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## **Voters' attitudes to population growth in Australia**

*Results of a survey conducted for Sustainable Population Australia, November 2015*

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## **Voters' attitudes to population growth in Australia**

*Results of a survey conducted for Sustainable Population Australia, 6-12 November 2015*

*Katharine Betts*

Since 2007 Australia has experienced unprecedented population growth,<sup>1</sup> consisting both of natural increase and immigration. Immigration, however, accounts for the greater part of this growth,<sup>2</sup> and is set to continue. If the current intake is maintained it will take the country from its present population of just under 24 million to over 45 million by 2061.<sup>3</sup>

In November 2015 Sustainable Population Australia commissioned a survey of attitudes to this population growth. The current paper reports on this survey, presents the headline figures and analyses the focuses of support for and against population growth within the electorate.

Opposition to population growth is concentrated among young people, while support for it is concentrated among people born overseas, as well as people who are university educated. People living in Canberra are the most pro-growth of all, while those living in regional areas are much more skeptical.

One of the key findings is that ignorance of demography is widespread. Nonetheless, while ignorance is keeping many voters in the dark, between 51 and 67 per cent of them have a gut feeling that they do not want the massive growth that the big end of town is quietly forcing on them.<sup>4</sup>

### **Main findings**

Most voters do not want high population growth. Fifty one per cent think Australia does not need more people (Table 1), and 67 per cent do not want the population to grow above 30 million (while only five per cent think 40 million plus is a good idea) (Table 2).

**Table 1: 'Do you think Australia needs more people?' Percentages**

Yes	38
No	51
Don't know	11
Total	100
Total N	1230

**Table 2: ‘Currently (in late 2015), Australia has a population of almost 24 million. In the decades ahead, do you think Australia should aim for a population of:…’**

Less than 10 million	3
Between 10 and 20 million	7
Between 20 and 30 million	57
Between 30 and 40 million	22
Between 40 and 60 million	4
More than 60 million	1
Don’t know	6
Total	100
Total N	1230

Table 3 shows that, even among the minority who think Australia does need more people, 46 per cent do not want the population to grow above 30 million.

**Table 3: Preferred population size<sup>φ</sup> by ‘Do you think Australia needs more people? Percentages**

Preferred population size:	Does Australia need more people?			
	Yes	No	Don’t know	Total
Up to 30 million	46	85	54	67
30 million plus	51	11	20	27
Don’t know	3	4	26	6
Total	100	100	100	100
Total	469	627	133	1229

<sup>φ</sup> The question was ‘Currently (in late 2015), Australia has a population of almost 24 million. In the decades ahead, do you think Australia should aim for a population of:…Less than 10 million, between 10 and 20 million, between 20 and 30 million, between 30 and 40 million. Between 40 and 60 million, more than 60 million?’

### Demographic knowledge

The survey included four questions on demographic knowledge (see Appendix 2, questions 5 to 8). The results show that ignorance of demography is widespread. Only two per cent of the 1230 respondents could answer all four of the questions correctly, while 13 per cent could not answer any of them correctly. (Table A1 in Appendix 1 sets out the questions together with their answers.)

Respondents were rather more knowledgeable on the two numerical questions (on the size of the current population and on the proportion of the program that the humanitarian intake comprises). They were least knowledgeable on Questions 8: ‘As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? Australia has one of the highest population growth rates in the developed world. True, False, Don’t Know’. The correct answer, ‘True’, was provided by only 19 per cent.

The four knowledge questions have been combined so as to give each respondent one point for each correct answer. This produces a total score, varying from 0 to 4. The

results have been grouped into three categories: ignorant (score 0 to 1), knows a little (score 2), knows a lot (scores 3 to 4)

**Table 4: Do you think Australia needs more people? By number of knowledge questions answered correctly, percentages**

	None or one correct	Two correct	Three or four correct	Total
Yes	33.5	*47.9	29.8	38.1
No	53.0	*43.2	*62.6	51.0
Don't know	13.5	8.9	7.6	10.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	585	447	198	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge does affect attitudes to growth. People who are the most knowledgeable about demography are more likely to say that Australia does not need more people (Table 4), and very much more likely to want the population to stay below 30 million (Table 5).

**Table 5: Preferred population size by number of knowledge questions answered correctly, percentages**

Currently ..., Australia has a population of almost 24 million. ... do you think Australia should aim for a population of:	None or one correct	Two correct	Three or four correct	Total
Below 30 m	67	62	*76	67
30 m plus	23	*35	21	27
Don't know	10	3	3	6
Total	100	100	100	100
Total N	583	448	198	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

### Gender

Demographic knowledge is not the only variable affecting attitudes to growth. Table 6 shows that women are more likely to favour stability than men. Indeed, men are more likely to prefer growth to stability.

