Strengthening Democracy

Creating a data tool on democratic resilience

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Strengthening democratic resilience and social cohesion relies heavily on the work of local government authorities and community organisations. To achieve this, the Strengthening Democracy Project has created a practical tool that can provide a profile of a local area, the relevant available statistics and considerations for the design of programs that will have an impact.

Democratic resilience can be assessed through individual and group participation in civil society and political processes. In particular, the safeguarding of these opportunities and associated institutions. The data visualisation tool resulting from this project is built on the currently available high quality data.

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute undertook a program of work to inform how Australia can strengthen its democratic resilience. The program was divided into three stages. The first involved a qualitative analysis of a representative sample of the population to understand how democracy is understood. It was further enhanced by a study of the prevalence and association of 'democracy' in mainstream media such as opinion pages and in Hansard (the report of the proceedings of the Australian parliament and its committees). The second stage was to locate and analyse evaluations of national and international programs intended to build democratic resilience, social cohesion and civic participation.

Finally, the results of the first two stages informed the third stage which included:

1. Identification of data linkage opportunities.
2. Assessment of potential indicators for spatial and temporal monitoring of Australia's social cohesion and democratic resilience.
3. Provision of insights into where and how to improve the design of future programs that strengthen democratic resilience and social cohesion.
4. Creation of a data visualisation webpage.

Essentially, the program of work indicated that there are limited sources of indicators related to democracy that can provide the breadth, accuracy and coherence required to ensure the data visualisation is accurate and timely. The most substantial data source was the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey. It provides the only annual survey that employ a comprehensive questionnaire and probability-based methodology. This survey provides the Scanlon-Monash Index which is constructed by aggregating responses from 20 questions in the survey. These cover the five domains of social cohesion: belonging, worth, social inclusion and justice, participation and acceptance and rejection.

To aid an understanding of the state of democracy within the local government area, the project created the Democracy Index. This was built through the aggregation of nine questions that focus specifically on democracy and political participation. While the Index is in its early stages, with only one year of data available, it will become more robust over time.

For both Indexes, the tool—known as the Social Cohesion Compass and available on the Scanlon Institute website—provides the variation of the score above or below the average. This is one of the many insights that can now be accessed in one place. Others include:

- Obtain a comprehensive perspective of any local government area.
- Compare two local government areas on any Scanlon-Monash Index domain including belonging, worth, social inclusion and justice, participation and acceptance and rejection.
- Examine the position of each local government area within the State regarding the relationship between political participation and income, education of the democracy index.
- Discover the essential design considerations required in programs to strengthen social cohesion and democratic resilience.
- Choose the design considerations for different target age groups.

Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience

"Trust is a key foundation of social cohesion. Trust is a basis for our involvement and engagement in society and our social wellbeing and connectedness. Trust is one of the most important and studied forms of social capital and is believed to be an important foundation for social, economic and civic engagement in society and is strongly associated with positive mental health and wellbeing.

Trust in society is multidimensional. Critical to social cohesion is the trust we have in other people in our communities and in the nation, as a whole (interpersonal trust), as well as the trust we have in government, the political system and societal institutions (institutional trust). Interpersonal and institutional trust are separate but related concepts. Our experiences and perceptions of people in government and other institutions shapes how we view and trust people generally in society and vice versa).

Trust in government is important for democracy and the functioning, strength and legitimacy of our political system. Distrust can fuel disengagement and disaffiliation, especially among those who experience social, economic and political marginalisation in other areas. Distrust can also fuel discontent with the political system and the perceived political class, social and political polarisation and demands for fundamental change of either a democratic or anti-democratic character. Blind and unquestioning trust in government, however, is a risk to democracy, making political engagement and activism a critical ingredient in keeping governments accountable and maintaining the strength of our democracy." (Australian Cohesion Index Report, 2023)

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 Research Institute surveys since 2007.

