

A BIGGER AUSTRALIA: OPINIONS FOR AND AGAINST

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Final-release data from 2009–2010 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes are now available. These allow the analysis of attitudes to population growth across a wider range of background variables than in the pre-release data reported in the previous issue of People and Place. University graduates and migrants from non-English-speaking-backgrounds, especially if they are from high-income households, are the most likely to favour growth. In contrast, Australia-born non-graduates and people living in non-metropolitan areas are the least likely to do so. Voters who support the conservative parties are the most in favour of population stability but, even so, over two-thirds of Labor and Greens voters want stability. Many voters who are alienated from politics also support stability. Together these findings suggest opportunities for pro-stability parties and candidates in the forthcoming federal election.

In September 2009 Treasury published its projection for a population growing from 22.2 million in 2010 to 35.9 million in 2050.¹ In October the then Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said that he was pleased with this. He believed in population growth: ‘I make no apology for that. I actually think it is a good thing that our population is growing’.²

The previous issue of *People and Place* ran a report on voters’ attitudes to growth.³ It was based on pre-release data from the 2009–2010 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) of voters, made available in early March 2010, and drawn from a large mailout survey of people on the electoral roll. These data contained answers to questions on population growth, answers which could be cross-tabulated against a limited number of background variables: sex, age, and state or territory of residence.

The report showed the proportions supporting growth and the proportions supporting stability, and the reasons that each of the two groups had for taking these positions. Final-release data from the survey are now available (as of early June 2010) with many more background variables. These allow us to pursue the question of who prefers population stability

and who prefers growth in more detail. The final-release data can also provide answers to questions about whether respondents’ reasons for taking their chosen positions vary with their social location. The other differences between the pre-release and the final-release data are that the number of valid responses has increased from 3052 to 3192⁴ and that weights have been calculated to compensate for any divergence between the sample’s distribution by age and sex and that of the population as a whole.⁵

ATTITUDES TO GROWTH AND STABILITY BY SOCIAL LOCATION

In the pre-release file 69 per cent of respondents answered ‘no’ to the question, ‘Do you think Australia need more people?’ and 31 per cent said ‘yes’. In the final, weighted sample the proportion saying ‘no’ has increased slightly to 72 per cent and the proportion saying ‘yes’ has fallen slightly to 28 per cent.

The pre-release data had shown a strong relationship between gender and attitudes to growth, with women much more pro-stability than men; this difference remains.⁶ It showed only a slight difference in attitudes by age and this too remains. The overall pattern of responses by state

is also the same with Queensland the most pro-stability and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) the least.⁷ However, the proportions pro-stability in each state are all slightly higher than in the pre-release data.

Table 1 sets out the pattern of responses by state in the final-release data.

Table 2 disaggregates attitudes to growth in the five mainland states by region.

Table 1: Attitudes to growth by state, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people?	Queensland (Qld)	South Australia (SA)	Victoria (Vic)	New South Wales (NSW)	Tasmania	Western Australia (WA)	ACT	Total
No	76	74	72	70	70	66	65	72
Yes	24	26	28	30	30	34	35	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	611	294	866	862	96	371	63	3192

Source: The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes [Computer file], Canberra: Australian Social Science Data Archive, The Australian National University, 2010, final-release data.

Notes: The question was: 'Do you think Australia needs more people? Yes [or] no'. People who did not answer this (n=51) are excluded from the analysis here and in subsequent tables. The 29 respondents from the Northern Territory are not shown separately but are included in the total.

The data in Table 1 (as in all the tables in the present article) are weighted.

