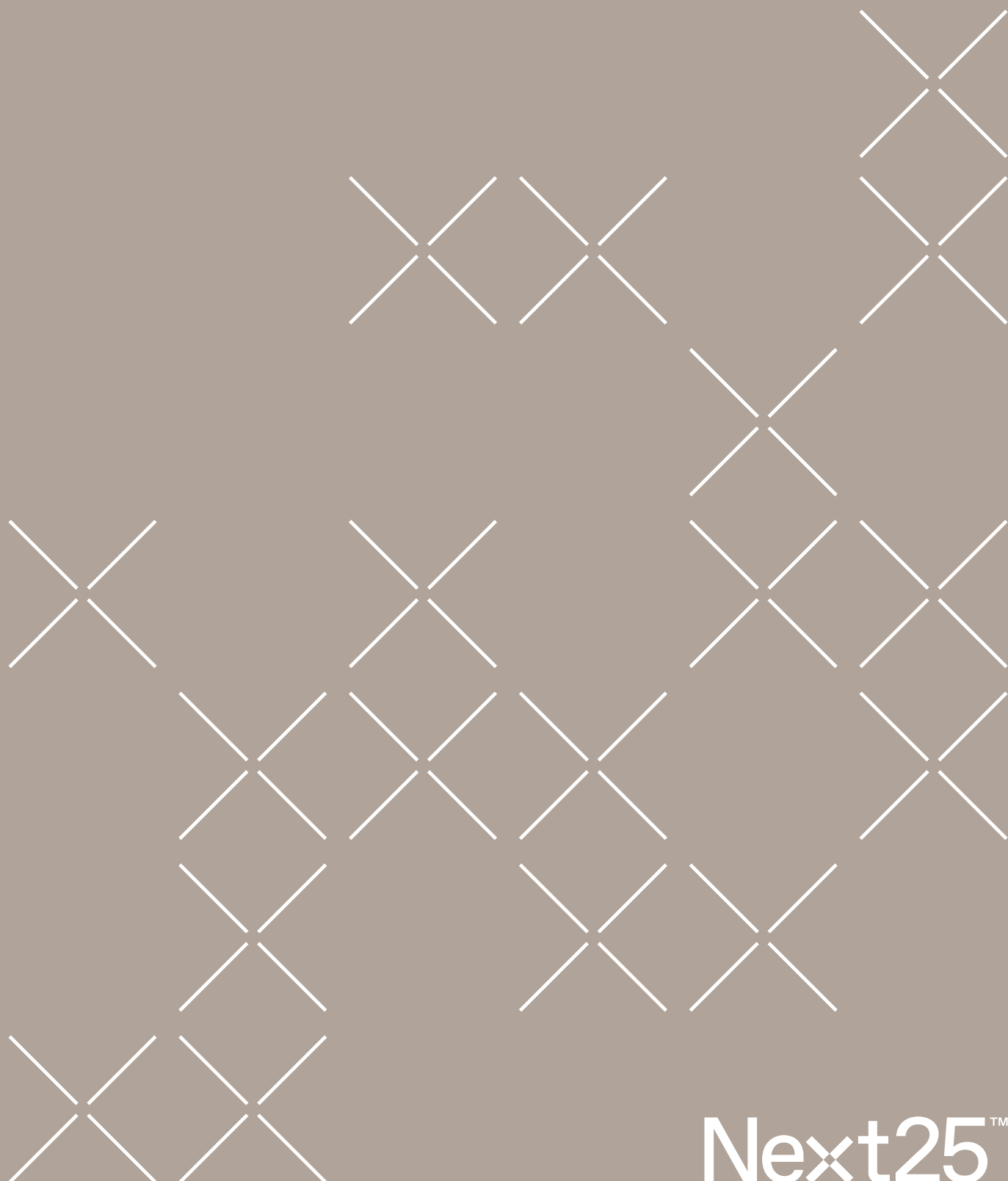


Providing a “Fair Go” for All

Navigator Snapshot #3



Next25™

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1. Next25 Navigator and the Future Australia Wants

How do we define a flourishing Australian future? The [Next25 Navigator](#) survey (2021) sets a clear direction by engaging 2,825 people to answer the question, “What future does Australia want, and are we on track?” The survey results show that, overwhelmingly, the public believes Australia is not on track to deliver a flourishing future (see detailed findings [here](#)).

