



Young Australians' civic engagement

Insights from *Growing up in Australia*, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*

July 2026

Young Australians' civic engagement is evolving

Civic engagement among young Australians has received increasing attention in public and policy spheres in recent years. Young people's participation in civic life is widely seen as a marker of a healthy democracy and society, while also contributing to individual wellbeing through building a sense of purpose, belonging and agency. However, commentary across Australian policy, research and media points to declining civic knowledge, participation and community connection among young people, raising concerns about their engagement in civic life (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2025; Borhan, 2025; Fu et al., 2021).

LSAC Wave 10 data provide a nuanced picture of young people's civic and political engagement. It supports the idea that their engagement is evolving; young people continue to participate in civic and political life, through digital and informal pathways, as well as traditional pathways.

****Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)*** is an ongoing study that follows the lives of children, through to adolescence and adulthood, and their families from all over Australia. In 2004, around 5,000 0–1 year olds (B cohort) and 5,000 4–5 year olds (K cohort) and their families were recruited and have been surveyed every 2 years since.

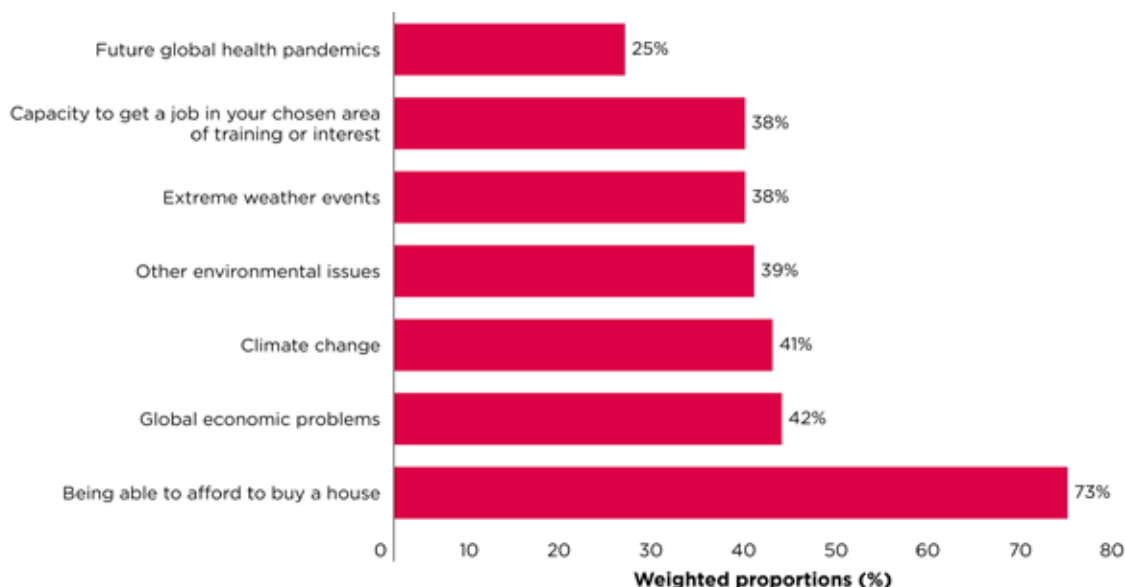
This research is based on Wave 10 data from a total of 4,407 participants in 2023–24. At this time, the B cohort was aged 19–20 years ($n = 2,302$) and the K cohort was aged 23–24 years ($n = 2,105$). The sample includes 52% young cisgender men, 46% young cisgender women and 2% young trans and gender diverse people. Information on the study design, questionnaires, statistical considerations, data files and other data resources are available via the LSAC [Data user guide](#).

Young people are concerned about social, economic and environmental issues

Young Australians are entering adulthood at a time of rapid social, political, economic and digital change. Many are navigating major life transitions while also facing cost-of-living pressures, a deterioration in housing affordability and broader global uncertainty.

- A substantial proportion of young Australians aged 19–20 and 23–24 years old reported being 'quite a bit' or 'very much' concerned about key challenges facing their generation (Figure 1).
- Overall, 83% of 19–20 and 23–24 year olds reported being 'quite a bit' or 'very much' concerned about at least one issue, including 89% of young cisgender women, 91% of young trans and gender diverse people and 77% of young cisgender men.

