



Dissatisfaction with democracy and perceptions of future directions

Survey of Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy: Additional Insights #2

This summary offers additional insights into those people who report being dissatisfied with Australian democracy and their perception of future democratic direction, drawing on data from the Survey of Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy ('Trust in Democracy Survey') conducted in June 2023.¹

We identify three unique profiles based on how respondents answered two questions from the Trust in Democracy Survey. First, respondents answered a question related to their general satisfaction with the way democracy works in Australia². For those who selected a response that was dissatisfied or neutral, an additional question was asked to capture an option that best reflected their opinion about future directions³.

The three profiles that we look at are:

- **Profile 1:** Dissatisfied, and not sure about how to move forward
- **Profile 2:** Dissatisfied, but wanting to continue building upon what we've got to improve democracy
- **Profile 3:** Dissatisfied, and wanting to start again or wanting a new system to replace democracy

Our analysis consists of two parts. First, we seek to identify characteristics associated with those who reported being dissatisfied with Australian democracy *compared* to those who reported being satisfied. Through logistic regression analysis, we identify characteristics that are associated with a greater likelihood of a person belonging to each specific profile versus the satisfied baseline group. Second, we shift our comparator group away from those who are satisfied, to those who are dissatisfied and wanting to continue building (*Profile 2*). This allows us to better understand the relative positions of other dissatisfied profiles and identify characteristics that are associated with them beyond those that are already associated with dissatisfaction. This is important because dissatisfaction is an inevitable component of even a healthy democracy. But when this leads to disengagement or less constructive forms of engagement, it is not healthy for democracy.

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

² Q9: How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Australia? Options: Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, Satisfied, Very satisfied, Not sure.

³ Q10: You indicated you are ['very dissatisfied', 'dissatisfied', 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with] / ['not sure' with how you feel about] the way democracy works in Australia. Which of the following best reflects your opinion about democracy in Australia? Options: We need to continue building upon what we've got to improve democracy in Australia, We need to remove what we've got and start again to improve democracy in Australia, There are political systems other than democracy that will work better in Australia, Not sure, Other.

Our analysis reveals that demographics, wellbeing factors, and civic engagement are associated with perceptions of democratic directions.

Gender and location are associated with views on how to move forward with democracy.

- Women who were dissatisfied with democracy were more likely to be unsure about its future directions, but they also showed a strong desire to improve it.
 - Women were 1.35x more likely than men to be dissatisfied with Australian democracy, and not sure about how to move forward.
 - Women were 1.48x more likely than men to be dissatisfied but still wanted to improve democracy based on what we've got.
- Regional residents were more likely to be in all three dissatisfied groups compared to those who live in metro areas. They were:
 - 1.54x more likely to be dissatisfied and unsure than be in the satisfied group.
 - 1.6x more likely to be dissatisfied and wanting to continue building than be in the satisfied group.
 - 1.54x more likely to be dissatisfied and wanting to start again than be in the satisfied group.

Well-being factors like life satisfaction, experience of discrimination, and interpersonal trust are associated with democratic outlook.

- Lower life satisfaction is associated with a greater likelihood of being unsure about future democratic directions and wanting to start again.
 - People with low life satisfaction were 3.33x more likely to be unsure about the future democratic directions.
 - Those who were less satisfied with life are 4.55x more likely to want to remove what we have and start again.
- Experiences of discrimination are linked to greater uncertainty and desire for a new system.
 - Those who have faced discrimination were 1.52x more likely to be unsure about how to move forward to strengthen democracy than those who have not.
 - Those that faced discrimination were 3.45x more likely to want to remove what we have and start again.
- Low interpersonal trust is associated with a greater likelihood of being in all three dissatisfied profiles. People who expressed less trust in others were:
 - 3.03x more likely to be dissatisfied and unsure than be in the satisfied group.
 - 3.33x more likely to be dissatisfied and wanting to continue building than be in the satisfied group.
 - 3.45x more likely to want to start again than be in the satisfied group.

Civic education and participation in civic or political activities are associated with perceptions of democratic directions.

- Lower levels of civic education⁴ are linked to dissatisfaction and uncertainty about future directions, and a desire to start again.
 - Individuals who did not participate in civic education at school were 1.58x more likely to be unsure about democratic directions.
 - Individuals who did not participate in civic education were 2.75x more likely to want to start again compared to those satisfied with democracy.
- Active civic engagement is associated with a greater desire to improve democracy based on what we have built.
 - Each additional civic or political activity undertaken increased the likelihood of wanting to build on the current system to improve democracy by 1.18x.
 - People who were unlikely to vote without compulsory voting were 3.53x more likely to be unsure about democratic directions, and 3.6x more likely to want a new system.

Comparing within the dissatisfied profiles, those unsure about directions and those wanting to start over show distinct differences in particular individual traits.

People who were unsure about democratic directions tend to come from lower educational backgrounds, have lower life satisfaction, and report lower levels of civic education, knowledge and participation.

- Those who did not finish Grade 12 were 1.9x more likely than those who did to be unsure than want to continue building.
- People who did not visit a state, territory or federal parliament at school are 2.56x more likely than those who did to be unsure than want to continue building.
- People that report low levels of democratic understanding are 3.7x more likely to be unsure than want to continue building.
- Each additional political activity participation reduced the likelihood of being unsure about democratic directions by 1.27x.

⁴ Civic education encompasses a range of knowledge, skills, and values related to civic and political life. This education has been integrated into Australian school curricula. Beyond formal schooling, people can attend civic education programs provided by government bodies, NGOs and universities. Want to know more about how civic education influences people's perceptions on Australian democracy? See our [Additional Insights #1: Civic Education and Democratic Perceptions](#).

Those who wanted to remove the current system and start again were more likely to be men, to have experienced discrimination and to report lower levels of civic education and voting intention.

- Men were 1.56x more likely than women to want to start over than continue building.
- Those who have experienced discrimination were 1.54x more likely to prefer starting again than continuing to build on the current system.
- People who did not receive civic education at school were 1.78x more likely to want a new system than to continue building democracy based on what we've got.
- People who indicated that they were unlikely to vote if voting was not mandatory were 1.67x more likely to want a new system than to continue building.

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