



Social
Research
Centre

A subsidiary of



Australian
National
University

The Life in Australia™ Historic Events Survey:

Australians Name the
10 Most Significant Historic
Events of Their Lifetime

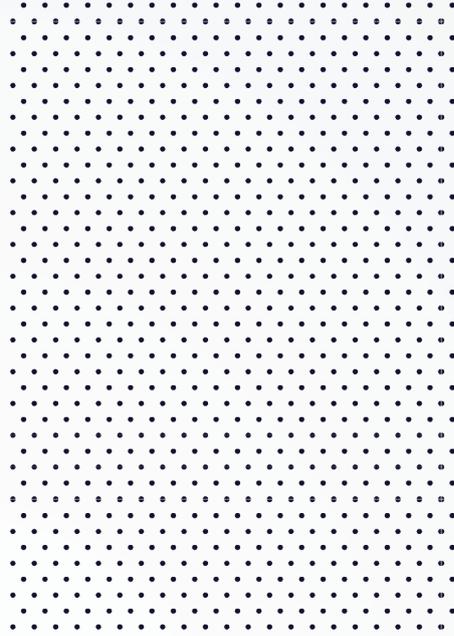
Topline Report

Darren Pennay¹, Frank Bongiorno², Paul Myers³

¹ Darren Pennay is founder and CEO of the Social Research Centre. He is also a Campus visitor at the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Queensland's Institute for Social Science Research.

² Frank Bongiorno, FRHistS, FASSA, is Professor in the School of History at the Australian National University.

³ Dr Paul Myers is Executive Director of Quantitative Research Consulting at the Social Research Centre. He is also a Campus visitor at the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods.



About the Social Research Centre

The Social Research Centre provides the Australian social science research community with access to world-class social research services. Our motivation stems from the desire to collect data of the highest quality, undertake research in the public good, enhance knowledge and contribute to an improved understanding of Australian society.

Our service offer includes in-house primary data collection via telephone, online, hard copy and mixed modes; advice on all aspects of survey research and qualitative research, sophisticated sampling and weighting solutions, data management and data processing services, statistical advisory services and analytical and interpretative reporting. The Social Research Centre is a subsidiary of the Australian National University.



Executive Summary



Momentous world and local events shape our view of the world and our view of Australian life. The perception that change is occurring at an ever-increasing rate may be due to the tumultuous times we live in and fuelled by the information age and the ubiquity of social media and the 24-hour news cycle. In Australia, the fact the nation has seen five changes of Prime Minister between 2007 and 2015 may also contribute to the perception we live in a rapidly changing world.

Whatever the perception is regarding the pace of change, we are undoubtedly living through turbulent times both domestically and internationally in terms of our environment, society and economy. While it may seem at times that we are being continuously buffeted by current events, it is also the case that, via the internet, the past is more accessible than ever before. One illustration of this is the continuing boom in family history and genealogy.

In the lead up to Australia Day 2018 researchers at the Social Research Centre, in collaboration with colleagues from the Australian National University, thought it opportune to reflect on our shared history and the nation-shaping events that have occurred in our lifetime, and to consider which particular aspects of our past are the most significant in terms of how we understand our identity and our place in the world. To this end, we asked 2,074 members of the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia™ panel to nominate up to 10 historic events in their lifetime that, in their view, have had the greatest impact on the country. The youngest survey participant is aged 18 years and the oldest 93 years.

The event that topped the list as the most frequently mentioned (at 30%) was same-sex marriage – no surprise considering the timing of the survey late in 2017. Same-sex marriage just shaded the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon on September 11 2001

(at 27%). Others that made the top ten were Kevin Rudd's Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples (13%), the Port Arthur Massacre (13%), the Sydney Olympics (12%), the Dismissal of the Whitlam Government (12%) and the Vietnam War (11%). In single figures, but still in the top ten, were the Apollo 11 moon landing and the arrival of the internet, both at 9%, and Australia II's America's Cup victory, the Global Financial Crisis and the election of Julia Gillard as the first female prime minister, all at 8%.

There are some differences across the generations. For GenZ (born in 1995 or after) and Millennials (born between 1980 and 1994) the same-sex marriage vote is the most frequently mentioned event, for GenX (born between 1965 and 1979) it is September 11. For Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), it is the Vietnam War, while for the Silent Generation (born in 1945 or earlier) it is World War 2.

The historic event that has made us most proud of our country (nominated by 13% of participants) is the same-sex marriage vote followed by the Sydney Olympics (10%). The event that has made us most disappointed in our country is our treatment of offshore asylum seekers (8%).

When asked to consider which single event had the greatest impact on Australia, the most common response is the September 11 terrorist attacks. This is true for all generations apart from the Silent Generation for whom World War 2 is the single most important nation-defining event of their lifetime. The September 11 terrorist attacks are the single most important historic event for females and males, those living in our capital cities and those outside of the capitals, those living in the most and least disadvantaged areas of our country and across the political divide. The September 11 attacks were also deemed to be the most significant historic event regardless of educational attainment or personal income. For overseas-born participants September 11 was just shaded by same-sex marriage as the single most significant nation-shaping historic event of their lifetime.

It is noteworthy that Indigenous events such as the Apology, the Mabo decision and the 1967 Aboriginal referendum continue to resonate in our collective memory (mentioned by 24%), as do immigration-related events such as the refugee crisis and offshore detention centres (mentioned by 14%).

The historic event that has made us most proud of our country (nominated by 13% of participants) is the same-sex marriage vote followed by the Sydney Olympics (10%). The event that has made us most disappointed in our country is our treatment of offshore asylum seekers (8%).

The findings of this survey show the common threads of the shared history that bind generations of Australians together, as well as the differences between those generations.



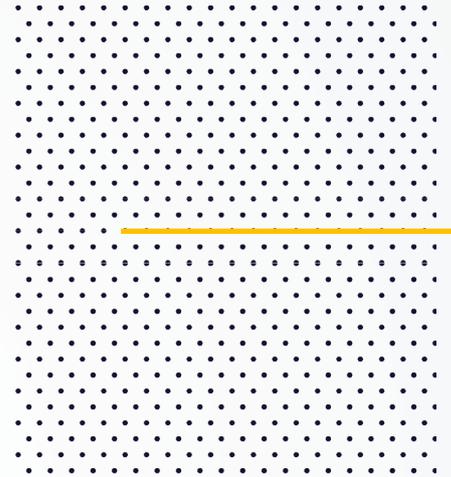
Top 10 Most Significant Historic Events in Living Memory

Life in Australia™ participants were asked to name the 10 historic events that had occurred in their lifetime they thought had the greatest impact on the country. They could mention a specific event, a series of related events, or any other historic developments or changes that had an important impact on the nation. Events were not prompted in any way nor listed in any order.

In response to this question, Life in Australia™ participants mentioned more than 300 unique events across a range of broad themes including law, politics, human rights, technology, sport, terrorism, war, the economy, international events, immigration and multiculturalism, infrastructure and transport, health and the environment.

However, clearly standing out in our national consciousness are two events: the recent same-sex marriage process and the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11 2001.