To dig deeper into the survey findings, Next25 conducted 26 qualitative interviews with demographically varied members of the public and an additional 16 people who are informed by their professional roles. Both interviewee groups presented similar responses to our questions and will be referred to as one group (N=42 for qualitative aspects). See Annex II for further details about the interviews and interviewees.

Providing a “Fair Go” for All is the third in a series of snapshots that draw on in-depth interviews to investigate some of the most significant findings from the 2021 Navigator survey. The [other two releases](#) explore Australia’s failure to take responsibility for mistakes and the public interest through a lens of age and gender. Together, these three snapshots provide significant additional insight on important national issues. This deeper understanding creates a foundation for actively improving Australia’s future-making system.

Let’s make the future Australia wants.

2. Investigating the “Fair Go” in Australian Culture and Identity

The first reported usage of the term “fair go” in Australia dates back to the picket line of the shearer’s strike in 1890s Queensland, where an arrested worker exclaimed, “Do you call this a ‘fair go’?” – coining the iconic phrase.

Since then, the concept of the “fair go” has lived on. The 2021 Navigator survey revealed that providing opportunities for everyone – the “fair go” – is in the public’s top ten most important aspirations. Moreover, it is one of the top ten aspirations people in Australia are most aligned on, regardless of who they are or their background. But how exactly do we define this colloquial phrase in modern society? Next25 investigated further to understand the meaning behind this aspiration that the nation values so highly.

Our qualitative interviews demonstrate that people see the “fair go” as a core part of Australia’s identity. While our conversations highlighted the ambiguity of the phrase, interviewees said the “fair go” is embedded across society.

“I think the ‘fair go’ is perceived differently across the population. But everyone believes in it. It’s an Australian ethos. It’s a part of our identity. It’s formed through history”

– Woman, 40-49

“It’s one of the fundamental premises of the country, one of our cultural building blocks. It doesn’t matter if you come from a different place in Australia”

– Woman, 20-29

Interviewees explained that the value society places on the “fair go” is linked to our convict and working-class history. As one person remarked, the “fair go” is “inherently within us because we’ve come from a convict background” (Woman, 40-49).

“Everyone believes in it... And from the perspective of an immigrant family, that’s within the way we perceive ourselves as Australians, that the ‘fair go’ should be available. That’s what we’re known for as a country”

– Woman, 40-49

“It probably might even stem back to that convict mentality that we want to chop down that tall poppy syndrome and chop down the guy who’s standing, he’s rich, his life is so easy, and our lives are so hard. He needs to come down”

– Woman, 30-39

“I’ve been raised on that phrase since I was a little boy. My father gave me the phrase, his father gave it to him... They were mostly working-class people”

– Man, 70+

¹ ‘The Shearers’ Dispute’ (March 25, 1891) The Brisbane Courier, QLD, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/3523967?searchTerm=%22fair%20go%22&searchLimits=l-decade=189||||-year=1891||||-title=16||||-month=03>

3. The “Fair Go” Endures Today in the Hearts and Minds of Australians

Our research demonstrates that the “fair go” is seen as an important pillar of Australia’s identity – but there is a strong belief that the nation is performing poorly on this. Examining the data more closely reveals nuanced perceptions between demographics. So, our interviews dug deeper into what the “fair go” means in theory and in practice.

3.1 Australia agrees that the “fair go” is important

The 2021 Navigator survey found that 76% of people in Australia agree that the “fair go” is important. The nation is most aligned on this aspiration out of the 39 measured in the survey. There is only slight variation in the percentage of men and women across locations and education levels who said the “fair go” is important:

- 75% of women and 78% of men
- 76% of people from metro areas and 77% of people from rural areas
- 75% of those who are high school educated and 75% of people with a master’s degree or higher

However, dissecting the data further reveals some interesting findings.

