



**TRUE ISSUES®**

**FIND OUT  
WHAT THEY'RE  
THINKING.**

May 2024



JWS RESEARCH



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# Immigration and border security keeps growing in focus while cost of living remains a top concern for 80%



In May 2024, cost of living clearly holds as the dominant issue Australians want the Federal Government to focus on. Unprompted, a majority (55%) of adults continue to name **cost of living** in their top three most important issues or concerns, and 80% place cost of living in their top five from a prompted list.

Renters (86%) and those aged 35-54 years (85%) are even more likely to cite cost of living as a top issue compared with Australians overall. Cost of living has now consistently been a top issue for more than 70% of Australians since August 2022, thus nearly the full duration of the Albanese Government. The gap between cost of living and the next most dominant issue has been at least 20 points since June 2023.

**Hospitals, healthcare and ageing** (58%) and **housing and interest rates** (55%) are the next most important prompted issues. Both of these areas, while well beneath cost of living in depth of concern, are nominated at least twice the rate of much lower issues that still make the Top 10, such as energy (24%), education (24%), immigration (24%) and provision of public services (21%).

May 2024 sees hospitals, healthcare and ageing cited even more often among women (8 points higher than overall), and people living in regional Australia (7 points higher).

Housing and interest rates is an even higher rated issue for younger adults aged 18-34 (12 points higher than overall) and sits as the second most important issue for younger Australians after cost of living.

High profile news coverage of violent events in Sydney has likely impacted on the latest top prompted issues results relating to **terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism** (up 4 points).

**Immigration and border security** is now a top five issue for 24% of people. It sits as equal 7<sup>th</sup> overall of the issues they want the Government to focus on. While the 3 point increase in this survey is not significant, in June of last year only 15% regarded immigration as a top five priority. The real challenge for the Albanese Government however is how they are now seen as performing on immigration and border security relative to a year ago. In June 2023 they had an immigration performance score of 51. This placed it at the time in the top handful of issues in terms of perceived performance. Today immigration is down to an index score of 42. This slide now places it as 7<sup>th</sup> lowest area of government performance out of the 22 areas we consistently test in True Issues.

Addressing the **environment and climate change** (17% unprompted, 29% prompted mentions) has moderated in recent months with this issue dropping in mentions by 4 points across both categories.

# Government performance has slightly improved but views on the direction of national economy low and flatlined



The latest results have seen a halt to the trend slide in the public's rating of the **Federal Government's performance** overall, having ticked up 2 points in May to sit at an index score of 47. But negative concerns about the **direction of the national economy** are very low and sit at a pessimistic rating of minus 20 points for the third consecutive survey. Asked if the national economy is headed in the right or wrong direction Australians have now consistently responded with a net negative double-digit rating since August 2022.

Sentiment that the national economy is heading in the wrong direction has especially grown in **Victoria** where it has seen an 8 point worsening. Pessimism about the national economy has also jumped among 18-34 year olds (5 points) and people in households earning above \$200,000 (5 points).

More people also now believe **their own state or territory economy** has taken a turn for the worse and is heading in the wrong direction. From February to May the net negative score drop on people's view about their own state or territory economy sunk a further 7 points to sit down at minus 15, only marginally above the national result. This has coincided with several challenging state budgets.

Since February, **Victorians** have registered a 5 point growth in perceiving their own economy as heading the wrong way, **Western Australians** a 7 point jump and **South Australians** a 12 point increase in pessimism.

Australians see the direction of travel of **their own personal situation** (3 point drop), their local community (5 point drop) and the circumstances of business and industry (3% drop) to all be on the slide compared with earlier this year.

The Federal Government's performance on dealing with **cost of living** remains a major weakness, with an index score of only 26, a minor 1 point improvement. **Housing and interest rates** is still rated dimly for Government performance at 30, though up 2 points.

