



Public Attitudes towards the Australian Defence Force

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Contents

Key Findings	01
Introduction	02
Background	03
Methodology	04
Section 1 – Attitudes towards the Australian Defence Force	05
Section 2 – The Role of the Australian Defence Force	09
Section 3 – Australian Defence Force Operations in Afghanistan.....	13
Section 4 – Supporting Australia’s Veterans	16
Section 5 – Figures.....	19
References	33
Biographies	35

Key Findings

- Overall, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) was highly regarded by respondents to the survey. Strong majorities held positive opinions of the organisation, and expressed both trust in it as an institution, and trust that it would act ethically. The willingness of respondents to recommend service in the ADF was, however, significantly lower.
- Across all the topics covered by the survey it was apparent that public knowledge of the ADF as an institution, and of the activities it conducts, was very limited. There were also clear signs of a positive correlation between knowledge of the ADF and trust in it.
- Despite consistent indications of Australia's declining strategic situation, support for an expansion of the ADF, and a growth of defence funding to pay for it, was limited.
- The survey revealed that public support for the ADF to engage in humanitarian and disaster relief operations both within Australia, and in the wider region, was high.
- Sentiments regarding whether the ADF should prioritise working with allies to ensure wider security, or should focus on the defence of Australian territory, were complex and defy easy characterisation.
- Knowledge of Australian operations as part of the war in Afghanistan was comparatively low, as was awareness of issues stemming from those deployments, including the accusations of war crimes. Despite this, the data suggests that the accusations have negatively impacted trust in the ADF.
- The survey results suggest that public awareness of veterans and veterans' issues is low, and respondents were divided on the question of whether the government did a good job of supporting veterans. Over half of respondents had not heard of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, however there was strong support for the establishment of a new agency focused on veterans' welfare.

Introduction

How do Australians view the Australian Defence Force (ADF), how much do they know about its activities, and what are public attitudes on issues such as recent ADF operations and the treatment of veterans? These are all questions that this survey seeks to answer.

National security and defence are increasingly important issues in the public debate. It is widely accepted that Australia is now in the most challenging strategic circumstances since the end of the Second World War, and events such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the diplomatic earthquake caused by the return of President Trump to the White House have further destabilised the world order. These challenges have been brought home to Australians by recent events including the circumnavigation of Australia by Chinese warships. In 2025, therefore, defence and security matters to Australians in a way that it arguably has not done for much of the past 80 years.

The reality of the situation can be seen in the bipartisan agreement between the major Australian political parties that there needs to be a growth in the defence budget, and the regular intrusion of defence related issues into the federal election campaign.

Given the sustained and growing importance of defence for Australia, one would expect there to be a wide variety of detailed data on what Australians think about these issues. In the realm of foreign policy this does exist. This is most notable in work undertaken by the Lowy Institute, through its Public Opinion and Foreign Policy program, which has provided detailed data on how Australians view the world for the past twenty years.¹ Within this there has been significant cross over into defence matters, with consistent questions related to the alliance with the United States, and more recently AUKUS.²

In contrast to this, data on how Australians view the ADF as an institution, and more specific questions around the operations that the ADF conducts, is few and far between. This survey addresses this gap, assessing public attitudes across four major areas:

- Attitudes towards the ADF
- The role of the ADF
- ADF operations in Afghanistan, and
- Supporting Australia's veterans.

Through exploring how the public thinks about the ADF across these four areas, the report sheds significant light on attitudes towards one of the most important institutions in Australia and provides detail to inform the growing public debate on defence. The data from the survey also provides evidence to inform policy decisions, which are frequently predicated on a certain set of beliefs about how the Australian public views the ADF. In many cases this evidence confirms those assumptions, but in places it challenges us to think again about the preconceived ideas that have become established in the policymaking and academic communities in Canberra and beyond.

¹ Lowy Institute, The Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Program, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/programs-projects/public-opinion-foreign-policy-program> (accessed 16 May 2025)

² There is additional ad hoc polling from other sources, included The Australia Institute - The Australia Institute, 'Polling – President Trump, security and the US–Australian alliance', March 2025, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Polling-President-Trump-security-and-the-US%E2%80%93Australian-alliance.pdf> (accessed 10 April 2025)

Background

Given the significance of national security matters and the importance of the ADF as an institution, we know remarkably little about how the Australian public thinks about defence as either a national challenge or as an organisation.³ There are, however, useful indicators of public attitudes that can be garnered by looking at specific questions from surveys that explore different elements of public engagement with the broader Australian security and defence environment.

As previously mentioned, the annual Lowy Institute poll has become a staple of analysis of Australian foreign affairs and offers some very useful context for understanding views of defence.⁴ For example, it has charted how Australians' confidence in their own safety and security has declined markedly over the past decade and a half. In 2010 42% of Australians felt "very safe" and 92% of Australians felt either "safe" or "very safe". By 2024 those figures had dropped to 62% feeling "safe" or "very safe", with only 5% declaring that they felt "very safe". Military threats were high on the list of Australians' worries, with conflicts in Taiwan and the South China Sea ranking second and third in the list of issues causing greatest concern.⁵

The Lowy Polls also shed interesting light on public attitudes towards Australia's alliances, and by extension, some of the types of operations the ADF would be expected to complete. According to the 2024 Poll 63% of Australians believed that the alliance with the United States made Australia safer from an attack or pressure from China. But at the same time 75% of the population felt that the alliance made the country more likely to be drawn into a conflict in Asia against its own interests.⁶

Another critical source of data on Australian attitudes across a range of issues including defence is the Australian Election Study, which has been run in the wake of federal elections since 1987.⁷ Since the early 1990s the study has consistently contained questions relating to the support for defence funding, belief in the quality of Australian defence forces, and the importance of, and faith in, ANZUS. Recent surveys (2016, 2019 & 2022) show low and declining numbers of respondents having confidence in the ability of Australia to defend itself, and slow growth of support for an increase in defence funding.⁸

There is considerably less data on the attitudes of Australians towards defence as an institution, or on specific defence related issues. There is some data on the confidence Australians feel regarding institutions in general, and within this the ADF comes out very well, at least in comparative terms. Across the past 15 years there has been reasonably consistent polling showing that roughly a third of Australians have "a great deal" of faith in the ADF, a statistic that compares very well to other institutions, such as the courts, Parliament, and the public service.⁹ The depth and drivers of this public confidence are, however, not readily discernible.

Unsurprisingly there was detailed polling carried out on public attitudes towards ADF operations, including those in Afghanistan, in the lead up to and during the deployments.¹⁰ Information is, however, scarce on how Australians view those operations in retrospect, and how that shapes wider attitudes towards the ADF.

The data from the current survey builds on, fleshes out, and in places challenges this previous work to offer a far more detailed view of how Australians view the ADF as an institution and the challenges that it faces in 2025.

³ For one of the few detailed analyses see Danielle Chubb & Ian McAllister, *Australian Public Opinion, Defence and Foreign Policy: Attitudes and Trends Since 1945*, (London, 2021)

⁴ Ryan Neelam, *Lowy Institute Poll 2024*, <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/files/lowyinsitutepoll-2024.pdf>, (accessed 4 April 2025)

⁵ *Lowy Institute Poll 2024*, p. 17

⁶ *Lowy Institute Poll 2024*, p. 13

⁷ Australian Election Study, <https://australianelectionstudy.org/about/#aes>, (accessed 4 April 2025)

⁸ Sarah Cameron & Ian McAllister, *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study 1987– 2022*, (Canberra, ANU, 2022), p. 136; Ian McAllister, Toni Makkai, Clive Bean, Rachel Kay Gibson, "Australian Election Study, 2016", (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4225/87/70ZCZA> (accessed 1 April 2025); Ian McAllister, Clive Bean, Rachel Gibson, Toni Makkai, Jill Sheppard, Sarah Cameron, "Australian Election Study, 2019", (2019) <https://doi.org/10.26193/KMAMMW> (accessed 2 April 2025); Ian McAllister, Jill Sheppard, Sarah Cameron, Simon Jackman "Australian Election Study, 2022", (2022) <https://doi.org/10.26193/W3U2S3>, (accessed 2 April 2025)

⁹ Chubb & McAllister, *Australian Public Opinion, Defence and Foreign Policy*, p. 23

¹⁰ ABC, 'Majority want troops out of Afghanistan: poll', 4 June 2011, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-06-04/majority-want-troops-out-of-afghanistan-poll/2745782>, (accessed 16 May 2025); Lowy Institute, Polling on Afghanistan, <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/tags/afghanistan/>, (accessed 4 April 2025)

Methodology

To develop a firmer foundation for the discussion of Australian public opinion on defence and the ADF, the authors employed iLink Research Services, which conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,500 adults in Australia. The survey received ethics approval from the UNSW Human Research Advisory Panel (iRECS7568). The survey was conducted between 26th February and 4th March 2025 utilising iLink's online panel comprising a nationally representative sample of adults aged 18+ in Australia. As detailed below, the sample was surveyed on four broad areas: attitudes to the ADF; role of the ADF; ADF operations in Afghanistan; and the support for veterans. Our respondents broadly represent the Australian public, in geographic representation, age, and gender.

Table 1

	NET	100%
Gender	Male	49.5%
	Female	50.4%
Age range	18-29	23.1%
	30-39	19.8%
	40-49	19.2%
	50-59	16.1%
	60-69	13.8%
	70-100	8.0%
State	NSW	31.4%
	VIC	25.4%
	QLD	20.4%
	SA	7.4%
	WA	10.2%
	Other	5.2%
Metro/Regional	Metro areas	63.7%
	Regional areas	36.3%
Military connection	Any military connection	25.6%
	No military connection	74.4%
Nationality	Australian nationality	63.6%
	Other nationality	36.4%
Religious	Any religious affiliation	48.4%
	No religious affiliation	51.6%
Household Income	Less than \$50,000	20.1%
	\$50,000 - \$74,999	15.8%
	\$75,000 - \$99,999	16.5%
	\$100,000 - \$149,999	23.3%
	\$150,000+	24.2%
Education	High school (secondary)	32.3%
	Tertiary	46.7%
	Postgraduate	19.1%
Voting preference	Australian Labor Party	37.3%
	Liberal Party	29.7%
	Greens	12.0%
	Independent	10.1%
	National Party / Other	10.9%

Section 1 – Attitudes towards the Australian Defence Force

- The majority of Australians, 68%, reported that they had a positive attitude towards the ADF, while only 8% reported a negative opinion of the ADF.
- Two thirds of respondents trusted the ADF to act ethically, but there were significant demographic differences in responses, including by political affiliation.
- Only 46% of respondents would recommend service in the ADF to a family member.
- The majority of respondents felt that the ADF was appropriately sized and funded. Only one third supported an increase in the defence budget.
- Respondents placed the greatest priority on the Army for funding, followed by the Navy and then Air Force.

The ADF is one of the largest and most important federal institutions in Australia. Almost uniquely among the country's governance structures the ADF is granted the right to use lethal force in specific circumstances, and the hierarchical nature of its command structures invests its leaders with a degree of power that is highly unusual in the civilian world. Beyond this, funding for defence constitutes one of the largest single areas of expenditure in the federal budget, and one that appears likely to grow in the near future.

The ADF, in common with all militaries in democratic countries, enjoys these privileges on the expectation that the organisation will act appropriately and retain public trust. That the Australian people have confidence in the ADF is vital for the organisation to continue to be able to carry out its core business.

Public perceptions are also critical in another area, recruitment. The workforce challenges facing the ADF have been widely discussed in recent years, and it is acknowledged that the Defence Force needs to continue to work on its public image, and engage diverse communities across Australia if it is to not only meet these challenges, but also mirror the society it is there to protect.

Outlook on, and trust in, the ADF

Overall attitudes towards the ADF were very positive. 68% of respondents broadly agreed with the statement "I have a positive opinion of the ADF", whilst only 8% broadly disagreed.¹¹ Men were more likely to have a positive opinion of the ADF (72%), with only 63% of women expressing the same opinion.

The survey asked respondents two questions about trust: whether they trusted the ADF as an institution, and whether they trusted it to act ethically. In both cases the data closely mirrored overall attitudes towards the ADF. 69% of respondents broadly agreed that they had trust in the ADF as an institution, and 66% trusted it to act ethically. In both cases the number of respondents who disagreed with the statement was low (8% and 9% respectively), but roughly one quarter of respondents were neutral. Again, men were more likely to express positive sentiments towards the ADF than women, with 75% of men expressing trust in the institution and 71% expressing faith in it to act ethically. The corresponding numbers for female respondents were 64% and 62%.

