COMMUNITY TRUST IN ABS STATISTICS SURVEY (CTASS)

Summary Report

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1 SURVEY OVERVIEW

1.1 ABOUT THE SURVEY

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) commissioned ENGINE to conduct the 2020 Community Trust in ABS Statistics Survey (CTASS). This is the third iteration of the survey, which was previously undertaken in 2010 and 2015. This report presents a summary of the key findings for the 2020 CTASS.

The purpose of the CTASS was to measure and identify any changes in the level of trust the general community and informed users of ABS data have in official statistics.

The General Community Survey involved Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and was a single frame random mobile design.

The Informed User Survey used a list provided by the ABS.

The main fieldwork period took place from March 2020 to May 2020. The average survey length for the General Community Survey was 17 minutes; and 15 minutes for the Informed Users Survey.

1.2 ABOUT THIS REPORT

The results for the General Community Survey have been weighted to the Australian population. Statistical tests have been carried out to highlight significant differences between key subgroups. Significant differences for these analysis variables are reported in the text. Where no differences are found this is not mentioned.

Weighting was not applied to the informed user dataset and statistical tests have not been carried out between the different types of user; due to the nature of the sample, which was not random probability based; and because of the small number of economists and journalists (who have been combined into one group for analysis purposes).

Comparisons with the 2015 CTASS are presented in Section 3.4 . Significance testing at a probability level of 0.05 has been carried out. An asterisk (*) in the charts indicates a statistically significant difference between the results. Since the informed users were sampled non-randomly, no significance testing has been done between the survey years.

Percentages have been rounded up to whole integers. Single-response items may not add to 100% due to rounding. Multiple-response items might add to more than 100% due to respondents selecting multiple response codes.

The bases presented in the tables and figures are unweighted numbers.

The project was carried out in compliance with ISO 20252 and membership requirements for Association of Market and Social Research Organisations (AMSRO) and the Research Society.

2 METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaires were provided by the ABS. To allow for comparability with the previous 2015 CTASS, the questions asked were kept the same where possible.

It is worth noting that the 2020 CTASS was undertaking during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was saturating the media. Therefore, interpretation of the results should be considered in light of this unprecedented and evolving situation.

2.1 GENERAL COMMUNITY

The 2020 CTASS involved n=2,203 CATI with Australian residents, aged 15 and over, from all states and territories. However, of the n=2,203 interviews achieved, 24 interviews had missing data required for weighting and were therefore excluded from the sample. The remaining 2,179 records have been weighted to the Australian population by Age, Gender and Part-of-State and Education to provide estimates of the Australian population.

The General Community Survey used a single frame random mobile design and the sample was provided by SamplePages.

The response rates and cooperation rates were calculated based on the internationally recognised American Association for Population Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards. The cooperation rate for the General Community Survey was 11.4% and the response rate was 4.6%.

Table 1. General Community – Key field statistics

Key field statistics	
Target interviews	2,200
Interviews achieved	2,203
Average survey length	17 mins
AAPOR Cooperation Rate	11.4%
AAPOR Response Rate	4.6%
Total sample records used	57,499
Fieldwork period	25 March to 4 May 2020

2.2 INFORMED USERS

The sample was compiled and provided by the ABS and included academics (the vast majority), journalists and economists who are known users in direct contact with the ABS; and had agreed to be contacted for research purposes. The Informed Users Survey set out to achieve up to n=180 interviews from a list on n=223 users of ABS statistics. No quotas were set by user type. A total of n=178 interviews were achieved with 166 academics, 4 journalists and 8 economists.

The cooperation rate for the informed user survey was 81.7% and the response rate was 81.7%.

Table 2. Informed Users – Key field statistics

Key field statistics	
Target interviews	180
Interviews achieved	178
Average survey length	15 min
AAPOR Co-operation Rate	81.7%
AAPOR Response Rate	81.7%
Total sample records used	223
Fieldwork period	9 April to 28 April 2020

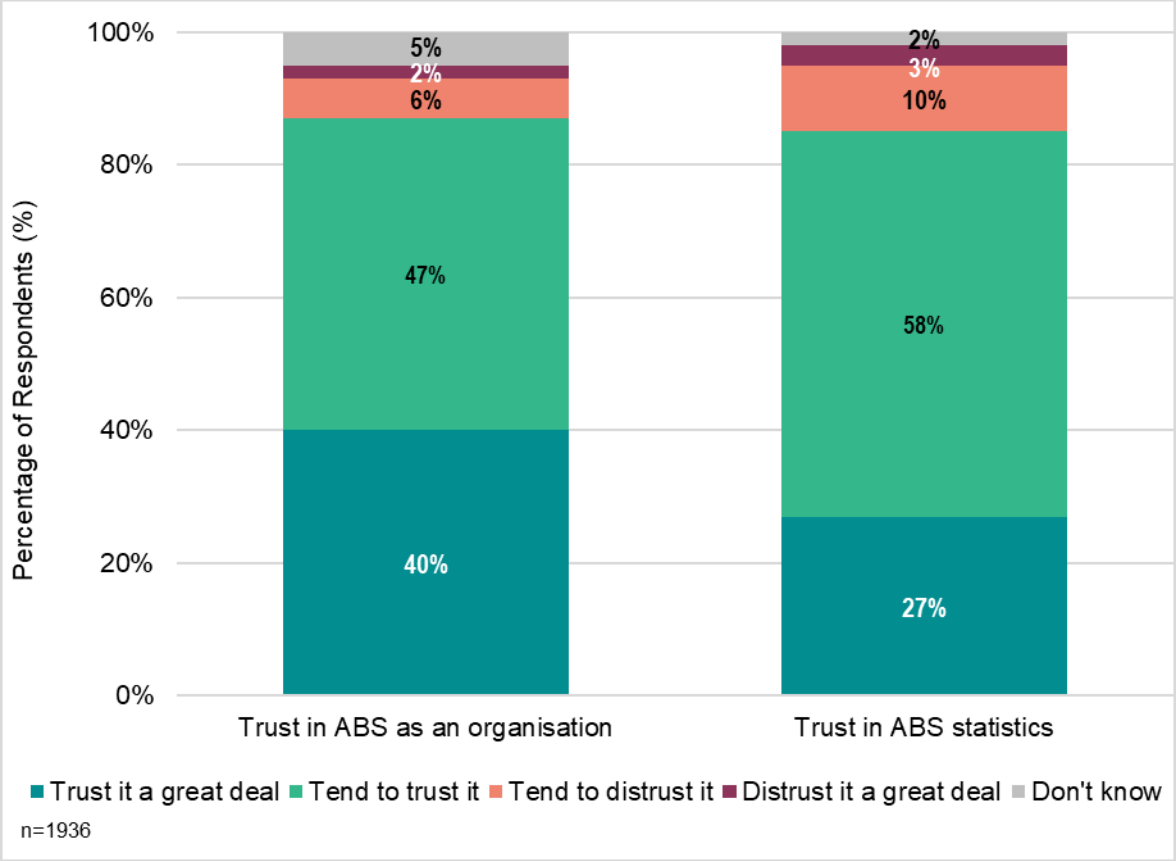
3 KEY FINDINGS

3.1 TRUST IN ABS

Overall trust in the ABS as an organisation and overall trust in ABS statistics were positive with more than four in five general community respondents stating this.

Overall, 87% of respondents indicated that they trusted the ABS as an organisation with 40% saying that they 'trust it a great deal' and 47% indicated that they 'tend to trust it'. Similarly, 85% of respondents indicated that they trusted the statistics produced by the ABS with 27% saying that they 'trust them a great deal' and 58% indicating that they 'tend to trust them'.

Figure 1. General Community - Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics

