

# Polling - Government use of consultants

*May 2023*

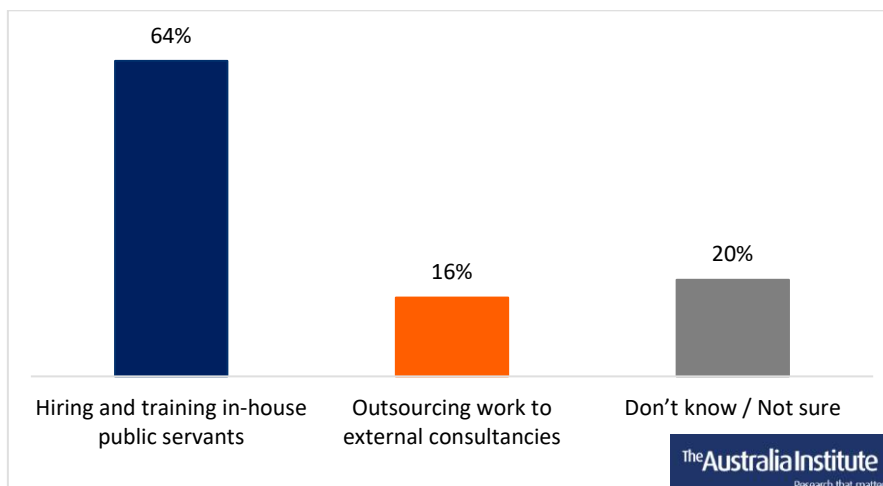
## Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,002 Australians about their attitudes towards the Federal Government's use of external consultants.

The results show that:

- Four in five Australians (79%) agree that the public service should have the skills and capacity to do work currently outsourced to consultants.
- Three in four Australians (72%) think the \$1 billion spent by the Federal Government on external consultancies last year was too much and most (64%) think it would be better spent on hiring and training in-house public servants.
- An overwhelming majority (85%) agree that consultants should be required to answer questions about work commissioned by the government when called upon in parliamentary and other inquiries (6% disagree).
- Four in five Australians (80%) agree that consulting firms that leak confidential government information should be banned from consulting for the government (10% disagree).

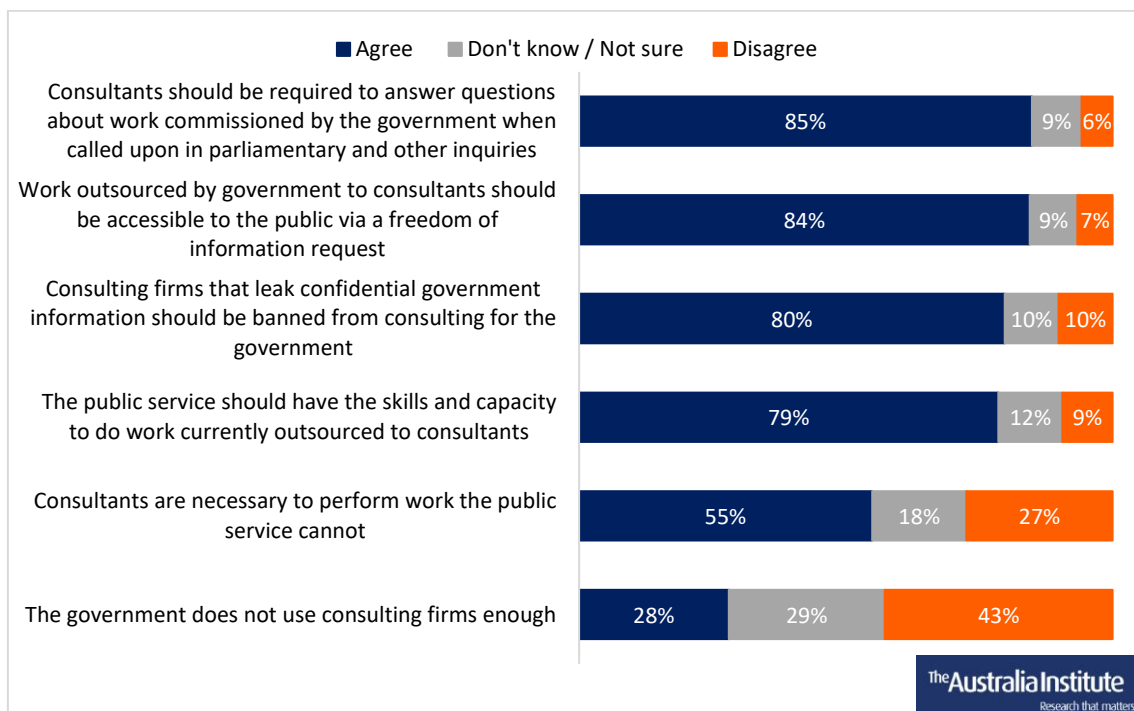
**Figure 1: The better use of the \$1 billion spent on external consultants last year**



Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with statements about work done by consultants, and the rules that consultants are subject to.