**Table 6: Q1 Do you think Australia needs more people? by gender %**

	Men	Women	Total sample
Yes	*47	29	38
No	45	57	51
Don't know	8	14	11
Total	100	100	100.
Total N	603	627	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

Table 7 shows the reasons respondents chose for thinking that Australia needs more people, both for the whole sample and for men and women separately.

**Table 7: Reasons for saying that Australia needs more people, by gender and total sample, percentages**

	Men	Women	Total sample
We need to continually increase the population for economic growth.	39	30	35
Having more babies and/or migrants could offset the ageing of the Australian population.	20	16	18
We need skilled migrants for skill gaps in our workforce.	16	13	14
Increasing our population means more cultural diversity.	11	13	11
We need to increase our total immigration so we can take in more refugees as part of that.	2	9	5
Increasing the population could boost the housing industry and keep real-estate prices at a healthy level.	3	5	4
Attempts to limit population growth by low immigration are just racism in disguise.	3	4	4
We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants.	2	5	3
A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs.	2	4	3
A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia.	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100
Total N	572	368	940

Note: Only those who said 'Yes' to 'Do you think Australia need more people?' responded to this set of questions.

Respondents picked two reasons, a first one and a second one, from a list (see Appendix 2. question 3). This table adds the two reasons together. Consequently the unit of analysis is one response, not one respondent.

In the sample as a whole among those wanting population growth economic reasons (economic growth, anti-ageing, and the ‘need for skills’) predominate, with a desire to keep feeding cultural diversity coming fourth.

Men were more likely than women to give the first three reasons, especially the perceived need to support economic growth.

They were less likely than women to pick adding to cultural diversity as a reason, and a lot less likely to mention refugees. Thus men were a little more likely to pick the economic reasons and women a little more likely to pick a preference for increasing cultural diversity and/or a belief that an increase in immigration is necessary in order to boost the refugee intake.

When we turn to reasons for thinking that Australia does not need more people concerns about congestion and cultural diversity dominate. These are closely followed by a desire to train our own and worries about unemployment. The natural environment comes fifth (Table 8). There is less difference here between men and women, except that men are more likely to decry cultural diversity and a little less likely than women to mention refugees.

**Table 8: Reasons for saying Australia does not need more people, by gender and total sample, percentages**

	Men	Women	Total sample
Our cities are too crowded already and there is too much traffic.	24	19	21
We have too much cultural diversity already, with migrant enclaves rather than peaceful assimilation.	22	16	18
We should train our own people, not take skilled workers from other countries where they could be needed more.	14	17	16
Having more people could make unemployment worse.	11	13	12
The natural environment is getting worse because of the numbers of people we already have and there may not be enough water for more people.	10	11	11
Population growth increases the cost of housing, taking prices sky-high.	9	10	9
Population growth makes it much harder for Australia to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions.	3	4	4
Australia could not absorb the massive numbers needed to make any real difference to world population growth	3	4	4
We could take in more refugees than we usually do without increasing the population (because many people leave Australia)	2	4	3
The so-called ageing of the population is not really a big problem for Australia, and high immigration wouldn't fix it	3	2	2
Total	100	100	100
Total N	542	718	1262

Note: Only those who said 'No' to 'Do you think Australia need more people?' responded to this set of questions.

Respondents picked two reasons, a first one and a second one, from the list (see question 4, Appendix 2). This table adds the two reasons together. Consequently the unit of analysis is one response, not one respondent.

There is a slightly greater spread of reasons for not wanting growth than there is for supporting it: five responses reach double figures in Table 8 compared to four in Table 7.

Reasons for not wanting or wanting growth were analysed by demographic knowledge . But the results showed little difference between those who knew a lot and those who knew very little. So these are not presented here.



## Education

The effect of respondents' educational qualifications on demographic knowledge is minimal (Table 9). The only statistically significant difference was that graduates are rather less likely to be ignorant than those with no post-school qualifications.

