

THE LOWY INSTITUTE POLL

# Australians Speak 2005

PUBLIC OPINION AND FOREIGN POLICY



Ivan Cook

**LOWY INSTITUTE**  
FOR INTERNATIONAL POLICY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

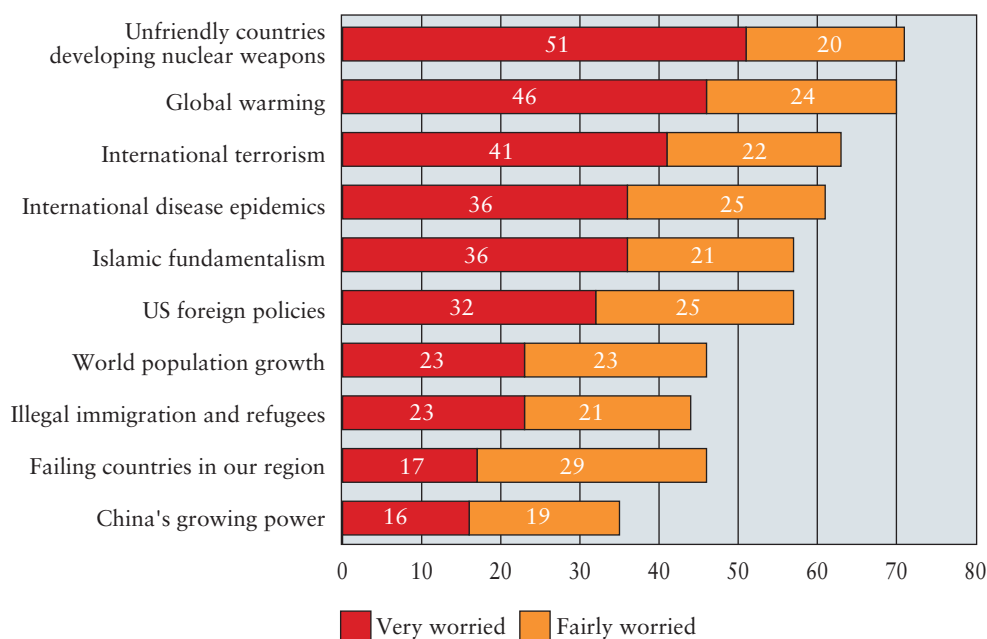
Australians feel positive and self-confident about Australia's place in the world, but we also have a realistic sense of our limitations and vulnerabilities. A vast majority believe Australia is 'a good international citizen' (82%), 'important in Asia' (82%), and 'well-placed to succeed in a competitive world' (79%), while few agree with the notion that we are 'unimportant in global politics' (37%). But three quarters of respondents also think we are 'vulnerable to external threats' (76%), and while the population is evenly split on whether we are 'independent minded', 65% think we are 'a follower not a leader'.

Australians are generally optimistic about our economic future, but noticeably less optimistic about our international security. 67% of Australians are either 'very optimistic' or 'optimistic' about our economic performance in the world over the next five years, but only 50% of Australians are either 'very optimistic' or 'optimistic' about our international security over the next five years.

Looking beyond our shores, Australians feel most positive about the countries with which we have longstanding, deep and stable relationships. New Zealand (94%), the United Kingdom (86%), Europe (85%), Singapore (83%) and Japan (84%) are our favourites, quite closely followed by China (69%).

The glaring omission from this list is the United States, for which only 58% of Australians have positive feelings. The only places we asked about that generate fewer positive feelings than the United States are Indonesia (52%), the Middle East (25%), Iran (24%) and Iraq (23%).

So what is it about America that we don't like? For a start, 68% of Australians think we take too much notice of the views of the United States in our foreign policy. When we asked respondents to rate a series of potential threats, we discovered that by one measure both Islamic fundamentalism and United States foreign policies are worrying to 57% of Australians: a startling equivalence. By the same measure, China's growing power



“HOW WORRIED ARE YOU ABOUT THE FOLLOWING POTENTIAL THREATS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD?”

worries only 35% of Australians, and comes last in a list of threats.

The survey has exposed a seam of antipathy towards the United States and its influence over our affairs, but how deeply felt is it, and will it really affect our relationship? Australians are pragmatic about the value of the ANZUS alliance, with 72% saying it is either very or fairly important for Australia’s security. But when we asked whether Australia should act in accordance with the alliance if it meant following the United States to war with China over Taiwan, the answer was a resounding ‘No’. Only 21% of those surveyed would support such a move.

