Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

Civic Participation and Connections in Australia: Pulse Report, July 2026

Background

The Civic Participation and Connections module was developed in partnership with the Office for Social Cohesion, Department of Home Affairs to complement existing Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services (TAPS) measures.

The module provides measures of Australian participation in public life, interaction and openness to connection across different backgrounds and beliefs, perceptions of public services and government institutions, and involvement in decision-making. Measuring the extent and quality of these experiences can help us understand which elements of Australian civic participation and connections are working well and what might be improved.

Questions were informed by a review of Australian and international civic engagement and social cohesion frameworks and developed through consultation with government and non-government experts. By tracking changes over time, these reports can help identify emerging challenges and opportunities relevant to community engagement, participation, and social cohesion, helping to inform policy and program development.

Executive summary

The July 2026 Civic Participation and Connections results provide a snapshot of how Australians participate in public life; their interactions and openness to connection; how they perceive public services and government institutions; and their involvement in decision-making. Two waves with the module have been completed, with results from May 2026 and July 2026 showing similar results and patterns. In this report, we refer to data from the July 2026 wave and highlight results from May 2026 in the tables shown.

Five overall key findings emerged:

1. Australians are generally connected and open to engagement in their communities, with types of participation concentrated in informal and community-based settings rather than formal civic or political activities.
2. Most respondents are open to engaging with people whose backgrounds and beliefs differ from their own, including many who currently have relatively low levels of interaction with those of different backgrounds.
3. A majority of respondents believe public services and government institutions have the best interests of people like them in mind.

4. The most commonly reported barrier to involvement in government decision making was the belief that participation would not make a difference. Preferences for involvement also varied, with some respondents favouring ongoing collaboration with government and others preferring greater community control over decisions.
5. Respondents with incomes below the median, those with less than Year 12 education, and regional residents reported lower participation, lower interaction with people who have different backgrounds or beliefs to them, lower perceived influence, and lower belief that government and public institutions have the best interests of people like them in mind.

Detailed results

Participation in public life

Participation was concentrated in informal and community-based settings, while participation in formal civic and political activities remained relatively low. Regular participation ("most days or every day" or "at least once a week") was highest in public spaces (33.2%), general online communities (29.0%), sporting or recreational groups (25.8%), and local online groups (25.3%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Proportion of respondents who regularly participated in various settings in the last 12 months

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Public spaces in your area	34.9	33.2
General online communities or forums	30.2	29.0
Sporting or recreational groups	27.2	25.8
Local online community groups or forums	27.1	25.3
Religious or cultural activities	16.7	20.1
Workplace activities outside your core work tasks	17.0	17.7
Places where you study or receive training	16.4	17.2
Volunteering or charity groups	14.2	16.7
Local community or neighbourhood events and activities	14.5	14.7

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
School-related activities for parents or carers	12.9	14.4
Arts or creative groups and activities	14.1	14.2
Advocacy groups and activities	9.8	11.0
Government-run public forums	9.1	9.9
Political party activities	9.9	9.8
Protests, rallies or marches	8.5	9.3
Union activities	7.2	8.5

Regular participation

Around one-quarter of respondents (26.1%) regularly participated in four or more settings, while one-third (32.9%) did not regularly participate in any of the activities measured (Table 2).

Table 2: Proportion of respondents who regularly participated across multiple settings

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
0 settings	30.2	32.9
1 setting	18.6	17.4
2 settings	15.6	14.9
3 settings	11.5	8.6
4+ settings	24.0	26.1

Reduced participation due to lack of acceptance

Most respondents (71.2%) did not report reducing participation because they felt unaccepted (Table 3). Among those who did reduce participation, the most commonly reported settings were sporting, volunteering or recreational activities (12.4%), workplace, study or training settings (12.0%), and cultural or religious settings (11.8%).

