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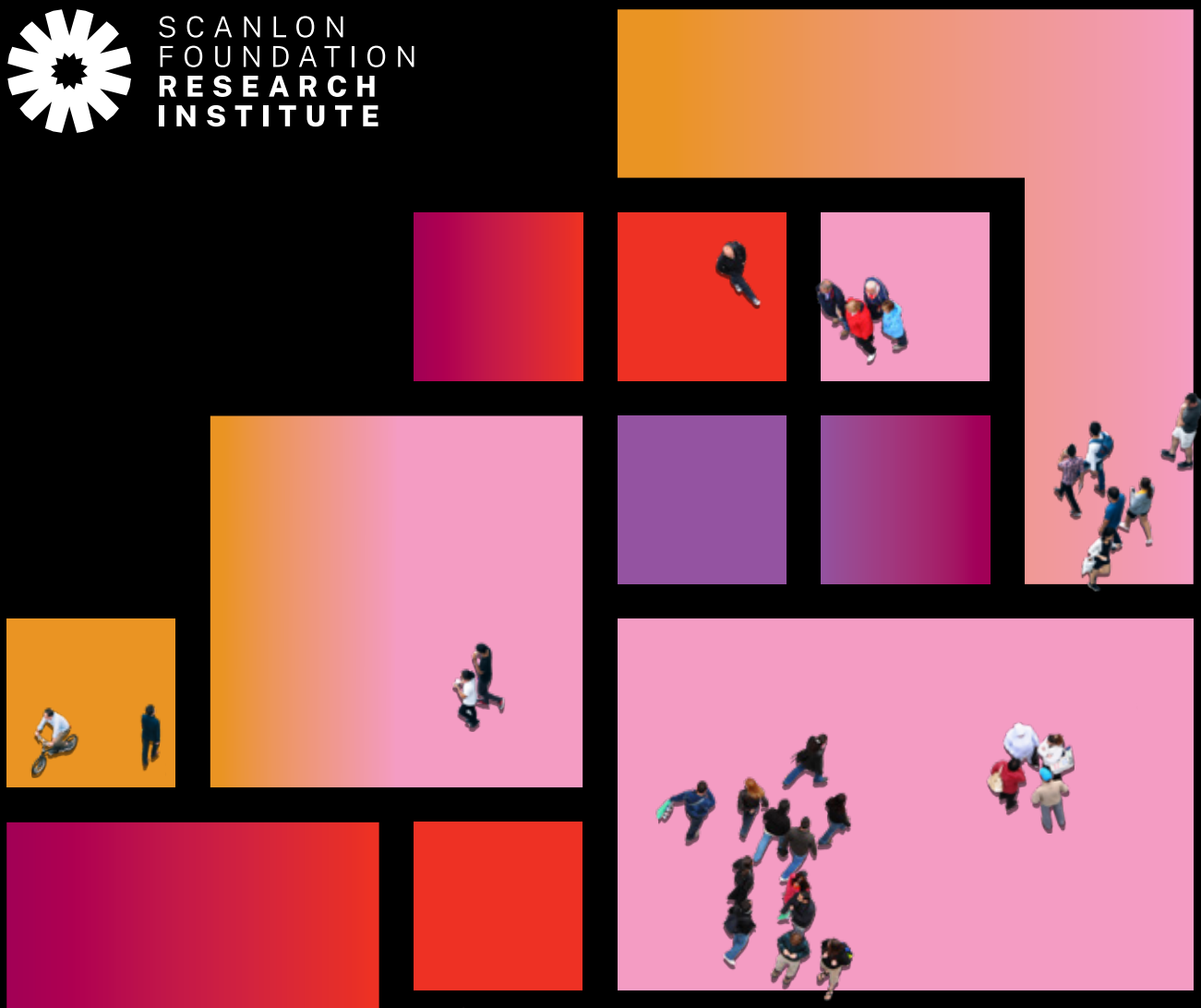

MAPPING SOCIAL COHESION

Social connections through troubled times

2025

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Katarzyna Szachna

Foreword

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute is pleased to provide you with the 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion Report.

Under the guidance of Dr James O'Donnell, the survey, conducted in July 2025 through the Social Research Centre, provides the most comprehensive, ongoing profile of Australia's social cohesion.

One of the most significant findings has been the resilience of the Australian population given the multiple national and international events that have resonated through our various media channels. This resilience is, in part, the result of our connectedness and the resulting social bonds that are particularly characteristics of our local neighbourhoods. This clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of programs and inclusive environments created by local councils but also the responsibilities that sit with them to maintain and strengthen these bonds.

Financial hardship continues to be a weight on our social cohesion and will need to be a necessary focus for governments in the coming year particularly for the younger generations. Recognising the diversity of issues that are faced across the generations, Australians are generally happy and their trust in government has increased slightly since the 2024 survey.

The Scanlon Foundation created, and has supported, the Research Institute to ensure that Australia has an independent, non-partisan, comprehensive understanding of social cohesion. This research is essential for focusing our attention on the areas where we need to add resources, and areas where we need to maximise our strengths to spread initiatives and strategies that maintain and build our diverse, cohesive society.

Although we have now chosen to provide a more manageable report this year, we will be releasing additional data from the 2025 survey through our Social Cohesion Insights, Social Cohesion Compass and our segmentation project. Please ensure you have signed up to receive our regular communications for the year ahead.

Anthea Hancocks
CEO
Scanlon Foundation Research Institute

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Introduction

The year 2025 has been another year of difficulties for the world. As we write, the violence and horrors of the conflict in Gaza and the Middle East have intensified and spread across the region and continued to provoke social and political tensions in all corners of the world including confronting experiences of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.[1]

The war between Russia and Ukraine entered its fourth war year in 2025 and sits alongside other conflicts in Africa and many other parts of the world.[2] Meanwhile, immigration continues to be a highly divisive issue across Europe and the United States, adding to a host of other emerging and long-term issues related to the economy, climate change, terrorism, health and misinformation.[3]

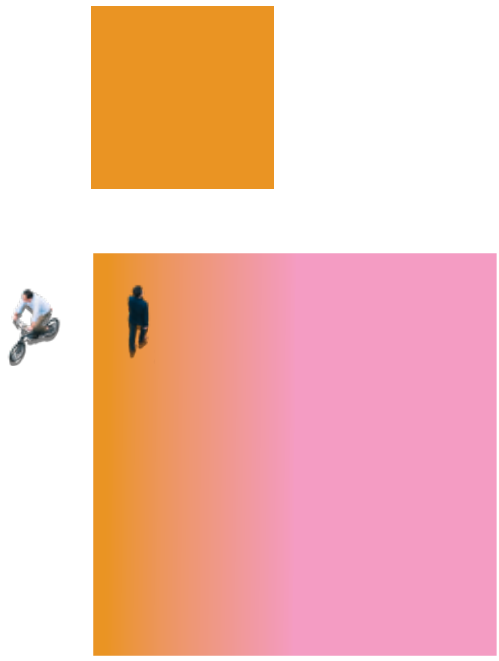
Australia is deeply connected to these global challenges while also dealing with a range of home-grown issues. In August 2025, anti-immigration protests and movements that have been common across Europe and north America in recent years arrived in Australia through the 'March for Australia' rallies[4] and have coincided with continued difficult experiences, debates and protests including over the current conflict in Gaza, Australia's relationship with its First peoples, the cost of living and financial hardship. Peaceful division, debate and protest are foundational to a vibrant democracy and oftentimes demonstrate our common humanity and our concern for others and the collective good. Instances of violence, racism and notably in the current climate, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, however, demonstrate the opposite, a lack of humanity, the marginalisation of communities and an erosion of common bonds.

This national and global environment places pressure on Australian society and tests the resilience of its social fabric and cohesion. As we reported last year in Mapping Social Cohesion 2024, social cohesion in Australia has been reasonably resilient on our measures in the face of this tumult, albeit coming after periods of decline through the 2010s and since the COVID-19 pandemic[5] and despite signs of the influence of external pressures and strains on intercultural harmony.[6] The resilience has been underpinned by the strength of our social fabric, connections and wellbeing, including as measured through active participation in social, community and civic groups, the cohesiveness of neighbourhoods, consistent levels of happiness and continued recognition of the contribution and importance of our diversity. New and continuing pressures in 2025 though, further test the fabric of Australian society.

In a year of social, economic and political tumult, the Mapping Social Cohesion 2025 study provides a crucial barometer of how Australian society is faring. Now in its 18th year, the 2025 study involved a nationally representative survey of more than 8,000 Australian adults to gauge their attitudes, perceptions, experiences and behaviours related to social cohesion and other topical and related issues. Measuring social cohesion across five key areas of belonging, worth, social justice, participation and acceptance, we find that overall social cohesion has been steady over the last year, underpinned by strong bonds and active participation in our neighbourhoods and communities, renewed trust in government and resilient happiness and personal wellbeing.

Nevertheless, current and ongoing challenges in Australia and around the world are putting pressure on social cohesion. High levels of support for multiculturalism and diversity recorded in 2022 and 2023 have continued to taper off, while prejudice and discrimination directed towards immigrant and cultural groups remain common. Cost-of-living pressures also remain common and the accumulation of financial hardship in recent years is associated with lower levels of trust, happiness and neighbourhood connection. Trust in government and Australian democracy, meanwhile, is sharply divided along party political lines, while the sense of belonging younger generations have in Australia has declined substantially in the last 10-15 years.

In the current climate, the relative stability of many of our measures of social cohesion speaks to the enduring strength of the social fabric of communities across Australia. The bonds we form with people in our daily lives and in neighbourhoods and local communities provides the foundation for our social cohesion and collective wellbeing. While not unbreakable and often tested by current events, these bonds are not so easily broken and help weather and safeguard social cohesion through challenging times.



Mapping Social Cohesion 2025

The Mapping Social Cohesion study is a crucial resource and record of how Australian society is faring through these tumultuous times. As in every year since 2009 and after the first study in 2007, a nationally representative survey was conducted to gauge the attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and experiences of Australians related to social cohesion.

In 2025, more than 8,000 adults took part in the survey as members of the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™ panel. We also administered a shorter survey in one of four different languages (including English) to 245 people who have immigrated to Australia over the years in an effort to strengthen our representation of Australia's migrant and cultural diversity. More information on this year's study is available in the Appendix.

As every year, social cohesion in Australia is measured across five key areas or domains:

- Belonging: the sense of pride and belonging people have in Australia and in Australian life and culture, and the belonging they feel in their neighbourhoods
- Worth: the degree of emotional and material wellbeing
- Social inclusion and justice: perceptions of economic fairness and trust in government
- Participation: involvement in political activities and participation in social, community, and civic groups
- Acceptance and rejection: attitudes to immigrant diversity, support for minorities, and experience of discrimination

In each of these domains, a series of questions are asked of respondents to the Mapping Social Cohesion survey. This allows us to measure social cohesion in each of these domains, track their progress over time and identify differences and potential drivers of social cohesion across Australia. Several of the questions have been asked in every survey since 2007 and provide the key information for the Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion, a multi-dimensional tool to measure and track social cohesion over time.[7]

Despite the continuing national and global challenges of recent years, most of our indicators of social cohesion have been stable in the last two years. This stability is reflected in the Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion shown in Figure 1, which has recorded a score of 78 in 2023, 2024 and 2025.[8] As we will explain in this report, although social cohesion is more complex and multi-faceted than can be captured in any single number, this result reflects stability across a wide range of indicators in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey.

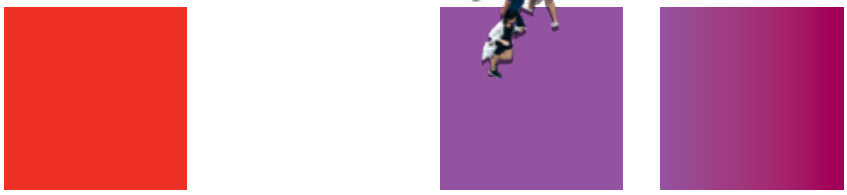
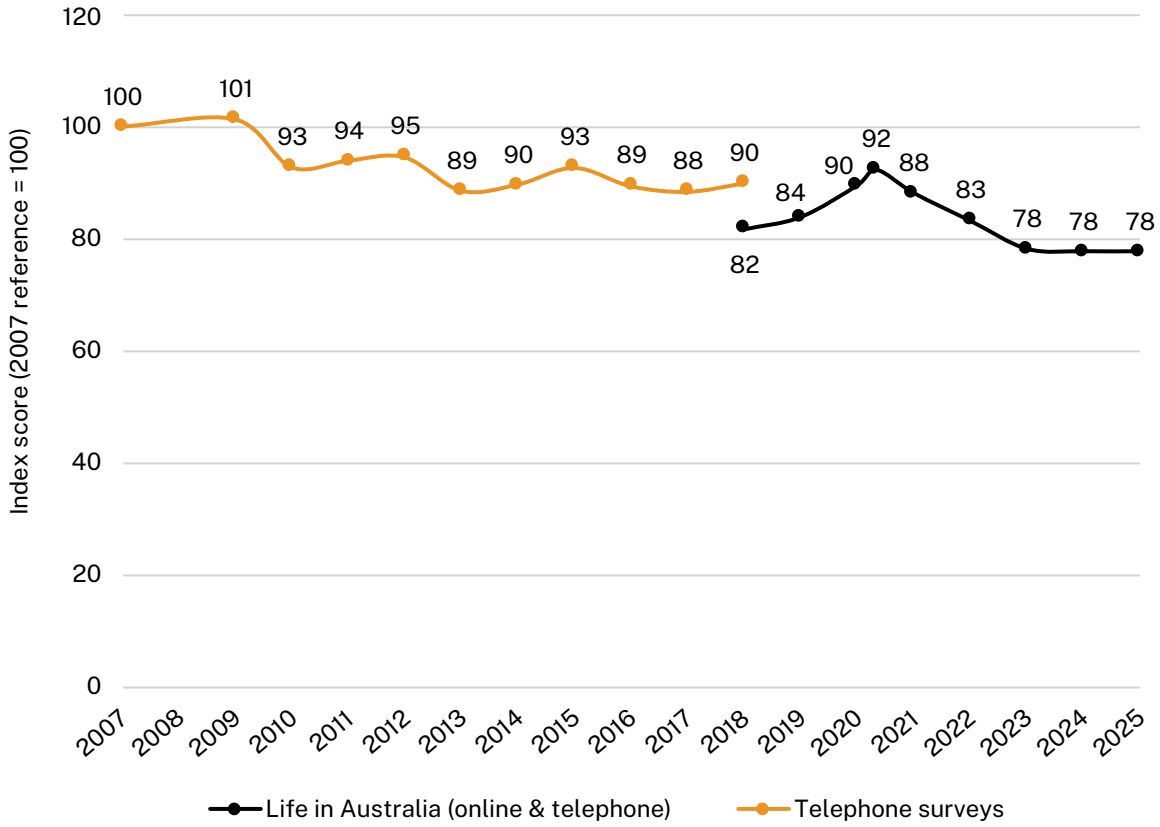


Figure 1. Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion, 2007 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)



Note: the difference in social cohesion in 2018 between the Life in Australia™ survey and the telephone survey reflects an interviewer mode effect, resulting from lower reported cohesion when respondents completed the survey online and did not have to speak to a person over the phone. See the Appendix and O'Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

The stability of social cohesion may seem surprising in the face of these tumultuous times but perhaps reflects the continuity of daily life and the resilience of social bonds and connections that shape our everyday lives. As we explain later in this report, Australians continue to be actively involved in the social and civic life of their communities, including through participating in sports clubs, charities, social clubs and religious groups (see Figure 15), connecting with family and friends on a regular basis and building and maintaining bonds with neighbours and local communities (see Figure 14). These perhaps provide important foundations for Australia's overall social cohesion that are not easily disturbed by external social, economic and political upheaval.

Nevertheless, we can still detect several short-term and long-run pressures on social cohesion. Australians' sense of national pride and belonging has been steady since 2023, though this comes after longer-term declines since 2007 (see Figure 2). Financial pressures have been stubbornly common since 2023 (see Figure 10) and particularly impacting renters, single parent families and young-to-middle aged adults (Figure 11). Meanwhile, in a world deeply polarised over attitudes to migration[9], recognition of the contribution of immigrants to Australian society and general support for diversity and multiculturalism has been a source of strength in recent years (Figure 5), though now strained by current events and the persistence of discrimination and racism (Figure 7).

