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Public confidence in the NSW criminal justice system: 2025 update

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AIM

This study assesses: (1) the level of public confidence in the New South Wales (NSW) criminal justice system (CJS) in 2025; (2) the association between confidence levels and socio-demographics, exposure to crime and sources of information; (3) changes in public confidence since 2012; and (4) changes in perceptions of crime and justice outcomes since 2012.

METHOD

Data were obtained from a repeated cross-sectional survey of NSW adults (n=2,002 in 2007; n=2,001 in 2012; n=1,989 in 2014; n=2,000 in 2019; n=2,000 in 2025). Confidence levels were assessed for the CJS as a whole, for police and for courts in 2025. Perceptions of the appropriateness of court sentences were also measured. Bivariate relationships were assessed using Pearson's chi-square test of independence and multivariate relationships controlling for socio-demographic factors were examined using logistic regression. Trend analyses were conducted using logistic regression to assess if there was a change in the percentage of respondents who were confident in the CJS between 2012 and 2025.

RESULTS

In 2025, just over half of adults were confident that the CJS brings people who commit crimes to justice (54%) and a high proportion thought that the rights of accused are respected (73%) and accused are treated fairly (69%). Confidence that the CJS meets the needs of victims (34%) and deals with cases promptly (23%) was low. Almost 40 percent of adults thought that court sentences were appropriate. Obtaining information about the CJS from government publications, educational sources or newspapers was associated with higher levels of confidence in the CJS. By contrast, talkback radio, social media and word-of-mouth were associated with lower confidence levels. Levels of confidence also varied significantly by socio-demographic factors, and recent experiences as a victim. Public confidence in the NSW CJS as a whole was found to be significantly lower in 2025 compared with the three previous surveys since 2012. Confidence in both the police and the courts fell, with declines seen across nine of the 10 measures included in the survey. The drop in confidence was most pronounced for the police between 2019 and 2025.

CONCLUSION

Confidence in the NSW CJS has declined significantly since 2019 across all measures and is at the lowest levels since BOCSAR's survey began in 2007. More research is needed to understand the reasons for this observed decline in public trust.

KEYWORDS

Public confidence

Sentencing

Repeated cross-sectional survey

Police

Courts

Knowledge

Media

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining public confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS) is critical for its legitimacy and effectiveness. When trust declines, victims may hesitate to report crimes, offenders may not cooperate with court proceedings and community participation as jurors or witnesses can diminish (Halstead, 2015; Moore, 2020). Tracking confidence over time is therefore a key priority for justice agencies, especially in an era of declining trust in public institutions (Biddle, 2025) and growing concerns about misinformation (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2020).

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) began measuring confidence in the New South Wales (NSW) CJS in 2007, using a survey modelled on the British Crime Survey (Jones et al., 2008; Jones & Weatherburn, 2010). Subsequent waves were undertaken in 2012, 2014, and 2019 using a similar methodology (Halstead, 2015; Moore, 2020; Snowball & Jones, 2012). The results from these surveys reveal a consistent pattern: while most respondents believe offenders are brought to justice and the rights of the accused are upheld, confidence in timely case resolution and victim support remains low. In 2019, for example, nearly three-quarters of respondents believed the criminal justice system respected the rights of the accused and 60% thought it brought offenders to justice, but only 31% felt cases are handled promptly and 44% believed the needs of victims are met. Police were rated higher than the courts in delivering justice and supporting victims, while courts were viewed as better at protecting the rights of the accused but slower in case processing. Two-thirds of respondents considered court sentences too lenient.

Similar surveys have been undertaken across Australia and internationally, and while differences in methodologies preclude direct comparisons, some common themes emerge. Firstly, people generally report higher confidence in police than other government agencies and institutions. Biddle (2022) found that three-quarters of Australian respondents to an Australian National University (ANU) poll survey were confident in police, but less than half had trust in the courts and prisons. A 2024 survey of 1,603 Australians by Resolve Political Monitor found that 47% of respondents “did not have faith in the judiciary”. By contrast 69% of this sample reported that they “trusted the police” (Massola, 2024). Similarly, the 2025 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) found that a higher share reported confidence in the police (around two-thirds) than for the CJS as a whole (around half) (Office for National Statistics, 2025). In Canada where most people were at least moderately aware of the police and courts, only one-quarter were very aware of the police and only one-fifth were very aware of the courts (Duff, 2024). Indermaur and Roberts (2009) refer to an “evaporation effect” in confidence levels as people move through the legal system. This is from initial contact through the police (where confidence is reasonably high) to later stages of contact, at which the public typically have less experience, such as courts and corrections (where it is lower). Further, levels of public scrutiny of the police in recent years have been relatively high, compared to the courts and corrections.

Secondly, public perceptions of the CJS vary significantly by demographics, and prior experience with crime. Several studies show that confidence in the CJS is higher among males, younger people, those from metropolitan locations, those with more education (e.g. a university degree), and those on higher incomes (Halstead, 2015; Marsh et al., 2019; Moore, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2025). However, a Canadian study by Duff (2024) found that persons aged 18-34 years had less confidence that the CJS was accessible to all compared with older age groups (around one-fifth versus one-quarter). Victims of property crime or violence also report significantly lower confidence across most measures. Moore (2020) and Halstead (2015) found lower levels of confidence in NSW among recent victims of property crime or physical force/violence. In England and Wales just over one half of recent victims agreed that the CJS was fair compared with almost two-thirds of non-victims (Office for National Statistics, 2025).

Thirdly, public understanding of crime and justice outcomes is generally poor and heavily influenced by information sources. Research shows that perceptions of court sentences are often inaccurate, and many believe that the penalties imposed by courts are too lenient (Hough & Roberts, 2004; Jones & Weatherburn, 2010; Moore, 2020; Roberts et al., 2003). Studies also reveal poor knowledge of actual

crime trends, including the prevalence and trajectory of specific offences (Butler & McFarlane, 2009; Gelb, 2006; Gelb, 2008, Marsh et al., 2019; Roberts & Indermaur, 2007). These misperceptions can undermine public confidence in the CJS and exacerbate expressions of public punitiveness (Halstead, 2015). Media reporting plays a dominant role in shaping these views (Roth, 2014). Media narratives can promote the view that sentencing is not “tough enough” or that crimes rates are rising, even when official data suggests otherwise (Duffy et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 2019; Pfeiffer et al. 2005). The association between media consumption and confidence varies by media type. For example, in NSW in 2019, people who found newspapers and other traditional news sources, government publications or educational sources influential had higher confidence in the CJS, while those who considered talk-back radio an influential source of information had lower confidence (Moore, 2020).

Examining trends over time, Moore (2020) found that confidence levels in the NSW criminal justice system have remained relatively stable. However, other more recent evidence suggests a decline in public trust. The 2025 CSEW, for example, found that while confidence in the effectiveness of the CJS increased between 2009 and 2016 it had since declined. Less than half of respondents were confident in its effectiveness in the 2025 wave (Office for National Statistics, 2025). A 2022 Canadian survey found that the share of Canadians reporting “moderate” confidence in the family justice system has been decreasing since 2019, with an increase in “not confident” for both fairness and accessibility (Department of Justice Canada, 2022). Biddle and Gray (2024) noted declining trust in government institutions, though police remain the most trusted. In the United States there was a marked decline in the level of confidence in courts, dropping from 59 to 35 percent between 2020 and 2024. Over the same period the median confidence level for other OECD¹ countries has been stable (Gallup, 2024). In light of these results, a re-examination of the level of public confidence in the NSW criminal justice system is warranted.

The current study

This research aimed to address four key questions:

1. What is the level of public confidence in the NSW CJS in 2025?
2. What factors influence confidence in the NSW CJS in 2025?
3. Has the level of public confidence in the NSW CJS changed since 2012?
4. Have public perceptions of crime and justice outcomes changed over time?