**Table 9: Demographic knowledge by level of post-school education**

Total knowledge questions correct	No post-school qualification	Other post-school qualification	Degree, including post-graduate degree	Total
none or one correct	#56	49	#42	48
Two correct	31	37	38	36
Three or four correct	14	14	20	16
Total	100	100	100	100
Total N	225	523	482	1230

# Difference between the two sub-groups significant at the .05 level

In contrast, educational attainment has a marked effect on enthusiasm for population growth. Graduates are between 13 and 14 percentage points more likely to favour growth than is the sample as a whole, a difference that is significant at the .01 level (Table 10). In contrast, people with no post-school qualifications are between nine and ten percentage points less likely to want growth than the sample as a whole.

**Table 10: 'Do you think Australia needs more people?' By level of post-school qualification, percentages**

	No post-school qualification	Other post-school qualification	Degree, including post-graduate degree	Total sample
Yes	*29	*30	**52	38
No	58	*59	**39	51
Don't know	13	11	10	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Total N	226	522	482	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

The reasons respondents give for their choices differ by gender, but they do not differ much by level of qualification, except that female graduates are 11 to 12 percentage points more likely to give a need to import skills as a reason compared to female non-graduates (see Appendix 1, Table A2). When it came to reasons for not wanting growth male graduates are 10 to 11 percentage points more likely to cite problems with the natural environment than are male non-graduates, and female graduates are

five percentage points more like to cite the cost of housing (see Appendix 1, Table A3).

### Birthplace

The respondents' birthplace makes a strong difference to attitudes to population growth, with people born overseas more likely to be pro-growth. (See Table 11.) Some of the birthplace groupings in the sample are quite small but, despite this, people born in Asia are much more likely to say Australia needs more people than is the sample as a whole. Even though there were only 57 of them in the sample, this difference was significant at the .01 level.

**Table 11: Q1 Do you think Australia needs more people? By own birthplace, percentages**

	Australia	UK, NZ, Ireland, Nth America	Other Europe	Asia	Middle East & Nth Africa	Other	Total sample
Yes	33	*54	45	**61	67	65	38
No	55	41	35	32	22	30	51
Don't know	12	6	20	7	11	5	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	953	142	40	57	9	20	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

Table 12 shows attitudes by respondents' birthplace in three broad groups. Here it is clear that people born overseas, particularly but not exclusively those born in non-English-speaking background countries, are more pro-growth than are the Australia-born.

**Table 12: Do you think Australia needs more people? By own birth place grouped, percentages**

	Australia	UK, NZ, Ireland, Nth America	Other	Total sample
Yes	33	*54	**57	38
No	55	41	**32	51
Don't know	12	6	11	11
Total	100	100	100	100
Total N	953	142	126	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

**Table 13: Do you think Australia needs more people? By ethnic background (own birthplace plus parents' birthplace), percentages**

	Australian born, both parents Australian born	Australian born, both parents overseas born, either ESB or other	Australian born, one parent Australian born, one overseas born (ESB or other)	ESB born, both parents ESB born	Other born, both parents other born	Other combinations	Total
Yes	33	31	36	*54	*57	51	38
No	56	56	53	*40	**33	40	51
Don't know	12	14	11	6	10	9	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	673	117	143	126	111	43	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

Note: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries and regions, that is the UK, NZ, Ireland and North America.

Tables 11 and 12 show that people who are themselves migrants are more likely to say that Australia needs more people. But the Australian-born children of migrants provide responses that are very similar to those given by the Australian-born of Australian-born parents.

One possible explanation for the difference between Australian-born people and first-generation migrants may be that the Australian-born are more likely to remember Australia as it was 20 years ago. They can remember a time of lower congestion and more affordable housing and compare this with the growth-fed problems of the present day. First-generation migrants will have different points of reference.

## Age

**Table 14: Do you think Australia needs more people? By age group**

Do you think Australia needs more people?	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 plus	Total
Yes	**20	33	39	37	*49	45	38
No	61	52	50	55	43	48	51
Don't know	19	15	11	8	8	7	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	148	220	222	209	185	246	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

Table 14 shows responses to the 'Do you think Australia needs more people' question by age group. The standout finding here is that young people, aged 18 to 24, are much less likely to say that Australia needs more people than is the sample as a whole. In contrast, older people, aged 55 to 64 are more likely to say that it does need more people.

The reasons young people give for holding their opinions also differ both from those of the older group and from the sample as a whole.

