

NOVEMBER 2023

# THE FUTURE OF AUSTRALIA

A Survey of the Values and Beliefs  
of Young Australians

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# Executive Summary

In July, the Institute of Public Affairs commissioned independent market research agency Insightfully to ask 800 Australians aged 16-25 a series of 11 questions about public policy. This report analyses their attitudes towards the role of government and what this might say about the political preferences of young Australians.

## **Young Australians are aspirational but believe they will be worse off than their parents**

- Pessimism about the future has increased from 49 per cent in 2016 to 64 per cent in 2023.
- Two-thirds of young Australians believe they will own their own home within two decades
- Two-thirds of young Australians harbour ambitions as future business owners.

## **Young Australians prefer a small government that prioritises cost-of-living**

- A majority of young Australians prefer a smaller government, providing fewer services with low taxes.
- Young Australians overwhelmingly agree that the federal budget deficit and national debt are a major problem.
- Lowering cost-of-living is more than twice as important to young Australians than any other issue.

## **Young Australians strongly oppose censorship and believe that activism has gone too far**

- A clear majority of young Australians explicitly oppose censorship.
- 83 per cent of young Australians think more people today are overly sensitive and likely to take offence at ideas they disagree with.
- 63 per cent of young Australians agreed that LGBTQ activists have gone too far and are now imposing their views on other Australians.

## **Young Australian men and women are fundamentally divided by feminism**

- More than 50 per cent of young Australians either disagreed that women are sometimes given preferential treatment, or thought that if it was happening, it was a good thing.
- 45 per cent of respondents agreed that women are given preferential treatment over men, with twice as many men agreeing than women.
- Men largely think feminism has gone too far and preferential treatment for women is not right. Women largely do not think they receive preferential treatment or if they do, they think it is right.

## **The data does not show young Australians have deserted the right**

- This survey questions the popular narrative that most young Australians are committed to the ideological left. It shows that the majority believe in traditional centre-right values.
- Young Australians are looking for leadership. Political parties on the centre-right have an opportunity to engage with young people on issues like home ownership and cost-of-living.
- Centre-right parties must stand for centre-right values. If they become too similar to their left-leaning rivals, Australians will vote based on factors like aesthetics, branding, or messaging.

# Foreword

This is the second major survey of young Australians that the Institute of Public Affairs has undertaken, with the first being in 2016.

These surveys are motivated by the need to enrich our understanding of the values, aspirations, hopes, and concerns of today's young Australians, whose direction in life is of vital importance to the future of our nation.

There are many polls and surveys about the attitudes of young Australians, but many fail to grapple with the nuanced and often complex and still developing views of those who only just recently graduated school, are still at university or in vocational training, or who have just entered the workforce.

As our survey shows, young Australians (aged 16-25) are more deeply committed, as a cohort, to the values which define the Australian way of life than is sometimes thought.

First and foremost among these values are freedom of speech, free enterprise, home ownership, a limited and efficient government, and tolerance.

As this survey makes clear, as a whole young Australians are fundamentally aspirational and want to build a better life for themselves and their (future) families. An overwhelming majority of young Australians want to start their own business and own their own home, and a clear majority want lower taxes and a smaller government even though they understand this means fewer public services would be provided. This suggests that they understand the negative relationship between government intervention and their capacity to achieve their goals in life.

Interestingly, the proportion of young people who want government to be smaller, with lower taxes and fewer public services, has increased from 41 per cent in 2016, to 56 per cent in 2023.

Young Australians are also informed and concerned about civic issues of substantial importance to our nation's future. For instance, a very large and growing majority of young Australians are concerned about the federal budget deficit and national debt, and a majority want these issues to be addressed immediately, not just when the economy improves.

Perhaps the most arresting finding of our survey is that two-thirds of young Australians believe that they will be worse off than their parents' generation. On this issue, there has been sharp 15 per cent increase since 2016, and this pessimistic assessment is shared across the age range and among both women and men.

The reason for this can be debated but is most likely attributable to the significant social consequences of the pandemic lockdowns; the catastrophism around climate change; and the real and emerging challenges associated with accessing basic amenities, such as housing and rental accommodation.

Often young Australians are dismissed as left-wing, or woke, and unable to shake off the indoctrination of schools and universities. But our survey shows that the truth is far more nuanced and complex.

For instance, just like Australians of all ages, young Australians are primarily concerned with the cost of living. And fewer than one in ten believe that reducing emissions should be the top priority of governments (this compares with four in ten who believe cost of living should be the top priority, and two in ten who nominated housing affordability).

Critically, a clear majority, of around two-thirds of young Australians, oppose censorship. And a similar number believe LGBTQ activism has now gone too far, including 73 per cent of young men.

It is important to understand the significance of this. The precise question we asked was, “speech which is claimed to have hurt someone’s feelings should be censored”. This proposition was strongly rejected, although young women were more likely to favour censorship than young men.

The term ‘censorship’ seems to resonate more than ‘freedom of speech’, perhaps because freedom of speech is seen to be abstract and American, whereas censorship is something that is experienced in the classroom and online by young Australians. Almost every person younger than 25 would have personally experienced censorship of some form, and they don’t like it.

The views of young Australians are far from uniform on the most controversial topic we polled, which was feminism. Digging into the data shows nuanced and complex views, revealing the need for debate and leadership in this area.

Forty-five per cent of respondents agreed that women are given preferential treatment over men, with twice as many men agreeing than women. Of those who agreed that women were receiving preferential treatment, twice as many thought it was not a good thing than those who thought it was. And twice as many young men thought it was not a good thing, compared to women.

What this suggests is that, on controversial social matters, young Australians are still finding their way in the world and there is little consensus.

Lastly, some have said the future is bleak because young people support socialism. This constitutes a misreading of what young people actually mean by socialism. For instance, our survey showed a very strong majority supports income redistribution. But this is not socialism. It is, in essence, simply the system we have in place today which, for all its faults, works well most of the time. And the proportion of young people who support redistribution is not inconsistent with that of the population as a whole.

We should take tremendous hope out of this survey, which shows that young Australians are more committed to our values than what is sometimes claimed, and they are, as a whole, proving resistant to the one-sided narrative they receive at our educational institutions and in the media.

*Daniel Wild,  
Deputy Executive Director,  
Institute of Public Affairs*

# Introduction

There is ongoing debate around the source of the saying, “If you are not a liberal at 20, you have no heart. If you are not a conservative at 40, you have no brain”. Whether it was Winston Churchill, Edmund Burke, George Bernard Shaw, or someone else, we will probably never know, but the fact it is so often quoted is significant. The transition from left to right is one of the oldest rules in politics. However, recent polling seems to suggest that young Australians, and many young people in the Western world, are leaning to the left in unprecedented numbers and, unlike previous generations, they are not changing their views as they age.<sup>1</sup>

Australian Election Study data appears to confirm this narrative and shows young Australians are increasingly less likely to vote for centre-right parties.<sup>2</sup> However, it does not necessarily follow that they are deserting centre-right values. If support for these values were collapsing, it would be reflected in a concurrent fall in support for the fundamental tenets of the Liberal and National parties, which include the principles of free speech, free enterprise and free association.

This survey reveals that the opposite is the case and provides a more nuanced analysis of the attitudes of young Australians towards politics. It shows that young Australians are entrepreneurial, sceptical of big government and they dislike censorship. Support

for small government and lower taxes sits alongside support for wealth distribution and action on climate change. Young people do not uniformly lean left. Instead, their attitudes to social and cultural issues are spread across the political spectrum and many lean towards the centre-right.

*The Future of Australia: A Survey of the Values and Beliefs of Young Australians 2023* is the second survey commissioned by the Institute of Public Affairs to examine the attitudes of young people about important public policy issues. It was preceded by the *Growing Freedom: Survey of Young Australians 2016*, a wide-ranging study of over 1000 young Australians aged between 16 and 25. The 2023 survey polled over 800 young people in the same age bracket. Additional questions included in the 2023 survey address attitudes towards censorship, LGBTQ activism and feminism.

The socio-political landscape in Australia and globally has changed dramatically since the Institute of Public Affairs released the first iteration of *Growing Freedom: Survey of Young Australians* in 2016. Australians are feeling the financial consequences of the COVID-19 lockdowns, all federal, state and territory governments have multi-billion-dollar debts to pay off, and the economy is teetering on the edge of recession due to rampant inflation, cost-of-living pressures, and rising interest rates.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Matthew Taylor, *Generation Left: young voters are deserting the right* (Centre for Independent Studies, June 2023).

2 See *Generation Left* (2023) 4-10.

3 Freya Noble, ‘Working Aussies experience highest yearly jump in cost of living on record’, 9News (3 May 2023): <https://www.9news.com.au/national/abs-data-cost-of-living-index-increases-highest-yearly-jump-on-record-australia/a86f48fa-28a0-43fe-92e7-951eb2fabd41>; and Noel Towell, ‘State governments are in unprecedented debt. Who do they owe the money to?’ *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 March 2021): <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/state-governments-are-in-unprecedented-debt-who-do-they-owe-the-money-to-20210309-p5794d.html>.

