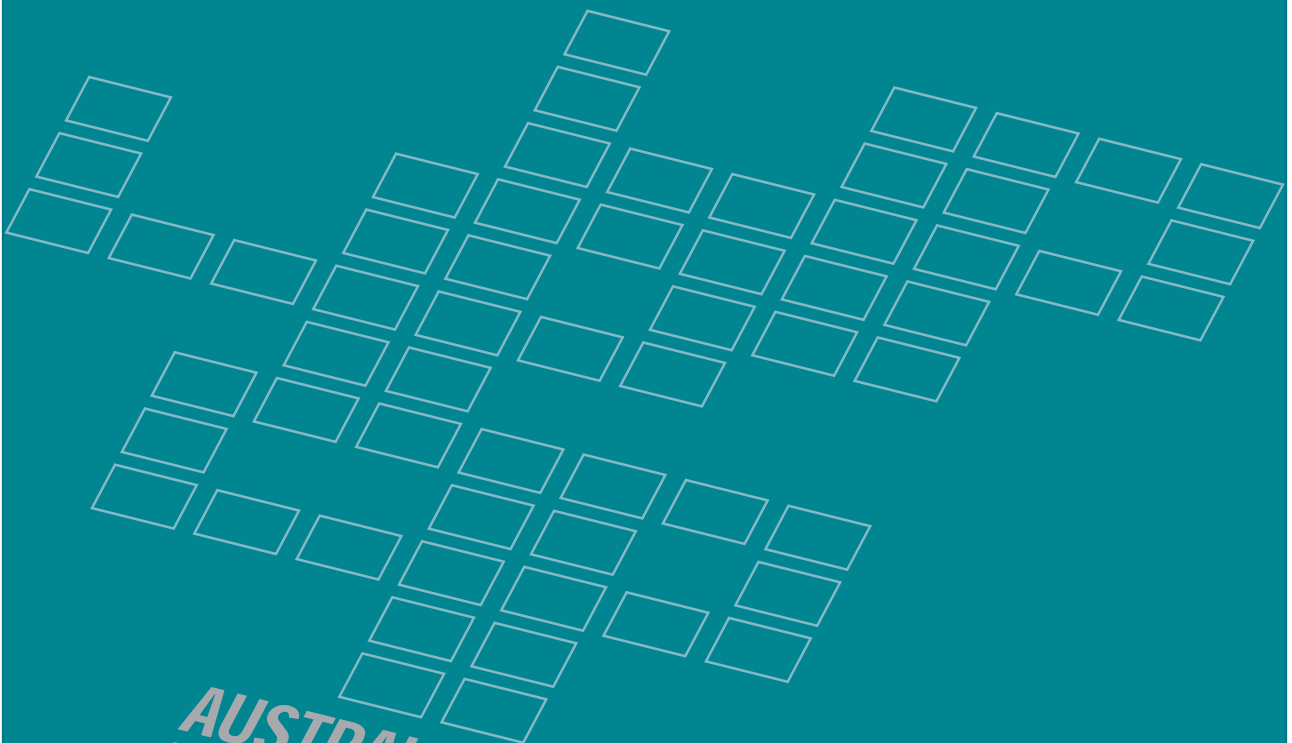




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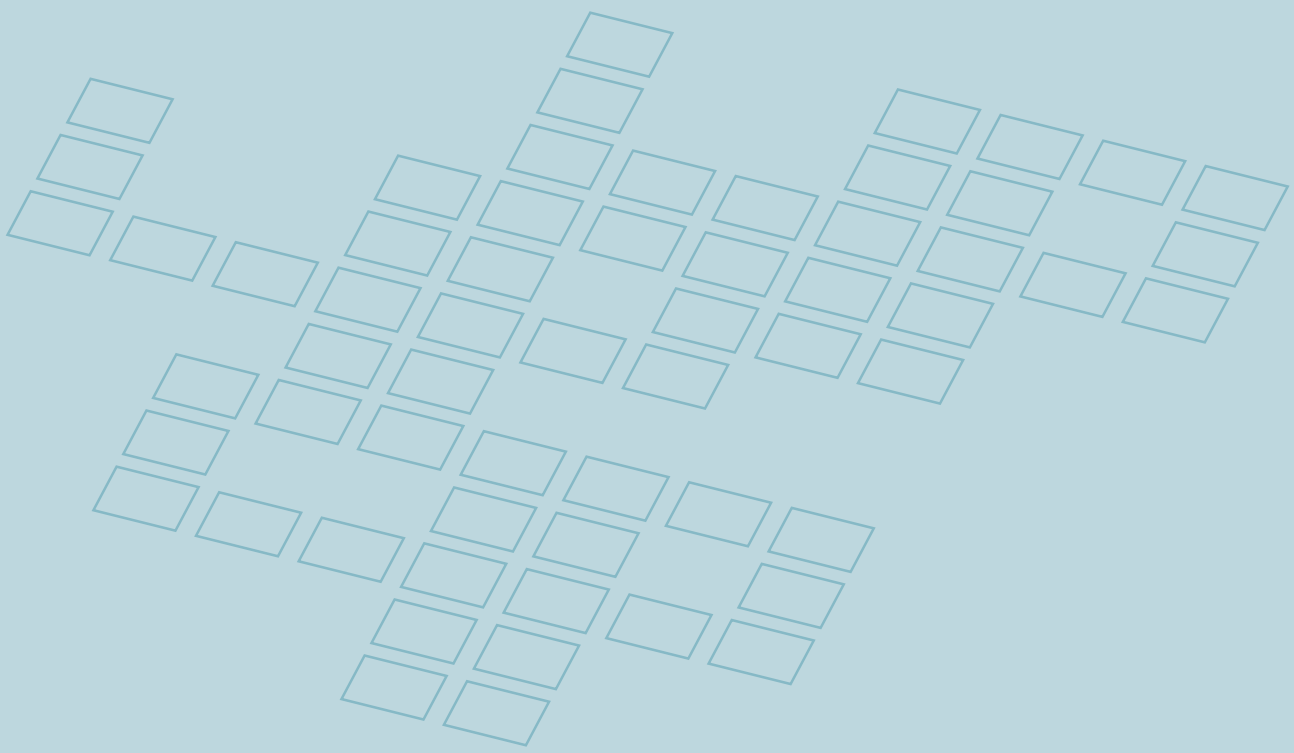


**AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS**

YOUTH POLL 2005

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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 2005 (also available at www.natashastottdespoja.democrats.org.au) 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.

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 emphasises the importance of family and youth suicide as issues of particular concern to young people. It also gauges opinions on the state issues that affect young people.

Youth Poll not only provides a great opportunity for young people to have a say, but it also gives policy-makers the chance to incorporate these views in to 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 better represent the interests of young Australians.

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

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja
Senator for South Australia



2. Demographics

2.1 Age

The Youth Poll 2005 questionnaire sought opinions from people aged between 15 and 20.

2.2 Sex

Consistent with previous years, female respondents outnumber male respondents.

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.

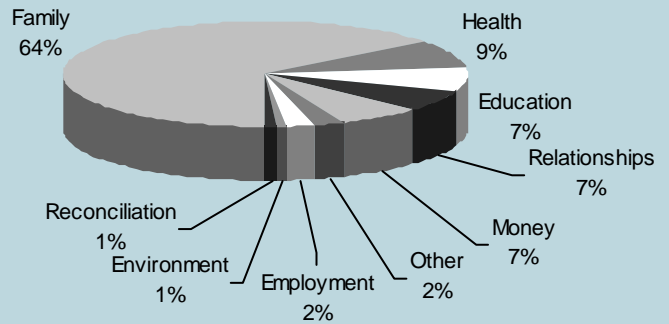
2.4 Important issues

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

With 64% of preferences, family is viewed as a very important issue to respondents.

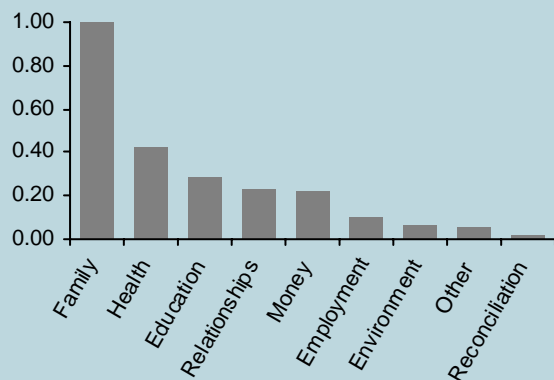
With 9% of votes, health is the second most important issue among respondents. Education, relationships and money closely follow with 7% each.

These values are represented in the following chart.



The chart below incorporates preferences 1 to 3. Education, relationships and money are distinguished in terms of their relative importance to young people.

Education is ranked as more important than relationships, followed by money.¹



A 2004 survey for Mission Australia found the top three issues for youth were alcohol and other drugs, bullying and emotional abuse, and coping with stress.²

3. Employment



3.1 Employment Status

94% of respondents to Youth Poll are in education or training. 50% are unemployed students and 44% are employed students.

Of the 6% of respondents not in full time education, 3% are employed and 3% unemployed.



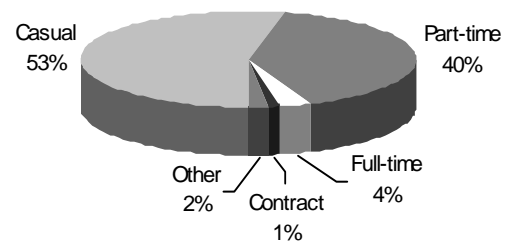
According to the ABS, in 2004 86% of young people between 15-19 were either in full time study or full time work, with 69% in full time study, approximately 16% in full time work and about 1.3% working and studying part time.³

Of the remaining 14%, part time workers made up 6%, and 8% were unemployed or not in the labour force.⁴

3.2 Type of Employment

A majority of those respondents in paid employment are employed casually (53%) or part time (40%).

Only 4% are in full time positions, with a further 1% in contract positions.

