Australian National University

Political and policy attitudes in an age of pessimism, March 2026

Professor Nicholas Biddle[1] and Professor Matthew Gray[2]

1. Head, School of Politics and International Relations, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University
2. Director, POLIS: The Centre for Social Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University

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

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Abstract

This paper reports on political and policy attitudes collected in the March 2026 ANUpoll, a survey of 3,662 adult Australians conducted between 11 and 26 March 2026. The survey was conducted against a backdrop of acute economic anxiety and historically low life satisfaction documented in a companion paper (Biddle and Gray 2026), and during a period of significant movement in published polling on voting intentions.

Australians in March 2026 retain broadly expansive views on the role of government, with majority support for government responsibility across all thirteen domains examined. However, the average value of the belief-in-government index declined between December 2025 and March 2026, consistent with falling institutional confidence over this period. Fiscal attitudes reflect a well-documented paradox: support for spending to stimulate the economy has declined, concern about public debt has reached a series high, and more Australians than at any previous ANUpoll wave describe their income taxes as too high, yet majorities simultaneously favour increased government spending across most budget areas.

Environmental attitudes show a modest shift under conditions of economic strain. The proportion of Australians believing the country does too little for the environment has declined from pandemic-era levels, though it remains the most common view. Nearly three in ten Australians rate global warming as not serious or not very serious, a higher scepticism rate than for any other environmental issue asked about.

The political analysis draws on voting intention data, party ratings, and three statistical models to examine the attitudinal and policy foundations of support for five political parties: the Liberals, Labor, Nationals, Greens, and One Nation. While demographic characteristics explain some of the variation in party ratings, attitudinal indices—covering financial stress, hope, belief in government, environmental concern, institutional confidence, and populist orientation—add considerably greater explanatory power. Confidence in institutions is positively associated with favourable ratings for the Liberal, Labor, National and Greens parties but has no significant association with the ratings of One Nation. The strongest attitudinal predictor of a favourable One Nation rating is populist orientation, with policy preference for stricter border control and less strict environmental laws emerging as the policy items most distinctively associated with One Nation support.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the current rise in One Nation support reflects an internally coherent attitudinal configuration rather than a simple protest response to economic conditions, though financial stress remains an important contributing factor.

1 Introduction and overview

Between 11 and 26 March 2026, the ANU in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU) conducted the most recent ANUpoll survey of 3,662 adult Australians. Data collection took place against a backdrop of considerable domestic and international disruption, including the ongoing war between the US/Israel and Iran, the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and their effects on oil and other prices.

In the first summary paper based on the March 2026 ANUpoll survey (Biddle and Gray 2026), we concluded that 'Australia in March 2026 is a country under considerable strain', with average life satisfaction 'the lowest recorded in the ANUpoll series' and 'the culmination of a sustained deterioration rather than a sudden fall.' We found optimism about the future having largely evaporated, and a relatively high rate of pessimism about life relative to the past. However, we also concluded that 'Australia is not at the point of democratic unravelling, but the economic, security, and institutional pressures documented ... establish a baseline against which future surveys will need to be read carefully.'

The March 2026 survey contained a range of questions regarding policy prioritisation, budget strategy, and concerns for the environment. Furthermore, in the survey we collected data on political attitudes including voting intentions and party ratings.

The broad picture of economic anxiety and deepening pessimism about the national trajectory documented in the first paper is consistent with a substantial body of recent public analysis and commentary. Writing in The Conversation ahead of the 2025 federal election, Viet Nguyen and colleagues identified rising economic pessimism as a principal driver of the long-run collapse in support for the major parties, noting that the share of Australians reporting deterioration in their household finances had steadily increased since the Global Financial Crisis, and that support for minor parties and independents had roughly doubled over the same period.[i] A minority government did not eventuate, but that analysis framed the upcoming 2025 election result not primarily as an anti-Trump backlash, but as a more straightforward expression of dissatisfaction with economic conditions that had been building for years.

The data reported in this paper allow us to test and extend that argument with new March 2026 evidence, and to identify more precisely which attitudes and experiences are driving voters toward which alternatives.

Geopolitics and financial uncertainty provide one backdrop against which the ANUpoll survey was conducted. However, another backdrop is a substantial shift in political attitudes post-election. As will be described later in the paper, the main centre-right party grouping of the Liberal/National Party Coalition has followed their poor showing in the 2025 election with a dramatic decline in party support in published polling. In their place, the right-wing One Nation party has seen a surge in support in the same polls, surpassing the Coalition in most, and matching the governing centre-left Labor Party in some.

The scale and pace of this shift attracted widespread commentary in the months leading up to the March 2026 ANUpoll and since. Antony Green, writing in January 2026, described the Coalition's predicament in structural rather than cyclical terms, arguing that One Nation's growth was concentrated precisely in the outer metropolitan and

regional seats where the Coalition's remaining representation was concentrated, creating a compounding threat to their viability as an opposition force.[ii]

The Australian Financial Review,[iii] reporting on consolidated survey data, identified 'anti-establishment sentiment, lack of confidence in the political system, and the perception that the major parties are Tweedledee and Tweedledum' as the primary drivers, and described the shift as a structural realignment rather than a protest cycle. The South Australian state election in March 2026, held during our data collection window, provided further evidence: One Nation won four lower house seats in a state where it had historically returned primary votes of around four per cent, drawing support from both former Coalition voters and working-class Labor areas in the outer suburbs.

Some have viewed this increase in One Nation support with substantial consternation. Others have welcomed it as a disruption of the Labor/Coalition duopoly in Australian politics. Our aim in this paper is neither to condemn nor support Australians that say they would vote for One Nation. Rather, our aim is to use a range of other data from the ANUpoll survey to help explain why some people may report a high degree of support for the party, as well as why some might retain a preference for the other major parties (including the Greens) in the Australian system. In doing so, the paper moves beyond the polling numbers that have dominated public commentary to examine the attitudinal and policy foundations of party support: what people think government should do, how much they trust institutions, how they assess the economic outlook, and how populist in orientation they are. That analysis, we argue, offers a more complete account of this political moment than voting intentions alone can provide.

To achieve these research aims, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 examines Australians' views on the role of government, drawing on thirteen specific policy domains to construct an overall index of belief in government responsibility, and analyses the demographic and geographic factors associated with a more or less expansive view of what government should do. Section 3 extends this analysis to the question of how government activity should be funded, examining attitudes toward fiscal stimulus, the tax-versus-services trade-off, concerns about public debt, and views on personal income tax, drawing on time-series data that in some cases stretches back to the Global Financial Crisis. Section 4 turns to the environment, analysing both broad assessments of Australia's contribution to environmental protection and concern about nine specific environmental issues, again situating the March 2026 findings within a longer time series.

Section 5 presents the paper's central political analysis. It begins with voting intentions and party ratings before moving to the more analytically productive question of who supports which party and why, examining the demographic, attitudinal, and policy predictors of ratings for each of the five parties, including One Nation, which is included as a named response option in the ANUpoll for the first time. The section draws on six indices spanning financial stress, optimism, belief in government, environmental concern, institutional confidence, and a populism scale, to provide a richer account of the attitudinal foundations of party support than polling data alone can offer. Section 6 presents concluding comments.

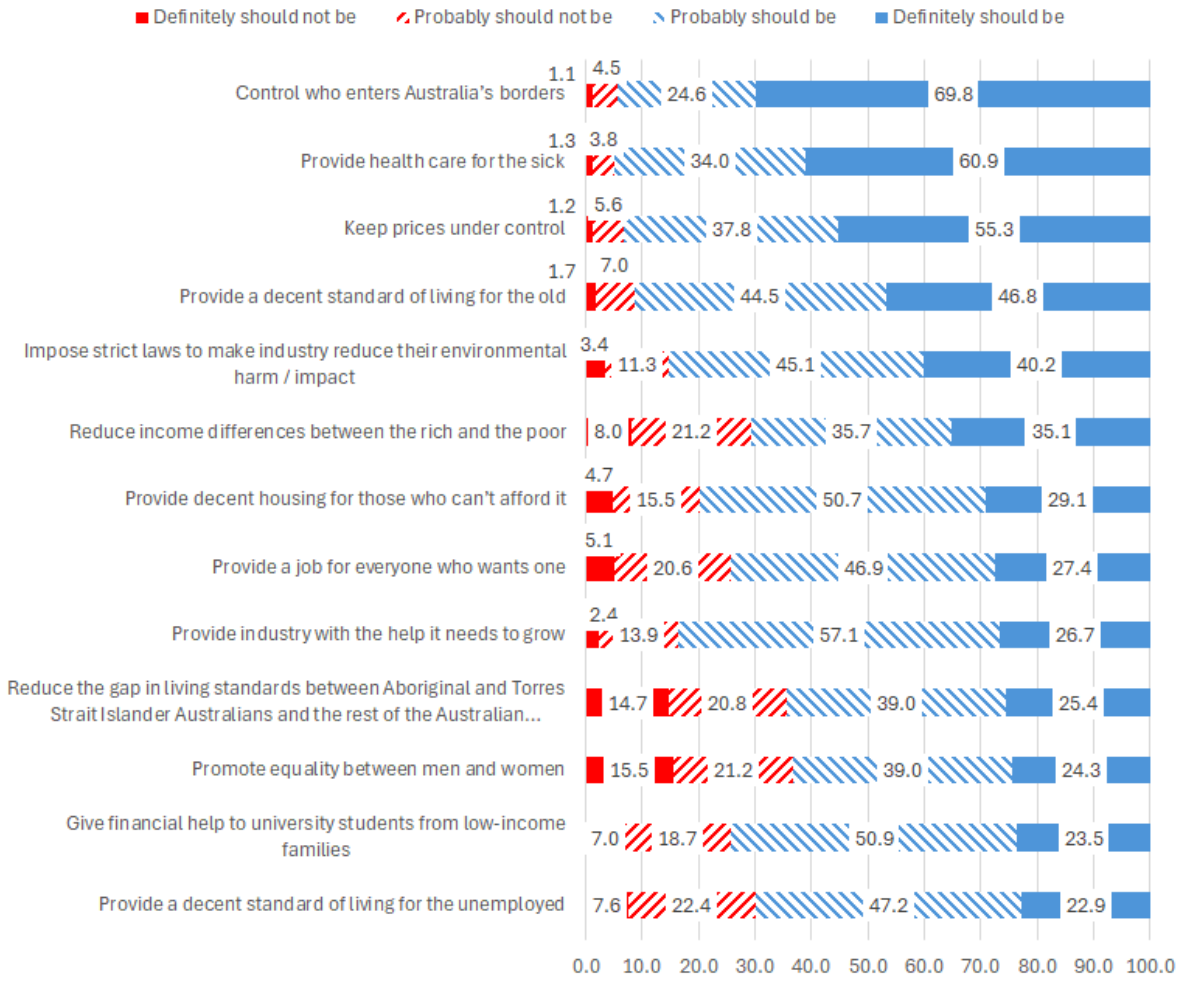
2 The perceived responsibility of government

The analysis of Australia's policy views begins by examining perceptions on the extent to which each of 13 potential roles should, or should not be the responsibility of governments in Australia. The specific question asked is '*On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to…?*' with four possible response options.

