Taking stock: Wellbeing and political attitudes in Australia at the start of the post-COVID era, January 2023

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The survey data will soon be available for download through the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/BTCSY5).

Extended abstract

The aim of this paper is to use data collected during January 2023 and Australia's recent history to take stock of Australia's wellbeing, as well as its attitudes towards key political and social institutions as Australia enters a post-COVID world. The data was collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, in partnership with the Social Research Centre from a representative sample of Australians as part of the ANUpoll series of surveys. The January 2023 survey collected data from 3,370 Australians aged 18 years and over.

Wellbeing in Australia, whether measured by life satisfaction or psychological distress has improved substantially since their lowest levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although psychological distress is now back to pre-pandemic levels, life satisfaction is still lower than late 2019/early 2020. Measures of financial stress are now higher than pre-pandemic, as almost half of Australians think that rising prices are a 'very big problem.'

Australians are more confident in the Federal Government than they have been since the height of the 'rally-around-the-flag' period in 2020, with almost twice as many Australians confident in their government now compared to January 2020. Over the longer term, there has been some declines in confidence in institutions (in particular churches and religions institutions), but Australians are as confident in the Federal Government in 2023 as they were in 2008, and even more confident in the public service. More than three-quarters of Australians are satisfied with democracy in Australia and a little under three-quarters are satisfied with the direction of the country.

There are even fewer Australians in January 2023 that supported statements related to populism compared to August 2018. Australians also do not appear to be demanding a much greater role for government since just prior to the pandemic. Indeed, apart from support for the unemployed, there are many areas of policy for which fewer Australians think governments should have a role to play.

There are groups within the population that are far less satisfied, either with their own lives or with institutions in Australia. Those with low levels of education, low income, or who are unemployed/permanently excluded from the labour market due to health conditions or a disability were all found to be of concern for many of the measures analysed in this paper.

Executive summary

Data and overview

- This paper uses data collected over the period form October 2019 to January 2023 to take stock of the wellbeing of Australians, as well as their attitudes towards key political and social institutions as Australia enters a post-COVID world.
- The data used in this paper was collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods from a representative sample of Australians as part of the ANUpoll series of surveys. Respondents are from the Life in Australia™ panel, Australia's only probability-based source of online and offline survey participants.
- The January 2023 survey collected data from 3,370 adult Australians.

Wellbeing

- Over the COVID-19 period, life satisfaction varied quite substantially with the highest level of life satisfaction reported in November 2020, and the lowest levels in April 2020 and August 2021. Life satisfaction has shown a steady increase since August 2021, reaching 6.78 on a scale of 0 to 10 in January 2023, significantly higher than it was in January 2022, but still lower than late 2020, and pre-COVID.
- There is considerable variation in wellbeing across the Australian population:
    - Those aged 55 years and over have higher life satisfaction than younger Australians, with life satisfaction lowest for those aged 35 to 44 years.
    - Those with an undergraduate degree have a higher level of life satisfaction than those without a qualification and who have completed Year 12. At the other end of the distribution, those who have not completed Year 12 have a lower level of life satisfaction than those who have.
    - Those who live in a household in the bottom two income quintiles have a lower life satisfaction than those in the middle quintile, whereas those in the upper two quintiles have higher levels of life satisfaction than those in the middle.
    - Those Australians who were unemployed and those who were permanently sick or disabled had significantly and substantially lower life satisfaction than those who were employed.
- Australians are, on average, more financially stressed now than at any time during the pandemic period. 27.9 per cent of Australians were finding it difficult on their current income, more than 10 percentage points higher than in November 2020.
- Although higher than in January 2022, between October 2022 and January 2023, there was a decline in the per cent of Australians who thought price increases (inflation) were a very big problem (from 56.9 to 49.9 per cent) and an increase in the per cent who thought it was only a small problem (from 4.7 to 7.8 per cent).

Trust, confidence and satisfaction

- The proportion of Australians who had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the Federal Government increased from 35.6 per cent in April 2022 just prior to the election to 52.9 per cent in August 2022. In January 2023, confidence was steady at 51.2 per cent.

  - While this was still below the peak confidence achieved by the then Morrison government in the early months of the pandemic (60.6 per cent in May 2020), the increase between April and August 2022 is the first significant reversal after more-or-less continuous declines since November 2020.
- Institutions in Australia for which the general public has relatively high levels of confidence are the Australian defence forces (80.5 per cent confident or very confident), police (71.2 per cent), universities (69.5 per cent), and hospitals and the health system (67.7 per cent).
  - The least trusted institutions in Australia are churches and religious institutions (29.5 per cent confident or very confident), telecommunications companies (34.0 per cent), utility companies (39.9 per cent) and unions (41.5 per cent).
  - Many institutions have either stable or improving levels of confidence over the last 15 years. There was only a small, but not statistically significant change in confidence in the Federal government, and an increase in confidence in the public service. The biggest improvement in confidence is with banks and other financial institutions, and there was a smaller, but still significant increase in confidence in courts and the legal system.
  - The largest decline in confidence over the last 15 years has been in churches and religions institutions. There were also double-digit percentage declines for universities and police. Although confidence in these last two institutions remains high, the trends are not positive.
- There has been a noticeable decline in the per cent of Australians who were very satisfied in democracy (from 23.4 per cent in March 2008 to 14.2 per cent in January 2023). However, there has not been a corresponding increase at the other extreme with a decline from 4.0 to 3.1 in the per cent not at all satisfied. Increases instead were found in the middle two categories. In Australia 77.0 per cent of adults are fairly or very satisfied with democracy, compared to 81.4 per cent in 2008.
- 73.9 per cent of Australians are also currently satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country. This has been steady since May 2022, but is slightly lower than the 78.3 per cent satisfied or very satisfied in March 2008.

Who is satisfied and confident?

- Older Australians are more confident in the Federal Government than middle-aged and younger Australians and more satisfied with democracy.
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were slightly more confident in the Federal Government and slightly more satisfied with the direction of the country.
- Those who had not completed high school were less confident in the Federal Government, and less satisfied with democracy. Post-school qualifications also mattered, but the association was a little complicated. Those with a degree were more confident with the direction of the country, but slightly less satisfied with democracy.
- Higher income tended to be associated with greater levels of satisfaction and confidence. Those with relatively low levels of income were less satisfied with democracy than those in the middle-income group.
- Those who reported that they were permanently sick or has a disability were less confident in the government, far less satisfied with the direction of the country, and

less satisfied with democracy. Those who were unemployed in the week preceding the survey were less satisfied with democracy than the employed.

Role of government and views on expenditure

- Activities of government that Australians are more or less supportive of government having a role in has stayed relatively consistent over the last four-and-a-half years.
    - The roles that have the greatest level of support are providing health care for the sick, controlling who enters Australia's borders and providing a decent standard of living for the old.
    - Those with the lowest levels of support are providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed, providing industry assistance, and providing a job for everyone who wants one.
    - On balance, there has been a drop in support for more roles than there has been an increase in support. The greatest declines were for promoting equality between men and women, providing industry with the help it needs, and providing a decent standard of living for the old.
- On balance, a slightly higher per cent of Australians were either somewhat or very worried about debt now than 14 years ago.
- In the March 2008 ANUpoll, respondents were asked 'Would you like to see more, the same or less government spending on the following areas…?'
    - 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 – 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 the last fifteen years – from 33.7 per cent in March 2008 to 38.2 per cent in January 2023. The largest increase though was for unemployment benefits. In March 2008, only 17.8 per cent of Australians thought that more should be spent on unemployment benefits. By January 2023 more than twice as many people (39.6 per cent) thought that more should be spent on unemployment benefits.

Support for populism

- There has been a decline from August 2018 in agreement for a number of statements related to populism.
    - There are fewer Australians in January 2023 compared to August 2008 that think that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves (from 67.9 in August 2008 to 52.8 per cent in January 2023), the people I disagree with politically are just misinformed (27.9 to 16.6 per cent) and the will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's

politics (69.6 to 58.8 per cent).

- On the other hand, more Australians think that Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives, increasing from 31.6 per cent in August 2018 to 36.6 per cent in January 2023.
- Females and young Australians are more supportive of populist attitudes with those aged 75 years and over less supportive.
- Those who speak a language other than English are more supportive of populist attitudes compared to those who speak English only.
- There are large differences by post-school qualifications, with those who have a degree being less supportive.
- Income has a strong correlation and those who are permanently sick or have a disability are much more supportive of populist attitudes than those who were employed.

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1 Introduction and overview

Royals, Referenda, and recreation. These are the stories that dominated the news over the 2022/23 Australian summer.

In what is the fastest-selling non-fiction book of all-time (according to Guinness World Records[1]), Prince Harry's memoir *Spare* with its tales of conflict and drama within the British Royal Family dominated several news cycles. Although most stories focused on the more sensational aspects of the book, it also raised issues in Australia regarding a potential move towards a republic and the ongoing relevance of the monarchy for the country.

In what most would class as more serious news, the ongoing story that also dominated opinion pages in January 2023 was the planned Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. As of mid-February, the Opposition leader Mr Peter Dutton had not indicated whether the Coalition would support the Yes or No case. Instead, he was asking a number of questions of the Prime Minister, including on the role and limits of the Voice, if the Referendum ends up a success.[2]

Adding to the focus on the Referendum, tentatively scheduled for some time in Spring 2023, was the trip to Alive Springs by Prime Minister Mr Albanese, in response to an increase in property-crime and assault.[3] This highlighted to some the need for a Voice to Parliament, whereas for others it highlighted that there were more important issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities than Constitutional Recognition.

Some of the biggest news stories, however, concerned that most Australian of summer diversions – sport and recreation. The cricket test match series with the West Indies and South Africa, the Domestic Big Bash League, and the annual Sydney to Hobart yacht race moved sport to the front pages of the newspapers, and to the start of the TV news bulletins. Supplementing the discussion on organised sport was a debate as to whether cabanas (a type of sun shelter) should be banned or restricted at busy beaches.[4] Should we celebrate the sun-smart approach as a win for public health messaging, or should we lament the crowding of our most popular beaches?

For many, the most important sporting event over summer is the Australian Tennis Open. In January 2022 there was a convergence of the back and front pages of the newspapers, with the favourite for the men's version of the Australian Tennis Open (Novak Djokovic) deported from the country on the eve of the event due to his public stance against vaccine mandates and uncertain vaccination status.[5] In 2023 on the other hand the focus for the men's event (which Djokovik ended up winning) was almost exclusively on the tennis. Where wider world events did filter through to the Australian Open was the nationality of the women's winner – Aryna Sabalenka – who was unable to compete under the name or flag of Belarus, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the support of Belarus.

This description of what made news in January 2023 is quite different to the previous three summers in Australia. The bushfires that occurred over the 2019/20 Australian spring and summer (also known as the Black Summer fires) were unprecedented in scale and global in impact in terms of smoke and air quality,[6] release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Jalaludin et al., 2020) and total area burned. Many Australians had their outdoor activities curtailed, and their holiday plans severely interrupted.

In January 2021, Australia was around 10-months into the worst global pandemic in living memory. While at that point in time, Australia had experienced lower COVID-19 cases and deaths than comparable countries in North America and Western Europe[7], the impacts of the pandemic were still felt across the country. One year later and leading up to the 2021/22 summer, many Australians were hopeful that the high rates of vaccination that had been achieved would lead to an opening up of the country. Furthermore, there was an expectation that many of the restrictions put in place to keep COVID-19 rates of infection (and hospitalisations/deaths) low would be eased.[8] This was hampered somewhat, however, by the arrival of the Omicron variant in Australia in late-November 2021.[9] The outbreak led to a more rapid increase in infections than had been anticipated, and the maintenance of restrictions for those who tested positive to COVID-19 or who had been in close contact with someone who had. Furthermore, there were widely reported shortages or delays in accessing COVID-19 tests, which were still a requirement for many activities, including domestic and international travel.[10]

It has been argued by politicians, commentators, and others that the substantial increases in government expenditure, additional controls imposed on the day-to-day life of individuals, and social, economic, and environmental disruptions caused by COVID-19 may have impacted on the political attitudes and views of Australians regarding the extent and nature of the role of government (Anderson et al., 2021). It has also been argued that the widespread bushfires of 2019-20 and subsequent major floods may also have impacted on attitudes towards environmental issues and policy (UN Environment Program 2020).

A report by the British Academy on COVID-19 and Society argues that “COVID-19 has been a catalyst for further movement towards more socially responsible capitalism.” (British Academy 2021: 38). However, an emerging body of research about the impact of the pandemic on public opinion and values suggests otherwise (e.g., Nettle 2020; Reeskens et al. 2021). For example, Reeskkens et al. (2021: S163), using longitudinal Dutch data find that “it doesn’t seem like the coronavirus crisis has shaken up values tremendously.”

Stepping into these debates, the Treasurer Dr Jim Chalmers released an extended essay through *The Monthly* on the 1st of February 2023 on *Capitalism after the crises.* The use of the plural was deliberate, as Dr Chalmers argued that the Global Financial Crisis (known in most of the rest of the world as the Great Recession), the climate-crisis which includes floods and fires in Australia, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine as well as other international conflicts and tensions all require a different approach to governing, and ‘the place of values and optimism in how we rethink capitalism.’

In the essay, Dr Chalmers outlines his view of the role of his own government thus: ‘Our mission is to redefine and reform our economy and institutions in ways that make our people and communities more resilient, and our society and democracy stronger as well.’ His plan to achieve this mission was not articulated in depth in the essay, but there were hints and signposts. He argued, for example, that ‘the problem wasn’t so much more markets as poorly designed ones’ and therefore that the Albanese Labor government would be more willing to intervene and shape markets than its immediate predecessor. He argues that what Australia needs is ‘as much about a change of mindset as a change of government.’

Dr Chalmers also talked about how ‘People sincerely committed to democracy all share an unease at the rise of anti-democratic trends in developed countries.’ He tied some of these democratic trends to economic trends, and particularly the widening in inequality seen in many developed countries, though the evidence for this in Australia is much weaker (Productivity Commission 2018).

