Mapping Social Cohesion

> Launching the National Social Cohesion Index

> Incorporating the Scanlon Monash Index

By Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus

2021

Australian Government

Scanlon Foundation Research Institute

Monash University

Australian multicultural foundation

Social Research Centre
A subsidiary of The Australian National University

A word from **The Hon Alex Hawke MP**

As home to people of more than 300 ancestries, Australia is a proud and highly successful multicultural nation. United by our shared values, we are one of the most stable and longstanding liberal democracies in the world. From the cultures of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the oldest continuing living cultures in the world, to European settlement and the arrival of successive waves of migration that have led to our vibrant multicultural society; our national identity has been uniquely shaped and fosters a proud tradition of welcoming people from around the world who are willing and able to help build our great nation and national story.

Creating and maintaining this unique national identity is what social cohesion is about. It is about what we share, what keeps us together, and how we manage as a community those areas of life where we differ.

As this inaugural and important report by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute illustrates, doing this well is what has kept Australia strong and united through the unprecedented challenges of recent years, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic.

We do face challenges to our unity as a liberal democracy, however. As we bounce back from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can and are doing more to build on this strong foundation and further build a harmonious, prosperous and inclusive society.

Over successive years, the Australian Government has made new investments in priority areas to maintain and strengthen our social cohesion - one being our decision last year to support the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute to enhance its important work.

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute is rightly recognised for producing world leading research on social cohesion. In doing so, it has played a leading role in stimulating and enriching our national conversation about social cohesion and its importance to our way of life.

As a result of the Government's investment, I am pleased to introduce the first ever Australian Cohesion Index as part of the Mapping Social Cohesion 2021 Report. It signals an ongoing commitment by the Scanlon Foundation and the Australian Government to enrich public understanding of social cohesion and to develop a national scorecard illustrating strengths and challenges.

I am sure this report will become a valuable tool as we continue to develop and protect Australia's social cohesion into the future.

Alex Hawke
MP

A word from **Peter Scanlon AO**

Understanding social cohesion in Australia has never been as important as it is right now.

As we live through one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime, how has cohesion been impacted? We know the pandemic has been all-consuming – no other answer has garnered such consensus in response to the question 'what is the greatest problem facing Australia today?'. But what has it meant for the country's mood, and our openness to the world?

The answer, in part, lies within this report. The fifteenth edition of our annual research series provides an insight afforded almost nowhere else in the world into how our national cohesion has fared throughout the pandemic, and how it's changed since before COVID.

This year, we add even more insight. The addition of the Australian Cohesion Index, with support from the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, adds another layer of data to the picture of social cohesion in Australia. Drawing on insight from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other sources, we add objective indicators to the usual subjective indicators found in the Mapping Social Cohesion report – creating a rich pool of information to analyse.

This report offers insight and analysis of cohesion in Australia. It is the cornerstone of the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's research program and will continue providing an evidence-based source for planning and policy in this country. I, and everyone else at the Foundation and its Research Institute, are very proud to present the latest instalment of the Mapping Social Cohesion research.

Peter Scanlon
Chair, Scanlon Foundation

Photo by Seb Reivers on Unsplash

Contents

Introduction **6**

Executive Summary **8**

Part One: The 2021 Mapping Social Cohension Survey **18**

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion 2021 24
Components of the Scanlon-Monash Index 26
Ranking of Issues 32
COVID-19 35
Trust 36
Government 38
An Open Society 46
Perception of Racism 48
Globalisation 50
Immigrants 53
Multiculturalism 56
Indigenous Australians 58
Discriminatory Attitudes 59
Experience of Discrimination 64
Balance of Australian Opinion 67

Part Two: The Australian Cohesion Index **70**

Introducing the Australian Cohesion Index 71
Objective Indicators 79
Material Conditions 84
Health 91
Education 96
Participation and Connections 100

Part Three: Life During the Pandemic **104**

Part A: 2020-21: The data 105
Part B: How has Australia fared in a time of crisis? - Trish Prentice 115

Appendices **129**

Appendix 1: Factors influencing social cohesion - Andrew Ward, Storm Logan, Benjamin Phillips 130
Appendix 2: Australian Cohesion Index calculation - Benjamin Phillips 134

References **136**

Acknowledgments **138**

Introduction:

Redrawing the map on social cohesion

For more than a decade, the Scanlon Foundation and its Scanlon Foundation Research Institute has been conducting and leading research on social cohesion in Australia via the Mapping Social Cohesion Research series.

We know social cohesion is a key driver of Australia's success as a prosperous, diverse society, and so this year, we're adding new products, more data and further insights to our research program, to help inform public discussion on social cohesion issues and empower the critical thinking that will help drive our country's interests.

Our annual Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, running since 2007, continued this year, with its results continuing to track shifting attitudes over time at annual intervals.

This year, we add a new product to our stable: The Australian Cohesion Index. Developed using funding from the Department of Home Affairs, this Index will be published every two years, and combine attitudinal data gathered through the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey with objective indicators from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other sources. Combining these data sets will bring more depth and context to the picture of social cohesion in Australia to drive informed debate and decisions.

Rounding out 2021's expanded program, we have commissioned a qualitative research project to capture in-depth interviews with people from local government areas across Australia with high immigrant and refugee populations, recording their lived experiences of their communities and connection.

Each of these elements – the 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Survey findings, the new Australian Cohesion Index, and our qualitative research findings – is showcased in this single research report, released by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute in late November 2021.

Last year's Mapping Social Cohesion findings indicated that, during the first eight months of the COVID-19 crisis, Australia had experienced increased social cohesion, as people responded to a common threat through mutual support.

Now, almost a year on, and with COVID still very much a part of our lives, has that trend continued, halted, or reversed?

Our expanded 2021 research program will help answer this question, providing further insight the character of Australian society during a prolonged and unprecedented global pandemic.

Anthea Hancocks
Chief Executive Officer,
Scanlon Foundation

In this report

This year, the Mapping Social Cohesion report has expanded. In this report, you will find:

> The Mapping Social Cohesion survey results, including the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of social cohesion

> The Australian Cohesion Index, an additional set of objective (statistical) indicators to supplement the subjective (survey) data

> A look at life during the pandemic, through analysis of statistical data as well as a qualitative research program, including interviews with people with strong knowledge of their local area and people from culturally diverse backgrounds to understand how COVID-19 has impacted social cohesion.

Photo by Ivan Tsaregorodtsev on Unsplash

Executive Summary

The Scanlon Foundation social cohesion surveys, first conducted in 2007 and annually since 2009, have made a major contribution to our knowledge of Australian society. It is rare for any country to have privately funded surveys of social issues over a fifteen-year period, let alone surveys that are as comprehensive and methodologically rigorous as these.

In 2021 the project has expanded, with financial backing from the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs supplementing that of the Scanlon Foundation. **Two additional elements have been added: the first, a set of objective (statistical) indictors** to supplement the subjective (survey) data. This new dimension has made possible the calculation of a composite Australian Cohesion Index (ACI).

The second addition is qualitative. Sixty-six interviews were conducted in mainland capital cities between July and September 2021, at a time when more than half the Australian population was subject to lockdowns requiring strict limitation on movement outside of the home. The interviews were conducted to ensure the report reflects lived experiences in a time of crisis, with particular attention to minorities not well represented in the national survey.

THE SCANLON FOUNDATION SURVEY

The 2021 survey is the fifteenth national survey that the Scanlon Foundation has conducted since 2007 – and the third during the pandemic. The survey is administered on the Social Research Centre's Life In Australia™ (LinA) panel, Australia's first and only national probability-based online panel. It was conducted from 12-26 July, at a time of rising concern over the spread of the pandemic that led to lockdown restrictions in New South Wales on 26 June, later extended to the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, and south east Queensland.

The Scanlon Foundation surveys are distinctive: first, in terms of **comprehensive coverage**. The 2021 survey employed a questionnaire comprising 95 substantive and 21 demographic questions in ten modules; second, the sample is sufficiently large (3,572 respondents) to provide insight into **segments of the population**; for example, groups differentiated by age, education attainment, financial status and political alignment; third, the long record of surveying enables **tracking of the constant and changing elements of Australian opinion over a fifteen year period.**

What does the Scanlon Foundation survey reveal about the character of the Australian society in a time of pandemic?

CONCERNS

The **major shift in opinion recorded in the 2021 survey relates to the government's ability to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus.** In the survey conducted in July 2020, although the lockdown measures were proving effective, in response to the open-ended question: 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?', 63% of respondents indicated the pandemic, followed by a much lower 15% referencing the economy. This is an unprecedented level of concern obtained in response to an open-ended question that typically obtains a broad range of responses, with no single issue indicated by more than one-third of respondents.

While in November 2020 concern over the pandemic had subsided, indicated by a

Photo by Matt Boitor on Unsplash

much lower 32%, the 2021 survey found that concern had returned to **almost the level indicated a year earlier: 59%.**

Approval of the federal government's response to the pandemic has fallen from a very high 85% in 2020 to 52%, although still a majority. The state governments that were able to halt virus transmission and avoid lengthy lockdowns continued to be rated very highly, with approval of the Western Australian and South Australian government close to 90%, while New South Wales, which also had enjoyed a very high level of approval in 2020, saw approval fall to 59%.

While there were protests against **government lockdowns which gained much media attention, the survey finds that approval of lockdowns won close to 90% endorsement**. In July 2021, 87% of respondents across the nation viewed lockdown restrictions as 'definitely required' or 'probably required'; in the states most affected, restrictions were approved by 91% of New South Wales and 85% of Victorian respondents.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Effective control of virus transmission and levels of financial assistance in 2020 translated into increased trust in government, as indicated by the response the 'government in Canberra ... [can be trusted] to do the right thing for the Australian people' 'almost always' or 'most of the time.' It had previously been at a low level since 2007: on average, 32% of respondents provided this response. In July 2020, a much larger 54% indicated trust, the highest proportion obtained in the fifteen years of surveying by the Scanlon Foundation. **In 2021, the proportion indicating trust was lower by 10 percentage points at 44%, but still well above the long term average.**

The survey also sought to determine if the difficulties faced by the country created disenchantment with the democratic form of government. Respondents were asked if it would be better to have **government by a 'strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.'** In past years this option had proved to be attractive only to a minority, and this **remained unchanged** during the pandemic. In 2019, 22% of respondents indicated that rule by a 'strong leader' would be 'very good' or 'fairly good', 21% in 2020 and 2021. Just 3% viewed the 'strong leader' option as 'very good'.

When the question was asked **with reference to the time of crisis, 'during the COVID-19 pandemic,' the non-democratic option was favoured by a substantially larger proportion**, close to one-in-three. Yet even in such a context, the attraction of a strong leader **did not gain** support during the pandemic: it was viewed favourably by 38% in July 2020 and 35% in July 2021.

NATIONAL MOOD

A number of questions provide insight into the national mood, which was found to be positive over the three Scanlon Foundation surveys conducted in 2020-21.

When asked 'are you **optimistic or pessimistic about Australia's future?'**, 63% indicated that they were optimistic in 2019, a higher 70% in July 2020 and **71% in 2021.**

In response to a question on personal trust, regarded as a key indicator of a cohesive society, in 2019, 43% agreed that '**most people can be trusted'**; in 2021, 52%. Analysis of an international survey which includes Australia – the World Values Survey – has found that majority indication of trust is rare. In surveys between 2010 and 2014 in 52 countries, only in five, including Australia, was there majority endorsement of the view that 'most people can be trusted'.

Trust was also explored through questions concerning the respondent's neighbourhood. In response to the statement 'people in your local area are **willing to help their neighbours'**, agreement was at 81% in 2019 and at a higher 86% in both July 2020 and 2021.

MINORITIES

What of minority opinion, has there been a shift during the pandemic? A significant increase in stress and anxiety has been reported by some national surveys. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Household Impacts Survey found high or very high levels of psychological distress in one-in-five of the adult population: 21% in November 2020, 20% in June 2021. This compares with 13% indicating this level of psychological distress in the 2017-18 National Health Survey. In August 2020, 17% of respondents to the ABS survey indicated that they felt 'so sad nothing could cheer you up', a lower 12% in November 2020 and 11% in June 2021.

The Scanlon Foundation survey has not registered this shift over the course of the pandemic, but it has found that minorities with negative outlook comprise 15%-30% of the population, depending on the question asked. While the majority indicated that they were optimistic about the future, 29% were 'pessimistic' or 'very pessimistic'. This was, however, a lower proportion in 2021 than in 2019, when 36% indicated pessimism.

With regard to sense of happiness, **20% of respondents indicated that they were 'unhappy' or 'very unhappy'**, marginally higher by two percentage points than in 2019. **Sense of happiness is strongly correlated with financial satisfaction**. In 2021, of those 'very satisfied' with their financial situation, 9% indicate they are unhappy; of those who are 'very dissatisfied' with their financial situation, 64% indicate they are unhappy.

A narrower indication of negative sentiment was provided in response to a new question in the 2021 survey which asked: 'During the past 30 days, about **how often did you feel the things in your life were worthwhile?'** A large majority, 86%, indicated that 'things in their lives' were worthwhile 'all of the time,' 'most of the time' or 'some of the time', while **14% indicated 'a little of the time' or 'none of the time'.**

FINANCIAL WELL BEING

Despite the level of economic dislocation during the pandemic, the **surprising finding is that in 2020 and 2021 more positive responses were obtained for a number of financial questions when compared with the previous two years** – although, as in past years, a substantial (but smaller) minority indicated a negative response.

In response to a question that asked: 'How **satisfied are you with your present financial situation,' 71% in 2021** indicated they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied,' compared to 64% in 2019. In 2021 , 29% were 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied', compared with 36% in 2019.

With regard to financial circumstances in 2021, **69%** of respondents indicated that they were 'living reasonably comfortably,' 'very comfortably,' or were 'prosperous,' **compared with a lower 61% in 2019.**

With regard to future expectations, in response to the statement that 'Australia is a **land of economic opportunity** where in the long run, hard work brings a better life,' **72% agreed in 2021**, compared to 71% in 2019.

PERCEPTION OF RACISM

There is, however, **one significant aspect of the findings that seems to challenge the positive indication of the national mood.**

When asked **'how big a problem is racism in Australia?',** in 2020 the proportion indicating that it was a 'very big problem' or 'fairly big problem' was stable: 39% in July and 40% in November. In 2021, however, it was **substantially higher at 60%.** An increase of 20 percentage points in response to a general question of this nature is **almost unprecedented in the Scanlon Foundation surveys.**

The timing of this substantial shift in opinion is difficult to explain. Why was it registered in July 2021, but not in the earlier surveys in 2020 when discussion of racism was at least as prominent, brought to attention by a number of events, including the Black Lives Matter protests, which were at their peak in May-June 2020?

Analysis by reference to segments of society does not provide a clear answer: while a higher proportion of overseas born see racism as a big problem, including 69% of respondents born in an Asian country, 57% of Australia-born agree, an increase of twenty percentage points since November 2020.

It might be that the finding reflects reaction to the policies of some state governments, condemned by some as unfairly targeting racial minorities, but again the difference between the states is in a narrow range: 54%-62%.

Does the finding indicate that Australian's have become increasingly aware of racism in their country over the course of the pandemic? Scapegoating at first targeted the Chinese community, then the broader Asian community, then Middle-Eastern and Jewish communities. **Is there a perception that an increased number of Australians are now acting in a racist manner?** If there is such a perception, it is not based on a shift detected by the Scanlon Foundation survey, which is uniquely placed to shed light on this issue with some 35 questions dealing with immigrants and cultural diversity.

In terms of substance, as distinct from perception, the Scanlon Foundation surveys establish that there has been no increase in the proportion of respondents adopting xenophobic and racist views.

OPENNESS TO THE WORLD

Do Australians regard their future in terms of the policies adopted to contain the pandemic, involving the partial closing of the borders? With regard to openness to the world, as indicated by trade policies, the survey asked: 'Thinking about the **growing economic ties between Australia and other countries**, sometimes referred to as globalisation, do you think this is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad for Australia?' A substantial majority – **76%**

Photo by Elevate on Unsplash

in 2021 – considered that globalisation was 'very good' or 'fairly good,' almost the same proportion as in 2019 (75%).

The questions 'should Australia trade more with the rest of the world, trade about the same, or trade less ...?' obtained a similar pattern of response to the question on globalisation: a combined 79% favoured more or 'about the same,' while a minority of 20% favoured less.

The proposition that '**immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy'** was endorsed by 76% in 2019 and a substantially higher **86% in July 2021.**

Agreement with the proposition that '**Multiculturalism has been good for Australia'** was at 80% in 2019 and **86% in July 2021.**

Rejection of racist perspectives was also indicated by questions concerning Indigenous Australians. No less than 90%, among the highest level obtained for any question across the survey, indicated agreement with the proposition that 'The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community is very important for Australia as a nation'. Agreement with inclusion in the school curriculum of 'Indigenous histories and cultures' was almost at the same exceptional level, 88%.

STRONG NEGATIVE OPINIONS

Evidence on the balance of opinion is provided by the **tracking of strong negative responses**, indicated by those who are most likely proponents of racist and xenophobic views. The **findings suggest this is a shrinking (not increasing) sector of the population**: fewer respondents indicated strong negative views than in the years preceding the pandemic. Thus in 2021, 3% 'strongly disagreed' with the view that 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia', compared to 7% in 2019; 5% indicated strong agreement in 2021 with the notion of 'rejection purely on the basis of religion' in the selection of immigrants, compared to 11% in 2019; 10% in 2021 indicated a 'very negative' view of Muslims, compared to 17% in 2019.

HIERARCHY OF RACIAL PREFERENCE

There is a paradox that has been noted in the interpretation of earlier Scanlon Foundation surveys. Alongside the large majority endorsement of cultural diversity, the contribution of immigrants to Australian society, and the policy of multiculturalism, there is **a long-standing hierarchy of ethnic and racial preference that seems in a large part resistant to**

change. The hierarchy is indicated, for example, by response to the question that asks: 'Would you say your feelings are positive, negative or neutral towards immigrants from [country]?' In response, 6% of respondents indicated they held 'very negative' or 'somewhat negative' feelings towards people from the United Kingdom, 6% from Germany, a much higher 27% towards those from India and 43% towards China. Between July 2020 and July 2021 there has been **a marginal reduction in the indication of negative views, yet the hierarchy still remains.** Negative attitude towards immigrants from Lebanon were indicated by 42% in 2020 and 38% in 2021; towards Sudanese, 49% in 2020, 46% in 2021. With regard to faith groups, the highest proportion of negative views is indicated towards Muslim Australians: 37% in 2020; 32% in 2021.

EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

In past Scanlon Foundation surveys, the highest level of discrimination was reported by Australians of non-English speaking background. This worrying finding remains a feature of the 2021 findings. In response to the question, 'Have you experienced discrimination in the last twelve months because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion?', 11% of respondents born in Australia indicated they had experienced discrimination, 12% of overseas-born in an English speaking country, and 34% overseas born in a non-English speaking country, including 38% born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan, and 40% of all respondents born in Asia.

AUSTRALIAN COHESION INDEX (ACI)

A new feature of the Mapping Social Cohesion report is the Australian Cohesion Index, which combines subjective and objective indicators to build a robust picture of cohesion in Australia.

The challenge of identifying the best metrics of social progress and wellbeing has occupied leading researchers for more than 50 years, with more than 25 current international indexes that track aspects of social progress.

Indexes are of value for providing a summary indication of change over time. They also provide a useful way to introduce the range of statistical indicators that inform them. Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in economics, stated with reference to the United Nations Human Development Index that while he was initially sceptical of the index, "which is inescapably crude," he came to recognise its value as "an introductory move in getting people interested in the rich collection of information" on which it is built.

The selection of indicators included in the objective component of the ACI was based upon a broad definition of social progress, including the concept of 'wellbeing.' This mirrors the approach adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its 2011 definition of cohesion: "**a cohesive society** as one that works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility".

Informed by a review of international indexes, **the Australian index developed for this project comprises five domains**: the first two relate to material conditions, income and employment, together with three domains covering health, education and community participation.

Indicators were tracked over the decade 2008-2018. This end point was selected as statistical data in a number of cases is not current. For example, the latest National Health Survey is for 2017-18; data on student performance is available for 2018 and 2019 and federal electoral data to 2019.

In keeping with the findings of the Scanlon Foundation surveys, the objective indicators point to a society characterised by a large measure of stability. The objective index score for 2018 is 97 when benchmarked against

2008 (which is scored at 100). Aggregated with the Scanlon-Monash Index, which in 2018 was at 90 index points benchmarked against 2007, **the Australian Cohesion Index score for 2018 is 94**, pointing to a small decline of six index points from the 2007-08 benchmark.

Australia is recognised as offering **a high standard of living and opportunity** for most of its population, as indicated by the demand for places in its immigration program.

To take some examples of positive outcomes, **life expectancy**, which is a summary indicator of the health of a population, is among the highest in the world. In 2019, Australia had the eighth highest female and the fifth highest male life expectancy globally. Between 2004-05 and 2017-18, close to 85% of Australians rated their health as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good'.

Australia has a level of **economic prosperity** matched by few countries. Prior to the pandemic, Australia achieved a record 29 years of recession-free expansion. Household net worth between 2009-10 and 2017-18 increased by 20%: from $852,000 to $1,022,000.

Close to two million additional workers were employed between 2008 and 2018 (an increase from 10.7 million to 12.6 million); in the record year, 2017, employment increased by 393,400 persons. While most of this workforce growth is a result of the country's high rate of immigration, there was also increased workforce participation from domestic sources, particularly women and those over the age of 55.

Unemployment has been at a relatively low level and did not rise to the levels in many advanced economies during the Global Financial Crisis. It was at 6.2% in 2014 and 5.1% in the last months of 2018.

However, the objective indicators discussed in the report also bring to notice **potential threats to the country's social cohesion, threats that are common to many western nations.**

Even before the pandemic, which exacerbated a worrying range of indicators, a substantial number of young people did not successfully transition from school to further education, training or employment. There was a significant increase in the level of household debt and low income households in rental stress, and lower levels of community participation and connection.

In specific terms, in 2018, 8.6% of young men and 9.4% of young women were not engaged in education, employment or training. In the decade to 2018, unemployment and underemployment rates for younger people were more than twice the rate for all other workers; in 2018 they were at 12.9% for young men and 9.1% for young women. The housing debt to income ratio has increased from 62% of annual disposable income in 1998 to 148% in 2018. Within the low income category, those in rental stress in capital cities increased by a substantial nine percentage points between 2007-08 and 2017-18: from 38.5% to almost half (47.8%).

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

A second additional component of this year's report are interviews that were conducted to ensure the report reflects lived experiences in a time of crisis and the experiences of groups not necessarily well represented in the national survey.

A total of 66 interviews were conducted by Zoom in all mainland states, with a focus on 10 Local Government Areas (LGAs) with relatively high proportions of cultural and religious diversity.

The interviews indicate social cohesion has not been broken by the pandemic. There was **no evidence of widespread tensions in communities, of conflict or the ongoing targeting of members of certain cultural communities.**

A number of further positives were highlighted. There was **a general feeling that communities would emerge stronger from the pandemic**, not weaker. Interviewees expressed a sense of hope about the future and acknowledged their communities' resilience. For some, the pandemic helped foster a sense of unity, beyond perceived difference.

Another positive outcome of the pandemic, interviewees noted, was new flexibility. Most notably this came from working from home arrangements, but many organisations also developed new ways of offering services. While some of these were ultimately unsuccessful, the sense of adaptability and responsiveness to the changing circumstances remained.

However, the interviews also revealed a **number of important lessons** that had emerged from the pandemic**. One concerned effective communication with community members from non-English speaking backgrounds**. For these groups, especially individuals with low levels of literacy in English and their first language, it was essential that official communications be provided in additional mediums beyond written form, including audio and video. As the pandemic continued, governments and organisations became more proficient at reaching cultural communities in formats and places where individuals commonly access information. Community leaders and cultural organisations played an essential role in the communication process as trusted voices within these groups.

The interviews also revealed **widespread technological disparities between groups**. The elderly, the socio-economically disadvantaged and some cultural communities experienced technological barriers in the form of lack of access to devices, insufficient knowledge of how to use devices or programs or lack of internet access, particularly due to the prohibitive cost of data. For these groups, **lack of access to technology increased social isolation, created barriers to accessing services and added to the challenges surrounding home schooling.**

The pandemic, and the public health measures put in place to prevent the spread of the virus, had a number of significant social impacts on communities. Interviewees reported **the disruption of community connection, an increase in social isolation, greater mental health issues, and an increase in family violence and homelessness in communities.**

A number of psychological impacts were also reported, including more fear, uncertainty and anxiety.

The interviews highlighted differences in experiences and ability to cope between individuals and also between different segments of society.

Women were impacted in specific ways by the pandemic. In general, they took on greater responsibility for home schooling, managing children at home and home duties, and experienced reduced social connection and increased isolation as a result. New mothers were prevented from accessing key supports such as mothers' groups, playgroups and maternal and child health services. Loss of casual work had disproportionate impact on women, as did incidences of family violence.

Children also faced particular impacts. Those who did not thrive in the home-schooling environment or who faced particular vulnerabilities dropped behind academically; younger children were affected by reduced social contact, which had developmental ramifications. Many interviewees expressed strong concern about disengagement amongst children and young people.

The pandemic also had **particular effects on cultural communities**. Parents with low English proficiency experienced language barriers to assisting their children; those with a lack of formal schooling or little literacy felt helpless in the home-schooling environment.

Refugees and asylum seekers also experienced greater psychological impact, with stay-at-home orders, movement restrictions, curfews and the experience of watching people panic buy food bringing back traumatic memories from their homelands.

2021 IN PERSPECTIVE

The 2020 and 2021 Scanlon Foundation surveys have found evidence **of a strong, cohesive and resilient society, although not without qualification.**

Despite the level of economic dislocation, the surprising finding is that more positive responses have been obtained for a number of questions on personal financial circumstances than in the previous two years.

Unexpectedly, the Scanlon-Monash Index moved in a positive direction, both in July and November 2020, and while it was lower in 2021 at 88, it was still 4.3 index points higher than the pre-pandemic level.

The key to the positive findings appears to be the high (although declining) level of **support for government; the high level of trust in fellow citizens; the level of economic satisfaction; and optimism for the future.**

Neither the 2020 nor the 2021 survey obtained indication of heightened support for raising barriers and closing Australia to the world. A substantial majority of survey respondents continue to endorse open trade, immigration and multicultural policies. Almost all Australians endorse the general statement that an immigrant is just as likely to make a good citizen as an Australian-born person.

But there are reservations. **Alongside the positive findings, there continues to be evidence of a relatively high level of negative opinion towards Australians of Asian, African and Middle Eastern background, which co-exists with substantial and majority concern about racism in Australia society.**

The qualitative component of the project brings to notice a number of ongoing challenges. The pandemic has exposed disparities which if not addressed may progressively erode social cohesion. They include technological disparities, language barriers not only among new arrivals but other sections of the population, and widening socio-economic gaps that were also identified by the objective component of this report.

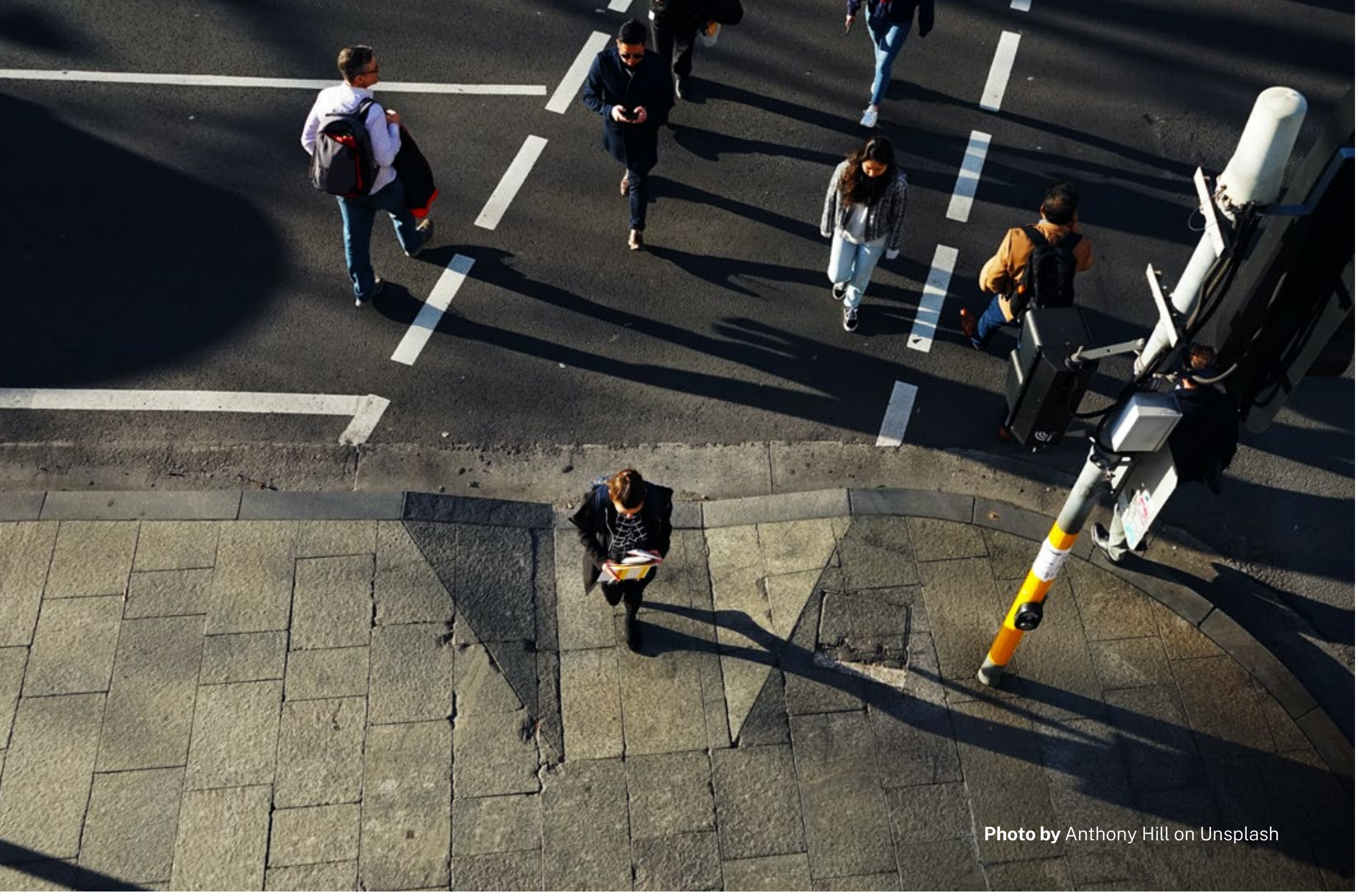
There are concerns about the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on children and young people, and other **groups or individuals that may be overlooked as communities recover.** Some of the most vulnerable identified by interviewees included those who had fallen outside of the government's financial support criteria; those with casual or insecure work; the homeless; the infirm; those with mental health issues; international students and asylum seekers. Support will also be needed to address the sustained impact of caregiving on service providers and community organisations.

A further task for communities will be to address the isolation, disconnection and impact on connectedness.

Evidence suggests the pandemic had a significant impact, even in states that experienced shorter periods of lockdown. As a result, **there should not be an assumption that those communities that experienced less restriction were not impacted.**

1 Part One
The 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Survey

> This section explores the results of the fifteenth annual Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, including the findings from the Scanlon-Monash Index of social cohesion.



The 2021 Scanlon Foundation Survey

The 2021 Scanlon Foundation national survey is the fifteenth in the series, following the benchmark survey in 2007 and annual surveys since 2009.

The first twelve surveys, conducted between 2007-19, were administered to landline telephone numbers, and then to landline and mobile numbers, employing Random Digital Dialling (RDD).

Between 2017-19 the survey was administered in parallel by RDD and on the Social Research Centre's Life In Australia™ (LinA) panel, to provide understanding of the impact of mode of administration on survey results. Since 2019, the survey has been administered solely on the LinA panel.

LinA was established in 2016 and is Australia's first and only national probability-based online panel. In 2021 LinA had 4,499 active members. LinA panel members were initially recruited via their landline or mobile phone and paid $20 to join the panel; between 2018-21 additional panel members have been recruited using a combination of methodologies, including a sample drawn from the Geocoded National Address File. Unlike most other research panels, LinA includes people both with and without internet access. Those without internet access or those who are not comfortable completing surveys over the internet are able to complete surveys by telephone. LinA panellists are offered an incentive of $10 for each survey completed, paid by gift voucher, deposit into a PayPal account or charitable donation. The 2021 LinA sample was obtained with 96% of surveys completed online and 4% by telephone.

SAMPLE

Between 2007-19, a total of 20,200 respondents completed the telephone administered (RDD) national Scanlon Foundation surveys, and an additional 16,038 completed on the LinA panel between 2018-21. In total, over 36,000 respondents have completed the national survey, providing an Australians archive of unparalleled scope to establish the trend of opinion over fifteen years.

In 2021 3,572 respondents completed the survey. A sample of this size is expected to yield a maximum sampling error of approximately ±2 percentage points 19 times out of 20, with additional margin of close to ±2 percentage points associated with the establishment of the LinA panel. For sub-groups analysis, the margin of sampling error is larger.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The 2021 national survey employed the questionnaire structure common to the 2007-20 surveys, together with questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The questionnaire comprised:

- 95 substantive questions in ten modules and including sixteen questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- 14 demographic questions, plus seven demographic variables obtained from the panel member profiles.

QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTRATION

The 2021 survey was administered from 12-26 July 2021; online completion took an average 20.9 minutes, completion by telephone took more than six minutes longer, 27.5 minutes. Of the 4,463 panel members invited to complete the survey, 3,572 (80%) did so, 15.7% were non-contactable during the fieldwork period and only 1.3% invited members refused to take part or did not complete the survey.

WEIGHTING OF SURVEY RESULTS

Survey data are weighted to adjust for the chance of being sampled in the survey and to bring the achieved respondent profile into line with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demographic indicators.

The demographic benchmarks included in the weighting solution are: state or territory of residence (capital, rest of state), gender, age, highest education (bachelor's degree, below), language spoken at home (English, other), dwelling tenure, and household composition.

Administration and weighting details are provided in the technical report available for download on the Mapping Australia's Population internet site.[1]

1 The Mapping Australia's Population site is at http://www.monash.edu/mapping-population

Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

CONCEPTUALISING SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion as a concept has a long tradition in academic enquiry and it remains **fundamentally important to understanding the role of consensus and conflict in society.** In a recent review of the social cohesion literature, David Schiefer and Jolanda van der Noll note "social cohesion is not a contemporary construct but is rooted in a long history of theoretical debates on the question of what constitutes social order in a society and why it can be maintained even in time of social changes" (2017: 583). It was a central concern of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), one of the founders of sociology, who studied society's ability to remain connected throughout various stages of development, from feudal, village-based societies to the complexities of the modern world.

In Durkheim's understanding, pre-modern agrarian societies were based around "mechanical solidarity"—the intersection of lives, connection of families through marriage and common experiences in work, housing and food, shared beliefs and values, embodied in common religious beliefs that were unquestioned.

However, in the modern, urbanised world, this commonality no longer operates. Instead, **modern societies are held together by the interdependence of their members.** In an industrial society labour is divided and each worker only produces a fraction of the goods required to sustain life. This creates a dependence among members of society for goods and services. In Durkheim's conceptualisation, this interdependence is termed "organic solidarity," likened to the way organs in the human body depend upon each other. **Trust in strangers—people we do not know but on whom we are reliant, just as they are reliant on us—is essential** to the functioning of modern societies (Larsen 2014).

Unlike pre-modern societies, modern societies are more fragile, with **greater potential for conflict and fracturing**, a consequence of the breaking of social bonds, loss of common beliefs and the fragility of existence. Durkheim developed the concept of 'anomie' to describe the instability resulting from the breakdown of common standards and values, leaving lives characterised by a sense of futility, emptiness and despair, or protest and rebellion.

In succession to Durkheim, social cohesion has been a major interest of leading researchers in sociology, social psychology and political science. A recent literature review covering work since the 1990s found "enormous attention" in academic and in policy-directed research to social cohesion, with the publication of some 350 articles, books, reports and policy papers (Schiefer and Noll 2017). However, **there is currently no definition or conceptualisation of social cohesion that is broadly accepted**.

While social cohesion will necessarily remain a contested concept, with different understandings informed by political values, **there are three core dimensions,** one or more of which can usually be found in definitions. These dimensions are:

1. **IDEATIONAL:** Social cohesion is understood as an **intangible, subjective** phenomenon. It is concerned with the extent of **[a] shared values, mutual respect and acceptance of difference, as well as [b] trust** between people (horizontal) and trust in institutions (vertical). In the conceptualisation of social cohesion there has been a shift in emphasis from "consensus regarding life style, beliefs, and values as an essential element of social cohesion to the notion that cohesion strongly relies on the acceptance of, and constructive dealing with diversity and ... conflicts" and the willingness of individuals to cooperate and work together to achieve collective goals (Schiefer and Noll 2017).

2. **BEHAVIOURAL:** in the view of some theorists, it is essential that values and **attitudes lead to action** such as political and social involvement, including the provision of voluntary assistance. Action is also evident in the relational dimension, in the ties between individuals, the development of networks and cooperation to achieve goals for mutual benefit (Chan et al. 2006).

3. **DISTRIBUTIVE:** The distributive dimension is actualised in the **distribution of physical, economic, educational, social and cultural resources**. It includes the range of opportunities available to individuals to access education, health services and employment that provides adequate income.

Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

THE SCANLON-MONASH INDEX

Incorporating these three dimensions, the Scanlon-Monash Index of social cohesion was developed based on the 2007 Scanlon Foundation national survey. The following questions were employed to construct the Index for **five domains of social cohesion**, three of which were primarily ideational, one behavioural and one distributive:

- **Belonging:** Indication of pride in the Australian way of life and culture; sense of belonging; importance of maintaining Australian way of life and culture.
- **Worth:** Satisfaction with present financial situation and indication of happiness over the last year.
- **Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy:** Measurement of rejection, indicated by a negative view of immigration from many different countries; reported experience of discrimination in the last 12 months; disagreement with government support to ethnic minorities for maintenance of customs and traditions; feeling that life in three or four years will be worse.
- **Participation** (political): Vote in an election; signing a petition; contact with a Member of Parliament; participation in a boycott; attendance at a protest.
- **Social inclusion and justice:** Views on the adequacy of financial support for people on low incomes; the gap between high and low incomes; Australia as a land of economic opportunity; trust in the Australian government.