Figure 1: Percentage of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years in 2023–24 who were ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ concerned about social, economic and environmental issues ($n = 4,168$)



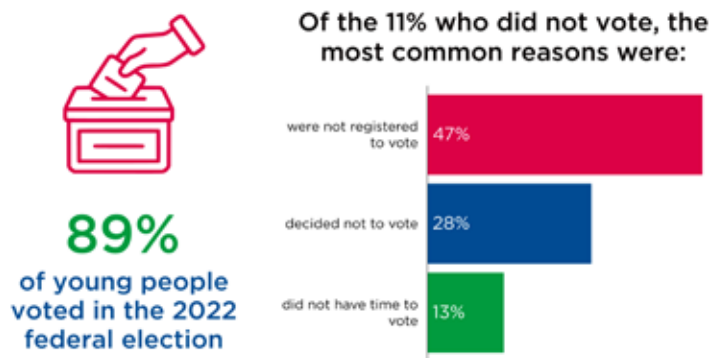
These findings suggest that young Australians are highly aware of the social, economic and environmental issues shaping their lives. Understanding how these concerns may translate into action requires a broad view of civic engagement.

What is civic engagement? Civic engagement includes individual and collective actions that respond to political and social issues and that help shape the community’s present and future (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Civic engagement evolves over the life course as part of a broad ‘civic journey’ (Mycock & Prosser, 2025). Examining both formal and informal aspects of civic engagement, including political participation and volunteering, as well as confidence and trust in institutions, provides a well-rounded picture of how young Australians in their late teens and early 20s engage with civic life today.

Young people are participating in civic and political life

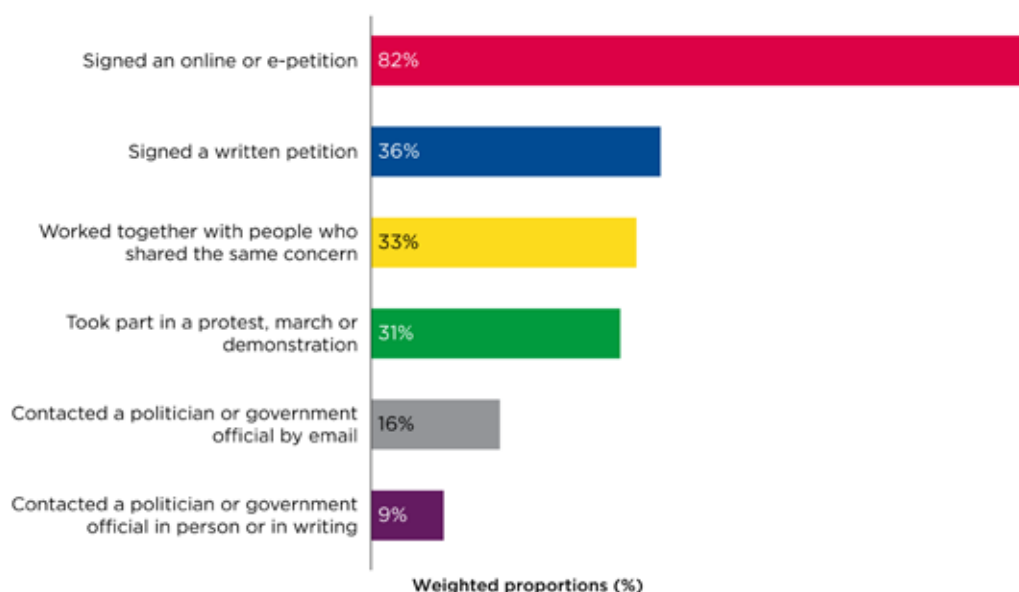
Young Australians continue to participate in political life in measurable ways:

- Of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years, 9 in 10 reported that they voted in the 2022 federal election. This is roughly the same as the national average (AEC data).



- While many young Australians are engaging in formal democratic processes, only 1% reported regular involvement with a political party.
- Beyond voting and party membership, 41% of young people reported expressing their views over the past 5 years about government actions.
- Of those who expressed their views, they were more likely to report participating through collective action, such as petitions and protests, than through individual and formal contact with government ministers or departments (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years in 2023–24 who expressed their views over the past 5 years about government policy and decisions (*n* = 1,796)

