

Polling - Whistleblowing & secrecy

May 2023

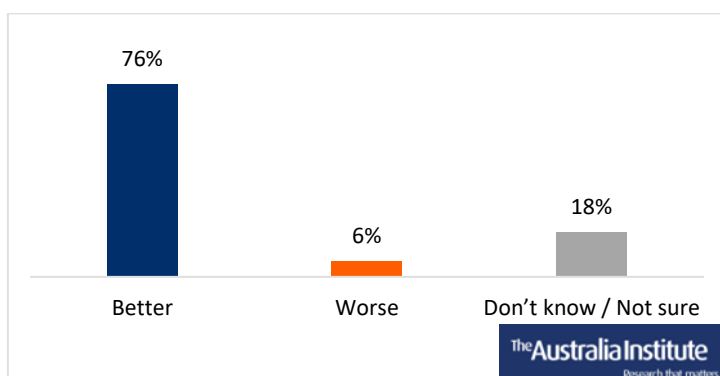
Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,002 Australians about their attitudes towards government secrecy and whistleblowing. The survey was developed in collaboration with the Human Rights Law Centre.

The results show that:

- Three in four (76%) say whistleblowers make Australia a better place.
- An overwhelming majority of Australians (84%) support stronger legal protection for whistleblowers.
- Most Australians think that the government is too secretive about how it deals with allegations of corruption (60%) and how it spends money (51%).
- Four in five (79%) support the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority.
- A majority of Australians think the government should intervene to end the prosecution of whistleblowers Richard Boyle (71%) and David McBride (64%).
- Since the Australia Institute last polled on this issue in November 2021,¹ perceptions of whistleblowers have remained largely consistent.

Figure 1: Whether whistleblowers make Australia a better or worse place

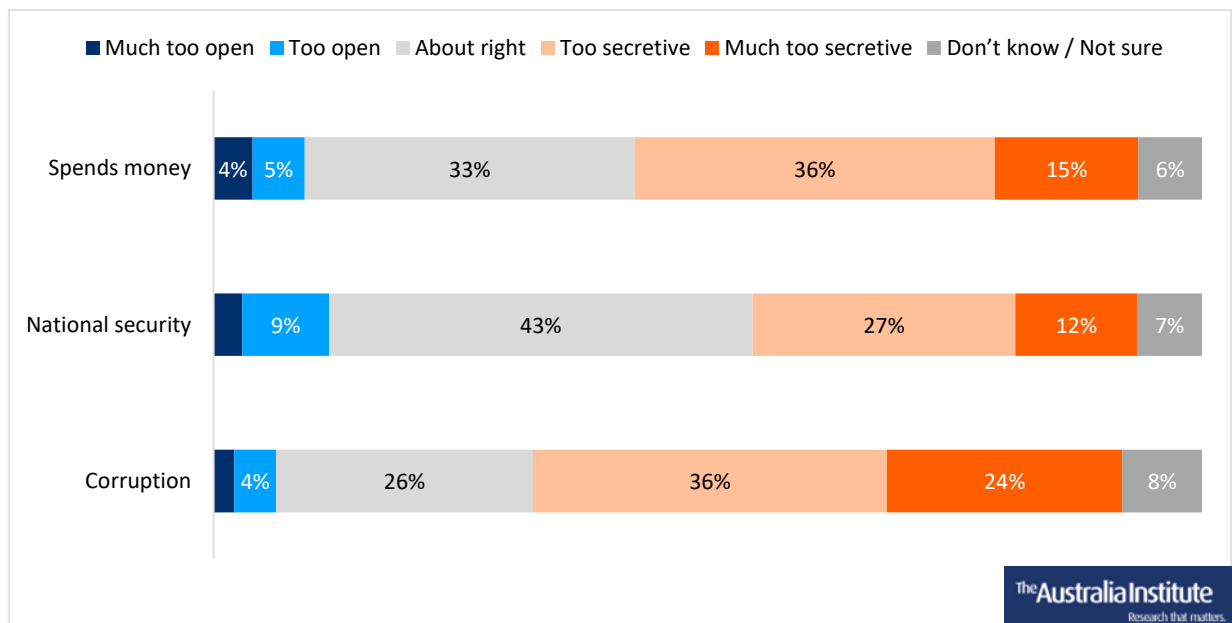


¹ Australia Institute (2021) *Polling – Whistleblowers*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-whistleblowers/>

Respondents were asked if they would describe the Australian government as too secretive or too open about how it spends money, national security, and how it deals with allegations of corruption.

