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Building for the Common Good

Mapping Social Cohesion 2025
Catholic Social Services Australia

Introducing the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute



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- Origin – Scanlon Foundation – Social Cohesion Focus
- Commenced – 2019 – Approved Research Institute
- Mapping Social Cohesion Survey and Reports – 20 yrs 2027
- Additional Research – Government, Federal, State and Local
- Publications Program – Reports, Narratives, Essays, Insights,
- Communications and Dissemination – Website, Social Media, Webinars, Presentations, etc.

Social Cohesion - “the willingness of members of society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper”

What is social cohesion?

- No agreed definition
- Three common elements
 - Shared vision
 - Well functioning community with shared goals and responsibilities and a readiness to cooperate – individuals and institutions
 - A never-ending process not an outcome.
- Operates across multiple interconnected systems
- Not value neutral – needs to be linked to democratic values

What it does not mean

- No conflict
- Assimilation or homogeneity
- Any one group or entity is responsible for social cohesion or for threatening it
- The dynamics are the same as the US, UK, Canada etc
- No racism, no discrimination
- Touchy feely programs being nice to minority communities

What people talk about when they talk about social cohesion

Shared views - Social relations, connection, social order, social good, relational, dynamic, requiring maintenance

- **Academia** – problematize the concept , focus on measurement and implications for inequality.
- **Government** – operational terms, informs policy frameworks, program design, participation, belonging and stability
- **Civic society** – advocacy oriented, emphasizes lived experiences, community harm and dialogue-based responses.

What's missing – discussion of power, institutional structures, systemic conditions



MAPPING SOCIAL COHESION

**Social connections
through troubled times**

James O'Donnell,
Alice Falkiner &
Katarzyna Szachna

The 2025 Mapping Social Cohesion survey conducted in July-Sept.

➤ **~100 questions** related to social cohesion and related attitudes, perceptions and behaviours

More than **8,000 people** completed a survey in 2025

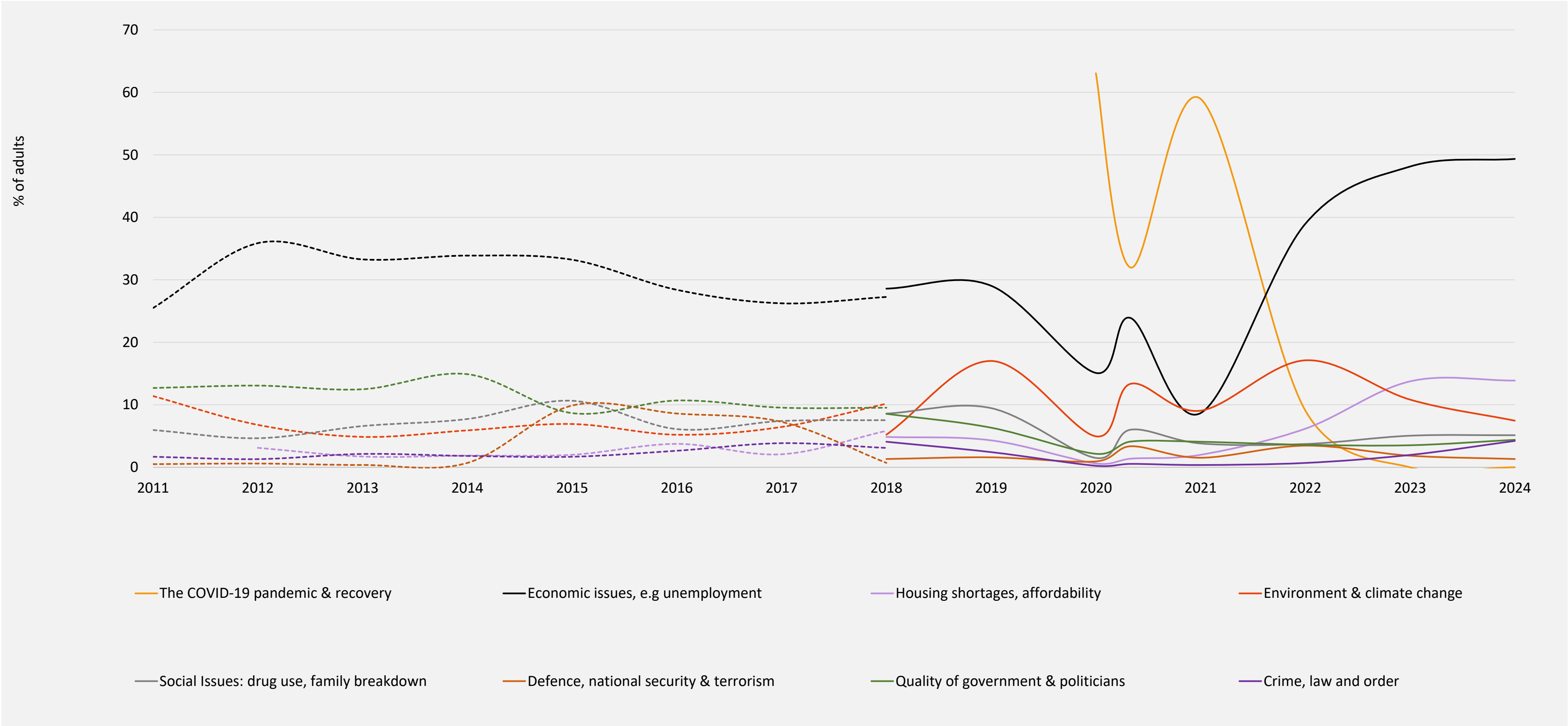
- 8,029 adults (18+) completed the full survey through the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™ panel (99% complete online survey; 1% by telephone)
- 245 adults from different cultural groups completed a shorter online survey

Delivered in partnership between the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute & the Australian National University

Mapping Social Cohesion 2025

- **Sense of belonging:** the sense of pride and belonging in Australia and the Australian way of life
- **Sense of worth:** the sense of happiness and financial satisfaction
- **Social inclusion & justice:** the sense of fairness in society and trust in government
- **Participation:** engagement in social, community & civic groups and political activities
- **Acceptance & rejection:** acceptance and support for differences and diversity, and experience of discrimination

‘What do you think is the most important problem facing Australia today?’





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What is the most
important issue facing
Australia today?

- No. 6 – Quality of government/politicians
- No. 7 – Defence, national security, terrorism
- No. 8 – Immigration
- No. 9 – Health Care