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

METHOD

Data collection

Cross-sectional survey data

A quota-based sample of 2,000 adults living in NSW was interviewed for the survey. Quotas were set to ensure that the sample was broadly representative of the NSW population in terms of gender, age and residential location.² Only English-speaking people aged 18 and over were eligible to participate. A market research company³ administered the survey in May and June 2025 and collected data using two methods: (1) a telephone survey; and (2) an online survey.⁴ The samples for both modes were sourced from the same probability seeded source known as the Single Source survey. Six thousand Australians are recruited per month for the Single Source survey; 2,000 are recruited via address-based sampling and 4,000 via random-digit-dialling (RDD). Individuals who agree to future contact specify whether they prefer to be interviewed by telephone or online, and are added to a verified respondent database with known demographics and location. The use of two different survey modes is a departure from the approach used in previous waves of the BOCSAR “Confidence in the CJS” survey. The two survey modes were used to ensure it was possible to recruit a sufficiently large sample of people aged 18-34.

For the telephone sample, 21,567 numbers were called at least once. Contact was made with 5,256 eligible respondents and 1,000 of these people completed the interview (90% via a mobile phone). This equates to a response rate of 19%. Only a small number of people contacted were excluded based on the survey eligibility criteria (39 because the quota had been filled, 94 due to a language barrier and six who were under 18 years of age).

For the online survey, 1,000 questionnaires were completed. A further 596 individuals accessed the survey but were not included in the final sample. The majority of these individuals (n=463) were excluded because the quota had been filled for that age/gender group in that location. A smaller number were excluded because they started but did not complete the survey (n=98) or were ineligible based on age/English proficiency (n=35).

Table 1 compares the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample included in the 2025 survey with the samples in each of the previous four waves of the BOCSAR survey. As seen here, the gender composition across the five surveys is similar. However, the 2019 and 2025 surveys have a higher share of respondents who are aged 50 years and older, who live in Greater Sydney and who are university-educated compared with previous years. Couples are the most common household structure across all five surveys but declined from 66% of the sample in 2007 to 57% in 2025. The share of respondents with household incomes of \$130,000 or greater increased significantly over survey waves, and a higher proportion of respondents disclosed their household income in 2025 compared with previous years (15% vs. 22%).

² Gender defined as female and male. Age group defined as 18-34, 35-49 and 50+ years. Location defined as greater Sydney and rest of NSW. Population benchmarks for these variables were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data when calculating the population weights. These were as published in the Labour Force Survey (April 2025).

³ Roy Morgan Research Institute.

⁴ Telephone surveys were conducted using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and online surveys using computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI).

Table 1. Survey sample composition (%) by survey year and socio-demographic characteristics

| Characteristic | Sample (%) | | | | | p-value |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------|
| | 2007 n=2,002 | 2012 n=2,001 | 2014 n=1,989 | 2019 n=2,000 | 2025 n=2,000 | |
| Gender | | | | | | .194 |
| Males | 48.0 | 49.5 | 49.2 | 46.2 | 49.3 | |
| Females | 52.0 | 50.5 | 50.8 | 53.8 | 50.8 | |
| Age group | | | | | | .006 ** |
| 18-34 | 29.3 | 30.5 | 30.2 | 28.4 | 29.3 | |
| 35-49 | 28.6 | 29.3 | 29.4 | 26.3 | 25.8 | |
| 50+ | 42.1 | 40.2 | 40.4 | 45.4 | 45.0 | |
| Residential location | | | | | | .003 ** |
| Greater Sydney | 60.6 | 63.3 | 62.9 | 65.6 | 65.9 | |
| Other NSW | 39.4 | 36.7 | 37.1 | 34.4 | 34.1 | |
| Education | | | | | | < .001 *** |
| Year 10 or less | 21.9 | 16.2 | 16.4 | 13.2 | 7.1 | |
| Year 11 or 12 | 21.0 | 19.5 | 20.8 | 12.9 | 11.7 | |
| TAFE | 20.6 | 24.9 | 22.9 | 24.1 | 25.8 | |
| University | 36.5 | 39.4 | 39.9 | 49.8 | 55.4 | |
| Household structure | | | | | | < .001 *** |
| Person living alone | 17.2 | 12.3 | 11.5 | 16.7 | 19.7 | |
| Couple no children at home | 26.8 | 23.4 | 23.6 | 27.5 | 28.1 | |
| Couple with children at home | 39.1 | 45.3 | 42.9 | 31.8 | 29.1 | |
| Single parent with children at home | 6.5 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 5.8 | 6.4 | |
| Group household/Other | 10.4 | 13.8 | 16.7 | 18.2 | 16.6 | |
| Household income | | | | | | < .001 *** |
| <\$60,000 | 33.7 | 27.3 | 23.9 | 23.2 | 18.1 | |
| \$60,000-\$99,000 | 20.0 | 20.7 | 18.3 | 16.0 | 15.8 | |
| \$100,000-\$129,000 | 10.5 | 13.2 | 12.0 | 11.0 | 11.0 | |
| \$130,000 or more | 12.8 | 20.1 | 23.6 | 27.5 | 40.3 | |
| Can't say/refused | 23.0 | 18.7 | 22.2 | 22.2 | 14.8 | |

Stars indicate statistical significance at a variety of levels: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

Reported p-value based on Pearson Chi-square test of independence of distributions over time.

Population weights were calculated for the 2025 sample using the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates (January 2025) updated from 2021 Census data. While this report presents results using raw data, repeating these analyses using the population weighted data did not change the results.

Questionnaire

Confidence in the criminal justice system and perceptions of crime and justice

Consistent with previous BOCSAR surveys, confidence in the CJS was measured using the following five questions:

How confident are you that the criminal justice system....

1. ...is effective in bringing people who commit crimes to justice?
2. ...meets the needs of victims of crime?
3. ...respects the rights of people accused of committing a crime?
4. ...treats people accused of committing a crime fairly?
5. ...deals with cases promptly?

The order of questions were randomly rotated and for each question respondents were presented with four response options: “very confident”, “fairly confident”, “not very confident” and “not at all confident”. Confidence levels for the police and the courts were measured separately using the same approach.

A general measure of punitiveness was also collected in the survey. Here, respondents were asked “In general, would you say that sentences handed down by the courts are too tough, about right, or too lenient?” This item was coded on a five-point scale: “much too tough”, “a little too tough”, “about right”, “a little too lenient”, and “much too lenient”.

Another set of questions were included to assess respondents’ perceptions of crime trends and criminal justice outcomes. Four questions were asked about crime trends over the past five years:

1. Do you think the level of property crime has changed in NSW over the past five years?
2. Do you think the level of violent crime has changed in NSW over the past five years?
3. Do you think the level of crime committed by young people (under 18 years) has changed in NSW over the past five years?
4. Do you think the level of violence against women has changed in NSW over the past five years?

For these questions, the possible responses were: “a lot more crime”, “a little more crime”, “about the same”, “a little less crime”, “a lot less crime”.⁵ Two questions were also included to gauge perceptions on the incidence of violence in crime and the level of crime committed by young people. These questions were rated on a 100-point scale and were worded as follows:

5. “Of every 100 crimes recorded by the police, roughly what number do you think involve violence or the threat of violence?”
6. “Of every 100 crimes recorded by the police, roughly what number do you think are committed by young people (under the age of 18)?”

To assess respondents’ knowledge of criminal justice outcomes, respondents were asked to rate on a 100-point scale the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment for home burglary and murder:

7. “Of every 100 people charged with home burglary and brought to court, roughly what number do you think end up convicted?”
8. “Out of every 100 men aged 21 or over who are convicted of home burglary, how many do you think are sent to prison?”
9. “Of every 100 people charged with murder and brought to court, roughly what number do you think end up convicted?”
10. “Out of every 100 men aged 21 or over who are convicted of murder, how many do you think are sent to prison?”

Crime victimisation and influential sources

In addition to the socio-demographic characteristics listed in Table 1 above, information was collected about respondents’ experience of crime in the previous 12 months. Respondents were asked “In the last 12 months...”:

1. “...have you had any property stolen or purposely damaged, or has there been an attempt to steal or damage your property?”
2. “...did anyone, including people you know, use physical force or violence against you?”
3. “...did anyone, including people you know, try to use or threaten to use physical force or violence against you?”

