

Polling - Christmas waste 2024

Nina Gbor
Alexia Adhikari
December 2024

INTRODUCTION

Giving and receiving gifts is one of the most cherished Christmas traditions. The polling conducted for this report shows that more than three in four Australians (77%) like buying gifts for people at Christmas. However, more than half (52%) would prefer it if people did not buy them gifts for them at Christmas. One quarter of Australians (27%) expect to receive Christmas presents that they will never use or wear. We estimate the value of these unwanted gifts, many of which will end up as landfill waste, at over \$1 billion.¹ This is an increase on the estimated \$921 million spent on unused gifts in 2023.² Despite this, our polling shows that almost half of Australians (47%) don't think about how the gifts they buy will eventually be disposed of.

In addition to increased spending on gifts, seven in 10 Australians (70%) spend more on food/grocery bills during the Christmas period. The good news is that three in four Australians (75%) keep leftover food from Christmas meals to eat another time, while only 7% throw it out.

Our polling results also show that a greater number of Australians buy gift wrapping paper (69%) than gift bags (52%). However, gift bags are more likely to be reused (65% of those who use gift bags reuse them) than wrapping paper (24% of those who use wrapping paper reuse it).

Australia's throwaway culture, and the ubiquity of single use materials means that Australia generates nearly 76 million tonnes of waste annually.³ As the most popular holiday, and one that has become commercialised in more recent times, waste levels – of gifts, trees, food, drink, plastic, wrapping paper and other holiday accoutrements –

¹ See Discussion and calculations section.

² Gbor and Walters (2023) *Christmas waste 2023*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/christmas-waste-2023/>

³ DCCEEW (2022) *Australia's latest waste figures in new report*, <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/plibersek/media-releases/australias-latest-waste-figures-new-report>

tend to spike during Christmas. One study found that Christmas consumption is responsible for 5.5% of the United Kingdom's total annual carbon footprint.⁴

Reducing waste at Christmas would not only be beneficial for the environment, it would also help Australians feeling the pinch of the cost-of-living crisis.⁵ Embracing the principles of a circular economy over the linear take-make-waste model could help bring a deeper meaning to Christmas.

⁴ Haq et al (2007) "The Carbon Cost of Christmas", *Stockholm Environment Institute*, <http://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1088.4808>

⁵ Grudnoff (2024) *The debate about inflation, interest rates, and the cost of living is broken*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/the-debate-about-inflation-interest-rates-and-the-cost-of-living-is-broken/>

POLLING

Gift giving

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that they like buying gifts for people at Christmas.

- 77% of Australians agree that they like buying gifts for people, only 21% disagree.

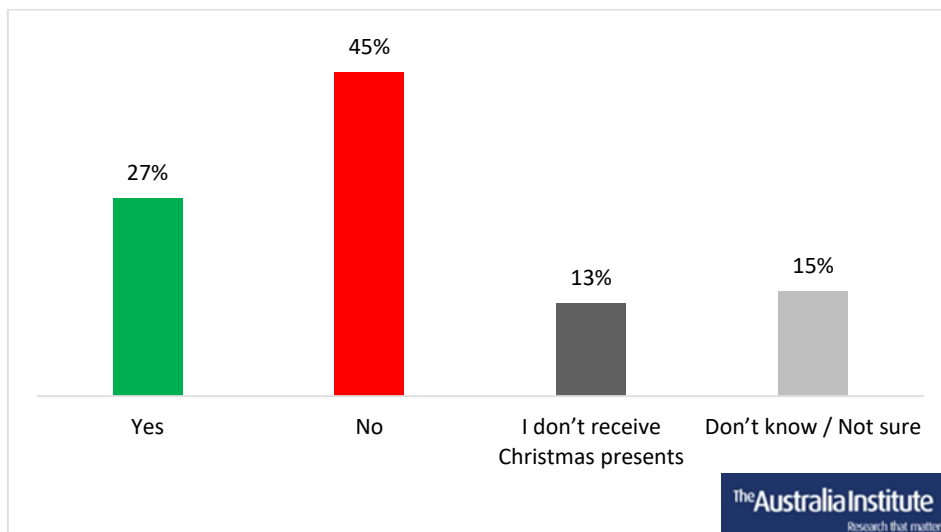
Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that they would prefer it if people did not buy them gifts at Christmas.

