

Attitudes to immigration and cultural diversity in Australia

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Key Words:

Research aim:

This article aims to examine Australian attitudes to immigration and cultural diversity.

Results/Conclusion:

Findings of Dunn's Challenging Racism project were also presented as indicating a high level of negativity. In the context of stated 'racist attitude indicators', nearly half of Australians (49%) reportedly harboured 'anti-Muslim' attitudes and nearly a quarter were 'anti-Indigenous' (28%), 'anti-Asian' (24%) and 'anti-Semitic' (23%). As with the AustraliaSCAN survey, the finding gained much media attention, with prominent coverage in the Melbourne Age (23 February 2011). Paralleling the AustraliaSCAN report, the finding that gained most public attention – relating to the extent of 'anti-Muslim' sentiment – was based on just one question and employed a methodology which failed to distinguish mid-range from strongly held opinion. In the Dunn surveys, conducted in different states of Australian between 2001 and 2008, respondents were asked: 'In your opinion how concerned would you feel if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of Muslim faith', then Jewish faith, Asian background, and Aboriginal background. In reporting the findings, it was assumed that concern over marriage of a 'close relative' to a person of Muslim faith was indicative of 'anti-Muslim' attitude and was a 'racist attitude indicator'. But a range of factors may explain 'concern' over the marriage of a son or daughter, not least the strength of the respondent's own identity

Implications:

A further problem concerns the way the result was obtained. In surveying, respondents are normally presented with a matched set of positive and negative response options, typically two positive, a mid-point and two negative. But in the question used by Dunn, an uneven response frame was employed, with one positive and four negative response options: (1) 'not at all concerned'; (2) 'slightly concerned'; (3) 'somewhat concerned'; (4) 'very concerned'; and (5) 'extremely concerned'. To illustrate the method used to calculate 'anti-Muslim' attitudes, findings for the Sydney Statistical Region are considered. The Challenging Racism project reported that in the Sydney Statistical Region, 56.6% of the population is 'anti-Muslim', compared with 54.4% in New South Wales and 48.6% in Australia. To reach this result the four negative responses were simply added, so that the response 'slightly concerned' was accorded equal weight with the response 'extremely concerned'.

Cultural Group(s):

Location of study:

Age group:

Number included in study:

2000

Type of participants:

Australians that live in areas of high immigrant concentration in Sydney and Melbourne.

Research approach:

Engaging with members of the community in directed surveys regarding immigration in Australia

Type of data:

Quantitative data derived from surveys of 70 questions.

Secondary data sources used:

Specific scales or analytical techniques used:

Implications/ Recommendations:

Notes: