

# Woke up call

## Australians' attitudes to and perceptions of “wokeness”

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Research paper

**Bill Browne**

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# Summary

Given the context in which the term “woke” is used in media commentary, it may surprise readers to discover – for example – that only one in five people who described themselves as woke ahead of the 2022 federal election intended to vote for the Greens; less than the share of woke people who intended to vote for the Coalition.

Testing our assumptions and presumptions is one of the key benefits of opinion polling, which is why the Australia Institute polled Australians in April 2022 on whether they consider themselves woke and how they would define the term.

Among those familiar with the term woke, a positive definition (being alert to racial injustice) is preferred to a negative one (punishing people for thinking the “wrong” things). Even those who would not describe themselves as woke are as likely to give the term woke the positive definition as they are the negative one.

These results may reflect the indiscriminate use of the term woke by its detractors in politics and the media. Having been told that the UK monarchy, the Wiggles, the Australian cricket team, Pope Francis and the Disney Corporation are woke, Australians may conclude that the woke are in good company.

The use of woke as a pejorative has failed to cut through. A majority of Australians are either unfamiliar with the term or would describe themselves as woke. Those who are familiar with the term woke, would not consider themselves woke and ascribe a negative definition to the term are a small minority in this country.

# Introduction

Rise, like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number!  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you:  
Ye are many—they are few!"

*The Masque of Anarchy, Percy Bysshe Shelley*

The use of the term “woke” has become increasingly widespread among media outlets and conservative commentators. The term is rarely accompanied by a definition or explored in depth; it is used as a pejorative to describe social movements or groups, similarly to how “politically correct” emerged during the 1980s and 1990s in the United States and subsequently in Howard era Australia.

The Australia Institute regularly consults Australians to discover whether a factual basis underlies certain political stereotypes. In 2019, we asked Australians about their drink preferences after politicians and commentators began associating chardonnay and soy or almond milk lattes with inner city progressives. Our research found that the majority of chardonnay, latte and non-dairy milk drinkers lived outside of the inner city, and were much more likely to vote for the Coalition than the Greens.<sup>1</sup> It appears that political figures have been less willing to dismiss political causes and movements based on drink preference since our polling showed that these stereotypes were erroneous.

With an eye towards testing another common political stereotype, the Australia Institute polled Australians to find out what they think of the term “woke”, and whether they would describe themselves as woke.

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<sup>1</sup> Inner-city and Greens voters are about as likely to drink these drinks as those of other voting intentions, and there are many fewer inner-city residents than residents of other places and many fewer Greens voters than there are Coalition voters. The Australia Institute (2019) *Polling – Lattes and Chardonnays*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-lattes-and-chardonnays/>

# Origins and use of the term woke

The term “woke” has its origins in African American vernacular, and has come to mean alert to racial injustice, or to social injustice more generally.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the metaphor of waking up to a truer understanding of the world has been used by transformative social movements for thousands of years, with some of the oldest examples being in the Holy Bible.<sup>3</sup>

The quote from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem that opens this paper uses waking up as a simile to describe peaceful, democratic protesters discovering their strength in the face of Murder, Hypocrisy, Fraud and Anarchy.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr gave a commencement address to Oberlin College in 1965 that warned “There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution”.<sup>5</sup>

In the United States, the term “woke” has been co-opted by its detractors and is now used mostly as a pejorative.<sup>6</sup> Australian conservatives have imported cultural and political memes such as “wokeness” from the United States.

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<sup>2</sup> Mirzaei (2019) *Where “woke” came from and why marketers should think twice before jumping on the social activism bandwagon*, <http://theconversation.com/where-woke-came-from-and-why-marketers-should-think-twice-before-jumping-on-the-social-activism-bandwagon-122713>

<sup>3</sup> See for example 1 Thessalonians 5:5–6, Romans 13:11–14 and Joel 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> Written in response to the 1819 “Peterloo massacre” in Manchester, in which protesters advocating parliamentary reform were killed by charging cavalry.

<sup>5</sup> Mirzaei (2019) *Where “woke” came from and why marketers should think twice before jumping on the social activism bandwagon*

<sup>6</sup> Bacon Jr (2021) *Why Attacking ‘Cancel Culture’ And ‘Woke’ People Is Becoming The GOP’s New Political Strategy*, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-attacking-cancel-culture-and-woke-people-is-becoming-the-gops-new-political-strategy/>

## Who is labelled as woke?

The term woke is used widely and imprecisely by commentators and politicians, both in Australia and more widely. Supposedly woke people, organisations and practices include:

- The Wiggles, for hiring three women (including a woman with Ethiopian heritage and an Indigenous woman) and a man with Filipino heritage.<sup>7</sup>
- The Wiggles, for introducing a unicorn character, “Shirley Shawn”, who uses “they/them” pronouns.<sup>8</sup>
- Net zero carbon emission targets, and those that support them – including the House of Windsor (the UK monarchy) and “every other corporation”.<sup>9</sup>
- Bad erotica.<sup>10</sup>
- Woke “numpties” NSW Treasurer Matt Kean and federal Liberal MPs Trent Zimmerman and Warren Entsch, for criticising Liberal candidate Katherine Deves for her comments on transgender people and comparing changing views on gender to the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup>
- Political correctness.<sup>12</sup>
- Channel 9, Channel 10 and The Project.<sup>13</sup>
- The movement for Australia to become a republic is “just the tip of [the] dangerous iceberg of woke”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ferguson & Lyons (2021) *Nationals senator Matt Canavan says Wiggles will ‘go broke’ for ‘going woke,’* <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/nationals-senator-matt-canavan-says-wiggles-will-go-broke-for-going-woke/news-story/a5bb42104448c2c0d8a9907c2f9b95ce>

<sup>8</sup> Dreher (2021) *The Wiggles Of Weimar*, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/wiggles-of-weimar-lgbt-shirley-shawn-non-binary/>; Shelton (2021) *Woke Wiggles induct children into LGBTIQ+ gender fluidity*, [https://www.lyleshelton.com.au/woke\\_wiggles\\_induct\\_children\\_into\\_lgbtiqa\\_gender\\_fluidity](https://www.lyleshelton.com.au/woke_wiggles_induct_children_into_lgbtiqa_gender_fluidity)

<sup>9</sup> Canavan (2021) *Woke net zero targets will weaken us*, <https://notzero.substack.com/p/woke-net-zero-targets-will-weaken>

<sup>10</sup> Gambotto-Burke (2022) *Woke erotica will leave you lusting for more*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/woke-erotica-will-leave-you-lusting-for-more/news-story/ff04ef4dd4da029ac7c7ecea33618e01>