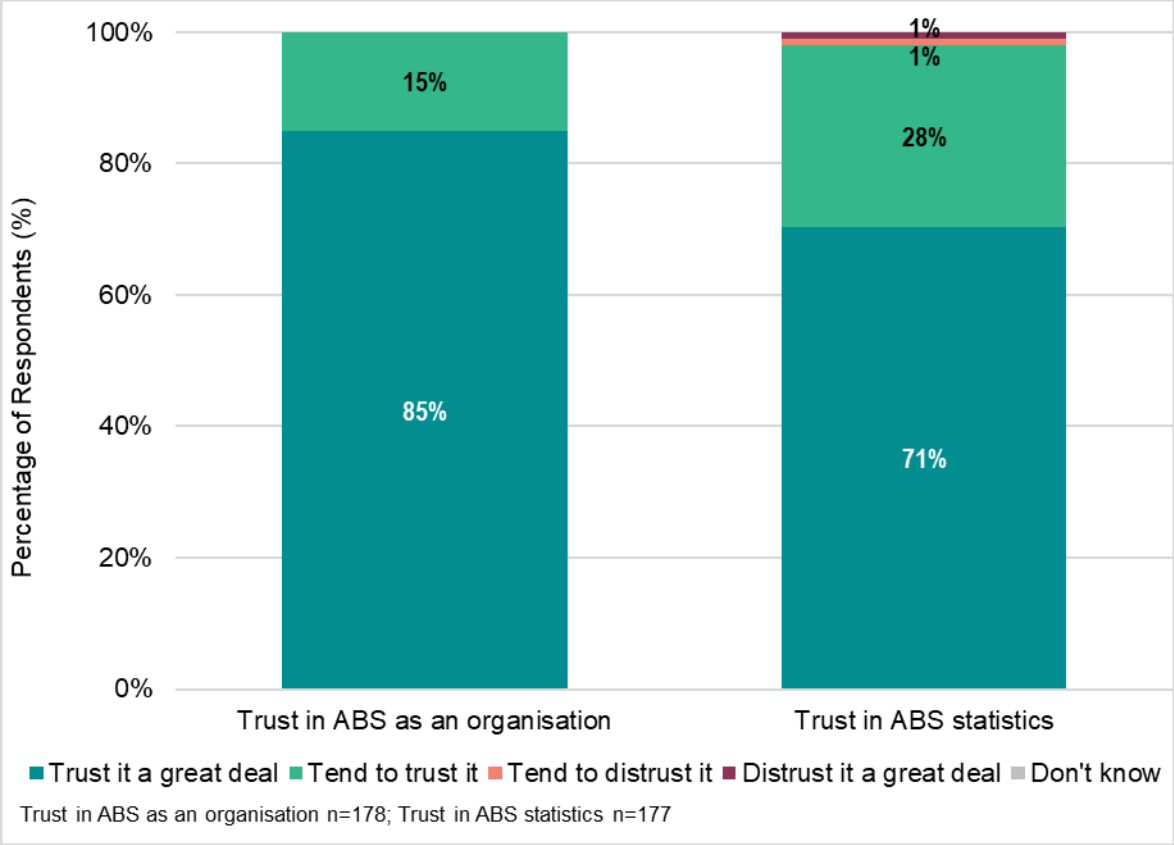


Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

There were higher levels of trust among informed users, in the organisation itself as well as the statistics it produces. All users (100%) said that they trusted the ABS as an organisation with 85% saying 'a great deal' and 15% indicating that they 'tend to trust it'. The degree of trust in ABS statistics was high (98%) with 71% saying they trust them 'a great deal' and 15% indicating that they 'tend to trust them', as shown in Figure 2.

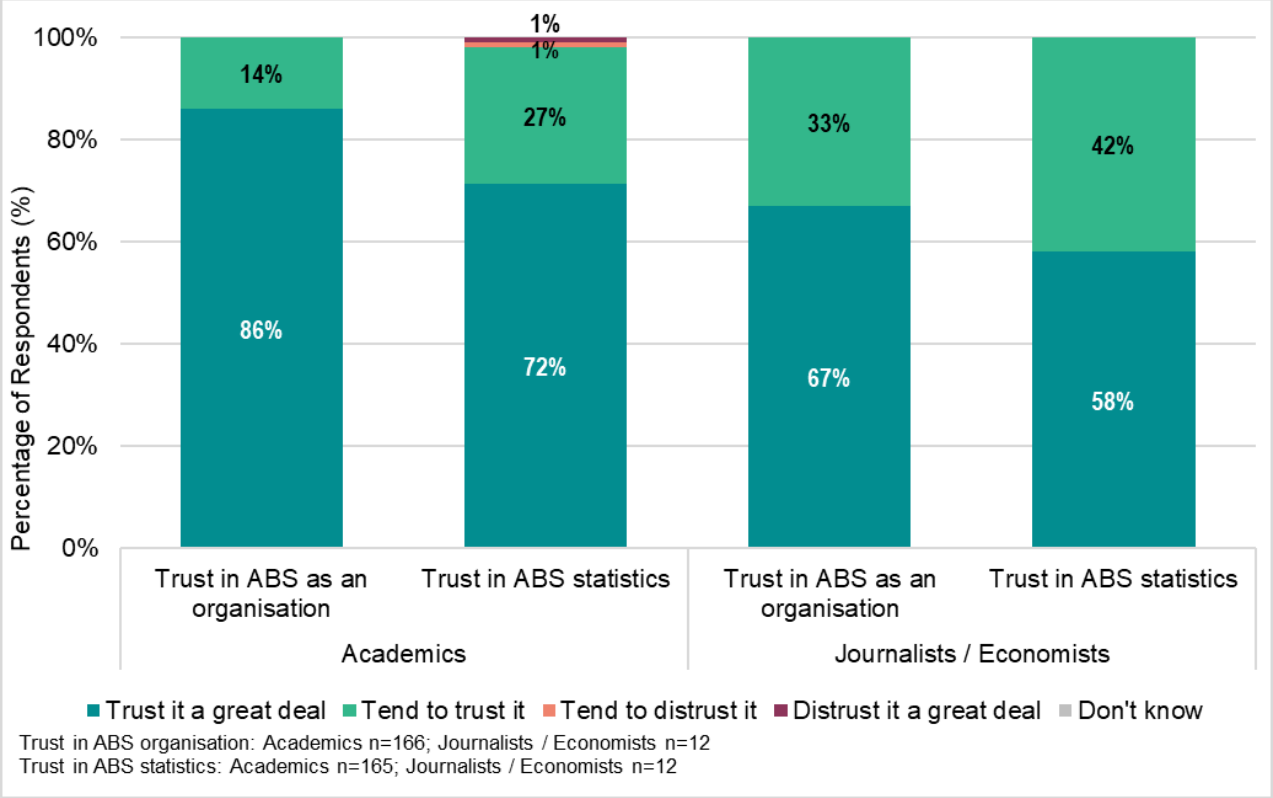
Academics tended to report higher levels of trust than journalists/economists for both the organisation itself (86% versus 67%) and its statistics (72% versus 58%). However, the number of journalists/economists was small; and this should be taken into account. These results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to ABS statistics



Note: One person said they did not use ABS statistics.

Figure 3. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to ABS statistics by user



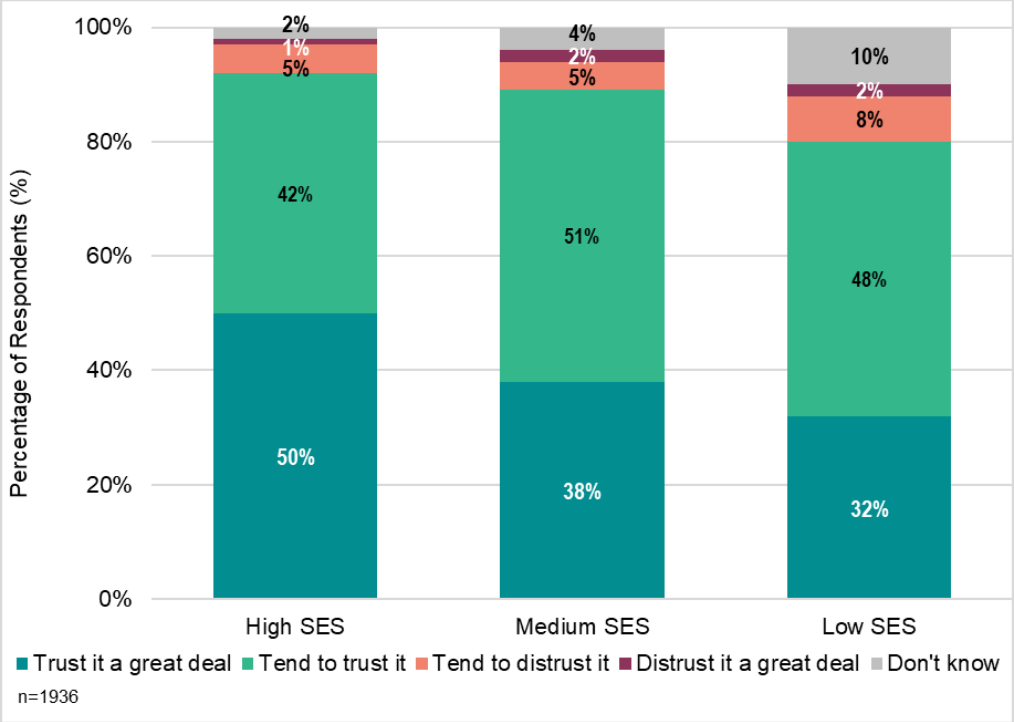
Note: One person said they did not use ABS statistics. Small sample size for journalists/economists – these results should be treated with caution.

In keeping with the 2015 CTASS, socio-economic status (SES) was derived from occupation and education of the general community respondents.

Respondents with a high SES background were more likely to trust (a great deal or tend to trust) the ABS as an organisation than those with a low SES background (92% compared with 79%), as shown in Figure 4.

