Australian National University

Views on political parties and the role of government

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Abstract

This paper explores how Australians view political parties and the role of government in the lead-up to the 2025 Federal Election, drawing on nationally representative survey data collected in October 2024 and January/February 2025 as part of the ANU 2925 Election Monitoring Survey Series.

The analysis reveals a politically disengaged electorate with few signs of deep ideological commitment to major parties or their leaders. Across both survey waves, no party or leader achieved an average favourability score above the midpoint on a 0–10 scale. The Liberal Party was rated marginally more favourably than Labor, but Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was more popular than Opposition Leader Peter Dutton. Support for the Greens and Nationals was lower and more polarised, with the former facing high rates of strong disapproval and the latter marked by widespread indifference.

While affective polarisation in Australia remains relatively low compared to other democracies, it is not evenly distributed. Older Australians, Coalition supporters, and residents of outer metropolitan or provincial electorates display higher levels of polarisation, while younger Australians, women, and those with higher education are less polarised. Moreover, individuals with very positive or very negative assessments of the economy are significantly more polarised than those with more neutral economic views.

A central contribution of the paper is the link between optimism and pessimism and political sentiment. Australians who are more optimistic about the country's future and less pessimistic about the past are more favourable toward both major parties and less politically polarised. Optimism is associated not only with increased support for the governing Labor Party but, to a lesser extent, for the Coalition as well—suggesting that general system confidence shapes party evaluations across the spectrum.

The paper also examines attitudes toward taxation and public expenditure. Australians are increasingly reluctant to support new spending, even as very few believe they pay too little tax. Since 2009, support for additional government spending has declined across most policy areas, particularly the environment, arts, and unemployment benefits. While partisan differences in spending priorities persist, the electorate as a whole appears more cautious.

Overall, the findings suggest an electorate that is neither deeply polarised nor highly enthusiastic, but instead uncertain, ambivalent, and shaped by broader moods of optimism and pessimism. These sentiments, rather than clear ideological divides, may play an outsized role in shaping the outcome of the 2025 election

1 Introduction and overview

As January 2025 turned to February, Australian school students began a new school year, most of their parents had returned to work, and city traffic was returning to normal (i.e, busy!). The Australian Open Tennis tournament had just concluded, but the Australia vs India cricket series was a bit of a distant memory. While these are the normal patterns of a late Australian summer, 2025 was one of those years where the end of summer coincides with the ramping up of a Federal Election campaign. The exact date for the election was still not known, but everyone knew that it needed to be called by mid-May.

Some dated the start of the election campaign to the address given by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to the National Press Club on the 24th of January.[1] In the speech he outlined how in his view 'this year's election is not a matter of competing plans striving for the same outcome. It's not two roads that ultimately lead to the same destination. This election is a choice between two fundamentally different approaches and vastly different agendas. Two completely different visions for our nation, for our economy, for our people and our place in the world.'

The Opposition Leader Peter Dutton did not give as clear an election speech, at least not at the National Press Club. He did, however, give a speech on the 31st of January to the Menzies Research Centre,[2] a week after Albanese's. In his speech, Mr Dutton also tried to draw a contrast between the two parties, stating that 'Our country urgently needs a government which revives responsible economic management and restores common sense economic policy – in a way that only a Coalition government can do. And that's what a Dutton Coalition Government will do after the election.'

In the lead up to the calling of the election, what is sometimes called the *phoney war* part of the campaign, both parties were clearly trying to differentiate themselves.

Just after these two speeches, the Australian National University (ANU) in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) conducted the second wave of data collection for the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS). 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. This follows data collection in October 2024 (Wave 1) with 3,622 respondents.

Since that data collection, the government delivered an early (pre-election) budget. In his Budget Speech, the Treasurer Dr Jim Chalmers concluded that 'The plan at the core of this Budget is about more than putting the worst behind us. It's about seizing the best of what's ahead of us. To build a stronger economy – And a future we can all be proud of.'[3] In his reply speech two days later, Opposition Leader Peter Dutton concluded by arguing that 'Australians are worse off under the Albanese Government' asking for Australians to vote for him and his party at the forthcoming election as 'A better choice for you, your family, and our country.'

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 2025) 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 this paper, we bring together these two strands of analysis. We consider 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.

The first set of attitudes relate to views on political parties and leaders. In addition to looking at views towards the individual parties, we also consider a measure of *affective polarisation*, which according to Druckman and Levendusky (2019) in the US context is 'the tendency of people identifying as Republicans or Democrats to view opposing partisans negatively and copartisans positively.' In the Australian context, we measure the relative dislike that those who support the Labor party feel towards the Liberal party, and vice-versa. The second set of attitudes that we consider is a person's belief in specific roles of government and expenditure. We look at concerns about government debt, preferences for reduced taxes over increased expenditure, and views on specific areas of expenditure. We relate both sets of attitudes to optimism about the present relative to the past, and the future relative to now.

2 Views towards parties and leaders

2.1 Individual party and leader favourability

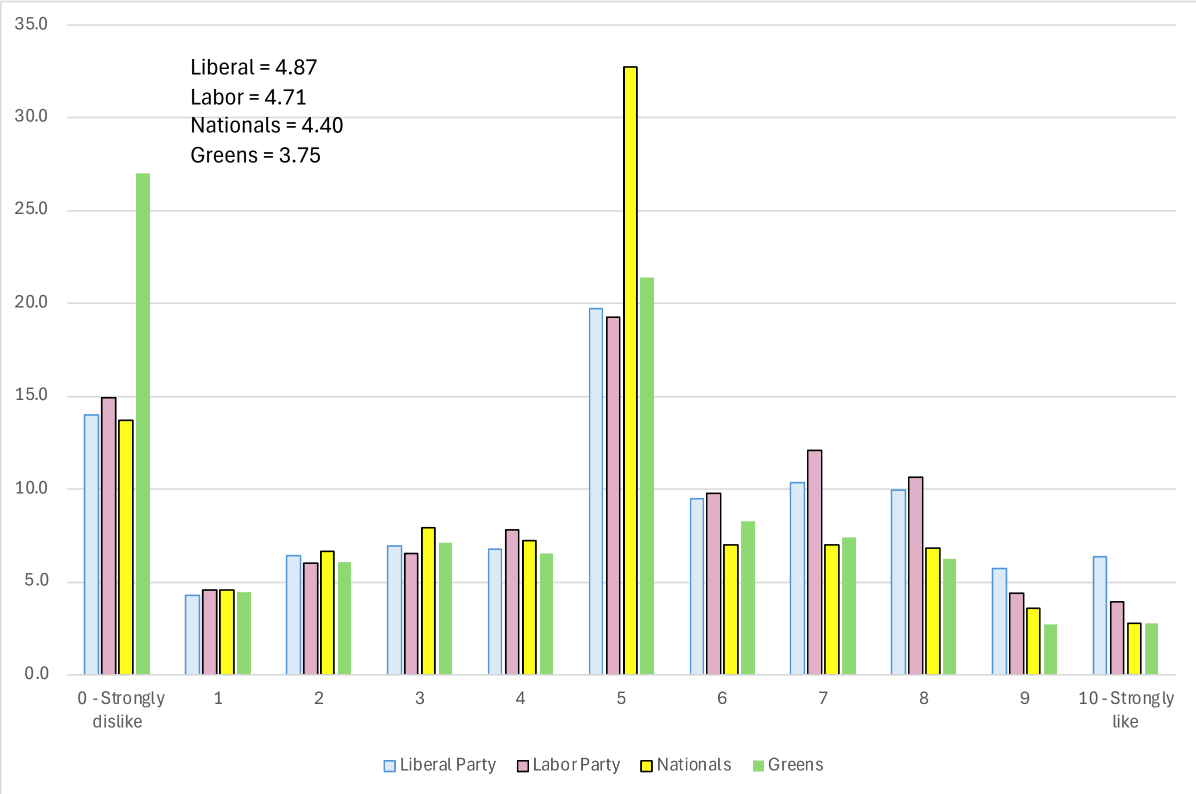
There are four main parties contesting the next Federal Election. The Liberal and National parties will again form a Coalition either in government or as the main opposition, with the Labor Party either staying in government or returning to be the main opposition. For a number of elections, the third largest party outside of these two groupings is the Greens party, which has at times been able to hold the balance of power in the Senate, and currently has four lower house Members of Parliament, including leader Adam Bandt.