⁵ The wording of question 4 used ‘violence’ instead of ‘crime’. Frequencies of perceptions of five-year trends in 2025 are shown in Appendix D.

Respondents were also asked to indicate which sources of information about the criminal justice system were influential for them personally. For this question, respondents were presented with a list of 10 information sources (see below) and asked to indicate whether that particular source was “influential” or “not influential”. Response options (1) to (9) were presented in a random order.

1. Personal experience
2. Relatives' and/or friends' experiences
3. Word of mouth / information from people you don't know (other than friends/relatives)
4. Newspapers (e.g. Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, Daily Telegraph, local newspaper) (in print or online)
5. News/current affairs programs on TV/radio
6. Talk-back radio
7. Government publications/websites
8. Books / School / college / university courses
9. Social media (including Twitter/X, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube etc.)
10. Other online sources (such as podcasts, online forums, or discussion boards; not including social media or online newspapers)

The full survey questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

Analyses

For the first research question, the distribution of responses for the five CJS confidence measures is first presented for the 2025 survey. The four-point scale was dichotomised to compare “very” and “fairly” confident with “not very” and “not at all” confident. “Don't know” or “refused” responses were excluded. Responses to the questions about confidence in police and courts were also dichotomised and are presented separately. The association between the five measures of overall confidence in the CJS and socio-demographics, prior crime victimisation and information sources was then examined using Pearson chi-square tests.

To identify independent predictors of confidence in the CJS (the second research question), a logistic regression was run including all six socio-demographic variables, as well as victimisation during the previous 12 months and sources of CJS information. Victimisation was measured as a combination of property crime and physical force or violence (including the threat thereof). Information sources were combined into three categories: (i) newspapers, news/current affairs on TV/radio, government publications and education; (ii) friends/personal experience/word of mouth; (iii) online/social media/talkback radio. Survey mode (telephone or online) was included in the regression models to verify whether results were consistent across modes of delivery. This regression was run separately for confidence in the CJS as a whole, the police and the courts.⁶

For the third research question, public confidence in the CJS, police and courts including views on leniency in sentencing, is compared across the four survey waves from 2012. For these analyses, the 2025 survey was restricted to the sample of respondents who were interviewed by telephone to maintain comparability with previous surveys. This also accounts for potential differences in social desirability bias between the telephone and online groups (for example, Berzelak & Vehovar [2018] found lower social desirability bias for online surveys relative to telephone and face-to-face selection modes). Trends for the full 2025 survey sample (telephone and online modes combined) can be found in Appendix F. Logistic regressions were conducted to assess whether confidence levels have changed over time after adjusting for changes in socio-demographics between survey years (see Hosmer et al., [2013] for details about what

⁶ Results for confidence in the police and the courts are shown in Appendix C.

a logistic regression does and how it can be used).⁷ The results for 2025 were compared with the results from the 2012, 2014 and 2019 surveys and are presented as adjusted odds ratios. Additional trend analyses compared 2025 with 2019 which also adjusted for victimisation and information sources.

Finally, for the fourth research question, trends in perceptions of crime trends and criminal justice outcomes are presented between 2012 and 2025. Consistent with the approach used by Halstead (2015), public perceptions of crime trends and justice were measured by calculating the percentage of respondents who thought that property crime was increasing, the average estimate of the incidence of violence in crime and average estimates of conviction and imprisonment rates for home burglary and murder respectively.

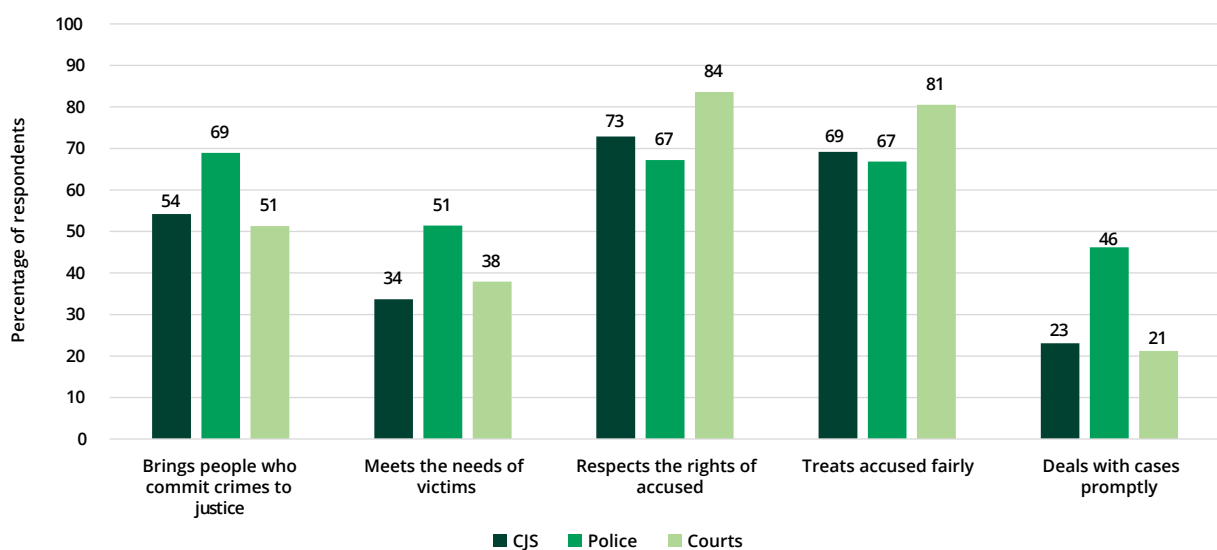
RESULTS

What is the level of public confidence in the NSW CJS in 2025?

Just over half of respondents were very confident or fairly confident that the CJS brings people who commit crimes to justice (Figure 1). A large share was confident that the CJS respects the rights of the accused (73%) and treats the accused fairly (69%). By contrast, less than one quarter of respondents were confident that the CJS deals with cases promptly (23%) and around one third were confident that the CJS meets the needs of victims.

Confidence levels in the NSW police and courts are also shown in Figure 1. Compared with the courts, a higher proportion of respondents reported being very or fairly confident that the police bring offenders to justice (69% vs. 51%), meet the needs of victims (51% vs. 38%) and deal with cases promptly (46% vs. 21%). Conversely, more respondents were confident that the courts (compared to the police) respect the rights of the accused (84% vs. 67%) and treat the accused fairly (81% vs. 67%).

Figure 1. Confidence in NSW CJS, police and courts, 2025



⁷ It was not possible to adjust for recent victim status as it had only been measured since 2014. Sources of information could not be adjusted for as it had only been measured using the same format since 2019.

What factors influence confidence in the CJS in 2025?

