

Australian Values Study - 2018

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Australia's voice in the
World Values Survey

The Australian National University

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The Social Research Centre provides the Australian social science research community with access to world-class social research services. Our motivation stems from the desire to collect data of the highest quality, undertake research in the public good, enhance knowledge and contribute to an improved understanding of Australian society and our place in the world.

We are a subsidiary of the Australian National University.



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Executive Summary

Since 1981, the World Values Survey has tracked changes in the values and beliefs of citizens in 97 countries, including Australia.

These surveys have identified considerable change in what people want out of life and what they believe. This is the seventh wave of the World Values Survey, allowing us to track changes between countries but also over time. In each country, we ask people the same questions (across a range of different languages) to measure their views on religion, gender roles, work, democracy, good governance, social capital, political participation, cultural diversity, and environmental protection. Countries will have until the end of December 2019 to complete their survey fieldwork.



The Australian component of the World Values Survey is referred to as the Australian Values Study or AVS. The Australian National University has been responsible for the AVS since 2005, with data collection carried out by the Social Research Centre.

We surveyed more than 1,800 Australians during 2018, and several key themes have emerged.

Despite our claims to larrikinism, we have a keen respect for *authority* and many of us are open to '*strongman*' and *technocratic styles of government*.

However, we remain committed to the concept of democracy and are broadly satisfied with how Australian *democracy* is functioning.

Confidence in a range of civic and political organisations is in decline, but most acutely towards media organisations.

Our thoughts on *immigration* remain mixed. We believe that migrants make Australia more diverse and vibrant, but also that immigration increases social conflict.

And around half of all Australians *believe in* God, and an afterlife with a heaven and a hell.

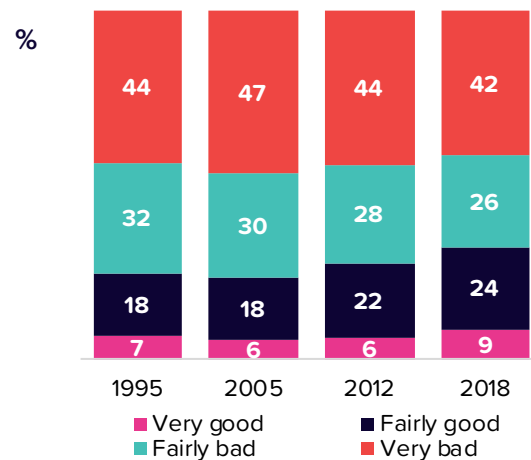
Authoritarian attitudes

The World Values Survey asks a range of questions to measure people's feelings about authority generally, and authoritarian government specifically.

The most direct question asks how Australians would view 'having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections'. Although the largest group of respondents view this style of government as 'very bad', a consistent core of Australians believes it would be 'good' or 'very good'. This core is increasing in size, but very slowly and from a low base.

Below are various types of political systems. Please indicate what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

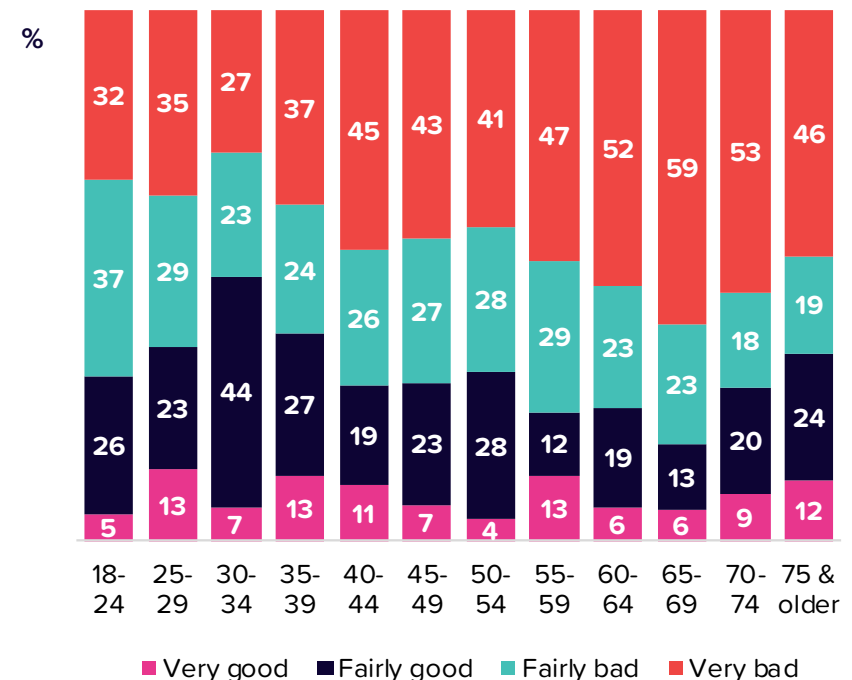
... **Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.**



Younger Australians, generally, are slightly more likely to view 'a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections' as a good type of political system. Baby Boomers – born in the aftermath of World War II and now mostly aged 60 years or older – are the most likely to view it is a 'very bad' system.

