

Polling - Perceptions of corruption

September 2023

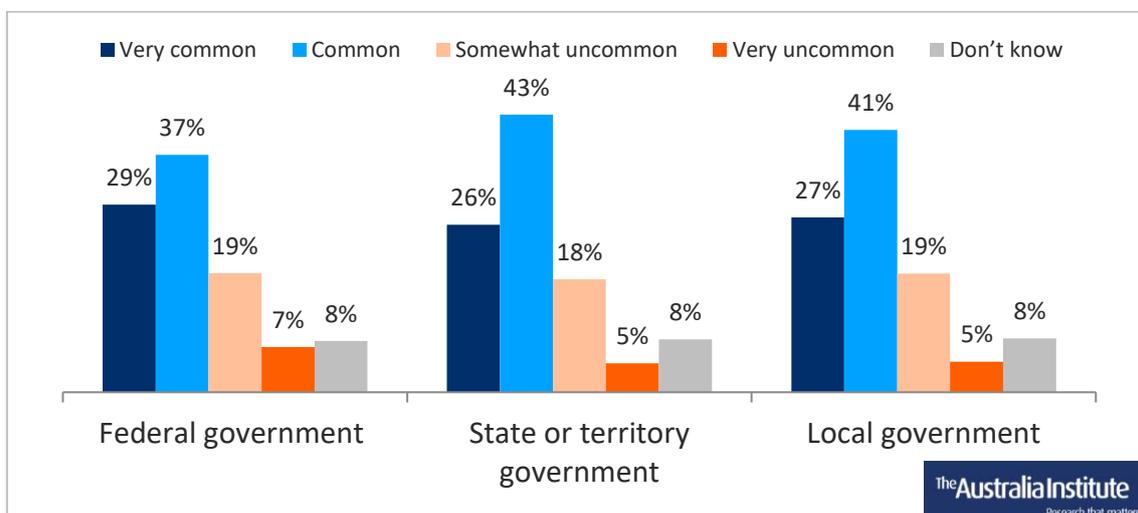
Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a sample of 1,535 Australians about their perceptions of the prevalence of corruption at different levels of government.

The results show that:

- There is little difference in perceived corruption by level of government, although it is perceived as somewhat more common at the state and territory level (70% say it is common) than the federal level (66% say it is common).
- When presented with eight examples of behaviours that are potentially corrupt, a majority of Australians say each behaviour is corrupt.
- Over four in five Australians (86%) consider appointing a friend or colleague to a public role over others who are **more** qualified to be corrupt conduct, the highest result for any example of government behaviour listed.
- The related example, of appointing a friend or colleague over others who are **equally** qualified, is considered corrupt conduct by 76% of Australians.
- Over four in five Australians (83%) consider it corrupt conduct to sign a contract with an overseas company after being alerted to a risk that some of that money may go to corrupt officials.

Figure 1: Perception of the prevalence of corruption



Respondents were shown the text:

Corruption is often defined as “the use of entrusted power for private gain”.

They were then asked how prevalent they think corruption is at each level of government.

The results show that:

- There is little difference in perceived corruption by level of government.
- Two in three Australians think that corruption is common across federal (66%), state and territory (70%), and local government (68%).
- Only one in four Australians think that corruption is uncommon across federal (26%), and local government (23%).
 - One in five think that corruption is uncommon across state and territory governments (22%).
- Perceived corruption does not vary significantly by voting intention, with about two in three Labor (64%), Coalition (63%), Greens (69%) and Independent/Other voters (72%) saying corruption is common at the federal level.
 - For each level of government, One Nation voters are more likely to perceive corruption as common than other voting intentions are (85% at the federal level).

