

AUS LIANOW

Report: 4 June 2021

Understanding **AustraliaNOW**

Using cultural tracking expertise and leveraging 25 years of insights generated from AustraliaSCAN, AustraliaNOW provides an ongoing understanding of Australians' attitudes and perceptions to life in Australia today.

Capturing emergent themes, how they co-exist and inter-relate, AustraliaNOW explores and defines what this means for organisations and brands to help them prepare for and navigate the days, weeks and months ahead.

Culture and society cannot be understood with surveys alone – we need to study people in their natural environment and influences around them to provide context and clarity to the results of this research. This complementary approach takes unstructured data from various sources and models it to find themes, behaviours, and feelings.

Method

- Weekly online survey closely tracking the rapidly changing sentiment of Australians
- More than 1,000 interviews per week, every week since March 2020
- **This report draws from over 63,000 interviews**
- All interviews with those 18 years and over and weighted to a representative national sample
- Integration of 25 years of AustraliaSCAN to provide deep context
- Report fieldwork timing for this report: 26th March 2020 – 31st June 2021

Search

Google Trends tracks ~1,500 categories of interest which we monitor to see if there are any behavioural changes happening in Australia that might be of interest. It is focused on behavior, not feelings.

Social

We monitor every Tweet and every Reddit post in Australia that is focused on the current pandemic. We analyse to monitor general sentiment, 8 key emotions, and what's driving them.

News

We capture 4k Australian News Headlines daily that are captured in 15 minute intervals to show us what the media is focusing on, and how they're going about it in terms of sentiment.

This month in summary

May 2021

MINDSET

Eyes are on the Victorian COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown. National **concern about the COVID-19 situation re-emerged** in the past week.

Despite this we are largely hopeful and optimistic. Economic metrics continue to indicate low unemployment and a strong GDP. However, there are **building levels of stress** among certain cohorts of the community.

As small businesses struggle in a locked-down Victoria, the prospect of a **third wave of COVID-19** looms more heavily across Australia.

Australians largely feel that the **pandemic has been handled well**, but the sense that the nation is heading in the right direction has waned.

INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

Following the Federal Government's budget announcement that the international border is unlikely to reopen until mid-2022, we have reflected on the consequences of the so-called "**Fortress Australia**" policy.

The decision to close Australia's international border has been instrumental in containing COVID-19 and has consistently been supported by the public.

However, there are **a number of social and economic costs** – on a personal level Australians have had **leisure travel plans averted**, experienced **separation from family and friends** and had **disruptions to international work and business**.

Australians are divided as to whether they believe quarantine-free travel should be available for vaccinated Australians.

CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP

Following months of relatively high financial confidence, **confidence has fallen in May**. This is reflected across all States and follows Government pandemic stimulus being removed.

Underemployment and job security remain an issue, with many Australian workers wanting more hours and/or not confident they will keep their job or main source of income for the next 6 months. Concern over ability to pay bills is also on the rise.

Confidence in the Federal Government has dropped across all States.

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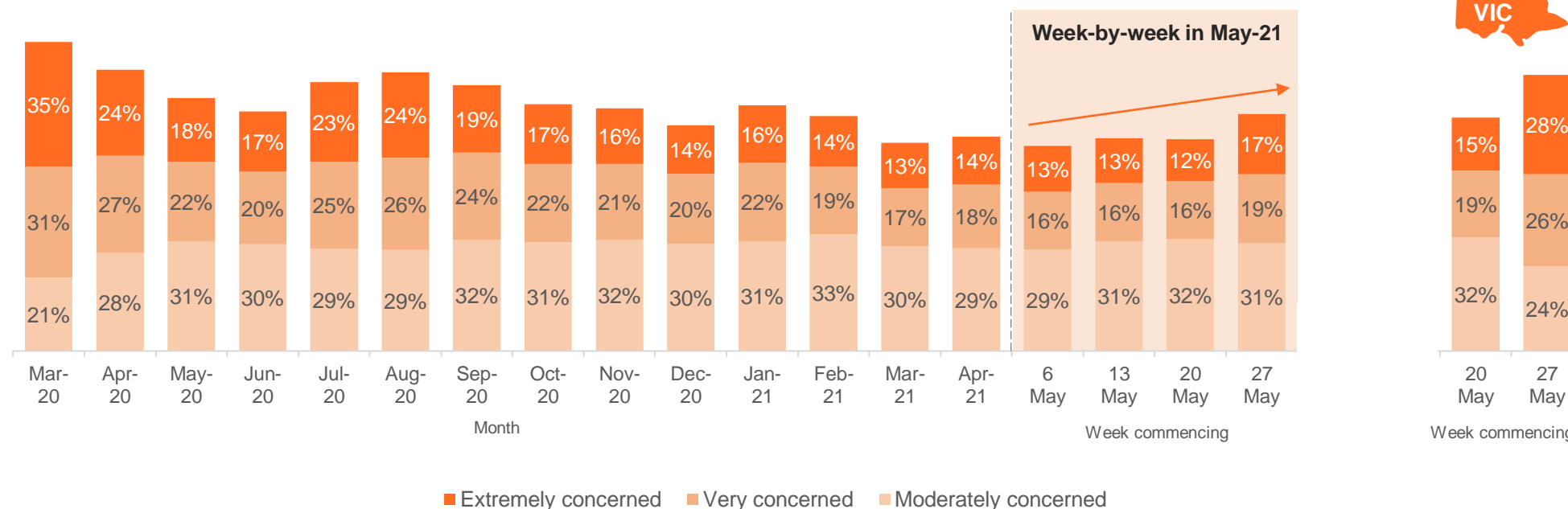
MINDSET

COVID concern re-emerging

Survey

With all eyes on the Victorian COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown, **national concern about the COVID-19 situation has re-emerged in the past week**. Public concern now resembles how we felt following separate outbreaks in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in December and early January. Concern is particularly heightened in Victoria, the epicenter of the latest outbreak.

Concern about the COVID-19/coronavirus situation (All Australians)



