

No matter who wins the election, many Australians think real leadership will be lacking

Written by Samuel Wilson, Senior Lecturer in Management, Swinburne University of Technology

With the federal election a little over a month away, it appears many Australians have little faith the winners will be able to provide the type of leadership that can change the country in a meaningful way.

According to our recent research, nearly a third (29.8%) of respondents believe that the Coalition shows no “leadership for the public good”, compared to just 5% who believe the Coalition shows such leadership to an extremely large extent.

Labor fared only slightly better – 24.9% of respondents believe it shows no “leadership for the public good”, compared to 7.3% who said it shows it to an extremely large extent.

Our findings revealed that minor parties, the Greens and One Nation, didn’t inspire confidence, either. About a third (32.9%) of respondents believe the Greens show no “leadership for the public good”, while just over half (50.3%) believe the same of One Nation.

Equally concerning is the collapse of Australians’ trust and confidence in their democratic institutions of government.

Just over a quarter (26.3%) of respondents believe that the federal government, as an institution, shows no “leadership for the public good”. This score is somewhat worse than perceptions of state governments (24.6%) and significantly worse than perceptions of local governments (16.2%).

Read more: [*What can governments and leaders do when trust evaporates?*](#)

The findings come from the [initial results of the Australian Leadership Index](#) , a new quarterly

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survey from the Swinburne Business School that measures and tracks community perceptions and expectations of leadership across 12 institutions in the government, public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

These results were drawn from two nationally representative surveys of 1,000 Australians we conducted in March.

Taken together, the results provide more bad news for the Coalition in the lead-up to the federal election on May 18.

Accountability and ethics are key

We hasten to add that the disillusionment with the federal government does not extend to voters' perceptions of the public sector. On balance, voters think the public health and education sectors show leadership for the public good.

This indicates that public disillusionment lies squarely with the people who make the policy, rather than those who implement it.

Consistent with other studies, our findings confirm the importance of transparency, accountability and ethics to perceptions of trust and confidence in leadership.

Read more: [Reforming our political system is not a quick fix. Here's a step-by-step guide to how to do it](#)

From a community perspective, political leadership for the public good occurs when leaders demonstrate high ethical standards, prioritise transparency and accountability even when it could have a negative impact on their administrations, and are alive and responsive to the

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needs of the people they serve.

In other words, leadership for the greater good is reflected in *what* value leaders create, *how* they create this value, and *for whom* they create it.

Political leaders in Australia are currently lacking on all counts.

For whom is value created?

Our survey results shed light on where the public thinks the federal government is failing to create value and what the community expects of political leaders to serve the greater good.

Notably, creating economic value has no bearing on perceptions of politicians' leadership for the public good. As former Liberal Party leader [John Hewson recently observed](#), voters now take effective economic management for granted from governments.

The same could be said for the creation of social value through, for example, the provision of social services and the enactment of policies that enable people to flourish.

From the public's perspective, the creation of social and economic value is essentially "core business" for the federal government.

In order to be seen as showing leadership for the public good, the federal government needs to go beyond business as usual.

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What looms largest in the public mind when thinking about leadership for the greater good is *how* political leaders create value and *for whom* they create value.

Specifically, politicians need to behave ethically and demonstrate accountability for their actions. Australians have had enough of the opportunistic, short-term game of point-scoring and blame-shifting.

Read more: [**Australians' trust in politicians and democracy hits an all-time low: new research**](#)

Moreover, political leaders need to be seen as responsive to the people they serve, in addition to balancing the needs of different groups of stakeholders. Concern about the use of [donations](#) to gain access to, and exert influence over, politicians looms large in the public mind.

In the lead-up to the federal election, and in the wake of recent Royal Commissions into [banking](#) and [religious institutions](#), it's the ideal time for Australians to consider the kind of leadership we need for the Australia we want.

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Read more <http://theconversation.com/no-matter-who-wins-the-election-many-australians-think-real-leadership-will-be-lacking-115449>