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Democracy 2025

TRUST AND DEMOCRACY IN AUSTRALIA

Democratic decline and renewal

Gerry Stoker, Mark Evans and Max Halupka

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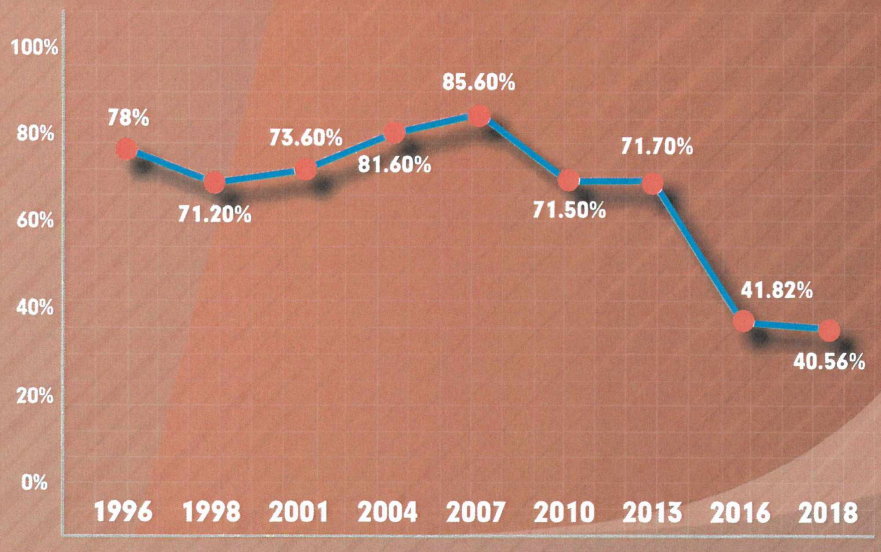
Report No.1



DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION IN AUSTRALIA 1996 TO 2018

Museum of Australian Democracy Old Parliament House

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNANCE & POLICY ANALYSIS

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Democracy 2025

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ABOUT DEMOCRACY 2025 – BRIDGING THE TRUST DIVIDE

Across Australia trust in our democracy is on the decline.

Trust is the glue that facilitates collective action for mutual benefit. Without trust we don't have the ability to address complex, long-term challenges. Trust is also closely tied to democratic satisfaction.

MoAD's (Museum of Australian Democracy) recent research, *Trust and Democracy in Australia*, shows that in 2018 satisfaction in democracy has more than halved in a decade and trust in key institutions and social leaders is eroding.

By 2025 if nothing is done and current trends continue, fewer than 10 per cent of Australians will trust their politicians and political institutions – resulting in ineffective and illegitimate government, and declining social and economic wellbeing.

This problem must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

MoAD is taking action. We are bringing together every section of the community and igniting a national conversation on strengthening Australian democratic practice.

MoAD and our foundation partner, the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra (UC-IGPA), are embarking on a bold new initiative, **Democracy 2025**, to *bridge the trust divide and re-engage Australians with their democracy*.

MoAD holds a unique position, on the frontline of democracy, civic agency and change, a museum not just of objects but of ideas. We empower Australians through exhibitions, schools' learning programs and events that both stimulate and inspire. Trusted by the public, government, public service and business alike, we advance national conversations about democracy, past, present and future.

Democracy 2025 will drive a process of national reflection and renewal on how we can rebuild trust and strengthen democratic practice in Australia.

We believe that this ambitious goal is critical to the health of the nation. Nothing less will do.

Daryl Karp, Director, MoAD

Professor Mark Evans, Director of Democracy 2025, UC-IGPA

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We need to get more involved but they [government and politicians] don't have time for us and our views. Apart from election time. Then they're interested in us. Maybe that's what needs to change. They need to be as interested in our views when they've been elected.

FIRST TIME VOTER,
URBAN AUSTRALIAN

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Over the past four years UC-IGPA and MoAD have conducted a range of quantitative surveys with the Social Research Institute at Ipsos on the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy. This report updates our findings from 2014 and 2016.

The research informing this report was conducted in July 2018 and includes a quantitative survey of a representative sample of 1021 Australians and 20 focus groups with various 'slices of Australian life': mainstream Australians (recruited at random, mix of age, gender, family and socio-economic status); older Australians (over 65, not working); young Australians (under 23); new Australians (migrants to Australia that became citizens within the past 10 years); rural and regional Australians (living outside metropolitan Australia); LGBTQI Australians; and, Australians with disability (and their carers).

Democracy 2025 and the co-authors of this report would like to thank a number of people who have provided comment and support to our deliberations including Daryl Karp, Lorna Evans, Coco Liu and Nilima Mathai. We would also like to thank Julia Knapp at Ipsos for her continuing support for this project.

Any errors or omissions, however, remain the fault of the authors alone.

This report is the first output from the initiative Democracy 2025 – bridging the trust divide. For other reports in this series visit our website at: www.democracy2025.gov.au

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Don't get me wrong, we need democracy. And I know and respect the fact that lots of Australians have died for what we have today. What did someone once say; Churchill or someone? Probably got it wrong but "democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others?" Problem is that it's out of touch with the people. We can't get excited about it because it doesn't work for us. Australian democracy is out of touch.

FIRST TIME VOTER,
REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a national survey (n=1021) that explores the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy. It was conducted by Ipsos in late July 2018 prior to the Liberal Party's leadership spill. We understood political trust in this survey as a relational concept that is about "keeping promises and agreements" (Hetherington, 2005). The survey questionnaire was based on questions designed by the Democracy 2025 team, and including questions that had previously been asked of similar samples in 2014 and 2016, allowing for time series analysis. The findings from this quantitative survey have also been explored through qualitative focus group research. Key qualitative insights can be found in the substantive sections of the report.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE AND RENEWAL

Australians should rightly be proud of their hard won democratic traditions and freedoms and the achievement of stable government which has delivered social and economic wellbeing for its citizens. However, the findings presented in this report should give all democrats pause for thought. We continue to find compelling evidence of an increasing trust divide between government and citizen reflected in the decline of democratic satisfaction, receding trust in politicians, political parties and other key institutions (especially media) and lack of public confidence in the capacity of government to address public policy concerns. Australia is currently experiencing a culture shift from an allegiant to a divergent democratic culture (Dalton and Welzel, eds., 2014) with an increasing number of citizens searching for a new politics to represent their values and defend their material needs and aspirations for the future. Please consider the evidence presented below.

Australians are happy with underlying democratic values and infrastructure

The majority of Australians dislike the conflict driven politics of the Federal Parliament but don't dislike democratic values or democracy as a system of government. When asked to select three aspects of Australian democracy that they liked the most, the top three in 2018 were (in order): (1) "Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens"; (2) "Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle"; and (3) "Australian elections are free and fair". Respondents were least likely to choose features that praised (or showed engagement) with current democratic politics. The findings suggest that Australians are happy with the underlying democratic infrastructure of Australian society that allows them to achieve a high standard of living; but are less positive or engaged about day-to-day political operations.

Australians are deeply unhappy with democratic politics

Fewer than 41 per cent of Australian citizens are currently satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia down from 86 per cent in 2007. Public satisfaction has fallen particularly sharply since 2013 when 72 per cent of Australian citizens were satisfied. Generation X is least satisfied (31 per cent) and the Baby Boomers most satisfied (50 per cent). At a time when the "#Metoo" movement is beginning to politicize women on a global scale, women are generally less satisfied with democracy and more distrusting of politicians and political institutions.

In general, levels of trust in government and politicians in Australia are at their lowest levels since times series data has been available

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Federal government is trusted by just 31 per cent of the population while state and local government performs little better with just over a third of people trusting them. Ministers and MPs (whether federal or state) rate at just 21 per cent while more than 60 per cent of Australians believe that the honesty and integrity of politicians is very low. One issue that appears to unite most Australians is complaining about their politicians. What are their three biggest grievances? That politicians are not accountable for broken promises; that they don't deal with the issues that really matter; and that big business has too much power (Liberal and National Party voters identify trade unions instead of big business).

The continued decline of political trust has also contaminated public confidence in other key political institutions with only five rating above 50 per cent – police, military, civic wellbeing organisations (e.g. Headspace or community services), universities and health care institutions. Trust was lowest in political parties (16 per cent) and web-based media (20 per cent). Trust in banks and web-based media have significantly decreased since the last survey reflecting the impact of contextual factors. In these cases the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry and the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal.

Those more likely to feel satisfied with the status quo include those aged over 55 (Baby Boomers), those earning more than $200,000 a year and those who vote for the National or Liberal Parties. They are also more likely to be male and an immigrant, because those born overseas tend to be more satisfied with Australian politics than native born. They see Australian democracy as a sanctuary and are excited at the prospect of a new life. Those that are most likely to be unhappy are Australian born, female, aged in their forties (Generation X) and struggling on less than $50,000 a year. They are also more likely to identify with minor political parties like *One Nation* or *Centre Alliance* or independents such as Cathy McGowan's *Voice for Indi* and to be a critic of the major political parties.

In sum, politicians, government ministers, media and political parties are deeply distrusted because the majority of Australians dislike conflict-driven politics in Canberra which they perceive to be disconnected from their everyday lives. There are three dimensions to this dimension of the trust divide – perceptions that politicians lack integrity, empathy and simply don't deliver on the issues that citizens care most about. But it is not just about the behaviour of politicians but also about getting things done (e.g. addressing cost of living concerns such as rising energy bills).

Declining political and social trust is the perfect storm for independents

Levels of social trust are also in decline. Social trust between people has fallen below 50 per cent for the first time to 47 per cent. Although a majority still believe that people in their neighbourhood would help others out – except for the very rich (47 per cent). There are four attitudinal shifts on display here. Firstly, many voters care more about effective and competent government (governability issues) than promises of more dollars in their pockets (personal economic expectations).

Secondly, there is also a group of voters that are completely disconnected from traditional politics. They are deeply distrustful not just of politicians, but almost every major institution and authority figure listed in the survey, except for their local GP. When given 15 options to describe what they like about

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Australian democracy, including free and fair elections, their main response was 'None of the above'. This group of disconnected voters are the most disconnected group in our society; they are feeling very economically insecure, a significant proportion are on welfare or low incomes, and are increasingly politically alienated and angry just like Trump and Brexit voters.

Thirdly, we can also identify an increasingly large group of Australians that are up for a different politics, are deeply critical of Australia's main political parties and are looking for an alternative across a broad ideological spectrum from Hanson, to Sharkie, to McGowan and Phelps. This is a perfect storm for independents of a variety of types.

And, fourthly, there is a group of Australians who vote independent for tactical reasons to either secure greater resources for their communities or to register a protest vote against the two party system.

Appetite for democratic reform is extremely strong

Respondents were asked to consider different pathways to reform. We found a significant appetite for reform with nine out of 15 proposed reforms receiving net agreement rates above 50 per cent. The top five reforms favoured in the survey include: (1) limiting money donated to parties and spent in elections; (2) the right for voters to recall ineffective local MP; (3) giving all MPs a free vote in parliament; (4) co-designing policies with ordinary Australians; and (5) citizen juries to solve complex problems that parliament can't fix. Reforms aimed at improving the practice of representative politics were the most popular, followed by reforms aimed at giving citizens a greater say. There were also strong levels of support for reforms aimed at creating a stronger community or local focus to decision-making. Only reforms aimed at guaranteeing the representation of certain groups failed to attract majority support. Remarkably accessing more detailed information about innovative reforms led to greater support for those reforms. This is an important finding revealing the centrality of strategic communication in winning the war of ideas.

All are reforms likely to challenge dominant thinking within the main political parties (see Dalton et al., 2011). The smart politicians will (and do) understand that this is just good representative politics; treating Australian citizens with respect and empathy on an ongoing basis and not just during election campaigns. Certainly the parties and candidates that do get the importance of a new politics could steal a march at the next election.

IN CONCLUSION – TIPPING POINT

Liberal democracies are founded upon a delicate balance between trust and distrust. Indeed constitutional settlements are designed on that basis through the separation of the powers of the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches of government, the existence of a free media to monitor legitimate statecraft and other checks and balances. This demonstrates the challenge in defining the appropriate normative stance of what level of trust or distrust is acceptable. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that we may have reached a tipping point due to a deepening trust divide in Australia which has increased in scope and intensity since 2007.

We have found a mixed pattern of evidence in relation to both the allegiant and assertive models of democratic culture (see Box 1). The allegiant model is challenged in that deference to politicians appears absent and trust in institutions has weakened. Yet citizens still appear to value the overall stability of

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their political system even if lack of political trust means they lack confidence in its ability to deliver especially on more challenging policy issues. At present, sustained affluence matched with a decline in political trust, has led not to the critical citizens envisaged by the assertive model but rather to a culture of citizen disengagement, cynicism and divergence from the political elite. Most Australian citizens are very clear that they do not like the character of contemporary politics on display in Federal government and democratic renewal is required to address the democratic pressures that are threatening to undermine our core democratic values. We characterise this as a *divergent* democratic culture but not an assertive one.