<sup>11</sup> Advance Australia (2022) *Vote them out! These numpties reckon blokes should play women’s sport*, [https://www.advanceaustralia.org.au/vote\\_them\\_out\\_these\\_numpties\\_reckon\\_blokes\\_should\\_play\\_women\\_s\\_sport](https://www.advanceaustralia.org.au/vote_them_out_these_numpties_reckon_blokes_should_play_women_s_sport); Smith (2022) *Moment Ben Fordham slams “woke” guest’s glaring mistake over Katherine Deves’ controversial tweet about transgender sex offenders in prison*, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10737085/NSW-Treasurer-Matt-Kean-slams-Ben-Fordham-2GB-interview-debate-transgender-athletes.html>

<sup>12</sup> Kitney (2021) *John Howard on the growing debt pile, China and ‘wokeism,’* <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/john-howard-on-the-growing-debt-pile-china-and-virtue-signalling-20210629-p585cc>

<sup>13</sup> Tabakoff (2021) *‘Too woke’: Kyle Sandilands takes on The Project*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/too-woke-kyle-sandilands-takes-on-the-project/news-story/92ac8599146d2eef7aab1b795cf0eeb3>

<sup>14</sup> Cater (2022) *Republic push just the tip of dangerous iceberg of woke*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/republic-push-just-the-tip-of-dangerous-iceberg-of-woke/news-story/a71d44072588f7278337394654f0d073>

- Corporations supporting “social issues”, like action on climate change.<sup>15</sup>
- Vegan food.<sup>16</sup>
- The Disney Corporation, for having a target that half of its characters are either LGBTQ or members of a racial minority.<sup>17</sup> Disney is a global company, and a small minority of the world’s population is white.
- Parents of transgender and pansexual children.<sup>18</sup>
- The Australian cricket team, for taking a knee to “show solidarity with people of colour” and holding barefoot circles to acknowledge traditional owners.<sup>19</sup>
- Atlassian co-founder and co-CEO Mike Cannon-Brookes is the “king of woke”, and activist shareholders are “woke”, for wanting energy companies to phase out coal. Cannon-Brookes and his investment partner Brookfield (a Canadian private equity company) are “woke capital” for wanting to buy AGL Energy and use a multi-billion-dollar cash infusion to phase out its coal generation in favour of renewable energy.<sup>20</sup>
- Pope Francis, described as “certainly the most woke pope” in the past 100 years.<sup>21</sup>
- Those who use the term “white privilege”, including “woke-ish” Liberal MP Dave Sharma.<sup>22</sup>
- The Tasmanian Liberals, for demoting Eric Abetz to third out of six on their Senate ticket.<sup>23</sup>
- Not running anti-vaccination cartoons in the newspaper.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kitney (2021) *John Howard on the growing debt pile, China and ‘wokeism’*

<sup>16</sup> Marikar (2019) *What’s in a Woke McRib?*, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/22/whats-in-a-woke-mcrib>

<sup>17</sup> The Mocker (2022) *Woke Disney, the harpiest place on earth*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/woke-disney-the-harpiest-place-on-earth/news-story/66283c26483bb005dc15715b655ff505>

<sup>18</sup> The Mocker (2022) *Woke Disney, the harpiest place on earth*

<sup>19</sup> Advance Australia (3 December 2021) *Woke cricketers have a decision to make*, by email.

<sup>20</sup> Advance Australia (25 February 2022) *Woke capital is coming for your cheap power*, by email; Credlin (2022) *Beware power of the woke cowboy capitalists*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/beware-power-of-the-woke-cowboy-capitalists/news-story/18c14cfb9215f5dd6fd192796160d730>

<sup>21</sup> Sheridan (2021) *The West may not survive its own woke madness*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/the-west-may-not-survive-its-own-woke-madness/news-story/432ecf41aee35432dc932ec091f48b85>

<sup>22</sup> Albrechtsen (2022) *True Liberal voters prepare a woke-up call for Sharma*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/true-liberal-voters-prepare-a-wokeup-call-for-sharma/news-story/c7d7b0c14e30d489009a3c42f834d52e>

<sup>23</sup> Baker & Alvaro (2022) *Who is behind Eric Abetz’s “below-the-line” re-election campaign?*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-13/who-is-behind-eric-abetz-election-campaign/100984900>

<sup>24</sup> Tabakoff (2021) *The Age cartoonist Michael Leunig axed after anti-Dan Andrews cartoon*, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/the-age-cartoonist-michael-leunig-axed-after-antidan-andrews-cartoon/news-story/fd5acfa9e7f6dc420c38a116177c0bcc>

- Wearing rainbow clothing to show support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex colleagues, friends and family.<sup>25</sup>
- Not punishing school students for supposedly pretending they are cats.<sup>26</sup>
- Introducing gender-neutral pronouns into the French dictionary.<sup>27</sup> For comparison, “they” has been used in English as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun since at least 1375 AD.<sup>28</sup>
- Not caring about biological sex.<sup>29</sup>
- A report outlining women and girls’ experiences of domestic violence in Queensland.<sup>30</sup>
- A US Army recruitment ad featuring a corporal whose back story includes the leadership shown by her two mothers.<sup>31</sup>
- Saying climate change contributes to national disasters like the Black Summer bushfires.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, *The Daily Telegraph* identified Anthony Albanese, then Opposition Leader, as “not woke” after Albanese answered that men cannot have babies and avoided weighing in on whether Captain Cook was “hero or zero” by describing him as a “world-changer”.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Massola & Galloway (2021) ‘We are not pursuing a woke agenda’: Dutton bans special morning teas at Defence after IDAHOBIT, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/we-are-not-pursuing-a-woke-agenda-dutton-bans-special-morning-teas-at-defence-after-idahobit-20210521-p57u2g.html>

<sup>26</sup> Barry (2022) *Ep 08 - Cat tale*, <https://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/episodes/cats/13816064>

<sup>27</sup> ABC News (2021) *French dictionary sparks heated debate by adding non-binary “iel” pronoun*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-18/french-dictionary-sparks-debate-with-non-binary-iel-pronoun/100629432>

<sup>28</sup> Baron (2018) *A brief history of singular ‘they,’* <https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/>

<sup>29</sup> Button (2021) *Cancel culture: Gender, sex and power, the debate dividing universities*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/gender-sex-and-power-the-debate-dividing-universities-20211118-p599zz.html>

<sup>30</sup> Clark (2021) *Qld premier sidesteps “woke” DV comments*, <https://www.northernbeachesreview.com.au/story/7537231/qld-premier-sidesteps-woke-dv-comments/>

<sup>31</sup> Chrenkoff (2021) *Winning the war on woke in the armed forces*, <https://www.spectator.com.au/2021/05/winning-the-war-on-woke-in-the-armed-forces/>; Szoldra (2021) *What Ted Cruz doesn’t understand about those ‘woke’ Army recruiting commercials*, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/ted-cruz-emma-malonelord/>

