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## Australian Constitutional Values / Federalism Study *Summary*

Prepared for and by

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## METHODOLOGY & FUNDING

### Sample

- Conducted nationally in Australia by Newspoll Limited among 1,201 respondents aged 18 years and over.
- Respondents were selected via a stratified random sample process which included:
  - a quota being set for each capital city and non-capital city area, and within each of these areas, a quota being set for groups of statistical divisions or subdivisions;
  - random selection of household telephone numbers using random digit dialling (RDD);
  - random selection of an individual in each household by a "last birthday" screening question.

### Interviewing

- Conducted by telephone over the period of 1-8 May 2008 by fully trained and personally briefed interviewers.
- To ensure the sample included those people who tend to spend a lot of time away from home, a system of call backs and appointments was incorporated.

### Weighting

- To reflect the population distribution, results were post-weighted to:
  - Australian Bureau of Statistics data on age, highest level of schooling completed, and sex;
  - area, using ABS statistical divisions grouped as 68 areas;
  - federal voting intention (using the previous two Newspoll voting intention surveys).
- Results presented as weighted, showing population estimates represented by the respondents, expressed in thousands. The percentages are based on these weighted figures.

### Funding

- Funded by the Australian Research Council, Discovery Project DP0666833, led by Griffith University, with Charles Sturt University, University of New England and the University of Melbourne.

## KEY RESULTS

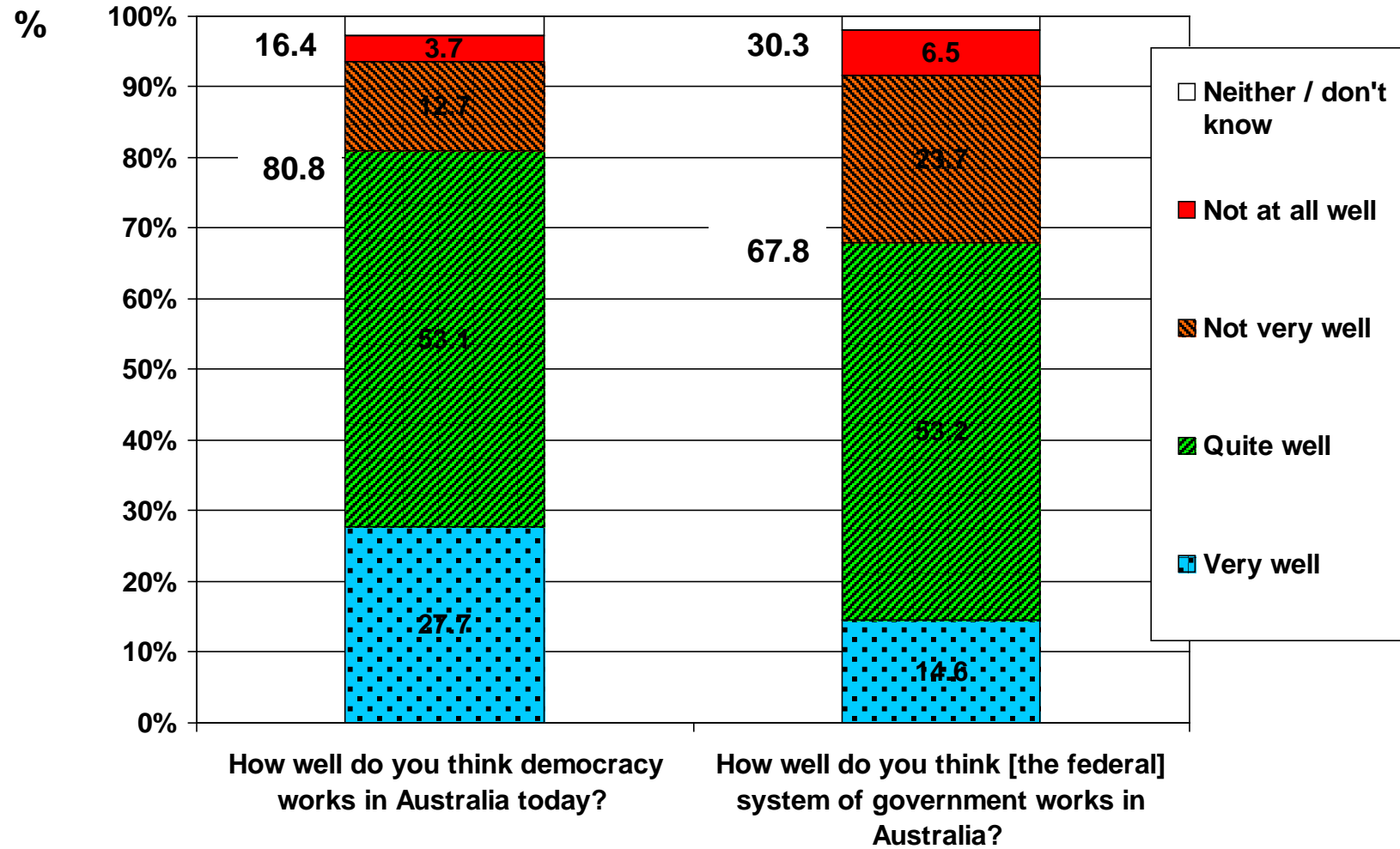
### Satisfaction with democracy and federalism