We can also observe from our survey findings that trust is a complex and potentially "wicked" problem with multiple dimensions and causes (see Head, 2008). These can be understood as supply and demand side factors. The supply-side factors start from the premise that public trust must in some way correspond with the trustworthiness of government. The argument is that it is the supply of government that matters most in orienting the outlooks of citizens. Demand-side theories focus on how much individuals trust government and politics and explore their key characteristics. The demand and supply side factors are numerous and in approaching reform options there is unlikely to be a straightforward linear causal path to move from defining the problem, understanding and explaining it and designing counter measures. Nor is it likely that the trust divide will be solved simply by fiddling with the architecture of government or improving the behaviour of politicians or the media. It will require a broad range of responses underpinned by a renewal of our democratic fundamentals. The implication of this finding is to encourage an understanding of this complexity and the need to develop a multi-faceted strategy to tackle issues of trust.

Australians imagine their democracy in a way that demonstrates support for a new participatory politics but with the aim of shoring up representative democracy and developing a more integrated, inclusive and responsive democratic system. In the light of this discovery, we argue that an effective path to reform is not about choosing between representative and participatory democratic models but of finding linking arrangements between them.

We explore a range of interventions that might make a difference in our second report ***Bridging the trust divide – lessons from international experience.***

Box 1: Allegiant and assertive models of democratic culture

ALLEGIANT	ASSERTIVE
Emphasis on order and security	Emphasis on voice and participation
Deference to authority	Distance from authority
Trust in institutions	Scepticism of institutions
Limited liberal view of democracy	Expanded democratic expectations
Limited protest/protest potential	Direct, elite challenging action
Traditional forms of participation	Mixture of traditional and new forms of participation

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What does Australian democracy mean to me? It means a second chance for a peaceful life for my family. We will always be grateful for this opportunity. I don't think Australians know how lucky they are. But I guess they don't know. You only know how good something is when you haven't got it.

GENERATION X, URBAN NEW AUSTRALIAN

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We should be proud of what we've achieved. When we were kids we had nothing new. I was the youngest so everything was handed down to me. I didn't have my own pair of shoes until I went to war. The church picnic, chicken at Christmas, sharing a bar of chocolate – these were our luxuries. The stuff kids get today; they have no idea. Democracy has given us so much but we need to remember where we have come from; remember our history.

BUILDER, REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

In late July 2018, Ipsos was commissioned by the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA) to conduct an online survey of n=1021 Australians to explore the relationship between trust in the political system and attitudes towards democracy. We understand political trust in this survey as a relational concept that is about "keeping promises and agreements" (Hetherington, 2005). The survey questionnaire was based on questions designed by the Democracy 2025 team, and included some questions that had previously been asked of similar samples in 2014 and 2016, allowing for time series analysis (see Evans et al., 2017; Evans and Stoker 2016; Stoker et al., 2017). The survey was administered to an online panel, with minimum quotas set to ensure a robust sample of Australians by age, gender, state and household income. Data was weighted by age, gender and location to match the composition of the Australian population.

This introductory section provides an overview of the methodology, weighting and sampling techniques deployed in the survey, together with an overview of the structure of the report to follow.

METHODOLOGY

The Democracy 2025 team provided Ipsos with a draft questionnaire of approximately 10 minutes in length. The final questionnaire used to collect data is available at Appendix 1. The survey was administered to an online panel between the 23rd July and 30th July 2018. In total, 1,021 Australians completed the survey. A random stratified sample of the general public was used. Minimum quotas were set to ensure a robust sample of Australians by age, gender, location and socioeconomic status. Rather than aiming for a sample that is representative of the population, these quotas were set to ensure that a sufficient sample was collected for each group of interest. For example, this survey involved recruiting a larger sample of Builders (people born between 1925 and 1945) in order to allow for comparisons between this generation and others in the analysis. The sample included quotas for age, gender, state and household income.

The findings from this quantitative survey have also been explored through qualitative focus group research. We have conducted 20 focus groups with different groups of Australians including; older Australians (over 65, not working); young Australians; new Australians; urban, rural and regional Australians; and, Australians with disability (or carers). We have also deliberately recruited participants for certain focus groups in marginal constituencies (e.g. Indi, Longman, Mayo, and Toowoomba North) who do not align with a particular political party or are rethinking their political position. Please note that illustrative verbatims (presented in italics) used in this report have been edited for brevity and/or sense.

Weighting

All data was weighted by age, gender and location and for comparability between waves. Data provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics was used to obtain population figures for each of these groups. Weighting is used to adjust the results of studies to make them more representative (e.g., if a study has 20 per cent men, but the population has 50 per cent, weighting can be used to bring the results of the study into line with the population). We undertook Rim weighting using Q software, using the variables gender, age (generation) and location (state).

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Table 1: Quotas

LOCATION	MINIMUM SAMPLE
NSW	196
Vic	196
QLD	150
WA	96
SA	96
TAS	42
ACT	42
NT	42
TOTAL	1000
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	**MINIMUM SAMPLE**
<50K	200
50-100K	200
>100K	200
GENDER	**MINIMUM SAMPLE**
Male	450
Female	450
AGE	**MINIMUM SAMPLE**
Builders (born 1925-45)	100
Baby boomers (1946-64)	100
Generation X (1965-79)	100
Millennials (1980-94)	100
Generation Z (1995-present)	100

All statistical significance testing in this report was performed using Q computer software package and SPSS. Significance testing between independent subgroups was performed using independent samples t-tests for comparison of means and z-tests for comparisons of proportions, all conducted at the 95 per cent confidence level using the effective sample size. A 'significant difference' means that we can be 95 per cent confident that the difference observed between the two samples reflects a true difference in the population of interest, and is not a result of chance.

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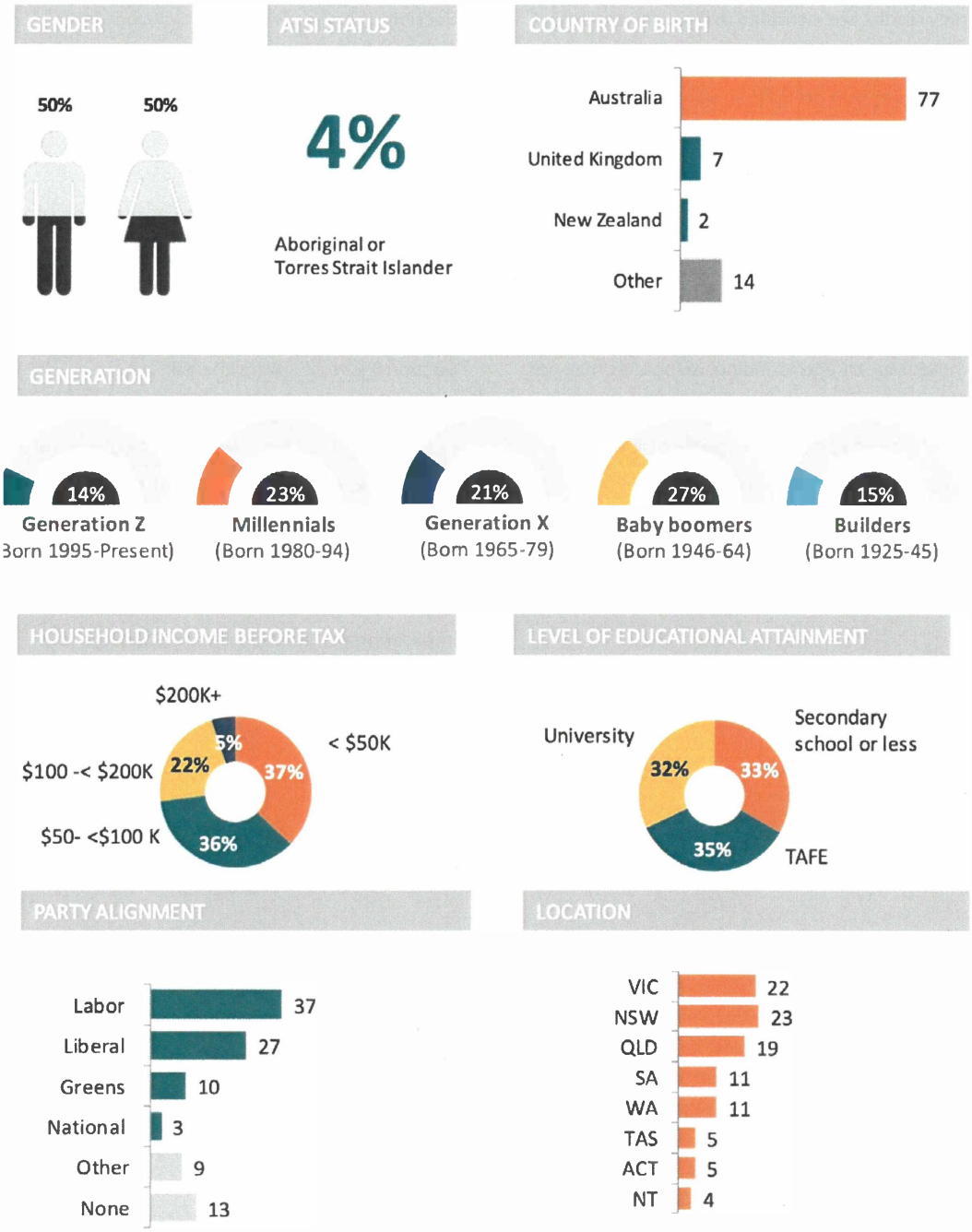
Survey sample

Figure 1, below, outlines the demographics of the survey sample. Note that this data is unweighted. However, as described in section 4.2, above, data shown in the remainder of the report has been weighted to bring the survey results into line with the true Australian population.

Figure 1: Demographics



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HOW TO INTERPRET THIS REPORT

For each question, data has been presented in a combination of tables and charts at the overall level by generation, political affiliation, household income, country of birth (Australia vs. other) and gender. Significant differences between the 2016 and 2018 survey results are identified using a downwards arrow (↑) to indicate that a result is significantly lower among that group than all other groups, and an upwards arrow (↓) to indicate that it is significantly higher. Significant differences by political alignment, engagement and location (state and regional versus metropolitan) are noted in the commentary. In addition, significant differences in relation to the other variables examined have been noted in the commentary. Due to rounding, responses may not always add up to 100%, and NETs (e.g. 'very satisfied' + 'fairly satisfied') may not appear to be an exact addition of the two responses included.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report findings are organised into three substantive sections and a conclusion. Sections one, two and three provide detailed analysis of three narratives of democratic decline and renewal.

Section 1 – *a decade of democratic decline* – explores attitudes towards democratic politics and practices over time.

Section 2 – *a country divided* – examines attitudinal differences between sections of the Australian population on issues of trust and democracy.

Section 3 – *democratic renewal* – investigates the underlying causes of the sense of malaise felt about how democratic politics are working and what Australian citizens think might be useful paths to reform.

The conclusion – tipping point – explores the implications of the report's main findings for Australia's democratic culture.

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Australia has come a long way for a young country. We are a great democracy but I think we take a lot for granted. I do think democracy is under attack. If you look at all the democracies in our backyard with the exception of New Zealand they are all vulnerable. It's our responsibility to make our democracy stronger.

BABY BOOMER, COASTAL AUSTRALIAN

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I have a full life. I go at it hard because I want to show everyone that my disability won't hold me back. Not for one second. It's partly because of that, that I get the idea about active citizenship. The great thing about Australian democracy is that there are so many ways in which we can participate. But you have to go for it. I am doing democracy differently to most people and loving every second.

GENERATION X, AUSTRALIAN WITH DISABILITY

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NARRATIVES OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE AND RENEWAL

1. A DECADE OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

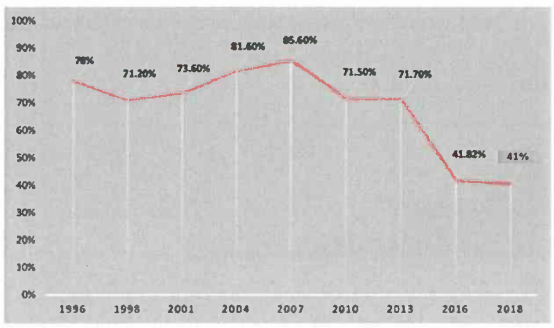
In terms of the attitudes of Australian citizens towards democratic politics and practices, the 2018 survey evidence observes a pattern of decline and sustained negativity. This section of the report demonstrates:

- that satisfaction with democracy has been in decline for a decade but has declined more steeply in the last five years.
- That trust in political institutions and actors is low.
- That only a small proportion of the population have much faith in the integrity of Australia's politicians.
- That social trust is also on the wane for some groups.
- That trust in the media and news coverage of politics is low.

