



# Gen Z at the Ballot Box

Young Australian's Voices on Politics

# Executive Summary:

## The Y's Research on the Influence of Young Australians in the Next Election.



Since our founding in 1844, the Y has been dedicated to supporting young people. Our commitment spans diverse initiatives, from Youth Parliaments to early childhood education to alternative schooling, ensuring that young Australians have a voice in shaping the future.

We believe that, particularly during election periods, it is crucial to prioritise the perspectives of children and young people. As a community, we have a responsibility to listen to their concerns and integrate them into the national conversation.

In collaboration with the Redbridge Group and Monash University, the Y has conducted a major research project to explore the influence of young Australians in the upcoming election. Key research questions include:

- Where will young Australians have the greatest impact on the voting outcome?
- What are their primary concerns?
- Which policies on offer resonate most with them, particularly regarding housing and inflation?
- Do Gen Z Australians feel confident that the government will act in their interests?
- Who are they most likely to support at the polls?

### The research reveals young voters

- are concentrated in some highly contested electorates so their votes will be significant in determining who wins the election.
- hold priority issues that are cost of living, housing, healthcare, climate change, crime, education, job security, economic inequality, and career advancement opportunities.
- have strong views on some of the policies on offer on housing affordability and the cost of living.
- have low confidence in the major parties' ability to address their top concerns especially on the issues of housing affordability and the cost of living.
- have mixed views on voting, with nearly half saying they would not or may not vote if it wasn't compulsory.

This research highlights the critical need for political leaders to engage with and respond to the concerns of young Australians to ensure their voices are heard and their issues addressed in the upcoming and following elections.

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# Y Australia:

## Empowering Children, Young People, and Communities for a Better Future



Y Australia is a proud member of the global YMCA, a Movement dedicated to children, young people, and communities in 120 countries across the world.

We operate across every state and territory in Australia with a reach spanning over 680 communities, employing 12,300 staff members, and facilitating more than 16 million visits to our programs and facilities annually. We are committed to empowering individuals from all backgrounds to achieve their full potential with dignity.

The mission of our not-for-profit is to empower children, young people, and communities throughout Australia to build a just, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive world where everyone can thrive in body, mind, and spirit.

Y Australia is made up of 12 Member Y's, each governed by a local voluntary Board of Directors elected by Members. This structure allows us to maintain local relevance while making a broader impact. Our collective efforts are guided by our bold vision: to create systemic change for a better world with and for young people. This vision is supported by four strategic pillars:

- **Community Wellbeing**
- **Meaningful Work**
- **Sustainable Planet**
- **Just World**

The Y provides a wide range of programs and services aimed at supporting children and young people throughout their lives. Our offerings include youth leadership, empowerment, and civic education programs, all designed to help young individuals become engaged and active members of their communities.

Among our key initiatives is the Youth Parliament program, which provides young Australians the opportunity to raise their voices and be heard in state and territory Parliament chambers, empowering the next generation of leaders.

### **Acknowledgements**

Y Australia acknowledges the critical contributions to this work from the RedBridge Group and Monash University Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice. Particular thanks go to Simon Welsh, Alex Fein and Kosmos Samaras at RedBridge, and Professor Lucas Walsh, Dr Bao Hyunh and Dr Zihong Deng at Monash.

# About the Survey

This report presents the first phase of analysis from research conducted by the Redbridge Group, with a primary focus on Generation Z (Australians born between 1997 and 2012).

The research investigates the voting priorities of young Australians, going beyond traditional party alignment to understand their core concerns, preferred policy responses, and their level of confidence that government will act on these issues.

## Scope and Methodology

Redbridge undertook a two-stage research process:

- **Qualitative Phase:** Four focus groups were conducted in December last year to explore emerging themes and perspectives.
- **Quantitative Phase:** A national survey of 2,000 Australians under the age of 30 was conducted, offering a robust dataset for analysis.

Notably, 50% of survey respondents reside in 30 marginal electorates with a high concentration of young voters. These electorates are the primary focus of this report due to the significant impact young voters are expected to have on their outcomes—and, by extension, on the overall election result.