Figure 2: Perception of federal government corruption, by voting intention

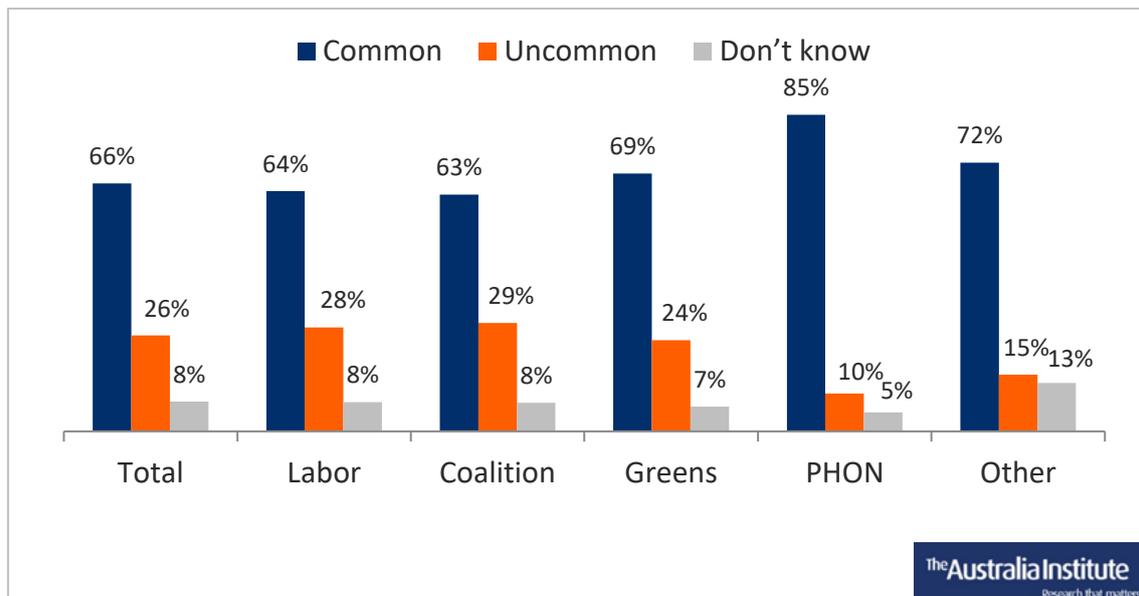


Figure 3: Perception of state or territory government corruption, by state

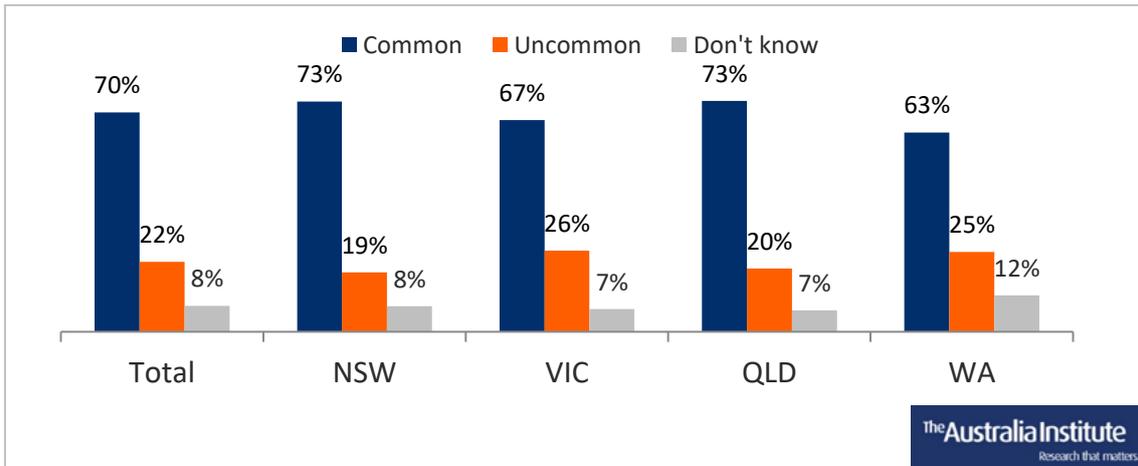
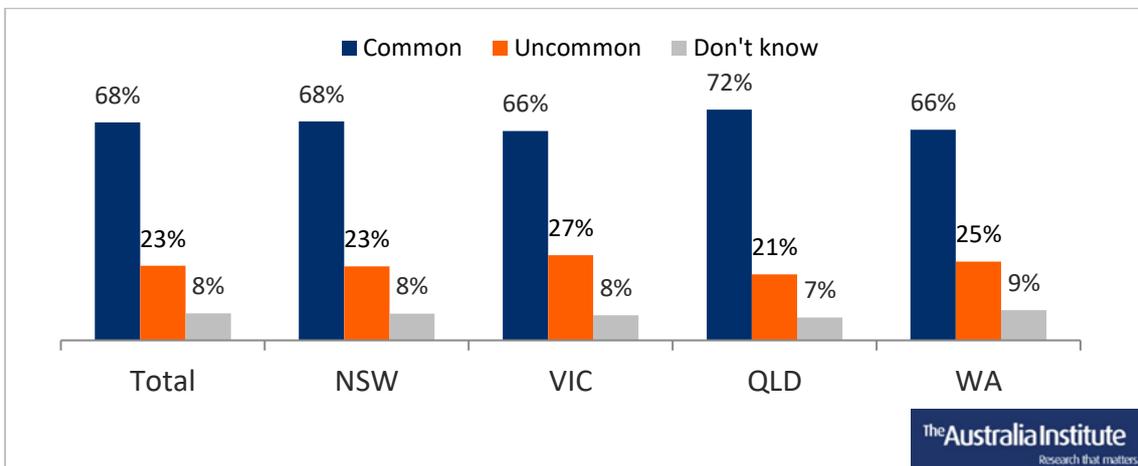


