



# True Issues<sup>®</sup>

February 2026

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# Concerns about food, housing and electricity costs remain, as immigration becomes a top five issue for Australians

Following a RBA decision to lift the official cash rate for the first time in over two years, this February 2026 True Issues® sees living costs and housing continue to lead community concerns, and more Australians looking for greater government focus on immigration, the economy and interest rates.

Unprompted, a majority (56%) of adults continue to name **cost of living** in their top three most important issues or concerns, and around three-quarters (77%) select it in their top five from a prompted list – similar to November 2025 results. **Food and grocery costs** are a key stressor for a majority (65%) of Australians in managing their cost of living, followed by **home mortgage repayments** and **rent** (50%), **electricity** (48%), **health and medical costs** (42%), and **home and vehicle insurance** (40%).

After living costs, **housing supply and affordability** remains ahead of **hospitals and healthcare** as the next most important issue to Australians (50% and 46% prompted responses, respectively). With housing prices and rent expected to continue rising in 2026, housing remains top of mind for one in three adults (34%) and a higher 44% among 18 to 34 year olds.

The **economy and finances** (39%, previously 35% prompted responses) remains a key issue across all age groups. Amid RBA expectations of rising unemployment and slowing GDP growth this year, it is now a more top of mind concern than in 2025 (21%, up from 17%).

This is followed by increased community concern about **immigration and border security** (34% prompted responses, up from 26%, and

25% unprompted mentions, up from 19%). **Immigration** is the second highest unprompted issue and third highest prompted issue among older adults aged 55 and over, and a concern for a majority of One Nation voters. Australians concerned about immigration want more government focus on reducing migrant intake, citing perceived pressures on the housing market and challenges related to social cohesion.

Immigration is followed by **environment and climate change** (26% prompted responses), **employment and wages** (24%) and **interest rates** (23%, up from 17%). Employment and wages remains a notably higher concern among 18 to 34 year olds (42%) – third highest after living costs and housing.

In the wake of the December terrorist attacks in Bondi, almost one in five Australians (19%) select **social cohesion (including dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism)** in their top five issues the Government should be focusing on. Australians calling for stronger action on social cohesion mention issues such as racism, equality (including women's rights), fears of terrorism, extremist ideologies and tensions related to protests.

Overall, more than one in three Australians remain optimistic about the future and continue to view their **personal situation** as heading in the right direction (35%), greater than the one in four (24%) who believe this is heading in the wrong direction. This means the personal situation net direction trend has declined by 5 points since November. Renters, low income households (up to \$50,000), and One Nation party voters are most pessimistic about their future.

# Decline in perceptions of government performance across all areas as confidence in the national economy plummets

Ratings of **Australian Government** performance have declined since November and are below 'average' (i.e. an index score below 50) both overall and across all individual issues measured. The Albanese Government's **overall performance** index score is 41 (down six points), a level last recorded by the Turnbull Government in August 2016, following its narrow election win.

Following this month's cash rate increase, the greatest declines in perceptions of Government performance are on **interest rates** (index score of 33, down 10 points) and the **economy and finances** (index score of 37, down six points). Other key areas of decline include its worst performing areas of **cost of living** (index score of 22, down five points) and **housing supply and affordability** (index score of 24, down three points).

Five-point decreases were also recorded for other poorer performing areas, **immigration and border security** and **vision and leadership** (index score of 37 each), and November gains made on **foreign affairs and trade** (index score of 47, down five points) have been lost.

**Social cohesion** (index score of 35) is another poor performing area for this Government, as it works to implement its response to the December terrorist attack in Bondi.

Confidence in the **national economy** has declined further in February, to its lowest level since tracking began in 2013. Almost half of adults (48%, up from 40%) now rate the economy as heading in the wrong direction, compared with just 14% (down from 20%) who see it heading in the right direction.

Australians are only slightly positive about **business and industry** performance (index score of 53) but still rate it ahead of all levels of government. More adults now see business heading in the wrong direction (26%) than see it heading in the right direction (20%).

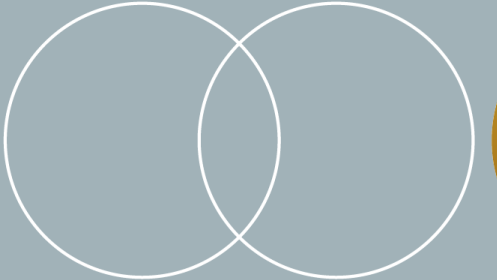
At state level, rated performance is most positive for the **South Australian and Western Australian governments** (index score of 56 for each), followed by the **Queensland Government** (index score of 54). More residents see these **state economies** as heading in the right direction than in the wrong direction. This is an encouraging result for the South Australian Government as it heads into the 2026 state election.

The **NSW Government** continues to rate less well (index score of 49) and more NSW residents see their state economy heading in the wrong direction (32%) than the right one (20%).

Also heading into an election year, the **Victorian Government** continues to rate poorly on performance (index score of 34) with over half of Victorians rating their state economy as heading in the wrong direction (55%).

**Local council** performance continues to rate just 'average' (index score of 50), and there remains slightly more optimism among Australians that their **local community** is heading in the right direction (28%) than heading in the wrong direction (24%).

