

PulseCheck draws on data and research from around Australia, bringing together economic indicators from the ABS, public polling, and other insights, to determine Australia's 'pulse' and help organisations understand the environment in which they seek to build trust and change minds.

York Park Group is a stakeholder strategy firm. We specialise in strategy and reputation, public affairs, transaction communications, and crisis and issues management. To be effective, we seek to understand not only the saliency of our client's matters, but the broader environment within which they are seeking to influence.

Reputation management and advocacy in Australia is increasingly complex with an evolving media landscape, a fast-changing and fragmented policy environment, and increasing geopolitical challenges.

There is a never-ending stream of publicly available economic, social and political insights. The York Park Group PulseCheck brings together high quality, national data to provide a single reference point of the broader environment in which our clients seek to build and manage their reputation, and advocate for policy outcomes.

Calm Before the Rupture

As Australians began their summer holidays, they did so with positivity. The Q4 PulseCheck shows the nation on track to end the year in a better frame than it started. That moment of calm now seems to be a lifetime ago. The Bondi Beach terrorism attack occurred in the final days of the Q4 data, with its impact felt across the community and affecting government and politics. As Prime Minister of Canada, Mark Carney, said of the world order in January, we are now in "a period of great rupture". Australia's social cohesion is at risk and our political consensus, fraying for the past decade, is now standing entirely exposed.

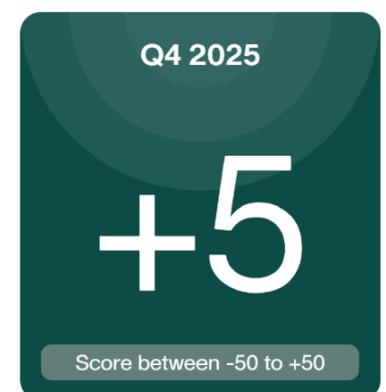
In 2026, businesses and organisations navigating the public arena do so in an environment of deep precariousness. Politics - domestic and global - is more charged than ever, making corporate public positioning even harder when things go right or wrong. Combined with upticks in inflation released in January and expectations of RBA rate rises in February, the year ahead could mark a moment of fracturing in Australia.

Consumers and Businesses Diverge – Q4 2025

The Pulse has recorded two consecutive positive quarters for the first time since August 2022, rising to +5 in Q4-2025, up from +4 in Q3-2025.

A divergence has emerged between increasingly confident consumers and more cautious businesses. Consumer sentiment is now at its highest level since December 2021, yet business confidence and conditions have fallen below their long run averages for the first time in six months.

This, combined with an uptick in inflation, created an uncertain outlook despite improved trading and profitability in December. Although the national mood fell slightly – continuing its decline from a post-election high – the outlook for the country stayed constant, suggesting a belief that consumers are yet to link increased inflation with potential interest rate rises.



The Federal Coalition polled at its lowest-ever level amid continued instability; at a state level, the Liberal Party in Victoria, NSW and South Australia all replaced their leaders, electing relatively new, Gen-X and Millennial female MPs.

The Albanese Government appeared to gain momentum after a successful meeting with US President Trump which secured a critical minerals strategic agreement. This was further buoyed by the world-first under 16s social media ban. However, the travel expenses scandal dominated news ahead of the Bondi terrorist attack on December 14.

PulseCheck Methodology

York Park Group wanted PulseCheck to be an objective and subjective measurement. In developing the methodology, we considered:

- How do voters the community feel generally against their actions?
- What are business perceptions against the decisions they make?
- How to answer these questions with data that already exists?

We determined six national measurements released monthly were the best indicators of the national pulse. PulseCheck is then calculated by setting each indicator onto an equal and unified scale. This ‘normalises’ the data onto a scale of -50 and 50, with 0 set as a neutral score, indicating that, socially, economically and politically, Australia is neither positive nor negative.

Indicator	Q4 2025 Change
<i>ABS Household Spending Indicator</i>	
<i>Westpac and Melbourne Institute Consumer Sentiment Index</i>	
<i>NAB Business Survey – Confidence</i>	
<i>NAB Business Survey – Conditions</i>	
<i>Essential Media – National Mood</i>	
<i>Resolve Country Outlook Index</i>	

Outlook for Q1-2026

The impact of the Bondi terrorist attack will be profound and long-lasting. Social cohesion is difficult to define, let alone measure.

The continued decline in the national mood and outlook will last throughout 2026. This will intensify as submissions to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion are published and hearings commence.

