



2025 MCKINNON INDEX

Detailed Findings

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About MCKINNON

McKinnon was founded in 2015 by Dr Sophie Oh and Grant Rule, with the aim of strengthening Australia's democracy. We believe better governments is the key to a stronger Australia. The quality of our leadership and democracy has never mattered more. That's why we work to develop political leadership, strengthen our institutions and solve the most pressing policy issues to create lasting outcomes that benefit all Australians.

Our work is focused on four key areas:

- strong and trusted democratic institutions that foster cohesion, constructive debate, and informed public participation in democratic processes
- exceptional political leadership, as positive leadership is crucial in a high-functioning democracy
- world leading policy, supporting innovative solutions to Australia's biggest problems such as education reform through leading pilot programmes; and
- a high performing public sector, with the right capabilities and institutions to produce high quality service delivery, evidenced based policymaking and long-term thinking.

McKinnon incubates, delivers and supports practical improvements that deliver tangible progress to the operation of government and supports initiatives including:

- the McKinnon Prize for Political Leadership, which was established to recognise political leaders at all levels of government who have driven positive impact through their vision, collaboration, courage and ethical behaviour
- the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organisation that provides outstanding professional development for members of Australia's federal, state and territory parliaments

- Australian Policy Online (APO), which curates and archives a free online library of articles, research reports, evaluations, policy briefs and white papers to help organisations including government, non-for-profits and think tanks access timely and reliable information on public policy; and
- e61, a not-for-profit, non-partisan economic research institute that analyses big data to help answer Australia's most pressing economic policy questions.

McKinnon is non-partisan and motivated only by the public interest.

For further information please visit our website <https://mckinnon.co/about-us>.



CEO FOREWORD

Australia's democracy is among the most enduring and respected in the world. It has provided the foundation for our prosperity, our freedoms, and our collective identity as a nation. The peaceful transfer of power, the independence of our institutions, and the expectation that governments are accountable to the people have given Australia stability at home and credibility abroad.

Yet, as any system that depends on public trust and active participation, democracy is not fixed. It is not immune from pressure. Its strength relies on constant renewal, on leaders who listen and deliver, on institutions that act fairly and transparently, and on citizens who believe their voices matter. That is why we have created the McKinnon Index: an annual dashboard of democratic health. It measures trust in leaders, effectiveness of governments, performance of our institutions, and how Australians engage in politics and public debate.

The McKinnon Index offers a new way to understand these dynamics. It blends nationwide public opinion with international benchmarks and system measures to create a national gauge of democratic health. The Index does not tell governments what to do. It is not a scorecard of political ideology, party allegiance, or a list of winners and losers. Instead, it will track where trust is rising or falling, and where action is needed. It highlights strengths worth defending, risks that require vigilance, and opportunities to renew the relationship between governments, institutions and the Australian people.

Importantly, the Index has been designed as a long-term resource, with McKinnon making an ongoing annual commitment to this work. Each year, it will track changes in perceptions, measure pressures on institutions, and provide a consistent benchmark for policymakers, researchers, civil society and the media. Over time, it will allow us to see whether reforms are strengthening our system or leaving it vulnerable, whether communities feel more included or excluded, and whether trust is being rebuilt.

Strength and stability

Australia's democracy remains robust. The rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, compulsory voting, and the Australian Electoral Commission's strong reputation are all hallmarks of a system that still delivers fairness and stability. International observers consistently place our democratic institutions among the most trusted. And the inaugural Index demonstrates the vast majority of Australians continue to see democracy as preferable to any alternative system.

These are not small achievements. In an era when many democracies around the world face threats of disinformation, polarisation and declining legitimacy, Australia's system has shown resilience. But resilience should not be confused with immunity. Strength requires attention. Stability requires stewardship. Trust requires renewal.

Warning signs

The inaugural McKinnon Index reveals many Australians do not feel their leaders are listening. Disengagement is especially pronounced among younger people, those living outside major cities, and those who do not feel a strong sense of belonging in Australia.

While trust in public services and independent institutions is strong, our political leaders and governments are consistently less trusted across the nation. Three-quarters of Australians say democracy is preferable to any other form of government. Yet only just over half are satisfied with how it works today. In other words, Australians value the democratic system, but many are not convinced it is delivering for them in practice.

Dissatisfaction is particularly concentrated among those with a poor sense of belonging, while higher satisfaction is found among Australians with higher education and income levels, but the divide signals that for many, democracy is not meeting lived expectations.

Social fault lines

Beyond institutions, the Index shows new divides are emerging in how Australians relate to politics. Almost three-quarters of Australians reject the idea that politics should prevent friendships. But among young people aged 18 to 24, one in five say they could not be friends with someone who holds different political views. Older Australians are far more likely to keep relationships across divides. This shift suggests politics is increasingly being felt as personal, with implications for social cohesion and tolerance.

Australians are also evenly split on whether debate is healthy and respectful. For a system that depends on contest of ideas, this is a warning signal that the culture of debate itself needs renewal.

Trust in institutions

One of the more encouraging insights from the Index is that Australians retain confidence in many of our institutions, especially public servants, the courts, and electoral commissions. Around two-thirds are confident in election outcomes, and almost seven in ten believe elections are free and fair. But trust is uneven, with much lower confidence among First Nations Australians, remote communities, and those with weaker social connection.

This tells us trust is not abstract. It rises and falls with people's direct experience, whether they feel government services are responsive, whether decisions are transparent, whether their voices are heard. The lesson is clear: trust must be earned through delivery.

A shared responsibility

The McKinnon Index makes one message clear: democracy is not a set and forget inheritance. Leaders must listen, institutions must act with integrity, the media must inform without inflaming, and citizens must be engaged.

At McKinnon, we see this as part of a broader mission. If we want to change a culture that is divisive and rebuild confidence in democracy, we need to invest in the capability of those we choose to lead. That is why, alongside the Index, we invest in programs like the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership to build the capability of our leaders and the McKinnon Prize which models what good looks like in political leadership. With the right capability and culture, policy becomes smarter, civility creates meaningful debate, institutions become stronger, and public confidence begins to rebuild.

We believe Australia's democracy will only thrive if we inspire more Australians to engage in politics, reform the systems that shape decision-making, and equip leaders with the skills and capabilities needed to deliver.

Looking ahead

The challenges ahead, whether economic, social or environmental, will test the capacity of our governments and the resilience of our democratic institutions. They will also test our willingness as Australians to maintain the trust that underpins those institutions. The McKinnon Index cannot solve those challenges, but it can provide the clarity and evidence we need to confront them with honesty, and to measure whether we are making progress.

Trust, delivery and fairness fuel effective government and a cohesive society. In the end, the health of our democracy is a shared responsibility. If we want a stronger Australia, we must actively sustain the systems that hold us together. The McKinnon Index is a tool to help ensure we do just that.



MIKE BAIRD

Chief Executive Officer, McKinnon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The McKinnon Index is an annual dashboard tracking the health and effectiveness of our governments and democracy over time. It has been established to provide a comprehensive, ongoing measure of Australia's democratic and governmental performance. It contains 91 measures, with demographic breakdowns, across three interrelated themes:

1. Trust in government and political leaders,
2. Effectiveness of the public sector and government service delivery, and
3. Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions.

Drawing on a nationwide survey of over 4,400 Australians, supplemented with international benchmarks and system-level indicators, the Index serves as an annual diagnostic tool. It will help governments, researchers and civil society monitor trends, understand drivers of democratic and institutional health, and evaluate the impact of reform efforts over time.

This inaugural Index offers a detailed picture of how Australians view their democracy and governments — what is working well, where confidence is waning, and what can be done to renew trust and strengthen democratic resilience. Its findings provide an evidence base to guide the actions of governments, civil society, and institutions seeking to improve the performance and legitimacy of Australia's system of government.

Key findings

Trust in independent institutions is strong, but trust in politicians is lower

Australians have high confidence in many of our independent institutions, including the courts, the Australian Electoral Commission, and the public service. Yet trust in governments and politicians remains significantly lower. Only around two in five Australians express high trust in their governments, while perceptions of corruption are high, with 62.0% believing it to be a problem in federal politics, and 57.9% believing it is a problem in their state. Independent and arms-length institutions, such as electoral commissions and independent regulators and advisory bodies are the most trusted — reinforcing the need to safeguard their autonomy and integrity. Trust is highest among younger Australians (18–24), those born overseas, and university-educated individuals — but significantly lower among middle-aged Australians and those who report a poor sense of belonging.

But while Australians appear to hold cynical views of their politicians, when asked what could solve the challenges facing Australia's governments, the most common response was the need for leadership with courage, vision and long-term thinking. Citizens are calling for leaders who listen, act ethically, and focus on national progress over short-term politics.

Effectiveness and service delivery drive trust

Australians are more likely to trust their governments if they consider them to be effective: among those who rate the Federal Government as very effective, 86.2% also express high trust in it (compared with 37.6% who trust the Federal Government from the total sample). Overall, more Australians consider their governments to be effective than trust it, with state governments ranking better than the Federal Government on both measures.

A majority of Australians are satisfied with most public services, except for education and social security. More people consider the public service to be capable of solving long-term challenges than politicians, and while state governments are more trusted and seen as more effective, federal public servants and politicians are seen as more capable than their state counterparts. There is also a perceived gap between governments' willingness to adopt innovative ideas and their ability to implement them, suggesting that execution, not vision, is the greater challenge. While 43.6% think the Federal Government looks internationally for policy solutions, only 34.8% believe it would adopt innovative ideas to improve services.

Australians value democracy, but are less satisfied with how it works

76.0% of Australians agree that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, yet just over half (54.5%) are satisfied with how it works in practice. Satisfaction is lower among those with weaker social connection, lower income, or less confidence in understanding how democracy works. Younger Australians, particularly young women, are more ambivalent toward democracy, being more likely to say they are neither satisfied or dissatisfied with democracy, signalling an urgent need to engage new generations in civic life.

Electoral participation in Australia is strong when compared globally, however 16.8% say the main reason they vote is to avoid a fine. When combining this with the number of eligible Australians who did not vote in the last election (either because they are not enrolled or did not turn out), around a quarter of voting-age Australians could be considered disengaged from the democratic process. By contrast, 52.0% said one of the top three reasons they vote is to influence decisions, 43.6% said it's

because it's a civic responsibility, and 37.0% wanted to improve their community — evidence that civic duty remains a strong motivator for many.

Our democratic culture is healthy, but there is room to improve. Outside elections, 50.6% believe people like them can have a say in what government does, and 67.9% agree people can freely express political opinions. Most Australians also reject political violence and say they can be friends with those with different political views, but divisions are emerging. Among those aged 18-24, one in five say they could not be friends with someone holding different political views compared with much lower levels among older cohorts — a sign that political identity is becoming more personal and polarised.

Some cohorts are facing a democratic deficit

Australians overall are supportive and engaged in our democracy. However, some groups stand out as less engaged or feel less well served by it, such as those living in outer regional areas and younger Australians. It is important that our political leaders, public services and civil society continue to identify ways to reach and engage with these cohorts.

Those who rely on social media for news express lower trust in government, less satisfaction with democracy, and less confidence in elections, highlighting the importance of credible information environments for democratic resilience.

Future directions

The McKinnon Index is designed to be a long-term, evidence-based resource that tracks the evolving health of Australia's democracy and governments. Future editions will incorporate expert assessments from political leaders, senior public servants, academics, and commentators to complement public opinion data.

The inaugural findings send a clear message: **Australia's democracy remains strong, but its health depends on sustained attention and renewal.** Trust must be earned through delivery, leadership must be grounded in integrity and vision, and institutions must remain independent, capable, and inclusive. The McKinnon Index provides the data, insight, and direction needed to support that renewal — for governments, civil society, and the Australian people alike.

About the McKinnon Index

While many features of our democracy and system of government are long standing, the system itself is not static. Government performance and democratic resilience can fluctuate over time, meaning it is important to understand how well Australia is performing if we are to respond effectively to emerging issues. As McKinnon is dedicated to creating better governments for a stronger Australia, we view measuring the strength of our democratic system and factors that contribute to that strength an important part of this work.

To ensure the Index is both comprehensive and useful, measures have been chosen to cover three core indicators of good governments: governments that are trusted, effective, and operate in a robust democracy. The Index is organised around these three themes. Within each theme we track indicators that evidence suggests drive performance. For example, our democracy and governments are held up by several important pillars – a robust media that informs the public and holds those in power to account; strong political leadership and an effective civil service; and a well informed and cohesive citizenry. By measuring both overall system performance as well as the performance of its key drivers, we aim to diagnose not only when the system might be under pressure, but what may be driving that.

The selection of themes, sub-themes, and specific measures was based on a review of existing surveys and indices aimed at tracking democratic health or government performance, as well as literature on the factors that drive these two objectives. Following this, we gathered feedback from several experts in this field, including academics, public servants and civil society organisations. The McKinnon Index builds on previous efforts to measure the democratic health of countries or government performance, but combines these two concepts to create a comprehensive dashboard of measures tracking Australia's governments and democracy, and addresses gaps in current reporting and measurement.

Data for the Index is primarily taken from a large-scale representative survey delivered in partnership with Roy Morgan, a trusted independent Australian market and social research firm with over 80 years' experience. The remaining data has been sourced from a variety of existing sources, such as the Australian Electoral Commission and Australian Bureau of Statistics, which are referenced in this report.

For more details on how the measures were chosen and the evidence behind them, the methodology used, and the full list of measures, see the Appendices to this report.

Visit our website to view
the McKinnon Index data
in an interactive dashboard

MCKINNON.CO/INDEX





This report is the first in what will be an annual McKinnon project to track the performance of our democracy and governments over time. The series of measures which make up the McKinnon Index track trust in government and political leaders, the effectiveness of our public sector and service delivery, and the performance of our democratic institutions. It provides readers with a detailed picture of not only high-level system health indicators, but what factors might be driving performance in these areas. This will assist governments, civil society organisations, and McKinnon to better understand what aspects of our democracy and system of government need further strengthening, and catalyse conversations about how to best achieve this.

Global democratic trends and threats

Living in a country with strong and stable governments and a robust democracy is not something we can take for granted. Australia's democracy is strong, but not unshakable, and we need only look to the rapid changes in other countries to see the challenges facing our democratic system.

This report is being released in a context where democracy worldwide is increasingly under threat. On several key international benchmarks, democracy is in decline globally:

- In its 2025 Report, the International Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project assessed that the world has fewer democracies than autocracies for the first time in over 20 years;¹
- The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 2024 Democracy Index found that in the past year more than twice as many countries became less democratic than became more democratic, and the global average democratic score across countries continued to decline to its lowest result in decades;²
- Freedom House found that fundamental freedoms declined around the world for the 19th consecutive year, and that twice as many countries experienced a reduction in their political rights and civil liberties than saw an improvement;³
- The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance assessed that just over half of all countries in 2024 experienced a decline in at least one factor of democratic performance compared with their own performance five years earlier, making this the eighth consecutive year in which nations experiencing democratic decline outnumbered those showing progress.⁴

1 Nord, Marina, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Tiago Fernandes, Ana Good God, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2025. Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped? University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute.

2 Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy? *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 2025.

3 Freedom in the World 2025: The uphill battle to safeguard rights, *Freedom House*, 2025

4 The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move, <https://apo.org.au/node/332255>

There are a number of drivers behind this worrying global trend. In 2024 the Federal Government's [Strengthening Democracy Taskforce](#) identified eight interconnected challenges (bolded below) to our democracy that undermine three sources of democratic strength: trust in institutions, social cohesion, and credible sources of information:

- **Credible information:** When the health of the information environment is eroded, it becomes harder for people to discern truth and trust public institutions. This is eroded by **misinformation**, amplified by **social media and digital platforms**, made worse by **artificial intelligence** and manipulated through **foreign interference**.
- **Trusted institutions:** Declining trust in institutions erodes confidence in their security, integrity, legitimacy, responsiveness, and performance. This can be caused by **dissatisfaction with government and governing** which can be driven by poor performance of institutions or cases of corruption, as well as rising **inequality, discrimination and intolerance**, or **polarization and division** where this leads people to believe government is not serving their interests or representing them. Trust is also undermined by the same factors that erode credible information listed above
- **Social inclusion:** When social divisions become entrenched and extreme, through **polarization and divisions**, democratic deliberation, tolerance, and compromise become nearly impossible, hindering the ability of diverse views to coexist within a unifying system. This can be driven by persistent **discrimination and intolerance** and **inequality**, and amplified by **foreign interference** and **misinformation** that is spread further via **social media**.

What these challenges highlight is that there is no one route to, or cause of, democratic erosion. This is backed up by new research from the Lowy Institute which created a systems map⁵, which identifies the relationship between conditions, actors and pathways that can lead to democratic erosion. This highlights that individual issues like loss of trust in the media, citizen disengagement, or polarisation are not just isolated issues, but may be part of a wider trend that erodes democracy. It is therefore important to monitor these individual elements to identify signs of potential democratic decline.

These threats are not specific to Australia, but are global challenges which have been well documented and linked to democratic backsliding globally. Fortunately, Australia still ranks among the top performing democracies, ranking 11th globally in the EIU's Democracy Index, and being one of only 29 countries rated as full liberal democracies by V-Dem, but we are not immune from these challenges.

Trends in government performance

Challenges to democracy also impede good governance. For example, a more divided society can lead to a more divided parliament, with legislative gridlock making it more difficult to address long-term challenges. Dissatisfaction with government also impacts its social licence reducing the cooperation and engagement required from citizens that effective service delivery depends on. The aims of strengthening our democracy and improving our governments overlap and are mutually reinforcing and are considered together in the McKinnon Index.

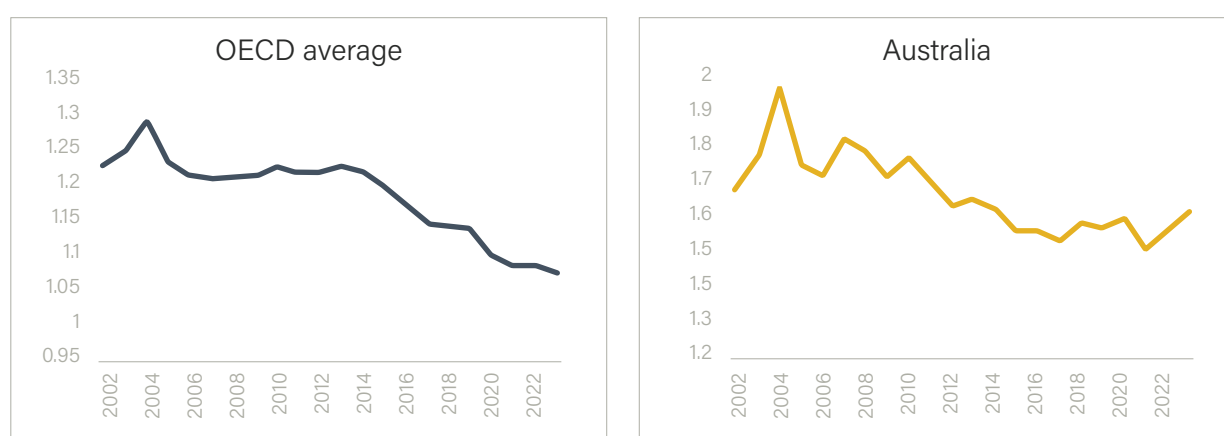
5 [Understanding Democratic Erosion - Lowy Institute](#)

Australia tends to rank well on international benchmarks of government performance, such as the Blavatnik Index of Public Administration where we rank 8th out of 120 countries assessed⁶. However, there are still worrying trends in government effectiveness across countries including Australia. According to the World Bank Government Effectiveness Index⁷, which captures perceptions of the quality of public services and policy implementation, the average score for OECD countries has been declining since 2002.

This is true of Australia despite a slight improvement in recent years, though we remain above the OECD average.

While not a direct measure of government effectiveness, increasing disillusionment with the major political parties (as seen by their continued decline of vote share since the 1980s⁸) points to wider dissatisfaction with the performance of the parties that form government and an increasing desire to look for alternatives.

Figure 1: Change in World Bank Government Effectiveness Index over time



Actions being taken to support our governments and democracy⁹

Overall, Australia has a robust democracy, often ranking near the top of countries globally on various indices of government performance, freedoms and democratic health. But there are actions we can take to ensure we continue to prosper and mitigate these challenges. McKinnon is focused on delivering meaningful, measurable impact to improve our democracy and governments, and thankfully we are part of a robust ecosystem of government and non-government actors in Australia that share this purpose. This includes a range of government agencies, including the

creation of their Social Cohesion Taskforce, as the successor to their Strengthening Democracy Taskforce, and other agencies such as the Australian Electoral Commission which established its Defending Democracy Unit in 2022 as a permanent function to safeguard electoral integrity and respond to threats. There are also many not-for-profits, academics and civil society organisations focussed on tackling these challenges. This Index can therefore be a tool to support their work, helping organisations to monitor these issues, diagnose emerging threats, and evaluate interventions to address them.

6 Overall Results | Blavatnik Index of Public Administration

7 The index of Government Effectiveness captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. The Index ranges from +2.5 (highest score) to -2.5. Source: [Government Effectiveness: Estimate | Data](#)

8 [The steady decline of voters choosing the major parties is reshaping Australian politics - The Australia Institute](#)

9 Source: World Bank Government Effectiveness Index. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GE.EST>

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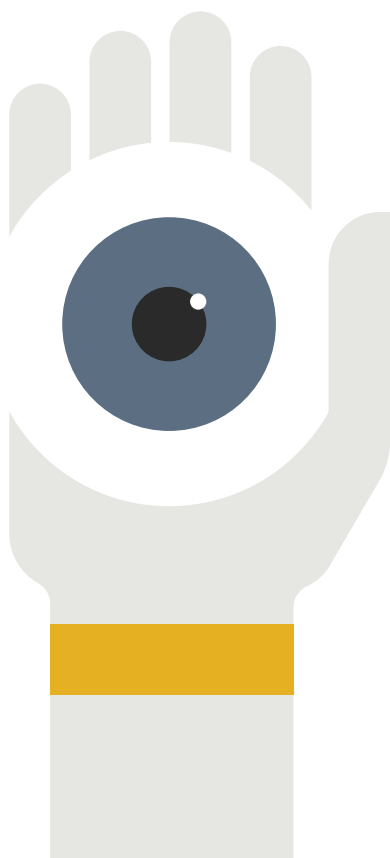
TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AND AUSTRALIA'S POLITICAL LEADERS



This chapter presents data for all measures related to trust in government and political leaders. We break the drivers of trust down into three groups: measures of representation (whether you trust that political leaders understand and represent your interests), measures of integrity (whether you trust that those in government are honest, do what they say, and serve the public interest), and capability (whether you trust that those in government are able to deliver on what they promise).