National pride & belonging

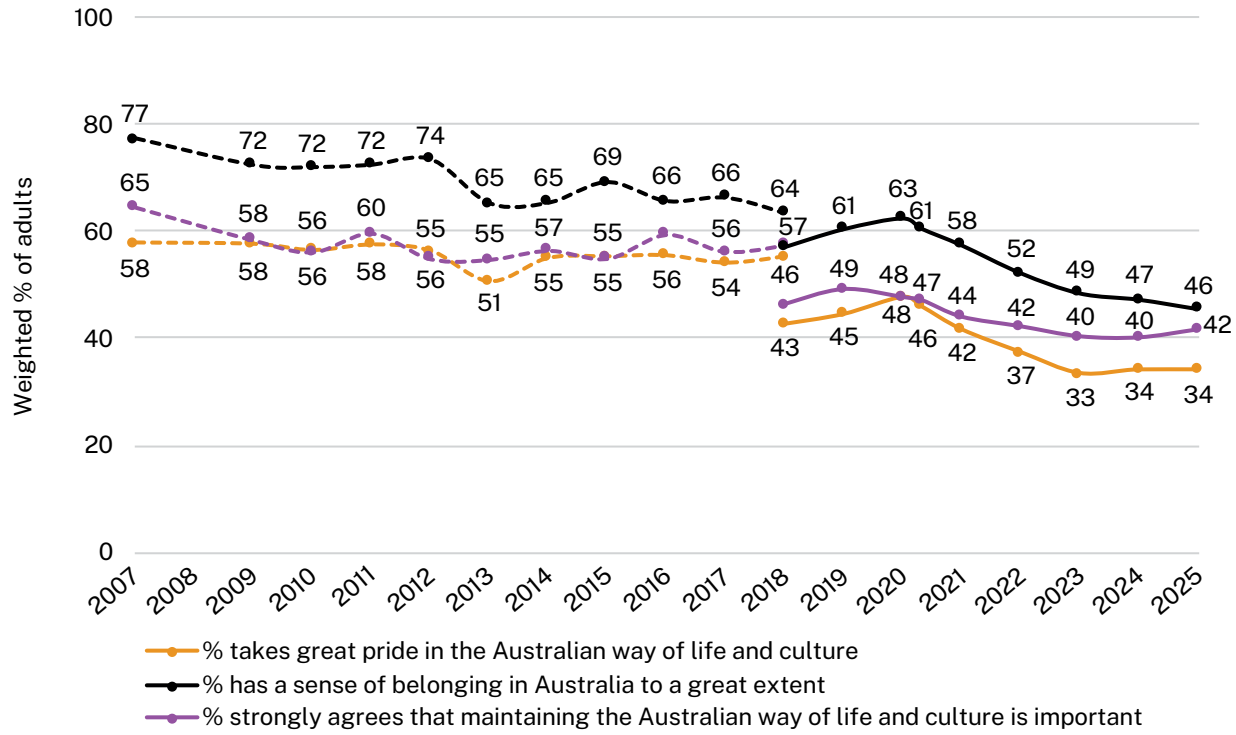
The sense of belonging people have in their communities and nations is a foundational aspect of social cohesion.

To have a sense of belonging and place in the world is an important human need and so central to our personal wellbeing, while also providing a basis for active engagement in society.[10] For these reasons, the sense of belonging is a key domain of social cohesion in the Mapping Social Cohesion study.

Historically, belonging has been measured on the Mapping Social Cohesion survey through three questions that focus on people's sense of belonging in Australia and the pride and sense of importance they place in maintaining 'the Australian way of life and culture'. Importantly, we do not ask respondents to define the Australian way of life and culture. Rather, we ask respondents to tell us how much they identify with and take pride in life and culture however they think of it.

Following a period of decline and then stability in the mid-2010s, Australians' sense of belonging, pride and the importance they attach to maintaining the national way of life and culture have declined over the past five years. However, as we show in Figure 2, the bulk of this decline occurred in the years between 2020 and 2023. Since 2023, feelings of national pride and belonging have remained relatively stable.

Figure 2. Indicators of national pride and belonging, 2007 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)



Note: dashed lines indicate when the survey was run only as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O'Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

In 2020, close to two-thirds of adults (63 per cent) said they felt a sense of belonging in Australia to a great extent, but by 2025 this figure has fallen to 46 per cent. Only three percentage points of this drop occurred between 2023 and 2025 (49 per cent to 46 per cent respectively).

Indicators of pride and cultural identity show similar patterns. The proportion of adults who take great pride in the Australian way of life and culture has fallen by 14 percentage points since 2020, reaching just one-third in 2024 (34 per cent) and 2025 (34 per cent). However, from 2023 to 2025 there was little to no change in the proportion who express great pride in the Australian way of life and culture.

Similarly, the share of adults who strongly agree that maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important declined from nearly one-half (49 per cent) in 2019 to 42 per cent in 2025. This proportion though has been relatively stable since 2022. These results indicate that although identity-based dimensions of social cohesion remain fragile, the sharp declines seen earlier in the decade have eased, with recent years pointing to a more stable, albeit relatively low, level of national pride, belonging and cultural attachment.

Young adults, those who have immigrated to Australia and those who are struggling financially have the weakest levels of belonging. Among 18 to 24 year olds and 25 to 34 year olds, fewer than one-in three (29 per cent) say they have a sense of belonging in Australia to a great extent, compared with 72 per cent for those aged 65 years and over. Likewise, just 32 per cent of overseas-born Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds and 33 per cent of those who describe their financial situation as 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' have a great sense of belonging, compared with 49 per cent of all Australian-born adults and 58 per cent of all adults who describe their financial situation as 'prosperous' or 'very comfortable'.

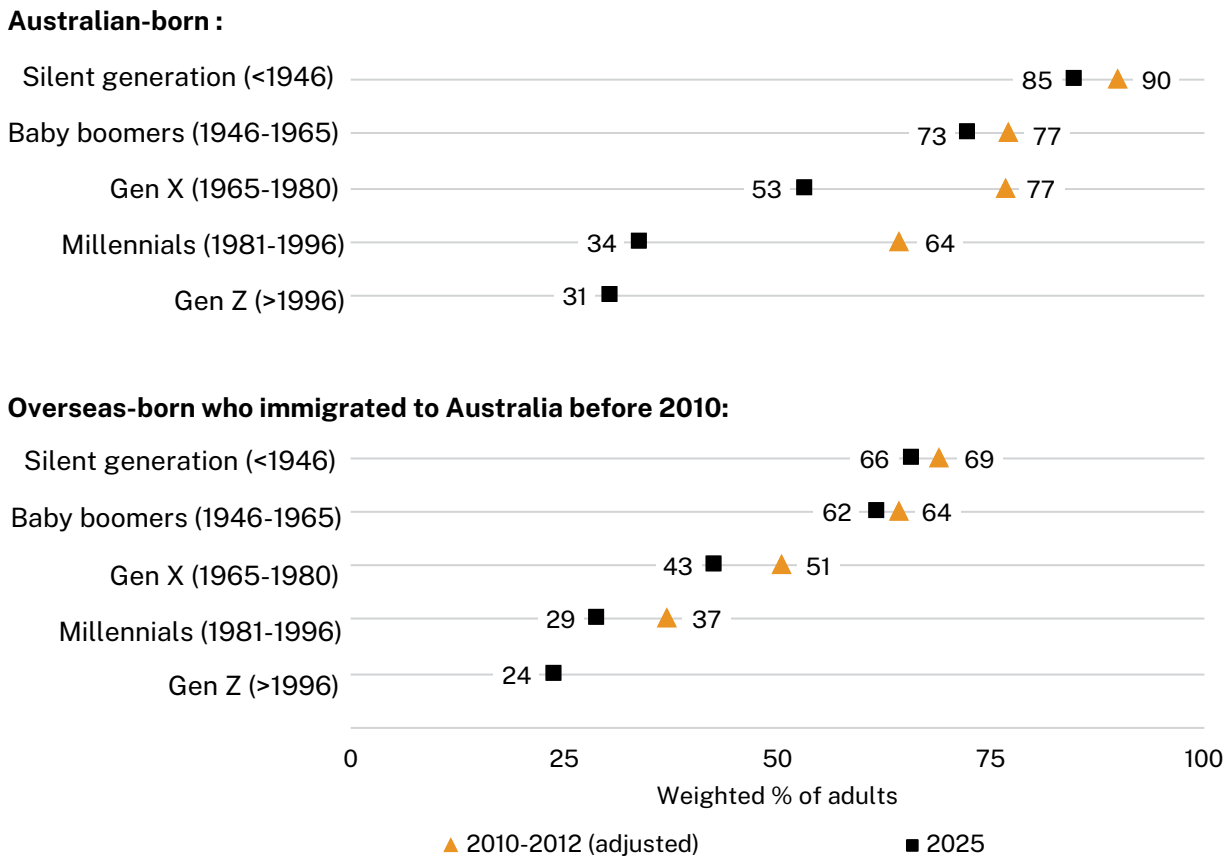
Of particular concern, generational differences in the sense of belonging appear to be widening. As we show in Figure 3, declines in the proportion of people who have a great sense of belonging in Australia since the early 2010s have been largest among younger adult generations. We estimate, for example, that the proportion of Australian-born Millennials (defined here as people born between 1981 and 1996 inclusive) with a great sense of belonging declined from an average of 64 per cent across the 2010, 2011 and 2012 surveys[11] to 34 per cent in 2025, while the proportion declined from 77 per cent to 53 per cent among Gen X (born 1965–1980). Although Gen Z (born after 1996) were too young to participate in surveys in the early 2010s, just 31 per cent of the Australian-born have a great sense of belonging in 2025.

As we have reported in recent Mapping Social Cohesion reports[12], there are several potential social, cultural, economic, ideological and personal reasons why younger generations report declining and weaker belonging than older generations. To the extent that differences are related to changing social and cultural preferences in how younger adults identify themselves in relation to the country, the shift may not necessarily be a cause for concern. Greater concern though is warranted where low and declining belonging is related to social and economic disadvantage and disconnection.

In our analysis of this year's Mapping Social Cohesion survey, we find evidence that differences in national pride and belonging between younger and older adults are most associated with political values and personal social disadvantage. Using a decomposition analysis[13], we find that young people's more progressive, left-wing political orientations is strongly associated with their weaker sense of national pride and belonging, particularly where they are concerned about economic justice and fairness.

Millennials and Gen Zs, for example, who agree that the gap between high- and low-income earners is too large are 40 per cent less likely to have a great sense of belonging in Australia than Baby Boomers and older generations who disagree that the income gap is too large after accounting for a range of personal characteristics and attitudes.[14]

Figure 3. To what extent do you have a sense of belonging in Australia?' The proportion who say 'to a great extent' by generation and across time, 2010-2012 (telephone surveys) and 2025 (Life in Australia™)



Note: 2010-2012 estimates adjusted to remove the effect of the transition from telephone surveys to the mostly online Life in Australia™ surveys.

By the same token, young adults' greater sense of loneliness and weaker sense of happiness, safety and neighbourhood connection are also strongly associated with their weaker sense of national pride and belonging. Millennials and Gen Zs who say they feel isolated from others some of the time or often are 52 per cent less likely to have a great sense of belonging in Australia than Baby Boomer and older generations who say they never feel isolated.[15]

Interestingly, factors such as education, social media and living in regional Australia do not appear to help explain why younger adults report less national pride and belonging.

Current trends and generational shifts do not guarantee but are pointing towards a future in which smaller shares of people have a strong sense of national pride and belonging in Australia. Opinions will vary on the extent to which this is a major concern, not least for the potential for social and cultural trends and preferences to continue shifting and perhaps reverse course. Where though a weakened sense of belonging is of urgent public and community concern is where it reflects social and economic disadvantage, social disconnection and perceived injustice and disillusionment.

Attitudes to migration & diversity

In the wake of protest and debate, immigration has become a social and political flashpoint across much of the developed world. While anti-immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment has taken some time to reach Australia in its current wave, signs of its arrival was witnessed in the 'March for Australia' protests in August 2025.

As we show in this section, the concerns expressed by protesters around the levels of immigration to Australia are commonly shared across the country. However, while the disturbing racist element to the protests remains ever present and of deep concern in Australia, it remains a minority view, with most people (even those who think immigration is too high) expressing strong symbolic support for the value of multiculturalism and diversity and the contribution of immigration to Australian society, culture and the economy.

As we reported in the Mapping Social Cohesion 2024 report, one of the sharpest shifts in sentiment we have recorded in recent years has been in the proportion of Australians who think that immigration is 'too high'.[16] As shown in Figure 4, 24 per cent of adults in 2022 said that 'the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present' is 'too high' as opposed to 'too low' or 'about right'. By 2024, this proportion jumped to 49 per cent and remains at a similar level in 2025 (51 per cent).

The increase in support for reducing immigration should not be interpreted as reflecting a widespread and rapid escalation in anti-immigrant sentiment. As we explained last year, the rising share of the population who believe immigration is too high has come in a context in which international borders were re-opened to immigration after the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequent to the 2022 Mapping Social Cohesion survey and leading up to the 2024 survey, there was a sharp spike in actual immigration levels[17], prompting the Federal Government and Opposition to propose and enact policies and legislation to reduce immigration levels[18] [19], tacitly or explicitly accepting that they were too high and likely helping to lead public opinion on the issue. Nevertheless, the proportion of adults who believe that immigration is too high is higher in 2025 than has ever been recorded in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey (Figure 4).

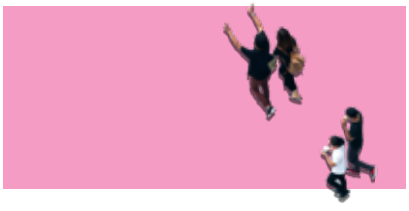
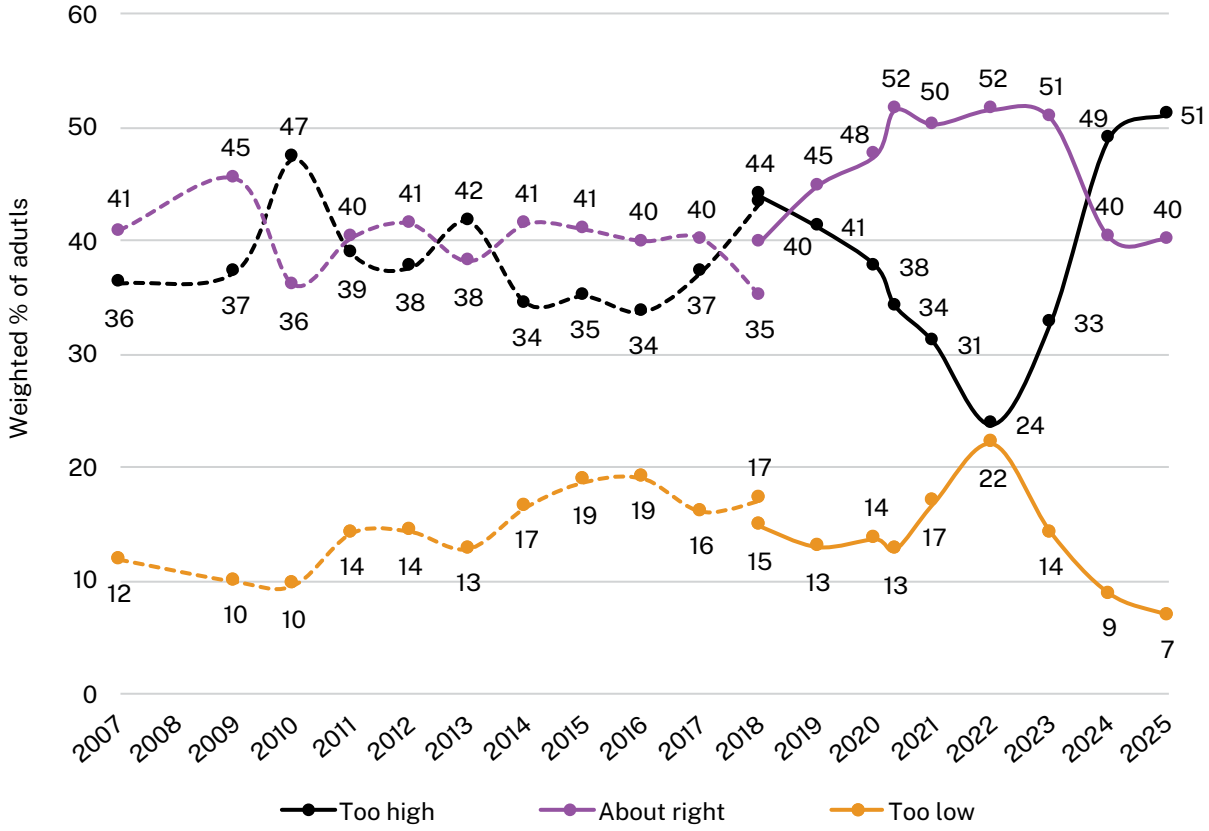


