

Shifting Trust and Satisfaction: Monitoring a Key Dimension of Democratic Resilience in Australia (October 2024 to May 2025)

Author: Professor Nicholas Biddle,¹

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

June 2025

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



Australian
National
University

Acknowledgement and series note

In early 2024, the Resilient Democracy Data and Research Network was established as a collaboration between Australian researchers, civil society leaders and government agencies. The network is designed to encourage interdisciplinary, collaborative and actionable research seeking policy-relevant insights that measure, diagnose and assess pathways strengthening Australia's democratic resilience.

The network is dedicated to sharing the analysis publicly, and to encouraging the use of these ideas to prompt future research collaborations and actionable policy.

This particular discussion paper was funded by the Australian National University.

This paper reflects the views, analysis, and conclusions of the author(s) alone. Responsibility for the content rests entirely with the author(s) and does not necessarily represent the views or positions of the Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network, its members, funders, partner organisations, or the Australian Government.

Recommended citation: Biddle, N., (2025) 'Shifting Trust and Satisfaction: Monitoring a Key Dimension of Democratic Resilience in Australia (October 2024 to May 2025)' *Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network Discussion Paper 7*, Australian National University.

Abstract

How do major national events—such as elections, geopolitical shifts, and natural disasters—shape public trust in democratic institutions? This paper draws on data from the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS), a four-wave longitudinal survey conducted between October 2024 and May 2025, to explore key patterns of trust and satisfaction across different organisations and levels of Australia’s democratic institutions following the 2025 federal election.

The analysis finds a post-election “democracy bounce,” with satisfaction in democracy rising to 73.3 per cent and higher trust in political institutions, particularly the federal government and Parliament. Most Australians viewed the election process as fair and well-run, reinforcing public confidence. However, they also reported concerns about data misuse and media bias. Reported levels of trust varied across demographic groups, with younger Australians, people without Year 12 qualifications, and those experiencing financial stress reporting lower confidence in institutional performance and representativeness.

While most Australians reported feeling that the new Parliament could represent “people like me,” this sentiment was less widespread among voters with lower education and income levels. The finding that “rich voters” were seen as the best represented group raises further questions about perceived equity in political representation.

The findings highlight both strengths and enduring risks in Australia’s democracy. While elections can boost short-term trust, long-term resilience will depend on addressing underlying disparities in institutional confidence, civic inclusion, and perceived fairness. This research paper offers insights for policymakers seeking to build public trust and monitors changing factors. Addressing disparities in perceived representativeness and institutional trust will be critical to maintaining democratic resilience in the years ahead.

1 Introduction and overview

Strengthening democracy in Australia requires more than comparisons with other OECD countries. It demands close attention to domestic trends and patterns in the key drivers of democratic resilience—particularly how Australians experience, evaluate, and engage with democratic institutions over time. Understanding where and why dissatisfaction emerges or diminishes is critical to informing policy and practice.

A central challenge is determining how often we should measure these changes. Are people's views shaped primarily by everyday experiences, major national events, or global developments? Do attitudes shift gradually, or do moments like elections or referendums trigger sharp changes in trust, satisfaction, and perceptions of performance? And do they shift in equal ways across population sub-groups, or the political, social and economic institutions that underpin democratic institutions, or is there relevant variation in response to different contexts?

In October 2024, the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR) at the Australian National University (ANU) in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) commenced data collection for the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS). Since then, there has been three additional waves of data collection, with Wave 2 taking place in January/February 2025, Wave 3 in March/April at the start of the election campaign, and Wave 4 in May immediately after the Federal Election. The Appendix to this paper gives more details on the survey.

One of the aims and focuses of the 2025 EMSS was to track aspects of democratic resilience. Specifically, during a time where there are widespread claims of democratic backsliding internationally (see Little and Meng 2024 for a comprehensive empirical critique of this literature), one important contribution is to track public opinion on how Australians view democracy, how they view their politicians, and how they view the outcome and conduct of the election. Further, as the related literature on democratic resilience suggests (Biddle et al. 2025), a strong and resilient democracy is one with high levels of social inclusion and cohesion.

The aim of this paper then is to summarise the findings from all four waves of the 2025 EMSS (and related surveys where they exist) on how Australians view their own lives over the election period, how they view Australia's direction and its democracy, and their perceptions of the conduct and outcomes from the election.

1.1 The 2025 Federal Election context

The 2025 federal election in Australia was announced in April, following months of speculation about its timing. It came against the backdrop of major flooding disasters, rising cost-of-living pressures, and growing geopolitical instability—including regional tensions and global economic uncertainty. While every election is shaped by its unique circumstances, the broader context in which it is conducted matters deeply. How elections are administered—particularly under the stewardship of a non-partisan public service during the caretaker period—and how they are framed by public and social media all influence public trust, perceptions of legitimacy, and satisfaction with democracy. These factors set the stage for understanding how Australians responded to the 2025 election, and how it shaped broader views of democratic performance in a volatile global moment.

On the 10th of June, 2025, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese delivered his first major address to the National Press Club (NPC) following his re-election in early May.¹ While much of

the speech was understandably focused outlining the Government's policy agenda, a notable theme was the role of public service delivery in maintaining democratic legitimacy. Midway through his address, the Prime Minister stated:

We are living in a time of significant global uncertainty - and that reaches beyond just economic instability. It is the more corrosive proposition that politics and government and democratic institutions, including a free media, are incapable of meeting the demands of this moment.

This comment echoes a growing body of research showing that public support for democracy is strongly tied to perceptions of government performance—particularly in delivering essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and economic security (Anderson and Tverdova 2003, Rothstein 2011). According to Magalhães (2014) 'evidence from more than 100 surveys in close to 80 countries, and different measures of democratic support, it is shown that government effectiveness is the strongest macro-level predictor' of support for democracy. This is particularly the case in democratic regimes, where according to the same author 'government effectiveness, understood as the quality of policy-making formulation and implementation, is linked to higher levels of support for democracy.'

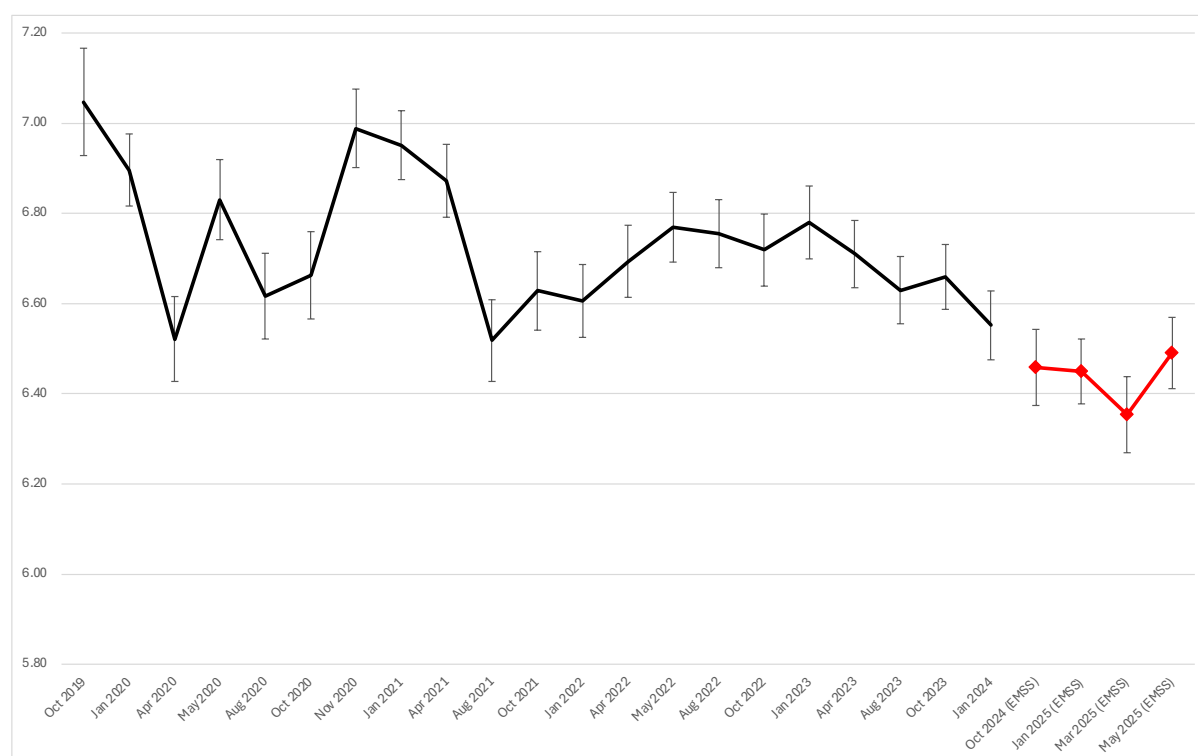
2 Life satisfaction and financial wellbeing over the election period

