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UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA:
ATTITUDES AND CHALLENGES
ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods

Report No. 29: October 2019

(ANUpoll data collected April 2019)

ANU Centre for Social
Research & Methods

ANU College of
Arts & Social Sciences

ANUPOLL

UNIVERSITIES IN AUSTRALIA: ATTITUDES AND CHALLENGES

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ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods
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About the poll

ANUpoll is conducted for The Australian National University (ANU) by the Social Research Centre, an ANU Enterprise business. The poll surveys a national random sample of the adult population (using the 'Life in Australia'TM panel), and is conducted via the Internet (88 per cent of respondents) and phone (12 per cent of respondents). The use of this mixed-mode frame is to ensure coverage of households without Internet access.

In this poll, 2,054 people were interviewed between the 8th and 26th of April 2019. Among individuals who received the survey (ie remaining members of the 'Life in Australia' panel), a completion rate of 76.5 per cent was achieved. Taking into account the recruitment rate to the panel, the cumulative response rate is calculated as 8.6 per cent. The results have been weighted to represent the national population. The poll's margin of error is approximately ± 2.5 per cent.

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VICE-CHANCELLOR'S FOREWORD



When I became Vice-Chancellor of Australia's national university in 2016, there was great debate among my colleagues and across the higher education sector about the role of universities in the modern age.

Is the purpose of an institution like ours to enhance knowledge and develop new technologies, or to train the leaders and workforces of tomorrow? Is it to shape debate and public policy, guided by expert research and advice, or is it to advance our nation's role in a complex global order? To me, it is all of these things and more.

But as we contemplate our purpose, we must also look to the views of the general population as to what they believe the role of universities is, and help marry these differences in views together.

This poll – the 29th since 2008 – examines the attitudes of everyday Australians when it comes to universities, as places of research, learning and public debate. It is something all universities should do.

As brokers of ground-breaking education and research, universities need to 'get' the millions of people living their daily lives outside our campuses. We must be places that embrace people from all walks of life, who have different experiences and yet prepare them for the world beyond our institutions.

The results are insightful, drawn from a broad base of the Australian population.

The poll addresses attitudes on whether universities are preparing Australians for the workforce; whether universities are still places to debate controversial ideas; and whether we play a pivotal role in educating people from disadvantaged or regional backgrounds.

The results point to the trusted role of universities and university researchers – in the public's eye the most reliable source of facts and information. Encouragingly, in the main, the Australian public is very confident in our universities.

But the results also highlight some key policy considerations, including questions of academic freedom and the ongoing place of international students. The latter is a question most Australian universities currently face and grapple with.

Here at ANU, we have decided that the right number of students for us – both international and domestic, undergraduate and postgraduate – is about 20,000.

We want to ensure we remain a university where students are not lost in a crowd, but are part of a learning community of outstanding students from diverse backgrounds, drawn from across Australia, our region and the world.

The poll's findings show there is also a strong sense universities primarily exist to train the workforce of the future, with powerful insights on what Australians think we should and how we should be teaching.

Yet, great teaching is but one part of the rich tapestry our universities weave. And in the view of ANU, great researchers make the best teachers. With so much new knowledge generated by universities, clearly we need to do a better job at telling the public just how much better our research makes their daily lives. After all, research drives the knowledge and innovation that forms the basis of exceptional teaching.

Ultimately, this ANUpoll is a demonstration of our aspirations here at ANU. It is the perfect example of how ANU, as the national university, seeks to inform everyday Australians, our university colleagues in Australia and internationally, and our nation's leaders about the complexities and opportunities we face, so that we can design the best universities possible for 21st century Australia.

I congratulate Associate Professor Nicholas Biddle and the team at the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods and the data collectors in the Social Research Centre for their work on this poll. I hope you find it as insightful and inspiring as I have.



Professor Brian P. Schmidt AC
Vice-Chancellor and President
The Australian National University

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Universities provide a diversity of roles in a modern, industrialised country like Australia. Their core function still is to provide advanced education and training for young adults after they have left high school. However, an increasing number of Australian university students are 'mature-age', either undertaking graduate training, entering university for the first time later in life, or returning to train for a new career or vocation.

In addition to their role as education providers, universities also play a broader role in the Australian economy and society. Much of the new knowledge in Australia is either generated at Australian universities, or imported and distilled from other research institutions internationally. This includes scientific research (the stereotypical researcher in a lab-coat), but also research in the humanities, arts, life and social sciences. Much of the public policy development in Australia occurs within universities, or is critiqued/evaluated by university-based researchers.

Universities are also major contributors to the economic health of the cities and regions in which they are located. They are major export earners, as the proportion of international students at universities has increased, particularly amongst post-graduate students. Domestic students also contribute to the local economy though, not only through the fees that they pay (either directly or via the government), but also through their spending on housing, transport, entertainment and other goods/services.

The relative importance of these roles has changed and is likely to change even more into the future. So too have public attitudes towards universities and whether they have got the balance of these roles right. Furthermore, there are new challenges for universities and university students and staff as attitudes of the societies in which they operate change.

These trends and university responses are far from free from criticism. Some have criticised the perceived increase in the profit motive as a driver of education decision making. For example, Harris (2014) has argued that 'universities are now subject to the same internal governance rules as trading corporations, and these are incompatible with the mission of a university and with academic independence. In addition, the regulation of universities has become so invasive that they can no longer be seen as truly autonomous self-accrediting institutions.'

Others have criticised the extent to which students are encouraged to confront challenging ideas and engage in intellectual debates. In the recently released *Coddling of the American Mind*, Haidt and Lukianoff (2018) outline what they see as 'three Great Untruths that seem to have spread widely in recent years:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: *What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.*
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: *Always trust your feelings.*
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: *Life is a battle between good and evil people.*' (italics in original)

In the authors view, the background and treatment of students who are entering universities has changed, and universities (in the US at least) are now providing an environment that is bad for students' long-term mental health, as well as for scholarship and debate.

There has also been considerable media and academic debate on the safety of university students on campus and the extent to which students and staff are able to undertake their studies or work free from the fear of sexual assault (DeMatteo, Galloway et al. 2015, Fedina, Holmes et al. 2018). Or according to others, free from the fear of unfounded sexual assault allegations, stating that 'Our universities are becoming increasingly unfriendly places for young men' (Arndt 2019).

Not everyone thinks that universities are beneficial for local residents and local economies. In a previous survey in this series, we documented the decline in support for population growth in Australia (Biddle 2019), with some claiming that growth in overseas student numbers is a driver of congestion and a cause of the backlash against population growth more generally. For example, in a recent interview,¹ Abul Rizvi, a former deputy secretary in the then Federal Immigration Department, stated that 'The real pressure on Australia's highly populated east-coast cities was driven by a surge in international students.'

1 www.sbs.com.au/news/expert-says-international-students-not-permanent-migrants-driving-congestion-in-cities

The labour market that universities are training students for is also changing. While the effect of this labour market change on employment outcomes is contested (see Borland and Coelli (2017) and Frey and Osborne (2013) for competing predictions), what is not in doubt is that the labour market of the future will need workers with a very different skillset to the labour market of the past.

It would be an exaggeration to say that universities are going through unprecedented change. The post-war expansion, introduction of income-contingent loans (Chapman 2006), and so-called Dawkins-reforms of the 80s and 90s have arguably had a much greater structural impact on universities than factors in more recent years (Forsyth 2014). Nonetheless, we are currently at a time where what we expect of a university and the attitudes of the public towards higher education institutions are changing.

In this paper, we summarise findings from the 29th ANUpoll, which focused on the role of the university. We look at confidence in universities broadly, as well as specific aspects of the university system. We also asked a representative sample of the Australian population what they thought universities should be teaching and whether they are teaching the most important things either in general, or for the future labour market. Finally, we provide some data on two current policy debates related to universities – foreign students and academic freedom.