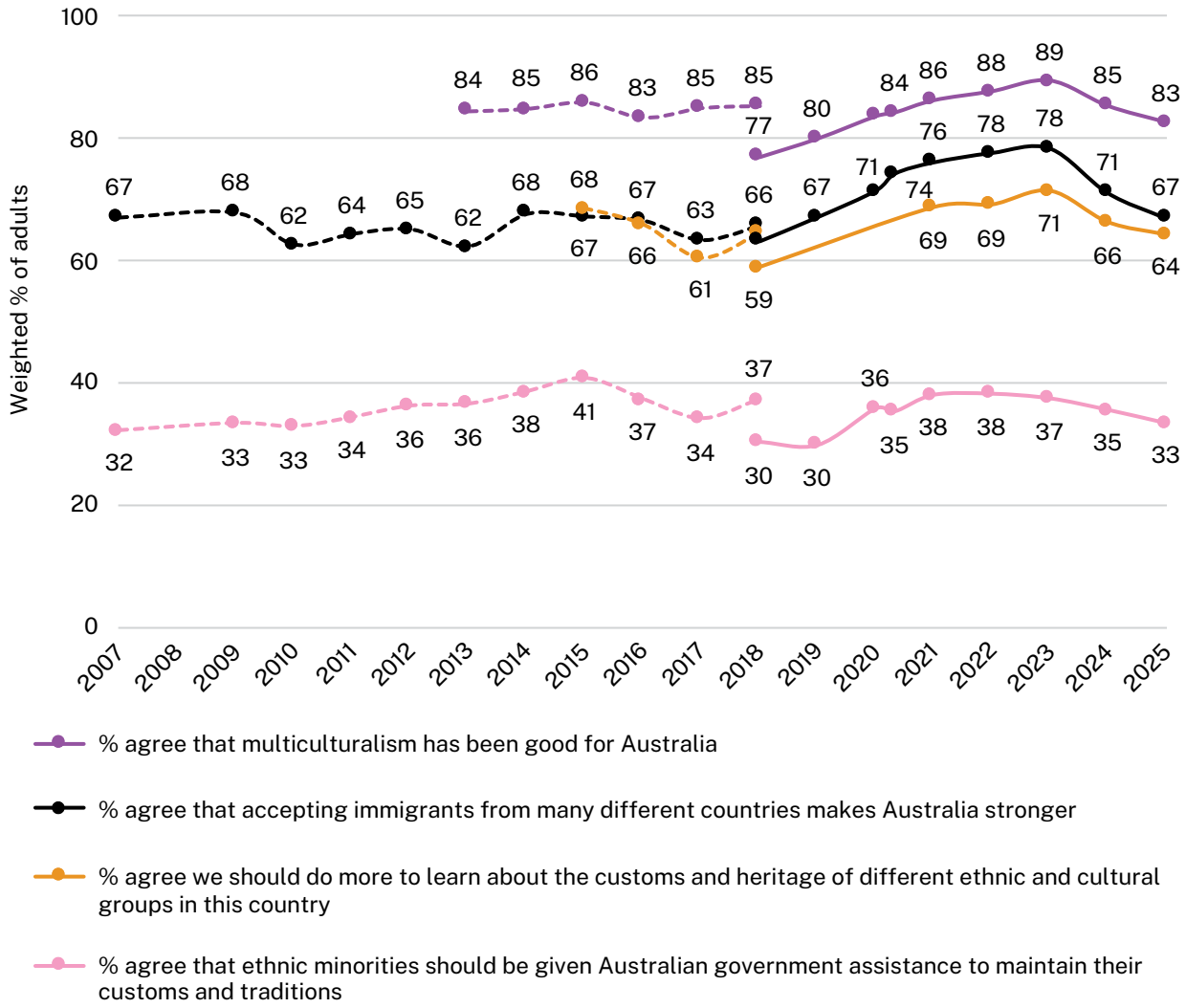
Figure 4. ‘What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present? Would you say it has been… too high, about right or too low’, 2007 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)



Note: dashed lines indicate when the survey was run only as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O’Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

Concern around the number of people immigrating to Australia, however, has not substantially undermined support for multiculturalism and diversity. A summary of overall national-levels attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity is shown in Figure 5. According to these results, 83 per cent of Australian adults agree or strongly agree that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia’, 67 per cent agree that ‘accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger’ and 64 per cent agree that ‘we should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this country’. These proportions have declined since peaking in 2023, perhaps reflecting the pressures of recent years, though remain at least in line with levels recorded through the 2010s.

Figure 5. Attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity, 2007-2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018-2025 (Life in Australia™)



Note: dashed lines indicate when the survey was run only as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O'Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

The steepest decline has been in the proportion of adults who agree that 'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger'. Between 2023 and 2025, this proportion declined from 78 per cent to 67 per cent. The decline over this time has been steepest among Liberal-National Coalition voters (down 15 percentage points), people who own their home outright (down 14 percentage points) and are retired (down 12 percentage points) and those who are financially struggling to pay bills or describe themselves as 'poor' (down 11 percentage points). Weakening support for the view that immigrant diversity makes Australia stronger does not necessarily translate to support for a discriminatory migration program though, with those who disagree that diversity makes Australia stronger reasonably evenly split between those who agree (51 per cent) or disagree (48 per cent) that it should be possible to reject immigrants coming to Australia on the basis of their race, ethnicity or religion.

Whether symbolic support for diversity and multiculturalism translates to support for concrete action is another question. As shown in Figure 5, only one-in-three adults (33 per cent) agree that 'ethnic minorities should be given Australian government assistance to maintain their customs and traditions'. This share is in line with its historical average since 2007. On other measures though, 90 per cent of adults agree that 'someone born outside of Australia is just as likely to be a good citizen as someone born in Australia', 80 per cent agree that 'immigrants

are generally good for Australia's economy' and 78 per cent agree that 'immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures'.

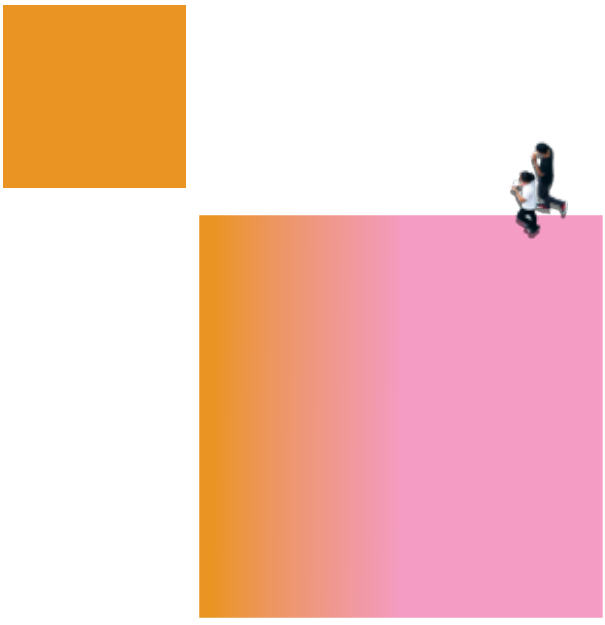
Across this broad sweep of measures therefore, the Mapping Social Cohesion study illustrates the importance of distinguishing between attitudes people have towards the *number* of people immigrating to Australia at any given time and their attitudes to the value of diversity, multiculturalism and immigrants themselves. While there is certainly an overlap between racist attitudes and belief that immigration is too high, most people in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey who say that levels are too high still agree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia (71 per cent), that people born outside of Australia are just likely to be make good citizens (85 per cent), are good for Australia's economy (66 per cent) and improve Australian society by bring new ideas and cultures (64 per cent). Strikingly, even among overseas-born Australians, 46 per cent believe immigration is too high.

Rather than reflecting widespread anti-immigrant sentiment, concerns about immigration levels more commonly relate to concerns around the economy and housing. Among those who think immigration is too high, 58 per cent think the economy or housing shortages and affordability is the most important problem facing Australia in 2025, with only one-in-ten (9 per cent) citing immigration itself as the most important problem. In the total population, 58 per cent cite economic and housing issues and 5 per cent cite immigration as the most important problem.

The relationship, however, between concerns about housing, the economy and immigration indicates that people commonly believe that immigration is adding to economic and housing pressures. In 2025, 58 per cent of the total population and 79 per cent of the population who think immigration is too high agree or strongly agree that 'immigrants increase house prices'. Approximately one-half (48 per cent) of people who think immigration is too high also agree that 'immigrants take jobs away' (31 per cent of all people).

The way in which people conflate immigration with housing and economic pressures potentially in turn has flow-on effects for the strength of support for multiculturalism and diversity. People who believe that immigrants increase house prices or take jobs away are 37 per cent less likely to believe that 'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger' in 2025. While it is difficult to say perceived threats to housing and jobs cause less support for diversity, we can also say that people who believed that immigrants increase house prices or take jobs away in 2024 were 2.2 times more likely to change their minds between 2024 and 2025 from agreeing that immigrant diversity makes Australia stronger in 2024 to disagreeing in 2025 and after controlling for a range of personal characteristics.[20]

In this way, housing and economic pressures are potentially contributing not only to concerns about levels of immigration but also the strength of support of multiculturalism and diversity. The accumulated strength of support over years and decades potentially has a protective effect, making it difficult for anti-immigrant sentiment to take a stronger hold and has perhaps helped to prevent deeper division over immigration in Australia in recent years. Steady declines in support for diversity and multiculturalism though should be taken as a sign that support cannot be taken for granted or assumed to be immune from the social and economic strains on individuals and households, nor the political influences that would seek to create deeper divisions.



Prejudice, discrimination & racism

The strength of support for multiculturalism and diversity that has accumulated in Australia over years and decades is a potentially important resource in guarding against deeper divisions over immigration and greater threats to social cohesion.

This strength though can be, by no means, used to downplay the difficult experiences of racism and discrimination experienced by First Nations Australians[21], immigrants and cultural and religious communities across Australia. While a longstanding issue since colonisation, racism remains an issue shaping Australian society and its social cohesion, evidenced recently with the targeting of Indian Australians as part of the 'March for Australia' rallies[22] and the difficult experiences faced by Muslim, Jewish and other affected communities in the wake of the conflict in Gaza.[23]

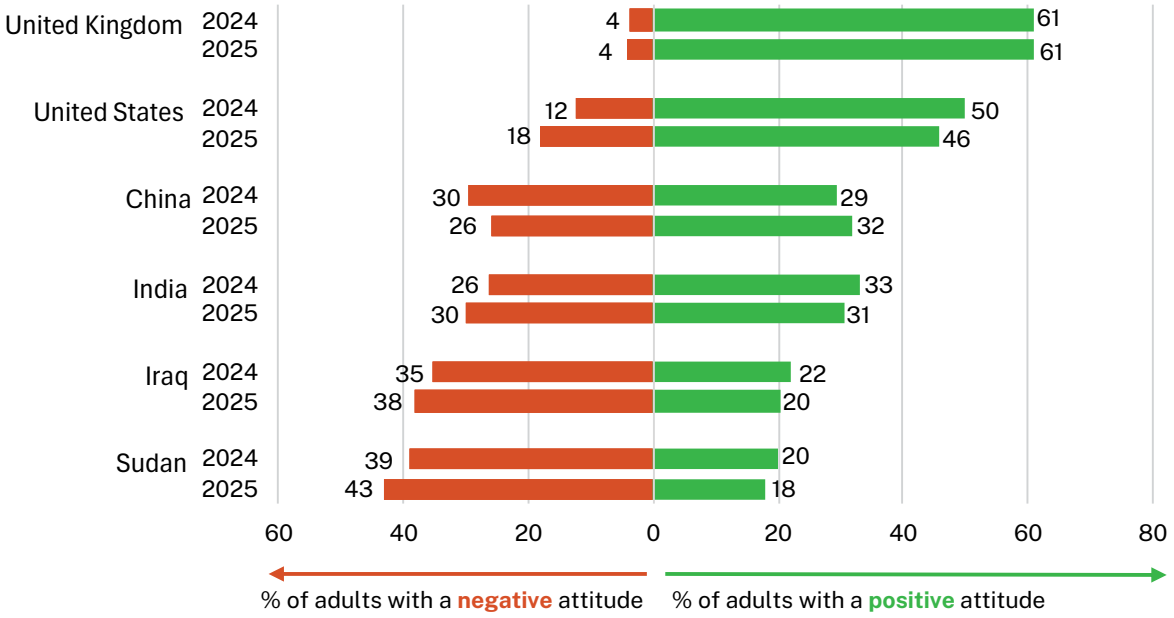
The Mapping Social Cohesion survey is not able to provide an exhaustive or in-depth understanding of racism, though it can inform us about the extent of prejudices and discrimination that may be related to racism. A somewhat crude but effective way that we monitor negative prejudices and stereotypes on the survey is by asking respondents whether they have positive, negative or neutral views towards specific immigrant and religious groups. We ask respondents 'would you say your feelings are positive, negative or neutral towards immigrants from' ten select countries, namely the United Kingdom, the United States, Italy, Germany, China, India, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Ethiopia. We likewise ask respondents to say whether they have positive, negative and neutral attitudes towards people of the major religious faiths – Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism. This cross-section of countries and faiths allows us to assess whether attitudes towards diverse groups differ substantially from those expressed towards those from Anglo, European and Christian backgrounds – a difference that may reflect ethnic and racial biases.

Australians' views of immigrants do indeed differ markedly by whether or not immigrants come from Anglo-European or other backgrounds. Select results are shown in Figure 6. In 2025, people arriving from the United Kingdom continued to be seen warmly, with 61 per cent of adults holding a positive attitude and only 4 per cent a negative one (35 per cent were neutral), unchanged from 2024. Although not shown (to conserve space), attitudes towards those from Italy (60 per cent positive, 37 per cent neutral, 3 per cent negative) and Germany (57 per cent positive, 39 per cent neutral, 3 per cent negative) were similarly positive. Immigrants from the United States also remain broadly well regarded (46 per cent positive, 36 per cent neutral, 18 negative), though sentiments cooled somewhat between 2024 and 2025.

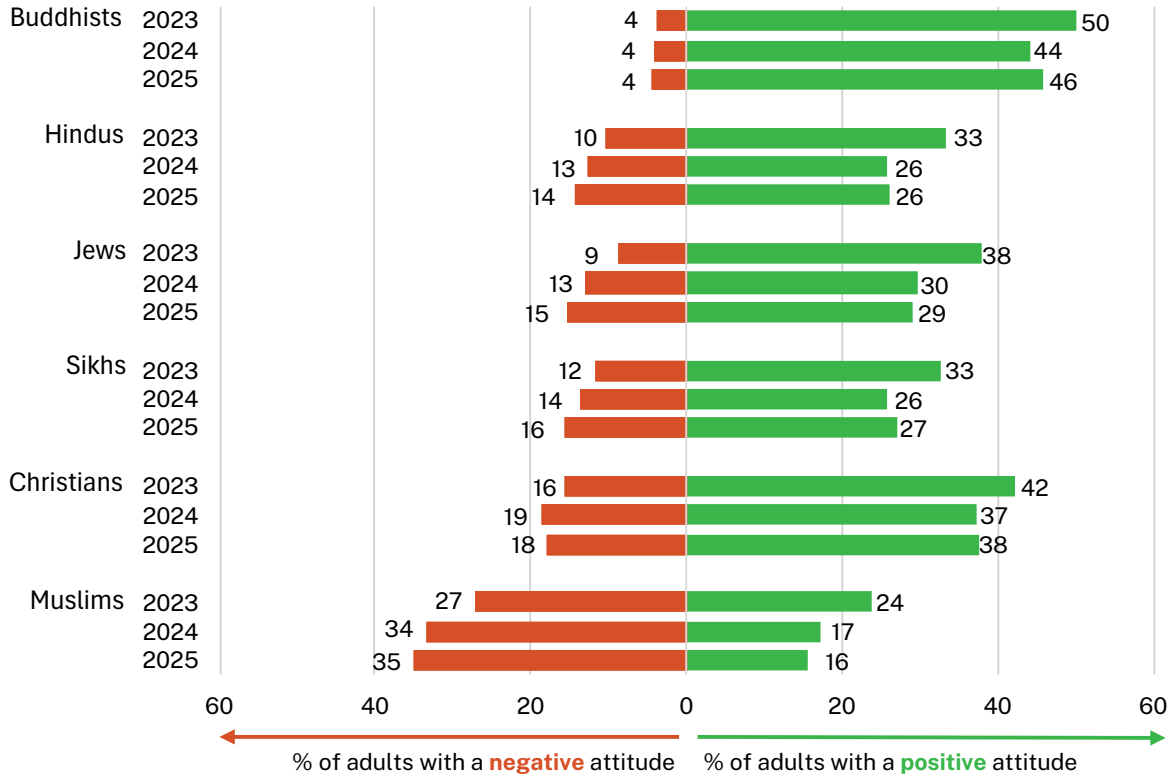
Opinions about immigrants from Asian and African backgrounds are less positive. Attitudes to immigrants from China and India are mixed, with positive and negative views near equally divided. More people express negative attitudes than positive attitudes towards each of the other groups, with for example, fewer than one-in-five adults holding positive attitudes and around two-in-five holding negative attitudes towards immigrants from Iraq and Sudan.