2.1 Life satisfaction

One of the first questions asked in each wave of the EMSS 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?” This question was also asked in the ANUpoll series of surveys using a comparable methodology, so we have time series data going back prior to the COVID-19 period, or essentially two whole parliamentary cycles.

Figure 1 shows that there had been a continued decline in the level of life satisfaction in Australia since the start of 2023 and up until the start of the election period. Average life satisfaction in March/April (Wave 3) was 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. However, over the election period there was a statistically significant increase in life satisfaction, to an average of 6.49. This is still below the post-2022 election average, but Australians appear more satisfied after the election than they were leading up to it.

Figure 1 Life satisfaction, all Australians, October 2019 to May 2025



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

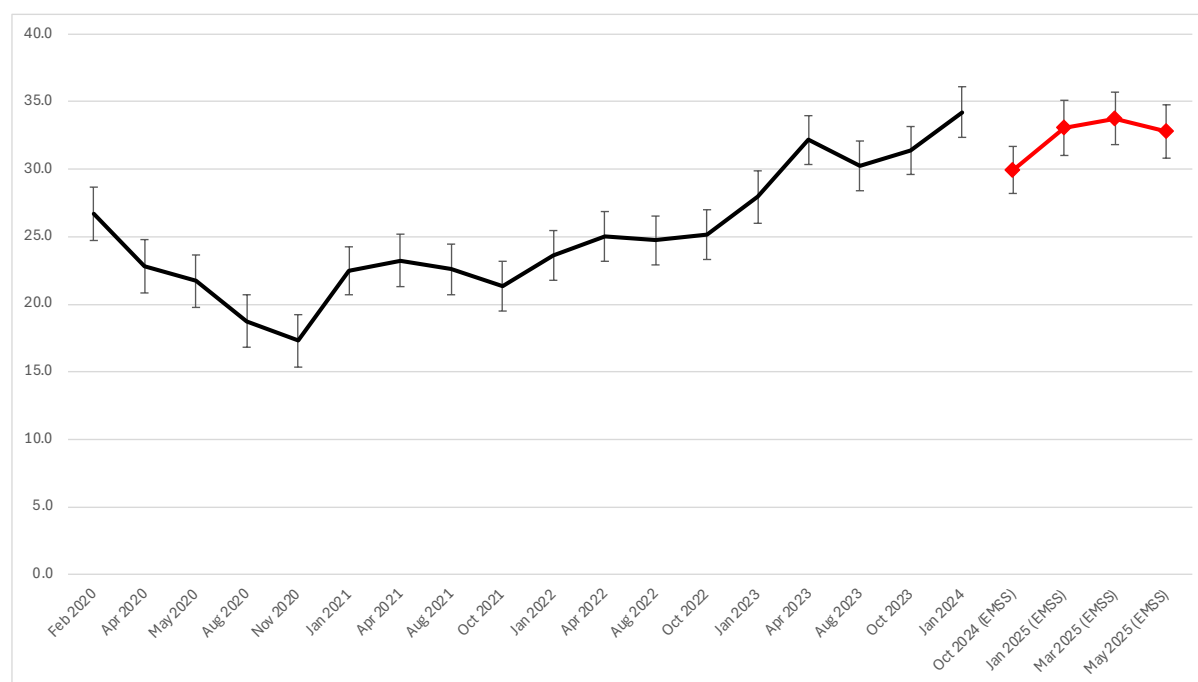
Source: ANUpoll (October 2019 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

2.2 Financial stress

Financial stress remains high, but there has not been an increase or decrease 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 May, 32.8 per cent reported finding it difficult or very difficult, statistically very similar to the 33.1 per cent observed in January/February, and the 33.8 per cent in March/April.

Figure 2 Financial stress, or the per cent of Australians finding it difficult or very difficult on their current income, February 2020 to May 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, March/April, and May 2025)

2.3 Social trust

In Wave 1 and Wave 4 of the 2025 EMSS, respondents were asked three questions from the Bryer (2015) Social Trust Scale, developed for the European Social Survey (ESS). The specific questions are listed below, which can be averaged into a single item:

- Trust – Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you can’t be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.
- Fairness – Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means most people would try to take advantage of you and 10 means most people would try to be fair.
- Helpfulness – Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means people mostly look out for themselves and 10 means people mostly try to be helpful.

The average values for the three items just after the 2025 election are 5.58 (trust), 5.51

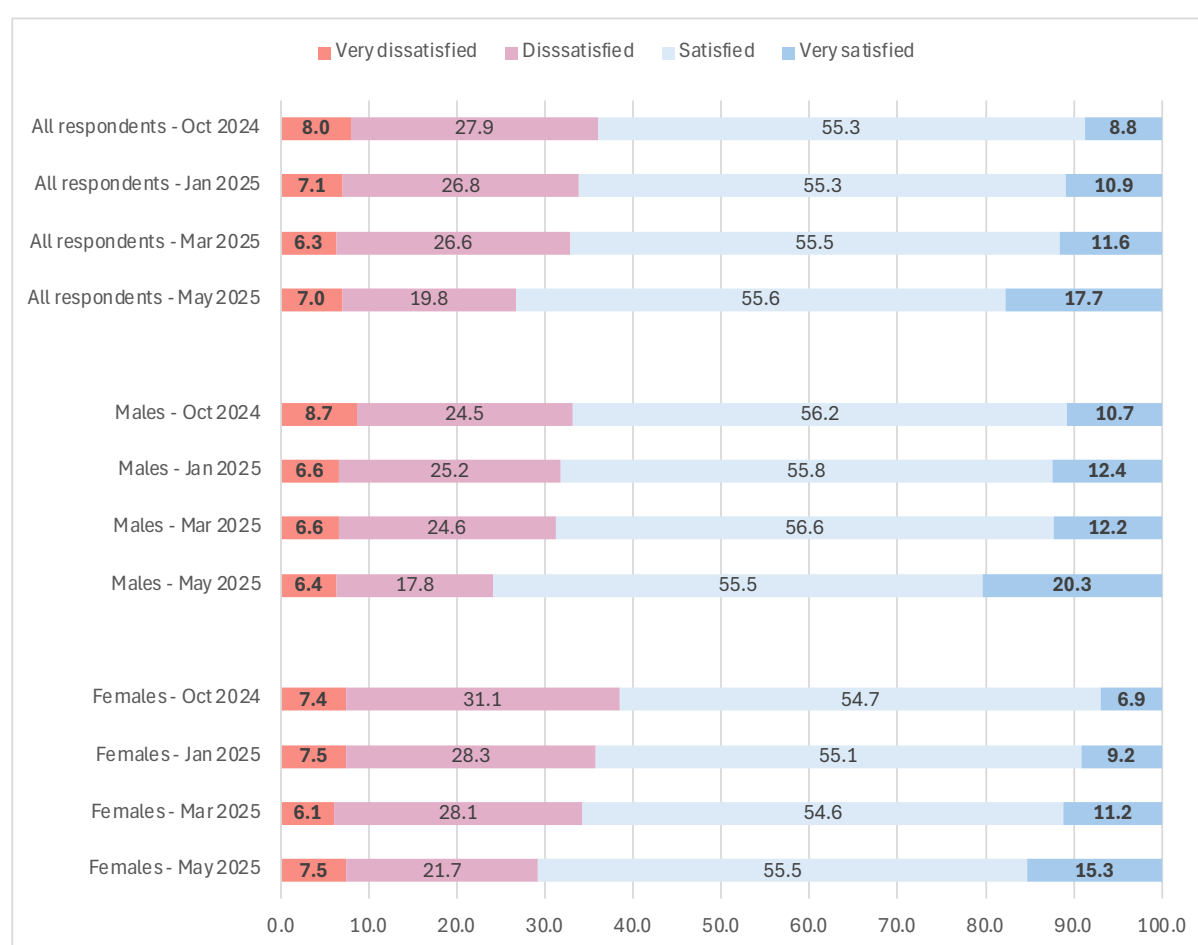
(fairness), and 5.45 (helpfulness). Averaged, the social trust scale across Australia was 5.51 in May 2025. This was exactly the same (to two decimal places) as the value in October 2024 (5.51), with no statistically significant change in any of the three underlying measures. Furthermore, Australia has relatively high values on this scale compared to countries that took part in the ESS, with the average in Australia for the single item trust measure below that of four Scandinavian countries, Austria, and Switzerland, but above that of 21 other countries that took part in the survey (including the United Kingdom, and Ireland).

