



FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF ALL?

HOW AUSTRALIANS VIEW THE INTEGRITY, COMPETENCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Authors: Samuel Wilson, Melissa Wheeler and Vlad Demsar.

<https://doi.org/10.25916/c3b7-vq19>

Publisher

Australian Leadership Index
Swinburne University of Technology
John Street, Hawthorn, Victoria 3122 Australia

Email: austleadershipindex@swin.edu.au

Web: <https://australianleadershipindex.org/>

Research partners

Dassier
Dynata

Date of publication

May 2023

Recommend citation: Wilson, S. G., Wheeler, M. A., & Demsar, V. (2023). *For the greater good of all? How Australians view the integrity, competence and contribution of federal government*. Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.



This report is released subject to a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND licence (Licence). This means, in summary, that you may reproduce, transmit and distribute the text, provided that you do not do so for commercial purposes, and provided that you attribute the text as extracted from this report. You must not alter, transform or build upon the text in this publication. Your rights under the Licence are in addition to any fair dealing rights which you have under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Please see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
RESEARCH APPROACH	9
LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS	12
AFTERWORD	19
GETTING INVOLVED	20



FOREWORD

In recent years, as chronicled in countless news stories and reports into trust, public integrity, accountability, transparency and corruption, our institutions of government have become widely seen as places of maladministration and misconduct, more concerned with serving self and vested interests ahead of the public interest. Although these concerns are expressed in relation to all levels of government, they are arguably most pronounced in relation to federal government.

In this special report, the Australian Leadership Index takes stock of the current state of federal government leadership for the greater good, as perceived by the Australian public. By examining public perceptions of government integrity, competence and contribution to public value, overall and against national benchmarks, we reveal the low esteem in which federal government is held and contextualise the results within Australia's wider institutional landscape.

Importantly, because the restoration of public trust in government must be a bipartisan or multi-partisan effort, we do not differentiate between the Morrison and Albanese governments in the findings presented in this report. Indeed, the administrations are represented fairly evenly in these results, which are based on data collected between October 2021 to March 2023.

Further, because governments are entrusted in public office to act in the public interest, we point to opportunities for political leaders across the aisle to begin to restore public trust in government. Specifically, we identify the factors that foster public perceptions of government integrity, competence and contribution and, in the long run, the sense that government serves the public interest.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report has four sections.

Section 1, **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**, provides a high-level summary of the Australian Leadership Index's results for the federal government.

Section 2, **RESEARCH APPROACH**, provides an overview of how this study of Australian leadership was conducted.

Section 3, **LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS**, presents detailed results of public perceptions of federal government integrity, competence, contribution, and leadership.

This section also examines the role that integrity, competence and contribution play in predicting public perceptions of government leadership and offers insights into how public perceptions of government integrity, competence, and contribution can be improved.

Finally, section 4, **GETTING INVOLVED**, invites you to engage with the Australian Leadership Index.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HIGH LEVEL LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

KEY FINDINGS

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP BELOW PAR

As an institution, the federal government is widely seen as enacting moderate leadership for the greater good, performing significantly below the national benchmarks on all leadership metrics: overall leadership, leadership for the greater good, and public leadership.

WEAKEST PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC INTEGRITY

The federal government is perceived to perform poorly on all three drivers of leadership for the greater good: *integrity*, *contribution* and *competence*. It performs especially poorly in terms of integrity.

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

Competence and contribution matter, but public integrity is critical. The top three drivers of public perceptions of federal government integrity are: (1) perceived honesty of intentions; (2) perceived ethicality of conduct; and (3) perceived sincerity of motives.



LEADERSHIP FOR THE GREATER GOOD

57_{/100}

- 7 POINTS BELOW THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK



INTEGRITY

55_{/100}

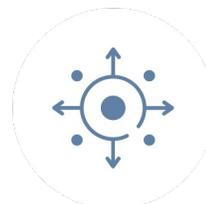
- 8 POINTS BELOW THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK



CONTRIBUTION

58_{/100}

- 8 POINTS BELOW THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK



COMPETENCE

58_{/100}

- 9 POINTS BELOW THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK

Sample details: These results are based on a sample collected from October 2021 to March 2023, $n = 824$ (i.e., the number of observations about the federal government) and $n = 20,098$ (i.e., the number of observations across the four sectors). The average of these 20,098 observations comprises the national benchmark on each metric.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WIDELY SEEN AS INCOMPETENT AND LACKING INTEGRITY