Satisfaction with democracy

Satisfaction with how democracy works has been in decline since the end of the Howard era in 2007 but has been in freefall since 2013 (when it was at 71 per cent) standing at 41 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 2). In comparative terms this finding puts Australia below the median satisfaction rating in comparison with other advanced industrial democracies. A global survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in spring 2017 reveals that satisfaction with the way democracy works stood at the 70 per cent or above bracket in Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany; and, at around 50 per cent in Poland and in the United Kingdom post-Brexit referendum.

Fig 2: Satisfaction with democracy in Australia



Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

The rating for the USA in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump to the presidency was 46 per cent and in Hungary 44 per cent. The only countries lower than Australia in the ratings were France (34 per cent), Italy (31 per cent), Spain (25 per cent) and Greece (21 per cent). For these comparative findings see: http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/many-unhappy-with-current-political-system/ (retrieved 19 November 2018). In sum, in the main the trust divide has been most acute in countries highly impacted by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) such as Greece with one exception – Australia.

Trust in individuals and institutions

The survey reveals that Members of Parliament (MPs) in general are distrusted by nearly half the population (48 per cent) and that only one in five (21 per cent) are willing to express that they trust them "a little bit" or "very much" (see Figure 2). As Figure 3 shows, the trend over time is negative for trust in politicians, although the major drop in trust occurred a decade or more ago. Government Ministers are distrusted by 48 per cent of respondents and only trusted to some degree by 23 per cent. The figures get slightly better when citizens are asked about their local MP (31 per cent indicating they "trust them a little bit") and local councillor (29 per cent saying they "trust them a little bit"). Other actors are trusted to a much greater degree: GPs (81 per cent); Judges (55 per cent) and too some extent Public Servants (38 per cent). But notably there are other occupations that appear to be almost as distrusted as politicians such as business people (31 per cent), journalists (28 per cent) and trade unionists (26 per cent).

As for trust in political institutions the attitudinal patterns remain just as gloomy. Approximately three in ten respondents trust federal government, one in

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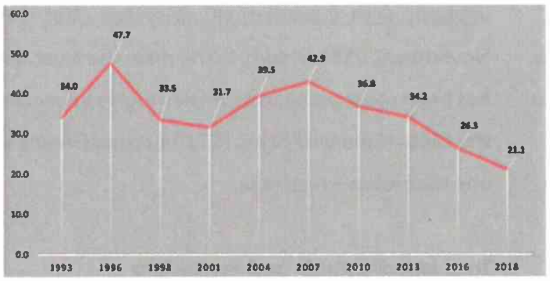
five trust political parties, less than four in ten trust state or territory government or local government. Again, some institutions are much more trusted by the public such as the police (70 per cent), civil wellbeing organisations (69 per cent), the military (66 per cent) and Universities (62 per cent).

Figure 3: Trust in politicians



Q: How much do you personally trust each of the following?

The comparative standing of Australia can be judged by a Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2017. Among the 28 countries inside the European Union the median trust score for national governments was 40 per cent (European Commission, 2017). Sweden and the Netherlands have trust scores of 70 per cent. The only countries with a lower trust score than Federal government in Australia were Italy (27 per cent), Spain (18 per cent and Greece (13 per cent).

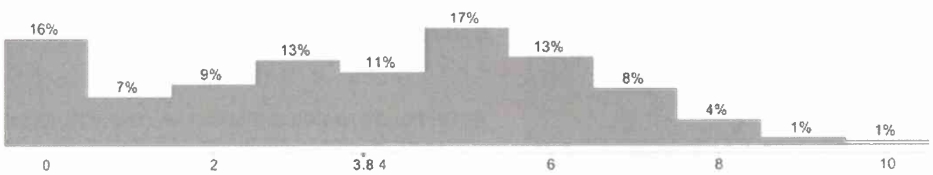
Political integrity

If trust is about a citizen's sense about governments and politicians keeping promises and trying to do the right thing then it is worth investigating related perspectives on how they view the standards of honesty and integrity of politicians. The attitudinal pattern is again a negative one, only 11 per cent of citizens think that the standards are "very high" or "somewhat high" (indeed only 1 per cent think they are "very high"). Negative perceptions dominate: with 36 per cent viewing standards as "somewhat low" and 25 per cent viewing them as "very low". Leaving 27 per cent arguing they are neither "high" nor "low". Given that honesty and integrity are qualities that most citizens would highly prize in politics then we can conclude that 90 per cent of citizens have a negative view of the standards of honesty and integrity held by politicians.

Political empathy

Given the longitudinal pattern of democratic decline in Australia, we investigated whether citizens might think that politics worked better for them in the past. We asked two questions. Respondents were asked to rate how much they thought politicians cared about people, on a scale of one to ten. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of ratings, showing that on average respondents did not think politicians "cared about people like [me]" (mean score of 3.8). 55 per cent of respondents rated politician "don't care about people like [me]" (by giving a rating of less than five, with the rating receiving the greatest number five indicating neutral.

Figure 4: How much politicians care about people currently



Q: How much do you personally trust each of the following?

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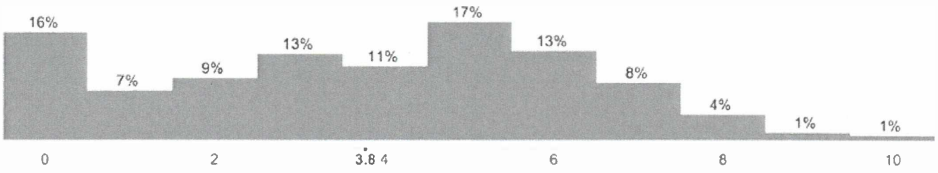
Respondents were also asked to rate how much they thought politicians "cared about people like [me] ten years ago" on a scale of one to 10. The findings are presented in Figure 5. The proportion of respondents who gave the number 0 nearly halved from when asked to think about whether politicians care now from 16 per cent now to nine per cent 30 years ago. The mean rating was 4.8 showing that on average, the proportion of respondents who thought politicians didn't care (rating of less than five) decreased to 37 per cent (from 55 per cent when asked to think whether politicians care about people now). Overall, this reflects that the average respondent thought that politicians cared more about people 30 years ago than they do today.

Figure 5: How much did politicians care 30 years ago?



Q: Using the 0 to 10 scale below, how much do you think politicians cared about people like you 30 years ago?

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Well I think multiculturalism has been very good for Australia, I think it's been the backbone for Australia and I think the fact that we have so many different races in Australia has given us an extremely good view of what is fair, so I think while there are moments, different governments, maybe different directions, I think generally Australia is a very fair country and I think that's largely down to the diverse range of people who live here. Most of us came from a migrant background.

BABY BOOMER, REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN

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2. A DIVIDED COUNTRY

This section of the report explores attitudinal differences between sections of the Australian population on issues of trust and democracy. As the previous section established most Australians share a profound sense that there is a malaise afflicting their political system. But there are important shades of difference in perspective to understand. We show that:

- those with the lowest income are least satisfied with how democracy works.
- That women are more dissatisfied than men about the way democracy works and that most Australians think that sexism is widespread in politics.
- That the older generations are both the most satisfied and the most dissatisfied with the way democracy works.
- That Generation X is the age cohort that is most lacking in trust in Australian political institutions.
- Those who tend to support an established political party are more trusting of political institutions.
- Those who are recent arrivals to Australia tend to be more trusting of political institutions.
- There are some attitudinal differences between states and territories and some differences. between metropolitan and rural areas, although given the small sample size in different locations these findings need to be treated with caution.

The lower your income the less satisfied with democracy you are

Figure 6 tells a clear-cut story. The lower your income the less satisfied you are with how democracy works. The dissatisfaction percentage as income increases is as follows 36:30:23:11. Focusing on the relative standing between the highest and lowest income groups reveals that the proportion of citizens in the lowest income level that are dissatisfied with how democracy works is three times greater than those in the highest category (36 per cent against 11 per cent). But is it that the lowest income group is both the most satisfied and the least satisfied cohort with Australia's democratic arrangements? The answer is negative. The net satisfaction rate for those with an income below $50,000 (that is, those satisfied minus those dissatisfied) is -2. If you compare this outcome with those on the highest incomes ($200,000 and above) where net satisfaction reaches +41, we can see that income levels matter in driving democratic satisfaction.

The connection between income and democratic satisfaction is not perhaps that surprising, especially (as we will see in Section 3) as one of the attributes that gives citizens a reason for supporting democracy is that it provides for economic security and social welfare. The Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2017) found a similar pattern when looking at trust in government across 28 European countries noting that:

> *"the less difficulty a respondent has in paying households bills, the more likely they are to trust the national government: 46 per cent of those with the least difficulties do so, compared to 21 per cent with the most difficulties".*

There is evidently a significant relationship between a sense of economic wellbeing and satisfaction with the way democracy works.

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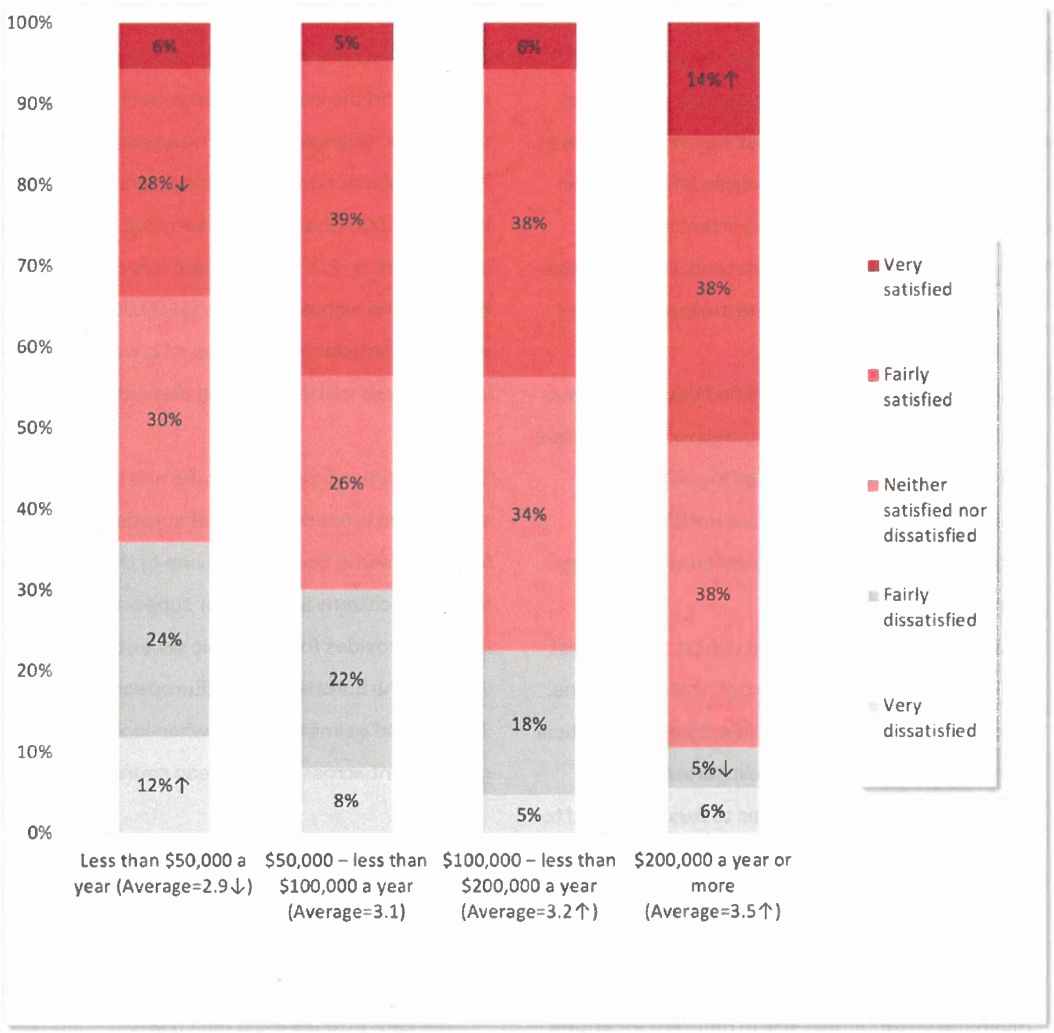
Figure 6: Income distribution and democratic satisfaction



Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

Women are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy than men

There are some differences based on gender evident from the 2018 survey. Men have a five-point lead over women for levels of satisfaction in democracy (43 to 38 per cent) and men were three times more likely to report being "highly satisfied" than women. This trend is perhaps reflective of a wider sense that high levels of sexism are impacting on politics in Australia. In Figure 7 we present findings from another national survey conducted by the authors in 2018 in which we asked citizens to identify areas of society where they perceived sexism to be most widespread (Evans, Haussegger, Halupka and Rowe, 2018). Sexism is viewed to be most prevalent in politics (58 per cent), the workplace (53 per cent), the media (42 per cent) and advertising (33 per cent). Moreover, comparative findings from the Eurobarometer (2018) suggest that politics in Australia is perceived to be much more sexist than in Europe.