Given the proximity of the Historic Events Survey to the same-sex marriage postal survey and subsequent announcement of the results, it perhaps comes as no surprise that same-sex marriage is the most frequently mentioned historic event. About one in three (30%) Australians include same-sex marriage as one of the 10 historic events that occurred during their lifetime that had the greatest impact on the country. Same-sex marriage just shaded the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11 2001 at 27 per cent.



Top 10 historic events

1	Same-sex marriage	30%
2	September 11	27%
3	The Apology	13%
4	Port Arthur Massacre	13%
5	2000 Sydney Olympics	12%
6	The Dismissal	12%
7	Vietnam War	11%
8	Moon landing	9%
9	The internet / WWW	9%
10	America's Cup win	8%
	Global Financial Crisis	8%
	First female PM	8%

Near misses (all 7%): Bali bombings, Gun law reforms, Lindt Café siege and World War 2.

4 The same-sex marriage postal vote was announced on 9 August with the voting period from 12 September to 7 November. The result was announced on 15 November.

Other historic events that figure prominently in our national consciousness and were mentioned by more than one in ten Australians are:

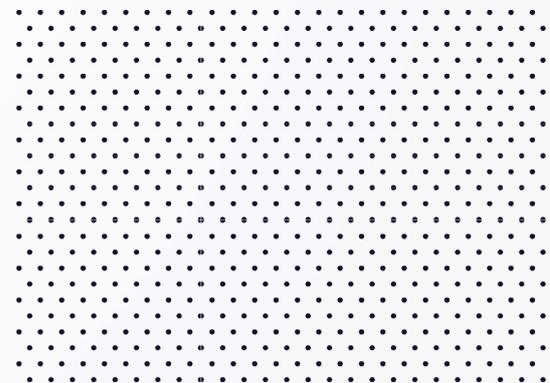
- The national Apology to Australia's Indigenous people for the Stolen Generations (13%). 'The Apology' came about as a recommendation from The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families that resulted in the *Bringing them Home* report. The apology was delivered in Parliament by the then Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008. The apology and the response by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, resulted in a commitment to a Closing the Gap strategy and annual statement aimed at reducing the gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as well as the gaps in infant mortality and life expectancy.
- The Port Arthur Massacre (13%) which took place in April 1996 and resulted in 35 people being killed by a lone gunman using semi-automatic weapons. The Port Arthur Massacre remains the deadliest mass shooting in Australia's history and was a driving force behind the introduction of gun control laws by the government of Prime Minister John Howard in 1996. The introduction of the gun control laws was mentioned by 7%.
- The 2000 Sydney Olympics (12%).
- The dismissal of the Whitlam government and the ensuing 'constitutional crisis' which unfolded in November 1975 (12%), and
- the Vietnam war (1962-1973) (11%).

Other top 10 mentions include:

- The 1969 moon landing by Apollo 11 (9%), and
- The dawn and rise of the internet / worldwide web (9%).⁵

Tied for tenth were:

- The winning of the America's Cup yacht race by Australia II in 1983. This was the first time in the 132-year history of the race that the Cup had been won by a team other than the New York Yacht Club (8%).
- The Global Financial Crisis of late in the first decade of the 21st century and the lingering effects thereof (8%), and
- The election of Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in 2010 (also 8%).



⁵ The internet was invented in 1989. Internet penetration was achieved to over 50% of Australian households in 2002-03 (53%), ABS Cat. 8146.0, Household Use of Information Technology, 22 September 2004

Generation



For our youngest survey participants (GenZ and the Millennials) same-sex marriage is the most frequently mentioned historic event for its impact on Australia in their lifetime, at 41% and 42% respectively. For both of these groups September 11 was the next most frequently mentioned event. **These generations both mention the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in their top 10 and are the only ones to do so.** The Lindt Café siege (18%) is of far more significance for GenZ than any other generation.⁶

For GenX the most frequently mentioned historic event is September 11 (35%), for Baby Boomers the Vietnam War (28%) and for the Silent Generation, World War 2 is the event which resonates most profoundly, nominated by 44 per cent. The dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's government in 1975 by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr (27%) resonates more strongly among Baby Boomers than all other generations. The only event to make the top ten for each generation is same-sex marriage. The September 11 attacks figure prominently among all generations, but does not make the top ten for the Silent Generation (as mentioned by 7%).

The Generations defined

Silent Generation: Born 1945 or before (aged 72 to 93 in 2017)

Baby Boomers: 1946 to 1964 (aged 53 to 71 in 2017)

Generation X: 1965 to 1979 (aged 38 to 52 in 2017)

Millennials: 1980 to 1994 (aged 23 to 37 in 2017)

Generation Z: 1995 or later (aged 22 or younger in 2017)

⁶ The Lindt Café siege took place in Sydney's Martin Place on 15-16 December 2014 when a lone gunman held 18 people hostage and an 18-hour standoff with police ensued. Two hostages were killed, one by the gunman and one via a ricochet from police gunfire during the rescue. The gunman was also killed. The incident was treated as a terrorist attack.

Historic events by generation

	Generation Z	%	Generation Y / Millennials	%	Generation X	%
1	Same-sex marriage	41	Same-sex marriage	42	September 11	35
2	September 11	28	September 11	36	Same-sex marriage	30
3	The Apology	27	The Apology	16	Port Arthur Massacre	21
4	Lindt Café Siege	18	2000 Sydney Olympics	14	The Apology	18
5	First female PM	15	Port Arthur Massacre	13	2000 Sydney Olympics	16
6	2000 Sydney Olympics	14	Global Financial Crisis	12	America's Cup win	15
7	Gun law reform	12	Bali bombings	10	The internet / WWW	12
8	Steve Irwin's death	10	First female PM	10	Bali bombings	11
9	Iraq war	9	Lindt Café Siege	9	First female PM	10
10	Bali bombings	9	Donald Trump's election	8	Mabo decision	9
	Donald Trump's election	9	Gun law reform	8	Gun law reform	9
			The internet / WWW	8		

	Baby boomers	%	Silent Generation	%
1	Vietnam War	28	World War 2	44
2	The Dismissal	27	Moon landing	19
3	Same-sex marriage	24	Vietnam War	18
4	Moon landing	21	The Dismissal	17
5	September 11	20	Queen Elizabeth II*	13
6	America's Cup win	12	Same-sex marriage	13
7	Port Arthur Massacre	11	Air travel	11
8	Decimal currency	11	Various infrastructure projects**	11
9	2000 Sydney Olympics	10	Decimal currency	9
10	Cyclone Tracy	10	Television	8
			Medical advancements	8

* Includes mentions of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and visits to Australia

** Including infrastructure projects such as the Construction of the Sydney Opera House, the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric scheme and the advent of renewable energy.

Political party identification

Similarities and differences are apparent when the significant events in Australian history are viewed through the lens of political party affiliation. **Party affiliation is determined by the question 'Generally speaking, which political party do you usually think of yourself as a supporter of?'**

In the top 10 among supporters of the three major political parties - Coalition, ALP and Greens - are six common events: same-sex marriage, September 11, the 2000 Olympics, the Port Arthur Massacre, the Dismissal, and the Internet.

