

AWARENESS TO ACTION

A youth-informed proposal for a more just,
equitable and sustainable Australian future



Young Australians have clear priorities for the future



1. Climate Solutions

Taking actions to limit global warming to 1.5°C, or at worst 2°C, above pre-industrial levels, through reducing and offsetting emissions in the pursuit of significant reductions by 2030 and Net Zero by 2050. This will involve investing in a sustainable-energy-fuelled economy while simultaneously seeking to protect and restore life on land and in water, in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals¹.



2. Wellbeing & Security

Preserving the mental and physical wellbeing of the individual and ensuring their access to secure housing. Both wellbeing and security play an integral role in enabling active participation, agency and quality of life within our communities and society.



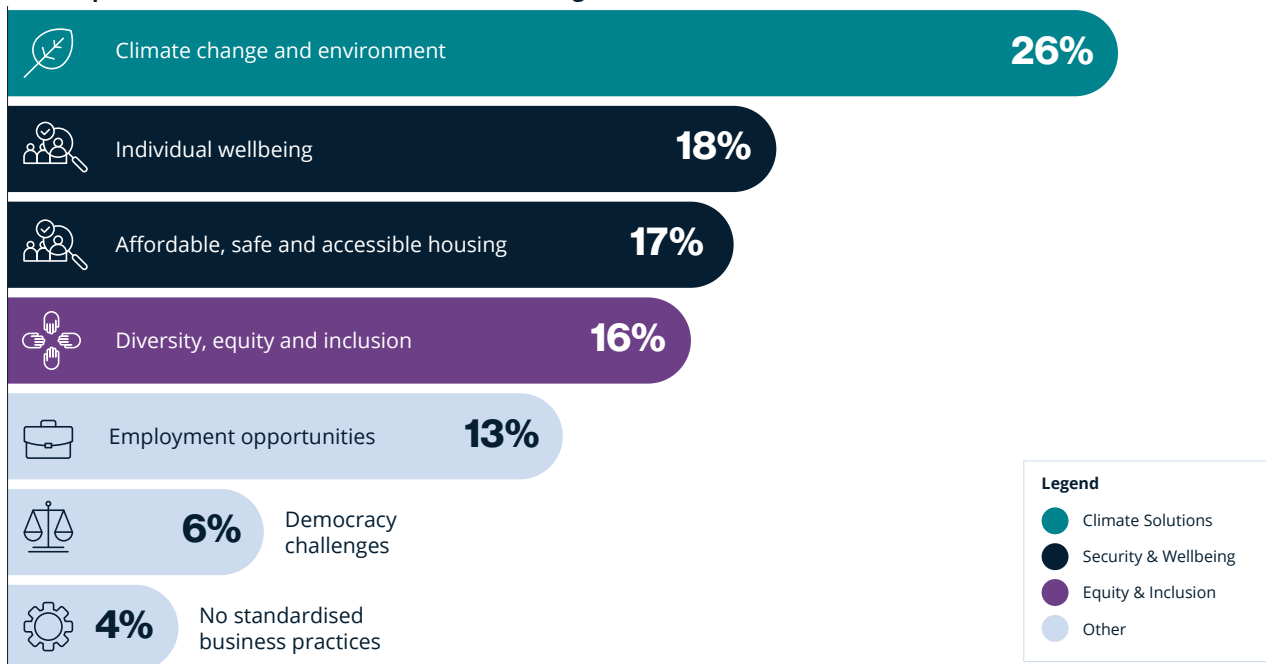
3. Equity & Inclusion

Correcting long-standing injustices with regards to historically marginalised communities is essential to creating a society that is safe, just and encourages participation of all people. This report brings focus specifically to First Nations justice.



What are the most important challenges facing Australia today?

% of respondents that ranked this as their #1 challenge



Legend

- Climate Solutions
- Security & Wellbeing
- Equity & Inclusion
- Other

Figure 4. Most important challenges facing Australia today (N = 5,743)

Young Australians do not feel confident in Australia’s approach to the future

Participants were surveyed on their confidence in Australia’s “current approach” to tackle the global challenges, including climate change, international instability, pandemic risks and the changing nature of work and technology.

34% of young Australians reported their confidence level at or below 4/10, with an additional 35% indicating their confidence level as ‘neutral’.

Only 4% of young Australians demonstrated absolute confidence in Australia’s current approach.



How confident are you that current global challenges are solvable under the existing approaches of government and industry?