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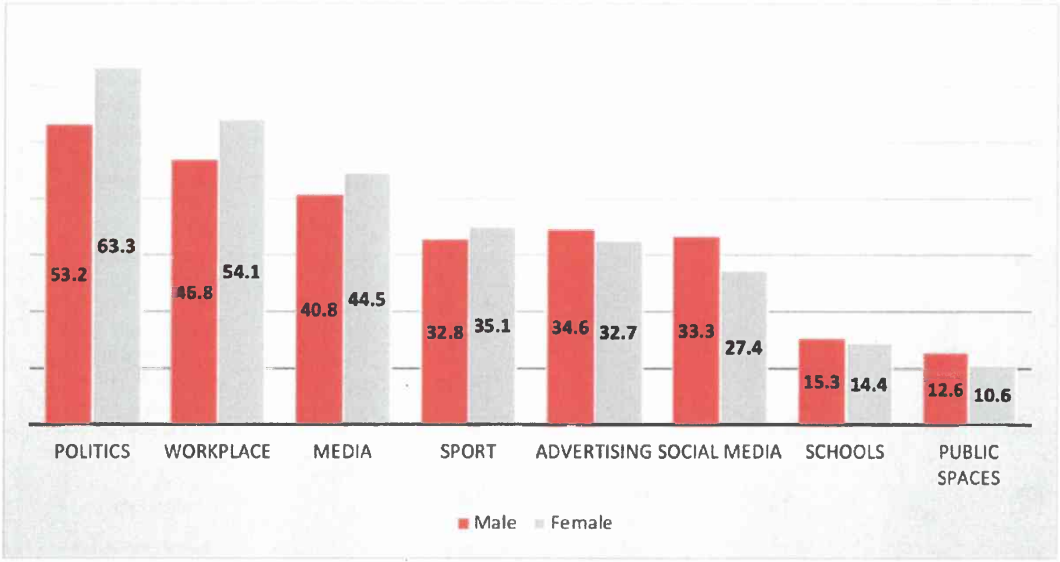
Figure 7: Areas of society where sexism is most widespread



Q: Choose three areas of society where sexism is most widespread

The older generations are both the most and the least satisfied with democracy

Figure 8 shows that in terms of satisfaction with democracy younger generations represent about a third of the percentage of respondents who say they are "neither satisfied" nor "dissatisfied" with the way democracy works. But in the two older generation groups that proportion falls to around 20 per cent. The impact of the presence of greater discord between older generations on these issues is that they are both the most and the least satisfied with democracy. For example, 45 per cent of the Builders (1925 to 1945) are satisfied with democracy and 35 per cent are dissatisfied with democracy. And fifty percent of the next oldest generation of citizens, the Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964), are satisfied with democracy and 28 per cent dissatisfied with democracy.

As a result, the average satisfaction rate with how democracy works across all generations is remarkably similar (see Table 2). Hence, the sense of malaise about democracy is not driven by generational differences. That generational patterns in negativity towards politics are not that strong are evident from some of our survey findings but others suggest that when it comes to trust in government and other political institutions Generation X (1965 to 1979) appears to lead the field in negativity. Figure 8 shows the differences across generations in levels of trust. Generation X gives the lowest ratings of all generations in terms of trust in government at any level, trust in political parties and trust in public servants. Builders, the older of our generation groups, are, on average, the most trusting.

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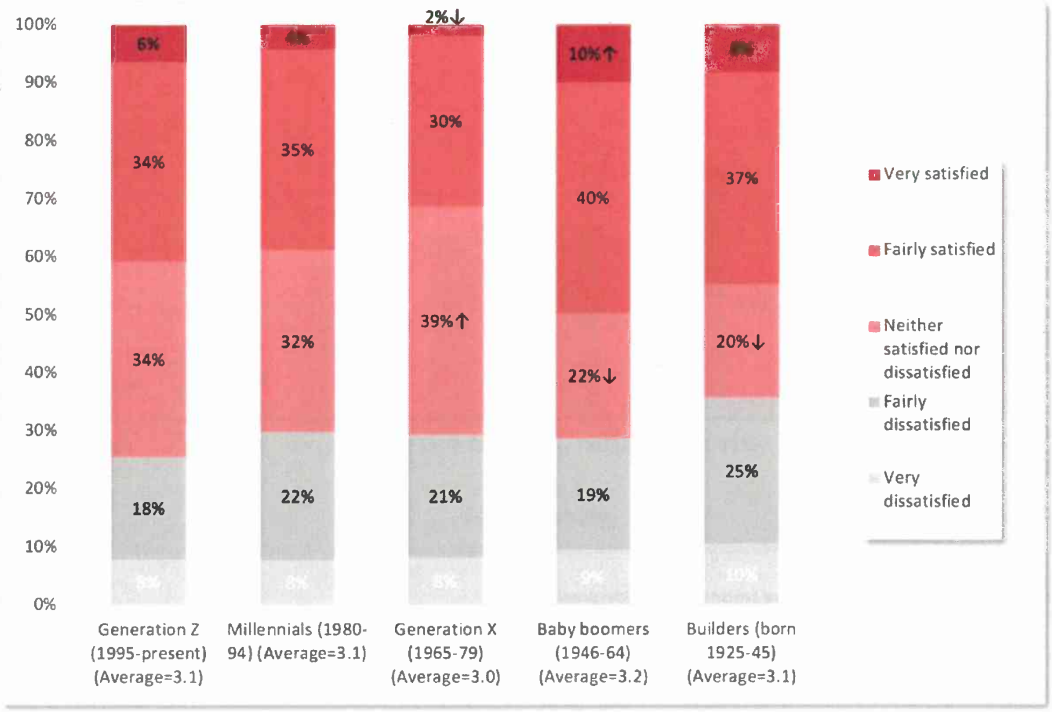
Figure 8: Democratic satisfaction by different generations



Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

Supporters of established political parties are more trusting of political institutions

We can distinguish between parties long-established as part of the Australian political landscape (Labor, Liberals and Nationals) and those that formed recently. Voters that see themselves as supporters of the established parties exhibit considerable more trust in political institutions than those who see themselves as supporters of less established parties and those that view themselves as supporters of no party at all. As Figures 9 and 10 show, that pattern holds true for federal and state/territory government and for political parties in general. There are substantial differences in many cases with supporters of established political parties often showing about twice the level of trust of supporters of less established parties or those without a party allegiance.

These findings suggest that supporters of the established parties feel that they have a greater stake in the political system than those who do not. For citizens, supporting a party that has held power or has a prospect of being in power would appear to give them more reason to trust political institutions. As Figure 11 shows the same pattern holds when it comes to satisfaction with how democracy works and, again, with supporters of established political parties displaying greater satisfaction than others.

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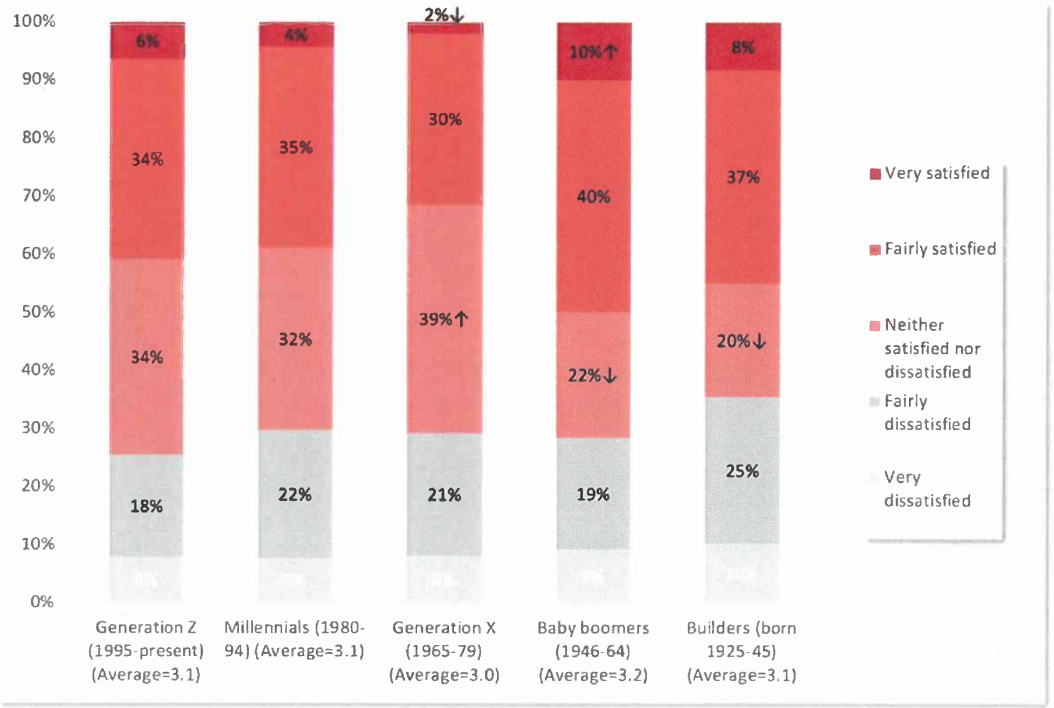
Table 2: Levels of political trust in different generations

	Generation Z (1995-present)	Millennials (1980-94)	Generation X (1965-79)	Baby Boomers (1946-64)	Builders (1925-45)
State/Territory government	38.5%	40.0%	26.7%	35.7%	44.1%
Federal government	39.5%	31.5%	21.5%	30.8%	39.2%
Political parties	26.9%	15.6%	12.2%	16.7%	15.7%
Local Government	66.5%	47.1%	33.6%	47.5%	54.9%
Government ministers	27.5%	24.5%	15.7%	24.3%	31.1%
MPs in general	26.9%	23.2%	16.1%	20.2%	22.3%
Local councillors	33.8%	31.7%	24.7%	27.2%	33.3%
Public servants	45.4%	40.4%	34.4%	39.4%	35.9%
Your local MP	29.2%	30.5%	27.5%	31.2%	39.8%

Q: How much do you personally trust each of the following?

Figure 9: Levels of trust in State Government by type of voter



Q: How much do you personally trust each of the following?

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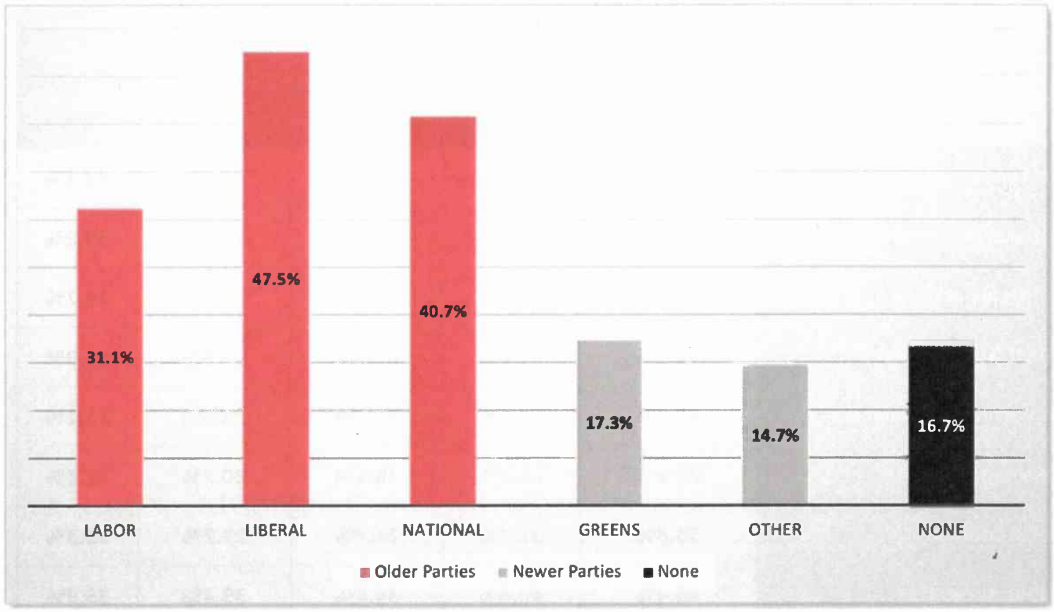
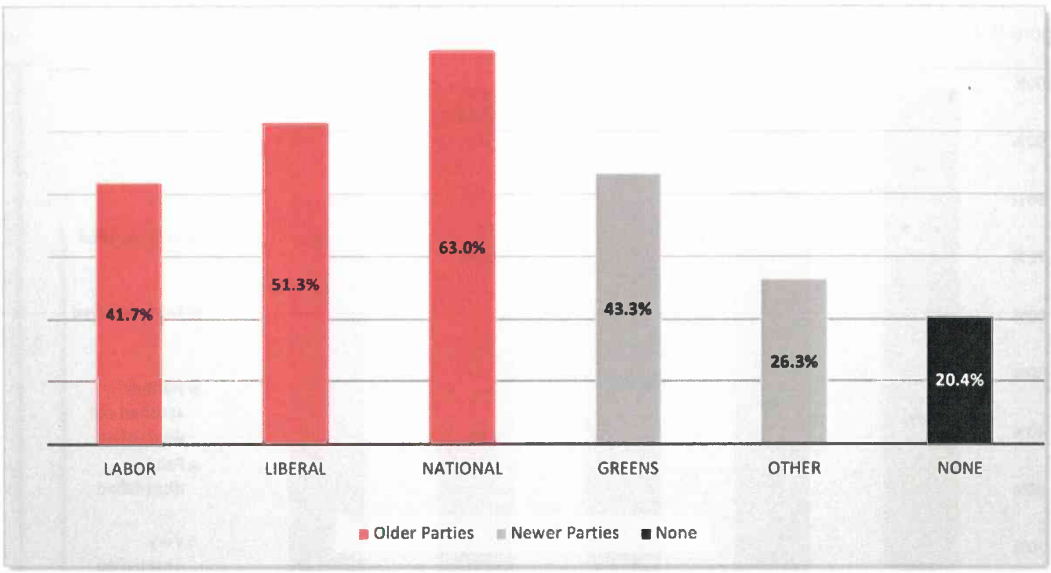
Figure 10: Levels of trust in Federal Government by type of voter



Q: How much do you personally trust each of the following?