After trialling several models, a procedure was adopted which drew **attention to minor shifts in opinion** and reported experience which may call for closer analysis. This approach is in contrast with one that compresses or diminishes the impact of change by, for example, calculating the mean score for a set of responses.[2] The Index was benchmarked at 100 based on the 2007 Scanlon Foundation survey.

In 2021 the Index was redeveloped; it will comprise 29 questions, compared to 18 in the existing Index. The full set of questions was administered in the 2021 survey and will provide the benchmark for the new Index calculation, to be first reported in 2022.

2 The nominal Index scores the level of agreement (or disagreement in the domain of rejection). The highest level of response (for example, 'strongly agree') is scored twice the value of the second level ('agree'). Responses within four of the five domains are equalised; within the domain of participation, activities requiring greater initiative (contacting a Member of Parliament, participating in a boycott, attending a protest) are accorded double the weight of the more passive activities of voting (compulsory in Australia) and signing a petition. See Andrew Markus and Jessica Arnup, *Mapping Social Cohesion 2009: The Scanlon Foundations Surveys Full Report* (2010), section 12

The Scanlon–Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion 2021

The Scanlon-Monash Index was developed to heighten awareness of broad shifts in opinion and has been a feature of the Scanlon Foundation surveys since 2007.

After a period of volatility between 2009 and 2010, the SMI remained close to 89 in six of the seven surveys between 2013 and 2019 in the telephone administered (RDD) version of the survey. In the panel version (LinA), the SMI was lower, on average by seven index points: 81.5 in 2018 and 83.7 in 2019. This difference is likely explained by a willingness to provide a more truthful response when respondents self-complete a survey, as distinct from responding to an interviewer.

In a finding that seems counter-intuitive, in 2020 the SMI moved in a positive direction, up from 83.7 in 2019 to 89.4 in July 2020, and again more positive in November 2020. In 2021 it was marginally lower at 88, but still more than four index points higher than in 2019. **In four of the five domains, the SMI was higher in 2021 than in 2019.**

Comparison of July 2020 and July 2021, however, finds that the index is lower in four of the five domains: it is lower by 14.6 index points in the domain of social inclusion and justice, by 4.1 index points in sense of belonging, 2 index points in sense of worth, and marginally lower (0.4 points) in political participation. It is substantially higher in the domain of acceptance and rejection, where it is more positive by 14 index points.

In 2021, following a detailed evaluation of the original SMI (which comprised 18 questions) a new, more robust index was developed comprising 29 questions, 17 of which are new to the survey. Results of the new index, which can be calculated for each respondent, will be reported in 2022, benchmarked to the results of the 29 questions that were included in the 2021 survey. In 2021 the questions were used in the statistical calculation of the factors influencing social cohesion, included in the appendix to this report (see pages 129–135).

Table 1 The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion, 2018-21 (LinA)

DOMAIN	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 202	JUL 2021	CHANGE 2020-2021
1. Sense of belonging	85.0	86.0	88.3	87.5	84.2	**-4.1**
2. Sense of worth	77.4	80.0	84.0	83.0	82.0	**-2.0**
3. Social inclusion and justice	87.8	92.6	112.0	110.5	97.4	**-14.6**
4. Political participation	94.6	93.0	95.4	93.8	95.0	**-0.4**
5. Acceptance (rejection)	62.9	66.7	67.4	86.6	81.4	**+14.0**
AVERAGE	**81.5**	**83.7**	**89.4**	**92.3**	**88.0**	**-1.4**

Table 2 The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion, 2007-19 (RDD)

DOMAIN	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1. Sense of belonging	100	96.9	95.0	96.6	95.1	91.0	92.6	93.4	93.5	92.0	92.0	88.9
2. Sense of worth	100	97.2	96.7	96.5	96.5	93.8	96.8	97.2	95.9	94.7	94.4	90.9
3. Social inclusion and justice	100	112.4	91.9	94.4	95.1	98.0	93.7	90.6	91.7	87.5	92.4	93.1
4. Political participation	100	105.3	98.0	106.4	106.6	90.8	93.6	99.7	98.8	104.2	100.6	102.9
5. Acceptance (rejection)	100	94.4	81.5	75.3	78.6	68.8	70.9	81.6	66.6	64.1	69.3	72.1
AVERAGE	**100**	**101.2**	**92.6**	**93.8**	**94.4**	**88.5**	**89.5**	**92.5**	**89.3**	**88.5**	**89.7**	**89.6**

Figure 1 The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion (Index points)

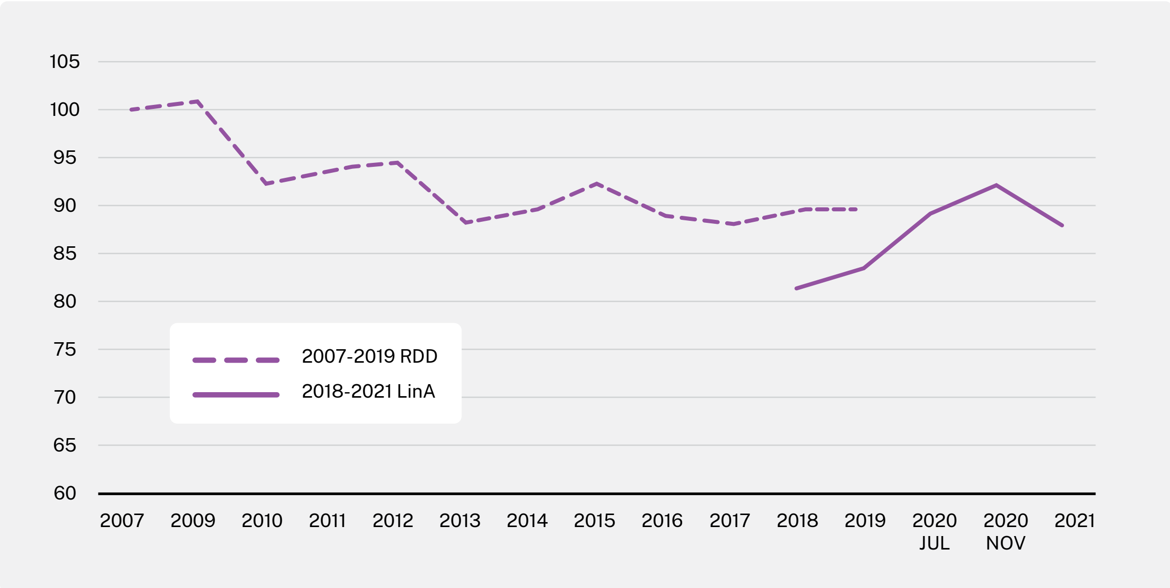
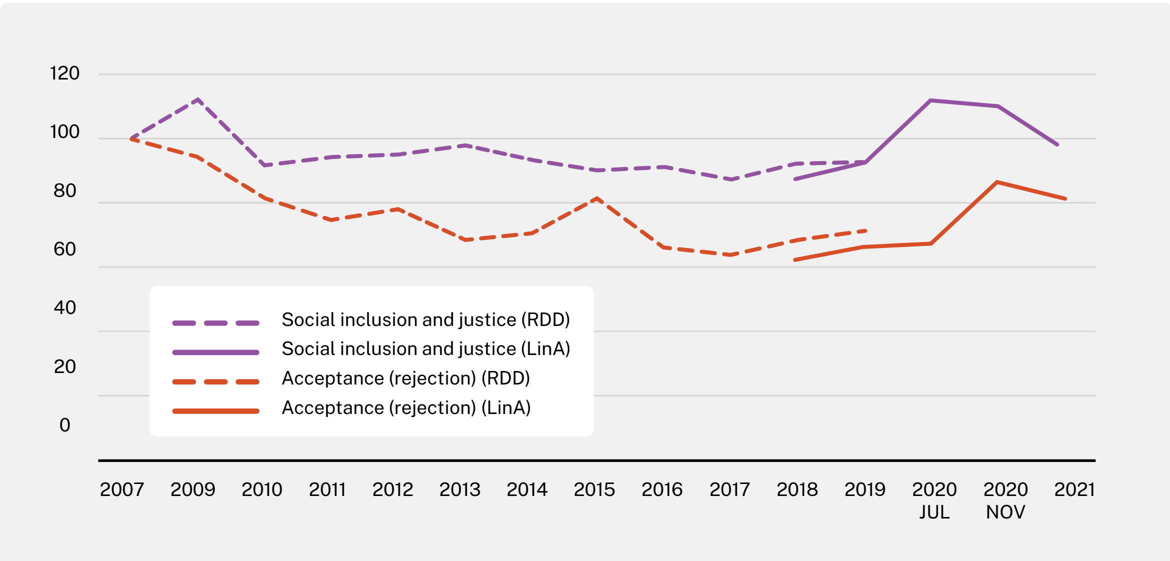


Figure 2 The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) of Social Cohesion, selected domains (Index points)



Components of the Scanlon-Monash Index

SMI 1: SENSE OF BELONGING

In 2021, general questions relating to sense of belonging and affinity with Australia and its culture continued to elicit the high level of positive response that has been evident in Australian surveys over the last 20 years.

Between 2018 and 2021, **sense of belonging** in Australia to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent was stable, in the narrow range 90%-92%; **sense of pride** in the Australian way of life and culture to a 'great' or 'moderate' extent was in the range 85%-89%; and 'strong agreement' or 'agreement' with the **'importance of maintaining the Australian way of life and culture in the modern world'** was almost identical, in the range 87%-90%.

There has, however, been **a minor decrease between July 2020 and July 2021 in opinion at the strongest level of positive response**, compensated by an increase at the second level of positive response.

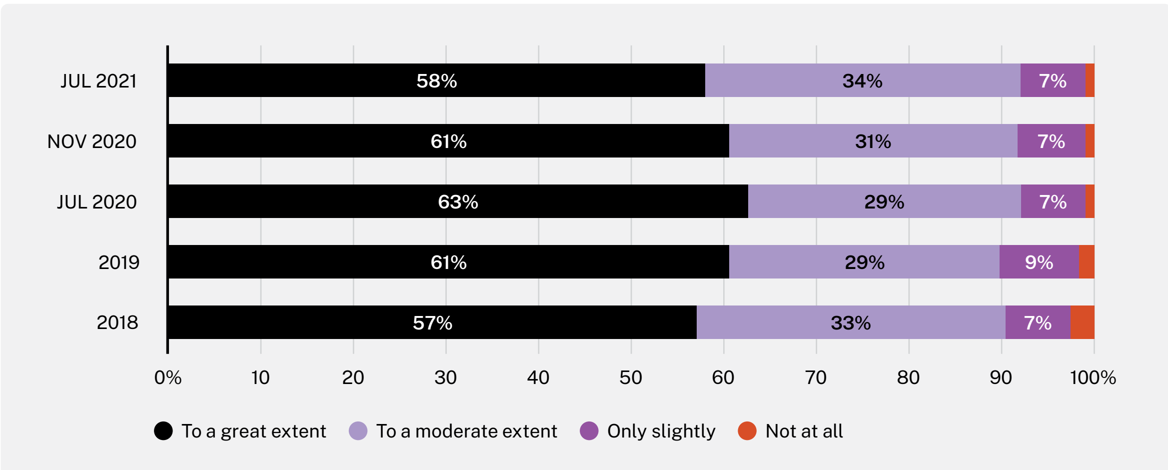
Sense of belonging to a 'great extent' was at 63% in July 2020, 58% in July 2021; 'sense of pride' to a 'great extent' declined for 48% to 42% over this period, while 'strong agreement' in the importance of maintaining the Australia way of life declined from 48% to 44%.

Table 3 Sense of belonging, 2018-2021 (LinA)

		2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
SENSE OF BELONGING	Great extent	57	61	63	61	58
	Moderate extent	33	29	29	31	34
		90	**90**	**92**	**92**	**91**
SENSE OF PRIDE	Great extent	43	45	48	46	42*
	Moderate extent	44	41	41	42	45
		87	**85**	**89**	**88**	**87**
MAINTAINING AUSTRALIAN WAY OF LIFE IS IMPORTANT	Strongly agree	47	49	48	47	44
	Agree	42	38	41	43	43
		88	**87**	**89**	**90**	**87***

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Figure 3 'To what extent do you have a sense of belonging in Australia?', 2018-21 (LinA)



SMI 2: SENSE OF WORTH

There has been significant change in 2020 and 2021 in indication of financial satisfaction, which increased significantly, while surprisingly, given the impact of the pandemic, sense of happiness remained in the range indicated in 2018-19 (78%-81%).

Financial satisfaction ('very satisfied' and 'satisfied') was at 61% in 2018, 64% in 2019, and substantially higher in 2020 and 2021: 73% in July 2020, 72% in November 2020, and 71% in July 2021.

Happiness over the last year: ('very happy' and 'happy'), was at 80% in July and 79% in both November 2020 and July 2021. The proportion indicating the strongest level, 'very happy', has declined marginally from 14% in 2018 and 13% in 2019 to 10%-12% in 2020 and 2021.

Unhappiness ('unhappy' and 'very unhappy') was at a consistent level in 2020-21, indicated by 20% of respondents, within two percentage points of that level in 2018 and 2019.

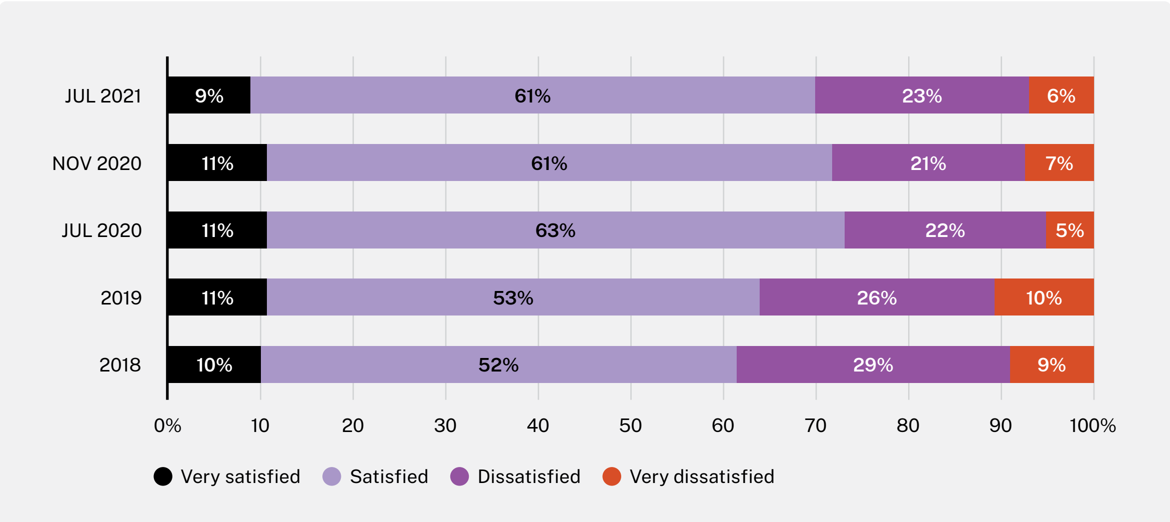
Sense of happiness is strongly correlated with financial satisfaction. In 2021, of those 'very satisfied' with their financial situation, 9% indicate that they are unhappy; of those who are 'very dissatisfied' with their financial situation, 64% indicate they are unhappy. With regard to self-described financial situation, of those who indicate their financial situation is 'prosperous' or 'living very comfortably', 8% are unhappy; of those who indicate they are 'poor' or 'struggling to pay bills', 57% are unhappy.

Table 4 Sense of worth, 2018-2021 (LinA)

		2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
FINANCIAL SATISFACTION	Very satisfied	10	11	11	11	9
	Satisfied	52	53	63	61	61
		61	**64**	**73**	**72**	**71**
HAPPINESS OVER THE LAST YEAR	Very satisfied	14	13	11	10	12
	Satisfied	64	67	68	69	67
		78	**81**	**80**	**79**	**79**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

Figure 4 'How satisfied are you with your present financial situation?', 2018-21 (LinA)



SMI 3: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND JUSTICE

The domain of **social inclusion and justice registered the greatest volatility over the course of the pandemic. There was a significant increase of 19.4 index points between 2019 and July 2020, from 92.6 to 112 index points, followed by a fall of 14.6 index points between July 2020 and July 2021. The change is explained by response to two of the four questions that constitute the domain.**

The July 2020 survey recorded a change of 15 percentage points in response to the proposition that '**people living on low incomes in Australia receive enough financial support** from the government': agreement increased from 40% to 55%, then fell to 47% in July 2021.

This response, indicating a positive assessment of government, is linked to a second question that also recorded significant change. **Trust in government 'almost always' or 'most of the time' was at 36% in 2019, and a much higher 54% in 2020, an increase of 18 percentage points. The July 2021 survey found that the proportion with a positive view of government fell by 10 percentage points, to 44%.** (This issue is further discussed on pages 38–44 of this report).

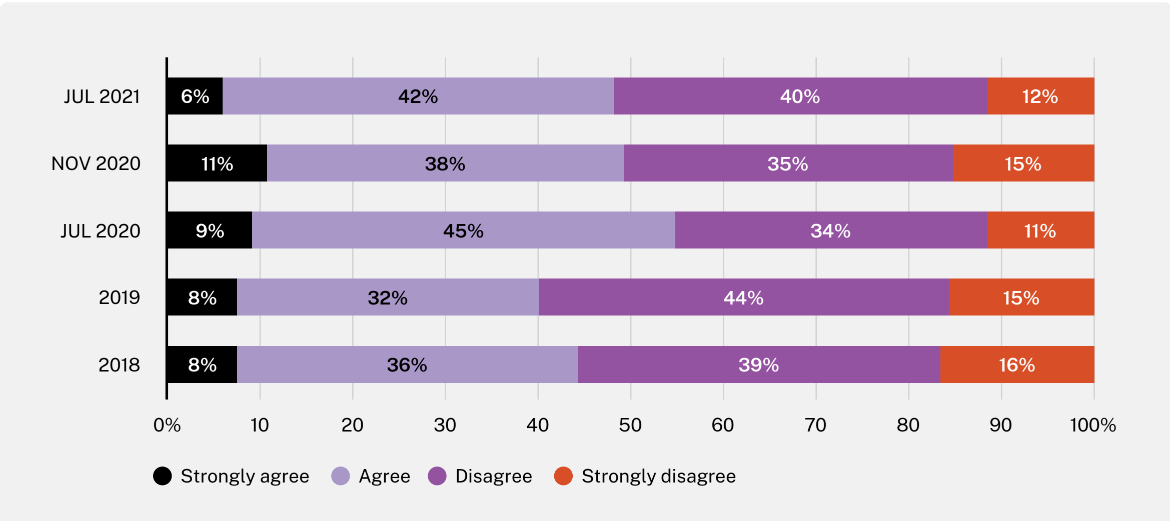
In response to two additional questions, little change was indicated. In response to the proposition that '**Australia is a land of economic opportunity** where in the long run, hard work brings a better life', the level of agreement has remained in a narrow range between 2018 and 2021: from 71% to 74%, with a marginally lower proportion in agreement in 2021. The

Table 5 Social inclusion and justice, 2018-21 (LinA)

		2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
LAND OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY	Strongly agree	21	19	19	19	15*
	Agree	50	52	55	53	58*
		71	**71**	**74**	**74**	**72**
GAP IN INCOMES TOO LARGE	Very satisfied	36	31	27	35	31*
	Satisfied	44	46	49	43	46*
		80	**78**	**76**	**78**	**77**
TRUST GOVERNMENT	Almost always	3	3	5	6	4*
	Most of the time	26	33	49	49	40*
		28	**36**	**54**	**56**	**44***

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

Figure 5 'People living on low incomes in Australia receive enough financial support from the government', 2018-21 (LinA)



level of 'strong agreement', however, has decreased from 21% in 2018, to 19% in 2020, and to 15% in 2021.

In response to the proposition that '**in Australia today, the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large**', aggregated opinion was little changed. Agreement ('strongly agree' or 'agree') has been in the range 76%-80%, at 76% in July 2020 and 77% in 2021, with greater volatility in the distribution of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses. 'Strong agreement' with the view that the gap in incomes is too large was at 31% in both 2019 and 2021, and a lower 27% in July 2021.

SMI 4: PARTICIPATION

In July 2021, the Index which measures participation was at 95 index points, within one index point of 2018 (94.6) and July 2020 (95.4), and within two index points of 2019 (93.0).

The proportion indicating that they had voted in an election over the last three years decreased from 78% in July 2020 to 75% in 2021, compared to 86% in 2019, when the last federal election was held.

In other respects, almost identical results were obtained for 2020 and 2021.

In 2021, 56% indicated that they had signed a petition, 55% in 2020; 20% indicated that they had contacted a member of parliament in both years; 18% in both 2021 and 2020 indicated participation in a boycott of a product or company; 10% in 2021 and 9% in 2020 attended a protest, march or demonstration.

Two additional forms of political activity were included in the July 2021 survey, to provide a fuller understanding of political involvement.

The findings for the additional questions are that involvement in **online political activity, posting or sharing anything online, is the third most common activity of the seven specified in 2021**, indicated by 27%, compared with 28% in 2020.

Close to one in seven respondents (14% in 2021, 13% in 2020) indicated that they had 'got together with others to try to resolve a local problem'.

In 2021, 13% indicated they had not been involved any of the seven forms of political activity specified, almost identical with the proportion indicated in 2020.

Table 6 'Which, if any, of the following have you done over the last three years or so?', 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Voted in an election	77	86	78	80	75*
Signed a petition	54	49	55	53	56
Written or spoken to a federal or state member of parliament	20	18	20	21	20
Joined a boycott of a product or company	17	16	18	17	18
Attended a protest, march or demonstration	10	9	9	8	10*
Posted or shared anything about politics online			28		27
Attended a meeting			21		
Got together with others to try to resolve a local problem			13		14
Stood for election to a local or community organisation			2		
None of the above	13	9	12	13	13
N (unweighted)	2,260	2,033	3,090	2,793	3,572

Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05

Photo by Mitchell Luo on Unsplash

SMI 5: ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION

The Index of acceptance and rejection found substantial positive movement in 2021, registering 81.4 index points, compared to 67.4 index points in 2020 and 66.7 index points in 2019.

Reported experience of discrimination over the previous 12 months based on 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion' recorded little change in four of the last five years: it was at 19% in 2018, 16% in 2019, 18% in July 2020, and 16% in 2021. **In November 2020, a significantly lower 13% was indicated, possibly a result of the lockdowns which meant that there was less opportunity for contact and hence less discrimination experienced.**

Sense of pessimism about the future, in response to a question on expectations for 'life in three or four years', decreased from a relatively high 22% in July 2020 to a lower 16% in 2021.

In response to the proposition that **'ethnic minorities should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions', there has been a decrease in the level of disagreement**, down from 69% in both 2018 and 2019 to 63% in 2020 and 61% in 2021, although disagreement is consistently indicated by a majority in response to this question.

The fourth question that contributes to the Index of acceptance and rejection considers immigration as a broad principle.

Disagreement ('strongly disagree' or 'disagree') with the proposition that **'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger' also recorded a decline in negative sentiment,** down from 36% in 2018 and 32% in 2019, to 28% in July 2020 and 23% in 2021.

Figure 6 Domain of Acceptance/Rejection, 2007-2019 RDD (dotted line), 2018-2021 LinA (solid line, Index points)

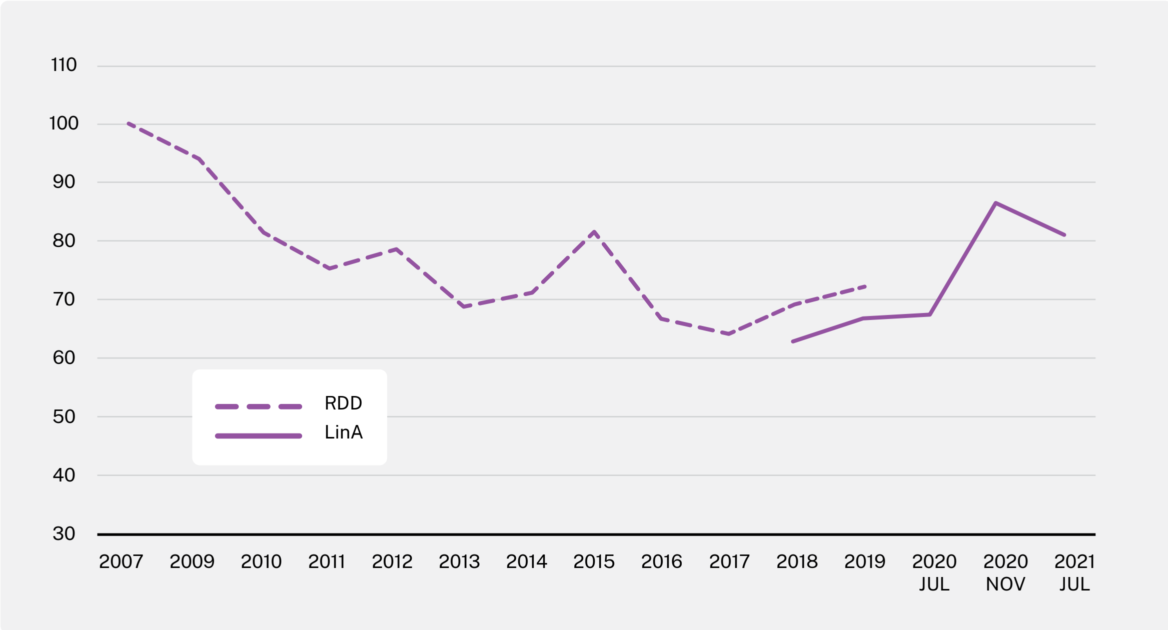
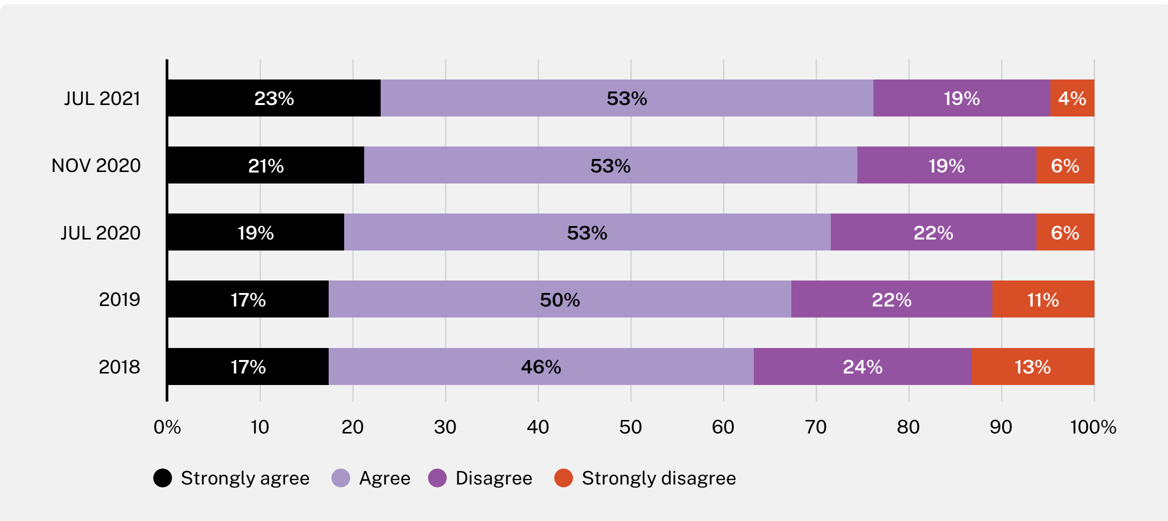


Table 7 Acceptance and rejection, 2018-21 (LinA)

		2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION	Yes	19	16	18	13	16
ACCEPTING IMMIGRANTS FROM MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES MAKES AUSTRALIA STRONGER	Strongly disagree	13	11	6	6	4*
	Disagree	24	22	22	19	19
		36	**32**	**28**	**25**	**23**
ASSISTANCE TO MAINTAIN CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS	Strongly disagree	30	29	21	21	17*
	Disagree	39	40	42	43	43
		69	**69**	**63**	**64**	**61**
LIFE IN THREE OR FOUR YEARS	Much worse	4	4	4	3	4
	A little worse	14	15	18	11	12
		18	**19**	**22**	**14**	**16**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

Figure 7 ‘Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger’, 2018-21 (LinA)



Ranking of Issues

The Scanlon Foundation survey seeks to determine the issues that are of greatest concern in the community.

Since 2011, the first question in the survey has been open-ended. It asks: 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?' The value of an open-ended question is that it leaves it to respondents to indicate issues, rather than requiring selection from a pre-determined and limited list. An open-ended approach necessarily produces a broad range of responses.

Up to 2019 there was a large measure of stability in response to this question. **In the nine surveys between 2011 and 2019, respondents have consistently given first rank to issues related to the economy, unemployment and poverty,** in the range 26%-36%, with the highpoint in 2012. Other issues which have been prominent are the impact of climate change on the environment, in the range 4%-19% (peak in 2019), quality of government 6%-15% (peak in 2014), and social issues, including family breakdown, child care, and drug use 5%-11% (2015). Three other issues reached 10% in one year: defence, national security and the threat of terrorism (2015); concern over immigration and the rate of population growth (2019); and concern over the number of asylum seekers reaching Australia (2013).

In July 2020, the impact of COVID-19 produced a dramatic change, with the pandemic dominating responses to an extent not matched over the course of the surveys by any other issue: it was indicated by 63% of respondents as the 'most important problem', followed by the economy at 15% and climate change at 5%. No other issue was indicated by more than 2% of respondents.

In November 2020, there was a partial return to the pattern of previous years. COVID-19 remained the dominant issue, but it was selected by **a much smaller 32%,** while the economy (24%), climate change (13%), and social issues (6%) rose in importance.

In July 2021, there was a return to the pattern evident twelve months earlier, with mounting concern over the spread of infections at the time of the survey, particularly in Sydney; 59% of respondents indicated that the impact of the pandemic was the most important problem, with 9% indicating the economy and the same proportion indicating climate change. As in past years, a relatively small proportion indicated social issues (4%), the quality of politicians (4%), and the health system (3%). Concern about immigration and population growth, which had been a third ranked issue in prior to the pandemic, was indicated by just 1% of respondents.

Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

Table 8 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?', 2011-19 (percentage, RDD) 2018-2021 (percentage, LinA)

ISSUE	RDD									LinA				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
COVID-19, including impact on the economy												63	32	59*
Economy/ unemployment/ poverty	26	36	33	34	33	28	26	27	28	29	29	15	24	9*
Environment – climate change/water shortages (concern)	11	4	5	6	7	5	6	10	19	5	17	5	13	9*
Social issues – (family breakdown, child care, drug use, lack of personal direction)	6	5	7	8	11	6	7	8	8	9	10	2	6	4*
Immigration/population growth (concern)	5	4	3	3	3	5	6	7	6	7	10	2	3	1*
Quality of government/ politicians	13	13	13	15	9	11	10	10	6	9	6	2	4	4
Health/medical/ hospitals	4	3	4	5	2	5	3	4	5	3	4	1	2	3
Housing shortage/ affordability/interest rates	3	2	2	2	4	2	6	4	4	5	4	1	1	2
Crime/law and order	2	1	2	2	2	3	4	3	2	4	2	0	1	0
Education/schools	1	2	3	4	2	4	4	2	2	1	1	0	1	0
Defence/national security/terrorism	1	1	0	1	10	9	7	1	2	1	2	1	3	2
Asylum seekers – too many/refugees/ boat people/illegal immigrants (negative comment)	4	8	10	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
Asylum seekers – poor treatment, sympathy towards refugees/ boat people/illegal immigrants	3	4	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Immigration/population – too low/need more people (supportive)	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Racism	2	1	1	1	2	4	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Environment – overreaction to climate change/carbon tax (sceptical)	6	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Women's issues (e.g. equal pay/opportunity, violence, etc.)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Indigenous issues	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Industrial relations/ trade unions	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other/nothing/don't know/decline	11	8	12	16	10	12	14	18	15	24	12	7	8	6
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
N (unweighted)	2.001	2,000	1,200	1,526	1,501	1,500	2,236	1,500	1,500	2,260	2,033	3,090	2,793	3,572

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05*

Figure 8 Ranking of issues, November 2020 (LinA)

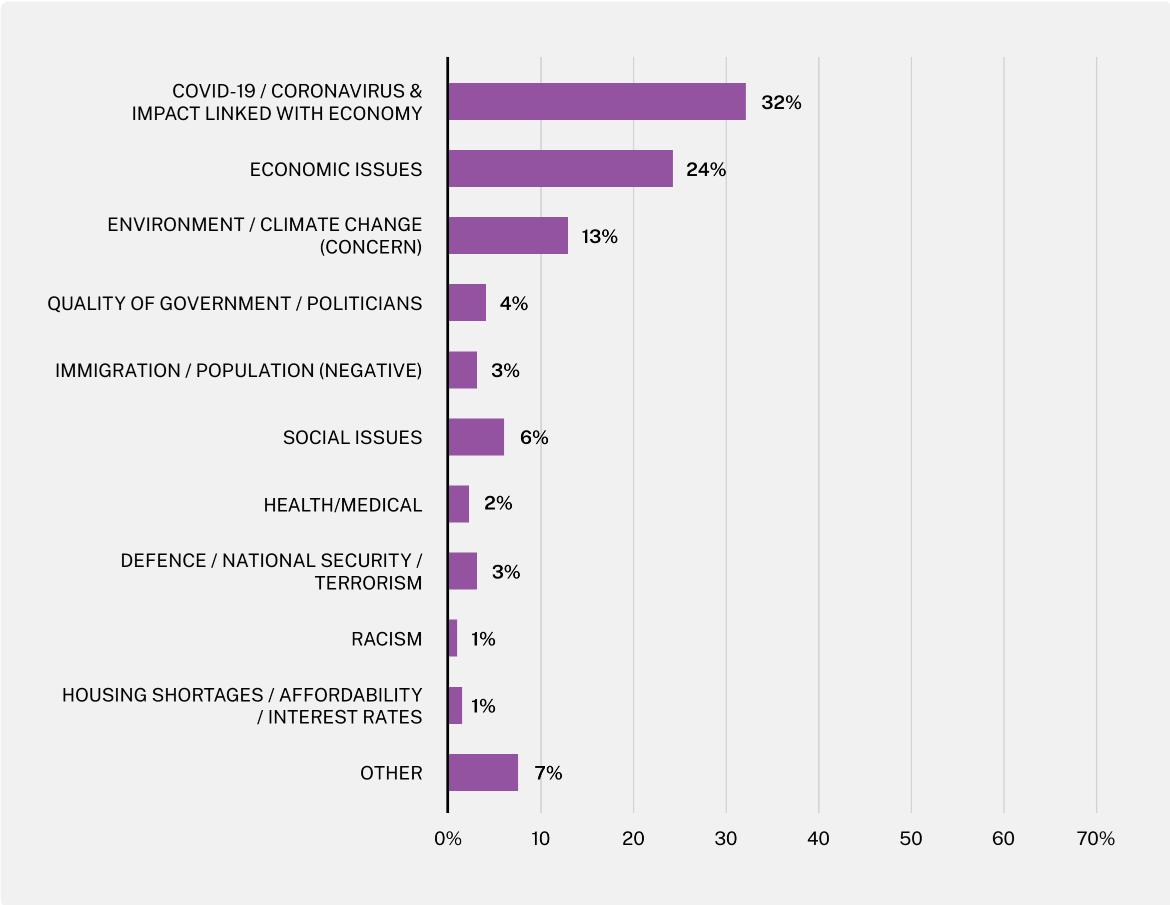
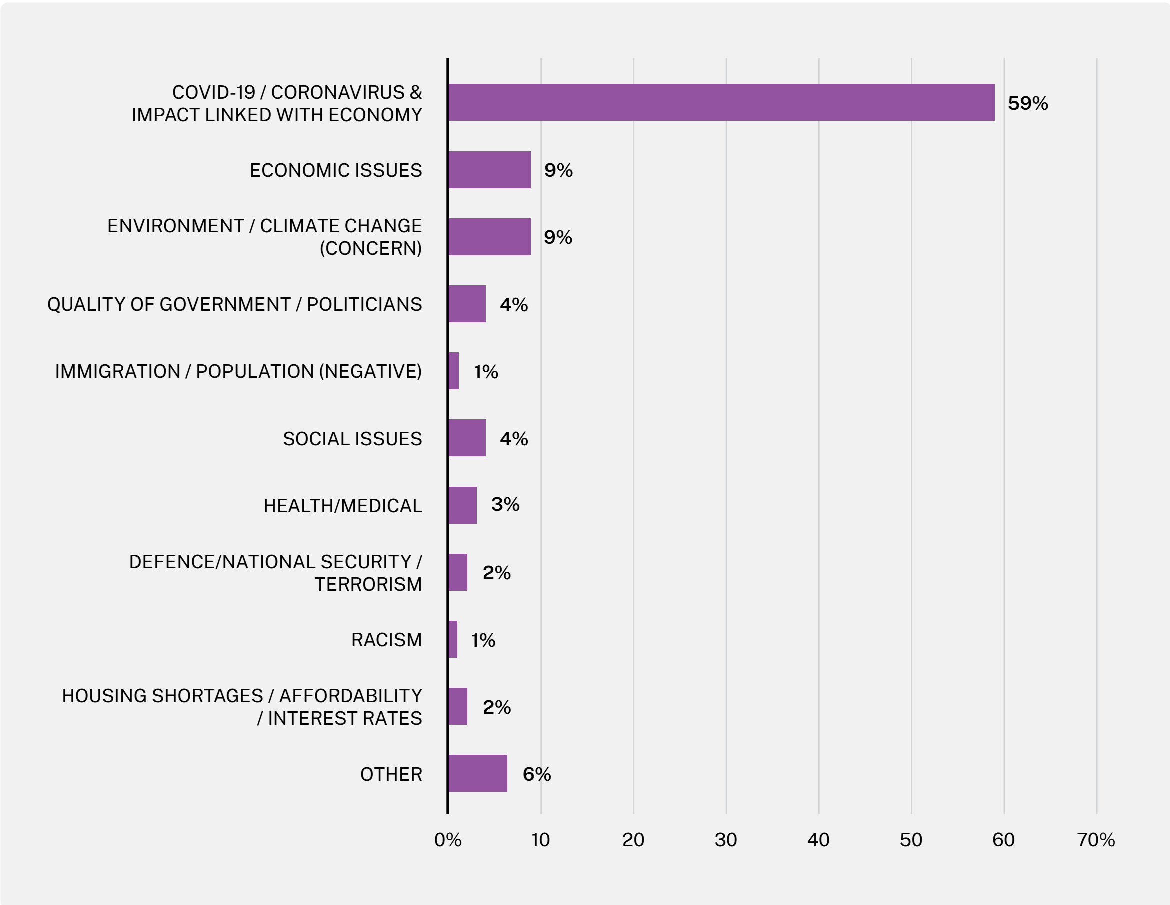


Figure 9 Ranking of issues, July 2021 (LinA)



COVID-19

Analysis of those indicating that COVID-19 is the most important problem facing Australia was undertaken by six demographic and two attitudinal variables. The demographic variables analysed were gender, state of residence, region (capital city or rest of state), age, highest level of educational attainment, and birthplace; the attitudinal variables were self-described financial situation and political alignment, indicated by response to the question 'If there was a Federal election held today, for which party would you probably vote?'.

