



2025 MCKINNON INDEX

Key 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 in 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 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 the Electoral Commission. 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

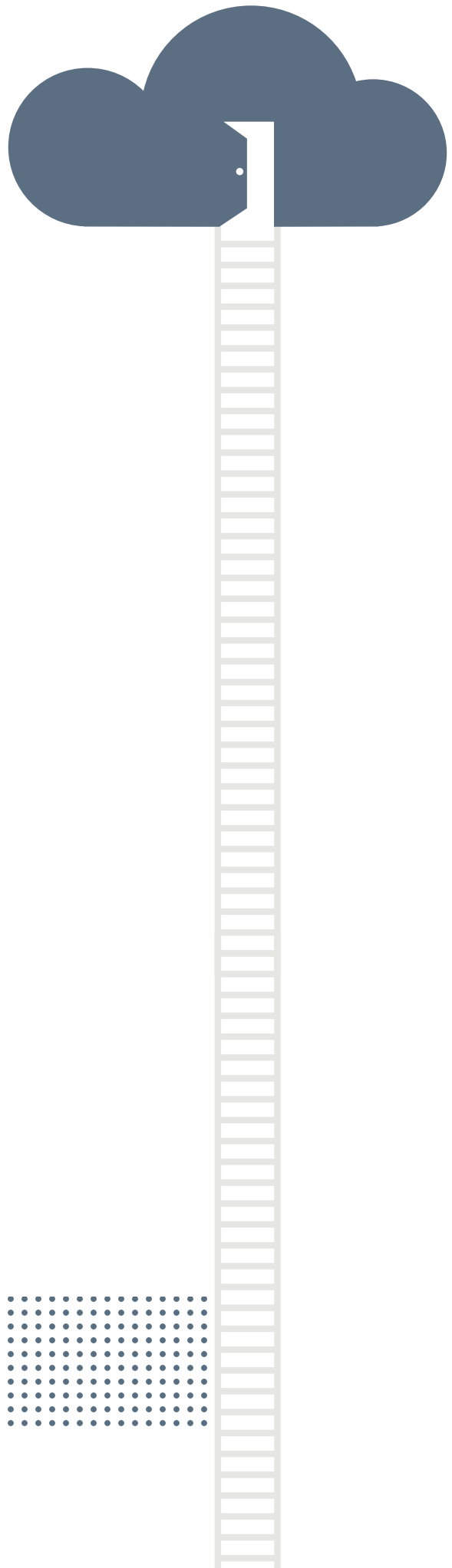
The challenges ahead, whether economic, social, or environmental, will test the capacity of our governments and the resilience of our democratic institutions. They will also test our willingness as Australians to maintain the trust that underpins those institutions. The McKinnon Index cannot solve those 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



WHAT IS THE MCKINNON INDEX?

The McKinnon Index is an annual dashboard of democratic health made up of a collection of measures that track the health and effectiveness of our governments and democracy over time. Most measures are taken from a 4,400-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.

The McKinnon Index is grounded in McKinnon's mission: enabling 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 our index is both comprehensive and useful, the McKinnon Index will track:

- Trust in government and Australia's political leaders
- The effectiveness of our public sector and government service delivery
- Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions

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

MCKINNON.CO/INDEX



KEY FINDINGS

The first McKinnon Index provides a snapshot of how Australia's democracy and system of government is performing and where pressure is emerging. Trust in institutions remains stronger than trust in politicians, and perceptions of effectiveness directly shape confidence in government.

While three-quarters of Australians support democracy (76.0%), only around half (54.5%) are satisfied with how it functions. Some groups are further disengaged in our democracy than others, highlighting where work is needed to ensure our system works for everyone.

Trust in government and Australia's political leaders

Key findings:

- **Strength:** Trust in independent institutions is strong (70.2% for AEC)
- **Challenge:** Trust in politicians is lower
- **Challenge:** Perceptions that corruption is a problem in government are high (62.0%)
- **Opportunity:** Trust levels are below the highest performing OECD nations

Australians overwhelmingly trust our institutions. Independent institutions were the most trusted, including the Australian Electoral Commission (70.2%) and independent regulators (56.7%), followed by the public service, and then government overall. Trust in federal politicians (35.9%) and political parties (31.2%) is far lower – trust rises the more independent of politics that institutions operate.

Trust is also higher for State than for the Federal government and politicians. Trust is higher among young people (18–24), university graduates and those satisfied with the country's direction, but drops sharply among those who feel little sense of belonging in Australia. Those who trust any institution are also more likely to have higher trust in all others.

