

Australia Day: State of the Nation



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#VOXPOP

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We're comfortable for now, but more wary of the future.

In the lead up to Australia Day 2016, it seems timely to ask the people of the Illawarra about their views on some of the big political, social and economic issues facing the nation.

Indigenous Australia. Improving the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is a long-term goal, however, 10 years into the 'Closing the Gap' framework, our efforts have made a negligible impact, according to the Prime Minister's 2015 Closing the Gap Report. When asked how satisfied they were with progress to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians by 2031, 51.1% of respondents indicated they were dissatisfied. Dissatisfied respondents outnumbered satisfied respondents (17.1%) by 3:1. Another 20.1% were unsure. The impact of our efforts across Indigenous lives in terms of health, work, housing, education and safety, questions not only our policies and programs, but also how well Indigenous Australians are involved in the process.

Some argue that in order to achieve reconciliation, Indigenous Australians need formal recognition in the national constitution. We asked the people of the Illawarra whether recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the constitution would help Australians embrace the Indigenous heritage of our country. A definitive 64% of respondents agreed it would and only 16.3% disagreed. Put another way; 4:1 were in favour of the idea.

If this represents a national view, a referendum could be successful. But with only 8 out of 44 referendums having been carried in the past 110 years, constitutional recognition is still some way off for Indigenous Australians.

Australian Republic. This #IRISVoxPop checked the pulse on the 'Australia as a republic' issue, asking if Australia is ready for a popularly elected head of state - and to become an independent state. 46.4% of respondents agreed with the proposition, while 28.9% did not. Almost one in five (19.2%) were unsure and 5.4% couldn't say. "Based on this result, it would seem the pro-republicans need to prosecute their case more vigorously if they wish to see an Australian republic any time soon," said IRIS Research's Consulting Manager, Peter Watts. "While direct comparison with the 1999 Republican Referendum results is not possible due to the differing nature of the questions, it is interesting that based on this survey result, at face value, sentiment on this issue seems not to have shifted significantly in the past 16 years," he said.

Multiculturalism. The majority of respondents agree that Australia's greatest strength is to blend people from all parts of the world into a tolerant and harmonious society. A significant 60.3% were in agreement, while only 15.5% did not agree and 22.6% were unsure.

This result suggests we view our multicultural society largely as an asset and a defining achievement for our country. Of all the questions in this #VoxPop, this had the lowest 'can't say' response rate, indicating that most people had a definitive view on the matter.

The Environment. 46% of respondents did not agree with the statement that 'Australia is serious about global warming and will become a renewable energy economy in good time', while 23% agreed with the statement – a 2:1 ratio. A significant 28.9% (almost one in three) of respondents were unsure, suggesting they want more evidence of our policies and actions regarding global warming before they can make up their minds. "This is an interesting outcome given we are fresh from Australia's commitment at the 'Paris Agreement' just two months ago, to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. Perhaps some of us need to see what this means in practical terms before deciding how serious Australia is about global warming," said Peter Watts.