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 2 shows the relationship between respondent socio-demographic characteristics and confidence measures for the whole CJS.⁸ Higher levels of education and income were associated with higher confidence in the CJS. Respondents with a university education and respondents with higher household incomes were more confident on all measures except that cases are dealt with promptly (for which there was no difference by education level). Males were significantly more confident than females that the needs of victims are met and that cases are dealt with promptly. Younger age groups were more confident that victims' needs are met and that cases are dealt with promptly, while older age groups were more confident that the rights of the accused are respected and accused people are treated fairly. Respondents from Greater Sydney had more confidence that the CJS brings people who commit crimes to justice and meets the needs of victims compared with respondents from the rest of NSW.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics and confidence in the NSW CJS, 2025 (% confident)

| Socio-demographic characteristic | Confident that the CJS | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | Brings people who commit crimes to justice | Meets the needs of victims | Respects the rights of accused | Treats accused fairly | Deals with cases promptly |
| Gender | | ** | | | ** |
| Males | 55.5 | 37.0 | 74.4 | 70.7 | 25.9 |
| Females | 52.9 | 30.6 | 71.5 | 67.9 | 20.3 |
| Age group | | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| 18-24 | 59.7 | 48.8 | 63.7 | 61.7 | 38.1 |
| 25-39 | 56.1 | 38.6 | 66.1 | 62.9 | 23.8 |
| 40-54 | 50.8 | 30.6 | 76.7 | 72.5 | 22.0 |
| 55+ | 54.2 | 29.7 | 76.8 | 72.9 | 20.9 |
| Residential location | *** | *** | | | |
| Greater Sydney | 57.7 | 36.9 | 72.4 | 69.0 | 23.8 |
| Other NSW | 47.6 | 27.6 | 73.9 | 69.6 | 21.6 |
| Education | *** | *** | *** | *** | |
| Year 10 or less | 32.6 | 28.7 | 64.9 | 66.4 | 28.2 |
| Year 11 or 12 | 49.8 | 32.4 | 65.2 | 63.2 | 24.9 |
| TAFE | 44.0 | 25.8 | 71.3 | 64.1 | 21.1 |
| University | 62.8 | 38.4 | 76.3 | 73.3 | 22.8 |
| Household structure | ** | | *** | ** | |
| Person living alone | 51.7 | 28.7 | 67.6 | 67.7 | 23.0 |
| Couple no children at home | 54.3 | 33.2 | 76.4 | 71.7 | 21.5 |
| Couple with children at home | 53.7 | 34.7 | 78.5 | 73.2 | 22.8 |
| Single parent with children at home | 43.8 | 32.5 | 69.2 | 62.9 | 24.4 |
| Group household/Other | 62.2 | 39.2 | 64.7 | 62.3 | 25.9 |
| Household income | *** | *** | *** | ** | |
| <\$60,000 | 46.4 | 26.7 | 66.0 | 61.8 | 23.6 |
| \$60,000-\$99,000 | 50.3 | 30.8 | 70.1 | 68.0 | 21.3 |
| \$100,000-\$129,000 | 54.8 | 27.7 | 73.6 | 69.2 | 21.0 |
| \$130,000-\$199,999 | 56.3 | 36.9 | 74.2 | 71.4 | 23.3 |
| \$200,000 or more | 62.5 | 43.0 | 81.0 | 75.1 | 23.5 |
| Can't say/refused | 52.2 | 31.8 | 69.3 | 67.5 | 24.9 |

Stars indicate statistical significance at a variety of levels: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

⁸ Stars in Table 2 show whether there was a significant association between a socio-demographic characteristic and each of the five confidence measures. This is an overall association rather than specifying a reference category of a socio-demographic variables which the other categories are compared to.

Equivalent tables for confidence in the police and the courts are presented in Appendix B. For police there were no income effects on any measure. Education to Year 10 had higher confidence that the police brought offenders to justice, met the needs of victims and dealt with cases promptly. For courts, males had higher confidence across all five measures and younger respondents had higher confidence that offenders are brought to justice.

Experiences as a victim

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 15 percent of respondents had been a victim of property crime, seven percent had been a victim of physical force or violence, and 12 percent had faced the threat of physical force or violence. Overall, 24 percent of respondents were a victim of at least one of these offences. Respondents who had been a victim of property crime, physical force or violence, or had faced the threat of physical force or violence were significantly less likely to be confident in the CJS (Table 3). This was true across all confidence measures except timely case resolution, where there was no statistically significant difference by prior victimisation.

Table 3. Recent exposure to crime and confidence in the NSW CJS, 2025
– percent fairly/very confident (Don't know and refused excluded)

| | Brings people who commit crimes to justice (%) | Meets the needs of victims (%) | Respects the rights of accused (%) | Treats accused fairly (%) | Deals with cases promptly (%) |
|--|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Exposed to property crime? | | | | | |
| Yes | 44.0 *** | 28.3 * | 65.6 ** | 61.9 ** | 26.0 |
| No [^] | 56.1 | 34.5 | 74.4 | 70.6 | 22.5 |
| Exposed to physical force or violence? | | | | | |
| Yes | 34.3 *** | 23.6 ** | 61.9 ** | 57.9 ** | 24.6 |
| No [^] | 55.9 | 34.6 | 73.8 | 70.2 | 22.9 |
| Faced threat of physical force or violence? | | | | | |
| Yes | 39.6 *** | 26.1 ** | 61.2 *** | 56.3 *** | 20.9 |
| No [^] | 56.3 | 34.8 | 74.6 | 71.0 | 23.4 |
| Any of the above? | | | | | |
| Yes | 43.0 *** | 28.1 ** | 64.9 *** | 61.9 *** | 25.0 |
| No [^] | 57.8 | 35.6 | 75.4 | 71.5 | 22.5 |

Stars indicate statistical significance at a variety of levels: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

[^] = reference category

Media influences

Table 4 presents levels of confidence in the CJS by the information sources that respondents thought were influential. Newspapers were associated with significantly higher confidence across all five measures, government publications/websites were associated with higher confidence on all measures except respecting the rights of the accused, and educational sources were associated with higher confidence on three measures, excluding respects the rights of the accused and treats the accused fairly (which already had high levels of confidence). Accessing news/current affairs programs and TV/radio was associated with higher confidence that accused rights are respected and that accused are treated fairly by the CJS. By contrast, social media and word-of-mouth were associated with lower reported confidence. The experiences of respondents themselves, their friends and family, and news or current affairs on television and radio were the most frequently reported sources of influence on respondents' perceptions of the CJS.⁹

⁹ Around three quarters of respondents said either friends/relatives experience or their own experience were influential. News/current affairs on television/radio were influential for 72 percent of respondents, and newspapers for 62 percent. Around half of respondents said that government publications/websites, other online sources or books and courses were influential. Social media was influential for 44 percent, while only one third rated word of mouth or talkback radio as influential.

Table 4. Sources of information and confidence in the NSW CJS, 2025 – percent fairly/very confident
(Don't know and refused excluded)

| | Brings people who commit crimes to justice (%) | Meets the needs of victims (%) | Respects the rights of accused (%) | Treats accused fairly (%) | Deals with cases promptly (%) |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Newspapers | | | | | |
| Influential | 56.8 ** | 36.1 ** | 76.1 *** | 73.3 *** | 24.6 * |
| Not influential [^] | 49.9 | 29.9 | 67.6 | 62.4 | 20.3 |
| Government publications | | | | | |
| Influential | 60.7 *** | 38.3 *** | 74.4 | 72.8 *** | 26.9 *** |
| Not influential [^] | 46.8 | 28.4 | 71.5 | 64.9 | 18.6 |
| Books, education courses | | | | | |
| Influential | 61.6 *** | 36.4 * | 71.5 | 67.8 | 26.0 ** |
| Not influential [^] | 47.0 | 31.2 | 74.4 | 70.6 | 20.0 |
| News/current affairs | | | | | |
| Influential | 54.6 | 34.2 | 75.9 *** | 71.8 *** | 23.8 |
| Not influential [^] | 53.7 | 32.9 | 65.2 | 62.9 | 21.5 |
| Other online sources | | | | | |
| Influential | 55.1 | 34.7 | 71.0 | 67.4 | 23.4 |
| Not influential [^] | 53.3 | 32.9 | 74.9 | 71.1 | 22.7 |
| Friends/relatives experiences | | | | | |
| Influential | 52.0 *** | 32.1 ** | 72.0 | 68.4 | 23.1 |
| Not influential [^] | 61.2 | 39.1 | 75.1 | 71.9 | 22.9 |
| Personal experience | | | | | |
| Influential | 53.1 | 32.8 | 71.0 * | 67.6 ** | 22.8 |
| Not influential [^] | 58.0 | 36.7 | 76.5 | 74.2 | 24.2 |
| Talkback radio | | | | | |
| Influential | 43.7 *** | 26.9 *** | 74.5 | 69.5 | 24.0 |
| Not influential [^] | 59.3 | 37.1 | 72.3 | 69.2 | 22.6 |
| Social media | | | | | |
| Influential | 48.7 *** | 32.7 | 68.1 *** | 63.5 *** | 24.1 |
| Not influential [^] | 58.6 | 34.8 | 76.6 | 73.6 | 22.1 |
| Word of mouth | | | | | |
| Influential | 46.4 *** | 29.8 ** | 68.0 *** | 65.1 ** | 22.2 |
| Not influential [^] | 58.8 | 36.1 | 75.8 | 71.6 | 23.5 |

Stars indicate statistical significance at a variety of levels: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

[^] = reference category

Which factors matter the most for confidence in the CJS?