Figure 6. Positive and negative attitudes towards immigrants from select countries and people of different faiths, Life in Australia™, 2023-2025

a) Attitudes towards immigrants from select countries



b) Attitudes towards people of different religious faiths



Perceptions of immigrants from different religious faiths also show clear contrasts. Most strikingly, in Figure 6b, 35 per cent expressed a negative attitude towards Muslims. This proportion had been declining in recent years[24], but increased between 2023 and 2024.

Since 2023, attitudes towards people of Hindu, Jewish and Sikh faiths have also become less positive and more negative. Indeed, while attitudes towards Jewish people became significantly more negative after the start of the current conflict in Gaza, the extent of negative attitudes towards Jewish people are at similar levels to those of other faiths. The recent experience for Jewish Australian communities though is qualitatively different and likely more damaging, where negative attitudes have translated to anti-Semitic hatred and violence.[25]

There could be a number of reasons for the prevalence of negative attitudes expressed towards immigrant and religious communities. On the face of it though, disproportionately negative attitudes highlight a persistent hierarchy of acceptance and a concerning level of prejudice particularly towards people of Islamic faith and Australians from Asian and African backgrounds.

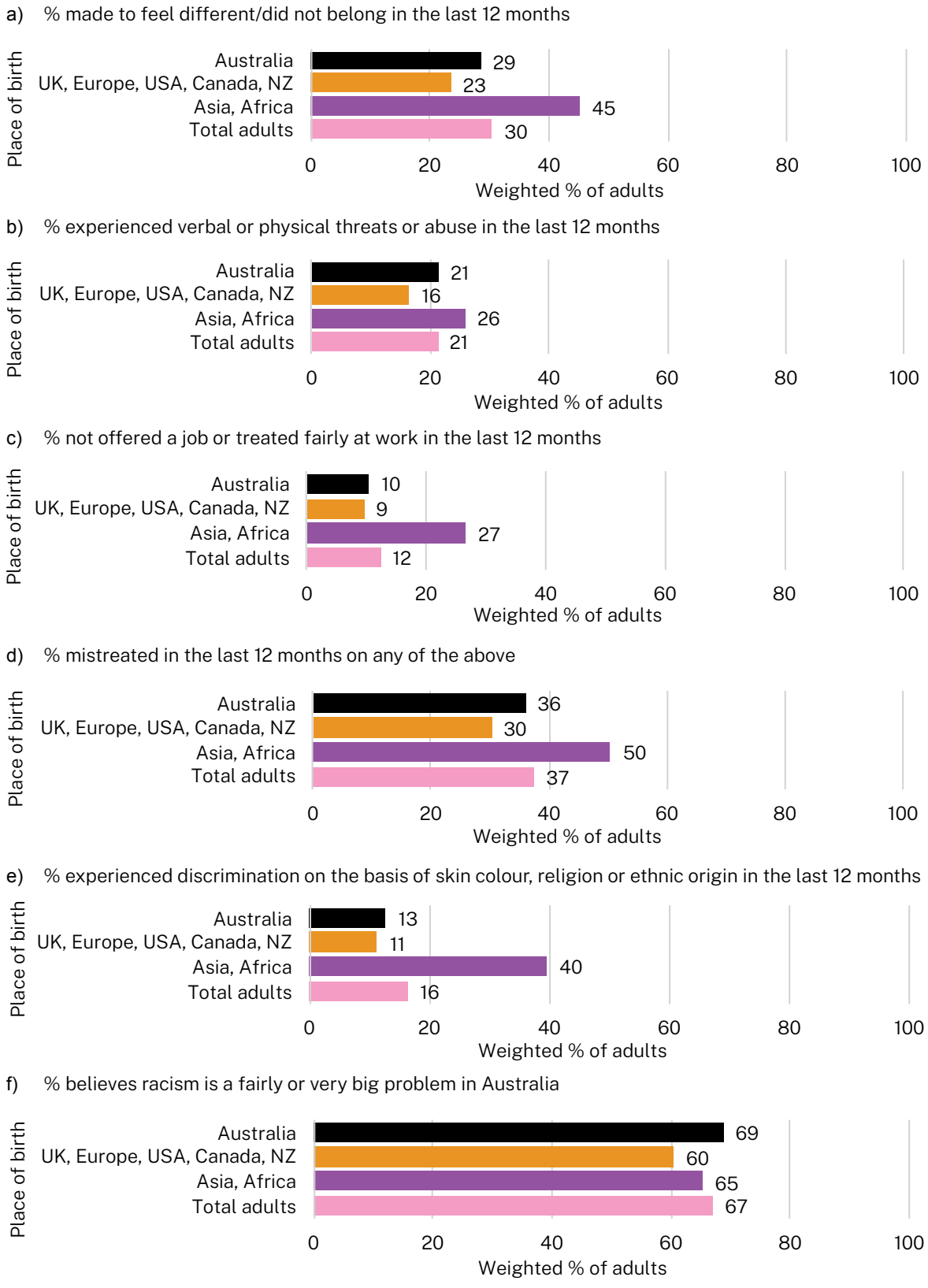
Whether prejudice reflects and translates to racist attitudes and behaviours is another question. While the Mapping Social Cohesion survey does not directly capture instances and experiences of racism, the survey does ask whether people have experienced discrimination in the last 12 months based on their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion and whether they think racism is a problem in Australia. Since 2024, we have also asked respondents whether they experienced different forms of mistreatment in the previous 12 months. We do not have a large enough number of respondents in the survey to produce estimates of discrimination, perceived racism and mistreatment for specific groups and communities. We can though combine survey data with data from Australia's Census to come up with estimates for people based on the regions of the world they were born in.[26] The results are shown in Figure 7 and Table A1 in the Appendix.

Mistreatment and discrimination are commonly experienced by people from African and Asian backgrounds. We estimate that a combined 45 per cent of people born in Africa and Asia were made to feel different or as if they did not belong in the last 12 months (Figure 7a), 26 per cent experienced verbal or physical threat or abuse (Figure 7b) and 27 per cent were not offered a job or treated fairly at work (Figure 7c). Approximately, one-half experienced mistreatment in any of these areas (Figure 7d). While this may not be related to racial or ethnically motivated discrimination, these forms of mistreatment were significantly and often substantially more commonly reported by people from Asian or African backgrounds than those born in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States of America and Canada. People born in Asia and Africa were also substantially more likely to report experiencing discrimination in the last 12 months based on their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion (40 per cent).

Strikingly, the Australian-born population are at least as likely as overseas-born Australians to recognise racism as a problem. In 2025, two-in-three Australian-born (69 per cent) adults believe that racism is a fairly or very big problem in Australia, a similar proportion to those born in Asia or Africa. Even among third generation Australians (people whose parents were both born in Australia), two-in-three (68 per cent) believe this is the case. While this might, in part, reflect perceived racism towards white Anglo Australians, we estimate that only around one-in-ten third generation Australians who believe racism is a fairly or very big problem say they themselves experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the last 12 months – and this will include at least some First Nations Australians.

Racism, discrimination and prejudice are longstanding and, as our results suggest, continuing issues for Australian society. Considering the White Australia Policy was only fully dismantled and multiculturalism embraced fifty years ago, considerable albeit uneven progress has been made since. Much work though is still to be done. Harnessing the symbolic support Australians have for diversity and multiculturalism to tackle some of the underlying sources of racial and ethnic bias and prejudice could be a fruitful area for public and community attention in this space.

Figure 7. Experience of mistreatment for any reason, discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic origin or religion and perceived racism in Australia by immigrant background, 2025



Trust in government & the political system

Trust in government and the confidence people have in the political system and institutions is a crucial foundation for societal functioning and social cohesion.

Arguably, debate and division is an even more foundational cornerstone of democracy, while a degree of scepticism and the right to question is valuable for guarding against the misuse and abuse of power.[27] Nevertheless, widespread trust in government and politics is indicative of a political leadership that is seen to be doing the right thing by the people, while that trust provides a mandate for government to pursue and implement policies in the interest of the country.[28]

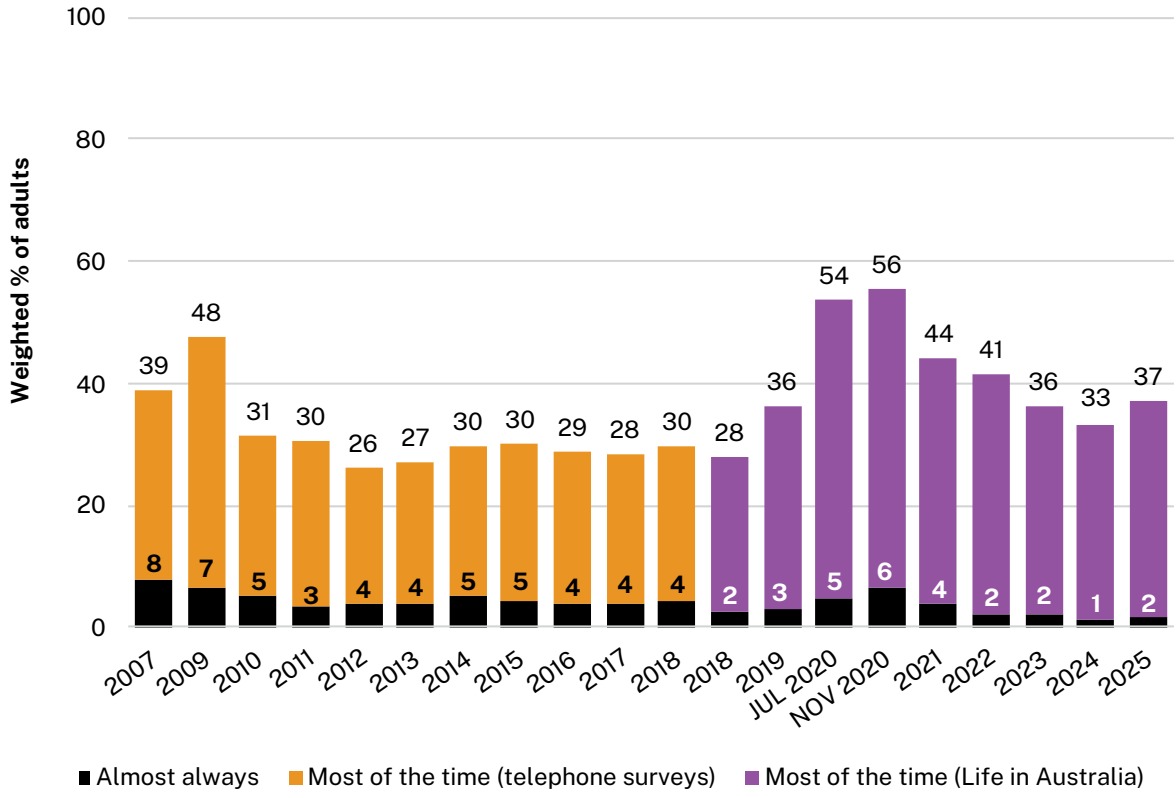
Trust in government and the political system is measured through several questions on the Mapping Social Cohesion survey. The longest running question, asked in every survey since 2007, asks respondents how often they 'think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing by the Australian people' and sits alongside other questions that speak to the confidence people have in the political system more generally. Responses to these questions always partly reflect a partisan divide where people are more likely to trust the government they voted for and that best aligns with their own views. Nevertheless, a degree of trust that governments have the best interests of people at heart and that the political system is fair is an important aspect to our social cohesion and democratic functioning, especially when the party in government is not the one we all voted for.

Australians' confidence in the Federal Government has shifted markedly in recent years (see Figure 8). Belief that the Government can be trusted to do the right thing by the Australian people rose sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a peak of 56 per cent of adults in 2020 saying the government could be trusted 'almost always' or 'most of the time' (as opposed to 'only some of the time' or 'almost never'). Since then, however, trust declined steadily, reaching just one-in-three (33 per cent) people in 2024.

Trust in government rose though from 33 to 37 per cent in the last year, an increase of four percentage points. While this remains below the pandemic-era high recorded in 2020, it remains notably higher than the levels recorded through most of the 2010–2018 period when it sat in a relatively steady band between 26 and 31 per cent. Whether the 2025 result reflects a short-term post-election bump or indicates an easing of public disillusionment with government and the start of a recovery from the low trust of the 2010s remains to be seen.

The increase in trust in the Federal Government is mostly driven by increasing trust among progressive voters following the 2025 Federal election. Trust increased significantly between 2024 and 2025 among Labor and Greens voters, while remaining reasonably stable among Coalition voters. Among people who voted for Labor at the election in May, for instance, belief that the Government can be trusted to do the right thing by the Australian people all or most of the time increased from 44 per cent in 2024 to 58 per cent in 2025.

Figure 8. ‘How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?’ Proportion of adults who say ‘almost always’ or ‘most of the time’, 2007 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)

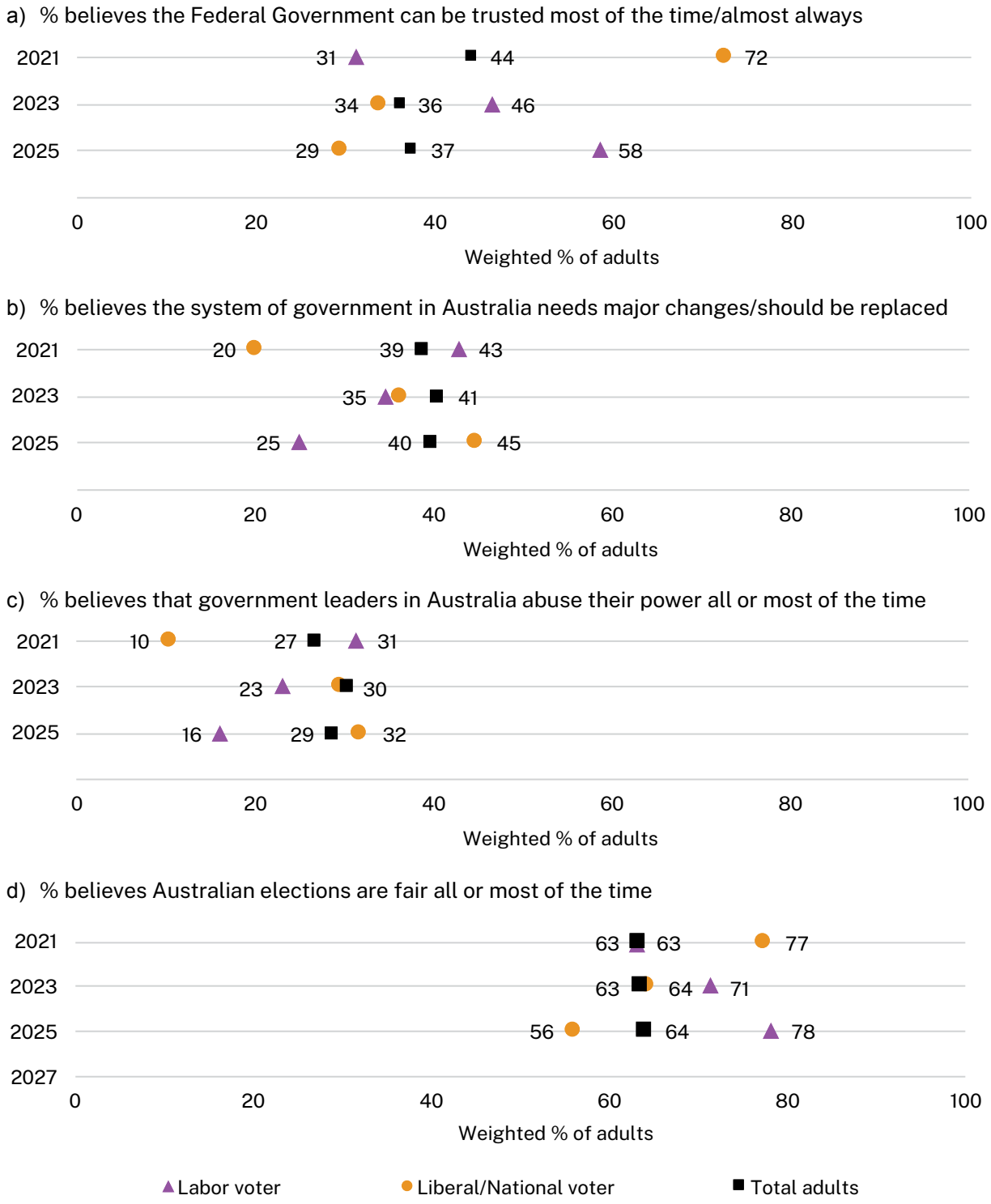


Note: results up to 2018 relate to when the survey was run purely as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O’Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

The polarisation of trust in government along party lines is shown in Figure 9a (see also Table A2). In 2021, under the Scott Morrison-led Coalition Government, 72 per cent of Coalition voters said the Government can be trusted most of the time or almost always. After the election of the Anthony Albanese-led Labor Government in May 2022, trust among Coalition voters fell to 34 per cent in 2023 and 29 per cent in 2025. Over the same period, trust among Labor voters increased from 31 per cent in 2021 under the Coalition Government to 46 per cent in 2023 and 58 per cent in 2025 under the Labor Government.