Figure 4: Perception of local government corruption, by state



Respondents were then given eight examples of government behaviour and were asked for each whether they thought each example constituted corrupt conduct.

- For each of the eight examples, more than two in three Australians consider it to constitute corrupt conduct (66%–86%).

Cronyism is the most common form of corruption witnessed by federal public servants.¹ Two examples related to cronyism:

- Over four in five Australians (86%) consider appointing a friend or colleague to a public role over others who are **more** qualified to be corrupt conduct.
 - This was the highest result for any example of government behaviour listed.
- The related example, of appointing a friend or colleague over others who are **equally** qualified, is considered corrupt conduct by 76% of Australians.

Two examples related to political expediency:

- Over four in five Australians (83%) consider it corrupt conduct to sign a contract with an overseas company after being alerted to a risk that some of that money may go to corrupt officials.
- Three in four Australians (76%) consider it corrupt conduct to remove a political rival from Parliament by offering them a high-paying or prestigious public appointment.

One example related explicitly to the behaviour of senior public servants:

- Over four in five (83%) consider it corrupt conduct for a senior public servant to mislead Cabinet or the Parliament.

One example related to misuse of government grants (also known as pork barrelling):

- Four in five (81%) consider it corrupt conduct to allocate public money to projects in marginal seats in order to win votes.

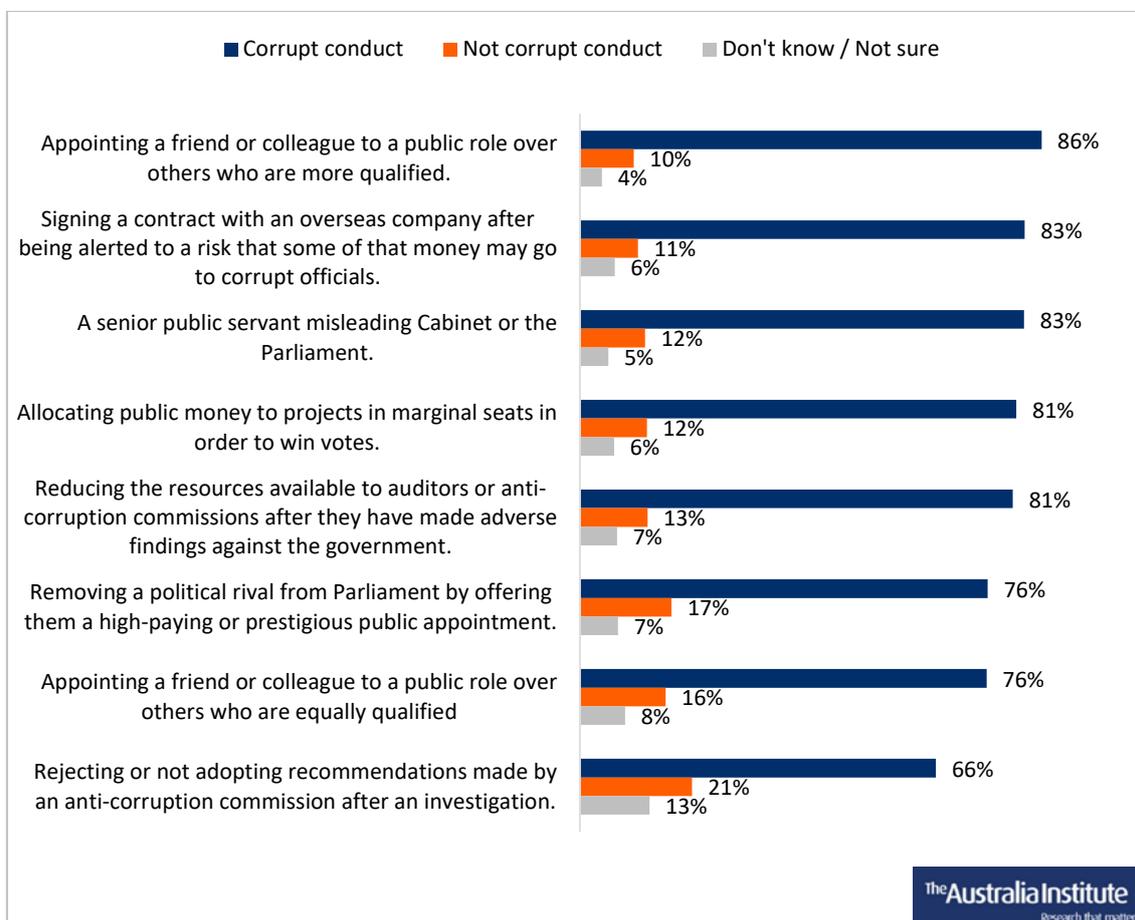
Two examples related to the government's relationship with accountability organs:

- Four in five (81%) consider it corrupt conduct to reduce the resources available to auditors or anti-corruption commissions after they have made adverse findings against the government.

¹ Australian Public Service Commission (2022) *State of the Service 2021-22*, p. 161, <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/state-of-service/2022>

- Rejecting or not adopting recommendations made by an anti-corruption commission after an investigation is considered corrupt conduct by two in three Australians (66%), the lowest result for any of the eight examples.

Figure 5: Perceptions of corruption in government actions



There is some difference in answers by voting intention:

- One Nation voters (84% on average) and Independent/Other voters (82% on average) were more likely to consider the listed government behaviours as corrupt.
- Greens voters (81% on average) and Labor voters (78%) were slightly less likely to consider the listed government behaviours as corrupt.
- Coalition voters (77% on average) were least likely to consider the listed government behaviours as corrupt.

Method

Between 29 August and 1 September 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. A further 406 South Australians and 127 Queenslanders were sampled to produce more precise results, but weighting was used to ensure that people from these states were not over-represented in national results.

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 1138.

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.

Corruption is often defined as “the use of entrusted power for private gain”. How prevalent do you think corruption is at each level of government?

Local government (councils, LGAs)

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Very common	27%	30%	25%	29%	27%	27%	25%
Common	41%	39%	43%	40%	38%	45%	41%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	19%	18%	19%	23%	15%	15%
Very uncommon	5%	6%	3%	4%	4%	5%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	11%	8%	8%	7%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Very common	27%	23%	26%	29%	36%	39%
Common	41%	46%	41%	37%	41%	28%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	19%	20%	20%	15%	13%
Very uncommon	5%	4%	5%	5%	2%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	8%	7%	9%	7%	14%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Very common	27%	29%	32%	27%	33%	21%
Common	41%	37%	41%	42%	36%	45%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	21%	17%	15%	14%	22%
Very uncommon	5%	5%	4%	2%	5%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	6%	13%	11%	7%

State or territory government

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Very common	26%	24%	28%	26%	28%	28%	20%
Common	43%	43%	44%	47%	39%	45%	43%
Somewhat uncommon	18%	22%	14%	14%	21%	15%	20%
Very uncommon	5%	6%	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	5%	11%	8%	7%	7%	12%

	Total	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Very common	26%	21%	26%	26%	36%	43%
Common	43%	46%	42%	46%	47%	32%
Somewhat uncommon	18%	21%	18%	17%	12%	6%
Very uncommon	5%	5%	5%	3%	0%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	9%	8%	5%	12%

	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Very common	26%	26%	29%	26%	32%	21%
Common	43%	45%	48%	43%	35%	44%
Somewhat uncommon	18%	17%	14%	15%	17%	23%
Very uncommon	5%	5%	3%	3%	5%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	7%	14%	10%	6%

Federal government

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very common	29%	26%	32%	30%	25%	34%	32%
Common	37%	34%	40%	38%	38%	38%	29%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	25%	13%	18%	23%	14%	18%
Very uncommon	7%	9%	5%	7%	7%	7%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	10%	7%	6%	7%	13%

	Total	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Very common	29%	23%	28%	34%	46%	43%
Common	37%	41%	36%	35%	39%	28%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	21%	20%	19%	10%	7%
Very uncommon	7%	7%	9%	5%	0%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	8%	8%	7%	5%	13%

	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Very common	29%	33%	36%	28%	31%	22%
Common	37%	33%	39%	40%	36%	38%
Somewhat uncommon	19%	20%	13%	14%	16%	25%
Very uncommon	7%	7%	5%	5%	8%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	7%	13%	10%	6%

What follows are examples of government behaviour. For each one, please identify if in your opinion it does or does not constitute corrupt conduct.