- Most Australians (51%) think that the government is too secretive about how it spends its money with one in three (33%) thinking the level of secrecy or openness is about right.
- Two in five Australians (43%) think that the level of government secrecy or openness about national security is about right, somewhat more than the share who think that the government is too secretive (39%).
- Three in five Australians (60%) think that the government is too secretive about how it deals with allegations of corruption, while just one in four (26%) think the level of secrecy or openness is about right.
 - This includes a majority from every voting intention (52–84%) who think that the government is too secretive about allegations of corruption, with the largest proportions being Independent (76%) and One Nation (84%) voters.
- These results are broadly consistent with 2021 sentiments, however more people in 2023 think that the government is too secretive about spending money (43% in 2021) and corruption (52% in 2021).

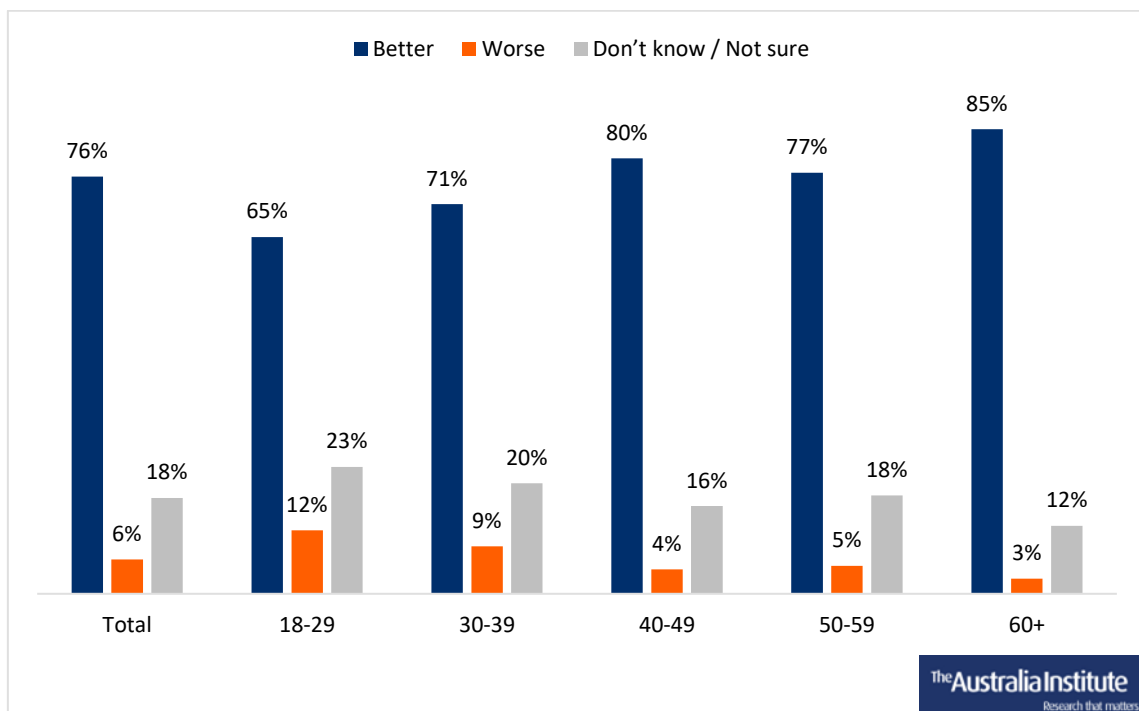
Figure 2: Perceptions on Australian government secrecy about key policy areas



Respondents were asked whether they thought whistleblowers make Australia a better or worse place.

- Three in four Australians (76%) say whistleblowers make Australia a better place, this is more than 10 times as many as who said that whistleblowers make Australia a worse place (6%).
- Agreement that whistleblowers make Australia a better place increases with age, from 65% among those aged 18–29 to 85% among those 60 or older.
- This was consistent with 2021 results, where 75% said whistleblowers make Australia better.

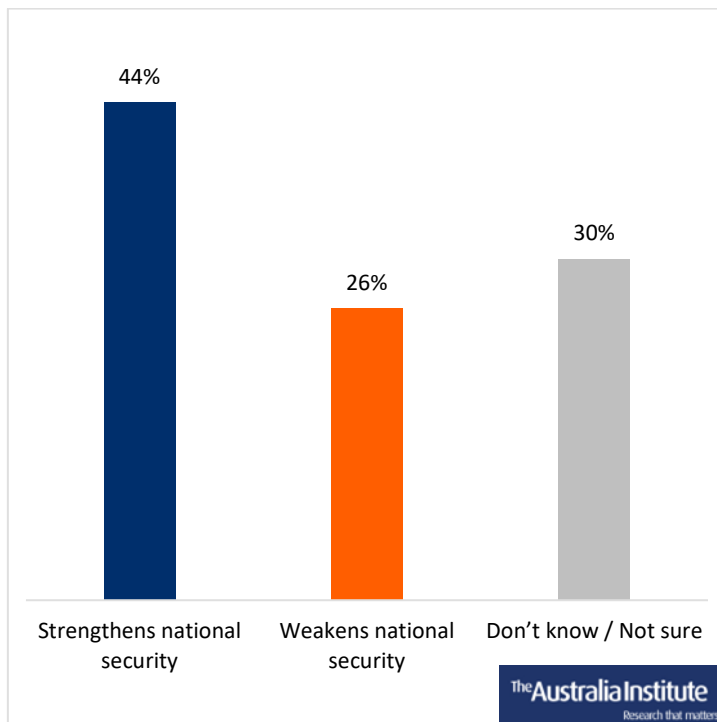
Figure 3: Whether whistleblowers make Australia better or worse, by age