In 2023, the shift towards minor parties has continued, with first preference votes for the two major parties down to an all-time low of 68.5 per cent at the 2022 federal election.<sup>4</sup> Serious questions remain about the state of modern liberal democracies after the unprecedented actions taken during the 2020-21 pandemic. This is supported by research in the social sciences which shows confidence in institutions experienced a sharp decline in 2022, compared to pre-COVID levels.<sup>5</sup>

Overseas, China's Xi Jinping was re-elected to an unprecedented third term as President of China, the war between Russia and Ukraine rages on, and Israel has suffered one of the worst attacks in its history at the hands of Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, sparking ongoing conflict between the two groups. Moving to less existential challenges, earlier this year France saw mass protests and strikes over proposed pension reforms to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64.<sup>6</sup> In the technology space, artificial intelligence has advanced in leaps and bounds with the introduction of ChatGPT, and virtual reality received an upgrade with Apple releasing the Vision Pro Headset, it's first major new product in decades.

To secure the fundamental principles and values that underpin the Australian way of life, we must understand what the rising generation thinks. Australian youth are the focus of this survey which was conducted for the IPA by independent market research agency Insightfully.

The results reveal that young Australians are entrepreneurial, they believe in small government, cutting taxes, home ownership and freedom of speech. However, they are pessimistic about the future insofar as they believe they will be worse off than their parents' generation and are concerned about the cost-of-living crisis. Surprisingly, given the increasingly politicised state of the school curriculum, young Australians are less supportive of popular ideologies and narratives, than might be expected. They oppose censorship, believe LGBTQ activism has gone too far and prioritise cost-of-living over climate change.

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4 Josh Nichola and Nick Evershed, 'Votes for Labor and the Coalition plummet to all-time low as Australia swings away from major parties', *The Guardian* (28 May 2022): <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2022/may/28/votes-for-labor-and-the-coalition-plummet-to-all-time-low-as-australia-swings-away-from-major-parties>.

5 Pew Research Centre, 'Americans' trust in scientists, other groups declines: Republicans' confidence in medical scientists down sharply since early in the coronavirus outbreak' (15 February 2022): <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/02/15/americans-trust-in-scientists-other-groups-declines/>.

6 Rhoda Kwan, Amy Hawkins and Agencies, 'Xi Jinping handed unprecedented third term as China's president', *The Guardian* (10 March 2023): <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/10/xi-jinping-handed-unprecedented-third-term-as-chinas-president>; and 'France faces 11th day of strikes, protests amid pension deadlock', *France24* (6 March 2023): <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230406-france-braces-for-new-protests-after-pensions-deadlock>.

# Future hopes and fears

## Do you think your generation will be better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents' generation?

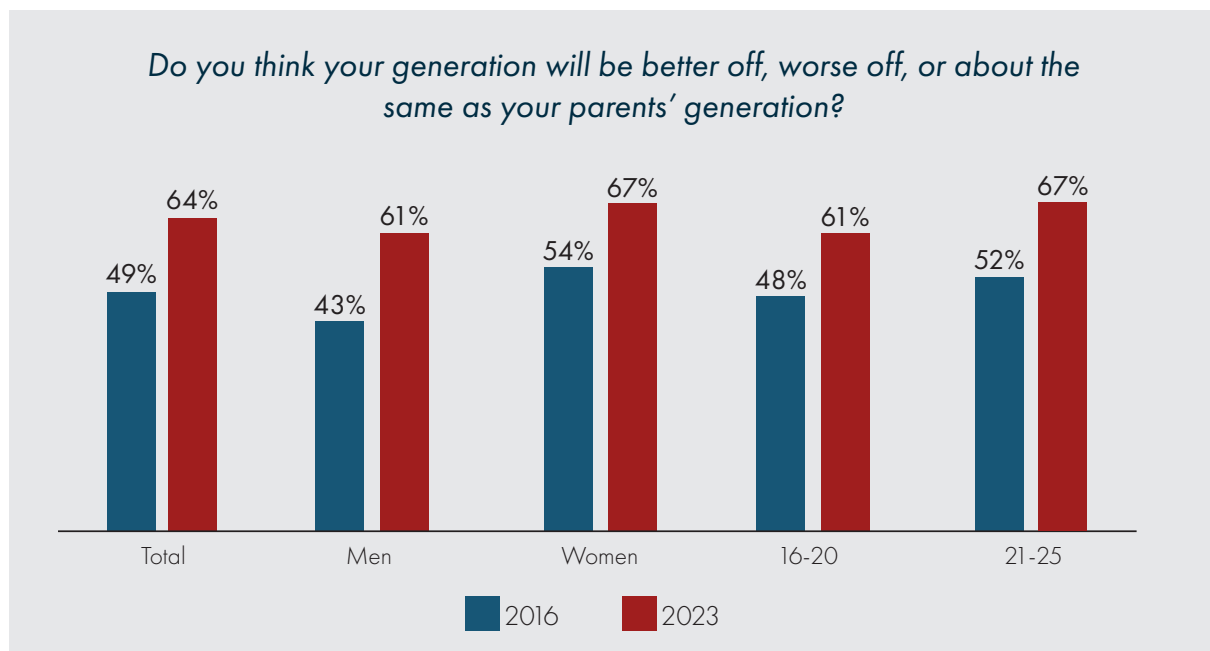
Young Australians are optimistic and aspirational, but remarkably less so than they were seven years ago.<sup>7</sup> In 2016, many young Australians were not only positive about their personal future, but also the future of the nation. This finding is reflected in the 2023 survey, but optimism about the future has fallen.

Of the people surveyed in 2016, 69 per cent believed they would have a better standard of living in 10 years' time.<sup>8</sup>

By 2023, public opinion has changed dramatically. A large majority (64 per cent) of young Australians now believe that they will be worse off than their parents' generation. The number of people who said they would be better off fell from 25 per cent in 2016 to 17 per cent in 2023. Likewise, the number of people who said there would be little difference between the two generations also fell from 22 per cent in 2016 to 15 per cent in 2023.

Women (67 per cent) were more likely than men (61 per cent) to adopt a pessimistic view. Likewise, those aged 21-25 (67 per cent) were more likely to say they would be worse off than those aged 16-20 (61 per cent). Comparing the 2016 and 2023 surveys, a trend emerges indicating young people are increasingly pessimistic about their own prospects. Young people appear to believe living standards have peaked and are more likely to fall than rise during their lifetime.

This pessimistic outlook is reflected in the mental health crisis which has broken out in many Western countries.<sup>9</sup> An uncertain economic environment, fears about global warming ('climate anxiety') coupled with Australia's aging population and a growing tax burden for future generations, are all factors which play into concerns young Australians may have about the future.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Institute of Public Affairs, *Growing Freedom: Survey of Young Australians* (30 December 2016): available at <https://ipa.org.au/publications-ipa/media-releases/young-australians-full-optimism-future>, and Matthew Lesh, 'Growing Freedom' (2017) 69(1) *IPA Review* 24, 24-29.

<sup>8</sup> *Growing Freedom* (2016) table 26.

<sup>9</sup> Dimitri Abramov and Paulo-de-Tarso de Castro Peixoto, 'Does contemporary Western culture play a role in mental disorders?' (2022) *Front Psychiatry*: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9489857/>.

<sup>10</sup> Treasury, *2023 Intergeneration Report: Australia's future to 2063* (Commonwealth of Australia, 24 August 2023):



