

From generation to generation



Taking a generational view of the population provides a useful framework for analysing census data. Dividing the population into generations and looking at the different social and economic experiences they have had can help us to understand the changes that have occurred and continue to occur in Australian society.

In this report 5 cohorts are identified: the Oldest Generation; the Lucky Generation; the Baby Boomers; Generation X and Y; and the internet or iGeneration (see table below). This article defines each generation, and briefly describes their social and economic history and current characteristics. These groups are used in several articles throughout this report which provide more in-depth analysis of various aspects of the life experience of these generations. While each generation shares certain characteristics, it should be acknowledged that within each generation a

great deal of individual variety occurs. Therefore, where useful, generations have been further divided into smaller age groups to highlight this diversity.

Oldest Generation the most likely to live alone

Born before 1927, the surviving members of this generation were aged 80 years and over in 2006 and comprised 4% of the total population. As young adults, the older members of this birth cohort may have experienced interrupted employment and family formation during the Great Depression. Many of the men would have served in the armed forces during World War II. Members of the Oldest Generation had limited formal educational opportunities: in 2006, 39% reported they left school at Year 8 or below or never attended school compared to 2% of Generation X and Y.

Defining the generations

In defining the generations, a number of factors have been taken into account including birth rates, significant world events and shared life experiences. Each generation covers a similar sized age group (generally 20 years) to allow more meaningful comparisons across generations. For example, Generation X and Y, while separately identified by some social commentators, have many characteristics in common and have been combined to form a 20 year birth cohort. It should be noted that there is no widespread agreement about the names and definitions of these generations. Furthermore, the names adopted in this report have been used by other commentators to refer to slightly different groups.

Summary of the generations

	<i>Birth cohort</i>	<i>Age in 2006</i> years	<i>Size of group in 2006</i> '000	<i>Proportion of the population in 2006</i> %
Oldest Generation	1891–1926	80 and over	727.3	3.7
Lucky Generation	1926–1946	60–79	2 875.1	14.5
Baby Boomers	1946–1966	40–59	5 468.8	27.5
Generation X and Y	1966–1986	20–39	5 489.9	27.6
iGeneration	1986–2006	0–19	5 294.1	26.7

Living arrangements and relationship in household

	Oldest Generation 80 and over %	Lucky Generation 60–79 %	Baby Boomers 40–59 %	Generation X and Y 20–39 %	iGeneration 0–19 %
In private dwellings					
Husband, wife or partner	30.3	61.0	68.0	48.9	0.5
Lone parent	5.3	3.4	7.4	5.0	0.1
Lone person	32.9	19.2	9.9	7.1	0.3
Group household member	1.1	1.8	2.0	7.3	0.7
Child	0.0	0.4	2.1	16.0	89.6
Other(a)	8.2	7.5	4.4	8.0	3.5
Total in private dwellings(b)	80.4	96.6	97.6	97.1	98.5
In non-private dwellings(c)	19.6	3.4	2.4	2.9	1.5
Total(d)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- (a) Includes other related individuals, non-family members and visitors from within Australia.
- (b) Includes persons in non-classifiable households.
- (c) Includes persons living in hospitals, nursing homes, cared accommodation for the retired and aged, other welfare institutions and other non-private dwellings such as hotels and motels.
- (d) Excludes people counted in migratory, off-shore and shipping Collection Districts.

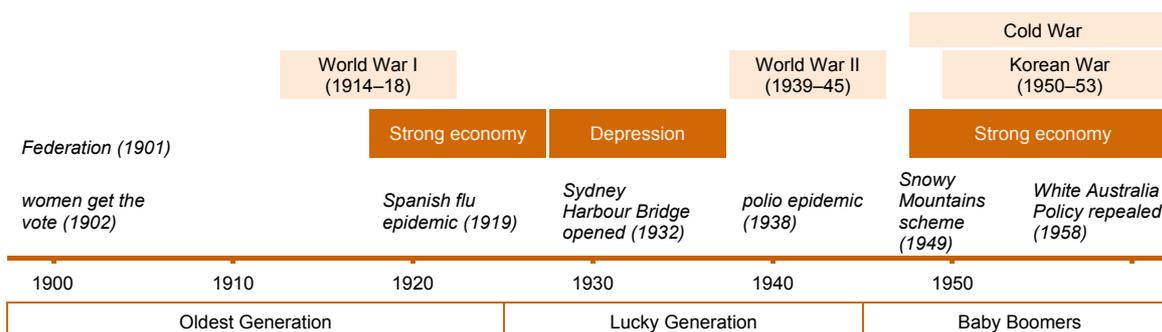
In 2006, 33% of the Oldest Generation were living alone, the highest proportion of all generations. A further 30% were living with their husband, wife or partner while 17% were living in nursing homes or cared accommodation for the retired or aged. Of those living alone, more than 4 in 5 were widowed. This generation reported the highest rate of religious affiliation (82%) of all the generations, with Anglican (30%) and Catholic (23%) the most commonly reported faiths.

