

Partisanship, polarisation and social cohesion in Australia

McKinnon Poll | Susan McKinnon Foundation

August 2024



Research methodology



JWS Research has been commissioned to conduct public opinion research as part of this program.

JWS Research is an independent, privately and wholly Australian-owned research firm.

Established more than a decade ago, JWS Research has grown quickly to become an industry leader and one of the most respected firms in Australia for providing research-based advice to the government and business sectors, particularly on complex and challenging issues.

JWS Research is engaged by senior levels of business and government across Australia because they provide robust research and critical analysis to underpin strategic decision making and actions.

JWS pride themselves on their commitment to research design integrity to produce quality results and insights for their clients.

Qualitative

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions

n=6 in-depth interviews conducted via video conferencing with expert stakeholders

- Stakeholders comprised a range of experts on partisanship and polarisation.
- Approximately 45 minutes in duration.
- Conducted 30th April to 16th May 2024.

n=6 focus group discussions conducted via video conferencing

- Among adult Australians eligible to vote in Australian elections from across the country.
- Segmented by political affiliation (hard right vs hard left voters), level of engagement in politics (somewhat vs not at all engaged) and CALD background (Chinese vs other).
- 90 minutes in duration.
- Conducted 23rd May to 3rd June 2024.

Quantitative

Online survey

n=3,000 Australians aged 18 years and over

- Survey quotas on age, gender and location, and weighting applied at the analysis stage to actual age / gender / location proportions based on ABS census data.
- The maximum margin of error on the total sample of n=3,000 is +/-1.8% at the 95% confidence level.
- Differences of +/-1% for net scores are due to rounding.
- 15 minutes in length.

Conducted 16th to 28th July, 2024.

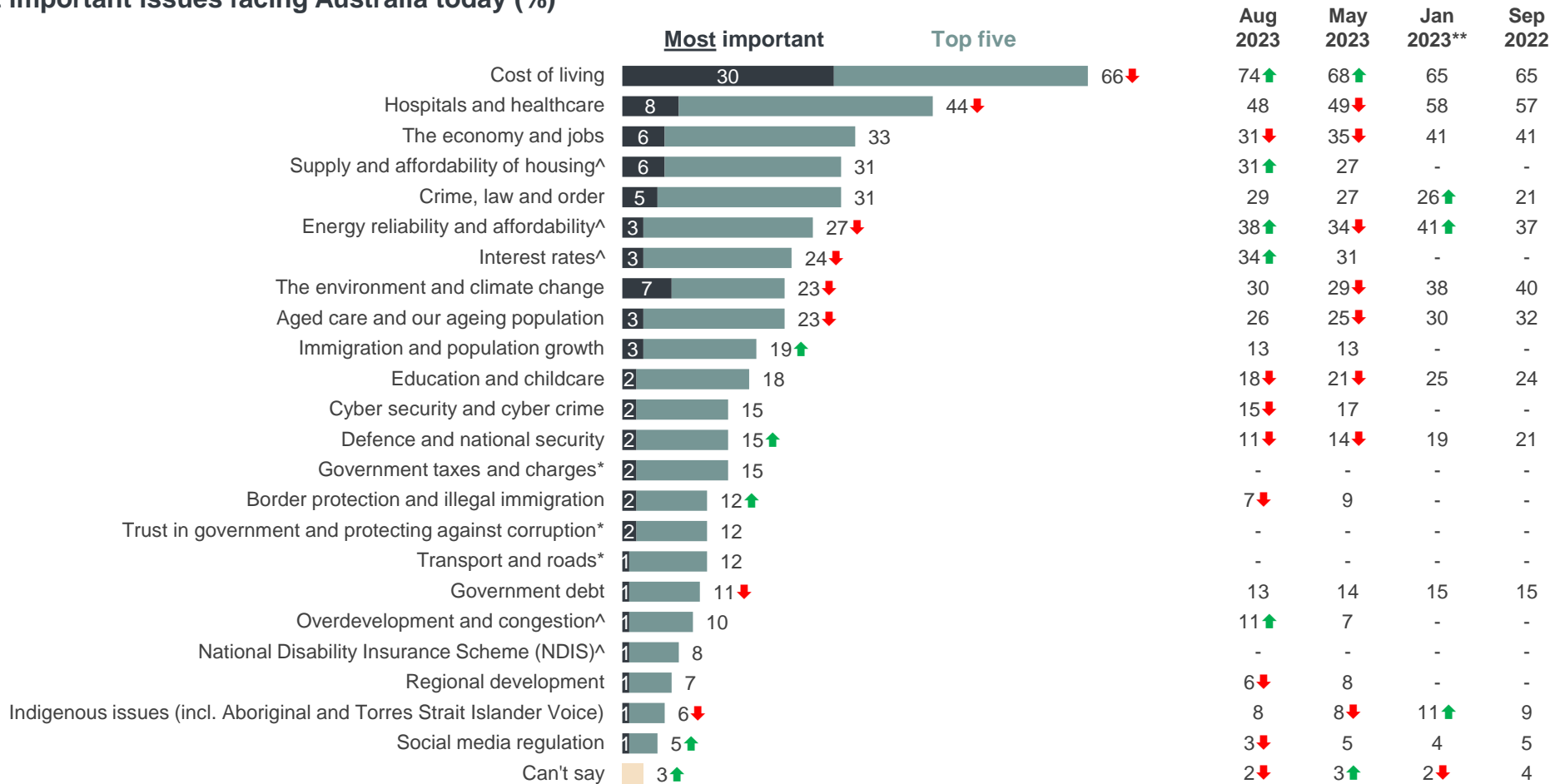
Where possible, results have been compared to previous surveys, also conducted among 3000 Australian adults in August, June and May 2023, and September 2022.

The research was conducted in compliance with AS-ISO 20252.



Cost of living still most important, but abating, amid rising concerns over immigration, defence, and border protection

Most important issues facing Australia today (%)



*Added in Jul 2024. ^Wording change in Jul 2024

**January 2023 survey conducted among Australian eligible voters.

Significantly higher ↑ / lower ↓ than the previous wave at the 95% confidence interval.

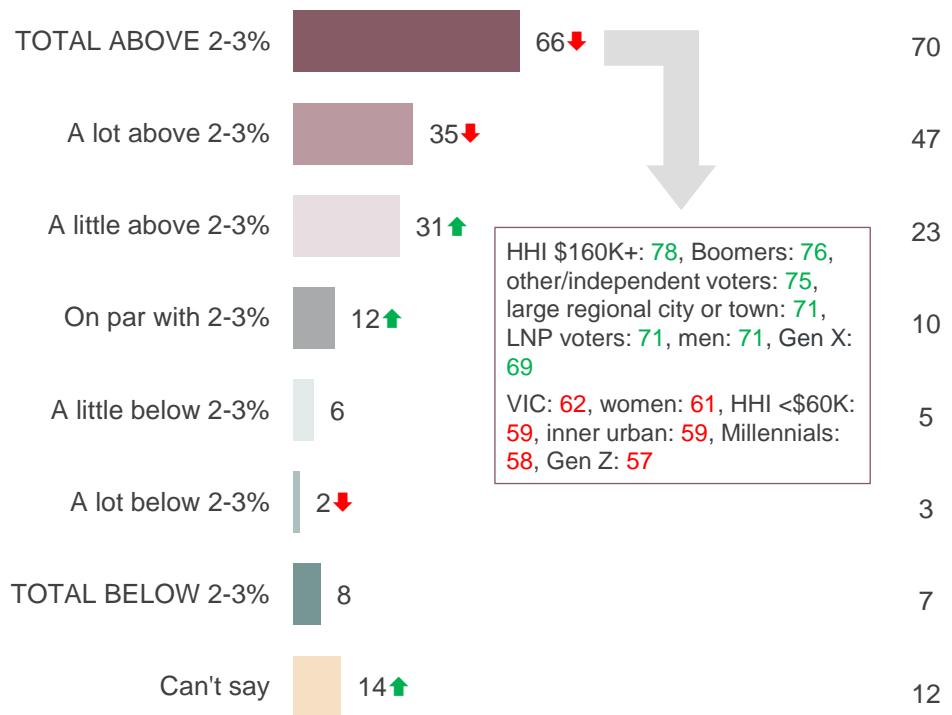
Q2. What are the most important issues facing Australia today and into the future that we should be doing something about? Please select your top five issues, in order of importance.

Base: All respondents – Jul 2024 (n=3,000); Aug 2023 (n=3,000); May 2023 (n=3,000); Jan 2023 (n=3,000); Sep 2022 (n=3,000).

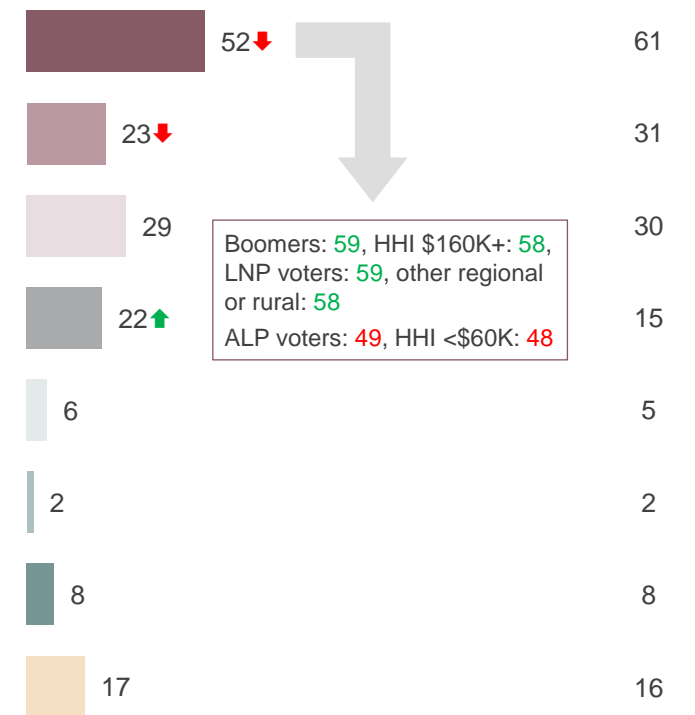


Significant decline in current and expected inflation above 2-3% since August 2023

Perceptions of current rate of inflation (%)



Expected rate of inflation in 12 months' time (%)



Significantly higher ↑ / lower ↓ than the previous wave at the 95% confidence interval.

Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Q4a. The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has an inflation target of keeping inflation between 2-3%, on average, over time. What do you think the current rate of inflation is? (It's okay if you're not sure. We're interested in your impressions.) / Q4b. What do you think the current rate of inflation is? (It's okay if you're not sure. We're interested in your impressions.)

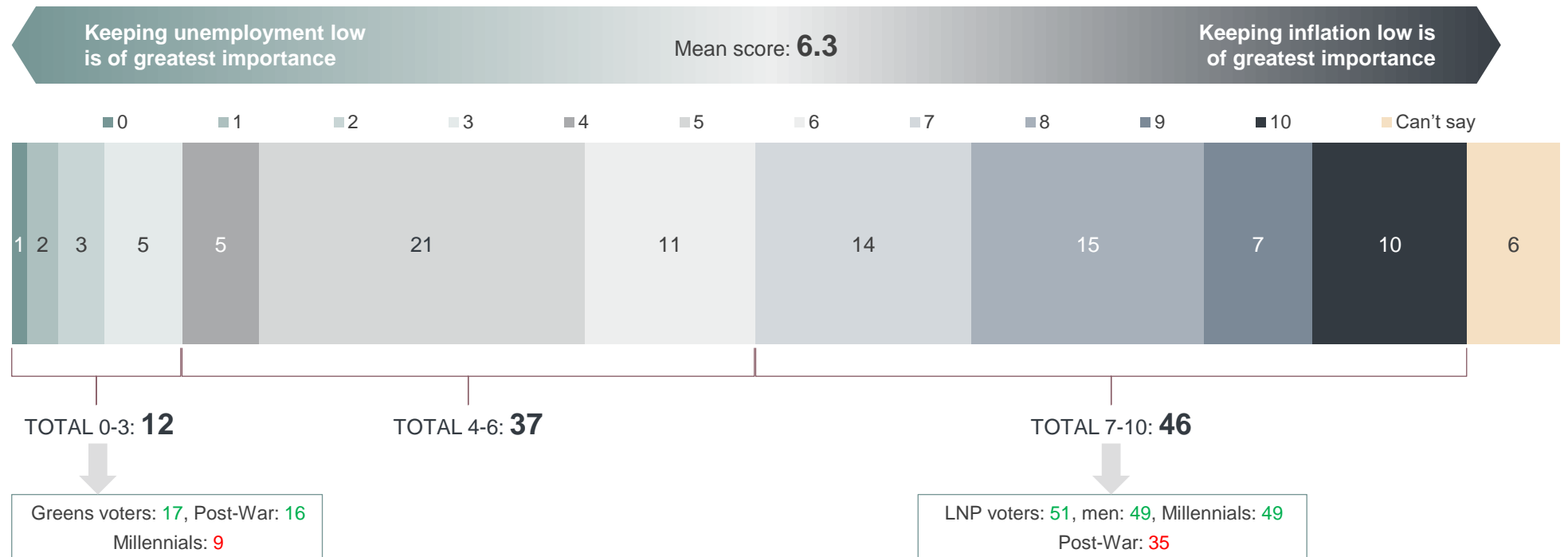
Q5. And what do you expect the inflation rate to be in 12 months' time?

Base: All respondents – Jul 2024 (n=3,000); Aug 2023 (n=3,000).