Dr Chalmers also highlighted the need for wellbeing to be factored into the measurement of the trajectory of a country (as was identified in the October 2022-23 Australian Government Budget). He argued that:

> What we measure directs our action. If our measurements are flawed or incomplete, it follows that what we do will be too. Last year's October budget sketched our approach to measuring what matters and fleshed out Australia's first national wellbeing agenda, by tracking a range of outcomes broader than, but not instead of, traditional measures of economic strength.

In January 2023, Australia is at a potential inflection point. The nation's attention has moved on from the bushfires and somewhat from the pandemic, even if COVID-19 is still having real public health impacts. Indeed, from the 1st of November 2022 to the 31st of January 2023, cumulative deaths in Australia from COVID-19 have risen from 15,665 to 18,615.[11] Furthermore, the inevitable switch from a La Niña to an El Niño weather-setting will likely see drought and fire danger return, at least in the medium-term.[12] We may be looking at the news and policy using a post-COVID lens, even if we are still being impacted at the individual, community, and national level by the virus. But, the nation's attention is on what economic, environmental, political, and social structures will prevail in this post-COVID era.

To know where a country is heading, or where it could be heading, it is important to take stock of where it stands at a particular point in time, and its most recent trajectory. The aim of this paper then, is to use data collected during January 2023 and Australia's recent history to take stock of Australia's wellbeing, as well as its attitudes towards many of the domains that Dr Chalmers' essay traverses. The data that we focus on was collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods from a representative sample of Australians as part of the ANUpoll series of surveys. Respondents are from the Life in Australia™ panel, Australia's only probability-based source of online and offline survey participants.

The January 2023 survey collected data from 3,370 Australians aged 18 years and over. Many of these respondents were the same as those interviewed over the January 2020 to October 2022 waves of data collection (described in Section 2) and we are therefore able to analyse change at the individual level for many of the outcomes of interest. We also make comparisons, however, with much earlier waves of data collection as part of the ANUpoll series of surveys, which used a slightly different recruitment and collection methodology.

In order to take stock of Australia's wellbeing and political attitudes, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. After the data description (Section 2), we present trends in measures of wellbeing since the start of Australia's most recent crisis period (Section 3), with 16 waves of data collection from October 2019 onwards. We then turn to the views of Australians with regards to key institutions (Section 4), including democracy, with Section 5 focusing on the role of government in Australia. In Section 6 we look at a specific module on views on populism, with Section 7 providing some concluding comments.

2 Describing the data

In April 2020, the Social Research Centre on behalf of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods collected the first wave of data as part of the centre's COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Series.[13] Since that first wave of data collection, surveys have been undertaken a further 13 times. The most recent wave of data collection was undertaken in January 2023, and this will be the last wave of data as part of the series.

Surveys have also been conducted with the same group of respondents in January and February 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic started in Australia, as part of the ANUpoll and Australian Social Survey International-ESS (AUSSI-ESS) surveys respectively.[14] This allows us to track outcomes for the same group of individuals from just prior to COVID-19 impacting Australia through to almost three years since COVID-19 first reached Australia.

The January 2023 survey collected data from 3,370 Australians aged 18 years and over.[15] Data collection for this most recent ANUpoll commenced on the 16th of January 2023 with a pilot test of telephone respondents. The main data collection commenced on the 17th and concluded on the 30th of January. 54.7 per cent of the sample had completed the survey by the 19th of January and the average interview duration was 26.1 minutes.

The Social Research Centre collected data online and through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in order to ensure representation from the offline Australian population. Around 2.8 per cent of interviews were collected via CATI.[16] A total of 4,249 panel members were invited to take part in the January 2023 survey, leading to a wave-specific completion rate of 79.3 per cent.[17] Of those who completed the October 2022 survey (the next most recent survey), 91.8 per cent completed the January 2023 survey.

Data in the paper is weighted to population benchmarks. For Life in Australia™, the approach for deriving weights generally consists of the following steps:

1. Compute a base weight for each respondent as the product of two weights:
    a. Their enrolment weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent post-stratification to key demographic benchmarks
    b. Their response propensity weight, estimated from enrolment information available for both respondents and non-respondents to the present wave.
2. Adjust the base weights so that they satisfy the latest population benchmarks for several demographic characteristics.

Across all fourteen surveys undertaken during the COVID-19 period, there were 6,542 respondents that completed at least one of the waves of data collection. 17.9 per cent of these completed one wave of data collection only, with a further 6.8 per cent having completed two waves. At the other end of the distribution, 20.0 per cent of the cumulative respondents completed all fourteen waves of data collection and a further 6.1 per cent completed thirteen of the fourteen waves.

Table 1 gives the number of respondents for each of the fourteen waves of data collection during the COVID-19 period, as well as the two pre-COVID waves. The table also gives the survey window for the data collection, and the per cent of January 2020 respondents who completed that particular wave. In between the April and August 2022 surveys, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey was undertaken on the Life in Australia™ panel, with a limited range of data items available for analysis in this paper.

Table 1 Survey participation – January 2020 to April 2022

Wave	Survey window	Sample size	Per cent of January 2020 survey that completed wave
January 2020	20th January to 3rd February, 2020	3,249	100
February 2020	17th February to 2nd March, 2020	3,228	91.4
1 – April 2020	14th to 27th April, 2020	3,155	88.8
2 – May 2020	11th to 25th May, 2020	3,249	91.0
3 – August 2020	10th to 24th August, 2020	3,061	85.9
4 – October 2020	12th to 26th October, 2020	3,043	85.5
5 – November 2020	9th to 23rd November, 2020	3,029	84.9
6 – January 2021	18th January to 1st February, 2021	3,459	83.8
7 – April 2021	12th to 26th April, 2021	3,286	80.8
8 – August 2021	10th to 23rd August, 2021	3,135	71.1
9 – October 2021	12th to 26th October, 2021	3,474	68.6
10 – January 2022	17th to 30th January, 2022	3,472	63.4
11 – April 2022	11th to the 24th of April, 2022	3,587	64.0
CSES	23rd May to 5th June, 2022	3,556	63.5
12 – August 2022	8th to 22nd August, 2022	3,510	62.7
13 – October 2022	10th to 24th October, 2022	3,468	62.4
14 – January 2023	16th to 30th January, 2023	3,370	60.8

In addition to data from the COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Series (and the surveys that immediately preceded it), this paper makes use of data from the first ANUpoll, conducted in March 2008 and the fifth wave of data collection in June 2009. The methodology for earlier waves of ANUpoll varied from the current waves, reflecting the prevailing online access and response patterns of the time. Like the current waves of data collection, the March 2008 and June 2009 surveys were a national random sample of the adult population aged 18 years and over. Fewer interviews were conducted in those waves though, with 1,000 people interviewed for each. Furthermore, all respondents were interviewed by telephone. The results for that wave of data collection have been weighted to represent the national population as of March 2008 or June 2009 respectively.

3 Wellbeing at the start of the post-COVID era

The October update to the 2023-23 Australian Government Budget included Budget Statement No. 4 – *Measuring What Matters*[18] which makes the case that "A coherent and comprehensive framework would help us better understand our economy and society and would support more informed policy making and accountability." This Budget Statement also commits the Government to release a stand-alone "Measuring What Matters Statement" in 2023.

The *Measuring What Matters* Budget Statement includes a framework of 32 indicators related to wellbeing grouped using a 'traffic light' system. There are twelve indicators that fall into the green category in that they are at or better than the OECD average and either stable or improving and there are five indicators that are in the red category, in that they are worse than the OECD average and declining. In between, within the orange category there are six indicators that were worse than the OECD average but stable or improving, alongside nine indicators that were at or better than the OECD average but declining.

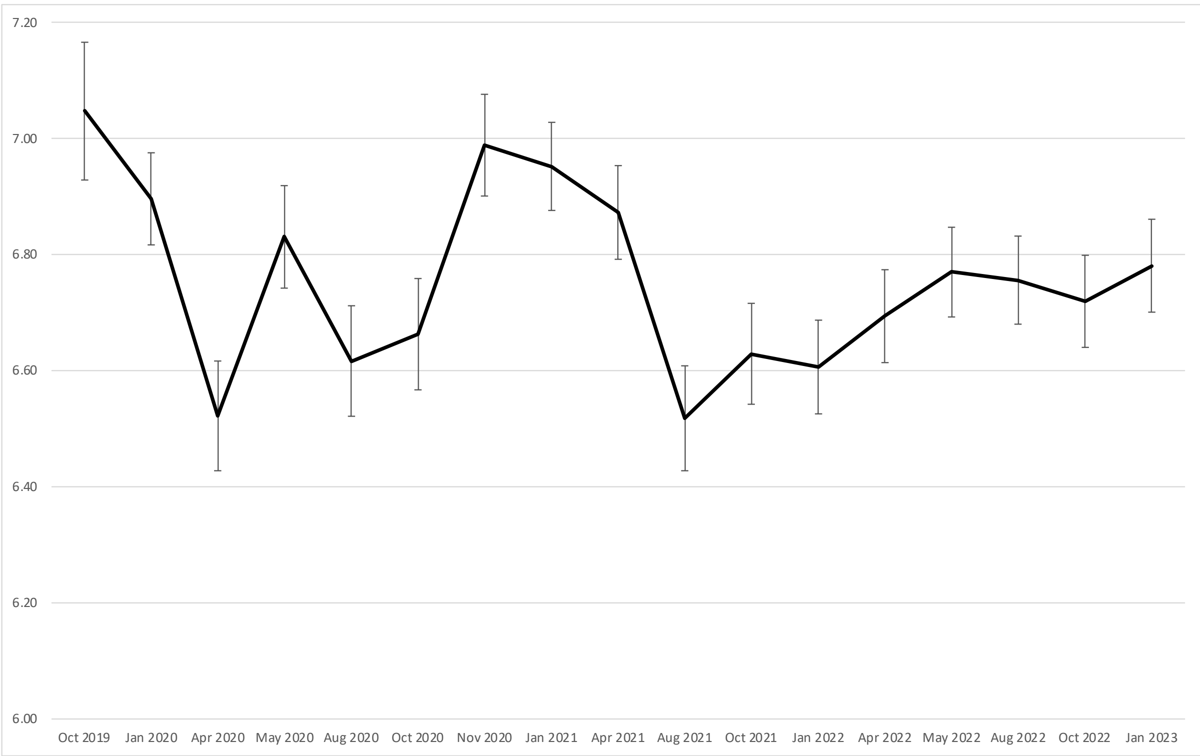
3.1 Life satisfaction

One of the 32 indicators used (found to be at/better than the OECD average but declining) is life satisfaction. This has been measured consistently in ANUpoll across the COVID-19 period, and in each of the COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Survey respondents have been asked:

> *'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'. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?'*

Over the COVID-19 period (Figure 1), life satisfaction varied quite substantially with the highest level of life satisfaction reported in November 2020, and the lowest levels in April 2020 and August 2021. Since this August 2021 minimum of 6.52, life satisfaction has shown a steady increase reaching 6.78 in January 2023, significantly higher than it was earlier in the year, but still lower than late 2020, and pre-COVID.

Figure 1 Life satisfaction, Australia, October 2019 to January 2023



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

Source: ANUpoll, Oct 2019; January, April, May, August, October, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; January, April, May, August, and October 2022; and January 2023

While there has been a steady improvement in life satisfaction since August 2021, it is clear from Figure 1 that this measure of wellbeing is not back to what it was pre-COVID (even taking into account the impact of the Black Summer bushfires on wellbeing at the population level).

A focus on wellbeing in assessing the effectiveness of policy setting and identifying policies that may assist in improving wellbeing requires an understanding of the levels of wellbeing of different population groups. Table 2 summarises results from a regression analysis where life satisfaction is the dependent variable, and there are a range of explanatory variables observed about the individual. By utilising a regression model – in this case ordinary least squares regression[19] – it is possible to estimate the relationship between one of the explanatory variables and life satisfaction, whilst holding constant other explanatory variables in the model. A positive coefficient suggests that at the start of the post-COVID period, a person with that characteristic has a higher life satisfaction. A negative coefficient suggests that opposite (a lower life satisfaction).

There is no difference in life satisfaction between males and females, and no statistically significant differences by age within the 18 to 54 age groups. Those aged 55 years and over, however, have significantly and substantially higher life satisfaction than those aged 35 to 44 (the base case), with the highest level of life satisfaction found for those aged 75 years and over. There are also no major difference according to other demographic characteristics (Indigenous status, country of birth, language spoken at home) and the broad region or socioeconomic status of the area in which a person lives.

There is a difference in life satisfaction by education. Those with an undergraduate degree have a higher level of life satisfaction than those without a post-school qualification and who have completed Year 12. Those who have not completed Year 12 have a lower level of life satisfaction than those who have completed Year 12. One of the concerns identified by the Treasurer in his essay is political instability, and anti-democratic tendencies in some advanced democracies. Several authors have explored low education as a predictive factor in support for populism (Spruyt et al. 2016; Robertson and Nestore 2022; Hussain and Yunus 2021). We will attempt to estimate this relationship directly in subsequent sections, but for now it is worth highlighting that if low wellbeing is a precursor for alienation from society and institutions, then this is one mechanism through which those with low education may feel a sense of alienation.

There is a rich literature also on the relationship between income and wellbeing (Kahneman and Deaton 2010), which has been shown to be positive, albeit with smaller impacts as income increases (i.e., non-linear). There is support for this in the ANUpoll data. Specifically, controlling for employment and education amongst other things, those who live in a household in the bottom two income quintiles have a lower life satisfaction than those in the middle quintile, whereas those in the upper two quintiles have higher levels of life satisfaction than those in the middle. Indeed, the largest gap across quintiles is between the fourth and fifth quintile. This suggests that rather than there being diminishing marginal returns to income, returns if anything widen at the top of the distribution.

The final set of variables in the model capture a person's main activity in the week preceding the survey. The base case is those whose main activity was employment, with six other potential activities included as explanatory variables.[20] There was no difference in life satisfaction between those whose main activity was education, housework or caring; or some other activity compared to the employed. Furthermore, those who were retired had a higher life satisfaction than those who were employed (even though we control for age in the model). However, even when we control for household income, those Australians who were unemployed and those who were permanently sick or disabled had significantly and substantially lower life satisfaction than those who were employed.