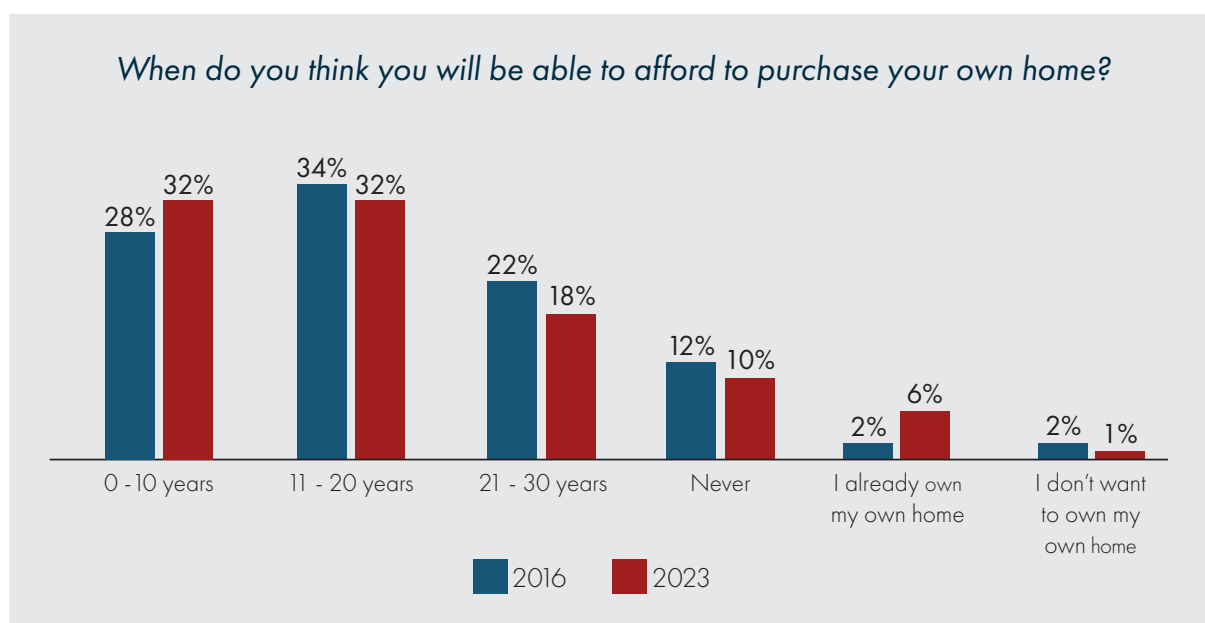
## When do you think you will be able to afford to purchase your own home?

Three-quarters of Australians believe home ownership is a large part of the 'Australian way of life' according to a survey conducted by ANU in 2017.<sup>11</sup> The survey also found that Australians are just as likely to buy housing for non-financial reasons, such as emotional security, stability and belonging, as financial reasons. However, rapidly rising property prices in major Australian cities have brought national attention to the issue of housing affordability.

These findings are supported by the IPA's survey which confirmed once again that the narrative that young Australians do not want to own their own home is false. Only one per cent of respondents said they did not want their own home. Two-thirds believe they will own their own home in two decades. Only one in 10 believe they will never be able to afford their own home.

The number of respondents who were doubtful they would be able to own their own home within the next decade has fallen from 68 per cent in 2016 to 60 per cent in 2023. In 2016, 12 per cent of young Australians believed they would never own their own home compared to 10 per cent in 2023. Surprisingly, the number of people who said they already owned their own home has risen from two per cent in 2016 to six per cent in 2023.<sup>12</sup>

These findings bode well for the future prosperity of the nation. As observed by CoreLogic's Eliza Owen, 'Home ownership is deeply entrenched in wealth accumulation.' She also noted that nearly 57 per cent of households' wealth is held in housing.<sup>13</sup> Home ownership is a cornerstone of prosperity. Positive attitudes on this topic are indicative of a positive outlook for the nation.



<sup>11</sup> Jill Sheppard, Matthew Gray, and Ben Phillips, *Attitudes to Housing Affordability: Pressures, Problems and Solutions* (ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Report No. 24, May 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Growing Freedom (2016) table 25.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Spiro, 'Australia needs a dose of "common prosperity" to fix housing affordability crisis', *South China Morning Post* (30 May 2022): <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3179663/australia-needs-dose-common-prosperity-fix-housing-affordability>.

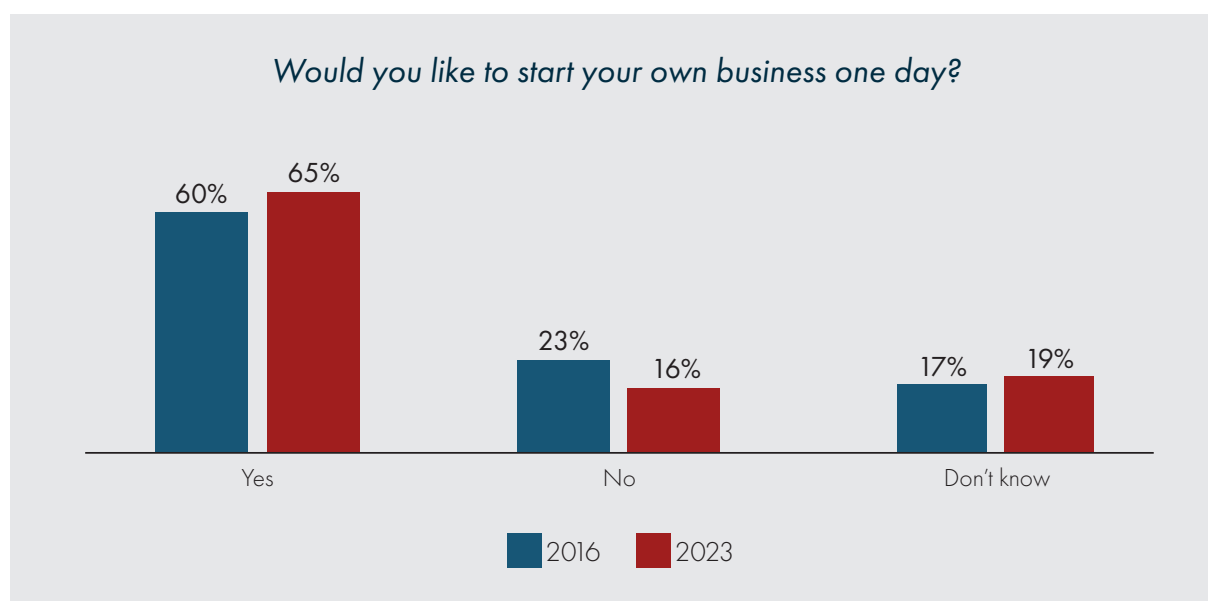
### Would you like to start your own business one day?

Optimism is a key contributor to human flourishing. It is associated with better physical and mental health and improved education, earning and relational outcomes. Conversely, a lack of optimism or confidence alone can have a negative impact upon financial markets and stock prices. There is also a strong link between optimism and entrepreneurship according to a solid stream of academic research.<sup>14</sup>

According to this survey, two-thirds of young Australians harbour ambitions as future business owners and are interested in starting their own business one day. Young men (69 per cent) were more likely to express entrepreneurial ambition

than young women (61 per cent). Similarly, those aged 21-25 (69 per cent) were more likely to want to start their own business than those aged 16-20 (61 per cent).

It is interesting to note that the entrepreneurial spirit among young Australians in 2023 is higher than it was in 2016, despite the COVID-19 disruption.<sup>15</sup> There has been a five per cent increase from 60 per cent to 65 per cent. The results reveal that young Australians are optimistic and entrepreneurial and believe that we can help the economy by cutting taxes and government spending.



<sup>14</sup> Lars Persson and Thomas Seiler, 'Entrepreneurial optimism and creative destruction', (2022) 62 *The North American Journal of Economic and Finance* 101737.

<sup>15</sup> Growing Freedom (2016) Table 23.

# Role of Government

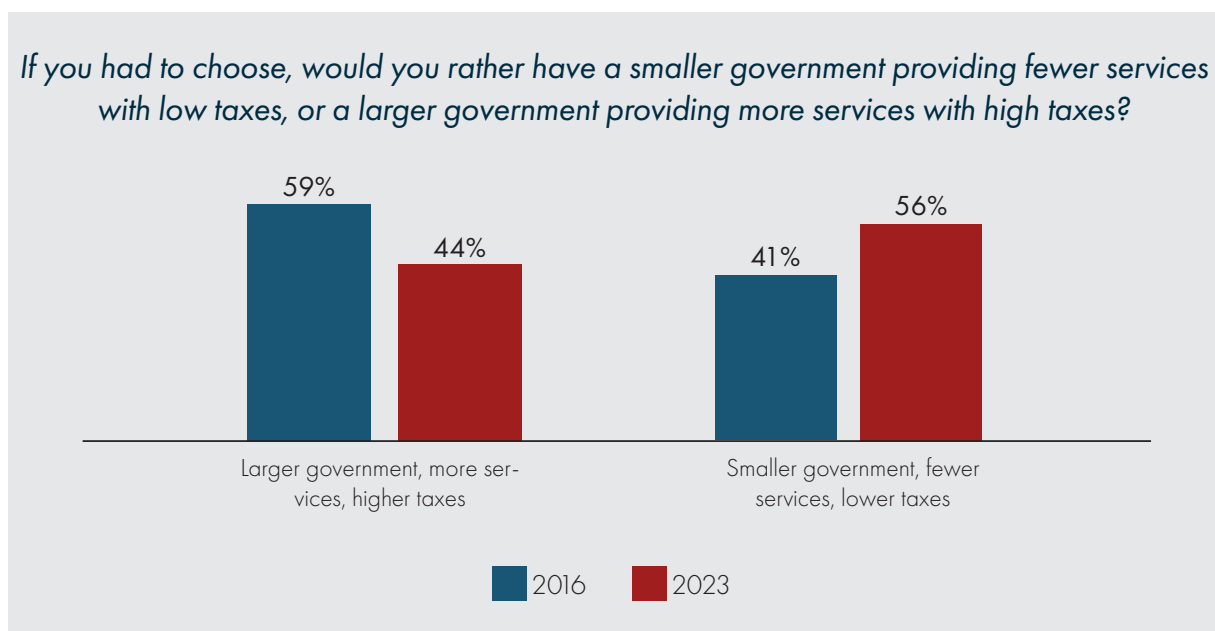
*If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services with low taxes, or a larger government providing more services with high taxes?*

The 2023 *Intergenerational Report* warns of an aging population and a growing tax burden on future generations. Real GDP growth over the next 40 years has also been downgraded from 2.6 to 2.2 per cent. The Treasury outlook also forecast four decades of deficits due to government spending on services and debt repayments which spiraled after the COVID-19 crisis. This survey suggests these facts have hit home for young Australians.

