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# MYOB Australian Small Business Survey

## Special Focus Report: Election 2004

### October 2004

Small Business Survey Report

Prepared by AMR Interactive

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## About the Study

This report presents findings for Election Questions from the Q4 2004 MYOB Small Business Survey comprising a national sample of 1,000 small business proprietors and general managers, whose businesses have a connection to the internet, conducted in September 2004. These are defined as both non-employing and employing businesses with fewer than 20 employees. Results have been weighted to reflect the small business population distribution according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for company size, length of time operating, and selected ANZSIC Industry divisions. Refer to ABS publications *Characteristics of Small Business*, 8127.0, 2001 and *Small Business in Australia*, 1321, 2001.

For a copy of the main report please contact the survey project manager or MYOB Public Relations.

Election Questions presented are:

- Party plan to vote for in Senate and House of Reps
- Party voted for in last election in Senate and House of Reps
- Reasons for changing preference if planning to vote differently
- Top issues of importance affecting voting decision
- Issues not adequately addressed in campaign
- How well the ALP and Coalition policies address small business concerns
- Main sources of information about political policies
- Perceptions of State and Federal Government performance

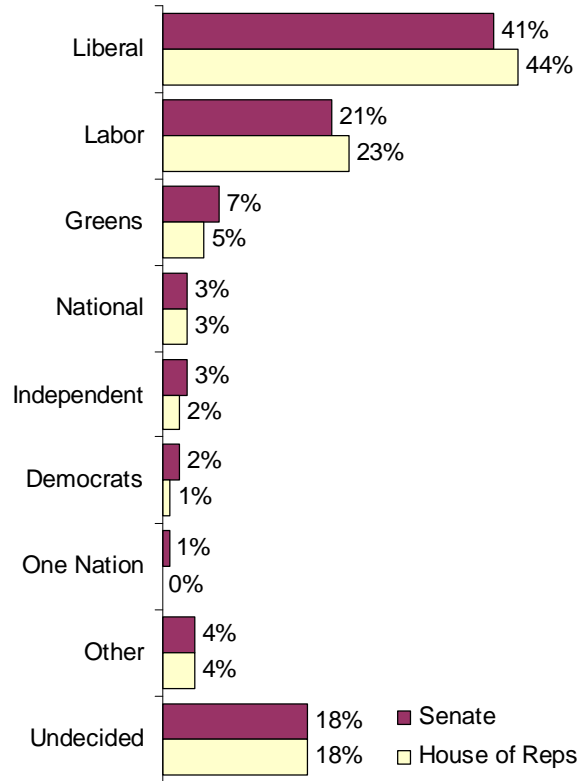
Note: 5% of the sample said they were not registered to vote and are not included.



**Voting Preference**

Chart 1: Party plan to vote for on October 9<sup>th</sup> (%)

**47% plan to vote for the Coalition in the House of Reps**



Base: Online Australian small businesses  
 Q: On October 9, which party do you plan to vote for in the Senate/ House of Representatives?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

Almost half of small business owners plan to vote for the Coalition in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

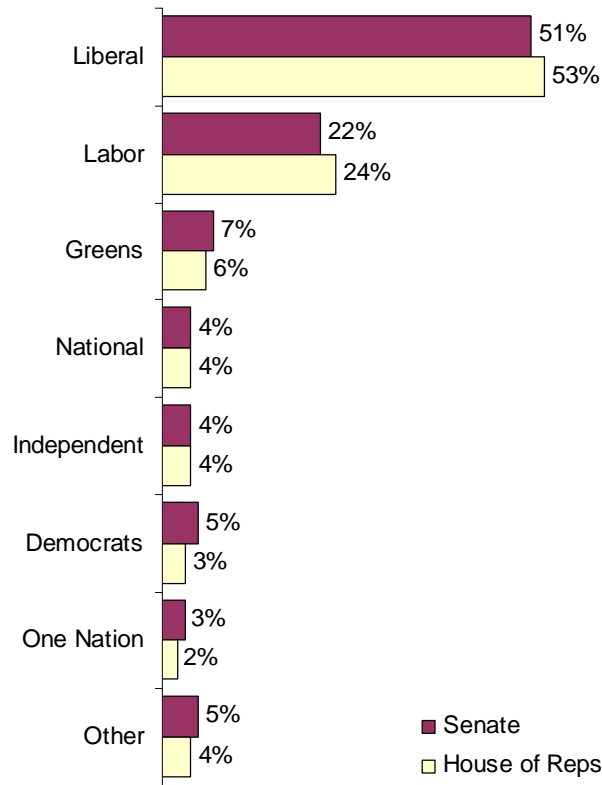
The ALP trails with only one fifth to one quarter of the vote.