3 Satisfaction with democracy and the direction of the country

One of the key tracking variables collected in the 2025 EMSS is a person's satisfaction with democracy. Each wave we have asked 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?'

Figure 3 gives the (weighted) per cent of Australians that gave each of the four possible response options, first for all Australians, and then separately for males and females. Satisfaction improved across each of the three intervals between our waves of collection, but the largest increase was the time period around the election itself. Almost three-quarters of Australians (73.3 per cent) were satisfied with democracy in May 2025, compared to just over two-thirds (67.1 per cent) in March/April. The increase was slightly greater for males compared to females, with the former remaining more satisfied than the latter.

Figure 3 Satisfaction with democracy – October 2024 to May 2025

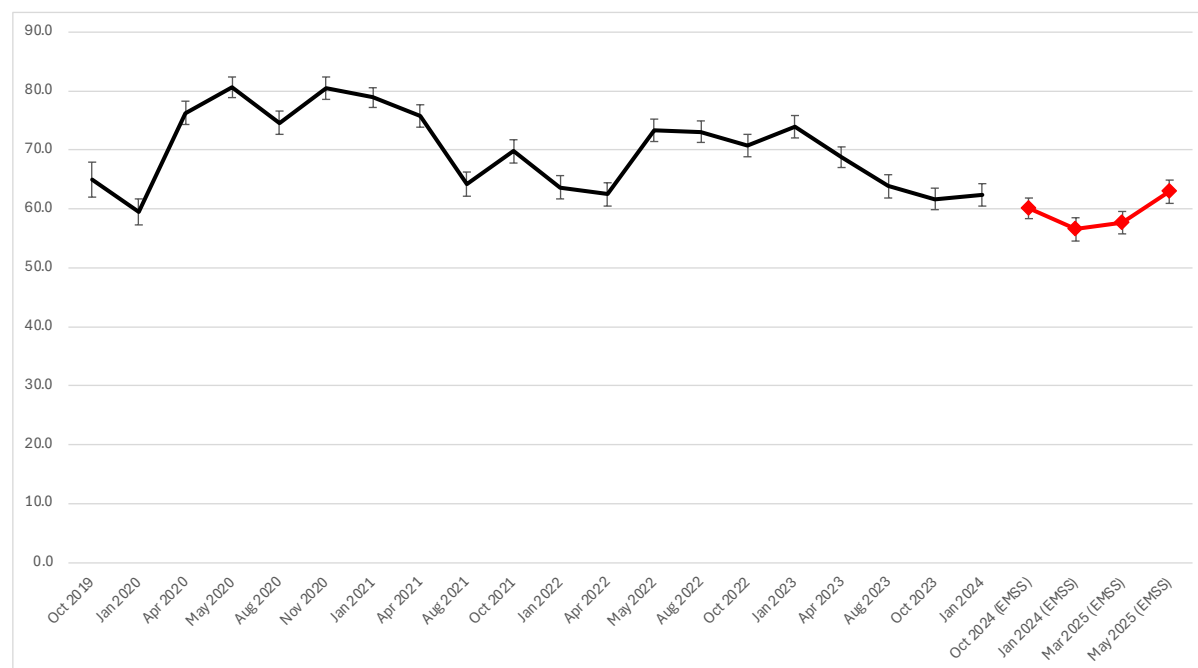


Source: Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

A related question that we have asked in each of our waves of data collection relates to satisfaction with the direction of the country. We have also asked this question over a number of years through the ANUpoll series of surveys that the EMSS is a part of, giving us a much longer time series.

Australians are more satisfied with the direction of the country now than they have been since the start of 2024, with a significant and substantial increase from before to after the election from 57.7 per cent satisfied/very satisfied to 62.9 per cent. However, Australians haven't returned to the same level of satisfaction they expressed just after the 2022 election, when 73.3 per cent of Australians reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the country's direction.

