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Attitudes towards the justice system

Comparing Australia and Belgium

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Outline

Why Australia and Belgium?

- Arising from the ISC World Crime Forum, October 2013 in Canberra

Research questions

- How much confidence do people in Australia and Belgium have in the police, courts and justice systems in their own countries?
- What differences in these perceptions exist between the two countries?
- What explanations can be offered to explain the commonalities and divergences that are present?

Data sources and results

- Australian Survey of Social Attitudes for 2011
- Belgium Justice Barometer for 2010
- Comparative geo-political, social, economic and crime statistics
- Findings and some preliminary explanations

The way forward

- Improving the evidence base, data analysis and hypothesis testing



Comparing Australia and Belgium 2011

Geo-political factors

- **Size:** Australia 7.7 million sq km; Belgium 30,500 sq km (half of Tasmania)
- **Population:** Australia 21.5 million; Belgium 11.0 million
- **Arable land:** Australia 6%; Belgium: 24%

Social factors

- **Median age:** Australia 37; Belgium 43
- **Tertiary enrolment:** Australia 83%; Belgium: 69%
- **Internet penetration:** Australia 88.8%; Belgium 81.3%

Economic factors

- **GDP per capita:** Australia: €43,846; Belgium €32,818
- **GDP growth rate:** Australia: 2.4%; Belgium: 1.8%
- **Unemployment rate:** Australia: 5.6%; Belgium: 7.1%
- **T.I. Corruption Perceptions Index:** Australia: 8.8; Belgium: 7.5 (10 best)



Comparing crime and safety in Australia and Belgium

Recorded crime* (per 100,000 population in 2011)

- **Homicide rate:** Australia (1.1) [Sydney 1.1]; Belgium (1.9) [Brussels 2.1]
- **Theft offences rate:** Australia 2,155; Belgium: 2,280

Criminal justice agencies* (per 100,000 population)

- **Persons convicted:** Australia: 69.2 (2004); Belgium: 1,372 (2002)
- **Police officers rate:** Australia: 223 (2004); Belgium: 357 (2004)
- **Imprisonment rate:** Australia: 95.5 (2004); Belgium: 43.8 (2002)
- **Remand detention rate:** Australia 23%; Belgium 32%
- **Punitivity ratio*:** Australia: 1.38; Belgium: 0.03

OECD Better Life Index**

- **Feel safe walking home at night**
Australia: M-78%, F-51%; Belgium: M-75%, F-58%
- **Percentage satisfied with their lives (2007 and 2012)**
Australia: 76%-73%, Belgium: 78%-70%
- **Trust in government (2011)** Australia: 53%; Belgium: 44%

* Harrendorf & Smit (2010); **OECD Better Life Index (2011)



Australian Surveys of Social Attitudes

Methodology

- 5 surveys conducted biennially by ANU since 2003, latest in 2011
- 130 core questions on crime, work, education, taxes, families etc.
- Mail survey of Australians aged 18 years and over
- Confidence: ● a great deal ● quite a lot ● not very much ● none ● can't choose

Samples

- Random sample selected from national electoral roll and weighted against census data for age, sex and educational attainment
- 2011 – 6,250 sampled; 1,946 respondents (31%) [1,718 in 2009]

Topics covered

- Level of confidence in police, courts, prisons and politicians (2009, 2011)
- Level of concern about selected crime types (2009)
- Change in level of crime in last 2 years (2009)
- Most important issue facing Australia (2011)



Belgium Justice Barometers

Methodology

- Funded by King Baudouin Foundation with public support
- First survey conducted by KU Leuven & Uni Liege in 2002
- Replicated by 'Significant GfK' in 2007 and 2011
- Attitudes to justice institutions, actors, procedures, political decisions
- CATI survey of Belgian residents aged 15 years and over
- Confidence ratings: ● yes, ● rather-yes, ● rather-no, ● no, ● no opinion

Samples

- Random sample selected from Brussels, Walloon and Flanders and weighted against National Statistical Unit data for age, sex and language
- 2002 – 9,991 sampled; 3,200 respondents in 2002 (32%); 3,210 in 2007; 3,237 in 2010

Topics covered

- Level of confidence in the justice system
- Confidence in education, police, parliament, justice, press, church



Levels of confidence (% respondents)



