

# Public Sector Reputation Index

Australia 2024



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# 1. Introduction to the Index



The Public Sector Reputation Index is a globally validated model which we have evolved to work in a public sector setting. The model contains 16 reputation attributes, which each sit under one of four pillars: trust, social responsibility, leadership and fairness.

## Reputation Score



### Trust

- Listens to the public's point of view
- Uses taxpayer money responsibly
- Is trustworthy
- Can be relied upon to protect individuals' personal information
- Has the best of intentions



### Social Responsibility

- Behaves in a responsible way towards the environment
- Is a positive influence on society
- Has a positive impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing



### Leadership

- Is a forward looking organisation
- Contributes to economic growth
- Is easy to deal with in a digital environment
- Is a successful and well-run organisation



### Fairness

- Treats their employees well
- Deals fairly with people regardless of their background or role
- Works positively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Works positively with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people

The index spans Australia, New Zealand and Singapore. This gives us the ability to compare results across countries, further contextualising our results.



# What did we do?



3,100

interviews conducted to reflect the views of all Australians











































Nationally representative sample by age, gender, state and territory.



**Fieldwork dates:**  
13 to 28 March 2024

We asked respondents about 40 Australian federal public sector departments and agencies. The Australian Electoral Commission is a new entrant on the Index in 2023. We review and update Departments and agencies on the list each year and take account of any changes in our trend analysis.

 Australian Government Attorney-General's Department	 Australian Government Austrade	 Australian BORDER FORCE	 ABC	 Australian Bureau of Statistics	 acma	 Australian Competition & Consumer Commission	 Creative Australia
 AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE	 AFP AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE	 Australian Human Rights Commission <i>everyone, everywhere, everyday</i>	 Australian Government Australian Public Service Commission	 ASIC Australian Securities & Investments Commission	 Australian Government Australian Sports Commission	 Australian Government Australian Taxation Office	 Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology
 Australian Government Civil Aviation Safety Authority	 CSIRO	 Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	 Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	 Australian Government Department of Education	 Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	 Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care
 Australian Government Department of Home Affairs	 Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources	 Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts	 Australian Government Department of Social Services	 Australian Government The Treasury	 Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs	 ndia	 Australian Government Productivity Commission
 RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA	 safe work australia	 centrelink	 Australian Government Child Support Agency	 medicare	 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care Therapeutic Goods Administration	 TOURISM AUSTRALIA	 AEC Australian Electoral Commission













## 2. Top performers in 2024

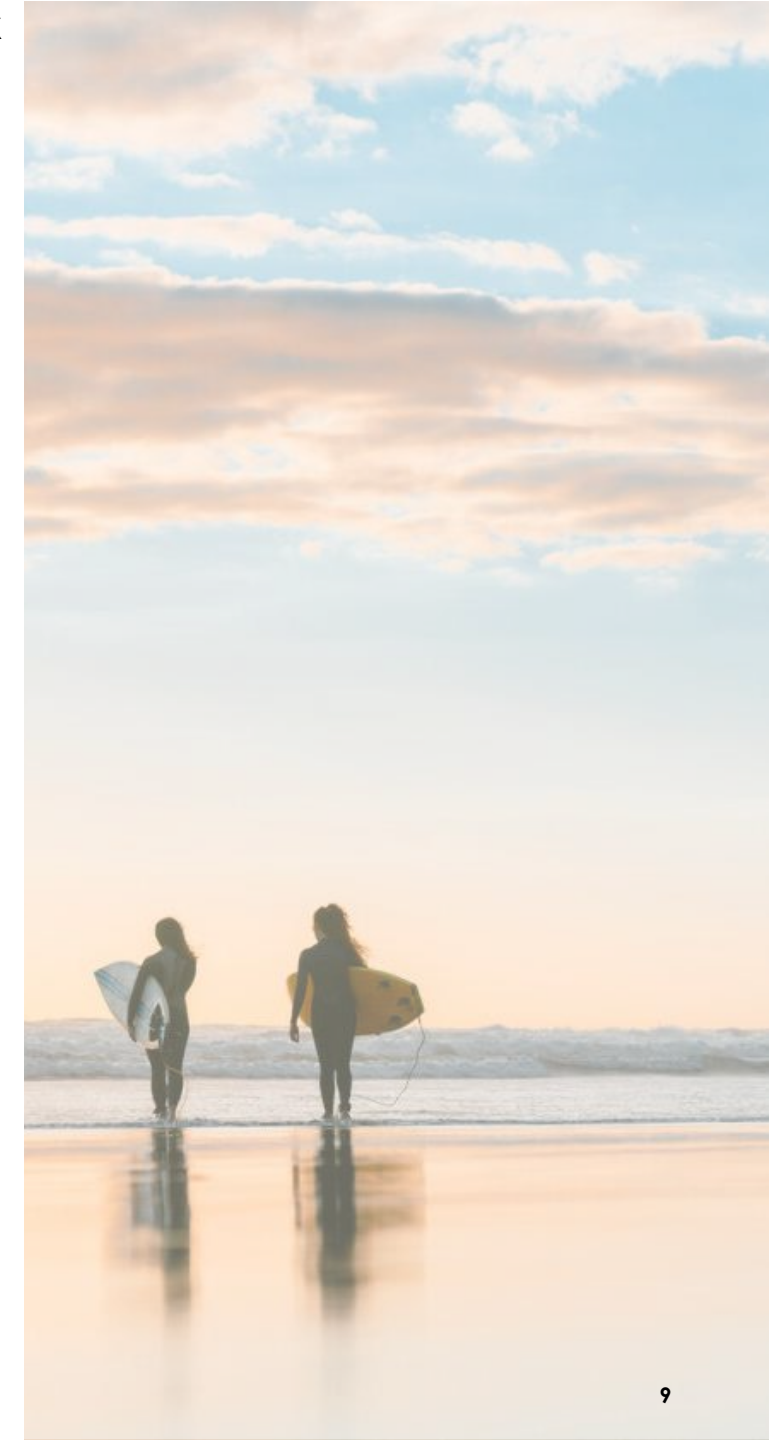


# Overall Reputation Top 10

CSIRO continues to be the highest rated of all the agencies and departments on the Index this year, followed closely by Civil Aviation Safety Authority and the Bureau of Meteorology.

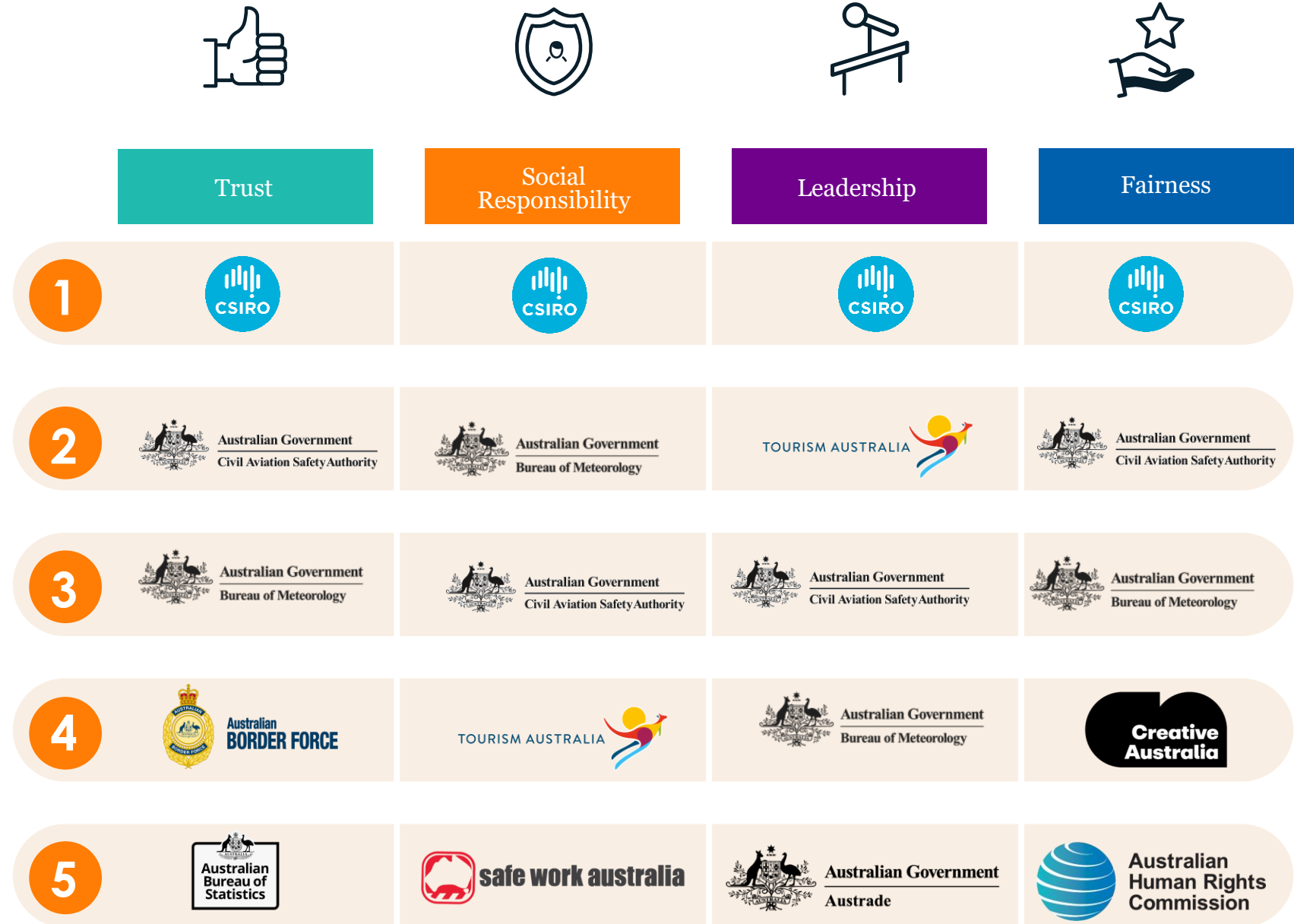
New entrants to the top 10 include Australian Border Force and Creative Australia.

Score	Agency	2023 RANK
73	 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	1
71	 Australian Government Civil Aviation Safety Authority	3
71	 Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology	2
70	 TOURISM AUSTRALIA	6
69	 Australian BORDER FORCE	Outside top 10
69	 Creative Australia	Outside top 10
69	 safe work australia	4
69	 Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care Therapeutic Goods Administration	10
68	 Australian Bureau of Statistics	5
68	 Australian Human Rights Commission <i>everyone, everywhere, everyday</i>	8



# Top 5 pillars

CSIRO, BoM and CASA are in a strong position across all four pillars; cementing their top 3 status.



# Movers & shakers

The Department of Social Services has improved its reputation score the most since 2023. It is followed by Infrastructure (DITRDCA), Creative Australia, and the Department of Home Affairs.

Improvements to Creative Australia's reputation score follow a rebrand from the Australian Arts Council (in August 2023).



## Who has improved their reputation score the most since 2023?



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services



Australian Government  
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts








Australian Government  
Department of Home Affairs

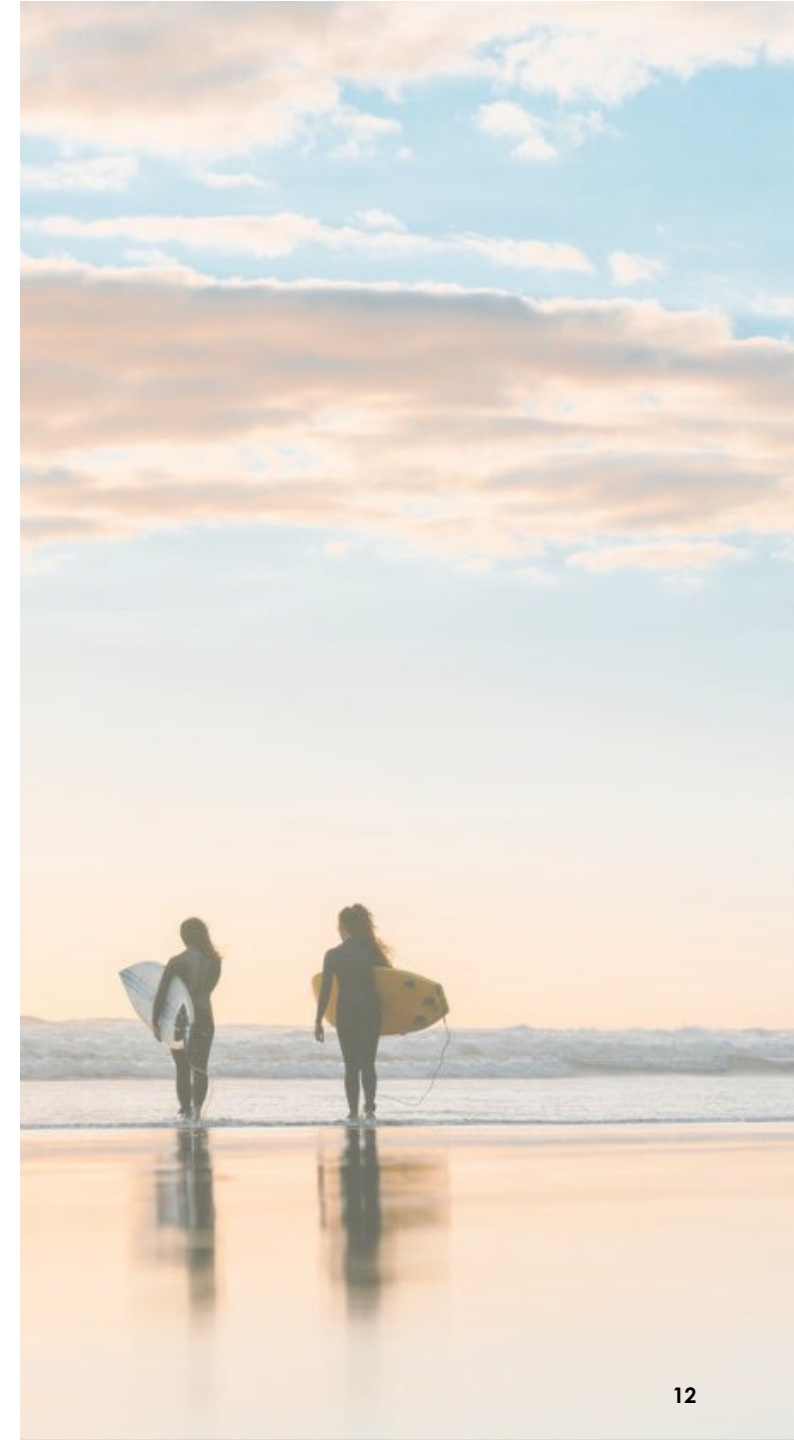


The Therapeutic Goods Administration under the Department of Aged Care is the highest rated of the Departments on the Index, followed by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources.