Australians are in general supportive of an expansive role of government, with at least six-in-ten Australians thinking that most policy roles probably or definitely should be the responsibility of government. However, despite broad agreement on an expansive role, support varies substantially across specific responsibilities, particularly when focussing on the proportion who definitely agree. At one extreme, almost seven-in-ten Australians (69.8 per cent) definitely agree that governments in Australia should control who enters the country. There is also majority support for providing health care for the sick (60.9 per cent), and for keeping prices under control (55.3 per cent). These areas can be considered core responsibilities of government in the eyes of Australians.

At the other end of the distribution, there are three roles of government for which fewer than one-quarter of Australians believe should definitely be a government responsibility. The lowest level of definite support is for providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed, with only 22.9 per cent thinking this should definitely be a responsibility of government. Support is similarly low for providing financial assistance to low-income university students (23.5 per cent) and promoting equality between men and women (24.3 per cent). It is important to note, however, that a majority of Australians still believe that each of these roles should probably or definitely fall within the remit of government. These functions are therefore not rejected outright, but are more accurately characterised as being seen as peripheral rather than core responsibilities of government.

Figure 1 Support for specific responsibilities of government, March 2026, Australia (%)



Source: ANUpoll

With one minor exception, people who support a given responsibility of government are also more likely to support the other areas being government responsibilities. This consistency suggests the presence of an underlying 'belief in government' that varies across the population, and in part shapes support for particular roles. Evidence for this comes from a factor analysis, which provides qualified support for a single factor, with an eigenvalue of 4.08 compared to 1.07 for the second factor. All the individual roles have a positive loading on that first factor, indicating a broadly shared dimension underpinning attitudes toward government responsibility. However, the relative weakness of the second factor, alongside the behaviour of one specific item, suggests that not all roles fit equally well within this general belief structure.

The role that departs most clearly from this general structure is border control. Support for government responsibility in controlling who enters the country loads substantially more strongly on the second factor than on the primary belief-in-government factor, indicating that attitudes toward border control are organised along a distinct latent dimension.[iv]

This separation is also evident in the response distribution itself, with border control attracting the highest proportion of respondents who definitely endorse it as a

government responsibility (69.8 per cent). Taken together, these results suggest that support for border control is not simply an extension of broader preference for an expansive or minimalist state, but reflects a qualitatively different orientation toward government responsibility. As shown in later sections of the paper, this distinction has substantive implications for understanding political alignments and the foundations of party support.

We return to the analysis of the individual roles of government in a later section. For the remainder of this section, we summarise attitudes using a single composite index (measure), while recognising that a substantial proportion of the variation in views on government responsibility remains unexplained. Specifically, we create an additive belief-in-government index by assigning a value of one for 'definitely should not be,' and a value of four for 'definitely should be.' We multiply the average value of the person's responses by 13, which means the index ranges from 13 (low belief in government) to 48 (high belief).

The average value for this index in March 2026 is 40.6, with a standard deviation of 6.2. There was a statistically significant decline from December 2025 (when the value was 42.0). However, the March 2026 value is slightly higher than the value observed in January 2025 (40.2).

The timing of this decline is noteworthy. The period between December 2025 and March 2026 was one of sharply rising economic anxiety and falling institutional confidence, as documented in Biddle and Gray (2026). An intuitive expectation might be that deteriorating conditions would increase demand for government action. The data suggest the opposite. As conditions worsened, Australians became modestly more sceptical about the scope of government responsibility, albeit back to the January 2025 baseline. This is consistent with the declining confidence in the Federal Government documented in the first paper, and points to a population that is anxious but not, on average, looking to government as the primary source of relief.

These indices are particularly useful for examining relationships with other key measures in the dataset. In a later section, we use the belief-in-government index as an explanatory variable in a detailed regression model. For the remainder of this section, we focus on the demographic and geographic factors that are predictive of a person's underlying beliefs about government responsibility. To facilitate this analysis, we first transform the index into a z-score, standardising it to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. We then estimate a linear regression model, which allows us to look at the relationship with one variable or group of variables, holding all other variables constant. Coefficient estimates from this model are presented in Table 1.

There are differences between age groups. Those aged 65 to 74 years have a more expansive belief than those aged 35 to 44 (the base case). However, the biggest difference is between young adults and the rest of the population. Controlling for other characteristics, those aged 18 to 24 have an index value 0.403 higher than the base case. Gender differences are also evident, although smaller in magnitude. Females score 0.272 of a standard deviation higher on the belief-in-government index than males.

There are no statistically significant differences in beliefs about government responsibility by country of birth. Those who are employed have a lower belief-in-government index value. Individuals living outside inner-metropolitan areas are also less

supportive of government taking on expansive responsibilities. One finding that stands out is the absence of any statistically significant education gradient in beliefs about government responsibility. Unlike life satisfaction, democratic attitudes, institutional confidence, and financial stress, which all varied substantially by educational attainment, views on what government should and should not do appear to be distributed broadly across the population regardless of qualification level (Biddle and Gray 2026).

Table 1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with index of 'belief in government', March 2026

Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.403	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.151	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.067	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.114	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.199	**
Aged 75 years plus	0.025	
Female	0.272	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.056	
Has a degree	0.066	
Born overseas – English speaking country	0.064	
Born overseas – non-English speaking country	0.059	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.132	*
Employed	-0.193	***
Outer Metropolitan Electorate	-0.097	*
Provincial Electorate	-0.097	*
Rural Electorate	-0.136	**
Constant	-0.122	
Number of respondents	3,438	

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

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

Source: ANUpoll

Taken together, the findings in this section establish an important framing for the political analysis that follows. Australians in March 2026 retain a broadly expansive view of what government should do, but that view has softened since December 2025, and sits alongside deep scepticism about the government's actual performance as documented in Biddle and Gray (2026).

Taken together, the demographic profile of those with a stronger belief in government responsibility is younger, female, and inner-metropolitan. Border control stands apart from this general picture, commanding unusually strong 'definite' support across the population and loading on a distinct dimension. The paper returns to each of these patterns in the political preferences analysis, where belief in government and views on specific roles emerge as some of the strongest predictors of which party Australians are inclined to support.

3 Taxes and spending

In general, the greater the number of roles of government the larger and more expensive it will be for the government to fulfil its roles. Expansions in the role of government can be funded via higher taxes or via governments borrowing money. In the March 2026 ANUpoll we asked a number of questions related to views on government spending, including whether it should be higher or lower, how it should be funded, and what it should focus on.

The first question asked was:

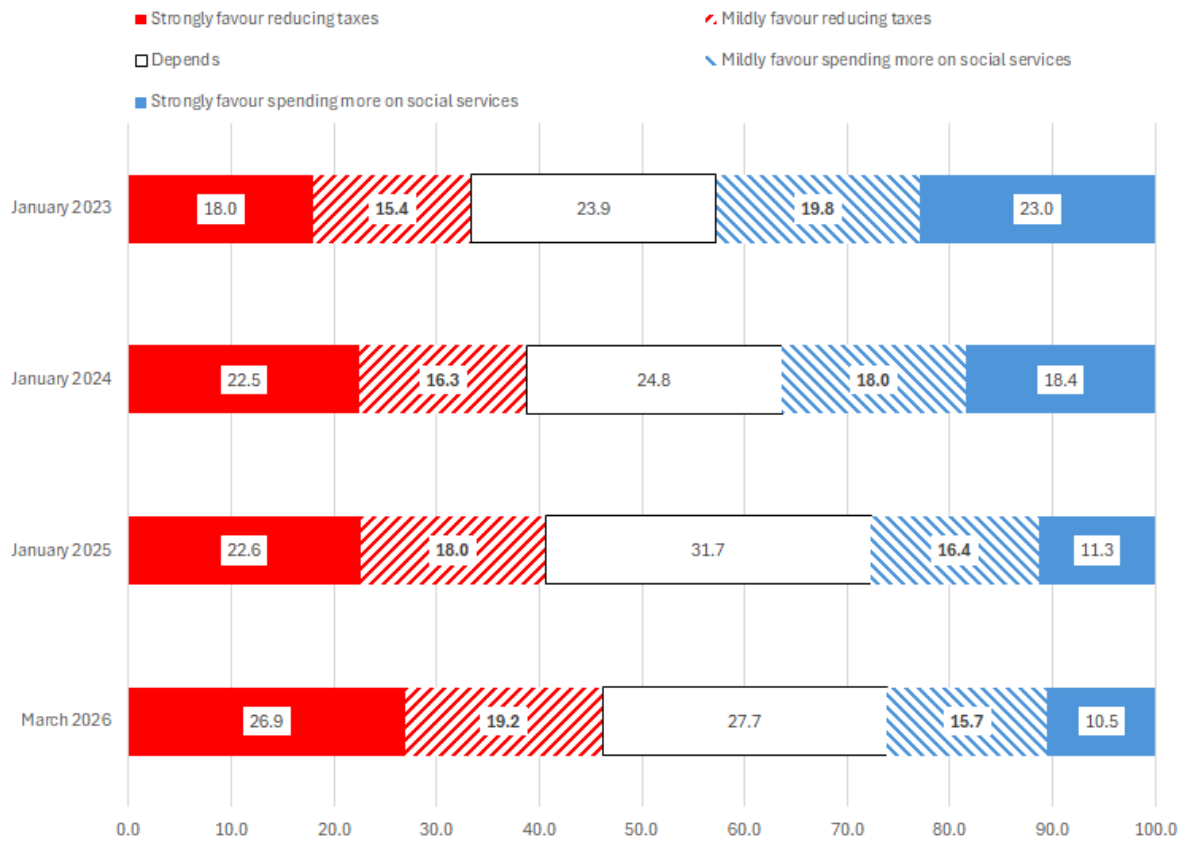
> '*Which comes closer to your view? The government should spend money to stimulate the national economy, even if it means increasing the budget deficit or the government should not spend money to stimulate the national economy and should focus instead on reducing the budget deficit…?'*

Slightly fewer than half (46.4 per cent) favoured spending to stimulate the economy. This represents a decline from January 2025 when the population was almost exactly evenly divided, with 50.2 per cent preferring government spending.