In Wave 1 and 2 of the 2025EMS, we asked respondents: 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.' Figure 1 gives the distribution of responses, as well as the average value in the upper-left section of the figure.

In the lead-up to the 2025 Federal Election, of the four main political parties, Australians were most favourable towards the Liberal Party, with an average value of 4.87. Although the Labor Party has a slightly lower favourability (mean of 4.71), the difference is not quite statistically significant (p-value = 0.108). The two minor parties were viewed far less favourably than the two major parties, with a very high per cent of respondents having a negative view towards the Greens (27.0 per cent giving a value of 0) and a very high per cent of respondents somewhat indifferent towards the Nationals Party (32.8 per cent giving a value of 5).

The average values for the individual parties tended to be lower in January 2025 compared to October 2024. The decline was slightly larger in magnitude for the Labor party compared to the Liberal party, but across our longitudinal sample, these differences were not statistically significant.

Figure 1 Distribution of likeability of main political parties, January 2025



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

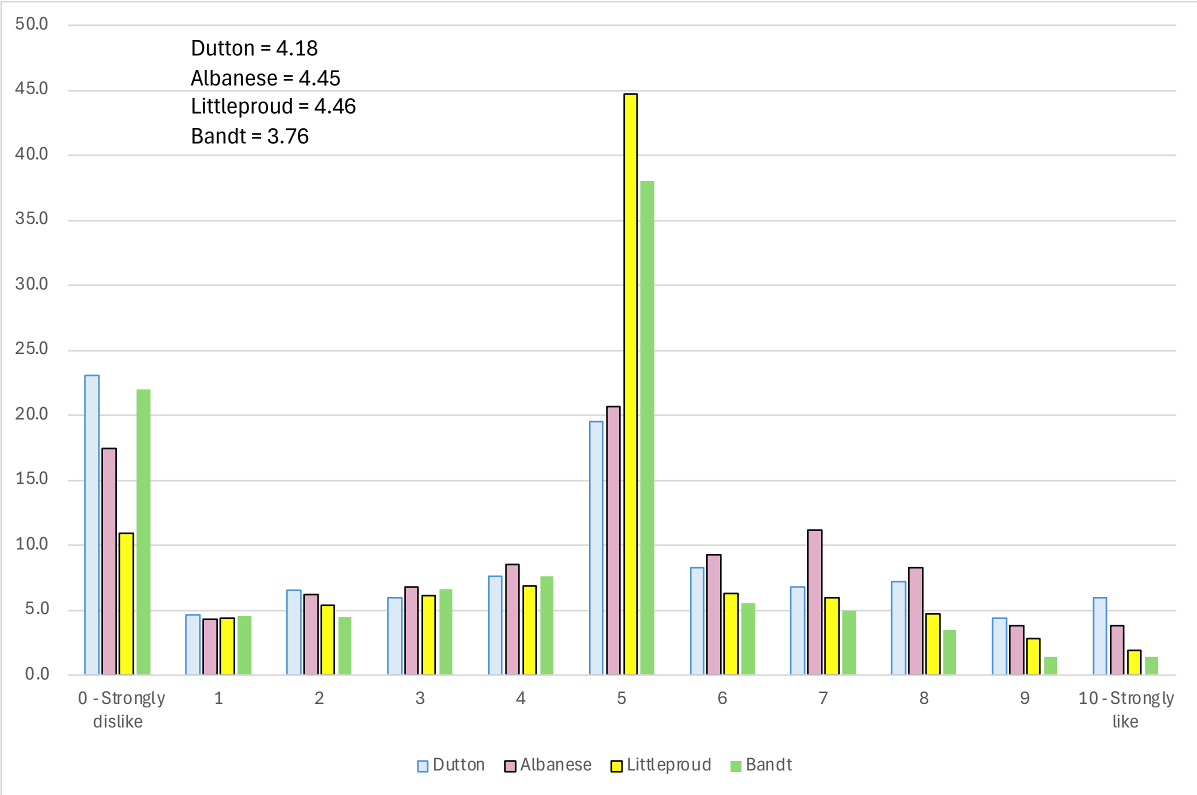
2.2 Views towards party leaders

Following the question on views towards the party, respondents were asked 'Again, using a scale from 0 to 10, how much do you like or dislike the following party leaders. If you don't know much about them, you should give them a rating of 5.' Even though there is the option of giving a value of 5 (Neutral), there was a very high non-response rate for the questions on David Littleproud, the Nationals leader (454 respondents with missing values) and Adam Bandt (403 respondents with missing values).

Focusing on those that did give a response, Figure 2 gives the distribution of values, as well as the mean value in the text box. Despite a lower favourability rating for the Labor Party compared to the Liberal Party (Figure 1), respondents rate Prime Minister Anthony Albanese significantly higher (4.45) than Opposition Leader Peter Dutton (4.18). Nationals Leader David Littleproud has a similar rating (4.46) to the Prime Minister, due in large part to many people giving a value of 5, whereas the Greens leader Adam Bandt has the lowest rating of all party leaders (3.76).

Again, there has been a decline between October 2024 and January 2025 in favourability ratings of the party leaders. The decline was slightly larger for the Opposition Leader

Figure 2 Distribution of likeability of party leaders, January 2025



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

2.3 Measures of polarisation

Australia does not have the same level of polarisation experienced in many other established democracies (Gidron et al. 2019), nor have the trends been in the same direction. Garzia et al. (2023) found that an 'intensifying trend is observable in a number of countries but it is, by no means, generalizable to all established democracies.' Indeed, Australia was the only country amongst 17 countries that had a statistically and linear negative slope when estimating 'affective polarization trends among party identifiers' with six countries having significant positive slopes (Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States).

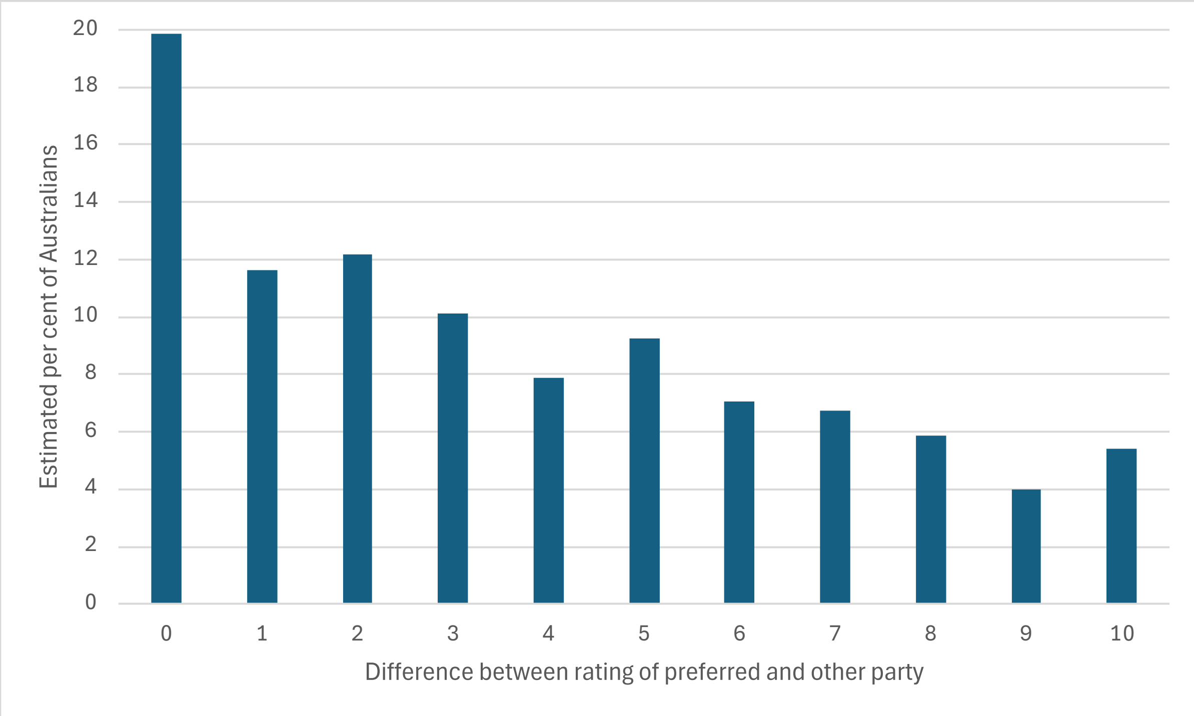
There are many ways of measuring affective polarisation, but a simple one in a country like Australia with two major parties is the difference in ratings between the preferred ('most likeable') party and the other major party. So, if someone had the same rating for Labor and Liberal, they would have a value of 0. If they rated Liberal 4 on the 0 to 10 scale and Labor 6, then their measure would be 2. A more polarised respondent might rate Labor as 2 and Liberal as 7, giving a polarisation measure of 5.

