

Monday, 20 March 2017

## Aussies are losing their competitive spirit for sport

Just one in five Australians now regularly play competitive sports, down from 27 percent in 2001, the latest sports participation data from Roy Morgan Research shows.

Whether one-on-one or team vs team, the number of Australians (aged 14+) who regularly play competitive sport has declined consistently since 2001. Roy Morgan monitors the participation trends in over 60 sports, fitness activities and outdoor leisure pursuits. Over the past 15 years, more Australians are walking for exercise, jogging, cycling, gymming and yoga-ing—but fewer are playing most of the 27 sports shown below that can actually be won or lost (with or without breaking a sweat).

		Number of Regular Participants		
		2001	2016	Change
1	Soccer	428,000	623,000	46%
2	Golf	814,000	621,000	-24%
3	Tennis	711,000	463,000	-35%
4	Basketball	422,000	438,000	4%
5	Cricket	418,000	377,000	-10%
6	Martial arts	281,000	321,000	14%
7	Netball	414,000	315,000	-24%
8	Australian Rules football	256,000	253,000	-1%
9	Lawn bowls	312,000	233,000	-25%
10	Darts	238,000	232,000	-3%
11	Pool/Snooker/Billiards	680,000	213,000	-69%
12	Athletics/Track & field	158,000	173,000	9%
13	Table tennis	187,000	170,000	-9%
14	Volleyball	177,000	160,000	-10%
15	Badminton	103,000	141,000	37%
16	Field hockey	156,000	129,000	-17%
17	Rugby League	175,000	127,000	-27%
18	Ten Pin bowling	318,000	122,000	-62%
19	Rowing	73,000	118,000	62%
20	Gymnastics	108,000	101,000	-6%
21	Softball	104,000	79,000	-24%
22	Triathlons	52,000	67,000	29%
23	Baseball	49,000	61,000	24%
24	Squash	178,000	59,000	-67%
25	Ballroom Dancing	99,000	55,000	-44%
26	Rugby Union	148,000	55,000	-63%
27	Archery	35,000	50,000	43%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4,211,000</b>	<b>3,937,000</b>	<b>-7%</b>

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source Australia. Base: Australians aged 14+, January to December 2001 (sample = 26,198) and January to December 2016 (sample = 14,330).

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Only a third of these competitive sports have gained regular participants since 2001 (and only five beat the national population growth of 26 percent over the period).

Soccer has been the big winner of the new century so far, gaining almost 200,000 regular participants (up 46 percent to 623,000). Now the most-played competitive sport in Australia, in 2001 soccer was fourth on the list, with only slightly more players than basketball, cricket and netball. While soccer overtook tennis ten years ago, since 2014 it has been neck-and-neck with golf—and nabbed the top spot in 2016.

Rowing has enjoyed the largest proportional growth (up 62 percent to 118,000 regular participants)—however it's fair to say not all would be racing competitively. Badminton (up 37 percent), triathlons (up 29 percent to 67,000) and archery (up 43 percent to 50,000) have also grown strongly.

The only other competitive sports that gained regular participants over the period (although not quite enough to exceed population growth) are basketball (up four percent to 438,000), martial arts (up 14 percent to 321,000), athletics or track and field events (up nine percent to 173,000), and baseball (up 24 percent to 61,000).

The popularity of pool, snooker and billiards has declined rapidly since 2001, with the number of regular players today less than third of what it was—back when it was more popular than soccer. The number of Australians playing ten pin bowling, squash or rugby union regularly also declined by over 60 percent.

Tennis lost almost a quarter of a million regular players since 2001 (down 35 percent), more than any other competitive sport. Almost 100,000 fewer Australians now play netball regularly (down 24 percent), and 41,000 fewer play cricket (down 10 percent). Australian Rules football has held on to over 250,000 players (down just one percent)—enough to overtake lawn bowls (down 25 percent to 233,000).

Roy Morgan measures other sports and activities that *some* participants might well do competitively—such as swimming, snowboarding and surfing, boxing, ice skating and horse riding—but were determined here to be more aligned with fitness and leisure than competition.

### *Sports are losing men and women of all ages*

While it's true that Australia has an ageing population, the decline in competitive sports participation is apparent across all age groups—and both sexes. Participation rates among men and women in most different age groups have shrunk by well over 20 percent.

In 2001, 34 percent of men and 20 percent of women (aged 14+) played one or more competitive sports regularly; by 2016 it was just 26 percent and 14 percent respectively.

