

Problems facing Australia: attender attitudes

Prioritising issues

The Australian nation is generally prosperous, well endowed with many natural resources, and has a stable system of government. Nevertheless, complex problems, endemic poverty for certain sectors of society, environmental issues, and the possibility of risks and failures accompany even the best of our way of life.

In the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were surveyed on their views of problems facing Australia. The survey question was as follows:

Below is a list of problems that face Australia today. Please indicate how important each problem is.

- The economy
- Health care
- Education
- The environment
- Crime
- Water management
- Cost of living
- Immigration
- Poverty
- Better government
- Honesty & social responsibility in business
- Australia's ability to provide for its food needs¹
- Gambling
- Youth suicide
- Alcohol and substance abuse

Respondents indicated the level of importance on a scale from one to five, where 1 was "not important", 3 was "fairly important", and 5 was "very important". In order to assist with the presentation of results, charts and tables in this Fact Sheet display the average (mean) scores on these scales. A higher score indicates a higher level of importance.

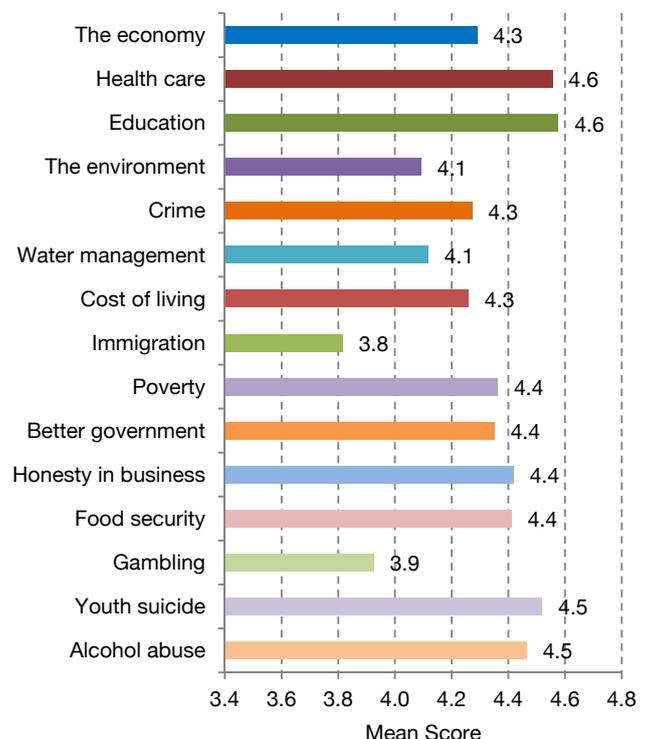
Overall findings

The top two most important issues identified by church attenders were education and health care, with almost 9 out of 10 people giving them a rating of at least 4 out of five for importance.

The survey responses present a picture of attenders who are particularly concerned about quality of life and the future of the young. It is noteworthy that education and health care are centerpieces of government responsibility, policy and budgeting.

When framed as problems, the two issues least likely to be identified as important to church attenders were immigration (mean score of 3.8) and gambling (mean score of 3.9).

Figure 1: Problems facing Australia



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey 0 (n=1,409).

¹ The term "food security" is used as shorthand for this problem throughout the Fact Sheet.

Differences by demographics

The age of church attenders made a difference to views for all questions. People aged 50+ consistently rated the issues as more important than younger people. People under 30 years old gave the weakest importance ratings, except for poverty where the 30 to 49 year olds gave the weakest rating. Women also attributed higher importance ratings to almost all issues (honesty in business and gambling were the exceptions). There were some differences by attenders' levels of educational attainment, but only across a minority of issues.

Table 1: Problems facing Australia by age & gender

| Problem | Age | | | | Gender | |
|---------------------|------------|-------|-------|-----|--------|------|
| | 15-29 | 30-49 | 50-69 | 70+ | Female | Male |
| | Mean score | | | | | |
| The economy | 3.9 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.2 |
| Health care | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.3 |
| Education | 4.3 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 4.4 |
| The environment | 3.8 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 3.9 |
| Crime | 4.0 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.1 |
| Water management | 3.7 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.0 |
| Cost of living | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.1 |
| Immigration | 3.5 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 3.6 |
| Poverty | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.1 |
| Better government | 4.1 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.2 |
| Honesty in business | 4.1 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.3 |
| Food security | 4.0 | 4.2 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 4.2 |
| Gambling | 3.6 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3.8 |
| Youth suicide | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 4.4 |
| Alcohol abuse | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 4.3 |

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,284).

Differences by denomination

The level of importance attributed to the issues varied by denomination across all questions except for gambling and alcohol abuse, where differences were not statistically significant.

Table 2: Problems facing Australia by denomination

| Problem | Angli- can | Baptist/ Church- es of Christ | Cath- olic | Luth- eran | Pente- costal | Unit- ing | Other Prot- estant |
|---------------------|---------------|--|---------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| | Mean score | | | | | | |
| The economy | 4.0 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| Health care | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 4.6 | 4.3 |
| Education | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.6 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.5 |
| The environment | 4.0 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 3.8 | 4.3 | 3.8 |
| Crime | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| Water management | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.2 | 4.3 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 4.0 |
| Cost of living | 3.8 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.2 | 4.0 |
| Immigration | 3.6 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.9 | 3.6 |
| Poverty | 4.1 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.2 |
| Better government | 4.0 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.2 |
| Honesty in business | 4.2 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.3 |
| Food security | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.3 |
| Gambling | 3.8 | 4.0 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 3.7 |
| Youth suicide | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.5 | 4.3 |
| Alcohol abuse | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 4.3 |

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O (n=1,293).

Compared with church attenders from other denominations, Anglicans tended to attribute the least importance to the issues, and Catholics tended to attribute the greatest importance. When the issues were ranked in terms of importance within each of the denominations (with a higher rank indicating higher importance), the ranking pattern for Anglicans and Pentecostals differed the most from the ranking across all attenders. Food security, water management and the environment exhibited much higher rankings for Anglicans than for all attenders (and education, health care and cost of living displayed much lower rankings for Anglicans). The economy and cost of living exhibited much higher rankings (and education and food security much lower rankings) for Pentecostals than for attenders as a whole.

Summary

Church attenders were presented with a list of problems that face Australia and they indicated how important they felt each problem was. The issues rated with the highest levels of importance were education and health care. Issues with the lowest average ratings as problems facing Australia were immigration and gambling. Older attenders (aged 50+) tended to rate issues as more important than younger attenders. There were also differences in the views of attenders of different denominations.

References

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey O, NCLS Research, Sydney.

Citation

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About NCLS: The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is a quantitative survey of 260,000-450,000 church attenders, 6,000-10,000 church leaders and 3,000-7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year since 1991.