

ANU-SRC Poll: Changing views of governance: Results from the ANUpoll, 2008 and 2014

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About the survey

The ANU Poll is conducted for The Australian National University (ANU) by the Social Research Centre, an ANU Enterprise business. The survey is a national random sample of the adult population aged 18 years and over conducted by telephone. In this survey, 1,388 people were interviewed between 23 June and 9 July 2014, with a response rate of 63 per cent. The results have been weighted to represent the national population. The survey's margin of error is ± 2.5 per cent.

Vice-Chancellor's message

How the public views various aspects of governance is a key indicator of the health of any democracy. How these views may have shifted over time can also provide crucial information about the trajectory of change, as well as pointing towards areas that may require political reform.

This ANUpoll on governance replicates the very first ANUpoll conducted in 2008. This period was a tumultuous one for Australia covering, among other things, the global financial crisis. How these events have affected ordinary Australians' views of governance is therefore essential for understanding their long-term consequences for the political system.

The general conclusion is that governance has fared well over the period. There is increased public confidence in our major institutions, and a notable finding is that younger people differ little from their older counterparts in their overall confidence.

The key indicators of democratic health, satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy, show a decline from previous periods, but remain high by international standards. And while opinions about the future are more pessimistic than they were in 2008, younger people display a remarkably optimistic view of future Australian society.

These survey findings show how the public's views of our political system have changed. They also provide some insights, through the attitudes of the younger respondents, into how these views may shape our politics in future years.

ANUpoll was designed to inform public and policy debate as well as to assist in scholarly research. It builds on The Australian National University's long tradition of social survey research, which began in the 1960s. Today, it fulfils the University's mission of addressing topics of national importance.

I hope the release of this poll's findings contributes to a greater understanding of the nation's attitudes towards the changing views of governance.

Professor Ian Young AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

Confidence in institutions

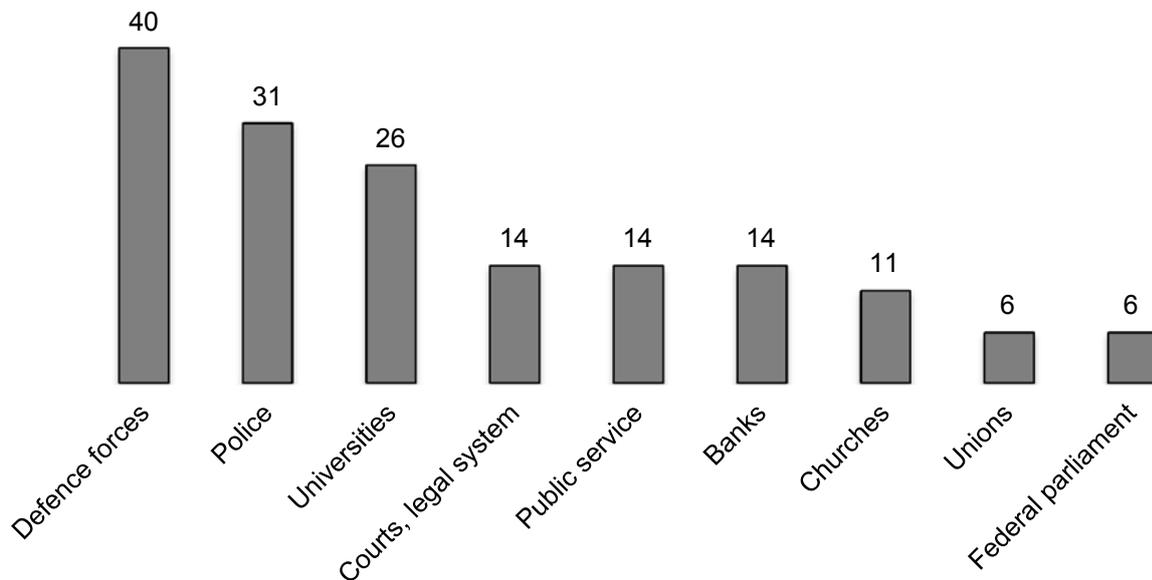
Key points

- There is strong public confidence in the defence forces, the police and universities. Institutions associated with politics attract much less public support.
- Over the past two decades, overall confidence in Australia’s major institutions has increased, most notably for the police.
- Younger people have the same overall level of confidence compared to the rest of the population, but there are differences for specific institutions, most notably the police and banks.