Further detail on Methodology has been provided at the end of the report.

## Focus on Young Voters in Marginal Seats

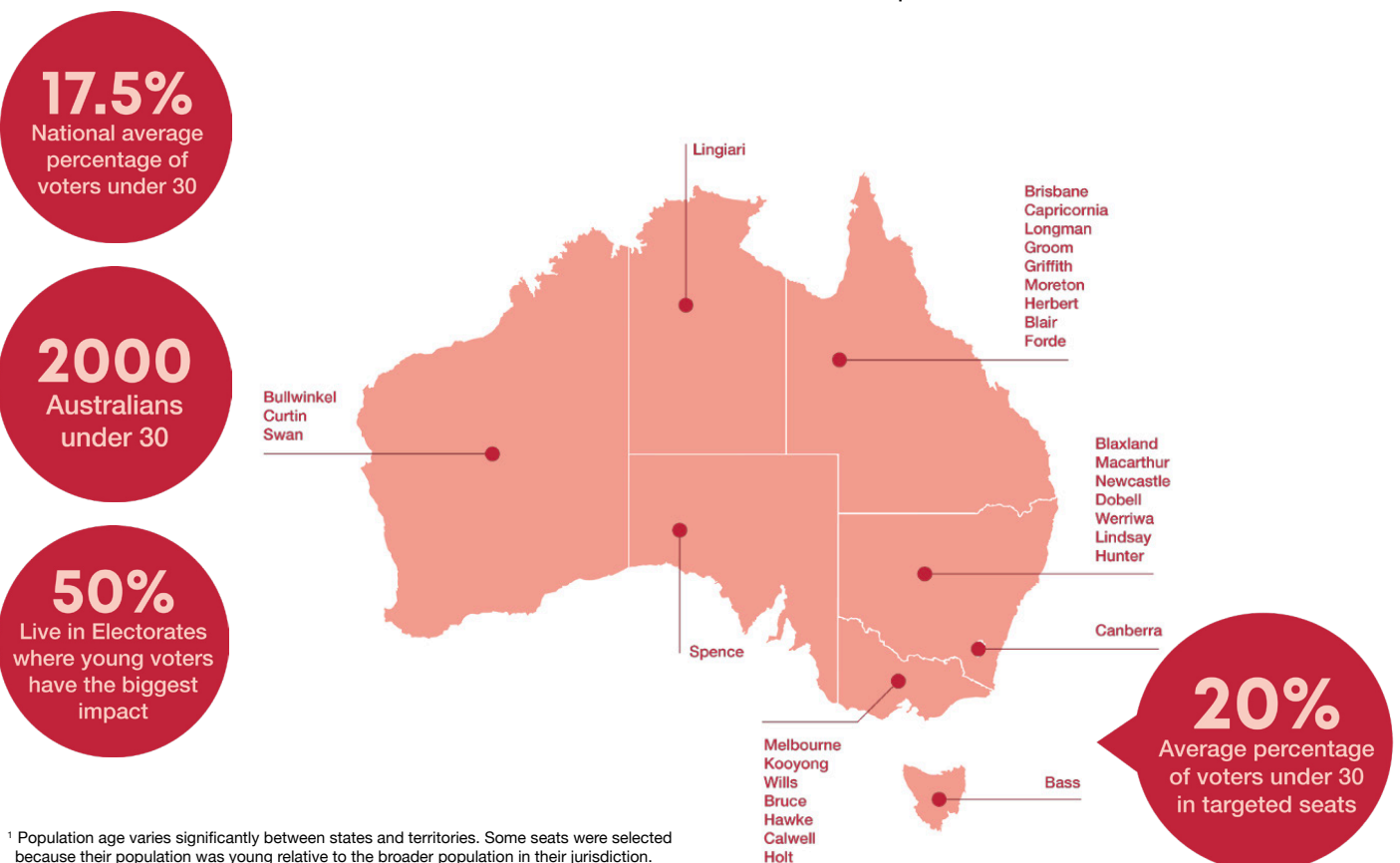
Young Australians under 30 make up 17.5% of the national voting population, but their representation is even greater in the selected, averaging 20%, and reaching as high as 26%. This was a key focus for our research. The demographic weight underscores the potential of Gen Z to influence the outcome of the federal election.