Top five issues in order

The Economy

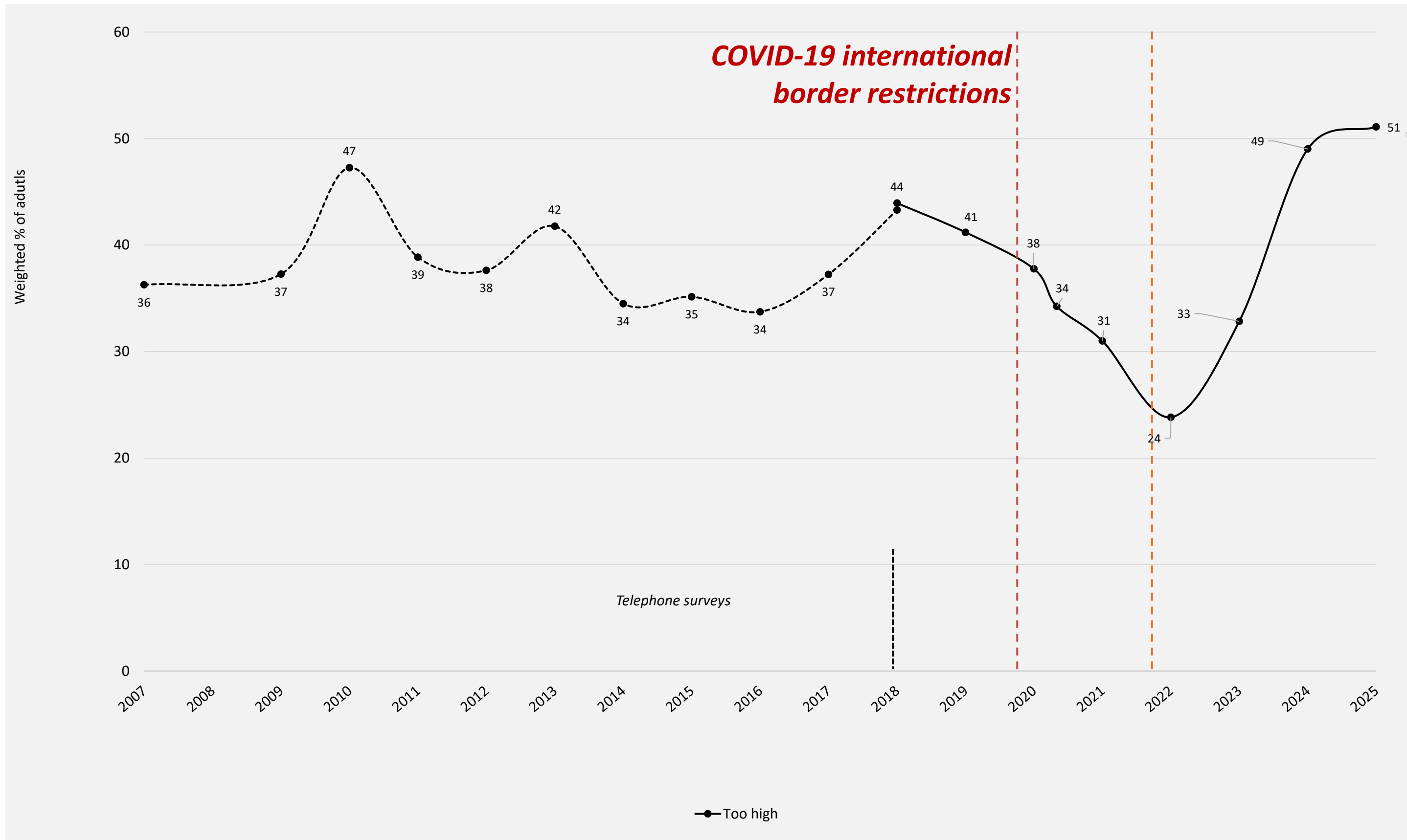
Housing

Environment/Climate Change

Social Issues

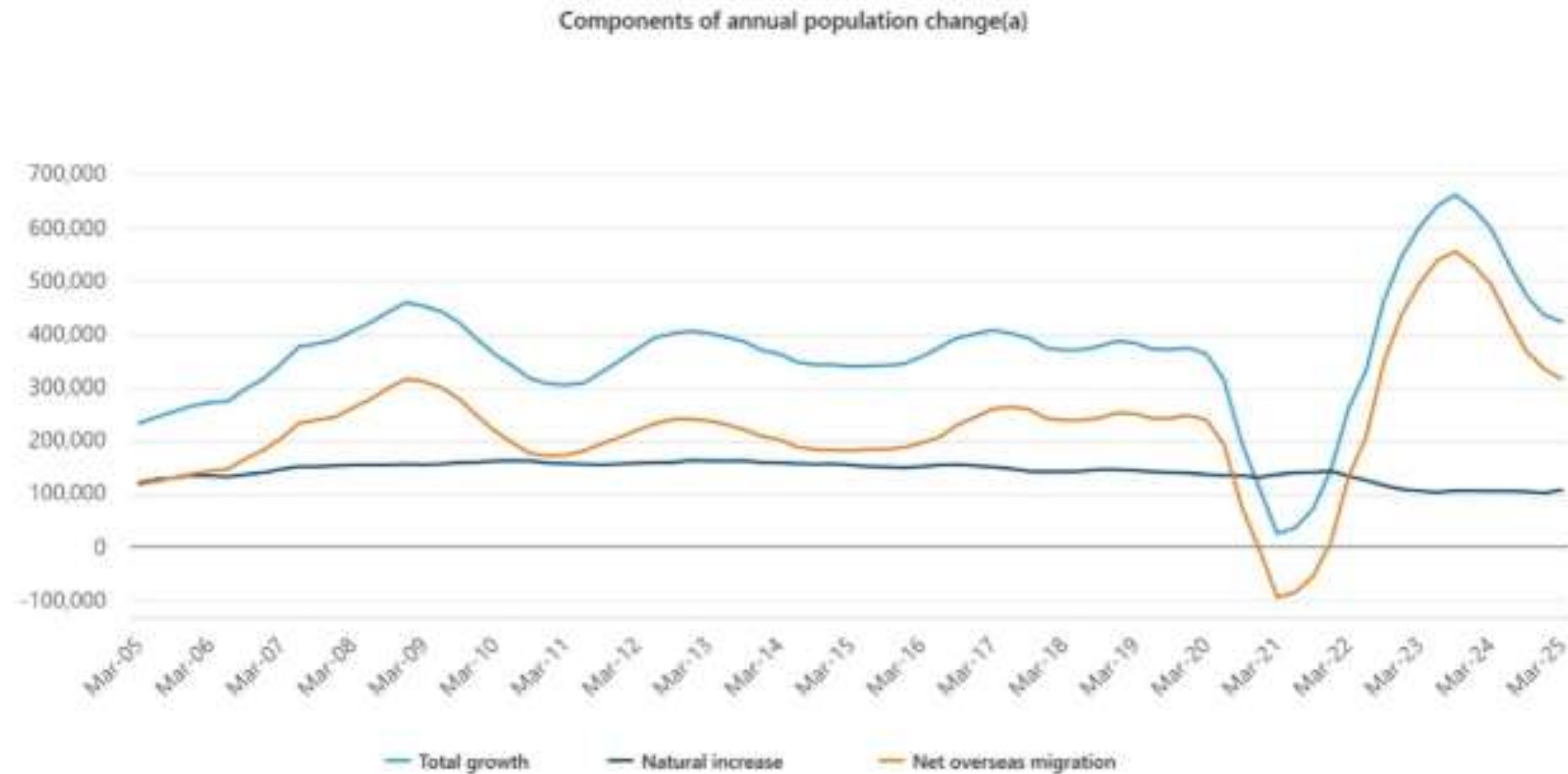
Crime

‘What do you think of the number of immigrants accepted into Australia at present? % who say ‘too high’



In 2025, 51% say that immigration to Australia is too high, similar to last year and substantially higher than during the 2010s.

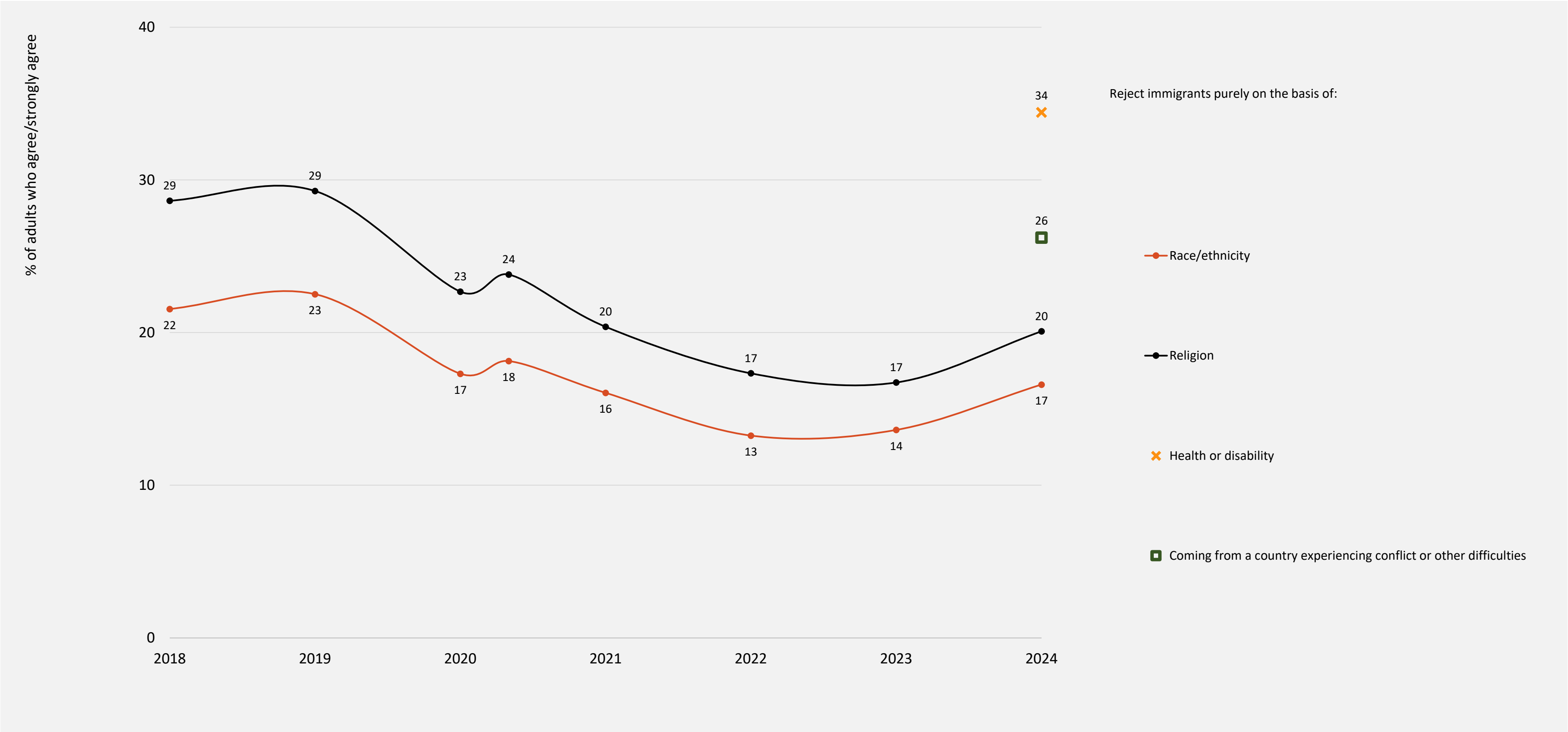
Current population change – Net overseas migration declining



a. Annual components calculated at the end of each quarter.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics National state and Territory population March 2025

‘When a family or individual applies to migrate to Australia, it should be possible for them to be rejected purely on the basis of...’



Attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity

In 2025,

- **83%** agree that **multiculturalism has been good** for Australia, down from 89% in 2023
- **67%** agree that accepting **immigrants from many different countries** makes Australia stronger, down from 78% in 2023
- **81%** agree that immigrants are generally **good for the economy**, down from 86% in 2023
- **90%** agree that people born outside Australia are **just as likely to be a good citizen** as people born in Australia, down from 94% in 2023
- **78%** agree that **immigrants improve Australian society** by bringing new ideas and cultures, down from 85% in 2023

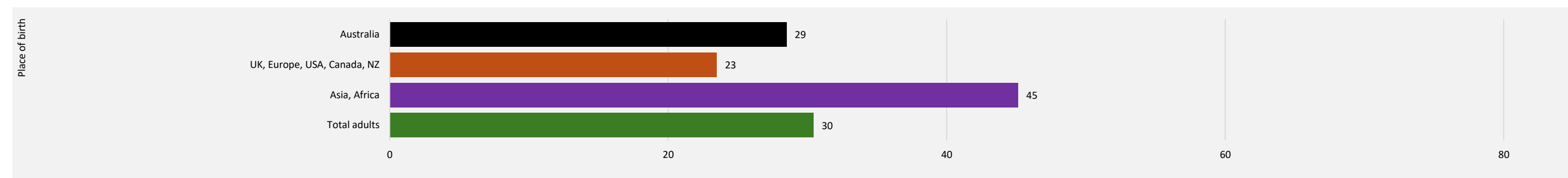
Discrimination, mistreatment and racism

% experienced discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion in the last 12 months

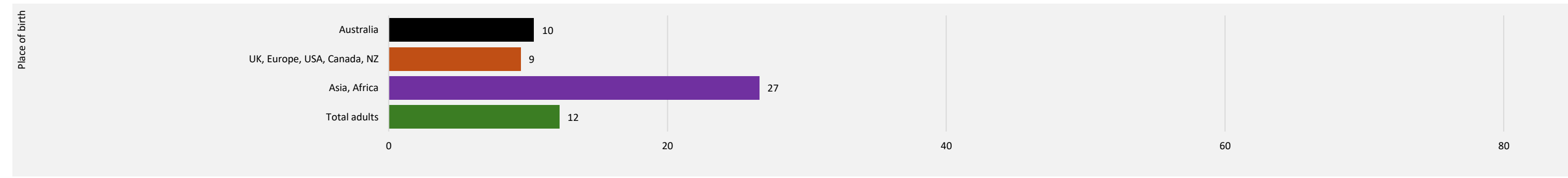


An estimated 40% of people born in Asia & Africa experienced discrimination in the last 12 months on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.