The broad findings indicate a large measure of agreement across the variables and little change with respect to the results obtained in July 2020 and July 2021.

The outliers for relatively high proportions of people concerned by the pandemic are residents of New South Wales (65%) and those intending to vote Liberal or National (67%). Relatively low proportions indicating the pandemic as the most important problem are Queenslanders (52%), those aged 18-24 (49%), those whose self-described financial situation is struggling to pay bills or poor (45%), and those intending to vote Greens (44%) or One Nation (48%).

Table 9 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?' Response: COVID-19, July 2021 (July 2020 in brackets), percentage

GENDER	Female	Male					
	63 (67)	55 (59)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia		
	59 (72)	65 (62)	52 (55)	63 (63)	55 (63)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	59 (63)	59 (64)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	49 (52)	59 (63)	59 (63)	58 (61)	60 (64)	64 (68)	60 (70)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Post-graduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	55 (59)	62 (58)	59 (67)	63 (63)	54 (60)	65 (68)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	60 (64)	62 (64)	56 (64)	45 (56)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	63 (66)	67 (67)	44 (54)	48 (49)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	58 (63)	62 (67)	61 (63)				

Trust

It has been argued that trust is the key variable for predicting the level of social cohesion in a society.

Danish researcher Christian Larsen defines social cohesion in terms of 'belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that **they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each othe**r' (2014: 5) In Larsen's view, in modern societies

> the most important aspect is not that citizens believe they share the same religion, family values, attitude towards homosexuality or other ideals; for the everyday operation of highly differentiated societies, **the most important aspect of social cohesion is that citizens believe they share the norm of not cheating each other.**

A number of national and international surveys measure trust using the question: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted – or – that you can't be too careful in dealing with people.' This question has been asked, for example, in the World Values Survey (WVS), the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey, and in the Scanlon Foundation surveys since 2007.

The WVS data collected between 2010 and 2014 found that of 52 countries surveyed, **only in five countries including Australia, was there majority endorsement of the view 'most people can be trusted'**. Larsen observes that **'a high level of social trust is a rare phenomenon.'** The countries other than Australia were the Netherlands, China, Sweden and New Zealand.

The General Social Survey, which is based on a larger sample than the WVS and employs slightly different wording, with five response options ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', obtained majority agreement in 2019 at 55% that most people can be trusted, consistent with earlier surveys conducted in 2006 (54%), 2010 (54%) and 2014 (54%). **In 2020 the GSS found that trust was at 62%.**

The Scanlon Foundation national surveys have found that opinion on trust is close to evenly divided, with results in the range 45%-55% across the eleven RDD surveys conducted between 2007-2019. In the years 2014-2019 the level of trust was consistently in a narrow range: 48%-50%.

In the LinA surveys, which are mostly self-completed online, indication of trust was lower in 2018 and 2019, with 42%-43% indicating that 'most people can be trusted', and 56%-57% that you 'can't be too careful'.

An important finding of the July 2020 survey was that trust in 'most people' was a higher 49%. In November 2020 there was a further increase of four percentage points to 53%, and trust was at 52% in 2021.

Comparison of the 2021 findings with combined data for the 2018-19 survey and the July 2020 survey was undertaken by six demographic and two attitudinal variables. The finding is that trust in 2021 is consistently higher than in 2020, with the main exception those intending to vote Greens: in July 2020, 68% of Greens voters indicated that most people can be trusted, a lower (but still substantial) 58% in 2021.

The lowest level of agreement that 'most people can be trusted' is among supporters of One Nation (33% in 2021; 28% in 2020); those whose self-described financial situation is '**struggling to pay bills' or 'poor'** (29%; 29%) and whose highest level of education is up to Year 11 (39%; 36%).

The highest-level of agreement that 'most people can be trusted' is among those who indicate that their financial situation is **'prosperous' or 'very comfortable'** (67%) and those with a **post-graduate qualification** (66%).

Figure 10 'Most people can be trusted', 2018-21 (LinA)

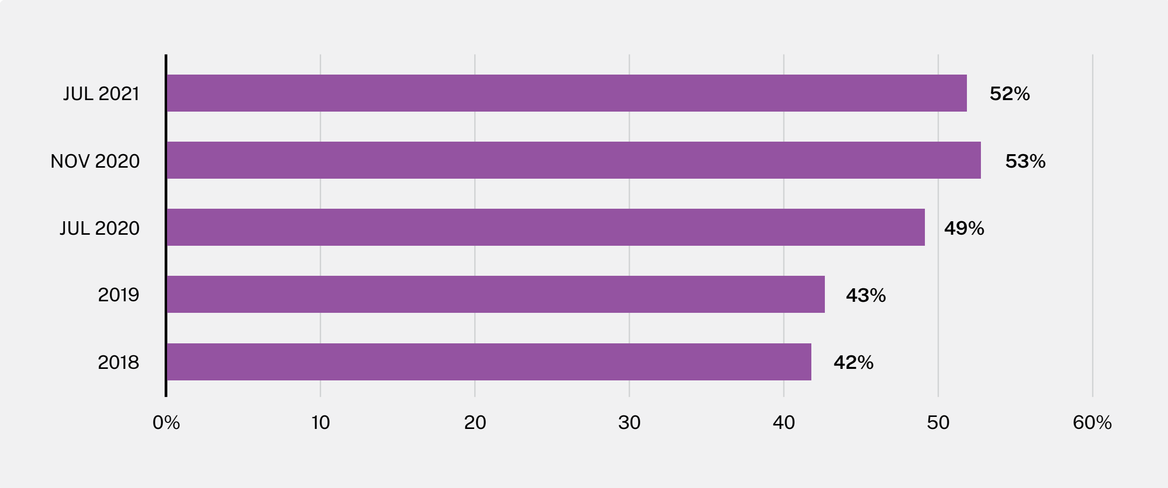


Table 10 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' Response: 'can be trusted', July 2021 (July 2020 and 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	50 (47, 41)	53 (52, 45)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	51 (52, 42)	55 (50 ,47)	57 (49, 41)	48 (50, 42)	48 (45, 40)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	53 (50, 45)	50 (48, 39)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	43 (44, 41)	48 (44, 47)	54 (52, 40)	55 (52, 44)	52 (48, 40)	55 (53, 41)	56 (54, 46)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma / Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	66 (63, 60)	59 (55, 55)	52 (49 ,36)	46 (45, 43)	49 (49, 47)	39 (36, 26)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	67 (60, 58)	55 (55, 45)	40 (38, 39)	29 (29, 28)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	54 (49, 43)	55 (50, 42)	58 (68, 61)	33 (28, 23)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	52 (48, 41)	55 (57, 43)	49 (48, 47)				

Government

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

The Scanlon Foundation surveys have provided annual tracking of trust in the Australian government since 2007.

The survey asks: **'How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?'** Respondents are presented with four options: 'almost always', 'most of the time', 'only some of the time', and 'almost never'.

In 2009, at the peak of popularity of the Rudd Labor government, trust in 'government to do the right thing' 'almost always' or 'most of the time' reached 48%. Indicating a widespread perception that Labor had failed to deliver on its promises, **trust collapsed to 31% in 2010 and further declined to 26% in 2012**, representing a fall of 22% since 2009. **Trust remained in the range 26%-31% between 2013 and 2019 in the RDD version of the survey.** In 2018, in the LinA version of the survey, trust was at 28%; in 2019 at 36%.

In 2020, in the context of the pandemic, trust rose to 54% in July, the highest proportion recorded in the surveys, and was at 55% in November.

In July 2021, trust was at a lower level (44%), but still substantially higher than recorded in surveys between 2010 and 2019.

In the analysis of sub-groups, results for the July 2021 survey were compared with combined data from the July 2020 and 2018-19 LinA surveys, aggregated to increase reliability, an approach adopted in other sections of this report.

Of the 33 sub-groups analysed, in 2020 trust was above 50% in 24, whereas in 2018-19 no sub-groups indicated trust at that level. In every sub-group trust increased by at least 10 percentage points, and by more than 20 percentage points in nine.

In 2021 trust was above 50% in only four sub-groups: residents of Western Australia (51%), those aged 65-74 (56%) and 75 or older (55%), and those intending to vote Liberal or National (73%).

As in previous survey findings, a notable variation is found by political alignment, indicating that a key predictor of trust in government is a person's support or opposition to the party in power: thus, a relatively low proportion indicate trust in government among those intending to vote One Nation (20%), Greens (22%), and Labor (31%), in contrast with a substantial majority of those intending to vote Liberal/National (73%).

A relatively low level of trust is indicated by those who are 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' (32%), 'just getting along,' (37%), aged 18-24 (38%) and 25-34 (33%), and residents of Victoria (38%).

Figure 11 'How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?' Response: 'almost always' or 'most of the time' 2007-19 (RDD), 2018-21 (LinA)

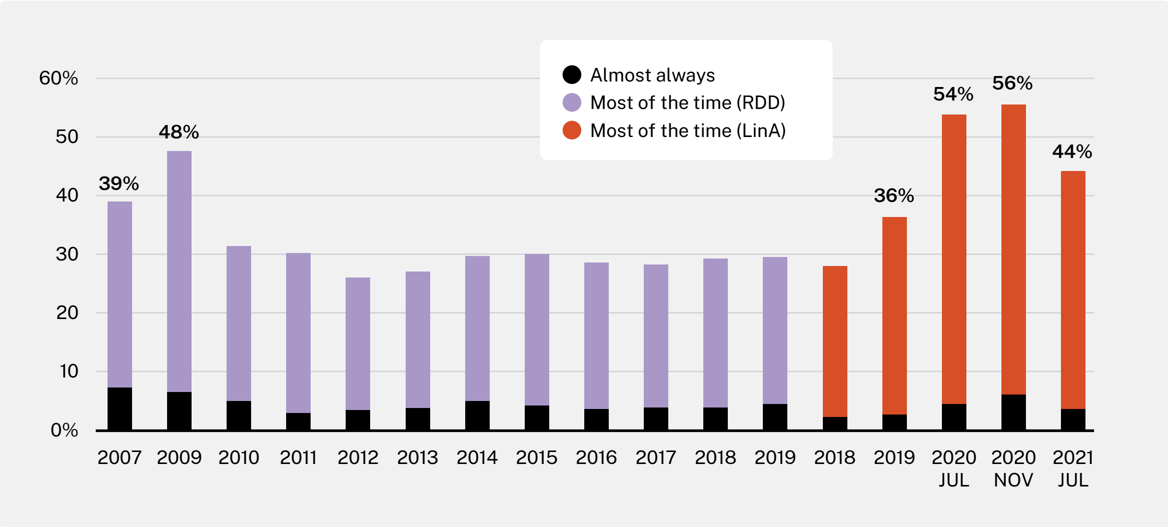


Table 11 'How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?' Response: 'almost always', 'most of the time', July 2021 (July 2020 LinA 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	43 (54, 31)	46 (53, 33)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	38 (54, 32)	47 (55, 32)	51 (63, 40)	49 (56, 28)	42 (49, 26)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	43 (53, 33)	46 (54, 30)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	38 (40, 30)	33 (43, 29)	43 (52, 33)	46 (59, 33)	49 (56, 30)	56 (63, 31)	55 (67, 41)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	43 (55, 36)	46 (56, 38)	42 (53, 31)	43 (47, 32)	43 (53, 30)	49 (58, 26)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	49 (64, 48)	48 (57, 36)	37 (45, 26)	32 (38, 15)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	31 (43, 22)	73 (75, 49)	22 (31, 21)	20 (31, 9)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	44 (52, 30)	42 (56, 29)	47 (57, 38)				

Further indication of confidence in government was provided by a question in the 2020 and 2021 surveys that asked: 'How well is the federal government responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?' In both July and November 2020, **a resounding 85% indicated 'very well' or 'fairly well'**, while only a small minority of 14%-15% indicated a negative assessment, 'fairly badly' or 'very badly'.

In 2021 confidence in the federal government's response to the pandemic was substantially lower, with 52% of respondents (down by 33 percentage points) indicating that it was responding 'very well' or 'fairly well.' The proportion indicating that the government was performing 'fairly badly' or 'very badly' increased from 14%-15% to 48%.

In July 2021, positive assessment of government was higher at state than the federal level.

Positive assessment was highest in Western Australia (94%) and South Australia (88%), only marginally lower than in 2020. In Victoria positive assessment was at 71% (compared to 56% in July 2020 and 78% in November 2020).

The largest fall in the assessment of state governments was in Queensland at 76% (92% in July 2020) and New South Wales 59% (81%).

Table 12 'How well is the federal government responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?' 2020-21, all respondents, percentage

	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
'Very well'	28	30	9*
'Fairly well'	57	55	43*
Sub-total	**85**	**85**	**52***
'Fairly badly'	11	11	28*
'Very badly'	3	4	21*
Sub-total	**14**	**15**	**48***

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05*

Table 13 'In your opinion, how well is your state government responding to the COVID-19 pandemic?' , 2020-21. Response: 'very well' or 'fairly well', percentage

	NSW	VICTORIA	QUEENSLAND	WESTERN AUSTRALIA	SOUTH AUSTRALIA
2020 July	81	65	92	99	94
2020 November	92	78	85	98	93
2021 July	59	71	76	94	88

Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding

With regard to lockdown restrictions, which have been a matter of public controversy, government restrictions obtained a high level of endorsement in 2020 and this has continued in 2021. In July 2020, 95% of respondents indicated that the restrictions were ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ required; 88% in November 2020, and 87% in July 2021. There was, however, a change in the proportions indicating ‘definitely required’ and ‘probably required’. Over the course of the three surveys the proportion indicating ‘definitely required’ declined from 79% to 63% to 59%, while ‘probably required’ has increased from 15% to 24% to 29%.

State level analysis finds a large measure of consistency. In July 2021, agreement with lockdown restrictions was in the range 89%-91% in New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia, 85% in Victoria and a lower 82% in Queensland. In all states a majority, in the range 51%-65%, indicated that the restrictions were ‘definitely required’.

In no sub-groups analysed is there a majority of the view that lockdown restrictions were ‘definitely not required’ or ‘probably not required’. Those intending to vote One Nation stand out, with 44% of the view that restrictions were not required. The only other groups where more than 15% of respondents indicate this view are the 20% ‘struggling to pay bills’ or ‘poor’, those with a diploma, certificate, trade or apprentice qualification (16%) and those aged 25-34 (16%). Very low proportions opposed to restrictions are among those aged 18-24 (5%), intending to vote Greens (6%) or Labor (7%), and aged 65 or older (8%; 7%).

Figure 12 ‘Do you think that the lockdown restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic were required?’ All respondents, July 2021, percentage

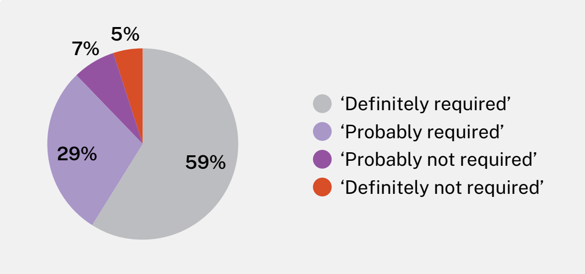


Table 14 ‘Do you think that the lockdown restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic were required?’ All respondents, 2020-21, percentage

	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
‘Definitely required’	79	63	59
‘Probably required’	15	24	29
Sub-total	**95**	**88**	**87**
‘Probably not required’	4	7	7
‘Definitely not required’	1	6	5
Sub-total	**5**	**12**	**12**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 15 ‘Do you think that the lockdown restrictions that were imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic were required?’ Respondents by state, July 2021, percentage

	NSW	VICTORIA	QUEENSLAND	WESTERN AUSTRALIA	SOUTH AUSTRALIA
‘Definitely required’	64	53	51	65	58
‘Probably required’	26	32	31	25	31
Sub-total	**91**	**85**	**82**	**89**	**89**
‘Probably not required’	4	10	9	6	7
‘Definitely not required’	5	4	8	5	4
Sub-total	**9**	**14**	**17**	**10**	**11**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 16 Lockdown restrictions were 'definitely not required', 'probably not required', July 2021, percentage

GENDER	Female	Male					
	10	15					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	14	9	10	11	17		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	12	13					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	5	16	15	15	12	8	7
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprentice	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	11	9	16	16	10	11	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	12	11	13	20			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	7	14	6	44			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	13	9	11				

NEED FOR CHANGE?

Since 2014 the Scanlon Foundation survey has asked respondents if 'the system of government we have in Australia works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced?'.

In 2020, a combined 69% in July and 72% in November indicated that the system 'works fine' or 'needs only minor change', a significant increase from 57% in 2018 and 62% in 2019. A minority of 28%-31% (43% in 2018; 38% in 2019) opted for 'major change' or 'should be replaced'.

In the context of the more negative assessment of government response to the pandemic, in 2021 a lower 60% indicated that the system 'works fine' or 'needs only minor change', while 39% supported 'major change' or 'replacement', close to the proportion in 2019 (38%).

Analysis of sub-groups finds that in 2021 support for major change or replacement of the system of government is surprisingly highest at 61% among those who intend to vote Greens, a higher proportion than among supporters of One Nation (54%), those 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' (54%), 'just getting along' (49%), and aged 18-24 (50%).

The lowest proportion favouring major change is among those who are supporters of the Liberal or National parties (21%), residents of South Australia (29%), those whose self-described financial circumstance is 'prosperous' or 'living very comfortably' (31%), and those aged 65 or older (32%, 33%).

THE NON-DEMOCRACTIC OPTION

The extent of support for a non-democratic system of government was tested by a question that asked if 'having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections would be a good or bad way of governing Australia?' In the 2018 survey, 25% agreed that having a strong leader would be good; in 2019, 22%. There was no increase in the context of the pandemic, with agreement at a consistent 21% across the three 2020-21 surveys.

However, when asked if 'having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections would be good way of governing during the COVID-19 pandemic,' a substantially higher 38% indicated agreement in July. Agreement was lower at 33% in November 2020 and to 35% in July 2021.

In July 2021, ‘a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections’ was favoured in the highest proportion (53%) by those of non-English speaking background, a marked difference from 30% among Australia-born; 44% aged 25-34; 43% ‘struggling to pay bills’ or ‘poor’; 40% residents of Western Australia; and 38% of One Nation supporters. It was favoured in the lowest proportion by Greens supporters at 24%.

Figure 13 ‘Would you say the system of government we have in Australia works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced?’, 2014-19 (RDD), 2018-21 (LinA)

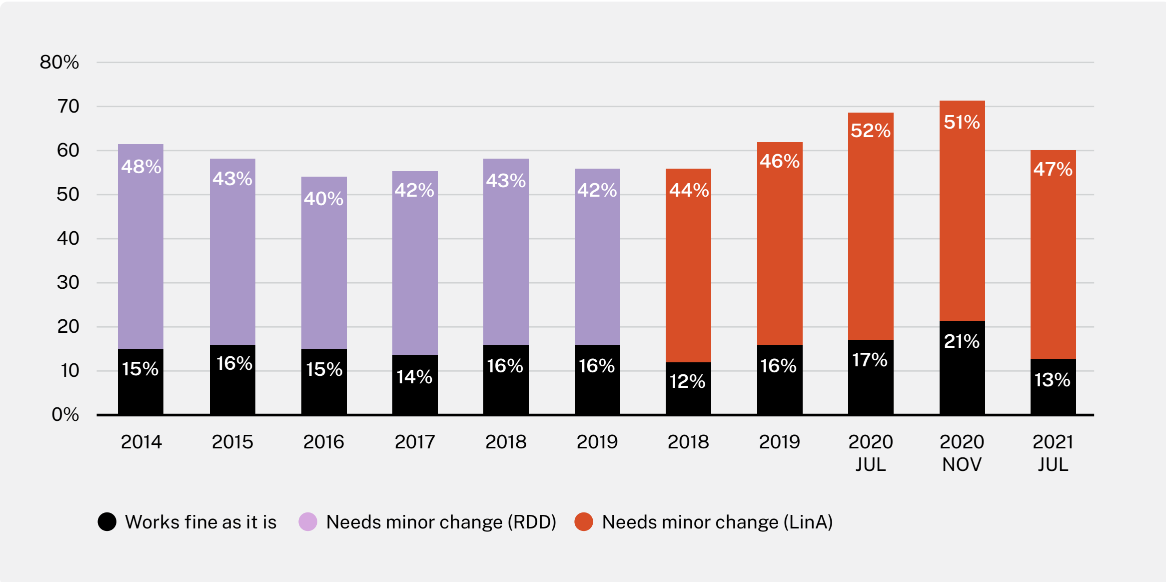


Table 17 ‘Would you say the system of government we have in Australia works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced?’ Response: ‘needs major change’ or ‘should be replaced’, July 2021 (July 2020, 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	42 (31, 41)	36 (31, 39)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	43 (30, 37)	37 (30, 41)	31 (28, 34)	29 (24, 41)	45 (37, 48)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	38 (31, 38)	40 (30, 44)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	50 (36, 38)	43 (36, 44)	39 (32, 48)	37 (28, 42)	37 (30, 42)	32 (27, 36)	33 (22, 26)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprentice	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	36 (33, 36)	29 (26, 33)	42 (34, 41)	39 (32, 42)	43 (31, 38)	39 (28, 50)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	31 (24, 23)	35 (27, 38)	49 (39, 41)	54 (44, 65)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	43 (35, 44)	21 (16, 24)	61 (47, 52)	54 (53, 73)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	39 (31, 41)	40 (30, 48)	37 (31, 34)				

Table 18 'Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections .... way of governing Australia', 2018-21 (%)

	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
'Very good'	4	5	3	4	3
'Fairly good'	20	18	18	18	18
Sub-total	**25**	**22**	**21**	**21**	**21**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

Table 19 'Would you say that during the COVID-19 pandemic, having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections .... way of governing Australia', 2018-21 (%)

	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
'Very good'	9	10	9
'Fairly good'	28	24	26
Sub-total good	**38**	**33**	**35**
'Fairly bad'	31	32	31
'Very bad'	29	34	33
Sub-total bad	**61**	**66**	**64**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

Table 20 'Would you say that during the COVID-19 pandemic, having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament would be....?' Response: 'Very good', 'fairly good', July 2021 (July 2020 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	36 (38)	33 (38)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	35 (41)	35 (34)	40 (44)	34 (36)	32 (37)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	35 (39)	33 (34)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	34 (36)	44 (47)	37 (40)	29 (33)	30 (35)	29 (31)	32 (33)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprentice	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	33 (32)	34 (36)	31 (35)	37 (42)	35 (39)	43 (42)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	32 (35)	33 (34)	36 (41)	43 (57)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	32 (36)	38 (41)	24 (21)	38 (50)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	30 (33)	28 (35)	53 (54)				

Photo by Soumya Shrestha on Unsplash

An Open Society

Photo by Alexandra Nicolae on Unsplash

There is a well-known risk of heightened xenophobia and scapegoating in troubled times. **Xenophobia refers to the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners; scapegoating,** according to the Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology (2016), refers to a phenomenon wherein **'a guiltless person, or group of people, is blamed for a problem,'** or seen as its 'entire reason.' Engaging in scapegoating unifies those who join together to blame, providing 'a sense of accomplishment, rather than helplessness'.

Fear and hatred of foreigners features in Australia's history, as it does in the histories of all countries. For example, the late 1920s and 1930s were times of economic dislocation and high unemployment, with fierce competition for jobs. Asian immigration had been banned in 1901 and during the inter-war years there was pressure to extend restrictions on entry under the White Australia policy.

In 1930 a British Preference League in Queensland sought to limit employment of Italian cane-cutters and in the Western Australia mines there were outbreaks of rioting targeting southern Europeans. In 1934, in the most severe incident, firearms and home-made bombs were used, two miners were killed, many were wounded and there was extensive property damage. The rioters' demand was that 'no foreigner who is not naturalised or born in Australia be allowed to work on the mines'.

As in all countries, in Australia there is **an informal hierarchy of racial preference, with Asian groups middle ranked.** In the context of the pandemic, scapegoating at first targeted the Chinese community, then the broader Asian community, then Middle-Eastern and Jewish communities.

The Scanlon Foundation survey finds **a relatively high rate of discrimination reported by Asian Australians:** in 2021, discrimination on the basis of ‘skin colour, ethnic origin or religion’ was reported by 11% Australia-born, 40% born in an Asian country.

But this pattern of discrimination should not be assumed to be a new development. Experience of discrimination in 2020 and 2021 is consistent with findings obtained in pre-pandemic years. Thus, in the 2018-19 Scanlon Foundation survey, experience of discrimination was indicated by 41% of respondents born in an Asian country.

One area of significant change in the Scanlon Foundation survey is heightened perception of racism. In 2021, in response to the question: ‘In your opinion, how big of a problem is racism in Australia?’, 60% of respondents indicated that it was a ‘very big problem’ or ‘fairly big problem’, compared to 39% in July 2020 and 40% in July 2020. An increase of twenty percentage points **in response to a general question of this nature is almost unprecedented in the Scanlon Foundation surveys.**

How is this finding to be explained? Why was it registered in July 2021 but not in earlier surveys in 2020 when discussion of racism was at least a prominent, brought to attention by events such as the Black Lives Matter protests?

Has mainstream opinion turned increasingly negative towards the hallmarks of an open society: free trade, immigration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism? The Scanlon Foundation survey is uniquely placed to address this question.

There has been much surveying in Australia during the pandemic, by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Lowy Institute, the Australian National University, and commercial agencies, including Newspoll, Essential Research and Bastion – but the focus has been on politics, on impact of the pandemic on households, on ability of people to cope, and on mental health issues.

The Scanlon Foundation alone has surveyed a range of issues concerned with global trade, immigration and cultural diversity, with some 35 questions and the capacity to benchmark these against pre-pandemic findings.

The following sections of the report consider, in order:

- Perception of racism
- Views of globalisation, with a focus of trade policy
- Value to Australia of immigration
- Multiculturalism
- Relations with Indigenous Australians
- Discriminatory attitudes
- Views of specific immigrant groups
- Views of specific faith groups
- Experience of discrimination
- Balance of opinion – in particular, is there an increased proportion with strong negative views towards immigration and cultural diversity?

Perception of Racism

A significant shift in opinion between 2020 and 2021 was registered in response to a question that asked respondents to indicate their view of racism in Australia. In July 2020, in response to the question that asked: '**How big a problem is racism in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic'**, 39% of respondents in July and 40% in November perceived it to be 'a very big problem' or 'a fairly big problem.' When the question was asked in general terms in 2021, without reference to the pandemic ('how big a problem is racism in Australia?'), the expectation was that it would be seen as a problem by a lower proportion, but **the surprising finding was that it was seen as a problem by a substantially larger proportion, 60%.**

In 2021, **57% Australia-born viewed racism as a problem (compared to 36%-37% in 2020),** 57% UK- and Ireland-born (35% in 2020), and 69% born in an Asian country (55% in 2020), including **78% born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan.**

Further analysis by the eight variables employed in this report finds that **perception of racism is an issue that polarises opinion**, although it is acknowledged as a problem by 40% or more respondents in all categories but one.

Racism is seen as a problem by **88% of Greens voters, 71% Labor,** 79% of those aged 18-24, 74% aged 25-34, 69% 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor', 65% 'just getting along', 68% of women, and 65% with university level education.

In contrast, it is seen as a problem by a substantial but lower proportion of **Liberal/ National voters at 40%, 30% of One Nation voters,** 41% of those aged 75 or over, 48% with education up to Year 11, and 50% of men.

Table 21 2020: 'In your opinion, how big a problem is racism in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic?' 2021: 'In your opinion, how big a problem is racism in Australia?' (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	AUSTRALIA			UK AND IRELAND			ASIA			TOTAL		
	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
'Very big problem'	8	5	14	5	3	13	13	12	15	8	6	15
'Fairly big problem'	29	31	43	29	32	43	47	43	54	31	33	45
Total problem	**36**	**37**	**57**	**35**	**35**	**57**	**59**	**55**	**69**	**39**	**40**	**60**

Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding. In 2020, the question was asked with reference to the pandemic: 'In your opinion, how big of a problem is racism in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic'

Table 22 2021: 'In your opinion, how big a problem is racism in Australia?' (July 2020: 'In your opinion, how big a problem is racism in Australia during the COCID-19 pandemic?', in brackets). Response: 'very big problem', 'fairly big problem' (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	68 (47)	50 (31)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	62 (44)	61 (39)	59 (38)	54 (35)	56 (36)		
REGION	Capital	Rest of state					
	62 (41)	55 (35)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	79 (59)	74 (53)	64 (43)	53 (32)	46 (27)	49 (28)	41 (25)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	65 (45)	65 (41)	60 (32)	55 (30)	63 (45)	48 (31)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	58 (36)	56 (36)	65 (43)	69 (53)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	71 (49)	40 (28)	88 (63)	30 (16)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	57 (36)	62 (36)	64 (51)				

Globalisation

Australia's **openness to the world** was considered in a question first included in the 2018 survey. Respondents are asked if 'growing economic ties between Australia and other countries, sometimes referred to as globalisation', is good or bad for the country. In 2020 **a substantial majority, 72% in July and 74% in November, agreed that it was good. It was at a marginally higher 76% in 2021.** The proportion indicating that it was bad declined to 22%, the same as 2019.

A second question, first asked in July 2020, specified trade 'with the rest of the world' and asked if Australia should trade more, about the same or less. In 2020, 28% indicated agreement that Australia should trade more, in 2021 a higher 36%. In 2020, a **combined 70% indicated that Australia should trade 'more' or 'about the same'. The proportion was a higher 79% in 2021,** while only 20% indicated that Australia should trade less.

Sub-group analysis of response to the globalisation question was undertaken by six demographic and two attitudinal variables, with results obtained in 2021 compared with those in 2020 and the combined results for 2018-19.

In 2021, a relatively high proportion (although minority) of the view that growing economic ties are bad for Australia is found among One Nation supporters (42%), those whose financial situation is indicated to be 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' (31%) or 'just getting along' (30%), and those whose highest level of education is at the trade or apprentice level (29%).

The lowest proportion viewing such ties as bad is found among those with a bachelor's degree (14%), those whose self-described financial situation is prosperous or very comfortable (14%), and aged 18-24 (17%).

Increased negative response between 2020 and 2021 is obtained only for those aged 18-24 (17%; 13%) and those intending to vote Greens (25%; 24%).

Table 23 'Thinking about the growing economic ties between Australia and other countries, sometimes referred to as globalisation, do you think this is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad for Australia', 2018-2021 (percentage, RDD and LinA)

RESPONSE	RDD		LinA				
	2018	2019	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Very good	21	20	16	12	11	13	15
Fairly good	51	51	61	62	60	62	62
Sub-total	**71**	**71**	**76**	**75**	**72**	**74**	**76**
Fairly bad	14	13	18	18	23*	19	19
Very bad	9	9	4	5	4	5	3*
Sub-total	**23**	**22**	**23**	**22**	**27***	**24**	**22**
Don't know/ decline	6	8	1	3	1	2	2
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 24 'In your opinion, should Australia trade more with the rest of the world, trade about the same, or trade less?', 2020, 2021 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2020	2021
Trade more with the rest of the world (exporting more and importing more	28	36*
Trade about the same with the rest of the world	42	43
Trade less with the rest of the world (exporting less and importing less)	29	20*
Don't know/ decline	1	1
Total	**100**	**100**

**Change between July 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 25 'Thinking about the growing economic ties between Australia and other countries, sometimes referred to as globalisation, do you think this is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad for Australia'. Response: 'fairly bad', 'very bad', July 2021, (July 2020 and 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	20 (26, 21)	24 (28, 24)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	24 (25, 22)	19 (26, 21)	20 (25, 22)	24 (30, 29)	24 (31, 23)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	21 (26, 21)	24 (30, 25)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75+
	17 (13, 16)	22 (27, 17)	22 (28, 25)	25 (31, 25)	23 (35, 29)	20 (27, 22)	19 (23, 19)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	17 (22, 18)	14 (16, 16)	26 (34, 28)	29 (32, 26)	21 (22, 18)	22 (34, 26)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	14 (16, 18)	19 (26, 19)	30 (33, 27)	31 (44, 34)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	20 (25, 20)	16 (26, 19)	25 (24, 19)	42 (44, 47)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	23 (30, 25)	18 (24, 20)	19 (21, 18)				

Additional questions considered perception of influence in the Pacific and confidence in major powers to 'follow global trade rules to ensure fair trade'.

From a list of four countries, by a large margin, **respondents expect that China would have 'the most influence in the Pacific region ten years from now': in 2021, 76% of respondents in indicated China,** just 14% the United States, 4% India, and 3% Japan. These findings were almost identical with those obtained in 2019 and 2020.

When asked 'How much confidence do you have that [country] follows the global trade rules to ensure fair trade?,' in 2021 93% indicated 'a lot of confidence' or 'some confidence' in New Zealand, 84% in the United Kingdom, 82% Japan, 67% United States, and a substantially lower 15% in China. There was little difference in results obtained in 2020 and 2021, with the exception of an increased proportion indicating confidence in the United States (43; 67%), possibly reflecting the changed view of the country since the election of President Biden.

Table 26 'Which country do you think will have the most influence in the Pacific region ten years from now?' 2019-21 (percentage, LinA)

	MOST INFLUENCE IN THE PACIFIC REGION TEN YEARS FROM NOW		
	2019	JUL 2020	JUL 2021
China	76	78	76
United States	13	10	14*
India	4	5	4
Japan	4	4	3
Other/ Don't know/ decline	3	3	2
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

**Change between 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05*

Table 27 'How much confidence do you have that [country] follows the global trade rules to ensure fair trade?' July 2020 and July 2021 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	CHINA		UNITED STATES		JAPAN		UNITED KINGDOM		NEW ZEALAND	
	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
A lot of confidence	1	1	5	9	16	21	18	21	52	51
Some confidence	11	14	38	58	63	61	65	63	42	42
Sub-total	**12**	**15**	**43**	**67**	**79**	**82**	**83**	**84**	**94**	**93**
Not much confidence	39	40	41	26	16	14	14	13	4	4
No confidence at all	48	45	15	6	3	3	2	2	1	1
Sub-total	**87**	**84**	**56**	**32**	**19**	**17**	**15**	**14**	**5**	**6**
Don't know/ decline	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding

Immigrants

The Scanlon Foundation survey provides the only probability based annual tracking of opinion on immigration, employing consistent questionnaire structure and question wording to measure the trend of public opinion.

Respondents to the survey are asked: 'What do you think the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present. Would you say it has been too high, about right or too low?'.

The question was asked in a modified form in 2020 and 2021, to reflect the halting of immigration due to the pandemic. In response to the question worded 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia **in recent years?', a decreasing minority indicated that it had been 'too high', 38% in July 2020, 34% in November, and 31% in July 2021.**

In 2020, there was a significant increase in unemployment, but with the closing of the borders it was difficult for political groups concerned with immigration to argue that the current economic problems were caused by immigration. As the findings indicate, **even when respondents were questioned with reference to immigration in 'recent years', there was no heightened negative sentiment towards immigration.**

Table 28 2018-19: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present? Would you say it is...', 2020-21: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia in recent years? Would you say it has been ...' (percentage, LinA)

SURVEY YEAR	TOO HIGH	ABOUT RIGHT	TOO LOW	ABOUT RIGHT + TOO LOW	NO OPINION/
2018	44	40	15	55	2
2019	41	45	13	58	1
2020 July	38	48	14	61	1
2020 November	34	52	13	64	2
2021 July	31*	50	17*	67	2

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding.*

POPULATION SEGMENTS

Attitudes within sub-groups of the population were analysed with reference to six demographic and two attitudinal variables. The demographic variables analysed, as in other sections of this report, were gender, state of residence, region (capital city or rest of state), age, highest level of completed education, and birthplace; the attitudinal variables were self-described financial situation and political alignment, indicated by response to the question: 'If there was a Federal election held today, for which party would you probably vote?'

The analysis found that in 2021 **majority agreement that the immigration intake was 'too high' in recent years** is obtained in only two sub-groups, and at a lower level than in the previous two years**: One Nation supporters** (67% 2021; 84% 2020; 83% 2018-19) and those with **education up to Year 11** (56%; 65%; 70%).

The **lowest level of agreement** that the immigration intake was 'too high' in recent years is among **Greens supporters** (13% in 2021, 14% 2020, 12% 2018-19), **those aged 18-24** (13%, 16%, 18%) and 25-34 (21%, 25%, 24%), with a postgraduate (23%, 26%, 27%) or bachelor's degree (17%, 21%, 27%), with self-described financial situation 'prosperous' or 'very comfortable' (24%, 28%, 35%), and of non-English speaking background (19%, 29%, 33%).