In the previous section we saw that confidence in the CJS varies across different sub-groups of the population (e.g. age, income, education level, prior experience with crime as a victim) and is strongly influenced by the type of media consumed. To explore which of these factors are independently associated with higher confidence in the CJS, a logistic regression model was specified for each of the five confidence measures, and socio-demographic characteristics, recent victimisation and sources of information were included as explanatory variables. Survey mode was also included as a binary explanatory variable to account for any differences between respondents who took the survey via telephone versus online. Similar logistic regression models were developed for the measures of confidence in the police and courts, and these results are presented in Appendix C.

Table 5 shows the estimated odds ratios from the five logistic regression models predicting confidence in different aspects of the CJS. An odds ratio greater than one indicates that the characteristic is associated with a higher likelihood of a respondent being “very” or “fairly” confident in that specific aspect of the CJS. An odds ratio less than one indicates that the characteristic is associated with a lower likelihood of a respondent being “very” or “fairly” confident in that specific aspect of the CJS.

We see that after controlling for a range of observable characteristics almost all the results presented in the previous section hold. Specifically, we find that males and younger people have greater confidence that victims’ needs are met and cases are dealt with promptly, respondents residing in Sydney metropolitan areas have greater confidence that people who commit crimes are brought to justice and the needs of victims are met, and respondents with higher education levels are generally more confident across all aspects of the CJS. However, once other factors are controlled for, there is no statistically significant association between confidence and household income, with the exception that those with household incomes over \$200,000 are more confident that offenders are brought to justice and the accused’s rights are respected. We also found that victims had lower confidence on all measures except the promptness of case resolution, while respondents who accessed more traditional sources like newspapers, government publications and educational courses for information on the CJS had higher confidence across all five measures.¹⁰

¹⁰ As a robustness check, the logistic regressions were also run with the ‘Newspapers, Govt, Education’ category separated into (i) newspapers/news programs on TV/radio and (ii) government publications and education. For the whole CJS both information sources were associated with significantly higher confidence in meeting victims needs and dealing with cases promptly. Government and education sources were also associated with higher confidence in offenders being brought to justice, and newspapers/news programs were associated with the CJS respecting rights of accused and treating accused fairly.

Table 5. Results of logistic regression models predicting respondent confidence in the five measures of the NSW CJS, 2025

| | Brings people who commit crimes to justice | Meets the needs of victims | Respects the rights of accused | Treats accused fairly | Deals with cases promptly |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Adj OR [#] | Adj OR | Adj OR | Adj OR | Adj OR |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Females | 0.92 | 0.77 ** | 0.90 | 0.89 | 0.72 ** |
| Males (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Age group | | | | | |
| 18-24 | 1.34 | 2.58 *** | 0.64 | 0.64 | 2.26 ** |
| 25-39 | 0.89 | 1.34 * | 0.46 *** | 0.53 *** | 1.22 |
| 40-54 | 0.76 | 0.94 | 0.74 | 0.82 | 1.07 |
| 55+ (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Residential location | | | | | |
| Other NSW | 0.74 ** | 0.70 ** | 1.23 | 1.19 | 0.89 |
| Greater Sydney (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Education | | | | | |
| Year 10 or less | 0.31 *** | 0.84 | 0.63 * | 0.81 | 1.39 |
| Year 11 or 12 | 0.57 *** | 0.71 | 0.67 * | 0.72 | 0.91 |
| TAFE | 0.55 *** | 0.70 ** | 0.89 | 0.73 * | 0.93 |
| University (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Household structure | | | | | |
| Person living alone (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Couple no children at home | 0.87 | 1.04 | 1.13 | 0.91 | 0.99 |
| Couple with children at home | 0.90 | 1.07 | 1.38 | 1.05 | 1.05 |
| Single parent with children at home | 0.82 | 1.33 | 1.22 | 0.83 | 1.17 |
| Group household/Other | 1.36 | 1.21 | 0.91 | 0.82 | 1.01 |
| Household income | | | | | |
| <\$60,000 | 0.93 | 0.92 | 0.74 | 0.61 ** | 1.23 |
| \$60,000-\$99,000 (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| \$100,000-\$129,000 | 1.14 | 0.82 | 1.15 | 1.02 | 0.99 |
| \$130,000-\$199,999 | 1.23 | 1.28 | 1.30 | 1.21 | 1.08 |
| \$200,000 or more | 1.47 * | 1.42 | 1.95 *** | 1.39 | 0.93 |
| Can't say/refused | 0.94 | 0.88 | 0.94 | 0.89 | 1.10 |
| Victim (property or violence) | | | | | |
| Yes | 0.54 *** | 0.64 *** | 0.66 ** | 0.70 ** | 1.07 |
| No (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Newspapers, Govt, Education | | | | | |
| Influential | 2.07 *** | 1.88 ** | 1.61 * | 2.15 *** | 2.53 ** |
| Not influential (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Personal, friends experience | | | | | |
| Influential | 0.87 | 0.89 | 0.82 | 0.77 | 0.99 |
| Not influential (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Talkback radio, social media | | | | | |
| Influential | 0.66 *** | 0.67 *** | 0.90 | 0.82 | 0.94 |
| Not influential (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Mode of selection | | | | | |
| Online | 0.80 * | 0.69 *** | 1.17 | 0.97 | 0.69 ** |
| Telephone (ref) | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |

[#] Adj OR = Adjusted odds ratio

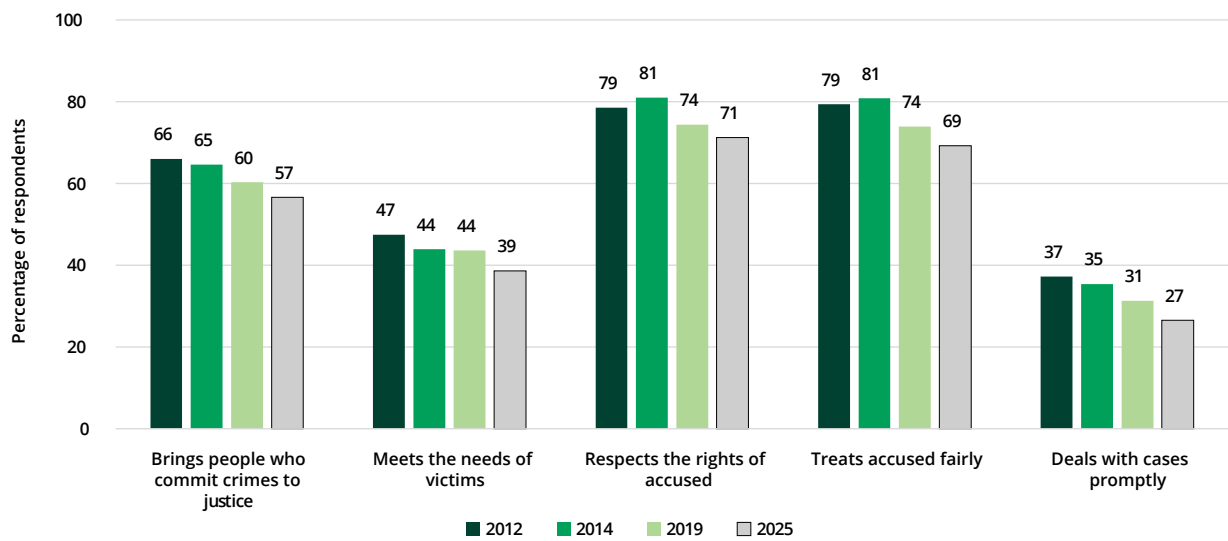
(ref) = reference category

Stars indicate statistical significance at a variety of conventional thresholds of statistical significance: * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001

Has the level of public confidence in the NSW CJS changed since 2012?

