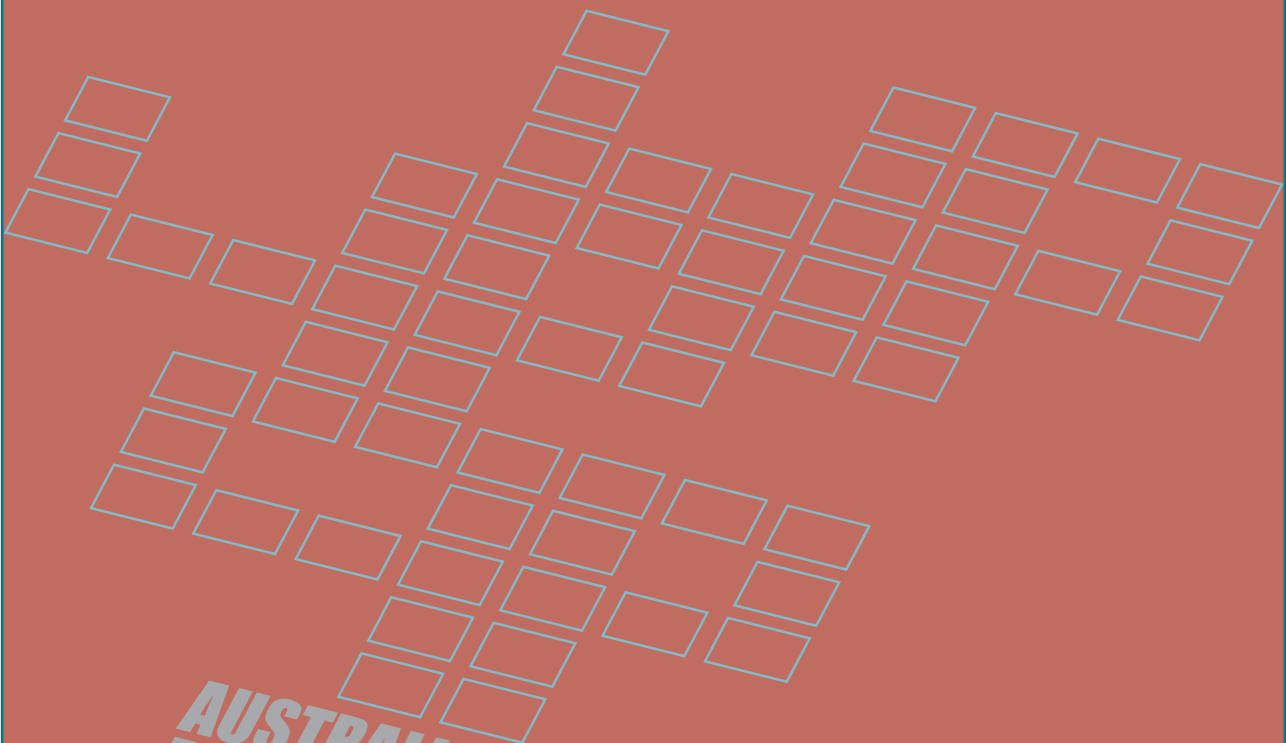




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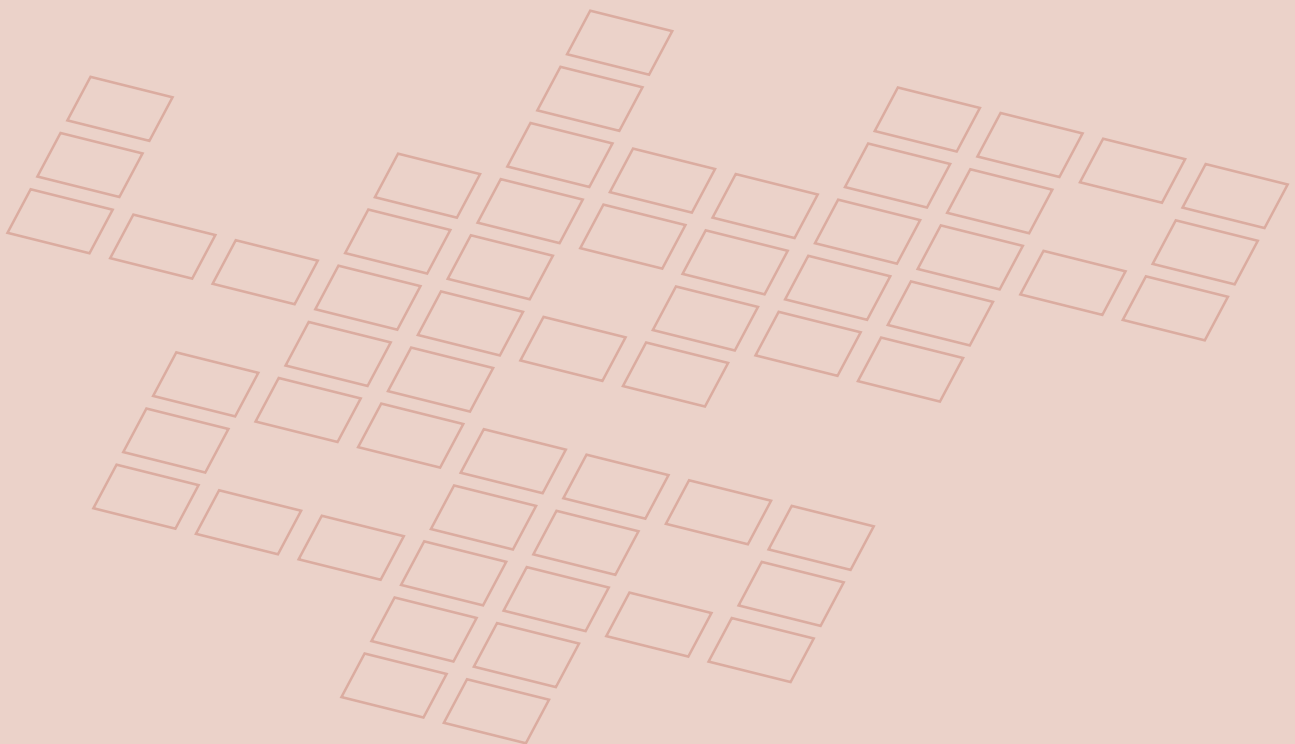


**AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS**

YOUTH POLL 2007

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Demographics	4
3. Employment	5
4. Health	6
5. Education and Training	8
6. National Issues	11
7. State Issues	15
8. Conclusion - a snapshot of young Australians	17



Senator Natasha Stott Despoja
PO Box 3419, Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000

Phone - 08 8232 7595
Fax - 08 8232 7601

senator.stottdespoja@aph.gov.au

1. Introduction



For more than a decade the Australian Democrats have conducted an annual Youth Poll that highlights the attitudes and opinions of young people on a diverse range of important issues.

The poll is aimed at 15 to 20 year olds and is distributed to schools, TAFEs, universities, youth and church groups, and welfare, charity and community organisations in every State and Territory.

Youth Poll asks young people about employment, health, education and training and a range of other issues.

This poll is part of a commitment to recognising the contribution young people make and the importance of including their views in the political process.

Young Australians continue to search for new opportunities, greater understanding and a platform from which to voice their ideas. Often, young people's views and opinions are misrepresented, ignored or stereotyped.

Youth Poll 2007 (also available at www.natashastottdespoja.com) provides a detailed insight into how young Australians feel about themselves, their place in society, their approach to life and the issues that are important to them. Youth Poll provides an invaluable indicator of the attitudes of Australia's young people. It gauges opinions on both federal and state issues that affect young people.

While Youth Poll reveals a diversity of opinions on various issues, the results show that many young people are united in their concerns and feelings. This year, Youth Poll has found that family and health are important to young people with climate change continuing to be an issue of particular concern.

Youth Poll not only provides a great opportunity for young people to have a say, it also gives policy-makers the chance to incorporate these views in policy so as to reflect the interests and concerns of young people. Like all Australians, young people deserve attention and respect from their Government. Youth Poll is just one way we seek to represent better the interests of young Australians.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Natasha Stott Despoja".

Natasha Stott Despoja
Senator for South Australia



2.1 Age

The Youth Poll 2007 questionnaire sought opinions from people aged between 15 and 20.

2.2 Sex

Males and females are equally represented.

2.3 Residence

Respondents come from all states and territories, and live in urban, regional and remote areas.

Most respondents live with family, but others live with friends, alone, are homeless, or have alternative living arrangements.

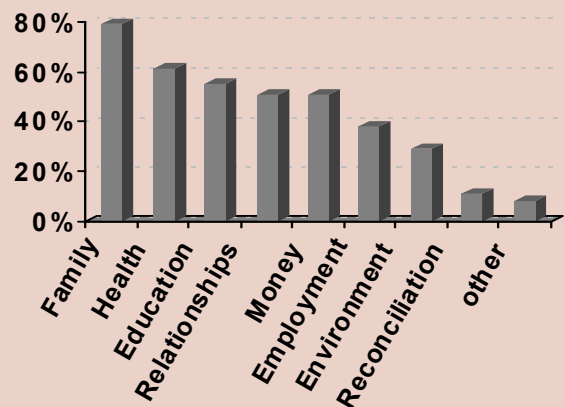
2.4 Important issues

We asked young people to nominate all the issues most important to them from a list of 9.

Consistent with previous years, family proved to be the dominant issue to respondents, with over 75% nominating family as an important issue to them.

Following closely behind was health on 59% and education on 55%, consistent with last year's results.

These values are represented in the following chart.



A 2006 survey by Mission Australia found young people valued most family relationships 72.3%, followed by friendships 66.8% and being independent 35.2%¹

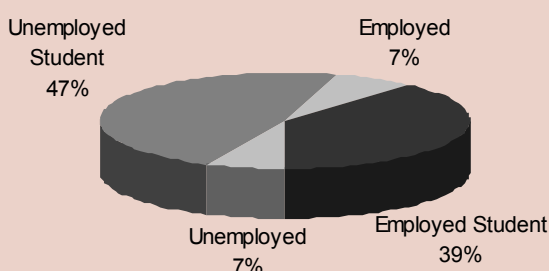
3. Employment



3.1 Employment Status

86% of Youth Poll respondents are in education or training. Of these, 47% are unemployed students and 39% are employed students.