Figure 3 gives the distribution of values in Australia in January 2025. Slightly less than one-in-five Australia (19.9 per cent) give the same value (on a scale of 0 to 10) for both major parties. Slightly more than one-in-twenty (5.4 per cent) give the maximum value of 10, with one party rated as 0 and the other as 10.

The average value across all Australians is 3.81. This is slightly, but not significantly, higher than the average of 3.77 recorded in October 2024. Amongst those who prefer the

Liberal party, the average difference is 4.89. This is significantly higher than the average of 4.36 for those that prefer the Labor party.

Figure 5 Difference in reported likeability between Labor and Liberal (absolute value), January 2025



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

2.4 Relationship between optimism/pessimism and views towards political parties

In this final part of the section, we consider the extent to which the measures of political attitudes already presented are associated with the index of optimism/pessimism that we introduced in Biddle (2025). We analyse this primarily using a regression approach, where we estimate two separate models for each of our four dependent variables outlined below. The first two dependent variables are the ratings (on a scale of 0 to 10) of individual party likeability. The third dependent variable is the combined favourability towards both parties (sum of the likeability scales for both the Liberal and Labor parties, referred to as major party favourability) and the last dependent variable is the normalised affective polarisation measure, estimating by dividing by the major party favourability.[4]

The first model in our analysis includes basic demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables only. The second model includes these variables as controls, but also includes the optimism/pessimism index.[5]

Beginning with the background variables (Table 1a), we find similar results in terms of favourability towards the major parties to those from October 2024 when we analysed the first wave of the 2025EMSS. Specifically:

- Younger Australians were more favourable towards the Labor Party, but older Australians were much more favourable towards the Liberal Party,

- Females were much less favourable towards the Liberal Party, but there was no different in favourability by gender towards the Labor Party
- Those with higher levels of education (a degree) are more favourable towards the Labor Party and less favourable towards the Liberal Party. There are no differences between those with low levels of education and those with a middle value.
- Those who live outside a capital city are slightly less favourable towards the Labor Party, however there is no difference in favourability towards the Liberal Party.
- Those who speak a language other than English were more favourable towards the Liberal Party, but there is no difference in favourability towards the Labor Party.

We also find interesting differences in major party favourability and normalised affective polarisation. Specifically

- Younger and older Australians have a greater level of major party favourability. Younger Australians are less polarised, whereas older Australians are more polarised.
- Females have a lower level of major party favourability, but are also less polarised.
- Those with higher levels of education have slightly greater major party favourability.
- Those who speak a language other than English at home are slightly less polarised.

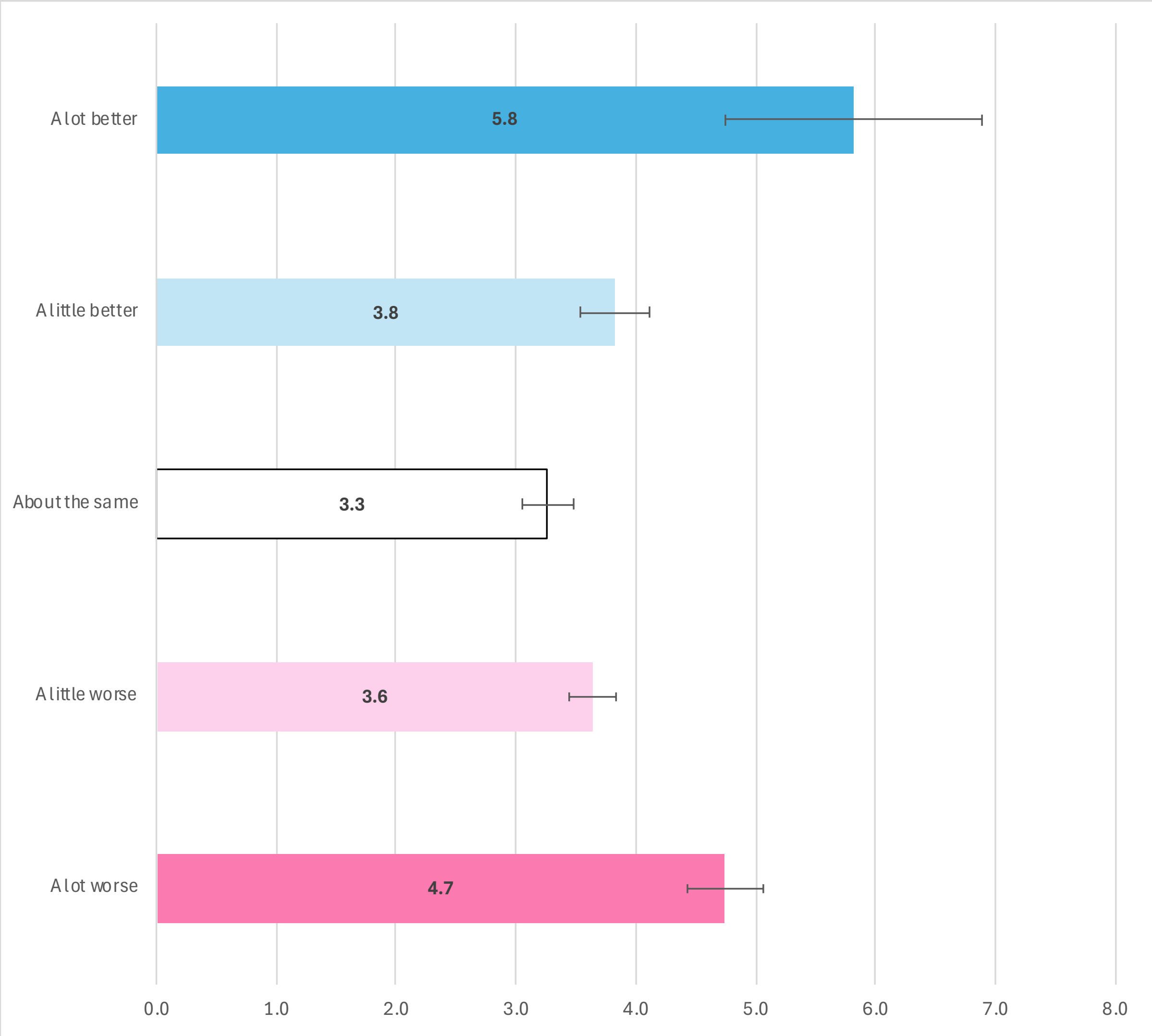
In the second set of models (Table 1b), our measure of optimism/pessimism is associated with all four dependent variables. However, as we might expect, the associations aren't always in the same direction, and also not of the same magnitude. The additive index is associated with a higher favourability towards the Liberal Party. This is in a different direction to what we might expect, given the Liberal Party is currently in Opposition. However, the p-value is only 0.034, and the coefficient of 0.032 suggests only a small increase in favourability from a one-unit change in the optimism/pessimism index.

The association with the Labor Party is also positive (as we would expect for the governing party) but is much larger and has a p-value of less than 0.01. Those who are more optimistic about the future and less pessimistic about the past are far more favourable towards the current Government.

Given the association with both parties is positive, it is not surprising that our major party favourability measure also has a positive association with optimism/pessimism. What is interesting though is that those who are more optimistic/less pessimistic are less polarised.