It is important to note that almost one fifth (18%) are undecided. Of these, eight out of ten say they will decide less than a week before (36%) or on the day (44%).

**Party voted for in last Federal election**

Chart 2: Party vote for in last Federal election (%)

**57% voted for the Coalition in the House of Reps last election**



Base: Online Australian small businesses  
 Q: In the last election, which party did you vote for in the Senate/ House of Representatives?

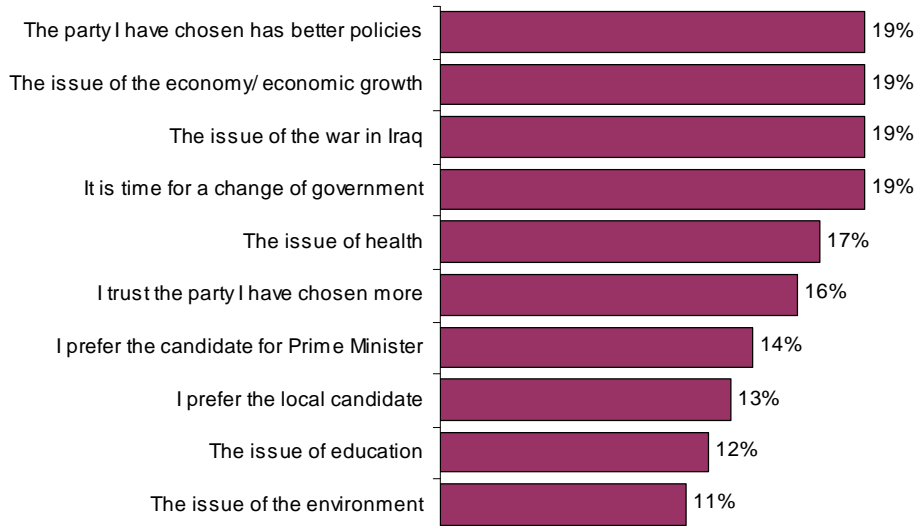
AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

While more voted for the Coalition last time, it is the large number of undecided voters that is diluting the number planning to vote for them this time, rather than a larger proportion that voted Labor.

## Reasons for changing voting preference

Chart 3: Reasons for changing voting preference (%)

### The reasons for changing voting preferences are diverse



Base: Online Australian small businesses

Q: In the last election, which party did you vote for in the Senate/ House of Representatives?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =419)

Almost one half (45%) of the sample has changed their voting preferences in some way since the last election, for a range of reasons.

Preference for policies, the economy, the Iraq war, and generally wanting a change of government are each cited by around one fifth of voters who have changed preferences.

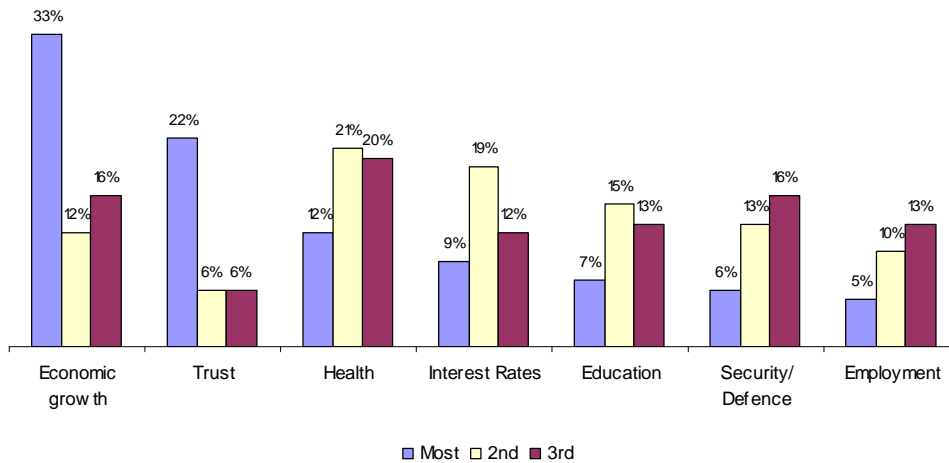
Despite this diverse range of reasons, the overall voting profile has not changed substantially from that seen in the last election. This suggests that while many voters have shifted allegiances, they have done so in proportions that generally maintain the status quo. The major parties look to be gaining as many as they are losing.