Figure 5: Portion of respondents who reported that most people can be trusted
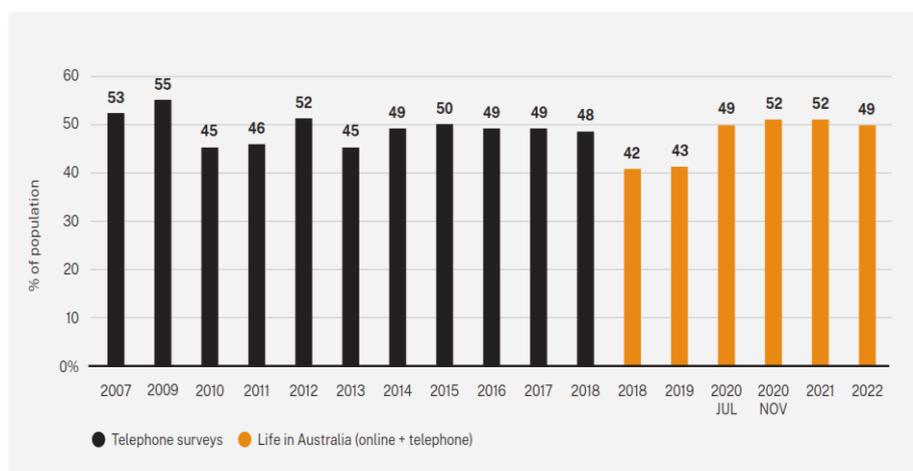
Source: James O'Donnell, Mapping Social Cohesion 2022, p. 56
2007-2018 (telephone survey), 2018-2022 (online and telephone) – Scanlon Foundation

Trust in government has been identified as one of the most important foundations upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems are built. Trust is seen as essential for social cohesion and well-being as it affects its ability to govern without resorting to coercion. (OECD report, Government at a Glance 2013).

To gauge levels of trust in government, the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute surveys have asked: "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". Again, the focus has been on determining change over time using a consistent methodology—rather than absolute levels of trust—which may be influenced by survey context and methodology.

Figure 6: Portion of respondents who think the government in Canberra can be trusted
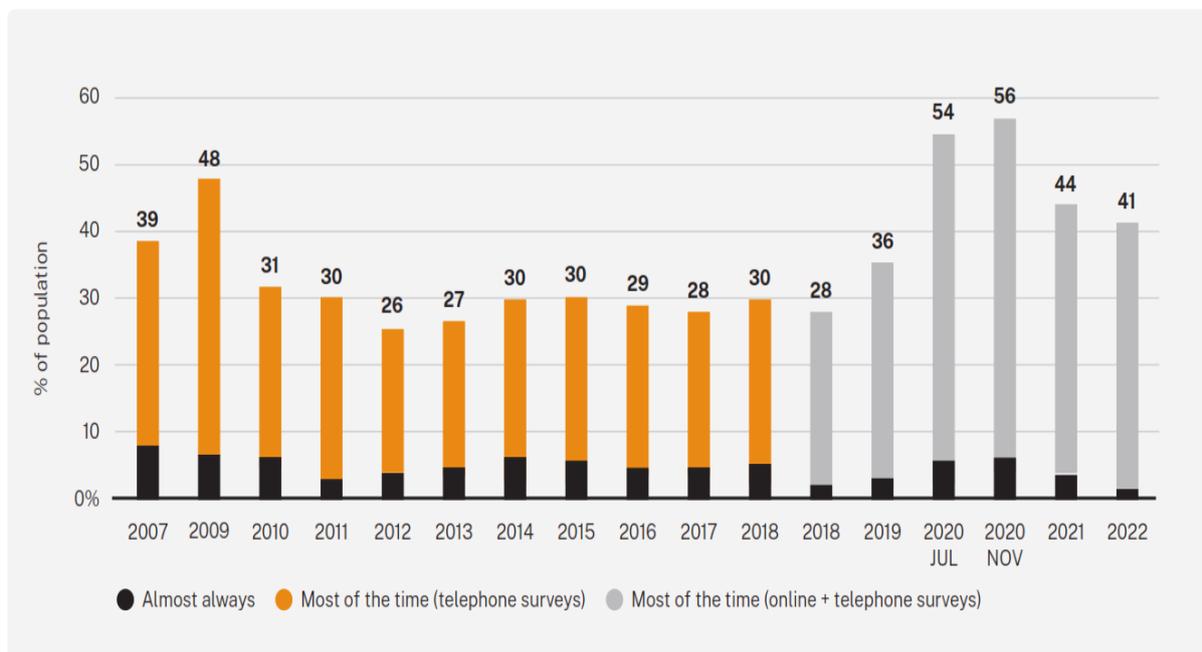
Source: James O'Donnell, Mapping Social Cohesion 2022, p. 53
2007-2018 (telephone survey), 2018-2022 (online and telephone) – Scanlon Foundation

As was referenced earlier, trust is a key foundation of social cohesion and an important foundation for social, economic and civic engagement in society. Trust in each other and trust in our institutions is essential to a resilient society.