Below are various types of political systems. Please indicate what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

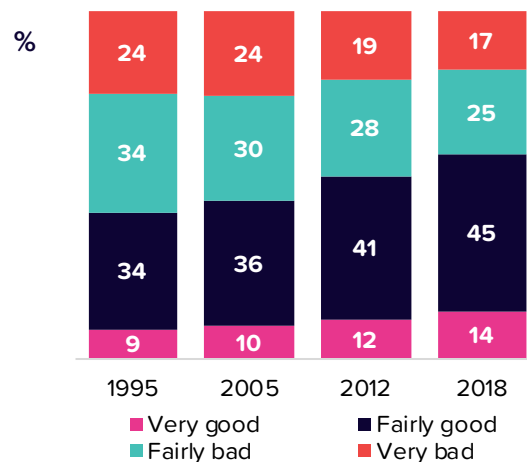
... **Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections. Responses by respondents' age group.**



Similarly, the percentage of Australians who believe that 'having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country' is increasing. In 2018, 59 per cent of respondents think this is a 'good' or 'very good' way of governing Australia.

Below are various types of political systems. Please indicate what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

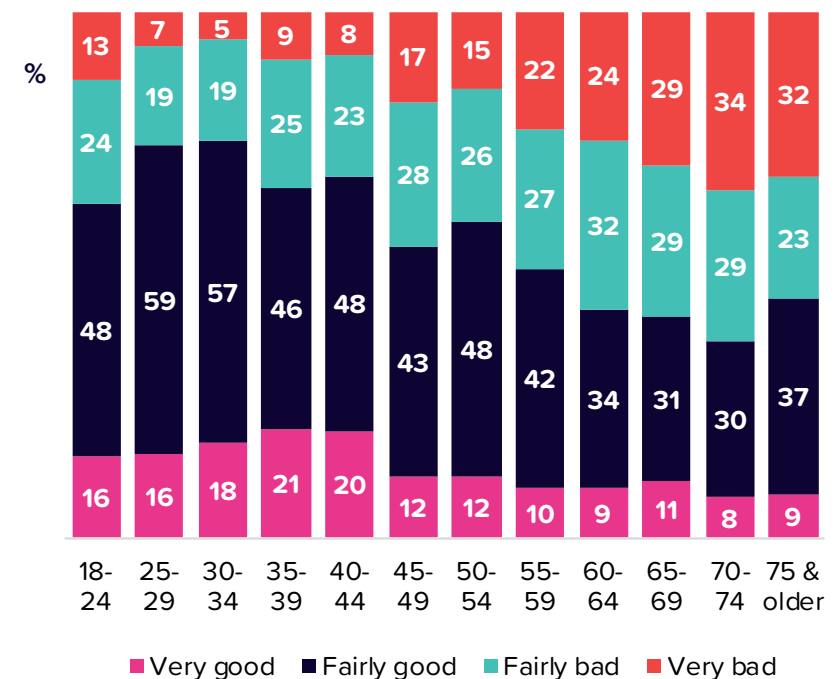
... Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country.



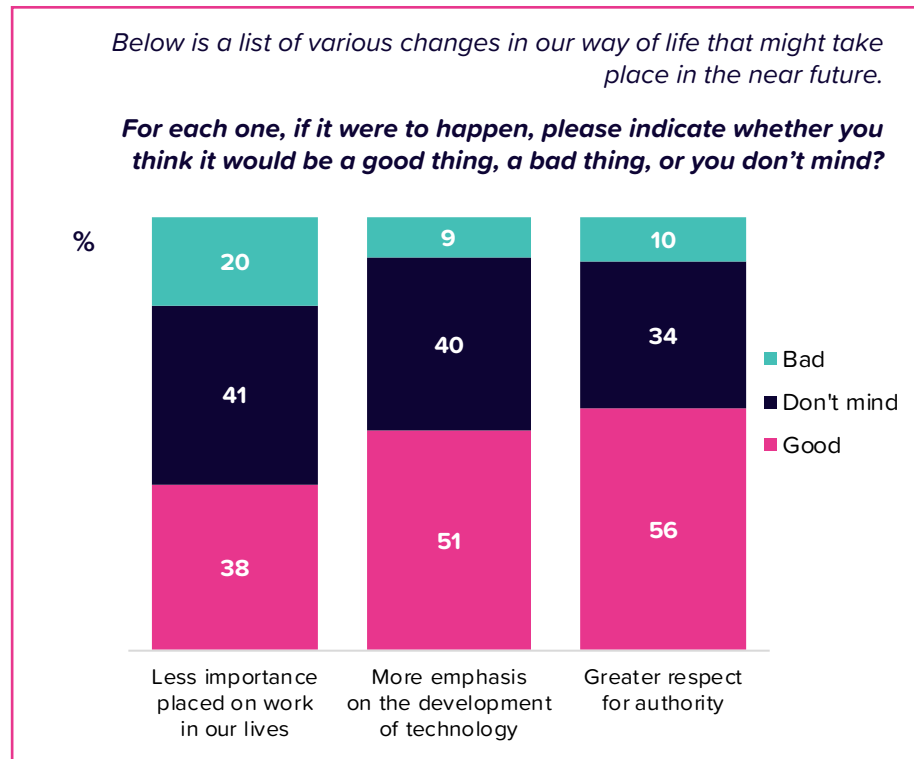
Again, this view is most popular among younger age groups. Three in four Australians (75 per cent) aged between 25 and 34 years think having experts, not government, make decisions is a very good or fairly good idea. That percentage falls to 38 per cent of respondents aged between 70 and 74 years.

Below are various types of political systems. Please indicate what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country?

... Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country. Responses by respondents' age group.



We also find that, when compared with selected other changes that may happen in our society, Australians would most prefer to see 'greater respect for authority'.



