009 to 18-20 June 2010).

<sup>4</sup> This question was asked of Australian citizens only. Julia Gillard was sworn in as Prime Minister on 24 June 2010, a change of leadership which occurred during the survey period. Prior to 24 June, 1892 respondents had completed the survey, with only an additional 129 (6.4%) completions between 24 and 28 June.

**Figure 5: 'Australia is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life.'**



**Figure 6: 'How often do you think the Government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for Australian people?'**



## Long-term trends

The key to interpreting survey findings is the context of results – without context it is as though we were asked to find our way around an unfamiliar city without a map. Findings of earlier Australian surveys provide a map for interpreting results, affording the means to locate long-term trends. The Scanlon Foundation surveys have enabled short-term trends to be understood at a level of precision rarely available in Australian social science research.

### Trust

The 2007 survey indicated an increased level of trust in fellow Australians, when compared to results of earlier surveys. A question relating to trust has been posed in identical terms in four surveys between 1983 and 2003, with respondents given the options that most people ‘can be trusted’, that one ‘can’t be too careful’, or that it is not possible to answer. For the first time, the 2007 survey indicated majority endorsement of the proposition that most can be trusted – a marked change since 2003. The 2009 survey replicated the 2007 finding, but the 2010 survey registered a sharp fall, from 55% agreeing that most people ‘can be trusted’ to 45%, close to the findings of some surveys conducted before 2007.

### Sense of pride

Consideration of sense of pride in being Australian indicates a level of consistency above 90%.

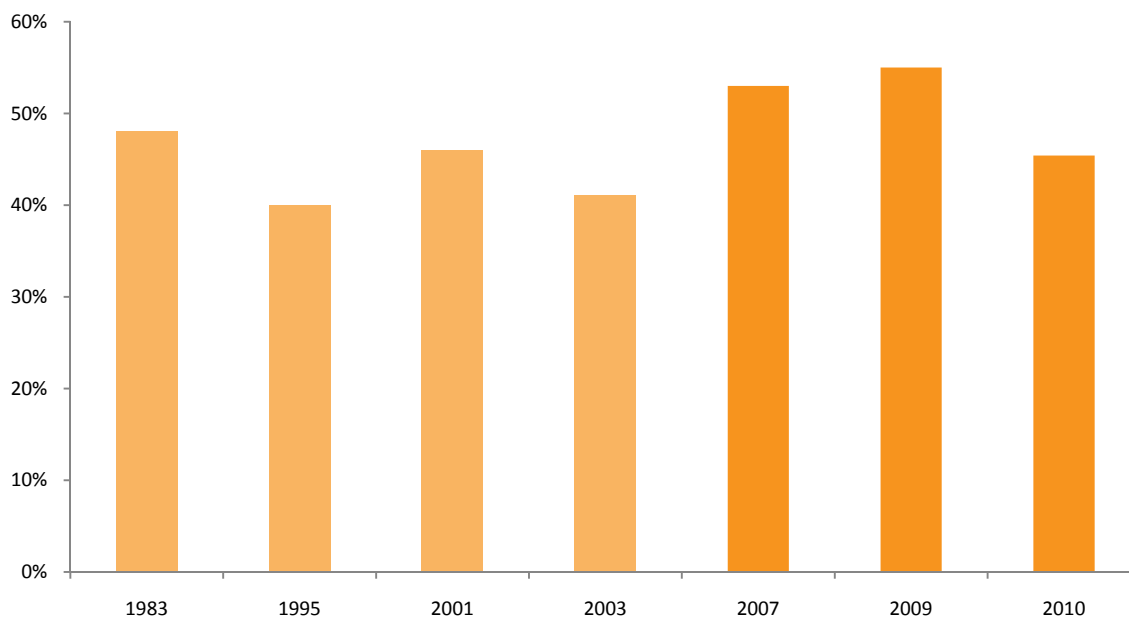
### Personal finances

Questions relating to financial satisfaction have been asked using different wording and scales of measurement. While allowance needs to be made for these differences, the findings indicate a gradual decline at the strongest level of financial satisfaction, ‘very satisfied’, (20% in 1981, 18% in 1995, 16% in 2007, 15% in 2009, 13% in 2010). There has, however, been marked increase in the second category, those indicating that they were ‘satisfied’, which registered 41% in 1981, 35% in 1995, a markedly higher 58% in 2007, 57% in 2009 and 60% in 2010.

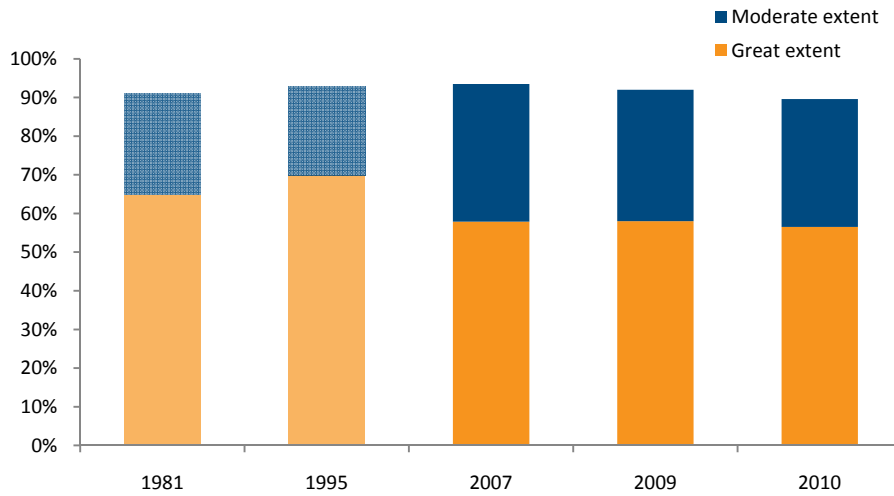
### Assistance to ethnic minorities

One of the most striking findings denoting shift in opinion relates to the issue of government support to ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions. While still a minority viewpoint at slightly over 30%, the 2007 survey indicated a doubling of support from findings recorded in 1995 and 2003. The 2009 and 2010 surveys replicated the 2007 finding.

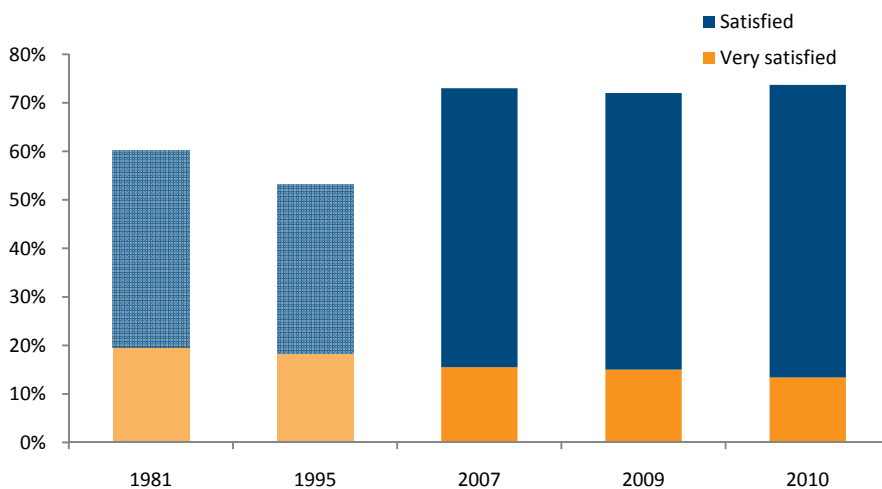
**Figure 7: Most people can be trusted, Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2007-2010 and earlier surveys compared**



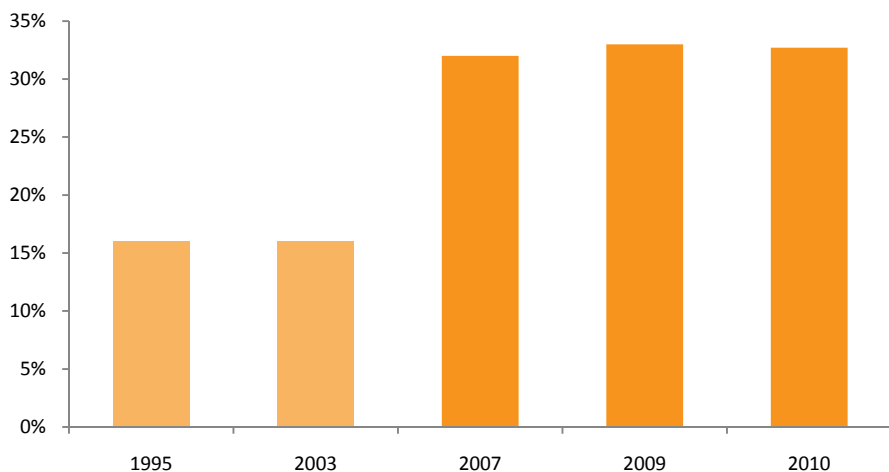
**Figure 8: Pride in Australian nationality, way of life and culture, Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2007-2010 and earlier surveys compared**



**Figure 9: Financial satisfaction, Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2007-2010 and earlier surveys compared**



**Figure 10: Agreement with the proposition that ethnic minorities in Australia should be given government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions, Scanlon Foundation Surveys 2007-2010 and earlier surveys compared**



## Ranking of issues

There has been extensive media discussion of population, immigration and asylum issues over the last twelve months. During the 2010 election campaign, the issue received prominent attention in the policies of the Liberal Party. Opposition leader Tony Abbott, at the launch of his campaign, gave prominent attention to his strategy to stop the arrival of asylum seekers by boat, pledged to re-introduce Temporary Protection Visas to prevent asylum seekers gaining permanent residence and to reduce the 2009 immigration level by more than 100,000 places. Does the extent of public discussion reflect widely held community priorities? On best indications, the answer is a qualified negative.

The first question in the 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey was open ended. Respondents were asked 'what do you think are the most important problems facing Australia today?' The value of an open ended question is that it leaves it to respondents to stipulate issues that are important to them, rather than requiring selection from a pre-determined and necessarily limited list.

Respondents gave their first ranking, by a large margin, to issues related to the economy, unemployment and poverty. Environmental issues ranked second and issues related to the quality of government and political leadership ranked third. High ranking issues in other polls, relating to health and education, ranked low in the open ended question.

After the third level, a number of issues were ranked close together. They were social and family issues (including child care, family breakdown), negative comment about asylum seekers, concern about immigration and population growth and, marginally lower, issues related to health care.