In 2016, 59 per cent of young Australians said they would prefer a larger government providing more services with high taxes.<sup>16</sup> This result has been flipped on its head in 2023. Young Australians across the age and gender demographics are consistent in their preference for a smaller government providing fewer services and low taxes. Perhaps young people feel they had a taste of big government during the 2020-21 years of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions and are now moving in the opposite direction.

The finding that most young Australians (56 per cent) prefer small government, fewer services and low taxes goes against the narrative that most young Australians lean to the left. The desire for less government intervention supports a policy platform of fiscal conservatism and individual responsibility. As Margaret Thatcher said, 'there can be no liberty unless there is economic liberty'. And economic liberty is undermined by large government and higher taxes.

The preference for small government among young Australians is also consistent with ANU's survey of the broader community conducted in January this year which found that the number of people who believe government should play a smaller role has increased. Additionally, 44.5 per cent reported economic issues as 'most important'.<sup>17</sup> The views of young Australians align with the views of older Australians on this issue.



<sup>16</sup> Growing Freedom (2016) Table 11.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Biddle and Matthew Gray, *Taking stock: Wellbeing and political attitudes in Australia at the start of the post-COVID era, January 2023* (Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, March 2023).

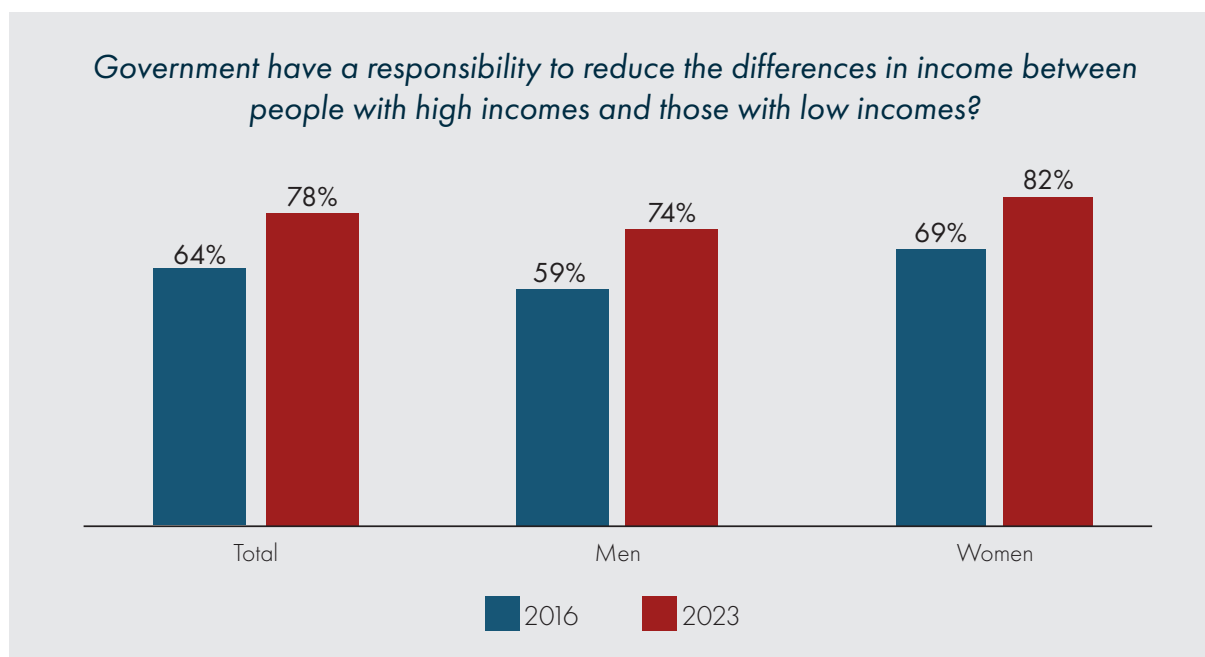
### *Government have a responsibility to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes (Agree/disagree)?*

Despite a marked preference for small government, lower taxes and fewer services, a clear majority of young Australians (78 per cent) also believe the government has a responsibility to reduce income differences. Support for this statement in 2023 is much stronger than it was in 2016, when only 64 per cent of those surveyed agreed with the statement.<sup>18</sup> Women (82 per cent) were more likely to agree than men (74 per cent). Not surprisingly, young unemployed people were most likely to agree the government should reduce the income gap.

Drawing the conclusion that this response from young Australians suggests they support socialism, would be a misreading of the question. Income redistribution is not socialism. And small government and wealth redistribution are not mutually exclusive ideas. A small government still collects taxes and provides services.

Support for income redistribution shows that young Australians believe in some sort of social safety net for the marginalised and vulnerable. It doesn't indicate the size of the safety net and is just one facet of Australia's broader tax and transfer system. Strong support for small government with lower taxes and fewer services would suggest that many would prefer this service to be limited which is inconsistent with the narrative that young Australians support socialism.

Turning to the American Gallup poll, it is also interesting to note that while there may be broad support for socialism, especially among young people, two-thirds of respondents also named big government as the biggest threat.<sup>19</sup> If socialism means anything, it means more power in the hands of government. However, only eight percent of respondents said the government had too little power. Perhaps young people are conflating socialism with income redistribution and the real number is much lower than what is shown by the polls.



18 Growing Freedom (2016) Table 17.

19 David Boaz, 'Young People like "Socialism," but do they know what it is?' *National Review Online* (25 October 2018): available at <https://www.cato.org/commentary/young-people-socialism-do-they-know-what-it>.

## Which of these statements do you think best describes the federal budget deficit and national debt?

In 2023, young Australians (82 per cent) overwhelmingly agree that the federal budget deficit and national debt are a 'major problem'. The majority (52 per cent) believe it should be addressed 'now' while about a third believe it should be addressed 'when the economy is better'. Only four per cent of respondents said it was 'not much of a problem'.

This represents an increase on the 2016 results which showed only 71 per cent of respondents saw the federal budget deficit and national debt as a 'major problem'.<sup>20</sup> Just 40 per cent agreed that it should be addressed 'now', while 31 per cent said it should be addressed 'when the economy is better'. More than twice as many people in the 2016 survey saw it as 'not much of a problem'.

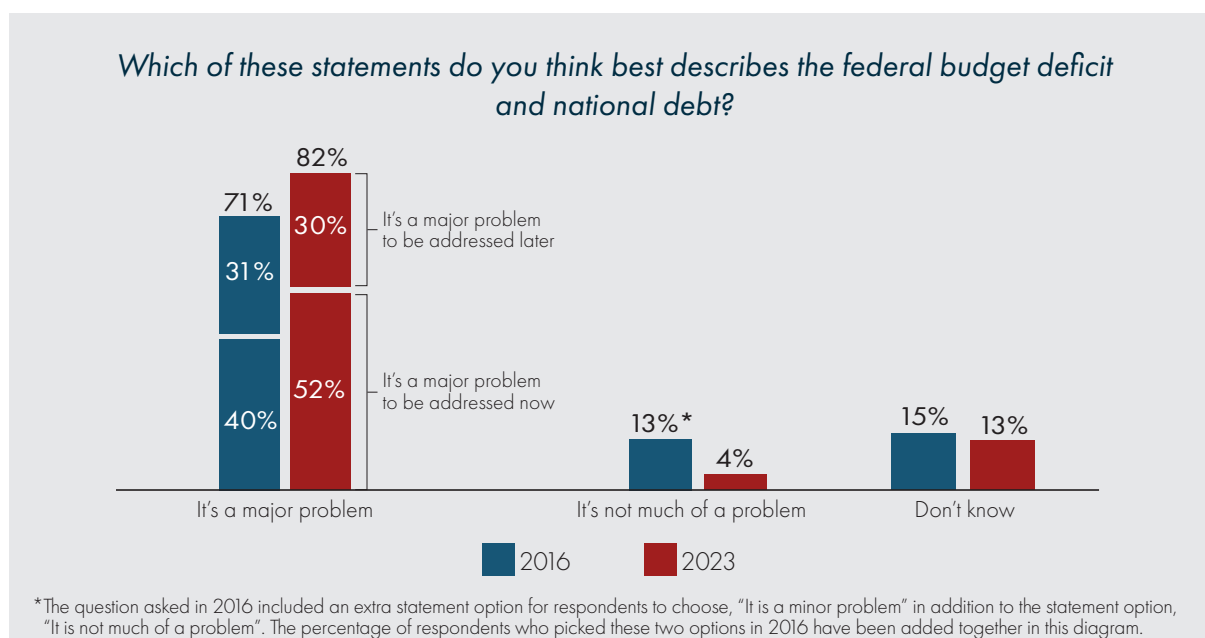
There has been a major shift in the attitudes of young Australians towards the federal budget deficit and national debt. The number of people who believe it is not much of a problem has dropped significantly

since 2016 and far more people believe it is a major problem in 2023.