This partisan polarisation is also reflected in broader attitudes to the functioning of the Australian democracy and the political system. Examples are shown in Figure 9b, Figure 9c and Figure 9d. Overall, 40 per cent of adults say ‘the system of government we have in Australia’ needs ‘major changes’ or ‘should be replaced’ (59 per cent say ‘it works fine as it is’ or ‘needs minor change’), a proportion that has fluctuated somewhat in recent years, though the trend has been stable since 2021. Likewise, 29 per cent believe that ‘government leaders in Australia abuse their power’ all or most of the time (71 per cent say it is ‘some of the time’, ‘a little of the time’ or ‘none of the time’) and 64 per cent say that in their view, Australian elections are fair all or most of the time (36 per cent say some, a little or none of the time), both of which have been stable since 2021.

Figure 9. Indicators of confidence in Australia's political system by vote for major parties and total adults, Life in Australia™ , 2021, 2023 and 2025



Note: Vote is based on who respondents said they gave their first preference to in the House at Representatives at the most recent Federal Election. Total adults includes voters for other parties/candidates and non-voters.

Among Labor and Coalition voters, however, the trends have been sharp and diverging. The proportion of Coalition voters that believe the system needs at least major changes increased from 20 per cent in 2021 to 45 per cent in 2025, while the proportion who believe that leaders abuse their powers most or all of the time increased from 10 per cent to 32 per cent and the proportion who believe elections are fair all or most of the time dropped from 77 per cent to 56 per cent. As shown in Figure 9b, Figure 9c and Figure 9d, these trends are reversed among Labor voters.

Stable, if not increasing, levels of trust in the government and the political system in this year's survey disguise striking partisan shifts in sentiment before and after the 2022 change of Federal Government. Attitudes have not necessarily become more polarised over this time. In fact, the differences between Labor and Coalition voters have narrowed on three of the four indicators in Figure 9 (all except whether 'elections are fair'). Even so, it is perhaps a cause for continued monitoring, if not concern, that attitudes not just to the government of the day but to the wider political system and the integrity of elections can swing so sharply and in such diverging ways between different groups of voters. While Australia's political system has particular protective features such as mandatory voting[29], our results suggest that nor is Australian democracy invulnerable to the sort of political polarisation impacting many parts of the world today.

Financial hardship and its social costs

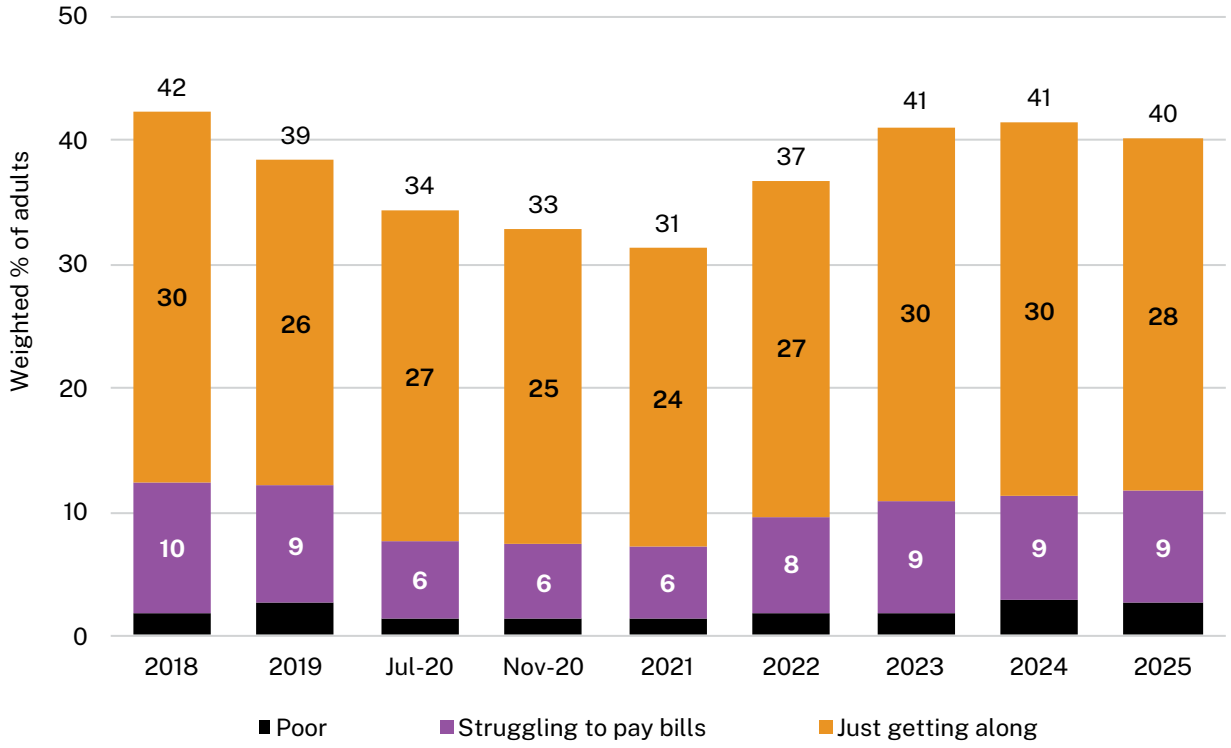
The cost-of-living has been a dominant issue in Australia and much of the world for the past three years. Inflation and rising interest rates has coincided with a rise in financial struggles.[30]

Even as inflation has subsided[31] and interest rates have stopped increasing[32], household incomes, at least until recently, have not kept pace with the cost-of-living[33] and financial hardship has remained stubbornly high.[34] With economic conditions improving, we might hope for an easing in financial hardship in coming years. The personal and social consequences, however, may have lasting effects, including on social cohesion.

Economic and financial conditions are related to social cohesion in important ways, both in how they shape our material and emotional worth and wellbeing and influence our levels of trust, belonging and opportunities and willingness to participate in our communities. Indeed, as we have previously reported, financial wellbeing is the single most important factor associated with social cohesion that we can identify in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey.[35] We build on this evidence in this section, including by showing that after multiple years of heightened cost-of-living pressures, persistent financial hardship is potentially having a cumulative effect on our social bonds and connections.

Despite improving economic conditions, a substantial share of Australians continue to report financial hardship. In 2025, when asked to describe their financial circumstances, 40 per cent of adults said they were either 'just getting along', 'struggling to pay bills', or 'poor'. Specifically, 28 per cent of adults said they were at best 'just getting along' financially, 9 per cent were 'struggling to pay bills' and a further 3 per cent described themselves as 'poor'. These figures are near identical to those in 2023 and 2024 (both 41 per cent), indicating that financial stress has remained stubbornly common despite slowing inflation and a pause in interest rate rises.

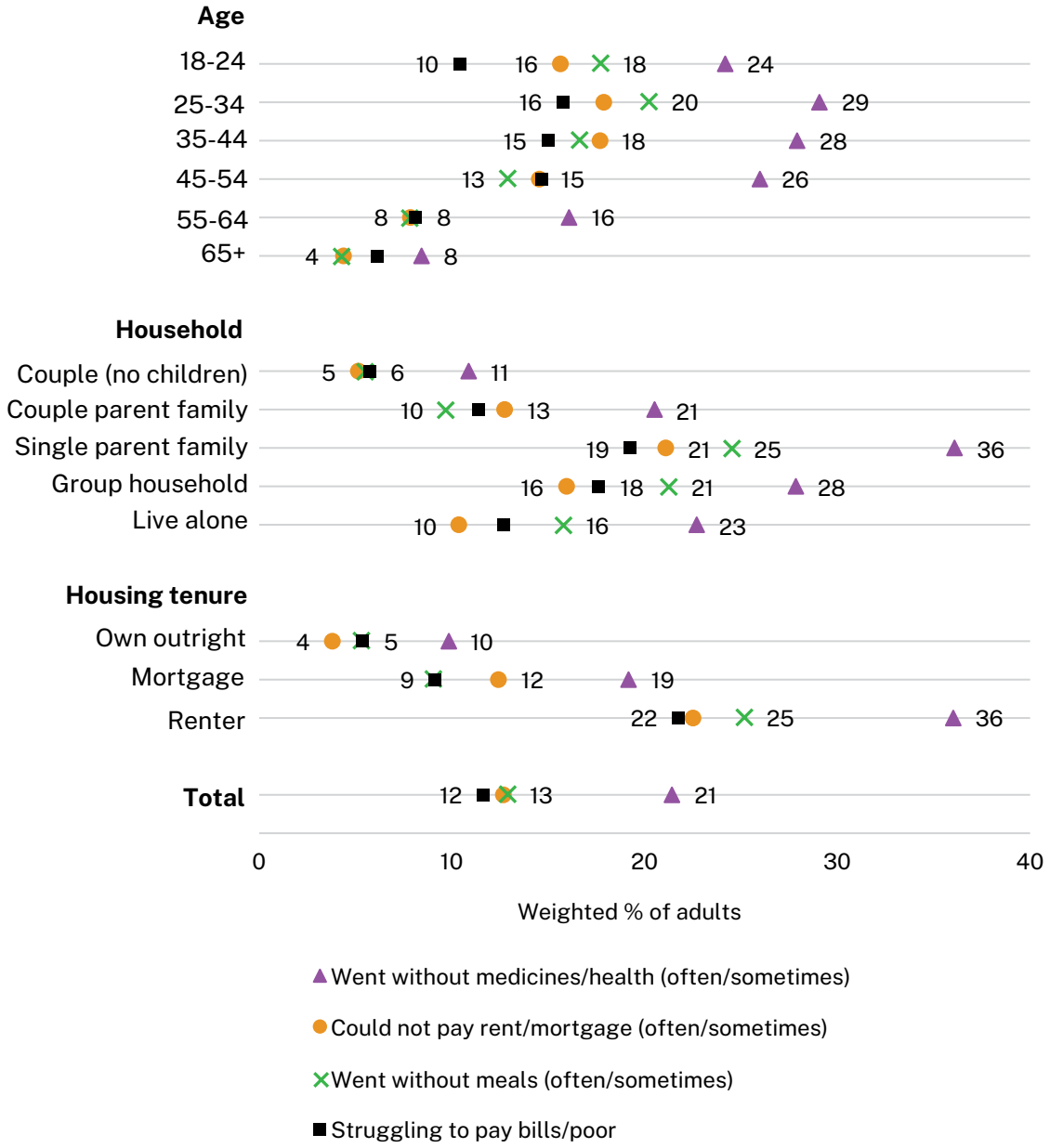
Figure 10. Proportion of adults who describe their financial situation as 'just getting along', 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor', Life in Australia™, 2018 to 2025



Financial hardship has also been stubbornly common since 2023 on a broader range of questions we have added to the Mapping Social Cohesion survey. In 2025, 13 per cent of adults say they have often or sometimes gone without meals in the last 12 months because there was not enough money for food, similar to the proportion in 2023 (12 per cent) and higher than it was when the question was first asked in 2021 (9 per cent). Likewise, 13 per cent said they often or sometimes could not pay the rent or mortgage on time in 2025 and 22 per cent said they often or sometimes could not pay for medicines or health care, near identical to the proportions when these questions were first asked in 2023 (12 per cent and 22 per cent respectively).

Financial hardship is particularly common among young and middle-aged adults, single parent families, non-family households and renters. The proportion of adults reporting financial hardship by age group, household composition and housing tenure in 2025 are shown in Figure 11 (see also Table A3). These results show, for example, that among people living in single parent families, 36 per cent often or sometimes could not pay for medicines or health care, 25 per cent went without meals, 21 per cent could not pay the rent or mortgage and 19 per cent said they were struggling to pay bills or 'poor'.

Figure 11. Indicators of financial stress in the past 12 months by age, household composition and housing tenure, Life in Australia™, 2025



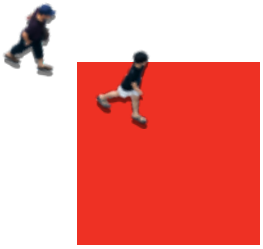
While the levels of financial hardship in 2025 are similar to those recorded in 2018 (when 42 per cent of adults reported financial difficulties) the overall trend since 2023 has been one of consistent levels of financial strain. The persistence of financial pressure highlights the challenges households face in meeting everyday costs and underscores the continuing impact of economic conditions on social cohesion and wellbeing. Indeed, the persistence of financial stress for individuals and households in recent years is potentially having a compounding effect on personal and social wellbeing and cohesion.

Having tracked many of the same individuals on Life in Australia™ for multiple years, we can estimate the proportion of respondents who have experienced financial difficulties over multiple years. In doing so, we find that a weighted estimate of 16 per cent of adults in 2025 have been just getting along at best for three or more consecutive years, 12 per cent have been getting along at best for one or two years and 15 per cent have been getting along or struggling for an unknown length of time.[36]

Persistent financial difficulties over multiple years are in turn, strongly associated with several indicators of social cohesion. In particular, people who we observe have been 'just getting along' at best for three or more years are much less likely to report being happy, to trust in the Federal Government or people generally or to believe their neighbours help and get along with each other. For example, we estimate that in 2025,

- 58 per cent of adults are happy if they have been financially 'just getting along', 'struggling to pay bills' or 'poor' for at least three consecutive years, compared with 78 per cent of those who have been just getting along at best for one or two years and 91 per cent of those who say they are financially comfortable or prosperous.[37]
- 28 per cent of adults trust the Federal Government to do the right thing by the Australian people all or most of the time if they have been just getting along at best for three or more years, compared with 36 per cent of those who have been getting along at best for 1-2 years and 47 per cent of those who are comfortable or prosperous.[38]
- 32 per cent of adults believe that 'generally speaking, most people can be trusted' if they have been just getting along at best for three or more years, compared with 41 per cent of those who have been just getting along at best for 1-2 years and 55 per cent of those who say they are comfortable or prosperous.[39]
- 61 per cent of adults agree that their neighbours are willing help each other and get on well together from different national or ethnic backgrounds if they have been just getting along at best for three or more years, compared with 70 per cent of those who have been getting along at best for 1-2 years and 79 per cent of those who are comfortable or prosperous.[40]

While difficult to prove, these results are consistent with the view that financial hardship, and particularly persistent hardship, can have a cumulative and corrosive effect on the individual social bonds and ties that collectively contribute to social cohesion. Given recent macroeconomic indicators, we might reasonably hope that cost-of-living pressures will ease in coming years, though whether that will translate to a meaningful reduction in persistent hardship and an improvement in social outcomes remains to be seen and ought to be a foremost area of public and community concern.



Personal happiness & wellbeing

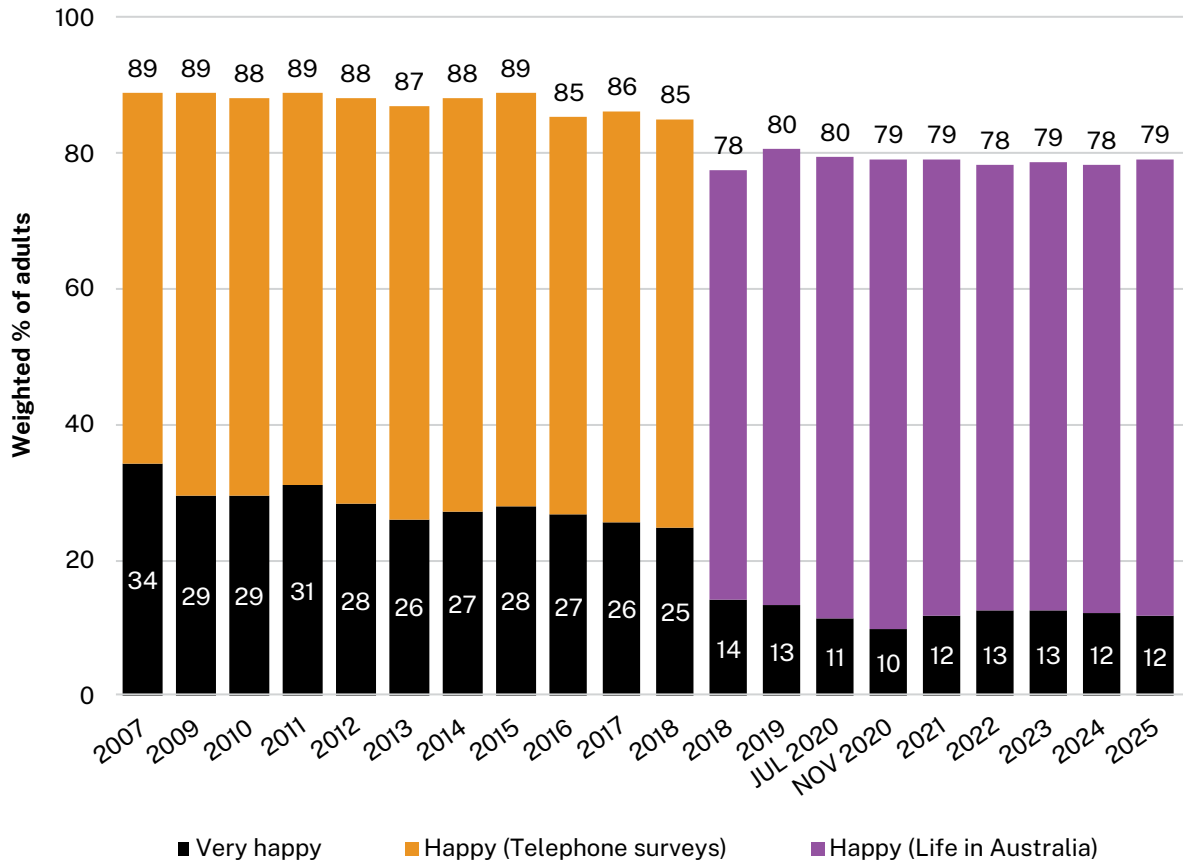
One of the most important functions of social cohesion is arguably in supporting personal social wellbeing and happiness.