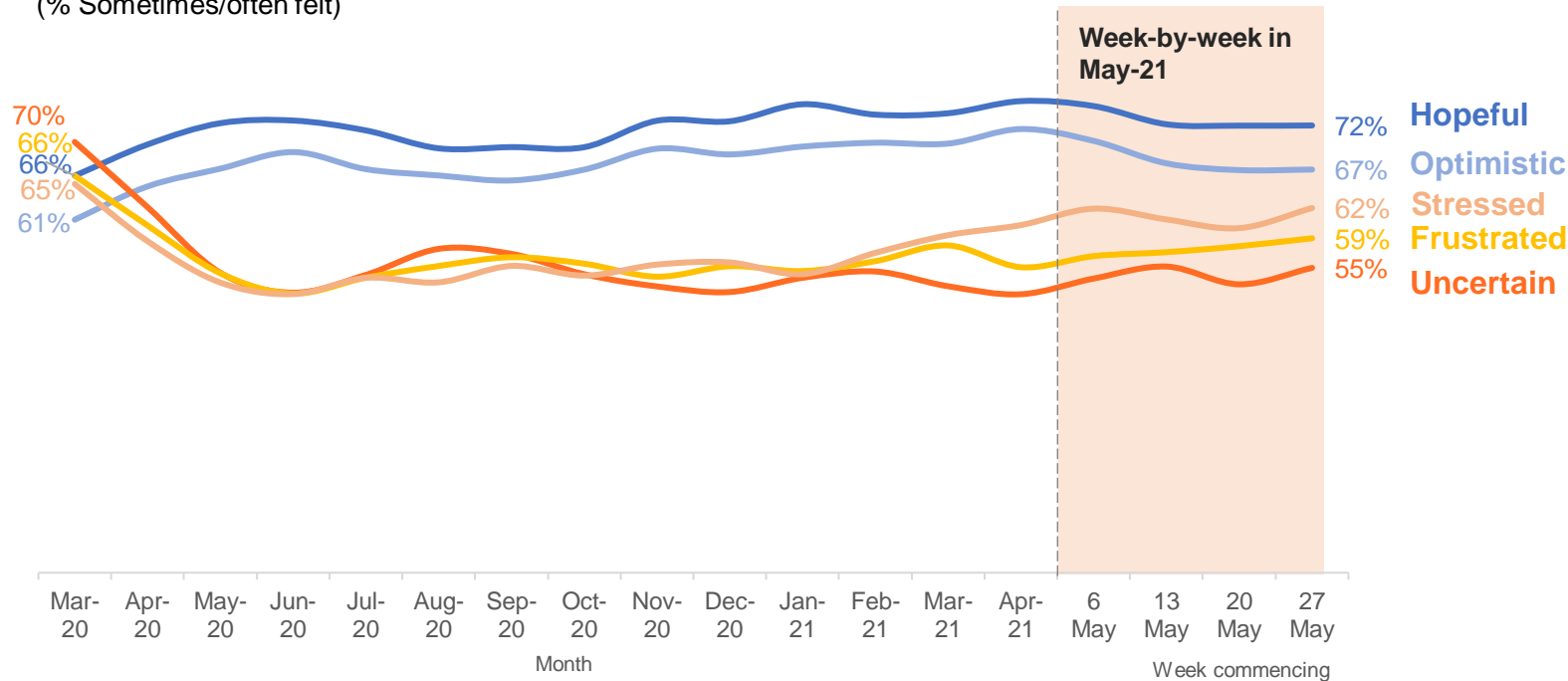
Q8 - Firstly, how concerned are you about the Coronavirus/Covid-19 situation in general?

All respondents, n=c. 1,000-7,300 per month; n=1,000 per week of May. Victorian residents, n=250 per week of May.

Optimistic, but stress on the rise

Survey

Mood over the last week
(% Sometimes/often felt)



As a nation we are largely **hopeful and optimistic**. Economic metrics continue to indicate **low unemployment** (5.5%) and a **strong GDP** (growing by a much-better-than-expected 1.1 per cent over the past year)¹.

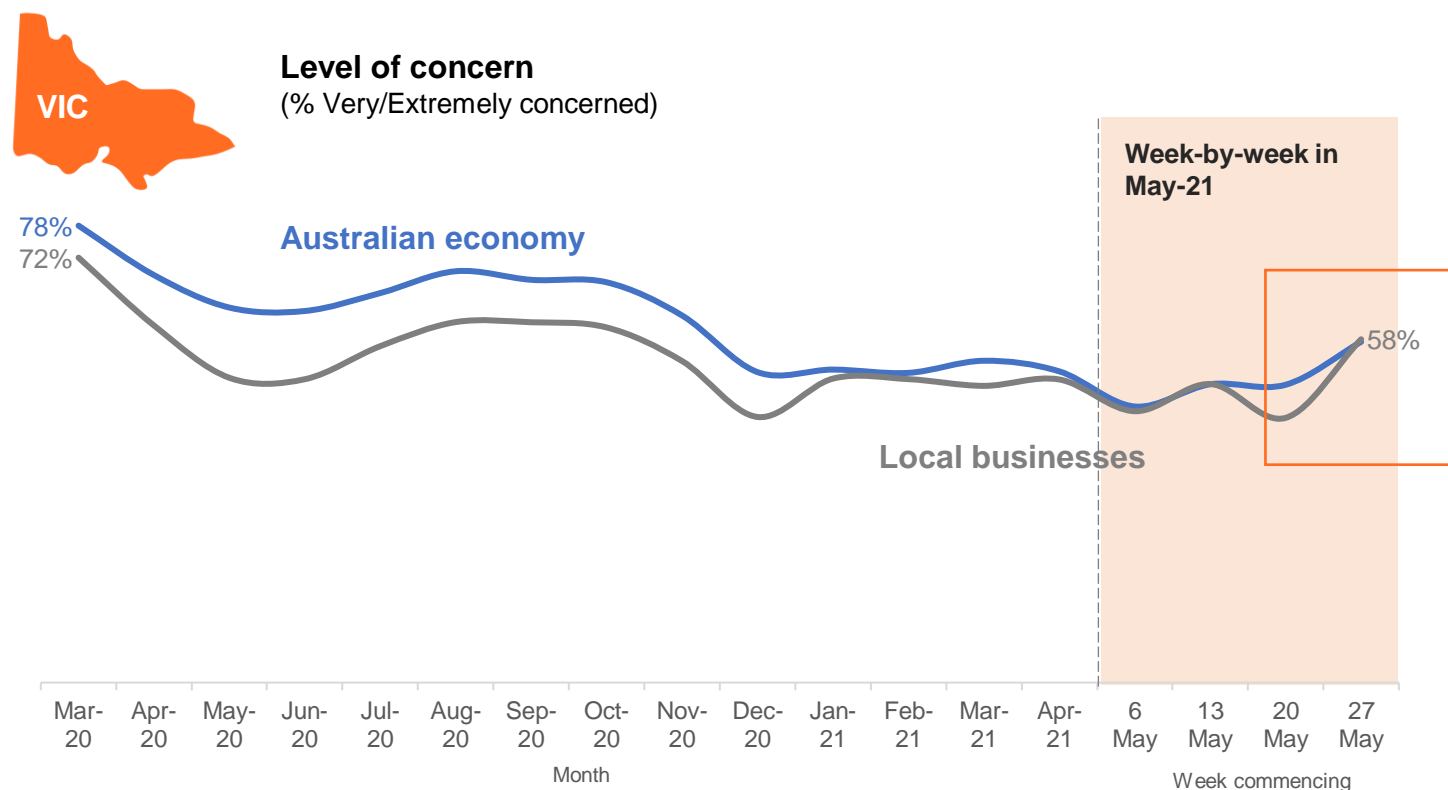
However, there are **mounting levels of stress** among certain cohorts of the community, including **females, under 40s, young families, part time/casual employees or those not in the workforce or in unstable work**.

Q7 - Thinking back over the last week, how often did you feel:
All respondents, n=c. 1,000-7,300 per month; n=1,000 per week of May.

¹Sources: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment>
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-02/gdp-march-quarter-economic-growth-covid-rebound/100184004>

Fears for small business in Victoria

Survey



As the State headed into a **week-long lockdown** on the 27th of May (which was subsequently extended in Melbourne for an additional week), there was an **uptick in concern about local businesses and the national economy**. Concern for small businesses in Victoria is now equal to concerns over the broader economy.

Concerns this week are high across most cohorts of the community, but particularly high in **metropolitan Melbourne** (60%) compared to regional Victoria (53%).