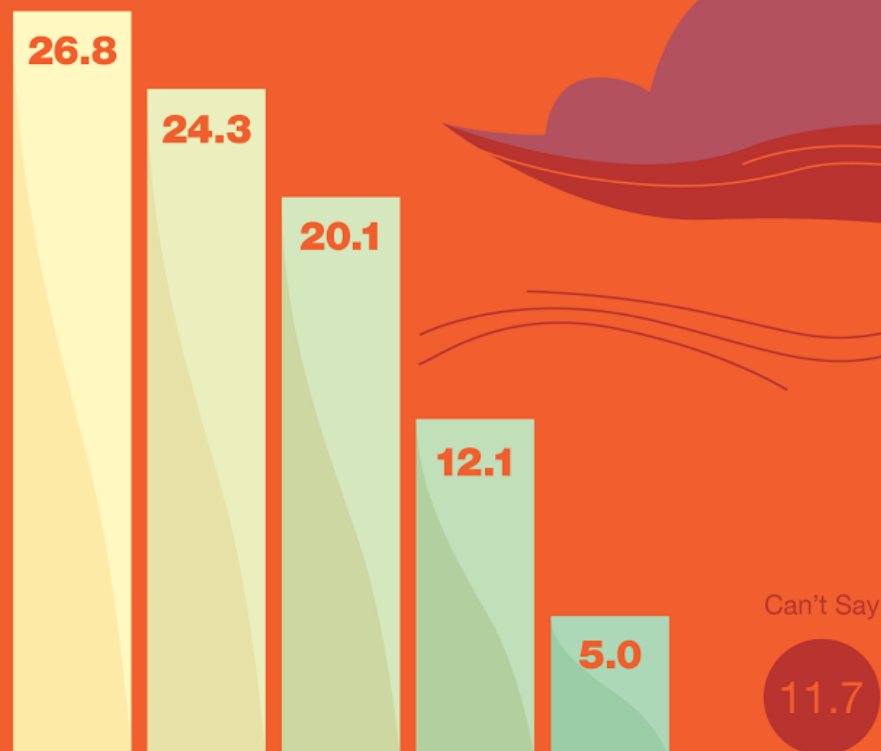
Comfortable & Confident? Three out of four respondents feel comfortable with life in general right now. But a quarter of us aren't either. When those who answered that they were not comfortable with life today to elaborate on this, the most common causes for concern were a lack of political leadership, global insecurity and terrorism, job and income insecurity (earners and investors) and corporate greed.

If we're generally comfortable with today, we are less sanguine about the future. 60.7% of respondents feel confident about the future, but 39.3% do not. When asked why, the three leading concerns were a lack of vision for Australia, structure of the Australian economy and the effects of globalisation (the impact of the rise of China was commonly cited in relation to this concern). These sentiments are not surprising given the pace and extent of social and economic change in Australia and around the world.

How will we feel next year? "It will be interesting to see how 2016 pans out. We'll be sure to invite the people of the Illawarra to tell us again in twelve months' time," said Peter Watts.

Almost 250 locals responded to the State of the Nation #IRISVoxPop run on 20-21 January 2016. As always, we are grateful to the people of the Illawarra for being willing to share their views with us through the #IRISVoxPop series.

I am satisfied with the progress we are making in closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians within a generation