The effect of social cohesion, particularly of cohesive neighbourhoods, has been a major area of academic research for several years.[41] [42] [43] [44] While the findings are often nuanced, it is almost always shown to be the case that when people have good social connections and networks and a strong sense of belonging and cohesion within neighbourhoods, communities and society, they are most likely to say they are happy and satisfied with life. So whether social cohesion *causes* people to be happy or not, personal wellbeing and happiness is a useful, if not one of the most important, indicators of social cohesion.

When asked to take all things into consideration, around four out of five Australians (79 per cent) reported being either happy or very happy over the past year on the Mapping Social Cohesion survey (as opposed to unhappy or very unhappy). Since 2018 when the survey shifted to the mostly online Life in Australia™ survey, the proportion of adults who said they were happy or very happy has remained within the range of 78–80 per cent, with only minor fluctuations (see Figure 12). After we adjust for the fact that people were less likely to admit being unhappy on the telephone surveys prior to 2018, we estimate that the proportion saying they are happy has been consistent since 2016.

This stability is consistent with results for life satisfaction recorded on the General Social Survey and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)[45] and highlights that despite rising economic pressures and social divisions in other areas, most Australians continue to consistently report a positive sense of personal wellbeing.

Figure 12. ‘Taking all things into consideration, would you say that over the last year you have been…?’ Proportion of adults who say happy or very happy, 2007 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)

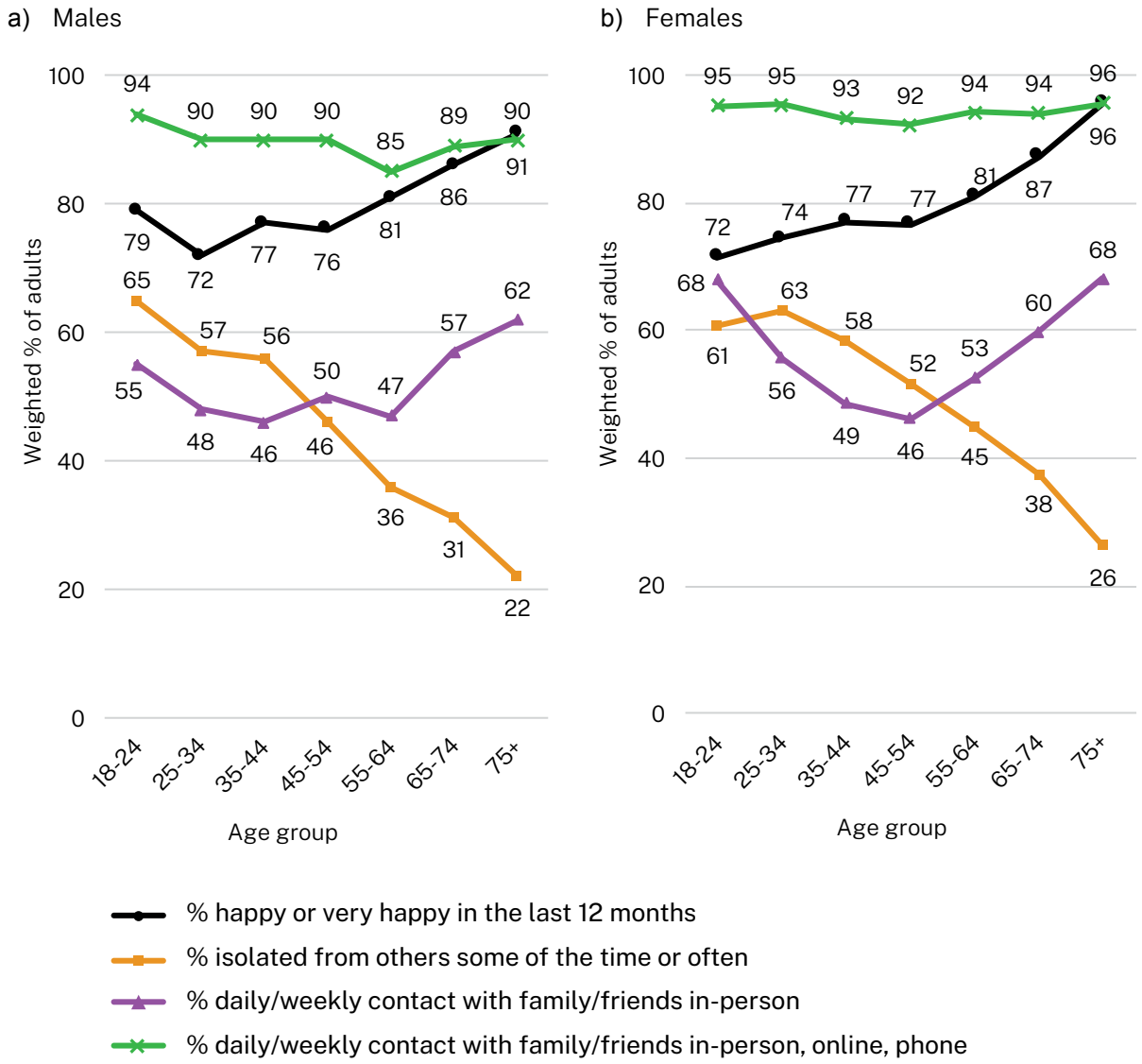


Note: results up to 2018 relate to when the survey was run purely as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O’Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

Happiness and life satisfaction are strongly related to economic and social factors. Among people who say they are financially ‘struggling to pay the bills’ or ‘poor’, just 41 per cent said they had been happy or very happy over the last year, compared with 94 per cent of those who say they are ‘prosperous’ or ‘very comfortable’ and 90 per cent of those who are ‘reasonably comfortable’.

Like the sense of belonging, happiness is strongly related to social connections and is relatively less prevalent among young adults. In Figure 13 (and Table A4), we show levels of happiness and indicators of social connection and isolation for males and females by age group. For 18-24 year olds, 79 per cent of males and 72 per cent females said they had been happy or very happy in the last 12 months, similar to levels for 24-34 year olds, 35-44 year olds and 45-54 year olds and significantly lower than for people aged 65 years and over. Patterns of social isolation form almost a mirror image where 65 per cent of 18-24 year old males and 61 per cent of females say they feel isolated from others ‘some of the time’ or often, proportions that decline to 22 and 26 per cent among males and females aged 75 years and over.

Figure 13. Happiness, social connections and isolation and age group and gender, Life in Australia™, 2025



Feelings of happiness and social isolation are, in turn, reflective of the regularity of contact people have with family and friends. While most people communicate with family and friends in some form – whether in person, online or by phone – on at least a weekly basis, younger-to-middle aged adults are relatively less likely to see family and friends in person (see Figure 13). For 35-44 year olds, for example, 46 per cent of males and 49 per cent meet with family or friends on a daily or weekly basis, significantly below levels for those aged 65 years and over. This difference in in-person contact is then strongly associated with differences in happiness and life satisfaction between older and young-to-middle aged cohorts, suggesting that social disconnection is weighing on the personal wellbeing and happiness of many adults.

Local and community connections

The stability of our measures of social cohesion in a world of social and economic tumult demonstrates the way in which social cohesion is much more than a reflection of the state of the economy or the battles that take place in political and online spheres.

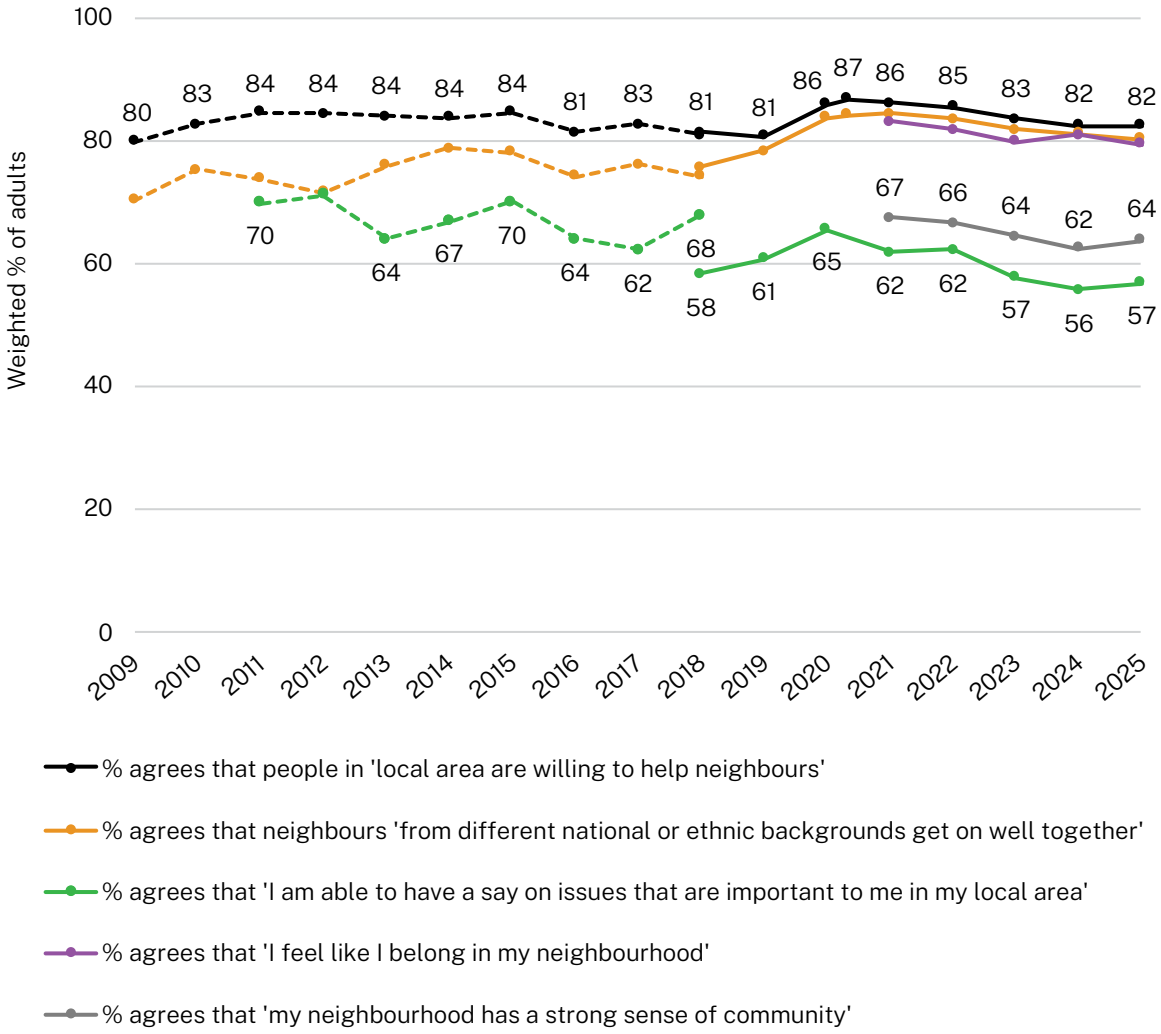
Rather, social cohesion reflects the social, emotional and practical bonds we have between each other that we build and maintain each day and that hold us together as communities and a society.[46] The benefits of social cohesion can also be subtle but powerful in protecting us from external and home-grown sources of division. Oftentimes, the true value of social cohesion comes not in the good times but in protecting and supporting our collective wellbeing through difficult and challenging periods, in supporting people and communities through hardship and guarding against widespread disparities and disadvantage in social connectedness and wellbeing across society.[47]

In many ways, daily interactions within our communities are at the heart of the protective effect of social cohesion. They provide friendships and sources of social support, opportunities for interacting with people from diverse backgrounds and breaking down prejudice, providing avenues for active engagement and establishing a sense of identity, belonging and trust in friends and strangers alike.[48]

One of the sources of community strength that we have been reporting on in recent years has been in neighbourhood connections and cohesion. Our results this year show that most Australians continue to report high levels of local connection and neighbourliness. Key results are shown in Figure 14. In 2025, more than four out of five adults (82 per cent) agreed that people in their local area are willing to help neighbours, a level that has remained consistently high over the past 15 years. Similarly, 80 per cent said that neighbours from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together, only slightly lower than the peaks recorded in 2020 and 2021. Additionally, 80 per cent of respondents also reported feeling that they belong in their neighbourhood, though this has also declined modestly since 2020 and 2021.

Other indicators of neighbourhood cohesion are at somewhat lower levels. Around two-thirds (64 per cent) of adults in 2025 agreed their neighbourhood has a strong sense of community, while just over 57 per cent said they have a say on issues that matter to them locally. Both proportions are down from earlier peaks, but have been steady over the last year.

Figure 14. Indicators of neighbourhood social cohesion, 2009 to 2018 (telephone surveys) and 2018 to 2025 (Life in Australia™)

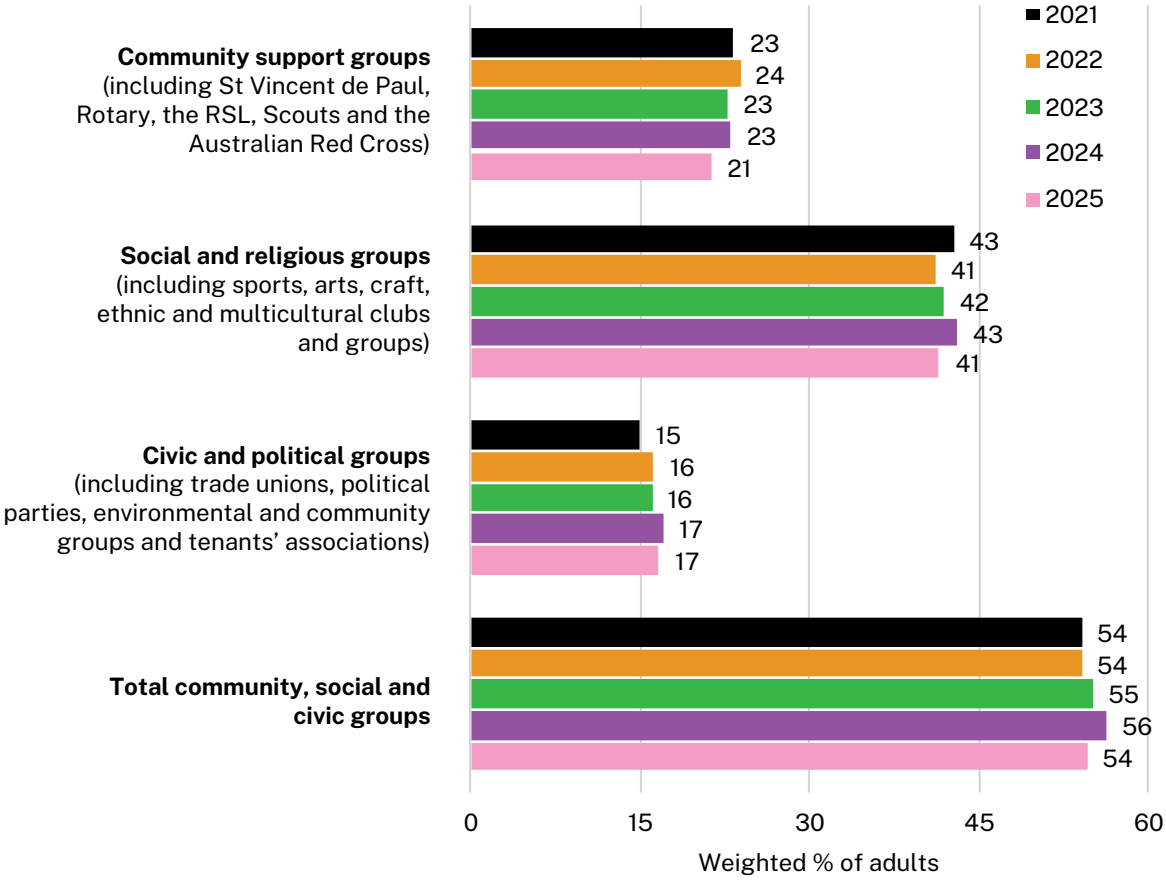


Note: dashed lines indicate when the survey was run only as a telephone survey. See the Appendix and O'Donnell et al. (2024) for more information.