Respondents were told that special secrecy laws apply to information relating to national security. They were then asked whether they thought it generally strengthens or weakens national security when people go public with information of potential wrongdoing relating to national security or defence.

- Nearly half (44%) of Australians think that national security is strengthened when people go public with information of potential wrongdoing relating to national security or defence.
- One in four (26%) think that national security is weakened when people go public with information of potential wrongdoing relating to national security or defence.
- About one in three (30%) don't know or aren't sure whether whistleblowers strengthen or weaken national security.

Figure 4: Whether whistleblowing strengthens or weakens national security



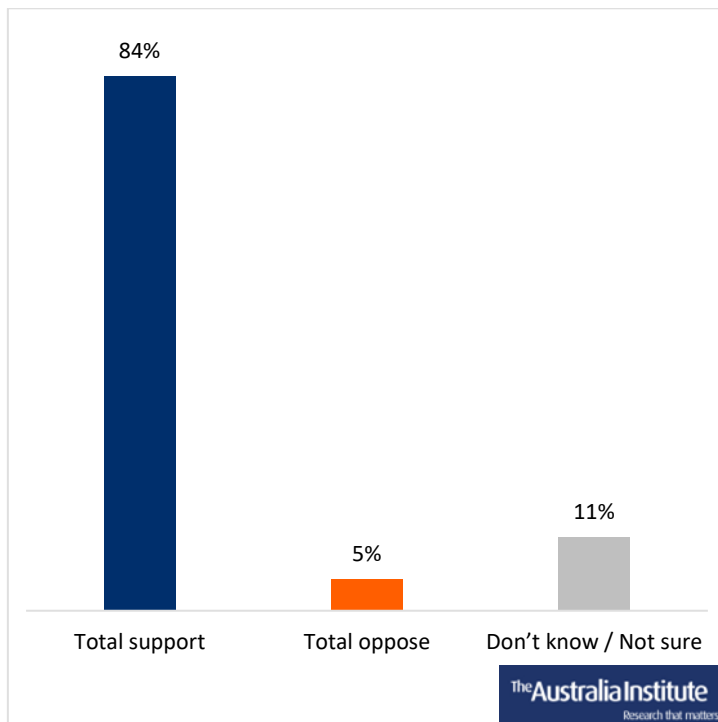
Respondents were told:

Research shows that a high proportion of Australians who blow the whistle on wrongdoing at work suffer direct damage as a result, such as harassment, suspension or demotion. Some even lose their jobs.

They were then asked whether they would support or oppose stronger legal protections for Australian whistleblowers.

- Four in five Australians (84%) support stronger legal protection for whistleblowers. Only one in 20 (5%) oppose stronger legal protections for whistleblowers.
- Across all voting intentions, at least four out of five Australians support stronger legal protections for whistleblowers (80–89%).

Figure 5: Perceptions on stronger Australian whistleblower protections

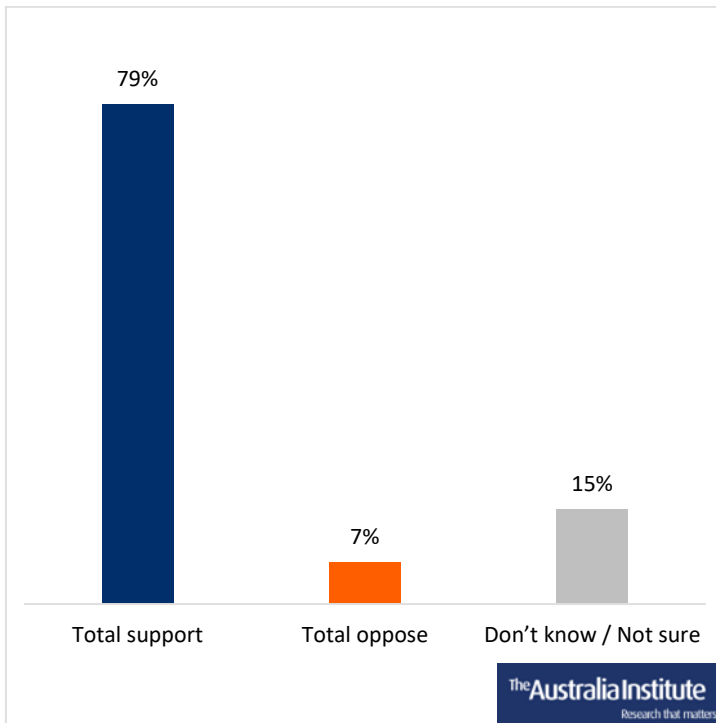


In July 2021, the Australia Institute asked Australians a related question about reforming whistleblower laws for public servants specifically, before the end of the year. In that instance, 71% of respondents agreed that whistleblower protections for public servants should be strengthened.

Respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority.

- Four in five Australians (79%) support the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority.
- Less than one in 10 oppose the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority (7%).
- Across all voting intentions, about three in four Australians support the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority (77–80%).

Figure 6: Support for the introduction of a whistleblower protection authority



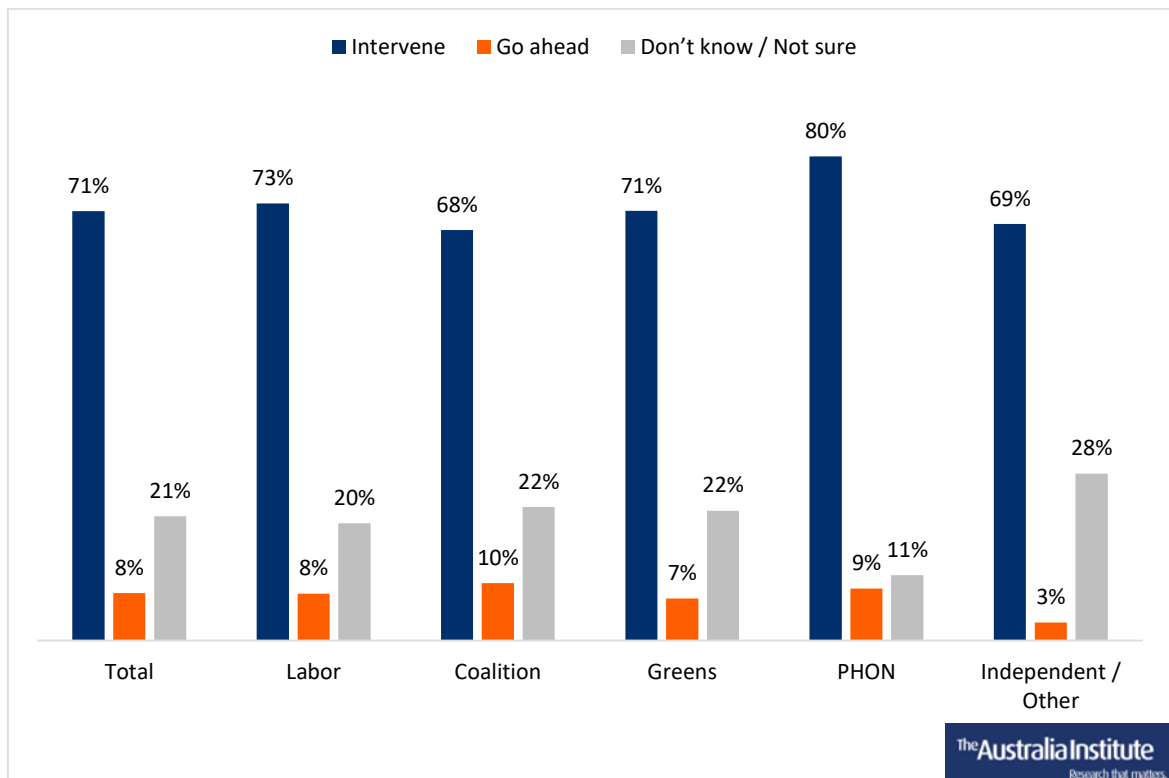
Respondents were given some background information on two current whistleblower cases, and asked whether they thought that the government should intervene to end the prosecution, or that the prosecution should go ahead.

Before being asked about Richard Boyle, respondents were given this information:

Richard Boyle blew the whistle on unethical debt recovery practices at the Australian Tax Office. Although three independent inquiries confirmed his concerns, Boyle is being prosecuted and faces the prospect of jail-time later this year if convicted.

- Almost three in four of Australians (71%) think that the Australian government should intervene to end the prosecution of Richard Boyle.
- Labor voters (73%) and One Nation voters (80%) are most likely to say that the government should intervene.
- Coalition voters are least likely to say that the government should intervene, however, even among Coalition voters 68% say the government should intervene.