Figure 2 shows trends in the five CJS confidence measures across the four most recent waves of the BOCSAR survey: 2012, 2014, 2019 and 2025. Given the differences in confidence levels by survey mode, and considering previous surveys were conducted exclusively via telephone, comparisons of 2025 results to previous survey waves were restricted to those who responded via telephone. This figure shows that, across all five measures, confidence levels were significantly lower in 2025 compared with the three earlier surveys. This is true even after controlling for changes in the socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents over time (Appendix E, Table E1).¹¹

Figure 2. Confidence in NSW CJS by survey year, 2012-2025 #



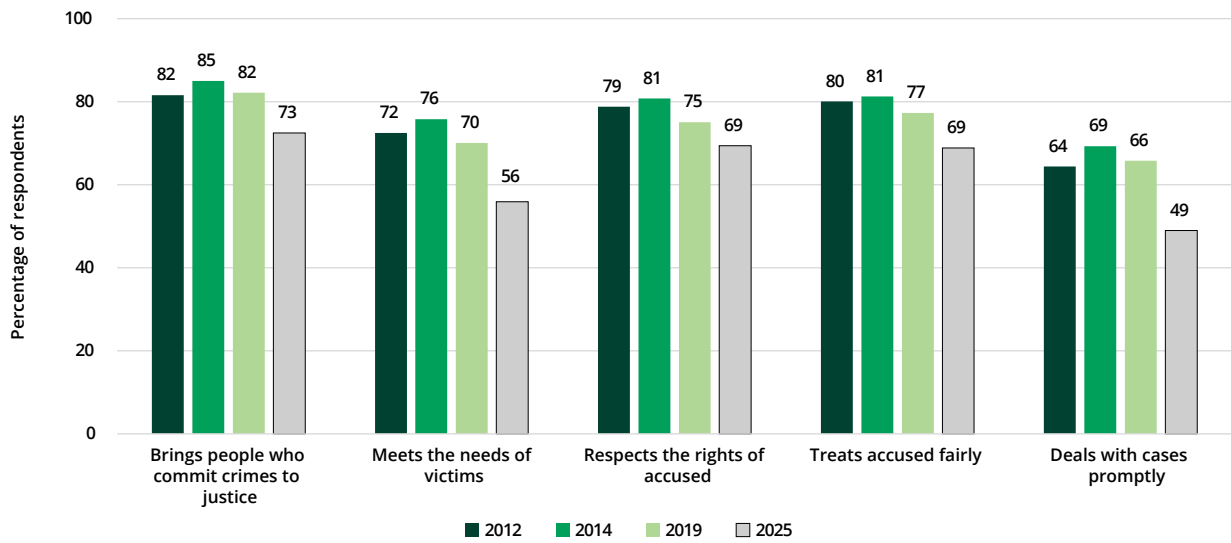
Telephone respondents only

Similarly, when we examine trends in public confidence in police we see significant declines between 2012 and 2025 across all five measures (Figure 3). The declines were particularly pronounced between 2019 and 2025. Over this 6-year time span, the share of respondents who were confident that police bring people who commit crimes to justice declined from 82 to 73 percent, the proportion who were confident that the police meet the needs of victims declined from 70 to 56 percent, and the proportion who were confident that police deal with cases promptly declined from 66 to 49 percent. Confidence that the police respects the rights of the accused declined from 75 to 69 percent, while confidence that the accused are treated fairly also declined from 77 to 69 percent. These downward trends remained statistically significant after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (Table E2 of Appendix E).¹²

11 Victim status and information sources are not controlled for, as victim status has only been measured since 2014 and information sources since 2019. Trend analyses also compared 2025 with 2019 controlling for prior victimisation and information sources accessed. Respondents still had significantly lower confidence on all five measures in 2025.

12 Significant declines on all five police measures between 2019 and 2025 remained while controlling for victimisation and information sources.

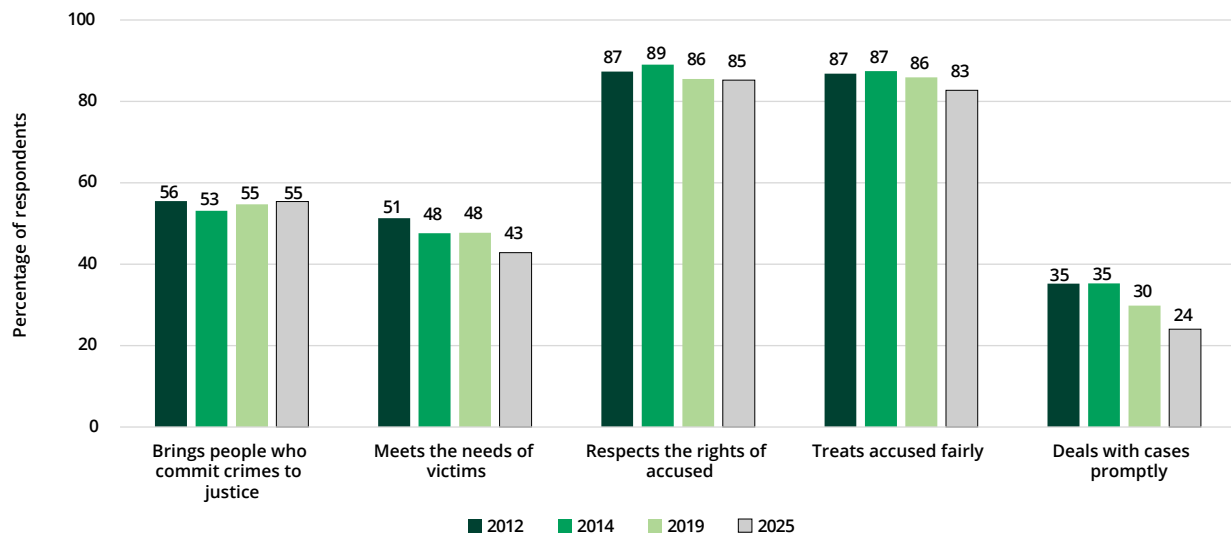
Figure 3. Confidence in NSW Police by survey year, 2012-2025 #



Telephone respondents only

Figure 4 shows trends in the five confidence measures for the courts from 2012 to 2025. Confidence that the courts meet victims’ needs, treat accused fairly and deal with cases promptly all declined, with an especially large decline in 2025 in public confidence that cases are dealt with promptly. There was no significant change in reported confidence in the courts bringing offenders to justice, which remained at around 55 percent. There was also no significant change between 2019 and 2025 in respondents’ confidence in the courts respecting the rights of the accused, which remained high at around 85 percent. Table E3 in Appendix E shows the estimated odds ratios from the five logistic regression models for court confidence (both unadjusted and adjusted for socio-demographics).¹³