- Most Australians (80.8%) think democracy works quite well or very well in Australia, as against 16.4% who thinks it does not work well.
- Most Australians (67.8%) also think Australia's federal system of three levels of government works quite well or very well, but fewer than think democracy works well. 30.3% think the federal system does not work well.

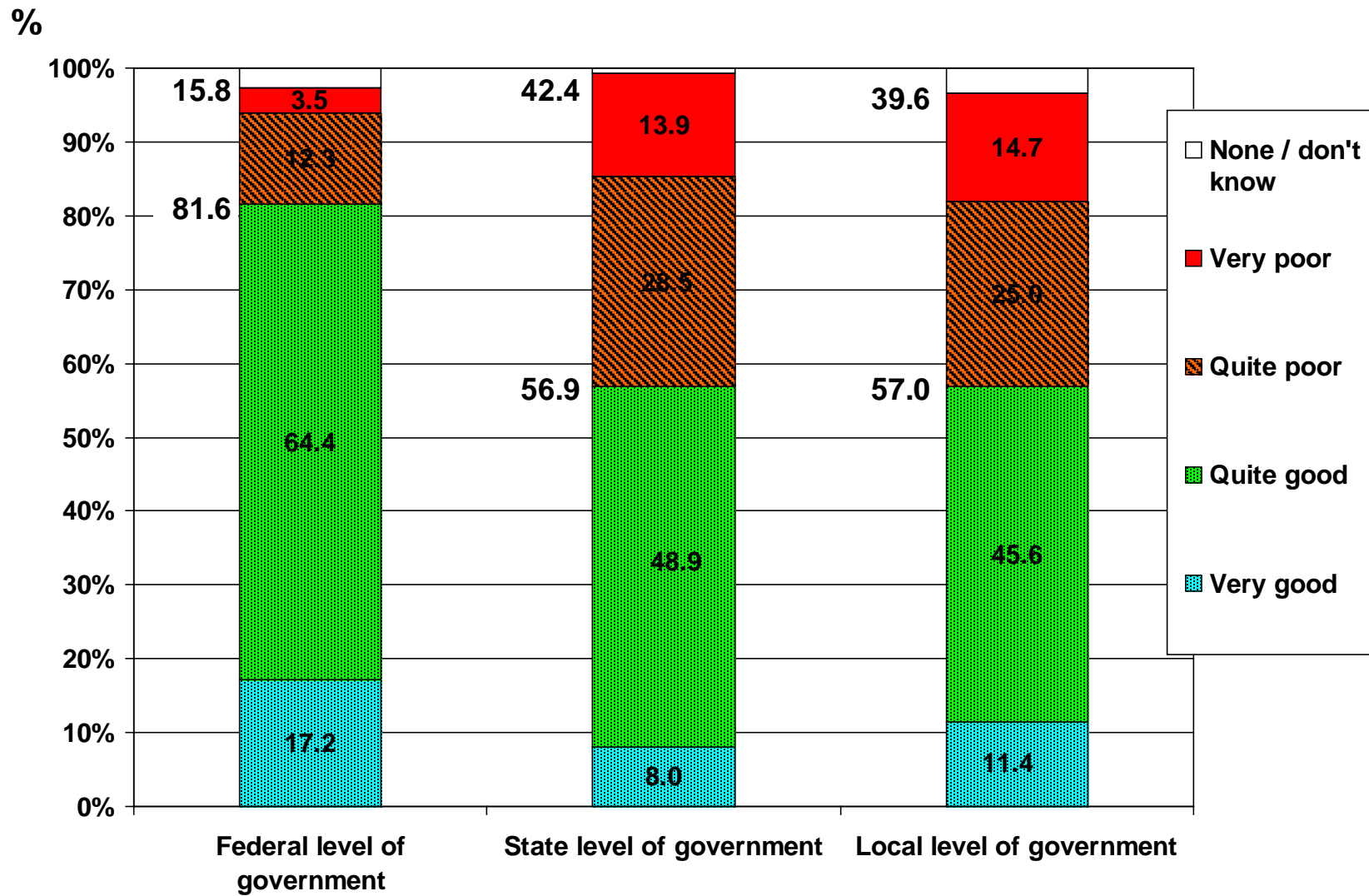
### Performance and effectiveness of levels of government