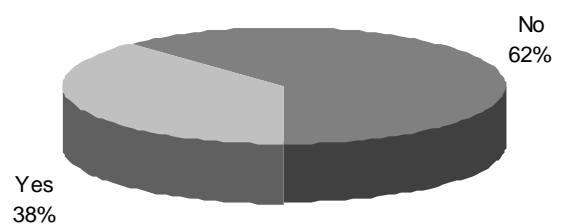


While 15-19 year olds make up 21% of the workforce, they represent 40% of all casual employees.⁵

3.3 Employment Culture

Is there homophobia where you work or study?

38% of respondents said they had experienced homophobia in their workplace.



A 2005 study revealed that 44% of respondents had been verbally abused and 16% physically abused because of their sexual orientation.⁶ School was the most likely location for this abuse.⁷

4. Health

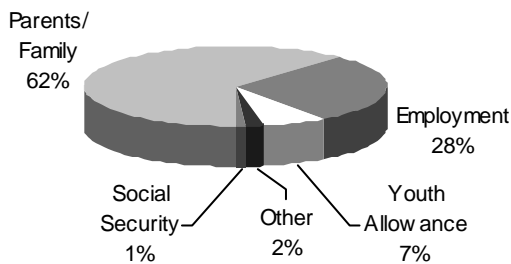
3.4 Source of Income

What is your main source of income?

Over half of respondents (62%) rely on their parents or family for income.

A further 28% derive their primary form of income from employment.

7% of respondents' main source of income is Youth Allowance, and a further 1% rely on other social security benefits.

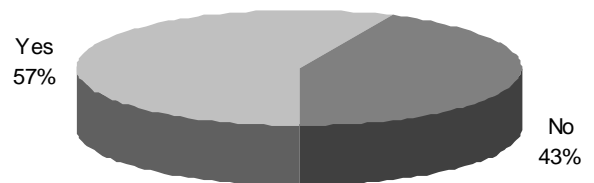


The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 indicated that 46.7% of young people aged 16-19 relied on employment as their main source of income.⁸ 32.3% relied on their families and 15.9% relied on Youth Allowance.⁹

4.1 Youth Suicide

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

An alarming number of respondents (57%) report knowing a young person who has attempted or committed suicide. This is a small increase on last year's result of 55%.



In 2003, 19.3% of deaths for males and 13.3% of deaths for females aged between 15-19 were attributed to suicide.¹⁰

Suicide rates for males between 15-25 have more than tripled over the last 40 years.¹¹

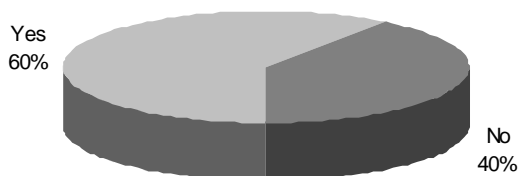
Suicide rates are higher in rural and remote areas than in capital cities.¹²



4.2 Condom Vending Machines

Should condom vending machines be available in schools?

60% of respondents support the installation of condom vending machines in schools, a slight increase on last year's Poll.



A 2002 study showed that one in four teenagers have had sexual intercourse without using a condom.¹³

22.7% of teenagers reported they were affected by drugs or alcohol during their most recent sexual encounter.¹⁴

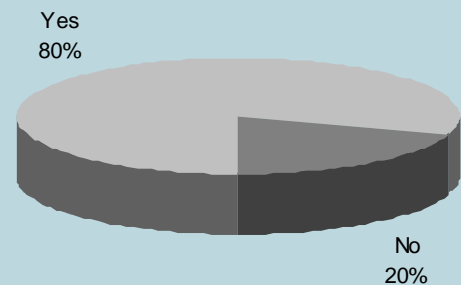
Chlamydia and gonorrhoea are sexually transmitted infections. Both are "Notifiable Infections" and a registry of infected persons is kept by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia.¹⁵ If untreated, both can cause infertility.¹⁶

Men and women under 30 made up 75% and 85% respectively of all South Australian cases of chlamydia from January to March, 2005.¹⁷

4.3 Birth Control

Should young people have access to free birth control?

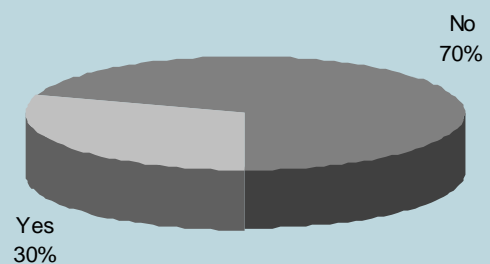
An overwhelming number of respondents (80%) want young people to have access to free birth control.



4.4 Drugs

Have you ever tried marijuana?

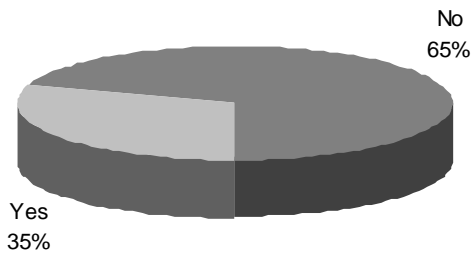
30% of respondents have tried marijuana, down from last year's result of 33%.



