



Satisfaction with Democracy in Australia: Pulse report, February 2026

Executive summary

After a statistically significant increase in satisfaction with democracy in January 2026, results in February 2026 show a significant decrease in satisfaction (58.7% from 64.8%), back to approximately the same results as in December 2025 (58.1%).

Satisfaction with democracy of people born in Australia also dropped in February 2026 (65.3% in January 2026 to 58.9%) but remains above satisfaction in December 2025 (55.9%). Trust in democracy for people born overseas dropped further (57.0% from 62.6% in February 2026) and is now over 10% lower than in December 2025 (67.3%). February 2026 is only the third time (along with January 2026 and November 2023) that satisfaction with democracy was lower for people born overseas than for people born in Australia.

For most other demographics groups, trust in democracy dropped back to similar levels seen in December 2025, except people over 65, which remained 3.5% higher (58.3% - February 2026; 58.4% - January 2026; 54.8% - December 2025). This was particularly apparent for 18–34 year olds and people whose level of education is below year 12, who had large increases in January 2026 and are now below the levels seen in December 2025 (though within the margin of error for the sample in this survey).

Trust in democratic and public institutions has returned to December 2025 results for most institutions (to within the margin of error), following increases across the board in January 2026.

The perceived performance of key elements of democracy remains higher than December 2025 for most elements by 2 to 3 percentage points, and 5 to 6 percentage points for “the courts and law system are free from political influence, bias, and external pressures” (55.7% February 2026, 49.4% December 2025), “public services are reliable” (64.8% February 2026, 57.4% December 2025), and “everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, or other characteristics” (56.8% February 2026, 52.9% December 2025).



Results

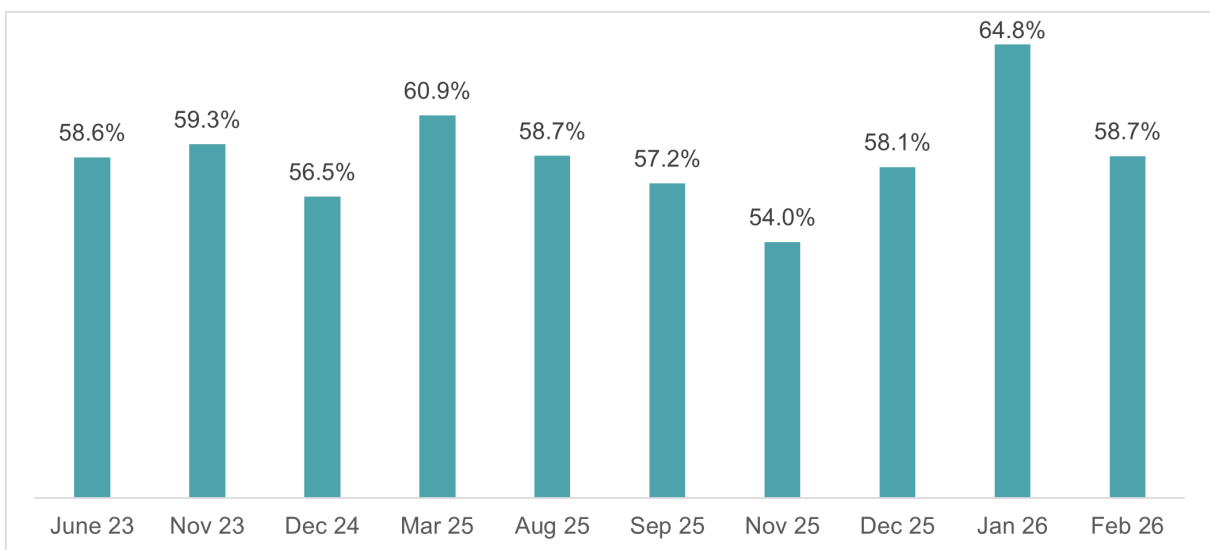
Satisfaction with democracy

Overall satisfaction (“satisfied” + “very satisfied”) has decreased 6.1 percentage points in February 2026 from January 2026 (58.7% from 64.8%). It remains 0.6% above December 2025 (58.1%) and 4.7% above November 2025 (54.0%).