Figure 4 Satisfaction with direction of the country – October 2019 to May 2025

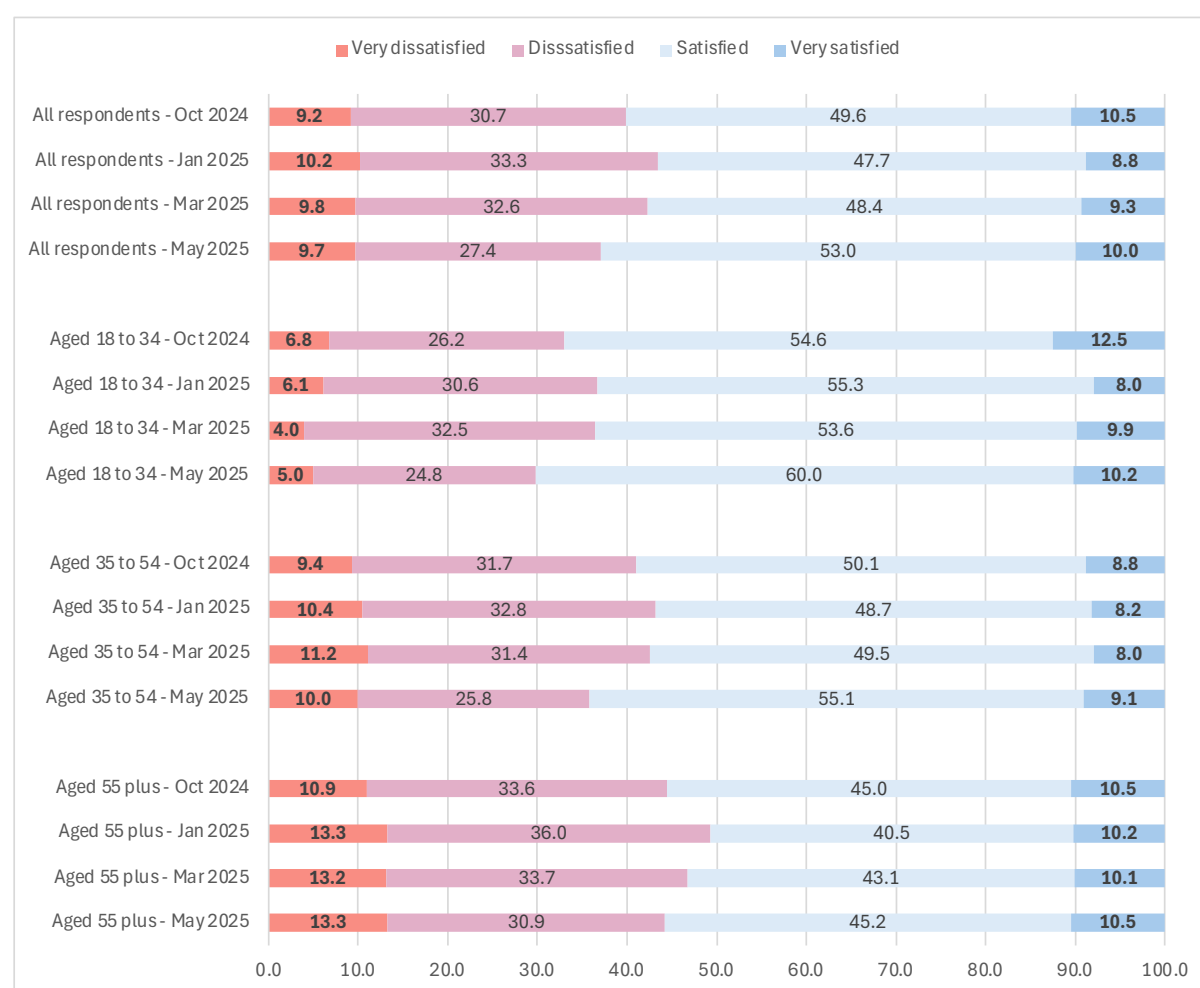


Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Source: ANUpoll (October 2019 to January 2024) and Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

It continues to be the case that younger Australians are more satisfied with the direction of the country than older Australians (Figure 5). Indeed, the gap between those aged 18 to 34 years (70.2 per cent) and those aged 55 years and over (55.7 per cent) widened over the election period.

Figure 5 Satisfaction with direction of country by age – October 2024 to May 2025



Source: Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

A key focus of the EMSS is to have a large and diverse enough sample to identify where there might be pockets of dissatisfaction, either with democracy or with the direction of the country in general. We can look at this through a regression approach where we take a dependent variable (in this case satisfaction with democracy or the direction of the country) and see how a set of explanatory variables (for example age, or education) might be associated with that dependent variable, whilst holding other explanatory variables constant. This doesn't allow us to measure causal pathways between these variables, but it does allow us to get closer to capturing more direct associations.

The longitudinal nature of the EMSS also allows us to obtain more precise estimates for variation in satisfaction for relatively small population sub-groups. If we combine all four waves of data and focus on those variables that have been asked in every wave of data collection, then we can look at variation over the election period across important demographic groups.

Because our data is longitudinal, it is important to take into account the fact that how someone responds to a question on satisfaction with democracy or the direction of the country at one point in time is highly correlated with satisfaction at a different point in time. We do this through a random effects model.² For the analysis of satisfaction with democracy, we have

13,726 observations across 6,933 individuals. For the analysis of satisfaction with the direction of the country, it is 13,849 observations across 7,017 individuals.

Results presented in Table 1 identify a number of key groups that have lower levels of satisfaction than their counterparts. Furthermore, by including a dummy variable for each time period, we can see that even controlling for these demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, satisfaction with democracy increased over the period (particularly between wave 3 and 4), whereas satisfaction with the direction of the country declined between October and January-April, then increased between April and May.

Females are significantly less satisfied with democracy than males, but have similar views on the direction of the country. Younger **and** older Australians have higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than those in the middle part of the age distribution (those aged 35 to 44 years). However, older Australians are far less satisfied with the direction of the country than those in the middle part of the age distribution, who are in turn less satisfied than younger Australians.

Our larger sample allows us to show that those with a degree are far more satisfied with democracy than those without a degree, and those that have completed Year 12 are far more satisfied than those that have not. Education also matters, but to a lesser extent, in explaining satisfaction with the direction of the country. On balance, education is one of the cleavages in our democratic resilience story.

Those that are born overseas (particularly in a non-English speaking country) are more satisfied with democracy than those born in Australia, and they are substantially more likely to be satisfied with the direction of the country. In terms of democratic resilience, Australia's migration integration is a real success story.

<<<Table 1 here>>>

Table 1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with satisfaction with democracy and the direction of the country, October 2024 to May 2025

Explanatory variables	Democracy		Direction of country	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Female	-0.140	**	-0.043	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.319	***	0.368	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.147	*	0.124	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.054		-0.320	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.156		-0.469	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.368	***	-0.358	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.421	***	-0.342	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.277	***	-0.107	
Has a degree	0.435	***	0.305	***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.081		0.301	***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.247	***	0.439	***
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.275	***	-0.029	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.111	*	-0.003	
January/February 2025 data collection	0.146	***	-0.147	***
March/April 2025 data collection	0.172	***	-0.128	***
May 2025 data collection	0.496	***	0.150	***
Constant	0.573	***	0.599	***
Number of observations	13,726		13,849	
Number of respondents	6,933		7,017	

Notes: Random effects, probit 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 a capital city.

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 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series

The variables included in the modelling in Table 1 are for the most part, time invariant. People can move between capital cities and non-capital cities, increase their education, or move across age cohorts. However, it is uncommon over such a small window of time. However, there are a number of time varying characteristics that we asked in each wave of the EMSS. One that is highly predictive of satisfaction with democracy/direction of the country is financial stress. In Table 2, we include this in an expanded model, showing that fluctuations in financial stress are highly predictive of fluctuations in satisfaction. To improve these measures of democratic resilience, an overarching goal of government needs to be reducing the number of people in the country that feel their income is not adequate to meet their expenditure needs.

Table 2 **Regression model estimates of the factors associated with satisfaction with democracy and the direction of the country including financial stress, October 2024 to May 2025**

Explanatory variables	Democracy Coeff. Signif.	Direction of country Coeff. Signif.
Finding it difficult on current income	-0.795 ***	-0.841 ***
Female	-0.104 *	-0.008
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.312 ***	0.333 ***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.100	0.068
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.017	-0.352 ***
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.067	-0.560 ***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.273 ***	-0.440 ***
Aged 75 years plus	0.285 **	-0.474 ***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.259 ***	-0.080
Has a degree	0.332 ***	0.218 ***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.056	0.275 ***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.240 ***	0.424 ***
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.254 ***	-0.020
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.106 *	0.010
January/February 2025 data collection	0.159 ***	-0.137 ***
March/April 2025 data collection	0.201 ***	-0.106 **
May 2025 data collection	0.499 ***	0.157 ***
Constant	0.856 ***	0.899 ***
Number of observations	13,665	13,779
Number of respondents	6,897	6,979

Notes: Random effects, probit 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 a capital city.