Table 3: Proportion of respondents who have reduced their participation in various settings due to perceived lack of acceptance

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Sporting, volunteering, or recreational settings	14.8	12.4
Workplace, study, or training settings	12.7	12.0
Cultural or religious settings	11.7	11.8
Local community or neighbourhood settings	10.9	10.0
Civic, public issue, or political settings	8.1	8.6
None of the above	68.1	71.2

Connection across difference

Nearly half of respondents (47.6%)[1] reported often or very often interacting with people whose backgrounds and beliefs differ from their own, while 15.8% reported doing so rarely or never (Table 4).

Table 4: Proportion of respondents who interact with others with different beliefs or backgrounds on a day-to-day basis

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Very often	23.8	21.5
Often	28.1	26.0
Sometimes	31.8	32.2
Rarely	10.6	12.8
Never	3.0	3.0

[1] This figure is 47.6%, not 47.5% as suggested by adding the relevant categories in Table 4, because of rounding applied to figures in Table 4.

Openness to connecting more with people

More than two-thirds (67.9%) agreed or strongly agreed they would be open to having more conversations or contact with people from different backgrounds and beliefs (Table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of respondents who agree that they are open to interacting with others with different beliefs or backgrounds

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Strongly agree	28.3	25.3
Agree	40.1	42.6
Neither agree nor disagree	22.6	23.8
Disagree	4.4	3.0
Strongly disagree	2.4	2.5

Current interaction and openness to more interaction

Respondents were grouped according to their reported level of interaction with people from different backgrounds or with different beliefs, and their openness to increasing that interaction. Overall, 42.3% of respondents reported both high interaction and high openness to connecting with people from different backgrounds or beliefs, while 28.4% reported lower interaction but remained highly open to greater connection (Table 6). Only small proportions reported low openness, regardless of their current level of interaction.

Table 6: Respondent level segmentation based on current interaction and identified openness to connect with people who have different backgrounds or beliefs

Groups	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Low interaction, low openness	5.2	4.0
Low interaction, neutral openness	16.2	17.6
Low interaction, high openness	25.1	28.4
High interaction, low openness	1.6	1.8
High interaction, neutral openness	6.6	5.9
High interaction, high openness	45.3	42.3

Note: We define low interaction as those who selected “never”, “rarely”, or “sometimes” for Q3 (see Appendix), and high interaction as “often” or “very often”. We define low openness as those who selected “strongly disagree” or “disagree” for Q4, neutral openness as “neither agree nor disagree”, and high openness as “agree” or “strongly agree”.

Perceptions of Government, personal influence, and desired involvement

A majority of respondents (56.5%) agreed that public services and government institutions have the best interests of people like them in mind. One in ten (10.9%) respondents disagreed (Table 7).

Table 7: Proportion of respondents who agree that the government has the best interests of people like themselves in mind

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Strongly agree	15.2	15.6
Agree	41.2	40.9
Neither agree nor disagree	29.3	29.1
Disagree	7.8	7.9
Strongly disagree	3.6	3.0

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Not sure	2.8	3.4

Perceived influence in decision making

Respondents were more likely to feel they had influence over decisions in their local area than over decisions affecting the country as a whole. Around two in five respondents (39.7%) reported a great deal of influence or some influence over local decisions (Table 8), compared with 29.6% who reported similarly over national decisions (Table 9). Nearly two-thirds (64.9%) reported having little or no influence over decisions affecting the country as a whole.

Table 8: Perceived influence over local decision making

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
A great deal of influence	10.2	11.1
Some influence	25.8	28.6
Not very much influence	32.4	30.0
No influence at all	27.5	25.4
Don’t know	4.2	4.9

Table 9: Perceived influence over national decision making

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
A great deal of influence	10.5	11.0
Some influence	19.5	18.6
Not very much influence	32.4	31.4
No influence at all	34.2	33.5
Don’t know	3.5	5.5

Desired involvement in decision making

Despite relatively low perceptions of influence, more than half of respondents wanted to be either fairly involved or very involved in decision-making in both their local area (54.5%) (Table 10) and nationally (52.2%) (Table 11).

