Democracy 2025

POLITICAL TRUST AND DEMOCRACY IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS:

IS AUSTRALIA STILL THE LUCKY COUNTRY?

A Snapshot of the findings from a national survey

Mark Evans | Viktor Valgarðsson | Will Jennings | Gerry Stoker

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Tables

Findings
SNAPSHOT

PUBLIC TRUST AS A POLITICAL RESOURCE IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS. WITHOUT IT THE CHANGES TO PUBLIC BEHAVIOUR NECESSARY TO CONTAIN AND ULTIMATELY PREVENT THE SPREAD OF INFECTION ARE SLOWER AND MORE RESOURCE INTENSIVE. PEOPLE NEED TO TRUST THE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT MORE GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE. HAS THE AUSTRALIAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE PROVED ROBUST ENOUGH TO WIN THE TRUST OF ITS CITIZENS IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS? THIS REPORT TACKLES THIS QUESTION THROUGH THE PRESENTATION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS FROM A SURVEY OF A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF 1059 AUSTRALIANS AGED BETWEEN 18 AND 75 YEARS. THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED BETWEEN MAY AND JUNE 2020 IN AUSTRALIA, ITALY, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND THE UNITED STATES TO ALLOW FOR COMPARISON.
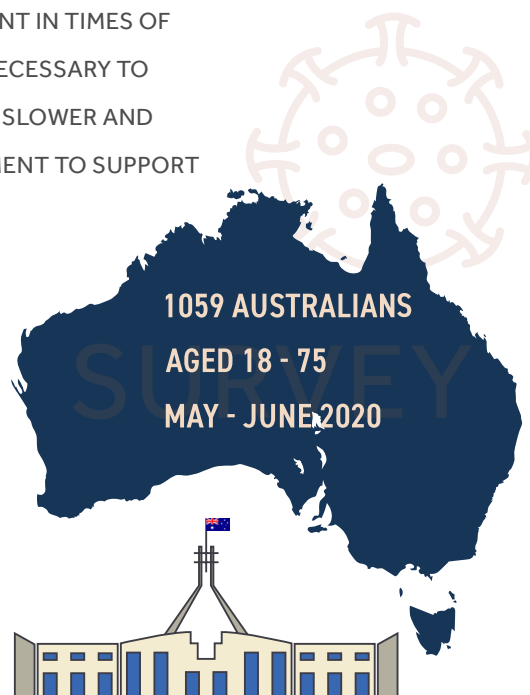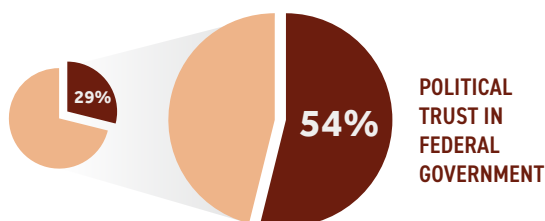
1059 AUSTRALIANS AGED 18 - 75 MAY - JUNE 2020

HAS THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL TRUST CHANGED DURING THE CORONAVIRUS?

29%

54% POLITICAL TRUST IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Political trust has increased significantly in Australia in times of Coronavirus and compares strongly with Italy, the UK and the US. For the first time in over a decade, Australians are exhibiting relatively high levels of political trust in federal government (from 29 to 54%), and the Australian Public Service (from 38 to 54%).

38%

54% POLITICAL TRUST IN AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Australians have the highest level of confidence in defence and law and order organisations such as the army (78%), police (75%) and the courts (55%). Levels of trust are also high in health services (77%), cultural institutions such as museums (70%) and universities (61%).

78% ARMY

77% HEALTH SERVICES

75% POLICE

70% MUSEUMS

55% COURTS

61% UNIVERSITIES

20%

19%

**TRUST IN
SOCIAL MEDIA**

32%

39%

TRUST IN TV

29%

37%

**TRUST IN
NEWSPRINT**

38%

41%

TRUST IN RADIO

77%

**TRUST IN SCIENTISTS
AND EXPERTS**
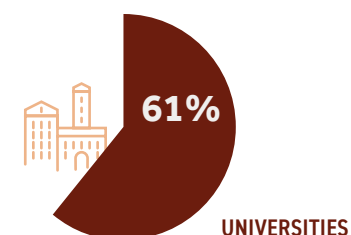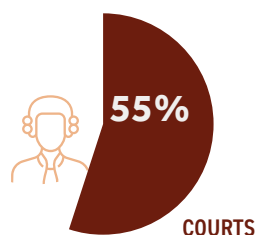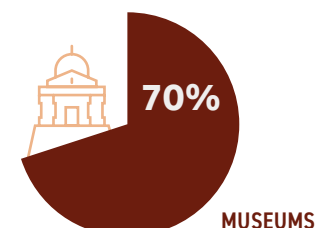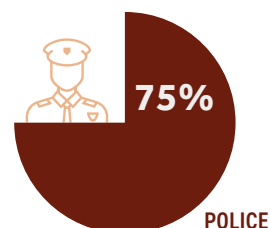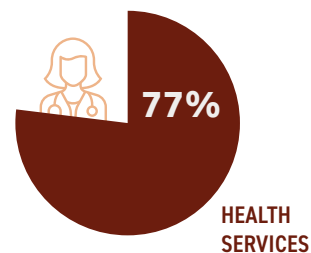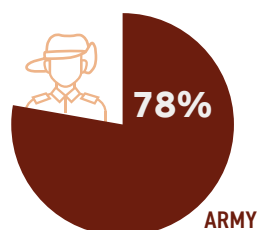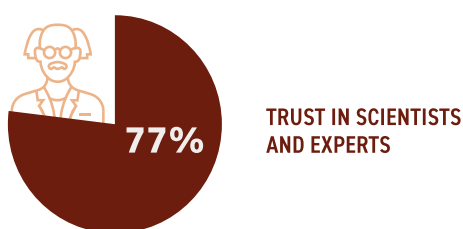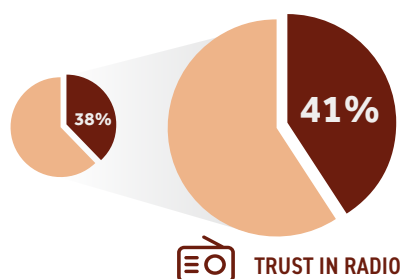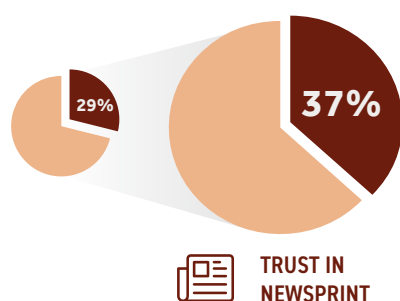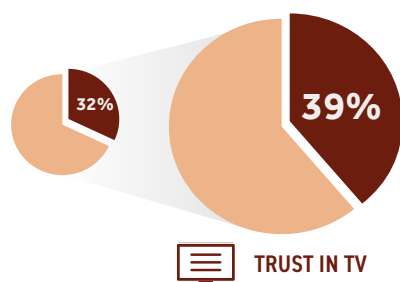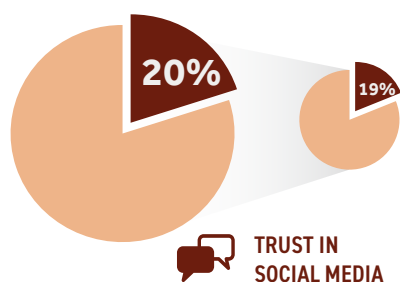
Australians continue to have low levels of trust in social media (from 20 to 19%) but trust in TV (from 32 to 39%), radio (from 38 to 41%) and newsprint (from 29 to 37%) have all marginally increased. Australians continue to exhibit high levels of trust in scientists and experts (77%).

HAVE AUSTRALIANS BEEN COMPLIANT WITH COVID-19 MEASURES?

Most Australians comply with the key measures to combat COVID-19 (e.g. social distancing) but are marginally less compliant across the range of interventions than their counterparts in UK and Italy but equal with the US. This is likely to be due to lower perceptions of the risk of infection given the significant differences in the number of COVID-19 fatalities.

VICTORIA

**VICTORIANS
MOST COMPLIANT WITH ANTI-COVID-19 MEASURES**

NORTHERN TERRITORY

ACT
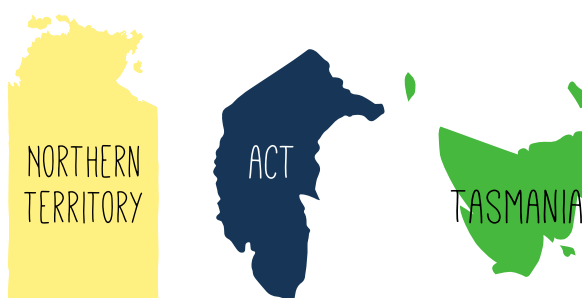
TASMANIA

THE ACT, TASMANIA, AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, LEAST COMPLIANT WITH ANTI-COVID-19 MEASURES

Victorians are the most compliant with anti-COVID-19 measures; a somewhat ironic observation given the recent upsurge in COVID-19 cases in Victoria. The ACT, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory, are the least compliant. Again, this is in line with the low level of reported cases in these states and territories and by implication lower public perception of the risk of infection.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAS COVID-19 MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP BEEN IN AUSTRALIA?

Prime Minister Scott Morrison is perceived to be performing strongly on most measures of COVID-19 management and leadership by a significant majority of Australians. Indeed, he possesses the strongest performance measures in our four-country sample.
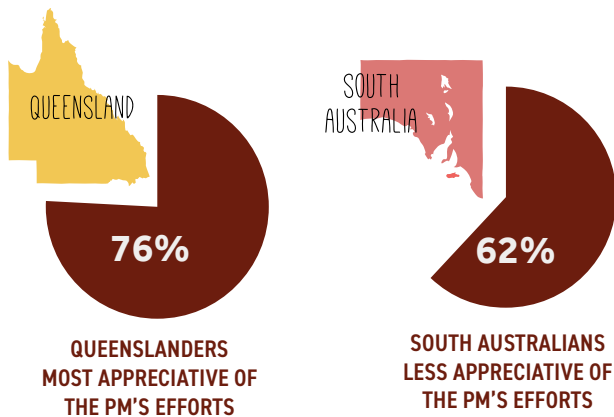
QUEENSLAND

76%

QUEENSLANDERS MOST APPRECIATIVE OF THE PM'S EFFORTS

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

62%

SOUTH AUSTRALIANS LESS APPRECIATIVE OF THE PM'S EFFORTS

There is also strong support for the Prime Minister's handling of COVID-19 across the federation. Queenslanders (76%) are the most appreciative of the Prime Minister's efforts and South Australians the least appreciative (62%).

HANDLING WELL

37%

STATE PREMIER OR CHIEF MINISTER

HANDLING WELL

71%

BRENDAN MURPHY
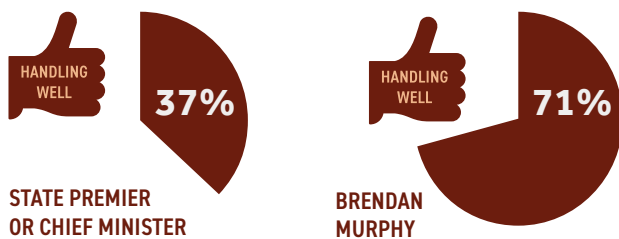
In contrast, the general assessment of the handling of the crisis by state and territory leaders is much lower but they are deemed to perform much better in 'terms of listening to experts' and 'caring about citizens'. On average, only 37 percent of Australians think their state premier or chief minister is 'handling the coronavirus situation well.' In contrast, 71 per cent consider former Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy to be 'handling the coronavirus situation well,' demonstrating the importance that Australians now attach to evidence-based decision-making.