When we delve into the relationship with polarisation, we find an interesting non-linear relationship. We can see this in Figure 6, which focuses on the value of affective polarisation across someone's views on whether economic circumstances in Australia have improved/worsened over the last 12 months. We can see that those who have very positive views towards the economy are more polarised, as are those who have very negative views towards the economy. It is those that are more neutral that are least polarised.[6]

Figure 6 Individual-level polarisation by views on whether economic circumstances in Australia have improved/worsened over the last 12 months, January 2025



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January 2025)

Table 1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with favourability and affective polarisation, January 2025

Table 1a Model 1 – Demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables

Explanatory variables	Liberal		Labor		Major party		Polarisation	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.128		0.959	***	0.815	***	-0.073	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.066		0.341	*	0.266		-0.037	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.099		-0.029		0.070		0.059	**
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.315		-0.116		0.188		0.123	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.501	**	0.236		0.744	***	0.163	***
Aged 75 years plus	1.679	***	-0.696	**	0.974	***	0.186	***
Female	-0.348	***	0.009		-0.334	**	-0.053	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.193		0.180		-0.014		-0.033	
Has a degree	-0.280	**	0.559	***	0.266	*	-0.009	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.089		0.218		0.121		-0.023	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.077		0.316	*	0.398		-0.040	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.102		-0.266	**	-0.153		-0.002	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.388	**	-0.078		0.315		-0.071	***
Constant	4.840	***	4.434	***	9.282	***	0.449	***
Sample size	3,357		3,367		3,352		3,277	

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 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 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

**Table 1b	Model 2 – Additive optimism index**

Explanatory variables	Liberal		Labor		Major party		Polarisation	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Additive optimism index	0.032	**	0.218	***	0.251	***	-0.013	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.160		0.497	**	0.312		-0.048	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.075		0.027		-0.063		-0.029	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.132		-0.147		-0.019		0.069	**
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.247		-0.066		0.162		0.116	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.483	**	0.135		0.619	**	0.170	***
Aged 75 years plus	1.647	***	-0.792	***	0.832	***	0.200	***
Female	-0.380	***	0.163		-0.208		-0.064	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.270		0.402	*	0.133		-0.048	*
Has a degree	-0.239	*	0.364	***	0.114		0.001	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.030		0.006		-0.036		-0.016	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.006		0.137		0.131		-0.018	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.145		-0.274	**	-0.121		-0.003	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.286		0.017		0.298		-0.076	***
Constant/Cut-point 1	4.306	***	0.398		4.713	***	0.688	***
Sample size	3,002		3,009		2,998		2,926	

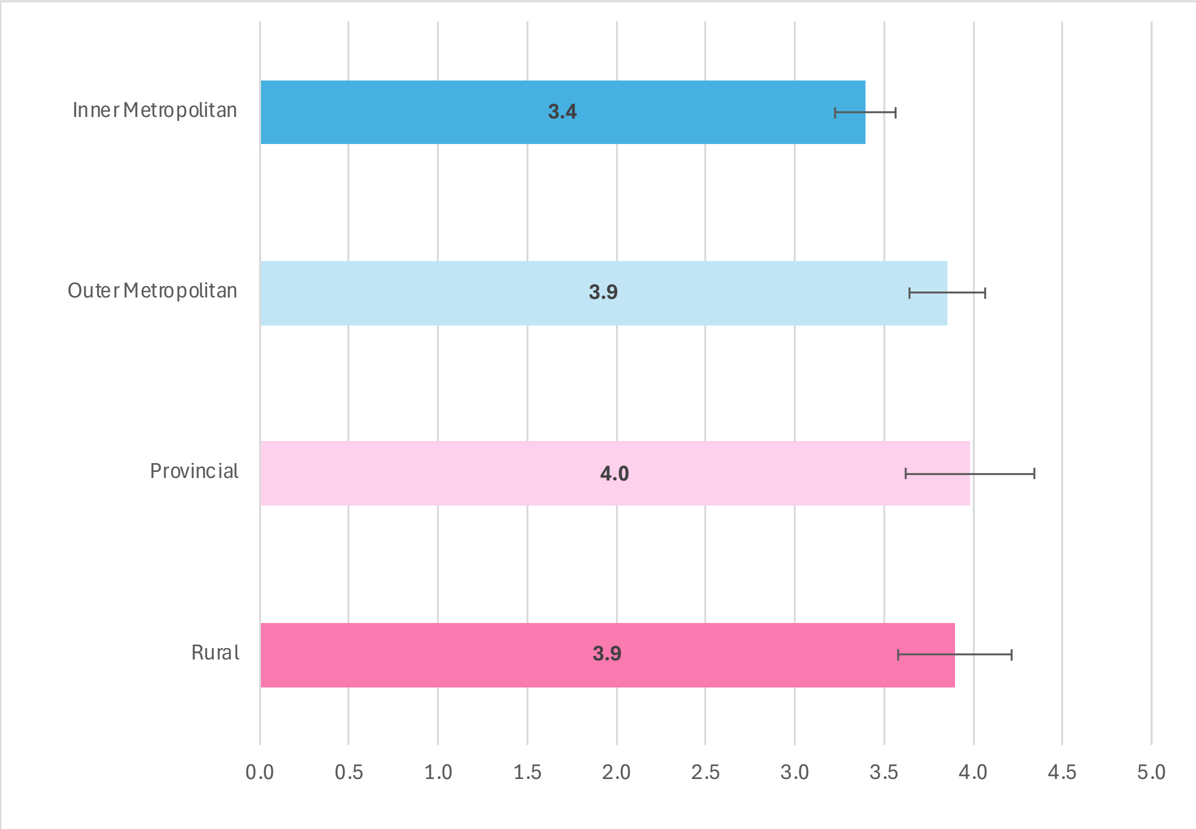
Notes:	Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in a capital city.

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 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

In Table 1, we did not find any major differences in affective polarisation by geography. However, the measure used is a reasonably crude, binary indicator of location. Wave 2 of the 2025EMSS also includes information on a person's electorate, and when we classify electorates into a more structural geography more variation emerges. There is an emerging consensus that the forthcoming election will be decided in the outer suburbs and per-urban fringes of Australia's large capital cities. However, Figure 7 shows that in these regions (Outer Metropolitan and Provincial according the Australian Electoral Commission's Demographic classification), individual-level affective polarisation is much higher than in inner metropolitan areas.

Figure 7 Level of individual polarisation by electorate type, January 2025



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January 2025)

3 Support for government expenditure and taxation

In the June 2009, January 2023, and January 2024 ANUpolls, respondents were asked a range of questions about the economy, and the government's role in taxing and spending. The first of these surveys took place during the Global Financial Crisis and we repeated many of the same questions in the January 2023 ANUpoll and then again in January 2024 to compare attitudes during the current economic period. We repeated many of these questions again in Wave 2 of the 2025EMSS.

