

# Attitudes towards migration and the relationship with democratic satisfaction: October 2024

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## Acknowledgement and series note

In early 2024, the Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network was established as a collaboration between Australian researchers, civil society leaders and government agencies. The network is designed to encourage interdisciplinary, collaborative and applied research seeking policy-relevant insights that measure, diagnose and assess pathways strengthening Australia's democratic resilience. The network is dedicated to sharing the analysis publicly and to encourage the use of these ideas to prompt future research collaborations and actionable policy.

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## Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of attitudes toward migration and satisfaction with democracy in Australia and Europe, using data from the Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) conducted in October 2024 and the European Social Survey (ESS). The analysis highlights how Australians' perceptions of migration have evolved since 2020 and compares these to attitudes in 24 European countries. While Australians generally support migration, the perceived economic, cultural, and social benefits of migration have slightly declined over the past five years.

Australians remain more supportive of migration than most European countries, clustering with Nordic and Anglo-Celtic nations. The study examines demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing migration attitudes, finding that younger individuals, those with higher education, and overseas-born Australians hold more positive views. Individuals identifying as a different race or ethnicity than the majority are less likely to perceive migration benefits, a trend that persists across statistical models.

A key finding is the positive correlation between perceptions of migration benefits and satisfaction with democracy. Countries and individuals with favourable views on migration express higher levels of democratic satisfaction, even when controlling for other factors. These results underscore the role of inclusive policies and public narratives in fostering democratic cohesion. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for balanced migration policies that address both economic and cultural dimensions that underpin more resilient democracies.

# 1 Introduction and overview

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2024 was the ‘biggest election year in human history’<sup>1</sup> with close to 4 billion people or over half the world’s population voting in local or national elections. 2024 was also the year in which there is the greatest number of people that live in a country different to the one in which they were born in. According to *Our World in Data*,<sup>2</sup> there were 282 million emigrants in 2024, up from 141 million in 1990.

Many of the elections that took place in 2024 had extensive policy debates focused on the issue of immigration. The US election for example, which took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, led to the re-election of a president whose political identity has been tied to scepticism and often hostility towards immigration. In a post-election survey undertaken by the Pew Research Center,<sup>3</sup> 62 per cent of all voters, including 82 per cent of Republican voters, identified immigration as ‘very important’ to their vote. Furthermore, elections in the UK, France, and for the EU Parliament that also took place in 2024 included a heavy focus on immigration, albeit with different context to the US.

These elections raise a series of questions on how attitudes towards immigration are correlated with other factors that strengthen or weaken democratic values and institutions, and the degree to which democracies are resilient to pressures on social inclusion. Specifically, we write this paper in the context of a burgeoning literature on democratic resilience (Biddle et al. 2025), that suggests a strong and resilient democracy is one with high levels of social inclusion and cohesion. If views on immigration are a key political cleavage in a democracy, as the data suggests they are,<sup>4</sup> then tracking and understanding these views is essential for supporting and strengthening democratic systems.

There is a substantial existing literature that explores attitudes towards migration. In a recent empirical re-evaluation, Müller and Sai (2020) identify two potential explanations in the literature for variation across individuals and countries in attitudes towards migration. One is economic factors (developed by Facchini and Mayda (2009)), whereby the relative skill of migrants to the individual determines attitudes. In essence, those in the host country population that have skill- complementarity are more supportive, whereas those that face labour market competition from migration are less supportive. The second strand of literature identified by Müller and Sai (2020) and analysed in detail by Hainmueller et al. (2015) emphasises non-economic factors (tolerance and ethnocentrism).

The 2015 European refugee crisis serves as a key historical moment where attitudes towards migration and trust in democratic institutions were tested across several countries. In the wake of large-scale humanitarian arrivals, many European democracies experienced an observable shift in public opinion, political discourse, and electoral behaviour. Using individual-level data across 20 European countries after the crisis, Müller and Sai (2020) find support for both hypotheses mentioned above, but conclude that although ‘economic mechanisms matter, their net effect is much smaller than the impact of non-economic factors on attitudes towards immigration.’

Becker (2019) focused on a somewhat surprisingly understudied aspect of migration attitudes, namely views of recent migrant cohorts (first-generation migrants) and their children (second-generation) and grandchildren (third-generation). Using data from the US, the author found that although ‘Persons with a migration background had more favourable attitudes towards immigration compared to those without a migration background’, looking across multiple generations ‘this is the case only for first-generation immigrants.’

Despite the quite extensive literature on attitudes towards migration, including using cross-national datasets, only a small proportion makes use of Australian data. This is despite a very extensive social survey program in Australia – including the Mapping Social Cohesion surveys<sup>5</sup>, and the Australian Election Study<sup>6</sup> - with long time series on attitudes towards migration.

Australia also has one of the largest foreign-born populations (as a percentage of the total population) in the world. Indeed, across countries with a population of around 10 million or more, Australia in 2020 had the fourth largest ‘International migrant stock as a percentage of the total population’ (30.1 per cent of a population of around 25.5 million) behind the United Arab Emirates (88.1 per cent, 9.9 million), Saudi Arabia (38.6 per cent, 34.8 million), and Jordan (33.9 per cent, 10.2 million). However, Australia is the highest democracy on that list, meaning it is a potential case study of how high migrant flows can be accommodated without political backlash. Furthermore, it has been argued (Elias et al. 2020) that ‘Australia’s unique and strong multicultural ethos has combined with successful intercultural strategies at different levels of diversity governance, policy and practice across various sectoral terrains.’

There are some Australian-specific studies, but many of these papers are from many decades ago, prior to a recent uptick in migration and changing source countries (Birrell and Betts 2001; Kamp et al. 2017; and Richardson and Taft 1968). Ueffing et al. (2015) compared attitudes in Australia with those in Germany. After demonstrating a more positive attitude empirically, the authors concluded that the ‘planned integrative immigration policy in Australia supports the formation of more positive attitudes towards immigration by influencing people’s perception on the economic and socio-cultural impacts of immigration.’ That is, Australia has long had a migration policy that strictly polices entry into the country, and prioritises migrants with high and relevant human capital.

The views of Australians towards migration are therefore likely to be one factor that influences broader political attitudes, including voting patterns and the outcome of the 2025 Federal election. To explore these views, we make use of a recent survey of the social attitudes of a broadly representative sample of the Australian population. The Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS), conducted in October 2024, includes responses from 2,062 adult Australians across all states/territories and demographic groups. The survey includes citizens and non-citizens, and was conducted online using the Life in Australia panel, and has been weighted to accurately represent the Australian population. Prior to weighting the data, 29.9 per cent of the sample were born overseas, allowing for robust analysis of Australian born vs. foreign-born respondents.

In addition to exploring in-depth but in isolation the attitudes of Australians in October 2024, we make two other comparisons of interest. The first comparison we make is with results from a similar survey conducted in February 2020. This survey was conducted using a very similar process to the current survey (predominantly online, using the Life in Australia panel, and weighted to the general public), with a very similar set of questions, and had a total sample of 3,228 respondents. Importantly, this survey was conducted just prior to the arrival of COVID-19 and related public health measures in Australia, meaning it is less impacted by COVID-era policies.

While the Life in Australia provides a probability-based, broadly representative sample of the Australian population, there is a key limitation to keep in mind. Specifically, all data collection is conducted in English. This means that the attitudes of those with limited English language ability are not as accurately reflected in the survey. There is a particular difficulty in a country like Australia in translating surveys into other languages, as there is no 'second language' that captures a sizable minority of speakers (compared to Spanish in the US, for example).

The second comparison we make is with respondents from 28 European countries that had taken part in Wave 11 of the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2023 and 2024. The Australian survey that is used as the basis for this paper was, as the name suggests, modelled on English-language version of the ESS questionnaire, with exact overlap with the migration questions. Furthermore, the countries in the ESS are comparable with Australia as they are relatively stable democracies, and for the most part predominantly immigration destination rather than source countries (at least recently).