- One in two Australians (52%) agree that they would prefer it if people did not buy them gifts, while 43% disagree.

Respondents were asked if they expected to get Christmas presents this year that they will never use or wear.

- Over one quarter of Australians (27%) expect to get Christmas presents that they will never use or wear, while 45% do not.

Figure 1: Expectation of receiving a Christmas present I will not use or wear

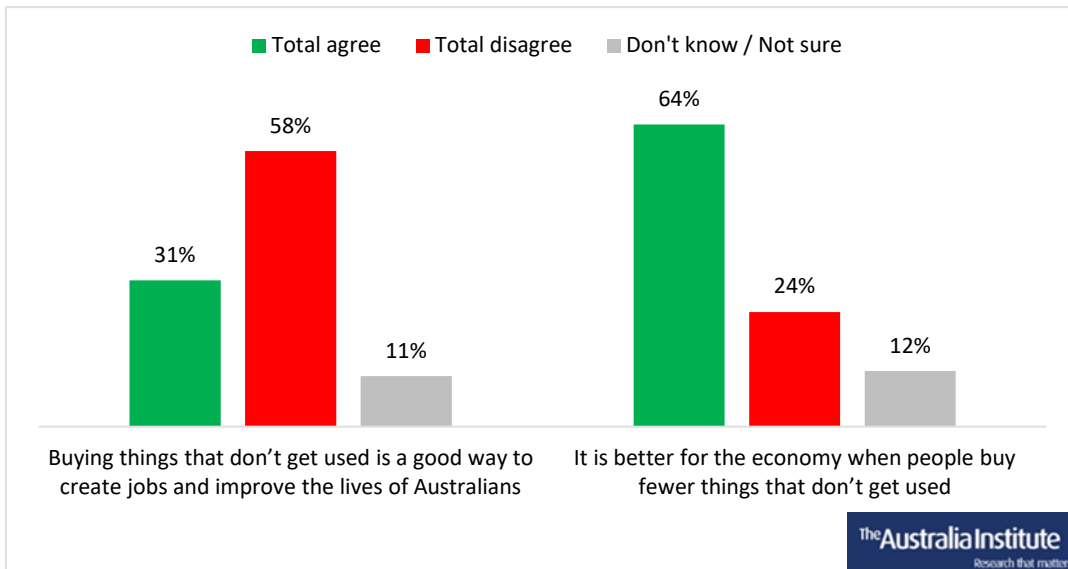


Respondents were asked about the economic impacts of present giving.

- Nearly three in five Australians (58%) disagree with the statement that 'buying things that don't get used is a good way to create jobs and improve the lives of Australians' (31% agree).

- 64% of Australians agree with the statement that ‘it is better for the economy when people buy fewer things that don’t get used’ (24% disagree).