- A majority of Australians (81.6%) rate the performance of the federal level of government as quite good or very good.
- Far fewer Australians rate the performance of the local level of government (57.0%) or the state level of government (56.9%) as quite good or very good.
- 50.1% of Australians rate the federal level of government as the **most effective** at doing 'its particular job'. Only 19.9% rate the local level of government as the most effective, and only 18.1% rate the state level as the most effective.
- 35.3% of Australians rate local government as the **least effective** level of government, followed by 32.2% who rate the state level as the least effective, and 15.7% who rate the federal level as the least effective.

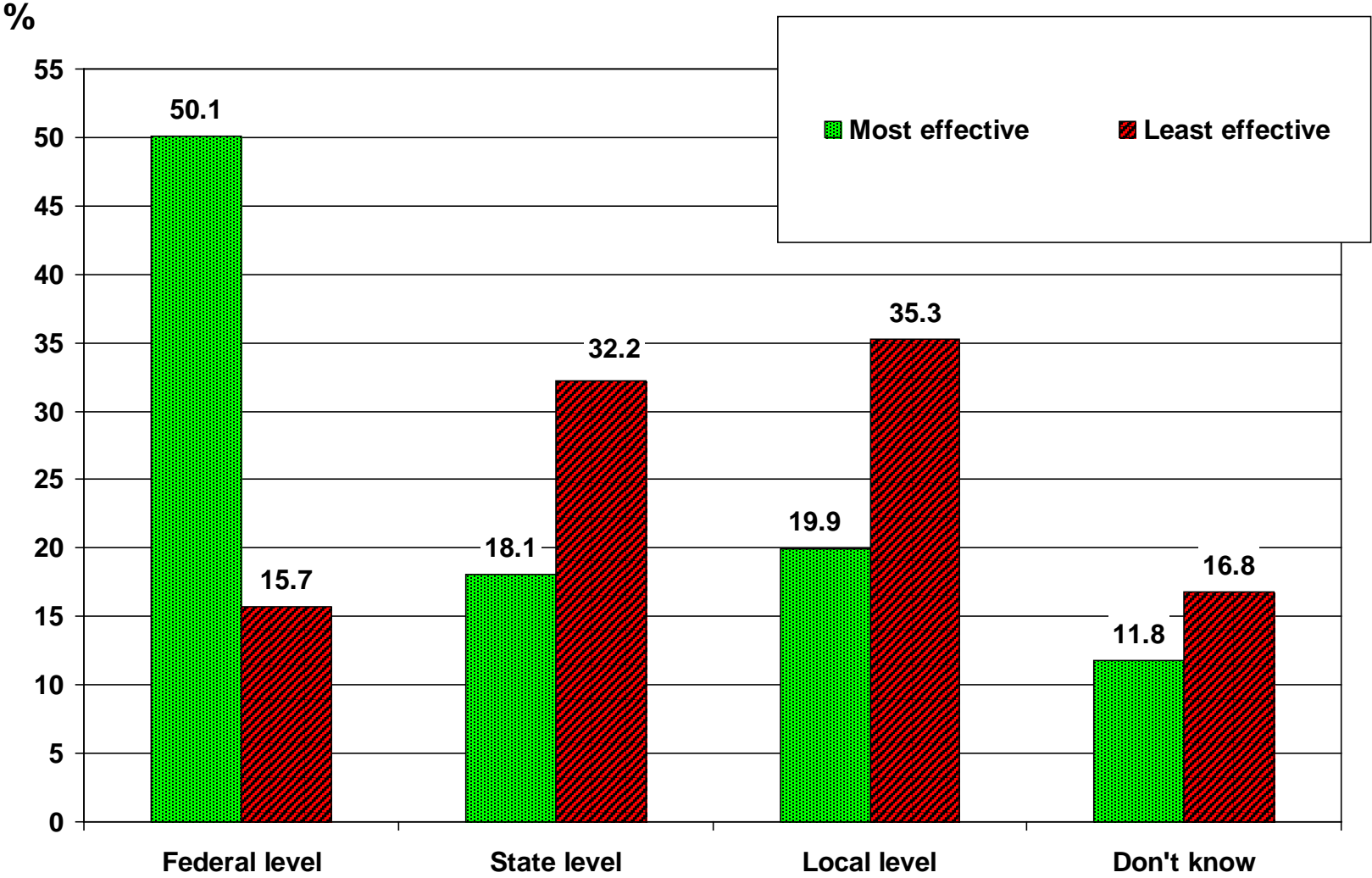
## Australians' satisfaction with democracy and federalism