These fourth ranked issues were stipulated as 'most important' by around 1 in 15, or approximately 7%, of respondents. If asylum, immigration and population issues are grouped together, they were ranked first by 14% of respondents. This is a relatively high proportion, but only stipulated as the 'most important' by 1 in 7 of respondents.

**Table 6: 'What do you think are the most important problems facing Australia today?' (First and second mention)**

Rank	Issue	Frequency – first mention	Percentage Specifying - first mention	Percentage specifying - second mention	Total
1	Economy/ unemployment/ poverty	449	22.2%	13.6%	35.8%
2	Environment/ climate change/ water shortages	305	15.1%	7.1%	22.2%
3	Quality of government/ politicians	226	11.2%	5.4%	16.6%
4	Social Issues - (family, child care, drug use, family breakdown, lack of personal direction, etc)	143	7.1%	4.9%	12.0%
=5	Asylum seekers (negative comment)/ illegal immigrants	138	6.8%	3.5%	10.3%
=5	Immigration/ population growth	137	6.8%	6.0%	12.8%
7	Health/ medical/ hospitals	112	5.6%	4.7%	10.3%
8	Crime/ law and order	77	3.8%	2.6%	6.4%
9	Education/ schools	44	2.2%	2.5%	4.7%
10	Housing shortage/ affordability/ interest rates	43	2.1%	2.8%	4.9%
11	Racism	21	1.1%	1.3%	2.4%
12	Poor treatment of asylum seekers	14	0.7%	1.1%	1.8%
	Indigenous issues	3	0.1%	0.8%	0.9%
	Other (including don't know / nothing)	305	15.3%	6.5%	21.8%
	Missing values			37.2%	
	Total	2,021	100%	100%	

In marked contrast, indicating the role of media coverage in elevating issues to national prominence – or lack of coverage relegating to obscurity – only 3 respondents (0.1%) indicated that Indigenous issues ranked as the ‘most important’ facing Australia.

Newspoll for *The Australian*, which provides the only available long-term trend data on the ranking of issues, explored the ranking of issues in the context of the 2010 election campaign.

A survey conducted on 27 July by Newspoll asked respondents to rank ten specified issues as ‘very important, fairly important or not important on how you would vote in the federal election.’ This approach does not require respondents to rank the issues of most importance to them, merely to indicate their ranking of each individual issue. Ten issues were specified.

The top ranked issue was health and Medicare, selected as ‘very important’ by 79% of respondents, followed by education (72%) and the economy (70%).

‘Asylum-seekers arriving in Australia’ was the sixth ranked issue, rated as ‘very important’ by 50% of respondents. While this may be regarded as low, asylum issues ranked above interest rates (45%), inflation (43%), climate change (43%), and industrial relations (42%). Newspoll trend data provides a context for interpreting the significance of a rating at the 50% level. While Newspoll has not sought views on asylum seekers over the last ten years, it ranked attitudes to immigration from 2000-2006. During this period immigration was ranked as ‘very important’ on one occasion at 50% and on another at 49%, at a time of extensive discussion of the asylum and border control issues in 2001 and 2002.

This Newspoll finding, along with the findings of the Scanlon Foundation survey, support the interpretation that **at a time of heightened public discussion, as occurred in 2010, immigration and asylum issues shift from a low to a medium rank, but not to the top level.**

**Table 7: ‘Would you say each of the following issues is very important, fairly important or not important on how you personally would vote in a federal election?’ Newspoll for *The Australian*, 2000-2010**

Issues	2000 Sept	2001 Sept	2002 Feb	2002 June	2004 June	2006 June	2008 July	2010 Feb	2010 July
Health & Medicare	74%	77%	74%	77%	82%	83%	79%	82%	79%
Education	78%	79%	79%	77%	80%	79%	78%	77%	72%
Economy						67%	72%	74%	70%
Water planning							74%	66%	
Welfare and social issues	60%	61%	58%	60%	59%	59%	61%	59%	
Family issues	63%	61%	63%	59%	61%	59%			
National security					66%	60%	49%	57%	54%
Environment	64%	61%	63%	60%	60%	60%	63%	57%	
Leadership	61%	62%	59%	57%	65%	55%	57%	56%	62%
Climate change							55%	40%	43%
Defence		44%	50%	46%	54%	51%			
Industrial relations	38%	37%	35%	32%	31%	53%	38%	35%	42%
Unemployment	65%	63%	61%	60%	55%				
Taxation	57%	58%	56%	51%	57%	54%			
Interest rates	53%	43%	46%	44%	50%	51%			45%
Inflation	52%	40%	41%	41%	40%	45%			43%
Women’s issues	38%	41%	37%	43%	46%	41%			
<b>Immigration</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>43%</b>			
<b>Asylum</b>									<b>50%</b>
Aboriginal issues	34%	28%	25%	27%	26%	27%			

Source: Newspoll for *The Australian*

# Immigration

## Immigration level – actual and perceived

There is considerable confusion in public discussion over the size of the immigration intake, a function of changes in statistical definitions and a proliferation of categories under which residence in Australia is obtained. One particular source of confusion is the failure to distinguish between permanent and temporary (long-term) entrants and to take into account the large number of Australian residents permanently departing.

Net Overseas Migration declined from an estimated 299,000 during 2008-09 to an estimated 230-250,000 during 2009-10. But in the context of extensive discussion of immigration issues, only 4% of respondents perceived a decline in immigration.

The 2009 Scanlon Foundation survey found that 50% of respondents were of the view that immigration had increased over the last twelve months, while 15% answered that they did not know. The 2010 survey found that 64% of respondents were of the view that the level of immigration had increased over the last twelve months, up by 14% from 2009, while those who did not know declined by 5%.

**Table 8: ‘To the best of your knowledge, in the last 12 months would you say that the level of immigration into Australia has increased, decreased or is unchanged?’**

Response	2009	2010
Increased	49.7%	63.5%**
Decreased	7.6%	3.9%**
Unchanged	27.2%	22.5%**
Refused	0.1%	0%
No opinion/ Don't know	15.5%	10.1%**
Total	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	2019	2021

\*\* Statistically significant variance;  $p < .05$

## Attitude to the immigration intake

Questions related to the immigration intake have been a staple of public opinion polling for over 50 years and provide the most reliable basis for precise understanding of trends in public opinion. These questions produce the most volatile results, with variation in response ranging across the 30–70% range which characterises politicised issues. Whereas in the early-1990s a large majority (over 70% at its peak) considered that the intake was ‘too high’, surveys since 1998 have indicated a significant and consistent shift in opinion, such that perception that the intake was ‘too high’ became the minority viewpoint and for eight years the level of those considering the intake to be ‘about right’ or ‘too low’ was in the range 54–57%.

Paralleling the perceived increase in immigration, **there has been a marked rise in the proportion agreeing with the view that the intake was ‘too high’**: up from 37% to 47% (or amongst Australian citizens only, up from 39% to 48%). This finding is almost identical with the 46% average result from five polls conducted by polling agencies in the period March-July 2010.<sup>5</sup>

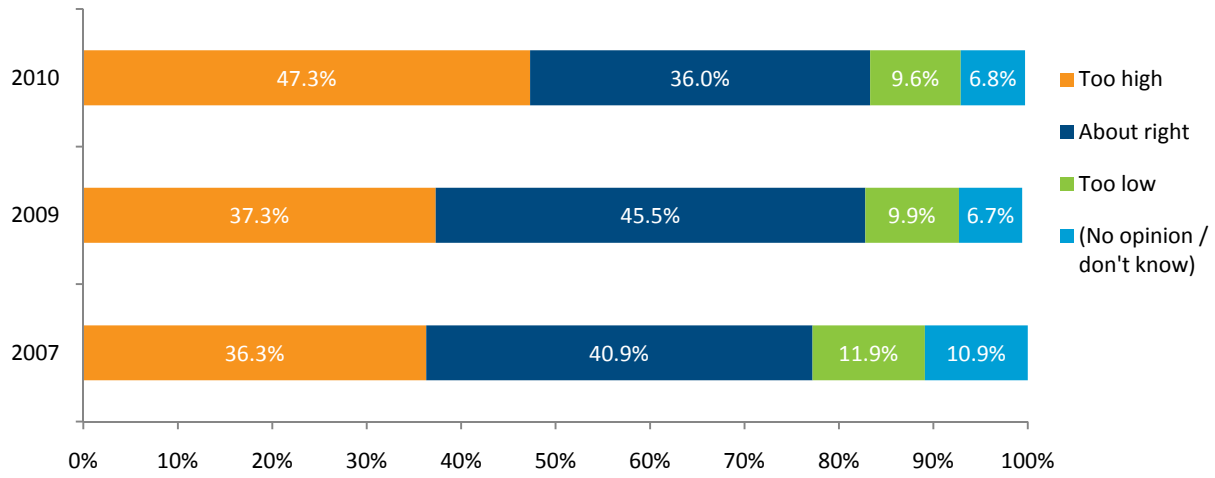
There are two key factors bearing on attitudes to immigration: the state of the labour market and the extent of politicisation of immigration issues. As indicated by Figure 12, there was no Australia-wide deterioration in the labour market over the twelve months preceding the survey, so that a break in the correlation between movement in the level of unemployment and attitudes to immigration is evident. There was a similar pattern whereby negativity to immigration was above the trend in unemployment when immigration issues were politicised in the mid-1980s and following the 1996 election with the rise to prominence of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party. The rise in negative sentiment between mid-2009 and mid-2010 is to be explained in part by the politicisation of immigration issues, but may also be the consequence of a shift in attitudes following a period of sustained large immigration.

However, given the level of recent immigration and the extent of public debate, the finding that views on immigration remained almost evenly divided, 47% of the view that immigration is ‘too high’, 46% that it is ‘about right’ or ‘too low’) **indicates a surprising strength of support for the current immigration program**. On past record, the level of negative sentiment may well have reached the range 55%-60%. There is evidence, discussed below, to support the view that over the last ten years there has been a significant shift in Australian opinion, with broad support for a non-discriminatory program that is perceived to be furthering the national interest.