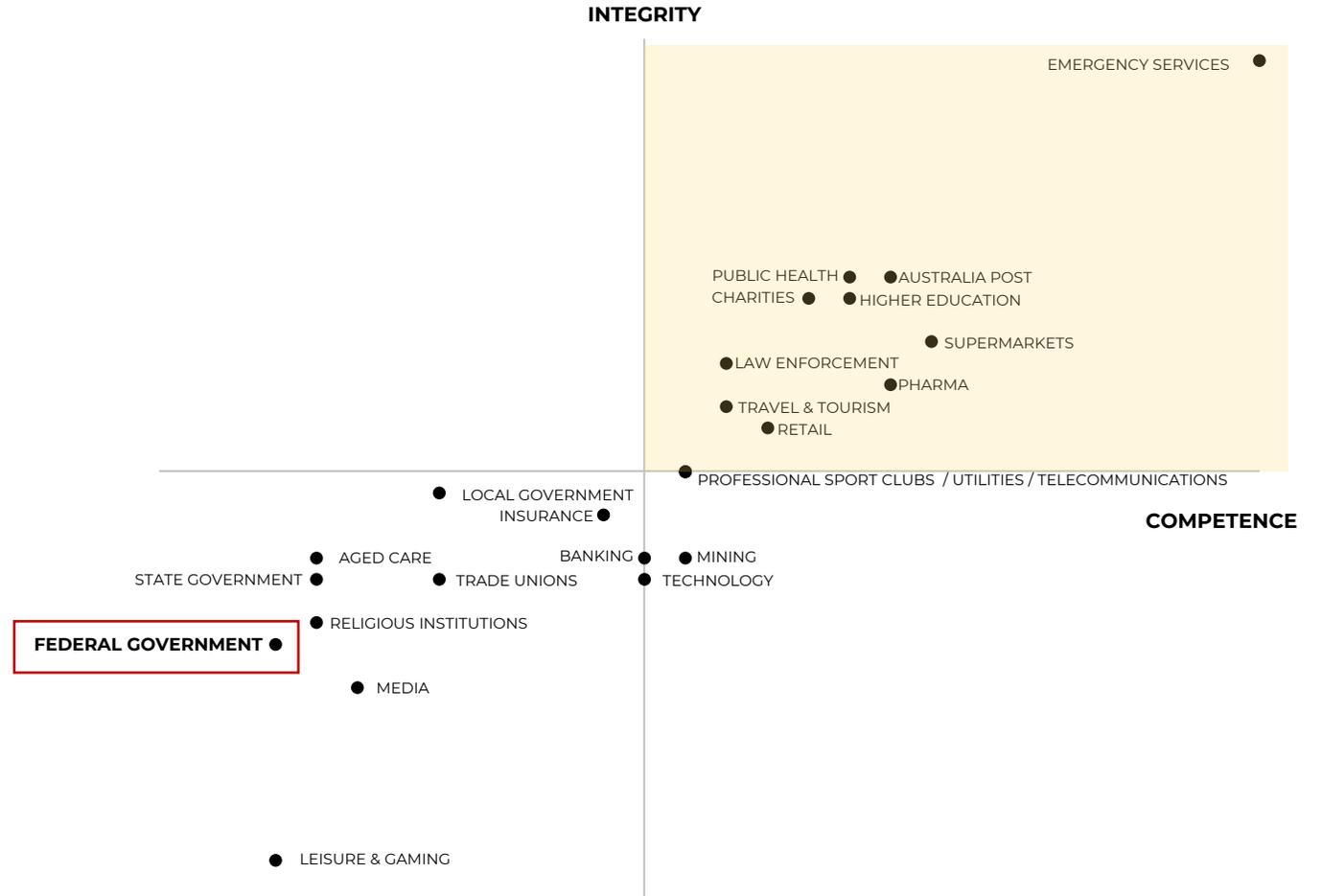
THE GOLDEN QUADRANT

Institutions in the 'golden quadrant' are viewed as having both good intentions and the ability to enact these intentions; both of which are major drivers of public trust.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SEEN TO LACK COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY

As an institution, the federal government could hardly be further away from the golden quadrant in the public mind.

From the vantage point of the Australian public, the federal government is seen as ill-intentioned and incompetent, and thus as undeserving of public trust.



Sample details: These results are based on a nationally representative sample collected from October 2021 to December 2022 of $n = 18,852$ (i.e., the number of observations from Australians who rated any institution across the four sectors), which equates to an average of 754 observations per institution.

RESEARCH APPROACH

METHODS AND MEASURES

THE ALI LEADERSHIP MODEL

LEADERSHIP FOR THE GREATER GOOD IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Leadership for the greater good is relevant to all institutions and sectors, not just the institutions of government. For this reason, the Australian Leadership Index (ALI) tracks public perceptions of a wide range of institutions across the government, public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

