Australian National University

Hope, Hardship, and Democratic Confidence: Social Wellbeing and Political Sentiment in Election-Year Australia

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Author: Professor Nicholas Biddle[1*]

1. Head, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University

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*Contact: nicholas.biddle@anu.edu.au

Extended Abstract

This report presents findings from the third wave of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), conducted from 28th March to 8th April, during the first fortnight of the 2025 federal election campaign. With a sample of 3,608 Australians—two-thirds of whom participated in at least one prior wave—the survey provides longitudinal insight into Australians' evolving political attitudes, wellbeing, and policy preferences at a time of acute economic and geopolitical uncertainty.

The report highlights a national mood characterised by persistent hardship and limited optimism. Average life satisfaction has fallen to 6.35 on a 0–10 scale, below levels recorded during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline is most pronounced among Australians aged 35–44 and among women. While satisfaction with the direction of the country (57.7per cent) and with democracy (67.1per cent) remains stable, both measures are below levels observed at the last election in 2022. Financial stress is widespread, particularly among younger and less-educated Australians, with one in three reporting difficulty living on their current income.

Despite the challenging socio-economic context, political favourability has shifted modestly in favour of the incumbent Labor government. Between January/February and March/April 2025, Labor overtook the Liberal Party in average favourability (4.95 vs 4.76), and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese widened his lead over Opposition Leader Peter Dutton. Among the longitudinal sample, these shifts were most pronounced among women, younger Australians, and those with a tertiary education. The share of respondents rating Dutton unfavourably has now surpassed 50 per cent.

Voting intention data reflect these trends. Compared to the start of the year, Labor's primary vote has increased, Coalition support has declined, and the proportion of undecided voters has shrunk. Nearly one-in-five changed party grouping between January/February and March/April, with net flows toward Labor from both the Coalition and the undecided. Older Australians (aged 55 and over) were the least likely to switch.

When asked about policy priorities, respondents overwhelmingly identified reducing the cost of living as the top concern (74.6per cent). Other top-ranked issues included strengthening the economy, reducing health care costs, and reducing crime. Compared to an ANUpoll conducted in April 2022, there has been a decline in support for addressing climate change and reforming political institutions—priorities that were central to Teal Independent candidates in the last election. Marked differences emerge by voting intention: Labor voters prioritise climate, childcare, and gender-based violence prevention; Coalition voters prioritise immigration, the budget deficit, and military strength.

This wave of the EMSS also includes novel questions on housing policy and supply-side liberalism. Most Australians support the broad idea of building more of what people need, but fewer are willing to accept development that changes their local area. Among the policy options presented for improving housing affordability, a plurality (38.8per cent) favour increased government investment in social and affordable housing. Coalition voters are more divided, with stronger support for deregulation. Undecided voters are more likely to support direct financial assistance, suggesting they may be the target of demand-side campaign policies.

1 Introduction and overview

On Friday the 28th of March, the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made his way to Government House to meet Governor-General Sam Moyston to seek permission to formally call the next Federal Election. Scheduled for the 3rd of May, the election will be preceded by a roughly 5-week campaign, which commenced with the two major parties and their leaders in almost a dead heat in terms of voting intentions and favourability.

In his first speech after calling the election, the Prime Minister started by saying that "Over the last few years, the world has thrown a lot at Australia. In uncertain times, we cannot decide the challenges that we face, but we can determine how we respond. Now on 3 May, you choose the way forward." He concluded his prepared remarks with “At this election, I'm asking for the support of the Australian people to keep building on the hard work that we have done and the strong foundations that we have laid. I'm asking you to vote Labor so we can keep building Australia's future together.”[1]

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton responded quickly to the election announcement. He stated in his prepared remarks that “This election is a choice, about who can better manage our economy. Of course, the question that Australians need to ask is: are you better off today, and is our country better off today, than three years ago?”[2]

The opening remarks by the Prime Minister hinted at the global uncertainty that is likely to shape much of the election campaign. Indeed, many commentators have noted that the election will be dominated by three, rather than two elected figures – the leaders of the two major parties in Australia certainly, but also the US President Donald Trump.

Less than one week into the campaign – the 2nd of April, US time – the US President and his administration announced a sweeping set of new tariffs imposed on goods imports to the US from almost all countries that trade with the US. It was soon apparent that the formula used to calculate the tariffs was a function of the trade deficit the US has with that country. So, Australia and many other countries that the US has a trade surplus with were only given a baseline tariff of 10 per cent.[3] Other countries, like for example Vietnam, that exports more to the US than the US exports to them, were hit with much larger ‘reciprocal’ tariffs (46 per cent in the case of Vietnam).

The US stock market did not react well to this so-called ‘liberation day’.[4] Perhaps more importantly, reaction in the US Bond Market suggested a decline in the market’s perception of the US as a safe haven for investors. Clearly in reaction to these selloffs, and general economic uncertainty, the US Administration announced a 90-day pause in the reciprocal tariffs imposed on most countries, that were instead given an interim tariff of 10 per cent.[5]

The exception to this pause was tariffs imposed on most Chinese goods exports. Ostensibly in response to retaliatory tariffs that the Chinese government had imposed on the US, tariffs of up to 145 per cent were imposed on Chinese exports to the US. Subsequent days have seen repeated back-and-forth between the world’s two largest economies, with claims and counter-claims on which country has the most strategic leverage when it comes to world trade.[6]

Leaving aside the rights and wrongs for the US in terms of erecting new trade barriers, a less globalised economy is likely to have significant adverse impacts on a medium-sized, open economy like Australia's. It is doubly problematic when the two leading protagonists in the trade war are Australia's main export destination (China) and its most important security partner (the US).

The international political environment has therefore brought into sharp focus some of the risks facing whichever party forms government after the May 3rd election. In addition, that party will also need to deal with the aftermath of the inflationary crisis experienced post-pandemic, a housing and infrastructure shortage exacerbated by a growing population, slow to non-existing productivity growth, and a declining tax base alongside growing demand for health and disability services.

Just as the election was being called, the Australian National University (ANU) in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) conducted the third wave of data collection for the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS). Data collection commenced on Thursday the 26th of March with a pilot data collection. Full data collection commenced on Friday 28th March, the day the 2025 Federal Election date of May 3rd was announced, and finished on the 8th of April with 3,608 respondents. This follows data collection in October 2024 (Wave 1) with 3,622 respondents, and January/February 2025 with 3,514 respondents.

One of the unique aspects of the EMSS is the tracking of a large number of respondents across multiple waves of data collection. In total, 2,404 respondents or 66.6 per cent of Wave 3 respondents had completed at least one of the two previous waves of the EMSS. Specifically, 2,053 (56.9 per cent) had completed Wave 1 and 3, 2,186 (60.6 per cent) had completed Wave 2 and 3, and 1,835 (50.9 per cent) had completed Waves 1, 2, and 3.

In the first report on the 2025EMSS (Biddle and Gray 2024) we looked amongst other things at views towards the main political parties in Australia. We found that 5-6 months out from the election, none of the political parties and none of the party leaders had a favourability rating that was 5 or above on a scale of 0 to 10.

In the second report (Biddle 2025a) focusing mostly on Wave 2 data collection, we outlined how 'Life satisfaction has dropped to its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns … Financial stress remains high … Public trust in government institutions has eroded … [and] Australians are becoming increasingly pessimistic about both their personal circumstances and the broader future of the country.'

In the third report (Biddle 2025b), we brought together those two strands of analysis. We considered the extent to which optimism/pessimism for the present relative to the past, and the future relative to the present, is predictive of political attitudes in the lead up to the 2025 election campaign. We consider two sets of political attitudes.

In this fourth report as part of the 2025 EMSS, we focus on measures of wellbeing and societal satisfaction/confidence, views towards parties and party leaders, voting intentions, and policy priorities ahead of the election. Future papers using Wave 3 of the 2025 EMSS will consider attitudes towards gender equality, and views towards Artificial Intelligence and democracy.

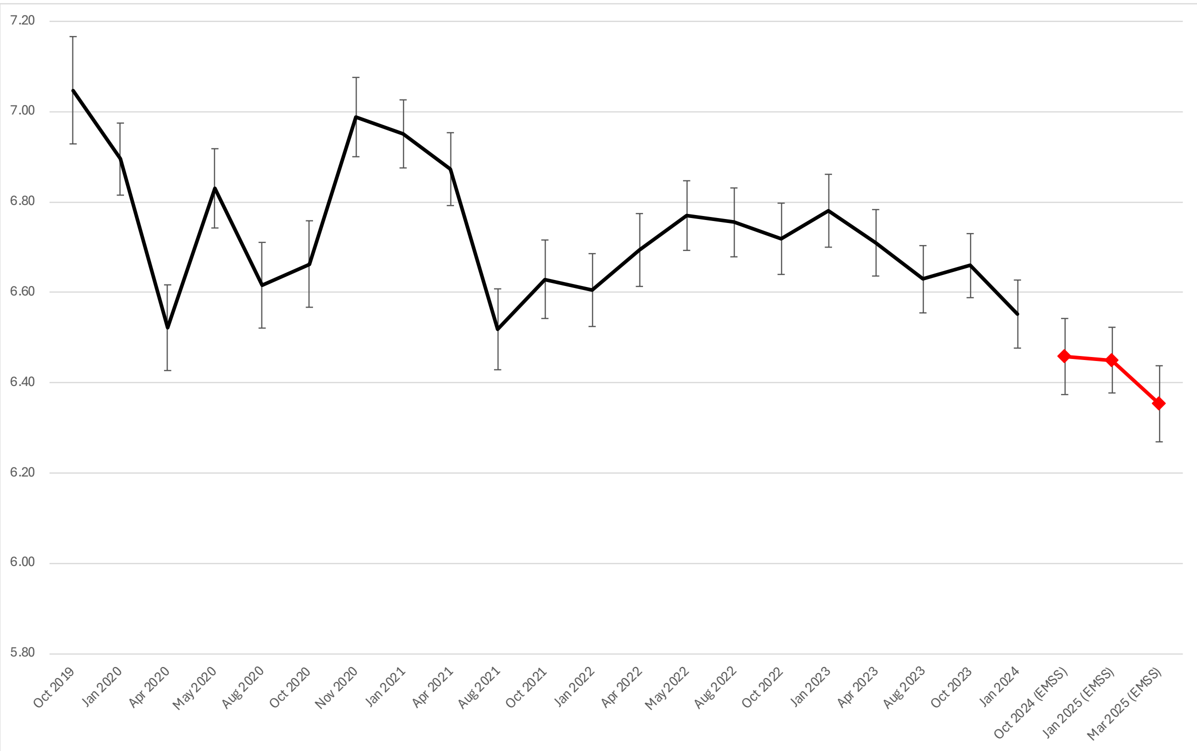
2 Wellbeing and views on the country and institutions

2.1 Life satisfaction

One of the first questions asked in the EMSSs starts with the following prompt: "The following question asks how satisfied you feel about life in general, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel 'not at all satisfied' and 10 means 'completely satisfied'." Respondents are then asked, "Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?"

If Australian voters were making their decision solely on the question posed by the Opposition Leader of whether they felt better off now than three years ago, then it would indeed be a landslide in favour of the Coalition. Figure 1 shows that there has been a continued decline in the level of life satisfaction in Australia since the start of 2023. Average life satisfaction is now 6.35, far lower than the value of 6.77 in May 2022 just after the last election, and lower even than the 6.52 observed during the COVID-19 lockdowns of April 2020 and August 2021.

