

FAD / **FUNDING AND DISCLOSURE REFORM**

AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025

Interim Report – Group C (General Public)

Prepared for the Australian Electoral Commission
Roy Morgan | January 2025
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Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

Purpose

This interim report presents early findings from the Group C General Public component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025. Its purpose is to inform planning for communication, education, and system development ahead of the July 2026 commencement of the electoral funding and disclosure reforms.

Scope

The report focuses on general public awareness and understanding of the reforms, perceptions of transparency and disclosure, and expectations of how information about political donations should be communicated and accessed. It explores how the public engages with existing AEC information and online services, including awareness and use of the Transparency Register. Findings are interim and directional. They are intended to identify emerging patterns, knowledge gaps, and communication risks, and will be considered alongside results from Groups A Political Actors and B Donors in later integrated analysis.

Interim Findings

Low awareness, low everyday salience

Awareness of changes to political funding and disclosure arrangements is low among the general public. Most respondents had not heard of the incoming reforms prior to the survey, and awareness of specific reform elements is limited to a minority.

Understanding lags behind interest

Self-reported understanding of how political donations are reported and published is low. However, interest in transparency and in learning more about donation disclosure exceeds current understanding, indicating latent interest rather than disengagement.

Transparency is highly valued

The ability to see who donates to political parties or candidates is considered very or extremely important by most respondents. Support for transparency is strong and consistent across the general public sample.

Trust in the AEC is high

Respondents report high levels of trust in the AEC, particularly in relation to fairness, independence, and effectiveness. Familiarity with the AEC's role in running elections is substantially higher than familiarity with its role in regulating political donations.

Interim Findings

The findings describe a general public with:

- low awareness and understanding of political funding and disclosure arrangements,
- high stated importance of transparency, high trust in the AEC, and
- limited, infrequent interaction with disclosure information.

This points to a need for clear, accessible, and well-timed public communication that supports transparency objectives without assuming high baseline knowledge or sustained engagement.

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1. Overview

Reform Context

Overview of the legislative reforms

Australia's federal electoral funding and disclosure framework is changing. The *Electoral Legislation Amendment (Electoral Reform) Act 2025* introduces lower disclosure thresholds, donation and expenditure caps, and more frequent reporting. Together, these changes are intended to strengthen transparency and public confidence in the electoral system.

For the general public, the reforms do not introduce new reporting obligations. Instead, they affect how political donations and campaign activity are disclosed, accessed, and understood. Changes to thresholds, timing, and reporting frequency shape what information becomes visible, how often it is updated, and how clearly it can be interpreted.

The reforms are scheduled to commence on 1 July 2026. This creates a defined period for communication, education, and system preparation. How effectively this period is used will influence public awareness of the reforms, understanding of disclosure information, and confidence in the integrity of the system.

Group C comprises members of the Australian public (aged 18+ years) who do not necessarily donate or participate directly in reporting. Their awareness, understanding, and expectations are important for understanding how the reforms are perceived beyond regulated stakeholders, and for informing public-facing communication and transparency objectives ahead of commencement.

Background and Research Objectives

This interim report forms part of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey program and presents early findings from the Group C (General Public) component following completion of fieldwork. Its purpose is to support implementation planning rather than to assess compliance outcomes or enforcement activity.

The report provides an early, evidence-based view of public awareness, understanding, and perceptions of the reforms, as well as anticipated information needs. These insights are intended to inform the AEC's approach to communication, education, and public transparency during the lead-in to commencement.

Research Objectives

The Group C component of the survey is designed to support implementation of the 2025–26 reforms by:

- Assessing awareness and understanding of the reforms
- Exploring perceived clarity and confidence
- Identifying communication and information needs
- Informing public-facing implementation planning

How to Read this Report

Interpretation guidance

This interim report provides the Australian Electoral Commission with an early, evidence-based view of findings from the Group C (General Public) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey 2025.

The findings presented should be read with the following in mind:

- Results are interim and directional and are reported ahead of integrated analysis across Groups A and B
- The emphasis is on identifying patterns, emerging risks, and information needs rather than drawing final conclusions about public attitudes.
- Measures of awareness and understanding reflect self-reported perceptions rather than observed behaviour or demonstrated knowledge.
- This report does not make final recommendations or prescribe actions. Its purpose is to inform planning and further analysis.

Further analysis will explore variation within the general public, including differences by awareness level, engagement with political information, and trust in institutions. Findings will be integrated with results from political actors and donors to strengthen the evidence base for final implementation decisions ahead of the July 2026 commencement.

2. Methodology and Interpretation

Method Overview

Survey approach

The Group C (General Public) component of the AEC Funding and Disclosure Stakeholder Survey was conducted as an online self-completion survey (CAWI). This approach allowed respondents to participate at a time and pace that suited them, while supporting coverage of awareness, understanding, attitudes, and expectations relating to electoral funding and disclosure reforms.

The survey was designed to capture early, self-reported perceptions rather than observed behaviour.

Fieldwork timing

Fieldwork for Group C was conducted in two stages:

- a pilot conducted from 10–11 December 2025
- main fieldwork conducted from 12 December to 5 January 2026

This timing supported broad participation across the holiday period and allowed for early testing of survey flow and comprehension prior to full launch.

Recruitment approach

Participants were recruited from Roy Morgan's Research Community, an online panel recruited using probability-based sampling methods. The Research Community is designed to reflect the Australian adult population and is used for large-scale public opinion and social research.

Eligible panel members were invited via email to participate in the survey.

Method Overview

Sample Design and Quotas

To support population coverage and balance:

- Hard quotas were applied for age and gender to ensure the achieved sample reflected the Australian adult population across these key characteristics.
- Soft quotas were applied for location to encourage broad geographic representation while retaining flexibility during fieldwork.

This approach supports national coverage while avoiding unnecessary exclusion of eligible respondents.

Achieved Sample and Data Quality

A total of 572 respondents completed the survey. Following standard data quality checks, 45 responses were removed, resulting in a final analysis sample of 527 respondents.

Data quality checks are a routine part of survey research and are used to identify responses where participants may have been distracted, rushed, or unable to give their full attention throughout the survey. This process helps ensure findings are based on considered and reliable responses.

Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the AEC and structured to capture evidence across the following key areas:

- Awareness and understanding of the reforms
- Perceived relevance
- Information and communication
- Awareness and use of AEC transparency
- Expectations of system visibility and usability
- Attitudes towards the AEC

Notes for Interpretation

The findings in this report should be interpreted with the following in mind:

- Results are based on self-reported perceptions rather than direct observation of behaviour.
- Reported awareness, attitudes and understanding reflect views at the time of fieldwork, ahead of reform commencement.
- Analysis focuses on overall patterns and emerging issues; detailed subgroup analysis will be undertaken in later reporting.
- Findings are intended to inform initial reform implementation planning and further analysis.

3. Fieldwork Snapshot and Data Quality

Fieldwork Snapshot

Fieldwork period	Pilot: 10–11 Dec 2025; Main: 12 Dec 2026–5 Jan 2026
Participation outcomes	6,026 eligible invited; 628 started (10.4%); 527 completed (9.4%); 32% completion among starters
Survey length	Median duration: 06:12 minutes

9.4%

response rate

70% completion among starters

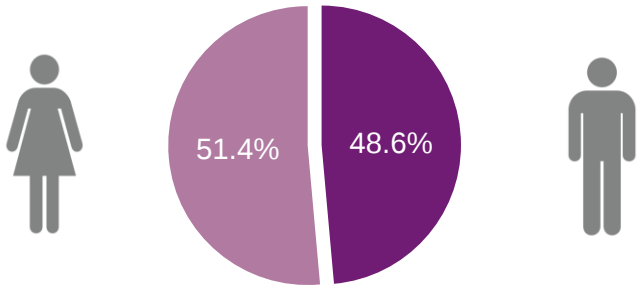
Response rates reflect expected outcomes for a short, low-salience survey administered to the general public. The overall response rate was 9.4% (AAPOR RR3), which is consistent with benchmarks for probability-based online panels where the topic is not of direct or immediate relevance to most respondents. As widely documented in survey methodology research, response rate alone is not a proxy for data quality; representativeness and data quality are addressed through probability-based recruitment, quota controls, and post-field quality checks.

4. Respondent Profile and Context

Respondent Profile

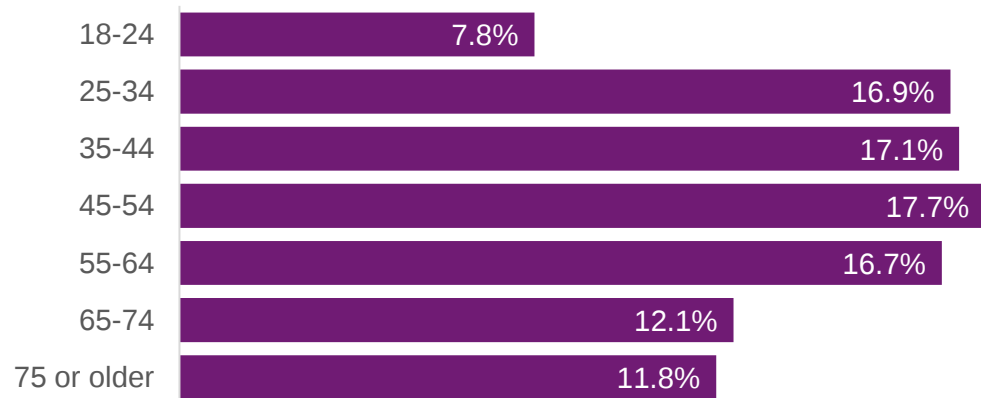
Demographics

Gender distribution



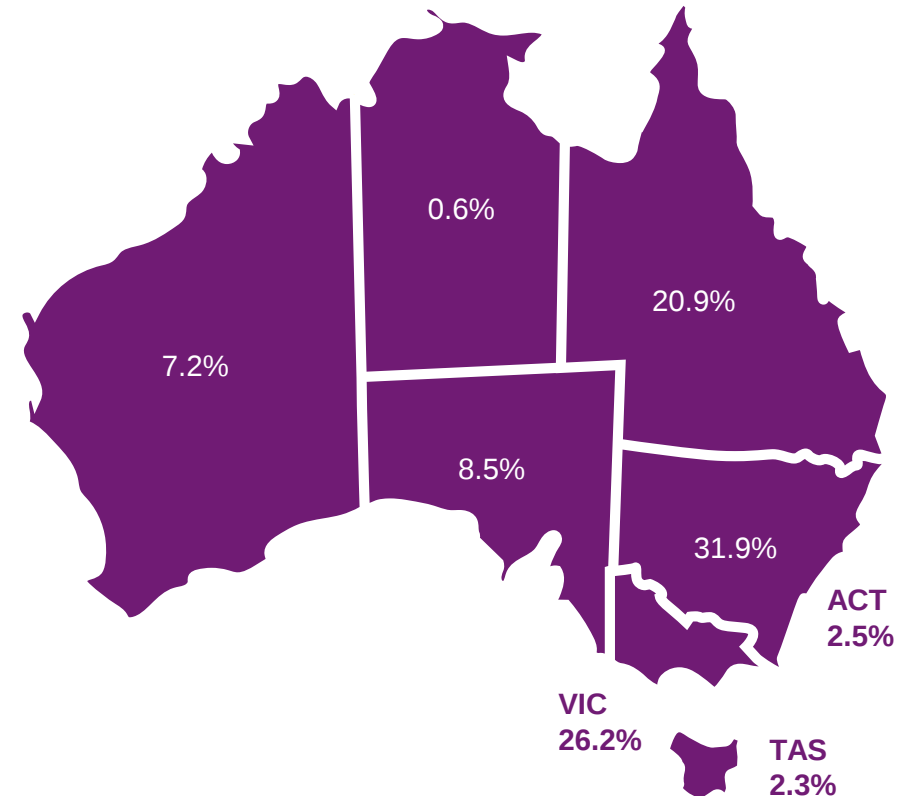
Question included options for non-binary identification, but these were not selected by any participant.

Age distribution



Respondents under the age of 18 excluded from the study.