Key findings:

- **Strength:** Trust in independent institutions is strong
- **Challenge:** Trust in politicians is low
- **Challenge:** Perceptions that corruption is a problem in government are high (62.0%)
- **Opportunity:** Trust in government is below the highest performing OECD nations
- **Insight:** People want more leadership with vision and action

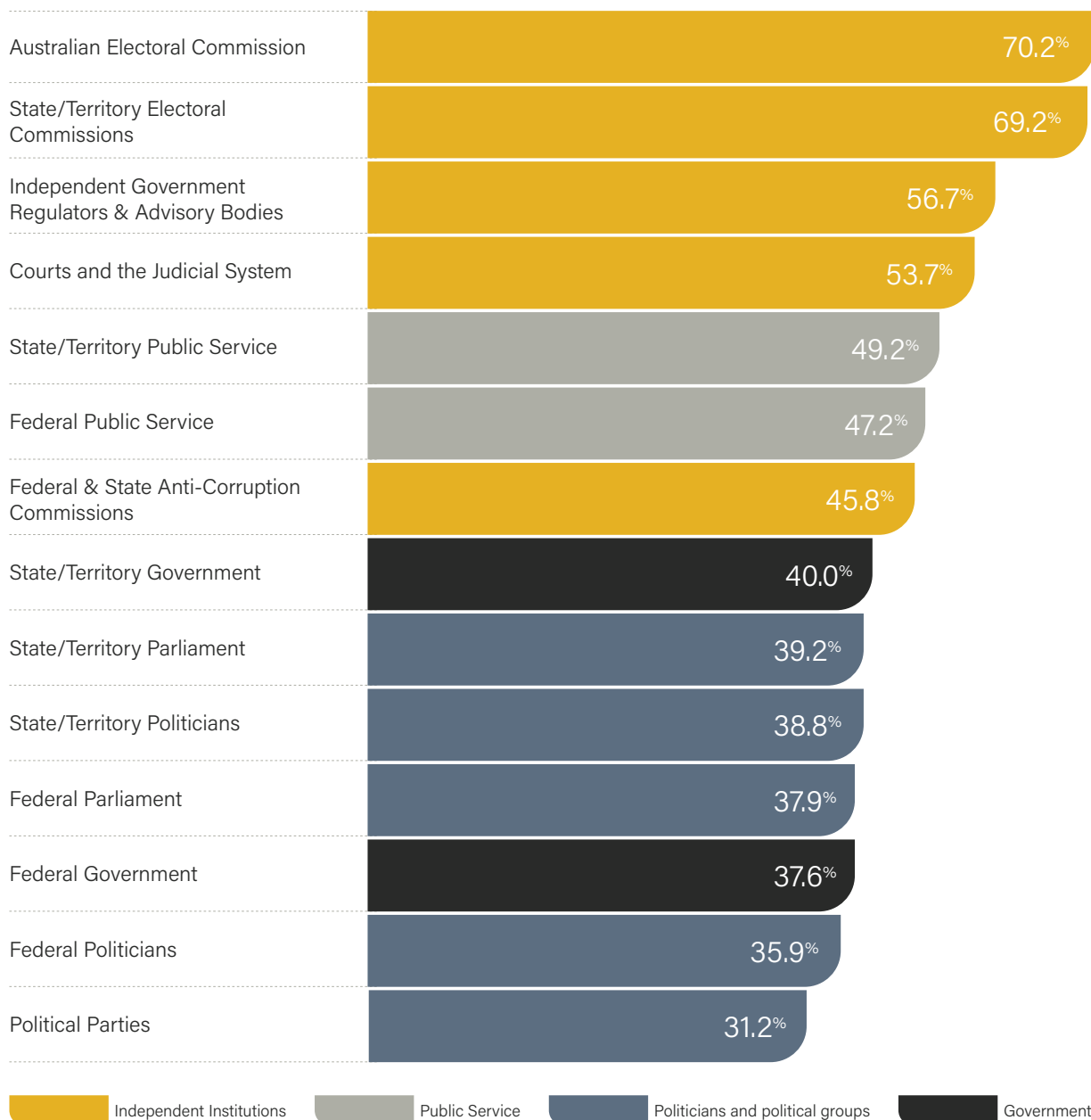


Overall trust measures

A majority of Australians trust our institutions, but trust in our governments and politicians is lower. Independent institutions like the AEC (70.2%) and arms-length regulators (56.7%) were the most trusted organisations, followed by the public service, governments and then politicians. In

other words, trust rises the more independently from politics that a public institution operates. This reinforces the importance of protecting the independence of our institutions to maintain overall trust in government.

Figure 2: Trust in institutions



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions asking "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how much do you trust [entity name]". Where "High or moderately high trust" is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; "Neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "No or low trust" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Trust is also higher for state/territory governments and politicians than federal. It is also higher among young people (18-24, particularly men), those with a university degree, people born outside Australia, and satisfied with the direction the country is heading in. Trust tends to be lower among those in middle age and people who don't feel a sense of belonging in Australia.

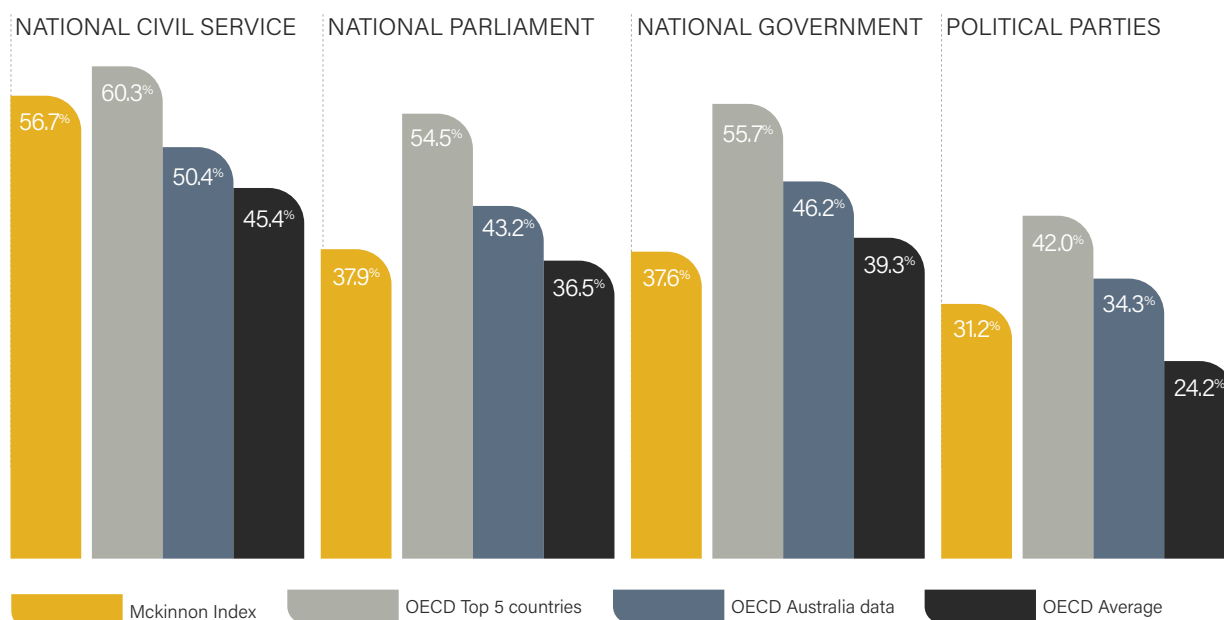
Trust also rises across all measures the more interested in politics someone is. For example, trust in political parties is 40.2% for those very interested in politics, compared to just 9.5% of those with no interest in politics. For electoral commissions, 80.8% of those very interested in politics trust them, compared to just 38.6% of those with no interest in politics. A positive takeaway from this is that the more engaged people are in our political system, the more they trust it, highlighting the importance of greater civic engagement (which is discussed further in Chapter 4).

While the relationship between trust in each institution is relatively low across groups, those who have high trust in any institution are more likely to have higher trust in all others. For example, while only 39.8% of those who trust the AEC also trust political parties, this is still higher than the 31.2% of the total population that trust political parties.

International benchmarks

The McKinnon Index replicates some questions on trust that are asked by the OECD every two years in their *Drivers of Trust in Government* survey. Comparing our results to the most recent 2023 survey,¹⁰ trust appears to have declined in government, parliament and political parties, but increased in the public service.¹¹ If these movements are not matched in other countries, Australia would slip below the OECD average for trust in government. While Australia generally performs well relative to the OECD average on these measures, there remains significant opportunity for improvement to match the levels of trust seen in the top performing nations.

Figure 3: OECD 2023 trust data and McKinnon Index trust data



Source: OECD 2023 *Drivers of Trust in Government Survey* and 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions which are worded consistently between the two surveys (with substitution of national with federal/Australian in the McKinnon Index). These questions ask "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how much do you trust [entity name]". Where "High or moderately high trust" is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; "Neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "No or low trust" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

10 OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.

11 Note that comparisons with other surveys are indicative only given differences in samples and collection methodology, however the question wording and scoring for the McKinnon Index is consistent with the OECD survey.

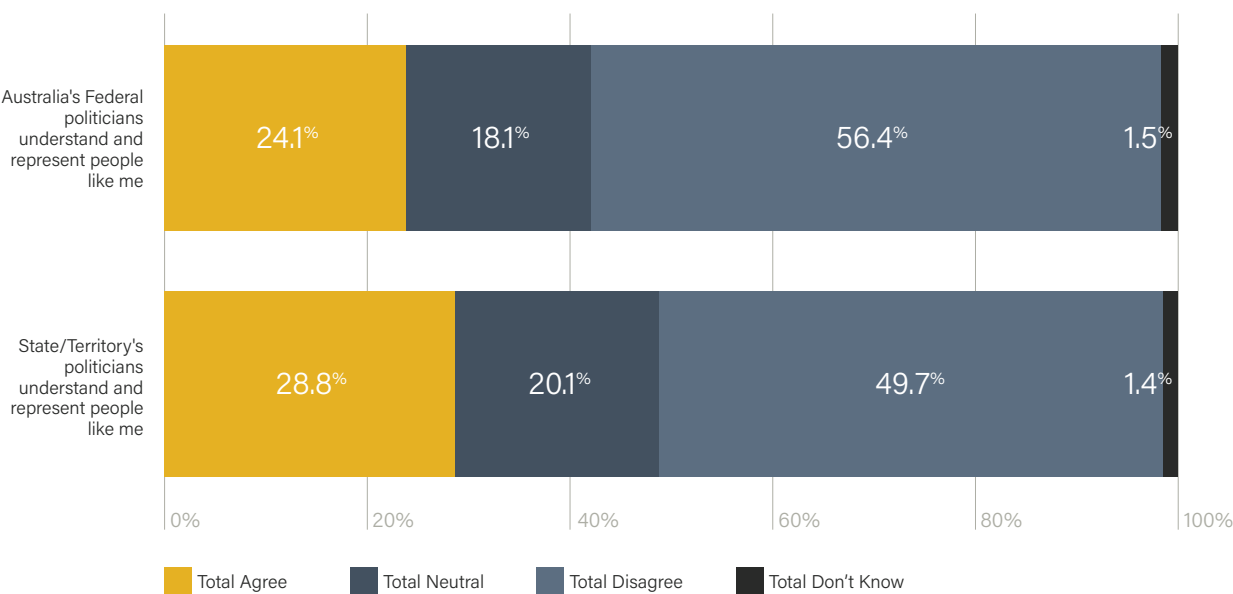
Measures of representation

One reason people may not trust their governments or political leaders is because they don't feel that they adequately represent them or their interests. A perceived misalignment between the values of political leaders and the public, or feeling our representatives do not understand us, reduces trust and increases the perceived distance between leaders and the public they serve.

When asked whether their state or Federal

politicians understand and represent people like them, a majority feel they do not, though more people feel represented by their state or territory politicians than Federal ones. Men, particularly those aged 50-64 (65.2%), were more likely to say Federal politicians don't understand and represent them, despite this being one of the best represented demographics in Parliament. Those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were also more likely than others to not feel represented (68.1%).

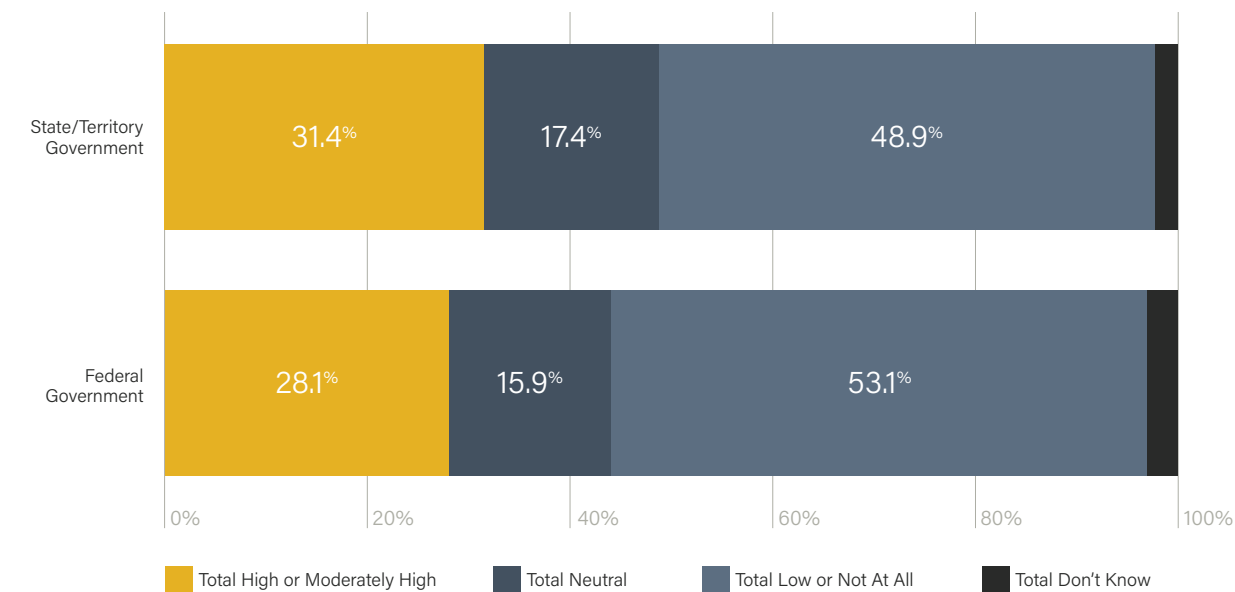
Figure 4: Graph of representation measures



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? [Australia's Federal / your State's] politicians understand and represent people like me." Where "Agree" is an aggregation of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" responses; "Neutral" is equal to "neither agree nor disagree" responses; "disagree" is an aggregation of "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Few Australians felt that the government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations, though more people thought their state or territory government did this than the Federal Government. Younger Australians (18-24) were the most likely to agree that their state (41.5%) and Federal Government (36.0%) adequately balances the interests of current and future generations, while those aged 35-49 were the least likely to (26.2% for state, 24.4% for Federal Government).

Figure 5: Confidence in governments to balance interests of current and future generations

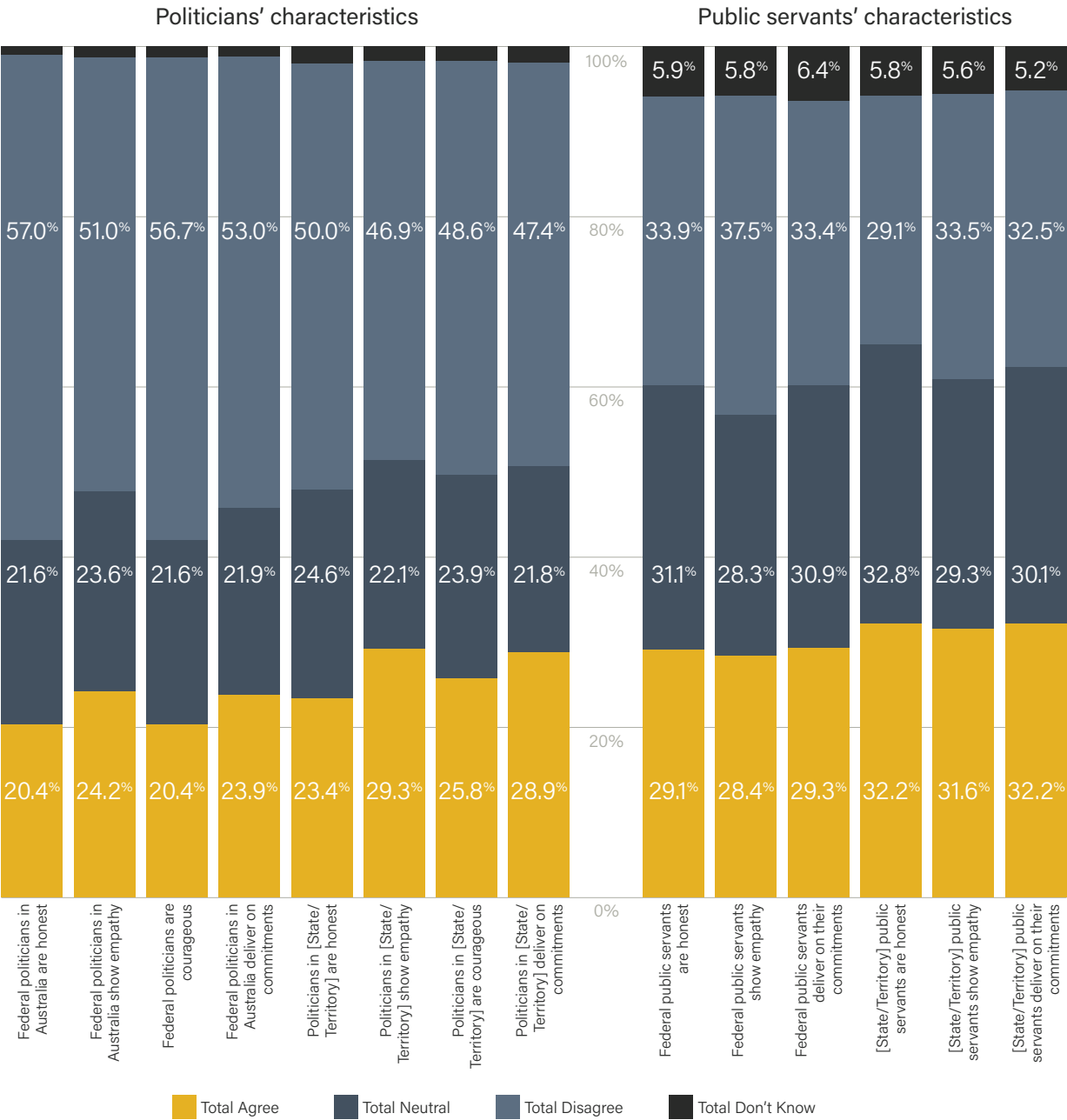


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question “On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how confident are you that [the Federal / your State] government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations?”. Where “Confident” is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; “Neutral” is equal to a response of 5; “Not confident” is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and “Don’t know” was a separate answer. “[State]” was replaced with text based on respondent’s location.

Measures of integrity

Another key driver of trust is integrity, or whether an individual or organisation is seen to act with honesty, fairness and will follow through on their promises. On this measure, Australians are generally sceptical about their political leaders, which helps explain their lower levels of trust in politicians. When asked whether they consider their state or Federal political leaders to be honest, empathetic, courageous and able to deliver, a majority disagreed in almost all instances. State politicians rated slightly better than Federal politicians, and as with trust, public servants outranked their political counterparts in either jurisdiction.

Figure 6: Perceived characteristics of State and Federal politicians and public servants

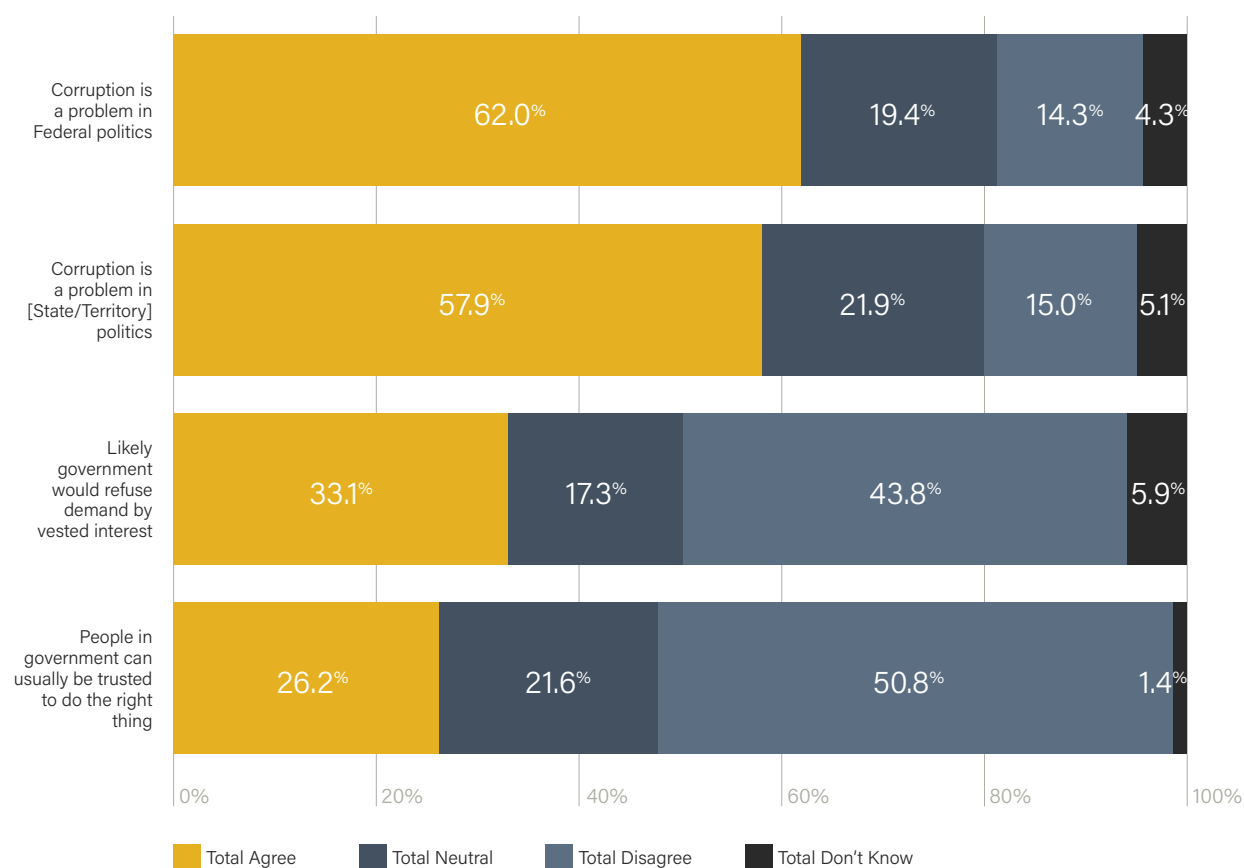


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the range of questions asking "Thinking about [politicians / public servants] specifically. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below?". Where "Agree" is an aggregation of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" responses; "Neutral" is equal to "neither agree nor disagree" responses; "Disagree" is an aggregation of "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

This cynicism towards our political leaders (and to a lesser extent public servants) could be driven by a range of issues, but general concern about corruption was the most prevalent of the issues surveyed with 62.0% of Australians believing that corruption is a problem in Federal politics, and 57.9% believing it is a problem in their state. This compares with the 56.4% who don't feel politicians understand and represent people like them, and 50.8% who don't think those in government can usually be trusted to do the right thing. While corruption was the most prevalent concern, this does not seem to be driven solely by the perceived power of vested interests: just 43.8% believe the government would not refuse a harmful policy promoted by a vested interest. This is in-line with the OECD average for this question in 2023, and better than where Australia was that year (47.3%).

Those on the extremes of politics were more likely to agree that corruption was a problem in Federal politics. Those who self-identity as **Left** and **Right** (1-2 and 8-9 on a 9-point political scale) were more likely to agree (67.7% Left, 73.5% Right) than those in Centre (60.5%) Centre-Left (60.1%) and Centre-Right (58.6%), though majorities in each group consider corruption to be a problem.