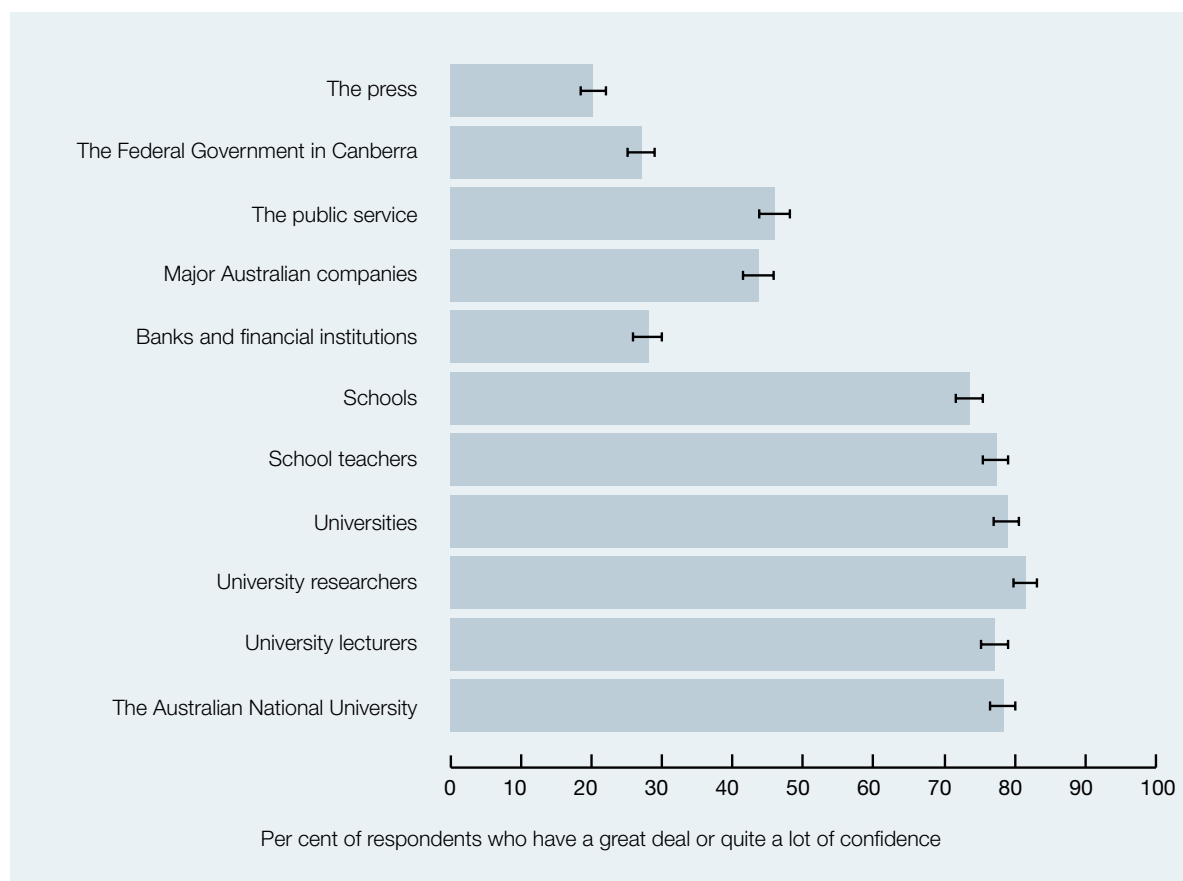
CONFIDENCE IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Trust or confidence in a wide variety of institutions has been on the decline for a number of years, both internationally (Stevenson and Wolfers 2011) and within Australia (Bean 2005, Martin 2010). While the trends are different for different countries, and for different types of institutions, universities are not immune from this decline. In the April ANUpoll, we asked respondents ‘How much confidence do you have in the following organisations?’, with eleven types of organisations or individual-types within organisations given.²

From our weighted sample, 15.9 per cent of respondents said that they had ‘a great deal of confidence’ and 63.0 per cent said they had ‘quite a lot of confidence’ in universities. This leaves a little over one-fifth of respondents who reported that they had ‘not very much confidence’ (18.7 per cent) or ‘none at all’ (2.3 per cent).

Combining the first two categories (‘a great deal’, and ‘quite a lot’), the following figure shows that there is a relatively high level of confidence in education institutions in general, slightly but significantly higher levels of confidence in universities compared to schools (78.8 per cent compared to 73.6 per cent) and a slightly higher level of confidence in university researchers compared to university lecturers (81.5 per cent compared to 77.1 per cent). While it is beyond the scope of this paper apart from for comparative purposes, the generally low level of confidence in the press (20.2 per cent), Federal Government in Canberra (27.0 per cent) and banks and financial institutions (28.0 per cent) is an ongoing concern for the functioning of Australia’s political and financial system.

FIGURE 1 Confidence in Institutions, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the ‘whiskers’ around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

² The order of presentation for these institutions is randomised

In the ANUpoll sample, 53.4 per cent of the (weighted) sample had never attended university. A small, but important segment of the sample (8.8 per cent) was currently attending university, with the remaining 37.8 per cent having attended university in the past. Not surprisingly, confidence in universities varies by people's exposure, with 86.0 per cent of current students and 81.4 per cent of former students having confidence in universities, compared to 75.9 per cent of those who had never attended. Not only are these differences statistically significant, they are also larger than the differences in confidence in other institutions, implying that exposure to universities (especially recently) is associated with confidence in universities in particular, rather than being associated with general confidence in institutions.

Although respondents to the survey were generally confident in Australian universities (at least in relative terms), there was slightly less support for the proposition that universities are teaching in the right way. We asked half our respondents 'Would you say universities are teaching students the important things they need to know, or universities are failing to teach students the important things they need to know?' A slight majority of respondents (60.0 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that universities were teaching students the important things they need to know.

When this question was asked in 2008 (McAllister 2008), far more respondents were able to give a response of 'Don't know.' However, if we assume that the Don't Know respondents would have given a similar split as the rest of the population if they were forced to make a choice (i.e. we pro-rata them to the other two categories), then there would appear to have been a decline since 2008 in the proportion of respondents who feel universities are teaching the important things. In 2008, 65.8 per cent of respondents who gave a response felt that universities were teaching the important things, compared to 34.2 per cent who thought they were failing to.

In the 2019 ANUpoll, we asked half of the respondents a slightly different question.³ One quarter of the sample were asked whether universities were teaching the important things for the current labour market and the remaining quarter were asked whether universities were teaching the important things for the future labour market. Both had a slightly lower response rate (56.1 per cent and 54.8 per cent respectively) implying that the general population does not feel universities are doing as well at preparing students for current or future jobs as they are in providing more generic skills.

The differences above are statistically significant when included in a simple regression analysis. Females, those who are either relatively young or relatively old and those who live in relatively advantaged areas are more likely to think that universities are teaching the right things. However, somewhat problematically, those respondents who had a degree (and particularly a post-graduate degree) were less likely to think that universities were teaching the important things than those who do not have post-school qualifications. Having attended a university may have increased confidence in the university, but it does not mean that a person thinks the curriculum is being designed or delivered in the right way.