- Men and women aged 50+ are more likely to say the “fair go” is important compared with younger people (Figure 1)
- Those who are retired (89%), occupied with home duties (77%), or a student (75%) are more likely to say the “fair go” is important than people of other employment statuses (Figure 2)
- The importance placed on the “fair go” generally increases alongside rising income brackets, with 75% of people earning less than \$52,000 seeing it as important compared with 82% of people earning over \$104,000

3. The “Fair Go” Endures Today in the Hearts and Minds of Australians

Figure 1: Importance of the “Fair Go” by Age and Gender

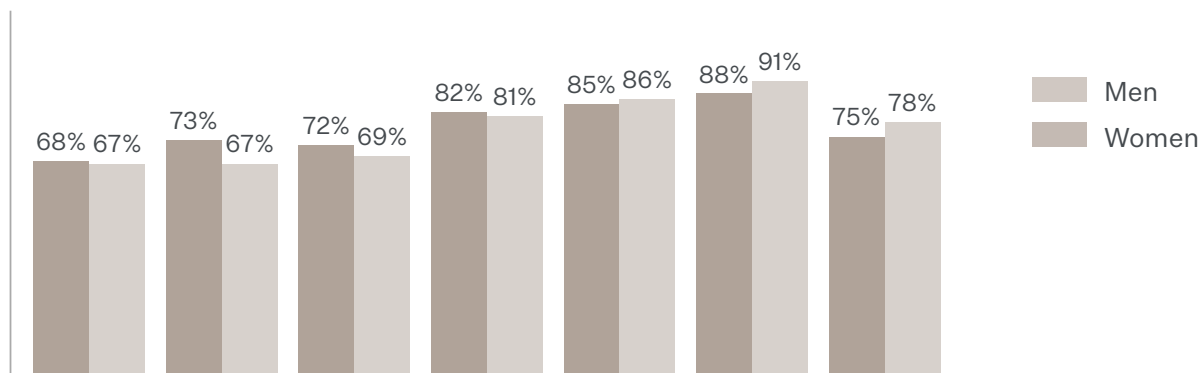


Figure 2: Importance of the “Fair Go” by Employment Status

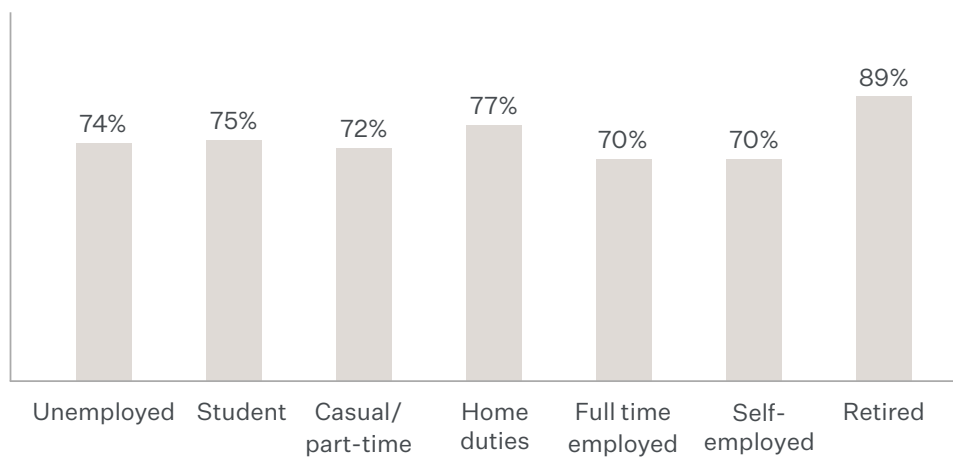
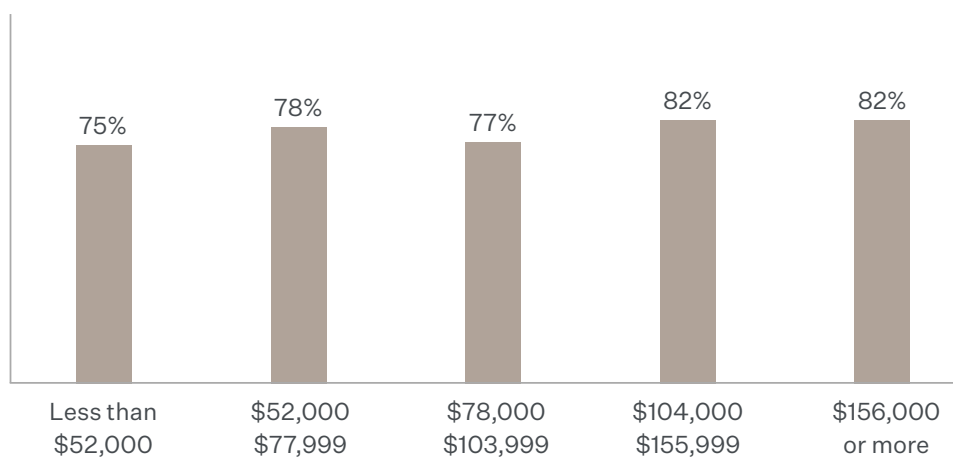