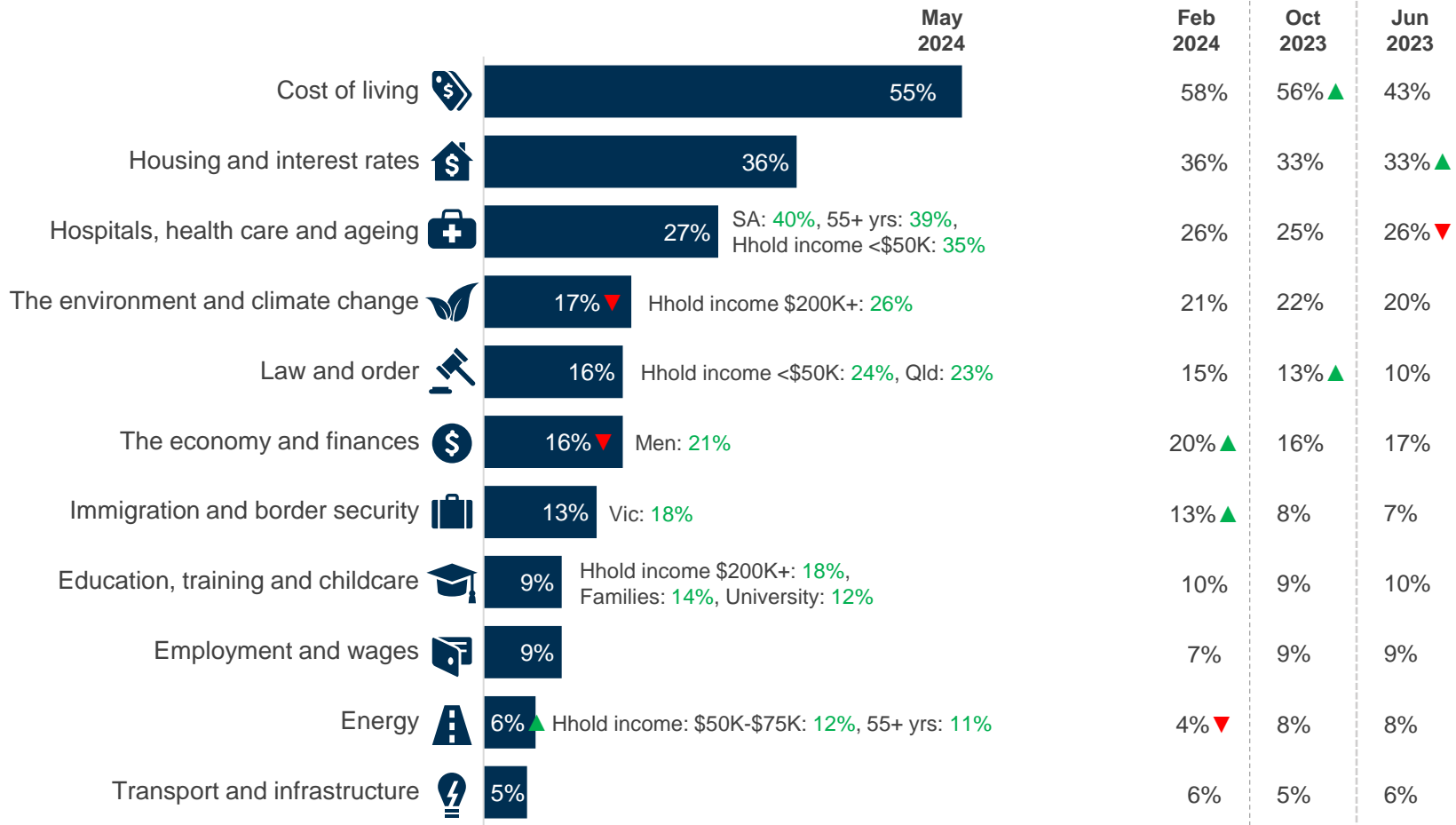
The Government continues to be regarded as performing strongly on **innovation, science and technology** (index score of 52), **mining and resources** (52 index score) as well as **defence and security** (51 index score). It has also registered a 50 point index score on dealing with **business and industry** and on **foreign affairs and trade**, both down a minor 1 point.

Public views on the performance of **their local council** (50 index score), **their state or territory government** (48 index score) and **business and industry** (55 index score) have remained largely unchanged.

# Cost of living remains the lead concern while the environment and economy are less top of mind this quarter



Most important issues the Australian Government should focus on  
(Up to 3 issues – unprompted^)



^ Note: Issues mentioned among 4% or fewer not shown.

Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.

Significantly ▲ higher / ▼ lower than previous True Issues wave at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. What are the most important issues that you think the Australian Government should focus on? These would be the issues or problems that personally interest or concern you the most. Please describe up to three separate issues in the text boxes below.

Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).

# Cost of living still holds over 20-point gap to next biggest prompted issue as concern about extremism grows



## Most important issues the Australian Government should focus on (Top 5 most important – prompted)



\* including The Voice' added June-October 2023.

Significantly ▲ higher / ▼ lower than previous True Issues wave at the 95% confidence interval.

Q. From the following list, please select the five most important issues you think the Australian Government should focus on.