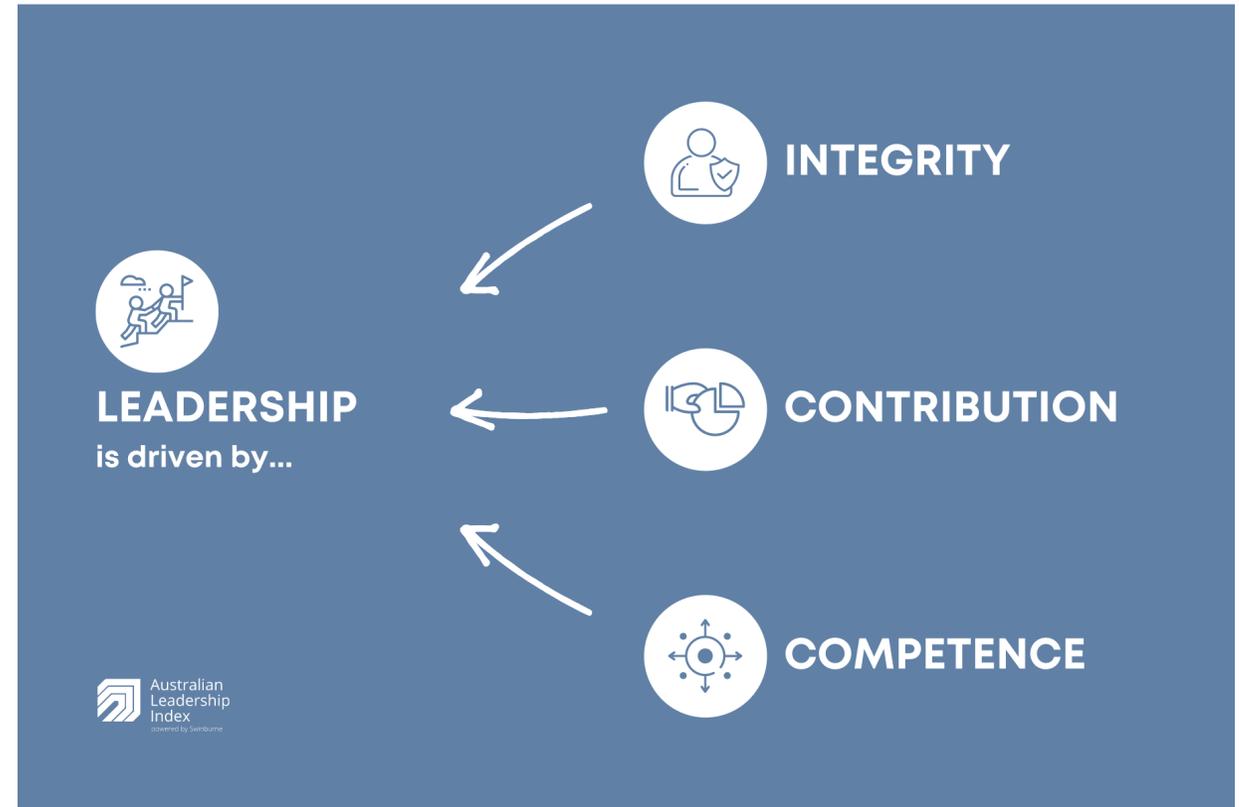
THE ALI LEADERSHIP MODEL

The Australian Leadership Index measures leadership, and its three drivers, integrity, contribution, and competence.

Integrity refers to factors like transparency, accountability, honesty of intentions.

Contribution refers to factors like contribution to financial outcomes, societal welfare, and environment.

Competence refers to factors like purpose, vision, skill, efficiency and service quality.

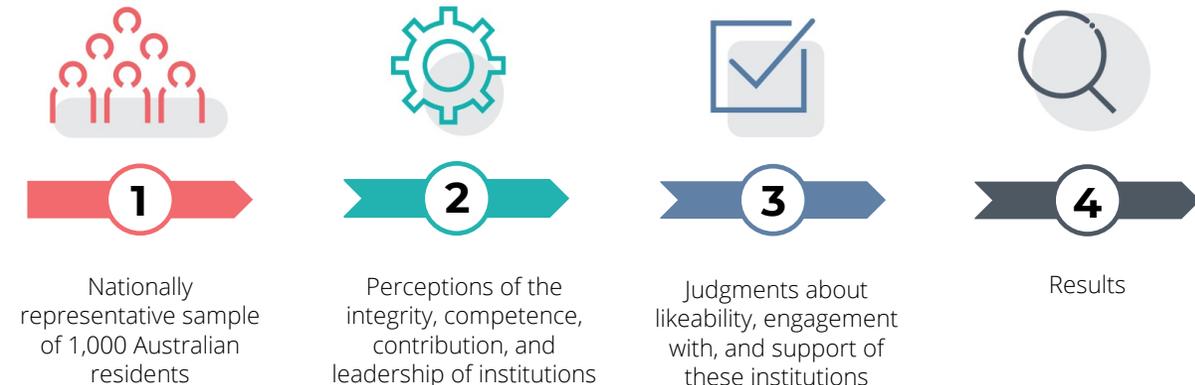


THE LARGEST EVER ONGOING SURVEY OF LEADERSHIP FOR THE GREATER GOOD IN AUSTRALIA

NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE

- ✓ Total 4,000 observations per quarter consisting of 1,000 participants, each rating four randomly selected institutions.
- ✓ Insights into 25 major institutions across the government, public, private and not-for-profit sectors.
- ✓ Nationally representative by age, gender and state proportions.
- ✓ Data collection is 'always on', increasing responsiveness to real world events.
- ✓ Comprehensive survey of public perceptions of leadership, including the drivers of leadership perceptions by institution and sector.
- ✓ Extensive respondent profiling data.