Even after accounting for demographic and socioeconomic differences in the population, people who are trusting of others and the Federal Government are more likely to be involved in social or religious groups, including sports clubs, church, hobby, ethnic and adult education groups according to results from the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey.

Political participation is an important aspect of how trust can be realised by the community. On the one hand, political protests and other forms of political activism arise from disenchantment with current policies and systems. At the same time, political actions signify a willingness to engage and fight for change, and perhaps also a belief that our leaders will respond, and change can be achieved.

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Differences in trust across society mirror socioeconomic inequalities. People with lower levels of education, those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and those who describe themselves as poor or struggling to pay their bills are much less likely to believe that people can be trusted. In 2022, just 28 per cent of people who were struggling to pay bills, or identify themselves as poor, were trusting of other people, compared with 68 per cent for people who describe themselves as prosperous or very comfortable and 53 per cent for those who are reasonably comfortable.

Data Linkages and indicators

Comparative indexes for identifying constructs of democracy

Together with the Social Research Centre, the Institute focused on the classification schemes used in three globally recognised initiatives that measure democracy: the Economist Intelligence Unit's (2022) *Democracy Index*, Freedom House's (2023) *Freedom in the World Index*, and various indexes created by the V-Dem Institute (Coppedge et al. 2023.

The coding of the constructs measured in these indices is shown below. Coding is always a balance between ensuring that indicators are sufficiently broad to cover multiple items but not so broad as to be meaningless. The codes shown below represent the best balance between these competing considerations.

Constructs used in democracy indices

Construct	Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index	Freedom House Freedom in the World	V-Dem		
			Electoral Democracy Index	Liberal Democracy Index*	Participatory Democracy Index*	Egalitarian Democracy Index*
Absence of corruption	X	X				
Academic freedom		X	X			
Bodily autonomy	X	X		X		
Checks and balances exist between centres of power in the political system	X			X		
Civil liberties are respected equally across groups	X	X				X
Civil society organisations free from government control	X	X	X		X	
Constitutional supremacy (the constitution is the supreme law of the land)				X		
Educational equality sufficient for all citizens to be able to exercise their basic rights	X					X
Effective and impartial civil service	X			X		
Elected leaders determine government policy	X	X				
Equality of opportunity		X				
Free and fair elections	X	X	X			
Freedom of labour and professional organisation	X	X				
Freedom of the press	X	X	X			
Government is transparent	X	X		X		
Health equality sufficient for all citizens to be able						X

Construct	Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index	Freedom House Freedom in the World	V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index	Liberal Democracy Index*	Participatory Democracy Index*	Egalitarian Democracy Index*
to exercise their basic rights						
Individual freedom of expression	X	X	X			
Individual freedom of movement	X	X		X		
Individual freedom of religion	X	X		X		
Individual freedom to own property	X	X		X		
Individual freedom to participate in politics	X	X				
Legislative supremacy (the legislative arm has primacy of position over the executive and judicial branches)	X		X			
Perceived political self-efficacy	X					
Personal safety	X	X		X		
Political participation	X					
Political parties free from government control	X	X	X	X		
Political power is distributed equally across groups						X
Popular absence of support for autocracy	X					
Popular belief in efficacy of democracy	X					
Popular confidence in political system	X					
Popular interest in politics	X					
Popular perception that human rights are protected	X					
Representation of under-represented groups in government	X					
Resources are distributed equitably across society						X
Rule of law	X	X		X		
Separation of Church and State	X					
Social cohesion	X					
Territorial integrity (the state has control over its territories)	X					
Unbiased media			X			
Universal suffrage	X		X			

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This analysis clearly demonstrated that there are many components (constructs) of democracy that are not covered in all surveys and highlight the potential for far more research into Australians and their democratic resilience.

Criteria for identifying suitable indicators

The review of potential data sources was guided by the following requirements for a robust index and to underpin the validity of the data visualisation tool. For this the Data Quality Framework (ABS 2009) was used to inform these principles:

- **Relevance** 'refers to how well the statistical product or release meets the needs of users in terms of the concept(s) measured, and the population(s) represented'. The indicator must have a good degree of fit with some dimension of democracy.