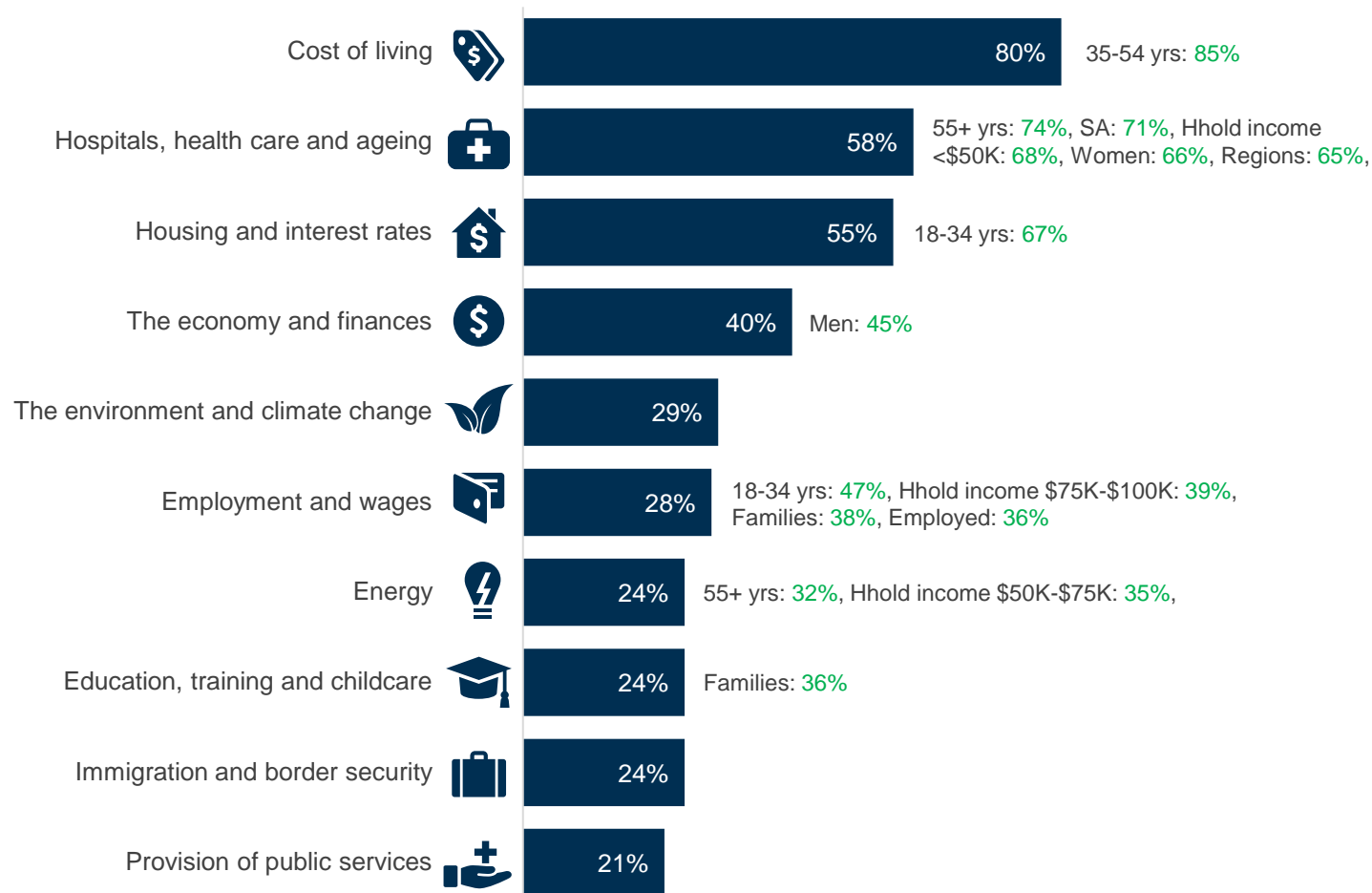
Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).



# Middle aged particularly concerned about COL while 2-in-3 young adults concerned about housing and interest rates



Highest ranked issues the Australian Government should focus on  
(Top 5 most important – prompted)



Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.  
Q. From the following list, please select the five most important issues you think the Australian Government should focus on.  
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Reasons cost of living, hospitals, healthcare and ageing, and housing and interest rates are the top three to focus on



*“Cost of living has direct consequences for other important issues such as crime, education, family violence, education, public safety and health, etc. I am personally seeing increases in homeless people and people turning to drugs on the streets, making myself and my family feel unsafe.”*

*“Things need to be cheaper – food, utilities, rent. People are going without food and sitting in freezing homes because they can’t afford anything.”*

*“It is rising exponentially, and wages remain the same.”*

*“Cost of living is out of control, people cannot afford to eat.”*

*“Everything is getting so expensive (groceries, petrol, electricity, etc.). I’m just getting by with one household income and two children and a mortgage. Interest rates increasing also doesn’t help. Government needs to do something about major supermarkets price gauging.”*

*“The issue of interest rates, which is the biggest contributor to high cost of living. It has a flow on effect to everything. Australia runs on a lot of borrowed money in many industries, including agriculture and small business, from banks and other financial Institutions. It is one of the reasons so many businesses are folding, not only because of debt but the ever-increasing cost of operating stock, etc.”*

*“Interest rates need to come down, everyday things are increasing, and wages are not enough.”*

*“There are not enough staff per patient. Public hospital waiting lists are too long.”*

*“I live in an area where getting a Dr’s appointment takes a week, seeing a specialist can take more than a month and will more than likely be rescheduled, and there is constant ramping of ambulances at all the hospitals in the region.”*

*“Healthcare needs to be more affordable. Number of people needing aged care places.”*

*“We have an ageing population and mental health is a significant issue impacting on our current society. More resources should be put into these areas.”*

*“High interest rates are preventing young people / families from being able to buy own home. Rental costs way too high.”*

*“Because many, many people own lots of houses and some own NOTHING! Worst tax system for housing.”*

*“With interest rates being high and everything being expensive, it has made it difficult to afford the essentials and to afford rent or buying a house.”*

*“I’m concerned about affordability of housing and the increased risk of homelessness. The quality of life for families is suffering due to housing costs.”*

Q. Please tell us a little about why a focus on [FIRST ISSUE SELECTED / 'MOST IMPORTANT IN Q3'] is most important to you. What are your key issues or concerns about this, at the moment? How do things need to change?

Base: All respondents (n=1,000).