Australia 2011 – courts & legal system

51% negative opinions

44% positive opinions

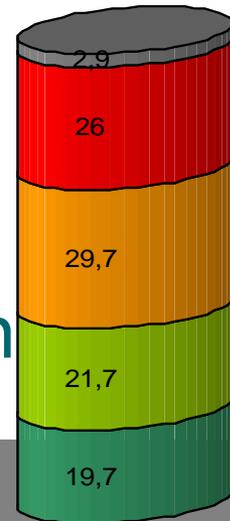
● great deal ● quite a lot ● not very much ● none ● can't choose

Belgium 2010 – justice system

58% negative opinions

41% positive opinions

● yes, ● rather-yes, ● rather-no, ● no, ● no opinion





Levels of confidence

Demographic variables – trends generally the same for:

- Decreases with age
- Increases with years of education (Aust), level of instruction (Belgium)
- Increases with income
- Higher for men than women
- Lower with divorced and widowed people
- Higher with catholics than protestants

Variables only available in Belgium

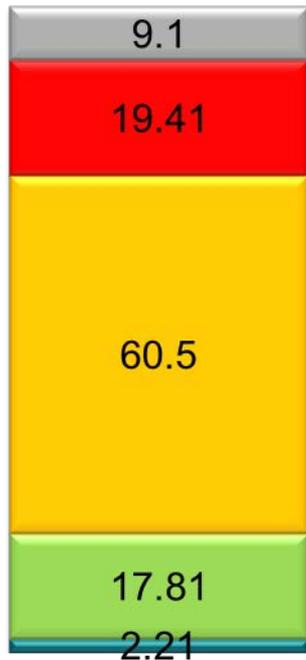
- **Lower confidence with prior experience of the justice system**
- Higher confidence with persons linked to the justice system
- Higher with persons reading the information press, and public media

Variables only available in Australia

- Most important issue facing Australia – crime 5.7% (rank 6)
- Change in crime level over last 2 years – more / lot more (68%)
- Concern over selected crime types – highest concern for ID theft (46%)



Confidence in dealing with cases promptly (% respondents)



Australia 2009 – courts deal with matters quickly

80% negative opinions

20% positive opinions

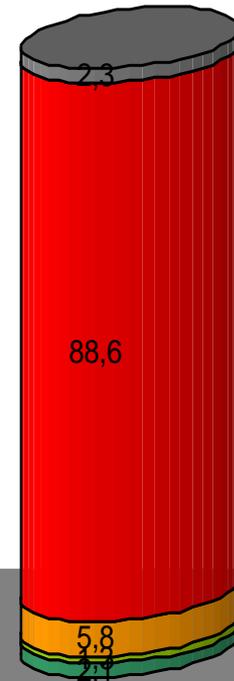
- great deal
- quite a lot
- not very much
- none
- can't choose