3 Question wording was randomly allocated

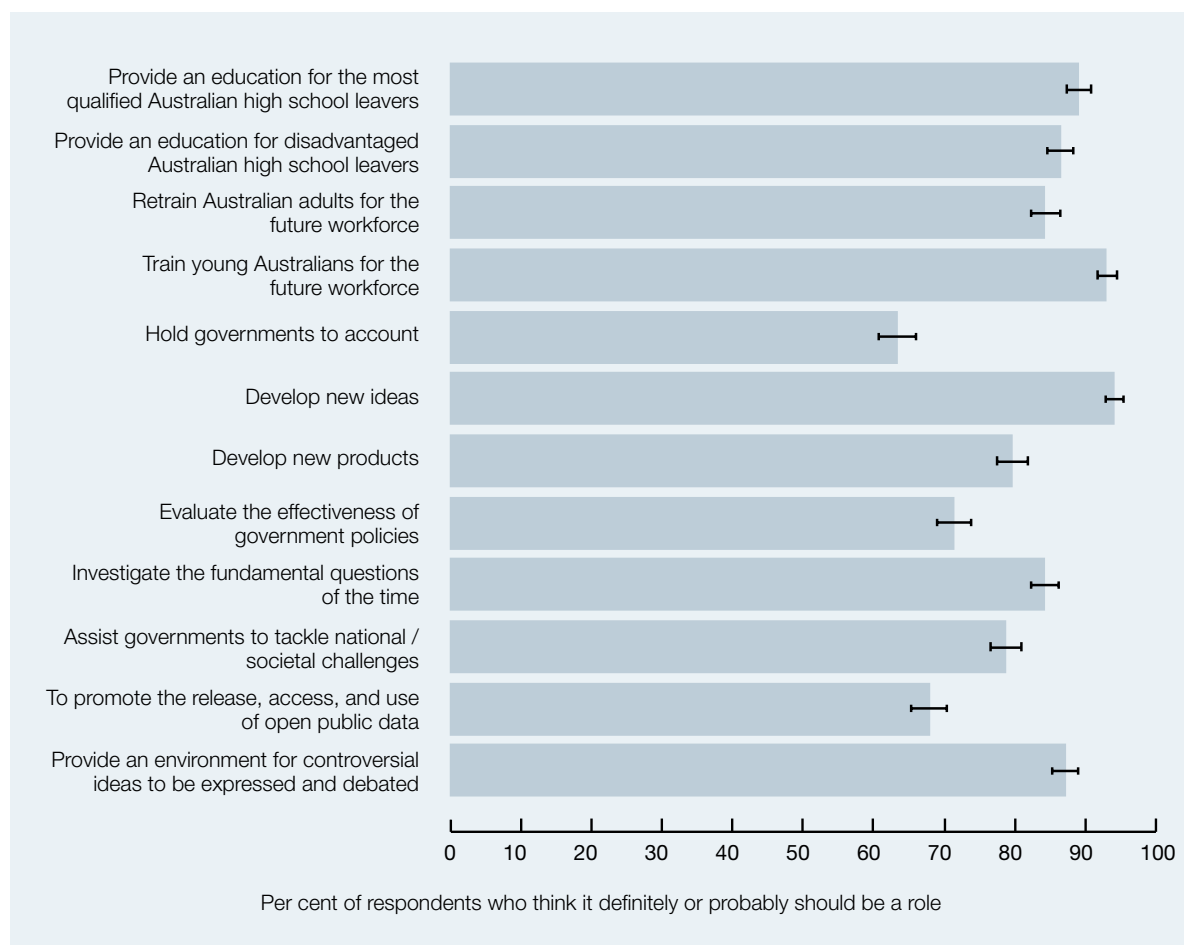
PUBLIC VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

There is a sizable minority of the general public who do not have confidence in universities, and an even larger percentage who do not think universities are teaching students the important things they need to know. One of the potential explanations for this is the competing roles that are expected of universities as 21st century institutions. Earlier in the survey, we had asked respondents 'Now thinking about University education, on the whole, do you think it should or should not be the responsibility of universities in Australia to ...?'.⁴ As shown in Figure 2, respondents to ANUpoll have a generally expansive view on what they think a role of the university should be.

Some of the differences across the perceived roles are very interesting. For example, 93.0 per cent of respondents thought universities should train young Australians for the future workforce, compared to 84.3 per cent of respondents who think universities should retrain Australian adults. Indeed, when we asked respondents to choose the most important role from the list, 44.4 per cent identified training young Australians for the future workforce as the main role, almost three times as high as the next most selected category (Provide an education for the most qualified Australian high school leavers).

There appears to be a greater level of support for basic as opposed to applied research, with 94.1 per cent of respondents thinking a role of the university is to develop new ideas compared to 79.7 per cent who think a role is to develop new products. Finally, while there is no option that has less than 60 per cent support, there is generally less support for what we might refer to as the public-policy role of universities. Only 63.4 per cent of respondents felt that one of the roles of universities in Australia is to 'Hold governments to account,' only 67.9 per cent of respondents felt that governments role is 'To promote the release, access, and use of open public data' and 71.5 per cent felt that universities should 'Evaluate the effectiveness of government policies.'

FIGURE 2 Perceived role of the university, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

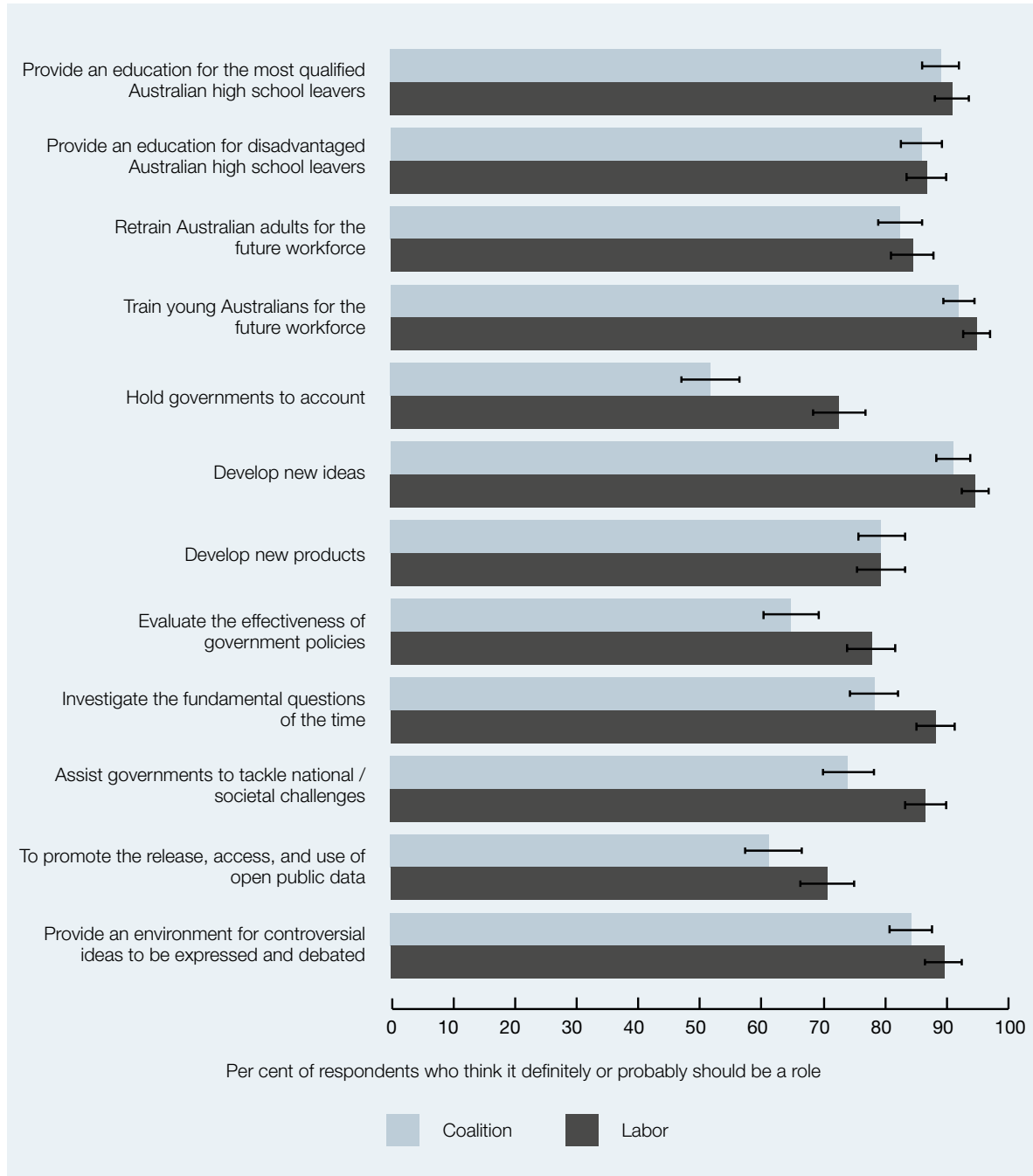
4 The order of specific roles was randomised

One of the interesting findings when we asked people to identify the most important role of universities is the support for 'Provide an education for disadvantaged Australian high school leavers.' For those who have never attended university, this was given as the most important role by 11.3 per cent of respondents. For current students on the other hand, it is only 6.5 per cent and for those who have attended but who are no longer attending university, it is only 4.8 per cent. One interpretation of this is that those who have not had access to a university are more acutely aware of the needs of disadvantaged students either because they remember the disadvantage they experienced in the past, or they are more likely to be at a lower part of the income distribution at the current point in time.