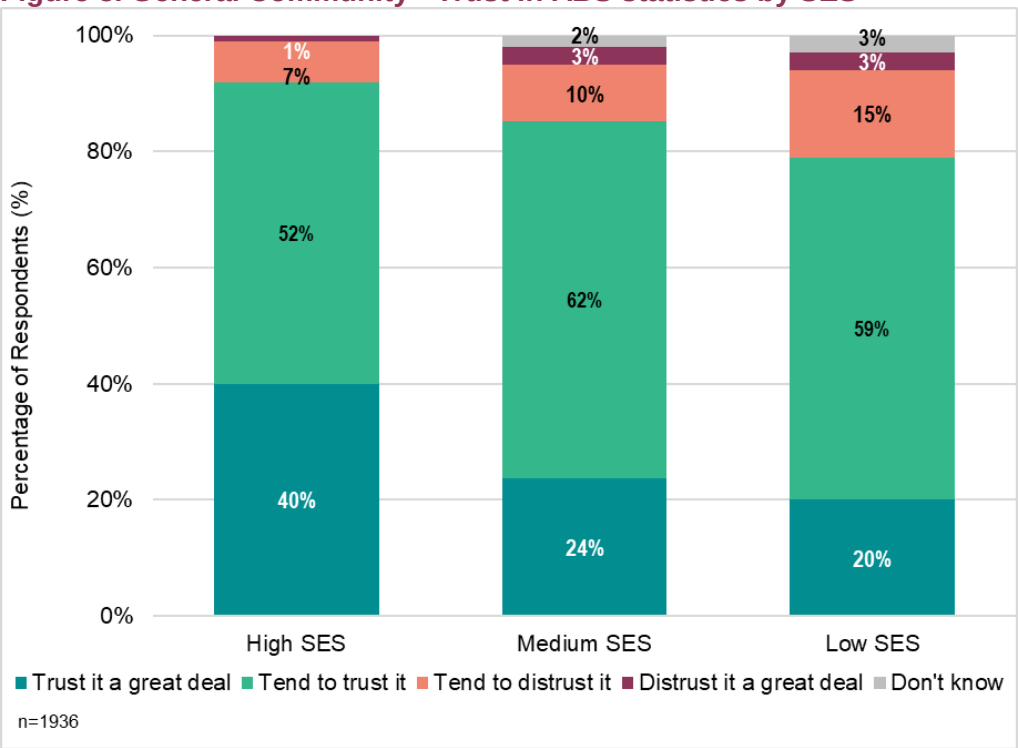
Similarly, people with a high SES were also more likely to trust (a great deal or tend to trust) the statistics produced by the ABS than those with a low SES background (92% compared with 80%), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 4. General Community - Trust in ABS as an organisation by SES



Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

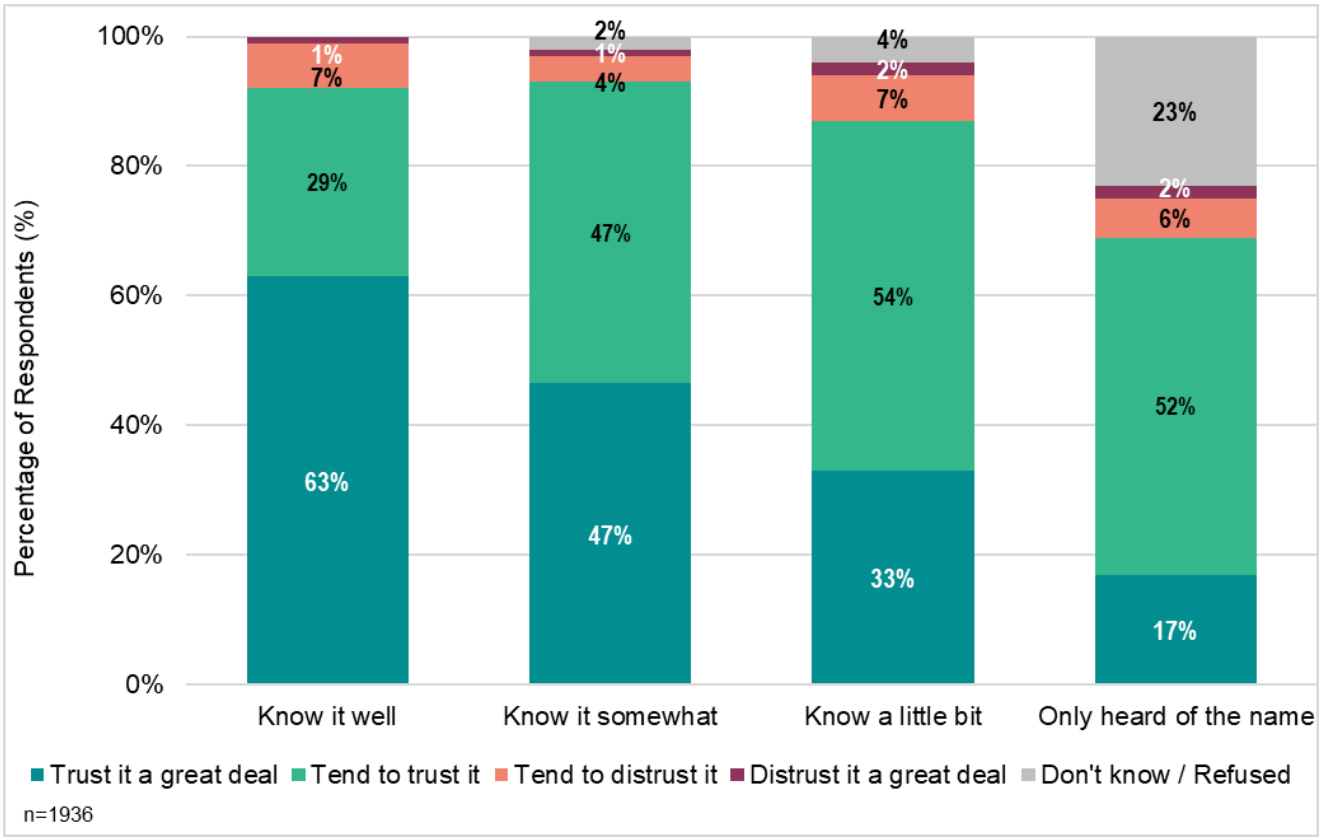
Figure 5. General Community - Trust in ABS statistics by SES



Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

There was a positive association between level of familiarity and level of trust. General community respondents who indicated that they know the ABS well were more likely to say that they trust it ‘a great deal’ (63%, compared with 33% of those who know the ABS only ‘a little bit’ or had only heard of the name (17%)).

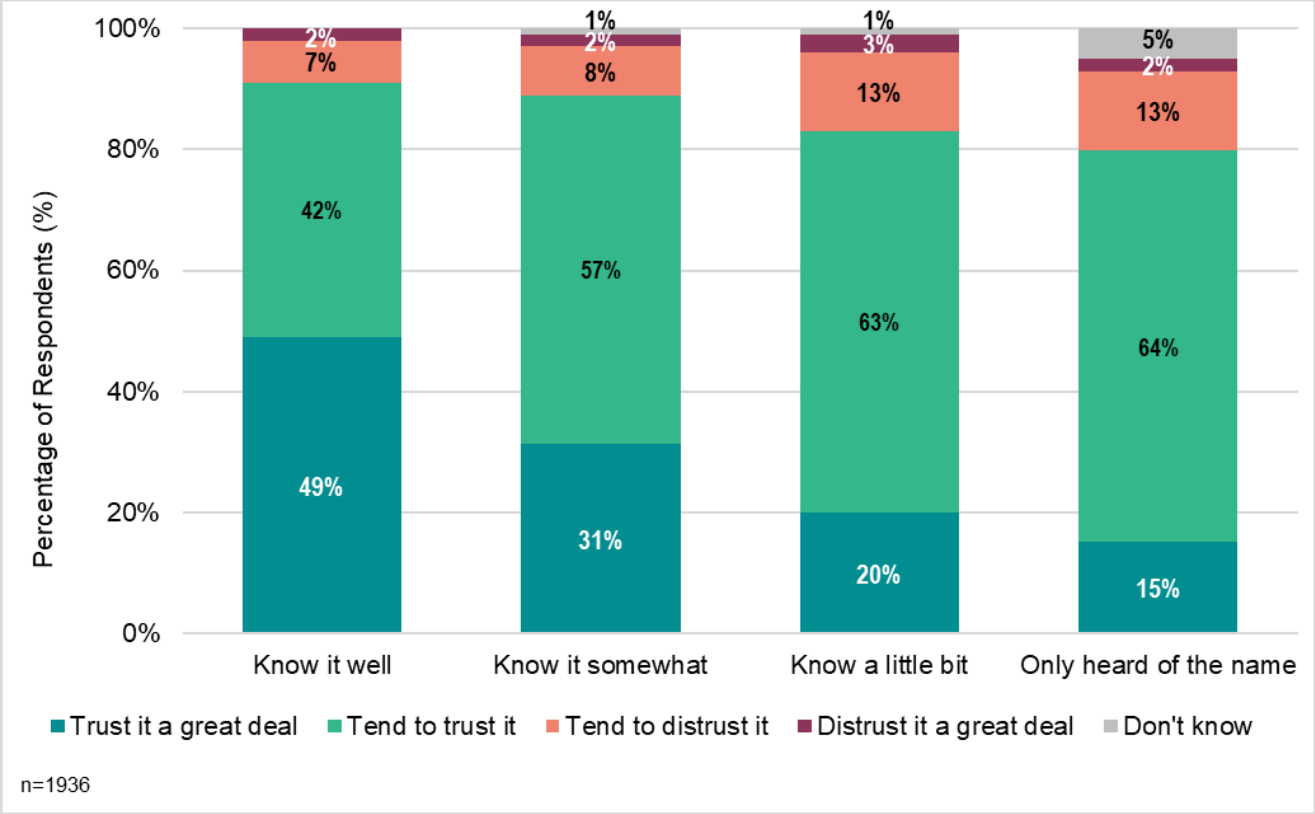
Figure 6. General Community - Trust in ABS as an organisation by knowledge of the ABS



Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Respondents with higher levels of familiarity with the ABS also had higher levels of trust in its statistics. Of those who knew the ABS well, 49% reported ‘a great deal’ of trust in ABS statistics. This compared with 20% of those who knew the ABS ‘a little bit’ and 15% who had ‘only heard of the name’.