Figure 7: Perceptions of corruption, integrity and vested interest influence in politics



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of confidence or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Desire for leadership with vision and action

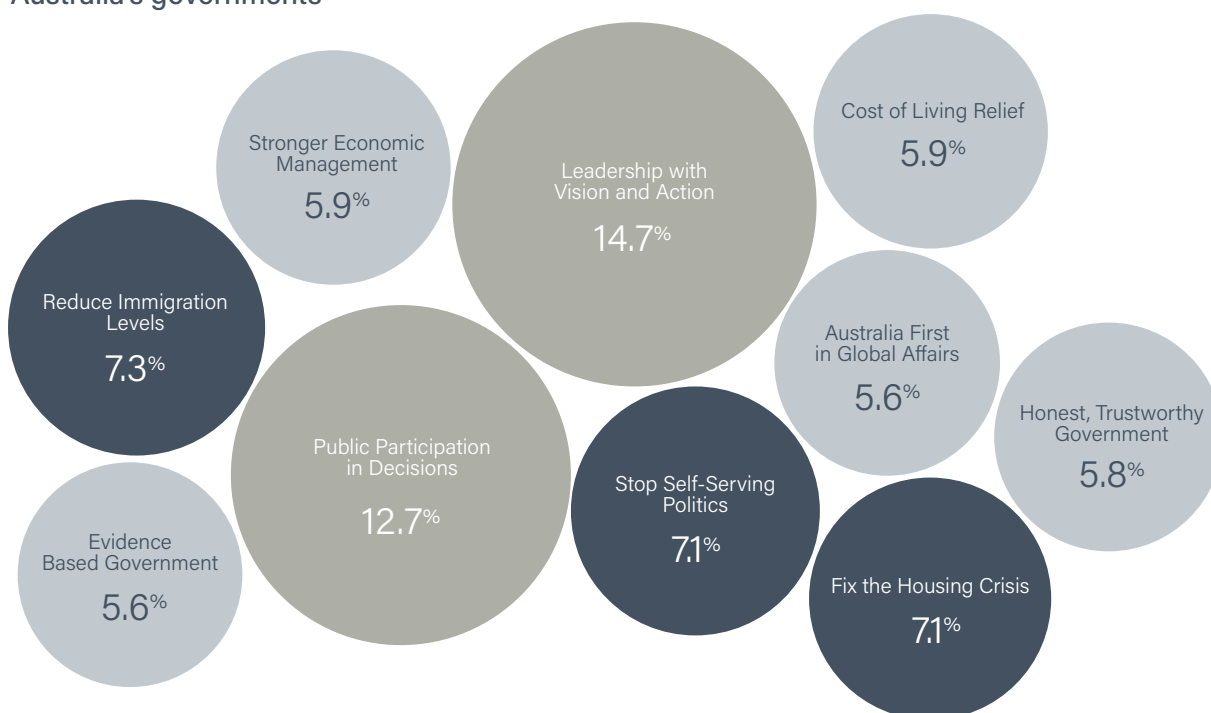
While people may currently be more cynical towards politicians, there was a clear appetite amongst respondents for leadership. When asked what one solution could solve the challenges facing Australia's governments, the most common responses called for leadership with vision and action (14.7%). This included responses calling for leaders to act with courage, competence, and vision; be willing to make tough decisions; and to focus on long-term national progress over short term politics. This was followed by calls for more public participation in decision making (12.7%), indicating a desire for greater community consultation and outreach. This was significantly higher than answers related to specific policy concerns, such as reducing Australia's immigration levels (7.3%) or fixing the housing crisis (7.1%).

Spotlight: McKinnon Prize

Calls for more leadership with vision and action align with the mission of the annual McKinnon Prize in Political Leadership, delivered in partnership with the University of Melbourne, which celebrates political leaders who demonstrate exceptional vision, collaboration, courage, and ethical behaviour. By highlighting exceptional leadership, the Prize reinforces trust in our political leaders and inspires future leaders, which is critical for a well-functioning democracy. While people may hold cynical views of politicians in general, showcasing examples of exceptional leadership can improve the overall standing of our elected representatives.



Figure 8: Top 10 solutions proposed by respondents to the challenges facing Australia's governments



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents the distributions of the top ten themes coded by Roy Morgan for open-text responses to the question "What one solution, if any, could solve the challenges facing Australia's governments?". Responses coded as "other", "don't know", "not applicable", or "no comment" are excluded.

3



EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR PUBLIC SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY



This chapter presents all measures related to perceptions and drivers of government effectiveness and satisfaction with services. We break down government effectiveness into three components: satisfaction with actual service delivery, perceptions of how capable the system is, and perceptions of how innovative and evidence-based government is.

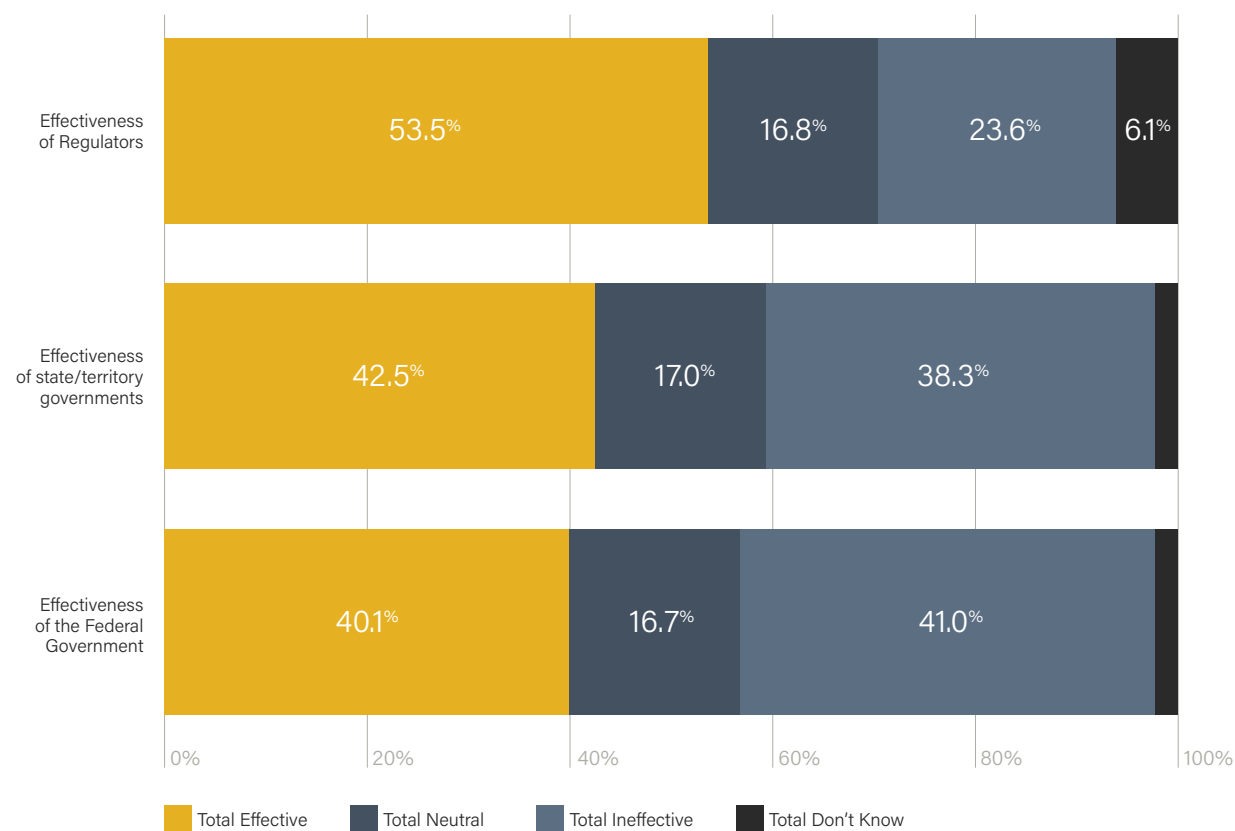
Key findings:

- **Strength:** A majority of Australians are satisfied with most public services
- **Insight:** There is a strong relationship between perceptions of government effectiveness and trust in government, highlighting the importance of governments delivering for their citizens
- **Insight:** More people perceive the public service than politicians to be capable of solving long-term challenges
- **Challenge:** More people believe governments look for innovative ideas than think they would adopt them in practice, highlighting a perceived challenge with implementation.

Overall measures of government effectiveness

More people consider independent regulators to be effective than government, and rate the state governments as more effective than the Federal Government. As with trust, those born outside of Australia or with a bachelor or postgraduate degree rate governments as more effective, and those aged 18-24 were more likely to consider their governments to be effective (49.5% Federal, 52.3% State) than other ages.

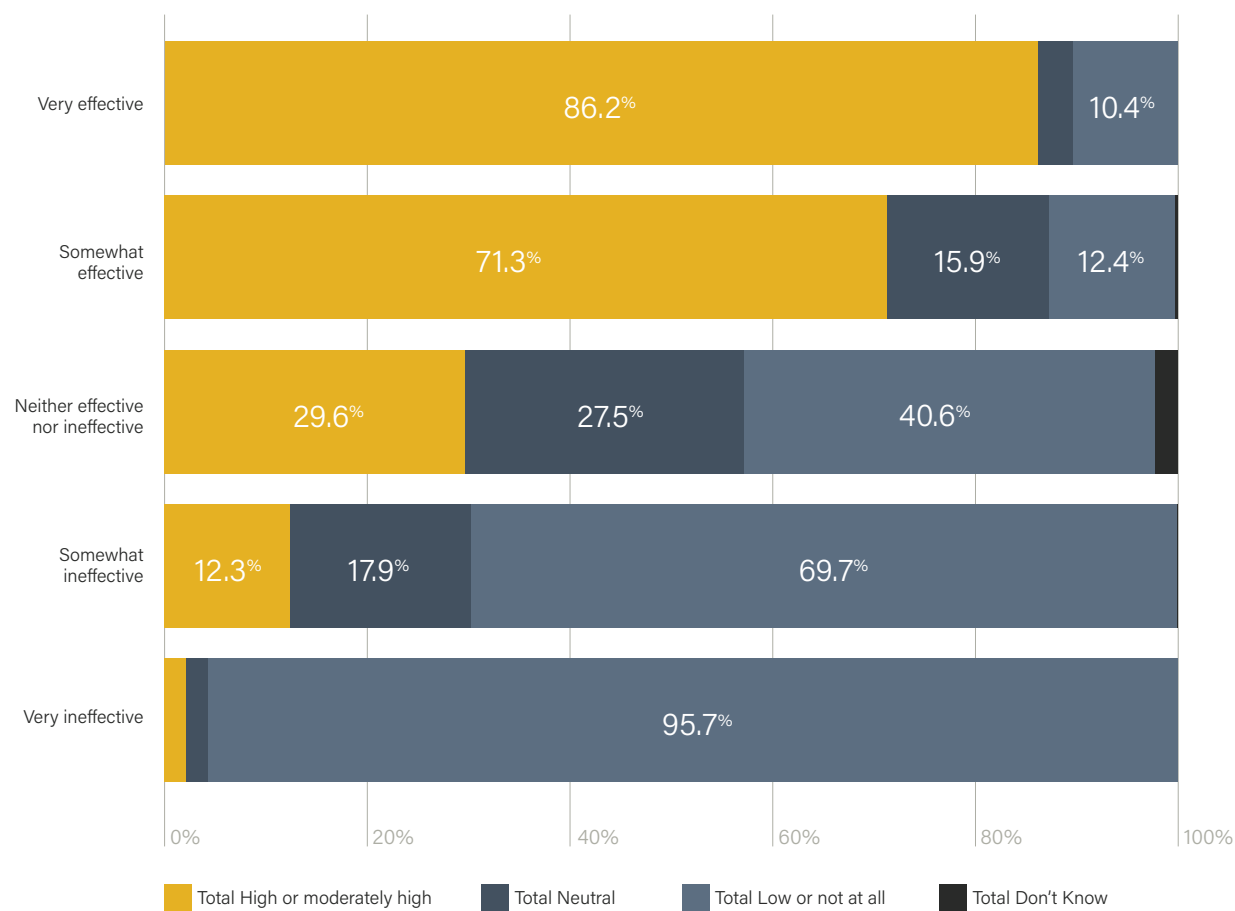
Figure 9: Effectiveness of governments and regulators



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions asking "How effective or ineffective would you say [entity name] is?" Where "Effective" is an aggregation of "very effective" and "somewhat effective" responses; "Neutral" is equal to "neither effective nor ineffective" responses; "Ineffective" is an aggregation of "somewhat ineffective" and "very ineffective" responses; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

A strong relationship exists between perceptions of government effectiveness and trust in government. For example, a large majority of those who thought the Federal Government was very effective also said they trust that government (86.2%), with similar patterns for state governments. Overall, more people consider their governments to be effective than trust them: 37.6% trust the Federal Government, while 40.1% consider them effective.

Figure 10: Relationship between perceived effectiveness of the Federal Government and trust in it



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "How effective or ineffective would you say Australia's Federal Government is?"; broken down by responses to the question "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how much do you trust the Federal Government?". Where "High or moderately high trust" is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; "Neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "No or low trust" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

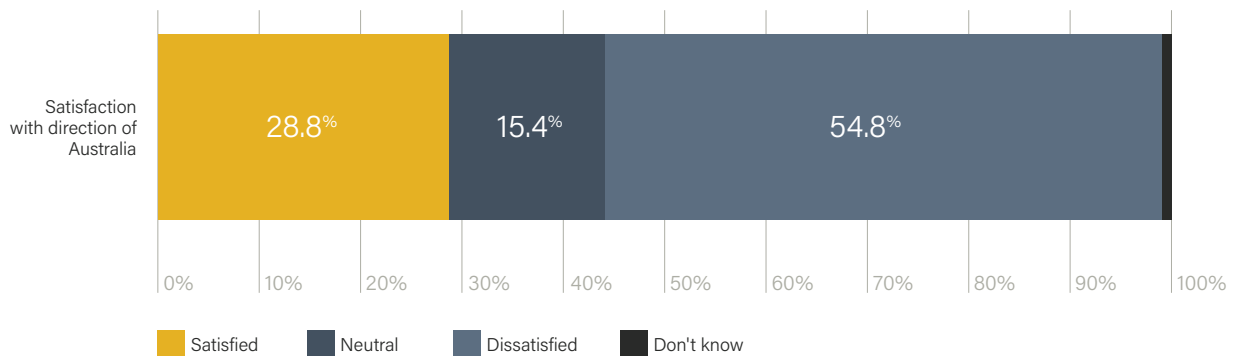
Further insight

When governments are seen to be delivering for their citizens, people are more likely to trust them. This finding is consistent with the OECD's work on the drivers of trust in government that includes satisfaction with services as one of its key drivers.¹²

McKinnon's Public Sector and Policy Innovation focus areas provide governments with the insights, capabilities and tools required to deliver higher quality services for Australians. We recognise that in addition to better outcomes there is also a democratic dividend from improved service delivery and government effectiveness.

However, fewer Australians are satisfied with the overall direction of the country, suggesting broader concerns about long-term government performance. Nearly twice as many people are dissatisfied (54.8%) as satisfied (28.8%). Because this question reflects views about longer-term trends and outcomes, rather than the immediate quality of service delivery or performance that shape perceptions of effectiveness, these lower scores may indicate wider unease about government policy, long-term planning, or broader economic and social conditions.

Figure 11: Satisfaction with the direction Australia is heading in



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "All things considered, how satisfied are you with the way Australia is heading?". Where "Satisfied" is an aggregation of "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses; "Neutral" is equal to "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" responses; "Dissatisfied" is an aggregation of "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" responses; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

International benchmarks

While Australians may be nearly evenly split on whether they think our governments are effective or not, Australia has ranked quite highly on international measures of government performance. The Blavatnik Index of Public Administration,¹³ compiled by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford, rates countries on how well their national public sector and administrative services function. In 2024, Australia ranked 8th out of 120 countries assessed.

The World Bank also collects data on how effectively and independently a government delivers and implements quality public services and policies, as well as how credible its commitments are. Of the 205 countries or regions it has data on for 2023, Australia ranked 14th for government effectiveness, although our rating has declined since 2004.

These international measures are largely derived from the expert opinion of raters selected by the relevant institution and provide a useful benchmark for how governments are seen to be performing.

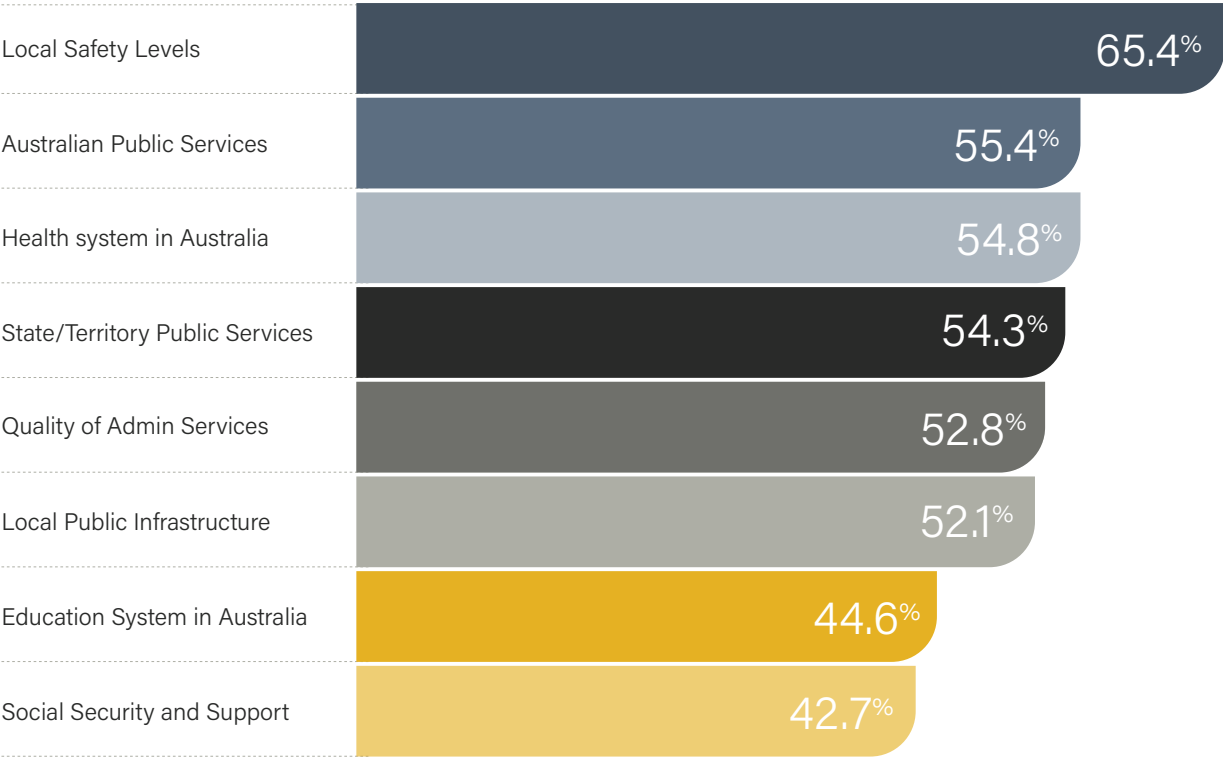
12 OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.

13 [Overall Results | Blavatnik Index of Public Administration](#)

Satisfaction with services

A majority of Australians are satisfied with public services generally as well as most of the specific services we surveyed, except for education (44.6% satisfied) and social security (42.7%). More Australians are satisfied with their services than believe their state or the Federal Government to be effective. Unlike measures of trust and effectiveness where states ranked higher than the Federal Government, slightly fewer people were satisfied with their state's public services than Federal public services.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with different services and services overall



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions asking "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means very dissatisfied and 10 means very satisfied, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following". Where "Very satisfied" is the aggregation of responses from 6-10; "Neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Very dissatisfied" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Comparing satisfaction with services to the most recent OCED Drivers of Trust in Government survey and the APSC's Trust and Satisfaction survey, the McKinnon Index records lower levels of satisfaction.¹⁴ In the 2025 APSC Trust and Satisfaction survey¹⁵

65% of respondents said they could trust Australia's public services (up from 58% in 2024), and 69% were satisfied with them (up from 68% in 2024), compared to the 55.4% who were satisfied with Federal public services in the McKinnon Index.

14 Note: while samples and weighting methodologies are different, overall satisfaction with Australia's public services was 68% in the 2024 APSC Trust and Satisfaction survey compared with 55.4% here. Similarly, OECD data from 2023 on satisfaction with education, health and administrative services were all higher than the results in the McKinnon Index.

15 [Australian public services – trust and satisfaction | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

Similarly, comparing satisfaction with health, education and administrative services with the same results in the 2023 OECD Survey¹⁶ (these were the only three asked about in that survey), satisfaction is now markedly lower, noting that differences in sampling and weighting between these surveys limit how directly they can be compared. Future editions of the McKinnon Index will enable additional insights on trends in perceptions of government service delivery.

Dashboard of service delivery:

To explore how closely related perceptions of government effectiveness and satisfaction with services are to policy outcomes, we include a high-level dashboard with a selection of policy indicators here for comparison. Rather than try to comprehensively summarise policy outcomes, this is intended as a guide only, and a more complete repository of delivery metrics can be found through either the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Productivity Commission's Report on Government services, or initiatives like Transforming Australia – an assessment of Australia's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Figure 13: Table of policy indicators

Policy area	Measure	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Economy	Gini coefficient (income)	0.305	0.289	0.296	0.322	0.307	–	–
	Real net national disposable income per capita (\$,000)	64.6	66.1	65	70.8	71.9	71	–
Health	Life satisfaction	7.9	7.9	7.9	7.9	7.9	–	–
	Life expectancy	82.8	82.9	83.2	83.3	83.2	–	–
Education	NAPLAN Math scores Year 9	595.7	592.1	N/A	587.5	584.4	567.7	565.3
	NAPLAN Reading scores Year 9	584.1	581.3	N/A	576.8	577.6	564.4	565
	PISA socio-economic parity in Math	0.71	–	–	–	0.53	–	–
Crime	Homicide and related offences per 100k pop	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.5	–
	Sexual assaults per 100k pop	105.4	105.9	107.2	120.8	126.1	136.3	–
	Kidnapping/abduction per 100k pop	1.8	2.1	1.6	1.8	2	1.9	–

Source: Please refer to Appendix B for details on the sources of data in Figure 13.

What this dashboard shows is that at a high level, our personal health and economic performance remain strong, but outcomes in education and some measures of public safety have been declining. Economic inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient for income, which measures the distribution of income amongst households, also declined between 2021-22 and 2022-23, however is still above its pre-COVID levels. This is also something to monitor for future years as levels of inequality may influence a range of measures in the McKinnon Index.