We have only asked this question once in the World Values Survey previously (in 2012), and even more Australians wanted greater respect for authority then: 63 per cent thought it would be a good development, 30 per cent did not mind either way, and seven per cent thought it would be bad.

Democracy and trust

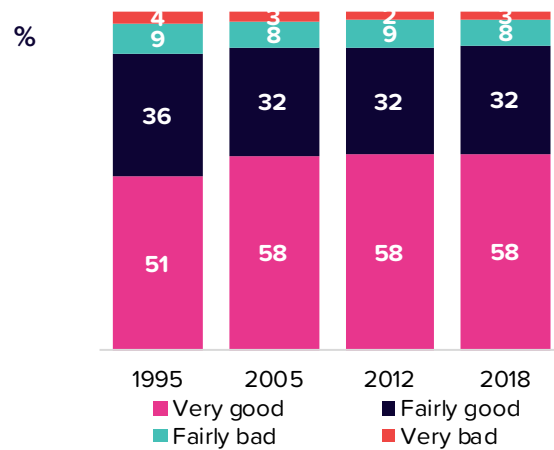
Nonetheless, we remain committed to the broad concept of democratic government.

Almost nine in ten Australians believe that 'having a democratic political system' is either a 'very good' or 'fairly good' form of government. Further, that percentage has been increasing since 1995.



Below are various types of political systems. Please indicate what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this country? ...

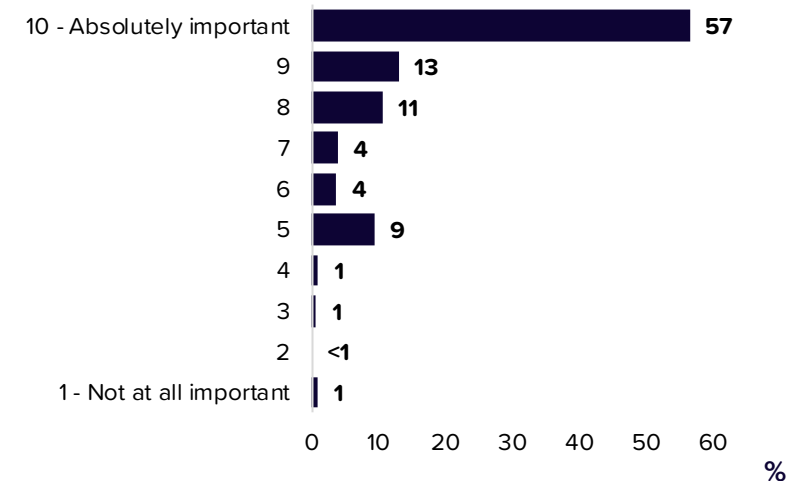
Having a democratic political system



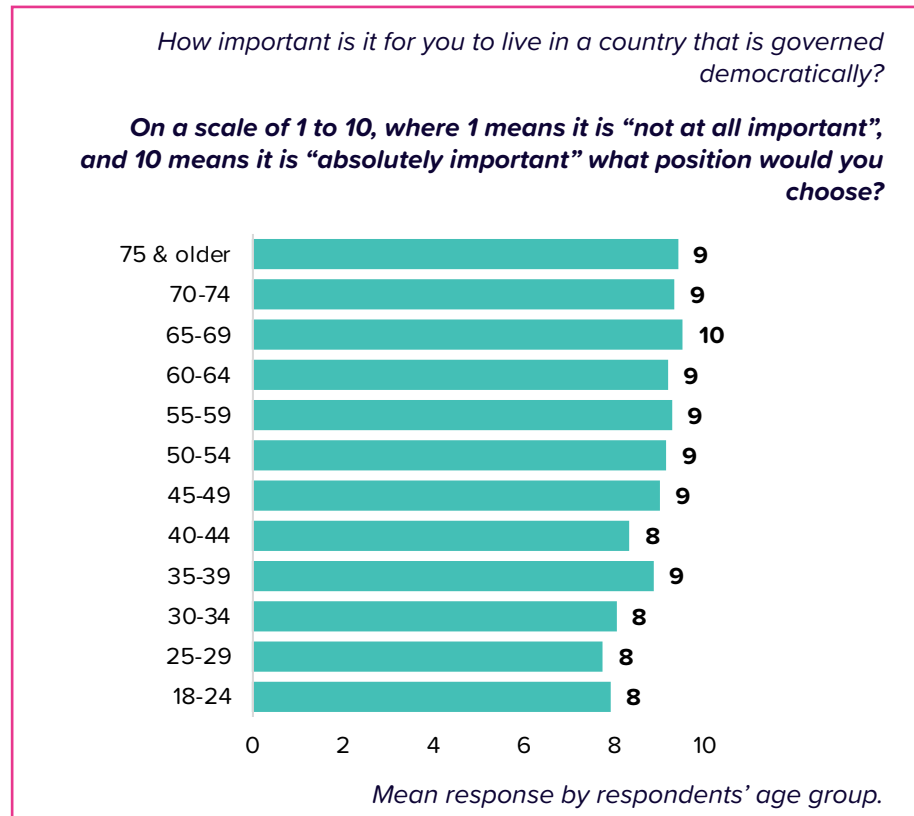
Importantly, more than half of all Australians believe it is 'absolutely important' to live in a country that is governed democratically. This suggests that, for most Australians, democracy is still the 'only game in town'.

How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?