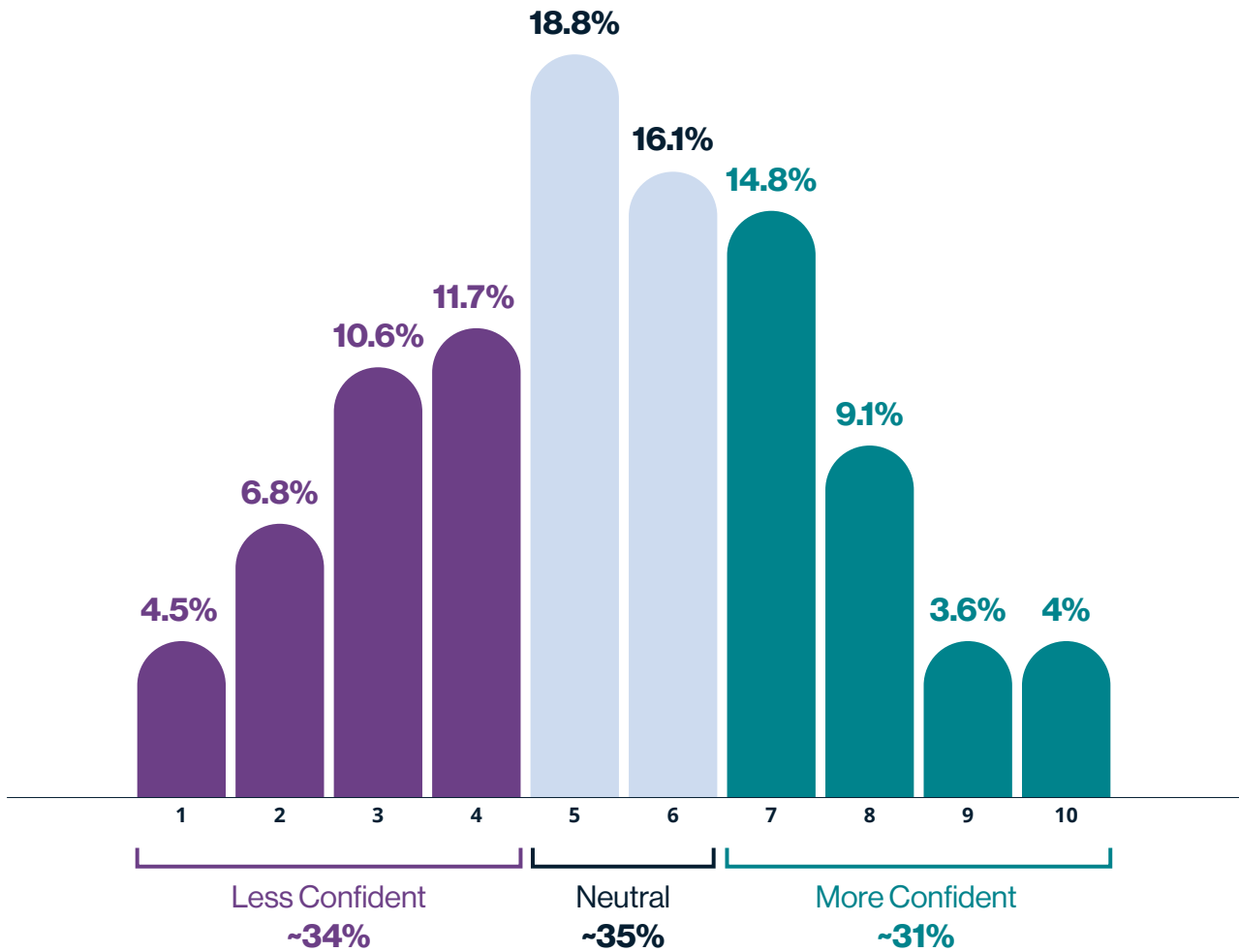


Figure 5. Confidence that current global challenges are solvable through existing approaches (N = 5,743)

Despite the uncertainty, young Australians remain hopeful

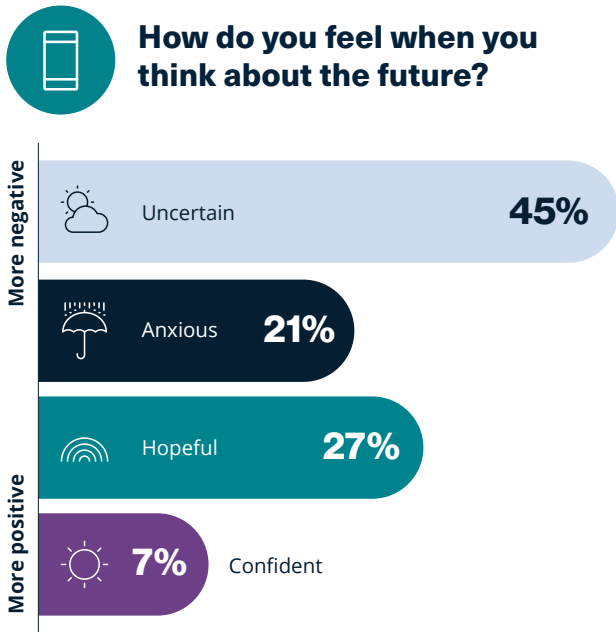


Figure 6. How young Australians feel about the future (N = 281)

This sentiment of uncertainty and low confidence was further illustrated by the findings of the *Your Voice* social media polling that sought to understand how young Australians felt about their future. 66% reported feeling uncertain or anxious about the future.

While 27% have retained hope as their primary feeling, only 7% feel confident about their future.

Young Australians are nervous about their future, but remain hopeful that progress is possible with an adjusted approach.



There is a massive window for us to reconsider and redesign. But, we must recognise that while nothing is off the table in this current context, there is also nothing guaranteed. The fact we have a window of opportunity does not, in itself, suggest that this will translate into the change we wish to see.

Abdullahi Alim,
 Founder & Head of Strategy, The Davos Lab, World Economic Forum



Over the last 18 months, we've seen the best and the worst of humanity. And, there are a few important things we can take from it. As a whole economy and certainly from a government perspective, we demonstrated the ability to move really quickly when there's a crisis, which is something that I hope we can translate to other issues.

We also saw the whole of the community rally together with businesses and the National Cabinet. That sense of collaboration and community has been truly remarkable and is something that should be sustained.

Deanne Stewart,
 CEO, Aware Super

Young Australians want to see greater action on climate change from their leaders

Young Australians ranked climate change and environmental concerns as the most important challenge facing the country today.

93%

of young Australians polled believe that government is not doing enough to address climate change.

 **Do you believe our government is doing enough to address climate change?**

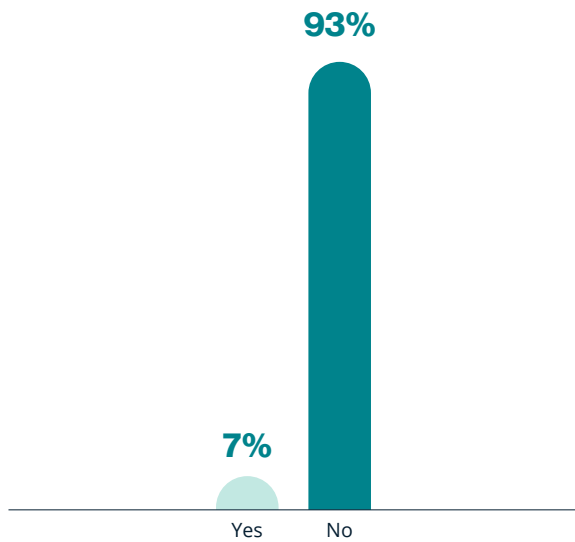


Figure 7. Is Government doing enough to address climate change (N = 927)

80%

either agree or strongly agree with the assertion that the government should make accelerating climate change action a key goal of economic recovery.

 **My government should make accelerating climate change action a key goal of the economic recovery**

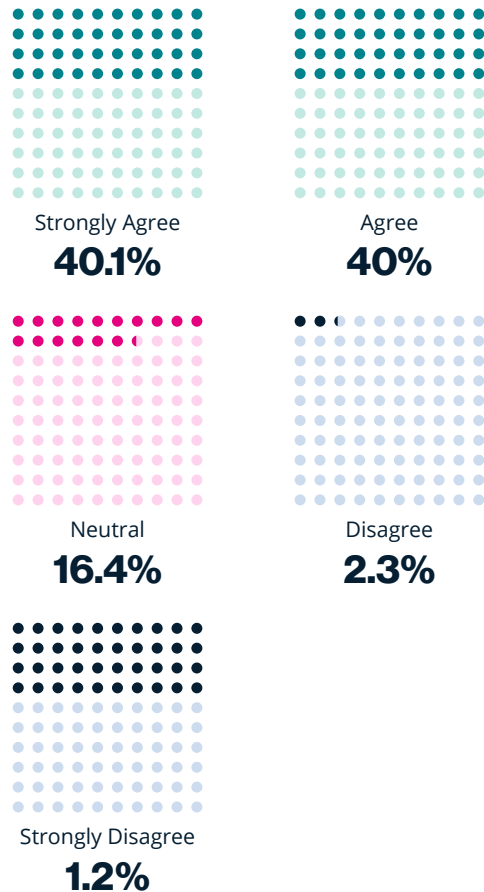


Figure 8. Should government accelerate climate change actions as part of the economic recovery (N = 5,743)

Respondents identified the obligation of large corporations to change their commercial strategies to support more just, equitable and sustainable outcomes.