Figure 4. Confidence in NSW Courts, 2012-2025 #

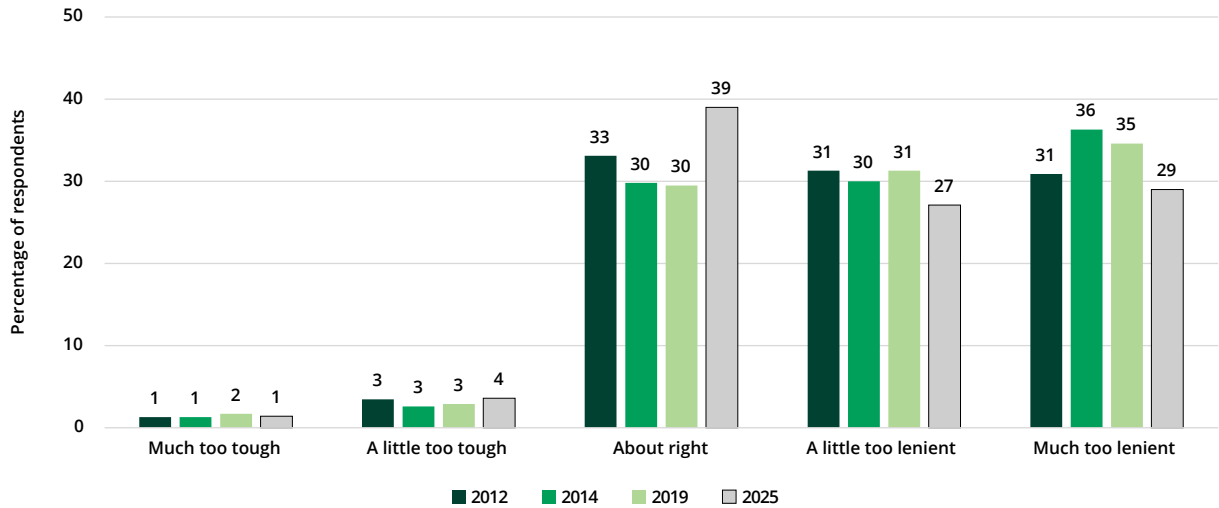


Telephone respondents only

13 For each of the five court measures the same pattern of results remained after also controlling for victimisation and information sources between 2019 and 2025. There was reduced confidence in meeting victims needs, treating accused fairly and dealing with cases promptly. There was no change in confidence that offenders are brought to justice nor that the accused rights are respected.

Finally, Figure 5 presents trends in respondents’ opinions on the appropriateness of the sentences imposed by the NSW courts - another indicator of public confidence in the court process. In 2025, most respondents believed that sentences are too lenient (56%), and just five percent reported that sentences are too tough. However, the share of respondents who thought that sentences are appropriate (i.e. “about right”) increased considerably between 2019 and 2025, rising from 30 percent to 39 percent. Conversely, the percentage who believed sentences are too lenient fell from 66 percent in 2019 to 56 percent in 2025, a 10 percentage point drop. Logistic regression models controlling for socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents confirmed that public confidence in sentencing was significantly higher in 2025 compared with 2014 and 2019 (see Table E4, Appendix E).

Figure 5. Views on the appropriateness of sentencing, 2012-2025 #



Telephone respondents only

Have perceptions and knowledge of crime and justice outcomes changed over time?

In the previous section we saw evidence for declining confidence in the CJS. It is possible that this drop in public confidence is driven by changes in community perceptions of crime and knowledge of court outcomes. Both Moore (2020) and Halstead (2015) found that NSW residents have poor knowledge of crime and court outcomes, and that these misperceptions are associated with reduced confidence in the CJS. Specifically, lower confidence levels were found among those who reported a high incidence of violent crime, rising property crime rates, and low conviction and imprisonment rates for serious crimes.

Table 6. Average perceptions of crime and justice outcomes, and statistically significant changes over time (telephone), 2012 - 2025 (bivariate)

| Perception measure | Average estimate by survey respondents | | | | Statistically significant changes over time | | |
|--|--|----------|------------------|------------------|---|-----------|-----------|
| | 2012 | 2014 | 2019 | 2025 | 2012-2025 | 2014-2025 | 2019-2025 |
| Perceptions of crime | | | | | | | |
| Share of recorded crime that is violent (%) | 55.7 | 56.3 | 57.1 | 52.5 | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Benchmark statistic | (6) | (6) | (6) | (9) | | | |
| Property crime trending higher in last 5 years (% respondents) # | 49.8 | 38.3 | 44.1 | 50.1 | - | ↑ | ↑ |
| Benchmark statistic | (trending lower) | (stable) | (trending lower) | (trending lower) | | | |
| Perceptions of justice outcomes | | | | | | | |
| Conviction rate for home burglary (%) | 49.1 | 49.9 | 50.9 | 50.9 | - | - | - |
| Benchmark statistic | (73) | (73) | (72) | (65) | | | |
| Imprisonment rate for home burglary (%) | 38.0 | 38.0 | 40.9 | 40.0 | - | - | - |
| Benchmark statistic | (59) | (60) | (62) | (58) | | | |
| Conviction rate for murder (%) | 60.9 | 61.5 | 61.8 | 61.4 | - | - | - |
| Benchmark statistic | (55) | (60) | (49) | (57) | | | |
| Imprisonment rate for murder (%) | 76.0 | 76.3 | 77.1 | 79.5 | ↑ | ↑ | - |
| Benchmark statistic | (100) | (100) | (100) | (100) | | | |

Notes. ↑ / ↓ signify increases/decreases in estimates significant at $p < .05$ level in a Pearson chi-square test of independence for the binary property crime measure and by comparison of means using one-way ANOVA for all other measures.

- signify no statistically significant change.

Average statistic reports proportion of respondents who estimated "a lot more" or "a little more" property crime rather than "about the same", "a little less" or "a lot less" over previous five years.

Table 6 shows public perceptions of crime and criminal justice outcomes in 2025 and how these views have changed over time. The table presents survey respondents' estimates of the percentage of recorded crime that involves violence or a threat of violence, views on trends in property and estimates of the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment for home burglary and murder. Benchmarks derived from official statistics are shown in parentheses below the average estimates of the respondents.

A large proportion of respondents (50%) in the 2025 survey believed that overall property crime rates had increased either a little or a lot in NSW over the last five years, which is inconsistent with recorded crimes statistics which shows a 17 percent *decline* in property crime from 2019 to 2024.¹⁴ Consistent with earlier BOCSAR studies, respondents drastically overestimated the number of crimes involving violence, estimating that, on average, 53 out of every 100 crimes involve violence or a threat of violence when the actual rate is just nine percent. While knowledge of court outcomes was closer to benchmark statistics, respondents still significantly underestimated the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment for home burglary (51% vs 65% for conviction; 40% vs 58% for imprisonment). While the conviction rate for murder was similar to benchmark statistics (61% vs 57%) respondents underestimated the imprisonment rate (80% vs 100%).

Examining changes over time in these measures, we see that a higher share of respondents in the 2025 survey thought property crime was trending upward compared with respondents in the 2014 and 2019 surveys (50%, 44% and 38%, respectively). While respondents in 2025 still significantly overestimated the number of crimes that involve violence, there was a slight improvement in knowledge compared with previous years, dropping from a mean estimate of 57 percent in 2019 to 53 percent in 2025. Meanwhile, there was no change from 2012 to 2025 in the perceived likelihood of conviction and imprisonment for serious crime, except for the estimated rate of imprisonment for murder which was significantly higher in the 2025 survey compared with the 2012 and 2014 surveys (80 percent and 76 percent, respectively); again reflecting a slight improvement in public knowledge.

¹⁴ Property crime rates are compared from 2019 to 2024 (rather than 2020 to 2024) because 2020 was an atypical year, with crime rates unusually low due to the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

This survey is the fifth BOCSAR survey on public confidence in the CJS in NSW. In 2025, just over half of respondents were confident that the CJS brings people who commit crime to justice, while a larger proportion believed that the rights of the accused are respected and accused are treated fairly (73 and 69 percent, respectively). Confidence was considerably lower in relation to the system meeting victims' needs (34 percent) and resolving cases promptly (23 percent). Relative to previous surveys, there was a sharp decline in public confidence in the CJS across all five measures and confidence is now at its lowest level since BOCSAR's survey began.

Confidence in both the police and the courts fell between 2012 and 2025. However, the drop was most pronounced for police between 2019 and 2025. Over this six-year time span, confidence that police bring offenders to justice fell from 82 to 73 percent and confidence that the police meet victims' needs dropped from 70 to 56 percent. Confidence in how police treat accused also declined. Although confidence in the courts' ability to meet victims' needs and bring offenders to justice weakened slightly, confidence in the courts' treatment of accused persons remained high. Notably, views on sentencing became more favourable, with 39 percent of respondents in 2025 stating that sentences were "about right", up from 30 percent in 2019.