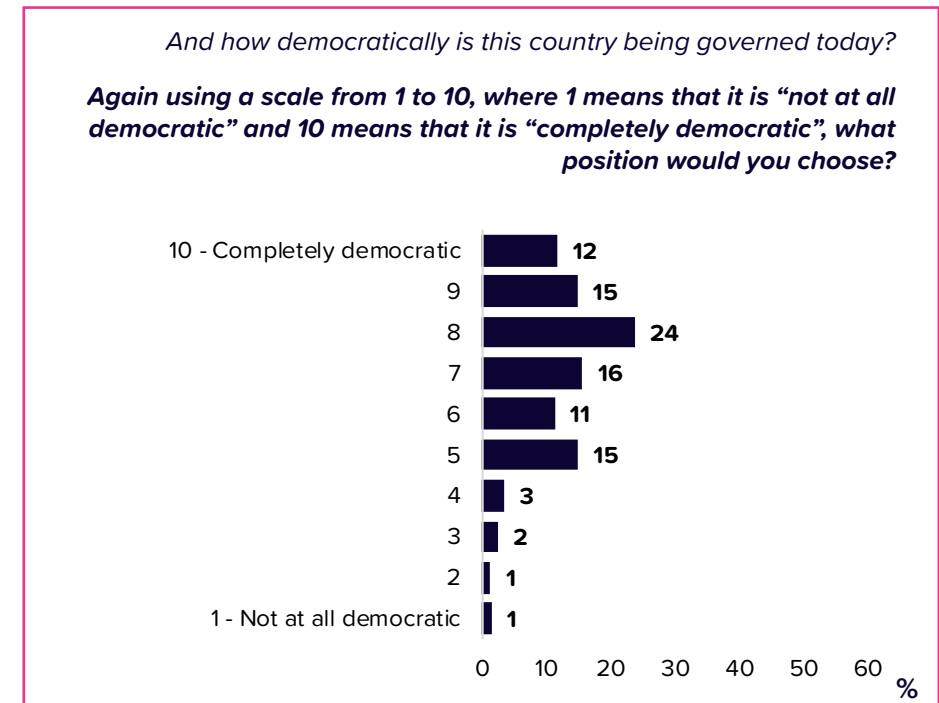
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means it is "not at all important", and 10 means it is "absolutely important" what position would you choose?



However, older Australians are more likely than younger Australians to believe it is important to live in a country that is governed democratically.



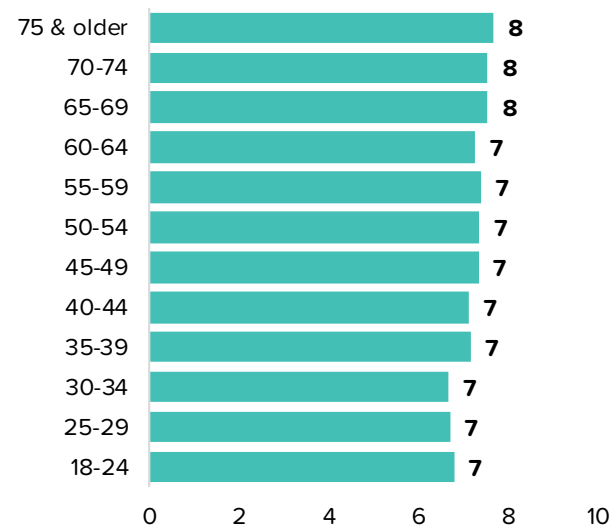
Australians are broadly satisfied that Australia is currently being governed democratically.



We observe some differences by age group, but they are not as pronounced as the differences in the importance of living in a democratic system by age group.

And how democratically is this country being governed today?

Again using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that it is “not at all democratic” and 10 means that it is “completely democratic”, what position would you choose?



Mean response by respondents' age group.

Confidence in political and civic organisations

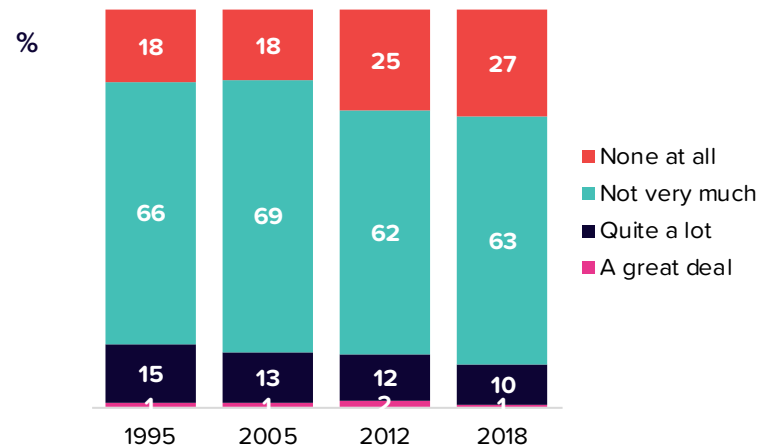
Although Australians remain supportive of the concept of democracy and broadly satisfied with how the political system is operating, their confidence in specific political organisations continues to fall.

Very few Australians express confidence in the country's political parties, and that number is declining even further. In 2018, 27 per cent of Australians report having 'no confidence at all' *in political parties*. No more than one per cent of Australians has expressed having 'a great deal' of confidence in parties in any of the four times the question has been asked since 1981.