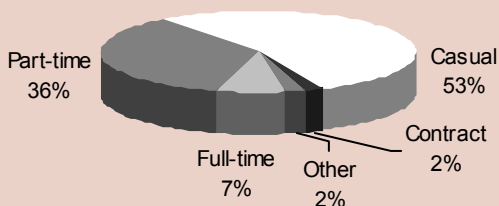
7% of respondents are employed and 7% are unemployed, making up 14% of all respondents.



A 2006 report found that nearly a quarter of young Australians who are working part-time do so only because they cannot find full-time work.²

3.2 Type of Employment

Down 3% from last year, only 7% of the employed respondents are working full-time. Most of the other employed respondents (53%) are in casual employment, and 36% work part-time.

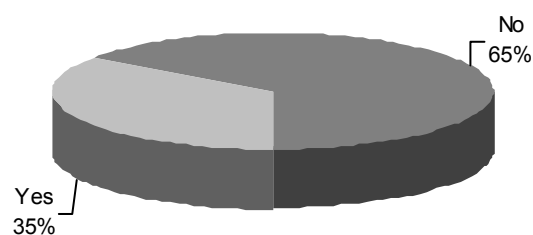


Despite the lack of full-time employment opportunities, the percentage of young adults in full-time study or work were higher in 2006 than at any time in the past two decades, with 16% of teenagers engaging in full-time work.³

3.3 Employment Culture

Is there homophobia where you work or study?

35% of respondents said they had experienced homophobia in their workplace or study environment, down 7% from last year.



A 2005 study revealed that 74% of all homophobic abuse occurs at schools, with 49% of same sex attracted young people revealing they fear for their safety.⁴

The study also revealed that young people who had experienced homophobia were more likely to self harm, with 35% admitting to having thought about or gone through with a form of self harm.⁵

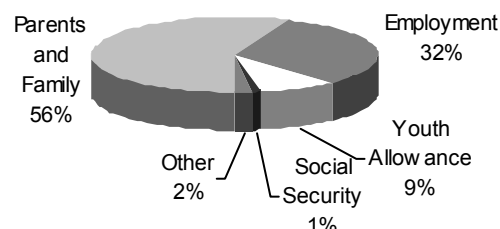
3.4 Source of Income

What is your main source of income?

More than half of respondents (56%) rely on their parents or family for income.

Work is the main source of income for 32% of respondents.

Only 9% of respondents said Youth Allowance is their main source of income, down 6% from last year, 2% rely on other forms of income with 1% relying on social security benefits.

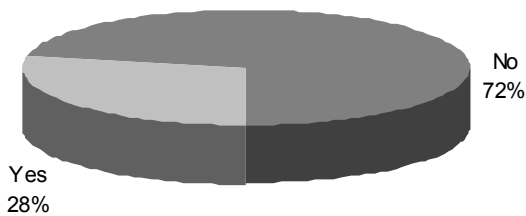


4. Health

3.5 Industrial Relations Changes

Has anyone you know been affected by the new Industrial Relations (WorkChoices) laws?

28% of respondents know someone who has been affected by WorkChoices.



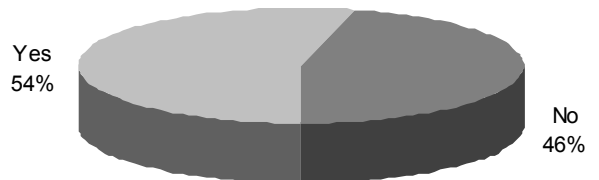
According to a recent Newspoll survey, only 14% of 18-34 year olds believe WorkChoices will have a positive impact on their working conditions, with 44% believing it will have a negative impact.⁶

In a survey conducted by the CPSU, over 97% of respondents argued the new Industrial Relations laws have failed to make workplaces fairer and more balanced.⁷

4.1 Youth Suicide

Do you know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide?

The majority of respondents (54%) report knowing a young person who has attempted or committed suicide. This is a small increase on last year's result of 52%.



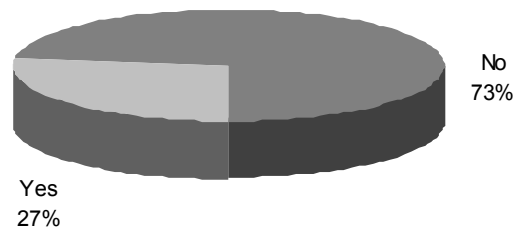
In 2005, 67 males between the ages of 15-19 committed suicide, compared to 24 females.⁸

Mission Australia's *National Survey of Young Australians 2006* highlighted that 28% of respondents were concerned about suicide, and 21% were concerned about self harm.⁹

4.2 Drugs

Have you ever tried marijuana?

27% of respondents have tried marijuana, a decrease of 10% since last year.



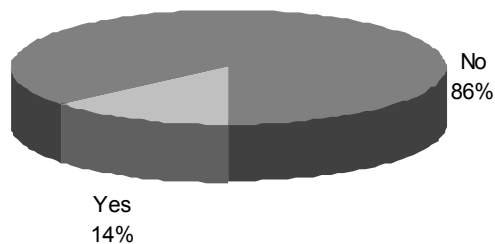
A recent National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre survey revealed 78% of Australians under 30 are concerned about the effects of cannabis on the community, believing there are social problems associated with its use.¹⁰



Australia has the highest use of cannabis in relation to other western countries, with 15% of the population between 15-64 years having used the drug in the past year.¹¹

Have you ever tried amphetamines or hallucinogens (such as Ecstasy, Speed or LSD)?