Effective governance rests on strong and enduring public confidence in the major institutions of society. This ongoing public confidence provides the resilience that enables a society to deal with any crises or threats to democracy that may emerge.

The Australian public has traditionally exhibited high levels of confidence in major institutions. When asked about their level of confidence in nine institutions, the ANUpoll found that four out of every 10 respondents expressed “a great deal” of confidence in the defence forces and almost one in three “a great deal” confidence in the police.

At the other end of the scale, less confidence emerged among the survey respondents for the federal parliament and trade unions. Just six per cent had “a great deal” of confidence in the parliament and trade unions. The churches and banks, in the wake of the recent negative publicity surrounding their activities, also do not attract widespread confidence.



“I am now going to read out a number of organisations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?” Estimates for per cent who say “great deal” and exclude don’t know responses for comparability with results from previous years.

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

Judged over two decades, public confidence in most of the major institutions has increased. Of the eight institutions that were included in a 2001 survey, public confidence has increased for seven of them; the exception is the federal parliament where the level of confidence has remained unchanged. Indeed, for five of the institutions the increase since 2001 has been 10 percentage points or more. The police, for example, have attracted notably more confidence, as have universities.

	2001	2005	2008	2014	(Change 2001-14)
Australian defence forces	26	25	32	40	(+14)
Universities	11	-	24	26	(+15)
Police	13	24	22	31	(+18)
Churches, religious institutions	-	7	13	11	
Courts, legal system	5	11	12	14	(+9)
Federal parliament	5	5	10	6	(+1)
Unions	3	3	7	6	(+3)
Public service	3	3	7	14	(+11)
Banks, financial institutions	2	-	6	14	(+12)

Sources Australian Election Study, 2001; Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2005; ANUpolls on Governance, 2008 and 2014.

While overall public confidence in the major institutions of society has generally increased, those that have benefitted most from this increase are non-political institutions. Institutions which have direct or indirect political associations tend to show much smaller increases in confidence.

A frequent observation is that young people exhibit less confidence in institutions compared to their older counterparts, reflecting their alleged cynicism. In contrast, the results from the ANUpoll show that, overall, younger people have the same level of confidence in institutions compared to the rest of the population. Among those aged 18 to 34, the overall per cent saying that they have a “great deal” of confidence across all nine institutions is 19 per cent, almost the same as the other two age groups.

	Per cent say “great deal” confidence		
	18-34	35-44	55+
Australian defence forces	35*	42	42
Universities	29*	27	24
Police	25**	32	37
Churches, religious institutions	10	12	11
Courts, legal system	19*	13	13
Federal parliament	7	4	6
Unions	7	6	6
Public service	19**	13	11
Banks, financial institutions	20**	12	10
(Average)	(19)	(18)	(18)

* difference between 18-34 and 55+ groups statistically significant at $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014

While the overall level of confidence is the same across the three age groups, there are age differences for particular institutions. The largest differences are on the police and banks, with younger people showing less confidence in the police but more confidence in the banks compared to the 55 or older age group. Younger people are also more likely to show confidence in the public service and the courts and are less likely to be confident about the defence forces.