65% of respondents agree that banks should stop supporting fossil fuel expansion through lending and financial services.

This suggests a significant proportion of young people believe that financial institutions have both the ability and the responsibility to curb Australia's dependency on fossil fuels.



How strongly do you agree/disagree that banks should stop supporting fossil fuel expansion through lending and financial services?

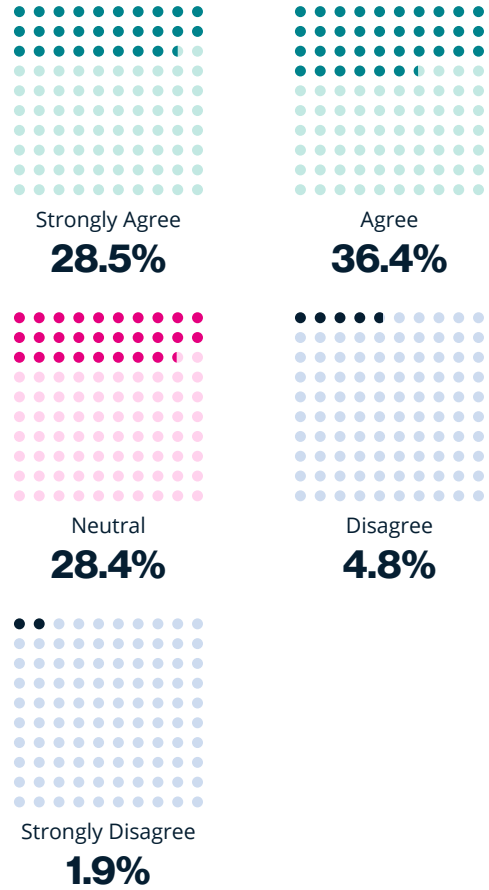


Figure 9. Should banks stop supporting fossil fuel expansion (N = 5,743)



2050 is too late for action. We have to tackle fossil fuel expansion and we have to start restoring the environment. Young people see this, they know it. I really urge my political colleagues to take the concerns of young people seriously. They deserve a future. They deserve a planet that is still liveable.

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young,
Senator for South Australia



In response to which stakeholders they deemed to be most important for increasing the availability of sustainable products, **34% of young Australians identified governments as the single most important stakeholder that can enable increased availability of sustainable products, which is more than double the next stakeholder.**

Young Australians feel that using renewable energy is the most important individual behaviour (30%) to combat climate change. This was followed by reducing our consumption of disposable goods (17%) and recycling whenever possible (16%).

Which stakeholders are most important to taking action on increasing the availability of sustainable products?

Which individual behaviours do you think can make the greatest impact in combating climate change?

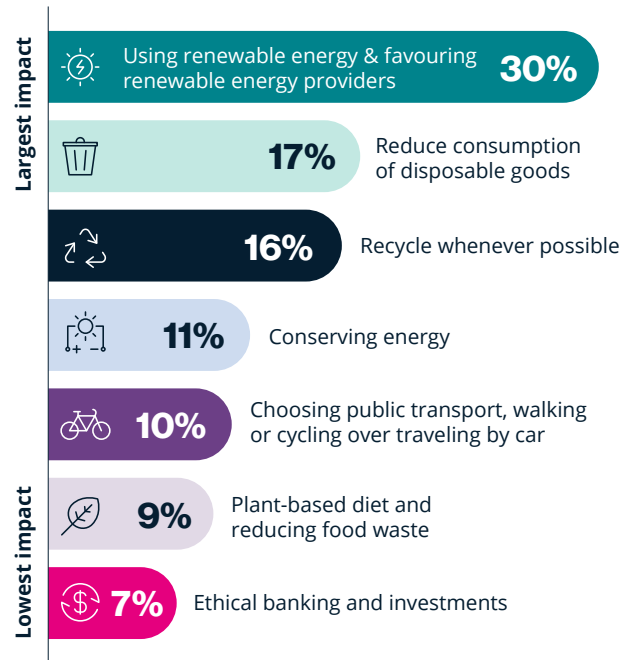
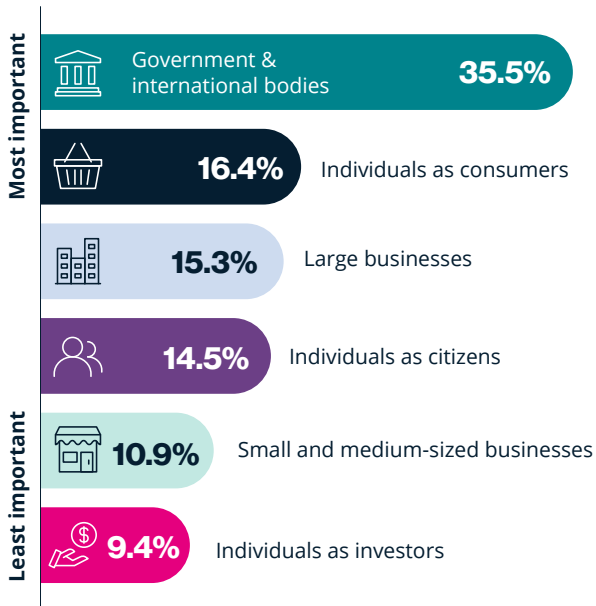


Figure 10. Stakeholders most important to increasing availability of sustainable products (N = 5,743)

Figure 11. Behaviours with greatest impact on combating climate change (N = 5,743)

Young Australians feel their wellbeing and security is under threat and feel ill-prepared for their future

Young Australians identified individual wellbeing (mental and physical health) and security (affordable, safe and accessible housing) as the second and third most important challenges currently facing Australia (Figure 4).

While this report remains optimistic at the levels of hope retained by young people, it should not be ignored that 66% of young people feel either 'uncertain' or 'anxious' about their future (Figure 6). This is reinforced by the sentiment that Young Australians do not feel adequately prepared for, supported in or secure in their future.

Individual Wellbeing

Individual wellbeing was ranked as the second most pressing challenge facing Australia, with many submissions from young Australians indicating challenges specifically around mental health.

Growing recognition of the need for stability and care for personal health was reflected in 19% of young Australians who cite work/life balance as the most influential factor when considering which companies to work for (second only to pay).

Housing Security

Young Australians are more concerned about having a home than a job, and access to safe and affordable housing was described as the third most crucial challenge.