Table 2: Attitudes to growth by region, the five mainland states, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people?	Queensland			South Australia			Victoria		
	non-metro	outer metro	inner metro	non-metro	outer metro	inner metro	non-metro	outer metro	inner metro
No	**86	71	63	*83	74	67	77	71	66
Yes	**14	29	37	**17	26	33	23	29	34
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	271	208	125	98	102	88	283	310	244

Australia needs more people?	New South Wales			Western Australia			Total
	non-metro	outer metro	inner metro	non-metro	outer metro	inner metro	
No	76	69	**58	80	**49	69	72
Yes	24	31	**42	20	**51	31	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	415	258	176	113	123	133	3192

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Respondents were asked if they lived in an 'Outer metropolitan area of a major city (over 100,000 people)' or an 'Inner metropolitan area of a major city (over 100,000 people)'. Respondents who chose other options such as 'a large town (over 25,000 people)' or 'a rural area or village' have been grouped together as 'non-metro'. Respondents who did not answer the question on region (n=59) are not shown separately.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

It shows differences by region, some of them quite strong. It is interesting that inner-metropolitan areas in NSW and elsewhere are less pro-stability and more pro-growth than the sample as a whole. As the definition of a metropolitan area is a 'major city (over 100,000 people)' these areas in NSW would include inner-city regions in Wollongong and Newcastle as well as in Sydney. In contrast to the inner-metropolitan regions, non-metropolitan regions, especially in Queensland and South Australia, are more pro-stability than are any of the metropolitan areas.

Given the distress that growing traffic congestion and overloaded infrastructure are causing in the major cities⁸ this pattern of results may seem surprising. But many voters living in inner metropolitan areas are either university graduates, first-generation migrants or both. Table 3 shows that voters born overseas are more likely to support growth, particularly if they were born in non-English-speaking-background (NESB) countries. Table 4 shows that graduates are much more likely to be pro-growth than are voters in the sample as a whole and Table 5 shows that this is especially so if they are overseas-born.

Table 6 shows that graduates and migrants are under represented in non-metropolitan areas and over represented in inner-metropolitan regions.

This is particularly true of migrants born in NESB countries. Conversely the Australia-born are overrepresented in non-metropolitan regions and under-represented in metropolitan regions, particularly inner-metropolitan regions.

Tables 3 to 5 show that graduates, together with voters born overseas, are

Table 3: Attitudes to growth by birthplace, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

	Australia -born	ESB-born	NESB-born	Total
No	*76	**60	**47	72
Yes	*24	**40	**53	28
Total	100	100	100	100
Total	2475	311	358	3192

Source: See Table 1.
 Notes: ESB stands for English-speaking-background countries and NESB for non-English-speaking-background countries. Subtotals exclude missing on birthplace or not stated (n=42).
 * Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.
 ** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

Table 4: Attitudes to growth by level of post-school qualification, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Graduate or postgraduate degree	Trade, certificate or diploma	None	Total
No	**56	74	*76	72
Yes	**44	26	*24	28
Total	100	100	100	100
Total	559	903	1596	3192

Source: See Table 1.
 Notes: Subtotals exclude 26 still at school and 109 missing on qualifications.
 * Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.
 ** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

much more pro-growth than those born in Australia, especially if they are born in NESB countries. Thus the data in Tables 3 to 6 provide a provisional explanation for the attitudes to growth by region in the five mainland states shown in Table 2.⁹ The question of why NESB-born migrants and university graduates should be significantly less likely to support stability than are Australia-born non-graduates is, of course,

a deeper one. It cannot be pursued here but has received attention elsewhere.¹⁰

The preponderance of graduates and NESB-born migrants in inner-metropolitan regions helps explain the lower proportions in these regions supporting stability, but the outer-metropolitan areas in West Australia in Table 2 are more of a mystery. Apart from Perth, no Western Australian town exceeds 100,000 so it is voters in the outer

Table 5: Attitudes to growth by level of qualifications and birthplace group, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Graduates			Non-graduates			Total
	Australia-born	ESB-born	NESB-born	Australia-born	ESB-born	NESB-born	
No	**59	*51	**39	**80	*63	**49	72
Yes	**41	*49	**61	**20	*37	**51	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	416	65	72	2059	247	287	3192

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Respondents who were missing on the question on qualifications are included in non-graduate groups; those missing or not stated on country of birth (n=46) are not shown separately but are included in the total.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

Table 6: Graduates and birthplace groups by region, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

	Non-metropolitan	Outer-metropolitan	Inner-metropolitan	Total
All graduates	**11	17	**28	17
All Australia-born	**84	74	*73	78
All ESB-born	*7	13	10	10
All-NESB born	**7	12	*17	11
Total per cent	110	116	128	116
(Total respondents in region)	(1269)	(1052)	(805)	(3192)

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Totals add to more than 100 per cent because graduates are also included in the birthplace groupings. Of the graduates in the sample 76 per cent are Australia-born, 12 per cent ESB-born, and 13 per cent NESB-born.