Differences are also evident. While the most frequently mentioned historic events for ALP

(37%) and Greens (45%) supporters is same-sex marriage, for Coalition supporters the most frequently mentioned is September 11 (30%). Other events uniquely mentioned by Coalition supporters were the Moon landing, World War 2, the Bali bombings and the Global Financial Crisis.

For ALP and Greens supporters, the Apology to Australia's Indigenous people for the Stolen Generations and the election of Australia's first female Prime Minister made their top 10, but are absent from the top 10 for Coalition supporters. For Greens supporters, the Mabo decision and the introduction of gun control laws are frequently mentioned.

Historic events by political party identification

	Coalition	%	Labor Party (ALP)	%	Greens	%
1	September 11	30	Same-sex marriage	37	Same-sex marriage	45
2	Same-sex marriage	27	September 11	26	September 11	30
3	Vietnam War	16	The Apology	20	The Apology	25
4	2000 Olympic Games	15	Port Arthur Massacre	15	Port Arthur Massacre	17
5	Moon landing	14	The Dismissal	14	2000 Olympic Games	16
6	Port Arthur Massacre	13	First female PM	11	The Dismissal	12
7	The Dismissal	13	Vietnam War	11	First female PM	12
8	World War 2	12	2000 Olympic Games	11	The internet / WWW	12
9	Bali bombings	10	America's Cup win	10	Mabo decision	11
10	Global Financial Crisis	9	The internet / WWW	9	Gun Law reform	10
	America's Cup win	9			Lindt Café Siege	10
	The internet / WWW	9				

One Nation Voters

While caution is needed given the small sample size (n=82) potential One Nation voters were identified via the following question, 'If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?' Notable findings among those who identified as potential One Nation voters are that neither the Apology nor the Port Arthur Massacre feature in their top ten most frequently mentioned events. Same-sex marriage which ranks as one or two for those who identify as Coalition, Labor and Green supported comes in at number 7 among potential One Nation voters.

Gender

Differences between women and men in terms of the resonance of historic events is more a matter of emphasis than substance. In fact, of the top 10 events for women and men, seven are common to both. These are same-sex marriage, September 11, the Dismissal, the Apology, the Port Arthur Massacre, the Vietnam War and the 2000 Olympics (see Tables Appendix).

Events unique in the top ten for women are Julia Gillard as the first female Prime Minister (11% compared to 4% of men) and the emergence of the internet, the Bali bombings and the Lindt Café siege (all at 9% and tied for ninth place). Tragedies such as the Bali bombings, the Lindt Café siege and the Port Arthur Massacre seemed to resonate more strongly among women than men.

Unique among the top ten most frequently mentioned events by men but not women are the moon landing (11%), the Americas Cup victory (9%) and the Global Financial Crisis (9%).



Geography

Also examined is whether perceptions of historic events vary between capital city and non-capital city residents and for residents living in our most advantaged and most disadvantaged areas of the country⁷ (see Tables Appendix).

Same-sex marriage is more commonly cited as an event of national significance for those residing in capital cities (33%) compared to those residing in regional, rural or remote areas (24%). The Apology to Indigenous people is also more likely to be cited by residents of our capital cities (15% compared to 10%). There is some suggestion in these data that progressive issues, such as same-sex marriage and the Apology, are more likely to resonate in our nation's capitals than in the regional, rural or remote areas of the country.

The relative disadvantage of someone's geographic location seemingly has little impact on how historic events are perceived. Those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country share eight of their top 10 events with those living in the least disadvantaged areas. These are same-sex marriage, September 11, the Vietnam War, the Port Arthur Massacre, the Dismissal, the moon landing, the Apology and the 2000 Olympics.

The events uniquely mentioned by those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country are World War 2 (10%), The Lindt Café siege (9%) and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (8%) in 1997 following a motor vehicle accident in Paris.



⁷ The Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is a general socio-economic index that summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. A low score indicates relatively greater disadvantage in general. For example, an area could have a low score if there are (among other things): many households with low income, many people with no qualifications, or many people in low skill occupations. A high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage in general. For example, an area may have a high score if there are (among other things): few households with low incomes, few people with no qualifications, and few people in low skilled occupations. For our analysis we use quintiles to compare the survey responses from participants living in areas in the lowest IRSD score (the most disadvantaged quintile) to those responses from survey participants living in areas with highest IRSD score (the least disadvantaged quintile).

See <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/2033.0.55.001main+features100052011>.

State/Territory differences

While the Life in Australia™ Historic Events Survey was designed and undertaken to provide a national perspective, careful interpretation does permit some limited commentary at the state and territory level, particularly for the more populous states. Refer to the Tables Appendix for these data.

Among the notable State/Territory findings are the following:

New South Wales	The Sydney Olympics are much more likely to be mentioned by residents of NSW (18%) compared to the national average (12%). This was also the case for the Lindt Café siege (10% in NSW compared with 7% nationally).
Victoria	The Black Saturday bushfires are more likely to be mentioned in Victoria (6%) than elsewhere (national average – 3%). Sporting events are more likely to be mentioned in Victoria (5%) than NSW (1%).
Queensland	The Queensland floods are included in the top 10 by Queenslanders (9%). Sporting events more likely to be mentioned in Queensland (8%) than elsewhere.
South Australia	The moon landing resonates more strongly among South Australians (16%) than across the nation (9%). Princess Diana’s death is mentioned by 11% of South Australians compared with 5% nationally.
Western Australia	West Australians more likely to mention the Americas Cup win (16%), the Bali bombings (13%) and the mining boom (5%).
Tasmania	The Port Arthur Massacre was the most frequently mentioned event in Tasmania (32%). Nationally the proportion mentioning Port Arthur was 13%. Princess Diana’s death and the Mabo decision were also more frequently mentioned by survey participants residing in Tasmania.
Northern Territory	Gun law reform, the Mabo decision/Indigenous land rights and Cyclone Tracy are more dominant issues in the Northern Territory.
Australian Capital Territory	The Vietnam war tops the list in the ACT. The ACT is the only State/Territory in which the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States makes the top ten.



Educational attainment

Perceptions of the most significant historic events are reasonably consistent across different levels of educational attainment, with eight of the top 10 plus ties being the same for those who had completed a University degree and those who had not (see Tables Appendix).

Events that appear to resonate more strongly with those who have completed a University degree are the Global Financial crisis (15%) and the Mabo decision (10%) - a landmark court case led by Eddie Mabo which concluded in

1992 and resulted in the recognition of native title in Australia and the rejection of *terra nullius*.

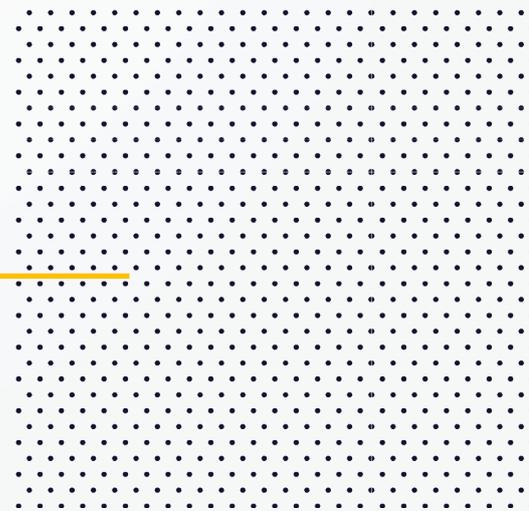
Possibly reflecting their older age profile, events uniquely mentioned by non-University graduates are the Moon landing (10%), the Americas Cup win (9%) and World War 2 (7%). Non-University graduates are also more likely to mention the Bali Bombings in 2002 [and 2005] (7%).