Figure 3: Importance of the “Fair Go” by Annual Income



3.2 Equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all

While our survey data shows that people across age groups, locations, education levels, and incomes see the “fair go” as important, this does not reveal what the phrase means to Australia as a nation. Next25 explored its meaning in qualitative interviews, which found that many agree the “fair go” is about equality of opportunity and equal treatment for all.

Almost all people interviewed agree with the statement that the “fair go” means “everyone being treated equally regardless of gender, race, and socio-economic status. Everyone gets the same treatment no matter their background”

However, the colloquialism of the phrase opens it up to interpretation, with interviewees expanding further on their definition of the “fair go”:



3.3 The “fair go” in practice

Building on how the nation defines the “fair go”, we asked interviewees to explain what that means in practice. One interviewee explained that those who have “got more... should give more” (Woman, 30-39) – and many agreed.

Three-quarters of interviewees agree that the “fair go” means “everyone, including the little guy, should have an equal chance at the basics in life. And, if you’ve got more, you should give more”

A similar sentiment was encapsulated by others defining “equity” as the “recognition that we’re not on an even playing field and that some need more supports in place” (Woman, 30-39). As one interviewee explained, the difference between equity and equality is that “equality is everyone getting the same thing, and equity is everyone getting what they need” (Woman, 40-49).

But for some, achieving this is not straightforward. Others are more cynical about the “fair go” and viability of equity.

“The notion of equity is something that everyone aspires to as long as it doesn’t cost them anything”

– **Man, 50-59**

“If you were told to choose between equality and equity, I’m guessing that most people would say equity. And that’s what I’m saying as well. But when you get into specific examples, it gets really complex”

– **Man, 50-59**

Interviewees also reflected on whether conditions should be attached to receiving a “fair go”. While some agree that “the fair go should be universal” (Woman, 30-39), others say it can be “perpetuated by political discourse, such as ‘have a go to get a go’, which implies that you are not worthy of something unless you’re adding back to society” (Woman, 30-39).

“The conditionality [of the ‘fair go’] is consistently used in rhetoric by The Coalition. And to be honest, now Labor as well. And the ‘fair go’ should not be conditional”

– **Woman, 30-39**

“If they have continuously abused it [the ‘fair go’], squandered it [it should be conditional]. Particularly when there is a finite amount of ‘fair go’”

– **Man, 50-59**

“There are always those who think the world owes them”

– **Woman, 60-69**

3. The “Fair Go” Endures Today in the Hearts and Minds of Australians

Connected to this idea of conditionality, interviewees considered the implications of Australia’s justice system and whether it supports everyone having a “fair go”.

“I think everyone should have a ‘fair go’ at the very least, but if you mean people like criminals and terrorists, well, I think they’ve basically lost their rights once they crossed that line. So I don’t believe they should get a ‘fair go’, because they haven’t given their victims a ‘fair go’”

– Man, 30-39

“If you commit a crime and go to jail and then you come out, then in my opinion, you should have a clean slate... [But] they have a reputation that impedes them from re-entering society, and from ever having a ‘fair go’... And I think it’s shocking, and it probably just causes that person to commit another crime and spend more time in jail and come out, and then commit further crimes and then become a problem, like a major problem, because the crimes become more serious. And then, the likelihood of them ever receiving a ‘fair go’ diminishes to almost zero, and then they probably feel close to zero self-worth”

– Man, 50-59

While there is a sense of cynicism towards the “fair go”, interviewees pointed out examples of opportunities for equal rights, education, and employment.