Figure 1 Life satisfaction, all Australians, October 2019 to March/April 2025

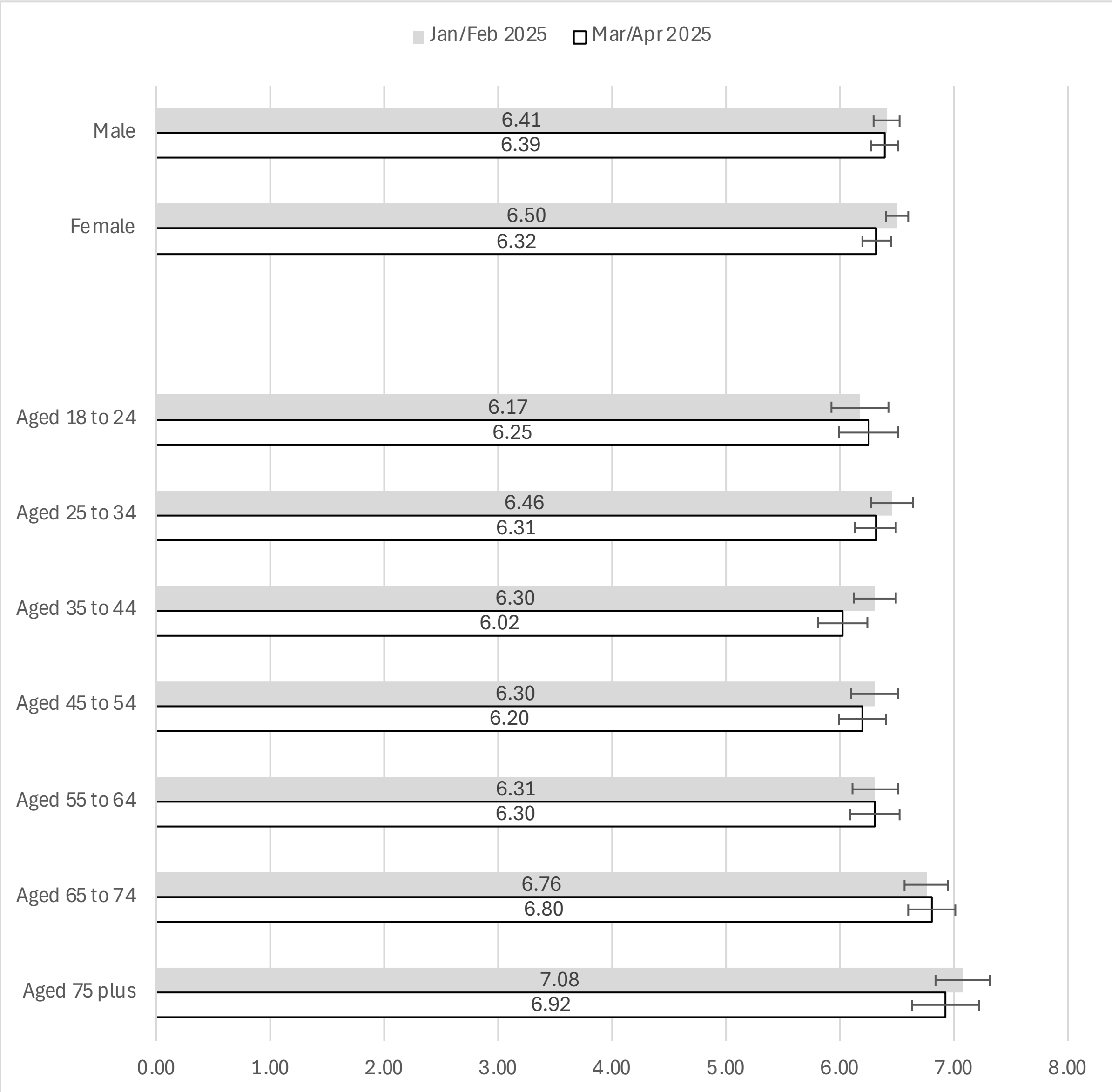


Note: The "whiskers" indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: ANUpoll (October 2019 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

Between our last two waves of data collection, there were declines in life satisfaction for both males and females. However, it is only females that experienced a statistically significant decline in life satisfaction (Figure 2). By age, the largest declines in life satisfaction were in the middle part of the age distribution, particularly those aged 35 to 44 years – from 6.30 in Jan/Feb to 6.02 in Mar/Apr. These differences hold in a regression framework, when we use our longitudinal sample and control for baseline life satisfaction, as well as education, country of birth, language spoken at home, and geography.

Figure 2 Life satisfaction by age and sex, January/February and March/April 2025



Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: Wave 2 and 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January/February, and March/April 2025)

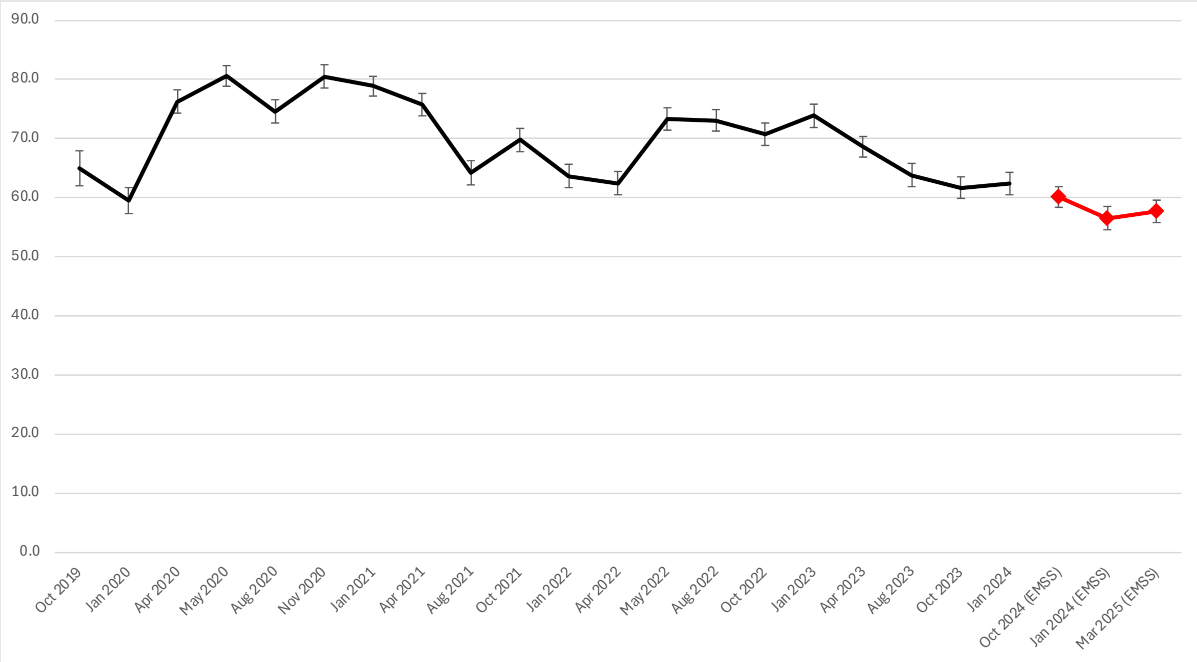
2.2 Satisfaction with direction of the country and democracy

While people’s views on their own circumstances are an important factor in their voting behaviour (i.e. egocentric predictors), survey evidence suggests that views of how the country as a whole is going (sociotropic predictors) is at least as important, and arguably more so (Lockerbie 2006; Hellwig and McAllister (2016)). This is important because despite the above decline in life satisfaction, there was no decline in the per cent of

Australians that were satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country. Survey participants were responding to the following question: ‘Firstly, a general question about your views on living in Australia. All things considered, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the country is heading?’

In March/April 57.7 per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country. This is a substantial decline since May 2022 (73.3 per cent) and also a decline since just prior to the May 2022 election (62.4 per cent in April 2022). However, satisfaction with the direction of the country has been steady since January/February 2025.

Figure 3 Satisfaction with direction of the country

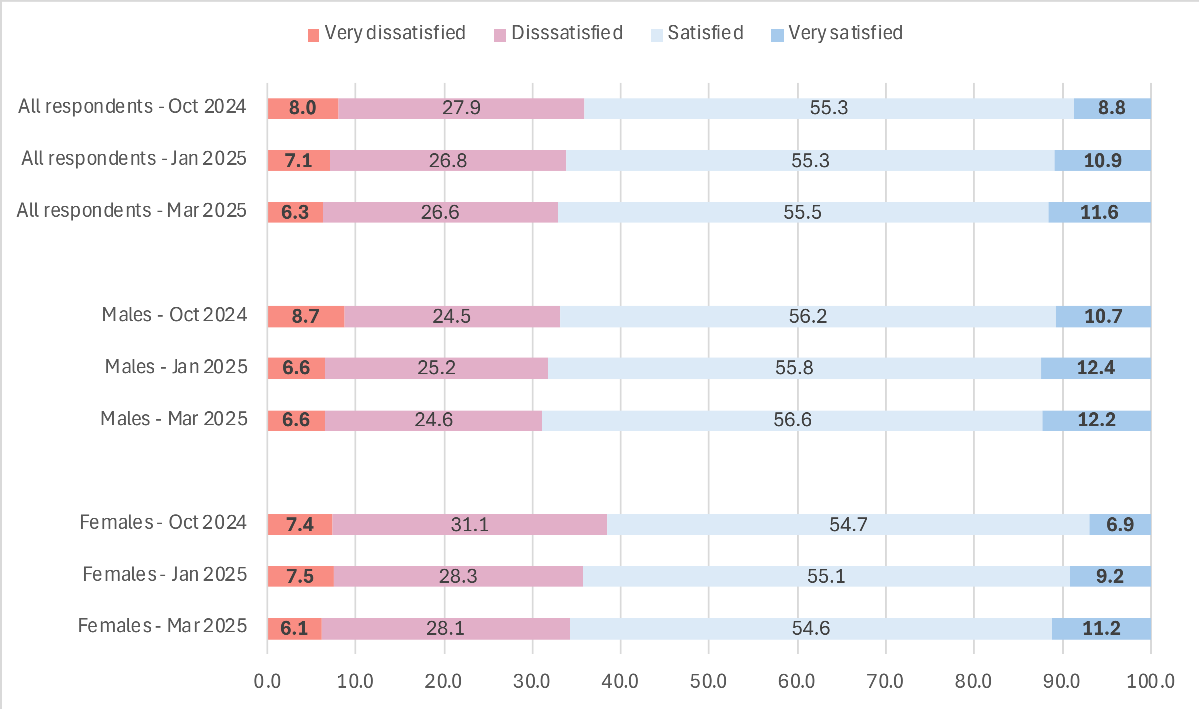


Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: ANUpoll (October 2019 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

Over the two months in between Wave 2 and Wave 3 of the EMSS, there has not been a major change in satisfaction with democracy in Australia (Figure 4). Responding to the question: ‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?’, 67.1 per cent of Australians were satisfied or very satisfied in March/April, compared to 66.1 per cent in January/February. Both of these values are slight increases from October 2024 (64.1 per cent). Males continue to remain more satisfied with democracy than females

Figure 4 Satisfaction with democracy, October 2024 to March/April 2025

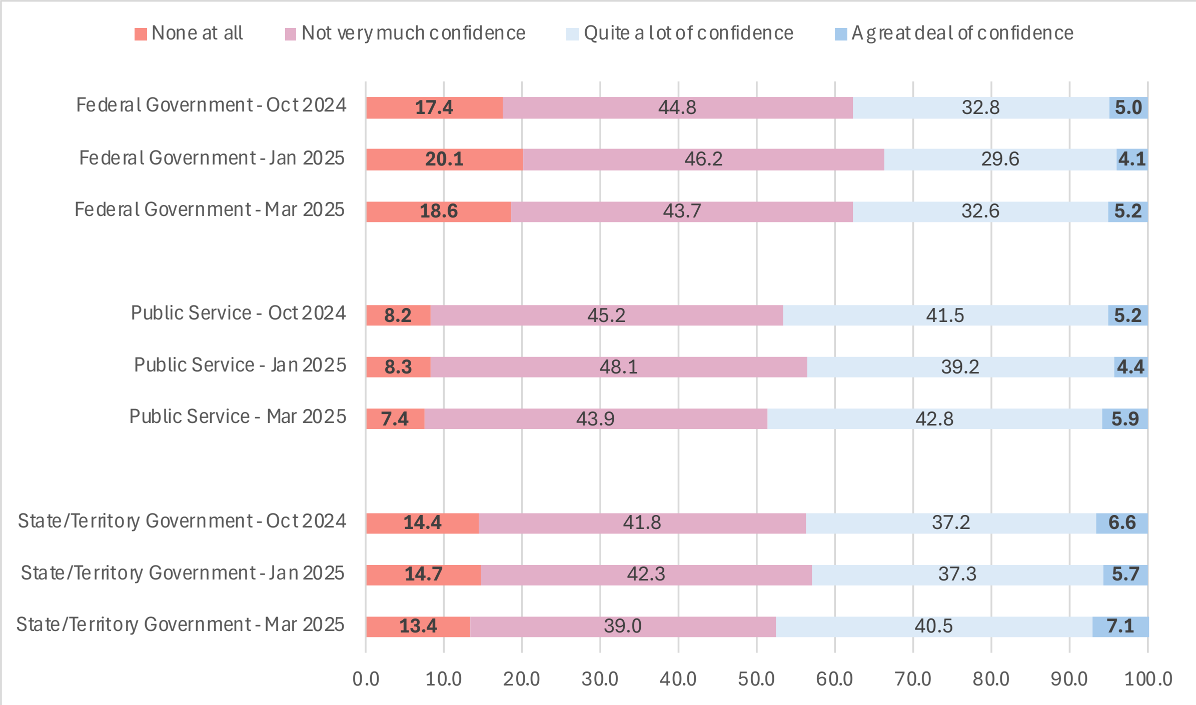


Source: Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

2.3 Confidence in institutions

Over the last two months there was an increase in confidence in key democratic institutions. Although it continues to have the lowest level of confidence of the three asked about, there was a significant increase in the per cent of Australians with quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the Federal government – from 33.7 per cent in January/February 2025 to 37.7 per cent in October 2024. However, this increase is for the most part a return to the value observed in October 2024 of 37.8 per cent (Figure 5).