- **Timeliness** 'refers to the delay between the reference period (to which the data pertain) and the date at which the data became available; and the delay between the advertised date and the date at which the data become available (i.e., the actual release date)'. Time plays an important role in the selection of indicators, as described below:
  - > **An established time-series**. Previous observations provide important context with respect to trend over time as well as a sense of the degree to which the indicator varies over time. This helps guard against over-reacting to a change in an indicator which may—with the benefit of hindsight afforded by an established time-series—be well within the range of variation seen in the past. Prior observations can also help call attention to changes that are historically unprecedented or which run counter to a long-running trend.
  - > **Likely to be available in the future**. Because these are—with the exception of indicators found in the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey—'found' data that are funded by external parties who are assumed not to be influenceable by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, the future is beyond our control. Nevertheless, we can reason from what we know of the prior time-series, and the funder, to make best efforts to identify indicators likely to be available in the future.
  - > **Frequent observations**. A good indicator would have frequent observations both in the past and future (e.g., annually), providing a better sense of trends.
  - > **Timely future data releases**. Although not a criterion for selection, indicators that are available close to the reference period for which they are measured are most helpful going forwards, minimising the need to reissue prior estimates when data becomes available.

- **Accuracy** 'refers to the degree to which the data correctly describes the phenomenon they were designed to measure' and covers several criteria:
  - > **Reliable estimates at sub-national levels**. A good indicator would provide sufficient reliability for reporting at sub-national levels. For surveys, this is in part a question of sample size and the distribution of responses across areas for which estimates are desired. Unfortunately, as will be shown, the survey-based indicators identified are based on sample sizes sufficient only for reliable high-level estimates (e.g., national and larger states).
  - > **Minimal errors of representation and measurement**. Surveys are subject to errors of representation (coverage error, sampling error, non-response error, and adjustment

error) and measurement (measurement error and coding error) (Groves et al. 2009). Administrative and Big Data have analogous types of error (Biemer and Amaya 2020). A good indicator should have minimal errors. Error is also related to coherence, discussed below.

- **Coherence** 'refers to the internal consistency of a statistical collection, product or release, as well as its comparability with other sources of information, within a broad analytical framework and over time'.
  > **Change in method** is the primary concern with respect to coherence, particularly for survey-based indicators. Changes in method can cause a time-series break. Variations in question wording and changes in survey methods were of particular concern.
  > **Overlap other Scanlon Foundation Research Institute indicators** is another issue with coherence. The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute produces the Australian Cohesion Index which, in some instances, overlaps with measuring the strength of democracy. As seen in the prior section, social cohesion is part of one of the indexes of democracy. Both the Scanlon-Monash Index and the Australian Cohesion Index measure political participation and engagement in civil society organisations. This does not preclude the use of these indicators for measuring democracy but should be borne in mind if comparison is made between indicators of the strength of democracy and these indicators; some correlation should be expected because of the use of identical or similar indicators in both indices.

- **Interpretability** 'refers to the availability of information to help provide insight into the data'. A good indicator should have transparent methodology.

- **Institutional environment** 'refers to the institutional and organisational factors which may have a significant influence on the effectiveness and credibility of the agency producing the statistics'. A good indicator should be produced by a credible producer.

Potential Data Producers and frequency

Producer	Data	Years available and frequency of collection	Notes
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)	General Social Survey (GSS)	2006-2020, generally quadrennial	
Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Inc. and International Social Survey Programme	Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA)	2003-2022, generally annual	Wide variation in content and question wording over years makes the AuSSA unsuitable for use
Australian Election Commission (AEC)	Voting data	1996-2022, triennial or quadrennial	Data prior to 1996 should be available but are not in the main section of the AES website
Australian National University (ANU)	Australian Election Study (AES)	2016-2022, triennial or quadrennial	Earlier data should be available; the 2016-2022 range is for questionnaires available on the Australian Data Archive
ANU and Hu Fu Center for East Asian Democratic Studies, National Taiwan University	Asian Barometer Survey	2019	Only fielded in Australia in 2019 and thus unsuitable for use

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Producer	Data	Years available and frequency of collection	Notes
ANU and CSES Secretariat	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)	1996-2022, irregular	
ANU and ESS European Research Infrastructure Consortium	European Social Survey	2019	Only fielded in Australia in 2019 and thus unsuitable for use
ANU and World Values Survey Association	World Values Survey (WVS)	1981-2018, irregular	
Lowy Institute	Lowy Institute Poll	2012-2023, annual	
Scanlon Foundation Research Institute	Mapping Social Cohesion Survey	2007-2023, generally annual	

Survey sources

Except for the General Social Survey (GSS), most waves of surveys reviewed have sample sizes below 3,000 per wave. This limits reliable direct estimates to larger states and are unlikely to support reliable estimates below the state/territory level.