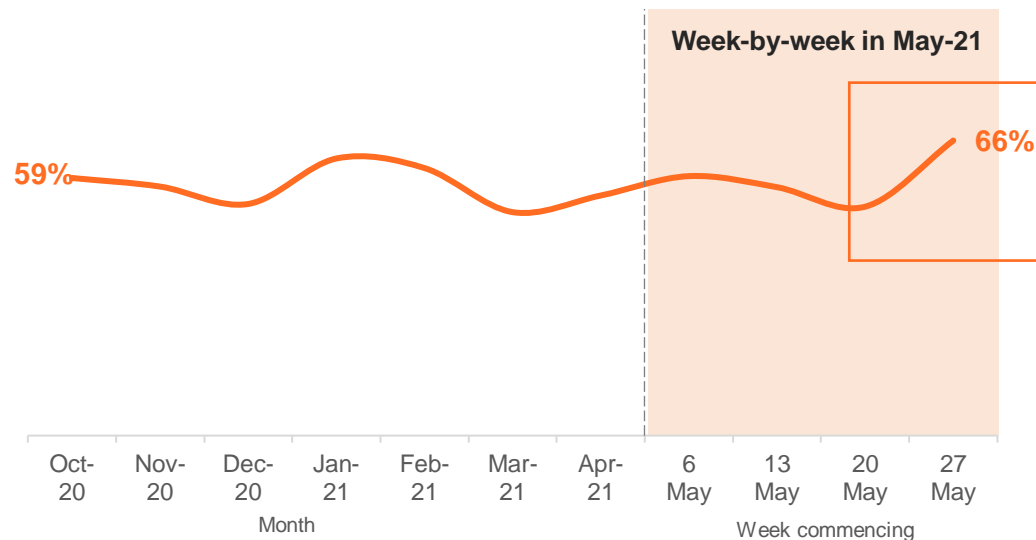
Q9 - How concerned are you about the impact Coronavirus/Covid-19 will have on the following:
Victorian residents, n=c. 350-1,500 per month; n=250 per week of May.

Third wave front of mind

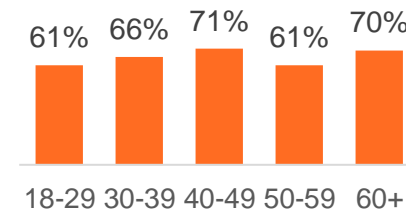
Survey

I am concerned there will be a third wave of coronavirus cases in Australia

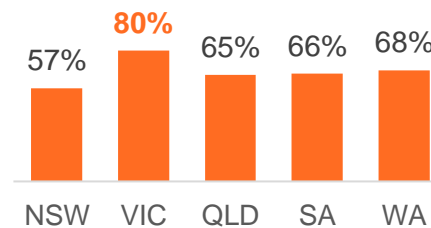
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6)



By Age – 27th May 2021



By State – 27th May 2021



The prospect of a **third wave of COVID-19** in Australia looms more heavily this week, with almost two thirds (66%) concerned (up from 56% in April). This comes amid signs that the UK may be in the early stages of a third wave¹ and reports of **more contagious strains** appear globally.

Concern is highest in Victoria, where the most recent outbreak is occurring, and is the highest it's been since October 2020.

Q10 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

All respondents, n=c. 1,000-7,300 per month; n=1,000 per week of May. W/C 27th May 18-29 n=228; 30-39 n=185; 40-49 n=188; 50-59 n=151; 60+ n=248. NSW n=319; VIC n=253; QLD n=210; SA n=79; WA n=94

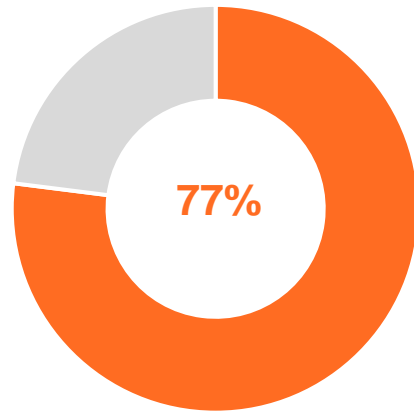
¹Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-57304515>

Approval of pandemic management

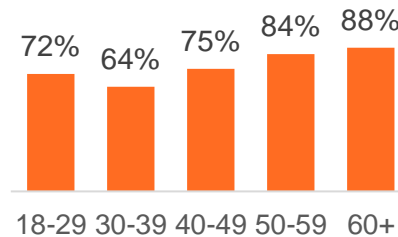
Survey

Australia has done a good job handling the pandemic

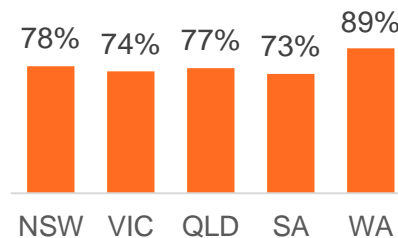
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6 – 20th May 2021)



By Age



By State



Australians largely feel that the nation has **done a good job of handling the pandemic** (77% agree). Approval is highest in States where confidence in State government is similarly high (WA and NSW).

Younger Australians, young families and lower income households tend to be **less approving** of how the pandemic has been managed. These are the groups that have arguably been the **most impacted** by the adverse affects of the pandemic.

Those that approve pandemic management are also more likely to feel that the virus is **under control** in their State, feel their **day-to-day outlook is back to normal** and (if working) are confident they can **keep their job/source of income** for the next 6 months.

Q132 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

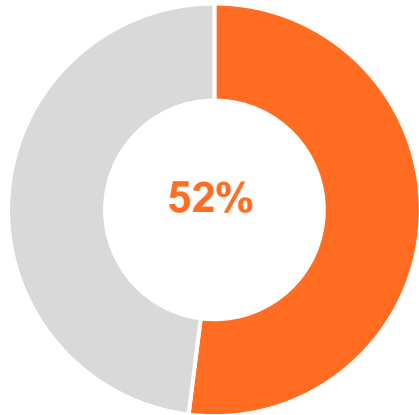
All respondents, W/C 20 May 21, n=1,000. 18-29 n=220; 30-39 n=179; 40-49 n=177; 50-59 n=159; 60+ n=265. NSW n=316; VIC n=249; QLD n=210; SA n=81; WA n=99

Nation's unity questioned

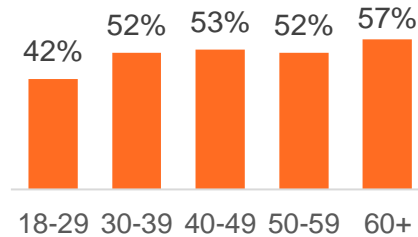
Survey

Australia is more united since before the pandemic

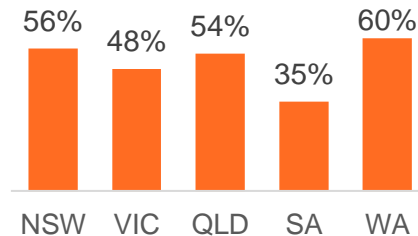
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6 – 20th May 2021)



By Age



By State



Despite high levels of approval for how the pandemic has been managed, we are **divided on whether Australia is more united** since before the pandemic (52% agree / 48% disagree).

Younger Australians in particular (aged 18-29 years) are **least likely to feel that the nation is more united**.

The key issue impacting our cohesiveness perceptions is the **growing gap between rich and poor**. Those less likely to feel we are united are more likely to feel that **financial inequality** and addressing the gap between rich and poor is the most pressing issue of our time.