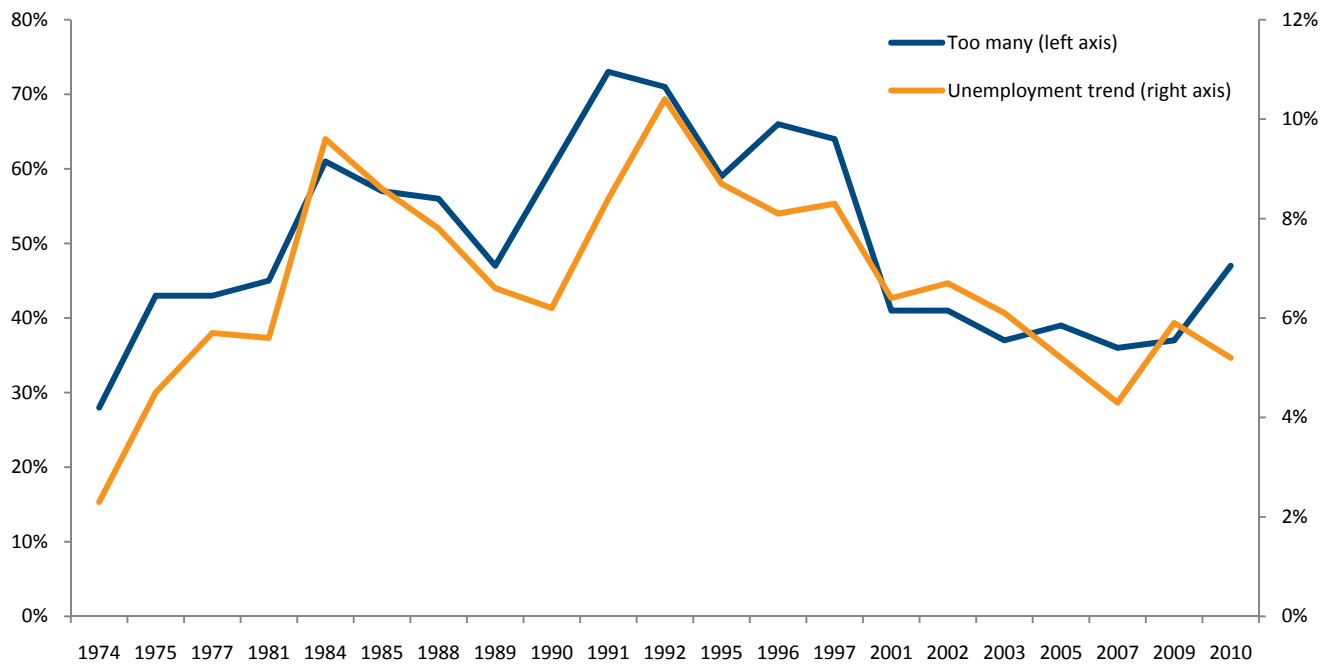
<sup>5</sup> Age (Nielsen), 31 July 2010; Roy Morgan Research Finding No. 4536; Essential Report 5 July 2010; Age (Nielsen), 19 April 2010; Roy Morgan Research Finding No. 4482



**Figure 11: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia?'**



**Figure 12: Correlation between unemployment and those of the view that the immigration intake is 'too high', 1974-2010**



## Demographic variables

Statistical analysis of the 2009 Scanlon Foundation survey indicated that positive views towards immigration are most likely to be held by:

- Those under the age of 34, and the linked demographics of those who have never married and are students;
- Those of non English-speaking background;
- Those who, when asked about their present financial circumstances, indicate that they are 'prosperous' or 'living very comfortably';
- Those who hold a university level qualification and the linked demographic of those who are employed in a professional capacity;
- Those who indicate that they are likely to vote for the Greens Party in the next election.

Those most likely to hold negative views include:

- Those over the age of 65;
- Those without post-school educational qualifications or with trade or diploma level qualifications;
- Those who, when asked about their present financial circumstances, indicate that they are 'struggling to pay bills' or are 'poor'.

To a large extent the same patterns are evident in the 2010 survey, after the extent of shift in negative attitudes (from 37% to 47%) and the lower level of survey reliability for sub-groups are taken into account. Those who remain relatively positive include the overseas-born, those who indicate their financial status as 'prosperous' or 'living very comfortably', those who hold a university level qualification and those who indicate that they are likely to vote for the Greens Party.

The most marked shifts in negative sentiment between the 2009-2010 surveys are for male respondents, residents of Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland, and those aged 25-44.

There is also a sharp differentiation among supporters of the two major parties, a differentiation of 13 percentage points in 2009 and 11 percentage points in 2010. The highest proportion who considered immigration to be 'too high' were those likely to vote for the Liberal/ National Coalition and those who indicated that they were uncertain how they would vote.

**Table 9: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present?'**  
**Response: 'Too high'**

Gender	Male	Female				
2007	33%	39%				
2009	35%	40%				
2010	48%	47%				
State	South Australia	Victoria	NSW	Western Australia	Queensland	
2007	30%	30%	42%	35%	39%	
2009	33%	37%	38%	39%	41%	
2010	36%	52%	39%	55%	57%	
Region	Capital	Rest of state				
2007	33%	43%				
2009	35%	42%				
2010	43%	55%				
Age	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
2007	35%	28%	35%	35%	40%	46%
2009	38%	29%	31%	37%	38%	53%
2010	48%	45%	48%	41%	51%	51%
Level of completed education	Up to and including year 12	Trade/diploma	BA or higher			
2007	41%	36%	20%			
2009	47%	45%	22%			
2010	54%	46%	29%			
Financial situation	Prosperous / very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills / poor		
2009	28%	36%	42%	49%		
2010	35%	47%	50%	58%		
Intended vote	Labor	Liberal/National	Greens	Uncertain		
2009	34%	47%	25%	43%		
2010	43%	54%	36%	52%		
Birthplace	Australia	Overseas-ESB	Overseas-NESB			
2007	40%	29%	27%			
2009	43%	29%	25%			
2010	52%	34%	39%			

This table does not include 2007 data for two variables as the relevant questions were not asked in the 2007 survey.

## Population issues

The Third Intergenerational Report was released by The Treasurer, Wayne Swan, in February 2010 following earlier reports in 2002 and 2007. The Intergenerational reports consider the ‘implications of demographic change for economic growth and assess the financial implications of continuing current policies and trends over the next four decades.’ The key findings bearing on population were:

- Predicted slowing of annual population growth to 1.2% over the next 40 years, down from 1.4% for the period 1970-2010, resulting from a stable fertility rate of 1.4 births per woman and a continuation of immigration at the same level as achieved over the period 1970-2010, an annual average rate of 0.6% of the population;
- Based on these trends, Australia’s population was projected to reach 35.9 million in 2050;
- The proportion of the population aged 65 and over was expected to increase to 22.7% of the total population by 2050, up from 8.3% in 1970 and 13.5% in 2010.

The projected population of 35.9 million sparked extensive and polarised public debates, waged between what came to be termed advocates of a ‘Big Australia’ and ‘Small Australia’, with little understanding that the Intergenerational Report’s projection was relatively conservative and based on the continuation of trends of the last forty years.

Surveys sought to establish attitudes toward the projected population of 35.9 million. One approach taken in surveys was to provide a set of numbers (25 million, 30 million, 35 million, 40 million) and ask respondents for their view on the best population target.

Such questions make little sense to those polled and are largely pointless. Respondents lack the knowledge to make an informed judgment and as to be expected in such a context, responses are ranged along a normal curve—that is, the most common response is at the mid-point of the range of options presented to respondents, then either side of the mid-point, with a small proportion selecting the extreme or outlier positions. The results obtained by the Lowy and Morgan polls conducted in March 2010 are presented in Figure 12.<sup>6</sup>

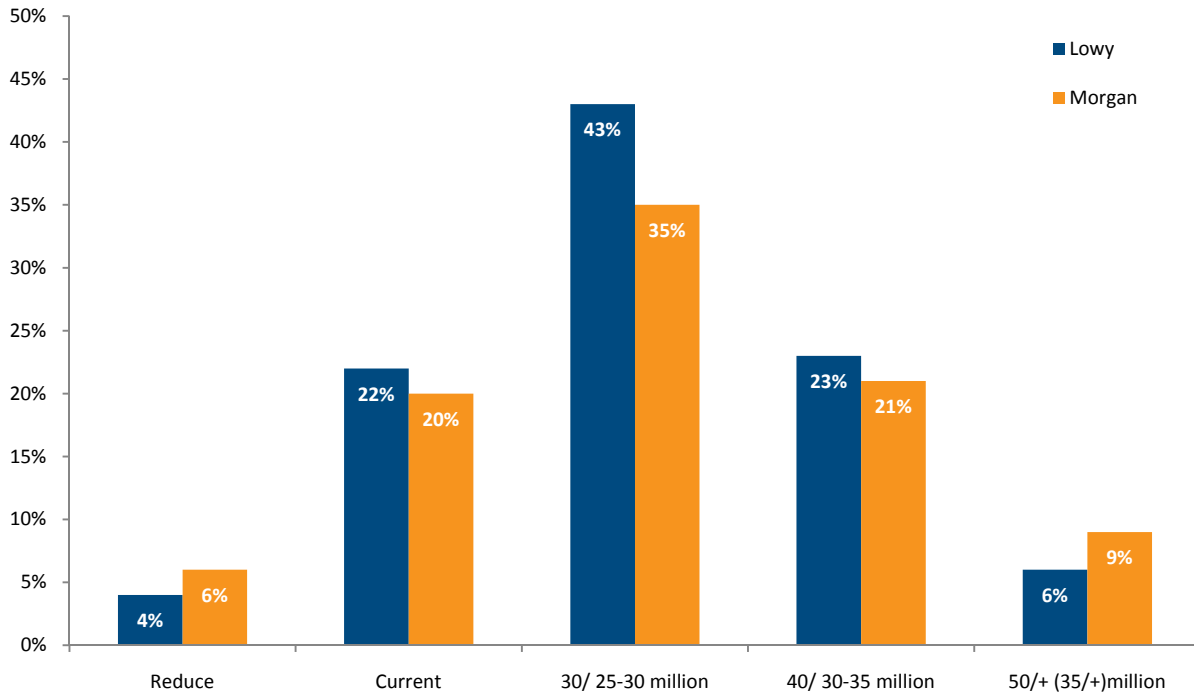
**Table 10: Australia, projected population**

Age range	Population by age (millions of people)					
	1970	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
0-14	3.6	4.2	4.9	5.4	5.7	6.2
15-64	7.9	15.0	16.6	18.2	20.0	21.6
65-84	1.0	2.6	3.7	4.8	5.6	6.3
85+	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.8	1.3	1.8
Total	12.5	22.2	25.7	29.2	32.6	35.9
	Population by age (percentage)					
0-14	28.8%	19.1%	19.0%	18.3%	17.4%	17.2%
15-64	62.8%	67.4%	64.7%	62.4%	61.3%	60.2%
65-84	7.8%	11.7%	14.3%	16.6%	17.2%	17.6%
85+	0.5%	1.8%	2.1%	2.7%	4.0%	5.1%

Source: The Treasury, *The 2010 Intergenerational Report* (2010)

<sup>6</sup> Fergus Hanson, *The Lowy Institute Poll 2010: Australia and World, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*; Roy Morgan Research, Finding Number 4482, conducted 16-17 March 2010.