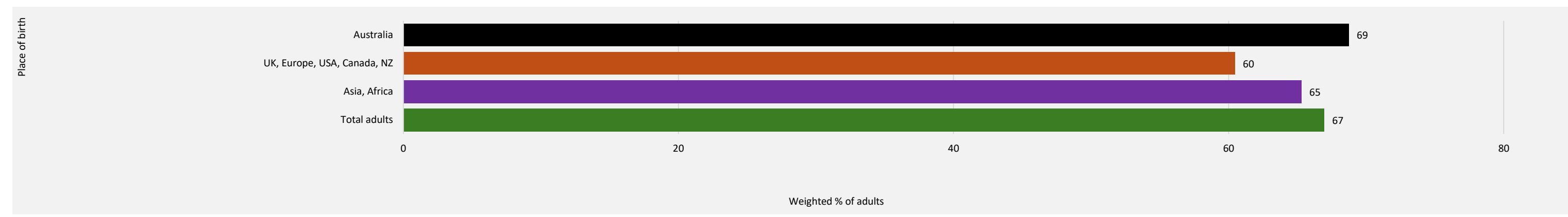
% made to feel different/did not belong in the last 12 months



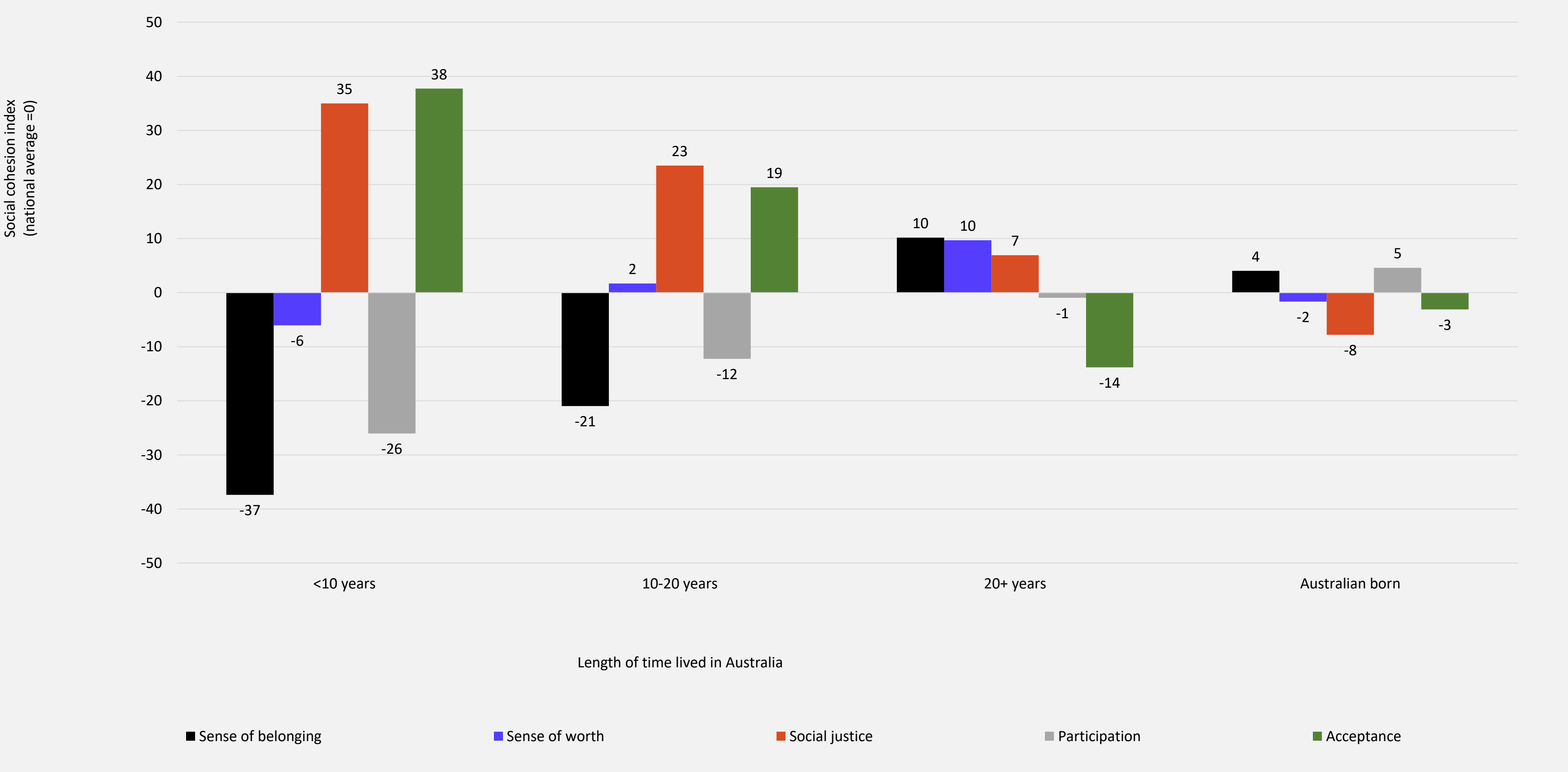
% not offered a job or treated fairly at work in the last 12 months



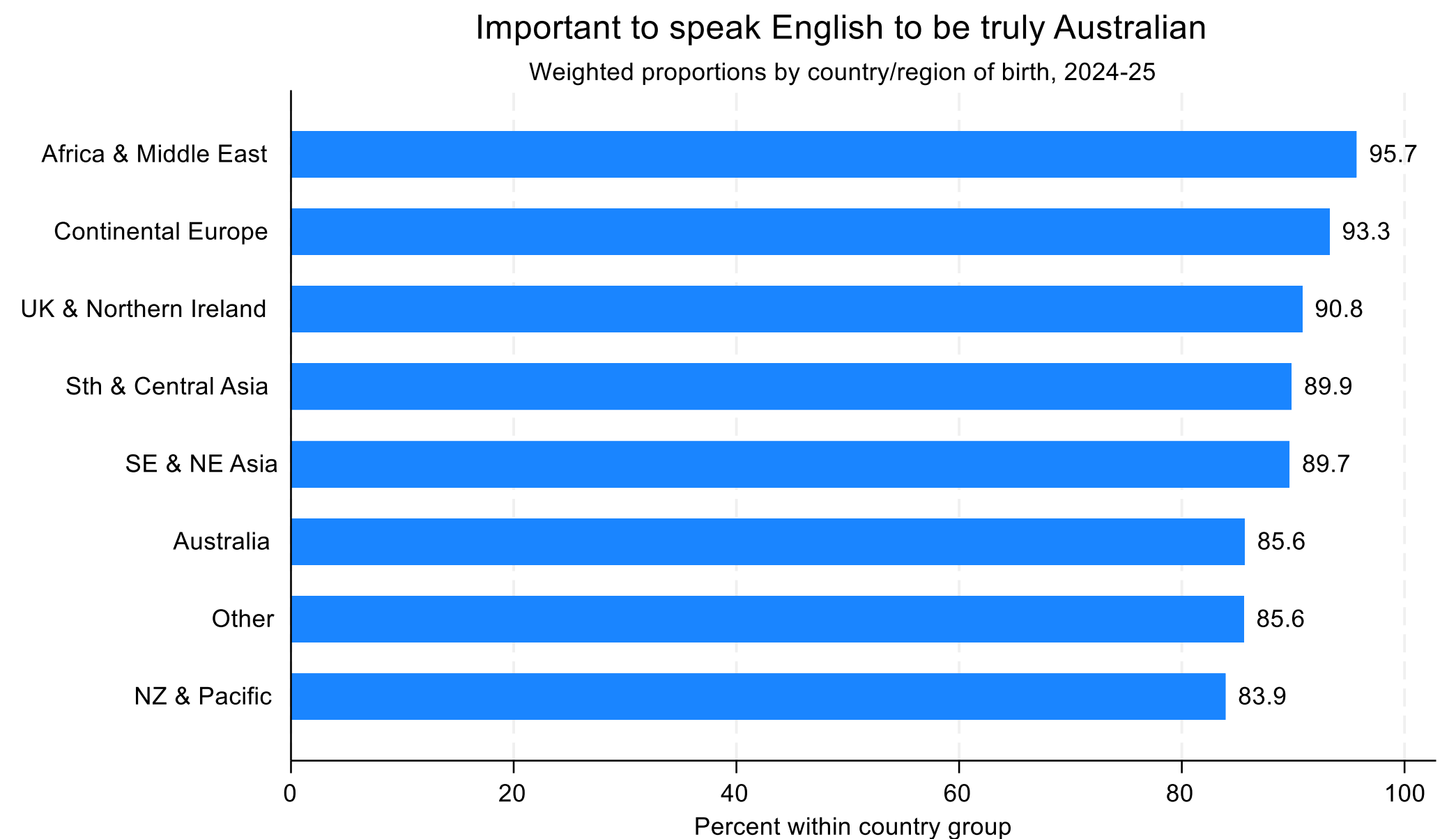
% believes that racism is a fairly or very big problem in Australia