Income

The two most frequently mentioned historic events – same-sex marriage and September 11 – are ranked one and two by low, middle, and high income earners alike (see Tables Appendix). Other historic events common across these broad income categories are the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the Dismissal, the Apology and the Port Arthur Massacre – although of note is that the Apology and the Port Arthur Massacre ranked higher in the top

10 for middle and upper income earners than for those on lower income.

For lower and middle income survey participants, the Vietnam War and the America's Cup win made the top 10 most significant historic events, but were absent from the top 10 for higher income earners. Mention of the Global Financial Crisis increased with income.



Birthplace

The most significant events in Australian history as named by those born in Australia and those born overseas largely overlap, with eight of the top 10 being the same (see Tables Appendix).

The only notable differences are that those born overseas more frequently mention the Americas Cup win (8%), the Global Financial crisis (7%) and The Lindt Café siege (6%). Those born in Australia are more likely to mention the advent of the internet/worldwide web (10%) and the election of Australia's first female Prime Minister (9%).

Indigenous Australians

Although very cautious interpretation is required given the small sample size (n=40), same-sex marriage is more commonly mentioned among the top 10 historic events by Indigenous survey participants (41%) compared with the non-Indigenous participants (30%). The same is true with respect to the Apology (37% compared with 12%) and the Port Arthur Massacre (23% compared with 12%).



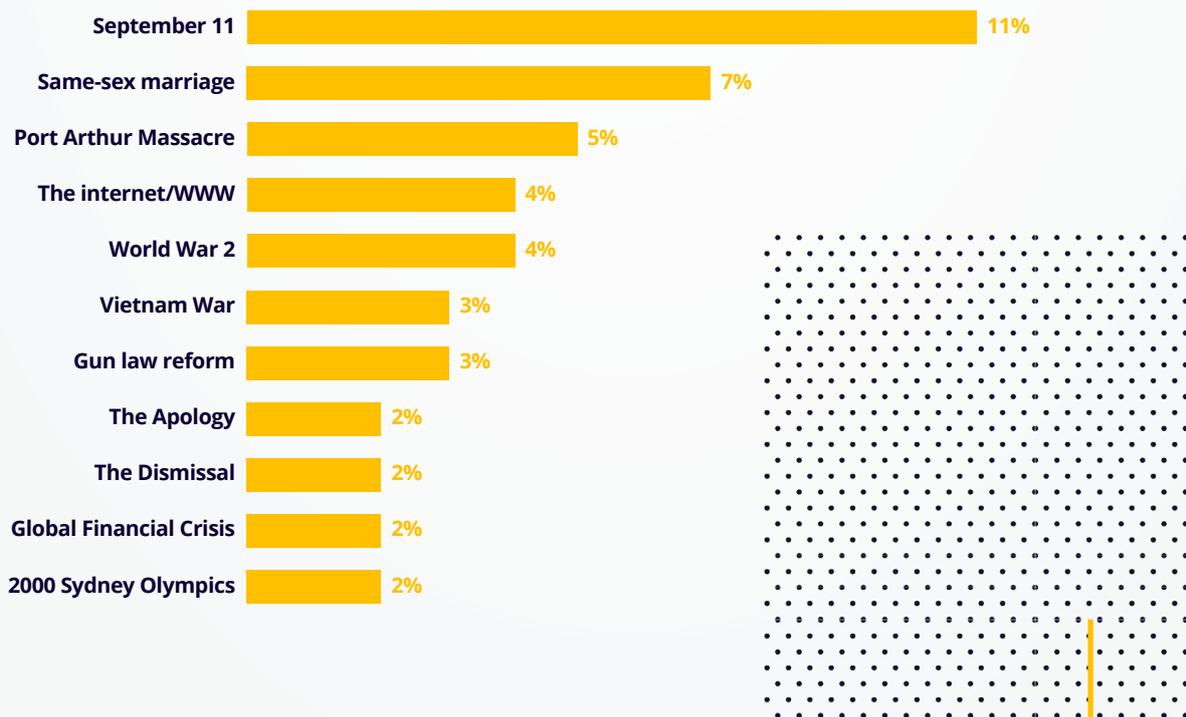
Most Significant Event

When asked a more reflective question 'Of the events you named, which one would you say had the greatest impact on the country?' a somewhat different picture emerges.

While same-sex marriage still figures prominently (7%), the event most commonly nominated by Australians as having the greatest impact on our country in their lifetime is the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon.

The September 11 terrorist attacks (at 11%) are regarded by all generations, apart from the Silent Generation (born in 1945 or before), as the single most important nation defining event of their life time. For the Silent Generation it is World War 2, as mentioned by 24 per cent. The September 11 terrorist attacks are the single most important historic event for females and males, those living in our capital cities and those outside of the capitals, those living in the most and least disadvantaged areas of our country and across the political divide. The September 11 attacks were also deemed to be the most significant historic event regardless of educational attainment or personal income. For overseas-born participants September 11 was just shaded by the same-sex marriage process as the single most significant historic event of their lifetime.

Single most important historic event in your lifetime



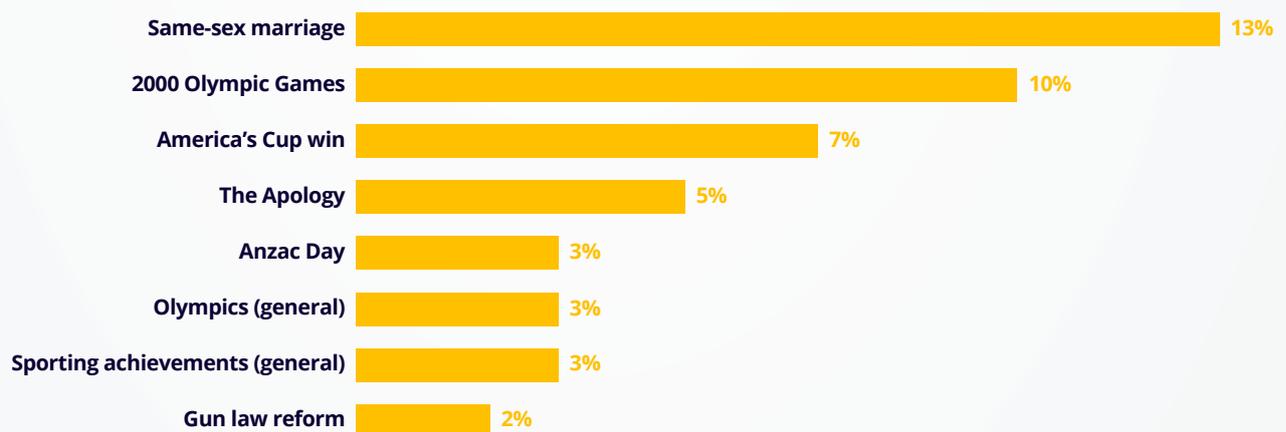
Events causing greatest pride and most disappointment in Australia

Life in Australia™ panel members were also asked to name the times or events in their lifetime when they felt most proud of and most disappointed in the country.

