NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association
Research Brief
November 2024

- Labor's 'new working class' – comprising nurses, midwives, teachers and other public sector workers – were critical to delivering the party government at the 2023 NSW election. Labor achieved gains in electorates with high proportions of public sector workers – as covered by this [ABC post-election analysis](#). This cohort, and the supporting Union *Pay Them What They're Worth* campaign, were central to gains in middle and outer suburban Sydney, such as Camden, Parramatta, Riverstone, Penrith and East Hills. As well as in peri-urban and regional electorates such as Heathcote, Gosford and The Entrance.

- RedBridge conducted a quantitative (online) survey of 1,508 voters across the 20 most marginal Labor-held state seats in NSW, including many of the seats mentioned above (see figure 1). The survey found *overwhelming* support for the NSW nurses and midwives' 15% pay claim – this support existed across demographics and political identifications. 70% of participants support a 15% pay increase, including 71% of Labor voters, 66% of Coalition voters and 90% of Greens voters. Support was higher in the outer suburbs (72%) and regions (75%), and also among those with higher levels of exposure to the health system. See figure 2.

- Support *increased* (80% overall) once respondents were treated messaging around a) the exodus of nurses/midwives from the NSW system due to the pay disparity with other states (e.g. the 18% pay gap for junior nurses/midwives compared with QLD) and b) NSW nurses/midwives not being entitled to two consecutive days off. See figure 3.

- As an indication of the strength of feeling on this issue, 57% of participants with a Coalition vote intention supported nurses/midwives striking for better pay. This rose to 68% among Labor voters and 84% among Greens voters (see figure 4). Support for the nurses/midwives is deep and broad-based.

- Qualitative research by RedBridge has found that outer suburban and regional cohorts have a strong emotional engagement in issues around public sector wages, based in a close identification with these workers (especially nurses) who's efforts they depend upon and who they see as being under-valued. These cohorts then see this under-valuing as being reflective of not just government's attitudes towards these workers, but to the outer-suburban/regional communities that depend on them: *"If you have to fight for every dollar your worth then they don't think highly of you."*

- Given this identification, it is unsurprising that the survey found that NSW Government's management of the nurses/midwives pay claim has important implications for vote intention – both at the state and federal levels:
  - Healthcare is a 'top three' concern in respondents' personal issues agenda. See figure 5.
  - There is no real difference in respondents' assessments of Labor and the Coalition on health. Indeed, more Labor voters rate the Coalition favourably on health than vice versa. See figure 6.

- The nurses/midwives pay issue is important to views of NSW Government for 61% of respondents. See figure 7.
- The pay issues around nurses/midwives' serve to reduce confidence in the NSW Government's management of the public hospital system for 68% of respondents, including 60% of Labor voters. Again, regional (74%) and outer-suburban (64%) respondents are most impacted. See figure 8.
- The state of NSW's public health system is important to the federal vote intention of 45% of respondents, including 42% of Labor voters with regional (48%) and outer-suburban (46%) voters most strongly influenced by this issue. See figure 9.

Research Figures

Figure 1 – Electorates Surveyed

Middle suburbs	Outer suburbs	Regional areas
Coogee	Penrith	Bega
East Hills	Riverstone	Gosford
Parramatta	Camden	Heathcote
Rockdale	Cabramatta	Lismore
Strathfield	Liverpool	Monaro
	Prospect	South Coast
	Leppington	The Entrance
	Londonderry	

Figure 2 – Support for 15% Pay Increase (Untreated)

Initial support for a 15 per cent pay increase for nurses and midwives

Nurses and midwives in NSW's public health system are asking for a one-year 15% pay rise. Do you support or oppose a 15% pay increase for nurses and midwives?

Legend:
- Strongly support
- Support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Not sure