Although small area estimation has allowed the creation of reliable estimates at the local government area level for the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, the Social Research Centre is able to do so because they have the necessary geographic information available (being the data producer) and—working with the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute—have been able to ensure that a wide variety of demographic variables are used in the model-based estimates.

Access to low-level geographic information on respondents in other surveys is likely to be restricted to protect respondent confidentiality and other surveys may not have a sufficiently wide set of demographic variables harmonised with Census items. Given the above, it does not appear possible to go below state-level estimates retrospectively.

Voting data

Australian Electoral Commission data on voting is available at the division (electorate) level. Coherence for time-series trends at a sub-national level is challenging because division borders change between elections. Coherence between voting data below the state/territory level and other indicators is also problematic. Divisions are also non-ABS geographies and do not exactly map to standard ABS geographies.

Although the AEC provides a concordance between 2022 polling place and 2016 Statistical Area level 1 (SA1), including the number of votes cast, this only allows probabilistic extrapolation of higher division-level results to SA1s. Consequently, although voting data is available at a sub-national level and does not have the small sample size concerns of survey data, it would have required considerable data processing to provide a semblance of coherence over time or with other indicators.

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The Mapping Social Cohesion data met the criteria

As a result of this analysis, the decision was made to base the base data around the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey data for the following reasons:

- **Relevance**
  Although there are a number of surveys that include one or more questions regarding democracy or social cohesion. No other survey includes as many as in the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey. With more than 65 questions related to social cohesion, enough of these relate to democratic elements.

- **Timeliness**
  The Mapping Social Cohesion Survey has an established time series as it is run annually and can be relied upon to be undertaken into the future.

- **Accuracy**
  The Mapping Social Cohesion Survey is overseen by the experts at the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute and its Research Committee as well as the Social Research Centre. Both organisations are accredited through the Research Society and ISO 20252. The Mapping Social Cohesion Survey positively addresses the issues of accuracy as the sample size is large (over 7,500 participants) so the ability to make reliable judgements at the sub-national level is possible and it similarly reduces the level of error that is possible. Further information is available in methodology section of the Mapping Social Cohesion Report 2023.

- **Coherence**
  Due to the accuracy of the data, the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey through the Social Research Centre, also consistently collects numerous demographic and geographic data points of the respondents.

- **Interpretability**
  The Mapping Social Cohesion Survey reports provide a thorough description of its methodology.

- **Institutional environment**
  The Social Research Centre is aligned with the Australian National University and globally recognised for its expertise, professionalism and quality.

Program Design Considerations

Insights for the program design considerations and pathways to strengthen democracy

The work outlined in Public Report 2 highlighted the need for several key principles to underpin the design of program design. Effective programs:

- Are based on participatory approaches that involve stakeholders and community members throughout all stages, from design through to evaluation. This ensures that programs are culturally appropriate and safe, respond to community needs and have community support.
- Adopt a strengths-based approach. This involves building on and amplifying existing community resources, such as interpersonal relationships and inter-organisational partnerships.
- Are based on pedagogical approaches that continue to build community capacity to proactively identify and collaboratively solve problems as they arise.
- Are evidence-based. This involves specifying the mechanisms through which the desired changes will be achieved, how program components and characteristics are intended to facilitate these changes and evaluation of program processes and outcomes.
- Receive appropriate levels of resources, including infrastructure, funding and staffing.

Building on the prior discussion regarding the need to maintain and strengthen trust in others, in institutions and in government, the analysis, being guided by the principles above, recommended the following considerations, pathways and examples.

