

Church attenders' views of immigrants

Strengthening Australia

Migration, the largest component of Australia's population growth, is caught up in the identity of the nation. It strengthens Australia's workforce, economy, and humanitarian obligations. Almost half of Australia's population were either born overseas or have a migrant parent, according to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing. Furthermore, almost two thirds of Australians think that migration from a diverse range of countries makes Australia stronger¹.

How do church attenders view immigrants and their impact on Australian society? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following questions:

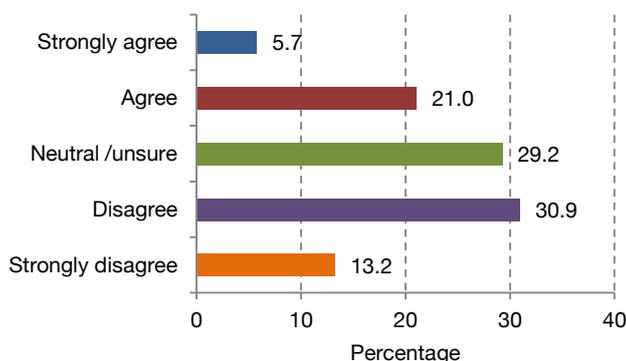
How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Mark one on EACH line)

Immigrants increase crime rates

Immigrants improve Australian society by bringing in new ideas and cultures

Overall results

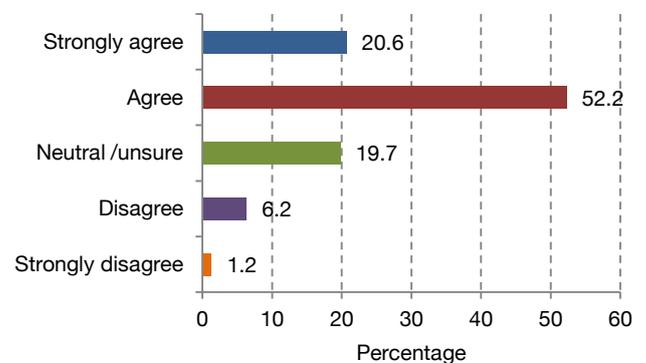
Figure 1: Immigrants increase crime rates



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,389).

As shown in Figure 1, more church attenders disagreed than agreed with the statement that immigrants increase crime rates (44% vs. 27%). A large proportion of attenders indicated they were 'neutral/unsure' about the statement, perhaps because the question had an objective quality despite also measuring an attitude, and these attenders did not know the answer.

Figure 2: Immigrants improve Australian society



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,408).

The vast majority (73%) of church attenders agreed or strongly agreed that immigrants improve Australian society (see Figure 2). This suggests that the underlying attitude towards immigrants among most church attenders is a positive one. Although the proportion of attenders who were neutral/unsure was again large, those who disagreed (6%) or strongly disagreed (1%) were in the clear minority.

Demographics

The likelihood of attenders agreeing that immigrants increase crime rates seems to increase with age, with 17% of 15-29 year olds agreeing or strongly agreeing, compared with 40% of those 70 years or older. Different age groups did not differ significantly on whether they thought immigrants improve Australian society. This suggests that some older attenders hold negative and positive attitudes towards migrants simultaneously.

Attenders' attitudes towards immigrants did not differ significantly by gender; males and females were similar in their responses to the statements above.

¹ <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/australian-migration-trends-2011-12-glance.pdf>

Those attenders with a university education were much less likely to agree that immigrants increase crime rates, with 13% agreeing compared with 34% (on average) of those with a lower education (see Table 1). They were also more likely to agree that immigrants improve Australian society, with 85% thinking so compared with 73% of those with a trade certificate and 63% with school as their highest education.

Table 1: Attitudes towards immigrants by education

	Education		
	School	Trade cert/ diploma	Degree
Increase crime rates			
Percentage			
Agree/Strongly agree	36	31	13
Neutral/unsure	31	33	25
Disagree/Strongly disagree	34	36	63
Improve Australian society			
Agree/Strongly agree	63	73	85
Neutral/unsure	25	21	12
Disagree/Strongly disagree	12	7	2

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,372 to 1,388)

Out of the different types of attenders, visitors were the most likely to agree (83%) and least likely to disagree (3%) that immigrants improve Australian society. Newcomers to church life in the past 5 years had the lowest proportion of agreement (66%), and were the most ambivalent (28% who were neutral/unsure). For long-term attenders (more than 5 years at their church), 72% agreed and 8% disagreed that immigrants improve Australian society. There were no significant differences between attender types in how they answered the question on immigrants and crime.

Table 2: Immigrants improve society by denomination

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Church- es of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
Percentage							
Strongly agree	25	9	23	15	26	14	14
Agree	49	52	55	51	49	48	52
Neutral/unsure	19	28	16	22	20	30	23
Disagree	5	9	6	12	2	8	11
Strongly disagree	2	2	1	0	3	0	0

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,408)

Catholic attenders were the most likely to agree or strongly agree that immigrants improve society (78%), not surprisingly given the large proportion of Catholics in Australia who are immigrants. Baptist/Churches of Christ (61%) and the Uniting Church (62%) were the least likely to agree or strongly agree. Denominations

did not differ significantly in their opinions on whether immigrants increase crime rates.

Summary

With migrants to Australia making up a key element of Australian life, how other citizens and immigrants themselves view and accept (other) immigrants is of great importance. While a vast majority of church goers agree that Australian society is improved by the new ideas and cultures that immigrants bring, a majority also either agree that immigrants increase crime rates, or don't know whether they do or not.

Data sources

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Citation

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