Mark McGowan from Western Australia (49%) is the highest performing state premier, followed by South Australia's Steven Marshall (44%). The poorest rated state premier is Queensland's Annastacia Palaszczuk (28%) followed by New South Wales Premier, Gladys Berejiklian (34%). This suggests that in Australia, the politics of national unity ('rally around the flag') come to the fore in times of crisis and this has penalised states or territories seen to be pursuing self-interest.
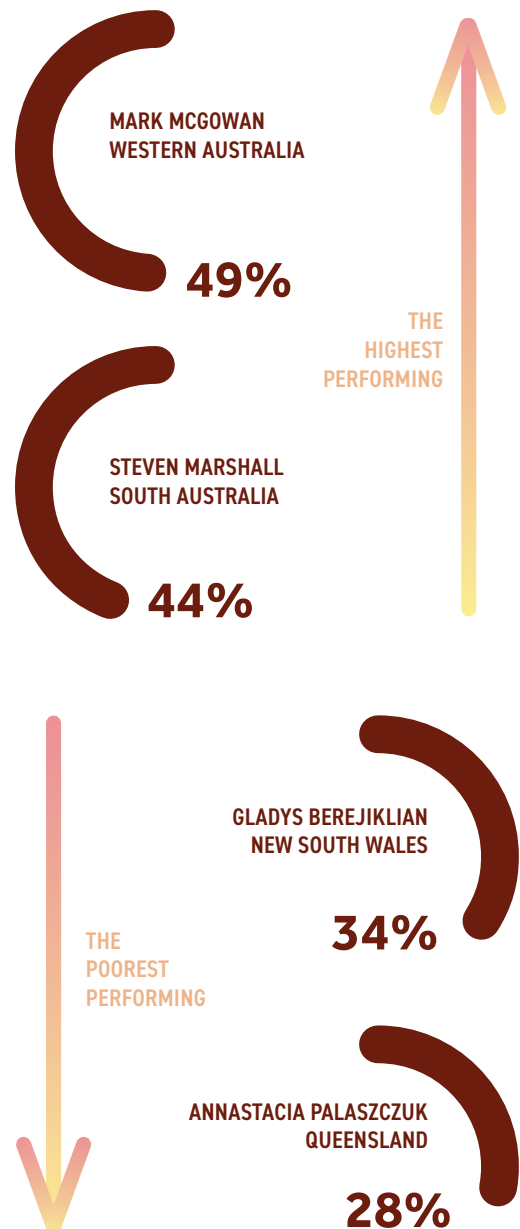
MARK MCGOWAN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

49%

THE HIGHEST PERFORMING

STEVEN MARSHALL SOUTH AUSTRALIA

44%

GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN NEW SOUTH WALES

34%

THE POOREST PERFORMING

ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK QUEENSLAND

28%

DOES AUSTRALIA HAVE THE INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY?

Here we consider issues of SOCIAL, ECONOMIC and POLITICAL CONFIDENCE.
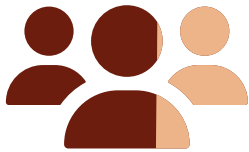
60%
AUSTRALIANS

Although a significant majority of Australians (60%) expect COVID-19 to have a 'high' or 'very high' level of financial threat for them and their families, they are far less worried than their counterparts in Italy, the UK, and the US about the threat COVID-19 poses to the country (33%), to them personally (19%), or to their job or business (29%).

POSES TO THE COUNTRY

33%

POSES PERSONALLY

19%
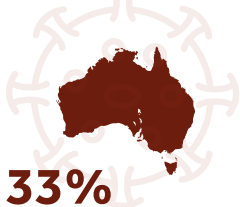
POSES TO JOB OR BUSINESS
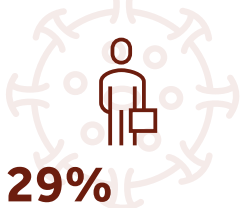
29%

Women, young people, Labor voters, and those on lower incomes with lower levels of qualifications are the most pessimistic on all of these confidence measures.

Nonetheless, Australians remain confident that Australia will bounce back from COVID-19, with most of them believing that Australia is 'more resilient than most other countries' (72%) or even 'best in the world' (8.7%).

MORE RESILIENT THAN MOST OTHER COUNTRIES
72%

BEST IN THE WORLD
8.7%

We also assessed whether views about democracy had changed as a consequence of COVID-19. In general, there is overwhelming support for representative democracy but with a focus on making the representative system of government more representative, accountable and responsive to the citizenry and underpinned by a new politics which is 'cleaner', 'collaborative' and 'evidence-based'.

STAYING LUCKY

Although there is a cautionary tale currently brewing in Victoria with the introduction of a six-week lockdown of metropolitan Melbourne in response to the report of a second wave of 191 cases, the fatality figures in Australia still pale in significance compared with Italy, the UK, and the US. At the time of writing (6 July 2020) Australia has incurred 104 fatalities compared with 129,891 in the US, 44,305 in the UK, and 34,861 in Italy.

104 AUSTRALIA

As of **06.07.2020**

129,891 US

44,305 UK

34,861 ITALY
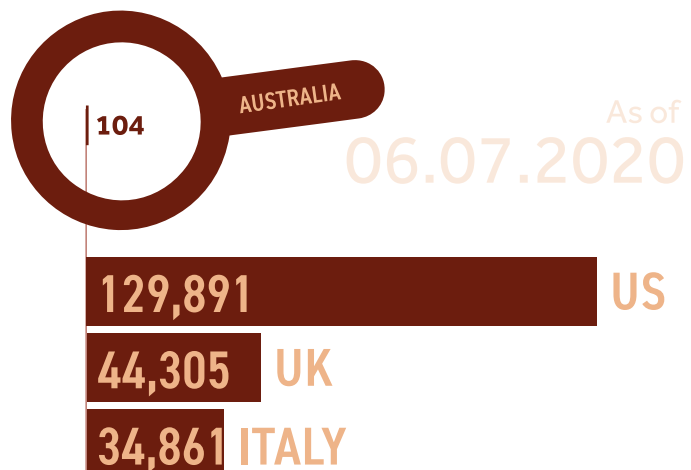
STAYING LUCKY

Context therefore matters. The lived citizen experience of the pandemic has been dramatically different in Australia when compared with the UK, Italy and the US. Australia has been lucky in terms of its relative geographical isolation from international air passenger traffic and its ability to be able to look both East and West for progressive policy ideas to combat the virus. However, Australia has also benefitted from effective governance. Prime Minister Scott Morrison's approval rating has soared on the back of effective handling of the threat, facilitated by strong political bipartisanship from Labor, and by atypical coordination of state and federal governments via the National Cabinet. However, the big question remains as to whether the Prime Minister can sustain strong levels of public trust in the recovery period.

THERE ARE SOME POSITIVE LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 HITHERTO WHICH NEED TO BE ADOPTED IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS.

Lesson 1: the politics of collegiality and collaboration reflected in the creation and then the institutionalisation of the National Cabinet has played well with an Australian public fed-up with conflict-driven adversarial politics. It is noteworthy that the states which have been seen to pursue self-interest rather than the national interest during the pandemic, such as Queensland, have the lowest public approval rates in our survey. This suggests that in Australia, the politics of national unity ('rally around the flag') come to the fore in times of crisis and potentially dissipate in times of recovery and stability when regional self-interest becomes more evident in the contestation for scarce resources.

Lesson 1

Lesson 2: the Australian public expect their governments to continue to listen to the experts, as reflected in the high regard that Australians have for evidence informed decision-making observed in our survey (77%).

Lesson 2

77%
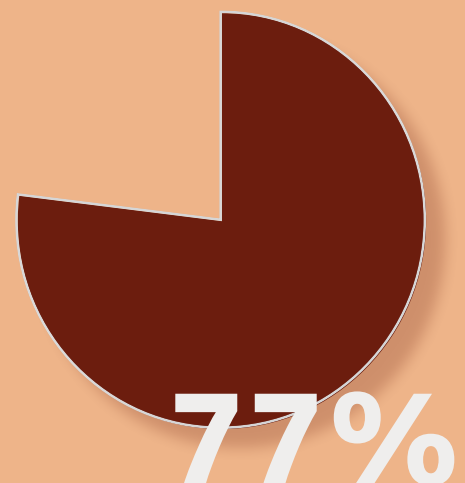
Lesson 3: the significant increase in trust in the Australian Public Service (38 to 54%) bolsters the case for public services becoming a critical space for enhancing the relationship between government and citizen. Public trust aligns strongly with the trustworthiness of government. It is the supply of government – delivering goods and services like economic growth, welfare and security – that matters most in orienting the outlooks of citizens. The quality of public service production is a critical dimension of trust-building with the citizenry.

Our survey data shows that Australians are fearful of negative economic impacts from COVID-19. How the federal government manages public finances in the recovery period is pivotal to maintaining long-term public trust. The crucial lesson from the Global Financial Crisis is that those countries that introduced austerity measures too quickly in the wake of fiscal stimulus – such as Italy, Greece, the UK, Portugal, Spain or the US – paid for it in terms of declining political trust and social cohesion and the rise of populism.

Lesson 3

Lesson 4: to resist introducing austerity measures until you know that the economy has stabilised as it has a lasting negative impact on public attitudes towards the political class.

Although it is heartening to see the Australian public's attachment to the importance of expert advice driving policy responses to the pandemic, it would be wrong to view post-COVID 19 recovery as a simple fix between political and technocratic elites. Building on the burst of covert political trust in the Australian system there is support in our survey for building a national post-COVID-19 consensus featured by more inclusive, clean, collaborative and evidence-based politics.

Lesson 4

THE CRITICAL LESSON IS CLEAR – AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO AVOID REVERTING TO THE OLD CONFLICT-DRIVEN ADVERSARIAL POLITICS AND USE ITS HISTORICAL ADAPTIVE CAPACITY AND GUILE TO REMAIN A LUCKY COUNTRY. ECONOMIC RECOVERY NEEDS TO BE ANCHORED IN A NEW POLITICS TO ENSURE GOOD OUTCOMES FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS. WAITING UNTIL 2022 FOR A FEDERAL ELECTION TO LEGITIMATE A COALITION OR LABOR VISION FOR THE FUTURE COULD WELL BE TOO LATE.

INTRODUCTION

This report forms part of a broader comparative research collaboration between the Democracy 2025[1] initiative in the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House and the Trustgov Project[2] at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom on *Political trust and democracy in times of Coronavirus*.

We seek to investigate whether public attitudes towards issues of political trust, and democratic institutions and practices have changed in consequence of COVID-19 in Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

These countries have been selected as they include two countries (the UK and the US) that are viewed to be poor responders to the pandemic, one country (Italy) that began poorly but has subsequently demonstrated significant adaptive capacity and a further country (Australia) which appears to have managed the pandemic successfully from the outset. This sample of countries will allow us to generate high quality comparative data for measuring the significance of political trust in enabling effective government management and recovery from COVID-19.

We commissioned the Social Research Institute at Ipsos to process a nationally representative on-line national survey in Australia with population quotas aligned with the 2016 census.[3] This comprised a representative sample of 1059 adults aged between 18 and 75 years for the main survey and a booster sample of 50 Adults aged 75 years+.

The four surveys were conducted between May and June 2020 in Australia, Italy, the UK, and the US using the same core questions to allow for comparison.

This report provides a snapshot of the high-level descriptive findings from the Australian survey. It foreshadows two more detailed reports to follow in August and September 2020 – one on the comparative findings and one on the Australian findings.