This need was ranked two positions above employment opportunities, and many respondents to the *Your Voice* campaign drew attention to the fundamental ability to acquire secure and affordable accommodation in any form.



71%

state that they 'do not feel secure' about their future



Do you feel your future is secure?

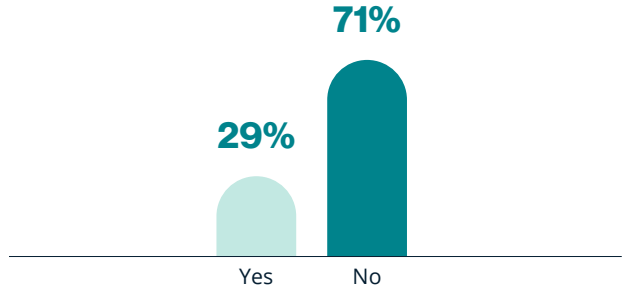


Figure 12. Do young Australians feel their future is secure (N = 984)

70%

do not believe their education is preparing them adequately for their future



Do you believe your education is preparing you adequately for your future?

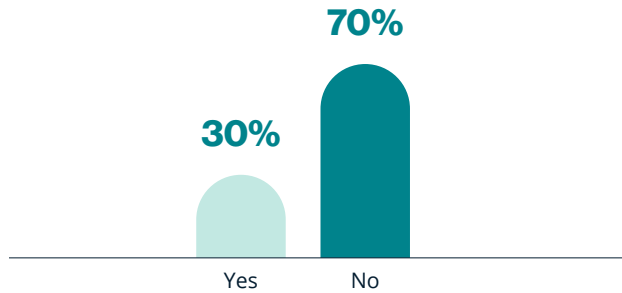


Figure 13. Is education preparing young Australians for the future (N = 520)

78%

do not believe that all Australians have access to the basic support they need



Do you believe that all Australians have access to the basic support they need?

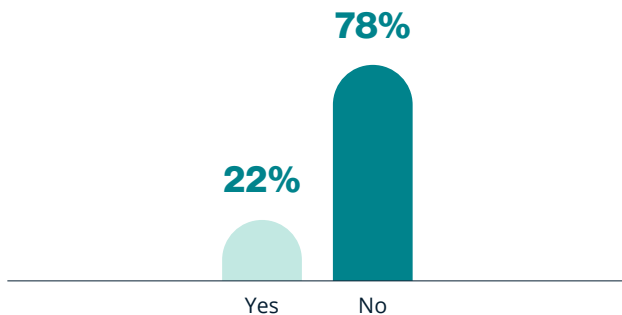


Figure 14. Do Australians have access to the basic support they need (N = 530)

Young Australians think Australia needs to prioritise equity and inclusion, specifically for First Nations Australians

When asked what they felt to be the most pressing challenges facing Australia, 16% of young people identified 'diversity, equity and inclusion' as the most pressing challenge. In addition 38% of those asked 'what is the most important social issue to you' gave responses focused on diversity and inclusion.

66%

When asked if they believed Australia to be inclusive, 66% responded 'no'.

Young Australians identify First Nations reconciliation, gender inequality, racism and the experience of people living with disabilities as priority considerations.

Equity and inclusion challenges impact many groups in Australia. While we recognise each of these issues warrant discussion, **the scope of our research and of this report directs our focus to First Nations inequities***.



Do you believe Australia is inclusive?

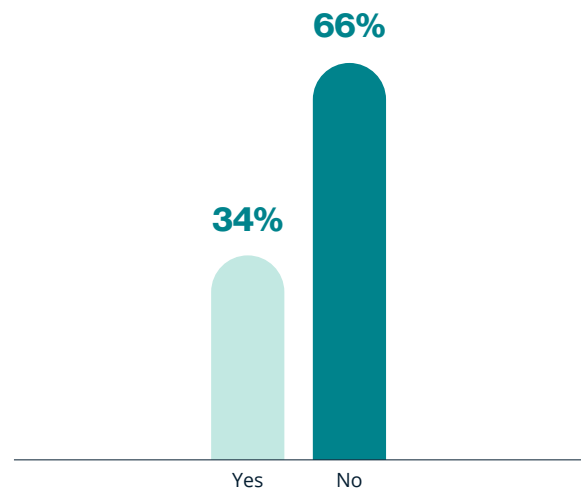


Figure 15. Do young Australians believe Australia is inclusive (N = 747)

* This focus is a product of its tractability, a framework employed by the Oxford Uehiro Center that provides directives for courses of priority on the tenets of the problem to be solved, the resources saved and those at risk. The authors recommend that further work be done to fully canvass the broader issues that are of great importance to a more just, equitable and sustainable future for all Australians.

Wurundjeri Country | Melbourne, Victoria





75%

of young Australians believe that First Nations' rights and reconciliation are important for Australia's future*. 17% ranked it at 10/10 of importance.



How much of a priority should further work on First Nations' rights and reconciliation be for Australia in the future?