Q132 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

All respondents, W/C 20 May 21, n=1,000. 18-29 n=220; 30-39 n=179; 40-49 n=177; 50-59 n=159; 60+ n=265. NSW n=316; VIC n=249; QLD n=210; SA n=81; WA n=99

Financial pressures **shift priorities**

Survey

Most important things for Government to take action on straight away

(Top 10)

		Change since Apr-21 (percentage points)
Cost of living	38%	+3
Environment/climate change	31%	-3
The Australian economy	30%	0
Housing affordability	27%	+3
Mental illness	27%	+4
Domestic violence	26%	+1
Public healthcare	24%	0
Care for the elderly	24%	+1
Unemployment	23%	-1
Homelessness	21%	-1

With pandemic stimulus measures withdrawn, a supercharged housing market and possible lockdowns front-of-mind, **cost of living remains the top issue** Australians would like Government to take action on straight away.

Housing affordability and mental illness have both increased slightly in importance since last month.

Generational differences continue to play out, with Australians aged 40+ more likely to prioritise the economy and those aged under 40 years more concerned with housing affordability, mental illness and domestic violence.

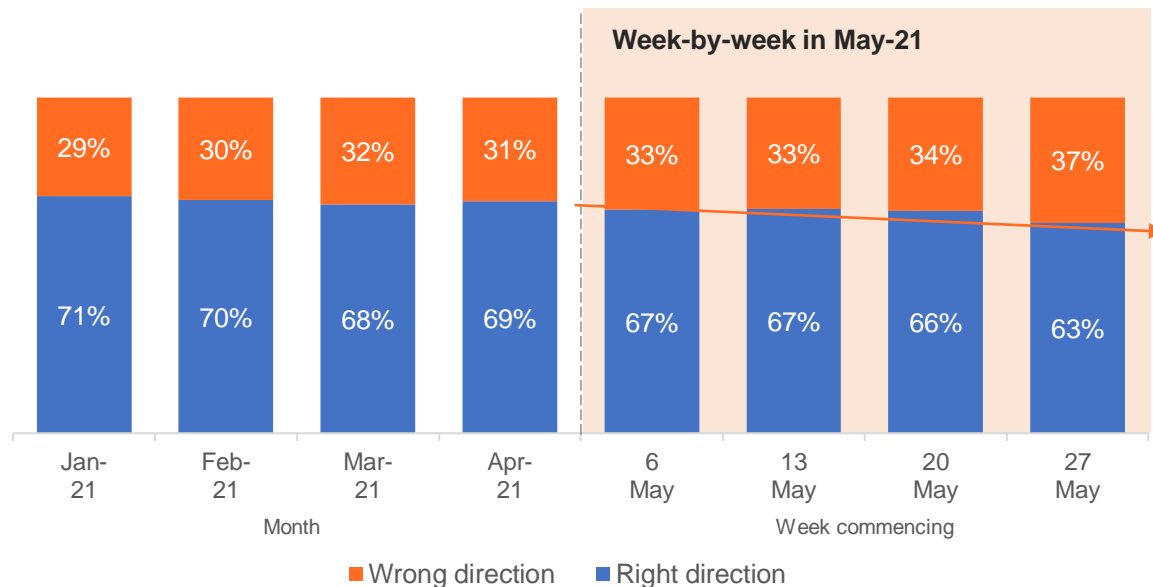
Q16a - Which of these do you believe are the five (5) most important things for government to take action on straight away?
All respondents, Apr-21, n=4,007. May-20, n=3,068

Overall sentiment wavering

Survey

At the beginning of 2021, sentiment and morale was particularly high. There was **anticipation for a more positive year** ahead and a sense of national pride over Australia's handling of the pandemic. In May, the sense that the nation is heading in the right direction has waned, with **falling confidence in the Federal Government**, **removed stimulus measures** despite many industries having not yet recovered from the pandemic and the estimate for international borders opening seemingly very far away¹.

Are things in Australia going in the right or wrong direction?
(All Australians)



More likely to believe Australia is going in the...

Wrong direction

- Lower confidence in the Federal Government, welfare system and respective State government.
- Higher concern about the impact of the pandemic on the economy, their financial situation, house prices and potential burden on the healthcare system
- Place greater importance on cost of living, the environment/climate change, housing affordability and the gap between rich and poor.
- More likely to be in regional areas, not in the workforce, lower incomes and renters.

Right direction

- Higher confidence in the Federal Government, welfare system and respective State government.
- Lower concern about the impact of the pandemic on various areas.
- Place greater importance on the Australian economy, care for the elderly and public healthcare.
- More likely to be male, aged 60+, in metropolitan areas, working full time or retired, higher incomes and homeowners.

Q7a - Thinking about the way things are going in Australia, do you think things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?

All respondents, n=c. 1,000-7,300 per month.

¹Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-11/federal-budget-2021-borders-international-travel-vaccines/100132620>



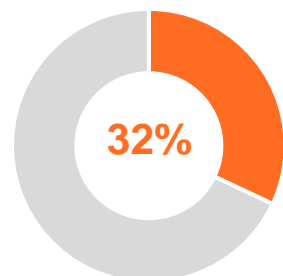
INTERNATIONAL BORDERS

Our **safety net** against COVID

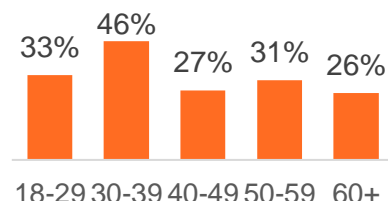
Survey

Australia's international border should re-open as soon as possible

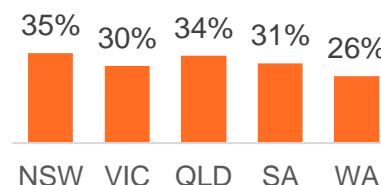
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6 – 20th May 2021)



By Age

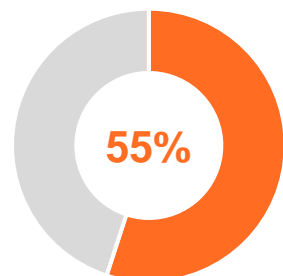


By State

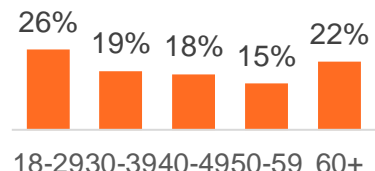


The government should be doing more to bring home Australians stuck overseas

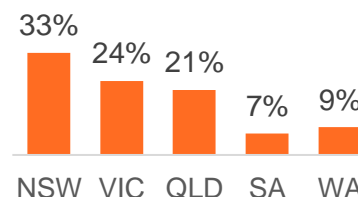
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6 – 20th May 2021)



By Age



By State



The decision to close Australia's international border has been instrumental in containing COVID-19, but there are **a number of social and economic costs**. Estimates¹ suggest that our closed border is **costing the economy \$36.5 million a day**.

Despite this, there is **strong support for keeping borders closed** – only a third (32%) believe Australia's international border should re-open as soon as possible.

Those that believe that **globalisation is good for Australia** (47% of Australians) are more likely to think that the international border should re-open as soon as possible.

Another contentious issue is that of **bringing home Australian citizens from overseas**. Australians are split on this issue, with 55% agreeing that the Government should be doing more in this area, and 45% disagreeing.

Q132 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

All respondents, W/C 20 May 21, n=1,000. 18-29 n=220; 30-39 n=179; 40-49 n=177; 50-59 n=159; 60+ n=265. NSW n=316; VIC n=249; QLD n=210; SA n=81; WA n=99

¹Source: <https://theconversation.com/australias-closed-border-is-costing-the-economy-36-5-million-a-day-160873>

The **personal impacts** of border closures

While many feel fairly unaffected personally from the international border being closed, many have had **leisure travel plans averted**, experienced **separation from family and friends** and had **disruptions to international work and business**.