The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey revealed that 25.5% of 14-19 year olds had used marijuana in their lifetime, down from 34.3% in the 2001 survey.¹⁸

Should marijuana be decriminalised?

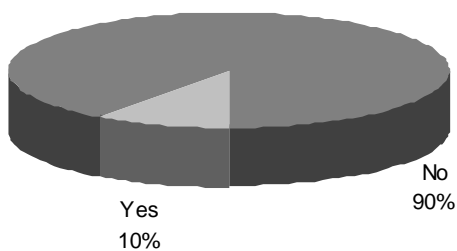
35% of respondents support the decriminalisation of marijuana, a decrease of 1%.



A 2002 Morgan Poll found 37% of 18-24 year olds and only 23% of 14-17 year olds believe smoking marijuana should be legal.¹⁹

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

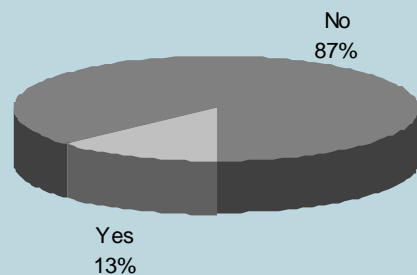
10% of respondents have tried amphetamines or hallucinogens, such as Ecstasy, LSD or Speed. This is a decrease of four percent on last year's Youth Poll. (14%)



A 2004 survey showed 29.3% of young people aged between 14-19 had used illicit drugs in their lifetime.²⁰ Meth/amphetamines had been used at least once by 6.6% of 14-19 year olds.²¹ Recent use of Ecstasy in this age group dropped from 5.7% in 2001 to 3.9% in 2004.²²

Do you smoke?

13% of respondents smoke, continuing a significant decreasing trend from previous Youth Polls, 18% in 2004 and 21% in 2003.



The 2004 National Drug Strategy Survey found that 16.7% of young people aged between 14-19 have smoked at some stage in their lives.²³ 10.7% smoke daily, with females in this age group more likely to smoke than males.²⁴



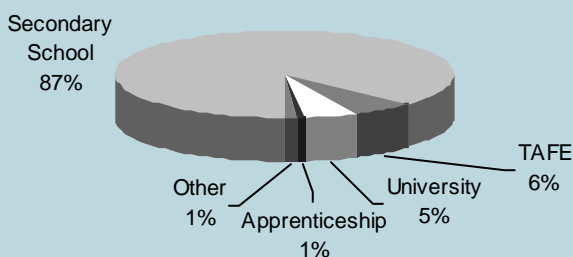
5. Education and Training

95% of Youth Poll 2005 respondents are in some form of education or training.

This is the same as last year's figure, similarly representing the second highest percentage of respondents in education and training since Youth Poll began in 1992.

87% are in secondary school and for those in further education, TAFE is the more common option, with 6%.

5% of respondents are undertaking university study, with a further 1% doing apprenticeships.

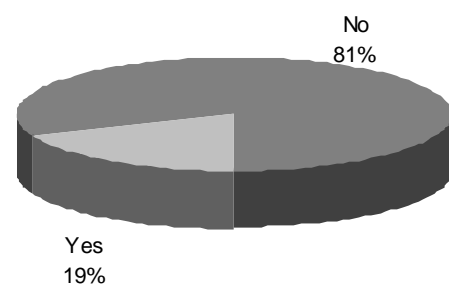


According to July 2005 ABS statistics, in 2004 76.2% of 15-19 year olds were in some form of education.²⁵

5.1 Youth Allowance

Are you receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship?

81% of respondents are not receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship, up from 70% last year.

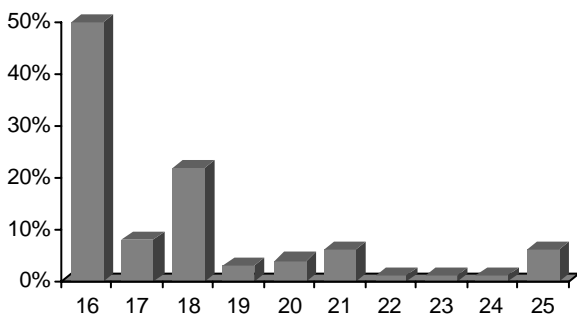


2003 figures showed the percentage of students under 19 who were receiving student income support declined significantly from 33% in 1998 to 21% in 2001.²⁶

What should the Youth Allowance age of independence be?

The overall pattern of responses is similar to that in last year's Youth Poll.

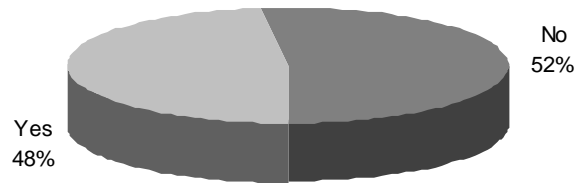
Half the respondents believe the Youth Allowance age of independence should be 16 years of age. 22% believe it should be 18, while 8% believe it should be 17 and a further 6% believe it should be 21. Only 6% of the respondents believe the age of independence should be 25, as it is currently set by the Government.