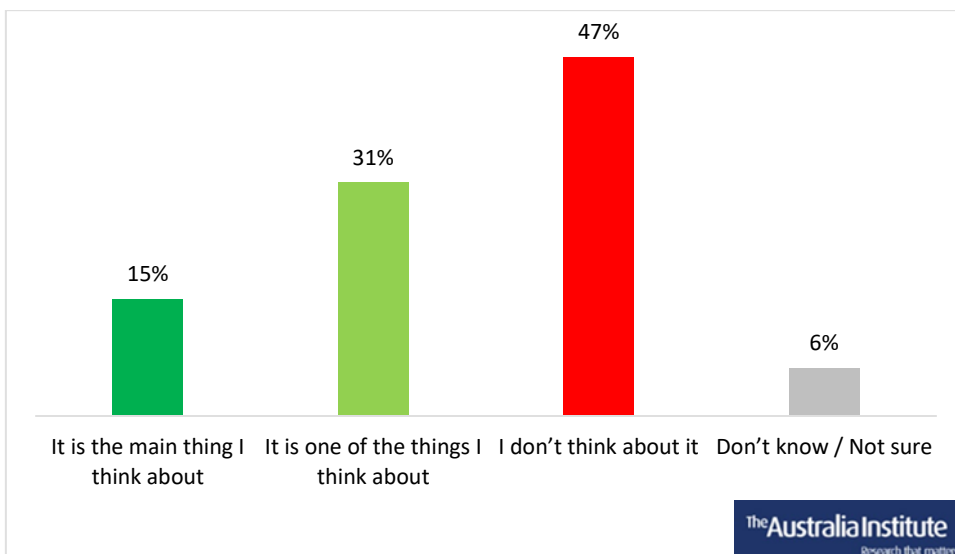
Figure 2: Economic impacts of unused purchases



Respondents were asked if, when purchasing gifts for others, how much they account for how those gifts would eventually be disposed of.

- 47% of Australians don’t think about how the gifts they purchase will eventually be disposed of.
 - For 15% of Australians, eventual gift disposal is the main thing they think about.
 - For three in 10 (31%) Australians, it is one of the things they think about.

Figure 3: Degree to which eventual gift disposal is thought about



Gift bags and wrapping paper usage

Respondents were asked how many gift bags they buy during Christmas.

- More than half of Australians (52%) buy gift bags during Christmas
- 44% buy between one to six gift bags, and 9% buy seven or more gift bags.
- 40% of Australians do not buy gift bags during Christmas time.

Respondents were asked what they do with used gift bags.

- Two in three (65%) Australians re-use gift bags.
- 12% of Australians do not use or receive gift bags.

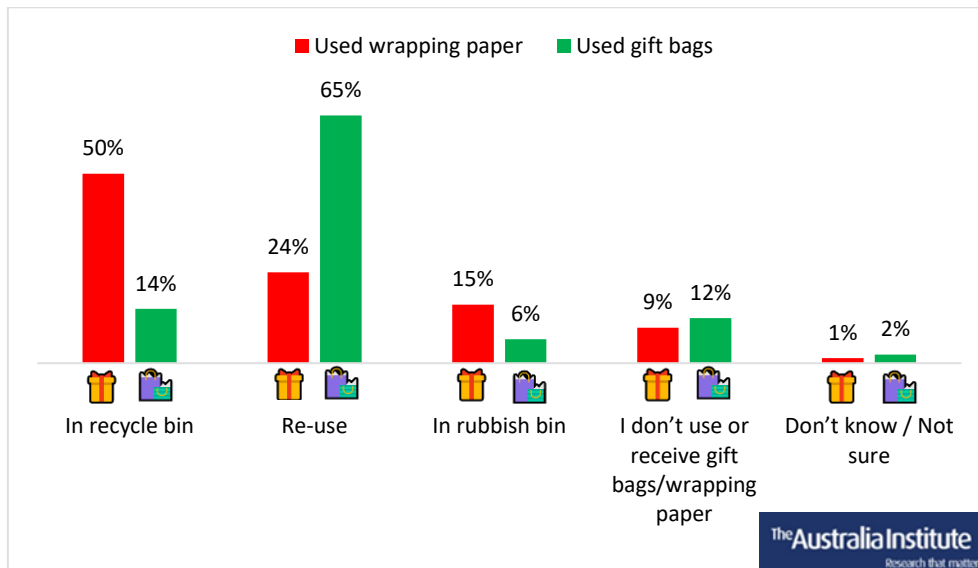
Respondents were asked how much gift wrapping paper they buy during Christmas.

- Most Australians buy between one and six metres of wrapping paper during Christmas (53%), with 15% buying seven metres or more. One in five (22%) do not buy any.