In 2023, there were no striking variations based on gender or age. However, women at 55 per cent were more likely than men at 49 per cent to say that the federal deficit and national debt 'should be addressed now' while men at 33 per cent were more likely than women at 26 per cent to say it 'should be addressed when the economy is better'. Men were also twice as likely as women to say it was 'not much of a problem'.

Respondents aged 21-25 (55 per cent) were also more likely than those aged 16-20 (49 per cent) to say the federal budget deficit and national debt 'should be addressed now'. The younger age group were more likely than the older age group to say it 'should be addressed when the economy is better'.

Change headline in diagram below to 'Which of these statements do you think best describes the federal budget deficit and national debt?'<sup>21</sup>



20 Growing Freedom (2016) Table 12.

21 Both the 2016 and 2023 surveys asked, 'Which of these statements do you think best describes the federal budget deficit and national debt?' The statements available to respondents in 2016 included 'It is a minor problem' and 'It is not much of a problem'. Due to the similarities of the statements, both were combined into 'It's not much of a major problem' for presentation purposes in the chart. 'It is a minor problem' was not included in the 2023 survey as an available response.

**Out of the following, what do you believe the government should prioritise? Please rank in order from highest to lowest priority.**

When asked to rank the importance of issues as government priorities, 'lowering cost-of-living' was more than twice as important to young Australians than any other issue, including housing affordability, mental health and reducing emissions.

A breakdown based on gender shows that women (45 per cent) are more concerned about cost of living than men (38 per cent). However, lowering cost-of-living was the most common answer given by both genders. Men were twice as likely to list freedom of speech (7 per cent to 3 per cent) and national security (6 per cent to 3 per cent) as a priority than women. A breakdown based on age shows that those aged 16-20 (12 per cent) were twice as likely to list reducing emissions as a top priority than their 21–25 year-old counterparts (6 per cent). However, overall, fewer than one in 10 young Australians think reducing emissions should be a top priority for the government.

These results go against the narrative that young people believe climate agenda is the most pressing issue for governments to address. Clearly, the cost-of-living crisis has put financial pressures front of mind for many young people.

On the economic front, rampant inflation has seen record-breaking cost-of-living increases. Living costs for working Australians experienced the highest yearly jump on record according to data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in May.<sup>22</sup> HECS-HELP student loans increased by 7.1 per cent in May. Previously the indexation rate had hovered around two per cent, so this was a significant additional cost for students.<sup>23</sup> On top of this, the Reserve Bank's decision to lift interest rates to 4.35 per cent in November has placed increasing stress on mortgage holders which has had a flow on effect for renters.<sup>24</sup> Both ANZ and Westpac are expecting living standards to decline over the next year and financial analysts predict Australia is facing a 50 per cent chance of recession in the next 12 months.<sup>25</sup>

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22 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Employees' annual living costs highest on record' (Media Release, 3 May 2023): <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/employees-annual-living-costs-highest-record>.

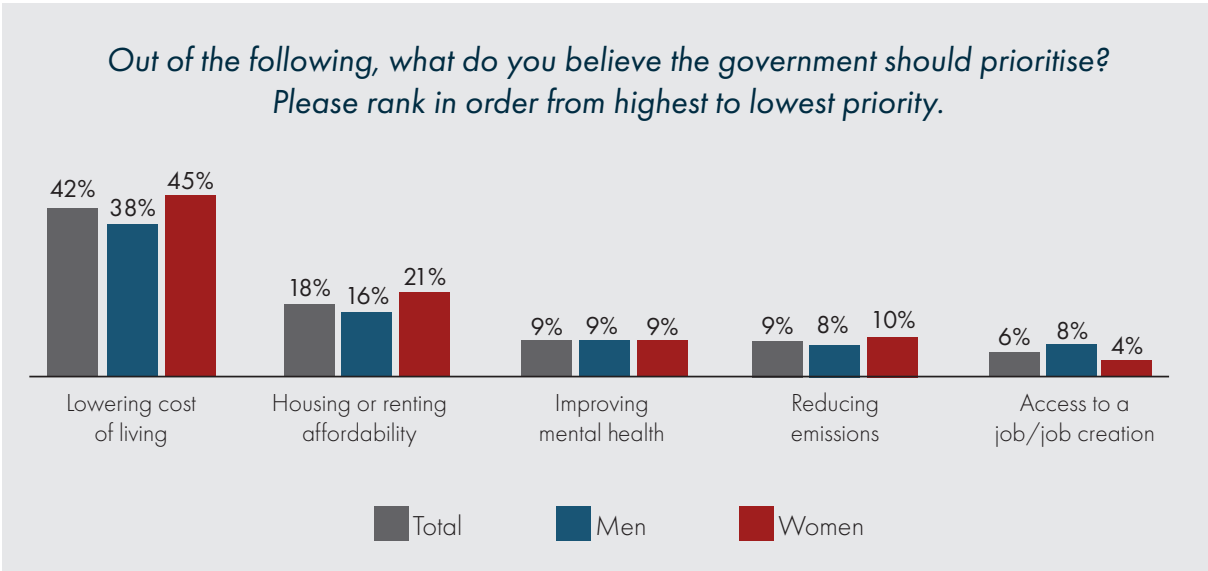
23 Australian Taxation Office, *Study and training loan indexation rates*: <https://www.ato.gov.au/Rates/Study-and-training-loan-indexation-rates/>.

24 Reserve Bank of Australia, 'Statement by Michele Bullock, Governor: Monetary Policy Decision' (Media Release, 7 November 2023): <https://www.rba.gov.au/media-releases/2023/mr-23-30.html>.

25 Emily McPherson, 'Concerns grow over per-capita recession as rate rises continue to bite', 9News (19 June 2023): <https://www.9news.com.au/national/concerns-grow-over-per-capita-recession-as-interest-rate-rises-continue-to-bite/298a0a8d-97a4-4ac2-9488-cef807eac670>.

As the financial situation deteriorates, climate change is becoming less of a priority for young people. Ultimately, the net zero agenda is costly. Young people living out of home are already paying for it through increased living expenses and students are paying for it via increased study loans. A survey conducted by Resolve Strategic for the IPA in March 2022 found 42 per cent of voters were not willing to financially support action to reduce Australia’s emissions.<sup>26</sup> A further 50 per cent would

pay between \$50-100 per year and only eight per cent would pay \$500 or more per year. The survey suggests Australians are less supportive of net zero when the personal cost is made clear to them. If the economic climate were friendlier, perhaps cost-of-living would not have such a great statistical lead. As it is, the top concern of young Australians in 2023 is mounting financial pressures.



<sup>26</sup> Daniel Wild ‘Australians Won’t Pay For Net Zero’ (Institute of Public Affairs Media Release, 3 May 2022): <https://ipa.org.au/publications-ipa/media-releases/australians-wont-pay-for-net-zero>.