Under current legislation, students under 25 years of age are considered financially dependent on their parents (with certain exceptions).²⁷ Parental assets and income, including the family home, jewellery and salary are assessed in determining whether a student should receive income support.²⁸ Those who qualify for income support, but are considered 'dependent', receive just over half the 'independent' allowance.²⁹

Are the current levels of student assistance adequate?

The majority of respondents (52%) believe the current levels of student assistance are not adequate. This is similar to last year's result of 55%.



Current Youth Allowance rates, not including Rent Assistance, are:³⁰

YOUTH ALLOWANCE	Allowance Paid per Fortnight
Single, no children:	
Under 18, at home	\$178.70
Under 18, away from home	\$326.50
18 and over, away from home	\$326.50
18 and over, at home	\$214.90
Single, with children	\$427.80
Partnered, no children	\$326.50
Partnered, with children	\$358.50
Special rate for long term unemployed or migrant English students 21 years or over commencing full-time study	
Single, living at home	\$263.90
Single, living away from home	\$396.60
Partnered, no children	\$358.50



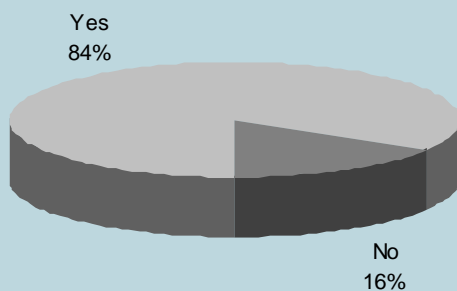
National Rights Welfare Network figures reveal the rate for a single, independent student between 18-24 was 38% below the Henderson poverty line.³¹

A 2005 Centre for the Study of Higher Education report found that the time full-time students spent on campus and in class had decreased from 17.6 hours per week in 1994 to 15.9 hours per week in 2004, and the incidence of full time students in paid employment had risen 8% to 55%.³²

5.2 Higher Education

Should education be publicly funded?

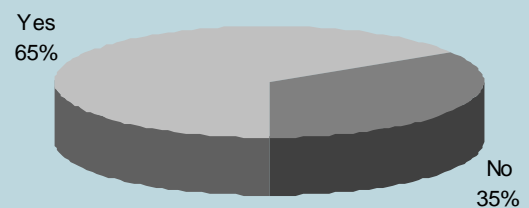
84% of respondents believe the Government should be responsible for adequately funding public education. This is consistent with previous years, 85% in 2004 and 87% in 2003.



Australian Government funding of higher education dropped significantly from 58.3% of total university revenue in 1997 to 40.1% in 2002.³³

Will the 25% increase in HECS fees at most universities discourage you from attending?

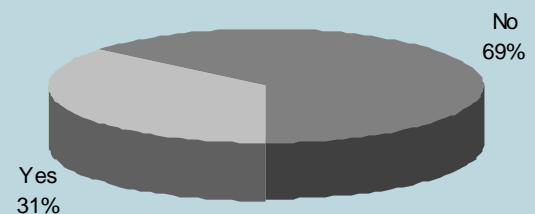
A majority of respondents (65%) believe a 25% increase in HECS fees would discourage them from attending university.



The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 indicated a rise in HECS fees had prevented 22.2% of those aged between 16-19 from attending university.³⁴

Should full fee paying students be able to enter universities with lower marks than HECS students?

The majority of respondents (69%) do not want full fee paying students entering university with lower marks than HECS students.



6. National Issues

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

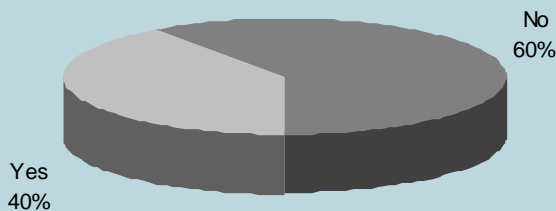
Young people feel they are not able to have a significant impact on the decisions that affect them. Their poor representation in policy making processes has left many young Australians feeling cynical and disillusioned about politics. Initial findings of a four year survey by the Electoral Commission suggest young people do not trust politicians, and are not necessarily interested in “politics”, but are willing to engage with issues that concern them.³⁵

Young Australians have a strong social conscience and are often highly engaged in political issues. It is party politics with which they do not identify.³⁶

6.1 Asylum seekers

Do you support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers?

An increasing proportion of participants (60%) do not support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers. This response is significantly higher than last year’s 42%.

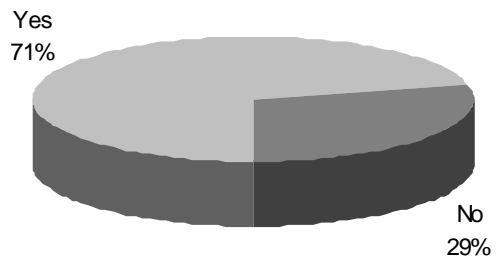


The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 indicates that 47.1% of 16-19 year olds disagree with the Government’s treatment of asylum seekers and 19.1% agree.³⁷

6.2 Indigenous treaty

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

Similar to Youth Poll results since 2001, more than two thirds of respondents (71%) believe the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians.