People missing on either birthplace, qualification or region (n=93) are excluded from the subtotals.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

suburbs of Perth who, against the major trend in the data, are showing a slight majority favouring growth. Outer Perth contains only a slightly above average proportion of NESB-born voters (14 per cent, compared to the sample average of 11 per cent), but it has a much higher proportion of voters born in English-speaking background (ESB) countries (28 per cent as compared to the sample average of 10 per cent) and they too tend to be more pro-growth than the Australia-born (see Table 3). Thus 41 per cent of all voters in outer Perth are overseas-born compared to 21 per cent in the sample as a whole; no other region shown in Table 2 has an overseas-born proportion of more than 30 per cent.

The strong pro-stability attitudes of voters in non-metropolitan regions is of more than statistical interest. Politicians are now acutely aware of the negative feelings about growth among many voters in the major cities. One proposed solution is to encourage existing residents and new migrants to move to non-metropolitan areas. In some cases individual country towns may welcome this, but many are already feeling their own population pressures. They may resist being used still further as a means of relieving stresses on the larger cities.¹¹

Table 7 shows that respondents with a degree-level qualification together with non-graduates born in NESB countries account for 43 per cent of the voters who favour growth and only 20 per cent of those who favour stability. (The two groups made up 26 per cent of the sample overall.)

Table 8 shows that voters born in Australia, even if both their parents were born overseas, have similar attitudes to growth as do those who are Australia-born, with both parents Australia-born. This suggests that, in as much as a greater preference for growth is associated with being born overseas oneself, this preference is not passed on to locally-born children. The survey included a question on ancestry; curiously, the minority (24 per cent) who said that their ancestry was Australian showed little difference in their attitudes to growth and stability from those who were simply born in Australia—their response patterns were almost identical.¹²

Table 9 also shows that, for immigrants, their time of arrival in Australia is associated with a distinctive pattern of preferences for growth or stability. It is not the case that the most recent arrivals are the most pro-growth; there is a trace of this pattern for the ESB-born migrants, though

Table 7: Level of qualifications and birthplace group by attitudes to growth, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people:	Yes	No	Total
Graduate and Australia-born	19	11	13
Graduate and ESB-born	4	1	2
Graduate and NESB-born	5	1	2
Non-graduate and Australia-born	46	72	65
Non-graduate and ESB-born	10	7	8
Non-graduate and NESB-born	16	6	9
All graduates plus all non-graduate NESB-born	43	20	26
Total	100	100	100
Total N	906	2286	3192

Source: See Table 1

Table 8: Attitudes to growth by respondent's birth place and birth place of parents, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Australia-born, both parents Australia-born	Australia-born, one parent A-born one o' seas-born	Australia-born, both parents ESB-born	Australia-born, both parents NESB-born	First-generation ESB-born	First-generation NESB-born	Total
No	*76	72	76	78	**60	**47	72
Yes	*24	28	24	22	**40	**53	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	1809	145	50	174	311	358	3192

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: People missing on either their own country of birth or that of one or both parents (n=345) are not included in the subtotals but are included in the total. * Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level; ** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

the post-1989 ESB arrivals are very few. Rather the strongest pattern to emerge from Table 9 concerns NESB-born migrants who came to Australia between 1970 and 1989. It is they, rather than the more recent NESB arrivals, who are the most pro-growth.¹³

