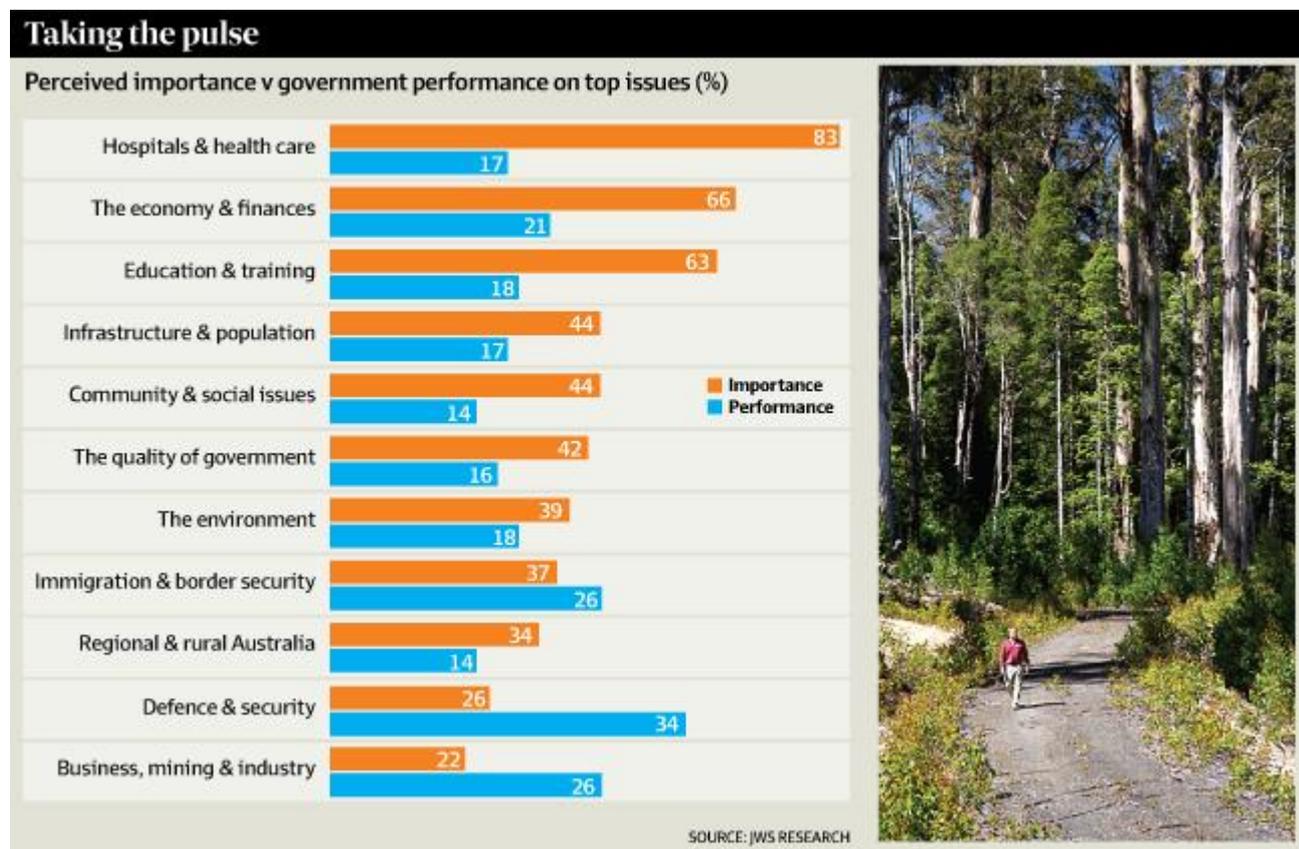


# Voters mark down government on health, economy, education

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Voters do not feel the government is focusing on the areas they consider to be most important – health, the economy and education – according to a comprehensive new analysis that is a wake-up call for the Coalition.

The analysis finds that the level of public concern about perceived ABC bias, an area of significant government focus in recent months, is next to negligible. Only 1 per cent of the 44 per cent of voters who cited community and social issues as important singled out the ABC as one of those issues.

While the voters feel the government has excelled in border protection, and they have accepted its tough stance towards industry assistance, they marked down the government's performance in the areas they consider most important.

The True Issues analysis by JWS Research, which paints a snapshot of the government's performance six months into its tenure, finds the initial burst of confidence and optimism that followed last year's federal election has largely receded.

Concerns over the cost of living, the strength of the national economy, wages and employment have slumped to the pre-election levels when Labor was in power.

“[The data] depicts a downward spiral in attitudes toward the economy, leadership and policy on a range of issues,” the analysis says. “While attitudes rebounded somewhat after the federal election, a perceived lack of progress and government stalemate on key policy concerns has seen a return to pre-election levels and below.”

JWS Research director John Scales, one of Australia’s foremost political pollsters, conducts the True Issues polling about three times a year.

The latest survey sampled the views of 1000 voters during the first week of March. It follows the last True Issues survey in November last year, and the one before that in June, when Labor was in government.

When asked what were the top five issues in terms of importance, 83 per cent listed hospitals and healthcare, 66 per cent cited the economy and finances, 63 per cent cited education and training, 44 per cent said infrastructure and population, and 44 per cent nominated community and social issues.

### **SIGNIFICANT DISCONNECT BETWEEN IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE**

The survey found there was a “significant disconnect” between perceived importance and the government’s performance on each issue.

Just 17 per cent rated the government’s performance on hospitals and health care, 21 per cent rated it on the economy and finances, and 18 per cent on education and training.

When economy and finances were broken down, 64 per cent cited the cost of living as the chief concern, while 34 per cent cited the strength of the economy and 31 per cent cited wages and employment.

In all three cases, fears concerning these issues had all increased since November and were back to around June levels.

Mr Scales said it was significant that out of the issues that most concerned voters, business, mining and industry was a lowly 10th. At the same time, the government was perceived to be doing a better job in this area than Labor.

“This would suggest that the government has effectively managed to dissociate itself from some of the job losses coming out of business and industry, and perhaps it is having some success with its messaging around breaking the handout culture mentality of business and industry,” he said.

The downside to this was that the mounting manufacturing job losses were fuelling the unease over the government’s economic performance.

While the government spent much of this week focused on its war on red tape, just 8 per cent of the 22 per cent who rated business, mining and industry as an issue of importance cited red tape as a concern.

The future of manufacturing and the carbon and mining taxes were the top three concerns in this category.

Mr Scales said the “real success story” for the government so far had been immigration and border security. The government’s rating on the issue has jumped from 12 per cent in June, to 17 per cent in November, to 26 per cent in March.

However, the upshot is that the issue has slid down the ladder in terms of importance to voters and rates eight out of 10, and it risks further receding from voter consciousness.

Under Labor, it was a top-five issue of concern.