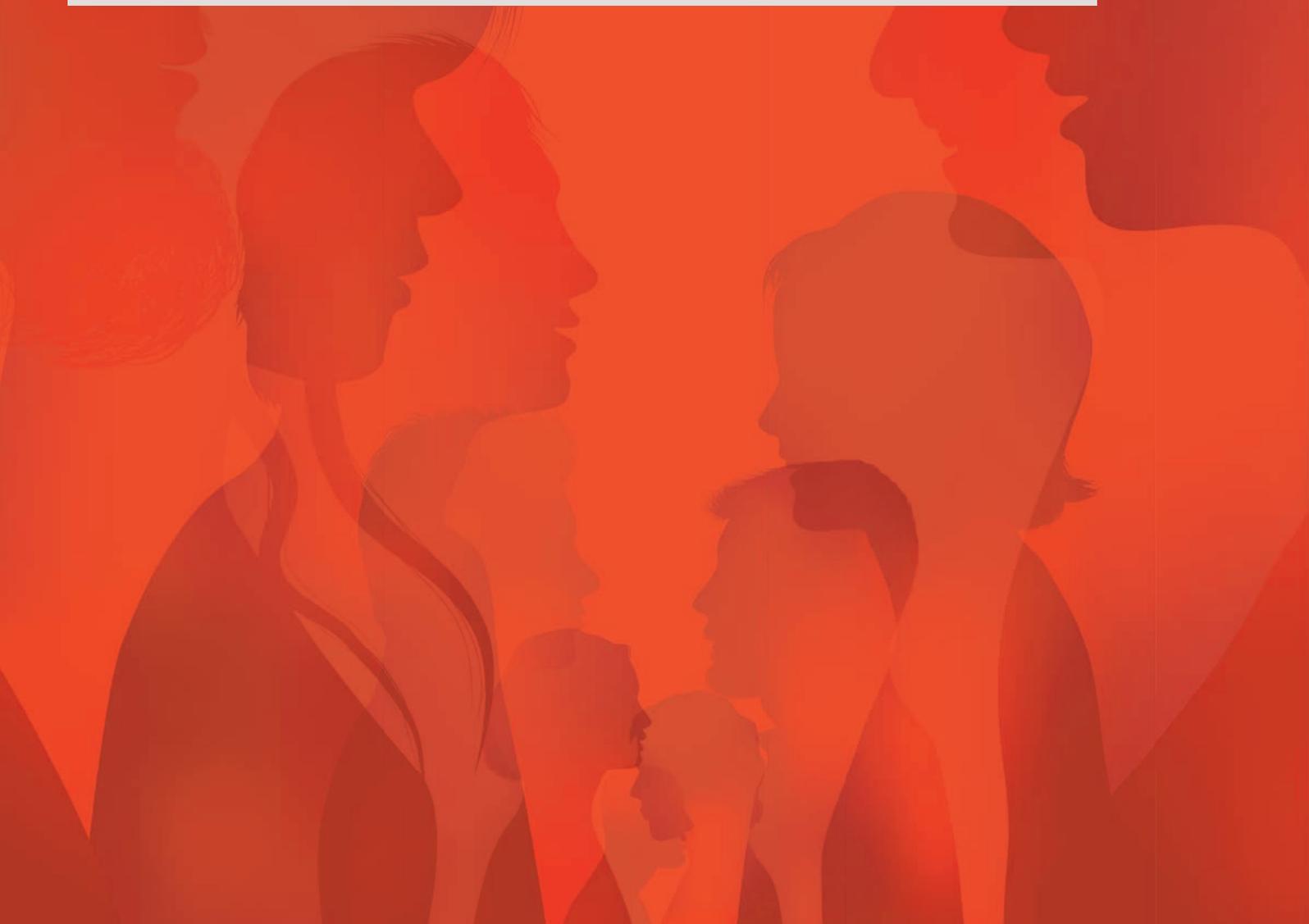


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Australian Civic Engagement Index

Sydney Policy Lab

30 August 2021



Context

As countries around the world try to rebuild from the pandemic, success will depend as much on the contribution of the broader public as it will on the efforts of political or industry leaders.