That said, around one fifth of voters remain undecided, and will be making their decision very close to or on election day, leaving room for the major parties to pick up these swinging voters late in the campaign. This will require focussing on issues that small business owners see as important and covering those that they feel have not yet been adequately addressed.

## Importance of issues affecting voting decision

Chart 4: Issues important to voting decision (%)

### The Economy, Trust and Health are the most important issues



Base: Online Australian small businesses

Q: Please indicate the top three issues in terms of importance to your voting decision

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

One third of small business owners rank the Economy as the most important issue in terms of their voting decision. Around one fifth rate Trust and just over one in ten say Health is the most important.

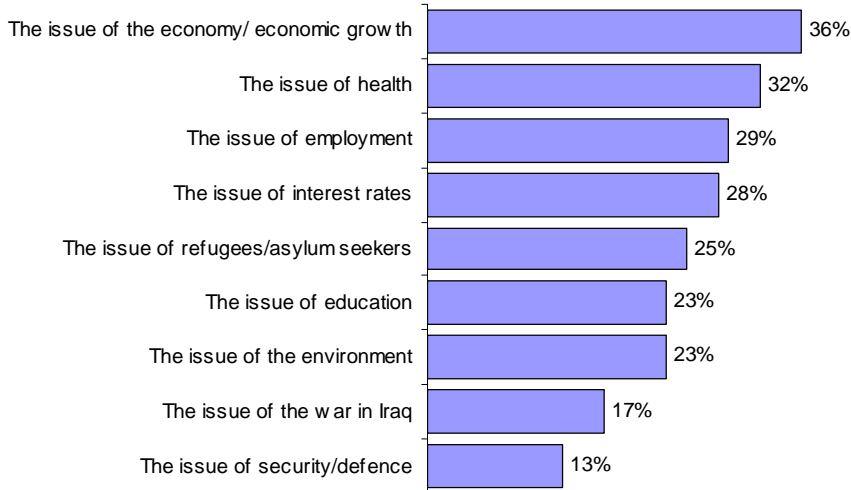
Health leads as the second and third most important issue for one fifth, while a similar number say Interest Rates are their second most important concern.

After the Economy, the diversity of opinion suggests equal attention must be paid to the issues of Trust, Health and Interest Rates when it comes to luring voters from the Small Business sector.

**Issues not yet adequately addressed**

Chart 5: Issues not adequately addressed in the campaign (%)

**The Economy and Health are seen as deserving more attention**



Base: Online Australian small businesses

Q: In the Election campaign so far, what has not been addressed adequately that should have been?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =419)

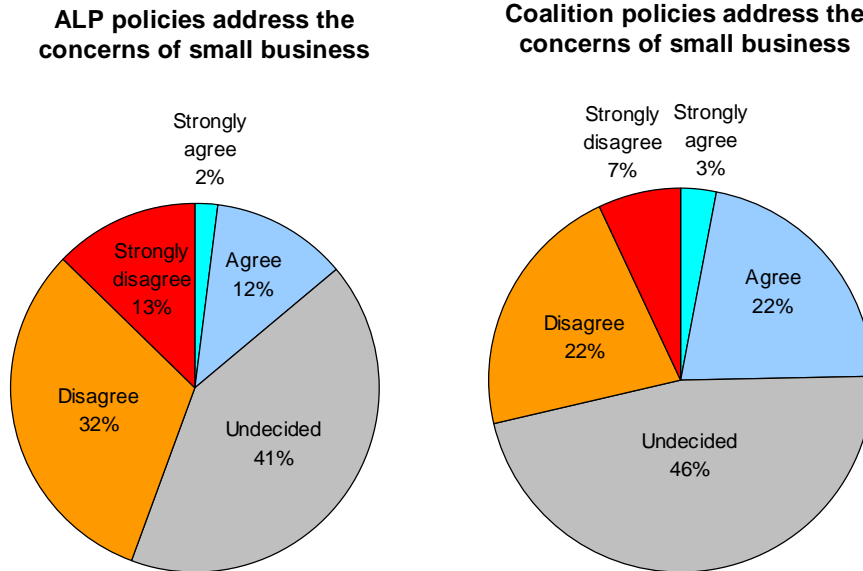
The Economy, Health, Employment and Interest Rates are the top ranking issues that small business owners believe need more attention in the campaign. This shows a range of opinions in the business community that parties must deal with effectively if they are to reach small business owners, with around three out of ten concerned about each of these key issues.