Equal Rights

“When [children] join a soccer team, everyone is given an opportunity to play whether they’re male or female” – **Male, 40-49**

“Marriage Equality - very strong example. Equal pay for women, First Nations rights being considered” – **Woman, 60-69**

“Australian political parties; quotas for female representatives” – **Woman, 30-39**

Education

“I come from a time when university education was free. So once you got in, your life was made” – **Man, 70+**

“Scholarships to people who are disadvantaged to study or go to university” – **Woman, 20-29**

“I was involved in a tutoring organisation that worked with Indigenous students ... to say these are your pathways, your opportunities, this is what you can do ... We take that for granted. So creating pathways for access to education. Bridging the awareness gap” – **Woman, 20-29**

Employment

“I’m from India and I got a job at one of the biggest hospitals. Now I’m in management” – **Man, 30-39**

“As a woman in the workplace, at first, I was like no, I don’t want you to hire me because you have a quota. I want you to hire me because I’m good. But then I’m like it kind of might just have to start like that” – **Woman, 30-39**

“My wife is Chinese. She was not given any promotion opportunities; there was always a reason that her English wasn’t good enough. I was like, wait, you’re never ever going to get the opportunity, so let’s go somewhere where Mandarin is valued” – **Man, unspecified**

“I didn’t get a pay rise for years until I had a female manager” – **Woman, 60-69**

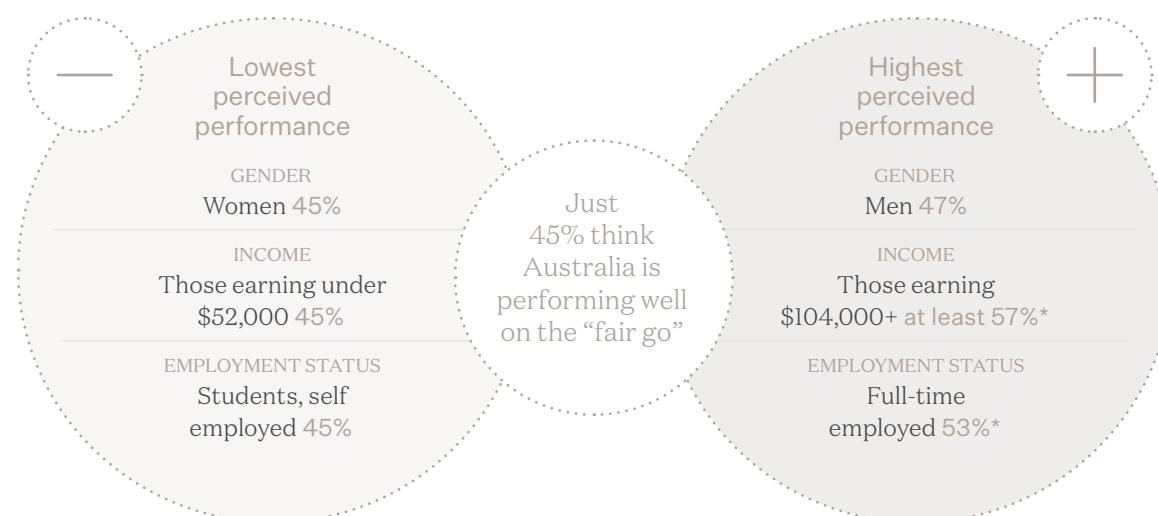
4. Australia Called Out for Failing to Provide a “Fair Go” for All

4.1 Measuring Australia’s performance on the “fair go”

In addition to measuring perceived importance, the 2021 Navigator survey asked the public to rank how well Australia is performing on the “fair go”. While our qualitative research reveals a sentiment that “Australia has a relatively ‘fair go’” (Woman, 30-39) considering the “spread of wealth in Australia... in other countries [it] is much worse” (Woman, 30-39) – only 45% of those surveyed believe the nation is doing a good job at it.

People’s views on how well Australia performs on the “fair go” differs slightly according to demographics, particularly employment status, age, and income (Figure 4). Our research shows that people who are older, more highly educated, and earn a higher income are more likely to say Australia is performing well on the “fair go”. Interestingly, older people and those earning higher incomes also view the “fair go” as more important when compared with the sentiment from other groups (see Section 3.1).

Figure 4: Highest and Lowest Performance of the “Fair Go” by Demographics



* Groups marked with an asterisk indicate a statistically significant higher or lower percentage within that population compared to the national average, meaning that there is a clear measurable difference in the response of this group versus the rest of the population and the result is extremely unlikely to be due to chance.