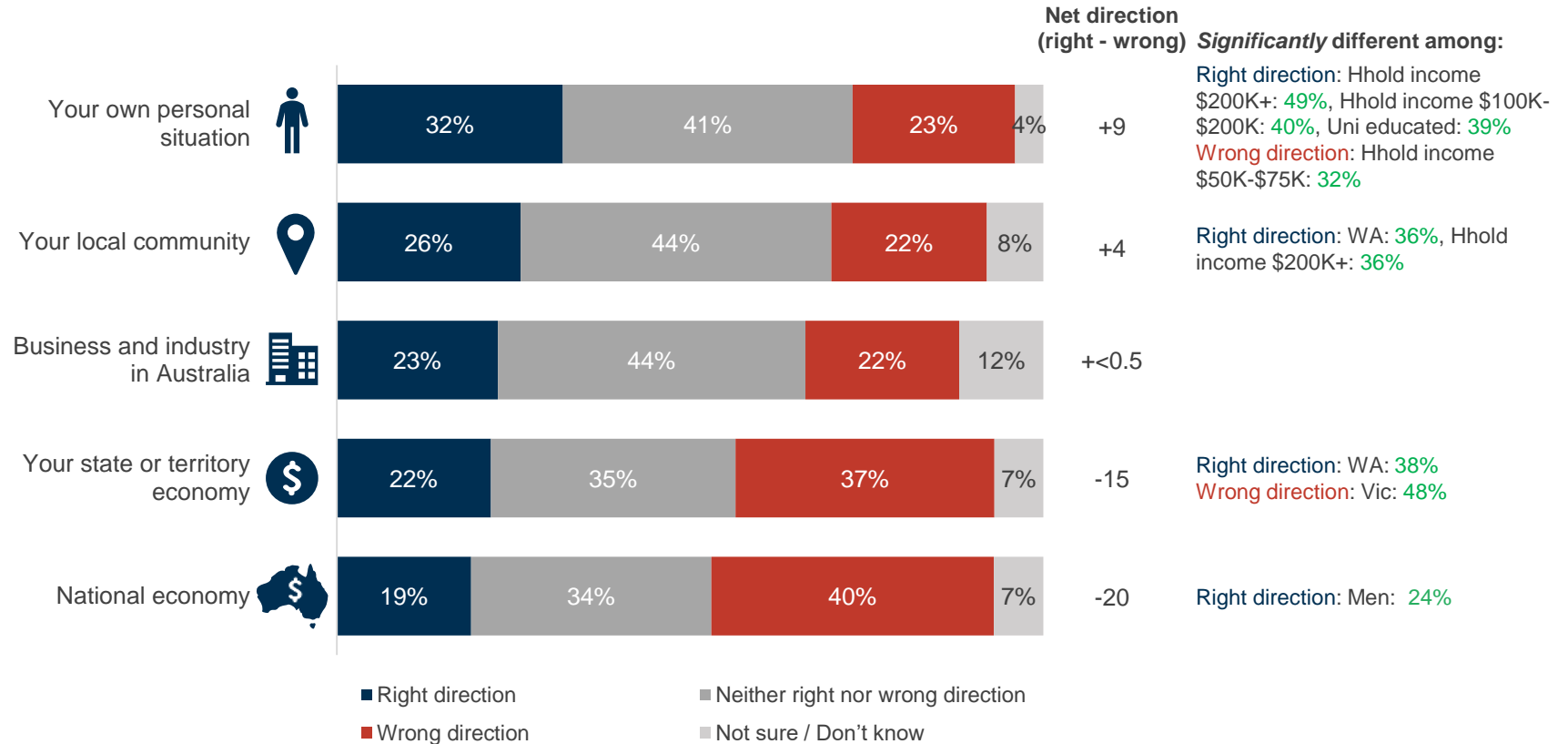


**Are we headed in  
the right  
direction?**

# Australians pessimistic about direction of economies but optimistic about their personal situation and community



## Direction of organisations and groups in Australia

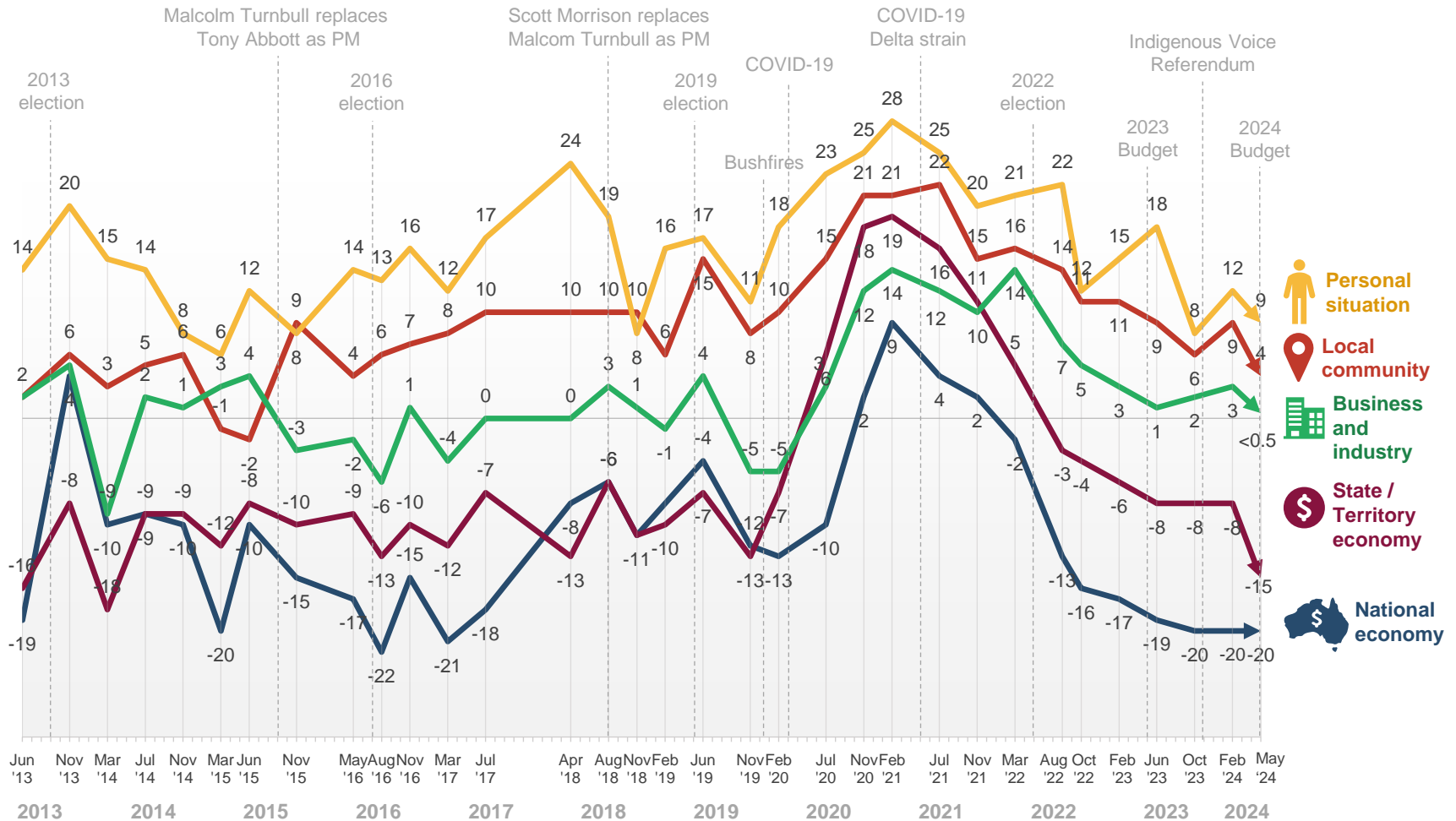


Significantly higher than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.  
 Q. Do you think each of the following is generally headed in the right or the wrong direction?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Confidence in national economy flatlining amid sharp drop for state economies, declines on personal, business outlook



**Direction of organisations and groups in Australia**  
 Net direction trend (% right direction - % wrong direction)



Q. Do you think each of the following is generally headed in the right or the wrong direction?  
 Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).

# How does the Australian Government perform on top issues?

# Government failing to gain traction on most important issues – living costs, health, housing and rates



## Australian Government performance on issues (Performance index#)

|   | May 2024 | Feb 2024 | Oct 2023 | Jun 2023 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Innovation, science and technology              | 52       | 53       | 53       | 54       |
| Mining and resources                            | 52       | 52       | 51       | 52       |
| The defence and security of our nation          | 51       | 53       | 55       | 55       |
| Business and industry                           | 50       | 51       | 51       | 52       |
| Foreign affairs and trade                       | 50       | 51       | 52       | 55       |
| Terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism | 49       | 52       | 54       | 56       |
| Agriculture and regional development            | 49       | 47       | 50       | 50       |
| Provision of public services                    | 48       | 48       | 49       | 49       |
| Indigenous issues*                              | 48       | 46       | 44       | 49       |
| Transport and infrastructure                    | 48       | 47       | 47       | 49       |
| Community, family and social services           | 47       | 47       | 49       | 49       |
| Education, training and childcare               | 47       | 47       | 48       | 50       |
| The environment and climate change              | 46       | 45       | 45       | 46       |
| Employment and wages                            | 45       | 44       | 45       | 46       |
| Population growth                               | 43       | 41       | 44       | 46       |
| Immigration and border security                 | 42       | 46       | 49       | 51       |
| Vision and leadership                           | 42       | 41       | 43       | 47       |
| The economy and finances                        | 41       | 40       | 42       | 42       |
| Energy  | 41       | 40       | 39       | 41       |
| Hospitals, health care and ageing               | 39       | 39       | 40       | 40       |
| Housing and interest rates                      | 30       | 28       | 30       | 30       |
| Cost of living                                  | 26       | 25       | 27       | 29       |