16 OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.



Spotlight: Multi-school Organisations pilot

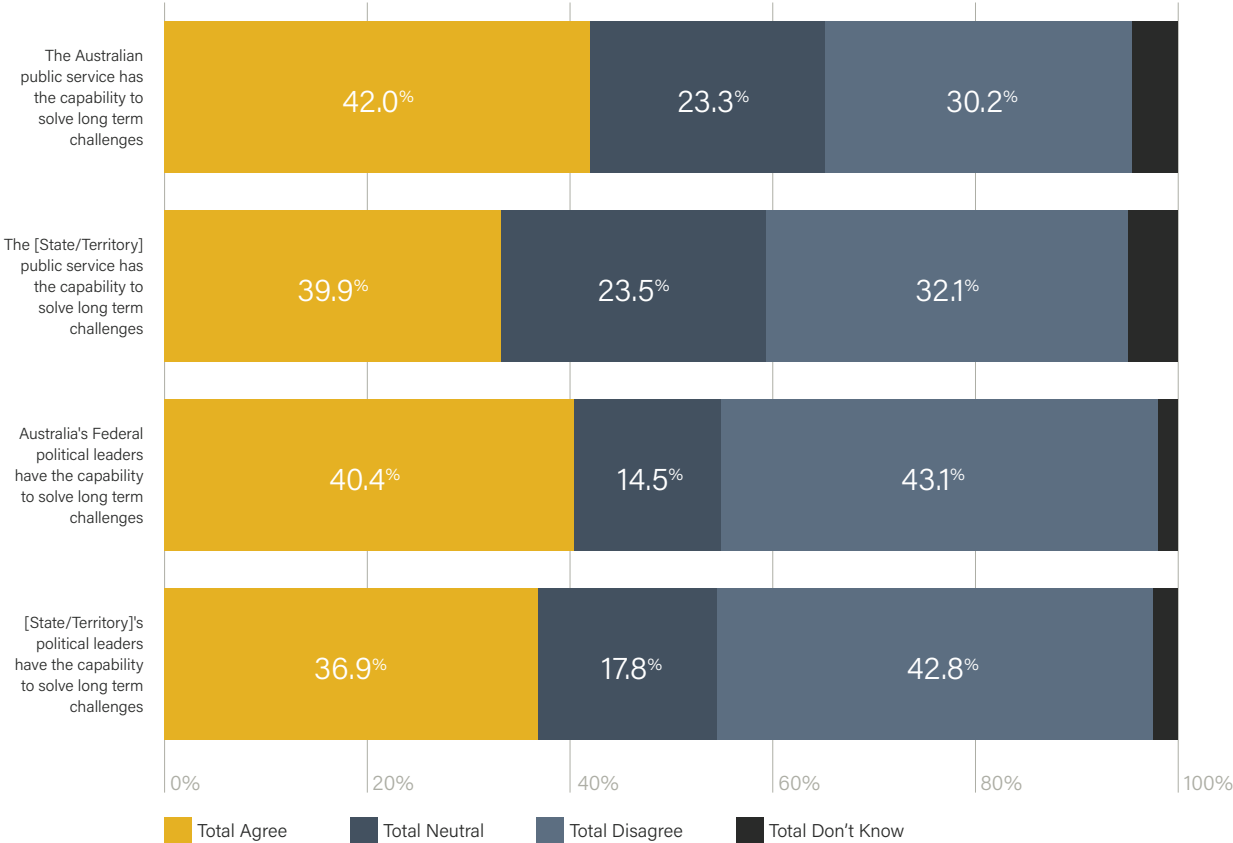
As demonstrated in the data, Australia's education results are declining and the equity gap between students is widening with one in three Australian school students not meeting NAPLAN's literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Multi-School Organisations (MSOs) are designed specifically to address this challenge, to lift standards by organising schools into strong families under shared executive leadership. They provide common teaching practice, clear accountability, and a back-office that frees principals and teachers up to focus on learning.

The results speak for themselves. In the UK, over 70% of underperforming schools improved to 'good' or 'outstanding' after joining a Multi-Academy Trust — the UK's version of an MSO.

Now, Tasmania in partnership with McKinnon, is leading the way. The first state to trial Multi-School Organisations — a bold, five-year partnership that connects schools, supports teachers, and lifts outcomes for every child.

Figure 14: Perceived capability of federal and state public servants and political leaders



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions asking "How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? [Entity name] have the capability to solve long term challenges". Where "Agree" is the aggregation of responses "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"; "Neutral" is equal to "neither agree nor disagree" responses; "Disagree" is the aggregation of responses "Strongly disagree" and "Disagree"; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Perceptions of capability

Our data shows that, unlike trust and overall effectiveness where states perform better, Federal public servants and politicians are seen as more capable than their state counterparts. Within each jurisdiction, more people believe the public sector has the capability to solve long-term challenges than politicians.

Those on higher incomes (46.5%) and with postgraduate degrees (44.6%) were more likely to rate federal politicians as capable, as were women (43.3% compared with 37.3% for men). Older women in particular were more likely than men of the same age to consider federal politicians to be capable, with 46.5% of women aged 50-64 believing this, compared with 30.7% for men. Those who self-identify as left (57.1%) or centre-left (53.9%) were also more likely to consider federal politicians to be capable, compared with just 25.4% of those who identify as right, which may relate more to the current make-up of the 48th Federal Parliament. Similar patterns were seen for perceptions of public service capability, though without differences between men and women.

Perceptions of innovation and use of evidence

Aside from measuring perceptions of capability, we also asked respondents whether they thought it likely government would adopt innovative ideas to improve a public service, and whether governments look internationally to find policy solutions.

While more people think the Federal Government looks internationally to find policy solutions (43.6%) than don't (30.8%), fewer people think it likely the government would adopt innovative ideas that could improve a public service than think they wouldn't (34.8% likely compared with 40.7% unlikely). This is also below the OECD average from 2023 that found 38.8% thought their government would adopt an innovative idea if it could improve a public service.¹⁷ This highlights a challenge in public policy – that it is easier to find ideas than implement them, and something it appears the public believe is true of our governments.

Australians were also much less likely to think that states look internationally to find policy solutions than the Federal Government, even though they are slightly more likely to think they adopt innovative ideas.



Spotlight: McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership

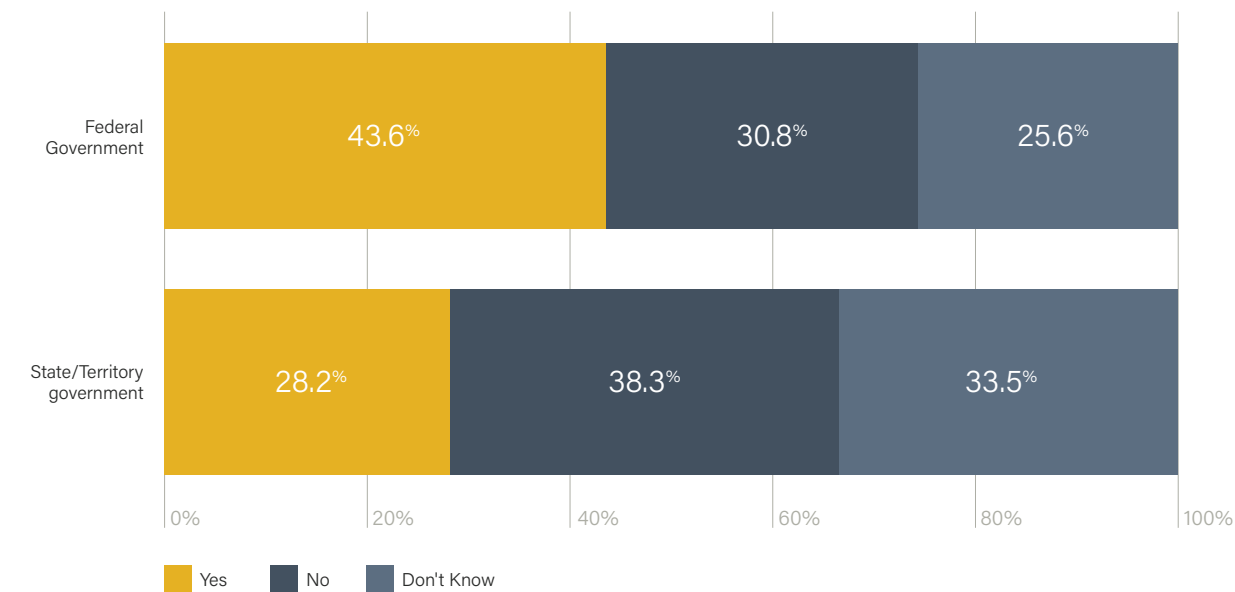
Given the importance of perceptions of capability in driving trust in government, it's critical that our political leaders have the skills they need to deliver for the Australian public. That is why McKinnon has partnered with Monash University since 2019 to establish the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership, Australia's only independent, non-partisan organisation dedicated to building the capability of political leaders.

Guided by a unique learning model, the McKinnon Institute convene the brightest faculty from around the world to create practical learning programs that provide leaders with the tools to deal with complex problems and deliver better governments and outcomes for Australia.

Over a third MPs across all nine parliaments have participated in a McKinnon Institute program with 91 scholars completing the Advanced Political Leadership course for parliamentarians who are potential ministers in the short-to-medium term.

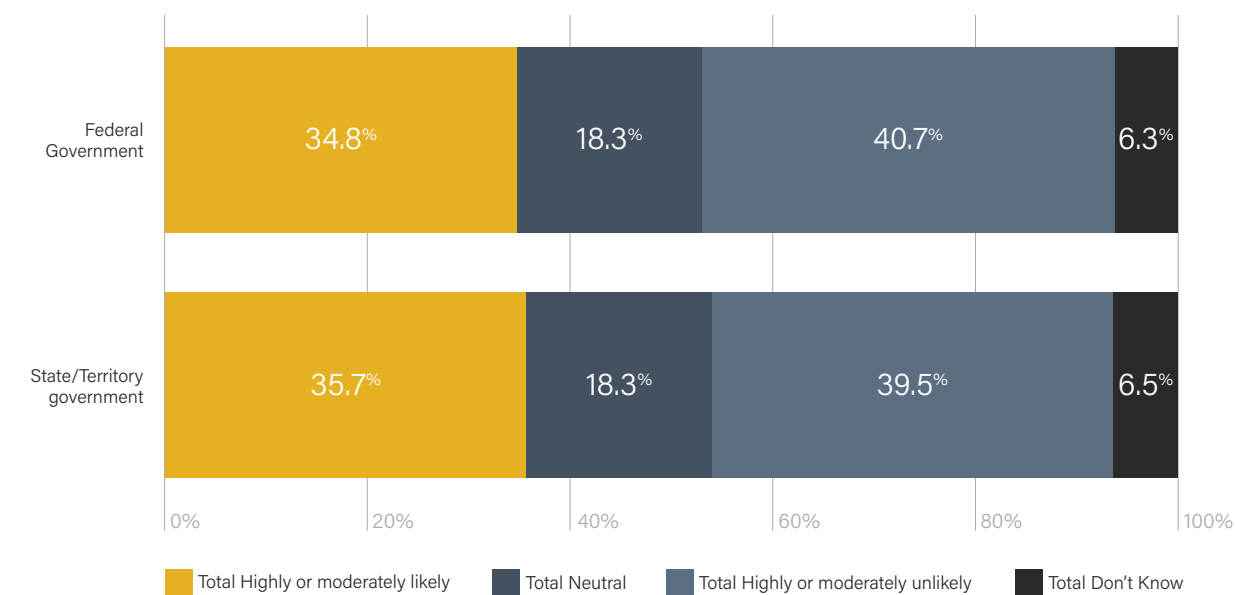
17 OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>

Figure 15: Do you think the following governments look internationally to find policy solution?



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "Do you think the following governments look internationally to find policy solutions?". "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Figure 16: Likelihood of governments adopting innovative ideas to improve a public service



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all likely and 10 means very likely, if there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible public institution in Australia?" Where "Likely" is the aggregation of responses 6-10, "Neutral" is equal to responses of 5; "Unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Future measures of capability and effectiveness

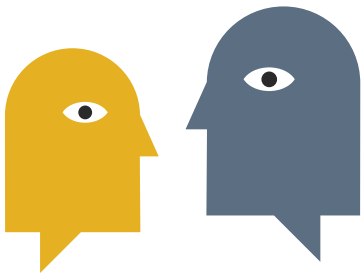
There are other ways to measure the capability and effectiveness of our public sector that are not suited to measurement through public opinion surveys. We aim to address this gap in future iterations of the McKinnon Index by developing an expert opinion survey for politicians, senior

public servants and other relevant experts who can reflect on the more technical aspects of the operations of government, which combined with public perceptions can provide a rich source of information on the performance of government.

4



DEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOURS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS



This chapter presents data for all measures related to democratic support and behaviours. We break down measures of the drivers of democratic performance into five groups: measures of the performance of our democratic institutions, measures of civic participation, measures of civic knowledge, measures relating to the media and information people consume, and measures of social cohesion and polarisation.

Key findings:

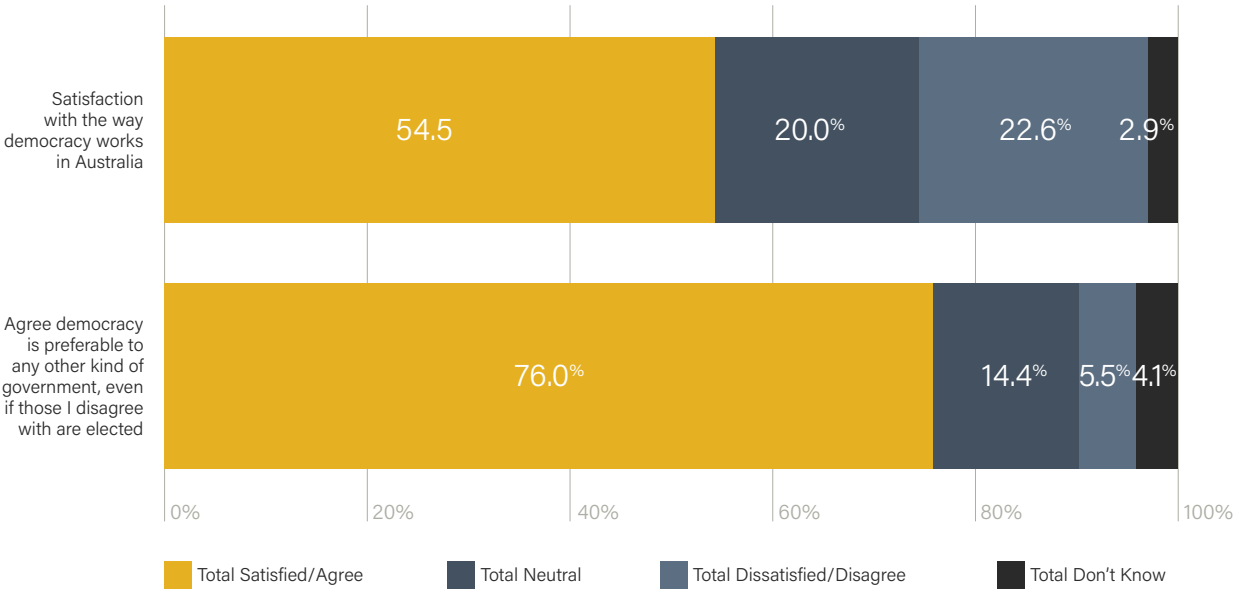
- **Strength:** Support for democracy remains strong (76.0%), and the vast majority of Australians reject violence to advance political causes (80.4%)
- **Challenge:** Satisfaction with how democracy works in Australia (54.5%) is lower than overall support for democracy
- **Challenge:** Around one in four Australians could be considered disengaged from voting as they either do not vote or vote mainly to avoid a fine
- **Strength:** Three quarters of Australians are confident they understand how our democracy works, and the number who believe our political system allows people like them to have a say in what government does is above the OECD average
- **Insight:** Concerns over misinformation and media bias or influence were the two most common responses when asked what the biggest challenges currently facing Australia's democracy were

Headline democratic measures

While support for democracy is high (76.0%), only 54.5% of Australians are satisfied with how it is working in practice. Satisfaction with democracy was lower among those who do not feel a strong sense of belonging in Australia, those who lack confidence in understanding how our democracy works, those whose highest qualification was high school and those on lower incomes. Younger people appear more ambivalent about democracy

than older cohorts. They were less likely to be satisfied with democracy, and far more likely to say they are neither satisfied or dissatisfied. However, dissatisfaction with democracy was highest among older Australians (50+), particularly men, so while overall more older Australians are satisfied with democracy than younger cohorts, they were also more likely to say they are dissatisfied than expressing a neutral opinion, indicating they are more certain in their views.

Figure 17: Support for, and satisfaction with, democracy



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the questions "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?" and agreement with the statement "Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, even if those I disagree with are elected." Where "Agree"/"Satisfied" is an aggregation of responses 4+ on a 5 point scale; "Neutral" is equal to a score of 3, and; "Disagree"/"dissatisfied" is an aggregation of responses 1-2; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

Driver analysis conducted by Roy Morgan found that dissatisfaction with democracy was most, but not solely, driven by the following other factors: how satisfied someone was with the performance of the state or Federal electoral commissions and whether they consider elections to be free and fair, whether they feel the political system allows people like them to have a say, whether they are satisfied with the direction the country is heading in, and

whether they consider the Federal Government to be effective. Together, these accounted for 50% of what was driving respondents to be dissatisfied with democracy among the core questions of our Index. A lack of confidence in understanding how our democracy works and not feeling part of Australia were also associated with being more likely to be dissatisfied with our democracy.

Figure 18: Top 10 factors driving dissatisfaction with democracy in the McKinnon Index

Question	Variance
The performance of the state electoral commission	10.75%
The performance of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	9.89%
The political system in Australia allows people like me to have a say in what the government does	9.73%
Satisfaction in direction of Australia	7.14%
I consider our elections to be free and fair	6.16%
Effectiveness of Federal Government	5.81%
Trust in the Federal Government	4.67%
Federal Government balancing intergenerational interests	4.42%
Australia's Federal politicians understand and represent people like me	4.29%
I am confident in the outcomes of our elections	4.20%

Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. Roy Morgan conducted driver analysis to see which responses to 62 different questions in the McKinnon Index were most related to the likelihood of someone saying that they were dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Australia. The model used was a Random Forest model that predicted whether respondents were dissatisfied with democracy or not. The model was highly accurate at 87%. SHAP analysis determined which variables were most influential in driving the model.

International benchmarks

While there is room to improve, support for, and satisfaction with, democracy in Australia seems high by international standards. A recent Gallup International poll of 43 countries¹⁸ found agreement that democracy is the best system of government was 59% on average, compared with the 76.0% in the McKinnon Index who agreed democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. And while fewer people are satisfied with democracy here (54.5%) than support it (76.0%), this is above the average of 23 countries surveyed by Pew Research Centre this year. That survey found that in 2025, only a median of 42% of adults were satisfied with democracy across those countries, with 58% dissatisfied (Australia was equal 3rd highest in this survey, with 61% satisfied and 39% dissatisfied – noting that for Pew's survey there was no 'neutral' option, a key difference with the McKinnon Index).¹⁹

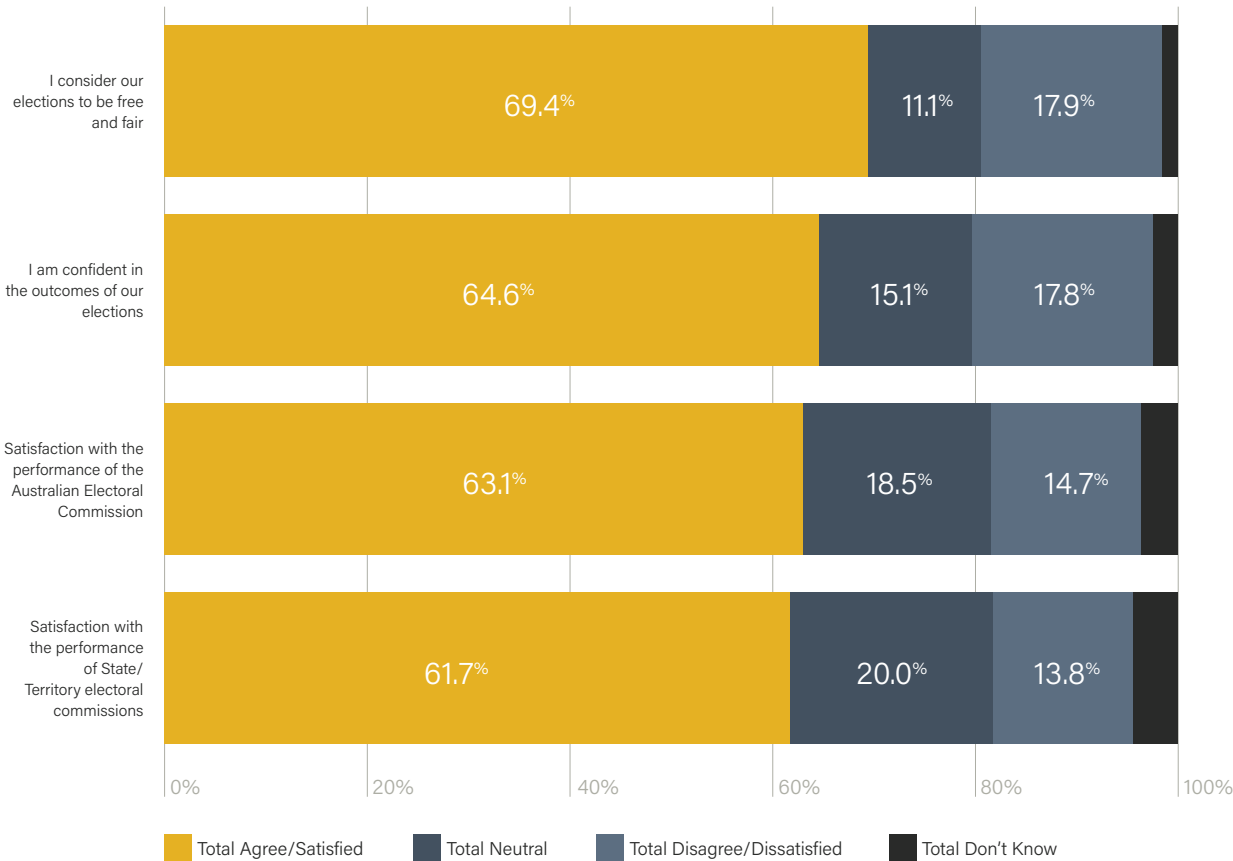
¹⁸ [Democracy Remains Popular but People Worldwide are Questioning its Performance: gallup-international.com](https://www.gallup.com/1000000/democracy-remains-popular-but-people-worldwide-are-questioning-its-performance.aspx)

¹⁹ [Dissatisfaction with democracy remains widespread in many nations | Pew Research Center](https://www.pewresearch.org/2025/01/01/dissatisfaction-with-democracy-remains-widespread-in-many-nations/)

Performance of democratic institutions

While only 54.5% of Australians are satisfied with how democracy works in Australia, more Australians are satisfied with the performance of our electoral commissions, have confidence in our elections and consider them free and fair.

Figure 19: Confidence in elections and satisfaction with electoral commissions



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions using a 5 point scale to show levels of agreement or satisfaction (scores of 4+), or disagreement and dissatisfaction (scores of 1-2), with scores of three being neutral; "Don't know" was a separate answer. The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report.

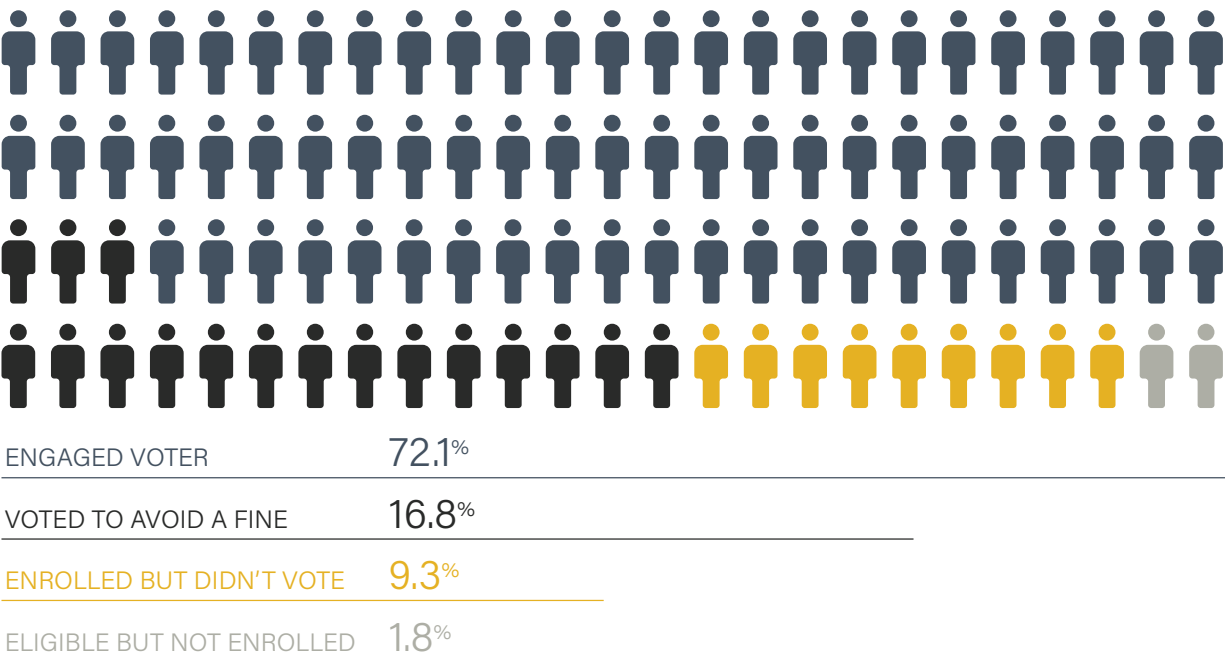
Satisfaction with electoral commissions was higher among those aged 65 and over (72.5%), on higher incomes (\$200k plus, 72.9%), and with university degrees (70.0%). Dissatisfaction was higher among those on the political right (33.2% dissatisfied), with some secondary school education (30.6%), those on lower incomes (<\$50k, 19.6%), and those living in outer regional areas (22.7%). Similar patterns

exist for confidence in election outcomes and belief that elections are free and fair, with those on higher incomes, with a university or postgraduate degree, from the political left and living in major cities more confident in our elections and likely to consider them fair.