# Censorship

*I think a lot more people today are overly sensitive and likely to take offence at ideas they disagree with (Agree/disagree).*

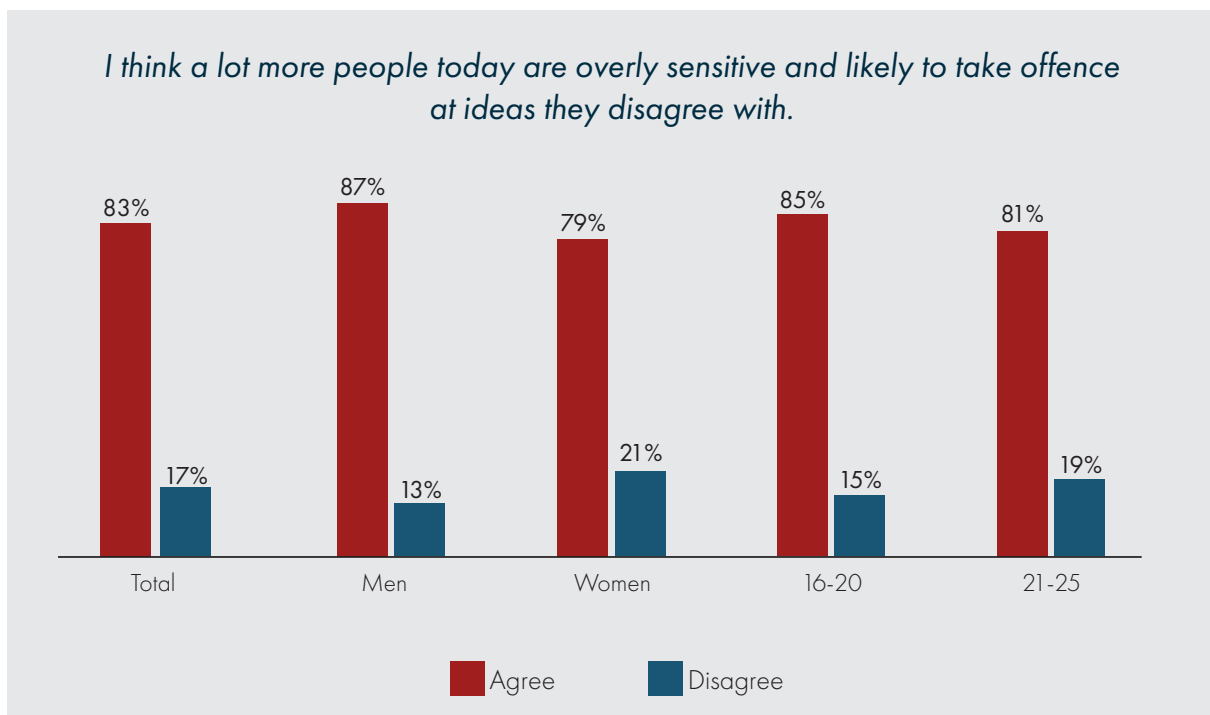
Much has been made of the ‘snowflake generation’ – an informal term describing people born between 1995 and 2010 and seen as less resilient and more sensitive than previous generations. Not surprisingly, a recent survey found 84 per cent of managers believe Generation Z is more difficult to work with than other generations.<sup>27</sup>

The affirmation of subjective feelings and self-expression over fact or reality has been encouraged by an education system that has increasingly ‘protected’ students from ideas they might find offensive.

The expansion of the definition of harm to include hurt feelings, unwelcome comments, or conduct deemed offensive by the overly sensitive, has become increasingly problematic for free societies.

This survey shows a significant majority of young Australians (83 per cent) agree that ‘a lot more people today are overly sensitive and likely to take offence at ideas they disagree with’. Only 17 per cent disagreed with this statement. Young Australians aged 16-17 were the most likely to agree with this statement (90 per cent) while those who had received a university education were the least likely (75 per cent). Men (87 per cent) were more likely to agree with this statement than women (79 per cent).

The rise of safe spaces, deplatforming activities and trigger warnings speaks to the rise of a generation of people who do not want their opinions challenged. Fortunately, many young Australians strongly oppose censorship and believe this sort of activism has gone too far.



<sup>27</sup> ResumeBuilder, ‘3 in 4 managers find it difficult to work with GenZ’ (Updated 15 May 2023): <https://www.resumebuilder.com/3-in-4-managers-find-it-difficult-to-work-with-genz/>



## Speech which is claimed to have hurt someone's feelings should be censored

Censorship is becoming increasingly problematic in modern Western culture. From Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton to the debate on *The Voice* to Parliament, in the name of 'safety' and 'harm prevention' classic works of fiction and critical political debates face increasing censorship.

In late March, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) reported on an increasing appetite for 'sensitivity readers' in the publishing industry.<sup>28</sup> However, this is a far broader issue, one that impacts education, media and politics.

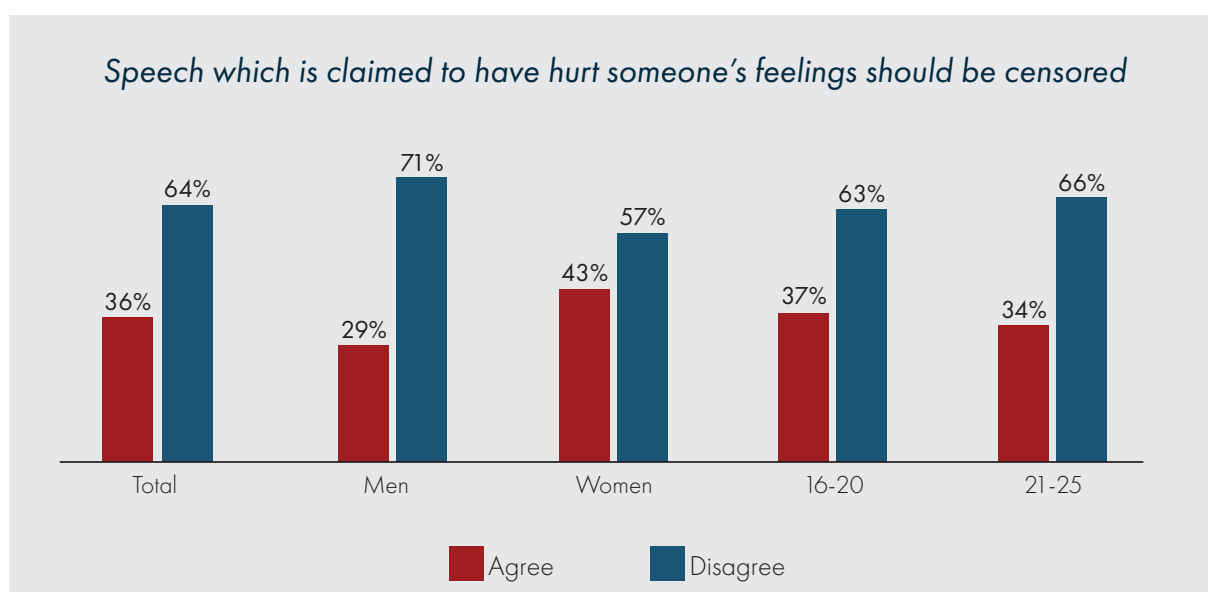
Fortunately, the push for censorship in elite circles is not reflected among young Australians. In fact, a clear majority (64 per cent) explicitly oppose censorship. Only 36 per cent agreed that speech which is claimed to have hurt someone's feelings should be censored. Men at 71 per cent were far more likely to oppose censorship than women at 57 per cent. Women aged 16-20 were the least likely to oppose censorship at 55 per cent followed closely by those

with a university education at 56 per cent. There were no major differences on the basis of age.

It is interesting that young Australians with a university education were the least likely to oppose censorship. At many Australian universities today, conduct policies and charters use broad and subjective terms like 'offense' and 'humiliation' which can be weaponised by activists to censor speech. The threat of punishment keeps students and academics from speaking out and voicing controversial opinions.

These policies require students to determine a fellow student's subjective individual sensitivity before speaking. It requires people to read the minds of others before making comments—an impossible task. In practice, university bans can be applied to anything from jokes that some might find offensive to ideas that could make classmates feel uncomfortable.

Despite the rise of censorship at universities, the pushback against cancel culture among young people supports the view that the principles of freedom are valued by this generation.



<sup>28</sup> Angel Eduardo, 'Why "sensitivity readers" are bad for free speech, art, and culture', *Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression* (31 March 2023): <https://www.thefire.org/news/why-sensitivity-readers-are-bad-free-speech-art-and-culture>.