Social cohesion for new Australians

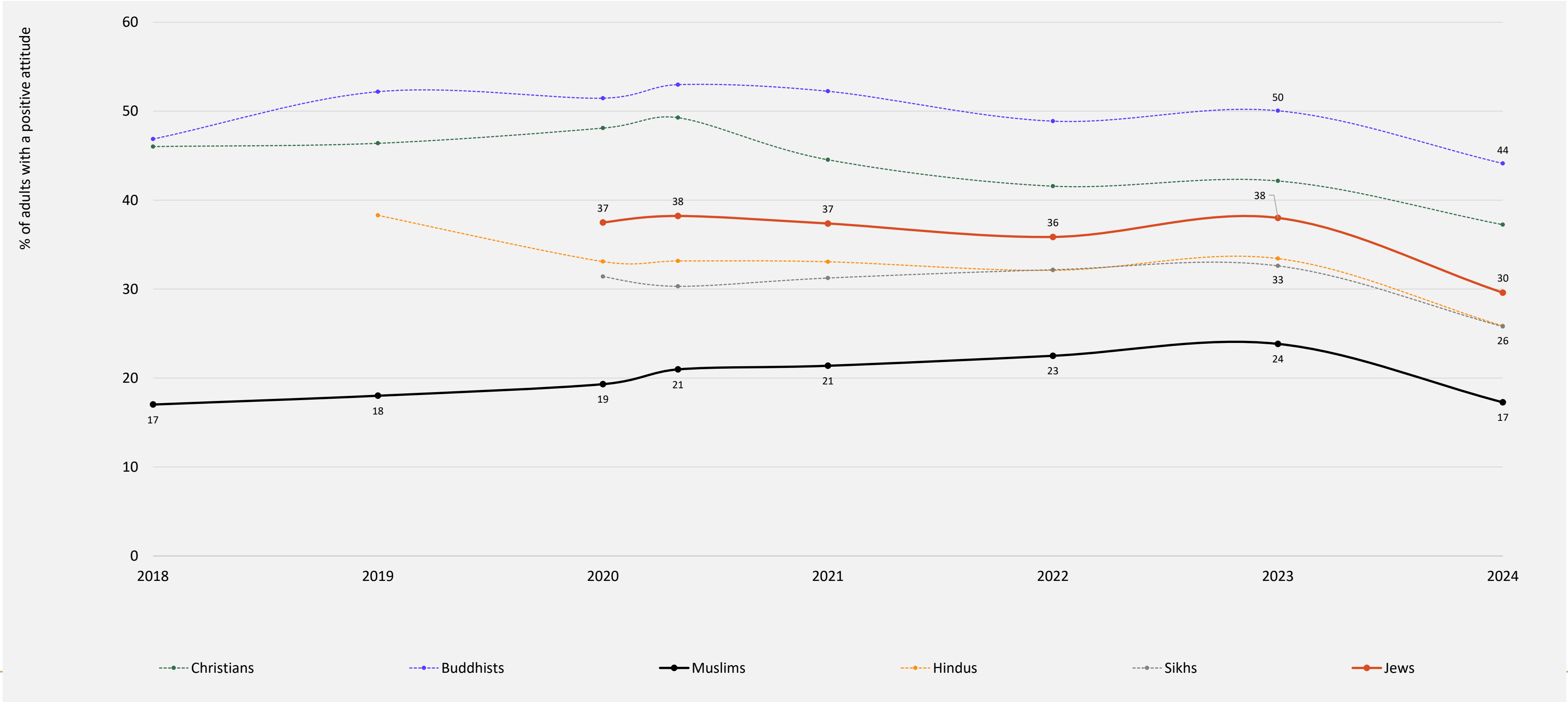


Most migrant groups place a lot of importance on being able to speak English...



Since 2024 (*n*=15,977)

‘Is your personal attitude positive, negative or neutral towards...’ Positive attitudes



Our analysis shows that people who

- view immigration and multiculturalism positively
- and those who have many close friends from different backgrounds

have much lower odds of holding negative attitudes toward Muslims,

Conversely,

- People in older age brackets (particularly over 65s) and
- those who vote for the LNP/CLP or One Nation

had much higher odds of having negative attitudes towards Muslims.

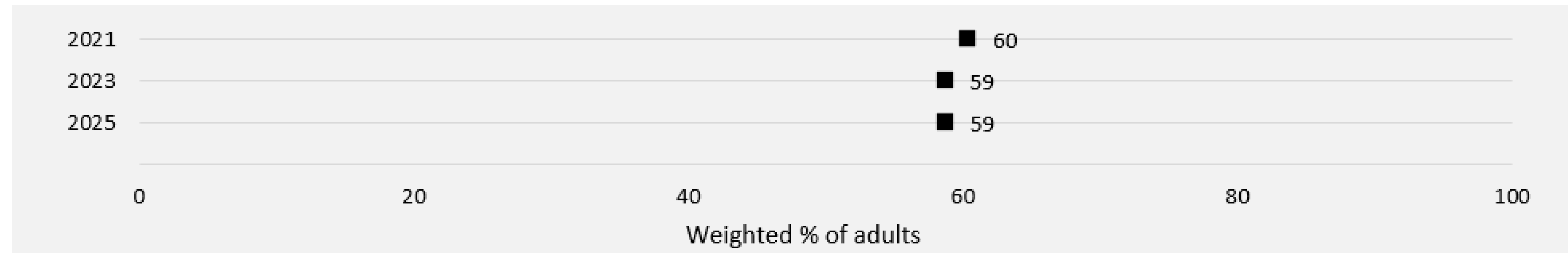
Partisan trust in government & the political system

% believes the Federal Government can be trusted most of the time/almost always

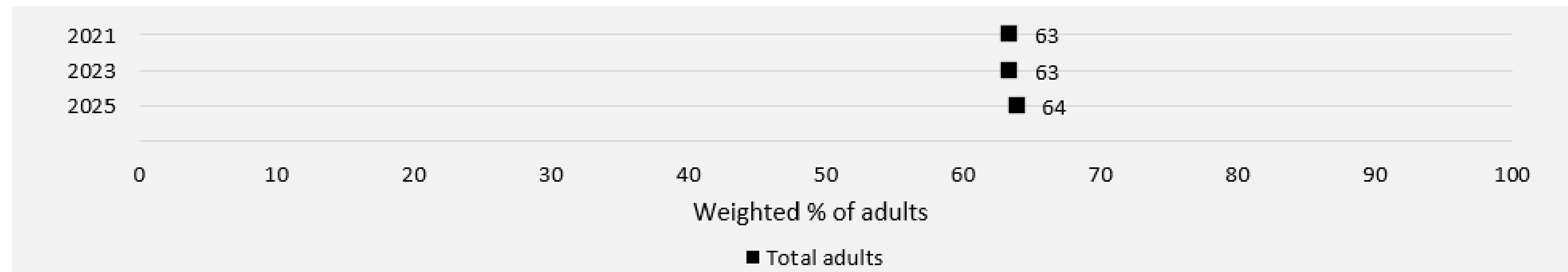


44% of people said the government could be trusted all/most of the time in 2021 (under the Morrison Coalition Government)

% believes the system of government in Australia works fine as it is or needs minor change at most

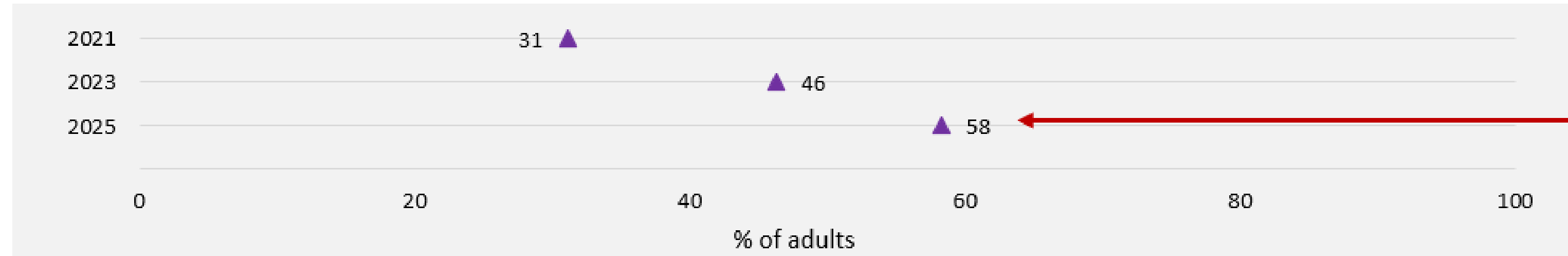


% believes Australian elections are fair all or most of the time



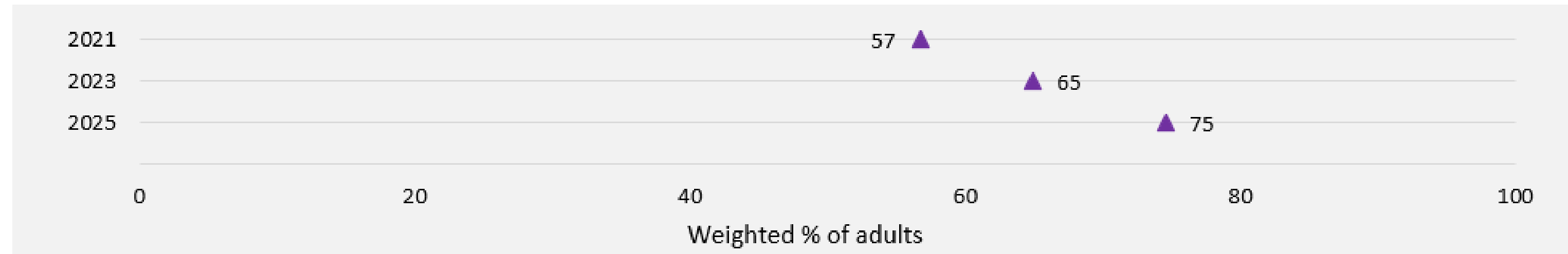
Partisan trust in government & the political system

% believes the Federal Government can be trusted most of the time/almost always

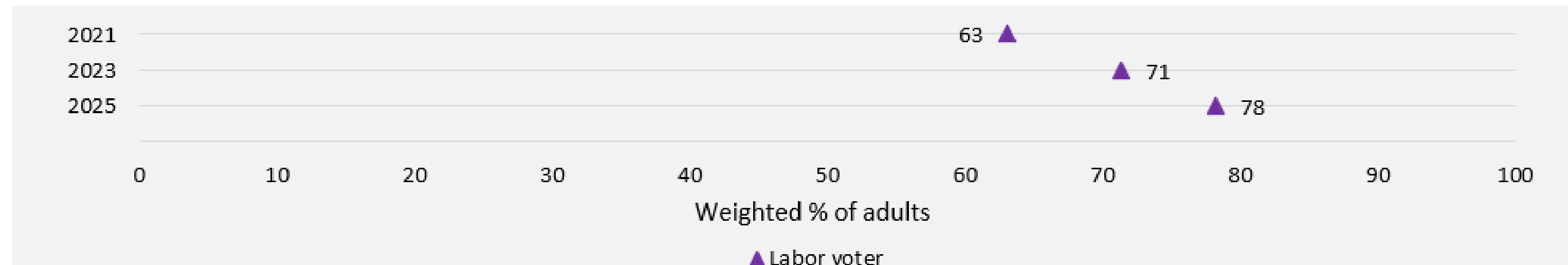


58% of Labor voters said the government could be trusted all/most of the time in 2025 (under the Albanese Labor Government), up from 31% in 2021 (under the Morrison Government)

% believes the system of government in Australia works fine as it is or needs minor change at most