Figure 7. General Community - Trust in ABS statistics by knowledge of the ABS



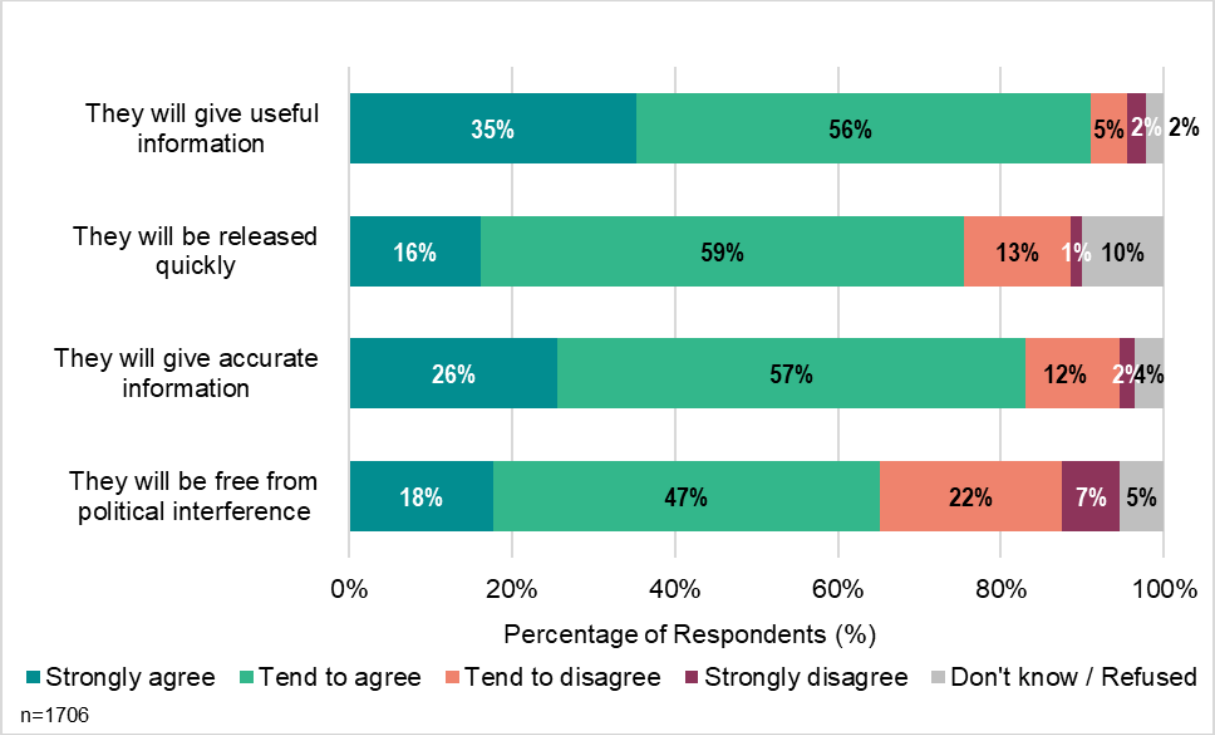
Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

3.2 FUTURE ABS STATISTICS

General community respondents who were familiar with at least one of the ABS sets of statistics (Census, employment and unemployment, GDP or CPI) and informed users were asked a set of questions about future statistics produced by the ABS. Positivity about future ABS statistics was higher among informed users than in the general population; with 76% of users in ‘strong agreement’ with the usefulness of future information, compared with 35% of the general community.

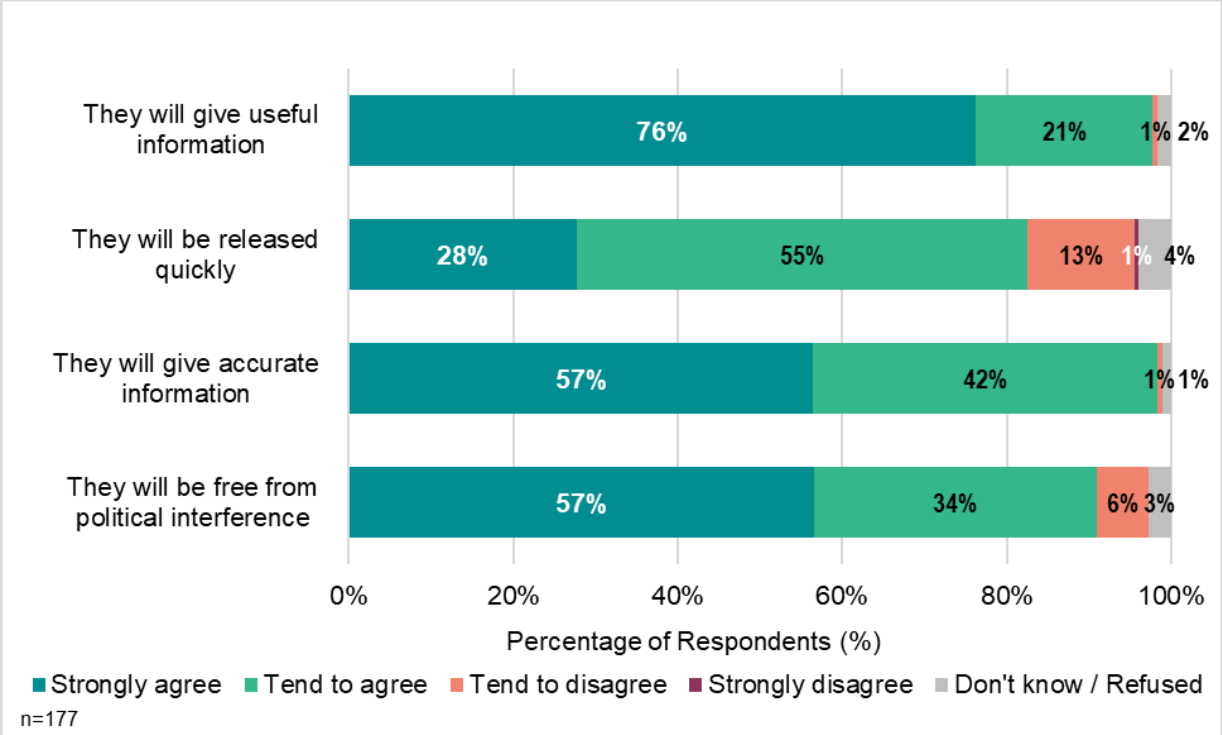
Overall, around four in five general community respondents (83%) believed that future information would be accurate, three quarters (75%) agreed that it will be released quickly; and a slightly lower proportion agreed that it will be free from political interference (65%). Equivalent figures for informed users were higher at 98%, 82% and 91% (respectively).

Figure 8. General Community - Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics



Base: Respondents who were familiar with ABS statistics (n=1,706)

Figure 9. Informed Users - Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics

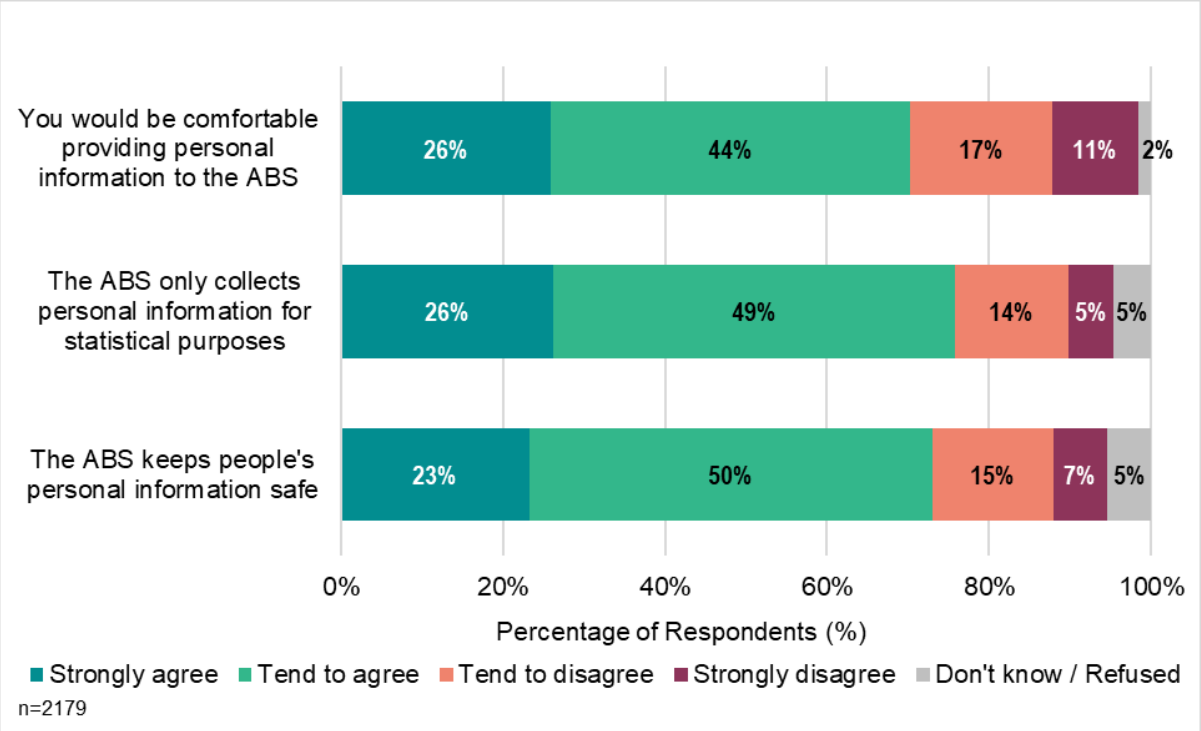


Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics (n=177)