The report assesses whether the Australian system of governance has proved robust enough to win the trust of its citizens and enable them to follow the measures necessary to contain, eradicate and recover from the virus.

It is organised into three parts. Part one explains how we understand the concept of political trust. In part two we present the survey findings in response to four research questions:

> *Has the level of political trust changed during the pandemic?*
> *How effective has COVID-19 management and leadership been in Australia?*
> *Have Australians been compliant with COVID-19 measures?*
> *Does Australia have the institutional resilience to meet the challenge of post-COVID-19 recovery?*

The report concludes with a reflection on the lessons that can be drawn from Australia's management of COVID-19 and what it needs to do in the recovery period to ensure that it remains a lucky country.

---

1. See: Democracy2025.gov.au. and *About Democracy 2025* for an overview of its mission.
2. The TrustGov Project is funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council and is based at the University of Southampton (see: https://trustgov.net/). The *About the TrustGov Project* for an overview of its mission.
3. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), *3235.0 - Regional Population by Age and Sex*, Canberra, Australia, retrieved 7 July from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3235.0

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY POLITICAL TRUST?

In keeping with our previous report[4], we understand trust in a political sense as a relational concept about "holding a positive perception about the actions of an individual or an organisation" (OECD 2017: 16) that requires "keeping promises and agreements" (Hethrington 2005: 1).

There are three different components of trust that operate in a liberal democracy:

- Trust occurs when A trusts that B will act on their behalf and in their interests to do X in particular and more generally.
- Mistrust occurs when A assumes that B may not act on their behalf and in their interests to do X but will judge B according to information and context. This definition is associated with the notion of a critical citizen and active citizenship and is viewed to strengthen democracy.
- Distrust occurs when A assumes that B is untrustworthy and will cause harm to their interests in respect of X or more generally.

A healthy dose of mistrust is said to be good for a liberal democratic system designed around checks and balances to ensure good governance and democratic practice.

In contrast to mistrust, the evidence suggests that political distrust weakens democracy by: making the business of government more resource intensive (Fukuyama 1995); eroding civic engagement and conventional forms of political participation (Franklin 2004) such as voter registration or turnout; lowering public confidence in government, reducing support for progressive public policies and promoting risk aversion and short-termism in government (Diamond & Plattner, eds. 2015); and, it potentially creates the space for the rise of authoritarian-populist forces at a time when social cohesion is at a premium (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). There may also be implications for long-term democratic stability as liberal democratic regimes are thought most durable when built upon popular legitimacy (Stoker et al., 2018).

Trust in politics matters, it is argued, because governments need the trust of citizens to tackle challenging issues and problems confronting society. Public trust as a political resource is particularly important in times of Coronavirus. Without it the changes to public behaviour necessary to contain and ultimately prevent the spread of infection are slower and more resource intensive. People need to trust the government to support more government intervention that makes a difference in managing the virus.

---

4. See Evans, M., Jennings, W. and Stoker, G. (2020), *How does Australia compare: is it a leading democracy? Two paradoxes for Australian democratic governance*, Democracy 2025, Report No. 6, Canberra: MoAD. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

FINDINGS

Has the level of political trust changed during the Coronavirus?

Just a short time ago, the 2019 Australian Election Study (AES) and the latest wave of the World Values Survey 2017-20 (WVS) recorded the lowest levels of trust in 'people in government' (AES, 2019) and 'trust in federal government' (WVS, 2017-20) on record at 25 per cent and 30 per cent respectively (see Table 1).[5]

Table 1: Trust – Australia compared with other established democracies (%)

Country	Political Trust %	Social Trust %
Spain	22	41
Italy	24	27
AUSTRALIA	**30**	**49**
France	32	27
United States	34	37
Germany	37	47
Austria	39	50
Denmark	40	77
Finland	45	71
Netherlands	46	58
Switzerland	67	59
Sweden	67	64

Source: World Values Survey Wave 7 2017–20

Measures:

POLITICAL TRUST

Could you tell me how much confidence in government you have: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? *Trust responses taken as great/quite lot*

SOCIAL TRUST

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? *Trust responses taken as 'most people can be trusted'*

---

5. The figure for 'trust in people in government' is sourced from Sarah Cameron and Ian McAllister (2019), *Trends in Australian Political Opinion. Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2019*, Canberra, ANU, p. 99. All other data is reported in Stoker, G., Evans, M., and Halupka, M. (2018a). *Democracy 2025 Report No. 1. Trust and Democracy in Australia: democratic decline and renewal* and Evans, M., Jennings, W. and Stoker, G. (2020), *Democracy 2025, Report No. 6. How does Australia compare: is it a leading democracy? Two paradoxes for Australian democratic governance*. Both retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

We can now report that political trust has increased significantly in Australia in times of Coronavirus and compares strongly with Italy, the UK and the US. For the first time in over a decade, Australians are exhibiting high levels of political trust in federal government (from 29 to 54%), and the Australian Public Service (from 38 to 54%).[6]

Australians have the highest level of confidence in defence and law and order organisations such as the army (78%), police (75%) and the courts (55%). Levels of trust are also high in health services (77%), cultural institutions such as museums (70%) and universities (61%).

Table 2: Confidence in key institutions across four countries – percentage who say they have 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence (%)

	Italy	UK	US	Australia	Average
Government	40	41	34	54	42
Parliament	24	39	26	[7]	30
Political Parties	9	18	13	25	16
Health Service	75	85	48	77	71
WHO	59	67	59	54	60
EU	38	41	46	n/a	41
Army	74	82	84	78	80
Press	33	18	36	32	30
TV	28	47	35	36	37
Courts	45	61	53	55	53
Police	77	70	71	75	73
Civil Service	32	57	64	54	51
Universities	76	73	64	61	69
Cultural institutions	n/a	n/a	n/a	70	70

Australians continue to have low levels of trust in social media (from 20 to 19%) but trust in TV (from 32 to 39%), radio (from 38 to 41%) and newsprint (from 29 to 37%) have all marginally increased (see Figure 1). Australians continue to exhibit high levels of trust in scientists and experts (77%).

6. Australian data reported in Stoker, G., Evans, M. & Halupka, M. (2018a), *Democracy 2025 Report No. 1: Trust and Democracy in Australia—Democratic Decline and Renewal*, MoAD, Canberra. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

7. We decided not to collect data on the Federal Parliament as it didn't convene during the period of data collection.

Figure 1: Public trust in various media, scientists and experts (%)
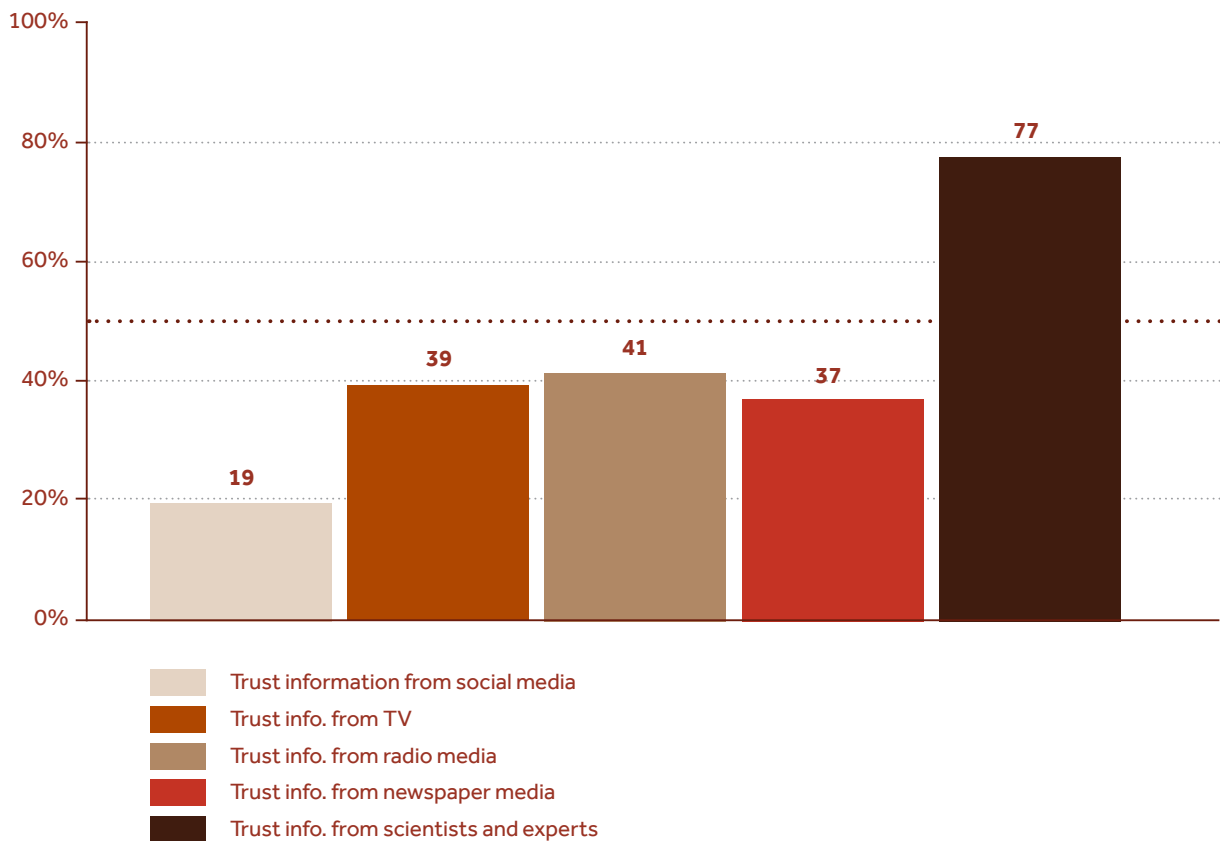
Legend:
- Trust information from social media
- Trust info. from TV
- Trust info. from radio media
- Trust info. from newspaper media
- Trust info. from scientists and experts

Values: 19, 39, 41, 37, 77

How effective has COVID-19 management and leadership been in Australia?

Prime Minister Scott Morrison is perceived to be performing strongly on most measures of COVID-19 management and leadership by a significant majority of Australians (see Table 3). Indeed, he possesses the strongest performance measures in our four-country sample.

He is deemed to listen to the advice of experts and other political views. He also performs well in comparison with his counterparts on empathy measures ('[he] cares about people like me'), serving the national interest ('[he] wants to do his best to serve the country in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak') and public communication ('[he] is open and transparent in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak').

Table 3: Public perceptions of the quality of prime ministerial/presidential leadership during COVID-19 (%)

	UK (Johnson)	US (Trump)	Italy (Conte)	Australia (Morrison)	Average
Listens to experts in how to handle the coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak	56	33	67	73	57
Listens to other politicians from government party/parties	51	41	49	57	49
Listens to politicians from opposition parties	23	16	26	36	25
Cares about people like me	33	34	37	46	37
Is handling the coronavirus situation well	37	35	52	69	48
Is handling the coronavirus outbreak competently and efficiently	37	36	51	67	48
Is handling the coronavirus outbreak poorly	47	55	29	20	38
Usually acts in his own interests in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak	40	59	21	32	38
Wants to do his best to serve the country in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak	58	44	62	70	58
Is generally free of corruption in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak	46	33	49	57	46
Is open and transparent in his handling of the coronavirus outbreak	36	36	50	57	45

Percentage of respondents in four countries who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with statements about how the leader of their country is handling COVID-19.

There is also strong support for the Prime Minister's handling of COVID-19 across the federation (see Figure 2). Queenslanders (76%) are the most appreciative of the Prime Minister's efforts and South Australians the least appreciative (62%). There were only 25 respondents in Tasmania, 22 in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and 10 in Northern Territory (NT) so we should not draw inferences from those responses to the general population in these states and territories, but it is interesting to note that all 10 respondents in NT agreed that the Prime Minister had been handling the crisis well.