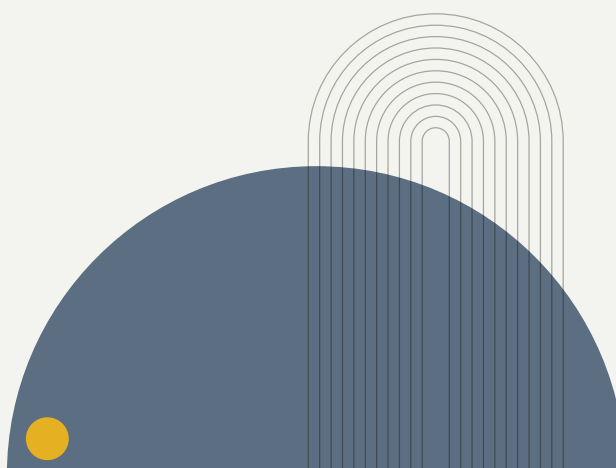
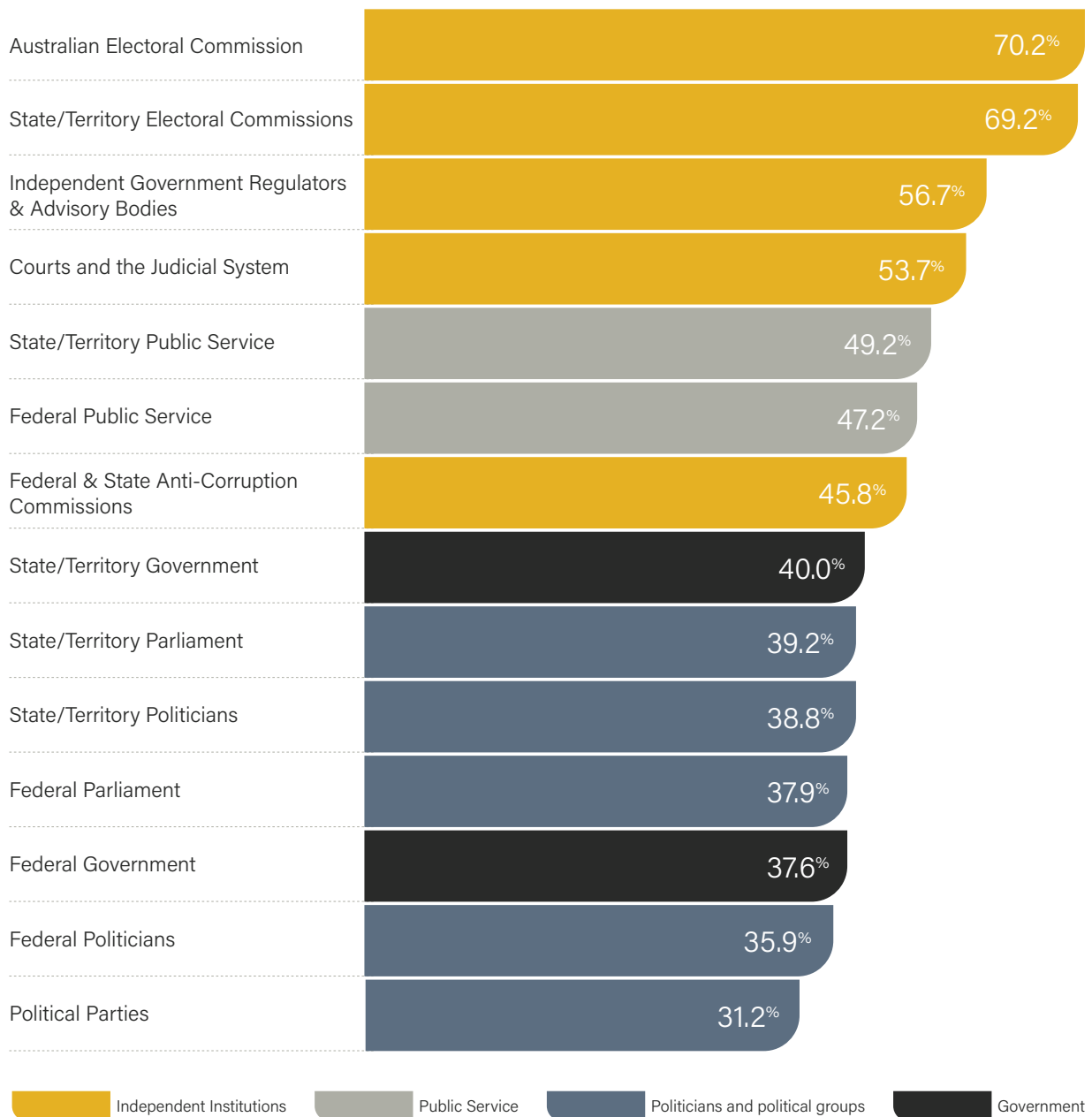


Figure 1: Trust in institutions

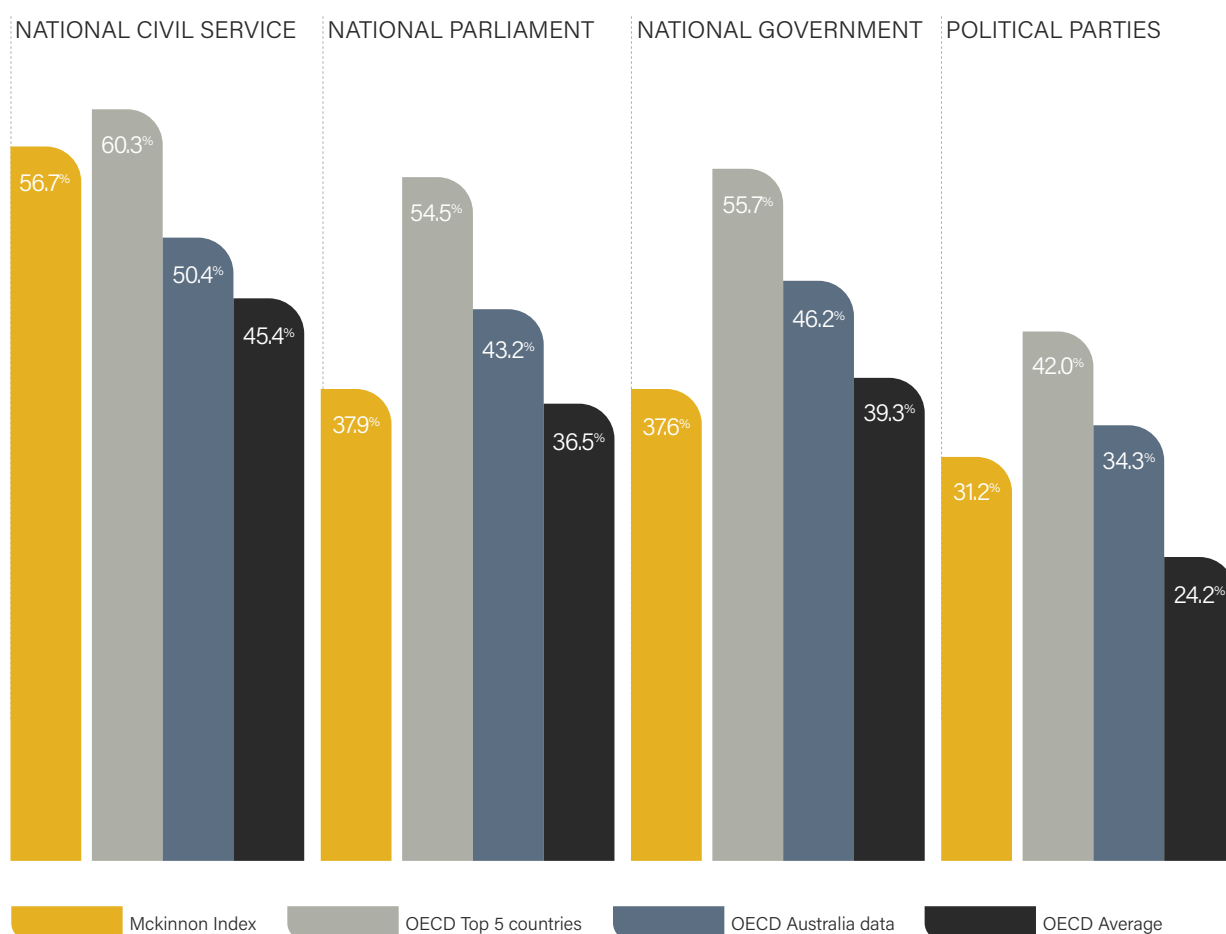


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from a range of questions asking "On a scale of 0-10 where 0 means not at all and 10 means completely, how much do you trust [entity name]". Where the percentage shown is the aggregation of responses from 6-10, considered to be those with "high or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

Comparing trust in key government institutions to 2023 OECD data indicates that while Australia generally performs well relative to the OECD average there remains significant opportunity for improvement to match the levels of trust seen in the top performing nations.¹

The cynicism towards political leaders could be driven by a range of issues, but general concern about corruption was high, with 62% believing it is a problem in federal politics and only 14% disagreeing. This was a higher proportion than felt politicians don't understand or represent them (56.4%) or don't think the government can be trusted to do the right thing (50.8%).

