Building Trust in Public Institutions

Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia

Building Trust in Public Institutions

Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia

OECD
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

Please cite this publication as:
OECD (2025), *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/28a876c2-en.

ISBN 978-92-64-62883-0 (print)
ISBN 978-92-64-42216-2 (PDF)
ISBN 978-92-64-76299-2 (HTML)

Building Trust in Public Institutions
ISSN 2957-3947 (print)
ISSN 2957-3955 (online)

Photo credits: Cover © chinaface/Gettyimages.

Corrigenda to OECD publications may be found at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/support/corrigenda.html.

© OECD 2025

Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. By using this work, you accept to be bound by the terms of this licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Attribution – you must cite the work.

Translations – you must cite the original work, identify changes to the original and add the following text: *In the event of any discrepancy between the original work and the translation, only the text of original work should be considered valid.*

Adaptations – you must cite the original work and add the following text: *This is an adaptation of an original work by the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its Member countries.*

Third-party material – the licence does not apply to third-party material in the work. If using such material, you are responsible for obtaining permission from the third party and for any claims of infringement.

You must not use the OECD logo, visual identity or cover image without express permission or suggest the OECD endorses your use of the work.

Any dispute arising under this licence shall be settled by arbitration in accordance with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) Arbitration Rules 2012. The seat of arbitration shall be Paris (France). The number of arbitrators shall be one.

Foreword

Trust in public institutions is a core component of effective public governance in democratic societies, especially as they navigate unprecedented challenges such as digital and environmental transitions. Trust can reduce transaction costs – in governance, in society, and in the economy – and ease compliance with public policies. It can help foster adherence to challenging reforms and programmes with better outcomes. In democracies, robust levels of trust – along with healthy levels of public scrutiny – can help legitimise and protect democratic institutions and norms. Australia exemplifies this through its long history of democratic innovation, a practice that both requires and generates trust. In this context, Australia stands out for its commitment to understanding and strengthening public trust. Through comprehensive national surveys and participation in international initiatives such as the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (Trust Survey), Australia demonstrates its dedication to building stronger, more responsive public institutions that serve its citizens effectively.

Australia's robust democratic framework and positive attitudes towards diversity promote social cohesion. However, the country also grapples with historical legacies and modern challenges, including housing shortages, economic inequality and increasing societal divides. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both the strengths and complexities of Australia's federal system, demonstrating how trust can be tested and reinforced during crises. As the public sector continues its transformation toward more human-centred administration, maintaining the delicate balance between long-term thinking and political responsiveness remains crucial for sustaining public confidence.

The OECD Trust Survey, conducted across 30 OECD countries, provides a comprehensive analysis of how trust operates within democratic systems. It recognises trust as both a vital input for governance and as a key indicator of institutional performance.

This report, Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia, draws on extensive quantitative data collected through the OECD Trust Survey in 2021 and 2023, complemented by in-depth interviews with Australian stakeholders, including government officials, academics, and civil society representatives during 2024. This methodological approach provides valuable insights into trust levels, citizens' perceptions, and assessments of Australian public institutions, focusing particularly on government competence, notably reliability and responsiveness, and values such as integrity, openness, and fairness.

The findings and recommendations presented in this report aim to support Australian policymakers and public officials in their efforts to enhance trust in public institutions and strengthen democratic governance. This work seeks to contribute to more responsive, reliable, and citizen-centred public institutions that can effectively serve Australian communities while maintaining the trust necessary for democratic resilience. This report is the seventh in-depth country study in the OECD series "Building Trust in Public Institutions" following Korea in 2018, Finland in 2021, Norway in 2022, New Zealand and Brazil in 2023, and Chile in 2024.

The report was approved by the Public Governance Committee on 18 March 2025 and prepared for publication by the Secretariat.

Acknowledgements

This report is the work of the OECD Public Governance Directorate, under the leadership of Elsa Pilichowski, Director. The publication was prepared by the OECD Governance Indicators and Performance Division, under the direction of Monica Brezzi, Head of the Division, and co-ordinated by Sarah Kups, Senior Economist.

The report was drafted by Sarah Kups (Chapter 2), Emma Phillips (Chapters 1 and 3), and Mariana Prats (Chapter 4). Ömer Faruk Metin was responsible for data analysis, visualisation, and drafting of technical annexes. Adem Kocaman provided formatting assistance. The report benefited greatly from comments provided by Frederic Boehm, Monica Brezzi, Gillian Dorner and Felipe González-Zapata.

Bradley Carron-Arthur, Director, Trust and Transparency Unit, Australian Public Service Commission, and Anna Li, Assistant Director, Trust and Transparency Unit, Australian Public Service Commission, formed the core team that coordinated the project in Australia. The OECD team thanks the representatives from different Australian Departments and Agencies, academics, and civil society for their participation in fact-finding interviews and written feedback on the draft report.

Table of contents

Foreword 3

Acknowledgements 4

Executive summary 8

Assessment and recommendations 10

1 Trust in context in Australia 14
1.1. Australia is a trusting and cohesive society grappling with contemporary challenges and historical legacies 16
1.2. Structural patterns and crisis events have influenced both the performance of public institutions and public perceptions 25
1.3. Conclusion 33
References 34
Notes 39

2 Trust levels and drivers of trust in Australian public institutions 40
2.1. Within a context marked by cost-of-living concerns and changes in political leadership, trust in Australian institutions has risen since 2021 42
2.2. Trust rose among almost all groups between 2021 and 2023, but women and people who perceive themselves as financially stressed or politically excluded still lag behind 48
2.3. Perceived government competence is an important driver of trust in different public institutions in Australia 55
References 66
Notes 67

3 Competence and trust in Australia 68
3.1. Reliability 69
3.2. Responsiveness 81
References 101
Notes 107

4 Values and trust in Australia 108
4.1. Openness 109
4.2. Integrity 123
4.3. Fairness 132
References 137
Notes 141

Annex A. Notes on the methodology of the OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023 in Australia 142

FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Levels of trust in government in Australia have remained relatively stable and in the mid-range over time 17
Figure 1.2. Levels of trust in government in Australia peaked in the mid-2000s 18
Figure 1.3. Interpersonal trust is slightly higher in Australia than across the OECD 21
Figure 1.4. The adjusted mortality rate dropped in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic 29
Figure 1.5. Government welfare spending during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased compared with the pre-pandemic period 32
Figure 2.1. Inflation, an important concern for the majority of people across the OECD, is seen as an important challenge by close to three-quarters of Australians 43
Figure 2.2. Trust in the federal government in Australia is above the OECD average 44
Figure 2.3. While across the OECD, there was a modest decline in trust in the national government between 2021 and 2023, in Australia, the opposite was true 45
Figure 2.4. Australians exhibit higher trust in all public institutions, with the exception of international organisations, than the OECD average 46
Figure 2.5. Trust in the federal and state government is significantly lower in Queensland, while trust in local government is comparatively high 47
Figure 2.6. Trust gaps related to gender and to political agency are larger in Australia than across the OECD 49
Figure 2.7. People under the age of 30 or who identify as part of a discriminated-against group indicate lower levels of trust in the police 51
Figure 2.8. Trust gap based on gender and financial concerns has increased 53
Figure 2.9. Trust strongly rose for those who did not vote for a party in power, but dropped for those who do not believe they have a say in what government does 54
Figure 2.10. People below the age of 50 and who have an upper secondary education became markedly more trusting in the federal government 55
Figure 2.11. Perceptions of all public governance dimensions in Australia have improved between 2021 and 2023, though the improvement was more moderate for integrity 56
Figure 2.12. The Australian government acting in the best interest of society is the variable most associated with trust in the federal government 60
Figure 2.13. Evidence-informed decision making is an important driver of trust in the federal parliament 61
Figure 2.14. The perception of having opportunities to voice opinions on local decisions is by far the most important driver of trust in local government 62
Figure 2.15. People who believe that the Australian Public Service looks out for the long-term interest of society are more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the APS 63
Figure 3.1. Australians feel confident in government's capacity to protect people during emergency 70
Figure 3.2. Government's ability to tackle long-term challenges is perceived differently across population groups 74
Figure 3.3. Confidence in government's ability to tackle complex challenges is higher in Australia than OECD average 76
Figure 3.4. A slight majority of Australians feel public institutions use the best available evidence 78
Figure 3.5. In Australia and other OECD countries, people who voted for a party in power tend to find it more likely that government makes decisions based on evidence 79
Figure 3.6. Service satisfaction among users exceeds the OECD average, but only slightly so for administrative services 82
Figure 3.7. Australians are satisfied with different aspects of administrative services 85
Figure 3.8. In Australia, women and people with financial concerns are less satisfied with services compared to men and those who don't feel financial concerns 87
Figure 3.9. In Australia and across the OECD, less than half believes government is responsive to people's demands 91
Figure 3.10. Nearly half of Australians feel public institutions would implement innovative ideas if it would improve a public service 94
Figure 3.11. Australia is a top performer in the OECD's Digital Government Index 95
Figure 3.12. Australians' confidence in the legitimate use of personal data surpasses OECD average 98
Figure 4.1. Australia outperforms OECD average in clear communication on administrative services 110
Figure 4.2. The perceived clarity of reforms' impacts is notably higher in Australia than the OECD average 111
Figure 4.3. Australians who get information about politics are more likely trust in federal government, regardless of media source 114
Figure 4.4. Around half of Australians believes the political system allows people to have a say 116
Figure 4.5. Sense of having a say in political decisions differs across population groups in Australia 117

Figure 4.6. A majority of Australians feel they have a voice in local decisions in 2023 119
Figure 4.7. Australians are less likely to engage in political activities compared to the OECD average 120
Figure 4.8. Australians' views on two important aspects of public integrity are above their OECD peers 124
Figure 4.9. Around four in ten Australians believe a public employee would refuse a bribe to speed up access to public services 125
Figure 4.10. Perceptions of revolving doors are a concern across OECD countries 128
Figure 4.11. Social media users have lower confidence in government's ability to resist undue corporate influence 129
Figure 4.12. 46% believe the federal parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable 131
Figure 4.13. Similar to other OECD countries, belief in fairness to access government benefits is higher than perceived equal treatment by public employees in Australia 133
Figure 4.14. Most population groups trust in fair treatment in government benefits and services 134
Figure 4.15. Nearly half of Australians believes the national parliament balances the needs of different groups in policy debates 135

TABLES

Table 2.1. Overview of survey quotas implemented in the Australian survey 42
Table 2.2. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions 57
Table 2.3. Drivers of trust in public institutions in Australia and across the OECD 65

Table A A.1. Sample composition by age, gender, education and region in Australia 143

BOXES

Box 1.1. The relationship between trust in public institutions, satisfaction with democracy and commitment to democratic values 19
Box 1.2. Key development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in Australia 23
Box 2.1. The OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions and its implementation in Australia 41
Box 2.2. Survey coverage gaps on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and methods to improve the inclusion of hard-to-cover populations 50
Box 2.3. Logistic regression models to assess drivers of trust in public institutions 58
Box 3.1. Disaster Recovery Centres in the United States of America 72
Box 3.2. OECD Framework on management of emerging critical risks 73
Box 3.3. Analytical framework to assess a country's EIPM ecosystem 80
Box 3.4. Elaboration of the National Teacher Workforce Plan in Australia 84
Box 3.5. OECD Recommendation on Human-centred Public Administrative Services 89
Box 3.6. Institutionalising citizen engagement in policy and service design in France 90
Box 3.7. Productivity Commission review of the Closing the Gap Agreement 93
Box 3.8. Systematic approach to digital skills training in Korea 96
Box 3.9. Data tracker in Estonia 99
Box 4.1. Public information in other languages in New Zealand 113
Box 4.2. New Zealand's communication initiatives during COVID-19 113
Box 4.3. Innovative engagement initiatives 121
Box 4.4. Robodebt Scheme 126
Box 4.5. Assessing workplace psychosocial factors in Canada's federal government 127
Box 4.6. Reporting and disclosing donations to political parties in the United States 130
Box 4.7. Initiatives to ensure fairness and representativeness of Aboriginal populations in New Zealand 136

Executive summary

Governments around the world are under pressure as they navigate major systemic transformations. Concurrent environmental and digital changes, combined with geopolitical tensions and a complex information environment, are creating a context of increased volatility and uncertainty. In response, many governments in OECD countries are focusing on strengthening trust in public institutions. This is a critical priority, since public trust is a good indicator of the evolution of the relationship between institutions and the people they serve; moreover, the erosion of trust undermines governments' ability to implement effective policies. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions suggests public trust can be fostered if institutions demonstrate their reliability, responsiveness, and commitment to openness, fairness, and integrity in both their operations and decision-making processes.

Australia ranks mid-range among OECD countries, with trust levels in government remaining relatively stable compared to other nations. While trust peaked in the mid-2000s and declined afterwards, it levelled out around 2020. The country benefits from strong democratic institutions known for innovation and adaptability. While the country's multicultural heritage strengthens its democratic resilience, it grapples with economic disparities and the lingering effects of colonialism. In the 2010s, the public sector underwent changes, which affected its capacity and public perception, and growing tensions between political responsiveness and institutional independence. The COVID-19 pandemic later tested Australia's federal system, though it also showcased effective crisis management capabilities—leading to expanded government intervention and temporary increases in public trust.

Evidence from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, conducted in October and November of 2023, reveals that trust in Australian institutions has been on the uptick since 2021, with 46% of Australians expressing high or moderately high trust in the federal government in 2023, exceeding the OECD average of 39%. This represents an eight-percentage point increase from 2021. In line with OECD-wide trends, law-and-order institutions enjoy the highest trust levels, with 68% of Australians trusting the police, while institutions associated with partisanship tend to receive lower trust ratings - 43% for federal parliament and 34% for political parties.

Despite an overall increase in trust in the Australian federal government across all population groups between 2021 and 2023, significant disparities persist and have even widened in some cases. The 2023 OECD Trust Survey finds that the most notable trust gap exists between those who feel “people like them” have a say in what the government does and those who don't, with a 52-percentage point difference. Trust levels are consistently lower among several socio-economic and demographic groups, including those experiencing financial stress, individuals with lower education levels, people who identify as belonging to discriminated-against groups, and women.

While Australians demonstrate above-average confidence in government institutions' emergency response capabilities, there are notable areas for improvement in the government’s ability to safeguard long-term interests fairly. Only 43% believe the Australian Public Service prioritises society's long-term interests. While satisfaction with essential services in education and healthcare is comparatively very high, administrative service satisfaction barely exceeds the OECD average. Perceptions of government responsiveness and innovation are rather positive compared to OECD peers, with just under half of Australians viewing the government as responsive to feedback. However, persistent population disparities in service satisfaction and concerns about equity and ethics in public sector innovation indicate ongoing challenges.

Australians generally hold positive views about government openness. For example, a large majority (70%) believe they can easily access public information and almost half of respondents (46%) feel able to participate in politics, though most limit their political engagement to voting. While public integrity perceptions are slightly above the OECD average, concerns about some private interests steering public policies persist, and integrity measures have shown minimal improvement since 2021. Perceptions of public institutions' fairness rank as the most positive among the five public governance drivers and surpass OECD averages. However, challenges remain, as issues like the Robodebt scheme have raised concerns about fair treatment.

When examining how public trust correlates with these perceptions of governance, independent of socio-economic and political factors, it emerges that the drivers of trust vary across institutions, suggesting different strategies are needed for different institutions. Perceptions of government competence play a crucial role in building trust—particularly in areas such as evidence-based decision making, service delivery, and innovation capacity. Notably, satisfaction with administrative services correlates with increased trust across all Australian public institutions, while perceived innovation drives trust specifically in the federal government and parliament. When institutions are seen to act in society's best interest, trust increases in both federal and local government. Similarly, trust in the Australian Public Service (APS) is strongly linked to perceptions that it considers long-term societal interests and provides honest advice. Lastly, trust in federal parliament and government is closely tied to perceptions of fairness and integrity, while local government trust is driven to a larger extent by openness.

Australia has undertaken this study as part of its commitment to trust-enhancing reforms and democratic principles. This report aims to contribute to Australia's efforts by providing an in-depth, evidence-based mapping of the main drivers of trust in different public institutions and identifying opportunities to strengthen public perceptions of governance—which in turn has the potential to increase trust levels. The table below summarises the main findings and areas of opportunity included in this report. Unless otherwise specified, all data points are drawn from the OECD Trust Survey.

Assessment and recommendations

Main findings	Areas of opportunity
Reliability	
62% of Australians believe government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives in an emergency, compared to 53% on average across the OECD. Despite a comprehensive disaster response framework, there is evidence of significant co-ordination and communication challenges across government levels, potentially creating confusion for citizens seeking resources in the aftermath of a large-scale emergency. Resilience efforts have largely been focused on natural disasters, but this scope has limited the integration of resilience concepts into broader national security discussions.	• Promoting a more citizen-centric and holistic approach to resilience: ○ Examine how to co-ordinate across government levels to provide more citizen-focused disaster responses, and help individuals better navigate the support and services available to them. ○ Enhance efforts to overcome silos to develop a whole-of-government approach to managing emerging critical risks.
Australians' perceptions of the ability of institutions to tackle long-term challenges are significantly higher than across the OECD. 43% of Australians believe that the Australian Public Service looks out for society's long-term interests, and 47% think the government adequately balances current and future generations' interests. Australia has developed a robust evidence base for long-term policy planning. However, large-scale deliberative initiatives focusing on long-term issues are not yet common or institutionalised in Australia.	• Enhancing confidence in the government's ability to protect long-term interests fairly and effectively: ○ Continue to invest in anticipatory and strategic foresight exercises to overcome the poverty of information about longer-term outcomes. ○ Strengthen the institutional framework to mitigate the fragility of long-term commitments in democracies, notably through the APS Stewardship function. ○ Balance this technocratic approach with enhanced mechanisms for citizen participation on long-term issues to promote buy-in.
Over half of the Australian population (52%) feel confident the government would use the best available evidence when designing policies, over 10 percentage points above the OECD average (41%). About two-thirds of ruling party voters believe the government uses the best evidence, compared to 40% of opposition voters. Since 2019, Australia has made significant progress in enhancing evidence-based policymaking, though the implementation and use of evidence varies across different policy areas.	• Further embedding high-quality research in decision-making processes: ○ Envisage assessing the country's evidence-informed policymaking to strengthen the use of evidence more equally across different commonwealth entities.
Responsiveness	
In Australia, satisfaction levels exceed OECD averages across key services, with education at 71% (up from 63% in 2021), healthcare at 64%, and administrative services at 68%. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia's performance in administrative services satisfaction is more modest, ranking 14th out of 30 countries. Workforce shortages are affecting all three service areas in Australia. In Australia, many key services involve complex co-ordination arrangements among levels of government, which at times can hinder the ability to deliver or enact change.	• Improving the user experience of government services to maintain high satisfaction with essential services: ○ Continue to address workforce shortages in key domains, notably teaching staff and health professional occupations, and frontline staff working for Services Australia. ○ Mitigate the effects of intergovernmental co-ordination failures on the provision of dependable essential services, notably by better connecting government services across agency and jurisdictional boundaries.

Main findings	Areas of opportunity
Although levels of satisfaction with essential services are high in Australia, the OECD Trust Survey reveals notable differences in satisfaction with Australian public services across socio-economic and demographic groups. Men, individuals with higher levels of education, and those without financial concerns consistently reported higher satisfaction levels with administrative services and healthcare. The education system showed less variation, with financial concerns being the only factor significantly affecting satisfaction levels. Data on satisfaction with services among Indigenous Australians is scarce, presenting challenges in assessing their experiences with public services and potential impact on trust levels. While Australian Commonwealth institutions have formal guidelines for citizen and stakeholder engagement and regularly interact with various actors in policy design, they primarily engage with other government departments and organised groups rather than citizens or users directly. Australians show above-average confidence in their government's responsiveness, with 46% believing public complaints lead to service improvements and 45% confident that majority opposition can change policies. However, evidence suggests many are unaware they can provide feedback, and those who do are not always satisfied with the outcome. Gaps in satisfaction and outcomes between Indigenous and non-indigenous citizens tend to require the use of additional levers, as they typically result from a different set of governance failures.	• Continue investing in a human-centred approach to public service, including through tailoring policies, programmes, and services to the diverse needs of the population: o Work towards developing measures of service satisfaction that are representative of different population groups, including Indigenous Australians. o Further institutionalise citizen engagement upstream during the problem identification and design phases of the policy cycle. o Develop a civil society organisation strategy to enhance civil society capacity and improve the quality of engagement: o Raise greater awareness among the public about how they can provide feedback and potentially gather additional data through the Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services as to what type of outcome people would typically seek when submitting feedback or a complaint. o In line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, move towards shared decision-making and enhanced capacity for community-controlled organisation to improve service responsiveness and policy outcomes for Indigenous Australians.
The OECD Trust Survey found that 48% of Australians believe public institutions would adopt innovative ideas to improve services, ranking Australia third in this aspect. The Australian government has been actively and successfully pursuing digital transformation in the public sector to drive innovation and improve access to government services. The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) is attempting to address the digital skills gap in APS through a mix of learning opportunities. These initiatives, in particular formal training opportunities, primarily focus on digital professionals. Currently, 20% of recent users of an administrative service in Australia report being dissatisfied with the ability to access administrative services through their preferred channel, on par with the OECD average of 21%. The most recent OECD Open, Useful, Reusable Data Index (OURData) ranked Australia 28th out of 36 OECD countries on data openness.	• Taking advantage of the digital transformation: o Expand training opportunities to target civil servants in non-digital roles more broadly. o Address shortcomings with regards to the existing legal and institutional framework for data interoperability and political incentives for data sharing, including with ACCOs.
There is evidence of a significant digital gap in Australia, particularly affecting Indigenous people, older adults, and those with lower education levels. 56% of Australians feel confident a government institution would only use their personal data for legitimate reasons. While this is above the OECD average of 52%, Australia ranks 10th out of the 30 surveyed countries.	• Balancing digital transformation with ethical and equity considerations: o Ensure efforts to promote digital transformation do not compound existing inequalities, notably for Indigenous Australians. Access to services through one's preferred channel should remain a priority. o Continue initiatives to strengthen privacy and security frameworks, as set out in the Data and Digital Government Strategy and explore ways for citizens to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information the government possesses about them or their community and how this data is used.

Main findings	Areas of opportunity
Openness	
A relatively large majority of Australians (70%) believe they can easily access information about administrative processes. In contrast, a much smaller share of people in Australia (46%) believe the government clearly informs them about the impacts that reforms can have on their lives. Only around four in ten Australians reported that information and statistics provided by government are easy to find (42%) and understand (40%). The federal administration in Australia routinely only communicate in English. This can make it difficult for a considerable share of the population to access public information.	• Promoting a culture of proactive disclosure of public information and clearly communicating with the citizens public institutions serve: o when information is high-stakes or when the target audience is linguistically diverse, provide information in languages other than English; o use plain and clear language; o share messages tailored to communities' needs and target different groups of audiences through identified relevant channels.
Only 41% of Australians reported high and moderately high trust in news media. People's trust in government was found to be related to their information and news consumption habits, with trust being higher in particular among newspaper readers. Trust is particularly low among those who do not follow politics or current affairs. Australia is among the leader countries in efforts to protect people from mis- and disinformation, and this is a collaborative objective involving not only public institutions but also other interested parties.	• Encouraging a healthy, diverse, and independent media environment enhancing opportunities for public scrutiny and informed decision making and investing in evidence-informed approaches to media literacy.
Almost half of Australians (46%) feel able to participate in politics and believe that people like them have a say in what the government does, compared to 40% and 30%, respectively, on average, across OECD countries. Challenges in terms of political voice seem to be higher for women, older people, those with lower levels of education or who are financially concerned. When analysing reported ways of engagement, almost two in ten Australians (17%) reported not participating in any form of political activity and, with the exception of electoral participation, Australians participate less than their OECD peers in all forms of participation. Lower levels of Australians' political participation are accompanied by an increasing fragmentation of the party system and lower levels of reported partisanship. Citizens in Australia are unable to propose legislation, and public institutions encourage a top-down approach to participation, where people can only react or contribute to what is proposed by the government. There are very few examples of more regular engagement between people and government officials, and even fewer opportunities for participatory or deliberative democracy.	• Enhancing and creating more opportunities for political engagement to align with Australians' perceptions of their ability to participate in and influence politics, and their appetite for direct democracy: o Make guidance and self-assessment tools on partnership and engagement a requirement for any new national or state policy. o States that do not have such bodies could explore the possibility of incorporating advisory bodies representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into their parliaments. o Centralise "*Have your say*" spaces hosted by different agencies into a single platform, facilitating access and allowing registration and monitoring of processes. o Put in place institutional channels that allow people to interact with policymakers more often, and test and open policy areas to allow citizens' initiatives or representative deliberative experiences. o Boost collective engagement by promoting national dialogues and strengthening political parties through more democratic decision-making and candidate selection procedures.
Integrity	
Perceptions of public integrity in Australia are slightly above the OECD average, except for those concerning "policy capture". Yet, they represent the set of public governance measures in which Australia fares worse, and which have improved least compared to the results of the 2021 OECD Trust Survey. Australia has multiple public integrity frameworks, policies and agencies setting standards of conduct and behaviour, controls, and safeguards against integrity risks. Despite efforts, institutional challenges remain, including those related to co-ordination in a federal country.	• Ensuring and strengthening co-operation on integrity issues by investing in data collection and governance, both horizontally among federal integrity agencies, and vertically with the States/Territories.
Challenges remain concerning the environment of public officials' psychological safety.	• Maintaining a safe work environment in public administration: o Determine how to address psychological health and safety. o Set and monitor standards that allow for identifying challenges.
44% of Australians doubt that a policymaker would refuse an offer of a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, slightly below the average across OECD countries (49%). Australia has regulations establishing cooling-off periods for Ministers and members of cabinet, but they do not cover members of legislative bodies or lobbyists.	• Ensuring all public institutions develop and implement policies on post-employment conflict of interest.

Main findings	Areas of opportunity
Only 41% of Australians believe that Australian Government institutions act according to the best interest of society and just a quarter (25%) of people in Australia find it likely that the government would refuse a corporation's demand that would benefit its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole. This is below the average across OECD countries (30%) and represents the only public governance perception indicator in which Australia does not outperform the OECD. Australia does not have in place regulations to ban contributions from foreign states or enterprises, nor ceilings to electoral campaign expenses, nor thresholds for personal contributions to candidates' campaigns	• Supporting the legislative branch in the extension of current regulations on lobbying, stipulating that transparency requirements cover the legislative and judiciary branches, and other actors than consultant lobbyists, such as think tanks, companies or trade associations. • Expanding disclosure requirements to private contributions regardless of amounts, banning donations from government contractors and requesting that disclosure is made in real-time.
Fairness	
A majority of Australians (55%) perceive that public officials will treat people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or country of origin, compared to 45%, on average, across the OECD. An even larger share of respondents (64%) believe their applications for government benefits or services would be treated fairly, 12 percentage points above the OECD average (52%). Women and Australians who reported lower education levels or financial concerns have lower perceptions of fairness.	• Policies aimed at mitigating perceived socioeconomic vulnerabilities and inequalities could be crucial in closing trust gaps among population groups.
Less than half of Australians (48%) believe that it is likely that the federal parliament adequately balances the needs of different regions and groups in society, while one-third of the population (30%) think it is unlikely.	• Promote initiatives to keep on promoting and ensuring diverse representation, both in public sector and politics. • Collecting and showcasing data disaggregated and according to relevance criteria that can be useful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which may help to better target policies, and tackle inequalities and vulnerabilities.

1 Trust in context in Australia

This chapter presents an overview of country-specific features that may affect the relationship between public governance and trust in Australia. It examines structural patterns, contemporary challenges, and historical legacies. Drawing on longitudinal data, the chapter highlights Australia's stable democratic foundations and strong public support for inclusive governance, while acknowledging challenges such as economic disparities and colonial legacies. The discussion concludes with an assessment of how the public administration has evolved in recent years, focusing on institutional reforms and the effects of recent crises.

Public trust plays a dual role in democratic governance, serving as both an essential input and a crucial indicator. As an important source of legitimacy, trust underpins public governance, allowing officials to make complex policy decisions and address global challenges. It lowers transaction costs, can boost political engagement, and eases policy compliance (Putnam, 1993[1]; Algan and Cahuc, 2013[2]; Fukuyama, 1995[3]). At the same time, trust serves as a useful gauge, reflecting how people view and interact with government institutions. It is worth noting, however, that high trust levels are not a prerequisite for democratic systems (Brezzi et al., 2021[4]). Rather, democracies thrive through "sceptical trust" and open dialogue, which fuel ongoing improvement and responsiveness to citizens' changing expectations (OECD, 2024[5]).

Australia has demonstrated its commitment to trust-enhancing reforms and to advancing democratic principles through various means. In November 2022, Australia signed the Luxembourg Declaration on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy, alongside 41 other countries and the European Union. This action, taken at the OECD Public Governance Committee's Ministerial Meeting, underscores Australia's proactive stance in fostering democratic resilience and public trust in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Recognising the critical role of public trust, Australia has invested in comprehensive initiatives to measure trust and make the results available to policymakers and the public. At the national level, these include the *Survey of Trust in Australian public services* (previously the 'Citizen Experience Survey'), carried out multiple times per year since 2019; and the 2023 *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian democracy survey.* Moreover, the importance of trust to broader well-being was recognised in "Measuring What Matters," Australia's National well-being framework. The framework includes a dimension 'Trust in institutions', which includes trust in others, in key institutions, in Australian Public Services and in the national government as indicators. At the international level, Australia has participated in the inaugural and 2023 waves of the *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* (OECD Trust Survey). To further this commitment, Australia has commissioned this study as an in-depth analysis of trust drivers, reflecting the nation's dedication to understanding and enhancing public trust in its institutions.

This study primarily draws on data collected during October-November 2023 through the OECD Trust Survey, conducted in 30 OECD countries including Australia; and to a lesser extent on the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, carried out in 22 OECD countries in late 2021. It offers new comparative insights into levels of trust in public institutions, citizens' perceptions and assessments of public institutions, focusing on government competence (responsiveness and reliability) and government values (integrity, openness, and fairness) (Brezzi et al., 2021[4]). Trust levels and perceptions of public institutions along these dimensions jointly make up the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (see Table 2.2 in Chapter 2), and the report chapters are structured according to the main public governance categories of the framework. These survey findings are complemented by qualitative data from over fifty interviews with key stakeholders from public institutions, academics, and civil society, conducted primarily in July 2024. This comprehensive approach provides a holistic view of areas where the government can take action to enhance public trust and improve citizens' lives.

The report is structured in four chapters, each exploring distinct aspects of trust in public institutions:

- Chapter 1: Presents an overview of country-specific features that may influence the relationship between public governance and public trust in Australia.
- Chapter 2: Examines trust levels across various public institutions and population groups and identifies the drivers of trust in different Australian institutions.
- Chapter 3: Focuses on competence as a core public governance driver of trust, discussing public perceptions against the background of Australia's relevant policies and initiatives.
- Chapter 4: Concentrates on values as another crucial driver of trust, similarly, analysing survey results in the context of Australia's existing policies.

Chapters 3 and 4 also incorporate comparisons to other countries' experiences and policies, identifying Australia's public governance strengths, specific challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive basis for reflection on how to strengthen trust and reinforce democratic governance in Australia.

This first chapter seeks to provide a snapshot of important socioeconomic, political, and institutional factors that help contextualise the survey findings presented later in the report. Notably, longitudinal data suggests public trust in the Australian government has remained relatively stable and mid-range over time. The country benefits from robust democratic institutions and strong public support for democratic governance, with positive attitudes towards diversity contributing to social cohesion. However, challenges such as economic disparities, the spectre of polarisation, and the ongoing impact of colonial legacies pose potential risks.

Long-term structural patterns and more recent crisis events have influenced both the performance of public institutions and public perceptions. The Australian public sector has undergone, and continues to undergo, significant changes in the 2010s. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a litmus test for Australia's federal system, showcasing both its crisis management strengths and the complexities of cross-government co-ordination.

1.1. Australia is a trusting and cohesive society grappling with contemporary challenges and historical legacies

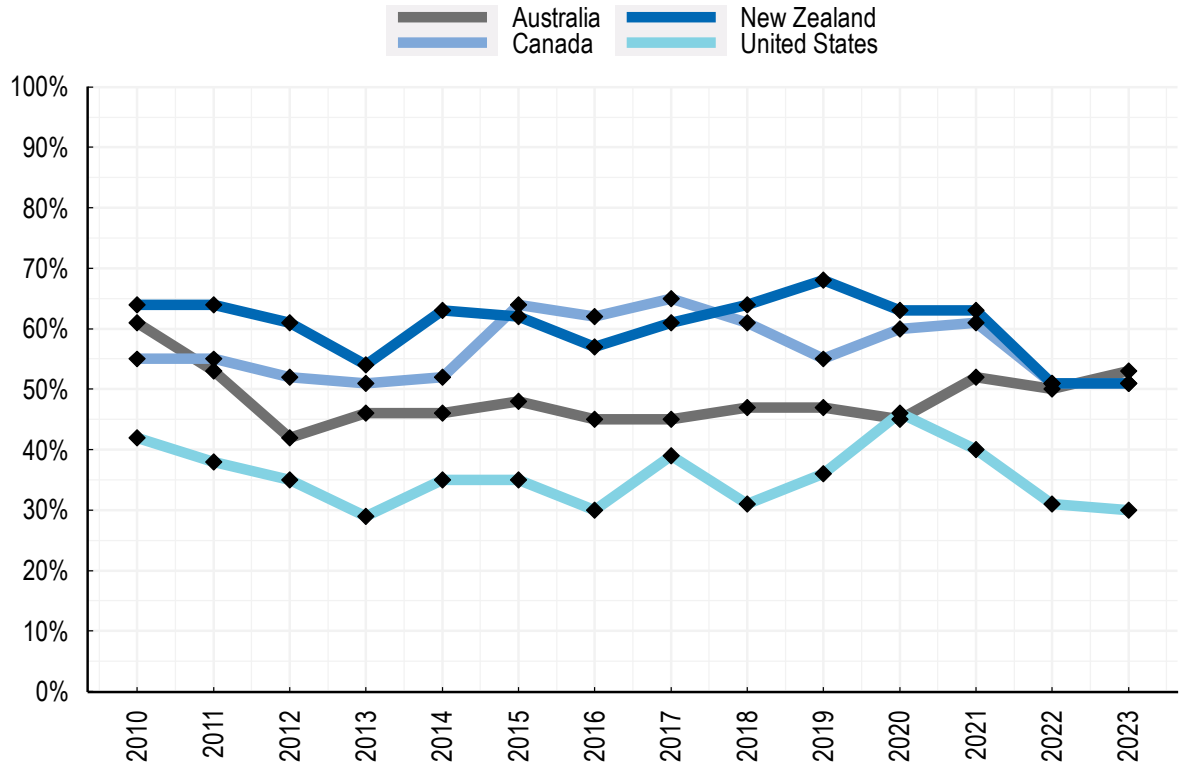
Trust in government in Australia has remained relatively stable over time, regularly placing the country in the mid-range among OECD countries. Australian democratic institutions and values are known for their innovative and adaptive approaches, which make them strong when assessed overall and when compared to other countries. The country’s rich multicultural heritage and positive attitudes towards diversity further contribute to democratic resilience. However, challenges persist. Economic disparities and polarisation have emerged as potential threats to interpersonal trust and the social fabric. Additionally, the historical legacies of colonialism continue to shape the lives of Indigenous peoples and their relationship with public institutions, presenting ongoing challenges to achieving true equality and reconciliation in Australian society.

1.1.1. Trust in government has remained relatively stable and close to the OECD average over time

Various surveys have consistently placed Australia in the mid-range for trust in government among OECD countries, with a slight uptick in recent years. For instance, while New Zealand has consistently outperformed Australia in trust levels since 2010, the United States generally showed lower trust levels. Canada and Ireland experienced more volatile trust levels, occasionally surpassing Australia in recent years (GallupAnalytics, 2022[6]) (see Figure 1.1). In 2021, Australia ranked 13th out of 20 countries participating in the OECD Trust Survey, with 38% of people having high to moderately high trust in the federal government, just below the OECD average of 41% (OECD, 2022[7]). In 2023, Australia climbed to 9th out of 30 countries, with 46% of people expressing high to moderately high trust in government—surpassing the OECD average of 39% (see Chapter 2).

Figure 1.1. Levels of trust in government in Australia have remained relatively stable and in the mid-range over time

Share of population in selected countries who indicate confidence in government across years, 2010-2023



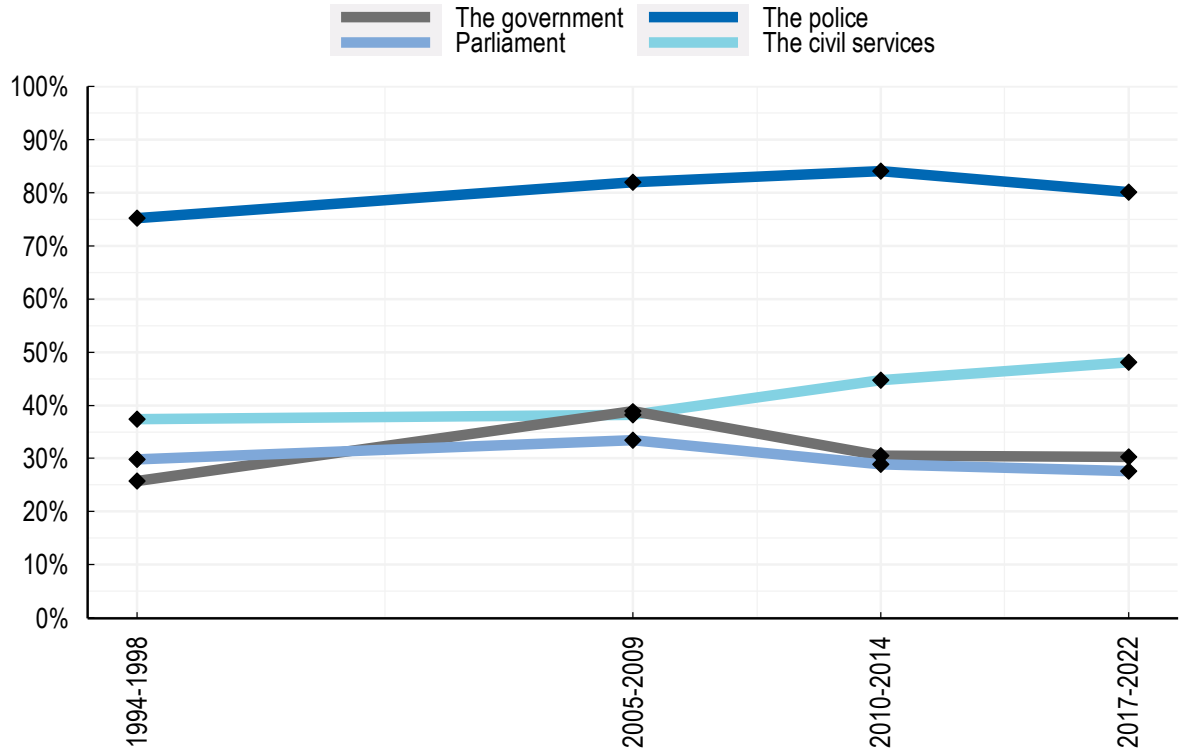
Note: The figure displays the share of respondents who reported confidence in their national government.; answering "yes" (the other response categories being "no" and "don't know") to the survey question: "In this country, do you have a confidence in national government?" The Gallup World Poll uses a representative sample of about 1 000 citizens in most countries.
Source: Gallup World Poll (2010-2023).

StatLink https://stat.link/j381x2

Although trust levels in the government remained relatively stable compared to other OECD countries, they nevertheless peaked in the mid-2000s, followed by a general decline, levelling out around 2020 (Figure 1.2). This is seen consistently across different surveys, including Gallup and the World Values Survey (GallupAnalytics, 2022[6]; Haerpfer et al., 2022[8]). Data from the Australian Election Study, a survey series timed to coincide with the Australian federal elections, show that until 2013, trust in government followed a more cyclical pattern, peaking with changes in government. The two changes of power in 1996 and 2007 coincided with notable increases in public trust (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2021[9]; Bean, 2001[10]). Australia's unique electoral system—combining compulsory voting and frequent elections—likely contributed to this distinctive pattern (Werner, 2016[11]). However, in 2013, a shift from Labor to Liberal leadership did not boost trust as expected; instead, it continued to decline. The recent rise in trust observed across various measures might signal a return to the cyclical pattern linked to party changes in government, coinciding with Labor's 2022 victory.

Figure 1.2. Levels of trust in government in Australia peaked in the mid-2000s

Share of population in Australia who indicate confidence in public institutions across years, 1994-2022



Note: This figure shows the share of respondents who expressed "a great deal" or "quite a lot" to the question "For each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all?: [The government/The police/Parliament/The civil service]", based on data from the World Values Survey. The periods covered are from Wave-3 (1994–1998) administered in 1995, Wave-5 (2005–2009) administered in 2005, Wave-6 (2010–2014) administered in 2012, and Wave-7 (2017–2022) administered in 2018.
Source: (Haerpfer et al., 2022[8]).

StatLink https://stat.link/kusyex

1.1.2. Australia benefits from robust democratic institutions

With strong democratic institutions, widespread public support for democratic governance, and a rich multicultural heritage, Australia has consistently ranked among the most established democracies globally. The nation's commitment to multiculturalism, evidenced by its diverse population and positive public sentiment towards immigration, has contributed to its unique and cohesive societal landscape. However, economic disparities and polarisation have emerged as growing threats.

Australia demonstrates strong democratic credentials based on several key indicators and unique features of its political system. In the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index, Australia consistently ranks highly, placing 14th in the global rankings in the latest results (Nord et al., 2024[12]). This index, which combines 71 indicators of liberal and electoral aspects of democracy, has seen Australia rank as high as 7th in recent years (Lührmann et al., 2018[13]). Similarly, in Freedom House's global freedom index, which measures access to political rights and civil liberties, Australia has maintained a high score of 95 out of 100 since 2022 (Freedom House, 2024[14]).

Furthermore, public sentiment strongly supports democracy in Australia. The Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy study found that 59% of people in Australia are (very) satisfied with how democracy works in the country; and an overwhelming majority (95%) think that it is (very) important to live in a democratically governed country (Commonwealth of Australia, APSC, 2024[15]) (Box 1.1). This notable support underscores the robust democratic culture in Australia, complementing its strong institutional framework.

Box 1.1. The relationship between trust in public institutions, satisfaction with democracy and commitment to democratic values

Sufficiently high levels of trust in public institutions can facilitate the implementation of policies and serves as a yardstick of the public's satisfaction with the government's public governance performance; and an increasing gap in how supporters of the government and opposition view non-political institutions such as courts and the civil service can be a sign of rising partisanship that can make it more difficult to come to political agreements and govern successfully. However, while distrust towards public institutions might contribute to a disenchantment of some people with the way that democracy works in their country, Australian and other data suggest that for most people, it translates neither to a rejection of democracy as a political system, nor of specific democratic values.

High trust in public institutions is not a necessary outcome of democratic governance. In fact, democracies can have lower trust levels because citizens—unlike those in autocratic systems—are not only free to express distrust in their government but are actively encouraged to scrutinise government behaviour and maintain "healthy scepticism" (Norris, 2022[16]). Democratic systems partially derive their strength from this dynamic: open public debate allows for the consideration of a wider range of opinions to achieve better outcomes, and the framework that enables institutions to hold each other accountable relies on this inherent degree of mistrust (OECD, 2024[5]).

Satisfaction with democracy in Australia is higher than in many other countries and exceeds trust in the federal government. According to the 2023 Pew Spring Global Attitudes Survey, satisfaction with democracy in Australia was only second to Sweden, exceeding satisfaction with democracy in fifteen other OECD countries (Pew Research Centre, 2024[17]). According to the June 2023 Australian Democracy Trust Survey, 59% were (very) satisfied with the way democracy worked in the country, exceeding the share of the population that trust the federal government by nearly ten percentage points. Another quarter of the population were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Moreover, two-thirds of the population (strongly) agreed with the statement that the electoral system represented their vote accurately.

While satisfaction with democracy is already relatively high, support for democracy and democratic values is even higher. According to the June 2023 Australian Democracy Trust Survey, 64% of respondents stated that it is very important, 21% that it is important and 10% that it is somewhat important to live in a country that is governed democratically, meaning that only 5% did not at least somewhat agree. More than nine in ten people also considered different democratic values, such as the protection of human rights, fair elections, equal application of the law, checks and balances, liberty of expression and a free and independent media as important or very important. Maintaining support for democracy is key, as falling levels can contribute to democratic deconsolidation (Claassen, 2019[18]). Not surprisingly, evidence from different sources suggests that people who trust public institutions more are also more likely to be satisfied with how democracy works in their country (Zmerli and Newton, 2007[19]); and that low trust in institutions can exacerbate the impact of economic stress on dissatisfaction with democracy (Poma and Pistoresi, 2023[20]).

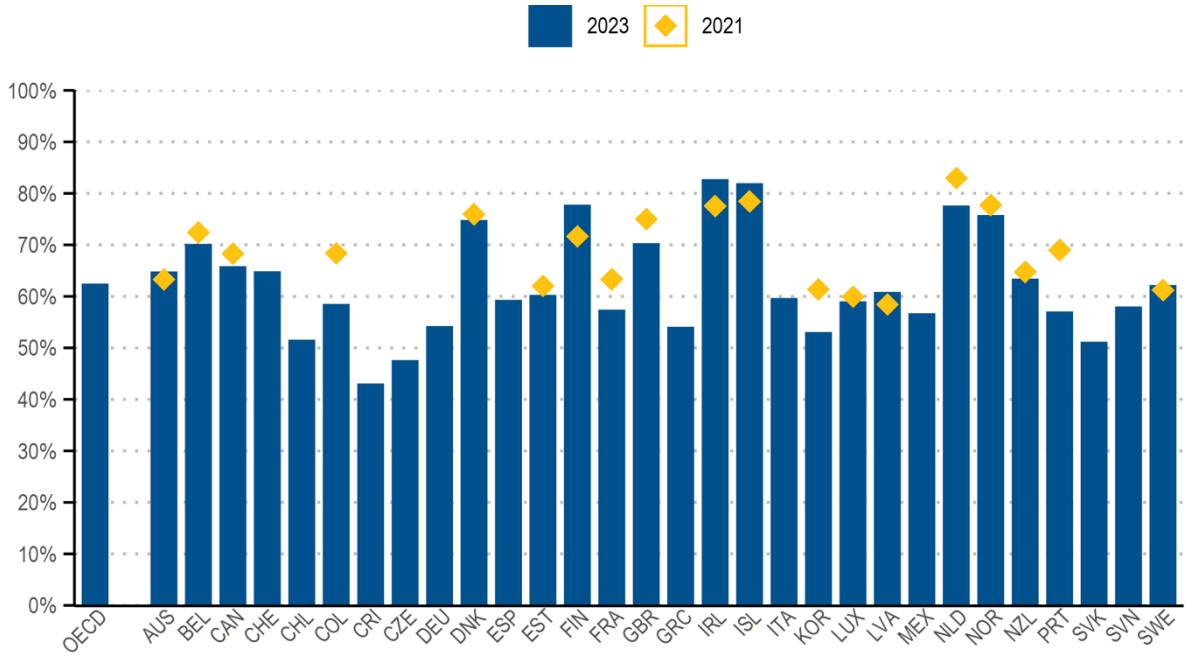
Australia is a historically diverse and multicultural country, with a wide variety of cultures, languages, and faiths shaping its societal landscape. This diversity is deeply rooted in the nation's history, beginning with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—recognised as the First People of the continent—who represent over 250 language groups (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024[21]). Australia's multicultural character was further enhanced by post-World War II immigration programmes, which have welcomed 7.5 million migrants, including 950 000 refugees, since 1945 (Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs, 2024[22]). In the 1970s, amid growing economic uncertainty, Australians challenged the existing political order and called on the government to provide a fuller sense of social citizenship and democracy. The Whitlam Labor Government (1972-75) and subsequent administrations responded by creating new frameworks and institutions that enabled citizens to participate more fully in society, protest, and hold power accountable. Key changes to the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) and amendments to the Australian Citizenship Act (1973)—which granted non-British migrants the same citizenship rights as British migrants—marked a shift towards a more inclusive framing of the nation (Pietsch et al., 2023[23]).

The 2021 Census reveals that more than half of Australian residents (51.5%) were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas, and over 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022[24]). Importantly, this multicultural makeup is viewed positively by the population, with the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's 2024 report on Social Cohesion indicating that 71% of Australians believe that accepting immigrants from many different countries strengthens the nation, and support for multiculturalism has risen to 85% in 2024 from 77% in 2018 (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024[25]). Australia's multicultural identity is therefore not only a historical fact but also a source of pride and satisfaction for contemporary Australian society.