The current version of the integrated file from the ESS<sup>7</sup> has 46,162 total responses, ranging from 685 respondents in Cyprus to 2,865 in Italy. The ESS includes countries inside and outside the European Union, with sample selection and collection methodology specific to each particular country's circumstances, and questions administered in a range of European and other languages.

With this data introduction and context in mind, the remainder of the paper focuses on the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Australians towards further permanent migration?
  - a. Have these attitudes changed through time?
  - b. How do they compare to views within countries in Europe?
  - c. How do these attitudes vary depending on whether the migrants are from 'the same race or ethnic group as most Australians' or from different race or ethnic groups.
2. To what extent is permanent migration seen as bad or good for the Australian economy, cultural life, and as a place to live?
  - a. Have these attitudes changed through time?
  - b. How do they compare to views within countries in Europe?
  - c. How do these views vary by broad demographic and socioeconomic group, or by other social and political attitudes
3. To what extent do Australians see themselves as being of the same race or ethnic group as most people in the country and how does this relate to attitudes towards migration?

- a. How does this relationship vary between Australia and Europe and within European countries?
4. To what extent are attitudes towards migration associated with broader views on democracy.

We consider each of these questions in turn, with the final section of the paper providing a summary and concluding comments.

## 2 Attitudes towards migration in Australia

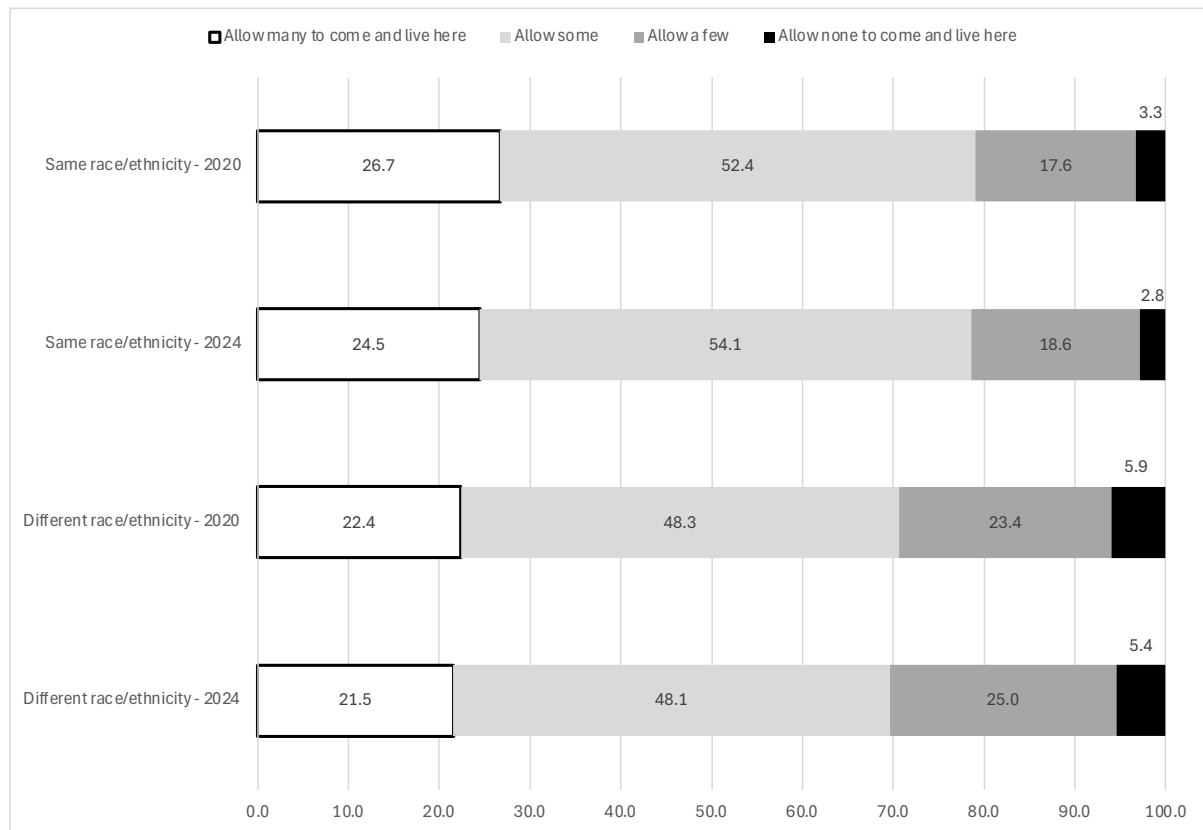
The first two questions in the AUSSI-ESS specifically focused on migration that were asked in the Australian surveys are listed below (**bolded** in the same way as the original question):

- To what extent do you think Australia should allow people of the **same race or ethnic group** as most Australian people to come and live here? and
- How about people of a **different** race or ethnic group from most Australian people?

There are two main points of interest in the results presented in Figure 1. First, for each year of data collection (2020 and 2024), there were more Australians that supported many or some people from the same race or ethnic group as most Australians to come and live in the country than supported many or some people from a different race or ethnic group. The difference shouldn't be exaggerated, as there were still more than one-in-five Australians (21.5 per cent) that supported many people from a different race or ethnicity to come and live in Australia and slightly less than half (48.1 per cent) that supported some coming to live here. Nonetheless, the differences between the two variables (same race/ethnicity and different race/ethnicity) are statistically significant.

The second thing to note though is that the levels and relativities haven't changed much at all since 2020. There was a slight decline in the per cent of Australians that thought many people with the same race/ethnicity should be allowed to come and live here (from 26.7 to 24.5 per cent), but this was not statistically significant and was also made up for by a commensurate increase in the proportion that thought some people should come and live here. Furthermore, there was an even smaller change in the per cent that thought many people from a different race/ethnicity should be allowed to come and live in Australia. That is, despite the potentially increased salience of the issue of immigration in Australia over the last five years, attitudes in Australia towards this aspect of migration have barely shifted.

**Figure 1 Attitudes towards permanent migration in Australia, by whether or not person identifies as same or different race/ethnicity to majority of Australians, February 2020 and October 2024**



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS), February 2020 and October 2024

While there has been a reasonable level of consistency in the support for allowing additional migrants to come to Australia between 2020 and 2024, there has been a drop in the perceived benefits of migration to Australia. Specifically, respondents were asked the following three questions on a scale of 0 to 10:

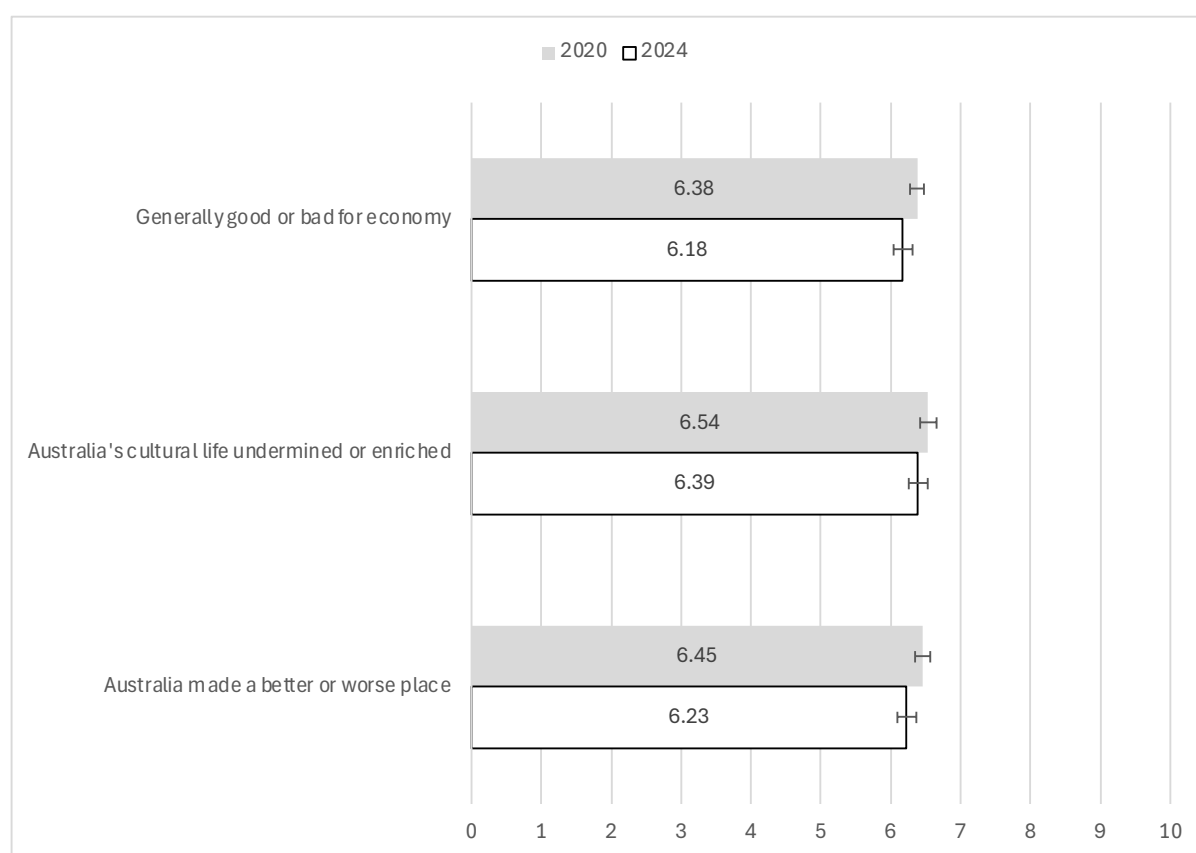
- Would you say it is generally bad or good for Australia's economy that people come to live here from other countries?
  - (0 is bad for the economy, 10 is good)
- Would you say that Australia's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?
  - (0 is cultural life undermined, 10 enriched)
- Is Australia made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?
  - (0 is worse place to live, 10)

On balance, we can see in Figure 2 that Australians are more likely to see migration to Australia as positive, rather than negative. On a scale of 0 to 10, the average value in 2024 is 6.18 for migration being generally good or bad for economy, 6.39 for Australia's cultural life undermined or enriched, and 6.23 for Australia made a better or worse place. However, this support declined between 2020 and 2024. The declines are all statistically significant and range in magnitude from a -0.15 decline for enriching cultural life (or 5.6



per cent of one standard deviation) to a decline of -0.23 for making Australia a better place to live (9.0 per cent of one standard deviation).

**Figure 2 Perceived benefits of migration to Australia, February 2020 and October 2024**



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS), February 2020 and October 2024

Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

### 3 Attitudes in Australia compared to attitudes in Europe

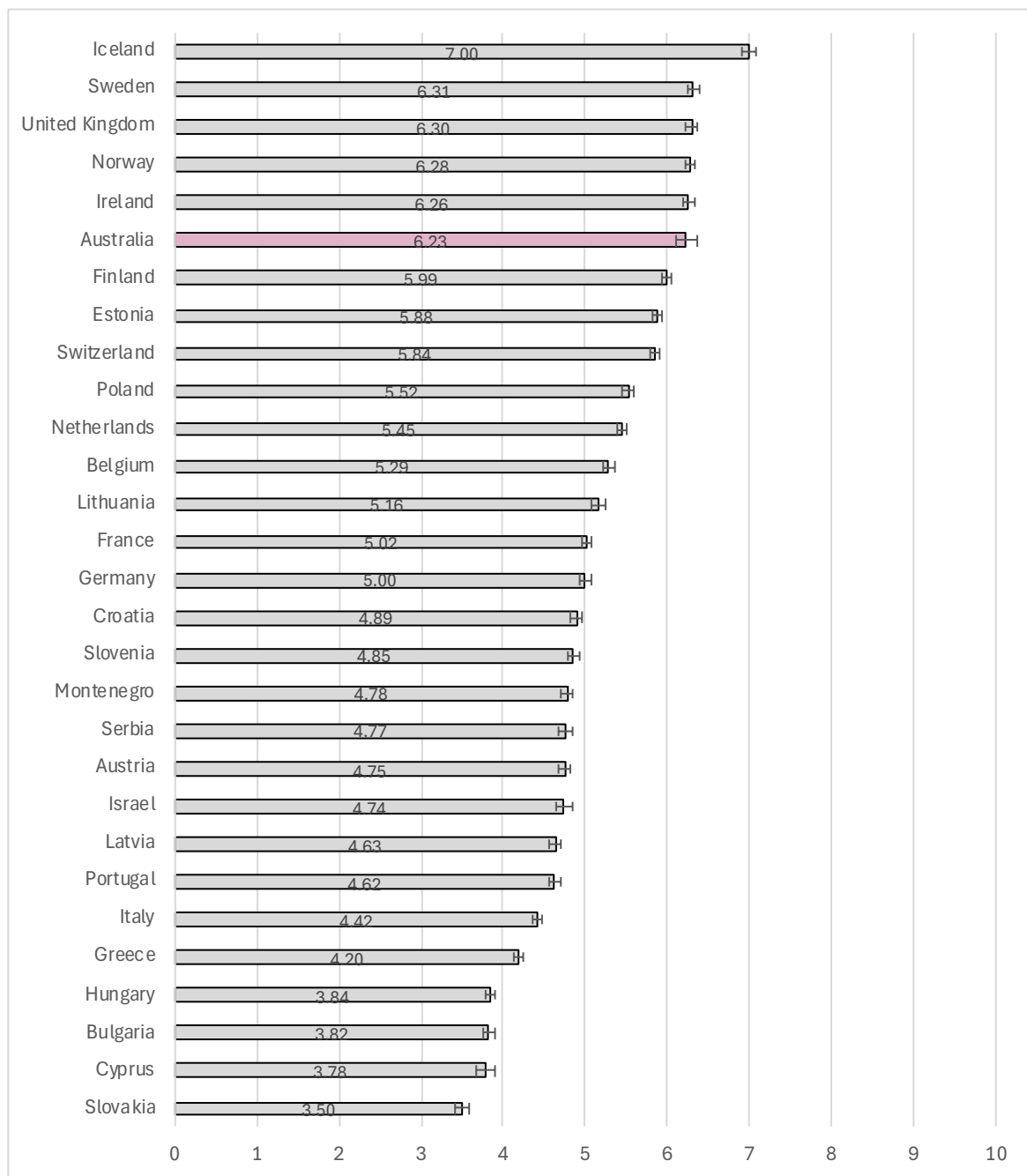
On balance, Australians are broadly supportive of migration and see it as having more benefits than costs. This partly reflects the long history of Australia as a country that has reasonably successfully integrated migrants into society and the economy (Megalogenis 2015). According to the 2021 Census, 51.5 per cent of Australians were either born overseas, or had a parent born overseas, with detailed empirical analysis suggesting that migrants to Australia, in particular skilled migrants, do well on average and well compared to other high migration countries like Australia (Harrap et al. 2022).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, there is ‘almost no evidence that immigration harms the labour market outcomes of those born in Australia’ (Breunig et al. 2017).

European countries have a more recent and less extensive history of migration, particularly of migration from outside of Europe. According to the United Nations,<sup>9</sup> with 30.1 per cent of Australians in 2020 born overseas, Australia has a much larger migration stock than all but the very small European countries, with only Switzerland (28.8 per cent) and Malta (26.0 per cent) coming close amongst moderate-large European countries.

It is unclear *a priori* whether a high rate of historic migration might positively or negatively predict support for future migration or perceptions that migration is beneficial. We can begin to answer this question by placing Australia in the distribution of average responses to the questions presented in the previous section, across the countries for which ESS data is available. We begin in Figure 3 with the average value for the question on whether a country is made a better or worse place to live by migration, with countries ordered from the highest perceived benefits (Iceland) to the lowest perceived benefits (Slovakia).