Below is a list of organizations. For each one, please indicate how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

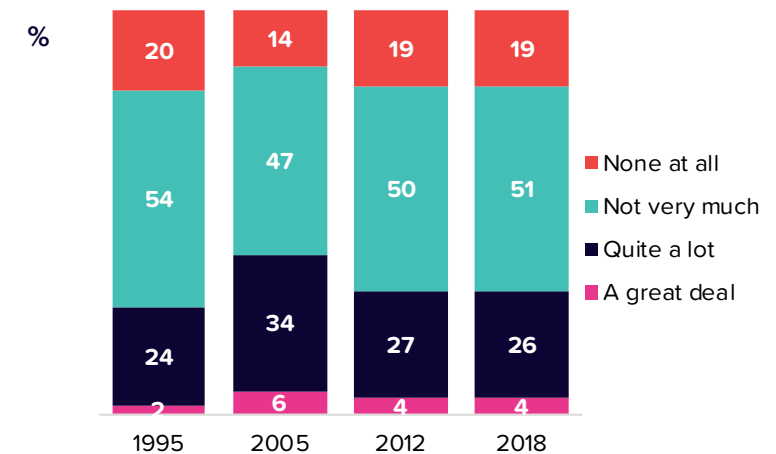
Political parties



A larger number of Australians have confidence in the federal government. Almost one in five (19 per cent) express 'no confidence at all' in the government, but this figure has been largely stable over time. Approximately half of the population regularly reports having 'not very much' confidence in the federal government.

Below is a list of organizations. For each one, please indicate how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

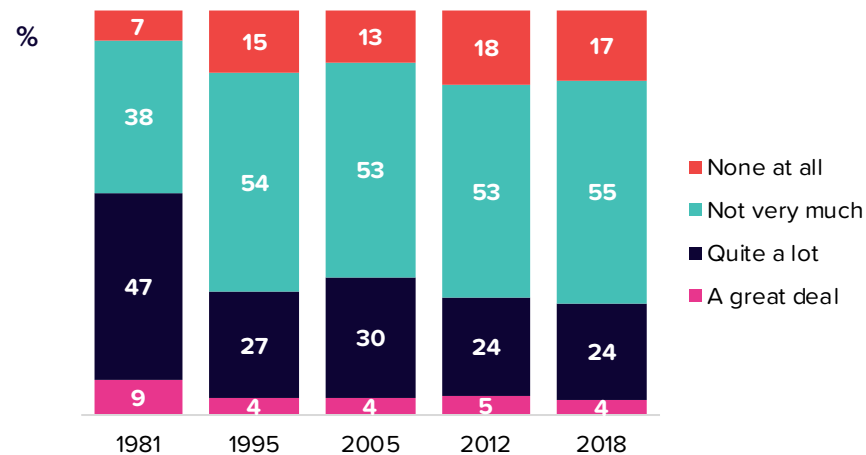
The federal government in Canberra



Similarly, confidence in the federal parliament has been quite low – but stable – over time. Since 1995, fewer than 20 per cent of Australians have expressed ‘no confidence at all’ in the parliament, and approximately half report ‘not very much’ confidence. Those expressing either ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ of confidence is steady at or near 30 per cent of the population.

Below is a list of organizations. For each one, please indicate how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

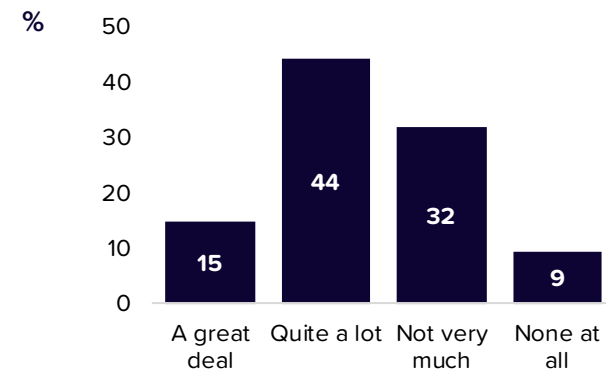
The federal parliament



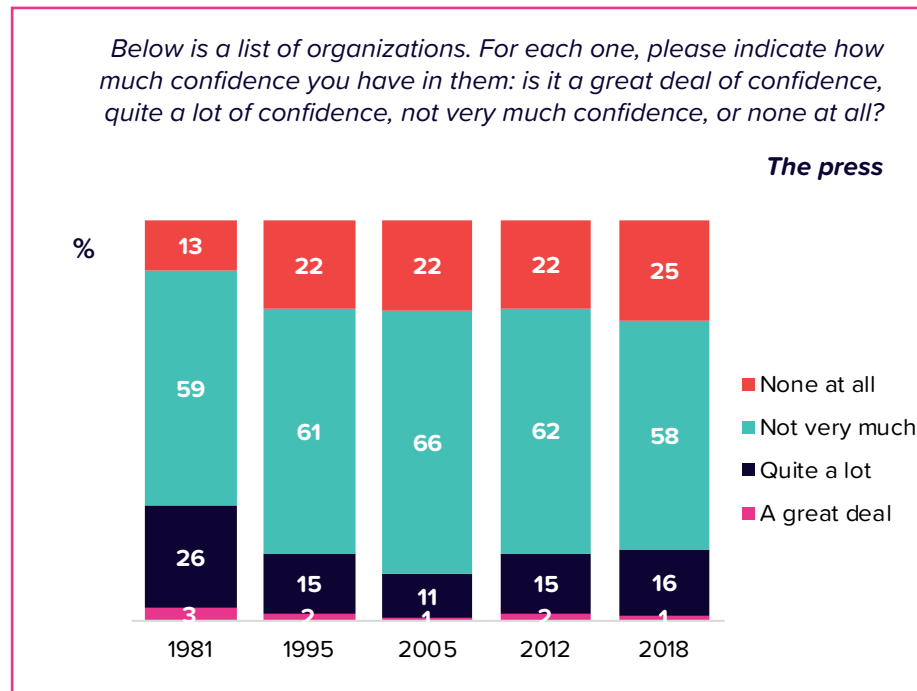
Happily, we have quite high rates of confidence in the administration of our elections. Asked for the first time in 2018, 15 per cent of Australians have ‘a great deal’ of confidence, and a further 44 per cent ‘quite a lot’ of confidence. Trust in an honest, accountable electoral administration is fundamental to a well-functioning democracy.