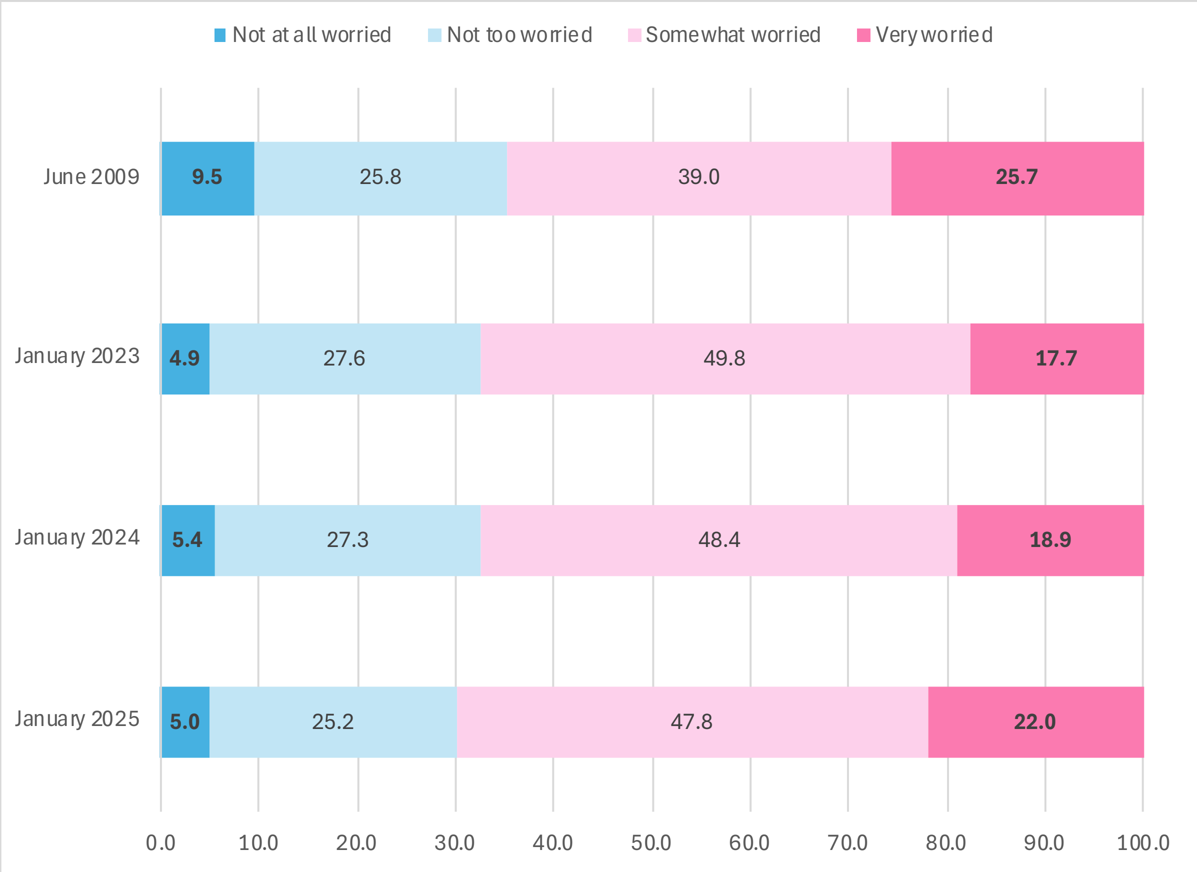
The June 2009 and recent January surveys included the question 'Which comes closer to your view? The government should spend money to stimulate the national economy, even if it means increasing the budget deficit OR the government should not spend money to stimulate the national economy and should focus instead on reducing the budget deficit…?’ In June 2009, 56.0 per cent of Australians thought that the government should spend more money. There was a slight, but not statistically significant increase in support for spending more money between 2009 and 2023 (up to 59.2 per cent), with no change again between 2023 and 2024 (58.2 per cent of Australians advocated spending more money in January 2024). By our 2025 survey, this had declined to 50.2 per cent.

Respondents were also asked ‘If the government had a choice between reducing taxes or spending more on social services, which do you think it should do?’ In June 2008 very few Australians were ambivalent in their response to this question with only 3.2 per cent saying it depends. By contrast, this had increased to about a quarter of Australians in January 2023 and 2024 (23.9 and 24.8 per cent respectively) and almost one-third in January 2025 (31.7 per cent).

In 2009, there were somewhat more Australians saying that they are strongly or mildly in favour of spending more on social services with 1.6 times as many people saying that (59.4 per cent) than saying governments should reduce taxes (37.4 per cent). By January 2024, there were roughly equal numbers of people in support of more spending on social services (36.4 per cent) compared to reducing taxes (38.8 per cent). However, this represented a short-term shift in priority towards reducing taxes, as in January 2023 it was 42.8 per cent in support for increasing social services compared to 33.4 per cent for reducing taxes or a ratio of 1.3:1. This shift had continued into our January 2025 data, with 40.6 per cent favouring a reduction in taxes compared to 27.8 per cent favouring an increase in services

When asked specifically about whether they were worried about government debt, views have become less extreme between June 2009 and January 2023, with not much change over the subsequent 12 and 24 months (Figure 8). The specific question we asked in all four surveys was ‘How worried are you that increasing government debt will harm the financial future of future generations?’ There were fewer Australians in January 2023/2024/2025 than in June 2009 who were either very worried (17.7, 18.9 and 22.0 per cent in 2023 to 2025 respectively compared to 25.7 per cent in 2009) or not at all worried (4.9, 5.4 and 5.0 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent).

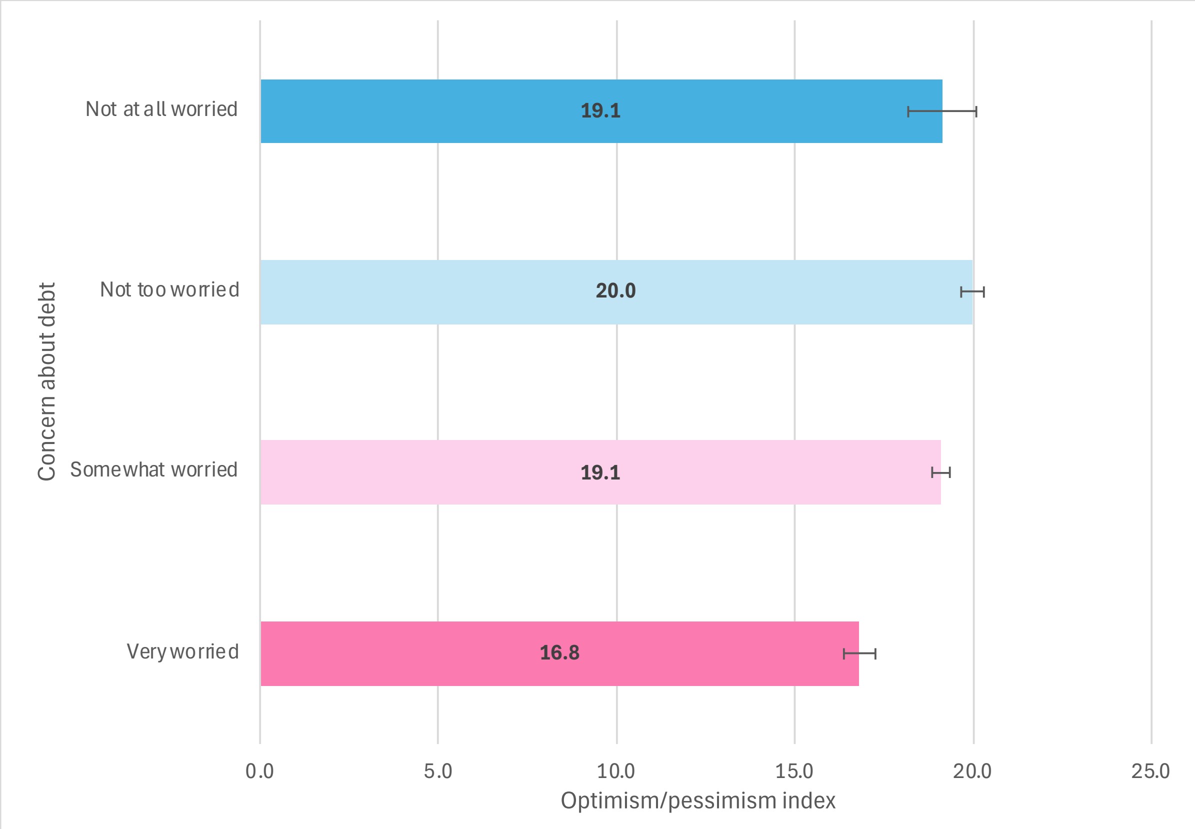
Figure 8 **Long-term change in worry about government debt – June 2009 to January 2025**



Source: ANUpoll: (June 2009 to January 2024) and Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024 and January 2025

One of the potential drivers of these concerns about government debt are more general levels of optimism and pessimism. In Figure 9, we present our optimism/pessimism index by responses to the question on worry about government debt in January 2025. Keeping in mind that higher values on the optimism/pessimism index are associated with more positive views regarding the present relative to the past and the future relative to the present, we can see that leaving aside the small proportion of people who are not at all worried about debt, as people become more worried about debt they are predicted to be less optimistic and more pessimistic.

Figure 9 **Optimism/pessimism by concerns about debt, January 2025**



Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (January 2025)

On balance, a slightly higher per cent of Australians were either somewhat or very worried about debt now than a decade and a half years ago (69.8 per cent in January 2025 compared to 64.7 per cent in June 2009). This highlights that even compared to the height of the Global Financial Crisis when the issue of debt and deficits was a frequent topic of media and political conversation, Australians are at least as worried about government debt now as they were previously. There are, however, policy areas that have gained additional support over the last decade-and-a-half in terms of additional government spending (alongside others where support has waned).