Civic participation

Australian's engagement in the democratic process is strong, however our data suggests this is an area that could be improved. While compulsory voting has helped ensure we have one of the highest participation rates in the world, more than one in ten eligible people of voting age did not vote at the last federal election. Of those who voted, 16.8% said their main reason for voting was to avoid a fine, indicating that while they may turn up, they are not well engaged in the democratic process. Combined, this means a quarter of the voting age population could be considered not democratically engaged.

Figure 20: Voter engagement data from AEC and McKinnon Index main reason for voting

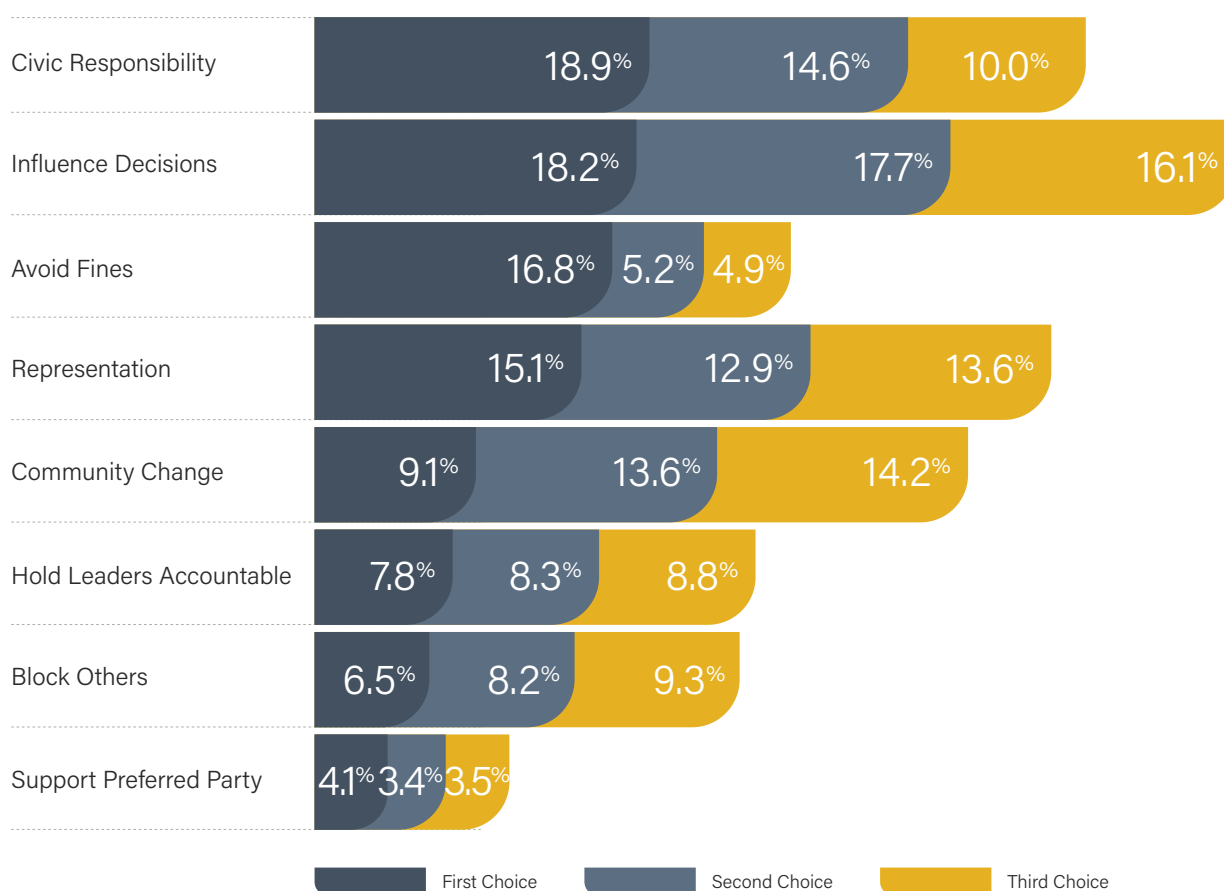


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index and AEC 2025 Election Turnout data. This represents the proportion of Australian's who are not enrolled based on AEC's enrolment data, and the proportion of registered Australian's who voted based on AEC's turnout data. The proportion who only voted to avoid a fine is based on those who chose that option as their first choice to the McKinnon Index question: "What are the main reasons you vote?" AEC turnout data accessed here: <https://www.aec.gov.au/election/fe25/participation-rates.htm>

While simply voting to avoid a fine was the third most common main reason for voting, overall it ranked only fifth when considering all responses (26.9% selected this in their top three). Younger Australians, those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, those not interested in politics, and those who get their news from online gaming platforms were groups more likely to say they vote to avoid a fine.

In contrast, far more people selected constructive reasons such as wanting to influence decisions (52.0%), seeing voting as a civic responsibility (43.6%) or to change their community (37.0%). More partisan motivations were less common, like blocking specific candidates (24.0%) or simply supporting a particular party (11.1%).

Figure 21: Main reasons for voting



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the question "What are the main reasons you vote?", where respondents could choose their top three from the following options provided: Voting is a responsibility of being an Australian citizen; I want to have a say in who represents me in parliament; I want to contribute to positive change and decisions that affect my community; Voting gives me the power to change who's in charge if I'm not happy with their decisions; I care about the issues and decisions that affect Australia and want to influence the laws that shape our lives; Voting is required by law, and I want to avoid a fine; I want to stop certain parties or candidates from being elected; and I strongly support a particular party or candidate.

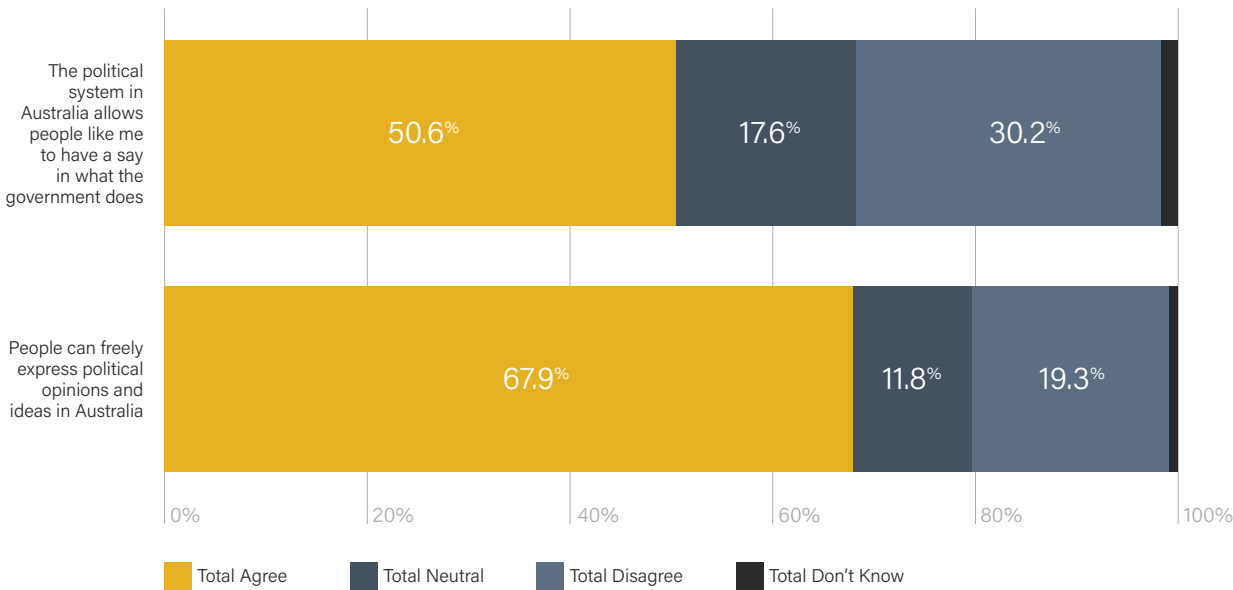
Interestingly, turnout in state elections is lower than Federal elections, and appears to be trending down over the last few elections in most jurisdictions. However, this does not necessarily mean fewer people are voting as since 2010, the enrolment rate has steadily improved thanks to increased efforts by electoral commissions. For example, while the turnout rate — the proportion of enrolled voters who cast a ballot — in the 2025 Federal Election was 90.7% (lower than most previous elections except 2022), the *participation rate* — the proportion of the *eligible population* who voted — was higher and has been increasing since 2013.

Democratic participation is not simply confined to voting though, and there are a number of ways citizens can influence policy or interact with politicians. In terms of whether people feel that they can express themselves or have a say outside of

voting, most people believe that our system allows people to do this, but fewer people believe they personally have a say. A majority of people agreed that people can freely express political opinions and ideas in Australia (67.9%), while around half (50.6%) agreed that our political system allows people like them to have a say in what the government does. This is above the OECD average from 2023²⁰ where only 30% felt their country allows people like them to have a say in what government does. However, not all Australian's feel this way. Disagreement with these statements was higher among men aged 35-49 and 50-64, those who support political parties on the right, those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and those with a poor sense of belonging. Agreement was higher among those with a university degree, on higher incomes, and who live in major cities.

20 OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en>.

Figure 22: Perceptions of ability to be heard politically



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the questions asking agreement with the statements "The political system in Australia allows people like me to have a say in what the government does" and "People can freely express political opinions and ideas in Australia". Where "Agree" is an aggregation of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"; "Neutral" is equal to "neither agree nor disagree"; "Disagree" is an aggregation of "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree"; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

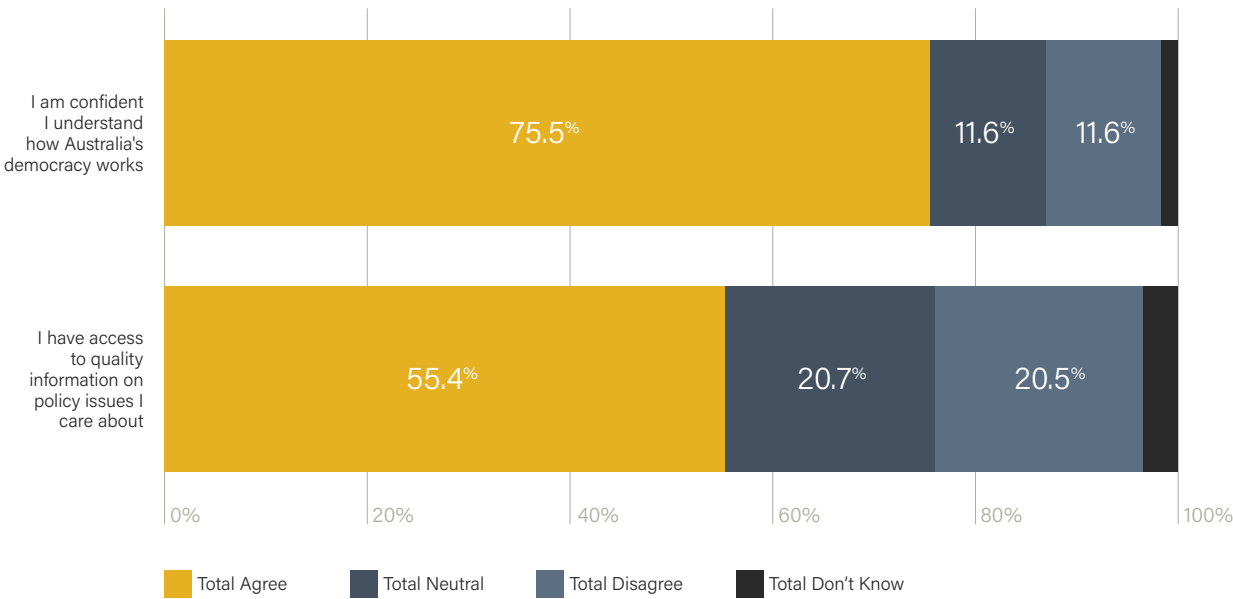
The 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion report²¹ found that 55% of Australians are involved in some form of social, religious, civic or political group, though within these groups Australians were least likely to be involved in civic and political groups (17%). This is important because this ongoing research finds that people who perceive strong cohesion in their neighbourhoods and actively participate are more likely to have a great sense of belonging in Australia, be happy, and to believe that most people can be trusted. This would also reinforce trust in government and support for democracy given the McKinnon Index finding that these views are more likely among those with a good sense of belonging. Promisingly though, while low, participation in civic and political groups has steadily increased from 15% in 2021 to 17% in 2025.

Civic knowledge

People's level of understanding with how our democracy works is an important prerequisite to them being able to engage in it. Overall, a majority of Australians agreed they were confident in their understanding of how Australia's democracy works (75.5%), with only 11.6% disagreeing. While this is positive, there are cohorts within Australia who are less confident, indicating areas where further civic education and outreach would be beneficial. Groups who were more likely to say they were not confident included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (31.1%), those who mainly speak a language other than English at home (21.3%), and younger Australians (20.4% for those aged 18-24 and 25-34, dropping to only 4.2% for those aged 65+). Importantly, those who said they didn't vote were among the most likely to say they were not confident they understand how our democracy works (32.6%).

21 O'Donnell, James, Alice Falkiner and Katarzyna Szachna. Mapping Social Cohesion 2025. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2025. <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2025>

Figure 23: Democratic understanding and access to information



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the questions asking agreement with the statements “I am confident I understand how Australia’s democracy works” and “I have access to quality information on policy issues I care about”. Where “Agree” is an aggregation of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree”; “Neutral” is equal to “neither agree nor disagree”; “Disagree” is an aggregation of “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree”; and “Don’t know” was a separate answer.

Measures of actual civic knowledge, as opposed to self-report, are infrequent, with students’ civic knowledge measured every three years, and last measured in 2024 through the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship. These results show a decline in civic knowledge, with the 2024 results being the lowest since testing began in 2004.²² Together with the McKinnon Index data, this highlights an emerging area of concern which reinforces the importance of a well delivered civics education program in upholding broad democratic support within Australia.

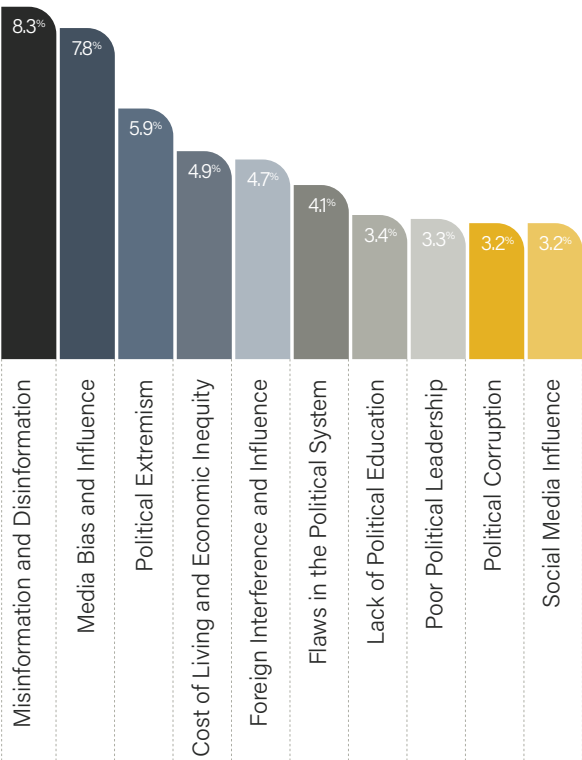
While most people say they understand how our democracy works, fewer people said they had access to information on policy issues they care about (55.4%). Those on lower incomes or those who do not have a university degree were both less likely to say they had access to information on policy and to say they understand how our democracy works, as were those who mainly get their news from social media and online gaming platforms.

22 [NAP - Civics and citizenship](#)

Media and the information environment

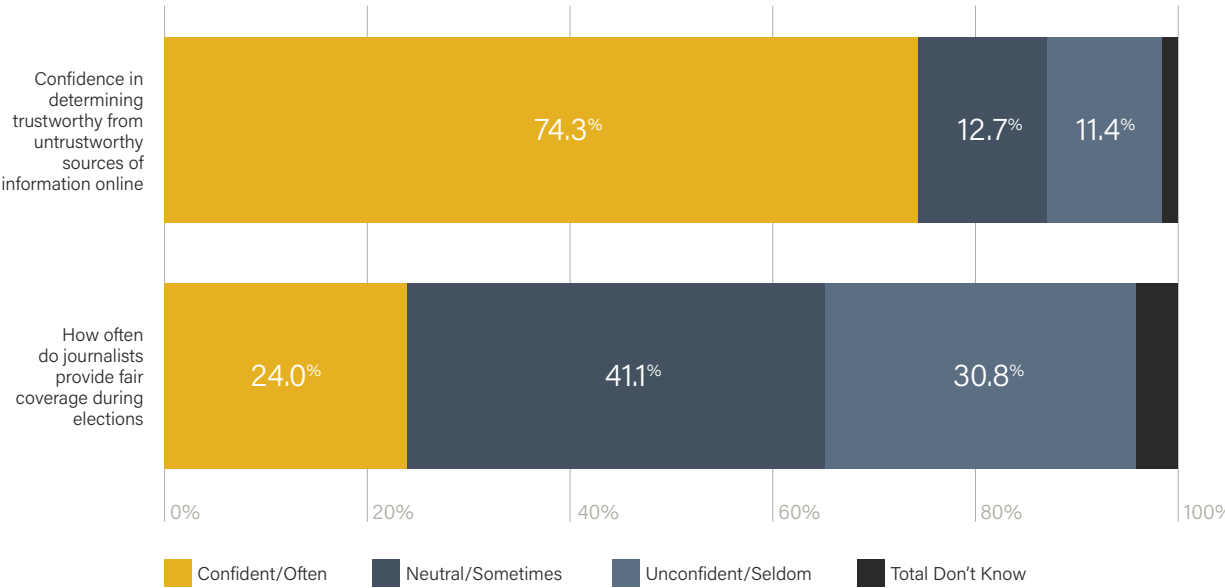
The McKinnon Index found Australians are also concerned about media coverage of politics and misinformation. Only 24.0% of Australians thought journalists often or very often provide fair coverage during elections, compared with 41.1% who thought they sometimes did, or 30.8% who thought they rarely or never did. And while most Australian’s (74.3%) were confident they could tell the difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of information online, concerns over misinformation and media bias or influence were the two most common responses when asked what the biggest challenges currently facing Australia’s democracy were. Interestingly, podcast listeners and online newspaper readers were among the most confident in identifying misinformation online (82% and 83.6% respectively), while online gamers were the least confident (57.2%), indicating simply being online does not improve confidence.

Figure 24: Top 10 challenges respondents listed to Australia’s democracy



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents the distributions of the top ten themes coded by Roy Morgan for open-text responses to the question “In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges currently facing Australia’s democracy?” Responses coded as “other”, “don’t know”, “not applicable”, or “no comment” are excluded.

Figure 25: Confidence in determining trustworthiness of news sources and perceived level of bias in media coverage of elections



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the questions “How confident are you in your ability to tell the difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of information online?” and asking agreement with the statement “In your view, how often do journalists provide fair coverage during elections in Australia?”. Where “Confident”/“Often” is an aggregation of responses 4+ on a 5 point scale; “Neutral”/“Sometimes” is equal to a score of 3; and; “Unconfident”/“Seldom” is an aggregation of responses 1-2; and “Don’t know” was a separate answer.

Further insight:

It seems that Australians are particularly concerned about misinformation, with the recent Digital News Report (DNR), compiled by the News Media Research Centre at the University of Canberra, finding that Australians were the most concerned nation about misinformation globally (74% concerned, compared with the global average of 57%).²³ This concern is not necessarily misplaced given the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 identified misinformation as the most severe global risk over the next two years for the second year in a row,²⁴ however what is driving Australian's concerns in particular, compared with our global peers, is unclear.

The media
trying to further
divide Australians into
left and right, rather
than accepting most
are somewhere in
the middle.

Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This was an open-text response to the question "In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges currently facing Australia's democracy?"

While few think that journalists provide fair coverage during elections, measuring actual bias across the media is difficult, as one's own views can influence whether they see certain content as biased or not. More positively, while scepticism about election coverage is high, general trust in news is higher when compared to the 2025 Digital News Report.²⁵ In 2025, the DNR found that trust in news generally rose by 3 percentage points to 43%, above the global average of 39%. When asked about the specific news they consume, even more people (49%) trust that news, but this is down from 50% the year before, with trust in 'my news' dropping among those in regional Australia from 49% to 44% since last year.

Social cohesion and polarisation

One key driver of democratic outcomes is how cohesive or polarised society is. The more polarised a society becomes, the less able it is to come together constructively to solve challenges, and at its most extreme can lead to politically motivated violence. Thankfully, the McKinnon Index finds levels of polarisation and support for violence are low, although Australians are evenly split on whether they think public debate is healthy and respectful (38.6% agree vs 38.1% disagree). The vast majority of people can still be friends with those who hold different political views (only 10.4% said they could not) and do not support politically motivated violence (only 8.9% believe it is sometimes justified). And while a minority here may support these views, a poll McKinnon commissioned in 2024²⁶ looking at levels of polarisation and support for politically motivated violence shows that fewer people this year agreed that it is sometimes justified to use violence to advance a cause they care about than said it was probably or definitely justified in that 2024 poll (16%).

The most recent World Values Survey (2017-2022)²⁷ also shows Australia, at 70.1%, was better than the global average of 68.7% who said it is never justified to use political violence, and the 60.1% who said this in the US.