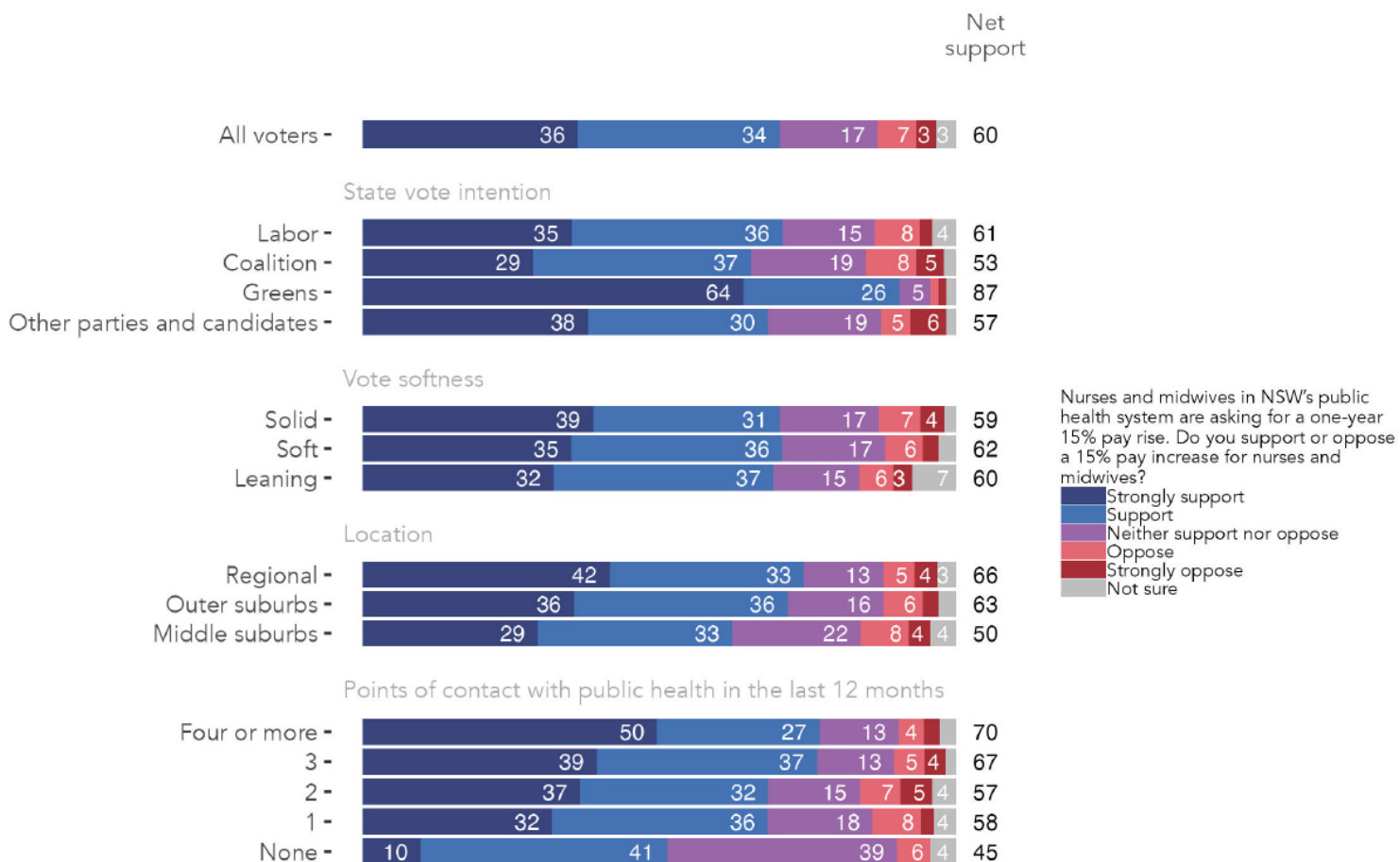|	Strongly support	Support	Neither support nor oppose	Oppose	Strongly oppose	Not sure	Net support
All voters	36	34	17	7	3	3	60
State vote intention							
Labor	35	36	15	8		4	61
Coalition	29	37	19	8		5	53
Greens	64		26	5			87
Other parties and candidates	38	30	19	5		6	57
Vote softness							
Solid	39	31	17	7		4	59
Soft	35	36	17	6			62
Leaning	32	37	15	6	3	7	60
Location							
Regional	42	33	13	5	4	3	66
Outer suburbs	36	36	16	6			63
Middle suburbs	29	33	22	8	4	4	50
Points of contact with public health in the last 12 months							
Four or more	50	27	13	4			70
3	39	37	13	5		4	67
2	37	32	15	7	5	4	57
1	32	36	18	8		4	58
None	10	41	39	6		4	45

Figure 3 - Support for 15% Pay Increase (Treated)