Figure 2: OECD 2023 trust data and McKinnon trust data



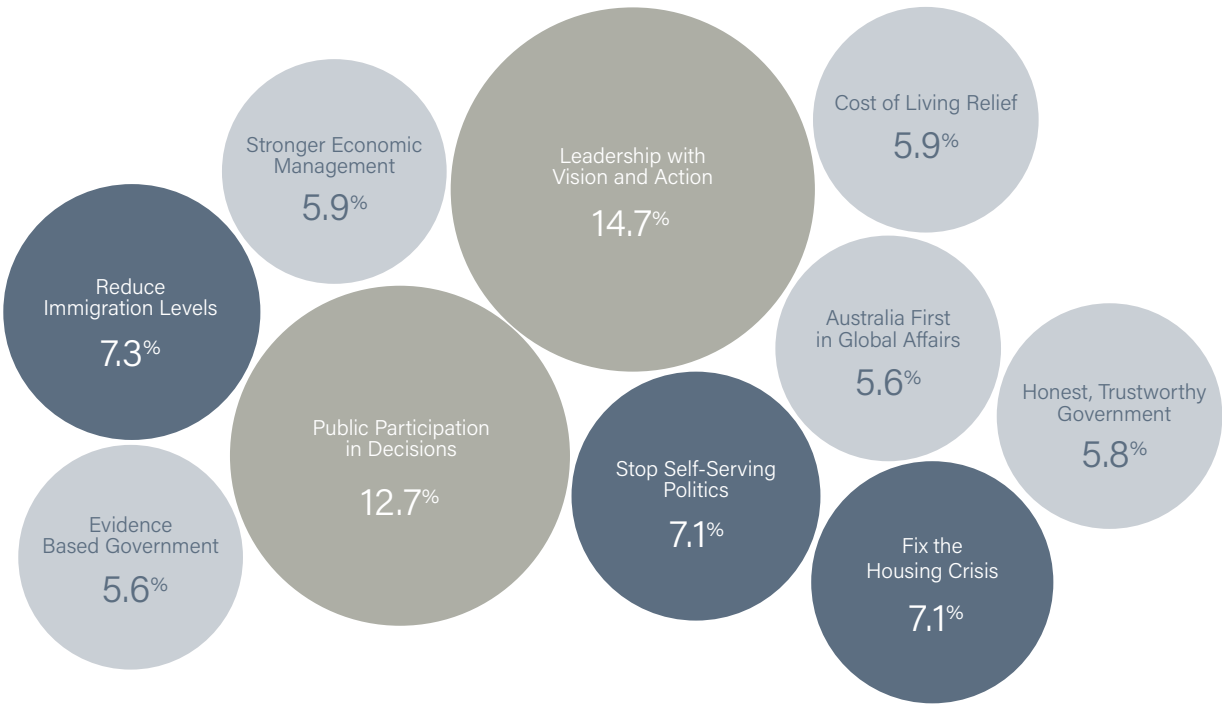
Source: OECD 2023 Drivers of Trust in Government Survey and 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from the range of questions which are worded consistently across the two surveys (with substitution of national with federal/Australian in the McKinnon Index). These questions ask "On a scale of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

¹ 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>.

Desire for leadership with vision and action

Australians want leaders who act with courage, competence and vision rather than short-term politics. When asked what one thing could solve the challenges facing Australia's governments, the most common answers related to calls for leadership with vision and action (14.7%) and public participation in decision making (12.7%). This was significantly higher than answers related to reducing Australia's immigration levels (7.3%) or fixing the housing crisis (7.1%).

Figure 3: Top 10 solutions for 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.

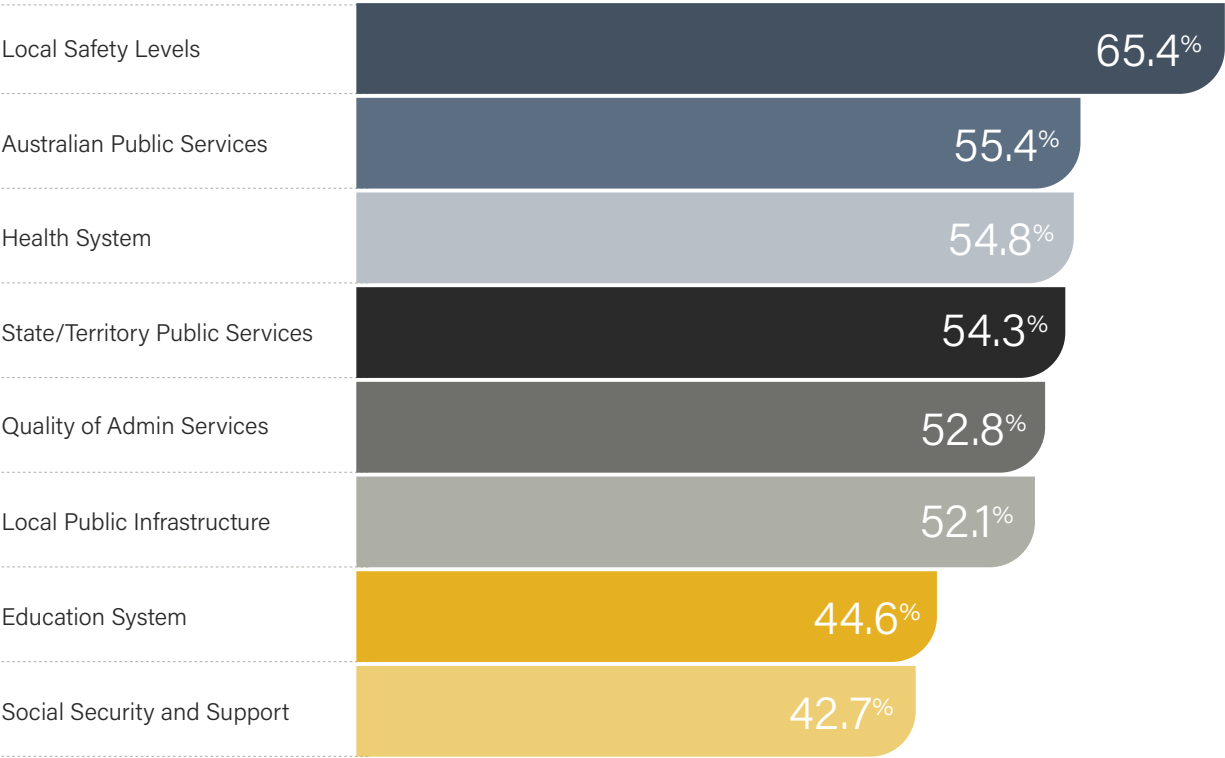
Effectiveness of our public sector and government service delivery