There are differences in the perceived role of the university based on the political party that the respondent would have voted for if an election was held on the day of the survey.⁵ Figure 3 shows that those who would have voted for the Coalition were far less supportive of four specific roles, three of which were related to the public policy roles of universities. Specifically, only 51.8 per cent of Coalition voters thought a role of the university was to 'Hold governments to account' compared to 72.5 per cent of Labor voters. While the differences were not as large, there were fewer Coalition voters who thought that universities should 'Evaluate the effectiveness of government policies' (64.7 per cent compared to 77.7 per cent) or 'Assist governments to tackle national/societal challenges' (74.0 per cent compared to 86.6 per cent). It should be kept in mind that the Coalition was in power in Canberra when the survey took place (and would go on to win the subsequent election). Coalition voters may be more supportive of those views if Labor was in power. Nonetheless, the results do highlight some contestation in the role of universities.

5 The exact wording of the question was 'If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?'

FIGURE 3 Perceived role of the university by major party voting, April 2019

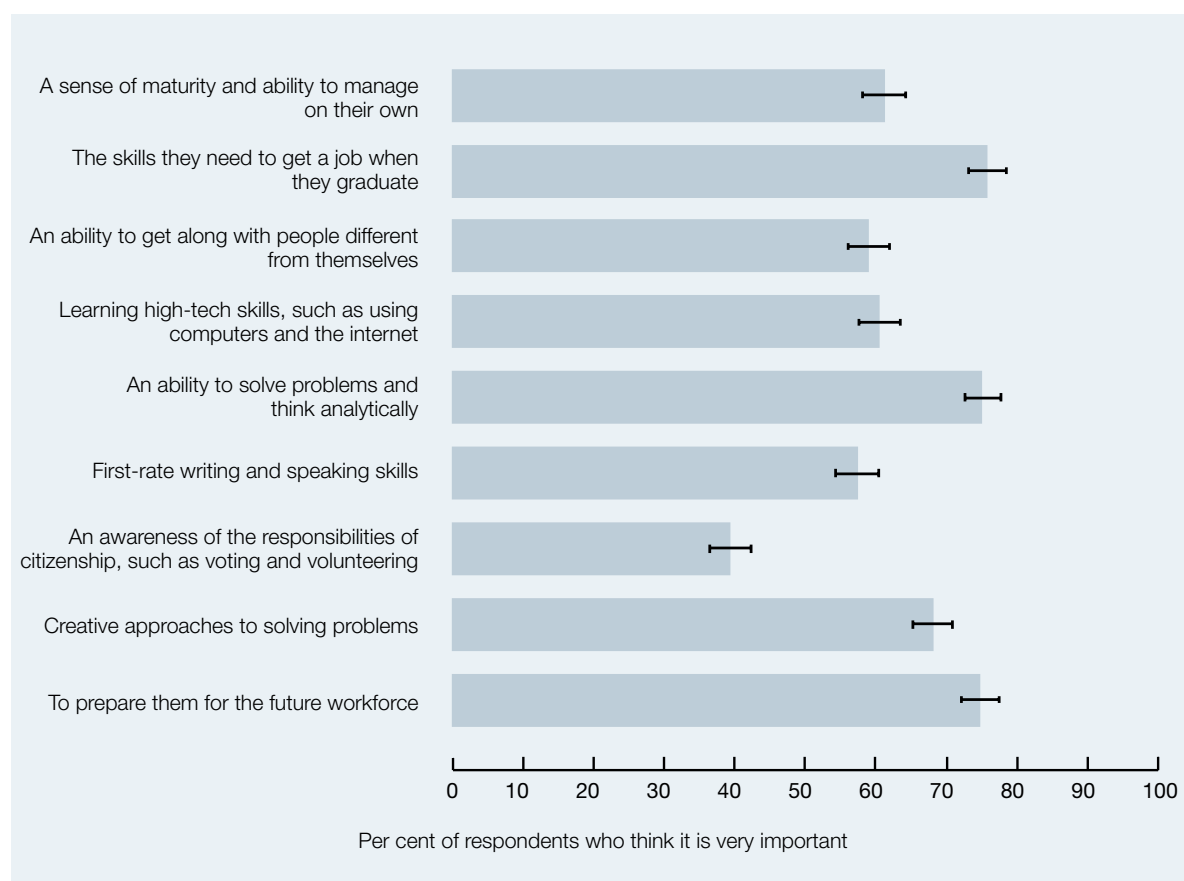


Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Regardless of a person's own experience with universities or the political party that the person would vote for, there is ongoing support for the education function of Australian universities. However, there is a variety of views as to what should be taught to university students. We asked 50 per cent of respondents 'The following is a list of skills and knowledge that students may gain from a university education. Please tell me how important you think each of these are...?' We gave nine sets of skills and knowledge, with Figure 4 giving the per cent of people who thought each one was 'very important.'

The three most common sets of skills and knowledge that respondents thought were very important are: 'The skills they need to get a job when they graduate' (76.0 per cent); 'An ability to solve problems and think analytically' (75.3 per cent) and 'To prepare them for the future workforce' (74.9 per cent). There is far less support for the view that university students should obtain 'An awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship, such as voting and volunteering' from a university education.

FIGURE 4 Importance of different types of skills and knowledge from a university education, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

There were three sets of skills and knowledge that were less likely to be identified as very important by the 25 per cent of respondents for whom we added an additional clarification at the end of the question that we are asking about 'the future labour market.' When this was specified, respondents were less likely to say the following sets of skills and knowledge were important: 'An ability to solve problems and think analytically' (70.4 per cent compared to 75.3 per cent for the control group); 'First-rate writing and speaking skills' (50.4 per cent compared to 57.5 per cent) and 'Creative approaches to solving problems' (61.7 per cent compared to 68.2 per cent).

There is a danger of over-interpreting survey experiments, as the specific wording can have a large effect on levels and differences. Nonetheless, these findings raise at least some cause for concern with regards to the views of Australians about the future labour market. As mentioned earlier, there is debate as to the extent to which automation will lead to a net gain or net loss in employment (and how large that change will be). However, there is general consensus that the types of jobs that will be created in the future will be those that rely on problem solving, communication and creativity (Daugherty and Wilson 2018). The finding that these were less likely to be seen as important when the future labour market is specified may imply that Australians are underinvesting in these skills.

PUBLIC POLICY DEBATES AND AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Views on international students

One of the major changes to universities over the last few decades has been the very dramatic increase in the number and proportion of international students. According to Norton, Cherastidtham et al. (2018) in their *Mapping Australian higher education 2018* report:

'International enrolments are booming. Nearly 400,000 international students studied in Australian universities in 2016, one-in-five studying at an offshore campus. New visa approvals show that the number of international students in 2018 will significantly exceed 2016 enrolments. Enrolments from China and India have grown the most, with Chinese students now making up a third of international enrolments.'

There are undoubted benefits of this increase in international students, with fees from these students contributing to university revenue (and therefore research), domestic students getting exposure to a wider range of students, and governments/local communities benefiting from the foreign exchange that these students bring to the country. There are potential costs though, with students potentially increasing congestion/house prices, changing the type of instruction that academics need to engage in and potentially taking the place of domestic students in particular programs (Borjas 2004). The net effect of these students is likely to be influenced by the role of the university that an individual sees as being of greatest importance. However, it should also be kept in mind that the decision as to how many international students a particular institution accepts will impact on a large segment of the population who aren't involved in that decision. That is, there are considerable externalities.