This additional negative relationship between unemployment and wellbeing is supported by the existing literature (Hetschko et al. 2016). It shows that additional income support for the unemployed or those in receipt of other benefits is likely to improve wellbeing across Australia (given the relationship between income and wellbeing), but that there are also likely to be direct benefits of supporting employment. This provides some empirical support for the inclusion of 'labour underutilisation' as a specific wellbeing measure in the framework in the budget, in addition to household income and even life satisfaction.

Table 2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with life satisfaction, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.085	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.256	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.078	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.213	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.544	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.740	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.839	***
Indigenous	-0.104	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.119	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.205	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.013	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.359	**
Has a post graduate degree	-0.022	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.237	*
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.033	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.028	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.042	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.126	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.051	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.131	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.472	***
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.330	**
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	0.380	***
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.787	***
Main activity - In education	-0.223	
Main activity - Unemployed	-0.786	**
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	-1.104	***
Main activity - Retired	0.722	***
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	0.083	
Main activity - Other	-0.144	
Constant	6.168	***
Sample size	3,048	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; lives in a household in the middle-income quintile; and main activity was employment in the previous 7 days.

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: ANUpoll, January 2023.

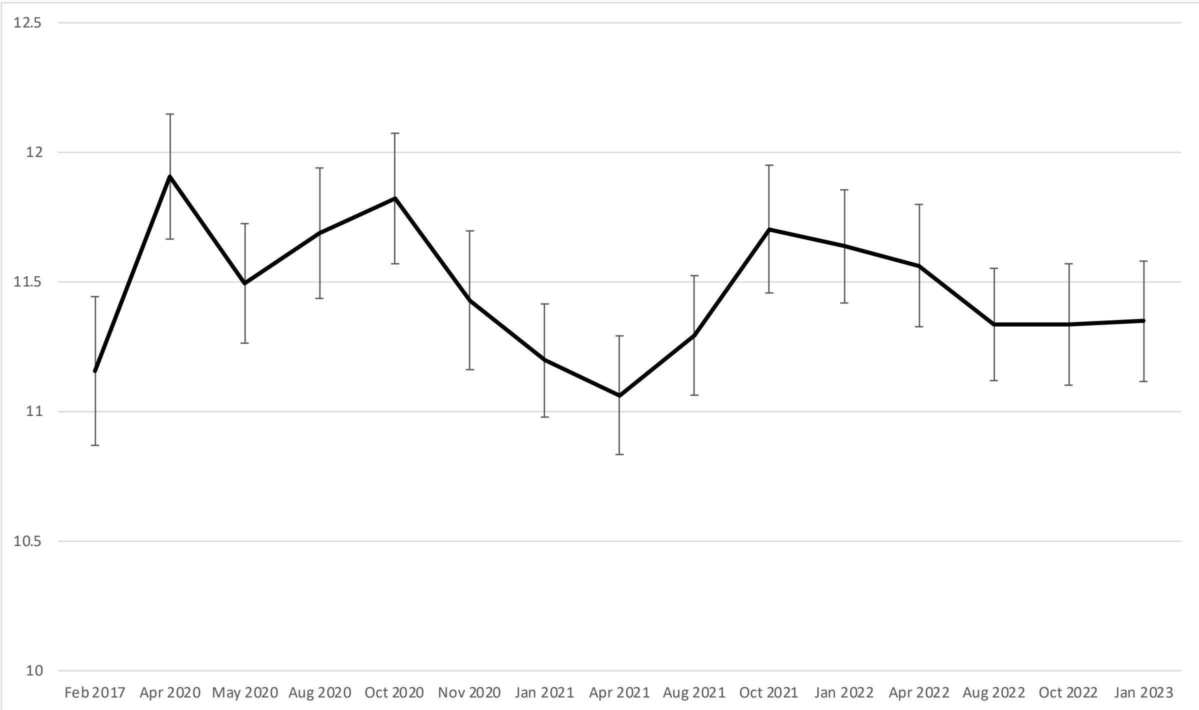
3.2 Mental health and loneliness

All of the waves of the COVID-19 Impact Monitoring surveys (i.e., since April 2020) have measured mental health using the Kessler (K6) module (Kessler et al. 2002). Although the K6 module was not asked just prior to the pandemic in the January and February surveys, comparable data is available from the Life in Australia^{TM} panel for February 2017.

The K6 questions ask the respondent how often in the last four weeks they felt: 'nervous'; 'hopeless'; 'restless or fidgety'; 'so depressed that nothing could cheer you up'; 'that everything was an effort'; and 'worthless'. There were five response categories, from "none of the time" to "all the time", with values ranging from 1 through 5. Respondents who score highly on this measure are considered to be at risk of a serious mental illness (other than a substance use disorder). It is important to recognise that while the K6 screens for the risk of serious mental illness, it is not a clinical diagnostic measure.

The K6 items can be summed to produce an index, with potential values ranging from 6 to 30 with higher values indicating higher levels of psychological distress. Figure 2 plots the continuous K6 measure since April 2020 (including a pre-COVID baseline from February 2017). There was a large increase in psychological distress between February 2017 and April 2020, improvements in May 2020, a worsening during the second half of 2020, and then gradual but substantial improvement to early 2021. After April 2021, there was a worsening in mental health outcomes again, with psychological distress starting to decline again in January 2022, but only slightly and with little change between January 2022 and April 2022. After April 2022, there was a much larger decline in psychological distress – from 11.56 in April to 11.34 in August 2022. Since then, this measure of psychological distress has been remarkably stable, and since then psychological distress is no longer significantly higher than in February 2017.

Figure 2 Psychological distress (K6), Australia, February 2017 to January 2023



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

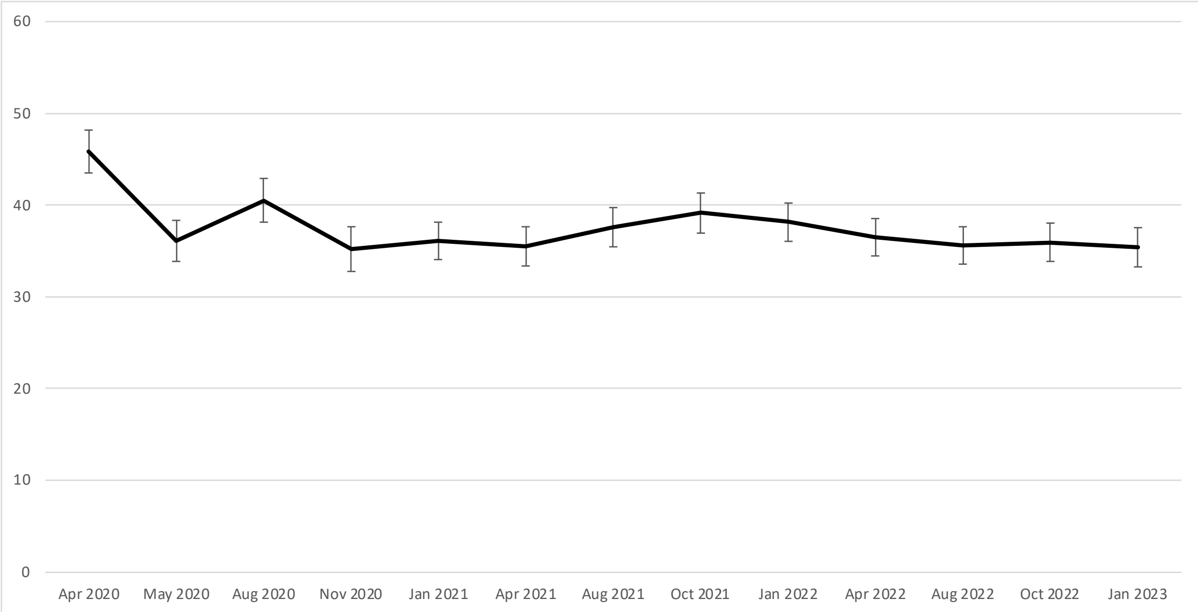
Source: Life in Australia, February 2017; ANUpoll: April, May, August, October, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; January, April, August, and October 2022; and January 2023

3.3 Social isolation

Since the start of the pandemic, respondents have been asked 'In the past week, how often have you felt lonely?' with four response options: rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day); some or a little of the time (1 to 2 days); occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3 to 4 days); most or all of the time (5 to 7 days).

There was a very high level of loneliness in April 2020, with 45.8 per cent of Australians saying that they were lonely at least some of the time (Figure 3) (data on loneliness was not collected prior to the pandemic). Loneliness declined after that first month of country-wide lockdowns, and then fluctuated slightly throughout the next two years. However, even in October 2022 more than one-third of Australians (35.9 per cent) reported having experienced loneliness at least some of the time in the week prior to the survey.

Figure 3 Per cent of Australians reporting that they had experienced loneliness, April 2020 to January 2023



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

Source: ANUpoll: April, May, August, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; and January, April, August, and October 2022

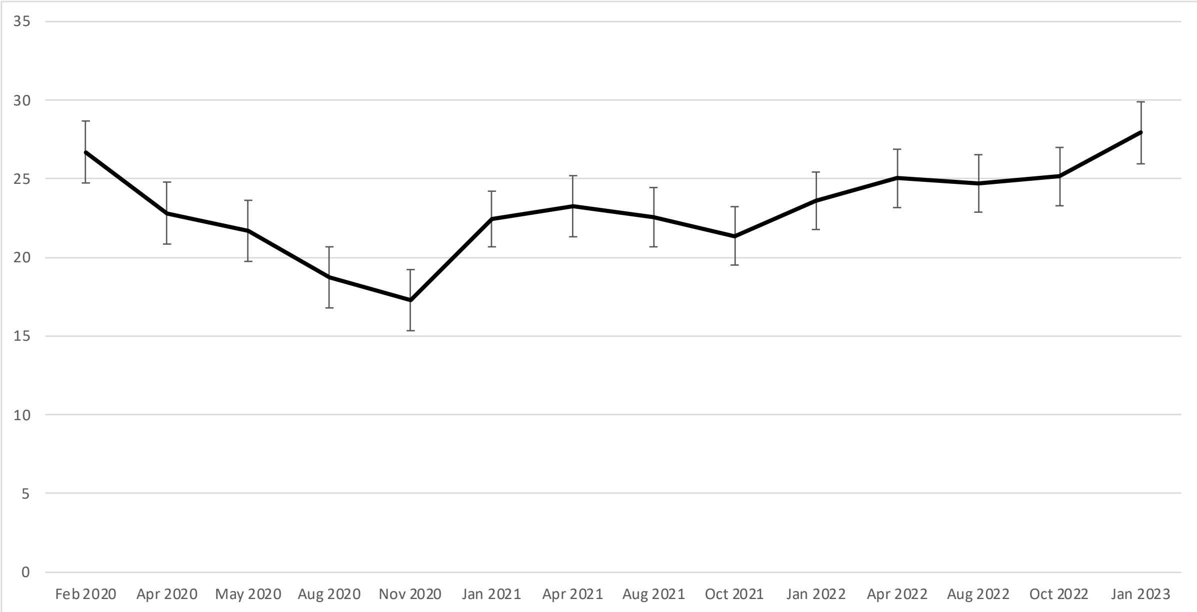
3.4 Financial stress

During the pandemic period, average real incomes fell. This did not always translate into increases in financial stress. This is partly because expenditure opportunities and requirements have also been impacted by the pandemic, particularly when borders were closed, and social distancing measures were still in place. This was also partly because while average real incomes fell, during the first year of the pandemic there were large increases in government payments which result in increases in incomes for low income households who are more likely to experience financial hardship.

Since February 2020, respondents have been asked ‘Which of the following descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays?’ with four response options: Living comfortably on present income; Coping on present income; Finding it difficult on present income; and Finding it very difficult on present income.

Figure 4 gives the per cent of Australians who are finding it difficult (or very difficult) on their present income. Pre-COVID, more than one-quarter (26.7 per cent) of Australians said that they were finding it difficult on their present income. This declined to 17.3 per cent by November 2020 during the first year of the pandemic. By October 2022, however, slightly more than one-quarter of Australians (25.1 per cent) were again finding it difficult on their current income. While this was just below the pre-pandemic level, by January 2023 (27.9 per cent) this measure of financial stress was above the pre-pandemic level.[21]

Figure 4 Difficulty getting by on current income, Australia, February 2020 to October 2022



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

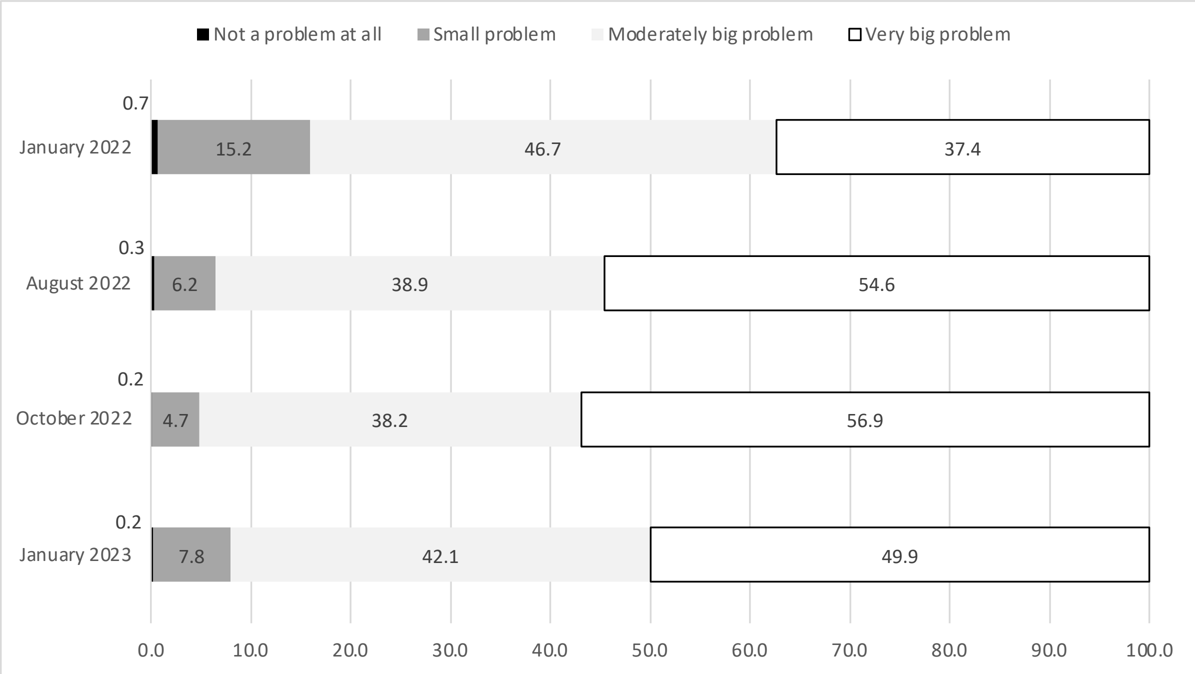
Source: AUSSI-ESS: February 2020; ANUpoll: April, May, August, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; and January, April, August, and October 2022

Australians are now more financially stressed than at any time during the pandemic period. A large part of the explanation for this is the very rapid increase in prices observed over the last year or so. Between the December 2021 and December 2022 quarters, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 7.8 per cent. This is more than twice the rate of inflation between December 2020 and December 2021 (3.5 per cent), meaning that real incomes have either been flat or falling for many people. Indeed, if we assume that the rate of inflation between the December 2022 and March 2023 quarters is the same as between the September and December quarters of last year, then real household incomes amongst ANUpoll respondents have declined by 4.3 per cent between January 2022 and January 2023.