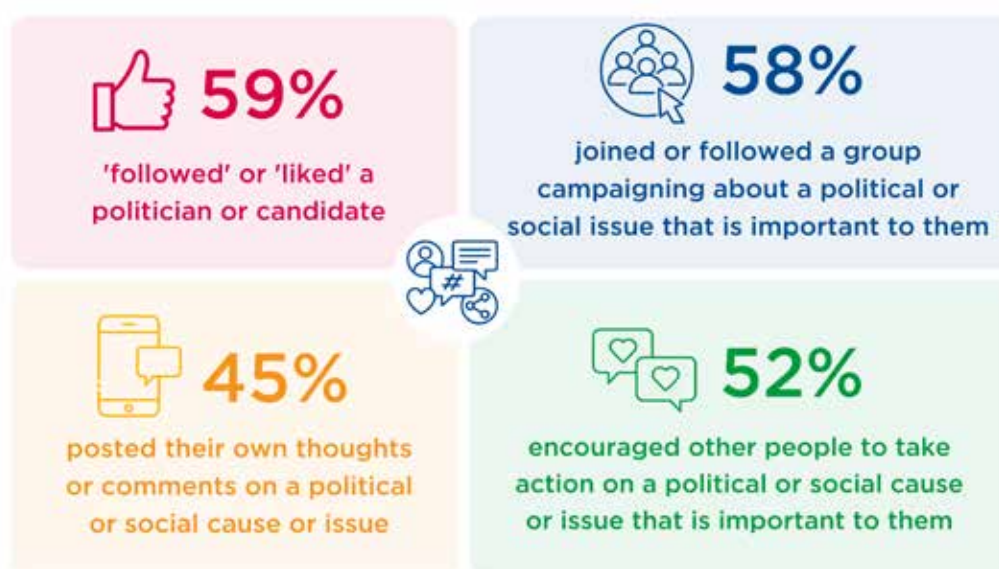


- Patterns of engagement varied based on age. Young people aged 23–24 years were more likely to report expressing their views using at least one of the above methods (45%) compared to those aged 19–20 years (37%).
- Patterns of engagement also varied based on gender identity. Young trans and gender diverse people were more likely to express their views (74%) than were young cisgender women (48%) and young cisgender men (33%).

These findings show that many young Australians are engaging in political life in various ways, not only through traditional channels such as party membership. Although, some groups may participate more than others.

Social media engagement is an important pathway for young people

- Around one-third (37%) of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years reported engaging with political or social issues on social media, using a range of pathways.



- Young people aged 23–24 years were more likely to report engaging with political or social issues on social media (41%) compared to young people aged 19–20 years (33%).

- Young trans and gender diverse people reported the highest rate of engagement (70%), followed by young cisgender women (41%) and young cisgender men (31%).

These findings suggest that social media platforms are a key medium for civic engagement among many young Australians, reflecting the social and technological contexts of their lives.

Many young people don't feel confident in understanding and influencing politics

Young people's participation in civic and political life may be shaped by how confident and capable they feel in understanding politics and influencing decision making.

When asked about their understanding of politics:

- Overall, 38% of young people said politics often seems too complicated to understand, including 50% of young cisgender women, 50% of young trans and gender diverse people, and 27% of young cisgender men.

When asked whether they felt people like them have a say in Australian politics:

- Only 11% of young people said Australia's political system allows people like them a meaningful say in what government does, including 12% of young cisgender men, 10% of young cisgender women, and 3% of young trans and gender diverse people.

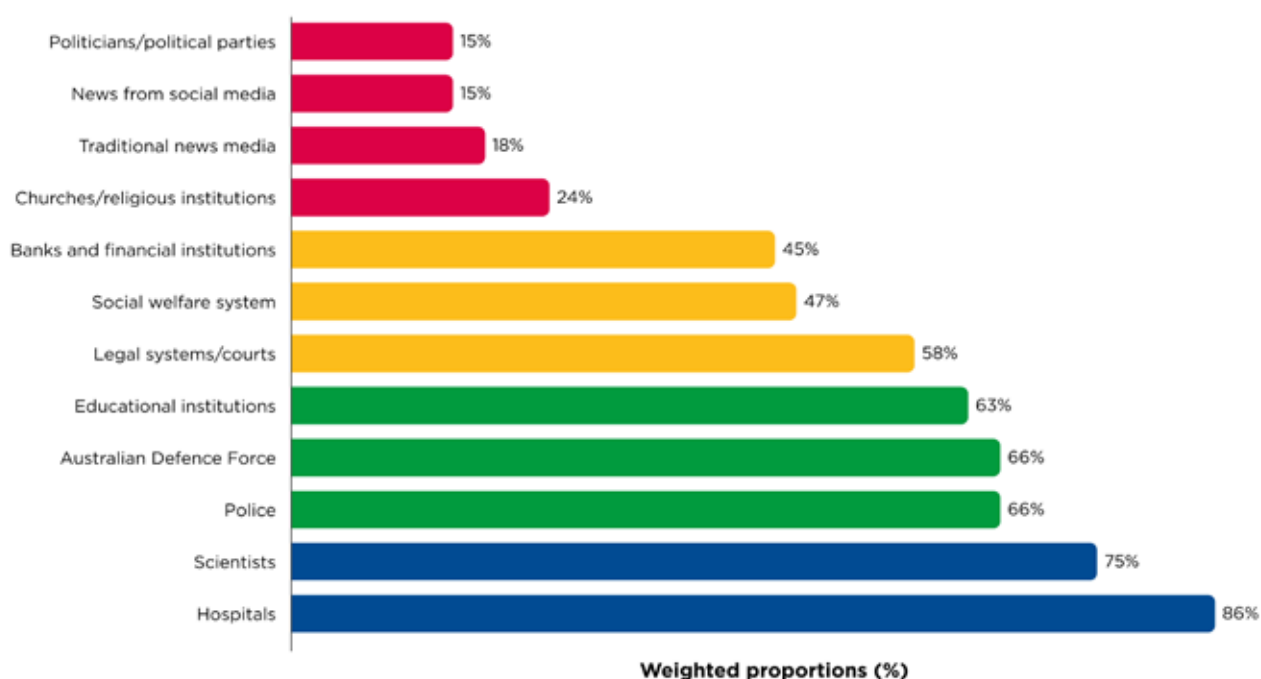
The education system is well placed to support young people's understanding of the Australian political system and enhance their confidence in participating in it. Consistent exposure to civic education across primary, secondary and tertiary education may help to shape positive 'civic journeys' into adult life.