23 Park, S., Fisher, C., McGuinness, K., Lee, J., Fujita, M., Haw, A., McCallum, K. & Nardi, G. (2025). Digital News Report: Australia 2025. Canberra: News and Media Research Centre, University of Canberra. [apo-nid330740_0.pdf](#)

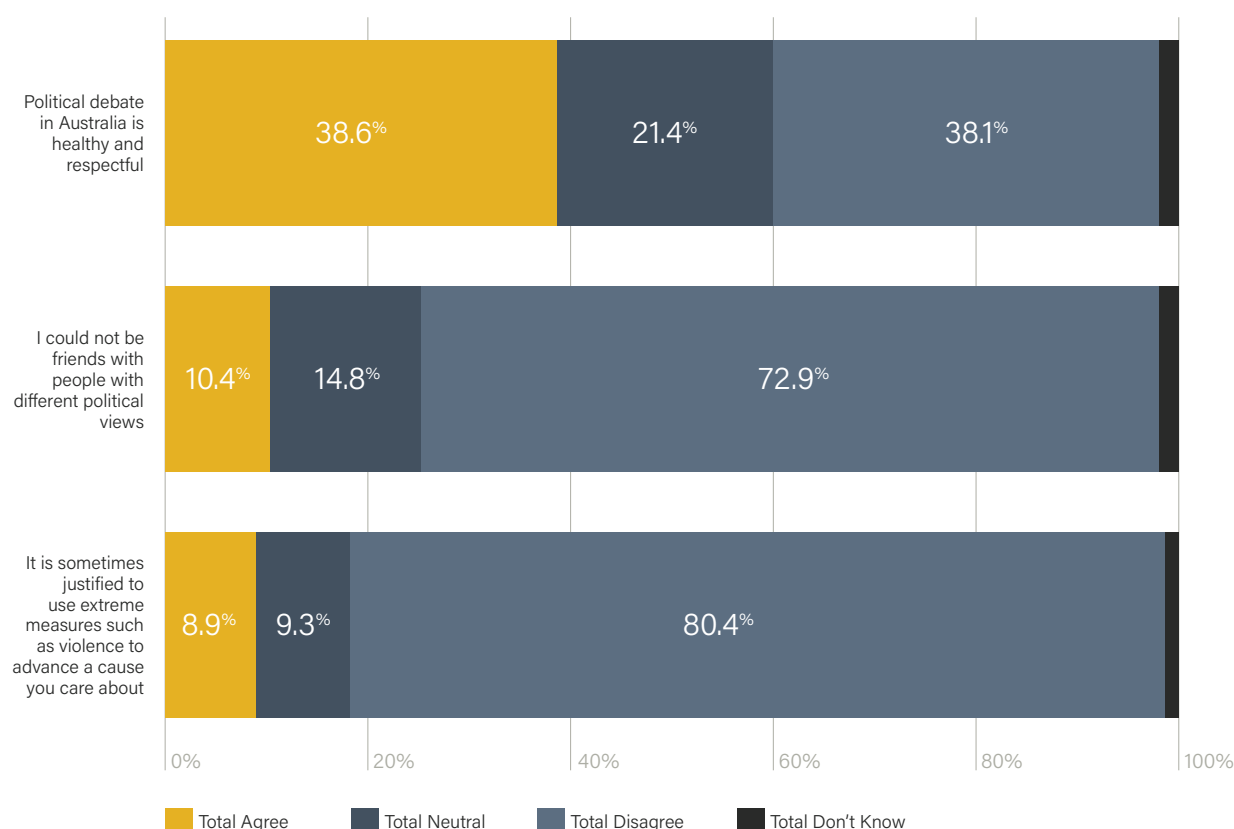
24 [Global Risks Report 2025 | World Economic Forum](#)

25 Park, S et. Al, (2025). Digital News Report.

26 McKinnon Poll (2024) Partisanship, polarisation and social cohesion in Australia. https://a-ap.storyblok.com/f/3001038/x/88e2db5e80/poll_partisanship_and_polarisation-report-final.pdf

27 [WVS Database](#)

Figure 26: Measures of polarisation and political debate



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the questions asking agreement with the statements "Political debate in Australia is healthy and respectful", "I could not be friends with people with different political views" and "It is sometimes justified to use extreme measures such as violence to advance a cause you care about". Where "Agree" is an aggregation of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"; "Neutral" is equal to "neither agree nor disagree"; "Disagree" is an aggregation of "somewhat disagree" and "strongly disagree"; and "Don't know" was a separate answer.

While these measures give us helpful data on the public's attitudes towards violence, it will also be important to track actual instances of political violence to understand the true scale of this problem. One of the most direct, although infrequent, measures of political violence is captured by the Australian Federal Police's Electoral Investigations Coordination Cell (EICC), which tracks and responds to threats against parliamentarians and candidates during Federal elections. During the 2025 Federal Election, the EICC received 51 reports relating to a range of alleged offences against parliamentarians and candidates.²⁸ While thankfully small, with no major incidents of harm to candidates reported during the campaign, this is an increase from the 39 reports recorded during the 2022 Federal Election and is a measure to watch to ensure this concerning trend does not continue.

While these measures look at political attitudes and violent behaviours specifically, the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion tracks a wide range of measures to understand Australian's attitudes and experiences relating to social cohesion, immigration, multiculturalism and wellbeing. This paints a detailed picture of the Australian community in terms of what it values and how people connect with society and each other, providing a more holistic measure of social cohesion. The 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion Report,²⁹ found that overall social cohesion has remained steady over the past three years despite the pressures experienced domestically from international conflicts and the rise of populist right-wing movements seen in other countries. This is a positive insight, however social cohesion levels are still below their pre-COVID levels, indicating there is room for improvement.

28 [Mission to protect a success: AFP keeps Parliamentarians safe during 2025 Federal Election | Australian Federal Police](#)


29 O'Donnell, James, Alice Falkiner and Katarzyna Szachna. Mapping Social Cohesion 2025. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2025. <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2025>

Australians' views of the strengths and improvements to our democracy

To help understand how Australians view our democracy, we also asked respondents what they thought the biggest strengths of Australia's democracy were, and what one solution, if any, could solve the challenges facing it.

By far the most common strength of our democratic system raised by respondents was the fact that we have compulsory voting. This was seen as a cornerstone of our democratic system, and was praised for ensuring high voter turnout,

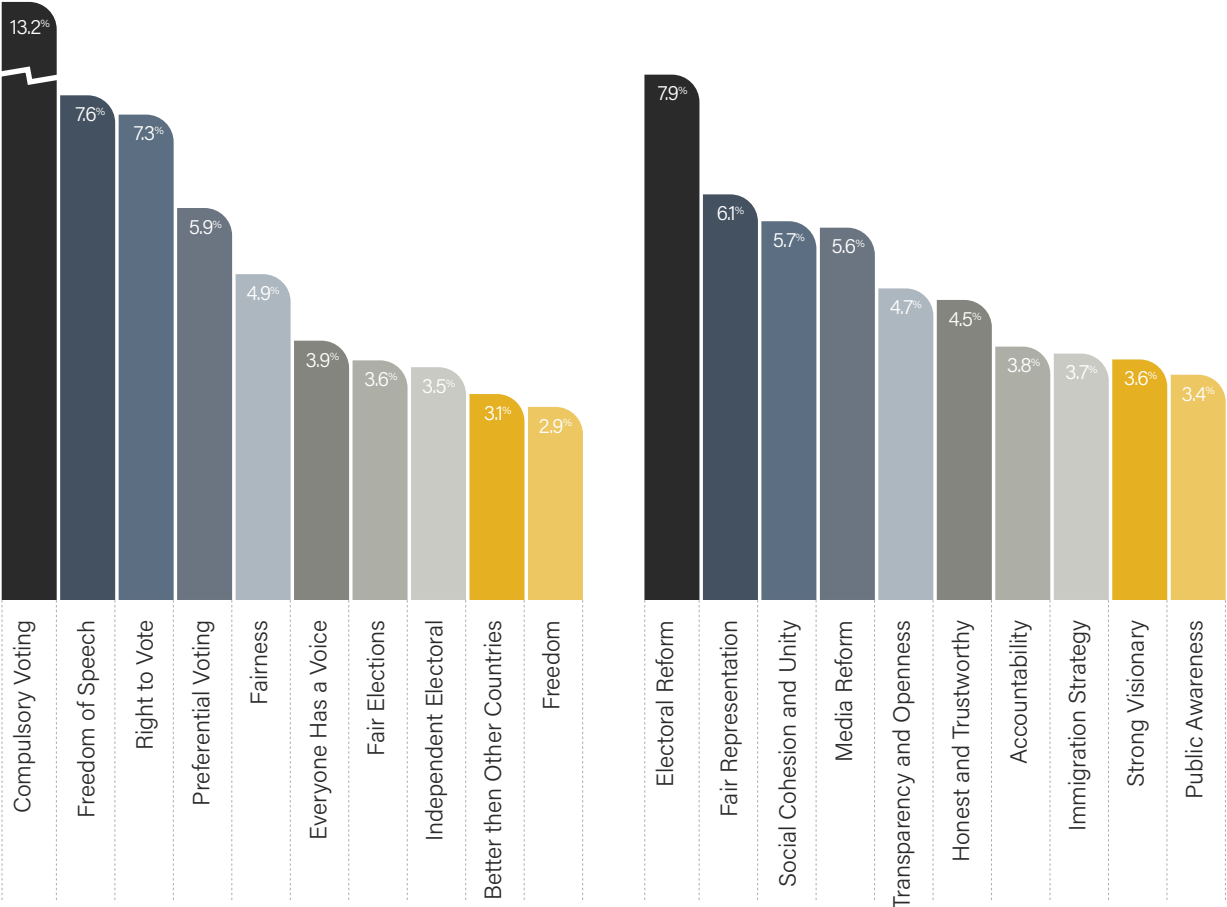
encouraging broad participation, and preventing the system from being dominated by only the most politically engaged. Freedom of speech and people's right to vote were the next most common, with respondents emphasising the ability to express diverse opinions without fear of repercussion as a strength, and equal voting rights and suffrage were seen as providing fairness and representation, reinforcing the idea that every citizen is perceived as having an equal say.



I like the mandatory voting—it allows parties to focus more on why people should vote for THEM rather than why people should vote at all.

Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This was an open-text response to the question "In your opinion, what are the biggest strengths of Australia's democracy?"

Figure 27: Top 10 responses when asked what the strengths of (left) and challenges facing (right) Australia's democracy are



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents the distributions of the top ten themes coded by Roy Morgan for open-text responses to the question "In your opinion, what are the biggest strengths of Australia's democracy?". Responses coded as "other", "don't know", "not applicable", or "no comment" are excluded.

Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents the distributions of the top ten themes coded by Roy Morgan for open-text responses to the question "What one solution, if any, could solve the challenges facing Australia's democracy?". Responses coded as "other", "don't know", "not applicable", or "no comment" are excluded.

When asked what solutions could help solve the challenges facing our democracy, a variety of ideas were raised. This included various ideas to reform the electoral system, from moving away from the two-party system to some calling to end preferential voting, with others pointing to the need for fairer representation and equity, as well as listening to communities. Other common themes included those highlighting the importance of social cohesion and unity, advocating for more tolerance, multiculturalism and reducing division, and those who raised the role that the media plays in our democracy and calling for unbiased reporting, higher standards of journalism, and action against media concentration and influence

Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This was an open-text response to the question "What one solution, if any, could solve the challenges facing Australia's governments?"

We are a multicultural society and so we should encourage education on tolerance from an early age.



PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT AND TRUST



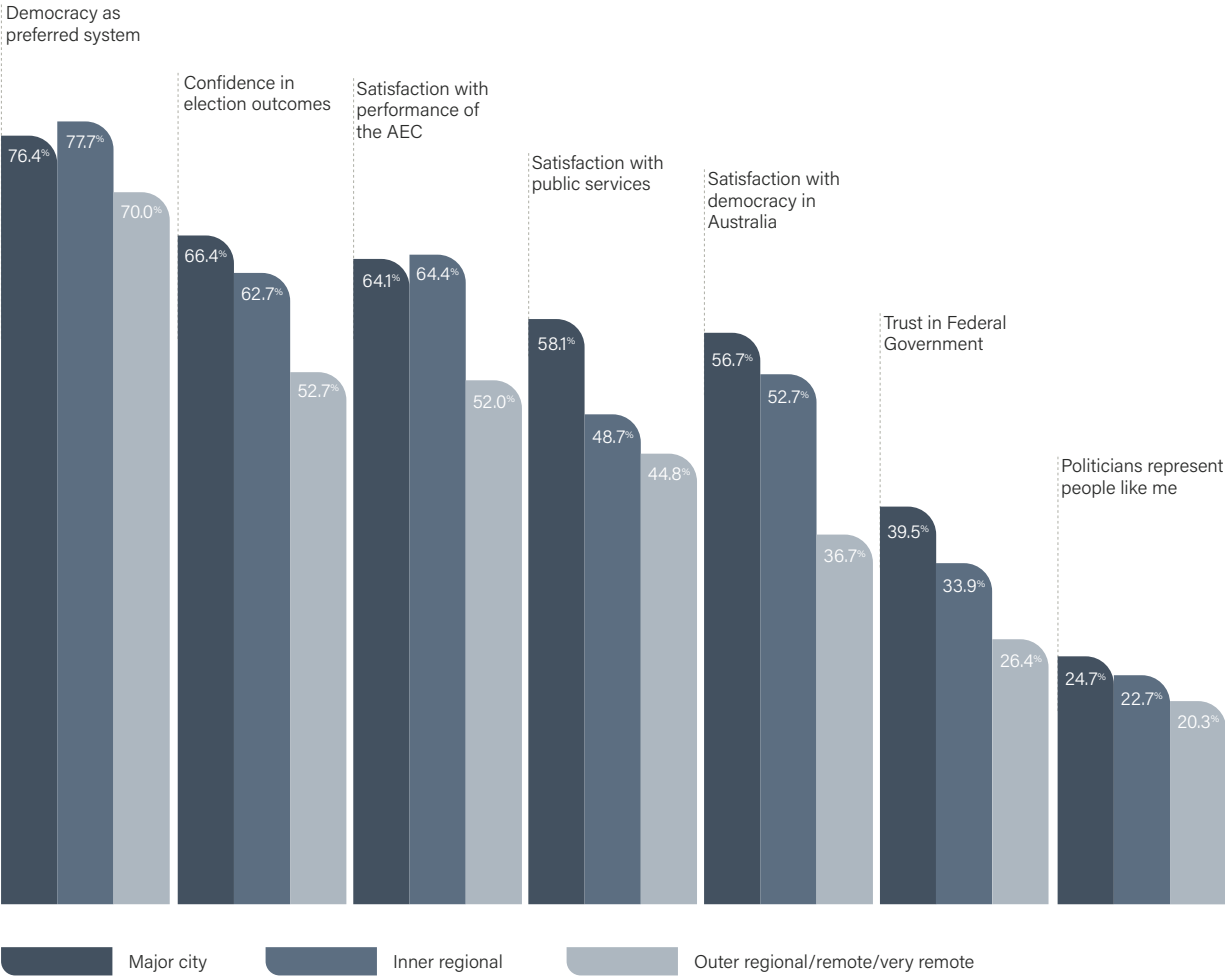
Australians overall are supportive and engaged in our democracy. However, some groups stand out as less engaged in our democracy, or that feel less well served by it. Analysing the key indicators of trust in government, perceptions of government effectiveness, and democratic engagement by demographics show patterns where some groups are of particular concern. If we are to ensure our democratic system works for everyone it is important that our political leaders, public services, and civil society continue to identify ways to reach and engage with these cohorts. Some of these groups are discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Regional disparities

There appears to be a democratic deficit in regional Australia relative to our cities. Not only are they less likely to trust the Federal or State government, but they are less confident in elections, less likely to agree democracy is preferable to any form of government, less satisfied with the Australian Electoral Commission, and less likely to think politicians understand and represent them. Confidence in election outcomes was particularly low for young men in rural areas.



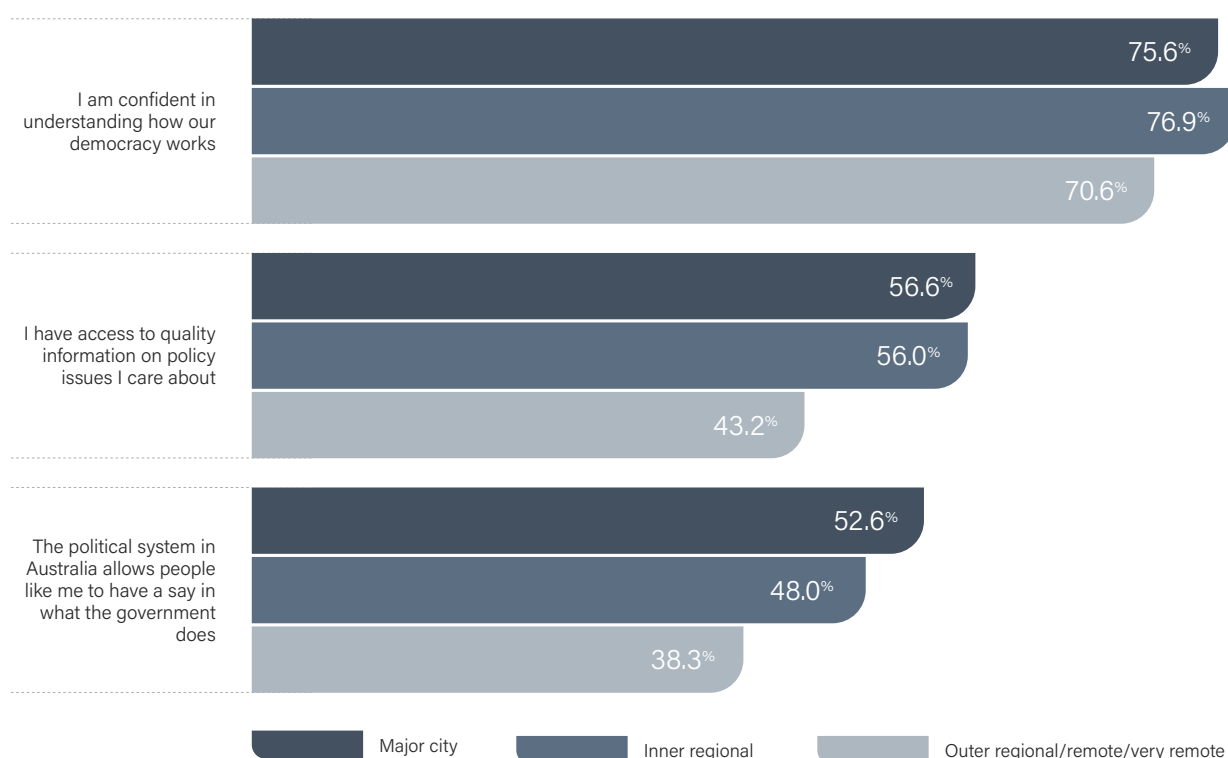
Figure 28: Democratic indicators by region



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Remoteness was determined based on respondents postcode and categorised by Roy Morgan using ABS regional classifications.

This deficit does not appear to be driven by a lack of understanding of how our democracy works, as this was not statistically significantly different across regional groups, and has not translated into support for violence or politics getting in the way of friendships, as both of these measures were lower in the regions than in cities. Instead, those who live furthest from the major cities were less likely to say they had access to quality information on policy issues they care about and were less likely to think the political system allowed people like them to have a say in what the government does, indicating a level of perceived distance from politics which may contribute to feeling less well served by it.

Figure 29: Regional differences in measures of democratic understanding and engagement



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, reflecting those who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Remoteness was determined based on respondents postcode and categorised by Roy Morgan using ABS regional classifications.

Further insights:

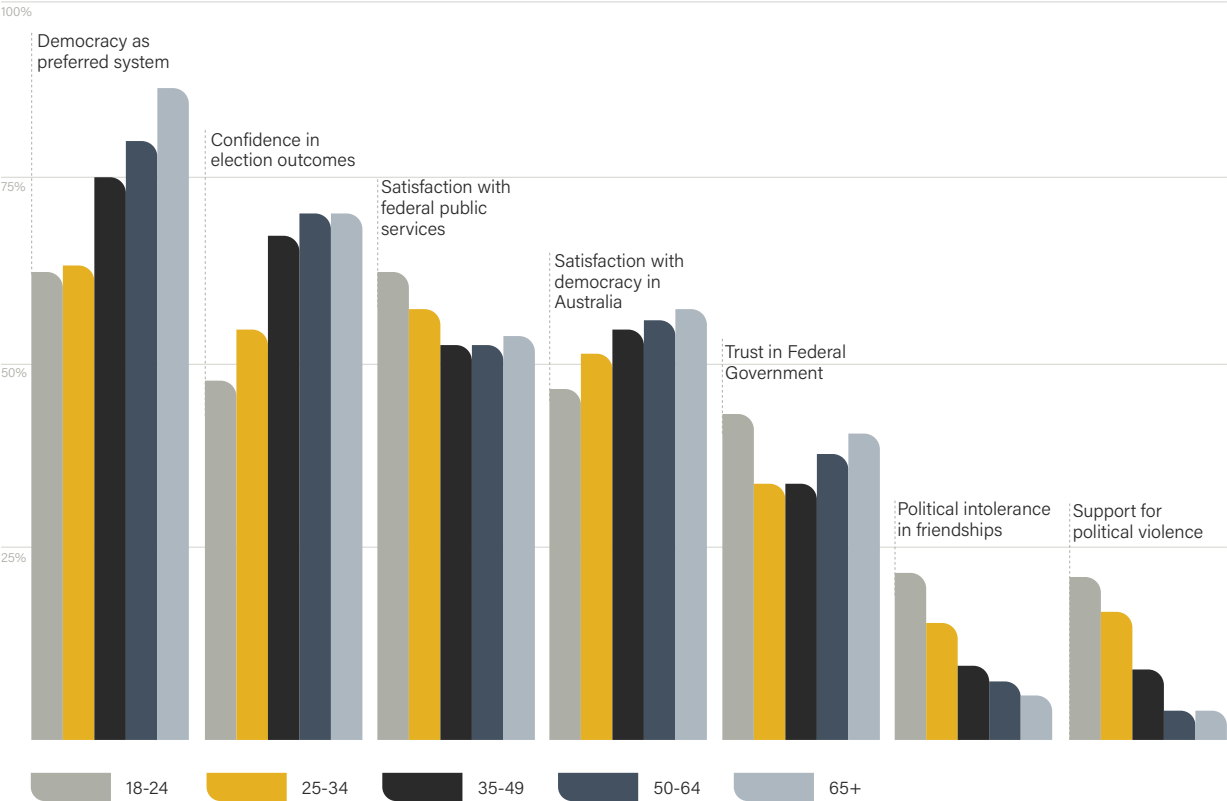
This data points to a few possible causes behind this regional democratic deficit:

- Feeling less well represented by federal politicians or feeling less able to have a say in what government does may be partially the result of the current political makeup of parliaments federally and in states given different voting patterns in regions and cities. Tracking this data over time will allow us to identify these impacts following changes in government at a state and federal level;
- There is a link between perceptions of government effectiveness and trust in institutions. People who live in regional Australia are more likely to consider government ineffective, and were less satisfied with all public services included in this survey, which could be a driver of their lower trust and satisfaction with democracy;
- Regions have been particularly affected by closures in local news, reducing local public interest journalism and the diversity of views which tend to support good democratic discourse, and which may contribute to those in regions feeling like they have less access to policy information than those in the cities;
- It could reflect something more fundamental with living in the regions, e.g., feeling further from the perceived centres of power (capital cities) which have the most politicians and dominate the news, or wider circumstances such as economic performance in the regions, or access to services.

Differences by age and gender

While most young people are still supportive of democracy and reject extreme views, this support and satisfaction with democracy is lower amongst young people, particularly young women. While young people tend to be more trusting of government and politicians, they are also more likely to hold undemocratic views and less likely to trust the AEC (unlike other institutions where young people tend to be more trusting).

Figure 30: Democratic indicators by age



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Age was determined based on respondents selecting which age bracket they belonged to.

These findings align with historical data showing younger people tend to be the most trusting of government of all age groups, however it does not appear that they are always the least satisfied with democracy. OECD data on Trust in Government from 2006-2024³⁰ shows that younger Australians (15-29) have consistently had higher trust in

government than older cohorts. However, data from the Australian Election Study on satisfaction with democracy from 1996-2022³¹ shows that while older people tend to be more consistently satisfied than younger people over time, this changes between elections and 18-24 year olds have gone from being the least satisfied group (2010-2013) to the most satisfied (2022).