We also have a more direct measure of the perception of prices in several recent ANUpolls. Specifically, in January 2022 respondents were first asked ’How much of a problem do you think rising prices are in Australia?’ This question was repeated in August 2022, October 2022, and January 2023. A vanishingly small proportion of Australians think that rising prices were not a problem at all (less than 1 per cent in each wave). The largest increase in the per cent of Australians who thought that rising prices were a very big problem increased the most in the first half of 2022. Between October 2022 and January 2023, on the other hand, there was a decline in the per cent of Australians who thought price increases were a very big problem (from 56.9 to 49.9 per cent) and an increase in the per cent who thought it was only a small problem (from 4.7 to 7.8 per cent).

While prices were still seen as a problem by the vast majority of Australians, there is some evidence that these concerns have eased slightly and that, given some of the patterns emerging in the US, the inflationary pressures may be about to ease somewhat in Australia. This has not yet translated into declines in financial stress given the cumulative impact of price rises over the last 12 months. However, the next 12 months may not be as bad.

Figure 5 Views on extent to which rising prices is a problem, January 2022 to January 2023



Source: January, August, and October 2022, January 2023

4 Trust, confidence and satisfaction

4.1 Confidence in institutions

A separate indicator in the wellbeing framework from the October 2022 Budget is trust in government. In a democracy, the party in power aims amongst other things to maintain the confidence of the citizens. For the rest of the population though, confidence in key institutions are important measures in a country or jurisdiction for two main reasons. First, they tell us something about the performance of these institutions through time. Secondly, the level of public confidence in institutions is an important factor in determining behaviour that is required by or mediated through interaction with those institutions with countries with high levels of trust tending to have better outcomes in times of crisis, all else being equal (Zaki et al. 2022).

During the early stages of the pandemic, confidence and trust in government increased in many countries across the world, including in Australia and New Zealand (Goldfinch et al. 2021). However, there is evidence to suggest that the 'rally-around-the-flag' effect was short-lived in many countries, with views on governments and other institutions converging on pre-pandemic levels as the pandemic period extended (Johansson et al. 2021).

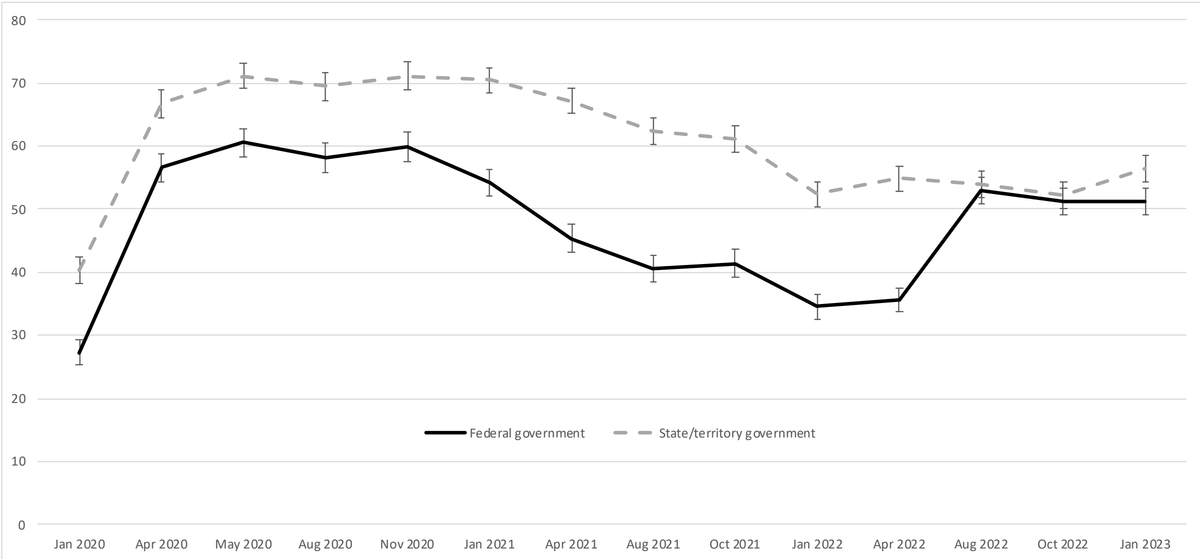
The trajectory in Australia was slightly different to other countries, and different for different levels of government. Furthermore, the patterns are complicated by the Federal election that took place in May 2022. Figure 6 gives the per cent of Australians who had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Federal Government between January 2020 and January 2022 (the bold line), as well as the per cent of Australians confident in the State/Territory government in which they live (the dotted line).

Confidence in the Federal Government increased substantially between January and August 2020 as the government intervened heavily in the economy and a range of aspects of people's lives early in the pandemic. From about November 2020 onwards, confidence declined quite substantially, such that by April 2022 just prior to the Federal election confidence was only just above what it was pre-pandemic and during the Black Summer bushfire crisis of 2019/20. There was a substantial increase in confidence in the Federal Government following the change of government at the May 2022 Federal Election. The proportion of Australians who had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in the Federal Government increased from 35.6 per cent in April 2022 just prior to the election to 52.9 per cent in August 2022. While this was still below the peak confidence achieved by the then Morrison government in the early months of the pandemic (60.6 per cent in May 2020), the increase between April and August 2022 was the first significant reversal after more-or-less continuous declines since November 2020. Between August 2022 and January 2023, confidence stayed reasonably steady and within the margin of error of the survey.

Confidence in the state/territory government in the jurisdiction in which a person lives also increased quite substantially in the first few months of the pandemic. It took longer for this confidence to decline (remaining high up until at least January 2021) and staying well above the January 2020 low. Confidence was quite steady over the period between the three of the last four waves of data collection – 54.8 per cent in April; 53.9 per cent in August; and 52.2 per cent in October 2022.

There is some indication of a potential uptick in confidence in state/territory governments between October 2022 (52.2 per cent across Australia) and January 2023 (56.4 per cent). This may be natural fluctuation and further waves of data would be helpful to confirm whether the change is going to be more than short lived. However, it is worth noting that the change was consistent across most states and territories, with increases in all jurisdictions apart from Queensland, though the standard errors for the smaller states and territories mean that conclusions about individual jurisdictions are inevitably speculative.

Figure 6 Per cent of Australians who had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Federal Government in Canberra and State/Territory governments – January 2020 to January 2023



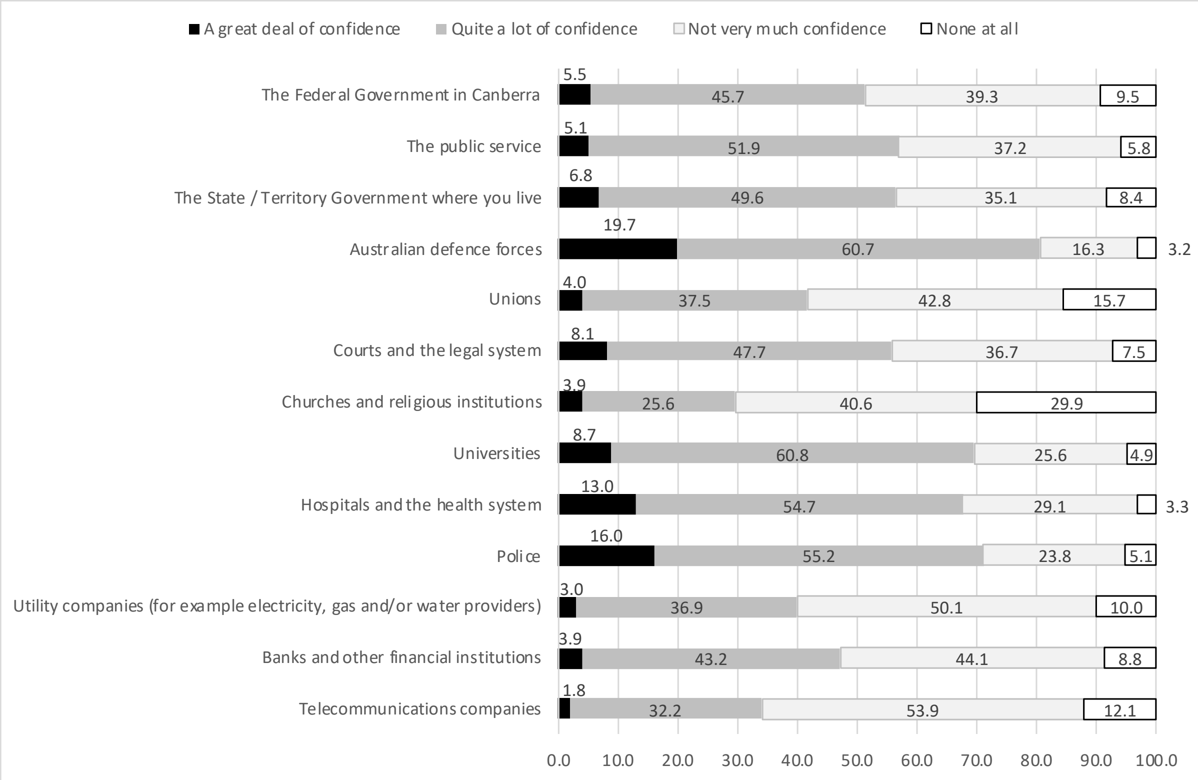
Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: January, April, May, August, October, and November 2020; January, April, August, October 2021; January, April, August, and October 2022; and January 2023

While it is clearly of particular interest to the government whether the Australian population has confidence in it as an institution, a broader conceptualisation of wellbeing could consider confidence in other institutions. In Figure 8, we look at a broader set of institutions – thirteen in total – and look at the distribution in confidence as of January 2023. Institutions in Australia for which the general public has relatively high levels of confidence are the Australian defence forces (80.5 per cent confident or very confident), and to a lesser extent the police (71.2 per cent), universities (69.5 per cent), and hospitals and the health system (67.7 per cent).

The least trusted institutions in Australia are churches and religious institutions, with only 3.9 per cent of Australians having a great deal of confidence, and 25.6 per cent having quite a lot of confidence. Telecommunications companies (34.0 per cent confident or very confident), utility companies (39.9 per cent) and unions (41.5 per cent) also have low levels of confidence.

Figure 7 Confidence in key institutions– January 2023



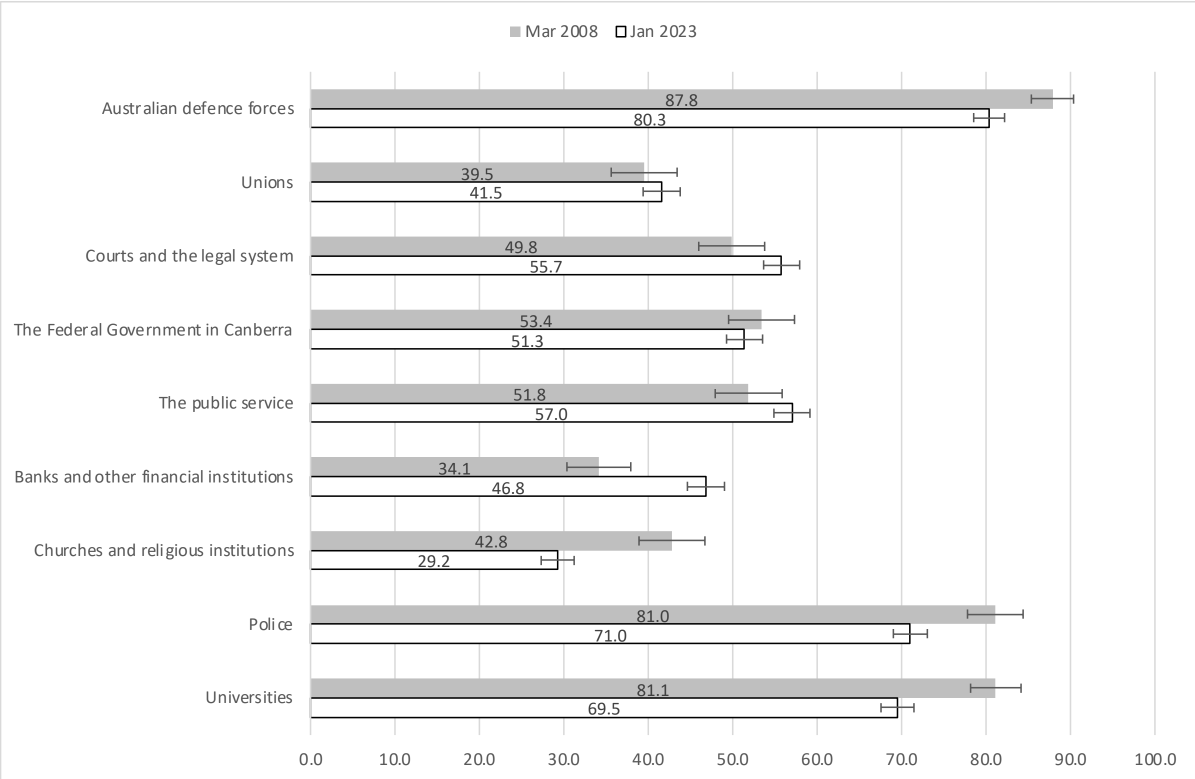
Source: ANUpoll: January 2023

Confidence in many, although not all of the institutions have been in decline over the medium to long term. Very similar questions were asked about nine of the institutions in March 2008. Figure 8 gives the per cent of Australians that had quite a lot or a great deal of confidence in these nine institutions in these two survey periods.

