ROY MORGAN

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A generational divide on freedom vs the law as Government urges people to 'not break the rules'

Australians' willingness to follow lockdown regulations and social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a key factor in our relatively low death toll from the disease. But new findings on generational divides over personal freedoms vs the law may indicate challenges ahead as the nation moves into the recovery phase.

As part of its commitment to helping business and government understand Australians' values, behaviour and circumstances, Roy Morgan surveys thousands of Australians each year. Its latest findings show that while the vast majority of Australians don't place personal freedoms ahead of the law, there is a major difference between generations.

Overall, almost a quarter (24.7%) of Australians agreed with the statement 'Freedom is more important than the law' in March, as the effects of the pandemic were starting to really be felt. But behind that average lies a big gap in attitudes across different ages.

Among Pre-Boomers (born before 1946), fewer than 1 in 7 (13.6%) placed freedom ahead of the law and among Baby Boomers (born 1946-1960) it was fewer than 1 in 6 (15.4%). But among Gen Z (born 1991-2006) more than 1 in 3 (35%) said freedom takes priority.

Michele Levine, CEO of Roy Morgan, says:

"There are certain issues, such as concerns about loss of privacy associated with new technology where we see far less variance across generations — in that instance the vast majority of Australians share that concern, with Baby Boomers just two percentage points above the 70.5% overall average, and Gen Z less than three points below it.

"But on the issue of freedom versus the law, we see significant differences by age. This is also the case when it comes to agreeing or disagreeing with the statement, 'I like to be with a crowd of people': while overall 19% of people feel that way, agreement is almost twice as high among Gen Z as among Baby Boomers (29.2% vs 15.5%).

"That's not to say that Gen Z Australians take their responsibilities around the pandemic less seriously, however there is no doubt that many have felt the weight of the lockdown very heavily. This week the Chief Medical Officer urged people to stick the course, not to do 'silly things' such as gather for house parties and not to 'break any of the rules'. As governments and health authorities work towards a gradual return to something approaching normality it's important that they grasp the different things that motivate different parts of the population and shape their messaging accordingly."

Trust in the Federal Government at a five-year low

Another finding from the same survey likely to concern authorities is that as in March, when asked to agree or disagree with the statement, 'I don't trust the current Australian government', more than half (56.3%) agreed with it. This is fewer than those who felt that way at the height of the bushfire crises in January (59.9%) but is still above the five-year average for this sentiment (53.8%).

To request an interview with Michele Levine or find out more about this data, call (03) 9224 5309 or email askroymorgan@roymorgan.com.

About Roy Morgan

Roy Morgan is the source of the most comprehensive data on Australians' behaviour and attitudes, surveying 1,000 people a week in a continuous cycle that has been running for two decades. The company has more than 75 years' experience collecting objective, independent information

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
20,000	±0.7	±0.6	±0.4	±0.3
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2