A 2001 poll by *The Age* newspaper found that 74% of 18-24 year olds supported entering into a treaty with Indigenous people, the highest support rate of any group surveyed.³⁸

6.3 Same-Sex Marriage

Do you support same-sex marriage?

A majority of respondents (55%) wholly support same-sex marriage. Interestingly, a significant number of respondents indicated support for female same-sex couples only, with none supporting only male same-sex marriages.³⁹



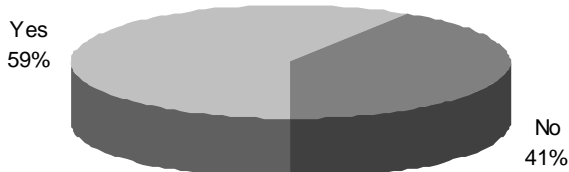


A 2004 Newspoll survey showed 55% of people aged between 18-34 are in favour of same-sex marriage.⁴⁰

6.4 Republic

Should Australia be a Republic?

Significant support still remains for Australia to become a Republic with 59% of young Australians expressing support. This is up from last year's 55%, and the same result from 2003.



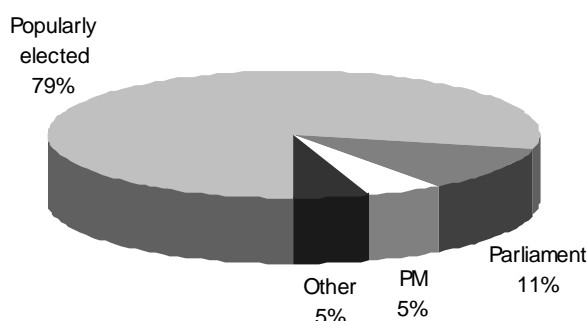
The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005 found that 36.8% of respondents aged 16-19 supported Australia becoming a Republic. Support was much higher in the 20-25 age group (57.1%).⁴¹

A recent opinion poll showed 60% of 18-24 year olds support Australia becoming a Republic, and 66% of them think it is inevitable.⁴²

A Parliamentary Inquiry was established last year to consider the most appropriate path towards an Australian Republic and to look at suitable models.⁴³ You can find the recommendations from this Inquiry at : http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/republic03/report/c08.pdf

How should the leader of an Australian Republic be chosen?

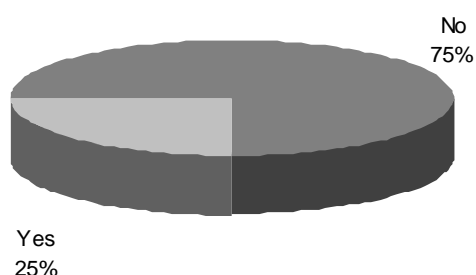
The vast majority of respondents (79%) believe the President of an Australian Republic should be popularly elected. 11% prefer a President elected by the Parliament, and 5% support either Prime Ministerial selection of a President or other methods of election.



6.5 Youth Representation

Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

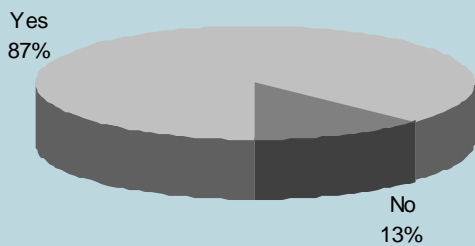
Three quarters of respondents (75%) do not believe the voting age should be lowered to 16. This is similar to results from previous Youth Polls.



28.9% of respondents in a recent survey supported the lowering of the voting age to 16, while 59.1% rejected the idea.⁴⁴

If you're 18, are you registered to vote?

87% of respondents who are eligible to vote (those respondents aged 18 years or older) report that they are on the electoral roll. This is a significant increase from last year's figure of 60% and may be due to last year's Federal Election.



Few young people are aware they can register on the electoral roll at age 17.

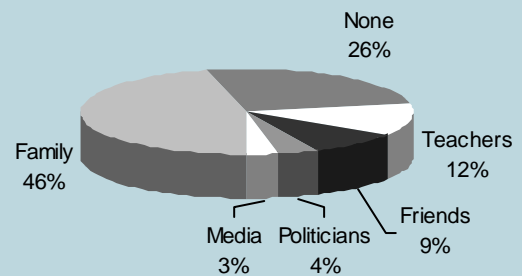
A 2004 Australian Electoral Commission Youth Electoral Survey showed 87% of Year 12 students intended to vote.⁴⁵

6.6 Trust

Who do you trust most about politics?

One of the main sources of political information, the media, has proved to be the least trusted in this year's Youth Poll, scoring just 3% of the vote. Politicians came in second bottom on 4%, confirming that young people remain sceptical about 'official' sources of political information.