<sup>32</sup> Secombe (2019) *Actually, it is climate change*, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2019/11/16/actually-it-climate-change/15738228009076>

<sup>33</sup> Withers (2022) *Go for woke*, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/the-politics/rachel-withers/2022/23/2022/1648010601/go-woke>

## Pushback on the use of woke as a pejorative

The vagueness of the “woke” criticism has been identified as a strength for right-wing parties, with columnist and senior writer for FiveThirtyEight Perry Bacon Jr arguing that:

Talking about identity and racial issues in vague terms like cancel culture and woke is particularly important right now for the GOP [the Republican Party]. In an increasingly diverse country across a number of dimensions (race, religion, sexual identity, etc.), Republicans need to make their cultural appeals to the party’s more conservative voters more subtext than text to avoid turning off too many Americans who wouldn’t want to vote for candidates or a party they perceive as bigoted.<sup>34</sup>

There is a push-back against the use of “woke” as a pejorative. NSW Liberal MLC Catherine Cusack was critical of the federal Liberal Party and Murdoch press for delaying action on climate change, writing:

To give you an idea as to how completely anti-intellectual and stupid this is, just read Andrew Bolt’s opinion piece in the Daily Telegraph last week saying it was “woke warmists” (climate change activists) like Tim Flannery who caused Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This is the sort of commentary the Liberal party has indulged and wedged and tried to harness into votes. It’s appalling.<sup>35</sup>

In the United Kingdom, attacks on charities for being too “woke” or “political” led to an influx of donations or members for those charities, and reportedly made the charities *more* willing to speak out.<sup>36</sup> Halima Begum, director of the Runnymede Trust, was emboldened by public support:

I feel when we talk about race at the moment we are reflecting public opinion, not attempting to change it.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bacon Jr (2021) *Why Attacking ‘Cancel Culture’ And ‘Woke’ People Is Becoming The GOP’s New Political Strategy*

<sup>35</sup> Cusack (2022) *I’m a Liberal MP and I cannot vote for the re-election of a Scott Morrison government*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/04/im-a-liberal-and-i-cannot-vote-for-the-re-election-of-a-scott-morrison-government>

<sup>36</sup> Butler (2022) *Attack on ‘woke’ charities has backfired, campaigners say*, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/20/attack-on-woke-charities-has-backfired-campaigners-say>

<sup>37</sup> Butler (2022) *Attack on ‘woke’ charities has backfired, campaigners say*

# Polling research

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,003 Australians in April 2022 about the term woke and how they expected Australians identified with the term.

## Familiarity with the term woke, and self-identification

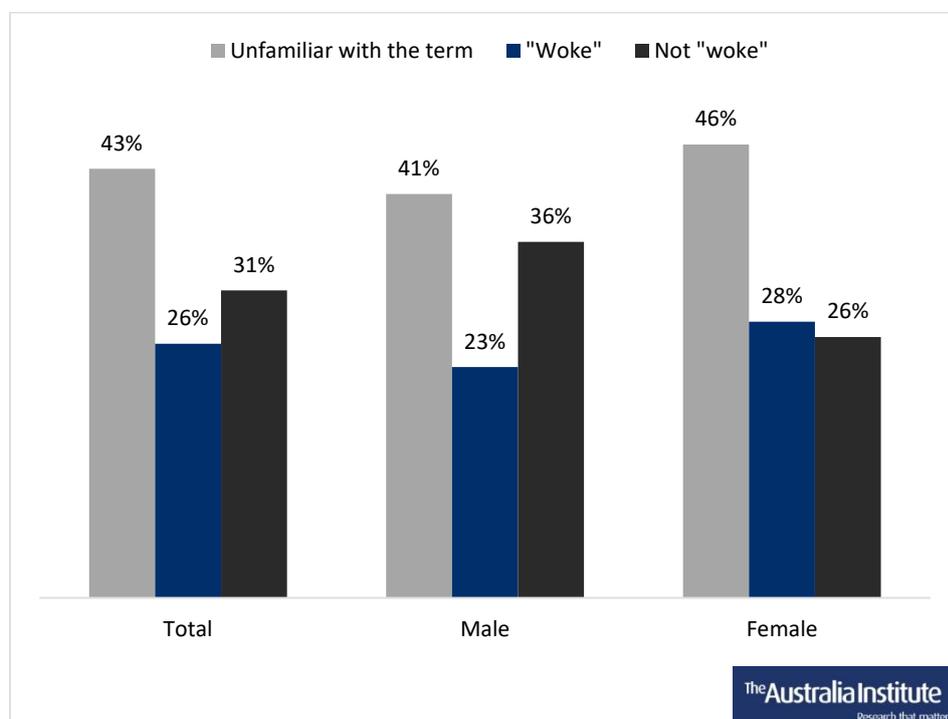
About three in five Australians (57%) say they are familiar with the term “woke”; 43% are not. Of those who are familiar with the term, 45% would describe themselves as woke and 55% would not.

Taken together, this means 43% of Australians are unfamiliar with the term woke, 31% would not describe themselves as woke and 26% would describe themselves as woke.

### Gender

About as many women would describe themselves as woke (28%) as not (26%). More men would describe themselves as not woke (36%) than woke (23%).