Post-treatment support for a 15 per cent pay
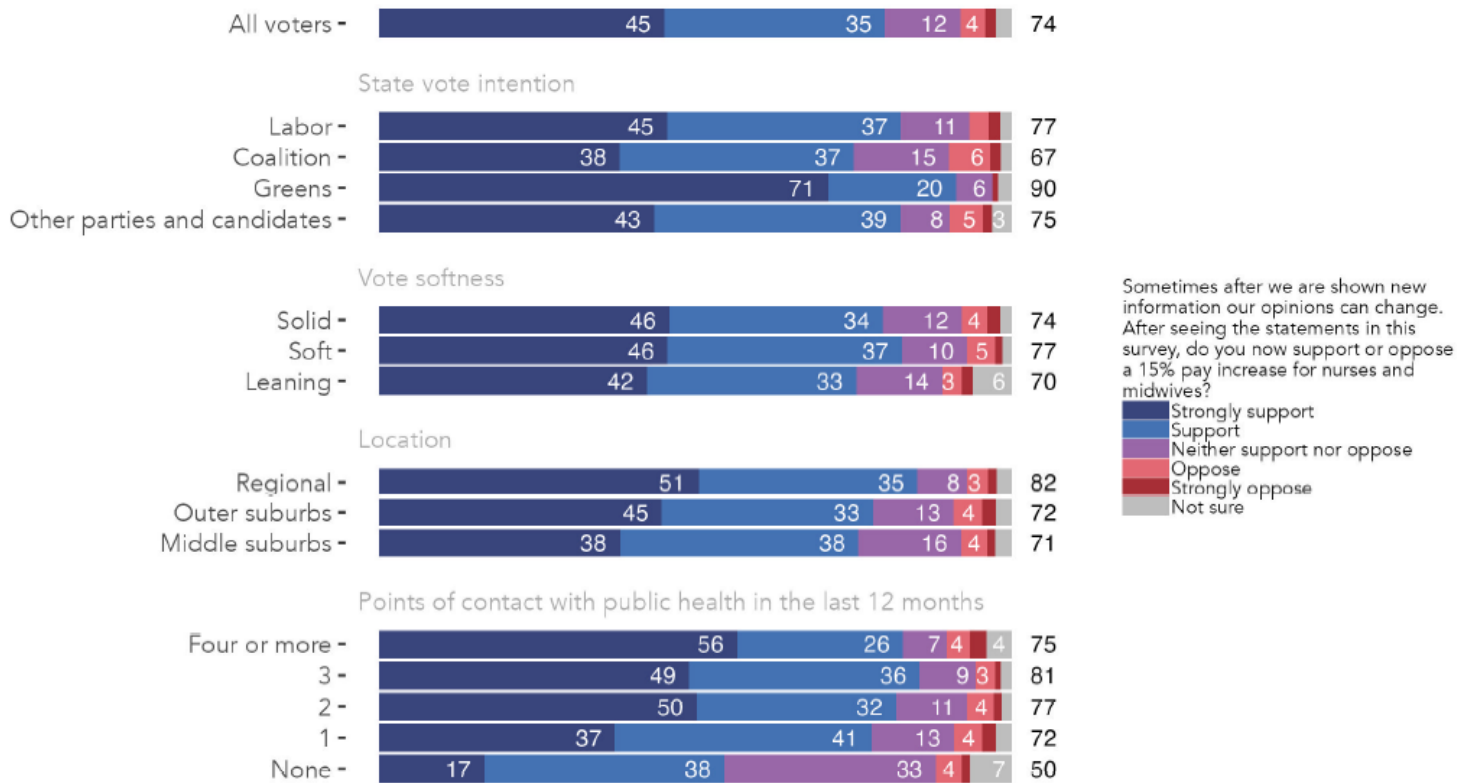increase for nurses and midwives

Net support

	Strongly support	Support	Neither	Oppose	Strongly oppose	Not sure	Net support
All voters	45	35	12	4			74

State vote intention

Labor	45	37	11				77
Coalition	38	37	15	6			67
Greens	71	20	6				90
Other parties and candidates	43	39	8	5	3		75

Vote softness

Solid	46	34	12	4			74
Soft	46	37	10	5			77
Leaning	42	33	14	3	6		70

Location

Regional	51	35	8	3			82
Outer suburbs	45	33	13	4			72
Middle suburbs	38	38	16	4			71

Points of contact with public health in the last 12 months

Four or more	56	26	7	4	4		75
3	49	36	9	3			81
2	50	32	11	4			77
1	37	41	13	4			72
None	17	38	33	4	7		50

Sometimes after we are shown new information our opinions can change. After seeing the statements in this survey, do you now support or oppose a 15% pay increase for nurses and midwives?

■ Strongly support
■ Support
■ Neither support nor oppose
■ Oppose
■ Strongly oppose
■ Not sure

Figure 4 – Support for Strike Action by Nurses/Midwives

Support for nurses and midwives' decision to strike for better pay

Net support

All voters	32 | 32 | 19 | 8 | 6 | 3	26

State vote intention

Labor	34 | 34 | 18 | 7 | 5	29
Coalition	25 | 32 | 22 | 11 | 8	17
Greens	54 | 30 | 9 | 3	52
Other parties and candidates	32 | 33 | 19 | 8 | 5	27

Vote softness

Solid	34 | 30 | 19 | 8 | 7	27
Soft	30 | 36 | 20 | 8 | 4	26
Leaning	34 | 27 | 19 | 7 | 5 | 8	29

Location

Regional	36 | 33 | 17 | 6 | 5 | 3	31
Outer suburbs	32 | 30 | 21 | 8 | 7	25
Middle suburbs	27 | 34 | 19 | 11 | 5 | 4	22

Points of contact with public health in the last 12 months

Four or more	40 | 32 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 4	33
3	35 | 39 | 14 | 7	32
2	35 | 29 | 22 | 6 | 5	30
1	28 | 30 | 22 | 10 | 7	21
None	17 | 32 | 26 | 11 | 6 | 8	11