This data broadly aligns with other information we have on Australian attitudes towards the ADF. The World Values Survey, run in 2012 and 2018, asked respondents how much confidence they had in the armed forces. In 2012 86% of Australian respondents had either a great deal of confidence, or quite a lot of confidence in the ADF. The figure for 2018 was 82%.¹² The data from our 2025 survey is slightly lower, which may be a result of a slowly declining trend, but appears more likely to be due to a slightly different style of question in which respondents were given a "neutral" option, which was unavailable in the World Values Surveys.

¹¹ We use the terms "broadly agree" to group together those who "agreed" and those who "strongly agreed" with the contention. Similarly, "broadly disagree" encompasses both those who "disagree" and those who "strongly disagree".

¹² World Values Survey Waves 6 & 7, Questions 109 & 65, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>, (accessed 8 April 2025)

There were several demographic factors that demonstrably affected respondents' overall attitude towards, and trust in, the ADF. Positive responses to these questions increased in line with respondents' reported household income and if they indicated a religious affiliation. Beyond this, there were two key demographic factors that appear to have influenced respondents' opinions of the ADF: whether they had a personal connection to the military¹³, and their political leanings. Generally, respondents with a military connection were more positive towards and more trusting of the ADF: 78% of those with a military connection had a positive opinion of the ADF and the same number trusted it as an institution. This compared with 64% and 66% respectively for those without a military connection. They were also more likely to trust the ADF to act ethically by a margin of 14 points (77% versus 63%).

This fits with a broader trend evident in the results of the survey, most notably in reference to the section on Afghanistan, that respondents who were more knowledgeable about the ADF and the operations it has conducted tended to have more positive views and display greater trust in the institution. We do not know which way the causality runs – does the greater knowledge itself engender trust or is it simply that those with a greater interest in, and affiliation with, defence matters are always more likely to have a greater knowledge base? The trend is, however, worth noting. For more on our survey's Afghanistan findings, see Section 3 (below).

Political leanings similarly affected respondents' positioning. Those who reported affiliation with the Liberal Party were the most positive toward, and trusting of, the ADF. Respondents who supported the Labor Party held similar views, only a few percentage points lower. By contrast, Greens voters and National Party/Other voters were least positive toward the ADF. Still over half of respondents from these groups (53% and 52% respectively) held positive views of the ADF, but they fell roughly 20 points behind Labor voters, and even further behind their Liberal-voting counterparts. Less than half of Greens voters trusted the ADF to act ethically—30 points behind Liberal voters (77%)—with 22% indicating their distrust of the ADF to act ethically, and a further 31% undecided/neutral.

One of the most significant indicators of trust in a military organisation is a willingness to serve or recommend service to others. Here we see a more balanced picture. 46% of respondents broadly agreed with the statement "I would recommend service in the ADF to a family member". Only 14% disagreed with the statement, but 40% expressed neutral views.

The demographic break downs were similar to those seen in the other questions surveying attitudes towards the ADF. Men were more likely to be willing to recommend ADF service than women (55% vs 38%), whilst those with some military connection were more likely to recommend the ADF as a career than those with no connection (68% versus 39%). The split based on political affiliation was also apparent. Those likely to vote Liberal were most supportive of a family member embarking on a military career (58%), followed by ALP voters (47%). By contrast, only 33% of Greens voters broadly agreed with the statement, and 27% broadly disagreed.

ADF significance and funding

Questions over defence funding and the size of the ADF have been the subject of considerable public debate in recent years, driven by issues such as Chinese military expansion, AUKUS, and doubts over the US alliance. Australians have also experienced a dramatic drop in their perceptions of their own safety across recent years, with the perceived likelihood of conflict in the region a key driver of that trend. In certain respects, this attitude is unsurprising. Since at least 2020 successive Australian governments have repeatedly made very stark statements about the rapid deterioration of the country's strategic situation and potential for great power conflict in our region.¹⁴

Despite this background, our survey found the public divided on the issue of an expansion of the ADF, and an increase in the defence budget to pay for it. Respondents were told that the ADF consists of roughly 57,000 full time personnel, and this was contextualized by noting that the British armed forces is made up of roughly 148,000 personnel whilst New Zealand's is comprised of 9,000.¹⁵ The majority of respondents (52%) felt that the ADF was the right size. 41% of respondents felt that the ADF was too small, and only 7% felt that it was

¹³ This category includes those who are currently serving, veterans, and those with a family member who had served or is serving.

¹⁴ Scott Morrison, Address - Launch of the 2020 Defence Strategic Update, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-42881>, (accessed 16 May 2025)

¹⁵ Department of Defence, *Annual Report 2023-2024, Workforce Summary*, <https://www.transparency.gov.au/publications/defence/departments-of-defence-annual-report-2023-24/chapter-6-workforce%2C-personnel-and-families/workforce-summary>; House of Commons Library, UK defence personnel statistics, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7930/>; New Zealand Defence Force, *Our People Structure and Leadership*, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/nzdf/who-we-are/our-people-structure-and-leadership/>

too large. Whilst there was a considerable cohort of respondents who supported an expansion of the ADF, there was limited support for major change. Of the 41% of respondents who believed that the ADF was too small, 32% selected the “too small” bracket, and only 8% believed it to be “much too small”.

The next questions asked about defence spending, again placing the Australian figure in the context of those from the UK and New Zealand. Notably, whilst 41% of respondents felt that the ADF was too small, only 33% believed that the defence budget should be increased. The number supporting a cut to the defence budget was larger than those supporting cuts to the ADF, but only slightly at 11%. The majority of respondents (56%) believed that Australian defence spending was about right. This data suggests that there is limited public support for a major uplift in defence spending. It should be noted that the fieldwork for this survey was conducted in February and March 2025 before some of the more notable impacts of the new Trump Administration fed through into the public debate, and before the widespread coverage of issues such as the circumnavigation of Australia by the Chinese Task Force. These events may have since shifted public attitudes, but it seems unlikely that such shifts would be major.

The data from this survey represents a notable change from the data trends in the Australian Election Survey (AES). The 2022 iteration of that survey saw a marked increase in the number of respondents who supported a growth in defence spending; 45% in 2022 up from 29% in 2019. There were corresponding falls in those who believed that defence spending was about right (39% in 2022 down from 49% in 2019) and those who supported cuts (16% in 2022 down from 22% in 2019). The data from our 2025 survey is closer to that of the AES in 2019 rather than that of 2022. This shift may be indicative of a decline in public support for defence spending in the three years since the last AES, in the light of issues such as cost of living pressure. However, it seems more likely that the difference was a product of the way in which the question was posed. The AES question provided no context to explain what Australian defence spending is, and how it compares to other countries. By contrast, our 2025 survey contextualized Australian spending in relation to that from the UK and New Zealand, which may have encouraged respondents to think that a figure in between these countries was appropriate. If this supposition is correct, then it supports the wider conclusion of the survey that Australian public attitudes towards defence are grounded on a very thin knowledge base.

Among the respondents to this survey, the youngest cohorts (18–29 and 30–39) were most likely to be comfortable with the current size of the ADF and defence funding. Only 32% of 18–29-year-olds thought that the ADF was too small, and 26% believed that there should be an increase in funding. Satisfaction decreased with age across both aspects, with 58% of the 70–100-year-old cohort believing the ADF is too small, and 57% supporting an increase in funding. Respondents with a military connection were also slightly more likely than their non-military counterparts to think the ADF was too small or more defence spending was required.

As with earlier questions, political leanings affected the responses provided. There was a strong sentiment among Independent, National Party/Other, and Liberal voters that the ADF was too small (49%, 48% and 46% respectively). The figure for Labor voters was 36% and Greens voters 27%. In both cases, a majority of respondents who expressed support for these parties felt that the ADF was appropriately sized (Labor 57%; Greens 59%).

The responses to the question about funding were similar but there was a notable divergence among Independent and National Party/Other voters between the comparatively strong support for a larger ADF, but a reticence to increase defence funding. The gap between the response to the two questions was 16% and 10% respectively. Across supporters of all parties a majority of respondents felt that defence funding was about right. Liberal voters were the most likely to support additional funds for the ADF, with 44% holding this view. The figure for Labor voters was 28%. Greens supporters were the only group among whom those supporting cuts to defence funding (22%) exceeded those advocating an increase (17%), but the majority of this cohort (61%) felt that current funding was appropriate.

In order to get a sense of how respondents saw the role of the ADF within wider national policy they were asked “To what extent do you agree that Australian security is best served by prioritizing developing a strong military compared with focusing on diplomacy and foreign aid?” More than half of respondents (54%) broadly agreed with this statement, 35% were neutral, and only 10% broadly disagreed. These trends were consistent across most of the demographic breakdowns. There was, however, a notable differentiation across voting preferences. Greens voters were the least likely to prioritize a strong military (33%), and Liberal voters the most likely (69%). Those affiliated with the Labor party sat in between (55%).

The data from this question, when viewed in the context of responses regarding the size of the ADF and defence funding reveals some of the complexities within Australian public attitudes towards defence and security. There is strong evidence that the public do feel less secure, and are concerned about the possibility of conflict. This survey shows that the majority of respondents see a strong military as the best way to enhance Australian security. The survey suggests that there, however, remains a reticence to spend more on defence.

In order to get a sense of public attitudes towards defence funding priorities the survey asked respondents whether they felt the closest affiliation to the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), Australian Army, or the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and which service they believed should be a priority in terms of funding. The majority of respondents (54%) had no preference for a particular service of the ADF. Of those who expressed a preference, 26% favoured the Australian Army, 18% the RAAF and 16% the RAN. When asked about funding, the majority of respondents (58%) believed that funding should not be divided equally among the services. Out of those who expressed that view the largest cohort (46%) believed that the Australian Army should be the priority for funding, followed by 29% favouring the RAN and 26% the RAAF. This data is noteworthy as it is in marked contrast to the strategic guidance that has been given by government, most notably in the *Defence Strategic Review*, to focus on the maritime domain, at the expense of the air and land domains.¹⁶ In the 2024 *Integrated Investment Program* 38% of funding is devoted to the maritime domain, compared with 16% to the land domain and 14% to the air domain.¹⁷ This disconnect suggests that messaging from the government and the Department of Defence over Australia's vulnerabilities and strategic context is not reaching the broader population.

ADF historical deployments

Finally, respondents were asked about the ADF's historical deployments: which they knew most about, which was most likely to be discussed among friends and family, and which they felt most positively about. The Second World War was most often ranked as the conflict which a respondent knew the most about, followed by the First World War, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Disaster Relief operations. Unsurprisingly, respondents reported knowing the least about pre-1914 conflicts, which are not widely covered in the national curriculum or featured in popular media. Respondents were told not to rank conflicts of which they were unaware, and outside of the major wars, responses were limited. For example, only 53% of respondents recorded that they were aware of peacekeeping operations in East Timor (1999-2012).

When it came to which conflicts were most likely to be discussed among respondents' family and friends, the ranking was relatively similar, though disaster relief operations rose to fourth position; a likely indication of the conspicuousness of these operations, both in the lives of everyday Australians and within media and political discourses. Similarly, the two world wars and disaster relief operations were most likely to receive positive sentiment from respondents: 41% felt most positively about Australia's achievements in the Second World War, followed by an equal 30% for the First World War and disaster relief operations. Interestingly, while only 6% of respondents felt they knew most about East Timor, and only 5% indicated that they would discuss peacekeeping in East Timor with family and friends, 18% of respondents felt most positive about Australia's achievements in East Timor. This discrepancy may be the result of the implications of "peacekeeping", which might provoke a more positive sentiment from the public, regardless of their awareness of these operations. Once again, pre-1914 conflicts were least likely to be viewed positively in terms of Australia's achievements therein. Finally, 25% of respondents indicated that they did not feel positively about Australia's achievements in any of the listed ADF deployments, and that none of these deployments would be discussed among their friends and family. National Party/Other voters were most likely to fall into this cohort of respondents.

¹⁶ Stephen Smith & Angus Houston, *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review*, (Canberra, 2023)

¹⁷ Department of Defence, *Integrated Investment Program*, (Canberra, 2024), p. 11

Section 2 – The Role of the Australian Defence Force

- Approximately one-quarter of respondents (26%) felt well-informed about current ADF operations.
- Respondents supported ADF deployments for both warfighting and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. However, support for ADF deployments for domestic assistance (83%) and regional assistance (69%) operations exceeded support for ADF deployments alongside allies and partners including, if necessary, in a conflict (64%).
- Nearly half of respondents (46%) thought that Australia is best served by focussing primarily on the defence of Australian territory rather than supporting allies and partners in maintaining wider regional security.
- More than three-quarters of respondents (76%) believed that the Australian Government should always be required to consult Parliament before committing the ADF to war.

