

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australians recognise benefits of immigration despite concerns over population growth

Despite sustained population growth and increased concern over Australia's immigration intake, the Scanlon Foundation's *2018 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* has found continued acceptance of cultural diversity, and a large measure of stability across key indicators of social cohesion.

For eleven years, the Mapping Social Cohesion surveys have used a consistent and comprehensive questionnaire structure to gauge a nuanced understanding of shifts in public opinion on social cohesion and immigration issues.

Produced by Monash University researchers, the research series is the largest and longest running of its kind, with a collective sample of more than 48,000 respondents. In 2018 the national survey was conducted by telephone interviews and as in past years, the sample size was 1500.**

This year's survey findings are consistent with other 2018 polls that have recorded an increase in concern about the level of immigration. However, in line with the October Fairfax-Ipsos poll – and contrary to many others – it finds that support for a reduction in immigration numbers remains a minority view, with a majority (52%) still indicating that the current intake is 'about right' or 'too low.'

Mapping Social Cohesion Report author, Professor Andrew Markus said eight new immigration questions in this year's survey provided deeper insight into the perceived value of immigration to the nation, and the potential issues influencing public opinion on immigration numbers.

"Beyond a narrow focus on the immigration intake, Australians continue to endorse the view that their country is an immigrant nation, and that immigration benefits the country," Professor Markus said.

In 2018, close to eight in ten Australians agree that immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures, and that immigrants are good for Australia's economy.

There remains a consistently high level of endorsement of multiculturalism, with 85% agreeing with the proposition that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia.'

When respondents are asked about the most important problem facing Australia, immigration does not rank in the top three responses, with concerns over the economy (mentioned by 27% of people), environmental issues (10%), and quality of government and politicians (10%) mentioned most often.

Support for restricting immigration on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion gains only minority support, with just 15% of respondents agreeing with restriction on the basis of race or ethnicity, and 18% on the basis of religion. Within a range of sub-groups considered, majority support is only found among One Nation supporters.

While a clear majority of Australians remain supportive of the multicultural character of their nation, there are some common concerns relating to the impact of immigration, Markus said.

"Close to five in ten are worried about the impact of immigration on overcrowding cities; housing prices; and government failure to manage population growth."

There are further differences in attitudes to immigration across different demographic groups.

Young people aged 18-29 with a Bachelor's degree or higher share the same level of concern about the impact of immigration on house prices (52%), but are significantly less likely than the general population to think that immigrants increase crime (7%, compared to 34%), and that the immigration intake is too high (7%, compared to 43%).

“Among educated young people – a cohort which can be expected to have a major influence on the direction of Australian society in coming decades – there is zero disagreement with the proposition that accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger,” Professor Markus said.

Other key findings in the 2018 report indicate stability across key indicators of social cohesion.

In 2018, 90% feel a ‘great’ or ‘moderate’ sense of belonging in Australia, 85% indicate they are happy with life in Australia, and 72% indicate satisfaction with their financial situation.

In contrast with some media assessments of then Prime Minister Turnbull during the period of July-August when the Scanlon Foundation surveys were conducted, trust in government to ‘do right by the Australian people’ was at the same – albeit low – level indicated in the previous four surveys (30%).

In line with 2017 findings, 74% of Australians in 2018 agree that their local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic groups get on well together; and only a minority 33% are worried about becoming a victim of crime in their local area – though concern is eight percentage points higher in Victoria (41%), where a number of violent home invasions and car jackings have received prominent media coverage throughout 2018.

When thinking about the future, the number of Australians who expected that their lives would be ‘the same’ or ‘improved’ in three or four years grew from 77% in 2017, to 83% in 2018.

“Given the magnitude of change which has tested Australia’s social cohesion since 2007 – the Global Financial Crisis, sustained population growth, political instability with six Prime Ministers in ten years – a large majority of Australians have demonstrated a remarkable resilience and optimism about the future,” Professor Markus said.

The Scanlon Foundation’s 2018 Mapping Social Cohesion Report is available at scanlonfoundation.org.au from 4 December 2018.

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**** NOTE: In addition to the interviewer administered telephone survey, in 2018 – for the first time – the full questionnaire was also administered on the probability-based Life in Australia™ panel. While this media release details findings of the interviewer administered survey to maintain consistency with previous years, the report includes detailed discussion on the impact of mode of surveying on estimates of public opinion.**

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About the Mapping Social Cohesion Report

The *2018 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* is based on an annual survey undertaken for the Scanlon Foundation by Monash University researchers. It tracks Australian attitudes on issues including immigration, multiculturalism, discrimination and political trust.

Since 2013, the survey has employed a dual-frame sample methodology comprising both landline and mobile phone numbers. In addition to the interviewer administered telephone survey, in 2018 for the first time the full questionnaire was also administered on the probability-based Life in Australia™ panel, with the majority of participants self-completing the survey online.

To our knowledge, this is the first major survey on social cohesion that has been conducted simultaneously in interviewer administered and self-administered modes.

The research series – now in its eleventh year – is the largest study of its kind with a collective sample of 48,000 Australians since it was first run in 2007.

Key 2018 findings:

- When asked, 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present?' 43% of respondents indicated 'too high'; 35% about right'; 17% 'too low'; and 5% 'no opinion/don't know.'
- Among those who indicate that they would vote for the Coalition, a majority (54%-56% across the two modes of surveying) consider the immigration intake to be 'too high;' among Labor voters, support for a decrease is in the range of 36%-43%.
- In Melbourne, 33% of respondents indicate immigration is 'too high', compared to 51% in Sydney
- 82% of all respondents agree that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures,' and 80% agree that 'immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy.'
- 85% of all respondents agree with the proposition that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia.'
- While 64% agree that migrants should change their behaviour to be more like Australians, a similar 65% support the notion that Australians should do more to learn about ethnic customs and cultures of migrants.
- A minority 37% agree with government assistance to ethnic minorities to maintain their customs and traditions.
- 54% of all respondents are concerned about the impact of immigration on overcrowding in Australian cities.
- 50% of all respondents are concerned about the impact of immigration on house prices.
- 48% of respondents have a negative view of the way Australian governments are managing population growth.
- While reported experience of discrimination 'because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion' remains relatively high in 2018 at 19%, it has not increased since 2016.
- 23% of all respondents hold negative attitudes towards Muslims. This finding has remained within the range of 22-25% since 2010.
- Life in Australia panellists (online survey respondents) who believed that the system of government 'needed major change' or 'should be replaced', jumped from 43% to 48% following the leadership shakeup.
- In response to the proposition that 'I am able to have a real say on issues that are important to me in my local area', there was 68% agreement in 2018 (up from 62% in 2017).