Trust in institutions is varied

Levels of trust vary across institutions in society (Figure 3). Overall, among young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years:

- Higher levels of trust were reported in health, science, security and educational institutions.
- Moderate levels of trust were reported in legal systems, the social welfare system and financial institutions.
- Lower levels of trust were reported in religious institutions, political parties and the media.

Figure 3: Percentage of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years in 2023–24 who reported 'a lot of trust' or 'some trust' in institutions ($n = 4,177$)



Varied trust in institutions may have implications for how and where young people choose to participate in civic life.

Volunteering remains an important form of community connection

Volunteering represents another way young people build connections and address issues in their communities.

- Around one-third (34%) of young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years reported volunteering in the past 12 months, including 36% of young cisgender women, 32% of young cisgender men and 21% of young trans and gender diverse people.
- In 2023–24, young people from these age groups reported volunteering at a higher rate than was reported by those from the broader age group of 15–24 year olds participating in Australia's General Social Survey in 2025 (16%) (Volunteering Australia, 2026).
- Young people aged 19–20 and 23–24 years reported volunteering regularly, with many volunteering on a weekly to monthly basis (67%).
- Common areas for volunteering included sport (38%), church or religious groups (20%), youth services (13%) and community organisations (13%).

What this tells us

Taken together, these findings suggest:

- **Young people care and act:** Young Australians are concerned about the issues affecting their future and their communities' futures, and many take political or civic action to express and address those concerns.
- **Engagement is going digital:** Many young Australians rely on digital platforms to engage in political and civic life.
- **Understanding may shape engagement:** Young Australians' civic engagement may increase with greater understanding of government processes and institutions.
- **Connection through volunteering:** Many young people are engaging with issues and their communities in various ways, including through volunteering.

Why these findings matter

These findings provide important context for interpreting claims that young people are disengaged from civic and political life in Australia. While there is prior evidence of declining civic knowledge and lower participation in traditional forms of engagement (Cameron, 2025), LSAC findings support that this may reflect a shift – rather than a withdrawal – in how young people participate. LSAC findings also highlight potential barriers that may undermine engagement.

Many young Australians continue to engage with civic and political issues, with many likely to do so through informal and digitally enabled forms as well as traditional pathways.

There is a risk that:

- Traditional measures of civic engagement may underestimate the extent to which young people are engaged with political and social issues.
- Policies intended to bolster civic engagement may fail to recognise or respond to the ways young people are already participating in civic life.
- Differences in engagement, confidence and trust in political systems – across groups of young people – could mean that some voices are heard while others are missed.

Recognising the ways in which young people engage is critical to ensuring that civic and political systems remain inclusive, responsive and capable of supporting young people's engagement now and well into adulthood.

LSAC provides an invaluable national data asset that can map a diverse range of civic experiences across life stages into adulthood.

Considerations for policy and decision makers

These findings highlight the need for policy and practice to better reflect how young people are engaging with civic life, and to build young people's confidence and trust in engagement pathways. They point to the importance of:

- recognising and supporting civic engagement strategies that are inclusive, accessible and meaningful to diverse groups of young people
- promoting capability and confidence for young people to meaningfully engage with civic and political issues over the life course by building their knowledge and skills
- strengthening pathways between informal and formal participation to ensure that engagement in online, grassroots and community-based activities informs genuine responses by government and decision makers.

Potential next steps with LSAC data

This study described young people's civic and political engagement using Wave 10 data. Using the longitudinal data, future studies could explore:

1. civic and political engagement among specific or priority groups of young people
2. intergenerational factors that shape young people's civic and political engagement over time
3. individual characteristics, experiences or contexts that support or hinder later civic and political engagement, institutional trust and confidence in understanding politics.

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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