Figure 1: Woke split, by gender

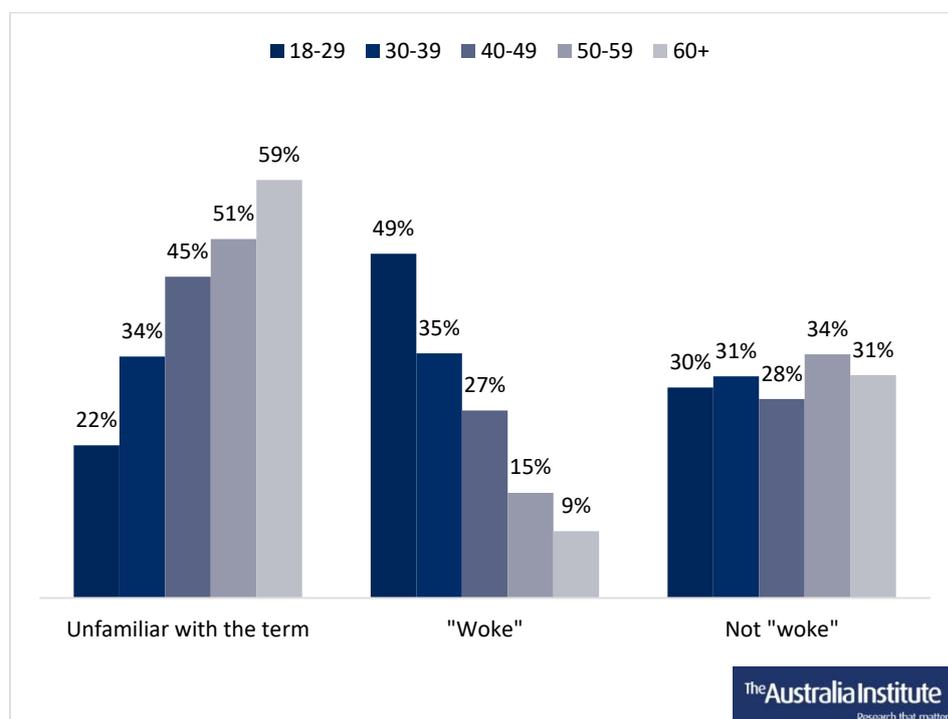


## Age

The number of Australians who would describe themselves as woke decreases by age. Half of those aged 18–29 (49%) would describe themselves as woke, declining to 9% of those aged 60 or older.

By contrast, the number of Australians who would not describe themselves as woke changes little by age group, from 30% among the youngest Australians to 31% among the oldest. However, unfamiliarity with the term increases with age, from just one in five of those aged 18–29 (22%) to three in five of those aged 60 or older (59%).

**Figure 2: Woke, by age group**



## Metro and regional

In 2019, then Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack said victims of the Black Summer bushfires “don’t need the ravings of some pure, enlightened and woke capital-city greenies.”<sup>38</sup>

The Australia Institute’s polling research shows that those living in metropolitan areas and those living in regional or rural areas are equally familiar with the term woke (57% for both), and, among those familiar with the term, are equally likely to describe themselves as woke (45% for metro and 44% for regional).

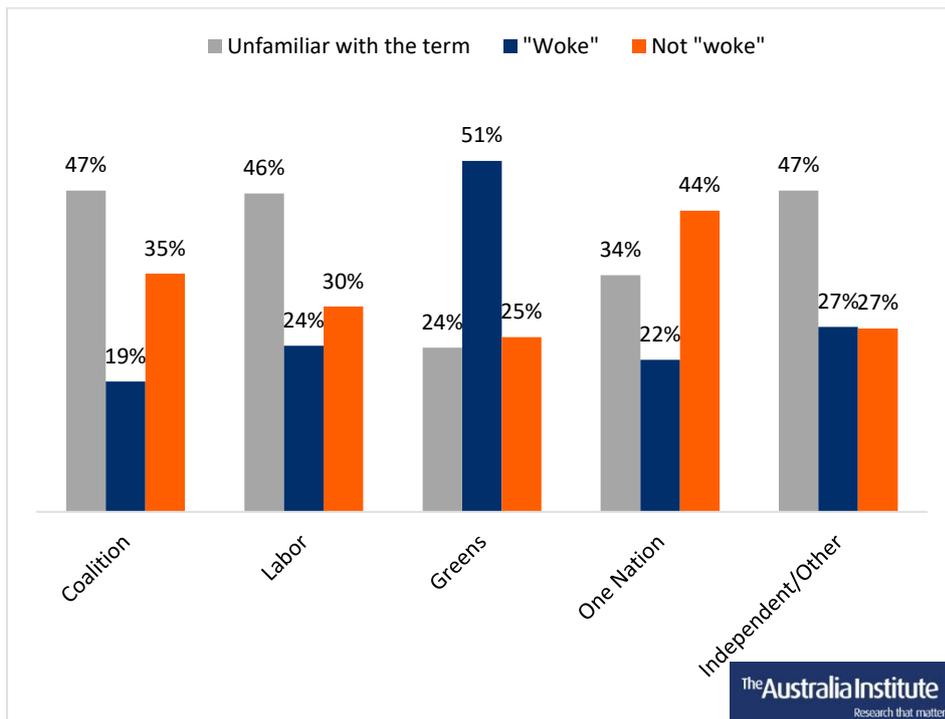
<sup>38</sup> Holden (2019) *I’d like a raving inner-city lunatic T-shirt for Christmas, please*, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/i-d-like-a-raving-inner-city-lunatic-t-shirt-for-christmas-please-20191112-p539tg.html>

## Voting intention

Among Coalition, Labor and Independent/Other voters, those unfamiliar with the term woke are the single largest group. More Coalition, Labor and One Nation voters would not describe themselves as woke than would describe themselves as woke. The opposite is true for Greens voters, and Independent/Other voters are effectively tied.

The poll was conducted in April, ahead of the 2022 federal election on 21 May.

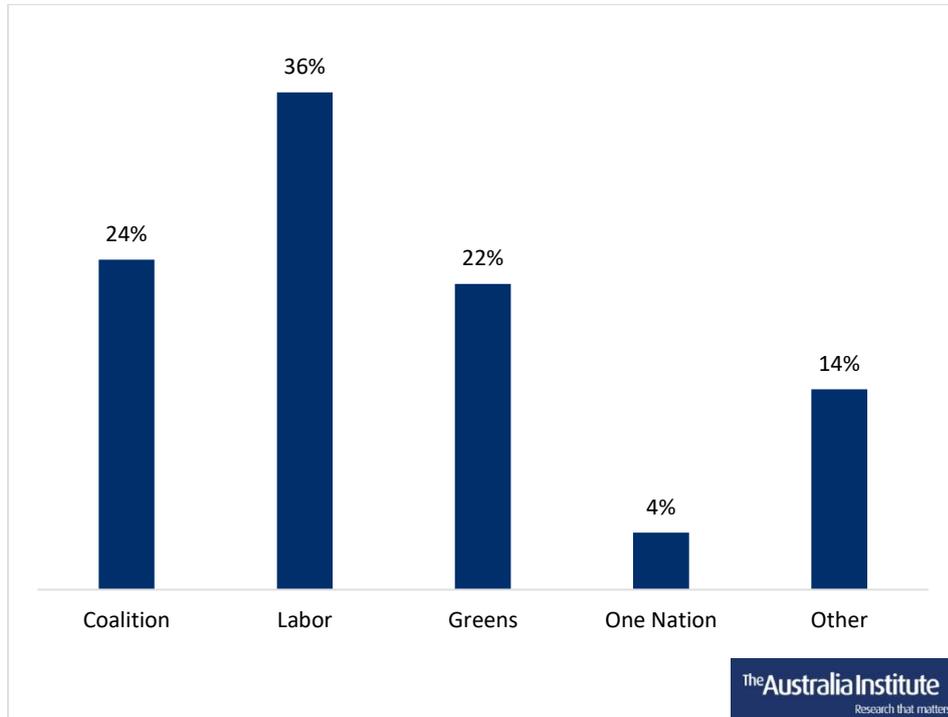
**Figure 3: Woke, by voting intention**



The results show that no party has a monopoly on “wokeness”. Only half of Greens voters (51%) would describe themselves as woke. One Nation voters are about as likely to describe themselves as woke as Labor voters are (22% vs 24%), and Coalition voters are not far behind (19%). For every two non-woke Coalition voters, there is more than one woke Coalition voter.