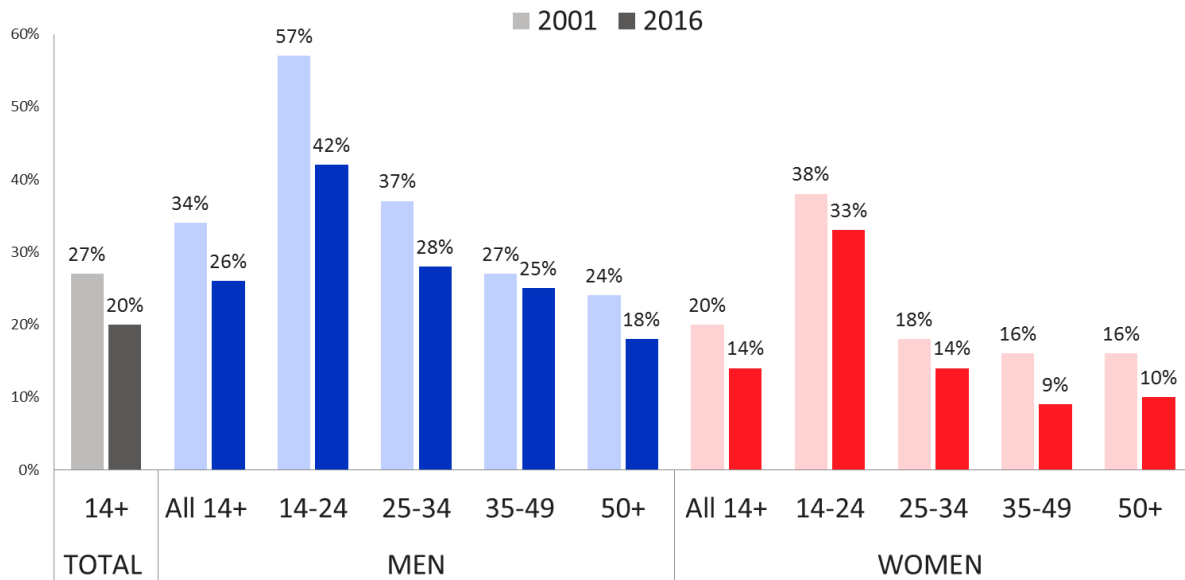
Young men aged 14 to 24 remain the most likely to play competitive sports, however the participation rate has fallen well below half: down from 57 percent in 2001 to 42 percent in 2016.

The sharpest proportional declines have been among women aged 35 to 49 and 50+. These groups were already the least likely to play any competitive sport 15 years ago (both 16 percent), and now just nine percent and 10 percent do, respectively.

Compared with other segments, the decrease in regular competitive sports participation has been smallest among men aged 35 to 49 (from 27 to 25 percent) and women aged 14 to 24 (from 38 to 33 percent). For the men, the overall rate has been bolstered by increased participation in the less strenuous competitions of

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golf, darts, pool and bowling. Among young women, the lower popularity of cricket, tennis, field hockey and gymnastics has been offset, in part, by increased participation in soccer, volleyball and, yes, Australian Rules football.



Source: Roy Morgan Single Source Australia. Base: Australians aged 14+, January to December 2001 (sample = 26,198) and January to December 2016 (sample = 14,330).

**Michele Levine – CEO, Roy Morgan Research, says:**

*“Australians are losing their competitive spirit when it comes to playing sport. Instead, more of us routinely go cycling or jogging, hiking and bushwalking, or head to the gym or yoga class.*

*“Overall, one in two Australians aged 14-plus regularly do some form of sport, fitness or heart-pumping leisure activity, which is unchanged since 2001. So although many sports have fallen out of favour, we’re still keeping comparatively fit through other individual activities that aren’t about keeping score, finishing first, or facing defeat from an opponent. Personal activities are also easier to fit into busy lifestyles, while competitive sports require a lot of time and commitment.*

*“Walking for exercise has also increased over the period, to now being something almost half of us do regularly. Today almost 20 percent of Australian don’t participate in any other sport or fitness activity except walking. Together this leaves an estimated three in 10 Australians who don’t do any regular sport or fitness activities at all—not even a brisk walk.*

*“Roy Morgan’s ongoing sports participation research is a quick go-to source for any association or club, government agency or health organisation needing to understand the long-term trends across demographic segments.”*

**To learn more about Roy Morgan’s ongoing sports and fitness participation research, or any of our sports spectating, TV viewership, betting, sponsorship awareness and club supporters data, call (+61) (3) 9224 5309 or email [askroymorgan@roymorgan.com](mailto:askroymorgan@roymorgan.com)**

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**About Roy Morgan Research**

Roy Morgan Research is the largest independent Australian research company, with offices throughout Australia, as well as in Indonesia, the United States and the United Kingdom. A full service research organisation specialising in omnibus and syndicated data, Roy Morgan Research has over 70 years' experience in collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

**Margin of Error**

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
5,000	±1.4	±1.2	±0.8	±0.6
7,500	±1.1	±1.0	±0.7	±0.5
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
20,000	±0.7	±0.6	±0.4	±0.3
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2

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