1. **Trust in institutions: strengthen, ensure integrity, inform political standards**
   It is necessary to strengthen trust in institutions particularly those that have a direct impact on an individual's life cycle e.g.:
   > The independence and high standards of the judiciary including the court system and policing
   > The fairness and transparency of Centrelink
   > The quality, equity and inclusion of the health system
   > The accessibility of quality all levels and systems of education
   > The regulatory controls of the banking system

   Or on their perception of the Federal Government
   > Recognition and compliance with the National Integrity Commission
   > Control of the behaviour and rules of debate in Parliamentary Question time
   > The role and outcomes of Parliamentary Committee hearings
   > The disciplining of any poor or unethical behaviour of politicians
   > The consideration of truth in political advertising rules and regulation

2. **Trust in people**
   Enhance the level of neighbourhood trust by focusing on those that feel isolated, in particular people who are young or newly arrived.
   Recognition of the role and influence of social media.

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3. **Understanding democracy**
   > Enhance the understanding by both established Australians and people who are newly arrived regarding the structure, mechanic, rights and responsibilities inherent in our democratic system.
   > Improve, enhance and expand civics education within our education system but also as part of our communications with communities. This is particularly relevant to new arrivals from countries with different systems of governance.
   > For many new arrivals, there is no framework in which to understand the different levels of government and associated responsibilities. To many 'government' is a single entity. This can cause misunderstanding, confusion and hamper the ability for individuals to obtain important services.

4. **Economic optimism**
   Narratives and actions at the local, State and Federal level need to encourage a sense of optimism regarding employment opportunities, improving career pathways and building and protecting wealth.

In a recent report from the European Union (author Dr William Hammond) published in 2023 entitled '*Culture and Democracy: the evidence; How citizens participation in cultural activities enhances civic engagement, democracy and social cohesion*', Dr Hammond summarised his key findings:

"The study leading to this report has found strong evidence that citizens' participation in cultural activities strengthens democracy and social cohesion in many different ways: At the national level, there is a clear and positive correlation between rates of cultural participation and indicators of civic engagement, democratic health and social cohesion, across both EU and non-EU countries. A range of large-scale population level studies show that rates of cultural participation are strongly related to positive civic and democratic behaviours, including rates of voting, engagement in community activities, volunteering and other civic-minded behaviours and attitudes such as tolerance, social trust and care. Extensive case study evidence suggests that cultural activities can also play a key role in strategies for community cohesion and engagement, and the inclusion and welfare of under-represented or marginalised social groups and individuals." European Commission's Culture and Democracy: the Evidence Report

The result of this, similar reports and the work of Stream 2, as outlined above and in Public Report 2, has been to inform the following meta-components to support the program design considerations incorporated into the data visualisation tool. The key components of programs, although not identifying specific types of programs, took into consideration, that they should have:

- Strengths-based approach.
- Community capacity building and acknowledgement of individual abilities.
- Building interpersonal relationships.
- Participatory approaches and Collaboration.
- Cultural safety.
- Transparency.

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Below are the specific elements of programs that would inform programs to strengthen social cohesion and democratic resilience for specific cohorts. These can be used as search terms within the data visualisation tool. The webpage hosting the visualisation tool also includes a glossary to the terminology below.

Cohort	Program Design Considerations	Pathways to strengthen democracy
Young people – up to 18	- School based programs - Political engagement curriculum - Curriculum includes civics education	- Political structures, systems and processes - Political participation rights and responsibilities
Female Youth – 18-30	- Multiple session training programs - Co-production to solving problems - Encourage volunteerism toward advocacy - Exposure to community leaders and decision makers	- Building trust in people and institutions - Opening channels to have a voice
Male Youth – 18-30	- Facilitate building networks - Peer-led interventions to solve problems - Encourage visualisations of visions and solutions - Build expertise in decision making	- Building trust in people and institutions - Opening channels to have a voice
Adults – 30-55	- Address community issues - Enable the ability to mobilise community assets - Foster digital transformation - Encourage participation in Advisory Committees - Use volunteering to foster innovative strategies - Build linkages across sectors, groups, geographies etc.	- Fostering respect and collaboration - Interpersonal relationships and linkages - Active participation in community programs
Adults – 55+	- Encourage public comment participation - Centre those affected/impacted in deliberations - Focus on the resolution of power imbalances - Build awareness of inclusion, language and collaboration	- Familiarity with all segments of society - Improvement of civic processes - Opening networks - Accountability of democratic processes

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Mapping Social Cohesion, Small Area Estimates and the Democracy Index

The data that has been incorporated into the data visualisation tool includes:

- Mapping Social Cohesion Survey data from 2020 – 2022.
- Data from the 2021 Census as outlined below.
- A specific democracy index based on the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey questions.