Table 10 shows that voters from higher-income households are more likely to favour growth than are those from lower-income households, and that this is especially true of graduates and of voters born in NESB countries. Indeed affluent first-generation migrants from non-English-speaking-background countries are very much more likely to be pro-growth and very much less likely to be pro-stability than the sample as a whole: this holds true whether they are graduates or not.¹⁴

Level of post-school education is strongly associated with attitudes to population growth, but so is occupation: see Table 11. Naturally the two variables are correlated, but the equivalence is not one-to-one. For example, few respondents who say their occupation is that of manager are graduates (only 20 per cent). Among social professionals (arts and media professionals, education professionals, and legal, social and welfare professionals) 77 per cent are graduates, but among the residual group of other professionals the proportion who are graduates is 56 per cent.

Table 11 shows a rough association with occupational level and attitudes to population growth, with the more skilled being rather less likely to support stability and the less skilled more likely to do so. But there are exceptions. Labourers are the most in favour of stability, but the grouping labeled 'technicians, trades workers, community and personal service workers' is more in favour of stability than, for example, machinery operators and drivers. Managers and other professionals are less likely to support stability than the sample as a whole (even though it is the preferred position of nearly two thirds of these group-

ings). However, the stand-out group are the social professionals.

Previous research has shown that people in these occupations are more in favour of immigration than people in other occupational groups.¹⁵ If they tended to read the population question as being about immigration one might expect them to register a pro-growth response. However in this particular sample, while the social professionals do stand out from the other occupational groups, they are just about as

much in favour of growth as are graduates as whole (56 per cent of whom preferred growth—see Table 4).

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Population growth has become a political issue since it became a focus of public debate late in 2009¹⁶ and a federal election will probably be held before the end of 2010. Thus it is important to explore the relationship between attitudes to growth and voting intention. Of course the data analysed here

Table 9: Attitudes to growth by respondent’s birthplace and year of arrival in Australia, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Australia -born	Arrived before 1970		Arrived 1970 to 1989		Arrived 1990 to 2007		Total
		ESB-born	NESB -born	ESB-born	NESB born	ESB-born	NESB born	
No	76	64	57	56	**35	58	**50	72
Yes	24	36	43	44	**65	42	**50	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	2475	141	115	129	122	36	107	3192

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Voters missing on birth place (n=70) and overseas-born people missing on year of arrival (n=66) are not shown in the subtotals but are shown in the total.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

Table 10: Attitudes to growth by annual household income, whole sample, graduates and NESB-born, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Whole sample			Graduates		NESB-born		Total
	\$0 to \$31,999 per annum	\$31,200 to \$77,999 per annum	\$78,000 and over per annum	\$0 to \$77,999 per annum	\$78,000 and over per annum	\$0 to \$77,999 per annum	\$78,000 and over per annum	
No	75	71	*65	**58	**53	**53	**37	72
Yes	25	29	*35	**42	**47	**47	**63	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	864	915	1016	197	325	232	93	3192

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Respondents missing on income (n=397) are not shown in the subtotals; more than half of these missing respondents are not in the labour force, and many may never have had paid work..

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

Table 11: Attitudes to growth by occupation, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Managers	Social professionals	Other professionals	Technicians, trades workers, community and personal service workers	Clerical, administrative and sales workers	Machinery operators and drivers	Labourers	Total
No	*64	**57	64	*79	72	73	*81	72
Yes	*36	**43	36	*21	28	27	*19	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	445	166	286	622	840	172	277	3193

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Voters missing or not codeable on occupation (n=385) are not shown in the subtotals; they include those who have never worked for pay. Social professionals are arts and media professionals, education professionals and legal, social and welfare professionals, including ministers of religion (ANZSCO sub-major groups, codes 21, 24 and 27).