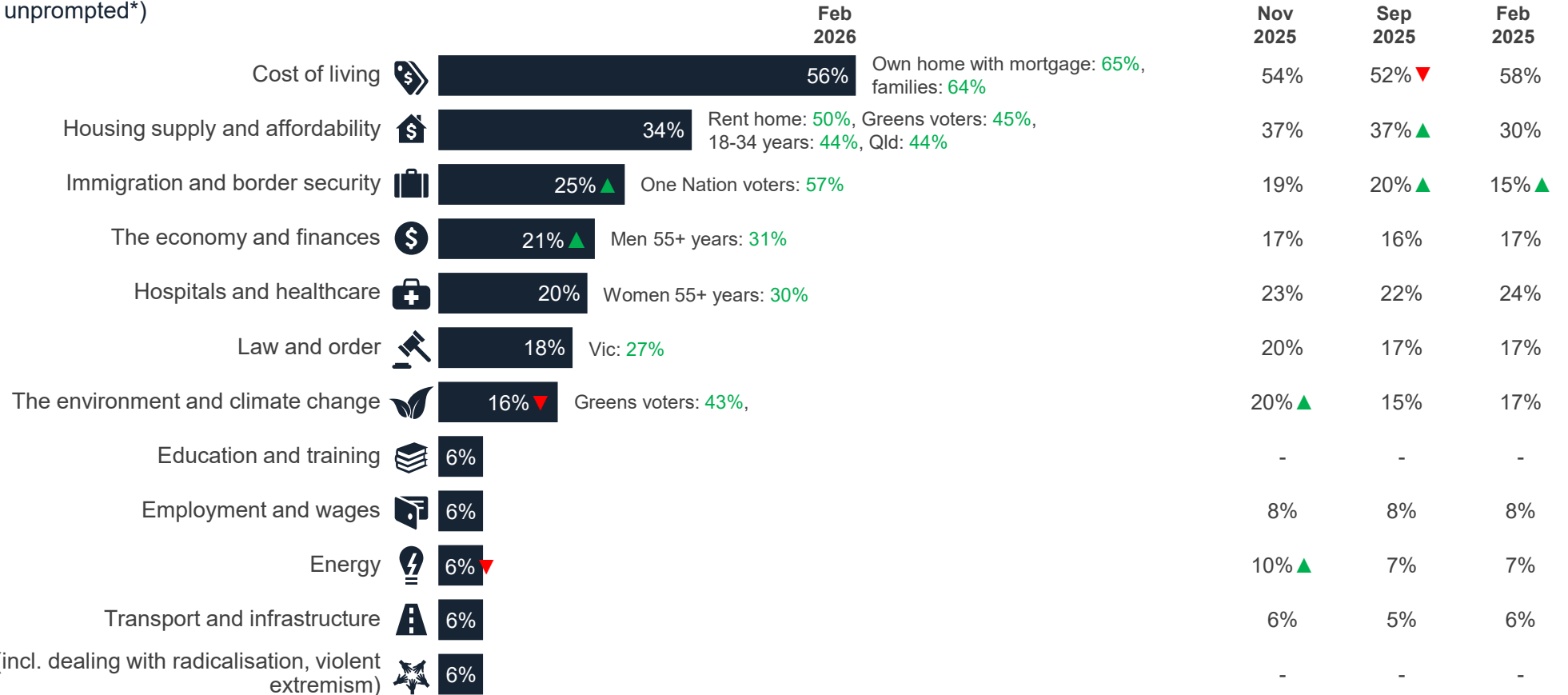
# What are the issues Australians care about?



# Cost of living and housing remain most top of mind, amid increased public concern about immigration and the economy

## Most important issues the Australian Government should focus on

(Up to 3 issues – unprompted\*)



\*Note: Issues mentioned by less than 6% not shown.

Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence level.

Significantly ▲ higher / ▼ lower than previous True Issues wave at the 95% confidence level.

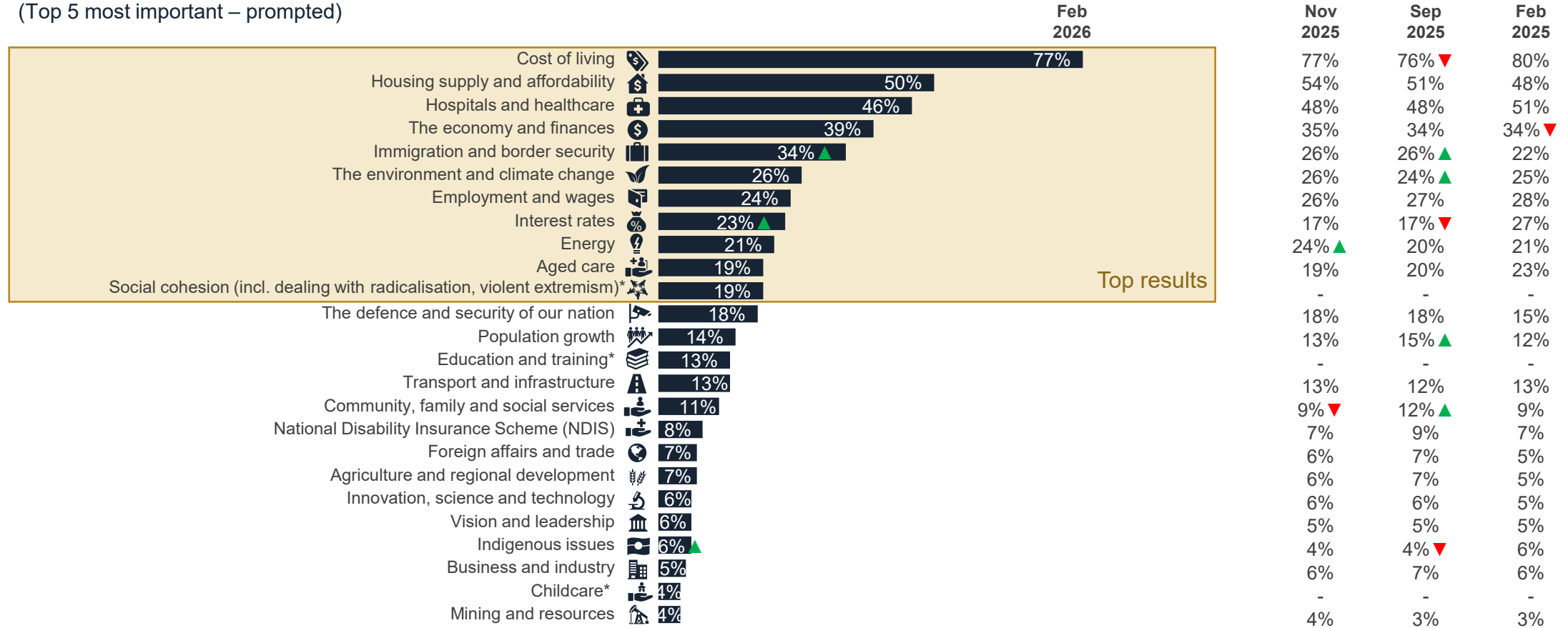
Q. What are the most important issues that you think the Australian Government should focus on? These would be the issues or problems that personally interest or concern you the most.

Base: All respondents (n=1,000 per wave).

# Living costs, housing and healthcare lead prompted concerns as more want a greater focus on immigration and interest rates

## Most important issues the Australian Government should focus on

(Top 5 most important – prompted)



\* In February 2026 a new category of 'social cohesion' was created, while 'childcare' was split out from 'education and training', and as such trends are not shown for these categories.

Significantly ▲ higher / ▼ lower than the previous wave at the 95% confidence level.