Australians tend to prioritise low inflation ahead of low unemployment

Importance of low unemployment versus low inflation (%)



Significantly **higher** / **lower** than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

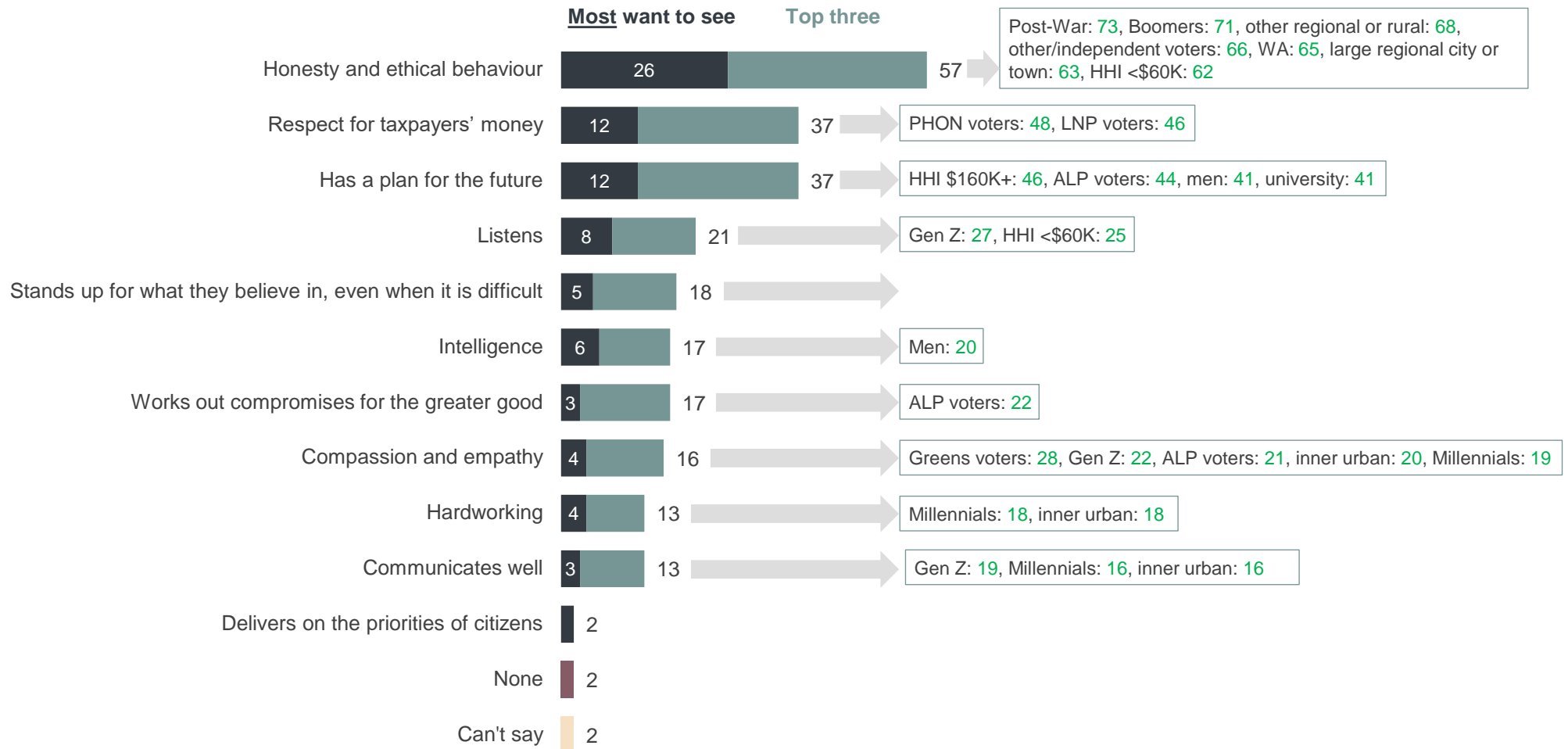
Q6. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is 'keeping unemployment low is of greatest importance' and 10 is 'keeping inflation low is of greatest importance', how much would you prioritise low unemployment versus low inflation?

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Honesty and ethical behaviour is the most sought-after quality in Australia's political leaders

Preferred qualities to be seen in Australia's political leaders (%)



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

Q1a. What are the qualities you most want to see in Australia's political leaders? Please select your top three qualities, in order of preference.

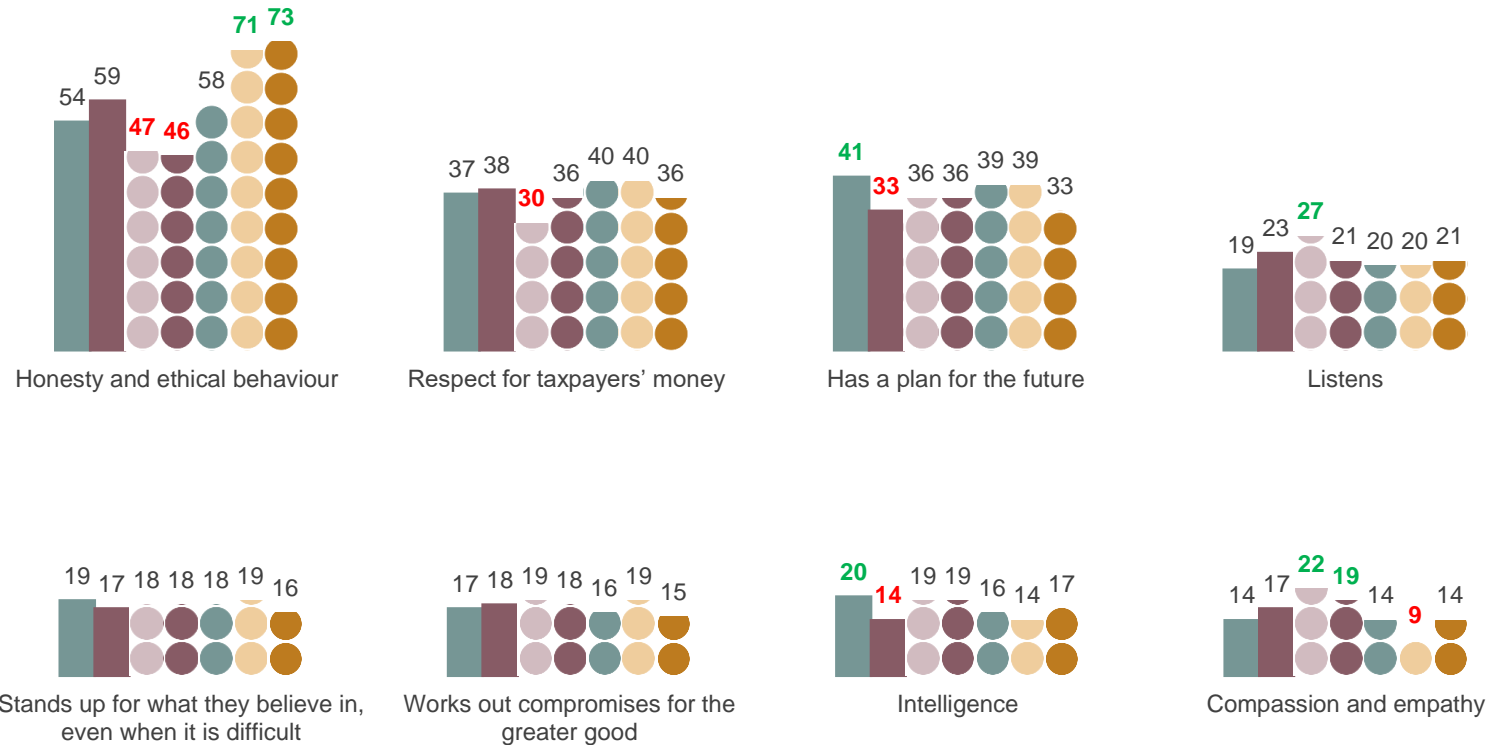
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Prioritisation of honesty and ethics in political leaders is significantly higher among Boomers and Post-war

Preferred qualities to be seen in Australia's political leaders (% top three)

■ Men ■ Women ● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers ● Post-War



Significantly *higher* / *lower* than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

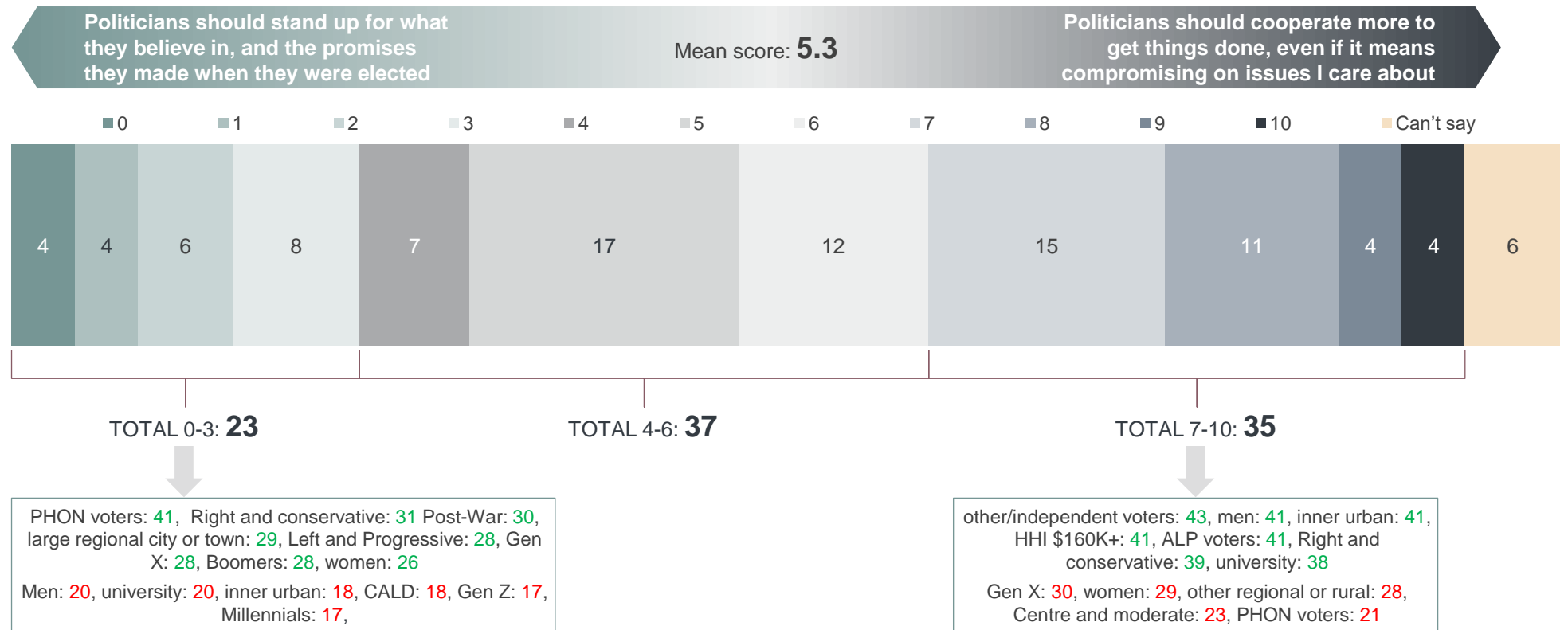
Q1a. What are the qualities you most want to see in Australia's political leaders? Please select your top three qualities, in order of preference.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Australians prioritise politicians cooperating to get things done slightly ahead of upholding their beliefs and promises

Prioritisation of beliefs versus compromises (%)



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

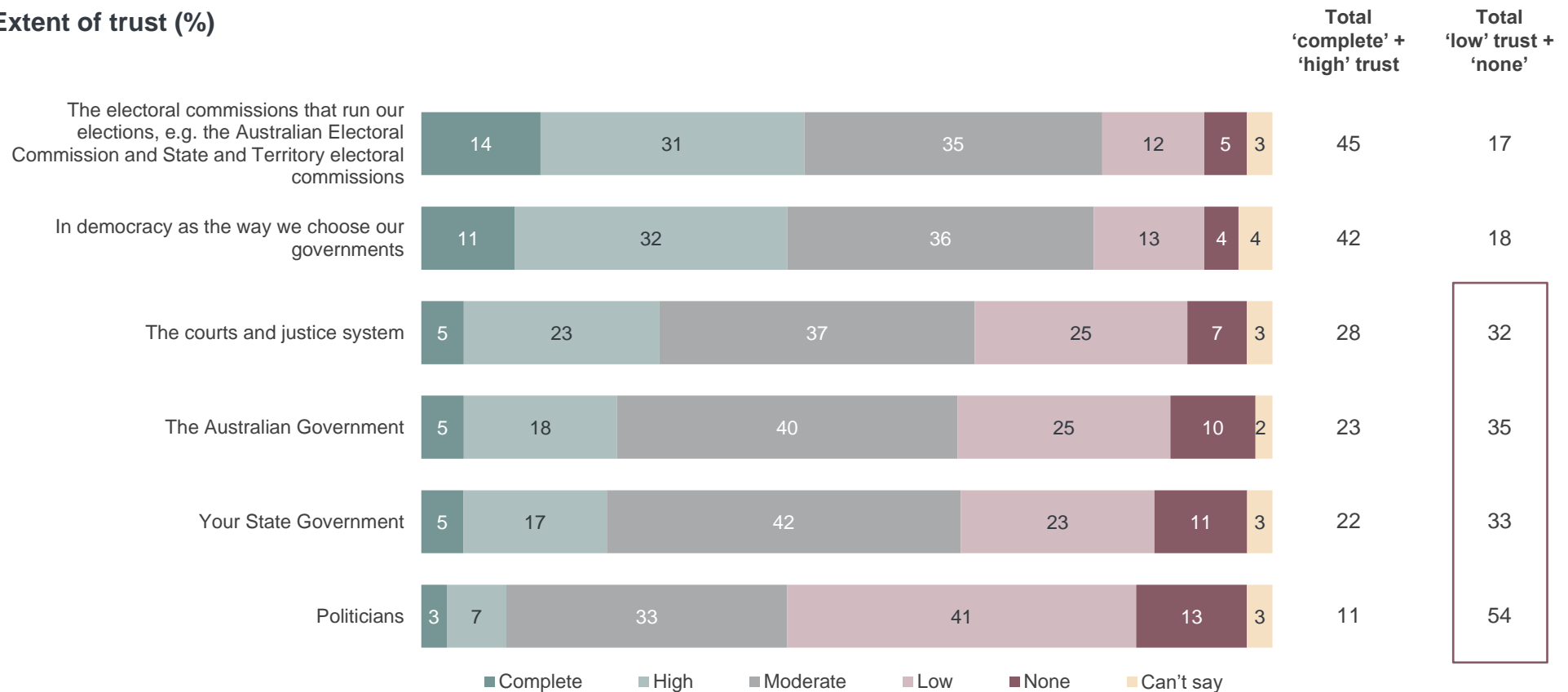
Q39. On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is 'Politicians should stand up for what they believe in, and the promises they made when they were elected' and 10 is 'Politicians should cooperate more to get things done, even if it means compromising on issues I care about', how much would you prioritise beliefs versus compromises?