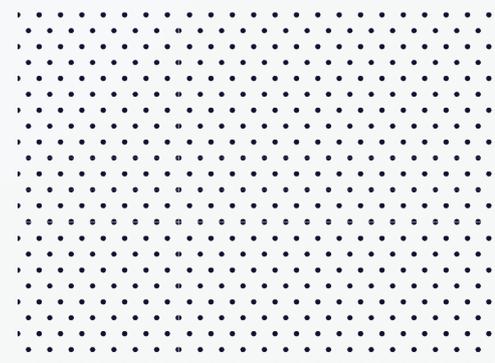
Compared to events of overall historic significance, there was more divergence of opinion as to the events which made survey participants feel most proud and most disappointed in Australia. The key event that stands out for Australians as a source of pride is the same-sex marriage postal survey and the subsequent progression of the law through parliament – with 13% naming it as the time or event during their lifetime when they felt most proud of Australia.

Ranked second behind same-sex marriage as a source of pride in Australia was the 2000 Sydney Olympics (10%), followed by the America's Cup win (7%) and the Apology (5%). **Australians also derive pride from Anzac commemorations as well as from participation in Olympic Games and various other sporting achievements. Also noteworthy is mention of the gun control laws introduced in response to the Port Arthur Massacre.**

Event that made you feel most proud of Australia



Near misses (all 1%): Cathy Freeman's win in the 2000 Olympics, Bicentenary 1988, 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Bob Hawke's Prime Ministership, Mabo decision

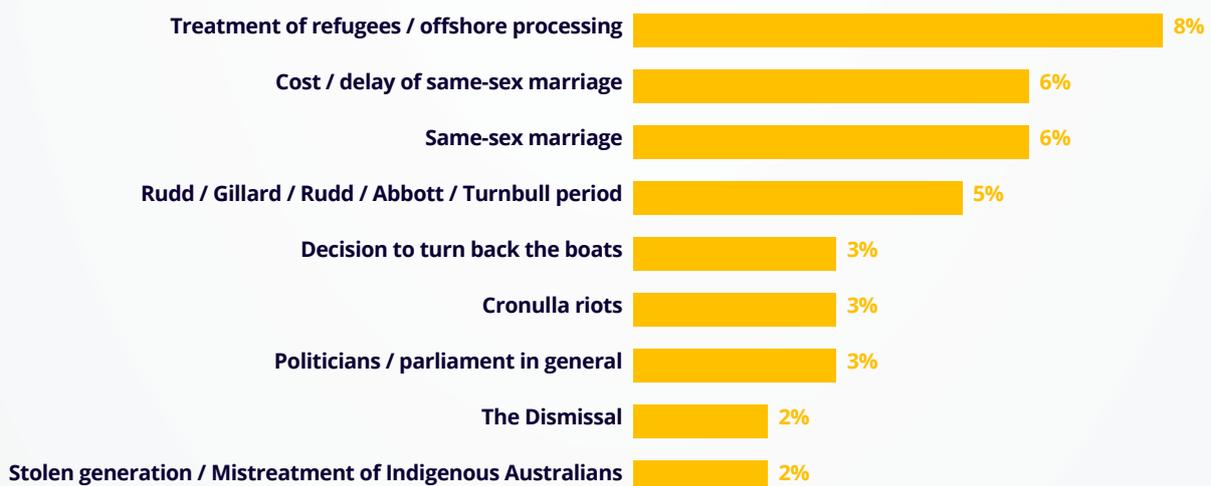


Events that have stood out as our biggest disappointments mainly revolve around three themes: the treatment of refugees, same-sex marriage and our national politics. Australia’s treatment of refugees / asylum seekers, and specifically offshore processing, is the most frequently mentioned moment of disappointment (mentioned by 8% of Australians). While same-sex marriage was the event most frequently cited as a source of national pride, the same event stands out for others as their biggest disappointment. Six per cent cited the fact that there was a national survey on the issue at all (instead of parliament simply legislating on the matter) along with the costs associated with running the postal survey and/or the delay it represented in moving forward with legislative changes as the

event in which they were most disappointed in Australia. The same proportion (6%) were disappointed with the outcome of the process.

The recent instability of Australian politics and the calibre of Australian politicians is also a source of disappointment for some – four per cent mentioning the churn of prime ministers between 2010 and 2015, three per cent mentioning Australian politics and politicians in general and one per cent mentioning the citizenship saga which saw a number of sitting members of parliament deemed ineligible due to being dual citizens. Three per cent also mention the decision turn back the boats as part of Operation Sovereign Borders introduced by the government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott in 2013.

Event that made you feel most disappointed in Australia



Near misses (all 1%): Tampa incident, poor treatment of Vietnam War veterans, National Broadband Network, the rise of One Nation.



Comparison with the USA



The catalyst for the Australian Historic Events Survey was a similar survey undertaken by the Pew Research Center in the USA in June-July 2016. The timing of the Pew Survey coincided with Donald Trump winning the Republican nomination. Given the Australia-US alliance and historical ties between the countries it is instructive to compare the top ten events in each country.⁸

Events/themes common to both countries include the September 11 terrorist attacks, same-sex marriage (legal in the USA since June 2016 when the Supreme Court ruled state-bans on same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional), the internet/Tech revolution, the moon landing and the Vietnam War. Both countries also have a mass shooting mentioned amongst the most important historic events of our lifetime. In the case of Australia, it is the 1996 Port Arthur Massacre, in the United States it is the Orlando Night club shooting which took place in June 2016, just days before the Pew Survey. The Orlando shooting resulted in the death of 49 people and the wounding of 58 others at a gay

nightclub. Another similarity, of sorts, is the prominence given in Australia to the accession of our first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in 2010. The American counterpoint is the election of the first black President in US history, Barack Obama, in 2008. These events are similarly significant in that each was the first time that white males had not held these positions.

When comparing the events that comprise the top ten in each country it notable that violent events (wars, mass shootings and assassinations) play a more prominent role in the memory of modern Americans than is the case in Australia. In the case of war, while the Vietnam war is mentioned by 11 per cent of Australians and 20 per cent of Americans, the Iraq, Afghanistan and Gulf wars all make the top ten in the US but not in Australia. In Australia, causes for national celebration such as the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the 1983 Americas Cup victory seem to have left more of an impression, with similar celebratory events missing from the US list.

⁸ Results from the 2017 Lowy Institute Poll Understanding Australian Attitudes Towards the World show that two thirds of Australians (65%) say we should remain close to the United States under President Donald Trump. Over three quarters (77%) regard the alliance relationship with the United States as either 'very' or 'fairly' important for Australia's security.