Below is a list of organizations. For each one, please indicate how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

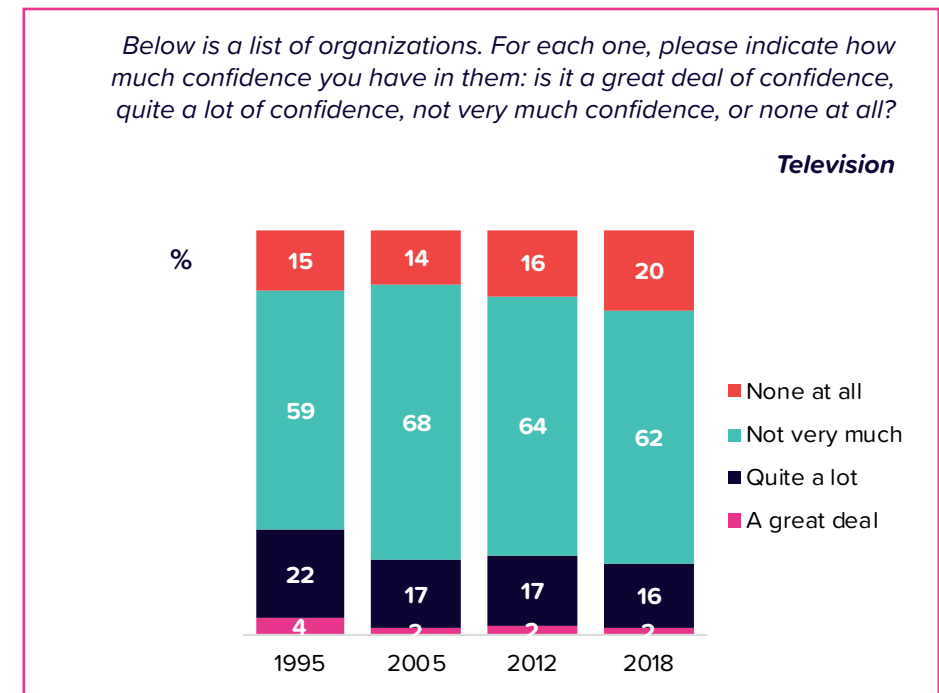
Elections (i.e. the Australian Electoral Commission), 2018



Confidence in a range of media has fallen since we first conducted the World Values Survey in Australia in 1981. In 2018, a full quarter of Australians express 'no confidence at all' in the press. A further 58 per cent have 'not very much' confidence.



Television fares little better. One in five Australians has 'no confidence at all' in television organisations; in total, more than 80 per cent expresses either 'no confidence at all' or 'not very much' confidence. However, these are not recent trends: these percentages have been generally steady since 1995.



When we compare Australians' confidence in a range of political and civil society organisations, we see that some institutions are clearly favoured. Australians place most confidence in the armed forces, with almost one third of the population expressing a 'great deal' of confidence in that institution. The police forces follow very closely, before elections, the courts, and universities. These three institutions represent some of the most integral parts of Australia's democratic system.

At the bottom end of the confidence scale resides Australia's political parties, the press, television, major companies, and trade unions. This represents a substantial challenge to Australian democracy in the future.

Despite the public findings of the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry (also known as the Banking or Hayne Royal Commission), confidence in banks remains relatively high: just below churches but above the Federal Government.