Respondents were asked what they do with used gift wrapping paper.

- One in two Australians (50%) put used gift wrapping paper in the recycle bin, 24% re-use it, and 15% put it in the rubbish bin.

Figure 4: Re-use and disposal of gift bags and wrapping paper

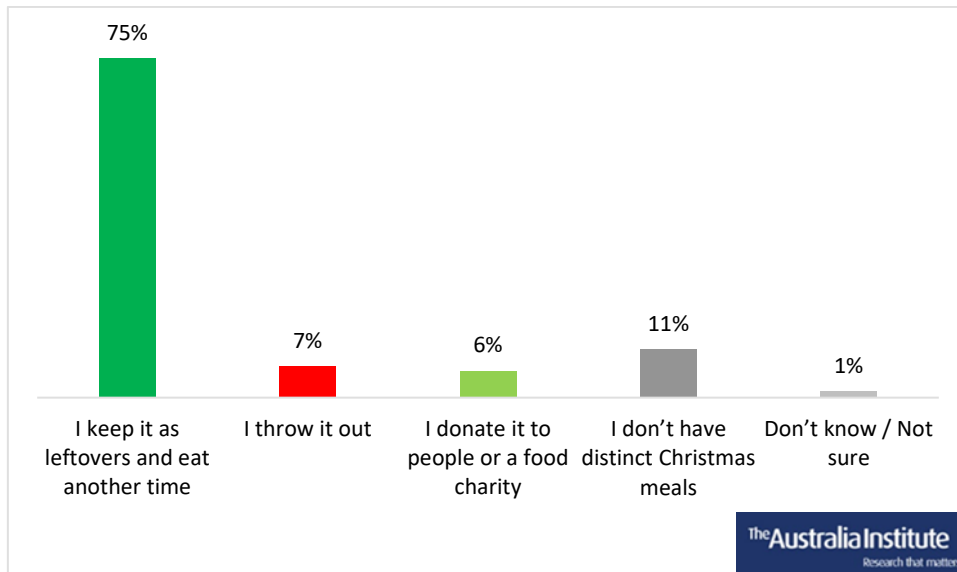


Spending and consumption at Christmas time

Respondents were asked what they do with any leftover food items from Christmas meals.

- Three in four Australians (75%) keep leftover food from Christmas meals to eat another time.
- 7% of Australians throw out leftover food from Christmas meals.
- 11% of Australians do not have distinct Christmas meals.

Figure 5: What do you do with leftover food from Christmas meals?



Respondents were asked if they spend more money on food/grocery bills during the Christmas period.

- Seven in 10 Australians (70%) spend more of food/grocery bills during the Christmas period. Nearly half (46%) spend up to \$500 more.
 - 16% spend between \$500 to \$1,000 more, and 8% spend more than \$1,000 more.
- One in four Australians (24%) do not spend more money on food/grocery bills during Christmas time.

Discussion and calculations

Since we poll adults only, there is a population that receives presents that isn't captured in the polling on whether people would prefer not to receive presents. For example, a parent who likes buying presents for their kids but doesn't like receiving presents would show up as 100% like buying presents, 0% like receiving presents – but all the presents would still be going to people who want to receive them.

We are also not able to account for the fact that some people may receive more presents (or more valuable presents) than others. It may be that those who are excited by presents get the majority of presents, while those who would prefer not to get presents get a smaller number.

To calculate the estimated value of unused and unwanted Christmas gifts presented in the Key Results, first we calculate the value of all gifts. This is done by multiplying the adult population⁶ by the average spend per person on gifts.⁷ An adult population of 20.9 million multiplied by the average spend per person of \$468 gives us a total value of gifts of \$9.8 billion. For the purposes of our calculations, we assume that those under the age of 18 will receive unused gifts in the same proportion as adults, but that only adults buy gifts.