DITRDCA's improved reputation score means it has entered the top 5 for departments, as has the Department of Employment and Workplace relations.

# Top rated departments 2024

		2023 RANK
#1	 <p><b>Australian Government</b>  <b>Department of Health and Aged Care</b>                      Therapeutic Goods Administration</p>	2
#2	 <p><b>Australian Government</b>  <b>Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources</b></p>	3
#3	 <p><b>Australian Government</b>  <b>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts</b></p>	Outside top 5
#4	 <p><b>Australian Government</b>  <b>Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</b></p>	1
#5	 <p><b>Australian Government</b>  <b>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</b></p>	Outside top 5

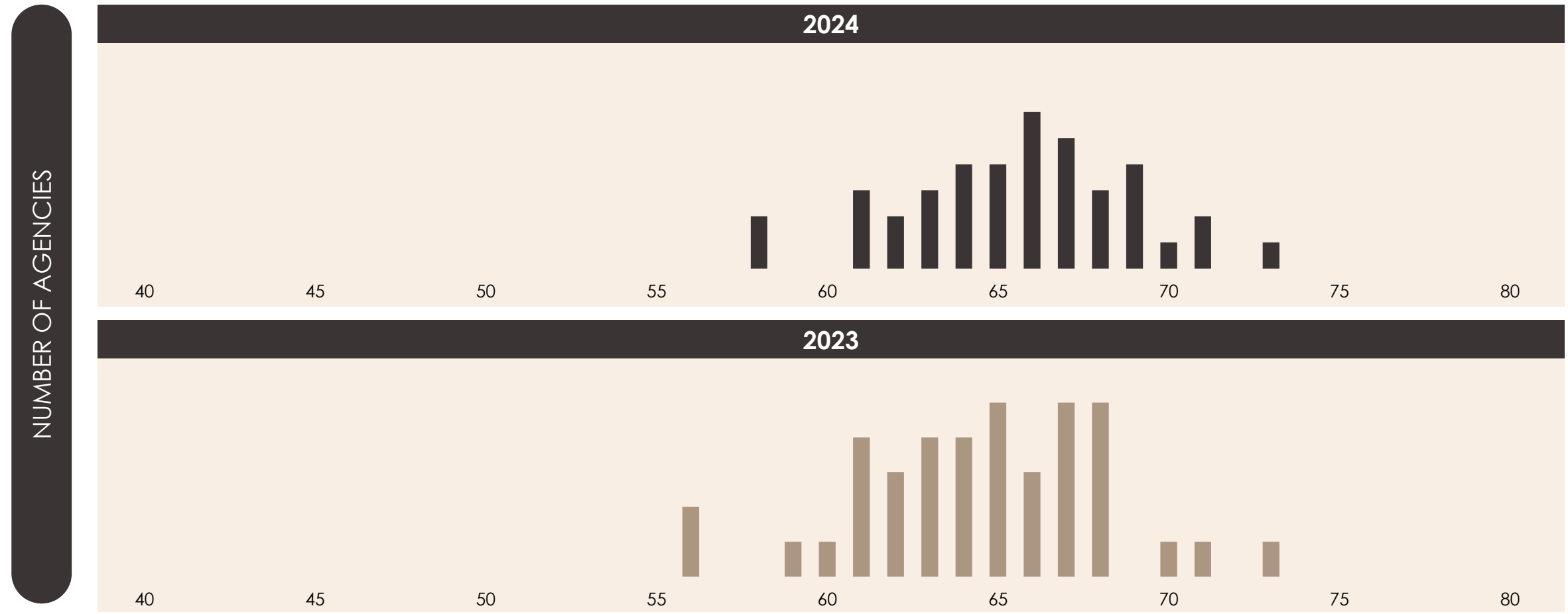




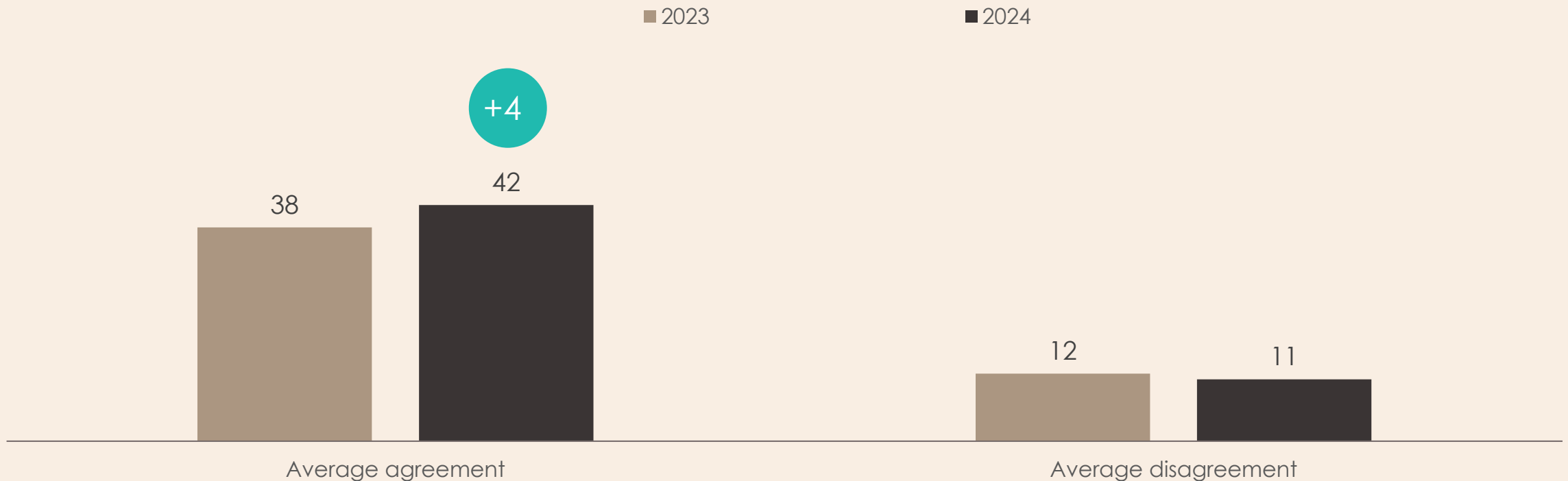
3.

# Public Sector trends

On the whole, the reputation of Australian public sector departments and agencies has improved slightly (2023 average=65, 2024 average=66). 26 departments and agencies have improved their score by at least 1 point since 2023; and only 8 have taken a backward step.



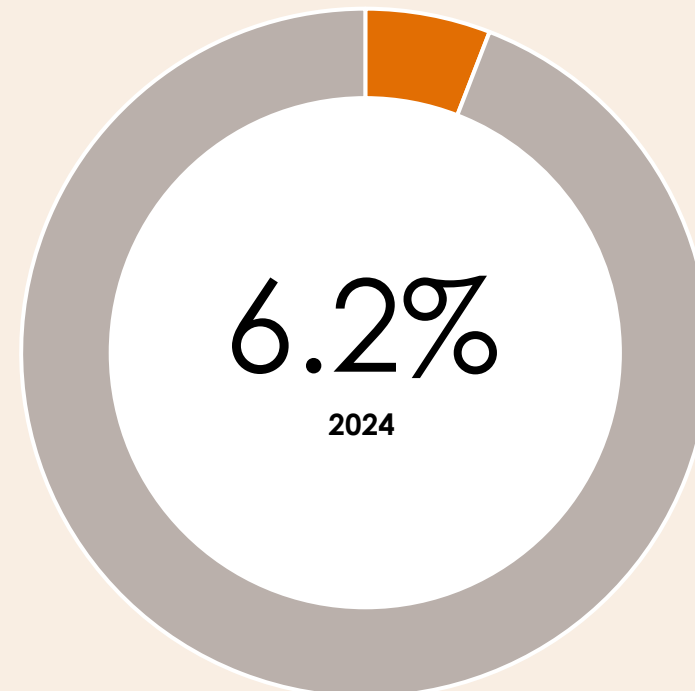
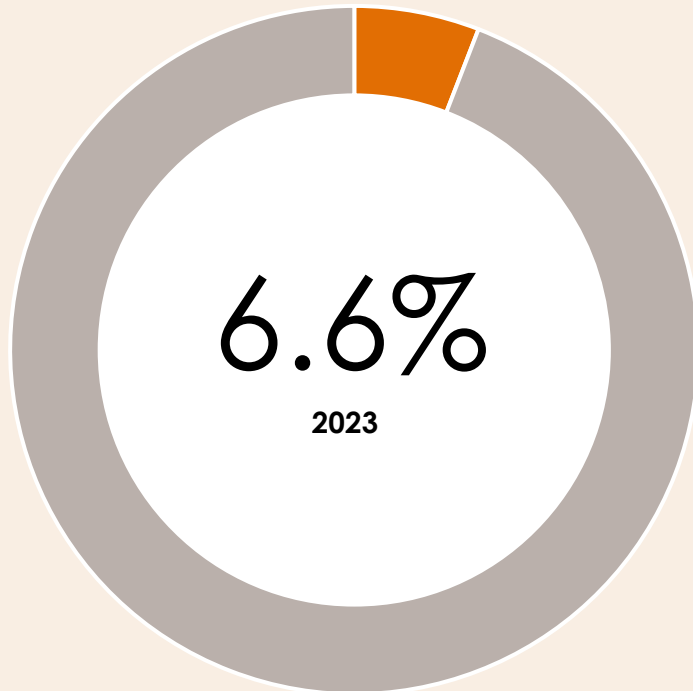
Reflecting improved reputation scores, agreement with the reputation statements has increased by an average of four percentage points since 2023. Average disagreement on the other hand is unchanged.



The proportion of Australians who are critical of more than a third of public sector agencies asked about is consistent with 2023, at only 6%. These people are characterised by a blanket dislike of the public sector, with there being little any one agency or department can do to shift their perception. Positively, this does leave 94% of the population who will form an opinion on an agency-by-agency basis.

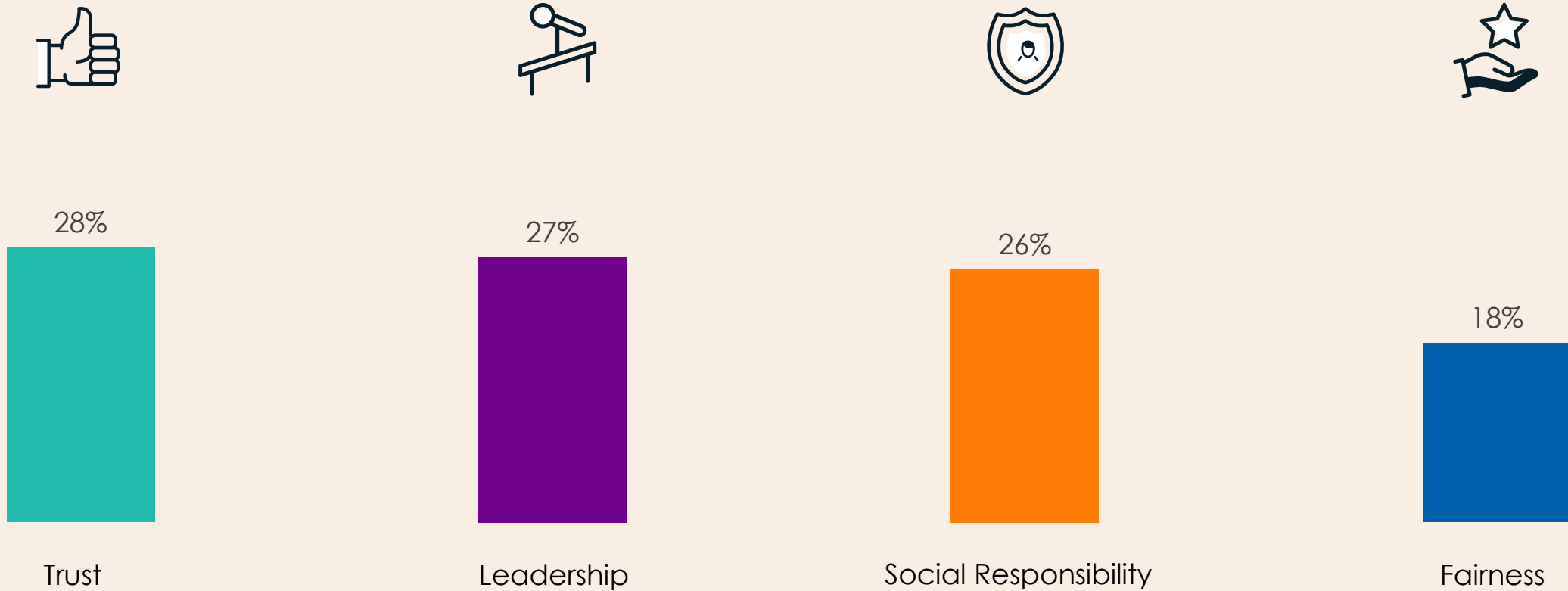
### Proportion of “Super Critics”