Do you support or oppose the decision of NSW nurses and midwives in 2024 to strike for better pay?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
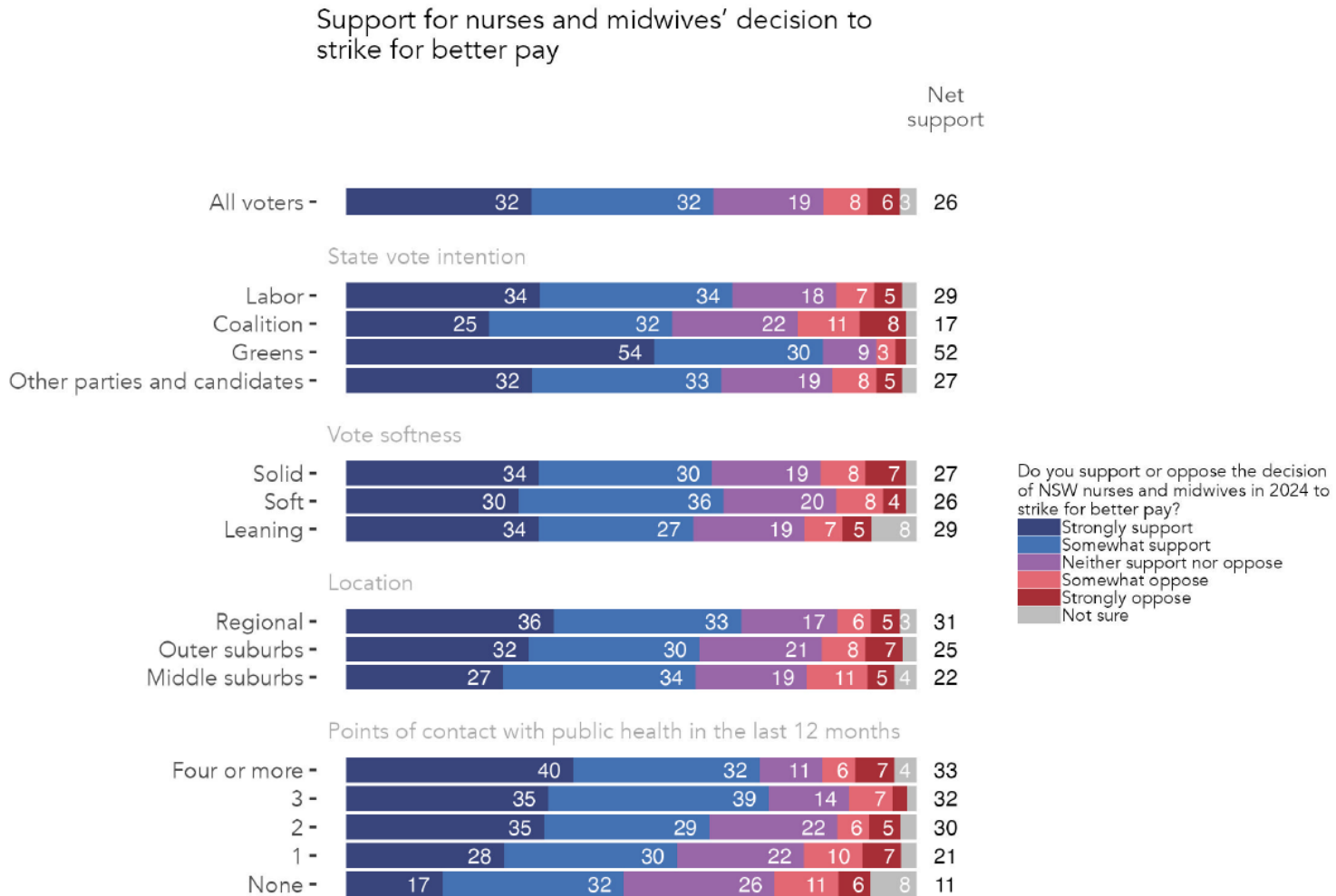- Strongly oppose
- Not sure