Personal impacts of international border closures

Leisure travel

"I will have to organise local travel and build experiences for my children to break away from the fear of not travelling.... wishing they could experience the beauty of other countries and the love of freedom with family."

Family/friends

"Yes, it means we don't get to see family and they don't get to meet our daughter for another year which makes it very sad indeed."

Work/business

"Sure will. I have plans for the near future to travel once the opportunity arises, as I've got investments that I need to attend to overseas."

Will not affect me

"No, I have no plans in travelling internationally. I am still concerned about the virus and scared that it'll be come back."

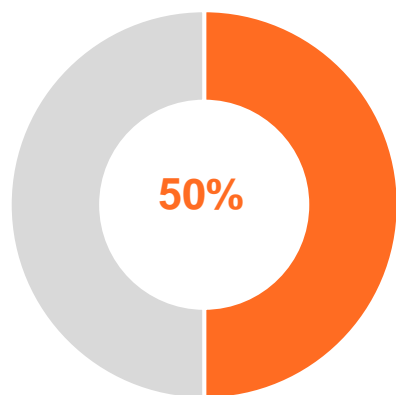
Q131 - The International borders may not reopen until mid-2022. Will this affect your plans over the next year?
All respondents, W/C 20 May 21, n=1,000.

Vaccine not a silver bullet

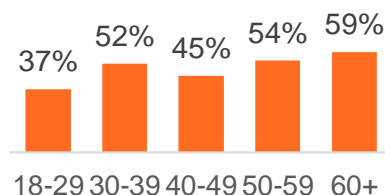
Survey

Quarantine-free travel should be available for vaccinated Australians

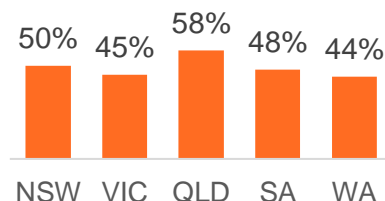
(% Agree, 4-6 out of 6 – 20th May 2021)



By Age



By State



Australians are divided as to whether they believe quarantine-free travel should be available for vaccinated Australians, with **50% agreeing that quarantine-free travel should be allowed** and 50% disagreeing.

Younger Australians (who are last to receive the vaccine under the planned roll-out and historically the most hesitant to receive the vaccine) are **least likely to endorse quarantine-free travel**.

4,362,739

vaccine doses administered in Australia as at 1st of June 2021

Source: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines>

Q132 - Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

All respondents, W/C 20 May 21, n=1,000. 18-29 n=220; 30-39 n=179; 40-49 n=177; 50-59 n=159; 60+ n=265. NSW n=316; VIC n=249; QLD n=210; SA n=81; WA n=99 .

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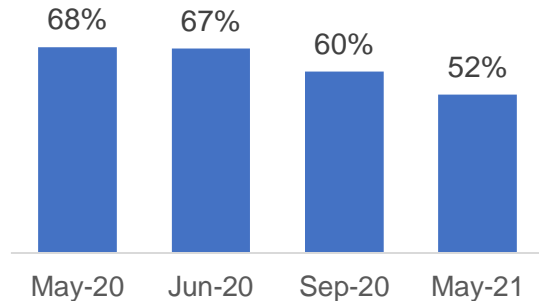
SAVING, SPENDING & INVESTING

Pandemic savings pots reducing

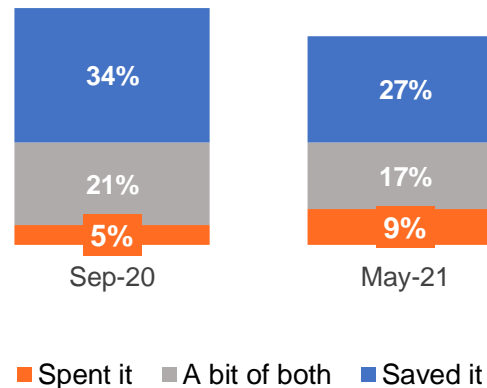
Survey

Australia's **household savings ratio dropped**¹ nearly 7 percentage points to the end of 2020, but still remains at unusually high levels. Just above half (52%) of Australians still have money they otherwise wouldn't have if not for the pandemic. Only 27% claimed to have saved all of it (compared to 34% in September 2020) and 9% claimed to have spent it (up from 5% in September 2020).

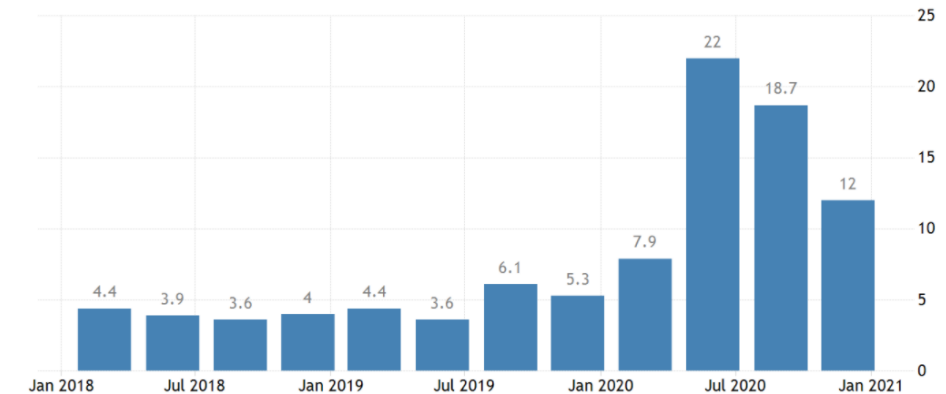
"During the pandemic I've had money I wouldn't otherwise have had"



"What have you done with that extra money?"



Household Savings Ratio (ABS¹)



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

Q13b - How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "As opportunities to spend have been limited during the pandemic, I have had money I wouldn't otherwise have had"?

Q13k - What have you done with that extra money?

All respondents, W/C 13 May-21, n=1,000

¹Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/australia/personal-savings>

Saving for travel and investing

Survey

Items saving towards

(Of those that have saved during pandemic)

Change since
Sep-20
(percentage
points)

Holiday/travel	39%	+6
To have savings in case I lose my job	24%	-2
To make investments (e.g. buying shares)	20%	+7
House deposit	20%	+4
Smaller purchases (e.g. household items)	17%	+2
Home renovations	17%	+1
A new or second-hand car	15%	-2
To fund my lifestyle once restrictions ease	13%	-3
No specific purpose	17%	-4

Savings goals have shifted since 2020, with both **travel and investing increasingly high on the list** of things people plan to do with the money they have saved throughout the pandemic.

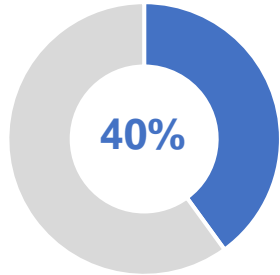
As seen last year, a quarter of those saving have done so in order to **protect themselves in case of a job loss**. This tendency towards saving reflects an **innate need to maintain control over our lives** in a society that is inherently uncertain.

Q13j - Which of the following things are you saving for?

