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When the COVID-19 crisis ends, we still have a distrust epidemic to deal with

Without trust life as we know it stops. We trust other drivers to stay on their side of a painted line. We trust banks to return our money. We trust pharmacists to get dosage right. Trust is the glue that holds society together.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed deep fissures of distrust in Australia, accelerating a risk that research firm Roy Morgan has been warning about for some time.

“We interview more than 50,000 Australians every year, in person, at length, and have done so for decades,” says Roy Morgan CEO Michele Levine. “We’ve seen countless trends come and go and deeper changes take root. But in 2017 we realised something new was happening. *Something* was corroding the way people felt about the companies they interacted with, the sports they followed, the communities they lived in.”

It clearly involved trust, “but we’ve been measuring trust for a long time and those measures weren’t capturing it,” she says. The breakthrough was realising that the issue wasn’t low trust levels, or even an absence of trust: “That’s a problem, but it doesn’t produce the societal cracks we were observing.” The culprit was much more potent and damaging: active distrust.

“Distrust poses a very real, material risk to brands, communities and even nations,” says Levine. “AMP is a prime example. The revelations of the Banking Royal Commission saw it become Australia’s most distrusted brand, wiping \$2.3 billion off its bottom line.”

Levine and her team developed a rigorous measure for distrust: the **Roy Morgan Risk Monitor**. They now measure both trust and distrust across and within 25 key industries, and also assess trust and distrust in key public political and business leaders. The results are disturbing. The latest findings on Australians’ distrust for our Prime Minister and government should ring loud alarm bells as the country faces its biggest challenge since World War II.

The top reasons Australians give for distrusting political leaders are they are “*dishonest/don’t tell the truth/dodgy*”, “*they focus on their own interest/have their own agenda/selfish*” and they are “*not community-minded*”. With many more people citing these perceptions of Scott Morrison than those who view him as “*Honest/genuine*”, “*Community-minded/focused on public interest*” or “*Sensible/Knowledgeable*”, his net position is one of distrust.

“This would be a concerning result for a nation’s leader at any point,” says Ms. Levine, “but now, when the entire country is looking for guidance, it poses a danger that must be acknowledged and addressed.

The same goes for the brands, companies and organisations whose rising distrust we have been tracking. The COVID-19 pandemic is shining spotlight on the dangers of the distrust that has been building on many fronts. We are now dealing with the viral pandemic head on, and we must confront the epidemic of distrust in the same manner.”

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Top 5 traits of political & business leaders that people 'Trust'

Top 5 traits of political leaders people 'Trust'	
1	27% - Honest/genuine
2	15% - Community-minded/focus on public interest
3	7% - Sensible/knowledgeable
4	6% - Good performance/competent
5	5% - Has integrity/sincerity
Top 5 traits of business leaders people 'Trust'	
1	30% - Honest/genuine
2	12% - Community-minded/focus on public interest
3	7% - Evidence-based
4	6% - Has integrity/sincerity
5	5% - Sensible/knowledgeable

Source: Roy Morgan Snap SMS survey conducted on March 18-19, 2020.

Base: Australians aged 14+. n=974.

Top 5 traits of political & business leaders that people 'Disrupt'

Top 5 traits of political leaders people 'Disrupt'	
1	26% - Dishonest/doesn't tell the truth/dodgy
2	19% - Focus on own interest/have own agenda/selfish
3	15% - Not community-minded/not putting public interest first
4	11% - Ineffective management/administration/lack of leadership
5	11% - Greedy/after huge profits
Top 5 traits of business leaders people 'Disrupt'	
1	33% - Focus on own interest/have own agenda/selfish
2	27% - Dishonest/doesn't tell the truth/dodgy
3	19% - Greedy/after huge profits
4	18% - Not community-minded/not putting public interest first
5	12% - Unethical/questionable practices

Source: Roy Morgan Snap SMS survey conducted on March 18-19, 2020.

Base: Australians aged 14+. n=974.

[Click here](#) for further in-depth details about the results of this special survey on 'Trust' and 'Disrupt' in political and business leaders.

About Roy Morgan

Roy Morgan is Australia's largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state, as well as in the U.S. and U.K. A full-service research organisation, Roy Morgan has over 75 years' experience collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
1,000	±3.0	±2.7	±1.9	±1.3