Figure 3 highlights the very wide variation across Europe in perceptions of migration. Iceland is an outlier, with a very high perceived benefit (7.00 on the 0 to 10 scale). Australia is then within a cluster of 5 other countries that have a value of around 6.2-6.3. Other countries in this group are the other Nordic countries (Sweden and Norway with Finland the next highest value) and the Anglo-Celtic ones (the United Kingdom and Ireland). The countries with relatively low values (values below 4.5) are in the Mediterranean (Cyprus, Greece, and Italy) or Central Europe (Slovakia and Hungary).

**Figure 3 Perceived benefits of migration, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**



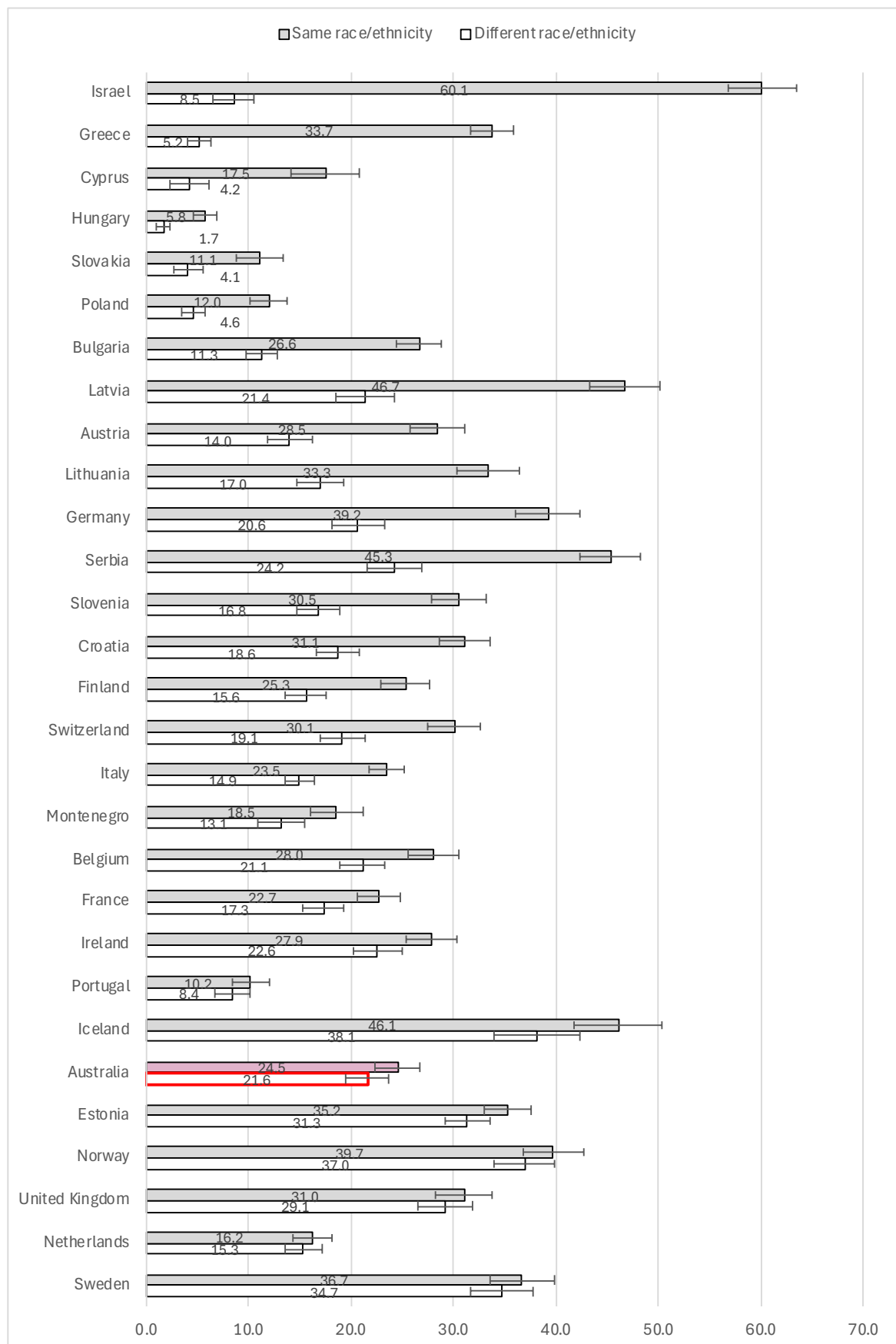
Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

There is a strong correlation between the average perception of the benefit of migration to the country and the proportion of people that think many people from the same race and ethnicity should be allowed to come and live in the country (0.3367) and an even greater correlation with the proportion of people that think many people from a different race or ethnicity should be allowed to come and live in the country (0.7974). While this shows that views towards migration are likely influenced by a common factor, the finding that there is a somewhat different correlation suggests that there are some countries where consistency in race and ethnicity is relatively highly prioritised.

We can see this disjuncture between support for same and different race/ethnicity in Figure 4, which gives the per cent of that country that supports many more people coming to live to that country, ordered by the relative difference in support depending on whether the question is about migrants from the same race/ethnicity or from a different race and ethnicity. That is, the first country in the chart – Israel – has more than 7 times as many people saying that many people should come to live there from countries with a similar race/ethnicity (60.1 per cent) compared to countries with a different race/ethnicity (8.5 per cent) and the second country – Greece – has more than 6 times. At the bottom of the graph, there were only 1.06 times as many people in Sweden that think there should be many people from countries with a similar race/ethnicity (36.7 per cent) compared to countries with a different race/ethnicity (34.7 per cent). Australia also has a relatively small difference (1.13 times, or 24.5 compared to 21.6 per cent).

**Figure 3 Attitudes towards permanent migration, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate. Countries are sorted by the relative difference between the two percentages

## 4 Predicting support for migration

Support for migration varies substantially within countries, as well as across countries. We explore this first by considering the factors associated with the value reported by respondents to the 2024 AUSSI-ESS survey on the question of whether migration makes Australia a better or worse place to live. We then undertake a cross-country analysis, including the 28 countries in the ESS, as well as Australia.

### 4.1 Factors associated with support for migration in Australia

We estimate relationships in this sub-section using a linear regression model,<sup>10</sup> with coefficient estimates presented in Table 1. The first model includes basic demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables only. Each subsequent model includes one additional variable, capturing either social/political attitudes, or more detailed demographic characteristics. We explain each of these additional explanatory variables as we introduce the results.

Beginning with the first model, there are no differences in attitudes towards our main measure of support for migration by sex. There are, however, age differences. Specifically, compared to the base case category (aged 35 to 44), younger Australians are far more likely to think that migration makes Australia a better place to live. Those who were born overseas in a non-English speaking country are far more positive towards migration than those who were born in Australia. However, the association with whether someone speaks a language other than English is in the opposite direction (negative).

There is a strong correlation between support for migration and education. The lowest level of support is amongst those that have not completed Year 12, with a difference of -1.20 relative to those that have completed Year 12 but don't have any other qualifications, holding constant other variables. Those with a certificate or diploma are also less supportive, whereas those with a post-graduate degree are more supportive. It is tempting to interpret this finding in a pejorative way (low levels of education associated with ignorance towards the net benefits of migration, or representing some form of prejudice). It is not possible to reject these interpretations with the data available. However, it should be noted that the literature suggests that those with low levels of education are more likely to be adversely affected by migration whereas those with higher levels of education (and the total Australian population) are positively affected (Bond and Gaston 2011).

If we move onto Model 2, we can begin to see some of the more subjective variables that also have a strong association with attitudes towards migration. Respondents were asked ‘In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?’ We break the population into three groups finding that those that identify as being left of centre (a value of 0 to 4) are more likely to see migration as being beneficial compared to those in the middle of the distribution (a value of 5) who are in turn more likely to see migration as being beneficial compared to those that self-identify as being right of centre.