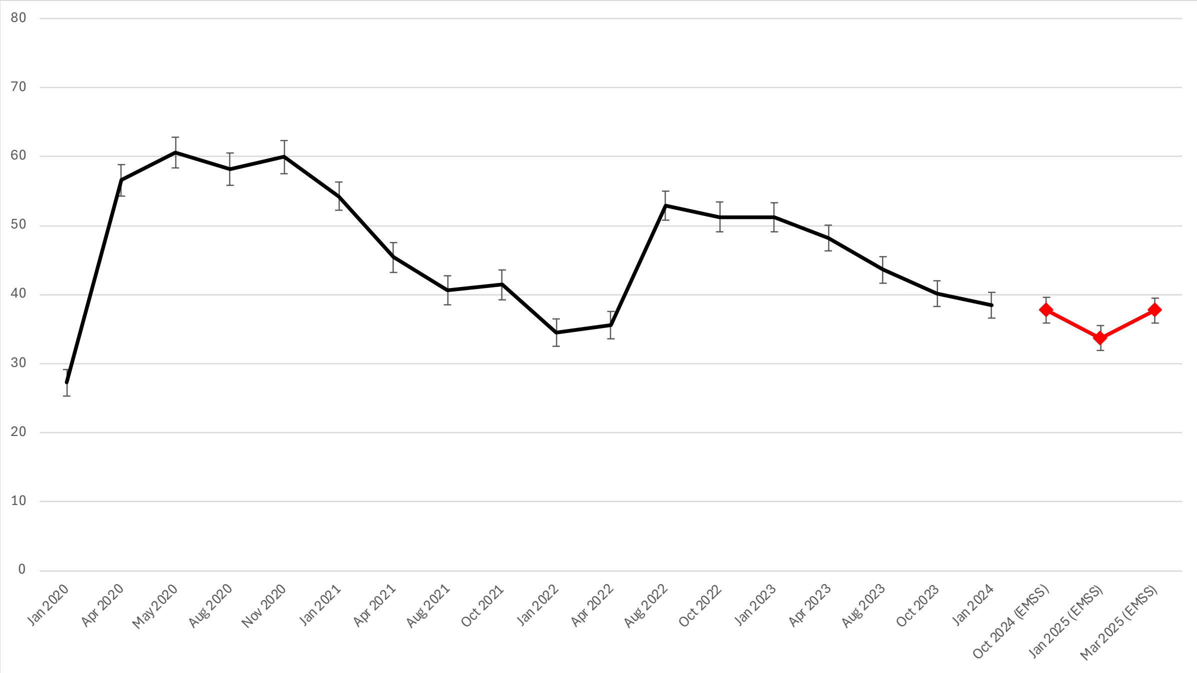
Figure 5 Confidence in institutions, October 2024 to March/April 2025



Source: Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

Over the longer term, the current levels of confidence in the Australian government are much lower than they were during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (when the Coalition was in power) and just after the May 2022 election (when the Labor Party took over government). However, current levels of confidence in government are slightly (but significantly) higher than they were in April 2022, just prior to the last election (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Confidence in the Federal Government, January 2020 to March/April 2025



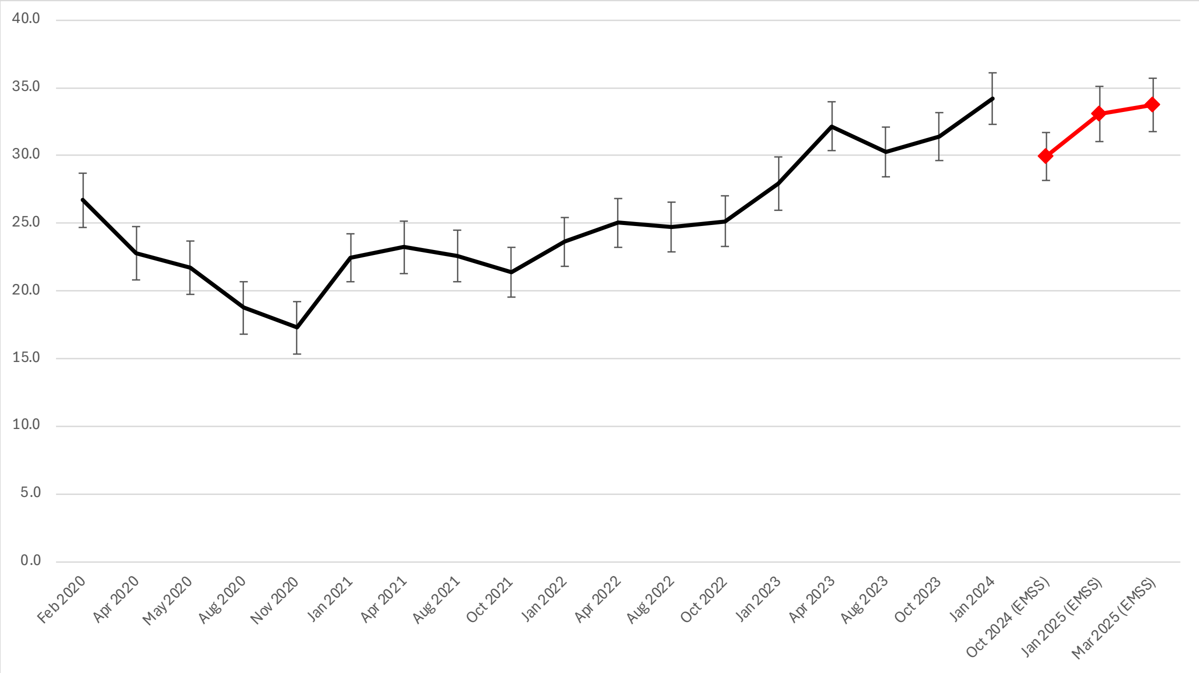
Note: The "whiskers" indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: ANUpoll (January 2020 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

2.4 Financial stress

Financial stress remains high, but there has not been an increase in the per cent of Australians that report that they are finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income (a question that we have asked going back to February 2020 in the ANUpoll series of surveys). In March/April 2025, 33.8 per cent reported finding it difficult or very difficult, statistically very similar to the 33.1 per cent observed in January/February.

Figure 7 Financial stress, or the per cent of Australians finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income, February 2020 to March/April 2025



Note: The "whiskers" indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

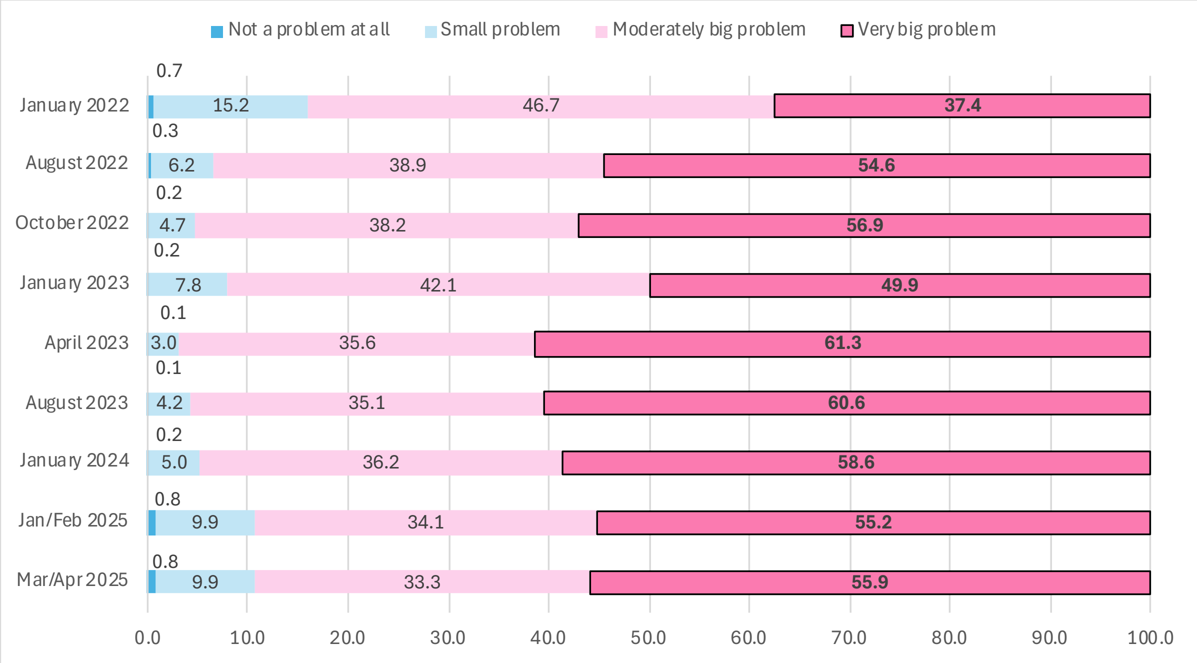
Source: ANUpoll (February 2020 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

This measure of financial stress is concentrated younger Australians. Amongst Australians aged 18 to 44 (broadly speaking, Millennials and Gen Z), 36.1 per cent were finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income. Amongst those aged 45 years and over (Gen X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation), this falls to 29.7 per cent.

There are even larger differences in financial stress by education, particularly at the top of the distribution. For those that have not completed Year 12 or have a post-school qualification, 37.5 per cent were finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income. This is very similar to those that have completed Year 12 but do not have a degree (37.6 per cent). However, for those with a degree, only 25.3 per cent were finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income.

In the final data item considered in this section, we asked respondents 'How much of a problem do you think rising prices are in Australia?' There has been very little change between January/February and March/April 2025 in the per cent of Australians that think rising prices are a very big or a moderately big problem.

Figure 8 Views on rising prices, January 2022 to March/April 2025



Source: ANUpoll (January 2022 to January 2024) and Wave 2 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January/February and March/April 2025)

3 Views on parties and leaders

3.1 Party favourability

Over the last few months, there has been a decline in life satisfaction in Australia, a continuation of a longer-term trend. Since just prior to the last election there has also been a decline in satisfaction with the direction of the country and an increase in the per cent of Australians finding it difficult on their current income. All of this would point to a very difficult election for an incumbent government. The only positive measure over that period is that confidence in the Federal (Albanese) Government in March/April 2025 is slightly higher than confidence in the Morrison government in April 2022, just prior to the last election. Even then though, confidence is well below the post-election peak in August 2022 when the Albanese government was definitely experiencing a positive honeymoon period.

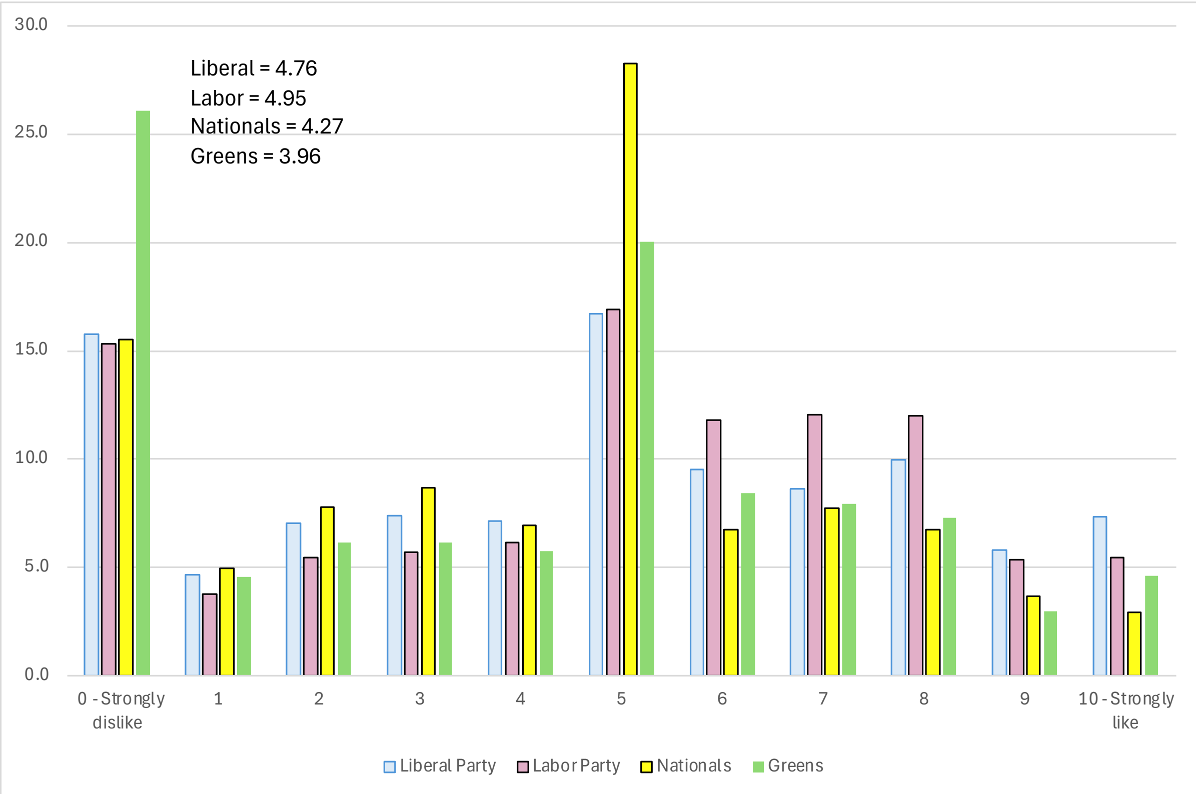
Up until January/February of this year, these national metrics were translating in slightly greater favourability towards the Liberal Party. Since the start of the campaign though, there has been a substantial turnaround in the views of Australians towards the two main political parties.