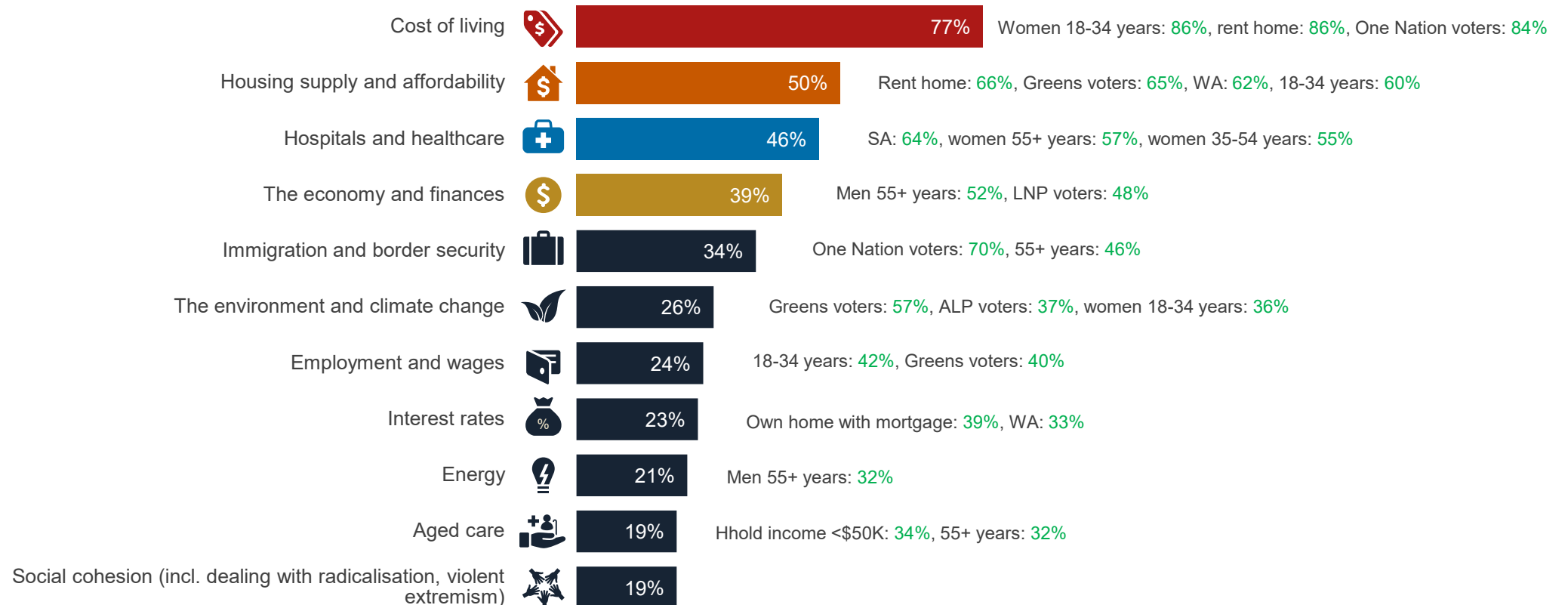
Q. From the following list, please select the five most important issues you think the Australian Government should focus on.

Base: All respondents (n=1,000 per wave).

# Living costs lead concerns across key demographic groups, followed by housing for under 55s and healthcare for 55+

## Highest ranked issues the Australian Government should focus on

(Top 5 most important – prompted)



Significantly **higher** than the national total at the 95% confidence level.

Q. From the following list, please select the five most important issues you think the Australian Government should focus on.

Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Australians feel the strain of higher living costs and are unsatisfied with the current state of the housing market

## Key issues or concerns about **cost of living** and **housing supply and affordability** – selected verbatims

*“Everything is going up and is far too expensive, like electricity, insurance, fuel and food. The Government have the hide to increase fuel excise, beer and spirit taxes ... We have already paid tax on our earnings, but they just keep adding more and more taxes.”*

*“Any cost of living measures which have been introduced only affect a small percentage of the population. Nothing has been done for the ‘average Australian’.”*

*“The cost of living has a flow on effect for a lot of our other problems. If people can’t afford the basics, then they aren’t going to be able to afford to do anything. It’s not just the case of not being able to splurge on a coffee on the weekend, but medicine and treatment or childcare / school needs. The key issue for me is seeing young families and elderly people not being able to afford to live, having to delve into savings, if they have any, which causes long term financial strain, creating a cycle.”*

*“So many people are living paycheck to paycheck and barely making ends meet. That’s not really living. We have to change something... to combat shrinkflation and grocery prices, energy prices and allow people to live with less financial burden.”*

*“To survive is becoming harder each day. Everything is just increasing in price. To change this, we need more regulations of major companies causing massive inflation of things. More transparency with cost and profits.”*

*“I live on an aged pension, and rent, so it does not leave enough to have any kind of quality of life or afford medication.”*

*“Price growth on the essentials has increased much faster than wages. The Government needs to take strong action to rein in large companies, all of whom are using their excessive market power to price gouge their customers, while suppressing wages.”*

*“I want my children to be able to grow up and afford a house. I want people to have hope that they will be able to live the lives they were promised, with shelter and security.”*

*“The shortage of housing has caused price increases that make ownership for younger generations little more than a dream.”*

*“Inflated supply and demand driving dwelling prices up. People are paying more in rent per week compared to the mortgage of the house they are renting on a per week cycle. Yet those people aren’t able to get approved to get a mortgage, where they would be paying less than their current rent. Foreign ownership of empty dwellings is another factor to consider.”*

*“We have a strong homeless population in our local community, who simply cannot break the cycle.”*

*“There is far too much emphasis on property as an investment rather than an everyday, functional necessity. Property investment may be somewhat necessary in our current system, but it shouldn’t be encouraged at the expense of people who actually need good quality housing that they can rely on but have to compete for it with people who already own multiple houses.”*

*“[It’s a] human right. Being able to afford housing and general amenities should be a major priority as it aids people and alleviates them from issues that stem from lacking housing (employment, insurance, safety).”*

*“Contributes to overall instability and delaying key longer term decisions like having a family.”*

*“As a renter, the price of a rental has skyrocketed. Also, if you are in a position where you have to vacate and find another property it’s extremely stressful going up against so many other people.”*

Q. Please tell us a little about why a focus on [FIRST ISSUE SELECTED / ‘MOST IMPORTANT’] is most important to you. What are your key issues or concerns about this, at the moment? How do things need to change?  
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Australians are concerned about capacity in the healthcare system and the national economic outlook

## Key issues or concerns about hospitals and healthcare and the economy and finances – selected verbatims

*“The health sector is exceptionally poor in Victoria and the Australian Government should mandate efficiency and better results, not just more money.”*

*“Concerns for rising mental health issues in the younger population. The baby boomer generation is filling hospitals leading to massive wait times in ED and ‘bed block’ in hospitals. This means higher demand for nursing staff, allied health and medical teams. Nursing ratios are not always followed due to demand, which leads to unsafe practices.”*

*“There is a huge backlog in waiting times for hospitals and a major shortage of doctors in rural areas.”*

*“Wait times in emergency departments are excessively long. Time to see your local GP is too long, which is why people are using emergency [departments] and the gap payment at the local GP is getting more and more expensive.”*

*“I work in allied health and think a well supported healthcare system benefits everyone - those accessing it and those who are employed by such services. I also have a young family and depend on an adequate system for my family.”*