**Figure 13: Best target population for Australia in: the next 40 years (Lowy), 2040 (Morgan)**



This pattern of response and its meaning seemingly escaped newspaper editors, who interpreted the findings as indicating lack of support for a ‘Big Australia.’ Thus the findings of the Lowy survey were presented by ABC News under the headline ‘Australians wary of 36m population target’ and by *The Australian* as ‘Two-thirds of population are opposed to ‘big Australia.’

The 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey took a different approach. It asked a series of questions, beginning with a testing of knowledge of public discussion: ‘Have you seen or heard anything in the media about the size of Australia’s future population?’ It found that **a large minority, 40% of respondents, were not aware of the public discussion about the size of Australia’s future population.**

**Table 11: 'And now, thinking about the size of Australia's future population. Have you seen or heard anything in the media about the size of Australia's future population?'**

Response	Percent
Yes	58.5%
No	40.3%
(Don't know)	1.1%
Total	100%
N (unweighted)	2,021

In a follow up question, respondents were asked for views on the much discussed 36 million projected population in 2050, not a range of possible numerical targets. The question employed a five-point scale, too large/ too small, much too large/ much too small, and about right.

In contrast with the level of opposition adduced from responses to specific numerical population size, which was interpreted as indicating opposition at the level of two-thirds of respondents or higher, the Scanlon Foundation survey obtained a level of negative sentiment at 51%.

This result is only marginally higher than those opposed to the current level of immigration (47%) and points to the likelihood that questions on future population are linked in the minds of respondents to questions on the current level of immigration. That is, those respondents who consider the current intake to be too high are likely to view targets indicating substantial population growth as too high, with a similar distribution pattern in response to the 'about right' and 'too low' options. The correlated pattern of response is indicated in Figure 13.

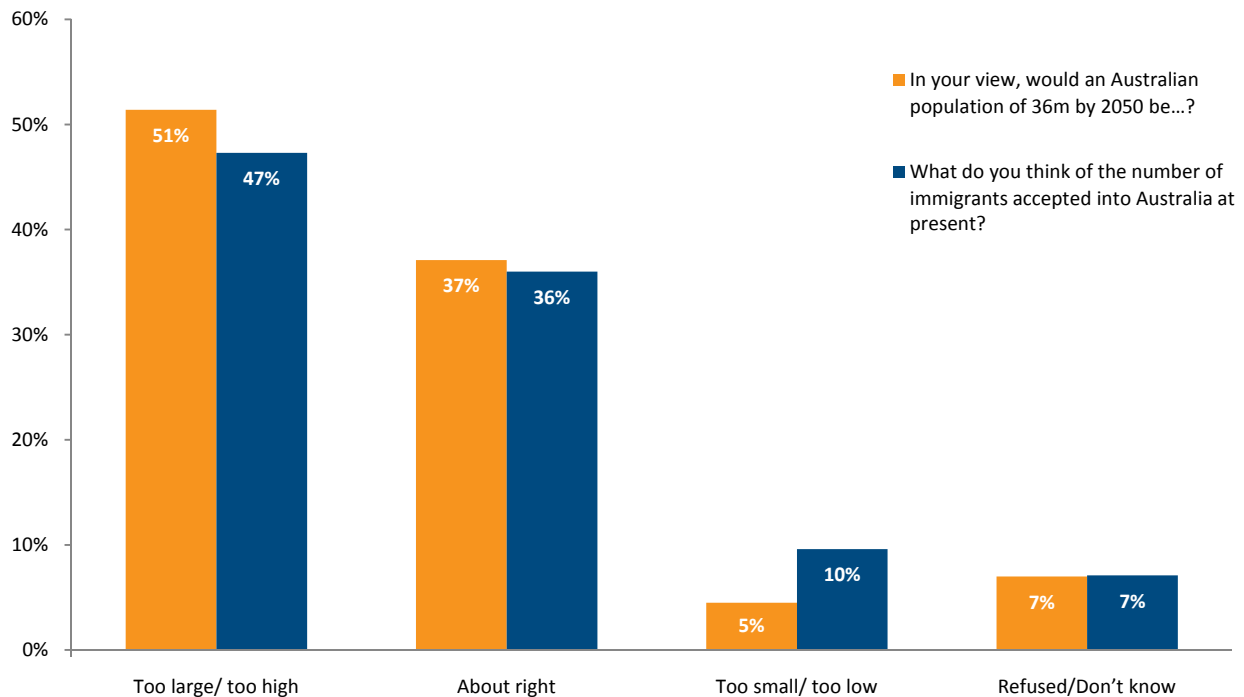
When results are disaggregated by awareness of media discussion about the size of Australia's future population, those with knowledge of public discussion are 9 percentage points more likely to consider the 36 million projected population to be 'much too large' when compared with those who are unaware of media discussion, the latter are 5% more likely to consider the projected population to be 'about right' and 2% more likely to respond that they 'do not know'.

**Table 12: 'In your view, would an Australian population of 36 million by 2050 be too large, about right or too small?'**<sup>7</sup> Cross-tabulated by persons who were 'aware'/'not aware' of media discussion about the size of Australia's future population

Response	Aware of media discussion	Not aware of media discussion	All respondents
Much too large	24.3%	15.5%	20.6%
Too large	30.2%	31.8%	30.8%
About right	35.3%	40.5%	37.1%
Too small	3.3%	4.2%	3.7%
Much too small	0.9%	0.5%	.7%
(Refused)	0.3%	0%	.2%
Don't know	5.6%	7.6%	6.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	1,319	681	2,021

<sup>7</sup> Respondents were presented with the options 'too large/too small' in random order.

**Figure 14: Attitudes to projected population in 2050 and to the current immigration intake**



## Explaining views on the desirable level of population in 2050

A sub-sample of 200 respondents who indicated negative views towards a population of 36 million by 2050 were asked to indicate the reason for their negative view, using an open ended question; a similar number favourable to the population target were asked to indicate the reason for their favourable view, again in response to an open ended question.

Those who regarded 36 million as too large most often mentioned concern about overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient natural resources, notably water, environmental degradation, impact on the labour market and standard of living.

Those favourably disposed most often mentioned economic benefits from a large population, including a stronger economy and enhanced capacity to support an ageing population. Some respondents also saw the greater cultural diversity from a larger population in positive terms. Traditional arguments concerning the capacity to enhance defence capability were mentioned by very few respondents.

## The adequacy of government infrastructure provision

Respondents were asked to rate **the record of the federal government in providing the infrastructure for future population growth**. Only 24% rated it as good (2% 'very good'), 52% as poor (20% 'very poor'), and 21% selected 'neither good nor poor.'

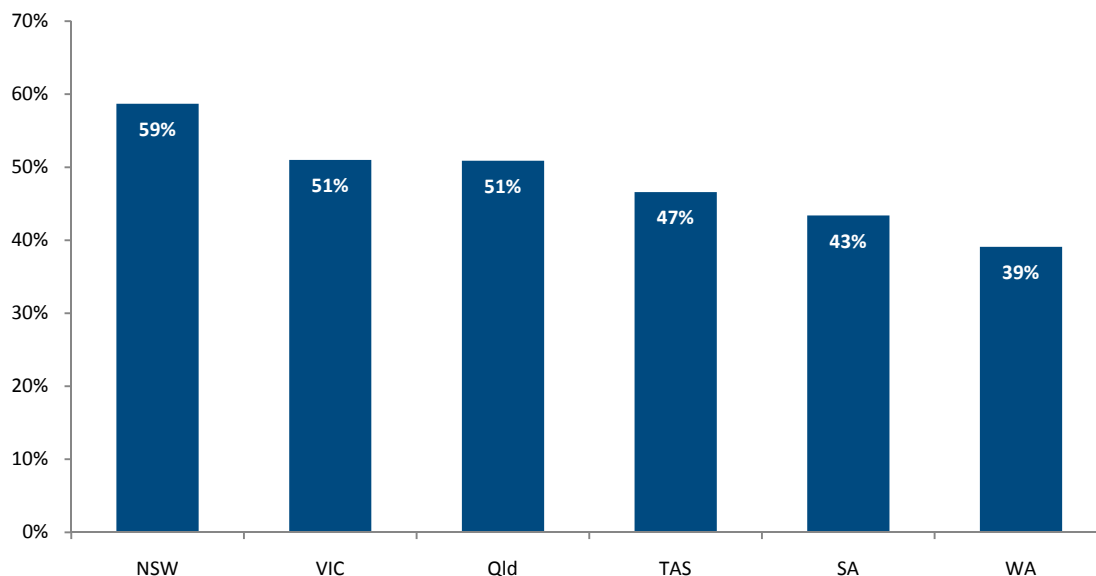
**Table 13: 'How would you rate the record of the current federal government in providing the roads, railways, and housing needed for future population growth? Is it...'**

Response	Percent
Very good	2.4%
Good	21.8%
Neither good nor poor	21.0%
Poor	31.8%
Very poor	19.6%
(Refused)	.2%
(Don't know)	3.2%
Total	100%
N (unweighted)	2,021

Responses were differentiated along party lines. Thus 15% of those likely to vote for the Coalition rated the record of the government in providing roads, railways and housing for future growth as good, 84% as poor or 'neither good nor poor', compared with 39% of intending Labor voters who were positive, 58% negative or neutral.

The survey was conducted at a time when support for the federal government was low, hence there was a strong pattern of negative judgement of any federal policy or action. But a notable feature was a pattern of response which cut across some demographics that earlier surveys showed to be strongly favourable of immigration; hence a differentiation in attitudes to [a] government planning and [b] immigration is evident. Negative sentiment is typically strongest in Queensland and Western Australia on immigration issues, but in response to assessment of government planning negative sentiment was found to be strongest in New South Wales and Victoria. Further, negative sentiment reached its highest level among those who described their financial circumstances as 'prosperous.' Contrary to the response to most questions surveyed, there was relatively minor differentiation by level of educational attainment.