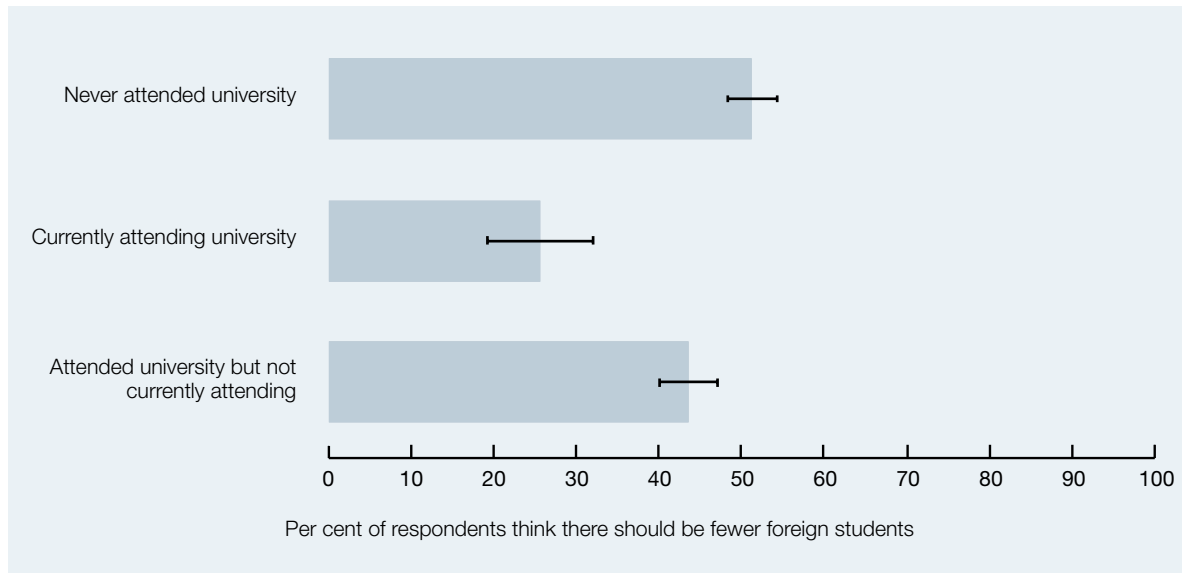
In the April ANUpoll, we asked respondents: 'Universities in Australia educate a mix of foreign and domestic students. Which of the following best represents your view?' The percentage of respondents who reported each of the three options (which were randomised) are as follows:

- > 46.1 per cent – Universities should be educating fewer foreign students and more domestic students
- > 52.8 per cent – The mix between foreign students and domestic students is about right
- > 1.1 per cent – Universities should be educating fewer domestic students and more foreign students

Clearly, very few respondents are supportive of a **relative** increase in foreign students. However, there was still a slightly larger percentage of people who were in support of at least as high a percentage as is currently the case compared to a decrease. Clearly though, there is a fair degree of concern within the general community about the current level of international students at Australian universities.

An important finding from the analysis, however, is that those who are most exposed to international students (as current students) are the least supportive of a reduction in international students. As shown in Figure 5, only 25.6 per cent of current university students are supportive of a reduction, compared to 51.3 per cent of those who have never attended university and 43.6 per cent of those who have attended but are not currently attending.

FIGURE 5 Support for reducing the proportion of foreign students at Australian universities, by respondent's university experience, April 2019

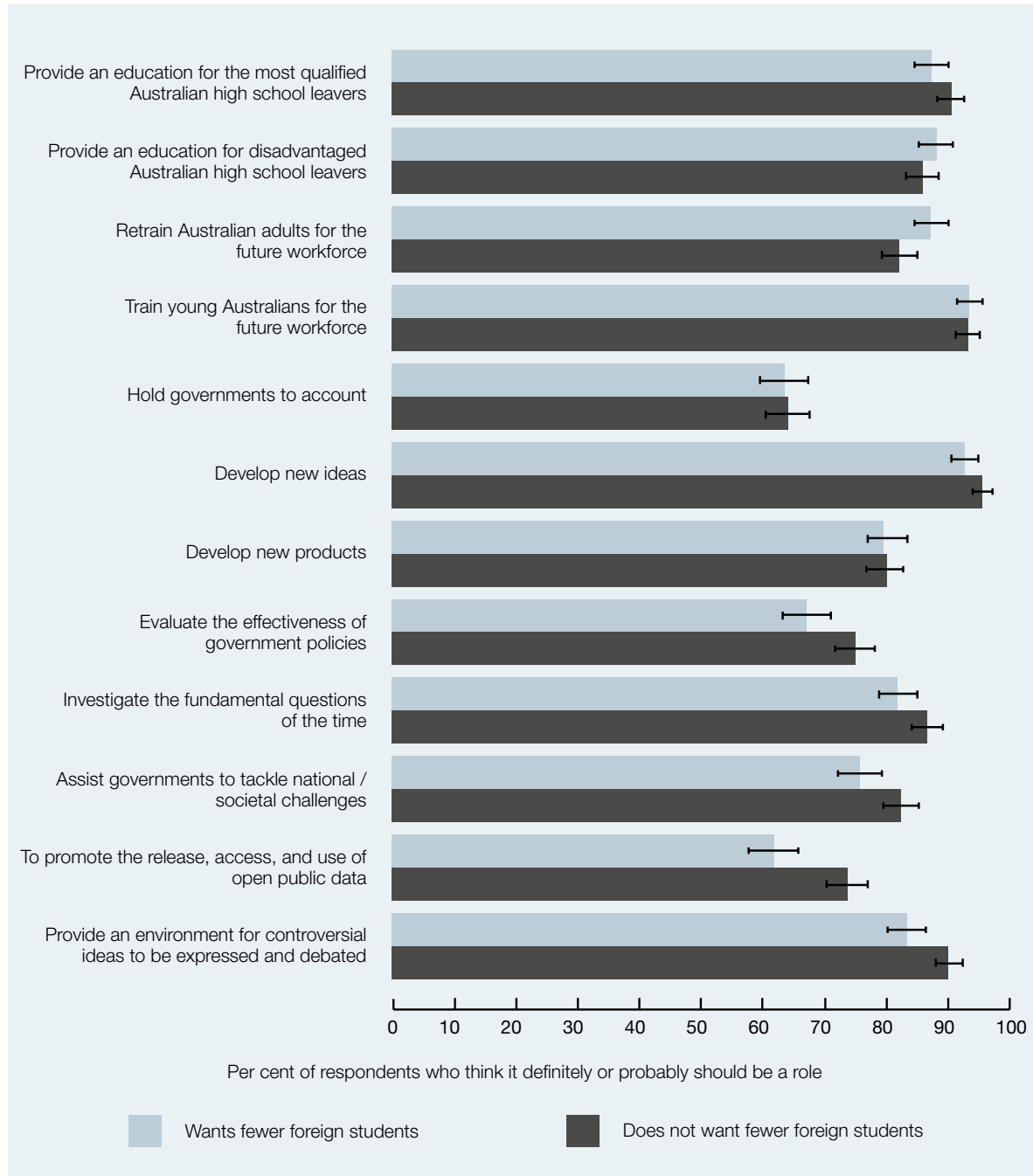


Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

If current students have less support for reducing foreign students in Australia's universities, then who is in support? There are some demographic factors that have an association. Females are slightly more likely to support fewer foreign students than males – 48.0 per cent compared to 44.0 per cent. Older respondents are also more supportive, with 54.0 per cent of those aged 55 years and over supporting fewer foreign students compared to 49.8 per cent of those aged 35 to 54 years and 32.4 per cent of those aged under 35. What is perhaps more interesting though is the lack of association with some other variables you might expect to be related. There was no statistically significant difference between those born in Australia and those born either in another English speaking country or in a non-English speaking country. There are also no differences by whether or not someone lives in a capital city.

What is perhaps not surprising, but is interesting nonetheless is that those who think we should reduce the number of foreign students relative to domestic students at Australian universities have somewhat different views on what the role of the university should be. Specifically, as shown in Figure 6, those who think there should be fewer foreign students are less likely to support the public policy role of universities. It is impossible with the data available to test the causal direction of this association, though it should be noted that these differences hold when demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are controlled for. Nonetheless, the results do give some support for the notion that those who think universities should focus on teaching and applied research are more likely to see the increase in foreign students as a not completely positive development.