Geographic distribution

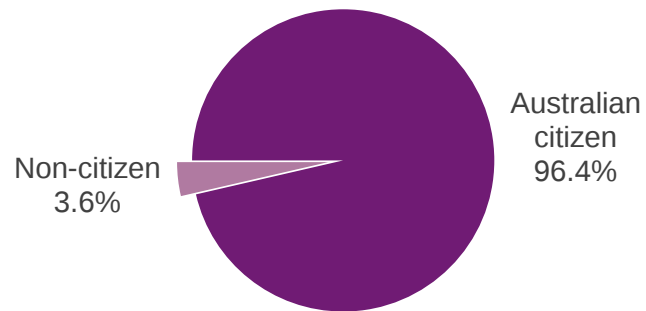


Australian map by Freeimages.com

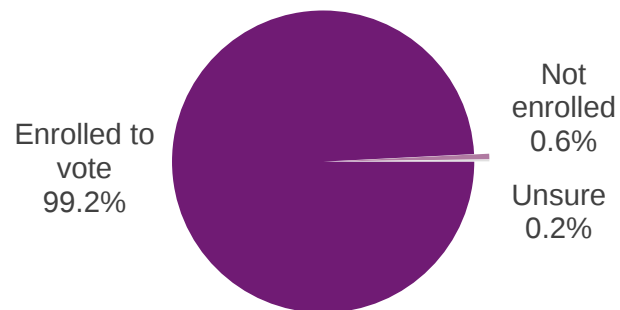
Respondent Profile

Citizenship, Enrolment, and Interest

Citizenship status

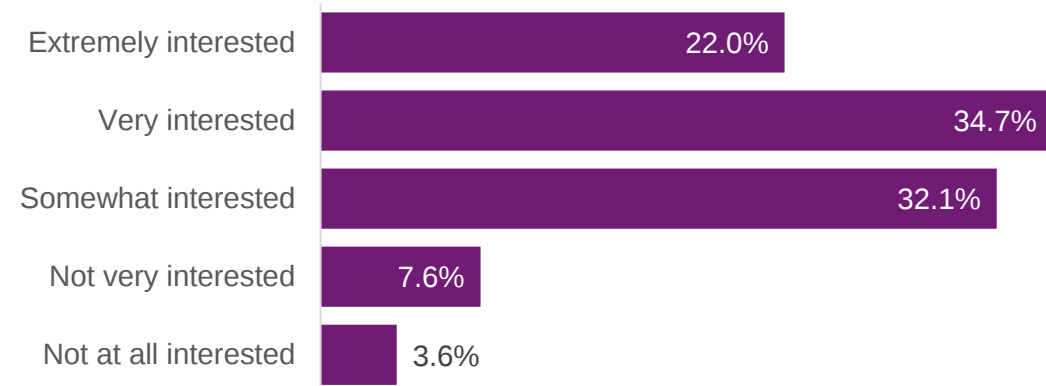


Enrolment status



Base: Group C Australian citizens (n=508)

Interest in politics and government in Australia



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

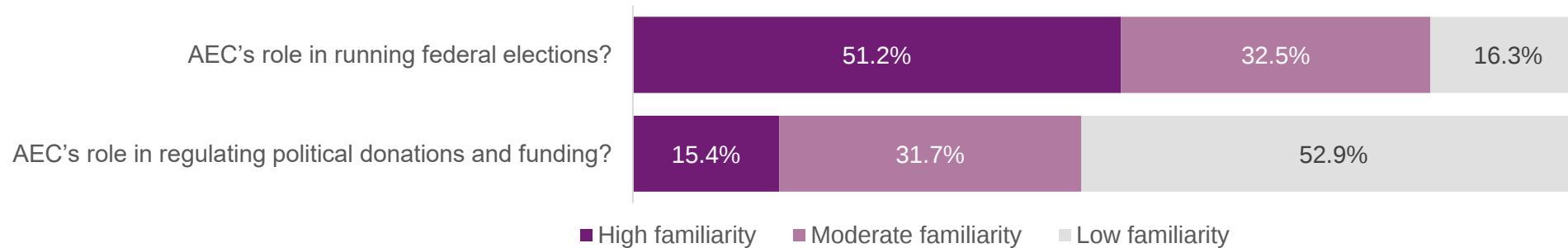
Q PF6. "How interested are you in politics and government in Australia, if at all?"

- Most survey respondents were at least somewhat interested in politics and government in Australia (88.8%), with more than half of respondents either 'very interested' or 'extremely interested'.
- When interpreting survey results it is important to keep in mind that a keen interest in politics may not translate to an interest in the political process.

Respondent Profile

Familiarity with the AEC

The Australian general public are much more likely to be familiar with the AEC's role in running federal elections, than their role in regulating political donations and funding.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PA1a. "Before today, how familiar were you with the AEC's role in running federal elections?"

Q PA1b. "Before today, how familiar were you with the AEC's role in regulating political donations and funding?"

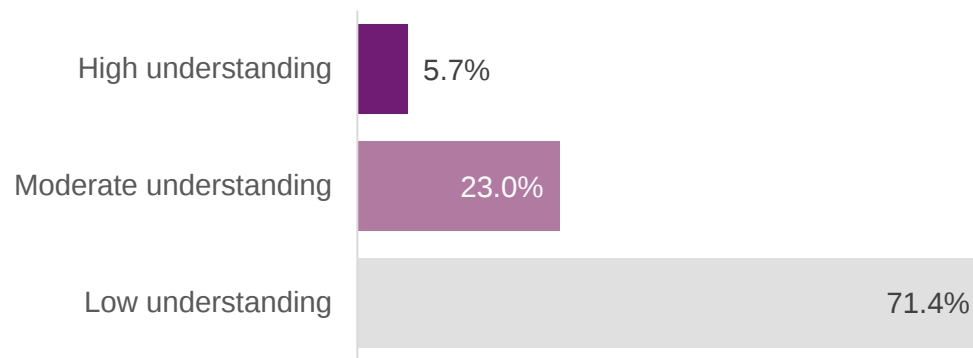
Response options 'extremely familiar' and 'very familiar' combined into 'High familiarity', 'slightly familiar' and 'not at all familiar' combined into 'Low familiarity'.

- Just over half of survey respondents reported a high level of familiarity with the AEC's role in running federal elections.
- The pattern of familiarity is reversed when asking about the AEC's role in regulating political donations. Survey respondents were unlikely to be familiar with this function of the commission, with over a half reporting low familiarity.