Stimulating the economy is not the only reason governments may choose to increase spending; another important objective is the provision of government services. To capture this trade-off, respondents were asked: *'If the government had a choice between reducing taxes or spending more on social services, which do you think it should do.'* As shown in Figure 2, which also includes data from three previous ANUpoll waves, Australians express a clear preference for reducing taxes. Specifically, 46.2 per cent are mildly or strongly in favour of tax reductions, compared with 26.2 per cent who favour increased spending on social services.

Support for reducing taxes has not always predominated, even in recent years. In 2025, preferences were more evenly balanced, with 27.7 per cent in favour of increased services compared to 40.6 per cent in favour of reducing taxes. In January 2024 the population was almost evenly split, with 38.8 per cent preferring tax reduction and 36.4 per cent preferring increased services. In January 2023, Australians were more in favour of increasing services (42.8 per cent) than reducing taxes (33.4 per cent).

Figure 2 Support for increasing taxes or increasing services, January 2023 to March 2026, Australia (%)

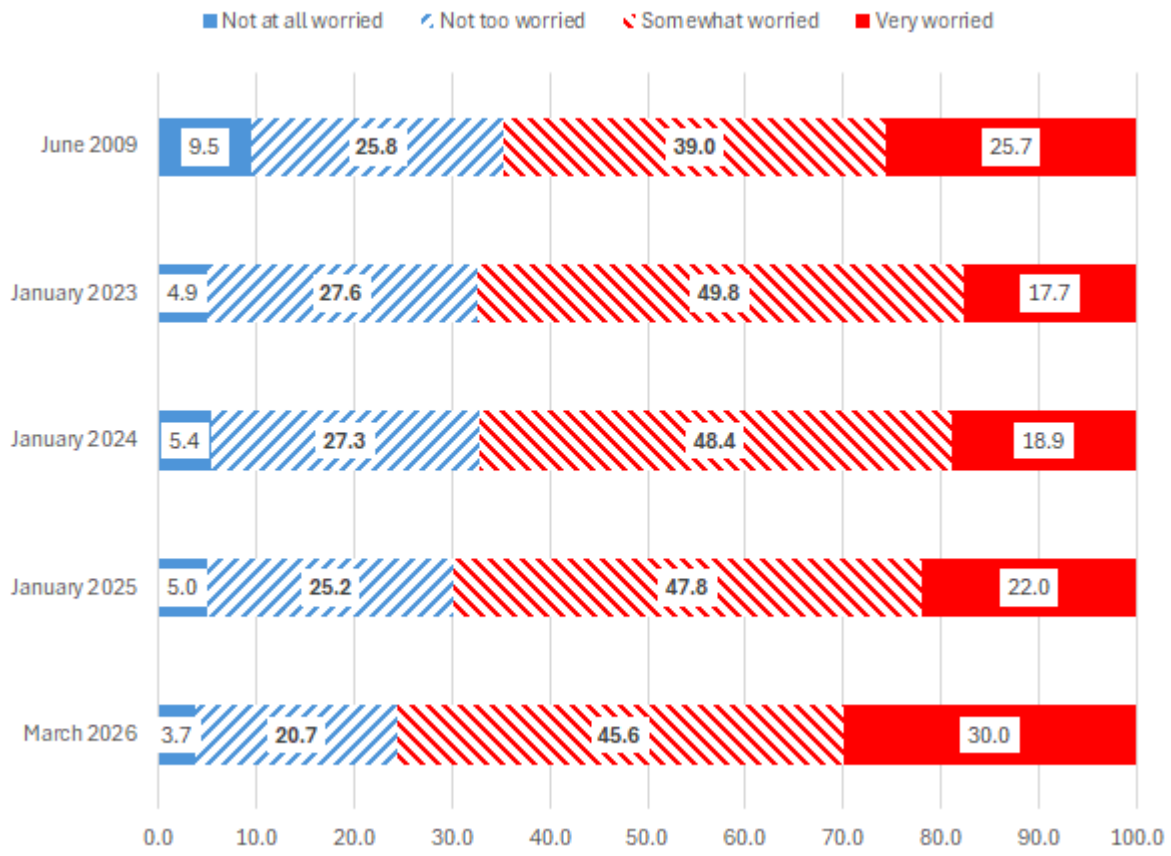


Source: ANUpoll

Concern about long-term government debt levels is related to questions about the level of taxation and government spending. Respondents to the ANUpoll surveys were first asked about government debt in June 2009 at the height of the Global Financial Crisis, with the question: '*How worried are you that increasing government debt will harm the financial future of future generations?*' At that time, 25.7 per cent of Australians reported being very worried and a further 39.0 per cent somewhat worried (Figure 3). The next time the question was asked was in January 2023, as Australia emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, and inflation was close to its recent peak. While the proportion who were very worried was lower at that point (17.7 per cent), there was a substantial increase in the proportion who reported being somewhat worried (49.8 per cent).

Concerns about government debt remained relatively stable between January 2023 and January 2025. However, there has been a large increase in the 14 months leading up to the most recent survey. Not only is the higher proportion of Australians who report being very worried about government debt now higher than at any point previously observed in the ANUpoll series (30.0 per cent), but the combined proportion who are either somewhat or very worried had increased to around three-quarters of the population (75.6 per cent).

Figure 3 Worry about debt, June 2009 to March 2026, Australia (%)



Source: ANUpoll

The final tax-related question concerns individuals' assessments of their own tax rates. Building on a question first asked in June 2009, respondents were asked: '*Do you consider the amount of income tax you have to pay this year as too high, about right, or too low?*' As shown in Figure 4, only a very small minority of Australians think they are not paying enough taxes, varying between 1.7 and 3.3 per cent across five survey waves. What varies more substantially over time is the balance between those who believe they are paying about the right amount of taxes and those who believe they are paying too much tax.

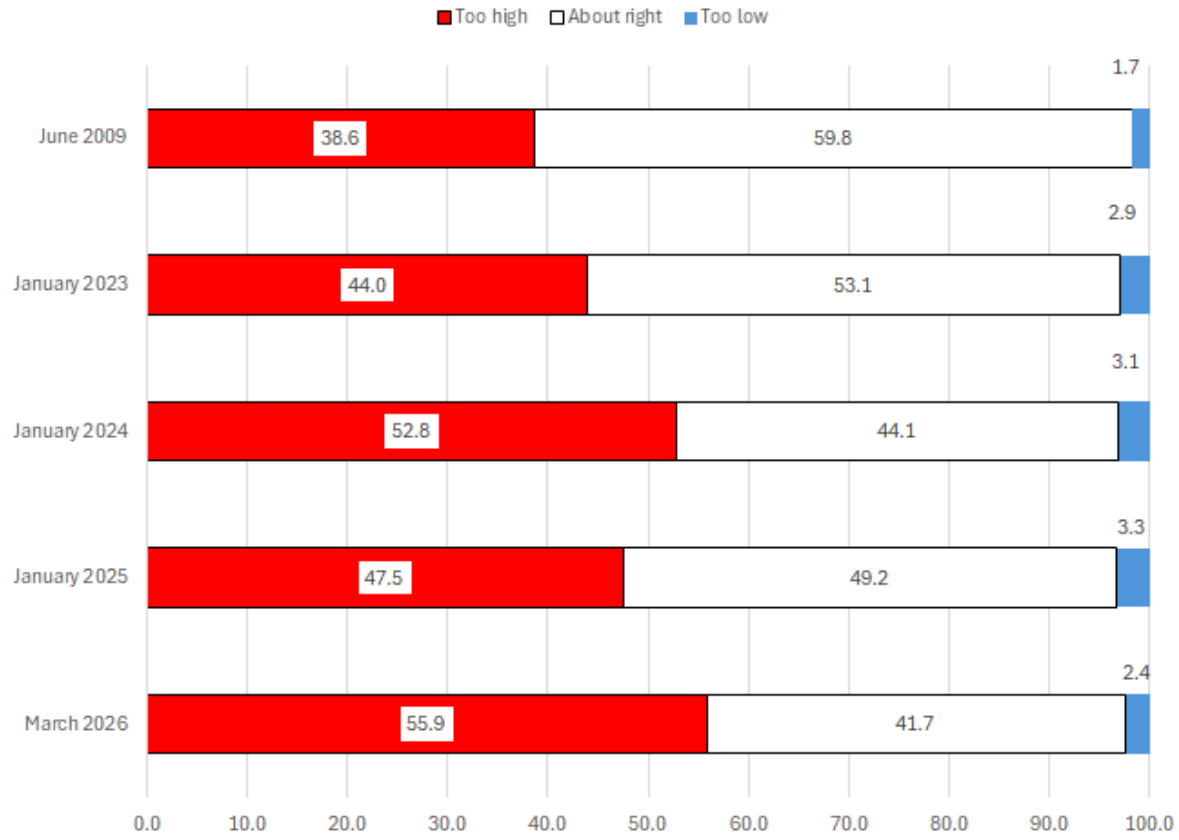
When the question was first asked in June 2009, substantially more Australians believe that their income taxes were about right (59.8 per cent) than believed they were paying too much (38.6 per cent). Although the gap was narrower, a higher proportion of people continued to view their taxes were about right in both January 2023 and January 2025. In contrast, in January 2024, prior to the Stage 3 tax cuts[v] that came into effect in July 2024, more Australians reported that their taxes were too high (52.8 per cent) than thought they were about right (44.1 per cent).

Between January 2025 and March 2026, there were no major changes to the personal income tax system. It is true that a proportion of Australians will have moved into a higher marginal tax rate due to bracket creep;[vi] however, inflation over this period was lower than at several earlier points in the time series. Nonetheless, Australians are now more likely than at any point in the ANUpoll series to report that their income taxes are too high. In

March 2026, 55.9 per cent reported their income taxes as too high, compared with 41.7 per cent who believed it was about right.

The explanation for this shift is unlikely to lie primarily in the tax system itself, given the absence of major structural changes since the Stage 3 cuts took effect. A more plausible account is that the subjective experience of financial strain documented in Biddle and Gray (2026) is reshaping how Australians perceive their tax burden, even when the objective rate is broadly unchanged. When household budgets are under pressure and financial stress is at a series high, the share of income paid in tax becomes more front of mind, not because the rate has risen but because the margin that people are living on has narrowed. This dynamic mirrors the employment anxiety finding from the first paper from the March 2026 ANUpoll data, where subjective job insecurity reached pandemic-era levels despite an unemployment rate of only 4.3 per cent.