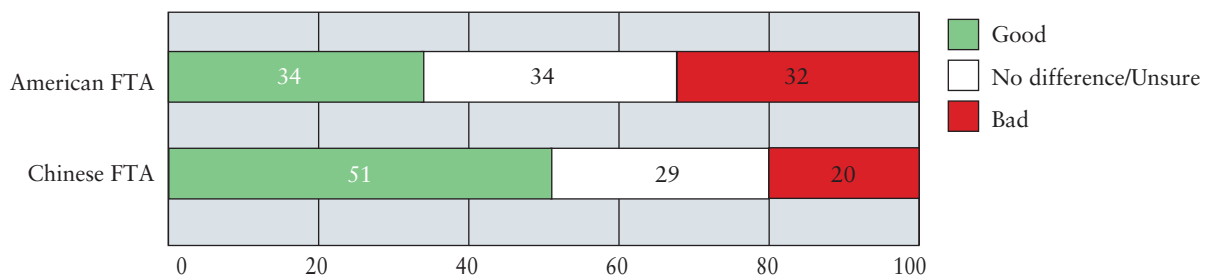
Turning to trade, Australians feel ambivalent at best about our free trade agreement with the United States (USFTA), which only 34% of respondents think will be good for Australia despite the fact that Australians are positive about trade agreements in general. 83% of respondents who think the USFTA is bad for Australia believe that ‘we should try to negotiate international agreements that open other countries’ markets to our exports in return for their goods coming into Australia’. In contrast, the idea of a free trade agreement with China commands majority support: 51% of respondents

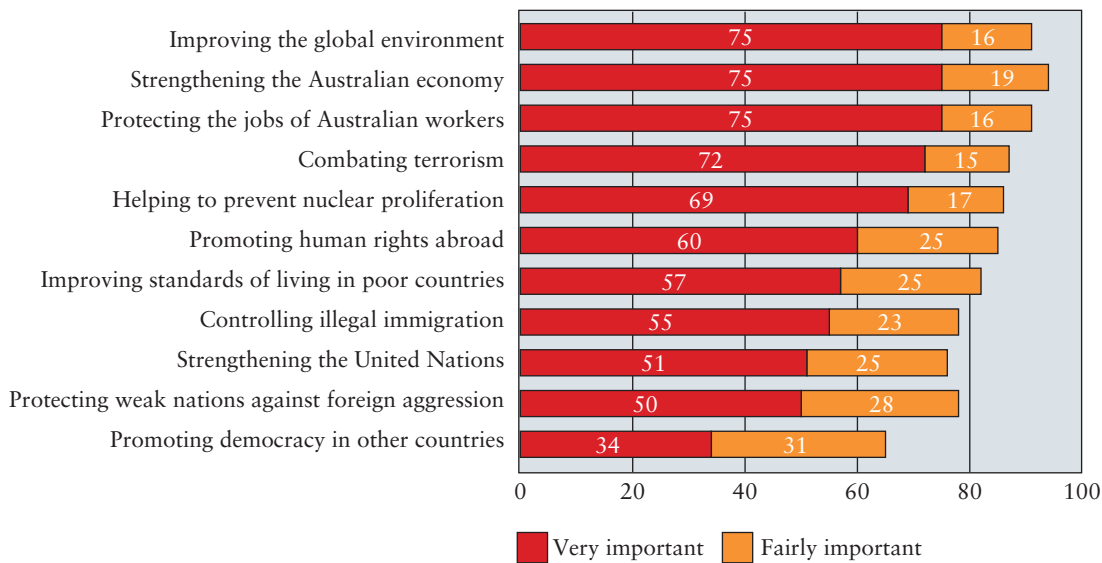
think it would be good for Australia. If ambivalence and caution towards the United States is one clear message of this survey, a sense of China’s great potential as a trading partner is another. Whether the imbalance in our feelings towards the two great countries will survive China’s growing diplomatic and strategic power, and whether positive attitudes towards a free trade agreement will survive a more public debate, remains to be seen.

Another clear finding is the importance Australians place on environmental concerns. ‘Improving the global environment’ should be our number one foreign policy goal, along with ‘strengthening the Australian economy’ and ‘protecting the jobs of Australian workers’. The benefits to our economy of globalisation are widely recognised, but 57% of Australians think that globalisation has had a bad effect on the environment, and the second most worrying international threat is ‘global warming’. Our concerns stand in stark contrast to those of Americans, who, in a similar survey, rated global warming as only a middling threat, less than half as worrying as international terrorism. For Australians, the threat of global warming is slightly more worrying than international terrorism.