*“Health is the primary driver of economic productivity. A sick or injured population cannot work, learn or innovate.”*

*“Lack of services is costing lives. Ramping of ambulances is delaying assistance and wasting valuable time of ambulance personnel. Insufficient importance is placed on spending in health areas compared to spending in other areas, etc.”*

*“There is not enough doctors and staff to look after all the people currently in hospital, long waiting times to see a specialist. Getting medication at the hospital used to be free, not anymore.”*

*“The economic forecast has been downgraded. I do not see much investment in R&D and manufacturing happening, and we are relying too much on mining and housing (which is not a productive asset and does not generate jobs!)”*

*“Inflation is up again which affects all people with mortgages and many renters, as the RBA has increased the cash rate and may do so again.”*

*“A focus on the economy and finances is most important to me because it affects nearly every part of daily life. From the cost of groceries and housing to access to education and healthcare, financial stability shapes people’s opportunities and overall well-being. Economic issues often hit the most vulnerable communities the hardest, so understanding and improving financial systems is key to creating fairness and long-term security for everyone.”*

*“Poor economic management wastes money and resources and lowers the living standards of everyone.”*

*“Productivity (GDP per capita). We have been going backwards on this measure for too long. Policies must be enacted to encourage use of capital for productive enterprises, not locked away in residential housing.”*

*“It is the result of a lot of issues ... overspending by government, lack of taxing of the resource industry, lack of investment in jobs and infrastructure to support growth.”*

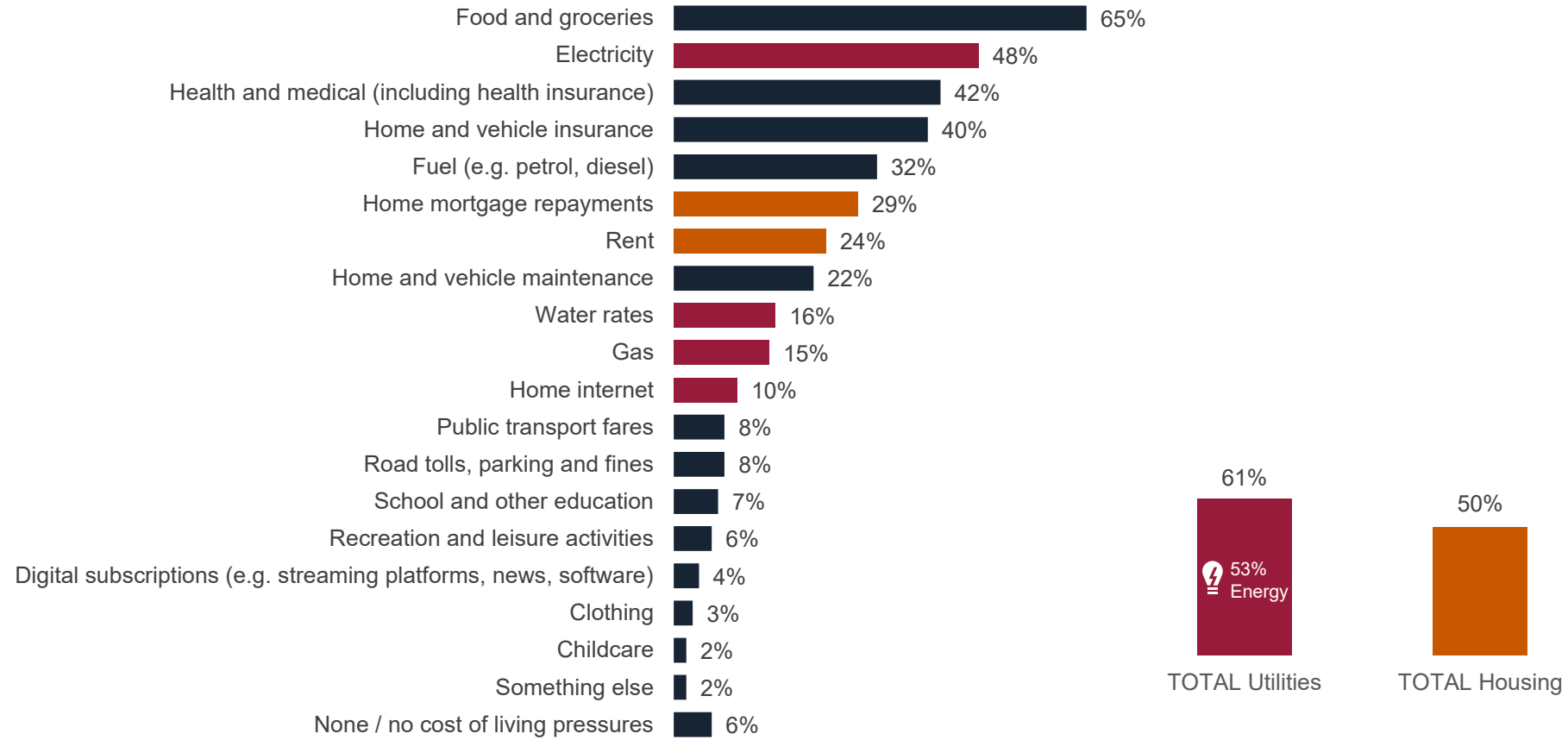
*“Having a strong economy means there will be jobs available for many people (ideally everyone who wants one) and provides tax income for the Government to spend on public services, including housing, transport infrastructure and healthcare.”*

Q. Please tell us a little about why a focus on [FIRST ISSUE SELECTED / 'MOST IMPORTANT'] is most important to you. What are your key issues or concerns about this, at the moment? How do things need to change?  
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Food prices are the most stressful cost of living pressure for Australians, followed by electricity, health and insurance

## Most stressful cost of living pressures

Multiple response – up to five responses allowed



Q. Which of the following cost of living pressures is **most** stressful for you, if any? Please select up to five.  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Food prices are the most stressful pressure across all groups, with housing costs a key stressor among under 55s