The primary role of the ADF is to 'defend Australia and its national interests, promote security and stability, and support the Australian community as directed by Government'.¹⁸ Over the past decade, Australia's security situation has deteriorated with the growth of China as a major revisionist power in our region. Recent geo-political shifts, most notably the return of President Trump to the White House, have raised questions over how best to respond to these challenges, and whether Australia should continue to follow its traditional approach to defence and security issues.

At the same time the demands on the ADF to support communities in Australia and overseas during emergencies has grown in unprecedented frequency and scale. The mounting impact of climate change suggests that this trend will continue into the future.

This section of the survey asked respondents about their attitudes toward the role of the ADF within this evolving domestic and international environment.

How well-informed did respondents feel about the ADF and its current operations?

The survey asked respondents whether they felt knowledgeable about the ADF including factors such as its size and role. Responses were evenly split, with 38% broadly agreeing, 27% broadly disagreeing and 35% expressing neutral views. They were then asked to respond to the statement "overall, I feel I am well informed about current ADF operations". Here you saw a notable decline in perceived knowledge, with the largest single cohort being those who felt neutral (38%), neither well-informed nor uninformed. More respondents (36%) felt uninformed about current ADF operations than felt well-informed (26%).

Perceived knowledge of the ADF and its operations varied considerably within certain demographic groups including by gender, military connection and age. Across both questions men were more likely to feel well informed than uninformed, whilst the reverse was true for women. 49% of men felt well informed about the ADF in general and 34% felt well informed about its operations. By contrast, only 27% and 19% of women expressed the same views. Those with a military connection were more likely to feel well informed than those who did not by a margin of roughly 20%. Even here, however, only 41% of those with a military connection felt well informed about ADF operations.

Respondents' perceptions that they felt well-informed about the ADF and its operations declined as the age of the cohort increased. Nearly half (49%) of respondents aged 18 – 29 felt well informed about the ADF, and 34% felt well informed about its operations. These numbers were higher than those who felt uninformed (23% and 28% respectively). This perception that respondents felt well informed declined as the age cohort increased and among 70–100-year-old respondents only 16% broadly agreed that they felt well-informed

¹⁸ Department of Defence, 'Who we are', <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/who-we-are>, (accessed 4 April 2025)

about ADF operations as against 38% who broadly disagreed. This trend is interesting, as other aspects of the survey suggested that older cohorts were more likely to have knowledge of specific issues or events. Arguably, therefore, this trend is one of perception of knowledge rather than absolute knowledge.

Views on specific roles of the ADF

The combination of the rise of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific, and the growth in the number of emergencies in Australia and abroad, has placed divergent demands on limited ADF resources. The question of where the ADF should focus its resources is one that has garnered significant attention in academic and policymaking circles. For this reason, the survey set out to ascertain the views of the Australian public on what they see as the key roles of the ADF.

Amongst all the questions asked about the role of the ADF, respondents were most positive about the ADF's domestic support function. 83% broadly agreed that the ADF should be used to support Australian people and communities during and after national emergencies such as bushfires and floods. Broad disagreement with the ADF's domestic support role was extremely low (2%). The strength of the positive sentiment on this issue is also noteworthy: out of the 83% who broadly agreed, 40% of them strongly agreed, a trend rarely seen in other data in the survey.

The positive consensus about the ADF's domestic support among respondents is unsurprising as disasters, and ADF disaster relief operations, are increasing within Australian communities. Between 2019 and 2024, there were more than 200 domestic disaster events;¹⁹ and between 2019 and 2023, the ADF deployed more than 35,100 personnel in disaster relief operations.²⁰ The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements found that there was a general belief among the Australian public that 'the ADF could assist in every aspect and was always readily available.'²¹ This is supported by the data from our survey.

Nonetheless, the appropriateness and sustainability of ADF domestic support vis-à-vis its primary defence of Australia function has become a matter of increasing debate. The Defence Strategic Review advocated for greater national resilience and emphasised that requests for ADF assistance in domestic disaster response should be an option of last resort when other civilian capabilities were exhausted.²² More recently, in 2024 the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience considered alternative models to ADF domestic support.²³ Respondents to our 2025 survey were therefore asked about whether they supported the establishment of an alternative organisation to the ADF to respond in times of national emergency (other than war), thus allowing the ADF to focus on its core task of defending Australia. There was strong support for this idea among respondents (61% broadly agreed), and only 10% broadly opposed the suggestion. Roughly a third of respondents expressed neutral opinions. Strong support both for the ADF fulfilling a domestic support role, and for the development of an alternative organisation for the same purpose may suggest a lack of detailed knowledge of the issues among respondents. However, it also suggests the public's focus is on there being someone who will assist in times of need, irrespective of whether that assistance is provided by the ADF or an alternative organisation.

The *National Defence Strategy* highlighted that it was important for Australia to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) in the Indo-Pacific region.²⁴ In 2025, 69% of respondents broadly agreed that regional HADR is an important mission for the ADF. Respondents were more likely to feel neutral (24%) than to disagree (5%) or strongly disagree (2%) that the mission was important. There were some subtle but notable demographic trends within responses to this question. Support for regional HADR increased by level of education and varied by political party preference. 64% of respondents whose highest level of qualification came from high school broadly supported regional HADR and 10% broadly opposed. By contrast, among those with postgraduate degrees 77% broadly supported and only 4% broadly opposed. Support also varied along political lines. Greens and Labor voters were the most likely to support regional

¹⁹ National Emergency Management Agency, *2023-24 Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit Report* (Canberra, 2024), p. 3

²⁰ Department of Defence, *Submission 25. Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience* (Canberra, 2023), p. 3

²¹ Mark Binskin, Annabelle Bennett & Andrew Macintosh, *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements: The Report* (Canberra, 2020), p. 187

²² *Defence Strategic Review*, p. 41

²³ Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience, *Boots on the Ground: Raising Resilience* (Canberra, 2024), p. v

²⁴ Department of Defence, *National Defence Strategy* (Canberra, 2024), p. 24

HADR (78% and 76% respectively), with a roughly ten percentage point drop among Liberal voters (67%). Independents and National Party/Other voters were least supportive of regional HADR as a mission for the ADF with only 59% and 52% respectively broadly supporting it.

Overall, the survey found strong support for the ADF to assist in HADR operations in both domestic and regional contexts, but the strength of respondents' attitudes towards the ADF's role in each context revealed greater divergence. Whilst 40% of respondents strongly agreed with ADF domestic support, less than one-quarter (23%) strongly agreed with regional HADR. Respondents' opposition to ADF assistance in either context was low: 2% for domestic operations and 7% for regional ones. However, greater contrast was apparent within some demographic groups. Among people with a high school (secondary) qualification, disagreement and strong disagreement with regional HADR (10%) was ten-times greater than with the ADF's domestic support (1%). Similarly, broad disagreement with regional HADR was twelve times greater than opposition to the ADF's domestic support among National Party/Other voters (12% and 1% respectively), eleven times greater among Independent voters (11% and 1% respectively) and four and-a-half times greater among Liberal Party voters (9% and 2% respectively).

Turning to the ADF's primary defence functions our survey asked a set of questions regarding the prioritization that should be given to working with allies and partners as opposed to independent operations in defence of Australia. The ADF has long attempted to balance these two approaches, and this can still be seen in the five ADF tasks set out in the *National Defence Strategy*.²⁵ This balance is, however, increasingly the subject of debate, something that appears likely to grow given the dynamics taking place in the United States.

The responses to this survey show that there is still strong support for the ADF to prioritise working closely with allies and partners, especially the United States. 75% of those surveyed broadly agreed with this statement and only 2% broadly disagreed, with 23% expressing neutral views. There were some demographic differences within the sample, with men (81%) were more likely to broadly support working closely with allies and partners than women (69%). The level of broad disagreement was similar (2% respectively), but women were more likely than men to feel neutral on the issue (29% versus 17%). Overall, however, the most notable element of the responses to this question was their consistency. For example, the difference between support from Liberal voters (80%) and Greens voters (76%) was small.

When asked if they felt it was in the country's best interests for the ADF to be deployed to support Australia's allies and partners, such as the United States, including, if necessary, in a conflict, respondents remained broadly supportive. 64% of those surveyed broadly agreed with the contention, 5% opposed and 31% were neutral. Men were roughly 10% more likely to support deploying the ADF to aid allies and partners than women (68% versus 59%). In response to this question, we did see some difference of opinion by political affiliation. Support was stronger in respondents aligned with the two major parties, with 75% of Liberal voters and 64% of Labor voters broadly supporting deploying the ADF in such circumstances. Those affiliated with the smaller parties were less supportive, with only 54% of Greens voters, 55% of Independents, and 50% of National Party/Other voters broadly agreeing with the statement. It should be emphasised that whilst outright opposition remained low for respondents in all political parties, there was a fair neutral sentiment. More than 30% of respondents within each party felt neutral, except for Liberal voters (22% felt neutral). The gap between respondents who believed that the ADF should prioritize working with allies and partners (75%), and those who supported deploying the ADF to aid those allies and partners (64%) is significant, if not surprising, and reflects similar tensions evident in the Lowy Poll, whereby 83% of respondents believed that Australia's alliance with the United States was important for Australia's security and a similar percentage of respondents (75%) believed that Australia's alliance with the United States made the country more likely to be drawn into a conflict in Asia against its own interests.²⁶

Questions over alliance versus self-reliance, and defence of Australia versus forward defence have dominated academic and policy debates for decades. In our survey respondents were asked if "Australia is best served by focusing primarily on the defence of Australian territory rather than supporting our allies and partners in maintaining wider regional security". Opinions were divided. 46% of respondents broadly agreed with the statement and 17% broadly disagreed, with 38% expressing neutral views. This split was relatively consistent across the different demographic breakdowns, although younger respondents tended to be more supportive of focusing on defence of Australian territory whilst among older cohorts the responses to the question were more even.

²⁵ *National Defence Strategy*, p. 25

²⁶ *Lowy Institute Poll 2024*, p. 13

As outlined within the Australian Constitution and Defence legislation, the Australian Government is not required to consult Parliament before committing the ADF to war. However, there has been growing political debate within Australia regarding the degree to which Parliament should be engaged, exemplified by numerous inquiries within the last decade including the 2023 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade *Inquiry into International Armed Conflict Decision Making*.²⁷ When asked for their opinion, more than three-quarters of respondents (76%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Australian Government should always be required to consult parliament before making such a commitment. Notably, this result represented the second highest level of net agreement for all questions asked about the role of the ADF, behind the positive consensus about the ADF's domestic support. Nonetheless, one-fifth of respondents felt neutral (20%) and 4% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

²⁷ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Inquiry into International Armed Conflict Decision Making* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

Section 3 - Australian Defence Force Operations in Afghanistan

- There is insufficient knowledge about Australia's longest war.
- Even veterans and currently serving personnel feel ill-informed about what Australian soldiers did in Afghanistan.
- That said, military and non-military respondents both believed that the main reason for Australia contributing to the war was in service of the Australian-United States alliance.
- There appears to be a correlation between knowledge of the ADF, including its operations in Afghanistan, and trust in the institution. Those who felt that they knew the ADF were much more likely to trust it.
- Despite all the publicity, a large proportion of respondents were not aware of the allegations that some Australian special forces soldiers may have committed war crimes in Afghanistan.
- Half of respondents who were aware of the accusations believed them, roughly a quarter did not believe them, and the remaining quarter were unsure.
- On the question of command accountability, respondents overwhelmingly believed that officers should be held accountable if soldiers under their command are found guilty of committing war crimes.

In 2001, following the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, the Howard Government invoked the ANZUS Treaty and committed Australian soldiers to the American-led war in Afghanistan.

Four years later (twenty years ago, this year), the government renewed Australia's contribution to the war and deployed ADF personnel to Uruzgan Province. In the years that followed, Australians conducted hundreds of high-intensity combat, reconstruction and mentoring operations alongside Afghan, Dutch, American and other forces. Such efforts persisted through changes in governments and evolved in line with wider shifts in the international community's approach to the war. Ultimately, the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021 marked the war's failure.