% of people who are critical of at least a third of the departments and agencies they are asked to give their opinion on





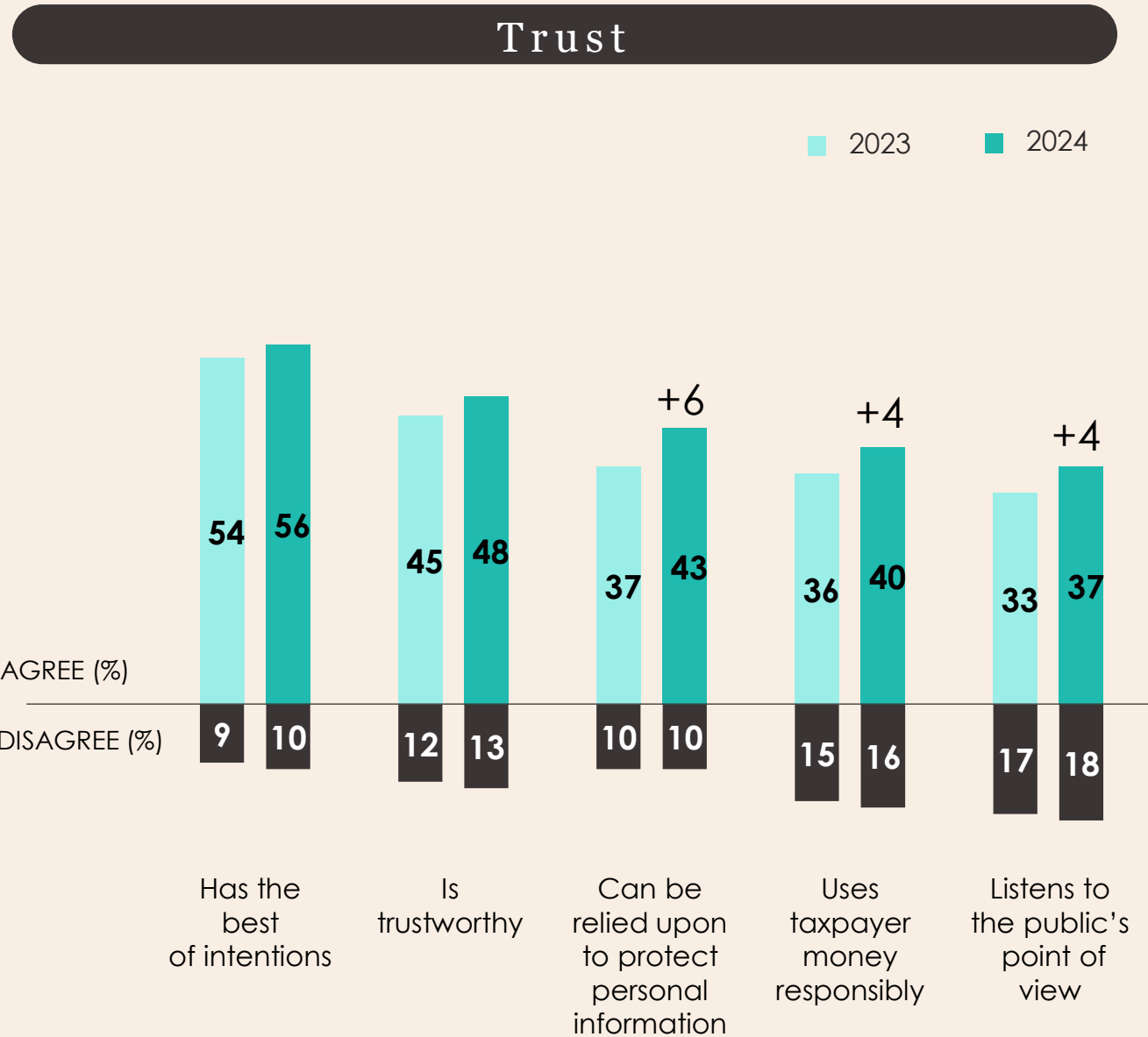
As part of our analysis, we calculate the relative importance of each pillar on reputation. Overall, trust is the most important pillar for building a strong reputation, however this is followed very closely by leadership and social responsibility.



There are three trust statements where agreement has increased by four or more percentage points on average since 2023:

- can be relied upon to protect personal information,
- uses taxpayer money responsibly
- listens to the public.

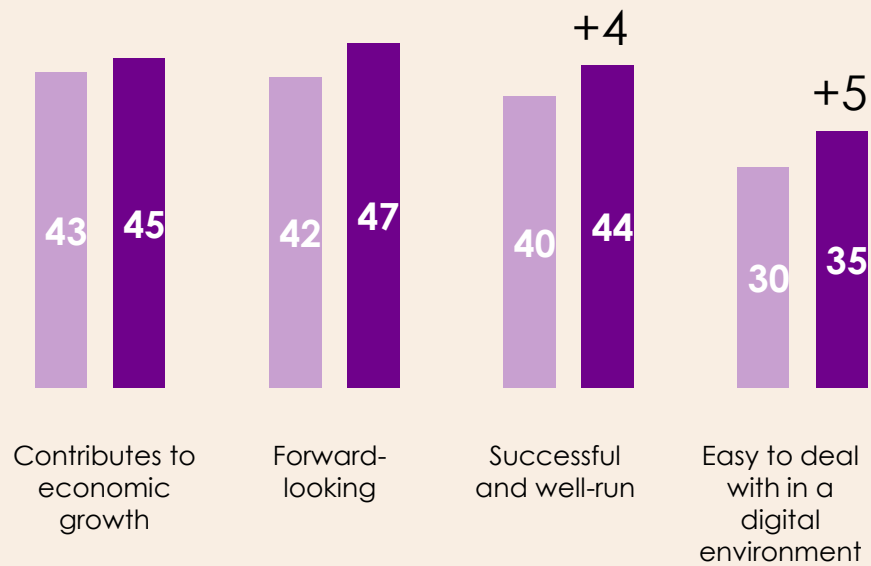
However, a substantial minority disagree with the latter two statements indicating that people would like to see greater citizen engagement and consultation.



Looking at average agreement across the remaining three pillars, we can see increases across the board. However, agreement with the fairness attributes has improved the most.

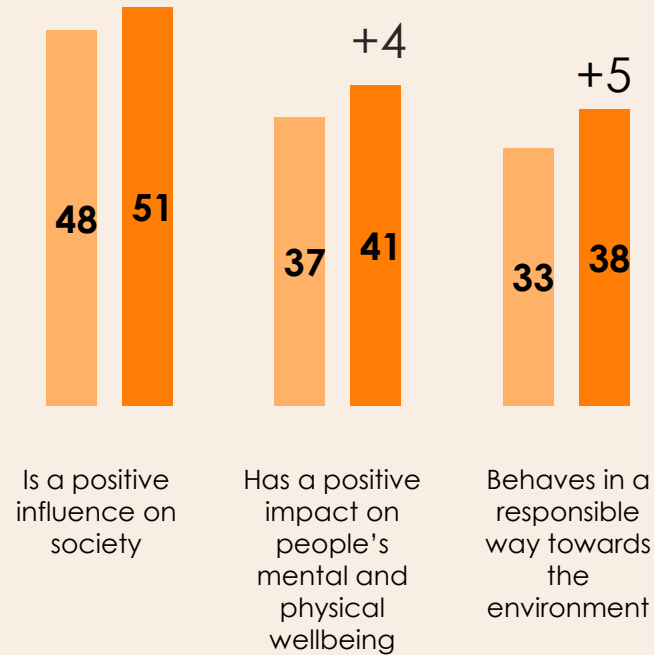
### Leadership

2023 2024



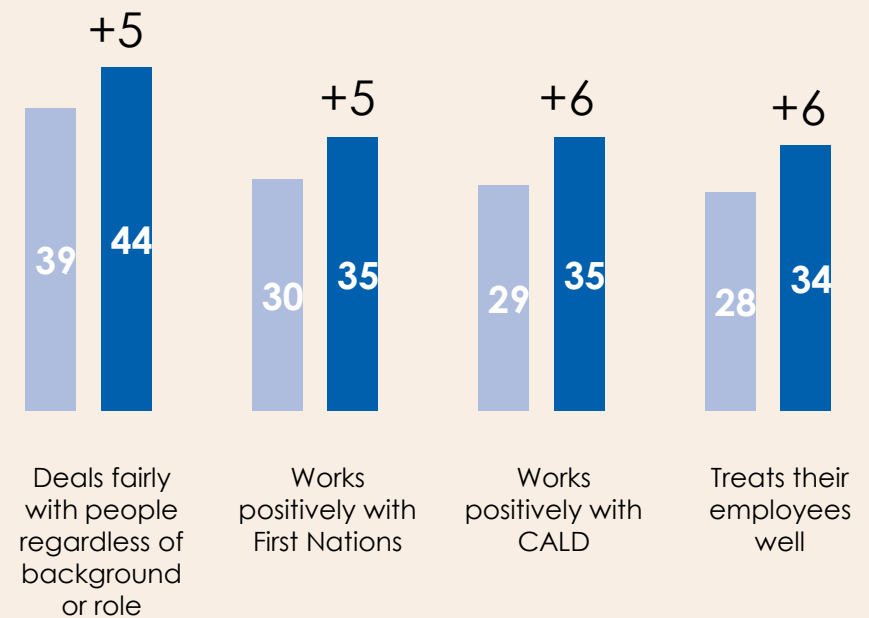
### Social Responsibility

2023 2024

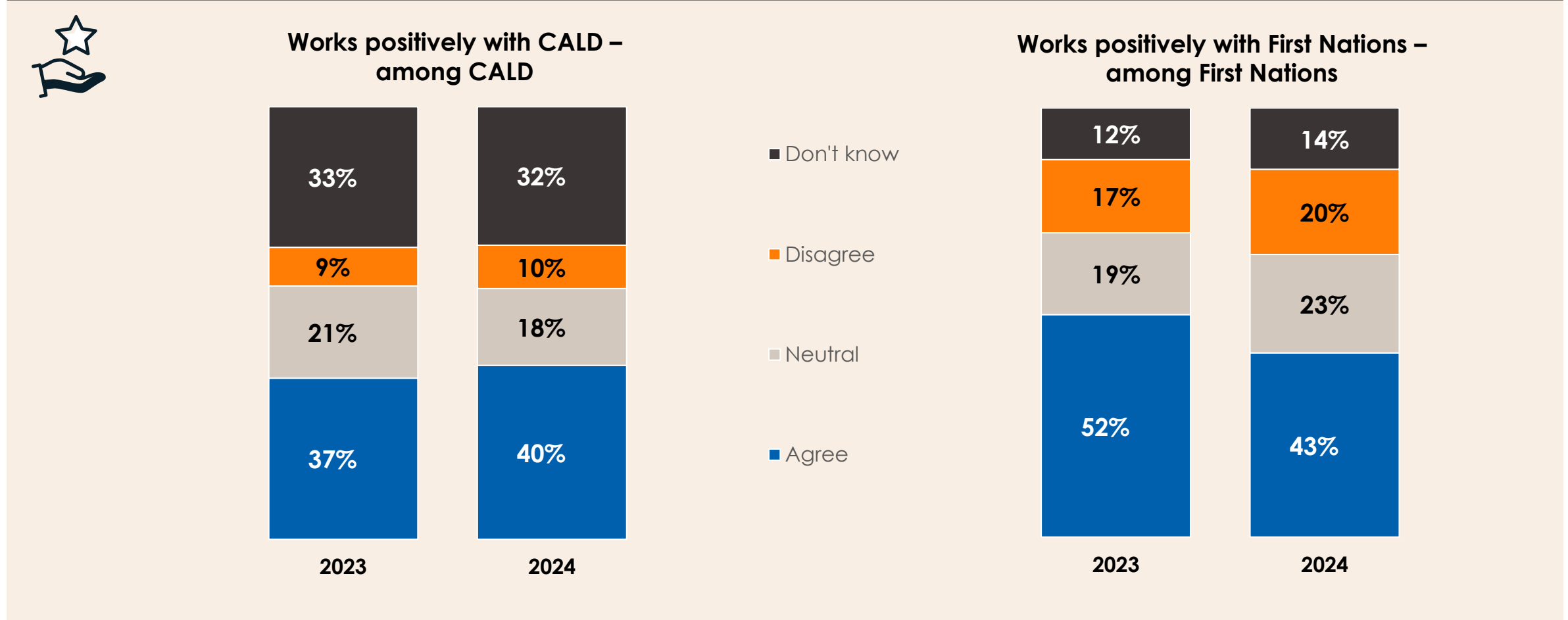


### Fairness

2023 2024



Increases in agreement that public sector agencies work positively with CALD have increased slightly among CALD peoples – however not to the same extent as at the population level. In contrast, agreement that public sector agencies work well with First Nations people has declined among people who identify as First Nations.