Top results

# For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report

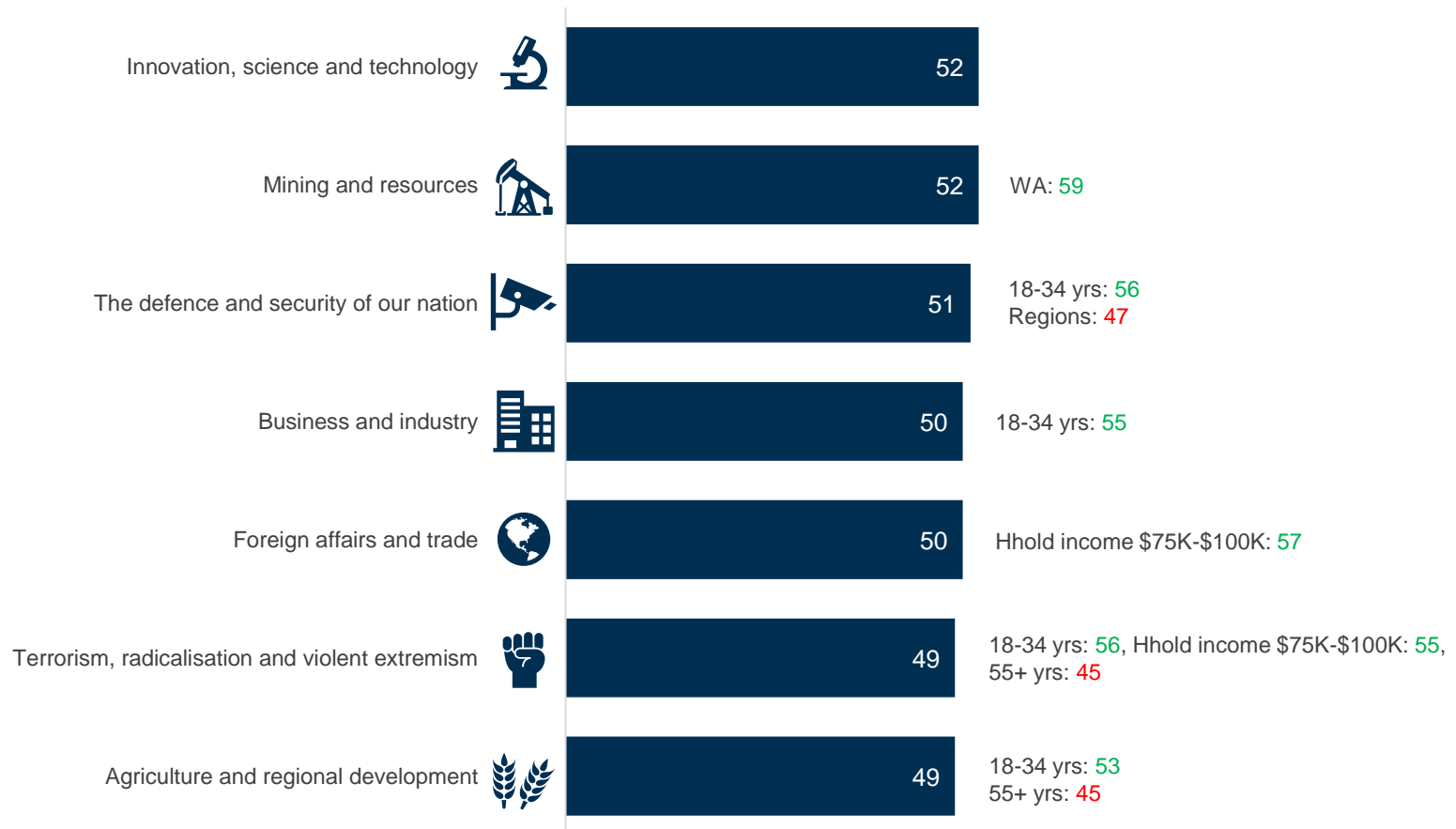
\* 'including The Voice' added June-October 2023.

Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?

Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).

# Young adults more positive about Government performance on key issues

**Top ranked issues for Australian Government performance**  
(Performance index#)



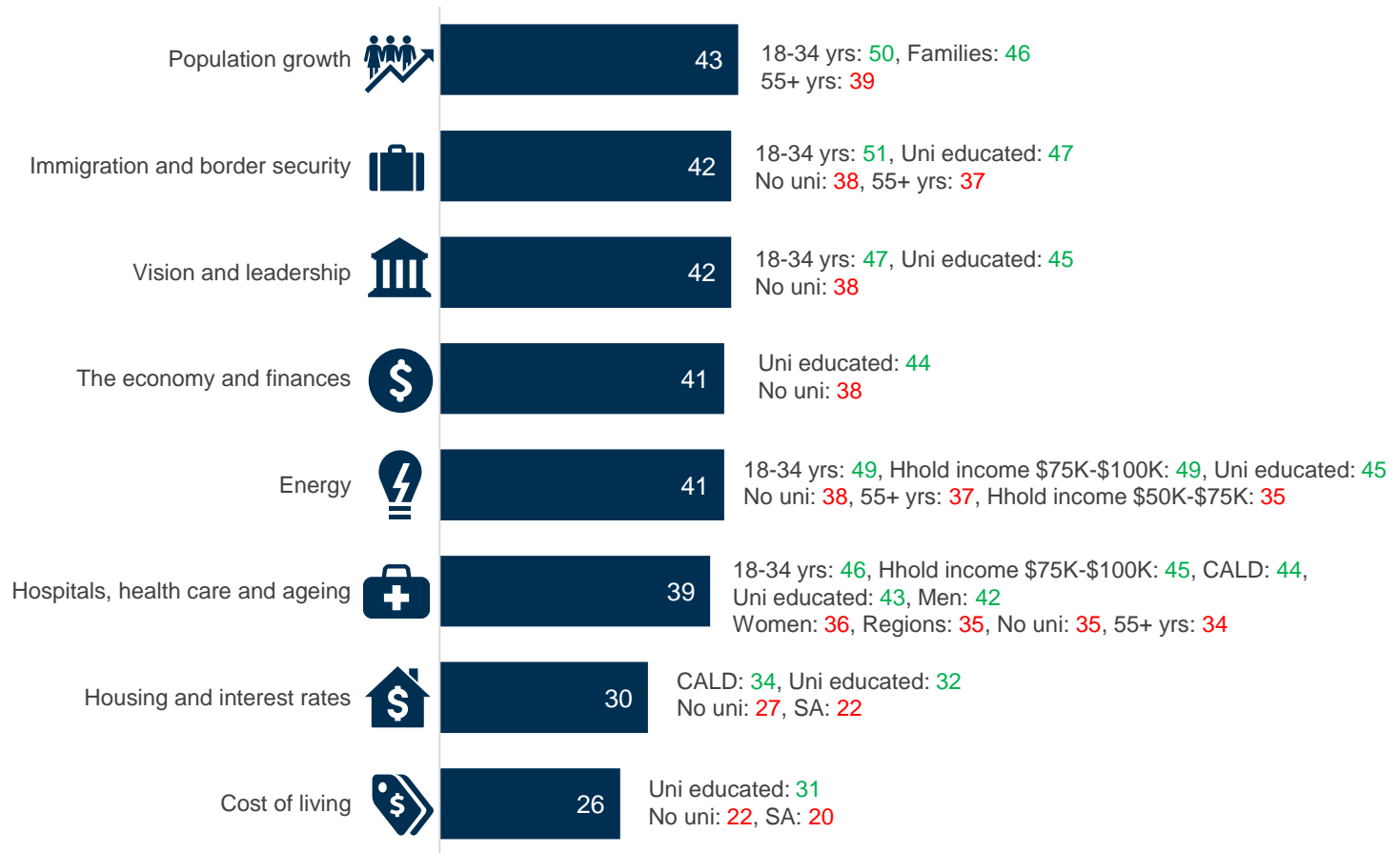
# For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.  
Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.  
Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?  
Base: All respondents (n=1,000).