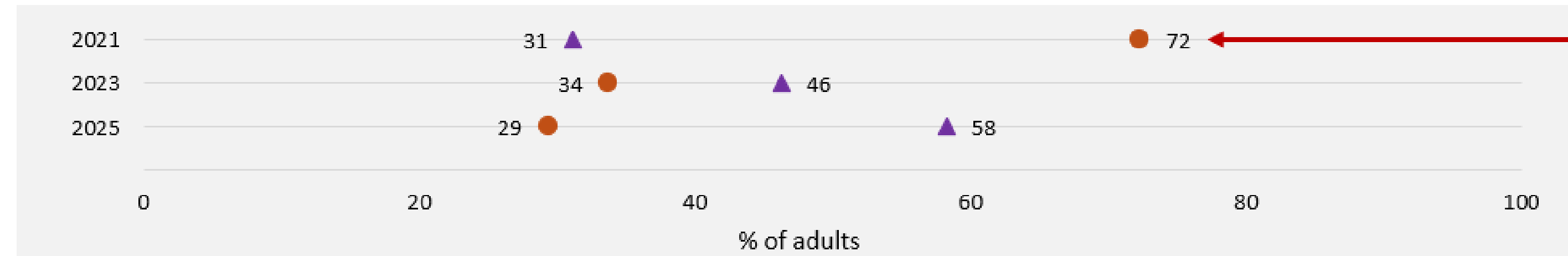


% believes Australian elections are fair all or most of the time



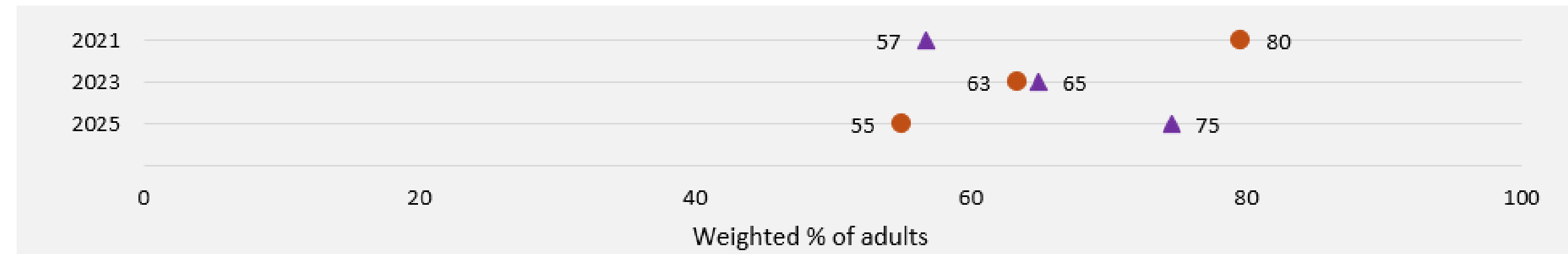
Partisan trust in government & the political system

% believes the Federal Government can be trusted most of the time/almost always

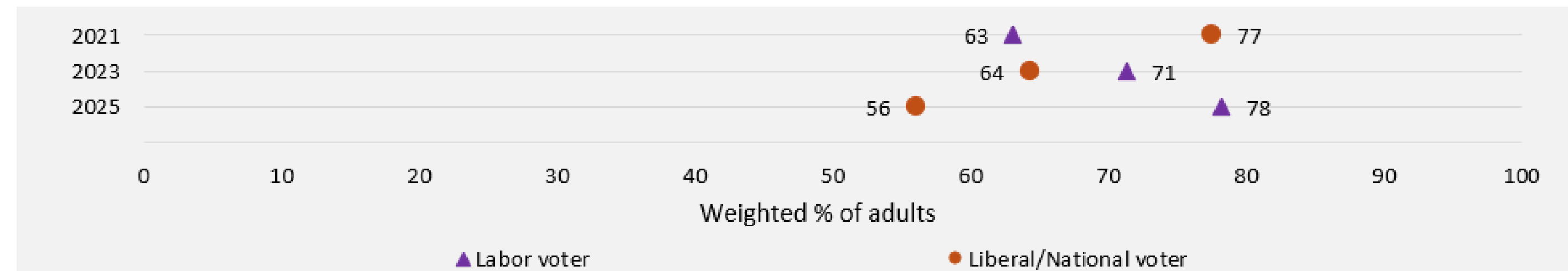


72% of Liberal/National voters said the government could be trusted all/most of the time in 2021 (under the Morrison Government), falling to 29% in 2025 (under the Albanese Labor Government)

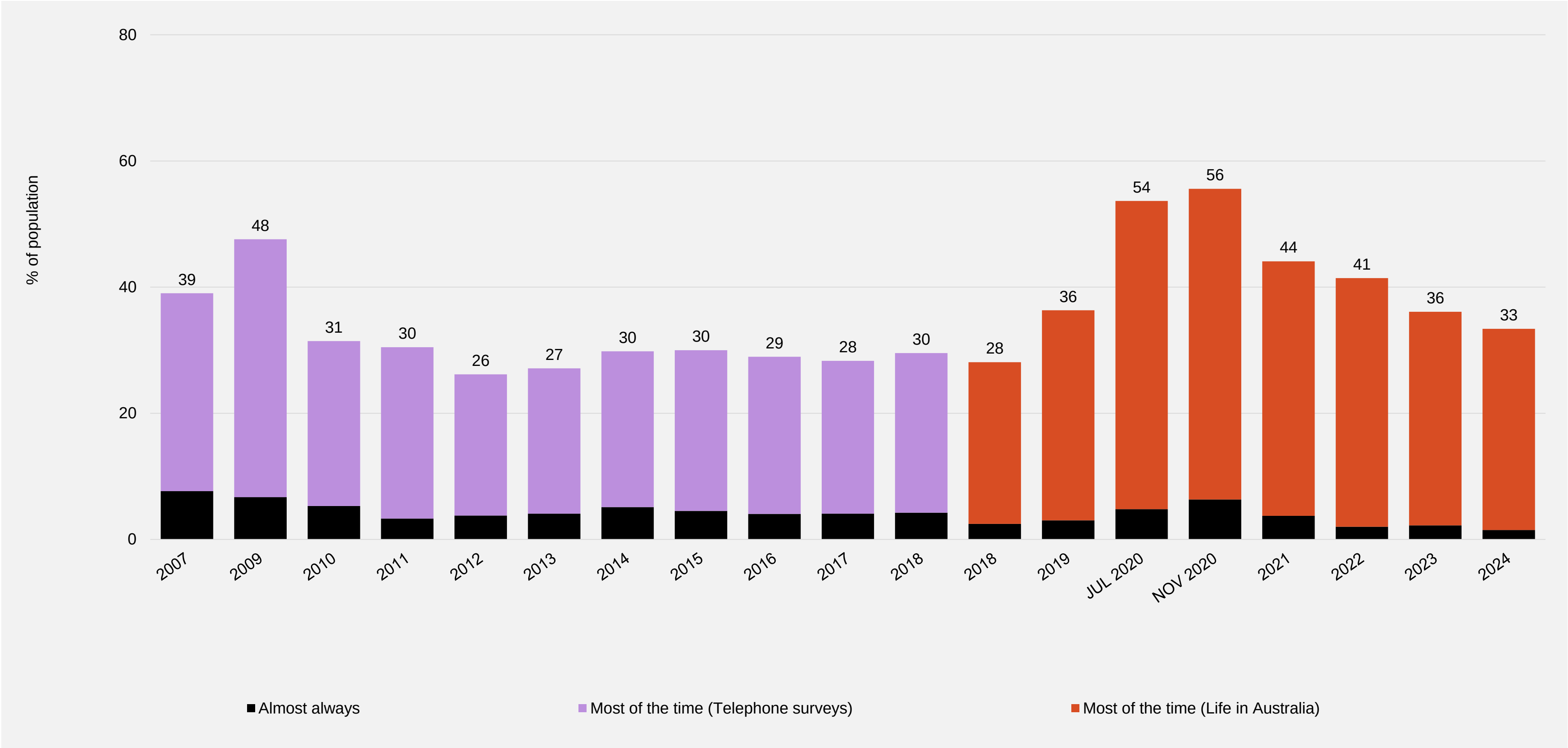
% believes the system of government in Australia works fine as it is or needs minor change at most



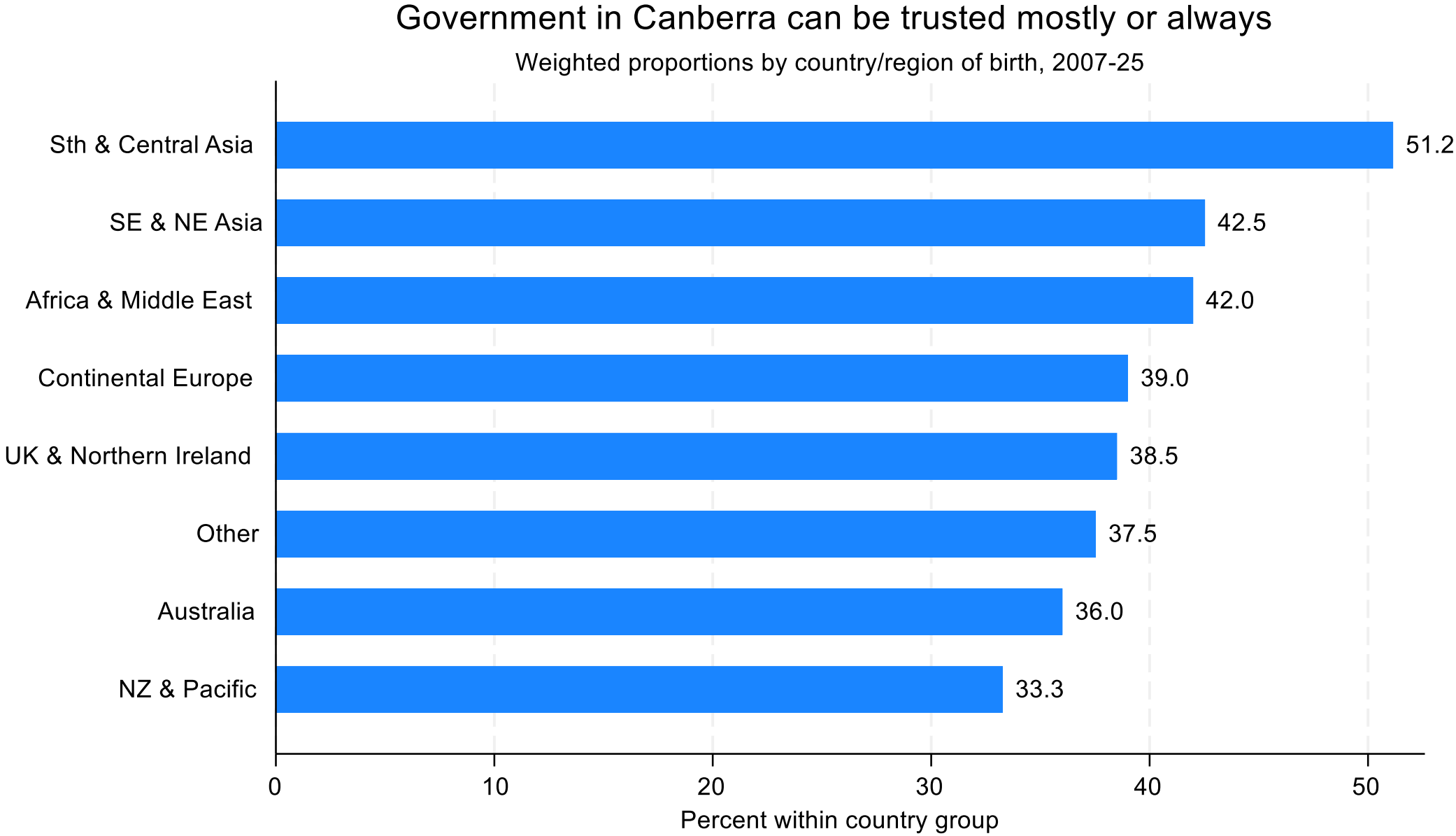
% believes Australian elections are fair all or most of the time



How often do you think the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people?