Table 10: Desired involvement in local decision making

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Very involved	15.1	15.8
Fairly involved	36.7	38.7
Not very involved	26.4	26.8
Not at all involved	16.5	11.8
Don’t know	5.4	6.9

Table 11: Desired involvement in national decision making

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
Very involved	15.7	18.2
Fairly involved	35.8	34.0
Not very involved	25.1	25.6
Not at all involved	17.2	14.9
Don’t know	6.2	7.2

Preferred involvement in decision-making

Respondents who expressed a desire to have a role in decision making were then asked the types of involvement they would prefer, with options available ranging from only consultation up to final decision-making power. The most commonly preferred forms of involvement focused on consultation and engagement rather than decision-making authority (Table 12). The most preferred option was providing views on a proposal before a final decision is made

(25.4%), followed by being involved throughout the process to ensure concerns are heard (21.7%) and being clearly informed about what is happening and why (20.6%). Smaller proportions preferred working as an equal partner with government (9.7%) or having the final decision made by the community rather than government (15.0%).

Table 12: Preferred type of involvement in government decision making

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
I want to give my views on a plan before the final decision is made	24.3	25.4
I want to be involved throughout the whole process to ensure my concerns are heard	18.6	21.7
I only want to be clearly told what is happening and why	23.7	20.6
I believe the final decision should be made by the community, not the government	14.7	15.0
I want to work as an equal partner with the government to solve problems together	11.5	9.7
Not sure	7.1	7.7

Barriers to involvement

The most commonly reported barrier to involvement in decision-making was the belief that participation would not make a difference (33.7%). Other commonly reported barriers included lack of time (23.1%), lack of interest (19.6%), and not knowing how to get involved (19.6%). Smaller proportions reported concerns about fear of judgement (7.1%), having had a negative experience and so not wanting to do it again (7.7%), and accessibility (11.2%) (Table 13).

Table 13: Perceived barriers to involvement

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
My involvement won’t make a difference	35.5	33.7
I don’t have time	25.9	23.1

Response category	May 2026 (%)	July 2026 (%)
I'm not interested	20.5	19.6
I don't know how to get involved	28.9	19.6
The ways to get involved are not fair or open	17.3	18.2
I don't have any networks (e.g. family, friends, colleagues) to encourage my participation	12.2	12.9
It is too expensive for me to be involved	12.5	12.7
It would be hard for me to access these opportunities (e.g. hard to access venues, no transport)	13.3	11.2
I had a negative experience and don't want to do it again	7.9	7.7
I would feel judged or not accepted for who I am	10.2	7.1
Other (please specify)	2.9	2.3
None of the above	9.5	11.5

Demographic patterns

Several demographic patterns were evident in May and July 2026:

- Lower-income respondents, those with less than Year 12 education, and regional residents generally reported lower participation, less interaction with people who have different backgrounds or beliefs, lower perceived influence, and lower confidence in government and public institutions.
- Younger respondents generally reported higher participation, openness, perceived influence, and desire for involvement, but were also more likely to reduce participation because they felt unaccepted.
- Across groups, desired involvement in government decision making generally exceeded their perceived influence over decision making. The type of involvement people would like to have, as well as their perceived barriers to involvement barriers varied by age, location, income, and education.

These patterns will be explored further in a separate analysis.

Appendix

Survey questionnaire

Introduction

In this section of the survey, we will ask about your participation and involvement in public life and involvement with civic and social institutions.

Q1 - In the last 12 months, how often were you involved in each of the following?
[Response options - Most days or every day, At least once a week, At least once a month, At least once in the last 12 months, Not in the last 12 months, Prefer not to say]