Only one in five woke people intended to vote for the Greens (22%) – about as many as intended to vote for the Coalition (24%). Three in five woke people (59%) are major party voters, including the 36% who intended to vote for the Labor Party.

**Figure 4: How woke people intend to vote**



## How the term woke is defined

Respondents who were familiar with the term woke were asked how they would define it, choosing between two provided definitions, “Other” (in which case they could write in a definition) or “Don’t know / Not sure”.

The two definitions provided were:

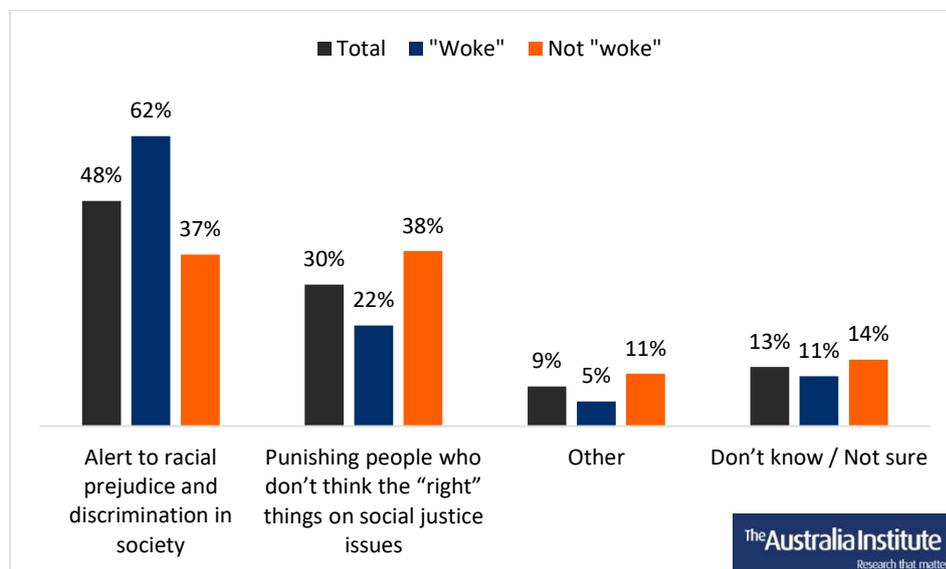
- Alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society
- Punishing people who don’t think the “right” things on social justice issues<sup>39</sup>

The “positive” definition, of being alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society, was the more popular definition. Almost half of those familiar with the term woke chose that definition, including three in five (62%) of those who would describe themselves as woke.

Three in 10 (30%) chose the “negative” definition, of punishing people who don’t think the “right” things on social justice issues. Interestingly, this included 22% of those who would describe themselves as woke, suggesting that a minority of woke people see punitiveness as a key part of wokeness.

Those who would not describe themselves as woke are about evenly divided between those who define woke using the positive definition and the negative definition (37% and 38% respectively).

**Figure 5: Definition of woke, among those familiar with the term**



<sup>39</sup> Based on the discussion in Mirzaei (2019) *Where “woke” came from and why marketers should think twice before jumping on the social activism bandwagon*

The Other option was included to get a sense of competing definitions, as well as to identify anyone who interpreted “woke” in its original sense as the past tense of “to awake”.

Two respondents gave a sleep-based definition.<sup>40</sup> Another respondent, who claimed to be woke, said that it was “a sexual term” but did not provide further details.

Three respondents identified the term as a pejorative, co-opted or having lost its original, social justice-focused meaning.

Other definitions, both among those who would describe themselves as woke and those who would not, mentioned racial justice, “LGBT”, the environment, capitalism, misogyny, all social justice issues, political awareness and political correctness.

Among those who would not describe themselves as woke, an element of control or close-mindedness was mentioned by seven respondents, ranging from claims that wokeness was sanctimonious or did not leave room for independent thought to claims that wokeness was fascist or a “communist totalitarian dictatorship”. Another six responses suggested that wokeness was a sign of stupidity or mental illness.

Overall, about 24 of the 45 respondents who wrote in their own definition wrote something clearly critical of wokeness. The other respondents were positive about the term, ambiguous or offered something entirely different.

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<sup>40</sup> Another wrote “get up”, which could refer to waking up or to the activist group GetUp!

## Perceived wokeness by voting intention

Respondents were told that other respondents had also been asked whether they would describe themselves as woke, and then asked how many respondents they thought would describe themselves as woke from each voting intention.

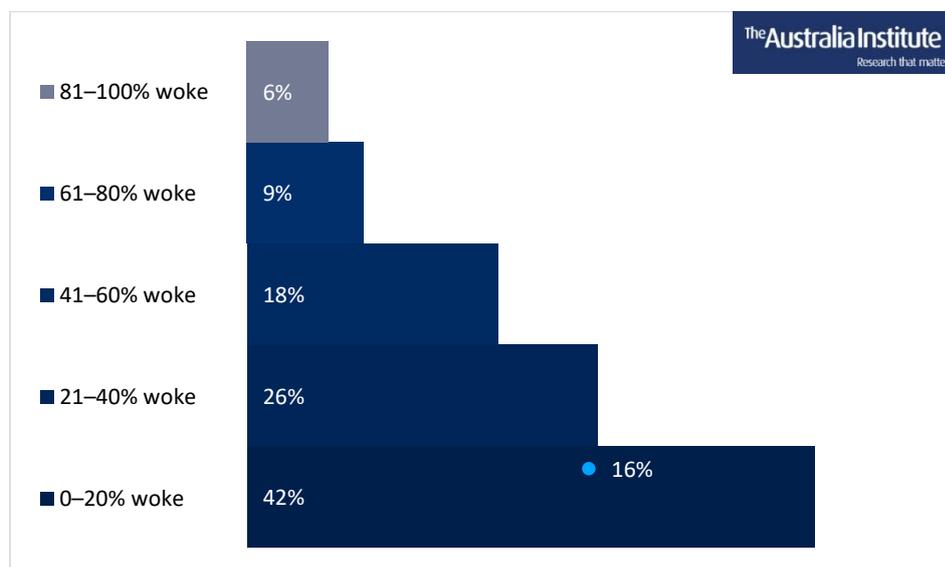
The results give a picture of how Australians perceive their fellow Australians. In the graphs that follow, the bars show what portion of respondents thought that share of a party's voters would describe themselves as woke.