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level; ** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

are now several months old and the political climate is changing. In the AuSSA data 38 per cent intend to vote Labor and 36 per cent Liberal or National Party. A Newspoll taken on 18–20 June 2010 had Labor at 35 per cent and Liberals and Nationals combined at 40 per cent. This was calculated on a base that excludes uncommitted voters. With Labor's leadership change from Rudd to Julia Gillard on 24 June voter sentiment shifted again; on 25–27 June Labor was at 42 per cent with the Liberals and Nationals still at 40 per cent.¹⁷

Table 12 shows that, regardless of voting intention, at least two thirds of voters were in favour of stability at the time of the survey. In some cases the proportions favouring stability were well over 80 per cent. Labor voters and Greens voters are only slightly less likely to favour stability than Liberal party voters. The most pro-stability voters are those intending to vote for the National Party and Family First. The small difference between Labor voters and the sample as a whole is largely explained by the greater proportion of graduates among them. The implication of these findings is that, if population growth does become an issue at the next election and the Coalition exploits this by taking pro-stability stance, the Labor party could be damaged unless it, too, moves in favour of stability.

It is interesting that 68 per cent of Greens voters were pro-stability, despite having an even higher proportion of graduates than Labor voters (32 per cent as opposed to 20 per cent). This does not accord with the previous record of committed environmentalists on the question of population.¹⁸ Perhaps they are now changing their position. If this is so a pro-growth Labor Party can be less certain of harvesting their preferences.

The group who said they would either vote informal or not vote at all are particularly interesting; they are relatively numerous (seven per cent of the sample)

and strongly in favour of stability. But they seem alienated from politics and thus unlikely to affect the outcome of the election, unless mobilised by some new themes or even by new parties. They are also young: 58 per cent are under 35 as opposed to 35 per cent of the sample as whole.

PREFERRED WAYS OF INCREASING THE POPULATION

The question on population growth in AuSSA 2009–2010 was followed by others. First, people who wanted growth were asked what kind of growth they would prefer: ‘If you answered “Yes” to [the question on whether Australia needs more people] how would you like the population to grow? Encourage people to have more children; Encourage more migrants to come; Encourage both migrants and larger families’.

As we have seen the blocks of voters with the most divergent views on growth are graduates and people born overseas in non-English-speaking-background countries.

This section, and the following section, divides the sample into four groups: all

graduates (irrespective of birth place) and non-graduates born in either Australia or in ESB countries or in NESB countries. This division is to avoid the very small numbers that would be involved if the graduates in the sample were also to be divided both by birthplace and by their attitudes to growth.

Table 13 shows voters who thought Australia did need more people by their preferred ways of adding to the population, broken down by the four analytical groups outlined above.

More than a quarter of the voters who prefer growth would like this growth to stem from natural increase. Australia-born non-graduates show an even stronger preference for natural increase; more than a third prefer this path to growth. Growth by immigration alone was popular among non-graduates born in ESB countries but the numbers are too small for statistical significance. Overall, rather more than half of the pro-growth minority favoured the combined path of natural increase plus immigration.

Table 12: Attitudes to growth by voting intention, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

Australia needs more people	Liberal Party	National Party	Labor	Greens	Family First	Would vote informal/ Would not vote	Total
No	72	**87	*67	68	**84	**84	72
Yes	28	**13	*33	32	**16	**16	28
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	1042	113	1229	280	100	225	3191

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: The question on voting intention was: ‘If a Federal election for the House of Representatives and Senate were to be held next Saturday, which party would get your first preference in the House of Representatives?’ The five parties shown in Table 12 were listed as alternatives together with the Australian Democrats, One Nation and other. ‘Would vote informal/Would not vote’ was also offered as an alternative.

Missing on voting intention (n=111), Australian Democrats (n=31), One Nation (n=30) and other (n=49) are not shown in the subtotals, but are included in the total. All three of the valid subgroups were strongly pro-stability, above the average for the sample as a whole.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

But what reasons did they, and the pro-stability camp, have for adopting the positions they had chosen?

REASONS FOR PREFERRING GROWTH OR STABILITY

The population questions went on to ask respondents who favoured growth to give their reasons and those who favoured stability to give their reasons. The following two tables use the analytic groups set out in Table 13 to explore the reasons given and to see if they vary by group.

