

## Church attenders' views on defence spending

Each year a portion of the Australian federal budget is allocated to defence, with the aims of ensuring national security and protecting shared interests with Australia's allies. In 2011/2012, when the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) was conducted, defence spending was estimated at \$26.3 billion.<sup>1</sup> In terms of public opinion, it has been claimed in recent years that "support for more defence spending has dropped to its lowest level since the end of the Cold War"<sup>2</sup>, as fewer Australians perceive a security threat to the country. Although Australian Electoral Study results support this claim (with the percent of Australians in favour of higher spending in decline since 2001), it is still a position held by many. In 2010, 45% of Australians surveyed thought the government should spend more on defence, compared to 10% who thought it should spend less and 45% who thought spending was about right<sup>3</sup>.

What do Australian church attenders think in relation to defence spending? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 NCLS, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

**Do you think that the government should spend more or less on defence?**

- Spend much more
- Spend some more
- About right at present
- Spend less
- Spend a lot less

### Overall results

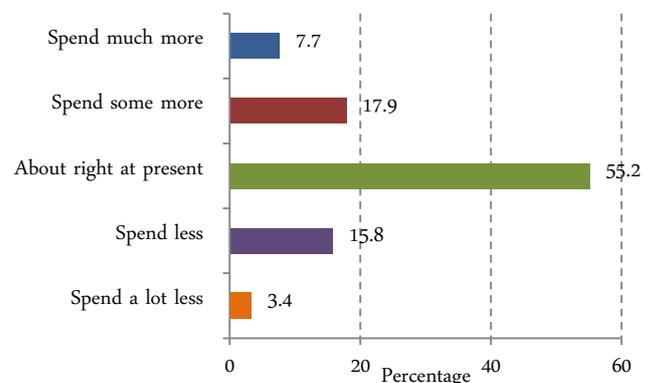
As shown in Figure 1, more than half (55%) of the attenders who answered this question thought that government spending on defence was "about right at present". It is possible that this option was also chosen by attenders who felt they didn't have enough

knowledge on the issues to make an informed selection.

Of the attenders who weren't content with the current level of defence spending, the majority wanted spending to increase. Over a quarter (26%) of all attenders thought the government should be spending more, with 18% selecting "some more" and 8% "much more". In contrast, almost one in five attenders (19%) thought less or much less should be spent on defence.

Comparing these results with those from the 2010 Australian Electoral Study mentioned earlier, church attenders as a whole were less likely to advocate increased spending on defence than the wider Australian population (26% vs. 45%). Correspondingly, higher proportions of attenders thought the government should spend less (19% vs. 10%), and that spending was about right at present (55% vs. 45%).

**Figure 1: Attender views on government defence spending**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,383).

### Demographics

Attenders were found to differ somewhat in their views on defence spending depending on their age (see Table 1). The oldest attenders were most likely to advocate increased spending, with 32% of 70 plus year olds thinking the government should spend more. Attenders aged between 30 and 49 were the most likely age group to select "about right at present" (with about six out of 10 choosing this option), and were the least likely age group to support increased spending.

1 Parliament of Australia, Department of Parliamentary Services, Budget Review 2012-2013, Research Paper no. 9, 2011-2012.  
 2 Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2008) Special Report on *Public Opinion in Australia towards Defence, Security and Terrorism, Issue 16*  
 3 McAllister, I., & Cameron, S. (2014) *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Electoral Study, 1987-2013*, ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences.

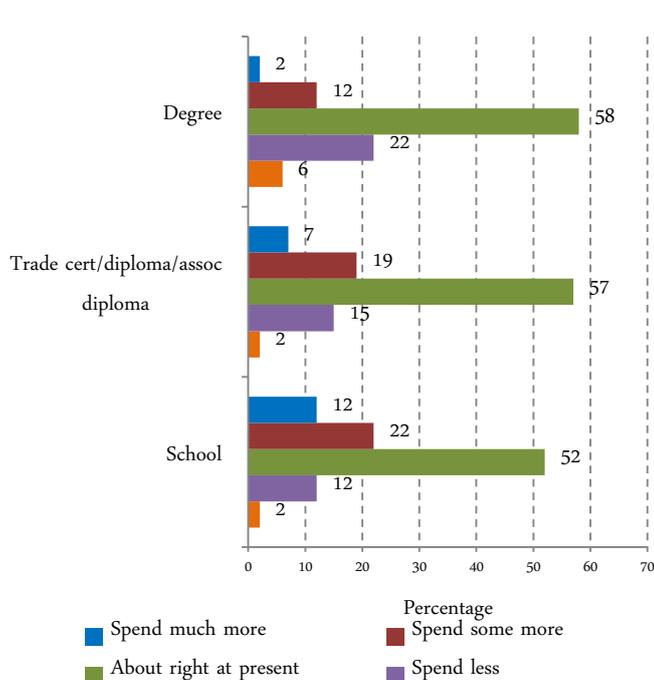
**Table 1: Views on defence spending by age**

	15-29 yrs	30-49 yrs	50-69 yrs	70+ yrs
	Percentage			
<b>Much more</b>	6	6	7	12
<b>Some more</b>	19	13	19	20
<b>About right</b>	58	61	53	49
<b>Less</b>	14	19	15	16
<b>A lot less</b>	2	2	5	3

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,376).

As shown in Figure 2, attenders with no post-school qualifications were more likely to support increased defence spending (34%) than those with either a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma (26%) or a university degree (14%). Attenders with a degree were the most likely to think the government should be spending less on defence (28% compared to 15% of other attenders).

**Figure 2: Views on defence spending by education**



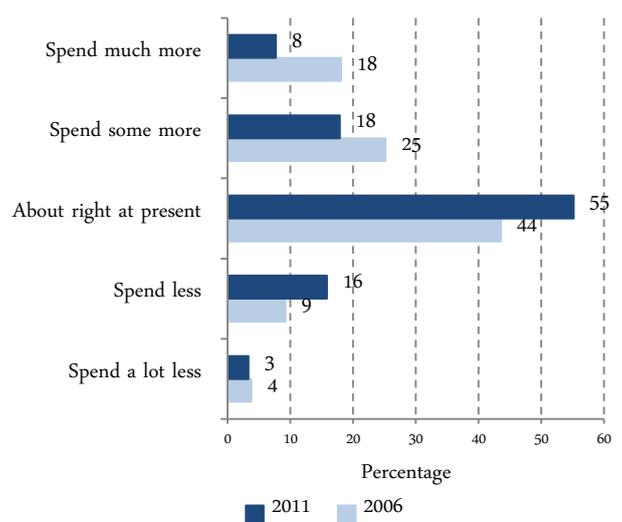
Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,366).

No significant differences in attitude were found based on attenders' gender, frequency of attendance, frequency of private devotions, or denomination.

### Change over time

Attenders in 2011 were significantly less likely to think the government should spend more on defence than attenders who were asked the same question in the 2006 NCLS (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Views on defence spending 2006 vs 2011**



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,383), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2,283).

### Summary

The majority of Australian church attenders thought the government's spending on defence was about right at present. The remaining attenders were more likely to advocate increased rather than decreased spending on defence, although the proportion in favour of more spending had decreased between 2006 and 2011. These findings varied according to attenders' age and education. Compared to the wider community, Australian church attenders were less likely to support increased government spending.

### Data sources

Powell, R., (2011) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

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

### Citation

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