

Polling - Google's news experiment

January 2021

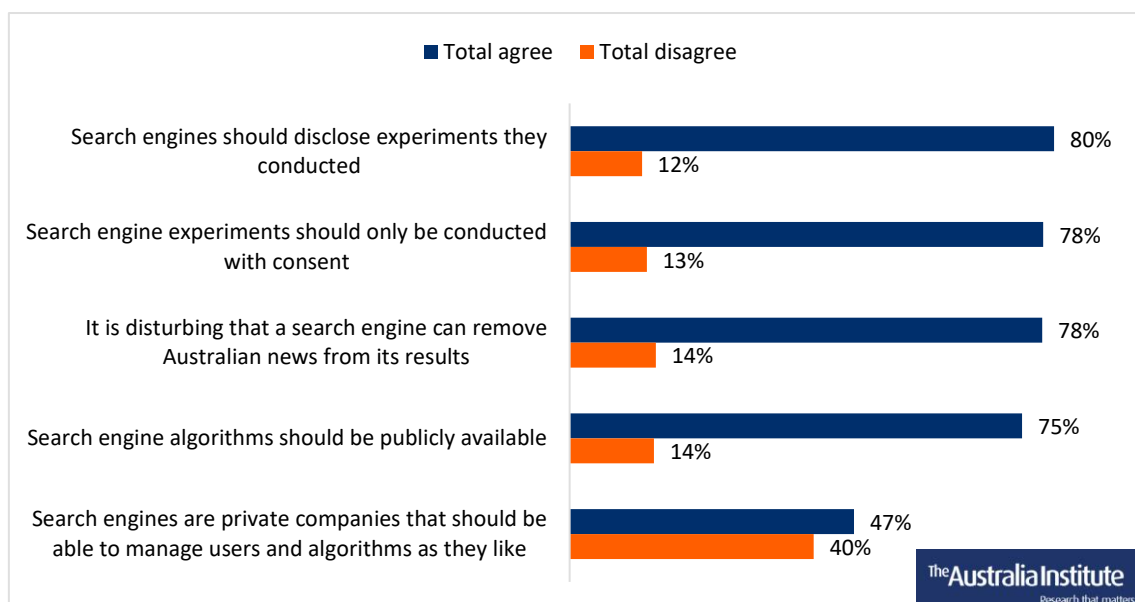
Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,003 Australians about reports that Google is conducting an “experiment” where it removes Australian news content from some users’ search results.

Most Australians agree with four out of five propositions on such “experiments”:

- Four in five (78–80%) agree that:
 - search engines should be required to disclose details of the experiments that they have conducted.
 - search engine experiments should only be conducted on those who have explicitly consented to participate in the experiment.
 - it is disturbing a search engine can remove Australian news from results.
- Three in four (75%) agree that the algorithms that search engines use should be publicly available so users can assess them.
- Disagreement on these four propositions ranges between 12% and 14%.

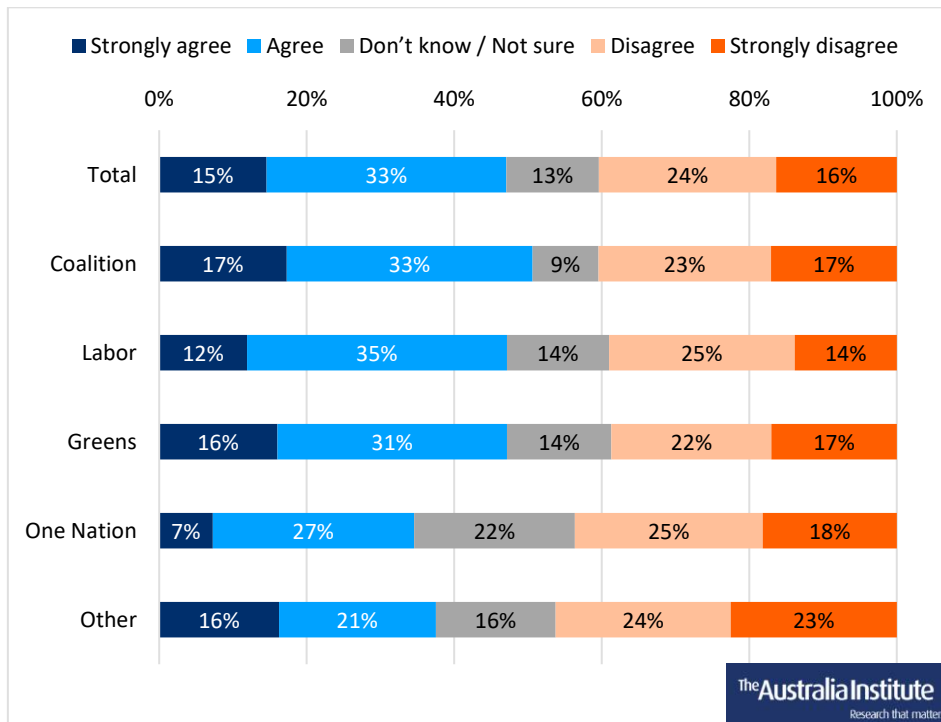
Figure 1: Agreement with propositions about Google's “experiment”