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, pointing to the importance in governments delivering for their citizens

A majority of Australian's are satisfied with Australia's public services overall (55.4%) and key areas including health (54.8%), administrative services (52.8%) and infrastructure (52.1%). However, a minority consider federal or state governments to be effective or have the capacity to solve long term challenges. Only one third believe governments are likely to adopt innovative ideas. Concerningly, 54.8% of Australians are dissatisfied with the country's direction.

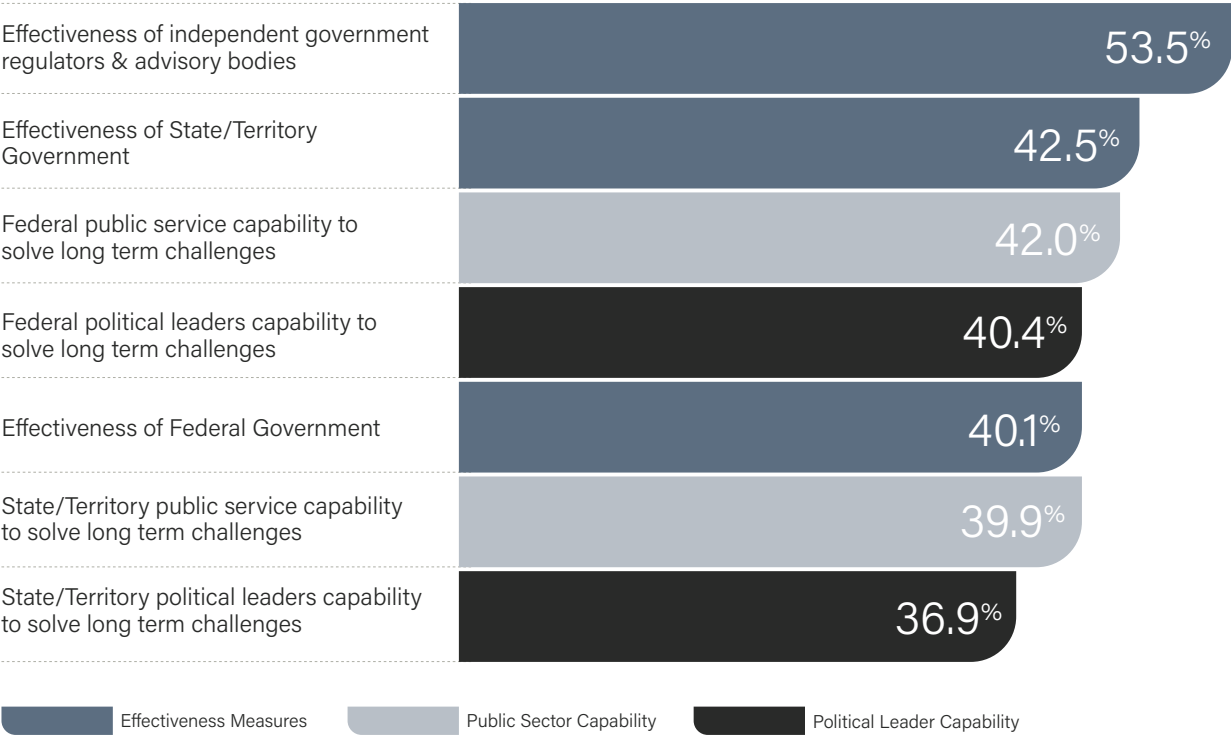
Figure 4: Satisfaction with different services and services overall



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 the percentage shown is the aggregation of responses from 6-10, considered to be those "satisfied", with scores of 5 being considered "neutral", and scores 0-4 considered "dissatisfied". "Don't know" was a separate answer. "[State]" was replaced with text based on respondent's location.

Trust is also highest when people see competence: 86.2% of those who rate the Federal government as “very effective” also say they trust it compared to the average of 37.6%. It is clear that when governments are seen to be delivering for their citizens, people are more likely to trust them.

Figure 5: Effectiveness & capability of government



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 the percentage shown is the aggregation of responses of “very effective” and “somewhat effective” (considered “Effective”); with respondents also able to choose “neither effective nor ineffective”, “somewhat ineffective” and “very ineffective”; and “Don’t know” was a separate answer. “[State]” was replaced with text based on respondent’s location.

Democratic behaviours and the performance of our democratic institutions

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.

76.0% of Australians prefer democracy to any alternative, yet only 54.5% are satisfied with how it works. Around two-thirds (64.6%) have confidence in election outcomes and 69.4% believe elections they are free and fair.

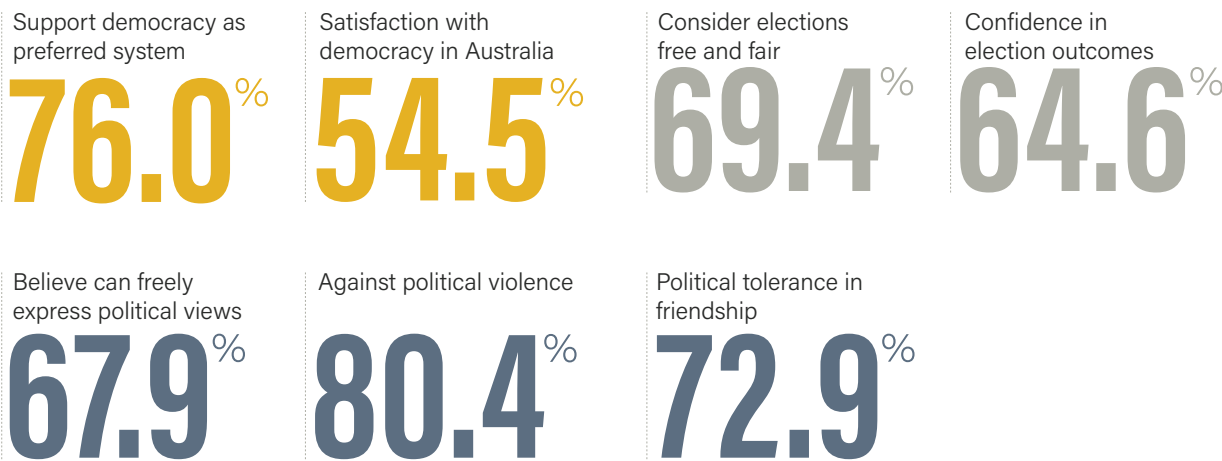
Satisfaction with democracy was lower among those whose highest qualification was high school, those on lower incomes, and older Australians (50+, particularly men aged 50-64). A lack of confidence in understanding how our democracy works and not feeling part of Australia were also associated with being more likely to be dissatisfied

with our democracy.