Figure 4 **Views on a person's own income taxes, June 2009 to March 2026, Australia (%)**

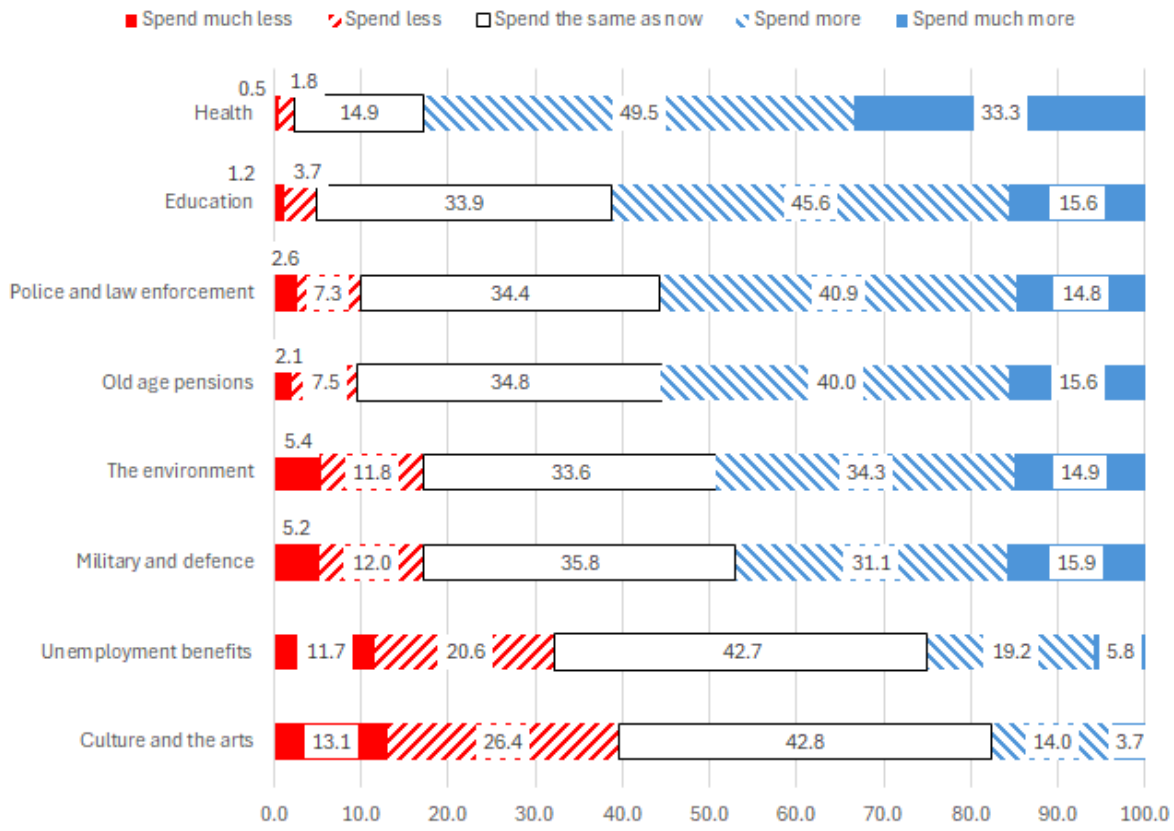


Source: ANUpoll

Taken together, responses to the preceding questions might lead one to think that Australians would be reluctant to support increased government spending across most areas of the budget. This is not the case. Respondents were asked about eight major areas of the government's expenditure and '*Would you like to see more, the same or less government spending on the following areas…?*' Response options range from spending much less to spending much more. As shown in Figure 5, Australians are more likely to say that they would like more spent than less spent in six of the eight areas. Support for

additional expenditure is strongest for health and education, which emerge as the policy areas which have the greatest support for increased spending.

Figure 5 Support for increases or decreases in expenditure by policy domain, March 2026, Australia (%)



Source: ANUpoll

The juxtaposition of results across Figures 2 through 5 fits squarely within the fiscal paradox well documented in public opinion research (including as far back as Welch 1985), but rarely as starkly as observed here. Australians in March 2026 want lower taxes, are more worried about debt than at any point in the ANUpoll series, and are increasingly sceptical of fiscal stimulus, yet simultaneously want more government spending in most areas of the budget. This combination is not necessarily irrational in that each question is asked in isolation. However, taken together it is structurally difficult to reconcile. It reflects a population that is financially squeezed, has diminished confidence in government's ability to deliver, and is at the same time simultaneously unwilling to accept either the taxes that more spending requires or the debt that would otherwise fund it.

The fiscal attitudes documented in this section sit at the intersection of two of this paper's central themes, building on the analysis from Biddle and Gray (2026). The first is the broad economic anxiety and financial strain described previously, which appears to be reshaping how Australians think about taxation and government capacity as much as it is reshaping their personal wellbeing and outlook. The second is the political realignment described in the introduction and examined in detail in Section 5. A population that wants government to do more, is unwilling to pay higher taxes to fund it,

and is at a series-high level of anxiety about public debt represents a structurally difficult environment for any governing party to navigate.

4 Views on environmental policy

In the previous section, we showed that almost half of the Australian population (49.2 per cent) believe government spending more on the environment should increase, while only 17.2 per cent favour reduced spending. This section examines people's concerns for the environment, beginning with whether they think Australia is doing enough to protect the environment (Figure 6). Respondents were asked: '*Some countries are doing more to protect the world environment than other countries are. In general, do you think that Australia is doing…?*' This question has been asked annually since January 2020.

In January 2020, 65.2 per cent of respondents thought Australia was doing too little to protect the environment. Only 9.6 per cent thought Australia was doing too much and the remaining 25.2 per cent thought the country was doing about the right amount. This survey was conducted during the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires, in which 33 people lost their lives, 3,000 homes were destroyed, and more than 17 million hectares of land burnt.[vii]

As attention in Australia switched from the bushfires to the COVID-19 pandemic, slightly fewer Australians thought that Australia was doing too little (58.3 per cent). There was not, however, an increase in the proportion of Australians that thought Australia was doing too much (7.6 per cent). Indeed, although there was not a statistically significant difference, if anything the proportion who thought Australia was doing too much was marginally lower.

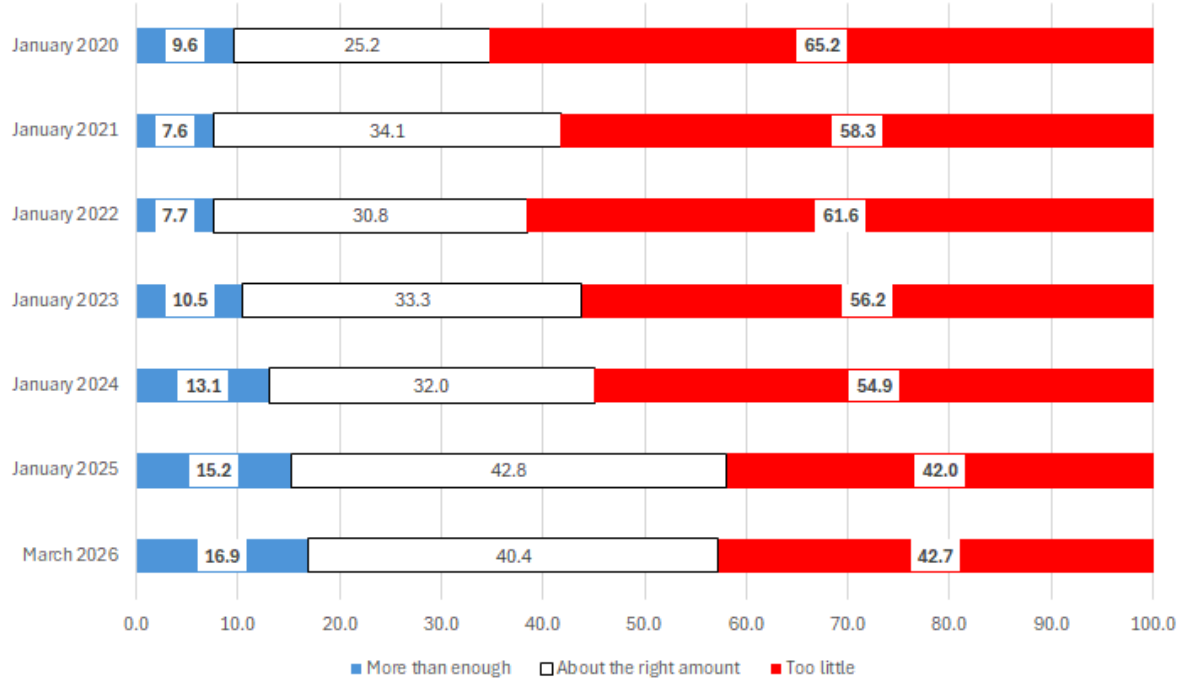
Over the inflationary and pandemic periods from 2021 to 2024, the proportion of Australians who thought the country was doing too little for the environment remained relatively stable. Throughout this period, there were consistently at least 20 percentage points more Australians who believed the country was doing too little compared to those that thought it was doing about the right amount. At the time, there was a steady increase in the proportion of respondents that thought Australia was doing too much, rising to 13.1 per cent in January 2024.

Over the last two surveys where we have asked the question, there has been a decline in the proportion of Australians who thought the country was doing too little, falling to around 42-43 per cent in both waves. Over the same period, there was a substantial increase in the proportion who thought Australia was doing about the right amount, rising to around 40-43 per cent. The share of Australians who thought the country was doing too much remains a minority; however, at 16.9 per cent in March 2026, this proportion is more than double the low observed in 2021.

The most striking feature of the time series is not the level of environmental concern, but its direction. Between 2021 and 2024, the proportion of Australians who believe the country was doing too little for the environment held broadly steady, even as cost-of-living pressures intensified and the cumulative experience of the pandemic led to what were then historically low levels of life satisfaction. This stability suggested that environmental concern was relatively resilient to economic stress, consistent with international evidence that environmental attitudes are more durable than simple "luxury good" theories of public opinion would predict (Inglehart 2013). The March 2026 data show that this resilience has limits. The period of acute strain documented in the

companion paper appears to have produced at least a modest shift in how Australians assess the country's environmental effort, though the majority view remains that Australia is doing too little.

