

Opposition is rising but most Australians still don't want aid cut

by Terence Wood

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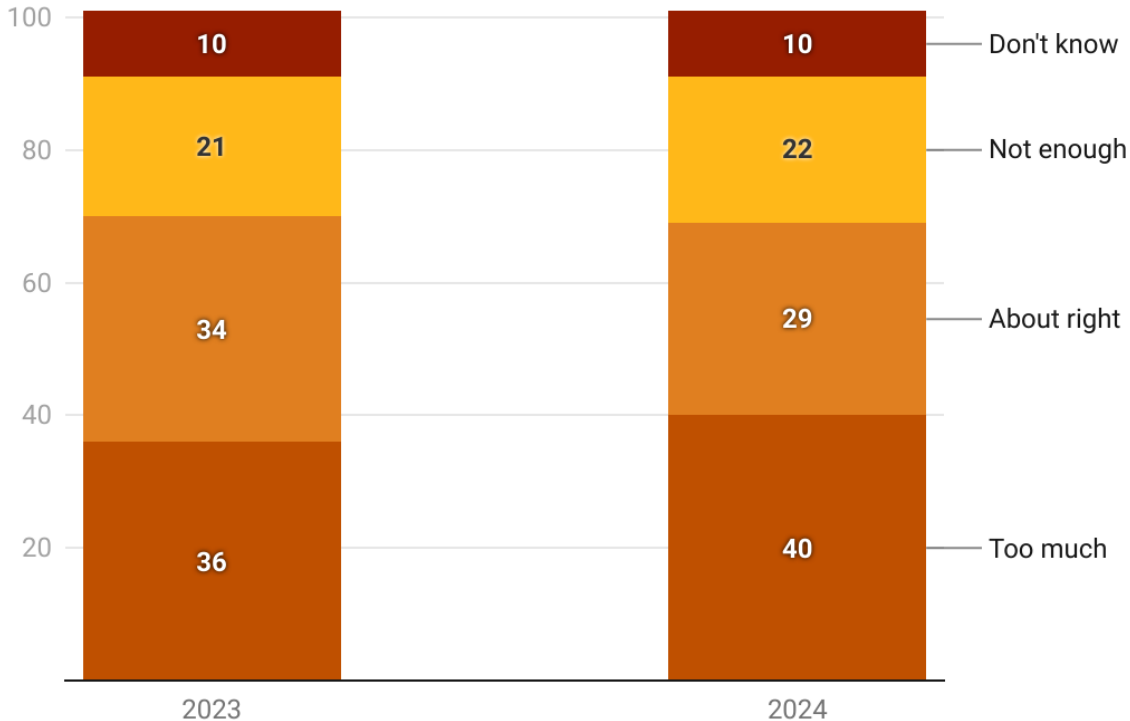


Brett Sherriff/DFAT

The results of the Development Policy Centre's 2024 public opinion survey about aid are in. Our surveys are designed to track attitudes to aid spending over time. To do this as reliably as possible we use the same (reputable) survey firm whenever we can, and we ask the same question each year, providing information on the share of federal government spending that is devoted to aid.

The results of the 2024 survey are shown below along with the results of our 2023 survey.

Figure 1: Australian attitudes to aid spending



Source: Development Policy Centre surveys • Created with Datawrapper

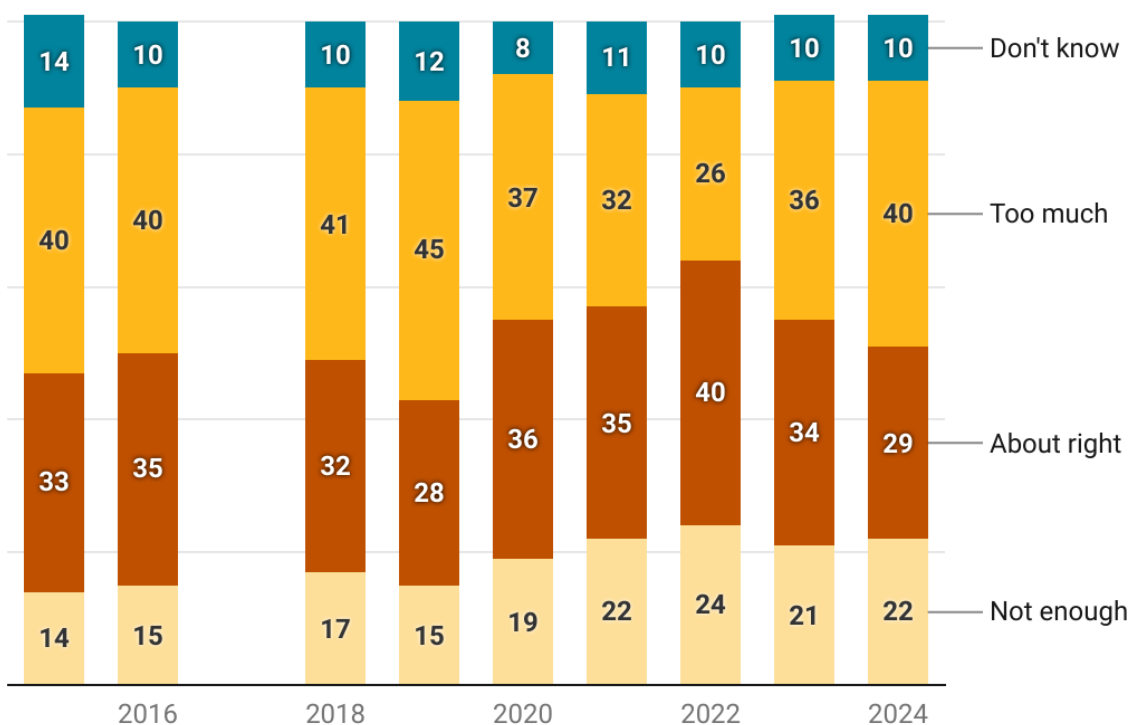
As you can see, the share of Australians who think that Australia gives too much aid is on the rise, yet this isn't because fewer Australians think Australia gives too little aid; the share who thinks Australia gives too little is effectively the same as last