Those that have saved extra money, W/C 13 May-21 n=432 (Sep-20 n=546)

International travel plans

Survey



Have annual leave entitlements at work

Average number of annual leave days accrued

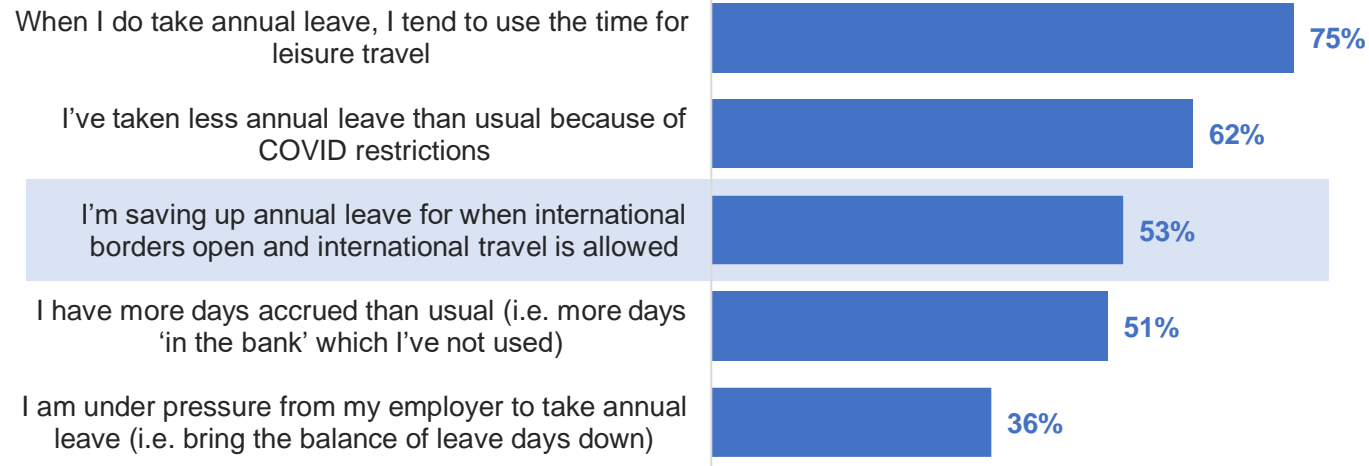
21 days

90% have 5 or more days accrued

(Base: those with annual leave entitlements and know their balance, n=354)

Sentiment regarding annual leave balances

(% Agree – those with annual leave entitlements n=404)



Workers have plans for their saved up annual leave entitlements, with **leisure travel a main priority**.

Of the 40% of Australians that have annual leave entitlements, the vast majority (90%) have 5+ days of annual leave accrued.

Around half (53%) of those with annual leave entitlements are **saving their annual leave for when international borders open**.

Just over a third of workers (36%) experience **pressure from their employer to take annual leave**, presenting an opportunity for the tourism industry to provide a compelling offer to these individuals.

Q146 - Do you have annual leave entitlements at your work? Base: All respondents W/C 6 May 21, n=1,000

Q147 - Approximately how many days of annual leave do you currently have accrued? Base: Those with annual leave entitlements and know their balance, n=354

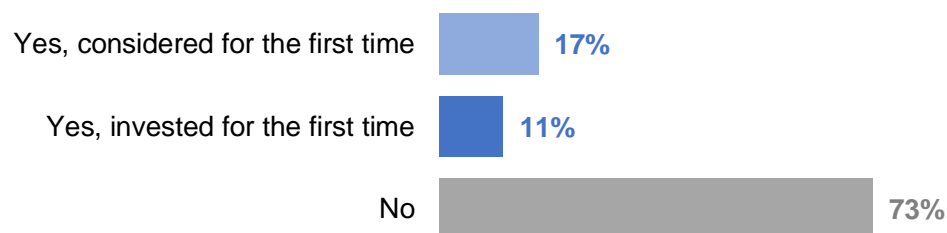
Q148 - To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your annual leave balance? Base: Those with annual leave entitlements, n=404

Young are investing

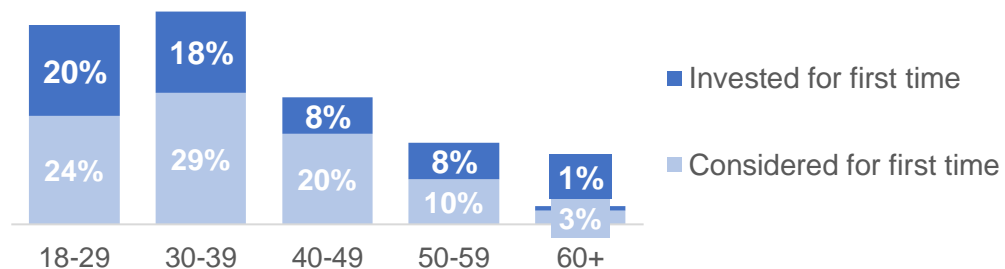
Survey

With opportunities to spend on international travel severely limited, many younger Australians are **choosing to invest their money**, often for the first time. While traditional investments (stocks/shares) and property are most popular, one in five Australians (21%) are open to cryptocurrencies, increasing to 28% among 18 to 39 year olds.

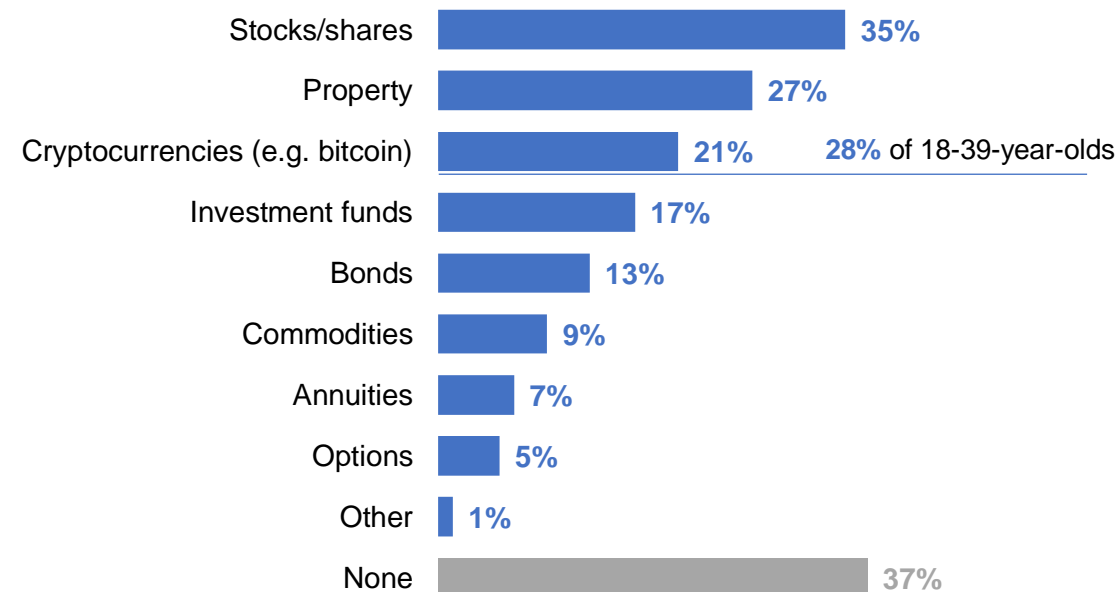
Invested/considered investing for the first time in last 12 months? (All Australians)



By Age



Investments open to (All Australians)



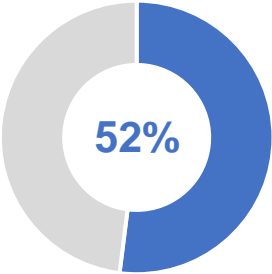
Q13q - Have you considered or invested in the sharemarket for the first time in the last 12 months (i.e. you hadn't done so before)?