**Table 15: Reasons for saying Australia needs more people by age group (18 to 24 and 55 to 64) and total sample (percentages)**

	18 to 24	55 to 64	Total sample
We need to continually increase the population for economic growth.	27	36	35
Having more babies and/or migrants could offset the ageing of the Australian population.	2	20	18
We need skilled migrants for skill gaps in our workforce.	15	17	14
Increasing our population means more cultural diversity.	27	10	11
We need to increase our total immigration so we can take in more refugees as part of that.	10	3	5
Increasing the population could boost the housing industry and keep real-estate prices at a healthy level.	9	4	4
Attempts to limit population growth by low immigration are just racism in disguise.	0	6	4
We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants.	2	4	3
A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs.	9	1	3
A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia.	0	1	2
Total	100	100	100
Total N	59	107	940

Note: Only those who said ‘Yes’ to ‘Do you think Australia need more people?’ responded to this set of questions.

Respondents picked two reasons, a first one and a second one, from a list (see Appendix 2, question 3). This table adds the two reasons together. Consequently the unit of analysis is one response, not one respondent.

Table 15 shows that young people were less likely to mention a supposed need to continually increase the population for economic growth, and that they are a lot less likely to mention a supposed need to offset demographic ageing. They were more likely to pick increasing cultural diversity as a reason for their pro-growth opinion. On all three of these points they were unlike the older group and unlike the sample as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

However, as they were the age group least likely to believe that Australia needs more people, their reasons for being pro-stability, set out in Table 16, are more interesting.

**Table 16: Reasons for saying Australia does not need more people by age group (18 to 24 and 55 to 64) and total sample (percentages)**

	18 to 24	55 to 64	Total sample
Our cities are too crowded already and there is too much traffic.	19	24	21
We have too much cultural diversity already, with migrant enclaves rather than peaceful assimilation.	8	18	18
We should train our own people, not take skilled workers from other countries where they could be needed more.	10	18	16
Having more people could make unemployment worse.	16	7	12
The natural environment is getting worse because of the numbers of people we already have and there may not be enough water	14	13	11
Population growth increases the cost of housing, taking prices sky-high.	13	1	9
Population growth makes it much harder for Australia to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions.	9	8	4
Australia could not absorb the massive numbers needed to make any real difference to world population	5	5	4
We could take in more refugees than we usually do without increasing the population (because many people leave Australia	5	1	3
The so-called ageing of the population is not really a big problem for Australia, and high immigration wouldn't fix it	1	4	2
Total	100	100	100
Total N	179	76	1262

Note: Only those who said 'No' to 'Do you think Australia need more people?' responded to this set of questions.

Respondents picked two reasons, a first one and a second one, from a list (see Appendix 2. question 4). This table adds the two reasons together. Consequently the unit of analysis is one response, not one respondent.

Four points stand out in Table 16: young people are much more likely to mention the high cost of housing, and the older group are much less likely to do so; younger people are also more likely to mention the risk of making unemployment worse than are the older group; and they are a lot less likely to mention cultural diversity as a problem. And while the environment is only in the fifth most likely to be picked as a reason for not wanting growth among the sample as a whole, it is third most likely among the young.

Young people also know less about demography than do older people: 57 per cent of respondents aged 18 to 24 scored one or zero on the knowledge questions, although they were one percentage point above the sample average for getting three or four correct. (See Appendix 1, Table A4.) But overall they reinforce the impression of an electorate that is poorly informed but worried about the consequence of rapid growth. For young people in particular the escalating costs of housing and the fear of unemployment loom large.

### Location

When the results are analysed by place of residence, people living in regional areas in the mainland states (and the Northern Territory) together with people living in Tasmania are less likely to say that Australia needs more people than those in the sample as a whole. Respondents living in the mainland state capitals are rather more favourably disposed to population growth than are those in the regions. A partial explanation for this is that university graduates are clustered in the mainland capitals (45 per cent of respondents in the metropolitan cities are graduates, compare to 27 per cent in mainland regional areas including the Northern Territory).<sup>7</sup> See Table A5 in Appendix 1.

Added to this the mainland capitals contain a higher proportion of people born overseas than do the regional areas: 26 per cent as opposed to 15 per cent. (See Appendix 1 Table A6.)

But the standout response pattern in Table 15 comes from voters living in the ACT, which mainly means Canberra. Even though their numbers are small, the difference between their response pattern and that of the sample as a whole is dramatic. Voters in the national capital are much more likely than voters as a whole to say to Australia needs more people and very much less likely to say that it does not.

This difference is so strong that it is significant at the .01 level which means there is a 99 per cent chance that it reflects a real difference in the population of voters as a whole. (Indeed, people living in the ACT are the most pro-growth group of all the subgroups analysed in this paper.)