We then calculate the proportion of people that will receive gifts that go unused. The survey results show that 27% of people indicated they expect to get gifts that they would not use or wear. But an additional 15% were unsure. We have assumed half of those who are unsure will end up receiving gifts that are unused. 7.5% (half of 15%) is added to the 27% to get 34.5% of people who will receive gifts that are unused. We then take 34.5% of the total value of all gifts (\$9.8 billion) to get the value of gifts going to people who receive gifts that are unused. This is \$3.4 billion.

But not all the gifts received by this group will be unused. Some will be used, and some will be unused. We have assumed that on average 30% of the gifts by value will be unused. This gives us the total value of gifts that are unused, 30% of \$3.4 billion, or \$1.01 billion.

⁶ Population estimates calculated from Table 59 'Estimated Resident Population By Single Year Of Age, Australia' June 2023 estimates for ages 18 to 100 and over, ABS (2024) *National, state and territory population, latest release 19 September 2024*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024>

⁷ Pureprofile (2024) *We're beginning to spend again at Christmas: Australians' festive season budgets on the rise but people still seek bargains*, <https://business.pureprofile.com/were-beginning-to-spend-again-at-christmas-australians-festive-season/>

CONCLUSION

While three in four Australians (77%) like buying gifts for people at Christmas time, a majority (52%) would prefer it if people did not buy them gifts. Nearly two in three Australians (64%) agree that it is better for the economy when people buy fewer things that don't get used, but over a quarter (27%) expect to receive a gift they will never wear or use. Overall, we estimate that more than \$1 billion in unwanted gifts will be given this Christmas, much of which will end up as waste in landfill.

Gift packaging – wrapping paper and gift bags – also generates high amounts of holiday waste. Our survey shows 69% of Australians purchase gift wrap and 52% purchase gift bags. Those who buy gift bags are more likely to reuse them (65%), as compared to those who buy gift wrapping paper (24%). This suggests that using gift bags instead of gift wrapping paper could help reduce Christmas waste.

In the Australia Institute's 2023 Christmas waste polling survey, out of 61% of Australians who had a Christmas tree in 2022, 85% planned to reuse it again in 2023.⁸ This positive result showed that Australians are aware of the possibilities of reuse and capable of reusing things bought at Christmas time.

Surprising people with gifts has become a Christmas ritual. But if Australians asked each other what they want for Christmas, instead of guessing, then people would receive fewer unwanted gifts and less waste would go to landfill. Australians would also save money, which is especially important in a cost-of-living crisis.

⁸ Gbor and Walters (2023) *Christmas Waste 2023*

APPENDIX

Method

Short disclosure statement

Panel provider	Dynata
Research company	The Australia Institute
Client commissioning the research	NA
Fieldwork dates	13 November 2024 to 15 November 2024
Mode of data collection	Online recruited from research panel
Target population	Australian adults aged 18+
Sample size	1,009
Australian Polling Council compliant	Yes
Voting intention published	No
Long disclosure statement	See below

Long disclosure statement

Effective sample size after weighting applied	982.94
Margin of error associated with effective sample size	±3%
Variables used in weighting	Age, gender, state/territory based on Australian Bureau of Statistics “National, state and territory population” data
Gender identity categorisation	Those who answered the gender identity question as “Non-binary”, “I use a different term”, or “Prefer not to answer” had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability
Weighting method used	Raking method
Full question text, responses categories and randomisation	See below
Source of online sample	Dynata’s online panel
Positioning of voting intention questions in questionnaire	Immediately after demographics, before policy questions
How were undecided voters handled?	Respondents who answered “Don’t know / Not sure” for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs
Method of calculating 2PP	NA
Voting intention categorisation	Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs
Location results	Results are shown only for larger states



**Australian
Polling Council
Quality Mark**

Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

Statements were presented in random order.