Australia vs. the USA

	Australia (SRC)	%	USA (Pew)	%
1	Same-sex marriage	30	September 11	76
2	September 11	27	Obama election	40
3	The Apology	13	The tech revolution	22
4	Port Arthur Massacre	13	JFK assassination	21
5	2000 Sydney Olympics	12	Vietnam War	20
6	The Dismissal	12	Iraq / Afghanistan wars	17
7	Vietnam War	11	Moon landing	17
8	Moon landing	9	Fall of the Berlin Wall / end of the Cold War	13
9	The internet / WWW	9	Gay marriage	11
10	America's Cup win	8	Orlando shooting	10
	Global Financial Crisis	8	Gulf War	10
	First female PM	8		



Broad Themes Shaping Australians' Perception of History

In addition to looking at the extent to which events are considered to be of national significance, an additional objective of this research is to allocate specific events to broader themes. This is done to try and discern the overarching historical forces which shape our national consciousness.⁹

These themes, along with some of the main underpinning events, are shown in the table below.

The main force at play when it comes to our consideration of the nationally significant events of our lifetime pertains to human rights and civil liberties, with issues of this nature mentioned by 45% of Australians.

While the human rights theme is dominated by the recent focus on same-sex marriage; the 2008 Apology, the 1992 Mabo decision and the 1967 referendum, at which Australians voted in favour of counting Aboriginal people in the census and empowering the federal government to legislate for them, are frequently mentioned also. Notable is the prominence of Indigenous human rights issues – a theme returned to later.

The next most prevalent theme shaping our perceptions of history, and in this case our everyday experience, is that of terrorism. While the events of September 11 dominate, the Bali bombings, the Lindt Café siege, the War on Terror and the emergence of ISIS also figure prominently.

Historic themes

	Theme	%	Examples
1	Human rights / Civil liberties	45	Same-sex marriage – 30%, Mabo decision – 6%, The Apology – 3%, 1967 Referendum – 2%
2	Terrorism	37	September 11 – 27%, Bali bombings – 7%, Lindt Café Siege – 7%, War on Terror/Terrorism nfi* – 4%, Emergence of ISIS – 2%
3	Australian politics	35	The Dismissal – 12%, First female PM – 8%, Rudd / Gillard / Rudd / Abbott / Turnbull period – 4%, Whitlam Prime Ministership – 3%
4	War	30	Vietnam war – 11%, World War 2 – 7%, Iraq war – 5%, Gulf war – 2%
5	Global / International events	28	Moon landing – 9%, Princess Diana's death – 5%, Trump election – 5%, Fall of Berlin Wall – 4%, Obama's election – 3%
6	Indigenous issues	24	The Apology – 13%, Mabo decision – 6%, Land rights – 3%, 1967 referendum – 2%, Granted the right to vote in federal elections in 1962 – 2%
7	Sporting events / achievements	24	2000 Sydney Olympics – 12%, America's Cup win – 8%, 1956 Olympics – 1%
8	Economic events	24	Global Financial Crisis – 8%, Introduction of GST – 5%, Mining boom – 2%
9	Tech revolution	21	The internet / WWW – 9%, Television – 3%, Computers – 3%
10	Law reform	17	Gun law reforms – 7%, Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sex Abuse – 2%, Equal pay legislation – 1%, No fault divorce – 1%

*nfi = no further information

Near misses: Natural disasters – 15% (e.g. Cyclone Tracy – 4%, Black Saturday bushfires – 3%, Queensland floods – 3%, Ash Wednesday – 1%). Immigration and related issues – 14% (e.g. Refugee crisis – 2% Immigration – 2%, Offshore detention centres – 2%)

⁹ The allocation of specific event to a particular theme is a somewhat subjective exercise and therefore open to interpretation and criticism. It is also the case that a single event can be coded to more than one theme. For example, 'The Apology' is both a human rights / civil liberties issue and an Indigenous issue. There are many other such examples.

National politics also play a very significant role when it comes to our perceptions of nation-defining events. Top of this list is the dismissal of the Whitlam government. Other issues to resonate include the election of Julia Gillard as our first female Prime Minister, the Prime Ministerial merry-go-round of Rudd/Gillard/Rudd/Abbott/Turnbull and the Whitlam Prime Ministership.

War has also made an indelible mark on Australians' perceptions of history with the Vietnam War and World War 2 having left the greatest imprint on our living memory.

Nowadays we live in a global village and international events such as the moon landing, the death of Princess Diana and the Trump and Obama presidencies are all examples of global events recognised by Australians as influential in the country's history.

Indigenous issues, sporting events and achievements, economic events, the Tech revolution and various law reforms are also among the major themes shaping our perceptions of history. Themes just outside of the top ten include natural disasters, in particular Cyclone Tracy (Christmas Eve 1974), the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires in South Australia and Victoria and the Queensland floods of 2010-11. The other theme just outside of the top ten is immigration-related issues.

As we approach Australia Day 2018, it is striking that Indigenous issues such as the Apology, the Mabo decision and the 1967 Aboriginal referendum continue to resonate in our collective memory (mentioned by 24%) as do immigration-related events such as the refugee crisis and offshore detention centres, mentioned by 14 per cent of participants.



About the Life in Australia™ panel

Developed and maintained by researchers at the Social Research Centre, Life in Australia™ is the most methodologically rigorous online panel in Australia and one of only several probability-based online panels in the world. It exclusively uses random probability-based sampling methods and covers both the online and offline population. This gives Australian researchers, policymakers, academics and business leaders access to a scientifically sampled cross section of the Australian community.

Results from Life in Australia surveys are generalisable to the adult population living in Australia and the sampling approach ensures that sampling errors and confidence intervals can be calculated. By comparison, non-probability 'opt in' online panels do not have these statistical properties.

Our panel members were recruited in October-November 2016 via their landline or mobile phone and provided their contact details so that they can take part in surveys on a regular basis. Panel members receive a small payment for joining the panel and for each questionnaire they complete.