The one proposition that did not receive majority support is that search engines are private companies that should be able to manage their users and algorithms however they like.

- 47% of Australians agree with this proposition, including 15% who strongly agree. 40% disagree, including 16% who strongly disagree.
- 13% did not know or weren't sure.

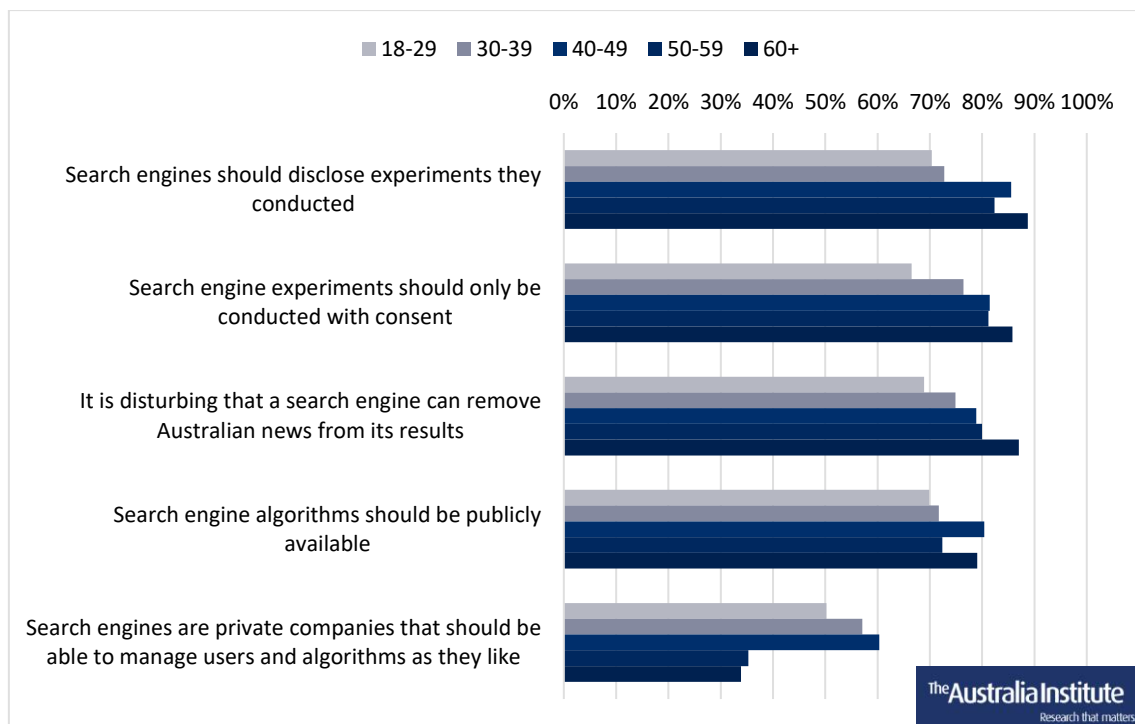
Figure 2: Search engines are private companies that should be able to manage their users and algorithms however they like



There is a noticeable difference in responses by age group. Younger respondents are less likely to agree, and more likely to disagree, with propositions that criticise or would limit the private search engines.

- 70% of those aged 18–29 agree that search engines should be required to disclose details of experiments, compared to 89% of those aged 60+ (18 percentage point gap).
- 67% of those aged 18–29 agree that search engine experiments should only be conducted on those who have explicitly consented, compared to 86% of those aged 60+ (19 percentage point gap).
- 69% of those aged 18–29 agree that it is disturbing that a search engine can remove Australian news from its results, compared to 87% of those aged 60+ (18 percentage point gap).
- Despite the gap between the youngest and oldest age groups, there is majority agreement with every proposition that is critical of the private search engines even among the youngest age group.