Figure 7: Government should intervene on the Richard Boyle whistleblower case or let the prosecution go ahead, by voting intention

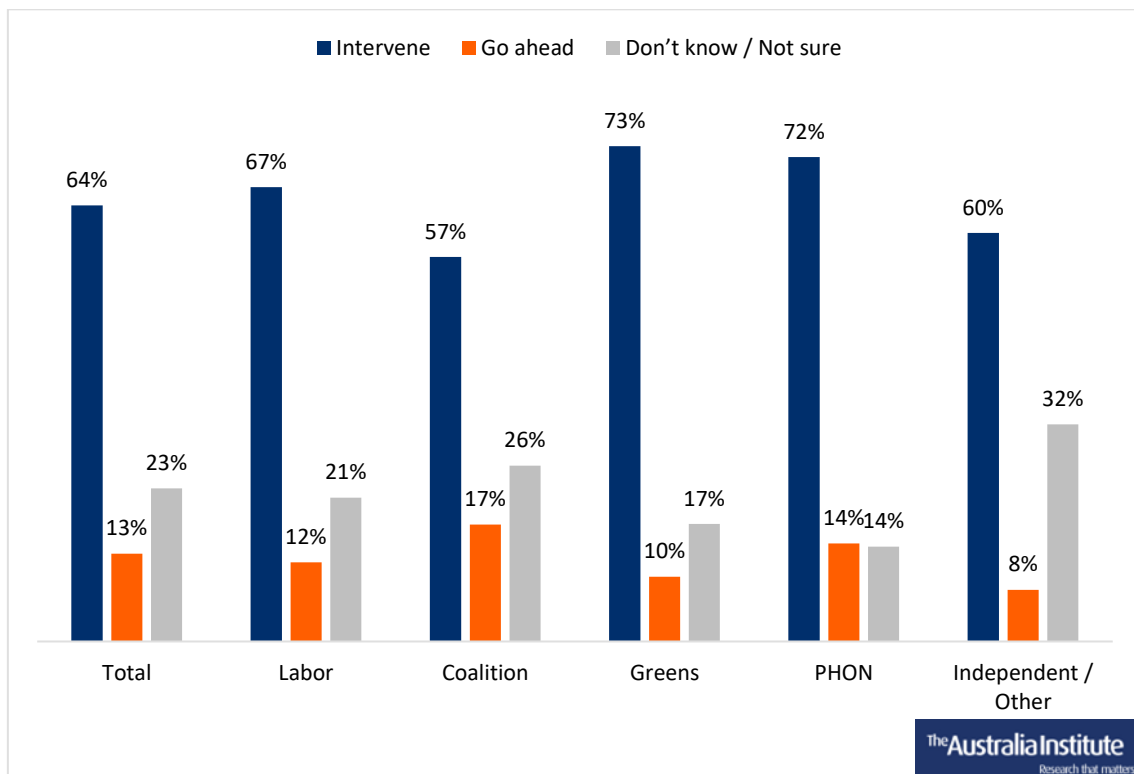


Before being asked about David McBride, respondents were given this information:

David McBride blew the whistle on alleged war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan. Although the Brereton Report confirmed his concerns, McBride is being prosecuted for breaching secrecy laws and faces the prospect of jail-time later this year if convicted.

- Two in three Australians (64%) think that the Australian government should intervene to end the prosecution of David McBride.
- One Nation voters (72%) and Greens voters (73%) are most likely to say that the government should intervene.
- Coalition voters are least likely to say that the government should intervene, however, even among Coalition voters 57% say the government should intervene.