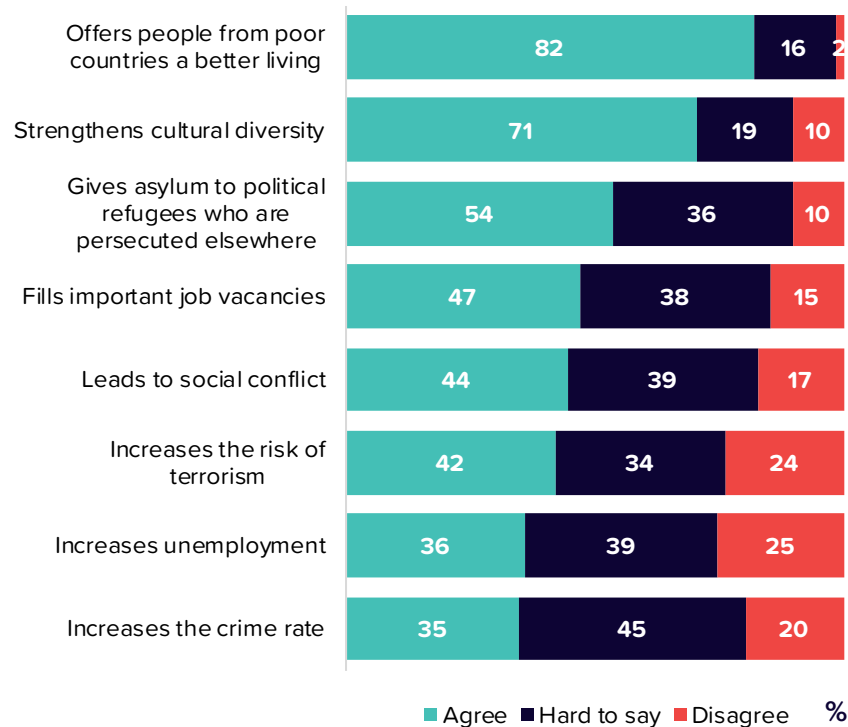
Thoughts on immigration

In accordance with other major surveys of Australian public opinion, the World Values Survey finds mixed views with regard to immigrants and immigration policy. Broadly, we agree that immigration improve the lives of immigrants and makes Australia more culturally diverse. We tend not to believe that immigration increases the rate of crime nor the risk of terrorism. Fewer than half of Australians surveyed believe that immigration leads to social conflict. On employment benefits, Australians seem unsure. Almost half believe immigration helps to fill important job vacancies, but one third believe it increases unemployment.



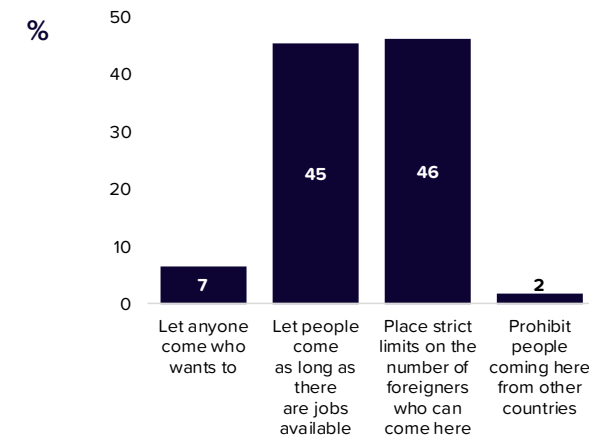
From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of Australia?

For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with it.



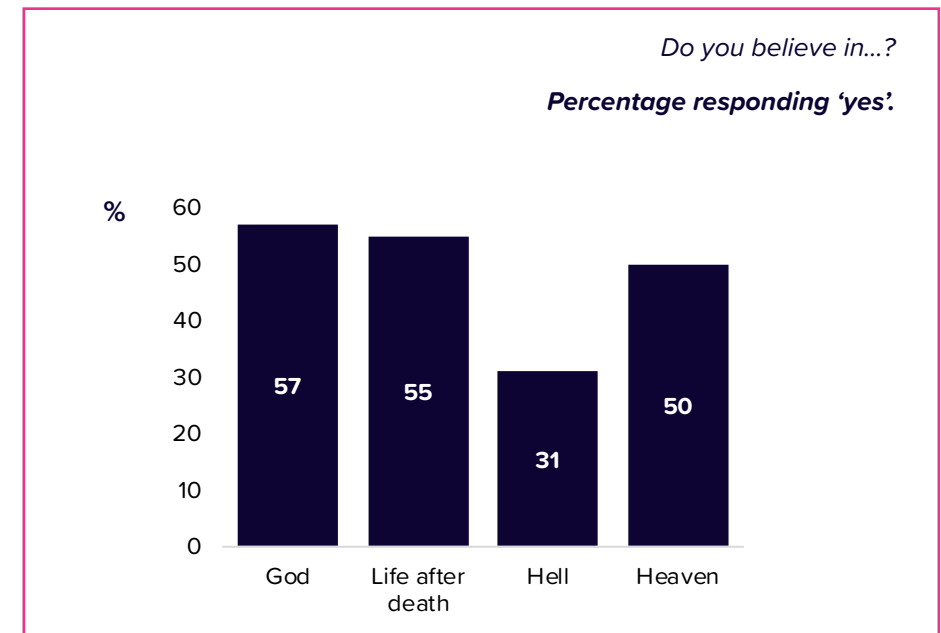
Australians also report mixed but largely centrist views on appropriate limits to immigration. More than 90 per cent of respondents selected either of the two most moderate options provided: 45 per cent believe that the Government should continue to allow immigrants to come to Australia so long as there are jobs available, while 46 per cent believe the Government should place 'strict limits' on who moves to Australia. Just over one in 20 – seven per cent – believe Australia should take any immigrant who wants to move to the country, and only two per cent believe we should prohibit all migration into Australia.

Which one of the following do you think the government should do?