Figure 2: Perceptions of the quality of prime ministerial leadership during COVID-19 by state and territory (%)
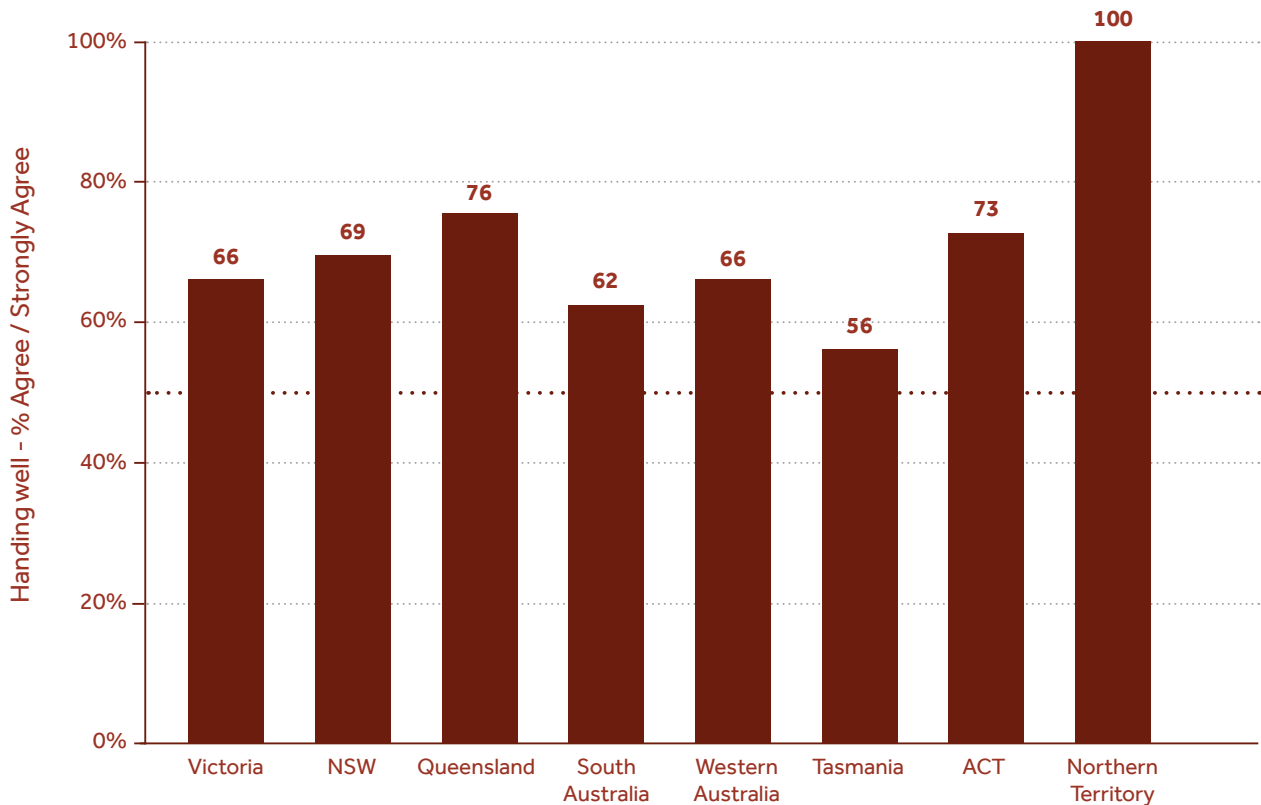
The findings look very different when we look at perceptions of the quality of COVID-19 management by state and territory political leaders (see Figure 3). On average, only 37 per cent of Australians think their state premier or chief minister is 'handling the coronavirus situation well.' In contrast, 71 per cent consider former Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy to be 'handling the coronavirus situation well,' demonstrating the importance that Australians attach to evidence-based decision-making.

Legend:
- State prem. handling coronavirus well
- State prem. cares about people like me
- State prem. listens to experts
- State prem. listens to opposition
- Brendan Murphy handling coronavirus well

In Figures 4 and 5, we present these measures by state and territory separately for those with and without sufficient number of respondents to make inferences to their populations. Mark McGowan from Western Australia (49%) is the highest performing state premier, followed by South Australia's Steven Marshall (44%). Figure 4 shows that the poorest rated state premier is Queensland's Annastacia Palaszczuk (28%) followed by New South Wales Premier, Gladys Berejiklian (34%), but Figure 5 shows that the few respondents in ACT (24%) and NT (33%) also rate their leaders poorly. The general assessment of the handling of the crisis by state and territory leaders is relatively low but they are deemed to perform much better in terms of 'listening to experts' and 'caring about citizens'.

Figure 4: Perceptions of the quality of leadership during COVID-19 by state (%)

Legend:
- State prem. handling coronavirus well
- State prem. listens to experts
- Brendan Murphy handling coronavirus well
- State prem. cares ab. people like me
- State prem. listens to opposition

Victoria: 42, 72, 74, 64, 71
New South Wales: 34, 57, 70, 44, 72
Queensland: 28, 65, 73, 52, 71
South Australia: 44, 79, 78, 48, 68
Western Australia: 49, 88, 88, 78, 66
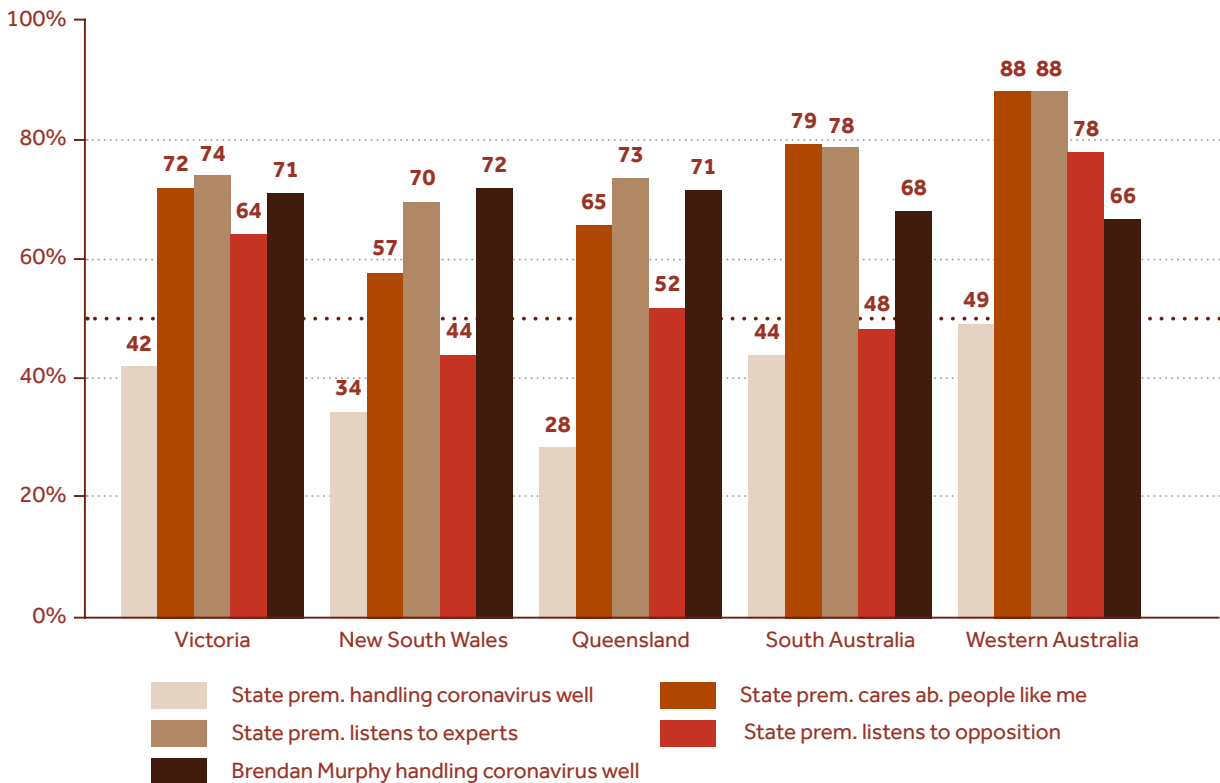
Figure 5: Perceptions of the quality of state and territory leadership during COVID-19 by state and territory noting small numbers of respondents (%)

Legend:
- State prem. handling coronavirus well
- State prem. listens to experts
- Brendan Murphy handling coronavirus well
- State prem. cares ab. people like me
- State prem. listens to opposition

Tasmania: 52, 92, 92, 68, 71
ACT: 24, 68, 73, 45, 77
Northern Territory: 33, 60, 70, 40, 78
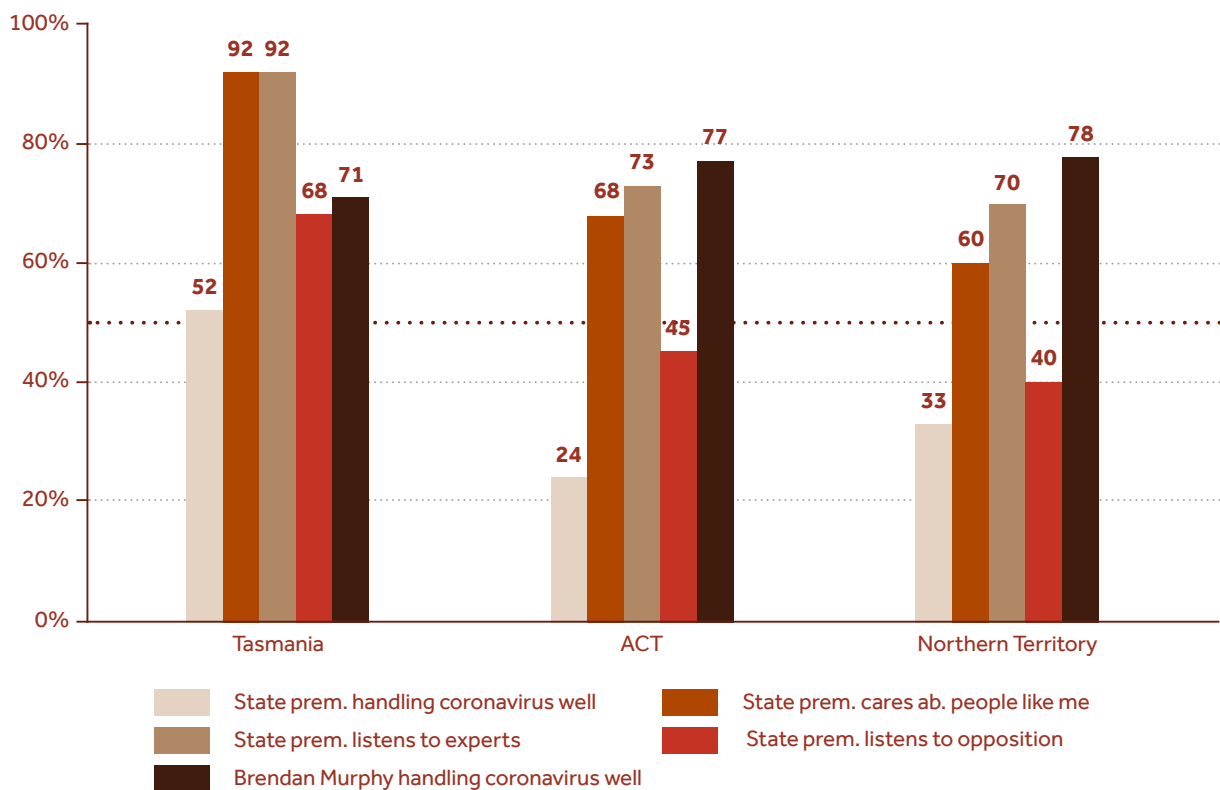
Have Australians been compliant with COVID-19 measures?