For all three waves of the 2025 EMSS, Respondents were asked ‘We would like to know what you think about Australia’s main political parties. Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. If you are neutral about a particular party or don't know much about them, you should give them a rating of 5.’

In January/February 2025, Australians had a more positive view towards the Liberal Party (4.87) compared to the Labor Party (4.71). However, in March/April (Figure 9), this difference had switched, and respondents were now less favourable towards the Liberal Party (4.76) than the Labor Party (4.95). In January/February, the difference between the Liberal and Labor parties was not statistically significant. However, in March/April 2025, the Labor Party has a significantly higher favourability rating than the Liberal Party (p-value = 0.048).

The Greens party remains the least favourable of the four major parties, with a value of 3.96 in March/April 2025.

Figure 9 Favourability of parties, March/April 2025



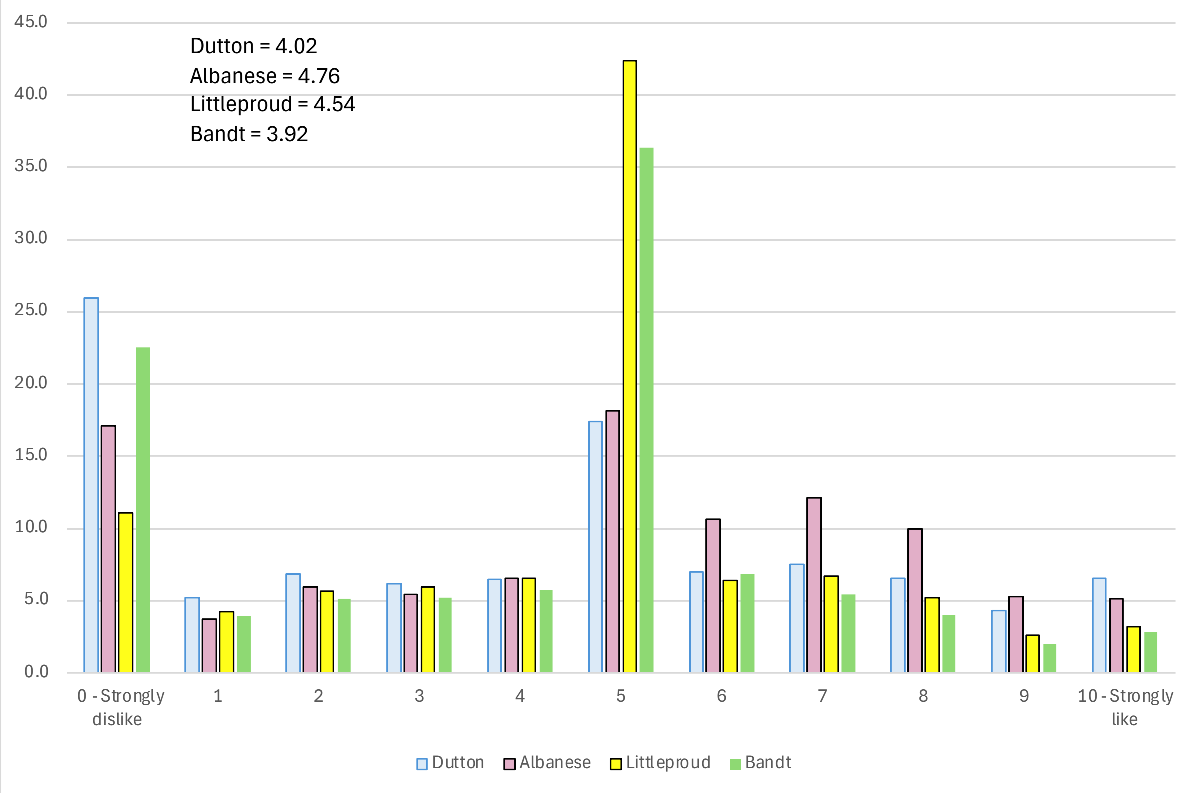
Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

3.2 Leader favourability

There was a widening in the gap in favourability ratings towards the two major party leaders. Using a similar question to favourability towards parties described above, in January/February Australians rated Peter Dutton 4.18 on a scale of 0 to 10 and Anthony Albanese 4.45. By March/April (Figure 10) this gap had widened to 4.02 for Peter Dutton and 4.76 for Anthony Albanese.

For the first time in our data, almost exactly half of Australians (50.6 per cent) rated Dutton unfavourably (a value of 0 to 4) compared to 32.0 per cent that rated him favourably (value of 6 to 10).

Figure 10 Favourability of leaders, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

3.3 Factors associated with favourability

There are clear differences in favourability depending on the characteristics of respondents. We can see this in the regression analysis summarised in Table 1, below. In the first two models, we use favourability towards the Liberal and Labor party as our two dependent variables, whereas in the last two models the dependent variable is favourability towards the two major party leaders.

Explanatory variables in the model as a person's age, their sex, their education, their country of birth and whether they speak a language other than English at home, and the type of electorate they live in according to the Australian Electoral Commission's four-category classification.

Older Australians report a higher favourability towards the Liberal Party and the Opposition Leader. For younger Australians, there is a higher favourability towards Labor and the Prime Minister. Females are no more or less likely to rate the Labor Party or the Prime Minister as being favourable, but they are significantly and substantially less likely (than males) to rate the Liberal Party or the Opposition Leader as favourable.

Education matters, but only in terms of favourability towards Labor or the Prime Minister. Specifically, those with a degree or higher as their highest level of qualification are more favourable. Interestingly, those who speak a language other than English at home are substantially more favourable towards the Liberal Party and the Opposition Leader.

Geography matters in terms of predicting favourability. Those outside of inner metropolitan areas are less favourable towards the Labor Party, but more favourable towards the Opposition Leader.

Table 1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with favourability, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Liberal Party		Labor Party		Dutton		Albanese	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.235		1.182	***	-0.744	***	0.833	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.230		0.513	***	-0.218		0.350	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.077		-0.159		0.320		-0.121	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.455	**	-0.241		0.684	***	-0.312	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.754	***	0.227		0.905	***	0.214	
Aged 75 years plus	1.747	***	-0.697	**	1.968	***	-0.749	***
Female	-0.300	**	0.072		-0.463	***	0.119	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.002		-0.019		0.252		0.044	
Has a degree	-0.066		0.382	***	-0.257	**	0.430	***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.165		0.346	*	-0.272		0.470	***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.131		0.418	*	0.208		0.302	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.454	**	-0.048		0.501	***	0.076	
Outer metropolitan electorate	0.128		-0.370	***	0.305	**	-0.507	
Provincial electorate	0.286		-0.429	*	0.394	*	-0.570	
Rural electorate	-0.184		-0.509	***	-0.037		-0.458	
Constant	4.539	***	4.866	***	3.725	***	4.727	
Sample size	3,475		3,478		3,449		3,472	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

Our longitudinal data allows us to not only look at the factors that are predictive of favourability at a particular point in time, but also allows us to track the factors that are associated with change in party and leader favourability. Table 2 summarises such an analysis, focusing on demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic predictors. We use the same dependent and independent variables as the cross-sectional results presented in Table 1, but for all four models, we also control for the January/February favourability value using what is known as a lagged dependent variable model.

Within our longitudinal sample using this regression framework, the change in favourability towards the Liberal party was more negative amongst those younger than 65 (particularly those aged 18 to 24) and with relatively low levels of education. The drop was consistent across the electorate classification. The change in favourability for Labor was evenly spread across demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables. The one exception to this was a slightly more positive change for females relative to males, with a p-value of 0.062 in the regression framework

Within our longitudinal sample, the drop in favourability towards Peter Dutton matched pretty closely the change in views towards the Liberal party. There was a relative improvement for those aged 65 years and over, and those with a degree, but other variables were not statistically significant. The improvement in favourability towards Anthony Albanese was concentrated amongst younger Australians (aged 18 to 24 years) and those that lived in an inner metropolitan area. There was a relative decline in favourability amongst those that lived in a provincial or rural electorate.

Table 2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with change in favourability, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Liberal Party		Labor Party		Dutton		Albanese	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Lagged dependent variable	0.823	***	0.850	***	0.894	***	0.883	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.653		0.354		-0.208		0.781	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.242		-0.107		-0.003		0.021	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.059		-0.196		0.052		0.018	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.133		0.000		0.126		0.058	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.343	**	0.060		0.273	*	0.122	
Aged 75 years plus	0.509	**	-0.064		0.412	**	-0.006	
Female	-0.236	*	0.232	*	-0.003		0.052	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.110		-0.065		-0.019		-0.185	
Has a degree	0.351	***	0.084		0.188	**	-0.051	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.082		0.163		0.061		0.072	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.066		0.225		0.069		0.104	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.104		0.006		0.022		-0.052	
Outer metropolitan electorate	-0.023		-0.149		-0.105		-0.188	
Provincial electorate	-0.116		-0.109		0.087		-0.316	
Rural electorate	-0.020		-0.160		-0.057		-0.317	
Constant	0.721	***	0.785	***	0.204		0.833	
Sample size	2,101		2,108		2,079		2,106	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 2 and 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January/February and March/April 2025

4 Voting intentions and views towards politics and politicians

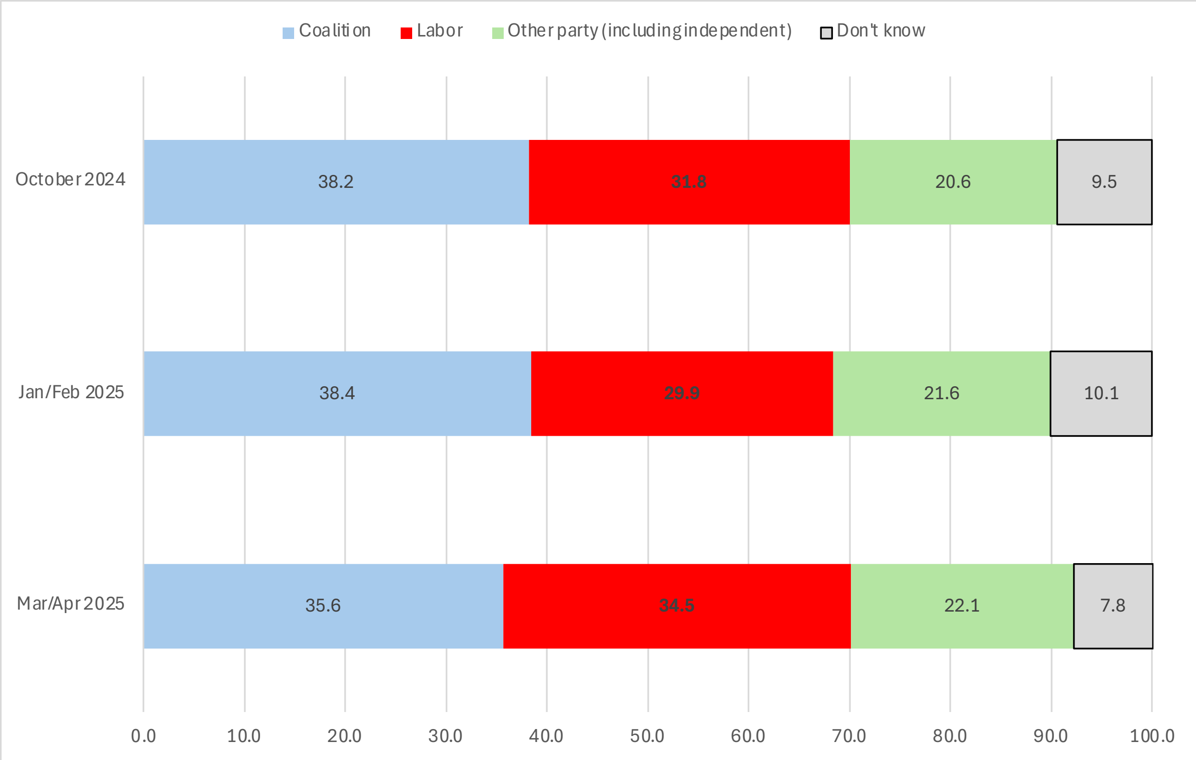
4.1 Voting intentions

At the start of the survey, respondents were asked ‘If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?’ We group responses into the Coalition, Labor, minor parties (including Greens and independents), and don’t know.