30 Accessed from: [OECD Data Explorer • Future well-being](#)
31 Accessed from: [Interactive Charts | Australian Election Study](#)

Further insights:

One factor driving these results could be how younger people tend to view politics compared with older Australians. While they may trust institutions more and feel as represented as other Australians, they are more likely to say they cannot be friends with people with different political views (especially women aged 18-24 with 29.2% agreeing compared with the average of 10.4%) and more likely to say they support violence to advance a cause they care about (strong agreement was particularly high among men aged 25-34, with 8.5% saying this compared with the average of 2.4%). This indicates that politics is increasingly being felt as personal, without this leading to greater cynicism towards government institutions.

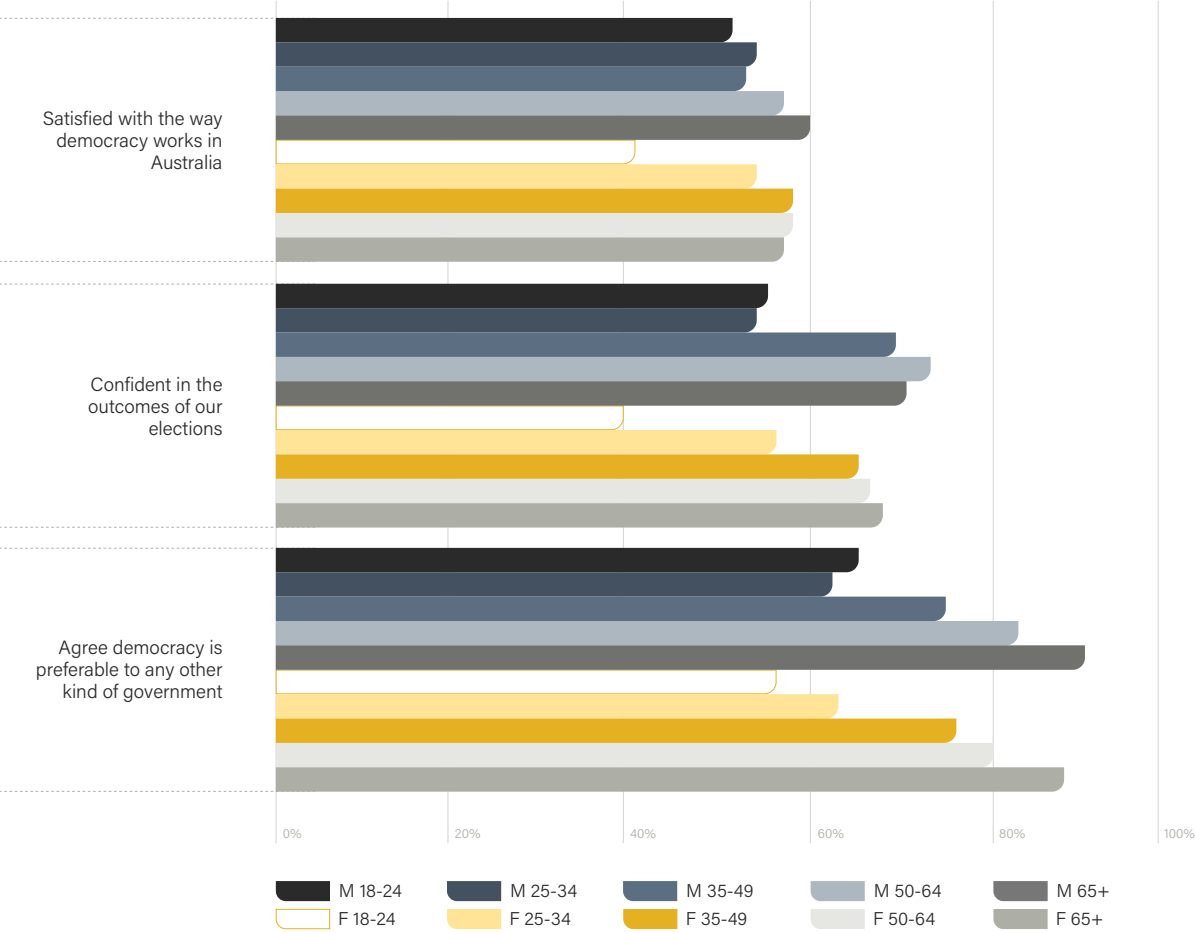
Positively though, young people are just as likely as other age groups to say they have access to quality information on policy issues they care about and are more likely to agree that the political system allows people like them to have a say, indicating their democratic attitudes may not be driven by feeling less informed or shut out of the system. Those aged 18-24 were also more likely to perceive that government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations than older Australians. Young people were also more likely to believe the government acts in the best interests of Australians than other age groups.

Young people's lower satisfaction with democracy and higher levels of polarisation may relate to the fact that they were less likely to say they understand how democracy works in Australia (60.7% for 18-24yos, rising to 85.5% for 65+) and are less interested in politics than older Australians (28.8% of 18-24yos are interested, rising to 60.3% for 65+). They were also much more likely than older Australians to say that avoiding a fine is one of their main motivations for voting, with 40.6% of 18-24 year olds choosing this compared with 26.9% overall, showing a higher level of democratic disengagement.

Dissatisfaction was particularly pronounced among young women compared with young men. Breaking down these measures by gender and age, lower satisfaction with democracy among 18-24 year olds was almost entirely driven by younger women, where only 42.8% were satisfied compared with 51.2% for young men, and an average of 54.5% overall. Similarly, while younger people of both genders were less likely to agree that democracy is the best form of government or be confident in election outcomes, younger women were the least likely to agree to these, while differences between genders on these measures for other age groups were much smaller.

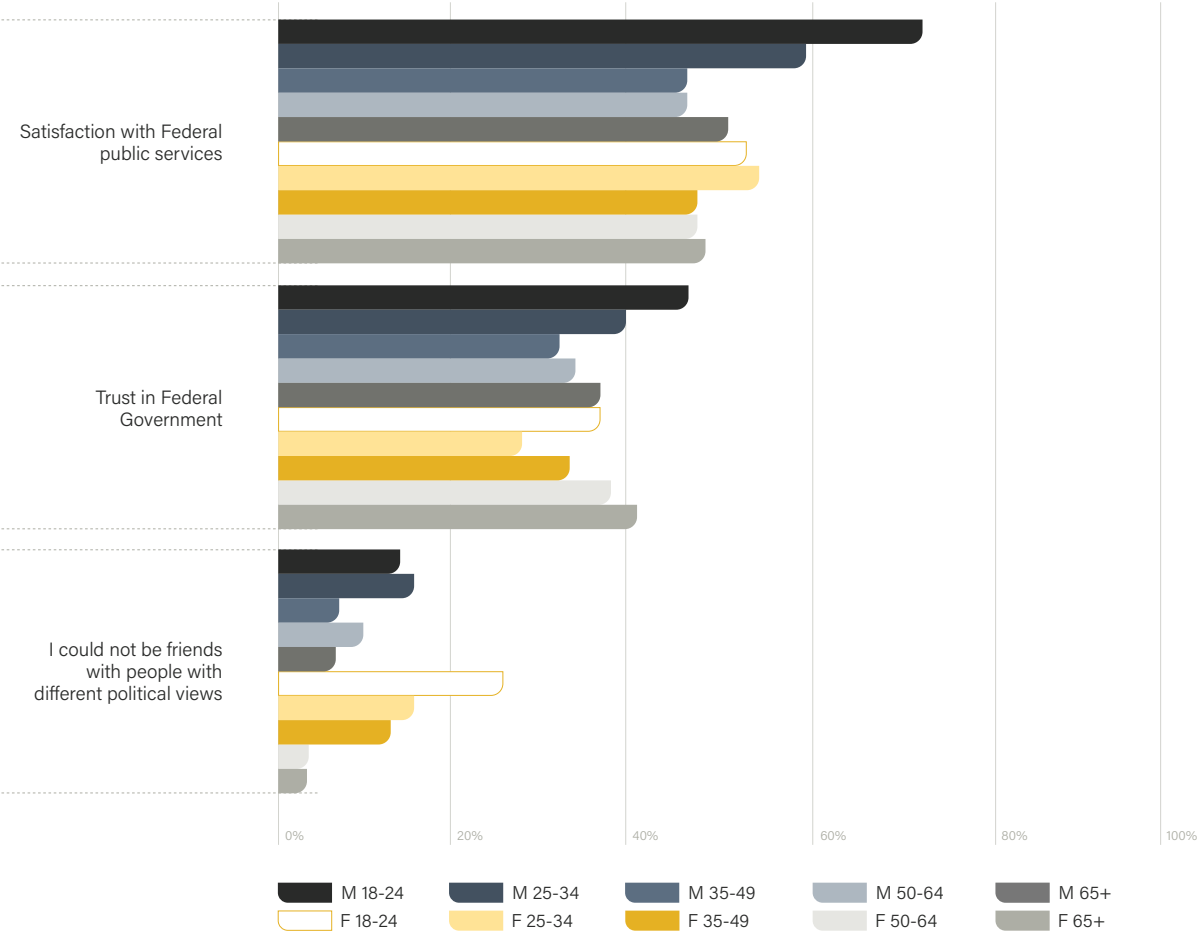
Moreover, young women were the most likely to say they could not be friends with people with different political views, while higher trust in government and satisfaction with services amongst young people is almost entirely driven by young men. Together, this indicates that young women in particular do not feel well served by our democracy or governments.

Figure 31: Age and gender differences on democratic measures



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Age and gender was determined based on respondents selections. Non-binary individuals are excluded from this graph due to small sample size.

Figure 32: Age and gender differences on trust, satisfaction with services, and polarisation measures

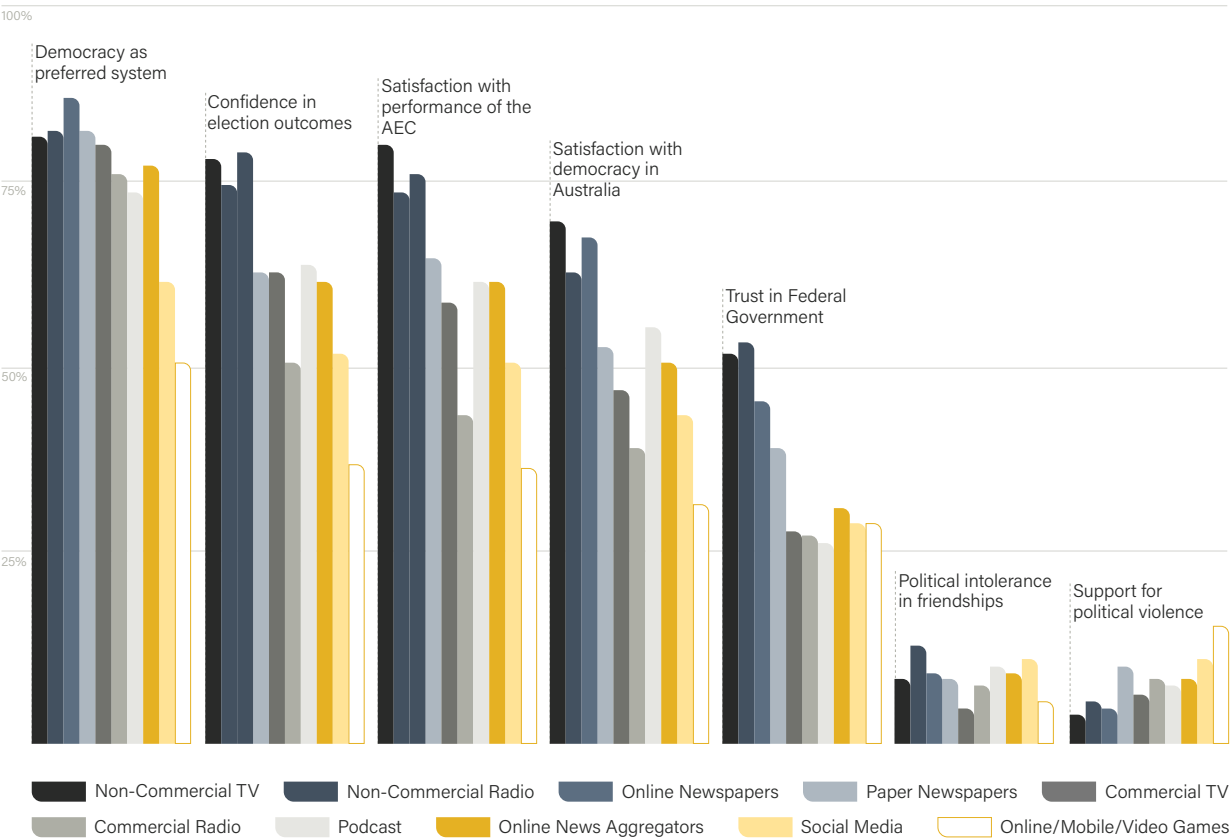


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Age and gender was determined based on respondents selections. Non-binary individuals are excluded from this graph due to small sample size.

Influence of media use

Where people get their news appears to influence democratic support, with less traditional sources like social media associated with lower democratic support.

Figure 33: Democratic indicators by main source of news



Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Media use is based on those who chose that option as their first choice to the McKinnon Index question: "Which media do you use the most to learn about news and current events on a regular basis?" where respondents could select their top three.

Those whose main source of news is non-commercial TV recorded higher levels of trust in government, and were among the most satisfied with democracy (69.4%) and supportive of it (80.9%). They are also more likely to say they can be friends with those with different political views and more likely to vote to influence decisions (60.2%) than simply to avoid a fine.

Conversely, those who view commercial TV or radio, or get their news from social media, were among the least satisfied with our democracy (47.4%, 39.8% and 44.3% respectively) and least trusting of government (29.1%, 28.3% and 30.1% respectively). However, while those who get their news primarily from commercial TV and radio are sceptical, they still support democracy more than those on social media, who recorded the lowest support for democracy (61.5%). Those on social media were also among the least confident in election outcomes (51.8%) (along with commercial radio listeners at 51.5%) and were also among the least likely to consider our elections free and fair (54.3%) (along with those who get their news from online gaming platforms at 45.5%).

Relatedly, those least satisfied with the direction the country is heading in were those whose main source of news was commercial TV (23%), commercial radio and online games (26% each), podcasts (27%) and social media (29%), nearly half the rate compared with those whose main source of news is non-commercial TV (54%) and radio (47%).

Further insight:

While we can't say based on this survey that media use is driving these results (e.g., choice of news source correlates with one's politics and other demographics which may be driving these results), there is a large body of academic literature showing that media exposure shapes political attitudes.³² This indicates that reforms to support public interest journalism and tackle misinformation online could be key enablers of protecting and enhancing our democracy and system of government. Supporting people to more effectively navigate through different sources of information online and discern which are trustworthy or not could also be an important enabler of our democracy and protect against the harms of misinformation.

32 Lorenz-Spreen, P., Oswald, L., Lewandowsky, S., & Hertwig, R. (2022). A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7, 74 - 101. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01460-1>.

6



CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS



The 2025 McKinnon Index shows that Australia's democracy has broad support, and highlights many strengths of our democratic system. Our institutions are trusted, elections are generally seen as free and fair, and our system of government continues to deliver safety, prosperity and opportunity for most Australians. Yet the Index also reveals clear challenges. Trust in political leaders remains low, satisfaction with how democracy functions is lower than overall support for democracy, and certain groups — including younger Australians, those with weaker social connection, and people in regional communities — feel less represented and less confident that government is working for them.

These findings remind us that the health of a democracy cannot be taken for granted. Strength today does not guarantee strength tomorrow. Public trust, civic participation and institutional integrity all depend on ongoing efforts — from governments that listen and deliver, from political leaders who act with integrity and vision, from media that inform rather than inflame, and from citizens who stay engaged and connected to the democratic process.

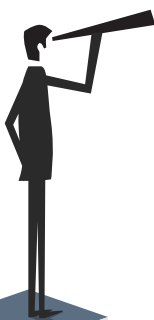
This is why McKinnon will track these measures annually to highlight changes over time, identifying where attention and reform are most needed, and adding additional measures including expert opinion from next year. But our commitment does not end with measurement. McKinnon will continue to respond to the challenges identified in the McKinnon Index by delivering a range of programs to support political leaders, make governments more effective and help them deliver innovative policies.

In 2026, McKinnon will also launch a program of work focused on democratic renewal. If you would like to learn more about this and receive updates as we approach the launch of this work, visit www.mckinnon.co/contact.

By working together — across government, academia, civil society and the community — we can ensure that Australia's democracy not only endures, but thrives for generations to come.

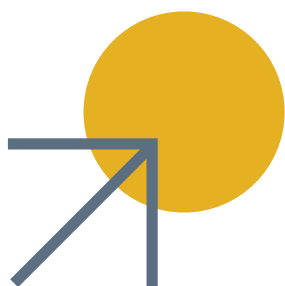
If you would like to get in touch to understand more about this data or provide feedback on the Index, please reach out to us at info@mckinnon.co.

To access the full data and further insights from the McKinnon Index please visit www.mckinnon.co/index



APPENDIX A – MCKINNON INDEX DEVELOPMENT AND METHODOLOGY

Measuring the performance of Australia's governments and democracy is complex. Policy outcomes, government capability and citizen satisfaction are all important but distinct factors. Similarly, there are many ways to measure the success or resilience of our democracy, such as the strength of democratic institutions or how well informed or engaged the public are. Given this, the McKinnon Index covers a wide range of topics, grouped into themes as discussed earlier in this report. The McKinnon Index does not attempt to consolidate all measures into a single score, but rather present groups of measures under themes to reflect performance across the diverse dimensions that underpin government effectiveness and democratic resilience.



Why McKinnon has established a new index

The McKinnon Index builds on previous efforts to measure the democratic health of countries or government performance. Some existing measures of democratic or government performance are listed below (Figure 34), however there remain gaps and limitations that we sought to address when creating this Index. For example, data on sub-national governments are rare, measurement can be infrequent, and most focus on composite indices that can obscure key drivers of democratic health.³³ This limits their usefulness in being able to diagnose specific, emerging challenges to government and democratic performance.

The McKinnon Index addresses these gaps by integrating measures of democracy and government performance in a way that shows how they contribute to making a country strong and prosperous – including at the state and territory level.

The existing measures and indices provide useful insights on their specific areas of focus. Where appropriate we have drawn on these, using existing measures or similar questions to allow for international and historic comparisons. However, we have also developed new measures to fill critical gaps and provide a comprehensive picture of Australia's democratic health.

33 Biddle, N., Fischer, A., Angus, S., Ercan, S., Grömping, and Gray, M., (2025) 'Democratic Resilience: Moving from Theoretical Frameworks to a Practical Measurement Agenda' Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network Discussion Paper 5, Australian National University.

Figure 34: Existing indices or surveys that measure democratic systems or government performance

Title	Details	Scope
<i>Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)</i>	Involving over 4,200 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures over 600 different attributes of democracy in over 200 countries. Experts rate each countries performance on these measures, which allow V-Dem to produce yearly scores on how democratic a country is, and in what ways.	Global – based on expert opinion
<i>Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index</i>	The EIU compiles ratings across 60 indicators to come up with a scale between 0-10 to determine how democratic a country is. The Index looks at measures related to electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.	Global – based on expert opinion and existing surveys (e.g., World Values Survey)
<i>OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Government</i>	Commencing in 2021, the OECD survey's people in most OECD countries on issues related to trust in government, such as perceptions of service delivery, policymaking processes, corruption and vested interest power.	OECD countries – based on population surveys
<i>Blavatnik Index of Public Administration</i>	The index brings together a range of data sources most relevant to the operation of civil services and public administrations to derive an overall score of government effectiveness. The four core domains of the Index include Strategy and Leadership, Public Policy, National Delivery, and People and Processes.	Global – based on existing data from various sources
<i>Freedom House Global Freedom Index</i>	Freedom House rates people's access to political rights and civil liberties in 208 countries and territories annually. Teams of experts develop numerical ratings for issues across the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of the government, freedom of expression and of belief, associational and organisational rights, the rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights.	Global – based on expert opinion
<i>Australian Public Sector Commission (APSC) Trust and Satisfaction with Australian Services survey</i>	The APSC has regularly surveyed Australians to measure the extent to which they trust, and are satisfied with, a range of Federal Government services and agencies, including the AEC, government departments, regulators, and Centrelink.	Australia, Federal only – based on population survey
<i>The Australian Election Study</i>	The study has surveyed voters and political candidates from 1987 in each election to understand what drives their choice of vote, as well as their attitudes towards a range of policy and governance issues.	Australia, Federal only – based on population survey
<i>World Values Survey</i>	The WVS has periodically surveyed people in 100 countries since 1981. There are nearly 300 questions in the survey, covering topics related to social values, politics, corruption, well-being, and social issues. The latest wave of survey data covers the period from 2017-22.	Global – based on population surveys

The McKinnon Index is grounded in McKinnon's mission: to deliver better governments for a stronger Australia. To support this, it measures both the current strength of our democratic system and the factors that contribute to that strength. To ensure the Index is both comprehensive and useful, measures have been chosen to cover three core indicators of good governments: governments that are **trusted**, **effective**, and operate in a robust **democracy**. The Index is organised around these three themes.

Within each theme we track leading indicators that evidence suggests drive performance. For example, our democracy and governments are held up by several important pillars – a robust media that informs the public and holds those in power to account; strong political leadership and an effective civil service; and a well informed and cohesive citizenry. By measuring both overall system performance as well as the performance of each pillar, we aim to diagnose not only when the system might be under pressure, but what may be driving that.

While some international indices identify whether democratic features exist (e.g., a free press or adequate checks on executive power), the McKinnon Index assesses their relative strength and perceived performance over time. Rather than trying to describe what type of democracy we have, the value of this exercise is in attempting to assess how robust the system is, and where pressures may emerge.

Chosen themes and groups of measures

The Index is organised under three themes, each with sub-themes and indicators (see Appendix B for a full list of the measures within each theme). While presented separately, these themes are interrelated – for example, effective governments foster trust,

while low trust can undermine democratic support. A good example of this is measuring economic performance and inequality. This is an important outcome in its own right and a good way to judge government effectiveness, however it is also a key driver of trust in government and support for democracy. When economic inequality gets too large or a nation's wealth declines, these both drive dissatisfaction with government and has been linked to democratic backsliding.³⁴

The selection of themes, sub-themes, and specific measures was based on a review of existing surveys and indices aimed at tracking democratic health or government performance, as well as literature on the factors that drive these two objectives. Following this, we gathered feedback from several experts in this field, including academics, public servants and civil society organisations. Details of these themes and the evidence behind them is below:

1. **Trust in government and Australia's political leaders:** Public trust in government is a cornerstone of its legitimacy and a key enabler of its effectiveness. High trust in government supports social cohesion,³⁵ enables effective policy implementation, and underpins the legitimacy and stability of political systems.³⁶ When citizens trust government, they are more likely to comply with laws, support public policies, and accept necessary sacrifices for the common good^{37, 38, 39} – something particularly crucial during crises.⁴⁰ Conversely, declining trust can lead to political cynicism, reduced support for leaders, and challenges to the effectiveness of governance.⁴¹ Trust in government is therefore a crucial indicator to track. However, trust should not be blind. Constructive scepticism can enhance

34 E.G. Rau, & S. Stokes. (2025) Income inequality and the erosion of democracy in the twenty-first century, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 122 (1) e2422543121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422543121>

35 Ostapenko, M., & Bunhea, L. (2023). TRUST IN GOVERNMENT AS A RESOURCE FOR SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT. *Scientific Journal "Regional Studies"* <https://doi.org/10.32782/2663-6170/2023.35.2>.

36 Hetherington, M. (1998). The Political Relevance of Political Trust. *American Political Science Review*, 92, 791 - 808. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586304>.