## Most stressful cost of living pressures

Multiple response – up to five responses allowed

	Total	Men	Women	18-34 yrs	35-54 yrs	55+ yrs	Families	Metro	Regions	HHI <\$50K	HHI \$50K - \$75K	HHI \$75K - \$100K	HHI \$100K-\$200K	HHI \$200K+	ALP voters	LNP voters	Greens voters	One Nation voters
Food and groceries	65%	58%	71%	65%	67%	63%	70%	62%	70%	73%	68%	69%	61%	56%	61%	65%	71%	76%
Electricity	48%	49%	48%	38%	49%	56%	48%	47%	50%	57%	46%	51%	48%	44%	49%	51%	39%	58%
Health and medical	42%	35%	48%	34%	41%	48%	36%	39%	47%	36%	45%	41%	39%	43%	35%	41%	37%	48%
Home and vehicle insurance	40%	36%	44%	26%	36%	55%	32%	34%	52%	44%	48%	31%	40%	35%	39%	39%	31%	51%
Fuel	32%	32%	33%	35%	25%	37%	30%	28%	41%	36%	34%	38%	30%	25%	27%	33%	33%	44%
Home mortgage repayments	29%	29%	28%	33%	45%	11%	50%	33%	21%	8%	14%	29%	38%	45%	32%	26%	29%	28%
Rent	24%	22%	26%	42%	19%	14%	22%	27%	18%	31%	29%	30%	21%	14%	17%	21%	43%	16%
Home and vehicle maintenance	22%	18%	25%	19%	20%	26%	22%	19%	27%	22%	31%	19%	21%	15%	23%	19%	17%	21%
Water rates	16%	15%	17%	11%	16%	20%	16%	16%	17%	18%	22%	16%	16%	12%	20%	16%	9%	20%
Gas	15%	17%	14%	12%	17%	17%	14%	18%	11%	18%	18%	15%	15%	15%	16%	15%	17%	16%
Home internet	10%	8%	11%	11%	9%	9%	11%	9%	10%	16%	5%	15%	9%	4%	12%	4%	11%	8%
Public transport fares	8%	9%	8%	16%	9%	2%	7%	12%	2%	2%	4%	15%	9%	8%	9%	3%	21%	4%
Road tolls, parking and fines	8%	10%	6%	11%	8%	5%	9%	10%	4%	5%	5%	4%	11%	9%	7%	7%	13%	5%
School and other education	7%	6%	7%	11%	8%	2%	16%	8%	4%	5%	4%	10%	8%	7%	9%	3%	11%	2%
Recreation and leisure activities	6%	6%	5%	9%	6%	3%	6%	6%	4%	6%	2%	7%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%
Digital subscriptions	4%	5%	3%	8%	3%	2%	3%	5%	2%	3%	4%	3%	5%	3%	6%	3%	4%	3%
Clothing	3%	3%	4%	8%	2%	1%	4%	3%	3%	2%	3%	5%	5%	2%	2%	5%	7%	2%
Childcare	2%	2%	2%	4%	3%	0%	8%	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	0%
Something else	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	4%
None / no cost of living pressures	6%	9%	4%	4%	4%	10%	3%	6%	7%	7%	9%	3%	5%	9%	6%	8%	5%	3%

Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence level.

Q. Which of the following cost of living pressures is **most** stressful for you, if any? Please select up to five.

Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

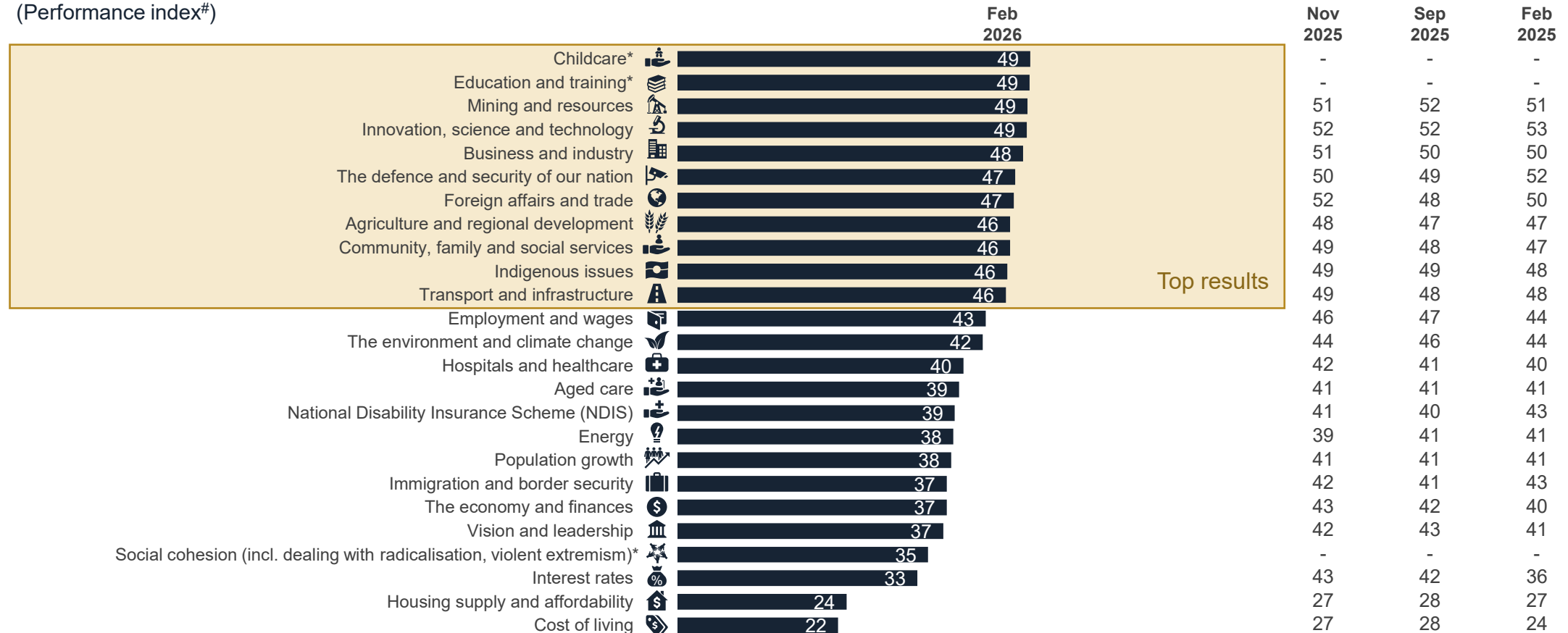
# How does the Australian Government perform on top issues?



# Government performance has declined across the board, most sharply on interest rates and the economy

## Australian Government performance on issues

(Performance index#)



\* In February 2026 a new category of 'social cohesion' was created, while 'childcare' was split out from 'education and training', and as such trends are not shown for these categories.

#For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.