In terms of individual categories:

- the proportion of those who are “very satisfied” (18.1%) decreased 0.5 percentage points and has remained stable since March 2025
- the proportion of those who are just “satisfied” decreased significantly from 46.3% in January 2026 to 40.6% in February 2026
- the proportion of those who are “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” significantly increased 3.5 percentage points to 22.6%
- the proportion of those who are “dissatisfied” increased 1.8 percentage points to 10.4%, still slightly below December 2025 (10.8%).
- the proportion of those who are “very dissatisfied” increased 1.3 percentage points to 5.7%.

Figure 1: Proportions of overall satisfaction over waves



Note: Proportions show those who responded “satisfied” or “very satisfied” to “how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?”



Table 1: Satisfaction with democracy

Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Very satisfied	12.0	15.4	20.5	17.8	18.1	17.4	17.5	18.4	18.6	18.1
Satisfied	46.6	44.0	36.0	43.1	40.6	39.8	36.5	39.7	46.3	40.6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25.2	24.1	25.6	22.3	23.7	22.8	22.9	23.1	19.1	22.6
Dissatisfied	10.2	10.3	10.8	10.7	10.9	11.4	11.2	10.8	8.6	10.4
Very dissatisfied	3.1	2.9	4.3	3.8	3.9	5.4	9.2	4.6	4.4	5.7
Not sure	2.9	3.3	2.9	2.3	2.8	3.3	2.7	3.4	3.0	2.6

Individual characteristics of satisfaction

The increases to overall satisfaction for demographic groups seen in January 2026 were largely reversed, particularly notable for 18-34 year olds (65.5%, 75.3%, 64.6% in December 2025, January 2026, February 2026 respectively) and people whose highest grade of education is below Year 12 (35.3%, 43.2%, 33.7% in December 2025, January 2026, and February 2026 respectively).

Table 2: Overall satisfaction with democracy split by demographic group

Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Men	65.2	63.3	63.2	66.7	65.7	65.7	59.9	66.8	72.2	68.8
Women	52.8	55.3	50.2	55.6	52.1	48.9	48.5	50.0	57.8	49.3
18-34	58.4	59.2	67.0	63.2	63.2	63.4	57.1	65.5	75.3	64.6



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
35-64	57.0	56.1	49.9	58.5	55.3	52.1	49.7	55.1	61.3	55.3
65+	62.7	66.8	56.9	63.1	59.8	59.8	59.4	54.8	58.4	58.3
Metro	60.6	63.3	61.9	64.7	63.1	60.0	58.7	62.4	68.4	62.4
Regional	50.9	43.4	42.1	48.5	44.7	46.0	41.8	46.9	50.5	46.9
Did not finish Grade 12	46.0	54.7	42.7	46.3	44.3	30.9	34.4	35.5	43.2	33.7
Finished Grade 12	57.9	56.4	52.9	58.9	57.0	54.9	53.5	58.0	64.1	59.4
Australian born	57.4	60.2	55.9	59.9	56.3	55.0	52.3	55.9	65.3	58.9
Born overseas	63.8	56.0	58.7	65.1	67.8	65.0	61.1	67.3	62.6	57.0

Note: proportions show those who selected "Satisfied" or "Very satisfied" to the question "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?"