In terms of compliance with COVID-19 measures, most Australians comply with the key interventions (see Figure 6). Australians are marginally less compliant across the range of interventions (i.e. taking the average of the seven questions, measured on a scale where 10 stood for having change their behaviour 'very much' and 0 'not at all') than their counterparts in UK and Italy but equal with the US (see Figure 7). This is likely to be due to lower perceptions of the risk of infection given the significant differences in the number of COVID-19 fatalities. At the time of writing (6 July 2020) Australia has incurred 104 fatalities compared with 129,891 in the US, 44,305 in the UK, and 34,861 in Italy.[8]

Figure 6: Compliance with key anti-COVID-19 measures in Australia (%)
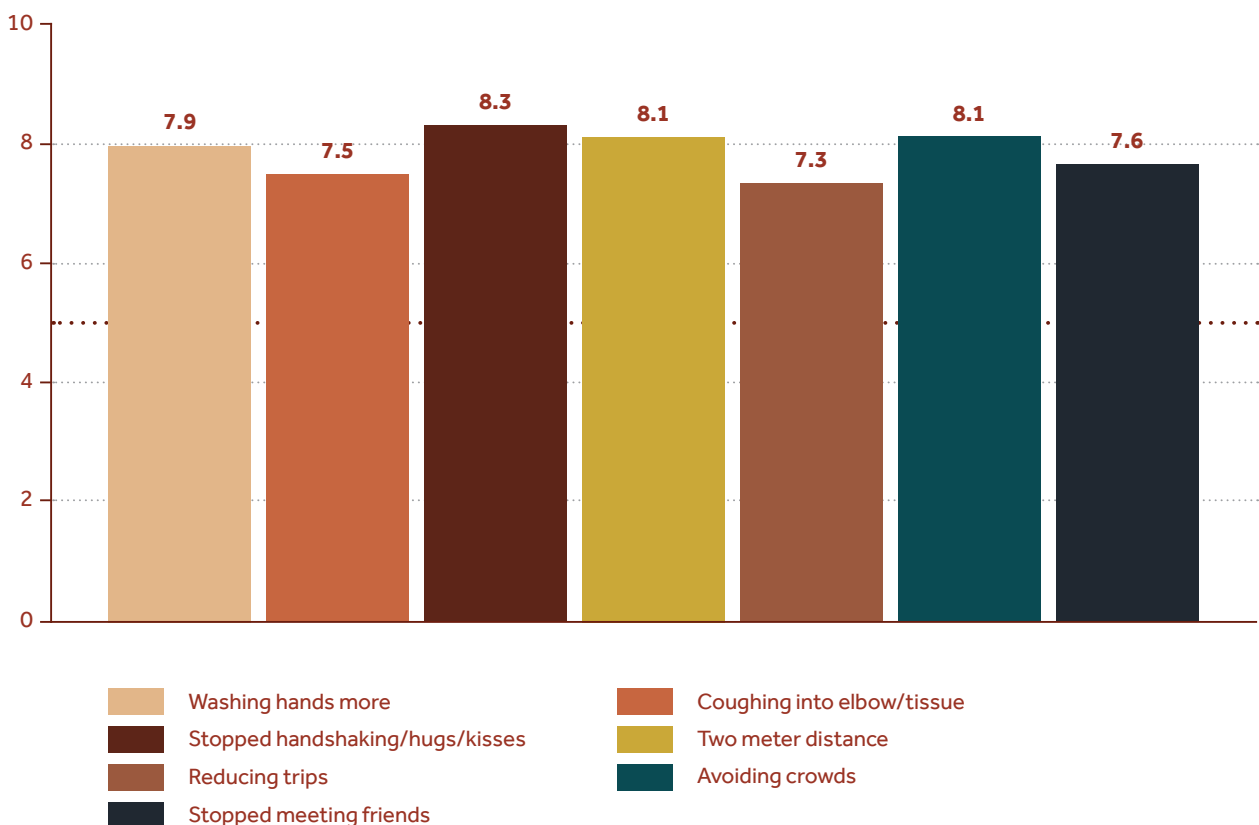
Legend:
- Washing hands more
- Stopped handshaking/hugs/kisses
- Reducing trips
- Stopped meeting friends
- Coughing into elbow/tissue
- Two meter distance
- Avoiding crowds

---

8. John Hopkins University Coronavirus Research Center (2020), *'COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering'*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html.

Figure 7: Compliance with key anti-COVID-19 measures in Australia, the UK, the US and Italy (%)
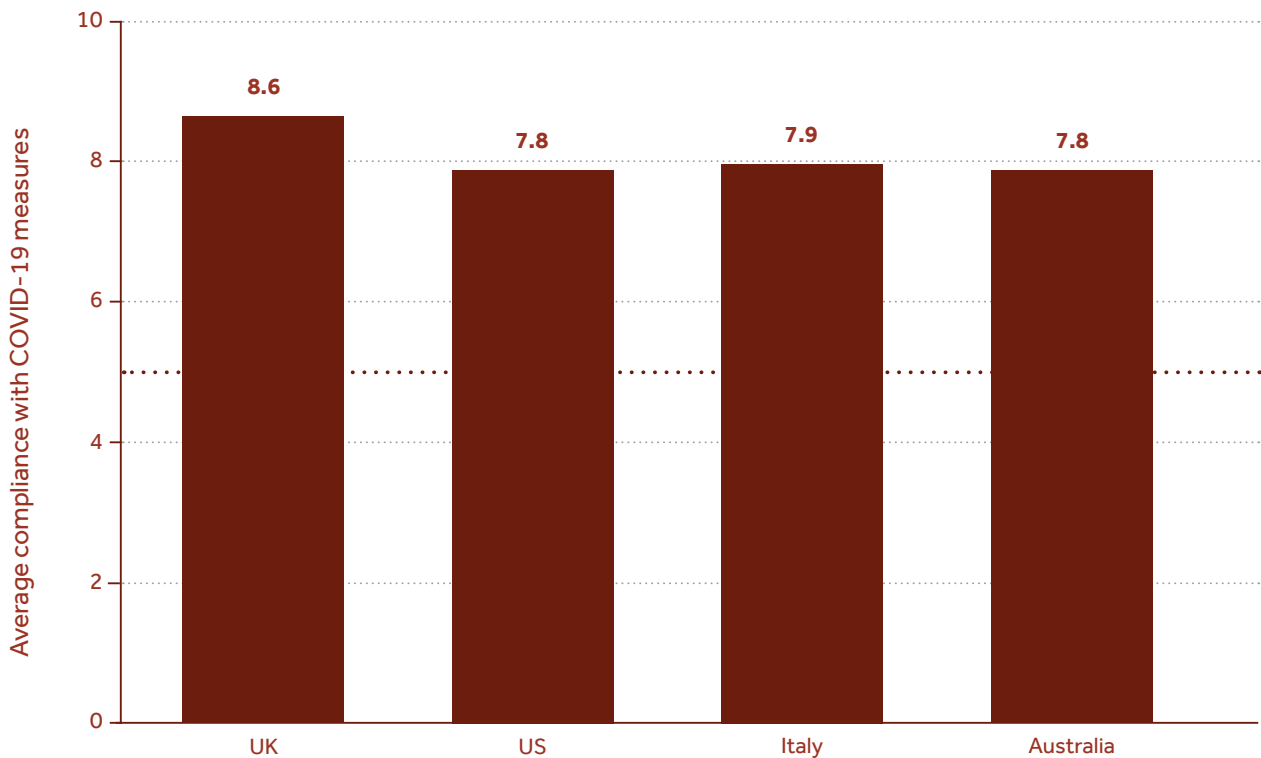
Victorians are the most compliant with anti-COVID-19 measures; a somewhat ironic observation given the recent upsurge in COVID-19 cases in Victoria (see Figure 8).[9] The ACT, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory, are the least compliant. Again, this is in line with the low level of reported cases in these states and territories and by implication lower public perception of the risk of infection (ACT: 0; Tasmania: 0, and the Northern Territory: 1).[10]

9. Australian Government Department of Health (2020), Coronavirus (COVID-19) current situation and case numbers. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers
10. Ibid.

Figure 8: Compliance with key anti-COVID-19 measures by state and territory in Australia (%)
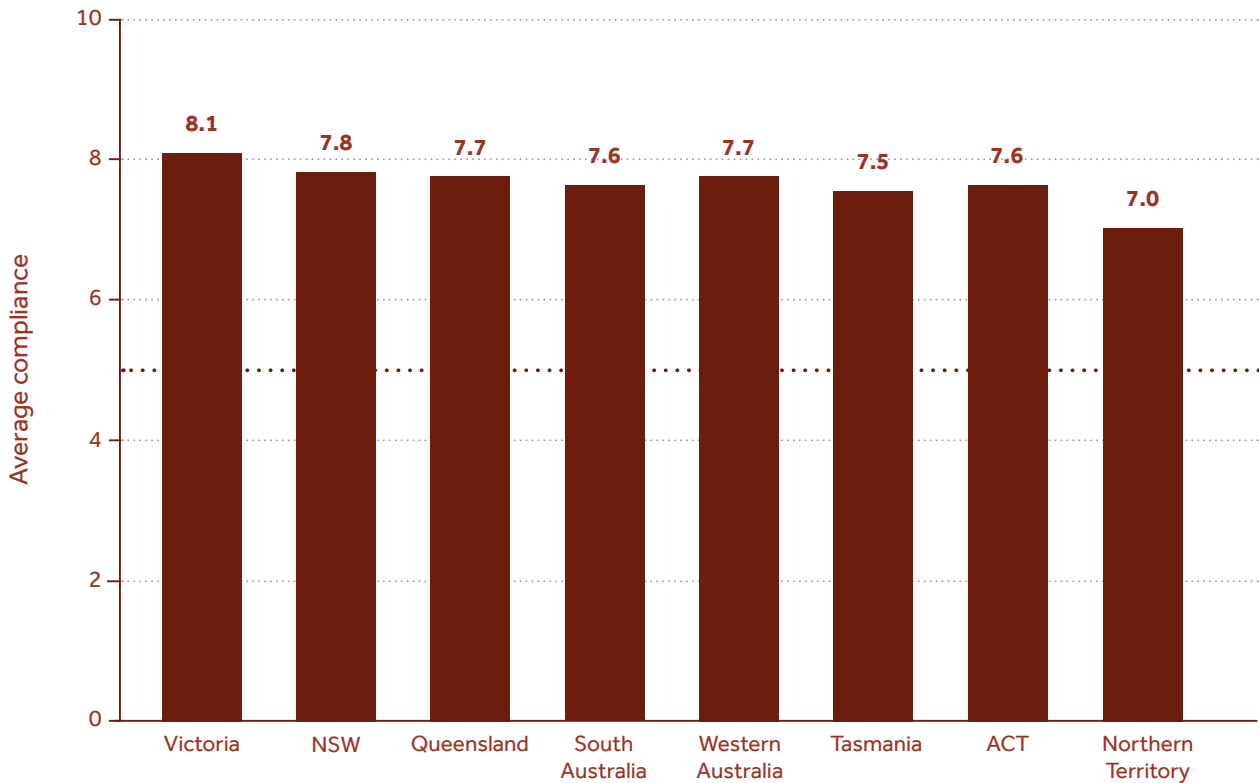
Does Australia have the institutional resilience to meet the challenge of post-COVID-19 recovery?