At a financial cost to the nation of somewhere from \$7.8 billion to \$13.6 billion, more than 39,000 ADF members and Defence civilians, along with Australian diplomats, police and aid workers, served in Afghanistan. 41 were killed, hundreds wounded, even more have been lost to suicide, and the ongoing health and psychological costs are unknown.²⁸ The cost to the people of Afghanistan was magnitudes greater: Amnesty International believes that more than 47,000 civilians, nearly 52,000 insurgent fighters, and 66,000 Afghan military and police personnel, died over the course of two decades.²⁹

²⁸ Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan: Interim Report*, (Canberra 2022), pp. 5, 34

²⁹ *Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan: Interim Report*, p. 36

Understanding of the war in Afghanistan

Despite these figures and the longevity of Australia's involvement in the war, as well as the significance of this conflict to a generation of ADF service personnel and their families, a strong case can be made that the Australian public still knows very little about Australia's war. Our survey results give weight to that assessment.

Before we even get to specifics, it is worth pointing out that under two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents stated that they were aware that Australia had participated at all in the war in Afghanistan. How can this be the case for Australia's longest war?

Perhaps an explanation is the extent to which successive governments, and the Department of Defence, informed – or kept information from – the Australian public.

Between one-in-four and one-in-five people (23%) believed they had a good understanding of what Australia had done in Afghanistan. Veterans and currently serving ADF personnel were more likely to feel informed, but the proportion who felt they had a good knowledge of Australia's contribution was still less than half.

There is an apparent correlation between knowledge and trust. Like those who felt informed about Defence issues generally, respondents who believed they had a good understanding of the war in Afghanistan were more likely to have a positive opinion of the ADF (84%), trust it (83%), and expect it to act ethically (82%). The results were roughly 15% lower for those with limited or no understanding of what Australia had done in Afghanistan for 20 years.

In his 2022 report that identified lessons from two decades of the ADF's experience in Afghanistan, Australian Army Major General Andrew Hocking, wrote: "Clearly communicating national and military strategic objectives to the public acts as an important democratic check and balance, and ensures veterans return to a community that has an awareness of their contribution".³⁰ Put simply, links can be made between society's awareness of what its soldiers do in the nation's name, and those same soldiers' sense of purpose and their ongoing wellbeing. It is in the nation's, and the soldiers' interests, that people are well informed.

Our survey results suggest that the Australian public have insufficient awareness of what Australian soldiers did in Afghanistan. But what do our findings say about respondents' knowledge of the reasons why Australian governments committed to the war, and what they hoped to achieve?

On ranking successive governments' primary motive for contributing to the war in Afghanistan, 44% of respondents thought it was to support Australia's alliance with the United States; a quarter believed it was to fight terrorism; 13% considered it was to assist the people of Afghanistan; and 11% thought it was about promoting democracy. The remainder believed it was for self-interested or other reasons. Interestingly, those who have previously or are currently serving in the ADF, agreed with the primacy of supporting the alliance (31%), but put significantly more weight in promoting democracy (26%) and fighting terrorism (24%) than other respondents. These differences in interpretation suggest that respondents' own experiences, or government messaging throughout the 20 years, was interpreted differently.

We were also interested in whether people thought the human and monetary costs of the war, as outlined above, were worth it, especially in light of the war's ultimate failure. Of the respondents who identified as having a good knowledge of the war, less than half (44%) believed the costs were justified. Those with a military connection were more likely to agree that the conflict was worth the costs.

Alleged war crimes in Afghanistan

We also explored how the public felt about the accusations that Australian special forces may have committed war crimes in Afghanistan. Despite the publicity that surrounded the findings of Major General Paul Brereton's Afghanistan Inquiry Report, and the extensive media coverage of the defamation trial brought by Ben Roberts-Smith VC MG, only 56% of respondents were aware of the allegations.³¹ Those aged 50 or

³⁰ Andrew Hocking, *Preparing for the Future: Key Organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign*, The Vanguard Occasional Paper Series, No. 2, (Canberra, 2022), p. 16

³¹ Paul Brereton, *Afghanistan Inquiry Report*, 2020, <https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/IGADF-Afghanistan-Inquiry-Public-Release-Version.pdf> (accessed 16 May 2025)

older were more likely than those aged 18-49, to be aware of the allegations. Those with military service, either their own or in their family, were the most likely to know (79%).

Of those who were aware of the stories of potential war crimes, half believed them to be true, 26% were unsure what to think, and 24% did not believe the accusations. Veterans and current serving military personnel were more likely to have made up their minds about the stories. Only 16% of this cohort felt unsure, the percentage who believed the allegations was broadly in line with the rest of the population, but a larger proportion (37%) did not believe the accusations.

Drawing on some of the themes that are present in Major General Brereton's report, we wondered what the public thought might have caused Australian special forces soldiers to potentially commit war crimes in Afghanistan. Respondents primarily ascribed it to "bad apples" within the ADF (34%). This was followed by poor military culture (30%), the stress of combat (19%), and poor command (9%) as explanations. Again, the results were different amongst those with military experience, who placed poor military culture as the predominant explanation (34%), and were more likely to emphasise command (21%), and significantly less likely to ascribe it to the stress of combat (8%).

Nearly two-thirds of respondents believed that those suspected of committing war crimes should be prosecuted. Respondents aged 18-59 were far more likely than those aged 60 and older, to hold that view. Greens (79%), Labor (74%), and Independent (70%) voters were more inclined to think prosecution appropriate, whereas those voting for the Nationals and smaller parties were roughly split (54%), and only 47% of Liberal Party voters were in favour of prosecuting.

The strongest results related to ongoing discussions about command accountability for potential war crimes. If respondents' views are any indicator, there can be no debate about whether or not commanders should be held accountable if soldiers under their command are found to have committed war crimes: only 2% believed officers should not be.

Despite the limited knowledge of both Australian operations in Afghanistan, and the allegations of war crimes, the survey does suggest that these events have had a detrimental impact on public trust in the ADF. More than one-third of respondents acknowledged that the war crimes allegations had negatively affected their opinion of the ADF. Slightly more were neutral, whereas 27% did not think it had changed how they thought about their military.

Section 4 – Supporting Australia's Veterans

- Knowledge of veterans and veterans' issues among the survey respondents was limited, with roughly one in three knowing a veteran personally.
- Respondents were divided on the question of whether the government was doing a good job of supporting veterans, with 38% agreeing, 30% disagreeing, and 32% feeling neutral
- Only 44% of respondents had heard of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide.
- Despite this there was overwhelming support – 83% – for the establishment of an independent agency focused on veterans' welfare, as recommended by the Commission.

Australia's commitment to the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has ensured that the treatment of veterans has become an important issue in the public and political debate. A particular focus within this debate has been on the prevalence of death by suicide among ADF personnel and veterans. In response to significant lobbying from veterans and bereaved families, a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide was established in 2021 and its recommendations handed down in 2024.³² The Commission, its findings, and the responses from the Government, Department of Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs, have been the subject of continuing media attention.

As part of this survey, we set out to explore Australian public attitudes across this issue. This included questioning how much public awareness there was of veterans in our society, what the attitudes were towards these individuals and their treatment by the Government. We also wanted to assess the level of knowledge of the Royal Commission, the issues it interrogated, and the conclusions it reached.

Knowledge of veterans

The results of our survey suggest that there is limited knowledge about veterans and their issues within wider Australian society. Overall, slightly over a third (35%) of respondents knew a veteran personally. This figure varies significantly depending on the age demographic, with 53% of the 70–100-year-old cohort knowing veterans, compared with only 26% of those aged 30-39.

Despite this significant proportion of respondents having a personal connection with a veteran, there is a strong sentiment that the Australian public does not have a good understanding of the experiences of veterans. Only 25% of respondents broadly agreed that the Australian public did have a good understanding, compared with 49% who disagreed with the statement, and 26% who felt neutral. Again, the most notable variation in these attitudes came across the age demographics. 35% of 18–29-year-olds felt that Australians had a good understanding of the experiences of veterans whilst 40% disagreed. This relative confidence faded progressively across the older cohorts, with respondents aged 70-100 overwhelmingly feeling that the experiences of veterans were not well understood (15% positive to 62% negative).

The implication that the wider Australian population do not have a good knowledge of veterans and veteran issues was borne out by a question asking how many veterans respondents thought there were in Australia in 2025. The 2021 census recorded that there were 496,276 veterans in addition to 84,865 serving personnel (permanent and reservist).³³ Respondents were given a range of options between 10,000 and 1,000,000 and were asked to select how many veterans they thought that there were in Australia. Under a third (29%) of respondents correctly identified 500,000, with the most popular choice (45%) being 100,000. This was relatively consistent across the demographic breakdown.

³² Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. About the Royal Commission, <https://defenceveteransuicide.royalcommission.gov.au/about>, (accessed 7 April 2025)

³³ Department of Veterans' Affairs, "Census reveals nearly 600,000 veterans in Australia", <https://www.dva.gov.au/newsroom/latest-news-veterans/census-reveals-nearly-600000-veterans-australia>, (accessed 7 April 2025)

Government support for veterans

Respondents were divided on the question of whether the government was providing strong support for ADF veterans, such as appropriate pensions, medical care, and transition from military to civilian life. Overall, 38% broadly agreed with the statement, with 30% broadly disagreeing, and 32% feeling neutral. There were relatively few responses at either extreme, with only 7% and 8% strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement. It is difficult to tell from this data whether that clustering in the middle is a product of a firmly held belief, or of a lack of knowledge about the true nature of the support provided to Australia's veterans.

There were several notable demographic shifts within responses to this question. As with a number of other questions related to veterans there is a marked change in views across the age cohorts. 45% of 18–29-year-olds felt that veterans were well supported by the Government (strongly agree/agree), whilst only 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. By contrast only 28% of 70–100-year-olds broadly agreed, and 44% broadly disagreed. Here the fact that older cohorts were more likely to personally know veterans may have shaped the responses of these groups. Alternatively, these could be legacy sentiments, reflecting attitudes towards the treatment of earlier generations of veterans.

Unsurprisingly respondents with a military connection were more likely to hold definite views on this topic. This group were both more likely to broadly agree with the statement that the Government provides strong support for ADF veterans (44%) and to broadly disagree with it (32%) than the wider body of respondents.

There are a couple of other notable demographic divides. The greater the reported annual household income of a respondent, the more likely they were to believe that the Government strongly supported veterans. Those reporting an income of less than \$50,000 were more likely to disagree with the statement than agree (36% to 30%). By contrast, those with an income of over \$150,000 were almost twice as likely to believe the Government was strongly supporting veterans as to disagree (44% to 24%).

Attitudes across supporters of the major political parties was remarkably consistent. However, those supporting Independents or the National Party were far more likely to believe that the Government was not properly supporting veterans. Nearly half (46%) of Independent voters broadly disagreed with the idea that veterans were well supported with only 24% agreeing.

Attitudes towards the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide received media attention through 2024 as the Commission's final report was delivered to the Government, the Government responded, and the Department of Defence and Department of Veterans' Affairs began the process of taking action. Despite the media coverage, 56% of respondents to the survey had not heard of the Royal Commission. This was relatively consistent across all the demographics, with the only major deviations coming among respondents over the age of 60 and those with some military connection. This lack of awareness clearly aligns with the limited knowledge of veterans' issues revealed elsewhere in this section, and the limited wider engagement with defence issues revealed elsewhere in our report.

One of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission was the establishment of an independent agency focused on veterans' well-being.³⁴ When surveyed the respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of the idea. 81% broadly agreed with the recommendation, and the strength of that support was also notable, with 44% strongly supporting it. This support was spread across all demographics; however, once again the strongest support came from older respondents, with 58% of those in the 70-100 age bracket strongly supporting the proposal. Among those who were aware of the Royal Commission the support was even stronger, with 89% broadly supporting, and 58% strongly supporting.

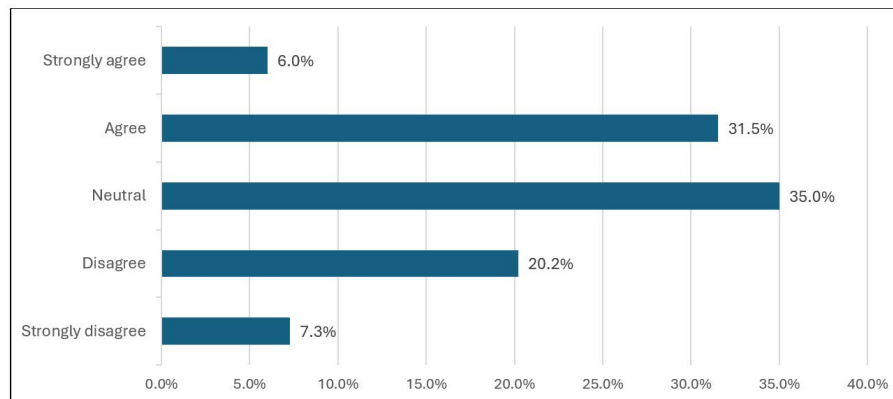
Among the admittedly limited sample of those who had served in the ADF (62 respondents) support for the establishment of an independent agency focused on veterans' welfare was very similar to the broader cohort (83%). Interestingly, however, this cohort of serving personnel and veterans contained a small but notable group (10%) who opposed the idea. This contrasts with very limited opposition (2%) among the general survey respondents.