3.3 PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE ABS

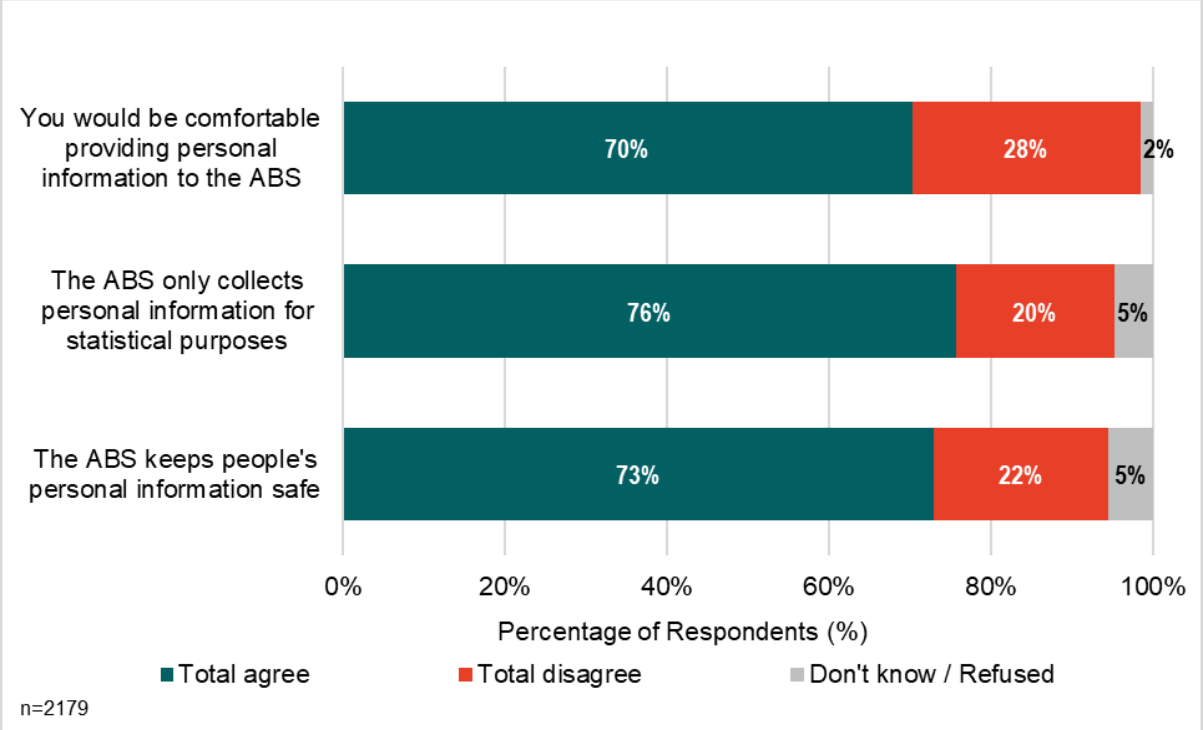
General community respondents were asked how they felt about providing information to the ABS in general. Positively, 76% of respondents agreed “the ABS only collects personal information for statistical purposes”, while 73% believed that the “ABS keeps people’s personal information safe” and 70% indicated that they “would be comfortable providing personal information to the ABS.” The full results are shown in Figure 10 and the overall results for level of agreement and disagreement is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 10. General Community – Providing information to the ABS



Base: All respondents (n=2,179)

Figure 11. General Community – Overall level of agreement and disagreement about providing information to the ABS



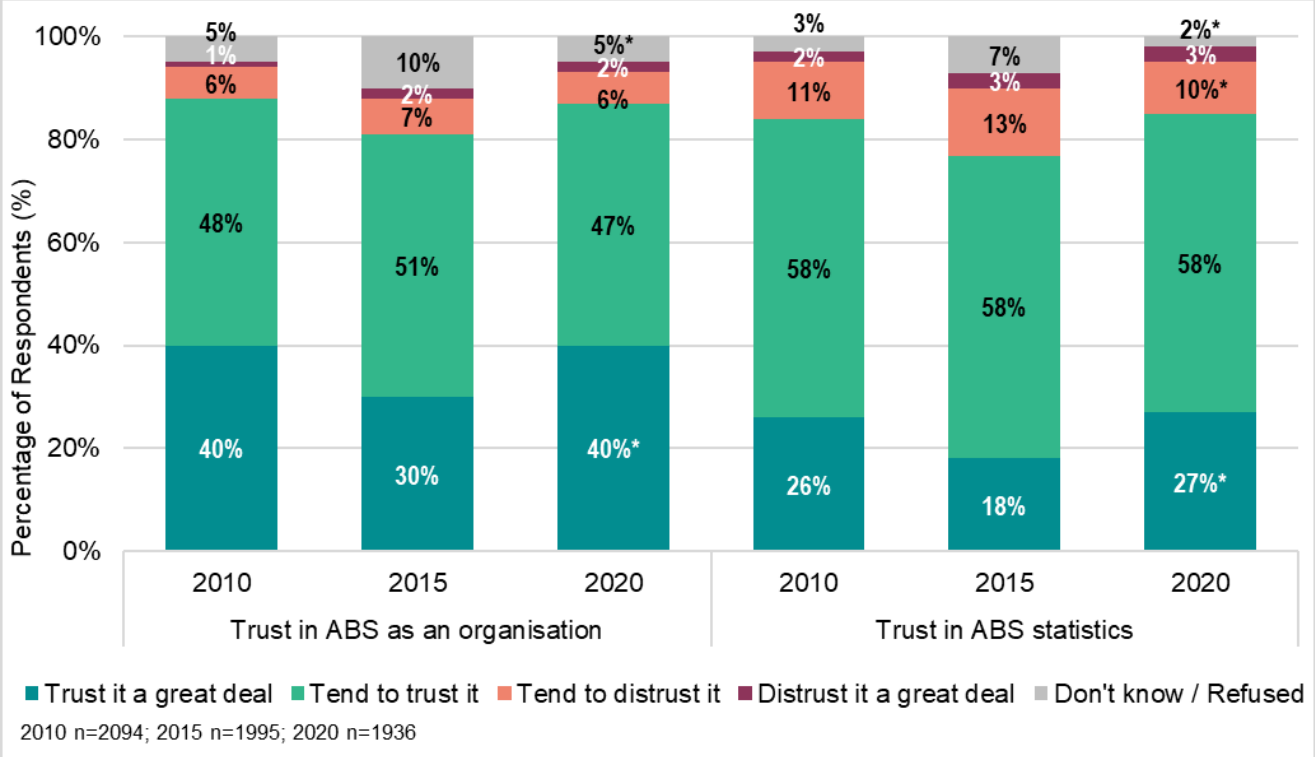
Base: All respondents (n=2,179)

3.4 COMPARISON WITH THE 2015 CTASS

There was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents in the general community who said they trust the ABS as an organisation ‘a great deal’, from 30% in 2015 to 40% in 2020. There was a significant decline in the proportion of respondents who said ‘don’t know or refused’ (5%, down from 10% in 2015).

In 2020, there was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents indicating that they trust ABS statistics ‘a great deal’ (27%, up from 18% in 2015). Conversely, there was a significant reduction in the proportion of respondents who said that they distrust the statistics produced by the ABS (13%, down from 16% in 2015).