Figure 3: Agreement with propositions about Google's "experiment", by age group



Method

The Australia Institute surveyed 1,003 people on 14 to 15 January 2021, online through Dynata's Rapid Results polling, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and region.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is 3%.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. "Coalition" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" refers to Independent/Other.

Detailed results

Journalists have reported that Google is conducting an “experiment” where it randomly selects some users and removes Australian news content – like *The Australian*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* – from their Google search results.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Search engine experiments should only be conducted on those who have explicitly consented to participate in the experiment.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	39%	41%	37%	42%	39%	40%	33%
Agree	39%	37%	42%	33%	40%	41%	42%
Disagree	10%	11%	8%	12%	9%	10%	9%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	3%	2%	4%	2%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	9%	7%	10%	11%	8%	7%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	39%	43%	36%	38%	33%	38%
Agree	39%	40%	42%	29%	44%	35%
Disagree	10%	8%	9%	18%	9%	10%
Strongly disagree	3%	2%	3%	5%	5%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	9%	7%	10%	10%	9%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	39%	31%	30%	41%	44%	48%
Agree	39%	35%	47%	40%	37%	38%
Disagree	10%	17%	11%	10%	9%	3%
Strongly disagree	3%	7%	5%	2%	1%	1%
Don't know / Not sure	9%	9%	8%	7%	9%	10%

Search engines should be required to disclose details of the experiments that they have conducted.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	41%	43%	38%	41%	42%	43%	33%
Agree	40%	37%	43%	37%	35%	41%	48%
Disagree	9%	10%	7%	9%	13%	7%	7%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	9%	9%	6%	5%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	41%	45%	37%	38%	36%	44%
Agree	40%	40%	44%	31%	38%	30%
Disagree	9%	6%	10%	15%	7%	9%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%	2%	7%	4%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	7%	9%	15%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	41%	27%	29%	44%	47%	54%
Agree	40%	43%	43%	42%	35%	35%
Disagree	9%	17%	13%	7%	6%	3%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	6%	1%	3%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	9%	8%	7%	9%	7%

The algorithms that search engines use should be publicly available so users can assess them.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	32%	35%	29%	35%	32%	32%	29%
Agree	43%	39%	46%	38%	43%	43%	47%
Disagree	10%	12%	8%	10%	12%	7%	11%
Strongly disagree	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	9%	13%	12%	8%	13%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	32%	35%	31%	28%	29%	35%
Agree	43%	45%	44%	41%	40%	31%
Disagree	10%	10%	8%	12%	11%	13%
Strongly disagree	4%	3%	4%	8%	5%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	7%	14%	11%	15%	18%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	32%	26%	21%	37%	38%	39%
Agree	43%	44%	51%	44%	35%	40%
Disagree	10%	17%	10%	9%	11%	3%
Strongly disagree	4%	8%	7%	2%	2%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	5%	11%	9%	15%	15%

It is disturbing that a search engine can remove Australian news from its results.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	40%	39%	41%	41%	40%	43%	32%
Agree	38%	38%	38%	39%	35%	40%	41%
Disagree	10%	12%	8%	8%	14%	7%	13%
Strongly disagree	4%	5%	3%	4%	5%	3%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	9%	8%	7%	7%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	40%	42%	38%	39%	38%	41%
Agree	38%	41%	38%	28%	44%	30%
Disagree	10%	8%	11%	15%	9%	8%
Strongly disagree	4%	3%	4%	8%	0%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	5%	8%	9%	9%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	40%	32%	29%	41%	44%	52%
Agree	38%	37%	46%	38%	36%	35%
Disagree	10%	18%	14%	8%	9%	3%
Strongly disagree	4%	8%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	8%	9%	8%	8%

Search engines are private companies that should be able to manage their users and algorithms however they like.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	15%	18%	11%	16%	15%	16%	11%
Agree	33%	34%	31%	30%	35%	30%	29%
Disagree	24%	23%	26%	23%	23%	23%	30%
Strongly disagree	16%	15%	17%	17%	18%	18%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	10%	14%	15%	9%	13%	18%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	15%	17%	12%	16%	7%	16%
Agree	33%	33%	35%	31%	27%	21%
Disagree	24%	23%	25%	22%	25%	24%
Strongly disagree	16%	17%	14%	17%	18%	23%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	9%	14%	14%	22%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	15%	15%	16%	22%	10%	10%
Agree	33%	35%	41%	39%	25%	23%
Disagree	24%	30%	19%	19%	22%	28%
Strongly disagree	16%	11%	12%	14%	25%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	9%	13%	7%	18%	16%