FIGURE 6 Perceived role of the university by views on foreign students, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals..

In November 2018, we asked a series of more general questions on migration and population growth as part of the 28th ANUpoll (Biddle 2019). Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between views on foreign students and broader population issues. The most general question that we asked in that previous survey was 'The Australian population is now a little over 25 million... Do you think Australia needs more people?' We were able to link responses of 1,759 individuals to this question and the question on foreign students in ANUpoll No. 29. Of those who said that universities should have fewer foreign students relative to domestic students, 21.1 per cent said that they thought Australia needed more people (when asked in November). For those who did not support lowering the number of foreign students, this increased to 38.4 per cent in support of population growth.

There were also quite different views on reasons for and against population growth when asked in November 2018, based on the responses to the question on foreign students in April 2019. Specifically, we asked respondents in November 2018 'Various reasons have been given for increasing Australia's population. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements...' as well as a separate question on 'Various reasons have been given to not increase Australia's population. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements...' Figure 7a and 7b give the percentage of the population who agree to the specific statements, separately by their responses to the question on foreign students.

For the most part, if people were in support of reducing foreign students, they were less likely to support the reasons for population growth asked about in November 2018 and more likely to support the reasons against. This was not always the case, as there were a few reasons against population growth for which there was no difference (We can still take refugees without increasing total migration; and The cost of housing is too high). Furthermore, there were a few responses for which the difference was particularly large. Specifically, the largest gap was for the view that 'We have too much cultural diversity already', which was agreed to by 58.2 per cent of those who wanted fewer foreign students but only 31.0 per cent of those who didn't.

As mentioned before, there is a danger of reading too much into survey differences and making assumptions about the attitudes that underly them. However, the linked data from Waves 28 and 29 of ANUpoll gives some support for the view that resistance to foreign students is driven in part by fears of increases in cultural diversity. Policies towards foreign students who may only want to study in Australia and then return to their home country may get caught up in broader concerns about the nature of Australian society.

FIGURE 7 Reasons for and against migration by views on foreign students, November 2018 and April 2019

FIGURE 7A Reasons for

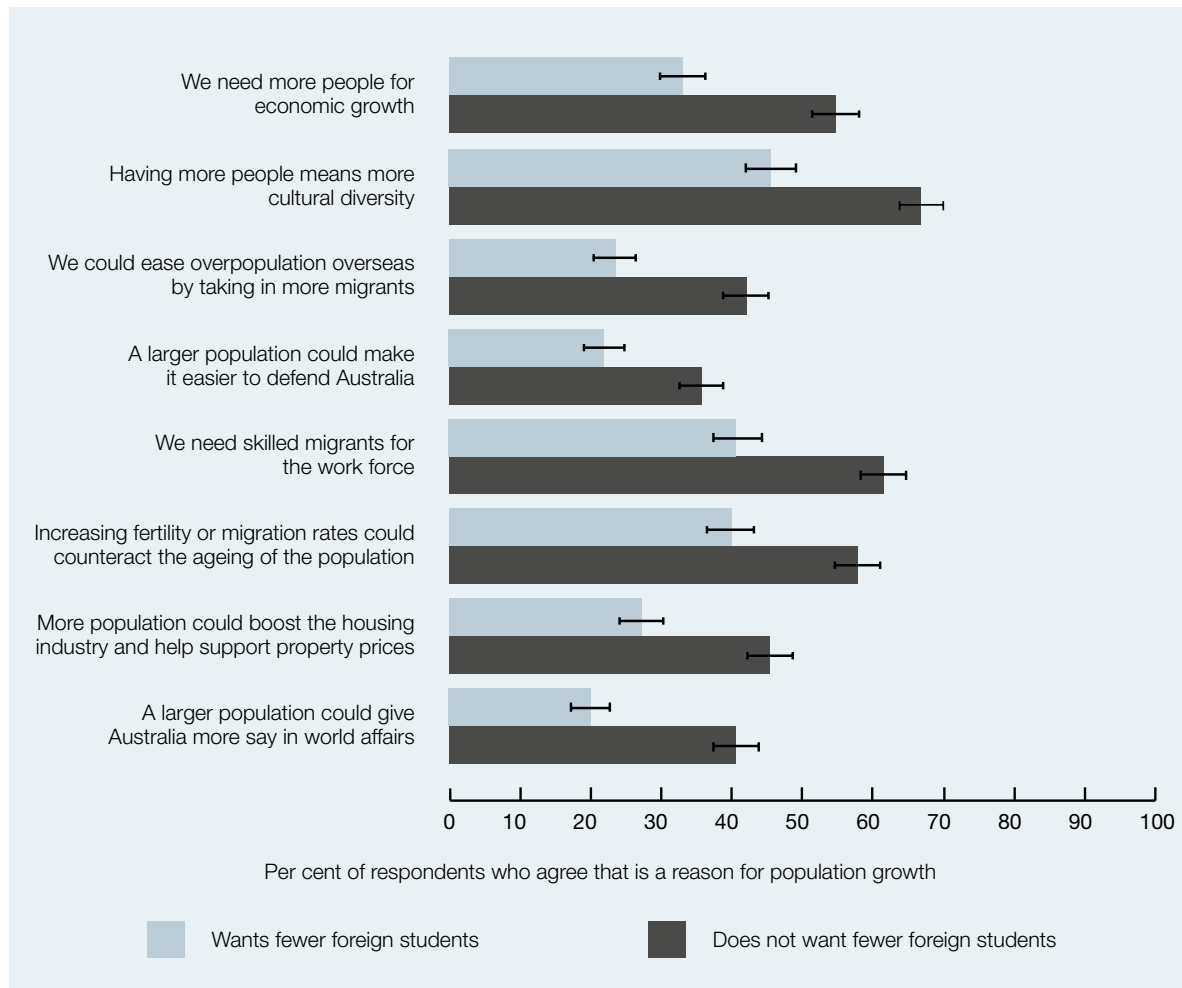
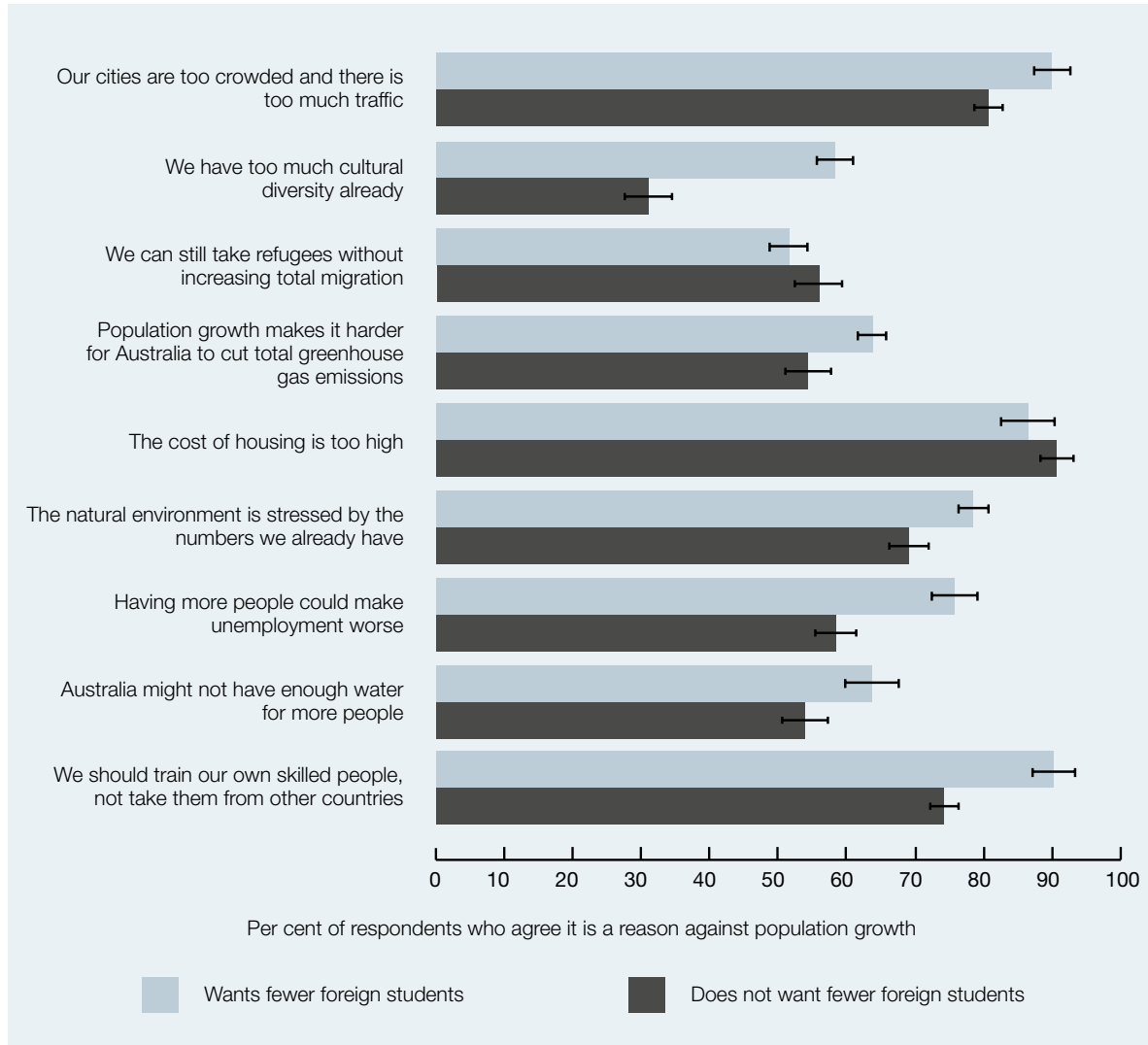