“ON BALANCE, DO YOU THINK THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WE HAVE SIGNED WITH THE UNITED STATES IS GOOD OR BAD FOR AUSTRALIA OR WILL IT MAKE NO DIFFERENCE?”

WE ARE IN THE EARLY STAGES OF NEGOTIATING A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH CHINA. ON BALANCE, DO YOU THINK SIGNING A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH CHINA WOULD BE GOOD OR BAD FOR AUSTRALIA OR WOULD IT MAKE NO DIFFERENCE?”





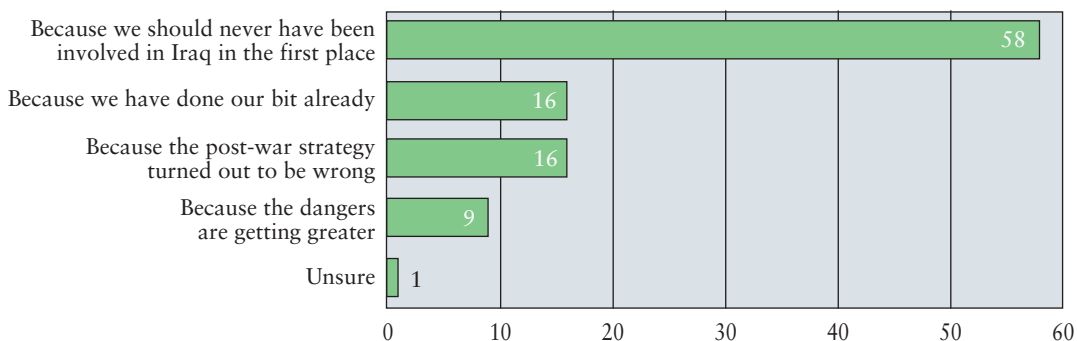
“THINKING ABOUT WHAT AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD BE TRYING TO ACHIEVE, I AM GOING TO READ A LIST OF GOALS, AND ASK YOU TO TELL ME HOW IMPORTANT EACH ONE IS FOR AUSTRALIA”

On the difficult questions of military intervention, Australians feel much more comfortable using armed force if it has been endorsed regionally or by the United Nations. Less than half of those surveyed (46%) support our continued military involvement in Iraq. When asked why, easily the most popular reason was ‘because we should never have been there in the first place’ (58%). International legitimacy is important to us. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) prefer that we rely on international law even though decisions may go against us, while only half as many (33%) would do whatever benefits us most in any given situation regardless of international law.

But if we are directly threatened, a clear majority of Australians would not hesitate

to take preemptive action. Two-thirds of Australians (66%) agreed that if we believed that terrorists based in another country were going to launch an attack against Australia, and if the other country could not or would not take action to stop them, we should have the right to strike directly at the terrorists.

Of all the external threats we face, the most worrying is the possibility that unfriendly countries will develop nuclear weapons. But a third of respondents (34%) believe we do not have the right to use armed force to prevent unfriendly countries acquiring them, and preventing nuclear proliferation is a foreign policy goal of only medium importance (fifth of 11). Although Australians worry about the consequences of nuclear proliferation, it



“YOU SAID THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO BE INVOLVED MILITARILY IN IRAQ. WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON?”

seems that we are ambivalent about taking a role for ourselves in international efforts to control it.

Australians are as divided now about our military contribution to Iraq as they were about the war itself, and have remained largely consistent in their views over the past two years. 46% believe we should continue to be involved militarily, and 51% believe we should not. Of those who said they supported the Iraq War at the time, 78% support our continued military involvement. Of those who opposed going to war at the time, 76% are against our continued military involvement. The major reason for keeping out of Iraq, with 58% support, is that 'we should never have been there in the first place'. The least popular of the reasons we suggested, with only 9% support, is 'because the dangers are getting greater'.



## INTRODUCTION

The Lowy Institute's mission is to inform and deepen the international policy debate in Australia and around the world. Public opinion has a central place in that debate, responding to (and helping to shape) the policy direction taken by government. The Lowy Institute Poll will draw out and clarify Australian public opinion on international policy.