because they generally perceive that they had an easier time than their parents. They didn't live through World War I or have to make ends meet during the Depression, and as young adults they experienced full employment and prosperity during the post-World War II economic boom. This generation has also been referred to as the Austerity Generation; affected by the privations resulting from the Great Depression in their formative years, they are often regarded as a hardworking and stoic generation who seek stability and security. The Lucky Generation has been a relatively small group compared to successive generations, partly due to low birth rates during the Depression and World War II and recent deaths.

Lucky Generation retire gradually

Born between 1926 and 1946, just prior to and during the Great Depression and World War II, they are referred to as the Lucky Generation

Time line⁴



Labour Force Status by generation

	Oldest Generation 80 and over	Lucky Generation 60–79	Baby Boomers 40–59	Generation X and Y 20–39	iGeneration(a) 15–19
	%	%	%	%	%
Males					
Employed full-time	1.7	18.2	68.0	66.5	17.7
Employed part-time	1.5	9.1	10.0	12.4	22.7
Unemployed	0.1	1.2	3.2	5.0	7.0
Not in the labour force	95.9	69.2	14.0	10.8	48.7
<i>Total males(b)</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Females					
Employed full-time	0.4	5.9	35.3	37.9	9.9
Employed part-time	0.5	8.7	30.5	27.1	33.7
Unemployed	0.1	0.4	2.8	4.2	6.8
Not in the labour force	98.6	83.5	27.3	26.0	45.5
<i>Total females(b)</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

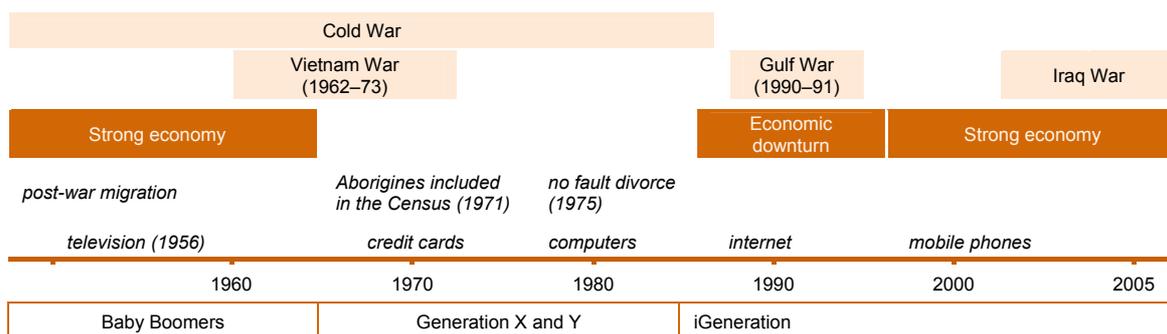
(a) Excludes those aged under 15 years.
 (b) Includes those employed but away from work during the reference period.

This cohort also experienced higher rates of infectious diseases (such as polio, diphtheria and rubella), cancer and heart disease during their lifetime than subsequent generations.¹ In 2006 the Lucky Generation were aged 60–79 years and accounted for 14% of the total Australian population. By 2006 the majority had retired from employment. Nearly twice as many men (30%) as women (16%) were employed, reflecting the traditional breadwinner and homemaker roles adopted by the majority of the Lucky Generation. Two thirds of those men employed were working full-time, while the majority of the employed women were working

part-time. See ‘Generations of employment’, p. 159–166, for a detailed analysis of the labour force experiences of each generation over time.

In 2006, the Lucky Generation had the highest proportion of members born overseas (36% compared to 31%–32% for both the Oldest Generation and the Baby Boomers and 24% for Generation X and Y). Contributing to the high proportion of overseas-born in this generation was the post World War II influx of European migrants in the 1950s and 1960s: 12% of this generation were born in the UK or Ireland and a further 11% in Southern and Eastern Europe (including 4% who were Italian-born).