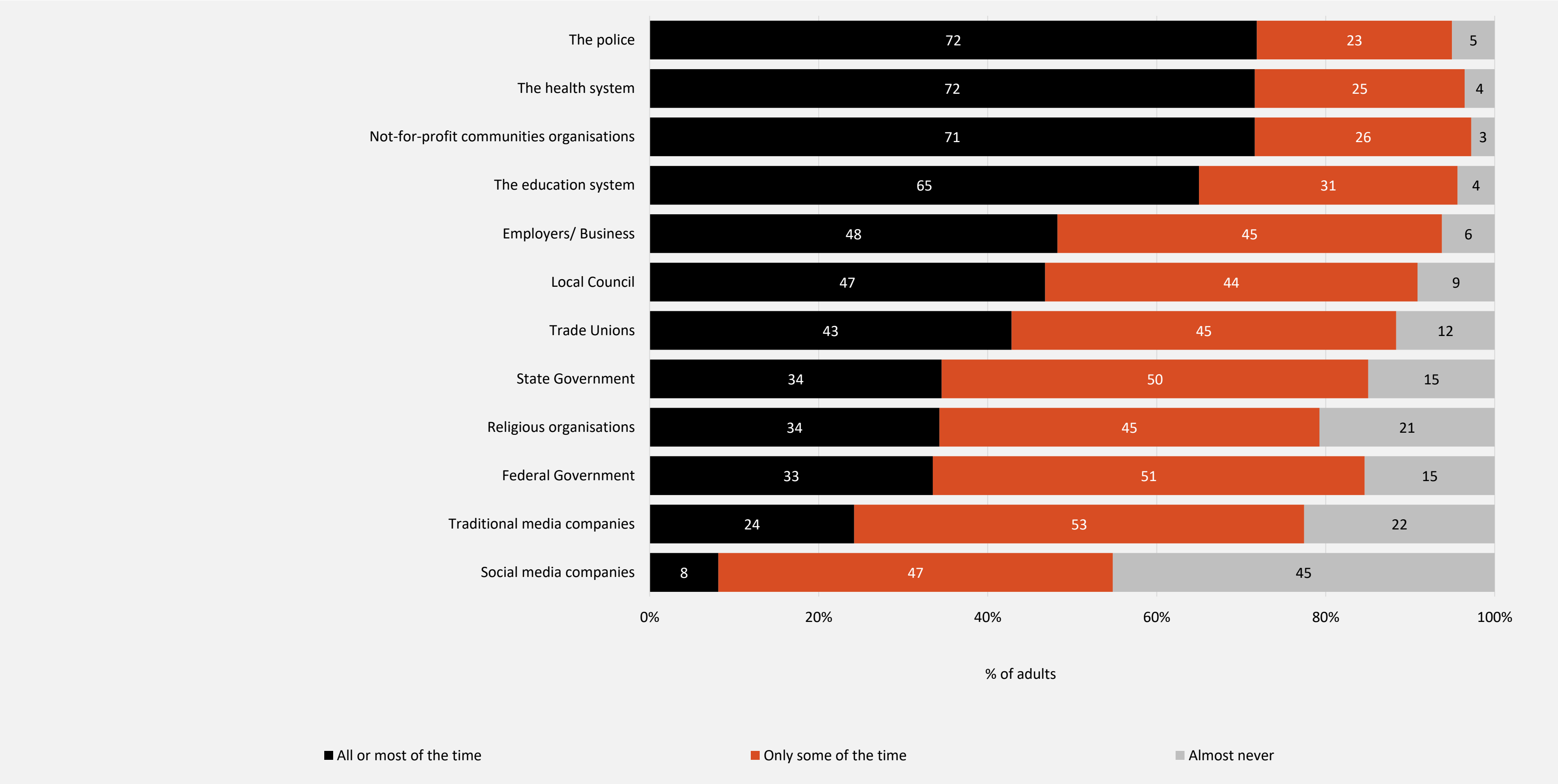


People not born in Australia have the highest degree of trust in the Federal Government.

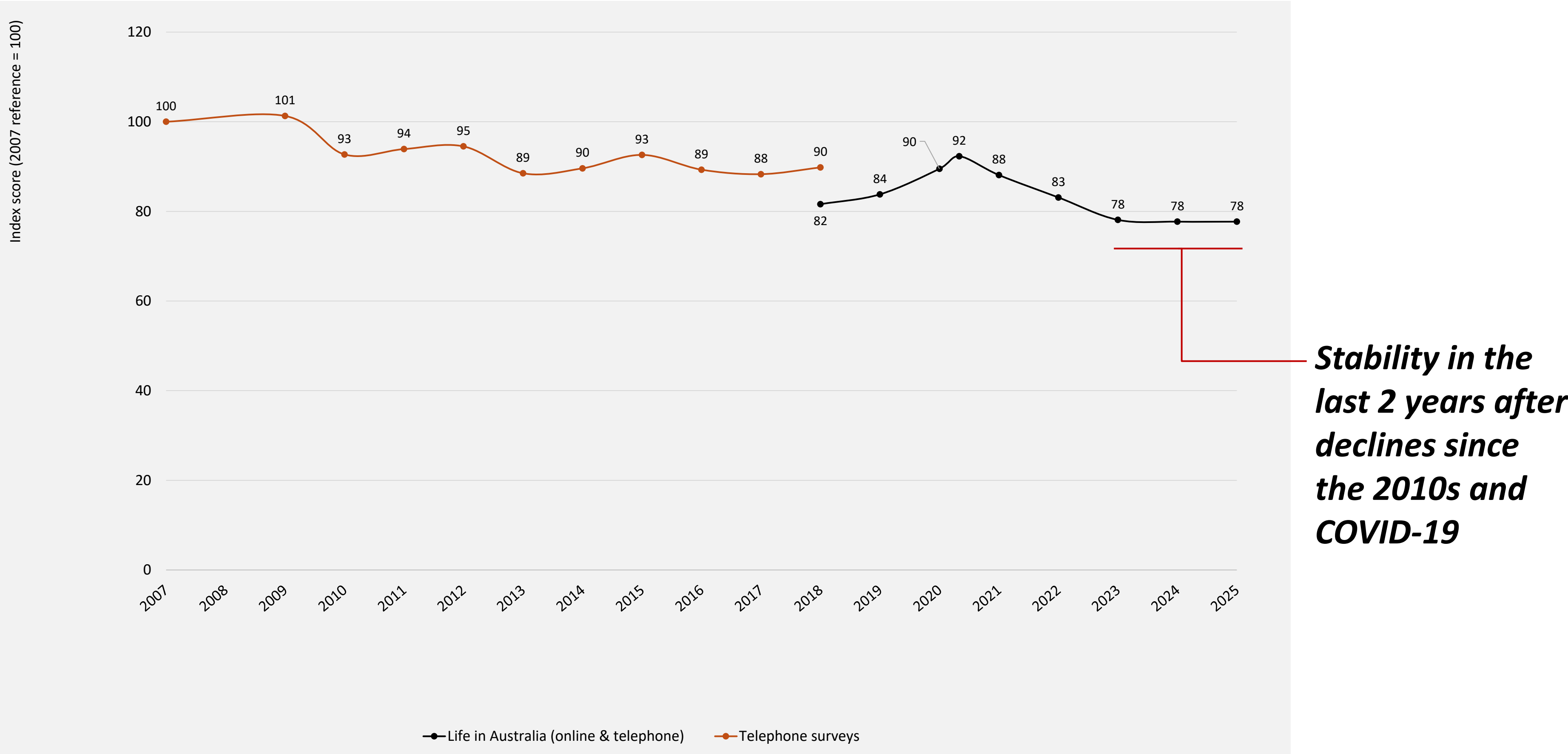


Since 2007 (*n*=62,965)