This section evaluates public perceptions of COVID-19 recovery, focusing on social, economic and political confidence issues.

THE ECONOMY

Although a significant majority of Australians (60%) expect COVID-19 to have a 'high' or 'very high' level of financial threat for them and their families, they are far less worried than their counterparts in Italy, the UK, and the US about the threat COVID-19 poses to the country (33%), to them personally (19%), or to their job or business (28%) (See Table 4). The majority of Australians are pessimistic about Australia's short-term economic prospects with close to a majority expecting the economy to get worse over the next 12 months; this percentage is slightly lower in the US but much higher in the UK and Italy.

Table 4: Perceptions of the level of threat posed by COVID-19 (%)

	Italy	UK	US	Australia	Total
The coronavirus will have a financial impact on you and your family	63	61	63	60	62
COVID-19 poses a threat to your country	64	68	61	33	57
COVID-19 poses a threat to you personally	28	33	28	19	27
COVID-19 poses a threat to your job or business	41	40	33	28	36

% of respondents in four countries who agree or strongly agree that "The coronavirus will have a financial impact on you and your family" and who say that COVID-19 poses a 'high' or 'very high' level of threat to their country, to the respondent personally and to the respondent's job or business.

Figure 9: Perceptions of the short-term economic outlook (%)
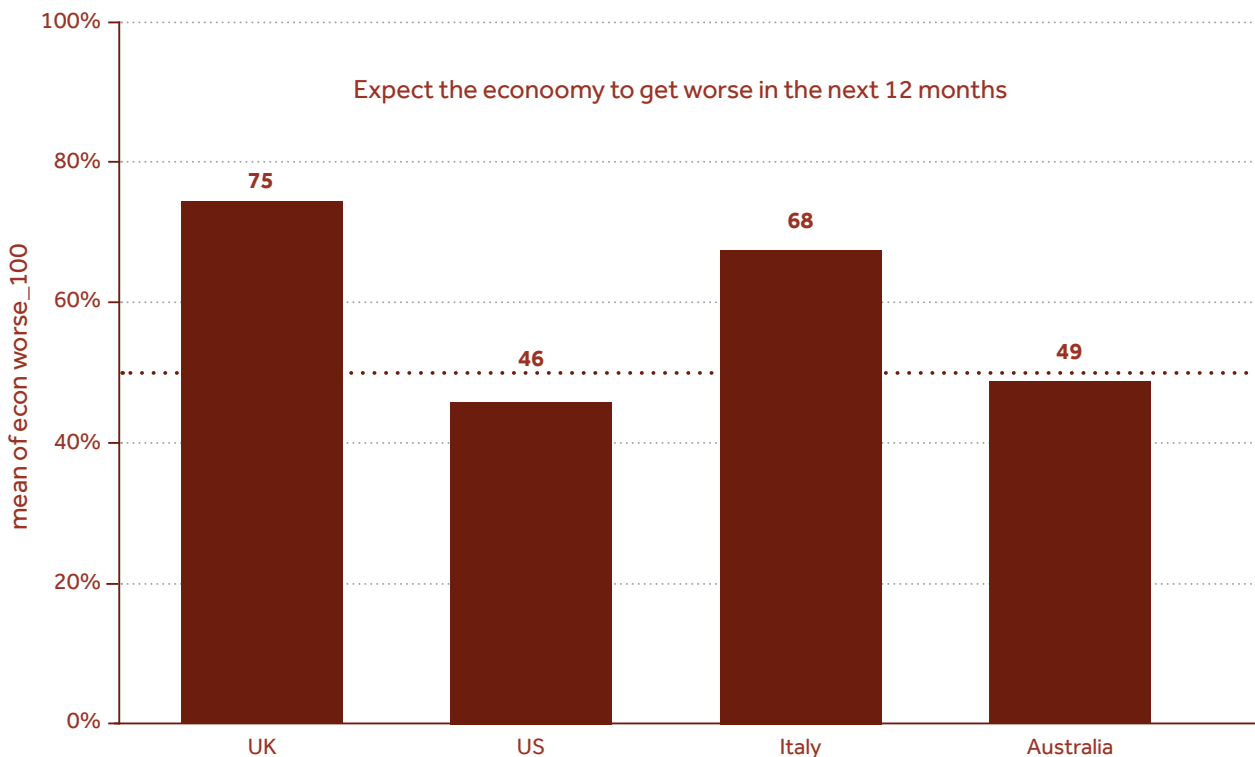
Nonetheless, Australians remain confident that Australia will bounce back from COVID-19 (see Figure 10), with most of them believing that Australia is more resilient than most other countries (72%) or even best in the world (8.7%). Women, young people, Labor voters, and those on lower incomes with lower levels of qualifications are the most pessimistic on all these confidence measures.

How resilient compared to other countries?

	Least in the world	Worse than most	No better or worse	Better than most	Most in the world
Value	.48	1.8	17	72	8.7
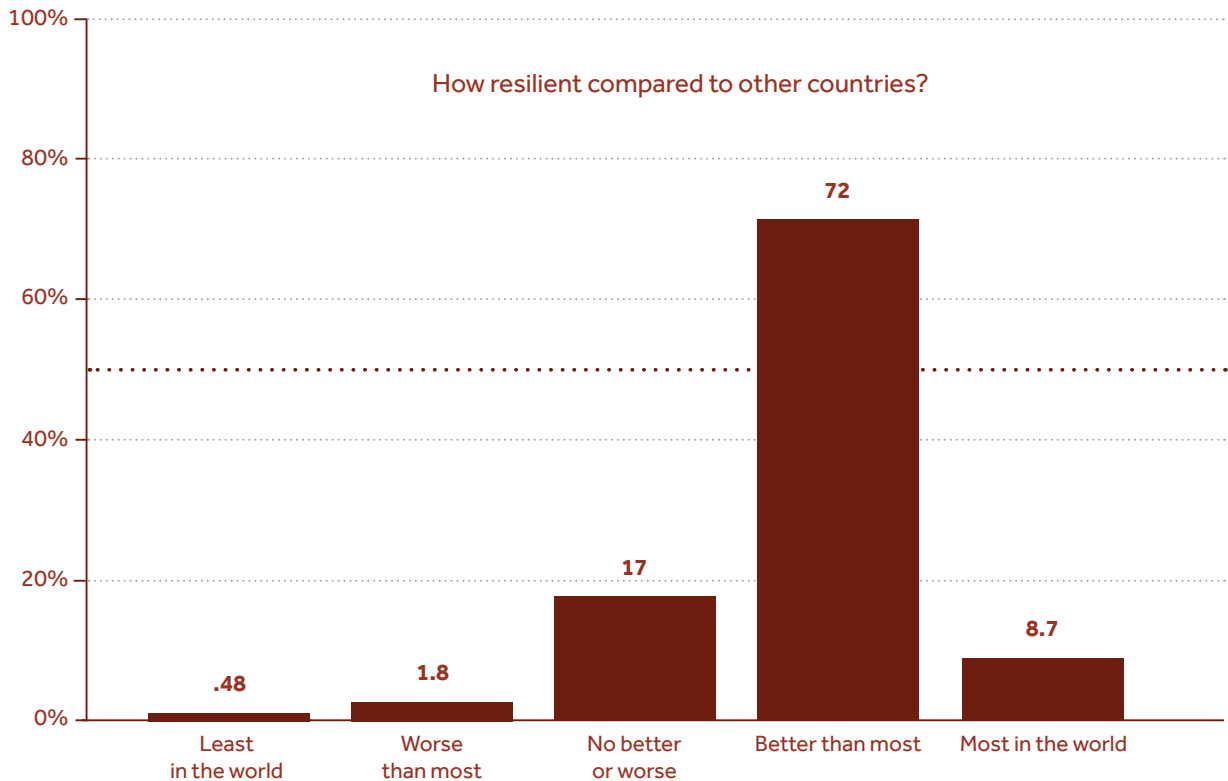
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DEMOCRACY

We also assessed whether views about democracy had changed in consequence of COVID-19 (see Figure 10). Although 55 per cent of Australians think that 'we need Australian democracy to be business as usual', 'in a post-Coronavirus world' there is emphatic support for making politicians 'behave with more honesty and empathy and discharge their responsibilities fairly' (87%), be more 'decisive but accountable to the citizenry for their actions' (82%) and 'collaborative and less adversarial' (82%).

There is also strong support for 'experts to have a greater say in decision-making' (70%), for politicians to 'be freer from political party machines and more responsive to their constituents' (76%) and for 'more participatory democracy where citizens have a greater say in decision-making' (67%).

There was less support for decentralising power within the federal system (47%) or getting 'rid of democracy and replac[ing] it with a strong leader' (17%) but strong support for continuing with the National Cabinet (66%).

In general, there is overwhelming support for representative democracy but with a focus on making the representative system of government more representative, accountable and responsive to the citizenry and underpinned by a new politics which is more inclusive, cleaner, collaborative and evidence-based.

Figure 11: Perceptions of how Australian democracy should change post-COVID-19 (%)

Legend:
- As usual
- More representative
- More participatory
- More decisive but accountable
- More collaborative
- Experts have more say
- Politicians more honest and fair
- More responsive to constituents
- Less centralised
- Get rid of democracy
- Continue with national cabinet

Values: 55, 78, 67, 82, 82, 70, 87, 76, 47, 17, 66
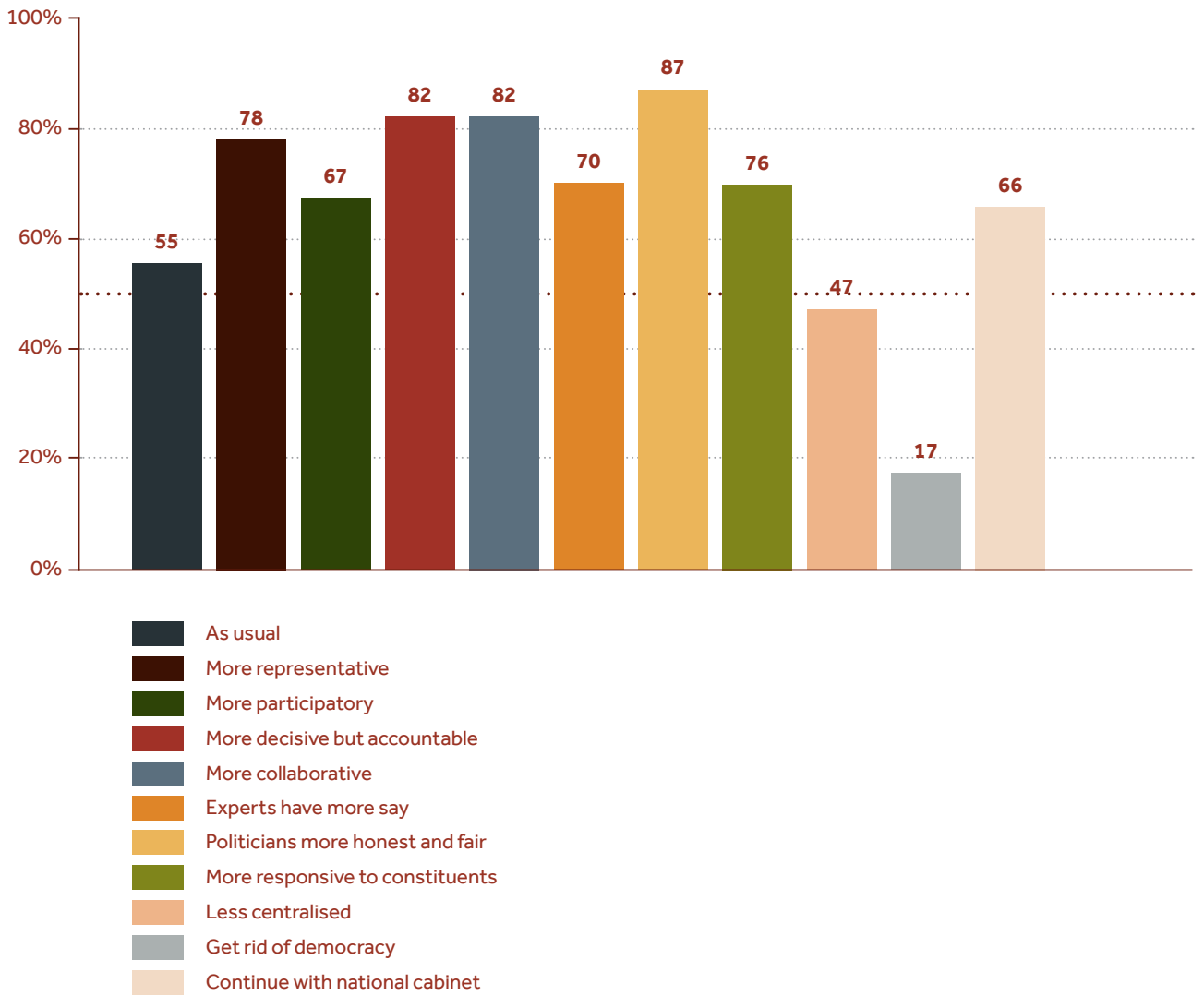
IN CONCLUSION: STAYING LUCKY

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people's ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise (Horne 1964).