**Table 17: Do you think Australia needs more people? By location, percentages**

	Mainland state capitals	Mainland regional, plus NT	ACT	Tasmania	Total
Yes	40	*31	**83	*29	38
No	49	57	**13	50	51
Don't know	10	12	4	21	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total	797	385	24	24	1230

\* Difference between the sub-total and the total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between the sub-total and the total sample significant at the .01 level

If the analysis is confined to Australian-born people who are not university graduates there is still a difference between respondents in the mainland capitals and the mainland regional areas, but it falls below the level of statistical significance. And the ACT is still much more in favour of population growth than the total subsample, but with only nine (Australian-born, non graduate) respondents it is not sensible to refine too much upon this.

**Table 18: Do you think Australia needs more people? By location, Australian-born and non-graduates only (percentages)**

	Mainland state capitals	Mainland regional, plus NT	ACT	Tasmania	Total
Yes	29	21	78	13	26
No	60	65	11	67	62
Don't know	11	13	11	20	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total	346	246	9	15	616

### Summary of results

Table 19 sets out the main findings on the variables associated with attitudes to population growth. It shows that being overseas born with both parents overseas born (regardless of whether they are born in the main English-speaking-background countries or not) is associated with a much higher percentage of voters saying that Australia needs more people. However, voters born in Australia of migrant parents show a similar spread of attitudes to those of the Australian-born of Australian-born parents.

Thus voters born overseas are more in favour of population growth, as are university graduates, people who know only a little about demography, men and, most especially, people living in the ACT.

The groups who tend to think that Australia does not need more people include young people, those who know a lot about demography, people living in the regions, women, and (irrespective of the birthplace of their parents) Australian-born people who are not university graduates.



**Table 19: Do you think Australia needs more people? By birthplace, gender, education and demographic knowledge, percentages**

	Own birthplace			Gender	
	Australia	UK, NZ, Ireland, Nth America	Other	Men	Women
Yes	33	*54	**57	*47	29
No	55	41	**38	45	57
Don't know	12	6	11	8	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	953	142	126	603	627

	Location			Age group	
	Mainland state capitals	Mainland regional, plus NT	ACT	18 to 24	55 to 64
Yes	40	*31	**83	**20	*49
No	49	57	**13	61	43
Don't know	10	12	4	19	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	797	385	24	148	185

	Post-school qualification		Australian -born, non-graduate	Demographic questions — Three or four correct	Total sample
	Non-graduate	Degree, plus			
Yes	*30	**52	**26	30	38
No	*59	**39	**62	*63	51
Don't know	11	10	12	8	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	748	482	616	198	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

\*\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .01 level

Respondents who think that Australia needs more people tend to cite economic factors as the reasons for their choice while those who favour stability point to congestion, a perception of too much cultural diversity, the need to train our own people, concerns about unemployment and concerns about the natural environment.

A key finding from this survey is that ignorance of demography is wide spread. A more open discussion of Australia's population futures could go some way to remedying this ignorance. But above all it shows that the vested interests pushing for growth are able to prevail because, while a majority of voters are unhappy with the outcome, they are largely in the dark, responding at the level of emotion and thus are easily marginalised.

## Appendix 1

### Tables

**Table A1: Summary of results of the four knowledge questions, percentages**

Knowledge questions	%	Total correct answers	%
Q5 correct	37.3	None correct	12.6
Q6 correct	53.6	One correct	34.9
Q7 correct	48.2	Two correct	36.4
Q8 correct	19.0	Three correct	14.1
		All 4 correct	2.0
Total N	1230		1230

**Q 5** As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? Because of our low birth rates, Australia's population would be shrinking now if it were not for immigration. True, False, Don't know

*[The correct answer to Q5 is 'false'. Because of population momentum even with no net migration Australia's population would keep on growing for a number of decades from natural increase alone. See ABS projection series 65 and 56, published November 2013. With a TFR of 1.8, medium life expectancy and nil net migration Australia's population would keep growing from natural increase alone until 2046; with a TFR of 2.0 and high life expectancy it would keep growing until 2069.]<sup>8</sup>*

**Q 6** As far as you know, the current population of Australia is:

Less than 23 million; Between 23 and 25 million; Between 26 and 28 million; Between 29 and 32 million; 33 million or more; Don't know

*[The correct answer to Q6 is between 23 and 25 million – in November 2015 it was 23.9 million, ABS population clock.]*

**Q 7** As far as you know currently (that is, in 2014-15) the percentage of our total migrant intake coming in under the humanitarian program (which includes asylum seekers/refugees) is: Less than 10%; Between 11 and 20%; Between 21 and 50%; More than 50%

