



## **Are Prisons a Moral and Fiscal Failure?**

In May the Minister of Finance, Bill English, called prisons a 'moral and fiscal failure', and said that after the completion of the new Men's Prison planned at Wiri, there will be no new prisons built. The government's aim would instead be to reduce crime and recidivism. "The public service has done a lot of very smart work on this and, and over the next two or three years, we're going to see the need for prison beds drop a bit at least."

Predictably his statement gave rise to a certain amount of controversy, and Research New Zealand therefore decided to see whether there was public support for the sentiment that prisons are "a moral and fiscal failure". A question about this was therefore included the most recent Research New Zealand social poll.

There is, indeed, strong support for the sentiment expressed by the Minister of Finance. Some 51 percent of respondents agreed with the statement and 29 percent disagreed. Nineteen percent did not express an opinion. The support came particularly from the age group 55 years and over, where 56 percent agreed with the statement, compared with the 15–34 year age group, where 45 percent agreed with the statement. In this age group there was also a high level of don't know responses at 25 percent, compared with 16 percent in the age group 55 years and over.

Among Maori/Pacific People some 63 percent agreed with Mr English; the highest level of agreement in any group in the poll. "Given that this is the group that experiences the highest imprisonment rate, this is perhaps understandable", said Research New Zealand Director, Emanuel Kalafatelis.

Interestingly, while the support for the sentiment was very similar across all regions, disagreement, at 34 percent, was highest in the Lower/Central North Island, and at 26 percent, lowest in the Upper North Island. "This is interesting", said Research New Zealand Director, Emanuel Kalafatelis, "because in the Central/Lower North Island region one generally finds the most liberal opinions on social issues".

Those in the highest income group (\$80,000 or more p.a.) expressed a higher than average level of support for the statement, at 56 percent.

*The Research New Zealand poll of 500 people aged 15 and over was conducted by telephone on 7–15 June 2011. The maximum margin of error for the sample as a whole is +/- 4.8 % (at the 95% confidence level). The data has been weighted to ensure it is an accurate representation of New Zealand's general population. The poll was not taken on behalf of any organization, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.*



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**Table 1:**

*Q21a. The next few questions are on a variety of topics, the first is about New Zealand prisons. The Minister of Finance, Mr Bill English, has described New Zealand prisons as a 'moral and fiscal failure'. Do you agree or disagree with this?*

	Total	Male	Female
Base =	500*	230	270
	%	%	%
Yes, agree	51	50	52
No, disagree	29	35	24
Don't know	19	14	24
Refused	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

\*Sub-sample based on those respondents...

**Table 2:**

*Q21a. The next few questions are on a variety of topics, the first is about New Zealand prisons. The Minister of Finance, Mr Bill English, has described New Zealand prisons as a 'moral and fiscal failure'. Do you agree or disagree with this?*

	Total	15-34 years	35 to 54 years	55 years and over
Base =	500*	106	164	230
	%	%	%	%
Yes, agree	51	45	53	56
No, disagree	29	30	30	27
Don't know	19	25	17	16
Refused	0	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 3:**

*Q21a. The next few questions are on a variety of topics, the first is about New Zealand prisons. The Minister of Finance, Mr Bill English, has described New Zealand prisons as a 'moral and fiscal failure'. Do you agree or disagree with this?*

	Total	NZ		Other
Base =	500*	European/Pakeha	Maori/Pacific	65
	%	%	%	%
Yes, agree	51	49	63	52
No, disagree	29	32	22	20
Don't know	19	19	14	28
Refused	0	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



**Table 4:**

*Q21a. The next few questions are on a variety of topics, the first is about New Zealand prisons. The Minister of Finance, Mr Bill English, has described New Zealand prisons as a 'moral and fiscal failure'. Do you agree or disagree with this?*

Base =	Total 500* %	Lower/Central North		
		Upper North Island 232 %	Island 109 %	South Island 159 %
Yes, agree	51	53	50	50
No, disagree	29	26	34	30
Don't know	19	20	16	20
Refused	0	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Table 5:**

*Q21a. The next few questions are on a variety of topics, the first is about New Zealand prisons. The Minister of Finance, Mr Bill English, has described New Zealand prisons as a 'moral and fiscal failure'. Do you agree or disagree with this?*

Base =	Total 480* %	At least \$40,000 but less than		
		Under \$40,000 180 %	\$80,000 154 %	\$80,000 or more 146 %
Yes, agree	51	47	52	56
No, disagree	29	34	28	25
Don't know	19	19	19	20
Refused	0	0	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

\*Sub-sample based on those respondents who were willing to disclose their income.

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