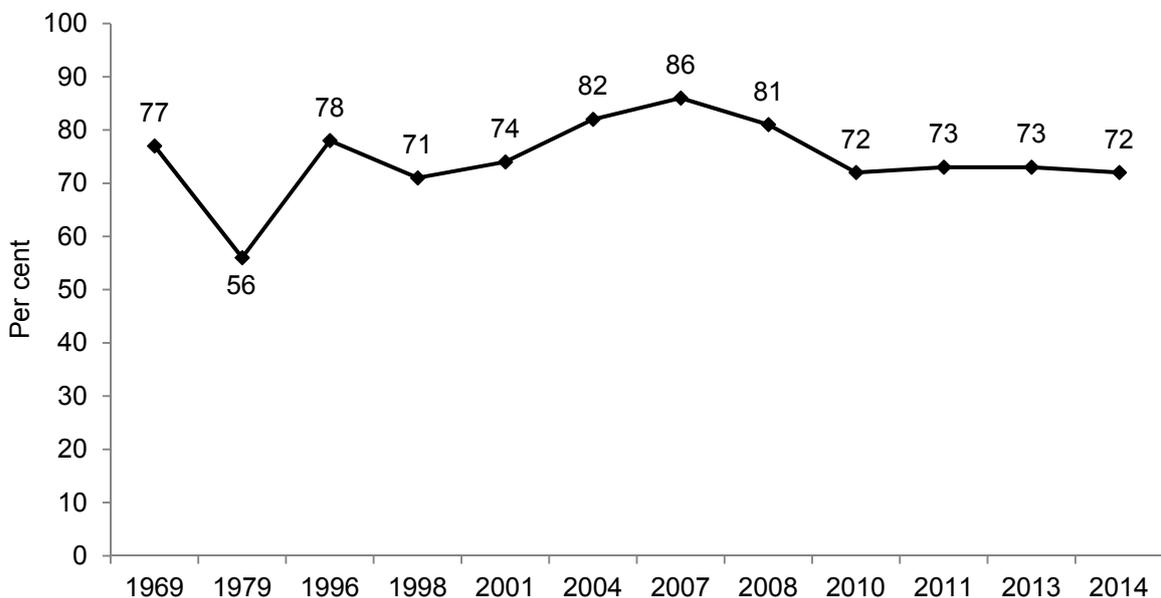
Attitudes to democracy

Key points

- Satisfaction with democracy remains at a low level in comparison to the 2000s, although it is still high by international standards.
- The public's feelings that they can influence politics is also at a low level, particularly with regard to feeling that whoever is in power can make a difference.
- Younger people have a stronger sense that who people vote for makes a difference, when compared to the rest of the population.

Popular attitudes to democracy, such as satisfaction with the democratic system and feelings of efficacy and trust, underpin the efficient operation of government. Australia has traditionally exhibited stronger democratic attitudes than are found across most of the other established democracies. This is a consequence of Australia's long-term political stability, relative economic prosperity, and the absence of any major political crises or physical threats.

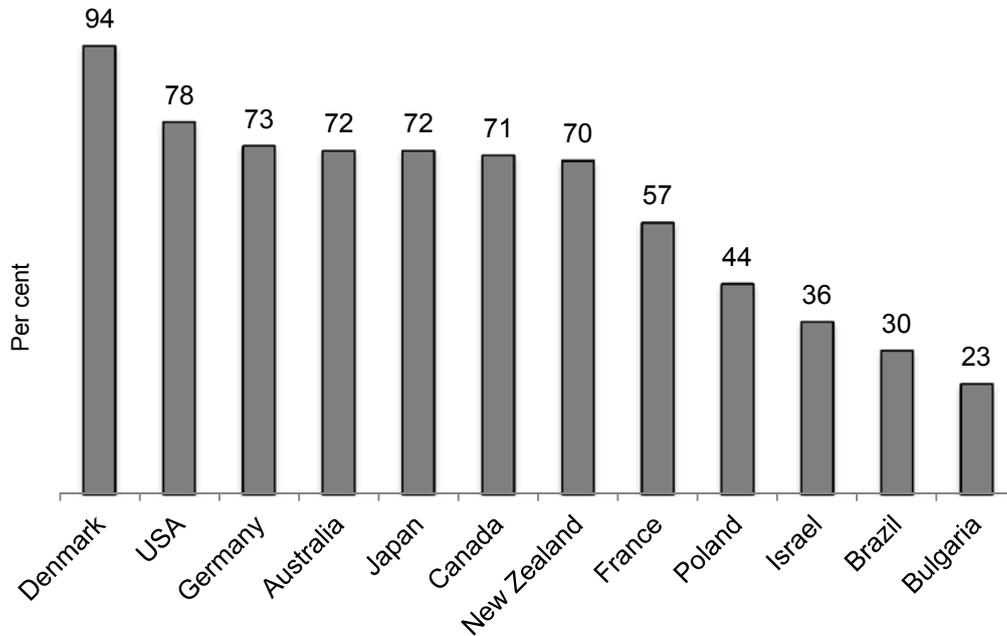
Since the late 1960s, the Australian public's level of satisfaction with democracy has experienced three distinct stages. First, following the 1975 constitutional crisis, satisfaction with democracy declined substantially, recording just 56 per cent in 1979. Second, from the mid-1990s onwards, when the question began to be regularly asked in surveys, satisfaction gradually increased, peaking at 86 per cent in 2007 with the election of the Rudd Labor government, following 11 years of Liberal government.



“On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?” Estimates are for “very satisfied” and “fairly satisfied” and exclude don’t know responses for comparability with results from previous years.