Interestingly that for a number of the institutions that we might be concerned about have either stable or improving levels of confidence. There was only a small, but not statistically significant change in confidence in the Federal government, and an increase in confidence in the public service. The biggest improvement in confidence is with banks and other financial institutions, which is perhaps not a surprise as the March 2008 survey took place at the start of the Global Financial Crisis. There was a smaller, but still significant increase in confidence in courts and the legal system.

The largest absolute decline in confidence over the last 15 years has been in churches and religions institutions. In March 2008, these institutions had a slightly higher level of confidence than unions, a much higher level of confidence than banks and financial institutions, and only slightly lower levels of confidence than courts and the legal system. Over the intervening period though, there was a 13.6 percentage point decline, making them the lowest out of all institutions. There were also double-digit percentage declines for universities and police. Although confidence in these institutions remains high, the trends are not positive, and steps may need to be considered to arrest the decline.

Figure 8 Long-term change in confidence in select institutions– March 2008 to January 2023



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

Source: ANUpoll: March 2008 and January 2023

4.2 Satisfaction with democracy

While the wellbeing framework outlined in the October 2022-23 Australian Budget includes Trust in Government as one of the indicators, much of the concern of late regarding political institutions in developed countries of late has focused on a related, but slightly different issue – whether or not people are broadly supportive of the working of democracy as a form of government.

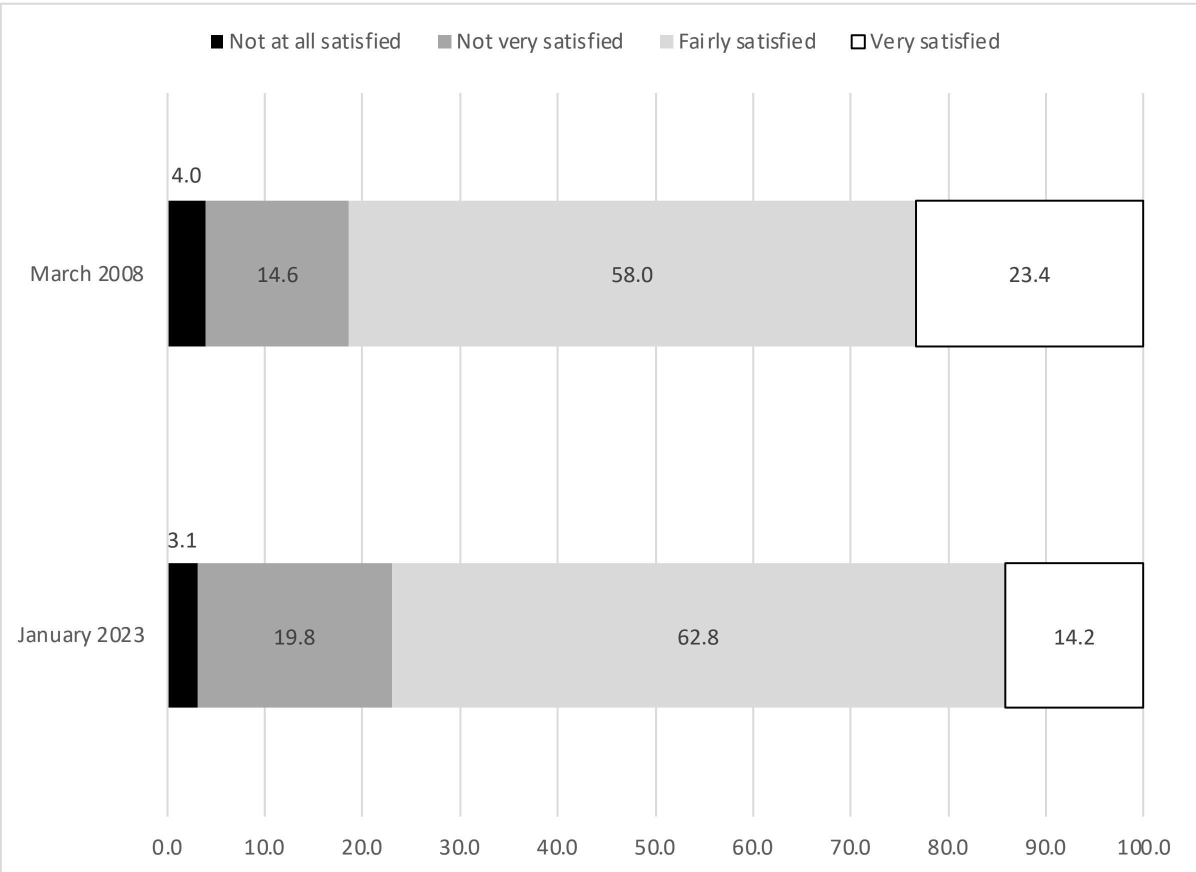
There is almost a separate industry that has developed on the specific crisis or crises of democracy, with books including *How Democracies Die* (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019), *Democracy and Its Crisis* (Grayling 2017), and *Democracy Rules* (Müller 2021) all taking a historical perspective to position the current moment in broader democratic trends. The first of these has perhaps gained the most attention, and concludes as follows: ‘Previous generations of Europeans and Americans made extraordinary sacrifices to defend our democratic institutions against powerful external threats. Our generation, which grew up taking democracy for granted, now faces a different task: We must prevent it from dying from within’ (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019: 231)

One of grounds for pessimism in Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) is that ‘Few societies in history have managed to be both multiracial and truly democratic.’ It is puzzling, however, that Australia or New Zealand are rarely mentioned in the book, and indeed do not feature in the index at all (despite Argentina, for example, having five separate mentions). While neither country is free from challenges, they both are clearly multiracial, have been consistently democratic for far longer than all but a handful of other countries, and do not appear to be suffering scale of decline in trust and satisfaction as the countries that Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) use as their case studies. The long-running Australian Election Study (AES), for example, found that the level of satisfaction with democracy in Australia just after the May 2022 election was very close to the average of the last 25 or so years, and within the standard error of values observed in 1998, 2001, 2010, and 2013 (Cameron and McAllister 2022). Satisfaction was lower than at its peak after the 2007 election, but Australians are broadly satisfied.

This relative stability is supported by ANUpoll data, based on a slightly larger sample size than the AES and also updated into 2023. Respondents to the March 2008 ANUpoll were 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?' This question was repeated in the January 2023 ANUpoll, with the same response options (Figure 9).

We can see from the figure that there has been a marked decline in the per cent of Australians who were very satisfied in democracy (from 23.4 per cent in 2008 to 14.2 per cent in 2023). However, there has not been a corresponding increase at the other extreme (there was actually a decline from 4.0 to 3.1 per cent not at all satisfied), with increases instead found in the middle two categories. What we might describe as whole-hearted satisfaction with democracy has declined, but in 2023 in Australia 77.0 per cent of adults are fairly or very satisfied, compared to 81.4 per cent in 2008. A concern, but far from a crisis.

Figure 9 Long-term change in satisfaction with democracy – March 2008 to January 2023



Source: ANUpoll: March 2008 and January 2023

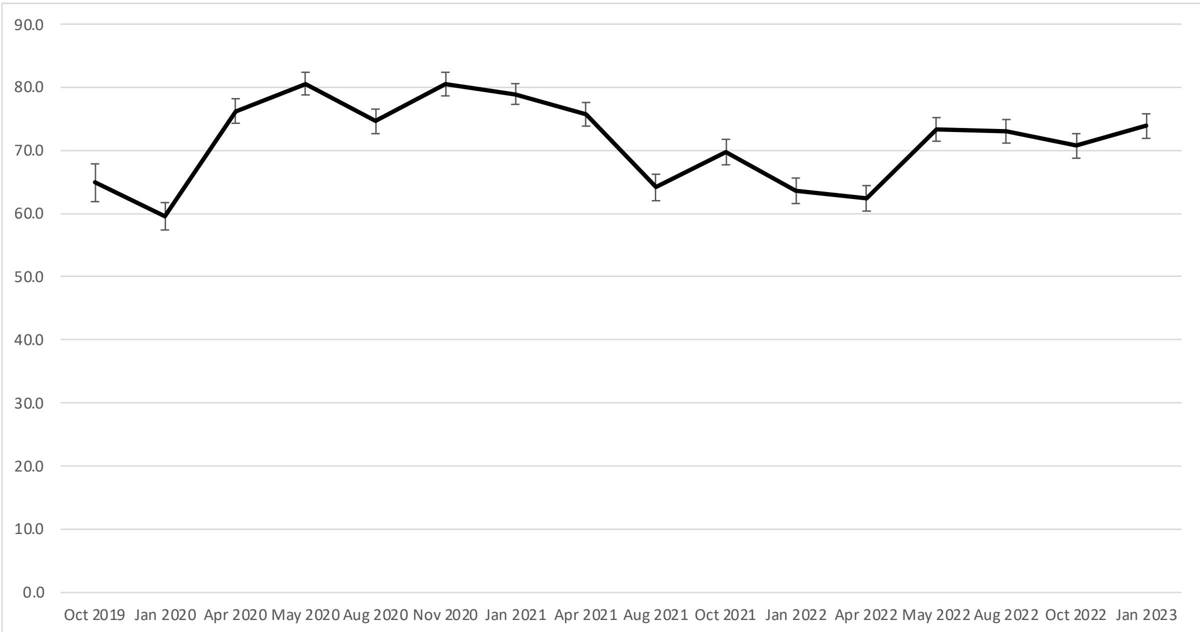
4.3 Satisfaction with the direction of the country

Variants of the question on satisfaction with democracy have been asked across multiple countries, and multiple time periods. In general, Australians tend to have relatively high levels of satisfaction with a recent study by the Pew Research Center[22] asking a similar question as part of the Global Attitudes Survey (most recently in the northern hemisphere Spring of 2022) in 19 countries. Although the methodology for Australia is similar to ANUpoll (in particular through the use of the Life in Australia™ panel), the questions are slightly different so the exact numbers are not directly comparable. Nonetheless, it is instructive that Australia has the equal fifth highest net satisfaction level, behind Sweden, Singapore, Germany and the Netherlands, and equal with Canada.

One of the reasons why Australians may have such a high level of satisfaction in democracy is that Australians also tend to have quite high levels of satisfaction with the direction of the country itself. The first question asked in the ANUpoll (since it was first collected in 2008) is 'Firstly, a general question about your views on living in Australia. All things considered, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the country is heading?'

Combining those who were satisfied or very satisfied (Figure 10), there was a significant and substantial increase in satisfaction between April and May 2022 (post-election), with a small but statistically significant decline between May and October 2022. Satisfaction increased again between October 2022 and January 2023, with 73.9 per cent of Australians currently satisfied or very satisfied.

Figure 10 Per cent of Australians who were satisfied or very satisfied with the direction of the country – October 2019 to January 2023.



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

Source: ANUpoll: January, April, May, August, October, and November 2020; January, April, August, and October 2021; January, April, May, August, and October 2022; and January 2023

Over the longer term, there has been a fair degree of stability in the levels of satisfaction with the direction of the country, perhaps explaining why there has not been as large an erosion in confidence and trust in institutions in Australia as in some other countries. If we exclude the 7 per cent of respondents in March 2008 who were neither satisfied or dissatisfied (an option that was not available in later waves), then 78.3 per cent of Australians were either very or fairly satisfied with the direction of the country in March 2008. This is slightly higher than in

January 2023, but not substantially so.

We can compare the results in Australia to the results from a similar question in the US, where much of the discussion on the crises of democracy originates and is focused. Undertaken by Gallup,[23] respondents were asked 'In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time?' In January 2023, only 23 per cent of respondents were satisfied, compared to 76 per cent dissatisfied (1 per cent gave no opinion), an almost mirror image of the results in Australia. Furthermore, while Australia has been relatively stable with high levels of satisfaction over the last 15 years, the US has been stable at the opposite extreme, with 21 per cent satisfied in the US in March 2008, and 77 per cent dissatisfied.

4.4 Who is satisfied, trusting, and confident?

On balance, Australians are quite positive about the country's direction, as well as its institutions. This positivity is not universal, of course. But compared to the US and many other developed democracies, on average Australians have a lot of confidence in their government and other institutions, are satisfied with how democracy is working, and satisfied with the direction in which the country is heading. However, just as comparisons across countries can be informative in terms of where satisfaction/confidence is relatively high or low and what might be driving these differences, it is also important to understand variation within a country in these key measures. Put simply, there are Australians who are far less satisfied, and less confident than others.

To analyse this variation, we repeated the regression analysis from the previous section using a slightly different methodology and with a different set of outcome measures, but using the same explanatory variables. The three outcomes that we analyse are confidence in the Federal Government; satisfaction with the direction of the country; and satisfaction with democracy. Because the dependent variables are categorical but ordered (i.e., higher values reflect greater confidence and greater satisfaction) we use an ordered probit model to analyse the factors. Results are presented as coefficients in Table 3, with positive coefficients indicating someone with that characteristic has a higher level of confidence or satisfaction, and negative values indicating a lower level.

There is some consistency across the three dependent variables, but some important differences as well. There are no major differences by sex, but there are some differences by age. Older Australians are more confident in the Federal Government than middle-aged and younger Australians and more satisfied with democracy. Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were slightly more confident in the Federal Government and slightly more satisfied with the direction of the country

One of the largest differences in our three measures is by high school education. Those who had not completed high school were less confident in the Federal Government, and less satisfied with democracy. Post-school qualifications also mattered, but the association was a little complicated. Those with a degree were more confident with the direction of the country, but slightly less satisfied with democracy.

Income has a reasonably consistent association with the outcome measures, with higher income tending to be associated with higher levels of satisfaction and confidence. There are fewer differences between the middle part of the income distribution and the bottom, though in the final model we can see that those with relatively low levels of income were less satisfied with democracy than those in the middle-income group.