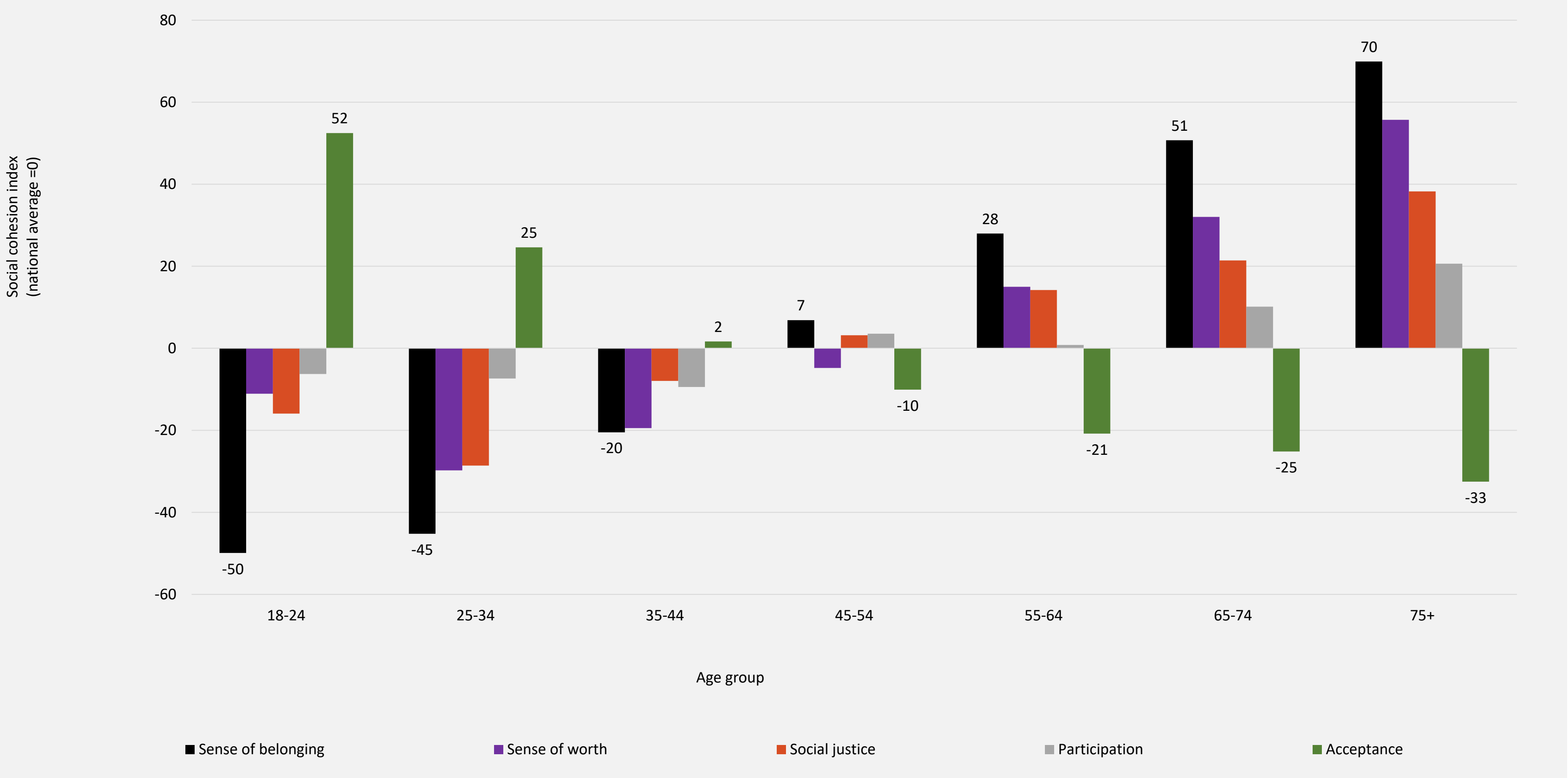
How often institutions can be trusted



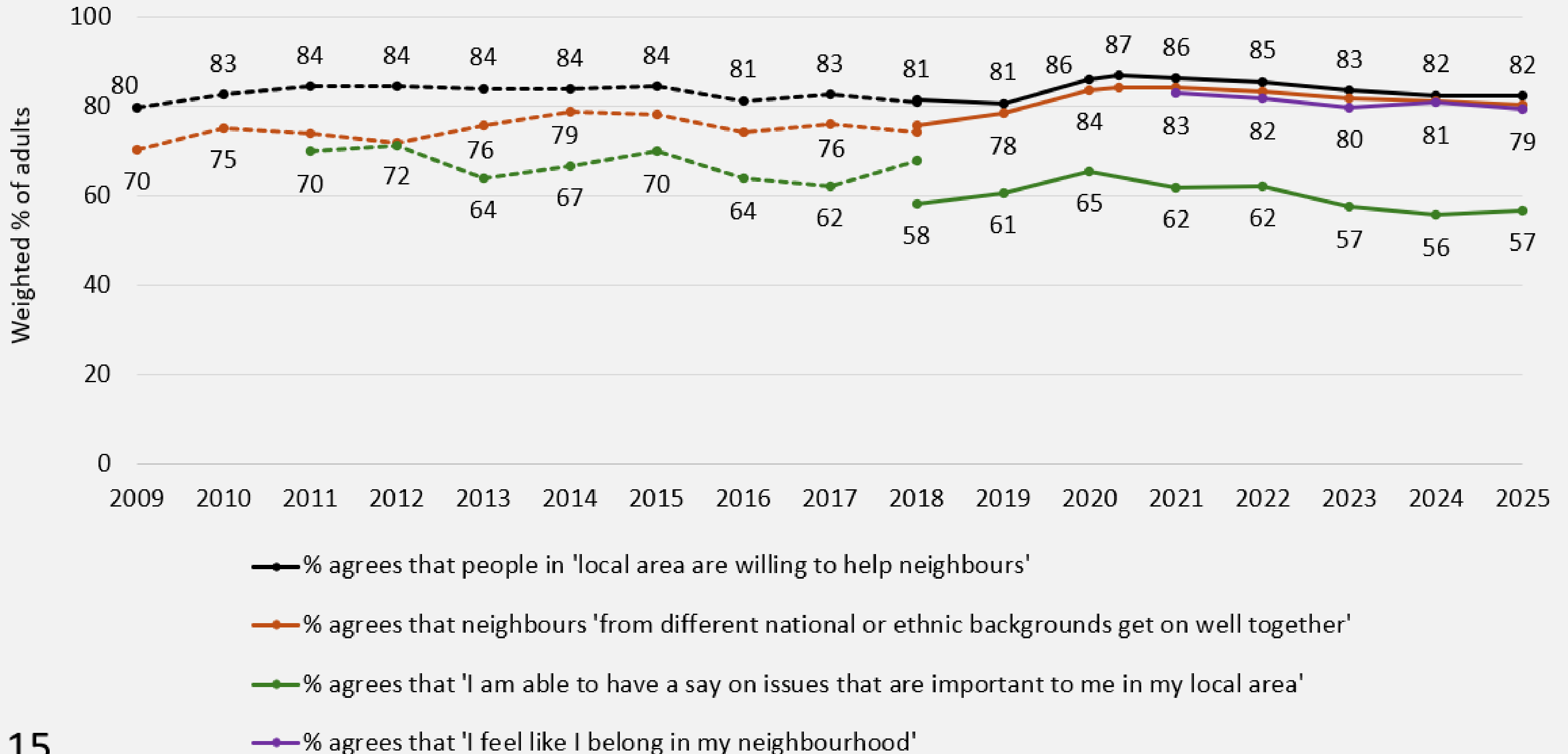
Scanlon Index of Social Cohesion



Social cohesion across age groups



Indicators of neighbourhood cohesion



Valued characteristics of the local neighbourhood for new arrivals

- Social connections
- Cultural diversity
- Transport links
- Safety

Valued community facilities

- Library
- Sporting facilities
- Local parks or playgrounds
- Community centres

What is belonging?

- ❖ A perception
- ❖ Influenced by external factors: physical space, institutions, systems, perception of safety
- ❖ Requires a reference group (something to belong to). Can feel belonging and lack of belonging at the same time. Also consider positive and negative belonging
- ❖ Dynamic – pull and push factors (physical and social) can enhance or detract from a sense of belonging
- ❖ Requires a sense of reciprocity with the group (shared history, understandings, feelings, beliefs)

New arrivals sense of belonging to Australia

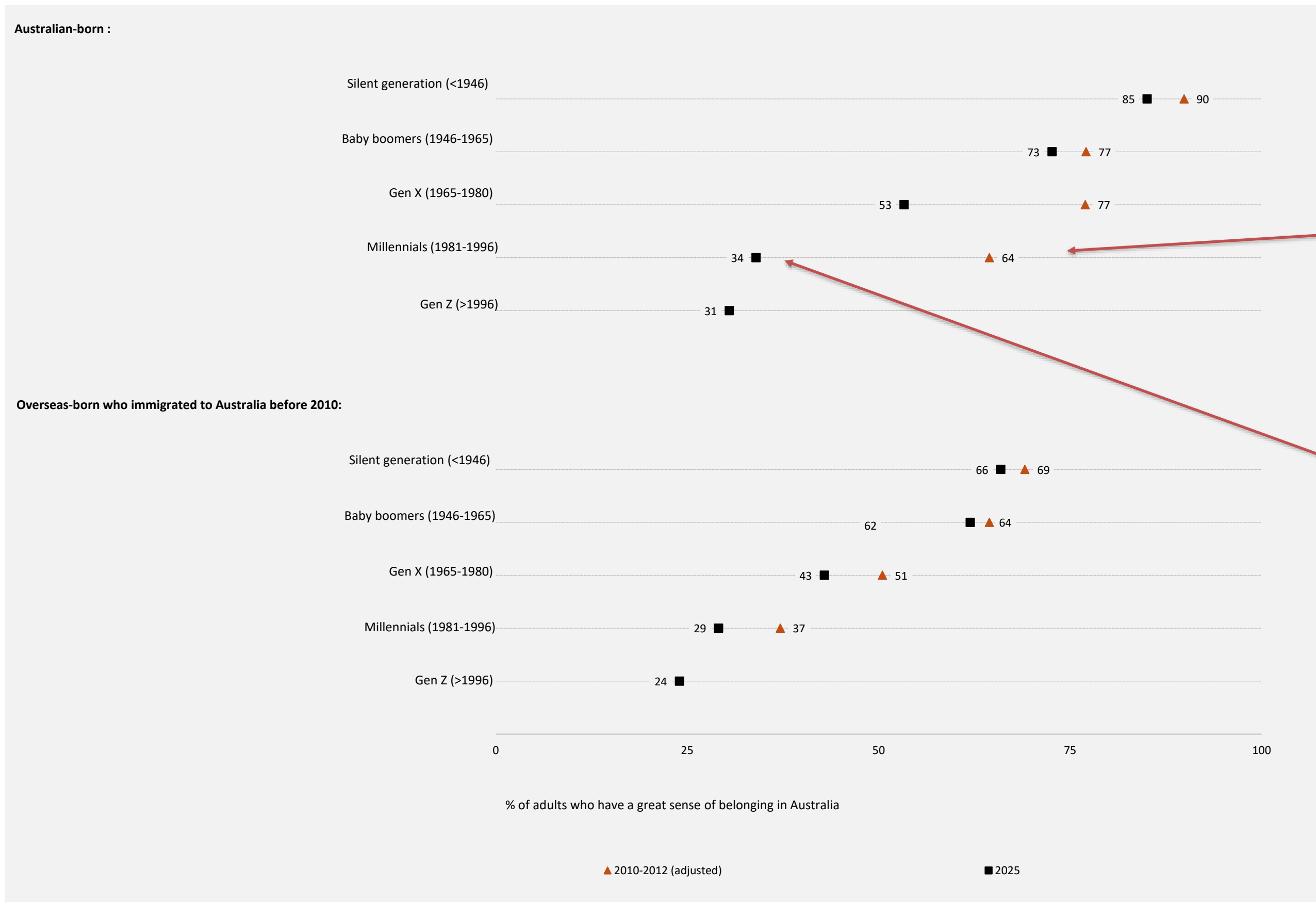


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Associated with:

- Feeling settled
- Time
- Familiarity
- Emotional connection
- Sense of loyalty to the country
- Adoption of cultural values

People with a great sense of belonging



In 2010-12, 64% of Millennials born in Australia said they had a great sense of belonging in Australia