Sources Australian National Political Attitudes Surveys, 1969, 1979; Australian Election Study, 1987-2013; ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

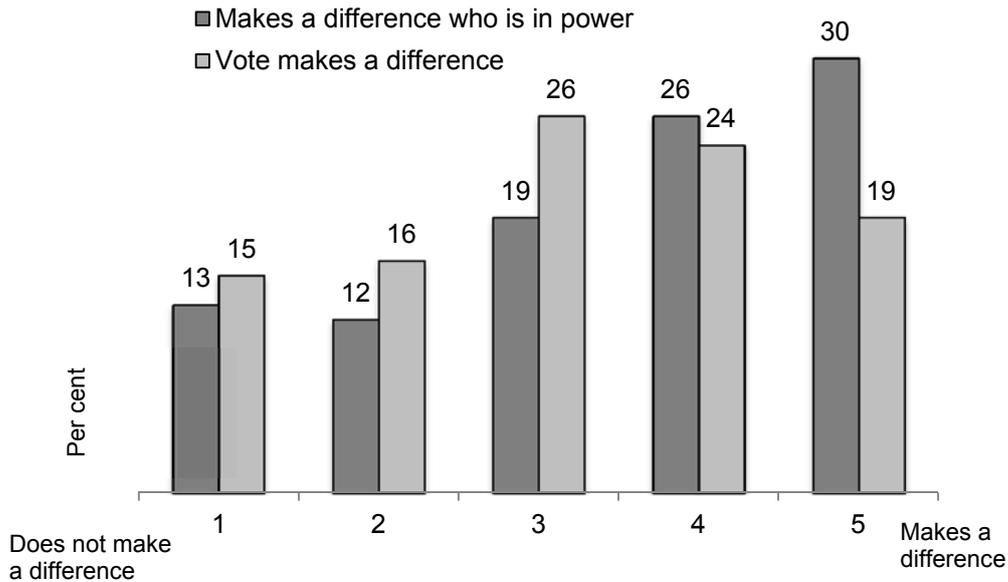
The period since 2007 represents the third stage, with satisfaction declining to 72 per cent and remaining at that level through to the present time. The period up to the 2013 election represents popular dissatisfaction with the performance of the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, and dissatisfaction with the experience of minority Labor government between the 2010 and 2013 elections. Satisfaction would have been expected to increase with the election of the new Liberal government in 2013, but it has remained at the pre-2013 level largely due to dissatisfaction with the performance of the Abbott Liberal Government.



Sources Comparative Study of Electoral Systems module 2; ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

Despite these lower levels of satisfaction with the democracy since 2010, Australia remains on par with many comparable democracies, such as Germany, Japan and Canada. The level of satisfaction with democracy in Australia is exceeded significantly only by the United States and Denmark.

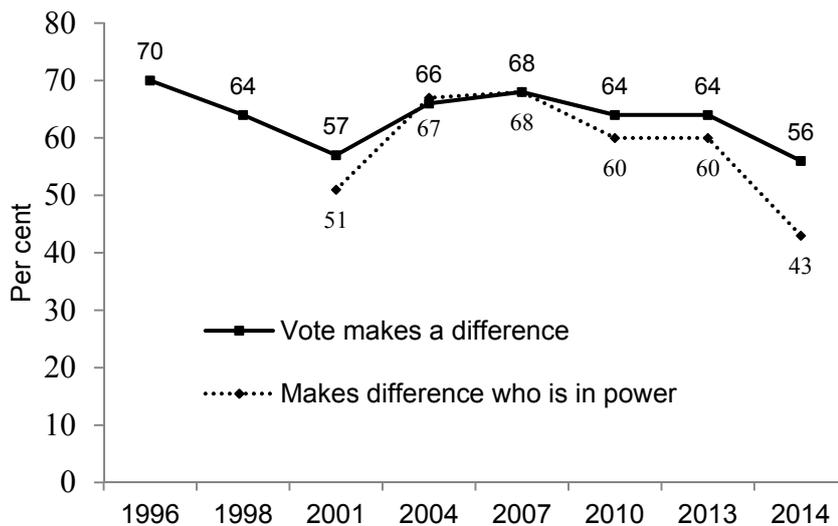
An important element of democratic attitudes is the sense that a citizen can have an influence on political outcomes through their vote, and that whoever holds office can make a difference to citizens' lives—what is often referred to as political efficacy. Australians have a strong sense of efficacy, and in the current survey more than half of those interviewed, 56 per cent, believed that whoever occupies political office could make a difference. Rather fewer, 43 per cent, thought that who someone votes would make a difference.