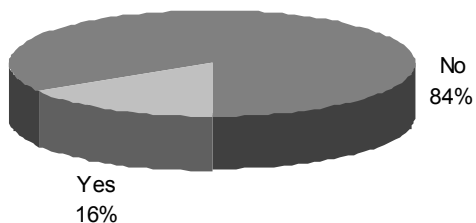
14% of respondents have tried amphetamines or hallucinogens, such as Ecstasy, LSD or Speed. This is a decrease of 3% on last year's Youth Poll.



An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report found there had been a decline of 12% in the usage of illicit substances by 12-17 year olds between 1999 and 2005.¹²

Do you smoke?

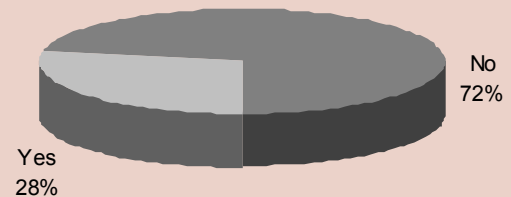
16% of respondents smoke, a decrease of 2% since last year.



According to a 2005 Survey, 7% of 12-15 year olds were current smokers, compared to 17% of 16-17 year olds.¹³

Do you binge drink (more than five drinks in one session)?

Showing a decrease of 10% since last year, 28% of respondents say that they binge drink.



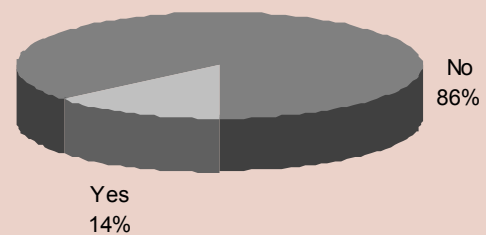
37% of young women between 18-24 consider themselves to be binge drinkers, compared to 30% of males.

One third of 18-24 year olds consider themselves 'binge drinkers', with young women more inclined to drink in excess than young men.¹⁴

4.3 Young Parents

Do you think society negatively stereotypes young parents?

This question is new for Youth Poll, with 14% of respondents agreeing that young parents are portrayed negatively in society.



Australia has the third highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the developed world, following the United States and the United Kingdom.¹⁵

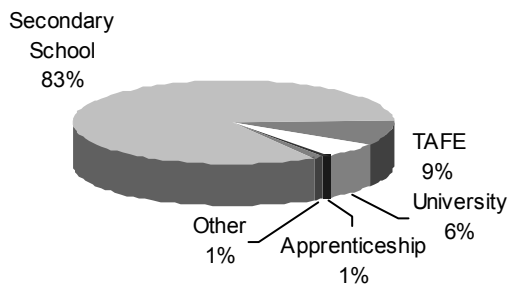
However, rates in Australia have decreased since the mid 1970s, with 2005 ABS statistics showing there were 10 744 births to mothers aged 19 or younger, compared to 12 631 births in 1995.¹⁶

5. Education and Training

94% of Youth Poll 2007 respondents are in some form of education or training.

This is a 2% increase on last year's figure. 83% are studying in secondary school, an increase of 9% on last year, and 9% are attending TAFE.

Respondents undertaking university study decreased to 6%, with a further 1% doing apprenticeships, and 2% in other forms of education and training.

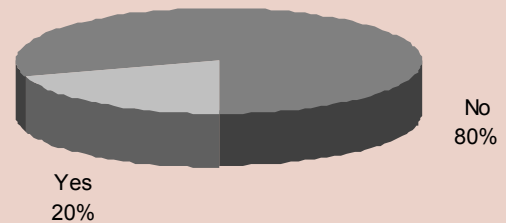


In May 2006, 70% of 15-19 year olds were at school or enrolled in full-time study.¹⁷

5.1 Youth Allowance

Are you receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship?

An overwhelming 80% of respondents are not receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship, a considerable increase from last year's 67%, almost equalling the 2005 result of 81%.



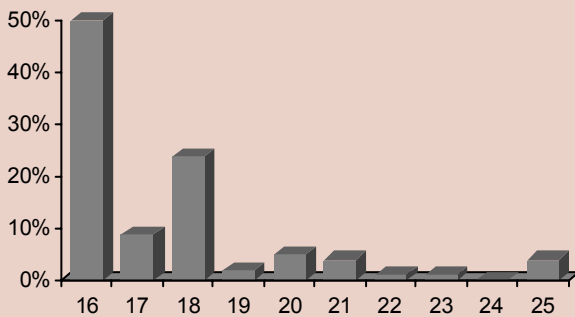
The AVCC *Australian University Student Finances 2006* report showed 30.4% of full-time undergraduates receive Youth Allowance, with only 4.8% receiving Austudy.¹⁸

The report found that in 2006, 12.8% of full-time undergraduates reported their applications for student income support had been refused.¹⁹



What should the Youth Allowance age of independence be?