There was very little change between October 2024 and January/February 2025 in the distribution of votes across those categories. The Coalition had a substantial lead in the primary vote, with around 10 per cent saying they don’t know who they would vote for.

Between January/February 2025 and March/April, there was a substantial increase in the Labor primary vote, a smaller decline in the Coalition vote, and a decline in the ‘don’t know’ vote. This tracks very closely what we observed in the previous section, but also data from other political polling (for example Newspoll) that more intentionally tries to predict election outcomes using a two-party preferred metric.[7]

Figure 11 Voting intentions if election were held in day of survey October 2024 to March/April 2025



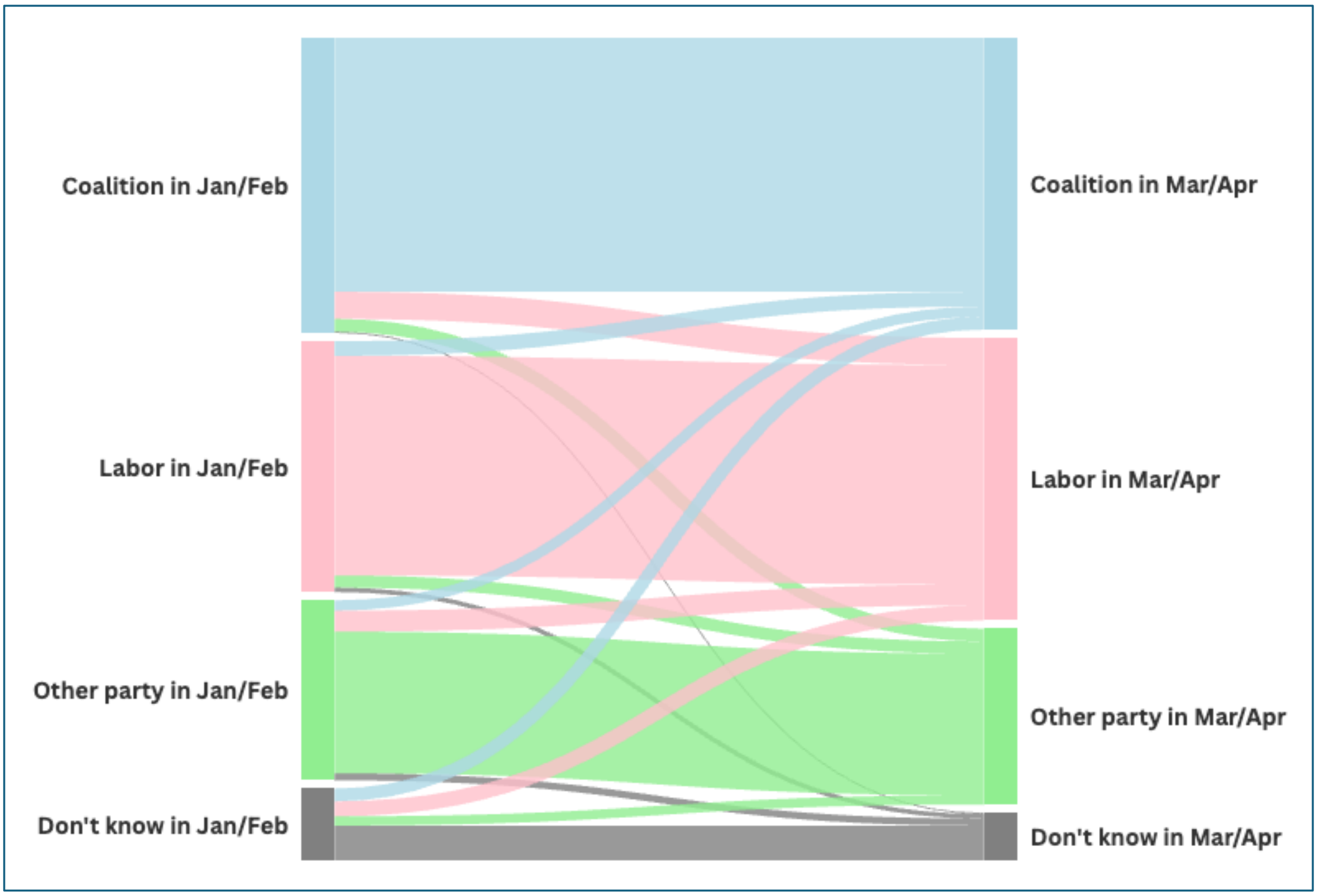
Source: Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

4.2 Vote switching

While the focus of the 2025 EMSS is not on predicting the election outcome, our longitudinal data does give an indication of how party support has changed as the election campaign has got under way. Specifically, tracking our longitudinal sample over the last two waves of data collection for the EMSS, we can see the flows of votes between the party groupings. This is summarised in Figure 12, with the individual percentages given in the table that follows.

The thicker lines show that there are net flows from the Coalition to Labor with 3.4 per cent switching in that direction, compared to 1.8 per cent switching in the opposite direction. There were also more Australians who switched from don't know to Labor (1.9 per cent), compared to those that switched in the opposite direction (0.6 per cent).

Figure 12 Voting flows, January/February to March/April 2025



Source: Wave 2 and 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January/February and March/April 2025)

Table 3 Voting flows, January/February to March/April 2025

January/February	March/April	Flow
Coalition in Jan/Feb	Coalition in Mar/Apr	31.51
Coalition in Jan/Feb	Labor in Mar/Apr	3.37
Coalition in Jan/Feb	Other party in Mar/Apr	1.58
Coalition in Jan/Feb	Don't know in Mar/Apr	0.16
Labor in Jan/Feb	Coalition in Mar/Apr	1.83
Labor in Jan/Feb	Labor in Mar/Apr	27.24
Labor in Jan/Feb	Other party in Mar/Apr	1.51
Labor in Jan/Feb	Don't know in Mar/Apr	0.56
Other party in Jan/Feb	Coalition in Mar/Apr	1.28
Other party in Jan/Feb	Labor in Mar/Apr	2.6
Other party in Jan/Feb	Other party in Mar/Apr	17.58
Other party in Jan/Feb	Don't know in Mar/Apr	0.87
Don't know in Jan/Feb	Coalition in Mar/Apr	1.59
Don't know in Jan/Feb	Labor in Mar/Apr	1.86
Don't know in Jan/Feb	Other party in Mar/Apr	1.15
Don't know in Jan/Feb	Don't know in Mar/Apr	4.31

Source: Wave 2 and 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January/February and March/April 2025)

Across the longitudinal sample, 19.4 per cent changed their party grouping (including to or from the 'don't know' group). In a regression model, Labor voters as of

January/February 2025 were slightly but not significantly less likely to have switched their vote compared to Coalition voters (p-value = 0.103), with the don't know group the most likely. Controlling for voting intentions in January/February, older voters (55 years and over) were less likely to have switched. There were no differences by sex, education, and location. However, those born overseas in an English-speaking country were slightly more likely to have switched vote.

Table 4 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with vote switching, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.
Labor voter in January/February 2025	-0.197	
Other party voter in January/February 2025	0.125	
Didn't know who to vote for in January/February 2025	0.992	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.276	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.074	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.095	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.371	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.414	***
Aged 75 years plus	-0.395	**
Female	0.061	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.098	
Has a degree	0.020	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.213	*
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.180	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.009	
Outer metropolitan electorate	0.017	
Provincial electorate	-0.011	
Rural electorate	0.006	
Constant	-0.917	***
Sample size	2,138	

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual would have voted for the Coalition in January/February 2025; is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

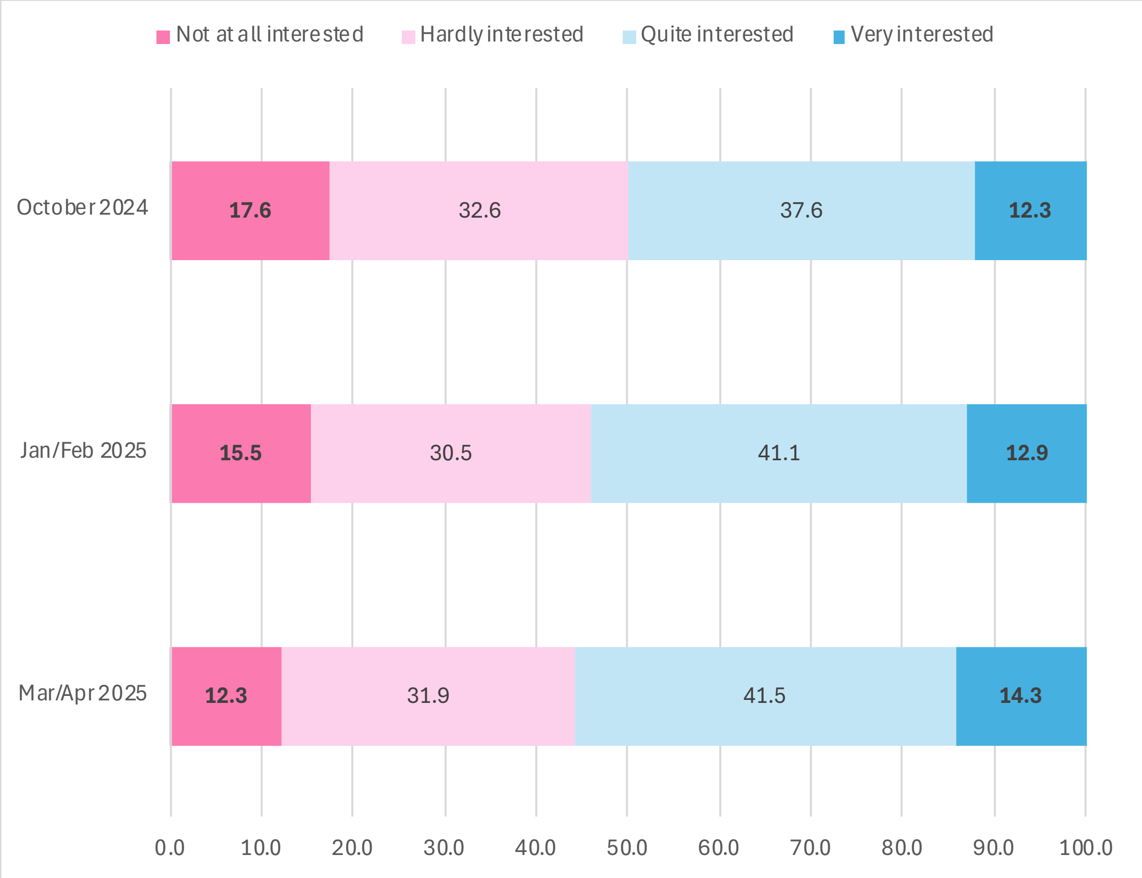
Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 2 and 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January/February and March/April 2025

4.3 Views towards politics and politicians

Respondents to the survey were asked 'How interested would you say you are in politics' and, although there has been a slight increase in the per cent of Australians quite or very interested (from 54.0 to 55.8 per cent), it is unlikely to have been enough to explain changes in voting intentions (Figure 13).