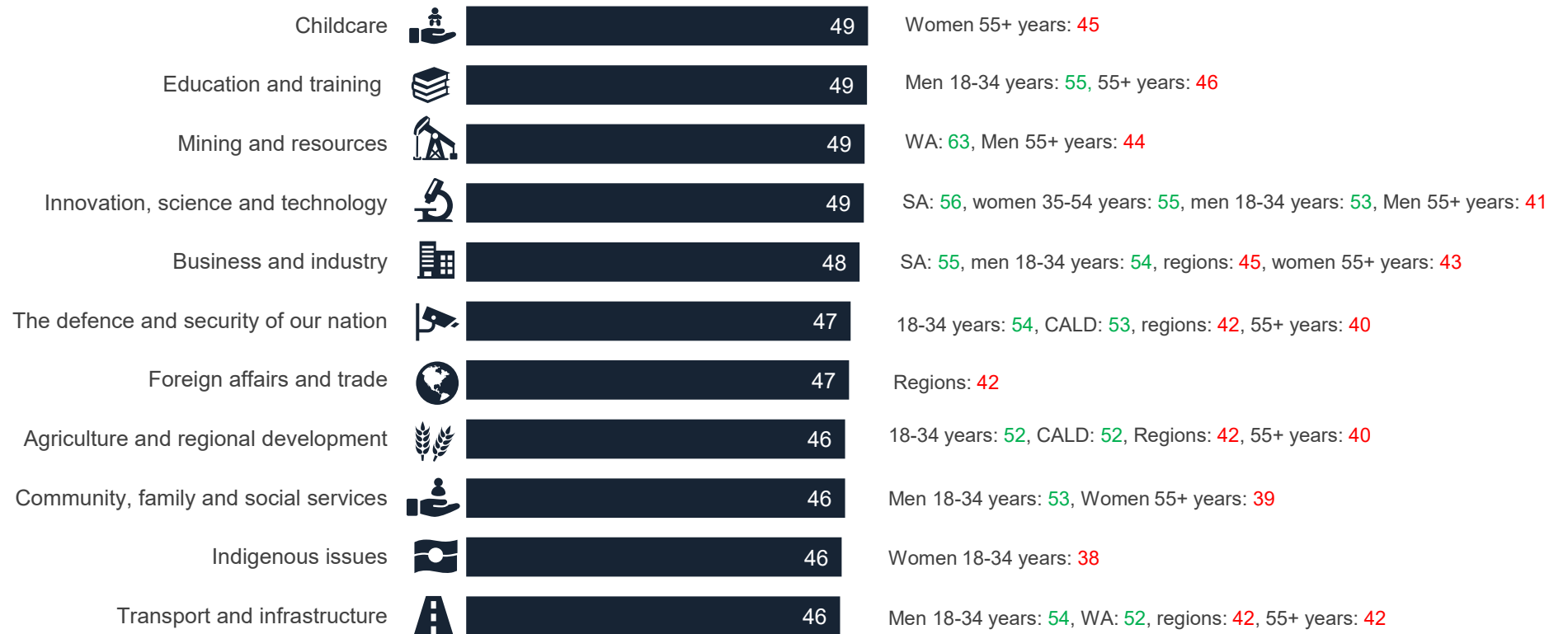
Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?

Base: All respondents (n=1,000 per wave).

# Young adults, especially young men, are most positive about government performance on key issues

## Top ranked issues for Australian Government performance

(Performance index#)



#For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.

Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence level.

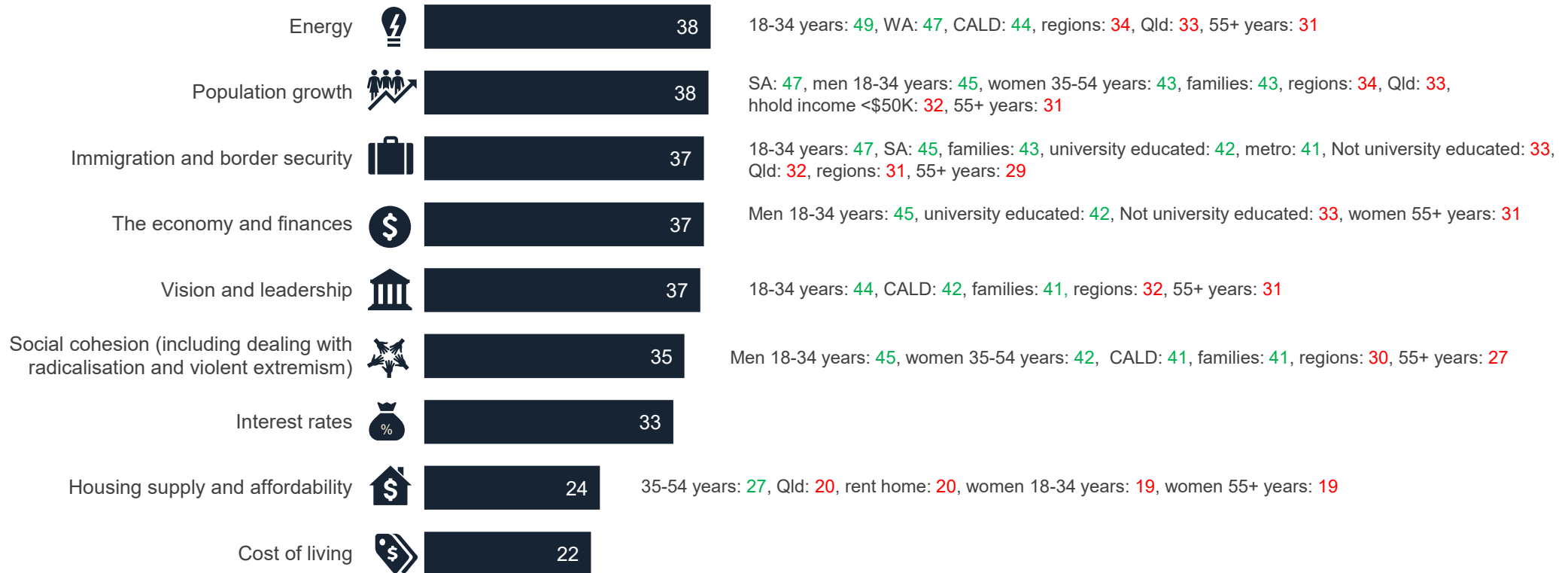
Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?

Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Older adults are most critical of government performance on key issues

## Bottom ranked issues for Australian Government performance

(Performance index#)



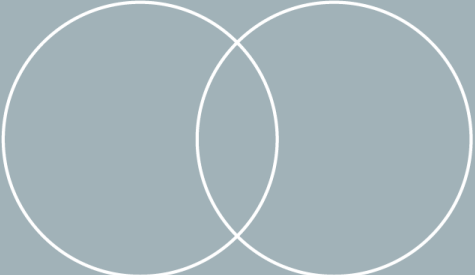
#For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.

Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence level.

Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?