- An overwhelming majority of Australians (85%) agree that consultants should be required to answer questions about work commissioned by the government when called upon in parliamentary and other inquiries (6% disagree).
- A similar majority (84%) agree that work outsourced by government to consultants should be accessible to the public via a freedom of information request (7% disagree).
- Four in five Australians (80%) agree that consulting firms that leak confidential government information should be banned from consulting for the government (10% disagree).
- Four in five Australians (79%) agree that the public service should have the skills and capacity to do work currently outsourced to consultants.
- While a majority of Australians (55%) agree that consultants are necessary to perform the work the public service cannot, just 28% agree they are not used enough – nearly half (43%) disagree.

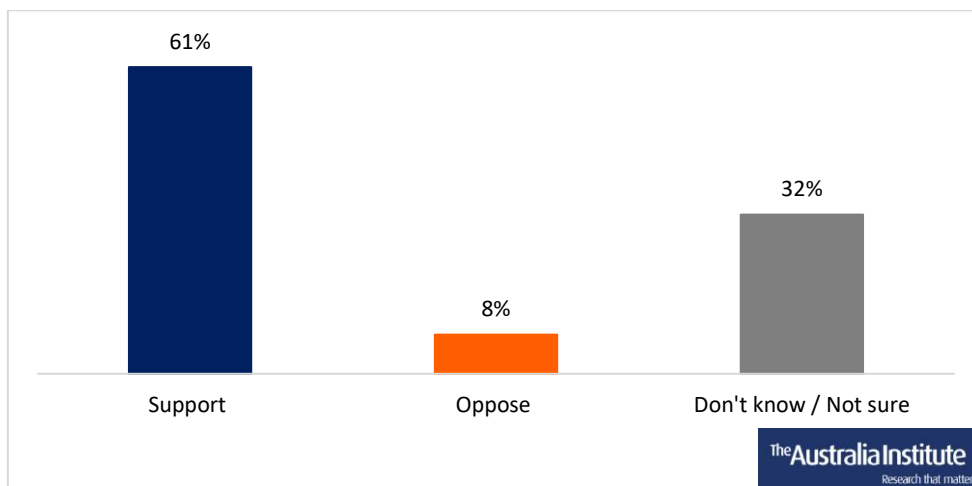
**Figure 2: Agreement about the amount of work done by consultants, and accountability measures that consultants are subject to.**



Respondents were asked if they support or oppose a cooling off period between working for the government and working for a consulting firm.

- Two in three Australians (61%) support a cooling off period between working for government and working for a consulting firm that has government contracts, while one in three (32%) were not sure.
- Fewer than one in ten (8%) oppose.

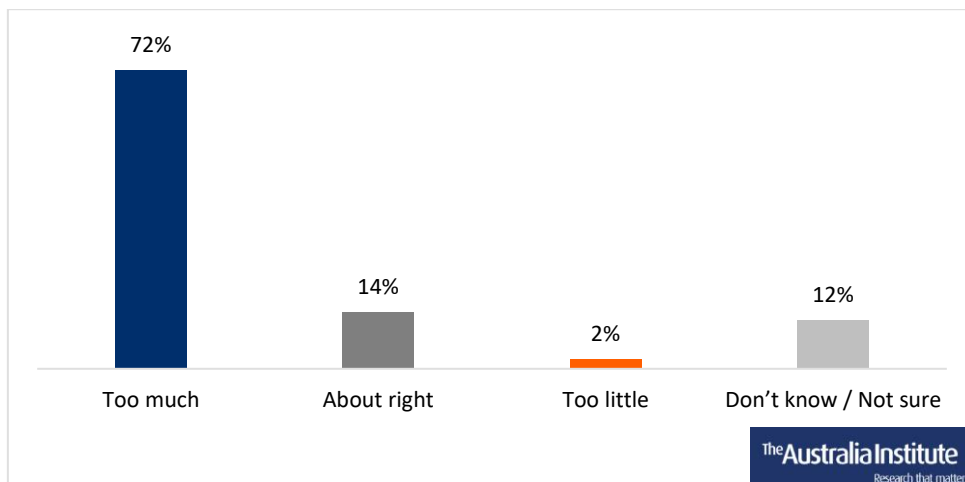
**Figure 3: Support for a cooling off period between working for government and consultants**



Respondents were then asked if the \$1 billion spent on external consultancies by the Federal Government represented too much, too little, or about the right amount of outsourcing of government work.