The examples were presented in random order.

Appointing a friend or colleague to a public role over others who are equally qualified.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	76%	74%	78%	76%	73%	79%	75%
Not corrupt conduct	16%	18%	14%	15%	19%	14%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	9%	8%	8%	9%	7%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	76%	73%	77%	75%	83%	81%
Not corrupt conduct	16%	20%	15%	13%	12%	11%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	8%	13%	6%	7%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	76%	64%	70%	82%	81%	80%
Not corrupt conduct	16%	21%	22%	10%	11%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	15%	8%	7%	8%	4%

Appointing a friend or colleague to a public role over others who are more qualified.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	86%	84%	87%	86%	87%	88%	82%
Not corrupt conduct	10%	12%	9%	11%	10%	7%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	5%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	86%	86%	83%	87%	94%	88%
Not corrupt conduct	10%	11%	13%	6%	2%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	3%	4%	7%	4%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	86%	75%	84%	89%	88%	91%
Not corrupt conduct	10%	18%	12%	8%	7%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	7%	4%	3%	5%	2%

Allocating public money to projects in marginal seats in order to win votes.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Corrupt conduct	81%	76%	86%	82%	81%	84%	75%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	18%	7%	13%	12%	10%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	6%	5%	7%	6%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Corrupt conduct	81%	78%	83%	80%	87%	78%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	15%	8%	14%	8%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	7%	9%	5%	5%	7%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Corrupt conduct	81%	74%	82%	82%	81%	85%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	14%	12%	11%	13%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	12%	5%	7%	6%	3%

Removing a political rival from Parliament by offering them a high-paying or prestigious public appointment.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Corrupt conduct	76%	73%	79%	79%	74%	77%	74%
Not corrupt conduct	17%	22%	13%	16%	19%	15%	16%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	6%	8%	5%	7%	8%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Corrupt conduct	76%	79%	70%	76%	78%	80%
Not corrupt conduct	17%	15%	23%	14%	13%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	5%	8%	9%	9%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Corrupt conduct	76%	76%	79%	79%	76%	72%
Not corrupt conduct	17%	19%	13%	15%	14%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	5%	8%	6%	9%	7%

Reducing the resources available to auditors or anti-corruption commissions after they have made adverse findings against the government.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	81%	78%	83%	81%	80%	84%	77%
Not corrupt conduct	13%	15%	10%	15%	13%	9%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	7%	7%	5%	7%	7%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	81%	77%	82%	85%	85%	84%
Not corrupt conduct	13%	15%	13%	8%	6%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	9%	5%	6%	8%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	81%	78%	83%	79%	78%	83%
Not corrupt conduct	13%	15%	14%	15%	11%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	7%	8%	3%	6%	10%	7%

Rejecting or not adopting recommendations made by an anti-corruption commission after an investigation.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	66%	60%	72%	66%	65%	71%	63%
Not corrupt conduct	21%	25%	17%	22%	22%	18%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	14%	12%	12%	13%	11%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	66%	66%	66%	67%	71%	67%
Not corrupt conduct	21%	23%	21%	18%	16%	20%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	11%	14%	16%	13%	13%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	66%	72%	66%	69%	67%	61%
Not corrupt conduct	21%	17%	20%	20%	19%	26%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	11%	14%	11%	14%	14%

Signing a contract with an overseas company after being alerted to a risk that some of that money may go to corrupt officials.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	83%	78%	88%	82%	81%	84%	84%
Not corrupt conduct	11%	15%	7%	14%	10%	10%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	7%	6%	4%	9%	6%	9%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	83%	81%	81%	86%	88%	86%
Not corrupt conduct	11%	13%	13%	6%	11%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	6%	8%	1%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	83%	78%	83%	85%	84%	84%
Not corrupt conduct	11%	15%	11%	9%	8%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	8%	6%	6%	8%	6%

A senior public servant misleading Cabinet or the Parliament.

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Corrupt conduct	83%	77%	88%	82%	80%	85%	88%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	17%	7%	14%	14%	11%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	5%	5%	4%	6%	5%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Corrupt conduct	83%	83%	80%	86%	89%	85%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	13%	14%	9%	4%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	4%	6%	5%	7%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Corrupt conduct	83%	79%	83%	83%	85%	83%
Not corrupt conduct	12%	17%	12%	11%	7%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	4%	5%	6%	8%	5%