50% of respondents believe the Youth Allowance age of independence should be 16, a decrease of 8% from last year. 24% believe it should be 18, while 9% believe it should be 17 and a further 5% believe it should be 20. Only 4% of the respondents believe the age of independence should be 25, as it is currently set by the Government.



Under current legislation, students under 25 years of age are considered financially dependent on their parents (with certain exceptions).²⁰ Parental assets and income, including the family home, jewellery and salary are assessed in determining whether a student should receive income support.²¹ Those who qualify for income support, but are considered 'dependent', receive just over half the 'independent' allowance.²²

Are the current levels of student assistance adequate?

A majority of respondents (54%) believe the current levels of student assistance are not adequate.



Current Youth Allowance rates, not including Rent Assistance, are:²³

Status	Allowance Paid Per Fortnight
Single, no children:	
Under 18, at home	\$190.50
Under 18, away from home	\$348.10*
18 and over, away from home	\$348.10*
18 and over, at home	\$229.10
Single, with children	\$456.00*
Partnered, no children	\$348.10*
Partnered with children	\$382.20*
Special rate for long-term unemployed or migrant English students 21 years or over commencing full-time study:	
Single, living at home	\$281.30
Single, living away from home	\$422.80
Partnered, no children	\$382.20

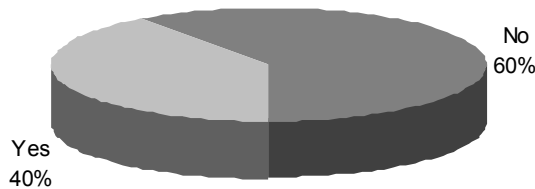
A 2006 report revealed that students are now worse off financially than in 2000, with 40% of full-time undergraduates agreeing that paid work adversely affects their studies, compared to 16% in 2000.²⁴

Almost a quarter of all undergraduates reported they missed regularly study commitments to work.²⁵

5.2 Higher Education

Should the Federal Government reverse its Voluntary Student Unionism legislation?

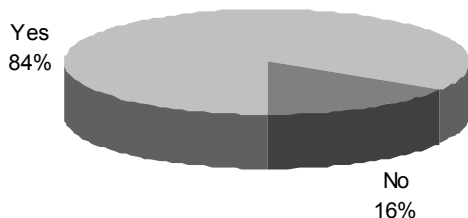
The majority of respondents (60%) do not believe the Government's VSU legislation should be reversed. This is in stark contrast to last year's result, when 58% of respondents were against the introduction of the VSU into universities.



The AVCC Report found that over 85% of students cannot afford the full cost of services such as healthcare and counselling due to the introduction of VSU.²⁶

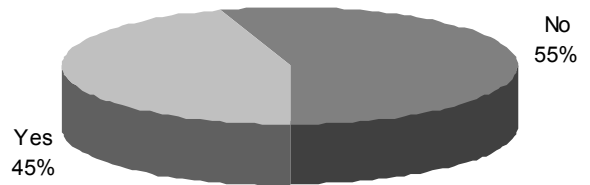
Should higher education be publicly funded?

Young people believe that higher education should be publicly funded, with 84% of respondents supporting public education.



Should Private Full-Fee paying Universities receive Government funding?

The majority of respondents (55%) do not believe full-fee paying universities should receive Government funding.



On October 29, 2004 the South Australian Government and Carnegie Mellon, a privately owned US university, signed a Heads of Agreement expressing their intention to collaborate in the establishment of a privately-owned university in Adelaide.²⁷

The South Australian Government has committed up to \$20 million over four years to assist with the establishment of the University. This funding comprises scholarships, start-up grants and operational support.²⁸

Carnegie Mellon began operations in Adelaide in May 2006.²⁹

6. National Issues



Although most Youth Poll respondents are below the voting age, they hold strong opinions on a range of issues.

Young people feel they are not able to have a significant impact on the decisions that affect them. Their poor representation in policy-making processes has left many young Australians feeling cynical and disillusioned about politics. An article in 2006 highlighted the political cynicism of the youth of today.

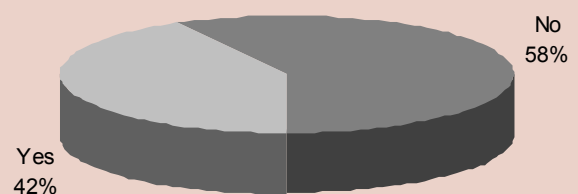
“Too many young people are being excluded from full participation in the social life of our community. It would be relevant and helpful to debate the ways young people are excluded from democratic access to political forums, and to debate the processes and mechanisms, including federal legislation, enabling employers to lawfully discriminate against them by denying them the economic and legal rights the rest of us now enjoy or take for granted.”³⁰

Many young Australians have a strong social conscience and are often highly engaged in political issues. It is party politics with which they may not identify.

6.1 Asylum seekers

Do you support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers?

58% of participants do not support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, compared with 64% last year and 60% in 2005.