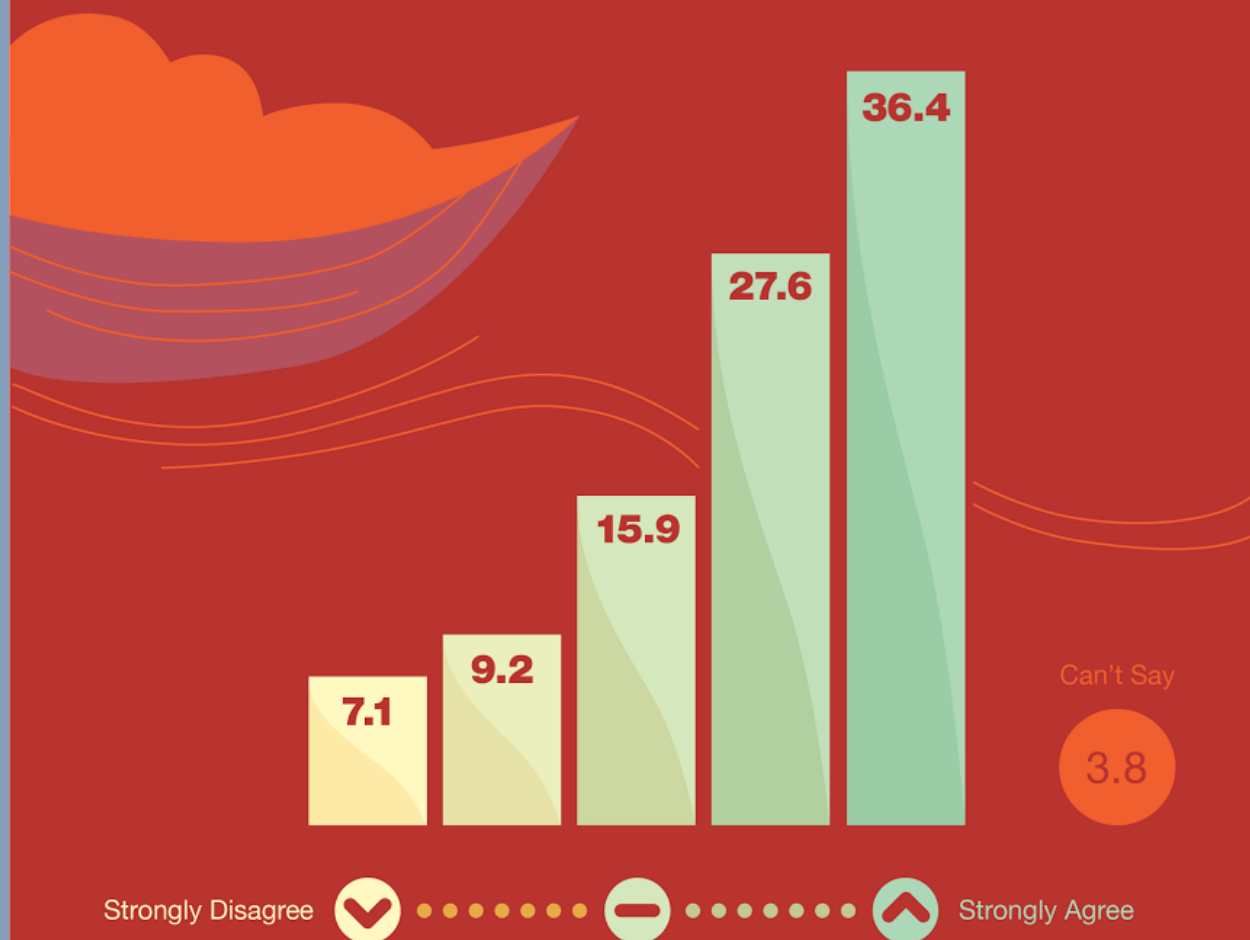


Strongly Disagree

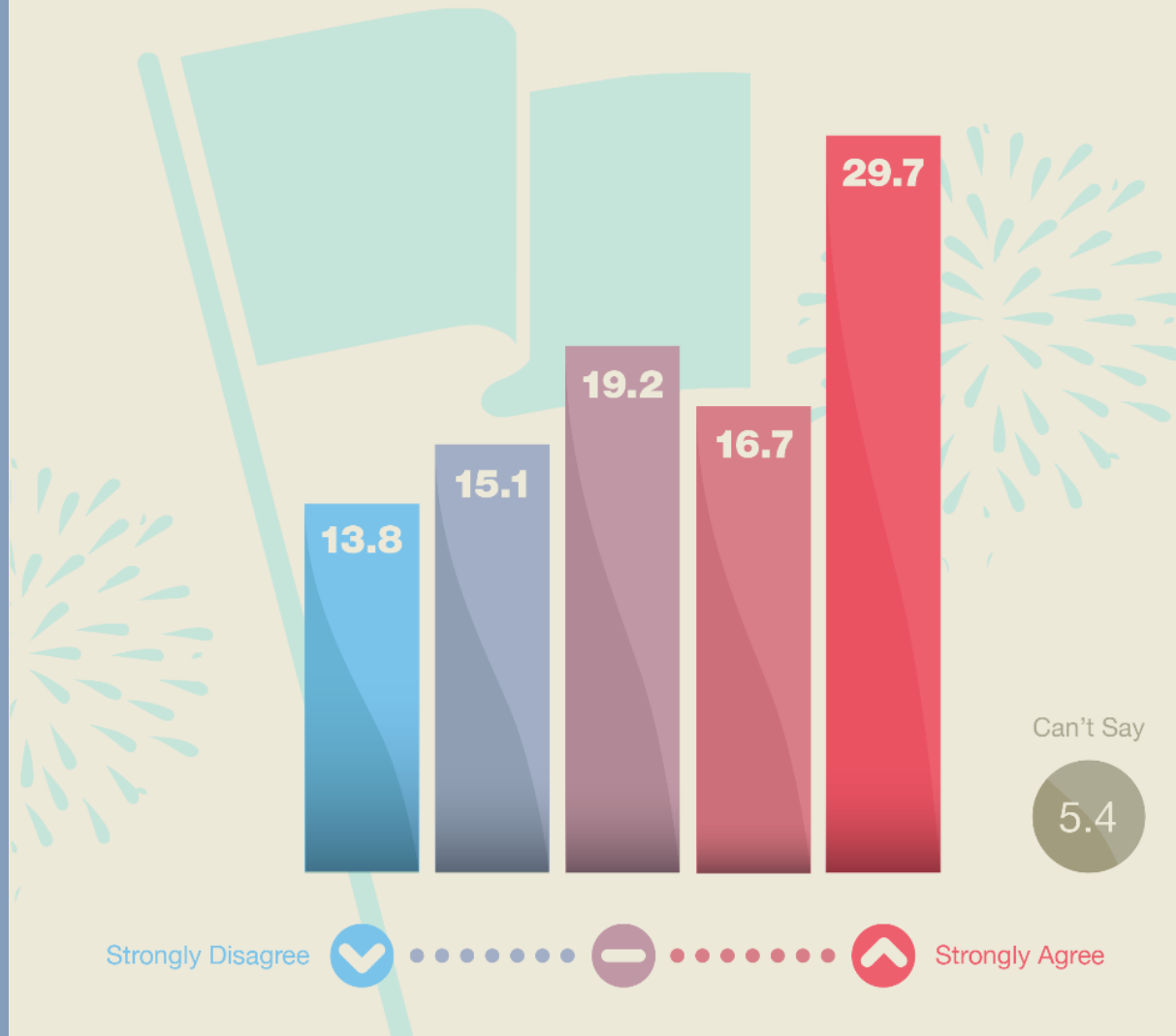


Strongly Agree

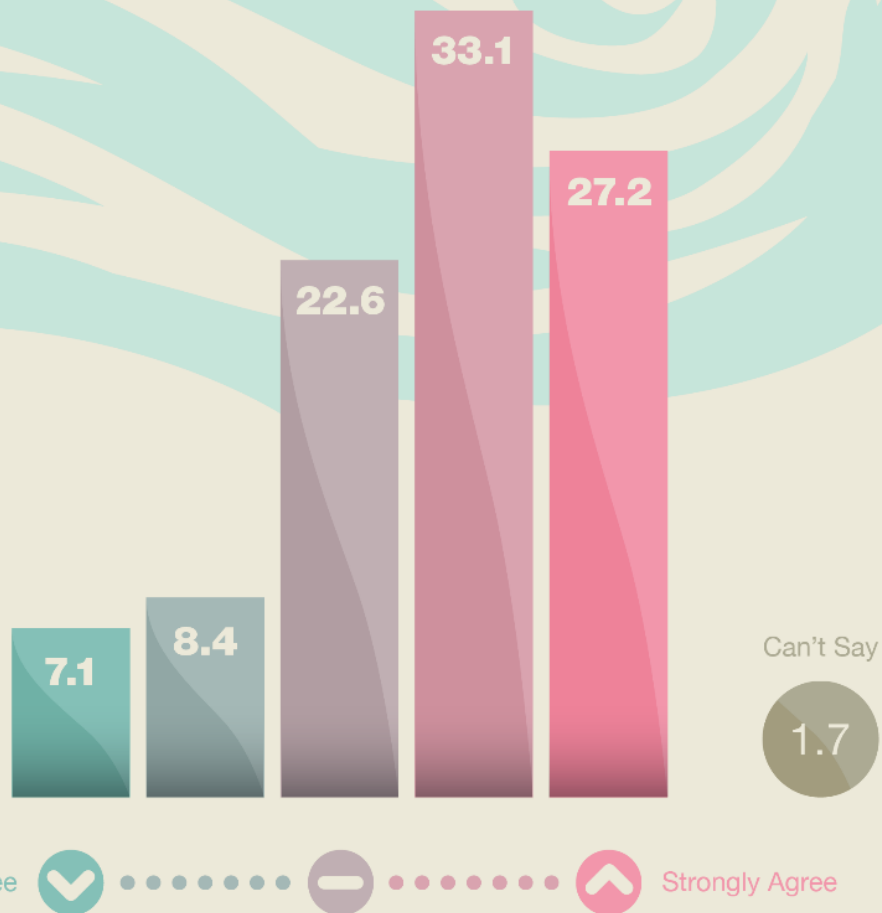
Recognition of Australia's Aboriginals in the nation's constitution will help Australians embrace the Indigenous heritage of our country