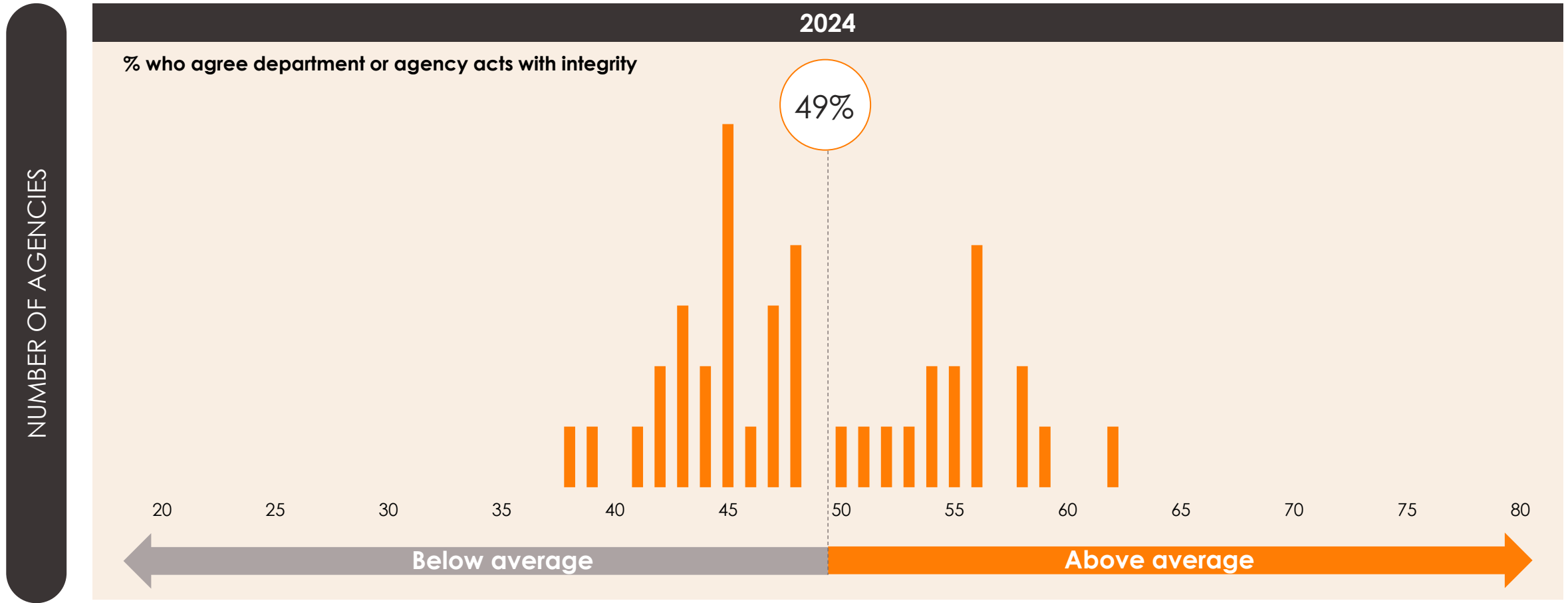


4.

# Perceptions of Integrity



On average, 49% of the public feel that Australian departments and agencies act with integrity.



# Highest integrity scores

The highest performing agencies on integrity all have a role to play in keeping Australians safe: Border Force, the AFP and CASA. The AEC and ABS are also perceived (as independent agencies) to have high degrees of integrity.



**Australian  
BORDER FORCE**



**AFP**  
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE



**Australian Government**  
**Civil Aviation Safety Authority**



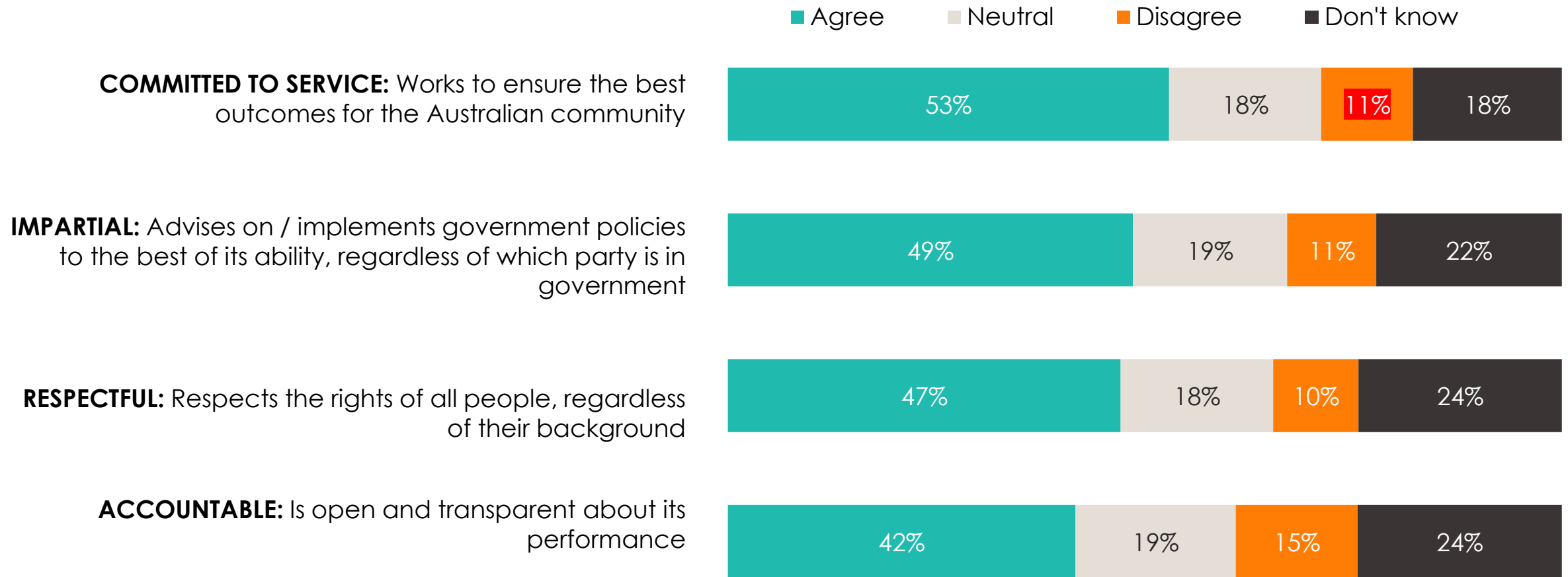
**AEC**  
Australian Electoral Commission



**Australian  
Bureau of  
Statistics**



On average, half of Australians feel public sector departments and agencies are committed to service, are impartial and respectful. Australians are somewhat less convinced that they are accountable.



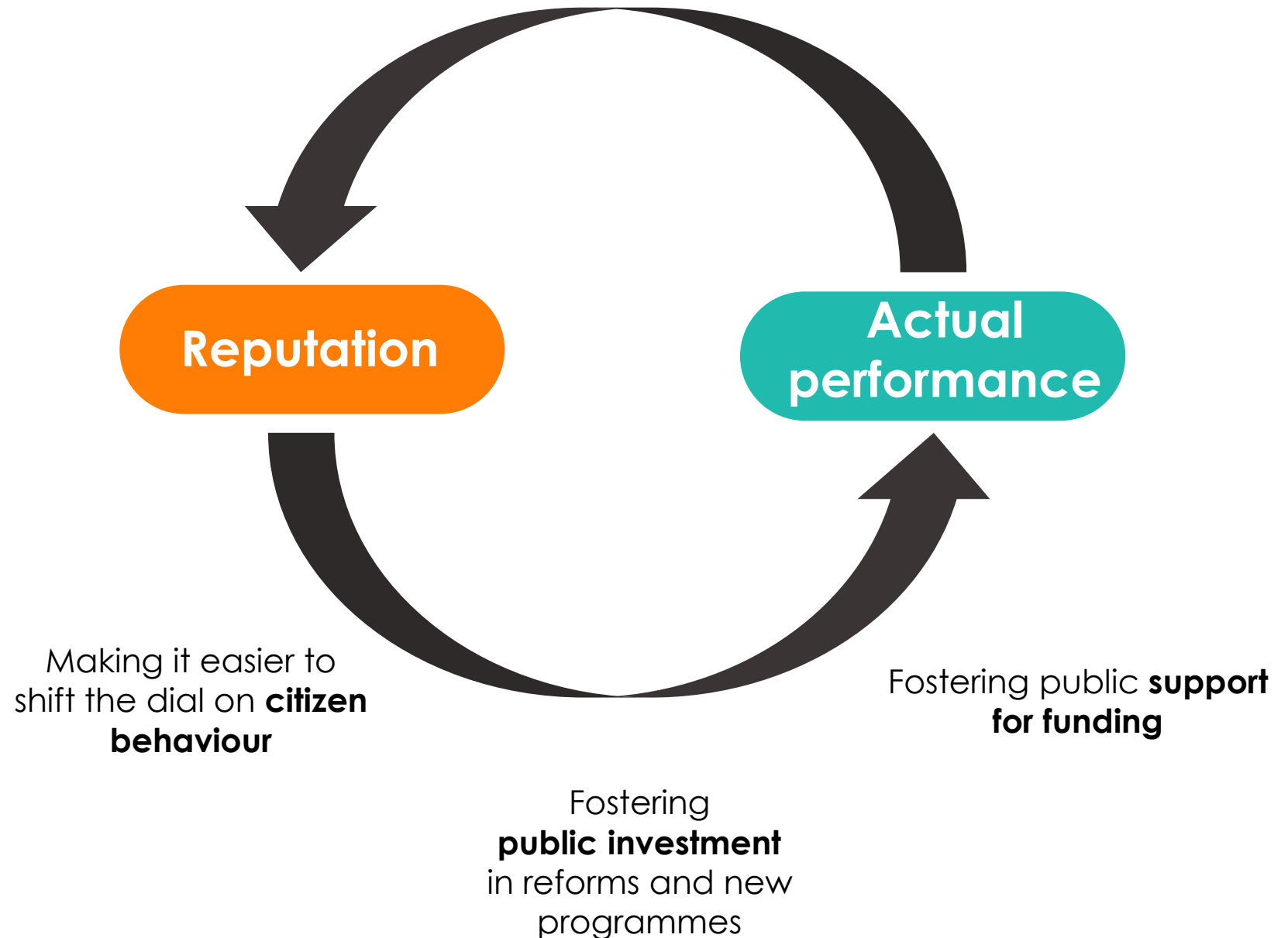




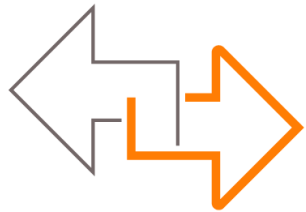
5.  
The reputation-  
performance gap

## Performance and reputation are intrinsically linked.

In 2023 we showed that a good reputation can help departments and agencies be more effective in their roles by making it easier to influence citizen behavior, fostering public investment in reforms and new programs and support for funding.



However, reputation and actual performance do not always match up completely. A disconnect between the two can occur due to ...



Misinformation



Lack of awareness /  
comms



Failing to perform on the  
things that actually  
matter to people



Confirmation bias –  
They've already made  
up their mind about you  
and disregard any  
conflicting evidence

Misinformation

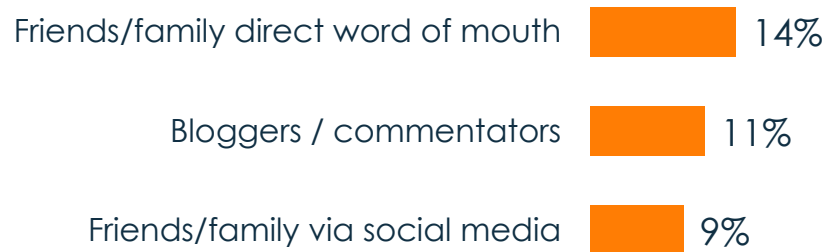


As we saw in 2023 media and communications have the biggest influence on reputation, especially the news media.