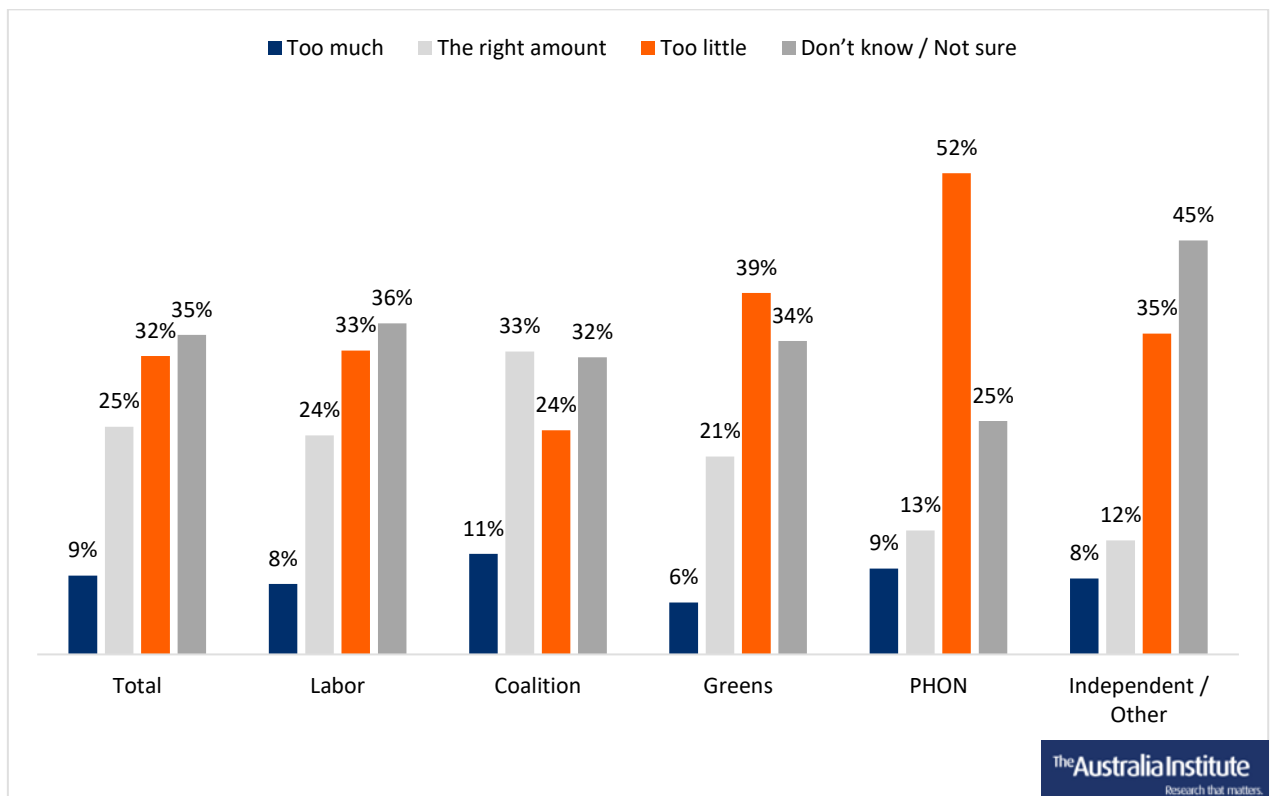
Figure 8: Government should intervene on the David McBride whistleblower case or let the prosecution go ahead, by voting intention



Respondents were asked whether they think the Federal Government is doing too much or too little to secure the release of Julian Assange.

- One in three Australians (32%) think that the Federal Government is doing too little to secure the release of Julian Assange.
- Another one in three Australians (35%) don't know or are unsure whether the Federal Government is doing too much or too little to secure the release of Julian Assange.
- Only one in ten Australians (9%) think that the Federal Government is doing too much to secure the release of Julian Assange.
- A majority of One Nation voters (52%) think that the Federal Government is doing too little to secure the release of Julian Assange.

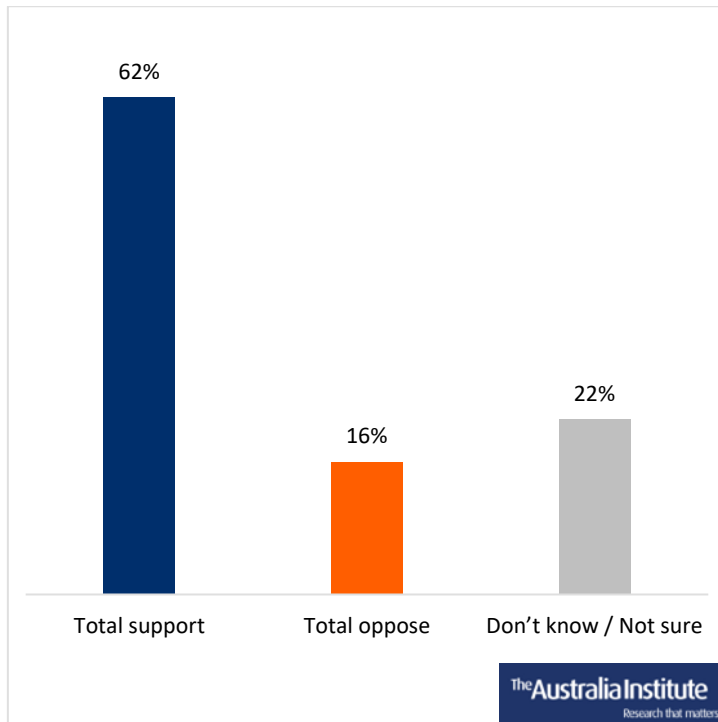
Figure 9: Is the government doing enough to secure the release of Julian Assange?



Respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose new laws that would reward whistleblowers in Australia who expose corporate wrongdoing.

- A large majority of Australians (62%) would support new laws that would reward whistleblowers in Australia who expose corporate wrongdoing.
- Less than one in five Australians (16%) would oppose new laws that would reward whistleblowers in Australia who expose corporate wrongdoing.

Figure 7: Support for rewards for whistleblowers who expose corporate wrongdoing



Method

Between 11 April and 14 April 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 954.

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.

For each of the following topics, would you describe the Australian government as too secretive or too open?