While four in five (80.4%) reject violence or extreme measures to advance causes, the number that believe it is warranted in some circumstances is still concerningly high.

While satisfaction may be lower, support for democracy in Australia seems high by international standards. A recent Gallup International poll of 43 countries found agreement that democracy is the best system of government was 59% on average, compared with the 76% in the McKinnon Index who agreed democracy if preferable to any other kind of government.²

Figure 6: Measures of democratic support and behaviours

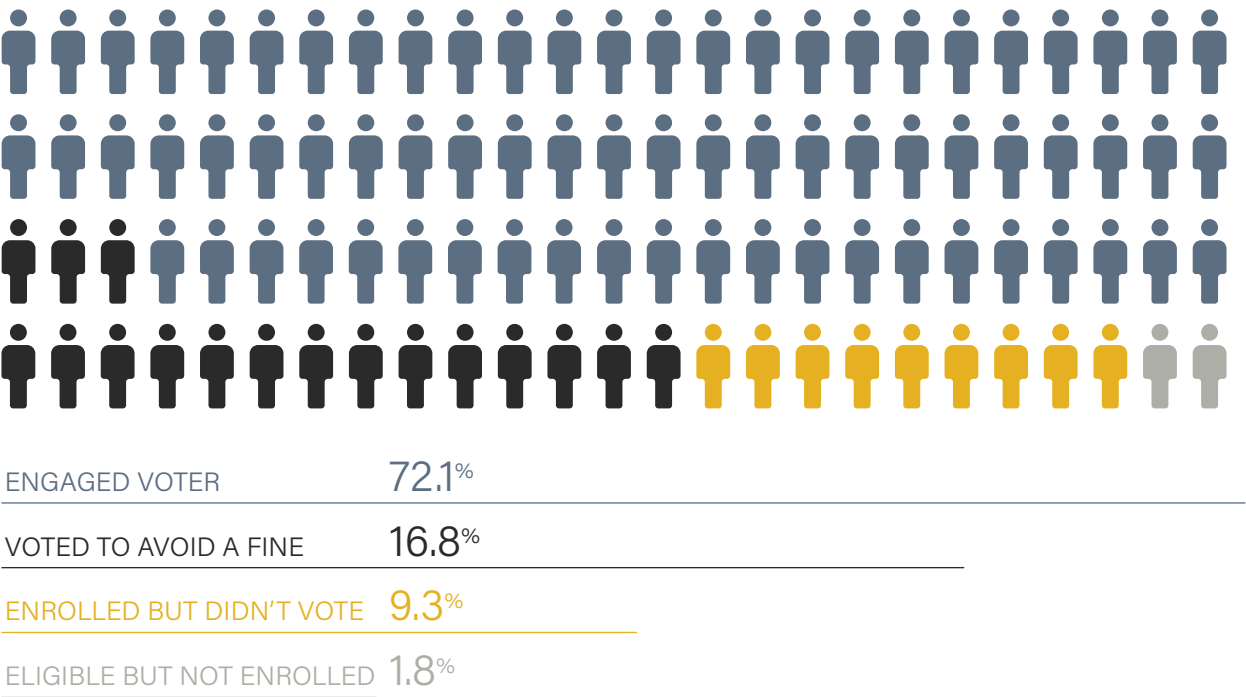


Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions is contained in the appendix to this report. Note responses to the questions on support for violence and whether someone could be friends with someone with different political views have been reverse coded for this graph.

2 Democracy Remains Popular but People Worldwide are Questioning its Performance: [gallup-international.com](https://www.gallup-international.com)

Around one in six Australians (16.8%) say they vote mainly to avoid a fine. While compulsory voting keeps our participation rate among the highest in the world, more than one in ten eligible Australians still didn't cast a ballot at the last federal election. Taken together, around a quarter of voting-age Australians could be considered disengaged from the democratic process.