Media and comms

**38%**



Conversation

**26%**



Impression

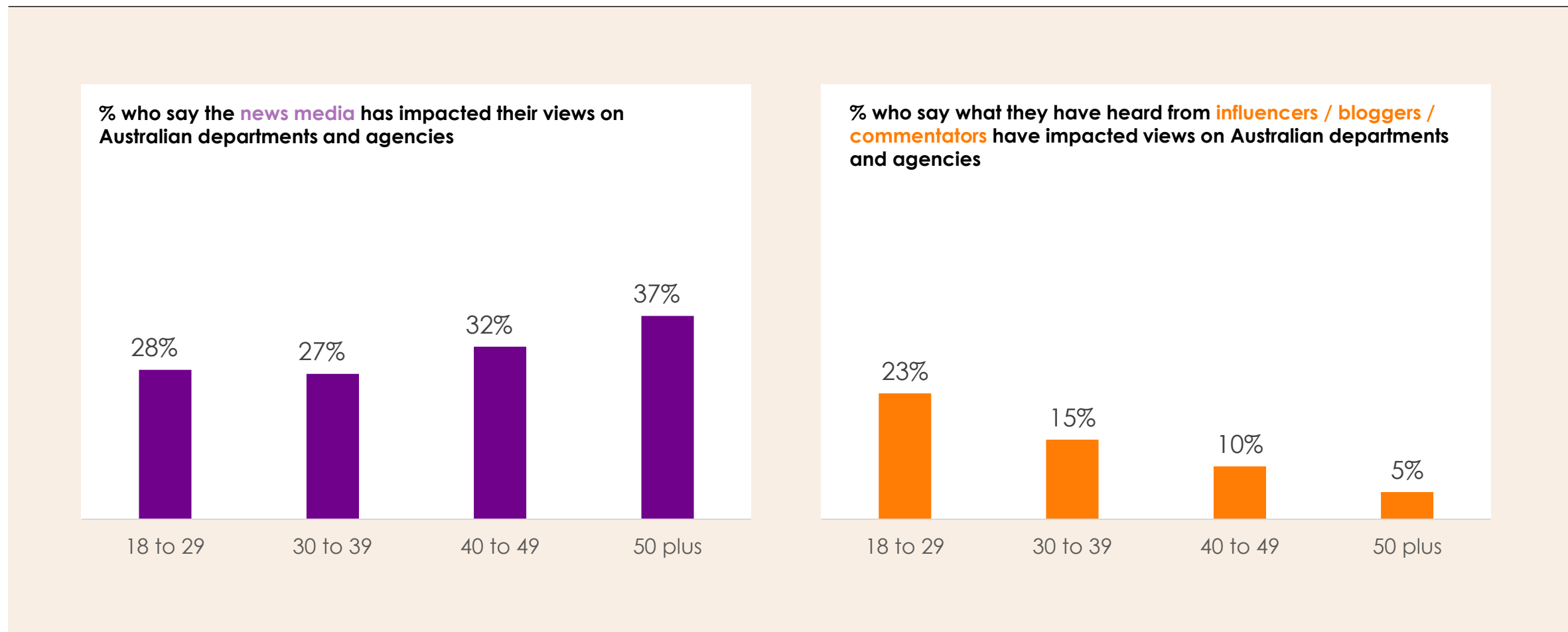
**41%**

However, the balance is shifting, with fewer Australians forming their opinions of departments and agencies from news media in 2024. Further, while we have not seen significant growth in reliance on word of mouth from friends, family, and influencers, bloggers and commentators, we have observed a small shift from 24% to 26%...

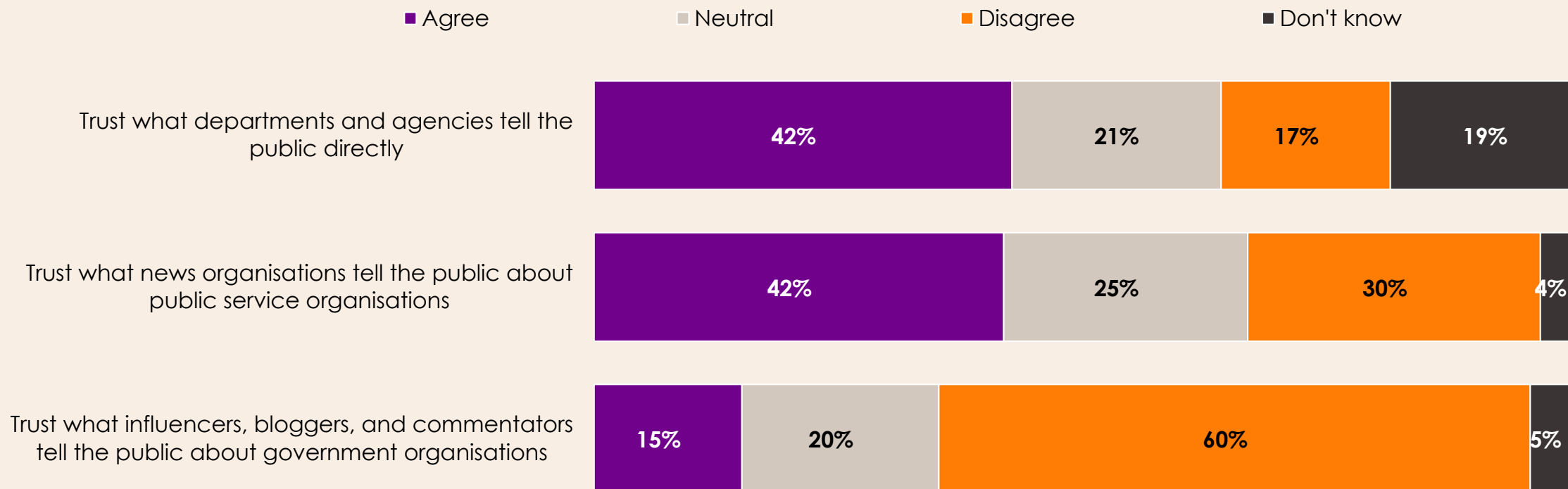
% who say the news media has impacted their views on Australian departments and agencies



... the reliance on unofficial sources looks set to increase, with young people considerably more likely to indicate influencers / bloggers and commentators impacts their views on the performance of departments and agencies

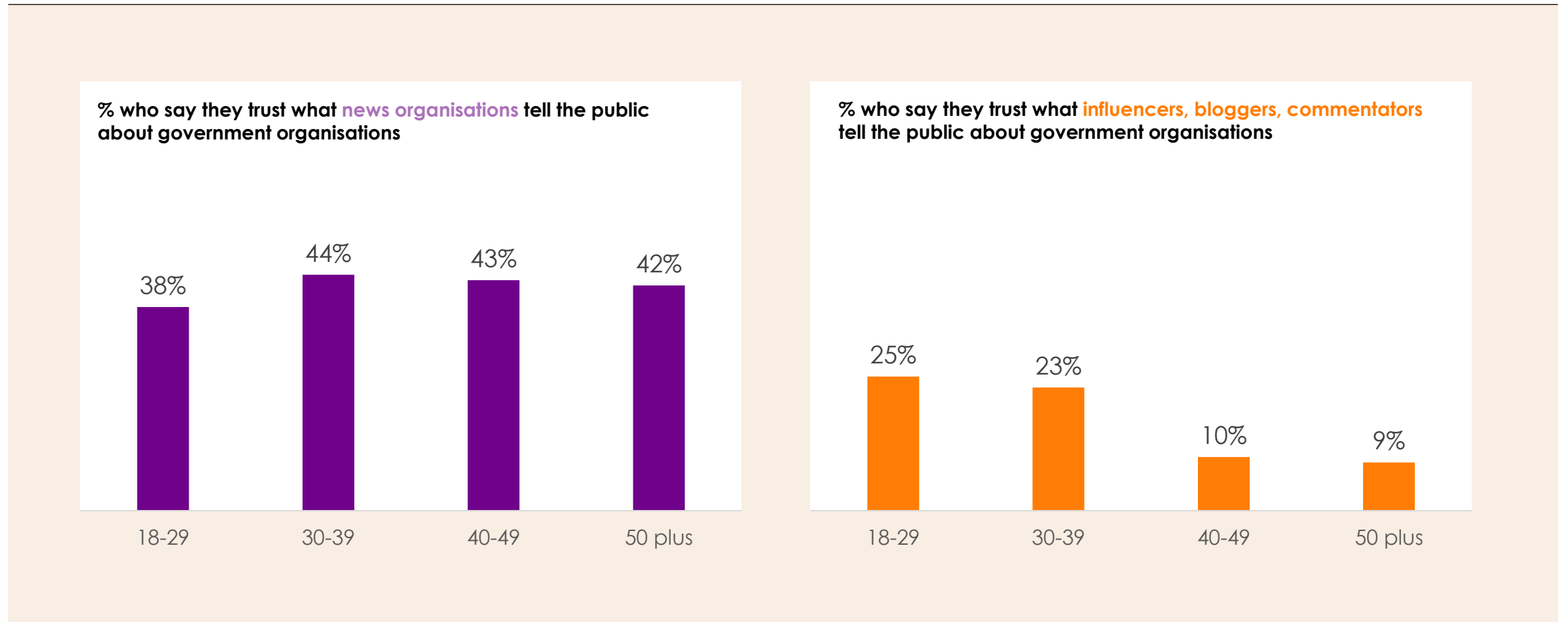


The New Zealand public sector reputation index asked respondents to what extent they trust information (1) direct from the department or agency (2) from news organisations and (3) from influencers, commentators and bloggers. Levels of trust for New Zealand departments and agencies are aligned, however distrust is nearly twice as high for news media. Trust in influencers, bloggers and commentators is particularly low.

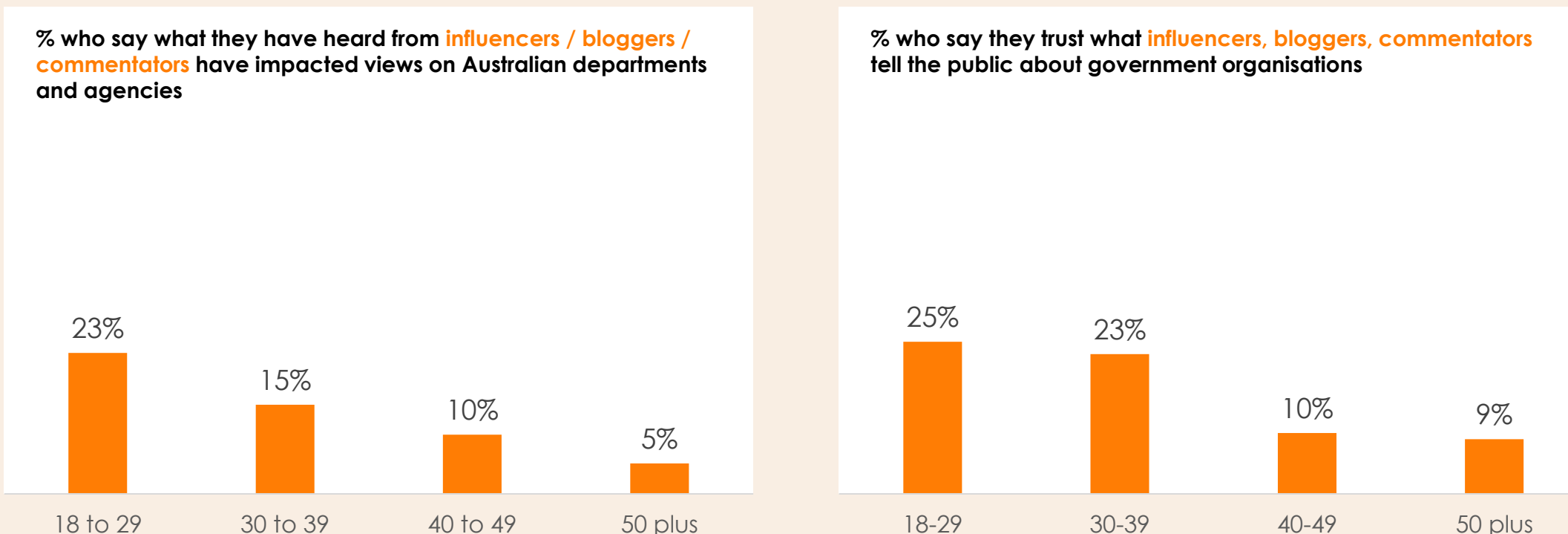




Young people are somewhat more trusting of influencers / bloggers / commentators, and less trusting of news organisations.



Higher consumption of information from influencers, blogs and commentators, coupled with higher trust means the trope about older people or ‘Boomers’ falling for fake news may not be all that accurate. Indeed, the fact young people are so comfortable being online likely means they are less diligent when consuming information online, impeding their ability to correctly identify misinformation.



## Does trust in Government still matter?

Unambiguously and resoundingly, yes.

In Australia, Verian conducts thousands of hours of discussion each year, with tens of thousands of Australians, in relation to Government campaigns, policies, programs and services, and we have some key observations about when brand and trust matters...these are just a few examples...

When faced with a choice about an online service offer, citizens will generally prefer the Australian Government to protect them and their data (versus a 'private' provider).

If citizens are in peril overseas...they want a serious, trusted and competent source of help and advice.

In a world where we are increasingly desensitised to cyber breaches and hacks, people still want to turn to a trusted source.