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



More people trust than distrust electoral commissions and democracy; the opposite is true for politicians, government and courts

Extent of trust (%)



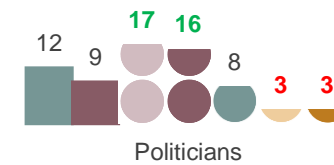
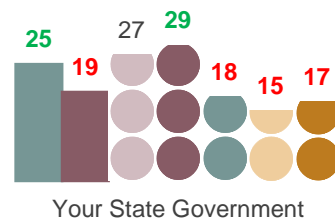
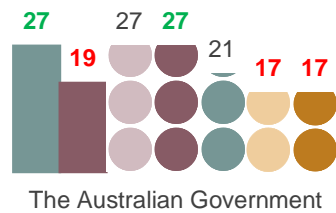
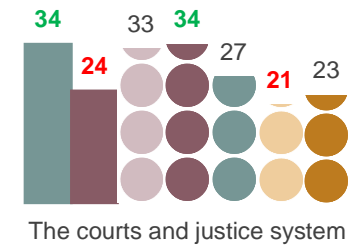
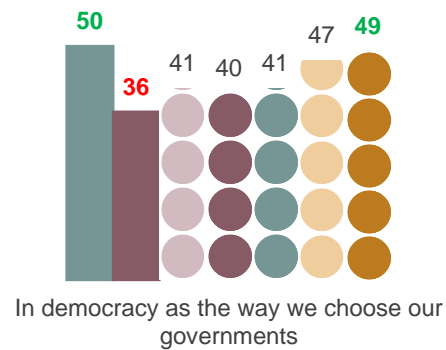
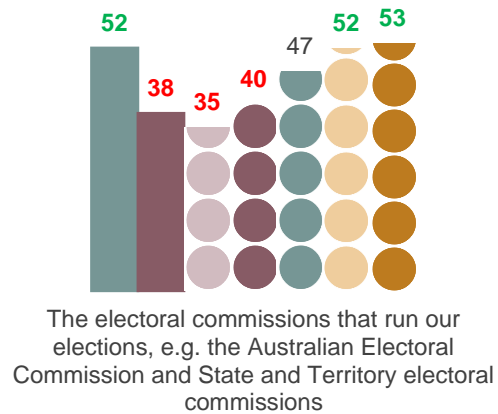
Q8c. How much trust do you have in each of the following?
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Trust in democracy is similar across lifestages; only Post-War are significantly more trusting than average

Extent of trust (% 'complete' + 'high' trust)

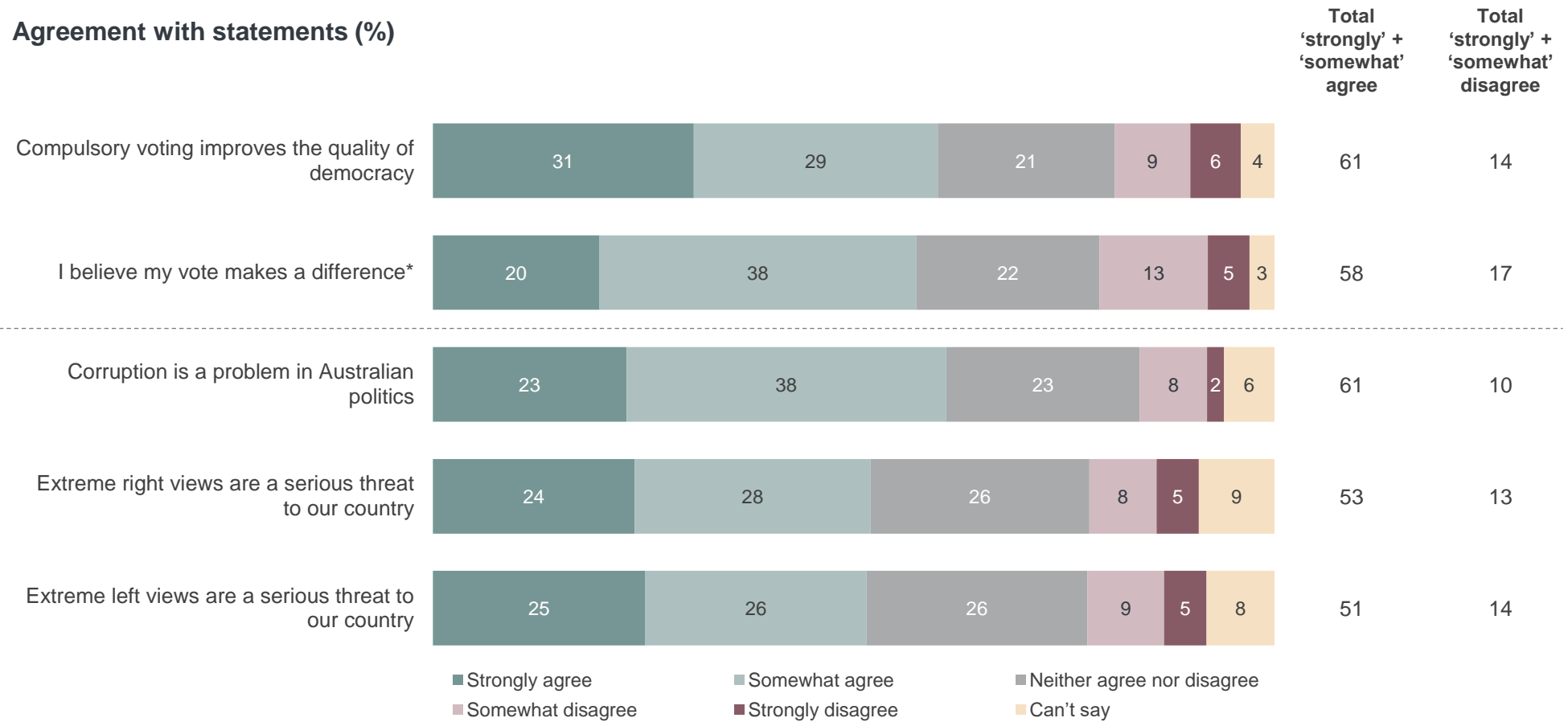
■ Men ■ Women ● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers ● Post-War



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.
Q8c. How much trust do you have in each of the following?
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Six in 10 agree compulsory voting improves democracy but corruption in Australian politics is seen as a problem



* Note: Statement asked of enrolled voters.

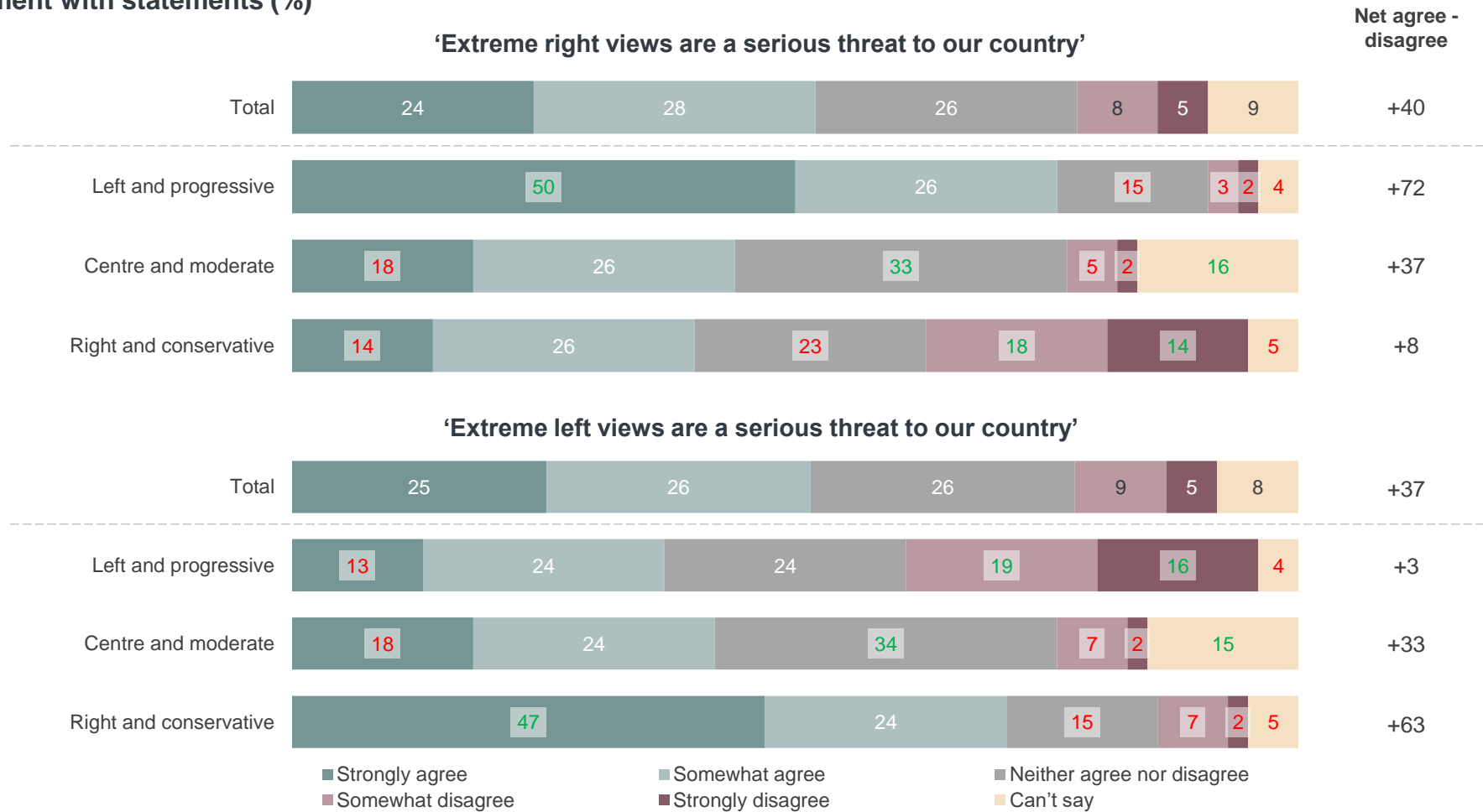
Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All respondents (n=3,000); enrolled voters (n=2,817).



The self-selected 'Left' and 'Right' believe extreme views from the other side are the threat

Agreement with statements (%)



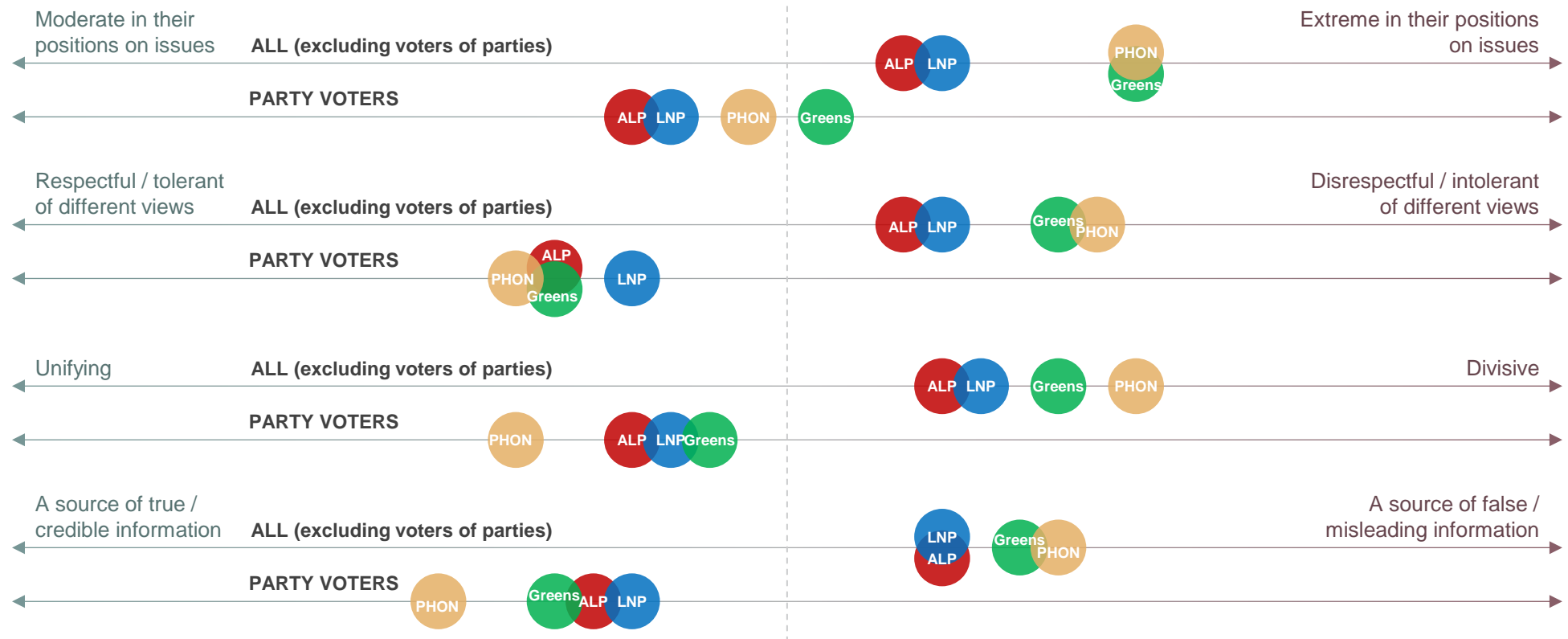
Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.
 Q9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Perceptions differ widely between voters and the wider population