Notably, Australia shows no evidence of erosion in generalised social trust/interpersonal trust, further underlining the country's strong social cohesion. Recent OECD Trust Surveys demonstrate a slight improvement in interpersonal trust levels, with Australia rising from 63% in 2021 (below the OECD average of 67%) to 65% in 2023 (above the OECD average of 62%) (see Figure 1.3). World Values Survey data suggest an upward trajectory over a broader time frame: after dropping to 39% in 1995, interpersonal trust rebounded to 46% in 2005 and has since stabilised between 48% and 51% (Haerpfer et al., 2022[8]). Moreover, trust towards people of other nationalities and religions remains high, with over 70% of Australians expressing trust in people of other nationalities, while trust in people of another religion has shown recent improvement. An IPSOS survey further supports these findings, ranking Australia as one of only six countries out of 27 that are net positive in measures of social cohesion[1] with a score of 12% (IPSOS, 2020[26]).

Figure 1.3. Interpersonal trust is slightly higher in Australia than across the OECD

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in other people (on a 0-10 scale), 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions across two survey waves of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust most people?". A 0-4 response corresponds to 'low or no trust', a 5 to 'neutral' and a 6-10 to 'high or moderately high trust'. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023. Mexico participated in 2021, but the 2023 survey did not include inter-personal trust question for this country.
Source: OECD Trust Survey, 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/jfyd84

1.1.3. The country's social fabric faces ongoing challenges related to inequality and the threat of polarisation

Australia faces challenges to its social fabric as economic disparities and financial uncertainties remain prevalent. Income inequality in Australia has grown over the past two decades, with the most significant rise occurring prior to the global financial crisis. While wage inequality has risen, primarily due to rapid earnings growth among top earners, this has been partially offset by increased labour force participation and longer working hours at the lower end of the income spectrum (Sila and Dugain, 2019[27]). The Gini coefficient for equivalised disposable household income increased from 0.289 in 2019–20 to 0.322 in 2021–22, indicating widening income inequality (Australian Bureau of Statistics[28]). Available evidence suggests a majority of Australians feel the current income distribution is unfair and that this appears to be affecting their views on democracy (Biddle and Gray, 2024[29]). In parallel, social dynamics are under pressure, as evidenced by the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion report, which revealed a sharp decline in people who have a great sense of belonging in Australia from 63% in 2020 to 47% in 2024 (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024[25]). Economic fairness concerns were understood to play a partial role in this decline, particularly the diminishing belief that "hard work brings a better life" (Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2023[30]).

For many households, one significant source of financial stress is the availability and cost of housing. Compared to other OECD countries, the housing supply in Australia is relatively low, contributing to shortages in properties available to buy or rent (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024[31]). Rising home prices, along with rising interest rates relevant for mortgage holders, have increased the share of households

overburdened by the cost of housing. Tenancy laws and regulations exist at the state or territory level, but overall, rent controls tend to be relatively limited (OECD, 2022[32]), potentially contributing to a sense of instability among renters. However, 77% of Australia's working-age population (15-64) held paid jobs in 2023, significantly outperforming the OECD average of 70%, which suggests Australians have better access to employment opportunities compared to many other developed nations, alleviating a potential source of financial stress (OECD, 2024[33]).

While Australia has so far managed to avoid extreme polarisation seen in some other OECD countries, there are indications that efforts to prevent further social fragmentation should remain a priority for the nation's democratic health. A cross-country study on polarisation, defined by the authors as the extent to which citizens feel more negatively toward other political parties than toward their own, found that Australia was among six OECD countries where polarisation actually decreased since the 1980s (Adams et al., 2020[34]). Furthermore, the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer classified Australia as only 'moderately polarised', setting it apart from countries that are either 'severely polarised' or at risk of becoming so (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2023[35]). Polarisation here is conceptualised as the perceived degree of division in society and perceived inability to overcome it. At a more granular level 35% of Australians believe their country is very or extremely divided—a low score compared to other surveyed countries. However, there are early warning signs that warrant attention: among those who perceive this division, 74% are pessimistic about the country's ability to overcome it. While this entrenchment affects only a comparatively small segment of the population, it signals the importance of a preventive approach. This is especially important as changing technology and digital landscapes are driving new information environments, with patterns that may undermine information integrity with consequences on polarisation, social cohesion and trust more broadly (see Chapter 4). In light of these national trends and the broader global context of increasing polarisation, the Strengthening Democracy's Taskforce report identified polarisation as one of the eight challenges to Australia's democracy[2] (Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs, 2024[36]).

1.1.4. Historical legacies of colonialism continue to impact Indigenous Australians' lives and their relationships with public institutions

As Australia grapples with contemporary challenges, it is crucial to recognise that these issues are intertwined with the country's complex historical legacy, particularly concerning its Indigenous peoples. Historical legacies of colonialism continue to shape the lives of Indigenous peoples in Australia, and their relationship with public institutions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintained diverse cultures and languages in Australia for 65 000 years, fostering connections within the continent and with neighbouring regions in Asia and the Pacific (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024[21]). The establishment of a British penal colony in 1788, rooted in the concept of terra nullius, brought on the spread of epidemic disease and systemic campaigns of dispossession and violence against Indigenous peoples (OECD, 2020[37]). The precolonial population of mainland Australia is estimated to have been between 350 000 and one million people; but by 1901, the Indigenous population had likely declined to under 100 000 (Hugo, 2001[38]). The last colonial frontier massacres of Indigenous peoples[3] took place in the 1930s, in the Northern Territory (Ryan et al., 2017-2022[39]).

For a period spanning nearly two centuries, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were systematically excluded from participating in political and policy-making processes that directly impacted their lives. During this time, they were largely under the control of state and religious bodies, subject to policies that initially aimed at "protection" and later shifted towards "assimilation" into mainstream Australian society. From the early 1800s, the creation of reserves and Christian missions, coupled with the appointment of "Protectors" and Protection Boards, progressively disrupted the ability of Indigenous Australians to support themselves and gave colonial authorities undue control over Indigenous lives (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997[40]). Australia's first constitution, established in 1901,

excluded them from the constitutional process and effectively left their welfare in the hands of the state (Australian Human Rights Commission[41]). This pattern of marginalisation and state interference in Indigenous lives eventually extended to the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, known as the "Stolen Generations," which continued until the 1960s (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997[40]). To this day, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain overrepresented in the child protection system. Despite a target to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031, the proportion has actually increased between 2019 and 2023 (Australian Government - Productivity Commission, 2023[42]).

The governance of “Indigenous affairs” in Australia has undergone significant changes since the mid-20th century, marked by Indigenous resistance to discriminatory policies and the gradual acquisition of political and land ownership rights (Box 1.2). A pivotal moment came with the 1967 constitutional amendment, which empowered the Commonwealth to legislate for Aboriginal people, creating a shared responsibility with the States. Despite this shift, States maintain primary control over land management, education, healthcare, and law enforcement (OECD, 2020[37]). In this federal context, the capacity for effective Indigenous self-governance is heavily influenced by the complex interplay of legislative frameworks, intergovernmental responsibilities, and administrative practices. Notably, the current governance structure presents several challenges to achieving meaningful self-governance for Indigenous communities, especially those straddling administrative borders. These challenges include the frequently siloed top-down delivery of programmes through sectoral ministries, poor co-ordination of services at the local level, short-term and fragmented funding arrangements, and frequent policy and governance changes (McDonald and Raderschall, 2019[43]) (see Chapter 3 for further discussion). Drawing on Indigenous Australian historical practices—which include sophisticated consultative frameworks, thorough deliberative practices, and a degree of comfort with uncertainty and conflicting narratives—could offer valuable insights (Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs, 2024[36]).

Box 1.2. Key development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in Australia

Key developments include:

- **1946:** Aboriginal pastoral workers initiate industrial action for higher pay.
- **1949:** Australian Citizenship Act grants Indigenous Australians the right to vote in Commonwealth elections if enrolled for State elections or having served in the Armed Forces.
- **1962:** All Indigenous Australians become eligible to vote at the Commonwealth level, however voting is not compulsory until the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1983* came into effect
- **1967:** Referendum passes with 90.7% of Australians voting to count Indigenous Australians in the census and grant the Commonwealth Government power to legislate for them.
- **1975:** Racial Discrimination Act passed at the Commonwealth level.
- **1976:** Australia's first comprehensive land rights legislation, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory), is passed. Land rights laws are subsequently implemented in six out of eight states and territories.
- **1989:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) established as the main Commonwealth agency in Indigenous affairs.
- **1991:** Commonwealth Government establishes the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.
- **1992:** Mabo decision by the High Court overturns terra nullius, ruling that native title exists over unalienated Crown land, national parks, and reserves.

- **1993:** Commonwealth Native Title Act recognises Aboriginal peoples' land rights based on common law and allows Indigenous people to make land claims under certain conditions, excluding freehold land.
- **1996:** High Court Wik decision finds that pastoral leases do not confer exclusive possession, allowing native title to coexist with these lease arrangements.
- **1997:** "Bringing Them Home," the report on the inquiry into the Stolen Generations, is released by the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- **1998:** Commonwealth Government amends the Native Title Act, restricting the process of native title claims.
- **2005:** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is dismantled by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act 2005 and replaced by a Commonwealth government-appointed advisory board.
- **2008:** Official apology to the Stolen Generations delivered.
- **2013:** Australian Parliament passes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013 with bipartisan support, acknowledging the need to recognise Indigenous peoples in Australia's constitution.
- **2017:** The Uluru Statement from the Heart is presented to the Australian public at the National Constitutional Convention in Yulara, on Aṉangu lands. This follows regional dialogues in 13 locations across Australia, with 250 delegates invited to the convention. The three key pillars of substantive reform called for in the Statement are:
  - **Voice** – a constitutionally enshrined representative mechanism to provide expert advice to Parliament about laws and policies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
  - **Treaty** – a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations peoples that acknowledges the historical and contemporary cultural rights and interests of First Peoples by formally recognising sovereignty, and that land was never ceded.
  - **Truth** – a comprehensive process to expose the full extent of injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to enable shared understanding of Australia's colonial history and its contemporary impacts.

The Turnbull Government rejects the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

- **2020:** Developed in partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap defines priority reforms to change the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Empowered Communities initiative aims to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership over decision making.
- **2023:** The referendum on changing the constitution to establish a body called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Voice is rejected by 60% of voters.

Source: (OECD, 2020[37]; SBS News, 2013[44]; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023[45]; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017[46]; Reconciliation Australia, 2021[47]; NIAA, n.d.[48]; Closing the Gap, 2024[49])

With regards to governance arrangements and policy outcomes, the Closing the Gap framework is the current overarching and comprehensive strategy launched by the Australian government in 2008 to address disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians (Closing the Gap, 2024[49]). In 2018, the Council of Australian Governments established the Joint Council on Closing the Gap, marking a significant step towards shared decision-making and collaboration. This led to a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap in July 2020, which brought together various levels of government, the Australian Local Government Association, and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Peak Organisations. The 2020 Agreement is unique in its inclusion of a non-government signatory, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, and its calling for fundamental changes in how governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Productivity Commission, 2024[50]). The framework is structured around four priority reforms and outlines nineteen national socio-economic targets across seventeen areas, with progress monitored through various mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability. Critics have nevertheless pointed out that the Closing the Gap framework tends to emphasise deficits rather than strengths and fails to adequately explore ways to leverage Indigenous assets and potential for growth (OECD, 2020[37]).

Despite these initiatives, the cumulative and intergenerational effects of colonisation are felt to this day. Although significant progress has been made since the 1960s, there remain substantial disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across various well-being indicators, associated with stark differences in life expectancy (see Chapters 3 and 4). Lastly, racial prejudice remains a significant issue, with 60% of Indigenous peoples reporting at least one experience of racial prejudice in the past 6 months in 2022, up from 52% in 2020 and 43% in 2018, compared to 25% of non-Indigenous people (Australian Reconciliation Barometer, 2022[51]).

1.2. Structural patterns and crisis events have influenced both the performance of public institutions and public perceptions

The Australian public sector has undergone significant changes in recent decades, influenced by New Public Management principles notable impacts on the overall capacity, capability, and structure of the Australian Public Service (APS). This pattern has been marked by increased outsourcing and external labour use, as well as growing tensions between political responsiveness and institutional independence. Concurrently, Australia has faced challenges in maintaining robust market competition, with trends showing increased market concentration and potential vulnerabilities to policy capture. The COVID-19 pandemic brought these issues into sharp focus, testing the capabilities of Australia's federal system whilst also demonstrating its strengths in crisis management. The pandemic response led to unprecedented government interventions, increased welfare spending, and a temporary boost in public trust, whilst also highlighting the complexities of co-ordinating across different levels of government in a federal system.

1.2.1. New Public Management principles had lasting effects on public sector capacity, but a paradigm shift has occurred in recent years

Employment in the public sector[4] in Australia has shown considerable fluctuations over recent years. The sector experienced a decline in the 2010s, with public sector's share of total filled jobs decreasing from approximately 15.5% in September 2010 to 14.6% in September 2019 (ABS, 2019[52]). By the September quarter of 2024, this share had risen to 15.1%, remaining below 2010 levels (ABS, 2024[53]). Within this broader trend, the APS has followed a similar pattern. The APS workforce grew from 159 299 employees in 2008 to peak at 167 343 in 2012, before declining to 150 360 in 2020. By 2024, numbers increased significantly to 185 343 - the highest level in sixteen years. However, when measured as a percentage of total employed persons, the APS workforce still represents a smaller proportion than in the past, falling from 1.53% in 2012 to 1.36% in 2024 (Australian Public Service Commission, 2024[54]).

In addition to structural factors such as technological changes, significant factors reshaping public sector employment numbers have been the rise in outsourcing and external labour use. The Average Staffing Level (ASL) cap, introduced in the 2015–2016 budget to limit full-time equivalent public servant numbers, further drove this trend. A 2023 audit revealed that in 2021–22, 112 government entities employed an external labour workforce of 53 900 full-time equivalent staff at a cost of AUD 20.8 billion. This was in addition to 144 300 directly employed public servants in these entities. Consequently, the actual

government workforce was about 37% larger than official public servant numbers suggest (Australian Government, 2023[55]).

In parallel to the increasing reliance on outsourcing, there has been a growing tension between the APS' responsiveness to the political class and its traditional role as an apolitical institution under the Westminster system (Podger and Kettl, 2024[56]). The APS is designed to serve the democratically elected government while maintaining its independence and efficiency. However, recent events, such as Robodebt debt scheme (see Chapter 4 for full context on the scheme) have highlighted concerns about the APS's ability to maintain this balance. The Royal Commission on Robodebt found that a lack of independence among departmental secretaries and a misunderstanding of the APS's role and values contributed to the scheme's failures. This situation highlights the ongoing challenge of balancing the APS's responsiveness to elected officials with its role in providing independent, expert advice (Royal Commission, 2023[57]).

The decline in APS capacity has not gone unnoticed, with several high-profile independent reviews expressing concerns. Two significant independent reviews of the Australian Public Service—the 2009 Moran Review and the 2019 Thodey Review—identified weaknesses in key areas such as strategic policy advising, human resources management, and digital capacity (Podger et al., 2023[58]). The 2019 Review went further, recommending better data collection on the use of external contractors and measures to enhance the APS's independence. These included stricter merit-based processes for senior appointments and a legislated code of conduct for ministerial staff (Independent Review of the APS, 2019[59]).

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant shift in this downsizing in Australia. The first half of 2020 saw an addition of 5 770 jobs, primarily on temporary contracts, with a total of 22 000 extra public servants hired by early September 2020. However, this growth was not intended to be permanent (Colley, Woods and Head, 2022[60]).

The change of government in 2022 presented an opportunity to capitalise on some of the changes made during the pandemic, and address several issues highlighted by the 2019 independent review of the Australian Public Service. The government has invested in APS capacity building, through onboarding of the external workforce and by removing the average staffing level (ASL) caps in 2022, resulting in a significant 6.9% growth in the workforce from 2022 to 2023. To address the over-reliance on external contractors, the Secretaries Board Capability and Workforce Committee is progressing priority actions to rebalance the APS workforce. These include developing an APS Strategic Commissioning Framework and establishing an in-house consulting capability. Lastly, efforts to bolster independence within the APS have been initiated. New whistleblower protections have been introduced and a Review into Public Sector Board Appointment Processes is underway to improve appointment practices. Additionally, the concept of stewardship is being embedded as an APS Value, clarifying the long-term responsibility of public servants to the institution and the public interest (Australian Public Service Commission, 2023[61]).

These structural shifts around public sector capacity can significantly impact service delivery and public perception of the government and public service. The decline in public sector employment, increased outsourcing, tensions between political responsiveness and apolitical roles, and identified capability gaps can lead to reduced service quality, loss of institutional knowledge, and difficulties in addressing complex challenges. These are all tangible outcomes which citizens can perceive. However, recent initiatives to bolster APS capabilities and enhance independence aim to mitigate these issues, potentially improving both service delivery and public confidence in the long term.

1.2.2. Trends of weakened market competition leave decision-making more vulnerable to policy capture

Competition in a market is crucial for consumer welfare and plays a role in promoting democratic decision-making. As firms grow into market leaders, they gain power and profits, potentially motivating them to influence politicians for their own interests rather than those of the general population (Beneke, 2021[62]). In Australia, however, unique structural challenges exist in maintaining robust competition (OECD, 2023[63]). The country's relatively small population, compared to its vast size, limits the number of potential competitors that can sustainably operate in certain industries. Furthermore, Australia's distance from other large markets can hinder international competitors from entering and competing effectively. These factors heighten the need for targeted public policies to foster competition and prevent market concentration.

Recent studies indicate a weakening of competitive intensity in Australian product markets. Market concentration has significantly increased across various industries since the early 2000s (Productivity Commission, 2023[64]; Parliament of Australia, 2024[65]), with utilities and retail sectors contributing most to this increase over the decade from 2010 to 2020 (Andrews, Dwyer and Triggs, 2023[66]). There are likewise indications of an increase in price to cost margins, or higher markup (Parliament of Australia, 2024[65]). Regarding firm entry and exit, the e61 Institute noted a decline in entry rates from 15% in the early 2000s to 12% pre-pandemic, with a slight uptick since then (Andrews, Dwyer and Triggs, 2023[66]). However, the Productivity Commission reported a modest growth in entry rates between 2013-14 and 2019-20, followed by a significant increase during the COVID-19 pandemic (Productivity Commission, 2023[64]). These trends collectively suggest a changing landscape of competition in Australian markets, with potential implications for economic dynamism and consumer welfare.

Largely in response to these identified trends, the Australian Treasurer announced a two-year Competition Review on August 23, 2023, aimed at modernising the economy and improving competition (Australian Government - Treasury, 2023[67]). The review examines competition laws, policies, and institutions, focusing on reforms to increase productivity, reduce living costs, and raise wages. Instead of a single report, the review team will conduct rolling policy projects, consulting publicly and issuing papers on specific reform topics over the next two years.

One of the focus areas of the Taskforce has been Australia’s merger laws. Australia's competition laws have unique characteristics compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2023[63]). Historically, while prohibiting anti-competitive mergers, Australia does not require pre-merger notification or regulatory clearance, and the ACCC lacks direct power to block mergers. Additionally, Australia's distinct regulatory standards, such as the Australian Design Rules, can impede foreign competition and product diffusion. The Treasury Laws Amendment (Mergers and Acquisitions Reform) Act 2024 introduced encouraging and significant changes. From January 2026, Australia will implement a mandatory and suspensory administrative system for mergers replacing the current voluntary approach, with businesses having the option to notify the ACCC from July 2025, while expanding the competition test to better assess competitive effects. This reform aims to enhance the ACCC's ability to prevent anti-competitive mergers, particularly in key sectors affecting cost of living, while ensuring faster processing of pro-competitive and benign mergers. The reform aims to support the maintenance of competition in Australia and encourage business dynamism through an efficient and effective risk-based merger system, leading to better outcomes for Australian.

The Taskforce has also been working with states and territories to implement pro-competitive reform efforts across the nation. On November 29th, 2024, Commonwealth, state and territory treasurers signed a landmark agreement to reinvigorate the National Competition Policy (NCP) aiming to stimulate economic growth and reduce prices. The agreement includes updated competition principles and governance structures, establishing a framework for reforms intended to enhance productivity, wages, and government revenue.

Features of competition in Australian markets may have implications for democratic governance and trust in public institutions. Recent evidence shows increasing concentration in various countries, coinciding with emerging pressures on democratic institutions, including challenges to the rule of law, trust in public institutions and the spread of disinformation. The relationship between competition and democracy is complex, with insufficient market competition potentially leading to concentrated economic power exercising undue influence upon political processes. Though lobbying is identified as a key mechanism linking competition to democracy, the transformation of economic power into political influence likely operates through multiple channels and varies by industry sector, with some like media potentially posing greater risks to democratic processes (OECD, 2024[68]). These factors may erode public trust if citizens perceive inadequate market regulation. However, the government's recent initiatives demonstrate awareness and could potentially address confidence deficits through effective reforms.

1.2.3. The COVID-19 pandemic's management continues to impact the public's relationship with government institutions

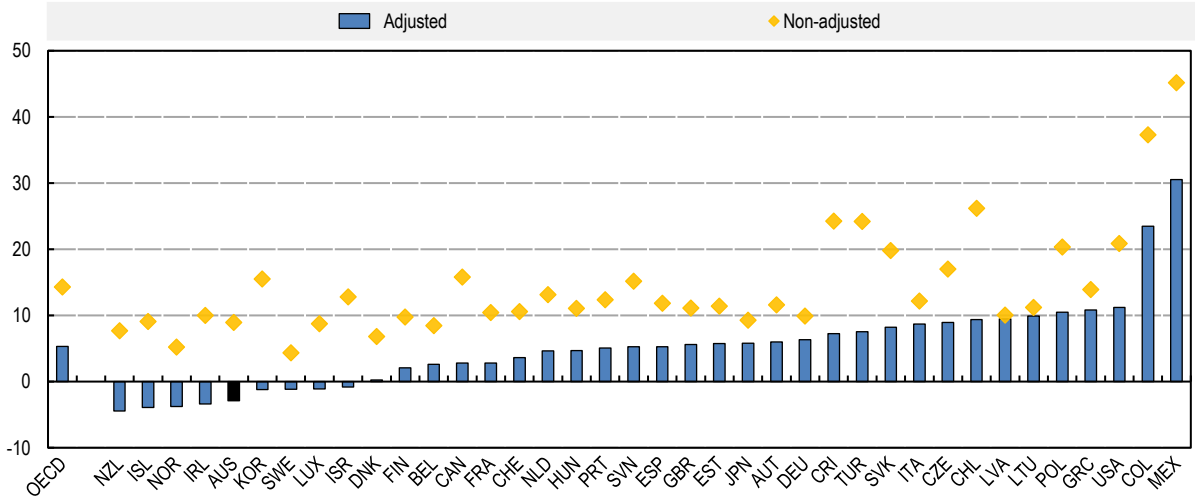
In addition to long-term structural shifts, crisis events can likewise influence public governance performance and public perceptions. The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented government interventions worldwide. Response effectiveness varied between countries, with successful ones minimising both health and economic impacts. Public trust in institutions played a crucial role in the effectiveness of measures like lockdowns and vaccinations (Zaki et al., 2022[69]). Conversely, effective pandemic management increased public trust in government, though with uneven effects in certain communities.

Australia's response to the pandemic was highly effective and yielded an initial "rally around the flag" effect

Australia's unique geographical position as an isolated island continent provided a significant advantage in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's early decision to close its international borders on March 20, 2020, was a crucial factor in its effective response strategy. While Australia officially adopted a "maximum suppression" approach, its implementation closely resembled a zero-COVID policy. This strategy encompassed stringent border controls, both international and interstate, rigorous quarantine measures, and rapid containment responses to any quarantine breaches (Basseal et al., 2023[70]). These policies continued into 2021, resulting in just 34 612 cumulative cases by August 2021, maintaining Australia's status as one of the countries with the lowest per capita infection rates among advanced democracies (Zaki et al., 2022[69]). Contrary to expectations in a pandemic, Australia was one of 9 OECD countries which saw the mortality rate fall during COVID-19 (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. The adjusted mortality rate dropped in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic

Percentage increase in deaths in 2020-22 compared to the baseline years, 2015-19



Note: OECD average excluding accession countries. Overall, when the number of deaths from 2015 to 2022 are adjusted for changes in population size and structure, the OECD counted an increase in deaths of just over 5.3% on average during the period 2020-22, compared with the pre-pandemic period. "Non-adjusted" mortality refers to the raw counts of deaths recorded during the covered periods, without considering changes in population size or structure. "Adjusted" deaths are mortality figures normalised to account for changes in population size, gender, and age. When adjusted, nine OECD countries reported fewer deaths during this period than might have been expected, with estimates indicating New Zealand had around 4.4% fewer deaths over the three-year period than might have been expected if population structure and size had remained constant between 2015 and 2022. On the other hand, even when considering the significant changes in population size and structure, Mexico and Colombia recorded significantly higher numbers of deaths than expected, at +30.5% and +23.5%, respectively.
Source: (Morgan et al., 2023[71]).

StatLink https://stat.link/y5csun

During times of crisis, particularly those that pose significant threats to a nation's security, public trust in government tends to increase dramatically, regardless of political affiliations or policy preferences. A survey conducted in both New Zealand and Australia in July 2020 found that around 80% of respondents in both countries agreed that the government was generally trustworthy (Goldfinch, Taplin and Gauld, 2021[72]). The study also revealed that approximately three-quarters of the participants believed that the government's management of the pandemic had increased their trust. Further research analysing thirteen survey waves carried out from January 2020 to October 2022 in Australia showed a substantial initial increase in public confidence across both the federal and state level of government. This heightened trust remained stable throughout the first year of the pandemic before waning (Biddle, Gray and McAllister, 2024[73]).

The independent inquiry into Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic found that following an initial boost in the early stages of the pandemic, trust erosion over time was primarily caused by a perceived lack of transparency, fairness, compassion, and proportionality in government responses. To prevent similar issues in future pandemics, key recommendations include making decision-making processes and evidence more transparent, tailoring communications for different audiences, increasing the use of behavioural insights, and establishing stronger privacy protections for digital technologies. The panel emphasised the importance of proactively rebuilding trust with affected communities and implementing robust privacy legislation, particularly given the increased reliance on digital solutions. This includes strict controls on data sharing with law enforcement and ensuring ethical use of personal information.

The management of the pandemic improved public awareness of government responsibilities in a complex federal setting

Australia's management of the COVID-19 pandemic involved a complex interplay between federal and state governments, each with distinct responsibilities. While the Commonwealth government wielded significant power through the Biosecurity Act 2015 and responsibility for macroeconomic and fiscal policy, implementing measures such as border controls and economic support, the states retained primary responsibility for public health measures, including lockdowns and testing facilities (Twomey, 2020[74]). This division of responsibilities necessitated robust joint decision-making mechanisms, particularly given the dual nature of the crisis as both a health and economic challenge (Saunders, 2021[75]). The shared management of the health system, with states running hospitals and the federal government providing substantial funding, further underscored the need for co-ordination. Despite the potential for conflict, Australia's federal structure proved effective in balancing unity and diversity in its pandemic response.

The COVID-19 pandemic required innovative institutional arrangements in Australia to facilitate increased co-ordination and joint decision-making across various levels of government. The most notable of these was the creation of the National Cabinet on March 15, 2020, (Murphy and Arban, 2021[76]). This body, which included the Prime Minister, State Premiers, and Territory Chief Ministers, replaced the slower, more bureaucratic Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The National Cabinet met more frequently, utilised video-conferencing technology, and operated with greater informality and confidentiality (Twomey, 2020[74]). The structure's success in managing the pandemic response led to its permanent establishment in May 2020, replacing COAG, and was attributed to its practicality, problem-solving focus, bipartisanship, and agility. Likewise, the National Co-ordination Mechanism (NCM) was established to support the National Cabinet's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, co-ordinating engagement between various levels of government and industry sectors (Royal Commission, 2020[77]). In October 2020, the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework was updated to incorporate the NCM.

The federal nature of Australian public governance allowed for a flexible and tailored response to the COVID-19 crisis. This system enabled different approaches based on varying circumstances and preferences across the country (Twomey, 2020[74]). The public demonstrated an ability to distinguish between levels of government and assign appropriate responsibilities, with a higher level of restriction having a negative association with confidence in state governments and a positive association with confidence in the federal government (Biddle, Gray and McAllister, 2024[73]). Additionally, numerous stakeholders interviewed in the context of this study highlighted that the experience of the pandemic clarified lines of accountability, as state governments had to justify their specific social distancing and quarantine measures to their constituents. It also allowed for sub-national experimentation, as seen in the adoption and spread of effective policies like mandatory mask-wearing (Murphy and Arban, 2021[76]). These benefits highlight the advantages of Australia's federal system in managing the complex challenges posed by the pandemic.

Of course, this differentiated approach enabled by Australia's federal structure was not without challenges or negative consequences. The internal border closures inherent to its "maximum suppression approach," caused economic disruption and emotional hardship for many citizens—especially in borderland communities. In some areas, particularly those with prolonged restrictions like Victoria, trust in institutions may have eroded (Biddle, Gray and McAllister, 2024[73]), potentially strengthening fringe movements like the Sovereign Citizens. While some variation in state-level health protection measures was likely inevitable, some scholars have urged public officials to better measure and weigh the appropriateness of these differences in the future against their contribution to national confusion and disruption (Basseal et al., 2023[70]).

Welfare spending increased significantly during the pandemic

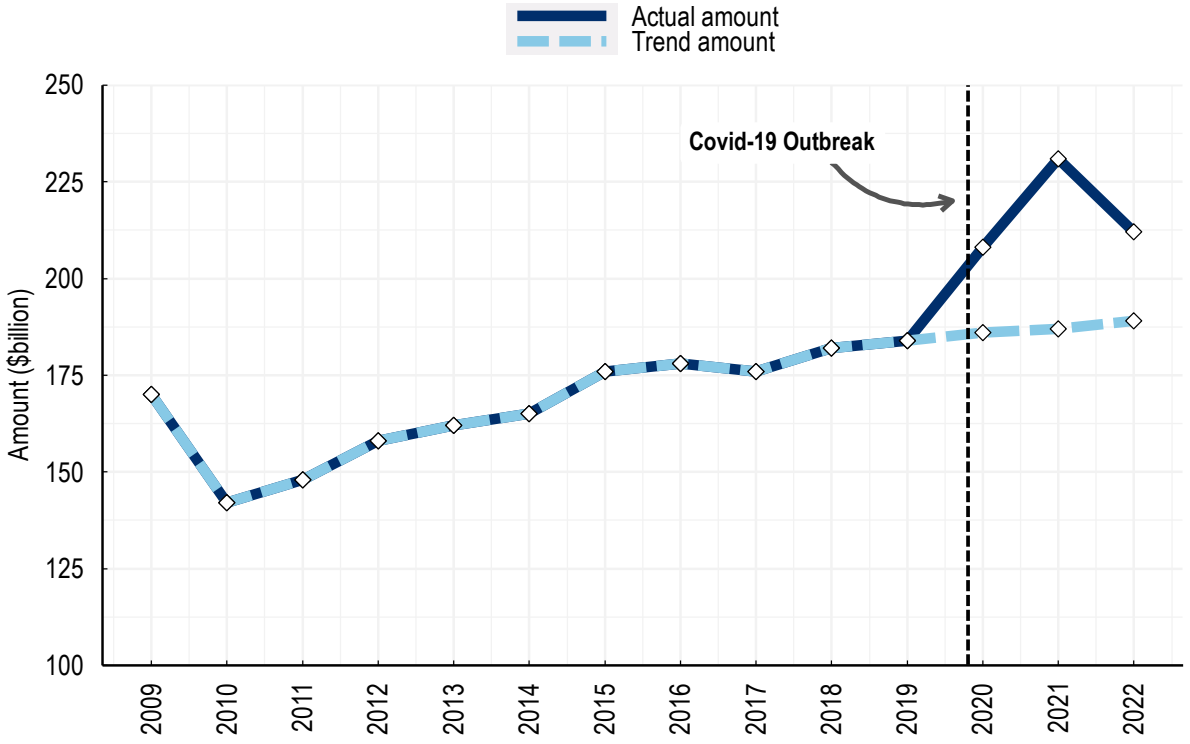
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the need for public social spending across OECD countries. Poverty rates were already rising prior to the pandemic, with poverty levels increased from 13.2% to 14.6% for the general population and from 16.2% to 19% for children between late 2019 and March 2020 (Davidson, Bradbury and Wong, 2023[78]). Given the disruptions caused by the pandemic, poverty could have risen drastically absent government intervention. The public social spending-to-GDP ratio rose from 20% in 2019 to 23% across the OECD on average in 2020, primarily due to increased spending rather than GDP decline (OECD, 2023[79]). This surge was crucial in addressing the economic impacts of the pandemic, particularly in combating rising poverty rates.

The Australian government implemented several economic response measures to support people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023[80]). Income support measures included Economic Support Payments, which provided one-off payments to eligible recipients of AUD 750 in March and July 2020 and two additional payments of AUD 250 each in November 2020 and March 2021 to eligible recipients. A Coronavirus Supplement was introduced in March 2020 as an additional payment for people receiving income support payments, initially providing AUD 550 per fortnight to eligible income support recipients, which was later reduced to AUD 250 and then AUD 150 per fortnight before ending in March 2021. The government also made temporary changes to the JobSeeker Payment, expanding eligibility, waiving certain tests, and waiting periods, and making the partner income test more generous. Beyond welfare payments, the government introduced the JobKeeper Payment, a wage subsidy paid to eligible businesses from March 2020 to March 2021 that also acted as an income transfer to households. It is worth noting that while pandemic income support measures ended, there has not been a reduction in the base rates of income support payments, with working age and student payments (for example JobSeeker) seeing permanent increases in the base rate since the pandemic. These measures represented a significant shift towards welfare generosity and relaxation of conditionality, which was particularly notable coming from a conservative government (Ramia and Perrone, 2023[81]).

Prior to the pandemic, welfare spending had grown steadily, following population growth, averaging around AUD 7 300 per person since 2017-18 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023[80]). During the 2019-21 period, spending increased by 11% annually, reaching AUD 9 010 per person in 2020-21 due to COVID-19 measures (Figure 1.5). In 2021-22, spending decreased by 8.5% but nevertheless remained higher than the pre-pandemic 10-year trend.

Figure 1.5. Government welfare spending during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased compared with the pre-pandemic period

Welfare spending by Australian government (constant prices) during the COVID-19 pandemic (2019–22) compared to the pre-pandemic period



Note: This figure shows the welfare spending in billion dollars from 2009 to 2022. The solid blue line represents the actual amount of welfare spending, while the dashed light blue line shows the trend amount. Actual amount is the welfare spending in 2022 prices. The trend amount is calculated by applying the average annual growth rate of welfare spending over the previous 10 years to the period from 2019 to 2022 with an assumption that the average annual growth rate for the previous 10-year period remains the same for 2019-2020 to 2021-2022.
Source: (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023[80]).

StatLink https://stat.link/u591ib

Increased welfare spending had a significant positive impact on poverty rates and well-being in Australia. The introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement and the temporary suspension of mutual obligation requirements led to substantial improvements in various aspects of recipients' lives, including better ability to meet basic needs, enhanced long-term financial security, improved physical and emotional well-being, and increased engagement in both paid and unpaid work (Klein et al., 2022[82]). The poverty rate fell dramatically, particularly in the June quarter of 2020, dropping to 12% overall and 13.7% among children (Davidson, Bradbury and Wong, 2023[78]). The impact was especially pronounced for specific groups, such as those relying on JobSeeker Payment, where poverty rates decreased by more than half.

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light complex issues surrounding income support payments in Australia. While income support measures during the height of the pandemic were well-received, their subsequent withdrawal has generated a backlash effect in some communities, potentially eroding trust between citizens and the government. Stakeholder interviews conducted as part of this study reveal a growing perception that the measures' withdrawal reflects a lack of willingness to address financial hardship.

1.3. Conclusion

Australia stands out as a nation with robust democratic foundations and public trust levels that have historically consistently aligned with the OECD average. The country's strong democratic institutions enjoy widespread support, with a vast majority of citizens viewing life in a democratically governed nation as desirable and beneficial.

While Australia's multicultural heritage and positive attitudes toward diversity seem to contribute to high levels of interpersonal trust, the nation faces several ongoing challenges. These include managing economic disparities, addressing potential polarisation risks, and addressing the continuing impact of colonial legacies. Housing and economic inequality create significant social pressures, and despite meaningful progress, substantial disparities persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across a wide range of indicators. While democracy cannot guarantee specific outcomes, both inequality and the lack of basic conditions for well-being alter people's relationship with public institutions and can undermine democratic participation and processes.

The evolution of Australia's public sector, particularly the recent uptick in public sector capacity following years of decline, and its response to recent crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates both the adaptability of its institutions and the complexities of maintaining effective governance in a federal system. However, trends of weakened market competition have made policy decision-making potentially more vulnerable to capture by special interests. Despite these challenges, Australia's commitment to measuring and enhancing public trust, coupled with its strong democratic foundations, positions it well for addressing future governance challenges while maintaining its democratic resilience.

References

ABS (2024), *Labour Account Australia, Final Quarterly Balanced: Subdivision, Division and Total All Industries*, https://dataexplorer.abs.gov.au/vis?fs[0]=Labour%2C0%7CEmployment%20and%20unemployment%23EMPLOYMENT_UNEMPLOYMENT%23&fs[1]=Adjustment%20Type%2C0%7COriginal%2310%23&pg=0&fc=Adjustment%20Type&isAvailabilityDisabled=false&snb=5&df[ds]=LABOUR_TOPICS&df[id]=LABOUR_ACCT_Q&df[ag]=ABS&df[vs]=1.0.0&dq=M14%2BM13%2BM12..TOTAL.10.Q&pd=2020-Q1%2C2024-Q3&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false&ly[cl]=TIME_PERIOD&ly[rw]=MEASURE (accessed on 24 January 2025). [53]

ABS (2019), *Public sector's share of jobs decreases over the past nine years*, https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/public-sectors-share-jobs-decreases-over-past-nine-years (accessed on 30 October 2024). [52]

Adams, J. et al. (2020), "Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization", https://doi.org/10.3386/W26669. [34]

Algan, Y. and P. Cahuc (2013), "Trust, growth and well-being: New evidence and policy implications", No. 7464, IZA Discussion Paper. [2]

Andrews, D., E. Dwyer and A. Triggs (2023), "Summary The state of competition in Australia". [66]

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), *Snapshot of Australia, 2021*, Snapshot of Australia, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/snapshot-australia/latest-release#culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-communities (accessed on 10 October 2024). [24]

Australian Bureau of Statistics (n.d.), *Income and wealth inequality*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/prosperous/income-and-wealth-inequality (accessed on 11 October 2024). [28]

Australian Government (2023), "The Australian Government's report on the Audit of Employment", https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/Audit%20of%20Employment%20-%20Report_1.pdf (accessed on 30 October 2024). [55]

Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs (2024), *Multicultural Framework Review - Australian Government Response*, https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review/australian-government-response (accessed on 10 October 2024). [22]

Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs (2024), "Strengthening Australian democracy A practical agenda for democratic resilience Report of the Strengthening Democracy Taskforce", https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/strengthening-australian-democracy.pdf (accessed on 10 October 2024). [36]

Australian Government - Productivity Commission (2023), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area12 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [42]

Australian Government - Treasury (2023), *Competition Review*, https://treasury.gov.au/review/competition-review-2023 (accessed on 15 October 2024). [67]

Australian Human Rights Commission (2023), *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/uluru-statement-heart (accessed on 12 October 2024). [45]

Australian Human Rights Commission (2017), *Historical Context*, https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/significance/historical-context-the-stolen-generations (accessed on 12 October 2024). [46]

Australian Human Rights Commission (1997), *Bringing Them Home - Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_h (accessed on 11 October 2024). [40]

Australian Human Rights Commission (n.d.), *About Constitutional Recognition*, https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/about-constitutional-recognition (accessed on 11 October 2024). [41]

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023), *Welfare expenditure*, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/welfare-expenditure (accessed on 13 October 2024). [80]

Australian Public Service Commission (2024), *State of the Service Report 2023-24 State of the Service Report*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/APSC%20State%20of%20the%20Service%202023-24.pdf (accessed on 16 January 2025). [54]

Australian Public Service Commission (2023), *State of the Service Report*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/APSC%20-%202022-23%20State%20of%20the%20Service%20Report.pdf. [61]

Australian Reconciliation Barometer (2022), *2022 Australian Reconciliation barometer*, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Australian-Reconciliation-Barometer-2022.pdf. [51]

Basseal, J. et al. (2023), "Key lessons from the COVID-19 public health response in Australia", *The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific*, Vol. 30, p. 100616, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2022.100616. [70]

Bean, C. (2001), "Party politics, political leaders and trust in government in Australia", *Political Science*, Vol. 53/1, pp. 17-27, https://doi.org/10.1177/003231870105300102. [10]

Beneke, F. (2021), "Competition Law and Political Influence of Large Corporations-Antitrust Analysis and the Link between Political and Economic Institutions", https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3831269. [62]

Biddle, N. and M. Gray (2024), "Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network | Discussion Paper 1 i POLIS@ANU: The Centre for Social Policy Research Income inequality and democratic resilience-Impacts and policy choices Acknowledgement and series note". [29]

Biddle, N., M. Gray and I. McAllister (2024), "Federalism and Confidence in Australian Governments During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 54/2, pp. 257-282, https://doi.org/10.1093/PUBLIUS/PJAD032. [73]

Brezzi, M. et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en. [4]

Claassen, C. (2019), "Does Public Support Help Democracy Survive?", *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 64/1, pp. 118-134, https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12452. [18]

Closing the Gap (2024), *History of Closing the Gap*, https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/resources/history (accessed on 26 October 2024). [49]

Colley, L., S. Woods and B. Head (2022), "Pandemic effects on public service employment in Australia", *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 33/1, pp. 56-79, https://doi.org/10.1177/10353046211056093. [60]

Commonwealth of Australia (2024), *Statement 4: Meeting Australia's Housing Challenge*, https://budget.gov.au/content/bp1/download/bp1_2024-25.pdf. [31]

Commonwealth of Australia (2024), "TOWARDS FAIRNESS A multicultural Australia for all", https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms. (accessed on 10 October 2024). [21]

Commonwealth of Australia, APSC (2024), *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy: 2023 National Survey*. [15]

Dassonneville, R. and I. McAllister (2021), "Explaining the decline of political trust in Australia", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 56/3, pp. 280-297, https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2021.1960272. [9]

Davidson, P., B. Bradbury and M. Wong (2023), *Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected*. [78]

Edelman Trust Barometer (2023), *2023 Edelman Trust Barometer | Navigating a polarised world*, https://www.edelman.com/trust/2023/trust-barometer (accessed on 10 October 2024). [35]

Freedom House (2024), *Australia: Freedom in the World 2024 Country Report*, https://freedomhouse.org/country/australia/freedom-world/2024 (accessed on 10 October 2024). [14]

Fukuyama, F. (1995), *Trust : the social virtues and the creation of prosperity.*, Free Press, New York. [3]

GallupAnalytics (2022), *Gallup - World Poll 2008-2022*, https://ga.gallup.com/ (accessed on 10 July 2023). [6]

Goldfinch, S., R. Taplin and R. Gauld (2021), "Trust in government increased during the Covid-19 pandemic in Australia and New Zealand", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 80/1, pp. 3-11, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12459. [72]

Haerpfer, C. et al. (2022), *World Values Survey Trend File (1981-2022) Cross-National Data-Set*, JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat, Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria. [8]

Hugo, G. (2001), *A century of population change in Australia*, c=AU; o=Commonwealth of Australia; ou=Australian Bureau of Statistics, https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/0b82c2f2654c3694ca2569de002139d9?Open (accessed on 11 October 2024). [38]

Independent Review of the APS (2019), *Our public service our future*, https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/independent-review-australian-public-service. [59]

IPSOS (2020), *Social Cohesion in the Pandemic Age: A Global Perspective*, https://www.ipsos.com/en/social-cohesion-pandemic-age-global-perspective (accessed on 11 October 2024). [26]

Klein, E. et al. (2022), "An exploratory study examining the changes to Australia's social security system during COVID-19 lockdown measures", *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 57/1, p. 51, https://doi.org/10.1002/AJS4.196. [82]

Lührmann, A. et al. (2018), *Democracy Report 2018: Democracy for All?*. [13]

McDonald, C. and L. Raderschall (2019), "Indigenous community capacity and multi-level governance"*, OECD Regional Development Working Papers*, No. 2019/04, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/8036b14d-en. [43]

Morgan, D. et al. (2023), *Examining recent mortality trends*, OECD Publishing, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/examining-recent-mortality-trends_78f69783-en.html (accessed on 13 October 2024). [71]

Murphy, J. and E. Arban (2021), "Assessing the Performance of Australian Federalism in Responding to the Pandemic", *Publius*, Vol. 51/4, pp. 627-649, https://doi.org/10.1093/PUBLIUS/PJAB026. [76]

NIAA (n.d.), *Culture and Empowering Communities*, https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/culture-and-empowering-communities (accessed on 12 October 2024). [48]

Nord, M. et al. (2024), "Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot", https://v-dem.net/about/funders/ (accessed on 10 October 2024). [12]

Norris, P. (2022), *In Praise of Skepticism*, Oxford University Press. [16]

OECD (2024), *Employment rate*, https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/employment-rate.html?oecdcontrol-40985420ae-var3=2023&oecdcontrol-40985420ae-var5=A (accessed on 27 January 2025). [33]

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. [5]

OECD (2024), "The interaction between competition and democracy"*, OECD Roundtables on Competition Policy Papers*, No. 316, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/8b3a575f-en. [68]

OECD (2023), "OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2023", p. 57, https://doi.org/10.1787/1794A7C9-EN. [63]

OECD (2023), *The rise and fall of public social spending with the COVID-19 pandemic*, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-rise-and-fall-of-public-social-spending-with-the-covid-19-pandemic_12563432-en.html (accessed on 13 October 2024). [79]

OECD (2022), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en. [7]

OECD (2022), *PH6.1 Rental Regulation*, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/data/datasets/affordable-housing-database/ph6-1-rental-regulation.pdf. [32]

OECD (2020), *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Australia*, OECD Rural Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ab4d8d52-en. [37]

Parliament of Australia (2024), *Better Competition, Better Prices: Report on the inquiry into promoting economic dynamism,*, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/RB000263/toc_pdf/BetterCompetition,BetterPrices.pdf. [65]

Pew Research Centre (2024), *4. Satisfaction with democracy and ratings for political leaders, parties*, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/02/28/satisfaction-with-democracy-and-ratings-for-political-leaders-parties/. [17]

Pietsch, T. et al. (2023), "Histories of Australian Democracy Australian Centre for Public History UTS Working Paper", https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10417730. [23]

Podger, A. et al. (2023), *Dilemmas in Public Management in Greater China and Australia*, ANU Press, https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/87687/9781760465742.pdf?sequence=1#page=399 (accessed on 30 October 2024). [58]

Podger, A. and D. Kettl (2024), "How much damage can a politicized public service do? Lessons from Australia", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 84/1, pp. 160-172, https://doi.org/10.1111/PUAR.13789. [56]

Poma, E. and B. Pistoresi (2023), "Government Support Measures, Trust in Institutions and Effects on Satisfaction with Democracy During the COVID-19 Outbreak", *Comparative Economic Studies*, Vol. 66/2, pp. 355-387, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41294-023-00223-9. [20]

Productivity Commission (2024), "Volume 1 - Study report - Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap", http://www.pc.gov.au (accessed on 26 October 2024). [50]

Productivity Commission (2023), "5-year Productivity Inquiry: A competitive, dynamic and sustainable future Inquiry report-volume 3", http://www.pc.gov.au (accessed on 16 January 2025). [64]

Putnam, R. (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Pres, Princeton, New Jersey. [1]

Ramia, G. and L. Perrone (2023), "Crisis Management, Policy Reform, and Institutions: The Social Policy Response to COVID-19 in Australia", *Social Policy and Society*, Vol. 22/3, pp. 562-576, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746421000427. [81]

Reconciliation Australia (2021), *Reconciliation Timeline: Key Moments*, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-timeline-key-moments/ (accessed on 12 October 2024). [47]

Royal Commission (2023), *Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme*, https://robodebt.royalcommission.gov.au/ (accessed on 30 October 2024). [57]

Royal Commission (2020), *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report*. [77]

Ryan, L. et al. (2017-2022), *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia 1788-1930*, http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1340762 (accessed on 11 October 2024). [39]

Saunders, C. (2021), *How Federations Responded to Covid-19*, http://law.unimelb.edu. (accessed on 13 October 2024). [75]

SBS News (2013), *Timeline: Indigenous rights movement*, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/timeline-indigenous-rights-movement/fb5nvvsdu. [44]

Scanlon Foundation Research Institute (2024), *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*, https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024 (accessed on 17 January 2025). [25]

Scanlon Foundation Research Institute (2023), "MAPPING SOCIAL COHESION 2023". [30]

Sila, U. and V. Dugain (2019), "Income, wealth and earnings inequality in Australia: Evidence from the HILDA survey", *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 1538, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/cab6789d-en. [27]

Twomey, A. (2020), *Multi-Level Government and COVID-19: Australia as a case study*. [74]

Werner, A. (2016), "Party responsiveness and voter confidence in Australia", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 51/3, pp. 436-457, https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2016.1219692. [11]

Zaki, B. et al. (2022), "In trust we trust: The impact of trust in government on excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Public Policy and Administration*, Vol. 37/2, p. 226, https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767211058003. [69]

Zmerli, S. and K. Newton (2007), *Trust in people, confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy*, Routledge. [19]

Notes

[1] Social cohesion based here on citizens' attitudes relative to social relations (trust in other people, shared priorities with others, and diversity), Connectedness (national identity, trust in the political system, and fairness of treatment) and Common good (helping others, respecting laws, and corruption).