*[The correct answer to Q 7 is less than 10%. The planned humanitarian intake for 2014-15 was 13,750, which is 6.7% of the total permanent intake of 203,750. Data for the general program are from*

*<http://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/20planning> and those for the humanitarian program are from*

*[http://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201516/Migration](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201516/Migration).]*

**Q 8** As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? Australia has one of the highest population growth rates in the developed world. True, False, Don't Know

*[The correct answer to Q 8 is 'true'. See M. Krockenberger, Population growth in Australia, The Australia Institute (March), 2015, p. 14. In the OECD only Luxembourg and Israel have higher growth rates.]*

**Table A2: Reasons for wanting population growth by educational groups, male and female graduates and non-graduates, percentages**

Reasons	Males		Females		Total
	graduates	non-graduates	graduates	non-graduates	
We need to continually increase the population for economic growth.	38	39	29	31	35
Having more babies and/or migrants could offset the ageing of the Australian population.	20	20	17	15	18
We need skilled migrants for skill gaps in our workforce.	17	13	18	6	14
Increasing our population means more cultural diversity.	11	10	12	15	11
We need to increase our total immigration so we can take in more refugees as part of that.	2	3	9	9	5
Increasing the population could boost the housing industry and keep real-estate prices at a healthy level.	3	3	4	8	4
Attempts to limit population growth by low immigration are just racism in disguise.	4	3	3	6	4
We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants.	3	2	4	5	3
A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs.	1	4	3	4	3
A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia.	2	2	1	3	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	303	270	194	173.0	940

Note: Respondents gave two reasons so the unit of analysis here is one reason not one respondent

**Table A3: Reasons for not wanting population growth by educational groups, male and female graduates and non-graduates, percentages**

Reasons	Males		Females		Total
	graduates	non-graduates	graduates	non-graduates	
Our cities are too crowded already and there is too much traffic.	28	22	22	18	21
We have too much cultural diversity already, with migrant enclaves rather than peaceful assimilation.	19	23	12	17	18
We should train our own people, not take skilled workers from other countries where they could be needed more.	7	16	16	17	16
Having more people could make unemployment worse.	7	13	11	14	12
The natural environment is getting worse because of the numbers of people we already have and there may not be enough water for more people	17	7	12	11	11
Population growth increases the cost of housing, taking prices sky-high.	11	8	13	8	9
Population growth makes it much harder for Australia to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions.	5	2	3	5	4
Australia could not absorb the massive numbers needed to make any real difference to world population	3	3	3	4	4
We could take in more refugees than we usually do without increasing the population (because many people leave Australia every year)	2	2	5	4	3
The so-called ageing of the population is not really a big problem for Australia, and high immigration wouldn't fix it even if it was	2	3	3	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	168	373	203	516	1262

Note: Respondents gave two reasons so the unit of analysis here is one reason not one respondent

**Table A4: Demographic knowledge by age group, percentages**

Total knowledge questions correct	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 plus	Total
none or one correct	*57	46	47	48	41	48	47
Two correct	26	37	38	36	41	38	36
Three or four correct	17	18	15	15	18	15	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	147	221	222	209	184	245	1230

\* Difference between sub-total and total sample significant at the .05 level

**Table A5: Qualifications by place of residence, percentages**

	Mainland state capitals	Mainland regional, plus NT	ACT	Tasmania	Total
No post-school qualification	15	25	28	12	18
Other post-school qualification	40	48	16	56	42
Degree, including post-graduate degree	45	27	56	32	39
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	796	381	25	25	1230

**Table A6: Birthplace by place of resident, percentages**

	Mainland state capitals	Mainland regional, plus NT	ACT	Tasmania	Total
Australia	74	85	72	96	78
Overseas born	26	15	28	4	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	792	381	25	24	1230

## **Appendix 2**

### **Methods**

Sustainable Population Australia supervised the design of the questions and commissioned Essential Research to gather the data. A random national sample of 1230 Australian citizens was selected from the Research Now online panel. Respondents were sent an email invitation linking to the online survey.

The Research Now online panel comprises over 100,000 people who have registered to take part in market and social research. The panel has been recruited from a variety of Internet sites and through partnerships with leading commercial brands. This avoids the bias associated with limited source recruitment. The panellists receive points for completing surveys, the number of points depending on the length of the survey. They can then exchange these points for gift vouchers. These small rewards help ensure reliable levels of response and that the respondent is motivated to give time to providing considered responses. Respondents to the present survey received points to the value of 50 cents.