Description of party

(mean score, sliding scale)



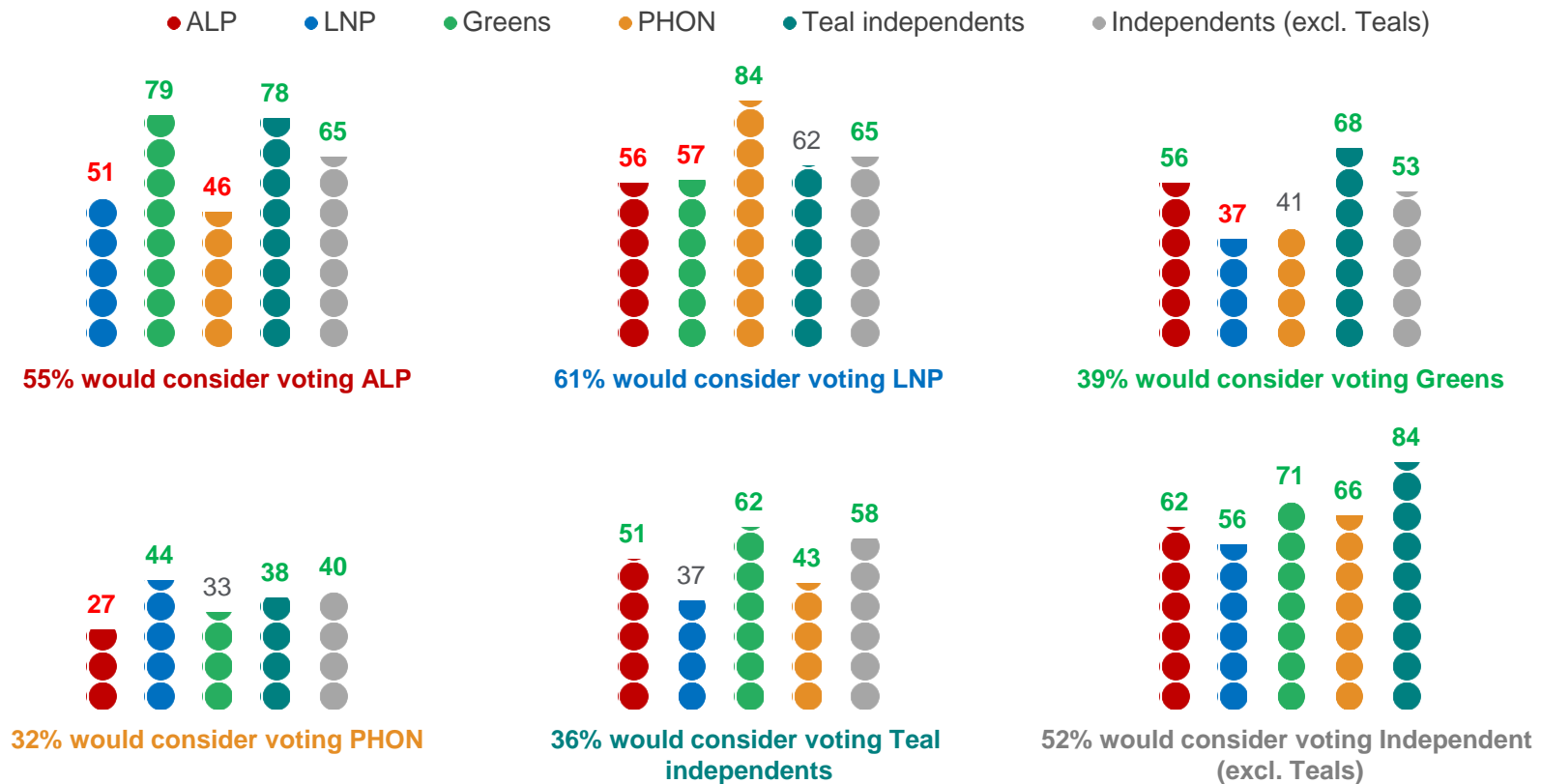
Q14a./Q14b./Q15. Thinking about different political parties in Australia. How would you describe...

Base: All respondents excl. ALP voters (n=2,163); excl. LNP voters (n=2,075); Split sample excl. Greens voters (n=841); excl. PHON voters (n=916).

Independent candidates attract the most consistent voting consideration across voters of all party allegiances



Considerations of parties (% among those who would 'definitely' + 'probably' consider voting for particular party)



Significantly *higher* / *lower* than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

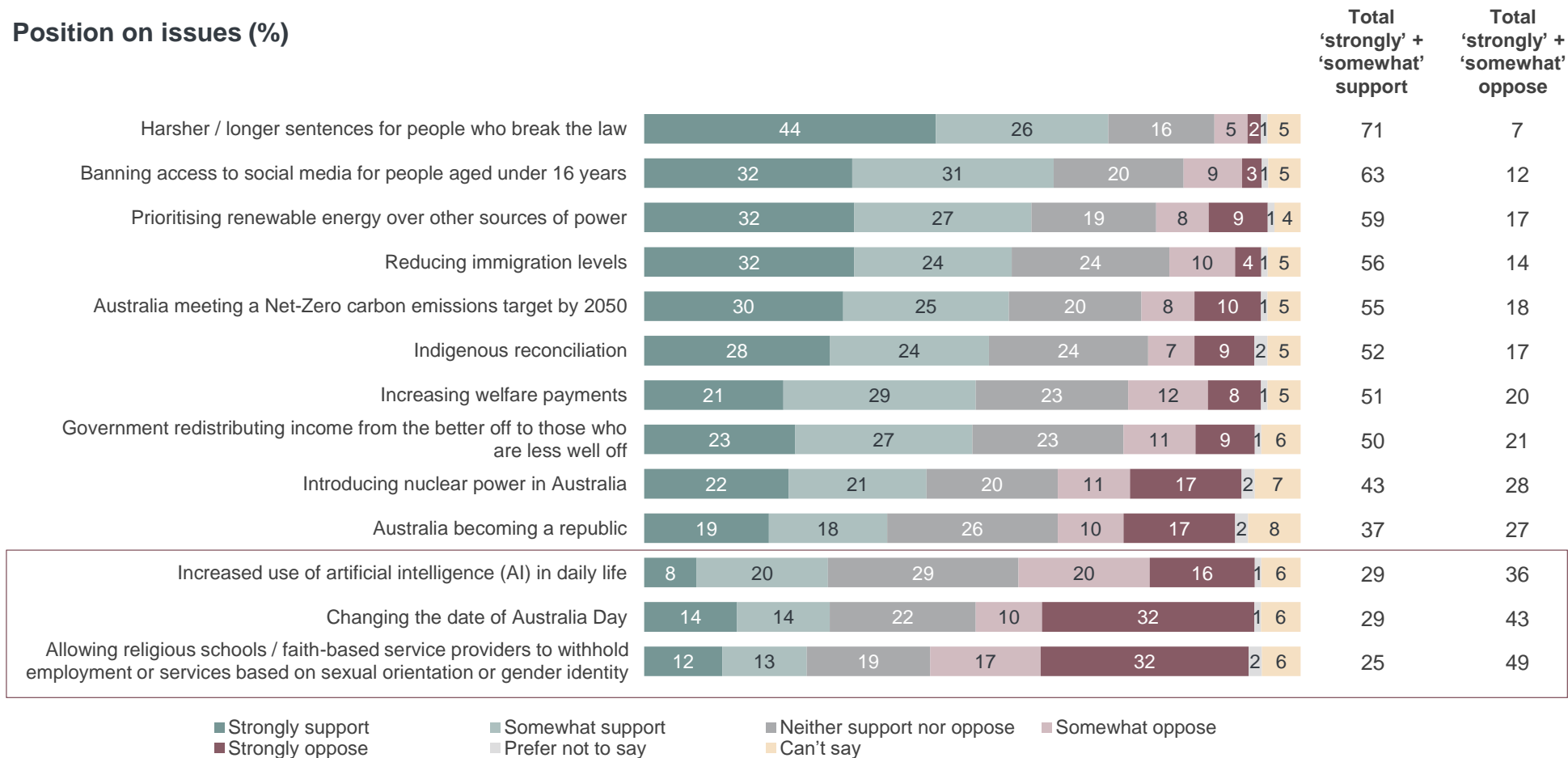
Q12. How likely are you to consider each of these political parties / candidates if you were deciding who to vote for at a federal election?

[IF NOT VOTER IE CODE 2-3 IN D2: It's okay if you're not enrolled, we're interested in your general impressions as someone who lives in Australia.]

Base: Consider voting for party – ALP (n=1,654); LNP (n=1,818); Greens (n=1,186); PHON (n=951); Teal independents (n=1,086); Independent (excl. Teals) (n=1,571).



Strong support for harsher sentencing, social media bans for under 16's and prioritisation of renewable energy

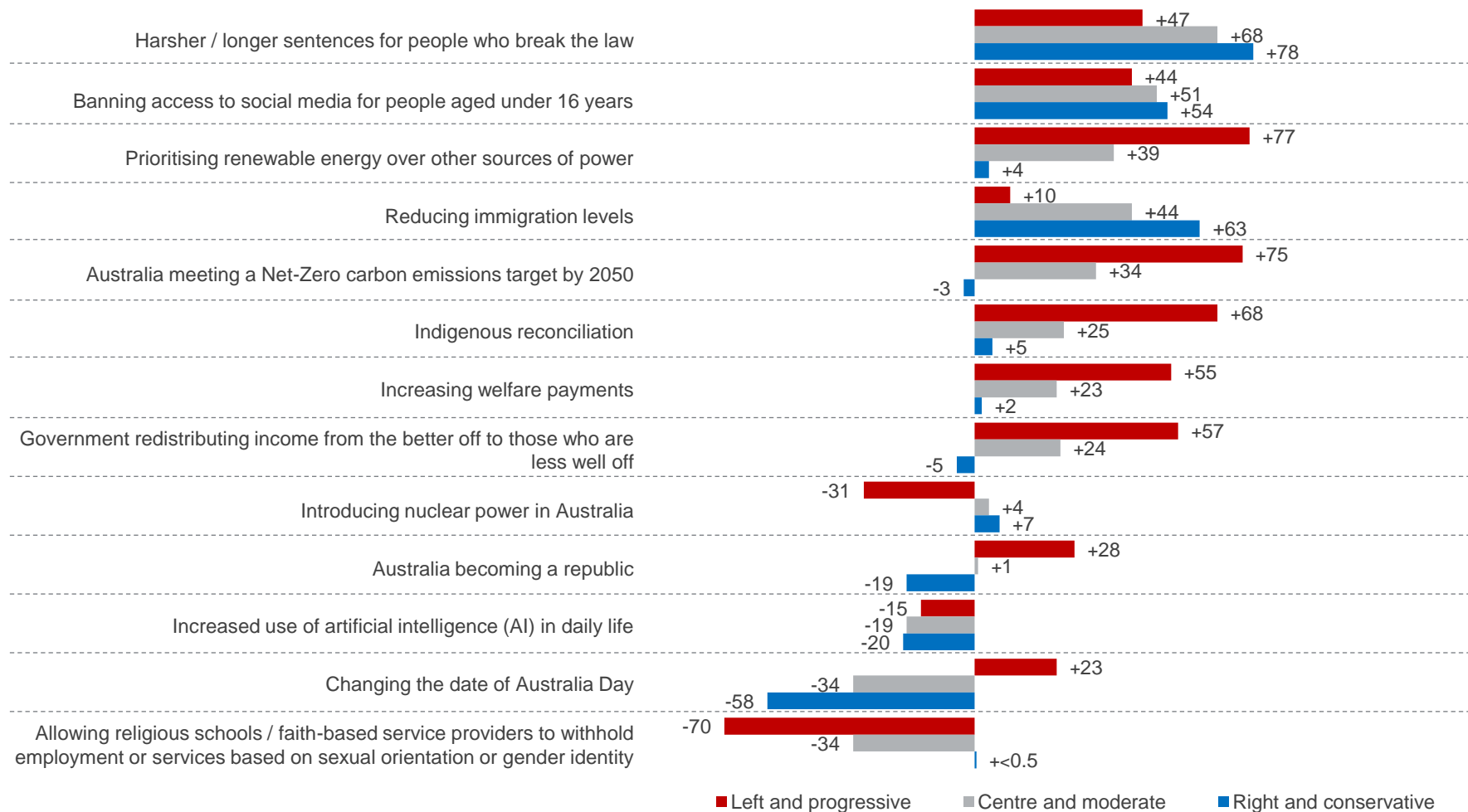


Q29. Which of the following best describes your position on the following issues?
 Base: All respondents (n=3,000).