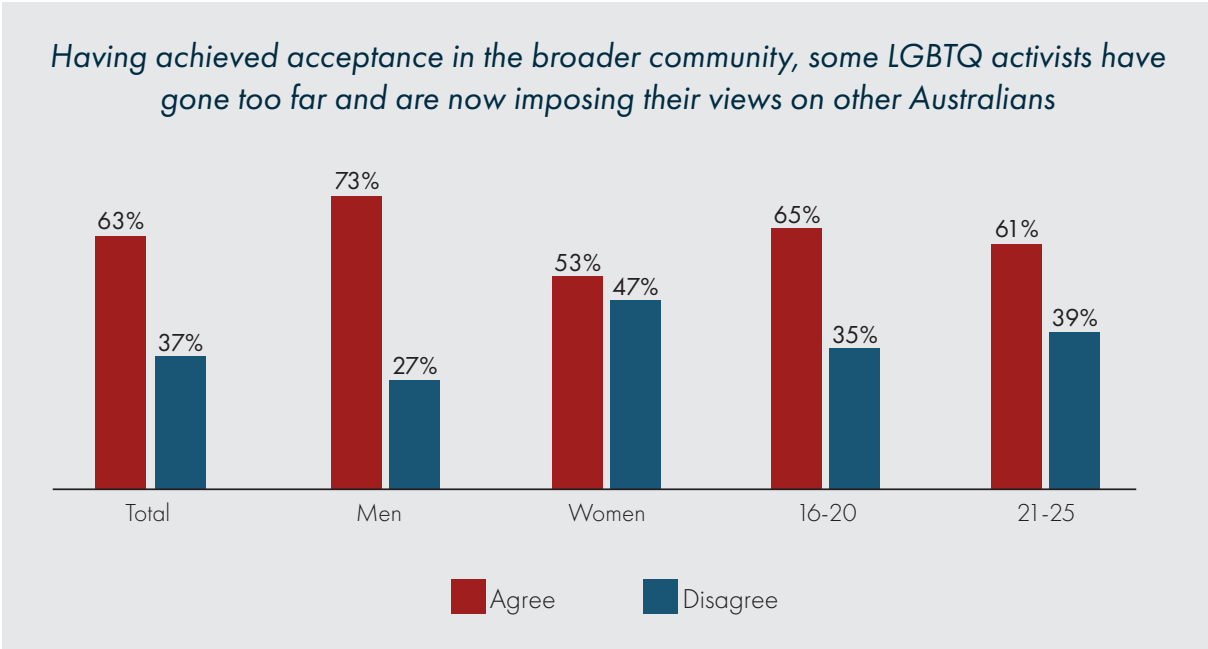
**Having achieved acceptance in the broader community, some LGBTQ activists have gone too far and are now imposing their views on other Australians.**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a wave of coordinated activism to secure civil rights and freedoms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people. Today, there are multiple days, weeks and months throughout the year to celebrate the LGBTQ community. The Mardis Gras, Pride Week and Wear it Purple Day are just a few key dates in the LGBTQ calendar. The success of this movement has been significant, with the rainbow flag now a common fixture in classrooms, businesses and public spaces across the nation.

However, this survey shows that a majority of young people (63 per cent) believe that LGBTQ activists have gone too far and are now imposing their views on other Australians. There was some disparity in response on the basis of gender and age. Young Australians aged 16-20 were more likely to agree

that LGBTQ activists had gone too far than those aged 21-25. Men (73 per cent) were far more likely to agree with this statement than women (53 per cent). Young Australians who had received a vocational education were 10 per cent more likely to agree that LGBTQ activists had gone too far than those who had received a university education.

Securing civil rights and freedoms for the LGBTQ community was an important step towards equality within the Western world. However, now there is a clear push by activists that society not only accept LGBTQ views but celebrate them. When asked, young Australians said that the pendulum has swung too far.



# Feminism

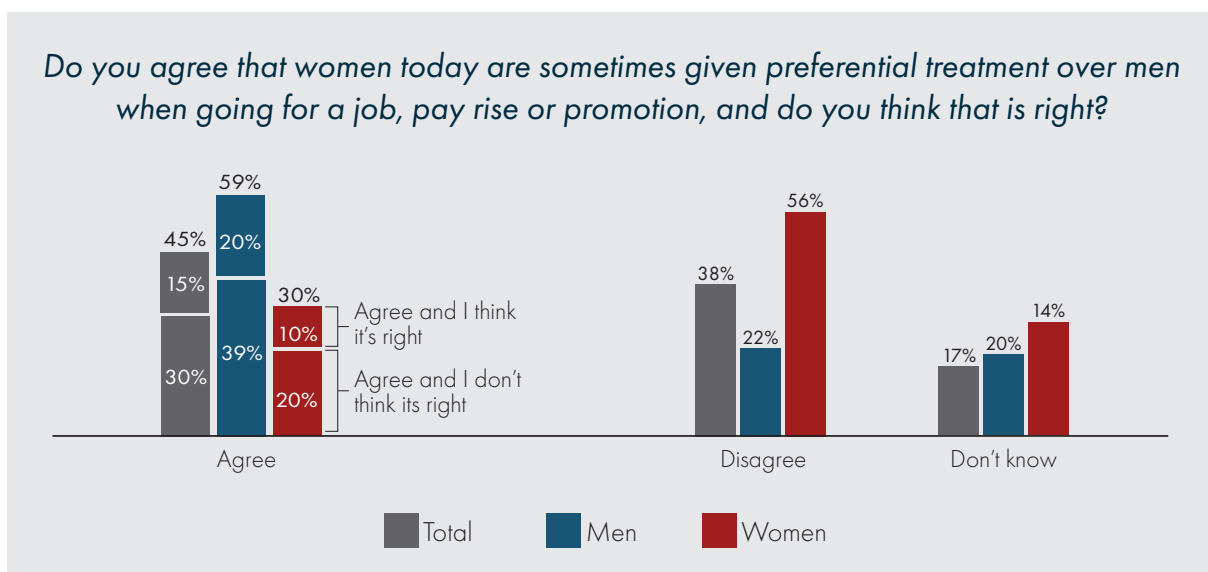
## Do you agree that women today are sometimes given preferential treatment over men when going for a job, pay rise or promotion, and do you think that is right?

Young Australian men and women are fundamentally divided over feminist values. More than half of respondents disagreed with the idea that women are sometimes given preferential treatment over men, or thought that if it was happening, it was a good thing. Of those who agreed with the statement, two-thirds thought it was wrong.

Just under half of respondents agreed that women are given preferential treatment over men. However, men and women tended to have polar opposite views of female advantage. Fifty-nine per cent of men agreed that women receive preferential treatment. Of this number 20 per cent said they thought this was right while 39 per cent said they thought this was wrong. Fifty-six per cent of women disagreed that women are given preferential treatment while 30 per cent of women thought that they were given preferential treatment. Of the 30 per cent who agreed, 10 per cent thought it was right while 21 per cent thought this was wrong. Women and men who agreed with the statement were twice as likely to say it was wrong than right.

These findings represent a key division between young people. It shows they are living in two different realities. Men think feminism has gone too far and preferential treatment for women is not the right thing for society. In contrast, women do not think they receive preferential treatment or if they do, they think it is the right thing for society. Feminism is a fundamental source of disagreement between young men and women. Ultimately, the young men and women who disagree with preferential treatment represent a significant minority of people who are being ignored and disagree with the direction society is heading.

These findings are reflected in broader society, with a new survey of American men released this year finding support for the statement 'feminism has made America a better place' was over 50 per cent among millennials but dropped below 50 per cent for Generation Z. Additionally, 55 per cent of men in Generation Z agreed that 'in America today, men have it harder than women.'<sup>29</sup>



<sup>29</sup> Gary Barker et al, *State of American men 2023: From crisis and confusion to hope* (Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice, 2023) 18.

## Conclusion

The IPA's *Growing Freedom: Survey of Young Australians 2023* provides a nuanced examination of young people's attitudes to important cultural, social and political issues. The takeaway message is that young people straddle the stereotypical left-right divide. They do not represent a solid left-wing voting bloc. Instead, their attitudes to social and cultural issues are spread across the political spectrum.

### **The data does not show young Australians have deserted the right**

New research published in Australia and across the Western world indicates that most young people are leaving parties which purport to uphold centre-right values and are voting for parties aligned with the left side of politics.<sup>30</sup> This has led to the popular narrative that young people are deserting the right. However, this conclusion is based on two key assumptions. First, that parties which claim to be centre-right are in fact aligned with centre-right values and are clearly distinct from their left-leaning counterparts. And second, that there are no other variables influencing voter decision making such as branding issues, poor messaging or a limited understanding of the policy platform of each party.

The Australian Election Study (AES) data shows support for the Liberal and National parties among Generation Z voters was significantly lower than any other generation of the post-war era. Millennials (born 1981 to 1995) were 12.7 percentage points less likely to vote for the Coalition at their early elections but only eight percentage points less likely to vote for the Coalition by the time they reached their 40s.<sup>31</sup> Generation Z (born 1996 to 2009) voters in their mid-20s are 25.3 percentage points less likely to vote for the Coalition than the average voter.<sup>32</sup> Clearly, young Australian voters have deserted the Coalition in the last few elections. But does it follow that they are deserting the right?

The IPA's *Growing Freedom: Survey of Young Australians 2023* suggests otherwise and provides a more nuanced examination of the situation. It does this by approaching the question of political preference by presenting young Australians with a series of questions about public policy issues. In this way it bypasses voting behaviour, looking instead at what young voters really want in relation to fiscal, cultural and ideological issues. Ultimately, the findings of the survey refute the narrative that most young Australians sit solely on the left side of politics.

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30 Matthew Taylor, *Generation Left: young voters are deserting the right* (Centre for Independent Studies, 2023); Burn-Murdoch, J, 'Millennials are shattering the oldest rule in politics', *Financial Times* (2022): <https://www.ft.com/content/c361e372-769e-45cd-a063-f5c0a7767cf4>; Benson, S, 'Liberals suffer broken heartland as Labor marches in: Newspoll', *The Australian* (2023): <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/liberals-suffer-broken-heartland-as-labor-marches-in-newspoll/news-story/99fbdd1fd7bb6af1ad79f37436daf23c>.