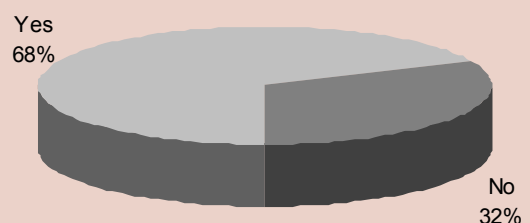


Australia grants asylum to approximately 12,000 people each year, ranking it behind 31st in the world, behind such developed countries as Pakistan and Iran.³¹

6.2 Indigenous Treaty

Do you think the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians?

An increasing proportion of respondents (68%) support a treaty with Indigenous Australians, an increase of 7% since last year.



May 27, 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of the referendum that changed the Australian Constitution to “count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the national census of the population and to give the Commonwealth Government power to make specific laws regarding Indigenous people.”³²

6.3 David Hicks

Do you believe the Australian Government should do more to ensure terror suspect David Hicks receives a fair trial?

An overwhelming 69% of respondents believe David Hicks should receive a fair trial.



A January 2007 survey showed that 52% of 18-34 year olds were strongly against the way the Federal Government handled the David Hicks case.³³

On Tuesday March 27, David Hicks pleaded guilty to the charge of providing material support for terrorism before a military commission preliminary hearing in Guantanamo Bay.

Mr Hicks will serve the remainder of his sentence in a South Australian Prison.

6.4 Access Card

Do you support the introduction of the Government's Access Card?

Just over half (51%) of the respondents do not support the introduction of the proposed Access Card.



In its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Access Card, the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) said they were concerned that the changes in age and eligibility criteria of the proposed Access Card will have a negative impact on the sexual and reproductive health of young Australians, and in particular, young women.³⁴



6.5 Same-Sex Marriage

Do you support same-sex marriage?

A majority of respondents (62%) support same-sex marriage, an increase of 5% from last year's poll.



Despite the Federal Government's inaction in removing discrimination against non-heterosexual individuals and same-sex couples, various states have initiated legislative reforms to recognise the rights of gay and lesbian Australians.

New laws governing domestic partnerships are to come into effect on 1 June in South Australia. Tasmania has implemented a same-sex register to improve legal recognition of gay couples, and Victoria is taking steps to introduce a similar register by the end of the year.³⁵

6.6 Republic

Should Australia be a Republic?

Support for an Australian Republic has dropped below 50% amongst young Australians.

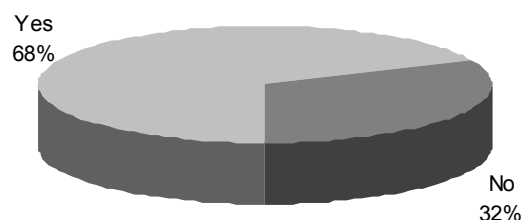


A recent opinion poll showed that support for a Republic has declined 9% over the past decade, with less than half (45%) of Australians now in support of a republic.³⁶

6.7 Religion and Politics

Do you believe there should be a separation between religion and politics?

In a new addition to the Youth Poll questionnaire this year, 68% of respondents believe there should be a separation between religion and politics.



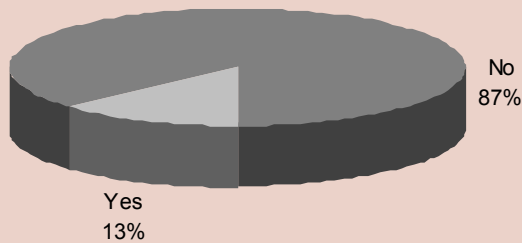
In an opinion piece for the *The Monthly* magazine in October last year, Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd argued that "the purpose of the church is not to be socially agreeable; it is to speak robustly to the state on behalf of those who cannot speak effectively for themselves."³⁷

On October 1, 2006 the Australian Democrats launched a discussion paper "Separation of Church and State: Politics, Religion, Policy and Law in Australia." You can find the paper at: http://www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/separation_of_church_and_state/

6.8 Climate Change

Do you think the Federal Government is doing enough to address climate change?

An overwhelming 87% of respondents do not believe that the Federal Government is doing enough to address climate change, an increase of 5% from last year.



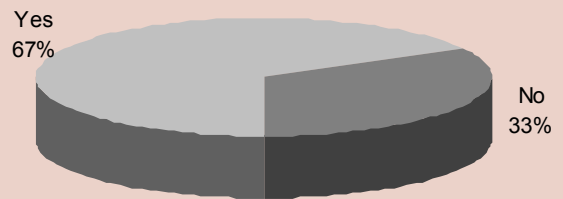
A February 2007 Newspoll survey found 94% of 18-34 year olds believe climate change is a massive problem in Australia.³⁸

Australians are more concerned about climate change than terrorism or any other global issue, with 82% arguing Australian Policy should go beyond the Kyoto Protocol guidelines to tackle climate change.³⁹

6.9 Embryonic Stem Cells

Do you support research using embryonic stem cells?

More than half of respondents (67%) support the use of embryonic stem cells in research.

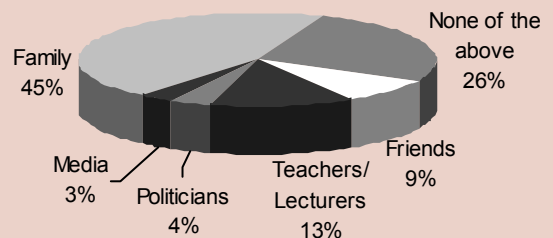


A Roy Morgan Poll on stem cell research showed 82% of Australians 14 years and older approve of the extraction of 'stem cells from human embryos so they can be used in the treatment of diseases and injuries.'⁴⁰

6.10 Trust

Who do you trust most on the subject of politics?