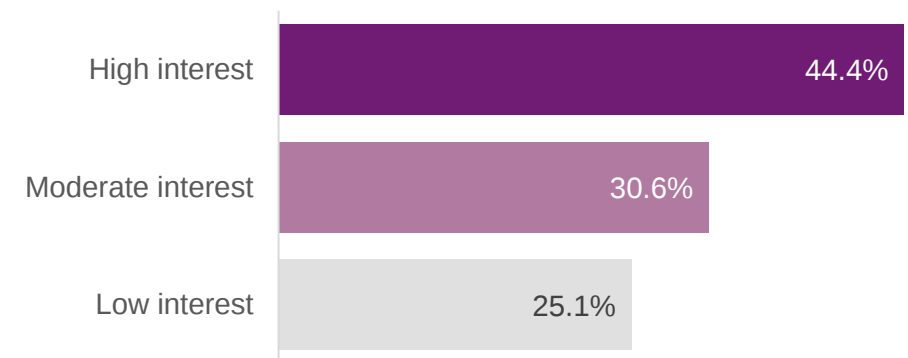
Respondent Profile

Understanding and interest

Understanding of how political donations are reported is low, but interest in learning more is high amongst the Australian public.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)
Q PB2a. "How well do you understand how political donations are reported and published in Australia?"
Response options 'extremely well' and 'very well' combined into 'High understanding', 'slightly well' and 'not at all' combined into 'Low understanding'.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)
Q PB2b. "How interested are you in understanding how political donations are reported and published in Australia?". Response options 'extremely interested' and 'very interested' combined into 'High interest', 'slightly interested' and 'not at all interested' combined into 'Low interest'.

- The current level of understanding for how political donations are reported and published in Australia was low amongst survey respondents, with almost three-quarters indicating they either didn't understand, or only understood slightly well.
- Interest in learning how political donations are reported and published in Australia was notably higher than understanding. This contrast suggests the general public consider transparency important, but most are not willing to go out of their way to learn about the process. Communications need to consider how best to reach an audience with low engagement.

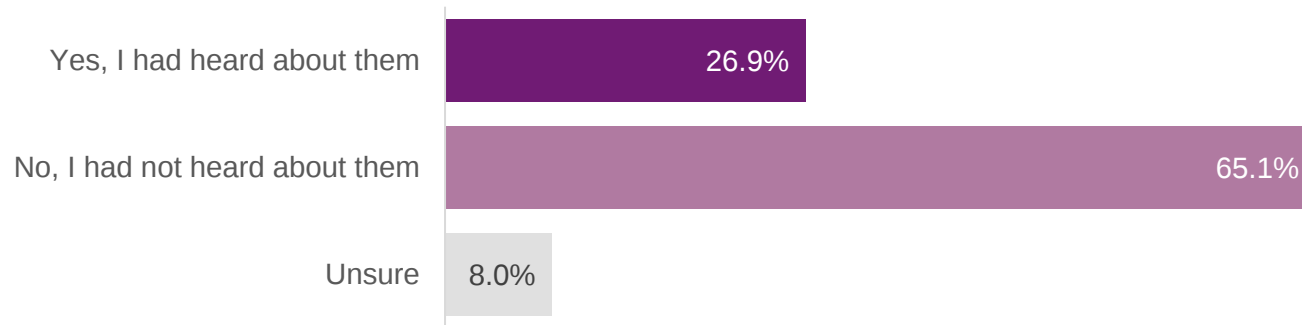
5. Insights

5.1 Awareness of reforms

Awareness of Reforms

Recent reforms

Awareness of the reforms is low amongst the Australian public



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

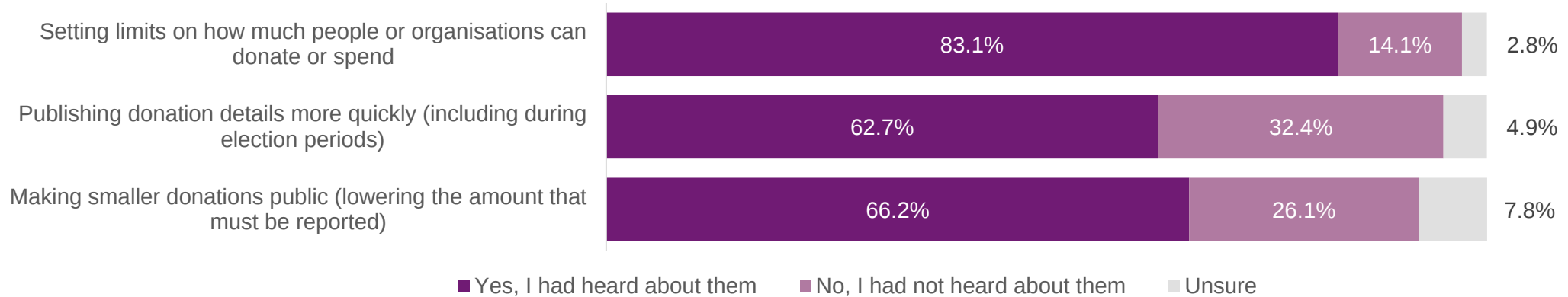
Q PB1. "Before today, had you heard about any changes to the rules about how political donations are reported or made public?"

- Almost two thirds of survey respondents reported having not heard of the incoming changes to the rules about how political donations are reported or made public. A quarter were aware of the changes.
- By contrast, awareness is much higher amongst both donors and political actors. Realistically, it is groups who must interact directly with the legislation that are likely to know about the reforms.

Awareness of Reforms

Specific reforms

The reform respondents are most likely to be familiar with is the limits on how much can be donated



Base: All Group C respondents aware of upcoming reforms (n=142)

Q PB3a. "Before today, had you heard about the following changes commencing 1 July 2026?"

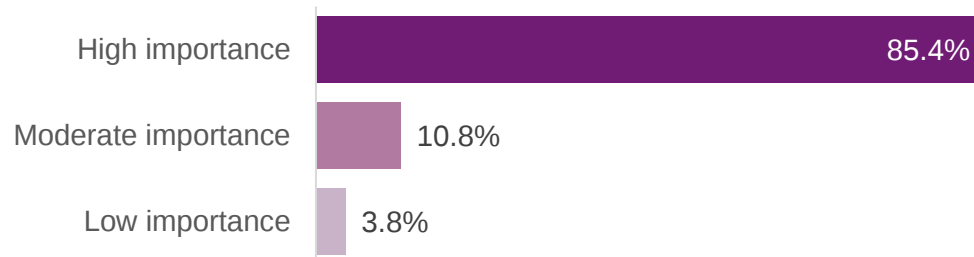
- Of respondents that reported familiarity with the upcoming reforms, most indicated they had previously heard of the changes to donations caps (83.1% of respondents).
- Awareness of changes to how quickly details of donations must be published, and how large those donations can be before they trigger these obligations was similar, reported by roughly two-thirds of those aware there were upcoming changes at all.