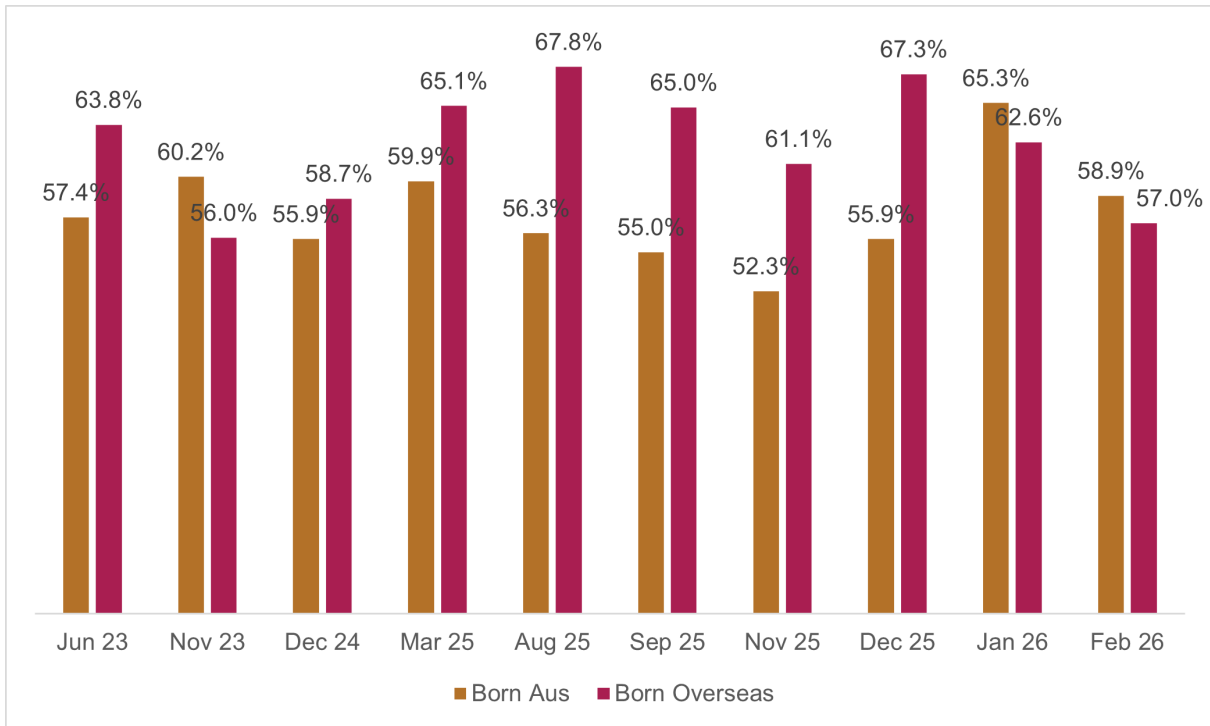
The proportion of people born in Australia who are satisfied overall decreased 6.4 percentage points (65.3% in January 2026 to 58.9% in February 2026) but remains 3 percentage points above December 2025 (55.9%).

Satisfaction decreased again for people born overseas by another 5.6 percentage points (62.6% in January 2026 to 57.0% in February 2026) and is now 10.3 percentage points below the level in December 2025. It is the second lowest it has been since the start of the survey (56.0% in November 2023).

February 2026, along with in January 2026 and November 2023, are the only times trust in democracy has been lower for those born overseas than those born in Australia.



Figure 2: Overall satisfaction by place of birth



Importance of democratic elements

The perceived importance of key elements of democracy was similar to January for all the elements of democracy. Respondents give higher importance ratings to elements relating to core democratic safeguards, including fairness, impartiality, and limits on abuse of power, rather than on elements related to voice, expression, and information.

Fair elections stand out within this pattern, indicating that formal electoral participation may be viewed as a more central or tangible expression of democracy than broader, less direct forms of influence over government decision-making.

Table 3: Importance of democratic elements (%)

Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
People can freely express political opinions and ideas about society	64.7	58.8	53.3	56.4	60.0	52.8	56.2	54.9	55.7	54.3



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Elections are fair	80.4	77.3	67.2	69.9	72.7	67.4	68.5	68.0	73.1	71.8
The courts and law system are free from political influence, bias, and external pressures	77.8	73.4	65.9	69.3	70.8	67.3	66.0	66.0	72.1	68.9
Public services are reliable	73.0	69.9	64.5	66.4	68.2	65.4	63.2	65.5	69.6	67.3
People get a say on the government's priorities	63.8	59.2	56.7	55.4	62.9	57.2	59.8	55.1	55.9	55.9
Everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or other characteristics	75.3	71.3	65.1	68.3	70.5	68.1	65.4	63.4	67.8	69.0
There are enough checks to ensure politicians and government officials can't abuse their power	75.9	72.9	66.3	68.5	71.0	69.8	68.3	66.4	71.6	70.0
The law is applied impartially regardless of who you are	76.9	72.6	67.0	66.8	67.5	67.3	64.3	64.7	70.8	69.9