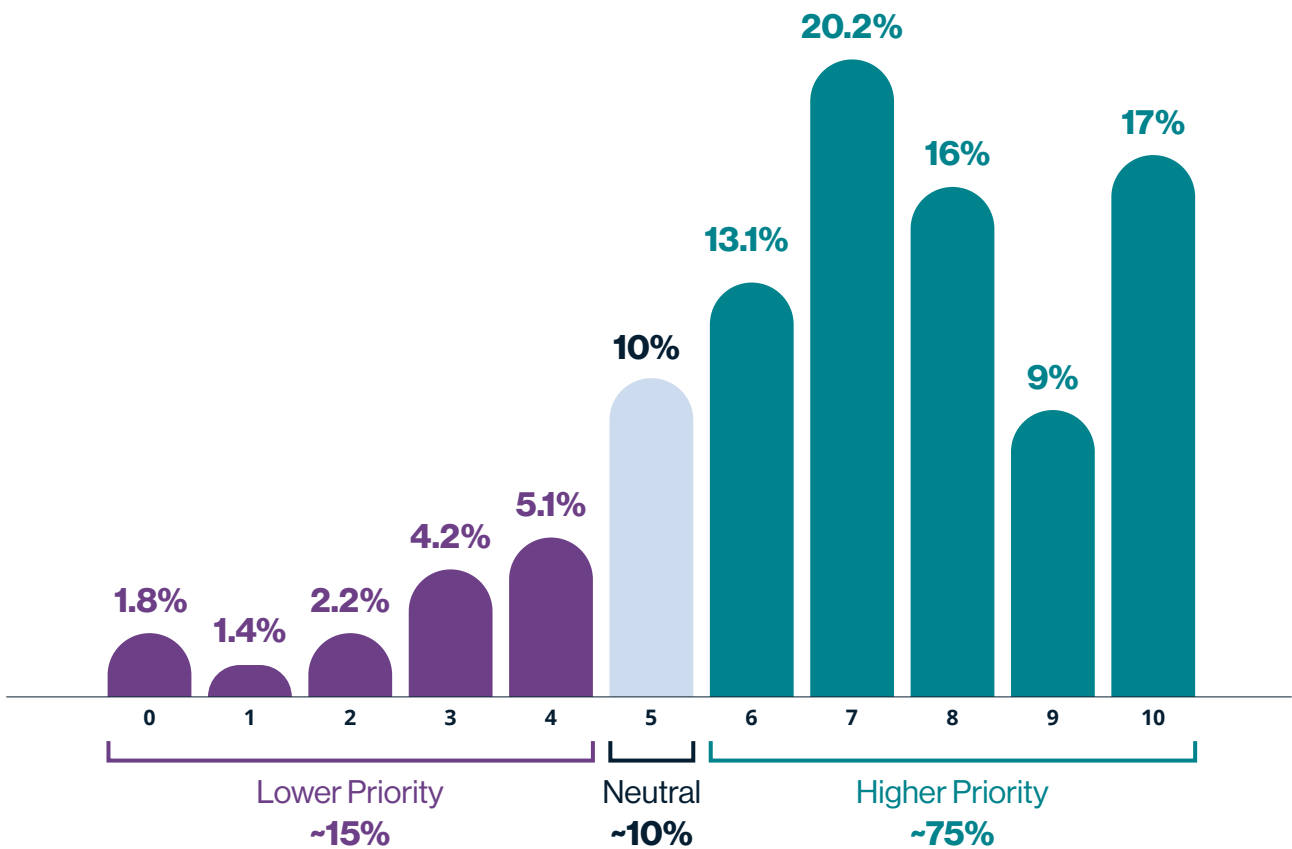


Figure 16. Priority that should be placed on First Nations' rights and reconciliation (N = 5,743)

* Young Australians scored it a 7/10 or greater in importance when asked 'on a scale of 1-10 how much of a priority should further work on First Nations recognition and reconciliation be for Australia in the future?'

96%

would vote 'yes' in a referendum to recognise First Nations Australians in the national constitution.

The majority of young Australians identified following the directives of the Uluru Statement from the Heart as a key first step in addressing reconciliation.



In a referendum to recognise First Nations Australians in our Constitution, how would you vote?

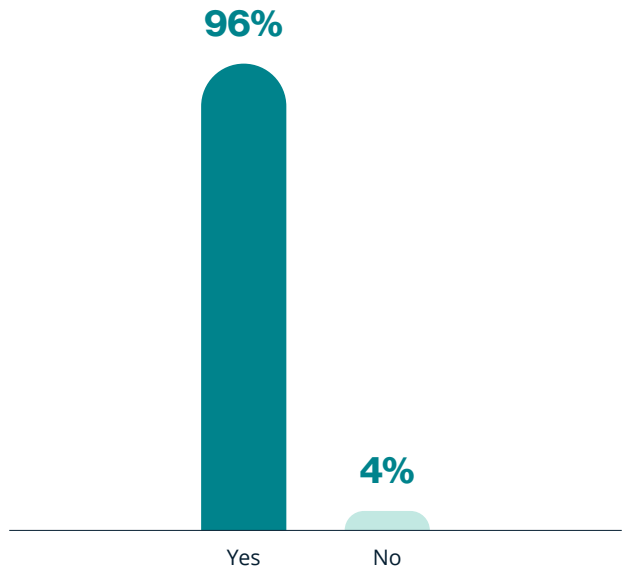


Figure 17. Would young Australians vote to recognise First Nations Australians in the constitution (N = 195)

90%

of young Australians believe First Nations Australians should have an enshrined voice in Parliament.

Young Australians believe First Nations rights and reconciliation must be prioritised and are dissatisfied with the rate of progress to date.

The true nature of equity and inclusion within Australia has become yet another front on which young Australians are demanding meaningful and proactive action from their leaders, with a reducing tolerance for symbolic gestures being leveraged in the absence of true progress.



Do you think First Nations Australians should have an enshrined voice in parliament?

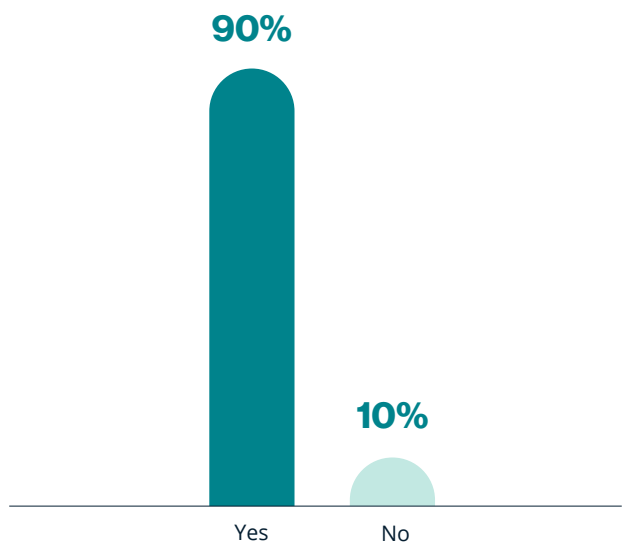


Figure 18. Would young Australians vote to recognise First Nations Australians in the constitution (N = 144)

Even though Young Australians are willing to ‘vote with their wallet’, this alone will not be enough

Young people value ethical consumption and brands with a purpose. This was illustrated by half (51%) of *Your Voice* survey respondents making consumption decisions primarily driven by ethical considerations in contrast to personal considerations such as price and convenience. The fact that young Australians are giving these variables equal weight is significant, especially given only 27% of respondents are employed full-time.

Young Australians’ personal commitment to driving change represents a changing tide in how companies should consider their operations and

value chains. This shift in sentiment represents a risk of attrition to brand loyalty for companies that do not feature ethical products, and an opportunity to capture market share amongst those that do.

To avoid fracturing their customer base, industry leaders should make ethical production cost-effective.⁸⁷ The scale of major global challenges, such as climate action, means conscious consumerism alone cannot drive the change that young Australians want to see. Collective action from government and industry, in conjunction with ethical consumer behaviour, is required.



Which of the following is most important to you when selecting a product or service to purchase?