31 Generation Left (2023)

32 Generation Left (2023)

This is good news for parties on the centre-right. There is a clear opportunity to re-engage with young Australians, given a sizeable share hold traditional centre-right values. Adopting policies which reflect these values will help parties like the Liberals and Nationals distinguish themselves from their leftwing rivals, Labor and the Greens. This is important, because when the policy platforms of major parties become too similar it means Australians are being forced to vote on factors other than policy, such as aesthetics, branding, messaging or the personal likeability of candidates.

When centre-right parties fail to stand for centre-right values, it leaves voters, both young and old, effectively disenfranchised. Young Australians are looking for leadership. Forthcoming exit polling on the Voice to Parliament referendum commissioned by the IPA shows that 41 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 voted No and this increases to 46 per cent in the next age bracket. This number started at a much lower base and increased over the campaign as young people were exposed to debate and their views were challenged. This shows there is an opportunity to reach out to younger cohorts and engage with them on the *substance* of political issues.

The IPA's survey reveals that young Australians are not committed to the ideological left. Instead, the majority believe in 'individual freedom' and 'free enterprise', the two hallmark values the federal Liberal Party claims to stand by on its website.<sup>33</sup> The responses given by young Australians to questions about public policy reflect a broad range of political views. Notable among the attitudes of young Australians was a strong desire for home ownership, an inclination towards entrepreneurship and a belief in the need for federal budget repair. Cost-of-living was a top priority and there was a marked preference for small government tempered by a belief that government should reduce income differences. Young Australians are also strongly opposed to censorship, believe that LGBTQ activism has gone too far, and are divided along gender lines on the topic of feminism.

These political preferences broadly align more with the centre-right than the values of the left, indicating that young Australians have not deserted the right.

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33 Liberals, 'Our Beliefs': <https://www.liberal.org.au/our-beliefs>.

# Survey Methodology

The nationwide online survey of n=848 Australians aged 16-25 years of age was conducted by an independent market research agency (Insightfully Pty Ltd) from 28 July to 7 August from multiple panel pools of more than 400,000 Australians.

The survey includes some questions identical to those asked in a survey published by the IPA in 2016, to track young people’s changing views over the past seven years and adds some new questions. The blended panel methodology included direct youth targeting and diverse recruitment channels.

To ensure a representative sample of young Australians completed the survey, quotas targets were applied on age, gender and location. Data were post-weighted based on the latest ABS 2021 Census population statistics by location (metropolitan and regional) within each state, and then individually within states by gender, age and education.

Smaller sub-samples may have varying margins of error and the total sample results are an accurate representation of the views of Australians 16-25 years of age to within +/-3.5 percentage points (at the 95% confidence interval).

## QUESTION 1

Are you:

COLUMN %	TOTAL
Male	51%
Female	48%
Prefer not to say	1%

## QUESTION 2

Which age group do you fall into?

COLUMN %	TOTAL
16-17	19%
18-20	28%
21-25	53%

## QUESTION 3

What is your suburb and postcode?<sup>34</sup>

COLUMN %	TOTAL
NSW	31%
VIC	26%
QLD	21%
WA	10%
TOTAL OTHER STATES	12%
SA	7%
TAS	2%
NT	1%
ACT	2%

<sup>34</sup> Suburb and postcode data was used to determine which state the person was from.

#### QUESTION 4

Would you like to start your own business one day?

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Yes	65%	69%	61%	61%	69%
No	16%	14%	17%	16%	15%
Don't know	19%	17%	22%	23%	16%

#### QUESTION 5

Do you think your generation will be better off, worse off, or about the same as your parents' generation?

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Better off	17%	17%	16%	17%	16%
Worse off	64%	61%	67%	61%	67%
About the same	15%	17%	13%	18%	13%
Don't know	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%

#### QUESTION 6

When do you think you will be able to afford to purchase your own home?

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
0-10 years	32%	33%	31%	30%	33%
11-20 years	32%	35%	30%	37%	29%
21-30 years	18%	17%	19%	22%	15%
Never	10%	8%	13%	9%	11%
I already own my own home	6%	6%	7%	0%	12%
I don't want to own my own home	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%

#### QUESTION 7

If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services with low taxes, or a larger government providing more services with higher taxes?

1. Larger government, more services, higher taxes.
2. Smaller government, few services, lower taxes.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Larger government, more services, higher taxes	44%	44%	43%	43%	44%
Smaller government, fewer services, lower taxes	56%	56%	57%	57%	56%

## QUESTION 8

Which of these statements do you think best describes the federal budget deficit and national debt?

1. It is a major problem that should be addressed now.
2. It is a major problem that should be addressed when the economy is better.
3. It is not much of a problem.
4. Don't know.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
TOTAL MAJOR PROBLEM	82%	83%	81%	80%	84%
It is a major problem that should be addressed now	52%	49%	55%	49%	55%
It is a major problem that should be addressed when the economy is better	30%	33%	26%	31%	29%
It is not much of a problem	4%	6%	3%	4%	5%
Don't know	13%	11%	16%	16%	11%

## QUESTION 9

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

9.1 I think a lot more people today are overly sensitive and likely to take offence at ideas they disagree with.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Agree	83%	87%	79%	85%	81%
Disagree	17%	13%	21%	15%	19%

9.2 Having achieved acceptance in the broader community, some LGBTQ activists have gone too far and are now imposing their views on other Australians.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Agree	63%	73%	53%	65%	61%
Disagree	37%	27%	47%	35%	39%

9.3 Speech which is claimed to have hurt someone's feelings should be censored.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Agree	36%	29%	43%	37%	34%
Disagree	64%	71%	57%	63%	66%

9.4 Governments have a responsibility to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Agree	78%	74%	82%	77%	78%
Disagree	22%	26%	18%	23%	22%



### QUESTION 10

Out of the following, what do you believe the government should prioritise? Please rank in the order from highest to lowest priority.

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
Lowering the cost of living	42%	38%	45%	41%	42%
Housing or rental affordability	18%	16%	21%	17%	20%
Improving mental health	9%	9%	9%	11%	7%
Reducing emissions	9%	8%	10%	12%	6%
Access to a job / job creation	6%	8%	4%	5%	7%
Freedom of speech	5%	7%	3%	3%	7%
National security	5%	6%	3%	5%	4%
Home ownership	4%	6%	3%	5%	4%
Reducing immigration	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%

### QUESTION 11

Do you agree that women today are sometimes given preferential treatment over men when going for a job, pay rise or promotion, and do you think that is right?

COLUMN %	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	16-20	21-25
TOTAL AGREE	45%	59%	30%	43%	47%
Agree, and I think it is right	15%	20%	10%	13%	17%
Agree, and I don't think it is right	30%	39%	21%	29%	30%
I DISAGREE	38%	22%	56%	39%	38%
DON'T KNOW	17%	20%	14%	18%	16%

### QUESTION 12

Just a few final questions now to make sure we have a good mix of responses. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

COLUMN %	TOTAL
School	65%
Certificate 3 or 4, Diploma	18%
University degree	14%
Other / Prefer not to say	3%

### QUESTION 13

For the majority of your primary and secondary schooling did you attend state school (public), private school (independent) or religious (faith-run, e.g. Catholic, Anglican, etc)?

COLUMN %	TOTAL
PUBLIC	61%
TOTAL NON-PUBLIC	38%
Private / independent	25%
Religious / faith-run	13%
UNSURE	1%

### QUESTION 14

And finally, which one of the following best describes your current work status?

COLUMN %	TOTAL
TOTAL EMPLOYED	62%
Employed full-time (more than 35 hours per week)	23%
Employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week)	23%
Casually employed	14%
Business owner / Self-employed	2%
TOTAL NOT EMPLOYED	38%
Unemployed	8%
Home duties	3%
Student	27%
Other	0%

## About the Institute of Public Affairs

The Institute of Public Affairs is an independent, non-profit public policy think tank, dedicated to preserving and strengthening the foundations of economic and political freedom. Since 1943, the IPA has been at the forefront of the political and policy debate, defining the contemporary political landscape. The IPA is funded by individual memberships, as well as individual and corporate donors.

The IPA supports the free market of ideas, the free flow of capital, a limited and efficient government, evidence-based public policy, the rule of law, and representative democracy. Throughout human history, these ideas have proven themselves to be the most dynamic, liberating and exciting. Our researchers apply these ideas to the public policy questions which matter today.

## About the author

**Brianna McKee** is a Research Fellow and National Manager for Generation Liberty at the Institute of Public Affairs. Prior to joining the IPA in 2022, she worked for two years at Sky News Australia, first as a Digital Producer before being promoted to Digital Reporter. During her time in journalism, Brianna engaged with complex political events on a daily basis, writing news stories about matters of domestic and international significance. Sydney born and bred, Brianna studied at Campion College Australia from 2017-2019 and received a bachelor's degree in the Liberal Arts, graduating top of her class.