In the third model, we look at the relationship between self-reported emotional attachment to Australia amongst respondents, and their views towards migration. Those who have a stronger emotional attachment to Australia are more likely to think that migration makes life in Australia better rather than worse. This may at first glance appear counter-intuitive. However, Verkuyten (2021) reported that ‘stronger national attachment tends to be associated with stronger anti-immigrant attitudes in non-settler countries, but not in settler countries in which cultural diversity is a constitutive norm of the national identity.’

The final model includes a variable for whether the individual themselves identifies as being of a different race or ethnicity to the majority of Australians (the specific question is ‘Do you feel you are part of the same race or ethnic group as most people in Australia’). In the 2024 survey, 22.7 per cent of Australians answer yes to that question. Again, it is somewhat counter-intuitive, but we find that those who identify as a different race/ethnicity to the majority of Australians are less likely to think that migration makes life in Australia better. The association is quite large (coefficient of -0.625) and although we do not present results here, the association holds whether or not we control for any other variables in the model (including being born overseas), whether or not we use the other two migration questions as the dependent variable (beneficial for the economy or beneficial for cultural life), or whether we use an ordered probit model where the dependent variable is either support for migration of people from the same race/ethnicity as Australia or migration of people from a different race/ethnicity. Within Australia, at least, this appears to be a very robust finding.

**Table 1 Factors associated with whether Australians think migration a better place to live, October 2024**

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Identifies as left wing			0.764	***				
Identifies as right-wing			-0.532	***				
Self-reported emotional attachment to Australia					0.172	***		
Identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity to the majority of Australians							-0.625	***
Female	0.069		-0.018		0.014		0.063	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.835	**	0.640		0.885	**	0.902	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.435	**	0.447	**	0.556	***	0.449	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.019		0.068		-0.119		0.007	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.150		0.145		-0.061		0.114	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.305		0.258		0.012		0.291	
Aged 75 years plus	0.358		0.468	*	0.001		0.286	
Born overseas in English speaking country	-0.026		-0.074		0.141		-0.018	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.492	**	0.632	**	0.500	**	0.549	**
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.429	*	-0.400		-0.373		-0.288	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-1.196	***	-1.050	***	-1.226	***	-1.189	***
Has non-degree qualifications	-0.488	**	-0.478	*	-0.484	**	-0.464	*
Has a post graduate degree	0.170		0.040		0.156		0.158	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.698	**	0.599	**	0.685	**	0.743	**
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.161		-0.087		-0.183		-0.187	
Constant term	6.309	***	6.175	***	5.171	***	6.422	***
Sample size	2,004		1,938		2,001		1,987	

Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024

Notes: Linear regression models. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; has completed Year 12 but does not have a qualification; and lives in a capital city.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*\*; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled \*

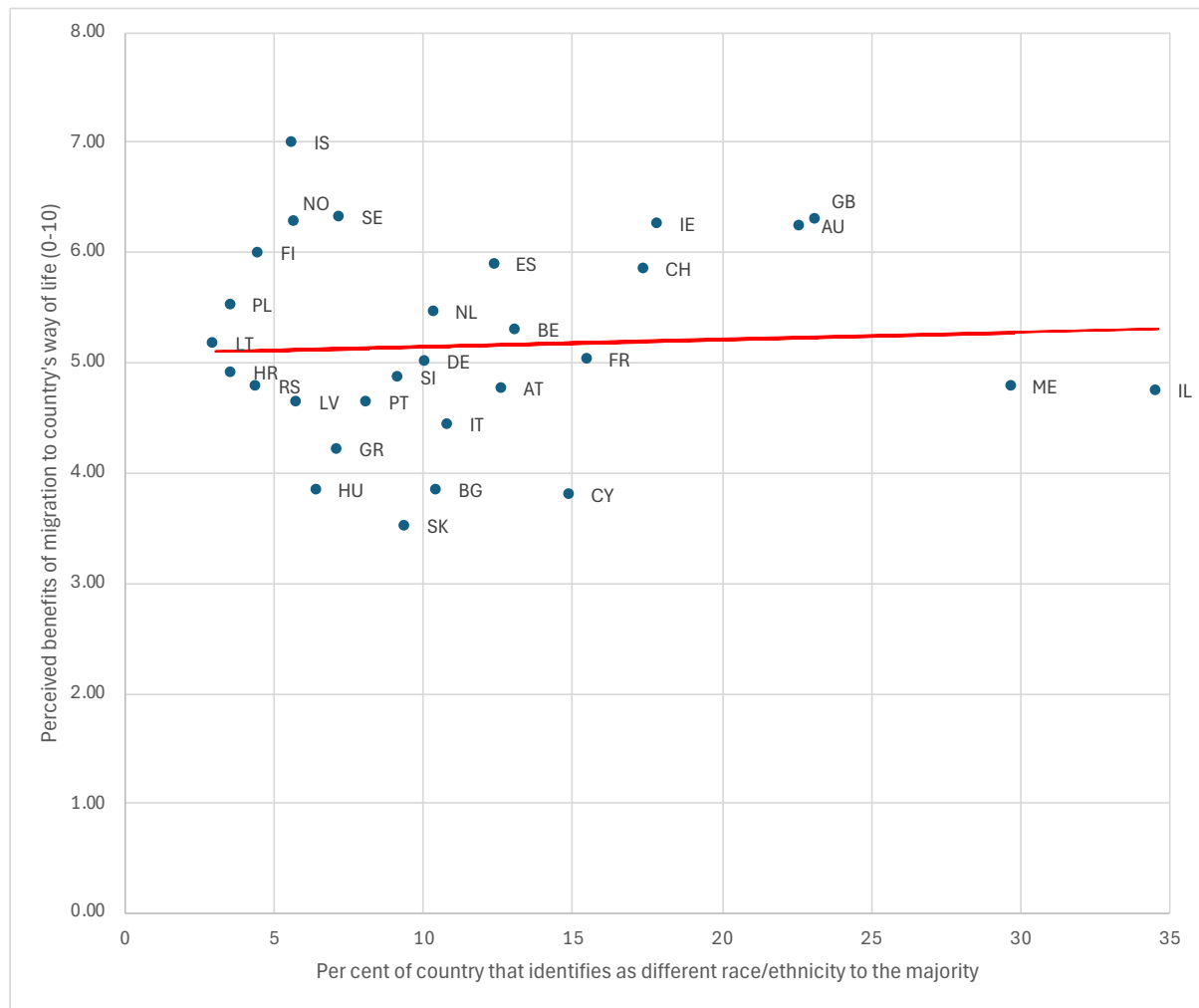


## 4.2 International predictors of support for migration

The previous section identified that within Australia, there is a negative relationship between whether or not a person identifies as being from a different race/ethnicity as the majority of Australians and their perceived benefits of migration to the country. In this section we extend the analysis to consider the nature of the relationship across countries, as well as within countries in Europe.

Figure 4 shows that there is no consistent relationship across countries in Europe and Australia in terms of the per cent of the country that identifies as being from a different race/ethnicity to the majority and the perceived benefits of migration (a measure that is quite high in Australia). There is a small positive slope (coefficient of 0.007, the red line), but a cross-country regression analysis did not find a statistically significant association (p-value of 0.761). This is essentially because there are a number of ‘high minority’ countries with high perceived benefits of migration (Australia and the United Kingdom), ‘low minority’ countries that also see high benefits of migration (Iceland), and others in the opposite direction.