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's Mapping Social Cohesion series has been the preeminent source of data and analysis on social cohesion in Australia over the past 16 years. The 2023 study is the 17th in the series, following the benchmark survey in 2007 and annual surveys since 2009 (and two in 2020, after COVID-19 hit). The 2023 study is the largest to date, combining a nationally representative survey of 7,454 Australians with additional targeted boost surveys of 251 first- and second-generation.

The main Mapping Social Cohesion Survey was administered through the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™ panel. Life in Australia™ was established in 2016 and is Australia's first and only national probability based online panel. In 2022, Life in Australia™ had more than 10,000 active members. Panel members are proactively recruited via their landline or mobile phone and paid $20 to join the panel. There is no ability to opt-in to the panel as they are randomly selected and invited to join to ensure the maximum possible representation of the population. They are offered a further incentive of $10 for each questionnaire completed or as a charitable donation. Members can be asked to complete a survey monthly with members invited to complete the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey once a year in July.

For the 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion Survey, 98 per cent of responses were provided online and 2 per cent by telephone. This latter component involved participants from the Life in Australia™ panel who completed the identical survey through an interview but were unable due to disability or lack of technical skills to complete the survey on-line.

All survey specific respondents are then weighted to ensure the total pool of survey respondents are representative of the Australian population. This allows us to infer from the survey results what social cohesion looks like across Australia. The large sample size of the survey respondents contributes to a reduction in any sample size issues by various demographics.

Survey data are weighted to adjust for the chance of being sampled in the survey and to ensure the demographic and socioeconomic profile of respondents mirrors the Australian population as closely as possible. This involves assigning each respondent a weight so that the sum of weights across a set of demographic indicators line up with benchmarks set by population and census data created by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The benchmarks included in the weighting solution are: state or territory of residence, whether lives in a capital city or elsewhere in the state, gender, age, highest education (bachelor's degree or below), language spoken at home (English or other), dwelling tenure, and household composition. Further information can be found in Appendix A of the 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion Survey Report.

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As has already been explained, the Institute undertook research on publicly available datasets which could be captured at the relevant geographical and statistical level and can be combined with the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute datasets to provide further insights. This included, but was not limited to, ABS data on education, employment, income, health, community, and the environment from the data cubes listed below. These were:

- Education and employment, ASGS and LGA, 2011, 2016-2021.xlsx
- Income (including government allowances), ASGS and LGA, 2011, 2016-2023.xlsx
- Population and people, ASGS, LGA, and RA, 2011, 2016-2023.xlsx
- Population and people, ASGS, LGA, and RA, 2011, 2016-2023.xlsx
- Population and people, ASGS, LGA, and RA, 2011, 2016-2023.xlsx
- Population and people, ASGS, LGA, and RA, 2011, 2016-2023.xlsx

Small Area Estimations

Small area estimates at the Local Government Area (LGA) level have been developed for the Scanlon-Monash Index and across the five domains of social cohesion. Estimates are developed by combining survey results with modelled estimates based on the population characteristics of the LGA. The model uses the survey data to calculate the relationships between respondent characteristics and index scores and then "projects" these relationships onto each LGA, creating estimates that reflect the population characteristics of each individual LGA.

They were derived using a Bayesian spatial model called the Intrinsic Conditional Auto-Regressive (ICAR) model. Small Area Estimation is widely used in government agencies and beyond. For example, the National Productivity Commission produces quarterly unemployment rates for Local Government Areas based on Small Area Estimations. Similarly, Australian researchers have used Small Area Estimations to estimate rates of poverty and disadvantage at the regional level. Small Area Estimation thus provides reliable estimates for LGAs where we do not have enough survey respondents.

The data visualisation tool incorporates the Scanlon-Monash Index score for each LGA as well as the corresponding score for each domain, in addition, each LGA search also includes the newly developed Democracy Index. These are each presented with the variation from the national mean.

Although these numbers provide the ability to undertake some assessment of relativity between LGAs, they are still in their early stages and further analysis and trend data will add value.

Democracy Index

The creation of the democracy index was possible due to the breadth of questions covered by the Mapping Social Cohesion Survey asked consistently across an ever-increasing number of respondents. The table below outlines the questions selected for the Democracy Index and their occurrence in recent survey rounds. Data from all waves was used to explore the correlations between the items and to develop a score for measuring the strength of democracy in Australia as illustrated in the table below. The original 21 candidate items were then reduced to 15 for final analysis. This was based on their inclusion across all three years and items related to personal safety were deemed not suitable for measuring democracy.