Personal Costs **49%**



Ethical Considerations **51%**

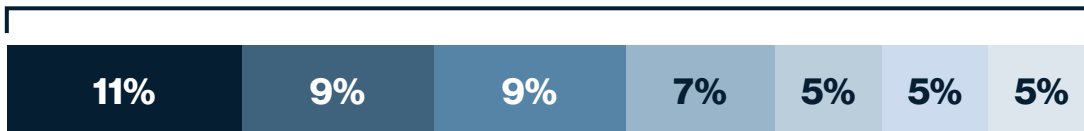


Figure 19. What is important when selecting a product or service to purchase (N = 5,743)

Young Australians are becoming increasingly aware of the implications of their choice of employer

Young Australians' choice of future employer is now driven by the organisation's 'values' and 'sustainability' practices, collectively 25%, to the same extent as their potential salary (26%), revealing another avenue by which

young Australians seek to drive change. This represents an opportunity for employers to bring value-based decisions and sustainability to the forefront of their business strategies and operations to attract and retain desirable talent.

What factors influence which businesses you choose to work for or with?

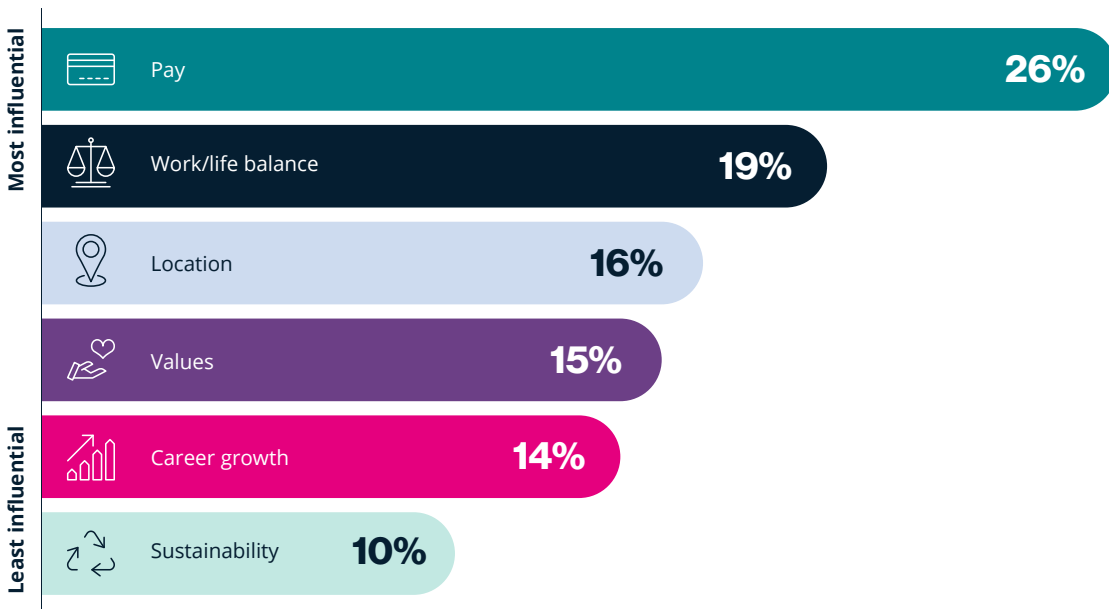


Figure 20. Factors which influence businesses young Australians choose to work for or with (N = 5,743)



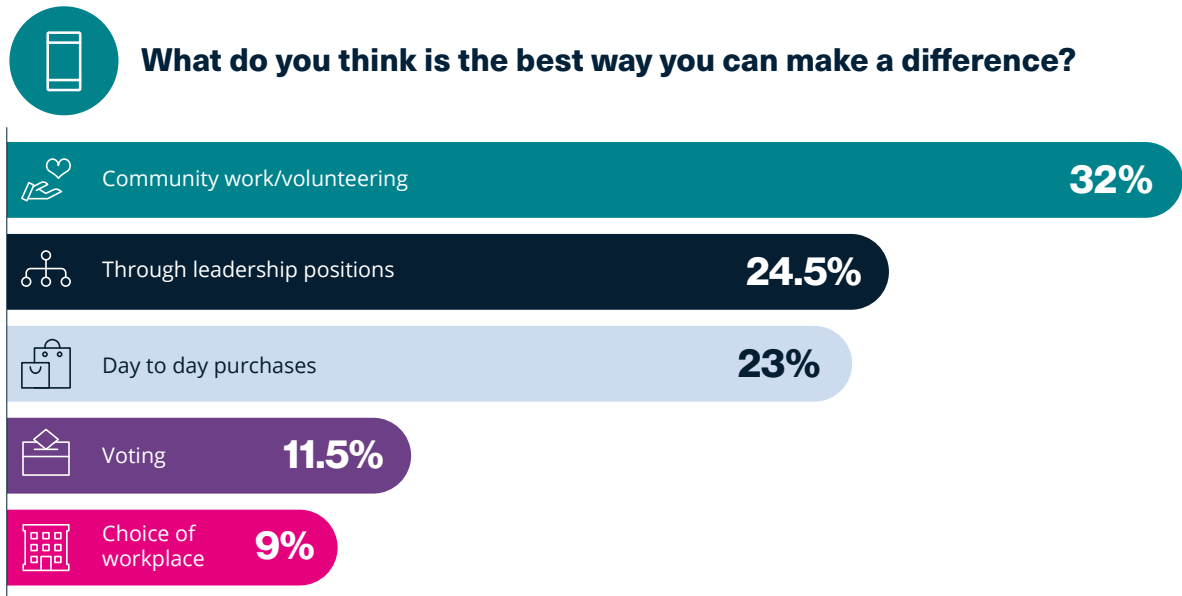


Figure 21. What is the best way one can make a difference (N = 384)

Young Australians are turning to other means of political expression

In the face of disenchantment with the electoral system, young people have adopted non-traditional means to drive change by embracing self-organisation, leveraging the rising power of social media⁹² and taking to the streets to express their frustration and effect change. For example, the Schools Strike 4 Climate, which was started by three students in central Victoria,

turned into a nation-wide movement supported by the Australian Youth Climate Coalition. Since the first protest march for climate action in 2018, the movement has garnered over 350,000 young Australians across 600 locations.⁹³

The challenge is not getting young Australians interested in politics; it is getting them engaged with a system where they do not feel heard.

Young Australians think government should take the lead so that businesses can follow with certainty

Young Australians emphasised the need for the government to lead the way and set the tone for change.

When asked who they deem to be *'most responsible for addressing climate change'*, 53% of young Australians selected government, while only 15% ranked large-scale enterprises as most responsible.



Who do you believe is most responsible for addressing climate change?



Figure 22. Who is most responsible for addressing climate change (N = 5,743)



Many businesses, communities and investors are taking significant action on sustainability knowing it's the right thing to do both financially and morally. However, many more tell us that they would go further if there was clarity of targets and policies, as without these, there is considerable risk and uncertainty about regulations that may be put in place in the future.

Deanne Stewart,
CEO, Aware Super

71%

of young Australians would support politicians who take bold, immediate and ambitious action on the issues they care about, such as climate change.