These electorates represent the frontline of generational change in Australian politics. Understanding the concerns, priorities, and engagement levels of young voters in these seats is essential for political parties and policymakers seeking to respond effectively to the emerging electorate of the next decade.

### The selection of these electorates was guided by the following criteria:

- High proportions of voters aged 18–29
- Electoral margins indicating competitive contests
- Geographical diversity, spanning all states and territories<sup>1</sup>
- Representation from regional, outer suburban, and inner metropolitan areas

By targeting these electorates, the research provides insights into the policy priorities and political engagement of young voters in the places where they will be most impactful.



<sup>1</sup> Population age varies significantly between states and territories. Some seats were selected because their population was young relative to the broader population in their jurisdiction. For example, the under 30 cohort in all Tasmania seats is smaller than the national average.

# Policy Priorities of Gen Z

## Key Findings

This section outlines the key policy concerns of young Australians, as identified in the Redbridge research.

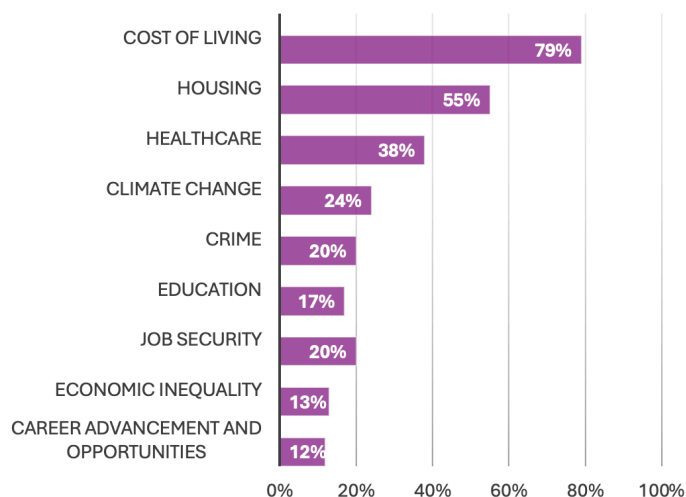
The findings carry significant implications for political leaders: while young people are highly engaged with policy issues, their traditional loyalties to political parties are diminishing. Political parties that present credible, practical solutions aligned with the priorities of young Australians are more likely to secure their support.

The research indicates that young people are deeply invested in a range of policy areas. However, their attachment to political parties is weakening. This shift highlights a growing openness among young voters to support candidates and parties that address their concerns with practical, forward-thinking policies—regardless of traditional party lines.

Confidence in these findings is reinforced by their consistency with other respected sources, including Mission Australia's Youth Survey and the Monash University Youth Barometer. Across these studies, young Australians consistently identify the following issues as top priorities:

- Cost of living
- Climate change
- Mental health
- Crime
- Education
- Economic inequality

This alignment underscores the reliability and relevance of the current survey results.



### Housing: A Critical Concern for 18–29 Year Olds

While all studies highlight similar themes, this survey—focused on the 18 to 29 age group—shows housing as an even higher priority. This reflects the unique pressures faced by young adults transitioning into full independence and financial responsibility.

### Gender Differences in Priorities

Further analysis reveals notable gender differences in policy concerns. Young women are more likely than young men to prioritise:

- Healthcare
- Cost of living
- Housing affordability

These distinctions suggest the need for targeted policy responses that consider the diverse experiences within the broader Gen Z demographic.

### Insights from Monash:

Poverty is more pronounced for young women than young men.<sup>i</sup>

In general, health and wellbeing relate to other areas of young people's lives.<sup>ii</sup>

Young people see cost of living, housing affordability and health as interconnected.<sup>iii</sup>



# Cost of Living

## Key Findings

The cost of living emerged as a top concern among young Australians, though the level of concern varies across different demographic groups. While high across the board, it is especially acute among young women, university-educated individuals, and those born overseas.

### Demographic Variations in Concern

The data reveals that concern about the cost of living is not uniform:

- Young women report higher levels of stress related to everyday expenses.
- University-educated respondents express heightened anxiety, potentially reflecting expectations around future economic stability and career pathways.