The final set of variables in the model capture a person's main activity. Those who reported that they were permanently sick or has a disability were less confident in the government, far less satisfied with the direction of the country, and less satisfied with democracy. Leaving aside the 'other' category, which is hard to interpret, the other group that had a negative value (i.e., lower satisfaction or confidence than those who were employed) were the unemployed. In particular, those who were unemployed in the week preceding the survey were less satisfied with democracy than the employed.

Table 3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with satisfaction and confidence, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Confidence in the Federal government		Satisfaction with direction of country		Satisfaction with democracy	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.013		0.040		-0.052	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.078		-0.100		0.141	
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.063		-0.077		-0.035	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.032		-0.032		-0.027	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.121		0.109		0.191	**
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.260	**	0.098		0.378	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.322	**	0.112		0.397	***
Indigenous	0.057		0.195		-0.030	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.097		0.070		0.000	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.217	**	0.183	**	0.137	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.048		0.033		-0.014	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.286	***	-0.124		-0.312	***
Has a post graduate degree	0.236	***	-0.019		-0.086	
Has an undergraduate degree	0.207	***	0.076		-0.005	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.044		-0.033		-0.179	**
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.115		0.118		0.150	*
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.111		0.093		0.147	*
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.037		0.180	**	0.242	***
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.047		0.120		0.050	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.030		0.011		0.012	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	-0.144	*	-0.016		-0.249	***
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	-0.048		-0.040		-0.097	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	0.035		0.167	**	0.167	**
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.278	***	0.235	***	0.401	***
Main activity - In education	0.094		-0.129		-0.103	
Main activity - Unemployed	-0.032		0.017		-0.312	**
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	-0.299	*	-0.518	***	-0.472	***
Main activity - Retired	0.172	*	0.145		0.134	
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	-0.060		-0.037		-0.144	
Main activity - Other	-0.202		-0.434	**	-0.336	**
Cut-point 1	-1.147		-1.591		-1.852	
Cut-point 2	0.176		-0.428		-0.650	
Cut-point 3	1.877		1.542		1.255	
Sample size	3,041		3,039		3,035	

Notes: Ordered probit model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; lives in a household in the middle-income quintile; and main activity was employment in the previous 7 days.

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: ANUpoll, January 2023.

5 The role of government in Australia, and views on expenditure

One of the core premises of the essay by Dr Chalmers in *The Monthly* is that the role of government needs to shift as Australia emerges from the recent crises (financial, bushfire, pandemic) and engages with the current and emerging crises (climate, democratic, inflation, geopolitical). In an era of polycrisis, the way we do government in Australia needs to shift, or so the argument goes. The essay spells out the beginning of the government's thinking on how that role might change (with a particular focus on social impact investing), and there are legitimate debates about the efficacy of the different approaches. In this section, we answer a slightly different question and focus on the public attitudes towards different roles and approaches of government, and how these are changing through time.

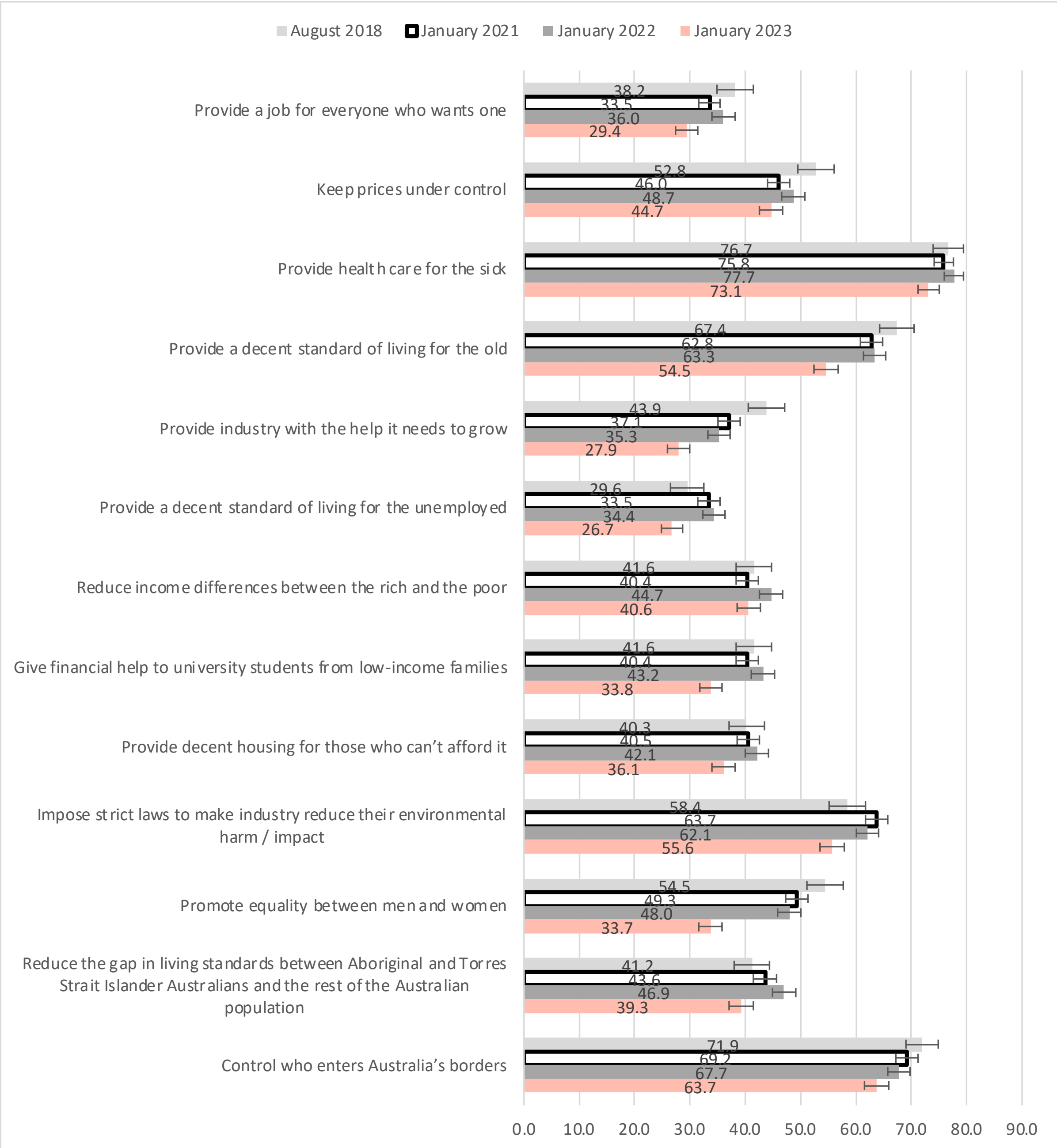
5.1 Public attitudes on the role of government in Australia

In August 2018, respondents to the ANUpoll were asked with regards to thirteen specific roles of government 'On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to ...?' Possible response options were definitely should be; probably should be, probably should not be, and definitely should not be. These questions were repeated in the last three January surveys. Figure 11 gives the per cent of Australian adults who think it definitely should be a role. The roles are presented randomly to respondents.

For the most part, the roles of government which have the greatest level of support have stayed relatively consistent over the last four-and-a-half years. The roles that have the greatest level of support are providing health care for the sick, controlling who enters Australia's borders and providing a decent standard of living for the old. Those with the lowest levels of support are providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed, providing industry assistance, and providing a job for everyone who wants one.

On balance, there has been a drop in support for more roles than there has been an increase in support. The greatest declines were for promoting equality between men and women, providing industry with the help it needs, and providing a decent standard of living for the old.

Figure 11 Per cent of Australians who definitely think particular roles should be the government's responsibility – August 2018 to January 2023.



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

Source: ANUpoll: August 2018; January 2021; January 2022; and January 2023

We can summarise this general decline through a 'Belief in Government Index', which is simply an aggregation of the thirteen measures, where we have a value of 0 if the person thinks that role should definitely not be the responsibility of government and a value of 3 if it definitely should be. Across individuals, therefore, the index ranges from 0 to 39. In August 2018, the average value for this index was 30.5. This dropped to 30.2 in January 2021, increased slightly to 30.4 in January 2022, but then dropped again to 28.9 in January 2023.

The factors that predict a strong belief in government are interesting, and not necessarily in the direction that you might expect. In Table 4, we analyse the factors associated with the

Belief in Government index (using a linear regression approach), whereas in the Appendix we analyse the factors associated with the individual roles (using an ordered probit model).

Those who are more supportive in general of a strong role for government are females, younger Australians (particularly under the age of 35), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, those in a household with a low income, and those who are permanently sick or have a disability. Those who are less supportive of a strong role of government are those who have not completed Year 12, who live outside of a capital city, and who live in a household with a relatively high income.

The differences by education are particularly large, even outside of the regression framework. Specifically, the average value for the index for those who have not completed Year 12 is 28.1, which is 1.4 points lower than for those who have completed Year 12 but don't have a qualification, or around one-quarter of a standard deviation. While this is quite a large difference, those with relatively low levels of education are not less supportive of all of the roles of government. Rather, the particular roles that those with low education are less supportive of (in the models summarised in the appendix are):

- Provide health care for the sick;
- Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed;
- Reduce income differences between the rich and the poor;
- Give financial help to university students from low-income families;
- Impose strict laws to make industry reduce their environmental harm / impact;
- Promote equality between men and women; and
- Reduce the gap in living standards between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the rest of the Australian population

Table 4 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with 'belief in government' index, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	1.047	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	1.023	
Aged 25 to 34 years	1.224	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.363	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.041	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.218	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.318	
Indigenous	2.133	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.310	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.281	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.117	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-1.457	***
Has a post graduate degree	-0.279	
Has an undergraduate degree	-0.021	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.212	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.076	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.451	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.129	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.215	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.989	***
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	1.665	***
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.675	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.987	**
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	-0.817	*
Main activity - In education	1.007	
Main activity - Unemployed	-1.051	
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	1.940	***
Main activity - Retired	-0.351	
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	0.370	
Main activity - Other	-0.702	
Constant	28.410	***
Sample size	2,993	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; lives in a household in the middle-income quintile; and main activity was employment in the previous 7 days.

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: ANUpoll, January 2023.

5.2 Support for government expenditure and taxation

The Treasurer in his essay for the Monthly makes clear that the government is operating in a fiscally constrained environment, and that any responses to the crises outlined by the government will not necessarily be able to be covered by additional expenditure. As he is clearly advocating a greater role in many areas of government (which does not appear to be supported by the general public), this distinction between government intervention and financial constraints may need to be made much clearer. It may well be that the reduced support for a strong role for government may be driven by similar concerns for the budget deficit, or at the very least some trends that are pointing in that direction.

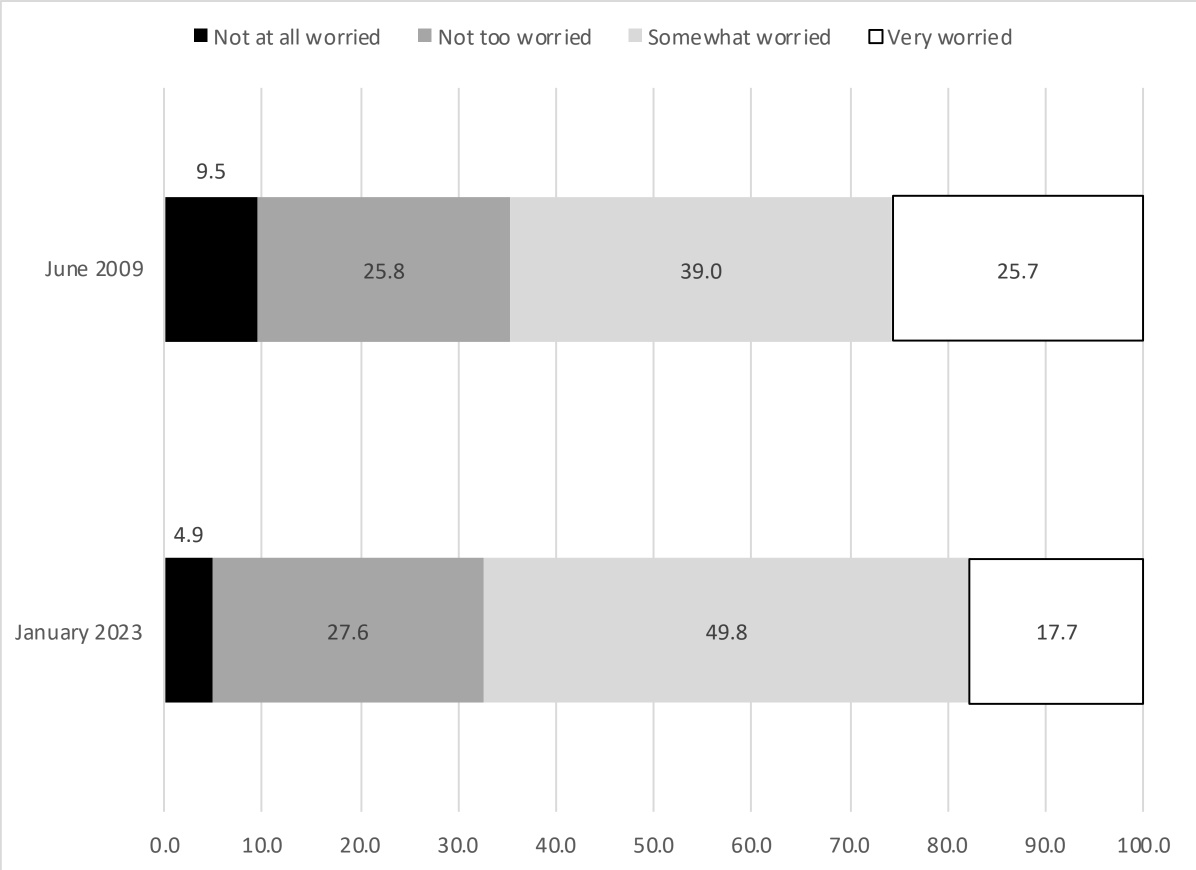
In June 2009, respondents to the fifth wave of ANUpoll were asked a range of questions about the economy, and the government's role in taxing and spending. Remembering that this was during the Global Financial Crisis, people were generally, but not strongly of the view that governments should spend additional money. We repeated some of these questions in the January 2023 ANUpoll.