year. The real change between the two years has been the fall in the percentage of Australians who think Australia gives the right amount of aid.

Although hostility to aid is on the rise, it's worth noting that only 40% of Australians think Australia gives too much aid, while 51% think Australia gives about the right amount of aid, or too little. In a sense, that is a surprisingly good finding given inflation and rising interest rates, as well as the current government's reluctance to increase domestic spending.

The next chart shows the full time series of Devpol polls since 2015. Care is needed when comparing 2022 to subsequent years as we had to change survey firms after 2022. What's more, 2022 seems like an unusually positive year, possibly due to the bounce-back from COVID, as well as increased awareness of the need for aid because of the pandemic.

Figure 2: Australian attitudes to aid spending over time



Notes: A spreadsheet of data that covers our surveys since 2015, as well as surveys run by other organisations stretching back many years, is available to download.

Source: Development Policy Centre surveys • Created with Datawrapper

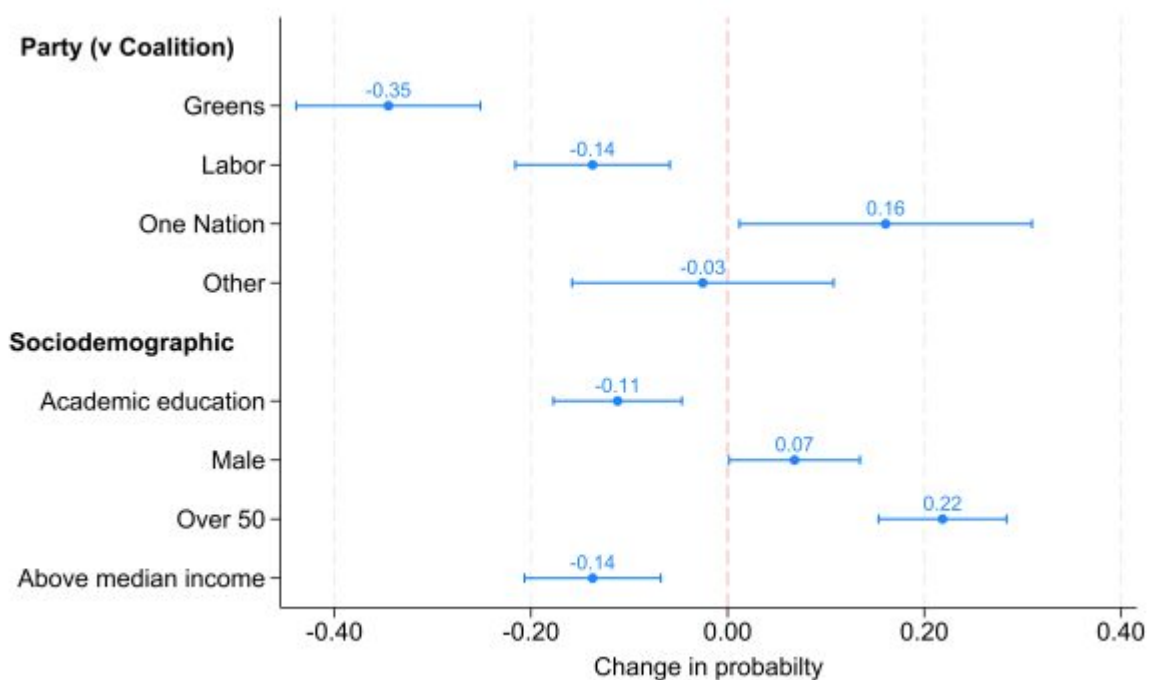
With appropriate care taken, the time series does reveal some interesting points. The belief that Australia gives too little aid is much less prone to change than the belief it gives too much. However, annual fluctuations notwithstanding, there has been a clear increase in the share of Australians who think Australia gives too little aid over time. The rise probably came to an end in 2021 or 2022, but there hasn't been a clear decrease since. This should be of some encouragement to

campaigners for more aid.