³⁴ Nick Kaladas, James Douglas and Peggy Brown, *Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide Final Report: Volume 1: Executive Summary, Recommendations and the Fundamentals*, (Canberra, 2024), Recommendation 87, p. 148

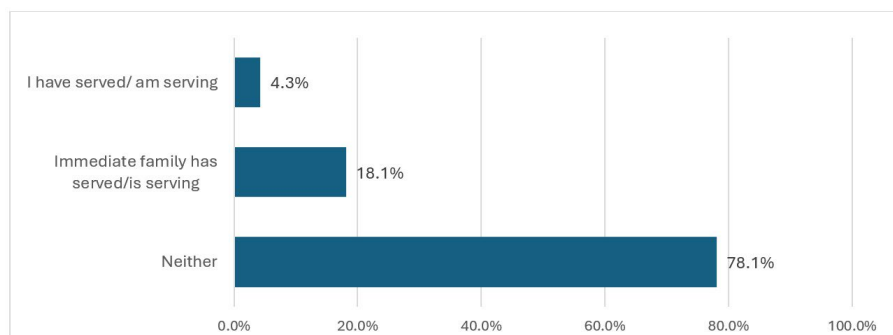
As a group, the respondents to this survey do not appear to have a detailed knowledge of veterans' affairs, and over 50% were unaware of the Royal Commission. A large proportion (70%) also felt either that the Government was doing a good job of supporting veterans or felt neutral on the issue. Despite this, support for a new agency was very strong. This suggests that the support is based more on a perception that the nation should take all possible steps to support its veterans, as opposed to a grounded belief that this step is necessary. In this light it is noteworthy that some of the clearest opposition to the establishment of such an agency comes from those for whom it would be intended to support. However, it must be noted that it is unclear from the survey whether this response was because this group opposed the idea of supporting veterans or that they did not believe that this was the correct way of supporting them.

Section 5 – Figures

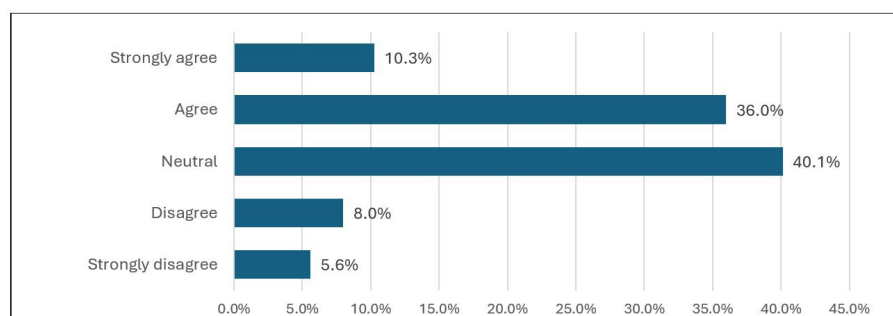
Question 1 – Overall, I am knowledgeable about the Australian Defence Force (ADF), such as its size, role and operations



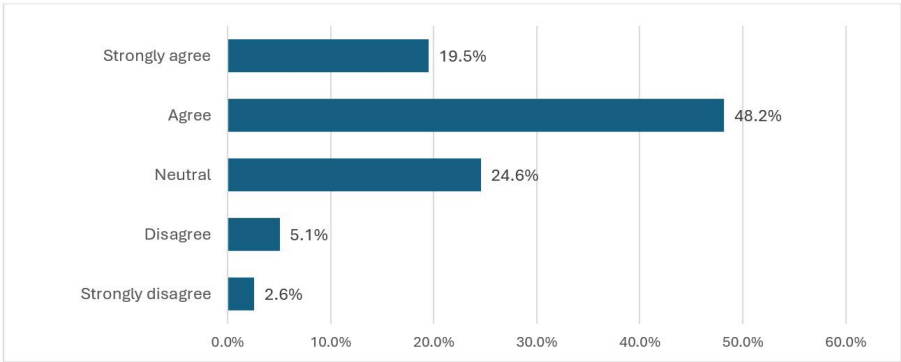
Question 2 – Have you or an immediate family member served in the ADF?



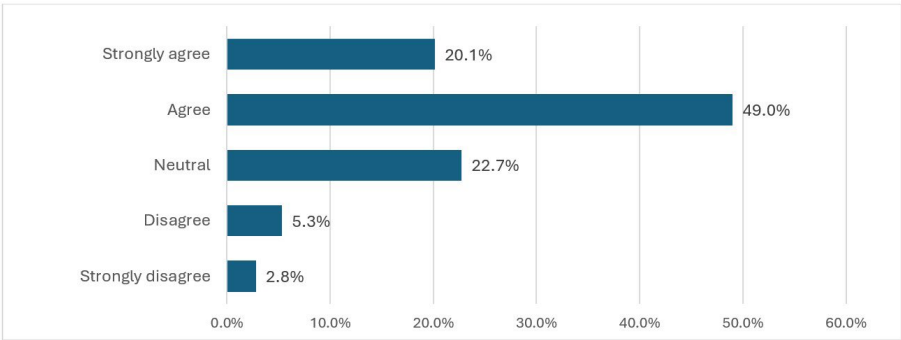
Question 3 – I would recommend service in the ADF to a family member



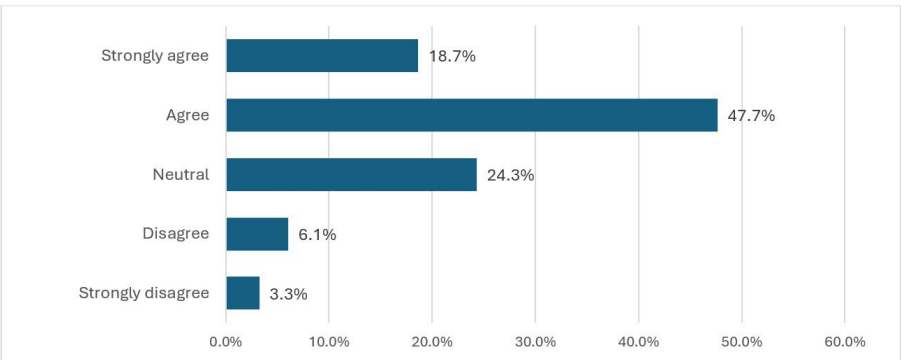
Question 4 – Overall, I have a positive opinion of the ADF



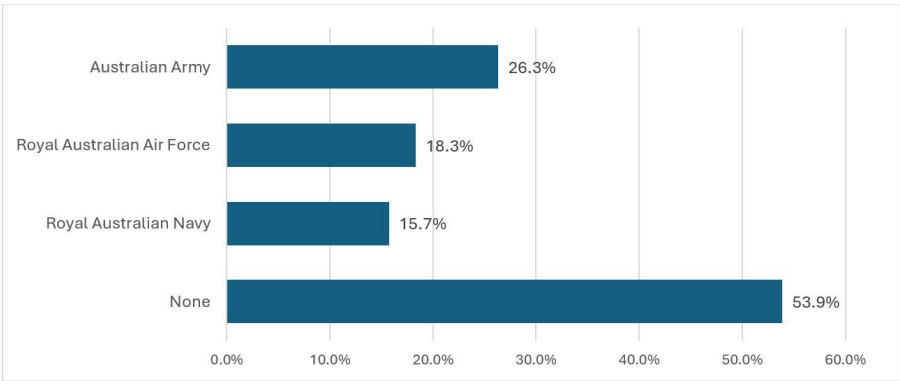
Question 5 – Overall, I trust the ADF as an institution



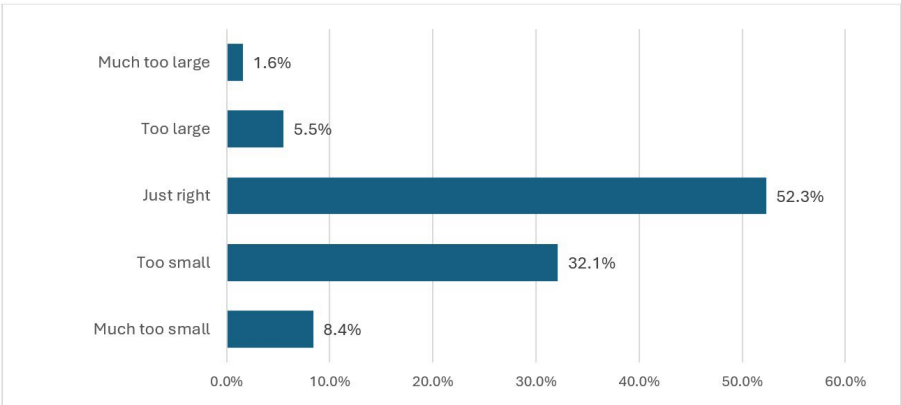
Question 6 – Overall, I trust the ADF to act ethically



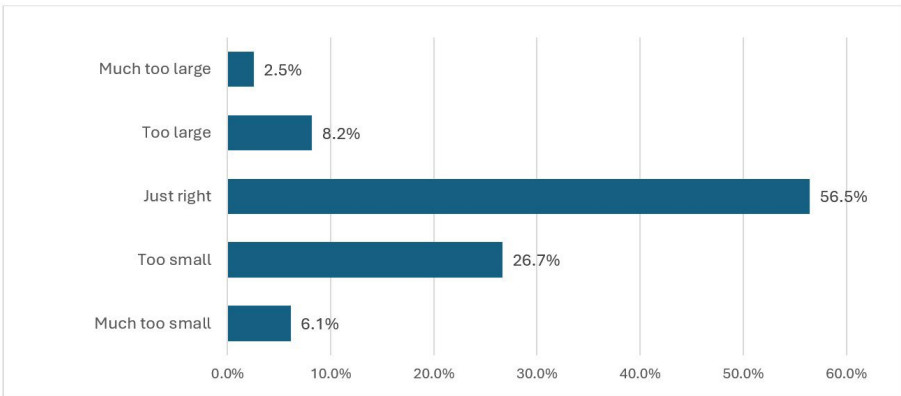
Question 7 – Do you identify with or have a greater interest in a particular service?



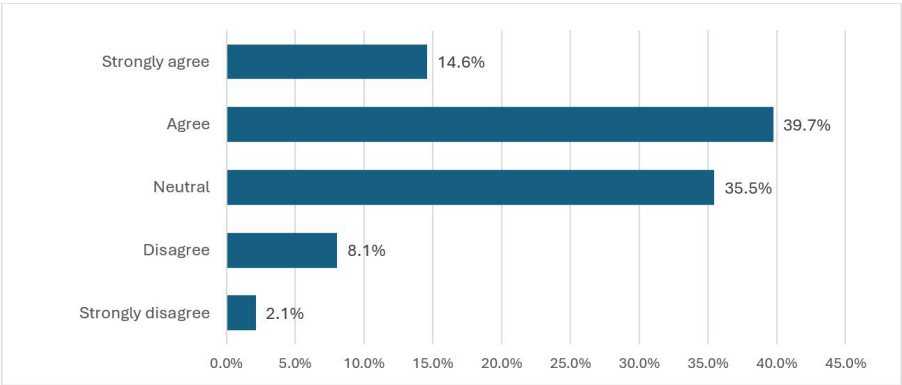
Question 8 – The ADF is currently composed of around 57,000 full time personnel. This compares with around 148,000 personnel in the British armed forces and around 9,000 in the New Zealand armed forces. Is the ADF:



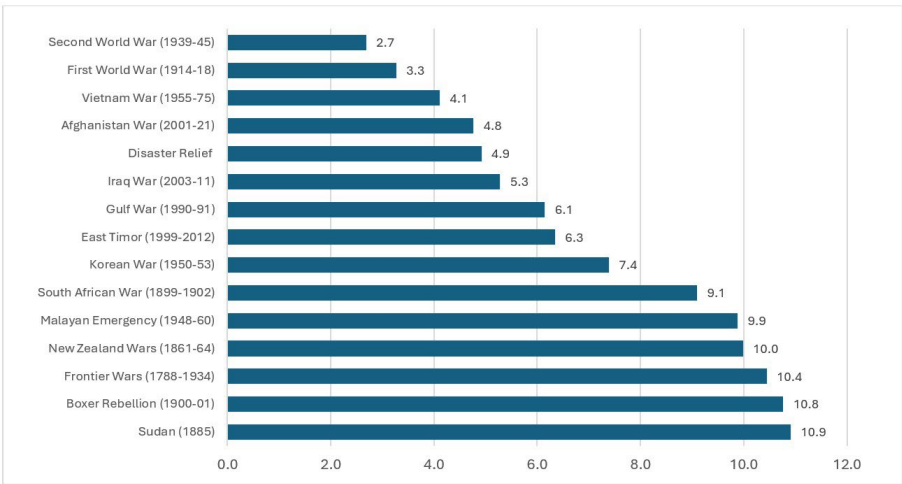
Question 9 - Australia spends around 2% of GDP on Defence. This compares to around 2.3% in Britain, and 1% in New Zealand. Is the Australian figure:



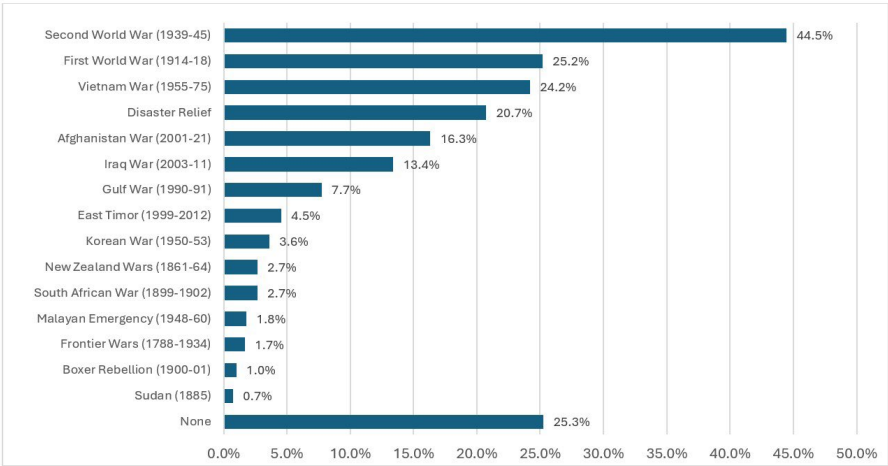
Question 10 - To what extent do you agree that Australian security is best served by prioritizing developing a strong military compared with focusing on diplomacy and foreign aid?



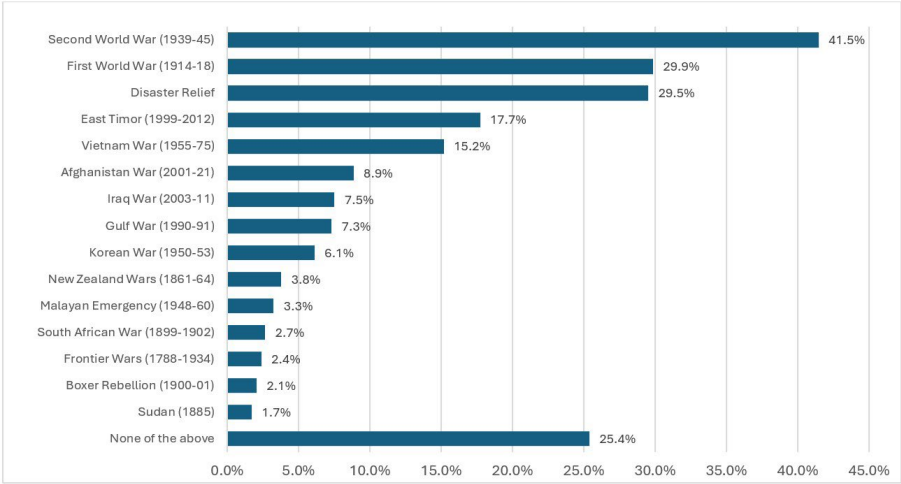
Question 11 - Rank these historical ADF deployments in terms of which you think you know the most about, from most known to least known. Data shows the net ranking (i.e. the lower the number the more people felt they knew)



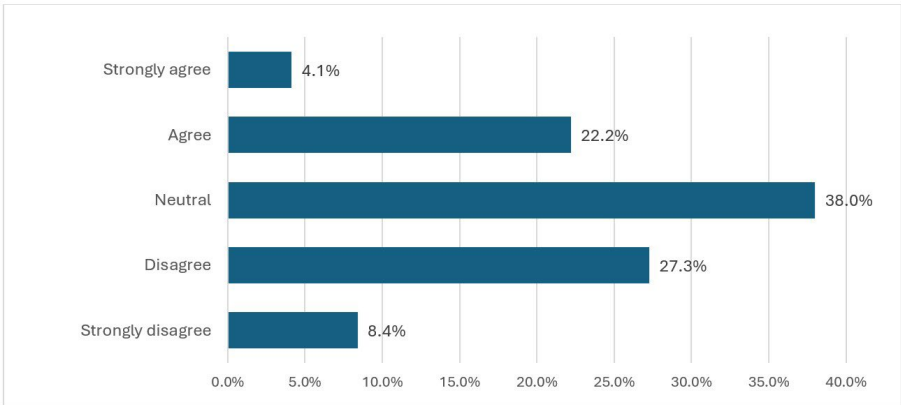
Question 12 - Which of these conflicts is most likely to be discussed among your friends and family?



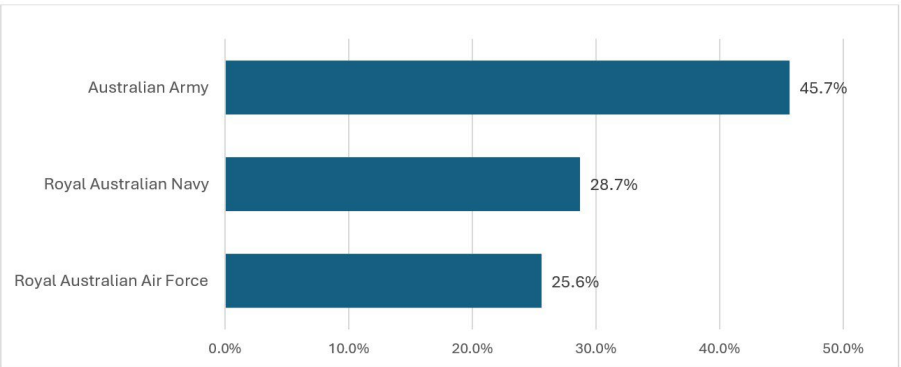
Questions 13 - Which of these historical Australian deployments do you feel most positive about Australia's achievements?



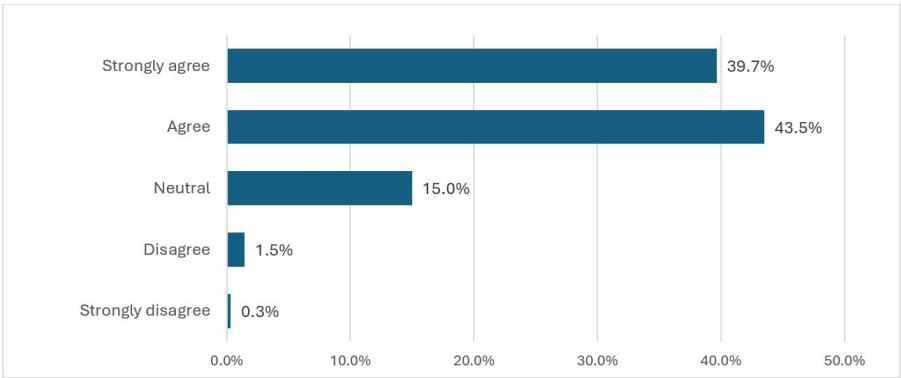
Question 14 – Overall, I feel I am well informed about current ADF operations



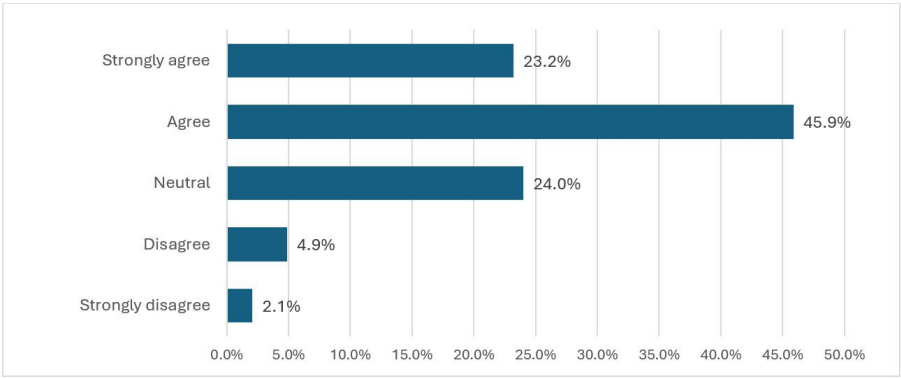
Question 15 – Rate the three services in order of what you believe should be their funding priority (where not rated equally).



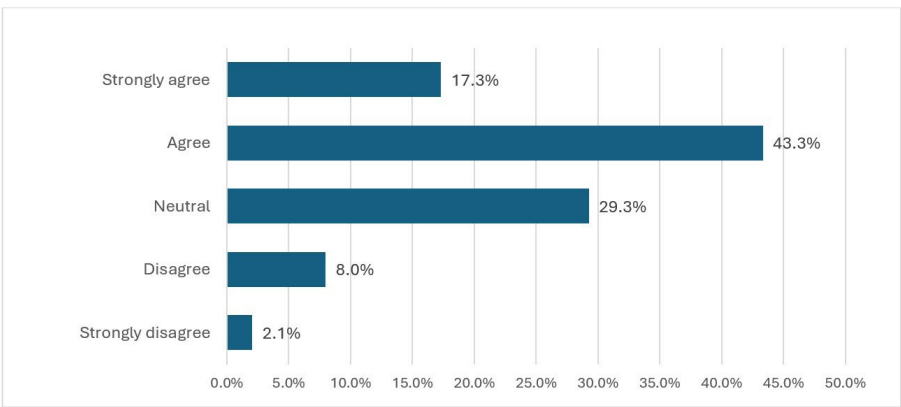
Question 16 – I believe that the ADF should be used to support Australian people and communities during and after national emergencies such as bushfires and floods



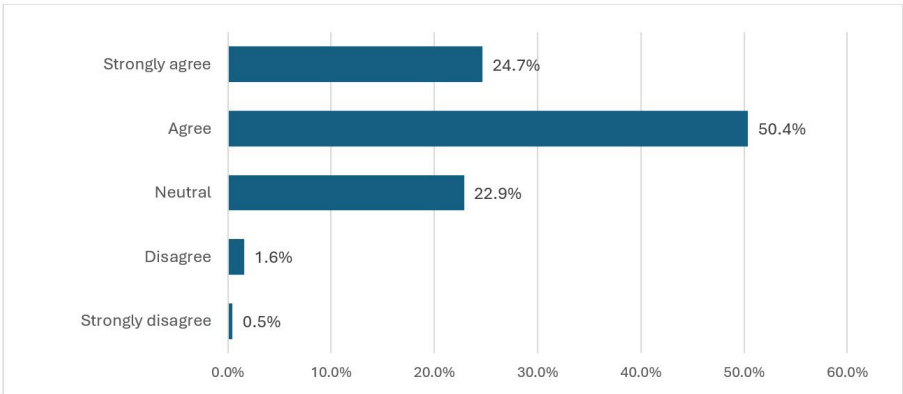
Question 17 – I believe that providing humanitarian aid and disaster relief to other countries within the region is an important mission for the ADF



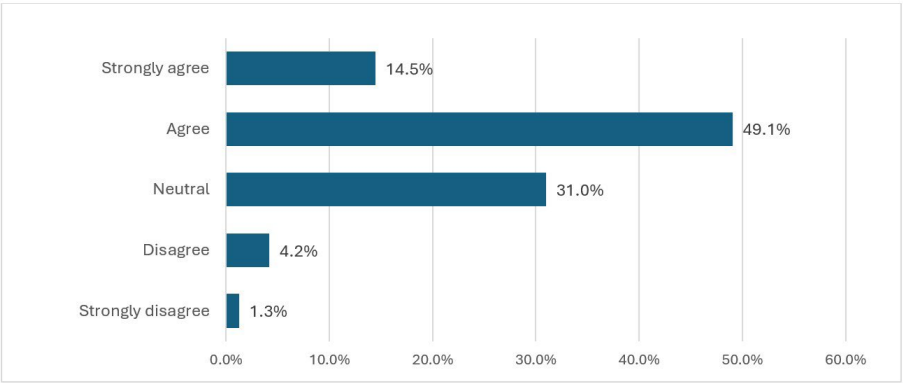
Question 18 – I support the establishment of an alternative organisation to the ADF to respond in times of national emergency other than war, such as disaster relief, to allow the ADF to focus on defending Australia