FIGURE 7B Reasons against



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Attitudes towards free speech on campus

While it has yet to feature heavily in debates amongst the broader public, there is significant discussion within universities and other institutions about the extent to which free speech is and should be supported on university campuses. At one extreme, Matthew Lesh of the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) has argued that⁶:

The failure to protect freedom of expression is seriously imperilling the discovery of truth, the core purpose of Australia's universities; student development, which requires debate and challenge; and the future of Australian society, which depends on a tolerance and openness to debate.

The IPA report, however, focuses on particular aspects of free speech⁷ with a focus on how universities themselves limit free speech, rather than constraints imposed externally (either implicitly or explicitly). By contrast, there is very little discussion in the IPA report on the extent to which funding agencies and governments in particular may limit what researchers do and do not focus on.

By contrast, in his report 'Report of the Independent Review of Freedom of Speech in Australian Higher Education Providers', Former Chief Justice Robert S. French (2019) concluded that 'From the available evidence ... claims of a freedom of speech crisis on Australian campuses are not substantiated.' He did, however, recognise that there are policies that are currently in place that have the potential to erode freedom of speech and therefore recommended a voluntary code that allows universities to maintain their autonomy in setting policies.

A survey like the ANUpoll is not well suited to give insights into whether free speech on campus is getting better or worse, or is too high or too low. Very few respondents are likely to have had the lived experience that would give them insights into current circumstances. However, respondents to the ANUpoll are able to give insights into what aspects of free speech are most valued and what community attitudes are to supporting different types of free speech. To shed light on this topic, we asked respondents: 'There has been a debate about the role of free speech on university campuses. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?' The following aspects of free speech were listed, with the preceding text the label used in the figures presented in this paper:

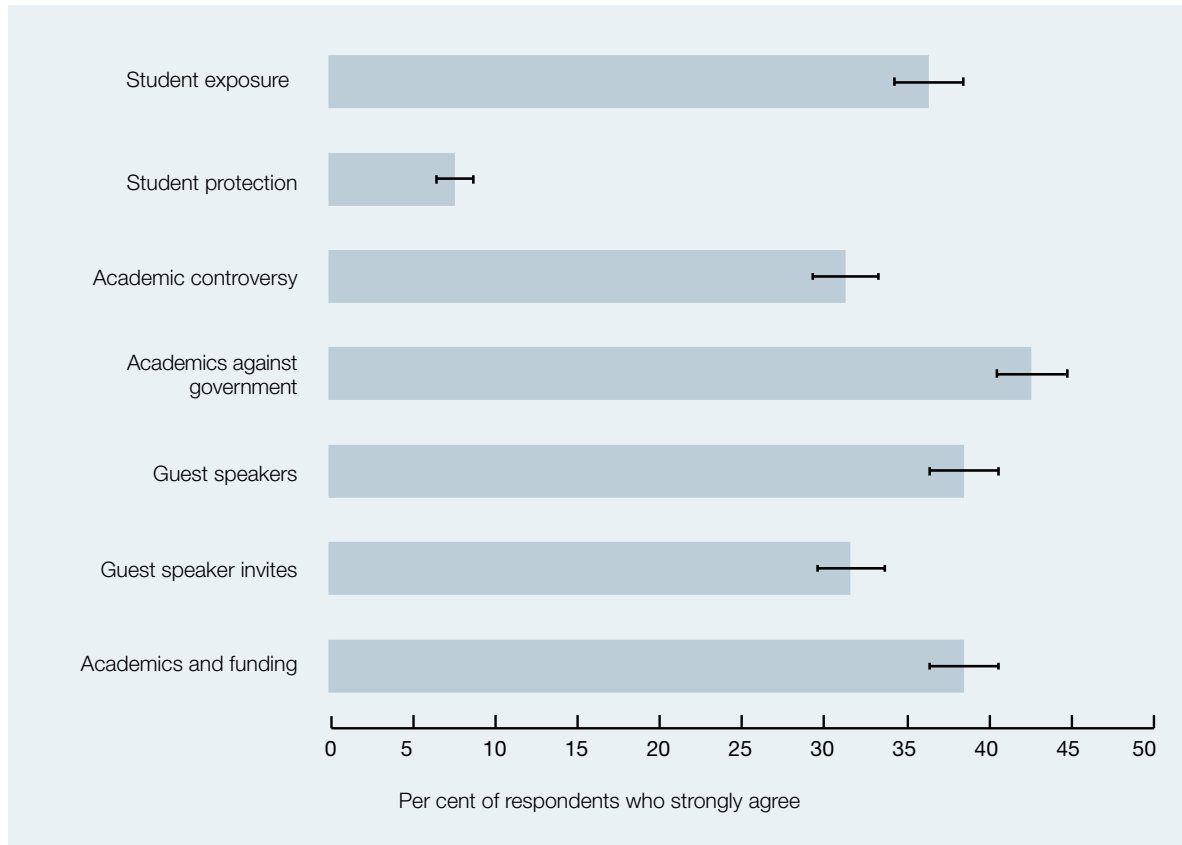
- a) *Student exposure* – Students at Australian universities should be exposed to opinions they disagree with;
- b) *Student protection* – students at Australian universities should be protected from opinions and ideas they find challenging;
- c) *Academic controversy* – academics at Australian universities should be able to express views that are controversial;
- d) *Academics against government* – academics at Australian universities should be able to express views that are different from the views of the government of the day;
- e) *Guest speakers* – it is an important part of the university experience to have guest speakers come to campus to share a wide variety of viewpoints on political, social, economic, and other contemporary issues;
- f) *Guest speaker invites* – Australian universities should invite speakers with a variety of ideas and opinions to campus, including speakers whose perspectives are very different from most students; and
- g) *Academics and funding* – academics at Australian universities should be able to focus on research without fear of funding constraints.

Apart from question b (which has an agreement rate of 26.2 per cent), the vast majority of respondents either agree or disagree with the above statements. For the other six questions, agreement ranges from 87.5 per cent (academics and funding) to 95.3 per cent (academics against government). These results perhaps aren't surprising, given the framing, lack of information on trade-offs that might need to be made, and relative inexperience of the Life in Australia panel members with regards to some of these issues. There is slightly more variation, however, when we focus on the 'strongly agree' category, as shown in Figure 8.