[2] These include foreign interference, social media and digital platforms, misinformation and disinformation, artificial intelligence, dissatisfaction with government, inequality, discrimination and intolerance, polarisation and division.

[3] Defined as the deliberate killing of six or more relatively undefended people in one operation.

[4] This includes employees in Commonwealth government (including defence force personnel); in State government; and in Local government.

2 Trust levels and drivers of trust in Australian public institutions

This chapter presents the levels of trust in public institutions in Australia, based on data from the 2021 and 2023 OECD Survey on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. It addresses how levels of trust in public institutions differ across groups with different socio-economic and demographic backgrounds as well as different perceptions of political agency and attitudes, and how trust gaps across groups have evolved between 2021 and 2023. The chapter also summarises how perceptions of public governance are associated with trust in Australia's federal government and parliament, the Australian Public Service and local government.

Within the context of a legacy of relatively high but fluctuating public trust (see Section 1.1.1 in Chapter 1), the Australian Public Service (APS) Reform programme seeks to deepen trust in government and public administration. The four APS Reform priority areas are for an APS that embodies integrity in everything it does; that puts people and business at the centre of policy and services; that is a model employer; and that has the capability to do its job well. This chapter provides evidence on current levels of trust and their evolution between 2021 and 2023, as well as an overview of the drivers of trust in public institutions in Australia that can help different levels of government and other public institutions identify opportunities for policy action to enhance trust.

This chapter consists of three sections: The first and second sections describe trust levels in different institutions and their evolution between 2021 and 2023 as measured by the OECD Trust survey; followed by an overview of differences in trust levels in the federal government between groups with different backgrounds. The third section discusses how perceptions of government competencies and values have evolved and provides insights into how these are associated with levels of trust in different public institutions. This analysis, which serves to identify the drivers of trust, sets the stage for the subsequent two chapters, which analyse expectations and perceptions of government competencies and values in more depth to highlight opportunities for policy action to enhance trust.

Box 2.1. The OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions and its implementation in Australia

The OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD Trust Survey) was created to allow democracies to assess trust levels and their drivers as a means to improve public governance and reinforce trust. Through a representative population survey, it measures people's trust in different public institutions and their perceptions of government competencies (reliability and responsiveness) and values (integrity, fairness and openness). Details about the analytical framework the survey is based on can be found in Brezzi et al. (2021[1]); and about the survey implementation in the 2021 and 2023 waves in Nguyen et al. (2022[2]) and OECD (2024[3]), respectively.

Despite the survey's relative novelty, OECD member countries have shown an increasing commitment to the survey. In the inaugural 2021 survey, 22 OECD countries including Australia participated. A year later, through the Luxembourg Declaration, Ministers and other high-level representatives called for the survey to be implemented every two years. In 2023, 30 OECD countries, again including Australia, took part. Out of a recognition that other countries could benefit from the learnings from the Trust Survey, in 2024, the OECD members created the Global Trust Survey Project, which allows non-member democracies to participate in the Trust survey on an equal footing and fosters a global dialogue on building trust and reinforcing democracy. A first extension beyond OECD member countries and accession candidates is in preparation in six Latin American and Caribbean countries at the time of writing.

The implementation of the survey in Australia closely followed the data collection in other countries. In Australia as well as most other participating countries, data collection occurred through an online survey conducted by the survey providers Ipsos (2023) and YouGov (2021). In 2023, the data collection in Australia was from October 25th to November 26th, aligning with the data collection period in almost all countries in October and November 2023; and in 2021, from November 26th to December 15th.

Table 2.1. Overview of survey quotas implemented in the Australian survey

		Categories	Source
Age	hard quota	**Six groups**: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+	*OECD.Stat: Population 2020*
Gender	hard quota	**Two groups**: female and male ("other" and "pnta" as an option)	*OECD.Stat: Population 2020*
Education	hard quota	**Three groups:** low, medium, high	*Dataset: Census of Population and Housing (2021)*
Large region	hard quota	**Four groups:** 1. New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory 2. Victoria, Tasmania, 3. Queensland, 4. South Australia, Northern Territory, Western Australia	*OECD.Stat: Regional Demography – Population, Large regions*
Income	soft quota	**Three groups:** bottom 20%, middle 60%, top 20%	*Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Household Income Data (2019)*

Note: The table shows the survey quotas and groups implemented in the OECD Trust Survey in Australia in 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

The target number for the nationally representative sample, assured through hard quotas on age, gender, education and large region and a soft quota on income (Table 2.1), was generally 2 000 respondents per country. In Australia, the final achieved samples were 2 020 (2023) and 2 014 (2021). Details about the achieved 2021 and 2023 samples can be found in Annex A.

In 2023, additional questions specific to Australia were added to the general OECD Trust Survey questionnaire. They cover aspects related to the perception of the integrity and orientation towards the long-term interests of society of the Australian Public Service. The question wording is as follows:

- If a government minister considers a new policy, how likely do you think it is that the Australian Public Service will give Government Ministers honest advice?
- How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?
  - The Australian Public Service looks out for the long-term interests of society, even as elected governments and society change.
  - Australian Government institutions act according to the best interest of society.

2.1. Within a context marked by cost-of-living concerns and changes in political leadership, trust in Australian institutions has risen since 2021

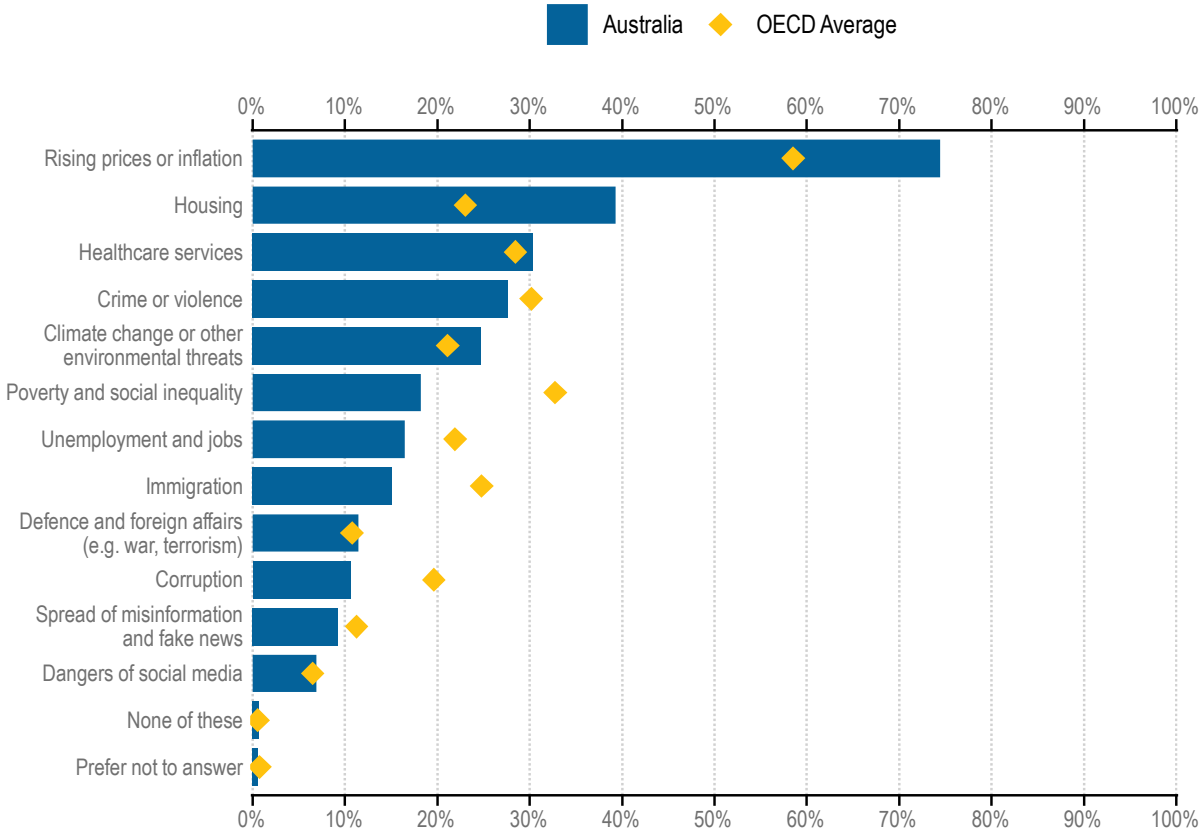
Trust levels in public institutions and perceptions of public governance performance can be affected by recent economic, social and political events experienced by the population.

In late 2023, when the OECD Trust Survey data were collected, Australians[1] were overwhelmingly concerned about inflation. Nearly three in four people in Australia (74%) named this topic as among the top three issues their country faced, compared to around six in ten (59%) people on average across the OECD (Figure 2.1). These concerns were rooted in inflation rates in 2022 and 2023 that far outpaced those experienced in any year since the early 1990s (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024[4]; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018[5]). These price increases were due in part to supply disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which have since eased, in part to increased

service and housing costs (Bullock, 2024[6]). Housing, in turn, is the second-most-frequently selected issue, mentioned by 39% of Australians, compared to 23% of people across the OECD. These topics are followed by healthcare and other essential services, selected by 30% of Australians (OECD average: 28%); crime and violence, selected by 28% of Australians (OECD average: 30%) and climate change and other environmental issues, selected by 25% of Australians (OECD average: 21%).

Figure 2.1. Inflation, an important concern for the majority of people across the OECD, is seen as an important challenge by close to three-quarters of Australians

Share of population who view policy issue as among the three most important ones facing their country, Australia and OECD average, 2023



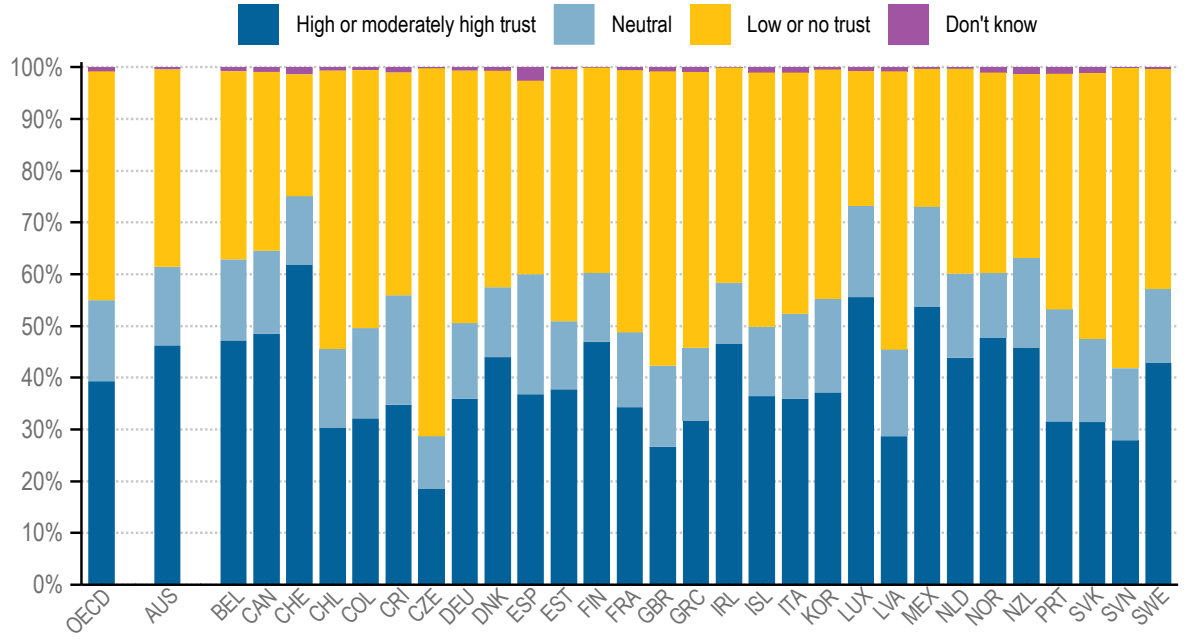
Note: The figure presents the share of the population who cited the respective issue as a reply to the question "What do you think are the three most important issues facing [COUNTRY]?". "OECD Average" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/jznhpv

Within this context, a comparatively high and rising share of Australians trusted the federal government. In 2023, 46% of Australians had high or moderately high trust in the federal government (selecting a response option from 6 to 10 on a 0-to-10-point scale), compared to an average of 39% across the 30 participating OECD countries (Figure 2.2). 38% of adults in Australia and 44% across the OECD had low or no trust in their national/federal government (corresponding to a response from 0 to 4); and 15% in Australia and 16% across the OECD provided a neutral response (corresponding to a response of 5).

Figure 2.2. Trust in the federal government in Australia is above the OECD average

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in their national/federal government (on a 0-10 scale), 2023



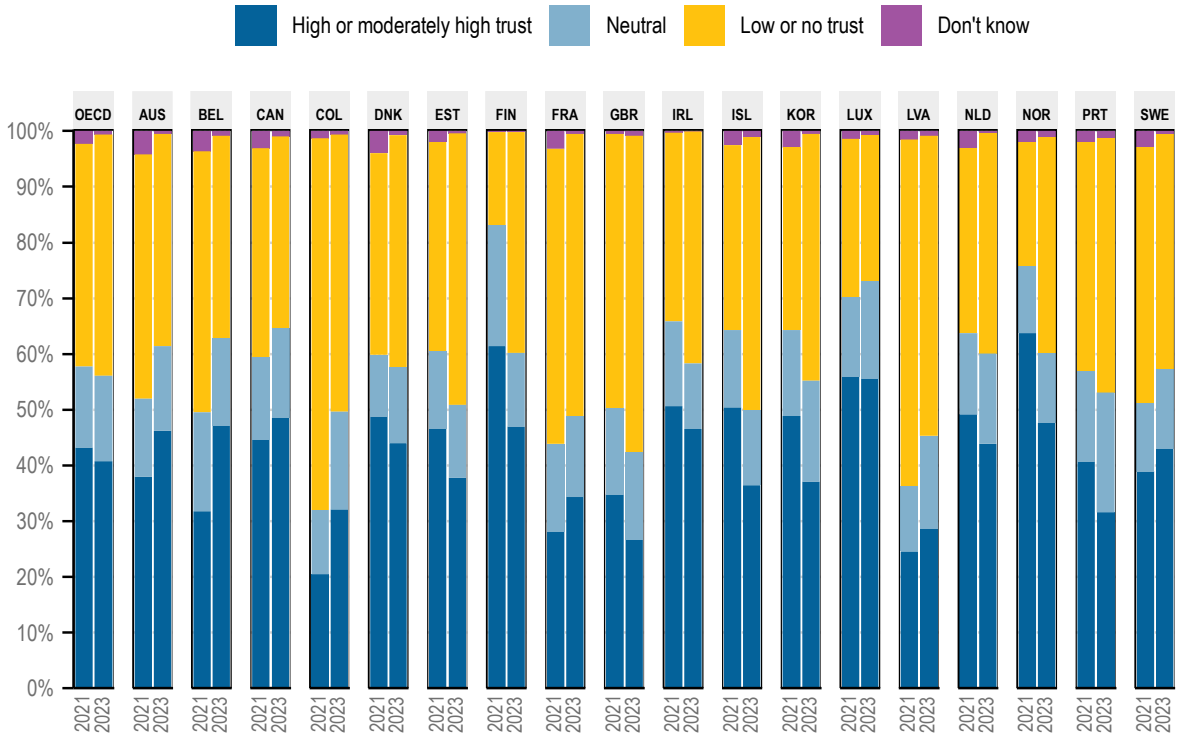
Note: 'High or moderately high' corresponds to the aggregation of response options 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national/federal government?"; neutral to option 5 and "low or no" to response options 0-4. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/1xaktf

The picture of higher trust in the federal government in Australia compared to the OECD average in 2023 contrasts with the situation in 2021. The share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government rose by eight percentage points over the period, taking their share from slightly below to markedly above the OECD average (Figure 2.3). As discussed in Chapter 1, the process of going to the polls, in particular, if leading to a change in political leadership, can affect trust. The 2022 federal election may thus have had a positive impact on trust levels, reflected not only in rising trust in the federal government but also in other institutions. In contrast, across the eighteen OECD countries with available data for both years, the average share of the population with high or moderately high trust in the national government dropped by two percentage points.

Figure 2.3. While across the OECD, there was a modest decline in trust in the national government between 2021 and 2023, in Australia, the opposite was true

Share of population who indicate different levels of trust in their national government (on a 0-10 scale), 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions across two survey waves of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government?". A 0-4 response corresponds to 'low or no trust', a 5 to 'neutral' and a 6-10 to 'high or moderately high trust'. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023. Mexico and New Zealand participated in 2021, but the survey for this year did not include the question about trust in the national government for these countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/1s8u7z

Trust in other public institutions likewise increased in Australia from 2021 to 2023. And as in most OECD countries, people in Australia place the higher trust in law-and-order institutions than in institutions that are perceived as more political, with trust in the public service and local government falling in the middle of the spectrum.

Regarding 'law-and-order' institutions according to the OECD Trust Survey, in 2023, more than two-thirds of people in Australia (68%) had high or moderately high trust in the police, compared to 63% on average across the OECD (Figure 2.4). This percentage even slightly exceeds the share who trust other people (65%). Close to six in ten people in Australia (59%) have high or moderately high trust in courts and the judicial system, compared to 54% across the OECD. Results from the June 2023 wave of the Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy survey also find that the police and courts are among the most trusted institutions (Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Public Service Commission, 2024[7]). The Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy Survey moreover reveals that ambulance, fire and other emergency services public health institutions and the Australian Defence Forces are even more trusted than the police. Ombudsmen, the Australian Electoral Commission and the Australian Human Rights Commission are likewise highly trusted, though less so than the police.[2]

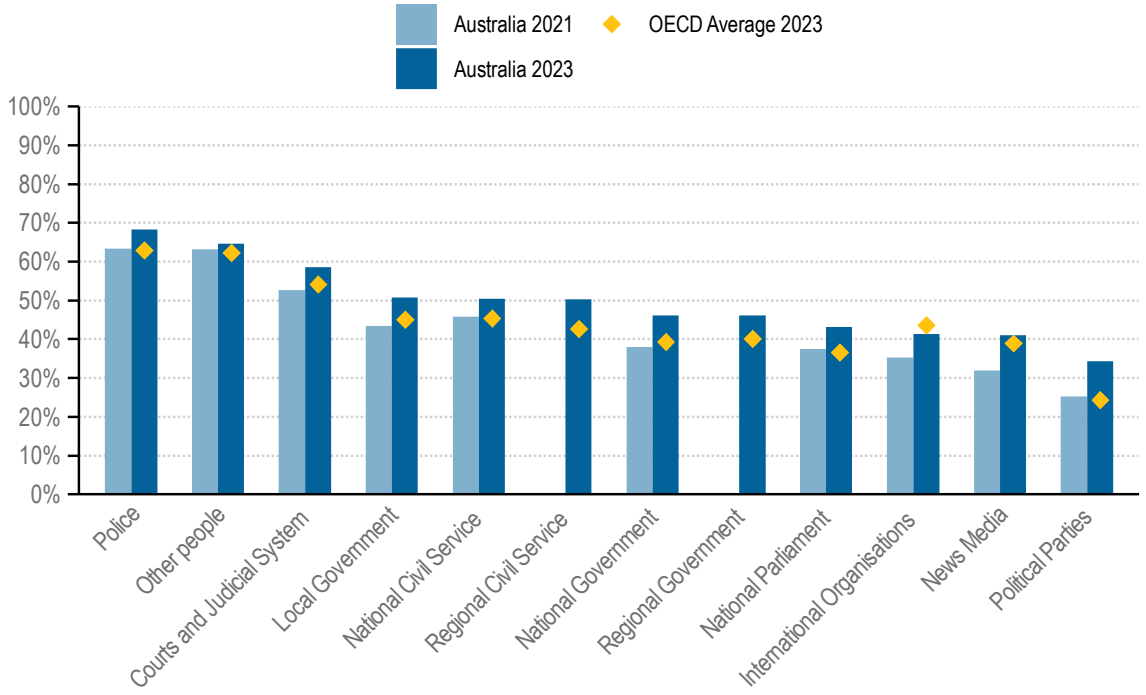
Institutions which are key in providing public services and with which individuals are in more frequent contact are likewise more frequently trusted than the federal government, but less so than law-and-order institutions. In particular, in 2023, one in two people in Australia had high or moderately high trust in the local government (51%) and the regional and federal civil service (50%) (Figure 2.4).

An equal percentage of 46% trust the national and their respective state or territory government. The assessment of the federal and state/territory governments are frequently closely linked: nearly 90% of respondents who either had high or moderately high trust or low and no trust in their national government had a corresponding trust level in their state or territory government. One potential may be that people are not always clear about the responsibilities of different levels of government and public administration within a complex federal system.

Finally, across the OECD and in Australia, institutions that some might associate with partisanship and political conflict are the least trusted. In particular, 43% of people in Australia, compared to an OECD average of 37%, had high or moderately high trust in the federal parliament; and only slightly more than one-third – 34%, compared to 24% across the OECD – had high or moderately high trust in political parties (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4. Australians exhibit higher trust in all public institutions, with the exception of international organisations, than the OECD average

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in different public institutions, other people and media, 2021 and 2023



Note: 'High or moderately high' corresponds to the aggregation of response options 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust [institution]?"; neutral to option 5 and "low or no" to response options 0-4. The question on trust in regional government is not asked in every participating country; and in some countries, the question about trust in the regional civil service refers to trust in the local or local and regional civil service.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

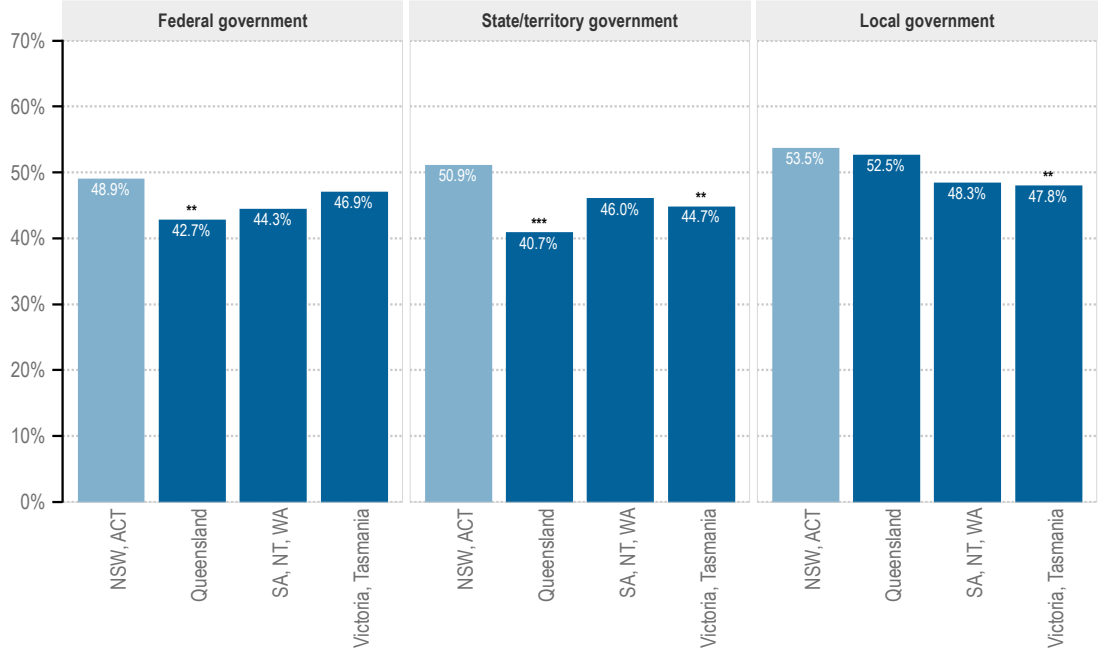
StatLink https://stat.link/o8kjbx

Similar to trust in the federal parliament, other institutions likewise gained in perceived trustworthiness since 2021. These increases were generally more pronounced for institutions that were typically less trusted, ranging from nine percentage points for political parties, 8 percentage points for local government, 6 percentage points for parliament and five percentage points for courts, to four percentage points for the police and federal civil service (Figure 2.4). These common movements in trust suggest that there is a certain amount of spill-over in trust levels between institutions, meaning that if a rising share of people find one public institution trustworthy, this can colour off on their perceptions of other institutions. Nevertheless, the markedly varying trust levels in different institutions also show that many people's assessment of different institutions are independent of each other.

Differences in trust by region appear to be smaller in Australia than in other OECD countries. The gap between the most trust and least trusting regions (in terms of trust in the national government) is smaller in Australia than in other OECD countries with the exceptions of Finland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands and the Slovak Republic – notably all much smaller countries. However, it is possible that geographic disaggregation at a more granular level would have revealed more pronounced geographic differences. Trust in all levels of government is highest in the combined region of the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales (Figure 2.5). Trust in the state/territory government varies most between regions, and trust in local government the least. Interestingly, while trust in the federal and state government is substantially lower in Queensland than in the other regions, when it comes to trust in local government, it is almost on part with the level observed in New South Wales/ACT.

Figure 2.5. Trust in the federal and state government is significantly lower in Queensland, while trust in local government is comparatively high

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in different public institutions by large region, 2023



Note: 'High or moderately high' corresponds to the aggregation of response options 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust [institution]?". The regions shown here correspond to the regions for which hard quotas were used in the survey, meaning that the proportion of survey respondents living in the region often consisting of two or more states or territories corresponds to their population shares. Additionally, the labels for two Australian regions have been abbreviated for clarity: "New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory" has been shortened to "NSW, ACT," and "South Australia, Northern Territory, Western Australia" to "SA, NT, WA." ** means that differences are statistically significant at the 95% level; *** means that differences are statistically significant at the 99% level. The reference group is shown in light blue.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/6wio0z

2.2. Trust rose among almost all groups between 2021 and 2023, but women and people who perceive themselves as financially stressed or politically excluded still lag behind

While the share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government diverges between different population groups, and while this divergence even increased in several cases between 2021 and 2023, trust in the federal government rose among almost all population groups over this timeframe.

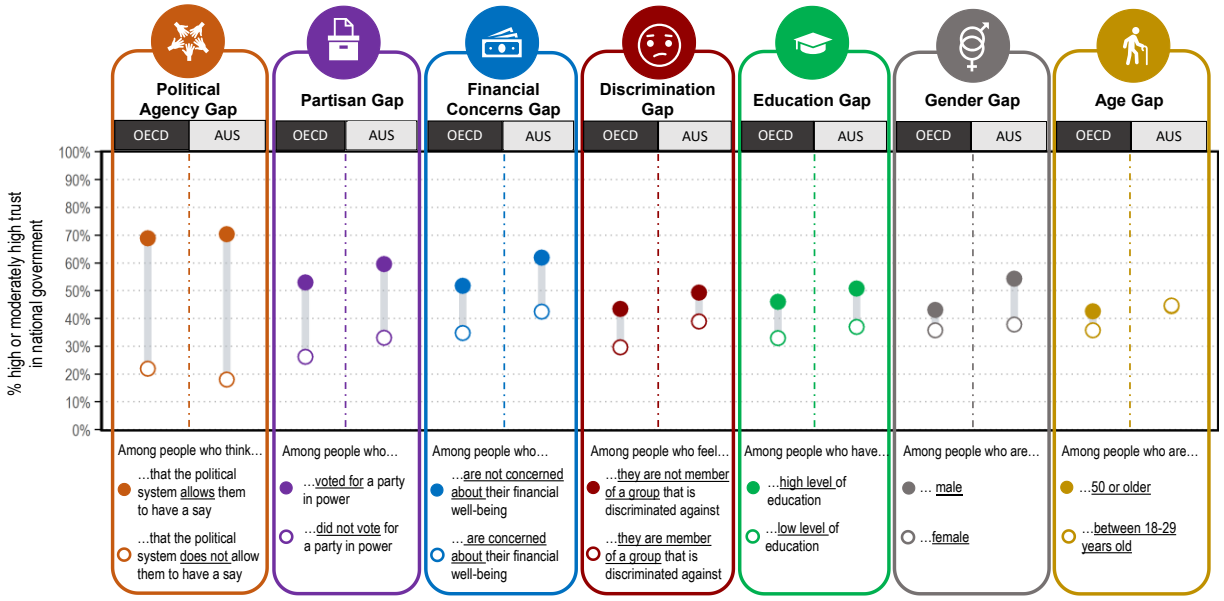
2.2.1. The largest trust gap is associated with perceptions of political voice

The perception of lacking political agency is the individual characteristic associated with the lowest levels of trust in the federal government. But individuals who feel financial stress, who are less educated or who identify as belonging to a discriminated-against group as well as women are also less likely to have high or moderately high trust in the federal government.

The gap in the share of people with high or moderately high trust in the federal government (simply called 'trust gap' from now on) between people who feel that people like them have a say in what government does – meaning those that perceive that they have political agency - and those who do not is one of the largest in the OECD, while the partisan trust gap – between those who have voted for the current government and those who didn't - is in line with the OECD average. In 2023, fewer than one in five people (18%) among those who do not feel that people like them have a say in what government does had high or moderately high trust in the national government, compared to 70% among those who feel like they had a say (Figure 2.6). This 52 percentage-point trust gap exceeds the 47 percentage-point OECD average. There are only six other OECD countries (Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany and New Zealand) with equal or larger political agency trust gaps. In contrast, the trust gap between those who voted or would have voted for the currently ruling party and those who did not or would not have voted for it is equal to 27 percentage points, which corresponds exactly to the average partisan trust gap across the 30 participating OECD countries.

Figure 2.6. Trust gaps related to gender and to political agency are larger in Australia than across the OECD

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government by population group, 2023



Note: The figure presents the weighted averages for Australia and the unweighted averages across OECD countries of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government?" by respondents' feelings of political agency, partisanship, socio-economic background and demographic characteristics. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' feeling confident to have a say in what the government does; by whether the respondent voted for or would have voted for a party in power in the last national election; whether they are somewhat or very concerned about their household's finances and economic well-being; having completed less than upper secondary education or having a post-secondary or tertiary degree; by gender and by age group.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/r6k8j1

Turning to trust gaps by socio-economic background, individuals who have financial concerns or who self-identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against have lower levels of trust in the national government than those who do not. In Australia, the share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government is twenty percentage points higher among those who do not have financial concerns for their household over the coming years compared to those who do, while this financial security trust gap has an average of seventeen percentage points across the OECD. The financial trust gap in Australia is thus ten percentage points higher than the trust gap between those who identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against and those who do not (10 percentage points in Australia, compared to 14 percentage points across the OECD). People who identify as being part of a group that is discriminated against may include Indigenous Australians, but this cannot be verified based on the OECD Trust Survey data. Therefore, it is not possible to identify the size of the trust gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, be it based on OECD or other data sources (see Box 2.2).

Trust survey data suggest a relatively large trust gap between men and women. Men in Australia on average are more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the federal government (54%) than women do (38%). This gender trust gap is above the 7 percentage point average gender trust gap across OECD countries. Moreover, it is above the gender trust gap measured by the November wave of the *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy* survey, which was equal to 9 percentage points. Methodological differences, including a different response scale and a sampling methodology relying on different quotas,

can contribute to differences in the measured trust gap. Nevertheless, both surveys come to the conclusion that women on average have significantly lower levels of trust in the federal government than men do.

In Australia, trust in the federal government by age group follows the shape of an arc; while across the OECD, it instead has the shape of stairs. Around 44% of people aged 18-29 and people aged 50+ have high or moderately high trust in the federal government; while across the OECD, among younger people, trust levels tend to be seven percentage points lower than among 50+ year olds. However, people aged 30 to 49 are more likely to trust the federal government, with 49% having high or moderately high trust. Across the OECD, the share of trusting the national/federal government in this age group instead generally lies between trust rates among younger and older people.

Box 2.2. Survey coverage gaps on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and methods to improve the inclusion of hard-to-cover populations

For different reasons, neither the OECD Trust Survey nor Australian surveys are suitable to analyse trust in public institutions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is an issue that concerns other smaller, hard-to-reach population groups, and can perpetuate a double bias: on the one hand, the resulting gaps in data can contribute to policies that do not adequately reflect the experience of all population groups, and on the other hand, these groups – many of which have been historically marginalised - are also under-represented among people who provide feedback on services and policies. In contrast to outcome data such as on health and education status, the coverage gap is particularly acute when it comes to attitudinal data, including on trust and satisfaction with public services (see Chapter 3).

The OECD Trust Survey neither asked about the ethnic background of respondents, nor used Indigenous status as a quota variable. Even if such a quota variable had been used, given the small population share of Indigenous Australians, they would have needed to be strongly over-sampled in order to be able to draw statistically significant conclusions about trust differences compared to non-indigenous Australians.

The Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy Survey did not have a quota for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people either, but they are nonetheless over-represented in the sample. However, the sampled individuals are not representative of Indigenous Australians. For example, they have higher levels of average educational attainment than is the case in the Indigenous population at large.

A 2016 survey run by the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) and the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA) included a quota for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Stoker et al., 2017[8]). When controlling for other demographic factors, participation and attitudinal data, they found that Aboriginal people were actually slightly more likely to trust government, though the coefficient was not statistically significant. However, it is likely that the survey suffers from the same issues of non-representativeness of the Indigenous Population as the Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy Survey.

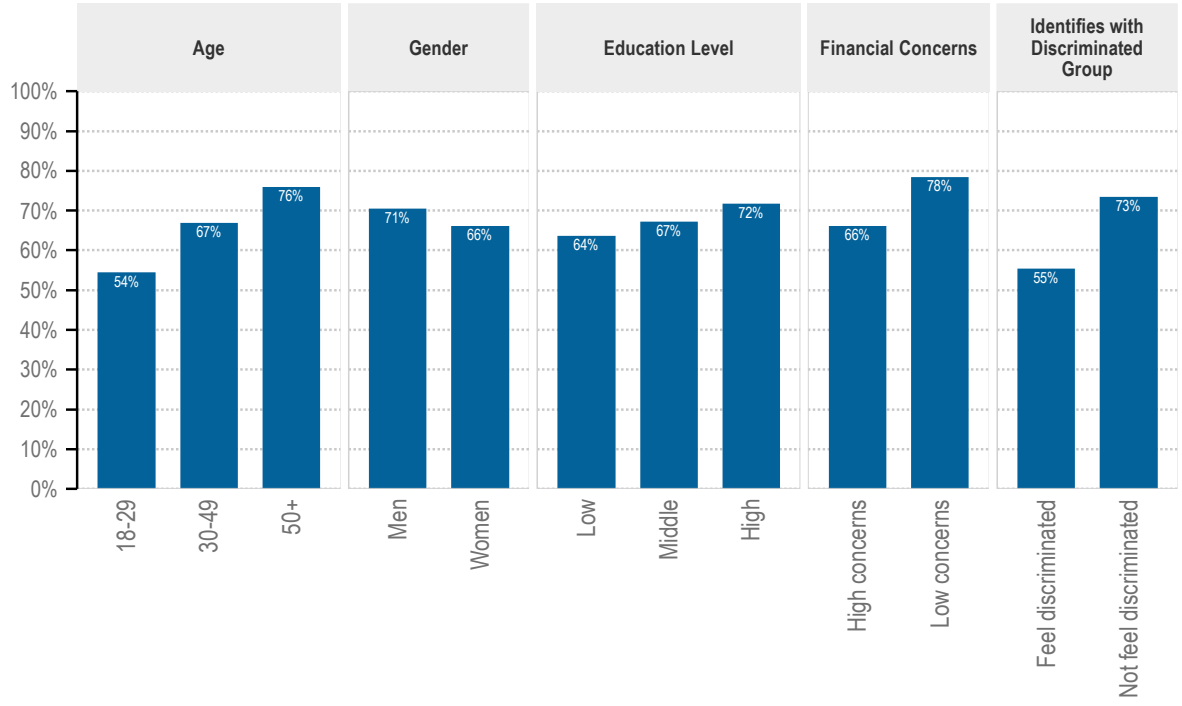
While the problem of including hard-to-reach population groups into surveys is not easy to solve, efforts can yield improvements. In addition to using a nationally representative sampling frame to identify members of the hard-to-reach population (Galinsky et al., 2019[9]), Tourangeau (2019[10]) cites different methods to overcome reluctance to actually participating in a survey. Many of these revolve around community engagement, and include tailoring the contact method to the group, recruiting members of the hard-to-reach population as interviewers and as multipliers, and providing information and questionnaires in multiple languages (see also Box 4.1 in Chapter 4).

2.2.2. Younger people and those who identify as belonging to a discriminated-against group place lower trust in the police

Trust gaps in other institutions often follow similar patterns as trust gaps in the national government, but there are a few exceptions. The most notable one concerns trust in police: Among people who identify as belonging to a group that is discriminated against and young people, the share with high or moderately high trust is 18 and 22 percentage points lower than among those who do not identify as belonging to a discriminated group and 50+ year olds (Figure 2.7). These trust gaps are thus considerably larger than the discrimination (-10 percentage points) and age (+1 percentage point) trust gaps in the federal government. In contrast, the gap in trust in the police by financial concerns (12 percentage points) and by gender (5 percentage points) are smaller than the respective federal government trust gaps.

Figure 2.7. People under the age of 30 or who identify as part of a discriminated-against group indicate lower levels of trust in the police

Proportion with high or moderately high trust in the police by population group, 2023



Note: 'High or moderately high' corresponds to the aggregation of response options 6-10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the police?". Shown here is the proportion with high or moderately high trust, by age, gender, education level, level of financial concerns and identification as belonging to a group that is discriminated against.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/mchy1f

Trust gaps in local government tend to be smaller, with the exception of age and discrimination status. Indeed, trust in the local government is 4 percentage points higher among young people and people who feel they are part of a discriminated against group, compared to the 1 percentage point federal government trust gap. In contrast, younger people have lower trust in the Australian Public Service (-6 percentage points relative to 50+ year olds), while differences in trust in the APS by self-identified discrimination and education status are similar to the federal government trust gap.

2.2.3. Trust rose for almost all population groups since 2021

While some trust gaps increased between 2021 and 2023, almost all population groups became more trusting in the federal government over this time frame. The gender, financial concerns and political agency gaps rose, in some cases drastically, while the education trust gap remained relatively constant, and the age and partisan trust gaps declined. But the reason for any increasing trust gaps lies mostly in the disproportionately higher increase in trust among groups that previously had higher trust levels, rather than in falling or stagnating trust levels among the less-trusting groups.

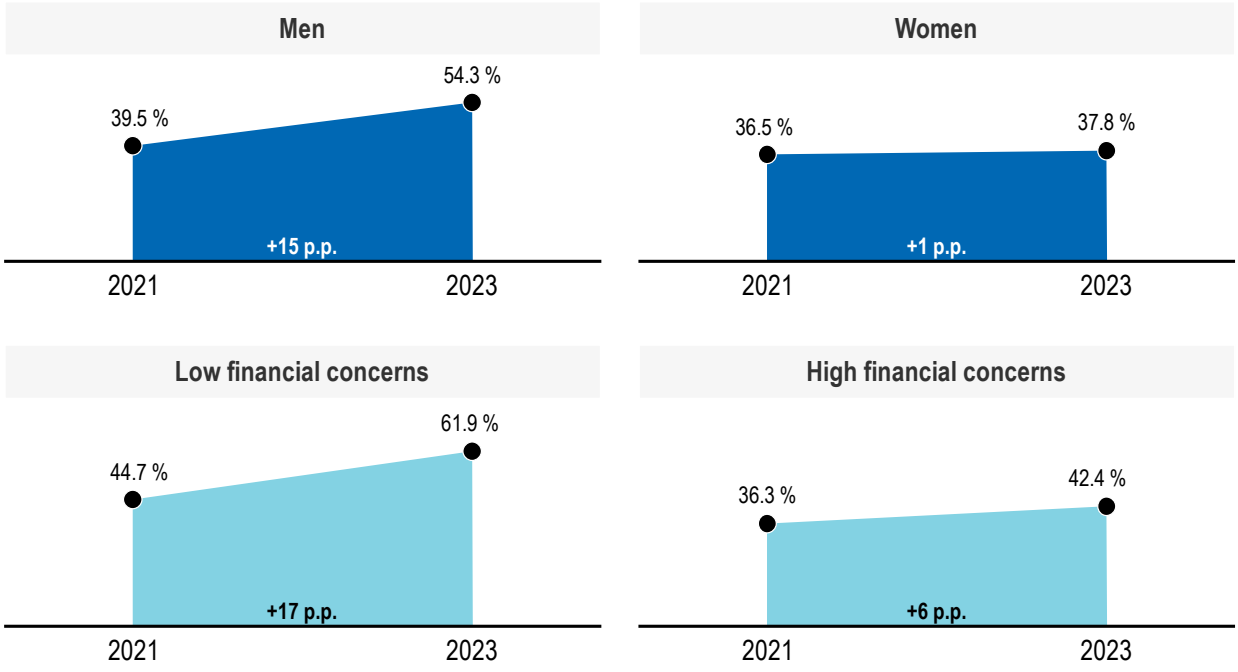
The widening of the gender and financial concerns trust gaps arose because increases in trust among one group were much more significant than in the other. For example, the widening of the gender trust gap, from 3 to 16 percentage points, was due to trust in the federal government rising by only 1 percentage point among women but 15 percentage points among men (Figure 2.8). A majority of men in Australia (54%) now have high or moderately high trust in the federal government. Similarly, the increase in the trust gap between those who expressed financial concerns and those who did not, from 8 to 20 percentage points, was driven by a 17 percentage point increase in trust among those without financial concerns, contrasted with a more moderate increase of 6 percentage points among those who express financial concerns (Figure 2.8). Over the same period, the share who are somewhat or very concerned about their household's finances rose from 67 to 79%.

In contrast, part of the increase in the trust gap by perceived political agency is due to dropping trust among those who perceive that they lack political agency. The growing trust gap between those who believe that people like them have a say in what government does and those who do not, from 43 to 52 percentage points, can be attributed to a small drop in trust among those who do not believe they have a say (-3 percentage points) and an increase among those who believe they have a say (+6 percentage points) (Figure 2.9). In fact, the drop in the share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government among those who do not feel they have a say and among those who do not feel confident to participate in politics (-2 percentage points) are the only drops in trust observed among any of the analysed socio-economic, demographic, partisanship and political agency groups.

However, it also needs to be noted that much like the identification of financial stress, the group of people who perceive that they have a say in what government does is far from stable over time. In fact, between 2021 and 2023, the share of Australians who felt like the political system did not let people like them have a say dropped from 48 to 36%. One of the factors that could have contributed to this shift might have been the recent federal elections, which could have renewed people's perception of political agency. The smaller remaining group of those who do not perceive that they have political agency could feel particularly alienated from the political system, which would make the slight drop in the share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government among them unsurprising.

Figure 2.8. Trust gap based on gender and financial concerns has increased

Share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government by gender and financial concerns, Australia, 2021 and 2023

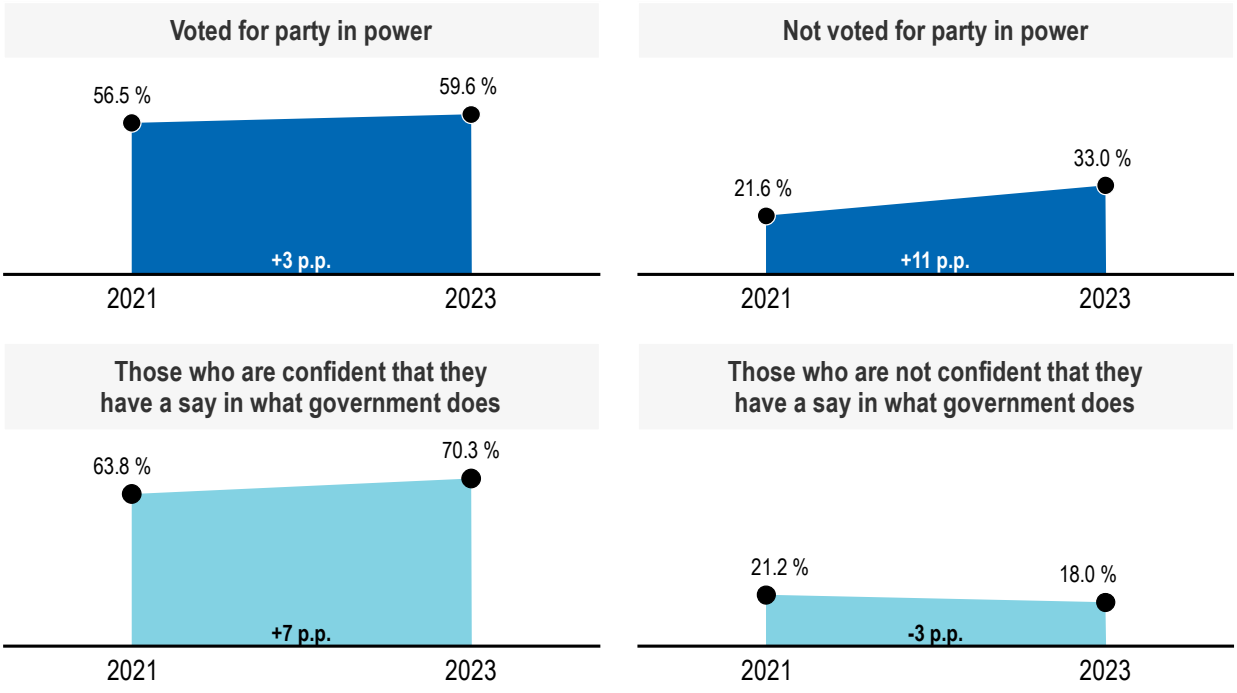


Note: Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" in the federal government based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by gender groups and whether they are somewhat or very concerned about their household's finances and economic well-being.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/bou189

Figure 2.9. Trust strongly rose for those who did not vote for a party in power, but dropped for those who do not believe they have a say in what government does

Share with high or moderately high trust in the federal government by voting for the incumbent party and perception of political agency, Australia, 2021 and 2023



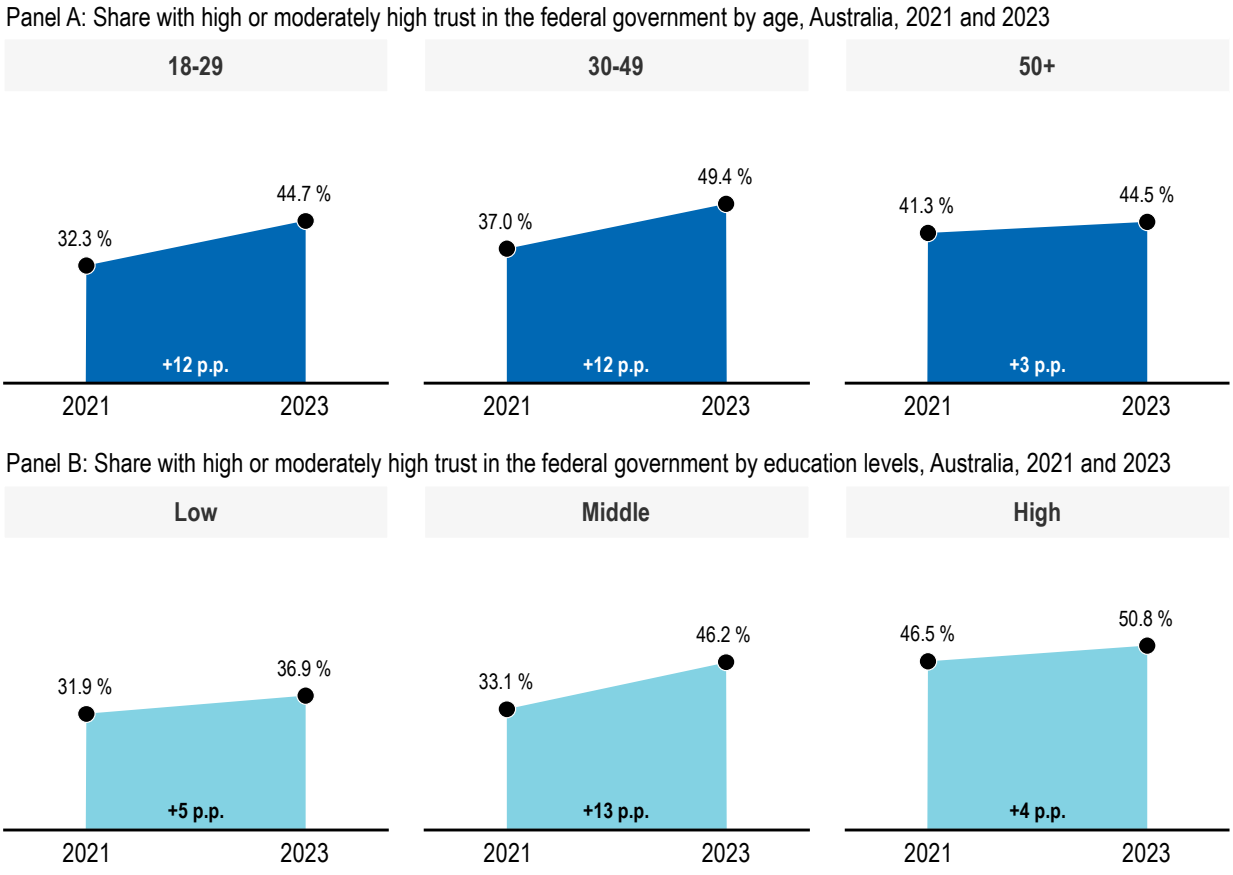
Note: Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" in the federal government based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by respondents' feeling confident to have a say in what the government does and by whether the respondent voted for or would have voted for a party in power in the last national election.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/0h96yv

The gap in trust in the federal government between those who did not complete upper secondary education and those who have post-secondary degree remained almost unchanged. In 2021, trust among university graduates and other post-secondary degree holders was 15 percentage points higher than among those who did not graduate from high school; and in 2023, this difference was 14 percentage points. Interestingly, trust rose far more drastically in the group with an upper secondary degree (+13 percentage points) then among those who did not graduate from upper secondary school (+5 percentage points) and those who have a post-secondary degree (+4 percentage points) (Figure 2.10).