The blue dot shows how many people with that voting intention describe themselves as woke. It is assumed that anyone not familiar with the term woke would not describe themselves as woke.

Among Liberal voters familiar with the term woke, 30% would describe themselves as woke. But since almost half of Liberal voters are not familiar with the term, only 16% of Liberal voters in total would describe themselves as woke.

Two in five Australians (42%) correctly identified that 0–20% of Liberal Party voters describe themselves as woke. Three in five (58%) overestimated the share.

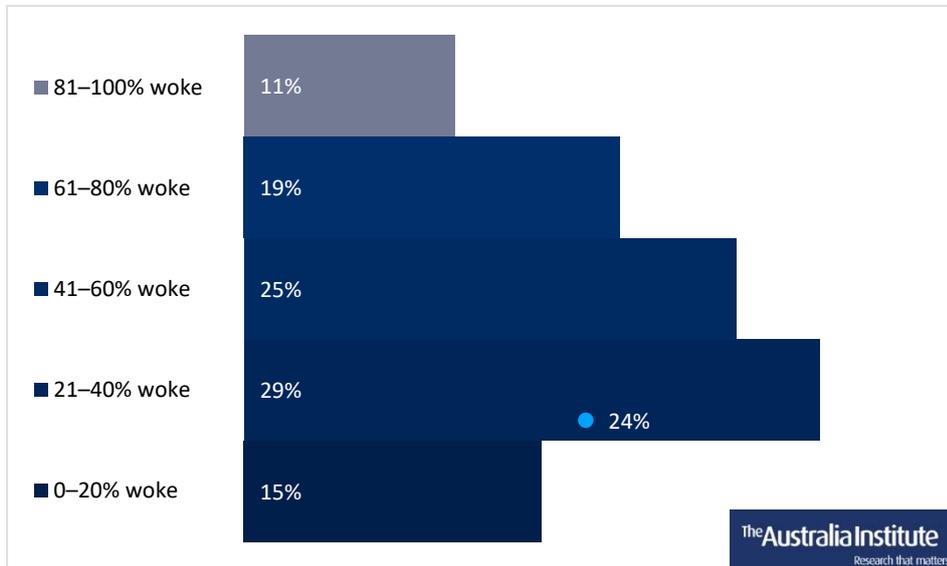
**Figure 6: Share of voters who would describe themselves as woke, Liberal Party**



One in four Labor voters (24%) would describe themselves as woke.

Three in 10 Australians (29%) correctly identified that 21–40% of Labor Party voters describe themselves as woke. Over half (55%) overestimated the share, and 15% underestimated it.

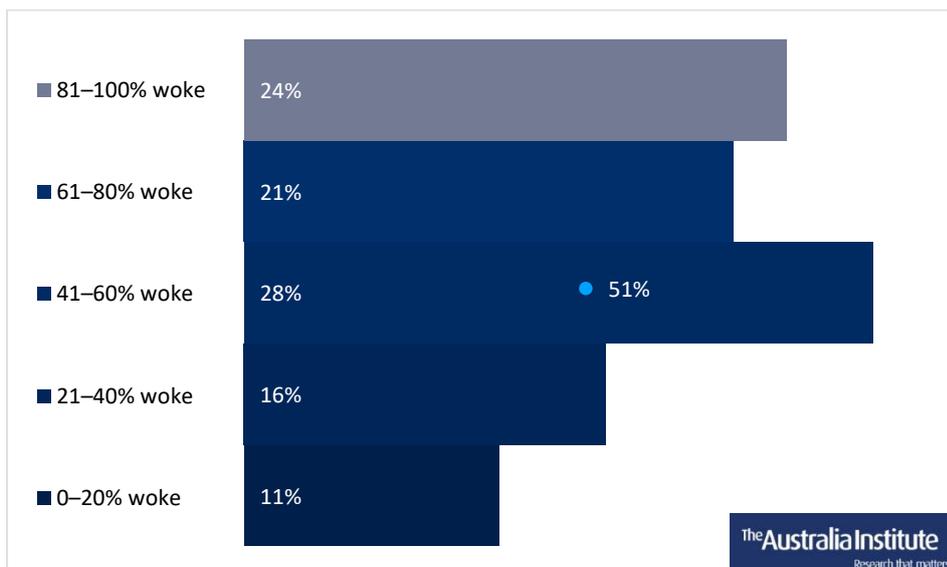
**Figure 7: Share of voters who would describe themselves as woke, Labor Party**



One in two Greens voters (51%) would describe themselves as woke.

Three in 10 Australians (28%) correctly identified that 41–60% of Greens voters describe themselves as woke. Almost half (45%) overestimated the share, and 27% underestimated it.

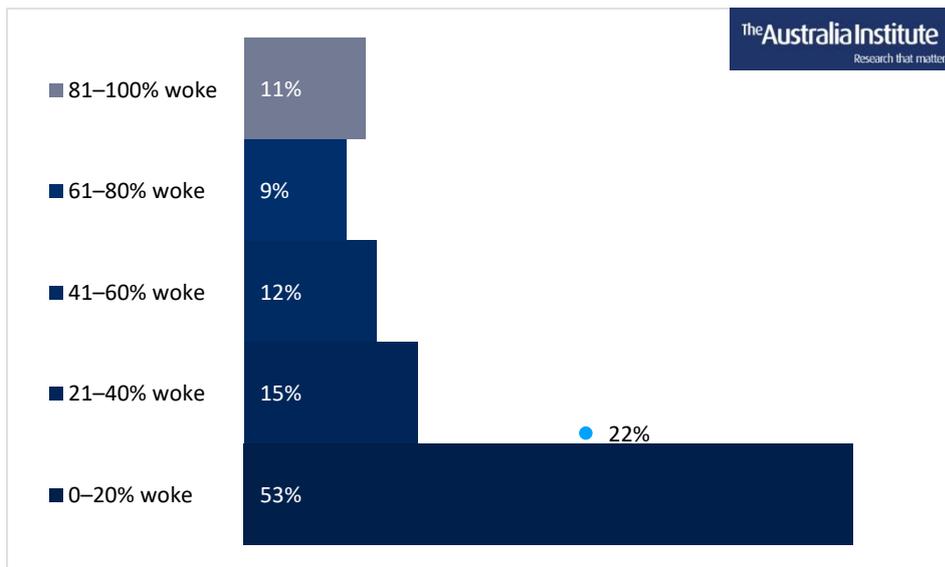
**Figure 8: Share of voters who would describe themselves as woke, Greens**



One in five One Nation voters (22%) would describe themselves as woke.

Only 15% of Australians correctly identified that 21–40% of One Nation voters describe themselves as woke. Over half (53%) underestimated the share, and 31% overestimated it. However, it is worth noting that the One Nation result was just 2 percentage points from the 0–20% tier chosen by most respondents (well within the margin of error).