Self-declared 'Right', 'Centre' and 'Left' Australians are largely in agreement on harsher sentencing, social media bans and AI



Position on issues (net support - oppose)

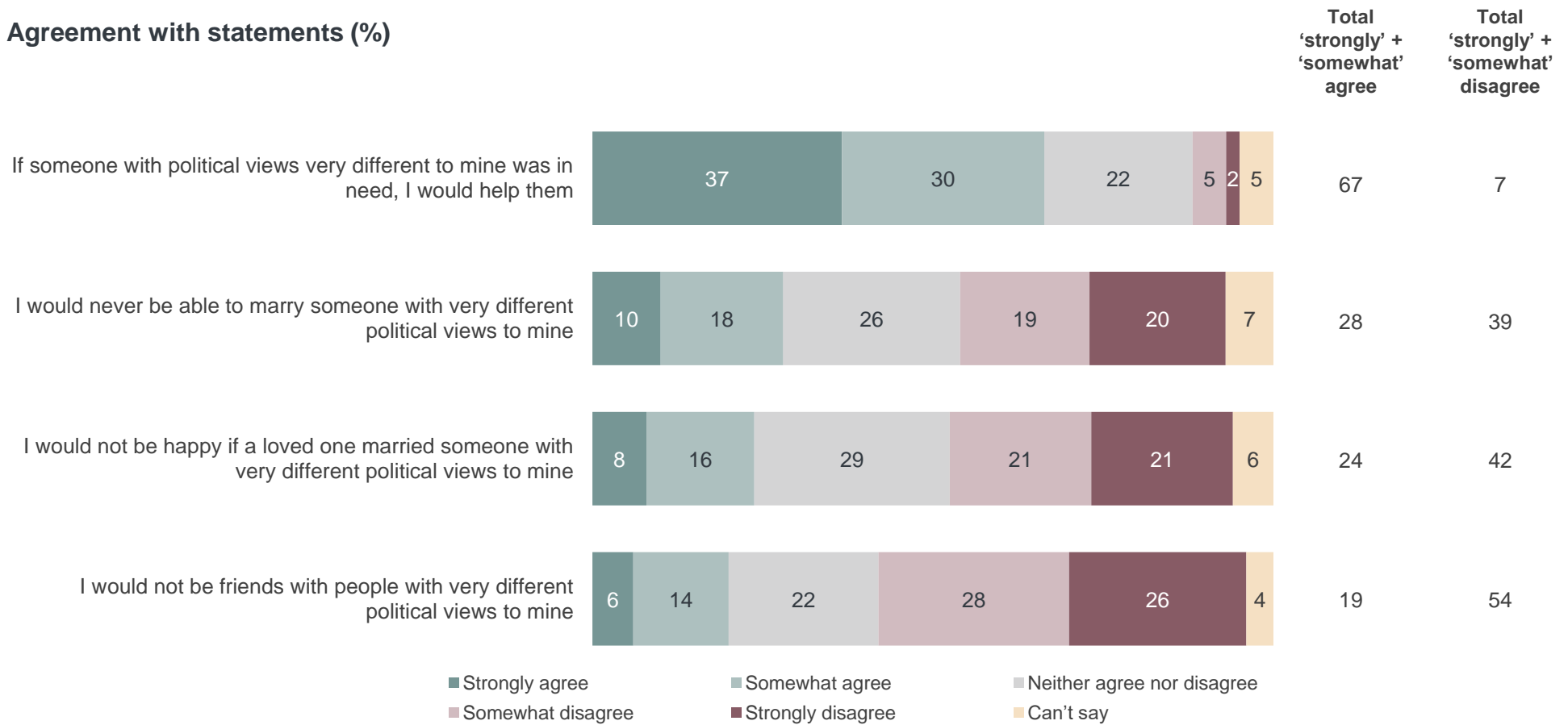


Q29. Which of the following best describes your position on the following issues?
 Base: Left and progressive (n=638); Centre and moderate (n=1,147); Right and conservative (n=694).

Most people are tolerant of friendships with people holding different political views



Agreement with statements (%)

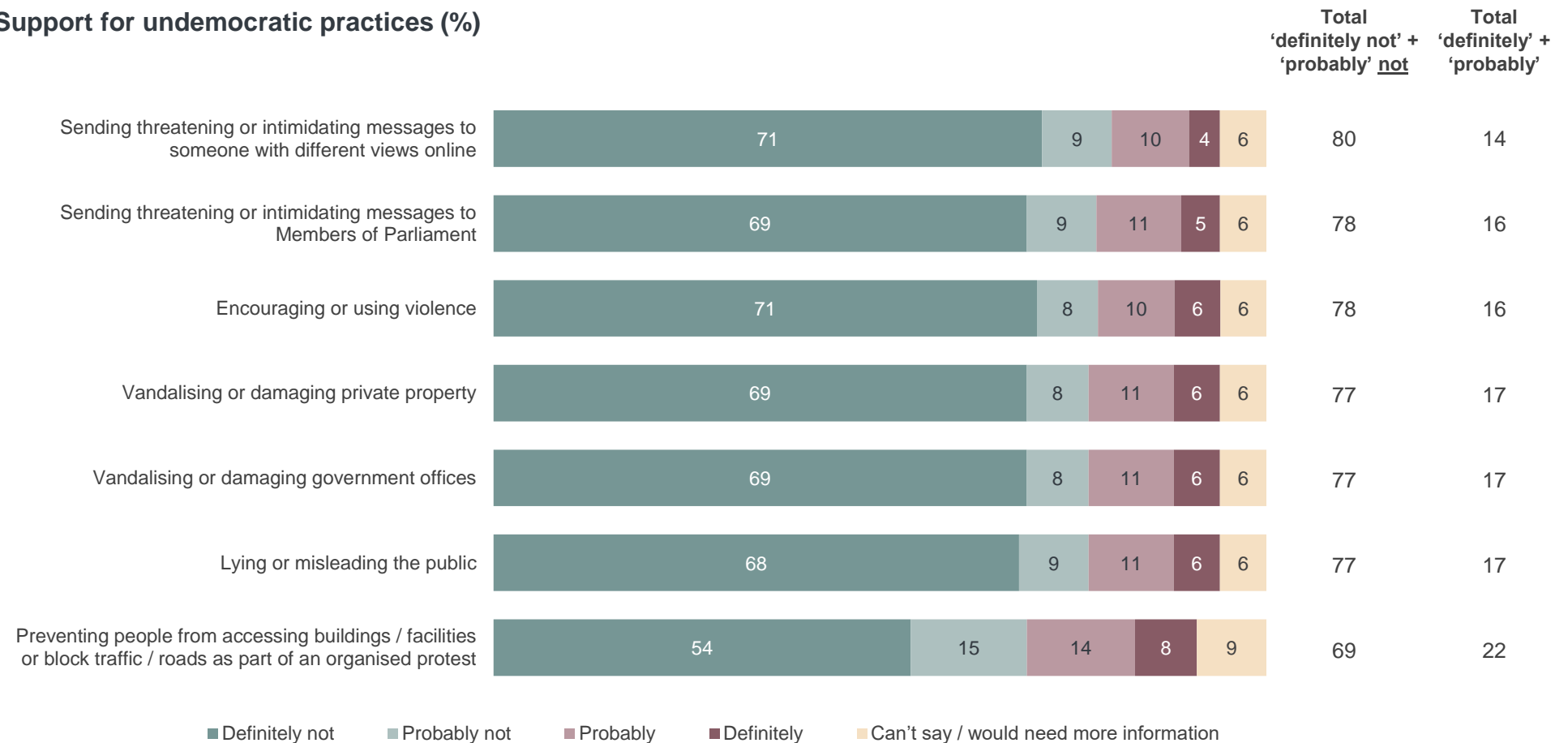


Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



At least one in ten Australians support all manner of undemocratic practices to advance a cause they care about

Support for undemocratic practices (%)



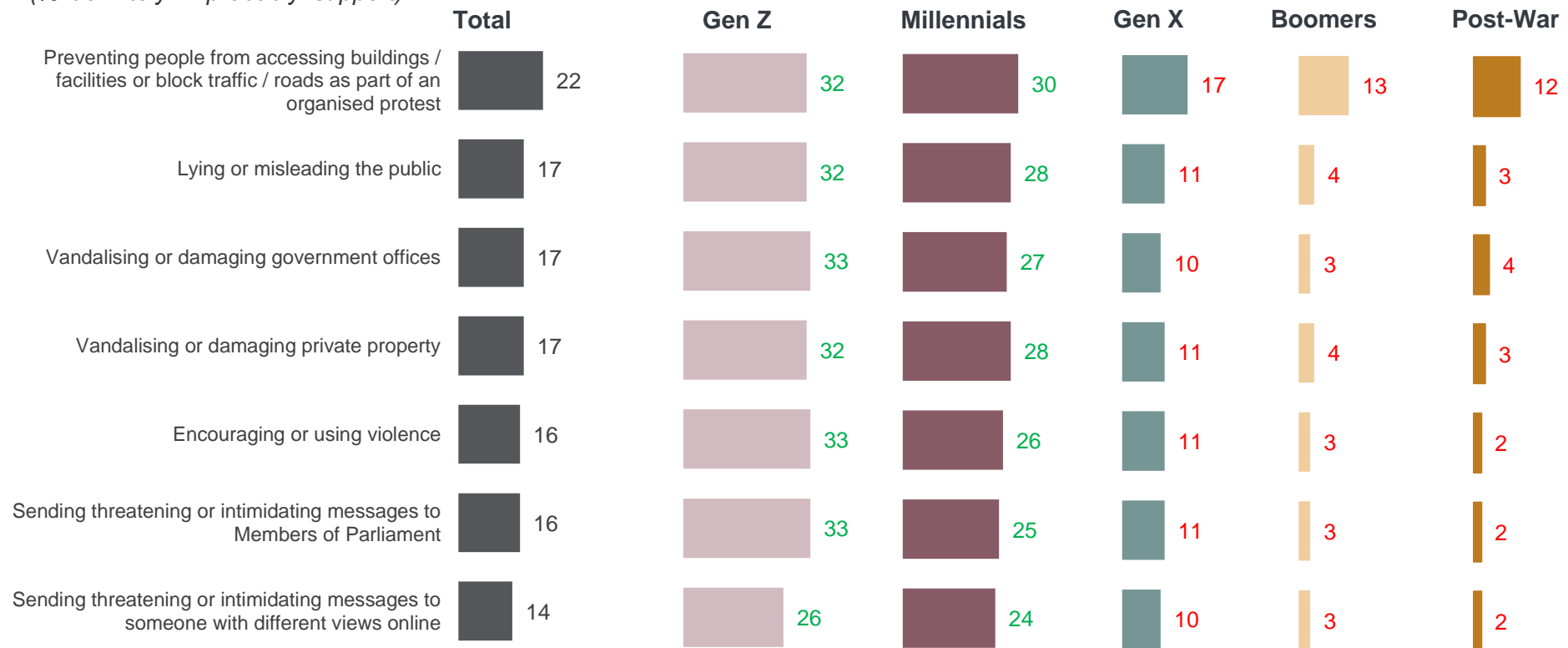
Q40. Would you support any of the following activities to advance a cause that you care about?
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Support for undemocratic practices correlates with lifestage; Gen Z most supportive, Post-War least

Support for undemocratic practices

(% 'definitely' + 'probably' support)



Significantly *higher* / *lower* than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

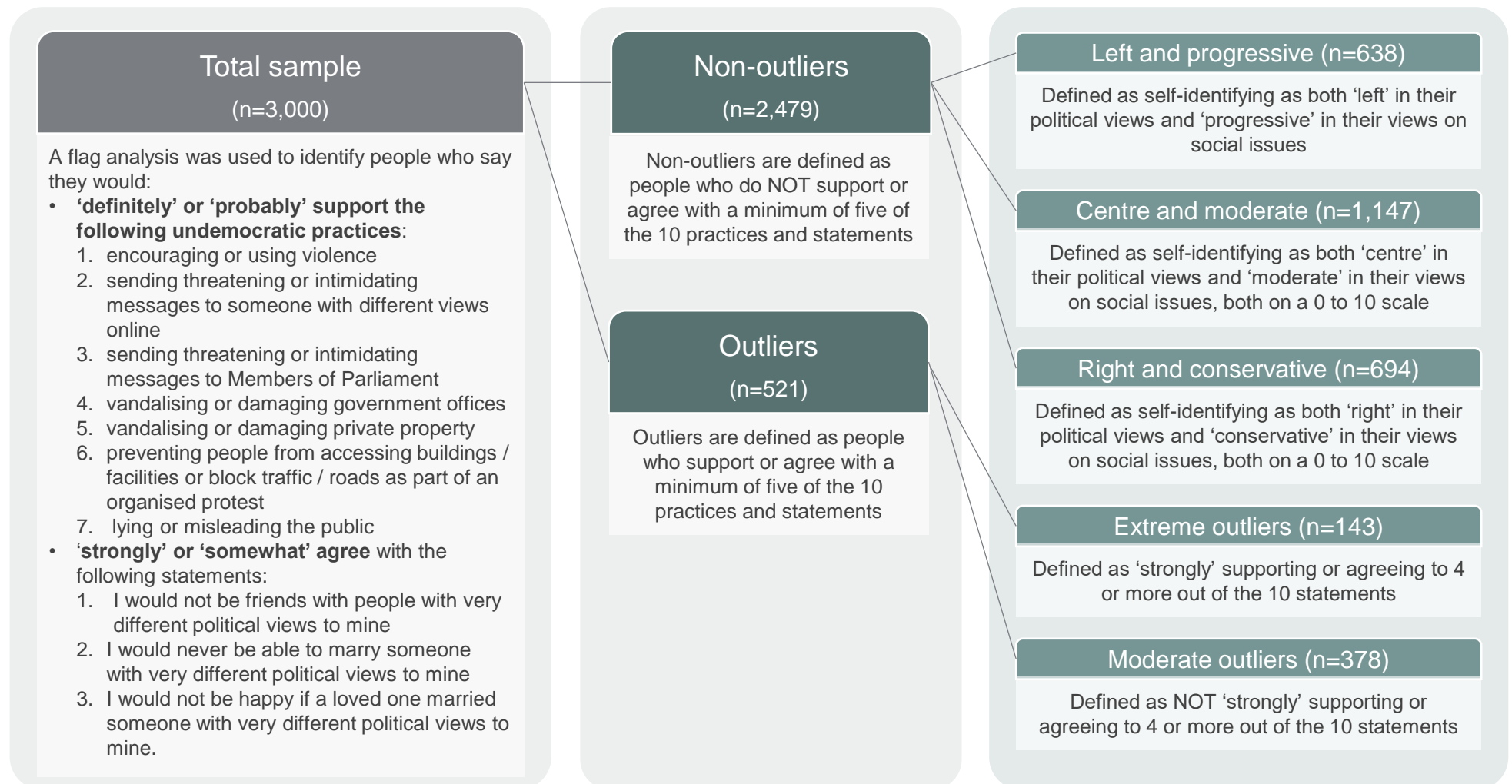
Q40. Would you support any of the following activities to advance a cause that you care about?