4.2 Inequality, racism, and unrecognised privilege contributing to the problem

Many believe the application of the “fair go” today is not fair, with just one in eight interviewees agreeing the “fair go” is available to all people in Australia. People reflected on how factors such as wealth, education, ethnicity, race, and gender can influence the opportunities afforded to a person in this country. A similar sentiment is reflected in our quantitative data, with those earning higher incomes saying Australia is doing better on the “fair go” compared with lower-income earners (Section 4.1).

Racism towards First Nations people and immigrants is particularly front of mind for interviewees when considering who does not get a “fair go”. Compounding inequality across the country is the view that those with privilege often fail to recognise their head start in life – giving themselves “more credit for good luck than we perhaps should” (Woman, 50-59).

“I was born white, male, [and] from Australia. I would have actually had to work hard to screw it up from there. I get a ‘fair go’. [But] the ‘fair go’ for all, it’s a myth...You get a ‘fair go’ if you’re well educated, wealthy, and from a British background”

– Man, 50-59

“If my brother said, ‘Give me a ‘fair go’ – I’d be like, ‘Mate, spare me, you have the easiest life ever’. However, if a First Nations person said it, then I’d be like, ‘Yeah, I get it’”

– Man, 30-39

“People starting from a low socio-economic background, including First Nations people and immigrants, are not given an equal chance to participate. If you don’t have money, you don’t get the best education or access to experiences that will help you achieve things”

– Woman, 20-29

“Ask someone who’s come to Australia via a boat and then been dumped on an island for eight years or whatever. Ask them about the ‘fair go’. And they’ll just look at you and say, ‘Well, what fair go? I feel like I’m a prisoner’”

– Man, 50-59

“I wonder if the ‘fair go’ was just for white Anglo males”

– Woman, 20-29

“There are a lot of systemic issues that prevent everyone having access to a ‘fair go’”

– Woman, 20-29

4.3 Grieving the perceived loss of the “fair go”

People are concerned that the “fair go” is becoming less available in Australia. Some interviewees attribute this to the loss of “old school” values, while others pointed to strong intolerance and inequality.

“I got given a ‘fair go’, I got a real chance to go and do all these things and to succeed in life, but I don’t think it’s true now”

– Male, 70+

“Giving everyone a fair chance. What that used to mean is different now... People are more selfish now. I see our old school values slipping away”

– Woman, 40-49

“We like to think that the ‘fair go’ is a part of us. But I think that’s something we’re losing at a rapid rate because there’s such fierce intolerance”

– Man, 50-59

“I think lots of people feel that their competencies aren’t being rewarded across the country, and they’re not given the opportunity... It’s this fear that you will have a very difficult life”

– Man, unspecified

“Are we losing this gallant, egalitarian feeling? Is it because we’re only really rewarding a certain group of people in this neoliberal fashion?”

– Man, unspecified

“We don’t have that base level of what once used to be fairness, and people are getting left behind”

– Woman, 40-49

For some, the perceived loss of the “fair go” is connected to Australia’s increasingly diverse population. Interviewees explained that the concept was “built for the white working-class Australia, which hardly exists anymore” (Woman, 50-59). Many believe that the “white working-class male perceives that their ‘fair go’ has been taken away from them and given more to some of the ethnic minorities” (Man, unspecified).

“I wonder, is there sort of a collective grieving around that notion of what Australia once was that’s being passed through families. It’s all too hard now, in a globalised world with a pandemic, we just have to look after the people who are in our tent. That wasn’t the community that I grew up in”

– Woman, 50-59

4.4 An overused and misused term

Disappointment with Australia’s performance on the “fair go” is highlighted by interviewees saying the term is “overused” and “misused”. Even if people still aspire to the “fair go” for Australia’s moral compass, its exploitation has seen the term become hollowed out.

“I totally think the ‘fair go’ is relevant. I just think it is over-used by people that have actually been given a ‘fair go’, when that [is] just frankly, lazy”

– Man, 30-39

“The ‘fair go’ has become an abused expression ... [it] is one of those empty expressions people use when they want to appear to be giving people a ‘fair go’”

– Man, 70+

“It’s been debased to the point where the meaning can be anything, or it can be just used as a good catch phrase to not deal with the real issue at hand”

– Man, 50-59

Interviewees explained that discourse within media and politics also contributes to the “fair go” losing its meaning.