**Figure 9: Share of voters who would describe themselves as woke, One Nation**



The Australia Institute also asked respondents how they thought Nationals voters would describe themselves. However, too few respondents reported that they intended to vote for the Nationals to make for a valid sample.

# Conclusion

“I don't know what you mean by ‘glory,’ ” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant ‘there's a nice knock-down argument for you!’ ”

“But ‘glory’ doesn't mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’,” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that's all.”

*Through the Looking-Glass, Lewis Carroll*

The use of the term “woke” to mean anything disliked by the speaker is, as Perry Bacon Jr writes, part of a strategy to build a coalition around vague grievances.

But casting a wide net has its disadvantages, which becomes clear from the Australia Institute's new polling research: the more broadly the term woke is used, the more people may see the term as describing themselves.

Critics have disparaged as “woke” the Australian cricket team, the monarchy of the United Kingdom (and Australia), the Disney Corporation, The Project, the Wiggles and Pope Francis – as well as anyone who prioritises climate action, racial diversity or inclusive language. Every corporation is woke, according to detractors. Even vegan food and bad erotica are woke.

Despite, or because of, these efforts, even those who would not describe themselves as woke are as likely to choose the positive definition of “woke” as they are the negative definition.

The term woke has been applied indiscriminately to popular movements, worthy causes and bedrock institutions. No wonder so many Australians – and a majority of women and of young Australians – who are familiar with the term describe themselves as woke, and most Australians who are familiar with the term woke have a positive interpretation of it. A term that was imported to divide Australians has failed to do so.

# Method

Between 5 and 8 April 2022, The Australia Institute surveyed 1,003 adults living in Australia, online through Dynata’s panel, with nationally representative samples by gender, age group and state/territory.

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.

The research is compliant with the Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards. The long methodology disclosure statement follows.

## **Long disclosure statement**

The results were weighted by three variables (gender, age group and state or territory) based on Australian Bureau of Statistics “National, state and territory population” data, using the raking method. This resulted in an effective sample size of 891.

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

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting intention questions appeared just after the initial demographic questions, before policy questions. Respondents who answered “Don’t know / Not sure” for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs.



## Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

Emphasis shown here in underline. Bold was used for emphasis in the survey.

### Are you familiar with the term “woke”?

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> | <b>NSW</b> | <b>VIC</b> | <b>QLD</b> | <b>WA</b> | <b>Metro</b> | <b>Regional</b> |
|------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 57%          | 59%         | 54%           | 59%        | 59%        | 56%        | 51%       | 57%          | 57%             |
| <b>No</b>  | 43%          | 41%         | 46%           | 41%        | 41%        | 44%        | 49%       | 43%          | 43%             |

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Coalition</b> | <b>Labor</b> | <b>Greens</b> | <b>One Nation</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 57%          | 53%              | 54%          | 76%           | 66%               | 53%          |
| <b>No</b>  | 43%          | 47%              | 46%          | 24%           | 34%               | 47%          |

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-39</b> | <b>40-49</b> | <b>50-59</b> | <b>60+</b> |
|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 57%          | 78%          | 66%          | 55%          | 49%          | 41%        |
| <b>No</b>  | 43%          | 22%          | 34%          | 45%          | 51%          | 59%        |

Respondents who were not familiar with the term woke were not asked any other questions.

### Would you describe yourself as “woke”?

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> | <b>NSW</b> | <b>VIC</b> | <b>QLD</b> | <b>WA</b> | <b>Metro</b> | <b>Regional</b> |
|------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 45%          | 39%         | 51%           | 46%        | 42%        | 42%        | 50%       | 45%          | 44%             |
| <b>No</b>  | 55%          | 61%         | 49%           | 54%        | 58%        | 58%        | 50%       | 55%          | 56%             |

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>Coalition</b> | <b>Labor</b> | <b>Greens</b> | <b>One Nation</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 45%          | 35%              | 45%          | 67%           | 34%               | 50%          |
| <b>No</b>  | 55%          | 65%              | 55%          | 33%           | 66%               | 50%          |

|            | <b>Total</b> | <b>18-29</b> | <b>30-39</b> | <b>40-49</b> | <b>50-59</b> | <b>60+</b> |
|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>Yes</b> | 45%          | 62%          | 52%          | 49%          | 30%          | 23%        |
| <b>No</b>  | 55%          | 38%          | 48%          | 51%          | 70%          | 77%        |

Other respondents to this poll have also been asked if they would describe themselves as “woke”.

Thinking of people who are intending to vote for the following parties, what percentage do you think described themselves as woke?

#### Liberal Party

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 42%          | 41%         | 42%           | 44%        | 47%        | 38%        | 34%       |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 26%          | 24%         | 28%           | 21%        | 23%        | 31%        | 25%       |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 18%          | 20%         | 17%           | 19%        | 21%        | 16%        | 24%       |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 8%          | 9%            | 10%        | 5%         | 9%         | 16%       |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 6%           | 7%          | 5%            | 6%         | 5%         | 7%         | 1%        |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 42%          | 38%              | 42%          | 43%           | 38%               | 49%          |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 26%          | 27%              | 29%          | 23%           | 24%               | 14%          |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 18%          | 15%              | 19%          | 26%           | 17%               | 18%          |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 13%              | 6%           | 6%            | 5%                | 10%          |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 6%           | 7%               | 4%           | 3%            | 16%               | 8%           |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 42%          | 34%          | 39%          | 40%          | 50%          | 49%        |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 26%          | 35%          | 21%          | 26%          | 15%          | 24%        |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 18%          | 19%          | 22%          | 17%          | 18%          | 15%        |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 8%           | 10%          | 12%          | 9%           | 5%         |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 6%           | 4%           | 8%           | 5%           | 8%           | 6%         |

#### Labor Party

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 15%          | 16%         | 15%           | 14%        | 13%        | 20%        | 16%       |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 29%          | 31%         | 28%           | 29%        | 32%        | 32%        | 30%       |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 25%          | 25%         | 26%           | 31%        | 17%        | 19%        | 31%       |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 19%          | 18%         | 21%           | 15%        | 25%        | 20%        | 11%       |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 11%         | 11%           | 11%        | 14%        | 8%         | 12%       |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 15%          | 13%              | 16%          | 10%           | 22%               | 21%          |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 29%          | 35%              | 25%          | 35%           | 17%               | 27%          |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 25%          | 22%              | 25%          | 30%           | 20%               | 31%          |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 19%          | 21%              | 22%          | 17%           | 21%               | 11%          |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 10%              | 12%          | 8%            | 20%               | 10%          |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 15%          | 14%          | 13%          | 17%          | 19%          | 16%        |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 29%          | 30%          | 34%          | 27%          | 21%          | 31%        |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 25%          | 24%          | 30%          | 27%          | 23%          | 21%        |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 19%          | 24%          | 15%          | 16%          | 22%          | 18%        |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 8%           | 9%           | 12%          | 15%          | 13%        |