Overseas-born young people show particular vulnerability, perhaps due to limited support networks and potential systemic barriers to economic participation.

### Support for Solutions: A Shift in Attitudes

Notably, the research highlights a significant shift in public sentiment around economic solutions. Despite decades of market-oriented policy approaches, there is strong bipartisan support for price controls, a finding that cuts across traditional party lines.

Both Labor and Coalition voters show comparable levels of support for measures aimed at directly regulating the cost of essential goods and services.

### Relevance to Current Election Commitments

These findings provide important context for interpreting recent election commitments:

- Labor’s focus on strengthening Medicare aligns with broad concerns around affordability in essential services.
- The Coalition’s emphasis on reducing fuel prices similarly addresses a universal and immediate cost pressure.
- The Greens’ advocacy for rent controls resonates with younger voters facing rising housing costs.
- In summary, the cost of living is not only a dominant issue for young Australians—it is also a key area where traditional ideological divides appear to be softening.

Voters are prioritising practical, tangible solutions over party orthodoxy, signalling a new era of policy expectations from the next generation of voters.

### Insights from Monash:

In 2023-24, 15–24-year-olds were more likely to delay getting, or go without, prescription medication than those aged 85 and over when needed due to cost (12.3% vs 2.4%). Those aged 25-34 years were more likely than those aged 85+ to delay or not consult a GP when needed due to cost (15.4% vs 1.6%).<sup>iv</sup>

45%

Support providing free healthcare, including GP visits, dental and mental health

56%

Support controlling price increases on essential goods and services (e.g. food, rent, utilities)

32%

Support cutting interest rates

40%

Support stopping price gouging by big business

“health care is ridiculously expensive. I know that when I have health concerns I definitely put it off because \$150.00 for a doctors visit is just crazy”

Survey Participant

# Housing Affordability: Key Findings

Housing affordability continues to be a critical concern for young Australians, particularly among certain demographic and political segments.

The concern with housing affordability is strong across cohorts but, but even more so among women, renters and voters supporting the Greens and other minor party voters.

Despite different political affiliations, there is strong, cross-party support for two key policy approaches:

- Restricting foreign investment in residential property with slightly higher support from LNP-leaning voters<sup>2</sup>
- Increased housing supply through new construction, with slightly higher approval among Labor and Greens voters.

## Relevance to Current Election Commitments

These findings offer a useful lens for interpreting current policy commitments across the political spectrum:

- The Coalition's proposal to restrict overseas student numbers aligns with concerns around external pressures on housing demand.

- Labor's National Housing Fund reflects a commitment to expanding supply, particularly in social and affordable housing sectors.
- The Greens' strong focus on renters resonates with the growing population of young Australians in this cohort.

In summary, housing affordability is a defining issue for young voters in this election cycle. The data points to strong support for a number of solutions. While this presents an opportunity for political leaders, there is also a significant challenge to gaining the confidence of Gen Z on housing that will be explored further in this report.

## Insights from Monash:

Older generations are more likely to have been home owners by the ages of 25–29 than younger generations.v While 65.8% of Baby Boomers owned a home (either with or without a mortgage) in 1991 when they were aged 25–39, this decreased to 54.6% of Millennials in 2021.vi



39%

Support increased rights for renters

37%

Support the mandatory provision of social or affordable homes in new developments

“For my generation hopelessness surrounds ever owning a home”

Survey Participant

49%

Support Government building more social and affordable housing

45%

Support stopping foreign investors from buying homes in Australia

37%

Support reducing tax breaks for property investors such as negative gearing

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that both major parties have committed to a two year ban on foreign investors purchasing houses