- ☐ Local community or neighbourhood events and activities (e.g. community festivals, local school fetes, street fairs or neighbourhood events)
- ☐ Public spaces in your area (e.g. parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, libraries, community centres)
- ☐ School-related activities for parents or carers (e.g. parent committees, school sports events, helping at school activities or events)
- ☐ Arts or creative groups and activities (e.g. choir, music groups, theatre groups, dance groups, art or craft groups)
- ☐ Local online community groups or forums (e.g. neighbourhood Facebook or WhatsApp groups)
- ☐ General online communities or forums (e.g. Reddit communities, Facebook interest groups, online hobby or gaming communities)
- ☐ Sporting or recreational groups (e.g. sporting clubs, running groups, walking groups, fitness groups)
- ☐ Religious or cultural activities (e.g. services, prayer groups, religious or cultural community events)
- ☐ Volunteering or charity groups (e.g. fundraising groups, community support organisations, environmental groups, local charity activities)
- ☐ Places where you study or receive training (e.g. university, TAFE, private college, short courses or certificate training)
- ☐ Workplace activities outside your core work tasks (e.g. lunches, social catch-ups, team events, after-work drinks)
- ☐ Advocacy groups and activities (e.g. issue-based groups, campaign groups, advocacy organisations)
- ☐ Political party activities (e.g. campaign volunteering, branch meetings, party events)
- ☐ Protests, rallies or marches (e.g. public demonstrations, protest marches, campaign rallies)
- ☐ government-run public forums (e.g. local or council consultations, town hall meetings, online public forums)
- ☐ Union activities (e.g. beyond just being a member, such as union meetings, rallies, campaigns or member events)

Q2 – In the last 12 months, have you not participated or reduced your level of participation in the following settings because you did not feel accepted? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Local community or neighbourhood settings
- ☐ Sporting, volunteering, or recreational settings
- ☐ Cultural or religious settings
- ☐ Work, study, or training settings
- ☐ Civic, public issue, or political settings
- ☐ None of the above

Q3 – In your day-to-day life, how often do you interact with people whose backgrounds and beliefs differ from your own?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Not sure

Q4 – To what extent do you agree that you would be open to having more conversations or contact with people whose backgrounds and beliefs differ from your own?

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Not sure

Q5 – When thinking the about public services and government institutions that you interact with or are aware of, to what extent do you agree that they have the best interests of people like you in mind?

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Not sure

Q6 – How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision making in...
[Response options - A great deal of influence, Some influence, Not very much influence, No influence at all, Don't know]

- ☐ Your local area
- ☐ The country as a whole

Q7 – To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision making in…*[Response options – Very involved, Fairly involved, Not very involved, Not at all involved, Don't know]*

- ☐ Your local area
- ☐ The country as a whole

Q8 – Which of the following best describes the kind of say you would like to have on government decisions*?* *[Only asked to people who selected that they'd like to be involved in at least some way locally or nationally in Q7]*

- ☐ I just want to be clearly told what is happening and why
- ☐ I want to give my views on a plan before the final decision is made
- ☐ I want to be involved throughout the whole process to ensure my concerns are heard
- ☐ I want to work as an equal partner with the government to solve problems together
- ☐ I believe the final decision should be made by the community, not the government
- ☐ Not sure

Q9 – Which of the following (if any) makes it harder for you to be involved? (Choose as many as apply)

- ☐ I don't have time
- ☐ I'm not interested
- ☐ I don't know how to get involved
- ☐ My involvement won't make a difference
- ☐ The ways to get involved are not fair or open
- ☐ I had a negative experience and don't want to do it again
- ☐ I don't have any networks (e.g. family, friends, colleagues) to encourage my participation
- ☐ I would be hard for me to access these opportunities (e.g. hard to access venues, no transport)
- ☐ I would feel judged or not accepted for who I am
- ☐ It's too expensive for me to get involved
- ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ None of the above

Survey methodology

The Civic Participation and Connections module is administered as part of the Survey of Trust in Australian Public Services (TAPS), a monthly national online survey conducted by the Australian Public Service Commission since 2019.

Two waves with the module have been completed to date: May 2026 (n = 1,023) and July 2026 (n = 1,026).

The survey uses quota sampling to broadly reflect the Australian population by age, gender, state or territory, and metropolitan/regional location. Data are collected through an established online panel of Australian adults aged 18 years and over.

Results in this report are descriptive and provide a snapshot of participation in public life, interaction and openness to connection across different backgrounds and beliefs, perceptions of public services and government institutions, and involvement in decision-making.