- Three in four Australians (72%) think \$1 billion represents too much outsourcing, while just 14% said it was about right.
- Only 2% of Australians thought \$1 billion represented too little outsourcing.

**Figure 4: Attitudes on the amount of outsourced government work**



## Method

Between 10 and 12 May 2023, The Australia Institute surveyed 1,002 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. Those who answered the gender identity question as “Non-binary”, “I use a different term”, or “Prefer not to answer” had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability. This resulted in an effective sample size of 949.9.

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

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.



**Australian  
Polling Council  
Quality Mark**

## Detailed results

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

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

**“Consulting firms that leak confidential government information should be banned from consulting for the government.”**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	50%	54%	46%	34%	44%	44%	54%	65%
<b>Agree</b>	30%	25%	34%	36%	32%	34%	26%	25%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	7%	7%	14%	8%	8%	6%	2%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	3%	3%	2%	4%	4%	2%	1%	2%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	10%	10%	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	50%	52%	49%	48%	46%
<b>Agree</b>	30%	30%	29%	32%	37%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	6%	9%	5%	4%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	10%	10%	9%	12%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	50%	50%	52%	44%	50%	47%
<b>Agree</b>	30%	31%	31%	31%	25%	25%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	8%	6%	13%	4%	6%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	3%	1%	3%	4%	7%	7%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	10%	10%	8%	8%	15%	15%

**“Consultants should be required to answer questions about work commissioned by the government when called upon in parliamentary and other inquiries.”**

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Strongly agree</b>	43%	47%	38%	29%	37%	35%	51%	55%
<b>Agree</b>	42%	39%	45%	50%	48%	49%	32%	35%
<b>Disagree</b>	4%	5%	4%	8%	3%	5%	3%	2%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	7%	11%	11%	11%	8%	12%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Strongly agree</b>	43%	44%	40%	42%	41%
<b>Agree</b>	42%	43%	47%	39%	44%
<b>Disagree</b>	4%	4%	3%	6%	2%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	8%	9%	12%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Strongly agree</b>	43%	40%	42%	45%	48%	49%
<b>Agree</b>	42%	45%	42%	45%	31%	31%
<b>Disagree</b>	4%	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	1%	2%	0%	6%	1%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	10%	9%	6%	10%	14%

**“Work outsourced by government to consultants should be accessible to the public via a freedom of information request.”**

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Strongly agree</b>	41%	46%	37%	31%	37%	37%	52%	47%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	40%	47%	49%	47%	42%	37%	42%
<b>Disagree</b>	5%	6%	4%	9%	4%	9%	1%	3%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	2%	1%	3%	1%	3%	0%	1%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	6%	12%	8%	11%	9%	10%	7%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Strongly agree</b>	41%	39%	42%	38%	48%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	45%	44%	46%	37%
<b>Disagree</b>	5%	5%	4%	7%	6%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	10%	9%	9%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Strongly agree</b>	41%	40%	39%	43%	45%	49%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	46%	42%	47%	36%	35%
<b>Disagree</b>	5%	4%	8%	6%	5%	2%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1%	1%	1%	1%	4%	2%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	9%	10%	9%	3%	10%	12%

**“The public service should have the skills and capacity to do work currently outsourced to consultants.”**

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Strongly agree</b>	36%	39%	33%	27%	33%	32%	45%	41%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	44%	42%	45%	45%	50%	39%	39%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	7%	7%	11%	8%	7%	5%	5%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	2%	2%	2%	5%	2%	1%	1%	3%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	12%	9%	15%	12%	13%	11%	10%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Strongly agree</b>	36%	40%	34%	31%	31%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	39%	42%	48%	51%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	7%	8%	6%	6%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	2%	2%	4%	1%	0%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	12%	11%	12%	13%	12%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Strongly agree</b>	36%	33%	37%	38%	44%	39%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	45%	41%	46%	34%	39%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	7%	9%	6%	3%	3%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	2%	1%	2%	4%	4%	4%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	12%	13%	11%	6%	14%	15%