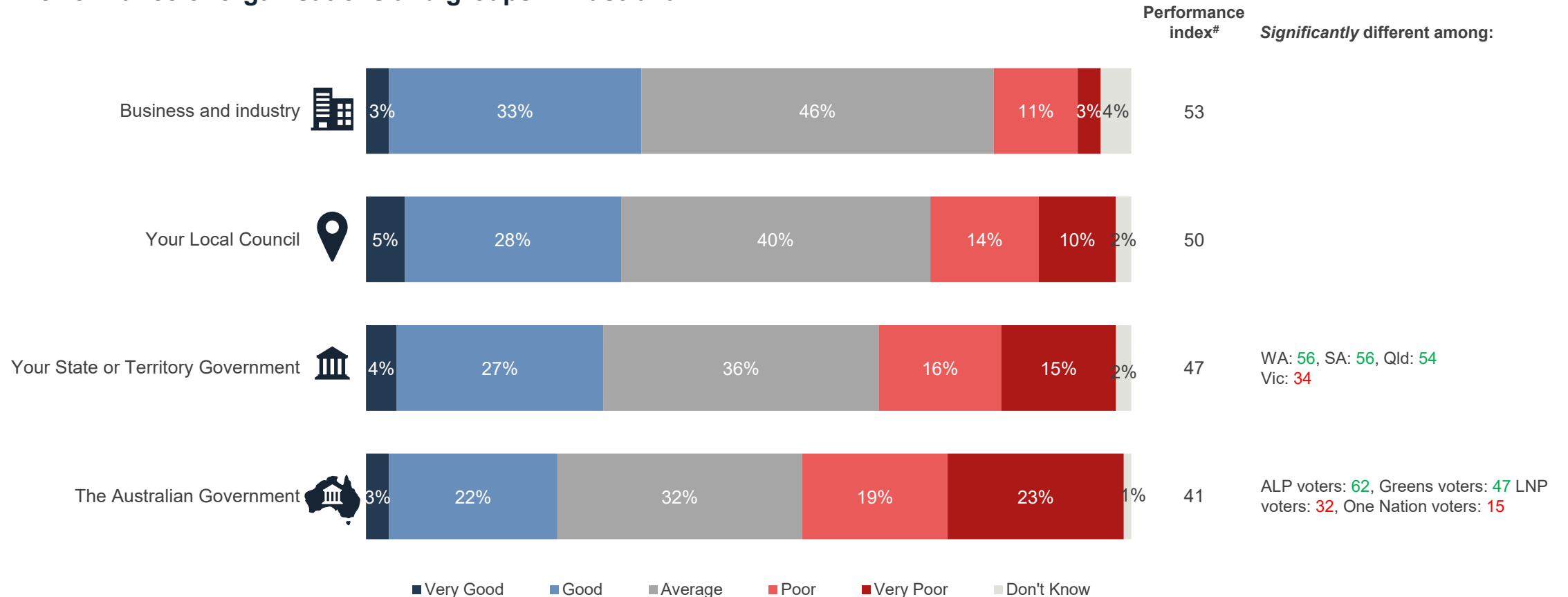
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# How are government, business and industry performing?



# Private sector performance is most commonly viewed as average but still stronger than the public sector

## Performance of organisations and groups in Australia

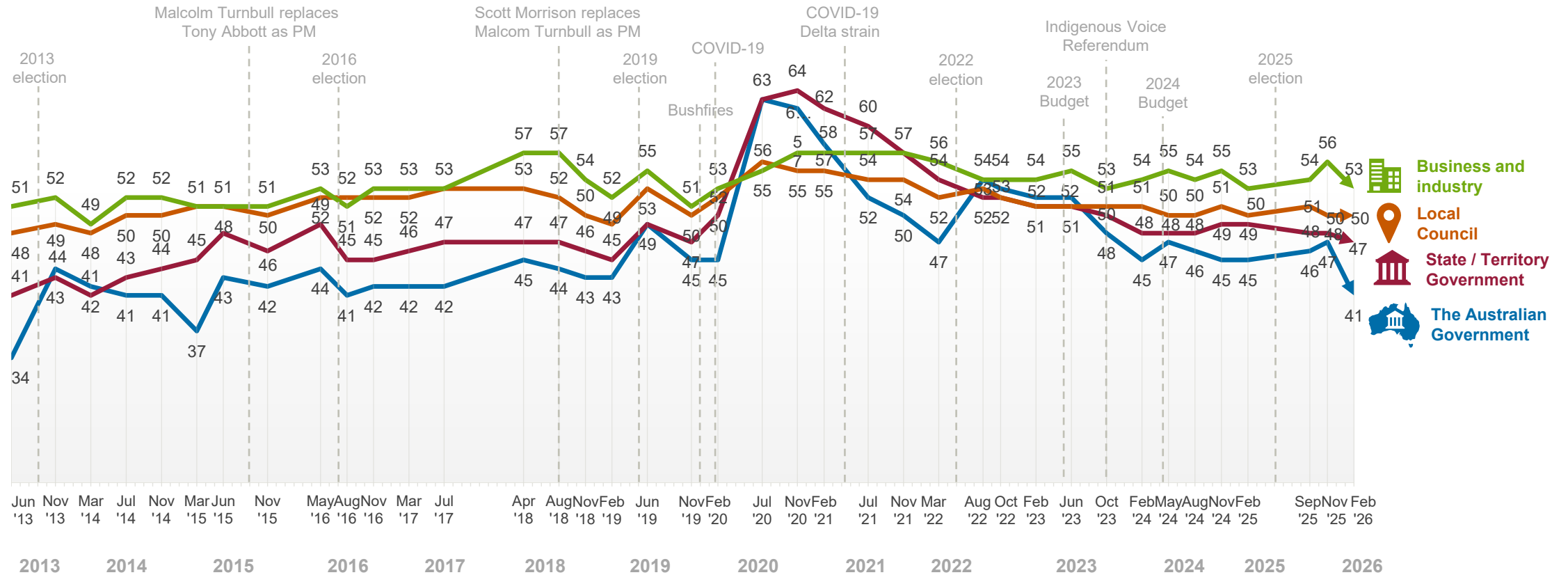


#For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the research methodology section of this report.  
Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence level.  
Q. How would you rate the current performance of each of the following organisations or groups in Australia?  
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# There has been a decline in the perceived performance of the Australian Government, as well as business and industry

## Performance of organisations and groups in Australia

(Performance index#)