About how it spends money

	<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>
Much too open	4%	6%	2%	8%	9%	3%	2%	0%
Too open	5%	7%	4%	10%	7%	7%	2%	2%
About right	33%	37%	30%	32%	33%	29%	32%	38%
Too secretive	36%	31%	42%	33%	36%	36%	43%	35%
Much too secretive	15%	15%	14%	9%	9%	15%	17%	20%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	5%	8%	8%	6%	10%	5%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Much too open	4%	4%	6%	1%	5%
Too open	5%	6%	7%	3%	4%
About right	33%	35%	33%	28%	43%
Too secretive	36%	32%	38%	43%	26%
Much too secretive	15%	16%	11%	18%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	8%	6%	6%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Much too open	4%	3%	5%	7%	2%	4%
Too open	5%	5%	7%	6%	2%	3%
About right	33%	45%	27%	28%	10%	19%
Too secretive	36%	35%	39%	34%	40%	34%
Much too secretive	15%	6%	19%	16%	40%	25%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	4%	9%	6%	16%

About national security

	<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>
Much too open	3%	4%	2%	5%	5%	1%	1%	2%
Too open	9%	13%	5%	16%	13%	6%	5%	5%
About right	43%	48%	38%	35%	36%	42%	48%	50%
Too secretive	27%	22%	31%	24%	30%	32%	30%	21%
Much too secretive	12%	9%	15%	12%	9%	9%	10%	18%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	5%	8%	8%	7%	9%	6%	4%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Much too open	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Too open	9%	10%	6%	10%	10%
About right	43%	44%	47%	37%	39%
Too secretive	27%	22%	28%	32%	27%
Much too secretive	12%	14%	9%	12%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	6%	6%	7%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Much too open	3%	2%	3%	6%	3%	2%
Too open	9%	8%	12%	10%	2%	3%
About right	43%	48%	44%	36%	21%	38%
Too secretive	27%	28%	26%	23%	34%	25%
Much too secretive	12%	8%	12%	15%	34%	22%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	7%	4%	10%	7%	11%

About how it deals with allegations of corruption

	<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>
Much too open	2%	3%	1%	4%	4%	1%	0%	1%
Too open	4%	5%	3%	9%	6%	4%	1%	2%
About right	26%	28%	24%	29%	29%	25%	25%	23%
Too secretive	36%	35%	37%	35%	35%	38%	38%	34%
Much too secretive	24%	21%	27%	16%	19%	20%	30%	32%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	9%	8%	8%	12%	5%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Much too open	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%
Too open	4%	7%	4%	3%	2%
About right	26%	27%	26%	24%	22%
Too secretive	36%	31%	38%	38%	40%
Much too secretive	24%	24%	22%	26%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	9%	7%	8%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Much too open	2%	2%	2%	4%	2%	2%
Too open	4%	4%	6%	4%	0%	0%
About right	26%	33%	24%	23%	10%	9%
Too secretive	36%	36%	37%	32%	33%	36%
Much too secretive	24%	16%	25%	26%	50%	40%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	8%	5%	12%	4%	13%

A whistleblower is someone who reports potential wrongdoing that isn't already being addressed. In general, do whistleblowers:

- Make Australia a better place
- Make Australia a worse place
- Don't know / Not sure

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Better	76%	80%	72%	65%	71%	80%	77%	85%
Worse	6%	8%	5%	12%	9%	4%	5%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	12%	23%	23%	20%	16%	18%	12%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Better	76%	75%	80%	76%	72%
Worse	6%	7%	5%	4%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	18%	15%	20%	20%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Better	76%	77%	80%	66%	78%	73%
Worse	6%	5%	9%	10%	1%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	18%	11%	24%	21%	25%

Special secrecy laws apply to information relating to national security. When people go public with information of potential wrongdoing relating to national security or defence, do they generally:

- Strengthen national security
- Weaken national security
- Don't know / Not sure

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Strengthen	44%	48%	40%	46%	49%	44%	40%	41%
Weaken	26%	26%	26%	27%	23%	21%	25%	29%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	26%	34%	26%	29%	35%	34%	29%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strengthen	44%	42%	43%	47%	48%
Weaken	26%	31%	24%	23%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	27%	33%	31%	31%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Strengthen	44%	44%	46%	49%	35%	37%
Weaken	26%	24%	32%	23%	26%	18%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	33%	22%	28%	39%	45%

Research shows that a high proportion of Australians who blow the whistle on wrongdoing at work suffer direct damage as a result, such as harassment, suspension or demotion. Some even lose their jobs.

Would you support or oppose stronger legal protections for Australian whistleblowers?