In the March 2008 ANUpoll, respondents were asked 'Would you like to see more, the same or less government spending on the following areas…?' There five potential response options: Spend much more; Spend more; Spend the same as now; Spend less; and Spend much less.

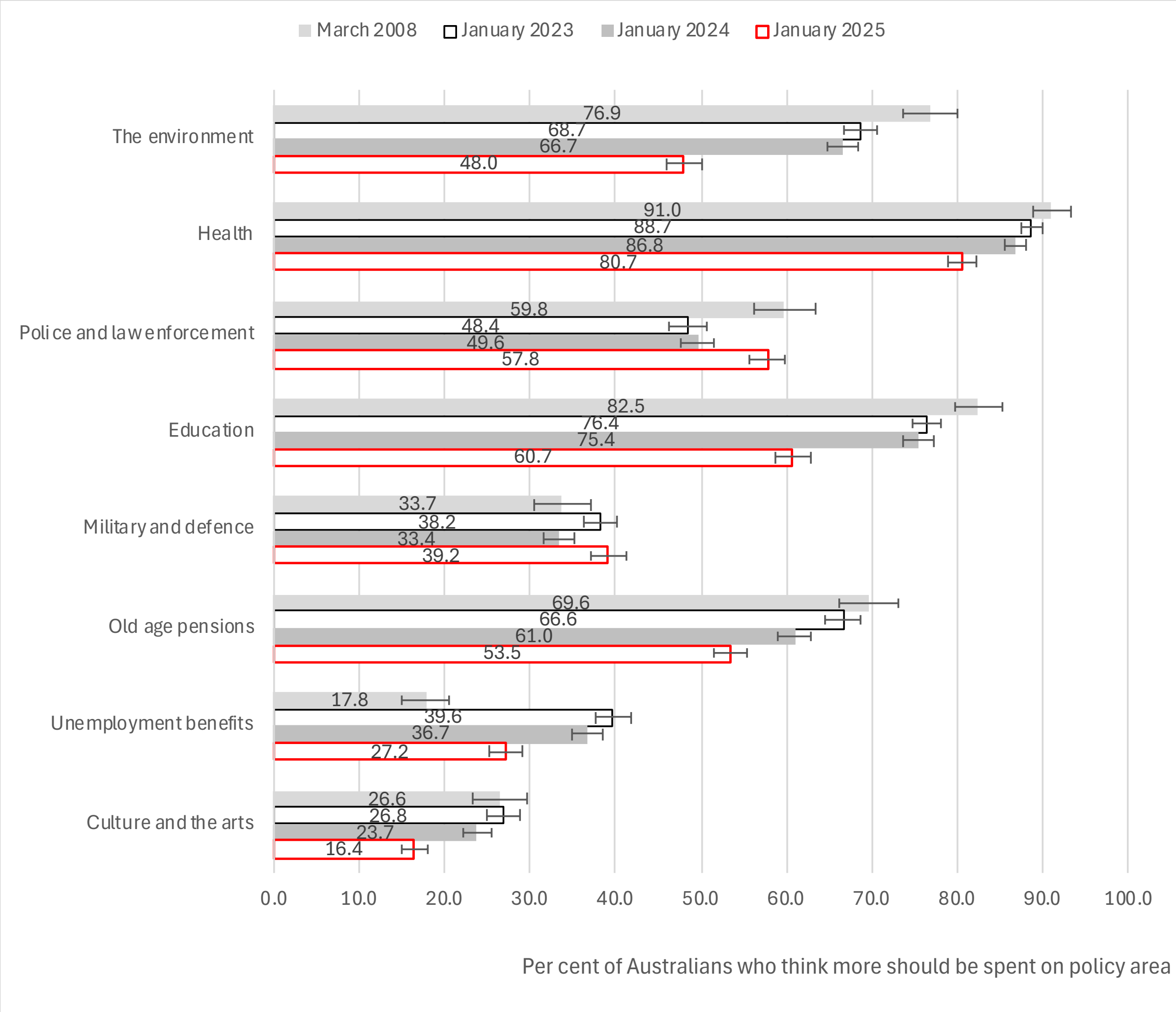
Figure 10 shows that of the eight areas considered, there were three where there was a significant and substantial decline in the per cent of Australians who think more should be spent between March 2008 and January 2023 – police and law enforcement (from 59.8 per cent in March 2008 to 48.4 per cent in January 2023); the environment (76.9 to 68.7 per cent); and education (82.5 to 76.4 per cent). There was a slight increase in the per cent of Australians who thought more should be spent on military and defence over fifteen years up until 2023 – from 33.7 per cent in March 2008 to 38.2 per cent in January 2023. However, far and away the largest increase was for unemployment benefits. In March 2008, when the unemployment rate was 4.1 per cent seasonally adjusted,[7] only 17.8 per cent of Australians thought that more should be spent on unemployment benefits. By January 2023 when unemployment was at an even lower 3.7 per cent, more than twice as many people (39.6 per cent) thought that more should be spent on unemployment benefits.

There have been some further shifts in the last 12-24 months. Support for additional spending on military and defence fluctuated, declining from 38.2 to 33.4 per cent between 2023 and 2024, but increasing again to 39.2 per cent in January 2025. There is also strong evidence for a decline in spending on old age pensions (from 66.6 to 61.0 per cent between 2023 and 2024 and then even further to 53.5 per cent in January 2025) and a decline in support for spending on unemployment benefits (from 39.6 to 36.7 per cent and then again to 27.2 per cent) and culture and the arts (from 26.8 to 23.7 per cent and further to 16.4 per cent).

Support for spending on health and education declined over the last 12 months, after being stable between January 2023 and 2024. However, the largest decline was for spending on the environment. After a decline between 2008 and 2023/24, there was an even bigger decline from January 2024 to only 48.0 per cent supporting additional spending on the environment.

Taken together, there was a significant decline in the average number of areas that people supported additional money spent on from 4.54/8 in January 2023 to 4.33/8 in January 2024, with a further decline to 3.83/8 in January 2025.

Figure 10 **Per cent of Australians who think more should be spent on particular policy areas – March 2008 to January 2025.**