One other way our survey data can be useful is that they can be used to get a better picture of which types of Australians are more likely to have different attitudes to aid.

The first chart below is from 2024 and is focused on the belief that Australia gives too much aid. It shows the simple bivariate relationships between particular traits and the belief that Australia gives too much aid. The x-axis shows the change in probability. The top line, for example, shows the average difference between Greens voters and Coalition voters. The next three lines do the same for other groups of voters relative to Coalition voters. The four sociodemographic lines show the average differences between people in the groups indicated and the complements of those groups — for example, the bottom line shows the difference between people that earn more than the median income (in the sample) and people in households that do not.

Figure 3: Comparing individual traits and belief that Australia gives too much aid

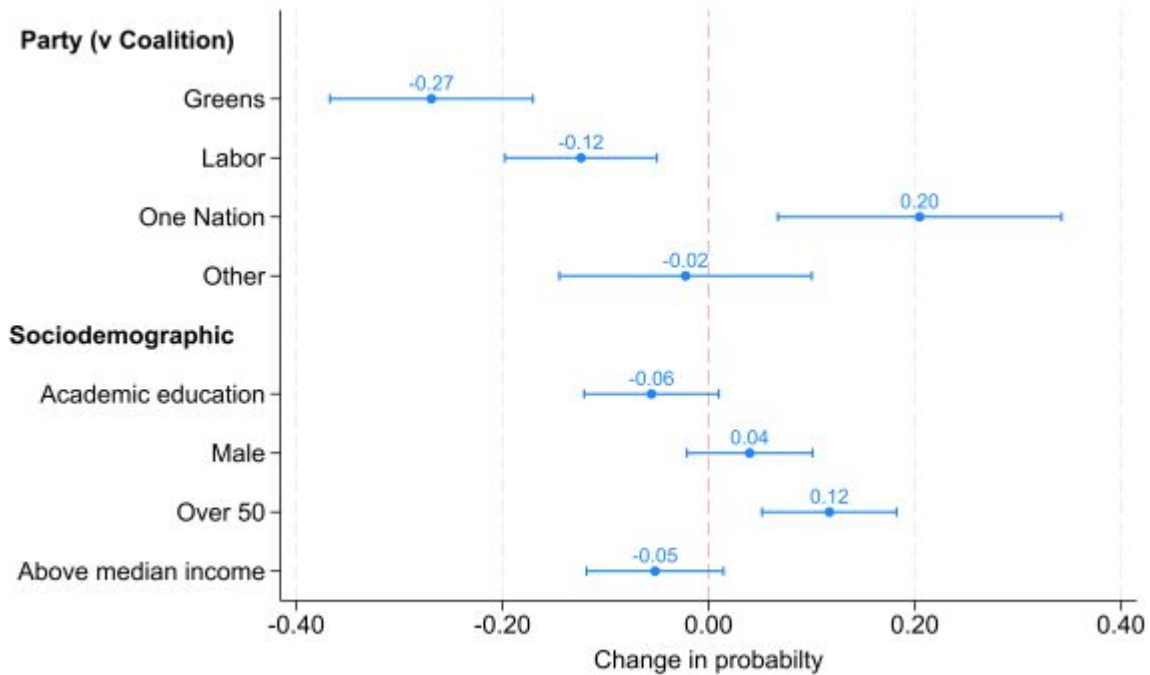


There are clear differences. Voters on the left are much less likely than Coalition supporters to think that Australia gives too much aid. Unsurprisingly, One Nation supporters are more likely. People with an academic education as well as more affluent people are less likely to think Australia gives too much aid, while men and older people are more likely.

The chart below shows the results of another logistic regression. This one contains multiple independent variables together. I've done this to account for relationships

between the various traits. Wealthy people, for example, might be more likely to vote for the Coalition, but including both income and party preference in the same regression accounts for this, affording a sense of the effect of ideology independent of the effect of income, and the effect of income independent of ideology.

Figure 4: Comparing multiple traits and the belief that Australia gives too much



Once again, the chart reveals a stark ideological divide. Even when we take into account other traits, people on the left are much less likely to think Australia gives too much aid than people on the right.

Other differences are less clear in this chart though. With the influence of other variables controlled for, the relationships between income and gender and the belief that Australia gives too much aid are no longer clear (not statistically significant). People with an academic education are probably less likely to think Australia gives too much aid, although this relationship is only statistically significant at $p < 0.1$ (in other words, it's not completely clear). One clear finding remains though, which is to do with age: even when controlling for other traits, older people are more likely to think Australia gives too much aid than younger people.

While they aren't a majority, in 2024 a large share of Australians believe their government gives too much aid. If you are trying to figure out where the heart of this hostility lies, it appears to be foremost amongst the old and on the right.

Note: A spreadsheet of data that covers our surveys since 2015, as well as surveys run by other organisations stretching back many years, is available [to download](#).

Disclosures:

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Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/opposition-is-rising-but-most-australians-still-dont-want-aid-cut-20240710/>