6 ipa.org.au/publications-ipa/research-papers/free-speech-on-campus-audit-2018

7 The list given of 'censorious actions' is 'violent protests against the presence of speakers, venue cancellations for controversial speakers, students required to pay security fees, activist students demanding course content censorship, universities censoring academics for their speech, students instructed to not express their viewpoint, and the growing use of trigger warnings.'

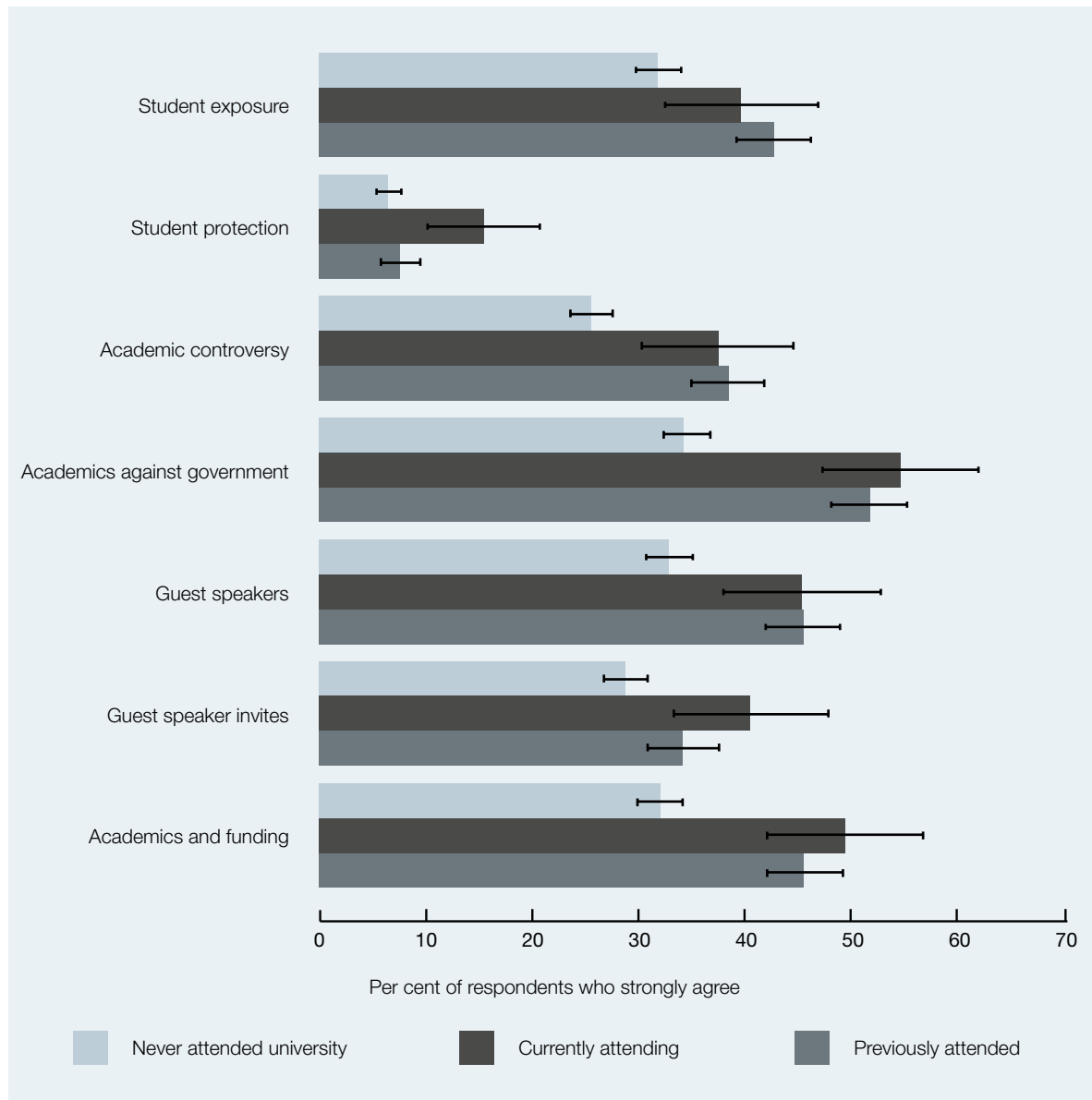
FIGURE 8 Per cent of respondents who strongly agree with statements regarding academic freedom, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

There is also significant variation in strength of support for aspects of academic freedom based on the respondent's own university experience. Figure 9 shows that those who are currently attending and those who have previously attended university have broadly similar views, though it should be noted that there is reasonable uncertainty around the estimates for current students given the small sample sizes. For the most part, these two groups are more supportive of the aspects of academic freedom asked in the survey than those who have never attended university.

FIGURE 9 Percentage of respondents who strongly agree with statements regarding academic freedom, by individual student status, April 2019



Note: Percentages are based on population weights, with the 'whiskers' around the estimates based on the 95 per cent confidence intervals.

The main exception is the single question on student protection, which 15.4 per cent of current students strongly agree with compared to 6.5 per cent and 7.6 per cent of those who have never or previously attended university respectively.⁸ We also find variation in response to this question based on when and where those with a bachelor degree or higher obtained their qualification. Specifically, those who obtained their degree outside of Australia were more likely to strongly agree with the statement on student protection (14.8 per cent compared to 4.6 per cent), with those who received their degree relatively recently being more likely to strongly support.

As far as we are aware, this is the first survey question asked of a representative sample of the population that asks about views of the general public on academic freedom. If this survey was to be repeated, we would have a greater range of statements that are likely to have relatively low support, explicitly ask about trade-offs and test the public's views on potential policy responses. However, results from the ANUpoll give a useful baseline for future questions and more detailed data analysis. Ultimately, the general public is quite supportive of the aspects of academic freedom that we asked about, though this support appears to be influenced by a student's own experience.

⁸ When we include those who agree and who strongly agree, there is no significant difference between current students and those who have never attended university, but both have a higher percentage than those who have previously attended.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the afterword to her recent book on *A History of the Modern Australian University*, Hannah Forsyth (2014) asks the question of 'What sort of university do we want?' Her answer, based on a reasonably pessimistic view of the recent history of universities is that:

'Higher education needs to grow still further; it needs to include more diverse students and find ways of teaching them effectively; it needs to expand knowledge yet again, not just to embrace additional professions, but also to encompass new ideas and be truly inclusive; it needs to keep looking for solutions to the problems that confront the world's economies, environments, democracies and philosophies.'

All of those aims are admirable and they find support in the data summarised in this paper. However, not all of them can be maximised at once, for every institution. Research and teaching is not a zero-sum game, as lecturers who are at the cutting edge of their field can inspire students and good teachers can create new ideas and new researchers through the teaching process. But, there is still a finite number of hours in a given day and limits to financial resources available within the system.

The role of Australian universities should not just be decided by those who are already in the system, or even by the priorities of the government of the day. They are for the most part public institutions and the general public has a role in shaping directions and priorities. The aim of this ANUpoll was to collect information on public attitudes towards Australian universities, document how these might be changing through time, and measure variation in these attitudes across the population.

The general public is broadly supportive of the roles that universities are currently playing and have a relatively high level of confidence in Australian universities. Not only is there greater confidence in universities than there is in the press, government, the public service, major Australian companies and banks (all of which receive a low level of confidence), but respondents to the ANUpoll indicated a greater confidence in universities than they did in schools.

There was slightly less support for the proposition that universities are teaching in the right way, particularly for the future labour market. There is a very large minority of Australians who think that universities should be reducing the number of foreign students, with responses to this question correlating strongly to more general fears with regards to population growth and cultural diversity in particular. Finally, there is general support for aspects of free speech on campus, with a sizable minority of respondents also stating that they see the need for protection for students to be balanced.

Ultimately, we hope that the data summarised in this report will be downloaded and used to help understand the public's views on the role of the universities, so that our higher education system can continue to make a positive contribution to Australian society.

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