**Figure 4 Perceived benefits of migration and proportion of population who identify as being a different race/ethnicity from majority, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**

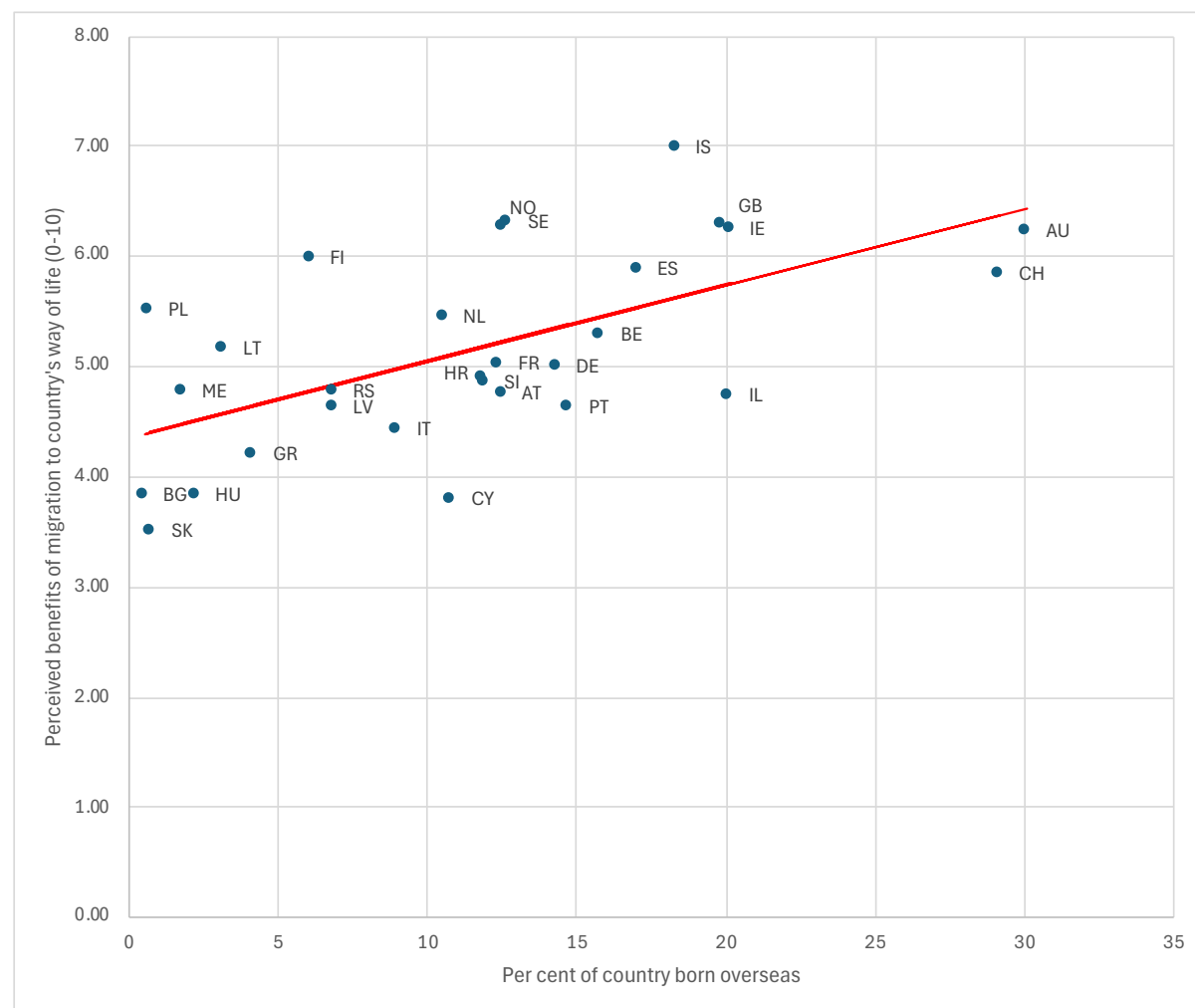


Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: Sample size and full country names are given in Appendix Table 1

There is a much stronger relationship between the per cent of the country born overseas and perceived benefits of migration (cross-country regression coefficient of 0.069) with a p-value from a cross-country regression analysis of less than 0.01. However, Figure 5 shows that even with that comparison, there are a number of countries quite far from the (red) fitted line.

**Figure 5 Perceived benefits of migration and proportion of population who were born overseas, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: Sample size and full country names are given in Appendix Table 1.

There is a correlation at the national level between the proportion of the population born overseas and support for migration. There are two potential explanations for this. The first is that migrants themselves are more likely to be supportive of migration, and they dominate the views of the native-born population which may be indifferent or have mildly negative views. The second, alternative, explanation is that the native-born population that lives in countries with relatively high migration are accustomed to and socialised with migrants, and perceive more benefits than costs. The individual-level data allows us to test these alternative hypotheses.

Specifically, we combine all observations across our 29 countries (including Australia) into a single dataset. The total number of observations (after exclusions due to missing values) is 45,096. We run a model where our dependent variable is perceived benefits of migration, and we include sex and age category as control variables. We then include two sets of explanatory variables, built around migration and race/ethnicity. For each of these variables, we include the individual's own status, the average value for the country in which the person lives, and the interaction between the two (i.e., six variables in total).

We include population weights in the analysis, and cluster standard errors at the country level. Results are summarised in Table 2.

Looking first at the control variables, females are more likely than males to see migration as being of benefit to the country, as are those under the age of 44 (compared to those 45 years and over, and particularly those 55 years and older).

On average, across all Europe and Australia, we do not find any relationship between the three variables capturing self-reported race/ethnicity and perceived benefits of migration. The three variables capturing migration status are, however, statistically significant. Specifically, those who were themselves born overseas were more likely to see migration of others to the country as beneficial. Amongst the native-born, living in a country with a high migration rate was associated with a higher rate of support for migration. This relationship, although still positive and statistically significant, is much weaker for those born overseas themselves.

Putting these results together, migrants see a large benefit of migration regardless of where they live, whereas the native-born only see a benefit if they live in countries with a large number of migrants.

**Table 2 Factors associated with whether Australians think migration a better place to live, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**

Explanatory variables	Coeff.	Signif.
Identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity to the majority	0.023	
Per cent of country that identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity	-0.015	
Interaction – Individual identification x country per cent	-0.010	
Born in a different country to which the interview took place (overseas born)	1.496	***
Per cent of country overseas born	0.074	***
Interaction – Individual born overseas x country per cent	-0.034	*
Female	0.107	*
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.136	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.126	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.181	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.364	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.423	***
Aged 75 years plus	-0.581	***
Constant term	4.513	***
Sample size	45,096	

Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Notes: Linear regression models. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in the survey country; and does not identify as a different race or ethnicity.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*\*; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled \*

We find quite similar results when we use our other main measures of attitudes towards migration as the dependent variable (support for migration of people of the same race/ethnicity as the majority of the country and support for migration of people of different race/ethnicity). As these are categorical variables, we need to estimate in slightly different ways. We use the ordered probit model (still using weights and clustering standard errors), with results presented as coefficients. The magnitude of these coefficients cannot be interpreted in the same way as with linear regression, but the sign (positive or negative) and statistical significance can be.

The results for the three country of birth questions are quite similar in Table 3 compared to Table 2 (in direction and statistical significance). Those born overseas are more supportive of permanent migration (regardless of the race and ethnicity of the future migrants), as are those native-born who live in high-migrant countries. The relationship between the migrant share of the country and support for migration is much weaker (and for the first estimation non-existent) for those born overseas themselves. There is once again relationship with the race/ethnicity measures.

