

30 August 2007

AUSTRALIANS SPEAK ON FOREIGN POLICY

The Lowy Institute for International Policy today released the results of its third annual poll surveying Australian public opinion on foreign policy and global affairs.

Relationship with the United States

60% of Australians had a favourable opinion of the US, but 76% had a favourable opinion of Americans. Between the first Lowy Institute Poll in 2005 and the third in June 2007, the number of Australians regarding the ANZUS alliance as 'very important' for Australia's security fell from 45% to 36%. In 2007, 'President George W. Bush' caused 69% to have an unfavourable opinion of the United States, with 'US foreign policies' causing 63% to hold an unfavourable opinion. When rating their feelings towards 15 countries on a 'thermometer' scale of 1° - 100°, respondents ranked the US at a mean of 60°, equally with Vietnam and behind New Zealand (81°), Great Britain (75°), Singapore (64°) and Japan (63°).

Climate change

Of all external threats to Australians, climate change causes the most concern, with 55% 'very worried' about it. Climate change ranks higher than the threats of 'unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons' (50% 'very worried' about it), 'Islamic fundamentalism' (39%) and 'international terrorism' (38%). As a foreign policy goal, 'tackling climate change' ranked equal highest in importance for those surveyed (75% thinking it a 'very important' goal) together with 'protecting the jobs of Australian workers', and ahead of 'combating international terrorism' (65%). Asked how convinced they were about certain methods of reducing carbon emissions, 65% responded that 'renewable energy like wind, solar and geothermal' was very convincing, and favoured far above other methods proposed, including 'nuclear energy' (19% very convinced) and 'clean coal where emissions are stored underground' (15%).

Iraq and Afghanistan

The majority of respondents thought that Australia should not 'continue to be involved militarily in Iraq' (57%), while equal proportions (46%) felt that Australia should continue in Afghanistan.

The rights of citizens to Australia's protection

81% of survey respondents felt that the government should assist Australians caught up in dangerous events in another country, with a very strong majority (75%) agreeing this was the case even if they were also citizens of that other country.

Migrant worker schemes

The Poll showed that Australians are receptive to the idea of allowing unskilled migrant workers into Australia for limited periods. A strong majority of respondents (around two thirds) agreed with positive statements about temporary migrant worker schemes such as 'good because they fill a gap in the demand for seasonal workers'. Significantly fewer agreed with negative statements about such schemes, such as that they '...make illegal immigration easier' or '...take jobs from Australians'.

The full report is available on the Lowy Institute website at

www.lowyinstitute.org

For further information please contact

Orietta Melfi (M) +61 (0) 438 323 466 or email omelfi@lowyinstitute.org

Alex Duchon (T) +61 2 8238 9120



The Lowy Institute is an independent, non-partisan think tank which researches international political, strategic and economic issues from an Australian perspective.

31 Bligh Street, Sydney NSW 2000 Tel: +61 2 8238 9000 Fax: +61 2 8238 9005

Web: www.lowyinstitute.org