I will vote for or support political leaders who commit to taking bold, immediate, and ambitious action to address the climate crisis

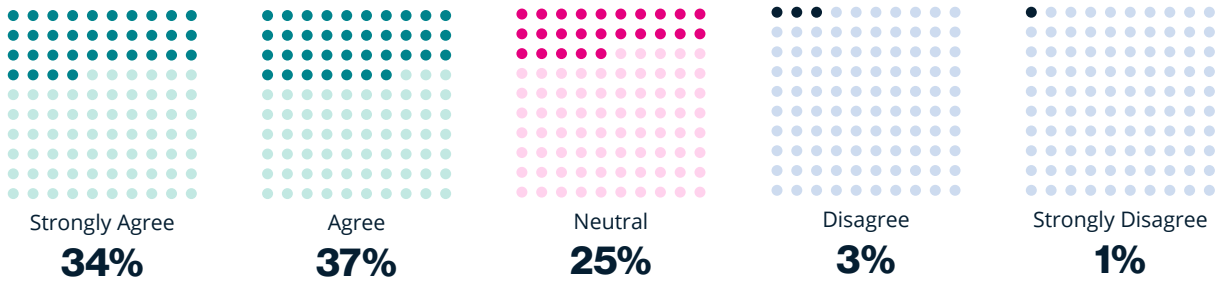


Figure 23. Voting or supporting political leaders who commit to climate action (N = 5,743)



Young Australians want industry to invest, innovate and be accountable

82%

of young Australians think businesses need to be held accountable for their environmental, social governance and technology standards of ethics.

Respondents reinforced the need for external imperatives to drive business behaviour, identifying 'stronger financial incentives', 'increased consumer pressure' and 'training for executive leadership teams' as the key factors that would *improve* responsible business practices. Key barriers perceived to *prevent* businesses from taking action include 'profitability', 'lack of commitment from public stakeholders' and 'conflict of interest' (Figure 27).



All private sector organisations should be held accountable for their environmental, social, governance and technology standards of ethics

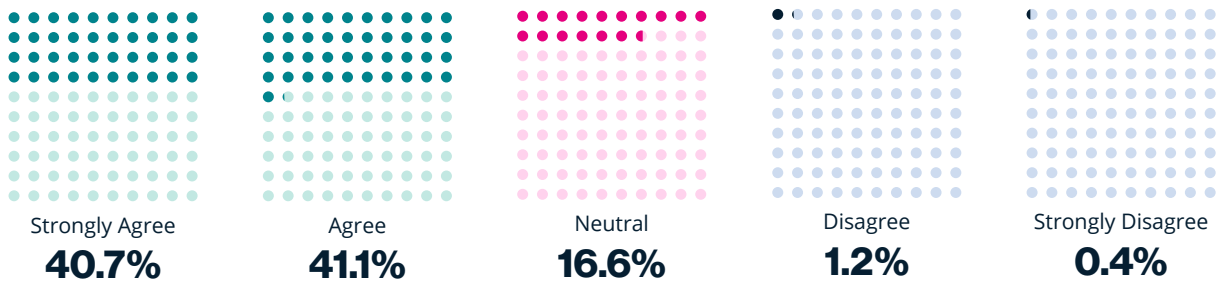


Figure 25. Should private sectors be held accountable for their business ethics (N = 5,743)



What do you think would improve the consideration of ESG standards into design, development and reporting of private organisations?

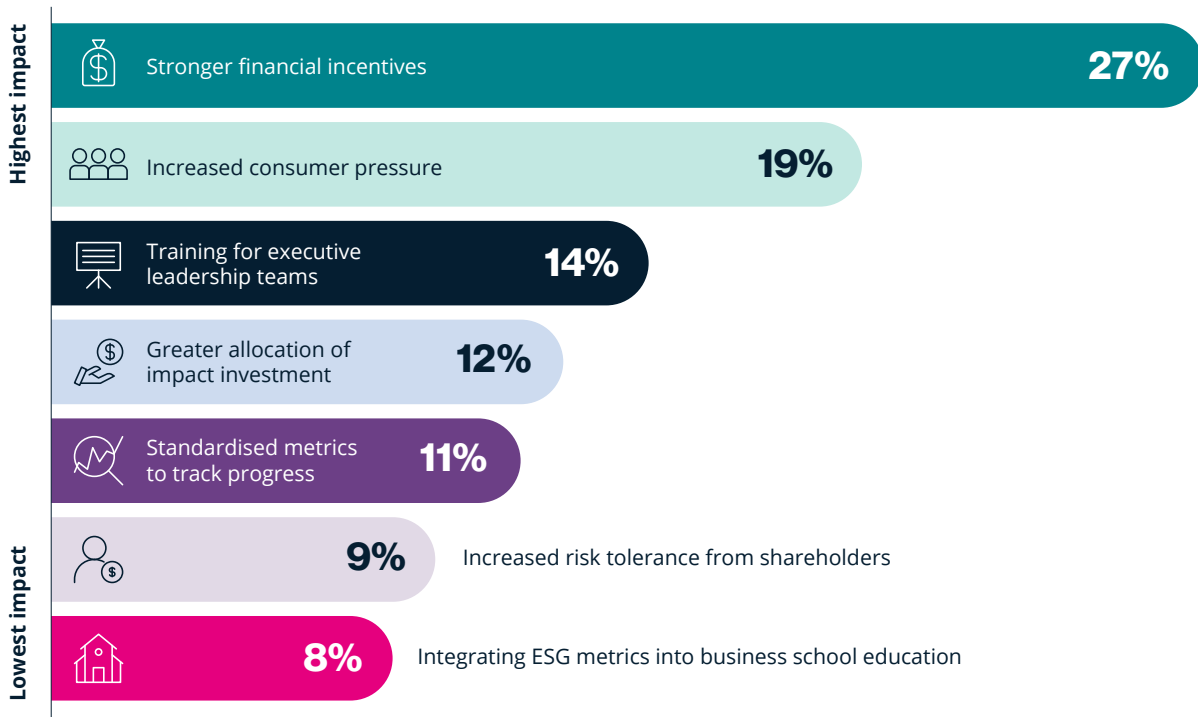


Figure 26. What would improve ESG standards (N = 5,743)



Business is the greatest platform for change, not only in creating and innovating new products, processes and services, but also in driving societal change... It can show how change can be affected while continuing to support jobs and standards of living. It builds on a long history of business driving important ideas that shape our communities.

Gisele Kapterian,
Director, Public Sector Strategy APAC, Salesforce



What are the key barriers that stand in the way of implementing next generation ESG considerations?