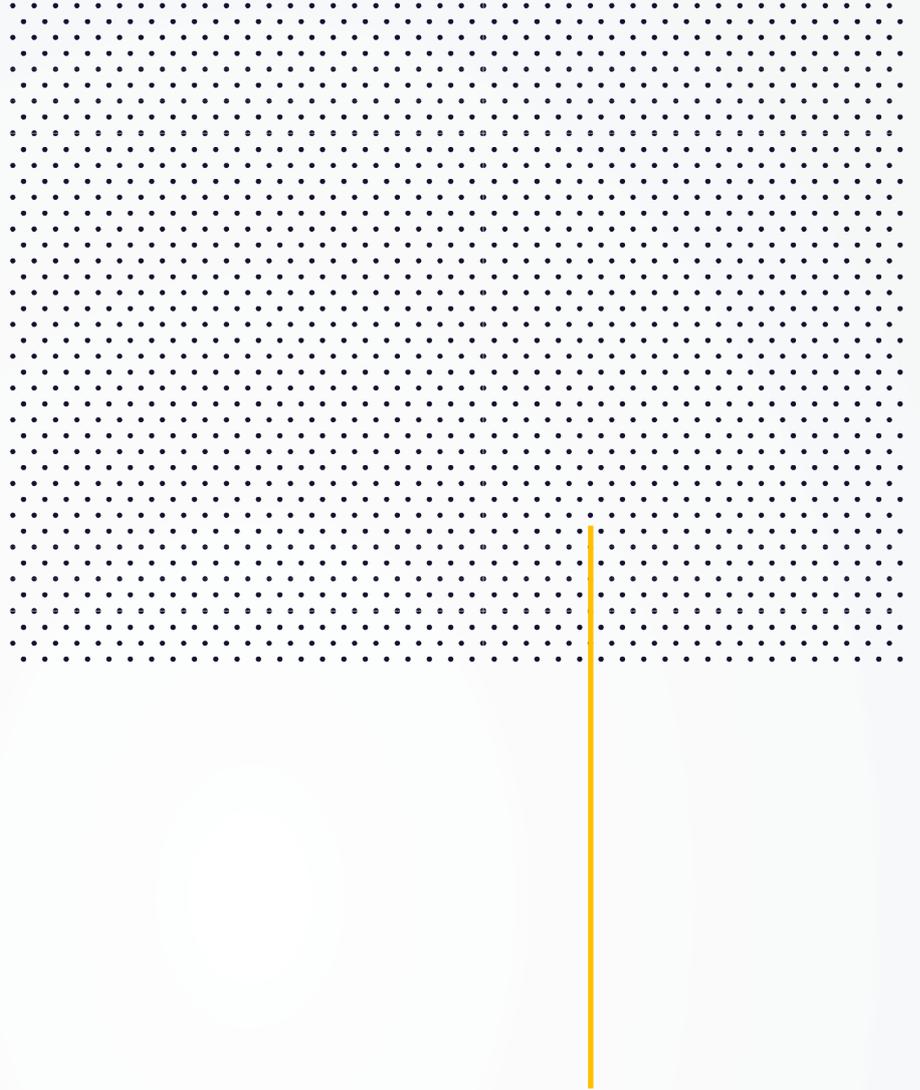
About the survey

The methodology adopted for the survey was a mixed-mode approach, including both online and telephone surveys conducted amongst members of the Social Research Centre's Life in Australia panel.

The survey was conducted from 15 November to 3 December 2017.

The in-scope population for the survey was all current members of the Life in Australia panel. Members of the panel are Australian residents aged 18 years or more. A total of 3,011 active panel members were invited to take part in the survey and 2,074 (68.9%) completed the survey. Of the responses provided 1,777 were provided online and 297 were gathered over the phone. In this way both the online and offline population are represented in the survey findings. The youngest respondent to complete a questionnaire was aged 18 years in 2017 and the oldest was aged 93 years.





Acknowledgements

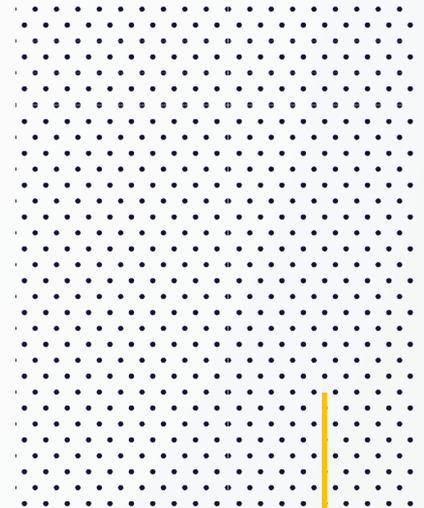
The Life in Australia™ Historic Events Survey is modelled on a survey undertaken by the Pew Research Center in the USA in June-July 2016. The survey was modified for use in Australia with permission. Our thanks to the Pew Research Center for their permission and cooperation.

Our thanks also go to the Life in Australia™ panel members who generously gave their time to complete the survey.

Tables Appendix

Unweighted sample sizes for sub-groups described throughout the report

	n	
Generation	Generation Z	73
	Generation Y / Millennials	368
	Generation X	454
	Baby Boomers	849
	Silent Generation	299
Gender	Female	1,134
	Male	935
Location	Capital City	1,371
	Rest of State	687
Political party	Coalition	682
	Labor Party (ALP)	608
	Greens	284
	Other	192
Education	University graduates	837
	Non-University graduates	1,237
SEIFA	Quartile 1 - Most disadvantage	282
	Quartile 2	364
	Quartile 3	403
	Quartile 4	452
	Quartile 5 - Least disadvantage	556
Birth place	Australian born	1,513
	Overseas born	548
Household income	Lower	634
	Middle	780
	Upper	230
State / Territory	New South Wales	607
	Victoria	491
	Queensland	409
	South Australia	205
	Western Australia	230
	Tasmania	55
	Northern Territory	19
	Australian Capital Territory	55
Total respondents	2,074	



Note: Prefer not to answer or don't know options for each variable are not shown in the table.

Historic events by gender#

	Female	%	Male	%
1	Same-sex marriage	35	September 11	27
2	September 11	27	Same-sex marriage	25
3	The Apology	17	The Dismissal	14
4	Port Arthur Massacre	15	Vietnam War	12
5	2000 Olympic Games	15	Moon landing	11
6	First female PM	11	Port Arthur Massacre	10
7	Vietnam War	10	2000 Olympic Games	10
8	The Dismissal	10	America's Cup win	9
9	Lindt Café Siege	9	Global Financial Crisis	9
10	The internet / WWW	9	The Apology	9
	Bali bombings	9		

Gender was self-recorded by Life in Australia™ participants. Non-binary gender identify options were provided, but are not shown in this table due to very small sample sizes (n=5).

Note: Prefer not to answer or don't know options for each variable are not shown in the table.

Historic events by geography

	Capital City	%	Rest of State	%	Most disadvantaged areas	%	Least disadvantaged areas	%
1	Same-sex marriage	33	September 11	27	Same-sex marriage	22	Same-sex marriage	36
2	September 11	27	Same-sex marriage	24	September 11	22	September 11	28
3	The Apology	15	Vietnam War	14	Vietnam War	12	The Apology	17
4	Port Arthur Massacre	13	The Dismissal	13	The Dismissal	11	Port Arthur Massacre	15
5	2000 Olympic Games	13	Port Arthur Massacre	11	Port Arthur Massacre	11	The Dismissal	13
6	The Dismissal	11	Moon landing	11	Moon landing	10	2000 Olympic Games	12
7	Vietnam War	10	2000 Olympic Games	11	World War 2	10	Vietnam War	12
8	Moon landing	9	The Apology	10	Lindt Café Siege	9	Global Financial Crisis	10
9	The internet / WWW	8	America's Cup win	10	Princess Diana's death	8	First female PM	10
10	Global Financial Crisis	8	The internet / WWW	9	2000 Olympic Games	8	Moon landing	10
	Bali bombings	8			The Apology	8		
	First female PM	8						
	America's Cup win	8						

Historic events by state / territory

	New South Wales	%	Victoria	%	Queensland	%
1	Same-sex marriage	31	Same-sex marriage	32	Same-sex marriage	30
2	September 11	27	September 11	27	September 11	26
3	2000 Sydney Olympics	18	Port Arthur Massacre	13	The Apology	17
4	The Apology	16	The Apology	11	Port Arthur Massacre	13
5	Vietnam War	13	The Dismissal	10	The Dismissal	13
6	The Dismissal	13	First female PM	9	2000 Sydney Olympics	12
7	Port Arthur Massacre	12	Vietnam War	9	Vietnam War	11
8	Moon landing	11	Global Financial Crisis	8	Global Financial Crisis	9
9	The internet / WWW	10	Gun law reform	8	Queensland floods	9
10	First female PM	10	2000 Sydney Olympics	8	Moon landing	9
	Lindt Café Siege	10	Bali bombings	8		
			Moon landing	8		