Figure 11: Democratic satisfaction by different types of voter



Q: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

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Locational differences

In general, citizens based in different states and territories reported uniform attitudes. But as Table 3 shows there are some nuanced differences. For example, respondents were asked to rate how much they thought politicians cared about people, on a scale of 1 to 10 – taking a rating of 0 as expressing they had no care for them and a rating of 1 to 3 as indicating that they cared only a little. Here we find some substantial differences.

Table 3: how much politicians care about people by state/territory

Column %	ACT	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	Aus
0: Politicians don't care	20%	14%	19%	15%	18%	13%	23%	14%	16%
1 - 3	35%	27%	23%	33%	31%	41%	19%	57% ↑	29%
4 - 6	38%	43%	43%	38%	39%	40%	41%	23%	41%
7 - 9	8%	15%	15%	13%	12%	6%	15%	6%	13%
10: Politicians care a lot	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Average	3.2	4.1 ↑	3.9	3.6	3.5	3.3 ↓	3.8	2.7 ↓	3.8

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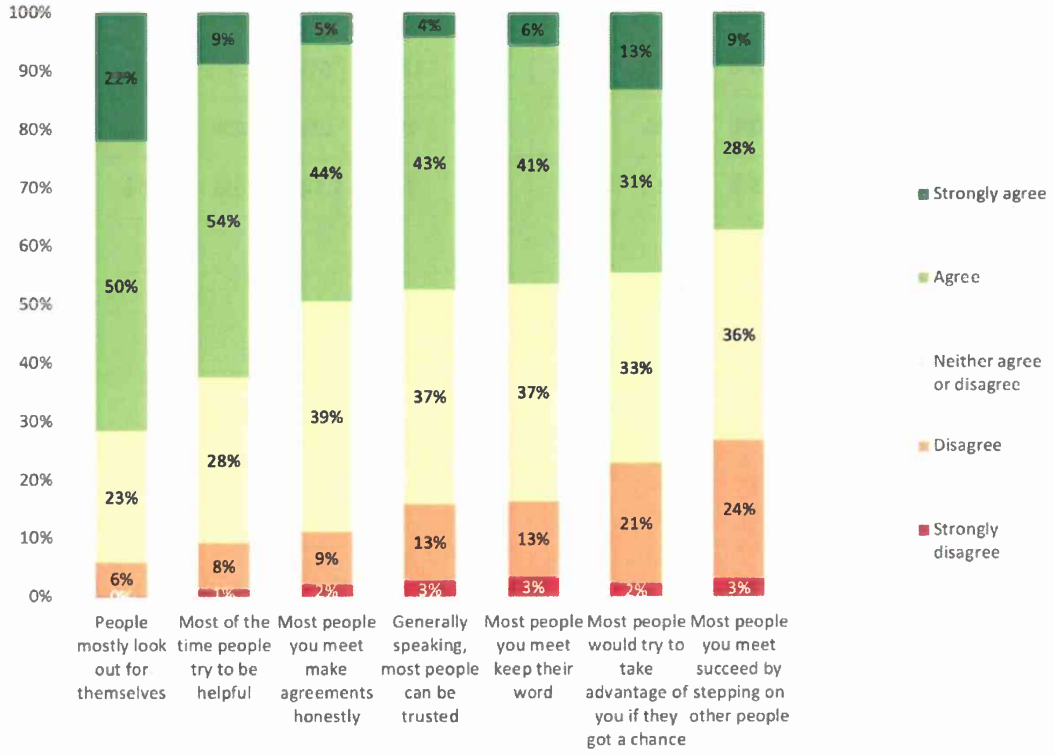
Within New South Wales (NSW), for example, 41 per cent of respondents fell into these two categories. But within Western Australia the combined figure rises to 54 per cent, and in the Northern Territories it reaches 71 per cent. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the ACT has the second highest percentage (at 20 per cent) of citizens who say politicians do not care at all, with Tasmania the highest at 23 per cent.

Social trust declines by age, income and party preference

Survey respondents were asked to rate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements that are proxy measures for social trust. They were given the option of responding on a Likert scale of one ("strongly disagree") to five ("strongly agree"). Figure 13 below represents the results of these ratings to five statements. There were no significant differences between ratings to any of the statements, however some general trends are evident. Respondents reported greatest NET agreement (agreed or strongly agreed) to the statement that "people tended to look out for themselves" (77 per cent compared to an average NET agreement rating of 52 per cent). This statement also received the greatest rate of strong agreement (22 per cent), the lowest level of disagreement (six per cent), the lowest level of ambivalence (23 per cent), and zero per cent who responded they strongly disagreed. These numbers suggest this is a strongly held and accessible belief compared to the other statements. By contrast, the next statement they showed greatest NET agreement to was that "most of the time people try to be helpful" (63 per cent). Perhaps reflecting the belief that people are willing to help each other out up until the point where they begin to incur losses.

Figure 12: Attitudes towards other people



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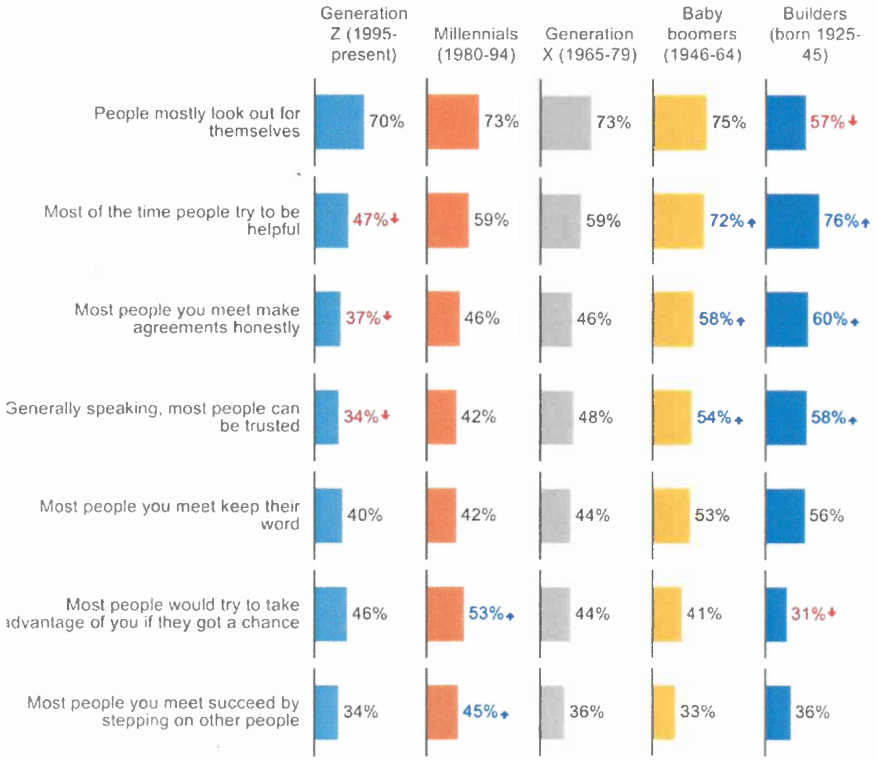
The strongest NET disagreement (strongly disagreed or disagreed) was for the statement that "most people succeeded by stepping on others" (27 per cent compared to an average NET disagreement rate of 15 per cent across all statements). This statement also had the lowest level of net agreement (37 per cent).

On average, statements that denoted an optimistic viewpoint of broader society and other people (statements 2, 3, 4, and 5) had an average NET agreement score of 52 per cent and an average NET disagreement score of 13 per cent. For statements that denoted a pessimistic view of broader society and other people (statement 1, 6 and 7) the average NET agreement score of 40 per cent and an average NET disagreement score of 19 per cent. On the whole, this seems to suggest that a narrow majority of respondents have a positive view of others and society (52 per cent); whilst the majority (60 per cent) of respondents do not have a negative view of others and society. Respondents are also more likely to disagree with a generally pessimistic view of society (19 per cent) than they are to disagree with an optimistic view of it (13 per cent).

Figure 14 below shows differences in net agreement to statements denoting a pessimistic or optimistic view of society and others across different generations. Generation Z are significantly less likely to agree to optimistic statements (40 per cent on average across statements 2, 3, 4, 5 compared to 63 per cent for Builders) regarding society and others. Similarly, millennials are significantly more likely to agree to pessimistic statements regarding society and others (57 per cent average across statements, 1, 7, and 8 compared to only 41 per cent average for Builders).

Figure 13: Attitudes towards people by generation (NET agree)



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Baby Boomers are significantly more likely to agree with optimistic statements denoting positivity towards society and others (average of 59 per cent across statements 2, 3, 4, and 5). Builders, however, show the greatest average NET agreement with optimistic statements of themselves and others. They are also significantly less likely to agree with pessimistic statements regarding others and society. Thus, it can be said that in general an optimistic outlook towards others and society grows with age; whilst a pessimistic world view declines with age. Figure 16 below represents the NET agreement ratings with optimism and pessimism towards society and others, broken down by political alignment. Two significant differences are worth mentioning: firstly, that Liberal-aligned voters are significantly more likely to agree to each and every optimistic statement (statements 2, 3, 4, and 5) than respondents from other groups. Secondly, respondents who are politically non-aligned (labelled "none") are significantly less likely to agree with each and every optimistic statement. It seems that the politically non-aligned respondents' lack of social trust correlates with their significantly lower levels of political trust.