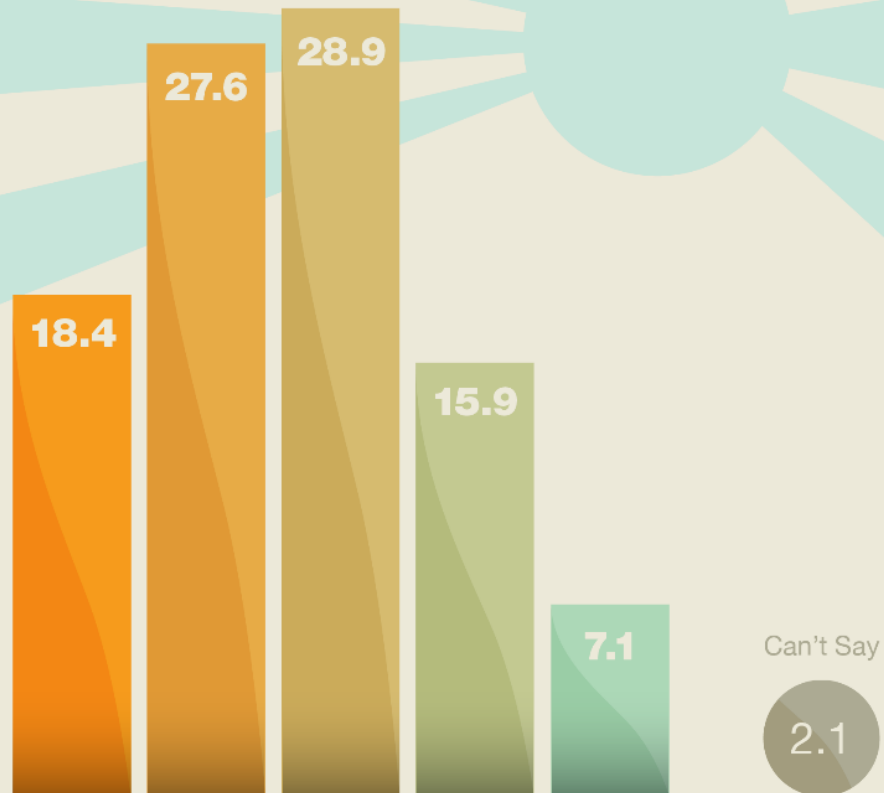
Australia is ready for a popularly elected head of state and to become an independent state



Australia's greatest strength is to blend people from all parts of the world into a tolerant and harmonious society



Australia is serious about global warming and will become a renewable energy economy in good time