# Voting Intention: Key Findings

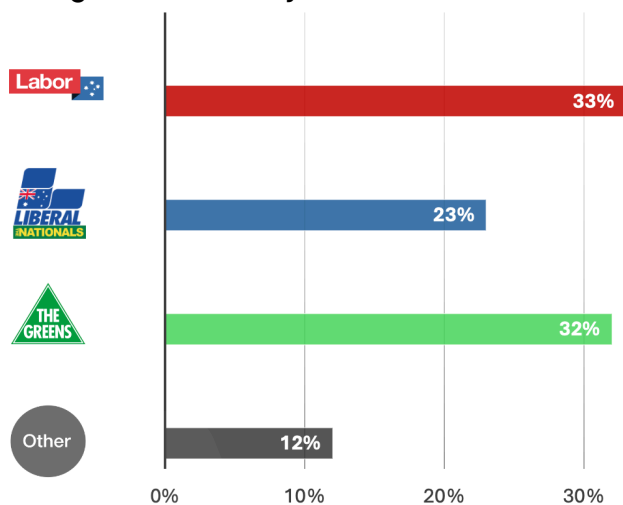
While this research is primarily focused on understanding the policy priorities of young Australians rather than direct party alignment, voting intention remains a valuable indicator of political engagement and ideological leanings within the under-30 demographic.

It's a long-established truism that younger voters tend to lean more progressively. This is confirmed in contrasting the RedBridge research with national polling trends for the general population observed across polls.

While support for the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is relatively consistent comparing Gen Z with the broader population, two key variations stand out:

- Support for the Coalition is about a third lower among Gen Z voters compared to the general population
- Support for the Greens is nearly three times higher among Gen Z than in the broader electorate.

## Voting intention in key seats:



However when we look deeper at age and gender segments in the research there are some important variations.

Despite overall lower support for the Coalition among Gen Z, the data reveals a notable distinction within the age spectrum. Coalition support is significantly higher among 18–21 year olds than among those aged 22–29.

This could indicate the early formation of more conservative voting habits in younger voters or the continued influence of parental views at a formative stage of political identity development.

Whether this is a long-term trend or a temporary effect remains an important question for future research.

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping voting intention:

- Support for Labor is relatively equal among young men and women.
- However, young women show substantially higher support for the Greens (39%) compared to young men (24%).
- Conversely, young men demonstrate considerably higher support for the Coalition (29%) compared to young women (17%).

## Implications for Political Leaders

These findings reinforce the importance of engaging younger voters—across all political affiliations—not only on the basis of party loyalty but through credible, issue-driven platforms.

For conservative parties in particular, the data suggests there is a receptive younger audience, especially among the 18–21 age group. Building sustained engagement with these voters will require attention to the policy areas they care most about—such as housing, cost of living, climate change, and education—rather than assuming traditional messaging will suffice.

In summary, voting intention among young Australians is complex and rapidly evolving.

While the broader trend leans progressive, there are emerging dynamics around age and gender that offer opportunities for tailored political engagement across the spectrum.

## Insights from Monash:

Young people engage in a wide range of issue-based forms of participation, rather than out of a sense of obligation to democratic institutions such as political parties. Many actively participate in activist organisations, social movements and other initiatives on issues that concern them, such as climate change.<sup>vii</sup>

# Gen Z's Vote of No Confidence

A critical insight emerging from this research is the disconnect between the policy priorities of young Australians and their confidence in government to deliver on them. This gap is especially pronounced in the two areas identified as most urgent by respondents: housing affordability and the cost of living.

Despite being the top concerns for Gen Z voters, housing and cost of living are also the areas where young people express the lowest levels of confidence in the government's ability to take meaningful action.

This trend is consistent across political affiliations and demographic segments within the under-30 cohort.

## Implications for Political Leaders

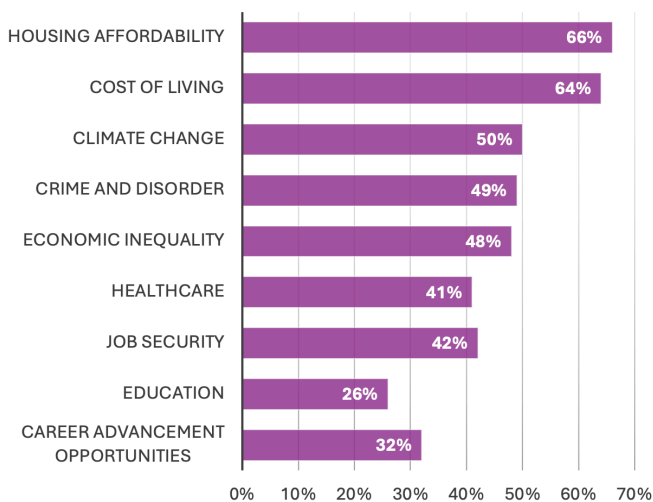
This lack of confidence is not rooted in ideology or party alignment—it stems from a broader perception that governments have not effectively delivered on these critical issues. This insight reinforces the importance of tangible outcomes: for young Australians, delivery drives trust.