Finally, the age and partisan trust gaps declined between 2021and 2023, thanks to increases in trust among young people and among those who did not vote for the incumbent government. In 2021, the share of 18-29 year olds who had high or moderately high trust in the national government was nine percentage points lower than among people aged 50 and above. In 2023, this gap had completely disappeared, thanks to the share with high or moderately high trust rising by 12 percentage points among young people and middle-aged people compared to 4 percentage points among older people (Figure 2.10). Over the two years, the partisan trust gap dropped from 35 to 27 percentage points. Trust among those who voted, or would have voted, for the government in the most recent election, which referred to the May 2019 election in the 2021 survey wave and the May 2022 election in the 2023 survey wave, rose by 3 percentage points. Among those who did not or would not have voted for the current government, the share with high or moderately high trust even rose by 11 percentage points (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.10. People below the age of 50 and who have an upper secondary education became markedly more trusting in the federal government



Note: Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" in the federal government based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. Low education corresponds to less than an upper secondary degree, middle to an upper secondary degree and high to a post-secondary or tertiary degree.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

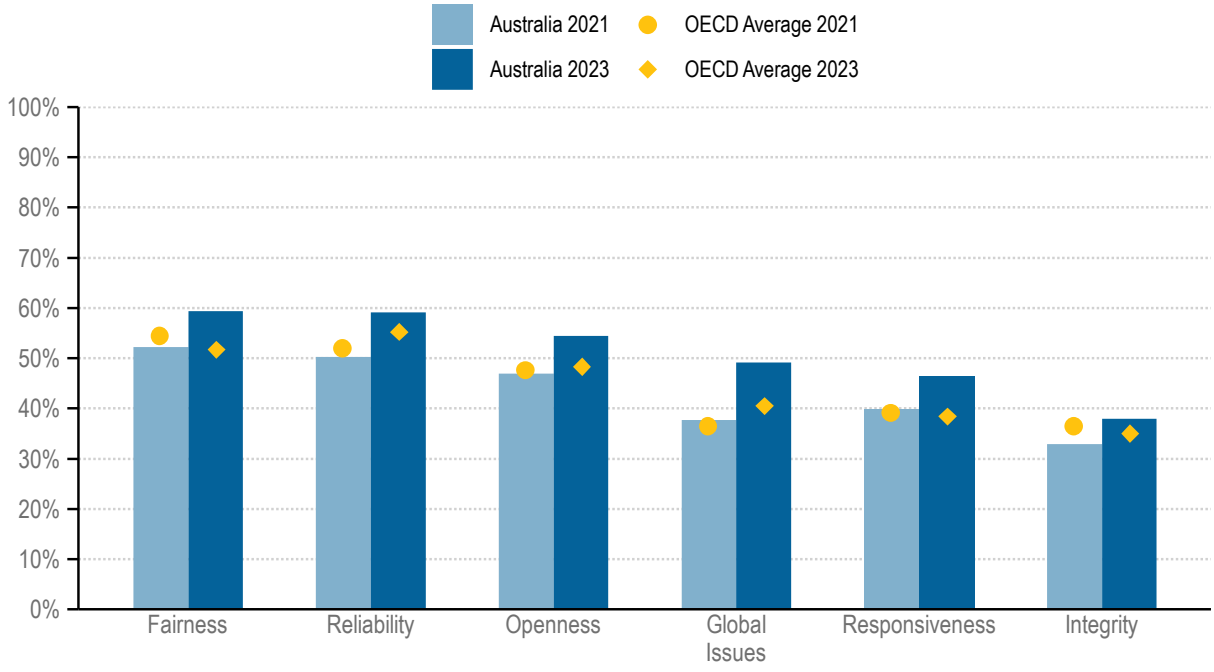
StatLink https://stat.link/ed1xlb

2.3. Perceived government competence is an important driver of trust in different public institutions in Australia

The OECD Trust Survey distinguishes different categories of public governance drivers of trust, ranging from the degree to which people expect and perceive institutions to be reliable[3] and responsive in formulating and implementing policies and services to their perceptions of how much institutions uphold the values of fairness, integrity and openness and how they address global and complex issues (see Box 2.1 and Table 2.2). In Australia, a majority of people in 2021 and 2023 perceived institutions as fair and reliable, while the share who provide positive responses to questions related to institutional openness only surpassed 50% in 2023 (Figure 2.11). Australians' perceptions of the capacity of government to address global issues – in this case, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions -, to be responsive and to act with integrity are less positive in comparison to the other public governance drivers; but more positive than average perceptions across the OECD.

Figure 2.11. Perceptions of all public governance dimensions in Australia have improved between 2021 and 2023, though the improvement was more moderate for integrity

Share of population expressing confidence in different public governance dimensions (average across survey questions), Australia and OECD, 2021 and 2023



Note: Figure presents the averages of "likely" responses across all sets of "trust drivers" questions. **"Fairness"** refers to the averages of two questions: (1) "If a public employee interacted with the public in the area where you live, how likely do you think it is that they would treat all people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or country of origin?", (2) "If you or a member of your household applied for government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?". **"Reliability"** refers to the averages of two questions: (1) "How satisfied are you with the administrative services in [COUNTRY] ?" and (2) "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?", which was asked in 2023 or "If a new serious contagious disease spreads, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that government institutions will be prepared to protect people's life?", asked in 2021. **"Openness"** refers to the averages of three questions: (1) "If a decision affecting your local community is to be made by the local government, how likely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your opinion?", (2) "If you needed information about an administrative service (for example obtaining a passport, registering a birth, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely do you think it is that clear information would be easily available?", and (3) "If you participated in a public consultation on reforming a policy area, how likely do you think it is that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in the consultation?". **"Global issues"** refers to the average of one question: "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that [COUNTRY] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years?". **"Responsiveness"** refers to the averages of three questions: (1) "If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely do you think it is that it would be improved?", (2) "If there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible institution?", and (3) "If over half of the people in [COUNTRY] clearly expressed a view against national or central policy, how likely do you think it is that it would be changed?". **"Integrity"** refers to the averages of three questions: (1) "If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?", and (2) "If a government employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?". Only questions administered in both survey waves are included. The "likely" share represents respondents who selected a rating between 6 and 10 on a 0–10 scale. The "OECD" average presents the unweighted average across all listed countries where data was available in both 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/82n5o0

Table 2.2. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions

OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		Covered by survey questions on perceptions on/evaluation of:
Levels of trust in different public institutions		Trust in national government, regional government, local government, national civil service, regional/local civil service, parliament, police, political parties, courts and judicial system, international organisations
Public Governance Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		
Competencies	*Reliability*	• Government ready to protect people's lives in the event of an emergency • Personal data shared with public offices are used for legitimate purposes only • Government regulate AI appropriately and help businesses and citizens use it responsibly • General satisfaction with administrative services and satisfaction with specific aspects
	Responsiveness	• Public services are improved following complaints • Public institutions adopt innovative ideas to improve public services • National policy is modified following public feedback • Government draws on the best available evidence for decision-making
Values	*Openness*	• Ease and availability of information about administrative services • Opportunity to voice opinions with local government • Citizen participation and engagement opportunities • Government clearly explains impact of reform
	Integrity	• Public employees' corruption • "Revolving doors" practices for high levels elected/politically appointed officials • Accountability between government branches (parliament, judiciary, executive) • Undue influence on government
	Fairness	• Public employees' consistent treatment of businesses and people regardless of their background and identify • Fair treatment in government services and benefits • Representation of needs of different regions and groups in society in Parliament
Perception of government action on intergenerational and global challenges		• Country's prioritisation of various policy goals • Country will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas in the next 10 years • National government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations
Cultural, Economic and Political Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions		• Trust in others • Own economic well-being • Belong to discriminated group • Demographic and socio-economic status • The political system allows people to have a say in what the government does • Own ability to participate in politics • Voting in national or local elections and carried out any political activities • Support for national referenda • News consumption • Trustworthiness of government statistics

The remainder of the chapter focuses on how these perceptions of public governance affect people's trust in the federal and local government, the federal parliament and the Australian Public Service. These relationships are analysed through regression analysis, which makes it possible to assess how people's views of multiple public governance drivers, coupled with their personal characteristics, relate to differences in trust in public institutions, and to identify those factors that have a positive association with trust. More precisely, the analysis reveals how an individual's likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in a public institution increases with a positive perception of a given public governance driver, while holding individuals' perceptions of the other public governance dimensions and their socio-economic and political backgrounds constant. The analysis presented here follows a similar methodology to that implemented in the 2023 OECD Trust Survey Report (OECD, 2024[11]) (Box 2.3). While there are methodological limitations that mean that we cannot identify whether a change in perception *causes* trust levels to change, the regression analysis is nonetheless a useful tool to understand which public

governance drivers have the strongest association with trust when controlling for other variables that are known to affect trust. Results from this analysis offer insights into possible avenues to strengthening trust.

The analysis of the drivers of trust in Australia suggests four main results (Table 2.1):

- First, the factors associated with higher levels of trust differ across institutions, suggesting different policies might be needed to reinforce trust in different institutions.
- Second, several drivers related to perceived government competencies, most notably government using evidence for decision making, satisfaction with administrative services, and public agencies' capacity to innovate for improving services, are strongly associated to increased trust in different public institutions. People who express higher satisfaction with administrative services are more likely to place trust in all public institutions in Australia; and the use of innovation is a driver of trust in both the federal government and parliament.
- Third, perceptions that government institutions act in the best interest of society are strongly associated with trust in the federal and local government, while the perception that the APS looks out for the long-term interests of society and gives government ministers honest advice are strongly related to trust in the APS.
- Fourth, several indicators related to government fairness and integrity are related to trust in the federal parliament and government, while openness is an important driver of trust in local government. People who believe that government adequately balances between the interests of current and future generations tend to be more trusting of government and parliament; those who find it likely that government withstands undue private influence are more likely to trust government; and those who find it likely that parliament holds government accountable are more likely to trust parliament.

Box 2.3. Logistic regression models to assess drivers of trust in public institutions

Exploring the role of different factors in trust levels through regression analysis can help develop targeted strategies to enhance public trust. Statistical tools can estimate the relationship between factors like socio-demographic variables and public governance drivers on the one hand and trust in public institutions on the other hand. The analysis has numerous methodological challenges. For example, trust levels can likewise influence perceptions of the governance drivers (reverse causality) and external factors not measured in the survey can affect both trust levels and public governance perceptions (omitted variable bias). Nevertheless, regression analyses remain a valuable tool for understanding which public governance drivers are most strongly associated with trust. The results from this analysis serve as a guide on which aspects to leverage or enhance to reinforce trust.

The econometric results presented in the report are the average marginal effects resulting from logistic regression analyses for establishing the main drivers of trust in the Commonwealth government and parliament, local government and the Australian Public Service. To measure trust in each institution, the survey asks: "On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being not at all and 10 being completely, how much do you trust each of the following?". Trust is recoded as a binary variable, where 0-4 represents low or no trust, and 6-10 represents high or moderately high trust. Responses marked as neutral (5) or "don't know" are not included in the analysis.

As outlined by the OECD Framework on the Drivers of Trust, the key factors influencing the individual-level trust in public institutions are likely to be their perceptions of the institutions' responsiveness, reliability, openness, integrity, and fairness, as well as their feelings of political agency. Government competencies and values are quantified using 19 variables, assessed on a 0-10 scale, and standardised for analytical purposes. Political agency is operationalised through variables assessing internal and external political efficacy, reflecting an individual's confidence in participating in politics and their belief

that individuals like them have a voice in government decisions. Additionally, perceptions of government actions on global and long-term challenges are captured through variables gauging confidence in the country's ability to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and confidence in the government's consideration of both current and future generations' interests.

The regression model controls for individuals' socio-demographic background (age, gender, education), interpersonal trust, perception of belonging to a discriminated against group, and financial concerns. Additionally, it controls for whether respondents voted (or intended to vote) for one of the parties currently in power. For each dependent variable, a sub-set of predictors is selected based on stepwise regression. All models include survey weights. Missing data are excluded using listwise deletion.

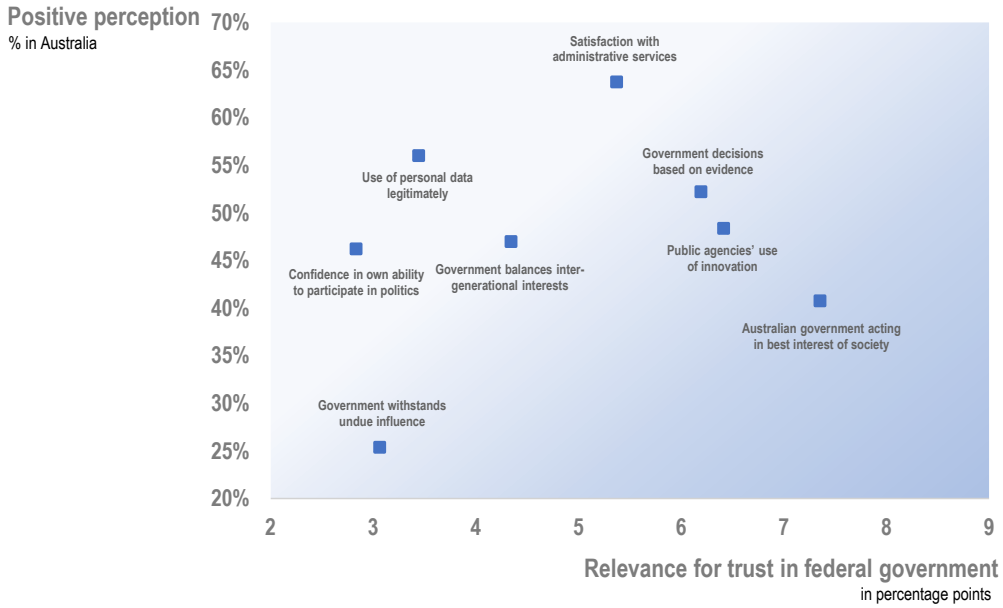
The statistically significant drivers are shown as average marginal effects. Statistically significant refers to those public governance variables included in the logistic regression model that resulted in $p<0.1$. The technical interpretation of the effect of government's reliability in taking evidence-based decisions on trust, for example, is that a one-standard-deviation increase in perceived reliability is associated with a 6.2 percentage point increase in the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national government. Or – taking into consideration all other variables in the model – all else being constant, moving from the citizen with average to one with a higher level of confidence in government's reliability is associated with in a 6.2 percentage point increase in the likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the national government.

2.3.1. Drivers of trust in the federal government

People who believe that government institutions act in the best interest of society naturally have a higher propensity of having high or moderately high trust in the national government, but several factors related primarily to government competencies, also have a positive association with trust. In particular, people who are more confident that government institutions act in the best interest of society are 7.4 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the federal government. The belief that institutions are responsive to feedback and to evidence also has a positive relationship with trust: A perceived higher likelihood that the government would adopt innovative ideas if they can improve public service is associated with a 6.4 percentage points higher likelihood of trusting the government. This variable is also the most important driver of trust in the federal government in a pooled analysis of 2021 and 2023 data. Confidence that government takes decisions based on the best available evidence is associated with a similar increase in trust (6.2 percentage points). Finally, an above-average satisfaction with administrative services is associated with a 5.4 percentage points higher likelihood of trusting government.[4]

Figure 2.12. The Australian government acting in the best interest of society is the variable most associated with trust in the federal government

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in the national government in response to improvements in selected public governance variables (X-axis) and average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (Y-axis)



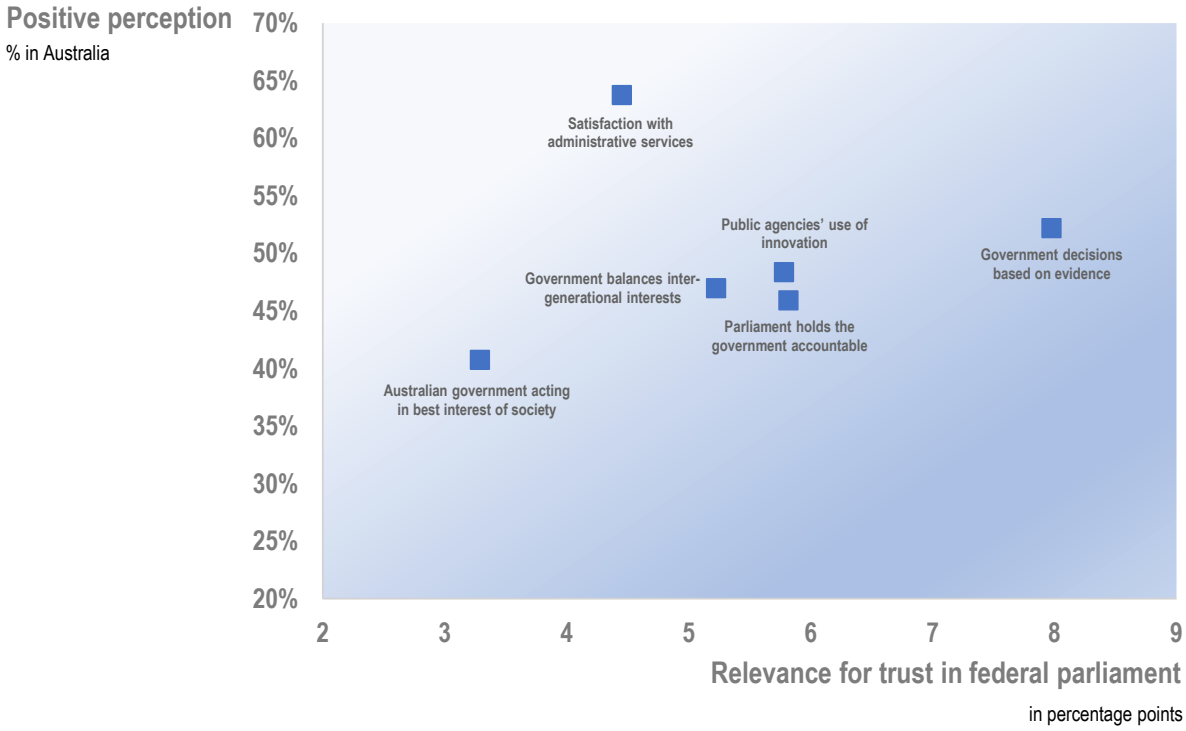
Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the national government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust and whether people perceive themselves to belong to a discriminated group in their country. Relevance for trust indicates the average marginal effect associated with the variable. One of the variables has a negative correlation with trust in the national government, which is not depicted here. All variables depicted are statistically significant at $p<0.1$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

2.3.2. Drivers of trust in the federal parliament

Positive perceptions that government decision making is evidence-informed likewise is an important driver of trust in the Australian parliament, but so are a few other factors related to reliability, responsiveness, fairness and integrity. People with an elevated perception that government relies on the best available evidence, statistics and data when making decisions are 8.0 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the national parliament. A possible explanation is that individuals who find it likely that the executive government relies on evidence in decision-making likewise find it likely that the legislature does so, and therefore have higher trust in Parliament. Higher confidence that parliament holds government accountable and that innovative ideas to improve public services would be adopted (both with average marginal effects of 5.8), that government balances adequately between the interests of current and future generations (5.2), higher satisfaction with administrative services (4.5), and government institutions acting in the best interest of society (3.3) are all associated with an increased likelihood of trusting parliament.

Figure 2.13. Evidence-informed decision making is an important driver of trust in the federal parliament

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in the federal parliament in response to improvements in selected public governance variables (X-axis) and average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (Y-axis)



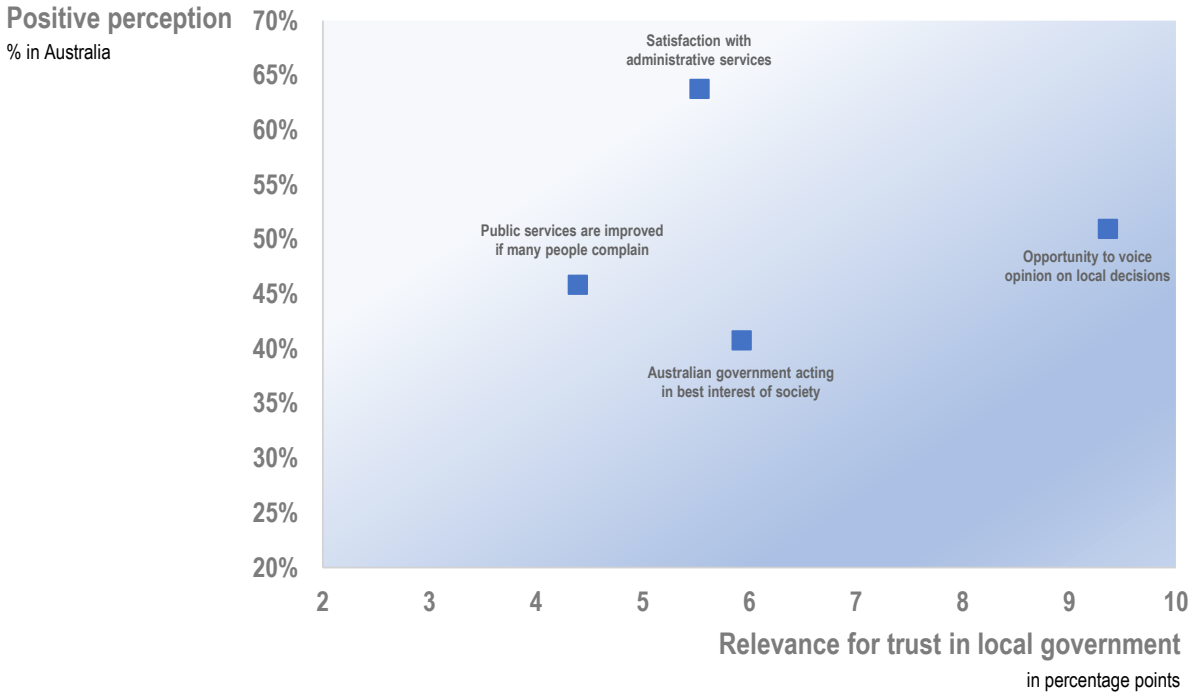
Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the federal/national parliament in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust and whether people perceive themselves to belong to a discriminated group in their country. Relevance for trust indicates the average marginal effect associated with the variable. One of the variables has a negative correlation with trust in the national government, which is not depicted here. All variables depicted are statistically significant at $p<0.1$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

2.3.3. Drivers of trust in local government

The single most important driver in trust in the local government in Australia is the perceived likelihood that citizens would have an opportunity to voice their opinion if a decision affecting their local community were to be made by the local government (openness). Citizens reporting a higher perceived likelihood also are 9.4 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the local government. Confidence in government acting in the best interest of society (average marginal effect: 5.9) and satisfaction with administrative services (5.5) also matter. Finally, the perception that government would improve a public service if there were many complaints has a moderately high association with trust in the local government, with an average marginal effect of 4.4 percentage points. These results are very similar to an analysis pooling result from both survey rounds.

Figure 2.14. The perception of having opportunities to voice opinions on local decisions is by far the most important driver of trust in local government

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in local government in response to improvements in selected public governance variables (X-axis) and average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (Y-axis)



Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in local government in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust and whether people perceive themselves to belong to a discriminated group in their country. Relevance for trust indicates the average marginal effect associated with the variable. One of the variables has a negative correlation with trust in the national government, which is not depicted here. All variables depicted are statistically significant at $p<0.1$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

2.3.4. Drivers of trust in the Australian Public Service

In contrast to the results on the drivers of trust in local government, the two most important identified drivers of trust in the Australian Public Service in 2023 are variables that were only included in the Australian trust study. Confidence in the Australian Public Service looking out for the long-term interest of society is associated with an increased likelihood of having high or moderately high trust in the civil service of 8.1 percentage points, and confidence that APS gives government honest advice has an average marginal effect of 6.8 percentage points. Above-average satisfaction with administrative services is associated with a 5.5 percentage points higher likelihood of trust in APS, and the legitimate use of personal data with a 4.7 percentage points higher likelihood. The analysis pooling data from both survey rounds confirms satisfaction with administrative services to be a key driver, but also identifies other drivers such as the perceived likelihood that the governments would improve public services if many people complained.

Figure 2.15. People who believe that the Australian Public Service looks out for the long-term interest of society are more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the APS

Percentage point change in high or moderately high trust in the Australian Public Service in response to improvements in selected public governance variables (X-axis) and average respondents' satisfaction in the noted variables (Y-axis)

Note: The figure shows the statistically significant determinants of trust in the Australian Public Service in a logistic estimation that controls for individual characteristics, including whether they voted or would have voted for one of the current parties in power, self-reported levels of interpersonal trust and whether people perceive themselves to belong to a discriminated group in their country. Relevance for trust indicates the average marginal effect associated with the variable. One of the variables has a negative correlation with trust in the national government, which is not depicted here. All variables depicted are statistically significant at $p<0.1$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

2.3.5. Comparing the drivers of trust in public institutions in Australia with the drivers of trust across the OECD

When comparing the main drivers of trust in public institutions in Australia with those across the OECD, there are some notable similarities but also differences. However, this comparison should be treated carefully. First, the sample on which the Australian analysis is based is much smaller than the sample for the cross-country analysis, making it more difficult to identify relationships that are smaller as statistically significant.[5] Second, the Australian analysis includes variables that are not included in the cross-country analysis. Given that different variables are correlated, this can lead to changes in the estimated coefficients as well as whether individual variables are dropped in the Australian analysis, which is implemented using stepwise selection.

Putting these caveats aside, the comparison shows a few interesting patterns concerning trust in Australian institutions:

- **Trust in institutions in Australia are more influenced by positive perceptions of day-to-day reliability than is the case across the OECD on average.** In both Australia and across the OECD, a positive perception of government taking decisions based on the best available evidence is an important driver of trust in the national government and parliament; though in Australia, the estimated impact on trust in the national parliament is nearly twice as large as across the OECD. Confidence that public agencies use data only for legitimate aims is a driver of trust in the national government and civil service across both the OECD and in Australia, with larger average marginal effects in Australia; but on the other hand, it is a driver of trust in local government and the national parliament across the OECD, but not in Australia. In contrast, a more positive perception of the emergency preparedness of government institutions is associated with higher trust levels in all public institutions across the OECD, but not with higher trust in any public institution in Australia.
- **Responsiveness and openness to innovation is seen as important to build trust in Australia.** Satisfaction with administrative services is an important driver of trust in all institutions everywhere, but in Australia, the impact is more pronounced, particularly for trust in the federal government and parliament A higher perceived likelihood that institutions would adopt innovative ideas if it could improve services is associated with higher levels of trust in the federal government and parliament in Australia, but not across the OECD; and a positive perception that services are improved following complaints appears to have a stronger association with trust in local government in Australia compared to the OECD average.
- **Perceived fairness in day-to-day interactions between citizens and their government matter more across the OECD than in Australia, while the perceived fairness of complex policy decision making matter in Australia as well as across the OECD.** Positive perceptions of fairness in public services and benefits are not associated with trust in any public institutions in Australia, while they have a smaller positive relationship with trust in local government and the civil service across the OECD. A higher perceived likelihood that government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations has a relationship with trust in the national government and parliament that is at the same order of magnitude in Australia and across the OECD, even if the exact point estimates differ. However, the perceived fairness in parliament decisions between different regions or groups in society has a positive association with trust in the national government and parliament across the OECD, but not in Australia.
- **Similarly, perceived integrity in decision making on complex policy issues plays more of a role in Australia compared to the OECD, while perceived petty corruption plays less of a role.** In addition to the Australia-specific integrity variables, government's withstanding of undue private influence that could be harmful to society at a whole is positively related to trust in the national/federal government in Australia and across the OECD. Parliament holding government accountable is related to trust in the national parliament everywhere, but only to trust in national and local government across the OECD but not in Australia. A higher perceived likelihood that a public employee would refuse a bribe to speed up service access is only (slightly) related to trust in the national civil service across the OECD, but not in Australia.
- **Across both the OECD and in Australia, openness to inputs on local decisions is an important driver of trust in local government.**
- **Perceptions of political agency have less of an influence on trust in institutions in Australia than across the OECD.** The perception of having a say in what government does, which is a driver of trust in all institutions in the OECD-wide analysis and is associated with the largest trust gap when comparing trust levels across groups, is not related to trust in any institution in Australia only. Confidence to participate in politics, however, has a positive relationship with trust in the federal government.

Table 2.3. Drivers of trust in public institutions in Australia and across the OECD

Average marginal effects of the logistic regressions for the OECD and Australia

	National/Federal government		Local government		National civil service		National/Federal Parliament	
	OECD	Australia	OECD	Australia	OECD	Australia	OECD	Australia
Competencies								
Government decisions based on evidence	6.8	6.2***	1.9	--	1.9	-	3.7	8.0***
Government balances intergenerational interests	6.4	4.3*	2.2	--	--	--	3.9	5.2***
Government institutions prepared for emergency	2.8	--	1.8	--	2.7	-	2.4	-
Satisfaction with administrative services	1.4	5.4***	3.9	5.5***	4.7	5.5***	2.1	4.4***
Public agencies' legitimate use of personal data	1.1	3.4*	2.0	--	3.1	4.7**	1.7	--
The APS looks out for the long-term interests of society	N.A.	--	N.A.	--	N.A.	8.1***	N.A.	--
Public agencies' use of innovation	--	6.4***	1.6	--	--	--	--	5.8***
Improved services due to complaints	--	--	1.6	4.4**	1.6	--	--	--
Government changes policy if people are against it								*-3.2**
Values								
Government institutions act in best interest of society	N.A.	7.4***	N.A.	5.9***	N.A.	--	N.A.	3.3***
The APS gives Government Ministers honest advice	N.A.	--	N.A.	--	N.A.	6.8***	N.A.	--
Government explains reform impacts	2.4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Parliament holds government accountable	2.9	--	2.0	--	--	--	4.1	5.8***
Government withstands undue influence	2.0	3.1*	--	--	--	--	1.5	--
Opinions from public consultations are adopted	2.0	-3.5*	--	--	2.6	--	--	--
Fair treatment of benefit claims	1.5	-3.6*	2.0	--	2.6	--	--	--
Parliament balances diverse interests	1.4	--	--	--	--	--	6.1	--
Ability to voice opinions on local matters	--	--	6.1	9.4 ***	--	--	--	--
Fair treatment of people by public employees	--	--	1.7	--	2.3	--	--	--
Public employees refuse bribes	--	--	--	--	1.6	--	--	--
Political agency								
Political voice	3.1	--	1.6	--	1.9	--	3.2	--
Confidence to participate in politics	1.2	2.8*	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: The table displays the average marginal effect for each variable that are associated with trust in the respective public institution. Each entry in the table represents the extent to which a change in the variable impacts trust levels, holding all other factors constant. A value of "--" indicates that the effect is not statistically significant at p=0.1. *** = p<0.01; ** = p<0.04; * = p<0.1. The OECD marginal effects are all statistically significant at p<0.01.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

The regression analyses also reveal that an important part, but by no means the entirety, of the observed differences in trust levels between different population groups (Figure 2.6) are due to different perceptions of the public governance drivers and socio-economic characteristics. For example, in the regression analysis, the difference in trust in the national government between those who voted for the current government and those who did not remains statistically significant and practically relevant. But the average marginal effect of 6 percentage points is much smaller than the 27 percentage points unadjusted trust gap. More educated people also remain 6 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust, but this average marginal effect is only statistically significant at the .1 level and again smaller than the 14 percentage points unadjusted trust gap. The average marginal effect on being a woman is not statistically significant, and neither are household financial concerns nor being a member of a discriminated-against group.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), *Consumer Price Index, Australia*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia/jun-quarter-2024> (accessed on 4 October 2024). [4]

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), *70 Years of Inflation in Australia*, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/research/70-years-inflation-australia. [5]

Brezzi, M. et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en. [1]

Bullock, M. (2024), *The Costs of High Inflation*, Reserve Bank of Australia, https://www.rba.gov.au/speeches/2024/sp-gov-2024-09-05.html. [6]

Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Public Service Commission (2024), *Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy: 2023 National Survey*. [7]

Galinsky, A. et al. (2019), "Surveying Strategies for Hard-to-Survey Populations: Lessons From the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander National Health Interview Survey", *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 109/10, pp. 1384-1391, https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2019.305217. [9]

Nguyen, D. et al. (2022), "Survey design and technical documentation supporting the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Government Institutions", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 53, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/6f6093c5-en. [2]

OECD (2024), *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results: Building Trust in a Complex Policy Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a20554b-en. [11]

OECD (2024), *OECD Trust Survey design and technical documentation - Annex to the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions - 2024 results*, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2024/07/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results_eeb36452/2023%20Trust%20Survey%20-%20Technical%20annex.pdf. [3]

Stoker, G. et al. (2017), *The impact of anti-politics on policymaking: Does lack of political agency matter?*, https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/conference/papers/2017/Stoker%20Jennings%20Evans%20and%20Halupka%20PSA%20Glasow%202017%20FINAL_0.pdf. [8]

Tourangeau, R. (2019), "Surveying Hard-to-Survey Populations Despite the Unfavorable Environment", *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 109/10, pp. 1326-1327, https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2019.305300. [10]

Notes

[1] For the purpose of the report, when talking about results of the OECD Trust Survey, 'Australians' means adults living in Australia, independent of their citizenship.

[2] Results between the OECD Trust Survey and the Trust in Australian Democracy survey can arise for several reasons. First, in many instances, the reference months differs, with the Australian Democracy Trust Survey consisting of two waves in June and November 2023, and results in some cases being based entirely on the June 2023 wave or a combination of the June and November waves. Second, response scales systematically differ. The OECD Trust Survey employs a 0 to 10 scale in which labels are attached only to the extreme values of 0 (completely distrust) and 10 (completely trust). In contrast, in the Australian Democracy survey, respondents can select from five possible answers that are all labelled, ranging from strongly distrust to strongly trust. In both surveys, there is an option to reply 'don't know'. Third, in the OECD trust survey, the trust level questions are the first substantive question, while in the Australian democracy survey, there are a number of prior questions related to their understanding of the importance and actual performance of different areas of democracy. In surveys, question order can influence how some individuals may reply to survey questions.

[3] "Satisfaction with administrative services" can be classified under both reliability ("Anticipate needs and assess evolving challenges. Minimise uncertainty in the economic, social and political environment") and the responsiveness ("Provide efficient, quality, affordable, timely and citizen-centred public services") of the Updated Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions. For the purposes of Chapter 3, it is grouped with responsiveness.

[4] A few additional variables are associated with trust in the federal government, but only at a 90% confidence level. In particular, confidence of one's own ability to participate in politics (2.8), the use of personal data only for legitimate purposes (3.4), and confidence in the country balancing the interests of current and future generations (4.3) are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. In addition, two variables that are statistically significant at this level have a negative association with trust in the national government: These are the perception of fair treatment of an application for government benefits and services (-3.6) and the perception that of opinions from a public consultation are adopted by government (-3.5). On the latter result, a hypothesis for an explanation is that people who were critical of government support for the Voice referendum may have simultaneously been more likely to answer this question in the affirmative and have low or no trust in the government.

[5] This can easily be seen in Table 2.1, where the smallest average marginal effect that is statistically significant at p=0.1 is around 3 percentage points large, while the smallest one in the cross-country analysis at p=0.01 is slightly larger than 1 percentage point.

3 Competence and trust in Australia

This chapter focuses on public perceptions of government competence in Australia, particularly in terms of reliability and responsiveness. It underscores the pivotal role these perceptions play in shaping public trust, and contrasts perceptions with government policies and practices. Government reliability is assessed through protection in cases of emergency, long-term interest management, and evidence-based policymaking. The chapter then shifts to government responsiveness, analysing overall satisfaction with services, responsiveness to input and feedback, and public sector innovation.

Perceptions of the competence of government institutions, understood as the government's ability to deliver as per expectations, are an important driver of overall trust in government. The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions further disaggregates government competence into two dimensions: reliability and responsiveness (Brezzi et al., 2021[1]).

Government reliability is examined through three lenses: protection against emerging risks, safeguarding long-term interests, and evidence-informed policymaking. While citizens feel they will be protected in emergencies, a more citizen-centric and integrated approach to resilience could further enhance this confidence. Additionally, there is more scepticism about the government's ability to balance current and future interests effectively. The chapter then pivots to government responsiveness, analysing overall satisfaction with services, responsiveness to input and feedback, and public sector innovation. Satisfaction with essential services is positive overall, although disparities between population groups persist. The government's responsiveness to feedback is viewed favourably, though challenges remain in balancing standardised and tailored services. While views on public sector innovation are generally positive, ethical and equity concerns persist, particularly in a context of digital transformation.

3.1. Reliability

The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions identifies **reliability** as the first pillar of government competence. This encompasses three key aspects: the government's ability and willingness to protect people's lives in the event of an emergency, the ability to act effectively on intergenerational and global challenges, and lastly the sound use of evidence in decision-making. The econometric analysis in Chapter 2 provides some crucial insight as to how perception of government reliability drives trust in various Australian public institutions.

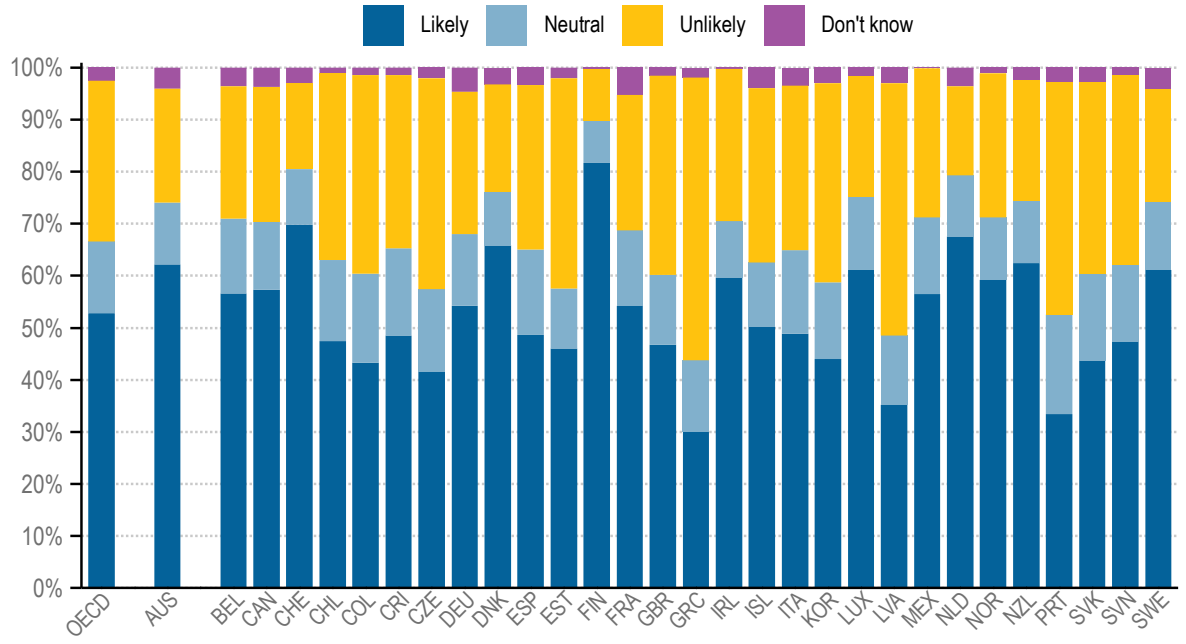
Most Australians feel confident that government institutions would protect people's lives in an emergency, surpassing the OECD average. However, Australians are less confident in the government's ability to safeguard long-term interests fairly and effectively. Fewer than half believe the government would adequately balance intergenerational interests—a crucial driver of trust in the federal government and parliament. Additionally, only 43% of Australians think the Australian Public Service prioritises society's long-term interests, an important factor influencing trust in the public service. Evidence-informed policymaking is essential for developing and implementing effective public policies and services in an increasingly volatile and uncertain environment. While half of Australians are confident the government would use the best available evidence when designing policies—exceeding the OECD average by over 10 percentage points—this still suggests room for improvement, especially as this dimension has emerged as one of the strongest drivers of trust in the federal government and parliament.

3.1.1. While a majority of Australians currently trust government emergency protection, future strategies will need to focus on building resilience through responsive and adaptive measures

The most fundamental aspect of reliability is the state's ability to protect citizens' lives and livelihoods against natural hazards and human-made threats. 62% of Australians believe government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives, compared to 53% on average across the OECD (Figure 3.1). These positive findings are commendable, especially considering that the data was collected in the fall of 2023—following the extreme bushfire season of 2019–2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, and record flooding in Western Australia.

Figure 3.1. Australians feel confident in government's capacity to protect people during emergency

Share of the population reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives in case of emergency, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If there was a large-scale emergency, how likely do you think it is that government institutions would be ready to protect people's lives?". "Likely" aggregates scores from 6-10 on the scale, "Neutral" corresponds to a score of 5, and "Unlikely" aggregates scores from 1-4. "OECD" represents the unweighted average of responses across all surveyed countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/8y5ihm

Australia faces a complex array of challenges in its current operating environment, suggesting effectively protecting people's lives may become increasingly challenging. These span geopolitical, environmental, and technological domains. The geopolitical landscape is marked by shifting power dynamics, escalating tensions, and accrued risks of foreign interference which not only challenge international norms but also reshape key global relationships. Climate change presents another critical challenge, manifesting in more frequent and severe natural disasters that test Australia's emergency response capabilities and expose vulnerabilities at the intersection of natural hazards and other crises. Furthermore, the country's increasing reliance on digital infrastructure, coupled with the growing threat of cyberattacks, poses substantial risks to both economic resilience and national security (Department of Home Affairs, 2022[2]). In response to these challenges, the OECD advocates for the development of national resilience as a key strategy in the dynamic governance of critical risks, emphasising the importance of adaptive capacity and preparedness in the face of evolving threats. Although the concept has different meanings across policy contexts, the OECD defines resilience as "*the capacity of systems to absorb a disturbance, recover from disruptions and adapt to changing conditions while retaining essentially the same function as prior to the disruptive shock*" (OECD, 2019[3]; Ablong, 2024[4]). Part of this capacity to absorb and recover from shocks can be derived from democratic institutions and processes. The Strengthening Democracy Taskforce's report on "Strengthening Australian Democracy—A Practical Agenda for Democratic Resilience" notably emphasises that adhering to democratic principles during emergencies and crises is essential for developing trust-building policy solutions (Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs, 2024[5]). The following paragraphs will primarily focus on resilience in the context of pandemics and national disasters in Australia, although a holistic approach to the wide variety of pressures that could create emergencies is inherent to the notion of resilience.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian government demonstrated significant adaptive capacity, through several key initiatives aimed at strengthening the nation's ability to respond to future emergencies. These include the establishment of the National Cabinet as a more agile intergovernmental forum, the addition of 'human coronavirus with pandemic potential' to the Biosecurity Act 2015, and increased attention to supply chain (Murphy and Arban, 2021[6]) [C(2023)163]. Notably, the government is establishing an Australian Centre for Disease Control to improve response and preparedness for public health emergencies. This new centre will focus on developing expertise in One Health, which explores the connections between human, animal, and environmental health, as well as improving intelligence on health threats (Australian Government - DHAC, 2024[7]). These measures collectively demonstrate Australia's willingness to learn from past emergencies to become more resilient and prepared in the face of potential future crises.

With regards to preparedness, Australia has established a robust institutional framework for crisis management and risk reduction, characterised by a multi-layered approach (Australian Government - DPMC, 2024[8]). The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is responsible for maintaining the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and can initiate and adjust the government's response as needed. The Framework represents the “Government’s capstone policy framing Australia’s national crisis management arrangements” (Australian Government - DPMC, 2024[8]). Several co-ordination mechanisms underpin this approach, including the NSC for ministerial-level decision-making, and the National Co-ordination Mechanism (NCM) for bringing together representatives from different levels of government and non-government entities. State and territory governments are nevertheless primarily responsible for emergency management within their jurisdictions (Parliament of Australia, 2024[9]). Australia also engages the private sector through initiatives like the Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN) for critical infrastructure resilience, and partners with civil society organisations on projects like 'Climate Resilient by Nature' [C (2023)163].

The country’s strategic framework for natural disaster management is comprehensive, and includes national frameworks and strategies focusing on disaster risk mitigation, adaptation, and resilience improvement, national funding frameworks, and a crisis management framework (Parliament of Australia, 2024[9]). Additionally, the Department of Home Affairs is working in collaboration with relevant agencies to develop a National Resilience Framework (Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs, 2022[10]). The Framework will aim to guide dynamic governance of critical risks and emphasise the important of adaptive capacity and preparedness in the face of evolving threats.

In spite of this robust and comprehensive institutional and strategic framework, the Australian Parliament's Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience interim report highlights ongoing issues with co-ordination and communication in disaster response and recovery (Parliament of Australia, 2024[9]). These challenges, partly attributed to Australia's federal system, impact the effectiveness of the disaster response framework. The report emphasises the need for improved co-ordination across all government levels and sector, highlighting for instance the absence of a national asset register for critical infrastructure and services during disasters. This lack of co-ordination often burdens citizens, causing confusion about accessing necessary resources. To address these challenges and improve trust, all levels of government in Australia could examine how to better co-ordinate to provide more citizen-focused disaster responses, and help individuals better navigate the support and services available to them. An example of such a co-ordinated human-centric approach, which public institutions in Australia could draw inspiration from, is the USA's FEMA Disaster Recovery Centre "one-stop-shops" (Box 3.1).

Box 3.1. Disaster Recovery Centres in the United States of America

FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) are accessible facilities and mobile offices individuals can visit to learn more about FEMA and other disaster assistance programs, or to request updates on their application DRCs are set up in convenient areas after a disaster to make them easier to find.

A DRC typically enables individuals to:

- Apply for assistance.
- Learn more about disaster assistance programs.
- Learn the status of their FEMA application.
- Understand any letters received from FEMA.
- Find housing and rental assistance information.
- Get answers to questions or resolve problems.
- Get referrals to agencies that may offer other assistance.
- Learn about Small Business Administration (SBA) program

FEMA has also created a DRC Locator to help people find the hours, services (FEMA, Federal, State/Local, and other), and locations of DRCs in proximity.

Source: reproduced from (FEMA, 2024[11])

The Australian Government has shown commitment to building resilience but faces challenges in implementing truly anticipatory and holistic mechanisms to anticipate and manage critical risks. In The focus of government efforts have nevertheless largely focused on natural disasters, reflecting Australia's vulnerability to such events, but this narrow scope has limited the integration of resilience concepts into broader national security discussions (Ablong, 2024[12]). The Australian Government is preparing its response to the Glasser Review, which recommends ways to improve national disaster governance by better co-ordinating resilience efforts across climate adaptation and national security areas. Likewise, the inaugural climate risk assessments, although detailed and comprehensive, do not take into consideration the interplay of the identified climate hazards with other types of hazards, geopolitical or technological for instance[1] (Australian Government - DCCEEW, 2024[13]). To address complex, transboundary risks in a holistic manner, public institutions could broadly consider the principles of the OECD framework in alignment with current and developing Australian Government risk and crisis management processes (Box 3.2). The steps in the OECD framework align with several Australian Government initiatives, notably the Annual Threat Assessment, and the Critical Infrastructure Annual Risk Review, as well as the Crisis Arrangements Committee. Additionally, in 2023 the Commonwealth Risk Management Policy was updated to require non-corporate Commonwealth entities to identify and manage emerging risks.

Box 3.2. OECD Framework on management of emerging critical risks

Published in 2023, this Framework is intended to support the implementation of the OECD Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks, which calls on Members to build preparedness through foresight analysis and anticipate complex and wide-ranging impacts. The Framework defines emerging critical risks and describes a seven-step process for identifying, assessing, and developing strategies for managing them.