Respondents were offered a list of nine possible reasons for their preferred position on growth and invited to chose two from this list. (The overall pattern of reasons given by both camps is the same in the final-release data as it was in the pre-release data.)¹⁹ Of the 906 voters who preferred growth, 880 offered at least one reason and 859 offered two reasons. Table 14 combines the two reasons offered; this means that the unit of analysis in Table 14 is not one respondent but one reason.

Missing values are also shown. The reasons are set out in descending order of popularity for the growth supporters as a whole.

Table 14 shows that, for the most part, the sub-groups chose an ordering of preferences similar to that of the sub-sample as a whole. However, graduates were more likely to pick as one of their two reasons a need for more people for economic growth or that having more babies and/or migrants could counteract the ageing of the population. In the first instance the difference was large enough for statistical significance at the .05 level. Non-graduates from NESB countries were unimpressed by the argument about the ageing of the population. The difference between them and the sample as a whole on this reason was strong. They were also a little more attracted to the argument about increasing cultural diversity, though here the difference between them and the sub-sample as a whole was not statistically significant. (Like most of the pro-growth

Table 13: Voters who say Australia needs more people, their preferred means, by level of qualification and birthplace, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

	Graduates	Non-graduates			Total
		Australia-born	ESB-born	NESB-born	
Missing	1	1	2	4	2
Encourage people to have more children	20	*34	19	21	26
Encourage more migrants to come	20	15	30	18	18
Encourage both migrants and larger families	59	50	49	57	54
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	246	414	91	146	906

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Subtotals exclude people missing on either qualifications or birthplace (n=10).

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

group, they are not attracted to the argument that we should increase the migrant intake in order to accept more refugees.)

Graduates and NESB-born migrants account for almost half of the pro-growth camp but their reasons for preferring growth differ a little. And very few of the growth supporters were motivated by a desire to boost the housing industry and prop up property prices. While this appears to be a prime motivation among the politically organised growth lobby,²⁰ it lacks popular support among the broader camp of voters who prefer growth. The growth

lobby is probably wise to stick to arguments about population growth boosting economic growth, offsetting demographic ageing, and importing needed skills.

Nonetheless, the argument about importing skilled workers could put them even further off-side with the pro-stability majority. See Table 15.

Of the 2286 respondents who preferred stability, 2205 gave at least one reason and 2172 gave two. Of all the reasons given 42 per cent referred to the environment (either natural or urban) and Table 15 shows that, among the pro-stability camp, graduates

Table 14: Reasons for preferring growth by level of qualification and birth place, both reasons combined, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

	Graduates	Non-graduates			All reasons for growth
		Australia -born	ESB -born	NESB -born	
We need more people for economic growth.	*37	34	30	34	34
Having more babies and/or migrants could counteract the ageing of the population.	23	21	18	**9	19
We need skilled migrants for the workforce.	14	13	19	16	15
Having more people means more cultural diversity.	10	8	8	12	9
A larger population could give Australia more say in world affairs.	4	6	5	4	5
A larger population could make it easier to defend Australia.	3	6	6	3	5
We may need to increase total migration so that we can take in more refugees.	5	3	3	1	3
We could ease overpopulation overseas by taking in more migrants.	3	4	4	2	3
More people could boost the housing industry and help support property prices.	0	3	1	2	2
Missing	1	1	8	15	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total reasons	490	828	182	292	1812

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Respondents could give two reasons. These are added together in this table. Consequently the unit of analysis is one reason not one respondent. Reasons are set out in descending order according to the choices of pro-growth voters as a whole.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

were much more likely to offer one of them, ‘the natural environment is stressed by the numbers we already have’, than was the sub-sample as a whole, and much less likely to say that we ‘have too much cultural diversity already’. They were also rather less likely to chose the argument that we should train our own than was the sub-sample as a whole. In contrast non-graduates born in NESB countries were less likely to chose environmental stress as one of their reasons and much more likely to express fears about population growth making unemployment worse.

Among the pro-growth camp the two main sets of supporters, graduates and non-graduate NESB-born voters were not closely united in their reasons. Among those who support stability these two key sets of voters are even less united in their reasons.