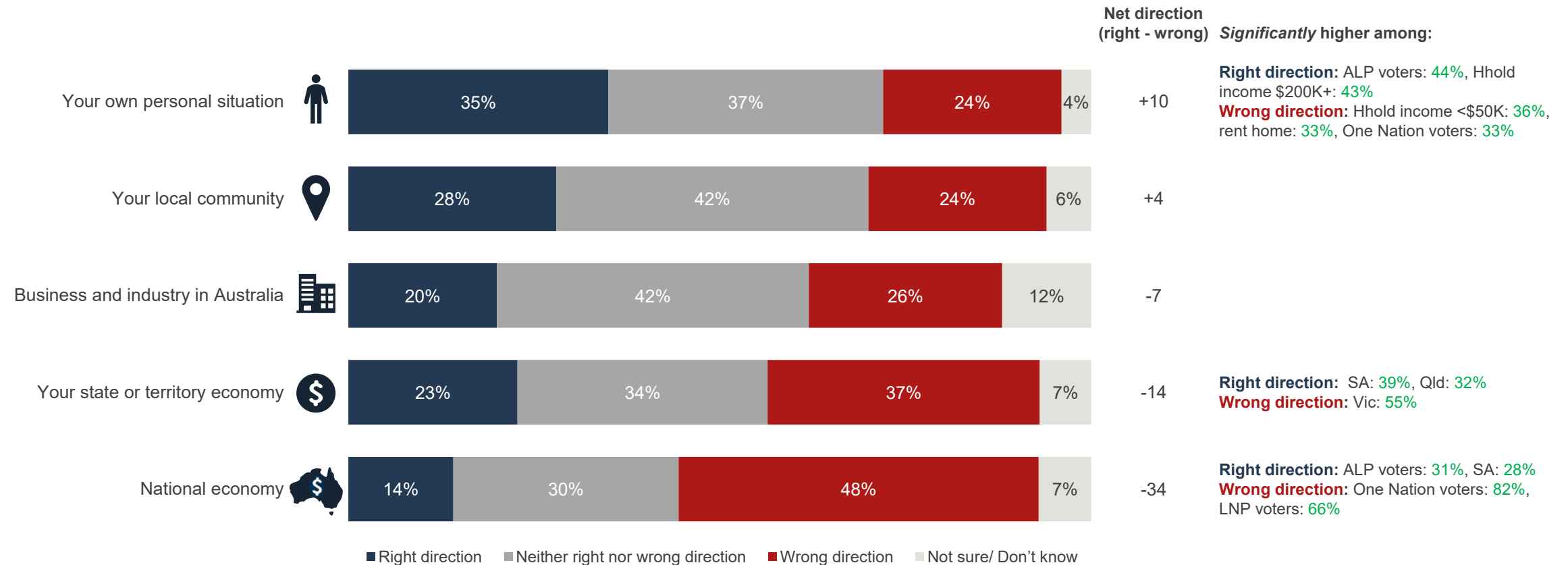
#For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.  
 Q. How would you rate the current performance of each of the following organisations or groups in Australia?  
 Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).

# Are we headed in the right direction?



# Almost half of Australians feel the national economy is heading in the wrong direction

## Direction of organisations and groups in Australia

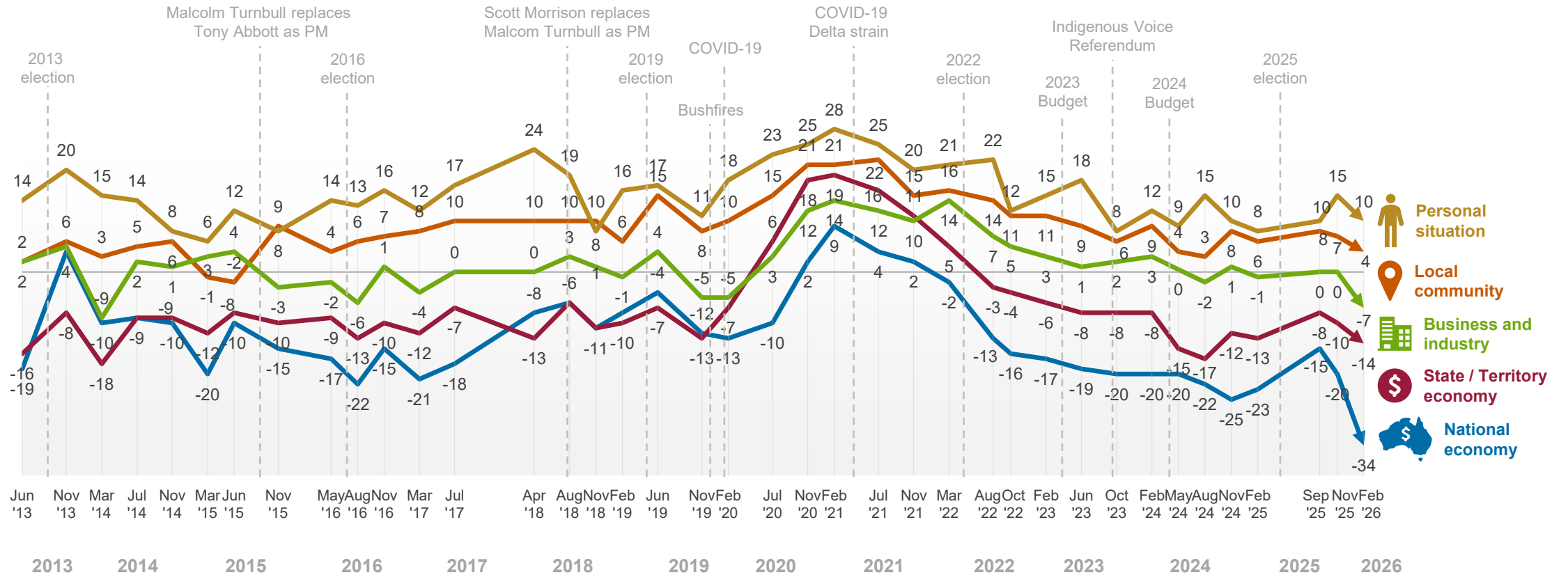


Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence level.  
 Q. Do you think each of the following is generally headed in the right or the wrong direction?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# The direction of the national economy has dropped to the lowest level on record

## Direction of organisations and groups in Australia

Net direction trend (% right direction - % wrong direction)



Q. Do you think each of the following is generally headed in the right or the wrong direction?  
 Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).

# Survey methodology

**National Online Survey**

**n=1,000 Australian adults**

- Conducted Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2026.
- Sample quotas on age, gender and location with post-survey weighting to actual age / gender / location proportions from Census data.
- Maximum margin of error on n=1,000 is +/-3.1% at the 95% confidence level.
- Differences of +/-1% for net scores are due to rounding.



The research was conducted in compliance with AS-ISO 20252.

**Explanation of index scores:**

To facilitate ease of reporting and comparison of results over time, an **index score** has been calculated for performance measures (*very good to very poor* ratings).

The index score is represented as a score out of 100.


To calculate this score, the **survey percentage result** for each scale category (excluding 'don't know' responses) is multiplied by an **index factor** to produce an **index value** for each category. These values are then summed to produce the **index score**, equating to 43 in this example.


Rating category	Survey percentage	Index factor	Index value (percentage x factor)
Very good	5%	100	5
Good	17%	75	13
Average	40%	50	20
Poor	19%	25	5
Very poor	15%	0	0
Don't know	4%	-	-
<b>Index score</b>			<b>43</b>



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in Australia...

Find out what they're thinking.

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