## The Path Forward: Rebuilding Confidence through Action

The findings suggest a clear opportunity for political parties and leaders: those who begin to deliver credible, measurable results on housing and cost of living will be best positioned to earn the trust and support of Gen Z voters.

This generation is issue-driven and results-oriented—policy announcements alone are not enough. Demonstrated progress is essential to building long-term confidence and political engagement.

In conclusion, bridging the trust gap among young Australians will require a shift from promises to performance. For any party seeking to win over Gen Z, policy delivery—not rhetoric—will be the decisive factor.



## Insights from Monash:

Longitudinal research shows that young adults have a low level of confidence in key political institutions. Two main criticisms are a lack of leadership displayed by politicians and a disconnection between politicians and Australian citizens.<sup>viii</sup>

**“When I think of politics, I think it’s such a stereotype that it’s middle aged, wealthy men, and you think about what do they know about the cost of living crisis that we’re going through”**

Survey Participant

# Commitment to Voting: A Challenge for Our Democracy

One of the more concerning findings from this research relates to the level of commitment young Australians feel toward voting—particularly in a hypothetical scenario where voting is not compulsory. In this scenario, only 55% would probably or definitely vote.

When asked whether they would vote if it were not compulsory, the responses varied significantly across geographic, educational, and political lines:

- **Highest commitment to voting was observed among:**
  - Young people living in inner metropolitan areas
  - University degree holders
  - Greens voters, with 70% saying they would vote voluntarily
- **Lowest commitment was found among:**
  - Young Australians in rural and regional areas, where willingness drops to between 64% and 51%
  - Those with education levels below Year 12
  - Older Gen Z voters, enthusiasm to vote peaks at 18-21 and declines at 26-29

These patterns are likely to be a reflection of broader themes identified in the research, particularly the low levels of trust in government to act on key issues such as housing and the cost of living. When young people do not believe their voices will lead to meaningful change, their motivation to participate in the democratic process naturally declines.

## Broader Implications for Democracy

This finding presents a significant challenge—not only for elected leaders and political institutions, but for civil society as a whole. As compulsory voting masks deeper disengagement, the question becomes urgent: How can we rebuild trust and inspire participation among the next generation of voters?

## Call to Action

Reversing this trend will require a whole of community effort, one that includes:

- Governments delivering on core policy concerns
- Supporting opportunities for young Australians to understand and engage in the political process
- Community leaders and educators promoting civic awareness and agency
- Political parties engaging meaningfully with young people, beyond election cycles.

The future health of Australia’s democracy depends not only on maintaining high voter turnout, but on ensuring that young Australians see voting as a meaningful and impactful act.

Rebuilding this belief is a shared responsibility—and one that demands immediate attention.

## Insights from Monash:

The lower commitment to voting reflects lower confidence in democracy. In 2024, Australians aged 18–44 (65%) were less likely than Australians aged over 45 (79%) to say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. This gap that has widened since 2022.<sup>ix</sup>



# Overall, only 55% would probably or definitely vote.

Key finding

# Methodology

This report is based on both qualitative and quantitative research conducted to understand the views, concerns, and political engagement of young Australians aged 18 to 29. The research involved a combination of focus groups and surveys, designed to gather insights from a representative cross-section of the target age group across multiple states and territories. Below is a summary of the methodology employed.