Strongly Disagree



Strongly Agree

**I feel comfortable with
life in general in
January 2016**

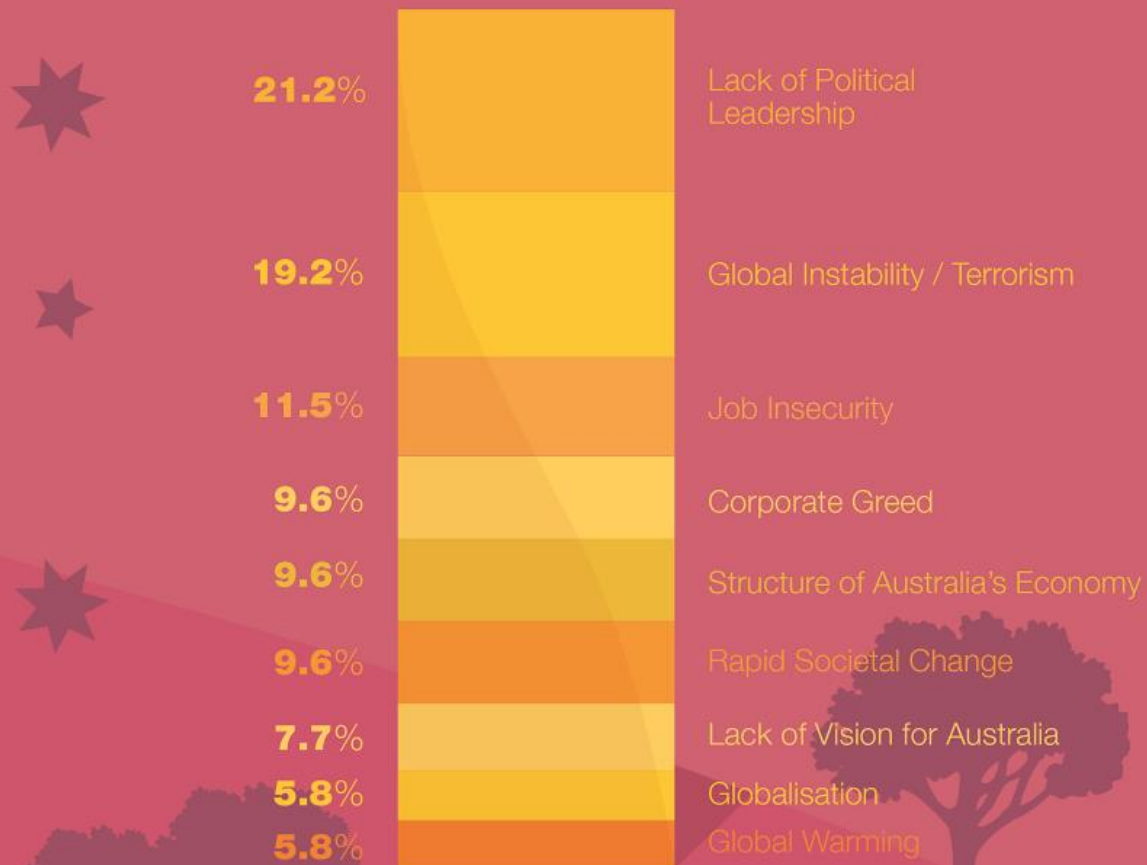


Yes 76.2%

No 23.8%



Why don't you feel comfortable with life in general in January 2016



**I feel confident in
Australia's future
