

<b>Key Policy in discussion</b>	<b>Integrity, Gender and the Just Use of Power</b>
<b>Portfolio and or agency</b>	<b>Multiple</b>
<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>21 March 2022</b>
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### **Executive Summary**

The annual **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people. Australia still ranks relatively highly on the [CPI](#), but our score has dropped from 85 out of 100 to 73 over the last decade, putting us below many comparator nations.

When governments prioritise their own and insider outcomes, it is very likely to be at the expense of women (among other outsider groups) and [noticed by women](#). We focus here on the need for a suite of transparency and accountability measures around women's access to Commonwealth resources and decision-making, including a meaningful ICAC. In our analysis we emphasise the gender responsive budgeting as a critical transparency measure that should be applied to the allocation of all Commonwealth resources.

We also focus on the Commonwealth's broader national accountability for women's access to decision-making in public life and the unfinished business of *Respect@Work* and *Setting the Standard* reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission. All of these go to the issue of integrity and the question of whether the government embodies the principles of equality, justice and fairness.

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### **Key Questions of concern that need to be addressed**

- 1. Will your government commit to introduce a substantive gender responsive budgeting approach across government and an independent Women's Budget Statement?**
- 2. How will your government progress the unfinished business of *Respect@Work* and *Setting the Standard* reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission?**

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The National Foundation for Australian Women is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. NFAW is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations.

Authorised by the National Foundation for Australian Women, Canberra: President Ms Jane Madden.

3. **How will your government ensure Indigenous women's voices drive and determine policy that affects Indigenous women? Will your government work with Indigenous women to develop a separate national Action Plan to End Violence Against Indigenous Women?**
4. **What will your government do to ensure women are equally represented in your party, in Parliament and in leadership positions across society?**
5. **How will a federal Anti-Corruption Commission introduced by your government hold the government to account and prioritise the broader public interest?**

### **Details about this policy**

#### **1. ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

What Australia's dropping CPI ranking reflects is generally [soft corruption](#), which has 'the same ends as corrupt conduct — the securing of private advantage at the expense of the public interest and proper process ... but through entirely legal means, because it is always about clever exploitation of the rules rather than breaking them'. Public perception of soft corruption is [driven by reports](#) of grants programs that bend or ignore rules, political pork-barrelling, ongoing insider access to govt decision-making, cronyism and nepotism in appointments, and repeated failures of public accountability and transparency.

Initial responses to [COVID showcased](#) how crises exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly in access to public services and financial resources. This may explain why Australian women are more [concerned than men](#) by soft corruption. Women were more likely to lose jobs and also more likely to be excluded from JobKeeper support; industry support for child care was first to be revoked; women had to [trade increased job insecurity for additional unpaid work](#) at home. As publicly funded caring services (child care, aged care, health care) [staffed largely by women](#) were stretched to breaking, [the 2020 Budget targeted recovery resources to male-dominated industries](#).

Budget decisions and budget winners and losers are not gender-neutral any more than tax is neutral. Tax rules will have [different impacts](#) on women and men, since they work different hours in paid and unpaid work and experience, on average, a 30% earnings gap. When the 2020 Budget [targeted massive tax relief](#) to the higher paid, it favoured male-dominated earners. When superannuation breaks advantage large accounts, they favour male-dominated earners. High effective marginal tax rates disadvantage women. When budget expenditure is withheld from public housing, social infrastructure and social services, women are disproportionately affected.

Women's Budget Statements show these gendered differentials across all public expenditure. NFAW, which since 2014 has prepared a [Gender Lens on the Budget](#), has long argued that the independent Parliamentary Budget Office should be funded to provide such analysis. The government document that went by the name of a WBS in the [2021 Budget](#) analysed the impact on women of only [0.14%](#) of outlays over a four-year period, selecting women-focussed policies, rather than analysing the whole of the expenditure.