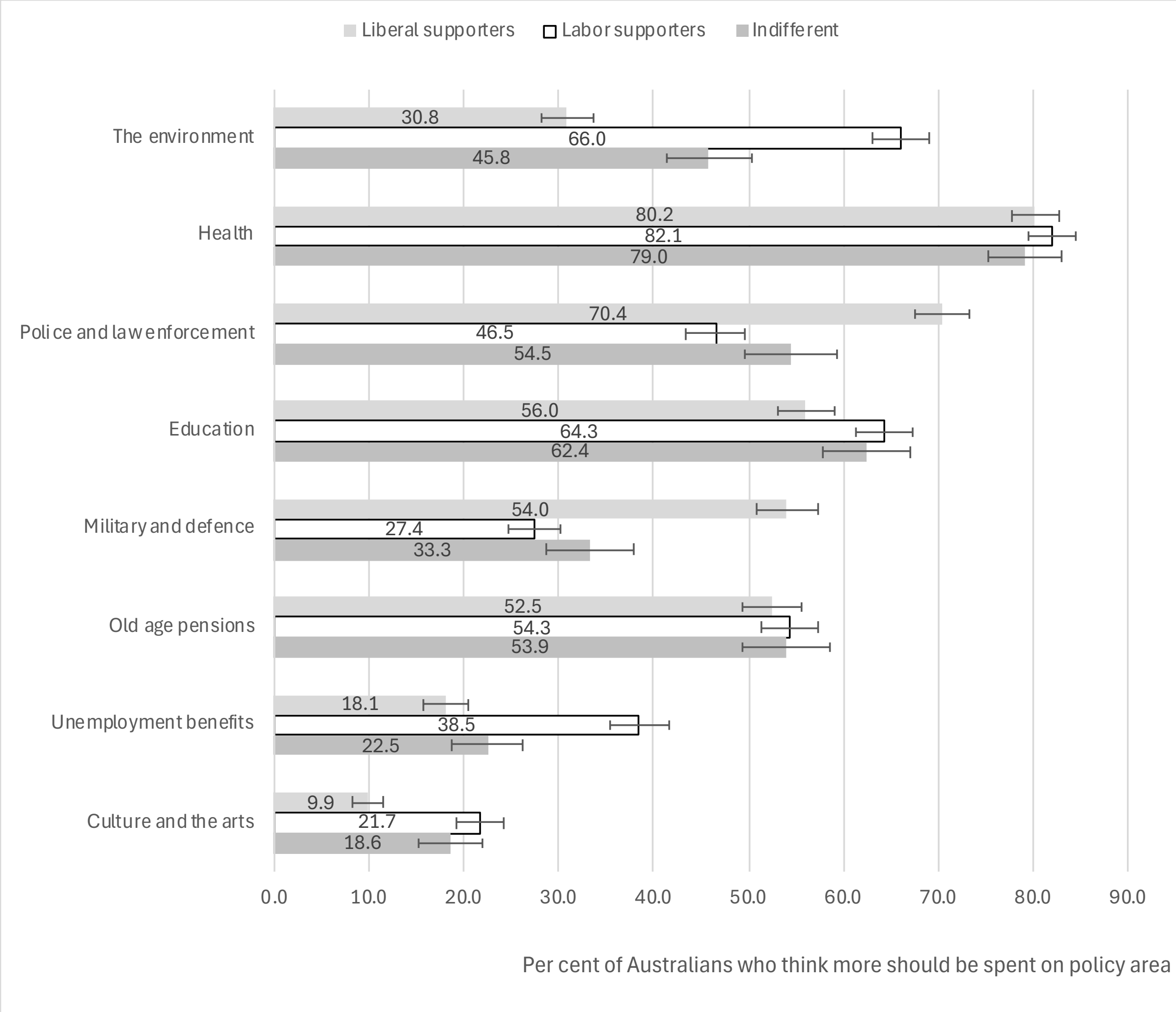
Note: The "whiskers" on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: (March 2008 to January 2024) and Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024 and January 2025

There are large differences in support for additional expenditure depending on a person's party support. Specifically, in Figure 11 we give the per cent of Australians that think there should be additional expenditure on the particular policy areas for those that are Liberal Party supporters (39.5 per cent of Australians that give a higher favourability rating towards the Liberals), Labor Party supporters (40.7 per cent) and those that are indifferent between the two parties (19.9 per cent that give the same rating.

Some of these differences are not surprising. Labor supporters are more in favour of increased spending overall (4.01/8 compared to 3.72/8 for Liberal Party supporters) as well as specifically for the environment, education, unemployment benefits, and culture and the arts. Liberal Party supporters on the other hand are in favour of increased spending on policy and law enforcement, as well as military and defence. There is more bipartisan support for an increased expenditure on health, as well as old age pensions.

Figure 11 Per cent of Australians who think more should be spent on particular policy areas – By party support.



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

Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024 and January 2025

Controlling for party support, we find that our optimism/pessimism is associated with views on whether in general more should be spent on the breadth of policy areas. Specifically, our dependent variable (in Table 2) is the number of policy areas that the person supports additional expenditure for. We control for demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables (by themselves first in Table 1) as well as whether or not the person supports the Liberal Party or is indifferent (the base case is those that support the Labor Party).[8]

After confirming that Liberal Party supporters and those that are indifferent are less likely to support additional expenditure, we can see that those who are more optimistic/less pessimistic are also less likely to support additional expenditure. Other variables that are significant are age (younger and older Australians support additional expenditure), sex (females support additional expenditure) and language spoken at home (non-English speakers support additional expenditure).

Table 2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with support for additional expenditure, January 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Liberal party supporter			-0.442	***
Neither Liberal or Labor Party supporter			-0.327	***
Optimism/pessimism index			-0.023	**
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.478	***	0.499	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.209		-0.166	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.308	**	0.314	**
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.579	***	0.565	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.733	***	0.746	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.894	***	1.031	***
Female	0.358	***	0.324	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.009		-0.052	
Has a degree	-0.098		-0.135	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.047		-0.021	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.200		-0.266	*
Lives outside of a capital city	0.066		0.058	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.242	*	0.365	**
Constant	3.321	***	3.987	***
Sample size	3,228		2,885	

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 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 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

Although the index of optimism/pessimism is broadly predictive of less support for additional expenditure, results presented in Table 3 suggest that this associated in two main areas of expenditure. Specifically, when we control for party favourability, as well as a range of demographic and geographic characteristics, we can see in Table 3 that those who are more optimistic or less pessimistic are less supportive of additional expenditure on health and the old age pension in particular.

Table 3 **Regression model estimates of the factors associated with support for additional expenditure – By expenditure type, January 2025**

Table 3a

Explanatory variables	The environment		Health		Police and law enforcement		Education	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Liberal party supporter	-0.908	***	-0.185	**	0.480	***	-0.196	***
Neither Liberal or Labor Party supporter	-0.555	***	-0.151	*	0.225	***	-0.037	
Optimism/pessimism index	0.003		-0.030	***	-0.008		-0.002	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.312	***	0.256	*	-0.335	***	0.313	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.039		-0.012		-0.234	**	-0.100	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.095		0.205	**	0.174	*	0.031	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.043		0.582	***	0.338	***	0.055	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.044		0.569	***	0.552	***	0.091	
Aged 75 years plus	0.179		0.753	***	0.652	***	0.295	***
Female	0.371	***	0.227	***	0.095	*	0.103	*
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.202	**	-0.004		0.113		-0.170	**
Has a degree	0.191	***	0.043		-0.241	***	0.122	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.129		-0.142		-0.074		0.024	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.153		-0.123		-0.045		-0.215	**
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.060		0.106		0.023		0.042	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.010		0.160		0.094		0.240	***
Constant	0.099		1.115	***	-0.016		0.220	
Sample size	2,963		2,975		2,960		2,974	

Notes: Binary probit 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 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

Table 3b

Explanatory variables	Military and defence		Old age pensions		Unemployment benefits		Culture and the arts	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Liberal party supporter	0.561	***	-0.188	***	-0.689	***	-0.381	***
Neither Liberal or Labor Party supporter	0.179	**	0.001		-0.481	***	-0.085	
Optimism/pessimism index	-0.009		-0.020	***	-0.006		0.008	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.162		-0.052		0.319	***	0.484	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.053		-0.125		-0.121		0.048	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.166	*	0.186	**	0.130		-0.065	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.324	***	0.402	***	0.134		-0.161	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.446	***	0.606	***	0.160		-0.323	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.594	***	0.557	***	0.224	*	-0.261	*
Female	-0.143	**	0.180	***	0.160	***	0.034	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.153	*	0.189	*	0.014		-0.297	**
Has a degree	-0.171	***	-0.253	***	-0.017		0.135	*
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.098		0.085		-0.049		-0.077	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.202	*	0.053		-0.073		-0.005	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.080		0.106		-0.034		-0.105	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.114		-0.015		0.229	**	0.210	**
Constant	-0.502	***	0.240		-0.361	**	-0.981	***
Sample size	2,957		2,959		2,955		2,961	