Figure 7: AEC voter engagement data and reason for vote



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>

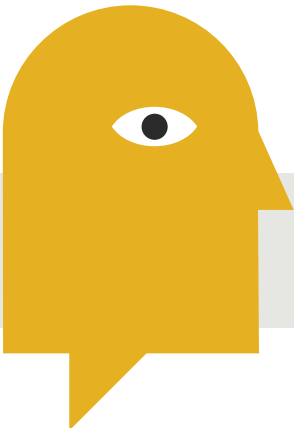
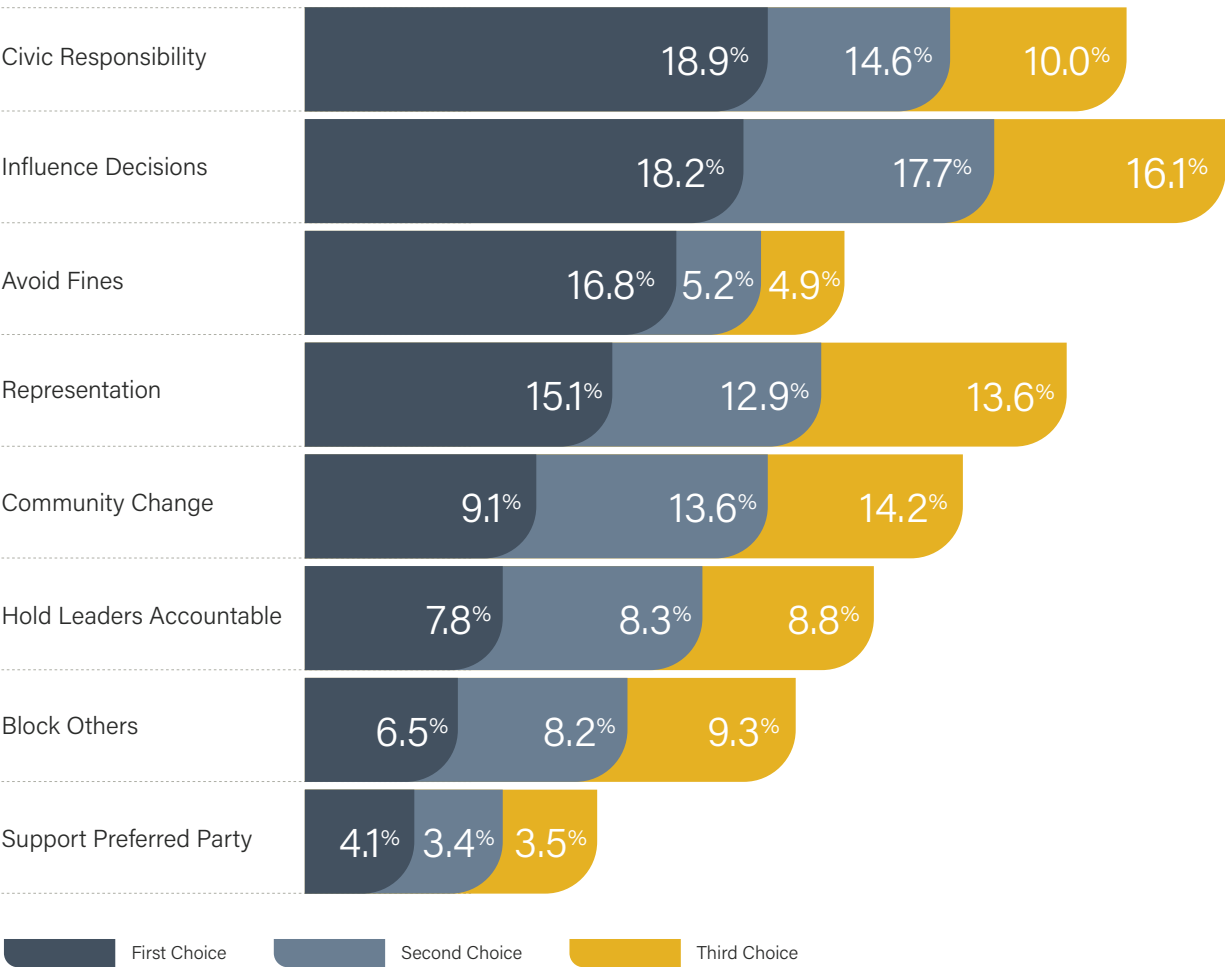
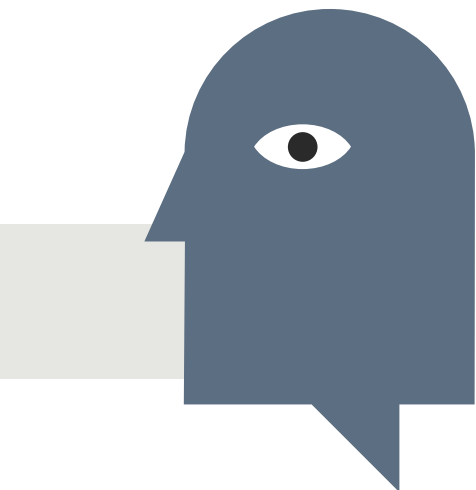


Figure 8: Main reasons for voting



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.



PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT AND TRUST

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

Regional disparities

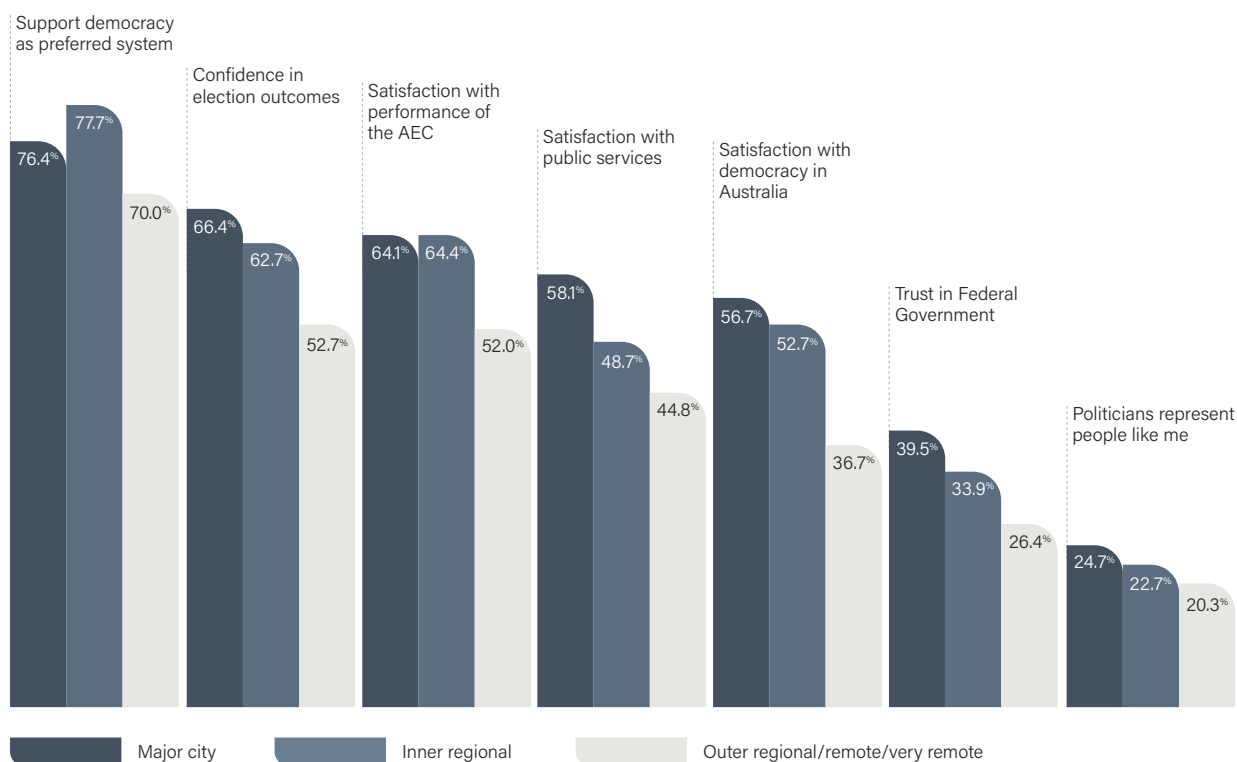
Key findings:

- **Concern:** Regions perform worse on most key democratic indicators compared to cities

There appears to be a democratic deficit in regional Australia relative to our cities. Regional Australians record lower trust in government, lower satisfaction with the AEC, and weaker belief that politicians understand and represent them.