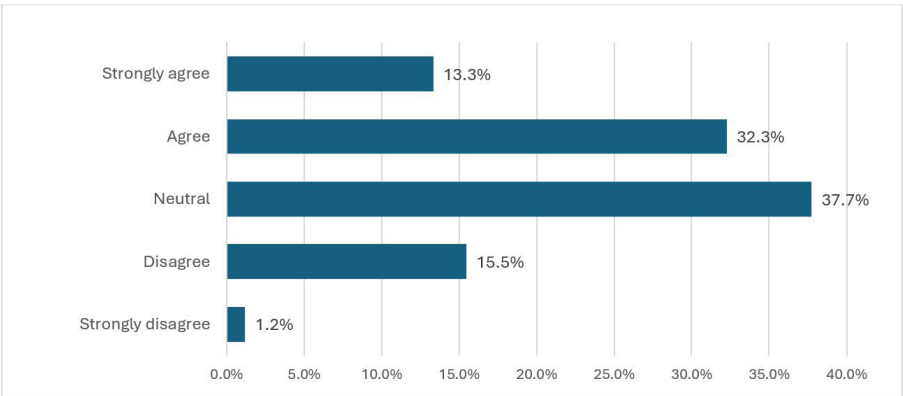
Question 19 – The ADF should prioritise working closely with allies and partners, especially the United States



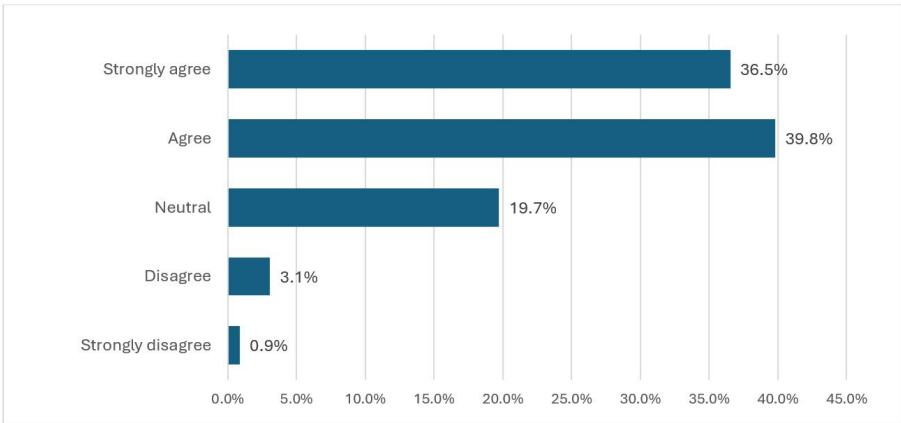
Question 20 – It is in Australia’s best interests for the ADF to be deployed to support the country’s allies and partners, such as the United States, including, if necessary, in a conflict



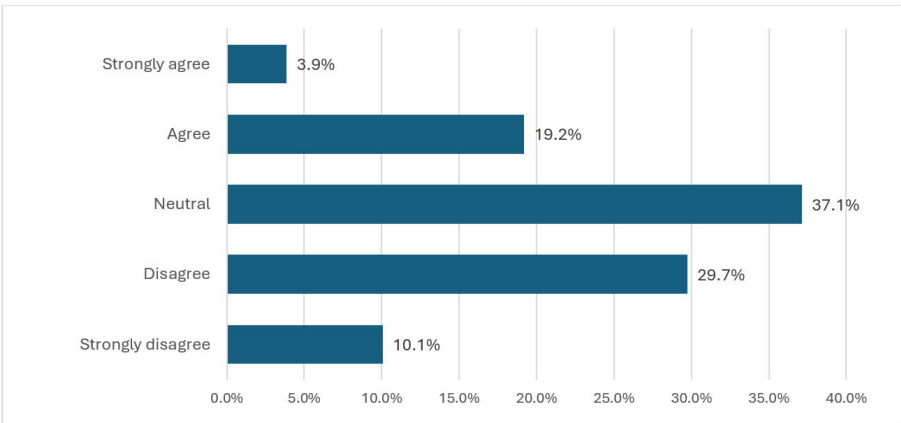
Question 21 – Australia is best served by focusing primarily on the defence of Australian territory rather than supporting our allies and partners in maintaining wider regional security



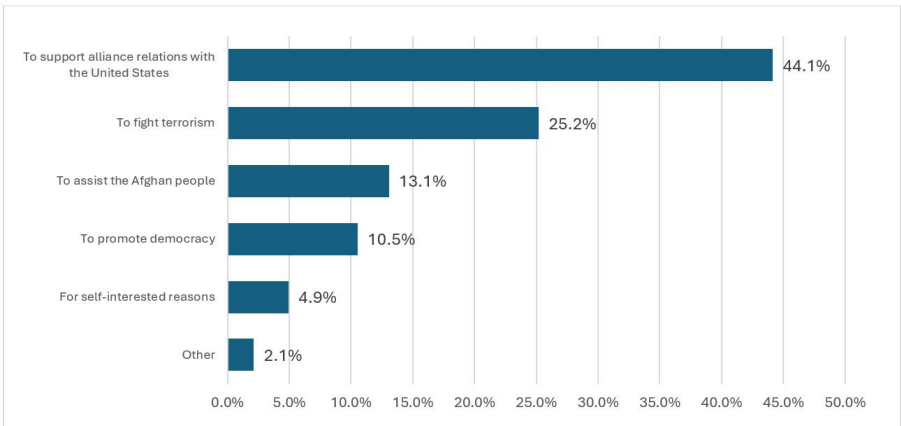
Question 22 – The Australian Government should always be required to consult Parliament before committing the ADF to war



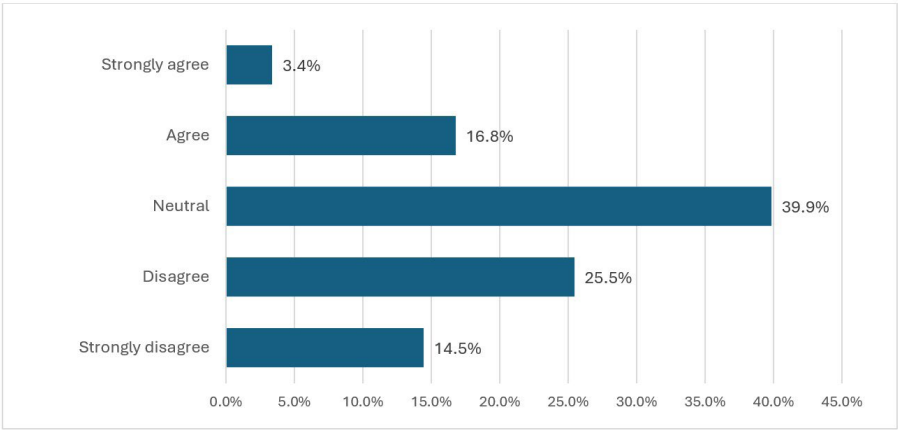
Question 23 – Overall, I have a good knowledge of ADF operations and activities in Afghanistan



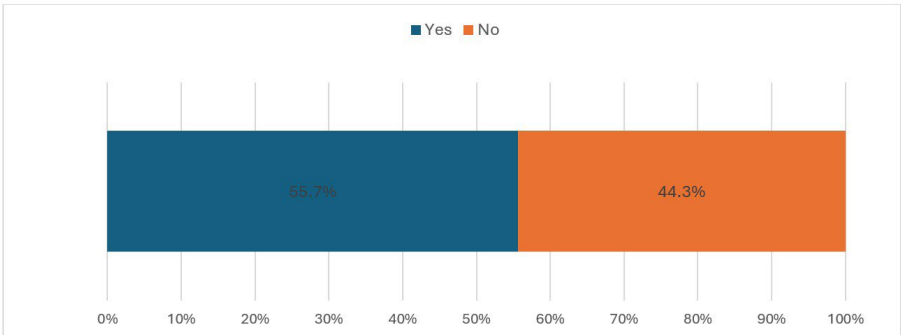
Question 24 – What do you think the primary Australian Government motive was for deploying ADF forces to Afghanistan?



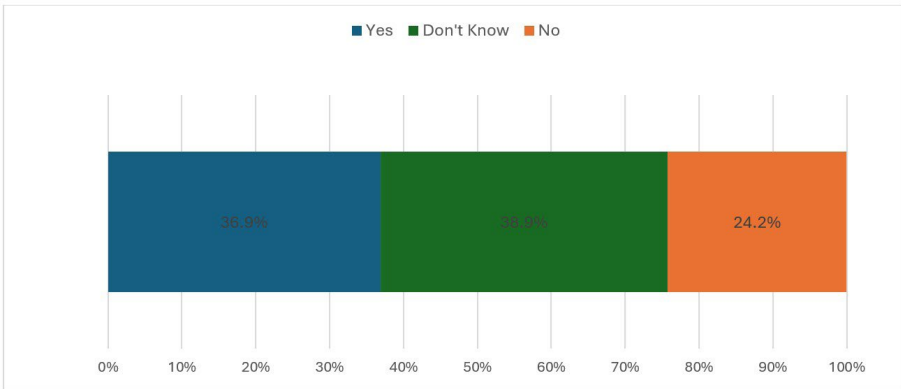
Question 25 – Australia’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan was worth the human and monetary costs



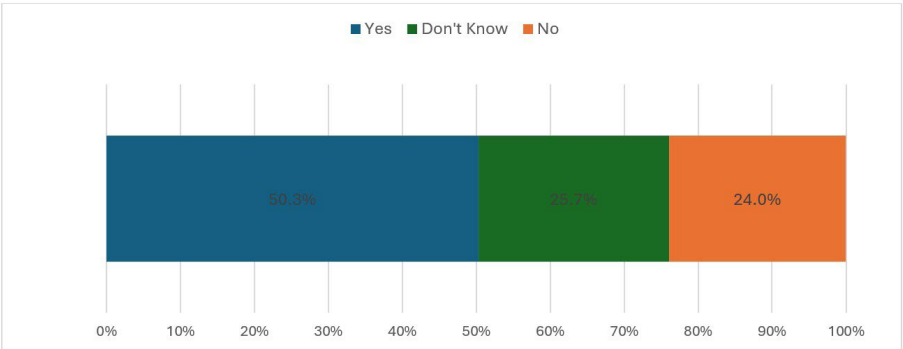
Question 26 - Are you aware of the recent war crimes allegations relating to the involvement of Australian special forces in Afghanistan?



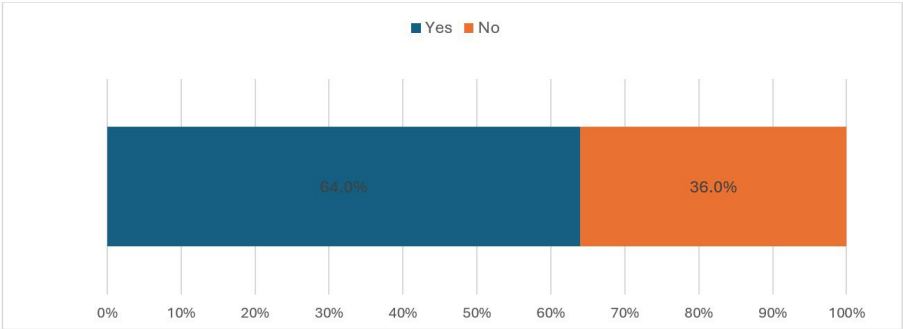
Question 27 - Do you believe reports that some Australian soldiers allegedly committed war crimes in Afghanistan?