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 *

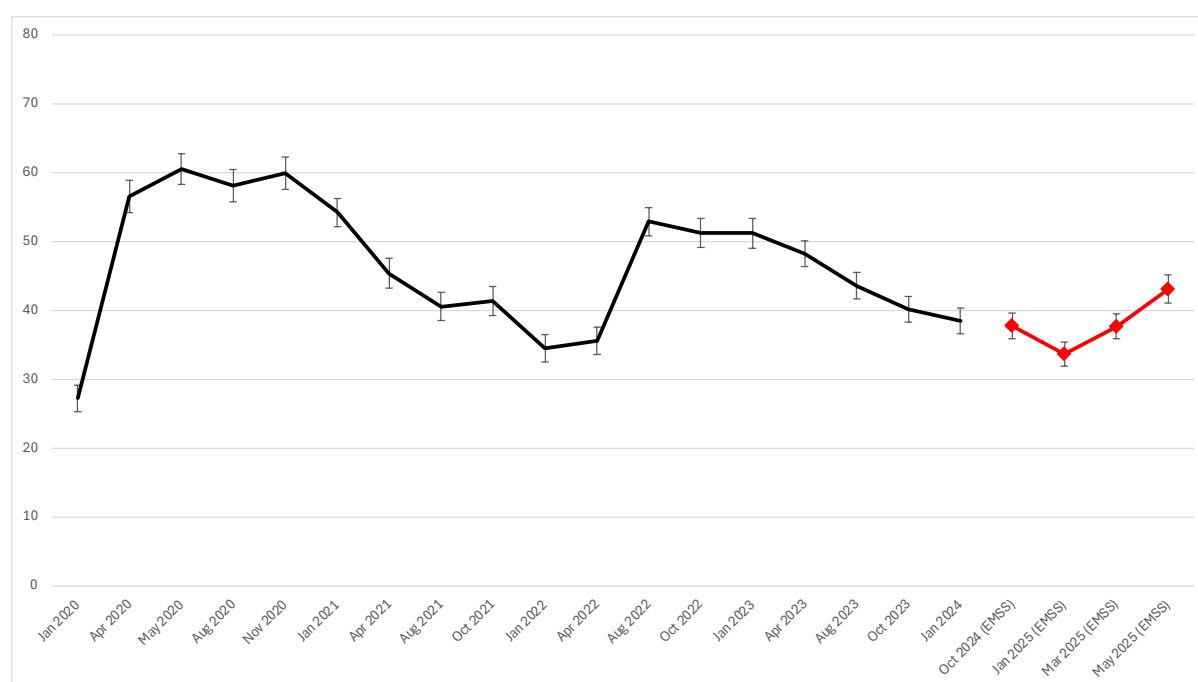
Source: Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series

4 Confidence and Trust in institutions

The election appears to have coincided with an improvement in confidence and trust in key political institutions, alongside the improvement in satisfaction. However, this improvement has for the most part been concentrated on political 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 over the election period. There are now more people confident in the Federal Government (43.1 per cent) than any time since after the 2023 Voice Referendum. Over the longer term, the current levels of confidence in the Australian government are still 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).

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

In Table 3 we replicate the analysis from the previous section, with confidence in the Federal Government as the dependent variable. We analyse with and without financial stress as an explanatory variable. People’s experiences of financial stress are clearly important (Model 2), but even controlling for that there are a number of groups with lower levels of confidence – females, those in the middle part of the age distribution (particularly aged 55 to 64), those with low levels of education, those born in Australia, and those that live outside of a capital city.

Table 3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with confidence in the federal government, October 2024 to May 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Finding it difficult on current income	-0.795	***	-0.841	***
Female	-0.104	*	-0.008	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.312	***	0.333	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.100		0.068	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.017		-0.352	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.067		-0.560	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.273	***	-0.440	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.285	**	-0.474	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.259	***	-0.080	
Has a degree	0.332	***	0.218	***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.056		0.275	***
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.240	***	0.424	***
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.254	***	-0.020	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.106	*	0.010	
January/February 2025 data collection	0.159	***	-0.137	***
March/April 2025 data collection	0.201	***	-0.106	**
May 2025 data collection	0.499	***	0.157	***
Constant	0.856	***	0.899	***
Number of observations	13,642		13,583	
Number of respondents	6,896		6,861	

Notes: Random effects, probit 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 a capital city.

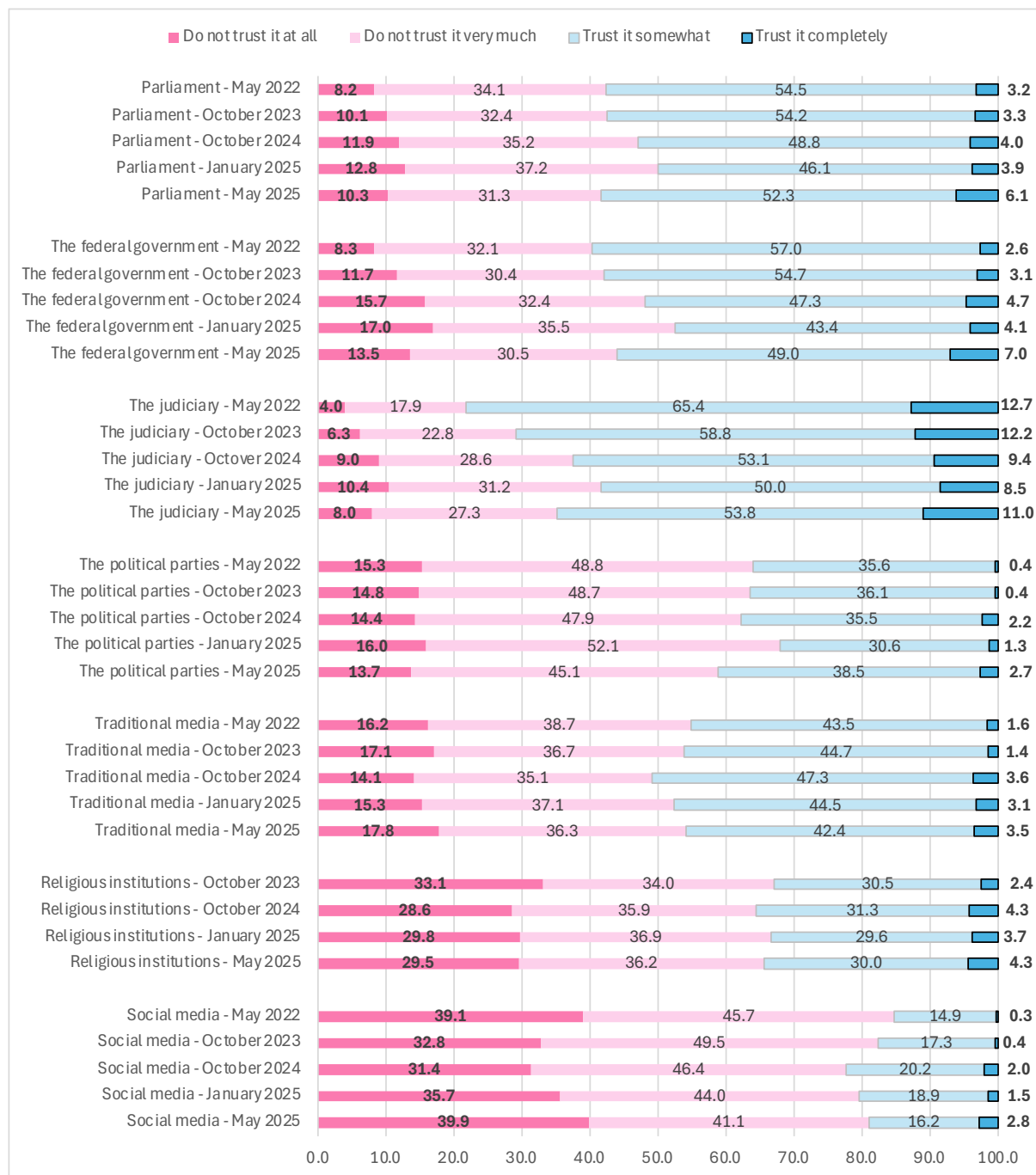
Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series

We have also asked the following question in three of our four EMSS waves, as well as a number of ANUpoll surveys: *We would now like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions and groups. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you trust it completely, trust it somewhat, do not trust it very much, or do not trust it at all?*

The following figure shows that there was a particularly large increase in trust in political parties, the federal government, and Parliament more broadly. There was a more moderate (but still significant) increase in trust in the judiciary, but no change in trust in media (traditional or social), or in religious institutions.

Figure 7 Trust in institutions – May 2022 to 2025



Source: ANUpoll (May 2022 and October 2023) and Wave 1 to 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024, January/February, March/April, and May 2025)

5 Conduct of the elections, and perceptions of the Parliament.

Elections can shape people's views on democracy through the outcome, and the policy agenda that eventuates. However, how the election was conducted matters as well. The literature has consistently shown that transparent, fair, and effectively managed electoral processes enhance citizens' trust in democratic institutions and contribute positively to their satisfaction with democracy (Norris, 2014; Birch, 2010). Conversely, perceptions of electoral misconduct—including fraud, voter suppression, or administrative incompetence—erodes public confidence, increasing political cynicism and disillusionment, potentially undermining democratic resilience.

