

Fairfax-Ipsos poll: Australians split on Muslim migration ahead of new population policy

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Australian voters are split on whether to cut the number of migrants coming from Muslim countries, as the Morrison government considers an overhaul of immigration and population rules within weeks.

A special Fairfax-Ipsos survey finds only 14 per cent of voters support an increase in the number of immigrants from Muslim countries while 35 per cent believe the intake should stay the same. But another 46 per cent believe the intake should be reduced a lot or a little - a position backed by a clear majority of Coalition voters and one third of Labor voters.

The exclusive poll was conducted after the Bourke Street terror attack by Hassan Khalif Shire Ali and amid growing calls from some conservative members of Parliament to cut migration from Muslim nations.

The poll's findings also highlight the challenge facing Prime Minister Scott Morrison as he attempts to regain political support, with the government trailing Labor by 48 per cent to 52 per cent in two-party terms.

Voters split on immigration

A Fairfax-Ipsos poll shows the voters divided over population policy while the Coalition struggles to close the gap with Labor, trailing 48 per cent to 52 per cent in two-party preferred. The government has increased its standing from one month ago, when it trailed Labor by 55 per cent to 45 per cent, after Mr Morrison's bus tour of Queensland and other campaign measures to raise his personal profile with voters.

Mr Morrison has a personal lead over Opposition Leader Bill Shorten as preferred prime minister, 47 per cent to 35 per cent, a result that has been stable for three months. The rating for Mr Morrison as preferred prime minister is in line with the last result for Malcolm Turnbull in August, days before the government's leadership crisis, but is lower than the polling for Mr Turnbull for most of this year.

Mr Morrison has raised expectations for a major statement on migration and population by the end of the year, flagging measures to increase skilled immigration and encourage more migrants to move to regional Australia.

Fairfax-Ipsos poll has a simple message to MPs: cut carbon emissions as well as power bills

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton oversaw a reduction in the number of permanent migrants coming to Australia last year from the official estimate of 190,000 to an actual intake of 163,000, fuelling talk of a similar cut in future years. The Immigration Minister, David Coleman, last week said no decision had been taken on the planning level for the 2020 financial year.

A Fairfax-Ipsos survey in October found stronger support for overall migration, with 23 per cent of respondents backing an increase in the intake and 29 per cent approving the current intake. Another 45 per cent wanted the intake to be cut a little or a lot.

Australians often over-estimate the proportion of the population that is Muslim, with Ipsos surveys finding respondents believe it is 17 per cent when the reality is 3 per cent. The government runs a non-discriminatory migration program but has discretion in the humanitarian intake to put a priority on some over others, with the Syrian intake of 12,000 refugees in recent years said to favour Yazidis, Christians and other minorities.

Australians have supported a multicultural migration intake for many years, according to annual research by the Scanlon Foundation on social cohesion, but the findings also show a “hierarchy of ethnic preference” on migrants. Attitudes have shifted marginally in the past seven years amid heavy media coverage of terrorist attacks and heightened political debate about migration, including the revival of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation and a call by Queensland senator Fraser Anning to return to the White Australia Policy.

While 31.9 per cent of respondents said they had a positive attitude to Muslims in 2010, this slipped to 28.3 per cent in the Scanlon research in 2017. The proportion with a negative attitude rose from 23.5 per cent to 25 per cent, but there was no consistent year-on-year trend up or down over the period. The Scanlon findings, led by Monash University professor Andrew Markus, have also found a strong sense of integration among Muslim Australians.

The Fairfax-Ipsos survey also highlights the pressure on Mr Morrison and Energy Minister Angus Taylor to tackle energy policy, with voters divided on whether prices or the environment should take priority. While 47 per cent said

the government's first objective should be to reduce prices, 39 per cent said it should be reducing carbon emissions. The support for reducing household bills was higher among Coalition voters, at 58 per cent, while only 22 per cent of this group put a priority on greenhouse gas emissions.

The inverse applied among Labor voters, with 53 per cent putting a priority on carbon emissions and 36 per cent naming household bills as the primary objective.

Greens voters overwhelmingly favoured cuts to greenhouse gas emissions, with 74 per cent naming this the priority, while reducing household bills had support from 80 per cent of One Nation voters.

In an important measure of voter satisfaction, 48 per cent said they approved of Mr Morrison's performance while 36 per cent said they disapproved. This means his "net approval" rating was 12 percentage points and has been consistently positive since he took office. Mr Shorten saw no significant change to his performance, with 40 per cent approval and 47 per cent disapproval, leaving him with a negative net approval rating.

The poll is based on telephone interviews with 1200 respondents from Wednesday to Saturday and has a margin of error of 2.9 per cent.