Australians in June 2009 were asked '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…?' Back then, 56.0 per cent of Australians thought that the government should spend more money. There has been a slight, but not statistically significant increase in support for spending more money, up to 59.2 per cent in January 2023.

Respondents to the 2009 survey 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?' Very few Australians were ambivalent, with only 3.2 per cent of Australians in June 2009 saying it depends. By contrast, this had increased to about a quarter of Australians in January 2023 (23.9 per cent). 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 increase taxes (37.4 per cent). By January 2023, there were roughly equal numbers of people in support of more spending on social services (42.8 per cent) compared to raising taxes (33.4 per cent), or a ratio of only 1.3:1.

When asked specifically about whether they were worried about government debt, views have become less extreme between June 2009 and January 2023 (Figure 12). The specific question we asked in both 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 than in June 2009 who were either very worried (17.7 per cent compared to 25.7 per cent) or not at all worried (4.9 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent). Those who were not too worried stayed relatively stable (49.8 per cent in January 2023 compared to 39.0 per cent in June 2009), but there was a large increase in the per cent who said that they were somewhat worried (39.0 to 49.8 per cent).

Figure 12 Long-term change in worry about government debt – June 2009 to January 2023



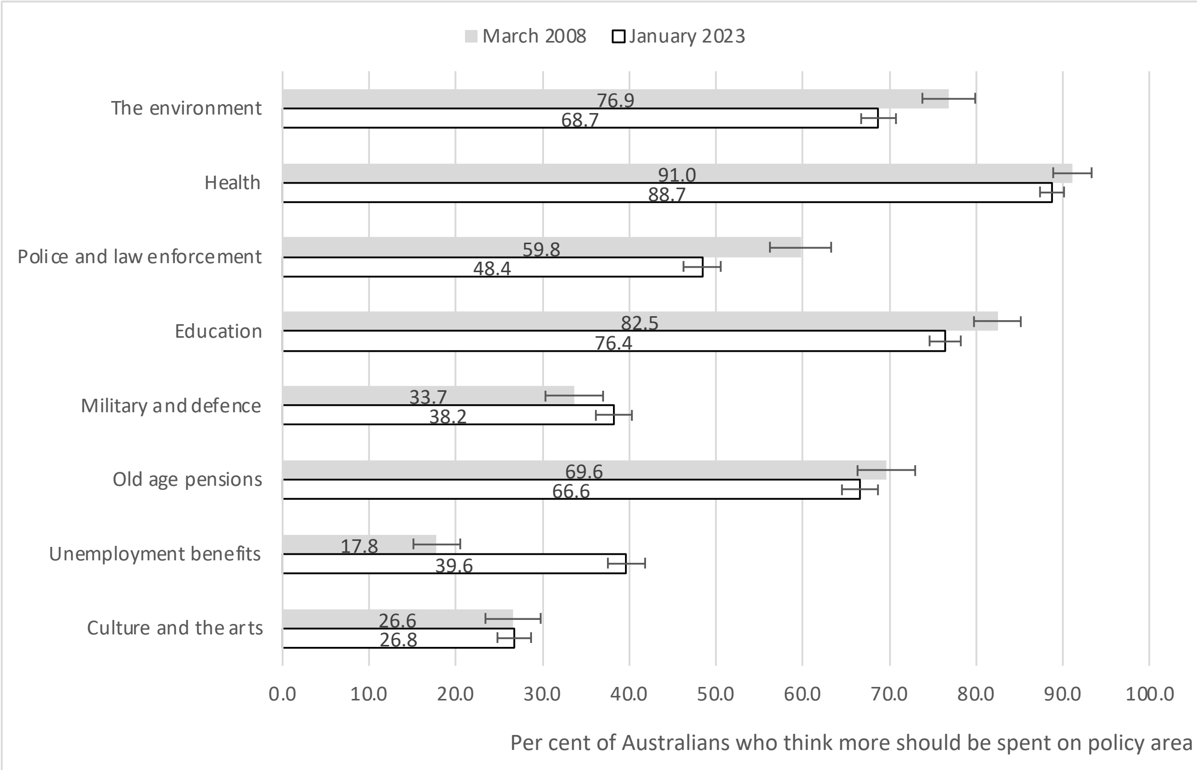
Source: ANUpoll: June 2009 and January 2023

On balance, a slightly higher per cent of Australians were either somewhat or very worried about debt now than 14 years ago. This highlights that even compared to 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 13 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 – 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 the last fifteen years – 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,[24] 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.

Figure 13 Per cent of Australians who think more should be spent on particular policy areas – March 2008 and January 2023.



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

Source: ANUpoll: March 2008 and January 2023

Taken together, the results presented in this and the previous sub-section provide mixed support for the arguments made by the Treasurer in is February 2023 Monthly essay. The article could be read as a call for a greater role for government in society and the economy, partially as a response to multiple crises. If anything, however, there has been a decline in support for a strong role for government since the start of the pandemic, implying that the government that he is helping to lead has much to do in persuading a reluctant public. Where there is support, however, is the belief that any expansion in the role of government will need to be within tight fiscal constraints. Compared to the last time the world was on the brink of (or already in) a recession, support for additional expenditure has certainly not increased.

Where there has been a shift, and where there is a large gap in the essay relative to the ANUpoll results is support for an increase in money spent on government benefits. Although there is not quite yet majority support, there has been a more than doubling of support from less than one-in-five to almost two-in-five Australians supporting an increase. At the time of writing , the Treasurer along with the Minister for Social Services was convening an 'Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee' whose role was to 'to provide advice on economic inclusion including policy settings, systems and structures, and the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments ahead of every Federal Budget.'[25] Although the committee is not focused on public opinion pertaining to these payments, recommendations for an increase in from the committee may attract a greater level of public support than they would have relatively recently.

6 Support for populist attitudes

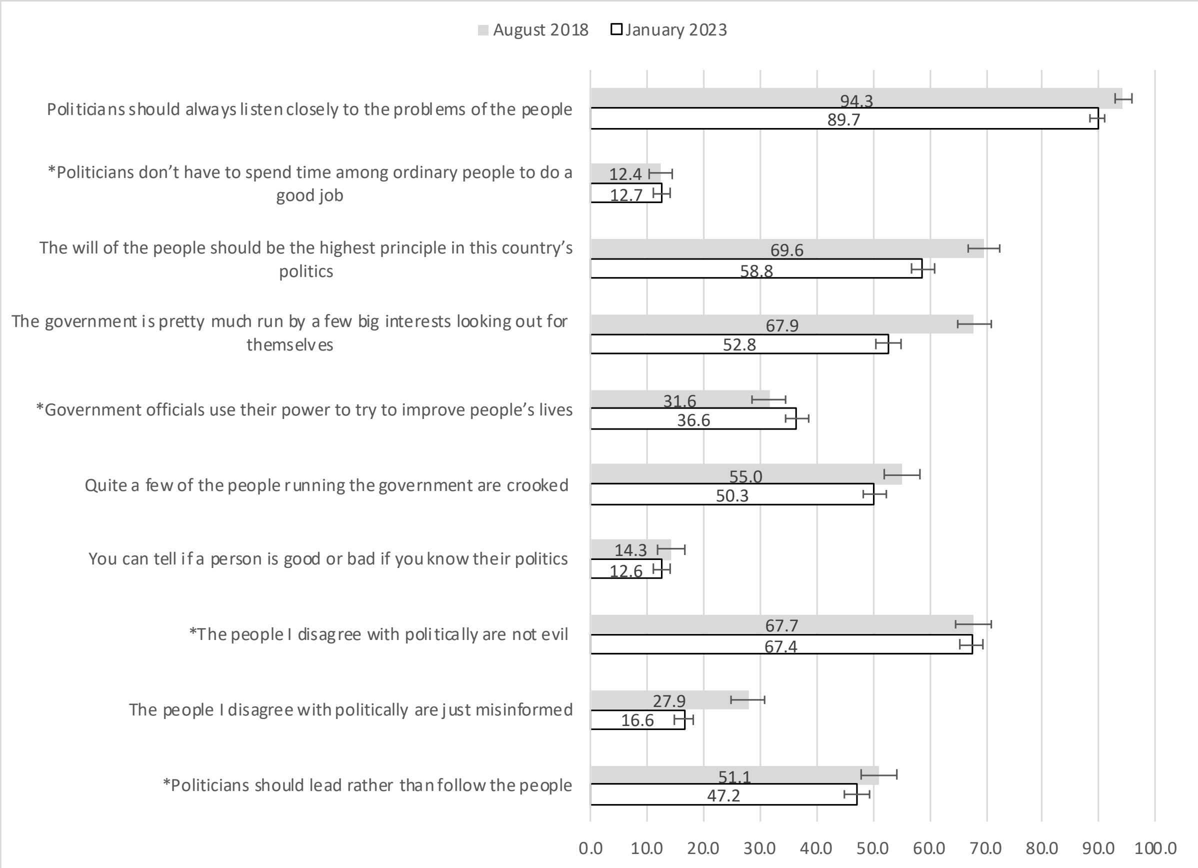
One of the stated motivations for a recasting of economic policy in Australia by the Treasurer in his Monthly essay was to undercut the support for anti-democratic politicians and leaders. Economic policy was framed as a mechanism to deal with what is perceived to be a political crisis, as follows:

> 'Democracies will prevail if we rely on their inbuilt strengths, and the ethical and practical incentives for leaders to govern in ways that improve the lives of the people. Our populations only become susceptible to the lies of populists and autocrats when democracies fail. It is in these circumstances that people reach for extremes – when they believe their system is already broken and their leaders have stopped listening'[26]

Although the threat from populist leaders should not be ignored, the survey evidence in Australia suggests that the risk is lower than in many other countries, and the data summarised below suggests that support is if anything declining. Specifically, in the August 2018 ANUpoll, we utilised a new (at the time) nine-item scale populism scale developed by Silva et al. (2018) with three dimensions – people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichean outlook. Each of the constructs had two positively worded and one negatively worded question, and we added a tenth negatively worded question that summarises a more general perception of populism related to politicians versus the people leading a country.

Figure 14 shows that there has been a decline from August 2018 in agreement for a number of the positively worded statements, and an increase for at least one of the negatively worded statements (marked with an *). Specifically, there are fewer Australians in January 2023 compared to August 2018 that think that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves (from 67.9 in August 2018 to 52.8 per cent in January 2023), the people I disagree with politically are just misinformed (27.9 to 16.6 per cent) and the will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics (69.6 to 58.8 per cent). On the other hand, more Australians think that Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives, increasing from 31.6 per cent in August 2018 to 36.6 per cent in January 2023.

Figure 14 Per cent of Australians who agree or strongly agree with statements regarding populism – August 2018 and January 2023.



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

Source: ANUpoll: August 2018 and January 2023

After confirming that the positively worded questions have a positive loading in a factor analysis and the negatively worded questions have a negative loading, we constructed an additive index which ranges from a minimum of 10 (strongly disagree with all the positively worded statements and strongly agree with all the negatively worded ones) and a maximum of 50 (strongly agree with all the positively worded statements and strongly disagree with all the negatively worded ones). In August 2018, the average value for this index was 33.4, whereas by January 2023 it had declined to 31.7. This decline by 1.7 points is equivalent to two-fifths of a standard deviation, which is quite a large decline over a relatively short period of time.

There is quite interesting variation in this index across some of the population sub-groups that we have been analysing, as demonstrated in the regression analysis presented in Table 5. Females and young Australians are more supportive of populist attitudes than males and those in the middle part of the age distribution. However, there are even larger differences between those aged 75 years and over and those aged 35 to 44, with the former less likely to support populist attitudes. Those who speak a language other than English are more supportive of populist attitudes compared to those who speak English only. It is interesting that there are no differences between those who have not completed Year 12 and those who have, but there are large differences by post-school qualifications. The average value for those with a postgraduate degree is 30.7 and for those with an undergraduate degree it is 31.0. For those who have completed Year 12 but do not have a qualification, however, it is 32.3.

Income has a strong correlation, but only at the top of the income distribution compared to the middle. There is no significant difference between the middle and the bottom. Finally, those who are permanently sick or have a disability are much more supportive of populist attitudes than those who were employed, as did those who were 'Doing housework, looking after children or other persons.' Those who were retired, on the other hand, had lower levels of support.

Table 5 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with populism index, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.333	*
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.923	*
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.519	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.257	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.699	**
Aged 65 to 74 years	-1.174	***
Aged 75 years plus	-1.631	***
Indigenous	-0.051	
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.018	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.468	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.694	*
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.146	
Has a post graduate degree	-1.194	***
Has an undergraduate degree	-1.006	***
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.104	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.413	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.436	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.258	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.384	
Lives outside of a capital city	0.009	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	0.429	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.280	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.769	**
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	-1.277	***
Main activity - In education	-0.164	
Main activity - Unemployed	0.038	
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	1.524	***
Main activity - Retired	-0.752	**
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	0.631	*
Main activity - Other	1.019	
Constant	32.536	***
Sample size	3,021	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; lives in a household in the middle-income quintile; and main activity was employment in the previous 7 days.

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: ANUpoll, January 2023.

7 Concluding comments

It is tempting for us in Australia to be drawn to the narratives and trends that emerge from the US and the UK. That is where much of the popular culture that we consume is generated, where many of the books we read are written and focused on, and where many of our institutions originated from. Furthermore, from an academic perspective, it is where the journals that Australian-based researchers try to publish are based, and where the high-profile conferences are held.

To be sure, there is much insight that can be gained from the political difficulties and social cleavages that are undoubtedly occurring in those two countries. If democracy and the social contract is fraying in the US and the UK, then we should be worried that Australia may not be far behind, or may already be there.

Despite the relevance of the US and the UK to Australia, we should also take care to analyse our own data and make our own judgements about the state of the country, the political system, and society as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, one could also argue that there is much that can be learned in those two countries from the Australian system. For, while not entirely positive, the political, economic, and social settings in Australia appear to be far from being in crisis.