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



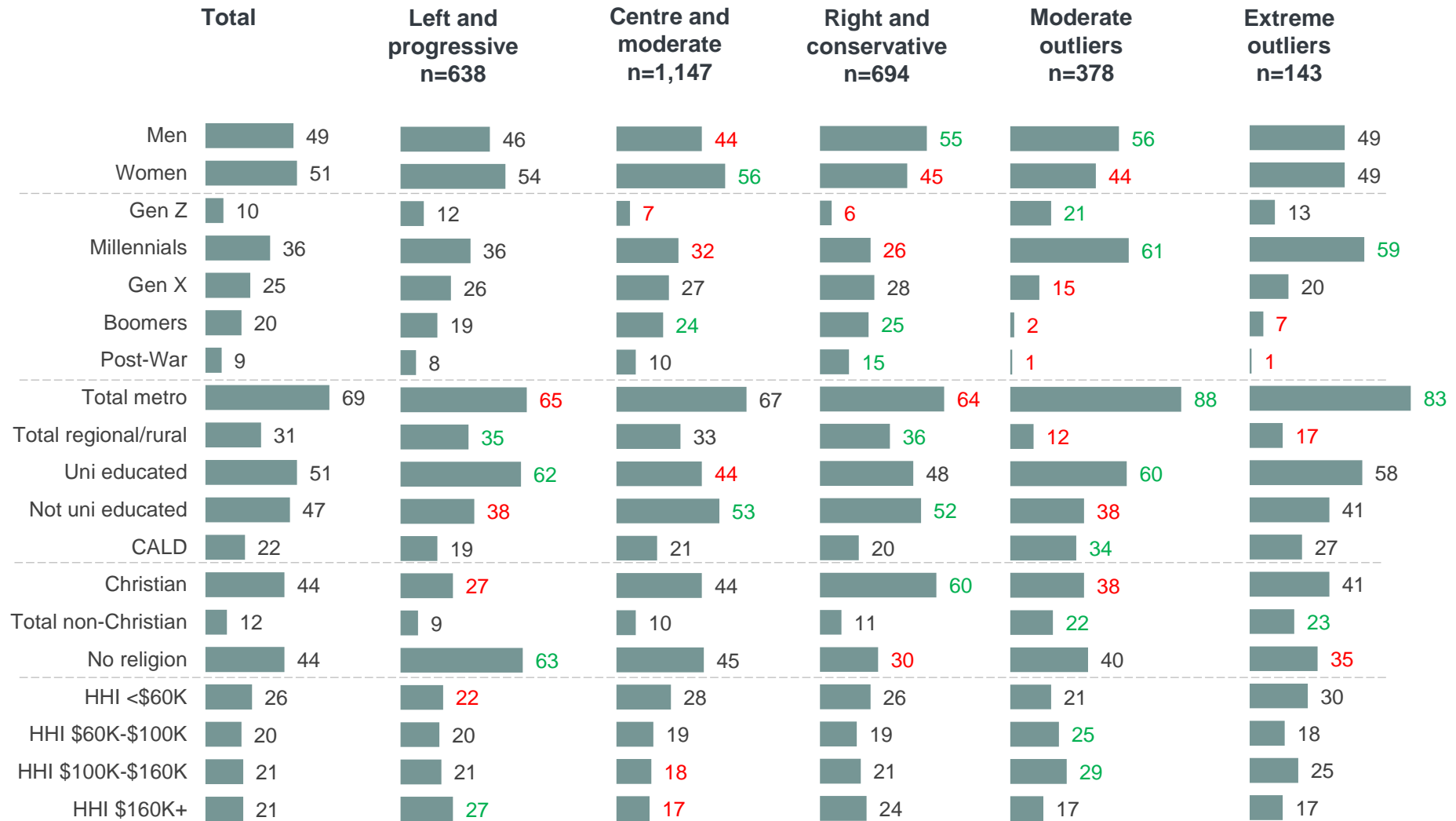
Segmenting the Australian public

Using a combination of flag analysis and Principal Component Analysis (PCA), we have grouped the Australian public into five categories, based on where Australians position themselves on the spectra of politics and social issues, their support for undemocratic practices, and their agreement to engage in a relationship with people whose political views are misaligned with their own.





Segment profiles (%)

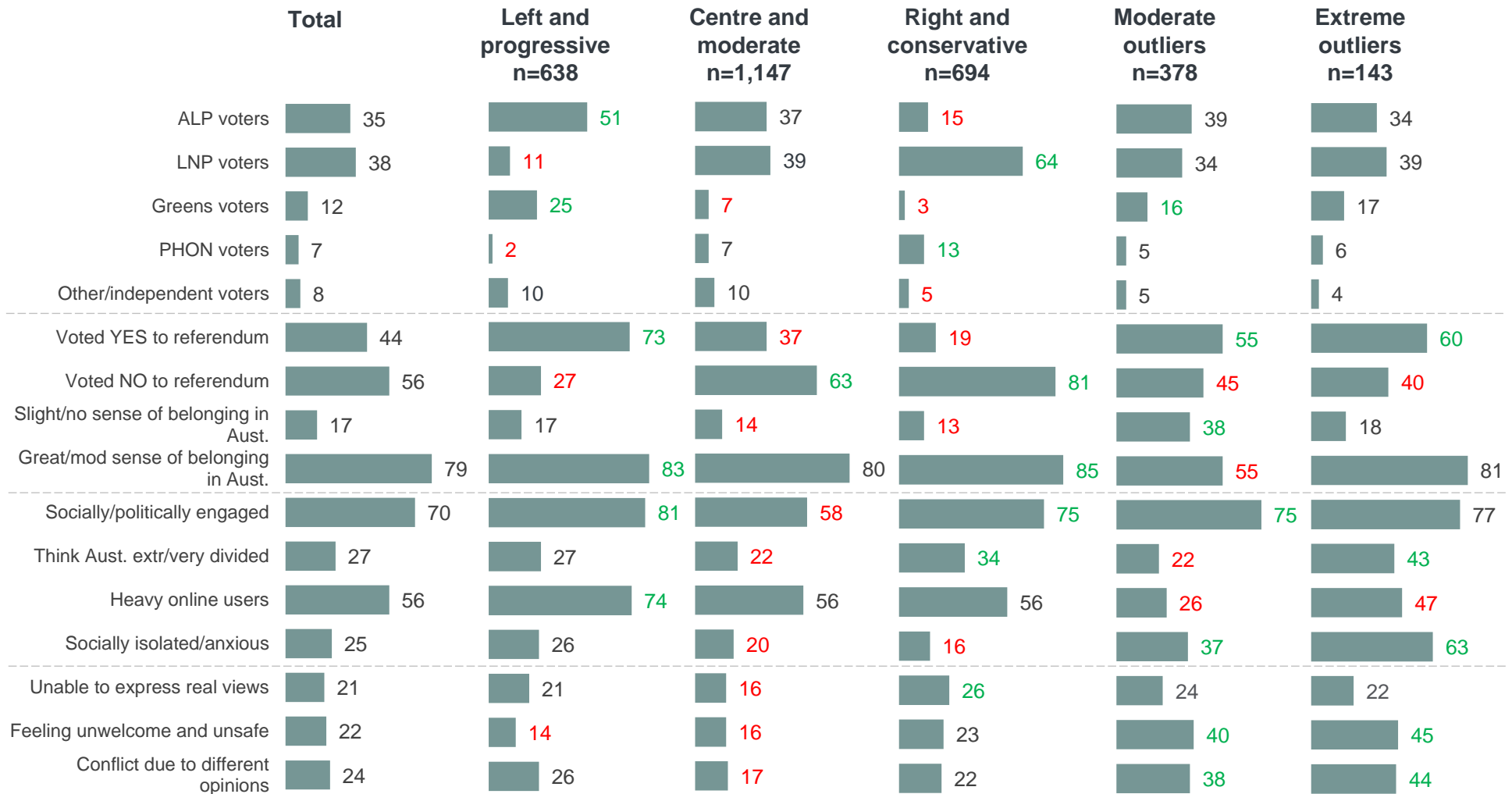


Significantly **higher** / **lower** than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000); Left leaning and progressive (n=638); Centre and moderate (n=1,147); Right leaning and conservative (n=694); Moderate outliers (n=378); Extreme outliers (n=143).



Segment profiles (%)



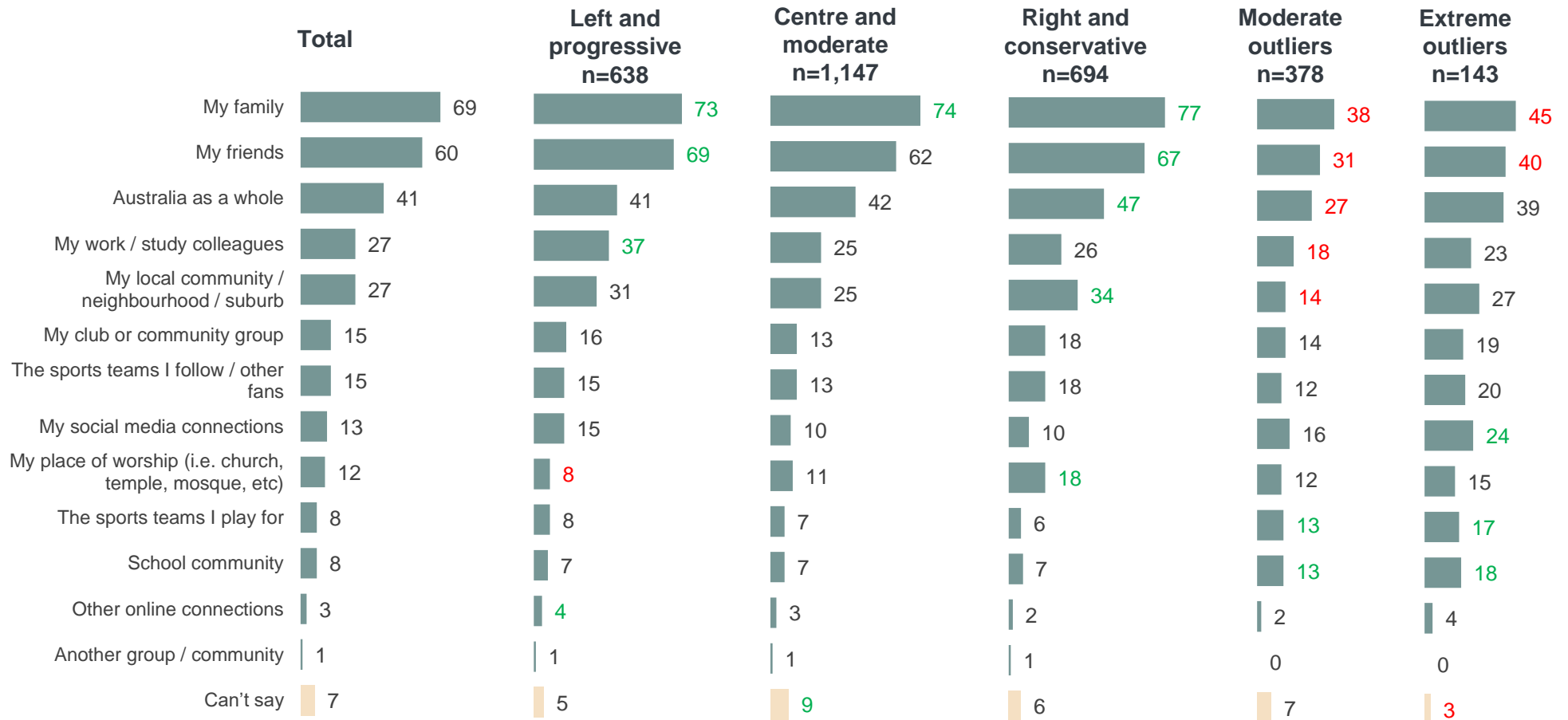
Significantly **higher** / **lower** than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000); Left leaning and progressive (n=638); Centre and moderate (n=1,147); Right leaning and conservative (n=694); Moderate outliers (n=378); Extreme outliers (n=143).