In terms of active community participation, more than half of Australians (55 per cent) reported being involved in some form of a community, social, religious, civic and/or political group in 2025. As shown in Figure 15, this level is similar to those recorded since 2021. Participation is made up by:

- One-in-five (21 per cent) adults were involved in a community support group in the last 12 months, such as St Vincent de Paul, Rotary, the RSL, Scouts and the Australian Red Cross. This proportion is in line with or slightly below levels recorded in every survey since the question was first asked in 2021.
- Just over two-in-five (41 per cent) adults were involved in a social or religious group in 2024, including sports, arts, craft, ethnic and multicultural clubs and groups, also similar to levels recorded since 2021.
- One-in-six (17 per cent) adults were involved in a civic or political group such as a trade union, political party, environmental and civil rights groups, consumer organisations and tenants' associations, largely the same share since 2022.

Figure 15. Involvement in community, social, religious, civic and political groups in the last 12 months, Life in Australia™, 2021 to 2025



Neighbourhood cohesion and community participation provides an important source of connection, belonging and resilience in local communities. These, in turn, potentially support social cohesion across the country. In the Mapping Social Cohesion survey, people who perceive strong cohesion in their neighbourhoods and those who participate in social, community and civic groups are much more likely to have a great sense of belonging in Australia, to believe that most people can be trusted, to be happy and to agree that accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger. We cannot say from this evidence that neighbourhood cohesion and participation cause better social cohesion outcomes, though some research suggests that cause and effect between wellbeing and participation goes both ways – that participation supports wellbeing and wellbeing supports participation.[49]

We can see some evidence of the potential protective effect of neighbourhood cohesion in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey by tracking changes over time. We find that people were more likely to remain or become happy between 2024 and 2025 if they lived in neighbourhoods they perceived as cohesive. We estimate that after accounting for a range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, 54 per cent of people who were unhappy in 2024 became happy in 2025 if they lived in cohesive neighbourhoods, compared with 37 per cent of people in less cohesive neighbourhoods. If they were happy last year, 94 per cent of those in the most cohesive neighbourhoods remained happy in 2025, compared with 85 per cent of those in less cohesive neighbourhoods.[50]

Similar findings are found with respect to belonging, trust and acceptance. Compared with those in less cohesive neighbourhoods, people living in neighbourhoods they perceive as cohesive were:

- 65 per cent more likely to shift from not having a great sense of belonging in 2024 to having a great sense in 2025 and 19 per cent more likely to maintain a great sense of belonging.[51]
- 2.2 times more likely to shift from not believing that people generally can be trusted in 2024 to trusting people in 2025 and 20 per cent more likely to maintain trust.[52]
- 2.1 times more likely to shift from not agreeing the multiculturalism has been good for Australia in 2024 to agreeing in 2025 and as likely if not somewhat more likely to maintain agreement.[53]

While it is difficult to prove cause and effect, these results provide support for the view that local and community bonds can support overall social cohesion, helping people to attain and maintain the sort of personal and social wellbeing that in the aggregate helps to define and influence social cohesion across Australia and protect against difficult and challenging times.

Conclusion

This year's Mapping Social Cohesion study reflects many of the immediate and long-term challenges and strengths of Australian society.

Most of our indicators of social cohesion have been reasonably stable over the last one to two years, which in the current national and global climate perhaps reflects positively on the resilience of Australia's social fabric. Most notably, cohesion and engagement in neighbourhoods and local communities looks to be a source of strength not only for their local benefits but also for their associations with the stability of wider measures of social cohesion including trust, belonging and acceptance across the country. Indeed, we find that people living in close knit neighbourhoods are the most likely to have attained and maintained a sense of national belonging, trust in government and people and acceptance of diversity through these tumultuous last couple of years.

Nuances in this year's findings though point to long-term, emerging and looming challenges. The sense of national pride and belonging has been stable in recent times, though remains at the lowest levels we have recorded since 2007. Driven by considerable declines among younger generations and associated with personal and financial wellbeing, social isolation and disconnection, lower levels of national belonging may well point to normal social and cultural change though also contains important elements that should be of public and community concern. Likewise, persistent financial hardship is potentially having damaging cumulative effects on social outcomes, while the common experience of discrimination and the widely held prejudices expressed towards people of different religious faiths and from different migrant backgrounds detracts substantially from Australia's intercultural harmony. Finally, recent stability, if not improvement, in the trust people have in government and the political system comes off a reasonably low base and masks strong partisan shifts in trust depending on which party is in government.

Through these findings, this year's Mapping Social Cohesion study sends a call for thinking, discussion and action across communities and the country. A call to think through and address the big social challenges – generational divides, social and financial wellbeing, racism and prejudice and working collectively to solve political, social, economic and environmental challenges. The strength of our community bonds and cohesion stands as a valuable resource in meeting these challenges.

Appendix: Mapping Social Cohesion 2025

The Mapping Social Cohesion study was developed in partnership between the Scanlon Foundation and Monash University under the leadership of Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus.

Now in its 18th year, the study has interviewed more than 60,000 people and delivered 18 national reports alongside countless other reports, papers and briefings.

The study is now led by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute and the Australian National University. The research for this year's report was hosted by the *PopLab* in the School of Demography at the Australian National University. The report authors, Alice Falkiner and Katarzyna Szachna are employed by the PopLab, while James O'Donnell is employed by the School of Demography and affiliated with the PopLab.

A special committee, 'the Brains Trust' is convened to oversee the research. The Brains Trust is comprised of Anthea Hancocks, CEO of the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Institute staff Trish Prentice, Rouven Link, John van Kooy and Phoebe Johnston, Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus AO, Darren Pennay and Bruce Smith.

The Mapping Social Cohesion survey was administered and managed by the Social Research Centre. Key staff integral to the production of this year's study include Alison Eglentals, Cameron Mak, Natasha Vickers, Ben Phillips, Andrew Ward and Jack Burton.

The 2025 study involved the largest national survey in its history of Australians' attitudes, perceptions, experiences and actions related to social cohesion. As has been the case since 2018, the survey was administered to the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™, a panel of more than 10,000 adults. In July this year, 8,029 members of Life in Australia™, agreed to take part in the Mapping Social Cohesion survey.

As we have done since 2023, we also administered a shorter survey in one of four different languages (including English) to 245 Australians who have immigrated over the years from Africa, the Middle East and India. These respondents were identified and recruited through Polaron Connect. While it is incredibly challenging to adequately capture all of Australia's diversity, this is an important step to ensure the Mapping Social Cohesion study continues to represent and reflect the views across Australia's rich migrant, cultural and linguistic diversity.

Most people have completed the survey online (99 per cent in 2025) since the transition of the survey to Life in Australia™ in 2018, though people have the option to complete the survey by phone. Prior to 2018, the survey was conducted as a purely phone survey, initially to landline telephone numbers and then to landline and mobile numbers. As explained in previous reports, the shift to the mostly online survey impacted our results, leading to lower estimates of social cohesion when people completed the survey online and did not have to interact with a person over the phone (and so were more likely to admit being unhappy, financially stressed, social isolated and less accepting of diversity among other things).[54] We measure and adjust for this effect though by comparing results in 2018 and 2019 when the survey was simultaneously run as both a telephone and online survey.

The Mapping Social Cohesion 2025 study was approved by the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number H/2025/0152).

In the wake of 2025 Federal election, the Social Research Centre, the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute and the Australian National University have also had the opportunity to gauge the extent to which Life in Australia™ and the Mapping Social Cohesion study represents the diversity of political opinion in Australia. A common problem for survey designers around the world for several years has been in engaging and representing conservative voices and voters.[55]

This year, we have taken steps to strengthen the political representativeness of the study. Firstly, the Social Research Centre (SRC) developed an approach to select respondents from Life in Australia™ based on who they voted for at the 2025 election and then weight all respondents to mirror the election results. The SRC call this approach the Voting Adjusted Sample Selection (VASS).

Secondly, we administered the Mapping Social Cohesion survey to a sample of 3,000 conservative and minor party voters and non-voting adults in parallel to the survey given to Life in Australia™. This sample was recruited from a non-probability panel run by the Online Research Unit (ORU). The VASS approach ensures that we have a mix of voters that mirrors the results of the 2025 election, while the survey to the ORU panel helps to investigate and verify whether the survey responses of conservative and minor party voters and non-voting adults on Life in Australia™ are typical and representative of such groups generally.

At the time of writing this report, we are still working through the data and developing and testing long-term strategies to future-proof the Mapping Social Cohesion study. We will have more to say on this work including through a forthcoming technical report and through the Mapping Social Cohesion 2026 report. Our preliminary analysis though gives us great confidence in the ongoing strength of the Mapping Social Cohesion study and its ability to reflect the views of all Australians.

In this report, we have concentrated our analysis on aspects and indicators of social cohesion in which we have the highest degree of confidence in the results. This relates to the great majority of questions and items on the survey. For a select few politically divisive items, we have not reported findings in this report, but will have more to say in future reports.

The results of the Mapping Social Cohesion survey are used to make inferences about the state of social cohesion across Australia. Our large sample of respondents gives us a great deal of power in doing so. However, we obviously do not survey each and every Australian and there are various ways in which our results would differ from results if we were to survey everyone. Differences can be classified as either random or non-random errors.

Non-random errors arise where survey respondents are not similar in characteristics or representative of the population. For example, there may not be enough respondents in key demographic and socioeconomic groups to match the characteristics of the population. We use population weights to try to correct for any underrepresentation in the Mapping Social Cohesion sample that we can observe. Population weights are calculated by age, gender, education, neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage, place of residence, migrant background and language spoken at home based on Census and population data and applied to each respondent to give responses more weight where that respondent is part of a group that is underrepresented on the survey on any of those domains.

Random error arises from the fact that none of the variables we measure are fixed, permanent characteristics of people or society and can vary in time and space. Like flipping a coin 100 times, there is no guarantee that it will come up heads 50 times even if it is a perfectly balanced coin. The most notable source of random error in any sample survey comes from the fact that, outside of censuses, we do not interview everyone in the population and inevitable differences arise between the results from a sample of respondents to the results we would get if we interviewed everyone, even if our sample was broadly representative of the population.

We use statistical theory to derive estimates of random error and express these as 95 per cent confidence intervals. The 95 per cent confidence intervals are the ranges within which we are 95 per cent confident that the true estimate lies within (the estimate we would get if we interviewed everyone). Because of our large sample, the national-level estimates have relatively narrow confidence intervals – usually 1-2 percentage points on either side of the reported estimates. For example, we report that 46 per cent of adults have a sense of belonging in Australia to a great extent in 2025. The 95 per

cent confidence interval around this estimate is 44 to 48 per cent, meaning we are 95 per cent confident that if we interviewed all Australian adults, between 44 and 48 per cent would say that have a great sense of belonging.

Confidence intervals are wider for any sub-national estimates that we present in this report (for example, estimates of belonging among Millennials). This is because we are drawing on a smaller sample of respondents for any sub-national analysis, creating greater potential for random variation. To help explain the range of uncertainty, we provide confidence intervals for our sub-national estimates in the notes to this report and in the following tables. Table A1 provides the confidence intervals related to the estimates reported in Figure 7 of this report. Table A2 gives the intervals related to Figure 9, Table A3 relates to Figure 11 and Table A4 relates to Figure 13. Finally, Table A5 shows the number of respondents to the 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion survey in select demographic and socioeconomic groups.

Table A1. Experience of mistreatment for any reason, discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic origin or religion and perceived racism in Australia by immigrant background – with confidence intervals, 2025

	Weighted % of adults [95% Confidence intervals]
% made to feel different/did not belong in the last 12 months	
Australia	29 [27, 30]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	23 [21, 27]
Asia, Africa	45 [38, 52]
Total adults	**30 [29, 32]**
% experienced verbal or physical threats or abuse in the last 12 months	
Australia	21 [20, 23]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	16 [14, 19]
Asia, Africa	26 [20, 32]
Total adults	**21 [20, 22]**
% not offered a job or treated fairly at work in the last 12 months	
Australia	10 [9, 12]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	9 [8, 12]
Asia, Africa	27 [20, 33]
Total adults	**12 [11, 13]**
% mistreated in the last 12 months on any of the above	
Australia	36 [34, 38]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	30 [27, 33]
Asia, Africa	50 [44, 57]
Total adults	**37 [36, 39]**
% experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, religion or ethnic origin in the last 12 months	
Australia	13 [12, 14]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	11 [9, 14]
Asia, Africa	40 [33, 46]
Total adults	**16 [15, 18]**
% believes racism is a fairly or very big problem in Australia	
Australia	69 [67, 70]
UK, Europe, USA, Canada, NZ	60 [57, 64]
Asia, Africa	65 [59, 71]
Total adults	**67 [66, 68]**

Table A2. Indicators of confidence in Australia's political system by vote for major parties and total adults, 2021, 2023 and 2025 (Life in Australia™)

	Labor voter	Liberal/ National voter	Total adults
	Weighted % of adults [95% confidence interval]		
% believes the Federal Government can be trusted most of the time/almost always			
2021	31 [28, 35]	72 [69, 76]	44 [42, 46]
2023	46 [44, 49]	34 [31, 37]	36 [35, 37]
2025	58 [56, 61]	29 [27, 32]	37 [36, 39]
% believes the system of government in Australia should be replaced or needs major changes			
2021	43 [39, 47]	20 [17, 24]	39 [37, 41]
2023	35 [32, 37]	36 [33, 39]	41 [39, 42]
2025	25 [23, 27]	45 [42, 48]	41 [39, 42]
% believes that government leaders in Australia abuse their power all or most of the time			
2021	31 [28, 35]	10 [8, 13]	27 [25, 29]
2023	23 [21, 25]	30 [27, 33]	30 [29, 32]
2025	16 [14, 18]	32 [29, 35]	30 [28, 31]
% believes Australian elections are fair all or most of the time			
2021	63 [59, 67]	77 [74, 81]	63 [61, 66]
2023	71 [69, 74]	64 [61, 67]	63 [62, 65]
2025	78 [76, 80]	56 [53, 59]	62 [61, 64]

Table A3. Indicators of financial stress in the past 12 months by age, household composition and housing tenure – with confidence intervals, Life in Australia™, 2025

	Struggling to pay bills/poor	Went without meals (often/ sometimes)	Could not pay rent/ mortgage (often/ sometimes)	Went without medicines/ health (often/ sometimes)
	Weighted % of adults [95% confidence interval]			
Age				
18-24	10 [8, 14]	18 [14, 22]	16 [12, 20]	24 [20, 29]
25-34	16 [13, 19]	20 [17, 24]	18 [15, 21]	29 [26, 33]
35-44	15 [13, 17]	17 [14, 19]	18 [15, 20]	28 [25, 31]
45-54	15 [12, 17]	13 [11, 15]	15 [12, 17]	26 [23, 29]
55-64	8 [6, 10]	8 [6, 10]	8 [6, 10]	16 [14, 19]
65+	6 [5, 8]	4 [3, 6]	4 [3, 6]	8 [7, 10]
Household				
Couple no children	6 [5, 7]	6 [4, 7]	5 [4, 6]	11 [9, 13]
Couple parent family	11 [10, 13]	10 [8, 12]	13 [11, 15]	21 [18, 23]
Single parent family	19 [15, 24]	25 [20, 30]	21 [17, 26]	36 [31, 41]
Group household	18 [13, 24]	21 [16, 28]	16 [11, 22]	28 [22, 35]
Live alone	13 [11, 15]	16 [14, 18]	10 [9, 13]	23 [20, 25]
Housing tenure				
Own outright	5 [4, 7]	5 [4, 7]	4 [3, 5]	10 [8, 11]
Mortgage	9 [8, 11]	9 [8, 11]	12 [11, 14]	19 [17, 21]
Rent	22 [19, 24]	25 [23, 28]	23 [20, 25]	36 [33, 39]
Total	**12 [11, 13]**	**13 [12, 14]**	**13 [12, 14]**	**21 [20, 23]**

Table A4. Happiness, social connections and isolation and age group and gender – with confidence intervals, Life in Australia™, 2025

	Happy in the last 12 months	Isolated from others some of the time or often	Daily/weekly contact with family/friends in-person	Daily/weekly contact with family/friends in-person, online, phone
	Weighted % of adults [95% confidence interval]			
Males				
18-24	79 [71, 85]	65 [56, 73]	55 [46, 64]	94 [88, 97]
25-34	72 [66, 78]	57 [50, 63]	48 [42, 55]	90 [85, 93]
35-44	77 [73, 81]	56 [51, 61]	46 [41, 51]	90 [87, 93]
45-54	76 [71, 80]	46 [41, 51]	50 [45, 55]	90 [86, 92]
55-64	81 [77, 85]	36 [32, 41]	47 [43, 52]	85 [81, 88]
65-74	86 [83, 89]	31 [27, 35]	57 [52, 62]	89 [86, 92]
75+	91 [87, 94]	22 [17, 27]	62 [56, 67]	90 [85, 93]
Females				
18-24	72 [64, 78]	61 [53, 68]	68 [60, 75]	95 [91, 98]
25-34	74 [70, 79]	63 [59, 67]	56 [51, 60]	95 [93, 97]
35-44	77 [73, 80]	58 [54, 62]	49 [45, 53]	93 [91, 95]
45-54	77 [73, 80]	52 [47, 56]	46 [42, 51]	92 [89, 94]
55-64	81 [77, 84]	45 [41, 49]	53 [49, 57]	94 [92, 96]
65-74	87 [84, 90]	38 [34, 42]	60 [56, 64]	94 [92, 96]
75+	96 [93, 97]	26 [21, 32]	68 [62, 73]	96 [92, 97]