Figure 6 Views on Australia's contribution to the environment, January 2020 to March 2026, Australia (%)

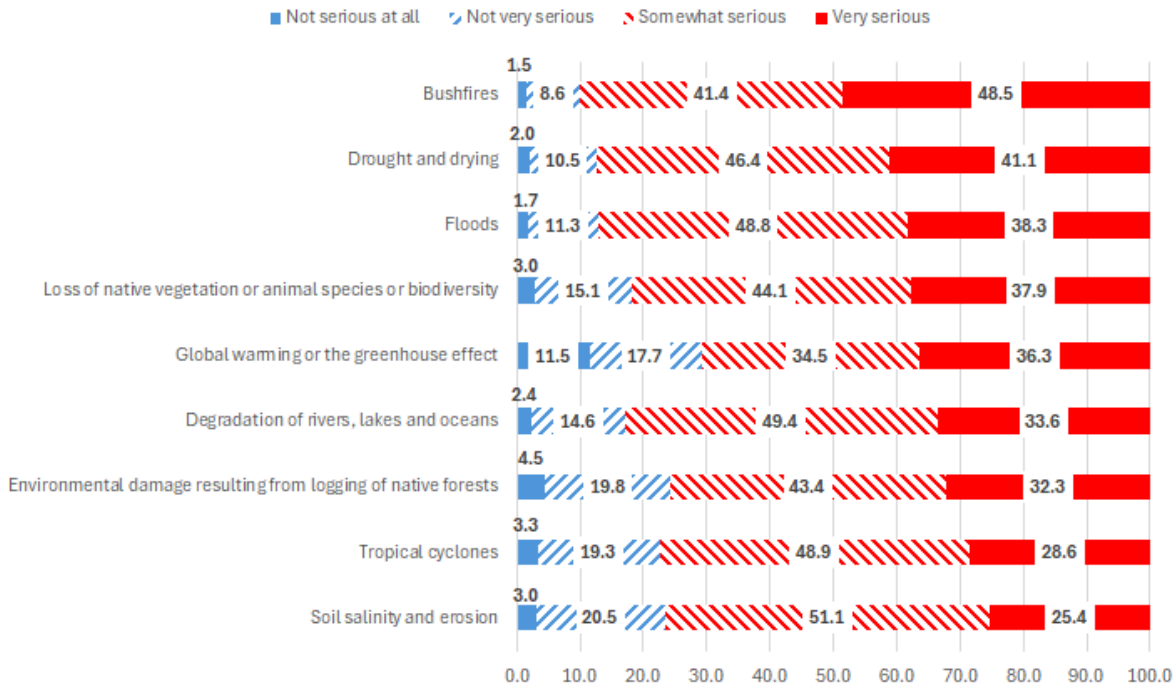


Source: ANUpoll

'The environment' is a broad term, encompassing both government expenditure (Figure 5) and assessments of Australia's overall contribution (Figure 6). For this reason, respondents were also asked about nine specific environmental issues, and how serious they considered each to be for Australia (Figure 7). Australians continue to rate bushfires as the most serious concern, with 48.5 per cent considering bushfires to be very serious and a further 41.4 per cent rating them as somewhat serious. Reflecting the vastness of the Australian continent, and in some places the variation within or across years, the second and third most serious concerns are drought and drying (41.1 per cent rating it is very serious) and floods (38.3 per cent).

The environmental issue with the highest proportion of Australians thinking it not serious at all, or not very serious, is 'global warming or the greenhouse effect,' with a combined total of 29.2 per cent. This result warrants particular attention. That nearly three-in-ten Australians rate it as not serious at all or not very serious, a substantially higher combined scepticism rate than for any other issue on the list, is highly relevant to understanding the current political moment, given that global warming is the issue most directly linked to the international climate commitments that have shaped Australian energy and emissions policy for the past decade.

Figure 7 Perceived seriousness of environmental issues, March 2026, Australia (%)



Source: ANUpoll

There is a very strong correlation across the nine environmental concerns. Individuals who rate one of these issues as serious are very likely to rate the others as serious as well. Factor analysis provides empirical support for a single underlying dimension of environmental concern, with an eigenvalue for the first factor of 4.98, a big gap with the second factor (0.45) and all nine underlying variables loading strongly on the first factor (factor loadings of at least 0.66).

For these reasons, we construct a single additive index of environmental concerns. Each item is coded on a four-point scale, with a value of one for not serious at all and a value of four for very serious. We then multiply the average value of an individual's responses by nine, producing an index that ranges from nine (low environmental concern) to 36 (high concern).

The average value for the index in March 2026 was 28.2. This was a slight, but not statistically significant increase from January 2025, when the average index value was 27.9. However, both represent a significant decline from January 2024, when the average index value was 30.0.

We again examined the factors associated with the index, after first converting it to a z-score with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Younger Australians have the greatest level of concern about the environment, with an index value that is 0.193 (or around one-fifth of a standard deviation) higher than someone aged 35 to 44. Females also have a greater level of concern, with the largest coefficient in the model (0.386). Australians with a degree have a greater level of concern than those without (though there is no difference between those that have not completed Year 12 or a qualification and those that have at least one of those). Finally, respondents who were employed at the time of the survey have a lower level of concern than those that were not employed.

Table 2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with index of 'environmental concerns', March 2026

Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.193	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.087	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.051	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.055	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.147	
Aged 75 years plus	-0.055	
Female	0.386	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.002	
Has a degree	0.178	***
Born overseas – English speaking country	0.045	
Born overseas – non-English speaking country	-0.016	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.011	
Employed	-0.206	***
Outer Metropolitan Electorate	-0.019	
Provincial Electorate	0.006	
Rural Electorate	-0.006	
Constant	-0.156	*
Number of respondents	3,423	

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

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

Source: ANUpoll

The environmental attitudes documented in this section complete the attitudinal foundation for the political analysis in Section 5. Australia in March 2026 is a country where the majority believe too little is being spent on the environment and that Australia is not doing enough, but where a meaningful and demographically distinctive minority is sceptical about the seriousness of global warming specifically. This division maps closely onto the party support patterns that follow.

5 Political preferences

5.1 Voting intentions

There is conjecture that at the time of the March 2026 ANUpoll, Australia was experiencing either political party dealignment, or realignment (Cameron and McAllister 2024). In other words, views towards the existing political parties were shifting, and had not yet cohered on a more stable medium-term equilibrium. Alongside shifts in the relative support for established parties, the characteristics that predict whether an individual supports one party rather than another also appear to have changed.

Detailed analysis of the 2025 Australian Election Study (AES) helped explain the dramatic decline in support for the Liberal/National Coalition at the May 2025 election, at which Labor achieved one of its largest majorities in Parliament (Cameron et al. 2025). Since the May 2025 election, support for the Coalition has continued to decline, with multiple breakdowns in the Coalition arrangement and leadership changes, with the replacement of the former Opposition Leader Sussan Ley and former Leader of the National Party David Littleproud with Angus Taylor and Matt Canavan respectively.

Perhaps the most consequential shift in political attitudes since the May 2025 election has been the dramatic rise in support for the One Nation Party. At the election, the party's primary vote was relatively low at 6.4 per cent, and it failed to win any seats in the Lower House. By the end of 2025, however, as One Nation's support increased in published polls, former Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and then member of the National Party switched parties, and now sits in the Lower House as a One Nation member.

In the March 2026 ANUpoll, respondents were asked: '*If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?*' For the first time, One Nation was included as a named response option. In previous waves, reflecting relatively low levels of support, respondents needed to type in One Nation in the 'Some other party (please specify)' response category.

Responses to this question in the ANUpoll are broadly consistent with other published polls at the time, though if anything a little bit higher. Specifically, 26.0 per cent of respondents said they would vote for the minor party, exactly the same (to one-decimal place) as the per cent that said they would vote Labor. Only 19.3 per cent of respondents said that they would vote for the Liberal/National Coalition, with 11.4 per cent saying they would vote Greens. This leaves 3.9 per cent that said they would vote for a different party (including independents) and a very substantial 13.4 per cent that did not know which party they would vote for.

It is perhaps not surprising that such a high proportion of people did not know who they would vote for at this stage, given that the next federal election does not have to be held until 2028. The ANUpoll does not force respondents to nominate a voting intention, and uncertainty about vote choice itself provides useful information. In addition, as the survey asks about first preference only, we do not know where second and third preferences would ultimately flow. For these reasons, in the remainder of this section we focus on later questions in the survey that give a richer set of information.

The 13.4 per cent who did not know who they would vote for is itself a meaningful finding. In the context of the dealignment described by Cameron and McAllister (2024), a large, undecided share should not be interpreted simply as a polling artefact but rather as evidence of genuine detachment from the existing party system. Although larger in magnitude in the ANUpoll data, a substantial share was also noted in the Guardian Essential poll discussed earlier. The AES data from the 2025 election (in Cameron et al 2025) found that voters who switched parties in that election were disproportionately concentrated among those with weak prior party identification, and the continued softness in the voting intention distribution suggests that detachment has deepened rather than resolved in the months since.

However, it is important to note that the voting intention results were broadly consistent with those reported in other published polls at the time, and sufficiently close to suggest that the analysis that follows is indicative of the broader political landscape. In the most recent Guardian Essential poll, published on the 29th of April, One Nation's primary vote was estimated at 25 per cent, compared with 30 per cent for Labor and 24 per cent for the Coalition.[viii] However, in a Sky News survey undertaken with YouGov (between the 14th and 21st of April),[ix] it was found that 'One Nation has surged to equal first place in the latest Sky News Pulse, tying with Labor on primary vote for the first time in history.'

5.2 Party ratings

The main outcomes of interest in this section are responses to the following question: '*We would like to know what you think about Australia's main political parties. Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. If you are neutral about a particular party or don't know much about them, you should give them a rating of 5*.'

For the first time in the ANUpoll surveys, respondents were asked about their views towards One Nation as a named response option, alongside the Liberal Party, the Labor Party (ALP), the National Party, and the Greens. The Liberal and Labor parties recorded very similar levels of support (4.40 and 4.41 respectively), while support for the National Party is moderate at 4.15. The Greens party received the lowest average rating (3.79). In contrast, One Nation recorded the highest average rating in March 2026, at 4.61. Amongst respondents who provided ratings for both the Labor party and One Nation, the difference between the two parties is just statistically significant at the 5 per cent level of significance (p-value = 0.046).

Figure 8 presents the full distribution of party ratings. Across the five parties, the Liberal and National parties have the smallest proportion of respondents with extreme levels of dislike, with 14.8 and 14.6 per cent of Australians respectively gave a value of 0 out of 10. The National Party has far and away the greatest proportion of people that are indifferent, with 30.5 per cent giving a value of 5 out of 10.