# Older adults and adults who did not attend university more critical of Government performance on key issues



## Bottom ranked issues for Australian Government performance (Performance index#)



# For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.  
 Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.  
 Q. How would you rate the performance of the Australian Government on each of the following issues?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

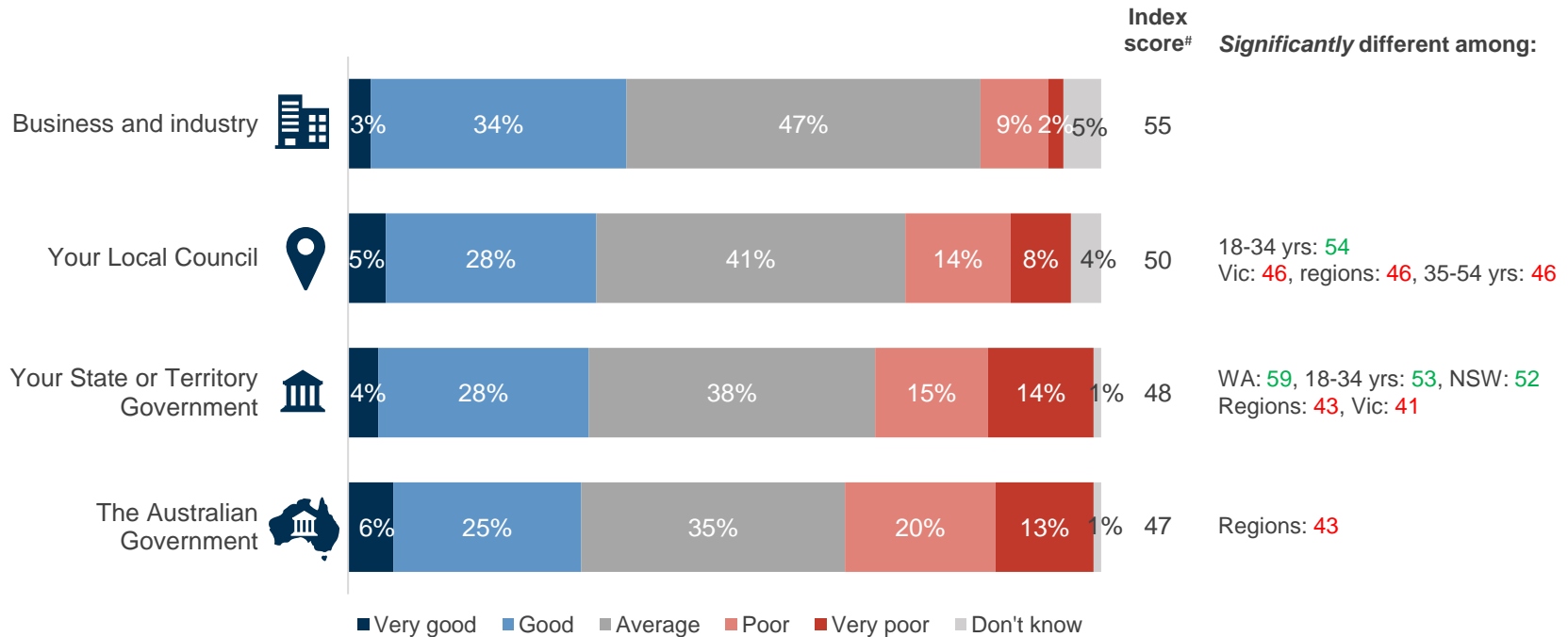


**How are  
government,  
business and  
industry  
performing?**



# Business continues to outperform all levels of government

## Performance of organisations and groups in Australia

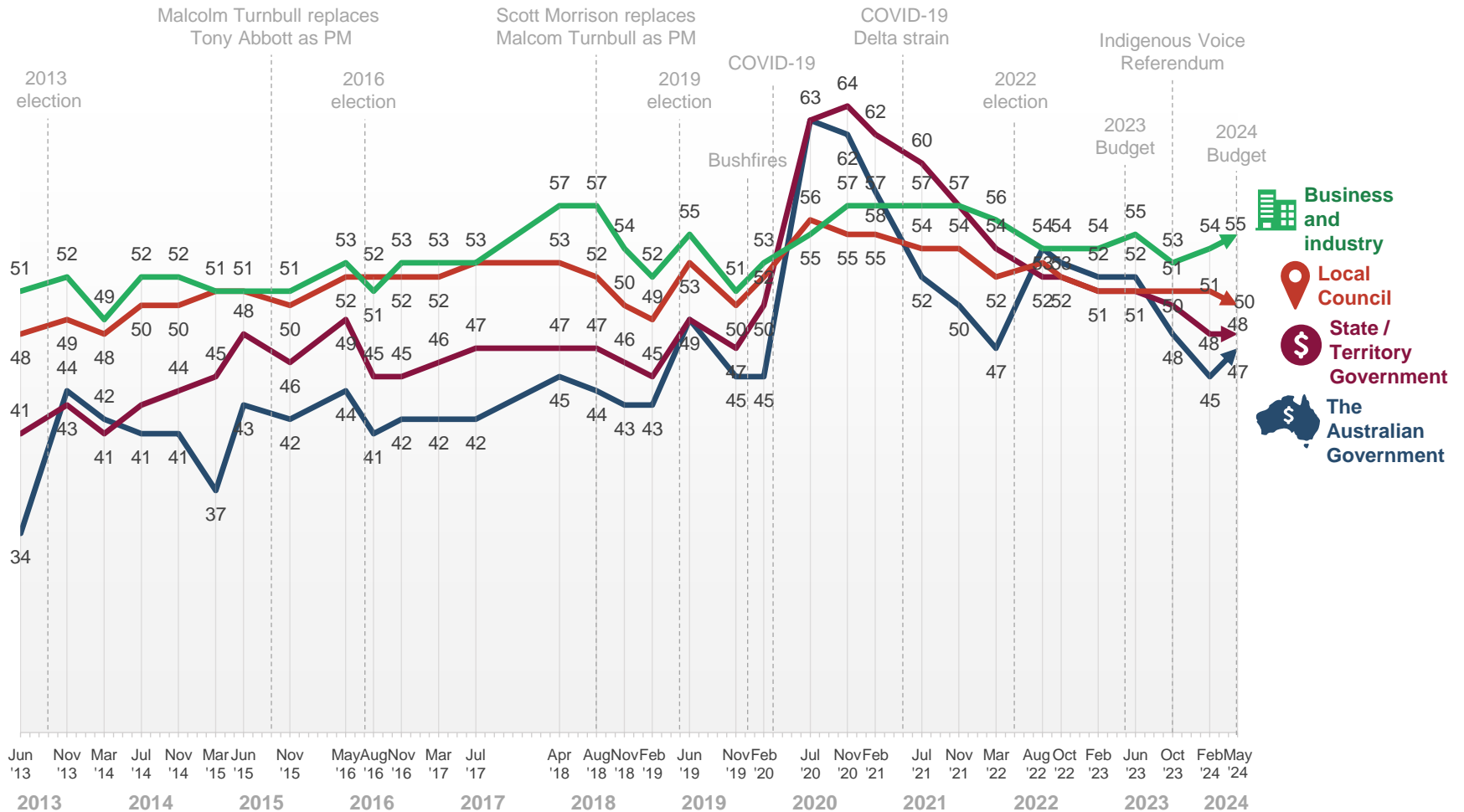


<sup>#</sup> For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the research methodology section of this report. Significantly higher / lower than the national total at the 95% confidence interval.  
 Q. How would you rate the current performance of each of the following organisations or groups in Australia?  
 Base: All respondents (n=1,000).

# Albanese Government performance bounces back slightly from February low as business begins upward trend



Performance of organisations and groups in Australia  
Index score trend#



# For an explanation of how index scores are calculated refer to the survey methodology section of this report.  
Q. How would you rate the current performance of each of the following organisations or groups in Australia?  
Base: All respondents (approximately n=1,000 per wave, n=1,225 in June 2023).



## Survey methodology



### National Online Survey

#### n=1,000 Australian adults

- Conducted Friday 17<sup>th</sup> - Monday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024.
- Sample quotas on age, gender and location, with post-survey weighting to actual age / gender / location proportions from Census data.
- Maximum margin of error on n=1,000 is +/-3.1% at the 95% confidence level.
- Differences of +/-1% for net scores are due to rounding.

#### Explanation of index scores:

To facilitate ease of reporting and comparison of results over time, an **index score** has been calculated for performance measures (*very good* to *very poor* ratings).

The index score is represented as a score out of 100.

To calculate this score, the **survey percentage result** for each scale category (excluding 'don't know' responses) is multiplied by an **index factor** to produce an **index value** for each category. These values are then summed to produce the **index score**, equating to 43 in this example.

| Rating category    | Survey percentage | Index factor | Index value (percentage x factor) |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Very good</i>   | 5%                | 100          | 5                                 |
| <i>Good</i>        | 17%               | 75           | 13                                |
| <i>Average</i>     | 40%               | 50           | 20                                |
| <i>Poor</i>        | 19%               | 25           | 5                                 |
| <i>Very poor</i>   | 15%               | 0            | 0                                 |
| <i>Don't know</i>  | 4%                | -            | -                                 |
| <b>Index score</b> |                   |              | <b>43</b>                         |

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