- Step 1: Identify emerging critical risks
  - Conduct horizon scanning and develop alternative futures to explore potential changes to the strategic operating environment.
  - Identify risks within those future environments and prioritise a research agenda for further analysis
- Step 2: Assess and share information
  - Assess and characterise the risks, identify possible conditions for emergence, explore implications for management, measure confidence in the assessment; and share with responsible stakeholders.
  - Continually monitor for and report on indications of emergence.
- Step 3: Assess management maturity and identify gap areas
  - Assess knowledge, responsibility, authorities, and capabilities for risks identified, to understand how prepared the country is to manage these risks and where critical gaps exist.
- Step 4: Develop and prioritise recommendations for managing identified risks and coping with uncertainty
  - Develop recommendations for building all-hazard preparedness and managing specific identified risks or groups of risks.
  - Recommendations should focus on development of knowledge, assignment of responsibility, creation of authorities, and investment in capabilities.
  - Prioritise the most impactful for validation and implementation.
- Step 5: Emerging risk exercise series
  - Use tabletop exercises to explore the management of the risks identified in step 1: discuss the possible emergence of the risk, the anticipatory context in which the risk is assessed, and what actions can be taken in advance to reduce future negative consequences and seize strategic opportunities to create advantage.
  - When possible, use the exercise to validate the identification of gaps and capture recommendations on how to address them, drawing on lessons identified from the planning for and management of previous emergencies.
- Step 6: Develop flexible and adaptable strategic plans
  - Identify how recommendations align to the likely timeline for emergence for risks to identify and synchronise priority actions.
  - Revisit plans as understanding of the risk changes, including establishing a process for transferring analysis and management to national risk assessment process once emergence is confirmed.
- Step 7: Implement recommendations
  - To ensure continuous improvement, integrate recommendations into existing strategic, policy, and budgetary processes to close identified gap.

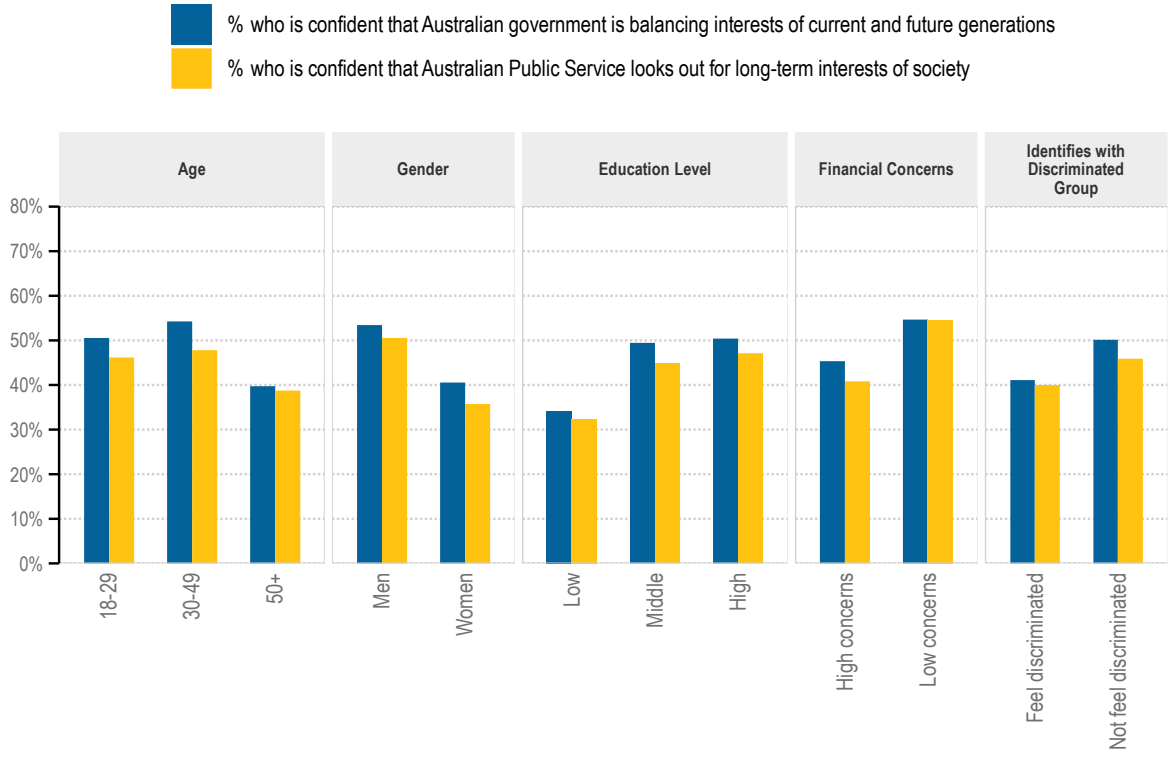
Source: reproduced from (OECD, 2024[14])

3.1.2. A minority of Australians are confident in the government's ability and willingness to protect long-term interests fairly and effectively

Australians' perceptions of the ability of institutions to tackle long-term challenges are significantly higher than across the OECD. Nevertheless, less than half of the population expresses confidence in the government's ability in this regard (Figure 3.2). 43% of Australians believe that the Australian Public Service looks out for society's long-term interests, a survey question that was only administered in Australia. There is a notable gender gap, with 51% of men holding this view compared to 36% of women. A slightly higher share of the Australian population, 47%, think the government adequately balances current and future generations' interests against 37% on average across the OECD. Again, there is a gender disparity, with 53% of men agreeing compared to 41% of women. Governments face unique challenges when addressing long-term issues like climate change, emerging technology regulation, and housing shortages. These policy problems are often hampered by limited information, clash with the short-term focus of electoral cycles, and risk being seen as technocratic issues divorced from public input.

Figure 3.2. Government's ability to tackle long-term challenges is perceived differently across population groups

Share of population who is confident that government balances inter-generational interests and the Australian Public Service seeks to serve long-term interests of society, Australia, 2023



Note: The figure shows the weighted Australia averages of responses to the questions "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that the national government adequately balances the interests of current and future generations" and "How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? - The Australian Public Service looks out for the long-term interests of society, even as elected governments and society change" by respondents' age, education level, gender, feeling of discrimination and status of financial concerns. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "confident" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. The status of discrimination is grouped by whether respondents stated whether they feel they belong to a discriminated group: ''Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in Australia?''. Financial concerns are measured by asking ''In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/f3n7tr

Australia has developed a robust evidence-base for long-term policy planning, mitigating the challenge of information poverty that often biases governments against long-term investments. The government produces comprehensive intergenerational reports that project economic and budgetary outlooks for the next 40 years, examining the sustainability of current policies in light of demographic and technological trends (Australian Government - Treasury, 2024[15]). Additionally, Australia has successfully institutionalised strategic foresight across its administration, with specialised teams in various government ministries focusing on future planning (OECD, 2022[16]). Initiatives such as the Futures Hub, CSIRO Futures, and the Australasian Joint Agencies Scanning Network, or the Investments Oversight Framework (IOF) further enhance the country's capacity for horizon scanning and trend analysis. Recently legislated, the introduction of Long-term Insights Briefings by the Australian Public Service demonstrates a commitment to examining information about medium-term and long-term trends, risks and opportunities that affect Australia or Australian society, and building institutional knowledge for future-oriented governance (Australian Government - DPMC, 2023[17]; Public Service Amendment Act 2024, 2024[18]).

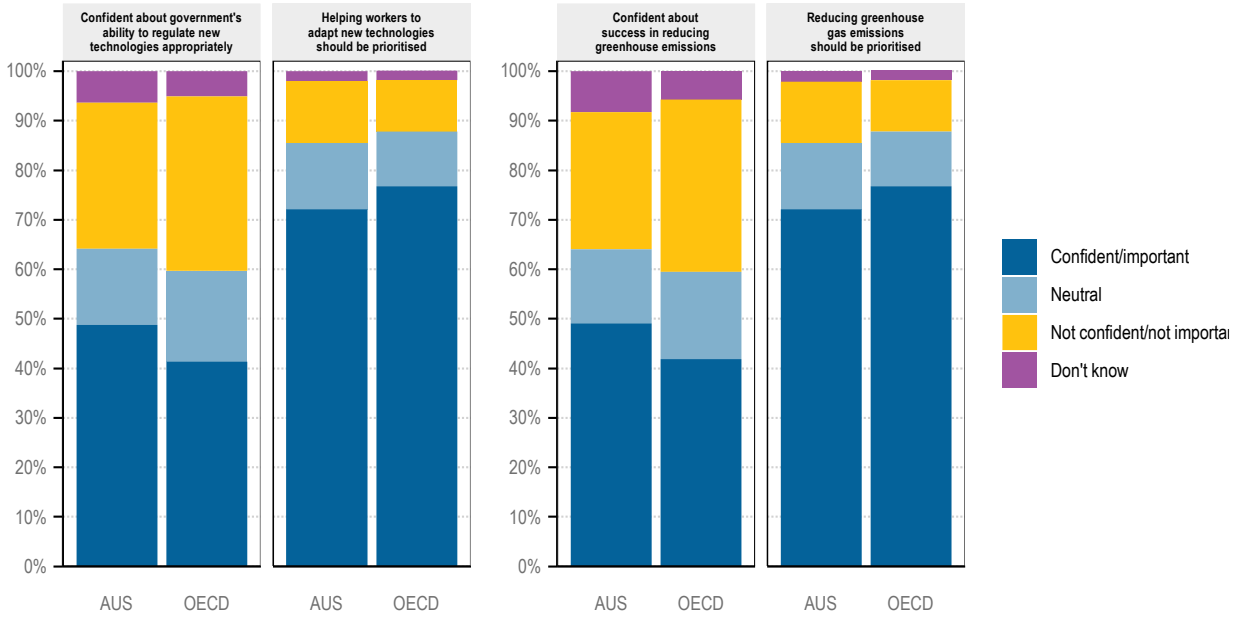
In addition to initiatives which aim to close the information gap, the incumbent government's strategic planning activities are critical to ensure the viability of long-term commitments (Ilott et al., 2016[19]). The Australian Public Service (APS) recognises this responsibility, as evidenced by recent amendments to the Public Service Act 1999. These changes introduced a new APS Value of Stewardship defined as anticipating medium and long-term issues, addressing current and future challenges, seizing opportunities, and considering the interests of all Australians (APSC, 2024[20]).

In parallel, it is also crucial to establish a continuous two-way dialogue between governments and the public. This ongoing engagement helps anchor long-term commitments and ensures that policies reflect the needs and perspectives of diverse stakeholders. The value of this two-way dialogue is recognised in the approach to developing Long-term Insights Briefings which must make provision for public consultation. It can not only improve the quality and democratic legitimacy of long-term policies but also increases public ownership over decision made (OECD, 2024[21]). Large-scale deliberative initiatives focusing on long-term issues are not yet common or institutionalised in Australia. Institutionalising these deliberative processes helps maintain continuity across political cycles and enables better long-term planning. A notable example of this institutionalisation is the Permanent Climate Assembly of Brussels, established in 2021. This assembly consists of 100 randomly selected citizens who serve for a period of 18 months, with one-third of the members being replaced every six months. The assembly is tasked with making recommendations on climate policies to the Brussels Parliament, ensuring a consistent citizen voice in climate-related decision-making (OECD, 2024[21]; Assemblée citoyenne pour le climat, 2024[22]). By fostering this ongoing dialogue and establishing permanent deliberative bodies, Australia could create more sustainable solutions to long-term challenges, particularly in policy areas where public buy-in is central. This recommendation aligns with Australia's commitment to establish "Youth advisory groups" included in the Third National Action Plan under the Open Government Partnership.

Additional data from the OECD Trust Survey sheds further light into Australians' perspectives on specific long-term issues. Notably, 49% of Australians trust the government to appropriately regulate new technologies and facilitate their use by people and businesses, again exceeding the OECD average of 41% Similarly, 49% of Australians are confident that their country's will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the next decade, surpassing the OECD average of 42% and showing an increase from 38% in 2021. In both cases, just over 7 in 10 Australians felt the government should make these policy areas priorities (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Confidence in government's ability to tackle complex challenges is higher in Australia than OECD average

Share of population reporting confidence in government's ability to regulate new technologies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and finds it important to prioritise those issues, Australia and OECD, 2023



Note: The figure presents the Australia and OECD averages of responses to the questions "If new technologies (for example artificial intelligence or digital applications) became available, how likely do you think it is that the national government will regulate them appropriately and help businesses and citizens use them responsibly?", "On a scale of 0-10, how important do you think it is that each of the following goals are prioritised in [COUNTRY]? - Helping workers in [Country] adapt to automation, digitalisation, and new technologies", "On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that [COUNTRY] will succeed in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the next ten years?" and "On a scale of 0-10, how important do you think it is that each of the following goals are prioritised in [COUNTRY]? - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions". The "Confident/important" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "Not confident/not important" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/et68xc

The confidence Australians express in the country's ability to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions only partially aligns with the current reality. When adjusted for population, Australia ranks second in GHG emissions among OECD countries, with 19 tonnes per capita in 2020 (Leandro, 2024[23]). The public's optimism could be influenced by various factors, including the complex nature of climate policy, political messaging emphasising carbon neutrality goals, and limited media scrutiny of policy implementation and effectiveness (OECD, 2024[24]).

When examining both the quality and likelihood of meeting established targets, the outlook becomes more nuanced. Australia has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 43% below 2005 levels by 2030, but these goals face substantial challenges due to the country's historical dependence on fossil fuels and its significant mining and agricultural sectors (Leandro, 2024[23]). Current measures under the government's baseline scenario are projected to keep the country on track, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 42.6% below 2005 levels by 2030 and remaining 3% below Australia's 2021-2030 emissions budget (Australian Government - DCEEW, 2024[25]). Organisations like Climate Action Tracker nevertheless criticise these targets projections, noting that the 2030 NDC target of 43% reduction falls short of the 1.5°C threshold, and highlighting concerns about the heavy reliance on land sector sequestration calculations, which mask limited progress in actual emissions reduction (Climate Action Tracker, 2024[26]). In light of this complex state of play, the 2023 OECD Economic Surveys: Australia

the OECD dedicated a chapter to achieving the transition to net zero in Australia and developed detailed recommendations to support Australia in achieving the transition to net zero (OECD, 2023[27]).

With regards to regulation surrounding technological innovation, Australia's existing regulatory framework appears efficient as reflected in its rankings: it stands 7th out of 25 OECD countries in terms of innovation-active businesses, according to the OECD innovation indicators (OECD, 2023[28]). Additionally, the World Intellectual Property Organization's 2023 Global Innovation Index places Australia 24th out of 132 countries, indicating its strong but still improving position in the global innovation landscape (WIPO, 2023[29]).

Recent government initiatives to gather public and stakeholder input on the adequacy of AI regulatory frameworks have nevertheless revealed a significant lack of public confidence in current institutional and regulatory structures. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's inaugural Long-term Insights briefing on AI's impact on public service trustworthiness (Australian Government - DPMC, 2023[17])highlighted a global study which found that only 44% of Australians believe AI's benefits outweigh its risks, with 35% agreeing that current institutional safeguards are adequate (Gillespie et al., 2023[30]). Moreover, the Department of Industry, Science and Resources' consultation process for their "Supporting Responsible AI" discussion paper received numerous submissions identifying critical gaps in existing laws (Australian Government - DISR, 2024[31]).

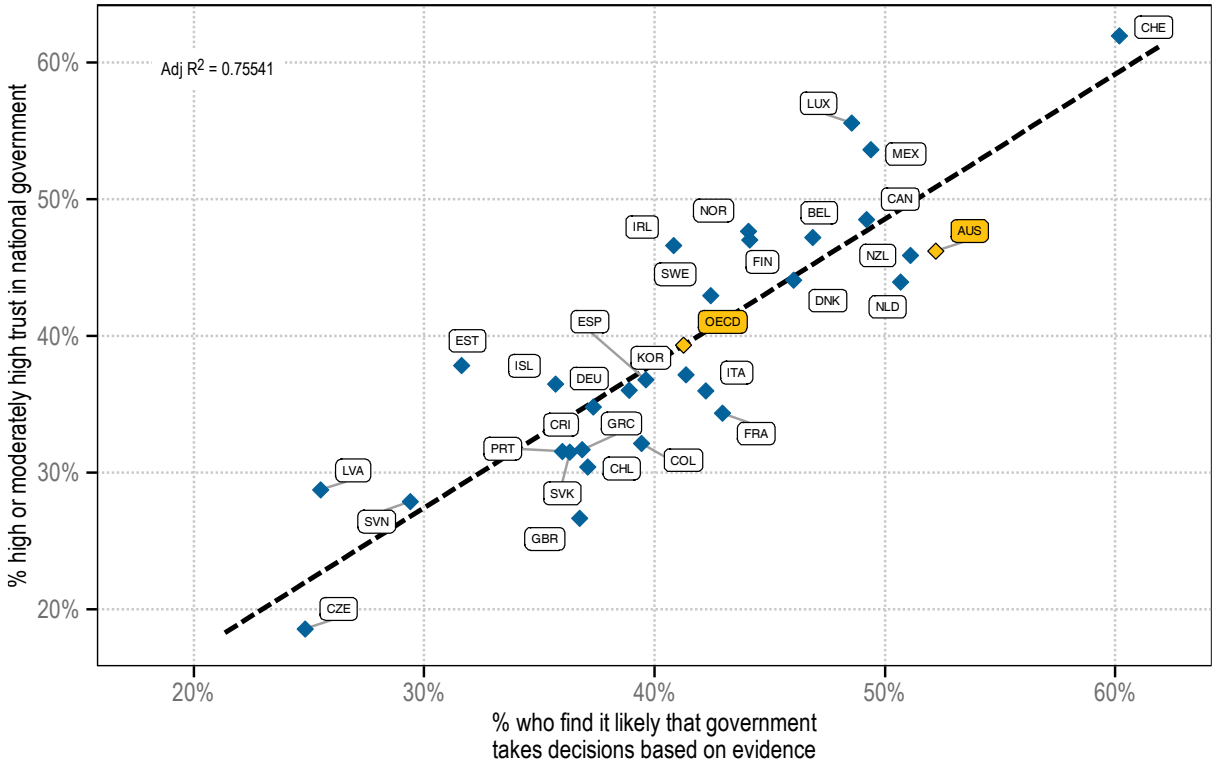
Building trust in the government's ability to effectively and safely harness innovation requires a two-pronged approach. On one hand, there is a need for an updated regulatory framework to address the challenges posed by emerging technologies, particularly AI. The government is actively working on strengthening existing laws and considering mandatory safeguards for high-risk AI applications (Australian Government - DISR, 2024[31]). On the other hand, clear communication efforts are crucial. The Long-Term Insights briefing highlights that there is low awareness of current initiatives and regulatory roles among the public (Australian Government - DPMC, 2023[17]). To build trustworthiness, the government must not only develop robust frameworks but also clearly communicate and explain these initiatives to the community. This includes making information about protections, regulatory responsibilities, and safety measures easily accessible and understandable to the public, especially in a complex and evolving technological landscape.

3.1.3. Further embedding high-quality research in decision-making processes could help lift trust levels

Evidence-informed policymaking is essential to elaborate and implement effective public policies and services in an increasingly volatile and uncertain environment. However successfully bridging the gap between knowledge formation and policymaking is challenging. Over half of the Australian population (52%) feel confident the government would use the best available evidence when designing policies, over 10 percentage points above the OECD average (41%) (Figure 3.4). Although Australia fares better compared to its peers, this represents an interesting area of opportunity given it is one of the largest drivers of trust in the federal government and parliament.

Figure 3.4. A slight majority of Australians feel public institutions use the best available evidence

Share of population with high or moderately high trust in the national government (y-axis) by share of people that think it is likely government takes decisions based on best available evidence (x-axis), 2023



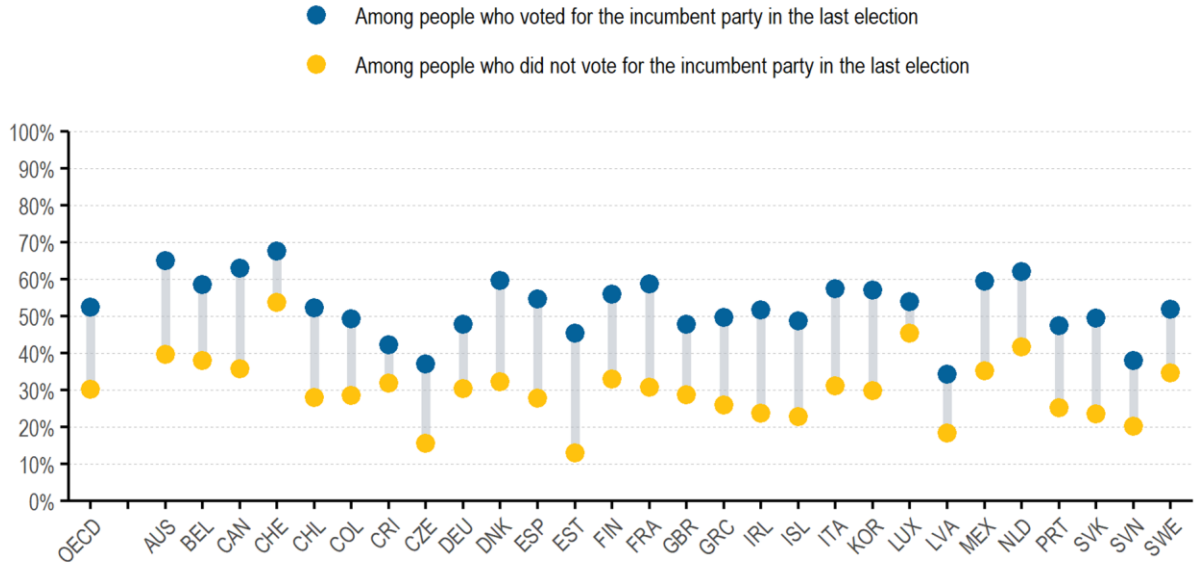
Note: The scatterplot presents the share of "high to moderately high trust" responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the national government?" on the y-axis. The y-axis presents the share of "likely" responses to the question "If the national government takes a decision, how likely do you think it is that it will draw on the best available evidence, research, and statistical data?". Both high or moderately high trust and 'likely' correspond to the 6-10 responses on the 0-10 scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/gczb43

Despite performing well compared to other OECD countries, nearly half of the Australian population perceives government decision-making as opaque. A notable gap exists between supporters and non-supporters of the incumbent party regarding their belief in the government's use of best evidence. While about two-thirds of those who voted for the current party in power believe the government uses the best evidence, only around 40% of those who did not vote for the ruling party think that is likely (Figure 3.5). As information environments become increasingly polarised, reaching a consensus on what constitutes the best evidence could potentially become more challenging. This divergence in perceptions could have implications for public trust and public buy-in for policies which require a significant degree of compliance. This underscores the importance of transparency about how government decisions are made (see Section 4.1.1 in Chapter 4).

Figure 3.5. In Australia and other OECD countries, people who voted for a party in power tend to find it more likely that government makes decisions based on evidence

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that government takes a decision based on best available evidence, research, and statistical data by whether they voted for a party in power or not, 2023



Note: The figure presents the responses to the question "If the national government takes a decision, how likely do you think it is that it will draw on the best available evidence, research, and statistical data?" by respondents' political alignment. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high or moderately high trust" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale, grouped by whether people voted (or would have) voted for the government in power: "Is the party you voted for in the last national election on [DATE] currently part of the government?". New Zealand is excluded from the figure as the survey question on voting for the current government was not included there. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/ds0t69

Australia has made significant progress in enhancing evidence-based policymaking, with practices varying across different policy areas. Australia continues to transparently publish Impact Analysis for relevant policies under the Australian Government Guide to Policy Impact Analysis. These are included with Explanatory Memorandum or Statement giving effect to policies as well as being published on the Office of Impact Analysis website. In line with recommendations from the 2019 Independent Review of the APS, there has been a concerted effort to institutionalise policy evaluation across government sectors (APS Reform, 2023[32]). In July 2023, the government established the Australian Centre of Evaluation to support APS evaluation practices and expertise; and most departments have now established in-house evaluation functions. Moreover, the Budget Process Operational Rules and Cabinet Handbook have been updated to focus on evaluating expenditure and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the policy lifecycle. Additionally, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) is developing a dedicated "evaluation profession" to attract and retain experts in this field (Australian Public Service Commission, 2024[33]). These initiatives appear to have been effective in shifting the culture, with stakeholders interviewed in the context of this study noting a growing interest in and demand for policy evaluation within the public service.

Other efforts to enhance the use of evidence in Australia's public service have shown mixed progress when comparing guidance from the 2019 Independent review. For instance, the Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services was expanded to include publishing agency-level data in annual reports and providing

monthly datasets online and steps are being taken to explore data sharing schemes with researchers. Efforts to formalise regular collaboration between the APS and academia are still underway.

Importantly, stakeholders have noted that the use of evidence tends to be unequal across policy areas, with sectors such as foreign aid, public health, education, and Indigenous affairs emerging as leaders. This suggests that while some progress has been made, there is still significant room for improvement in embedding high-quality research in decision-making processes and strengthening the public service's role as a knowledge broker across all policy domains.

Recognising the importance of addressing interconnected challenges through evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM), seven EU Member States are currently receiving technical support from the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) in this area (European Commission/OECD, 2022[34]). A dedicated framework was developed in the context of this project, to assess the evidence-informed policy making ecosystem in each country (see Box 3.3). Carrying out an assessment of this nature could help Australia better achieve its goal of regular and meaningful collaboration between the APS and academia. Drawing on this exercise, the newly established Australian Centre for Evaluation (supported by other existing functions such as the Office of Impact Analysis) has the potential to mature collaboration between the APS and academia and to improve evidence-informed policymaking.

Box 3.3. Analytical framework to assess a country's EIPM ecosystem

The following analytical framework was developed as part of the project on "Building capacity for evidence informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe" is supported by the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM)

	Supply of science and evidence	Demand for science and evidence	Where demand and supply meet
Individual	Professional and team competences Incentives to engage in science for policy Career profiles, mobility programmes and challenges		Better regulation, RIA, foresight, knowledge valorisation, policy evaluation, science advice, planning European commitments and processes (Structural Funds, RRP, etc.)
Organisation	Mandates & missions Dedicated structures, processes & support for science for policy	Role of civil service in policymaking Resources and staff suitable for evidence-informed policymaking	
Inter-organisational level	Co-ordination mechanisms & boundary organisations for policy engagement Role and functions of scientific councils, academies, etc.	Inter-institutional co-ordination (e.g. knowledge sharing mechanisms) Boundary organisations and actors to engage with scientific community and knowledge	
Systems / policy	Policies on research assessment, intersectoral mobility, research funding, etc. promoting EIPM-culture and values	Policies/processes/norms promoting EIPM-culture and values, public trust, and processes between branches of public administration	

Source: (European Commission/OECD, 2022[34])

3.1.4. Areas of opportunity for policy action

According to the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, Australians have more positive perceptions of government reliability compared to other OECD countries, though there remains room for improvement. While emergency preparedness correlates with higher trust in public institutions across the OECD, this correlation is notably absent in Australia. In a complex and volatile environment, where there is little room for error or oversight, this should nevertheless remain a priority for the government. Improving other dimensions of reliability have the potential to yield more important trust gains. Notably, positive perceptions of the government's ability to balance generational interests boosts trust in federal institutions, while confidence in the Australian Public Service's long-term focus increases public service trust by 8.1 percentage points. Evidence-based decision-making is a significant driver of trust in both the federal government and parliament—with the impact on parliamentary trust in Australia being nearly double the OECD average.

To improve perceptions of government reliability, and strengthen trust, Australia could consider the following:

- Promoting a more citizen-centric and holistic approach to resilience
  - Examine how to co-ordinate across government levels to provide more citizen-focused disaster responses, and help individuals better navigate the support and services available to them.
  - Enhance efforts to overcome silos to develop a whole-of-government approach to managing emerging critical risks.
- Enhancing confidence in the government's ability to protect long-term interests fairly and effectively
  - Continue to invest in anticipatory and strategic foresight exercises to overcome the poverty of information about longer-term outcomes.
  - Strengthen the institutional framework to mitigate the fragility of long-term commitments in democracies, notably through the APS Stewardship function.
  - Balance this technocratic approach with enhanced mechanisms for citizen participation on long-term issues to promote buy-in.
- Further embedding high-quality research in decision-making processes
  - Envisage assessing the country's evidence-informed policymaking to strengthen the use of evidence more equally across different commonwealth entities.

3.2. Responsiveness

The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions identifies ***responsiveness*** as the second pillar of government competence. This covers three dimensions of public governance: satisfaction with essential services; continuous improvement of services and programmes based on public input and feedback, and an innovative civil service. All these dimensions of government responsiveness drive trust in public institutions to varying degrees.

Australians are largely satisfied with the provision of essential services, although satisfaction with administrative services only marginally exceeds the OECD average. This represents an interesting area of opportunity given satisfaction with administrative services emerged as a driver of trust across all four selected public institutions. Nevertheless, important disparities between population groups persist, highlighting the challenges public institutions face in balancing a standardised service offer while tailoring their offer to specific needs. User-centric design and strengthening feedback loops can be a useful lever to mitigate these disparities, and boost satisfaction overall. In this regard, Australia performs rather well, with just under half of Australians consider the government to be responsive to their feedback,

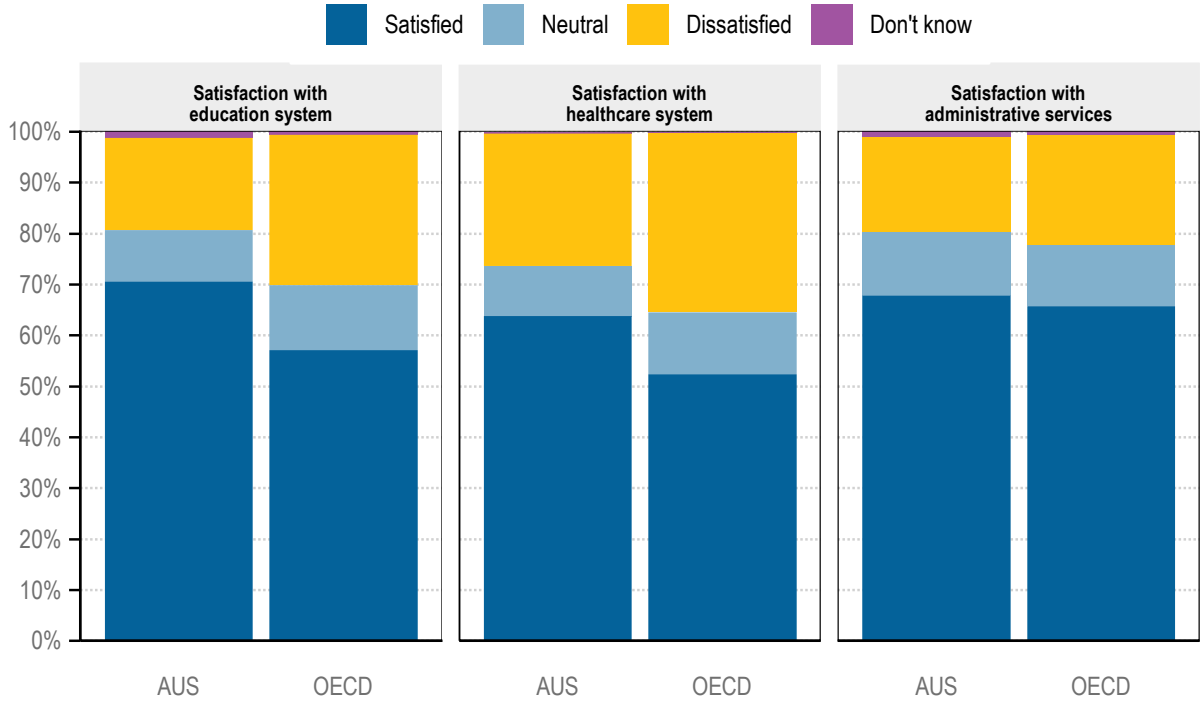
outperforming the OECD average. Finally, public sector innovation enables institutions to adapt their approaches to better address citizen expectations and has emerged as an important driver of trust in the federal government and in the public service in Australia. Overall, perceptions of public sector innovation in the country are relatively positive, but equity and ethical concerns persist.

3.2.1. Australians are largely satisfied with the provision of essential services

30% of Australian adults consider the availability, quality, and affordability of essential services such as healthcare and education among the top three policy issues in their country, aligning closely with the OECD average (Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2). This emphasis underscores the importance of continual enhancement in public service delivery to maintain and strengthen public trust in Australia's governmental institutions. Public institutions are generally perceived as dependable providers of essential services, such as education or health, with user satisfaction rates surpassing the OECD average. However, satisfaction with administrative services only marginally exceeds the OECD average (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6. Service satisfaction among users exceeds the OECD average, but only slightly so for administrative services

Share of recent service users who indicate satisfaction with the education and, healthcare system and administrative services, in Australia and OECD average, 2023



Note: The figure shows the OECD and Australia averages of "high satisfaction" responses to the questions, "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the healthcare/education/administrative system in [COUNTRY]?". Both the Australia and OECD averages represent the share of respondents who had interacted with the respective service in the past two years. 'High satisfaction' includes responses from 6 to 10 on the 0-10 scale. The 'OECD Average' is an unweighted average across countries, while 'Australia' represents the country's weighted average.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/1z902o

Education

In Australia, a large majority (71%) of those enrolled in an educational institution in the past two years—or who had a family member enrolled—were satisfied with the educational system (Figure 3.6). This share is well above the OECD average of 57% and has risen from 63% in 2021.

Assessments of student performance, including through the internationally comparable 'Programme for International Student Assessment' largely support the positive perceptions of Australia's education system. The 2022 PISA results show Australia ranks 11th out of 80 countries based on student literacy, science, and math skills (OECD, 2023[35]). Australia's education system is unique, with 31% of children attending government-dependent private schools (also called non-government schools in Australia), more than double the OECD average of 15% (OECD, 2024, p. 190[36]). Despite this highly privatised system, socioeconomic factors influence performance similarly to other OECD countries. In Australia, socio-economic status accounted for 15% of the variation in mathematics performance in PISA 2022, on par with the average across OECD countries (OECD, 2023[35]). However, long-term trends paint a somewhat more nuanced picture of educational outcomes: compared to the early 2000s, current 15-year-old Australian students are scoring at levels expected of 14-year-olds two decades ago in mathematics and reading. Similarly, based on NAPLAN, an assessment tool which tests reading and numeracy in all states and territories against the Australian curriculum only, the Productivity Commission found that results have remained generally flat over time (Productivity Commission, 2022[37]).

This trend of stagnant educational outcomes has unfolded despite substantial funding for education. Australia's education expenditure as a percentage of GDP ranks among the highest in OECD countries (5.8%, 6th out of 36 countries in 2021), and has risen in recent years (OECD, 2024, p. 281[36]; Productivity Commission, 2022[37]). This echoes research suggesting that *beyond a certain threshold,* how financial resources are used matters more for student performance than the level of investment (OECD, 2023[35]). In Australia in 2022, 61% of students were in schools where principals reported that instruction was hindered by staff shortages, and 27% by inadequate teaching staff (OECD, 2023[35]). This shortage has worsened since 2018 and is likely to remain, as a recent study found that just 41% of surveyed teachers intended to remain in the profession, citing heavy workloads, health concerns, and low professional status (Heffernan et al., 2022[38]). To address these challenges, Australia has developed new strategic priorities through the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, which notably has “building a strong and sustainable workforce” as one of three priority areas for reform, along with equity and excellence, and well-being for learning and engagement (Australian Government - Department of Education, 2024[39]).

However, the ability to deliver on these priority areas is constrained by Australia’s federal structure. Australia's education system features a shared responsibility between state/territory and federal governments (Australian Government - Department of Education, 2024[40]). States and territories provide most of the recurrent funding and manage the operation of government schools from preschool to secondary level and vocational training, while the Commonwealth leads national educational policies, provides most of the recurrent funding for non-government schools and has responsibility for tertiary education. The OECD Education Policy Outlook for Australia identifies two key challenges: the need for more inclusive involvement of diverse actors in policymaking and the difficulty in implementing national goals consistently across all levels due to varied sub-national contexts. These challenges are crucial to address the success of the new education agreement. (OECD, 2023[41]). A positive example of how Australia is addressing these challenges is the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Box 3.4).

Box 3.4. Elaboration of the National Teacher Workforce Plan in Australia

The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan is one positively cited example of State-Commonwealth collaboration. On 12 August 2022, all Education Ministers of Australia, teachers, principals, and other education experts came together for a roundtable to discuss the national issue of teacher workforce shortages. It was agreed work would begin to develop the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Action Plan) to attract and retain more teachers in the workforce. A draft Action Plan was developed and released for public consultation, which received more than 600 submissions from teachers, principals, education stakeholders and members of the community. The feedback received was incorporated and all Education Ministers agreed to the Action Plan in December 2022.

The Action Plan consists of 27 actions set out across five key priority areas aimed at setting a clear pathway for addressing Australia's teacher workforce shortages. Some actions are led by individual states and territories, while others are led by the Australian Government or other agencies.

As part of the implementation of the Action Plan, a dedicated National Teacher Workforce Action Plan Working Group, consisting of representatives from all states, territories, as well as education organisations and agencies, meets each quarter to discuss progress of all 27 actions under the Action Plan. The progress and implementation of each action is then reported to all education ministers through quarterly Education Ministers Meetings.

Source: Information provided by the Department of Education in the context of this Review.

Healthcare system

Satisfaction with the healthcare system in Australia is slightly lower than with the education system, but remains well above the OECD average: 64% of those who used or had a household member use the healthcare system in the past 12 months were satisfied, compared to the OECD average of 52% (Figure 3.6). Core indicators from the 2023 edition of Health at a Glance related to health outcomes and access to care suggest this positive perception is warranted (OECD, 2023[42]). Life expectancy at birth in Australia stands at 83 years, two years above the OECD average. Health coverage is excellent, with 100% of the population having coverage through Medicare (OECD, 2023[42]). However, there remains room for improvement regarding the effectiveness of primary and preventive care. For example, in terms of effective primary care, Australia performs worse than the OECD average—654 avoidable hospital admissions (per 100 000 people) compared to the OECD average of 463.

On one hand, the Australian health system appears efficient and well-resourced compared to other OECD countries, with higher public health expenditure (20% vs. 15% OECD average) and better health outcomes (OECD, 2023[42]). Australia also has a slightly above-average number of practicing physicians and nurses per capita. However, the system faces significant workforce challenges which threaten to increase in coming years (Australian Government - AIHW, 2024[43]). The Skills Priority List 2023 report indicates that 82% of health professional occupations were in shortage, particularly in areas like general practice and mental health. This shortage is exacerbated by structural factors, notably global competition for healthcare professionals and Australia's ageing population.

The slightly poorer results with regards to the effectiveness of primary and preventive care should also be interpreted considering the complex nature of the Australian health system's institutional framework. The federal government is primarily responsible for funding and regulating Medicare (universal health insurance scheme), the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and aged care, whilst also providing significant funding for public hospitals. State and territory governments are responsible for managing public hospitals, ambulance services, and community health services. Local governments play a role in environmental health and some

community services (Government of Australia, 2023[44]). This multi-tiered structure can lead to potential gaps in service delivery and challenges in co-ordinating care across different sectors of the health system especially between primary care and hospitals (Angeles, Crosland and Hensher, 2023[45]; OECD, 2015[46]). These issues can also be exacerbated by the fee-for-service funding model, which makes integrated care particularly challenging for patients with complex chronic conditions (Angeles, Crosland and Hensher, 2023[45]). Despite attempts to improve integration through initiatives like Medicare Locals and Primary Health Networks (PHNs), progress towards a cohesive national healthcare system has been limited.

Administrative services

Australia's satisfaction with administrative services shows a mixed picture. While 68% of Australians who used these services in the past year were satisfied, slightly above the OECD average of 66%, the country ranks 14th out of 30 countries. Encouragingly, overall satisfaction (among both users and non-users) has increased from 53% in 2021 to 65% in 2023. Further, while most users are satisfied with various aspects of their last experience with an administrative service, there is more room for improvement in service speed (67% satisfaction) and accessibility through preferred channels (71% satisfaction) (Figure 3.7). This area of action represents an important avenue to build trust, as satisfaction with administrative services significantly impacts trust at all levels of government in Australia. Above-average satisfaction is associated with a 5.4 percentage point increase in trust for the federal government, and 5.5 percentage points for both local government and public service.

Figure 3.7. Australians are satisfied with different aspects of administrative services

Share of population who are satisfied with the administrative service aspect, Australia and OECD average, 2023

Note: The figure presents the weighted Australia average and unweighted OECD average of the share who indicated satisfaction with the respective aspect when answering the question: "Thinking about the most recent administrative service that you personally made use of, how satisfied were you with each of the following? Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means you are not at all satisfied, and 10 means you are completely satisfied". The satisfied proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale. 'Don't know' and 'not applicable' were separate answer options.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/78lxs5

Administrative services encompass a wide range of governmental functions, including ID applications, birth registrations, and benefit applications. These services are provided by various institutions, at different levels of government. For instance, birth registrations or driver's licenses are typically handled at the state level, while passport applications are managed by the federal Australian Passport Office. The welfare system, a significant component of administrative services, involves both federal and state governments to a varying extent. In the 2021-22 fiscal year, government welfare spending reached AUD 212.4 billion, with the federal government contributing 88% of this amount (Australian Government - AIHW, 2024[47]). These services are largely overseen by the Minister for Government Services, who also serves as Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). It is anchored within the Department of Social Services, with several agencies responsible for implementation. These include Services Australia (which manages the MyGov online portal and programmes like Centrelink and Medicare Australia) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

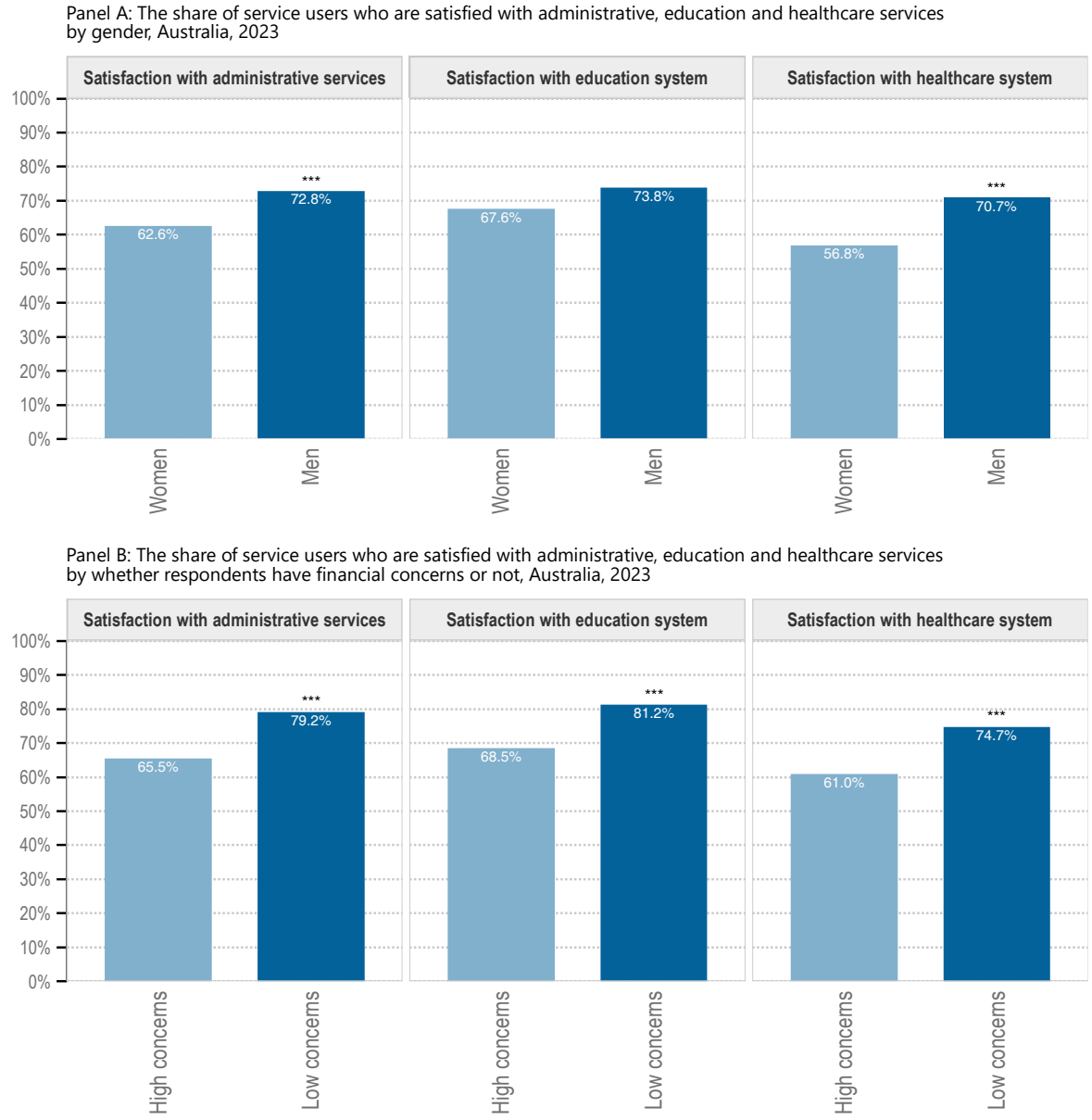
Delivery of administrative services in Australia have faced challenges in recent years, impacting satisfaction levels. Services Australia's reputation suffered due to the "Robodebt" scheme, while staffing issues led to backlogs and increased response times. The government has significantly increased staffing levels to address backlog issues (Government of Australia - DSS, 2024[48]; Services Australia, 2024[49]). Notably, there has been an increase of ongoing staff in frontline service delivery functions from the conversion of casual labour. Similarly, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)[2] has been under pressure, with an independent review highlighting concerns such as over-reliance on the scheme and financial sustainability (NDIS Review, 2023[50]). In response, the government has created a Disability Reform Roadmap and is developing a Foundational Supports Strategy (Australian Royal Commission, 2023[51]; Australian Government - DSS, 2024[52]).

3.2.2. Disparities in satisfaction with essential services between population groups remain

Although levels of satisfaction with essential services are high in Australia, the OECD Trust Survey reveals notable differences in satisfaction with Australian public services across socio-economic and demographic groups. Disparities in satisfaction with core government services can have significant implications for service uptake, and further compound existing inequalities (OECD, 2023[53]). These differences in satisfaction levels between socio-demographic groups may indicate variations in accessibility, timeliness, or quality of services for people with different backgrounds.

For administrative services, gender, education, and financial concern all play significant roles. Men, individuals with higher levels of educational attainment, and those without financial concerns consistently reported higher satisfaction levels (Figure 3.8). Healthcare system satisfaction followed a similar pattern. For example, women tend to be 14 percentage points less satisfied with healthcare services than men. Similarly, those with higher levels of educational attainment, and those without financial worries expressed greater satisfaction. Interestingly, the education system showed less variation, with only financial concern significantly impacting satisfaction levels. Notably, age did not significantly influence satisfaction across any of the three services. The consistent correlation between financial stability and higher satisfaction across all sectors underscores the profound impact of economic well-being on how citizens view and interact with public services in Australia.

Figure 3.8. In Australia, women and people with financial concerns are less satisfied with services compared to men and those who don't feel financial concerns



Note: The figure presents the weighted Australia averages of responses to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with the administrative/education/healthcare services in Australia?" by respondents' gender and status of financial concerns. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "satisfied" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. Financial concerns are measured by asking ''In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned) on a 1-4 scale.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/pel7nj

This presents a complex challenge for governments, as they must balance the need to streamline service provision out of an efficiency mindset while also catering to the specific needs of diverse groups and delivering on broader societal goals (Nordesjö, Ulmestig and Denvall, 2022[54]). The tension between standardisation and customisation is further complicated by the diversity of services, which cover a wide

range of needs and are organised in distinct ways (Baredes, 2022[55]). For instance, some services are more frequently used by certain social groups, while others are compulsory. Additionally, as outlined in prior sections, in Australia many key services involve complex co-ordination arrangements among levels of government, limiting the ability of any single level of government to enact change.

Data on satisfaction with services among Indigenous Australians is scarce, presenting challenges in assessing their experiences with public services and potential impact on trust levels. The OECD Trust Survey did not ask about people's ethnicity, and other surveys have faced limitations in representativeness (see Box 2.2 in Chapter 2). The Survey on Trust in Australian Public Services sample was not representative of the Indigenous Australian population. Current monitoring efforts primarily focus on socio-economic outcome measures rather than measures of access and quality of public services available to Indigenous Australians and subjective satisfaction levels. Developing measures of service satisfaction that are representative of different population groups, including Indigenous Australians, could provide public institutions with better evidence to address satisfaction gaps.

Nevertheless, recent data on socio-economic outcomes, produced to monitor progress made towards Closing the Gap targets, reveal significant disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the non-Indigenous population in Australia, suggesting public services are not yet adequately meeting the needs of Indigenous communities. A significant portion (15.4%) of Indigenous Australians live in remote or very remote areas, while 30% reside in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. This geographical and socioeconomic distribution starkly contrasts with non-Indigenous Australians and presents unique challenges for service delivery to Indigenous communities.

In education, 68% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20–24 years had attained Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared to 91% among non-Indigenous Australians (Productivity Commission, 2024[56]). This gap widens in remote areas and more disadvantaged socio-economic regions, highlighting the intersection of geographic and economic factors in educational attainment.

Health outcomes also show concerning disparities. Life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remains significantly lower than for non-Indigenous Australians, with gaps of 8.8 years for males and 8.1 years for females in 2020-2022 (Productivity Commission, 2024[57]). These gaps, while smaller than in 2005-2007, have widened since 2015-2017, indicating a regression in progress. As is the case for education metrics, the disparities are even more pronounced in remote and socio-economically disadvantaged areas. However, there are some positive trends, such as the increasing proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies born with a healthy birthweight, though this improvement is less evident in remote and disadvantaged areas (Productivity Commission, 2024[58]).