The politics of immigration is simplest to navigate for the Greens and One Nation parties. On the one hand, among Greens supporters there is little demand for a cut in immigration, on the other for One Nation the call for a cut to immigration is a major issue and serves to define the party. Opinion is more divided among Coalition supporters with 38% (45% in 2020) supporting the view that the immigration intake has been 'too high', 61% (54% in 2020) that it has been 'about right' or 'too low'. There is less division among Labor supporters in 2021, with 22% (30%) of the view that immigration has been 'too high', 77% (70%) that it has been 'about right' or 'too low'.

Table 29 2018-19: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present? Would you say it is...'? 2020-21: 'What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia in recent years? Would you say it has been ...'? Response: 'too high', July 2021 (July 2020 and 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	30 (35, 43)	32 (41, 43)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	28 (35, 41)	30 (39, 45)	27 (31, 44)	33 (39, 45)	38 (43, 42)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	28 (34, 40)	38 (45, 49)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	13 (16, 18)	21 (25, 24)	27 (31, 43)	38 (46, 51)	42 (50, 51)	41 (50, 64)	37 (48, 56)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	23 (26, 27)	17 (21, 27)	33 (38, 40)	36 (48, 51)	23 (29, 34)	56 (65, 70)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	24 (28, 35)	29 (35, 42)	36 (46, 43)	42 (48, 51)			
INTENDED VOTE	Greens	Labor	Liberal/ National	One Nation			
	13 (14, 12)	22 (30, 38)	38 (45, 54)	67 (84, 83)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	35 (41, 48)	29 (36, 34)	19 (29, 33)				

THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION

Three questions further explored attitudes to immigration, to determine if there was heightened negativity compared to recent years. The questions asked whether immigrants benefited Australia by introducing new ideas, whether they had a positive impact on the economy, and in negative terms whether they took jobs away and failed to integrate.

Consistent with the pattern of opinion throughout the report, there is no evidence of heightened negative sentiment in 2021 when the impact of immigration is considered. There is no indication that heightened concerns for employment and safety during the pandemic has led to heightened negativity towards immigrant groups.

In 2021 **less than one in four respondents (24%) agree that 'immigrants take jobs away',** a substantially lower proportion than 30% in July 2020, and 35% in 2019.

Disagreement with the proposition that 'immigrants are generally good for the economy' is at 14% in 2021, down from 18% in July 2020 and 23% in 2019.

Just 15% disagree with the proposition that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures,' compared to 23% in 2018. All of these negative responses are substantially lower than the proportions indicated prior to the pandemic.

Conversely, with reference to positive responses, in 2021, **84% (82% in July 2020) agree that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures,'** 86% (83%) agree that 'immigrants are generally good for the economy', and 75% (70%) disagree with the proposition that 'immigrants take jobs away.'

A question in the 2020-21 surveys asked for response to the proposition that 'someone who was born outside of Australia is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in Australia'. Agreement was at 90%-91% in 2020, 92% in 2021.

Table 30 The impact of immigration, selected questions, 2018-2021 (percentage, LinA)

QUESTION AND RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
'Immigrants take jobs away' ('strongly agree', 'agree')	34	35	30	28	24*
'Immigrants are generally good for the Australian economy' ('strongly disagree', 'disagree')	25	23	18	16	14
'Immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures' ('strongly disagree', 'disagree')	23	20	18	16	15
N (unweighted)	**2,260**	**2,033**	**3,090**	**2,793**	**3,572**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05*

Multiculturalism

The Scanlon Foundation surveys **find a consistently high level of endorsement of multiculturalism**. The finding for 2021 is consistent with past years, with **an increase in the proportion favourable to multiculturalism.**

Since 2013, the Scanlon Foundation surveys have asked for response to the proposition that **'multiculturalism has been good for Australia.'** Agreement in the RDD version of the survey was consistently in the range 83%-86%. This very high level of agreement was also obtained in the self-completion (LinA) version of the survey, although a lower proportion indicated 'strong agreement'. **With 'strong agreement' and 'agreement' combined, agreement was at 77% in 2018, 80% in 2019, a higher 84% in both July and November 2020, and 86% in 2021.**

It is unusual to find such a high level of positive response – above 80% – to any question that deals with a government policy that has been the subject of controversy; for example, in July 2021, 67% viewed the immigration intake of recent years as 'about right' or 'too low'.

In 2021, as in past years, the strongest level of agreement with the value of multiculturalism is found among Greens 97% (97% in 2020, 96% in 2018-19) and Labor supporters 90% (91%, 84%); those aged 18-24, 98% (96%, 91%) and 25-44 at 91%; with a bachelor's degree 94% (94%, 88%) or post-graduate degree at 92%; and of non-English speaking background 92%.

There are few sub-groups in which there are relatively high levels of disagreement with multiculturalism. By a large margin, the highest proportion indicating disagreement is among One Nation supporters, although lower in 2021 at 43% (56% in 2020, 65% in 2018-19), with smaller proportions among those with education to Year 11, 29% (30%, 36%); aged 75 and above, 22% (26%, 17%); and whose financial status is 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor', 22% (22%, 31%).

Figure 14 'Multiculturalism has been good for Australia', 2018-2021 (percentage, LinA)

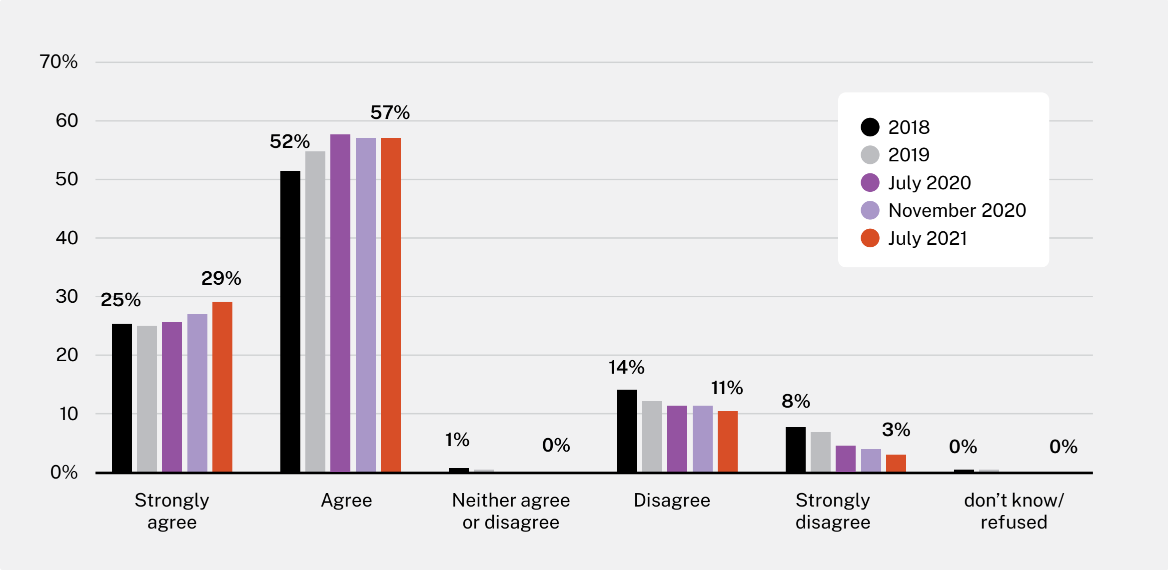


Photo by Mitchell Luo on Unsplash

Table 31 ‘Multiculturalism has been good for Australia’ 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Strongly agree	26	25	26	27	29
Agree	52	55	58	57	57
Sub-total agree	**77**	**80**	**84**	**84**	**86**
Neither agree nor disagree	1	1	0	0	0
Disagree	14	12	11	11	11
Strongly disagree	8	7	5	4	3
Sub-total disagree	**22**	**19**	**16**	**16**	**14**
N (unweighted)	**2,260**	**2,033**	**3,090**	**2,793**	**3,572**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 32 ‘Multiculturalism has been good for Australia’, Response: ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, July 2021 (July 2020, 2018-19 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	12 (14, 18)	15 (18, 23)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	10 (14, 17)	13 (16, 20)	12 (11, 25)	12 (15, 20)	21 (22, 27)		
REGION	Capital city	Rest of state					
	11 (14, 18)	18 (21, 26)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	2 (4, 9)	9 (10, 13)	9 (12, 21)	17 (18, 23)	18 (20, 26)	21 (23, 36)	22 (26, 17)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	7 (11, 12)	6 (6, 10)	14 (16, 23)	17 (23, 26)	9 (10, 14)	29 (30, 36)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	10 (13, 12)	12 (16, 21)	16 (17, 20)	22 (22, 31)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	9 (9, 15)	18 (20, 24)	3 (3, 4)	43 (56, 65)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	16 (18, 24)	13 (15, 17)	8 (10, 12)				

Photo by Stewart Munro on Unsplash

Indigenous Australians

Rejection of discriminatory and racist perspectives was also indicated by questions concerning Indigenous Australians. No less than 90%, among the highest level obtained for any question across the survey, indicated agreement with the proposition that 'The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community is very important for Australia as a nation'. Agreement with inclusion in the school curriculum of 'Indigenous histories and cultures' was almost at the same exceptional level, 88%.

There was a large measure of agreement across demographics on the importance of the relationship between Indigenous Australians and the wider Australian community. Agreement was highest among women (92%, 88% men), residents of New South Wales (93%), those with a bachelor degree (94%), supporters of the Labor Party (94%) and the Greens (93%). The lowest level of agreement was among One Nation voters (80%) and residents of Western Australia (85%). In no other population segment considered was agreement below 87%. Uniformity of opinion is indicated by the finding that agreement was at 90.3% among residents of a capital city and 90.1% among residents outside capital cities.

Table 33 Attitudes to relations with Indigenous Australians, 2021 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	'THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS AND THE WIDER AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR AUSTRALIA AS A NATION'	'IT IS IMPORTANT FOR INDIGENOUS HISTORIES AND CULTURES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM'
Strongly agree	46	46
Agree	44	42
Disagree	7	9
Strongly disagree	2	3
Refused/ Don't know	1	1
Total	**100**	**100**

May not sum exactly due to rounding

Discriminatory Attitudes

Since 2015, the Scanlon Foundation survey has tested the extent of support for immigration restriction. Respondents have been asked:

> 'Do you agree or disagree that when a family or individual applies to migrate to Australia that it should be possible for them to be rejected simply on the basis of...
>
> [a] Their race or ethnicity?
>
> [b] Their religion?'

Across the surveys there has been a large measure of consistency in the rejection of this form of discrimination in immigrant selection.

For both modes of surveying (RDD and LinA), strong support for discrimination ('strongly agree') on the basis of race or ethnicity was indicated by **a small minority, in the range 5%-8% and a lower 4% in 2020-21.**

Strong support ('strongly agree') for discrimination on the basis of religion was at a marginally higher level, in the range 8%-11% for both modes of surveying, a lower 6% in July 2020 and 5% in 2021.

In 2021, **with 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses combined, support for discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity is at 16%,** compared with a higher 22% in 2018, 23% in 2019, and 17% in July 2020; **on the basis of religion, support for discrimination was at 29% in 2019, 23% in July 2020, and 20% in 2021.**

Table 34 'Do you agree or disagree that when a family or individual applies to migrate to Australia, that it should be possible for them to be rejected simply on the basis of their race or ethnicity?' 2015-19 RDD, 2018-2021 LinA (percentage)

RESPONSE	RDD				LinA				
	2015	2017	2018	2019	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Strongly agree	7	8	7	5	8	8	4	4	4
Agree	12	8	8	10	13	15	13	14	12
Sub-total agree	**19**	**16**	**15**	**15**	**22**	**23**	**17**	**18**	**16**
Neither agree nor disagree	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	36	32	32	32	43	41	44	40	41
Strongly disagree	41	48	49	49	35	36	38	41	42
Sub-total disagree	**77**	**80**	**81**	**81**	**78**	**77**	**82***	**81**	**83**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 35 'Do you agree or disagree that when a family or individual applies to migrate to Australia, that it should be possible for them to be rejected simply on the basis of their religion?' 2015-19 RDD, 2018-2021 LinA (percentage)

RESPONSE	RDD				LinA				
	2015	2017	2018	2019	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Strongly agree	9	9	8	8	11	11	6	7	5
Agree	12	11	9	10	17	18	16	17	15
Sub-total agree	**20**	**20**	**18**	**17**	**29**	**29**	**23**	**24**	**20***
Neither agree nor disagree	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree	38	33	35	30	39	40	43	39	42
Strongly disagree	39	41	43	49*	32	30	34	37	37
Sub-total disagree	**76**	**74**	**78**	**79**	**71**	**70**	**76**	**76**	**79***

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

A DIVERSE IMMIGRATION INTAKE

Further insight into the level of support for discrimination in immigration policy is provided by other questions in the Scanlon Foundation surveys.

In response to the proposition that **'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger'**, there has been a consistent level of agreement, in the range 62%-68% across the interviewer administered surveys (RDD). Agreement was in the same range in the self-administered surveys (LinA): 63% in 2018 and 67% in 2019 (67%), but at a **higher 71% in July 2020, 74% in November, and 76% in 2021.**

Less than one-third (26%-30%) of respondents in the RDD version of the survey have disagreed with the value to Australia of 'immigrants from many different countries', a marginally higher proportion (32%-36%) in 2018-19 LinA surveys. **Again, the proportion with negative views on this question has been lower during 2020-21: 28% in July 2020, 25% in November, and 23% in 2021.** 'Strong disagreement' was at 11%-13% in the 2018 and 2019 LinA surveys, a lower 6% in both 2020 surveys and 4% in 2021.

Table 36 'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger', 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Strongly agree	17	17	19	21	23
Agree	46	50	53	53	53
Sub-total agree	**63**	**67**	**71**	**74**	**76**
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0	0	1	0
Disagree	24	22	22	19	19
Strongly disagree	13	11	6	6	4*
Sub-total disagree	**36**	**32**	**28**	**25**	**23**
N (unweighted)	**2,260**	**2,033**	**3,090**	**2,793**	**3,572**

**Change between Nov. 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Table 37 'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger', 2007-19 (percentage, RDD)

RESPONSE	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Strongly agree	22	25	19	24	26	22	26	27	30	26	29	30
Agree	45	43	43	40	39	40	41	40	36	37	37	38
Sub-total agree	**67**	**68**	**62**	**64**	**65**	**62**	**68**	**67**	**67**	**63**	**66**	**68**
Neither agree nor disagree	3	3	6	6	6	6	5	4	4	5	3	4
Disagree	18	18	19	16	15	18	16	17	16	16	17	15
Strongly disagree	8	9	11	11	11	11	10	9	11	13	13	12
Sub-total disagree	**26**	**27**	**30**	**27**	**26**	**29**	**26**	**27**	**27**	**30**	**30**	**28**
N (unweighted)	**2,012**	**2,019**	**2,021**	**2,001**	**2,000**	**1,200**	**1,526**	**1,501**	**1,500**	**2,236**	**1,500**	**1,500**

Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding

NATIONALITY

The 2021 Scanlon Foundation surveys also tested **attitudes towards specific national and faith groups.**

With regard to ten specified national groups, the 2021 survey asked: 'Would you say your feelings are positive, negative, or neutral?'.

Negative response ('very negative' or 'somewhat negative') was at 5%-6% towards British, Italians, and Germans; a higher 13% towards Americans; 27% towards Indians; 31% towards Ethiopians; and 38% towards Lebanese. It was **above 40% towards Iraqis (42%), Chinese (43%), and Sudanese (46%).**

Comparison of the results obtained in November 2020 with July 2021 finds that **for the five national groups for which negative response was above 25%, the proportions were lower in 2021**: for Chinese by 1 percentage point, Indian by 6, Lebanese by 7, Iraqis by 7, and Sudanese by 10.

Comparison of the results obtained in July 2020 with July 2021 finds that negative response was lower by 4 percentage points for China, by 1 for India, by 4 for Lebanon, by 7 for Iraq, by 3 for Sudan, and by 4 for Ethiopia.

These findings indicate that **in Australia, as in all countries, there continues to be a hierarchy of ethnic preference** that informs attitudes towards immigrants, with negative views held by a minority. **But a key issue explored in the analysis of the 2021 survey is the lessening of negative opinion, generally by small margins, that has occurred in the context of the pandemic.**

Table 38 'Would you say your feelings are positive, negative, or neutral towards [national group]?' Response: 'very negative' and 'somewhat negative', 2020-21 (percentage, LinA)

	LinA		
	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
United Kingdom	6	7	6
United States	18	17	13*
Italy	6	n/a	5
Germany	7	n/a	6
China	47	44	43
India	28	33	27*
Lebanon	42	45	38*
Iraq	49	49	42*
Sudan	49	56	46*
Ethiopia	35	n/a	31

**Change between Nov. 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05.*
Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding

FAITH GROUPS

The 2021 surveys asked respondents for their attitude to six faith groups. As in past years, and by a substantial margin, **the highest negative response was towards Muslims, at 32%.** This compares with negative attitude at 4% towards the Buddhist faith group, 9% Jewish, 13% Christian, 10% Hindu, and 12% Sikh.

Attitudes to three of the faith groups – Christian, Buddhist and Muslim – have been considered in the LinA version of the Scanlon Foundation surveys since 2017, towards Hindus since 2019, and provide insight into the trend of opinion in 2020.

In 2021, the proportion indicating negative views has not changed significantly for two of the faiths for whom comparative data is available; the negative proportion is marginally lower for the Buddhist (7% 2018, 4% 2021) and substantially **lower for Muslim (41% 2017, 32% 2021).** For the Christian and Hindu faiths, the change in negative response has been in a narrow range, respectively 11%-14% and 10%-12%.

The highest proportion (26% in the LinA surveys) indicating negative attitude to Christians are respondents who when asked for their faith indicate they are of 'no religion'.

Long-run indication of attitudes is provided by the RDD version of the survey, which included the question on faith groups between 2010-19. For this form of question there is significant variation by mode of survey administration, with much higher negative sentiment towards the Muslim faith in the self-completion (LinA) version: prior to 2020 negative response was in the range 21%-25% RDD, 39%-41% LinA.

Although not providing data which can be directly compared with the 2021 LinA survey, the long-range findings are significant for understanding trend of opinion, supporting the finding of the LinA survey that **while negative sentiment to the Muslim faith is at a relatively high level, there has been no increase. Rather, there is indication of statistically significant lessening of negative sentiment,** with the LinA finding of 40% negative in 2018 and 32% in 2021.

Table 39 'Is your personal attitude positive, negative or neutral towards ... [faith group]?', Response: 'very negative' and 'somewhat negative', 2017-21 (percentage, LinA)

FAITH GROUP	2017	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Buddhist	6	7	6	5	4	4
Jewish	--	--	--	9	9	9
Christian	12	12	14	11	12	13
Hindu	--	--	10	12	12	10
Sikh	--	--	--	13	14	12
Muslim	41	39	40	37	35	32

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 not significant at p=<.05*

Table 40 'Is your personal attitude positive, negative or neutral towards Muslims?', 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

RESPONSE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021
Very positive	6	5	6	5	6
Somewhat positive	12	13	13	16	15
Sub-total positive	**17**	**18**	**19**	**21**	**21**
Neutral	44	41	43	44	46
Somewhat negative	22	24	25	23	22
Very negative	17	17	13	12	10*
Sub-total negative	**39**	**40**	**37**	**35**	**32**
Don't know/decline	0	1	0	0	0
N (unweighted)	**2,260**	**2,033**	**3,090**	**2,793**	**3,572**

**Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05. . Subtotals may not sum exactly due to rounding*

Photo by Visual Karsa on Unsplash

Experience of Discrimination

A question posed in the Scanlon Foundation survey asks respondents if they have experienced discrimination over the previous twelve months 'because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.'

There was a large measure of consistency in reported experience of discrimination in the RDD and LinA versions of the Scanlon Foundation survey; in the RDD version between 2013-19, experience of discrimination was in the range 18%-20%, with the exception of 15% in 2015. In the LinA version it was 19% in 2018 and 16% in 2019.

In July 2020, 18% of respondents indicated an experience of discrimination, which is close to the average of the previous three years; in November a substantially lower 13%.

In July 2021, a marginally higher 16% reported discrimination.

Reported experience of discrimination was indicated in July 2021 by 15% of residents in New South Wales, lower than the 18% in July 2020. The relative proportions for Victoria were 16% and 15%; Queensland 18% and 24%; Western Australia 18% and 20%; and South Australia 12% and 13%.

Analysis by age group finds that the reported experience of discrimination for the LinA surveys **was highest among those aged 18-44 and followed the pattern of previous years**. In 2021, experience of discrimination was in a narrow range of 21%-22% indicated by those aged 18-44, 13%-16% aged 45-64, 7% aged 65-74, and 3% aged 75 or older.

Figure 15 'Have you experienced discrimination in the last twelve months because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion?' Response: 'yes', 2007-19 RDD, 2018-2021 LinA

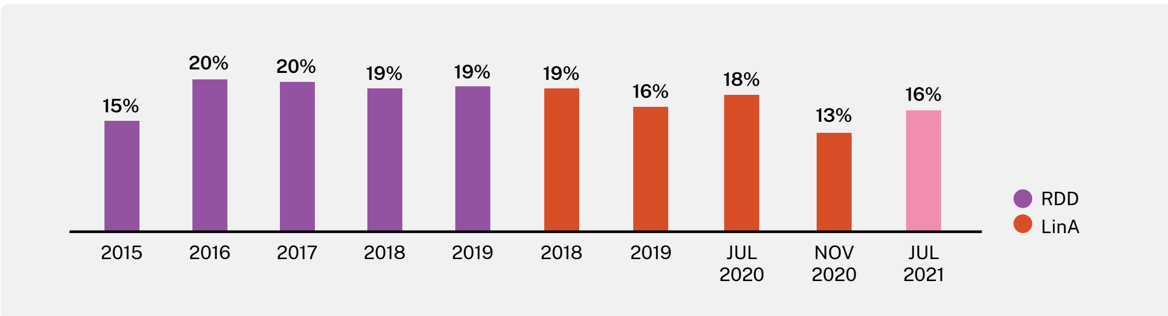


Figure 16 Reported experience of discrimination by age, 2020 July, 2021 July, (percentage, LinA)

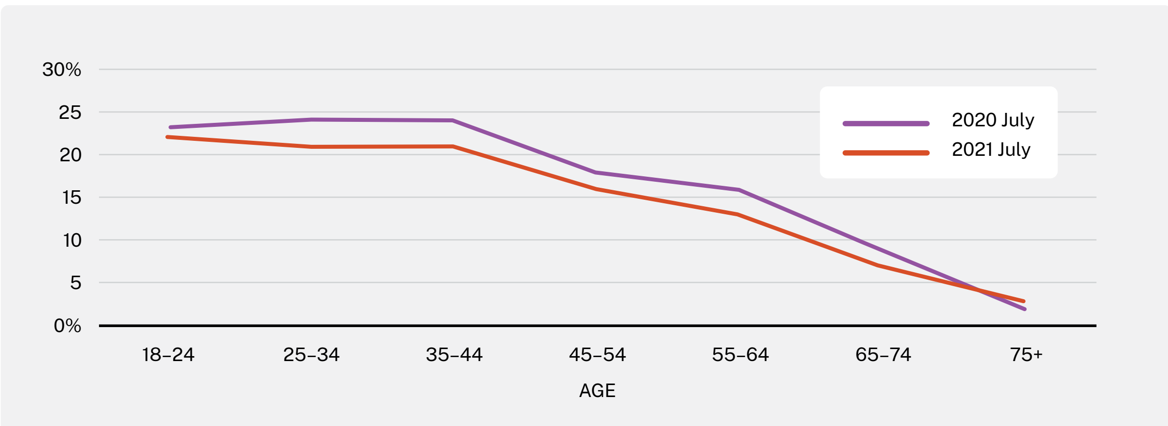


Table 41 'Have you experienced discrimination in the last twelve months because of your skin colour, ethnic origin or religion?' Response: 'yes' by age, 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	AVERAGE
2018	25	27	26	21	15	3	3	18.8
2019	20	26	20	18	15	4	2	16.3
2020 July	23	24	24	18	16	9	2	18.0
2020 November	16	17	20	12	9	6	2	13.1
2021	22	21	21	16	13	7	3	15.8
AVERAGE	**21.2**	**23.0**	**22.2**	**17.0**	**13.6**	**5.8**	**3.0**	**16.4**
N = July/ Nov. 2020 (unweighted)	**106/ 89**	**390/ 331**	**476/ 432**	**511/ 458**	**631/ 566**	**630/ 603**	**319/ 292**	**3,090/ 2,793**

Consistent with the pattern of previous surveys, **in 2021 those of a non-English speaking background reported the highest experience of discrimination by a large margin:** 34%, compared to 11% of those born in Australia and 12% of those born overseas in an English speaking country. Comparison of results obtained in July 2020 and July 2021 finds an indication of discrimination that is lower in 2021 by three percentage points among those born in Australia, three points lower among those born in an English-speaking country, but two points higher among those born in a non-English speaking country.

The average for the five LinA surveys conducted between 2018-21 finds reported experience of discrimination for Australia-born at 12.0%, 15.4% for those of English-speaking background, and a much higher 31.6% for those of non-English speaking background.

The results for the 2021 survey were compared with the results obtained in July 2020 and the aggregated results for the 2018 and 2019 LinA surveys to analyse the pattern of reported experience of discrimination by eight variables. Reported experience of discrimination was relatively high among those of non-English speaking background (34%), those whose self-described financial status is 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' (23% in 2021, 38% in 2020), those under the age of 45 (21%-22%; 23%-26% in previous years), and those whose highest completed education is at the postgraduate level (22%, 23%).

Reported experience of discrimination in 2021 is particularly low among those aged 65-74 and 75 or older (7%, 3%), with education up to Year 11 (9%), with highest level of education at the trade or apprentice level (11%), and those born in Australia (11%).

Table 42 Reported experience of discrimination by birthplace, 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

BIRTHPLACE	2018	2019	JUL 2020	NOV 2020	JUL 2021	AVERAGE
Australia	13	13	14	9	11	12.0
English-speaking background	23	15	15	12	12	15.4
Non-English-speaking background	35	26	32	31	34	31.6

Table 43 Reported experience of discrimination by birthplace, 2013-19 (percentage, RDD)

BIRTHPLACE	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	AVERAGE
Australia	16	16	12	17	15	17	17	15.7
English-speaking background	16	11	11	19	21	20	11	15.6
Non-English-speaking background	28	29	22	26	34	25	29	27.6

Table 44 Reported experience of discrimination, 2021 (July 2020, 2019 in brackets) (percentage, LinA)

GENDER	Female	Male					
	16 (17, 16)	16 (19, 20)					
STATE	Victoria	New South Wales	Western Australia	South Australia	Queensland		
	16 (15, 20)	15 (18, 17)	18 (20, 22)	12 (13, 11)	18 (24, 18)		
REGION	Capital	Rest of state					
	17 (20, 20)	13 (15, 12)					
AGE	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65-74	75+
	22 (23, 23)	21 (24, 26)	21 (24, 23)	16 (18, 19)	13 (16, 14)	7 (9, 4)	3 (2, 3)
HIGHEST COMPLETED EDUCATION	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor degree	Diploma/ Technical Certificate	Trade/ Apprenticeship	Year 12	Up to Year 11	
	22 (23, 27)	16 (19, 24)	17 (20, 19)	11 (14, 11)	18 (19, 18)	9 (12, 10)	
FINANCIAL SITUATION	Prosperous/ very comfortable	Reasonably comfortable	Just getting along	Struggling to pay bills/ Poor			
	12 (13, 11)	15 (15, 15)	19 (21, 20)	23 (38, 28)			
INTENDED VOTE	Labor	Liberal/ National	Greens	One Nation			
	16 (19, 14)	15 (14, 13)	13 (13, 15)	13 (35, 22)			
BIRTHPLACE	Australia	ESB	NESB				
	11 (14, 13)	12 (15, 23)	34 (32, 35)				

NATIONAL GROUPS

Analysis by region and country of birth finds substantial variation in the reported experience of discrimination, consistent with other surveys.

In 2021, experience of discrimination was indicated by 8% (12% July 2020) of respondents born in the United Kingdom or Ireland, 11% (14%) in Australia, **and a significantly higher 40% (39%) born in Asia. It was indicated by 38% of respondents born in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan.**

This is similar to the pattern obtained in earlier Scanlon Foundation surveys. The July 2020 survey found that experience of discrimination on the basis of race, skin colour or religion was indicated by 14% of respondents born in Australia, 12% born in the United Kingdom or Ireland, and a significantly higher 39% in Asia.

The relatively high proportion of respondents born in an Asian country indicating experience of discrimination is consistent with negative experiences indicated in response to a number of questions in the 2020 and 2021 surveys, but **comparison with findings obtained in 2018-19 indicates consistency rather than heightened experience of discrimination: in 2018-19 discrimination was indicated by 41% of respondents born in an Asian country, in July 2020 by 39%, and in July 2021 by 42%.**

Balance of Australian Opinion

This section seeks to further explore the extent of change in attitudes that has occurred in 2020 and 2021 by considering opinion on a range of issues related to immigration and cultural diversity.

The objective is to determine the relative proportions with strongly held views – whether positive or negative – **and whether the balance has changed in the context of the pandemic**. The focus is on LinA surveys conducted between 2018-21.

There is, however, no simple or definitive basis to determine the balance of opinion: answers are dependent on the specific questions and issues considered.

The range of questions in the Scanlon Foundation surveys provide scope to consider a number of perspectives. The following analysis considers eight questions that dealt with immigration and cultural diversity, most of them requiring a response to a statement. Only questions that have been asked since 2018 and with a five-point response scale (from strongly agree/positive to strongly disagree/negative) are included.

An important finding of this analysis is that the proportion holding strong negative views has decreased since 2018, particularly in 2020-21.

The eight questions are:

1. 'Ethnic minorities in Australia should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions.'
2. 'Is your personal attitude positive, negative, or neutral towards Muslims?'
3. 'Is your personal attitude positive, negative, or neutral towards Buddhists?'
4. 'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger.'
5. 'Do you agree or disagree that it should be possible to reject [applicants to migrate to Australia] simply on the basis of their religion?'
6. 'Do you agree or disagree that it should be possible to reject [applicants to migrate to Australia] simply on the basis of their race or ethnicity?'
7. 'Multiculturalism has been good for Australia.'
8. 'My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together.'

STRONG NEGATIVE AND STRONG POSITIVE

The Scanlon Foundation surveys have found that irrespective of survey mode, **the proportion holding strong negative views on issues of immigration and cultural diversity are in a small minority**, **in the range 1%-10%** since 2018 for seven of the eight questions here considered.

The proportion with strong positive views for these questions is in the range 6%-42%.

With reference to the impact of mode of surveying, there was only minor variation in strong negative views when the survey was run in parallel by two modes, indicating that the proportion of the population with strong negative views is constant irrespective of survey mode; those with strong negative opinions are not reticent to indicate them to an interviewer nor to disclose them when completing an online survey.

There was, however, some variation by survey mode in the proportion indicating strong positive views. This may be a function of what is known in surveying as Social Desirability Bias. In conversation with an interviewer, respondents may overstate their positive values, which are more truthfully indicated in a self-completion survey.

The pattern of response to the eight questions considered finds three groupings.

A. **Low strong negative** (2021, 2%-5%), **high strong positive** (2021, 11%-42%) in response to questions on neighbourhood, multiculturalism and immigrant selection on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion.

B. **Low strong negative** (2021, 1%-10%), **mid-range strong positive** (2021, 6%-23%) in response to questions on the value of a diverse immigration intake, and attitudes to those of the Buddhist and Muslim faiths.

C. **High strong negative** (2021, 17%), **low strong positive** (2021, 8%), obtained in response to general statements in favour of integration, based on a concern that many immigrants are not integrating into Australia life. Thus, when presented with the proposition that 'ethnic minorities should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions', the proportion with strong negative views is greater than the proportion with strong positive.

CHANGE IN 2020-21

The 2020-21 Scanlon Foundation surveys find a lower level of strong negative sentiment. Strong positive sentiment is either constant or marginally higher.

Thus, in the LinA surveys, strong negative view of multicultural policy was indicated by 7% of respondents in 2019, 4%-5% in 2020, and 3% in 2021; strong agreement with discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity in immigration selection was at 8% in 2019, 4% in 2020-21. Strong disagreement with the view that a diverse immigration intake 'makes Australia stronger' was at 11% in 2019, 6% in July and November 2020, and 4% in 2021; strong negative view of Muslims was at 17% in 2019, 13% in July and 12% in November 2020, 10% in 2021; and strong negative view of government assistance to ethnic minorities was at 29% in 2019, 21% in July and November 2020, and 17% in 2021.

Strong positive views on multicultural policy were at 25% in 2019, 26% in July and 27% in November 2020, and 29% in 2021; strong disagreement with discrimination in immigrant selection on the basis of religion increased from 30% in 2019 to 34% in July and 37% in November 2020 and was at 37% in 2021. Strong agreement with the value of a diverse immigration intake increased from 17% in 2019 to 19% in July and 21% in November 2020, and 23% in 2021. Strong positive views towards those of the Buddhist and Muslim faiths remained close to the 2019 level in 2020-21.

Table 45 Immigration and cultural diversity, selected questions, 2018-21 (percentage, LinA)

QUESTION AND RESPONSE	SURVEY	STRONG NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE	NEITHER	POSITIVE	STRONG POSITIVE
'Ethnic minorities in Australia should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions' ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')	**2021**	**17***	**43**	**1**	**30**	**8**
	2020-Nov	21	43	0	28	7
	2020-July	21	42	0	30	6
	2019	29	40	0	26	4
	2018	30	39	1	25	5
Personal attitude towards Muslims ('very negative' to 'very positive')	**2021**	**10***	**22**	**46**	**15**	**6**
	2020-Nov	12	23	44	16	5
	2020-July	13	25	43	13	6
	2019	17	24	41	13	5
	2018	17	22	44	12	5
Personal attitude towards Buddhists ('very negative' to 'very positive')	**2021**	**1**	**3**	**44**	**32**	**20**
	2020-Nov	2	3	42	33	20
	2020-July	1	3	44	30	21
	2019	3	3	42	33	20
	2018	2	5	46	28	19
'Accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger' ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')	**2021**	**4***	**19**	**0**	**53**	**23**
	2020-Nov	6	19	1	53	21
	2020-July	6	22	0	53	19
	2019	11	21	0	50	17
	2018	13	24	0	46	17
'Do you agree or disagree that it should be possible for them to be rejected on the basis of their race or ethnicity?' ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree')	**2021**	**4**	**12**	**0**	**41**	**42**
	2020-Nov	4	14	0	40	41
	2020-July	4	13	0	44	38
	2019	8	15	0	41	36
	2018	8	13	0	42	35
'Do you agree or disagree that it should be possible for them to be rejected on the basis of... their religion?' ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree')	**2021**	**5**	**15**	**0**	**42**	**37**
	2020-Nov	7	17	0	39	37
	2020-July	6	16	0	43	34
	2019	11	18	0	40	30
	2018	11	17	0	39	32
'Multiculturalism has been good for Australia' ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')	**2021**	**3**	**11**	**0**	**57**	**29**
	2020-Nov	4	11	0	57	27
	2020-July	5	11	0	58	26
	2019	7	12	1	55	25
	2018	8	14	1	52	25
'My local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together' (excludes 'not enough immigrants in my area') ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')	**2021**	**2**	**12**	**0**	**73**	**11***
	2020-Nov	2	11	0	70	14
	2020-July	1	13	1	71	14
	2019	3	15	0	66	13
	2018	4	18	0	65	11

Change between November 2020 and July 2021 significant at p=<.05;

1 High strong negative/ low strong positive
1 Low strong negative/mid-range strong positive
1 Low strong negative/high strong positive

2

Part Two
The Australian Cohesion Index

> This section details the new Australian Cohesion Index – a combination of subjective and objective indicators to build a robust picture of cohesion in Australia.

Introducing the Australian Cohesion Index

A new feature of the Mapping Social Cohesion report is the Australian Cohesion Index, which combines subjective and objective indicators of cohesion in Australia.

In the post-war decades, monitoring of social wellbeing had emphasised economic development, measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the total value of the goods and services produced by the economy of a country in a year. This focus was driven by a belief in the power of economics to transform society, reduce poverty and improve wellbeing.

In the 1980s a new emphasis came to prominence, recognising, in the words of Dr Mahbub ul Haq, Founder of the United Nations Human Development Report, the **need to measure "more significant things regarding human life than just the market value of commodities brought and sold"**:

> People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in higher measured income or growth figures: better nutrition and health services, greater access to knowledge, more secure livelihoods, better working conditions, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, and a sense of participating in the economic, cultural and political activities of their communities. (UN Human Development Report 1990: 9)

It was acknowledged that rapid GDP growth and high-income levels on their own were no guarantee for human progress or a cohesive society. On its own, GDP did not address distributional concerns about how economic resources were shared between individuals.

There was a high point of interest in the identification of an optimum number of indicators of social progress in the years 2008-12. A Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress was established by President Sarkozy of France, headed by Joseph Stiglitz (Nobel Prize winner in economics, 2001), with Amartya Sen (Nobel Prize winner in economics, 1999) serving as advisor, and with co-ordination by Jean Paul Fitoussi, a leading French economist and sociologist. In what came to be known as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission Report, it was reported that:

> **The time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's wellbeing …** Emphasising wellbeing is important because there appears to be an increasing gap between the information contained in aggregate GDP data and what counts for common people's wellbeing. (Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission 2009: 12)

The commission recommended that data collection should **include both objective and subjective indicators.**

While there has been substantial research undertaken on a framework of indicators to supplement the GDP, **as in the work on social cohesion there is no consensus: rather, a range of approaches, different descriptors and different metrics.** (see the recent Canadian review, Sanmartin et al. 2021).