Slightly more respondents report strong dislike of the Greens (25.6 per cent give a value of 0) than One Nation (24.2 per cent). At the same time, One Nation has the highest proportion of respondents expressing strong approval with 11.7 per cent assigning a rating of ten. Taken together, this means that One Nation has the highest dispersion of rating of the five parties, with a standard deviation of 3.51. The next highest level of dispersion is for the Labor party, with a standard deviation of 3.07.

Despite this similarity in overall variance, the composition of positive sentiment differs markedly between the two parties. Although a comparable proportion of respondents have a positive view of Labor (39.0 per cent with a value above 5) and One Nation (40.6 per cent), Labor's support is more muted in intensity. A substantially larger proportion of Labor's supporters express only a mild liking (35.3 per cent with a value between 6 and 9).

The high standard deviation for One Nation, larger than for any other party, would appear to reflect a party that polarises. Australians either rate One Nation highly or rate it near zero, with relatively little of the indifference that characterises views toward the National Party in particular. This distribution is consistent with international patterns observed for populist parties, where a motivated and enthusiastic support base coexists with equally motivated opposition, producing higher variance in ratings than the mainstream parties generate (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017).

Figure 8 Distribution of views towards political parties, March 2026 (%)

Source: ANUpoll

5.3 Demographic and socioeconomic predictors of party ratings

With such a large majority in Parliament, it is not expected that Prime Minister Albanese will call an election in the near future. As a result, the party ratings and voting intentions presented in the previous sub-section are of limited value as a predictor of future election outcomes. Moreover, given the fluctuations in voting intention that has been observed in the months leading up to the March ANUpoll and the weeks since, it is plausible that both voting intentions and relative ratings of the parties will be quite different by the time of publication.

For the purpose of understanding this political moment, what is most interesting is variation in ratings of the various political parties across observable characteristics. It is *who* favours One Nation or the Labor Party relatively highly (for example), not just whether one is higher that helps explain the potential realignment that is taking place. In this sub-section we begin with an analysis of the demographic and socioeconomic predictors, with the next sub-section expanding the analysis to include policy views as predictors.

To undertake the analysis, party ratings are standardised by converting them to z-scores, giving each distribution a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. We then estimate five separate regression models, one for each party, with coefficients and statistical significance reported in Table 3. While the results tell a complicated picture of party support, a number of key sociodemographic groups emerge as being important for each of the parties – either because they have relatively high or relatively low levels of support.

For the Liberal Party, the key support base is amongst older Australians, the employed, and those that speak a language other than English at home. Interestingly, there are no differences by education or by sex, both of which were found to be highly predictive of voting patterns at the last election. The voting patterns by these two characteristics appear to be driven more by variation in views towards other potential parties than views towards the Liberal Party. Support for the National Party is distributed similarly to support for the Liberal Party, with higher values for older Australians and those that are employed. However, there is also lower support for the Nationals amongst females compared to males.

For the Labor Party, younger Australians are a key demographic group providing relatively high levels of support. Education matters, particularly at the upper end of the distribution. Those with a degree have a rating that is more than one-quarter of one standard deviation higher than those without a degree, but that have completed Year 12 or have a non-degree qualification. Support for the Labor Party is relatively low outside of inner metropolitan areas, particularly in provincial and rural electorates.

Across the five models, the observed characteristics explain a much higher proportion of the variation in the ratings of the Greens party compared to the other four parties. There are more statistically significant variables and, in econometric parlance, the R-Squared is higher. Specifically, there is a very constant decline in support across the age distribution, with the oldest age group having a predicted rating that is more than one-standard deviation lower than the youngest age group. Sex matters (females rate the Greens higher) as does education (those with a degree have a higher rating). Those who

are employed have a lower rating and those that speak a language other than English at home have a higher rating.

There is also a large number of variables that are correlated with the ratings for the One Nation party. Younger Australians, particularly those aged 18 to 24 years, gave a much lower rating than those in the middle part of the age distribution. Older Australians, however, gave broadly similar ratings to the middle group. Females are much less supportive of One Nation than males, but the biggest difference is by education. Those that have not completed Year 12 and do not have a qualification give a much higher rating than the base case (those that have completed Year 12 or have a non-degree qualification). Those with a degree have a much less favourable view towards One Nation. Counterbalancing this, the employed and those that live outside of inner metropolitan areas have a much more favourable view.

Table 3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with ratings of political parties, March 2026

	Liberal		Labor		Nationals		Greens		One Nation	
Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.076		0.372	***	-0.013		0.585	***	-0.400	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.088		0.242	***	0.023		0.244	***	-0.125	*
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.040		-0.035		0.004		-0.198	***	0.004	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.050		-0.012		0.032		-0.377	***	0.064	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.235	***	0.069		0.257	***	-0.387	***	-0.088	
Aged 75 years plus	0.567	***	-0.066		0.612	***	-0.664	***	0.113	
Female	0.023		0.059		-0.084	*	0.216	***	-0.159	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.041		-0.123	*	0.034		-0.010		0.348	***
Has a degree	0.043		0.270	***	-0.029		0.282	***	-0.425	***
Born overseas – English speaking country	-0.037		-0.038		0.016		0.044		0.000	
Born overseas – non-English speaking country	0.061		0.119	*	0.067		-0.025		-0.081	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.145	**	0.062		0.068		0.125	**	0.052	
Employed	0.156	***	-0.086		0.110	**	-0.089	**	0.186	***
Outer Metropolitan Electorate	-0.056		-0.098	*	-0.035		-0.012		0.123	**
Provincial Electorate	-0.064		-0.210	***	0.021		-0.030		0.148	**
Rural Electorate	-0.119	*	-0.153	**	0.052		-0.083		0.204	***
Constant	-0.233	***	-0.024		-0.164	**	-0.035		-0.043	
Number of respondents	3,350		3,363		3,250		3,346		3,329	

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

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

Source: ANUpoll

5.4 Hope, financial stress, and policy views as predictors of party ratings

The companion paper to this analysis (Biddle and Gray 2026) documented that levels of hope in Australia have fallen to their lowest point in the 2020s. While confidence in institutions remains comparatively strong by international standards, it varies markedly across the population, and a substantial proportion of Australians continue to experience high levels of financial stress. In the present paper, we have also shown that Australians differ considerably in their beliefs about the appropriate role of government responsibility, as well as the intensity of their concern about environmental issues.

In this sub-section, we examine whether these attitudes and experiences are predictive of political attitudes. Specifically, we consider whether hope, financial stress, beliefs about government responsibility, environmental concern, confidence in institutions, and populist orientation are systematically associated with how individuals rate Australian political parties. Moving beyond demographic characteristics alone, the analysis assesses the extent to which these deeper orientations help explain variation in party ratings, and thereby shed light on the attitudinal foundations of contemporary party support.

We construct five indices covering the key attitudinal domains discussed above and analysed in depth in the two March 2026 ANUpoll papers. These are the additive indices for financial actions, hope, belief in government, environmental concern, and confidence in institutions. We add a sixth index, based on a populism scale incorporated in a number of waves since April 2018.

The populism index is based on a nine-item populism scale developed by Silva et al. (2018), which captures three core dimensions of populism: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichean outlook. Each dimension is measured using two positively worded and one negatively worded question. To this core battery, we add a tenth negatively worded question that captures a more general perception of populism related to politicians versus the people leading a country. The full set of variables underlying the populism index is presented in Appendix Figure A1, with negatively worded questions marked with an *.

We convert each of these indices to z-scores (with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one) and include them as additional explanatory variables in the models summarised in Table 3. The inclusion of these indices in the same model raises the potential concern of multicollinearity if the measures capture overlapping underlying constructs. We address this by ensuring that the constituent variables in each of the six indices are conceptually and empirically distinct, and by examining bivariate correlations between the indices. All correlations are under 0.7, a commonly used threshold, with a maximum correlation of 0.51. Moreover, and most importantly, the substantive conclusions for any given variable and party are unchanged when individual indices are excluded from the model, providing confidence that the results are not driven by collinearity among the explanatory variables.

Results presented in Table 4 show that supporters of the Liberal Party tend to hold more minimalist views of government responsibility and express lower levels of concern for the environment. At the same time, they tend to have relatively high confidence in

institutions, and comparatively low levels of support for populism. Supporters of the Labor Party share this relatively high level of confidence in institutions and there is an even stronger association with the level of support for populism. Where Labor supporters differ most clearly from Liberal supporters is in their substantially higher levels of hope, stronger belief in an active role for government, and greater concern for environmental issues.

The strongest attitudinal predictor of a favourable Labor rating, stronger even than belief in government or environmental concern, is the hope index introduced in Biddle and Gray (2026). This finding suggests that Labor's support base is disproportionately concentrated among Australians who have retained a degree of optimism about the future, despite the pessimism of the broader population. For a governing party, this is not necessarily a comfortable position: it suggests that Labor's relationship with the electorate depends in part on public hopefulness, a condition that is only partially within the government's direct control.

Like the supporters of their Coalition partners, National Party supporters hold a relatively minimalist view of government, express less concern for the environment, exhibit high confidence in institutions, and have comparatively low levels of support for populism. The principal point of divergence is their higher levels of financial stress. This financial stress finding for the National Party is the most distinctive thing about it in the attitudinal model: in every other respect, National Party supporters look like Liberal supporters.

This combination, an ideological alignment with the Coalition alongside greater economic strain may be politically consequential. It suggests that National Party supporters experiencing sharper financial pressure could be the most vulnerable segment of the Coalition’s base, and the group whose potential migration to One Nation represents the most acute structural risk to the Coalition's future.

All six of the indices are statistically significant predictors in the model where support for the Greens is the dependent variable. The pattern and direction of these associations are broadly similar to those observed for Labor Party supporters, with one important exception. Higher levels of financial stress are positively associated with stronger support for the Greens, a relationship that does not hold for Labor.

The model examining the factors associated with support for One Nation is particularly revealing. Unlike the other parties, support for One Nation shows no significant association with confidence in institutions. This absence is itself substantively important, given that institutional confidence is positively associated with more favourable ratings for all four of the other parties, despite their substantial political differences. The results suggest that confidence in existing institutions is linked to support for the established party system as whole but does not extend to One Nation.

The coefficient on financial stress is positive, and larger than for any other party, indicating that support for One Nation is strongest among Australians experiencing financial hardship. Consistent with this profile, One Nation supporters express lower levels of concern for the environment and are less supportive of an expansive role for government.

Across the first five indices, supporters of One Nation most closely resemble supporters of the National Party, at least in terms of direction of association. The key point of

divergence is views on populism. The final index in the model shows that those who score relatively highly on the populism index are significantly and substantially more likely to have a favourable rating of One Nation. By contrast, populism is negatively associated with ratings of all other parties, albeit not always significantly.