5.2 Transparency, trust and legitimacy

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

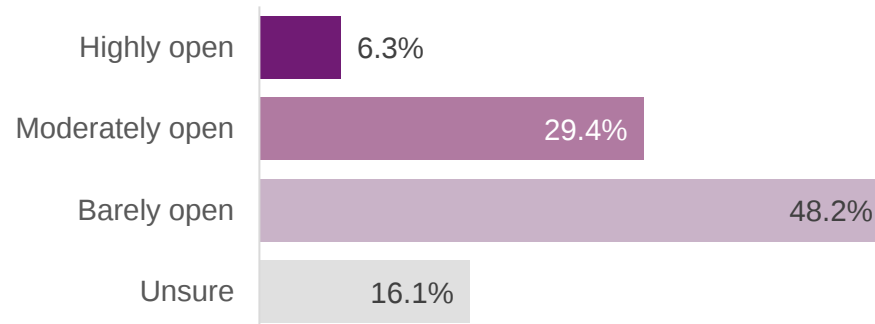
Perceptions of transparency

Donation transparency is highly important to the Australian public, but very few consider our system transparent



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PB4. "How important is it that Australians can see who donates to political parties or candidates?". Response option 'Extremely important' and 'Very important' combined into 'High importance', 'Slightly important', and 'Not at all important' combined into 'Low importance'.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

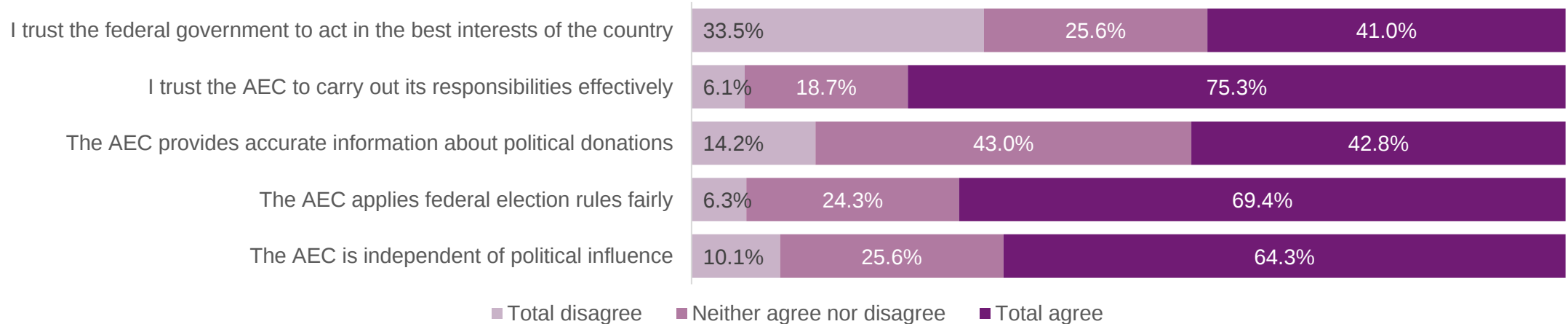
Q PB5a. "In your opinion, how transparent is the political donation system in Australia?". Response option 'Extremely open' and 'Very open' combined into 'Highly open', 'Slightly open', and 'Not at all open' combined into 'Barely open'.

- Survey respondents overwhelmingly consider it extremely important, or very important that Australians can see who donates to political parties or candidates.
- When asked to consider how transparent the political donation system is in Australia, respondents were very pessimistic. Very few considered the Australian system 'highly open', being much more likely to consider our system 'barely open'.
- Roughly one in six respondents were unsure as to how open and transparent the Australian system is.

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

Perceptions of the AEC

The Australian public tends to trust the AEC and believes they apply rules fairly, free of political influence



Base: Group C respondents at least slightly familiar with the AEC's role running elections, or regulating political donations and funding (n=493)

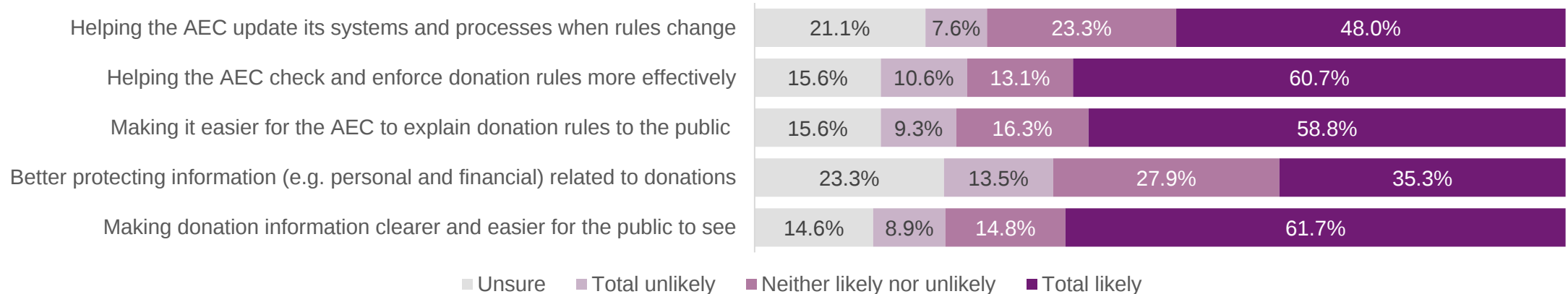
Q PA2. "How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?". Response option 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' combined into 'Total disagree', 'Agree', and 'Strongly agree' combined into 'Total agree'.

- Three quarters of respondents agreed they trust the AEC to carry out its responsibilities effectively. There was a similar level of agreement the AEC applied federal election rules fairly, and that they are independent of political influence. Disagreement with these statements was very low.
- Respondents were much less likely to agree that the AEC provides accurate information about political donations, with a much higher proportion taking a neutral position.
- Perceptions of the AEC tended to be better than for the federal government, with respondents roughly evenly split between agreement and disagreement they trust the federal government to act in the best interest of the country. The disparity suggests it's less likely perceptions of the federal government skew perceptions of the AEC.

Transparency, trust and legitimacy

Expected effects of FAD changes

AEC enforcement of donation rules, explaining those rules to the public, and communicating donation information are the improvements survey respondents were most optimistic about



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PB6. "Based on what you know so far, how likely is it that the upcoming changes to the political donation rules will lead to the following improvements?"