Although not focused on social cohesion, however defined, this significant body of work is of direct relevance to the development of a broadly conceptualised Australian Cohesion Index as it incorporates leading international evaluations of indicators of socially cohesive societies.


Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Currently there is an overlap of concepts, as indicated in the OECD's 2011 definition, which emphasises both the ideational and distributive domains of social cohesion and conceptualises "a cohesive society works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility" (OECD 2012). Overlap is also evident in the paper 'Social Cohesion in Canada: Possible Indicators' (2000) prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development, which discusses **"conditions favourable for inclusive social cohesion," including economic conditions, life chances and quality of life, alongside ideational and behavioural aspects of cohesive activity.**

THE VALUE OF AN INDEX?

Ian Castles, the former Australian Statistician, argued in 1998 that "composite indicators are unsatisfactory because they imply there is a single answer to the question of whether life in a particular country is getting better or worse. But there can be no single answer." One of his successors, Trevor Sutton, argued in terms similar to the OECD Better Life Initiative that "**we prefer an approach where there is a dashboard, and where there are a range of social, economic and environmental indicators that people can look at and come to their own judgement** about how they might want to weight those various measures of progress in Australia's society, and about whether they think Australian society is progressing across those key areas of interest." The major impediment to compiling an index was the difficulty of reaching agreement on the weighting of specific indicators. (Hawkins 2014: 201)

Proponents of indexes, on the other hand, argue that their value lies in providing summation of complex datasets. An index can also provide **an effective introduction and guide to** the data on which the index is based. It is argued that GDP, in various forms, has been influential because it is presented in a single number. Indexes of social progress that reduce a complex reality to a single number **cannot be ends in themselves, but provide an important starting point** for monitoring social progress.

Dr Mahbud ul Haq, argued that while the HDI might be seen as overly-simple, it would motivate people to explore the wealth of information included in its report. Also referring to the HDI, Amartya Sen stated that while he was initially sceptical of the index, "which is inescapably crude," he came to recognise its value as "an introductory move in getting people interested in the rich collection of information" on which it is built. (Sen 1999)

An additional value of an index is that in its summation it reflects the real world. When people are asked to describe their lives, they generally think in terms of **an overall impression**, not as a series of indicators; for instance, most people have no problem responding to a survey question about their level of happiness.

An index is not, however, to be considered as an end in itself. A weakness of an index is that **it can mask significant disparities in a population. Hence it is important to consider variation alongside the population average**, as recognised in the data reported by the OECD Better Life initiative. Key variations include the differences between men and women, old and young, those at the top and bottom (for example, the income of the top 10% of individuals and bottom 10%), and the proportion of the population below minimum thresholds, such as health, income and educational attainment.

While there is thus clear value in an index, it needs to be approached with an understanding of both its advantages and limitations.

DIFFERING APPROACHES

Just as there are different approaches to conceptualising social cohesion and wellbeing, and different views on the value of an index, so there are **different approaches to selecting indicators and aggregating** data. The main approaches are:

1. Gross Domestic Product, with various adjustments to reflect social as well as economic development.
2. As index based on objective (statistical) indicators, subjective (survey derived) indicators, or a composite index incorporating both objective and subjective indicators.
3. A dashboard of indicators organised within domains, hosted on the internet. (Hawkins 2014)

A leading example of a composite index is **the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, whose approach has been influential in the development of the ACI.** The dashboard approach in exemplified by the United Kingdom's Measures of National Wellbeing and the OECD Better Life Initiative, also the internet site of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

In current projects, **there is considerable variance in the number of domains and indicators, and the balance of objective and subjective indicators**. The simplest indexes comprise only one indicator, such as the World Happiness Report, which uses a self-assessed level of happiness (rated on a scale of 0 to 10) obtained from the Gallup World Poll, which ranks 95 countries by their level of happiness. In contrast the OECD's *How's Life?* Report comprises 15 domains and over 80 indicators. The Canadian Index comprises 8 domains, with 8 indicators in each, heavily weighted towards objective indicators, comprising 55 objective and 9 subjective indicators. The UK National Wellbeing Dashboard comprises 24 objective and 17 subjective indicators.

While there are different approaches, a consideration of more than 25 international indexes and dashboards finds a large measure of convergence. **Building on the extensive international work, ten domains and 42 indicators have been selected for the Australian Cohesion Index**, as detailed in the following tables. The findings for objective indicators are discussed in detail in this report, pages 79–103. The objective domains are Material Conditions – Income and Assets; Material Conditions – Employment; Health; Education; and Participation and Connectedness. The subject domains derived from the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI), are: Belonging; Worth; Social Inclusion and Justice; Participation; and Acceptance/ Rejection.

CALCULATING THE AUSTRALIAN COHESION INDEX

The approach of the Australian Cohesion Index (ACI) most closely resembles the Canadian Index of Wellbeing. As with the Canadian Index, **equal weighting is assigned to each indicator and each domain**. Details on the calculation of the ACI are provided in the appendix to this report. Again, in similar terms, both the Canadian Index and the ACI are envisaged as:

> **not a static measuring tool, carved in stone for all time. It grows and changes as more becomes known** about those factors that affect our wellbeing, how to measure changes in our quality of life, and when more sources of quality data become available. (Canadian Index of Wellbeing 2012: 14)

One feature differentiating the subjective and objective components of the ACI is timing. **Survey data is obtained at a specific point in time**, as with the Scanlon Foundation surveys which are conducted in July each year. In contrast, **objective indicators are collected at different points in time, hence in most cases they are recent but not current**. For example, the most recent Australian National Health Survey that has been released is for 2017-18; for indicators of school performance, one data set is for 2019, the other for 2018; the most recent federal election data is for 2019.

The ACI provides indication of **change in Australian society over the mid-term**. To enable a broad range of indicators to be used, data from 2018 (or as close as possible to 2018) is employed, benchmarked against data from 2008, **providing indication of change over a decade.** Subjective indicators are drawn from the 2018 Scanlon Foundation survey, benchmarked against the Scanlon Foundation survey conducted in 2007 (as there was no survey in 2008). It was decided not to cover the decade 2009-2019 as some indicators from 2009 were skewed because of the impact of the Global Financial Crisis.

To ensure that this report is current, it includes a section utilising objective indicators on the impact of the pandemic and presents the SMI result for 2021.

In keeping with the findings of the Scanlon Foundation surveys, the objective indicators point to a society characterised by a large measure of stability. As indicated in Table 46, the Index score for objective indicators is 97, subjective indicators 90, averaged to produce the **Australian Cohesion Index score of 94.** This score points to a small decline over the decade of six index points from the 2007-08 benchmark.

Table 46 Australian Cohesion Index

OBJECTIVE DOMAINS	2008	2018
Material Conditions – Income and Assets	100	102
Material Conditions – Employment	100	88
Health	100	103
Education	100	107
Participation and Connections	100	85
Average, objective domains	**100**	**97**
SUBJECTIVE DOMAINS (SCANLON-MONASH INDEX)	**2007 (RDD)**	**2018 (RDD)**
Belonging	100	92
Worth	100	94
Social Inclusion and Justice	100	92
Political Participation	100	101
Acceptance (rejection)	100	69
Average, subjective domains	**100**	**90**
ACI (average of objective and subjective domains)	**100**	**94**

Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Within the **objective domains, positive indication** is obtained in the domains of Education (107 index score), Health (103), and Material Conditions – Income and Assets (102). **Negative indication** is obtained for the domains of Material Conditions – Employment (88) and Participation and Connections (85), which obtains the lowest index score.

Among **individual indicators, positive** indication includes median household disposable income (111 index score), reduction of the proportion of households in relative income poverty (116), reduction of the workforce working more than 50 hours (112), reduction of health risk factors (smoking 137, alcohol consumption 130), the increased proportion with tertiary level educational qualifications (129), and voting in the federal election (105).

Negative indication includes the percentage of low income households in rental stress (81 index score), the underemployment ratio (67), youth unemployment (81), percentage aged 15 and above with high or very high psychological distress (92), and a number of indicators in the Participation and Connections domain: voluntary work (80), donations (87), involvement in a community support group (72) and a civic and political group. (50)

Within the subjective domains, four of the five subjective domains have moved to the negative, but the aggregated Index score is skewed by the low score obtained in the domain of Rejection (Acceptance). Three of the domains obtained index points in the range 92-94: Belonging (92), Social Inclusion (92) and Worth (94). Political participation is little changed from 2007 and in 2018 was at 101 index points. The **relatively low score of 69 obtained in the domain of Rejection (Acceptance) is in large part a function of the marked increase in experience of discrimination**, which was reported by 9% of respondents in 2007, 19% in 2018. Within the Rejection (Acceptance) domain there was also an increase in the proportion of respondents expecting their lives to be worse in three or four years (11% to 14%) and an increase (26% to 30%) in the proportion disagreeing with the statement that 'immigration from many different countries makes Australia stronger'.

Table 47 ACI - objective indicators

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	RAW VALUE		INDEX SCORE	
			2008	2018	2008	2010
MATERIAL CONDITIONS – INCOME AND ASSETS						
GDP	GDP per capita adjusted for inflation to base year	ABS	56,027	57,545	100	103
Income	Equivalised median household disposable income adjusted for inflation to base year	ABS	88.381	97,850	100	111
Relative income poverty (%)	Household disposable income below 50% of the national media, percentage	OECD	14.0	12.1	100	116
Income inequality	Gini coefficient for equivalised disposable household income	ABS	0.336	0.328	100	102
Rental stress (%)	Percentage of low income households in rental stress, capital cities	AIHW	38.5	47.8	100	81
Wealth inequality	Gini coefficient for household net wealth	ABS	0.602	0.621	100	97
Domain index score	**Mean**					**102**
MATERIAL CONDITIONS – EMPLOYMENT			**2008**	**2018**	**2008**	**2010**
Labour force participation rate (15-64) (%)	Seasonally adjusted percentage in labour force, June, as share of population aged 15-64	ABS	76.7	78.2	100	102
Unemployment rate (15-64) (%)	Seasonally adjusted percentage unemployed, June, as share of labour force aged 15-64	ABS	4.3	5.5	100	78
Underemployment ratio (15-64) (%)	Seasonally adjusted percentage underemployed, June, as share of employed people aged 15-64	ABS	6.1	9.2	100	67
Youth (15-24) unemployment (%)	Seasonally adjusted percentage unemployed, June, as share of labour force aged 15-24	ABS	9.0	11.2	100	81
Working hours (%)	Percentage of workforce working more than 50 hours	OECD	14.0	12.5	100	112
Domain index score	**Mean**					**88**
HEALTH			**2008**	**2018**	**2008**	**2010**
Life expectancy at birth in years	Men	ABS	79.5	80.9	100	102 (A)
Life expectancy at birth in years	Women	ABS	84.0	85.0	100	101 (A)
Self-assessed health status (age 15+) (%)	Percentage aged 15 and above with excellent, very good or good self-assessed health status	ABS	84.9	85.2	100	100
Psychological distress level (age 18+) (%)	Percentage aged 15 and above with high or very high psychological distress	ABS	12.0	13.0	100	92
Health risk factors: smoking (age 18+) (%)	Percentage aged 18 and above current daily smoker	ABS	18.9	13.8	100	137 (B)
Health risk factors: weight (age 18+) (%)	Percentage aged 18 and above overweight or obese	ABS	61.2	67.0	100	91 (B)
Health risk factors: alcohol (age 18+) (%)	Percentage aged 18 and above exceeding lifetime risk guidelines for alcohol	ABS	20.9	16.1	100	130 (B)
Domain index score	**Mean**					**103**

EDUCATION			2008	2018	2008	2018
NAPLAN Year 9 average reading (score)		NAPLAN	578.0	581.3	100	101 (A)
NAPLAN Year 9 average numeracy (score)		NAPLAN	582.2	592.1	100	102 (A)
PISA reading (score)		ACER	515	503	100	98 (B)
PISA mathematics (score)		ACER	514	491	100	96 (B)
PISA science (score)		ACER	527	503	100	95 (B)
Non-school qualification Certificate III/IV or above (25-64) (%)	Percentage aged 25-64 with non-school qualification. Certificate III/ IV or above	ABS	59.2	66.7	100	113
Bachelor degree or higher (20-64) (%)	Percentage aged 20-64 with bachelor's degree or above	ABS	24.4	31.4	100	129
Persons aged 15-24, fully engaged in employment, education or study (%)		ABS	83.7	81.1	100	97
Domain index score	**Mean**					**107**

PARTICIPATION AND CONNECTIONS			2008	2018	2008	2018
Voluntary work (%)	Percentage age 18 and above undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in last 12 months	ABS	36.2	28.8	100	80
Donations (%)	Tax-deductible donations claimed by taxpayers, proportion taxpayer claiming	AIHW	34.9	30.4	100	87
Organisational involvement: social groups (%)	Percentage age 18 and above involved in group in last 12 months	ABS	62.5	50	100	80 (A)
Organisational involvement: community support groups (%)	Percentage age 18 and above involved in group in last 12 months	ABS	34.9	25	100	72 (A)
Organisational involvement: civic and political groups (%)	Percentage age 18 and above involved in group in last 12 months	ABS	18.7	9.4	100	50 (A)
Voting (%)	Voter turnout for federal election, percentage of eligible voters	Aust. parliament	84.7	89.0	100	105
	Mean					**85**

Note: Indicators designated (A) are averaged, as are indicators designated (B). For calculation of the objective component of the ACI, see Appendix 2 to this report.

Table 48 ACI – Subjective indicators

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	2007	2018
BELONGING		**%**	**%**
Pride in the Australian way of life and culture	To a 'great' or 'moderate' extent	94 (58)	89 (55)
Sense of belonging	To a 'great' or 'moderate' extent	96 (77)	90 (64)
Importance of maintaining the Australia way of life and culture	'Strongly agree' or 'agree'	95 (65)	90 (58)
Score (index points)		**100**	**92**
WORTH			
Satisfaction with present financial situation	'Very satisfied' or 'satisfied'	74 (16)	72 (17)
Indication of happiness over the last year	'Very happy' or 'happy'	89 (34)	85 (25)
Score (index points)		**100**	**94**
SOCIAL INCLUSION AND JUSTICE			
People on low incomes receive enough financial support from government	'Strongly agree' or 'agree'	45 (12)	38 (12)
Gap between high and low incomes is too large	'Strongly disagree' or 'disagree'	18 (2)	19 (4)
Australia is a land of economic opportunity	'Strongly agree' or 'agree'	81 (34)	74 (34)
Trust the government in Canberra	'Almost always', 'most of the time'	39 (8)	30 (4)
Score (index points)		**100**	**92**
PARTICIPATION			
Voted in election	Yes	85	82
Signed a petition	Yes	55	52
Contacted a member of parliament (x2)	Yes	24	23
Participated in a boycott (x2)	Yes	12	18
Attended a protest (x2)	Yes	13	11
Score (index points)		**100**	**101**
REJECTION/ ACCEPTANCE			
Immigration from many different countries makes Australia stronger	'Strongly disagree' or 'disagree'	26 (8)	30 (13)
Reported experience of discrimination in the last 12 months	Yes	9	19
Government support to ethnic minorities for cultural maintenance	'Strongly disagree' or 'disagree'	62 (26)	57 (29)
Life in three or four years	'Much worse' or 'little worse'	11 (2)	14 (5)
Score		**100**	**69**

Note: The strongest level of response (for example, 'strongly agree') is indicated in brackets. The strongest level of response is scored at twice the value of the second level (for example, 'agree'). The 2007 survey was administered by interviewers by telephone (RDD), the 2018 survey that employed the same methodology (RDD) is used for the index construction. See explanation of the index calculation in footnote 2, above; see also the discussion of the Scanlon-Monash Index on pages 24–31 in this report.

Objective Indicators

OVERVIEW

As noted, between 2008-12 there was a high-point of interest in the development of metrics to measure social progress. In the words of a leading government inquiry, the search was for

> a statistical system that complements measures of market activity by measures centred on people's wellbeing and by measures that capture sustainability. Such a system must, of necessity, be plural – because no single measure can summarize something as complex as the wellbeing of the members of society… (Stiglitz et al. 2009: 8)

Most of the leading international indexes of social cohesion and wellbeing that have been developed preference statistical or objective indicators over attitudinal indicators obtained by surveys. For example, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing is comprised of 55 objective and 9 subjective indicators.

The Australian Cohesion Index that is developed in this report has close to even balance: it is comprised of 24 objective indicators and 18 subjective (from the Scanlon Foundation survey). The closest to this balance is the UK Measures of National Wellbeing Dashboard, comprising 24 objective and 17 subjective indicators.

Objective indicators for the period 2008-18 are considered for the insight they provide into stability and change in Australian society. It is important to determine if there are indicators of potential future threats to social cohesion. The statistical data that is included in the ACI is necessarily not current, as some important indicators are not collected annually. There is also a substantial time-lag before data is released.

The evidence presented in the following section of this report **points largely to stability; to a society that provides a high standard of living and opportunities for most of its population**. This perspective is consistent with the Scanlon Foundation survey findings; for example, when presented with the statement that "Australia is a land of economic opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life," close to 75% of respondents agree. The large number of immigrants seeking entry indicates the positive view held internationally of the quality of life in Australia.

Photo by Johan Mouchet on Unsplash

Photo by Rafael Leao on Unsplash

A WEALTHY SOCIETY

Australia is a member of the G20, which comprises the world's leading economies. It is classified by the International Monetary Fund as an 'advanced economy,' the eighteenth largest economy in the world as measured by Gross Domestic Product. **Australia has a level of economic prosperity matched by few countries.** Prior to the pandemic Australia achieved a record 29 years of recession-free expansion. Household net worth between 2009-10 and 2017-18 increased by 20%: from $852,000 to $1,022,000,

Close to two million additional workers were employed between 2008 and 2018 (an increase from 10.7 million to 12.6 million); in the record year – 2017 – employment increased by 393,400 persons. While most of this workforce growth is a result of the country's high rate of immigration, there was also increased workforce participation from domestic sources, particularly women and those over the age of 55. The labour force participation rate was at 76.7% in June 2008, and substantially higher at 78.2% in June 2018.

Unemployment has been at a relatively low level and did not rise to the levels in many advanced economies during the Global Financial Crisis. It was at 6.2% in 2014, 5.5% in June 2018 and 5.1% to 5.2% in the last months of 2018.

HEALTH

One of the most widely used indicators of population health is life expectancy at birth, which is viewed as a summary indicator of the health of a population. **Life expectancy in Australia continues to be ranked among the highest in the world**. Between 2017 and 2019, Australia had the eighth highest female and the fifth highest male life expectancy. Between 2004-05 and 2017-18, close to 85% of Australians rated their health as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good', with only minor variations across the National Health Survey years. However, **the proportion indicating mental or behavioural conditions has increased**. In 2017-18, 20.1% or 4.8 million Australians had a mental or behavioural condition, an increase from 17.5% or 4 million in 2014-15. Overall, mental health problems were more common amongst females than males (22.3% compared to 17.9%).

QUALIFICATIONS

An **increasing proportion of the population aged 25-64 has post-school qualifications** at Certificate III/IV level or above: 53.5% in 2008, 65.1% in 2018. The increase was mainly due to a higher proportion of people obtaining a university degree, with men and women gaining qualifications at almost the same rate. In 2008, 24.4% of Australians aged between 25 to 64 years had a tertiary qualification at a bachelor degree level or higher, in 2019, 32.7%.

VOTING

An indicator of a cohesive society is the **level of citizen engagement** with the political process by exercising the right to vote in elections. **Australia has one of the highest rates of electoral participation, a reflection of its compulsory voting system**. The proportion of the eligible population who registered to vote increased from 90.9% in 2012 to 96.8% in 2019. The increase in enrolment has resulted in an increased number participating in federal elections. In 2010, 84.7% of the Voter Eligible Population voted; in 2019, 88.9%.

Other indicators, however, are less positive and point to aspects of Australian life that warrant attention in the context of an evaluation of the potential threats to cohesion.

LEVEL OF DEBT

A feature of household finances is the **increased level of debt.** The housing debt to income ratio has increased over the last 20 years from 62% of annual disposable income in 1998 to 148% in 2018. In part, this increased level of debt reflects slow wages growth. Many people borrowed expecting their incomes to grow at the rate of earlier decades, but this expectation was not realised, leaving them with debt burdens they were unable to discharge.

EDUCATION

It is a truism that participation and engagement in education from an early age are essential for a person's development, foundational for both academic and general life success. There are two measures of school level educational attainment that provide data on the performance of students in Australia: the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The results obtained by **NAPLAN show only minor change** from the first year of testing in 2008, **but PISA,** a triennial survey of 15-year-old students, finds that Australian students performed relatively strongly in 2000, the year the survey commenced, but their **results have since declined**. For example, the Australian average for mathematics was 33 points higher than the OECD average in 2000, just two points higher in 2018.

PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING

The social networks of individuals and the development of trust and sharing that comes from personal interaction is **a key to the effective functioning of democracy**. As in the United States, there is **indication that civic participation is declining** in Australia, although the extent of decline is difficult to establish. As measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey, there has been a decline in participation in social groups from 63% in 2006 to 50% in 2019, and in civic and political groups from 19% to 9%.

The rate of **volunteering through an organisation has declined** over the last decade: from 36% in 2010 to 29% in 2019. Volunteers contributed 743.3 million hours to the community in 2014 and 596.2 million hours in 2019, a fall of 20%. This decline occurred in a changing volunteering environment. Volunteering is becoming more episodic and self-oriented and less associated with organisations. The 2016 State of Volunteering report found an increasing misalignment between volunteering roles that interest people and the roles that needed to be filled.

A positive finding is that Australian charitable giving is one of the highest in the world. The Charities Aid Foundation ranks Australia eighth in the 10-year period between 2009 and 2018 on the World Giving Index. Australian Taxation Office data show that tax-deductible donations have increased. After adjusting for inflation, total tax-deductible donations increased from $3 billion to $3.9 billion between 2007–08 and 2018–19. Although the total received by charities has increased, the **proportion of taxpayers claiming donations to charities on their tax returns has decreased** from 35% of taxpayers in 2007-08 to 29% in 2018-19.

GENDER

While in international comparisons Australia scores very highly in the area of educational attainment by women, it does less well in several economic indicators. One indicator, which points to a range of employment factors, is the **gender pay gap**, the difference between the average earnings of men and women in the workforce, calculated as a percentage of men's earnings. A comparison of average weekly earnings finds that the gender pay gap is 31.5%. One result of the different rates of earning is that in 2015-2016, on average, Australian women retired with $113,660 less superannuation than men, and women were more likely to experience poverty in retirement.

CASUALISATION OF THE WORKFORCE

In June 2018, 8,579,000 workers worked full-time and 4,012,000 worked part-time. While many people choose part-time by personal preference, around one-quarter (estimated **around 3% of the overall labour-force) were wanting extra hours but unable to obtain them**

POVERTY

Close to one in eight Australians live in relative poverty. Relative income poverty is indicated by household income below 50% of the median income. In 2016, 12.1% of households had this level of income, down from 14.0% in 2012.

Rental stress is defined by the ABS as households spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing. Within the low-income category, defined as those with the lowest 40% of household income, those in rental stress in capital cities increased between 2007-08 and 2017-18 by a substantial nine percentage points, from 38.5% to almost half the number of households (47.8%).

NEET

The acronym NEET refers to those not engaged in education, employment or training, to people who are considered disengaged from work and education. NEET is regarded as an important social and economic indicator. **Not participating in study or employment can contribute to future unemployment, lower income and employment insecurity.** Longterm outcomes of unemployment and job loss can lead to poor physical and mental health, family disruption, decreased social participation and poor educational attainment and wellbeing for their children.

In 2018, 8.6% of young men and 9.4% of women were NEET. The proportion has fluctuated over the previous ten years, in the range 7.5% - 10.0% of men and 9.2%-11.7% of women.

LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED

Between 2015-19, long-term unemployment was relatively stable at around 1.25%, with **one in five unemployed people having been unemployed for more than a year**, an increase from one in eight in the previous decade.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Younger people—defined as 15–24-year-olds—make up a large share of the unemployed. Younger workers are more adversely affected than the rest of the population at times of economic downturn, as has been the case during the pandemic. In the decade before 2018, unemployment and underemployment rates for younger people were **more than twice the rate for all workers**. In 2018, the unemployment rate for younger people in Australia was 11.2% (12.9% male, 9.1% female). A further issue is the changing basis of young people's employment. More than half (55%) now work part-time, compared to 15% in the early 1980s. This change is partly the results of the casualisation of the workforce, but also reflects the increased proportion of young people in full-time education.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

The Closing the Gap initiative aims at achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health and life expectancy within a generation. **While progress has been made over the past decade, only two of the targets are on track**. In 2016, 54% of Indigenous Australians of working age and living in Major Cities were employed, a lower 31% of those living in Very Remote areas.

In 2015-17, life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island males was 71.6 years and 75.6 years for females, 8.6 years less than non-Indigenous males and 7.8 years less for females. The gap narrowed by almost three years for males and two years for females over the previous ten years.

In education, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reaching the minimum standard is lower than the rest of the student population. For Year 9 students, difference was most marked in writing, with 53% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performing at or above the minimum standard, compared to 84% of non-Indigenous students.

Material Conditions

KEY INDICATORS

Income and Assets

- Gross Domestic Product
- Household income
- Relative poverty
- Income inequality
- Rental stress
- Wealth inequality

Employment

- Labour force participation
- Unemployment rate
- Underemployment rate
- Youth unemployment
- Working hours

Australia is a member of the G20, which comprises the world's leading economies. It is classified by the International Monetary Fund as an 'advanced economy,' the eighteenth largest economy in the world as measured by Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity adjusted).

Philip Lowe, Governor of the Reserve Bank, observed in 2018 that:

> **Australians enjoy a level of economic prosperity that few other people in the world enjoy.** Per capita incomes here are high and so, too, is wealth per capita. We have also avoided bouts of high unemployment for over a quarter of a century now. Our banking system is strong, we have world-class natural resources and Australians have access to high-quality health care and education. So there is much for us to feel fortunate about. (Lowe 2018)

Evidence on the performance of the economy is available in abundance. Indeed, **the most comprehensive statistical indicators are in the realm of economic performance**: for example, growth, profitability, imports and exports, the labour market, income and wealth. Some data sets released monthly, while indicators for other aspects of social well-being are annual, biennial or less frequent.

Australian economic growth over the last two decades has outpaced most leading economies, with Australia **recording 29 years of recession-free expansion** until the June quarter of 2020. From 2000 to the onset of the global financial crisis (GFC) in mid-2007, the nation averaged annual real GDP growth of over 3%, while in per capita terms growth was around 2%.

In the aftermath of the GFC there was a global economic downturn, with many countries experiencing their deepest recessions since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The impact was smaller for Australia than for other economies, explained by a range of factors, including low exposure of Australian banks to the US housing market and US banks. Australian growth slowed, but it was still maintained at close to 2.5% in real growth (1% per capita) until 2018, a full percentage point above the average OECD rate (Thirlwell 2019).

While a number of economic indicators show positive outcomes over the 2010s, indicators of inequality have remained. Concerns include slow wage growth, long-term unemployment, youth unemployment and housing stress.

INCOME

Personal income has grown over the decade since 2008. Median personal income was $42,987 in 2011-12, $49,805 in 2017-18, an increase of 16%. This was, however, a relatively slow rate of growth—around two percent per annum—compared to three to four percent in earlier decades. (Lowe 2018)

Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

Table 49 Median personal income, AU$

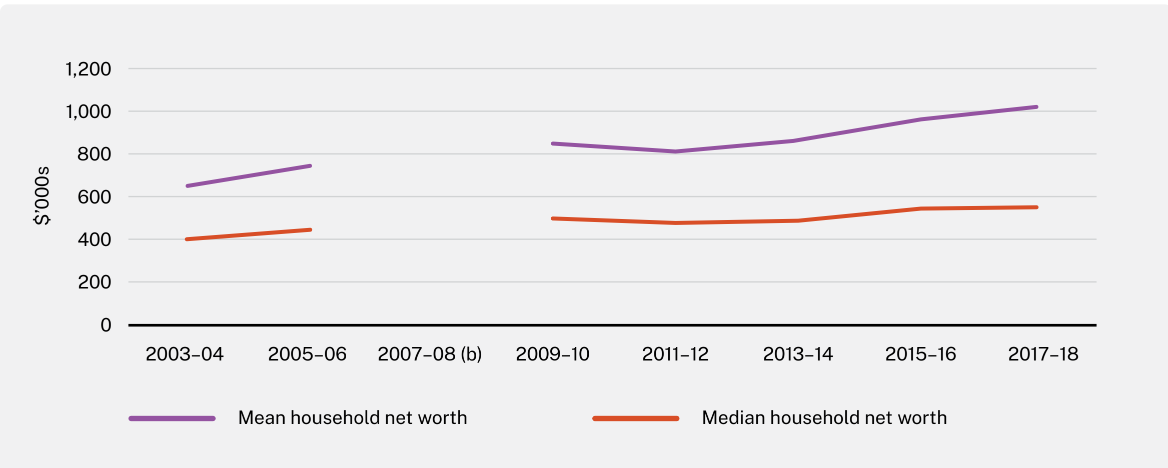
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Total income	42,987	44,778	45,828	46,854	47,692	48,360	49,805

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Income in Australia 2011-12 to 2017-18 (Released 16 Dec. 2020)

HOUSEHOLDS

Household net worth has grown over the last two decades, up to the September quarter of 2018, with the exception of five quarters during the GFC. **Mean household net worth was $852,000 in 2009-10 and $1,022,000 in 2017-18, an increase of 20%.** However, in the context of the skewing of income distribution, discussed below, **median household net worth finds lower growth**: an increase from $504,000 to $559,000 or 11% (ABS, Household Income and Wealth, released 12/07/2019). Equivalised household disposable income increased from $88,381 in 2008 to $97,850 in 2018, an increase of 10.7%.

Figure 17 Household net worth 2003-04 to 2017-18(a)



a) In 2017–18 dollars
b) Comprehensive wealth data was not collected in 2007–08
Source: ABS Survey of Income and Housing, various years
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Household Income and Wealth, Australia 2017–18 financial year

A feature of household finances is the increased level of household debt. **The housing debt to income ratio has increased throughout the last 20 years from 62% of annual disposable income in the September quarter of 1998 to 148% in the September quarter of 2018** (ABS, A decade before and after the global financial crisis, released 24/01/2019). Another indication of the level of debt is the ABS statistic on the proportion of households with debt three or more times their income, which increased from 23.4% to 28.4% between 2005-06 and 2017-18 (ABS Household Income and Wealth, reference period 2017-18, released 12/07/2019).

In part, this increased level of debt reflects **slow wages growth**. Many people borrowed expecting their incomes to grow at the rate of earlier decades, but this expectation was not realised, leaving them with debt burdens they were unable to discharge. Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe commented that "the slow wages growth is diminishing our sense of shared prosperity" (Lowe 2018).

INEQUALITY

A widely used indicator of income inequality is the Gini coefficient, a summary indicator with values between 0 and 1. A value of 0 indicates perfect equality, whereas 1 represents perfect inequality.

During the period of economic growth from the mid-1990s to 2009-10, inequality in Australia increased from 0.302 to 0.328. In the decade to 2017-18, the level of inequality has remained largely stable, within the range 0.336 and 0.328. In 2018, Australia's Gini coefficient ranked 13th highest out of 33 OECD member states.

At the same time, the Gini coefficient for household net wealth increased by 3.2%. From 2003-04 to 2017-18, **middle and high wealth households experienced a real increase in net worth**. The average net worth of middle wealth households increased from $415,800 to $564,500 (adjusted for inflation); high wealth households increased from $1.9 million to $3.2 million. Low wealth households, with an average net worth close to $35,000, did not experience an increase in net worth. (ABS, Household Income and Wealth, 12 July 2019)

Table 50 Gini coefficient, Australia

	2007–08	2015–16	2017–18	CHANGE 2007-08 TO 2017-18	%
Gini coefficient for equivalised disposable household income	0.336	0.323	0.328	-0.008	-2.4
Gini coefficient for household net wealth	0.602 (2009-10)	0.605	0.621	+0.019	+3.2

Source: ABS: Household Income and Wealth, Australia, released 12/07/2019. Equivalised Disposable Household income estimates are adjusted to standardise for variations in household size and composition, taking into account economies of scale that arise from the sharing of dwellings. Household net worth in 2017-18 dollars, adjusted using the Consumer Price Index.

Additional indicators of inequality are provided by comparing the wealth of different segments of the population. **In 2017-18, the lowest 20% of households had a mean net worth of $35,200;** the second lowest a worth of $231,100; the third lowest a worth of $565,500; the fourth lowest a worth of $1,04 million **and the wealthiest 20% a worth of $3.2 million.** (ABS, 2017-18 Household Income and Wealth Summary of Results, released 12 July 2019).

In the distribution of income, as distinct from wealth, there is substantial but less inequality. OECD statistics indicate that in Australia, the income of the top 20% of the population is nearly 5.5 times as much as the bottom 20%, a distribution of income that mirrors the OECD average. A more unequal distribution is found in the United States (8.4 times) and Great Britain (6.2 times).

Table 51 Ratio of average income of the top 20% to the average income of the bottom 20% of the income distribution, ratio

	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NZ	GBR	IRELAND	US	OECD
2012 (~2010)	5.52	5.26	5.19	5.92	4.63	8.63	5.47
2016 (~2017)	5.49	5.08	5.77	6.18	4.74	8.39	5.44

Source: OECD, How's Life? 2020, p.65

With regard to the distribution of wealth across the nation, **OECD analysis indicates that in 2014-16, the top 10% of wealth holders in Australia owned nearly half (46.5%) the wealth**. (OECD *How's Life? 2020*: 69)

At the other end of the wealth spectrum are those living in poverty. The Melbourne Institute's Household, Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) survey employs the most widely accepted approach, which "conceives of poverty as relative deprivation," measured as inadequacy of income. Consistent with the approach of the OECD, relative income poverty is indicated by household income below 50% of the median income, although HILDA also considers other approaches. The finding of the survey is that the relative poverty rate declined from 12.4% of the population in 2007 to 9.4% in 2016. It has increased since that time to 10.7% in 2018 (Wilkins 2020: 35, 37).

OECD analysis obtains a higher indication of poverty: the proportion of the Australian population with **income below 50% of household disposable income was 14% in 2012 and 12.1% in 2016**, slightly above the OECD average of 11.6%. (OECD, *How's Life? 2020*: 66)

GENDER GAP

A further indication of inequality in Australia is the income gender gap. While in international comparisons Australia scores very highly in the area of educational attainment by women, it does less well in several economic indicators. Women's participation in paid work has increased considerably over the past 50 years. In 1966 women made up 30% of the workforce, in 2018 participation had risen to almost half; yet inequalities persist. One indication is the statistic that in 2015-2016, on average, Australian women retired with $113,660 less superannuation than men, with the result that women were more likely to experience poverty in retirement.

The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of men and women in the workforce, calculated as a percentage of men's earnings. It is a measure of women's overall position in the paid workforce, not a comparison of remuneration in the same industries. Amongst OECD countries, the gender pay gap is between 14% and 20%. Australia is at the lower end of this range, where it has remained for two decades. The result is that women who work full-time on average earn close to $250 less per week than men. This measure, however, understates the gap, as it does not consider the relatively large proportion of women who are employed on a part-time basis. **A comparison of the earnings of all workers based on average weekly earnings finds that the gender pay gap increases to 31.5%** (Dawson *et al.*, 2020: 38-40).

Gender segregation in the Australian workforce should also be considered, with disproportionate numbers of women in female-dominated and less well remunerated industries such as aged-care, child-care and health and community services. (Human Rights Commission 2018)

WORKFORCE

As a consequence of sustained economic growth there was a **substantial increase of close to two million workers employed between 2008 and 2018 (from 10.7 million to 12.6 million).** The highest rate of annual growth since October 2011 was reached over the course of 2017, with employment up by 393,400 persons (or 3.3%). The employment to population ratio also increased by one percentage point to 62%.

Table 52 Employment: Employed persons, full-time and part-time

JUN 2010	JUN 2015	JUN 2017	JUN 2018
10,733,000	11,735,000	12,240,000	12,592,000

Source: Reserve Bank of Australia, Labour force (H5)

While the largest component of the increase was **from immigration, there was also increased workforce participation from domestic sources, particularly women and those over the age of 55.** The seasonally adjusted labour force participation rate was at 76.7% in June 2008 and 76.1% in January 2014. It was substantially higher at 78.2% in June 2018. According to the Reserve Bank, the increase in the number of workers reflected the wider availability of flexible and part-time work, with one in three Australians working part-time; improved child-care arrangements; the improved health of older Australians; and changes to the pension age. It is possible that higher debt also led to increased workforce participation, which after declining between 2008 and 2013-14 increased to a record level in 2019.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT RATE

While there is no definitive indication of what constitutes full-employment in the Australian economy, most estimates are in the range 4.5%-5%. Full-employment is never 0% or 1% because of a range of factors, including government labour supply policy and work readiness and qualifications of those looking for work.

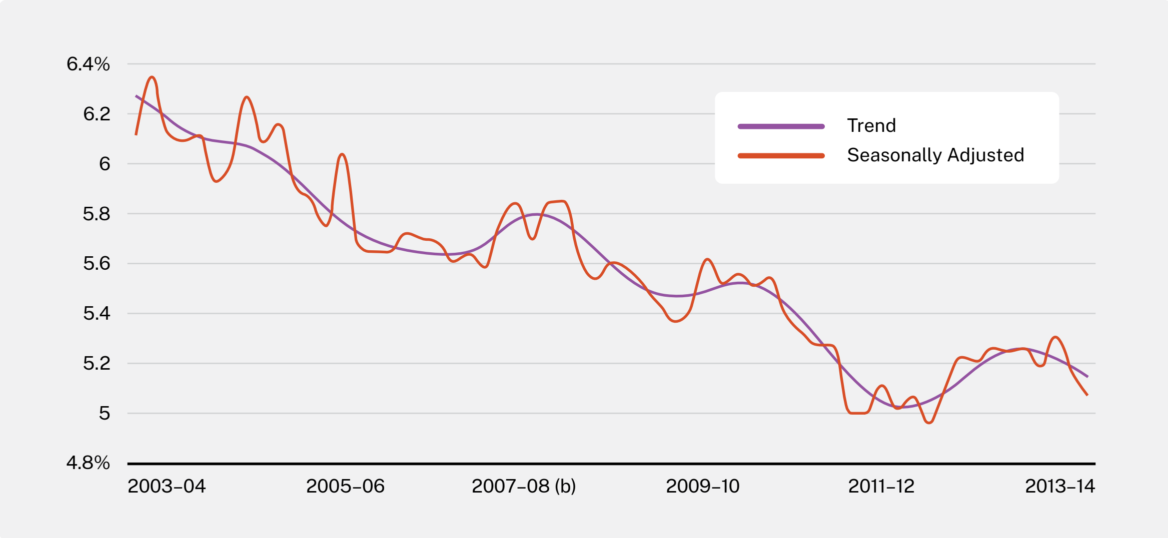
In the recession of the early 1990s, unemployment was in the range of 10% to 12% for more than two years. It was still at 8% in 1998 and 7% in 2001, before reaching a low point below 5% between May 2006 and January 2009, the lowest level since the early 1970s.