‘Outliers’ are significantly less likely than average to feel a strong sense of belonging with family and friends

Groups / communities where strongest sense of belonging felt (%) (multiple response)



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

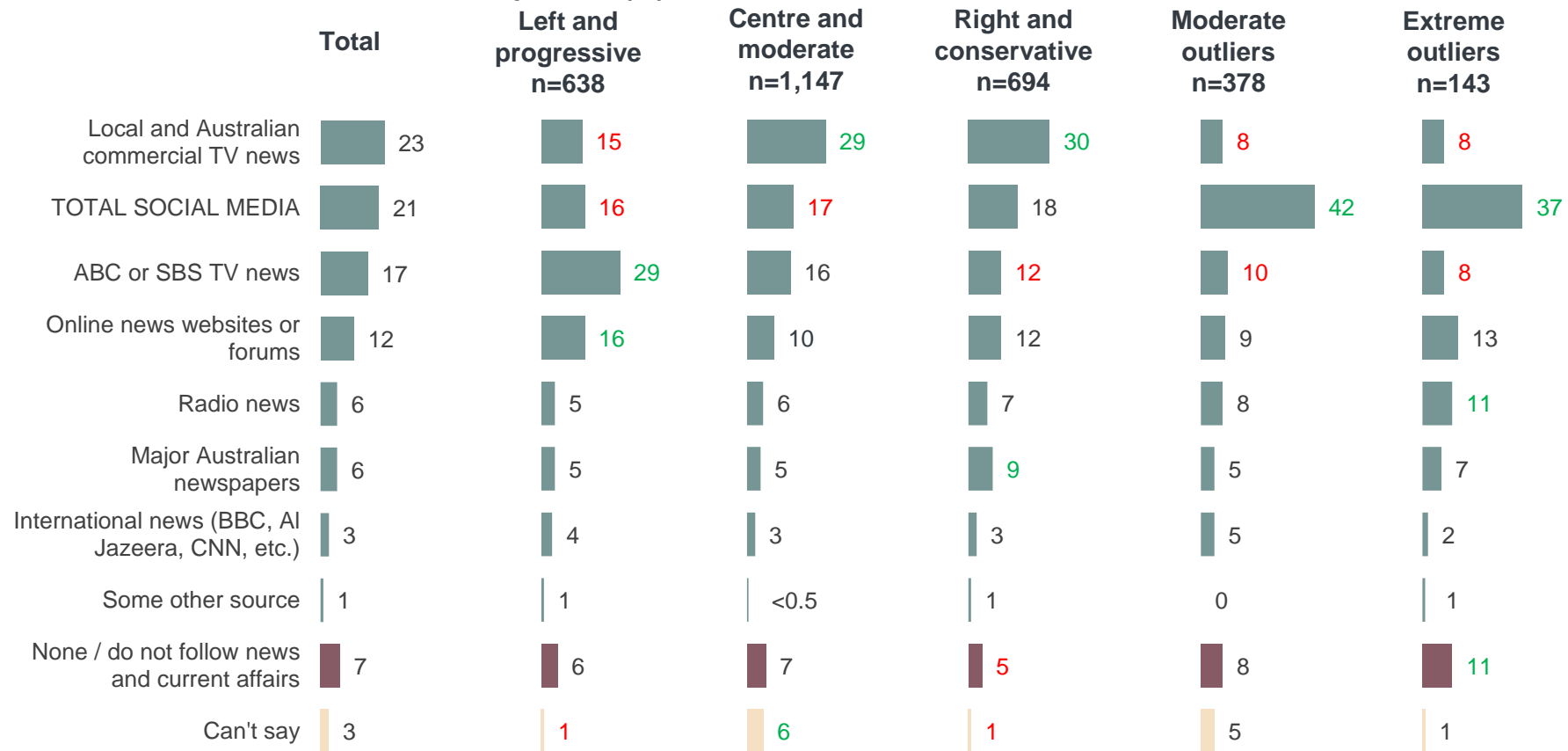
Q32b. From the list below, select the groups / communities where you feel a strong sense of belonging? Please select all that apply

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Social media is significantly more likely to be the main source of news and current affairs for 'Outliers'

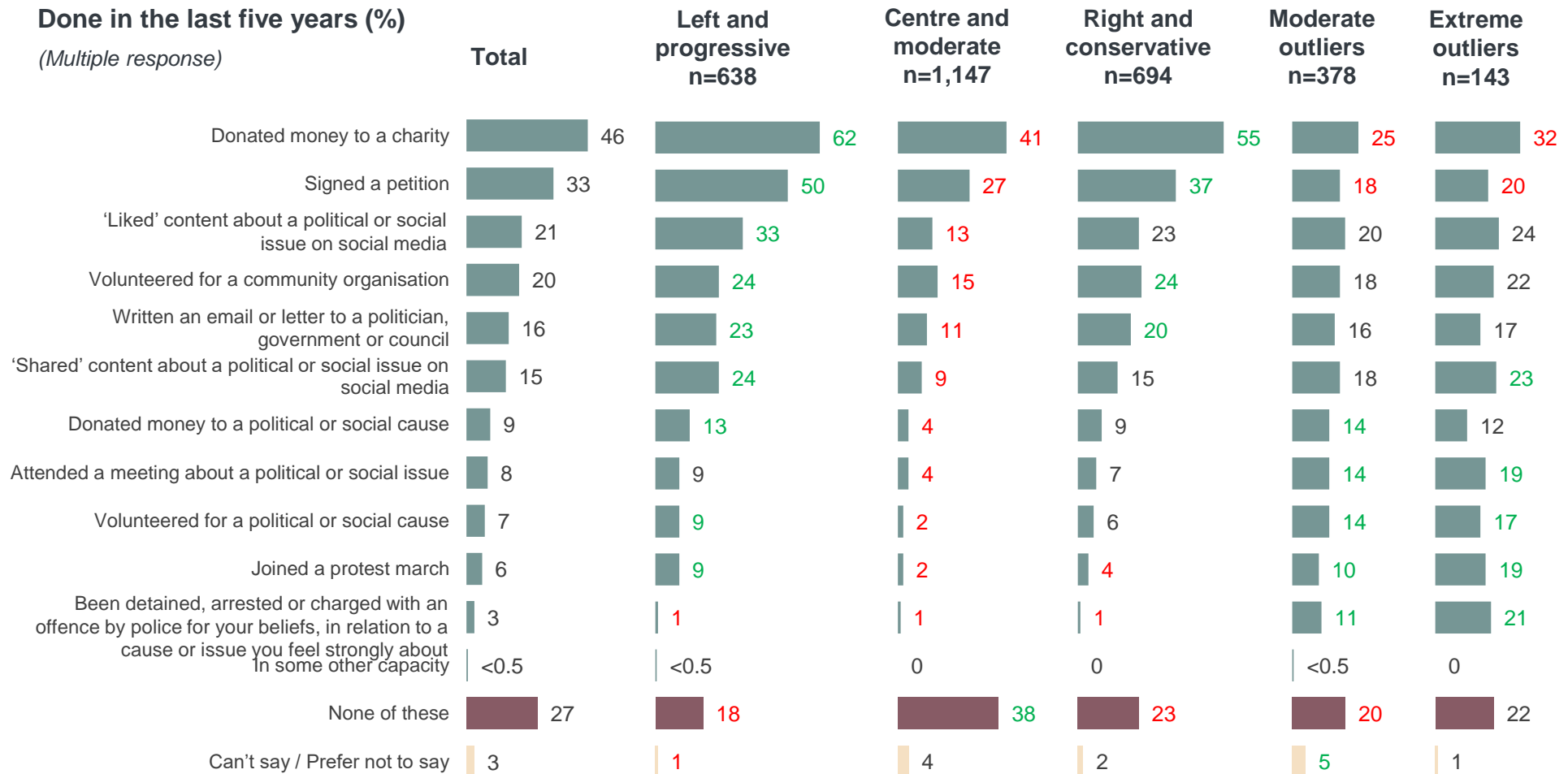
Main source of media across different profiles (%)



Significantly **higher** / **lower** than the total at the 95% confidence interval.
 Q31b. And which is your main source of news and current affairs?
 Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Self-declared ‘Left progressives’ and ‘Right conservatives’ significantly more likely than average to take action



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

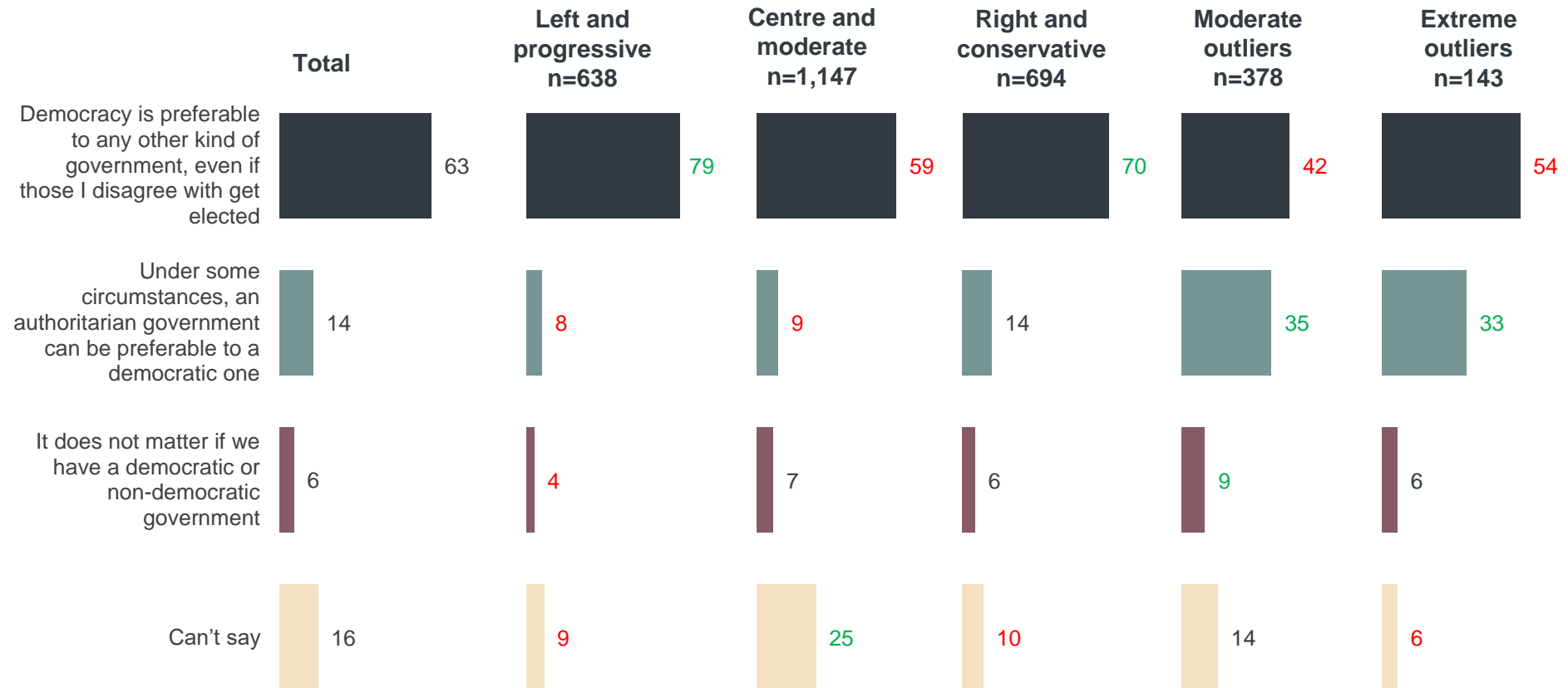
Q23a. Have you done any of the following in the last five years? Please select all that apply.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



'Outliers' significantly more open to an authoritarian government under some circumstances

Personal view about democracy across different profiles (%)



Significantly higher / lower than the total at the 95% confidence interval.

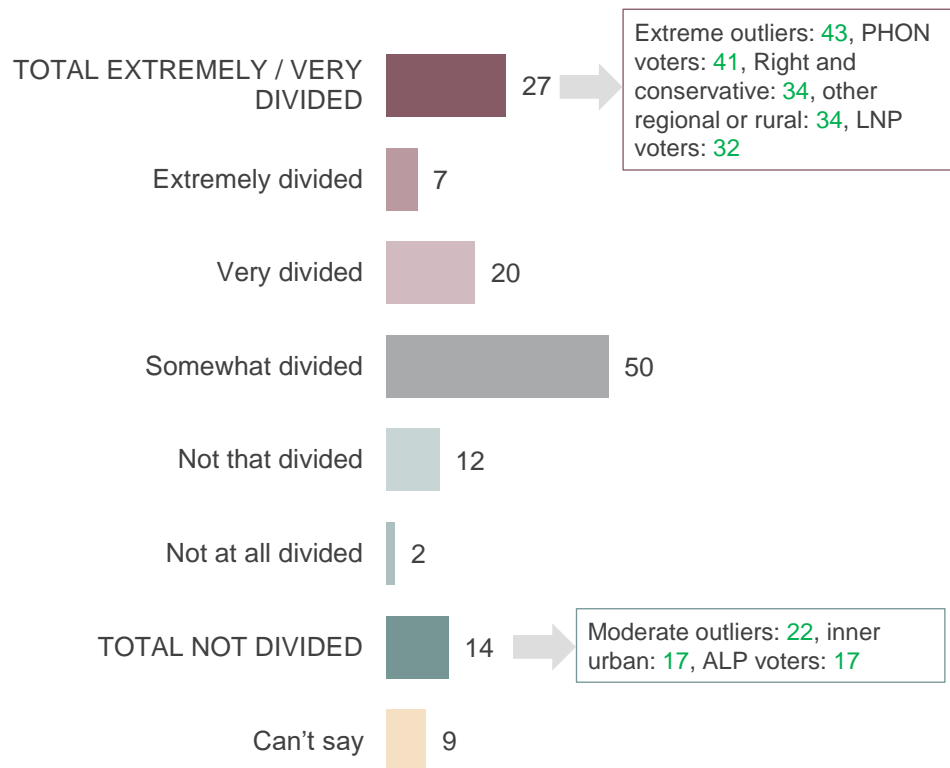
Q9a. Below are some statements about democracy. Please indicate which one of the three statements comes closest to your own personal view about democracy.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).