**“Consultants are necessary to perform work the public service cannot.”**

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	14%	16%	12%	23%	19%	10%	9%	9%
<b>Agree</b>	41%	39%	43%	47%	42%	45%	38%	36%
<b>Disagree</b>	19%	22%	16%	17%	15%	20%	20%	23%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	8%	10%	6%	4%	2%	6%	13%	15%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	18%	13%	22%	10%	21%	20%	20%	18%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	14%	15%	12%	12%	17%
<b>Agree</b>	41%	45%	40%	40%	39%
<b>Disagree</b>	19%	19%	21%	16%	12%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	8%	7%	8%	10%	10%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	18%	14%	19%	21%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	14%	15%	13%	15%	12%	12%
<b>Agree</b>	41%	42%	44%	42%	38%	31%
<b>Disagree</b>	19%	18%	20%	19%	17%	22%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	8%	6%	8%	9%	20%	13%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	18%	20%	14%	16%	13%	23%

**“The government does not use consulting firms enough.”**

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Strongly agree</b>	9%	10%	8%	17%	14%	8%	4%	4%
<b>Agree</b>	19%	18%	20%	28%	25%	24%	16%	7%
<b>Disagree</b>	24%	24%	23%	25%	26%	21%	20%	24%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	19%	25%	14%	7%	6%	13%	26%	37%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	29%	23%	35%	23%	30%	33%	34%	29%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Strongly agree</b>	9%	11%	8%	10%	5%
<b>Agree</b>	19%	20%	18%	21%	16%
<b>Disagree</b>	24%	24%	24%	20%	26%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	19%	18%	22%	17%	9%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	29%	26%	27%	32%	44%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Strongly agree</b>	9%	8%	9%	10%	16%	11%
<b>Agree</b>	19%	19%	20%	24%	15%	10%
<b>Disagree</b>	24%	26%	24%	25%	12%	16%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	19%	15%	22%	16%	26%	27%
<b>Don't know/Not sure</b>	29%	31%	26%	25%	31%	35%

Last year, the Federal Government spent over \$1 billion on external consultancies.

Which do you think is the better use of that money?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Outsourcing work to external consultancies</b>	16%	22%	11%	33%	26%	11%	5%	7%
<b>Hiring and training in-house public servants</b>	64%	62%	66%	49%	53%	67%	74%	76%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	20%	16%	23%	18%	22%	22%	21%	17%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Outsourcing work to external consultancies</b>	16%	18%	15%	16%	15%
<b>Hiring and training in-house public servants</b>	64%	65%	63%	64%	63%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	20%	17%	22%	20%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Outsourcing work to external consultancies</b>	16%	15%	22%	16%	12%	6%
<b>Hiring and training in-house public servants</b>	64%	66%	60%	65%	65%	68%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	20%	19%	18%	19%	24%	26%

**Would you support or oppose a cooling off period between working for government and working for a consulting firm that has government contracts?**

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Strongly support</b>	26%	36%	18%	19%	25%	26%	26%	33%
<b>Support</b>	34%	32%	37%	42%	38%	33%	31%	29%
<b>Oppose</b>	6%	6%	6%	10%	7%	8%	4%	4%
<b>Strongly oppose</b>	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	32%	24%	39%	28%	29%	31%	37%	33%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Strongly support</b>	26%	29%	29%	20%	29%
<b>Support</b>	34%	34%	33%	36%	35%
<b>Oppose</b>	6%	6%	6%	6%	2%
<b>Strongly oppose</b>	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	32%	30%	30%	36%	32%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Strongly support</b>	26%	23%	28%	30%	25%	34%
<b>Support</b>	34%	35%	36%	38%	28%	24%
<b>Oppose</b>	6%	6%	7%	11%	3%	3%
<b>Strongly oppose</b>	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	0%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	32%	34%	28%	20%	43%	39%

Last year, the Federal Government spent over \$1 billion on external consultancies.

Do you think this represents too much outsourcing of government work, too little or about right?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>Much too much</b>	35%	39%	31%	14%	22%	41%	51%	46%
<b>Too much</b>	37%	35%	40%	46%	38%	28%	32%	40%
<b>About right</b>	14%	15%	12%	26%	18%	13%	6%	6%
<b>Too little</b>	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	1%
<b>Much too little</b>	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	12%	8%	15%	9%	18%	15%	9%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Much too much</b>	35%	34%	36%	31%	40%
<b>Too much</b>	37%	36%	40%	39%	36%
<b>About right</b>	14%	14%	12%	14%	13%
<b>Too little</b>	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
<b>Much too little</b>	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	12%	14%	9%	14%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Much too much</b>	35%	32%	36%	31%	37%	48%
<b>Too much</b>	37%	43%	38%	31%	39%	22%
<b>About right</b>	14%	14%	14%	21%	3%	6%
<b>Too little</b>	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%
<b>Much too little</b>	1%	0%	1%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	12%	10%	10%	13%	18%	21%