For years now, political scientists have known that the stronger the commitment of everyday people to their own societies the more likely those societies are to be prosperous, fair and strong.

The more people volunteer for charities and other groups, the more they are able to trust their politicians, the more they look out for their neighbours and communities, the better the country as a whole will be.

But how does Australia fare on these issues?

How engaged are the Australian public? Who do they trust? And who do they look out for?

The Sydney Policy Lab wanted to understand the level of civic engagement and design an index that would help explain the behaviours and attitudes that driver this sense of connection.

Designed in partnership with Essential Research, the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney has developed the Australian Civic Engagement Index, an annual index which will measure how Australians' levels of trust, participation and connection with the community and each other.

The inaugural 2021 index is a national survey made up of 16 questions and including 1,098 participants. The survey was conducted online from 28th July to 1st August 2021 by Essential Research, as part of their Essential Report omnibus poll, with data provided by Qualtrics.

Inaugural 2021 Australian Civic Engagement Index - What did we find?

Key findings of the inaugural index include:

- Younger people who grew up in a home where English is not the primary language spoken in the home emerged as the most engaged citizens.
- Older, poorer, rural people rate significantly lower when it comes to civic engagement.
- People with children rate significantly higher on civic engagement than people without children, suggesting family draws people into civic spaces.
- The ability to form new relationships with people outside one's existing network of family and friends is one of the strongest indicators of an engaged citizen.

Survey approach

1. We asked people to provide a self-assessment of their personal engagement with their community.
2. We then asked a series of 16 standalone questions clustered around three core elements, identified as being engagement indicators.
 - Participation - personal levels of engagement with group community activity
 - Trust - stated confidence in institutions to act in the respondents' interests
 - Connection - depth and breadth of social and civic connection
3. Responses to each of the cluster questions was scaled (0 - 4) with responses given a score on each answer.
4. We compared the stated results to these questions with the initial self-assessment of connection to identify the influence that each of these indicators had on the broader level of engagement.
5. We then weighted each of the cluster questions based on their relative influence. For example, the strongest drivers of community connection were given the strongest weighting in the index.
6. Each individual was allocated receive a score out of 100, based on the weighted response to the 16 informing questions.
7. Participants were then grouped along demographic lines, to provide sub-scores for different groups.

Survey responses

The survey was conducted online from 28th July to 1st August 2021 and is based on 1,098 participants.

The target population is all Australian residents aged 18+. Participants were invited to participate and completed the survey online without an interviewer present and incentives were offered for participation.

The weighting efficiency applied to the results at a national level is 96%, which gives an effective sample size of 1,057. The margin of error at this effective sample size is $\pm 3.0\%$ (95% confidence level).

Quotas are applied during fieldwork for the final sample to be representative of the target population by age, gender and location.

RIM weighting is applied to the data using information sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The factors used in the weighting are age, gender, location and party ID.

This survey was conducted on Behalf of the University of Sydney's Policy Lab by Essential Research as part of their Essential Report omnibus poll with data provided by Qualtrics.

Information for the weighting efficiency, effective sample size and margin of error for each poll (from June 2021) can be found here: <https://essentialvision.com.au/about-this-poll>

All Essential Research staff hold Research Society membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour. This research is compliant with the Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards.

Highlights from the results

The 2021 survey established a baseline civic engagement rating for Australia of: 42.5.
The survey will be conducted annually.

Using the weighted scoring, comparing across the average all Australians, across different demographics, the top 3 most engaged cohorts are:

People who identified that they use a language other than English at home or with close family members	47.8
People aged 25-34	47.3
People who have a highest level of education: University Degree	46.9

Using the weighted scoring, comparing across the average all Australians, across different demographics, the three least engaged cohorts:

Highest level of education: Secondary School	36.7
Aged 75 and over	36.7
Federal Voting Intention: Pauline Hanson's One Nation	31.4

Breakdown by results for key demographics and questions

Generation split (age based)

1	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 and over
46.2	47.3	46.4	39.1	38.5	39.1	36.7

Geographical split

(city, outskirts, regions, rural)*

Inner Metro	Outer Metro	Provincial	Rural
46.5	40.8	40.9	40.3

Connection

Levels of connection - Self-assessment score

	Very connected	Fairly connected	Not that connected	Not connected at all
How would you rate your level of connection with your community?	12%	50%	32%	7%

What does connection look like?