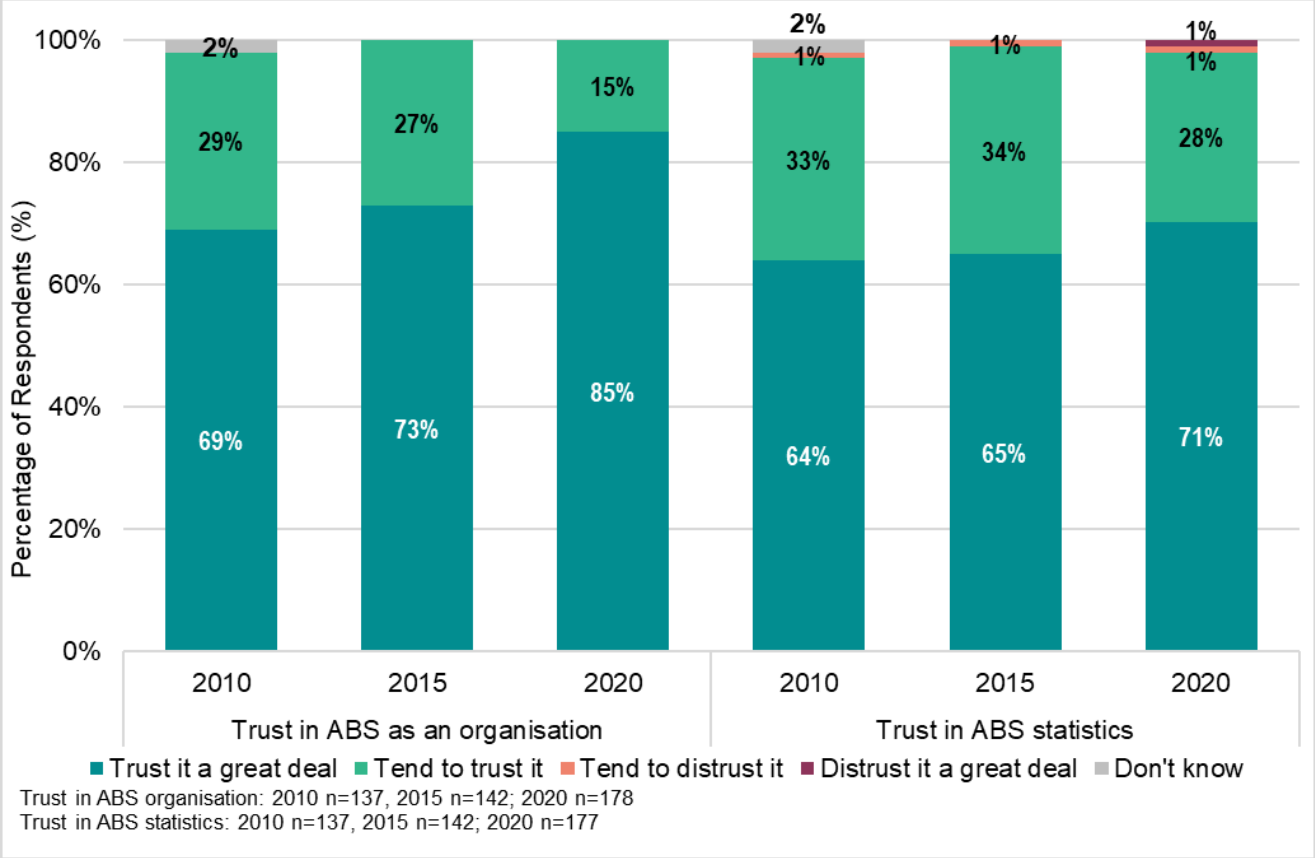
Figure 12. General Community - Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics, 2010, 2015 and 2020



Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS. 2010 (n=2,094); 2015 (n=1,995); 2020 (n=1,936)
Asterisks (*) in chart denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

Trust among informed users has remained unchanged since 2015, with all users (in both survey years) indicating that they trust the ABS as an organisation (100%). Similarly, trust in ABS statistics in this sample has remained unchanged since 2015 (99%).

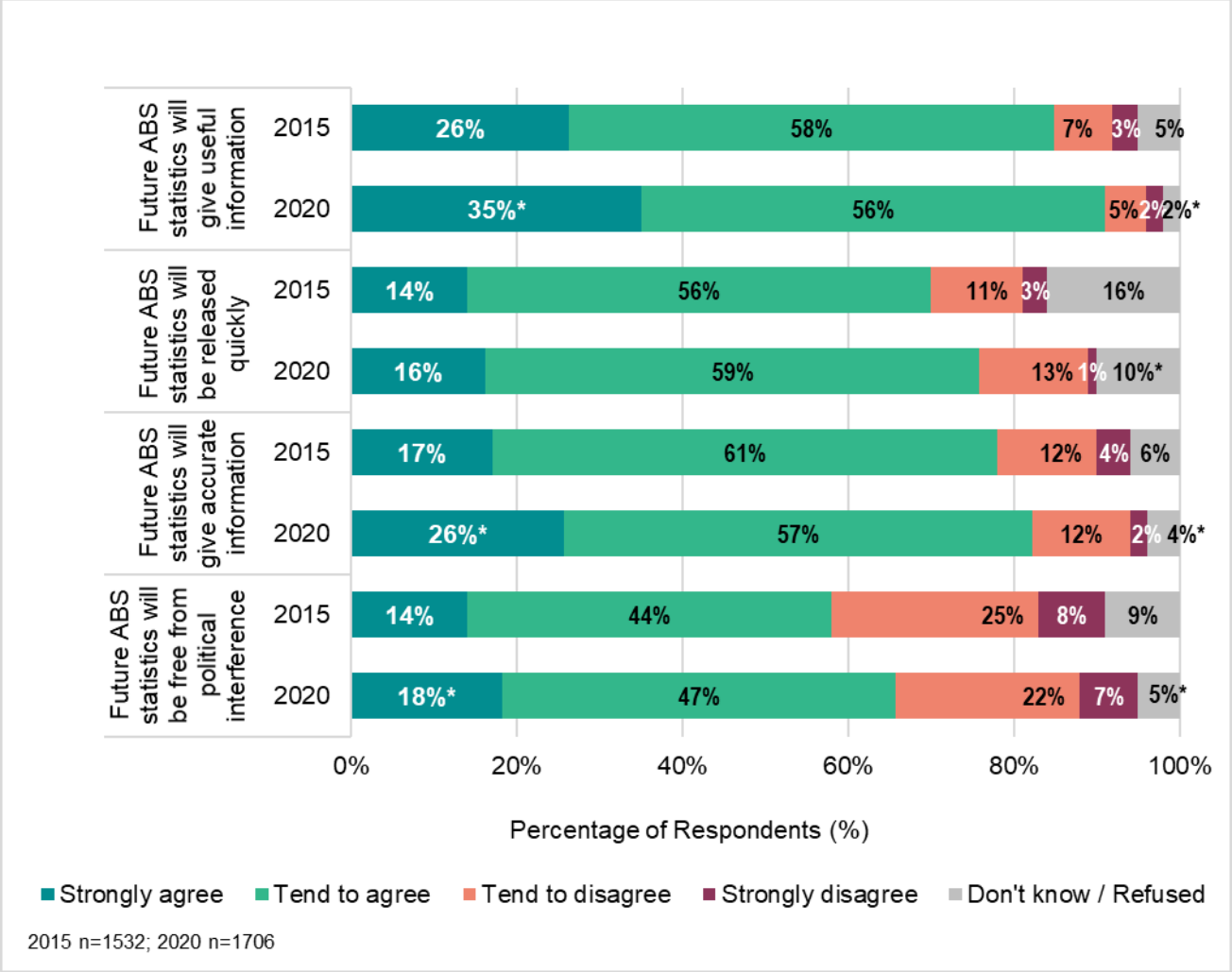
Figure 13. Informed Users - Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics, 2010, 2015 and 2020



Respondents were asked to think about future ABS statistics. As shown in Figure 14, there was a significant increase in the proportion of general community respondents strongly agreeing that future ABS statistics will give useful information (35%, up from 26% in 2015); give accurate information (26%, up from 17% in 2015) and be free from political interference (18%, up from 14% in 2015).