At 46%, the family is considered the most trustworthy source of political information. Significantly, the new category 'none' received the second highest response, with 26%. Teachers and lecturers follow at 12% and friends at 9%. Comparing these results to 2004, all choices have lost a fraction of respondents to the 'none' category.



Teachers and family were named the most trustworthy sources of political information in a 2004 report.⁴⁶



7. State Issues

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

NT

Should the Government be doing more to curb underage drinking?

40% of respondents from the NT believe the Government should be doing more to curb underage drinking.

Between 1993 and 2002, around 2 643 young people aged between 15-24 died from injuries related to alcohol consumption.⁴⁷

ACT

Are there enough services for young people in the ACT?

Only 29% of respondents believe there enough services for young people in the ACT.

ACTCOSS identified that the ACT Government's 2003/4 Budget did not adequately address a lack of youth services in areas such as health, employment, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation.⁴⁸

SA

Should the Government be able to impound cars which are doing burnouts or playing music too loudly?

Nearly three quarters (74%) of South Australian respondents do not support the impounding of cars for doing burnouts, or playing music too loudly.

Of these respondents, there was a significant number indicating they did not support impounding cars because of loud music, but did for burnouts.

Under this new law, drivers can be reported for various offences such as sustained wheel spinning. Offences attract a maximum fine of \$1250 and the offender's car can be impounded for up to 48 hours.⁴⁹

NSW

Do you support a night curfew for young P-plated drivers?

A majority of respondents (85%) do not support a night curfew for young P-plated drivers.

A recent survey indicated only 15% of young people want curfews for P-platers.⁵⁰

TAS

Is there adequate public transport for young people in Tasmania?

Tasmanian respondents are almost equally divided on this issue. 51% of respondents do not believe there is adequate public transport for young people.

A 2002 survey of Tasmanian young people found that 81% rely on their parents for transport.⁵¹

The State Government has initiated the Tasmanian Youth Transport Strategy, a plan to improve young people's access to transport and thus improve their study, work and socialising opportunities.⁵²

VIC

Do you intend to attend or get involved with next year's Commonwealth Games?

Victorian respondents are divided in their intentions to be a part of the 2006 Commonwealth Games, with 48% planning to attend or become involved.

The Melbourne 2006 Board has recommended four "youth orientated sports" be included in the Melbourne Commonwealth Games to attract a younger crowd. These sports are mountain biking, synchronized diving, basketball and triathlon.⁵³

WA

Should the school leaving age be raised?

68% of respondents do not believe the school leaving age should be raised in Western Australia.

The Western Australian Government has planned to increase the school leaving age from 15 to 16 by 2006 and 17 by 2008.⁵⁴

QLD

Should the Government be able to jail 17 year olds as adults?

Queensland respondents are equally divided in their support for this measure. 53% supported the Government jailing 17 year olds as adults.

In 2004, 39 young people, or 0.2 % of the Australian prison population, were aged under 18.⁵⁵

Conclusion - A snapshot of young Australians



Family continues to be the most 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.

Once again, an overwhelming majority of respondents do not agree with the current Youth Allowance age of independence. Half the respondents believe the age of independence must be lowered to 16, while only 6% agree with the current age of independence, 25.

Of concern is the large percentage of respondents who are discouraged from university study by the 25% HECS increase at most universities. A majority of participants also believe that full fee paying students should not be able to enter university with lower marks than HECS students.

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

The use of both marijuana and hallucinogens decreased on last year's figures and support for the decriminalisation of marijuana also dipped slightly. Fewer respondents said they smoke, continuing a trend evident in the last couple of Youth Polls.

Most young people surveyed do not support mandatory detention for asylum seekers, while an increasing number believe the Government should enter into a treaty with Indigenous Australians.

The majority number of young people who support Australia becoming a Republic rose since last year's poll. The overwhelming majority prefer a popularly elected president.

Northern Territory respondents disagree that the Government should be doing more to curb underage drinking.

A large majority of ACT respondents assert there are a lack of services for young people.

South Australian participants believe the Government should not be able to impound cars doing burnouts or playing music too loudly.

An overwhelming majority of NSW respondents reject a night curfew for P-plate drivers.

A small majority of Victorian respondents do not intend to be involved in next year's Commonwealth Games.

Most Western Australian participants do not want the school leaving age to be raised.

A small majority of Queensland respondents agree with their Government's jailing of 17 year olds as adults.

Just over half of Tasmanian respondents believe public transport for young people in Tasmania is inadequate.

While young people are becoming increasingly sceptical about trusting sources of political information, they are also showing an increasing engagement with the political process, indicated by the very high percentage of young people over 18 who are enrolled to vote. Their responses express a concern for the wider community but also, importantly, a willingness to bring about change.

FOOTNOTES

¹ In the chart, the ranks for each issue were weighted according to an arbitrary points system. First preference was given 4 points, the second, 2 points and the third, 1 point. The totals were then normalised in relation to the number one issue, family. A column graph has been used to represent the relative importance of the issues.