[Accountability mechanisms like the WBS are important where the withdrawal or allocation of resources affects different groups differently](#). Women are injured by the increased use of public monies to secure incumbent power through [electorally skewed multibillion dollar grants decisions](#) and election [pork barrels](#) while care industries remain underfunded and care work undervalued. Women are also injured when accountability bodies such as the [Audit Office](#) the [Australian Human rights Commission](#) and the [ABC](#) are attacked and defunded after raising integrity concerns. It is unsurprising that more women than men support a federal [Integrity Commission](#) (70% compared to 65%) -- their interests are more likely to suffer without it.

## 2. ADDRESSING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Public attention to gender equality and the ongoing scourge of gender-based violence has exploded over the last year. Matching this attention is the ongoing concern that the government does not fully comprehend the issues.

Two in three respondents in the latest [Essential poll](#) believe the government has shown more interest in protecting its political interests than the interests of women who have made rape and sexual assault allegations. The government has been seen to [prefer to protect senior Cabinet members](#) rather than to effectively respond to allegations of violence and harassment against them, and to minimise attention to these issues. The Government has run into trouble for seeming to minimise the issue, with the Prime Minister [lacerated](#) for his response to the 2021 March for Justice, for example.

There have been important landmark reports handed down in relation to [sexual harassment at work](#) and sexual violence in [Parliament House](#) and calls for a specific National Action Plan to end violence against [Indigenous women](#).

The Government's response has been seen as partial and fragmentary, while claiming to be comprehensive.

To many, it feels like little more than spin. For example, the government's response to the landmark [Respect@Work report](#) from the Australian Human Rights Commission was delivered in 2020 to Attorney General Porter where it sat unattended for over a year. When the government could no longer be seen to ignore it, its response was to divide the recommendations into stages and across various agencies and, arguably, to reduce the scope of the response at each step. The most important recommendations, to introduce a [positive obligation](#) on employers to deliver a safe workplace free from harassment and to provide the Australian Human Rights Commission with the powers to investigate breaches of that obligation directly and on its own motion, have been deferred and minimised.

It feels like the government has been dragged to the table to respond effectively to ongoing gender inequality and gender-based violence. The government response feels like it is too little, too late, and the [government is not able to comprehend](#) the experience of Australian women. Part of this may be because women are underrepresented in the government, discussed below.

## 3. ACCESS TO DECISION-MAKING AS LEGISLATORS AND CITIZENS

The more inclusive a government is, that is, the more representative it is of the wider community including women and minority groups, the more likely it is to make decisions in the broader interest. In 2021, Australia ranked a low [54<sup>th</sup> for political empowerment](#) on the Global Gender Gap Index (p. 103). As of [19 November 2021](#), women made up 26.7% of Liberal, 48.9% of Labor, 28.6% of National Party and 60% of Green parliamentarians.

Coalition women have been excluded from political participation on the [ground of merit-based decision-making](#) by mainly male political powerbrokers. Many of these are the same politicians who make non-merit appointments of cronies to rubber-stamp advisory bodies such as the [Covid](#)

[Commission](#), or bodies such as the [Administrative Appeals Tribunal](#) and the [Human Rights Commission](#).

The work of these inside appointees has real world implications for political outsiders such as victims of discrimination and recipients of social security and child support, mainly women, who are struggling with [an increasingly punitive and automated system](#).

Government outsiders find it more difficult to find out what is going on and to make themselves heard when they do.

Cabinet matters have generally been confidential, but this has been extended to [cabinet preparatory matters](#), to [‘national cabinet’ matters](#), to commercial-in confidence matters, to [on water matters](#), to an increasing range of [freedom of information](#) matters. The 2020–21 budget set a [new record](#) for items deemed not for publication. [Gag clauses have been attached to federal funds since the 1990s](#), silencing critical commentary by those contracted to oversee government programs. Governments are also using a [range of funding levers](#) around tax deductible status to silence non-government organisations.

Loss of transparency and accountability comes with a price. It costs outsider groups including women a role in decision-making and a standing in the decisions that are made. More broadly, it widens the gap between insiders and outsiders and undermines public trust in democracy.