Although the precise drivers of declining confidence are not clear from our study, several significant events since 2019 may have impacted public opinion. One of the most consequential was the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020/2021, the NSW government introduced numerous orders under the *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW) to stem the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This included restrictions on social gatherings, "stay-at-home" orders and mandatory mask-wearing. Police were responsible for enforcing these restrictions and issued more than \$56 million in infringement notices for breaches of public health orders, with over \$45 million within the three months to September 2021 (McNamara et al., 2022). This enforcement activity may have contributed to reduced confidence in the NSW Police Force. A UNSW review of policing during the pandemic reported that the zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance not only had lasting effects for many fine recipients but also "damaged police-community relations" particularly in heavily policed areas designated as local government areas (LGAs) of concern (McNamara et al., 2022). Further, following the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a reported rise in media concern about crime and policing, including increased media focus on police as part of the COVID-19 lockdowns, criticisms of the Police Commissioner, and disconnect between crime trends and public anxiety (Small, 2025). This, in combination with limited understanding of actual crime levels and trends, may provide some explanation for the marked decline in confidence in police. Economic disruptions during the pandemic may have also contributed to the decline in overall confidence in the CJS. For example, Reid et al. (2023) and Broihanne et al. (2025) show that economic shocks during the pandemic were negatively associated with trust in public institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic also caused substantial disruption to court operations in NSW. In March 2020, some criminal matters were suspended, and other matters had to be rapidly transitioned to an online environment. This resulted in significant delays, particularly in the Local Court. By 2021/22, contested Local Court matters took three months longer to finalise than in 2018/19, with domestic violence cases experiencing delays of more than 100 additional days from arrest to finalisation (see NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2022). Although the backlog in the NSW criminal courts has improved since 2021/22, court delay in 2024/25 remained above pre-pandemic levels. In the 12 months to June 2025, the median time from arrest to court finalisation for defended matters was 263 days in the Local Court and 826 days in the District Court. This is two and three months longer, respectively, compared with the 12 months to June 2019. A shift in case composition, with a greater proportion of matters now involving domestic violence and/or sexual offences (which are more often contested), may also be affecting court efficiency (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2025). Reflecting these pressures, the 2025 survey indicates that public satisfaction with the practical administration of criminal justice is at its lowest recorded level. Only one in four respondents expressed confidence in the courts ability to resolve cases

promptly, and fewer than half believed the police handle matters in a timely manner. This finding was consistent among respondents with and without direct experience as a victim of crime.

Public discourse around sexual assault and domestic violence, prompted by several recent high-profile cases, may also have contributed to declining confidence in the criminal justice system, particularly regarding how police and the courts meet victims' needs (which dropped 14 and five percentage points, respectively, between 2019 and 2025). A substantial body of research demonstrates that the media plays an important role in shaping public perceptions of the CJS (Duffy et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 2019; Moore, 2020; Pfeiffer et al., 2005; Roth, 2014), and since 2019, several prominent cases have dominated the Australian news.¹⁵ Much of this reporting has emphasised perceived inadequacies in police responses and the distress experienced by complainants. In addition, ongoing public debate about consent and coercive control in intimate partner relationships, ahead of legislative reforms introduced in NSW in 2022 and 2024, may have heightened community concern about whether victims are adequately protected and supported within the criminal justice system.

Consistent with earlier BOCSAR surveys, the 2025 results show that the sources people rely on for information about the criminal justice system are strongly associated with confidence levels. Respondents who identified traditional sources (such as newspapers, government publications and education sources) as influential reported much higher levels of confidence in the CJS. In contrast, those influenced by social media or talkback radio expressed lower confidence. These relationships persisted even after accounting for demographic differences and prior victimisation. Although the findings cannot be interpreted causally (given a respondent could nominate more than one source as influential and sources of information may be associated with other factors which also affect confidence), they raise the possibility that the growing prominence of social media could be another factor contributing to declining confidence in the NSW CJS. Notably, however, most respondents in 2025 continued to rely on traditional media sources (72 percent for news/current affairs or television/radio and 62 percent for newspapers) to access information about the criminal justice system, and around three-quarters drew on friends, relatives or personal experience when forming their views.

We also know from the earlier BOCSAR surveys (Halstead, 2015; Moore, 2020) and related research (Hough & Roberts, 2004; Roberts & Indermaur, 2007) that public confidence is closely linked to community perceptions of crime rates and knowledge of criminal justice outcomes. Confidence tends to be lower among those who believe crime is increasing or who think serious offences receive minimal punishment. Exploring this in the current study, in the context of the fall in public confidence, we find mixed results. A greater proportion of respondents in the 2025 survey believed property crime was increasing compared with 2014 and 2019 (50%, 44% and 38%, respectively), whereas there was a slight improvement in estimates of the incidence of violence in crime (53% in 2025 versus 57% in 2019). Perceptions of the likelihood of conviction and imprisonment for serious crime remained largely unchanged across the four survey waves. Despite the slight improvement in public knowledge, respondents continued to grossly overestimate levels of violent crime, underestimate conviction and imprisonment rates for home burglary and underestimate conviction rates for murder; patterns consistent with previous research (Moore, 2020).

Further research is required to better understand which, if any, of the factors outlined above are driving changes in public attitudes toward the NSW CJS. These contributing factors may not be unique to NSW, as similar declines in confidence have also been observed in other OECD countries. In England and Wales, only 48 percent were confident the CJS is effective compared with 54 percent in 2016 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). There was an increase in Canadians who were not confident that the family justice system was fair from 43 percent in 2019 to 48 percent in 2022. There was also a six percentage point increase in those who were not confident that it was accessible to all (Department of Justice Canada, 2022). In the United States, Gallup (2024) found that confidence in courts fell by 24 percentage points

¹⁵ See for example "Brittany Higgins accuses police of 'absolutely awful' treatment during investigations of rape" (Knaus, 2023); "Jarrod Hayne free from court after rape charges formally withdrawn" (The Guardian, 2024); "Questions over why police did not oppose alleged killer's bail before Molly Ticehurst murder" (McLeod, 2024).

between 2020 and 2024, though this was not found in other OECD countries. This time period has also seen considerable declines in trust in public institutions more broadly, both in Australia and overseas.¹⁶

Nonetheless, three clear findings have consistently emerged from the BOCSAR surveys which have important implications for policymakers. First, victims report significantly lower levels of confidence across most aspects of the criminal justice system, highlighting the value of continued investment in victim supports that facilitate reporting and participation in court proceedings. Second, dissatisfaction with the timeliness of case resolution is widespread, cutting across all socio-demographic groups and applying equally to both the courts and the police. Despite some improvements in court delay resulting from initiatives such as the Early Appropriate Guilty Plea (EAGP) reforms, rolling list courts, special call overs and additional judicial officers, the public perception is that time from arrest to court finalisation is unacceptably high (Klauzner & Yeong, 2021; Rahman et al., 2017; Thorburn & Weatherburn, 2018). As such, reducing time to justice should remain a priority area. Third, public knowledge of crime trends and court outcomes is poor. Strengthening access to accurate information about crime incidence and sentencing outcomes, and promoting unbiased reporting by mainstream media, remains essential for improving public confidence in and engagement with the justice system.

Before concluding, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. As with all survey research, sample representativeness is a potential concern, particularly given the challenges of reaching certain population groups and the exclusion of residents who do not speak English. To mitigate these issues, all five surveys employed quota sampling based on gender, age and geographic location, and population weights were developed to align the sample more closely with the NSW adult population. These measures produced similar weighted and unweighted estimates across both cross-sectional and trend analyses, although some degree of sample bias may still remain. The response rate for the telephone selection mode in 2025 was higher than in 2019 (19% versus 11%) though was lower than in 2014 (25%). In addition, while the analyses identify associations between factors and levels of confidence, causal inferences cannot be drawn.

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¹⁶ See, for example, Biddle (2022) and OECD (2024)

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