Available data also suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly more likely to require support from administrative and social services compared to the non-Indigenous population. This disparity is starkly illustrated across several key indicators. In child welfare, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care remains high, with 57.2 per 1000 children in care as of 2023, compared to just 4.7 per 1000 for non-Indigenous children (Productivity Commission, 2024[59]). The significant employment gap also suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to need job seeker services, with 55.7% of Indigenous people aged 25-64 years employed in 2021, compared to 77.7% among non-Indigenous people (Productivity Commission, 2024[60]). Housing data adds another layer to this complex picture, with 18.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households residing in social housing in 2021, compared to 3.2% for other households (Productivity Commission, 2024[61]). Notably, the proportion of Indigenous households in social housing increases dramatically with remoteness, reaching 68.7% in very remote areas.

Australia is not alone in facing stark disparities in satisfaction and outcomes between population groups. In 2023, the OECD Council adopted the Recommendation on Human-centred Public Administrative Services, which offers a clear, common framework for designing and delivering government services

tailored to people's needs to help bridge these gaps (see Box 3.5). The following two sections of this report will examine in more depth Australia's practices related to this recommendation.

Box 3.5. OECD Recommendation on Human-centred Public Administrative Services

The Recommendation on Human-centred Public Administrative Services was adopted by the OECD Council in September 2024. It offers a clear, common framework for designing and delivering government services that are tailored to people's needs and support them through major life events and challenges.

It outlines practices for governments to design and deliver human-centred public administrative services through:

- Strategic vision, values and rights
  - Foster and promote a strategic vision and approach to strengthen the design and delivery of services, based on the values and culture of a human-centred approach.
  - Uphold the protection of both the public interest, and the rights and legitimate interests of users through the design and delivery of services that offer procedural guarantees and administrative and judicial review.
- Core foundations
  - Clearly define roles and responsibilities for enabling human-centred service design and delivery.
  - Equip public servants with the skills and competencies and working environment to design and deliver human-centred services.
  - Ensure the availability of reliable and inclusive digital public infrastructure that supports human-centred service design and delivery.
- Seamless and accessible services
  - Develop simple and intuitive processes that are accessible, inclusive, and coherent across channels (phone, online, in-person), to facilitate a smooth user journey.
  - Adopt collaborative, inclusive, and innovative approaches in the design and delivery of services.
- Measurement, engagement, and improvement
  - Measure and report on user experiences with, and perceptions of, service design and delivery, and use this information to identify ways to improve satisfaction with public services.

Source: [OECD/LEGAL/0503]

3.2.3. Human-centred design, increased citizen engagement and strengthening feedback loops could help bridge these gaps and boost overall satisfaction

Service and policy design emerges as a crucial lever in mitigating these disparities (OECD, 2022[62]). A human-centred approach involves understanding users and their needs through ongoing measurement and engagement, making the design and delivery process participatory and inclusive, and addressing barriers that prevent people from accessing public services across all channels (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.3 in Chapter 4 on openness and fairness).

To enhance the quality of citizen participation in policy and service design, OECD countries are increasingly investing in building internal capacities and skills within their public service. The OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative monitoring report reveals that nearly 80% of surveyed countries have implemented toolkits and guidelines for civil servants on citizen and stakeholder participation, with 64% offering related training programs (OECD, 2024[21]). Australia exemplifies this approach with its comprehensive framework, including a Charter of Partnerships and Engagement, Good Practice Guidance and self-assessment tool for Partnerships and Engagement, as well as the APS Vision for user-centred service excellence which was created by the Australian community (Australian Government - APS Reform, 2024[63]). These resources support public officials in fostering quality external engagement and genuine partnerships in policymaking across various sectors, to better meet people's needs.

Interviews conducted for this study revealed that public institutions at the Commonwealth level in Australia engage regularly and systematically with a wide variety of actors and stakeholders when designing policies, programmes, and services. However, they tend to interact more with other departments, levels of government, and organised interest groups (both private sector and civil society organisations) rather than directly with citizens. This limited citizen engagement occurs for several reasons: sometimes due to low public knowledge about specific policy areas, sometimes because they believe citizen input is better managed by another institution jointly responsible for the portfolio, or because of challenges in framing the engagement in a way that wouldn't unduly influence the outcomes of the exercise.

While these efforts are commendable, there is a value in developing approaches which focus specifically on engaging citizens or intended users of a service, distinct from stakeholder engagement, which typically includes other interest groups (see also Section 4.1.2 in Chapter 4). The OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation processes highlights the value of this distinction "*Stakeholders can provide expertise and more specific input than citizens through mechanisms such as advisory bodies or experts' panels, whereas citizen participation requires methods that provide the public with the time, information, and resources to produce quality inputs and develop individual or collective recommendations*" (OECD, 2022[64]). France, as part of its Open Government Plan, has taken a pioneering step by developing two initiatives to institutionalise citizen engagement in policy and service design (Box 3.6).

Box 3.6. Institutionalising citizen engagement in policy and service design in France

France has introduced two innovative initiatives to enhance citizen engagement in policy and service design:

1. The Interministerial Center for Citizen Participation (CIPC) is a government body that provides support, advice, and expertise to improve the quality of citizen participation initiatives across the administration. Located within the centre of government, it assists administrations in their participatory projects and ensures the quality of citizen consultations, transparency, and follow-up actions.
2. The Citizen Initiatives Accelerator, created on December 17, 2021, supports projects led by citizens or associations working for the public interest. This program, part of France's open government action plan, offers a 3-month support phase for selected projects. The Accelerator aids project leaders through various means, including access to state data, coaching, administrative connections, funding assistance, and increased visibility.

Source : https://www.modernisation.gouv.fr/associer-les-citoyens/le-centre-interministeriel-de-la-participation-citoyenne

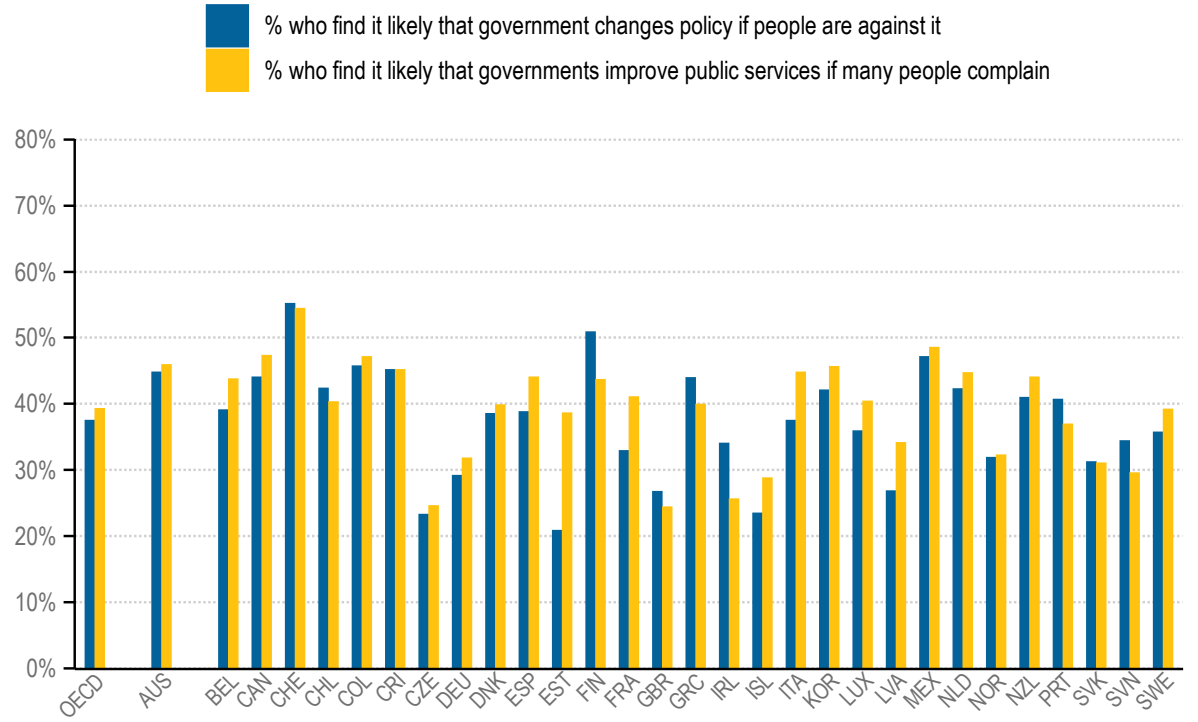
In parallel, Australia could benefit from developing a civil society organisation (CSO) strategy to enhance its the quality of its engagement with the civil society sector and align with international best practices. Most OECD countries (68% of 32 respondents) have already implemented such frameworks, leaving

Australia as one of only seven countries without a CSO strategy (OECD, 2024[21]). This presents an opportunity for Australia to strengthen its approach to civil society engagement. Government strategies to promote an enabling environment for CSOs typically include a definition of civil society, an assessment of the operating environment, a high-level vision for state-CSO engagement (usually focused on democracy, improved service delivery, citizen well-being, civic participation, and social cohesion), and coherent objectives that reflect these priorities (OECD, 2022[65]). A well-designed CSO strategy could support capacity-building among civil society organisations and help public institutions reap more benefits from frequent engagement with these groups.

A second lever to ensure services and programmes meet people's needs is a robust framework for gathering feedback and carrying out policy evaluations. In 2023, 46% of Australians believed that the government would improve a public service if many people complained, surpassing the OECD average of 39%. This represents a significant increase from 42% in 2021, indicating growing confidence in the government's willingness to address public concerns. Similarly, 45% of Australians feel that a government policy would be changed if a majority expressed opposition, compared to only 37% across the OECD. This perception has also improved from 38% in 2021, suggesting that Australians are increasingly confident in their ability to influence government decisions through collective action (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9. In Australia and across the OECD, less than half believes government is responsive to people's demands

Share of the population who find it likely that governments improve public services if many people complain and changes policy if people are against it, 2023



Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of the share who respond that it is 'likely' (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) to the questions "If over half of the people in [COUNTRY] clearly expressed a view against national or central policy, how likely do you think it is that it would be changed?" (blue) and "If many people complained about a public service that is working badly, how likely do you think it is that it would be improved?" (yellow).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/6q1nzk

The Australian Government employs a comprehensive framework of mechanisms to align its services with the needs and expectations of its citizens, and to facilitate feedback and complaints about various public services. This framework includes direct feedback channels, Ombudsmen at the federal and state levels, consumer protection agencies, the newly established Centre for Evaluation, as well as regular polling and survey exercises.

Despite this robust framework, the 2023 Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services found that just 64% of service users found it was clear they could give feedback about their experience. Of those who did provide feedback, 63% were satisfied with the way the feedback or complaint was handled. This suggests a need to raise greater awareness among the public as to how they can provide feedback, as well as potentially gathering additional data through the Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services as to what type of outcome people would typically seek when submitting feedback or a complaint, as well as disaggregating this data by region.

Gaps in satisfaction and outcomes between Indigenous and non-indigenous citizens tend to require the use of additional levers, as they typically result from a different set of governance failures. A 2019 OECD comparative study of five countries, including Australia, Canada, Mexico, New Zealand, and the United States, revealed that Australia faces the most severe disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, particularly in life expectancy, employment, and education. The study also identified four key governance failures contributing to poor outcomes: inadequate service delivery coherence, insufficient inter-governmental co-ordination, limited Indigenous involvement in decision-making, and inadequate community capacity. These issues stem from historical approaches characterised by spatial blindness and assimilation policies, hindering effective place-based strategies (OECD, 2019[66]).

These governance failures were all echoed by community-controlled organisation leaders interviewed in the context of this study. Interviewees flagged that grant funding model often makes it impossible to make changes in service provision in response to evolving needs, with organisations often managing dozens of funding arrangements for multiple service areas. Block funding was raised as a more promising alternative. The lack of co-ordination across government levels was also identified as a significant issue, in particular when communities straddle different jurisdictions. Innovative approaches in certain policy areas, such as mobile hubs with child welfare officers, able to work across state borders, were identified as positive developments. Crucially, all stakeholders felt a lack of shared decision-making in practice.

These challenges stem from various factors, including jurisdictional complexities, patterns of discrimination or inappropriate engagement, lack of political representation, and resource constraints faced by Indigenous organisations. The priority reform areas in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap seem to align well with the common governance failures identified by the OECD. However, the first review carried out by the Productivity Commission suggests progress in this area remains limited (Box 3.7).

Box 3.7. Productivity Commission review of the Closing the Gap Agreement

The Productivity Commission's first review of progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, released on 7 February 2024, found that fundamental changes are required to deliver on the Agreement. Below is a summary of the review's findings on the four priority reform areas:

Priority reform 1: Formal partnerships and Shared decision-making:

- Governments can share decision-making when trust and power balance exist, but this usually occurs only in emergencies or when pressured.
- Policy partnerships are acting more like forums rather than places for joint decision-making.
- Place-based partnerships are new, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in location selection.

Priority reform 2: Building the community-controlled sector:

- Some government organisations are making positive changes, such as longer-term contracts and prioritising funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)
- Overall progress has been slow, with many processes still following a 'business-as-usual' approach.
- Sector Strengthening Plans (SSPs) have been developed but lack detail and accountability.

Priority reform 3: Transforming government organisations:

- Many organisations are implementing cultural capability training and strategies to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the public sector.
- There's a lack of whole-of-government strategies for driving transformation.
- Lack of progress on this reform is putting other Priority Reforms and the Agreement at risk.

Priority reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level:

- No significant change has occurred in this area.
- Government actions mostly involve sharing existing data.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input on data use is often undervalued.
- Community data projects are progressing slowly, with unclear implications for broader reform

Overall, the review indicates that whilst some progress has been made, significant challenges remain in implementing the reforms effectively across all priority areas.

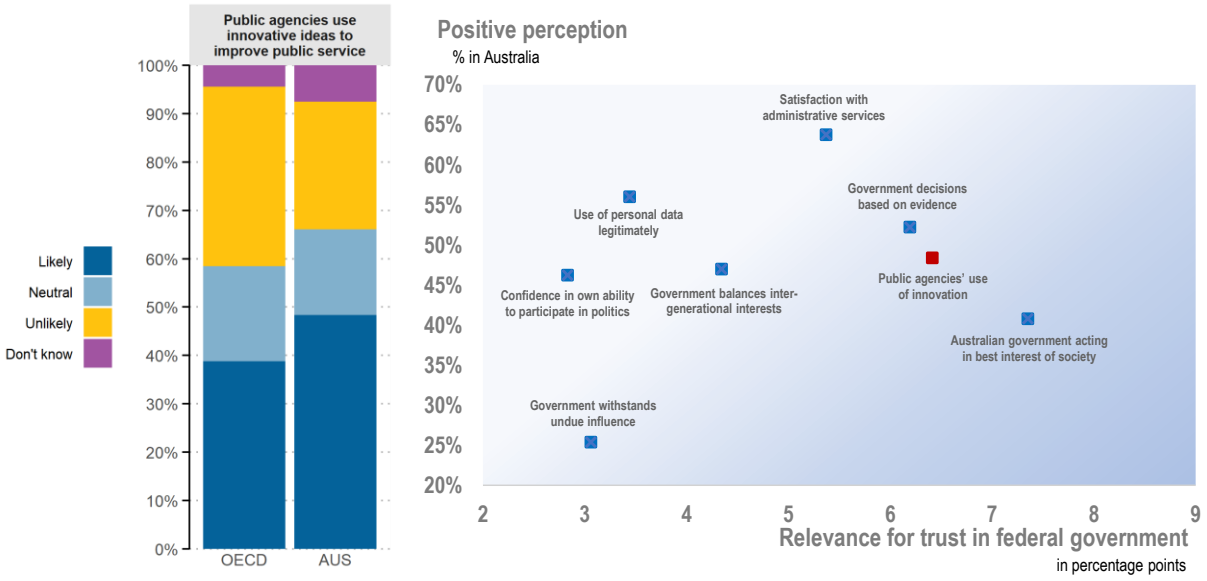
Source: (Productivity Commission, 2024[67])

3.2.4. Public sector innovation is critical lever for more seamless and accessible services, but equity and ethical concerns persist in the context of digital transformation

Innovation in the public sector is vital for maintaining public trust in government over time. It allows for the development of new approaches to address citizen expectations, as traditional structures and processes in the public sector can fall short in meeting these needs [OECD/LEGAL/0450]. This is often challenging for public administrations, whose systems tend to favour the status quo, a result of the need for stable and dependable government operations.

The OECD Trust Survey found 48% of Australians believe public institutions would adopt innovative ideas to improve services, ranking Australia third in this aspect (Figure 3.10). Furthermore, innovation has emerged as a driver of trust in both the federal government and parliament in Australia (see Chapter 2). This contrasts with the OECD overall trend, where innovation only drives trust in local government. These findings suggest that Australia's efforts to foster public sector innovation have been well-received overall and are positively contributing to public trust.

Figure 3.10. Nearly half of Australians feel public institutions would implement innovative ideas if it would improve a public service



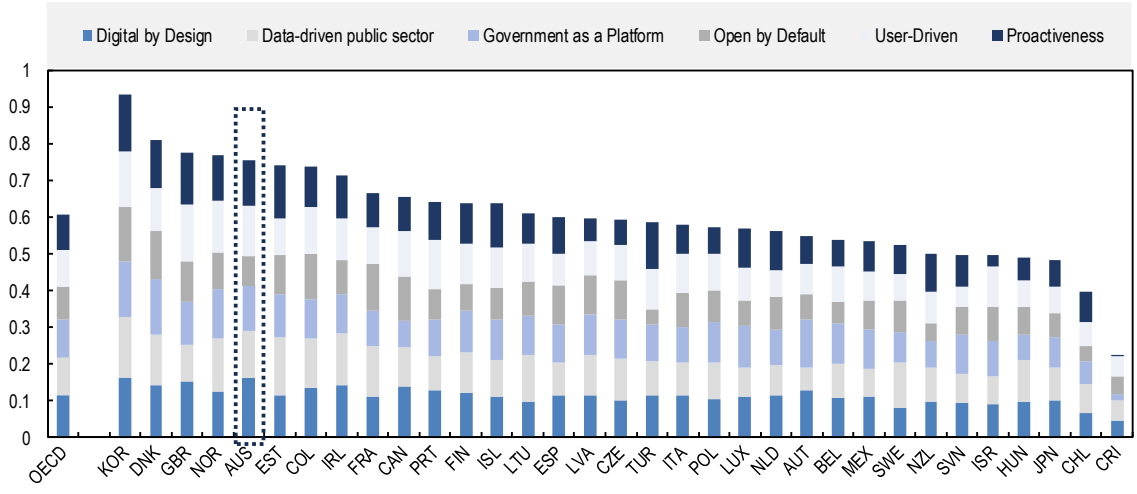
Note: The figure on the left shows the Australia and OECD averages of responses to the question "If there was an innovative idea that could improve a public service, how likely do you think it is that it would be adopted by the responsible institution?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. The figure on the right presents the statistically significant determinants of trust in the federal government in Australia, based on a logistic regression model that accounts for individual characteristics. These characteristics include whether respondents voted (or would have voted) for one of the current ruling parties, their self-reported levels of interpersonal trust, and whether they perceive themselves as part of a discriminated group within their country. The "relevance for trust" metric represents the average marginal effect of each variable. All displayed variables are statistically significant at $p < 0.1$.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/yz4eis

Once a primary focus of public sector reform in Australia, innovation has now become integrated across various objectives, serving as a means rather than an end. This shift is evident in the disbanding of the Public Sector Innovation Network in 2021 and the end of the Public Sector Innovation Awards in 2020 (Australian Government - Department of Industry, 2021[68]) (IPAA, 2024[69]). The 2019 Independent Review of the Australian Public Service highlighted the need for a revitalised innovation culture, redesigned processes, and enhanced capabilities to drive meaningful change, emphasising openness, collaboration, and calculated risk-taking (Independent Review of the APS, 2019[70]). Notably, it found that only 27% of APS employees at the time believed appropriate risk-taking was rewarded, and 44% reported insufficient time for innovation. The independent review's recommendations included guidance to establish public service innovation incubator, but this item was closed in favor of integrating innovation across various initiatives (Australian Government - APS Reform, 2023[71]).

The Australian government has been actively pursuing digital transformation in the public sector to drive innovation and improve access to government services. Key initiatives include the establishment of the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) in 2015, which provides strategic leadership and expertise on ICT and digital matters (Parliament of Australia, 2019[72]). The government has also implemented various strategies, such as the Data and Digital Government Strategy released in May 2023, along with other initiatives focusing on hosting, service platforms, cloud technology, and cybersecurity (Australian Public Service Commission, 2023[73]; ILO, 2022[74]) (Parliament of Australia, 2019[72]). These efforts have yielded positive results, with Australia ranking 5th in the OECD's 2023 Digital Government Index and scoring first in the 'digital by design' category (Figure 3.11). Additionally, more than 7 in 10 Australians were satisfied with the ease of using a digital service.

Figure 3.11. Australia is a top performer in the OECD's Digital Government Index



Note: The data collection period for this edition of the DGI is from 1 January 2020 to 31 October 2022. Data for Germany, Greece, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, and the United States are not included.
Source: OECD Survey on Digital Government 2.0.

StatLink https://stat.link/vd4qml

One key challenge in delivering on these strategic objectives is the shortfall in digital capabilities within the Australian public service (APS) workforce (Leahy, 2023[75]). The APS Data, Digital, and Cyber Workforce Plan is expected to be released in early 2025. In the meantime, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) is attempting to address the digital skills gap in APS through a mix of learning opportunities (Burtscher, Piano and Welby, 2024[76]). This includes formal training programs like the "Digital Traineeship Programme" and "Emerging Talent Programmes," which offer work-and-study arrangements to develop digital talent. The APSC has also implemented support activities for digital professionals, such as a career pathfinder tool, communities of practice, and a mobility pilot. Additionally, they offer informal learning activities targeting executives and women in digital leadership roles to strengthen their role in digital transformation. While these initiatives, in particular formal training opportunities, primarily focus on digital professionals, there is potential to expand efforts to target civil servants in non-digital roles more broadly, as is done in Korea for instance (see Box 3.8). These efforts could notably involve the APS academy.

Box 3.8. Systematic approach to digital skills training in Korea

The Korean government has implemented a comprehensive approach to digital skills training in the public sector, focusing on enhancing the capabilities of civil servants to support digital transformation in public administration. Below is an overview of their approach:

- **National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI)**: Established in 2016 under the Ministry of Personnel Management, the NHI offers a wide range of training and learning opportunities for civil servants.
- **Training Methods**: The NHI provides training through both a government e-learning platform and regular courses as part of a structured curriculum.
- **Customised Training**: Programmes are tailored to match different digital capability levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced) and specific job roles (e.g., IT officers, general administrative staff).
- **Training Content**:
  - General knowledge on ICT, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and big data technology for general civil servants
  - Specialised courses like 'Understanding Big Data' and 'Living a Smart Life'
  - 'Digital Literacy Building' programme for civil servants across different functions
  - IT management, web development, and IT/cyber security for digital professionals
- **Talent Development Platform**: Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Talent Development Platform uses HR data to provide customised training recommendations based on learning history, job profiles, and years of service. This platform offers:
  - An online learning environment for informal learning and on-the-job training
  - Content sharing capabilities for civil servants
  - The 'HERO Creators' programme, allowing government experts to provide training in their areas of expertise.
  - Real-time video learning system for digital participation and interaction

Source: (Burtscher, Piano and Welby, 2024[76]).

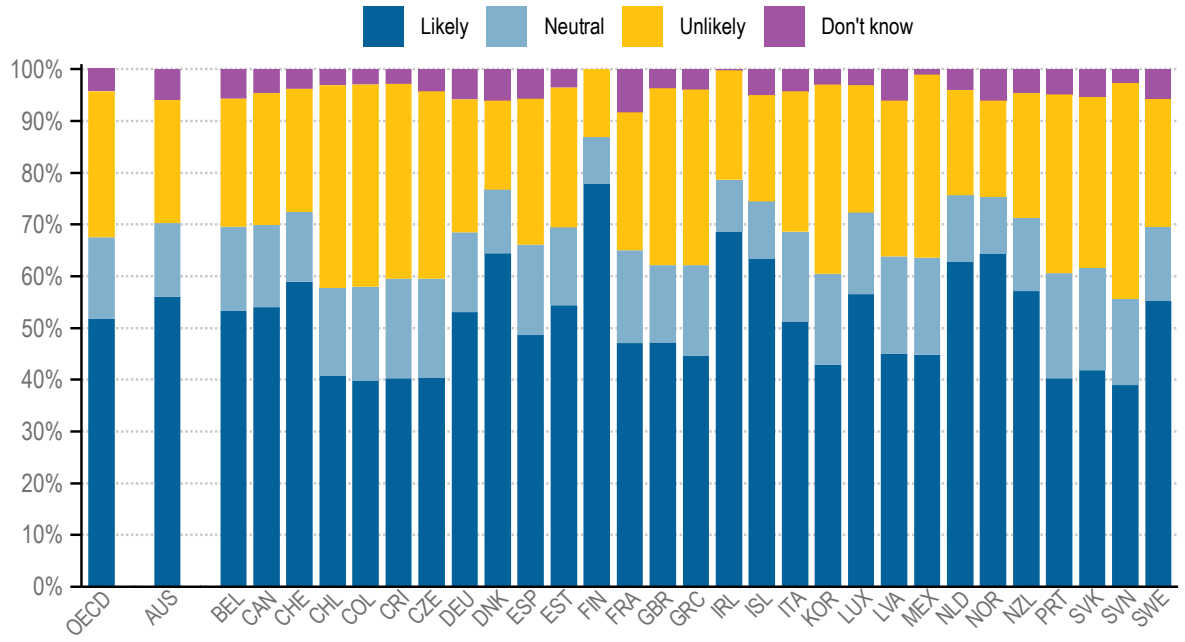
Digital transformation can also improve services through data interoperability—the seamless sharing and integration of information across government departments and systems. This can lead to a smoother experience for service users and more comprehensive insights, enabling policymakers to create better-targeted and more efficient public services. Australia performs below the OECD average on openness of government data. The most recent OECD Open, Useful, Reusable Data Index (OURData) ranked Australia 28th out of 36 OECD countries on data openness which measures data availability, data accessibility, and government support to data re-use (OECD, 2023[77]). This gap emerged clearly from interviews held in the context of this study. Interviewees felt data sharing within the Australian government still faces significant challenges due to complex legislative and policy barriers. The situation is further complicated by the federal structure, with states and territories often controlling crucial datasets, for instance academic progression disaggregated by population groups. Trust issues permeate these interactions, with state governments potentially fearing that shared data could be used against them in funding decisions. This lack of trust creates a significant hurdle for evidence-based policymaking and service delivery improvement. The impact of these data sharing difficulties extends beyond government agencies. Indeed, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), which play a vital role in service delivery, report substantial challenges in accessing data that could enhance their operations.

Another significant challenge in the digital transformation of public services is ensuring equal access and inclusion. As more services move online, the cost of providing offline alternatives increases, potentially disadvantaging those without internet access or digital skills (OECD, 2024[78]). This "dematerialisation of services" risks creating a divide where the digitally excluded face limited choices and higher costs. Currently, 20% of recent users of an administrative service in Australia report being dissatisfied with the ability to access administrative services through their preferred channel, on par with the OECD average of 21% (Figure 3.7). The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) measures digital inclusion across Access, Affordability, and Digital Ability, and provides some insight as to who might be most at risk of exclusion (Thomas et al., 2023[79]). While national digital inclusion is improving, significant disparities persist. A substantial digital gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, widening dramatically in remote areas. 9.4% of Australians are considered "highly excluded," particularly older adults and those with lower education levels. Digital inclusion correlates strongly with education, employment, and income, potentially limiting access to crucial government services for those most in need. These findings echo the experiences shared with the OECD during interviews conducted for this study. A leader of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation highlighted a challenge with "MyGov," the online portal for accessing Services Australia's administrative services. The portal only allows one phone number per account, creating difficulties in communities where mobile phones are often shared. To address the exclusionary effects of this digital approach, Services Australia assigned a staff member to work in person at the ACCO's building. This initiative was extremely well-received and proved to be effective in re-building trust with service users, as people needing support could now consult someone face-to-face within a community-controlled organisation.

According to the OECD Trust survey, 56% of Australians feel confident a government institution would only use their personal data for legitimate reasons (see Figure 3.12). While this is above the OECD average of 52%, Australia ranks 10th out of the 30 surveyed countries. This underscores the need to maintain a careful balance between promoting data interoperability and privacy protection. As citizens entrust their personal information to the government, robust safeguards must be in place to prevent privacy violations and inappropriate uses that could erode public trust (Australian Government - DPMC, 2023[17]). The public's fear in this regard might be informed by the growing number of data breaches experienced by the government, as well as the experience of the Robodebt scheme (OAIC, 2024[80]) (see Box 4.4 in Chapter 4).

Figure 3.12. Australians' confidence in the legitimate use of personal data surpasses OECD average

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a public agency would use their personal data for legitimate purposes only, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If you shared your personal data with a public agency/office/department, how likely do you think it is that it would be used for legitimate purposes only?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/bkc5tr

In conjunction with efforts to strengthen privacy and security frameworks, as set out in the Data and Digital Government Strategy, Australia could potentially improve trust by allowing citizens greater visibility into what data the government holds about them and how it is used (see also Section 4.1 in Chapter 4). Australians have the right to access government records containing their personal information under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) (OAIC, 2024[81]). However, requests must be made to each agency separately, and organisations can withhold information deemed "frivolous" or charge a fee for providing access. As a result, individuals may find it challenging to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information the government possesses about them or their community, as well as how this data is used. Estonia, for instance, has developed a data tracker that allows citizens to see what data the government holds about them and how it has been used (Box 3.9).

Box 3.9. Data tracker in Estonia

Introduced in 2017, the data tracker allows Estonian citizens to monitor who accesses their personal data and for what reasons. The tool is implemented across four major government agencies, enabling automatic tracking of personal data usage. These agencies include the Population Register, Health Insurance Fund, Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, and Social Insurance Board. Only citizens with an eID can log into the state portal to access the data tracker.

Prior to its launch, various government agencies offered similar services, but in a fragmented manner. This unified approach not only provided a universal solution adaptable to different government agencies but also significantly enhanced the user experience, contributing to greater transparency and trust in Estonia's e-governance system.

The data tracker is fundamental in fostering trust in the e-governance system. It increases awareness about personal data use in the national IT system and helps prevent doubt or distrust towards data processors. This level of transparency is seen as necessary to enhance trust in both public and private actors. Additionally, the right to know who is using one's data is enshrined in Estonian Data Protection Law and the European GDPR. The data tracker automates this process, positively affecting overall personal data management.

Source: (OECD, n.d.[82]; e-Estonia, 2019[83])

3.2.5. Areas of opportunity for policy action

According to the 2023 OECD Trust survey, Australia shows better perceptions of government responsiveness compared to OECD averages, though there's room for improvement. While Australians are generally content with essential services, their satisfaction with administrative services only slightly surpasses the OECD average, despite this being a key driver of institutional trust. Population disparities exist, suggesting the need for a more human-centred approach, notably with regards to measurement, engagement, and feedback loops. Regarding public sector innovation, Australians maintain a more positive outlook than other OECD countries, though less than half believe institutions would implement innovative improvements. This belief in institutional innovation uniquely correlates with trust in federal government and parliament in Australia. However, Australians also express stronger concerns about equity and ethics in this context. Notably, public trust in national government and civil service is strongly tied to perceptions of appropriate data handling by public agencies, with this connection being particularly pronounced in Australia compared to other OECD nations.

To improve perceptions of government responsiveness, and strengthen trust, Australia could consider the following:

- Improving the use experience of government services to maintain high satisfaction with essential services
  - Continue to address workforce shortages in key domains, notably teaching staff and health professional occupations, and frontline staff working for Services Australia.
  - Mitigate the effects of intergovernmental co-ordination failures on the provision of dependable essential services, notably by better connecting government services across agency and jurisdictional boundaries.
- Continue investing in a human-centred approach to public service, including through Tailoring policies, programmes, and services to the diverse needs of the population

- Work towards developing measures of service satisfaction that are representative of different population groups, including Indigenous Australians.
- Further institutionalise citizen engagement upstream during the problem identification and design phases of the policy cycle.
- Develop a civil society organisation strategy to enhance civil society capacity and improve the quality of engagement.
- Raise greater awareness among the public about how they can provide feedback and potentially gather additional data through the Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services as to what type of outcome people would typically seek when submitting feedback or a complaint.
- In line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, move towards shared decision-making and enhanced capacity for community-controlled organisation to improve service responsiveness and policy outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

- Improving the impact of innovation by taking advantage of the digital transformation
  - Expand training opportunities to target civil servants in non-digital roles more broadly.
  - Address shortcomings with regards to the existing legal and institutional framework for data interoperability and political incentives for data sharing, including with ACCOs.
- Balancing digital transformation with ethical and equity considerations:
  - Ensure efforts to promote digital transformation do not compound existing inequalities, notably for Indigenous Australians. Access to services through one's preferred channel should remain a priority.
  - Continue initiatives to strengthen privacy and security frameworks, as set out in the Data and Digital Government Strategy and explore ways for citizens to gain a comprehensive understanding of the information the government possesses about them or their community and how this data is used.

References

Ablong, M. (2024), "National resilience Lessons for Australian policy from international experience STRATEGY", https://www.aspi.org.au/report/national-resilience-lessons-australian-policy-international-experience (accessed on 27 October 2024). [12]

Ablong, M. (2024), *National resilience: lessons from Australian policy from international experience*, https://ad-aspi.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2024-02/National%20resilience.pdf?VersionId=i7v1J.m1quta2TKhuQMpzyTKqmMz9eMW. [4]

Angeles, M., P. Crosland and M. Hensher (2023), "Challenges for Medicare and universal health care in Australia since 2000", *The Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol. 218/7, pp. 322-329, https://doi.org/10.5694/MJA2.51844. [45]

APS Reform (2023), *Recommendation: 26 | Thodey Review Progress Report*, https://www.apsreform.gov.au/resources/reports/thodey-review-progress-report-november-2023/recommendation-26 (accessed on 29 October 2024). [32]

APSC (2024), *APS Values | Australian Public Service Commission*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/information-aps-employment/aps-values (accessed on 29 October 2024). [20]

Assemblée citoyenne pour le climat (2024), *Cycle 1*, https://forum.assembleeclimat.brussels/processes/cycle-1. [22]

Australian Government - AIHW (2024), *Health workforce*, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/workforce/health-workforce (accessed on 23 October 2024). [43]

Australian Government - AIHW (2024), *Welfare expenditure*, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/welfare-expenditure (accessed on 13 October 2024). [47]

Australian Government - APS Reform (2024), *Good Practice Guidance – Charter of Partnerships and Engagement*, https://www.apsreform.gov.au/news/good-practice-guidance-charter-partnerships-and-engagement (accessed on 25 October 2024). [63]

Australian Government - APS Reform (2023), *Thodey Review Progress Report as at November 2023: Recommendation: 27*, https://www.apsreform.gov.au/resources/reports/thodey-review-progress-report-november-2023/recommendation-27 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [71]

Australian Government - DCCEEW (2024), "National Climate Risk Assessment First pass assessment report", https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-climate-risk-assessment-first-pass-assessment-report-2024.pdf (accessed on 27 October 2024). [13]

Australian Government - DCEEW (2024), *Australia's emissions projections 2024*, https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/publications/australias-emissions-projections-2024. [25]

Australian Government - Department of Education (2024), *How schools are funded*, https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/how-schools-are-funded#:~:text=Schools%20are%20funded%20through%20a,other%20parental%20or%20private%20contributions. (accessed on 15 October 2024). [40]

Australian Government - Department of Education (2024), *The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034)*, https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/national-school-reform-agreement/better-and-fairer-schools-agreement-20252034 (accessed on 23 October 2024). [39]

Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs (2024), "Strengthening Australian democracy A practical agenda for democratic resilience Report of the Strengthening Democracy Taskforce", https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us-subsite/files/strengthening-australian-democracy.pdf (accessed on 10 October 2024). [5]

Australian Government - Department of Home Affairs (2022), "Fact Sheet - National Resilience Taskforce", https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/ClareONeil/Documents/factsheet-national-resilience-taskforce.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023). [10]

Australian Government - Department of Industry, S. (2021), *Public Sector Innovation Network relaunch project: Discover | Department of Industry, Science and Resources*, https://www.industry.gov.au/news/public-sector-innovation-network-relaunch-project-discover (accessed on 14 December 2023). [68]

Australian Government - DHAC (2024), *About the interim Australian Centre for Disease Control (CDC) | Australian Centre for Disease Control*, https://www.cdc.gov.au/about/about-interim-australian-centre-disease-control-cdc (accessed on 27 October 2024). [7]

Australian Government - DISR (2024), "Safe and responsible AI in Australia consultation: Australian Government's interim response", https://doi.org/10.14264/00d3c94. [31]

Australian Government - DPMC (2024), "Australian Government Crisis Management Framework", https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/australian- (accessed on 27 October 2024). [8]

Australian Government - DPMC (2023), "How might artificial intelligence affect the trustworthiness of public service delivery?", https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/ltib-report-how-might-ai-affect-trust-ps-delivery.pdf (accessed on 28 October 2024). [17]

Australian Government - DSS (2024), *Disability Reform Roadmap | Department of Social Services, Australian Government*, https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/disability-reform-roadmap?HTML (accessed on 24 October 2024). [52]

Australian Government - Treasury (2024), *Intergenerational reports*, https://treasury.gov.au/intergenerational-report (accessed on 29 October 2024). [15]

Australian Public Service Commission (2024), *APS Professions*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/aps-professions (accessed on 28 October 2024). [33]

Australian Public Service Commission (2023), *Data and Digital Government Strategy*, https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/workforce-information/research-analysis-and-publications/state-service/state-service-report-2023/aps-future/data-and-digital-government-strategy (accessed on 27 October 2024). [73]

Australian Royal Commission (2023), *Final Report | Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*, https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report (accessed on 15 December 2023). [51]

Baredes, B. (2022), "Serving citizens: Measuring the performance of services for a better user experience", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 52, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/65223af7-en. [55]

Brezzi, M. et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 48, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b6c5478c-en. [1]

Burtscher, M., S. Piano and B. Welby (2024), "Developing skills for digital government: A review of good practices across OECD governments", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 303, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f4dab2e9-en. [76]

Climate Action Tracker (2024), *Australia*, https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/. [26]

Department of Home Affairs (2022), "Department of Home Affairs | Corporate Plan 2022-23", https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms. (accessed on 15 December 2023). [2]

e-Estonia (2019), *Data tracker - tool that builds trust in institutions*, https://e-estonia.com/data-tracker-build-citizen-trust/ (accessed on 27 October 2024). [83]

European Commission/OECD (2022), "Building capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in governance and public administration in a post-pandemic Europe Athina Manta, DG REFORM". [34]

FEMA (2024), *DRC Locator*, https://egateway.fema.gov/ESF6/DRCLocator (accessed on 27 October 2024). [11]

Gillespie, N. et al. (2023), "Trust in Artificial Intelligence: A global study", https://doi.org/10.14264/00D3C94. [30]

Government of Australia (2023), *Health system overview - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/health-system-overview (accessed on 30 October 2023). [44]

Government of Australia - DSS (2024), *Services Australia delivers 900,000 claims, reduces call wait times | Department of Social Services Ministers*, https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/15451 (accessed on 24 October 2024). [48]

Heffernan, A. et al. (2022), "'I cannot sustain the workload and the emotional toll': Reasons behind Australian teachers' intentions to leave the profession", Vol. 66/2, pp. 196-209, https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441221086654. [38]

ILO (2022), "CASE STUDIES Case studies on digital transformation of social security administration and services AUSTRALIA", http://www.ilo.org/publns (accessed on 13 December 2023). [74]

Ilott, O. et al. (2016), "Making policy stick Tackling long-term challenges in government", https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/5225%20IFG%20-%20Making%20Policy%20Stick%20WEB.pdf (accessed on 29 October 2024). [19]

Independent Review of the APS (2019), *Our public service our future*, https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/independent-review-australian-public-service. [70]

IPAA (2024), *Public Sector Innovation Awards - Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT) Limited | Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT) Limited*, https://act.ipaa.org.au/psinnovationawards/ (accessed on 14 December 2023). [69]

Leahy, P. (2023), *Future-proofing the Australian public service*, Gov Tech Review, https://www.govtechreview.com.au/content/gov-digital/article/future-proofing-the-australian-public-service-556883435 (accessed on 13 December 2023). [75]

Leandro, A. (2024), "Achieving the transition to net zero in Australia", *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*, No. 1794, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9a56c9d2-en. [23]

Murphy, J. and E. Arban (2021), "Assessing the Performance of Australian Federalism in Responding to the Pandemic", *Publius*, Vol. 51/4, pp. 627-649, https://doi.org/10.1093/PUBLIUS/PJAB026. [6]

NDIS Review (2023), "Working together to deliver the NDIS Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme", https://pmc.gov.au/cca (accessed on 24 October 2024). [50]

Nordesjö, K., R. Ulmestig and V. Denvall (2022), "Coping with tensions between standardization and individualization in social assistance", *Nordic Social Work Research*, Vol. 12/4, pp. 435-449, https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2020.1835696. [54]

OAIC (2024), *Access your personal information*, https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/your-privacy-rights/your-personal-information/access-your-personal-information (accessed on 27 October 2024). [81]

OAIC (2024), *Report shows highest number of data breaches in 3.5 years*, https://www.oaic.gov.au/news/media-centre/report-shows-highest-number-of-data-breaches-in-3.5-years (accessed on 27 October 2024). [80]

OECD (2024), *Education at a Glance 2024 OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/c00cad36-en. (accessed on 23 October 2024). [36]

OECD (2024), "Framework on management of emerging critical risks", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 49, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/2f2eddd8-en. [14]

OECD (2024), *OECD Digital Economy Outlook 2024 (Volume 1): Embracing the Technology Frontier*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a1689dc5-en. [78]

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. [24]

OECD (2024), *The OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative: Monitoring Report – Assessing Progress and Charting the Way Forward*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9543bcfb-en. [21]

OECD (2023), "2023 OECD Open, Useful and Re-usable data (OURdata) Index: Results and key findings", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 43, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/a37f51c3-en. [77]

OECD (2023), *Business innovation statistics and indicators*, https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/business-innovation-statistics-and-indicators.html (accessed on 28 October 2024). [28]

OECD (2023), "Education policy outlook in Australia", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 67, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ce7a0965-en. [41]

OECD (2023), *Government at a Glance 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en. [53]

OECD (2023), *Health at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/7a7afb35-en. [42]

OECD (2023), *OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1794a7c9-en. [27]

OECD (2023), *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I and II) - Country Notes: Australia*, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022-results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/australia_e9346d47-en.html (accessed on 23 October 2024). [35]

OECD (2022), "Foresight and Anticipatory Governance in Practice Lessons in effective foresight institutionalisation PUBE", http://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/ (accessed on 14 December 2023). [16]

OECD (2022), "OECD Good Practice Principles for Public Service Design and Delivery in the Digital Age", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 23, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/2ade500b-en. [62]

OECD (2022), *OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f765caf6-en. [64]

OECD (2022), *The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/d234e975-en. [65]

OECD (2019), *Good Governance for Critical Infrastructure Resilience*, OECD Reviews of Risk Management Policies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/02f0e5a0-en. [3]

OECD (2019), *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development*, OECD Rural Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3203c082-en. [66]

OECD (2015), *OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality: Australia 2015: Raising Standards*, OECD Reviews of Health Care Quality, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264233836-en. [46]

OECD (n.d.), *Building Trust in Public Institutions*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b7d1e606-en. [82]

Parliament of Australia (2024), *Chapter 2 - Responding to natural disasters*, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Disaster_Resilience/DisasterResilience/Report/Chapter_2_-_Responding_to_natural_disasters (accessed on 27 October 2024). [9]

Parliament of Australia (2019), *Public sector digital transformation: a quick guide – Parliament of Australia*, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1819/Quick_Guides/PSDigitalTransformation (accessed on 13 December 2023). [72]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area2 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [58]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area12 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [59]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area1 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [57]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area5 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [56]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Social housing dwellings per 100 households by location - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area9/social-housing (accessed on 26 October 2024). [61]

Productivity Commission (2024), *Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities - Dashboard | Closing the Gap Information Repository*, https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area8 (accessed on 26 October 2024). [60]

Productivity Commission (2024), "Volume 1 - Study report - Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap", http://www.pc.gov.au (accessed on 26 October 2024). [67]

Productivity Commission (2022), "Study report - Review of the National School Reform Agreement", http://www.pc.gov.au (accessed on 23 October 2024). [37]

Public Service Amendment Act 2024 (2024), *Public Service Amendment Bill 2023*. [18]

Services Australia (2024), “2024-2025 Budget - Additional resources”, https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/budget-2024-25-services-australia-1.pdf (accessed on 24 October 2024). [49]

Thomas, J. et al. (2023), *Australian Digital Inclusion Index*, https://doi.org/10.25916/528s-ny91. [79]

WIPO (2023), *Global Innovation Index 2023: Innovation in the face of uncertainty*, https://www.wipo.int/web/global-innovation-index/2023/index (accessed on 28 October 2024). [29]

Notes

[1] This is not to say there is no value in this type of siloed exercise, which can serve to highlight the threats caused by climate change *in particular*, and can therefore be used as essential communication tool to counter climate change denialism and build political support for mitigation and adaptation measures.

[2] While the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) offers comprehensive disability support services, it can be classified as an “administrative service” in the context of the OECD Trust Survey. The survey's definition of administrative services, provided to respondents, includes activities like “applying for an ID, registering a birth or applying for benefits.” Even though the NDIS provides extensive support beyond basic administrative functions, from the survey respondents' perspective, their interaction with the NDIS would likely primarily fall under the category of “applying for benefits.”

4 Values and trust in Australia

This chapter analyses people's perceptions of government values in Australia, specifically related to openness, integrity and fairness. It situates these perceptions in the context of current government policies, and complements them with good practices from other OECD countries, proposing a range of strategies to enhance these aspects and public trust. In Australia, perceptions of government openness, public integrity and fairness are key drivers of trust, in particular for the civil service and local government.

The values that drive and guide governments along policy processes, including both policy making and implementation, are as crucial as the results of those policies, in what concerns public trust (Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020[1]; Brezzi et al., 2021[2]; OECD, 2022[3]). Openness, integrity and fairness are interrelated and mutually reliant public governance values. Open governments encourage greater citizen and stakeholder participation in public decision-making and make policy making more transparent to the public. This facilitates accountability and fosters co-operation, mutual respect and dignity to uphold the public interest, advancing integrity and fairness.

Perceptions of fairness, public integrity and government openness are key drivers of trust in Australia, in particular for the civil service and local government.

Australia is a top performer regarding openness, integrity and fairness. However, perceptions of public integrity are the set of public governance measures which Australians seem more sceptical about. In particular, Australians' perceptions of policy capture represent the only public governance indicator in which Australia does not outperform the OECD average.

This chapter explores Australians' expectations of government's integrity, openness and fairness. It provides context with information about current government policies and compares these with good practices across OECD countries.

4.1. Openness

According to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, open government refers to a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth (OECD, 2017[4]).

Openness can boost trust when governments operate in the public interest, foster accountability and make it easier for individuals to interact with them (Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer, 2012[5]; OECD, 2022[3]; Bauhr and Grimes, 2014[6]). However, it is also important to consider that other factors, such as cultural values shaping how people evaluate openness initiatives and their impact, could operate as mediators between openness and public trust (Grimmelikhuijsen, Piotrowski and Van Ryzin, 2020[7]).

The OECD Framework on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions assesses three aspects of governments' openness. These are: governments' ability to tell the public about its actions and to provide them with accurate, trustworthy, and pertinent public information; governments' readiness and ability to consult with stakeholders and the general public; and governments' reaction and ability to incorporate public input into the formulation of public policies. At the same, the OECD Trust Survey also gauges how citizens contribute to creating an open government culture, by including a set of questions on different aspects of political participation and attitudes.

Overall, results from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey indicate that most people in Australia have a favourable perception of openness and information availability. Further, many Australians feel able to participate and believe they have a say in what the government does. However, Australians seem to demand clearer and more inclusive communication; and most do not get involved in politics much beyond voting. In line with Australia's acknowledgment about the crucial role of interested, informed, and active citizens for a healthy democracy (Strengthening Democracy Taskforce, 2024[8]), feeling able to participate in politics is positively associated with Australians' trust in government. Further, Australians' perceptions about opportunities to voice their opinions in decisions affecting their community have the most significant influence on trust in the local government.