Time line⁴



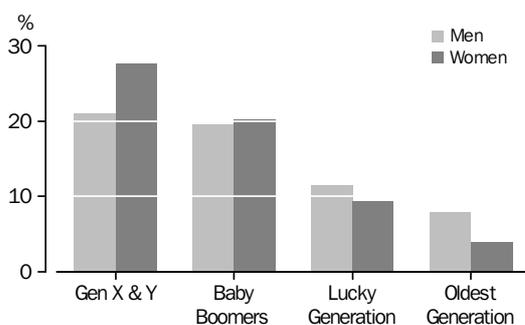
Baby Boomers share breadwinning role

In 2006 the Baby Boomers were aged 40–59 years. Born between 1946 and 1966 during the post-war economic boom, the Baby Boomers were the second largest generation in 2006, numbering 5.5 million or 28% of the total population. The size of this cohort can be attributed to the high rates of marriage and fertility, resulting from the catch up of marriage and child-bearing delayed by World War II, and the buoyant economy during their parents' child-bearing years. The influx of migrants to Australia following World War II also contributed to the size of this generation both directly (through the migration of children with their families) and indirectly (through the migration of young adults who would later have Baby Boomer children). Of all the generations, the Baby Boomers had the largest overseas-born population (1.6 million people) in 2006. However, the overseas-born comprise a smaller proportion (32%) of this generation than in the Lucky Generation (36%) because they joined a large cohort of Australian-born Boomers.

The older Baby Boomers entered the labour force when economic conditions were buoyant and experienced high rates of employment. The younger members of this generation have not had the same employment opportunities throughout their working lives as older Baby Boomers, with many affected by the economic downturn in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

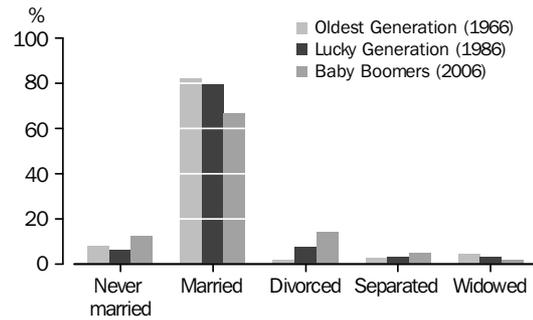
The Baby Boomer Generation has lived through enormous social change, experiencing rising rates of female participation in both tertiary education and the labour force, and the creation of the two income household as

Higher education qualifications by generation(a)



(a) Includes Bachelor degree, Graduate diploma, Graduate certificate, Master degree and Doctoral degree.

Registered marital status at 40–59 years



the norm. Just over two thirds of female Baby Boomers were employed in 2006, while 20% stated they had a Bachelor degree or higher qualification.

This generation experienced increasing rates of marital separation resulting from the introduction of 'no fault' divorce in 1975.² In 2006, 19% of Baby Boomers were separated or divorced, nearly double the rate recorded for the previous generation: when the Lucky Generation were the same age (40–59 years) in 1986, 11% were separated or divorced.

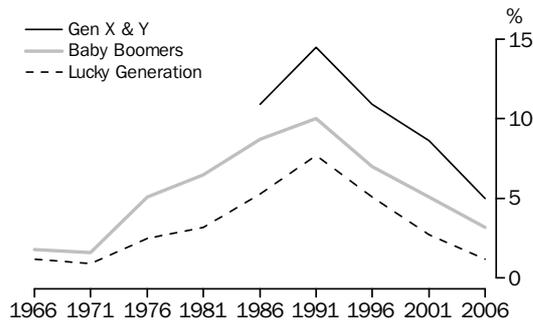
Generation X and Y the most highly qualified

Born between 1966 and 1986, this generation were aged 20–39 years in 2006. The older members of this birth cohort have been dubbed Generation X for the perceived namelessness felt by the generation overshadowed by the Baby Boomers who preceded them. Generation Y simply refers to the generation following X. With a combined size similar to the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y comprised 28% (5.5 million) of the total population in 2006.

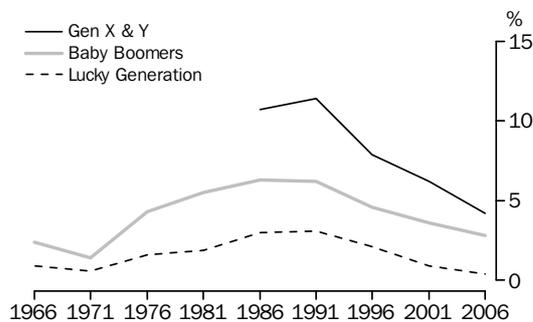
Generation X and Y were the first generation to experience increased rates of parental separation and divorce. They are also regarded as having fewer opportunities than their Baby Boomer predecessors, being the first to experience user-pays higher education and job insecurity.³ When Generation X and Y were entering the workforce, unemployment levels were high. For example in 1991, 15% of Generation X and Y men who were of working age (15–24 years) were unemployed. In contrast, Baby Boomers started entering the workforce in the late 1960s when unemployment levels were very low. By 1971, only 2% of working age Baby Boomer men (then aged 15–24 years) were unemployed.