Once again, a major source of political information, the media, has proved to be the least trusted in this year's Youth Poll, scoring just 3% of the vote, with politicians again coming in second to last on just 4%. This further proves that young people are still wary of 'official' sources of political information.



At 45%, family is again the leading source of political information, with the category 'none' again receiving the second highest response, with 26%. Teachers and lecturers follow at 13% and friends at 9%.

7. State Issues



Each respondent answered one of the following questions, depending on their State or Territory.

NT

Should courts consider Indigenous Customary Law as part of their sentencing process?

Over half of respondents (58%) believe Indigenous Customary Law should be considered when sentencing.

Indigenous Australians are 16 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians, and 35-40% of young people in juvenile detention are Indigenous.⁴¹

ACT

Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

An overwhelming majority (67%) of ACT respondents do not agree with lowering the voting age to 16.

On March 29, 2006, the ACT Legislative Assembly referred a proposal to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People. The inquiry is due to report back on or before October 1, 2007.⁴²

SA

Is the South Australian Government doing enough to protect the River Murray?

More than four fifths of respondents (86%) do not believe that the State Government is doing enough to protect the River Murray.

Current inflows from the River Murray into South Australia are at their lowest level in 116 years.⁴³

NSW

Have you ever been moved on from a public place?

Just under half (46%) of the New South Wales respondents have been moved on from a public place.

According to a report in 2004, 48% of people 'moved on' from a public place in NSW were aged 17 years or younger.⁴⁴

VIC

Should the legal drinking age be 21?

81% of respondents did not believe that the legal drinking age should be changed, a decrease of 8% from last year.

Figures from the Victorian Alcohol Statistics Handbook reveal that 300,000 young Victorians (16-24) drank to excess each month.⁴⁵

WA

Should WA have daylight savings?

A majority (66%) of WA respondents do not believe daylight savings should be introduced.

A three year daylight savings trial spanning three summers was passed in 2006, and will be followed by a referendum.⁴⁶

WA residents have narrowly rejected three referendums on daylight savings since 1975.⁴⁷

QLD

Do you believe the Government is doing enough to combat youth alcoholism?

Only 24% of respondents believe the Government is doing enough, with 76% agreeing that more needs to be done to combat youth alcoholism.

Alcohol is the cause of more than a quarter of all deaths of 15-29 year olds in developed countries, with Australia one of the most extreme comparatives.⁴⁸

TAS

Do you believe the Government should ban smoking in all public areas?

An overwhelming majority of Tasmanian respondents (80%) believe smoking should be banned in all public areas.

In 2006, Tasmania became the first state or territory in Australia to impose a complete ban on smoking in clubs and pubs.⁴⁹

The Tasmanian Government will impose a ban prohibiting smoking in cars carrying children from as early as July.⁵⁰

Conclusion - a snapshot of young Australians



Consistent with previous years, family, followed by health and education top the list as the important issue in the lives of a majority of young Australians.

While most respondents are involved in education and training, a large percentage are also employed, but on a casual basis. A large majority believe education should be publicly funded and that levels of student income support are insufficient.

More than 25% of respondents know someone that has been affected by Work Choices.

There is a small increase in the number of respondents who know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide.

The use of marijuana dramatically decreased by 10%, supporting the trend over the last few years. The number of respondents who smoke also decreased by 2%.

For the first time, 14% of respondents believe young parents are negatively stereotyped.

A majority of participants also believe that private full-fee paying universities should not receive Government funding.

An increasing number believe the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians.

28% of respondents say they binge drink. A decrease of 10% from last year.

Almost 70% of respondents believed the Federal Government should have done more to ensure David Hicks received a fair trial. A small majority of Youth Poll participants do not support the introduction of the Government's proposed Access Card.

Consistent with last year's result, an increasing proportion of respondents support same-sex marriage.

In a Youth Poll first, support for an Australian Republic dropped below 50% amongst young Australians.

A majority of respondents believe there should be a separation between religion and politics.

An overwhelming majority of respondents believe the Federal Government is not doing enough to tackle climate change.

More than 60% of respondents support the use of embryonic stem cells for research purposes.

Over half of Northern Territory respondents believe Indigenous Customary Law should be considered when sentencing.

South Australian participants believe the State Government is not doing enough to protect the River Murray.

Just under half of NSW respondents have been moved on from a public place.

An overwhelming majority of Victorian respondents did not believe the legal drinking age should be increased to 21.

Over 60% of Western Australians do not agree with the introduction of daylight savings.

An overwhelming majority of Queenslanders believe the government should do more to combat youth alcoholism.