**Figure 15: 'How would you rate the record of the current federal government in providing the roads, railways, and housing needed for future population growth?' Response: 'very poor' or 'poor' by state of residence**





**Table 14: ‘How would you rate the record of the current federal government in providing the roads, railways, and housing needed for future population growth?’ By state of residence**

Response	State of residence					
	NSW	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
Very good	1.4%	2.7%	5.3%	.0%	2.4%	3.4%
Good	18.8%	21.3%	23.0%	22.2%	22.4%	29.3%
<i>Sub-total - good</i>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>24.0%</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>32.7%</b>
Neither good nor poor	17.0%	21.6%	23.7%	28.9%	21.4%	26.3%
Poor	36.5%	31.3%	28.3%	33.3%	29.8%	25.4%
Very poor	22.2%	19.6%	15.1%	13.3%	21.2%	13.7%
<i>Sub-total - poor</i>	<b>58.7%</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>51.0%</b>	<b>39.1%</b>
(Refused)	.2%	.5%	.7%	.0%	.0%	0%
(Don't know)	4.0%	3.0%	3.9%	2.2%	2.8%	2.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	378	297	203	201	317	253

**Table 15: ‘How would you rate the record of the current federal government in providing the roads, railways, and housing needed for future population growth?’ By intended vote**

Response	Total	If there was a Federal election held today, for which party would you probably vote?			
		Labor Party	Liberal / National party	Greens	Undecided
Very good	2.4%	4.8%	.9%	.0%	1.7%
Good	21.8%	33.8%	13.6%	18.0%	21.4%
<i>Sub-total - good</i>	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>38.6%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>
Neither good nor poor	21.0%	25.9%	15.8%	25.1%	22.3%
Poor	31.7%	25.3%	37.3%	36.6%	32.9%
Very poor	19.6%	7.0%	30.9%	17.5%	16.8%
<i>Sub-total - poor</i>	<b>51.3%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>68.2%</b>	<b>54.1%</b>	<b>49.7%</b>
(Refused)	.2%	.4%	.2%	0%	0%
(Don't know)	3.2%	2.8%	1.3%	2.7%	4.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	2,021	554	668	228	305

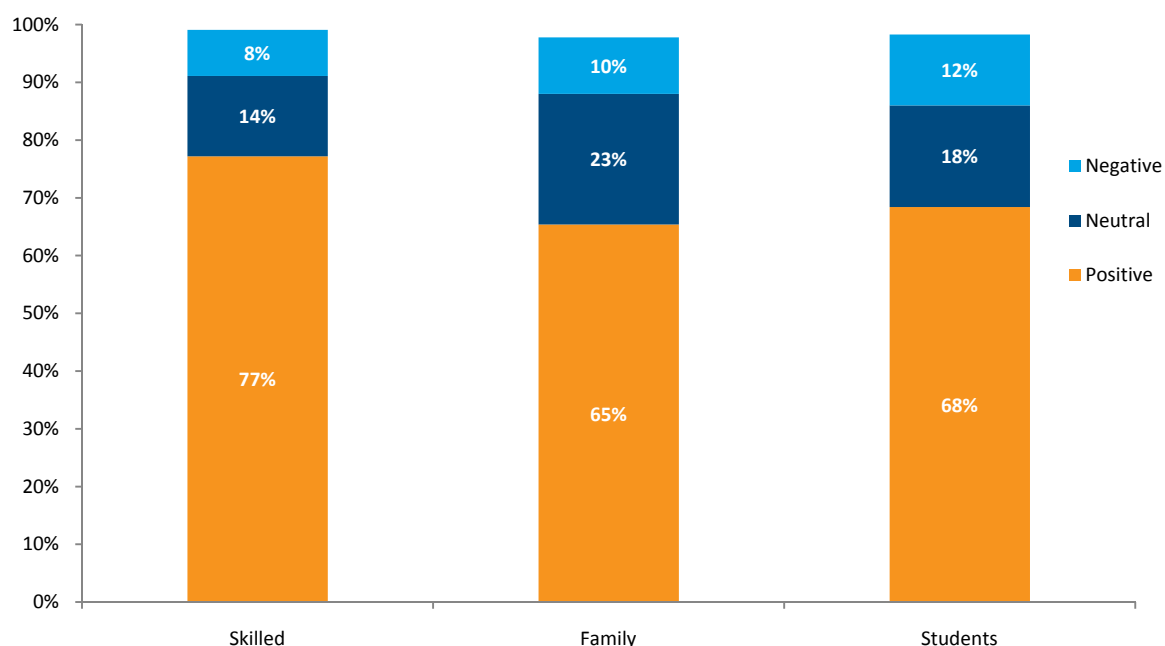
# Attitudes to immigrant visa categories, national and religious groups

2010 Scanlon Foundation survey undertook a detailed exploration of attitudes to immigrant categories, national and religious groups, to provide a fuller understanding of the nature of current attitudes and the extent of change in recent decades.

Respondents were asked for their views on the main categories of permanent and long-stay immigrants, that is, those admitted under the Skill or Family Streams of the Migration Program, and Overseas Students.

The survey found the most positive attitudes are towards immigrants admitted on the basis of skill. The views, however, towards the other two categories were almost as favourable. In these categories positive attitudes outnumber negative by a ratio close to 5:1 or higher.

**Figure 16: 'Do you feel positive, negative or neutral about (category) coming to live in Australia as a permanent or long term resident?'**



The above categories were defined in the survey as: Skilled workers (e.g. doctors or nurses, plumbers, etc.); those who have close family living in Australia (e.g. parents or children); and young people who want to study in Australia.

## Value of immigration from many different countries

Respondents were asked if ‘accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger.’

The survey found that those who agreed that immigrants from many different countries make Australia stronger outnumbered those who disagreed by a ratio of more than 2:1 – 62% agreed, 29% disagreed and 8% were either neutral, did not know or refused. There was minor change from the results of the 2009 survey, statistically significant in the decrease of those in strong agreement and the increase in the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ category.

The lowest level of agreement was amongst residents of Western Australia and Queensland, residents outside capital cities, those over the age of 65, without post-school qualifications, who describe their financial situation as ‘just getting along’, ‘struggling to pay bills’ and ‘poor’, and those intending to vote for the Coalition or uncertain of their vote.

**Table 16: ‘Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger.’**

Response	2007	2009	2010
Strongly agree	21.9%	24.7%	19.1%**
Agree	45.1%	43.2%	43.3%
<i>Sub-total - agree</i>	<b>67.0%</b>	<b>67.9%</b>	<b>62.4%</b>
Neither agree or disagree	3.3%	3.1%	5.9%**
Disagree	18.1%	17.9%	18.6%
Strongly disagree	7.8%	8.9%	10.9%
<i>Sub-total - disagree</i>	<b>25.9%</b>	<b>26.8%</b>	<b>29.4%</b>
Refused	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%
None of the above/ Don't know	3.6%	1.9%	2.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	2,012	2,019	2,021

\*\* Statistically significant variance;  $p < .05$ , 2009-2010.

**Table 17: 'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger.'**  
**Response: 'Strongly agree' and 'agree'**

Gender	Male	Female				
2007	73%	62%				
2009	69%	67%				
2010	62%	62%				
State	South Australia	Victoria	NSW	Western Australia	Queensland	
2007	75%	70%	64%	67%	65%	
2009	71%	76%	65%	59%	65%	
2010	65%	64%	67%	50%	57%	
Region	Capital	Rest of state				
2007	70%	62%				
2009	71%	62%				
2010	66%	57%				
Age	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
2007	75%	71%	72%	66%	66%	57%
2009	71%	73%	73%	67%	67%	55%
2010	69%	67%	65%	65%	61%	51%
Level of completed education	Up to and including year 12	Trade/diploma	BA or higher			
2007	63%	66%	83%			
2009	63%	61%	78%			
2010	57%	62%	81%			
Financial situation	Prosperous / very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/poor		
2009	75%	68%	68%	53%		
2010	75%	62%	56%	55%		
Intended vote	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	Uncertain		
2009	73%	58%	87%	62%		
2010	70%	54%	75%	54%		
Birthplace	Australia	Overseas-ESB	Overseas-NESB			
2007	64%	69%	75%			
2009	64%	71%	78%			
2010	59%	68%	68%			

This table does not include 2007 data for two variables as the relevant questions were not asked in the 2007 survey.

## Attitudes towards immigrants from specific countries

In all countries of immigration there is a hierarchy of ethnic preference, which informs attitudes to newcomers, at times determining categories of admission and exclusion. For much of the twentieth century there was a large degree of consistency in the status hierarchy within Australian society, with immigrants from the United Kingdom and other English-speaking countries ranked at the top, northern Europeans next, followed by other Europeans. That is where the ranking ended; non-European people were denied entry for permanent residence until a process of reform between 1966 and the late 1970s brought the White Australia policy to its end.

There has been little attention in Australian opinion polling to status hierarchies since the 1980s, and even in the 1970s and 1980s, polls asked imprecise and ambiguous questions on this issue. There are but few exceptions. A series of surveys conducted between 2001 and 2008 by Professor Kevin Dunn and his associates focused on racism and discrimination and asked respondents for their views on 'groups that don't fit into Australian society.' These surveys found concern over the presence of Muslim groups expressed by 40%-50% of respondents.

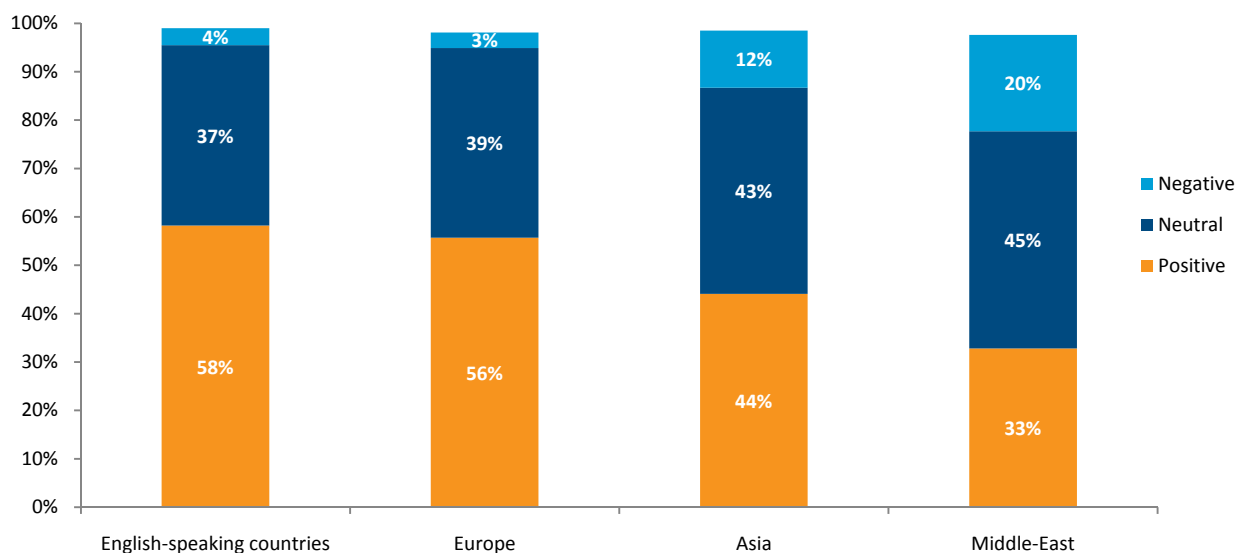
The 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey asked respondents if their feelings were positive, negative or neutral towards immigrants from twelve national groups, using a computer generated rotation designed to ensure that each respondent was asked for views on four nationalities, selected from the groupings of English-speaking, European, Asian and Middle East countries. The level of negative concern measured was considerably below that in the Dunn surveys.