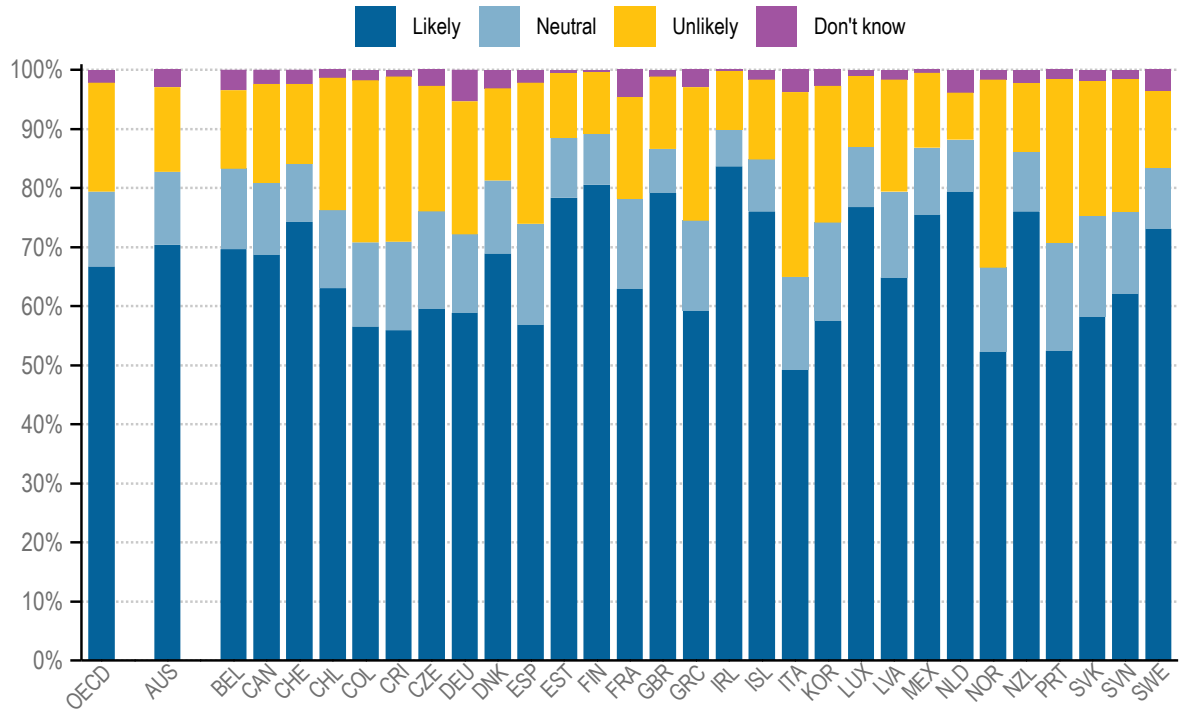
4.1.1. Australia could further invest in public communication beyond access to public information

Transparency is key for democratic governance. It opens the machinery of government to the public, making available information on how public institutions work, and consequently allows people to hold them accountable. Simultaneously, people's perceptions and understanding of how institutions function are largely shaped by the information they are exposed to. The current information ecosystem – marked by increasing concerns about the reliability and integrity of information - makes it more and more challenging for people to assess information quality (OECD, 2024[9]; OECD, 2024[10]).

Indeed, results of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey show that most people are satisfied with access to public information but have lower perceptions about communication on reforms and trustworthiness of official statistics. Slightly above the OECD average (67%) and 2021 results (65%), a relatively large majority of Australians (70%) believe they can easily access information about administrative processes (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Australia outperforms OECD average in clear communication on administrative services

Share of population who find it likely that clear information on administrative services is easily available, or (b) that national government clearly explains impact of reforms, Australia, 2023



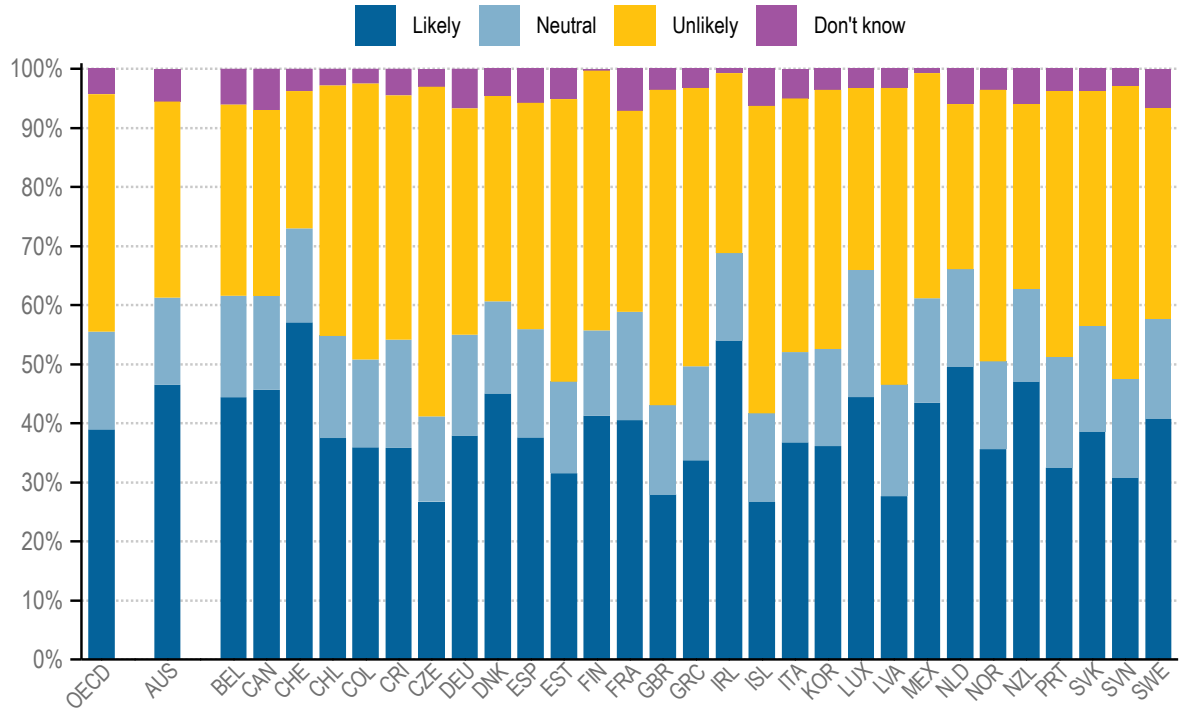
Note: The figure shows the share of the population who responded to the question "If you needed information about an administrative service (for example obtaining a passport, registering a birth, applying for benefits, etc.), how likely do you think it is that clear information would be easily available?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/qk41fh

The Freedom of Information Act has granted Australians the right to information since 1982, making Australia the second country in the world to enact such legislation. Further, Australia has been a member of the Open Government Partnership for a decade, and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner has recently launched an innovative dashboard, granting public access to its statistics over the last five years. But in an increasingly challenging information environment (OECD, 2024[9]), making public information available and granting citizens the right to information through access to information laws seem to be insufficient. Similar to their OECD peers (39%), a much smaller share of people in Australia believes the government clearly informs them about the impacts that reforms can have on their lives (46%) (Figure 4.2). Further, only around four in ten Australians reported that information and statistics provided by government are easy to find (42%) and understand (40%), and even fewer respondents believe that they allow them to verify whether government keeps its promises (31%), a prerequisite for holding governments accountable. These shares are even lower among women, older respondents, and those with lower levels of education or who reported financial concerns.

Figure 4.2. The perceived clarity of reforms' impacts is notably higher in Australia than the OECD average

Share of population who find it likely that national government clearly explains impact of reforms, Australia, 2023



Note: The figure shows the share of the population who responded to the question "If the national government was carrying out a reform, how likely do you think it is that it would clearly explain how you will be affected by the reform?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/8b4k0j

Research carried out in the country found that significant exceptions allowed by the Freedom of Information Act led to a lack of transparency and accountability in policymaking processes. According to the Global Right to Information Ranking, Australia's legislation does not cover all levels and branches of government, and its score on exceptions is comparatively low because of the large number of documents covered by enactments' secrecy provisions (Centre for Law and Democracy, 2022[11]). Besides, academic studies underscore the existence of uneven ministerial authority to enforce secrecy conclusive certificates (Henninger, 2017[12]), and that parliamentary departments supporting the House of Representatives and the Senate (Adams, 2014[13]) and deliberative documents (Moon, 2015[14]) are not fully transparent. In addition, experts interviewed for this study also pointed that the number of requests of public information decreased over years, together with partial or full information releases, while the share of refusals to requests increased. They also noted that government institutions should carefully balance and follow strict guidelines to distinguish and protect Australians' personal data that could be accessed through Freedom of Information's requests. At the same time, experts also noted that individuals should be able to access information that concerns themselves, even if it reveals certain personal information about others, such as in the case of people who were in out-of-home care as children.

In this regard, it is more and more important for public administrations, in Australia and worldwide, to promote a culture of proactive disclosure of public information and, more importantly, to clearly communicate with the citizens they serve. Effective public communication is a service in and of itself that can build trust in institutions by raising awareness of government actions. It can demonstrate commitment to values such as openness and integrity, and display responsiveness to public concerns. Conversely, if communication is perceived as inaccurate, difficult to understand, biased, or unimportant, it can erode public trust and make institutions appear untrustworthy or unreliable.

The Australian population is very diverse, but this diversity is not always reflected in how government communicates and exchanges with people from different cultures, ethnicities, or who speak different languages. According to the last national census (2021), approximately 3.8% of people identify as Indigenous, 29% were born abroad and 3.4% of the population spoke English not well or not at all (see also Sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 in Chapter 1). Yet, during interviews carried out for this study, experts highlighted that despite there being many programs encouraging and communicating in several languages at the state level and despite the government funding the Special Broadcasting Service, which provides multi-lingual news services in multiple media formats, the federal administration in Australia routinely only communicates in English. This can make it difficult for a considerable share of the population to access public information.

Many experts interviewed for this study associated an increase in political trust in the federal government and the public service in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Section 1.2.3 in Chapter 1) with the government's efforts to strengthen openness. For example, institutions provided translations of public health information into multiple languages, which was crucial to ensure that migrant communities and non-English speaking populations received accurate and timely information. Moreover, the Australian Department of Health offered a round-the-clock telephone interpreter service to speak to officials in a language other than English, and included in their website informative videos with messages tailored to communities' needs in collaboration with community leaders.[1] This successful experience could be replicated and extended to useful day-to-day functioning of public administration, similar to what encouraged in New Zealand (Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Public information in other languages in New Zealand

In New Zealand, English is the most spoken language, but there are also more than 160 other languages spoken across the country. As such, government organisations need to make sure culturally and linguistically diverse communities have fair access to important information. To ensure access to public information, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities created guidelines to help agencies:

- decide which languages to translate their information into
- share their information with communities, and
- understand the translation process.

Together with the guidelines ("*Unlocking language barriers*"), the Ministry for Ethnic Communities has developed an interactive data dashboard, using data from last census, which provides access to information on ethnicity, religion, and language at national and regional levels, allowing ethnic communities to be seen and counted.

Besides acknowledging that public communication needs to be centred in users (thus the need for plain language and understandability), it is crucial for governments to increasingly engage citizens in communication and tailor audience research while providing messages that resonate with all parts of society (Smillie and Scharfbillig, 2024[15]; OECD, 2021[16]). Experts interviewed for this study noted that many public agencies in Australia only share statements, news or reports on their website, use single messages and single channels, reach a small audience and would therefore need to mature their communication strategies. Conversely, the National Indigenous Australians' Agency complements long national reports with synthesis reports and community-adapted communication strategies, such as flyers. Further, New Zealand's communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic showcases a successful experience on which Australia could also build. It delivered clear messages, even when sharing scientific evidence, used multiplatform channels, targeted audiences, and was able to adjust and receive feedback from people (Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. New Zealand's communication initiatives during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand implemented innovative initiatives in the realm of transparency and communication, which have contributed to the country's successful response to the pandemic, while providing pertinent examples for broader communication strategies. These include:

- At the outbreak of the pandemic, New Zealand's government established the cross-party Epidemic Response Committee to deliberate and report to all other representatives in Parliament on the government's initiatives to tackle the pandemic. This was the first select committee in the country to have its proceedings broadcast live on Parliament TV. The broadcast aimed to provide maximum public visibility for the Committee's work while the Parliament was unable to meet because of COVID-19 restrictions. Furthermore, meetings of the Committee were live-streamed to the New Zealand Parliament Facebook page around three times a week.
- The government also set the policy to proactively publish cabinet documents every 15 days, and the Prime Minister and the Director General of Health broadcast daily press conferences to update New Zealand's "team of 5 million" on the progress in tackling the virus.

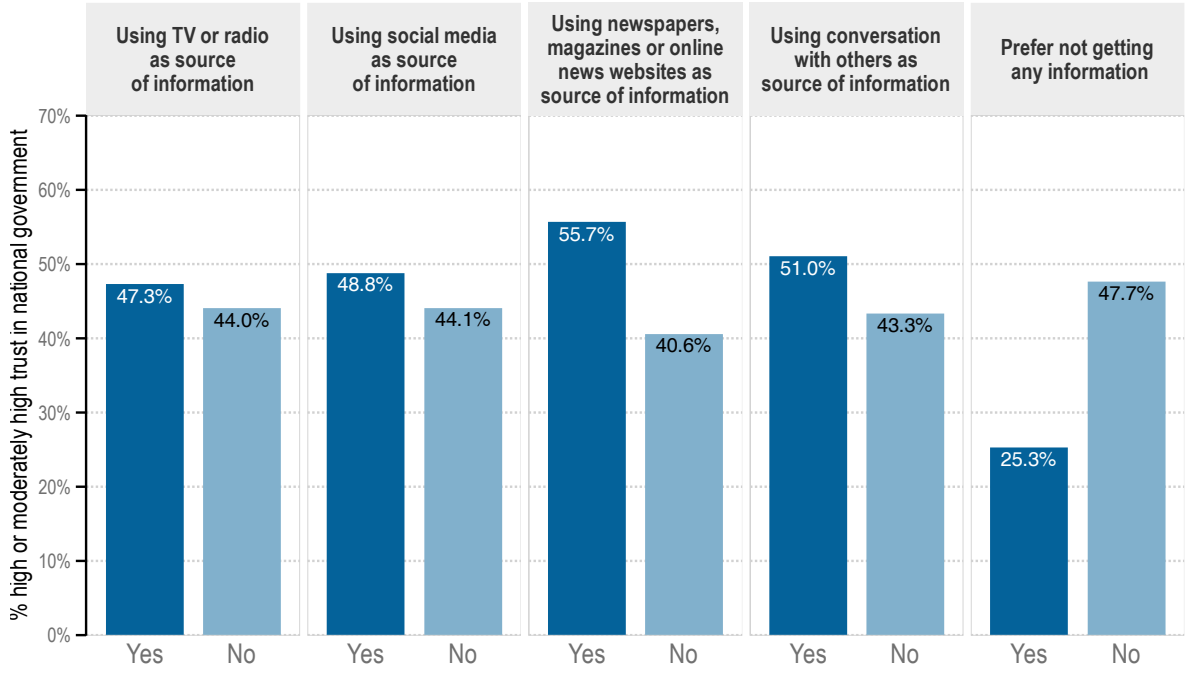
- In order to better target youth, they produced "Unstoppable Summer: A COVID-19 Public Service Announcement", a short musical video featuring the Director General of Health and shown before broad audience events, such as concerts.
- Finally, in October 2022 New Zealand adopted the Plain Language Act, as a step in the right direction to improve the accessibility of key documents for the public.

Source: Authors, based on (OECD, 2023[17]).

At the same time, worries over the accuracy and integrity of information have increased, and on average, 11% of people across OECD countries identified mis- and disinformation as one of the main three issues facing their country (OECD, 2024[10]). Besides, many people have concerns over the trustworthiness of media. In line with results across OECD countries, only 41% of Australians reported high and moderately high trust in news media (see Figure 2.4 in Chapter 2). Further, when Australians were asked about where they get information on politics, results from the OECD Trust Survey show TV and radio are the most cited sources (similar to results across OECD countries). People's trust in government was found to be related to their information and news consumption habits (Figure 4.3), with trust being higher in particular among newspaper readers (OECD, 2024[10]). Trust is particularly low among those who do not follow politics or current affairs.

Figure 4.3. Australians who get information about politics are more likely trust in federal government, regardless of media source

Share with high or moderately high trust in the national government by whether they obtain information about politics or current affairs from the named source, Australia, 2023



Note: The figure illustrates the share of population with high or moderately high trust in the federal government in Australia, depending on whether they use the media or information source about politics and current affairs on a typical day. "High or moderately high trust" corresponds to respondents who select an answer from 6 to 10 to the question "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust the federal government?". Whether or not the respondent uses the selected source of information is derived from their answer(s) to the question "On a typical day, from which of the following sources, if any, do you get information about politics and current affairs?", for which they can select all options that apply. The figure shows the weighted Australia averages.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/rn4gxy

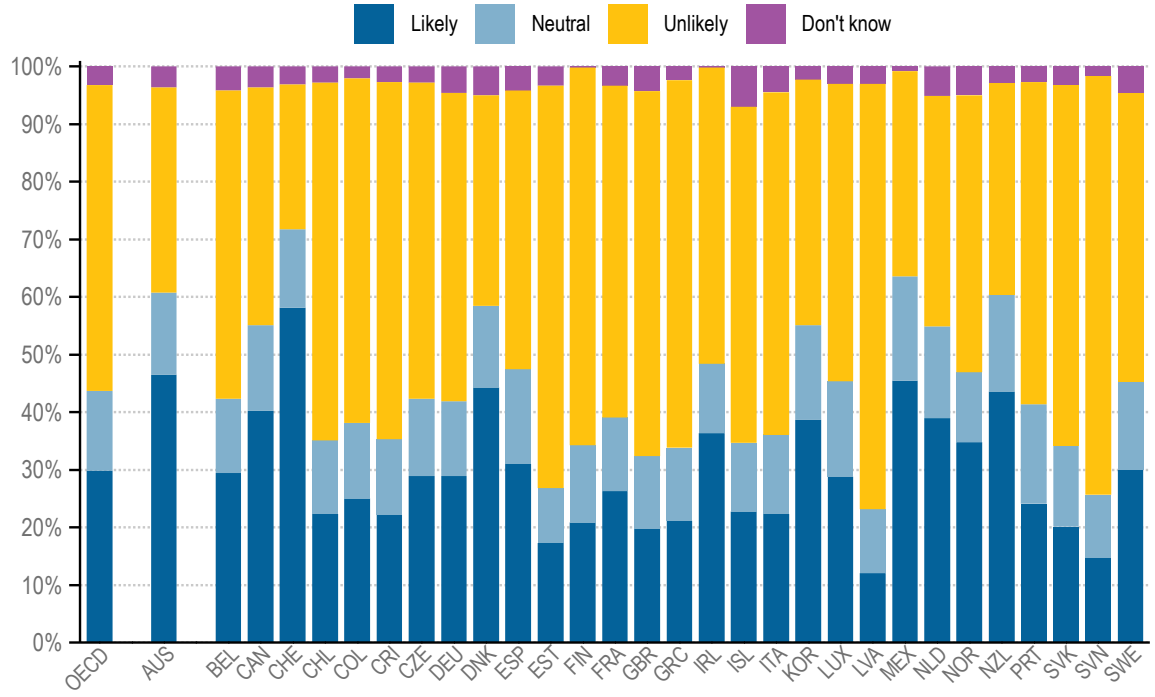
Australia undertakes important efforts in setting up guardrails against the spread of mis- and disinformation. In Australia, a moderately higher share of people reported using social media (44%) compared to those who get information from newspapers (37%). These results are key if considered that research conducted by the APSC found that 72% of Australians believe that during electoral periods, most people do not understand when information in the media is misleading or fake (Strengthening Democracy Taskforce, 2024[8]). While this is far from inevitable, social media platforms can contribute to creating echo-chambers and promoting polarisation (Cinelli, 2021[18]; Banks et al., 2020[19]). They can also speed up the transmission of damaging and false information, which can incite more radical emotions and mistrust (Klein and Robison, 2019[20]). Australia is among leader countries in efforts to protect people from mis- and disinformation, and this is a collaborative objective involving not only public institutions but also other interested parties. In 2021, the Digital Industry Group Inc. published a *Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* to provide safeguards against harms from the spread of false and misleading content on digital platforms (OECD, 2024[9]). This requirement only applies to platforms that voluntary enter into the Code. The Australian government is investing in an evidence-informed approach to media literacy which will be essential to foster societal resilience. This includes the development of Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy, co-designed in partnership with the media literacy research sector, education sector and communities, to better equip Australians to critically engage with news and media

4.1.2. Many Australians feel they have a political voice and participate in politics but are increasingly concerned they are not being heard

Australia is a vibrant democracy that ranks comparatively high in global indexes (see Section 1.1.1 in Chapter 1); and this may be reflected in above-average perceptions of political voice. Almost half of Australians (46%) feel able to participate in politics and believe that people like them have a say in what the government does, compared to 40% and 30%, respectively, on average, across OECD countries (Figure 4.4). Levels of political efficacy (feeling able to participate and influence in politics) have historically been relatively high, though they have been declining since 2007. The high levels have been generally explained by the compulsory vote and frequent elections: the three-year mandates for parliamentarians together with a federal structure result in Australians voting approximately once every 18 months (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2021[21]; Cameron et al., 2022[22]).

Figure 4.4. Around half of Australians believes the political system allows people to have a say

Share of Australians reporting different levels of perceived likelihood that the political system allows people like them to have a say in what the government does, 2023



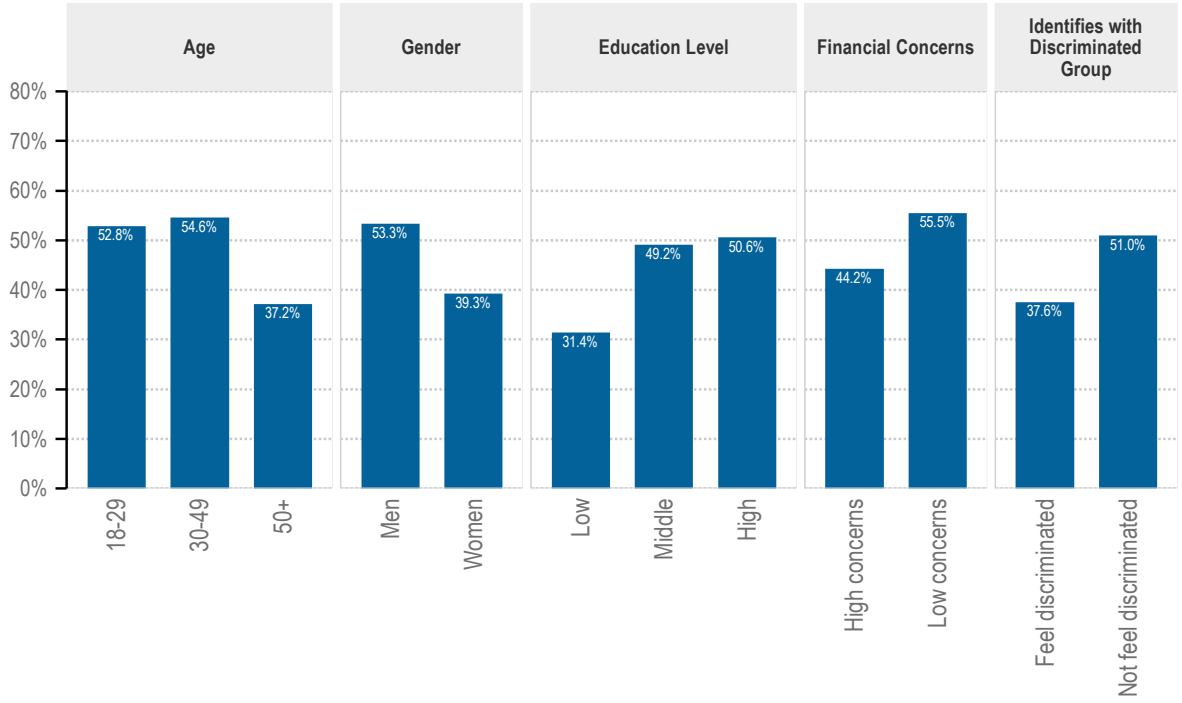
Note: The figure shows the distribution of responses within Australia and across OECD countries to the question: ‘’How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?’’. The “likely” proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; “neutral” is equal to a response of 5; “unlikely” is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and “don't know” was a separate answer. "OECD" represents the unweighted average of responses across all countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/wzjhsb

Despite many Australians feeling able to participate and influence in politics, a still sizeable share of the population feel they lack political voice, which could contribute to political disenchantment. Challenges in terms of political voice seem to be higher for women, older people, those with lower levels of education or who are financially concerned. On average 46% of Australians feel they have a say in what government does, though this share decreases to 39% for women and 31% for those reporting lower levels of education (Figure 4.5). Surprisingly and positively, most young people (53%) feel they have a voice. In contrast, a challenging point to note is that Australians who identify themselves as part of a discriminated group feel as able (48%) as other respondents to participate in politics, but not as able to influence politics (37%).

Figure 4.5. Sense of having a say in political decisions differs across population groups in Australia

Share of population who find it likely that political system allows people to have a say in what the government does by age, gender, education level, financial concerns and feeling of group-based discrimination, Australia, 2023



Note: The figure presents the weighted Australia averages of responses to the question "How much would you say the political system in [COUNTRY] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?" by respondents' age, gender, education level, status of financial concerns and feeling of discrimination. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high confidence" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. The status of discrimination is grouped by whether respondents stated whether they feel they belong to a discriminated group: "Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in Australia?". Financial concerns are measured by asking ''In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/nj7gsp

Measures of political voice and perceptions of meaningful engagement from the OECD Trust Survey have improved between 2021 and 2023: in 2023 42% of Australians believe the government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation compared to 36% in 2021. At the local level, in 2023 and well-above the OECD average (41%) a majority of people (51%) think they would have the opportunity to voice their opinion in a decision affecting their local community, while it was only 39% two years earlier (Figure 4.6). Perceptions of having opportunities to voice opinions in local matters is the most relevant determinant of trust in local government (see Chapter 2).

These improvements could be linked to a "cyclical trend" that academics and experts interviewed for this study associate with positive impacts of changes of government (Dassonneville and McAllister, 2021[21]) (see also Section 1.1.1 in Chapter 1).

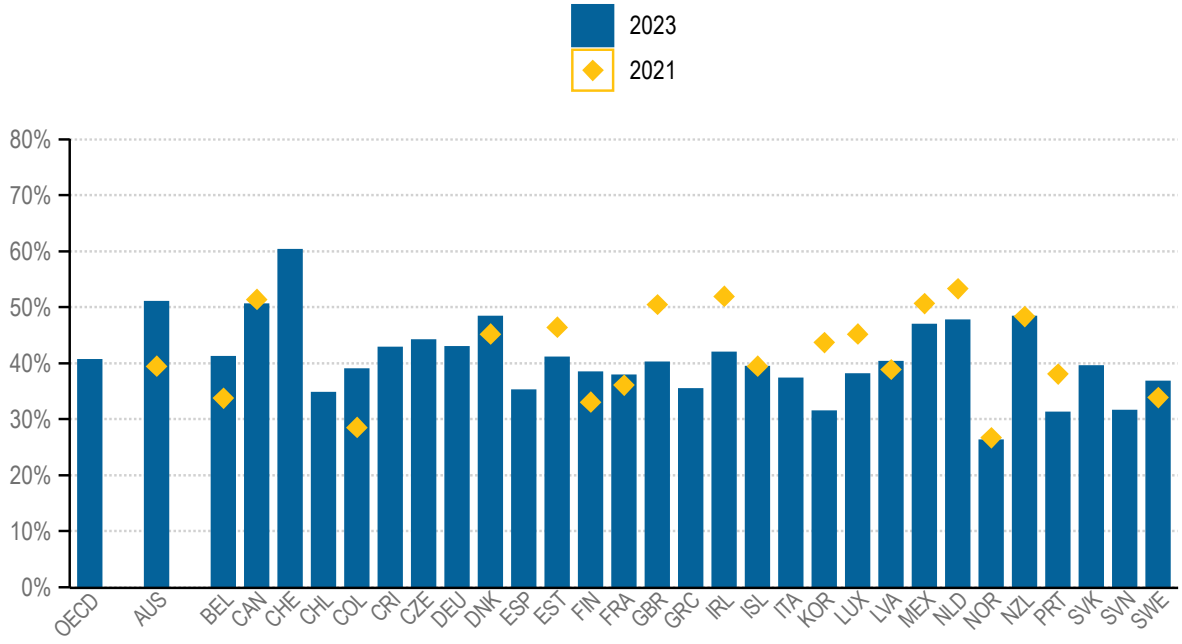
However, key policy initiatives recently put in place at different levels of government aiming to enhance engagement might have also played a role:

- For instance, since 2023 the Australian Public Service has a Charter, Good Practice Guidance and a self-assessment tool of Partnerships and Engagement, supporting public officials and entities in identifying principles and practices to achieve quality external engagement and genuine partnership in policymaking with people, communities, non-government sectors, academia and industry. These tools include specific guidance and frameworks to build authentic partnerships with Australia's First Nations people.
- In addition, not only at national level, but also most States created "*Have your say*" platforms. Through these platforms, citizens can register to be part of panels consulted on different policy topics, and access information on policy initiatives that are being developed at the subnational level.
- Local governments' acts stipulate that councils should engage their communities. A recently implemented research survey of local governments found that on average, councils put in place around thirty engagement processes per year, which range from public meetings to emerging methods, including open space and participatory budgeting (Christensen and McQuestin, 2018[23]).

At the same time, community engagement may facilitate adopting a bottom-up approach and permit co-design projects to grow into different institution-specific devolution experiments tailored to local and/or regional realities (Tremblay and Cowley, 2023[24]), such as citizens' committees in Victoria (Hendriks, Bolitho and Foulkes, 2013[25]). Finally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice referendum was the first national-level referendum of the century.

Figure 4.6. A majority of Australians feel they have a voice in local decisions in 2023

Share of population who find it likely that they have an opportunity to voice opinion on local government's decision, 2021 and 2023



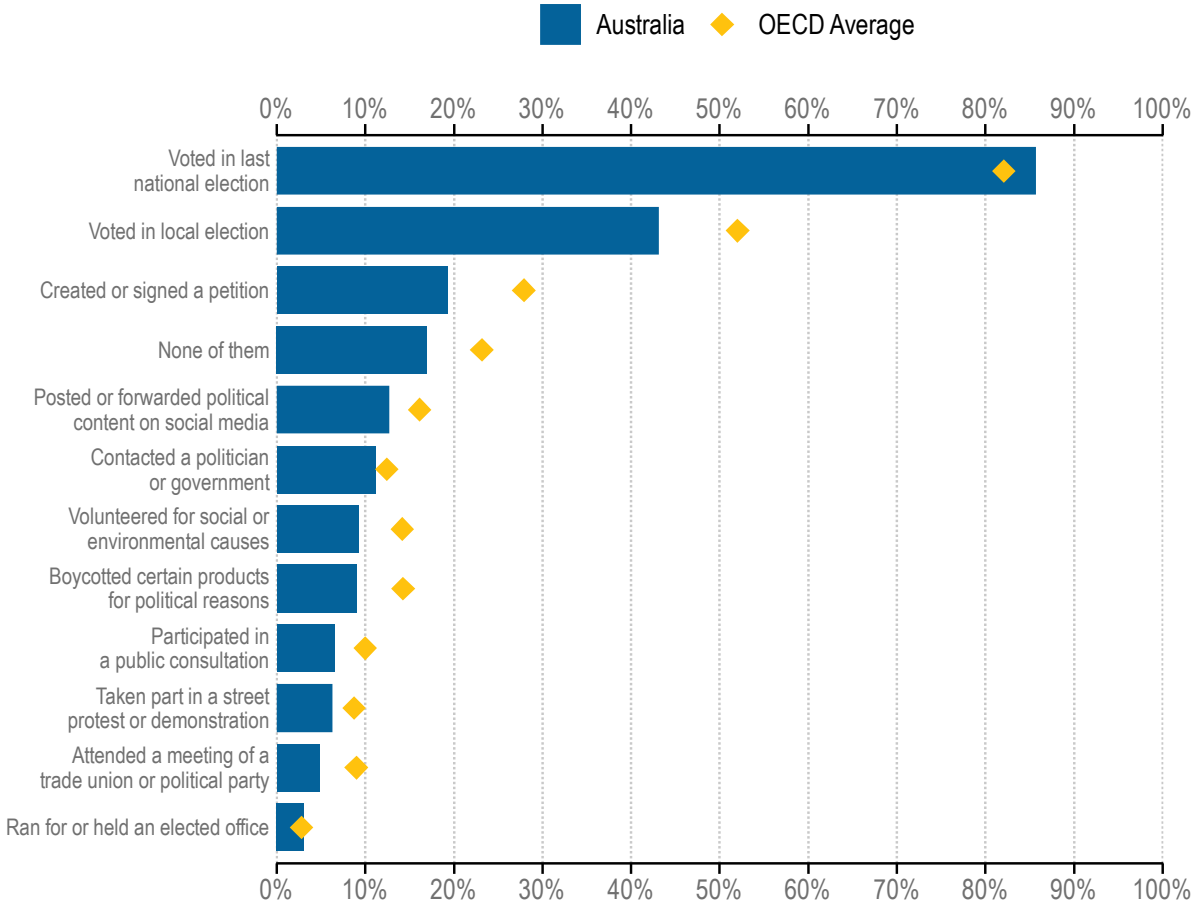
Note: The figure presents the share of respondents who answered "likely" to the question "If a decision affecting your local community is to be made by the local government, how likely do you think it is that you would have an opportunity to voice your opinion?" in 2021 and 2023. The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 scale. The 2021 survey question was worded slightly differently in Norway ("If a decision is to be made which will impact on the area where you live, how likely is it that you and other local residents will be given the opportunity to influence the decision?"), in Mexico ("If the authorities were to make a decision that would affect the area where you live, how likely is it that the people who live there would have the opportunity to influence that decision?") and in Finland ("If a decision affecting your community were to be taken by the local or regional government, how likely is it that you an others in the community would have an opportunity to voice your concerns?"). "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries in 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/o3ykd1

However, when analysing reported ways of engagement, almost two in ten Australians (17%) reported not participating in any form of political activity and, with the exception of electoral participation, Australians participate less than their OECD peers in all forms of participation. Comparing results with those of the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, Australians' participation has also diminished in all forms of engagement surveyed, observing the sharpest decline in the share of people reporting to have signed a petition (from 35 to 19%) (Figure 4.7). This change could be interpreted as a sign of improved perceptions about the government. The declining pattern in participation is in line with trends shown by the Australian Election Study (AES), except for online forms of engagement (Cameron and McAllister, 2022[26]).

Figure 4.7. Australians are less likely to engage in political activities compared to the OECD average

Share of the population who participated in various political activities, Australia and OECD, 2023



Note: The figure shows the weighted Australia average of the "yes" answers to any of the activities listed in the question, "Over the last 12 months, have you engaged in any of the following activities?". "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries in 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/pvin3s

Lower levels of Australians' political participation are accompanied by an increasing fragmentation of the party system and lower levels of reported partisanship. According to results of the AES, the combined share of votes of the two main political parties in the country has consistently declined over time. In 2022, people's interest in politics decreased and political partisanship reached record lows, with one in four voters identifying as non-partisan, evidencing a rising and challenging voter detachment (Cameron et al., 2022[22]). Experts interviewed for this study linked the observed paradoxical results in Australia –that is, high levels of trust in government and political voice together with lower levels of political participation except from electoral engagement- to the complexity of Australian institutional features together with increasingly worse evaluations of partisan leaders and less clear party policy programs, which is an obstacle to accountability. It was highlighted that preferential and compulsory voting, three-year term parliaments and the Australian federal structure imply, on the one hand, a highly fragmented distribution of power posing institutional power-sharing constraints for policy makers; and on the other hand, a very complex and demanding system for voters that could lead to participatory fatigue and discontent.

As such, there is a need to improve opportunities and levels of political engagement so they can be aligned with Australians' perceptions of their ability to participate, influence in politics, and their appetite for direct democracy: a large majority of Australians (81%) believe citizens should vote directly in referendums on specific issues of national importance. Otherwise, challenges of disenchantment and broader scepticism with politics may increase. In this regard, Australia may build on its own positive experiences. For instance, guidance and self-assessment tools on partnership and engagement could be made a requirement for any new national or state policy. States that currently do not have such bodies could also explore the possibility to incorporate advisory bodies representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their Parliaments, for instance following the experience of First Nations voice to Parliament in South Australia. They could also replicate experiences such as youth advisory groups. Multiple opportunities for people to participate and be consulted via the "have your say" dedicated spaces in different agencies' websites could be centralised and organised in a single platform, allowing citizens to have more accessible information and the public administration to compile records and monitor processes (providing summaries, registering who are the ones consulted and how often, etc.). Greece, Italy or the United Kingdom have such single platforms in place.

On the other hand, citizens in Australia are unable to propose legislation, and public institutions encourage a top-down approach to participation, where people can only react or contribute to what is proposed by government. There are very few examples of more regular engagement between people and government officials, and even fewer opportunities for participatory or deliberative democracy. Therefore, to encourage a more regular and meaningful engagement, Australia's government could put in place new institutional channels that allow people to interact with policymakers more often. Digital channels could be well received by Australians. As mentioned above, recent trends found that they tend to participate more via digital means (Cameron and McAllister, 2022[26]), although this may risk leaving behind population groups who do not have access to digital tools. France's Agora could serve as a good example. Moreover, Australia's government could also test and open some policy areas to allow citizens initiatives – encouraging a bottom-up approach to policymaking- or representative deliberative experiences. These experiences involve a randomly selected group of people, representative of the community, formulating collective recommendations for policymakers on complex problems, after dedicating their time to learning and working together through assisted deliberation (OECD, 2020[27]) (Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. Innovative engagement initiatives

France's AGORA is a digital tool created by the Interministerial Directorate for Public Transformation to maintain and enhance a continuous dialogue between citizens and the French government. The app allows people to pose questions to members of government and participate in online consultations initiated by different ministries.

In an effort to bolster democratic legitimacy, the **European Citizens' Initiative** enables citizens to propose legislation to the Commission if an initial project presented by a team of at least seven people living in seven different countries is supported by one million of EU people within a 12-months period. The supported initiative is presented to the Commission together with comprehensive data, signatures, and detailing funds obtained. More than 100 projects have been registered.

The **Irish Citizens' Assembly** involved 100 randomly selected citizens who discussed five legal and policy issues: the 8th amendment of the constitution on abortion, ageing populations, referendum processes, fixed-term parliaments and climate change. The Assembly's recommendations were submitted to parliament for further debate and based on its recommendations, the government called a referendum and declared a climate emergency.

Finally, adding to initiatives enhancing participation opportunities, Australia could also invest in leveraging collective engagement by for instance promoting national dialogues as in Finland (OECD, 2021[28]); and strengthening political parties, as key institutions in contemporary democracies representing collective interests. Participation in parties and collective organisations builds mutual trust, creates a sense of belonging and can make people feel they have a stake in collective endeavours (Parvin, 2018[29]). They could be reinforced, for instance, by promoting more democratic decision-making within parties and candidate selection procedures –such as the open, simultaneous and compulsory primaries carried out in Uruguay or Argentina— or making leaders more accountable toward partisans, via regular gatherings, elections, etc.

4.1.3. Areas of opportunity for policy action

Results from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey indicate that Australians' perceptions of openness are quite positive, and they feel able to participate and influence in politics. However, many Australians expect the government to communicate more clearly on reforms and do not engage in politics other than for voting.

Policy actions to improve perceptions of openness and enhance public trust include the following:

- Promoting a culture of proactive disclosure of public information and clearly communicating with the citizens they serve:
  - when information is high-stakes or when the target audience is linguistically diverse, provide information in languages other than English;
  - use plain and clear language;
  - share messages tailored to communities' needs and target different groups of audiences through identified relevant channels.
- Encouraging a healthy, diverse, and independent media environment enhancing opportunities of public scrutiny and informed decision-making, and investing in evidence-informed approaches to media literacy.
- Enhancing and creating more opportunities for political engagement to align with Australians' perceptions of their ability to participate in and influence politics, and their appetite for direct democracy.
  - Make guidance and self-assessment tools on partnership and engagement a requirement for any new national or state policy.
  - States that do not have such bodies could explore the possibility to incorporate advisory bodies representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into their parliaments.
  - Centralise "*Have your say*" spaces hosted by different agencies into a single platform, facilitating access and allowing registration and monitoring of processes.
  - Put in place institutional channels that allow people to interact with policy makers more often, and test and open policy areas to allow citizens initiatives or representative deliberative experiences.
  - Boost collective engagement by promoting national dialogues, and strengthening political parties through more democratic decision-making and candidate selection procedures.

4.2. Integrity

Public integrity and public trust are deeply interconnected (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015[30]; Murtin et al., 2018[31]; Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020[32]). Public integrity implies a consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector (OECD, 2017[33]). Public trust, on its end, refers to the confidence citizens place in public officials and institutions to act in their best interest. Conversely, corruption involves the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, undermining people's confidence in public institutions (Pellegata and Memoli, 2016[34]).

The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions reflects on integrity concerning governments' mandate to use powers and public resources ethically, by upholding high standards of behaviour, committing to fight corruption, and promoting accountability. The OECD Trust Survey gauges integrity by addressing perceptions of bribery, "revolving doors", policy capture and accountability between different branches of government.

Perceptions of public integrity in Australia are slightly above the OECD average, except for those concerning "policy capture". Yet, they represent the set of public governance measures in which Australia fares worse, and which have improved least compared to the results of the 2021 OECD Trust Survey (see Figure 2.10 in Chapter 2). Meanwhile, people's confidence that the government acts in the best interest of society is the most significant driver of trust in the national government in Australia, and Australians' perceptions of the APS giving honest advice to policymakers is also associated with trust in the civil service.

4.2.1. Many Australians consider public servants provide honest advice but there are still some concerns about them being susceptible to bribery

Experts assess Australia as a country relatively free of corruption and Australians' perceptions of public integrity are comparatively higher than those among their OECD peers (Figure 4.8). Moreover, the government of Australia pursues a pro-integrity culture. For example, it embeds integrity into public institutions, covering a complete range of aspects, from the conduct of individual employees to systems and practices. Accordingly, the Australian Public Service seems to be esteemed by the population. One in two Australians (51%) believe the Australian Public Service will give honest advice to high-level policymakers, while only 21% do not believe so. This could be a result of the long-standing merit-based and apolitical civil service in the country, which has among its key values that employment decisions are based on merit (*Public Service Act 1999*). Indeed, a culture of integrity cannot be established without a competent and driven civil service that is dedicated to the public interest and providing value for citizens (Charron et al., 2017[35]).

Figure 4.8. Australians' views on two important aspects of public integrity are above their OECD peers

Share of the population who find it likely that government employee refuses bribe to speed up service and that politicians refuses well-paid job for political favour, 2023

Note: The figure shows the share of population who answered 'likely' (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) to the questions "If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?" "If a government employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?"; "How likely do you think it is that the national parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?"; and "If a corporation promoted a policy that benefited its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole, how likely do you think it is that the national government would agree to the corporation's demand?". "OECD Average" presents the unweighted average across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/cfx49h

According to expert assessments, the country presents very low levels of corruption, ranking 14th among 180 countries in the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, and timidly recovering from its record-low score in 2021 (Transparency International, n.d.[36]). The Robodebt scheme (see Box 4.4) likely contributed to that decline, but since then, Australia has re-built confidence in displaying public integrity. Australia has in place an advanced national integrity system, with key institutions at federal and state level, including the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Administrative Review Tribunal (Strengthening Democracy Taskforce, 2024[8]). Besides, the Australian anti-corruption legislative framework is quite comprehensive, covering, for example, active and passive bribery of foreign and Commonwealth public officials, attempted corruption, extortion and money laundering as criminal offenses, applying to both individuals and companies (GAN Integrity, 2020[37]).

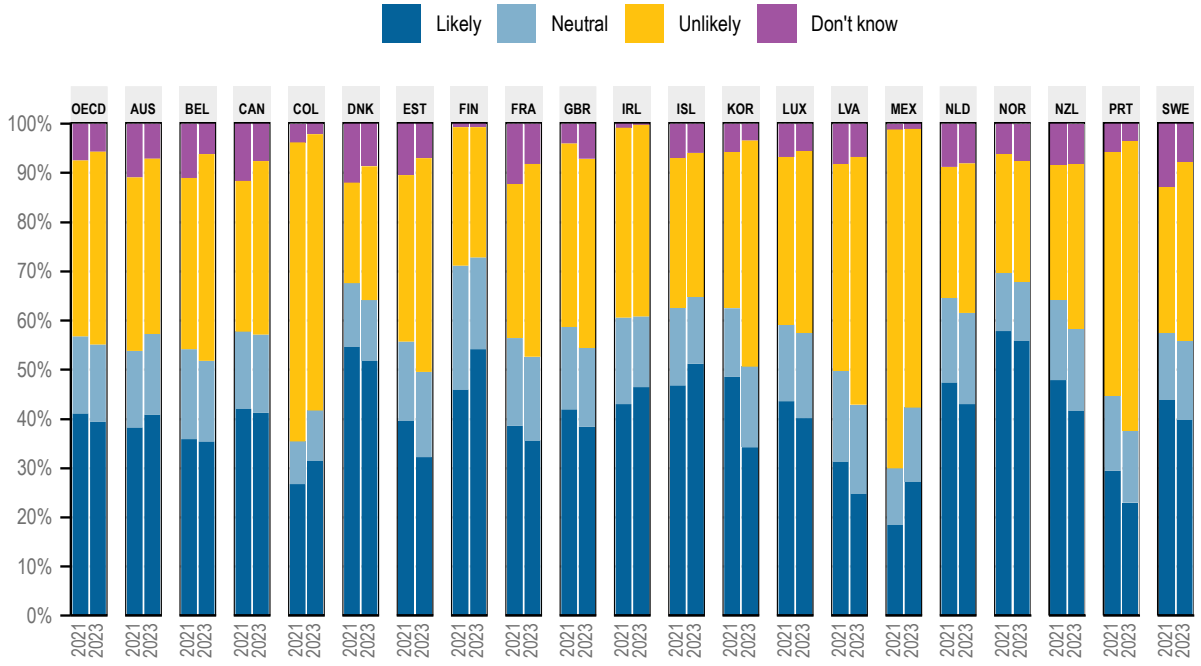
In addition, although 49% of people surveyed by the 2023 Trust and Satisfaction with Australian Democracy believe that corruption is widespread in Australia's democratic institutions and processes, when Australians are asked to select which among a range of issues are the most important ones in their

country, only one in ten Australians named “corruption”, compared to the average one in five across OECD countries (Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2).

However, a sizeable minority of Australians (36%) still feel public employees are susceptible to bribery (Figure 4.9) and only 43% of respondents to the 2023 OECD Trust Survey consider the Australian Public Service looks out for the long-term interests of society, even as elected governments and society change. In line with previous studies, these perceptions are worse among women, older respondents and those who have lower levels of education. Results from a recent survey of a large sample of Australians found that respondents with lower levels of education, who were unemployed or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people perceived higher levels of corruption, and that perceptions of corruption were associated with diminished levels of perceived legitimacy of public officials (Voce, Morgan and Cubitt, 2024[38]).

Figure 4.9. Around four in ten Australians believe a public employee would refuse a bribe to speed up access to public services

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a public employee would refuse a bribe, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of responses to the question “If a public employee was offered money by a citizen or a firm for speeding up access to a public service, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?” in the 2021 and 2023 waves. The “likely” proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; “neutral” is equal to a response of 5; “unlikely” is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and “Don't know” was a separate answer. “OECD” presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/5e1pmh

Notwithstanding differences in perceptions, it is important to underscore that experience of corruption is still quite low in the country. According to Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer, only 4% of Australians reported to have experienced bribery in the last 12 months, compared to a global average of 40% (Transparency International, 2017[39]). Besides, the way corruption is reported by the media has a key role in public opinion (McAllister, 2014[40]). As such, results of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey may need to be situated in the context of the “Robodebt Scheme” and fielding the survey close to the release of the Royal Commission Report, which may have impacted Australians’ perceptions of public integrity (Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. Robodebt Scheme

The Robodebt scheme refers to a government debt recovery program that operated from 2016 to 2019. Using an automated algorithm to find differences between welfare applicants' reported incomes and information from the Australian Tax Office, the system identified mismatches based on average incomes and issued debt letters to beneficiaries. However, the algorithm frequently miscalculated debts, unfairly singling out vulnerable people, who later were found to have no debts. The process led to widespread criticism and mental health problems among those impacted, but also had broad legal repercussions.

In 2020, the Australian government agreed to a $1.8 billion settlement with over 400 000 welfare claimants after acknowledging that the program was unlawful. Further, a Royal Commission that was set up to look into the program's shortcomings discovered that the government knew there were ethical and legal issues with the plan but nonetheless went ahead with it. The Robodebt affair, which exposed the risks of automated technology in human services without proper control, continues to be a pivotal point in Australia's welfare and legal history.

Source: (Braithwaite, 2020[41])

As stated, Australia has multiple public integrity frameworks, policies and agencies setting standards of conduct and behaviour, controls and safeguards against integrity risks –including a series of institutional changes and reviews prompted by the Robodebt scheme, and the integrity action plan prepared by the Australian Public Service Taskforce and included in the report “Louder than Words: APS Integrity Action Plan”.