Belgium 2010 – case terminated with reasonable delay

97% negative opinions

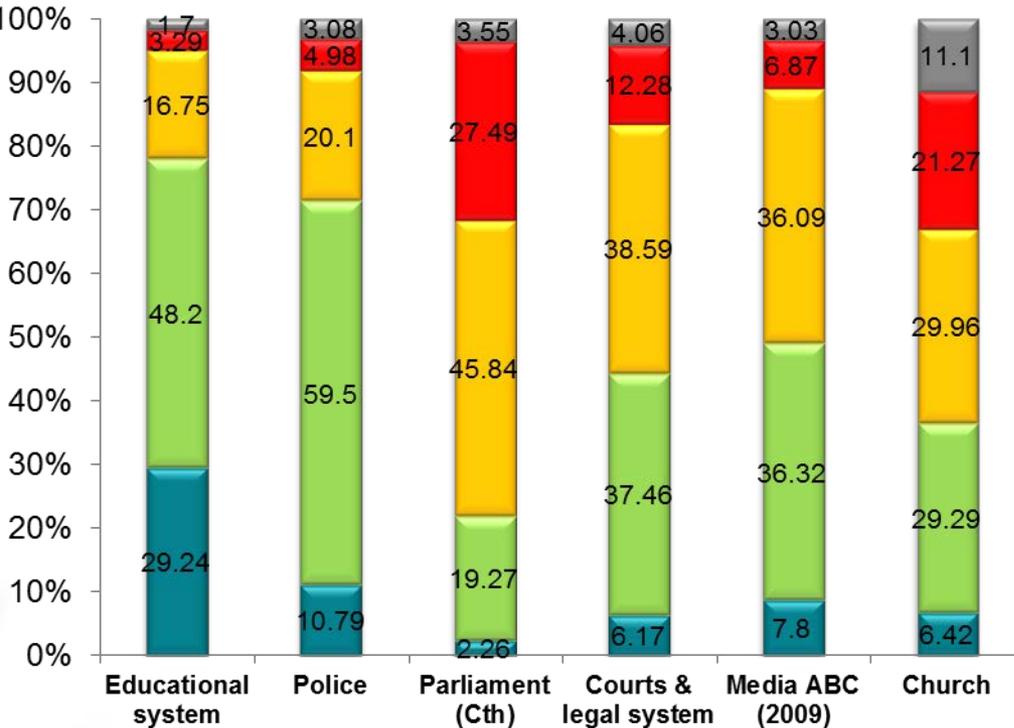
3% positive opinions

- yes,
- rather-yes,
- rather-no,
- no,
- no opinion

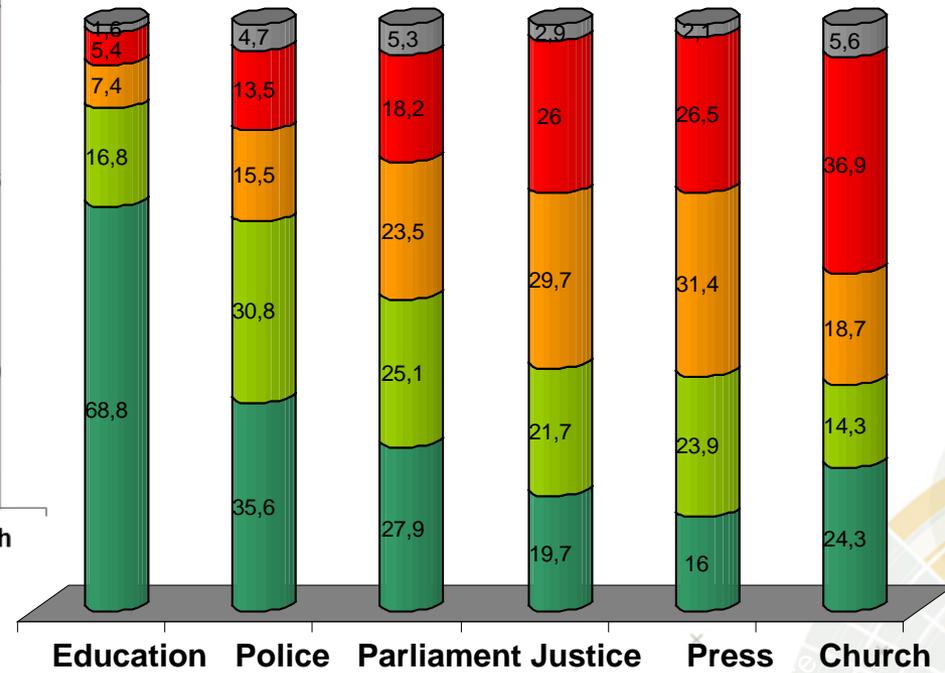




Levels of confidence in other institutions (% respondents) Australia 2011



Belgium 2010



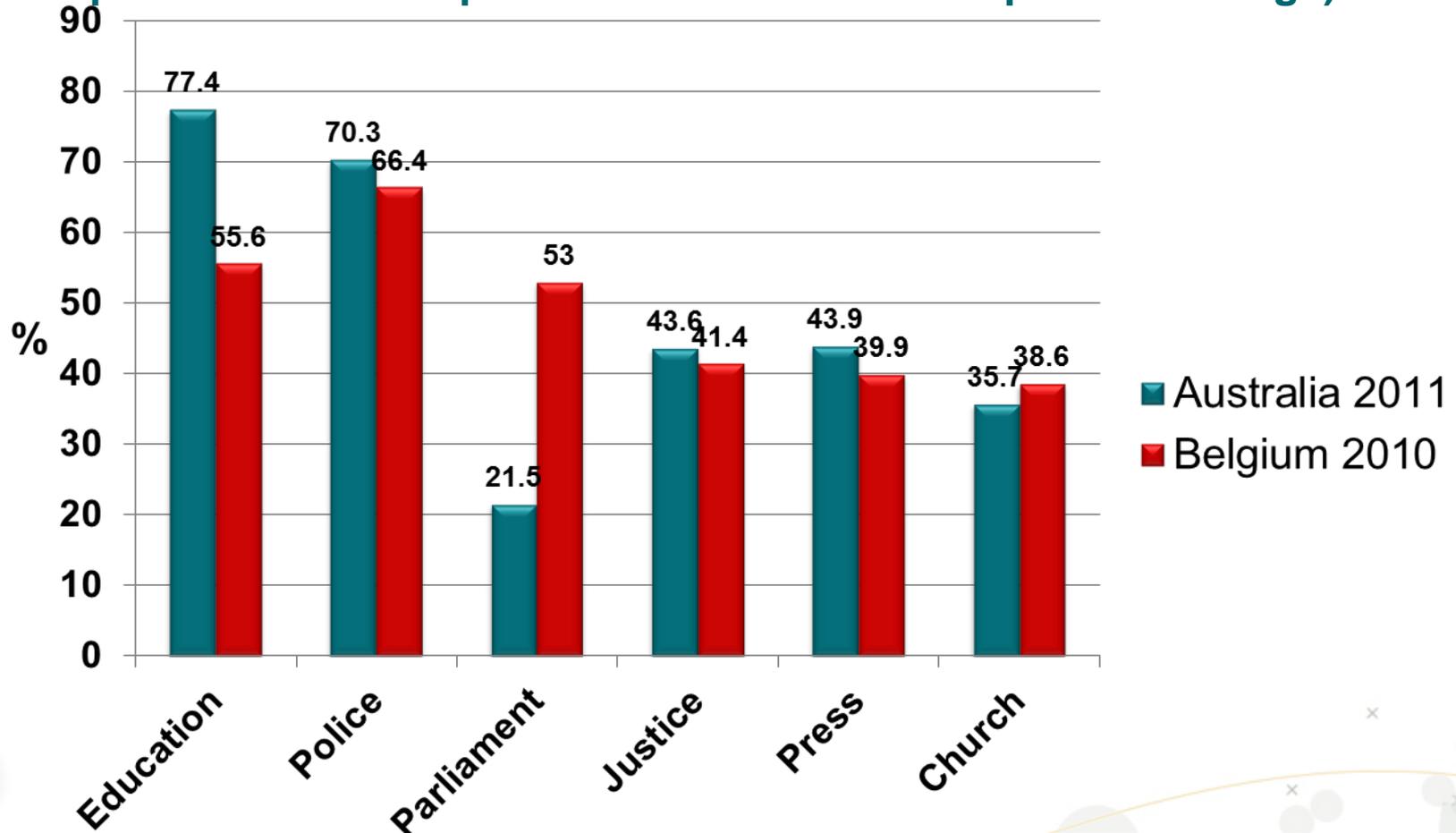
● great deal ● quite a lot ● not very much ● none
 ● can't choose

● yes ● rather-yes ● rather-no ● no ● no opinion



Levels of positive confidence in institutions

(% respondents who responded with the two most positive ratings)





Summary findings

Confidence levels in the justice system

- Overall similar levels – less than half had positive views
- Much higher levels of best and worst confidence ratings in Belgium
- More in Australia couldn't choose than Belgium (no opinion)
- Both had very low levels of confidence in dealing with cases promptly

Demographic variables

- Generally similar trends for selected demographics in both countries
- Absence of data in Australia for prior experience with the system – the most significant finding in Belgium was that experience with the justice system led to lower levels of confidence

Other institutions

- Australia tended to have more positive views in all institutions than Belgium, except for parliament and the church
- Most significant difference in confidence in (Cth) parliament
- Most positive ratings much higher in Belgium than in Australia overall



Some preliminary explanations

Methodological explanations

- Slightly different confidence ratings used
- Paper v CATI data collection
- Differing sample sizes and minimum ages
- Differing reference periods

Social and crime environment

- Belgium smaller and more densely populated
- Higher crime rates in Belgium
- Higher perceptions of corruption in Belgium
- Much higher punitivity ratio in Australia
- Better economic conditions in Australia

The way forward

- Improving the evidence base and up-dating datasets
- Further exploring demographic and other variables
- Undertaking statistical data analysis and hypothesis testing



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Australia's national research and knowledge centre on crime and justice