

## Voting patterns of church attenders

### Elections in Australia

Reporting on voter intentions for federal elections is a staple of Australian media news cycles and a constant source of interest to governments, businesses and civil society alike. Australian Federal Government elections are held to elect parliaments for three-year terms for the House of Representatives and in a ten-year period Australian voters could be required to vote on four separate occasions. Is there a clear voting pattern for Australian church attenders in federal elections? Results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey reveal church attender voting patterns across denominations.

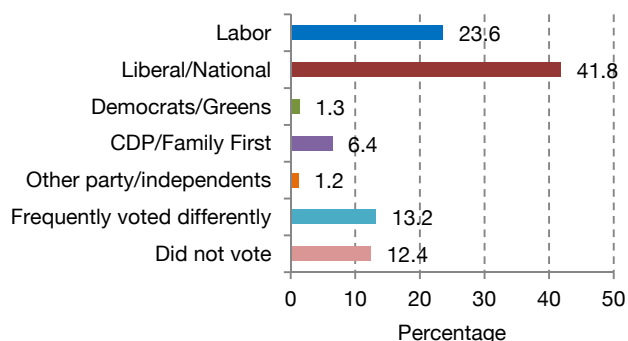
In late 2011, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders was asked:

**What have been your voting patterns over the last 10 years in lower house Federal elections?**

### Overall findings

The overall voting patterns of attenders in 2011 were as follows: Labor 23.6%, Liberal/National 41.8%, Democrats or Greens 1.3%, Christian Democratic Party and Family First 6.4%, and Other party or Independents 1.2%<sup>1</sup>. Of the remainder, 13.2% frequently vote differently and 12.4% did not vote at all.

**Figure 1: Church attender voting pattern**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,665).

<sup>1</sup> "Generally One Nation" and "Some other party or independents" were listed separately in the survey question. However, due to small numbers, the results are presented together here.

The 2011 survey reveals that no party held a majority of attender support in the last 10 years, although attender voter patterns heavily favoured the Liberal/National Coalition. Attenders were less likely to vote Labor or Greens than the general public when compared with voter patterns from elections held in the same ten-year period.<sup>2</sup>

### Denominational differences in voting

The 2011 survey also confirms that denominational differences in attender voter patterns do exist.

**Table 1: Church attender voting by denomination**

	Angli- can	Baptist/ Churches of Christ	Cath- olic	Luth- eran	Pente- costal	Unit- ing	Other Prot- estant
<b>Party</b>	<b>Percentage</b>						
Labor	19	17	31	15	12	25	17
Liberal/National	46	44	39	63	36	47	48
Democrats/Greens	2	1	1	1	1	3	0
CDP/Family First	5	13	2	4	17	4	8
Other party/ independents	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Frequently voted differently	18	11	13	9	10	15	12
Did not vote	7	14	11	6	22	6	14

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,665).

Catholic attenders (31%) are the largest group to have voted Labor. However, even Catholics are more likely to have voted Liberal/National with 39% indicating that they have generally voted for the Coalition. Lutherans (63%) are the most likely to generally vote Liberal/National, Anglicans (18%) the most likely to frequently vote differently, and Pentecostals (17%) and Baptist and Churches of Christ (13%) the most likely to generally vote Christian Dem Party or Family First. Catholics (2%) are the least likely to generally vote Christian Dem Party or Family First.

<sup>2</sup> The Liberal/National vote has averaged 44% over the last four elections, the Labor vote 39%, and the Christian Democrats/Family First 2%. Considering only those church attenders who voted, and distributing the swinging vote proportionately among the parties, the equivalent figures for church attenders are 56% Liberal/National, 32% Labor and 9% Christian Democrats/Family First. The results for each election are available at <http://results.aec.gov.au>

Across denominations long-term attenders were also more likely than other church attenders to vote Liberal/National, with 47% of those who have attended a church for five or more years generally voting for the Coalition.

### Demographic differences in voting

Gender played little role in shaping attender voter patterns in the 2011 survey.

The educational status of attenders does appear to have some bearing on voter patterns with 45% of those who listed their highest educational attainment as secondary school generally voting Liberal/National, compared to 40% of attenders with a greater level of formal education.

There also appears to be a strong correlation between age and the increased likelihood that attenders generally vote Liberal/National.

**Table 2: Church attender voting by age**

	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
	<b>Percentage</b>							
<b>Party</b>								
<b>Labor</b>	6	16	18	25	29	27	28	21
<b>Liberal/National</b>	8	28	32	38	39	47	56	71
<b>Democrats/Greens</b>	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
<b>CDP/Family First</b>	2	10	13	7	9	5	3	1
<b>Other party/independents</b>	0	3	2	1	2	1	1	0
<b>Frequently voted differently</b>	1	18	15	15	14	16	11	6
<b>Did not vote</b>	82	24	20	13	5	3	1	0

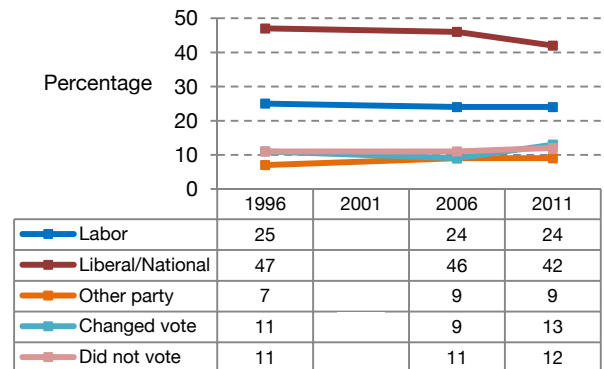
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R (n=3,635).

Of those aged 80 plus 71% generally voted Liberal/National, while 56% of 70-79 year olds and 47% of those aged 60-69 also voted Liberal/National. Age thus appears to be a strong indicator of attender voting patterns for the Coalition. One modest contrast to this trend is that the age group with the strongest Labor vote was 50-59 year olds (29%). While older attenders were most likely to generally vote Liberal/National, those most likely to vote for the Christian Dem Party or Family First were those aged 20-29 (10%) and those aged 30-39 (13%). It appears that a segment of younger attenders are casting their vote with minority parties that express their values rather than with the larger Liberal/National or Labor parties.

### Previous surveys

Comparisons with 1996 and 2006 survey data reveal no major changes in attender voting patterns over the last 15 years. No comparative data is available for 2001.

**Figure 2: Church attender voting 1996-2011**



Source: 1996 NCLS Attender Sample Survey I, 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J, 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Surveys N, O and R.

### Summary

While the patterns differ somewhat by denomination and demographic factors, Australian church attenders are predominantly conservative in their voting preferences, a trend which has changed little over 15 years.

### References

- Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J, NCLS Research, Sydney.
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### 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.