## Focus Group Research

Four online (Zoom) focus groups were conducted in December 2024, comprising participants aged 18–29. The groups were designed to explore a range of topics related to young Australians’ concerns, attitudes, and political views. Each group had specific demographic and geographic characteristics:

- **Group 1:** Mixed-gender, university-educated participants working in service/caring or business/technical professions, or full-time university students. These participants were from the inner/middle suburbs of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, and were predominantly renters.
- **Group 2:** Female participants with vocational or high school education, living in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, with some participants speaking a language other than English at home.
- **Group 3:** Male participants with vocational or high school education, living in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, with some participants speaking a language other than English at home.
- **Group 4:** Mixed-gender, including those with university, vocational, or high school education, living in regional Australia. These participants were drawn from federal electorates in Tasmania (Bass, Braddon), Victoria (Indi, Nicholls, Gippsland), New South Wales (Calare, Riverina, Farrer), and Queensland (Flynn, Capricornia, Dawson, Herbert, Kennedy).

## Focus Group Objectives

The focus groups aimed to explore several key areas:

- Broader attitudinal landscape and top-of-mind concerns of young Australians
- Confidence in their future and sense of community connection
- Perceptions of effective political representation and the values that characterize such leadership

- Confidence in Australia’s democratic system and the ability of government institutions to deliver on youth concerns
- Opinions on the Australian bureaucracy and whether it reflects the values and priorities of young people
- Insights into governance or policy models from overseas that may be applicable to Australia

## Survey Research

The quantitative component of the research involved two surveys, both targeting young voters aged 18–29:

1. **National Survey:** A nationally representative sample of 1,012 young voters aged 18–29, conducted to capture a broad understanding of the views and political priorities of young Australians.
2. **Key Seat Survey:** A survey of 1,000 young voters living in 30 Commonwealth electoral divisions with large concentrations of young voters. These seats were specifically targeted due to their high relevance to upcoming elections, based on their youth demographics.

The fieldwork for both surveys took place between Tuesday, 18 February and Friday, 28 February 2024, and respondents were recruited through an online panel. Quotas for age, gender, location, and education were applied to ensure the samples were representative of young voters both nationally and within the selected key seats.

## Sampling and Weighting

To ensure representativeness, rimb weighting was applied to both the nationally representative and key seat samples, adjusting for key demographic factors such as age, gender, education, religion, and location. The weight efficiency for both samples was as follows:

- National sample: 77%
- Key seat sample: 76%

This weighting provided an effective sample size of 781 for the national sample and 761 for the key seat sample.

# Methodology

## Margin of Error

Based on the effective sample sizes, the margin of error for a 50% result at a 95% confidence interval is:

- National sample:  $\pm 3.5\%$
- Key seat sample:  $\pm 3.6\%$

It is important to note that the margin of error is larger for subgroups (e.g., gender or location). Results based on these subgroups should be interpreted with caution, especially for small sample sizes.

This methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the attitudes and political priorities of young Australians, offering valuable insights into their concerns and the factors that may influence their voting behavior in the coming elections.

## Respondent Demographics

### Age Distribution

Participants were evenly spread across the three sub-groups within the 18–29 age range:

- 18–21 years: 29%
- 22–25 years: 36%
- 26–29 years: 35%

### Education Levels

Respondents reflected a broad spectrum of educational attainment:

- University degree holders: 24%
- TAFE or vocational qualifications: 29%
- Year 12 completion: 40%
- Less than Year 12: 7%

### Employment Status

The majority of respondents are actively engaged in the workforce:

- Full-time employment: 51%
- Part-time employment: 34%

- Not currently working: 15%

## Household Income

Household income levels among respondents highlight a skew toward lower to middle income brackets, which is consistent with broader national trends for this age group:

- \$3,000+ per week: 21%
- \$2,000–\$2,999 per week: 16%
- \$1,000–\$1,999 per week: 38%
- Less than \$1,000 per week: 17%
- Prefer not to say: 8%

## Relationship Status

A variety of relationship structures are represented:

- Married or living with a partner: 34%
- In a relationship but living apart: 18%
- Single: 48%

## Additional Demographic Characteristics

- Speak a language other than English at home: 8%
- Born overseas: 10%
- Identify as LGBT+: 16%
- Parent or guardian of children: 19%
- Home ownership: 35%
- Renting or other housing arrangements: 65%