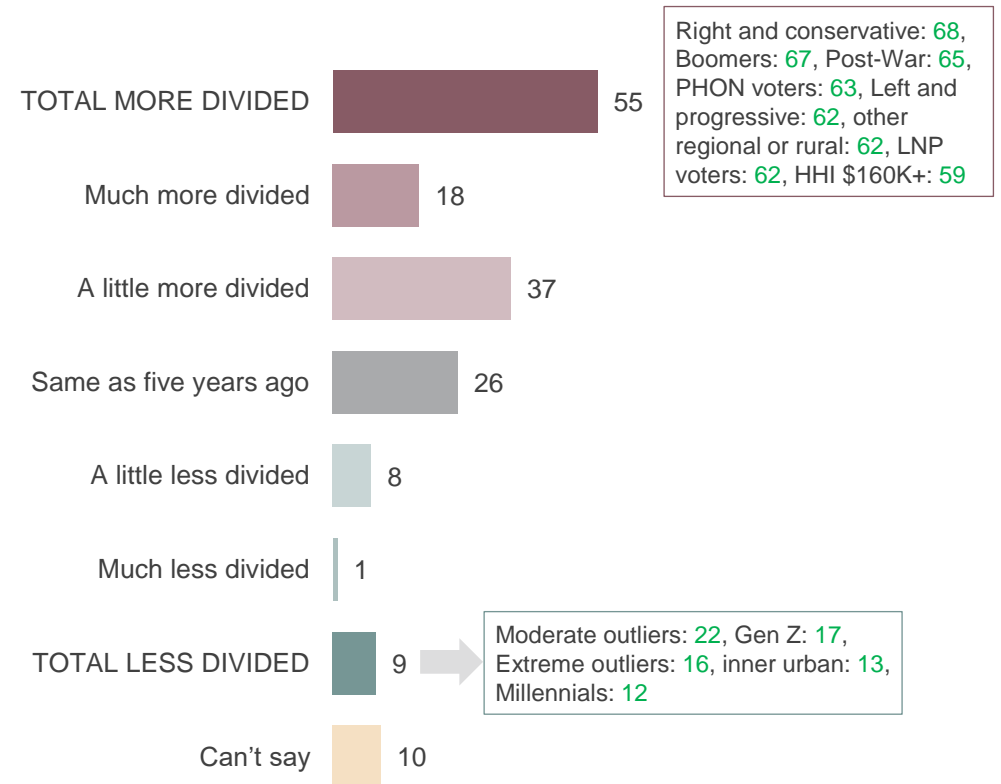


More than half of Australians believe the nation is more divided than five years ago

How divided Australians are on key political, economic and social issues (%)



How divided Australians today are compared with five years ago (%)



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

Q24. Overall, how divided do you think Australians are on key political, economic and social issues? / Q25. Compared with five years ago, do you think Australians today are more divided, less divided, or about the same as before?

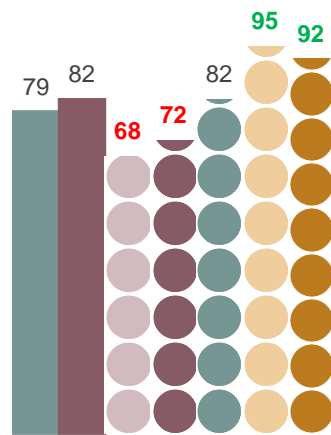
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



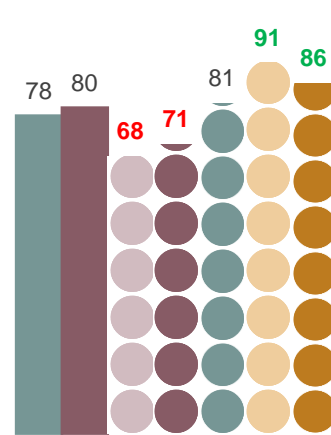
Boomers and Post-War far more so than Gen Z and Millennials have higher ideals on social cohesion

Agreement with social cohesion statements – by demographics (% total 'strongly' + 'somewhat' agree)

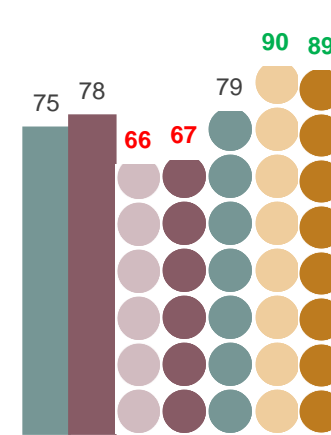
■ Men ■ Women ● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers ● Post-War



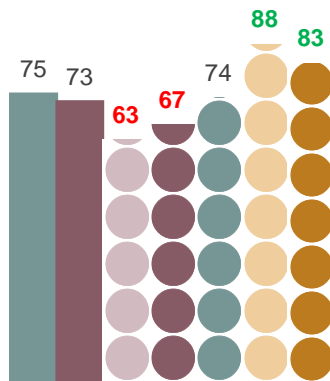
Australians should be being willing to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper



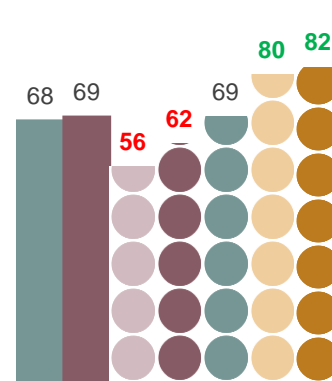
We can have disagreement on issues and still be a cohesive community



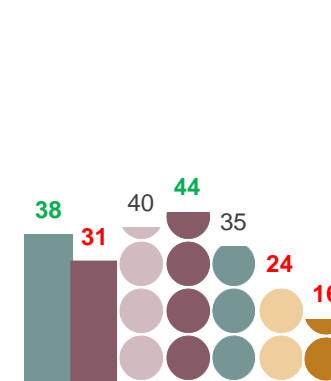
It's important that we have a shared understanding of what it means to be Australian



There are individuals / groups trying to divide communities in Australia



We should not let international disputes impact all of us living in Australia



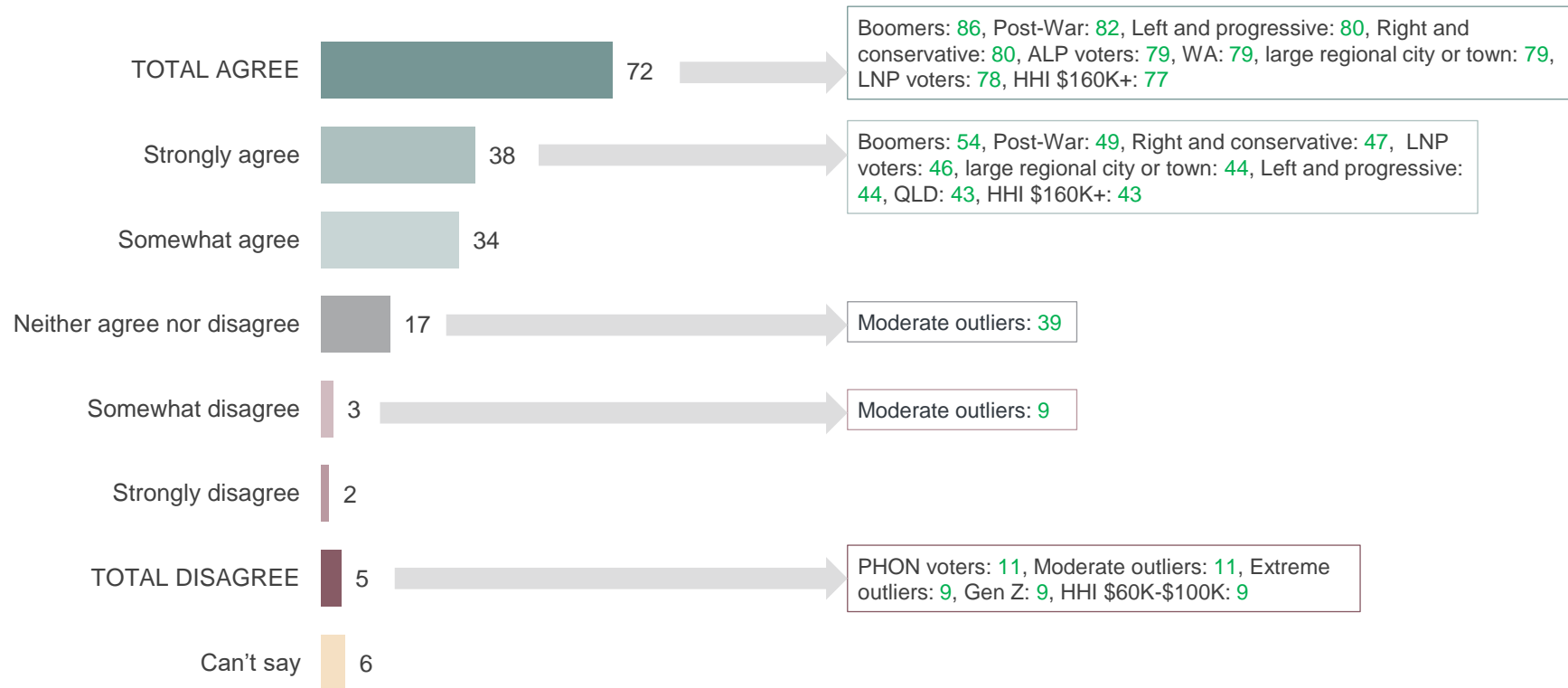
I have experienced discrimination in Australia based on my race, culture, religion or sexuality

Significantly **higher** / **lower** than the total at the 95% confidence interval.
Q35. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following?
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



Strong agreement among Australians that the Government needs to take action on extreme views and intolerance

Agreement that the Government should take further action to address extreme views and intolerance in our community (%)



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

Q41. Do you agree or disagree that the Government should take further action to address extreme views and intolerance in our community?

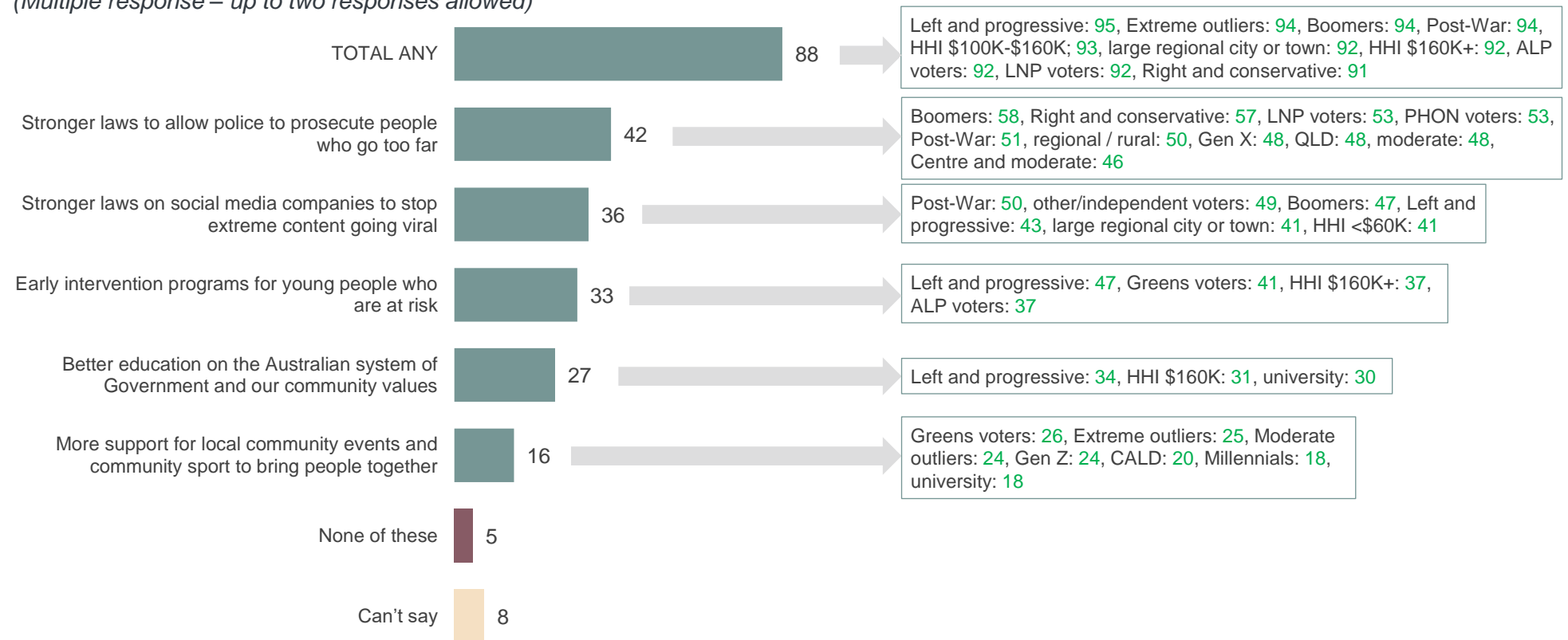
Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



More people believe stronger laws rather than intervention and education will be effective on intolerance

Actions most effective to address extreme views or intolerance in our community (%)

(Multiple response – up to two responses allowed)



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

Q42. Which of these actions do you think would be **most** effective to address extreme views or intolerance in our community? Please select up to **two**.

Base: All respondents (n=3,000).



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