“Do you think it makes a difference who is in power? Please give me a number from 1 through to 5 where a low number means it does not make a difference and a high number means it does make a difference?” “Do you think the people we vote for make any difference to what happens? Again, please give me a number from 1 through to 5 where a low number means the people we vote for do not make a difference and a high number means the people we vote for do make a difference.”

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

The trends from the late 1990s suggest that public feelings of political efficacy are currently at their lowest levels since the questions were first asked. In 1996, 70 per cent of those interviewed believed that their vote made a difference, declining to 57 per cent in 2001. After a recovery between 2004 and 2013, the current figure, at 56 per cent, is just below the 2001 estimate. The current proportion who believe that it makes a difference who is in power, at 43 per cent, is at an all-time low.



Sources Australian Election Study, 1996-2013; ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

General attitudes to democracy remain high in Australia by international standards. However, the longer-term trends suggest that public support has not recovered from the low points recorded after the 2010 election. Indeed, measures of efficacy—a key indicator of individual political empowerment—are at their lowest recorded levels.

Young people are not significantly different from the rest of the population on two of the three views of democracy. The exception is the proportion who say that who a person votes for makes a difference. In this case, younger people exhibit a significantly stronger sense of efficacy compared to both of the older age groups.

	18-34	35-44	55+
Per cent satisfied with democracy	69	74	74
Per cent say makes difference who is in power	58	53	54
Per cent say who vote for makes a difference	50**	41	39

* difference between 18-34 and 55+ groups statistically significant at $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014

Federal-state relations

Key points

- Public opinion on federal-state relations has shifted considerably over the past six years, and is now more favourable to the states than at any time since the late 1970s.
- A plurality of respondents believe that the federal government should provide the states with more money.
- Young people are more likely to favour the states rather than the federal government in terms of powers.

Relations between the Commonwealth Government and its state counterparts are always highly political, particularly with regard to the sensitive issue of funding. Each new government attempts to make a compact with the states, with varying degrees of success. The Hawke and Keating Governments, with their policy of 'co-operative federalism', represented one of the more successful periods of postwar federal-state relations. More recent governments have had varying levels of success in their relations with the states.

In line with changing government priorities, the public has also had differing views of federalism. In 1979, when the question was first asked in a survey, two-thirds of the respondents thought that the federal government had enough power and that the federal-state balance was appropriate. By 2008 there had been a substantial shift in opinion in favour of the federal government, and a plurality of respondents believed that the states should transfer powers to the federal government. However, in the current ANUpoll the balance of opinion has shifted yet again back towards the states, almost returning to the levels recorded in 1979.

	1979	2008	2014	(Change 1979-2014)
States should give more powers to federal government	17	40	24	(+7)
Federal government has enough power already	66	39	54	(-12)
Depends/No opinion	17	21	22	(+5)
Total	100	100	100	

“Do you think the state governments should give some powers to the federal government, or do you think the federal government has enough powers already?”

Sources **Australian National Political Attitudes Survey 1979, ANUpolls on Governance, 2008 and 2014.**

These are substantial changes in opinions occurring over a relatively short timespan. They undoubtedly reflect changes in state government party composition as well as the election of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007. In terms

of the distribution of resources between the state and federal governments, once again the results show that opinions in 2014 are closest to those recorded in 1979 than in 2008. In 2014, 43 per cent of those

interviewed believed that the federal government should provide more money to the states, compared to 37 per cent in 2008 and 49 per cent in 1979.

	1979	2008	2014	(Change 1979-2014)
Federal government should provide more money	49	37	43	(-6)
State governments have enough	30	38	30	(0)
Depends/No opinion	21	25	27	(+6)
Total	100	100	100	

“Do you think the federal government should provide more money to the state governments, or do you think the states have enough already?”

Sources Australian National Political Attitudes survey 1979, ANUpolls on Governance, 2008 and 2014.

Public opinion on federal-state relations has therefore fluctuated since the late 1970s, more so than is the case with most other views about governance. In particular, there has been a substantial change in opinion since 2008. In part, this reflects the political complexions of the states vis-a-vis the federal government, but it may also reflect a broader underlying view that successive federal governments have accumulated too much power at the expense of their state counterparts.

There are also significant variations in how young people view federal-state relations, at least with regard to whether the states or the federal government should have more power. Young people are more likely to endorse the states against the federal government; indeed, they are almost twice as likely to do so compared to the oldest age group.