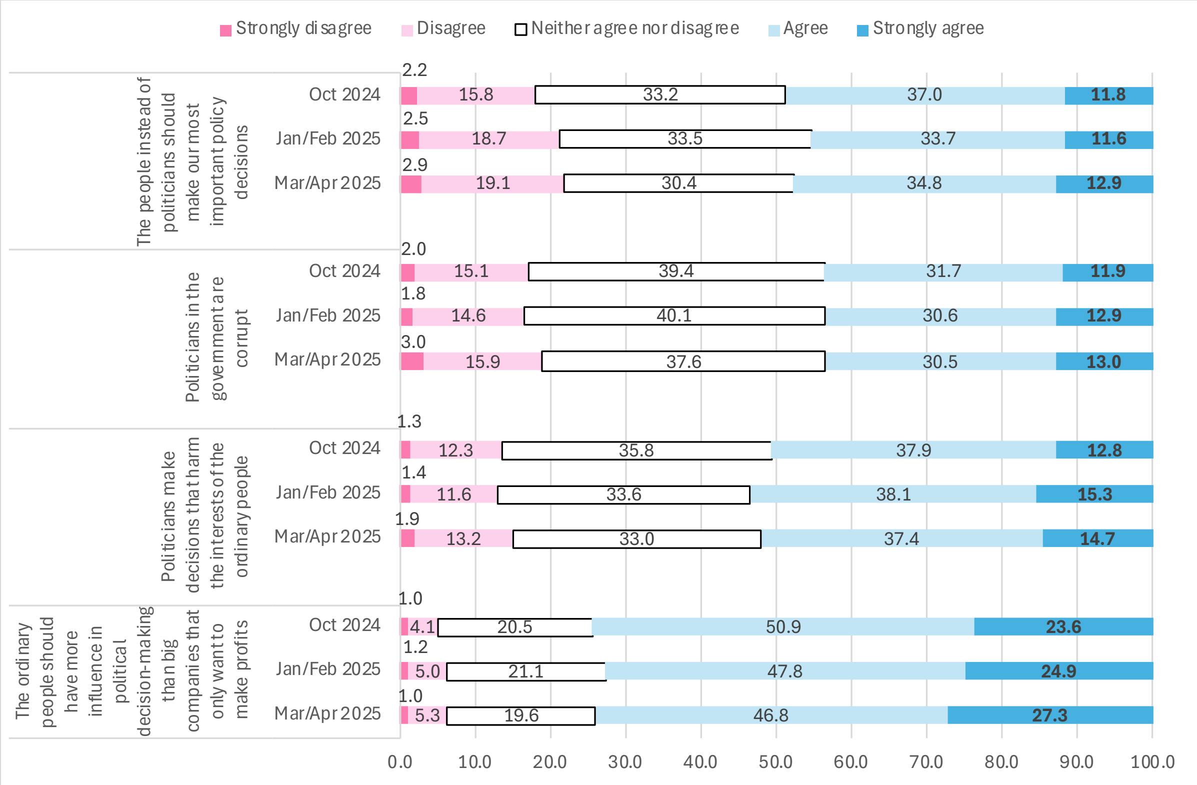
Figure 13 Interest in politics, October 2024 to March/April 2025



Source: Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

There also does not appear have been a substantial change in views towards politicians. The majority of Australians have reasonably negative views towards politicians and the role of big companies in political decision making, but this has been reasonably consistent over the three waves of data collection

Figure 14 Views towards politicians, October 2024 to March/April 2025



Source: Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, and March/April 2025)

5 Views on policy issues

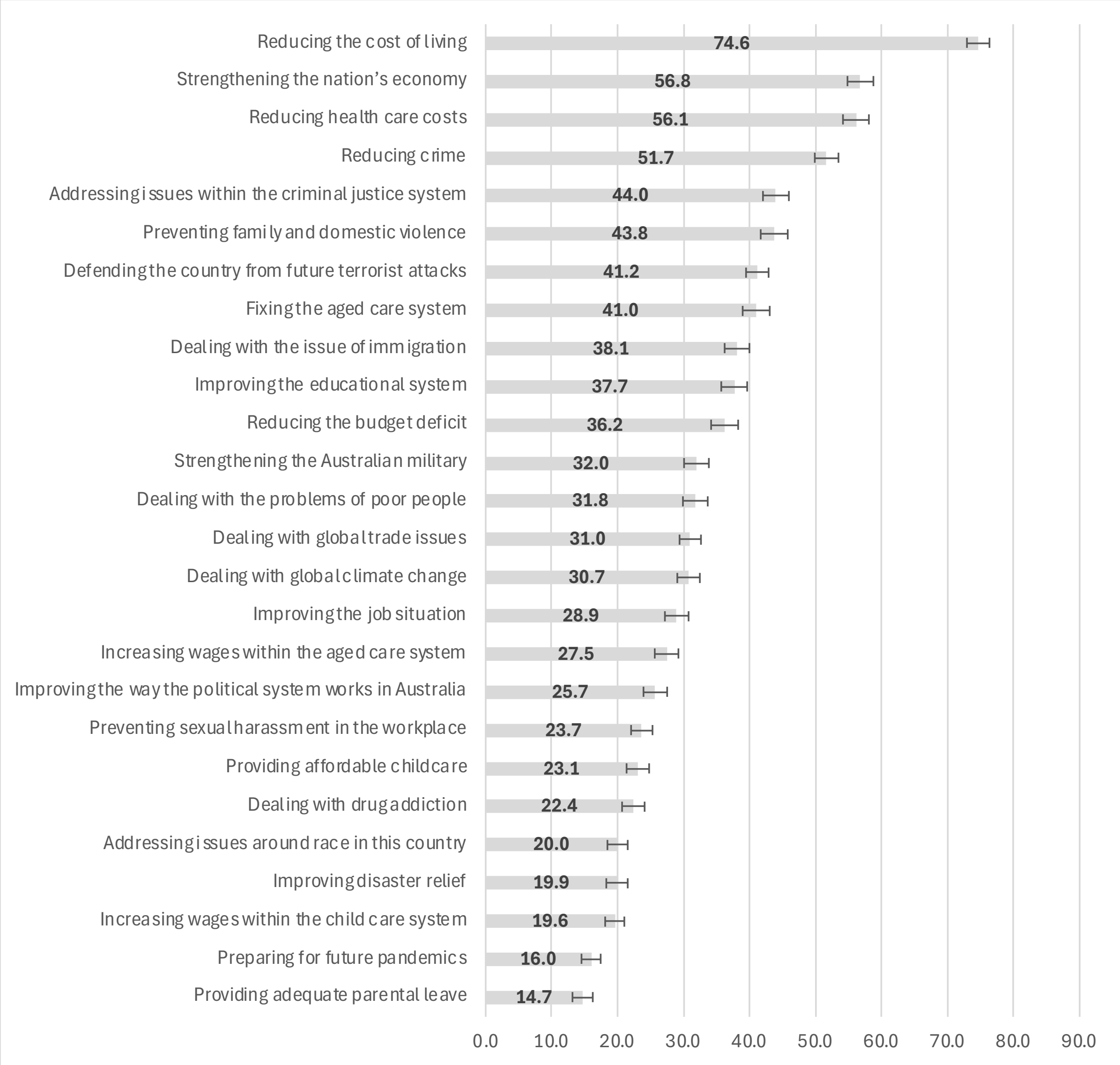
5.1 Policy priorities

Since at least the 90s, elections have frequently been referred to as 'Seinfeld elections'. That is, a show about nothing. While this has not been that frequent a descriptor for the 2025 election, particularly given the intervention of the US President, Senior Writer for The Australian Troy Bramston wrote over the weekend after our data collection finished (12th April)[8] that 'there is an obvious lack of policies to respond to the major challenges facing Australia in the short and long term, from global insecurity and an uncertain economy to the pressing need to reduce debt and lift productivity, improve health and education, and balance energy needs with decarbonising the economy.'

Survey respondents had a variety of views on the policy priorities flagged by Mr Bramston, as well as many others. Specifically, they were asked 'How much of a priority should each of these following be for the Federal government to address this year?', with 26 possible policy areas and response options of Top priority, Important but lower priority, Not too important, and Should not be done.

Figure 15 shows that the highest priority area is to reduce the cost of living, with 74.6 per cent of Australians rating this as a top priority. More than half of the population also reported 'Strengthening the nation's economy', 'Reducing health care costs', and 'Reducing crime' as top priorities.

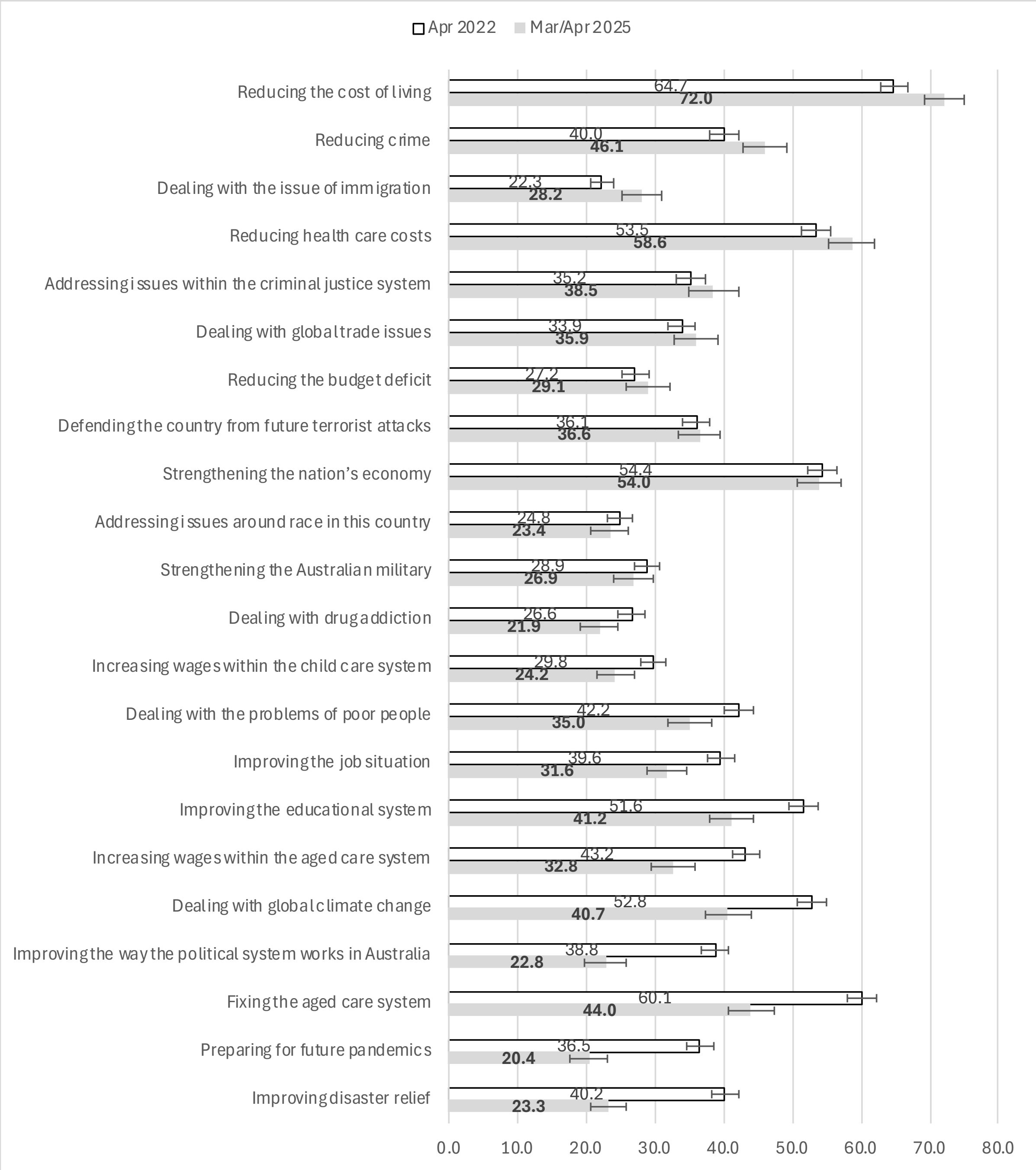
Figure 15 Priority areas seen as a top priority, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

The April 2022 ANUpoll asked the same question for 22 of the 26 policy areas. There has been an increase in the prioritisation towards reducing the cost of living, reducing crime, dealing with the issue of immigration, and reducing health care costs. There has been a decrease in prioritisation for a greater number of policy areas. The largest declines were for improving disaster relief, preparing for future pandemics, improving the way the political system works in Australia, and dealing with global climate change. The last two of these policy areas were a heavy focus of Teal Independent candidates at the last Federal election.