To what extent do each of the following statements sound like, or not like you?	A lot like me	Somewhat like me	Not really like me	Not like me at all
I actively look to connect with new people outside my immediate family and friendship group	14%	35%	34%	16%
I enjoy meeting and talking with new people in online groups and social network platforms	13%	30%	34%	23%
The views of people like me are listened to by those making decisions about how the country is governed	11%	38%	35%	16%
The issues that I care about are reflected in the media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers)	15%	51%	26%	9%

Participation

Engagement with the community

How would you describe your level of engagement with each of the following types of groups or organisations?	I have no involvement with this type of group or organisation	I follow what they're doing and engage occasionally	I am a member (i.e. have paid membership fees or donate money and/or engage regularly)	I volunteer my time to support them
A political party	70%	22%	5%	3%
Trade union, industry group or activist organisation	74%	16%	7%	3%
A faith-based community or church	67%	18%	10%	5%
Sporting clubs or organisations	56%	22%	16%	6%
Charitable or not-for-profit organisations	46%	30%	14%	10%
Cultural institutions (e.g. libraries, museums or galleries)	54%	30%	13%	3%
School parent and citizens or other education support group	70%	18%	8%	4%

Trust

Trust (topline table)

During times of difficulty, to what extent would you trust the following people or organisations to provide assistance or support to those in need?	Have a lot of trust	Have some trust	Have little trust	Have no trust at all
Your local elected representatives in politics (e.g. local MPs or councillors)	10%	46%	31%	13%
Government service organisations (e.g. health or community housing)	19%	51%	23%	8%
Large charities (e.g. Red Cross, Foodbank, The Smith Family)	31%	47%	16%	6%
Local community organisations (e.g. youth centre, sports club, or local church)	23%	54%	18%	5%
Neighbours (e.g. including 'mutual aid' support groups)	21%	53%	20%	6%

APPENDIX – Selected index questions

<p>How would you rate your level of engagement with your local community?</p> <p>Very connected</p> <p>Fairly connected</p> <p>Not that connected</p> <p>Not connected at all</p>	
<p>How would you describe your level of engagement with each of the following types of groups or organisations?</p> <p>I have no involvement with this type of group or organisation</p> <p>I follow what they're doing and engage occasionally</p> <p>I am a member (i.e. have paid membership fees or donate money and/or engage regularly)</p> <p>I volunteer my time to support them</p>	<p>A political party</p> <p>Trade union, industry group or activist organisation</p> <p>A faith-based community or church</p> <p>Sporting clubs or organisations</p> <p>Charitable or not-for-profit organisations</p> <p>Cultural institutions (e.g. libraries, museums or galleries)</p> <p>School parent and citizens or other education support group</p>
<p>During times of difficulty, to what extent would you trust the following people or organisations to provide assistance or support to those in need?</p> <p>Have no trust at all</p> <p>Have little trust</p> <p>Have some trust</p> <p>Have a lot of trust</p>	<p>Your local elected representatives in politics (e.g. local MPs or councillors)</p> <p>Government service organisations (e.g. health or community housing)</p> <p>Large charities (e.g. Red Cross, Foodbank, The Smith Family)</p> <p>Local community organisations (e.g. youth centre, sports club, or local church)</p> <p>Neighbours (e.g. including 'mutual aid' support groups)</p>
<p>To what extent do each of the following statements sound like, or not like you?</p> <p>Not like me at all</p> <p>Not really like me</p> <p>Somewhat like me</p> <p>A lot like me</p>	<p>I actively look to connect with new people outside my immediate family and friendship group</p> <p>I enjoy meeting and talking with new people in online groups and social network platforms</p> <p>The views of people like me are listened to by those making decisions about how the country is governed</p> <p>The issues that I care about are reflected in the media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers)</p>