Figure 14: Social trust by generation

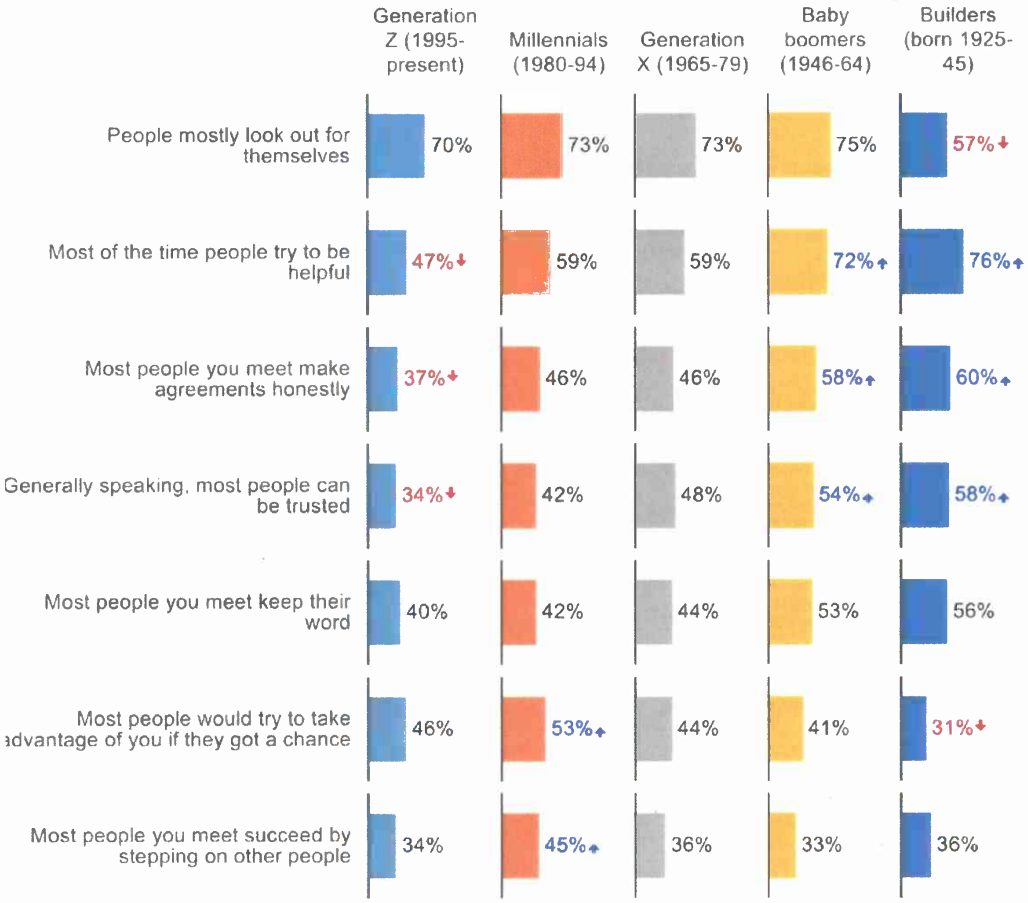

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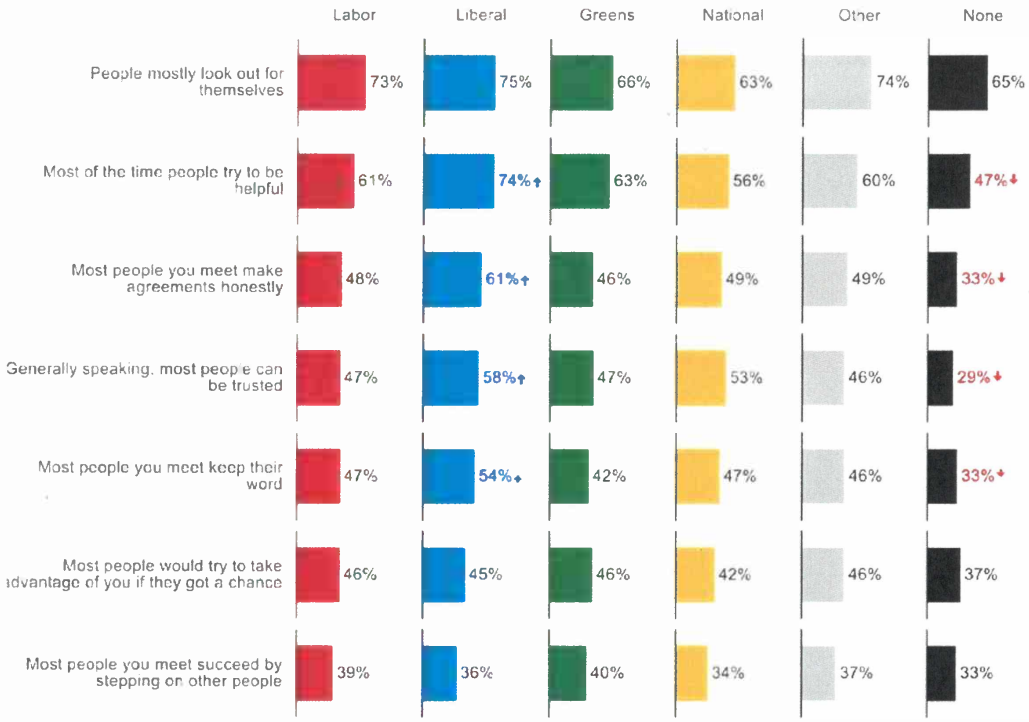
Figure 15: Attitudes towards people by voting behaviour (NET agree)



Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? By Q8. Generally speaking, what kind of voter do you think of yourself as?

Figure 17 overleaf illustrates the results for NET agreement to optimism and pessimism towards others and society broken down by level of household income. Only one significant difference was observed: those earning less than $50,000 per year were significantly less likely than all others to agree that 'generally speaking, most people can be trusted'. A range of other trends were observed: NET agreement on all of the optimistic statements (statements 2, 4, 5, and 7 in the figure below) steadily increased as income increased, whilst NET agreement on whether most people would take advantage of you if they got a chance steadily decreased with an increase in wealth. The richest income bracket ($200,000+) had the lowest level of NET agreement that people they met succeeded by stepping on others, perhaps reflecting the desirable self-bias that their comparative wealth was "self-made. There were no significant differences in NET agreement to these statements across gender or birthplace.

What do Australians believe the ideal politician looks like?

When asked to describe the characteristics of their ideal politician, our focus group participants were fairly uniform in emphasizing the importance of empathy ("approachable and accessible", "who listens to them"), integrity ("do what they say", "no broken promises"), and delivery ("follows up" and "delivers"). That is not often what they find in the contemporary politician:

> *"At the moment a lot of politicians go into politics for advancement rather than service. Turning out clones of media-savvy people with sound bites and platitudes not genuine responses. It feels like they're manufactured" (Baby Boomer, Regional and rural Australian).*

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Figure 16: Attitudes towards people by household income (NET agree ranking plot)

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

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Trust above all is defined as keeping promises and that is where politics is seen as failing. As one older Australian puts it:

> *"Keeping your word. That's a big thing with me. Don't tell me you're going to do some thing and then don't do it because I'll never trust you again" (Builder, Urban Australian).*

To trust a politician would mean they were approachable, reliable and consistent and that their words lined up with their actions:

> *"You're going to laugh at this from a male's point of view. When I shake hands with another male I will know by his handshake whether or not I'm going to trust him. They look you in the eye" (Generation X, Rural Australian).*

Declining political and social trust – the perfect storm for independents

There appears to be a significant relationship emerging between declining political and social trust. There are four attitudinal shifts on display here. Firstly, many voters care more about effective and competent government (governability issues) than promises of more dollars in their pockets (personal economic expectations).

Secondly, there is also a group of voters that are completely disconnected from traditional politics. They are deeply distrustful not just of politicians, but almost every major institution and authority figure listed in the survey, except for their local GP. When given 15 options to describe what they like about Australian democracy, including free and fair elections, their main response was 'None of the above'. This group of disconnected voters are the most disconnected group in our society; they are feeling very economically insecure, a significant proportion are on welfare or low incomes, and are increasingly politically alienated and angry just like Trump and Brexit voters (see: Stoker et al., 2017).

Thirdly, we can also identify an increasingly large group of Australians that are up for a different politics, are deeply critical of Australia's main political parties and are looking for an alternative across a broad ideological spectrum from Hanson, to Sharkie, to McGowan and Phelps. This is a perfect storm for independents of a variety of types.

And, fourthly, there is a group of Australians who vote independent for tactical reasons to either secure greater resources for their communities or to register a protest vote against the two party system.

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I don't care about Australian democracy because it doesn't care about us. It's your democracy not ours.

GENERATION X, INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN

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3. DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

This section of the report explores the underlying causes of the sense of malaise felt about how democratic politics are working and what Australian citizens think might be useful paths to reform. The findings from the 2018 survey show:

- That citizens like the way democracy delivers peace and stability, free and fair elections, a strong economy and public services. The results from 2018 confirm that these remain the same admired features of democracy reported in our 2014 survey *The Power of One*.
- The top dislikes of citizens about the way democracy works are broadly in line with preferences expressed in 2014, although there is less emphasise in 2018 on the media having too much power and more focus on politicians not really dealing with the issues that matter.
- A number of interesting variations exist within Australian society about likes and dislikes in respect of democracy.
- There is significant appetite for democratic reform with nine out of 15 proposed reforms receiving net agreement rates above 50 per cent.
- Reforms aimed at improving the practice of representative politics were the most popular, followed by reforms aimed at giving citizens a greater say. There were also strong levels of support for reforms aimed at creating a stronger community or local focus to decision-making. Only reforms aimed at guaranteeing the representation of certain groups failed to attract majority support.
- Accessing more detailed information about innovative reforms led to greater support for those reforms.

Likes and dislikes about Australian democracy

So far, this report has established that there is widespread negativity about the way democratic politics works in Australia, with some differences in the intensity of the negativity felt amongst different social groups. The challenge that we address here is to make sense of what lies behind that negativity.

As Figure 18 shows, we asked citizens about what they liked about democracy and the responses largely matched those provided to us in an earlier survey in 2014. When asked to select three aspects of Australian democracy that they liked the most, the top three in 2014 were (in order):

> 1. "Australia has had a peaceful and stable political history". 2. "Australian elections are free and fair" 3= Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle and 3= "Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens".

In 2018, our survey reveals the same top three attributes but in a slightly different order:

> 1. "Australia has been able to provide good education, health, welfare and other public services to its citizens". 2. Australia has experienced a good economy and lifestyle. 3. "Australian elections are free and fair".

Other likes about democracy also attracted some support, getting into the top three choices for many citizens: "freedom to defend interests" (19 per cent); "having a range of political parties to represent different interests" (19 per cent); and, "a chance to participate" (19 per cent). Respondents were least likely to choose features that praised (or showed engagement) with current democratic politics. Only

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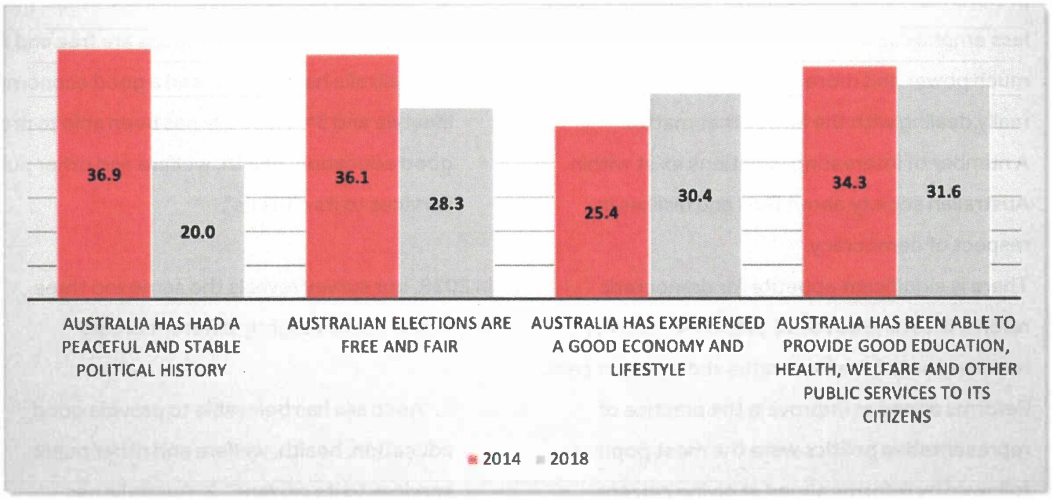
eight per cent thought that their "local MP served as a good representative", and four per cent selected the feature that suggested politicians "usually can find common ground in policy". The findings suggest that Australians are happy with the underlying infrastructure of Australian society that allows them to achieve a high standard of living; but are less positive or engaged about day-to-day political operations.

In terms of dislikes about Australian democracy (see Figure 19), the top responses were: "politicians can't be held to account for broken promises" (33 per cent), "politicians don't deal with the issues that really matter" (31 per cent) and "Big Businesses has too much power" (29 per cent). Respondents were least likely to select as a "dislike" about Australian democracy representational issues such as the lack of representation of youth, women, and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Comparing these responses to those provided to us in our 2014 survey, the big shift was away from a concern about the media having too much power towards a concern about politicians dealing with the issues that matter. This doesn't mean that the media is not a source of concern rather that the role of politicians is at the forefront of their considerations (see Chart 1 below). 2016 media data from the *Power of Us* survey (Evans et al., 2016).