Context matters. On 5 May 2020, the British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced that the number of people killed by the coronavirus in the UK stood at 32,313, the second highest death toll in the world.[11] By the time of writing (6 July 2020) the number of fatalities had reached 44,305 in the UK[12] and the number of deaths from COVID-19 in Australia stood at 104. Critics have accused a "complacent" British government of "massively underestimating" the gravity of the coronavirus crisis.[13] The prominent Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* reported that the situation in the UK was "like a nightmare from which you cannot awake, but in which you landed because of your own fault or stupidity". London correspondent Christoph Meyer writes that Britain has emerged as Europe's "problem child" of the COVID-19 crisis.

Although international comparison of COVID-19 death tolls are problematic there can be no doubt that the lived citizen experience of the pandemic has been dramatically different in the UK, Italy and the US when compared with Australia. Every citizen in those countries hit hard by COVID-19 has a heart-breaking personal story to tell about a friend, colleague or family member who has perished or suffered in the pandemic. In Australia, such stories are a rarity and most of us have been fortunate onlookers on the pandemic further perpetuating its image as the Lucky Country.[14] Competent management of COVID-19 in Australia appears to have impacted positively on levels of trust and confidence in the future and negatively on compliance rates with containment measures.

There is of course a cautionary tale currently brewing in Victoria with the introduction of a six-week lockdown of metropolitan Melbourne in response to the report of a second wave of 191 cases but, as noted above, the figures still pale into insignificance compared with Italy, the UK, and the US.[15]

11. Campbell, D., Perraudin, F., Davis, N. & Weaver, M. (2020), 'Calls for inquiry as UK reports highest Covid-19 death toll in Europe', *The Guardian*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/uk-coronavirus-death-toll-rises-above-32000-to-highest-in-europe.

12. John Hopkins University Coronavirus Research Center (2020), *'COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering'*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html.

13. Ippolito, L. (2020), 'Coronavirus, la Gran Bretagna non avvierà la fase 2 per altre tre settimane. I morti sono 32 mila: il bilancio peggiore l'Europa', *Corriere della Sera*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://www.corriere.it/esteri/20_maggio_05/coronavirus-gran-bretagna-l-incubo-britannico-fase-2-che-non-parte-3305b82e-8eac-11ea-8162-438cc7478e3a.shtml.

14. See Donald Horne's ironic discussion in *The Lucky Country* (1964), evaluated by Ian Lowe (2016) and others in *The Lucky Country? Reinventing Australia*.

15. Grattan, M. (2020), 'Six-week lockdown for Melbourne as record 191 new cases in latest tally', *The Conversation*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://theconversation.com/six-week-lockdown-for-melbourne-as-record-191-new-cases-in-latest-tally-142171

So how far can we put Australia's strong performance down to luck rather than design?

Australia has been lucky in so far that it benefits from its relative geographical isolation which has tempered the spread of the virus. Eight out of the 10 busiest international airports in the world are based in countries with the highest levels of fatalities from the pandemic.[16] It is also lucky to be able to look both East and West for progressive policy ideas to combat the virus. But unlike the Global Financial Crisis where Australia's interdependent economic relationship with China buffered the worst impacts of the recession, during COVID-19 the Australian system of governance has proved robust enough to win the trust of its citizens and enable them to negotiate the measures necessary to contain and manage the virus.

Where national leaders have not completely bungled their pandemic response (exceptions include the UK, the US and Brazil) the popularity of elected leaders has risen due to a 'rally around the flag' phenomenon originally proposed by American political scientist John Mueller (1970).[17] The characteristics that Mueller linked with the surges of popular support for incumbents were inspired by Cold War events but have substantial resonance with the COVID-19 outbreak. As Will Jennings notes:

> For a rally-round-the-flag to occur, the event had to be international, involve the country and its leader directly, and be 'specific, dramatic, and sharply focused'. The global significance of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the fact that the fight against it can (and has been) likened to a war – fits perfectly with this definition.

As to what drives this rally-round-the-flag at times of national crisis, patriotic feelings led the public to view the incumbent as the focus of national unity, leading to greater support as citizens set aside their partisan biases. This has been markedly so in Australia, where Prime Minister Scott Morrison's approval rating has soared on the back of effective handling of the threat, facilitated by strong political bipartisanship from Labor, and by atypical coordination of state and federal governments via the National Cabinet.

However, the big question remains as to whether the Prime Minister can sustain strong levels of public trust in the recovery period.

There are some positive lessons to be drawn from the government's management of COVID-19 hitherto which need to be adopted in the recovery process.

Lesson 1: the politics of collegiality and collaboration reflected in the creation and then the institutionalisation of the National Cabinet has played well with an Australian public fed-up with conflict-driven adversarial politics. It is noteworthy that the states which have been seen to pursue self-interest rather than the national interest during the pandemic, such as Queensland, have the lowest

---

16. US Global Investors (2020), 'Explore the World's Busiest Airports', Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: http://www.usfunds.com/investor-library/frank-talk/explore-the-worlds-10-busiest-airports/#.XwVK4CgzaUk.

17. See Will Jennings (2020), *COVID 19 and the Rally Around the Flag Effect*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://ukandeu.ac.uk/covid-19-and-the-rally-round-the-flag-effect/

18. Ibid.

public approval rates in our survey. This suggests that in Australia, the politics of national unity ('rally around the flag') come to the fore in times of crisis and potentially dissipate in times of recovery and stability when regional self-interest becomes more evident in the contestation for scarce resources.

Lesson 2: the Australian public expect their governments to continue to listen to the experts, as reflected in the high regard that Australians have for evidence informed decision-making observed in our survey (77%).

Lesson 3: the significant increase in trust in the Australian Public Service (54 from 38%) bolsters the case for public services becoming a critical space for enhancing the relationship between government and citizen. Public trust aligns strongly with the trustworthiness of government. It is the supply of government – delivering goods and services like economic growth, welfare and security – that matters most in orienting the outlooks of citizens. The quality of public service production is a critical dimension of trust-building with the citizenry.[19]

Our survey data shows that Australians are fearful of negative economic impacts from COVID-19 (see Table 4 and Figure 9) which is likely to constrain consumer spending and private investment and (in line with Krugman's New Keynesianism) to keep the economy afloat public investment and spending will need to bridge the gap.

There are also some sobering lessons to be drawn from the GFC in this regard. Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman argued in *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008* that those

countries that introduced austerity measures too quickly in the wake of fiscal stimulus – such as Italy, Greece, the UK, Portugal, Spain or the US – paid for it in terms of declining political trust and social cohesion and the rise of populism.

The fourth lesson then is to resist introducing austerity measures until you know that the economy has stabilised as it has a lasting negative impact on public attitudes towards the political class. 'Austerity mania' as Krugman calls it, fatally damaged elite credibility because ordinary working families no longer believed that they cared about people like them. In Eastern Europe, white nationalist parties came to power after centre-left governments alienated the working class by letting themselves be bullied into austerity policies. In Britain, support for right-wing extremists is strongest in shrinking communities hit hardest by fiscal austerity. And would we now have Trump if years of austerity hadn't delayed economic recovery under Barack Obama?

There are also some more speculative insights about COVID-19 interventions that are worth making here that are not aligned with our survey findings. The Australian government's smart decision to close the international borders quickly demonstrates that the case for re-opening international borders and ceasing quarantine measures needs to be based on 'overwhelming' evidence. Striking the right balance between the possibility of perpetual quarantine and opening-up for international trade and tourism will be a significant governance challenge in the recovery period.

---

19. See Stoker et al., 2018b.

It is also evident from the recent upsurge of cases in Victoria that social distancing measures are likely to become a new fact of life beyond the pandemic. And given that our survey data suggests that Australians are pragmatic compliers there is strong evidence that Australians will make the necessary behavioural changes.

After a decade of disappointment with digital democratic governance, governments and citizens around the world are embracing opportunities for digital participation. More and more citizens appear to be up for digital citizenship and engagement than ever before. The outstanding success of Australian telehealth services during the pandemic in easing the burden on health providers and the relative success of the COVID-SAFE application for contact tracing, provides strong evidence for extending and mainstreaming digital services nationwide.

Although it is heartening to see the Australian public's attachment to the importance of expert advice driving policy responses to the pandemic (see Table 3 and Figures 4 and 5); it would be wrong, as Krugman suggests, to view post-COVID 19 recovery as a simple fix between political and technocratic elites. Our survey findings suggest that the Australian citizenry expect a new style of politics post-COVID-19 (see Table 4). In focus group research that we conducted during the Eden Monaro by-election campaign at the end of June 2020, the vast majority of participants (17

out of 19) did not believe that any political party was offering a clear COVID-19 recovery plan and were surprised that there hadn't been a national conversation on the issue.[20]

We have made the case elsewhere for convening a citizen's assembly on the subject,[21] but building on the burst of covert political trust in the Australian system there is support in our survey for a post-COVID-19 consensus featured by more inclusive, clean, collaborative and evidence-based politics.

The critical lesson is clear – Australia needs to avoid reverting to the old conflict-driven adversarial politics and use its historical adaptive capacity and guile to remain a lucky country. Economic recovery needs to be anchored in a new politics to ensure good outcomes for all Australians. Waiting until 2022 for a federal election to legitimate a Coalition or Labor vision for the future could well be too late.

20. Grattan, M. (2020), 'Eden-Monaro focus groups: Voters want government to cushion pandemic recovery path'. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://theconversation.com/eden-monaro-focus-groups-voters-want-government-to-cushion-pandemic-recovery-path-141826.
21. Kenny, M. and Evans, M. (2020), 'Is our democracy due for an upgrade', *Canberra Times*, 2 May 2020. Retrieved 10 July 2020 from: https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6742271/is-our-democracy-due-for-an-upgrade/#gsc.tab=0

REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018), *3235.0 - Regional Population by Age and Sex*, Canberra, Australia. Retrieved 7 July 2020 from: https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3235.0

Cameron, S. and McAllister, I. (2019), *Trends in Australian Political Opinion. Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2019*, Canberra, ANU.