Despite efforts, institutional challenges remain, including those related to co-ordination in a federal country. According to the OECD’s Anticorruption and Integrity Outlook, though Australia’s strategic framework establishes objectives for mitigating public integrity risks in public financial management, internal control and risk management, there is no central co-ordination function responsible for implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation, nor an action plan in force (OECD, 2024[42]). In addition, a recent study of public services, focusing in particular on codes of conduct/acceptable behaviour across the APS revealed a substantial inconsistency between jurisdictions and a lack of available or accessible data related to compliance (Moon et al., 2023[43]). Further, experts interviewed for this study signalled that while there are instances in which the Commonwealth integrity agencies can exchange with state and territory counterparts, for example, through regular meetings that take place three times a year or joint investigations, there may be data or referral gaps. As such, there is a need to strengthen efforts to ensure co-operation on integrity issues by investing in data collection and governance, both horizontally between federal integrity agencies and vertically with the States/Territories.

In addition, despite Australia's crucial efforts in training high-level and middle managers to become integrity leaders in the public administration, experts interviewed for this study highlighted relevant challenges concerning the environment of public officials’ psychological safety, which may be related to negative impacts and lessons learned from the Robodebt scheme. Psychological safety is key for promoting a culture of integrity and a precondition for openness and transparency within an organisation; and can help support creative decision making. According to the OECD Public Integrity Handbook, a safe environment can be created and maintained in a variety of ways. For instance, managers and leaders can admit mistakes openly and use the lessons learned to improve future initiatives, and they can encourage staff to share ideas, including in more informal settings such as over lunch or coffee (OECD, 2020[44]).

Considering the above, Australia has piloted the “ADDRESS” model to respond to psychosocial hazards, consisting of guides and supporting resources to step through the identify, assess, control and review process within the APS. In this regard, Canada’s initiatives could serve as example. Beyond developing a

National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, the government of Canada assesses and monitors psychosocial factors affecting psychological health and safety in the workplace through the Public Service Employee Survey, with the goal of identifying and addressing areas for improvement (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5. Assessing workplace psychosocial factors in Canada's federal government

Canada's National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace identifies 13 factors affecting public officials' psychological health and safety, including Psychological Support, Organizational Culture, Clear Leadership and Expectations, and Involvement and Influence, among others.

In order to assess and monitor these factors, research has identified and used 43 items from Public Service Employee Survey (PSES). These include, for example: Managers lead by example, Supervisor keeps informed, Equal member of team, Satisfied with harassment resolution, Satisfied with discrimination resolution, etc.

The annual PSES is a voluntary survey, led by the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer and Statistics Canada, Through the survey, public officials evaluate their leadership, workforce, workplace and workplace well-being.

According to recent analysis, psychosocial factors captured by the survey (such as recognition and reward, or involvement and influence) were found to be significant predictors of job satisfaction among public employees.

Source: (Blais et al., 2021[45]); https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey.html

4.2.2. Many Australians perceive the government can be unduly influenced by the private sector

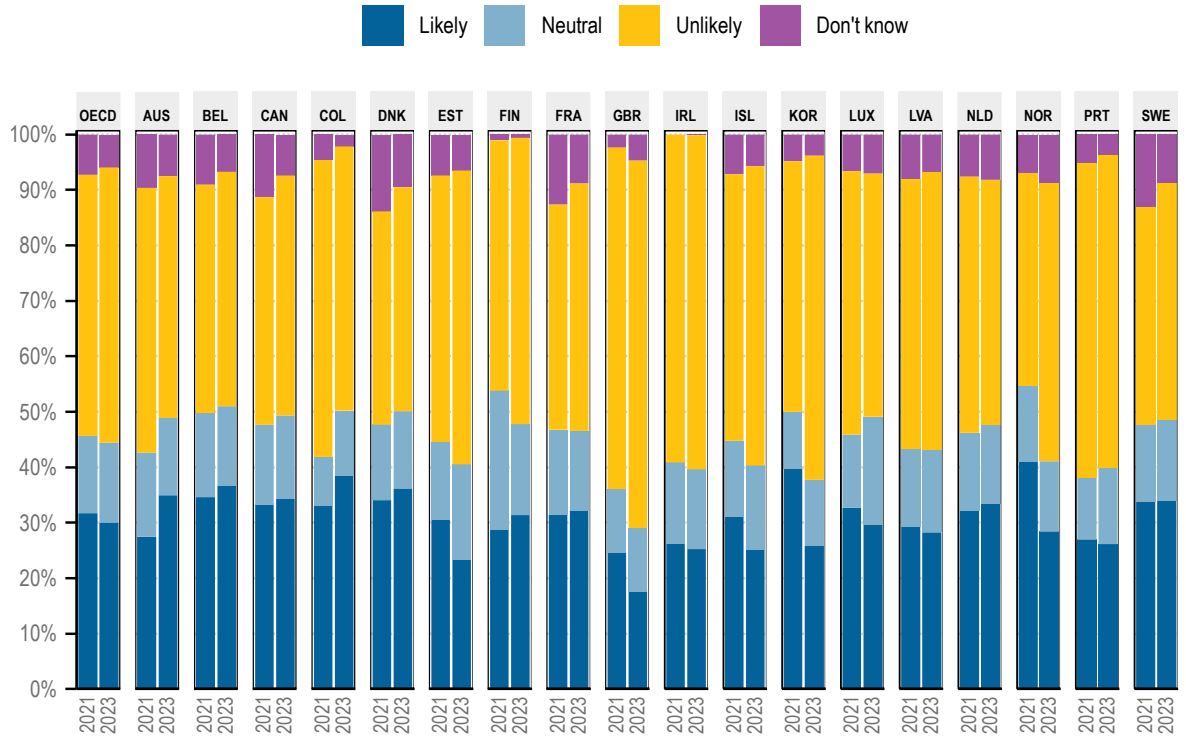
Although perceptions of overt and legally addressed types of corruption, such as bribery, are not widespread or experienced among Australians, they identify worrisome and broader integrity challenges. A majority of people believe that the government is run for a few big interests (Cameron et al., 2022[22]) and perceive 'elite' interests to have privileged influence over policies, potentially leading to policy and regulatory capture (Kirby and Webbe, 2019[46]). Foreign interference and attempts to improperly influence decisions have also recently exposed new challenges and increased existing risks of undue influence (Strengthening Democracy Taskforce, 2024[8]).

According to results of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, more than four in ten Australians (44%) doubt that a policy maker would refuse an offer of a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, slightly below the average across OECD countries (49%) (Figure 4.10). These results align to the fact that Australia has regulations establishing cooling-off periods for Ministers and members of cabinet, but they do not cover members of legislative bodies or lobbyists (OECD, 2021[47]). Indeed, according to OECD's Public Integrity Indicators, Australia has a comprehensive regulatory framework that defines and describes how to manage conflict-of-interest situations at various levels of government and includes proportional sanctions for breaches of conflict-of-interest provisions (OECD, 2024[42]). However, experts from Transparency International found that these regulations cover different levels of government unevenly and stipulate very short cooling-off periods (Transparency International Australia, 2021[48]). A recent assessment performed by the government identified that only around half of the Commonwealth agencies have formal policies on post-employment conflict of interest, and many lack mechanisms to monitor compliance (APS Integrity Taskforce, 2024[49]). In this regard, and following a risk-based approach, the

APS's reform agenda aims to supplement current measures and ensure they are balanced and implemented more consistently across the public service. It also envisions that new measures will set clear expectations for managing the employee separation process, and the conduct of any high-risk activities in agencies, following separation of individuals where they or their new employer may engage with government (APSC, 2024[50]).

Figure 4.10. Perceptions of revolving doors are a concern across OECD countries

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that a politician would refuse a well-paid job to grant a political favour, 2021 and 2023



Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If a politician was offered a well-paid job in the private sector in exchange for a political favour, how likely do you think it is that they would refuse it?" in the 2021 and 2023 waves. The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "Don't know" was a separate answer. "OECD" presents the unweighted average across countries, for the listed countries for which the variable was available in 2021 and 2023.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023.

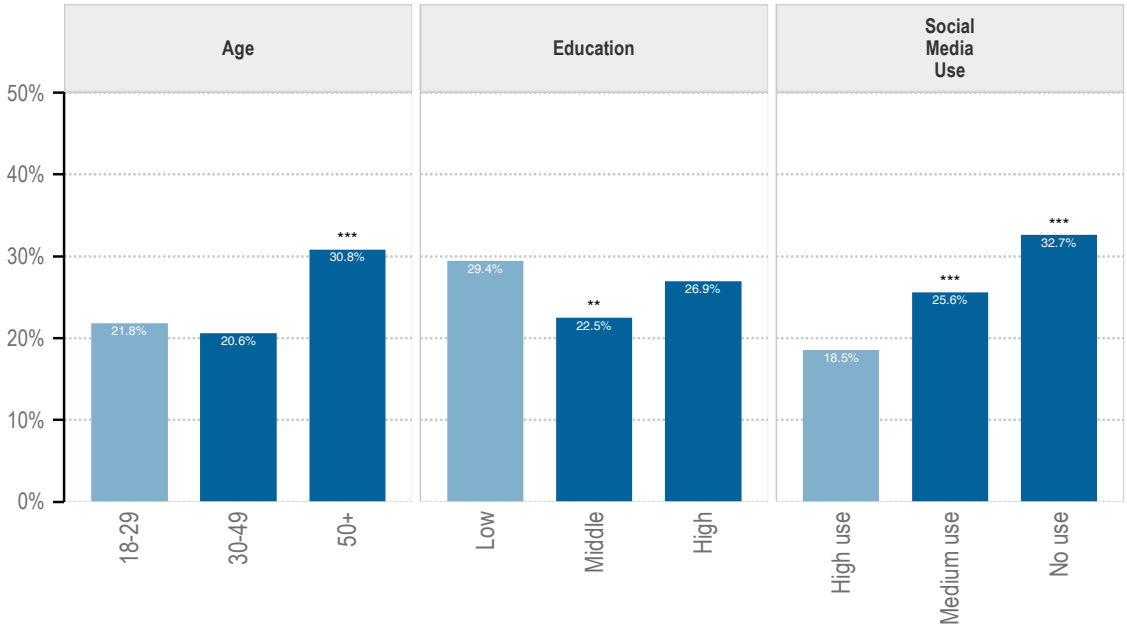
StatLink https://stat.link/mwroej

Further, only 41% believe that Australian Government institutions act according to the best interest of society and just a quarter (25%) of people in Australia find it likely that the government would refuse a corporation's demand that would benefit its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole. This is below the average across OECD countries (30%) and represents the only public governance perception indicator in which Australia does not outperform the OECD. In addition, it is interesting to highlight that when carrying out a more granular analysis of people's perceptions of public governance indicators driving trust by different population groups, Australians' perceptions of policy capture seem to be most negatively impacted by social media consumption. In general, those who reported a high use of social media have higher levels of trust (except for trust in others and trust in the police) and depict more positive perceptions of government competence, openness or fairness. But only 18% of them believe the government would

refuse a policy in favour of private interests, compared to 33% of Australians who reported not to use social media (Figure 4.11). This could be related to widespread communication about recent scandals covered by media, such as the PwC case -including allegations of conflict of interests and dissemination of government data by private consultancy firms employed by the government-, or Robodebt itself, as well as resonates with experts interviewed for this study, who underscored many people started to increasingly share negative views on the functioning of integrity institutions through social networks.

Figure 4.11. Social media users have lower confidence in government's ability to resist undue corporate influence

Share of population who are confident that government refuses to policy in corporations' interest by age, gender, education level, financial concerns, social media use and feeling of group-based discrimination in Australia, 2023



Note: Figure presents the "likely" proportion of aggregated responses from 6-10 to the question "If a corporation promoted a policy that benefited its industry but could be harmful to society as a whole, how likely do you think it is that the national government would agree to the corporation's demand?", by age, gender, education level, financial concerns, social media use, and feeling of discrimination. Shown here is the proportion of respondents who answered "likely" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. The status of discrimination is grouped by whether respondents stated whether they feel they belong to a discriminated group: ''Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in Australia?''. Social media use is identified with a question "What percentage of information on politics and current affairs do you get from social media (Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, reddit etc.)?". Financial concerns are measured by asking ''In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/9cjsie

In part given high levels of market concentration in the country (OECD, 2023[51]) and the potentially harmful impact of market concentration on democratic governance (OECD, 2024[52]) (see Section 1.2.2 in Chapter 1), Australia could consider reinforcing its regulations addressing the role of money in politics in order to prevent private interests improperly sway the decision-making process away from the public interest, using personal connections or privileged positions to influence policies. On the one hand, Australia could ensure all public institutions develop and have in place policies on post-employment conflict of interest. Further, the public service could support the legislative to extend current regulations on lobbying,

stipulating that transparency requirements cover the legislative and judiciary branches, as well as other actors than consultant lobbyists, such as think tanks, companies or trade associations (OECD, 2021[47]).

Additionally, experts interviewed for this study highlighted that Australians have increasing concerns about political donations. As per OECD's Public Integrity Indicators, for instance, Australia neither has in place regulations to ban contributions from foreign states or enterprises, nor ceilings to electoral campaign expenses, nor thresholds for personal contributions to candidates' campaigns. Therefore, it could be relevant to consider extending disclosure requirements to private contributions, banning donations from government contractors and requesting that disclosure is made in real-time, so that citizens are able to access information in a timely manner (Browne and Walters, 2023[53]). This recommendation aligns with Australia's commitment to "transparent political donations and truth in political advertising" included in the Third National Action Plan under the Open Government Partnership. The United States' regulations on transparency and access to information on political finance could serve as a relevant example (Box 4.6).

Box 4.6. Reporting and disclosing donations to political parties in the United States

Political committees (including, for instance, a committee of a candidate, a leadership PAC, or a political party committee) are required by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (FECA) to provide financial reports to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), which then makes them accessible to the public online or in person at the FEC's offices in Washington, DC. The FEC, in turn, has created comprehensive standard forms that must be filled out and include accurate information about contributions, donors, disbursements, and recipients, among other things. While contributions to political parties and other political committees are tallied on a calendar year basis, all contributions to federal candidates are tallied according to an election cycle, which starts on the first day after the date of the previous general election and ends on election day.

The reporting may vary in terms of intensity. For instance, a national party committee must submit monthly reports in both election and non-election years; a congressional candidate's main campaign committee must submit quarterly reports in addition to a financial report 12 days prior to and 30 days following the election. The FEC typically succeeds in making financial reports available online within 24 hours, despite the FECA's mandate that they be made public within 48 hours.

Source: (OECD, 2023[17]).

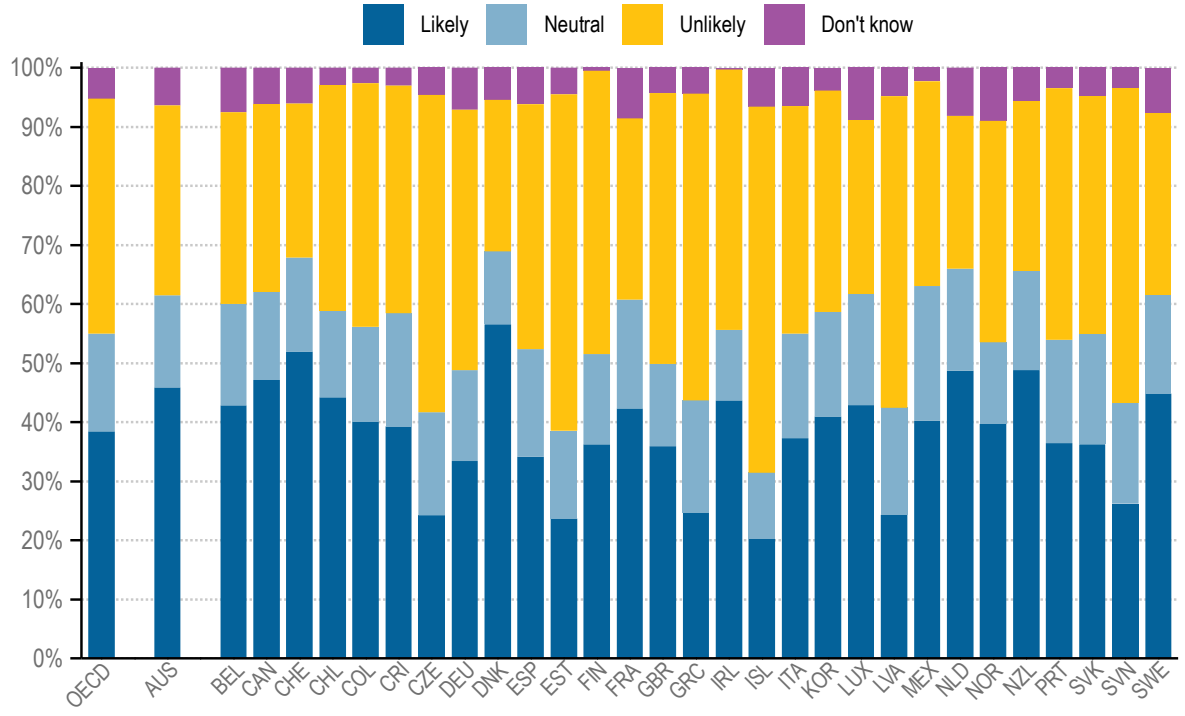
4.2.3. Many Australians believe that institutional checks and balances are effective

The system of checks and balances between branches of government is one of the fundamental tenets of democracy. It guarantees that various viewpoints are represented in decision making and safeguards established institutions from any attempt to abuse their authority, making clear that no one person or institution governs alone.

Despite Australians concerns and mentioned integrity challenges, above the average across OECD countries, 46% of respondents to the 2023 OECD Trust Survey in Australia perceive that the federal parliament would effectively hold the federal government accountable for their policies and behaviour, showcasing a strong democratic resilience in the country (Figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12. 46% believe the federal parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable

Share of population who find it likely or unlikely that the national/federal parliament holds the national/federal government accountable, 2023



Note: The figure shows the distribution of responses within Australia and across OECD countries to the question: "How likely do you think it is that the national parliament would effectively hold the national government accountable for their policies and behaviour, for instance by questioning a minister or reviewing the budget?". The "likely" proportion combines responses rated 6 to 10 on the 0-10 scale. "OECD" represents the unweighted average of responses across all countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/i3qmep

4.2.4. Areas of opportunity for policy action

Australians' perceptions of public integrity are slightly above the OECD average, with the exception of those on policy capture. However, perceptions of integrity in Australia present the lowest scores among other public governance indicators, and are crucial drivers of trust in government.

Policy actions to improve perceptions of integrity and strengthen public trust include the following:

- Ensuring and strengthening co-operation on integrity issues by investing in data collection and governance, both horizontally among federal integrity agencies, and vertically with the States/Territories.
- Maintaining a safe work environment in public administration
  - Determine how to address psychological health and safety;
  - Set and monitor standards that allow for identifying challenges.
- Ensuring all public institutions develop and implement policies on post-employment conflict of interest.

- Supporting the legislative branch in the extension of current regulations on lobbying, stipulating that transparency requirements cover the legislative and judiciary branches, and other actors than consultant lobbyists, such as think tanks, companies or trade associations.
- Expanding disclosure requirements to private contributions regardless of amounts, banning donations from government contractors and request that disclosure is made in real-time.

4.3. Fairness

Perceptions of fairness are crucial for public trust and people's evaluations on public governance. On the one hand, when people perceive that there is a lack of fairness in government's outcomes, seeing distributive unfairness widespread inequality, this may lead to sharp divisions in society and fuel social discontent, eroding the social fabric and public trust and potentially support for democratic ideals (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005[54]; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002[55]; Schnaudt, Hahn and Heppner, 2021[56]). On the other hand, procedural fairness such as impartiality and fairness in policymaking and exercise of power may have a key positive impact on governance's evaluations and can even offset the previous negative relationship (Saxton, 2021[57]).

The OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions gauges fairness considering two key aspects of governance: providing consistent treatment to people and business regardless of their background and identity, and ensuring costs and benefits of public policies are distributed equally among all societal members.

Overall, Australians' perceptions of fairness are the highest out of the main public governance drivers of trust. Yet, one in five Australians describe themselves as a member of a group that is discriminated against in the country, and the Robodebt scheme put in the focus of the public agenda how administrative procedures could harm individuals who are economically and socially marginalised (Mann, 2019[58]). Improving the perception of fairness of treatment in distribution of government benefits would have a large positive impact on trust in government in Australia. Similarly, ensuring intergenerational interests are balanced in policymaking could have a significant impact on trust in the federal government and the Parliament.

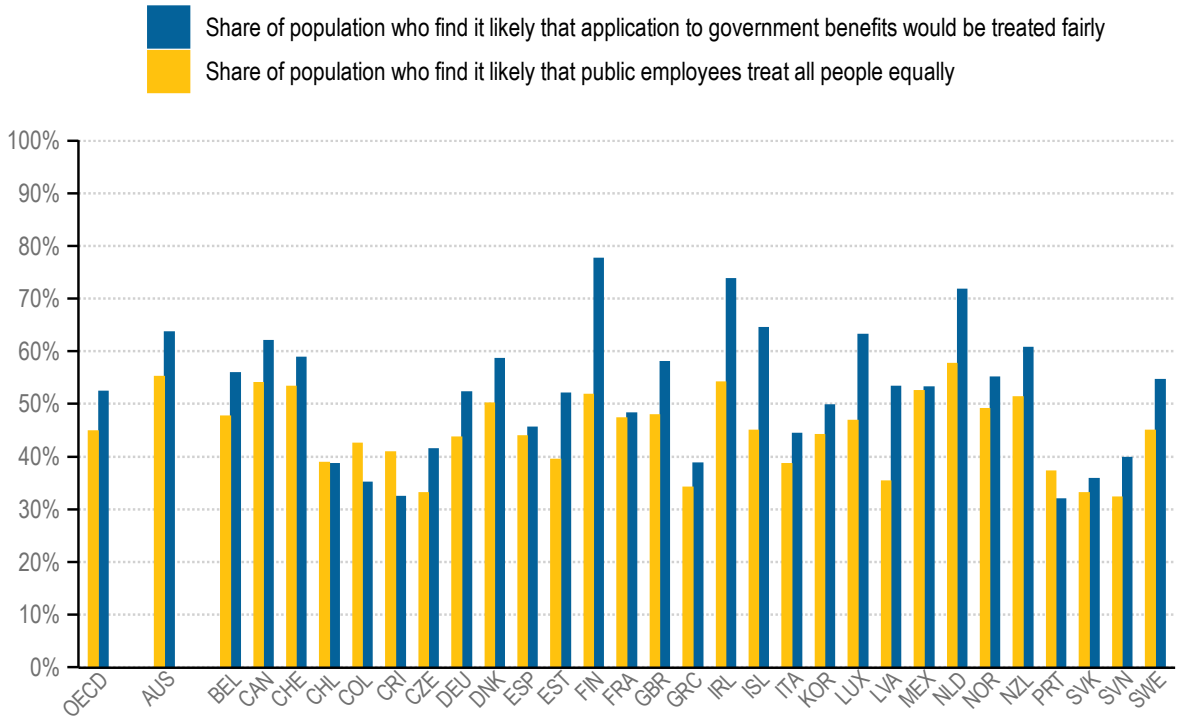
4.3.1. Most Australians believe they are treated fairly and overall public administration is fair

Fairness, egalitarianism, and equal opportunity are prominent principles in the way Australians conceptualise Australianness in economic, cultural, and societal terms (Plage et al., 2016[59]). In addition, experts' assessments rank Australia above the OECD average in the Egalitarian Democracy Index[2]. The Australian welfare system has been in place for more than a century and has enlarged its reach over time (Herscovitch and Stanton, 2008[60]). Besides, the OECD Better Life Index highlights that Australia does well in several well-being categories when compared to other nations. In terms of income, employment, education, health, social ties, civic involvement, environmental quality, and life happiness, Australia performs better than the OECD average. For example, on a scale of 0 to 10, Australians rated their overall level of contentment with life at 7.1, which is higher than the OECD average of 6.7 (OECD, 2024[61]).

According to the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, a majority of Australians (55%) perceive that public officials will treat people equally regardless of their income level, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or country of origin, compared to 45%, on average, across the OECD. An even larger share of respondents (64%) believe their applications for government benefits or services would be treated fairly, 12 percentage points above the OECD average (52%) (Figure 4.13). These are positive results, not only because they show an increase compared to results of the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, but also because Australians' perceptions of fairness of treatment in distribution of government benefits have a significant and positive impact on trust in the federal government.

Figure 4.13. Similar to other OECD countries, belief in fairness to access government benefits is higher than perceived equal treatment by public employees in Australia

Share of the population who find it likely that application to government benefits would be treated fairly and that public employees treat all people equally, 2023



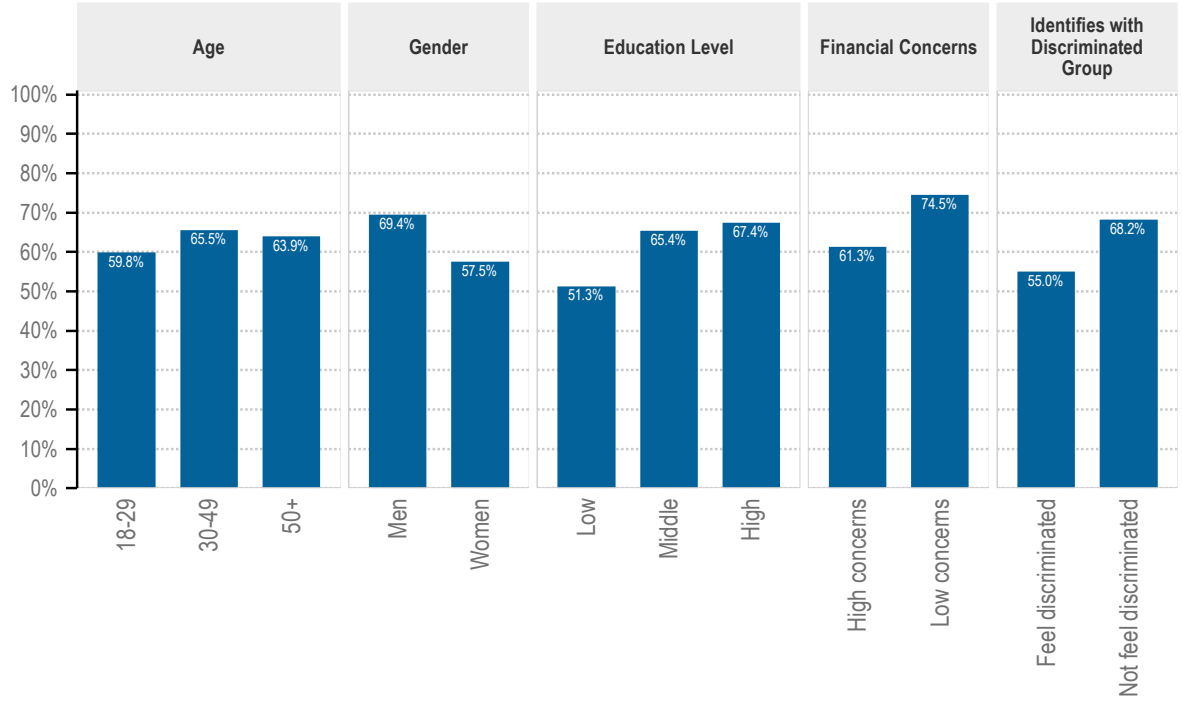
Note: The figure shows the within-country distributions of the share who respond that it is 'likely' (responses 6-10 on a 0-10 scale) to the questions "If you or a member of your household applied for government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" (blue) and "If a government employee interacts with the public in your area, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that they would treat all people equally regardless of their gender, sexual identity, ethnicity or country of origin?" (yellow).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/fpc0xn

Despite general positive results, it is relevant to disaggregate figures by population groups. Women, Australians who reported lower education levels or to have financial concerns have lower perceptions of fairness (Figure 4.14). This can represent a certain overlap with vulnerable population groups that were particularly impacted by the Robodebt scheme (Braithwaite, 2020[41]). In addition, according to experts interviewed for this study, the pandemic could have also impacted perceptions of these groups of people. In particular, the reduction of income support payments following the pandemic may have damaged trust among individuals who may have perceived the reduced payments as a sign that there was a lack of political will to address that their needs, leading to even more disenchantment than existed prior to the temporary increase.

Figure 4.14. Most population groups trust in fair treatment in government benefits and services

Share of population in Australia who find it likely that their application to government benefits would be treated fairly by age, gender, education level, financial concerns and feeling of group-based discrimination in Australia, 2023



Note: The figure presents the weighted Australia averages of responses to the question "If you or a member of your household applied for government benefit or service, how likely do you think it is that your application would be treated fairly?" by respondents' age, gender, education level, status of financial concerns and feeling of discrimination. Shown here is the proportion of respondents that have "high confidence" based on the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the 0-10 response scale. The status of discrimination is grouped by whether respondents stated whether they feel they belong to a discriminated group: ''Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in Australia?''. Financial concerns are measured by asking ''In general, thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about your household's finances and overall social and economic well-being?'' and aggregating responses 3 (somewhat concerned) and 4 (very concerned).
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/a2u0k6

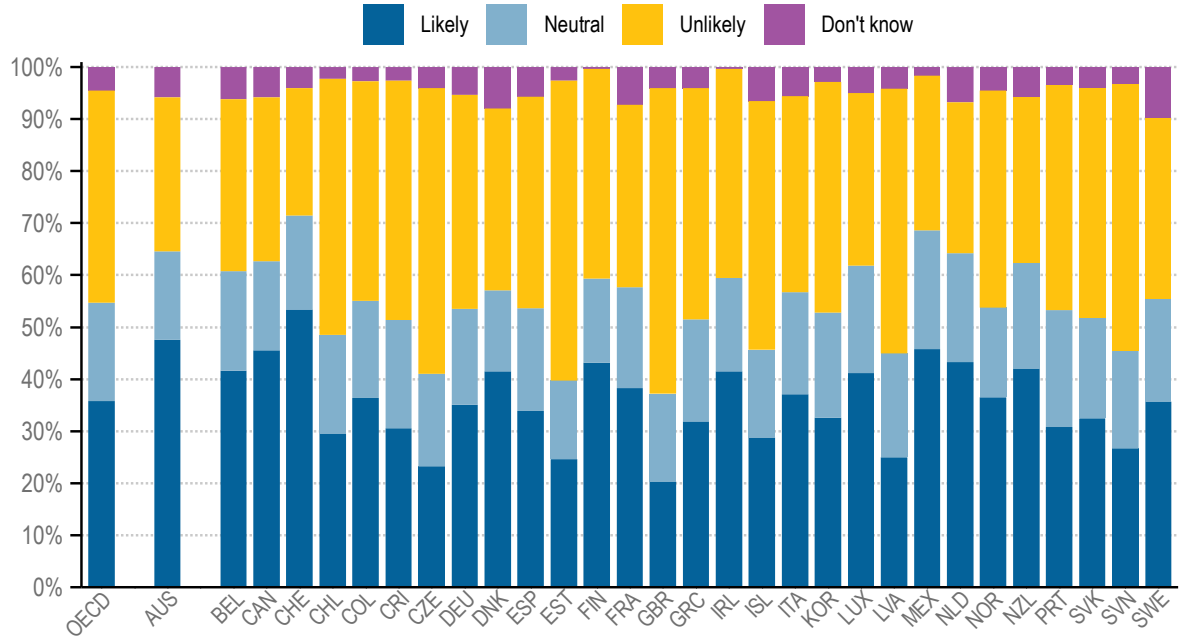
4.3.2. Yet, there are concerns regarding fairness and representatives in policy making

Australia is a diverse society, with indigenous heritage and broad immigration, and which has benefited much from public support for multiculturalism (see Section 1.1.2 in Chapter 1). Nevertheless, financial stress, economic inequality, and perceived unfair personal, social, economic, and health results of COVID-19 in immigrant communities (O'Donnell, 2023[62]) can threaten perceptions of fairness. Besides, after reaching the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in 2020, to tackle the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, many indicators have recently worsened (ICESCR, 2023[63]) (see Section 3.2.2 in Chapter 3).

As such, and though above the average across OECD countries, less than half of Australians (48%) believe that it is likely that the federal parliament adequately balances the needs of different regions and groups in society, while one-third of the population (30%) think it is unlikely (Figure 4.15). Furthermore, experts interviewed for this study underscored that communities were increasingly disengaged and felt they lack power in decision making, identifying this as a main challenge to the Australian democracy. At the same time, 38% of Australians expressed that government help for Indigenous Australians has not gone far enough (Cameron and McAllister, 2022[26]).

Figure 4.15. Nearly half of Australians believes the national parliament balances the needs of different groups in policy debates

Share of the population who find it likely or unlikely that national parliament balances the needs of different groups, 2023



Note: The figure presents the within-country distributions of responses to the question "If the national parliament or congress debated a new policy, how likely do you think it is that it would adequately balance the needs of different regions and groups in society?". The "likely" proportion is the aggregation of responses from 6-10 on the scale; "neutral" is equal to a response of 5; "unlikely" is the aggregation of responses from 0-4; and "don't know" was a separate answer choice. "OECD" presents the unweighted average of responses across countries.
Source: OECD Trust Survey 2023.

StatLink https://stat.link/5pkiyj

There have been considerable improvements in women's representation in the Australian Public Service and representative institutions, but there are still challenges in achieving representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For instance, in 2023, women represented 60.4% of the service workforce and 55% of the total senior leadership group in the APS. The Australian government has enhanced gender analytic capabilities throughout the Commonwealth and implemented gender-responsive budgeting (ICESCR, 2023[63]). In 2024, women represented 56% of federal parliamentarians, and as of 30 June 2024, women held 54.4% of government board positions. The Boosting First Nations employment initiative aims to increase representation and strengthen cultural safety for First Nations people in the APS. Significant gains are being made through the Senior Executive Service (SES) 100 initiative, which will increase First Nations leaders in the APS from 54 to 100 by mid-2025. This is an important step towards achieving the Australian Government's target of 5% for First Nations employment in the APS by 2030. As at June 2024, 3.4% of staff in the APS are First Nations, slightly below their share in the Australian population (3.8%, see Chapter 1). Moreover, despite the fact that as of August 2024, 4.4% of federal parliamentarians are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they do not represent specific Indigenous parties, and to the outcome of the Voice referendum posed a setback in First Nations' voice in policymaking.

In this regard, some of the initiatives put in place in New Zealand to collect data and ensure diverse representation, both in public sector and politics could serve as good examples for Australia to keep on enhancing strategies and policies in place. Expanding data in this way should build on the principle of *Indigenous Data Sovereignty,* which acknowledges the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to autonomously decide about data collected, accessed and used, ensuring they reflect Indigenous priorities, values, cultures, worldviews and diversity (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2024[64]). At the same time, as underscored by Australian public officials, and following 2021 Census' reports, which evidenced an undercount of 17.4% concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the national census needs to increase accuracy and ensure respondents are able to complete questionnaires.

Box 4.7. Initiatives to ensure fairness and representativeness of Aboriginal populations in New Zealand

New Zealand has in place a data platform *Te Whata* tailored by Aboriginal experts, so other experts, people and community leaders can better understand and use their data for policy initiatives, in line with their priorities and world views.

The platform puts together information from different sources and the design of the data allows community policymakers to align goals and strategies with key indicators at the community levels. The platform can produce brief snapshots, charts and tables, as well as an overview, or dashboard of the current state of the community unit.

The *Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme* in New Zealand assists early career graduates from ethnic communities in obtaining their first public sector employment.

Young graduates work for 18 months at various government organisations across the nation, and the government expectation is that since the public sector becomes more ethnically representative of the nation's diverse groups, it will eventually become more culturally competent. The program's objective is to modify public service in the future to conform to changing social standards.

4.3.3. Areas of opportunity for policy action

Australians' perceptions of fairness are the highest among the main public governance drivers of trust, yet diminished social cohesion, lack of representativeness and feelings of discrimination among Australians highlight increasing challenges. Policy actions to improve fairness and strengthen public trust include the following:

- Collecting and showcasing data disaggregated and according to relevance criteria that can be useful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which may help to better target policies, tackle inequalities and vulnerabilities.
- Policies aimed at mitigating perceived socioeconomic vulnerabilities and inequalities could be crucial in closing trust gaps among population groups.
- Promote initiatives to keep on promoting and ensuring diverse representation, both in public sector and politics.

References

Adams, C. (2014), "Freedom of Information and Parliamentary Departments", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 73/1, pp. 67-78, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12052. [13]

Alesina, A. and E. La Ferrara (2002), "Who trusts others?", *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 85/2, pp. 207-234, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0047-2727(01)00084-6. [55]

APS Integrity Taskforce (2024), *Louder Than Words: An APS Integrity Action Plan*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Australian Governemnt. [49]

APSC (2024), "APS Reform Agenda Stage 2 Integrity reforms. Issues Paper", APSC. [50]

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2024), *Understanding Data Sovereignty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. [64]

Banks, A. et al. (2020), "#PolarizedFeeds: Three Experiments on Polarization, Framing, and Social Media", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220940964. [19]

Bauhr, M. and M. Grimes (2014), "Indignation or Resignation.", *Governance*, Vol. 27/2, pp. 291-320. [6]

Blais, A. et al. (2021), *Measuring workplace psychosocial factors in the federal government. Health Report*, Statistics Canada. [45]

Braithwaite, V. (2020), "Beyond the bubble that is Robodebt: How governments that lose integrity threaten democracy", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55/3, pp. 242-259, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.122. [41]

Brezzi, M. et al. (2021), "An updated OECD framework on drivers of trust in public institutions to meet current and future challenges", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 48, OECD, Paris. [2]

Browne, B. and B. Walters (2023), *Securing transparency and diversity in political finance Reducing the influence of money in politics*. [53]

Cameron, S. and I. McAllister (2022), *Trends in Australian Political Opinion Results from the Australian Election Study 1987–2022*, Australian National University and Griffith University. [26]

Cameron, S. et al. (2022), *The 2022 Australian Federal Election Results from the Australian Election Study*, Australian National University and Griffith University. [22]

Centre for Law and Democracy (2022), *Australia*. [11]

Charron, N. et al. (2017), "Careers, connections, and corruption risks: Investigating the impact of bureaucratic meritocracy on public procurement processes", *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 79/1, https://doi.org/10.1086/687209. [35]

Christensen, H. and D. McQuestin (2018), "Community engagement in Australian local governments: a closer look and strategic implications", *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 45/4, pp. 453-480, https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1541794. [23]

Cinelli, M. (2021), *The echo chamber effect on social media*. [18]

Dassonneville, R. and I. McAllister (2021), "Explaining the decline of political trust in Australia", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 56/3, pp. 280-297, https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2021.1960272. [21]

GAN Integrity (2020), *Australia Risk Report*, https://www.ganintegrity.com/country-profiles/australia/. [37]

Grimmelikhuijsen, S. and A. Meijer (2012), "Effects of Transparency on the Perceived Trustworthiness of a Government Organization: Evidence from an Online Experiment", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 24/1, pp. 137-157, https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mus048. [5]

Grimmelikhuijsen, S., S. Piotrowski and G. Van Ryzin (2020), "Latent transparency and trust in government: Unexpected findings from two survey experiments", *Government Information Quarterly*, Vol. 37/4, p. 101497, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2020.101497. [7]

Hendriks, C., A. Bolitho and C. Foulkes (2013), "Localism and the paradox of devolution: delegated citizen committees in Victoria, Australia", *Policy Studies*, Vol. 34/5-6, pp. 575-591, https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2013.862450. [25]

Henninger, M. (2017), "Freedom of information and the right to know: Tensions between openness and secrecy", *Information Research: an international electronic journal*, Vol. 22/4. [12]

Herscovitch, A. and D. Stanton (2008), "History of Social Security in Australia.", *Family Matters* 80, pp. 51-60. [60]

ICESCR (2023), *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Sixth periodic report submitted by Australia under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant, due in 2022*, UN Economic and Social Council. [63]

Kirby, N. and S. Webbe (2019), *Being a Trusted and Respected Partner: The APS Integrity Framework: An ANZSOG Research Paper for the Australian Public Service Review Panel*, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, https://doi.org/10.54810/erqp2900. [46]

Klein, E. and J. Robison (2019), "Like, Post, and Distrust? How Social Media Use Affects Trust in Government", *Political Communication*, Vol. 37/1, pp. 46-64, https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1661891. [20]

Mann, M. (2019), *GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2019. Artificial intelligence: Human rights, social justice and development*, Association for Progressive communications (APc), Article 19, and Swedish InternAtional Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). [58]

McAllister, I. (2014), "Corruption and confidence in Australian political institutions", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 49/2, pp. 174-185, https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2014.880401. [40]

Moon, D. (2015), *A Matter of Balance? Freedom of Information and Deliberative Documents*, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL. [14]

Moon, K. et al. (2023), "Exploring integrity in Australian public services: A method to benchmark public service codes of conduct", *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12620. [43]

Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2015), *PUBLIC INTEGRITY AND TRUST IN EUROPE*, European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building (ERCAS), Hertie School of Governance. [30]

Murtin, F. et al. (2018), ""Trust and its determinants: Evidence from the Trustlab experiment"", *OECD Statistics Working Papers*, No. 2018/02, OECD, Paris. [31]

O'Donnell, J. (2023), "Social cohesion, diversity and inequalities in Australian communities", *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, Vol. 156/489-490, pp. 61-69. [62]

OECD (2024), *Anti-Corruption and Integrity Outlook 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/968587cd-en. [42]

OECD (2024), *Facts not Fakes: Tackling Disinformation, Strengthening Information Integrity*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/d909ff7a-en. [9]

OECD (2024), *How's Life? 2024: Well-being and Resilience in Times of Crisis*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/90ba854a-en. [61]

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. [10]

OECD (2024), "The interaction between competition and democracy", *OECD Roundtables on Competition Policy Papers*, No. 316, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/8b3a575f-en. [52]

OECD (2023), *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in New Zealand*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/948accf8-en. [17]

OECD (2023), *OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/1794a7c9-en. [51]

OECD (2022), *Building Trust to Reinforce Democracy: Main Findings from the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b407f99c-en. [3]

OECD (2021), *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Finland*, Building Trust in Public Institutions, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/52600c9e-en. [28]

OECD (2021), *Lobbying in the 21st Century: Transparency, Integrity and Access*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/c6d8eff8-en. [47]

OECD (2021), *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/22f8031c-en. [16]

OECD (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en. [27]

OECD (2020), *OECD Public Integrity Handbook*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ac8ed8e8-en. [44]

OECD (2017), *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government*, https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0438 (accessed on 12 March 2021). [4]

OECD (2017), *OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Integrity*, http://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/OECD-Recommendation-Public-Integrity.pdf. [33]

Parvin, P. (2018), "Democracy Without Participation: A New Politics for a Disengaged Era", *Res Publica*, Vol. 24/1, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1. [29]

Pellegata, A. and V. Memoli (2016), "Can Corruption Erode Confidence in Political Institutions Among European Countries? Comparing the Effects of Different Measures of Perceived Corruption", *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 128/1, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1036-0. [34]

Plage, S. et al. (2016), "Australianness as fairness: implications for cosmopolitan encounters", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 53/2, pp. 318-333, https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316667641. [59]

Rothstein, B. and E. Uslaner (2005), "All for All: Equality, Corruption, and Social Trust", *World Politics*, Vol. 58/1, pp. 41-72, https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2006.0022. [54]

Saxton, G. (2021), "Governance Quality, Fairness Perceptions, and Satisfaction with Democracy in Latin America", *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 63/2, pp. 122-145, https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2021.8. [57]

Schnaudt, C., C. Hahn and E. Heppner (2021), "Distributive and Procedural Justice and Political Trust in Europe", *Frontiers in Political Science*, Vol. 3, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.642232. [56]

Smillie, L. and M. Scharfbillig (2024), *Trustworthy Public Communications*, Publications Office of the European Union, JRC137725. [15]

Strengthening Democracy Taskforce (2024), *Strengthening Australian democracy: A practical agenda for democratic resilience*, Department of Home Affairs, Commonwealth of Australia. [8]

Transparency International (2017), *Global Corruption Barometer*, https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/people_and_corruption_asia_pacific_global_corruption_barometer. [39]

Transparency International (n.d.), *CPI*, https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/chile. [36]

Transparency International Australia (2021), *LOBBYING AND REVOLVING DOORS ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*. [48]

Tremblay, P. and A. Cowley (2023), *The Devolution Dilemma*, ANZSOG. [24]

Van de Walle, S. and K. Migchelbrink (2020), "Institutional quality, corruption, and impartiality: the role of process and outcome for citizen trust in public administration in 173 European regions", *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, Vol. 25/1, pp. 9-27, https://doi.org/10.1080/17487870.2020.1719103. [1]

Van de Walle, S. and K. Migchelbrink (2020), "Institutional quality, corruption, and impartiality: the role of process and outcome for citizen trust in public administration in 173 European regions", *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, https://doi.org/10.1080/17487870.2020.1719103. [32]

Voce, A., A. Morgan and T. Cubitt (2024), "Community perceptions of corruption by public officials. Australian Institute of Criminology", *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, Vol. 687. [38]

Notes

[1] For more information see: https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/covid-19/translated-information.

[2] Egalitarian democracy is achieved when 1) rights and freedoms of individuals are protected equally across all social groups; 2) resources are distributed equally across all social groups; 3) groups and individuals enjoy equal access to power (Varieties of Democracy Project, 2023).

Annex A. Notes on the methodology of the OECD Trust Survey 2021 and 2023 in Australia

Australia participated in the inaugural 2021 and the 2023 OECD Survey of Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD Trust Survey). The OECD Trust Survey was administered by the OECD Directorate for Public Governance in 22 and 30 OECD countries in 2021 and 2023, respectively. These countries were Australia, Austria (2021 only), Belgium, Canada, Chile (2023 only), Colombia, Costa Rica (2023 only), Czechia (2023 only), Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany (2023 only), Greece (2023 only), Iceland, Italy (2023 only), Ireland, Japan (2021 only), Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic (2023 only), Slovenia (2023 only), Spain (2023 only), Sweden, Switzerland (2023 only), and the United Kingdom. In Australia, the survey data were collected between November 26th to December 15th 2021 and October 25th and November 26th 2023.

In Australia and 15 and 23 other countries in 2021 and 2023 respectively, the surveys were conducted online by the polling firms YouGov (2021) and Ipsos (2023). The OECD Secretariat co-ordinated with the OECD procurement office to establish an agreement with the respective firm following an open and transparent market competition. For other countries, survey responses were collected by national statistical offices (in the cases of Finland, Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom), research institutes (Iceland), or survey companies selected by the respective country (Norway).

The two survey waves used non-probability sampling frames with volunteer-based online access panels. The adoption of non-probability sampling offered cost-effective and time-efficient way to design and execute the survey. This process also involved setting country-level demographic quotas to achieve representative samples of adults living in Australia for age, gender, education and regional distribution (referred to as hard quotas), along with income (referred to as a soft quota). OECD population statistics as well as the Census of Population and Housing and ABS Household Income data were consulted to set the appropriate quotas for Australia.

The 2021 and 2023 Trust Survey waves in Australia had a total sample of valid responses of 2 014 (2021) and 2 020 (2023). The detailed sample composition is provided in Table A A.1.

Table A A.1. Sample composition by age, gender, education and region in Australia

Groups	Sub-groups	N 2021	Weighted percentage 2021	N 2023	Weighted percentage 2023
Gender	Male	830	49.1%	1004	50.8%
	Female	1167	50.9%	1016	49.2%
Age	18-29	269	20.4%	421	21.1%
	30-49	720	35.4%	684	34.4%
	50+	1025	44.2%	915	44.5%
Education	Low	391	20.0%	368	18.2%
	Middle	734	42.0%	906	44.9%
	High	889	38.0%	745	37%
Region	New South Wales, ACT	610	33.7%	636	33.2%
	Queensland	441	19.8%	420	20.4%
	South Australia, Northern Territories, Western Australia	401	18.3%	379	18.7%
	Victoria, Tasmania	562	28.2%	585	27.8%

Source: Nguyen et al. (2022[1]) and OECD (2024[2]).

To facilitate comparisons across years, most of the 2021 survey questions were preserved. However, some questions were revised or deleted, and a few new topics were introduced. In addition to the core 2023 Trust Survey questionnaire, additional country-specific questions were asked in Australia. These questions pertained to the perception of the integrity and orientation towards the long-term interests of society of the Australian Public Service (see Box 2.1 in Chapter 2). For an in-depth overview of the OECD Trust Survey's methodology for the 2021 and 2023 wave, including the respective year's core questionnaire, please refer to the methodological and technical documentation (OECD, 2024[2]; Nguyen et al., 2022[1]).

References

Nguyen, D. et al. (2022), "Survey design and technical documentation supporting the 2021 OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Government Institutions", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 53, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/6f6093c5-en. [1]

OECD (2024), *OECD Trust Survey Design and Technical Documentation: Annex to the OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions - 2024 Results*, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2024/07/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results_eeb36452/2023%20Trust%20Survey%20-%20Technical%20annex.pdf. [2]

Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Australia

This report examines Australians' trust in their public institutions and explores ways to strengthen that trust. Trust in public institutions has become increasingly critical for effective democratic governance, especially when tackling challenges such as digital transformation and climate change. Through comprehensive analysis of trust levels and drivers across institutions, this report provides key insights for both policymakers and citizens, while benchmarking Australia's performance against other OECD countries. It highlights institutional strengths and areas of improvement, supporting Australia's efforts to strengthen democratic governance and ensure responsive and effective public institutions that benefit all Australians.

PRINT ISBN 978-92-64-62883-0
PDF ISBN 978-92-64-42216-2