About one quarter feel the issues of refugees, education and the environment also deserve more attention.

**Addressing the concerns of small business owners**

Chart 6: How well the concerns of small business owners have been addressed (%)

**More agree that the Coalition's policies address small business**



Base: Online Australian small businesses  
 Q: The policies presented by the Australian Labor Party/Coalition (so far) address the concerns/issues facing small business owners in Australia.

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

One quarter of small business owners agree that the Coalition's policies so far have addressed the concerns facing them in Australia, versus only 14% for the ALP.

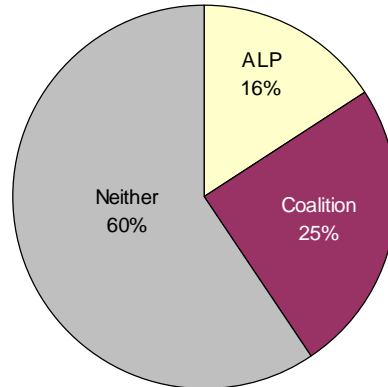
Disagreement is even more marked when it comes to the ALP's policies, at 45%, compared with 29% for the Coalition.

The trend of indecisiveness is continued here, with both the Coalition and ALP receiving a rating of undecided from around four out of ten owners.

## Reducing the administrative burden on small business owners

Chart 7: Which party is more committed to reducing the administrative burden (%)

**6 out of 10 owners believe neither major party is committed to reducing the administrative burden on small business owners**



Base: Online Australian small businesses

Q: Which party do you believe is more committed to reducing the administrative burden on small business owners?

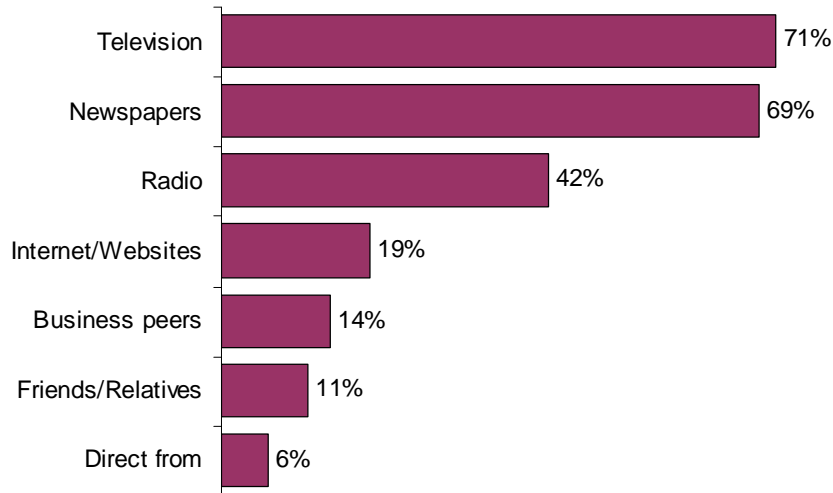
AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

While one quarter are believe the Coalition is more committed to reducing the administrative burden on small business owners, a huge 60% majority say neither major party is doing enough this area.

## Information sources used to understand political policies

Chart 8: Information sources used to understand political policies (%)

### TV and Print media are the most used sources of information



Base: Online Australian small businesses

Q: In seeking to understand political policy, where do you mainly gather your information?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

Seven out of ten small business owners use television and newspapers when seeking information about political policies.

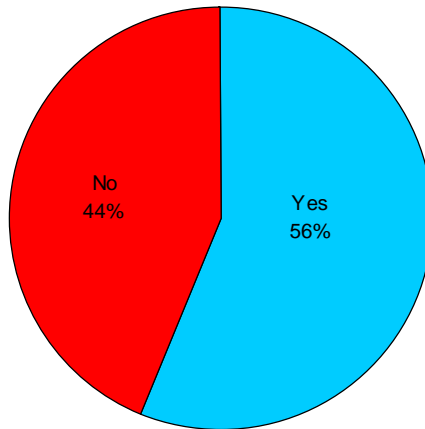
Four out of ten use radio and one fifth also use the internet.

