



# Civic Education and Democratic Perceptions

## Survey of Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy: Additional Insights #1

This summary offers additional insights into the levels and impacts of civic education on perceptions of Australian democracy, drawing on data from the Survey of Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy ('Trust in Democracy Survey') conducted in June 2023<sup>1</sup>.

Civic education encompasses a range of knowledge, skills, and values related to civic and political life. This education has been integrated into Australian school curricular. Beyond formal schooling, people can attend civic education programs provided by government bodies, NGOs and universities. In the Trust in Democracy Survey, we asked respondents about their participation in:

1. School-run civic or citizenship learning activities during primary or secondary school (Q11)
2. Visits to state, territory or federal parliament for civics learning (Q11a)
3. Civics or citizenship learning activities beyond primary and secondary schooling (Q11b)

### **In general, our results suggest a relatively lower level of civic education among the respondents.**

- 49% of participants reported some form of civic education, while 51% stated they had no exposure. Details of engagement include:
  - 25% received civic education within the school system.
  - 31% participated in excursion-based civics learning at parliaments.
  - 25% engaged in civic education activities outside primary and secondary school.
- The landscape of civic education across states in Australia presents distinctive patterns.
  - Victoria led in school-based civic education at 28%, followed by New South Wales and the ACT at 26% each; Queensland and Western Australia were at 24%, Northern Territory at 22%, South Australia at 21%, and Tasmania reported the lowest rate at 20%.

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of the survey and its main results, please find the link to the survey report and questionnaires [here](#).

## **Our analysis reveals a correlation between civic education levels and socioeconomic factors.**

- Lower levels of civic education are observed among women, the elderly, those with less formal education, lower-income individuals, the unemployed, and residents in regional areas.
  - Of the males, 53% reported receiving civic education at their primary or secondary schools; the percentage is 47% for female respondents.
  - The 18-24 age group reported the highest level of school-based civic education, at 43%, while the 65+ category reported the lowest level, at 12%.
  - Individuals with postgraduate degrees reported the highest school-based civic education (37%), while those without qualifications reported the lowest civic education (17%).
  - Individuals earning between \$2,000-\$2,999 per week exhibited the highest civic education level at 36%, while those with negative income reported the lowest, at 10%.
  - Permanent and casual employees reported the highest school-based civic education (32%), while only 22% of unemployed respondents received civic education at school age.
  - School-based civic education participation is 28% in metro areas and 21% in regional areas.

## **Our results show that civic education enhances people’s understanding, satisfaction, and participation in Australian democracy<sup>2</sup>.**

- Individuals who received civic education during their school years demonstrate a deeper understanding of and greater satisfaction with democracy.
  - 53% with civic education reported a robust understanding of democracy versus 35% of those without.
  - 72% of those educated about civics reported satisfaction with democracy in Australia, significantly higher than the 52% without civic education.
- Civic education positively shapes individuals’ perceptions of Australian democracy. For instance,
  - 85% of those with civic education believe in fixing democracy, compared to 77% of those without.
  - 74% of the civically educated felt the Australian electoral system accurately represents their vote, compared to 63% without civic education.
  - 67% of those with civic education believed Australia’s democracy is on the right track, compared to 47% without.
- Civic education influences how individuals assess the performance of democratic values. For instance,
  - 75% with civic education positively rated Australia’s execution of fair elections, in contrast to 68% without.

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<sup>2</sup> This analysis is based on school-based civic education as the survey question covers a range of dimensions within civic education including classroom learning and excursion based learning, such as visiting parliaments.

- 74% of civically educated respondents thought that Australia does well in human rights protection, whereas 65% of respondents did not have civic education.
- 71% with civic education agreed that people of all ages can easily learn how democracy works in Australia, compared to 61% without this education.
- Those with civic education reported higher satisfaction with public services and greater trust in public institutions. For instance,
  - 85% with civic education were satisfied with public education services, compared to 77% without.
  - 82% with civic education were satisfied with natural disaster response compared to 68% without.
  - 76% with civic education expressed trust in public health institutions, compared to 70% without.
  - 75% with civic education expressed trust in the Australian Defence Forces, compared to 72% without.
- Participation in civic activities is more common among those educated about civics in school. For instance,
  - 56% of civically educated people voted in state/territory elections, compared to 51% without this education. 42% participated in local council elections, compared to 36% without.
  - 68% with civic education discussed their views on important societal and democratic issues with family or friends, compared to 51% without this education.
  - 41% with civic education expressed willingness to write to their local Member of Parliament about a specific issue, doubled the 20% without civic education.
- Civic education affects how people respond to dissatisfaction with democracy, and those educated are more inclined to seek improvements within existing structures.
  - 42% of civically educated people preferred to work on improving democracy in Australia, while only 25% of those without civic education shared the same view.
  - 36% of those with civic education expressed uncertainty about the future of Australian democracy; this percentage increased to 55% of those without civic education.

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