In the context of the Global Financial Crisis, unemployment increased by a relatively small proportion from 5% to 6%. It was at 6.2% in 2014, before a gradual decline to 5.5% in June 2018 and 5.1% to 5.2% in the last months of that year.

However, a substantial proportion of the labour-force (around one third) were in part-time employment at that time. **In June 2018, 8,579,000 workers worked full-time and 4,012,000 worked part-time.** While many people choose part-time by personal preference**, around one-quarter (estimated around 3% of the overall labour-force) were wanting extra hours but unable to obtain them** (Lowe 2018). The underemployment ratio—the ratio of those wanting to work more hours, expressed as a proportion of total employed—rose from 6.1 in June 2008 to 6 in July 2016 and was at 9.1 in June 2018. (Labour Force, Australia. Table 22. Underutilised persons).

Alongside the increase in part-time work, 12.5% of employees were **usually working long hours** (defined as 50 hours or more per week) in 2018, down from 14% in 2010. This proportion was **substantially above the OECD average** of 7.2%. (OECD, *How's Life? 2020*, p. 96).

Figure 18 Unemployed rate, persons, seasonally adjusted, percentage



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia Devember 2019

Table 53 Share of the labour force unemployed for one year or more, percentage

	AUSTRALIA	CANADA	NZ	GBR	IRELAND	US	OECD
2010	1.0	1.0	0.7	2.5	7.2	2.8	3.2
2018	1.0	0.6	0.6	1.1	2.5	0.5	2.1

Source: OECD, How's Life? 2020, p.92

LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Long-term unemployment is defined as being without paid work for twelve months or more. The long-term unemployment rate generally follows the overall unemployment rate, with a time lag. Between 2015-19, long-term unemployment was relatively stable at around 1.25%, **with one in five unemployed people having been unemployed for more than a year,** an increase from one in eight in the previous decade. Further, between 2015-19 around 10% of the unemployed had been without work for two or more years. The level of long-term unemployment in Australia in 2018 was half the average level in the OECD.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Younger people—defined as 15–24-year-olds—**make up a large share of the unemployed**. They are of particular concern for government and the community as early failure to obtain work can have long lasting effects.

Younger workers are more adversely affected than the rest of the population at times of economic downturn. In the decade before 2018, unemployment and underemployment rates for younger people were **more than twice the rate for all workers**. In 2018, the unemployment rate for younger people in Australia was 11.3% (13.2% male, 9.3% female), compared to the overall unemployment

Table 54 Unemployment rate, youth, aged 15-24, seasonally adjusted, percentage

	2008 JUNE	2011 JUNE	2014 JUNE	2018 JUNE
Male	9.4	11.7	15.0	13.2
Female	8.8	10.5	11.7	9.3
Persons	9.0	11.2	13.4	11.3

Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, August 2018 rate of 5.4%. It was marginally higher than the average of OECD economies.

HOUSING

Substantial changes in the housing market have occurred in the past two decades. There has been a decline in home ownership, especially ownership without a mortgage; an increase in the proportion renting and an increase in the proportion of households paying more than 30% of their income on housing.

In 2017–18, around two thirds (66%) of Australian households owned their own home with or without a mortgage, but **ownership of homes without a mortgage has declined by 10 percentage points since 1997-98—from 39.5% to 29.5%.** Conversely, the proportion of homes owned with a mortgage increased by almost 6 percentage points, and the proportion of those renting increased from 25.8% to 30.2% . The proportion of those renting from a state or territory housing authority declined by close to 3 percentage points, while the proportion of those renting from a private landlord increased by more than 7 percentage points.

Housing costs as a proportion of household income have also changed. Rental stress is defined by the ABS as households spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing. Between 1994-5 and 2017-18, the proportion of households in rental stress increased from 13.8% in 1994-95 to 17% in 2017-18. **Within the low-income category**, defined as those with the lowest 40% of household income, **in capital cities those in rental stress increased between 2007-08 and 2017-18 by a substantial 9 percentage points**—from 38.5% to 47.8%. Outside of capital cities the proportion increased from 29.5% to 35.6%.

Table 55 Housing tenure, 1997-98 to 2017-18, percentage

	OWNER WITHOUT A MORTGAGE	OWNER WITH A MORTGAGE	RENTER STATE OR TERRITORY HOUSING AUTHORITY	RENTER PRIVATE LANDLORD
1997-98	39.5	30.9	5.8	20
2007-08	33.2	35.1	4.5	23.9
2017-18	29.5	36.7	3.1	27.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2017-18 financial year

Table 56 Housing costs as a proportion of household income, 1994–95, 2005–06 and 2017–18, percentage

PERCENTAGE OF INCOME SPENT ON HOUSING COSTS	1994–5	2005–06	2017–18
50% or more	4.6	5.1	5.5
30%–50%	9.2	11.4	11.5
25%–30%	5.8	7.0	7.6
25% or less	80.3	76.5	75.3

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Housing Affordability, 30 June 2021

Table 57 Proportion of low income households in rental stress, by household location, 2007-08 to 2017-18, percentage

YEAR	CAPITAL CITIES	REST OF STATE	ALL HOUSEHOLDS
2007-08	38.5	29.5	35
2009-10	47	32.7	40.9
2011-12	44.9	32	39.7
2013-14	49.8	34.7	43.7
2015-16	48.7	36.8	44.3
2017-18	47.8	35.6	43.1

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's welfare, Housing affordability data tables, Figure 2

Health

KEY INDICATORS

- Life expectancy at birth
- Self-assessed health
- Psychological distress
- Health risk factors: smoking, weight, alcohol consumption

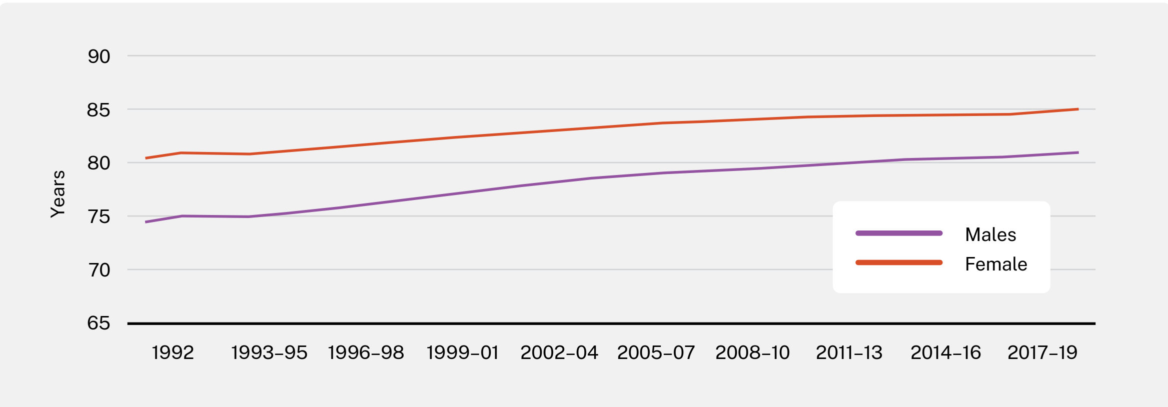
One of the most widely used indicators of population health is life expectancy at birth, which is viewed as a summary indicator of the health of a population. Life expectancy at birth is defined as the average length in years a newborn can expect to live if current death rates do not change through his or her life.

Life expectancy is Australia continues to be ranked among the highest in the world. Between 2017 and 2019, Australia had the eighth highest female and the fifth highest male life expectancy in the world.

Between 2005-07 and 2017-19, life expectancy in Australia for men increased by nearly two years, from 79 to 80.9 years, while it increased by 1.3 years for women, from 83.7 to 85 years.

Life expectancy differs between urban and rural regions. Between 2016 and 2018 Australia's more rural and remote populations had lower life expectancy than populations living in urbanised areas. In 2016–18, life expectancy at birth was highest in the Australian Capital Territory at 81.2 years for males and 85.1 years for females; it was lowest for both males and females in the outback region of the Northern Territory, where it was 72.8 years for males and 76.2 years for females. In the far west of New South Wales, it was 76.6 years for males and 81.7 years for females. (ABS Life Tables 2016-18, release 4/11/20). Low figures in the Northern Territory partly reflect **the much lower life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared with other Australians.** In 2015-17, life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island males was 71.6 years and 75.6 years for females. (Commonwealth of Australia 2019; ABS 2018, Life tables for ATSI)

Figure 19 Life expectancy at birth, 1992 to 2017-19



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Life tables 2017–2019

SELF-ASSESSED HEALTH

Self-assessed health is measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey (NHS). A question on self-assessed health is also included in the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey.

Self-assessed health is a commonly used measure of health status, included in the UK Measures of National Wellbeing, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the OECD *How's Life?* indicators.

The NHS and General Social Survey question used to determine self-assessed health status is worded: "In general, would you say your health is: excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?" These surveys have found **that close to 85% of Australians rated their health as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good' between 2004-05 and 2017-18**, with only minor variations over this period. With attention narrowed to two response options, the finding of the 2004-05 NHS survey was that 56.4% of Australians assessed their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' and this proportion remained almost unchanged over the next four surveys.

Table 58 Self-assessed health status, National Health Survey and General Social Survey. In response to the question, 'In general, would you say that your health is ...', percentage

NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY					GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY			
	Excellent/ very good	Good	Sub-total Excellent, Very good, Good	Fair/ poor		Excellent/ very good	Good	Fair/ poor
2004-05	56.4	27.8	84.2	15.8	2006	57.6	26.6	15.8
2007-08	56.1	29.0	85.1	14.9				
2011-12	56.0	29.9	85.9	14.1	2010	52.6	30.5	16.9
2014-15	56.2	28.9	85.1	14.8	2014	56.7	27.1	16.2
2017-18	56.4	28.8	85.2	14.7	2019	52.5	31.0	16.4

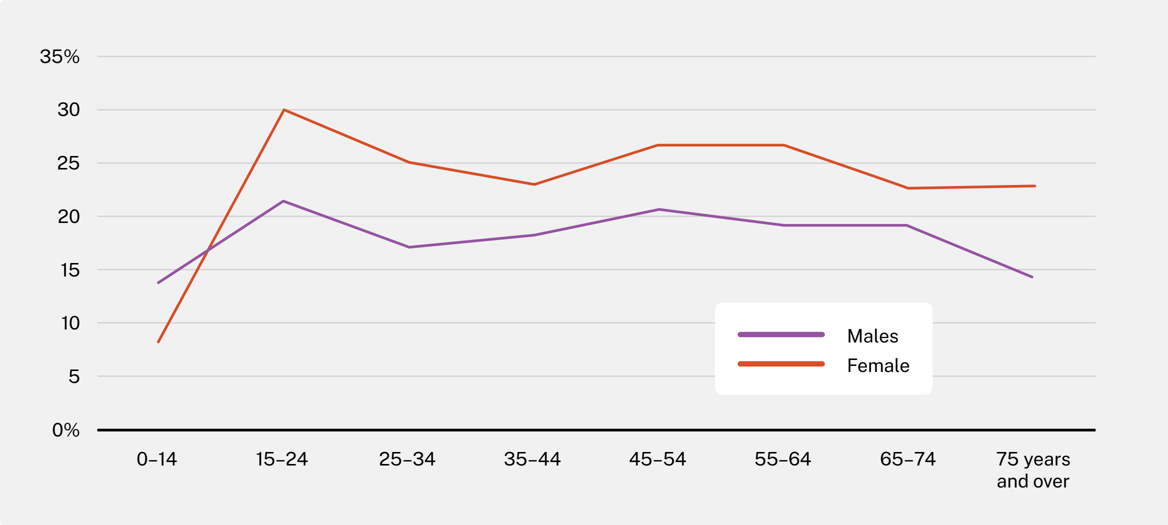
Source: ABS, National Health Survey, General Social Survey. For the NHS the published data is for respondents aged 15/+, with the exception of 2011-12 where it is 18/+; for the GSS, it is 18/+.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental and behavioural conditions are caused by a complex interplay of individual and social factors, both biological and psychological. They can also be influenced by social, environmental and economic situations. These conditions can have a significant impact on how a person thinks, behaves and participates in social activities. When introducing the results of its national survey, the ABS commented, "Good mental health is fundamental to *the wellbeing* of individuals, their families and *the population as a whole*" (ABS, National Health Survey, First Results, 2011-12, p.12, italics added).

A comparison of NHS findings for 2014-15 and 2017-18 finds that the proportion with mental or behavioural conditions has increased. In 2017-18, 20.1% or 4.8 million Australians had a mental or behavioural condition, an increase from 17.5% or 4 million in 2014-15. Overall, mental health problems were more common amongst females than males (22.3% compared to 17.9%).

Figure 20 Proportion of persons with a mental or behavioural condition, by age and sex, 2017-18



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Mental Health 2017–18 financial year

The components of mental or behavioural conditions are anxiety and depression related.

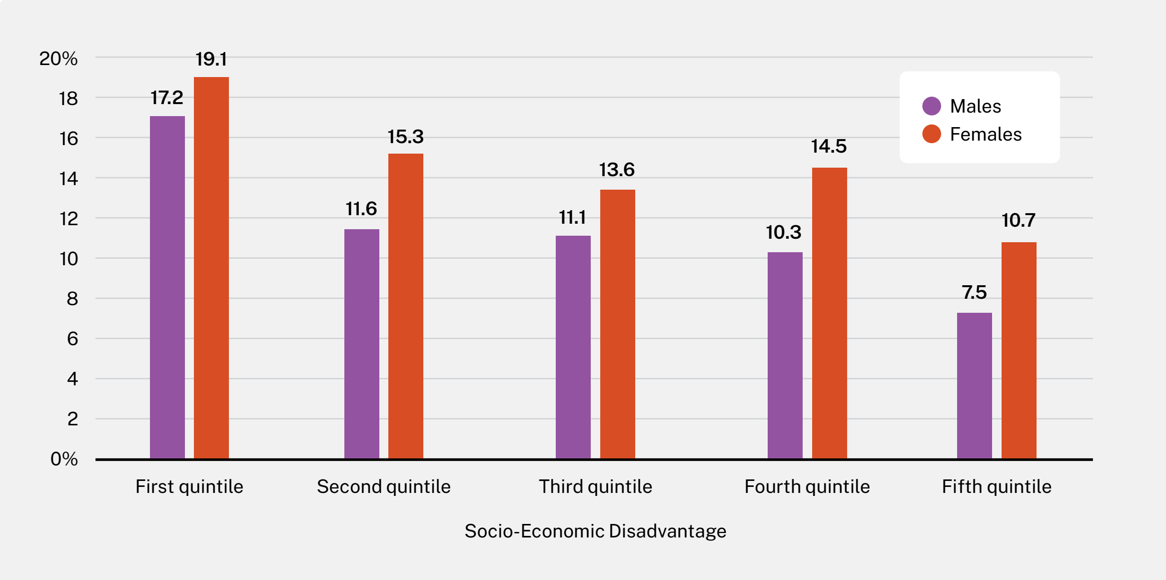
- **Anxiety-related**: In 2017-18, 13.1% (3.2 million people) had an anxiety-related condition, an increase from 2014-15 when 11.2% (2.6 million people) had such a condition. Females had an anxiety-related condition at one and a half times the rate of males (15.7% compared with 10.6%). The increase in rates of anxiety-related conditions between 2014-15 and 2017-18 was predominately in younger age groups. For females aged 15-24 years, the proportion with anxiety-related conditions increased from 18.9% in 2014-15 to 24.6%. For males of the same age, anxiety-related conditions almost doubled between the two surveys: from 7.9% to 13.9%, but remained substantially below the female proportion.
- **Depression-related:** Just over one in ten Australians (10.4%) had depression or feelings of depression in 2017-18, compared with 8.9% in 2014-15. Females had depression or feelings of depression at a higher rate than males (11.6% compared with 9.1% respectively), although the increase between 2014-15 and 2017-18 was especially evident amongst males aged 15-54 years (ABS, Mental Health, released 12/12/2018, National Health Survey results).

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

The proportion of people aged 18 or older indicating **high or very high levels of psychological distress was 12% percent in 2007-08, 13% in 2017-18**, representing 2.4 million people.

Social and economic conditions can impact on psychological mood. In 2017-18, **adults living in areas of highest socio-economic disadvantage were more than twice as likely to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress, compared to adults living in areas of least disadvantage** (18.3% compared with 9.0%). This is consistent with the pattern recorded in 2014-15 (17.7% compared with 7.3%).

Figure 21 Persons aged 18 and over – high or very high psychological distress by disadvantage(a), 2017-18



a) A lower index of Disadvantage quintile (e.g. the first quintile) indicates relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage in general. A higher Index of Disadvantage (e.g. the fifth quintile) indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage in general. See Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage in the Glossary.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Mental health 2017–18 financial year

HEALTH RISK FACTORS

The NHS provides data on the incidence of health risk factors. One risk, **smoking, has fallen significantly. Daily smoking was indicated by 22.3% of NHS respondents in 2001, 16.3% in 2011-12, and 13.8% by 2017-18**. Alcohol consumption that exceeds national health guidelines has also fallen, but by a smaller margin, but there has been little change in eating habits.

Rates of smoking are higher in more disadvantaged areas, with over one fifth (21.7%) of residents in areas of greatest relative socio-economic disadvantage indicating that they are daily smokers, compared with 6.8% in the least disadvantaged areas. This pattern remained constant between 2007-08 and 2017-18 (ABS, Smoking). **A higher proportion of men smoke** (16.9% compared to 12.1% for women). The Northern Territory has the highest rate of daily smokers (around one in five or 19.6%), compared with one in ten (10.6%) in Australian Capital Territory.

Alcohol consumption at a level that exceeds the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines also fell, from 20.9% of the population aged 18 or over in 2007-08 to 16.1% in 2017-18. However, **the proportion of the population that is overweight or obese increased** from 61.2% in 2007-08 to 67% in 2017-18. Inadequate fruit or vegetable consumption continues to characterise the adult population, with 93.9% having less than adequate nutrition in 2007-08 and 94.6% in 2017-18.

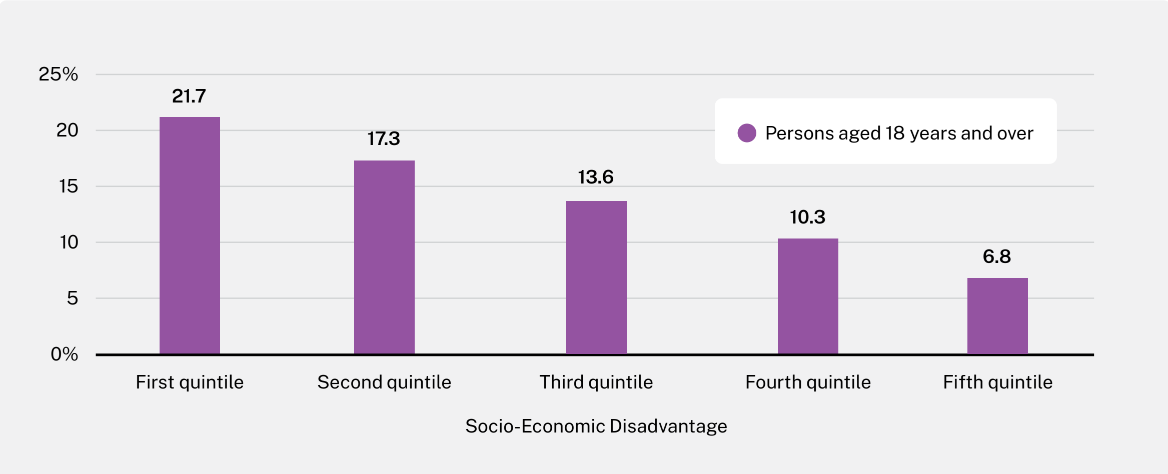
The proportion of adults aged 18 years and over who are overweight or obese increases with relative disadvantage. In 2017-18, seven in ten (71.8%) adults living in areas of greatest relative socio-economic disadvantage were overweight or obese, in comparison to six in ten (62.6%) in the least disadvantaged areas (fifth quintile).

Table 59 Health risk factors, persons aged 18 or over, selected indictors, percentage

	CURRENT DAILY SMOKER	SEDENTARY/ LOW EXERCISE LEVEL	ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION – EXCEED NHMRC LIFETIME RISK GUIDELINES	OVERWEIGHT/ OBESE	INADEQUATE FRUIT OR VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION
2001	22.3	69.4	18.5	---	---
2004-05	21.3	70.3	21.8	---	89.8
2007-08	18.9	72.3	20.9	61.2	93.9
2011-12	16.3	67.6	19.5	63.4	94.4
2014-15	14.5	66.2	17.4	63.4	92.9 (Veg.)
2017-18	13.8	---	16.1	67.0	94.6 (Fruit)

Source: ABS, National Health Survey, First results, 2017-18, Data downloads, Table 1, 2001-2017-18

Figure 22 Proportion of current daily smokers by areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage, 2017-18



a) A lower index of Disadvantage quintile (e.g. the first quintile) indicates relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage in general. A higher Index of Disadvantage (e.g. the fifth quintile) indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage in general. See Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage in the Glossary.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Smoking 2017–18 financial year

Education

KEY INDICATORS

- Year 9 standard – NAPLAN and PISA
- Non-school qualification
- Educational attainment – university degree of higher
- Youth not fully engaged in employment, education or training (NEET)

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) notes that "participation and engagement in education from an early age are essential for a person's development." These are critical foundations for both academic and general life success. Higher levels of education are connected to "better employment, income, health and life satisfaction" (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019: Snapshots).

ASSESSING STANDARD REACHED BY YEAR 9 STUDENTS

There are **two measures of school level educational performance of students**: the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

NAPLAN is a series of tests focused on basic skills that are administered annually to Australian students. These standardised tests assess students› reading, writing, language and numeracy. NAPLAN was introduced in 2008 and there has been a great deal of contention among those in the education sector as to whether the tests are appropriate. For this reason, the findings of the PISA program are also considered.

The 2018 NAPLAN results only show minor changes since the first year of testing in 2008. The majority of Year 9 students obtained results at or above the minimum standard for reading (93.4%), compared to 92.9% in 2008. 95.5% of students reached the numeracy standard (compared to 93.6% in 2008) and 79.5% reached the writing standard (compared to 84.8% in 2011, the first year the testing was introduced).

With data presented as an average score, there has been no statistically significant change from 2008 to 2018 for reading and numeracy assessments. Reading only increased by six points and numeracy increased by 13 points. Achievement in writing went down by 23 points.

Table 60 National Assessment Program 2008-2018, Average achievement (mean score) of students, Year 9, Australia

	2008 (BASE YEAR)	2012	2016	2018
Reading	578.0	574.8	580.8	584.1
Numeracy	582.2	584.2	588.9	595.7
Writing	565.9 (2011, base year)	553.7	549.1	542.4

Source: National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy, National Report for 2019, p. 258, p. 279; data for 2010 and 2012 is from the 2012 report; persuasive writing is from annual reports, p. 205

Photo by Alexis Brown on Unsplash

The very large number of students who complete the NAPLAN test—more than one million in 2017—make disaggregated analysis possible for a broad range of variables, including gender, language background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and the educational level of parents. A comparison of **results by gender** finds that girls perform at a higher rate than boys in all of the literacy domains, for numeracy, boys and girls achieved an equivalent national standard. The proportion of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students** reaching the minimum standards was much lower than the rest of the student population. The differences were most marked for writing, with 53% of Year 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students performing at or above the minimum standard, compared to 84% of non-Indigenous students.

Those students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who lived **in very remote areas did not perform as well on writing tests as those living in cities.** Only 30% of Year 9 students from remote areas reached minimum benchmarks, compared to 85% in major cities. Students whose parents had not completed Year 12 were more likely to fall below the national minimum standard. In terms of high level achievement, fifteen percent of students whose **parents** had completed a bachelor's degree achieved a Band 10 (top level) result in numeracy, compared to one to three percent of students whose parents' educational level was Year 11, 12 or Certificate. (NAPLAN 2019: 246, 202)

PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT

The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial survey of achievement in core school subjects of science, reading and mathematics and measures understanding and problem solving. The survey has been conducted since 2000. The latest results are for 2018.

It focuses on 15-year-olds, the age at which compulsory schooling comes to an end in a number of countries. It aims to assess, "the extent to which 15-year-old students near the end of their compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies." (quoted Carol Ey 2019)

Australian students performed relatively well in 2000, and while Australian students still perform above the OECD average, **the difference between the Australian and OECD averages have narrowed**. For example, the Australian average for mathematics was 33 points higher than the OECD average in 2000, 18 points higher in 2009 and just two points higher in 2018.

Table 61 Mean performance on PISA, Australia and OECD, 2000 to 2018

SCALE	COUNTRY	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
Reading	Australia	**528**	**525**	**513**	**515**	**512**	**503**	503
	OECD av.	500	494	492	493	496	493	487
Mathematics	Australia	**533**	**524**	**520**	**514**	**504**	**494**	491
	OECD av.	500	500	498	496	494	490	489
Science	Australia	**528**	**525**	**527**	**527**	**521**	**510**	503
	OECD av.	500	496	500	501	501	493	489

Source: OECD data, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, School student engagement and performance, release 16 Sept. 2021

As these results indicate, there is a significant difference in Australian student performance in NAPLAN and PISA testing. While NAPLAN results show stable or slight improvement since the first tests in 2008, the 2018 PISA tests indicate decline.

The **difference in the results may be explained by the way the questions are structured and phrased.** In NAPLAN there is more of a focus on basic literacy and numeracy; the PISA testing is more demanding, with an **emphasis on the thinking skills needed for more complex problem solving.**

Which is the better measure? Professor Geoff Masters, CEO of the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER), which conducts the PISA testing in Australia, argues in favour of PISA: '[The decline in the Australian PISA results] matters because PISA assesses skills that will be increasingly important in the future. Unlike many tests and examinations, PISA does not assess students' abilities to recall facts or basic literacy and numeracy skills. Instead, it assesses the ability to transfer and apply learning to new situations and unseen problems. This requires an understanding of fundamental concepts and principles, as well as the ability to think. (Carol Ey 2019). In the ACI Index calculation both NAPLAN and PISA scores are included.

THE PROPORTION OF PEOPLE AGED 25 TO 64 WITH A NON-SCHOOL QUALIFICATION

The annual ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW) collects information on participation in education, non-school qualifications, transition from education to work and current labour force and demographic characteristics of Australia's population.

In 2018, the SEW survey found that 65.1% of Australians aged 25 to 64 years had a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above. This had **increased by almost 15 percentage points from 2008, mainly due to a higher proportion of people obtaining a bachelor or higher degree**.

Table 62 Proportion of persons with a non-school qualification, Certificate III level or above aged 25-64

2004	48.2
2006	50.3
2008	53.2
2010	56.7
2012	60.5
2014	59.9
2016	63.1
2018	65.1

Source: Education and Work, Australia, May 2020

While a higher proportion of men than women had a non-school qualification in 2008, the difference was only one percentage point in 2018. The proportion of men with a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above in 2018 was 65.6% (57% in 2008), the proportion of women was 64.6% (50.1%).

Employment rates are higher for those with non-school qualifications. In 2019, 77% of those aged 15 to 74 years who had qualifications were employed, compared with 56% of those without qualifications (Education and Work, Australia, released 11/11/2020).

The further a person lives from an urban centre, the less likely they are to have a non-school qualification. For example, in 2019, 70% of people aged 25 to 64 years living in major cities had a non-school qualification, compared to 59% in outer regional and remote areas.

In 2014-15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 17-64 with a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above was 39%, up from 32% in 2002. Indigenous Australians living in Victorian major cities were most likely to have a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above (53%), with the lowest proportions in Western Australia (24%) and the Northern Territory (16%). (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2012: 46; ABS Work and Education, ATSI survey)

DEGREE LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS

The OECD includes tertiary graduation rates as an indicator of a country's capacity to produce workers with advanced or specialised knowledge and skills. In 2008, 24.4% of Australians aged between 25 to 64 years had a tertiary qualification at a bachelor degree level or higher. **In 2018 this was significantly higher at 31.4%, an increase of seven percentage points**.

Table 63 Highest non-school qualification, Bachelor degree or above, aged 25-64

2004	21.2
2006	22.9
2008	24.4
2010	25.5
2012	28.2
2014	27.9
2016	29.7
2018	31.4

Source: ABS, Education and Work, May 2018 (Released 13 Nov. 2019)

In 2020, 58% of people aged 15-64 who were studying for a non-school qualification were at university level: 40% doing a bachelor degree, 18% doing postgraduate studies, including graduate diplomas and certificates; 19% were studying for a certificate III or IV (ABS, Education and Work).

NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

The acronym NEET refers to those not engaged in education, employment or training, people who are considered disengaged from work and education.

NEET is different from the unemployment rate as it captures those who are inactive as well as those who are unemployed. It also differs from underemployment, which measures those who want and are available to work more hours than they currently have. Not participating in study or employment can contribute to future joblessness, lower income and employment insecurity. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021)

Given the potential consequences for society and for individuals, young people who are NEET are a policy concern worldwide. Between 2008 and 2018, the proportion of young Australian men (aged 15-24) considered NEET was in the range 7.4%-10.1%, with the peak in 2013; a higher proportion of young women were considered NEET, between 2008 and 2018 in the range 9.2%-11.7%, with the peak also in 2013. **In 2018, 8.6% of young men and 9.4% of women were NEET.** (ABS, Education and Work, released 11/11/2020)

Table 64 Proportion of young people (aged 15-24) not in any employment or study, by sex, percentage

	MALES	FEMALES
2008	7.4	10.0
2013	10.1	11.7
2014	9.8	10.6
2016	8.5	9.2
2018	8.6	9.4

Source: ABS, Education and Work, released 11/11/2020

Participation and Connections

KEY INDICATORS

- Voluntary work
- Charitable donations
- Organisational involvement: social, community support, civic and political groups
- Voting

Community participation is considered using three indicators: involvement in voluntary work through an organisation; involvement in social, community, civic or political groups; and participation in political life through voting. Involvement in sharing and reciprocal activities points to sense of belonging and citizenship.

VOLUNTARY WORK/ VOLUNTEERING

Various sources provide different estimates for volunteering. The following discussion is based on findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey (GSS), which has been conducted every four years between 2002-2014, as well as in 2019 and 2020.

The GSS found that in 2006, close to one third (34.1%) of the Australian population aged 15 years and over participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in the 12 months prior to the survey. **This rate of volunteering has declined over the last decade**: from 36.2% in 2010 to 30.9% in 2014 to 28.8% in 2019.

Volunteers contributed 743.3 million hours to the community in 2014 and 596.2 million hours in 2019, a fall of 20% (Volunteering Australia, Key Volunteering Statistics, January 2021).

The decline in volunteering is most evident among women, who in past years have been more likely than men to volunteer. In 2010, 38% of women and 34% of men indicated they had volunteered through an organisation; in 2014, 33% of women and 29% of men volunteered, but in 2019 volunteer rates were at a similar level for women and men (28% of women and 29% of men).

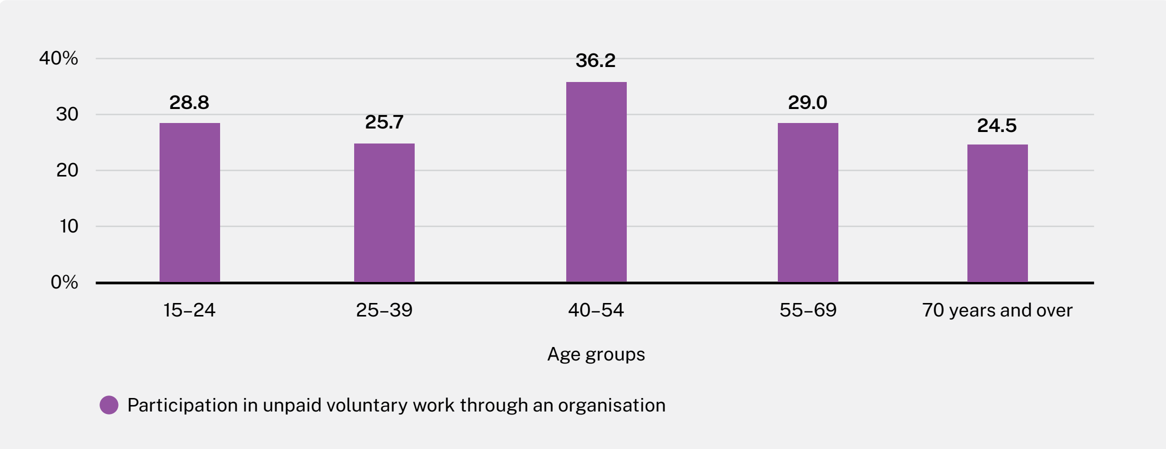
People aged 40-54 years are more likely to volunteer (36.2%) than other age groups. Volunteering rates for other age groups are: 28.8% for those aged 15-24, 25.7% aged 25-39, 29% aged 55-69, and 24.5% aged 70 years or above.

Table 65 Voluntary work through an organisation in the last 12 months

	2006	2010	2014	2019
Has undertaken unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in last 12 months	34.1	36.2	30.9	28.8

Source: General Social Survey, Summary Results, 2020, Released 29 June 2021

Figure 23 Participation in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation, by age



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survye: Summary Results, Australia 2019

People of immigrant background are more likely to volunteer informally in their community rather than formally through an organisation. In 2019, 31% of people born in Australia volunteered through an organisation, compared with 29% of overseas born and 20% of recent arrivals, while the rate of informal volunteering was close to 34% for both Australian and overseas born and only marginally lower (32%) for recent arrivals (Volunteering Australia 2021).

Overall, the **volunteering environment is changing in Australia. Volunteering is becoming more episodic, self-oriented and less associated with organisations.** The 2016 State of Volunteering report found an increasing misalignment between volunteering roles that interest people and the roles that needed to be filled. Thus, arts and culture and animal welfare positions tend to be oversubscribed, whereas disability services, community services, aged care and education have difficulty finding sufficient volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2021).

CHARITABLE GIVING

Charitable giving indicates commitment to and involvement in the community; however, it is difficult to measure. This is because 'philanthropy and giving occurs in many ways, and there are numerous mechanisms through which money can be given'. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021b)

Australian charitable giving is one of the highest in the world. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) ranks Australia eighth (out of 140 countries) in the 10-year period between 2009 and 2018 on the World Giving Index. In this period, three out of five Australians made a financial donation to a charity (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021b).

One way of tracking donations is through Taxation Department data, which is published annually. ATO data shows that tax-deductible donations have been increasing. After adjusting for inflation, total tax-deductible donations increased from $3 billion to $3.9 billion between 2007–08 and 2018–19. **While the total received by charities has increased, the proportion of taxpayers claiming donations to charities has decreased from 34.9% of taxpayers in 2007-08 to 28.7% in 2018-19.**

PARTICIPATION

The social networks of individuals and the development of trust and sharing that comes from personal interaction is thought to be a key to the effective functioning of democracy, according to American social researcher Robert Putnam.

A measure of the extent of civic participation is provided by the General Social Survey, which considers involvement in three types of groups in the 12 months preceding the survey:

- **Social groups** (such as sport, arts, religious, adult education, clubs)
- **Community support groups** (such as service clubs, welfare organisation, education and training, health promotion, emergency services)
- **Civic and political groups** (such as trade union, professional organisation, political party, environment, consumer, human and civil rights).

In 2019, half of all Australians indicated they were involved in social groups; one quarter in community support groups, and less than one in ten (9.4%) in civic and political groups. There is consistent indication of decline in civic participation.

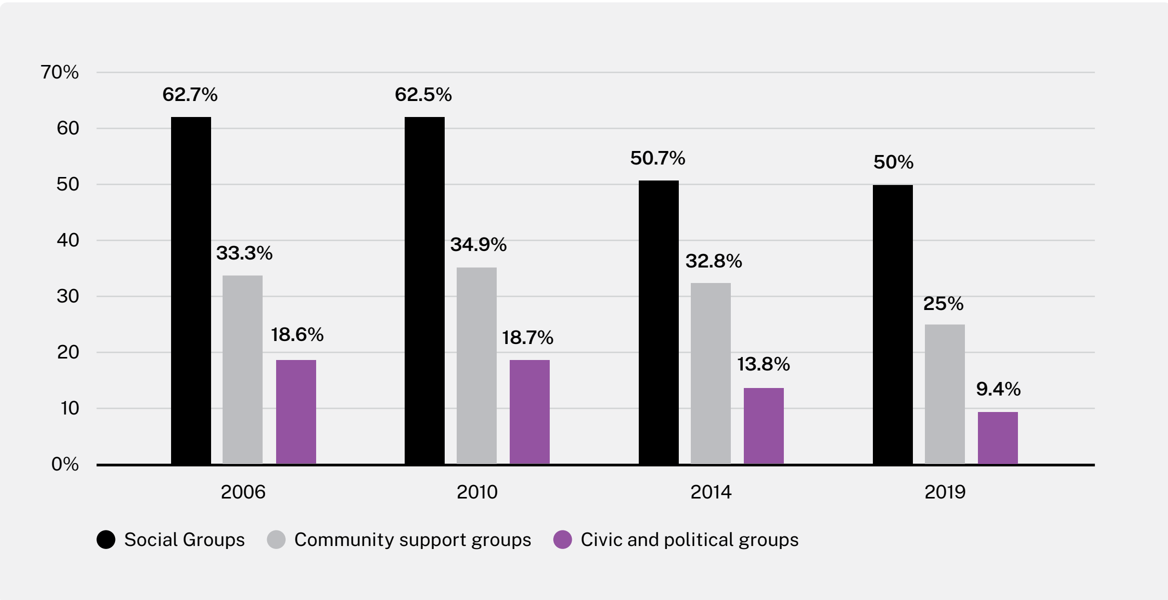
Involvement in social groups decreased from 63% to 51% between 2010 and 2014 and was at 50% in 2019**. Involvement in community support groups recorded little change between 2006 and 2014, when it was in the range of 33% to 35%, but there was a marked decrease in 2019 to 25%.** Participation in civic and political groups was consistent in 2006 and 2010, five percentage points lower in 2014 (14%) and a further four percentage points lower in 2019, a halving of involvement between 2006 and 2019.