Unemployment experiences of the generations(a)

Men



Women



(a) Proportion of all men or women in each generation aged 15 years and over at the time of each census who were unemployed.

The unemployment pattern was similar for women. Lower levels of unemployment experienced by Lucky Generation women partly reflect lower levels of labour force participation by women of that generation with fewer women seeking employment than in later generations.

Despite the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), Generation X and Y are the most highly educated generation on record, with one in four having a Bachelor degree or above in 2006. In each successive generation, the proportion of women who obtained higher education qualifications has increased relative to that of their male counterparts. In 2006, 28% of Generation X and Y women had a Bachelor degree or above compared with 21% of Generation X and Y men.

Spanning people in their early 20s to late 30s, Generation X and Y were represented more broadly across the different living arrangements than other generations in 2006. While 16% were living with parents, almost half

(49%) were living with a spouse or partner. A further 7% were living in group households while 7% were living alone.

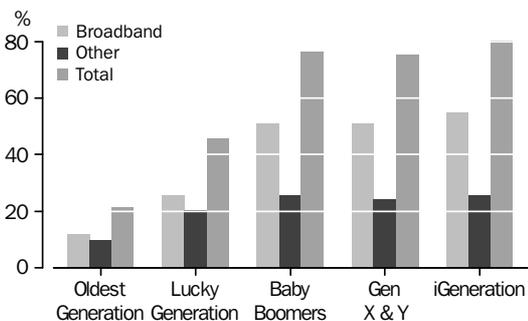
iGeneration live up to their name

Born between 1986 and 2006, the iGeneration (Internet Generation) spent their formative years in a period which saw the birth and rise of the internet. Aged 0–19 years in 2006, they take computers and the internet and a host of electronic consumables, such as DVDs, mobile phones and MP3 players for granted. Uptake of technology by the iGeneration is reflected in their rates of internet access. In 2006, 80% of the youngest generation had access to the internet at home with just over two thirds of this group having access to a broadband connection. Access was also high among Baby Boomers (76%) and Generation X and Y (75%), many of whom have their iGeneration children living with them at home.

Despite the gradual increase in one parent families, the majority of iGens in private households were living with their couple parents in 2006 (77%). Twenty years earlier in 1986, 85% of 0–19 year olds (Generation X and Y) were living with couple parents. For iGens living in couple families, around 9 out of 10 were the natural or adopted child of both parents.

The iGeneration, along with Generation X and Y, are the most secular generations, with almost one in four reporting no religion in 2006. Of the other generations, those reporting no religion ranged from 6% of the Oldest Generation to 17% of Baby Boomers. See 'Religion across the generations', p. 54–58, for more information.

Internet access by generation(a)



(a) Usual residents living in private dwellings only.

iGeneration aged 15–19: employment and education participation

	Studying(a)			Not studying %	Total(b) %
	Full-time	Part-time	Total		
	%	%	%		
Employed					
Full-time	0.5	3.1	3.7	9.9	13.9
Part-time	21.2	1.2	22.5	5.4	28.1
<i>Total employed(c)</i>	<i>24.1</i>	<i>4.6</i>	<i>28.9</i>	<i>16.6</i>	<i>46.0</i>
Not employed	44.9	1.2	46.4	7.1	54.0
Total(d)	69.3	5.9	74.8	25.2	100.0

(a) At secondary school, TAFE college, university or other educational institution. Total includes students who did not state full-time or part-time study status.

(b) Includes people who did not state attendance at an educational institution.

(c) Includes people who were employed and away from work.

(d) Includes people who did not state labour force status.

In 2006 the oldest members of the iGeneration were in their mid to late teens (aged 15–19 years). The majority (75%) were students, with nearly three quarters of these attending secondary school and the remainder attending a TAFE college, university or other tertiary institution. Nearly half (46%) of all 15–19 year old members of the iGeneration were employed in 2006 compared to 42% of 15–19 year old members of Generation X and Y in 1986 and 62% of 15–19 year old Baby Boomers in 1966. In 2006, many 15–19 year old iGens were combining work and study (29%), and of these, the overwhelming majority were studying full-time while working in a part-time job.

Endnotes

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006, *Measures of Australia's Progress*, cat. no. 1370.0, p. 33, ABS, Canberra.

2 ABS 1994, 'Changes in living arrangements', in *Australian Social Trends 1994*, cat. no. 4102.0, ABS, Canberra.

3 Baum, N. and Jackson, N. 2004, *Planning the local government response to ageing and place*, Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW, Sydney.

4 Australian Government 2007, *Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9 and 10*.