Response option 'Very unlikely' and 'Unlikely' combined into 'Total unlikely', 'Very likely', and 'Likely' combined into 'Total likely'.

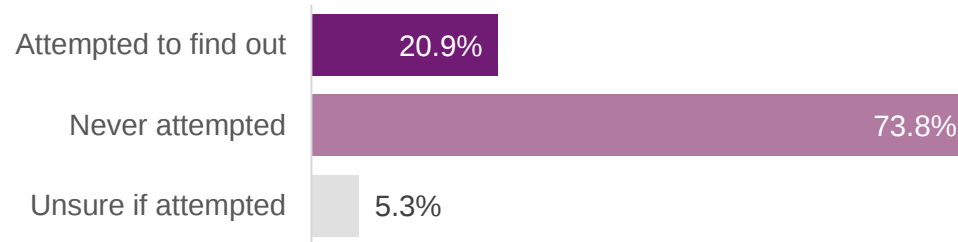
- More than half of survey respondents considered it likely that the incoming changes to funding and disclosure laws would lead to improvements in the AEC's ability to check and enforce donation rules more effectively, make it easier for the AEC to explain the rules to the public, and make it easier for the public to see information about the donations being made.
- Respondents were less likely to think the changes would help the AEC update its systems and processes, and protect information related to donations, but in both cases, more responded likely than unlikely.
- Although all respondents were asked to consider the improvements listed above, not all respondents are familiar with the changes coming into effect. It will be important to isolate the expectations of those familiar with the changes coming into effect.

5.3 Access to Information

Access to Information

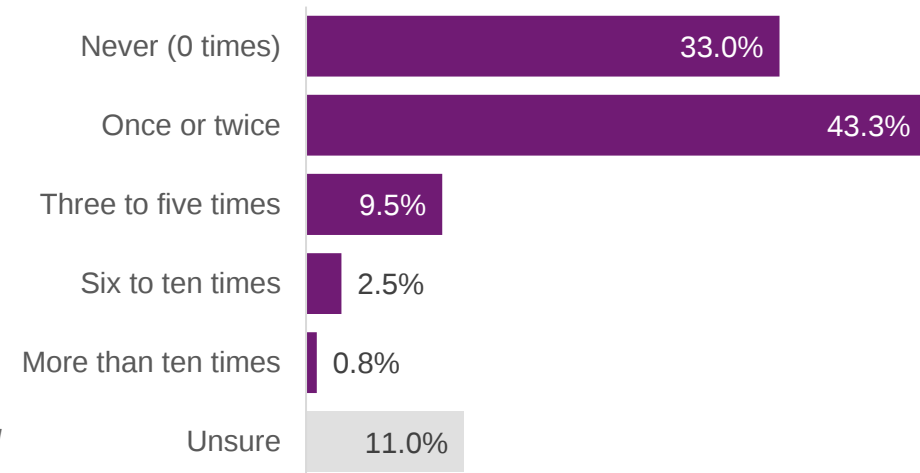
Frequency of access

Despite only a fifth of survey respondents having ever attempted to find out who donates to political parties or candidates, more than half expect to visit a website that shows this information in the next 12-months



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PD1. "Have you ever tried to find out who donates to political parties or candidates?"



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

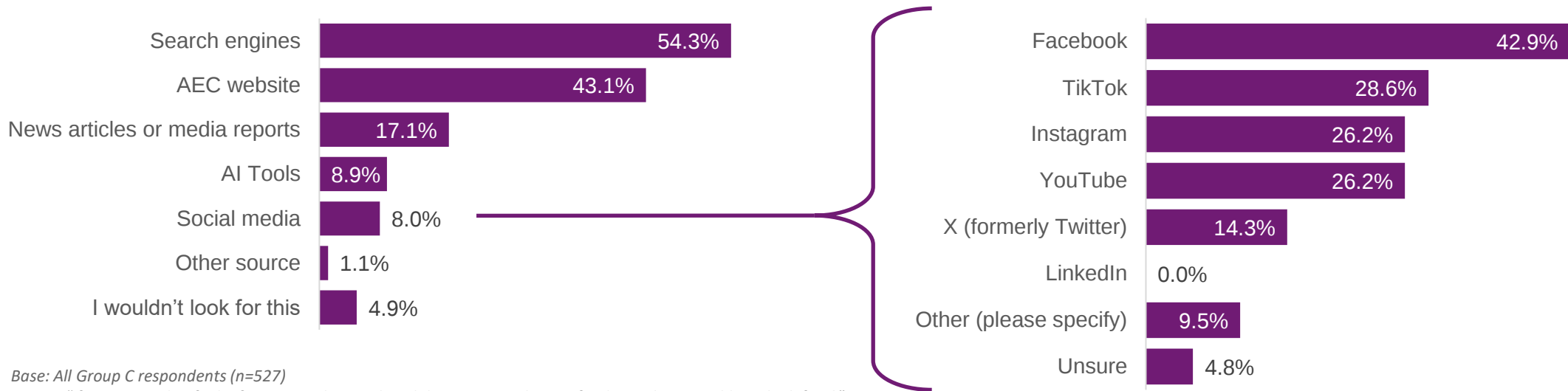
Q PD3. "In the next 12 months, how many times do you realistically think you would visit a website that shows who donates to political parties and candidates?"

- 56.0% of respondents realistically think they will visit a website in the next 12-months that shows who donates to political parties and candidates, however most of these people only expect they would visit this website once or twice.
- Despite the question being worded to encourage participants to be realistic about their web browsing activities, the large difference between those who think they would access information about donations, and those who have previously sought this information suggests participants are being optimistic about accessing such a website.
- Further analysis will consider the intersection of previous behaviour and future intentions to get a more accurate estimate of future website use.

Access to Information

Sources of information

The Australian public are most likely to use search engines to find information about political donations, followed by the AEC website.



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PD2. "If you wanted to find information about political donations or election funding, where would you look first?"

(Multiple response question.)

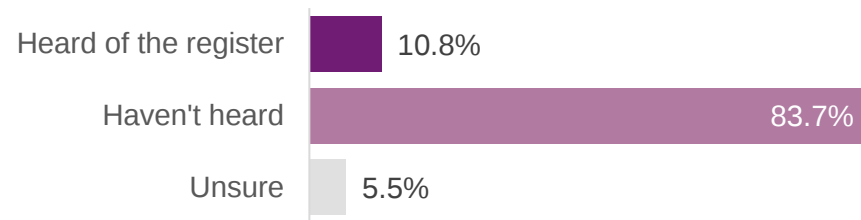
Q PD2b. "On which social media platforms would you be most likely to look for information about political donations or election funding? (Multiple response question, only presented to those indicating 'Social media' in PD2, n=42.)