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
People of all ages can easily learn how democracy works	58.7	60.8	53.2	55.4	57.2	56.9	56.6	51.6	58.4	54.8
A free and independent media	60.2	63.2	56.7	56.9	57.4	58.2	57.4	54.6	58.4	55.9
Free access to information	69.5	70.3	59.8	63.4	63.9	64.5	62.4	60.6	63.6	63.1
Human rights are protected	79.6	74.8	66.6	68.5	70.0	68.5	65.3	66.9	66.9	66.7

Performance of democratic elements

After large increases in January 2026, where perceived performance (“good” + “very good”) increased by an average of 5.4 percentage points, performance declined for most elements in February 2026.

Perceived performance still remains higher than December 2025 for most elements by 2 to 3 percentage points, and 5 to 6 percentage points for “the courts and law system are free from political influence, bias, and external pressures” (55.7% February 2026, 49.4% December 2025), “public services are reliable” (64.8% February 2026, 57.4% December 2025), “everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or other characteristics” (56.8% February 2026, 52.9% December 2025) and “human rights are protected” (64.5% February 2026, 60.8% December 2025).

Performance decreased significantly between January 2026 and February 2026 for “people get a say on the government’s priorities” (-4.4 percentage points, 46.3% from 50.7%) and “elections are fair” (-4.3 percentage points, 65.3% from 69.6%). Both remain the same or above the levels for December 2025 (47.3% and 61.9% respectively).

“There are enough checks to ensure politicians and government officials can’t abuse their power” has the lowest perceived performance (45.9%) while “elections are fair” has the highest (65.3%).



Table 4: Performance of democratic elements (%)

Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
People can freely express political opinions and ideas about society	67.0	72.2	61.0	60.5	62.1	58.1	58.3	60.2	61.9	61.6
Elections are fair	70.1	73.2	64.5	63.3	65.9	60.5	58.0	61.9	69.6	65.3
The courts and law system are free from political influence, bias, and external pressures	55.5	59.5	50.1	49.5	50.7	48.6	48.1	49.4	56.9	55.7
Public services are reliable	56.0	61.9	60.5	59.1	60.1	59.0	56.3	57.4	65.7	64.8
People get a say on the government's priorities	45.2	48.7	48.6	45.1	46.4	44.6	44.1	47.5	50.7	46.3
Everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or other characteristics	55.3	57.7	55.4	53.9	56.1	53.1	50.8	52.9	58.3	56.8
There are enough checks to ensure politicians and government officials can't abuse their power	40.5	48.2	46.5	43.9	44.7	42.6	40.9	43.4	45.8	45.9



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
The law is applied impartially regardless of who you are	50.1	56.0	51.2	51.2	52.5	50.0	49.0	50.7	55.6	52.8
People of all ages can easily learn how democracy works	64.1	68.6	62.2	60.1	63.3	57.6	57.9	60.2	67.7	64.1
A free and independent media	52.6	59.3	52.7	51.2	51.8	51.8	50.7	50.5	56.1	54.6
Free access to information	64.4	67.0.2	63.4	62.4	63.8	60.0	57.0	61.3	66.2	62.9
Human rights are protected	68.0	67.8.5	60.9	62.5	61.8	61.7	58.6	60.8	66.0	64.5

The gap between importance and performance

The importance-performance gap is measured by subtracting perceived importance from perceived performance for each element each month. This gives an indication as to whether people feel different elements of our democracy are stacking up to their expectations of how they should be performing.

The largest gaps continue to be concentrated in areas related to democratic integrity and fairness, particularly whether there are sufficient checks on politicians' power (-24.1 percentage points), whether the law is applied impartially (-17.1 points), and whether courts are free from political influence (-13.2 points). Democratic elements related to information access and service delivery show much smaller gaps.

Two elements continue to perform above their perceived importance: "people of all ages can easily learn how democracy works" (+9.3 points) and "people can freely express political opinions and ideas about society" (+7.3 points).



Trust in institutions

Trust decreased for most institutions in February 2026, returning to levels slightly higher than in December 2025.