CONCLUSION

Seventy-two per cent of voters think that Australia does not need more people. Voters who live in non-metropolitan areas are particularly likely to hold this opinion. Support for a stable population is high among

Table 15: Reasons for preferring stability by level of qualification and birth place, December 2009 to February 2010, per cent

	Graduates	Non graduates			All reasons for stability
		Australia -born	ESB -born	NESB -born	
We should train our own skilled people, not take them from other countries.	*18	26	25	24	25
The natural environment is stressed by the numbers we already have.	**26	15	14	**9	16
Our cities are too crowded and there is too much traffic.	13	12	12	11	12
Australia might not have enough water for more people.	12	11	17	10	12
We have too much cultural diversity already.	**4	12	11	12	10
Having more people could make unemployment worse.	*6	9	7	*17	9
We could still take refugees without high total migration.	9	4	5	3	5
The cost of housing is too high.	5	4	5	3	4
Population growth makes it harder for Australia to cut total greenhouse gas emissions.	7	3	3	3	3
Missing	2	5	0	5	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Total N	614	3290	312	282	4572

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: Respondents could give two reasons. These are added together in this table. Consequently the unit of analysis is one reason not one respondent. Reasons are set out in descending order according to the choices of the pro-stability voters as a whole.

* Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .05 level.

** Difference between the sub-group and the total is significant at the .01 level.

Australia-born voters who do not have university degrees, and among low-skilled workers. Voters who prefer stability tend to expect to vote for the National Party, Family First, the Liberals, or not to vote at all.

Support for growth is concentrated among voters who live in inner-metropolitan regions, graduates, and NESB-born migrants, especially those from high-income households. University graduates and NESB-born voters are two social groups who hold attitudes to population growth that differ from the rest of the electorate. But in no case do growth supporters constitute more than a third of the supporters of any political party.

Among voters who prefer stability, graduates and NESB-born non-graduates tend to have quite different reasons. Graduates emphasise environmental stress; the NESB-born focus on the risk of growth

making unemployment worse. But like all of the non-graduates, the reason for preferring stability that NESB-born voters are most likely chose is the need to train our own skilled workers.

As one might expect in a complex modern society people's reasons for taking up positions on the question of population growth vary. But there is one clear finding from the 2009–2010 AuSSA data: most voters do not see any need for further population growth. Majorities across the supporters of all political parties do not support the growth policies of the Rudd government. Any party that can present policies which capture these concerns should do well; such a party might even be able to recruit the alienated seven per cent who, despite the fact that they are on the electoral roll, intend not to vote or to vote informal.

References

- ¹ *Australia to 2050: Future Challenges* (Third Intergenerational Report), Department of Treasury, Canberra, 2010, pp. viii, 10
- ² K. O'Brien, 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd joins The 7.30 Report', *7.30 Report*, ABC TV (transcript), 22 October 2009
- ³ K. Betts, 'Population growth: what do Australian voters want?', *People and Place*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2010, pp. 49–64
- ⁴ The previous article and the current article is restricted to those respondents who answered the key question: 'Do you think Australia needs more people?' In the pre-release data 90 respondents were recorded as missing on this question. Subsequent manual inspection of the forms and data cleaning has reduced this number to 51. Total responses to the survey have also increased from 3142 in March 2010 to 3243 in June 2010. Thus the number of valid responses to the key question has gained both from late processing of questionnaires and from data cleaning, increasing from 3052 to 3192.
- ⁵ Large random samples are not always weighted in this way. If initial inspection of a sample's distribution on key variables shows that it is already representative, this step is unnecessary. For example, of the nine Australian Election Studies conducted from 1987 to 2007 only two (1993 and 1999) required weighting. Personal communication from Ian McAllister.
- ⁶ In the pre-release data 75 per cent of women answered 'no' to the question 'Do you think Australia needs more people?' and 62 per cent of men answered 'no'. In the final-release data the respective percentages were 78 per cent and 65 per cent.
- ⁷ Overall there is a slightly higher proportion of voters saying Australia does not need more people in the final-release, weighted file than was the case with the pre-release data. This is especially the case with the ACT, where the final release file has added five more cases and this, together with the weighting, produces a higher level of support for stability than before; previously only 50 per cent in the ACT wanted stability, with the final-release data 65 per cent prefer stability.
- ⁸ While distances traveled to work have remained relatively stable since the mid 1990s, or have even declined, there is evidence that the time spent commuting has increased for Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide. See *State of Australian Cities 2010*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Canberra, 2010, p. 104. For media