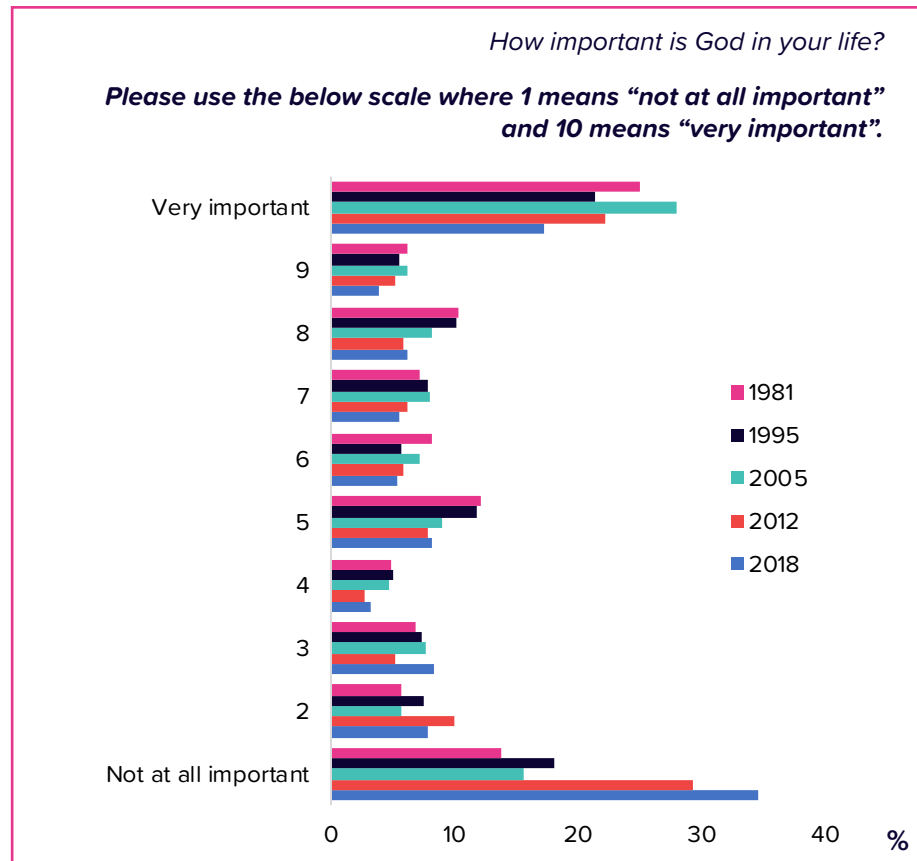


God and the afterlife

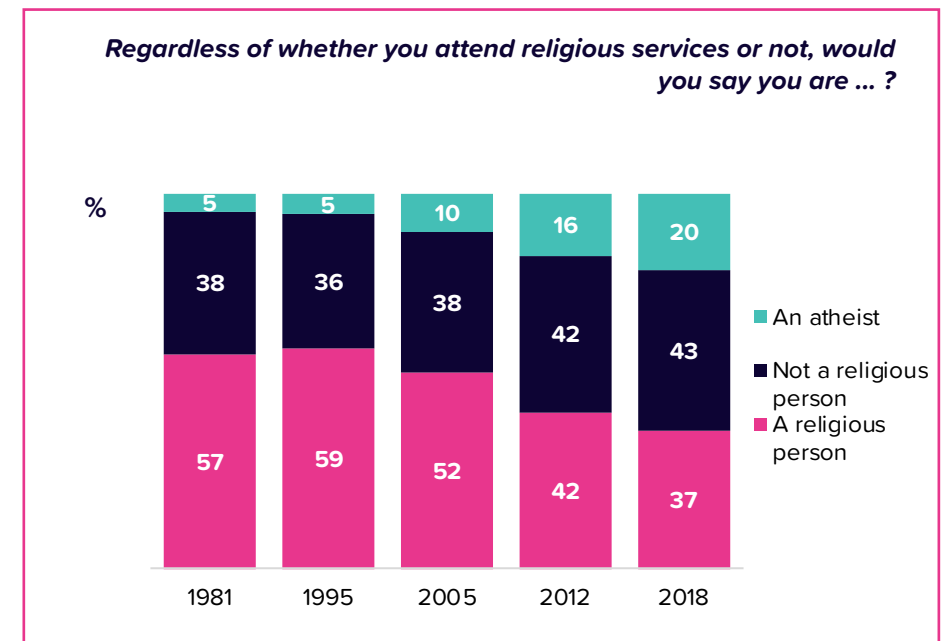
More than half – 57 per cent – of the Australians surveyed report that they believe in God. Similar numbers believe in an afterlife generally and heaven specifically, but only 31 per cent believe in hell.



The percentage of Australians who consider God 'not at all important' in their life is increasing. In the 1981 World Values Survey, 14 per cent placed themselves in this category, compared to 35 per cent in 2018. At the opposite end of the scale, the percentage replying that God is 'very important' in their life has declined from 25 per cent to 17 per cent between 1981 and 2018 (after increasing slightly in 2005).



Similarly, more Australians are describing themselves as atheists, and fewer are describing themselves as religious. In 1981, only five per cent of Australians identified as atheist, compared with 20 per cent in 2018. The number of 'religious people' has fallen from 57 per cent of the population to 37 over that same period.



About the survey

The in-scope population for the 2018 AVS was adults (18 years of age or over) who are residents of private households in Australia. The sampling approach used address-based sampling with mail as the primary contact method. A sequential mixed-mode design was applied to data collection with participants self-completing via an online or paper-based survey.

The data collection period for the AVS was 3 April to 6 August 2018. The total achieved sample size was 1,813, equating to a response rate of 30.2%.

Summary of key statistics

Field	Outcome
Total sample	6,000
Total interviews achieved	1,813
<i>Online</i>	1,100
<i>Hard copy</i>	713
Response rate (%)	30.2%
Main fieldwork start date	3-Apr-18
Main fieldwork finish date	6-Aug-18

This research was undertaken by the Social Research Centre in accordance with the Privacy Act (1988) and the Australian Privacy Principles contained therein, the Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code 2014, the Australian Market and Social Research Society's Code of Professional Practice, and ISO 20252 standards.

Further information

Information on the WVS, including published results from previous years, are available at www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

This report focusses on several key themes that emerged from the survey. The full results will be available from the Australian Data Archive, www.ada.edu.au.