**Table 3 Factors associated with support for permanent migration, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**

Explanatory variables	Same race/ethnicity		Different race/ethnicity	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity to the majority	-0.070		0.067	
Per cent of country that identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity	-0.003		-0.009	
Interaction – Individual identification x country per cent	-0.012		-0.008	
Born in a different country to which the interview took place (overseas born)	0.655	***	0.720	***
Per cent of country overseas born	0.023	**	0.039	***
Interaction – Individual born overseas x country per cent	-0.026	***	-0.031	***
Female	0.020		0.050	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.155	***	0.196	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.068	*	0.069	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.067	***	-0.114	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.064	**	-0.171	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.134	***	-0.271	***
Aged 75 years plus	-0.205	***	-0.351	***
Cut-point 1	-1.342		-0.931	
Cut-point 2	-0.472		0.051	
Cut-point 3	0.775		1.265	
Sample size	45,508		45,494	

Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Notes: Ordered probit regression models. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in the survey country; and does not identify as a different race or ethnicity.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*\*; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled \*

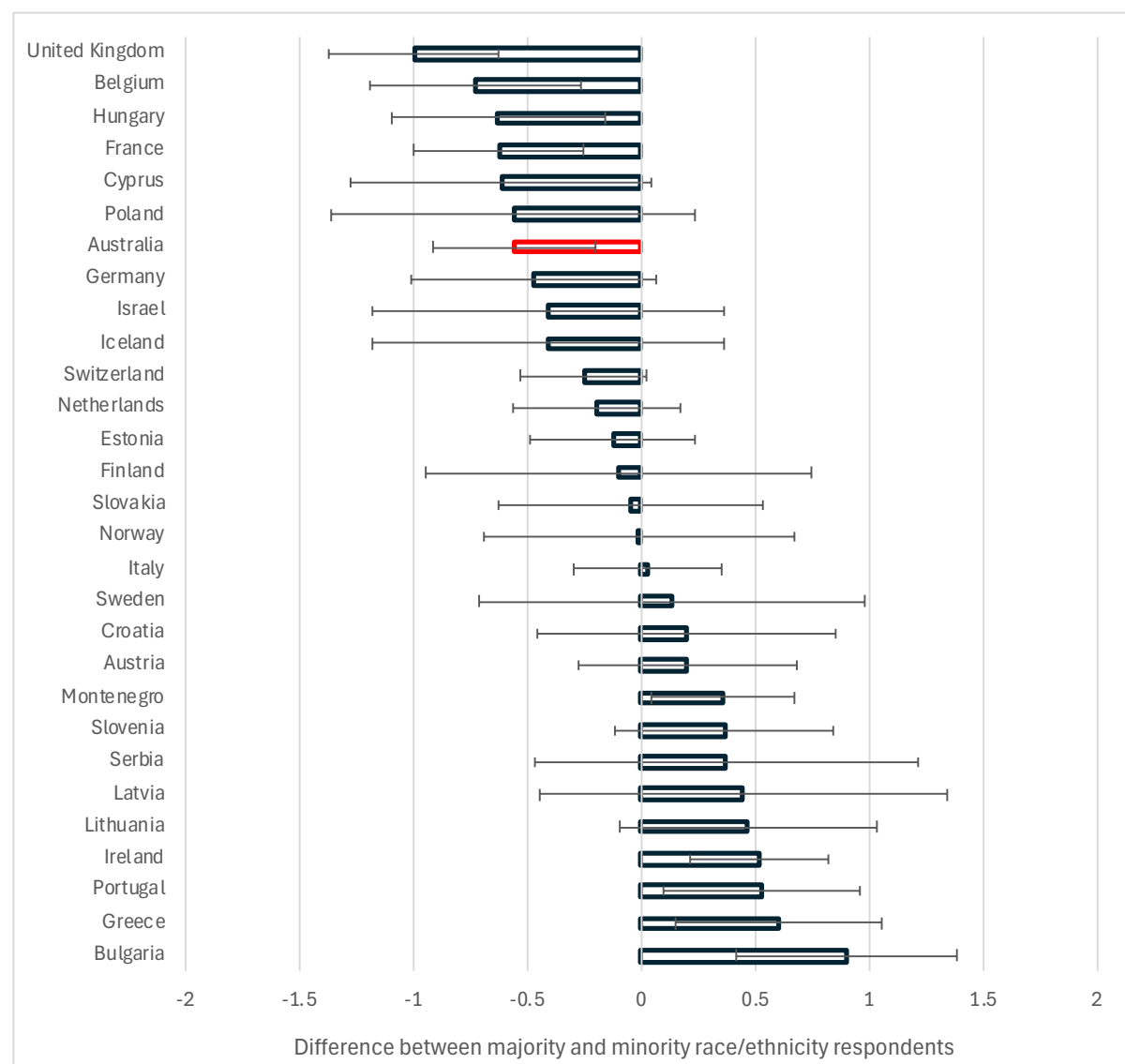
Looking back to Table 1, we found that within Australia there was a negative association between a belief that migration is beneficial for the country's way of life and the person self-identifying as being from a different race and ethnicity as the majority of the population. In Table 2, we did not find an association. One potential explanation for this is the inclusion of country-level values and interactions, increasing the complexity of the model. However, when we run a simple model with just individual associations, the variable is still statistically significant. As shown in Figure 6, the actual explanation appears to be that there are some countries in the sample where the association is positive, some where it is negative (like Australia), and some where there is no association at all. Averaged across the full set of countries, these associations cancel each other out.

Specifically, Figure 6 presents results from 29 separate linear regressions, one for each of the countries in the combined datasets. The results are the coefficients on the individual-level measure of whether or not a person self-identifies as being of a different race/ethnicity as the majority of the country. Additional variables in the model are whether or not the person was born overseas (which had a positive association for all but

ten of the estimations - Cyprus, Croatia, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, and Sweden were all not significant) as well as age and sex. It should be kept in mind that the figure tells us nothing about the average level of perceived support for migration (this was covered in Figure 3), but rather the difference between the majority and minority populations in those countries.

There are five countries that have a significantly negative association between minority status and perceived benefits of migration at the 5 per cent level of significance (including Australia, as mentioned previously) alongside four countries where there is a significantly positive association.

**Figure 6** Difference in perceived benefits of migration by whether or not identifies as being a different race/ethnicity from majority, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: Sample size and full country names are given in Appendix Table 1

## 5 Relationship between views on migration and satisfaction with democracy

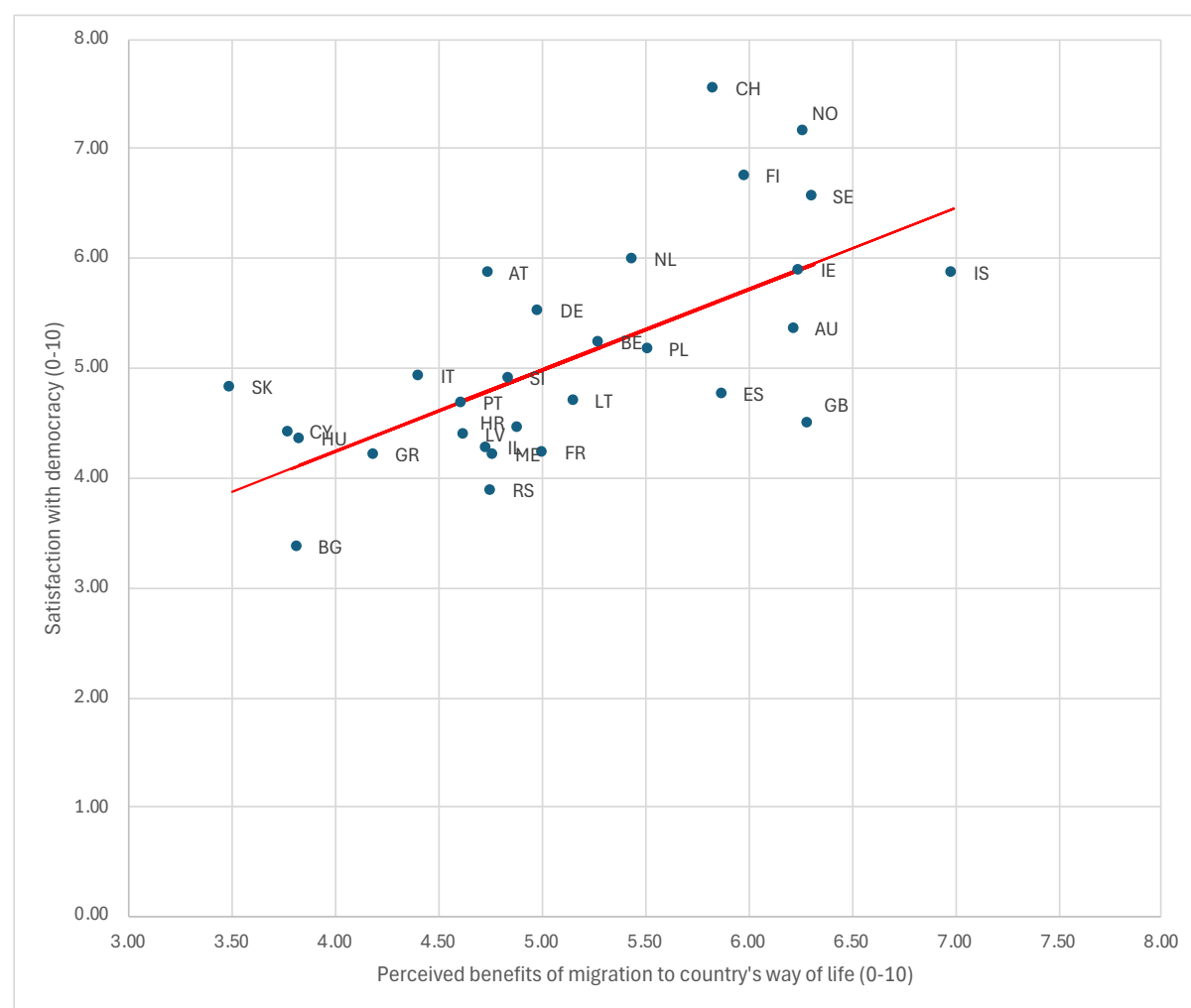
A reasonable question to ask regarding the results presented in the previous sections is – so what? Why should we care about the general public’s views towards migration? One response is that in a democracy, policy makers respond at least in part to the perceived wishes of the electorate. Many national leaders, including in Australia, have either advocated for reductions in migration, tried to implement policies that have such an effect, or in some cases been highly critical of migrants themselves. Given the strong support for migration in many countries (as shown in Section 3 of this paper), one might