- Using social media to find information about political donations or election funding was rare (8.0% of respondents). Amongst those who would use social media, Facebook was the platform they would be most likely to use.
- The choice of social media platform may have more to do with general use of those platforms, than any belief about which is best for information related to election funding.

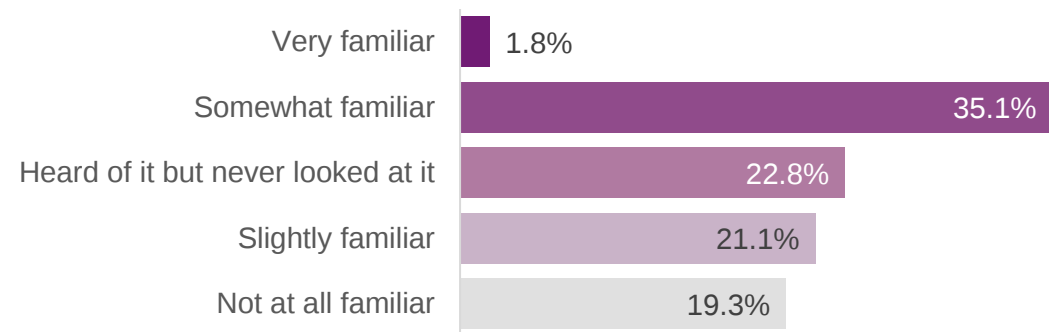
Access to Information

Awareness of Transparency Register

Very few survey respondents had ever heard of the Transparency Register



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)
Q PD4a. "Have you heard of the AEC's Transparency Register?"



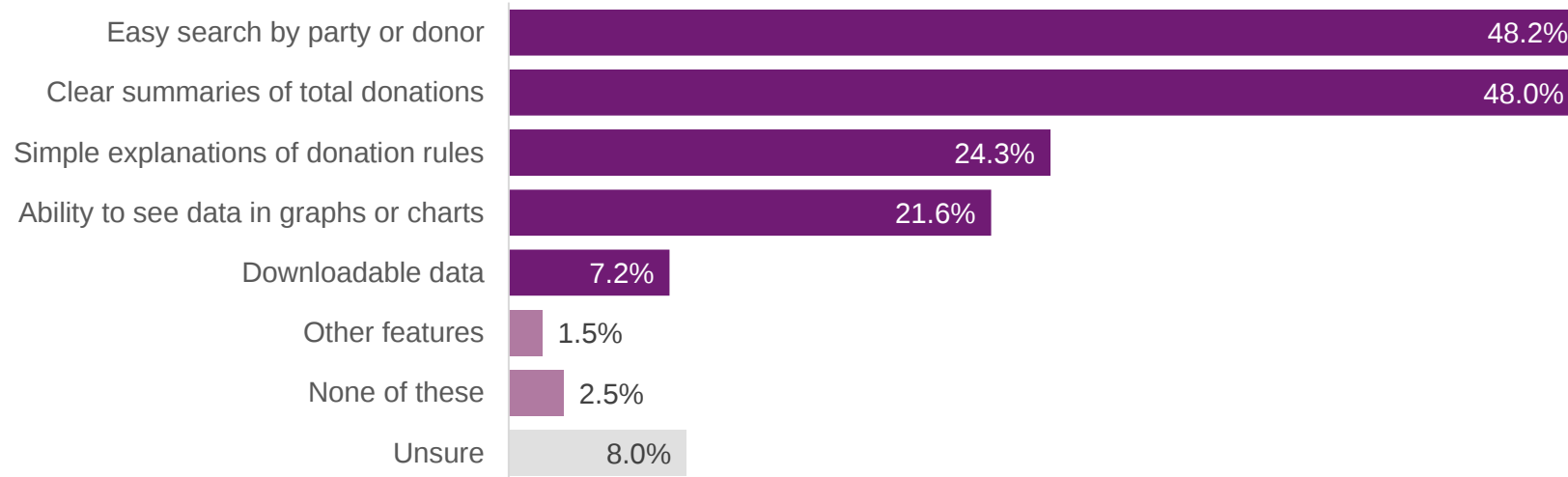
Base: Group C respondents that have heard of the Transparency Register (n=57)
Q PD4b. "How familiar are you with the AEC's Transparency Register?"

- Only one in ten survey respondents had previously heard of the AEC's transparency register, but even amongst those respondents' familiarity with the Transparency Register wasn't particularly high, with only a third indicating they were 'somewhat familiar', and almost none being 'very familiar'.
- These results support the same conclusions drawn from self-reported seeking of political donation information. Although a large proportion of the Australian public are interested in politics, very few actively seek out information related to political funding and disclosures.

Access to Information

Transparency Register features

Easy to use search tools and clear summaries of donations are the main features the public would find useful



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PD5. "The Transparency Register already lists who donates, how much, and to whom. If it were to include more features, which of the following would you find most useful?" (Multiple response question.)

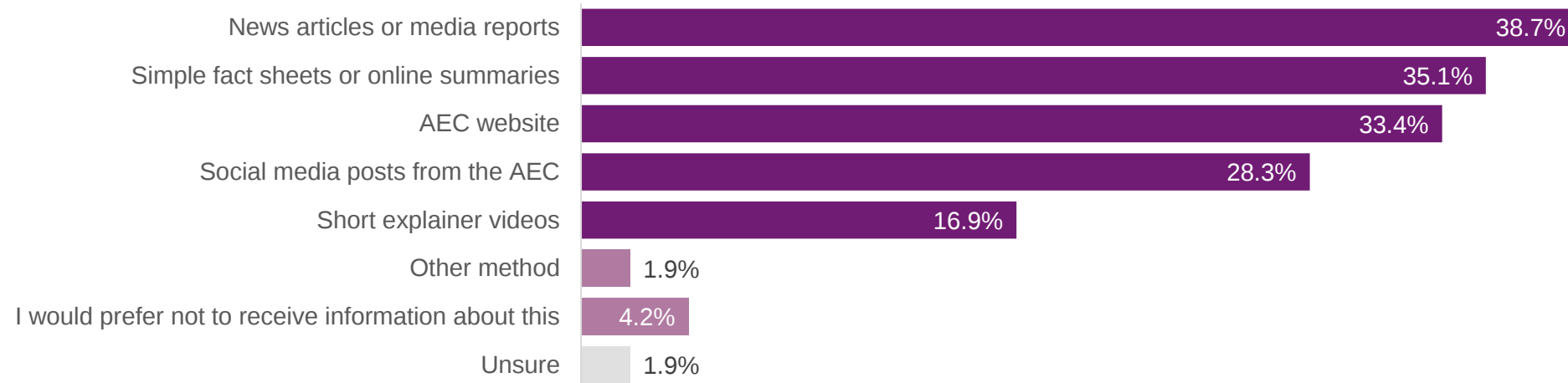
- Almost half of survey respondents indicated the feature they would find most useful on the AEC's Transparency Register would be an easy search function by party of donor, and clear summaries of total donations. By comparison, downloadable data was much less popular.
- This question has been asked of all users, but further analysis should consider what features are desired by those who are aware of the Transparency Register, and which features are of most interest to those that have previously looked for election funding information.