Q13r - Which of the following investments (if any) are you open to?

All respondents, W/C 13 May-21 n=1,000

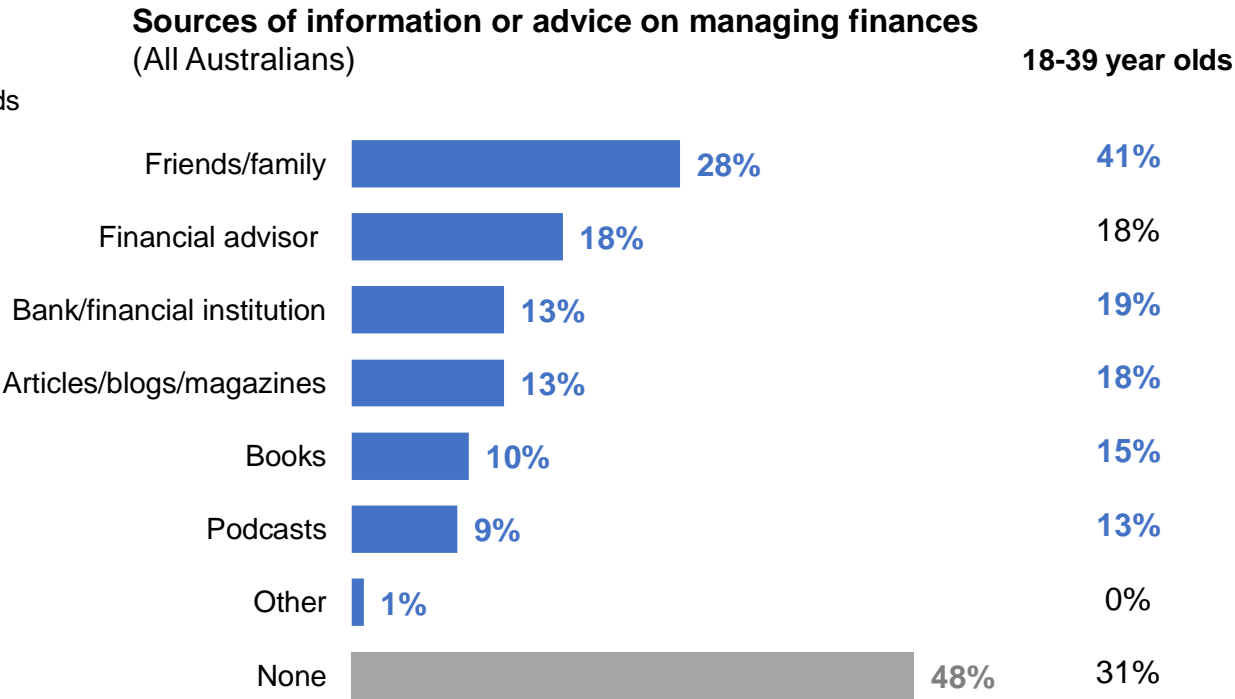
Demand for financial assistance

Survey



Sought information/advice on managing finances

69% of 18–39 year-olds



There is demand for information and advice on managing finances, with half of Australians having sought it out over the past year.

Many are turning to non-professional sources of financial advice such as family and friends, a source that is particularly popular among younger Australians (18-39 year olds). Banks, articles, books and podcasts are also more popular among the younger cohort.

Q13s - In the past 12 months, have you sought any information or advice on managing finances from any of the following sources?
All respondents, W/C 13 May-21 n=1,000

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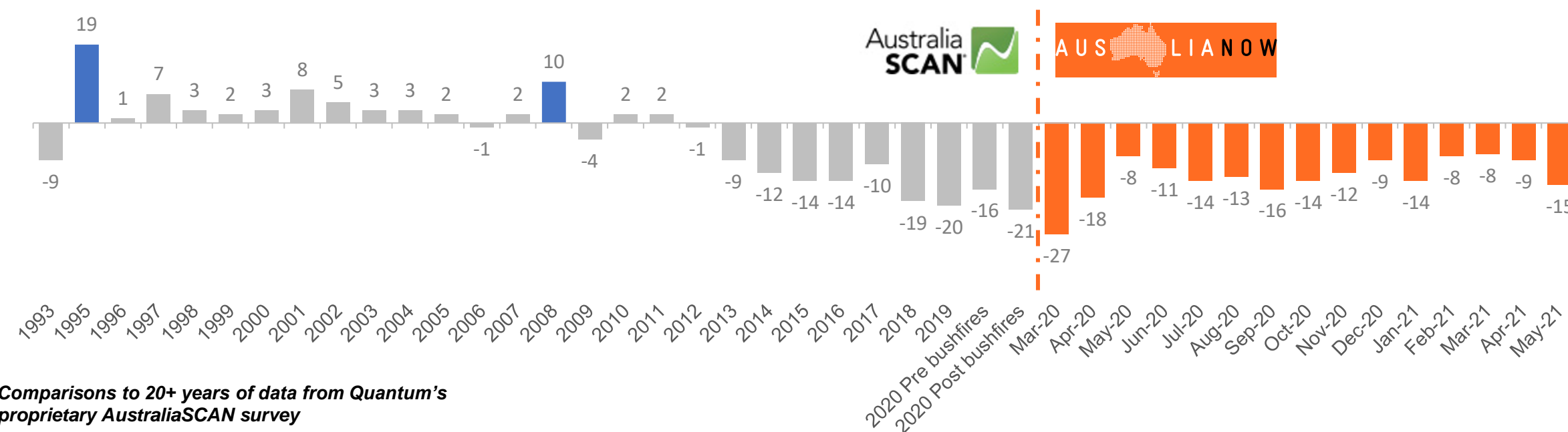
CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP

Fall in financial confidence

Following months of relatively high financial confidence, collective financial confidence has **fallen in May**. This is reflected across **all States** and follows Government pandemic stimulus being removed.

Confidence in financial future over next five years

(very confident – not confident)



Comparisons to 20+ years of data from Quantum's proprietary AustraliaSCAN survey

Q13. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about your ability to meet your financial needs in the next five years?

All respondents, n=4,000






Confidence uneven

Survey















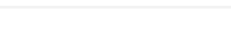






Financial confidence is lowest among females, 18–29-year-olds, renters, those not in the workforce and lower income households. Confidence within these cohorts is also generally **significantly lower than one year ago**.

Confidence is low across all major States.

Underemployment and job security remain an issue, with 61% of part-time/casual workers wanting to work more hours and 26% of Australian workers/business owners not confident they will keep their job or main source of income for the next 6 months.