Figure 5 – Issues NSW Government Should Focus On

Which of the following do you think are the most important issues for the NSW State Government to focus on right now?
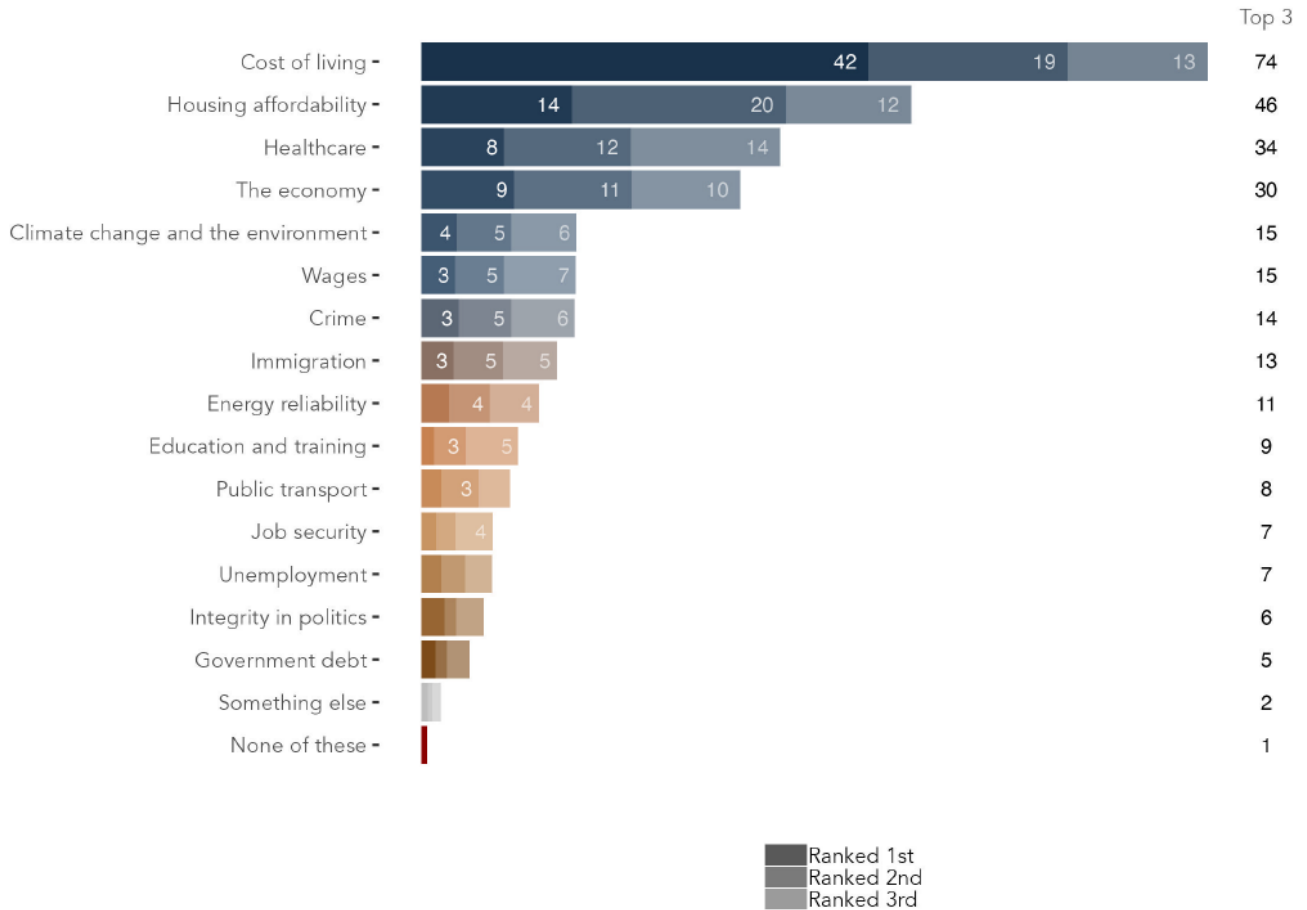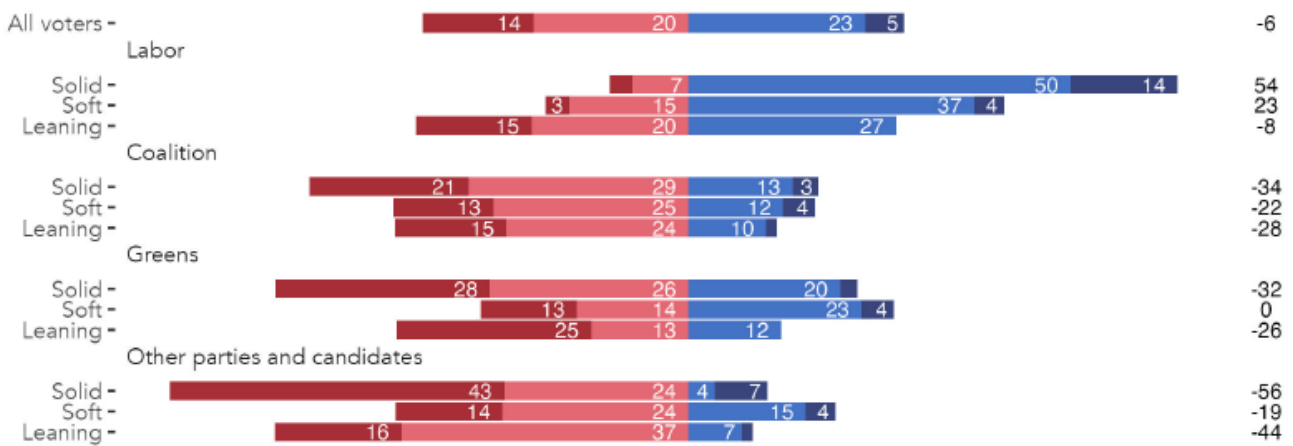
Issue	Ranked 1st	Ranked 2nd	Ranked 3rd	Top 3
Cost of living	42	19	13	74
Housing affordability	14	20	12	46
Healthcare	8	12	14	34
The economy	9	11	10	30
Climate change and the environment	4	5	6	15
Wages	3	5	7	15
Crime	3	5	6	14
Immigration	3	5	5	13
Energy reliability		4	4	11
Education and training		3	5	9
Public transport		3		8
Job security			4	7
Unemployment				7
Integrity in politics				6
Government debt				5
Something else				2
None of these				1