Australian Government



Australian Government  
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

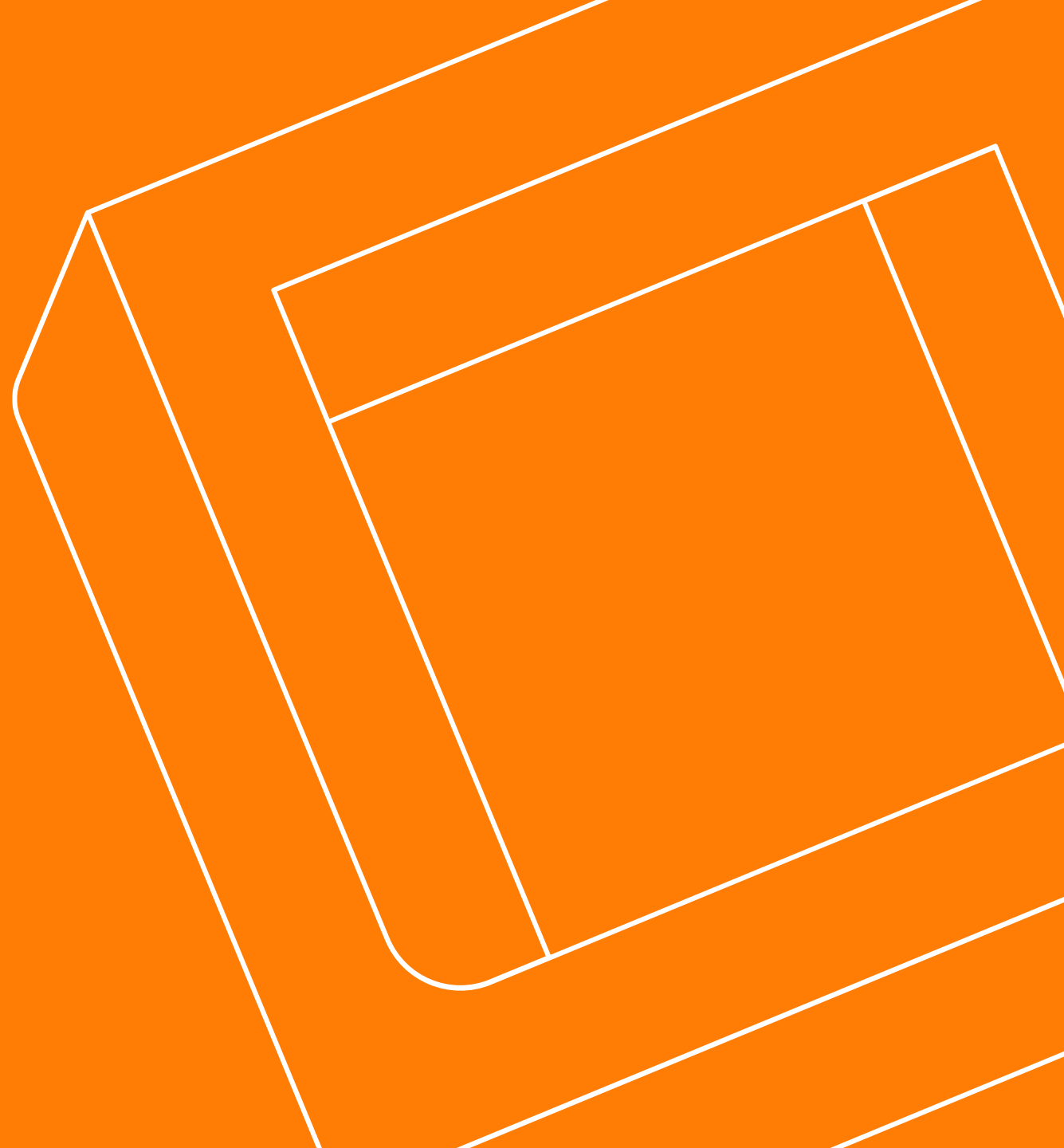


Australian Government

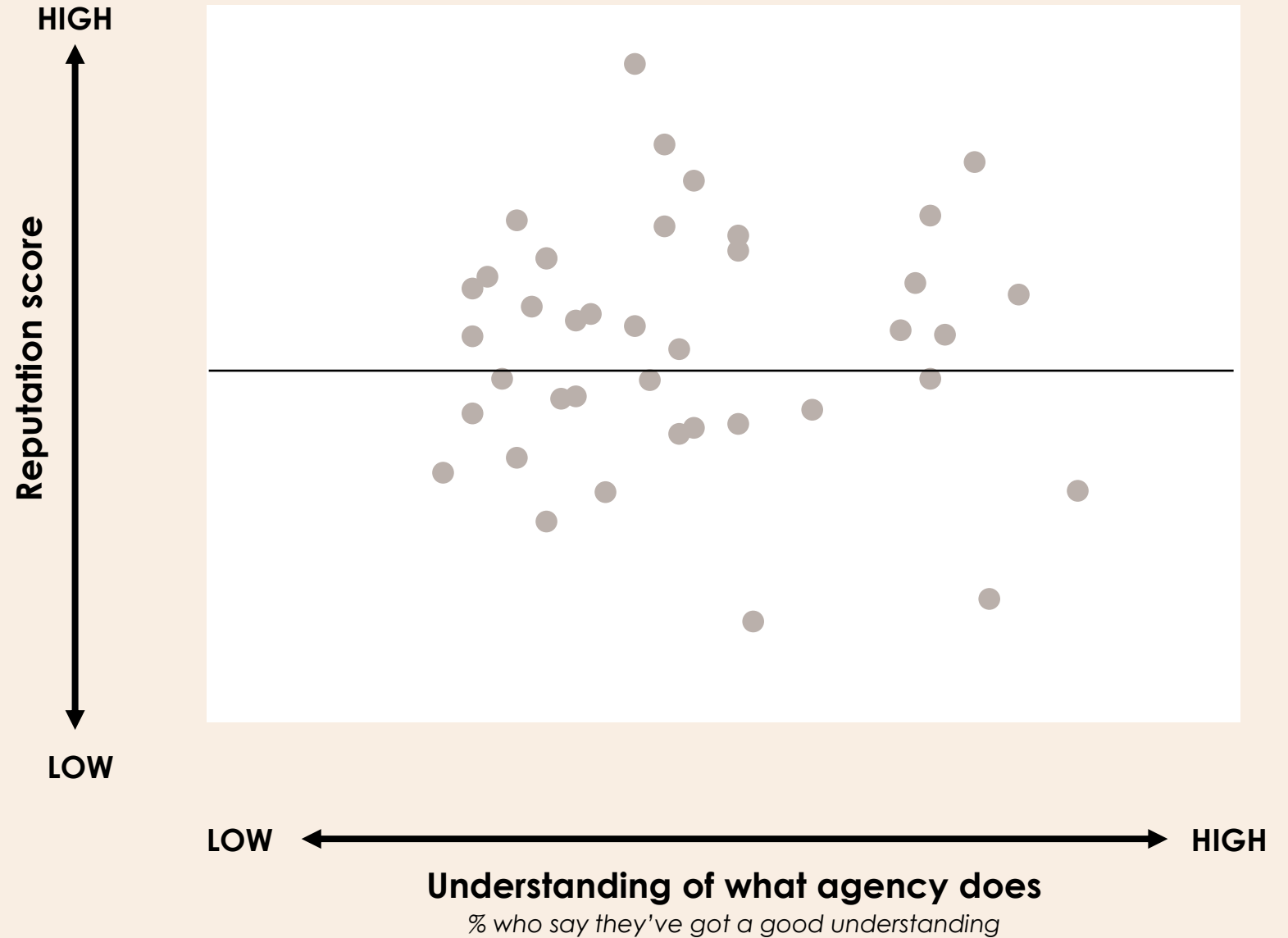


# Communication & awareness

Focusing our efforts on things that  
matter to people



In 2023 we showed that the public's knowledge of what a department or agency actually does isn't all that important to reputation.



And that what *actually* is important is the public's impression of the importance of an agency's work, and the perceived impact of that work.

This means that it's important that we understand which stories are going to connect with people in a meaningful way.

Low (0% to 40%)

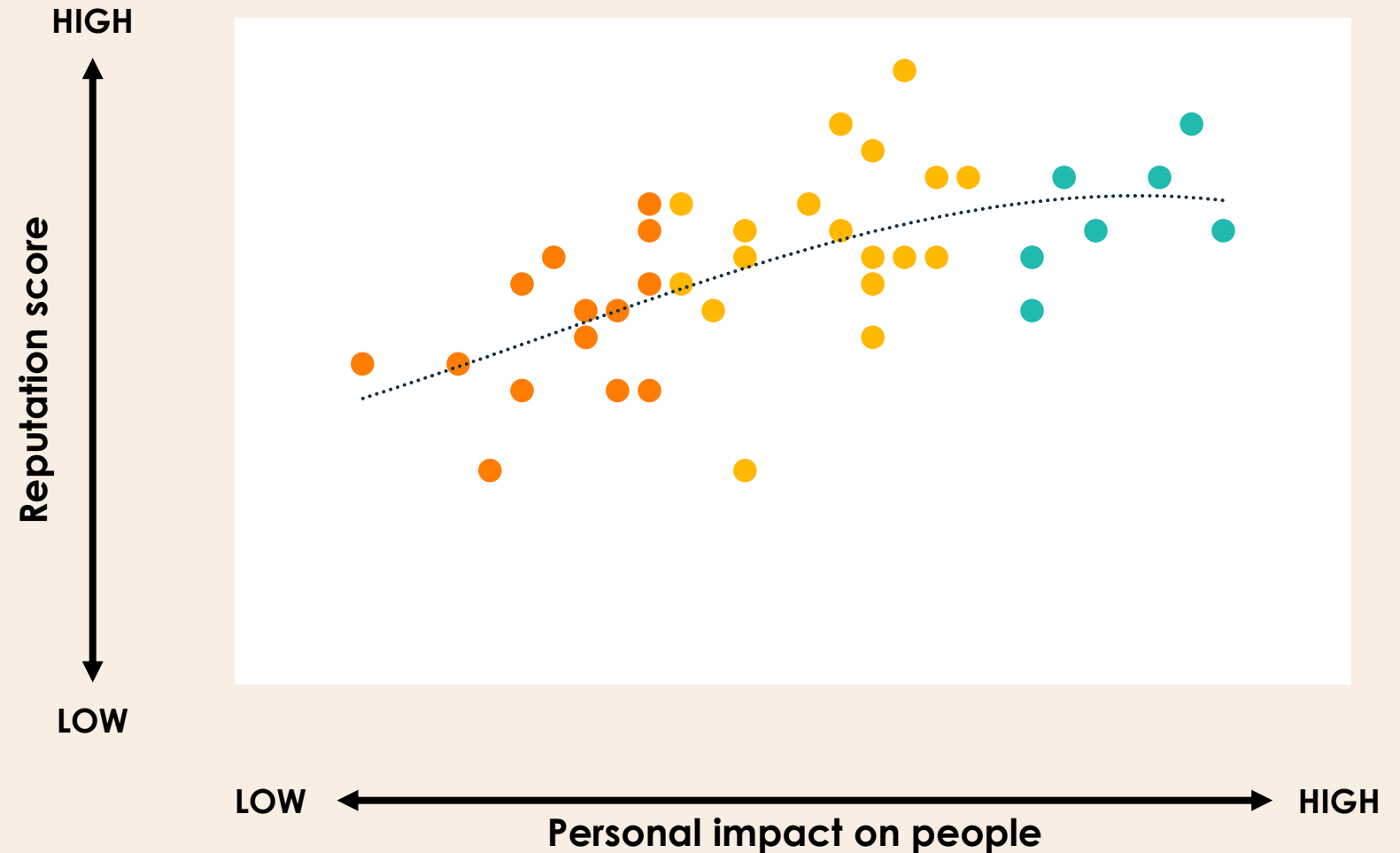
Moderate (41% to 50%)

High (51% to 100%)

Average Reputation: 63

Average Reputation: 67

Average Reputation: 68



The proportion of people who agree that a department or agency has a meaningful impact on them / the things they care about

The types of stories that connect with the public will be different for each agency. But we do find some common themes across our top 10...

### Stories where the benefit to individual / community is clear

“I have subscribed to the CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet so I am on their website a lot.”  
(CSIRO)

“They were said to have profited the government lots of money by bringing in a very large sum which can help to lower taxes if we can increase the amount of tourism we get in our country in turn helping small businesses and others gain recognition they deserve.”  
(Tourism Australia)

“The ad is about people being able to go to work safely, and they can turn to safe work after an injury, and they will help the employees to get there in the long run.”  
(Safe Work Australia)

### Stories about protecting Australians and our way of life

“Maintaining safety in our aviation, prevents dodgy airlines operating in Australia.”  
(Civil Aviation Safety Authority)

“Work they do to protect our borders.”  
(Australian Border Force)

“Has helped with information regarding floods and bushfires.”  
(Bureau of Meteorology)

“Whenever there is a work accident or disaster, they often make a statement about safety at work and peoples rights to a safe work environment.”  
(Safe Work Australia)

### Stories with a scientific leaning

“Vaccines for new diseases popping up (new covid strains) flu vax new medicines to be approved for administration.”  
(Therapeutic Goods Authority)