	<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>
Strongly support	41%	42%	40%	25%	45%	41%	49%	45%
Support	43%	44%	42%	52%	36%	43%	39%	42%
Oppose	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	6%	4%	2%
Strongly oppose	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	9%	13%	16%	15%	9%	8%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly support	41%	41%	39%	42%	45%
Support	43%	43%	45%	42%	36%
Oppose	4%	3%	3%	3%	5%
Strongly oppose	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	12%	12%	12%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly support	41%	42%	38%	38%	49%	48%
Support	43%	43%	45%	45%	40%	33%
Oppose	4%	2%	5%	5%	1%	4%
Strongly oppose	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	12%	11%	11%	9%	14%

Several countries have bodies that oversee and enforce whistleblower protection laws and provide guidance to whistleblowers. Australia has no such body.

Would you support or oppose the introduction of an Australian whistleblower protection authority?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Strongly support	35%	35%	35%	24%	37%	36%	41%	38%
Support	44%	44%	43%	47%	39%	46%	41%	44%
Oppose	5%	6%	5%	9%	7%	4%	4%	3%
Strongly oppose	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	13%	17%	18%	16%	14%	14%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly support	35%	35%	32%	36%	42%
Support	44%	42%	48%	44%	40%
Oppose	5%	7%	4%	5%	6%
Strongly oppose	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	15%	15%	15%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly support	35%	34%	30%	37%	47%	46%
Support	44%	46%	47%	43%	30%	30%
Oppose	5%	5%	7%	7%	0%	4%
Strongly oppose	1%	0%	2%	2%	1%	0%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	14%	14%	12%	22%	20%

Richard Boyle blew the whistle on unethical debt recovery practices at the Australian Taxation Office. Although three independent inquiries confirmed his concerns, Boyle is being prosecuted and faces the prospect of jail-time later this year if convicted. Do you think:

- The Australian government should intervene to end the prosecution
- The prosecution should go ahead
- Don't know / Not sure

	<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>
Intervene	71%	73%	70%	60%	73%	70%	74%	78%
Go ahead	8%	9%	7%	15%	8%	7%	6%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	21%	19%	23%	25%	19%	23%	20%	18%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Intervene	71%	71%	70%	67%	77%
Go ahead	8%	8%	8%	6%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	21%	20%	21%	26%	14%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Intervene	71%	73%	68%	71%	80%	69%
Go ahead	8%	8%	10%	7%	9%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	21%	20%	22%	22%	11%	28%

David McBride blew the whistle on alleged war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan. Although the Brereton Report confirmed his concerns, McBride is being prosecuted for breaching secrecy laws and faces the prospect of jail-time later this year if convicted. Do you think:

- The Australian government should intervene to end the prosecution
- The prosecution should go ahead
- Don't know / Not sure

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Intervene	64%	64%	65%	61%	69%	61%	68%	64%
Go ahead	13%	17%	9%	17%	13%	10%	11%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	23%	19%	26%	22%	18%	28%	21%	24%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Intervene	64%	63%	61%	63%	77%
Go ahead	13%	13%	15%	11%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	23%	24%	23%	26%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Intervene	64%	67%	57%	73%	72%	60%
Go ahead	13%	12%	17%	10%	14%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	23%	21%	26%	17%	14%	32%

Do you think the Federal Government is doing too much or too little to secure the release of Julian Assange?

	<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>
Too much	9%	11%	6%	7%	7%	6%	13%	10%
The right amount	25%	30%	20%	32%	26%	16%	20%	25%
Too little	32%	33%	32%	19%	27%	35%	34%	42%
Don't know / Not sure	35%	26%	42%	41%	39%	43%	32%	23%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Too much	9%	8%	10%	6%	9%
The right amount	25%	27%	24%	26%	16%
Too little	32%	31%	35%	34%	29%
Don't know / Not sure	35%	35%	31%	34%	46%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Too much	9%	8%	11%	6%	9%	8%
The right amount	25%	24%	33%	21%	13%	12%
Too little	32%	33%	24%	39%	52%	35%
Don't know / Not sure	35%	36%	32%	34%	25%	45%

In the United States, whistleblowers can be financially rewarded for exposing corporate wrongdoing.

Would you support or oppose new laws that rewarded whistleblowers in Australia who exposed corporate wrongdoing?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Strongly support	21%	27%	16%	21%	24%	23%	22%	19%
Support	40%	41%	40%	44%	45%	40%	42%	34%
Oppose	12%	12%	13%	9%	8%	11%	11%	20%
Strongly oppose	4%	5%	3%	3%	5%	2%	5%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	22%	15%	28%	24%	19%	24%	20%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly support	21%	24%	22%	20%	21%
Support	40%	36%	44%	40%	45%
Oppose	12%	12%	12%	13%	10%
Strongly oppose	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	22%	24%	17%	23%	21%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly support	21%	24%	15%	20%	39%	23%
Support	40%	39%	43%	45%	31%	37%
Oppose	12%	11%	15%	9%	11%	13%
Strongly oppose	4%	4%	5%	1%	5%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	22%	22%	21%	25%	15%	23%