Table A5. Number of respondents to the 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion survey by select demographic and socioeconomic characteristics

Number of respondents	
Gender	
Male	3,426
Female	4,762
Non-binary, other, refused	86
Age group	
18-24	378
25-34	1,044
35-44	1,524
45-54	1,354
55-64	1,526
65-74	1,582
75+	866
State/territory	
NSW	2,530
Victoria	2,187
Queensland	1,581
South Australia	668
Western Australia	776
Tasmania	239
Northern Territory	47
ACT	246
Household composition	
Live alone	1,790
Couple with no children	2,502
Couple parent family	2,161
Single parent family	594
Group household	266
Other household	961
Highest education	
University degree	4,652
Certificate III/IV / Diploma	2,229
Year 12	768
Less than Year 12	625
Place of birth	
Australia	5,731
UK, Europe, North America, NZ	1,250
Africa, Asia	1,134
Other	85

Number of respondents	
Language spoken at home	
English only	5,608
Other language	2,538
Capital city-rest of state	
Capital city	5,608
Rest of state/territory	2,538
Vote at 2025 Federal Election	
Labor	2,874
Liberal/National	1,743
Greens	1,081
Independent	725
Other	789
Did not vote	906
Neighbourhood disadvantage	
Quintile 1 - most disadvantaged	1,109
Quintile 2	1,420
Quintile 3	1,720
Quintile 4	1,861
Quintile 5 - least disadvantaged	2,034
Financial situation	
Prosperous	149
Struggling to pay bills	1,380
Living very comfortably	3,872
Living reasonably comfortably	2,084
Just getting along	622
Struggling to pay bills	155
Poor	
Survey mode	
Life in AustraliaTM	8,029
Polaron immigrant boost	245
Total	**8,274**

Note: the number of respondents in each category do not always sum to 8,274 respondents due to some respondents refusing to answer or answering 'don't know' to certain demographic and socioeconomic questions. Neighbourhood disadvantage is measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage, calculated from the 2021 Census for postal areas.

Endnotes

1 Australian Human Rights Commission. Seen and Heard. 2025. https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/projects/seen-and-heard

2 "Today's Armed Conflicts," Geneva Academy, accessed 24 September 2025. https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts

3 Jacob Poushter et al. "International Opinion on Global Threats" *Pew Research Center*, 19 August 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/08/19/international-opinion-on-global-threats/

4 Samuel McKeith and Hollie Adams. "Thousands in Australia march against immigration, government condemns rally." Reuters, 31 August 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thousands-australia-march-against-immigration-government-condemns-rally-2025-08-31/

5 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

6 For example, in the 2024 report, we reported a significant increase in the proportion of the adults who hold negative attitudes towards Muslim and Jewish people, coinciding with the current conflict in Gaza and the Middle East, and a sharp increase in the proportion of people who believe immigration to Australia is too high and a softening in support for diversity and multiculturalism (O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024).

7 The Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion was renamed from the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion in 2024. For details on its construction, see Andrew Markus and Jessica Arnup. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2009*. Scanlon Foundation, 2009. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/research/mapping-social-cohesion/

8 Scores on the Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion are 'indexed' to 2007, meaning that scores are calculated relative to scores recorded in the first 'baseline' survey conducted in 2007. An index score of 78, for example, indicates a score that is 78 per cent of its value in 2007 – or 22 percentage points lower. As reported in previous years (e.g. see O'Donnell et al. 2024, the Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion was affected by the transition of the Mapping Social Cohesion survey to the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™ panel in 2018. We estimate that this difference, the mode effect, reduced overall social cohesion by seven points. After adjusting for the transition to Life in Australia™ and removing the mode effect, we estimate that overall social cohesion is 15 points lower than in 2007 and six points lower than its average across the 2010s.

9 See for example Murat Aktas. "The rise of populist radical right parties in Europe," *International Sociology* 39, no. 6 (2024): 591–605. https://doi.org/10.1177/02685809241297547

10 O'Donnell et al. *Australian Cohesion Index*. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2023. https://aci.scanloninstitute.org.au/

11 We calculate average proportions across the 2010, 2011 and 2012 surveys for each generation and then adjust the proportions to remove the effect of the survey transitioning from a telephone survey to a mostly online survey administered to the Life in Australia™ panel in 2018. The effect is estimated as the difference in proportions between the telephone and Life in Australia™ surveys in 2018 and 2019 when both survey modes were run simultaneously.

12 See for example O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

13 Ebrahim Rahimi and Seyed Saeed Hashemi Nazari. "A detailed explanation and graphical representation of the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method with its application in health inequalities," *Emerging Themes in Epidemiology* 18, no. 12 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12982-021-00100-9

14 We calculate this with a linear regression model where we predict national pride and belonging for younger and older generations by whether they agree or disagree that the income gap is too large. National pride and belonging is calculated by adding up each individual's responses to the

questions in Figure 2. In the model, we control for gender, education, place of birth, language spoken at home, experience of discrimination, financial stress, perceived safety, loneliness, social media use, neighbourhood cohesion, participation in social, community or civic groups and whether or not respondents think that home ownership is important but unlikely in the next 10 years.

15 This is calculated with a similar linear regression model explained in note 14. The control variables are similar, except in this model, we add perceived economic fairness, political orientation and attitudes to multiculturalism and remove loneliness – due to its correlation with the key explanatory variable (social isolation).

16 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

17 ABS. "Overseas Migration." *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed 24 September 2025. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/overseas-migration

18 SBS News. "Skilled migration to be targeted as part of Coalition's cut to permanent visas." *SBS News*, 24 April 2025. https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/coalition-reveals-its-cuts-to-skilled-migration-humanitarian-intake/rg4r03dbb

19 Caitlin Cassidy. "Australian government moves to slow foreign student visas after failure of a cap plan." *The Guardian*, 19 December 2024. https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/dec/19/labor-australia-foreign-student-visa-cap-plan-new-policy-processing

20 This is estimated with a logistic regression model. In this model, the odds of an individual shifting from agreeing to disagreeing that 'accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger' between 2024 and 2025 is modelled as a function of whether they agreed in 2024 that immigrants 'increase house prices' and/or 'take jobs away' and controlling for respondents' age, gender, education, city of residence, disability, family composition, housing tenure, whether they were born in Australia or overseas and whether or not English is their first language and their self-described financial situation. From this model, we estimate that 16 per cent of people who agreed that immigrants increase house prices or take jobs in 2024 changed their mind between 2024 and 2025 and now disagree that immigrant diversity makes Australia stronger, compared with 7 per cent among those who did not agree that immigrants increase house prices or take jobs away. The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates (the range within which we think with 95 per cent confidence that the true estimate lies for the whole population) is 14-18 per cent and 6-8 per cent respectively.

21 For information on racism towards First Nations Australians, see for example, Fiona Allison et al. *If you don't think racism exists come take a walk with us' The Call It Out Racism Register 2023-2024*. Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney, 2025. https://callitout.com.au/resources

22 Neelima Choahan. "Indian Australians respond to being targets of abuse after negative political attention." *ABC News*, 12 September 2025. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-12/indian-australian-community-feel-targeted-after-anti-immigration/105751878

23 Australian Human Rights Commission. *Seen and Heard*. Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025. https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/projects/seen-and-heard

24 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

25 Tammy Reznik. "It can happen here: For Jewish Australians, being relentlessly targeted is not just frightening – it is exhausting." *ABC News*, 11 July 2025. https://www.abc.net.au/religion/antisemitism-jewish-australians-synagogue-melbourne-miznon/105520430

26 Mistreatment, discrimination and racism for people born in Asia and Africa are estimated through small domain estimation. We pool responses from overseas-born respondents on the Life in Australia™ panel and the migrant boost surveys between 2023 and 2025 and run a logistic regression model to estimate predicted

probabilities of mistreatment, discrimination and perceived discrimination by place of birth, year of the survey, age, gender, marital status, whether or not they speak a language other than English at home, highest educational attainment, neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage, city of residence and whether they immigrated to Australia more or fewer than ten years ago. We then map the probabilities onto results from the 2021 Australian Census and sum over the Asian and African-born population. In this way, we ensure our results are representative of the demographic and socioeconomic profile of Asian and African-born populations as best as we can measure.

27 Pippa Norris (editor). *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*. Oxford Academic, 1999. https://academic.oup.com/book/36109

28 Evans et al. *Trust in Australian Regional Public Services*. Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, 2019. https://www.apsreform.gov.au/research/trust-australian-regional-public-services/understanding-and-exploring-trust-public-0

29 Oprea et al. "Moving toward the Median: Compulsory Voting and Political Polarization," *American Political Science Review*, 118, no. 4 (2024): 1951–1965. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001399

30 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

31 ABS. "Consumer Price Index, Australia." *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed 24 September 2025. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/consumer-price-index-australia

32 "Cash rate target – the key monetary policy decision." Reserve Bank of Australia, accessed 24 September 2025. https://www.rba.gov.au/cash-rate-target-overview.html

33 See for example, trends in real net national disposable income: ABS. "Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product." *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed 24 September 2025. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-national-income-expenditure-and-product/jun-2025

34 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

35 See for example, O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

36 'Just getting along at best' combines those who said they were "just getting along", "struggling to pay bills" and "poor". The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates are 15-17 per cent for those just getting along at best for three or more years, 11-13 per cent for 1-2 years and 15-17 per cent for those getting along at best for an unknown length of time. These intervals give us the range in which we expect, with 95 per cent confidence, that the true estimate for the Australian population lies, taking into account that we do not survey the entire population. The reason we do not know the duration of time spent just getting along at best for 15 per cent of adults is because those respondents have not been involved with the Mapping Social Cohesion survey for a sufficient number of years.

37 The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates are 54-61 per cent for those just getting along, struggling or poor for three or more consecutive years, 75-81 per cent for those getting along at best for 1-2 years and 90-92 per cent for those who are comfortable or prosperous. We have more than 99 per cent confidence (i.e. $p < .01$) that lower levels of happiness among those who have been just getting along at best for three or more years are statistically significant (i.e. more than just due to random chance) before and after accounting for factors such as age, gender, education, city, disability, housing tenure, household composition, whether people are Australian or overseas born and whether their first language is English.

38 The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates are 25-31 per cent for those just getting along at best for three or more consecutive years,

32-40 per cent for those getting along at best for 1-2 years and 45-49 per cent for those who are comfortable or prosperous. The differences are statistically significant before and after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

39 The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates are 29-36 per cent for those just getting along at best for three or more consecutive years, 37-45 per cent for those getting along at best for 1-2 years and 54-57 per cent for those who are comfortable or prosperous. The differences are statistically significant before and after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

40 The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates are 58-64 per cent for those just getting along at best for three or more consecutive years, 66-74 per cent for those getting along at best for 1-2 years and 77-80 per cent for those who are comfortable or prosperous. The differences are statistically significant before and after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

41 Sally Fowler Davis and Megan Davies. "Understanding the Effects of Social Cohesion on Social Wellbeing: A Scoping Review," *International Journal of Public Health*¸ 70 (2025). https://doi.org/10.3389/ijph.2025.1607414

42 Jan Delhey and Georgi Dragolov. "Happier together. Social cohesion and subjective well-being in Europe," *International Journal of Psychology* 51, no. 3 (2016): 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12149

43 O'Brien et al. "Broken (windows) theory: A meta-analysis of the evidence for the pathways from neighborhood disorder to resident health outcomes and behaviors," *Social Science & Medicine* 228 (2019): 272–292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.11.015

44 O'Donnell et al. "The longitudinal effect of COVID-19 infections and lockdown on mental health and the protective effect of neighbourhood social relations," *Social Science & Medicine* 297, no. 114821 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114821

45 See the 'Overall life satisfaction' section of ABS. "Measuring What Matters." *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, accessed 24 September 2025. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters

46 Joseph Chan et al. "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research," *Social Indicators Research* 75 (2006): 273–302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1

47 See for example, O'Donnell et al. "The longitudinal effect of COVID-19 infections and lockdown on mental health and the protective effect of neighbourhood social relations," *Social Science & Medicine* 297, no. 114821 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.114821

48 See for example, Delia Baldassari and Maria Abascal. "Diversity and prosocial behavior," *Science* 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1183–1187. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2432

49 Ning Ding et al. "One-year reciprocal relationship between community participation and mental wellbeing in Australia: A panel analysis," *Social Science & Medicine* 128 (2015): 246–254. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.01.022

50 This is estimated with a logistic regression model. In this model, the odds of an individual being happy in 2025 is modelled as a function of whether they were happy in 2024 and their level of perceived neighbourhood cohesion in 2024 and controlling for respondents' age, gender, education, city of residence, disability, family composition, housing tenure, whether they were born in Australia or overseas and whether or not English is their first language, their self-described financial situation, experience of discrimination and the degree of socioeconomic disadvantage in their neighbourhood. Perceived neighbourhood cohesion is measured by adding up respondents' scores to questions of the extent of agreement or disagreement that 'people in your local area are willing to help their neighbours', 'my local area is a place where people from different national or ethnic backgrounds get on well together', 'I feel like I belong in my neighbourhood' and 'my neighbourhood has a strong sense of community'. This scale has a high level of reliability with a

Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.81. Neighbourhoods with high perceived cohesion are defined as those with scores in the top five per cent of responses, while neighbourhoods with low cohesion are defined as those with scores in the bottom five per cent. From this model, we estimate that 54 per cent of adults who were unhappy in 2024 became happy in 2025 if they lived in high cohesion neighbourhoods, compared with 37 per cent of people in low cohesion neighbourhoods. The 95 per cent confidence intervals around these estimates (the range within which we think with 95 per cent confidence that the true estimate lies for the whole population) is 29-46 per cent and 43-65 per cent respectively. The estimated probability of remaining happy was 94 per cent for people in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 92-97 per cent) and 85 per cent for people in low cohesion neighbourhood (confidence interval of 80-90 per cent).

51 This is estimated with a logistic regression model similar to the one described in note 50. The outcome variable in this model is whether or not people say they have a sense of belonging in Australia to a great extent. We estimate that 31 per cent of adults who did not have a great sense of belonging in 2024 had a great sense in 2025 if they lived in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 24-38 per cent), compared with 18 per cent of people in low cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 13-24 per cent). The estimated probability of continuing to have a great sense of belonging was 80 per cent for people in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 74-85 per cent) and 67 per cent for people in low cohesion neighbourhood (confidence interval of 59-75 per cent).

52 This is estimated with a logistic regression model similar to the one described in note 50. The outcome variable in this model is whether or not people say 'generally speaking, most people can be trusted'. We estimate that 34 per cent of adults who did not have a sense of trust in 2024 trusted in 2025 if they lived in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 27-41 per cent), compared with 16 per cent of people in low cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 12-20 per cent). The estimated probability of maintaining trust between 2024 and 2025 was 78 per cent for people in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 72-84 per cent) and 65 per cent for people in low cohesion neighbourhood (confidence interval of 57-74 per cent).

53 This is estimated with a logistic regression model similar to the one described in note 50. The outcome variable in this model is whether or not people say 'multiculturalism has been good for Australia'. We estimate that 53 per cent of adults who did not agree in 2024 agreed in 2025 if they lived in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 39-67 per cent), compared with 25 per cent of people in low cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 17-34 per cent). The estimated probability of maintaining belief that multiculturalism has been good between 2024 and 2025 was 95 per cent for people in high cohesion neighbourhoods (confidence interval of 93-97 per cent) and 91 per cent for people in low cohesion neighbourhood (confidence interval of 88-95 per cent). The latter difference is not statistically significant, i.e. it could be due to random chance.

54 O'Donnell et al. *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024*. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024

55 In 2025, 26 per cent of Life in Australia™ respondents to the Mapping Social Cohesion survey said they cast a formal vote voted for the Liberal-National Coalition in the House of Representatives at the 2025 Federal election. According to the AEC (2025), 3.2 million people voted for the Liberal Party as a first preference in the House of Representatives at the 2025 Federal Election, 1.1 million voted for the Liberal National Party of Queensland, 588,778 voted for The Nationals and 35,785 voted for the Country Liberal Party (NT). Combined, this represents 4.9 million votes for the Liberal-National Coalition or 32 per cent of all formal votes cast.

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