Although the populism measure is included in the model as a standardised index, the substantive scale of this relationship can be illustrated by considering two of the underlying variables, one positively, and one negatively worded. As shown in Figure A1, 36.6 per cent of Australians agree or strongly agree that *'Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.'* Respondents who agree with this statement give One Nation a rating of 4.0 on a scale of 0 to 10, compared with 5.0 among those who do not agree.

A similar pattern emerges for the positively worded statement *'Quite a few of the people running the government are crooked'*, with which 58.0 per cent of respondents agree or strongly agree. Those who agree give One Nation a rating of 5.2, compared to 3.8 among those who disagree. Together, these contrasts illustrate the substantive magnitude of the populism effect captured by the index, and help explain why populist orientation is such a powerful predictor of support for One Nation.

The differences across these two questions are even more pronounced for ratings of the Labor Party, but in the opposite direction. Take the last statement. Respondents who agree that *'Quite a few of the people running the government are crooked'* give the Labor Party a rating of 3.7, compared with a rating of 5.4 among those who disagree.

This symmetry is an important finding for understanding contemporary political attitudes. The same underlying dimension – scepticism about whether those running government use power honestly and competently – simultaneously predicts high ratings of One Nation and low ratings of Labor, and low One Nation ratings and high Labor ratings. This is therefore not simply a finding about One Nation. Rather it identifies a central axis of political competition in Australia in March 2026. More than any other pairing in the current political landscape, the contest between Labor and One Nation is structured by populist orientation or the lack thereof, in the existing political order as much as it reflects disagreement over specific policy issues.

These findings speak to a broader debate in the literature on the *political economy of populism* about whether support for populist parties is best understood as a response to economic deprivation or as the expression of a more coherent set of political orientations. Guriev and Papaioannou (2022), in a comprehensive review of the cross-national evidence, argue that economic grievance and institutional distrust are not competing explanations but interacting ones, with declining living standards feeding distrust and distrust in turn amplifying the appeal of anti-establishment alternatives.

The Australian case in March 2026 is broadly consistent with that account. Financial stress is a significant predictor of One Nation support, but it does not account for the full picture. The populism index, which captures scepticism about whether those running government use power in the interests of ordinary people, is a substantially stronger predictor than financial stress alone, and it is the one attitudinal measure that has no significant association with ratings for any of the four established parties. This pattern suggests that the rise in One Nation support reflects something more durable than a short-run response to cost-of-living pressures, precisely the distinction Guriev and

Papaioannou (2022) identify as central to understanding when economic shocks produce lasting versus temporary shifts in political alignment.

The attitudinal profile of One Nation supporters documented in this paper also bears on a second and related debate, between accounts that emphasise cultural backlash and those that emphasise economic anxiety as the primary driver of support for populist and authoritarian parties. Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue, on the basis of cross-national survey evidence, that support for authoritarian-populist parties is driven principally by a cultural backlash among older, less educated, and non-metropolitan voters whose values and worldview have been progressively marginalised by the long-run shift toward post-materialist priorities in mainstream politics.

The demographic profile of One Nation supporters in the March 2026 ANUpoll data is consistent with that account in several respects, with stronger support among men, those without post-secondary qualifications, and residents of non-metropolitan electorates (Table 3). However, the attitudinal model in Table 4 shows that controlling for these demographic characteristics, as well as financial stress, populist orientation remains a strong and independent predictor of One Nation ratings. This is consistent with Norris and Inglehart's argument that the cultural and institutional dimensions of populist support are not reducible to socioeconomic position, and that the values and orientations those demographics tend to carry, particularly scepticism about whether government serves ordinary people, are doing much of the explanatory work in their own right.

Table 4 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with ratings of political parties, Model 2 including index values, March 2026

	Liberal		Labor		Nationals		Greens		One Nation	
Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Financial stress index	0.019		0.028		0.083	***	0.051	**	0.099	***
Hope index	0.012		0.184	***	-0.024		0.178	***	-0.104	***
Belief in government index	-0.191	***	0.162	***	-0.168	***	0.181	***	-0.218	***
Environmental concern index	-0.191	***	0.142	***	-0.217	***	0.188	***	-0.214	***
Confidence in institutions index	0.207	***	0.248	***	0.205	***	0.118	***	0.037	
Support for populism index	-0.058	**	-0.233	***	-0.043	*	-0.054	***	0.146	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.089		0.088		0.006		0.315	***	-0.261	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.088		0.129	**	-0.007		0.112	*	-0.099	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.003		-0.083		-0.015		-0.243	***	0.016	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.072		-0.101		0.080		-0.419	***	0.145	**
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.209	**	-0.134		0.312	***	-0.502	***	0.061	
Aged 75 years plus	0.464	***	-0.281	***	0.599	***	-0.722	***	0.198	**
Female	0.177	***	0.010		0.046		0.113	***	-0.040	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.090		-0.017		0.077		0.038		0.329	***
Has a degree	0.035		0.090	**	-0.007		0.166	***	-0.292	***
Born overseas – English speaking country	-0.016		-0.039		0.024		0.027		-0.012	
Born overseas – non-English speaking country	0.023		0.037		0.023		-0.086		-0.074	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.122	**	0.031		0.061		0.069		0.042	
Employed	0.076		-0.004		0.073		0.011		0.084	*
Outer Metropolitan Electorate	-0.051		-0.004		-0.034		0.047		0.064	
Provincial Electorate	-0.042		-0.053		0.022		0.058		0.068	
Rural Electorate	-0.100	*	-0.019		0.083		-0.005		0.147	***
Constant	-0.247	***	0.029		-0.230	***	0.030		-0.086	
Number of respondents	3,103		3,115		3,020		3,098		3,084	

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

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

Source: ANUpoll

When discussing the Belief in Government index in Section 2 of the paper, we noted that there was only weak support for there being a single underlying factor. While there appears to be a common dimension shaping support for government responsibility across all domains, the strength of this relationship varies across individual roles, and there is evidence of a second factor influencing support for a more limited subset of responsibilities. Although Table 4 showed that belief in government is associated with support for all parties, some positively some negatively, the results presented in Table 5 show that views on specific government roles are more predictive than others.

The methodology to arrive at Table 5 is sequential and iterative. First, we add binary variables for whether respondents believe each of the thirteen roles should definitely be a government responsibility to the baseline models from Table 2. These role-specific variables are included without controlling for any of the other indices.

We then drop from the model all role of government variables that are not statistically significant at the 10 per cent level for each party and re-estimate the model. In subsequent iterations, any remaining variables that fail to reach significance at the five per cent level are dropped and the model re-estimated. This process is repeated until all variables have a statistically significant association with support for the relevant party.

This approach is intentionally data-driven rather than theoretically driven. It results in a set of government roles that are highly predictive, either positively or negatively, of support for each of the five parties. Importantly, the modelling strategy allows different roles to emerge as predictive for different parties, rather than imposing a common structure across models. Appendix Table A1 reports the coefficients for the control variables from the final regression, while Table 5 gives the coefficients for the roles-specific government responsibility variables.

Table 5 contains a large amount of detailed information. However, by focussing on those roles of government that both have a statistically significant association, and a relatively large coefficient (either positive or negative) for each party, it is possible to distil a clearer picture of the policy views that distinguish party supporters. These comparisons are relative rather than absolute.

Working across the table, and selecting the three roles of government with the largest absolute coefficient for each party, the following patterns emerge:

- **Liberal Party and National Party** supporters are less likely to believe that government should reduce income inequality or impose strict laws to support the environment, but more likely to support government assistance to industry.
- **Labor Party** supporters are less supportive of stronger government control over Australia's borders, while strongly supporting strict environmental laws and government role in providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed.
- **Greens Party** supporters tend to be less supportive of stronger government control over Australia's borders, but strongly support strict environmental laws and efforts to reduce gaps in living standards between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the rest of the population.
- **One Nation** supporters oppose strict environmental laws and efforts to reduce gaps in living standards between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

and the rest of the population, but strongly support government control over Australia's borders.

Table 5 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with ratings of political parties, Model 3 including roles of government, March 2026

	Liberal		Labor		Nationals		Greens		One Nation	
Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Provide a job for everyone who wants one							-0.100	**	0.158	***
Keep prices under control			-0.231	***			-0.117	***	0.109	**
Provide health care for the sick	-0.132	**							-0.133	**
Provide a decent standard of living for the old			-0.159	***			-0.154	***	0.124	**
Provide industry with the help it needs to grow	0.315	***	-0.149	***	0.333	***	-0.137	***	0.300	***
Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	-0.268	***	0.248	***			0.219	***		
Reduce income differences between the rich and the poor	-0.401	***			-0.337	***	0.134	***	-0.173	***
Give financial help to university students from low-income families					-0.118	**	0.158	***	-0.187	***
Provide decent housing for those who can't afford it										
Impose strict laws to make industry reduce their environmental harm / impact	-0.358	***	0.335	***	-0.498	***	0.335	***	-0.415	***
Promote equality between men and women			0.209	***	-0.173	***	0.242	***	-0.264	***
Reduce the gap in living standards between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the rest of the Australian population			0.204	***			0.334	***	-0.304	***
Control who enters Australia's borders	0.151	***	-0.360	***	0.201	***	-0.513	***	0.404	***

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

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

Additional controls are available in Appendix Table A1

Source: ANUpoll

Taken together, the three models presented in this section tell a coherent story about the current political moment. The demographic model reported in Table 3 establishes who supports which party in terms of observable characteristics: support for One Nation is disproportionately drawn from men, those without post-secondary qualifications, the employed, and non-metropolitan areas. However, demographics alone explain only a limited share of the variation in party rating, a point one of us has made in a separate paper on survey infrastructure in Australia for understanding democratic resilience (Dixon and Biddle 2025).

The attitudinal model presented in Table 4 substantially extends the explanatory power of the demographic analysis by adding six index measures. For One Nation, the most consequential additions are financial stress, low environmental concern, low belief in government, and above all, high populist orientation. The roles of government model in Table 5 then translates these abstract attitudinal dimensions into concrete policy positions, showing that the two issues most distinctive to One Nation's support base are strong support for border control and strong opposition to strict environmental laws.

The resulting picture is not one of simple protest voting or economic grievance alone. One Nation's support base in March 2026 is attitudinally coherent: financially stressed, sceptical of government's capacity and inclination to serve ordinary people, disengaged from environmental concerns, and organised around a populist account of political life in which politicians are self-serving, and the people's common sense is ignored.