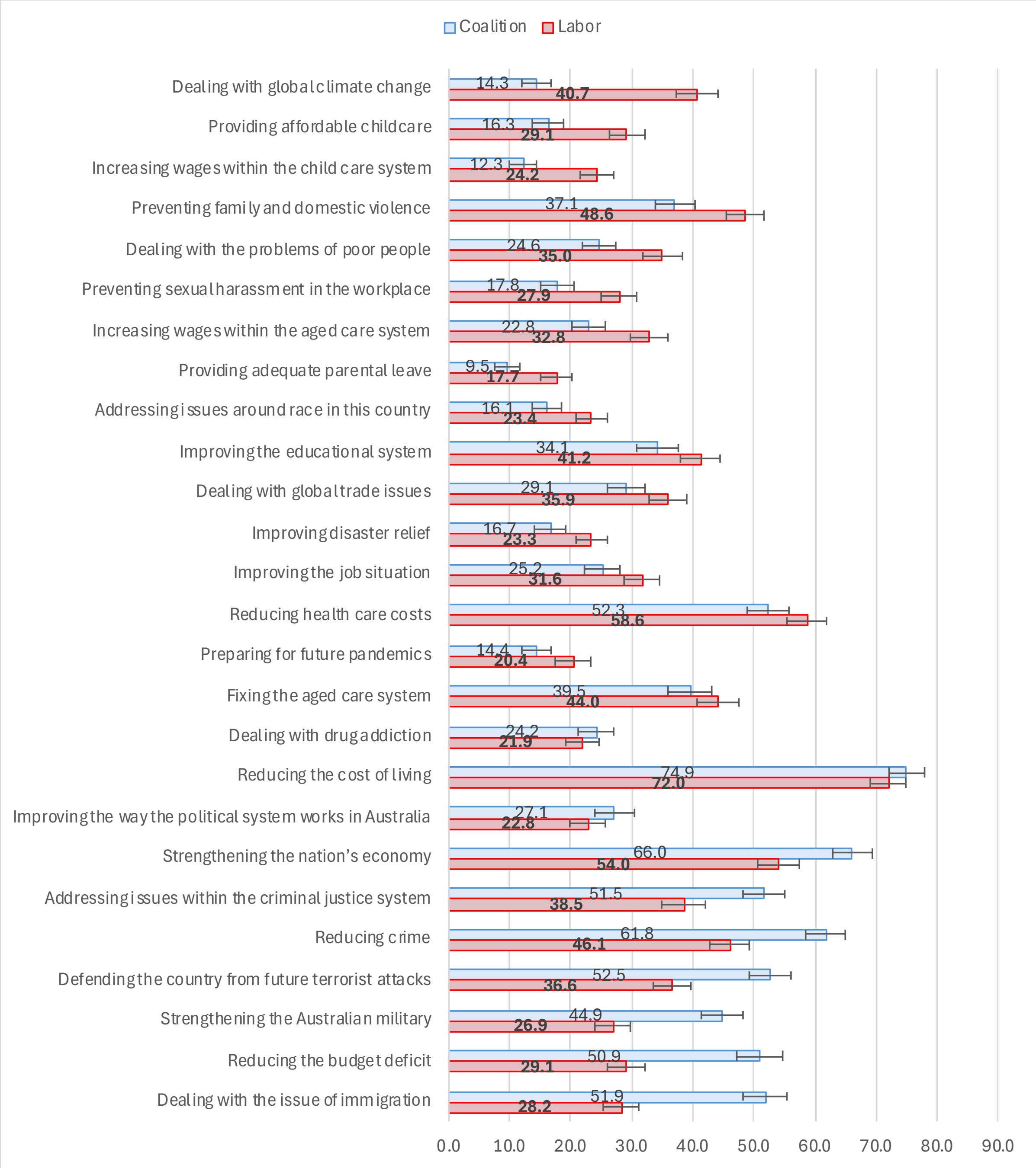
Figure 16 Priority areas, April 2022 and March/April 2025



Source: ANUpoll (April 2022) and Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

Labor and Coalition voters have very different priorities (Figure 17). Those who said they would vote Labor if an election was held the day of the survey are far more likely to see climate change, affordable childcare, increasing childcare wages, and preventing family and domestic violence as top priorities. The top relative priorities of Coalition voters, on the other hand are dealing with the issue of immigration, reducing the budget deficit, strengthening the Australian military, and defending the country from future terrorist attacks. One of the more interesting findings is the very low support from both party voters, but particular from Coalition voters, for Preparing for future pandemics

Figure 17 Priority areas, by voting intention, March/April 2025

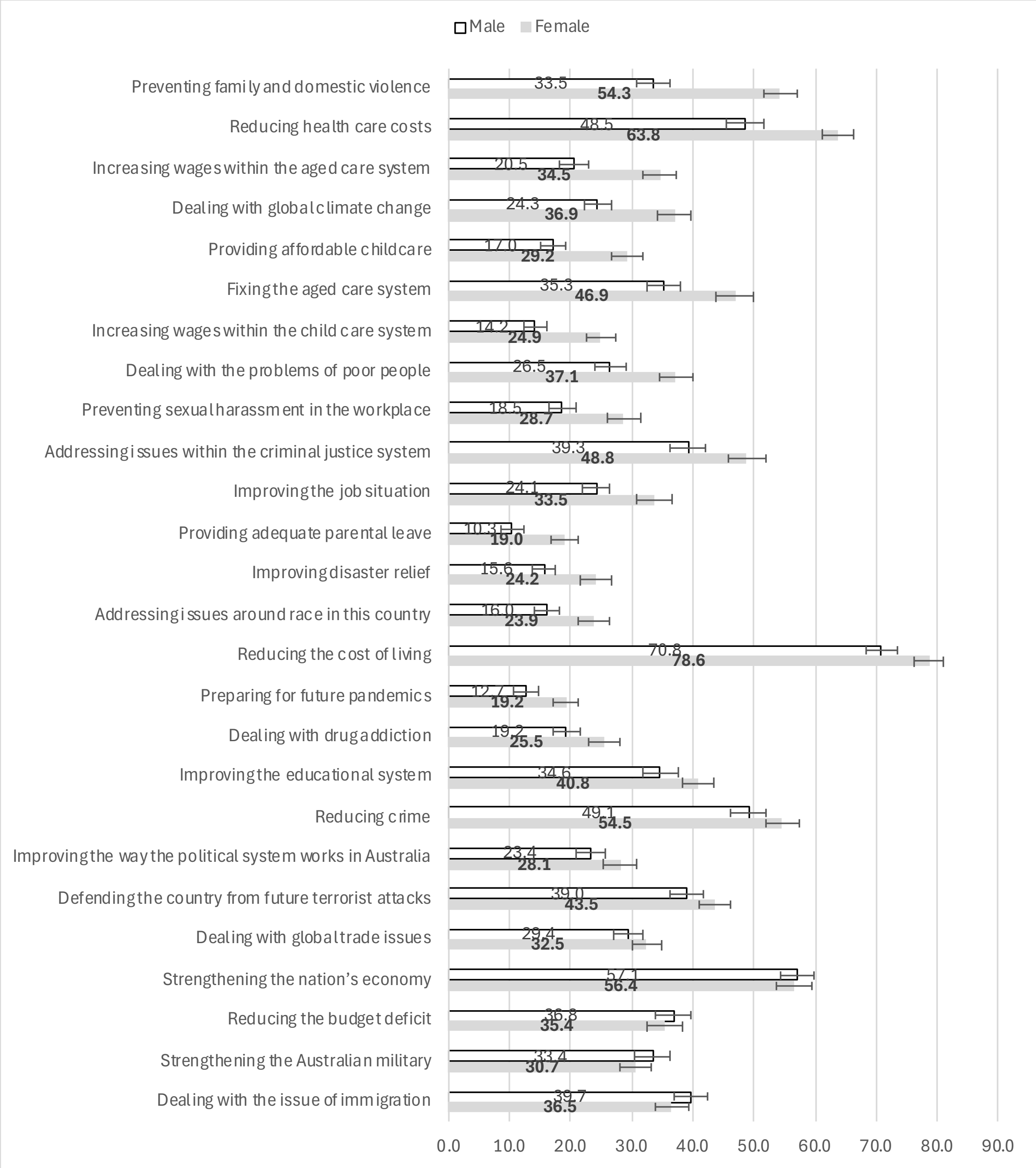


Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

Similar to the ANUpoll analysis in 2022, the majority of policy areas were seen as a higher priority for females compared to males. There were only two policy areas that were seen as a slightly higher priority (Dealing with the issue of immigration and Strengthening the Australia military), but the difference was only 3.2 and 2.7 percentage points respectively, and was not statistically significant.

The policy areas that females saw as having a relatively high priority were Preventing family and domestic violence, Reducing health care costs, Increasing wages within the age care system, Dealing with global climate change, and Providing affordable childcare.

Figure 18 Priority areas, by gender, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

5.2 Supply-side policy approaches

One of the policy areas of particular focus for both the Government and the Opposition is housing. It was a feature of both major parties at their campaign launches (on Sunday the 13th April, the weekend after data collection finished).[9] The Labor Party announced a commitment to build 100,000 new homes targeting first home buyers and reducing the deposit required to 5 per cent for a much greater number of buyers. The centrepiece of the Coalition's housing policy is to allow first home buyers to claim a tax deduction on mortgage payments (up to a limit). Housing experts have, however, identified the potential for such 'demand-side support' to be inflationary as it increases the amount that buyers can borrow to purchase a home.[10]

This highlights one of the real challenges of housing policy as discussed in Duca et al. (2021) in their summary of the existing international literature and Rahman (2010) focusing on Australian data. Unlike almost all other purchases that someone might be struggling to make, there are roughly the same number of Australians selling a house as buying a house at a given point in time. Any reductions in house prices that could make housing more affordable for non-homeowners, will make current homeowners feel less wealthy. If supply is fixed or constrained, then any increase in purchasing ability for some will increase the cost for all. It may be that the increase in purchasing ability outweighs the increase in costs, but the increase will be far less than first meets the eye.

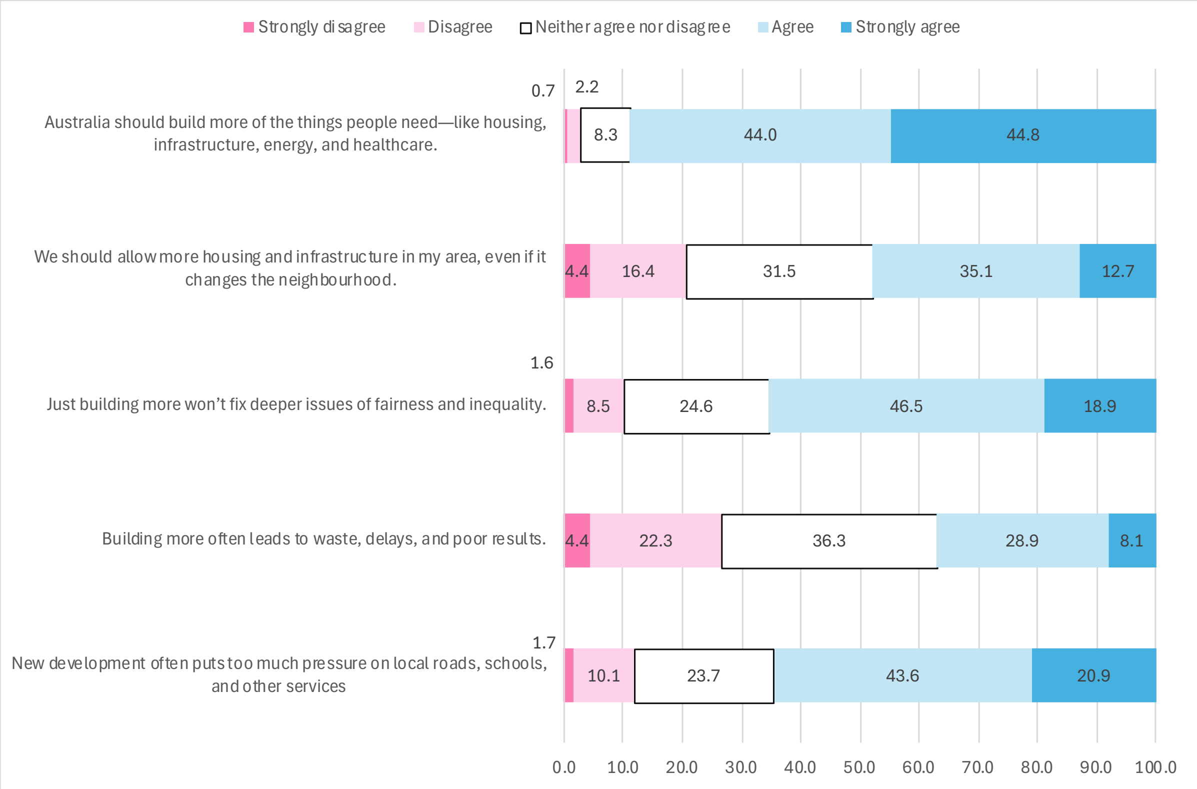
The alternative demand-side approach to housing affordability is to reduce the pressure on the existing housing stock by reducing the number of people attempting to purchase a house, or at least slowing down the growth in demand. If this is done by targeting those that do not vote (for example recent or future immigrants), then a political party may be seen to be doing something without alienating those that are being excluded.