SURVEY PROCESS



Note. "Integrity" refers to perceptions of transparency, accountability, honesty of intentions, and several other factors. "Contribution" refers to perceptions of contribution to financial outcomes, societal welfare, environment, and several other factors. "Competence" refers to perceptions of purpose, vision, skill, efficiency, and several other factors. A full list and explanation of the measures used in this study can be found in the Australian Leadership Index metrics glossary: <https://www.australianleadershipindex.org/metrics-glossary/>

LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

DETAILED RESEARCH FINDINGS

PERCEPTIONS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP: 2021-23

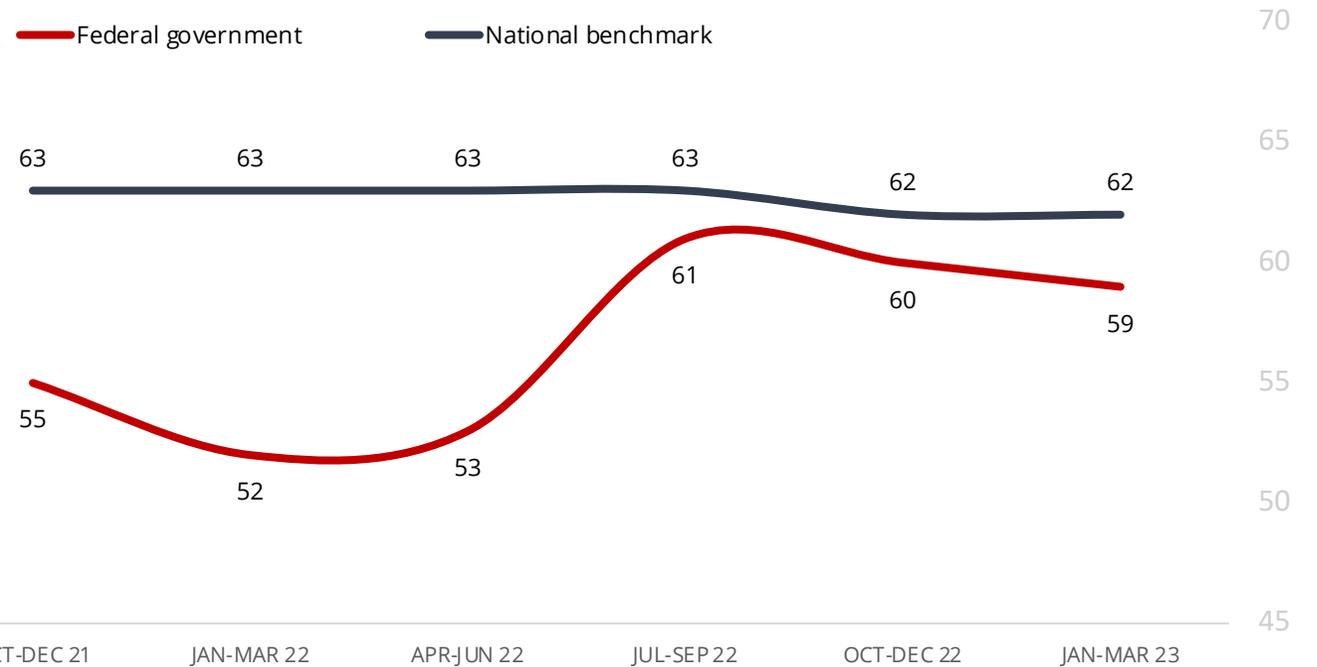
THE RISE AND FALL OF LEADERSHIP FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Public perceptions of government leadership fluctuated markedly between 2018 and 2021, rising and falling in response assorted crises.

After a stunning reversal of historic trends during the first year of the pandemic, perceptions of federal government leadership for the greater good fell precipitously throughout 2021.

POST-PANDEMIC, THE LEADERSHIP ROLLER COASTER CONTINUES

After rebounding following the 2022 federal election, public perceptions of government leadership for the greater good have begun to decline, steadily moving away from the national benchmark.



By 'leadership for the greater good', we are referring to when institutions make decisions, take actions, or develop policies that benefit or foster the well-being of the public, community, and society at large, rather than their own vested interests.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SECOND ONLY TO MEDIA AND GAMBLING IN TERMS OF PERCEIVED INTEGRITY