	18-34	35-44	55+
Per cent say states should give more powers to federal government	16**	27	29
Per cent say federal government should provide more money	42	48	42

**** difference between 18-34 and 55+ groups statistically significant at $p < .01$.**

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014

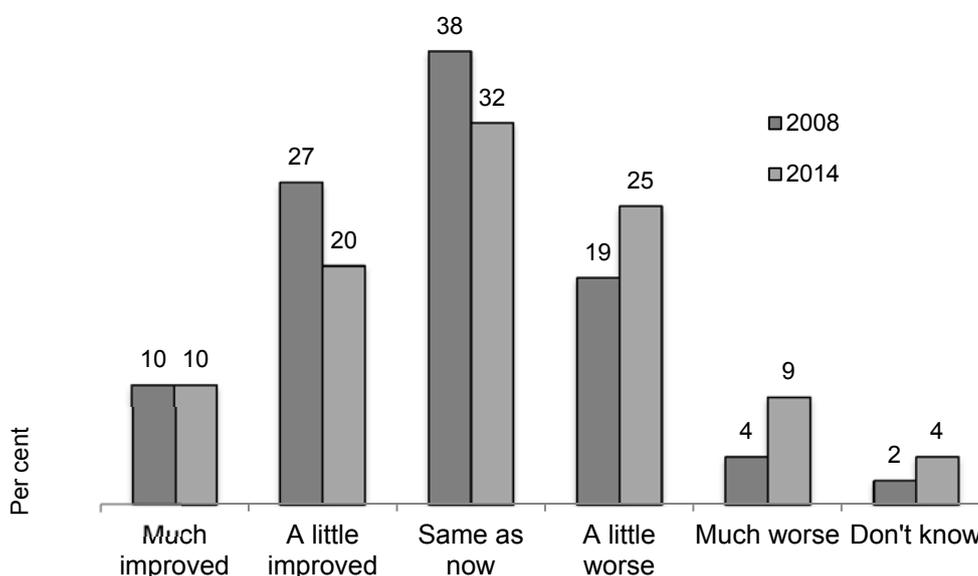
Future prospects

Key points

- Opinions about the future have become more pessimistic since 2008. Just 30 per cent believe that their lives will be better in five year's time.
- A narrow majority believe that the lives of their children will be worse than their own.
- Younger people are significantly more optimistic about the future compared to older people.

When the last ANUpoll on Governance was conducted in March 2008, the global financial crisis had only just begun. While Australia weathered the crisis without experiencing an economic recession, the crisis has made a major impression on public opinion. In the 2008 survey 37 per cent of the respondents believed that their lives would be improved in five year's time. Just one in four believed that their lives would be worse.

Views were more pessimistic in the 2014 survey, with the largest group of respondents, 34 per cent, believing that their lives would be worse in five years. Just 30 per cent believed that their lives would be improved, and 32 per cent thought that their lives would be unchanged. This is a substantial change over a period when it might have been thought that Australia's economic performance relative to the rest of the world which would produced a greater degree of optimism than was the case in 2008.

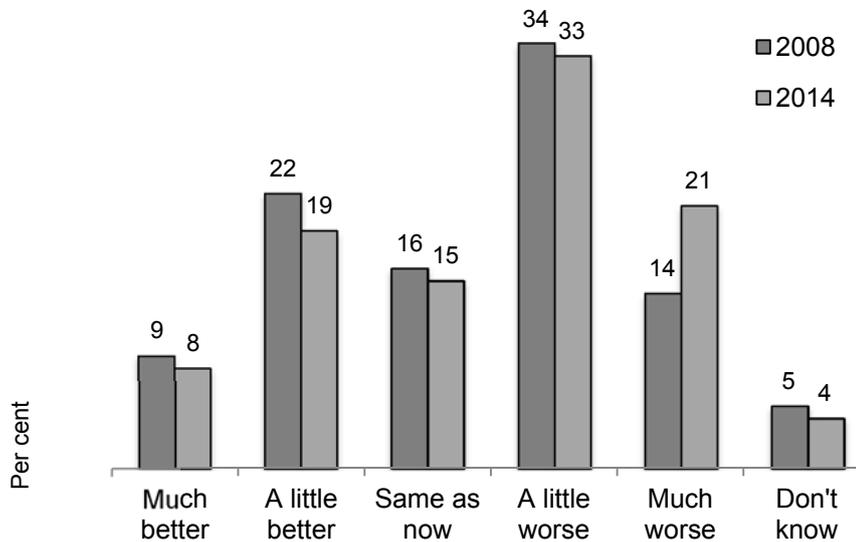


“In five years, do you think that your life in Australia will be...?”