## Performance of levels of government



# Effectiveness of levels of government



## Constitutional values – which levels of government should be doing what?

- Asked to choose which of the following statements was closest to their view, a large majority of Australians believed the federal government should interfere when necessary in state responsibilities:

Thinking about the powers and responsibilities of the federal government. Which one of the following statements comes closest to your view?

‘The federal government should **not** get involved in issues that are the responsibility of state governments’ **17.4%**

‘When there is an important issue that state governments are not solving, the federal government should step in to resolve it’ **79.2%**

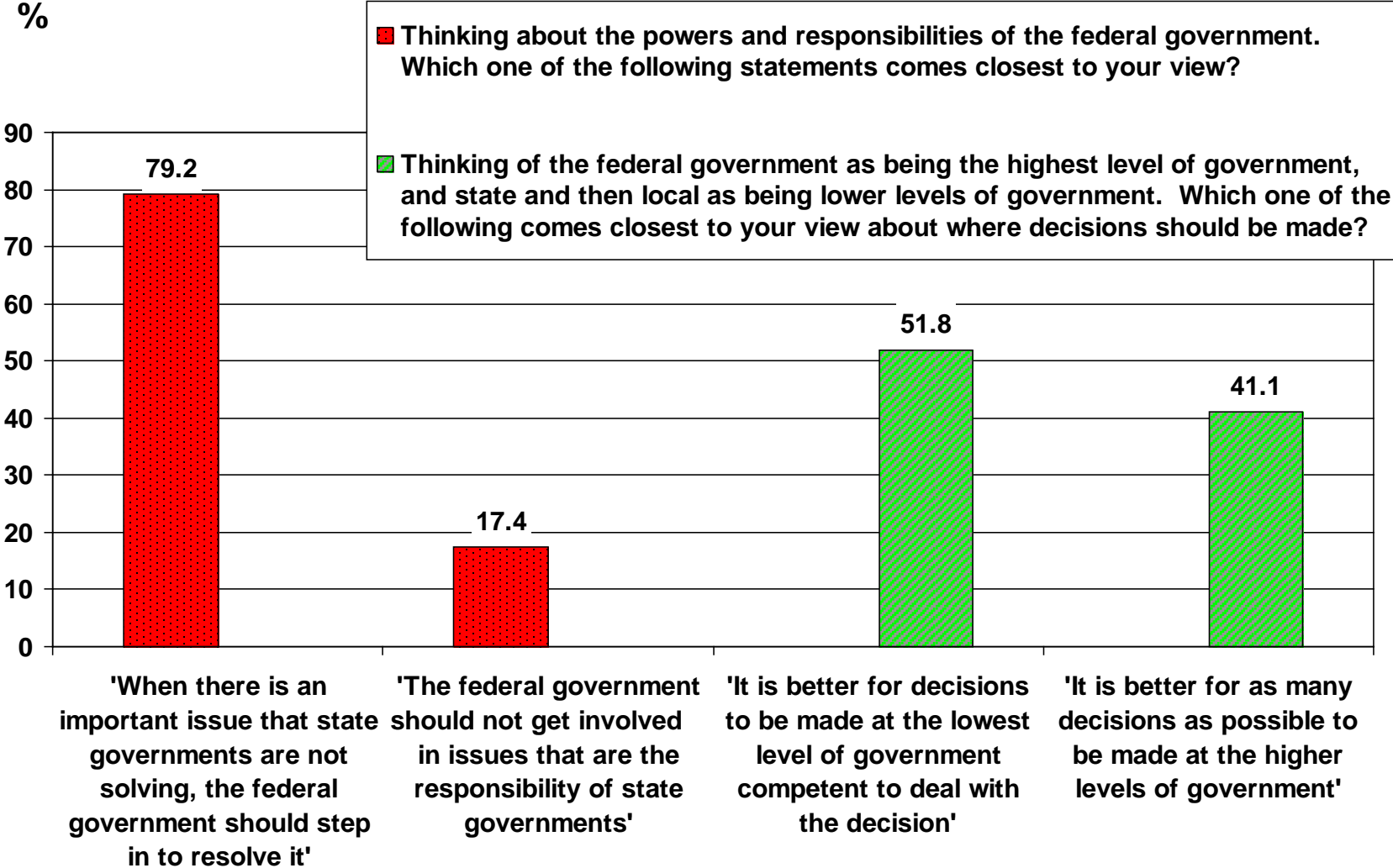
- However, asked which of the following statements was closest to their view, a majority of Australians also believed that decisions should be devolved to lowest appropriate level:

Thinking of the federal government as being the **highest** level of government, and state and then local as being **lower** levels of government. Which **one** of the following comes closest to your view about where decisions should be made?

‘It is better for decisions to be made at the lowest level of government competent to deal with the decision’ **51.8%**

‘It is better for as many decisions as possible to be made at the higher levels of government’ **41.1%**

# The quandary - which levels of government should be doing what?





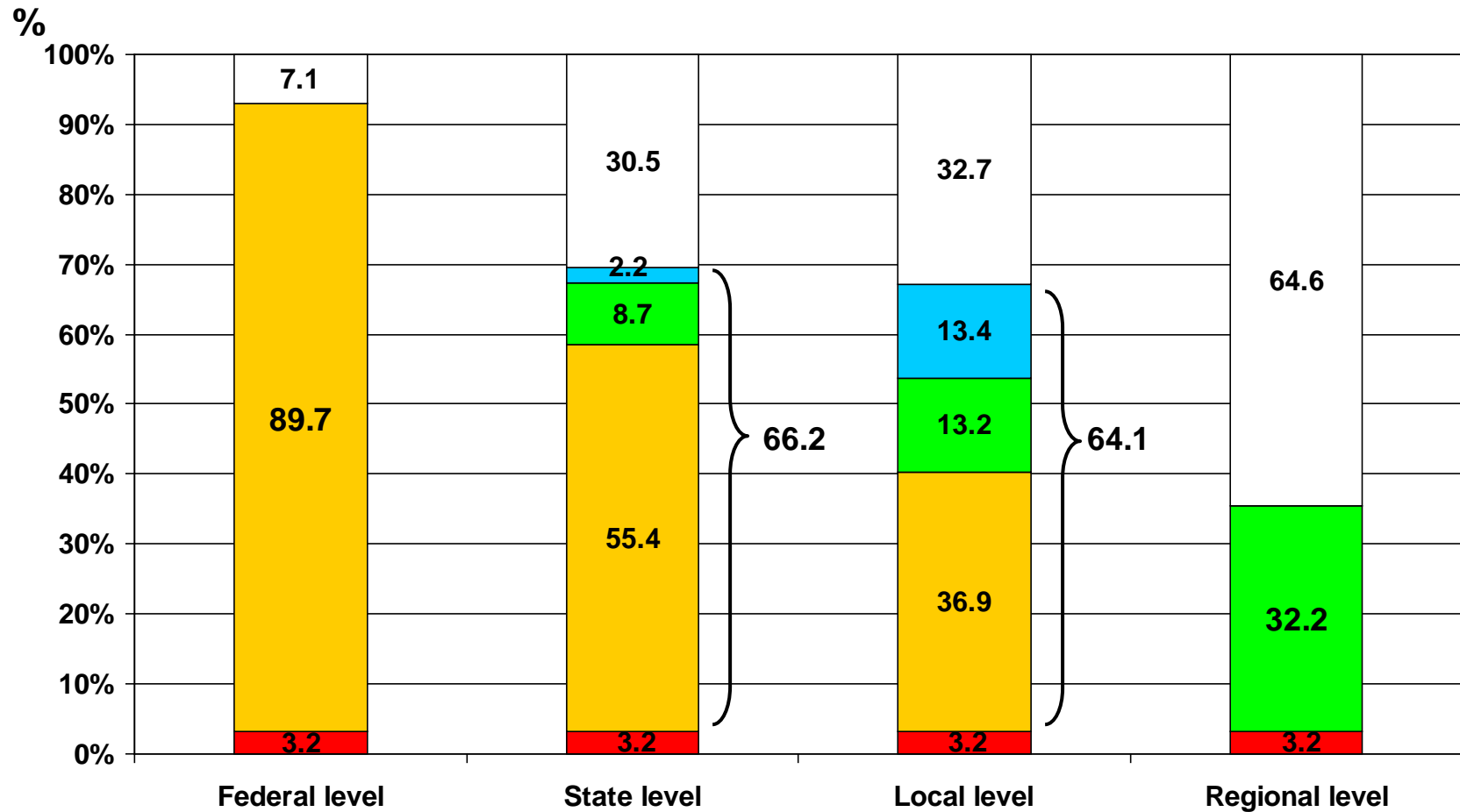
## Preferred future levels of government