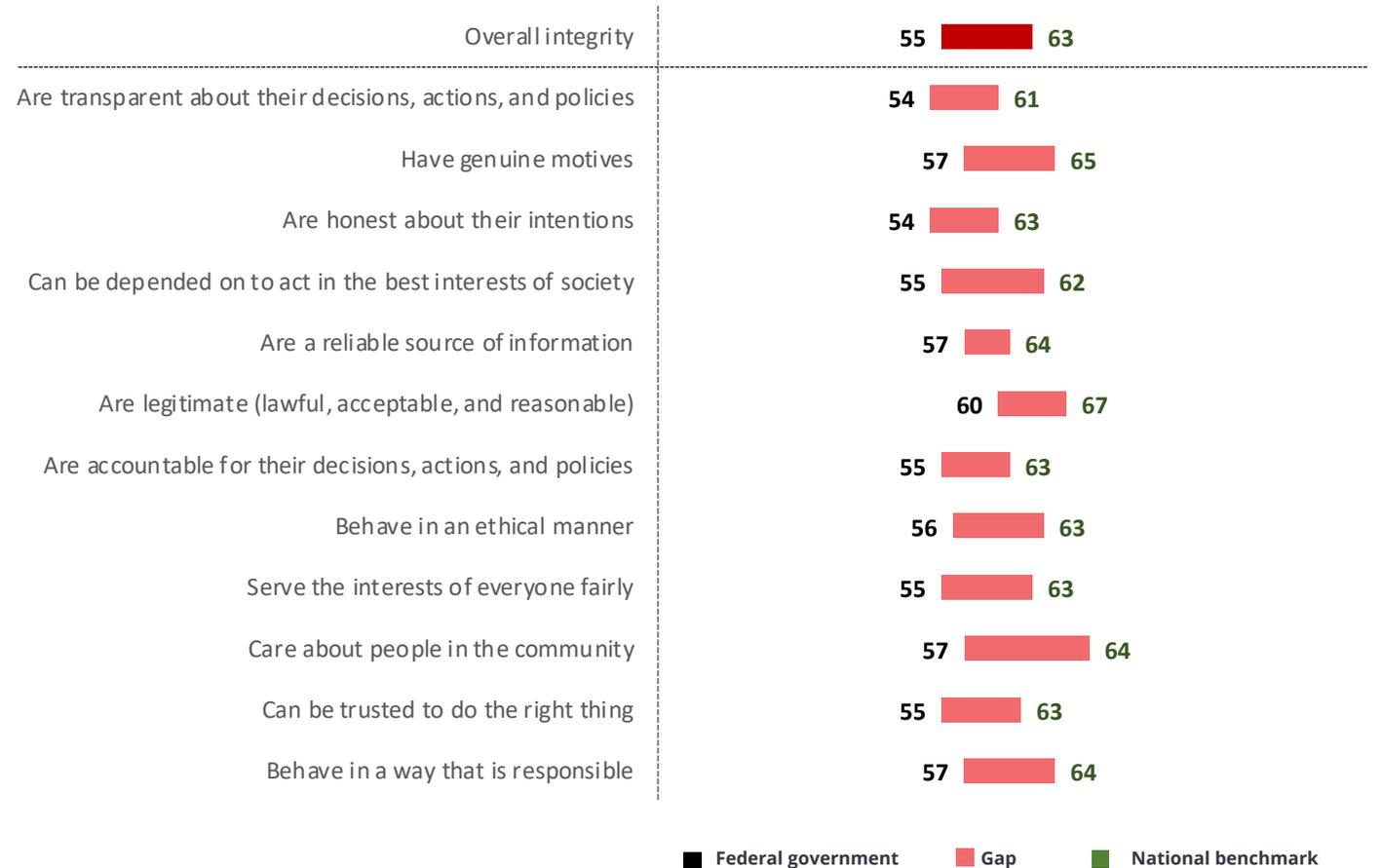
GOVERNMENT INTEGRITY IN THE RED

On all measures of *public integrity*, the federal government is in the red, falling significantly below the national benchmark.

From the vantage point of the public, the federal government performs especially poorly in terms of its apparent concern for people in the wider community and the extent to which it can be depended on to act in the best interest of society.

GOVERNMENT NEAR THE BOTTOM OF THE PUBLIC INTEGRITY LEAGUE TABLE

As an institution, the federal government is near the bottom of the public integrity league table. In the eyes of the public, the federal government ranks just above media companies and casinos.



Sample details: These results are based a sample collected from October 2021 to March 2023, $n = 824$ (i.e., the number of observations about the federal government) and $n = 20,098$ (i.e., the number of observations across the four sectors). The average of these 20,098 observations comprises the national benchmark on each metric).

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SECOND ONLY TO CHURCHES AND GAMBLING IN TERMS OF PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION

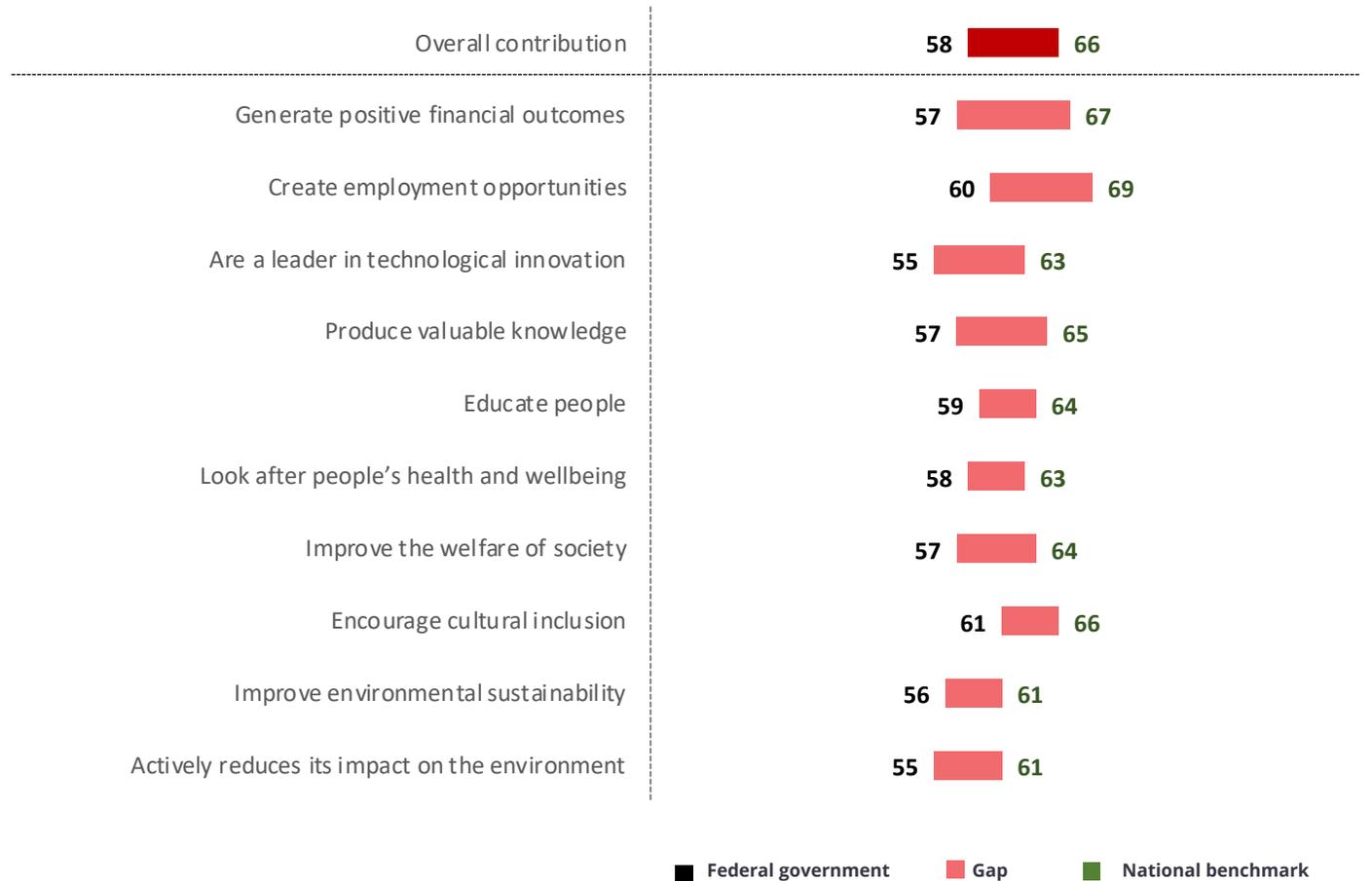
CONTRIBUTION RATINGS WELL BELOW NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

On all measures of *contribution*, the federal government is seen as performing well below the national benchmark.

From the vantage point of the public, the federal government performs especially poorly in terms of its creation of employment opportunities and the generation of positive financial outcomes.

GOVERNMENT AMONG WORST PERFORMERS IN TERMS OF CREATION OF PUBLIC VALUE

Again, as an institution, the federal government is near the bottom of the league table. In the eyes of the public, the federal government ranks just above religious institutions and gambling companies in terms of their contribution to public value.



Sample details: These results are based a sample collected from October 2021 to March 2023, $n = 824$ (i.e., the number of observations about the federal government) and $n = 20,098$ (i.e., the number of observations across the four sectors. The average of these 20,098 observations comprises the national benchmark on each metric).