Table 66 Community involvement, 2006-2019, percentages

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	2006	2010	2014	2019
Has been involved in groups in the last 12 months				
Social groups	62.7	62.5	50.7	50.0
Community support groups	33.3	34.9	32.8	25.0
Civic and political groups	18.6	18.7	13.8	9.4

Source: General Social Survey, Summary Results, 2020, Released 29 June 2021

Figure 24 Group involvement



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia 2019

VOTING

Voting is an important indication of engagement with the political process. An OECD report on its member states notes that in the 2016 federal election in Australia, **91% of registered voters participated. This was one of the highest rates of participation in the OECD where the average is 69%,** although it reflects the compulsory voting system, which is enforced by only three of the 36 OECD member states: Australia, Belgium and Luxembourg. Among the main English-speaking countries, in addition to Australia, only New Zealand achieves a voter turnout above 75%. (OECD, *How's Life? 2020* : 186)

Of registered voters, between 91% and 93% of people voted in federal elections between 2010 and 2019. The **proportion of eligible voters who register to vote has also increased between 2010 and 2019, from 90.9% to 96.8%.**

INFORMAL VOTING

There are indicators other than the proportion voting that may indicate lack of interest in or disenchantment with the workings of Australian politics.

One possible indicator is informal voting. As noted, in Australia voting is compulsory. Those registered to vote are required to do so and may be fined if they do not vote. However, they can register their negative views by voting informally by not completing their ballot paper as provided in instructions to voters. In the 2019 federal election, informal voting was highest in NSW, where it reached the highest that has been recorded at 7%. Antony Green, the ABC political analysist, found that around half of all informal votes were errors, with the other half indicating lack of interest in registering a valid vote or intentionally incorrectly completing the ballot paper in protest. (Green 2020)

DECLINE IN VOTE FOR MAJOR PARTIES

An additional trend that is of potential relevance to assessing the workings of Australian democracy is the **decrease in the vote obtained by major political parties, potentially indicating disillusionment with the parties that form government**. There has been a significant fall in voter support for the Liberal, National and Labor parties. In the election for the House of Representatives, minor parties and independent candidates won 6% of the vote in the 1950s, close to 8% in the 1970s and 1980s, almost 16% in the 1990s and 2000s and 22% in the 2010s. The proportion obtained by minor parties and independents in the last three federal elections (2013, 2016, 2019) has increased from 21.1% to 23.2% to 25.9%.

Table 67 Major party first preference votes, House of Representatives

PERIOD	NUMBER OF ELECTIONS	AVERAGE MAJOR PARTY VOTE	MINOR PARTY AND INDEPENDENT
1980s	4	92.2	7.9
1990s	4	84.4	15.6
2000s	3	83.5	16.5
2010s	4	77.9	22.1

Source: Gerard Newman (1999); Green (2019)

3

Part Three
Life During the Pandemic

> This section examines cohesion during the pandemic – through analysis of statistical data and qualitative research. The qualitative research program included interviews with individuals that have a strong knowledge of their local area, representation across key work sectors and diverse cultural and faith backgrounds.

Photo by Kina To on Unsplash

2020–2021: The data

The COVID-19 pandemic is a once in a fifty- or hundred-year event. The extent of disruption caused has been likened to a war or an economic depression.

In the context of the failure of international travel restrictions to stop the spread of infections in Australia, on 18 March 2020 Prime Minister Morrison announced social distancing measures and business restrictions. On 20 March Australian borders were closed to non-residents. Two days later, schools began to close and the following week the JobKeeper and the JobSeeker supplements were announced.

In the March quarter Gross Domestic Product fell 0.3%, followed by a record 7% fall in the June quarter. **By May 2020, 870,000 workers had lost their jobs and unemployment peaked at 7.5%, the highest level in over 20 years. Youth unemployment reached 23.6%.**

The underemployment rate, an indication of those unable to obtain the working hours they wanted, reached 13.8%, with 1.8 million people working reduced or no hours because of economic decline. **Some two-thirds of businesses reported a reduction in turnover.** The participation rate, a calculation of the labour force as a percentage of the working-age population, fell 3.4 percentage points, from 66.1% to 62.7%. The industries most impacted were education and training, accommodation and food services and information media and telecommunications. (ABS, One year of COVID-19)

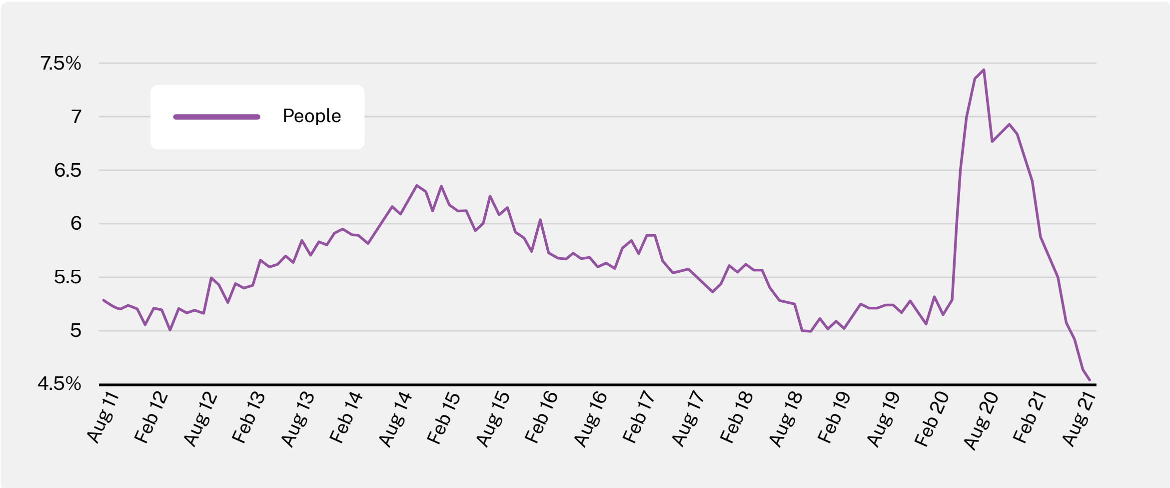
Table 68 Labour force status, seasonally adjusted, 2020

	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY
Employed persons	13,003,700	13,020,000	12,381,800	12,117,770	12,328,500	12,460,800
Unemployed people	709,800	713,300	841,900	923,000	992,300	1,009,400
Unemployment rate	5.2%	5.2%	6.4%	7.1%	7.4%	7.5%
Underemployment rate	8.6%	8.7%	13.8%	13.1%	11.7%	11.2%
Participation rate	66.0%	66.0%	63.6%	62.7%	64.0%	64.7%
Monthly hours worked in all jobs	1,781 million	1,782 million	1,617 million	1,605 million	1,665 million	1,681 million

Source: ABS, Labour Force

The extent of disruption, plotted on a line graph, has the appearance of a seismogram, the graphic output of a seismograph used to measure earthquake waves. It is a visual representation of a tear in the social fabric.

Figure 25 Unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia August 2021

Figure 26 Employed people, seasonally adjusted

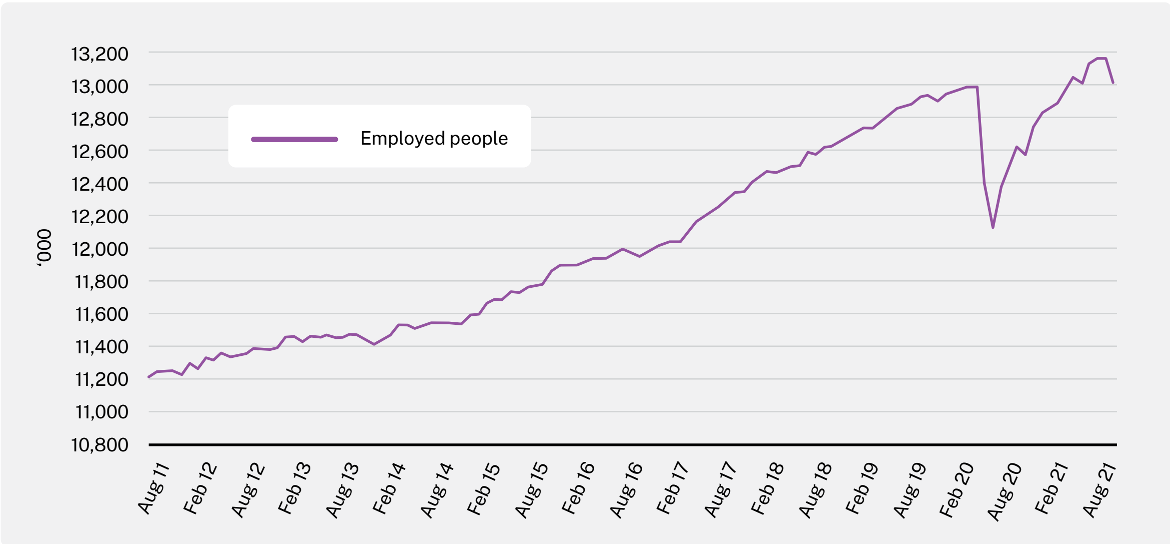


Photo by Kina To on Unsplash

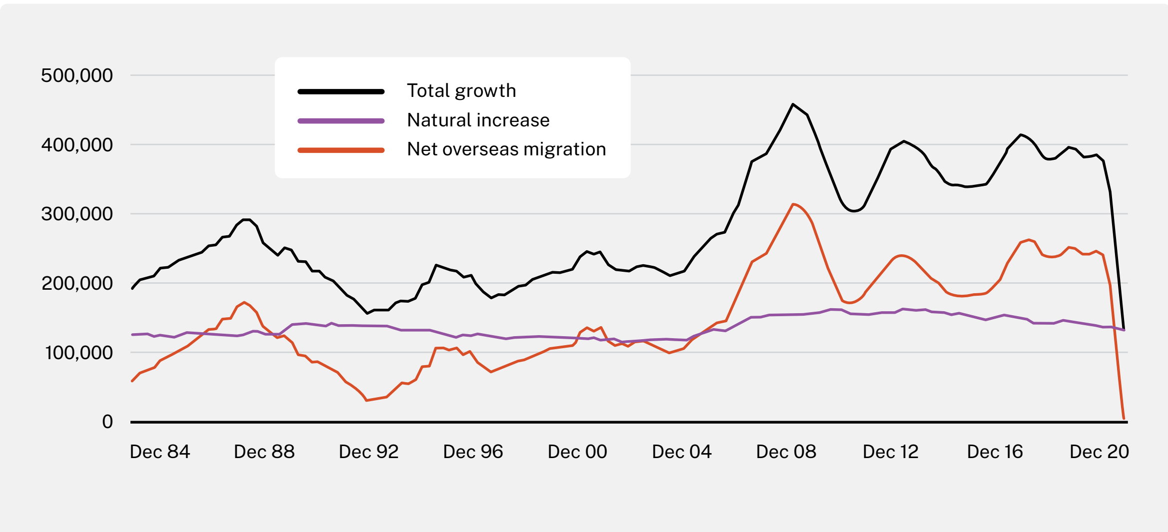
IMMIGRATION

The pandemic resulted in an abrupt slowing of Australian population growth, a consequence of the closure of international borders, which also halted international tourism. In January 2020 there were a record 2.3 million arrivals in Australia; in April 2020, just 21,000. This had an immediate impact on the accommodation and food services industries, also affecting airlines and airport employment.

In 2019, Australia's population grew by 1.5%, close to the average of the last fifteen years. In 2020, growth was 0.5% or 136,300 people, largely the result of natural increase. There were no observed effects of COVID-19 on total births and deaths, with the decline in the birthrate consistent with the pattern of recent years. The steep decline in migration was only partly offset by the increased number of Australians returning to the country and fewer leaving. **In recent years immigration contributed around 250,000 annually to the population; in 2020, just 3,500.**

Victoria, Queensland and the ACT all had net overseas migration losses in the 2020 calendar year, with Victoria losing almost 19,000 people. All other states and the Northern Territory recorded small increases, at most one-quarter the size of recent years. **Population growth is expected to be around 0.2% in 2021, the slowest rate for more than a century.** (ABS, Population change in 2020)

Figure 27 Components of annual population change (a)



a) Annual components calculated at the end of each quarter

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population change in 2020 17/06/2021


Photo by Chris McClay on Unsplash

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In response to the pandemic, Australian governments imposed a range of restrictions, either through national agreement or on the initiative of individual states, including shutting down non-essential services, placing limits on gatherings and social distancing rules. A second wave of COVID-19 emerged in Victoria from mid-June 2020, leading to stronger restrictions, including mandatory face coverings in public, 'stay at home' restrictions and curfews, with provision to leave home only for exercise, grocery shopping, essential work, medical reasons, or caregiving. There was a return to remote learning for primary and secondary schools, with onsite access to schools restricted to children of essential workers and those considered vulnerable. Child-care was restricted to families with one or both parents deemed essential workers.

Provision of financial assistance included the Coronavirus Supplement, paid fortnightly from 27 April 2020 to eligible income support recipients along with their usual payments, reduced in September 2020 and January 2021, ending in 31 March 2021. **In mid-September one in ten Australians (10%) indicated they were receiving the Coronavirus Supplement.** Of those receiving the payment, 32% reported mainly using it for purchasing household supplies, including groceries. Another 28% reported mainly using the payment for mortgage or rent payments.

The JobKeeper Payment enabled employers to claim $1,500 per fortnight per eligible employee from 30 March 2020 to retain their employees. It was changed to two tiers in September 2020 and ended on 28 March 2021. **Approximately one in seven Australians (14%) indicated in the September ABS Household Impacts survey they were receiving the JobKeeper Payment from their employer.** Of those receiving the payment in September, three in five (60%) indicated they were receiving less income than their usual pay. One in six (18%) received about the same income, while one in five (22%) received more income.

A safety net package of $1.1 billion was implemented to expand mental health and Telehealth services, increase domestic violence services and provide more emergency food relief.

By August there were signs of economic recovery in all states except Victoria, which was hit by a second COVID-19 wave and lockdown. In September 2020, hours worked in Victoria were 13.8% below the March quarter, compared to 1.8% lower in the rest of Australia**. Nationally, job vacancies recovered by 78% and in the December quarter GDP rose 3.1%.**

At the start of 2021 conditions continued to improve, with **employment recovering almost 93% of the 2020 March-May loss. However, in the context of further lockdowns in New South Wales and Victoria, employment declined between July and August 2021 by 146,300 jobs**, a monthly change of –1.1%. The underemployment rate increased by one percentage point to 9.3% and the labour participation rate decreased from 66% to 65.2%.

SOCIAL IMPACT

In addition to the Scanlon Foundation surveys, findings on the social impact of the pandemic in three other surveys are considered. They are:

- ABS General Social Survey, conducted June-September 2020
- ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, conducted fortnightly between April and July 2020 and monthly thereafter until June 2021
- Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods Tracking Wellbeing Outcomes survey, conducted on eight occasions between April 2020 and August 2021.

GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY

The General Social Survey (GSS) was conducted by the ABS every four years between 2002-14 and in 2019 and 2020. It provides important insight into the extent of change in the first phase of the pandemic, benchmarked against survey findings in 2019 and earlier.

In 2020 the GSS was administered over more than three months, from 15 June to 5 September, conducted online and by telephone interviewing. It utilised a probability sample, with data collected from approximately 5,300 households. Face-to-face interviewing was not possible in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, unlike in earlier waves of the GSS survey. Because of this change in methodology care needs to be taken when making comparisons between the findings obtained in 2019 and earlier.

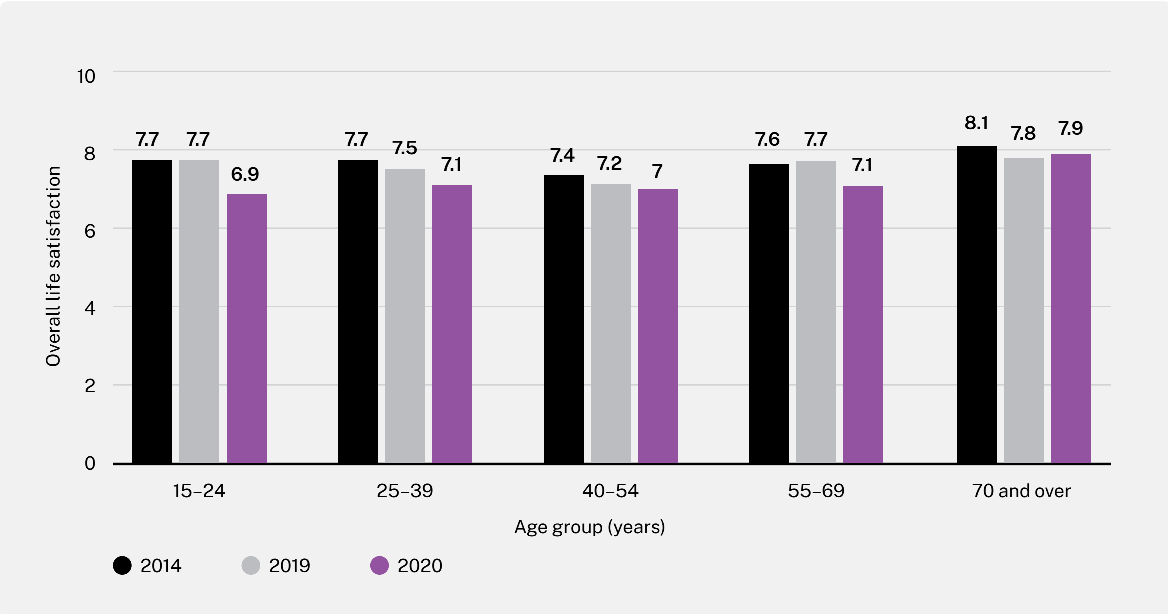
A key finding of the GSS is the limited negative impact of the pandemic in 2020. There is evidence of resilience and positivity, a pattern that is of sufficient consistency not to be dismissed as a result of the changes in survey methodology. A comparison of the responses obtained in 2020 and earlier surveys to fourteen questions on finances and mood finds more negative response to four questions, but more positive response to ten. The findings are similar to the mood captured in the 2020 Scanlon Foundation surveys, which employed a consistent methodology between 2017 and 2020.

Evidence of heightened negative response in the GSS relate to life satisfaction and financial circumstances, but it is notable that **change is in a narrow range, in contrast with the sharp fall in the statistical indicators.**

Photo by Gabriella Clare on Unsplash

Life satisfaction was measured by a question worded, “Overall, on a scale from 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days, with 0 meaning not satisfied and 10 completely satisfied?” In 2020, on average Australians rated their life satisfaction at 7.2, compared to 7.5 in 2019 and 7.6 in 2014. Analysis by age group finds that people aged 70 years and over indicated an overall life satisfaction of 7.9, while those aged 15-24 were substantially lower at 6.9. Life satisfaction in the young cohort declined by 0.8 percentage points between 2019 and 2020, substantially larger than among those aged 25-39 (0.4 percentage) and 40-54 (0.2 percentage points).

Figure 28 Overall life satisfaction by age, 2014-2020 (score/10)



Care must be exercised when making comparisons between this and previous surveys due to the higher non-response observed in 2020.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia 2020

The proportion of respondents who indicated they would be unable to raise $2,000 within a week increased and a higher proportion had at least one cash flow problem; fewer respondents indicated that they could obtain support in times of crisis from persons living outside their household. But **the most striking finding is the low proportion indicating heightened financial difficulty. Instead, the findings point to a society coping with the economic impact of the pandemic**. Thus, 93% of respondents indicated they would be able to obtain support in a crisis and only 19% would be unable to raise $2,000.

The high level of positive response evident in the earlier GSS surveys was maintained in 2020, indicated by questions on trust in fellow citizens and institutions and support for cultural diversity.

Agreement with the proposition that ‘it is a good thing for society to be comprised of different cultures’ was at 85% in 2020, higher than 81% in 2019. Fewer people indicated they had experienced some form of discrimination in the previous 12 months, 13% in 2020, 18% in 2019, possibly a reflection of the lockdowns and the reduced opportunity for contact, although the 12 months covered by the question includes the period before the pandemic.

With regard to trust, **a substantially higher proportion (and majority) indicated their agreement that ‘most people can be trusted’**—62% compared to 55% in 2019. Trust in the health care system increased from a substantial 67% in 2019 to 76%, while trust in police was marginally higher, 77% in 2019 and 80% in 2020.

Table 69 Selected questions, General Social Survey, 2014-2020

	2014	2019	2020
Self-assessed health status – excellent, very good	56.7	52.5	53.2
Overall life satisfaction	7.6	7.5	7.2
Able to get support in times of crisis from persons living outside the household	94.6	94.2	92.7
Agrees that it is a good thing for society to be comprised of different cultures	84.5	80.5	85.4
Has experienced discrimination in last 12 months	18.7	17.9	13.3
Feels most people can be trusted	54.4	55.2	61.9
Feels the healthcare system can be trusted	---	66.9	76.4
Feels police can be trusted	---	76.8	79.5
Feels the justice system can be trusted		57.6	62.9
Unable to raise $2000 within a week for something important	13.1	---	19.0
Had at least one cash flow problem in the last 12 months	19.4	---	21.0
Took at least one dissaving action in last 12 months	23.5	---	23.0
Experienced physical or threatened assault in last 12 months	8.0	6.2	3.7
Experienced actual or attempted break-in in last 12 months	7.1	6.6	4.6

Source: ABS, General Social Survey

ABS HOUSEHOLD IMPACTS OF COVID-19 SURVEY

The ABS Household Impacts Survey, conducted fortnightly and then monthly, was designed to provide a quick snapshot of the changing social and economic situation for Australian households during the COVID-19 pandemic using a panel of respondents.

Consistent with the GSS, the Household Survey indicated the limited impact of the pandemic on the material circumstances of the population. In August 2020 almost nine out of ten Australians (87%) reported their household expected to be able to pay the bills received in the next three months. Survey respondents indicated that the Coronavirus Supplement and the JobKeeper Payment was most often used to pay household bills.

In response to a question on household finances in September 2020, only a minority (16%) indicated that their household finances had deteriorated in the last four weeks, while 12% indicated that their finances had improved. The large majority—72%—indicated their finances had remained unchanged. A slightly higher proportion (21%) of households with children indicated that their financial circumstances had worsened. Almost one in five (22%) respondents had increased their savings, with another 15% having both increased their savings and reduced debt.

Yet with regard to mental and psychological wellbeing, a significantly higher level of negative response was indicated.

The Household Survey, consistent with the National Health Survey (NHS) conducted over the previous two decades, employed the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.

Between 2001 and 2017-18 the NHS indicated high or very high levels of distress in 11.7% to 13% of the population aged 18 years and over, with 13% obtained in 2017-18. (National Health Survey: First results, 2017-18 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au))

In contrast, **the Household Impacts Survey indicated a high or very high level of psychological distress in one in five of the adult population:** 21% in November 2020, 20% in March 2021 and 20% in June 2021.

In November 2020, a high or very high level of psychological distress was indicated by 25% of women, 16% of men; 32% of younger Australians (aged 18 to 34 years), compared with 17% aged 35-64. One in four (25%) Victorians indicated a high or very high level of psychological distress, compared with a low of 11% of Western Australians.

Table 70 K10, high or very high levels of psychological distress, selected variables, percentage

	SEX		AGE			STATE			
	MALE	FEMALE	18-34	35-64	65+	NSW	VICTORIA	QLD	WA
Nov. 2020	16.0	24.8	31.6	17.4	9.1	19.3	24.7	22.7	11.1
March 2021	17.0	21.8	28.1	17.7	9.4	18.0	24.7	19.3	14.0
June 2021	17.1	23.1	29.9	17.6	10.4	19.4	26.5	17.6	13.2

Source: Household Impacts survey, June 2021 (released 14 July 2021)

The shorter version of the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) included in the August 2020 survey found that nearly half the respondents indicated feelings of nervousness; four in ten that they were restless and 'everything was an effort'; and nearly one in four that they felt 'hopeless.' A lower but substantial proportion (17%) said they were so sad nothing could cheer them up and 16% felt worthless. There was a substantial decrease in these proportions between August and November 2020, with little change between November 2020 and June 2021 (See also Mental health - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)).

Table 71 Persons aged 18 years and over, selected feelings that impacted on emotional and mental wellbeing at least some of the time, August and November 2020, June 2021, percent

	AUGUST 2020	NOVEMBER 2020	JUNE 2021
Nervous	45.7	29.6	27.7
Restless or fidgety	41.1	24.3	23.7
Everything was an effort	40.7	25.8	25.5
Hopeless	23.6	15.3	15.6
So sad nothing could cheer you up	16.8	11.8	10.6
Worthless	15.9	11.4	12.6

Source: ABS, Household Impacts of COVID-19 survey, June 2021 (released 14 July 2021)


Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

ANU CENTRE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH AND METHODS, TRACKING WELLBEING OUTCOMES

Professors Nicholas Biddle, Matthew Gray and their colleagues at the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods tracked the impact of the pandemic in five surveys conducted in 2020 (April – November) and further surveys in 2021 (January, April, August) through the ANUpoll, a quarterly survey of Australian public opinion. The surveys were conducted on the Social Research Centre's probability-based Life In Australia™ (LinA) panel. They are particularly important for enabling a detailed analysis of life satisfaction and mental health over the course of the pandemic and for continuing to track the impact of the crisis after the monthly ABS household surveys ceased in June 2021.

In the context of the extended lockdowns in New South Wales and Victoria, **the August 2021 survey found a large increase in anxiety since April—from 50% to 61%—with the largest increase to 68% in New South Wales**. Life satisfaction was lower in August 2021, at a level similar to the first wave of the pandemic.

Each of the ANU surveys asked respondents about their life satisfaction in a similar but slightly differently worded question to that employed by the ABS. **The life satisfaction value in August 2021 was 6.52, down from 6.87 in April 2021 and far lower than the pre-COVID level obtained in October 2019 when it was 7.05**. Statistical analysis indicates that the two strongest determinants of a person's level of life satisfaction were age and location (a proxy for the geographic impact of the pandemic), with significantly lower levels of satisfaction indicated by those aged 18-34 and residents of Sydney and Melbourne.

Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

How has Australia fared in a time of crisis?

Trish Prentice

INTRODUCTION

To supplement the data obtained by the 2021 Mapping Social Cohesion survey, interviews were conducted to provide insight into how communities have fared during the pandemic. They aimed to provide **a grounded understanding of the specific impacts** of the pandemic in greater detail than the survey questions. They also aimed to capture the **experiences of those not necessarily well represented in the survey group**, including recent arrivals, refugees and asylum seekers and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. In contrast with the survey, which required response to a set of predetermined questions and with limited (usually five) response options, the interviews were loosely structured and open-ended, providing scope for interviewees to discuss their experiences in their own words.

A total of 66 interviews were conducted by Zoom in all mainland states, with a focus on 10 Local Government Areas (LGAs) with relatively high proportions of cultural and religious diversity. The LGAs were:

> **Victoria**
Greater Dandenong (GD), Hume (H)

> **New South Wales**
Fairfield (F), Cumberland (C)

> **Queensland**
Logan (L), Calamvale-Stretton (CS), Toowoomba (T)

> **South Australia**
Salisbury (S), Port Adelaide Enfield (PAE)

> **Western Australia**
Stirling (St)

In the following discussion, the location of interviews is identified by a letter abbreviation, as indicated above for each LGA.

The study was conducted between **20 July and 30 September**, a time when New South Wales and Victoria experienced an extended period of lockdown. As the interviews were conducted after the survey, they provide insights from a later period of the pandemic.

Within each LGA, interviewees were **selected based on their knowledge of the local community** and were of different cultural backgrounds. They typically worked in key sectors, including local government, health, education, business, sport and community service, or were involved in faith or community organisations, such as the RSL. Key questions included:

1. What was the impact of the pandemic on the local area?
2. Did the crisis bring people closer together or drive them further apart?
3. Will the community emerge stronger or weaker?
4. Are there learnings for the community, local organisations or the state and federal government?
5. Are there problems or challenges that remain unaddressed?

Photo by Pisauikan on Unsplash

WHAT CHALLENGES EMERGED?

In response to the question 'What was the impact of the pandemic on the local area?' interviewees described the problems that had emerged in their local area. The most common problems are described below. These can be categorised into social, psychological, economic and technological impacts.

Social impacts

The most commonly described problem was that community connection had been disrupted by the pandemic. This was mentioned by 58% of interviewees. Social isolation was also frequently described as an impact (36%), as were mental health issues, which were mentioned as either a concern or as something that had increased in the community. An increase in family violence was reported by 27% of interviewees and greater homelessness by 18% of interviewees.

Psychological impacts

Interviewees reported more fear (25% of interviewees), uncertainty (19%) and anxiety (18%) in their communities. Interviewees also described disengagement among children and/or young people as a significant concern.

Economic impacts

Food insecurity was frequently mentioned (40%). Interviewees described job losses (39%) and financial stress (16%) as further impacts. One third of interviewees spoke of negative impacts on local businesses, including loss of revenue or closures.

Technological impacts

37% of interviewees noted technological inequality or illiteracy had become apparent. Common barriers to digital access included lack of access to a computer or another digital device, inadequate knowledge of how to use the device, and the prohibitive cost of internet plans.

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED DIFFERENT SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY?

As well as the problems described by interviewees as impacting the community overall, they spoke of particular impacts on segments of the community.

Women

Women faced specific challenges during the pandemic. Interviewees spoke of women **taking on more responsibility** for home schooling, managing children at home and home duties, causing the "contraction of their social lives into much more of a domestic sphere" (Interviewee, S4) and the experience of "[greater] pressure" (C2). New mothers were **prevented from accessing key supports** such as mothers' groups, playgroups and maternal and child health services. Women were most commonly the victims of **family**

violence. Interviewees also spoke of the disproportionate impact of the **loss of casual work** on women. For instance, in the words of a local council employee: "The casual jobs went and that's what a lot of females do. They have casual work because they're looking after the kids and the kids are suddenly at home all the time schooling. You can't work..." (PAE4).

Children

A number of interviewees spoke of particular impacts on children and young people and voiced concern there would be ongoing ramifications: "I think some of the long-term impacts on children and young people... that's going to be a long-term concern" (H10). Stay at home orders, home schooling, restrictions on child care attendance and the closure of playgrounds, sports grounds and sporting clubs reduced opportunities for engagement and social interaction and increased their isolation. For young children, this had **developmental effects**; one community worker described the impact as "being just that step behind in their social awareness and understanding in knowing how to interact in a social environment" (S4). **For older children, there were academic impacts** for those who did not thrive in the home-schooling environment or who faced particular vulnerabilities. Interviewees also spoke of the consequences of less physical activity and movement, of general feelings of disengagement among children/youth and of mental health concerns.

Cultural communities

Interviewees described particular impacts on individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Home schooling posed difficulties for many families throughout the pandemic but interviewees spoke of **additional challenges for those from culturally diverse backgrounds**. Those with low English proficiency experienced language barriers to assisting their children. Many experienced technological barriers, with insufficient access to devices. Even when devices were provided by schools, there were additional challenges around gaining competency in programs and basic troubleshooting. Parents with a lack of formal schooling or little literacy felt helpless to support their children. One school staff member reflected:

> Can you imagine not being able to read or write and then being told that you've got to have this device and that's the way your child's going to learn? In the end we had one mum and she said, "I'm just tired." And I said, "You know what, go and have a Nanna nap. It's okay to have a sleep. Put your kids down in the bed with you, lie down and have a sleep. It's okay to do that." This is when we were dropping off the packs to all the families. And they were just exhausted. And I said, "You should tell the teacher that. Tell her that you're tired. It's too hard." She had a kinder child and a preppie. And I know she can't read or write. And she really struggled. (GD2)

A support coordinator explained the difficulty her client experienced:

> Her life story was just so heartbreaking and that's all she wants, is for her kids to have a better future... She can't read, she can't write, but she was really trying her best to help her kids with home schooling. They had one iPhone. She's got a lot of kids and she was explaining to me how they were sitting around the table and they were doing village school, she called it. She said, "Like village school, we were all learning from each other and we were listening to my grade five student's lessons and then listening to my grade one." That's all she wanted (GD1).

The pandemic also had **greater psychological impact for many refugees and asylum seekers**, with stay-at-home orders, movement restrictions, curfews and the experience of watching people panic buy food bringing back traumatic memories from their homelands. One interviewee, who had experienced the civil war in Chile in the 1970s, noted that even for her, who had lived through that experience decades ago, the lockdowns brought back distressing experiences. Other interviewees noted that the "heavy handed" enforcement of public health orders had been traumatic for some members of the community:

> But there were some really terrible stories of over-the-top heavy handedness without any information or explanation about why their whole family had just been basically rounded up, bundled up and put into a hotel for two weeks. For people who had come from a refugee background, that was just really traumatizing. They could have used at least a telephone interpreter to explain some of that... It might not have been as terrifying. (S2)

News of the spread of COVID in their **home countries** and of civil or military unrest (such as in Afghanistan after US troop withdrawal) caused further fear and distress for some individuals, compounded by the international border closures, travel restrictions and bans on returning citizens. One interviewee commented that the wider community was unaware of how greatly these restrictions were impacting cultural communities:

> "I think that the non-cultural communities in this area are not so aware of some of the pressures that might be on multicultural communities in terms of having extended family overseas" (CS3).

In some LGAs, particularly those identified as 'hot spot areas,' individuals from some cultural backgrounds were singled out as contributing to the spread of the virus. A number of interviewees recounted how people **feared contracting COVID because they felt they would be blamed** for transmission in the wider community. There were several instances (although this was not widely reported) where people faced overt hostility from others in the local area because of their cultural background:

> One of our mums who is of Indian background, she works at a local aged care place. And when the outbreak was in the aged care homes, she went to buy petrol one day and she had the badge on her, that she was from an aged care centre, on her jacket. And they said, "Do you work in aged care? You're one of those Indian women who are in aged care that have infected all our people in aged care." She got in the car and came to school. She picked up her child early and she was sobbing. She said, "I'm trying to do the right thing." So, she was victimized for working at an aged care facility, but also for her cultural background as well. And she said, "I'm trying to keep these people safe. It's not my fault." (GD2)

KEY LEARNINGS TO EMERGE FROM THE PANDEMIC

The digital divide

In eight of the 10 LGAs, interviewees reported that the pandemic had **revealed underlying disparities** in access to technology and/or digital literacy in the community. Those most commonly experiencing these disparities included **the elderly**, the economically disadvantaged and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. One interviewee commented that the different levels of access and digital competency was something that had only become evident during the pandemic: "I suspect that as a society, schools and universities and that sort of thing were certainly making assumptions in many ways about people's access.... I think it was pretty stark to see the difference" (T1).

Lack of digital access had different impacts on community members. Some of these were relatively minor, such as not being able to scan QR codes when entering a business or premises. Others were more significant. Interviewees reported that members of the community with limited or no digital access had been **prevented from accessing services that had moved online**, including applications for government support, small business grants, vaccination bookings or Telehealth. Individuals with little digital access also experienced **barriers to participating** in opportunities like job interviews. In

Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

usual circumstances, those without a computer could use public libraries or obtain assistance with online processes from service providers or friends or family members. Movement restrictions and rules preventing face to face service provision hampered this.

Lack of access to a computer or to sufficient devices for family members created particular challenges for families home-schooling:

> Well, firstly, they did not have the hardware that was required. I mean, if the parents were working from home, the children had to do the schooling from home and they were lucky to have one computer or no computers at home. How is that going to happen? If they didn't have the necessary software and more importantly the digital connection capacity and the payment required for the data to be used. How would that occur? If they didn't have the digital literacy to be able to get on, how will that occur? So you can see on all these grounds these people have been completely disadvantaged. I mean, so many things went online. Whether it's health, whether it's schooling, whether it's government information. (St8)

Digital barriers also prevented forms of online social connection, such as Zoom sessions, webinars or online classes. For those with little or no digital access, this hindered community participation and exacerbated their social isolation.

Communication barriers and competing narratives

The pandemic revealed the challenges that **those with lower levels or little English proficiency** experience when accessing information. The crisis required communities to absorb unprecedented amounts of information from government and health sources that changed frequently during the pandemic. Interviewees noted that in this context, barriers to either accessing such information or to effective communication with cultural communities became evident.

Early on in the crisis translation errors in the health messaging impacted the effectiveness of communication. For those working with individuals with little or no English proficiency, inaccuracies and inconsistencies in government released in-language information were evident. One interviewee noted, "The messages that were sent out by the government, the amount of times I've heard people say "That's actually not correct. The translation was actually not correct." It's quite shocking to me that they can get it so wrong" (GD9). There were also concerns about **the time it took to receive official translated material**. One interviewee recalled it could take up to three days after an announcement to receive material in other languages. She noted, "we would have our education workers doing the translations, because we couldn't wait for the state government" (H1). However, translated material **appears to have improved and was timelier as the pandemic went on**. One interviewee, working at a Migrant Resource Centre in Victoria, noted in early August, "There's a lot more translated material, and that translated material is coming out a lot quicker now" (H3). Similar observations were made in NSW.