5.1 Views on the conduct of the election

We asked respondents how often they felt a range of positive and negative election-related activities took place during the 2025 election. The following figure gives the responses of our sample, ordered from the activity that has the highest proportion of people thinking it happened very often, to the activity with the lowest proportion.

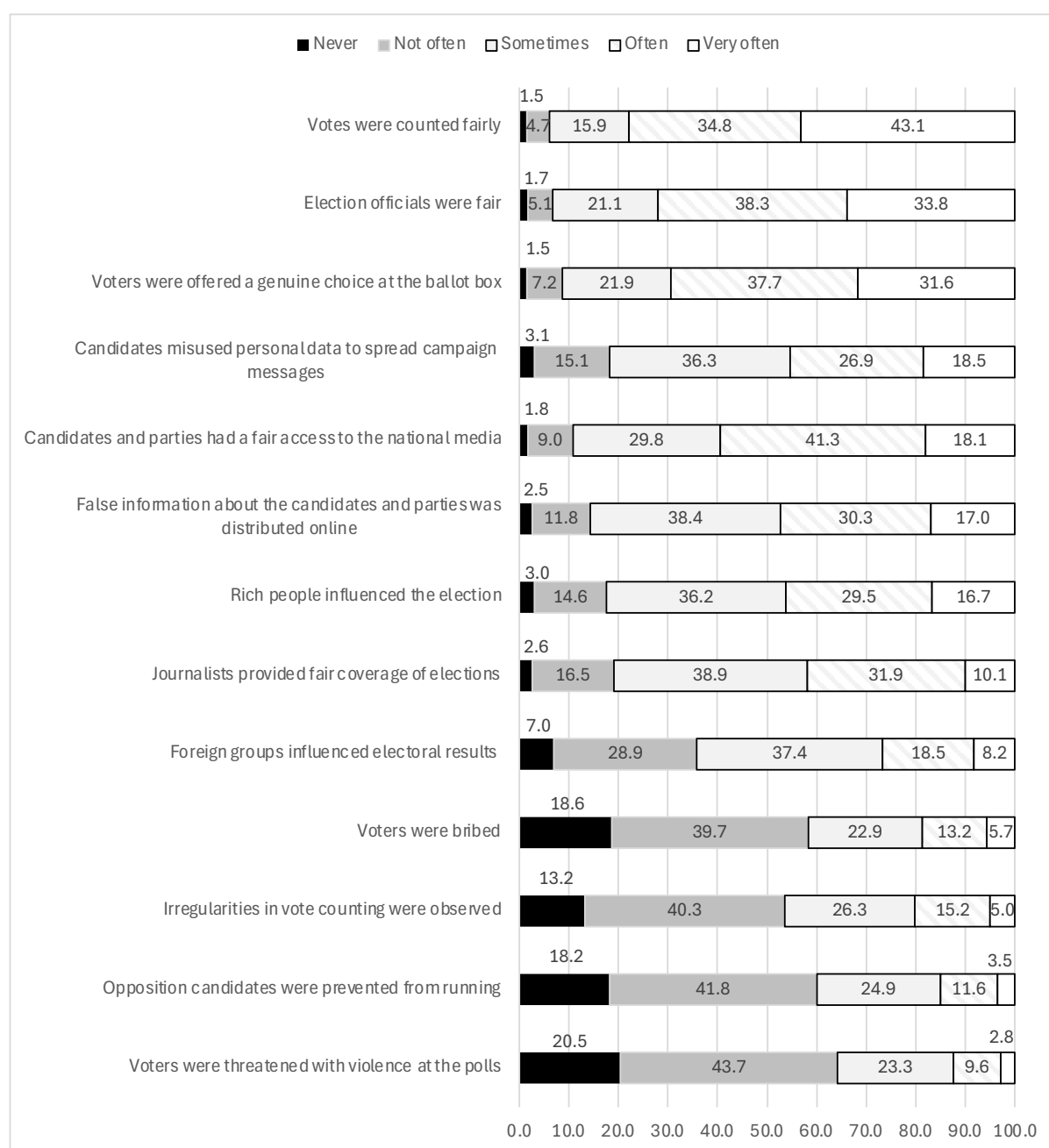
Almost four-in-five Australians (77.9 per cent) thought that votes were counted fairly often, or very often. Furthermore, 72.1 per cent thought that election officials were fair often or very often, with 69.4 per cent thinking that voters were offered a genuine choice at the ballot box.

At the other end of the distribution, only 12.5 per cent of Australians thought that voters were threatened with violence at the polls often or very often, with 15.1 per cent thinking that Opposition candidates were prevented from running. Ideally these latter two results would be 0% (and those in the previous paragraph would be 100%). However, on balance the responses are very positive in what they say about the perceived conduct of the election.

There are a couple of exceptions though that are worth noting. The positive outcome that has the lowest perceived frequency was that 'Journalists provided fair coverage of elections.' Only 10.1 per cent of Australians thought that occurred very often, with a further 31.9 per cent saying it occurred often. As mentioned in the previous section, while trust in political institutions improved over the election period, trust in political and social media did not.

The negative outcome that had the highest perceived frequency was that 'Candidates misused personal data to spread campaign messages.' 18.5 per cent of Australians thought that occurred very often, with a further 26.9 per cent saying it occurred often. As election campaigns become more and more data- and algorithm-driven, there is a need to monitor whether people's data privacy is being protected.

Figure 8 Perceptions of election conduct – May 2025



Source: Wave 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (May 2025)

Australians seem to have reasonably nuanced views towards the different electoral activities. Just because a person thinks that one of the positive activities occurred, it does not mean they are more or less likely than someone else to think that another one of the positive activities occurred, or that the negative activities didn't. It is true that there is a high correlation coefficient (in absolute terms) for many of the pairs of responses, but for many of the other combinations the correlation is essentially zero. Taken together, the first component of a principal components analysis does have an Eigenvalue far greater than one (4.07 to be precise), but it still only explains under one-third of the variation across the 13 items (0.314).

This complexity notwithstanding, there is still some value and information in analysing an additive index of the responses. Coding the positive activities from 1 for never and 5 for very often, and reverse coding the negative activities from 5 to never and 1 for very often, this index ranges from values of 13 for the least positive view towards the election, 65 for the most positive view, with a value of 39 for those that gave a value of sometimes for all 13 activities. Across all Australians the mean (43.7) and median (44) values were very similar, with more positive than negative views prevailing across what we might call an 'index of electoral legitimacy.'

What is more interesting than the average across all Australians, however, is how the index varied by other characteristics in the data. With a standard deviation across all Australians of 7.04, there is a fair bit of this variation to explain. To identify the most important factors, we undertook a relatively simple regression analysis. This analysis allows us to look at the association between perceived electoral legitimacy as the dependent variable, and a range of other observed independent variables. Importantly, the relationship between the dependent variable and one of the independent variables is estimated whilst holding all other independent variables in the model constant.

In the first model, we include age, sex, education, broad country of birth, language spoken at home, and geographic location of the person's electorate. In the second model, we include these variables, but also the party that the person voted for at the 2025 election.

Looking at Model 1 to start with, which does not include any controls for party-voting, we can see that those with the least positive views towards electoral legitimacy are younger Australians, those that have not completed Year 12, those that speak a language other than English at home, and those that live outside of an inner metropolitan electorate. Individuals with these characteristics may be particularly at risk of doubting the legitimacy of the new Parliament, with the associated risks of declines in social cohesion.

Controlling for these demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic characteristics, those that voted for the Coalition and those that voted for a party other than the three largest parties also had less positive views towards the legitimacy of the election. This is not surprising, as there is a large body of literature that suggests that those whose preferred party does poorly in an election explain that as a consequence of electoral fraud or incompetence (Cantú and Garcia-Ponce 2015).