Ranked 1st
Ranked 2nd
Ranked 3rd

Figure 6 – Assessments of Performance on Health

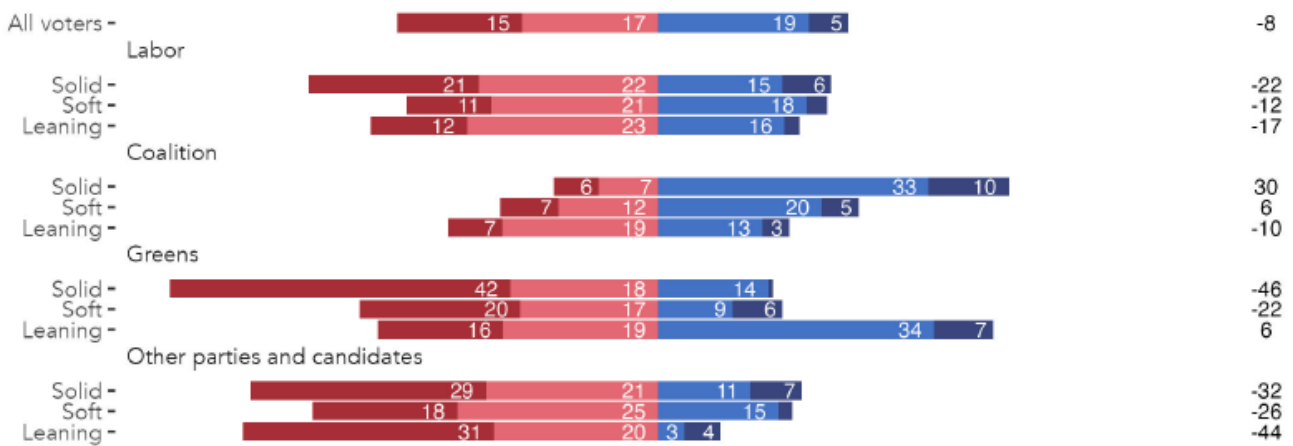How NSW voters in key seats rate the major parties on healthcare
By vote softness

The performance of the Labor Party

	Net performance
All voters	-6
Labor	
Solid	54
Soft	23
Leaning	-8
Coalition	
Solid	-34
Soft	-22
Leaning	-28
Greens	
Solid	-32
Soft	0
Leaning	-26
Other parties and candidates	
Solid	-56
Soft	-19
Leaning	-44

The performance of the Liberal Party

	Net performance
All voters	-8
Labor	
Solid	-22
Soft	-12
Leaning	-17
Coalition	
Solid	30
Soft	6
Leaning	-10
Greens	
Solid	-46
Soft	-22
Leaning	6
Other parties and candidates	
Solid	-32
Soft	-26
Leaning	-44