“I like buying gifts for people at Christmas.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	31%	26%	36%	28%	30%	31%	31%
Agree	46%	49%	43%	50%	50%	42%	40%
Disagree	13%	14%	11%	11%	14%	13%	12%
Strongly disagree	8%	9%	8%	9%	5%	11%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	31%	29%	35%	33%	23%	24%
Agree	46%	48%	46%	41%	36%	50%
Disagree	13%	13%	10%	15%	17%	14%
Strongly disagree	8%	9%	6%	8%	19%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	2%	2%	3%	3%	5%	0%

“I would prefer it if people did not buy me gifts at Christmas.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	22%	24%	20%	23%	21%	23%	22%
Agree	30%	33%	27%	31%	29%	29%	37%
Disagree	29%	28%	31%	28%	28%	33%	23%
Strongly disagree	13%	11%	16%	12%	15%	13%	12%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	4%	7%	6%	6%	2%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	22%	23%	18%	25%	25%	25%
Agree	30%	30%	33%	20%	35%	30%
Disagree	29%	29%	31%	32%	23%	25%
Strongly disagree	13%	13%	13%	18%	9%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	5%	5%	5%	7%	8%

This year do you expect to get Christmas presents that you will never use or wear?

Response options were presented in random order.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Yes	27%	27%	28%	34%	27%	25%	26%
No	45%	46%	44%	38%	48%	43%	51%
I don't receive Christmas presents	13%	12%	14%	12%	12%	18%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	16%	13%	16%	14%	13%	15%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Yes	27%	28%	26%	36%	18%	25%
No	45%	47%	48%	40%	50%	34%
I don't receive Christmas presents	13%	12%	11%	14%	20%	19%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	13%	16%	11%	12%	21%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following?

Statements were presented in random order.

“Buying things that don't get used is a good way to create jobs and improve the lives of Australians.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	9%	11%	7%	10%	7%	6%	13%
Agree	22%	26%	19%	26%	21%	23%	15%
Disagree	33%	32%	34%	31%	35%	34%	34%
Strongly disagree	25%	22%	28%	25%	27%	28%	24%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	9%	13%	9%	10%	10%	15%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	9%	8%	8%	16%	15%	3%
Agree	22%	21%	27%	23%	14%	13%
Disagree	33%	39%	30%	29%	38%	27%
Strongly disagree	25%	25%	25%	23%	21%	36%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	8%	11%	9%	12%	22%

“It is better for the economy when people buy fewer things that don’t get used.”

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	28%	27%	29%	30%	24%	32%	28%
Agree	36%	34%	37%	38%	36%	36%	40%
Disagree	17%	19%	15%	16%	20%	16%	11%
Strongly disagree	7%	9%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	12%	11%	13%	9%	14%	10%	16%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	28%	30%	26%	33%	31%	21%
Agree	36%	39%	36%	38%	20%	31%
Disagree	17%	16%	19%	14%	18%	17%
Strongly disagree	7%	6%	8%	8%	13%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	12%	9%	12%	6%	17%	25%

When purchasing gifts for others, how much do you account for how those gifts will eventually be disposed of?

Response options were presented in random order.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
It is the main thing I think about	15%	13%	17%	18%	12%	18%	10%
It is one of the things I think about	31%	28%	33%	27%	34%	33%	39%
I don't think about it	47%	52%	43%	49%	48%	42%	45%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
It is the main thing I think about	15%	16%	14%	19%	18%	11%
It is one of the things I think about	31%	35%	26%	44%	13%	26%
I don't think about it	47%	43%	54%	33%	57%	54%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	7%	5%	4%	12%	9%

How many gift bags do you buy during Christmas?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
1-3 bags	23%	23%	23%	25%	24%	23%	16%
4-6 bags	21%	23%	19%	23%	20%	20%	23%
7-10 bags	7%	8%	5%	7%	7%	2%	10%
11 or more bags	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%
None	40%	35%	45%	35%	37%	50%	40%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	10%	6%	7%	9%	4%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
1-3 bags	23%	25%	20%	21%	32%	24%
4-6 bags	21%	20%	26%	26%	4%	6%
7-10 bags	7%	8%	6%	8%	4%	4%
11 or more bags	2%	3%	2%	1%	4%	0%
None	40%	38%	37%	39%	47%	52%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	9%	5%	10%	14%

What do you do with used gift bags?