When questioned with regard to feelings towards immigrants from specific Middle Eastern countries (identified in Australian public discussion as main centres of Muslim populations), negative sentiment reached 26% for immigrants from Iraq and 23% for Lebanon, a considerably lower 11% for Egypt. But even with regard to immigrants from the Iraq, who attracted the highest level of negative response, those with positive (26%) and neutral (47%) feelings, a combined 73%, formed a large majority.

In contrast, the level of negative sentiment towards immigrants from English-speaking countries (England, New Zealand and the United States) and European countries (Italy, Greece and Germany) was under 5%. Negative sentiment towards immigrants from China and Vietnam was around 10%, and a higher 16% towards India. This higher proportion may be a product of the heated public discussion which at times has resulted from attacks on Indian students and the negative coverage of Australia in the Indian media.

It is notable that some 95% of respondents are positive or neutral towards immigrants from Italy and Greece, almost 90% positive or neutral towards China and Vietnam. **These findings point to a substantial change in Australian attitudes in a relatively short period of time – continental Europeans, who were the target of hostility in the 1950s and 1960s, and immigrants from Asia whose entry to Australia was much questioned in the 1980s, are now seen in a positive or neutral light by a large majority of Australians. While there is a higher level of negative feeling towards immigrants from India, Lebanon and Iraq, those with positive and neutral attitudes are the clear majority.**

**Figure 17: 'Would you say your feelings are positive, negative or neutral towards immigrants from ....?'**



**Table 18: ‘Would you say your feelings are positive, negative or neutral towards immigrants from ....?’<sup>8</sup>**

	Very positive	Somewhat positive	Sub-total positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Very negative	Sub-total negative	Refused/ don't know	Total	N (unweighted)
<b>ENGLISH-SPEAKING</b>										
England	25.5%	36.1%	61.6%	34.9%	1.3%	1.0%	2.3%	1.2%	100%	675
New Zealand	24.3%	38.6%	62.9%	32.8%	2.2%	1.1%	3.3%	1.0%	100%	672
United States of America	14.0%	36.2%	50.2%	44.2%	4.3%	0.6%	4.9%	0.8%	100%	674
Average			<b>58.2%</b>				<b>3.5%</b>			
<b>EUROPE</b>										
Italy	28.3%	30.2%	58.5%	38.5%	1.8%	0.9%	2.7%	0.4%	100%	673
Greece	18.9%	37.6%	56.5%	38.7%	1.7%	0.6%	2.3%	2.4%	100%	674
Germany	19.1%	33.1%	52.2%	40.4%	3.3%	1.2%	4.5%	3.0%	100%	674
Average			<b>55.7%</b>				<b>3.2%</b>			
<b>ASIA</b>										
China	13.3%	33.5%	46.8%	40.9%	8.1%	2.5%	10.6%	1.5%	100%	675
Vietnam	12.6%	32.2%	44.8%	45.2%	6.1%	2.3%	8.4%	1.6%	100%	675
India	12.1%	28.7%	40.8%	41.7%	12.7%	3.7%	16.4%	1.1%	100%	671
Average			<b>44.1%</b>				<b>11.8%</b>			
<b>MIDDLE-EAST</b>										
Lebanon	9.0%	22.9%	31.9%	42.7%	15.3%	7.4%	22.7%	2.7%	100%	675
Egypt	13.7%	26.9%	40.6%	44.8%	6.0%	5.1%	11.1%	3.5%	100%	671
Iraq	7.0%	18.8%	25.8%	47.1%	15.8%	10.0%	25.8%	1.3%	100%	675
Average			<b>32.8%</b>				<b>19.9%</b>			

<sup>8</sup> Each respondent was presented with four countries, randomly chosen from each of the four groups and listed in random order.

## Attitudes towards religious groups

The Scanlon Foundation survey considered attitudes towards religion as a way of obtaining additional evidence on Australian openness to diversity, and also to provide further insight into attitudes towards large immigrant groups of non-Christian background.

While Christianity is the predominant religious belief of Australians, the country is characterised by diversity of belief. At the 2006 census, 63% of Australians indicated that they were Christian, 30% that they had no religion or did not specify a religion, and the remaining 6% indicated a range of non-Christian religious beliefs, of which the largest proportion were Buddhist (2.1%) and Muslim (1.7%).

The survey asked respondents for their view on the importance of Australia continuing to be a country in which the main religion was Christianity. **Only a small majority (53%) ranked the continuance of Christianity as the main religion as important; 46% responded either that it was not important, or indicated a neutral attitude.**

Respondents were then asked for their attitude to the three largest religions in Australia – Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim – and to those of no religion. The question engaged respondents, indicated by the very low (less than 3%) aggregated ‘refused’ and ‘don’t know’ response level.

61% of respondents indicated that they were positive to Christians (a similar proportion to the number of Christians in Australia, as enumerated in the census), 4% were negative, and 34% were neutral. Attitude toward the largest non-Christian group, Buddhists, was similar, with 53% positive and only 5% negative. With regard to non-believers or atheists, the largest response category at 49%, was neutral, followed by 41% positive. Those who indicated negative views toward non-believers comprised only 8% of respondents.

Attitudes towards Muslims provided an important test case, given the level of negative reporting of issues involving those of the Muslim faith since the 9/11 attacks on the United States and subsequent bombing of western targets, including the Bali and London bombings. Even though the level of negative sentiment is considerably higher than for the other three groups, it only totals 24% – in contrast with a large majority, 74%, who indicated that they were either positive (32%) or neutral (42%). These relative proportions are almost identical to attitudes towards immigrants from Lebanon and Iraq – 74% either positive (29%) or neutral (45%), and 24% negative, indicating that attitudes to Muslims in all likelihood inform attitudes to immigrants from these two countries.

**Table 19: ‘How important is it to you that the main religion in Australia continues to be Christianity?’**

Response	Percent
Very important	30.9%
Important	21.8%
Neither important nor unimportant	6.9%
Unimportant	24.2%
Completely unimportant	15.0%
(Don't know)	1.2%
Total	100%
N (unweighted)	2,021

**Table 20: ‘Is your personal attitude positive, negative or neutral towards ....?’**

Religion	Very positive	Somewhat positive	Sub-total positive	Neutral	Somewhat negative	Very negative	Sub-total negative	Refused/ don't know	Total	N
Christians	34.6%	26.2%	<b>60.8%</b>	34.3%	2.5%	1.5%	<b>4.0%</b>	0.9%	100%	2,021
Buddhists	22.4%	31.0%	<b>53.4%</b>	39.2%	2.7%	2.3%	<b>5.0%</b>	2.5%	100%	2,021
Muslims	9.2%	22.7%	<b>31.9%</b>	42.3%	11.8%	11.7%	<b>23.5%</b>	2.4%	100%	2,021
Non-believers or atheists	13.7%	27.0%	<b>40.7%</b>	49.3%	5.0%	3.1%	<b>8.1%</b>	1.9%	100%	2,021

## Asylum seekers

Since late 2009 there has been a polarised and emotional debate sparked by the arrival of asylum seekers by boat. This debate has been fuelled by the increasing number of arrivals (up from an average of 200 per month in late 2009 to 700 per month in March-April 2010), on-going front page newspaper coverage, the advocacy by the Liberal Opposition of more stringent policy to halt arrivals, and a toughening of government policy. In April 2010, the Labor government temporarily suspended processing of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and in July began negotiations to establish a centre for off-shore processing of asylum seekers. As a consequence of the prominence of the issue, a number of news agencies commissioned polls. These polls focused on perceptions of government policy. **A consistent finding was the high level of support for a tougher policy**, by an average in excess of 60% of respondents in six polls conducted in the period March-July 2010. Polls also indicated a higher level of support for the policies advocated by the Liberal Party than those of the government, although the difference in the rating of the two parties narrowed in July as the Labor government adopted more stringent policies.

One poll, the 7 June 2010 Essential Report conducted by the online polling agency Essential Media Communications, was distinctive in exploring level of public knowledge of the number of asylum seekers reaching Australia by boat. It found that only a small minority (less than 20%) were aware that the total

number of asylum seekers only made up a very small proportion (close to 1%) of the annual intake of immigrants, 25% of respondents overestimated the number of asylum seekers by a very large margin and 30% could not indicate a number.

Contrary to the narrow basis of questions posed by major polling agencies, the Australian Red Cross commissioned a survey which took a different approach. The Red Cross survey, conducted in June 2010, included seven questions, several of a hypothetical nature, others without direct bearing on the current concerns with boat arrivals. The survey found that 86% of respondents agreed that they would flee to a safe country if they lived in a conflict zone; 94% of these respondents would use all of their money to get to a safe country; 83% agreed that people fleeing persecution should be able to seek protection in another country; 83% were willing to assist a refugee in their community to settle in Australia; 67% agreed that refugees have made a positive contribution to Australia. Interpreting these results, Australian Red Cross CEO Robert Ticker stated: 'On this evidence there appears to be a disconnect between the strong sympathy of the Australian public and the unsympathetic nature of much of the public debate around asylum seekers and refugees.'<sup>9</sup> The Red Cross did not, when releasing the findings of its survey, include the result of a seventh question, which asked respondents 'Do you believe asylum seekers who have arrived by boat are acting illegally?'. Nearly seven in ten respondents (69%) said yes, 31% said no. This level of negative response, in the 60%-70% range, is consistent with polling indicating support for a tougher government policy.

**Table 21: Attitudes to asylum seekers, May 2009-July 2010**

Question	Right of asylum seekers to apply for residence	PM Gillard getting tough on asylum seekers	Offshore processing of asylum seekers	Federal government too tough / soft	Suspension of processing	Right of asylum seekers to apply for residence	Handling of asylum issue	Policies of the Rudd government
Survey	Morgan	Galaxy	Age/ Nielsen	Essential Report	Age/ Nielsen	Morgan	Essential Report	Essential Report
Date	July 2010	July 2010	June 2010	April 2010	April 2010	March 2010	Nov 2009	May 2009
Support tougher policy	64%	63%	62%	65%	58%	64%	52%	55%
Retain current policy	26%	26%	33%	18%		26%	28%	26%
Support softer policy				6%			9%	4%
Do not know / other	10%	11%	5%	11%		10%	11%	15%

<sup>9</sup> Australian Red Cross internet site, accessed 21 June 2010; SBS World News, 21 June 2010; ABC News, 21 June 2010



To further understanding of the asylum issue, the 2010 Scanlon Foundation survey investigated the hypothesis that Australians **drew a distinction between asylum seekers applying overseas and those who arrived in Australian waters by boat and then claimed asylum**. It also explored the basis of attitudes to asylum seekers reaching Australia by boat and considered views on policy to be adopted by government.