The Social Research Centre undertook the analysis and checked for its integrity and longevity. It has been introduced into the data visualisation tool as a means for searchers to have a simple way to judge their population's comfort with democracy. Each of these questions is multifaceted and could be supported by detailed interrogation. In the interim, the combination of the small area estimation of the Scanlon-Monash Index and the Democracy Index together with the additional statistics for each LGA, provides an easy-to-understand context for the viewer.

The Mapping Social Cohesion Democracy Index questions

ID	Item	Rating scale	Wave 2021	Wave 2022	Wave 2023
b4_1	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Voted in an election)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_2	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Signed a petition)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_3	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Written or spoken to a Federal or State Member of Parliament)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_5	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Joined a boycott of a product or company)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_6	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Attended a protest, march or demonstration)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_8	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Got together with others to try to resolve a local problem)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
b4_14	B4. Please tell me which if any, of the following you have done over the last three years or so. (Posted or shared anything about politics online)	(0=No) (1=Yes)	✔	✔	✔
q03a	Q03a. In the last 12 months, have you been actively involved in any civic or political groups?	(1=Yes) (2=No)	✔	✔	✔
b6a	B6a. How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?	(1=Almost always) (4=Almost never)	✔	✔	✔
b10	B10. Would you say the system of government we have in Australia works fine as	(1=Works fine as it is) (4=Should be replaced)	✔	✔	✔
b9_2	B9_2. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections (Good/Bad way of governing Australia)	(1=Very good) (5=Very bad)	✔	✔	✔
q112	Q112. How often do you think government leaders in Australia abuse their power?	(1=All of the time) (5=None of the time)	✔	✔	✔
q228e	Q228E. In your view, are Australian elections fair?	(1=All of the time) (5=None of the time)	✔	✔	✔

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ID	Item	Rating scale	Wave 2021	Wave 2022	Wave 2023
d28	D28. In your opinion, how often do the courts make fair, impartial decisions based on the evidence made available to them? Would you say...	(1=All of the time) (5=None of the time)	✓	✓	✓
c30	C30. Everyone should be free to live their own lives as they wish, regardless of their sexual orientation	(1=Strongly agree) (4=Strongly disagree)	✓	✓	
f2_3	F2_3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements ... I am able to have a real say on issues that are important to me in my local area	(1=Strongly agree) (5=Strongly disagree)	✓	✓	✓
c31	C31. In your opinion, how widespread are corruption and bribe-taking in your local government?	(1=No-one is corrupt) (5=Everyone is corrupt)	✓		
bl4	BL4. How safe do you feel at home by yourself during the day?	(1=Very safe) (3=A bit unsafe)	✓	✓	✓
cv_4	CV_4. How safe do you feel walking during the day in your local area? Would you say you feel...?	(1=Very safe) (3=A bit unsafe)	✓		
f9b	F9b. How safe do you feel walking alone at night in your local area?	(1=Very safe) (3=A bit unsafe)	✓	✓	✓
f10	F10. Thinking about all types of crime in general, how worried are you about becoming a victim of crime in your local area?	(1=Very worried) (4=Not at all worried)	✓	✓	✓

How can we know more?

The results arising from this project have been achieved in a very compressed timeframe. So, it is only logical that more time would have allowed for each component to have been investigated further. We can recommend the following additions that would add value to our understanding of methods to build democratic resilience. It is also likely that other additions or expansions will arise following discussions with the Strengthening Democracy Taskforce of the Department of Home Affairs.

1. The creation of further indexes that can be integrated at a local government area level. This could be created to map the range of organisations or services that would be available in local areas that could support the types of programs that strengthen democratic resilience. This should focus on the democracy indicators that are not yet regularly included in ongoing surveys of the Australian population.
2. In depth, qualitative field research involves the ongoing investigation into key elements addressed by the Strengthening Democracy project.
3. Population-wide, local area surveys, undertaken regularly and focusing on key questions regarding Australia-specific programmatic solutions for building democratic resilience would be a vital addition for planning.
4. Maintain and update the data visualisation tool to track trends democratic support and the state of social cohesion across the nation.
5. Provide greater interpretation of the data to inform further place-based program design considerations, spatial and temporal applications for state and national use and the potential to measure the impact of particular local, state or national initiatives on geographic area dynamics.