The Australian Defence Force was the only institution to record an increase in trust (+0.4 percentage points, not statistically significant). Ambulance, fire, and other emergency services continue to have the highest trust of any institution (87.4%). Political parties continue to have the lowest trust (32.4%).

Table 5: Trust in various institutions (%)

Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Commonwealth / Federal Government	50.1	51.2	44.2	49.0	48.2	46.7	44.0	49.1	49.8	45.8
Commonwealth / Federal Parliament	44.1	46.0	42.9	45.2	46.0	43.7	43.2	47.7	47.8	46.4
Your state or territory government	49.3	45.5	46.1	49.2	48.4	46.7	43.9	49.7	52.2	50.9
Your state or territory parliament	46.2	44.0	46.6	48.4	45.2	45.9	45.4	47.5	52.9	49.8
Your local council	48.5	49.1	47.1	48.0	46.3	45.5	42.5	48.3	53.0	49.9
Political parties	25.6	30.1	33.4	31.7	30.3	28.0	28.3	32.7	34.0	32.4
Public servants	45.3	47.5	48.7	50.6	50.8	50.1	46.8	51.9	56.7	53.1



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Courts and legal system	54.3	54.3	52.1	54.6	53.8	53.0	47.3	56.1	57.3	54.8
Police and law enforcement	67.3	63.0	67.0	70.3	66.9	66.7	62.8	66.4	69.6	69.2
Public health institutions	72.1	69.1	64.9	69.9	66.7	64.8	62.2	67.0	70.9	68.1
Ombudsmen	62.1	59.4	63.6	64.2	62.2	60.4	57.0	63.4	64.4	61.8
Ambulance, fire, and other emergency services	88.5	85.1	85.1	87.7	87.5	87.1	84.2	86.2	87.9	87.4
Reserve Bank of Australia	38.5	42.4	48.1	51.2	53.2	50.4	49.5	54.1	59.1	53.8
Australian Electoral Commission	61.5	58.8	64.9	63.8	65.2	61.8	59.2	63.1	67.5	64.6
Australian Human Rights Commission	60.7	58.0	59.9	60.2	60.1	57.4	56.6	62.5	62.5	59.6
Australian Defence Force	72.1	69.8	72.6	76.6	74.6	74.4	71.2	73.4	74.3	74.7



Response category	Jun 2023 (%)	Nov 2023 (%)	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
Public broadcasters (e.g. ABC, SBS)	52.8	55.2	50.5	50.7	52.1	52.9	50.3	55.9	56.2	53.2

What are the views of those who are not satisfied with democracy?

The proportion of respondents who are not satisfied (either "very dissatisfied", "dissatisfied", "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied", or "not sure") but believe "we need to continue building upon what we've got to improve democracy in Australia" remains stable across waves (45.2% in February 2026).

The proportion of respondents who believe "there are political systems other than democracy that will work better in Australia" is 7.4% in February 2026, after a low of 4.5% in January 2026.

Table 6: Preferences for democracy for those not satisfied with democracy (%)

Response category	Dec 2024 (%)	Mar 2025 (%)	Aug 2025 (%)	Sep 2025 (%)	Nov 2025 (%)	Dec 2025 (%)	Jan 2026 (%)	Feb 2026 (%)
We need to continue building upon what we've got to improve democracy in Australia	47.4	44.5	45.6	44.6	40.0	41.9	42.5	45.2
We need to remove what we've got and start again to improve democracy in Australia	22.0	20.7	22.8	23.4	26.5	24.1	26.0	25.0
There are political systems other than democracy that will work better in Australia	6.2	7.8	8.1	7.4	8.5	6.1	4.5	7.4



Not sure	20.6	22.6	20.0	19.6	21.6	23.2	22.1	19.5
Other	3.9	4.4	3.5	4.9	3.4	4.7	5.0	2.9

Note: only respondents who previously selected "Very dissatisfied", "Dissatisfied", and "Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" for the prior satisfaction in democracy question answered this question ("You indicated that you are [Very dissatisfied / Dissatisfied / Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied] with the way democracy works in Australia. Which of the following best reflects your opinion about democracy in Australia?"). Wave 1 and 2 responses excluded as the question was asked differently in those waves.