Meanwhile, the RBA expects inflation to remain above three per cent for ‘much of next year’ – the next RBA decision in February will be key, as it will determine consumer spending and business investment. Any interest rate rise will define the Federal Government’s economic agenda, increasing calls for reform.

Sentiment from the World Economic Forum at Davos, specifically from Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, highlights the changing business confidence and conditions, as investors seek to understand what, if any, shifts will result from nations reducing their trust in, and reliance on, America.

The interplay of social division, economic uncertainty, and geopolitical instability will shape both public sentiment and investment decisions. The response of the Federal and State Governments will determine how this impacts The Pulse of Australia.

Q1 2026 Considerations – Looking Ahead

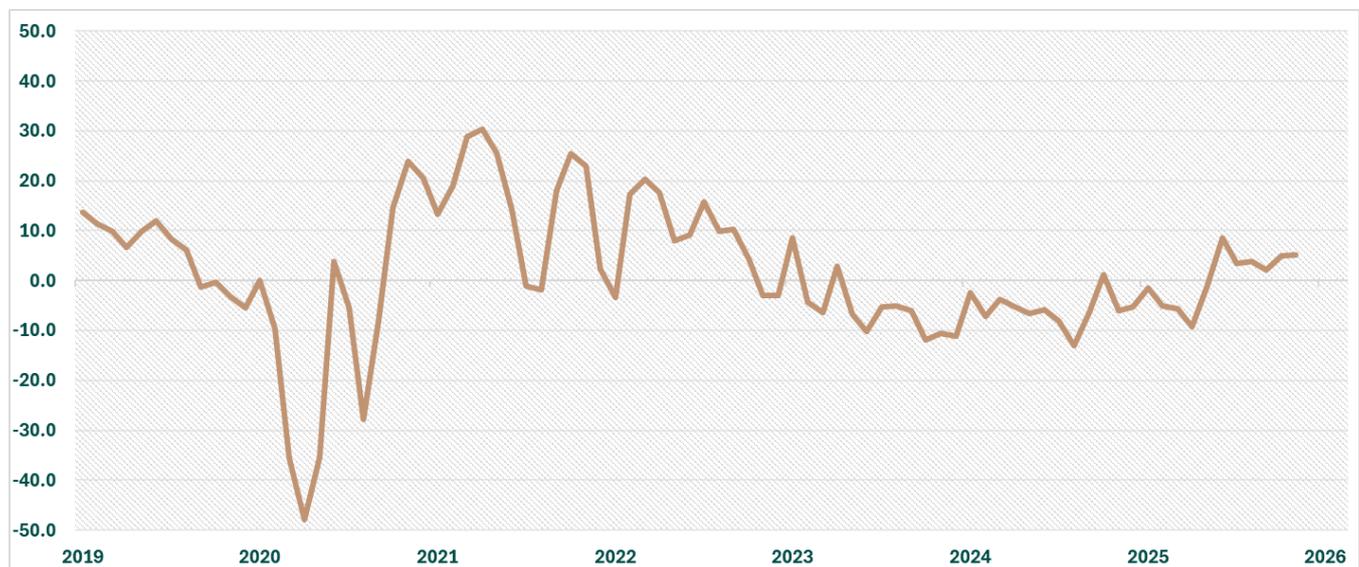
Reputation: Research shows 89 per cent of Australians believe they can spot an AI deepfake, yet only 42 per cent are able to when tested. Are we prepared for the risk this presents to our reputation?

Positioning: Are we prepared for a year dominated by a broader and challenging public debate surrounding antisemitism and social cohesion?

Messaging: How do you balance individual opinions against a broader organisation-wide narrative?

History: 2019 to 2026

Stepping back and viewing The Pulse over time illustrates the recent volatility. In 2025, following a post-election high, The Pulse settled at above its long-term trend. Recent events may see a return to this volatility.



Recommended Reading

York Park Group has filtered through articles, reports and whitepapers from Q4 so you don't have to. Here are some highlights that may be of interest:

- [Australia is losing ground: Top CEOs on the risks the country can't ignore – AFR](#)
- [The State of AI: Global Survey 2025 – McKinsey](#)
- [Millennials lead American optimism for the future – Harris Poll](#)
- [Just six months ago, Albanese was seen as untouchable. Now some say he's politically shrunk](#)
- [Why is communications so difficult today? – Simon Baugh](#)

For more information about the York Park Group PulseCheck, and how organisations can use it, please contact Sean Sammon – sean.sammon@yorkparkgroup.com.au or 0417 137 419