Figure 17: What Australians like about their democracy



Q: What do you like about the way democracy works in Australia today? Please select up to three responses that you believe are most important

Chart 1: Levels of trust in media 2016 and 2018

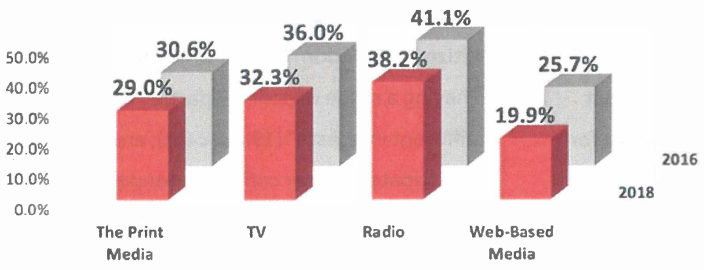


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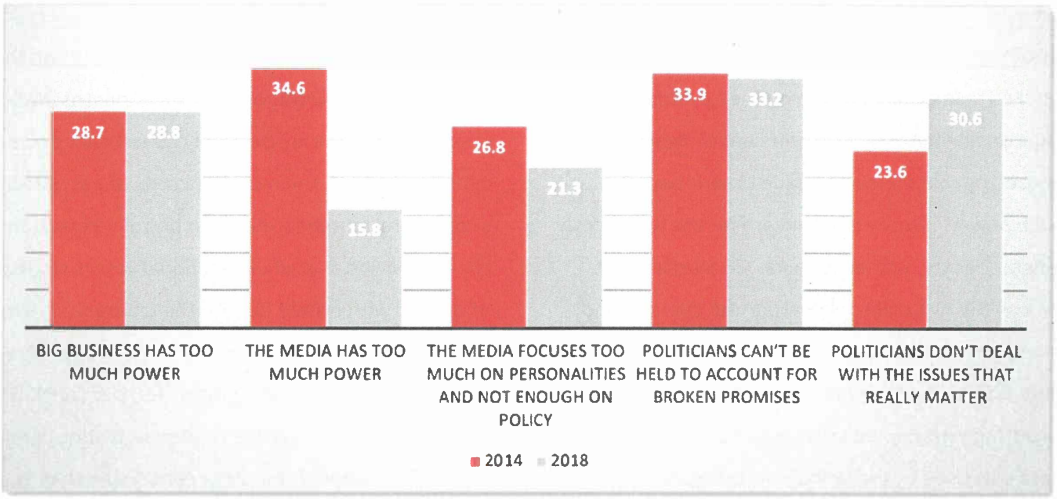
Figure 18: What Australian's dislike about their democracy



Q: What do you dislike about the way democracy works in Australia today? Please select up to three responses

Generational and demographic differences

In terms of perceptions about the positive features of Australian democracy certain differences between societal groups can be highlighted:

- Generation Z, the youngest generation, is not so convinced that delivering a good economy and lifestyle is an achievement of Australian democracy. Only 14 per cent of that generation picked that as a top positive feature compared to 43 per cent of Baby Boomers. Although Generation Z did share the view with other generations that "good public services" and "free and fair elections" were positive attributes of Australian democracy. Generation Z may well possess a less materialistic value system.
- Women shared with men the same perception of the top three positive attributes ("good public services", "good economy" and "free and fair elections") but were also slightly more positive about the "right to defend interests" and a "chance to participate".
- Which party, if any, you are inclined to support makes only a minor difference here. Labor and Liberal inclined voters' support the same top three positive attributes, matching those among the population in general. Greens place a chance to "defend interests" higher up the list but Nationals view the "opportunity to participate" as more important.

In terms of negative features of Australian democracy it is worth exploring differences in more detail. There are few differences between men and women except that only seven per cent of men felt it was a weakness of the political system that "women are not well represented in power"; whereas 14 per cent of women put that concern in their top three. Likewise men are more negative about "too much" trade union power (18 per cent) and "minor parties and independents" holding "too much power" (15 per cent) compared to women. Otherwise men and women seem to share very similar views about negative features of Australian democracy.

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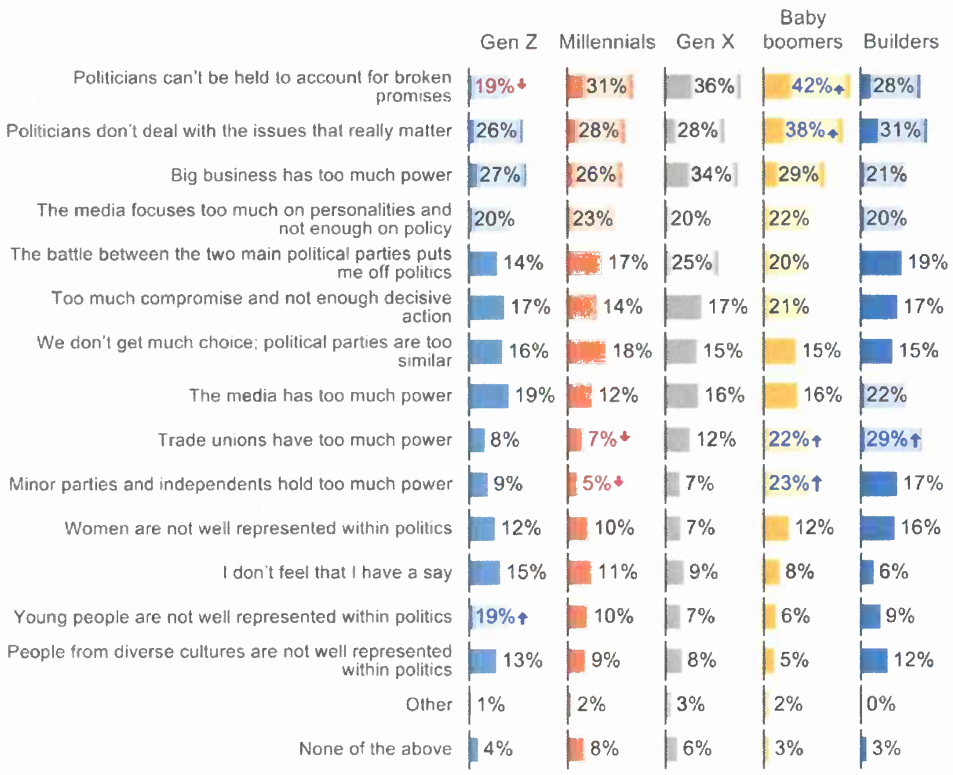
In terms of generations there are as Figure 20 shows some key differences, although there are also many similarities. For example, only 20 per cent of Generation Z picked politicians not keeping their promises as a top negative attribute; while 40 per cent of Baby Boomers focused on that concern. "Trade Unions have too much power" is more of a concern for the two oldest generations than other cohorts. Concerns about the way the two main political parties operate, and the power of minority parties and independents was more in focus for the older generations as well. Not surprisingly perhaps, the youngest generation (Z) was more exercised by the lack of representation for young people in politics than other groups.

There were some differences of opinion based on party loyalty. Liberal voters were unsurprisingly less worried by the power of big business (only 18 per cent having that issue in their top three negatives) and more concerned with the power of trade unions (with 33 per cent putting that issue in their top three negatives). The average for those concerns among all respondents were respectively 29 per cent and 14 per cent. In contrast, the main concerns of Labor inclined supporters' matched the most popular selections of the population as a whole. National voters shared a lot of ground with others but like the Liberals were more exercised than the average respondent about trade unions having "too much power" (30 per cent). Green supporters were much less concerned about negative trade union power (only 5 per cent noted that as a top worry). For Greens, the "battle between the two main political parties" was one of their top three concerns, alongside those shared with many others about politicians not dealing with "the issues that really matter" and the power of big business.

Figure 19: Negative features of Australian democracy by generation 2014 - 18



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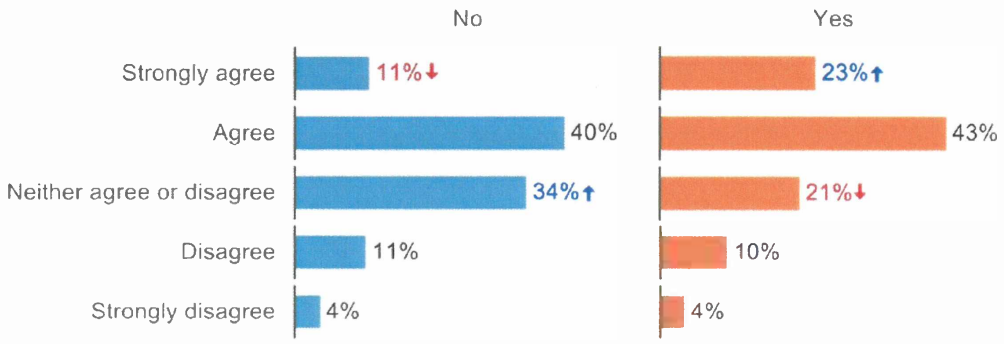
Support for different reform options

Survey respondents were asked to rate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on the topic of democratic reform drawn from across the political spectrum and featuring in reform programmes internationally (see: Evans 2013 and Smith 2009). As Figure 21 demonstrates below, accessing more detailed information about innovative reforms led to greater support for those reforms. This is an important finding revealing the centrality of strategic communication in winning the war of ideas.

Figure 22 shows that there was very strong support for democratic reforms that ensure greater integrity and transparency such as limiting how much money can be spent on election campaigning and how much political parties/candidates can accept from donors (73 per cent).There was also very strong support for democratic reforms that ensure greater political accountability of MPs and political parties to their electorates/members such as free votes in Parliament (60 per cent), the right to recall local members (62 per cent) and internal party reform that emphasizes community preferences (60 per cent). In addition, there was strong support for reforms that stimulate greater public participation such as the co-design of public services with citizens (71 per cent) and citizen juries (60 per cent). The least popular democratic reforms proposed were those that had to do with quotas for demographic representation (e.g. by age, gender, or ethnicity). Nine out of 15 proposed reforms had agreement rates above 50 per cent (i.e. support by the majority of respondents); suggesting significant appetite for reform.

Figure 23 reveals how respondents responded to proposed democratic forms when broken down by party preference. Labour supporters tend to favour more community-minded reforms. Labour and Liberal views on reform are remarkably uniform except on community-minded reforms. The greatest differences between parties can be found between the Liberals and Nationals on reform ideas in general. There are other nuanced differences between groups. So for example, men are less keen than women on co-design of public services; although the majority still support that option. New Australians (those that arrived after 2006) favour allowing dual citizens to stand for election.

Figure 20: Support for citizen juries by whether the respondent watched video



Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree that citizen juries based on the criminal jury system and comprised of a random sample of up to 15 Australian citizens should be used to solve complex policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix?

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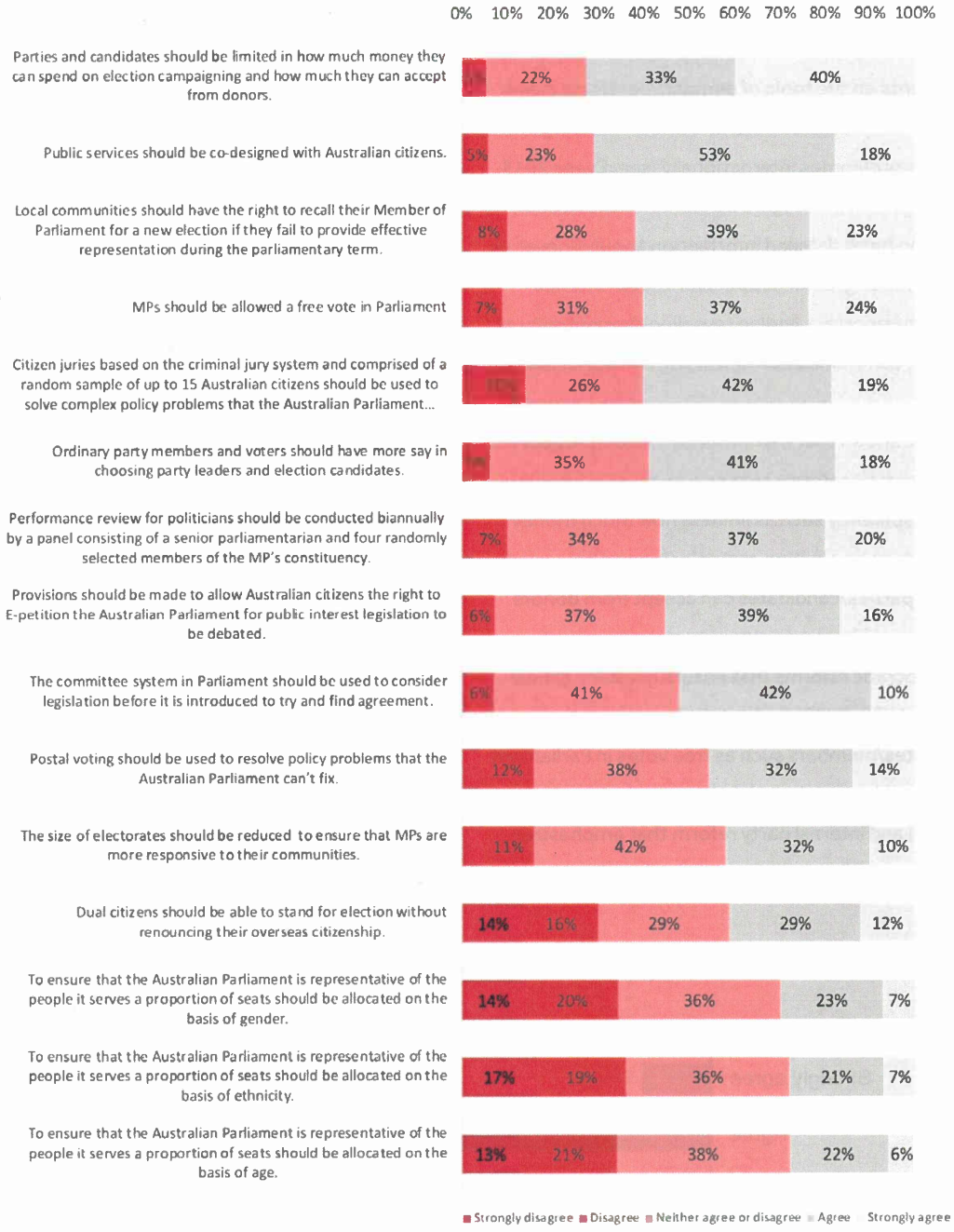
Figure 21: Appetite for various democratic reforms



Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

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Figure 22: Appetite for various democratic reforms by political alignment (NET agree)