Only one in ten gather info from friends or relatives.

## Should Australia become a Republic?

Chart 9: Should Australia become a Republic? (%)

### A slim majority believes Australia should become a Republic



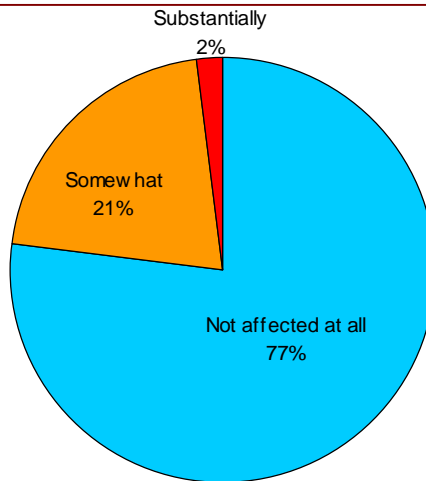
Base: Online Australian small businesses  
Q: Do you believe Australia should become a Republic?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)  
Small business owners are split almost down the middle as to whether Australia should become a Republic.

## Business Income affected by Federal Election

Chart 10: Which party is more committed to reducing the administrative burden (%)

### Most businesses are unaffected by the election



Base: Online Australian small businesses  
Q: Is your business income adversely affected during the course of a Federal Election?

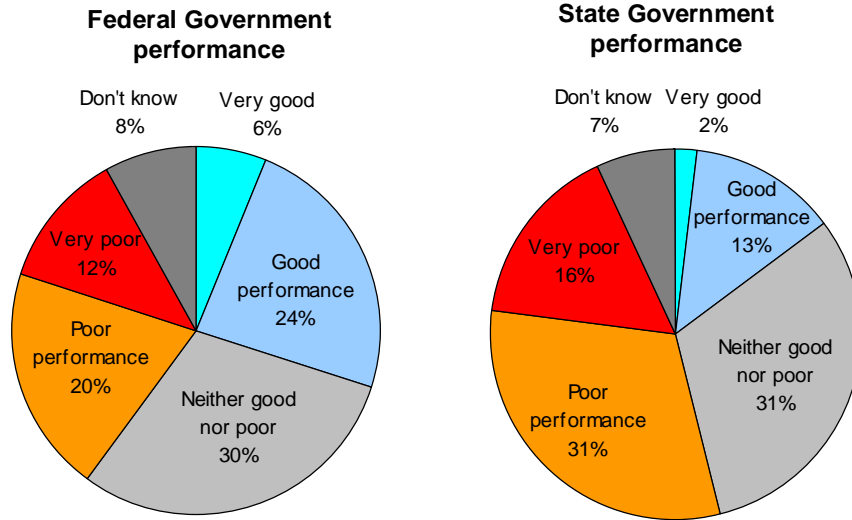
AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

One fifth say their business income is somewhat affected during the course of a Federal Election, and very few are substantially affected.

**Government Performance**

Chart 11: Federal and State Government performance (%)

**Twice as many are positive about the Federal Government**



Base: Online Australian small businesses  
 Q: How would you rate the Federal/State Government's current performance in contributing to the development of small business in Australia?

AMR Interactive, September 2004 (n =936)

A majority feel both the Federal and their State government are performing poorly when it comes to contributing to the development of small business.

Three out of ten are 'fence sitters' who feel neither are performing well or poorly, possibly because they are unaware of what, if anything, the governments are doing to aid small business. This may also lead to indecisiveness about the election in general.

## Appendix: Questionnaire items

### Election questions

Q13. Considering upcoming Federal election on October 9, we'd like to ask about voting preferences. Remember, responses are strictly confidential and not linked to personal information. Individual results are neither used alone nor shared with any company. All results are only analysed in aggregate to gauge general trends in the business community.

Q13a. On October 9, which party do you plan to vote for in the House of Representatives (lower House)?

1. Labour
2. Liberal
3. National
4. Greens
5. Democrats
6. One Nation
7. Local Independent
8. Not registered to vote
9. Other (SPECIFY)
10. Undecided

Q13b. On October 9, which party do you plan to vote for in the Senate (upper House)?

1. Labour
2. Liberal
3. National
4. Greens
5. Democrats
6. One Nation
7. Independent
8. Other (SPECIFY)
9. Undecided

ASK IF Q13a (9), ELSE SKIP TO Q14B

Q14a When will you decide on your choice for the House of Representatives (lower House)?