The political analysis in this section returns to the question posed in the introduction: what can attitudinal and policy data tell us about the current realignment that voting intentions alone cannot? The answer, we argue, is that the rise in One Nation support is not best understood as a temporary protest driven by cost-of-living pressures, though financial stress is a significant predictor. It reflects instead a potentially more durable and structurally grounded configuration, one where low hope, high financial stress, scepticism about government capacity, indifference to environmental concerns, and a populist orientation toward political life combine to produce a distinctive and internally coherent support base.

Whether that configuration hardens into lasting realignment or dissipates as economic conditions stabilise, and a greater focus is placed on the party as a potential opposition or governing party, depends on factors beyond the reach of a single ANUpoll. What the March 2026 ANUpoll data provide, however, is a clear attitudinal map of this political moment, offering a benchmark against which future shifts in Australian public opinion and party competition can be meaningfully assessed.

6 Concluding comments

The March 2026 ANUpoll provides a detailed snapshot of Australian public opinion at a moment of economic uncertainty and strain, political uncertainty, and attitudinal flux. Read alongside the companion analysis in Biddle and Gray (2026), the findings document not only deteriorating wellbeing and pessimism about the national trajectory, but also important shifts in how Australians think about government, policy priorities, and party politics.

On the role of government, Australians in March 2026 retain broadly expansive views, with majorities supporting government responsibility across all thirteen roles asked about. At the same time, the average level of belief in government responsibility declined modestly between December 2025 and March 2026, returning to its January 2025 level. During a period of economic anxiety, pessimism and falling institutional confidence, Australians still support a strong role for government. Border control stands apart from other roles, attracting unusually strong "definite" support (69.8 per cent) and loading on a dimension distinct from the general belief-in-government factor.

Fiscal attitudes tell a more contradictory story. Australians are now more worried about government debt than at any previous point in the ANUpoll series, more likely than ever to regard their own income taxes as too high, and support for fiscal stimulus has fallen to below half of the population. Yet despite these views, across most areas of the budget, Australians want more spending rather than less, particularly health and education. This is the type of fiscal paradox often seen in public opinion research, but currently at quite high levels, reflecting a population that is financially squeezed and wanting government action, while simultaneously unwilling to accept the taxes or debt that such action would require.

Environmental attitudes show a modest shift in the face of economic strain. The proportion of Australians believing the country does too little for the environment has declined from its pandemic-era plateau to around 42 per cent. Although this remains the most common view amongst Australians, who still in general believe that Australia is doing too little to protect the environment and favour higher environmental spending, both aggregate concern and perceived urgency declined relative to their pandemic-era peaks. Nearly three in ten Australians view global warming as not serious or not very serious, a higher scepticism rate than for any other environmental issue asked about. This is a further instance of the gap between stated preferences for action and weakening urgency about the underlying problems.

The political analysis ties these threads together. Party ratings and voting intentions indicate a period of pronounced dealignment, characterised by a large, undecided share and unusually volatile support for established parties.

Regression analyses show that demographic characteristics explain only a limited share of the variation in party ratings. Attitudinal factors including financial stress, hope, belief in government, environmental concern, confidence in institutions, and populist orientation add substantially more explanatory power.

For four of the five parties asked about, confidence in institutions is positively associated with a favourable rating; One Nation is the exception, where this association is absent. A

populist orientation (scepticism about whether those running government use power in the interests of ordinary people) is the single most distinctive predictor of favourable ratings for One Nation. While financial stress, low environmental concern and scepticism about government responsibility also play important roles, the contest between the two parties currently drawing equal primary vote support in the ANUpoll data (26.0 per cent each) is structured more strongly by this populist dimension than by any specific policy disagreement.

Translating these abstract patterns into specific policy terms, support for strict environmental regulation and low prioritisation of border control most strongly distinguish Labor and Greens supporters, while the opposite configuration—strong support for border control and opposition to strict environmental laws—characterises One Nation's support base.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the rise in One Nation support in March 2026 should not be understood as a short-term protest response to cost-of-living pressures alone. Rather, it reflects an attitudinal configuration combining financial strain, low hope, scepticism about government capacity, disengagement from environmental concerns, and a pronounced populist orientation. Whether this configuration hardens into a durable realignment or dissipates as economic and political conditions evolve is a question that extends beyond a single ANUpoll wave. What the March 2026 data provide, however, is a clear attitudinal map of this political moment; one that offers a benchmark against which future shifts in Australian public opinion and party competition can be meaningfully assessed.

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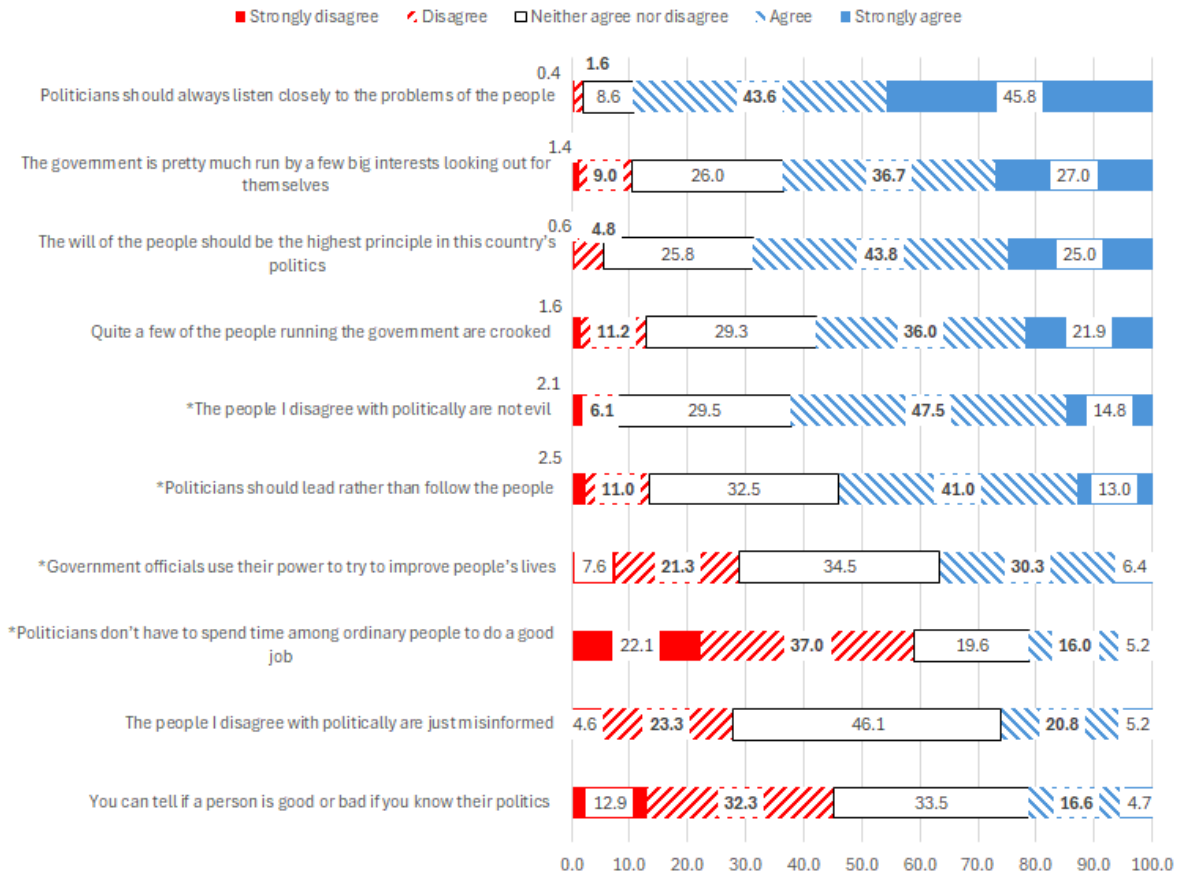
Appendix tables and figures

Figure A1 Variables from populism index, March 2026, Australia (%)



Source: ANUpoll

Table A1 Additional control variables for regression model estimates of the factors associated with ratings of political parties including role of government (Table 5), March 2026

	Liberal		Labor		Nationals		Greens		One Nation	
Explanatory variables	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.230	***	0.198	***	0.229	***	0.333	***	-0.135	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.084		0.171	**	0.069		0.155	**	-0.062	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.043		0.028		-0.016		-0.140	**	-0.046	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.073		0.014		0.079		-0.229	***	0.055	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.229	**	0.197	**	0.396	***	-0.156	*	-0.113	
Aged 75 years plus	0.448	***	0.030		0.594	***	-0.411	***	0.011	
Female	0.120	***	0.025		0.035		0.152	***	-0.029	
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.038		-0.075		0.006		-0.019		0.288	***
Has a degree	0.123	***	0.106	**	0.100	**	0.105	**	-0.216	***
Born overseas – English speaking country	-0.075		-0.048		0.006		0.041		-0.001	
Born overseas – non-English speaking country	0.029		0.207	***	0.050		0.018		-0.107	
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.169	***	-0.007		0.102		0.061		0.052	
Employed	0.079		-0.043		0.097	*	0.063		0.126	**
Outer Metropolitan Electorate	-0.030		-0.110	**	-0.052		0.013		0.114	**
Provincial Electorate	-0.085		-0.156	**	-0.031		0.007		0.081	
Rural Electorate	-0.172	***	-0.125	*	-0.007		-0.034		0.145	**
Constant	0.001		0.203	**	-0.124		0.040		-0.127	
Number of respondents	2,806		2,684		2,668		2,534		2,549	

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

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

Source: ANUpoll

Endnotes

[i] https://theconversation.com/economic-pessimism-is-behind-the-drift-of-voters-to-minor-parties-and-independents-256322

[ii] https://antonygreen.com.au/the-coalition-split-and-the-re-emergence-of-one-nation

[iii] https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/one-nation-surge-a-challenge-to-both-major-parties-20260128-p5nxij

[iv] Border control loads most strongly on the second factor, with a factor loading of 0.53 on the second factor, compared to 0.14 for that variable for the first factor.

[v] https://www.pbo.gov.au/publications-and-data/publications/costings/stage-3-tax-cuts-distributional-analysis

[vi] https://theconversation.com/how-does-australias-progressive-tax-system-work-and-what-is-bracket-creep-234152

[vii] https://www.apsc.gov.au/state-service/state-service-report-2019-20/chapter-1-commitment-service/black-summer

[viii] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/apr/28/pauline-hanson-one-nation-leadership-guardian-essential-poll-ntwnfb

[ix] https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/politics/pauline-hansons-one-nation-draws-level-with-labor-on-27-per-cent-primary-vote-for-first-time-in-sky-news-pulse-history/news-story/cbc88f47eac6ff1b3b8aa563dfe305e2