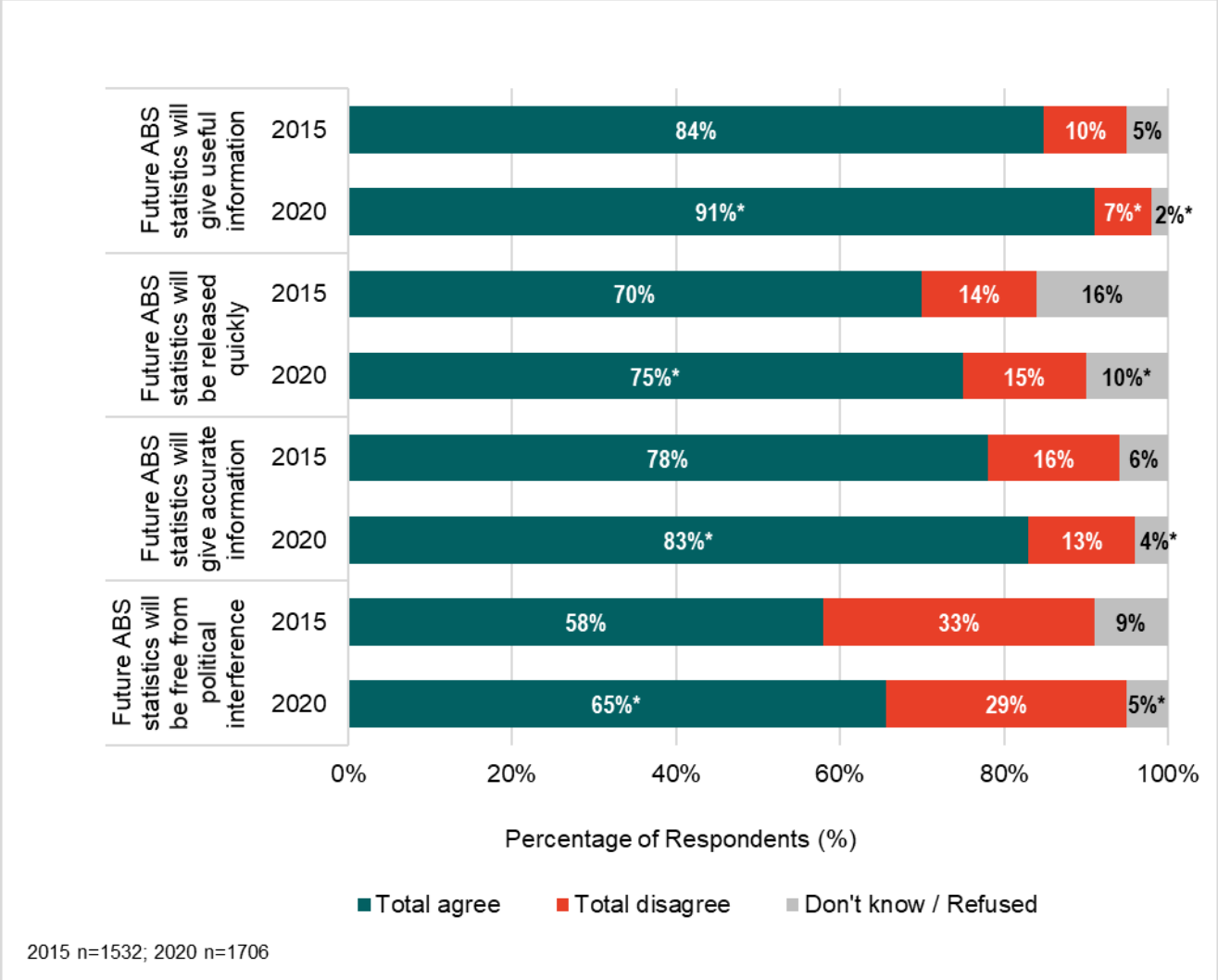
The full results are shown in Figure 14 and the overall agreement and disagreement is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 14. Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics among the general community, 2015 and 2020



Base: Respondents who were familiar with ABS statistics. 2015 (n=1,532); 2020 (n=1,706)
Asterisks (*) in chart denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

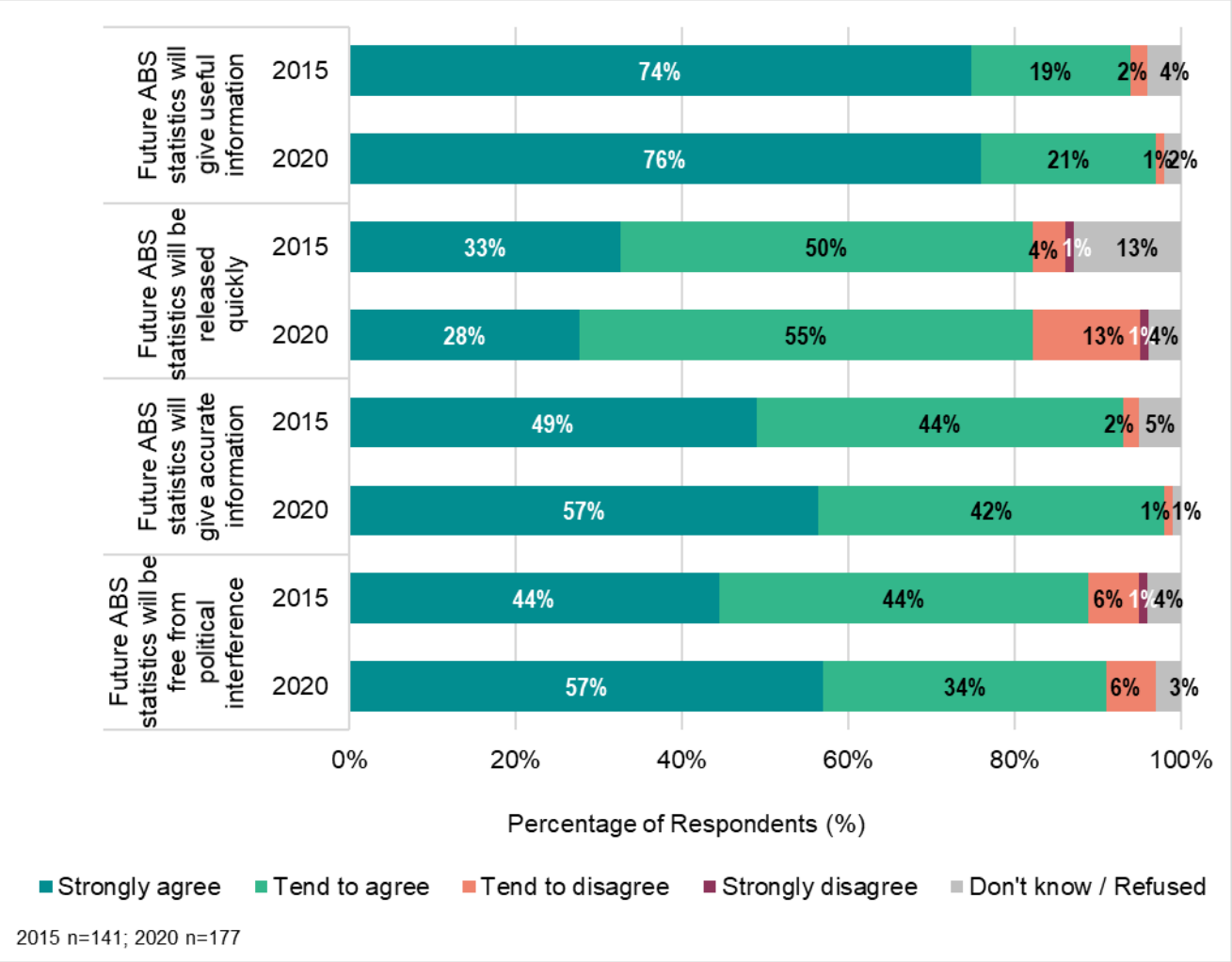
Figure 15. Overall agreement and disagreement with statements about future ABS statistics among the general community, 2015 and 2020



Base: Respondents who were familiar with ABS statistics. 2015 (n=1,532); 2020 (n=1,706)
Asterisks (*) in chart denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

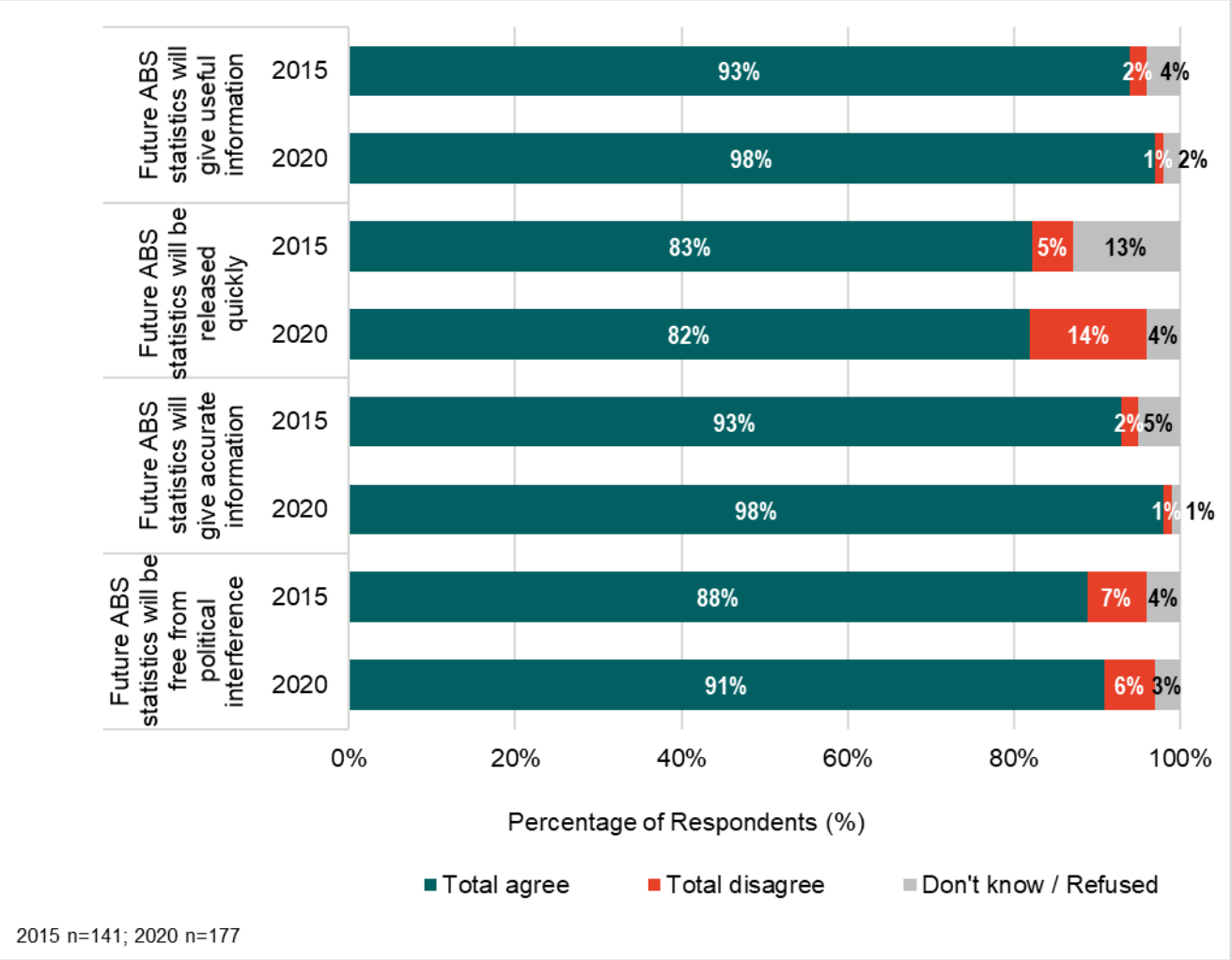
Informed users were also asked to think about future ABS statistics. There was a slight increase in the proportion of users agreeing that future ABS statistics will give useful information (98%, up from 93% in 2015); give accurate information (98%, up from 93% in 2015) and freedom from political interference (91%, up from 88% in 2015). The full results are shown in Figure 16 and the overall agreement and disagreement is shown in Figure 17.