37 Kim, S. (2005). The Role of Trust in the Modern Administrative State. *Administration & Society*, 37, 611 - 635. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399705278596>.

38 Cooper, C., Knotts, H., & Brennan, K. (2008). The Importance of Trust in Government for Public Administration: The Case of Zoning. *Public Administration Review*, 68, 459-468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-6210.2008.00882.X>.

39 Tománková, I. (2019). An Empirically-Aligned Concept of Trust in Government. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 12, 161 - 174. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nispa-2019-0007>.

40 Herati, H., Burns, K., Nascimento, M., Brown, P., Calnan, M., Dubé, È., Ward, P., Filice, E., Rotolo, B., Ike, N., & Meyer, S. (2023). Canadians' trust in government in a time of crisis: Does it matter?. *PLOS ONE*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0290664>.

41 Hetherington, M. (1998). The Political Relevance of Political Trust. *American Political Science Review*, 92, 791 - 808. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2586304>.

accountability and stimulate civic engagement. The challenge lies in preventing this scepticism from devolving into cynicism, which can erode democratic support and institutional effectiveness.⁴²

The McKinnon Index disaggregates trust across politicians, public servants, political parties, parliament, courts, electoral commissions, and other agencies to provide a detailed picture of trust in our political system. But we also know the main factors that drive trust in government,^{43, 44,45} so have included measures that track the following:

- **Honesty and integrity** – or whether you trust that someone means what they say and upholds expected standards. To measure this, we have questions related to perceptions of public servants and politicians’ personal honesty and integrity, perceptions of corruption and vested interest power, and whether those in government can be trusted to do the right thing.
- **Representativeness** – or feeling that someone understands you and can be trusted to look after your interests. We measure this aspect of trust through questions on whether people feel politicians understand and represent people like them, measures of the actual levels of representation in parliament, and whether people think politicians adequately balance the interests of current and future generations.
- **Competence and performance** – or whether you trust that someone can do what they say and will deliver. We can measure this through perceptions of capability and whether governments have delivered, which are also good measures of government effectiveness, so have grouped those measures under that theme in this report.

2. **The effectiveness of our public sector and government service delivery:** Effective governments deliver outcomes that meet public expectations and manage the political system competently. There are many ways to conceive of government effectiveness, such as through policy outcomes or measures of public sector capability, assessments of the quality of policy formulation and whether it is evidence informed and independent from political pressure. To reflect these, we have grouped measures into the following sub-themes:

- **Policy outcomes** – Our Index includes some policy indicators tracking high level outcomes relevant to Australia’s prosperity, such as economic performance and inequality, life satisfaction and life expectancy, crime rates and educational attainment. Detailed policy performance is well covered elsewhere such as in the Productivity Commission’s annual Report on Government Services, so these are not intended to be comprehensive measures of performance across policy domains, but rather provide helpful context alongside other measures.
- **Satisfaction with service delivery** – Alongside policy outcomes it is important to capture the public’s view of how different services are performing and whether they feel their expectations and needs are met. We include measures such as perceptions of how effective people think different services are such as the health, education and administrative systems.
- **Capability** – An effective government is one that has the capability to deliver for its citizens and address future challenges. This is also a key driver of trust in government. We have included measures of perceived capability and plan to further supplement these with expert assessments of government capability in next year’s Index.

42 Meer, T. (2017). Political Trust and the “Crisis of Democracy”. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ACREFORE/9780190228637.013.77>.

43 Grimmelikhuisen, S., & Knies, E. (2017). Validating a scale for citizen trust in government organizations. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83, 583-601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852315585950>.

44 Prats, M., Phillips, E., & Smid, S. (2023). Insights from the 2021 OECD Trust Survey: How people evaluate the trustworthiness of government institutions & implications for policymakers. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 9, 9 - 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23794607241262091>.

45 Mangion, M., & Frendo, G. (2022). Measuring Political Trust: Recognising the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. *European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecrm.211.214>.

- **Innovation and use of evidence** – We can also think of effectiveness in terms of how ambitious our governments are, and whether processes for developing new policies support achieving the best outcomes. We have included measures of to what extent people think governments adopt innovative ideas or look internationally to find policy solutions, and plan to further supplement these with expert assessments of government use of evidence and policymaking processes for next year's Index.

3. **Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions:**

Democracy is both a means to better governments and a public good itself. By giving people a choice in how they are governed and the freedom to express their views and participate in the political process, it allows people the opportunity to shape their own future and protect against abuses of power. This also supports better governments by providing mechanisms for people to hold leaders to account, ensure they are responsive to their needs and act in the public interest.

These are important principles to uphold, but evidence also shows that democratic systems produce better governments. They provide better healthcare,⁴⁶ have better economic performance,⁴⁷ and higher life satisfaction.⁴⁸ In short, democracies support both individual and collective wellbeing, a key goal of any government. But these benefits are not guaranteed, and the type of democracy matters. Governments tend to be more responsive when citizens actively participate,⁴⁹ and government performance generally is only improved in wealthier and more stable democracies.⁵⁰

Therefore, it is important that we measure the strength of our democracy and the various factors that uphold or could undermine it. The McKinnon Index does this by tracking the following:

- **Strong democratic institutions** – For our democracy to work, we need democratic institutions and electoral processes that are trusted and effective. We therefore measure people's perceptions of the performance of electoral commissions, and whether people view our elections as free and fair.
- **Civic participation** – A healthy democracy requires its citizens to be able to actively participate in it. Not only do levels of civic engagement improve things like the quality of governance through citizens more effectively monitoring and influencing government actions,⁵¹ but it can foster greater support for democracy itself.⁵² If citizens become too disengaged, democracy can decline when gradual erosions of rights and norms go unnoticed or unchallenged.⁵³ We therefore include measures of civic engagement such as voting behaviour and reasons for voting, whether people think the system allows people like them to have a say, and how often they engage in other civic activities.
- **Informed citizens** – People need to know enough about how our democratic system and government work to be able to participate effectively. Being able to access quality information on issues they care about is important if people are to make informed decisions on them. Therefore, it is important to understand how informed people are, or feel they are, as a precursor to whether they can actively participate. We have included measures such as levels of civic knowledge

46 Epstein, H. (2019). Good news for democracy. *The Lancet*, 393, 1576-1577. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30431-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30431-3).

47 Im, H. (2020). Democratic Development and Authoritarian Development Compared. , 235-272. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3703-5_10.

48 Altman, D., Flavin, P., & Radcliff, B. (2017). Democratic Institutions and Subjective Well-Being. *Political Studies*, 65, 685 - 704. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716683203>.

49 Michels, A. (2011). Innovations in democratic governance: how does citizen participation contribute to a better democracy?. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 77, 275 - 293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311399851>.

50 Charron, N., & Lapuente, V. (2010). Does democracy produce quality of government. *European Journal of Political Research*, 49, 443-470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1475-6765.2009.01906.X>.

51 (2018). Civic engagement and governance. *OECD Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018*. https://doi.org/10.1787/reg_cit_glance-2018-22-en.

52 Flanagan, C., & Levine, P. (2010). Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 20, 159 - 179. <https://doi.org/10.1353/FOC.0.0043>.

53 Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27, 19 - 5. <https://doi.org/10.1353/JOD.2016.0012>.

in schools, whether people think they understand how our political system works, and whether they think they have access to the information they'd like on policy issues they care about.

- **Media and the information environment**
 - The media also play a vital role in a well-functioning democracy as it can both help keep citizens informed and hold those in power to account. Indeed, there is a strong and consistent link between healthy democracies and having an independent, secure, and well-funded media.⁵⁴ Local news in particular has been found to support civic engagement, social cohesion, and democratic health.⁵⁵ But not all news supports democracy or provides readers with quality information. As large tech companies disrupt the business model of traditional media and collect most of what they used to earn in advertising revenue, there has been even less investment in areas of public interest journalism, making this a scarcer commodity.^{56, 57} And the rise of digital media poses its own issues, such as an increase in misinformation and potential lack of journalistic standards, with research finding a clear link between increasing digital media consumption and declining political trust, increasing populism and growing polarisation in established democracies.⁵⁸ To understand how well our media environment supports our democracy, we have included measures such as people's levels of trust in news, perceptions of media bias, and whether people think they can tell trustworthy from untrustworthy sources of information online.

- **Social cohesion and polarisation** – Evidence shows that eroding social cohesion and increased polarisation can lead to democratic backsliding, particularly because deep divisions in society make it easier for leaders to justify undemocratic actions.^{59, 60, 61} A well-functioning democracy also relies on having a shared set of values, beliefs, norms and attitudes, which becomes harder in more polarised and less cohesive societies.⁶² The Scanlon Foundation and Monash University already produce a yearly Social Cohesion Index – the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) – for Australia based on a range of measures, so we include this as a key measure of social cohesion. We supplement this with our own measures of polarisation as this is especially relevant to maintaining a robust democracy, such as how respectful people think public debate is, whether they could be friends with those with differing views to them, or would support politically motivated violence.

54 Neff, T., & Pickard, V. (2021). Funding Democracy: Public Media and Democratic Health in 33 Countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29, 601 - 627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211060255>.

55 See here for a good overview of this research: [How We Know Journalism is Good for Democracy - Democracy Fund](#)

56 Pickard, V. (2020). Restructuring Democratic Infrastructures: A Policy Approach to the Journalism Crisis. *Digital Journalism*, 8, 704–719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1733433>.

57 Medina-Laverón, M., Sánchez-Taberner, A., & Breiner, J. (2021). Some viable models for digital public-interest journalism. *El profesional de la información*. <https://doi.org/10.3145/EPI.2021.ENE18>.

58 Lorenz-Spreen, P., Oswald, L., Lewandowsky, S. et al. A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy. *Nat Hum Behav* 7, 74–101 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01460-1>.

59 Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021). The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 32, 27 - 41. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0050>.

60 Bartels, L., Daxecker, U., Hyde, S., Lindberg, S., & Nooruddin, I. (2023). The Forum: Global Challenges to Democracy? Perspectives on Democratic Backsliding. *International Studies Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viad019>.

61 McCoy, J., & Somer, M. (2018). Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), 234-271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818782> (Original work published 2019)

62 Sarah Yerkes and Erica Hogan (2025) Preventing Backsliding in New Democracies. [Preventing Backsliding in New Democracies | Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

Scope of this first iteration

This year's McKinnon Index draws primarily on data from a public opinion survey delivered in partnership with Roy Morgan, as well as data from existing sources including the AEC or ABS. Next year's Index will also include expert opinion measures, gathered from groups such as politicians, senior public servants, academics and commentators. This will allow us to measure areas where the views of insiders and those with knowledge of the system can offer additional insights alongside what the public can provide.

We view this Index as a starting point for ongoing dialogue and improvement. We plan to continue engaging experts in this field to gather feedback to make this tool as useful and robust as possible, while also ensuring it stays up to date and responsive to emerging evidence and events. Although we anticipate updates over time, we are committed to maintaining consistency across annual editions to support longitudinal analysis and track trends in Australia's democratic health and government performance.

Methodology and data sources

Survey methodology

In April 2025, McKinnon engaged Roy Morgan, a well-known independent Australian market and social research firm with over 80 years' experience, to conduct the first wave the McKinnon Index survey. The measures which formed the basis of the survey were developed by McKinnon, with Roy Morgan working with McKinnon to turn this into a comprehensive questionnaire and refining the questions through a small pilot with users.

The survey was conducted online with a large sample of n=4,416 Australians aged 18+ From the 9th –31st July 2025. Respondents were sourced primarily through Roy Morgan's own online panel, which is recruited through probability-based methods to reduce response bias and people self-selecting into the panel. There was an oversampling of smaller jurisdictions (Tasmania, the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) to ensure that meaningful analysis could be undertaken at a jurisdictional level. This oversampling was corrected in the final, national dataset by weighting back to

the known structure of the Australian population. Weighting was applied for age, gender, location and past vote to ensure both demographic and political representation in the final analysis. Responses that were of insufficient quality were screened out.

Analysis was predominately conducted by Roy Morgan with some additional analysis conducted in-house by McKinnon. We have not reported any differences between groups in this report where an individual sub-group contained less than 50 responses or where differences from the total were not statistically significant at a minimum of 95% confidence level. Responses to the open-ended qualitative questions were coded manually by a team of researchers at Roy Morgan.

Comparisons with other data sources

This report also draws on similar surveys and data sources to provide context for the results of the McKinnon Index. When designing this survey, McKinnon specifically selected questions that align with other surveys to allow for international comparisons or historical context, ensuring questions were worded and scored the same.

Having said that, comparisons between data in the McKinnon Index and other sources should still be interpreted with caution and taken as indicative only as they use different samples, surveying methods and potentially different weightings. For example, the OECD Drivers of Trust in Government survey weights by age, gender, broad regions, as well as education, but not past vote or politics.⁶³ The APSC's Trust and Satisfaction survey does not apply weightings except for survey waves where some populations are over-sampled.⁶⁴ These differences could go some way to explaining differences in results between these two surveys, with the inclusion of weightings for past vote a key difference. This is why we have visually separated data from the McKinnon Index with other sources.

63 [2023 Trust Survey - Technical annex.pdf](#)

64 [Trust in Australian public services Technical Appendix 2024-2025.docx](#)

APPENDIX B – LIST OF MCKINNON INDEX MEASURES AND THEMES

The McKinnon Index is made up of 91 measures, along with demographic questions, mostly taken from a 4416-person representative survey of Australian's conducted in July 2025 by Roy Morgan, supplemented with international benchmarks and structural data taken from sources such as the Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and other surveys such as the Scanlon-Monash Mapping Social Cohesion report or Digital News Report. Some survey measures were chosen to replicate questions in other surveys such as the OECD Drivers of Trust in Government Survey, allowing for international comparisons on these measures (noting comparisons should be taken as indicative given differences in survey samples and weighting methodologies).

Each measure relates to one of the three main themes of the Index: Trust in government and Australia's political leaders; The effectiveness of our public sector and government service delivery; and Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions. Within these, measures have been grouped into sub-themes as they relate to the different enabling factors that drive these headline measures or sections. The below table sets this out showing the full list of measures that make up the Index, grouped into these themes. Measures taken from sources other than the survey conducted by Roy Morgan are shaded grey.



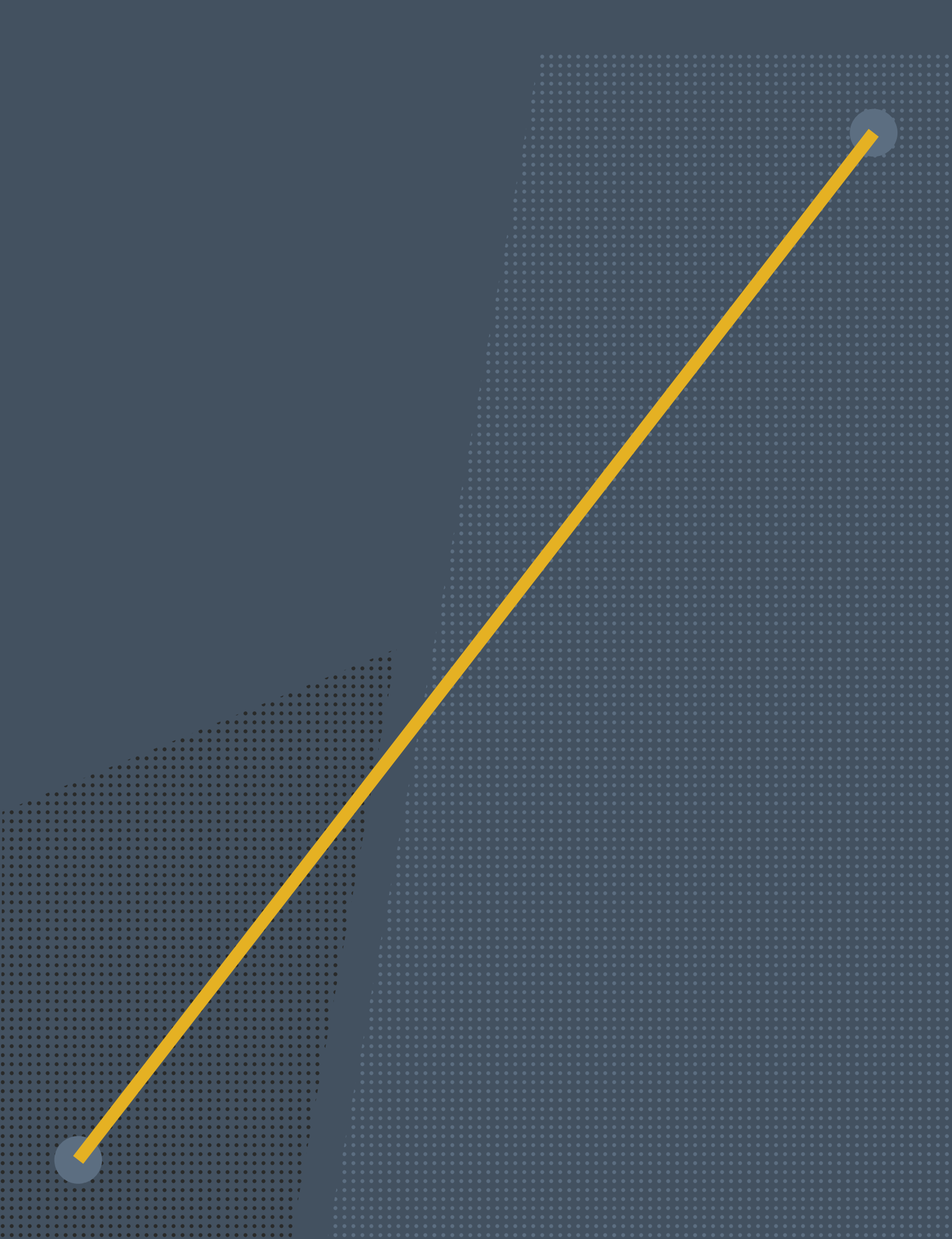
Theme	Measure	Source
Trust in government and Australia's political leaders		
<i>Trust (overall)</i>	<p>On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how much do you trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your State government ▪ Federal Parliament ▪ Your State Parliament ▪ Federal politicians ▪ Your state politicians ▪ Political parties ▪ The Federal public service ▪ Your State public service ▪ Courts and the judicial system ▪ Federal and State anti-corruption commissions ▪ Independent government regulators and advisory bodies (e.g., ACCC, ASIC, Fair Work Commission, Infrastructure Australia) ▪ The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)'s ability to administer elections ▪ Your State's Electoral Commission's ability to administer elections 	McKinnon Index
<i>Representation</i>	<p>How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Australia's Federal politicians understand and represent people like me ▪ Your State's politicians understand and represent people like me 	McKinnon Index
	<p>On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how confident are you that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the Federal government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations? ▪ Your State government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations? 	McKinnon Index

Theme	Measure	Source
<i>Integrity</i>	How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People in government can usually be trusted to do the right thing 	McKinnon Index
	How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal politicians in Australia are honest (do what they say) ▪ Federal politicians in Australia show empathy (understand and listen to people) ▪ Federal politicians in Australia deliver (follow up and deliver on their commitments) ▪ Federal politicians are courageous (stand up for what they believe in and are willing to take risks to achieve things) ▪ Your State politicians are honest (do what they say) ▪ Your State politicians show empathy (understand and listen to people) ▪ Your State politicians deliver (follow up and deliver on their commitments) ▪ Your State politicians are courageous (stand up for what they believe in and are willing to take risks to achieve things) 	McKinnon Index
	How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal public servants are honest (do what they say) ▪ Federal public servants show empathy (understand and listen to people) ▪ Federal public servants deliver (follow up and deliver on their commitments) ▪ Federal public servants are courageous (stand up for what they believe in and are willing to take risks to achieve things) ▪ Your State public servants are honest (do what they say) ▪ Your State public servants show empathy (understand and listen to people) ▪ Your State public servants deliver (follow up and deliver on their commitments) ▪ Your State public servants are courageous (stand up for what they believe in and are willing to take risks to achieve things) 	McKinnon Index
	On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all likely and 10 means very likely, if a vested interest (e.g., business, union, lobby group) promoted a policy that benefited itself but could be harmful to society as a whole, how likely do you think it is that the Federal government would refuse that interest's demand?	McKinnon Index
	How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corruption is a problem in Federal politics ▪ Corruption is a problem in your State's politics 	McKinnon Index

Theme	Measure	Source
The effectiveness of our public sector and government service delivery		
Effectiveness (overall)	How effective or ineffective would you say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia's Federal government is? your State's government is? independent government regulators and advisory bodies (e.g. ACCC, ASIC, Fair Work Commission, Infrastructure Australia) are? 	McKinnon Index
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Australia is heading? 	McKinnon Index
Capability	How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia's Federal political leaders have the capability to solve long term challenges Your State's political leaders have the capability to solve long term challenges 	McKinnon Index
	How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Australian public service has the capability to solve long term challenges Your State's public service has the capability to solve long term challenges 	McKinnon Index
Delivery of services	On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is very dissatisfied and 10 is very satisfied, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The education system in Australia The health system in Australia The quality of administrative services in Australia (e.g., applying for an ID or benefits, registering a birth etc.) Public infrastructure (e.g., roads, public transport, parks) where you live The level of safety in your local neighbourhood Social security and support provided to those in need (e.g., welfare payments, public housing) Your overall experiences with Australia's public services Your overall experiences with [STATE] public services 	McKinnon Index

Theme	Measure	Source
<i>Policy dashboard</i>	Gini coefficient (income)	ABS HILDA
	Real net national disposable income per capita (\$,000)	Transforming Australia Goal 8.1
	Life satisfaction	ABS HILDA
	Life expectancy	ABS
	NAPLAN Math scores Year 9	NAPLAN
	NAPLAN Reading scores Year 9	NAPLAN
	PISA socio-economic parity in Math	Transforming Australia Goal 4.5.1
	Homicide and related offences per 100k pop	ABS
	Sexual assaults per 100k pop	ABS
	Kidnapping/abduction per 100k pop	ABS
<i>Use of evidence</i>	On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all likely and 10 means very likely, if there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible public institution in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia? Your State? 	McKinnon Index
	Do you think the following governments look internationally to find policy solutions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Government Your State Government 	McKinnon Index
Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions		
<i>Democratic support</i>	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following: The way democracy works in Australia	McKinnon Index
	How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, even if those I disagree with are elected	McKinnon Index
<i>Democratic institutions</i>	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The performance of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) The performance of your State's Electoral Commission 	McKinnon Index
	How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am confident in the outcomes of our elections I consider our elections free and fair 	McKinnon Index

Theme	Measure	Source
<i>Informed citizens</i>	How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am confident I understand how Australia's democracy works I have access to quality information on policy issues I care about 	McKinnon Index
	Percentages of Year 10 students attaining the proficient standard nationally in Civics	National Assessment Plan – Civics and Citizenship
<i>Citizen participation</i>	How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The political system in Australia allows people like me to have a say in what the government does People can freely express political opinions and ideas in Australia 	McKinnon Index
	What are the main reasons you vote?	McKinnon Index
	2025 election: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrolment rate Turnout rate 	Australian Electoral Commission
	Involvement in community, social, religious, civic and political groups in the last 12 months.	Mapping Social Cohesion Report
<i>Media</i>	In your view, how often do journalists provide fair coverage during elections in Australia?	McKinnon Index
	How confident are you in your ability to tell the difference between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of information online?	McKinnon Index
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How much do you trust the news as a whole within your country? How much do you trust the news you choose to consume? 	Digital News Report
<i>Social cohesion and polarisation</i>	How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements listed below? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political debate in Australia is healthy and respectful I could not be friends with people with different political views It is sometimes justified to use extreme measures such as violence to advance a cause you care about 	McKinnon Index
	Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion	Mapping Social Cohesion Report
	Criminal reports investigated by EICC during the election	Australian Federal Police





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