Rating on Healthcare — Very poor / Poor / Good / Very good

Figure 7 – Nurses/Midwives Pay Issue Impacts on Views of NSW Government

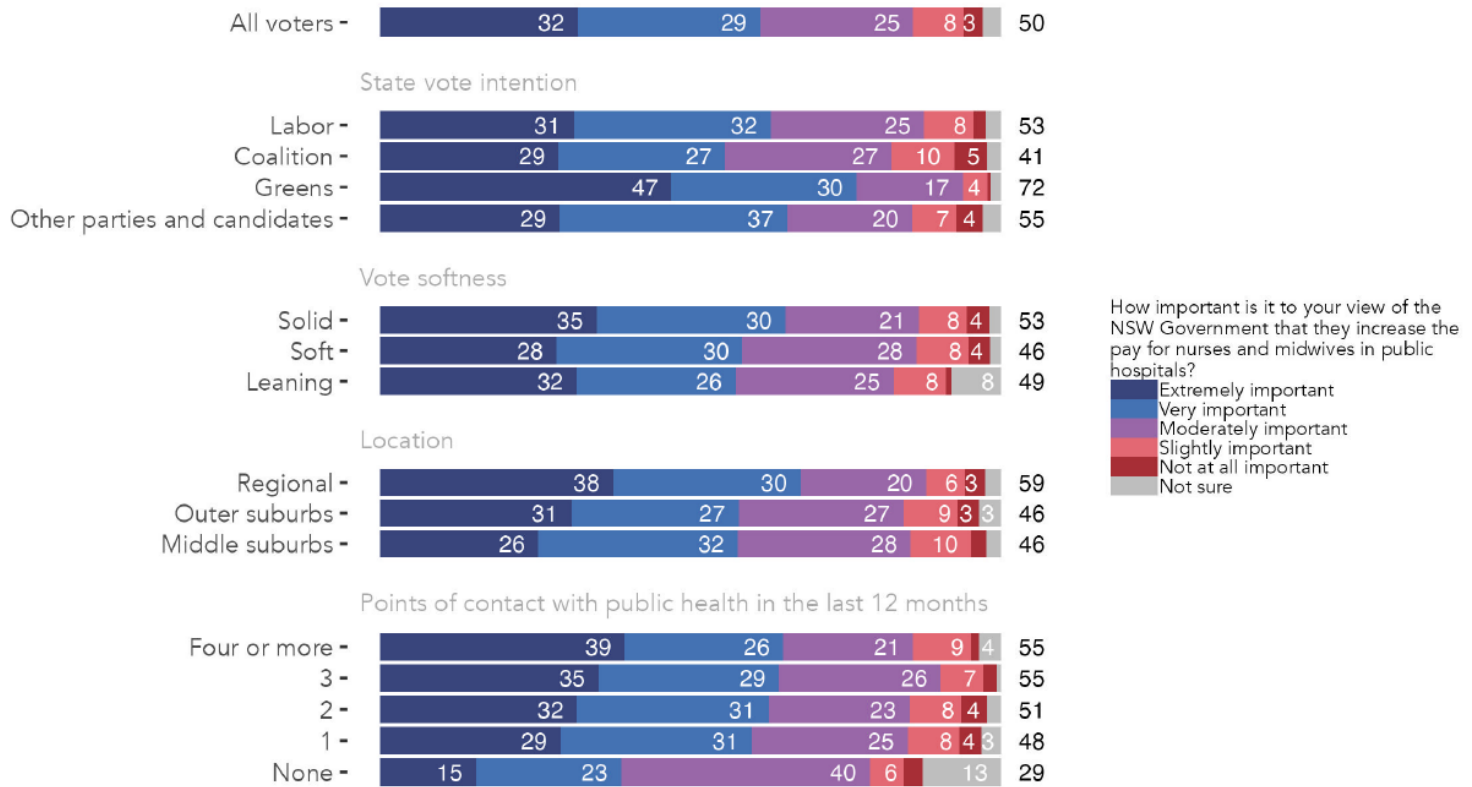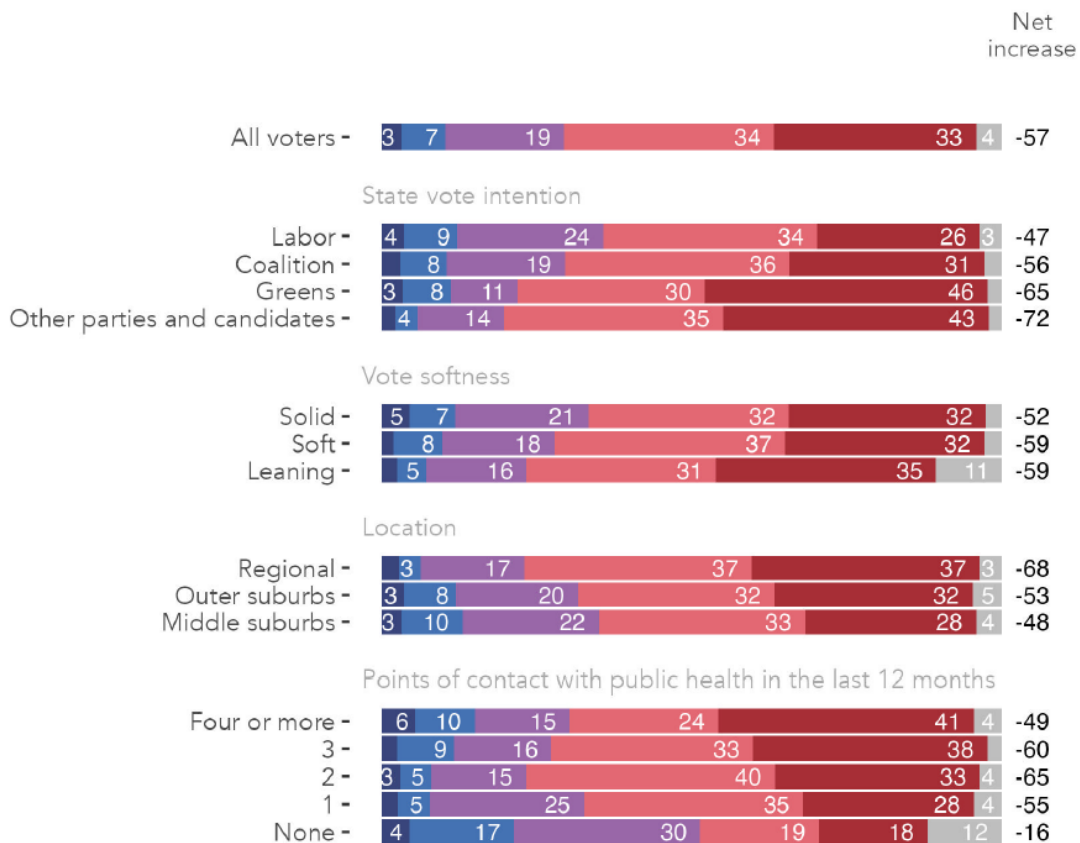How important are pay increases for nurses and midwives to voters' opinion of the NSW government