Figure 16. Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics among informed users, 2015 and 2020



Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics. 2015 (n=141); 2020 (n=177)

Figure 17. Overall agreement and disagreement with statements about future ABS statistics among informed users, 2015 and 2020



Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics. 2015 (n=141); 2020 (n=177)

4 RESULTS TABLES

Table 3. General Community – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	40%	47%	6%	2%	5%
Trust in ABS statistics	27%	58%	10%	3%	2%

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Table 4. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Trust in ABS statistics	71%	28%	1%	1%	0%

Trust in the ABS as an organisation. Base: All respondents (n=178)
Trust in ABS statistics. Base (n=177). Note: One person said they did not use ABS statistics.

Table 5. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics by academics

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	86%	14%	0%	0%	0%
Trust in ABS statistics	72%	27%	1%	1%	0%

Trust in the ABS as an organisation. Base: Academics (n=166);
Trust in ABS statistics. Base (n=165). Note: One person said they did not use ABS statistics.

Table 6. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics by journalists/economists

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Trust in ABS statistics	58%	42%	0%	0%	0%

Base: Journalists/economists (n=12). Note: Small sample size – these results should be treated with caution.

Table 7. General Community – Trust in ABS as an organisation by SES

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
High SES	50%	42%	5%	1%	2%
Medium SES	38%	51%	5%	2%	4%
Low SES	32%	48%	8%	2%	10%

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Table 8. General Community – Trust in ABS statistics by SES

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
High SES	40%	52%	7%	1%	0%
Medium SES	24%	62%	10%	3%	2%
Low SES	20%	59%	15%	3%	3%

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Table 9. General Community – Trust in ABS as an organisation by knowledge of the ABS

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Know it well	63%	29%	7%	1%	0%
Know it somewhat	47%	47%	4%	1%	2%
Know a little bit	33%	54%	7%	2%	4%
Only heard of the name	17%	52%	6%	2%	23%

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Table 10. General Community – Trust in ABS statistics by knowledge of the ABS

	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Know it well	49%	42%	7%	2%	0%
Know it somewhat	31%	57%	8%	2%	1%
Know a little bit	20%	63%	13%	3%	1%
Only heard of the name	15%	64%	13%	2%	5%

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS (n=1,936)

Table 11. General Community – Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics

	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	35%	56%	5%	2%	2%
Released quickly	16%	59%	13%	1%	10%
Accurate information	26%	57%	12%	2%	4%
Free from political interference	18%	47%	22%	7%	5%

Base: Respondents who were familiar with ABS statistics (n=1,706)

Table 12. Informed Users – Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics

	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	76%	21%	1%	0%	2%
Released quickly	28%	55%	13%	1%	4%
Accurate information	57%	42%	1%	0%	1%
Free from political interference	57%	34%	6%	0%	3%

Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics (n=177)

Table 13. General Community – Providing information to the ABS

	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know/ refused %
Comfortable providing information to the ABS	26%	44%	17%	11%	2%
ABS only collects information for statistical purposes	26%	49%	14%	5%	5%
ABS keeps people's personal information safe	23%	50%	15%	7%	5%

Base: All respondents (n=2,179)

Table 14. General Community – Overall level of agreement and disagreement about providing information to the ABS

	Total agree (strongly and tend to) %	Total disagree (tend to and strongly) %	Don't know/ refused %
Comfortable providing information to the ABS	70%	28%	2%
ABS only collects information for statistical purposes	76%	20%	5%
ABS keeps people's personal information safe	73%	22%	5%

Base: All respondents (n=2,179)

Table 15. General Community – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics, 2010, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	2010	40%	48%	6%	1%	5%
	2015	30%	51%	7%	2%	10%
	2020	40%*	47%	6%	2%	5%*
Trust in ABS statistics	2010	26%	58%	11%	2%	3%
	2015	18%	58%	13%	3%	7%
	2020	27%*	58%	10%*	3%	2%*

Base: Respondents who had heard of the ABS. 2010 (n=2,094); 2015 (n=1,995); 2020 (n=1,936)
Asterisks (*) in chart denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

Table 16. Informed Users – Trust in ABS as an organisation compared to trust in ABS statistics, 2010, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Trust it a great deal %	Tend to trust %	Tend to distrust it %	Distrust it a great deal %	Don't know/ refused %
Trust in the ABS as an organisation	2010	69%	29%	0%	0%	2%
	2015	73%	27%	0%	0%	0%
	2020	85%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Trust in ABS statistics	2010	64%	33%	1%	0%	2%
	2015	65%	34%	1%	0%	0%
	2020	71%	28%	1%	1%	0%

Trust in ABS as an organisation. Base: All respondents. 2010 (n=137); 2015 (n=142); 2020 (n=178)
Trust in ABS statistics. Base: 2010 (n=137); 2015 (n=142); 2020 (n=177). Note: one person said they did not use ABS statistics in 2020.

Table 17. General Community – Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	2015	26%	58%	7%	3%	5%
	2020	35%*	56%	5%	2%	2%*
Released quickly	2015	14%	56%	11%	3%	16%
	2020	16%	59%	13%	1%	10%*
Accurate information	2015	17%	61%	12%	4%	6%
	2020	26%*	57%	12%	2%	4%*
Free from political interference	2015	14%	44%	25%	8%	9%
	2020	18%*	47%	22%	7%	5%*

Base: Familiar with ABS statistics 2015 (n=1,532); 2020 (n=1,706)
Asterisks (*) in table denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

Table 18. General Community – Overall agreement and disagreement with statements about future ABS statistics, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Total agree (strongly and tend to) %	Total disagree (tend to and strongly) %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	2015	84%	10%	5%
	2020	91%*	7%*	2%*
Released quickly	2015	70%	14%	16%
	2020	75%*	15%	10%*
Accurate information	2015	78%	16%	6%
	2020	83%*	13%	4%*
Free from political interference	2015	58%	33%	9%
	2020	65%*	29%	5%*

Base: Familiar with ABS statistics 2015 (n=1,532); 2020 (n=1,706)
Asterisks (*) in table denotes a statistically significant difference to the 2015 result

Table 19. Informed Users – Agreement with statements about future ABS statistics, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	2015	74%	19%	2%	0%	4%
	2020	76%	21%	1%	0%	2%
Released quickly	2015	33%	50%	4%	1%	13%
	2020	28%	55%	13%	1%	4%
Accurate information	2015	49%	44%	2%	0%	5%
	2020	57%	42%	1%	0%	1%
Free from political interference	2015	44%	44%	6%	1%	4%
	2020	57%	34%	6%	0%	3%

Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics. 2015 (n=141); 2020 (n=177)

Table 20. Informed Users – Overall agreement and disagreement with statements about future ABS statistics, 2015 and 2020

	Year	Total agree (strongly and tend to) %	Total disagree (tend to and strongly) %	Don't know/ refused %
Usefulness of information	2015	93%	2%	4%
	2020	98%	1%	2%
Released quickly	2015	83%	5%	13%
	2020	82%	14%	4%
Accurate information	2015	93%	2%	5%
	2020	98%	1%	1%
Free from political interference	2015	88%	7%	4%
	2020	91%	6%	3%

Base: Respondents who had heard and used ABS statistics. 2015 (n=141); 2020 (n=177)