Australia's attention has shifted well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2022 as Australia was just starting to open its borders, when asked 'What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?', nearly half of adult Australians (44.6 per cent) said that it was COVID.[27] Being just prior to the election, a further 13.4 per cent said that better government was the most important issue. For our most recent survey, on the other hand, the most important issues given by respondents were economic issues, given by 44.5 per cent of Australians. A further 9.3 per cent listed housing shortages/affordability and interest rates, with only 1.3 per cent listing COVID as the most important issue. Governance issues had also receded in people's minds, with only 4.1 per cent of people reporting it as the most important issue.

Wellbeing in Australia, whether measured by life satisfaction or psychological distress has improved substantially since the worst periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although psychological distress is now back to pre-pandemic levels, life satisfaction is still lower than late 2019/early 2020. This may be because of the emergence of very rapid price rises, with measures of financial stress now higher than pre-pandemic, as almost half of Australians think that rising prices are a 'very big problem.' Although this financial stress does not appear to have translated yet into psychological distress, there is no guarantee that this will not start to emerge as the cumulative impact of price and interest rates rises take a heavier and heavier toll.

Australia has imported much of its inflation from overseas, but it does not appear to have imported some of the political problems other countries are facing. Australians are more confident in the Federal Government than they have been since the height of the 'rally-around-the-flag' period in 2020, with almost twice as many Australians confident in their government now compared to January 2020.

Over the longer term, there has been some declines in confidence in institutions (in particular churches and religions institutions), but Australians are as confident in the Federal Government in 2023 as they were in 2008, and even more confident in the public service. This is a remarkable almost lack of change, especially in comparison to many other developed democracies. And, although there has been a small decline since March 2008, more than three-quarters of Australians are satisfied with democracy in Australia and a little under three-quarters are satisfied with the direction of the country. There are even fewer Australians in

January 2023 that supported statements related to populism compared to August 2018, despite populism not having a strong hold in Australia at our baseline.

Perhaps because of this satisfaction, Australians do not appear to be demanding a much greater role for government since just prior to the pandemic. Indeed, apart from support for the unemployed, in many areas there are fewer Australians that think governments should have a role to play.

It is in some way not surprising that Australians are far more optimistic towards the country and the political system than in other democracies. Australia's COVID-19 experience was vastly different. According to the ever-useful *Our World in Data* website, Australia had a cumulative 19,070 confirmed COVID-19 deaths up until the 15th of February 2023. While those deaths are undoubtedly distressing, particularly for close family and friends of those who have died (or experienced serious illness), if Australia had the same per-person mortality rate as the US or the UK, then roughly 4.5 times as many Australians would have died from COVID-19, or a little over 86,000 deaths. If such a death rate had eventuated, then we would expect that Australians would be less satisfied with their own lives, less satisfied or confident in their institutions, and more likely to support notions of populism.

While the overall trends are positive, detailed analysis of the data presented in this paper does not support an attitude of complacency. There are groups within the population that are far less satisfied, either with their own lives or with institutions in Australia. Those with low levels of education, low income, or who are unemployed/permanently excluded from the labour market due to health conditions or a disability were all found to be of concern for many of the measures analysed in this paper.

Taken together, there is mixed-support for many of the notions outlined by the Treasurer in his February 2023 essay for *the Monthly*. He is right to point out that the education, employment, or income distribution appears to be leading to pockets of distrust and dissatisfaction, not to mention lower levels of wellbeing. On the other hand though, Australians do not appear to yet be demanding the restructuring of the relationship between government and its citizens or the economy that he appears to be advocating. The wellbeing data and the increased support for increases in unemployment benefits suggest a need for a targeted set of policy changes (if the wellbeing budget is actually to mean anything). More work needs to be done to convince the public that more substantive changes are warranted, though the high levels of confidence in the government that he serves in suggests that the Treasurer will at least have an audience with a somewhat receptive ear.

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Appendix Tables

Table A1a Factors associated with selected roles of government, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Provide job for everyone		Keep prices under control		Provide health care		Provide standard of living for old		Provide industry assistance	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.084		0.158	***	0.093		0.220	***	0.003	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.050		-0.027		-0.060		-0.018		0.188	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.217	**	0.071		-0.040		-0.008		0.171	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.009		-0.141	*	0.041		0.193	**	0.111	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.224	***	-0.310	***	0.060		0.165	*	0.064	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.179		-0.365	***	0.107		0.204		0.211	*
Aged 75 years plus	-0.282	**	-0.352	***	0.124		0.060		0.269	**
Indigenous	0.082		0.312		0.394		0.157		0.333	*
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.034		0.019		0.077		0.165	*	-0.019	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.033		0.002		-0.174		-0.193	*	0.059	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.291	***	0.223	**	-0.021		-0.093		0.188	*
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.114		0.061		-0.378	***	-0.119		0.011	
Has a post graduate degree	0.036		-0.208	**	-0.210		-0.052		-0.303	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.006		-0.148		-0.121		-0.041		-0.120	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	0.179	**	0.118		-0.121		0.015		0.140	*
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.069		0.129		-0.152		0.050		-0.013	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.011		0.100		0.125		0.096		-0.005	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	0.040		-0.052		-0.060		0.050		-0.118	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.101		-0.009		0.002		0.030		-0.103	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.083		-0.198	***	-0.133	*	-0.020		-0.191	***
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	0.333	***	0.316	***	0.064		0.181	*	0.052	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.277	***	0.069		0.014		0.066		-0.023	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.173	**	-0.087		-0.038		-0.118		-0.081	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	-0.246	***	-0.197	**	0.006		-0.180	**	0.034	
Main activity - In education	0.131		0.300		0.053		-0.063		0.033	
Main activity - Unemployed	-0.011		-0.112		-0.276		-0.156		-0.092	
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	0.393	***	0.350	**	0.426	**	0.336	**	0.084	
Main activity - Retired	-0.128		-0.137		-0.004		-0.051		-0.076	
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	0.081		0.107		0.221	*	0.161	*	-0.004	
Main activity - Other	-0.020		-0.076		-0.233		0.218		-0.282	
Cut-point 1	-1.374		-2.217		-2.692		-2.366		-1.930	
Cut-point 2	-0.347		-1.230		-2.179		-1.480		-0.848	
Cut-point 3	0.786		0.140		-0.727		0.073		0.652	
Sample size	3,035		3,039		3,047		3,047		3,037	

Table A1b Factors associated with selected roles of government, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Provide standard of living for unemp		Reduce income dif btw rich and poor		Financially help uni students		Provide housing		Impose strict enviro. laws	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.086		0.050		0.160	***	0.226	***	0.201	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.110		0.172		0.180		0.231	*	0.184	
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.138		0.231	***	0.165	*	0.100		0.218	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.005		-0.021		0.064		0.029		0.238	***
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.019		-0.211	**	0.093		0.007		0.182	**
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.163		-0.234	**	0.036		-0.018		0.078	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.156		-0.282	**	0.123		-0.103		0.093	
Indigenous	0.287		0.112		0.252		0.385	*	0.467	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.057		0.056		0.058		0.122		0.086	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.060		0.037		-0.032		-0.142		-0.037	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.130		-0.044		0.117		-0.036		-0.007	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.259	***	-0.222	**	-0.204	**	-0.196	*	-0.375	***
Has a post graduate degree	-0.049		-0.042		0.092		-0.024		0.008	
Has an undergraduate degree	-0.016		-0.091		0.069		0.015		-0.025	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.162	*	-0.079		-0.041		-0.054		-0.158	*
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	0.011		0.052		0.037		0.033		-0.123	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	-0.036		-0.034		0.059		0.018		0.025	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.068		-0.020		-0.084		-0.014		-0.052	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	-0.007		-0.026		-0.060		0.015		0.066	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.172	***	-0.164	***	-0.080		-0.102		-0.143	**
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	0.332	***	0.313	***	0.237	***	0.260	***	-0.006	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.115		0.278	***	0.074		0.043		-0.019	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.220	***	-0.086		-0.225	***	-0.239	***	-0.008	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	-0.218	***	-0.277	***	-0.077		-0.199	**	0.029	
Main activity - In education	0.432	**	0.367	*	0.236		0.143		-0.002	
Main activity - Unemployed	0.012		0.149		-0.299		-0.096		-0.174	
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	0.536	***	0.272	*	0.146		0.392	***	0.326	**
Main activity - Retired	0.014		-0.179	**	-0.128		-0.065		0.082	
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	0.064		0.007		0.140		-0.010		-0.023	
Main activity - Other	0.275		0.017		-0.253		-0.037		-0.025	
Cut-point 1	-1.778		-1.644		-1.846		-2.004		-2.053	
Cut-point 2	-0.727		-0.724		-0.967		-1.019		-1.321	
Cut-point 3	0.512		0.151		0.549		0.407		-0.045	
Sample size	3,034		3,040		3,040		3,043		3,044	

Table A1c Factors associated with selected roles of government, January 2023

Explanatory variables	Promote gender equality		Reduce Indigenous living standard gap		Control borders	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
Female	0.320	***	0.158	***	-0.304	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.345	**	0.587	***	-0.437	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.229	***	0.276	***	-0.273	***
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.027		-0.028		0.153	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.022		-0.035		0.292	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.065		0.023		0.155	
Aged 75 years plus	0.051		-0.082		0.165	
Indigenous	0.022		0.430	**	0.624	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.100		0.048		-0.136	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.001		0.066		0.008	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.045		-0.172	*	-0.129	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.252	***	-0.195	**	-0.060	
Has a post graduate degree	0.176	*	0.261	**	-0.292	***
Has an undergraduate degree	0.191	**	0.216	**	-0.118	
Has a Certificate III/IV, Diploma or Associate Degree	-0.079		0.014		-0.098	
Lives in the most disadvantaged areas (1st quintile)	-0.038		0.079		-0.024	
Lives in next most disadvantaged areas (2nd quintile)	0.058		0.132		0.031	
Lives in next most advantaged areas (4th quintile)	-0.023		0.059		-0.011	
Lives in the most advantaged areas (5th quintile)	0.057		0.139	*	-0.044	
Lives outside of a capital city	-0.143	**	-0.077		-0.010	
Lives in lowest income household (1st quintile)	0.147	*	0.173	**	0.037	
Lives in next lowest income household (2nd quintile)	0.017		0.047		-0.049	
Lives in next highest income household (4th quintile)	-0.043		-0.041		0.038	
Lives in highest income household (5th quintile)	0.004		0.066		0.247	***
Main activity - In education	0.024		-0.008		-0.237	
Main activity - Unemployed	-0.056		-0.294		-0.402	**
Main activity - Permanently sick or disabled	0.055		0.225		0.018	
Main activity - Retired	0.073		0.033		0.161	
Main activity - Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	-0.055		0.064		0.061	
Main activity - Other	-0.144		-0.181		-0.150	
Cut-point 1	-1.112		-1.264		-2.624	
Cut-point 2	-0.439		-0.489		-1.915	
Cut-point 3	0.652		0.589		-0.608	
Sample size	3,034		3,031		3,043	

Notes: Ordered probit model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; non-Indigenous; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a post-graduate degree; lives in neither an advantaged or disadvantaged suburb (third quintile); lives in a capital city; lives in a household in the middle-income quintile; and main activity was employment in the previous 7 days.

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: ANUpoll, January 2023.

Endnotes

1 https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2023/1/prince-harrys-spare-becomes-fastest-selling-non-fiction-book-ever-732915
2 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-10/dutton-seeks-assurances-on-limits-of-voice-s-advisory-role/101838954
3 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-26/alice-springs-nt-crime-alcohol-restrictions/101891270
4 https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/does-sydney-need-us-style-cabana-ban-to-curb-beach-spreading-20230202-p5chgi.html
5 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-17/novak-djokovic-australia-open-visa-cancelled-what-happened/100760594
6 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-51101049
7 https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases
8 https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/nsw-eases-restrictions-for-pubs-and-weddings-ahead-of-holidays-20201202-p56jwv.html
9 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-12-02/child-among-eight-omicron-covid-19-cases-in-nsw/100668408
10 https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/29/run-on-rapid-antigen-tests-leaves-australian-governments-scrambling-for-supplies
11 https://github.com/owid/covid-19-data/tree/master/public/data
12 http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/
13 https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/covid-19
14 The ANUpoll series of surveys is collected on a probability-based, longitudinal panel (Life in Australia™). By using probability-based recruiting (predominantly telephone-based) the unknown and unquantifiable biases inherent in opt-in (non-probability) panels are minimised and it is also possible to quantify the uncertainty around the estimates due to sampling error using standard statistical techniques. This is not possible with non-probability surveys.

15 The unit record survey data will soon be available for download through the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/BTCSY5).
16 The contact methodology adopted for the online Life in Australia™ members is an initial survey invitation via email and SMS (where available), followed by multiple email reminders and a reminder SMS. Telephone follow up of panel members who have not yet completed the survey commenced in the second week of fieldwork and consisted of reminder calls encouraging completion of the online survey. The contact methodology for offline Life in Australia™ members was an initial SMS (where available), followed by an extended call-cycle over a two-week period. A reminder SMS was also sent in the second week of fieldwork.
17 Taking into account recruitment to the panel, the cumulative response rate for this survey is around 6.5 per cent.
18 https://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/download/bp1_bs-4.pdf

[19] Because life satisfaction is observed as a categorical variable and can only take on integer values, we test the sensitivity of the model conclusions by re-estimating using the ordered probit model. While this model is more complex in terms of summarising the magnitude of the relationship, the sign and statistical significance of the main explanatory variables do not vary between the OLS and ordered probit models.

[20] It should be noted that a person's main activity is self-reported and mutually exclusive. Many respondents reported multiple activities. The question asks respondents who report that they were unemployed to specify whether they were actively seeking work or not. We combine both groups due to sample size issues.

[21] An 'unpaired t-test' suggests that this difference is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.04.

[22] https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/satisfaction-with-democracy-and-political-efficacy-in-advanced-economies-2022/

[23] https://news.gallup.com/poll/1669/general-mood-country.aspx

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

[25] https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/jim-chalmers-2022/media-releases/members-appointed-economic-inclusion-advisory-committee

[26] https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2023/february/jim-chalmers/capitalism-after-crises

[27] Responses are open-ended, and coded by the Social Research Centre into a series of categories (23 categories in 2023)