The survey first considered attitudes toward asylum seekers admitted after application overseas: it found that some two out of three respondents were positive to such asylum seekers, at a similar level to positive attitudes towards those admitted under the Family stream and Overseas Students applying to study in Australia.

**Table 22: ‘Do you feel positive, negative or neutral about refugees who have been assessed overseas and found to be victims of persecution and in need of help coming to live in Australia as a permanent or long term resident?’**

Response	Percent
Very positive	31.4%
Somewhat positive	35.1%
<i>Sub-total positive</i>	<b>66.5%</b>
Neutral	17.2%
Somewhat negative	7.9%
Very negative	5.8%
<i>Sub-total negative</i>	<b>13.7%</b>
Refused/Don't know	2.7%
Total	100%
N (unweighted)	2,021

It then asked, in an open-ended question so as not to limit responses by pre-determined categories, what respondents thought was ‘the main reason asylum seekers attempt to reach Australia by boat.’ The most common response, by a large margin, was that those arriving by boat were coming ‘for a better life.’ What may be seen as negative sentiment was again in the 60%-70% range; 61% of respondents were of the view that the asylum seekers came for a better life or were taking advantage of weakness in government policy.

**Table 23: ‘What do you think is the main reason asylum seekers try to reach Australia by boat?’**

Response	Percent
Are in fear of their lives	7.0%
Are facing persecution	11.7%
Desperation / desperate	10.8%
<i>Sub-total</i>	<b>29.5%</b>
For a better life	41.1%
Are living in poverty	5.6%
<i>Sub-total</i>	<b>46.7%</b>
Are queue jumpers	7.4%
Are wealthy and can afford it	1.1%
Easy to get into Australia	6.0%
<i>Sub-total</i>	<b>14.4%</b>
Other / Refused / Don't know	9.2%
Total	100%

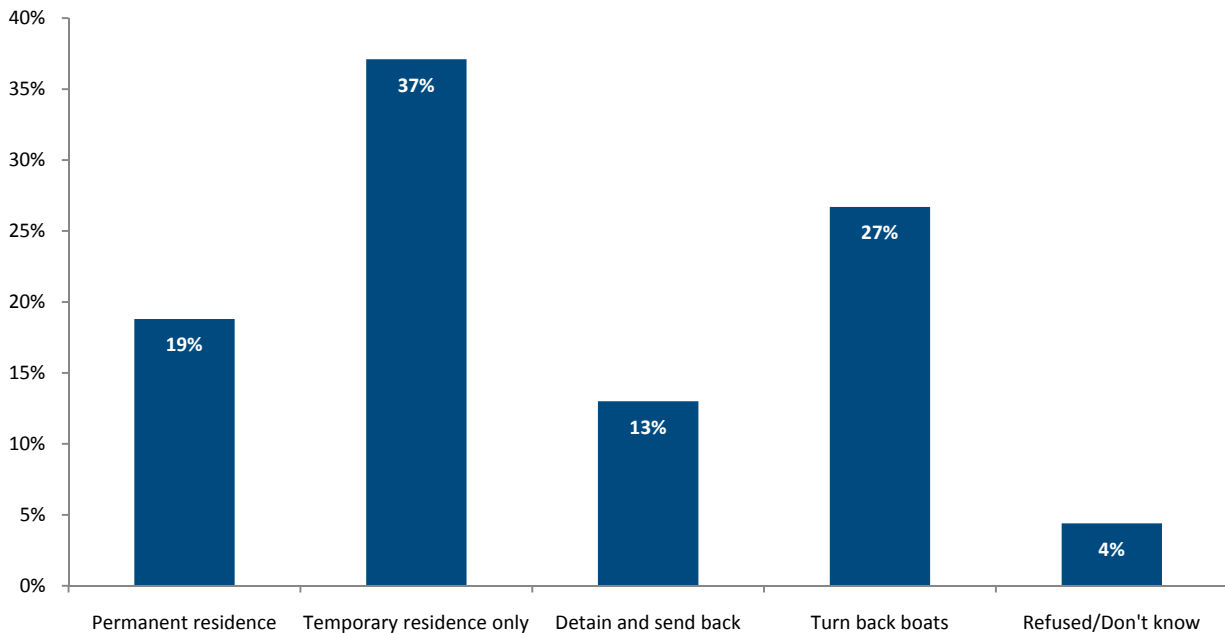
A third question sought views on the best policy to be adopted by government. Respondents were presented with four statements and asked which came ‘closest to your view about the best policy for dealing with asylum seekers, seeking to reach Australia by boat?’

1. They should be allowed to apply for permanent residence.
2. They should be allowed to apply for temporary residence only.
3. They should be kept in detention until they can be sent back.
4. Their boats should be turned back.

In response, 27% of respondents favoured turning back of boats; a further 13% favoured detention; the most popular answer, favoured by 37% of respondents, was ‘temporary residence only’; 19% favoured right of application for permanent residence. This last option best represented government policy in June 2010 (except for asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan), although this is not to assume that respondents were aware of the details of policy.

Consideration of attitudes within sub-groups indicated a differentiation in attitude by political support, state of residence, educational attainment and age.

**Figure 18: ‘Which of the following four statements comes closest to your view about the best policy for dealing with asylum seekers trying to reach Australia by boat?’**



The highest level of support for turning back boats or ‘detention until they can be sent back’ was provided by:

- National Party supporters: 54% turn back, 15% detain – total 69%
- Liberal Party supporters: 37% turn back, 16% detain – total 53%
- Residents of Western Australia: 35% turn back, 14% detain – total 49%
- Education up to Year 12: 33% turn back, 14% detain – total 47%
- Aged 65 and above: 31% turn back, 14% detain – total 46%

The highest level of support for right of asylum seekers to be able to apply for permanent residence was amongst those:

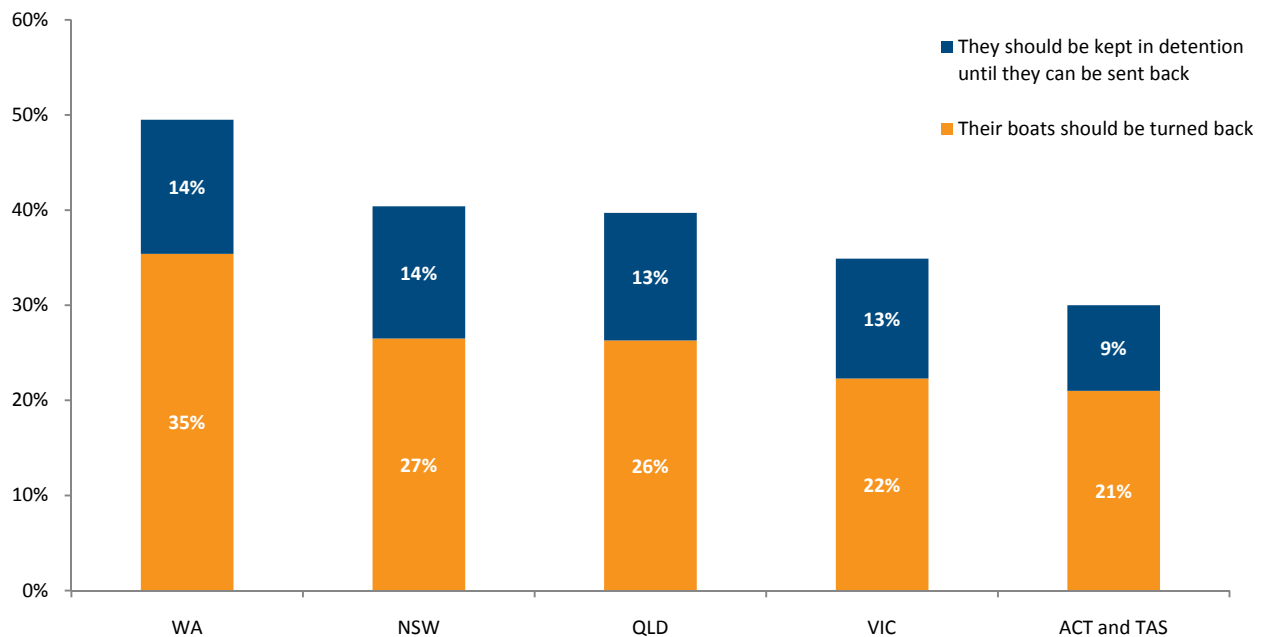
- Aged 18-24: 26%
- Greens: 35%; Labour Party: 26%
- Bachelor degree: 27%; Post-graduate degree: 29%

An important finding relates to level of consistency across sub-groups on the question of right to apply for permanent residence. **Even among the groups most favourable to asylum seekers who arrive by boat, support for the right to apply for permanent residence remained a minority viewpoint.**

Of those who indicated that they were likely to vote Greens, 35% supported right of permanent residence, 42% temporary residence only, and 20% favoured turning back boats or detention until deportation.

There was a similar pattern of response among those with tertiary qualifications. Of those with post-graduate qualifications, 29% supported permanent residence, 43% temporary residence only, and 23% favoured turning back boats or detention until deportation.

**Figure 19: ‘Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about the best policy for dealing with asylum seekers who try to reach Australia by boat?’**



The final asylum question asked, in the context of the record of the Rudd government, ‘What do you think of how the government is handling the asylum seeker issue? Overall do you think they are doing a good job, an average job or a poor job?’

11% of respondents considered that the government was doing a ‘very good’ or ‘good’ job, 38% that it was doing an ‘average job’, and the largest proportion, 47%, that it was doing a ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ job.

A general finding from this set of questions, and polling by a number of agencies in 2009-10 and in earlier years, is that **the arrival of boats is met with a high level of negativity.**

Possibly the arrival of ‘boat people’ taps into a deeply embedded fear of invasion from the north, a fear which has its origin in the colonial period of Australian history. The fear may well be irrational, and as noted there is poll data to indicate that the perception of numbers arriving is greatly exaggerated, but it is a fear that is not simply to be explained away.