1. 2 weeks before
2. 1 week before
3. Less than a week before
4. On the day

ASK IF Q13b (9), ELSE SKIP TO Q15A

Q14a When will you decide on your choice for the Senate (upper House)?

1. 2 weeks before
2. 1 week before
3. Less than a week before
4. On the day

Q15a. In the last election, which party did you vote for in the House of Representatives (lower House)?

1. Labour
2. Liberal
3. National
4. Greens
5. Democrats
6. One Nation
7. Local Independent
8. Other (SPECIFY)

Q15b. In the last election, which party did you vote for in the Senate (upper House)?

1. Labour
2. Liberal
3. National
4. Greens
5. Democrats
6. One Nation
7. Independent
8. Other (SPECIFY)

ASK IF Q15a/b DIFFERENT FROM Q13a/b, ELSE SKIP TO Q17

Q16 What was the main reason for changing your voting preference in this election?  
Please choose no more than three from the list below.

RANDOMISE

1. The party I have chosen this time has better policies
2. I prefer the candidate for Prime Minister of the party I have chosen this time
3. I prefer the local candidate of the party I have chosen this time
4. I trust the party I have chosen more
5. The issue of employment
6. The issue of interest rates
7. The issue of security/defence
8. The issue of education
9. The issue of health
10. The issue of the economy/ economic growth
11. The issue of the environment
12. The issue of the war in Iraq
13. The issue of refugees/asylum seekers
14. It is time for a change of government
15. Other (please type in)

Q17 Please indicate the top three issues in terms of importance to your voting decision:

RANDOMISE

|                        | Most important issue | Second most important issue | Third most important issue |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Trust                  |                      |                             |                            |
| Employment             |                      |                             |                            |
| Interest Rates         |                      |                             |                            |
| Security/Defence       |                      |                             |                            |
| Education              |                      |                             |                            |
| Health                 |                      |                             |                            |
| Economic growth        |                      |                             |                            |
| Other (please type in) |                      |                             |                            |

Q18 In the Election campaign so far, what has not been addressed adequately that should have been?

1. The issue of employment
2. The issue of interest rates
3. The issue of security/defence
4. The issue of education
5. The issue of health
6. The issue of the economy/ economic growth
7. The issue of the environment
8. The issue of the war in Iraq
9. The issue of refugees/asylum seekers
10. Other (please type in)

Q18 How strongly do you agree or disagree with these two statements?

Q18a. The policies presented by the Australian Labor Party (so far) address the concerns/issues facing small business owners in Australia.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Q18b. The policies presented by the Coalition (so far) address the concerns/issues facing small business owners in Australia?

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

Q19 Which party do you believe is more committed to reducing the administrative burden on small business owners?

1. ALP
2. Coalition
3. Neither

Q20 In seeking to understand the political policy, where do you mainly gather your information?

*Please choose a maximum of 3.*

1. TV
2. Radio
3. Newspapers
4. Internet/Websites
5. Friends/Relatives
6. Business peers
7. Direct from political parties

Q21 Do you have borrowings on which you pay interest?

1. Yes
2. No

Q22 What would be the impact of a 0.5% increase in interest rates on your business?

1. Very negative impact on profits
2. A somewhat negative impact on profits
3. Very little impact on profits

Q23 Is your business income adversely affected during the course of a Federal Election?

1. Not affected at all
2. Somewhat
3. Substantially

Q24 Do you believe Australia should become a Republic?

1. Yes
2. No

### **Perceptions of Government performance**

Q25. How would you rate the Federal Government's current performance in contributing to the development of small business in Australia?

Please indicate below where 1 means very poor performance, 2 means poor performance, 3 means neither poor nor good performance, 4 means good performance and 5 means very good performance. If you really have no idea, then select "Don't know".

1. Very poor performance
2. Poor performance
3. Neither good nor poor performance
4. Good performance
5. Very good performance
6. Don't know

Q26. How would you rate your State Government's current performance in contributing to the development of small business in your region?

Please indicate below where 1 means very poor performance, 2 means poor performance, 3 means neither poor nor good performance, 4 means good performance and 5 means very good performance. If you really have no idea, then select "Don't know".

1. Very poor performance
2. Poor performance
3. Neither good not poor performance
4. Good performance
5. Very good performance
6. Don't know