Table 4 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with perception of electoral legitimacy, May 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Voted for Coalition			-3.780	***
Voted for Greens			-0.751	*
Voted for other party			-3.589	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	-2.119	***	-2.295	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.633		-0.485	
Aged 45 to 54 years	1.360	***	1.759	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	2.465	***	2.919	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	3.643	***	3.966	***
Aged 75 years plus	2.838	***	3.674	***
Female	-0.330		-0.657	**
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-1.103	**	-0.752	
Has a degree	0.114		-0.104	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.231		-0.486	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.765		-0.975	**
Speaks a language other than English at home	-1.526	***	-1.601	***
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	-1.356	***	-1.262	***
Lives in a regional electorate	-1.624	***	-1.325	***
Lives in a rural electorate	-2.062	***	-1.694	***
Constant	44.587	***	46.344	***
Sample size	2,623		2,488	

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. For model 2, the base case is further classified as having voted for Labor.

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 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, May 2025

Coalition and Labor Party voters didn't disagree on all the legitimacy measures. Indeed, there were five of the activities that these two voter groups did not have significantly different values, at the 5% level of significance. This leaves, however, eight activities where perceptions across the two main voting groups differ. Specifically, compared to Labor voters, Coalition voters were much less likely to say that candidates and parties had a fair access to the national media, and that journalists provided fair coverage of elections. Again, this shows that perceptions of the media are key aspects of the electoral legitimacy story. Coalition voters, on the other hand, are much more likely to say that candidates misused personal data to spread campaign messages, or that foreign groups influenced electoral results.

5.2 Representativeness of Parliament

Some theories of democracy argue that a legislature should mirror the demographic and social composition of the population it represents—an idea known as *descriptive representation* (Haider-Markel 2007). In a geographic, single-member electorate system like Australia's, this ideal may be partially met, as electoral boundaries are drawn to reflect population distribution. Consequently, Parliament by design includes representatives from a wide range of regions and communities.

However, elections are designed to do more than produce a representative sample of the general public. In practice, majoritarian electoral systems tend to underrepresent minority and marginalised groups—particularly when those groups do not align with dominant political

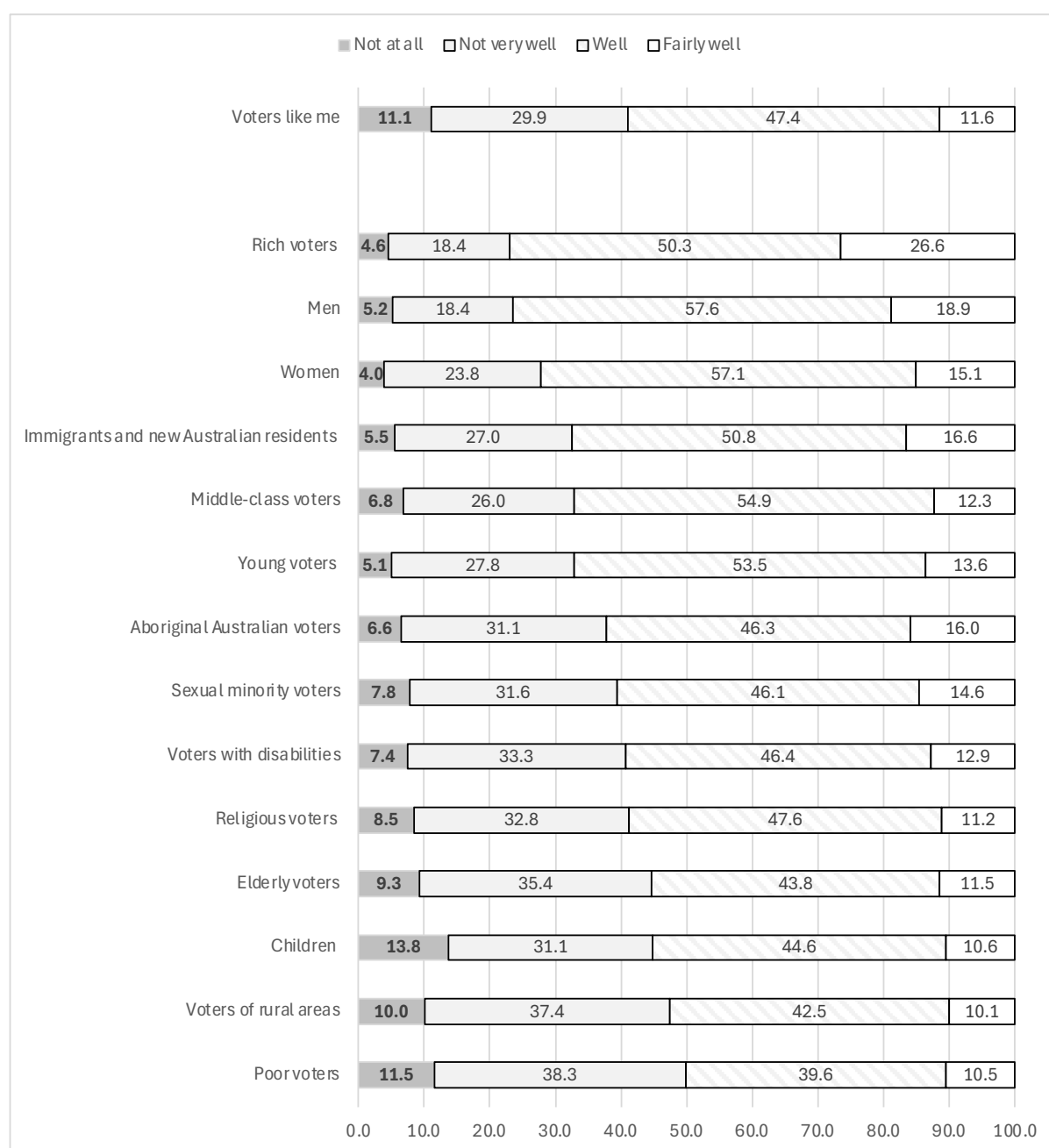
interests or cultural norms (Reynolds 2006). This results in a legislature that is often demographically and experientially distinct from the population as a whole.

A legislature that is too different from the population is likely to lack legitimacy. More importantly, whatever the intrinsic characteristics of members, what matters most is whether they are perceived to be able to adequately take into account the needs and aspirations of the electorate as a whole. With this in mind, we asked the following question in Wave 4 of the 2025 EMSS: *‘Considering the electoral outcomes of this federal election, how well do you think that the interests of the following groups will be represented by the newly elected members of parliament and the winning party.’* The first group is ‘voters like me’, followed by fourteen other groups in society.

The first line of the graph shows that Australians in general think that the new Parliament is able to represent people like them reasonably well. Around three-in-five (59.0 per cent) think it can do so well or fairly well, with only 11.1 per cent thinking that it is not able to do so at all.

The remainder of the graph looks at perceptions of the ability of the Parliament to represent specific named groups. It is somewhat problematic that the group that Australians think the Parliament is best able to represent is rich voters, with 77.0 per cent thinking that Parliament can do so well or fairly well. Reinforcing this perception of economic non-representation, only 50.2 per cent of Australians think that the Parliament can represent poor voters well or fairly well, the lowest amongst all the groups asked about.

Figure 9 Views on how well the 48th Parliament is able to represent particular groups



Source: Wave 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (May 2025)

Not all Australians have the same perception that the new Parliament is able to represent people like them. We explore this by replicating the same style of regression analysis, this time with the dependent variable having a value of 1 if the person thinks the Parliament represents them well or fairly well, and 0 if not. Because this is a binary variable, we estimate the parameters of the model using the probit model. Coefficients are positive if that characteristic is associated with a higher probability of thinking the Parliament represents them well, and negative if it is associated with a lower probability.