Campbell, D., Perraudin, F. , Davis, N. & Weaver, M. (2020), 'Calls for inquiry as UK reports highest COVID-19 death toll in Europe', *The Guardian*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/uk-coronavirus-death-toll-rises-above-32000-to-highest-in-europe

Diamond, L. & Plattner, M. F. eds. (2015), *Democracy in Decline?* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Duckett, S. and Stobart, A. (2020), '4 ways Australia's coronavirus response was a triumph, and 4 ways it fell short'. *The Conversation*. Retrieved 9 July 2020 from: https://theconversation.com/4-ways-australias-coronavirus-response-was-a-triumph-and-4-ways-it-fell-short-139845

Edelman (2019), *2019 Edelman Trust Barometer*. Retrieved 9 July 2020 from: https://www.afr.com/leadership/australians-show-surprise-leap-of-faith-in-edelman-trust-survey-20190122-h1abwv.

Evans, M., Jennings, W. and Stoker, G. (2020), *How does Australia compare: is it a leading democracy? Two paradoxes for Australian democratic governance*, Democracy 2025, Report No. 6, Canberra: MoAD. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

Evans, M., Stoker, G. and Halupka, M. (2019), 'Trust and democracy in Australia'. In Evans, M.,Grattan, M. and McCaffrie, B. eds., From Turnbull to Morrison. Trust Divide, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, pp. 17-35.

Evans, M., Stoker, G. and Halupka, M. (2019), Democracy 2025 Report No.5: How Australian federal politicians would like to reform their democracy. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

Evans, M., Stoker, G. and Halupka, M. (2019), 'Revealed: how Australian politicians would bridge the trust divide', *The Conversation*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://theconversation.com/revealed-how-australian-politicians-would-bridge-the-trust-divide-125217

Franklin, M.N. (2004), *Voter turnout and the dynamics of electoral competition in established democracies since 1945*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

Fukuyama, F. D. (1995), *Trust: the social virtues and the creation of prosperity*, New York, NY: Free Press.

Grattan, M. (2020), 'Six-week lockdown for Melbourne as record 191 new cases in latest tally', *The Conversation*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://theconversation.com/six-week-lockdown-for-melbourne-as-record-191-new-cases-in-latest-tally-142171

Hetherington, M. (2005), *Why Political Trust Matters*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Horne, D (1964), *The Lucky Country,* Penguin Books, Ringwood, Vic.

Ippolito, L. (2020), 'Coronavirus, la Gran Bretagna non avvierà la fase 2 per altre tre settimane. I morti sono 32 mila: il bilancio peggiore l'Europa', *Corriere della Sera*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://www.corriere. it/esteri/20_maggio_05/coronavirus-gran-bretagna-l-incubo-britannico-fase-2-che-non-parte-3305b82e-8eac-11ea-8162-438cc7478e3a.shtml.

Jennings, W. (2020), *COVID 19 and the Rally Around the Flag Effect*, Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https:// ukandeu.ac.uk/covid-19-and-the-rally-round-the-flag-effect/

John Hopkins University Coronavirus Research Center (2020), *'COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering'*. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html

Kenny, M. and Evans, M. (2020), 'Is our democracy due for an upgrade', *Canberra Times*, 2 May 2020. Retrieved 10 July 2020 from: https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6742271/is-our-democracy-due-for-an-upgrade/#gsc.tab=0

Krugman, P. (2008), *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*, Penguin Books.

Lowe, I (ed.) (2016). *The Lucky Country? Reinventing Australia*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Mueller, J.E. (1970), 'Presidential popularity from Truman to Johnson', *American Political Science Review*, 64, 1, pp. Retrieved 10 July from: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/ article/presidential-popularity-from-truman-to-johnson1/FBA184821B05C29F50256634B50440A8.

Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2018), *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2017), *Trust and Public Policy: How Better Governance Can Help Rebuild Public Trust*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264268920-en

Stoker, G., Evans, M., and Halupka, M. (2018b), *Democracy 2025 Report No. 2. What lessons can we draw from international experience for bridging the trust divide?* (2018), Canberra, MoAD. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025.gov.au.

Stoker, G., Evans, M., and Halupka, M. (2018a), *Democracy 2025 Report No. 1. Trust and Democracy in Australia: democratic decline and renewal*, Canberra, MoAD. Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: https://democracy2025. gov.au.

US Global Investors (2020), 'Explore the World's Busiest Airports', Retrieved 6 July 2020 from: http://www. usfunds.com/investor-library/frank-talk/explore-the-worlds-10-busiest-airports/#.XwVK4CgzaUk.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mark Evans (PhD) is the Director of the *Democracy 2025 – strengthening democratic practice* initiative at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House and Professor of Governance at the University of Canberra's (UC) Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis. He was formerly Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (2014-18), Director of the ANZSOG Institute for Governance (2009-14), Director of the World-wide Universities Public Policy Network (2005-7), Head of Politics at the University of York in the UK (1999-2007), and Dean of the Faculty of Business, Government and Law at the University of Canberra (2010-11). Mark has played an international role in supporting change governance practices and has acted as a senior policy advisor, and managed research and evaluation projects for 26 countries, the European Union, United Nations and the World Bank. He has also worked with every state and territory and most Commonwealth departments in Australia on change governance issues. His latest co-authored books include *Evidence based Policymaking and the Social Sciences – Methods that Matter* (Policy Press, 2016) and *From Turnbull to Morrison: Trust Divide* (Melbourne University Press, 2019). He has been senior editor of the international journal *Policy Studies* since 2004 and is an IPAA Council member.

Will Jennings (PhD) is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of Southampton. His research is concerned with questions relating to public policy and political behaviour – such as how issues get onto the policy agenda, how people form their vote preferences over time (and how polls do or don't line up with the eventual outcome as election day approaches), how voters judge the competence of parties, and why major projects and sports events go over budget so often. Previously he was a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Research Fellow at the University of Manchester. He completed his doctorate at the University of Oxford in 2004. Will is Co-Director of the UK Policy Agendas Project, and a member of the Comparative Agendas Project research network. He is a Trustee of the UK Political Studies Association and serves on the editorial boards of the *British Journal of Political Science, Public Opinion Quarterly, Political Studies, Political Studies Review, Journal of European Public Policy, European Political Science* and *Public Administration*. His recent books include Olympic Risks (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), *Policy Agendas in British Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), The Politics of Competence: Parties, Public Opinion and Voters (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and The Good Politician (Cambridge University Press, 2018). He is also senior elections analyst for Sky News in the UK.

Gerry Stoker (PhD) is Professor of Politics and Governance at the University of Southampton (in the UK) and Centenary Professor in IGPA at UC. He held previous professorial posts at Manchester and Strathclyde. Gerry's main research interests are in governance, democratic politics, local and regional governance, urban politics, public participation and public service reform. He has authored or edited over 25 books and published over 90 refereed articles or chapters in books. Gerry was the founding Chair of the New Local Government Network which won the UK think tank of the year and his book Why Politics Matters won the politics book of the year award from the Political Studies Association of the UK. Gerry has provided advice to various parts of the UK government and is also an expert advisor to the Council of Europe on local government and participation issues. He was awarded the Political Studies Association Award for 'making a difference' in recognition of the impact of his work on governance issues. His latest books include: The Relevance of Political Science (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Nuclear Power and Energy Policy: The Limits to Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Evidence-based policymaking in the social sciences: Methods that matter* (Policy Press, 2016), *Why Politics Matters* (Palgrave Macmillan), and *The Good Politician. Folk Theories, Political Interaction and the Rise of Anti-Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Viktor Valgarðsson (PhD) is a Teaching Fellow in Quantitative Comparative Politics at Durham University and a Research Fellow at the TrustGov Project at the University of Southampton. He completed his PhD at the University of Southampton in January 2020, studying the topic of voter turnout decline in Western Europe. He has published articles in the international journals *Political Studies, Scandinavian Political Studies* and *Globalizations*. His research focuses on various aspects of changing political participation and attitudes in established democracies including political support, voter turnout, democratic innovation, populism and electoral politics.

ABOUT DEMOCRACY 2025 – STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

Democracy 2025 – strengthening democratic practice was established by the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD), together with the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra (UC-IGPA), in October 2018. It was launched in the context of the lowest level recording of public trust and satisfaction with Australia's democratic arrangements and set against the global rise of debased semi-democracies.

Democracy 2025 audits and celebrates the qualities of Australian democracy, investigates and experiments with what works in terms of renewing our representative system of government and facilitates non-partisan conversations on how to improve our democratic practice and be the best democracy that we can be.

MoAD holds a unique position on the frontline of democracy, civic agency and change. We are a museum not just of objects but of ideas. We seek to empower Australians through exhibitions, schools' learning programs and events that both stimulate and inspire. Trusted by the public, government, public service and business alike, we are uniquely able to advance national conversations about democracy, past, present and future.

This report, the first of three written in collaboration with TRUSTGOV on the theme *Political Trust in Times of Coronavirus*, investigates whether Australian attitudes towards democratic institutions and practices have changed as a consequence of COVID-19. It will add fresh and unique insights to the growing body of applied research that underpins our activities helping us drive a process of national reflection, understanding, and renewal of Australia's democratic practice.

Find out more at: democracy2025.gov.au.

Daryl Karp AM

Director
MoAD

Professor Mark Evans

Director
*Democracy 2025
– strengthening democratic practice*

ABOUT TRUSTGOV

The TrustGov Project was established at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom in 2019 through a grant from the British Economic and Social Research Council and support from the University of Southampton and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It has five key aims and objectives.

1. To reframe theoretical debates. The project uses a 'trust but verify' notion as the normative yardstick to assess how far rational citizens form judgments about the trustworthiness of the agencies and the institutions of national and global governance.

2. To develop innovative concepts and expand scientific evidence. We do so by developing and gathering data for novel and innovative indices of trust in, and trustworthiness of, political institutions that complement the existing measures that form the basis of much of our knowledge. We document patterns and trends of trust in political institutions around the world – especially using survey data to map public confidence in the executive, judicial and legislative branches of national governments and in global governance agencies like the UN, World Bank and IMF. Comparisons are extended far beyond the boundaries of contemporary democracies to examine the evidence in a global context, covering a spectrum of regimes from the authoritarian to the democratic. The TrustGov project uses a multimethod and multilevel research design to examine new empirical evidence available from (i) exploratory focus groups, (ii) cross-national time-series survey observational data gathered in many countries, sub-regions, and types of regime worldwide, and (iii) randomized experimental data.

3. To expand knowledge about the drivers of trust. We do so by analyzing and comparing public evaluations of procedural and policy performance with governance indices at global, national and regional levels, along with processes of communication and information, to assess how far the public is capable of making knowledgeable judgments about the trustworthiness of national and global government agencies. What are the reasons why Type I and Type II errors occur?

4. To test empirical evidence about the spatial drivers of political trust. In addition, we seek to determine how far trust in political institutions varies by place – such as among nations, regions within a country, and among rural and urban communities. In particular, we seek to explore the relationship between support for national and global agencies of governance and place-based cultural identities and economic divides among citizens.

5. To inform multiple stakeholders about our findings. The project uses the lessons of our research to reframe public debate about trust, trustworthiness, and critical citizens who 'trust but verify', sharing evidence-based knowledge about practical reforms and best practices that multiple stakeholders can use to restore trust.

The core team of Principal Investigators for the TrustGov Project includes Professor **Will Jennings** (University of Southampton), Professor **Pippa Norris** (Harvard University and the University of Sydney), and Professor **Gerry Stoker** (University of Southampton and the University of Canberra).

For further information see: https://trustgov.net/

Visit **www.democracy2025.gov.au** and subscribe to
our latest research, news and events.