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LEAGUE TABLE IN TERMS OF PERCEIVED COMPETENCE

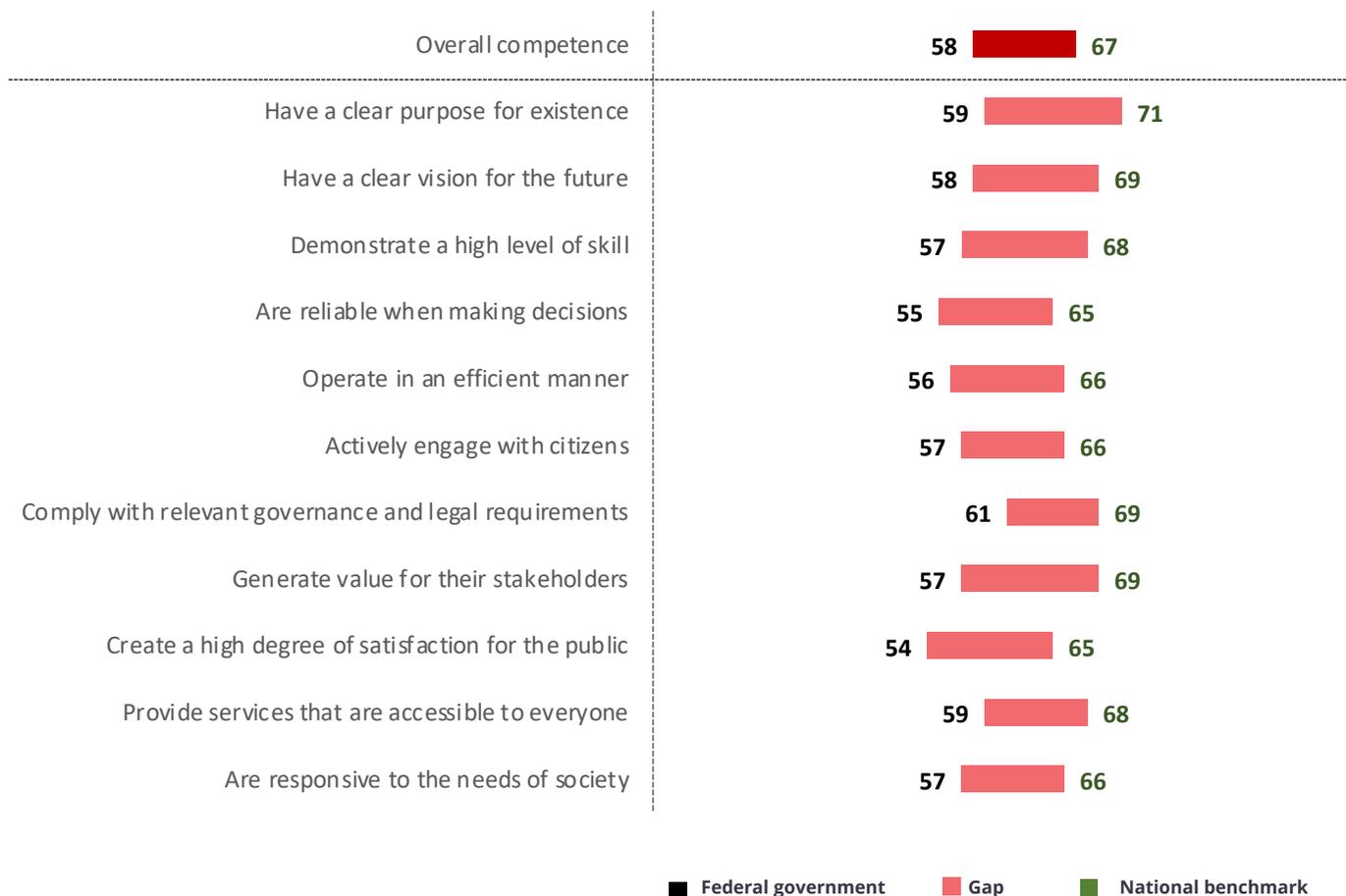
GOVERNMENT COMPETENCE RATINGS WELL BELOW NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

The federal government performs significantly below national benchmarks on all measures of *competence*.

From the point of view of ordinary Australians, the government performs especially poorly in terms of their purpose for existence and the creation of value for their major stakeholders; namely, citizens.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT JUDGED AS THE LEAST COMPETENT OF ALL INSTITUTIONS

As an institution, the federal government is tied with gaming and gambling companies as the least competent institution of the dozens of institutions measured by the Australian Leadership Index.



Sample details: These results are based a sample collected from October 2021 to March 2023, $n = 824$ (i.e., the number of observations about the federal government) and $n = 20,098$ (i.e., the number of observations across the four sectors). The average of these 20,098 observations comprises the national benchmark on each metric).

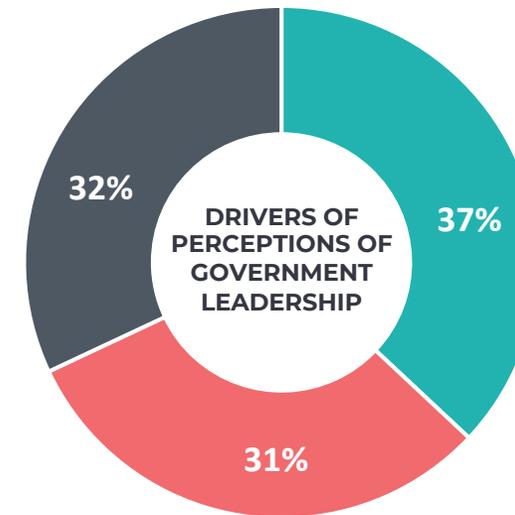
WHAT DRIVES PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP? THE ROLE OF INTEGRITY, COMPETENCE AND CONTRIBUTION

WHAT ROLE DOES INTEGRITY, COMPETENCE AND CONTRIBUTION PLAY IN LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS?

In addition to using integrity, competence and contribution metrics to assess perceptions of the federal government overall and in comparison to national benchmarks, these metrics can also be used to glean insights into the role these factors play in explaining public perceptions of federal government leadership.

COMPETENCE AND CONTRIBUTION ARE IMPORTANT, BUT INTEGRITY IS CRITICAL

Good intentions are critical (integrity), but the ability of federal government to enact these good intentions (competence) and produce good outcomes (contribution) are also very important.



■ Integrity ■ Contribution ■ Competence

Model fit: R-squared for overall linear regression model $R^2=0.92$. All drivers significant at $p<.001$ confidence interval.