Another barrier to communication was the reliance on written in-language material early on in the pandemic. An employee of a refugee health association explained the issue:

> At the start of the pandemic, what Queensland Health would do as soon as the press conference was done, [was to produce] a plain English text of what the restrictions would be. But I think at the start it wasn't really plain English and then they were only translating that plain English into 15 languages, then later on to 38 languages. But what we realized is that you can have the plain English, you can have the translated 38 languages, but if you don't do it in audio, there are some people in the community who can't read English and can't read their own language. Therefore, they would have no way of understanding that information, unless someone from their community tells them. (L6)

For individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds with limited or no literacy in their first language, the emphasis on written translation created communication barriers. One interviewee commented, "I've got a lot of Rohingyas in my hub. They have no literacy in their first language, so it's really hard to get messages out to them through media platforms that they can understand" (L3). Some communities, such as the Yazidis, lack a written language entirely, a local government representative noted (T2). It was therefore crucial that information be provided in several different formats. One interviewee reflected, "**we needed audio, we needed videos**, we needed multiple ways to approach the communication" (H1).

Crucial for effective communication was ensuring that messaging was released in forums where members of different cultural communities accessed information. Interviewees noted that different cultural groups used different media formats, forms of electronic communication and social media platforms. A local council employee recalled how this knowledge changed their communication strategy:

> I just remember early engagement with some community leaders saying, "Well, okay, you got your social media and that's great. But our community doesn't connect with social media. They use WhatsApp." The knowledge of having a different mechanism of communicating just changed the goalposts on how we were able to connect with the community. (H10)

Messaging often gained further momentum on its own once it reached a cultural community. An interviewee observed, "once it reaches those community channels, some of the messages that we've shared have gone interstate, some of them have gone global." (health sector, L6).

For those experiencing barriers to accessing official information sources, messaging was further hampered by competing narratives around the virus and the vaccine, including rumours on the internet, information from home countries and the views of family or friends. The chairperson of a cultural organisation expressed some of the difficulties his community faced in this regard: "They can't listen to the radio, they can't understand the news from TV. **They totally depend on the community members or family who are able to read, write and listen to the news**" (S3). One school staff member described a deliberate

Photo by Kate Trifo on Unsplash

misinformation campaign that had impacted her school community:

> Last week or the week before we had a death in one of our schools, a mum just in her thirties, and within the next two days there was a video posted that went viral. It was a picture of the mum with someone speaking about this mum who had the vaccine and as a result [it said] she had actually died. It was pretty much an anti-vaccination campaign... But it's very hard when you're seeing lots of videos like this going around and people are believing it. (L1)

Differences in language proficiency also highlighted the **generational divide** between the older and younger members of cultural communities. An interviewee working in health promotion explained how lack of English proficiency in the older generation created a reliance on younger family members to provide them with information about the pandemic, sometimes to their detriment: "If the family member or whoever they're getting the information from has hesitancy around the vaccine or around COVID, or whatever it might be, those messages are directly being passed on without any balance of information" (GD3).

Interviewees further highlighted the **important role community organisations and leaders** had played working with government to ensure health messaging was reaching cultural communities. They noted communicating in this way was more effective, not only because of leaders' understanding of language and cultural nuances but because of established relationships between community leaders and their communities. As a local council employee noted, "they are the trusted voices... We can't be on that platform with them... nor should we be." (H10) Another interviewee noted the **importance of trust** in communicating effectively:

> And it's interesting to see how quickly word of mouth or word that is shared by a trusted person from your own community can quickly just move on... Those people are now a go-to for most of their communities, to ask questions about vaccines, about where to go get tested, about what's happening at the moment. (L6)

Several interviewees emphasised that engagement between the government and cultural communities was necessary and should be ongoing. A community sector employee noted, "We need to have those mechanisms in place because communities see the emerging needs way before we're going to see them" (CS3). Another commented that these relationships should exist not only during a time of crisis: "We've been trying to be heard by government, but it takes something to go wrong for us to get that. In this case it was the flareup [in the local area] that brought everyone together and had DHS sitting there and people hearing them" (GD4).

Photo by Kina To on Unsplash

Perceptions of government

The federal, state and local governments have played a key role in managing the pandemic. While the Mapping Social Cohesion survey provided insights into trust in government, the interviews allowed a more detailed exploration of perceptions of government and how they changed during the crisis.

While the **federal government** had a more prominent position in the response to the pandemic in the early months, many interviewees felt its role was less visible in 2021. One interviewee reflected, "I think Scott Morrison hasn't really had much of a face... I think it's been more the individual states." (PAE4) There was strong support expressed for the federal Job Keeper and Job Seeker payments. Yet, interviewees noted community perceptions of the vaccine rollout were much less positive. An interviewee commented, "I definitely sense there's a mistrust for the federal government with some of the commentary around the AstraZeneca vaccine" (C1).

In contrast, the **role of state governments became more prominent** as the pandemic went on. Most interviewees said their communities had positive perceptions of the way the crisis had been handled at a state level. A local government employee in Calamvale Stretton (Qld) noted, "I think many people have found our state government to be proactive, and I think that's been something that people have appreciated" (CS1). Similar sentiments were expressed in Stirling (WA) and Salisbury (SA), "Generally, again, in South Australia, I think our chief health officer, Nicola, everyone thinks she's done an amazing job. Not everyone, of course I can't generalize, but the majority of people... feel positive that the state government is putting the right directions in place at the right time" (S1). Even in Hume, in the midst of the extended Victorian lockdown, perceptions of the state government were generally positive, "I think Dan the man has done pretty well trying to keep things at bay. I mean we'll see where it goes from here." (H4).

The **most notable exception was in Fairfield (NSW)**, where strong anger was expressed at the state government's enforcement of the lockdown:

> With COVID it's really tough. It's sort of the epicentre of COVID at the moment. The community is frustrated, angry. There is a sense that the state government has, in the last couple of weeks, really put Fairfield on the spot for no justified reason. There was a lot of anger about the police and the police operation that was announced publicly. But the stories that were coming out from there were that

> there were police on horseback, police with dogs... Apparently earlier on there were even choppers on top of the place, which was not appreciated by the residents. (F2)

Several interviewees felt the response had been damaging, **setting back the work that had been done to build relationships of trust** between the government and cultural communities:

> So much work that we've been doing in terms of educating the government representatives about the needs of multicultural communities and creating platforms for community leaders to speak with government representatives. This was all happening, but then the next week we saw the police, mounted police, and it just felt like it was falling on deaf ears. It was like, is this really meaningful consultation? And then the next level was the ADF coming in, and then there was huge outcry from the community about the amount of police. (F4)

In contrast, the majority of interviewees acknowledged that their **local government** had been visible, supportive and responsive during the pandemic, most notably by being "out and about in the community" (L3); actively communicating with the community through various means (C7); showing "strong leadership" (community services sector, F4) and being "engaged" (PAE4; H2).

One interviewee noted the pandemic had made it very clear that Australia had different levels of government that operated independently of one another:

> I think people have definitely become aware of the different layers of government... so there may be a distrust for, say, our prime minister, but they're aware that our premier is her own level of government and political party. (C1)

For some interviewees, this differentiation became greater as the pandemic continued, which was not a positive development. One interviewee commented, "I just don't like that rhetoric of looking at each state as if we are separate countries... All I'm seeing that it's easy for people to be drawn into that tribe-like mentality" (St 4). Another observed, "I think that the way the government managed it in the first six months, both sides of government, it was a one government approach... I think that unfortunately now the politics are coming in" (L7).

Interviewees, however, noted that **amongst recent arrivals there was less understanding of the different levels of government** and their areas of responsibility. They generally understood the term 'government' to apply to those in authority, most often associated with the power to grant visas or permanent residence.

Local area differences

Did the interviews reveal any clear differences between the areas studied?

The impacts on communities described by interviewees were surprisingly common. Disruptions to community connection; fear, anxiety and uncertainty; and concerns about the particular impacts on children/young people and cultural communities were reported in every LGA studied. Isolation and an increase in domestic violence were reported in nine of the 10 LGAs and mental health concerns in eight of the 10 LGAs. Interviewees from every state also reported economic impacts. **This evidence suggests the pandemic has had significant impact, even in states that experienced shorter periods of lockdown.** As a result, there should not be an assumption that those communities that experienced less restriction were not impacted.

The interviews provided specific insight into the impacts of the longer lockdowns on Victoria and NSW. **Lockdown fatigue** was reported in the Victorian LGAs of Greater Dandenong and Hume by more than half of the interviewees; it was also reported in Cumberland (NSW). Frustration was reported in both the Victorian and NSW LGAs and there was a feeling that people in the community were struggling to comply with the ongoing restrictions in Victoria. Victorian interviewees also spoke of the difficulty keeping their clients, constituents or participants engaged. Almost half of the interviewees from the other states (48%) expressed their **relief and gratitude they were not experiencing the same level of ongoing restriction as NSW or Victoria.**

Some impacts were more specific to particular LGAs. For example, homelessness was described as a problem by every interviewee in Toowoomba (Qld). Food insecurity was particularly mentioned as a concern in Port Adelaide Enfield (SA), Cumberland (NSW) and Greater Dandenong (Vic.). Local councils, community groups and local religious institutions had either established food services (meal or grocery provision) or increased existing services to address the need. In Calamvale Stretton (Qld), there was strong concern expressed about **the situation of international students** and the particular vulnerabilities they experienced in the face of job losses and lack of government support:

> So many students lost their jobs. Everything around what the challenges are for less resourced international students here really flared to the max… For those up that end, they faced homelessness. It was a massive issue. Lack of access to food and the ability to afford their living expenses. Stress around the study fees, particularly the students who were studying through private institutions, and mental health issues were through the ceiling. Isolation, marginalization, students were hiding away, because they were really fearful that they would be judged for not going home. Many said that they have invested so much to be here, that it would be very difficult for them to return home, but then for many also they couldn't return home. Their homes were in a state of disaster (CS1)

The interviews recorded the impact of the pandemic from the perspectives of people working in key sectors of the community that have knowledge of the community from their direct engagement with it during the pandemic (within their sphere of influence). **They provide insight into the issues that have emerged in communities; however, they do not measure the extent of the prevalence of these issues in communities**. For instance, they cannot provide statistical insight into how extensively these issues were experienced in each area; whether there were greater impacts in some suburbs in comparison to others; whether some groups were impacted more significantly; or how impacts may have changed over time. Yet the importance of the interviews lies in their grounded basis, with insights provided by those deeply engaged in their communities. Together, the interviews **provide cross-sector evidence of problems that emerged and how they impacted particular segments of the community**. This information has not been captured by other data. It will provide grounds for further study.

POSITIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the challenges that emerged during the pandemic, the interviews revealed perhaps a surprising amount of **optimism about the future**. More than a third of participants (38%) felt their communities would emerge from the pandemic stronger, not weaker. There was a strong sense of hope about the future, despite the difficulties communities had been experiencing. A number of interviewees spoke about the resilience of their communities.

> I think the biggest lesson I've learned is **how resilient people are** and how strong they are. After each lockdown, I'm so impressed with the sheer willingness of people to just connect. (GD1)

The pandemic brought about **new forms of connection** in some communities. Many of these were local, as movement restrictions in some states forced people closer to home. Interviewees felt communities were more connected to their local neighbourhoods as a result of the restrictions. Other connections emerged in online spaces, through Zoom activities and community forums on social media.

For some, the pandemic created a greater feeling of unity, as the shared experience overcame a sense of difference. As one faith leader commented:

> I guess pre-COVID, everyone was on their own lane, doing their own thing. However, the moment COVID struck, I think everyone realized that we all are in this together and we all need each other. (CS4)

Connection and unity were commonly demonstrated in very tangible ways, with people offering practical forms of support and welfare checks on others. A community centre manager noted, "**You saw the best of human kind**. The area is disadvantaged, but you saw locals bringing things for other locals. You know, people with not that much still bringing it in for people with less, it was really nice" (PAE1). For interviewees, these expressions of generosity and support helped to build or maintain community trust in the midst of the crisis.

Other interviewees spoke of **new opportunities** that had emerged. For some, the pandemic provided new business opportunities or the opportunity to innovate; the food and beverage sector being one example. Other businesses, like bicycle shops and caravan manufacturers, found themselves unexpectedly busy. In some communities there was a concerted effort to 'buy local', with an emphasis on supporting local businesses and purchasing local products or produce. Some businesses were forced into that business model as regional, interstate or overseas supply chains were cut off by border closures.

Other opportunities emerged in the form of **increased digital literacy**. With appropriate support, many individuals were able to cross over the digital divide, becoming competent users of new devices, applications and online services:

> What they have loved, when they have come back out of lockdown and we came to computer classes, they've said how important it was to have those skills to be able to connect with family overseas. And to connect with family generally. So now they're going oh, we know how to WhatsApp and it's much cheaper than ringing them on the phone; you don't have to pay. We can use the WiFi and things like that. So, they've learnt all these things. They're actually using those skills. (GD2)

A number of interviewees noted the pandemic had created **new flexibility**. Most notably this came from working from home arrangements, but many organisations also developed new ways of offering services. While some of these were ultimately unsuccessful, the sense of adaptability and responsiveness to the changing circumstances remained. Several interviewees noted they felt they were "working smarter" (PAE4) or that their organisations were more targeted in their work. New collaborations had been formed between community or service organisations or between government and community. There were lessons that had been learned and acted upon.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

As communities look towards emerging from the pandemic, challenges remain. For many organisations and service providers, significant work will need to go towards **reengaging those who have dropped away, disengaged or been lost**, especially during the prolonged lockdowns in some states. Disengagement appears to have happened for a number of reasons, including lockdown fatigue, technological barriers, lack of face-to-face interaction (with online engagement providing an inadequate substitute) or heightened vulnerability during this period. Interviewees noted that many people were experiencing fear and anxiety around reconnecting with others, going out in public or interacting in large groups.

Interviewees highlighted momentum for programs also needed to be rebuilt, as well as trust between service providers and their clients. One interviewee noted, "[We need to] start all the engagement again with families that are already hard to reach. **We're going to have to start all over again**" (community services sector, C2). Schools will also face challenges reengaging those students who have struggled with home learning, those who have fallen behind academically or children with vulnerabilities.

The sustained impact of caregiving on service providers and community organisations was another challenge identified by interviewees. 18% felt **caring for the caregivers** and addressing caregiver burnout would be a significant need emerging from the crisis:

> Those who have been hanging in there, doing it tough, soldiering on, are going to collapse in a bit of a heap. If you've been running on adrenaline, been hypervigilant, been super careful, all those things, when things are more relaxed, I think it's all going to catch up on us. There is going to need to be allowances made and a lot of care. The question is, those who have been doing all the caring are likely to be the ones who are going to be falling in a heap and therefore who's going to be caring? (GD6)

With **mental health issues** identified as one of the most significant challenges to emerge from the pandemic, interviewees noted ongoing resources would be needed to address the mental health impacts of the pandemic, including "far greater support systems" (St3). There was concern these impacts could lead to longer term problems. As a community development worker noted, this work was imperative "so that people don't actually fall into a chronic, mental health condition and require a medical response" (CS1). Further support was also needed for those who had experienced trauma, either as a result of home country experiences that had been relived or because of the impact of the fear and uncertainty generated by the pandemic. A community worker summed up her concerns, "I don't think we're automatically stronger without some significant effort and investment" (S4).

For many interviewees, there was worry that certain groups or individuals would fall through the cracks as communities recovered and people moved on with their lives. Some of **the most vulnerable** identified by interviewees included those who had fallen outside of the government's financial support criteria; those with casual or insecure work; the homeless; the infirm; those with mental health issues; international students and asylum seekers.

Looking forward, one of the greatest tasks for communities will be addressing the isolation, disconnection and impact to community connectedness brought about by the pandemic. Interviewees emphasised that while gains have been made through online connection, this has been an insufficient substitute for real life connection. In communities that had emerged from lockdown, the interviewees spoke of a real hunger for physical connection and in-person interaction. For them, facilitating these opportunities is likely to play an important role in counteracting social isolation and rebuilding trust. One community worker emphasised, "Yes, we're more connected than ever through social media and all of these online platforms, but **nothing can really replicate real life connection**" (F8).

The common experience of navigating the pandemic brought people together in new ways. Interviewees were hopeful this would continue to break down some of the barriers between people that had been evident before the pandemic:

> Everyone started to recognize each other as individuals, as people rather than from that group or from that group and the respect levels climbed and it was good to see. (PAE1)

HOW HAS AUSTRALIA FARED IN A TIME OF CRISIS?

The COVID 19 pandemic has been described as a once in a generation event. Australian governments have taken unprecedented measures to prevent the spread of the virus, limit deaths and hospitalisation and maintain public health, but these measures have had significant impacts on communities.

The interviews suggest **social cohesion has not been broken**. There was no evidence of widespread tensions in communities, conflict or the ongoing targeting of members of certain cultural communities. However, they revealed **widespread concern about social disconnection** in communities, **concern for the vulnerable, technological disparities** between different segments of the community and barriers to accessing information for cultural communities. How these issues are addressed will be important for strengthening social cohesion, supporting community recovery and mitigating the long-term ramifications of the crisis.

Photo by Nicolas Weldingh on Unsplash

Photo by Anthony Hill on Unsplash

Appendices

Appendix 1:
Factors Influencing Social Cohesion: Individual Modelling of the Scanlon-Monash Index

Andrew C. Ward, Principal Statistician, Storm Logan, Trainee Data Scientist, and Dr Benjamin Phillips, Chief Survey Methodologist, Social Research Centre

To supplement the bivariate analysis that aims to disaggregate key findings by six demographic and two attitudinal variables, included in the above analysis of the Scanlon Foundation survey, the Social Research Centre (SRC) was contracted to investigate person characteristics that were most associated with the values of the redeveloped Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI). The aim of the investigation was to use statistical modelling to assess the relationship between select person characteristics, collected by the 2021 survey, and the redeveloped SMI domain scores. It is envisaged that statistical modelling will be included in the Scanlon Foundation social cohesion report in following years, with a project currently underway to investigate the scope of statistical modelling to predict variation in attitudes between Local Government Areas. This work is in keeping with best international practice, which **cautions against limiting analyses to the national level, without consideration of significant variations within populations**. The following is a summary of the full-report, which may be accessed on the project website (https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2021).

The most important predictor of the index score obtained by individuals on the new, redeveloped **SMI overall was financial circumstances** (see Table 72). Individuals who rated their own financial circumstances the most positively scored highest on the SMI overall.

For the **Acceptance and Rejection domain, voting intention** was the most important predictor, with individuals intending to vote for the Greens having the highest (most positive) scores and those intending to vote for Pauline Hanson's One Nation having the lowest scores.

Age was the most important predictor for the Belonging domain, with index scores being highest amongst the oldest adults and decreasing steadily across the younger age groups.

Voting intention was the most important predictor of the Participation domain and was highest among those intending to vote for a minor party or independent, closely followed by the Greens. It was lowest among those not intending to vote.

Voting intention was also the most important predictor of the Social Inclusion and Justice domain. Index scores were highest for those intending to vote for the Coalition parties and lower across those intending to vote for other parties, as well as those not intending to vote.

Sense of Worth was best predicted by self-assessed financial circumstances, with those who rated themselves most prosperous scoring the highest and a steep and steady decline across less prosperous financial circumstances.

MULTIVARIATE MODELLING

As a way of providing insight into the complex ways that person characteristics and responses are related to their scores on the redeveloped SMI, **a multivariate modelling approach** was undertaken to accompany the bivariate analyses and crosstabulations of the 2021 survey data. By predicting a person's score, conditional on their survey responses, a model can **identify those items that have the largest 'net' effect** of those tested. This is more powerful than analyses that may only look at relationships based on one item at a time and cannot **measure the joint impact of multiple items.**

The survey collected a wide range of individual demographics and other responses, of which eighteen were used as predictors in the models. These were: age group, citizenship status, employment status, experience of discrimination, financial circumstances, gender, highest education, whether first language spoken was English or not, network diversity, religion, voting intention, worried about job loss, capital city/ rest of state, Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), state, country of birth, and dwelling tenure.

The redeveloped SMI scores are on a continuous scale and are approximately normally distributed. A multiple linear regression approach was taken, modelling person scores ('outcomes') from their survey responses ('predictors').[3] **Six models in total were generated, one for each domain and one for overall social cohesion.** The variance explained by each of the models ranged from 17% for the Participation domain to 38% for Worth.

The variance explained by each model was apportioned across each of the predictors to yield their relative contribution. These importance values are indicated in the following table for each of the domains. Since the total variance explained varies from domain to domain, the values are standardised so they sum to 100%. Taking *Overall Social Cohesion* as an example:

- The total variance explained by the model is 34%.
- Of that 34%, the largest proportion (almost 41% of it) is due to Financial circumstances.
- The next largest contributor (13.1% of the variance explained) is due to Voting intention.
- The smallest contributors, each at less than 1% of the variance explained, were ARIA+ (geographic remoteness), Citizenship status and Country of birth.
- Although included in the figure for completeness, Capital city / Rest of state, Gender and Language spoken were dropped from the reduced model and so made no contribution to the variance explained.

Each of the remaining domains can be read in the same way. The order of predictors is the same for each domain and reflects their average relative importance across all the models, from highest at the top (Financial circumstances) to lowest at the bottom (Capital city / Rest of state).

The survey items that contributed the most to the variance explained by the models were as follows:

- Financial circumstances; Voting intention; Highest education; Age group; Worried about job loss.

By contrast, the survey items that the models found to be least useful, never contributing more than 5% to the explained variance, were as follows:

- Citizenship status; Gender; SEIFA; State; Capital city / Rest of state.

3 To simplify the interpretation of outputs, two additional procedures were applied to the regression models. First, predictors were removed that had a negligible relationship with the scores, relative to other predictors. This was done using a stepwise selection approach, which iteratively removed predictors from the full model, each time testing if doing so made a notable difference to the model predictions. Such a procedure usually yields a parsimonious model that predicts the outcomes almost as well as the unrestricted model with all predictors.

The most notable variations across categories are as follows.

Table 72 Relative importance of survey items in predicting individual scores, overall social cohesion and domains

VARIABLE	OVERALL SOCIAL COHESION	ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION	BELONGING	PARTICIPATION	SOCIAL INCLUSION AND JUSTICE	WORTH
Financial circumstances	40.8	-	15.8	-	27.0	57.3
Voting intention	13.1	45.8	16.0	21.2	38.3	3.2
Age group	5.1	13.5	19.5	3.5	-	7.8
Highest education	5.9	10.7	-	15.3	-	-
Network diversity	4.4	3.7	1.2	14.7	-	1.1
Home ownership	5.8	6.7	13.9	3.2	5.0	9.1
Worried about job loss	7.5	1.5	4.9	2.8	3.7	10.0
Place of birth	0.7		3.8	8.9	3.5	-
Experienced discrimination	2.7	0.2	7.8	8.6	0.6	3.2
Remoteness	0.8	-	7.3	-	-	-
First language spoken	-	0	-	6.3	1.8	-
Religion	2.2	5.6	4.9	5.4	4.9	0.8
Employment status	4.8	-	-	-	5.6	4.3
Citizenship status	0.8	2.1	-	4.6	1.3	0.2
Gender		2.8	-	0.5	4.4	0.2
SEIFA	3.6	1.8	2.9	2.7	1.1	1.6
State	1.7	3.2	2.0	-	2.7	1.1
Capital city / rest of state	-	2.2	-	2.3	0.1	0.2

Table 73 Mean domain scores for most important predictors

VARIABLE	OVERALL SOCIAL COHESION	ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION	BELONGING	PARTICIPATION	SOCIAL INCLUSION AND JUSTICE	WORTH
FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES						
Prosperous	55.1	54.1	68.0	37.6	54.7	72.8
Living very comfortably	54.4	57.0	64.8	34.2	51.5	67.0
Living reasonably comfortably	53.0	55.7	61.2	32.5	49.9	59.2
Just getting along	50.3	55.3	56.2	32.3	44.6	48.7
Struggling to pay bills	48.7	56.8	54.1	34.0	40.9	42.3
Poor	45.4	53.4	47.6	26.7	33.5	35.9
VOTING INTENTION						
Labor Party	52.3	59.8	59.3	32.8	46.2	56.4
Coalition	53.3	49.4	64.6	30.9	53.7	59.6
Greens	52.3	69.8	56.3	40.1	43.4	54.9
One Nation / Pauline Hanson	50.6	40.2	61.9	37.9	46.0	58.5
Other	51.4	53.2	57.7	42.9	45.4	55.0
Would not vote	49.5	52.8	51.5	24.2	44.3	51.2
Not stated	52.4	55.3	60.6	29.4	48.9	55.9
AGE GROUP						
18-24 years	51.6	67.7	53.0	32.6	45.7	52.0
25-34 years	51.6	60.4	55.5	30.8	46.8	54.3
35-44 years	52.2	56.9	58.8	30.9	48.1	56.0
45-54 years	52.0	52.9	60.5	34.0	48.4	55.4
55-64 years	52.3	51.1	62.6	32.8	48.7	57.9
65-74 years	53.3	50.2	66.5	35.1	50.2	61.9
75+ years	53.9	50.1	69.1	37.7	50.9	64.9

Photo by Chuko Chribb on Unsplash

Appendix 2:
Calculation Of The Australian Cohesion Index

Dr Benjamin Phillips, Chief Survey Methodologist, Social Research Centre

Constructing an index out of a diverse set of available indicators typically involves two different kinds of steps: some means of standardising measures in diverse metrics (e.g. percentages, means and medians) and an aggregation step or steps where the various indicators are summed or averaged into a single metric. For the Australian Cohesion Index, we applied the approach used in the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (Michalos et al. 2011) for both the standardisation and aggregation steps. We address standardisation first and then aggregation.

In addition to measures being in different metrics (means, percentages, etc.), measures also can be in different directions. This is to say that for some measures a high value indicates positive social cohesion while for other measures it is a low value that indicates positive social cohesion. The percentage of eligible voters who vote in federal elections is an example of a positively scored measure. The percentage of adults with high or very high psychological distress is an example of a negatively scored measure. For aggregation to yield sensible results, the direction of negatively scored measures must be reversed, which we term reverse scoring.

Positively scored measures are standardised as follows, where Y_{Base} is the unstandardised value of the base year, Y_t is the unstandardised measure at time t and $\hat{Y}_t$ is the standardised measure at time t:

$$\hat{Y}_t = Y_t / Y_{Base} \times 100$$

Where there has been no shift, the standardised measure will be equal to 100. Where there has been an increase since the base year, the value will be greater than 100. Where there has been a decrease from the base year, the value will be less than 100. For example, if a measure was 10 in the base year and 20 in the next point of measurement, it would have a standardised value of 200.

Negatively scored measures are reverse scored. This is done substituting the reciprocal of Y into the equation shown above:

$$\hat{Y}_t = \left(\frac{1}{Y_t}\right) \Big/ \left(\frac{1}{Y_{Base}}\right) \times 100$$

In the case of a negatively scored measure that changed from 10 in the base year to 5, the standardised value would be 200. The use of reciprocals ensures that a halving of a negatively scored measure compared to the baseline value ends up scored the same as a doubling of a positively scored measures compared to the baseline. Although it might seem desirable to reverse score percentages as $100\% - Y\%$, such an approach could only work for percentages and not for other indicators like greenhouse gas emissions.

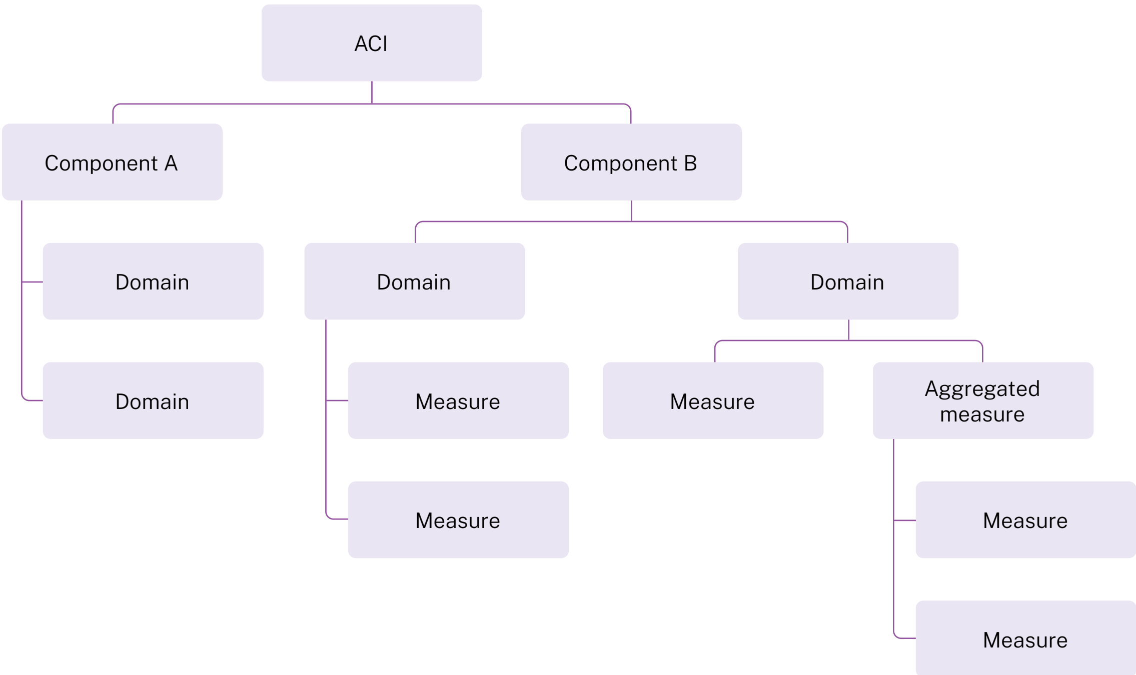
The standardised measures are then aggregated. This takes place in four stages, shown in simplified form in Figure .

The highest level is the Australian Cohesion Index score itself, which is formed by the average (i.e. mean) of Components A and B. Component A is the overall Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI). Component B is the statistical indicators. Components A and B receive equal weight in the final Australian Cohesion Index score. Component A is the average of the SMI domains values for the year (see Mapping Social Cohesion Survey reports for details regarding the SMI). Component B is the average of the domains for the statistical indicators, with each domain having equal weight.

For each domain of Component B, the measures that form each domain are averaged, with each measure receiving equal weight when calculating the mean.

For certain sets of very closely related measures (i.e. male and female life expectancy at birth, involvement in different types of organisations, NAPLAN scores, PISA results), the standardised values are averaged to yield a single measure prior to being averaged with other measures in the domain. This step is taken to ensure that these measures receive an appropriate weight. For example, in the case of PISA in the education domain, it would not be desirable for the reading, science and mathematics scores to be separate as they would then outweigh other measures like the proportion of the 20 to 64 year-old population with a non-school qualification, the proportion of the same population with a bachelor degree or above and the proportion of the 15 to 24 year-old population fully engaged in employment or study.

Figure 29 Australian Cohesion Index aggregation



Notes: Simplified example. Actual number of domains and number of measures in domains is larger.

References

International

Beauvais, Caroline and Jane Jenson (2002), Social Cohesion: Updating the State of Research, CPNR Discussion Paper No. F22, May 2002

Canadian Council on Social Development (2000), Social Cohesion in Canada: Possible Indicators, November 2000

Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2012), How are Canadians Really Doing? The 2012 CIW Report. Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo.

Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2016), How are Canadians Really Doing? The 2016 CIW National Report. Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo.

Chan, Joseph, Ho-Pong To and Elaine Chan (2006), 'Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research', *Social Indicators Research,* 75:273-302

Fletcher, Miles (2017), 'Beyond GDP: Measuring the economic well-being of individuals', UK Office for National Statistics, 6 July 2017

Jeannotte, Sharon (2003), Social cohesion: Insights from Canadian research, *International Comparative Research Group,* SRA-788

Larsen (2014), 'Social cohesion: Definition, measurement and development', Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies, Aalborg University

Michalos, Alex C., et al. (2011), *The Canadian Index of Wellbeing*. Technical Paper: Canadian Index of Wellbeing 1.0. Waterloo, ON: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo

OECD (2010), High-Level Expert Group on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress

OECD (2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020), How's Life? Measuring Well-being, OECD Publishing

OECD (2012), Perspectives on Global Development. Social Cohesion in a Shifting World, OECD Publishing

OECD (2018), Beyond GDP: Measuring What Counts for Economic and Social Performance, OECD Publishing

Sanmartin Claudia, *et al.* (2021), Moving Forward on Wellbeing (Quality of Life) Measures in Canada, Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series

Schiefer, David and Jolanda van der Noll (2017), 'The essentials of social cohesion: a literature review,' *Social Indicators Research,* 132: 579-603

Sen, Amartya (1999), United Nations 1999 Human Development Report, Globalization with a Human Face

Stiglitz, Joseph, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2009), Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress

Stiglitz, Joseph, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Martine Durand (2018), Beyond GDP: Measuring What Counts for Economic and Social Performance, OECD Publishing

United Nations Development Programme (1990), Human Development Report 1990, New York, Oxford University Press

United Nations Development Programme (2020), Human Development Report 2020. The Next Frontier. Human Development and the Anthropocene, United Nations

Australia

Australian Bureau of Statistics

- Employee Earnings and Hours
- Education and Work
- Energy Account
- General Social Survey
- Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey
- Household Income and Wealth
- Housing Occupancy and Costs
- Labour Force
- Life Tables
- Mental Health
- National Health Survey
- Personal Income
- Population
- Smoking

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012), Measures of Australia's Progress. Aspirations for Our Nation: A Conversation with Australians About Progress

Australian Human Rights Commission (2018), Face the Facts: Gender Equality

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017, 2019, 2021), Australia's Welfare, series

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021a), Housing affordability

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021b), Philanthropic and charitable donations

Australian Social Inclusion Board (2012), Social Inclusion in Australia. How Australia in faring, 2nd edition, Commonwealth of Australia

Commonwealth of Australia (2019), Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Closing the Gap Report 2019,

Dawson, Emma, *et al.*, Measure for measure. Gender Equality in Australia, Per Capita

Ey, Carol (2019), 'Pisa versus NAPLAN – a difference of questions', Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia

Green, Antony (2019), 'Preference flows at the 2019 Federal election', Antony Green's Election Blog

Green, Antony (2020), 'Candidates, informal voting and optional preferential voting', Antony Green's Election Blog

Hawkins, John (2014), 'The Four Approaches to Measuring Wellbeing', Andrew Podger and Dennis Trewin (eds), *Measuring and Promoting Wellbeing. How Important is Economic Growth?*, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, ANU Press

Lowe, Philip (2018), Address to Australian Industry Group, 13 June, Reserve Bank of Australia, Speeches

National Assessment Program (2012-2019), Literacy and Numeracy, National Report

Newman, Gerard (1999), 'Federal Election Results 1949-1998', Research Paper no. 8, Department of the Parliamentary Library

Thirlwell, Mark (2019), 'What has happened to Australia's economic growth?', Australian Institute of Company Directors, 30 October 2019

Volunteering Australia 2021, Key Volunteering Statistics, January

Wilkins, Roger, Ferdi Botha, Esperanza Vera-Toscano and Mark Wooden (2020), The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 18, Melbourne Institute

Acknowledgements and Credits

This project has been made possible with the financial support and vision of the Scanlon Foundation. The author is particularly grateful to Mr Peter Scanlon AO, Chairman, and Ms Anthea Hancocks, Chief Executive Officer, for the support provided.

In the initial planning and implementation of this project during 2006-07, Emeritus Professor John Nieuwenhuysen AM, then of Monash University, and Dr Hass Dellal AO, Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation, played key roles. The support of Mr Tony Fry, past Chief Executive Officer of the Scanlon Foundation, is also gratefully acknowledged.

In 2021, funding from the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs supported research for the development of the Australian Cohesion Index and research and analysis for the qualitative component of this report.

Mr Bruce Smith, independent consultant and Fellow of The Research Society, has been involved in the project from its inception and has provided sound advice and support at all stages of the project implementation, data analysis and interpretation. Additional assistance was provided by Adjunct Professor Darren Pennay, Founder and Senior Advisor, Research, Methods & Strategy, Social Research Centre.

Administration of the national surveys was undertaken by The Social Research Centre. The SRC provided expert advice during project planning and developed and applied the survey weight. The assistance Dr Benjamin Phillips, Chief Survey Methodologist, SRC, and Dr Wendy Heywood, Senior Research Consultant, is particularly acknowledged.

Dr Benjamin Phillips played a key role in the redevelopment of the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion. He also undertook the calculation of the Australian Cohesion Index. Andrew Ward, Principal Statistician, SRC, led the project analysing factors influencing social cohesion.

Ms Trish Prentice undertook the planning, interviews, analysis and writing of the qualitative section of this report.

Monash University provides the research environment that sustains this project.

MONASH University

Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus AO was the Pratt Foundation Research Professor in the School of Historical, International and Philosophical Studies, Monash University and is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. He has authored the annual Scanlon Foundation social cohesion reports since the project's establishment in 2007 and has published extensively in the field of Australian indigenous and immigration history.

SCANLON FOUNDATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute exists as a bridge between academic insight and public thought, to support the advancement of Australia as a welcoming, prosperous and cohesive nation**.** The body is an initiative of the Scanlon Foundation and furthers its belief that Australia's future prosperity, underpinned by continued population growth, will depend on our ability to maintain, foster and support social cohesion in our communities amidst ever-growing cultural diversity.

The Australian Multicultural Foundation was established in 1989 as a legacy of Australia's Bicentenary, to promote an awareness among the people of Australia of the diversity of cultures, and the contributions made by those from different backgrounds to the development of Australia's social, cultural and economic wellbeing, by adopting issues of national significance and initiating projects in any worthwhile field or activity to the benefit of the community.

The Social Research Centre provides the Australian social research community with access to world-class research and evaluation services including research design, survey management, statistical consulting, qualitative research, data science applications, and analysis and reporting.

Australian Government

SCANLON FOUNDATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

MONASH University

AUSTRALIAN multicultural foundation

Social Research Centre

A subsidiary of The Australian National University

@Scanlon_Inst

info@scanloninstitute.org.au

scanloninstitute.org.au

NOVEMBER 2021

ISBN 978-0-6486654-4-1

9 780648 665441