Notes: Binary probit 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 *

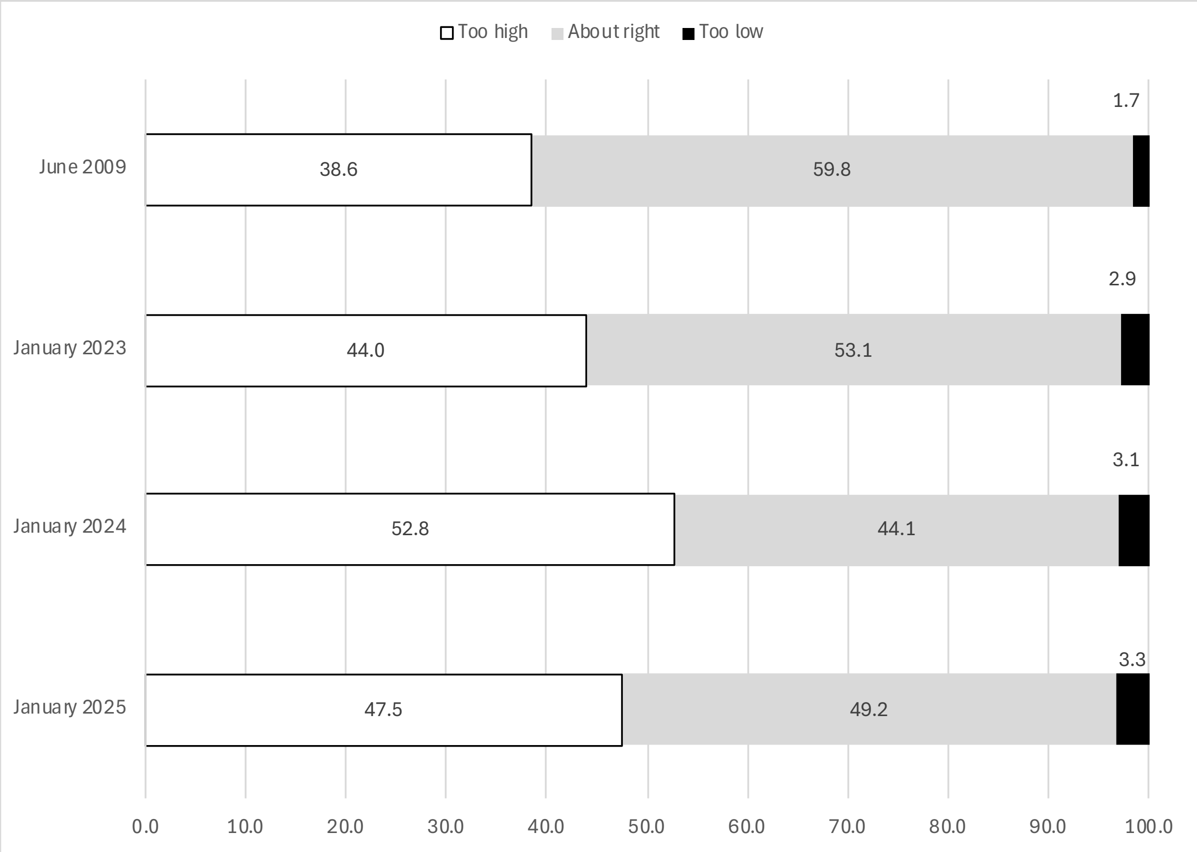
Source: Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, January 2025

One of the challenges of managing the implicit demand for additional government expenditure represented by Figure 10 and Figure 11 is that the public is generally reluctant to pay the additional taxes that would be required to cover the expenditure. In June 2009, as well as January 2023 and 2024 respondents were asked ‘Do you consider the amount of income tax you have to pay this year as too high, about right, or too low?’

The per cent of respondents that think the amount of taxes they pay is too low is very small – only 1.7 per cent in 2009, 2.9 per cent in 2023, 3.1 per cent in 2024 and 3.3 per cent in 2025. The interesting difference, therefore, is between those who think that the amount they pay is about right, compared to those who think that they pay too much. In March 2009, there were more Australians that thought what they paid was about right (59.8 per cent) compared to those who thought it was too much (38.6 per cent). By 2023, the gap had closed a bit, but there was still slightly more who thought it was about right compared to too much (53.1 and 44.0 per cent respectively). In 2024, however, this relativity has almost completely reversed, with 52.8 per cent of Australians thinking the taxes they pay is too high compared to 44.1 per cent that think it is about right.

It should be kept in mind that between the January 2024 and 2025 surveys, the Labor Government made substantial changes to the Stage 3 tax cuts with much large cuts for middle income Australians than had previously been legislated.[9] It is perhaps not surprising then that there was a slight decline (to 47.5 per cent) in the per cent of Australians that think their individual tax burden is too high, with a return to more Australians (49.2 per cent) now thinking that their individual tax burden is about right.

Figure 12 Long-term change in views about individual tax burden – June 2009 to January 2025



Source: ANUpoll: (June 2009 to January 2024) and Wave 2 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (October 2024 and January 2025

4 Concluding comments

As Australia heads toward the 2025 Federal Election, the electorate is marked by a combination of subdued enthusiasm for the major political parties, rising pessimism about the national direction, and a shifting sense of what government should do and how it should be funded.

Across two waves of nationally representative data, we find that no major political party or leader commands strong favourability from the electorate, with average ratings for all four main parties below the midpoint on a 0–10 scale, and dropping. While the Liberal Party marginally leads in average favourability, Labor's leader, Anthony Albanese, is rated higher than his Coalition counterpart, Peter Dutton. The Greens and Nationals (and their leaders) trail significantly, reflecting either polarised views (in the case of the Greens) or indifference (in the case of the Nationals).

Although average levels of affective polarisation (liking one party much more than the other) in Australia remain moderate by international standards, we observe clear patterns: Older Australians and those who support the Liberal Party exhibit higher levels of affective polarisation, while younger Australians, females and those with higher education tend to be less polarised. Furthermore, while overall polarisation levels remain moderate, we find significantly higher affective polarisation in outer metropolitan and provincial electorates—regions likely to decide the next election.

One of the key findings of the results presented in this paper is the important and consistent role of optimism and pessimism in shaping political attitudes. Australians who are more optimistic about the country's future and less pessimistic about its past tend to be more favourable toward both major parties and less polarised overall. Interestingly, this optimism is associated with greater favourability toward the incumbent Labor Party, but also, albeit to a lesser extent, toward the Opposition Liberal Party—suggesting that optimism may reflect broader system confidence rather than partisanship alone. In addition, those with very positive or very negative views about the economy are more polarised than those with more moderate economic outlooks, suggesting that political intensity may be highest at the extremes of perceived economic performance

Views on the role of government also reveal important trends. Support for government expenditure to stimulate the economy has declined in recent years, and preferences have shifted toward tax reduction rather than expanded social services. Meanwhile, support for increased government spending across policy areas has declined overall, especially in areas like the environment and unemployment benefits.

Yet these views remain sharply divided by party support, with Labor voters more supportive of spending in areas such as education, welfare, and the arts, while Coalition supporters are more likely to prioritise spending on defence and law enforcement.

Australians appear increasingly reluctant to support new public spending, even as support for tax increases remains low—pointing to a difficult fiscal and political environment for governments seeking to expand services or address emerging policy challenges

Together, these findings suggest that Australians remain ambivalent about both political leadership and the role of government. Across views on parties, government, and policy, a recurring pattern emerges: optimism and pessimism are shaping how Australians perceive not just their future, but the legitimacy and purpose of their political institutions. Economic outlook, party alignment, and generational differences all shape how voters engage with core political questions. As the 2025 election approaches, the electorate appears neither strongly mobilised nor deeply polarised, but instead cautiously disengaged, conditionally supportive, and uncertain about what lies ahead.

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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).

Survey weights were used in the analysis, using the iterative proportional fitting or raking method, implemented in STATA.[10] 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.

Endnotes

[1] https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2025-01-24-address-national-press-club

[2] https://peterdutton.com.au/leader-of-the-opposition-transcript-economic-address-to-the-menzies-research-centre-sydney/

[3] https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/speeches/2025-26-budget-speech-parliament-house-canberra

[4] This normalisation is based on an improved goodness of fit.

[5] The index ranges from a value of 9 for the most pessimistic views through to 33 for the most optimistic. Specifically, we combine 7 measures ordered from most pessimistic to most optimistic. For the five measures that are measured on a five-point scale, values range from 1 to 5, whereas for the two measures that are measured on a three-point scale, values range from 2 to 4. The index has a (weighted) mean of 18.9 and a standard deviation of 4.6. The modal value is 21 (10.1 per cent of people with a value of 3 for all the questions), however the bulk of Australians (61.7 per cent) have a value to the left of that mid-point, compared to a much smaller share (28.3 per cent) with a value to the right of the mid-point.

[6] We find a similar result when we include a quadratic index value, using affective polarisation as the dependent variable. Those who are most polarised are those who are very pessimistic and those that are very optimistic.

[7] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release

[8] Coefficient estimates are based on a linear regression model. Results are similar if we estimate using a Poisson Regression.

[9] https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/07/stage-3-tax-cuts-beyond-the-paycheck-a-long-term-look

[10] https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2018/01/26/how-different-weighting-methods-work/