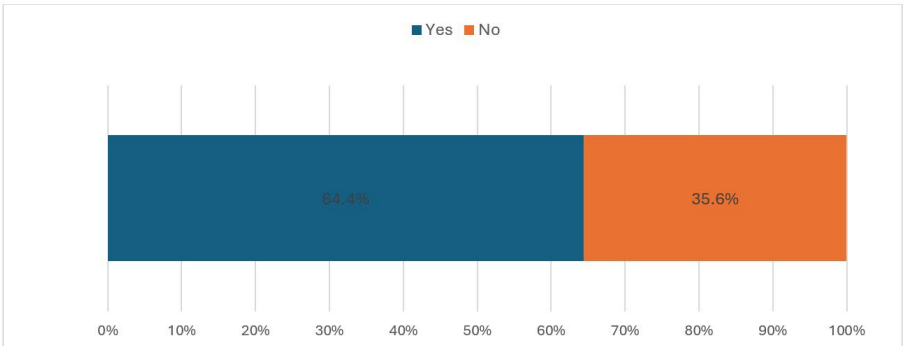
Question 27a – Do you believe reports that some Australian soldiers allegedly committed war crimes in Afghanistan? (Among those aware of allegations in Question 26)



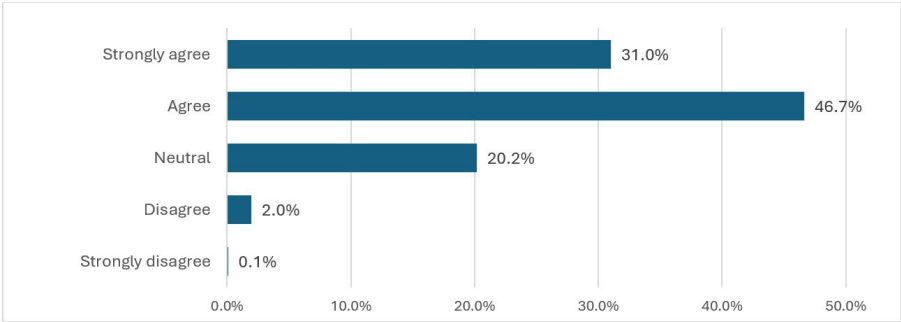
Question 28 – Should Australia prosecute those soldiers suspected of committing war crimes in Afghanistan?



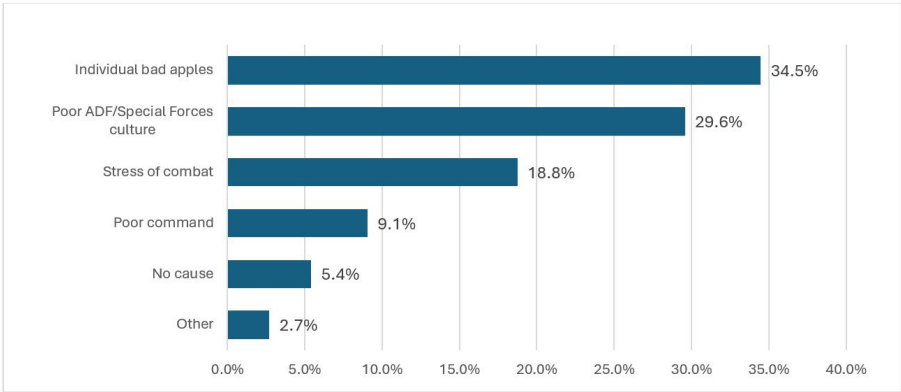
Question 28a – Should Australia prosecute those soldiers suspected of committing war crimes in Afghanistan? (Among those aware of allegations in Question 26)



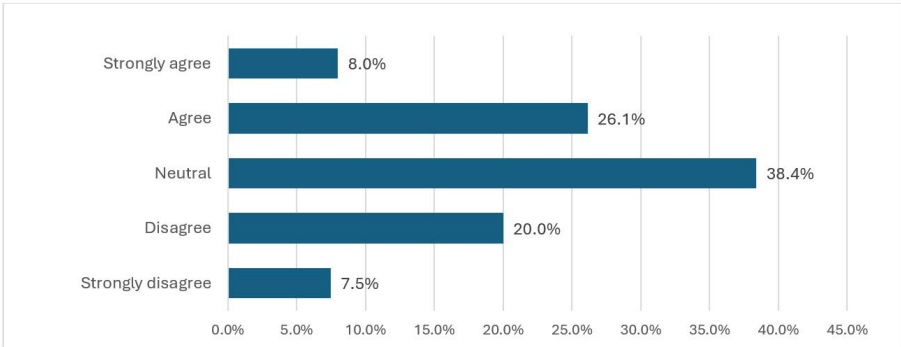
Question 29 – I believe that senior officers should be held accountable if war crimes are found to have been committed by Australian special forces in Afghanistan. (Among those who answered yes in Question 28)



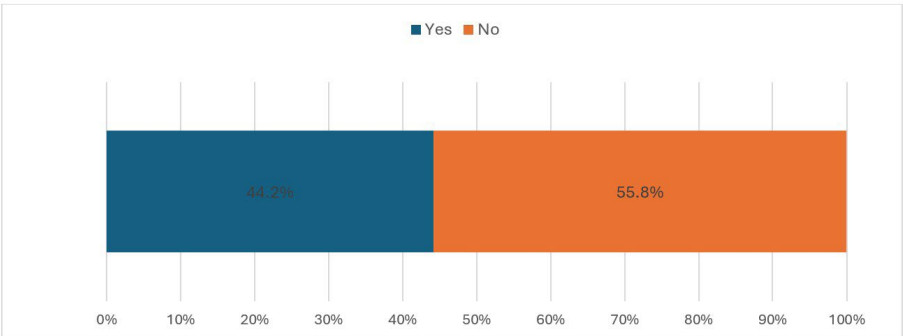
Question 30 – What do you think the preconditions were for any alleged war crimes being committed by ADF personnel in Afghanistan? (Among those who answered yes in Question 28)



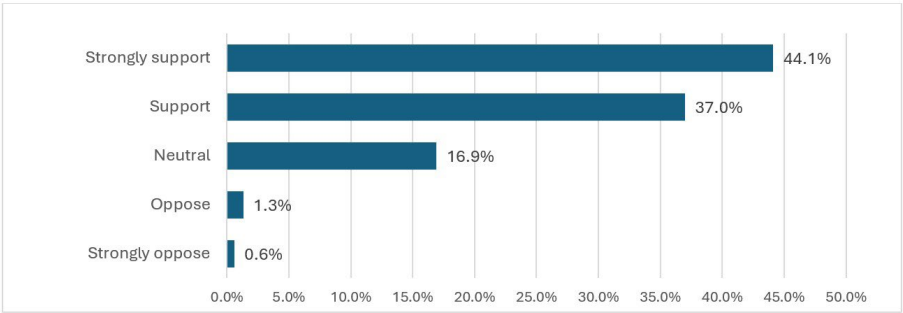
Question 31 – The allegations of war crimes have negatively affected my opinion of the ADF



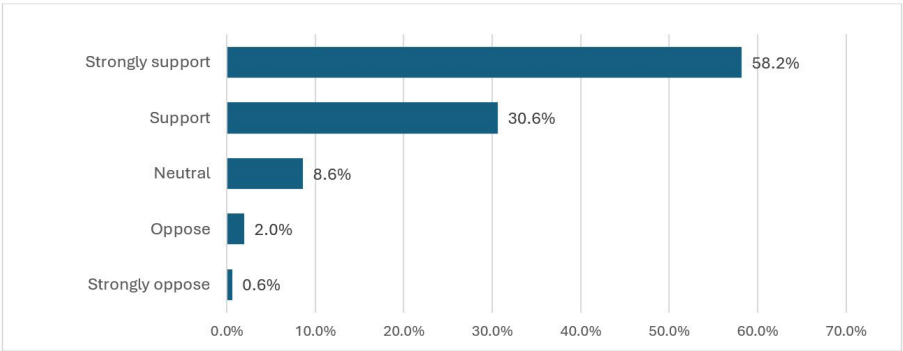
Question 32 - Are you aware of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide?



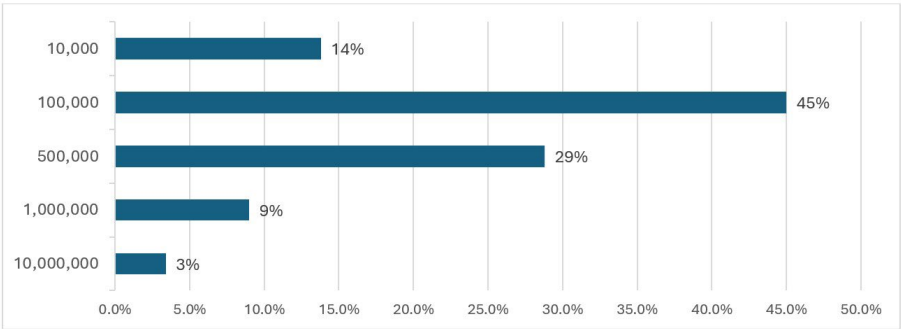
Question 33 – The Royal Commission recommended the government establish an independent agency to focus on veteran wellbeing. To what extent do you support this?



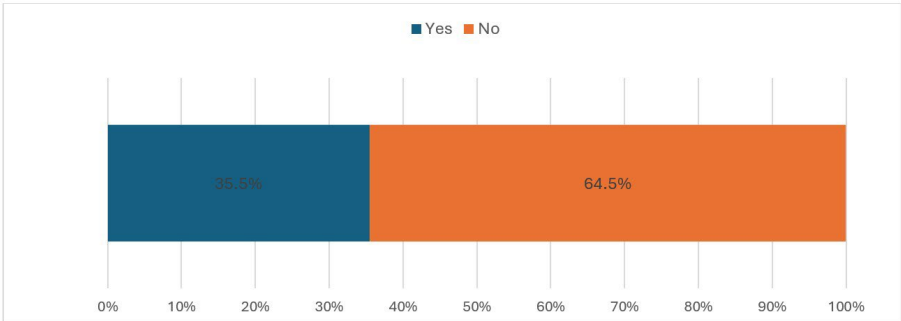
Question 33a - The Royal Commission recommended the government establish an independent agency to focus on veteran wellbeing. To what extent do you support this? (Among those aware of the Royal Commission in Question 32)



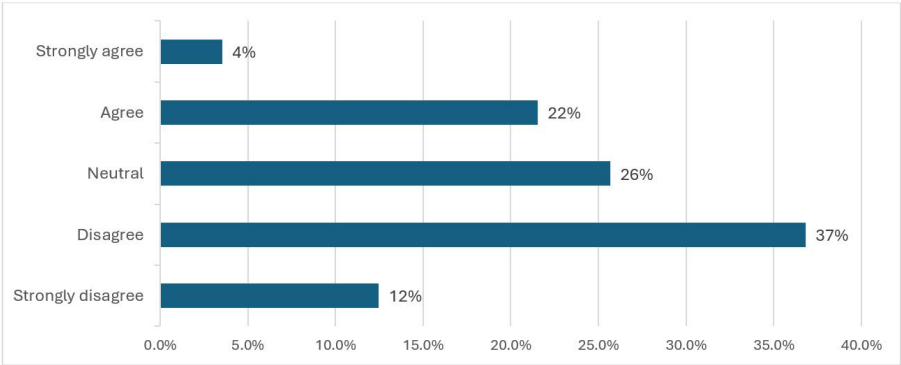
Question 34 - How many veterans do you think are in Australia in 2025?



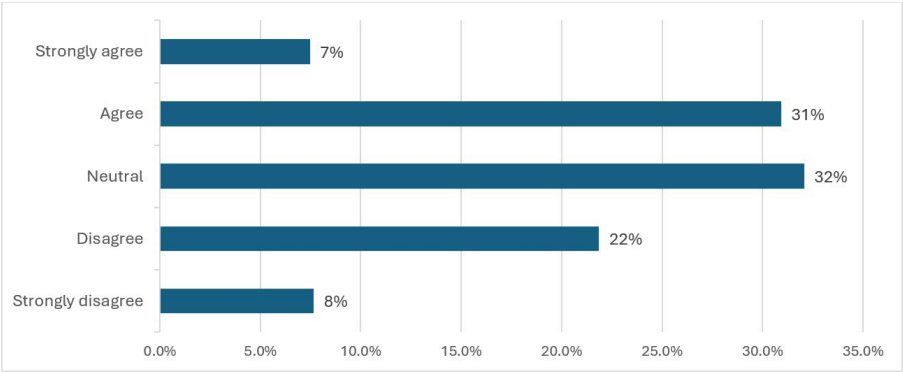
Question 35 - Do you know any veterans?



Question 36 – I believe that the Australian public have a good understanding of the experiences of veterans



Question 37 – I believe that the Australian Government provides strong support for ADF veterans, such as appropriate pensions, medical care and transition from the military to civilian life



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Biographies



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Dr Thomas Richardson is a military historian, whose research centres primarily on Australian wars after 1945 and insurgency and counterinsurgency. His most recent book is *Soldiers and Bushmen: The Australian Army in the South African War 1899-1902*, and will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2025.

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