- Respondents were asked to think about Australia's system of government in the **future** - say, 20 years from now – and how many levels of government they thought Australia should have. Respondents were also introduced to the concepts of regional government, and having more states, and asked if they had heard of them before; and asked, if they could have their choice, which levels of government Australia should have.
- If respondents chose state governments or local governments, they were asked if they thought there should be more, less or the same number as now.

## Levels that Australians would keep or abolish

- Most Australians (89.7%) would keep a federal level of government. Some Australians (7.1%) nevertheless said they would abolish it.
- Fewer Australians (66.2%) would keep state governments, with 55.4% keeping the same number as today, and the remainder either creating more or reducing the number. A sizeable number (30.5%) of Australians would abolish state governments altogether.
- 64.1% of Australians would keep a local level of government, but a sizeable number (32.7%) would also abolish it. As many people would increase the number of local governments as reduce them.
- Many Australians (32.2%) would create a new regional level of government.

## The future – who would have what levels of government?

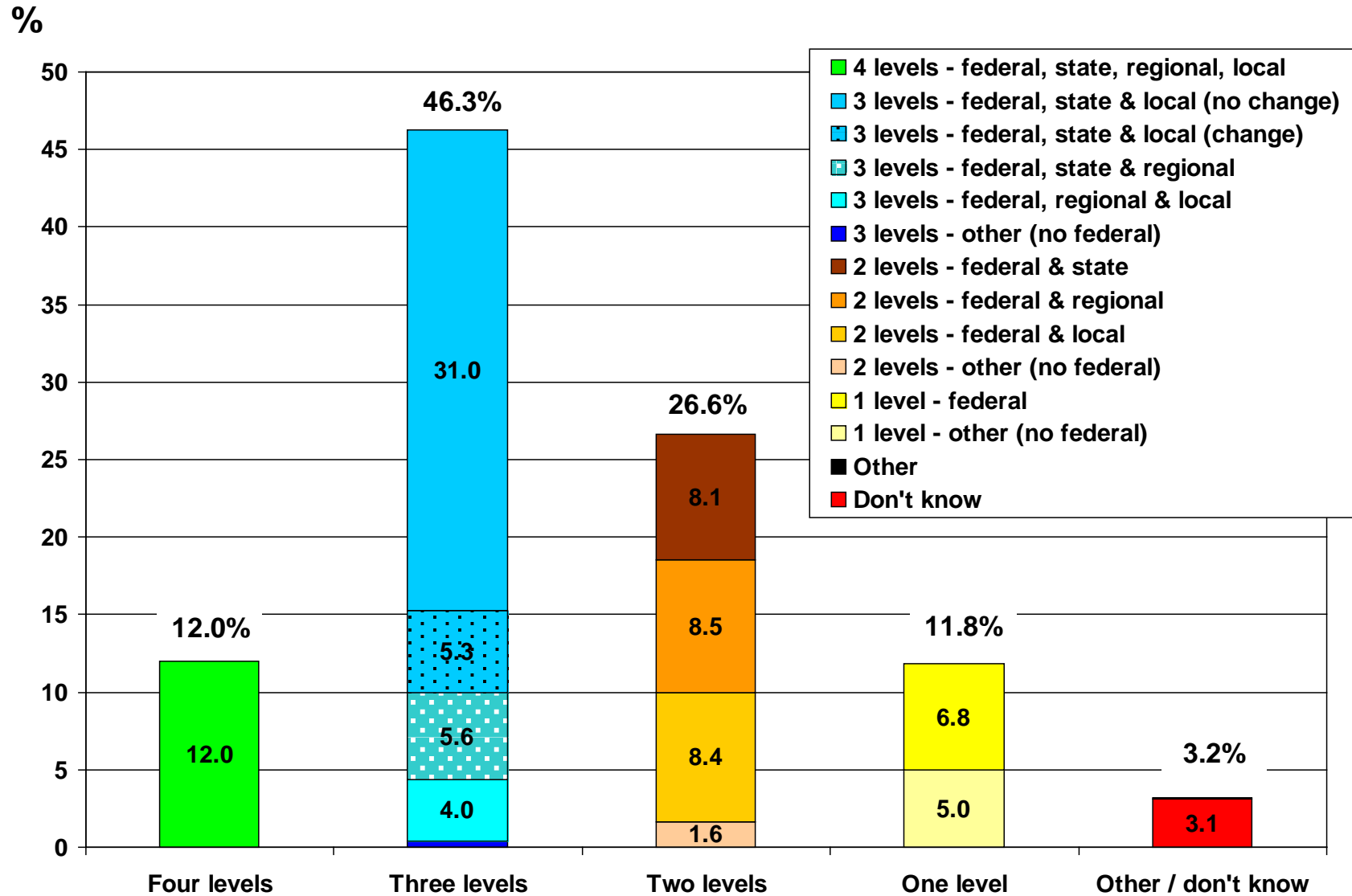


■ Other / don't know  
 ■ Keep same number (inc DK)  
 ■ Create more  
 ■ Less  
 ■ Abolish

## Number of tiers of government that Australians would have

- Contrary to many myths, most Australians (58.3%) would not prefer a system of government with fewer levels than today.
- Almost half of all Australians (46.3%) would like to keep a **three-levelled** system of government. However a third of those (15.3%) would have a different three-levelled system than the one they have today. Only 31% of Australians want to keep the current three-levelled system unchanged.
