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Same-sex marriage not on voters' radar: True Issues survey by JWS Research finds



The same-sex marriage debate doesn't keep voters up at night. David Rowe



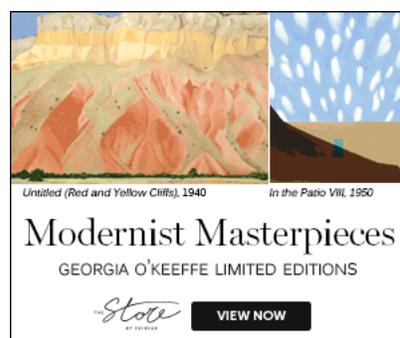
by Phillip Coorey

The federal government [may be imploding over same-sex marriage](#) but new research shows the issue is well down the list when it comes to what keeps voters awake at night.

The latest *True Issues* quarterly survey by JWS Research shows while health, education and the economy continue to be the top three concerns, worries over terrorism and the [cost of living](#) – fuelled by a [spike in energy prices](#) – are surging.

Same-sex marriage is a relatively niche issue, cited by 6 per cent of voters as an area of concern.

The survey, conducted about every four months, samples the views of 1250 voters. It determines which areas of policy are regarded as the most important, which specific sub-issues in each of these policy areas concern them, and asks them to grade the government's performance.



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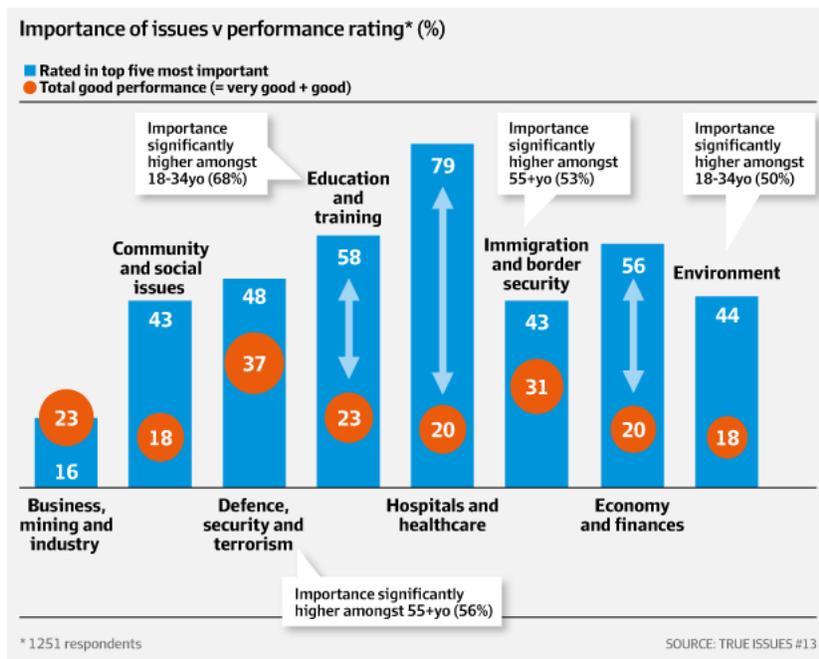
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The latest survey finds "Hospitals and Health Care" is again the top issue of importance, as rated by 79 per cent of voters, followed by "Education and Training" at 58 per cent, and the "Economy and Finances" (56 per cent).

Within Economy and Finances, the cost of living remains the dominant concern, especially energy costs and affordability.

Almost one third of those who cited the Economy and Finances as an area of importance mentioned energy costs as a sub-issue. Concern was highest among those aged over 55 years.

Since the last *True Issues* survey in March, the issue of "Defence, Security and Terrorism" has leapt into the top five issues of importance, coming in fourth at 48 per cent. It was rated at 42 per cent in March.

The poll was taken a week before [Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced the government would establish a super ministry of Home Affairs](#) to co-ordinate the various federal agencies responsible for national security and after the spate of terror atrocities in the United Kingdom – the Manchester suicide bombing and the London Bridge attacks – and before the weekend arrests in Sydney in relation to an alleged plot to blow up a plane.

Within the category of Defence, Security and Terrorism, the sub-issue terrorism is the dominant concern, cited by 58 per cent, an increase of 12 percentage points since March.

When it comes to rating the government's performance in the key areas of concern, Defence, Security and Terrorism continues to be the highest performing area at 37 per cent, followed by Immigration and Border Security (31 per cent).

While just 23 per cent rate the government's handling of Education and Training, this is an increase of four points since March, which JWS's managing director John Scales attributed to the passage in June of the government's Gonski 2.0 school funding increase of \$24 billion over a decade.

"The approval of [Gonski 2.0](#) through the Senate appears to be welcomed by the electorate, with the government performance on education increasing four points since March amid heightened concerns around school funding," he said.

The fifth-highest area of importance is Environment and Climate change, rising four points since March to 44 per cent, but the government receives a lowly performance rating of 18 per cent.

"Australians are waiting for action on the environment and climate change," said Mr Scales.

The results vindicate the frustrations of many inside government that this week's brouhaha over same-sex marriage is hurting the government if only because it has stopped it focusing on the issues voters regard as important.

Those arguing the issue should be resolved next week, say they are pushing for a vote to get it off the agenda and end the distraction. Those opposed to same-sex marriage accuse the rebels of scuttling the government's agenda this week, which was a focus on national security, the economy and domestic issues in Western Australia.

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