Response options were presented in random order.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
I put them in the rubbish bin	6%	10%	2%	7%	5%	6%	6%
I put them in the recycle bin	14%	18%	11%	15%	11%	14%	18%
I re-use them	65%	53%	77%	62%	72%	70%	58%
I don't use or receive gift bags	12%	16%	8%	13%	9%	10%	16%
Don't know / Not sure	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
I put them in the rubbish bin	6%	5%	9%	9%	8%	0%
I put them in the recycle bin	14%	13%	17%	14%	17%	10%
I re-use them	65%	69%	64%	60%	60%	69%
I don't use or receive gift bags	12%	13%	9%	14%	9%	19%
Don't know / Not sure	2%	2%	2%	4%	6%	2%

How much gift wrapping paper do you buy during Christmas?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
1-3 metres	25%	25%	25%	25%	24%	28%	25%
4-6 metres	28%	31%	26%	29%	27%	25%	28%
7-10 metres	11%	13%	10%	15%	13%	6%	12%
11 or more metres	4%	3%	5%	5%	3%	5%	4%
None	22%	20%	25%	18%	24%	28%	22%
Don't know / Not sure	9%	8%	9%	8%	9%	7%	8%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
1-3 metres	25%	24%	28%	27%	17%	19%
4-6 metres	28%	28%	32%	30%	28%	13%
7-10 metres	11%	11%	10%	16%	7%	12%
11 or more metres	4%	5%	5%	2%	2%	4%
None	22%	23%	20%	20%	28%	30%
Don't know / Not sure	9%	9%	5%	4%	19%	21%

What do you do with used gift wrapping paper?

Response options were presented in random order.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
I put it in the rubbish bin	15%	17%	14%	15%	15%	14%	17%
I put it in the recycle bin	50%	48%	52%	49%	49%	51%	51%
I re-use it	24%	21%	27%	25%	25%	24%	21%
I don't use or receive gift wrapping paper	9%	12%	7%	10%	8%	10%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
I put it in the rubbish bin	15%	15%	15%	20%	19%	10%
I put it in the recycle bin	50%	49%	49%	45%	58%	57%
I re-use it	24%	26%	23%	25%	16%	23%
I don't use or receive gift wrapping paper	9%	10%	10%	10%	5%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%

What do you do with any leftover food from Christmas meals?

Response options were presented in random order.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
I throw it out	7%	10%	4%	7%	4%	7%	11%
I keep it as leftovers and eat another time	75%	70%	80%	74%	77%	78%	74%
I donate it to people or a food charity	6%	7%	5%	6%	7%	3%	4%
I don't have distinct Christmas meals	11%	12%	9%	11%	10%	11%	11%
Don't know / Not sure	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
I throw it out	7%	4%	8%	13%	13%	5%
I keep it as leftovers and eat another time	75%	80%	73%	61%	80%	80%
I donate it to people or a food charity	6%	5%	7%	10%	2%	2%
I don't have distinct Christmas meals	11%	9%	11%	16%	6%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	3%

Do you spend more money on food/grocery bills during the Christmas period?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Yes, more than \$1,000 more	8%	8%	9%	8%	7%	7%	14%
Yes, around \$500 to \$1,000 more	16%	18%	14%	21%	16%	11%	16%
Yes, up to \$500 more	46%	46%	46%	44%	48%	48%	41%
No	24%	22%	26%	21%	23%	30%	24%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	4%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
Yes, more than \$1,000 more	8%	9%	7%	13%	5%	8%
Yes, around \$500 to \$1,000 more	16%	15%	17%	21%	5%	9%
Yes, up to \$500 more	46%	50%	48%	38%	45%	38%
No	24%	20%	23%	25%	32%	35%
Don't know / Not sure	6%	6%	5%	3%	12%	10%