- A significant group of Australians (12%) would like a **four-tiered system** with regional governments as well as state and local governments.
- 26.6% of Australians would prefer a **two-tiered** system, including 1.6% who want a two-tiered system without any federal government.
- 11.8% of Australians would prefer a **single** tier of government – 6.8% who want the national government to run all government in Australia, and 5% who would like no national government and instead only state (2.4%), regional (1.1%) or local (1.5%) government.

## Australians' preferred federal system – number of levels



## Major options for a future federal system

- In total, two-thirds of Australians (65.8%) think Australia's system of government should be structured differently in another 20 years or so than it is today – with different numbers and/or levels of government.
- Only a small number of Australians (3.2%) are not prepared to express a view or have a different view about options for the future of the system.
- Some Australians (7.1%) do not want to keep a federal level of government.
- Of the remainder, 31% of Australians would keep the same levels and number of states as today, but almost twice as many (58.7%) would still prefer to see structural change.
- Most of those who would prefer to see structural change (43.5% of all Australians) would like a system that either continues to have state governments (19%), or replaces them with regional governments (12.5%), or has both (17.6%).
- These Australians would like a system that has between two and four levels.
- Only 15.2% of Australians would like a federal system which does not continue to have either state or regional governments. Just over half of these (8.4%) would have a two-tiered system of national and local government, while 6.8% would prefer the national government to be the only level of government in Australia.

## Australians' preferred federal system – major restructure options