Figure 8 – Nurses/Midwives Pay Issue Impacts on Confidence in NSW Government

Reported change in confidence in the NSW government's management of the public health system after learning about pay and working conditions for nurses and midwives
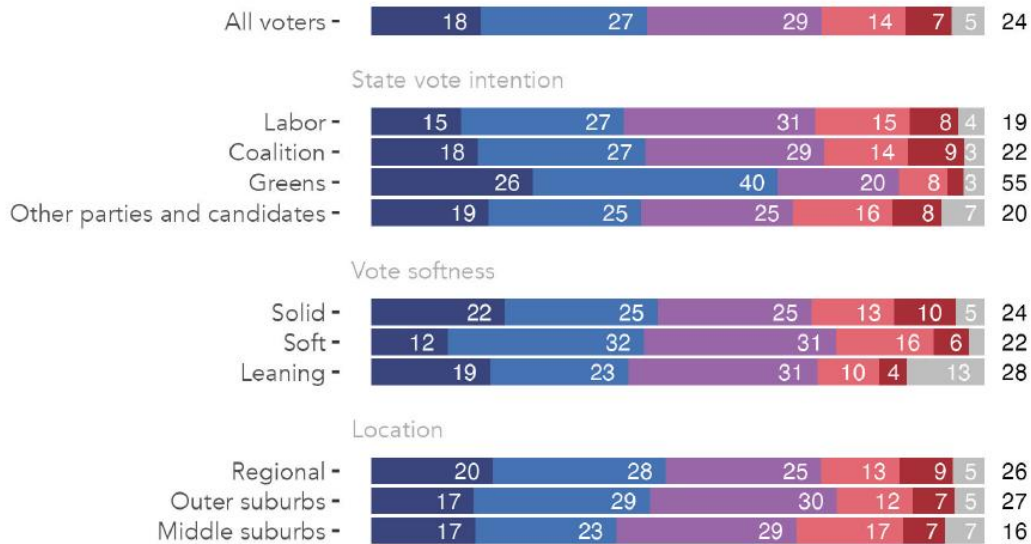
Junior nurses and midwives in NSW are the lowest paid in the country. Their pay is 18% lower than junior nurses and midwives in Queensland. Also, nurses and midwives working on a 24/7 roster system are not currently entitled to two consecutive days off (i.e. like a weekend). Does this increase or decrease your confidence in the NSW state government's management of the public hospital system?

Figure 9 – NSW Health System Impacts on Federal Vote Intention

Importance of the state of NSW's public health system to federal vote intention

Net important

		Net important
All voters	18 / 27 / 29 / 14 / 7 / 5	24
State vote intention		
Labor	15 / 27 / 31 / 15 / 8 / 4	19
Coalition	18 / 27 / 29 / 14 / 9 / 3	22
Greens	26 / 40 / 20 / 8 / 3	55
Other parties and candidates	19 / 25 / 25 / 16 / 8 / 7	20
Vote softness		
Solid	22 / 25 / 25 / 13 / 10 / 5	24
Soft	12 / 32 / 31 / 16 / 6	22
Leaning	19 / 23 / 31 / 10 / 4 / 13	28
Location		
Regional	20 / 28 / 25 / 13 / 9 / 5	26
Outer suburbs	17 / 29 / 30 / 12 / 7 / 5	27
Middle suburbs	17 / 23 / 29 / 17 / 7 / 7	16

If a federal election were held today (i.e. the election for the Australian Government), how important would the current state of the NSW public health system be in deciding who to vote for?

■ Extremely important
■ Very important
■ Moderately important
■ Slightly important
■ Not at all important
■ Not sure