This deficit does not appear to be driven by a lack of understanding of how our democracy works, as this was roughly equal across regional groups. Instead, those in the regions were less likely to say they had access to quality information on policy issues they care about (43.2% outer regional vs 56.6% for those in major cities) and were less likely to think the political system allowed people like them to have a say in what the government does (38.3% outer regions vs 52.6% for major cities). People who live in regional Australia are also less likely to be satisfied with all public services they were asked about.

Figure 9: Regional 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. Remoteness was determined based on respondents postcode and categorised based on the ABS remoteness classifications (see here for details: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/remoteness-structure/remoteness-areas>).

Youth

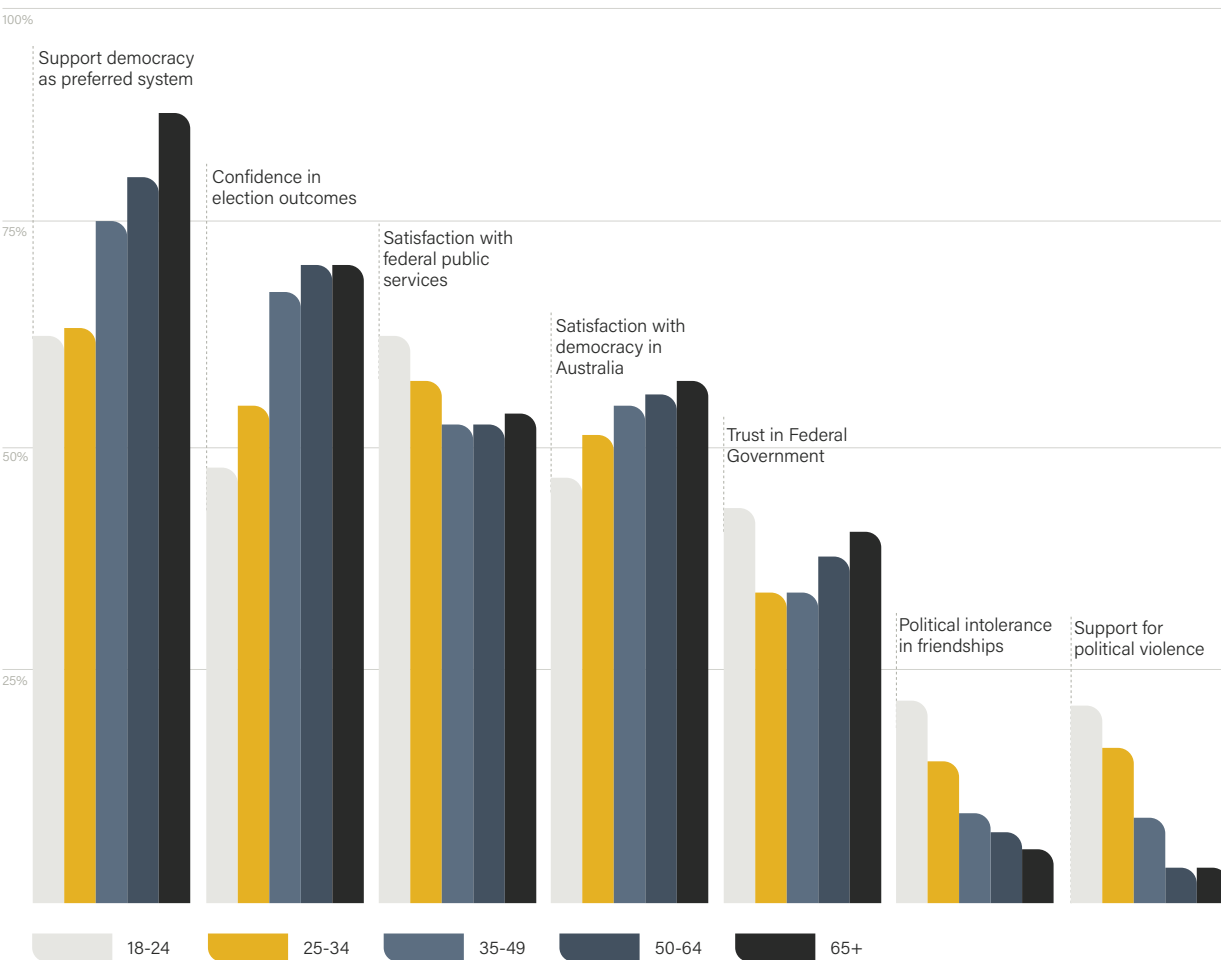
Key findings:

- **Strength:** Young people are among the most trusting of government and feel broadly well represented in our political system.
- **Concern:** Young people have lower support for, and satisfaction with, democracy, and are more likely to say they can't be friends with those with different political views and support politically motivated violence.

While they tend to be more trusting of government and more satisfied with public services, young people are less supportive of democracy and less likely to trust the AEC (unlike other institutions where young people tend to be more trusting). One in five (21.9%) 18-24 year olds say they cannot be friends with people who hold opposing political views, and young men (25-34) are the most likely to strongly support extreme measures like violence (8.5% vs 2.4% national average).

This democratic dissatisfaction may relate to the fact that younger people 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+).

Figure 10: 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.