### Australian Greens

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 11%          | 13%         | 9%            | 12%        | 10%        | 8%         | 11%       |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 16%          | 13%         | 19%           | 17%        | 18%        | 18%        | 10%       |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 28%          | 29%         | 26%           | 30%        | 23%        | 28%        | 36%       |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 21%          | 21%         | 22%           | 20%        | 22%        | 24%        | 19%       |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 24%          | 24%         | 24%           | 21%        | 27%        | 22%        | 25%       |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 11%          | 14%              | 10%          | 4%            | 11%               | 18%          |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 16%          | 16%              | 21%          | 11%           | 16%               | 8%           |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 28%          | 26%              | 29%          | 28%           | 19%               | 32%          |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 21%          | 16%              | 23%          | 32%           | 18%               | 21%          |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 24%          | 29%              | 18%          | 25%           | 37%               | 22%          |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 11%          | 12%          | 9%           | 11%          | 14%          | 11%        |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 16%          | 18%          | 19%          | 20%          | 9%           | 11%        |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 28%          | 25%          | 30%          | 25%          | 21%          | 34%        |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 21%          | 22%          | 27%          | 20%          | 19%          | 18%        |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 24%          | 23%          | 15%          | 24%          | 37%          | 25%        |

## National Party

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 39%          | 40%         | 37%           | 35%        | 42%        | 41%        | 39%       |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 23%          | 20%         | 27%           | 19%        | 28%        | 25%        | 17%       |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 19%          | 21%         | 17%           | 22%        | 16%        | 19%        | 29%       |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 14%          | 13%         | 14%           | 17%        | 10%        | 11%        | 14%       |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 5%           | 5%          | 5%            | 6%         | 5%         | 4%         | 1%        |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 39%          | 37%              | 39%          | 42%           | 34%               | 40%          |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 23%          | 27%              | 27%          | 20%           | 25%               | 9%           |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 19%          | 18%              | 18%          | 19%           | 14%               | 28%          |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 14%          | 14%              | 12%          | 15%           | 15%               | 14%          |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 5%           | 4%               | 4%           | 3%            | 12%               | 9%           |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>18-29</i> | <i>30-39</i> | <i>40-49</i> | <i>50-59</i> | <i>60+</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 39%          | 29%          | 31%          | 34%          | 53%          | 55%        |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 23%          | 34%          | 17%          | 20%          | 21%          | 21%        |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 19%          | 20%          | 22%          | 26%          | 14%          | 13%        |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 14%          | 14%          | 21%          | 14%          | 6%           | 10%        |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 5%           | 3%           | 9%           | 6%           | 7%           | 1%         |

## One Nation

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>NSW</i> | <i>VIC</i> | <i>QLD</i> | <i>WA</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 53%          | 53%         | 54%           | 53%        | 54%        | 50%        | 61%       |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 15%          | 13%         | 18%           | 11%        | 18%        | 20%        | 12%       |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 12%          | 15%         | 9%            | 14%        | 11%        | 12%        | 10%       |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 8%          | 10%           | 10%        | 6%         | 7%         | 14%       |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 12%         | 10%           | 12%        | 11%        | 11%        | 2%        |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | <i>Coalition</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Greens</i> | <i>One Nation</i> | <i>Other</i> |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 53%          | 53%              | 53%          | 56%           | 71%               | 46%          |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 15%          | 20%              | 17%          | 8%            | 2%                | 12%          |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 12%          | 9%               | 11%          | 11%           | 7%                | 21%          |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 10%              | 9%           | 9%            | 0%                | 11%          |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 7%               | 10%          | 17%           | 20%               | 11%          |

|                     | <i>Total</i> | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |
|---------------------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>0–20% woke</b>   | 53%          | 50%   | 44%   | 42%   | 72%   | 65% |
| <b>21–40% woke</b>  | 15%          | 17%   | 18%   | 16%   | 8%    | 14% |
| <b>41–60% woke</b>  | 12%          | 13%   | 12%   | 15%   | 8%    | 8%  |
| <b>61–80% woke</b>  | 9%           | 9%    | 15%   | 14%   | 3%    | 2%  |
| <b>81–100% woke</b> | 11%          | 10%   | 11%   | 12%   | 9%    | 11% |

How would you define the term “woke”?

|   | <i>Total</i> | Male | Female | NSW | VIC | QLD | WA  |
|---|--------------|------|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <b>Alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society</b>                      | 48%          | 47%  | 50%    | 41% | 53% | 52% | 57% |
| <b>Punishing people who don’t think the “right” things on social justice issues</b> | 30%          | 31%  | 29%    | 37% | 25% | 27% | 29% |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9%           | 10%  | 7%     | 9%  | 10% | 10% | 8%  |
| <b>Don’t know / Not sure</b>  | 13%          | 12%  | 14%    | 13% | 11% | 12% | 5%  |

|   | <i>Total</i> | Coalition | Labor | Greens | One Nation | Other |
|---|--------------|-----------|-------|--------|------------|-------|
| <b>Alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society</b>                      | 48%          | 43%       | 55%   | 67%    | 21%        | 32%   |
| <b>Punishing people who don’t think the “right” things on social justice issues</b> | 30%          | 41%       | 25%   | 17%    | 49%        | 29%   |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9%           | 7%        | 8%    | 6%     | 13%        | 15%   |
| <b>Don’t know / Not sure</b>  | 13%          | 10%       | 12%   | 10%    | 16%        | 24%   |

|   | <i>Total</i> | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | 60+ |
|---|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>Alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society</b>                      | 48%          | 57%   | 39%   | 40%   | 48%   | 54% |
| <b>Punishing people who don’t think the “right” things on social justice issues</b> | 30%          | 23%   | 38%   | 43%   | 33%   | 21% |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9%           | 8%    | 7%    | 5%    | 9%    | 13% |
| <b>Don’t know / Not sure</b>  | 13%          | 13%   | 16%   | 11%   | 10%   | 12% |

|   | <i>Total</i> | <i>Metro</i> | <i>Regional</i> |
|---|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| <b>Alert to racial prejudice and discrimination in society</b>                      | 48%          | 50%          | 45%             |
| <b>Punishing people who don't think the "right" things on social justice issues</b> | 30%          | 32%          | 27%             |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9%           | 7%           | 13%             |
| <b>Don't know / Not sure</b>  | 13%          | 12%          | 16%             |