- reports and commentary see: S. Lunn, 'The daily commute keeps getting longer', *The Australian*, 4 June 2009, p. 3; 'Crowding out a way of life', *Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 2010, p. 20; A. Ferguson, 'Congestion to cost region \$3bn a year', *The Australian*, 29 August 2009, p. 7; J. Dowling and C. Lucas, 'Bursting at the seams', *The Age*, 11 November 2009, p. 15; J. Gordon, 'Congestion the ultimate cost of people ingestion', *The Sunday Age*, 28 February 2010, p. 17.
- ⁹ Nonetheless even when birthplace and qualifications are controlled for the associations shown in Table 2 do not entirely disappear; data not shown separately here.
- ¹⁰ Re graduates, see work on the new class in K. Betts, *The Great Divide: Immigration Politics in Australia*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney, 1999, pp. 10–20, 71–95, 154–191. Re NESB immigrants, see *ibid.* pp. 226–228, 235–249.
- ¹¹ As well as the data in Table 2 see Editorial, 'All of Victoria must deal with growing pains', *The Age*, 16 June 2010, p. 16; P. Gardiner, 'Population cap warning', *Noosa News*, 4 June 2010, p. 2; P. Austin, 'They will come—so Brumby to build in the bush', *The Age*, 16 June 2010, p. 7; S. Nicholls, 'O'Farrell helps families to relocate and over-55s to downsize', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 2010, p. 5; 'Qld may need second capital: Bligh', *AAP Bulletins*, 30 March 2010. Of course the possibility of their resisting growth depends on their reasons, but only 11 per cent of the reasons for preferring stability given by voters in non-metropolitan regions concerned cultural diversity (as opposed to 10 per cent of the reasons given by the pro-stability camp as a whole). Overall their reasons for preferring stability were very similar to those given by all the voters in this camp.
- ¹² Twenty-three per cent of people giving their ancestry as Australian were pro-growth, compared to 24 per cent of those born in Australia, and 77 per cent were pro-stability compared to 76 per cent for the Australia-born.
- ¹³ This may reflect the fact that they arrived during the heyday of political multiculturalism which could have encouraged them to see support for further immigration (especially family reunion) in symbolic terms. For some, such support became sign of respect for NESB-born migrants in the community. See Betts, 1999, *op. cit.* Later arrivals under the Howard Government would have experienced a more pragmatic approach from federal politicians.
- ¹⁴ Sixty-five per cent of higher income NESB-born non-graduates preferred growth as did 61 per cent of those who were graduates.
- ¹⁵ See for example, K. Betts, 'Cosmopolitans and patriots: Australia's cultural divide and attitudes to immigration', *People and Place*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005, pp. 29–40.
- ¹⁶ See Betts, 2010, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁷ The News Poll can be downloaded from <www.newspoll.com.au>.
- ¹⁸ See K. Betts, 'Demographic and social research on the population and environment nexus in Australia: explaining the gap', *Population and Environment*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2004, pp. 157–172.
- ¹⁹ In a few cases the responses differ by one or two percentage points. For example, in the pre-release data 36 per cent of the pro-growth responses were 'we need more people for economic growth' compared to 34 per cent in the final-release data. Among the pro-stability responses 24 per cent of responses in the pre-release data were 'we should train our own skilled people ...' compared to 25 per cent in the final-release data.
- ²⁰ See K. Betts and M. Gilding, 'The growth lobby and Australia's immigration policy', *People and Place*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2006, pp. 40–52.