Impact of media use

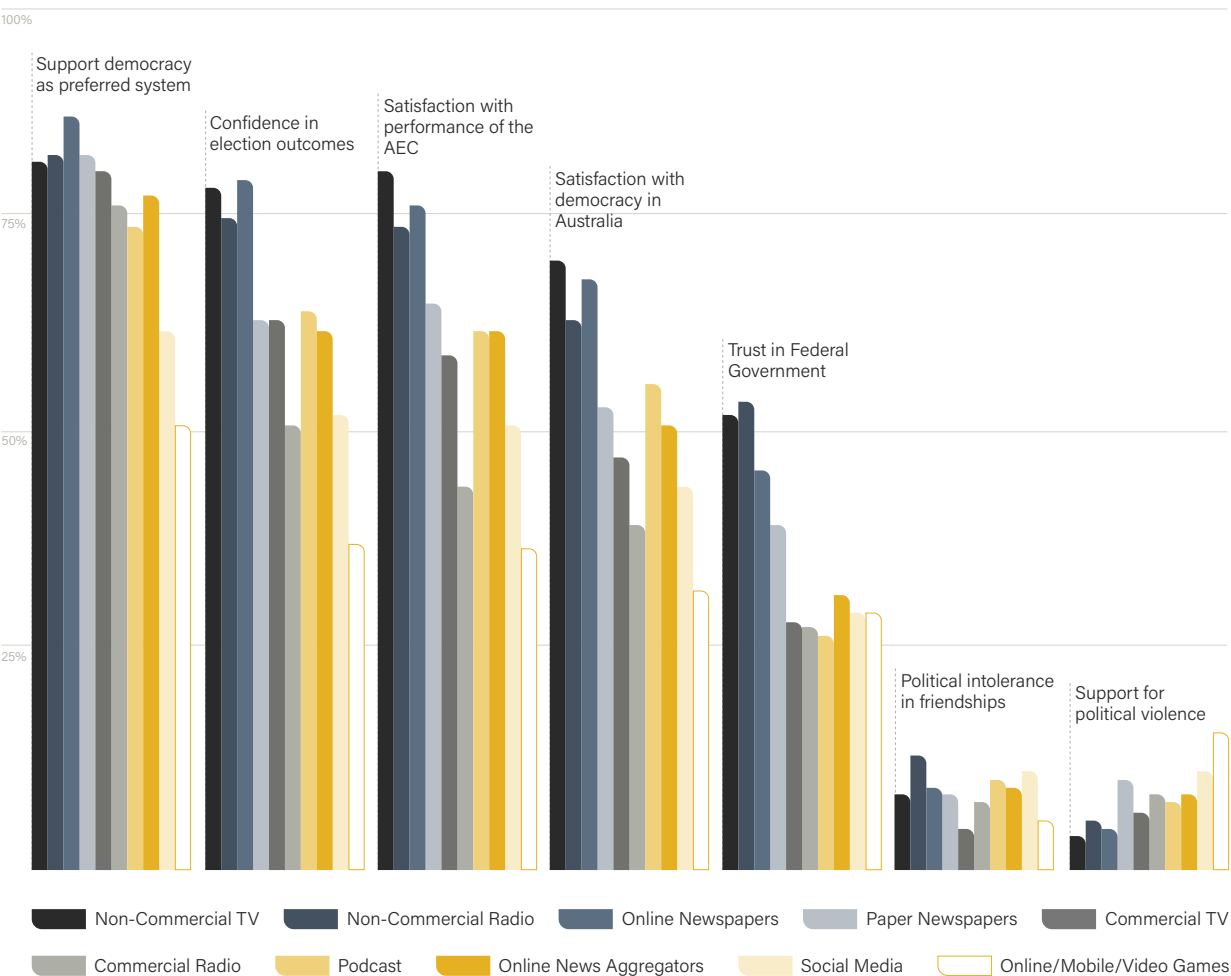
Key findings:

- **Challenge:** Support for democracy and confidence in elections is lower among those who use social media or other alternative sources of news.
- **Opportunity:** Many are concerned about misinformation and media bias or influence, indicating an area of reform to support people to feel more informed and engaged in our democracy.

Where people get their news seems to influence democratic support, with less traditional sources like social media associated with lower democratic support. Concerns related to misinformation and media bias were the most prevalent responses when people were asked about challenges facing Australia's democracy.

Generally, those whose main source of news was non-commercial TV or radio, or online newspapers, were the most supportive of democracy and satisfied with it, most trusting of government and confident in election outcomes, and least supportive of extreme measures such as violence. Conversely, those who get their news primarily from social media or online gaming platforms scored among the lowest for all these measures.

Figure 11: Democratic indicators and media use



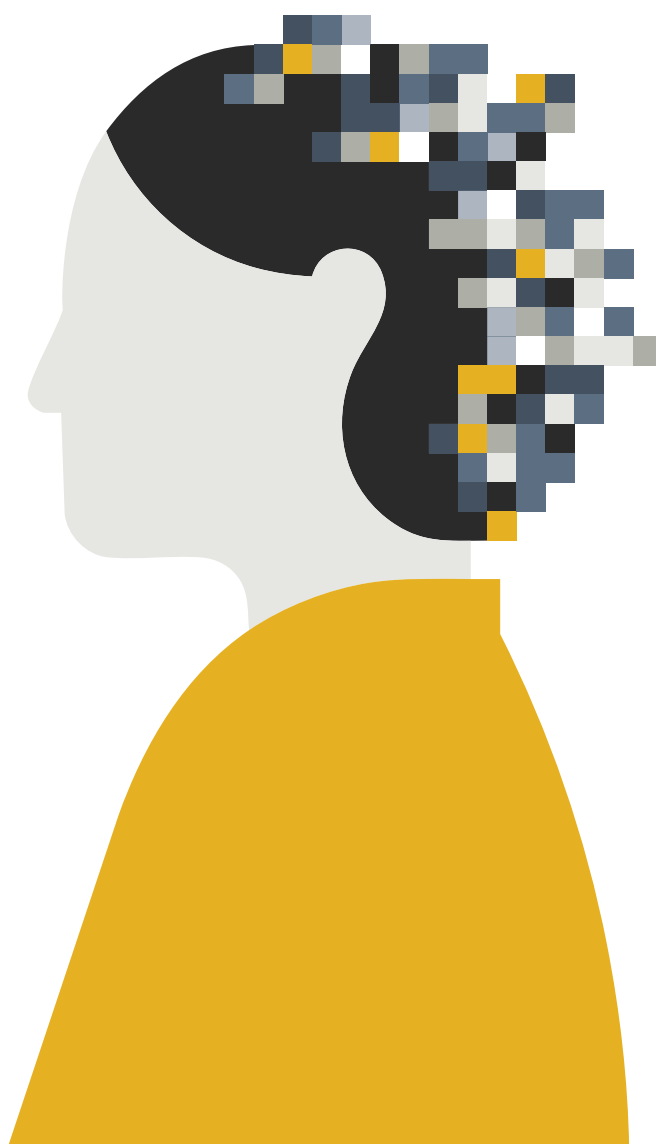
Source: 2025 McKinnon Index. This figure presents data from multiple questions, with responses converted into a single scale showing those who had greater than neutral levels of trust, satisfaction or agreement with the question (6+ for 10 point scales, 4+ for 5 point scales). The full list of questions 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.

WHAT'S NEXT

The McKinnon Index will track these measures annually, adding additional measures including expert opinion from next year. 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 deliver innovative policies. In 2026, McKinnon will also launch a program of work focused on democratic renewal.

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



Methodology:

Data for the Index is primarily taken from a large scale representative survey delivered in partnership with Roy Morgan. The remaining data is lifted from a variety of existing sources as referenced. The selection of themes, sub-themes, and specific measures was based on a desktop 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 aims.

The survey was conducted online with a large, representative 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. Weighting was applied for age, gender, location and past vote to ensure both demographic and political representation in the final analysis, and responses that were of insufficient quality were screened out.



Level 11
90 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

info@mckinnon.co

mckinnon.co