Most data and evidence suggests though that the most equitable and efficient way to increase housing affordability for the most number of potential home owners is to increase housing supply. In Australia, this has tended to be at the fringes of major cities, but this has negative impacts of environmental sustainability of cities (Trinder and Liu 2020), and can lead to long commute times for those without the option of working from home. Urban in-fill, however, is often resisted by existing home owners in the built-up areas that experience densification. These dilemmas are the subject of a new book on *Abundance* by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson, with the solutions labelled by many of its proponents as supply-side liberalism (Cebul 2019).

As far as we are aware, the 2025 EMSS is the first broadly representative national survey in Australia that has explicitly asked respondents about their views on aspects of supply-side liberalism. First we asked respondents agreement or disagreement on five related questions. Figure 19 shows that the first question, which captures the underlying philosophy of building more things that people need, is supported by the vast majority of Australians (88.8 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing).

The second question touches a little more on trade-offs of increasing supply, and has much less support, with less than half of respondents (47.8 per cent) agreeing or strongly agreeing that housing and infrastructure should be allowed in their area, even if it changes the neighbourhood. However, there is a large proportion of people that do not have a strong view, so there is only 20.7 per cent of people that disagree or strongly disagree. The last question raises some of the policy challenges of increasing housing supply in an area without additional investment, with 64.6 per cent of Australians agreeing or strongly agreeing that 'New development often puts too much pressure on local roads, schools, and other services.'

Figure 19 Views on aspects of supply-side liberalism, March/April 2025

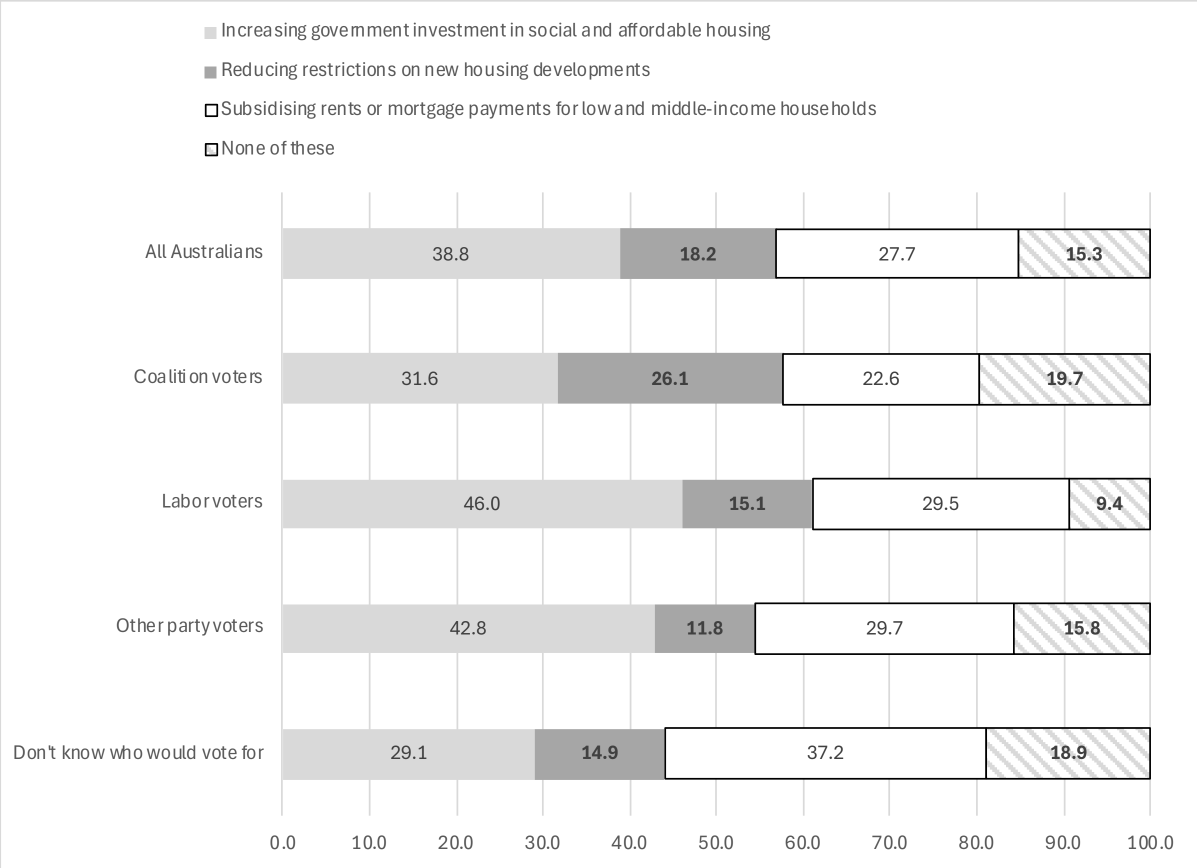


Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

The second of our two questions digs a little deeper into the three major policy options for improving housing affordability. Specifically, we asked respondents 'In your view, which of the following should be the top priority for making housing more affordable in Australia?' For all Australians combined, the desired solution is to increase government investment in social and affordable housing (38.8 per cent giving that option). This is also far-and-away the preferred solution for Labor voters (46.0 per cent) and Other party voters (42.8 per cent).

There is a more even spread amongst Coalition voters, with a relatively high proportion (26.1 per cent) supporting a more market-driven solution of reducing restrictions on new housing developments. Those who don't know who they would vote for are the most likely to support subsidising rents and mortgage payments, suggesting perhaps that the two major parties are trying to attract these undecided voters with their demand-side housing policies (implicitly or explicitly).

Figure 20 Views on housing policy response, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (March/April 2025)

6 Concluding comments

The March/April 2025 wave of the Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS) provides a sobering view of the national mood just weeks out from the federal election. Despite modest gains in confidence in government and party leadership for the Labor Party, Australians remain anxious about their personal wellbeing, and strongly aligned on cost-of-living pressures as their top policy concern.

With a sample of 3,608 respondents, two-thirds of whom participated in earlier EMSS waves, the March/April survey offers robust longitudinal insight into how the national mood, political loyalties, and policy priorities are evolving in the final stretch before the election.

Life Satisfaction at New Lows

Australians continue to report declining life satisfaction. The national average has now fallen to 6.35 out of 10, below the levels seen during the worst periods of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020 and August 2021.

The decline is sharpest among Australians aged 35 to 44, whose average rating dropped from 6.30 to 6.02 over the last two months. Life satisfaction has also fallen significantly among women, a finding that holds after controlling for education, birthplace, language spoken at home, and geography.

Confidence in Democracy and Institutions Stabilising

Despite personal discontent, Australians' satisfaction with the direction of the country has stabilised at 57.7 per cent, unchanged since January/February 2025, though still below levels observed in early 2023.

Satisfaction with democracy also remains steady, rising slightly to 67.1 per cent, from 64.1 per cent in October 2024. As in previous waves, men remain more satisfied than women with how democracy works in Australia.

Importantly, confidence in federal institutions has seen a modest rebound. Confidence in the federal government rose to 37.7 per cent, up from 33.7 per cent in January/February. This is close to the level observed in October 2024 and slightly higher than confidence levels just prior to the 2022 election.

Persistent Financial Stress and Economic Mismatch

Despite macroeconomic signals suggesting modest improvement, financial stress remains entrenched. One in three Australians (33.8 per cent) continues to report difficulty managing their current income—a rate unchanged since January and consistent with trends dating back to mid-2022.

Concern over rising prices also remains high, with no significant changes in the proportion of Australians describing inflation as a very big or moderately big problem. These findings reinforce the widening gap between macroeconomic indicators and everyday lived experiences.

Labor Gains in Favourability and Vote Intentions

One of the more significant developments since January is the rise in support for the Labor Party. After trailing the Liberal Party in average favourability in January/February (4.71 vs 4.87), Labor now leads slightly (4.95 vs 4.76), with the difference now statistically significant.

Within the longitudinal sample, the decline in Liberal favourability was greatest among Australians under 65 and those without a tertiary degree. In contrast, Labor's improvement was widespread, with a slightly greater gain among female respondents.

The Greens remain the least favourable of the four main parties (3.96), though their score has improved slightly among longitudinal respondents.

Leadership perceptions also shifted: Anthony Albanese's favourability increased from 4.45 to 4.76, while Peter Dutton's declined to 4.02. Notably, more than half of Australians (50.6 per cent) now rate Dutton unfavourably, compared to just 32.0 per cent who rate him favourably. Albanese's gains are concentrated among younger Australians, while Dutton's decline is consistent across most demographic groups.

Swing Voters in Motion

Between January/February and March/April 2025, the Labor primary vote increased, while support for the Coalition dipped and the undecided share shrank. Longitudinal data reveal net voter flows from the Coalition to Labor (3.4per cent vs 1.8per cent), and from undecided to Labor (1.9per cent).

Overall, nearly one in five voters (19.4per cent) changed party grouping over the past two months. Those aged 55 and over were least likely to switch, while no significant differences emerged by sex, education, or location. However, Australians born in English-speaking countries overseas were slightly more likely to switch than other groups.

While interest in politics has increased slightly (up from 54.0 to 55.8 per cent), this is unlikely to fully explain the movement in vote intentions.

Cost of Living Remains the Dominant Policy Concern

Australians remain united in their top policy priority: reducing the cost of living, with 74.6 per cent identifying it as a top concern. Other top-tier priorities include strengthening the economy, reducing health care costs, and reducing crime.

Comparing the current results to an April 2022 ANUpoll, there has been an increase in concern over immigration, crime, and health care costs. In contrast, priority for issues like climate change, disaster preparedness, and political reform has declined, including those championed by Teal independents in the 2022 election.

The divide between Labor and Coalition voters is stark: Labor supporters prioritise climate change, affordable childcare, and domestic violence prevention. Coalition voters focus on immigration, military strength, and the budget deficit.

Interestingly, preparing for future pandemics is now a low priority across the board—especially among Coalition voters.

Support for Supply-Side Solutions, with a Local Caveat

New survey questions from the March/April 2025 EMSS suggests broad support among Australians for the general philosophy underpinning supply-side liberalism—namely, building more of the things people need. Nearly nine-in-ten respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this principle.

When supply-side policies become more localised and involve trade-offs, support declines. Fewer than half (47.8 per cent) of respondents support new housing and infrastructure development in their own neighbourhoods if it changes the character of the area, while 64.6 per cent agree that such development often puts too much pressure on existing services like roads and schools.

When asked about the best way to improve housing affordability, the most popular solution was greater government investment in social and affordable housing, selected by 38.8 per cent of respondents. Support for this approach was especially strong among Labor and Other party voters. In contrast, Coalition voters were more evenly split, with a notable minority (26.1 per cent) favouring market-based solutions such as reducing planning restrictions.

Interestingly, undecided voters were more likely than any partisan group to support demand-side measures like subsidising rents and mortgage payments—suggesting that current policy offerings from both major parties may be attempting to court this group.

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Appendix – Survey details

Data collection for Wave 1 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series commenced with a pilot survey on Monday 14th of October. Full data collection commenced on the 15th of October, with data collection finishing on the 25th of October. There were a total of 3,622 respondents with a median survey length of 17 minutes. Those who completed the survey between the 14th and 17th of October were incorrectly not asked the last question in the survey on language spoken at home. After this date, this question was added to the survey, and those that missed that question were re-contacted for their language details.

Data collection for Wave 2 of the survey commenced with a pilot collection on the 29th of January. Full data collection commenced on the 31st of January and concluded on the 12th of February with 3,514 respondents. Of these respondents, 2,380 also completed the October 2024 survey, a retention rate of 65.7 per cent (relative to Wave 1).

Data collection for Wave 3 commenced on Thursday the 26th of March with a pilot data collection. Full data collection commenced on Friday 28th March, the day the 2025 Federal Election date of May 3rd was announced, and finished on the 8th of April with 3,608 respondents.

Survey weights were used in the analysis, using the iterative proportional fitting or raking method, implemented in STATA.[11] Population benchmarks that are used for weighting purposes are age, sex, education, and current employment. The first two of these measures comes from population estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the third (education) from the 2021 Census, and the fourth (employment) from the September 2024 Labour Force Survey.

Only those that stated their age and sex were included in the analysis. Those that gave a sex other than male or female were included in analysis apart from sex-based cross-tabulations, with the weight for those that reported they were either Non-binary or that 'I use a different term' based on the sample proportion. Missing values for employment and education were imputed for weighting purposed only using the *mi impute chained* command in STATA, with random seed set to be 10121978. A separate weight was calculated for those 2,380 respondents that were in both the October 2024 and January/February 2025 surveys.

The ethical aspects of data collection for all three waves of the EMSS have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

Endnotes

[1] https://anthonyalbanese.com.au/media-centre/press-conference-canberra-280325

[2] https://peterdutton.com.au/leader-of-the-opposition-transcript-press-conference-albion/

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[6] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62z54gwd22o

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