Perhaps surprisingly given the age distribution of Parliamentarians, younger Australians (aged 18 to 24 years) are more likely to think that the Parliament represents them than the rest of

the age distribution. It is an encouraging finding that the Parliament does not lack this aspect of legitimacy amongst the young.

What is less encouraging is that those with relatively low levels of education are far less likely to think that the Parliament is able to represent people like them. Leaving aside the more complex modelling, 62.2 per cent of Australians with a degree and 60.5 per cent of Australians that have Completed Year 12 but don't have a degree think that the new Parliament will be able to represent people like them well or fairly well. This falls to only 50.8 per cent of those that have not completed Year 12. There are real risks of a democratic system that is perceived to look down upon those with low levels of education.

The second model includes who the person voted for at the election as an additional explanatory variable. Not surprisingly, those that voted for Labor (the base case) were shown to have the highest perception of electoral representativeness. Leaving aside the modelling, 77.0 per cent of Labor voters thought the Parliament could represent them well or fairly well. Greens voters have a lower probability (67.3 per cent), but the biggest differences are for those that voted for the Coalition (45.8 per cent) or those that voted for another party (37.0 per cent).

Table 5 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with perception of electoral representativeness, May 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Voted for Coalition			-0.867	***
Voted for Greens			-0.318	***
Voted for other party			-1.076	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.286	***	0.235	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.101		0.049	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.014		0.025	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.090		-0.012	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.061		0.157	
Aged 75 years plus	0.032		0.230	**
Female	-0.038		-0.081	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.215	***	-0.246	***
Has a degree	0.016		0.020	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.158	*	0.100	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.111		0.052	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.063		-0.012	
Lives in an outer metropolitan electorate	-0.061		-0.072	
Lives in a regional electorate	-0.054		0.058	
Lives in a rural electorate	-0.196	**	-0.168	*
Constant	0.285	***	0.791	***
Sample size	3,386		3,194	

Notes: Probit 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. For model 2, the base case is further classified as having voted for Labor.

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 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, May 2025

There is also a strong correlation between perceptions of electoral integrity and representativeness. This is clear if we include the index in the regression model as an additional explanatory variable. However, there are a few of the election conduct variables that have a particularly strong correlation. Specifically, 66.3 per cent of those that thought that votes were counted fairly often or very often thought the Parliament represented them well/fairly well, compared to 39.1 per cent of those that did not think votes were counted fairly. There was an even larger difference between those that thought voters were offered a genuine choice at the ballot box (69.0 per cent thought Parliament represents them) and those that did not think there was a genuine choice (37.1 per cent).

6 Summary and concluding comments

These findings from Wave 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series point to a notable uptick in public confidence in Australia's democratic system following the election. Satisfaction with democracy reached its highest level since 2022, and perceptions of the country's direction also improved, particularly among younger Australians.

The patterns suggest a “democracy bounce” effect, where a combination of the orderly conduct of the election and/or the decisive outcome may have contributed to renewed optimism about the political system.

Importantly, trust in political institutions has also strengthened, particularly for the federal government, Parliament, and political parties. This increase has not extended to media or religious institutions, indicating that the post-election rise in institutional trust is narrowly focused on the political domain. While these trends are encouraging signs of democratic resilience, they should be interpreted with caution. The longer-term test will be whether satisfaction and trust can be sustained as the new Parliament begins governing.

Australians' perceptions of the 2025 federal election and the newly elected Parliament also reveal a broadly positive assessment of democratic integrity. Using data from Wave 4 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, this paper explores how Australians view the conduct of the election, the legitimacy of its outcome, and the representativeness of the incoming 48th Parliament. While most Australians felt that the election was fairly administered—with strong majorities endorsing the fairness of vote counting and election officials—there were notable concerns around media fairness and data misuse by candidates, reflecting a broader unease about the information environment in which elections are contested.

Perceptions of electoral legitimacy varied significantly by age, education, geographic location, and, most sharply, by who they voted for at the election. Older Australians, inner-city dwellers, and those with higher levels of education were more likely to view the election positively. Coalition and minor party voters, by contrast, expressed significantly lower levels of trust in the electoral process and its outcomes. This pattern extends to views on representativeness: while a majority of Australians felt that Parliament would represent “people like them,” belief in representativeness was unevenly distributed. Those without Year 12 qualifications and voters for parties other than Labor were much less likely to feel politically seen or heard.

Furthermore, the demographic group that voters were most likely to see as being represented well by the new Parliament is ‘rich voters.’ Together, these results point to an underlying tension in Australian democracy. On the one hand, there is widespread confidence in the mechanics of electoral administration; on the other, substantial segments of the population—particularly those on the losing side of the election—question whether the system delivers fair outcomes or genuine representation.

While the 2025 election did not provoke a crisis of legitimacy, these perceptions highlight the need for ongoing engagement, transparency, and institutional responsiveness, particularly for those at the political and socioeconomic margins. Addressing concerns about media fairness, data use, and representational equity will be crucial to sustaining trust in future electoral processes.

References

- Anderson, C.J. and Tverdova, Y.V., 2003. 'Corruption, political allegiances, and attitudes toward government in contemporary democracies.' *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), pp.91-109.
- Biddle, N., Fischer, A., Angus, S., Ercan, S., Grömping, and Gray, M., (2025) 'Democratic Resilience: Moving from Theoretical Frameworks to a Practical Measurement Agenda' *Australian Resilient Democracy Research and Data Network Discussion Paper 5*, Australian National University.
- Birch, S., 2010. 'Perceptions of electoral fairness and voter turnout'. *Comparative political studies*, 43(12), pp.1601-1622.
- Breyer, B. (2015). Social Trust Scale (ESS). Zusammenstellung sozialwissenschaftlicher Items und Skalen (ZIS). <https://doi.org/10.6102/zis235>
- Cantú, F. and García-Ponce, O., 2015. Partisan losers' effects: Perceptions of electoral integrity in Mexico. *Electoral Studies*, 39, pp.1-14.
- Little, A.T. and Meng, A., 2024. Measuring democratic backsliding. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 57(2), pp.149-161.
- Haider-Markel, D.P., 2007. 'Representation and backlash: The positive and negative influence of descriptive representation'. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 32(1), pp.107-133.
- Magalhães, P.C., 2014. 'Government effectiveness and support for democracy.' *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1), pp.77-97.
- Norris, P., 2014. *Why electoral integrity matters*. Cambridge University Press.
- Reynolds, A., 2006. Electoral systems and the protection and participation of minorities.
- Rothstein, B., 2011. *The quality of government: Corruption, social trust, and inequality in international perspective*. University of Chicago Press.
- Skocpol, T., 2024. 'Rising Threats to US Democracy: Roots and Responses'. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, pp.1-14.

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. 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. The fourth wave of data collection commenced on the 5th of May, immediately after the 2025 Federal Election. Between then and the 13th of May, a total of 3,720 surveys were completed.

After the first wave of data collection for the EMSS, each subsequent wave has been a combination of a new, refreshed sample, and a longitudinal component. Of respondents to Wave 1, 2,380 also completed the October 2024 survey, a retention rate of 65.7 per cent (relative to Wave 1). For the final wave of data collection, 2,361 respondents had completed at least one of the previous waves, whereas 1,359 were completing their first wave of data collection.

Across all four waves of data collection, we have a total of 14,379 observations. We only have one wave of data for 3,884 respondents in our total sample of 7,319 (53.1 per cent), whereas there are 1,234 respondents (16.9 per cent) that completed two waves, 692 (9.5 per cent) that completed three, and 1,509 (20.6 per cent) that completed all four waves of data collection.

Survey weights were used in the analysis, using the iterative proportional fitting or raking method, implemented in STATA.³ 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://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-national-press-club-0>
- ² <https://medium.com/@akif.iips/understanding-random-effect-and-fixed-effect-in-statistical-analysis-db4983cdf8b1>
- ³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2018/01/26/how-different-weighting-methods-work/>