The fieldwork was conducted from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2015, before the atrocities in Paris (on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

Loose quotas were set for age, gender and location. The sample distribution achieved was within 10 per cent of the ABS population distribution for age, gender and location. The data were then weighted to the actual age/gender/location distribution according to the ABS Census.

### **A note on Internet panel surveys**

Internet panel surveys are used increasingly today, partly because the proportion of households with fixed line phones who are prepared to respond to phone surveys has decreased. As of December 2014, 29 per cent of Australian adults had no fixed line telephone at home;<sup>9</sup> in contrast, as of 2012-13, 83 per cent of households had Internet access.<sup>10</sup> Besides, many of the households that do have fixed line phones screen their calls. Even by 2004 response rates to telephone polls had sunk as low as 17 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Industry sources say that in Australia today phone surveys using robo calls have response rates as low as two or three per cent.

Critics of Internet panel surveys say that they lack theoretical credibility. Their supporters say that some of them have proved their reliability and validity in practice.<sup>12</sup> YouGov in UK is now well established and has had success in predicting election outcomes,<sup>13</sup> while Essential Research in Australia predicted the primary vote in the 2010 election more accurately than any other poll.

**Questionnaire**  
**Sustainable Population Australia survey, November 2015**

The next few questions are about population growth. In the past decade Australia's population has been growing rapidly.

**Q1. Do you think Australia needs more people?**

- Yes  → Go to Q 2.  
No  → Go to Q 4.  
Don't know  → Go to Q 5.

**Q2. If you answered 'Yes' to question 1, how would you like Australia's population to grow?**

**Please choose only one option.**

1. Encourage Australian women to have more than two   
children  
2. Encourage more migrants to come here   
3. Encourage both migrants and larger families

**Q3. If you answered 'Yes' to question 1, please indicate your top two reasons for thinking that Australia needs more people.**

**Write the letters that match your reasons in the two boxes.**

First reason   
Second reason

- A. We need to continually increase the population for economic growth.
- B. Increasing our population means more cultural diversity.
- C. We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants.
- D. A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia.
- E. We need skilled migrants for skill gaps in our workforce.
- F. Having more babies and/or migrants could offset the ageing of the Australian population.

- G. We need to increase our total immigration so we can take in more refugees as part of that.
- H. Increasing the population could boost the housing industry and keep real-estate prices at a healthy level.
- I. A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs.
- J. Attempts to limit population growth by low immigration are just racism in disguise.

**Q4. If you answered ‘No’ to question 1, please indicate your top two reasons for thinking that Australia does *not* need more people.**

**Write the letters that match your reasons in the two boxes.**

First reason

Second reason

- A. Our cities are too crowded already and there is too much traffic.
- B. We have too much cultural diversity already, with migrant enclaves rather than peaceful assimilation.
- C. We could take in more refugees than we usually do without increasing the population (because many people leave Australia every year).
- D. Population growth makes it much harder for Australia to cut its total greenhouse gas emissions.
- E. Population growth increases the cost of housing, taking prices sky-high.
- F. The natural environment is getting worse because of the numbers of people we already have and there may not be enough water for more people.
- G. Australia could not absorb the massive numbers needed to make any real difference to world population
- H. Having more people could make unemployment worse.
- I. We should train our own people, not take skilled workers from other countries where they could be needed more.
- J. The so-called ageing of the population is not really a big problem for Australia, and high immigration wouldn’t fix it even if it was.



**Q 5** As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? Because of our low birth rates, Australia's population would be shrinking now if it were not for immigration.

True                       False                       Don't know

**Q 6** As far as you know, the current population of Australia is:

Less than 23 million                       Between 23 and 25 million  
 Between 26 and 28 million                       Between 29 and 32 million  
 33 million or more                       Don't know

**Q7** As far as you know currently (that is, in 2014-15) the percentage of our total migrant intake coming in under the humanitarian program (which includes asylum seekers/refugees) is:

Less than 10%                       Between 11 and 20%                       Between 21 and 50%  
 More than 50%                       Don't know

**Q8** As far as you know, is the following statement true or false? Australia has one of the highest population growth rates in the developed world.

True                       False                       Don't know

**Q9** Currently (in late 2015), Australia has a population of almost 24 million. In the decades ahead, I think Australia should aim for a population of:

Less than 10 million  
 Between 10 and 20 million  
 Between 20 and 30 million  
 Between 30 and 40 million  
 Between 40 and 60 million  
 More than 60 million  
 Don't know

And now some questions about yourself.