Appendix

Since 2023, the Australian Public Service Commission in collaboration with the Office for Social Cohesion has surveyed a nationally representative cross-section of Australians on their attitudes toward democracy, trust in public institutions, and satisfaction with democratic processes across the following waves:

- Wave 1: June 2023
- Wave 2: Nov 2023
- Wave 3: Dec 2024
- Wave 4: Mar 2025
- Wave 5: Aug 2025
- Wave 6: Sep 2025
- Wave 7: Nov 2025
- Wave 8: Dec 2025
- Wave 9: Jan 2026
- Wave 10: Feb 2026.

Wave 1, conducted in June 2023, and wave 2, conducted in November 2023 were run as their own standalone surveys, with wave 2 providing a post-referendum examination of satisfaction with democracy. These two waves involved a non-representative sample, but data have been weighted to Australian population statistics. The results from the first two waves were reported in detail in our [Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy report](#).

Wave 3 onwards consists of five key questions from the original democracy survey that were placed inside of the TAPS survey, a regular, national, online survey that measures public satisfaction, trust and experiences with Australian public services. The five questions were selected to be able to capture core elements of the original questionnaire while aligning with existing TAPS questions and themes. TAPS is asked to a sample representative of Australian population statistics, by age, gender and location, thus no weighting has been applied.

While respondents in wave 3 onwards are shown different questions leading up to the democracy questions than those in wave 1 and 2, robustness checks on demographics found that the same characteristics drive satisfaction with democracy, and with similar magnitudes, alleviating some cause for bias concerns, however order effects would still be present.



Democracy Module from Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services Questionnaire

Introduction text

In this section of the survey, we will ask about your experiences and thoughts of democracy in Australia. Australia's democracy is made up of many institutions, processes and principles. Democracy is a set of institutions and values that allow humans to decide, as equals, how they will live together. We are interested in your personal views about Australia's democracy.

Q1 - In thinking of what democracy means to you, how important do you consider each of the following elements of democracy? *[Scale from Not important at all, Somewhat important, Important, Very important, Not sure for each characteristic]*

- People can freely express political opinions and ideas about society
- Elections are fair
- The courts and law system are free from political influence, bias and external pressures
- Public services are reliable
- People get a say on the government's priorities
- Everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or other characteristics
- There are enough checks on senior politicians and government officials to ensure they cannot abuse their power
- The law is applied impartially regardless of who you are
- People of all ages can easily learn how democracy works
- A free and independent media
- Free access to information
- Human rights are protected

Q2 - How well do you think Australia performs in each of the following areas of democracy? *[Scale from Very poor, Poor, Fair, Good, Very good, Not sure for each characteristic]*

- People can freely express political opinions and ideas about society
- Elections are fair



- The courts and law system are free from political influence, bias and external pressures
- Public services are reliable
- People get a say on the government's priorities
- Everyone is treated fairly regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or other characteristics
- There are enough checks on senior politicians and government officials to ensure they cannot abuse their power
- The law is applied impartially regardless of who you are
- People of all ages can easily learn how democracy works
- A free and independent media
- Free access to information
- Human rights are protected

Q3 - How much do you trust or distrust each of the following institutions? *[Scale from Strongly distrust, Distrust, Neither trust nor distrust, Trust, Strongly trust, Not sure for each characteristic]*

- Commonwealth/federal government
- Commonwealth/federal parliament
- Your state or territory government
- Your state or territory parliament
- Your local council
- Political parties
- Public servants (non-elected government employees at federal, state or local levels of government)
- Courts and legal system
- Police and law enforcement
- Public health institutions
- Ombudsman
- Ambulance, fire and other emergency services
- The Reserve Bank of Australia
- The Australian Electoral Commission



- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Australian Defence Force
- Public broadcasters (e.g. ABC, SBS)

Q4 - How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia?

Response options:

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Not sure

Q5 (Ask only for respondents who chose *Very dissatisfied*, *Dissatisfied* or *Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* for Q4)

Which of the following best reflects your opinion about democracy in Australia?

- We need to continue building upon what we've got to improve democracy in Australia
- We need to remove what we've got and start again to improve democracy in Australia
- There are political systems other than democracy that will work better in Australia
- Not sure
- Other (please specify): _____