In 2025, just 34% said they had a great sense of belonging in Australia

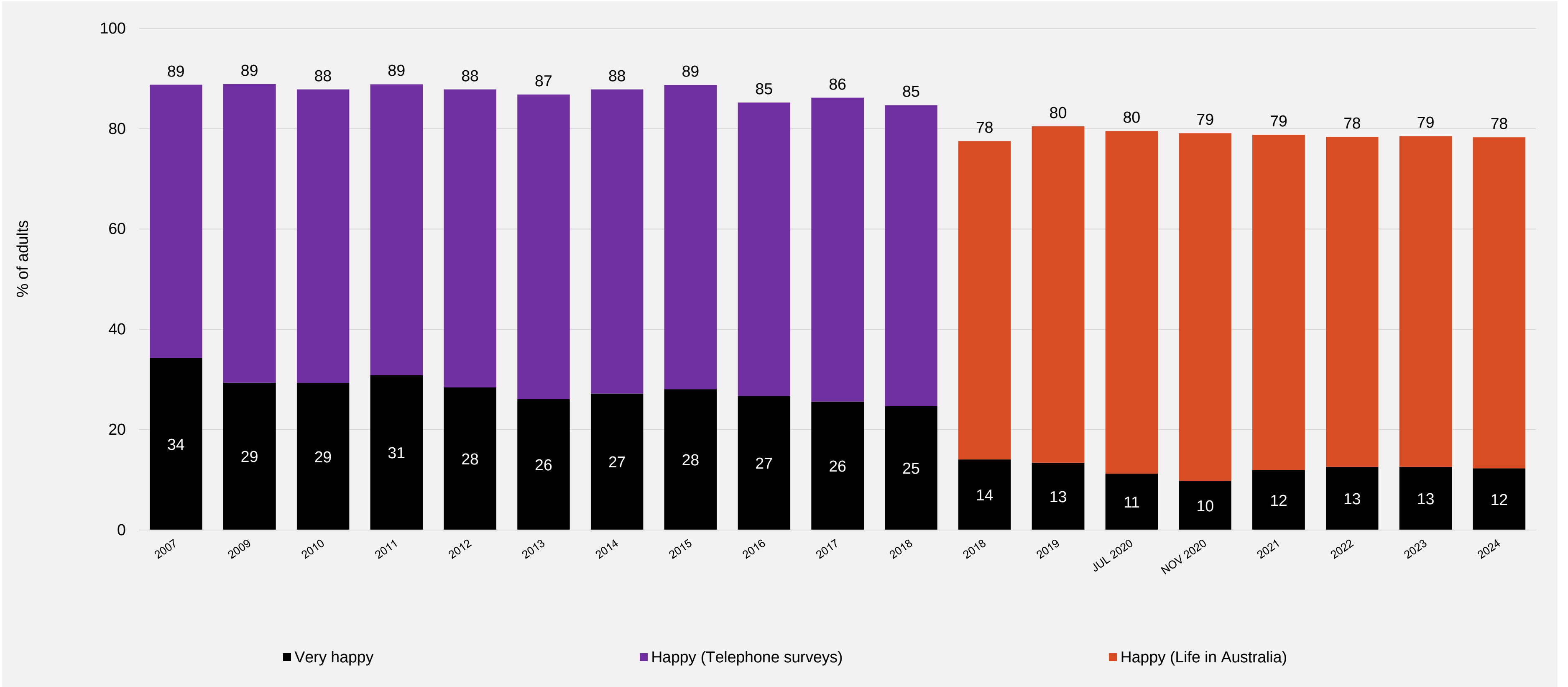
Places where social connections are forged

- The workplace
- Educational institutions
- Places of worship
- Sporting clubs
- Volunteering opportunities

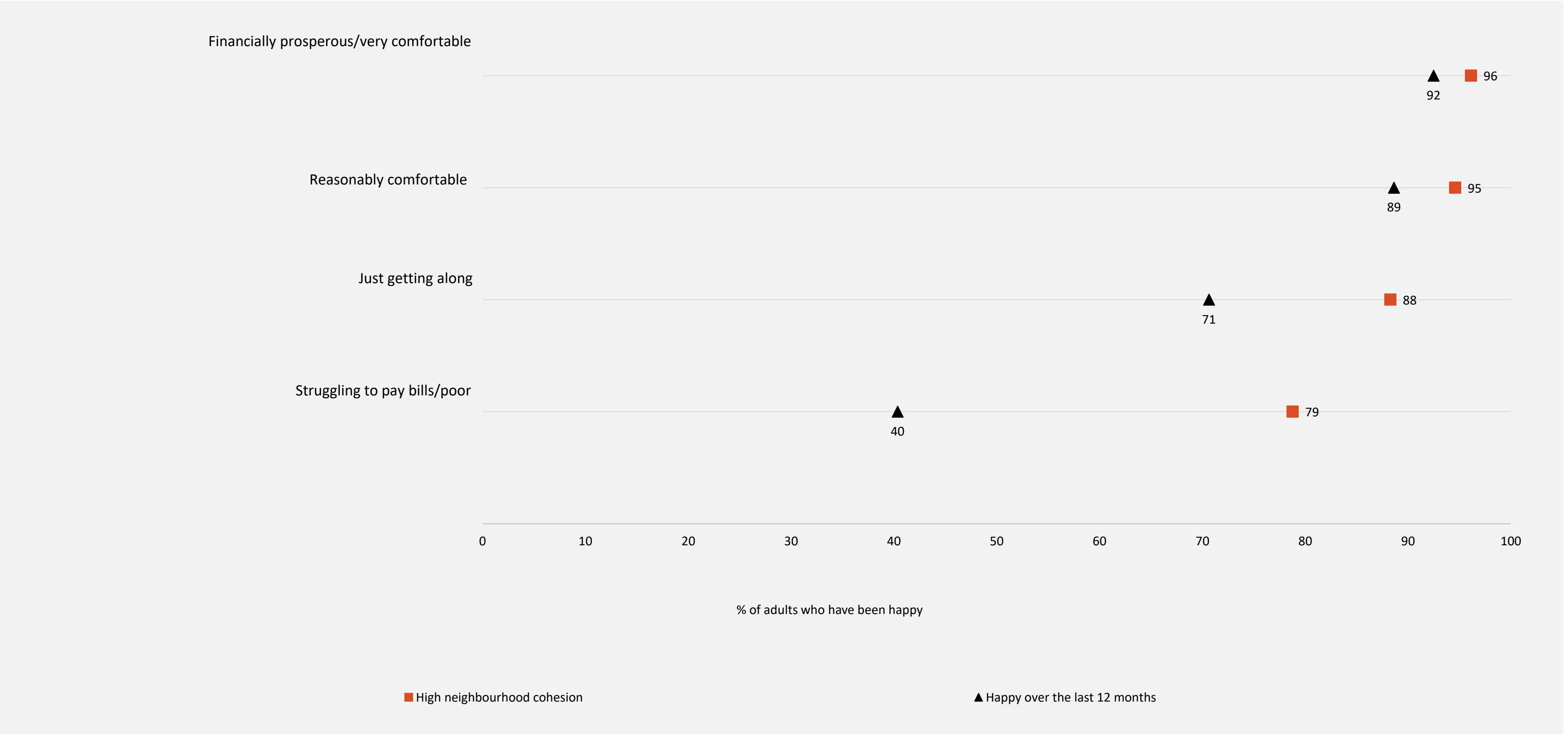


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Despite current challenges, most Australians are happy



Happy or very happy over the last 12 months



A quick reminder – Being mindful of our language

Words and phrases to avoid in speaking of others:

- CALD – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
- CARM – Culturally and Racially Marginalised
- Marginalised
- Disadvantaged
- Them (What do we call them then?)
- Those people
- Australians vs people who live in Australia

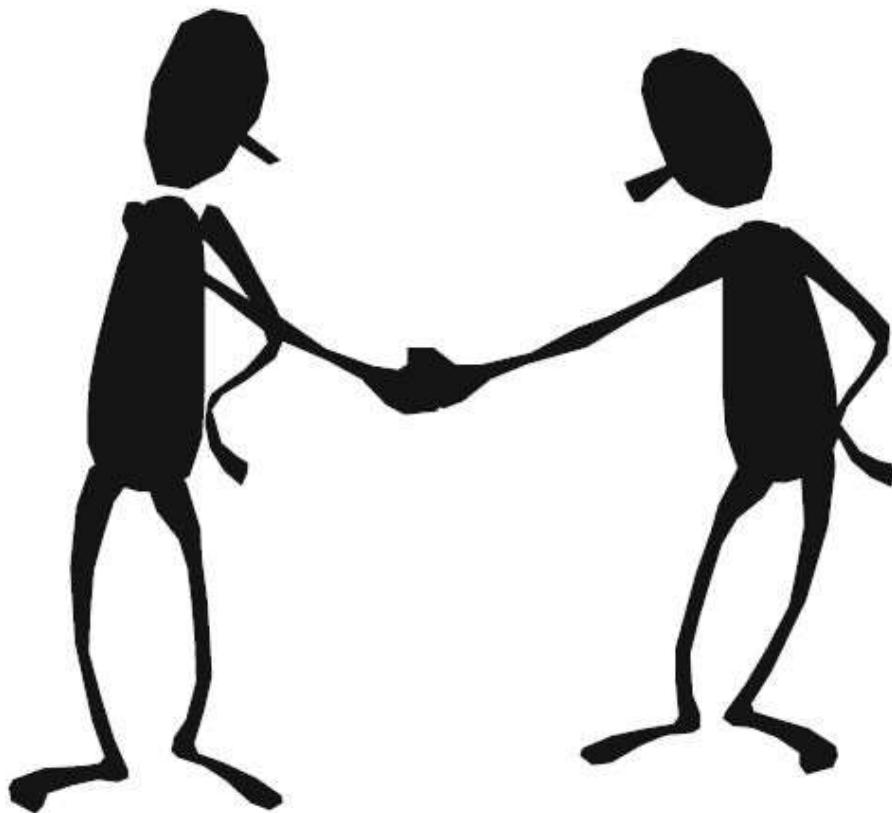
- Race unless given consent
- Religion unless given consent

- Migrant, Refugee, person seeking asylum unless given consent (don't assume recency of arrival).



How can you lead in ways that will strengthen social cohesion?

- Encourage optimism even if it is really difficult
- Focus on issues not categories e.g. safety and equity for everyone
- Build civic knowledge – how democracy works
- Build trust and familiarity
- Avoid the 3 P's: Pity, Paternalism, Patronising
- Alleviate fears, don't dismiss them
- Encourage respectful debate and respect for the outcomes
- Support everyone to step up



QUESTIONS