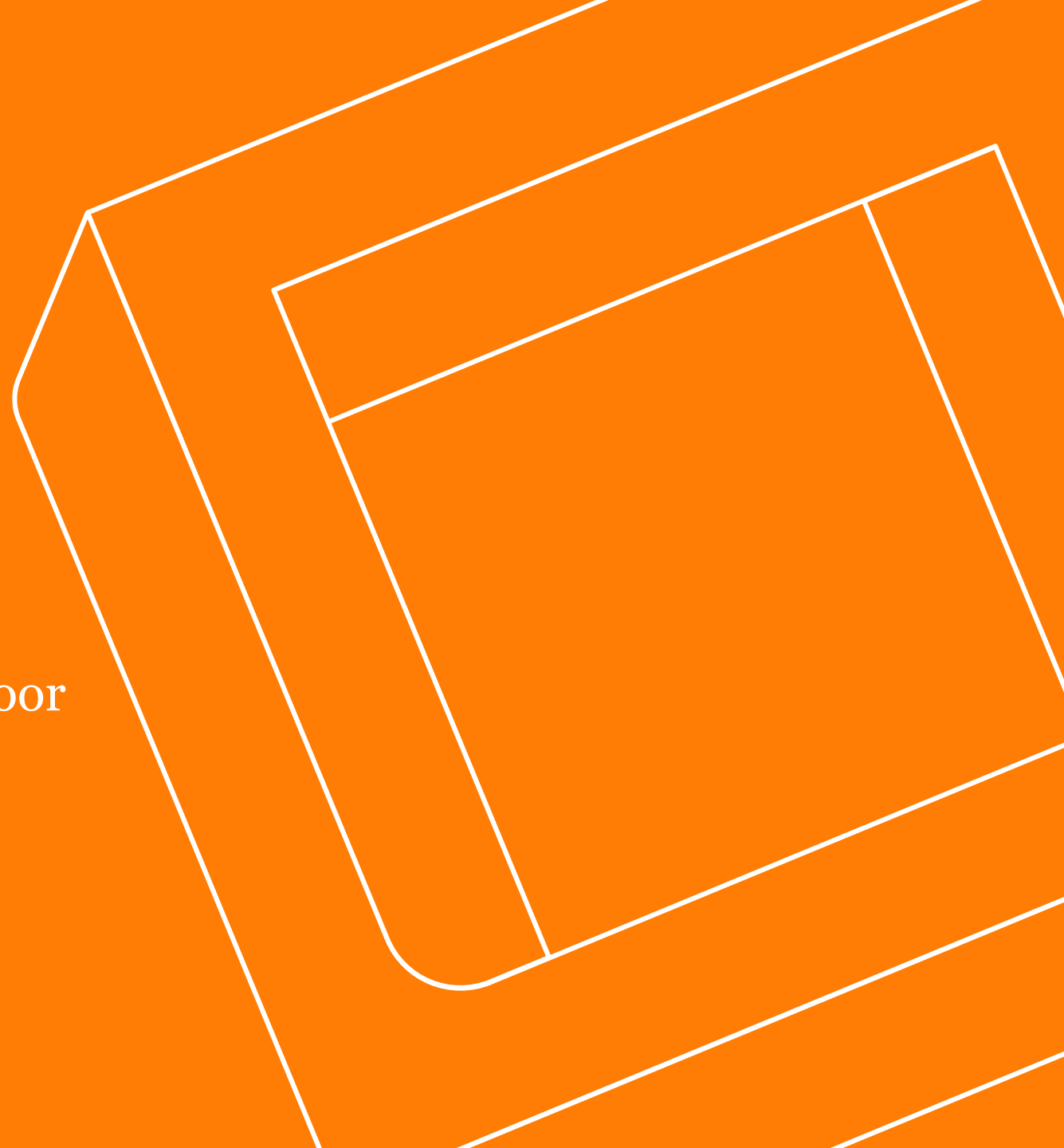
“They have or are trialing a new medical breakthrough.”  
(CSIRO)

“More about the economic and demographics stats that the ABS was producing.”  
(ABS)

“Helping businesses prepare for better use of renewable energy resources, working to develop critical minerals resources, investigating future of AI.”  
(Department of Industry, Science, Resources)

# Confirmation bias

How do we extract ourselves from the poor reputation cycle?

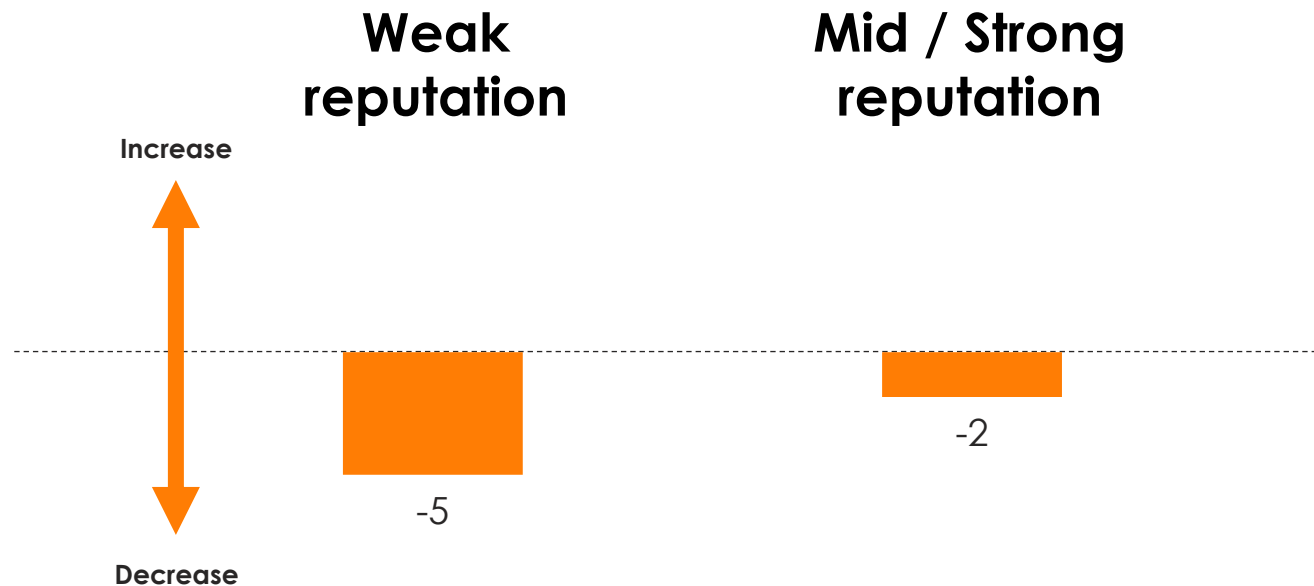




**Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek out and interpret information in a way that confirms our existing beliefs. It is a cognitive bias that can lead to inaccurate conclusions**

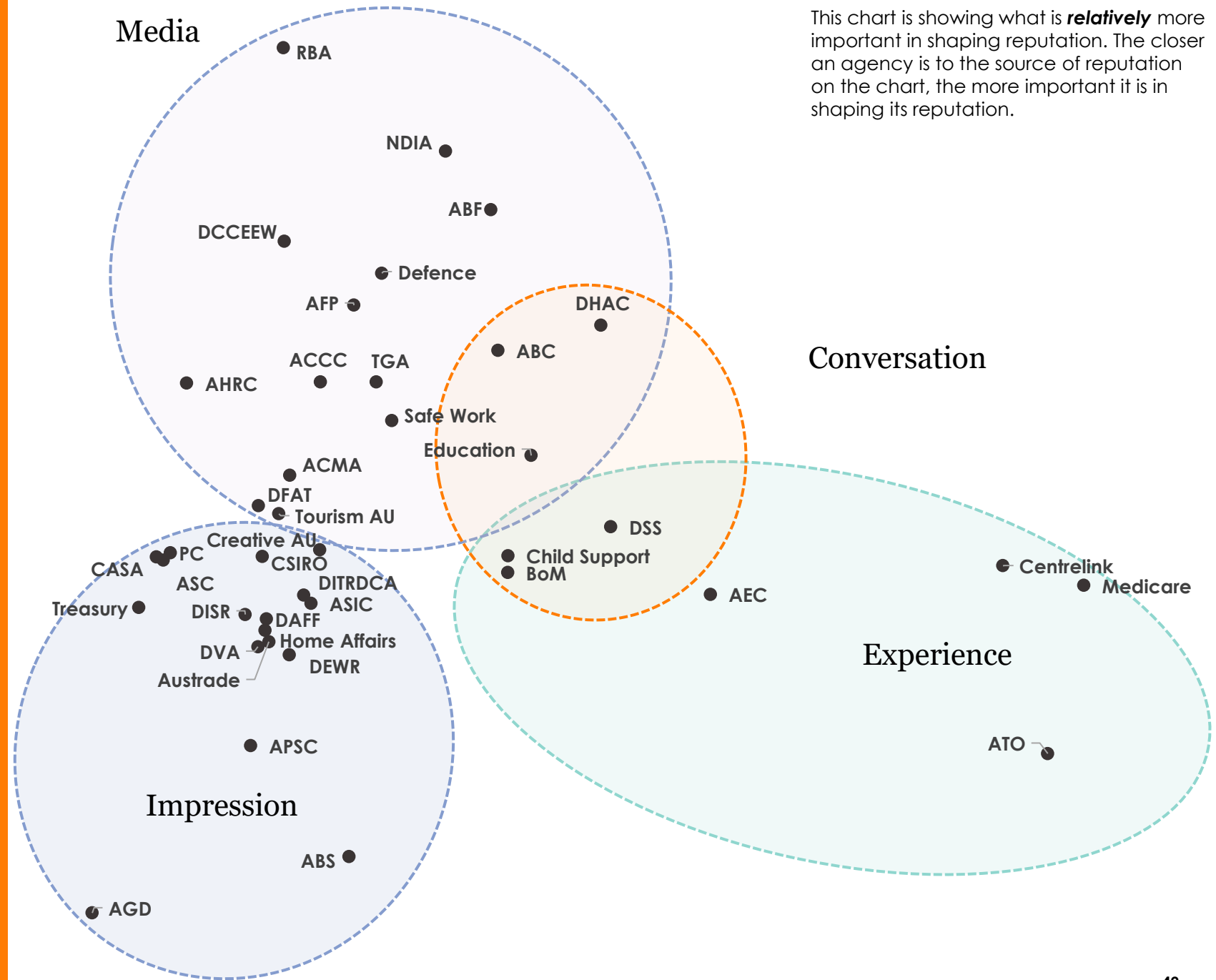
What we find is that if someone already has a negative view of a department or agency and they hear a negative news story about them, their opinion of that agency will decline to a greater extent than if they had started off with a positive view of that agency. This is confirmation bias in action.

Average change in reputation score when media/comms sentiment drops 10 percentage points plus\*

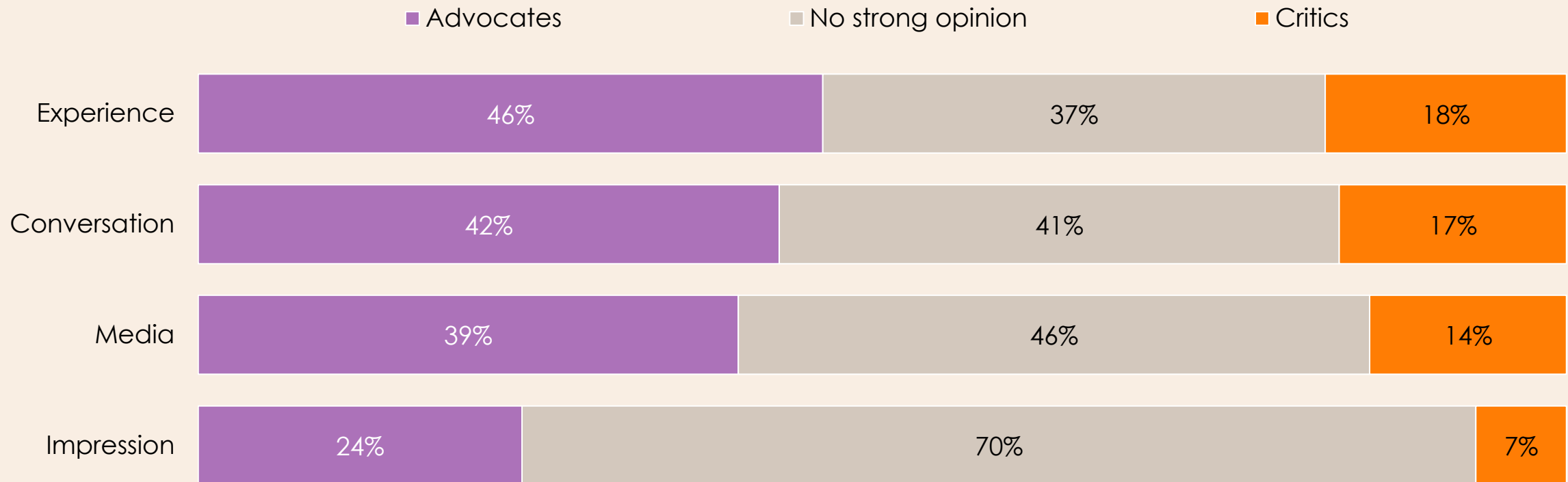


# What leads to these strongly held points of view?

Certain departments and agencies reputations are more influenced by some things than others...



The 'closer to home' the source of reputation is, the more strongly people feel about the department or agency – on average, two thirds (64%) of those who have had a direct experience have formed an opinion of the agency or department they had that experience with. In comparison, only 30% of people who are relying on their general impression or 'gut feel' of a department or agency have a firm opinion.



Departments and agencies who have an impression-led reputation are more susceptible to fluctuations in their reputation (both positive and negative).

This is because the public aren't basing their feelings about these departments or agencies on anything more than a 'gut feel'. So are going to be more easily swayed if they see or hear something negative (or positive).