**Q10 What is the highest qualification you have gained since leaving school?**

No qualification since leaving school and I am not currently studying for one

No qualification since leaving school but I am currently studying for one

*Your qualification—check the box for your **highest** qualification only*

Postgraduate degree

Postgraduate diploma

Bachelor degree (including honours)

Undergraduate diploma

Associate diploma

Trade qualification

Non-trade qualification (e.g. certificate)

**Q11 In which country or region were you, your mother and your father born?**

(Please write the appropriate number in the spaces below)

Australia .....1

New Zealand .....2

Other Oceania.....3

United Kingdom.....4

Republic of Ireland .....5

Italy .....6

Germany .....7

Greece .....8

Netherlands .....9

Yugoslavia (former) .....10

Other Europe .....11

China .....12

India .....13

Vietnam .....14

The Philippines.....15

Other Asia.....16

Middle East.....17

North Africa.....18  
Other Africa.....19  
North America.....20  
Central America.....21  
South America.....22  
Other.....23  
Don't know.....24

**Yourself**

**Your mother**

**Your father**

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> From 2007 to 2013 (calendar years) the population grew by an average of 393,900 people per year, an annual average increase of 1.81%. By contrast, in the 33 years from 1973 to 2006 it grew by an annual average of 218,313 or 1.31%. Calculated from *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Catalogue no. 3101.0 (various issues), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (In percentage terms growth was often higher in the 1950s and 1960s, but never in numerical terms.) And it is the numbers that matter.
- A modest number of immigrants added to a small population can represent a big increase in percentage terms. For example, the second person to disembark from the First Fleet in 1788 increased the European population of Australia by 100 per cent and the eleventh by 10 per cent. (Any population growing at constant rate in percentage terms — be it by 10% or 1% — will increase exponentially.)
- <sup>2</sup> From 2007 to 2013 net overseas migration accounted for 59.5% of population growth; from 1973 to 2006 it accounted for 40.3%. Calculated from *Australian Demographic Statistics*, ABS, Catalogue no. 3101.0 (various issues)
- <sup>3</sup> K. Betts, 'Migration to Australia: an overview of the data, from 1860 to 2014-15', The Australian Population Research Institute, Melbourne, 2015, [tapri.org.au](http://tapri.org.au), Table A9, p. 23
- <sup>4</sup> See A. White and S. Hutchinson, '“Ridiculous” immigration fires property spike: Carr', *The Australian*, 11 June 2015, p. 3; R. Hemming, 'Immigration driving improved results from retailers this season', *The Australian: Inquirer section*, 15 August 2015, p. 33; L. van Onselen, 'IPA urges massive population ponzi', *MacroBusiness*, 11 August 2015; A. Hepworth, 'Plan for more people, states told', *The Australian*, 8 April 2015, p. 19; D. Crowe, 'Shepherd backs migration hike', *The Australian*, 5 March 2015, p. 1, 2; A. Kohler, 'Healthcare and infrastructure spend tearing budget apart', *The Australian*, 6 May 2014, p. 30; K. Betts and M. Gilding, 'The growth lobby and Australia's immigration policy', *People and Place*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2006, pp. 40-52.
- <sup>5</sup> If a result is significant at the .05 level this means that there is a 95 per cent chance that the difference it points to holds in the population as a whole. This is a strong finding. If it is significant at the .01 level, the finding is very strong. Here there is a 99 per cent chance that the difference it points to holds in the population of voters as a whole.
- <sup>6</sup> While 23 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds were already university graduates, and were indeed rather more pro-growth than the rest of their cohort, the numbers were too small for any test of significance.
- <sup>7</sup> Unfortunately the data do not allow an analysis by whether the respondent was living in an inner or outer metropolitan area.
- <sup>8</sup> See *Population Projections, Australia, 2012 (Base) to 2101*, Catalogue no. 3222.0, ABS, Canberra, 2013, projection series 65 and 56.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Australians get mobile', by research and analysis section, ACMA 9 June 2015 <<http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Australians-get-mobile>>
- <sup>10</sup> *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2012-13*, ABS, Catalogue no. 8146.0
- <sup>11</sup> P. Kellner, 'Can online polls produce accurate findings?' *International Journal of Market Research*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2004, pp. 3-2, p. 19
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*; H. Taylor, 'The Case For Publishing (Some) Online Polls', *PollingReport.com*, vol. no. 2007, January 15 <[http://www.pollingreport.com/ht\\_online.htm](http://www.pollingreport.com/ht_online.htm)> accessed 31 August 2010
- <sup>13</sup> Kellner, 2004, *op. cit.*