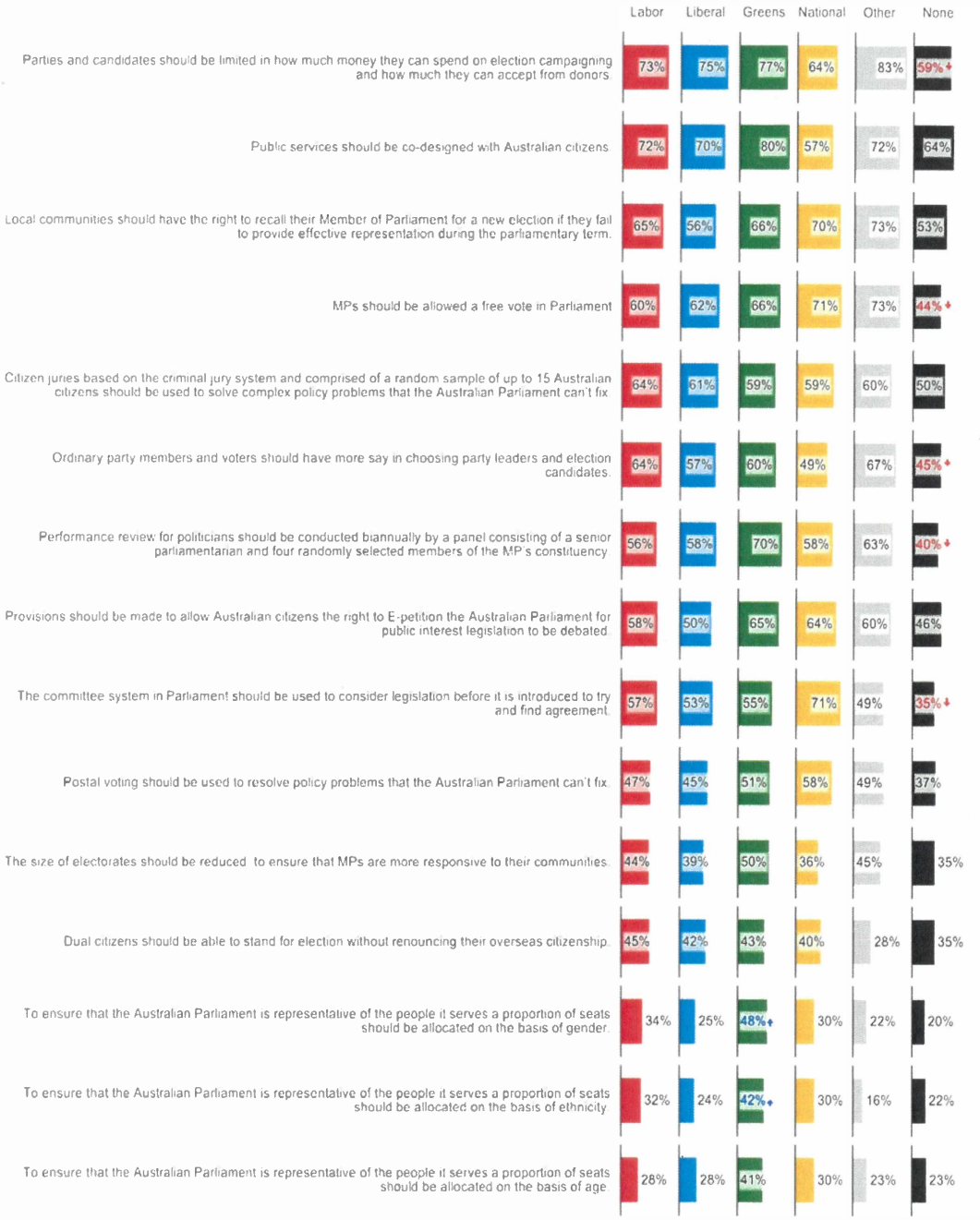

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Table 4: Different levels of support for reforms by gender and country of origin

Column %	Country of birth		Gender	
	Australia	Other	Male	Female
Parties and candidates should be limited in how much money they can spend on election campaigning and how much they can accept from donors.	75%	66%	74%	71%
Public services should be co-designed with Australian citizens.	71%	72%	66%	76%
Local communities should have the right to recall their Member of Parliament for a new election if they fail to provide effective representation during the parliamentary term.	63%	60%	58%	65%
MPs should be allowed a free vote in Parliament	59%	64%	64%	57%
Citizen juries based on the criminal jury system and comprised of a random sample of up to 15 Australian citizens should be used to solve complex policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.	61%	57%	57%	63%
Ordinary party members and voters should have more say in choosing party leaders and election candidates.	59%	58%	59%	59%
Performance review for politicians should be conducted biannually by a panel consisting of a senior parliamentarian and four randomly selected members of the MP's constituency.	57%	54%	54%	59%
Provisions should be made to allow Australian citizens the right to E-petition the Australian Parliament for public interest legislation to be debated.	57%	51%	56%	55%
The committee system in Parliament should be used to consider legislation before it is introduced to try and find agreement.	53%	49%	57%	48%
Postal voting should be used to resolve policy problems that the Australian Parliament can't fix.	47%	40%	47%	45%
The size of electorates should be reduced to ensure that MPs are more responsive to their communities.	43%	39%	39%	44%
Dual citizens should be able to stand for election without renouncing their overseas citizenship.	38%	52%	39%	43%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of gender.	30%	30%	27%	33%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of ethnicity.	29%	26%	26%	30%
To ensure that the Australian Parliament is representative of the people it serves a proportion of seats should be allocated on the basis of age.	30%	22%	27%	29%

Q: We would now like you to consider different ways of building trust between government and citizens. All statements about politicians apply to government at both the state and commonwealth levels. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

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Insights from Brisbane, Indi and Mayo Focus Groups

Most participants believe that political parties (even those with party loyalties) were disconnected from their communities. And they liked the Independents because they were perceived to be rooted in the community and trustworthy:

"I like her because she's not associated with the big parties and she's local and cares." (Baby Boomer Mayo, South Australia)

"I've become more passionate. I'm seeking knowledge more. I'm less deferential to political parties". (Generation X, Brisbane, Queensland)

"She works, acts and lives in Mayo and has Mayo in her heart". (Millennial Mayo, South Australia)

"She works really hard for us; we can rely on her". (Generation X, Indi, New South Wales)

"She bleeds Indi". (Millennial, Indi, New South Wales)

"We need to take politics back from the elite to the people". (Baby Boomer, Brisbane, Queensland)

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Everything seems just out of reach. No matter how hard we try something comes along to knock us down again; another bill or losing hours at work or the kids needing something extra. I thought democracy was supposed to make life easier for everyone. What do they call it – fair go? But we're always chasing. It's getting too hard.

MILLENNIAL, URBAN AUSTRALIAN

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IN CONCLUSION – TIPPING POINT

Liberal democracies are founded upon a delicate balance between trust and distrust. Indeed constitutional settlements are designed on that basis through the separation of the powers of the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches of government, the existence of a free media to monitor legitimate statecraft and other checks and balances. This demonstrates the challenge in defining the appropriate normative stance of what level of trust or distrust is acceptable. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that we may have reached a tipping point due to a deepening trust divide in Australia which has increased in scope and intensity since 2007.

We have found a mixed pattern of evidence in relation to both the allegiant and assertive models of democratic culture (Dalton and Welzel eds., 2014). The allegiant model is challenged in that deference to politicians appears absent and trust in institutions has weakened. Yet citizens still appear to value the overall stability of their political system even if lack of political trust means they lack confidence in its ability to deliver especially on more challenging policy issues. At present, sustained affluence matched with a decline in political trust, has led not to the critical citizens envisaged by the assertive model but rather to a culture of citizen disengagement, cynicism and divergence from the political elite. Most Australian citizens are very clear that they do not like the character of contemporary politics on display in Federal government and democratic renewal is required to address the democratic pressures that are threatening to undermine our core democratic values. We characterise this as a divergent democratic culture but not an assertive one.

We can also observe from our survey findings that trust is a complex and potentially "wicked" problem with multiple dimensions and causes (see Head, 2008). These can be understood as supply and demand side factors. The supply-side factors start from the premise that public trust must in some way correspond with the trustworthiness of government. The argument is that it is the supply of government that matters most in orienting the outlooks of citizens. Demand-side theories focus on how much individuals trust government and politics and explore their key characteristics. The demand and supply side factors are numerous and in approaching reform options there is unlikely to be a straightforward linear causal path to move from defining the problem, understanding and explaining it and designing counter measures. Nor is it likely that the trust divide will be solved simply by fiddling with the architecture of government or improving the behaviour of politicians or the media. It will require a broad range of responses underpinned by a renewal of our democratic fundamentals. The implication of this finding is to encourage an understanding of this complexity and the need to develop a multi-faceted strategy to tackle issues of trust.

Australians imagine their democracy in a way that demonstrates support for a new participatory politics but with the aim of shoring up representative democracy and developing a more integrated, inclusive and responsive democratic system. In the light of this discovery, we argue that an effective path to reform is not about choosing between representative and participatory democratic models but of finding linking arrangements between them.

We explore a range of interventions that might make a difference in our second report Bridging the trust divide – *lessons from international experience.*

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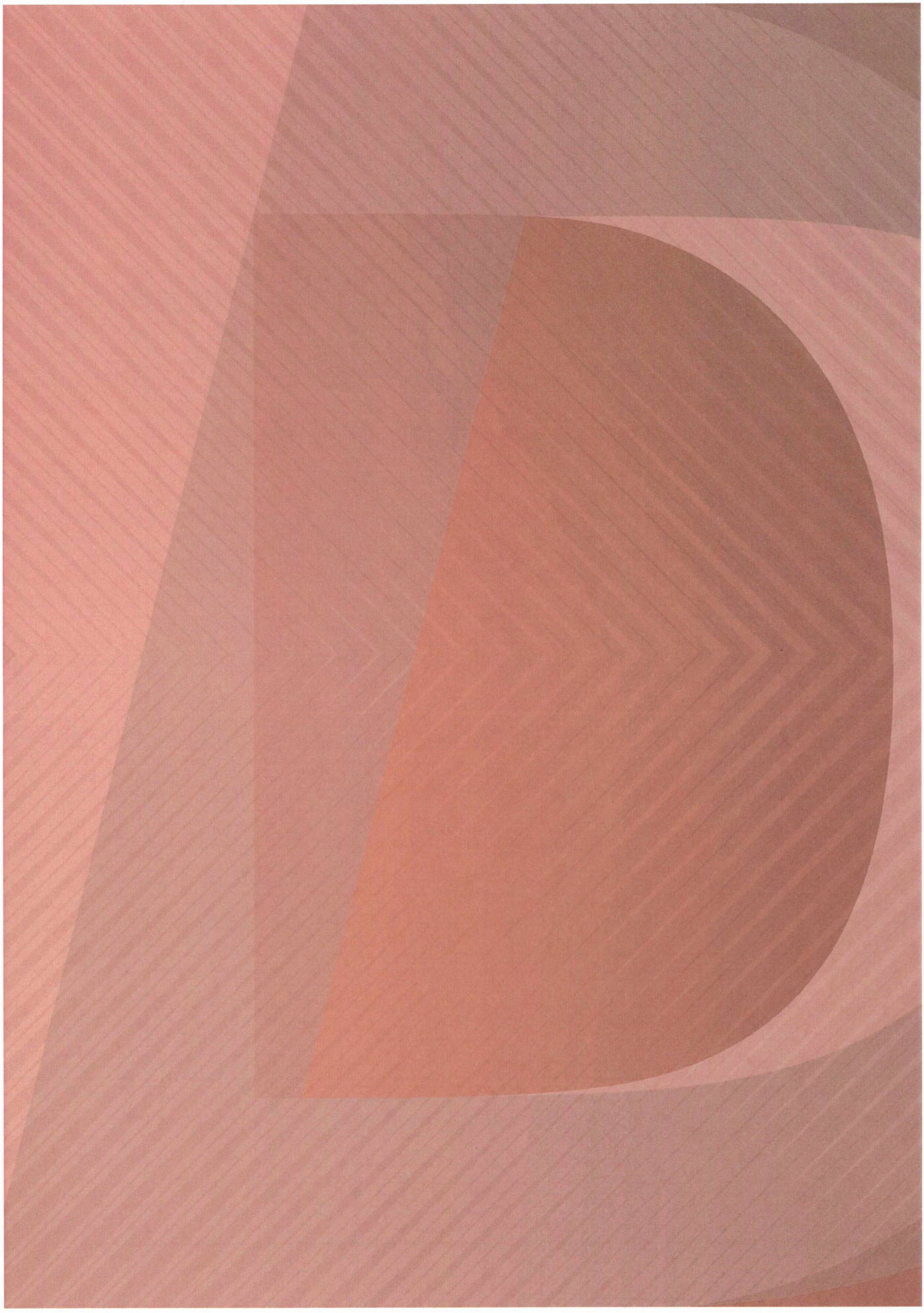
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