Average change in their reputation of 3 or more points

1 / 16

**Departments and agencies in the media zone**

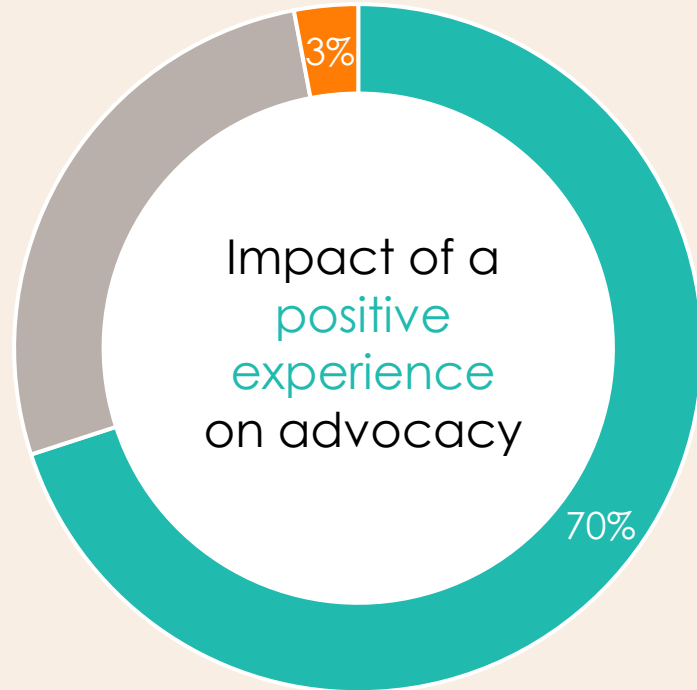
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**Departments and agencies in the experience zone**

6 / 17

**Departments and agencies in the impression zone**

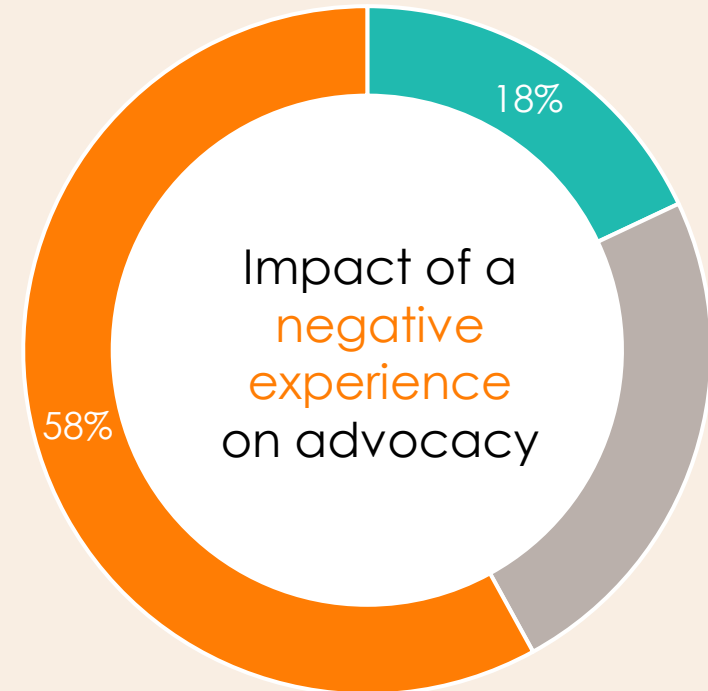
In contrast, people who have had direct experience with an agency are highly impacted by that experience. If someone has a positive experience, 7 out of 10 times they will be willing to speak highly of that department or agency. Equally if someone has a negative experience 58% will speak critically.



■ Will talk positively about department or agency

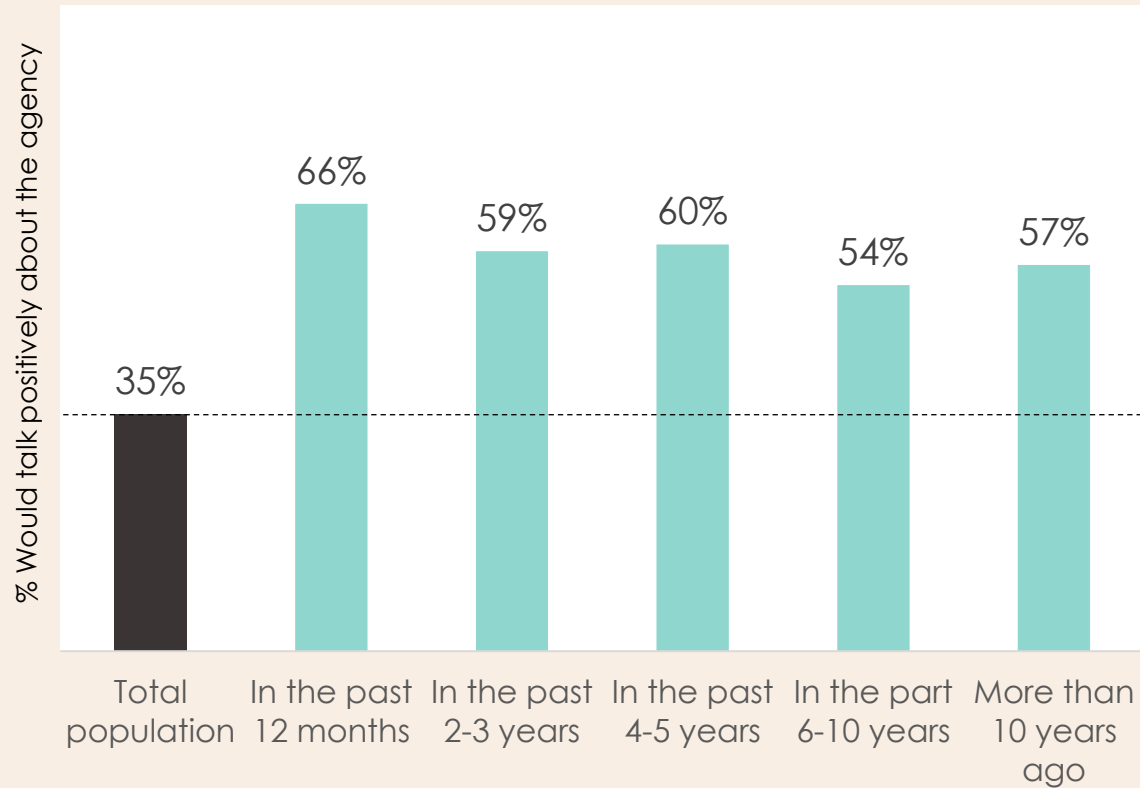
■ Neutral

■ Will be critical of department or agency

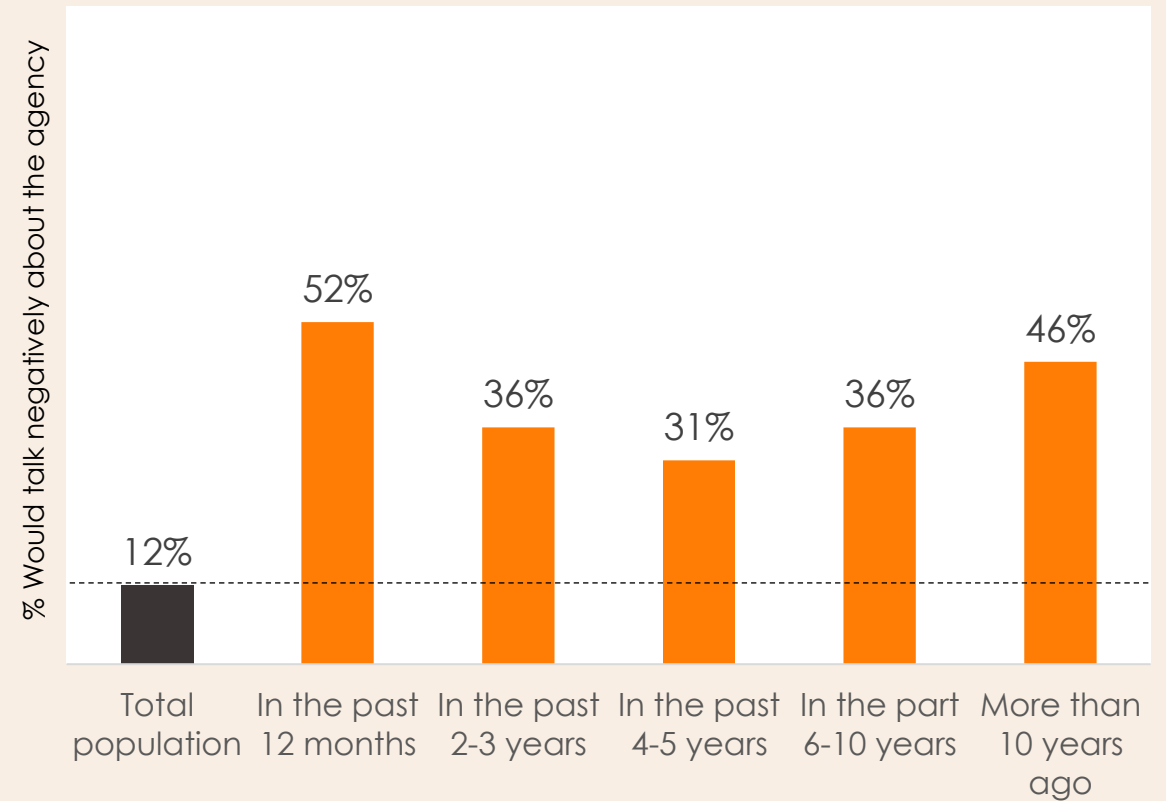


... both positive and negative experiences can have a lasting impact on their opinion of that department or agency for a number of years, with negative experiences having a far greater impact than positive ones. This means it's really important to get any touchpoints right.

### Last direct agency experience was good and it was ...



### Last direct agency experience was poor and it was ...



## What do we do if we find ourselves in a negative self-reinforcing cycle?

1. Look at actual performance first

2. Have a plan for the way in which you are going to respond to negative stories so you can reduce the damage

For example, who is going to front the media? A named person / the department or agency?

3. Understand what kinds of stories simply get views, and what actually shifts perceptions.

# 6. Key take-outs





# 1

## Public Sector reputation is on the up

This year we have seen a slight increase in reputation across the 40 public sector departments and agencies on the Index.

Trust remains the biggest driver of reputation – and this is also where there is greatest opportunity for improvement, with scores indicating people would like to see greater citizen engagement and consultation regarding where money is spent.



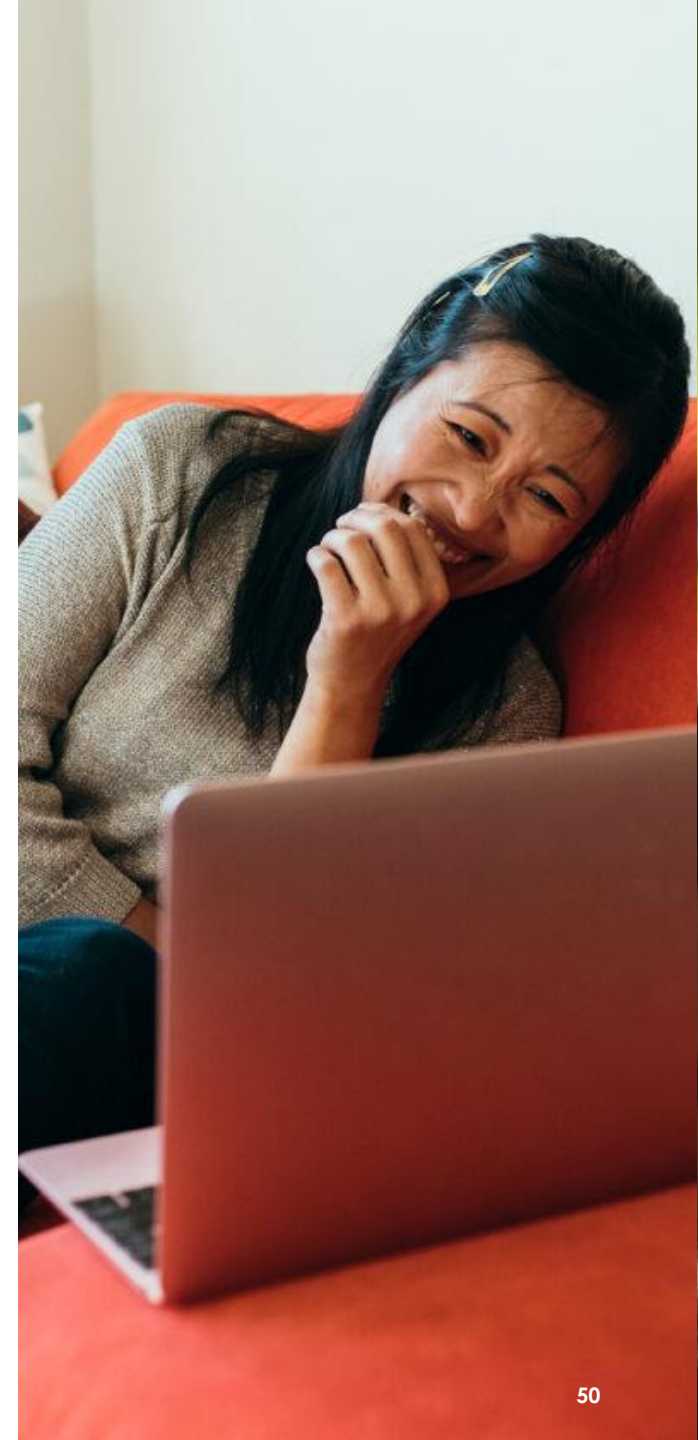
# 2

## It's sunnier out there than you might think

The picture may be brighter than the media has led us to believe when it comes to perceptions of integrity in the Australian Public Sector.

On average, half of Australians agree that public sector agencies act with integrity, and are committed to service, impartial and respectful. Importantly levels of disagreement with these statements is very low – around 10% for each.

There is most room for improvement when it comes to perceptions of accountability, which relates to being open and transparent about activities.



# 3

## But we do have a (growing) problem...

Reliance on the news media to form opinions of public sector agencies is declining and is expected to continue to do so (based on what information sources younger people are tending to rely on).

This leaves the door open for misinformation about what departments and agencies are doing to thrive. It's important then, that public sector agencies look for opportunities to grow their owned media, as well as insert themselves into the conversation by focusing on pushing stories that matter to people. These types of stories tend to be about how departments and agencies are helping them, or Australians like them, be healthier, happier, and more financially well off.



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Powering decisions  
that shape the world.