prosperity**

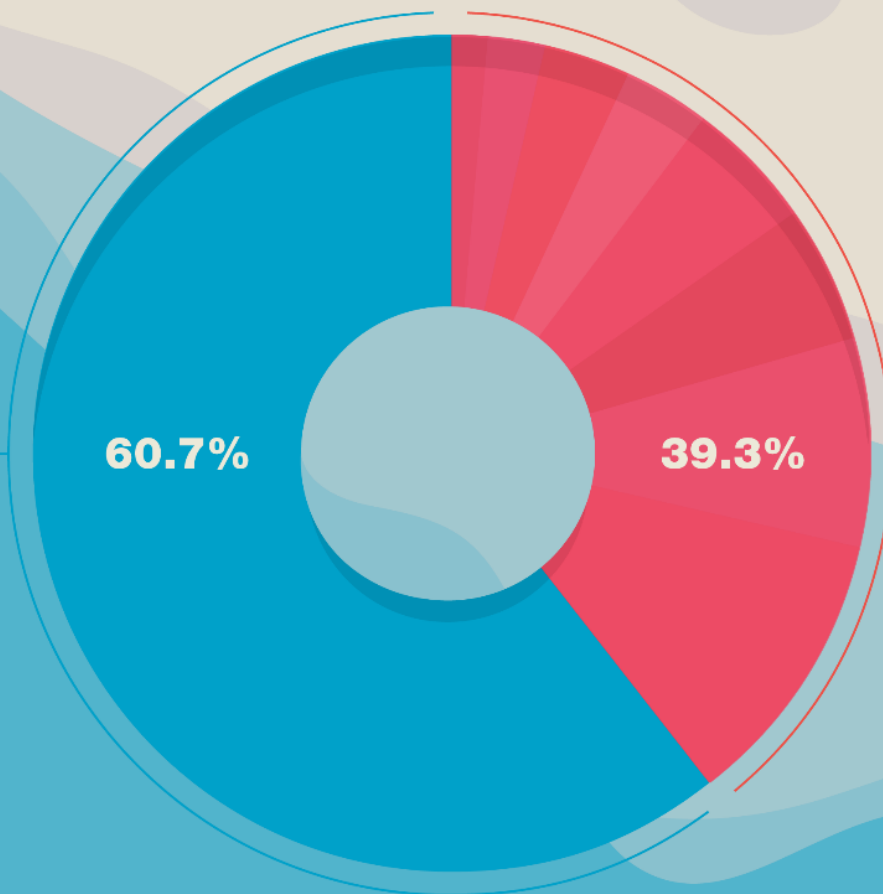


Yes

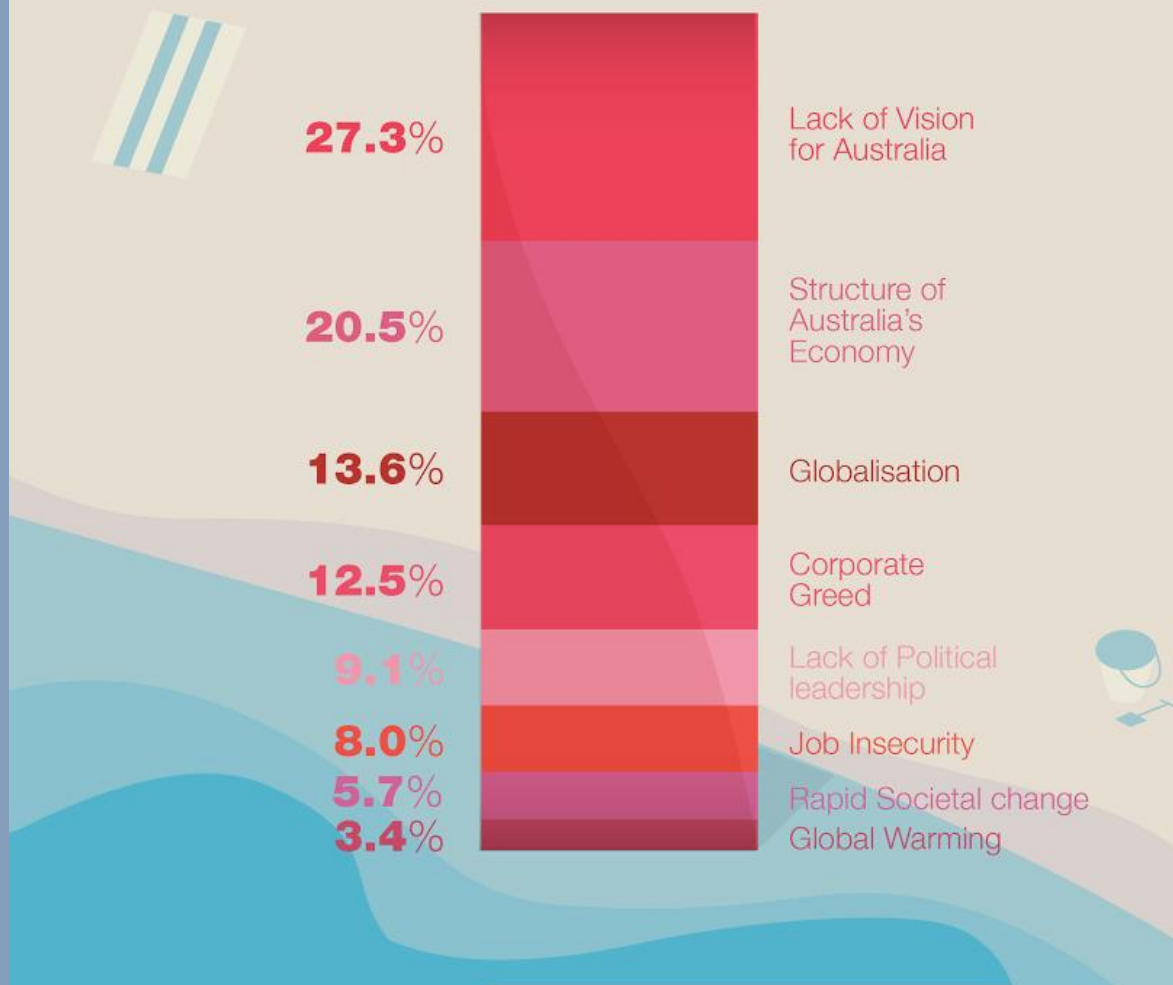
60.7%

39.3%

No



Why don't you feel confident in Australia's future prosperity?





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