ask how well they are targeting the median voter. Another, perhaps more interesting motivation, is that attitudes towards migration may be correlated with other outcomes that we care about.

One outcome of particular interest in the current environment is the level of satisfaction that residents have with the democratic system in which they live. Respondents to the ESS (and the AUSSI-ESS) were asked ‘And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?’ with the respondent’s country name included, and response options ranging from 0 (Extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (Extremely satisfied) Across the sample, responses range from 3.88 in Serbia to 7.0 in Iceland.

We can see in Figure 7 that there is a reasonably strong relationship at the country level. With a regression coefficient of 0.734 and a p-value in the country-level regression of less than 0.01, those countries that report a higher perceived benefit of migration are more likely to be satisfied with their democracy.

**Figure 7 Satisfaction with democracy and perceived benefits of migration, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**



Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Note: Sample size and full country names are given in Appendix Table 1

This result holds at the individual-level as well. Our final set of analysis is again run for all 29 countries combined, with the dependent variable satisfaction with democracy, and



the main independent variable perceived benefit of migration. In the first model, that is all we control for (apart from age and sex). However, in Model 2 we include migration and race/ethnicity status, with the final model also including average values for the country and interactions with the individual-level measure. We again cluster standard errors and use weights.

**Table 4 Factors associated with satisfaction with democracy, Australia and select European countries, 2022-2024**

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Perceived benefit of migration	0.302	***	0.287	***	0.262	***
Identifies as different race/ethnicity			-0.300	**	-0.081	
Per cent of country that identifies as different race/ethnicity					-0.039	*
Interaction – Individual identification x country per cent					-0.007	
Born in a different country (overseas born)			0.744	***	0.524	
Per cent of country overseas born					0.054	**
Interaction – Individual born overseas x country per cent					0.000	
Female	-0.129	***	-0.130	***	-0.124	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.309	***	0.349	***	0.272	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.045		0.064		-0.014	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.043		-0.029		-0.045	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.003		0.026		-0.041	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.143	*	0.170	**	0.095	
Aged 75 years plus	0.406	***	0.437	***	0.339	**
Constant	3.466	***	3.481	***	3.542	***
Sample size	44,417		44,036		44,036	

Source Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) October 2024, and ESS 2022-23

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in the survey country; and does not identify as a different race or ethnicity.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*\*; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled \*\*, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled \*

## 6 Summary and concluding comments

This paper examines the intersection between public attitudes towards migration and satisfaction with democracy in Australia and Europe. Using data from the Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) conducted in October 2024 and comparable European Social Survey (ESS) data, it analyses how Australians' perceptions of migration have evolved since 2020 and how these compare to attitudes in 28 European countries.

The findings reveal that Australians' views on migration have remained relatively stable over the past five years, with consistent support for allowing people of the same or different ethnic groups to migrate. However, perceptions of migration's benefits for Australia's economy, cultural life, and liveability have declined slightly but significantly. Comparatively though, Australians are generally more supportive of migration than many European nations, with responses clustering with Nordic and Anglo-Celtic countries in terms of seeing migration as beneficial.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors are strongly associated with attitudes toward migration. Younger Australians and those with higher education levels tend to view migration more favourably. Interestingly, individuals born overseas are consistently more

supportive of migration, while those identifying as a different race or ethnicity than the majority in the country report lower perceived benefits of migration.

The paper also identifies a positive correlation between perceptions of migration's benefits and satisfaction with democracy. Countries and individuals who view migration positively are more likely to express satisfaction with their democratic systems. This relationship holds even when controlling for other demographic, political, and cultural factors, underscoring the broader implications of migration attitudes views towards political systems and values.

Migration remains a salient issue in Australia and beyond, shaping and reflecting broader societal and political dynamics. While Australians display broad support for migration compared to many European countries, differences within demographic groups highlight the complexity of public attitudes. These findings underline the importance of policy approaches that address both the economic and cultural dimensions of migration, ensuring that migration's benefits are widely distributed and perceived.

Moreover, the link between positive migration attitudes and democratic satisfaction emphasizes the role of inclusive policies and rhetoric in bolstering democratic legitimacy. Policymakers should recognize that fostering a shared understanding of migration's contributions can strengthen democratic cohesion, especially in a time when migration is a divisive electoral issue.

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## Appendix – Additional tables

**Appendix Table 1 – Sample sizes and country codes**

Country	Country code	Sample size
Australia	AU	2,062
Austria	AT	2,354
Belgium	BE	1,594
Bulgaria	BG	2,239
Switzerland	CH	1,384
Cyprus	CY	685
Germany	DE	2,420
Estonia	ES	1,844
Finland	FI	1,563
France	FR	1,771
United Kingdom	GB	1,684
Greece	GR	2,757
Croatia	HR	1,563
Hungary	HU	2,118
Ireland	IE	2,017
Israel	IL	906
Iceland	IS	842
Italy	IT	2,865
Lithuania	LT	1,365
Latvia	LV	1,252
Montenegro	ME	1,609
Netherlands	NL	1,695
Norway	NO	1,337
Poland	PL	1,442
Portugal	PT	1,373
Serbia	RS	1,563
Sweden	SE	1,230
Slovenia	SI	1,248
Slovakia	SK	1,442

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.undp.org/super-year-elections>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://ourworldindata.org/migration>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/13/what-trump-supporters-believe-and-expect/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/latest-insights/the-seven-segments-and-english-identity/>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/research/mapping-social-cohesion/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://australianelectionstudy.org/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://ess.sikt.no/en/>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/census-2021-australia-becomes-a-majority-migrant-nation-20220627-p5awto>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/international-migrant-stock>
- <sup>10</sup> The dependent variable can take on one of 11 values, but is not continuous. We test the robustness of the results by estimating an ordered probit model. The measured associations do not vary substantially in terms of statistical significance, direction, and relative magnitude. However, we focus on the linear regression analysis as the coefficient are easier to interpret.