	South Australia	%	Western Australia	%	Tasmania	%
1	September 11	31	September 11	30	Port Arthur Massacre	32
2	Same-sex marriage	28	Same-sex marriage	28	Same-sex marriage	31
3	Moon landing	16	America's Cup win	16	September 11	29
4	Vietnam War	15	Port Arthur Massacre	14	Princess Diana's death	16
5	The Apology	12	The Dismissal	13	The Dismissal	12
6	Princess Diana's death	11	Bali bombings	13	2000 Sydney Olympics	11
7	2000 Sydney Olympics	10	Global Financial Crisis	11	Mabo decision	11
8	Bali bombings	10	Vietnam War	11	Various infrastructure projects*	**
9	The internet / WWW	8	Gun law reform	10	Aboriginals right to vote	**
10	The Dismissal	8	2000 Sydney Olympics	9	Boxing Day tsunami	**
			The internet / WWW	9	Global Financial Crisis	**
			Mabo decision	9	Donald Trump's election	**
					Vietnam War	**

	Northern Territory	%	Australian Capital Territory	%
1	Gun law reform	35	Vietnam War	15
2	Same-sex marriage	32	September 11	14
3	September 11	24	The Dismissal	14
4	Mabo decision	22	Global Financial Crisis	14
5	Cyclone Tracy	19	Introduction of the GST	12
6	Rudd/Gillard/Rudd/Abbott period	**	Gun law reform	10
7	Waterfront dispute	**	Same-sex marriage	**
8	Paul Keating's prime ministership	**	Loss of the car industry	**
9	Decimal currency	**	Donald Trump's election	**
10	Indigenous Australian's land rights	**	Port Arthur Massacre	**
			The internet / WWW	**
			Bali bombings	**

* Including infrastructure projects such as the Construction of the Sydney Opera House, the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric scheme and the advent of renewable energy.

** Suppressed due to small sample sizes.

Historic events by educational attainment

	University graduates	%	Non-University graduates	%
1	Same-sex marriage	40	Same-sex marriage	27
2	September 11	37	September 11	24
3	The Apology	18	Vietnam War	12
4	Port Arthur Massacre	17	2000 Olympic Games	12
5	Global Financial Crisis	15	The Apology	12
6	2000 Olympic Games	15	The Dismissal	11
7	The Dismissal	13	Port Arthur Massacre	11
8	The internet / WWW	13	Moon landing	10
9	First female PM	11	America's Cup win	9
10	Vietnam War	10	The internet / WWW	7
	Mabo decision	10	World War 2	7
			Bali Bombings	7
			First female PM	7



Historic events by annual household income

	Lower (<\$33,800)	%	Middle (\$33,800 - \$104,000)	%	Upper (>\$104,000)	%
1	Same-sex marriage	23	Same-sex marriage	32	Same-sex marriage	42
2	September 11	18	September 11	27	September 11	39
3	The Dismissal	14	The Apology	14	Port Arthur Massacre	20
4	World War 2	13	Port Arthur Massacre	14	The Apology	18
5	2000 Sydney Olympics	11	Vietnam War	12	2000 Sydney Olympics	18
6	Vietnam War	11	2000 Sydney Olympics	11	Global Financial Crisis	13
7	Moon landing	10	The Dismissal	11	The Dismissal	12
8	The Apology	9	America's Cup win	10	First female PM	12
9	America's Cup win	7	Global Financial Crisis	10	Bali bombings	12
10	Various infrastructure projects*	6	Moon landing	10	The internet / WWW	11
	The internet / WWW	6			Gun Law reform	11
	Television	6				
	Port Arthur Massacre	6				

Historic events by birthplace

	Australian born	%	Overseas born	%
1	September 11	30	Same-sex marriage	32
2	Same-sex marriage	30	September 11	19
3	Port Arthur Massacre	15	The Apology	12
4	2000 Olympic Games	15	The Dismissal	9
5	The Apology	13	Vietnam War	9
6	The Dismissal	13	America's Cup win	8
7	Vietnam War	12	Global Financial Crisis	7
8	Moon landing	11	Port Arthur Massacre	6
9	The internet / WWW	10	Lindt Café Siege	6
10	First female PM	9	2000 Olympic Games	6
			Moon landing	6

* Including infrastructure projects such as the Construction of the Sydney Opera House, the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric scheme and the advent of renewable energy.

Technical Appendix

The cumulative response rate for the survey was 9.7%. This statistic takes into account the response rates (RR3) as defined by American Association of Public Opinion Research from the at panel recruitment and enrolment as well as panel attrition and absenteeism.

The contact methodology adopted for online Life in Australia members is an initial survey invitation via email and SMS (where available), followed by multiple email reminders and a reminder SMS. Telephone non-response of panel members who have not yet completed the survey commences in the second week of fieldwork and consists of reminder calls encouraging completion of the online survey.

The contact methodology for offline Life in Australia members was an initial SMS (when mobile phone contact details are available), followed by an extended call-cycle over a three-week period. A reminder SMS is also sent in the second week of data collection.

All members are offered an incentive to complete each survey. The incentives offered for the survey had a value of \$10 and included:

- Electronic or physical Coles / Myer gift card;
- Payment into a PayPal account; or
- Charitable donation to a designated charity.

To ensure that results from the survey were as representative as possible of the population of Australian adults, weights were calculated for each respondent and included in the final dataset. The approach to deriving weights consisted of the following steps:

1. Compute a base weight for each respondent as the product of two weights:
 - a. Their enrolment weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent post-stratification to key demographic benchmarks; and
 - b. Their response propensity weight, estimated from enrolment information available for both respondents and non-respondents to the survey;
2. Calibrate the base weights so that they satisfy the latest population benchmarks for several demographic characteristics; and
3. Trim the weights so that no respondents have an undue influence on estimates made from the dataset to improve weight efficiency. Note that trimming did not notably improve weighting efficiency and so the final weights are untrimmed.

The research was undertaken in accordance with the Privacy Act (1988), the Australian Privacy Principles, the Australian Market and Social Research Society's Code of Professional Practice, the Market and Social Research Privacy Principles, and ISO 20252 standards. The survey data and accompanying technical documentation will soon be available via the Australian Data Archive (<https://www.ada.edu.au/>).

Image Credits

Page	Attribution	Website	Licence
10	Kate Lundy	http://www.katelundy.com.au	Attribution 2.0 Generic
11	John MacIntyre	https://www.flickr.com/photos/paisleyorguk/4377216040/	Attribution 2.0 Generic
14	butupa	https://www.flickr.com/photos/25792994@N04/	Attribution 2.0 Generic
15	Robert J. Fisch	https://www.flickr.com/photos/themachinestops	Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic
21	Sardaka	https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1)lndt_Cafe_siege_two_days_later_012a.jpg	Attribution 3.0 Unported

Images have been edited through the use of digital software. The edits made include cropping, colour adjustment, image overlays and more.



Social
Research
Centre

A subsidiary of



Australian
National
University