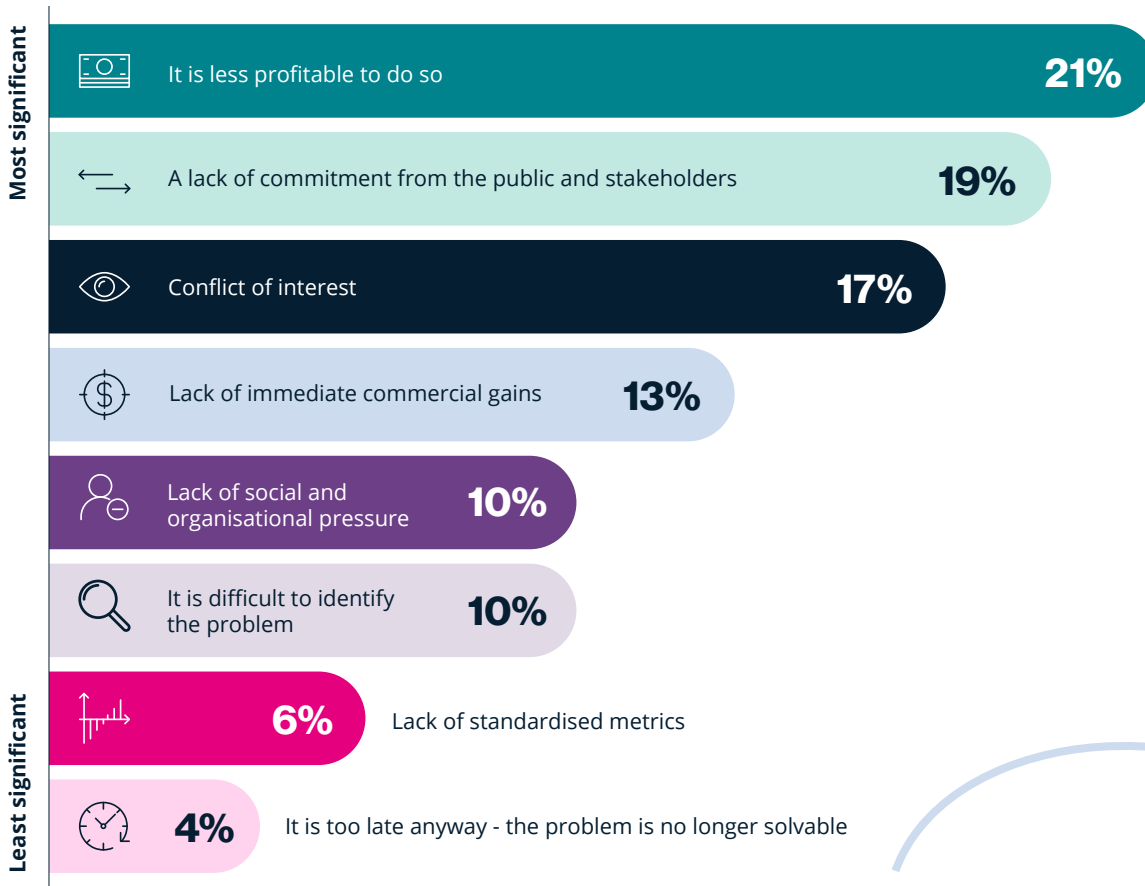


Figure 27. What would improve ESG considerations (N = 5,743)

Your Voice data shows that young Australians expect industry leaders to create change with ambition, which may require increased risk tolerance and innovation beyond what is possible for governments.

This confirms the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer findings, which found that 72% of Australians believe CEOs should act first rather than waiting for the government to enact change.⁹⁴

Young Australians' *Your Voice* responses affirmed other research findings that show we cannot wait for consumer demand to hit critical mass to drive these changes. Industry must undertake a leadership role in driving a more sustainable economy.^{95,96}

Young Australians want to see a new culture of leadership that is committed to proactive and ambitious action.

What would enable you to place more trust in Australian industry and government leaders?

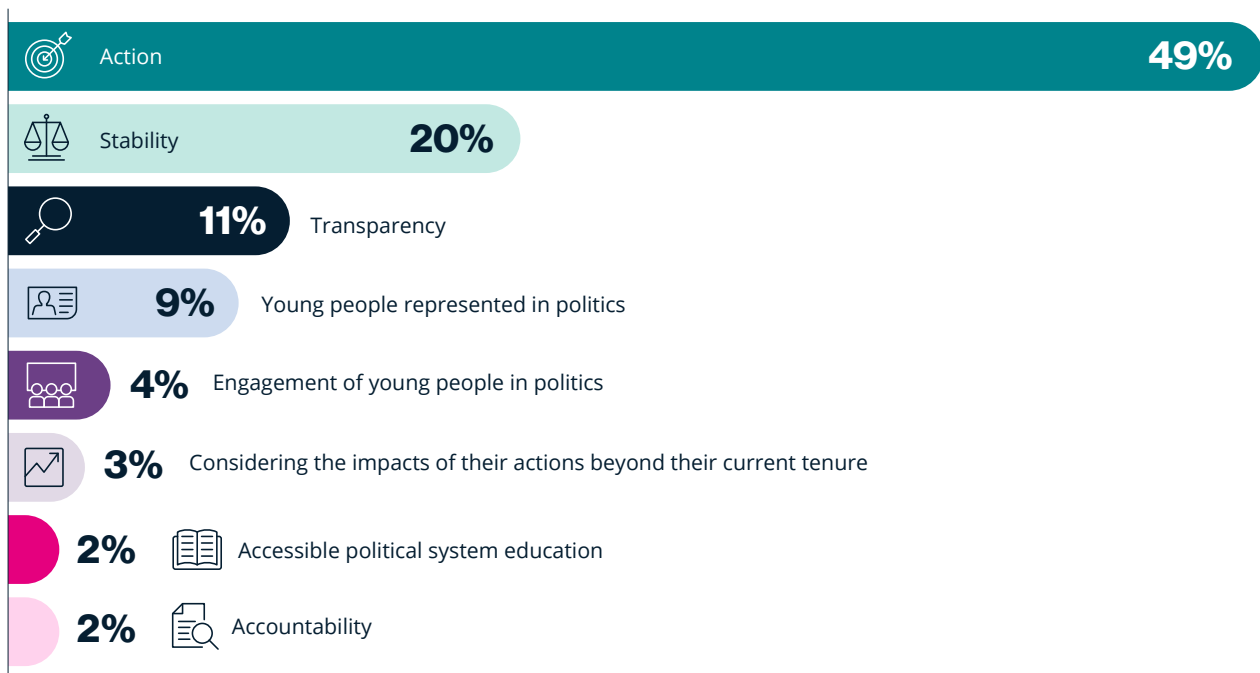


Figure 28. What would enable more trust in Australian leaders (N = 5,743)