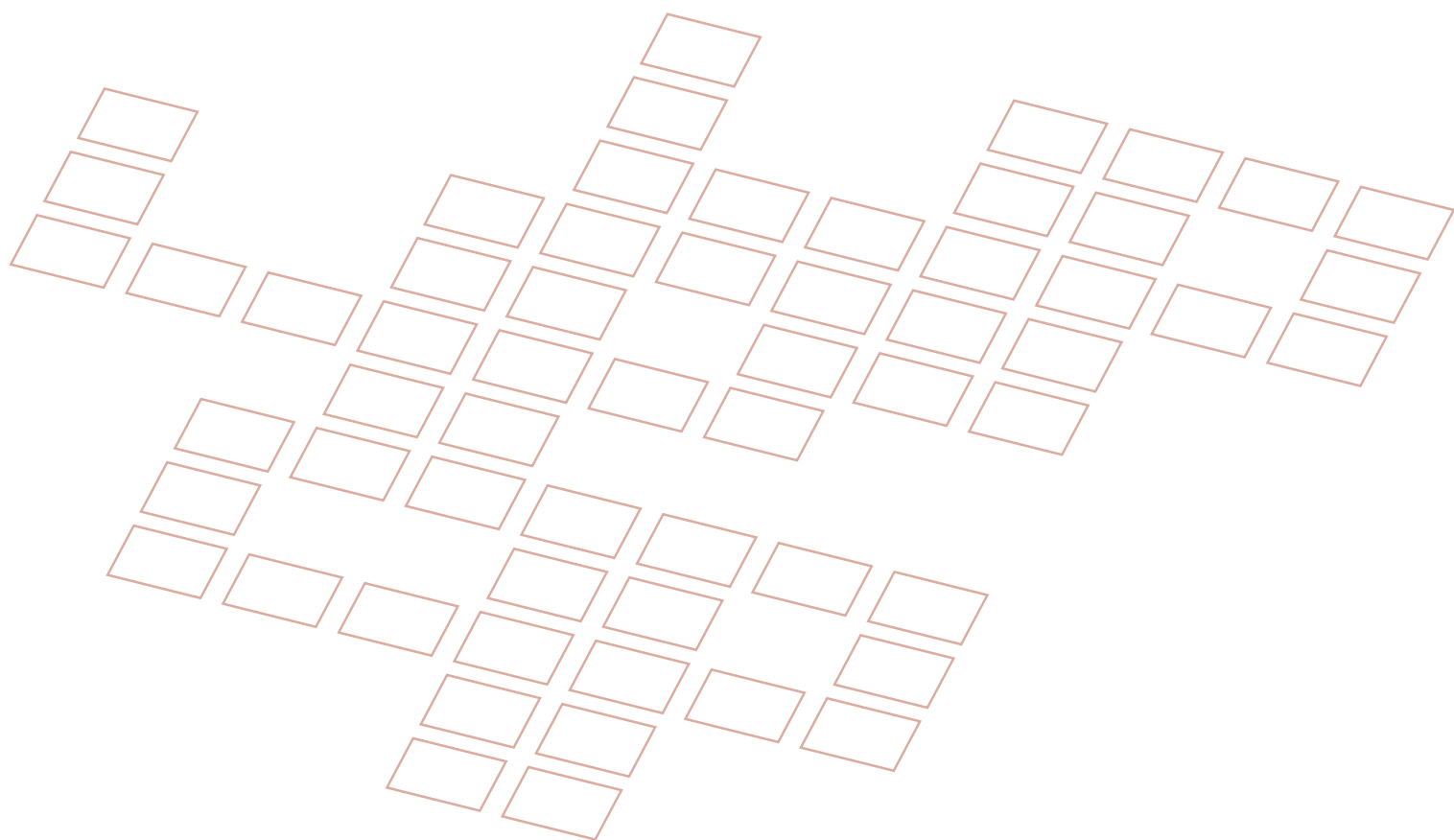
Only 20% of Tasmanians believe smoking should be banned in all areas.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mission Australia *National Survey of Young Australians 2006: Key and emerging issues* p.9
2. *How Young People are Faring 2006: Key Indicators* Dusseldorp Skills Forum (Monash University Centre for Economics of Education) p.21
3. *Ibid* p.viii
4. Lynne Hillier, Alina Turner & Anne Mitchell, 'Writing Themselves In Again' 2005 *ARCSHS, La Trobe University*
5. *Ibid*
6. Newspoll Market Research Survey 'Industrial Relations' 30 March – 1 April 2007
7. 'Your verdict on WorkChoices: One year on' Community and Public Sector Union 04/04/07 http://www.cpsu.org.au/news/1175654155_25294.html
8. ABS 'Suicide 2005' Publication March 2007 (Cat.No. 3309.0)
9. Mission Australia *Op.Cit* p.13
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You are considered independent if you are aged 16 years or over and have earned an amount equivalent to 75% of the National Training Wage Award Rate in an 18 month period before lodging a claim; working full-time at least 30 hours a week during the preceding two years (or for a period or periods of 12 months if you are considered disadvantaged); or have worked part-time for at least 15 hours a week for at least two years since last leaving school; or are 25 or more and a full-time student (in special circumstances). You are also considered independent if you are aged 15-24 and are above school leaving age in your state or territory; and are a refugee, an orphan or it is unreasonable for you to live at home; or are in state care, or only stopped being in state care because of your age; have, or have had a dependent child; are, or have been married, including living in a marriage-like relationship for 12 months or more, or six months (in special circumstances) ; or have parents who have those responsibilities.
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