In addition to the long held national fear, Australia is a country that leads (and has led) the world in the stringency of its control of immigration, and in which there is a very low number of undocumented immigrants (an estimated 40,000, compared to 12 million in the United States of America.) Boat arrivals are seen to challenge national sovereignty, related to capacity to control entrants into the country; boat arrivals present a threat unlike arrivals through airports, where controls are in place. Those who point to the inconsistency of focus on boat arrivals and the lack of attention to the number who arrive by air and subsequently claim asylum fail to understand the nature of fears evoked by the arrival of boats on Australia’s northern shores.

## Intolerance of diversity

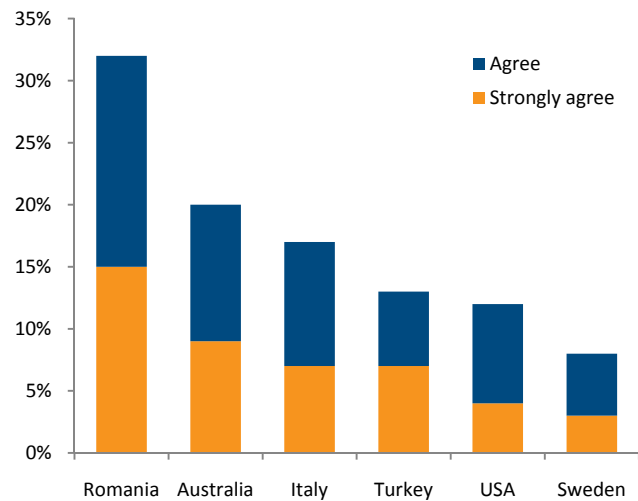
Intolerance of diversity is found in all national groups. Research undertaken by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia indicates that the proportion of the intolerant within the countries of the European Union ranges from a low of 4% of the population to a high of 27%. The intolerant are characterised by unease when in the presence of members of minority ethnic groups, their belief that minority cultures do not enrich society, their support for policies to encourage the emigration of minorities, their demand that those who remain assimilate to the dominant culture, and their opposition to anti-racist government policies. Intolerant attitudes are more widely held by people living in Mediterranean and eastern European countries and are at the lowest levels in Scandinavian countries.

At the other end of the spectrum are the actively tolerant, who make up from 7% to 33% of the populations of EU member countries. They welcome the presence of minorities, believe that minorities enrich society, oppose policies of assimilation and give strong support to anti-racist initiatives.

International surveys in the years 2003–07 in which Australia participated indicate that in Australia there is a relatively high level of support for immigration and a high proportion of Australians welcome the economic benefits of immigration and the new ideas and cultures that immigrants bring. (Figure 21)

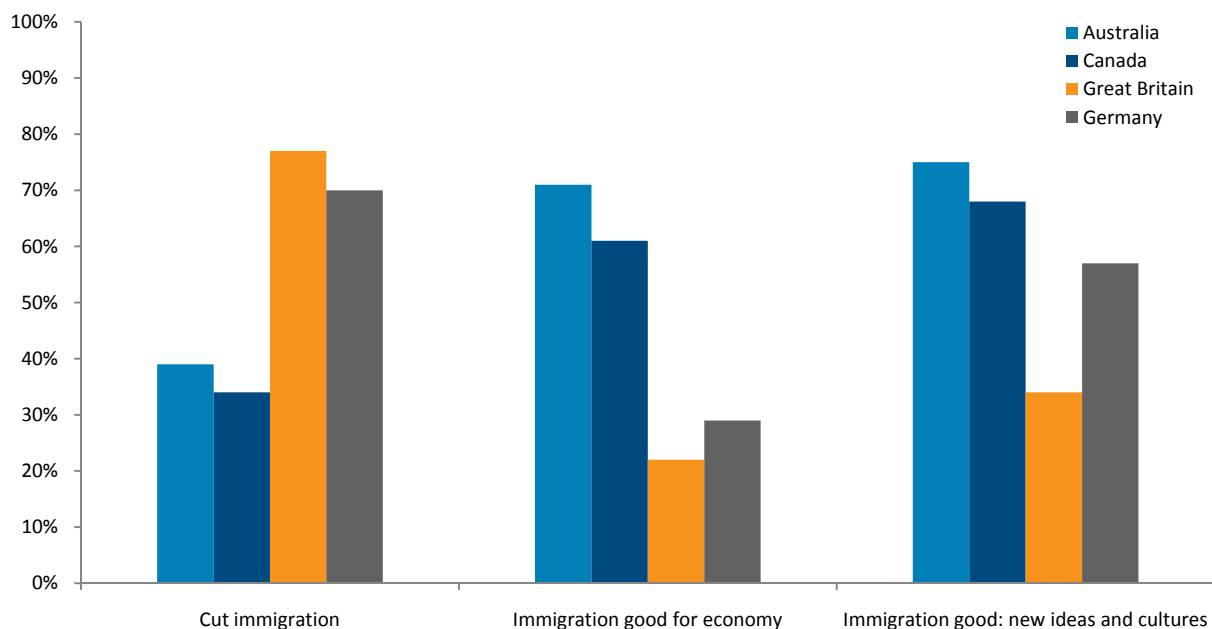
But there is also a relatively high level of intolerance. Thus a recent international survey found that 9% of Australian respondents ‘strongly agree’ with the proposition that ‘ethnic diversity erodes a country’s security’, a relatively high proportion compared to the United States (4%) and Sweden (3%).

**Figure 20: Ethnic diversity erodes a country’s security, national surveys, 2004–07**



Source: WWS 2004–07. Responses were ranked on a 10-point scale, ranging from ‘ethnic diversity erodes a country’s security’ at one end to ‘ethnic diversity enriches my life’ at the other. Levels 1–2 are interpreted as indicating ‘strong agreement’, levels 2–4 as indicating ‘agreement’.

**Figure 21: Attitudes to immigration intake and perception of the value of immigration, national surveys, 2003**



Source: ISSP 2003

**A consistent finding of surveys conducted in Australia over the last 30 years (depending on the type of question asked) is that levels of intolerance and rejection of cultural diversity can reach 40–45% of respondents. The core of the intolerant, numbering close to 10%, hold strongly negative views on issues related to a diverse immigration intake and multiculturalism.**

The findings of the 2010 survey are in line with the findings of the 2009 survey. Thus in 2010, 11% strongly disagreed and 19% disagreed (total 30% disagreed) with the proposition that ‘accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger’, the relative proportions in 2009 were 9%, 18% (total 27%), a difference of 3 percentage points between the two surveys. The level of total disagreement of long-time Australians (those born in Australia and both parents born in Australia) was 33% in 2010, 32% in 2009.

The additional range of questions in the 2010 survey provides scope to move beyond questions of a general nature to questions specifying sub-groups, such as refugees who gain entry by applying overseas and specific national groups. These specific questions indicate a lower level of negative response than obtained by questions of a general nature, as indicated by Table 24. Of particular significance for the understanding of change in Australian society is the low level of negative feeling towards immigrants from China, although there is a degree of differentiation when respondents aged 55 and above are considered.

As established by a number of research projects, the intolerant make up a higher proportion of the population in some geographic regions and among specific birthplace groups, as well as a range of additional demographic and socio-economic groups. Detailed findings are presented in the full report of the 2009 survey.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Markus and Jessica Arnup, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2009: The Scanlon Foundations Surveys Full Report* (2010), section 16 and 17

**Table 24: Level of negative sentiment, selected questions**

Response	Total (all respondents)			Born in Australia, both parents born in Australia			Aged 55+			Resident of Queensland & Western Australia		
	Strongly disagree/ very negative	Disagree/ somewhat negative	Total disagree/ negative	Strongly disagree/ very negative	Disagree/ somewhat negative	Total disagree/ negative	Strongly disagree/ very negative	Disagree/ somewhat negative	Total disagree/ negative	Strongly disagree/ very negative	Disagree/ somewhat negative	Total disagree/ negative
Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger (Strongly disagree / disagree)	10.9%	18.6%	<b>29.4%</b>	12.7%	20.5%	<b>33.2%</b>	14.5%	20.7%	<b>35.2%</b>	15.8%	21.2%	<b>37.0%</b>
Feelings towards immigrants from Lebanon (Very / somewhat negative)	7.4%	15.3%	<b>22.7%</b>	8.9%	13.9%	<b>22.8%</b>	12.7%	17.3%	<b>30.0%</b>	10.3%	17.4%	<b>27.7%</b>
Attitude to refugees who have been assessed overseas and found to be ... in need of help coming to live in Australia (Very / somewhat negative)	5.8%	7.9%	<b>13.7%</b>	5.2%	9.0%	<b>14.2%</b>	6.9%	8.9%	<b>15.8%</b>	6.6%	6.6%	<b>13.2%</b>
Feelings towards immigrants from China (Very / somewhat negative)	2.5%	8.1%	<b>10.6%</b>	2.7%	6.4%	<b>9.1%</b>	4.3%	12.5%	<b>16.8%</b>	4.5%	10.0%	<b>14.5%</b>
N (unweighted) Total 'from China' 'from Lebanon'			<b>2,021 675 675</b>			<b>1,127 357 384</b>			<b>889 307 300</b>			<b>550 180 187</b>

Note: The N refers to the Total sample and the sample responding to questions on specific national groups (i.e. feelings towards immigrants from Lebanon and China).

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Monash University provided the research environment that sustained the project.

## Credits

**Andrew Markus** is the Pratt Foundation research professor in the School of Historical Studies, Monash University, and a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. He has published extensively in the field of Australian indigenous and immigration history. His publications include *Australia's Immigration Revolution* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2009), co-authored with James Jupp and Peter McDonald, *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001) and *Building a New Community. Immigration and the Victorian Economy* (editor, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001).

**The Scanlon Foundation** is a member of Philanthropy Australia, the national membership organisation for grant-making trusts and foundations. Established in June 2001, the Foundation's mission, 'to support the creation of a larger cohesive Australian society', has led to the support of a number of social cohesion research projects, including this third survey of social cohesion in Australia.

**The Australian Multicultural Foundation** was established in 1989 as a legacy of Australia's Bicentenary, to promote an awareness among the people of Australia of the diversity of cultures, and the contributions made by those from different backgrounds to the development of Australia's social, cultural and economic wellbeing, by adopting issues of national significance and initiating projects in any worthwhile field or activity to the benefit of the community.

**Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements.** Monash University is committed to research that embraces themes and problems relevant to the regions in which they take place, and particularly those countries in which Monash has campuses and centres. The Institute for the Study of Global Movements plays a key role in research initiatives, including cross-disciplinary projects and research-based conferences, linking the international world of scholarship of which the University is a part.