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

Looking further ahead in time, to the lives of the respondents' children, there are fewer changes in opinions, but again tending towards pessimism. In 2008, 31 per cent of the respondents thought that their children's lives would be better than their own, and this declined slightly to 27 per cent in 2014. However,

in 2014 a majority of the respondents, 54 per cent, believed that their children’s lives would be worse than their own. There was also a substantial increase in the proportion saying that their children’s lives would be “much worse”.



“Compared with your life, do you think that the lives of today’s children will be ...?”

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014.

These opinions show an increased level of pessimism about the future, particularly with respect to the medium term, when compared to the same views in 2008. While such views do not directly correlate with political opinions, they provide a context within which the results showing declines in satisfaction with democracy and political efficacy need to be interpreted.

Younger people show a remarkable degree of optimism about the future compared to their older counterparts. On both questions, those aged 18 to 34 are significantly more optimistic than older respondents. Indeed, in the case of their future lives, 44 per cent of younger people see an improvement in five years compared to those aged 55 or over. Of course, part of this effect is a lifecycle one, with younger people looking at increased earnings and life satisfaction. Nevertheless, the degree of optimism among young people is also reflected in the question about the lives of today’s children.

	18-34	35-44	55+
Per cent say in five years life improved	44**	27	23
Per cent say lives of today’s children better	35**	26	25

** difference between 18-34 and 55+ groups statistically significant at $p < .01$.

Source ANUpoll on Governance, 2014

Poll questions

All things considered, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the country is heading?

	Frequency	Per cent
Very satisfied	131	9.4
Satisfied	585	42.1
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	146	10.5
Dissatisfied	325	23.4
Very dissatisfied	173	12.4
Don't know/not sure	29	2.1
Total	1,388	100

What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?

	Frequency	Per cent
Economy/jobs	366	26.4
Industrial relations	19	1.4
Interest rates	3	0.2
Housing affordability	15	1.1
Health care	57	4.1
Education	61	4.4
Defence/national security	2	0.1
Terrorism	3	0.2
Environment/global warming	118	8.5
Water management	2	0.1
Immigration	131	9.5
Indigenous affairs	1	0.1
Taxation	8	0.6
Better government	176	12.7
Law and order/ crime/ justice system	26	1.9
Ageing population	26	1.8
Values/ morals/ respect for others	53	3.8
Poverty/ Social exclusion/ inequality	60	4.3
Carbon Tax	1	0.1
The budget	45	3.3
Other (Specify)	13	0.9
(None/ no other)	28	2
Trade balance/loss of jobs to overseas	10	0.7
Rural/farming issues	4	0.3

Social services (including aged care, the disabled, etc)	17	1.2
Infrastructure/ Planning/ Innovation	6	0.4
Alcohol and Drug use	1	0.1
Young people's behaviour/attitudes	6	0.5
Foreign influence/Australia's position in world	25	1.8
Family/community/societal breakdown	2	0.1
Refused	11	0.8
Don't know/can't say	94	6.7
Total	1,388	100

And what do you think is the second most important problem facing Australia today?

	Frequency	Per cent
Economy/jobs	209	15.1
Industrial relations	18	1.3
Interest rates	11	0.8
Housing affordability	27	1.9
Health care	102	7.4
Education	91	6.6
Defence/national security	11	0.8
Terrorism	7	0.5
Environment/global warming	64	4.6
Water management	10	0.7
Immigration	94	6.8
Indigenous affairs	5	0.4
Taxation	19	1.4
Better government	76	5.5
Law and order/ crime/ justice system	28	2
Ageing population	36	2.6
Values/ morals/ respect for others	40	2.8
Poverty/ Social exclusion/ inequality	93	6.7
Carbon Tax	4	0.3
The budget	29	2.1
Trade balance/loss of jobs to overseas	6	0.4
Rural/farming issues	12	0.8

Social services (including aged care, the disabled, etc)	13	1
Infrastructure/ Planning/ Innovation	22	1.6
Alcohol and Drug use	4	0.3
Young people's behaviour/attitudes	6	0.5
Foreign influence/Australia's position in world	15	1.1
Family/community/societal breakdown	7	0.5
Other	24	1.8
None/ no other	63	4.5
Refused	11	0.8
Don't know/can't say	99	7.1
Not answered	133	9.6
Total	1,388	100

I am going to read out a number of organisations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

