



United or Divided?

Can communication help to bring
Australians together?



Togetherness Index
2024

senate **shj**

What is the Togetherness Index?



The Togetherness Index explores the role communication plays in connecting people. It measures **what communication elements contribute to social cohesion** within the community. Social cohesion refers to the strength of connections between people in a group. That group can be large, like the population of Australia, or small, like the members of a community group. The stronger the group's social cohesion, the more likely they are to trust each other, listen to what each other has to say and positively influence each other.

Social cohesion is influenced, positively or negatively, by the way we communicate with each other. Using the Togetherness Index, we study how Australians are receiving information, whether they are listening to it, how they feel about it and whether that information is having a positive effect on their behaviour.

The Togetherness Index (TI) identifies five communication drivers that influence togetherness. These are:



Closeness: how close Australians feel to different groups



Listening: whether Australians feel listened to by people and institutions



Optimism: how Australians feel after seeing, hearing or reading a message



Stories: how exposed Australians are to stories from people with different backgrounds

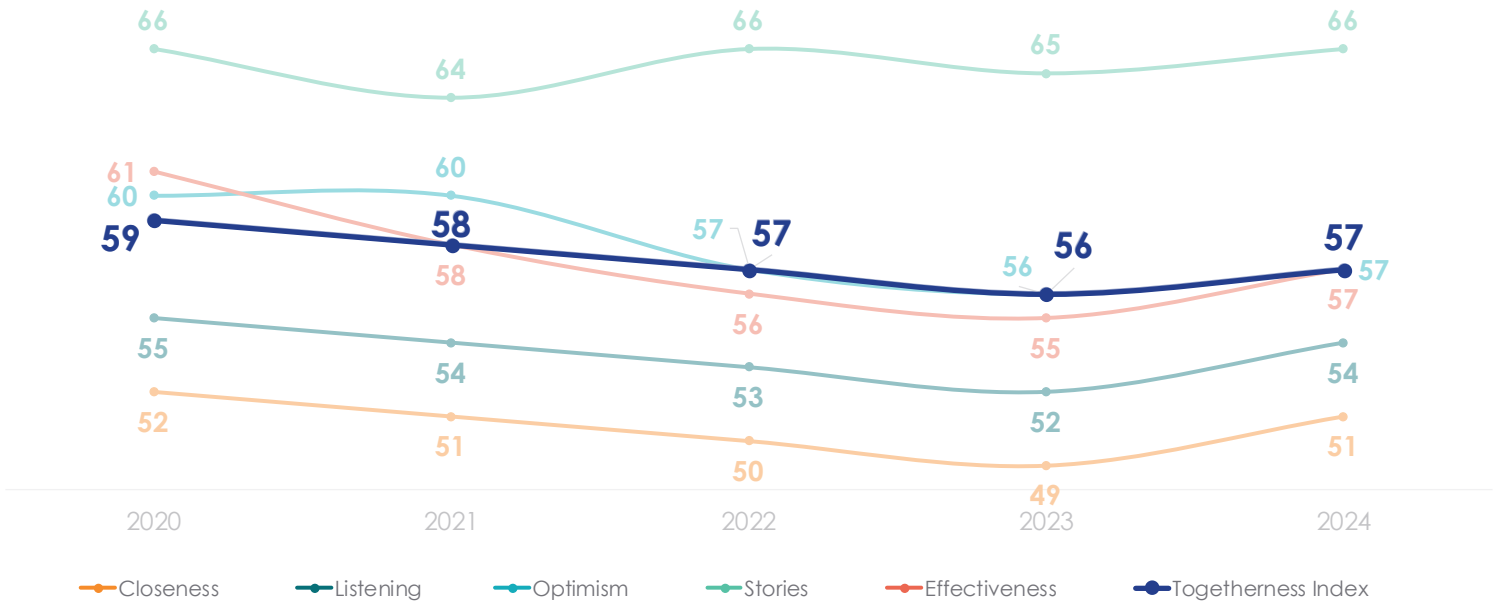


Effectiveness: how effective the communication Australians see, hear and read, is

We've measured these five elements over time and derived an index score for each. The overall combined average makes up the Togetherness Index.

The 2024 **Togetherness Index score is 57**, indicating that we still have some way to go in bringing people together.

The latest results reveal that **47% of Australians believe the country is divided**, an increase of four percentage points from 2023. Factors like the cost of living crisis, political polarisation, and social inequality have exacerbated feelings of disconnection.



1. The cost of living crisis erodes social connections



Economic stress is a major force driving division. A majority of Australians (54%) cite the cost of living as the most divisive social issue, followed by wealth inequality (27%).

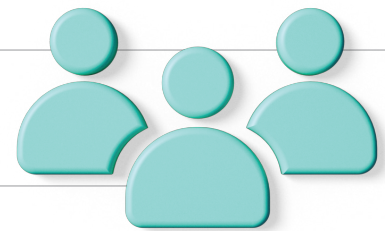
These economic pressures are damaging more than just wallets – they are fraying the social fabric of our communities. As people focus on surviving, they are left with less time, energy, and emotional space to engage with others. Data shows that spending on going out, occasions where people typically connect with others, has declined.



Cost of living pressures has made more people look inward, making sure they have enough money and goods to feed their families and pay their bills. Less time and effort spent helping others, focusing on family first.



2. People want to feel heard



The survey found a significant correlation between feeling listened to and a sense of togetherness. Older Australians (55+) report feeling less listened to than younger generations, contributing to the growing sense of division. Among the broader population, only 50% of Australians feel that their voices are heard in local community debates and decisions.

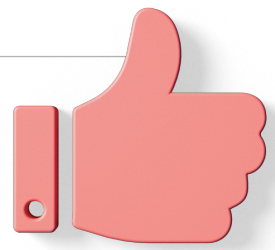
There is a perception that media reporting, particularly on key social and political issues, is perceived as fueling division and polarising narratives. There is a sense that the “middle ground” has been eroded, with Australians forced to choose a side in social and political issues.



The media constantly pit the two major parties and their policies against each other.



3. Optimism and positive messaging can foster unity



Despite the challenges, the Togetherness Index shows that there is room for optimism. Messages of inclusiveness, kindness, and positivity are cutting through. Community initiatives, and positive media stories are helping to build pockets of connection, even amid the broader division.



I detect more people speaking out about important issues in my community and also they are challenging extreme right wing views.

Because we have more knowledge on how to treat people better, it is advertised everywhere in the world and it's brought up in schools where it's not okay to bully or to be against another.



However, business leaders are still perceived as less trustworthy and less effective in promoting optimism, presenting a major opportunity for corporations to reframe their communications and build deeper connections with their audiences.



The role for communications professionals

The 2024 Togetherness Index underscores the critical role communication plays in shaping social cohesion. For professionals in the field, this is a call to action. Your work can either contribute to the growing sense of division or help build stronger, more connected communities.

To achieve this, communications professionals must focus on messages that are optimistic and emotionally resonant, offering solutions that help people reconnect and feel empowered. Positive, community-focused stories that emphasise inclusiveness, collaboration, and kindness are key to promoting unity and building trust.

By focusing on these strategies—listening, optimism, inclusiveness, and trust—communicators can help rebuild public trust, foster unity, and make a lasting impact on social cohesion in Australia.





Want to talk? We're here to help.

MELBOURNE

Darren Behar

Chief Executive Officer

P +61 458 001 296

E darren@senateshj.com.au

SYDNEY

Jodie Wrigley

Partner and Head of Social Change

P +61 402 303 555

E jodie@senateshj.com.au