Sample details: Nationally representative sample, from October 2021 to March 2023, $n = 824$.

Note. 'Integrity' refers to perceptions of transparency, accountability, honesty of intentions, and several other factors. 'Contribution' refers to perceptions of contribution to financial outcomes, societal welfare, environment, and several other factors. 'Competence' refers to perceptions of purpose, vision, skill, efficiency, and several other factors.

WHAT CAN POLITICAL LEADERS DO TO FOSTER PUBLIC FAITH IN THE INTEGRITY, COMPETENCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

Restoring public trust in the institution of federal government requires political leaders across the aisle to work together. The results of the Australian Leadership Index suggest that there are a host of things that political leaders can do, individually and collectively, to improve public perceptions of the integrity, competence and and contribution of this critical political institution.

TOP 5 DRIVERS OF INTEGRITY

1. Be honest about their intentions
2. Behave in an ethical manner
3. Have genuine motives
4. Care about people in the community
5. Be transparent about decisions, actions, and policies

TOP 5 DRIVERS OF COMPETENCE

1. Be reliable when making decisions
2. Create a high degree of satisfaction for public
3. Operate in an efficient manner
4. Demonstrate a high level of skill
5. Have a clear vision for the future

TOP 5 DRIVERS OF CONTRIBUTION

1. Generate positive financial outcomes
2. Produce valuable knowledge
3. Create employment opportunities
4. Improve the welfare of society
5. Improve environmental sustainability



AFTERWORD

Against a backdrop of countless news stories and reports into trust, public integrity, accountability, transparency and corruption, federal government has come to be seen as place of maladministration and misconduct that, too often, seems more concerned with vested interests than the public interest.

The results presented in this report largely affirm this conception of federal government. Fairly or otherwise, the community views federal government as an institution that lacks integrity and competence, and that makes only a modest contribution to the creation of public value. These public perceptions are evident across dozens of indicators of integrity, competence and contribution. Overall, this pattern of results paints a dismal picture of this institution.

Although the federal government is not alone in being perceived in this way – the public holds similarly critical views of state and local governments – the federal government is held in the lowest esteem of all, as reflected in its position at or near the bottom of all the Australian Leadership Index's league tables.

However, these results also point to opportunities for renewal and the gradual restoration of public trust. Because public perceptions of government leadership are underpinned, in broadly equal measure, by perceptions of integrity, competence and contribution, there are many opportunities across many domains for political leaders to demonstrate their commitment to the public interest; the long-term welfare and wellbeing of the general population.

For example, to foster public perceptions of integrity, honesty, transparency and genuine concern for the wellbeing of the community are central. To foster perceptions of contribution, the creation of social, economic and environmental value is critical. Finally, good intentions matter little if they cannot be enacted. Thus, to foster perceptions of competence, a clear vision for the future is important, as are high levels of skill, reliability, and efficiency in delivering on the responsibilities of federal government.

GETTING INVOLVED

HELP US SUSTAIN LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

MEET THE ALI TEAM



Dr Sam Wilson

Associate Professor,
Leadership

Research areas include leadership for the greater good and psychological studies of humanitarianism.

[Researcher profile >>](#)



Dr Melissa Wheeler

Senior Lecturer, Business
Ethics

Research areas include organisational ethics, moral decision making, and female representation in leadership.

[Researcher profile >>](#)



Dr Vlad Demsar

Lecturer, Marketing

Research areas include marketing strategy, consumer behaviour, digital cultures, and crisis management.

[Researcher profile >>](#)

A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT LEADERSHIP IN AUSTRALIA IS NOW MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER



Lack of leadership for the greater good

Australians are tired of leaders and institutions that prioritise self-interest over the public interest. The mission of the Australian Leadership Index is to provoke and sustain a national conversation about the nature of leadership for the greater good and the future of leadership for the good in Australia.



ALI inspires leadership in Australia

The Australian Leadership Index was created to measure and track perceptions of leadership for the greater good, with a view to inspire and sustain a culture of leadership for the greater good within and across institutions and sectors.



The largest study of leadership for the good

The Australian Leadership Index is the largest ever ongoing research study of public perceptions of leadership for the greater good in Australia, covering a range of institutions in the government, public, private and not-for-profit sectors.



Supported by
The Graham Foundation

The Australian Leadership Index is made possible by the generous support of The Graham Foundation, which has supported the ALI since its inception in 2018.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

We make it possible for all Australians to get involved in the national conversation about leadership.

Visit our website to explore all of the different options.

australianleadershipindex.org



**VIEW THE RESULTS IN OUR
ONLINE DASHBOARD**



**READ OUR ARTICLES AND
INSIGHTS REPORTS**



**WATCH THE FUTURE OF
LEADERSHIP VIDEO SERIES**



**ASK FOR MEDIA COMMENT
ON LEADERSHIP TOPICS**



**TALK TO US ABOUT
LEADERSHIP CONSULTING**



**BOOK SEMINARS AND
CORPORATE TRAINING**



**BECOME A SPONSOR OF
THE LEADERSHIP INDEX**

THANK YOU

AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP INDEX