	May-21	YEARLY CHANGE (Since May-20)
NSW	-12 	-4
VIC	-18 	-9
QLD	-19 	-15
SA	-18 	-12
WA	-10 	-3

Confidence in financial future over next five years (very confident – not confident)

	May-21	YEARLY CHANGE (Since May-20)
Total	-15 	-7
Males	-2 	+2
Females	-28 	-19
18-29	-29 	-9
30-39	-15 	-7
40-59	-18 	-2
60+	-1 	+16
Homeowners - outright	16 	-5
Homeowners - mortgage	-5 	-9
Renters	-39 	-28
Employed	-5 	+3
Business owner/self-employed	-14 	-11
Not employed	-54 	-17
Students	-51 	-27
Home duties	-46 	-36
Retired	4 	-10
<\$50K	-39 	-23
\$50-100K	-11 	-4
\$100K+	15 	+3
Families (kids under 18)	-13 	-8
Non-families	-11 	-3

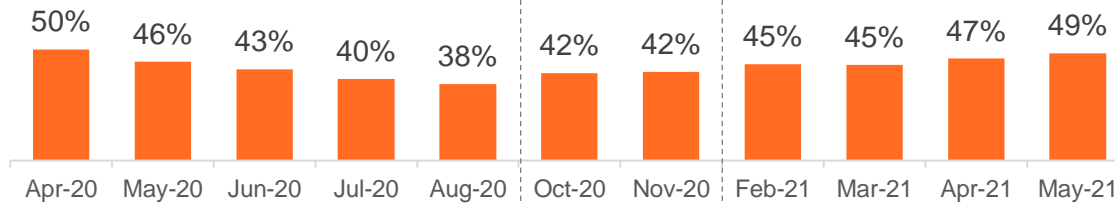
Q13. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about your ability to meet your financial needs in the next five years?

All respondents, n varies per sub-group

Bill stress rising

Survey

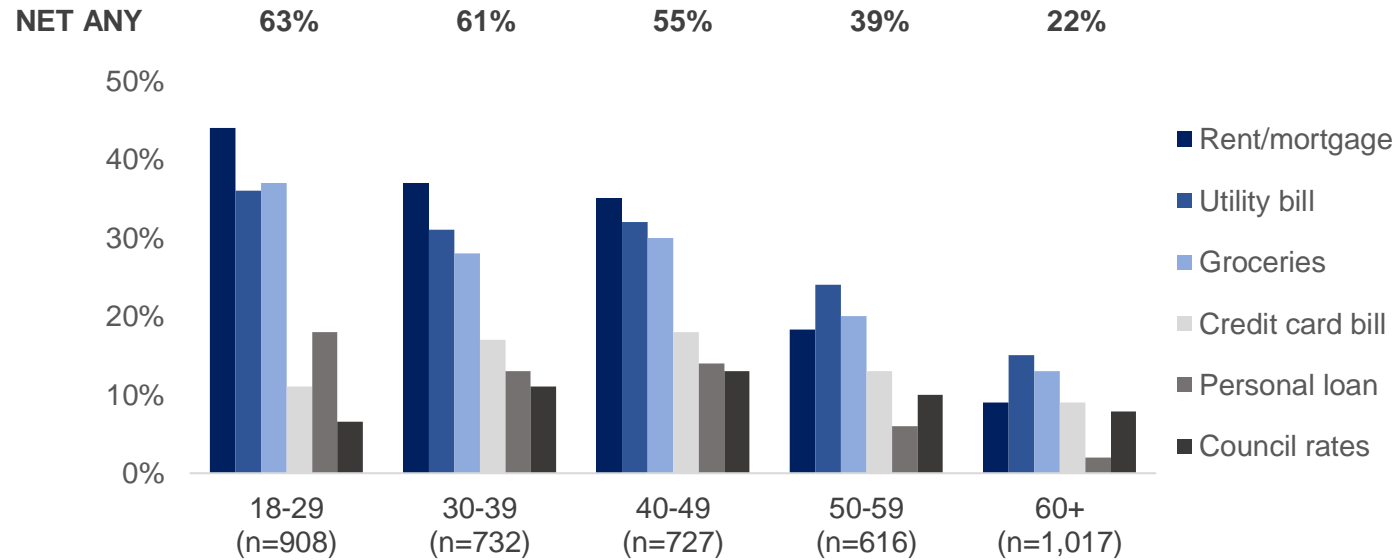
Struggling to pay any bills



As Australians struggle with financial confidence, **risk of defaulting on bills** continues to rise. Almost one-in-two experience **some form of bill stress**.

Bill stress continues to affect the young disproportionately where at least 30% of those aged 18-29 will struggle to pay their rent, utilities or grocery bills.

There are rising concerns about paying for **utility bills** (from 24% in April to 27% in May) and **groceries** (from 22% in April to 26% in May).

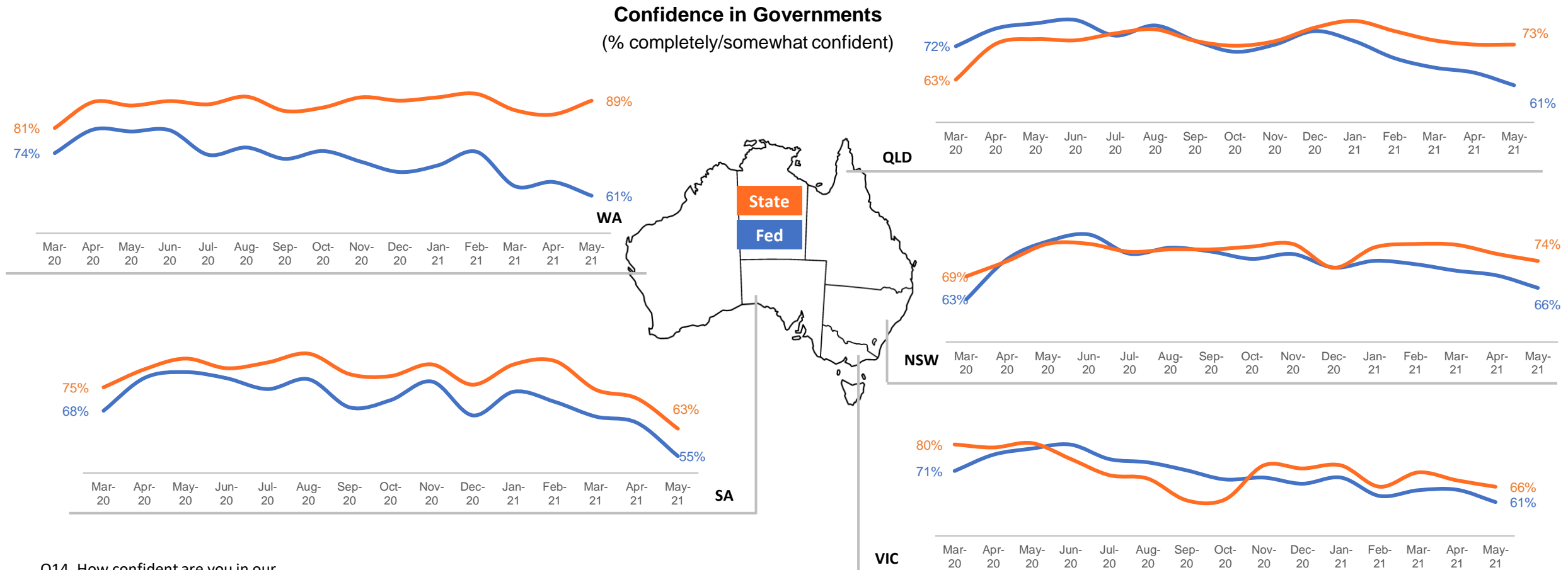


Q12. In the next three months do you think you will struggle to pay any of the following? Please select all that apply.
All respondents, May-21 n=4,000

Confidence in Federal Government dips

Survey

Confidence in the Federal Government has dropped across all States as the Victorian outbreak raises questions about the effectiveness of the hotel quarantine program and the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out .



Q14. How confident are you in our...

All respondents, n per month: NSW, n=c. 300-1,500; VIC, n=c. 260-1,500; QLD, n=c. 300-1,500; SA, n=c. 160-1,000; WA, n=c. 180-1,200.

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