...The Australian defence forces

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	512	36.9
Quite a lot of confidence	609	43.9
Not very much confidence	137	9.9
None at all	33	2.4
Refused	4	0.3
Don't know	92	6.6
Total	1,388	100

... The unions

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	73	5.3
Quite a lot of confidence	310	22.3
Not very much confidence	560	40.3
None at all	260	18.7
Refused	3	0.2
Don't know	182	13.1
Total	1,388	100

... The courts and the legal system

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	190	13.7
Quite a lot of confidence	501	36.1
Not very much confidence	501	36.1
None at all	123	8.9
Refused	1	0.1
Don't know	72	5.2
Total	1,388	100

... The federal parliament

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	73	5.3
Quite a lot of confidence	283	20.4
Not very much confidence	698	50.3
None at all	270	19.5
Refused	1	0
Don't know	63	4.5
Total	1,388	100

... The public service

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	176	12.7
Quite a lot of confidence	548	39.5
Not very much confidence	493	35.5
None at all	67	4.9
Refused	4	0.3
Don't know	99	7.1
Total	1,388	100

... Banks and financial institutions

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	182	13.1
Quite a lot of confidence	510	36.8
Not very much confidence	517	37.3
None at all	142	10.2
Refused	1	0.1
Don't know	36	2.6
Total	1,388	100

... Churches and religious institutions

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	140	10.1
Quite a lot of confidence	307	22.1
Not very much confidence	481	34.6
None at all	308	22.2
Refused	13	0.9
Don't know	139	10
Total	1,388	100

... The police in your state or territory

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	420	30.2
Quite a lot of confidence	671	48.3
Not very much confidence	201	14.5
None at all	52	3.7
Don't know	45	3.2
Total	1,388	100

... Universities

	Frequency	Per cent
A great deal of confidence	331	23.9
Quite a lot of confidence	696	50.2
Not very much confidence	189	13.6
None at all	32	2.3
Refused	3	0.2
Don't know	137	9.9
Total	1388	100

On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Australia?

	Frequency	Per cent
Very satisfied	287	20.6
Fairly satisfied	685	49.3
Not very satisfied	302	21.7
Not at all satisfied	74	5.4
Refused	2	0.1
Don't know	39	2.8
Total	1,388	100

Do you think it makes a difference who is in power? Please give me a number from 1 through to 5 where a low number means it does not make a difference and a high number means it does make a difference.

	Frequency	Per cent
1.00	180	13
2.00	161	11.6
3.00	252	18.2
4.00	348	25.1
5.00	401	28.9
Refused	9	0.6
Don't know	35	2.6
Total	1,388	100.0

Do you think the people we vote for make any difference to what happens? Again, please give me a number from 1 through to 5 where a low number means the people we vote for do not make a difference and a high number means the people we vote for do make a difference.

	Frequency	Per cent
1.00	204	14.7
2.00	211	15.2
3.00	346	24.9
4.00	322	23.2
5.00	263	18.9
Refused	14	1
Don't know	29	2.1
Total	1,388	100

Some people think that in order to deal with Australia's problems the state governments should hand over some of their powers to the federal government in Canberra. Others think that the federal government has enough power already. What is your view? Do you think the state governments should give some powers to the federal government, or do you think the federal government has enough powers already? If you have no opinion, just say so.

	Frequency	Per cent
States should give more powers to Federal government	328	23.6
Federal government has enough power already	747	53.8
It depends	100	7.2
No opinion	197	14.2
Refused	16	1.2
Total	1,388	100

Some people think the problem is really about money: the state governments could do their job better if the federal government provided them with more money. Others think that the state governments have enough money as it is. What is your view? Do you think the federal government should provide more money to the state governments, or do you think the states have enough already? If you have no opinion just say so.

	Frequency	Per cent
Federal government should provide more finance	598	43.1
State governments have enough	407	29.4
It depends	164	11.8
No opinion	208	15
Refused	11	0.8
Total	1,388	100

In five years, do you think that your life in Australia will be ...

	Frequency	Per cent
Much improved	141	10.2
A little improved	274	19.7
The same as now	451	32.5
A little worse, or	351	25.3
Much worse	122	8.8
Don't think will be living in Australia	7	0.5
Refused	3	0.2
Don't know	39	2.8
Total	1,388	100

Compared with your life, do you think that the lives of today's children will be ...

	Frequency	Per cent
Much better	109	7.9
A little better	270	19.4
The same as now	204	14.7
A little worse, or	458	33
Much worse	290	20.9
Don't know	58	4.2
Total	1,388	100