5.4 Communication Preferences

Communication Preferences

Method of communication

News articles are the Australian public's preference for learning about how political donations are made



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

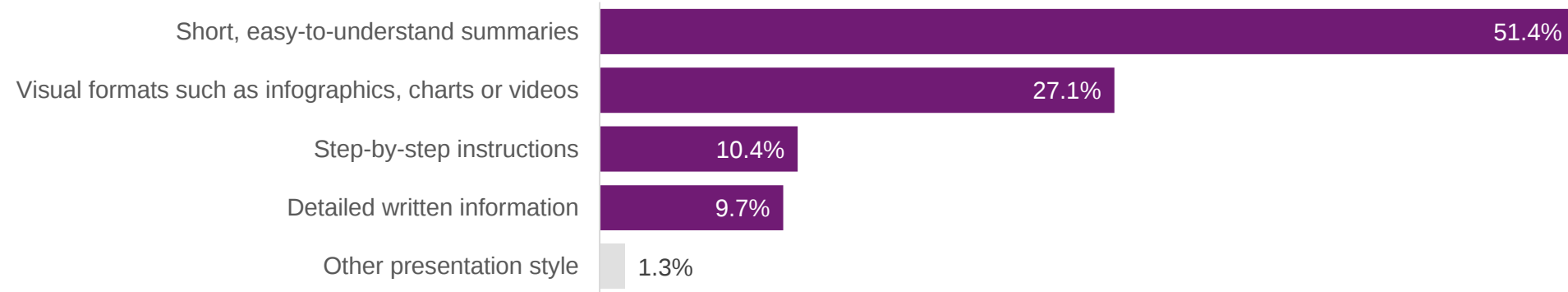
Q PC1. "How would you prefer to learn about how political donations are made public in Australia?" (Multiple response question.)

- The AEC website and simple fact sheets or online summaries were almost as popular among survey respondents as news articles for receiving information about how political donations are made public in Australia.
- Interest in short explainer videos was much lower, selected by only a sixth of respondents. Given these are generally more expensive to produce, it is unlikely this format is required to communicate with the public.

Communication Preferences

Presentation style

More than half of survey respondents would prefer short, easy-to-understand summaries from the AEC



Base: All Group C respondents (n=527)

Q PC2. "When receiving information from the AEC, which presentation style is most helpful to you?"

- Short, easy-to-understand summaries were clearly the most popular presentation for the Australian public.
- Although visual formats, which could include videos, were the second most popular presentation style, it's likely infographics and charts would be more popular given the lack of interest in short explainer videos.
- Interestingly, step-by-step instructions are not popular with the Australian public, despite being very popular with the other groups studied who are more concerned about completing accurate compliant disclosures.

6. Major Early Themes

Summary of Early Themes

- **Awareness of funding and disclosure reforms is low among the general public**

Most members of the general public report low awareness of changes to political funding and disclosure arrangements. A majority had not heard of the incoming reforms prior to the survey, and awareness of specific reform elements is limited to a minority of respondents.

- **Understanding of how political donations are reported is low**

Self-reported understanding of how political donations are reported and published in Australia is low. Most respondents indicate they understand the process either slightly or not at all, with only a small proportion reporting high understanding.

- **Interest in political donation transparency exceeds understanding**

Reported interest in understanding how political donations are reported is higher than reported understanding. A substantial proportion of respondents indicate moderate to high interest despite low levels of self-reported understanding.

- **Transparency in political donations is widely regarded as important**

Most respondents rate the ability to see who donates to political parties or candidates as very or extremely important. Support for transparency is high across the general public sample.

Summary of Early Themes

- **Trust in the AEC is high, including perceptions of fairness and independence**

Most respondents agree that the AEC acts fairly, independently of political influence, and effectively carries out its responsibilities. Levels of disagreement with these statements are low.

- **Familiarity with the AEC's regulatory role is lower than familiarity with its electoral role**

Respondents are more likely to report familiarity with the AEC's role in running federal elections than with its role in regulating political donations and funding. Familiarity with the regulatory function is low for more than half of respondents.

- **Expectations of reform impacts are moderate and mixed**

When asked about the likely effects of the upcoming reforms, respondents are more likely to rate improvements as likely than unlikely across several areas, including visibility of donation information and enforcement of rules. However, substantial proportions select neutral or unsure responses.

- **Anticipated future engagement with disclosure information is infrequent**

While over half of respondents expect they may visit a website showing political donations in the next 12 months, most anticipate doing so only once or twice rather than regularly.

Summary of Early Themes

- The findings describe a general public that reports low awareness and understanding of political funding and disclosure arrangements, alongside high stated importance of transparency and high trust in the AEC. Interaction with disclosure information, both past and anticipated, is limited and infrequent. These findings provide an evidence-based baseline ahead of reform commencement.

7. Next Steps

Next Steps

- **Undertake detailed sub-group analysis**
Analyse key findings by demographic characteristics and levels of political interest to identify differences in awareness, understanding and information needs across the general public.
- **Refine implications for public communication**
Assess how differences in awareness and salience affect the timing, framing and channels for public-facing information as reforms approach commencement.
- **Translate findings into actionable requirements for future phases**
Consolidate evidence into clear, prioritised requirements to inform public communication materials, transparency messaging and future evaluation strategies.