² Mission Australia, 'National Youth Survey- 2004 Key and Emerging Issues', http://www.mission.com.au/cm/resources/documents/Youth_Survey_2004.pdf

³ ABS, 'Australian Social Trends 2005- Young people at risk in the transition from school to work', pp. 94 (Cat. No. 4102.0)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ABS, '2. Australian Social Trends- Work, Casual employees', 2005 (A casual employee is defined as someone who is not entitled to either paid holiday leave or paid sick leave.)

⁶ Lynne Hillier, Alina Turner & Anne Mitchell, 'Writing Themselves In Again' 2005, ARCSHS, La Trobe University.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Advertiser Newspapers Ltd. Marketing Information Services Department, 'The Advertiser Youth Survey 2005', May 2005, theadvertiser.com.au/youthsurvey

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ABS 'Suicide:Recent Trends, Australia' December 2004 (Cat. No. 3309.0.55.001)

¹¹ Mission Australia, 'Scope the Facts- 2001 Youth Suicide' factsheet, <http://www.mission.com.au/uploadedFiles/youth%20suicide%20Scope%20the%20Facts.pdf>

¹² Mission Australia, 'Scope the Facts-2001 Youth Suicide', Op Cit.

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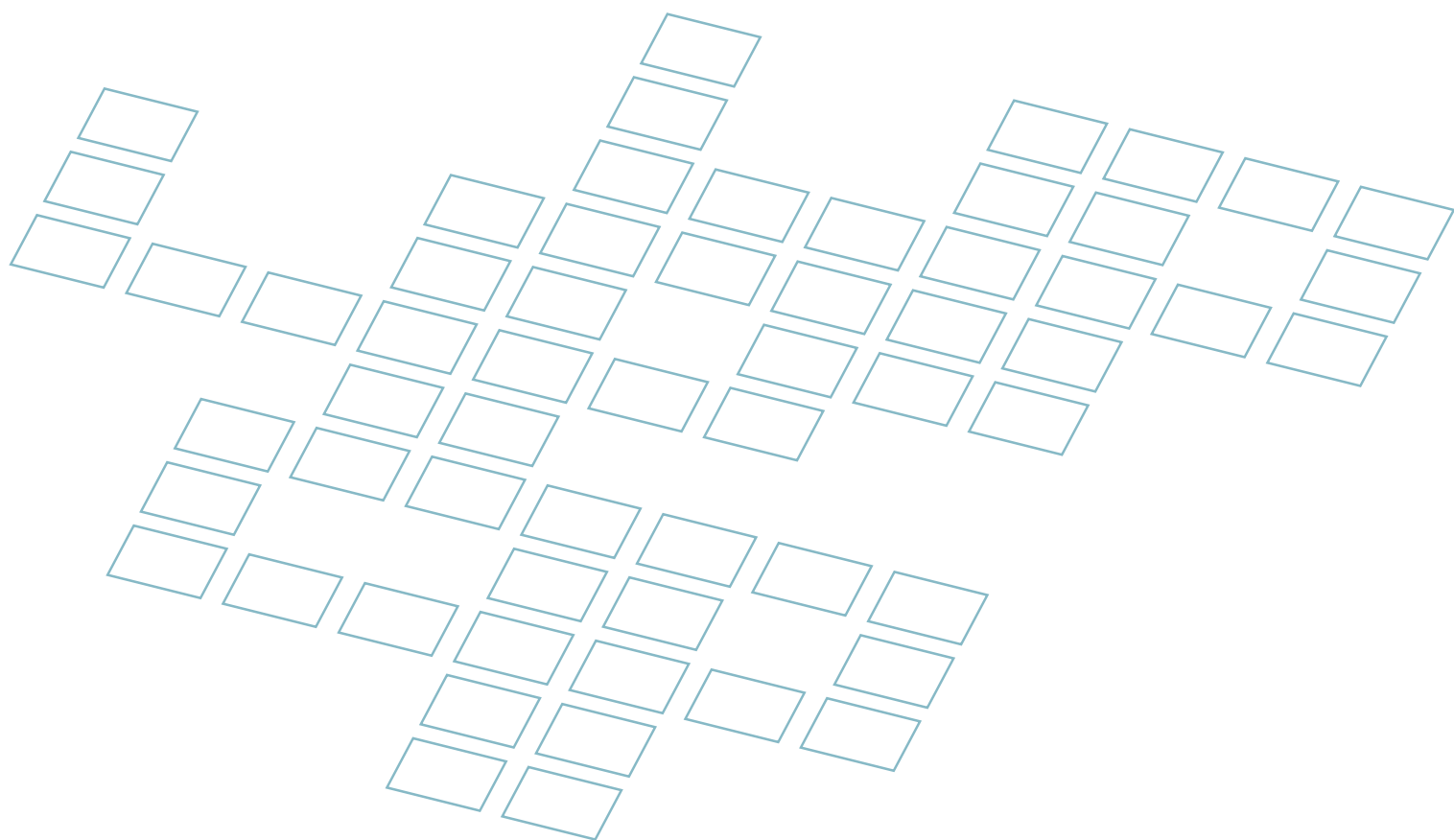
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