“If I was hearing it in a non-media or politics context, I might place some value or some interest in what it means and delve further. But in the context of mainstream media or in politics, it means nothing”

– Woman, 30-39

“I can’t remember the phrase Scott Morrison used recently about giving people a ‘fair go’... every time he was asked, he just put out this thing. Give it a ‘fair go’; we’ll give you a ‘fair go’... it’s a load of rubbish. Because they have no intent”

– Man, 50-59

4.5 Moving beyond “just a slogan”

While the “fair go” is considered by many as a core tenet of Australia’s identity, others see it as a myth. Interviewees compare its familiar yet elusive nature to the concept of “mateship”, saying “there is such a gap between what actually happens and what we hold dear” (Woman, 50-59). Even if Australia’s perception of the “fair go” is romanticised – or even intangible – the espoused values of equity and opportunity can set a useful agenda for improving the nation.

“I think the ‘fair go’ is a myth that we’d like to think is happening. We use the ‘fair go’ language to save ourselves from chaos, to help us avoid the dissonance [about] what is actually happening, and what our role is. So, we tell ourselves stories about a ‘fair go’”

– Man, 50-59

“It is an idealistic way of viewing what society could be. And sets that agenda for having an even playing field where people are starting from the same point and have access to the same opportunities. I don’t think it’s real. I would like it to be”

– Woman, 30-39

People see the “fair go” as a unifying pillar of Australian identity and a positive ideal for the country to work towards. However, for Australia to improve on providing opportunities for all, there must be clear directives and specific guidelines on what that looks like in practice to revitalise the “fair go” beyond slogans and vague rhetoric.

“It requires a shift in the system to try and understand how you revitalise the ‘fair go’, held in the heart as it were. If you’re not willing, if you don’t have the political will or imagination to do that, then you could arguably say it’s just a slogan, and it has no meaning”

– Man, unspecified

5. Opportunity for Positive Change

The 2021 Navigator survey revealed that the Australian public see the “fair go” as an important aspiration – yet are disappointed with how the nation is performing on providing an opportunity for all. While the “fair go” was first coined in the 1890s, our qualitative research affirms it remains in the hearts and minds of people across the country today. But definitions of the “fair go”, what that looks like in practice, and how conditional it is vary between interviewees.

There are different perceptions between gender, age, employment status, and annual income groups about whether Australia does provide a “fair go” for all. Many are concerned that the “fair go” is losing its meaning due to overuse and misuse – becoming a myth in modern society. Despite the “fair go” being hailed as a pillar of Australian identity, it seems out of reach for many amid wealth disparity, disadvantage, and racism.

While interviewees recalled examples where they believe a “fair go” has been provided, there is a desire for the “fair go” to be taken more seriously with specific guidelines for action. The country is calling for individuals and institutions to address inequality and prejudice if we are to provide a “fair go” for all, regardless of circumstance or background.

Together, let’s make the future Australia wants.

Acknowledgements

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Next25 acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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6. Method and Limitations

I. Further detail on the quantitative Navigator survey

Navigator has a sample of 2,825, is nationally representative and has been analysed across gender, age, household income, education, employment, state / territory, and region (metro, rural / regional). Fieldwork was conducted by Catalyst Research, online, between 16 December 2020 and 12 February 2021. The margin of error for the full sample (2,825) is + / - 1.8%. Every demographic and segmentation measured has a sample size of 500 or more and the margin of error is + / - 3.7%. In terms of limitations, the study results reported represent the first iteration of a long-term research program.

II. Further detail on the qualitative research

Following the initial survey, semi-structured interviews were held with established and emerging leaders and the public (n=42) to deepen Next25's understanding of three emergent themes: the fair go, responsibility for mistakes, and differences in age and gender. Between May-July 2021 the Next25 research team conducted hour-long online interviews with emerging and established leaders (n=16) on the themes of "fair go", responsibility, and age and gender. Participants ranged in gender, age, and sector (ie, business, academia / expert, community). During August 2021, Catalyst Research conducted hour-long online interviews on the same themes with the public (n=26), participants ranged in gender, age, employment status, education level, and state and territory. Regarding limitations, the qualitative nature of the method could not eliminate respondent bias. Further, within the public interviews, not all participants were asked all categories (individual, your community, public, politicians, business leaders).

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