This Lowy Institute Poll survey — the most comprehensive single survey ever taken of Australian public opinion on international policy — is the first of a series of surveys to be repeated at regular intervals. A core set of questions will be asked in each survey, so building over time an ever-deepening set of compatible data. The Lowy Institute Poll is designed to capture Australian opinion on a broad range of foreign policy issues chosen for their importance in the business of our nation. Each survey will deliver a snapshot of Australian views at a particular moment, while the series will enable us to track long-term changes in public attitudes. The past five years have been tumultuous for the community of nations, and it might be that some of the attitudes revealed in this survey are only temporary. Future editions of the Lowy Institute Poll will answer that question, and many others.

The first chapter in this report, *Our place in the world*, lays out Australians' views of our national character, about how we fit in the world, and about how we relate to the global leadership. Chapter 2, *Our approach to foreign policy*, reports the foreign policy priorities of Australians and our attitudes to international law and development aid. Chapter 3, *Our international security*, shows the external threats that Australians are most worried about and looks at the use of armed force beyond our shores. The principle of preemption and the

importance of the ANZUS alliance are also tested. Chapter 4, *Democratisation and Iraq*, gives Australians' views on democratisation in the Middle East, on the Iraq War, and on the current situation in Iraq. Chapter 5, *International trade*, describes Australian attitudes to international trade liberalisation, and looks at out trading arrangements with the United States and China. Australians also rate the effects of globalisation on their lives. Finally, Chapter 6, *Segmenting Australia*, highlights some of the divisive and unifying issues in international policy, and describes the characteristics of our different demographic groups.

To help place Australian views in an international context, this report includes comparisons of our survey data with similar data taken from surveys abroad. Comparison of data from different sources is not an exact science because of the different parameters, content and timing of the questions. But clearly there are views that apply internationally, as well as instructive differences.

### Acknowledgments

The survey was developed over the six months to February 2005 by Lowy Institute staff in partnership with the polling company UMR Research, and with the help of several external advisers. Above all we are indebted to Graeme Lawless for his sage and tireless advice. The best qualities of this project bear his imprint, and its faults exist despite him. From UMR, Bruce Dier and John Utting provided invaluable technical support and the benefit of long experience. Thanks are due to those members of the Lowy Institute Poll advisory committee who helped guide the project, namely Professor Andrew MacIntyre, Professor William Tow and Chemi Shalev. The development

of the Lowy Institute Poll was overseen by Allan Gyngell, Executive Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy. Any errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the author.

### **Methodology**

The survey data on which this report is based was collected in telephone interviews between the 5th and the 10th of February 2005 by UMR Research. One thousand people were surveyed, chosen to be representative of Australians aged 18 years and above. Figures displayed in the report are rounded to the nearest single digit, but responses are ranked to many decimal places and, where applicable, according to net rather than positive results. Net figures are positive less negative results.

The margin of error on the main sample (n=1000) is 3.1%, which means there is a 95% chance that the responses of Australians would fall somewhere between 3.1% less and 3.1% more than the responses of the sample. As the sample diminishes in size, results become increasingly indicative and less statistically valid.

# 1. OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

## The National Character

Knowledge of our national characteristics can help to explain Australians' views on particular issues. To elucidate the national character, survey respondents were asked to place Australia in the international context by rating a series of descriptions. In general Australians feel positive and self-confident about Australia, but we also have a realistic sense of our limitations and vulnerabilities. 82% of respondents believe Australia is 'a good international citizen', and 'important in Asia'. 79% think we are 'well-placed to succeed in a competitive world'. At the other end of the scale, only 37% agree with the notion that we are 'unimportant in global politics'. But 76% of respondents also think we are 'vulnerable to external threats', and while the population is evenly split on whether we are 'independent minded', 65% think we are 'a follower not a leader'.

## Measures of Confidence

Australians are generally optimistic about our economic future, but noticeably less optimistic about our international security. 67% of Australians are either 'very optimistic' (14%) or 'optimistic' (53%) about our economic performance in the world over the next five years. Only 10% are either 'pessimistic' (8%) or 'very pessimistic' (2%). 50% of Australians are either 'very optimistic' (8%) or 'optimistic' (42%) about our international security over the next five years, whereas 19% are either 'pessimistic' (16%) or 'very pessimistic' (3%).

## Our Friends and Neighbours

To place Australia in the community of nations, we asked respondents what they feel about the countries and regions of the world with which we are closest geographically, culturally and as trading partners. Most Australians feel positive

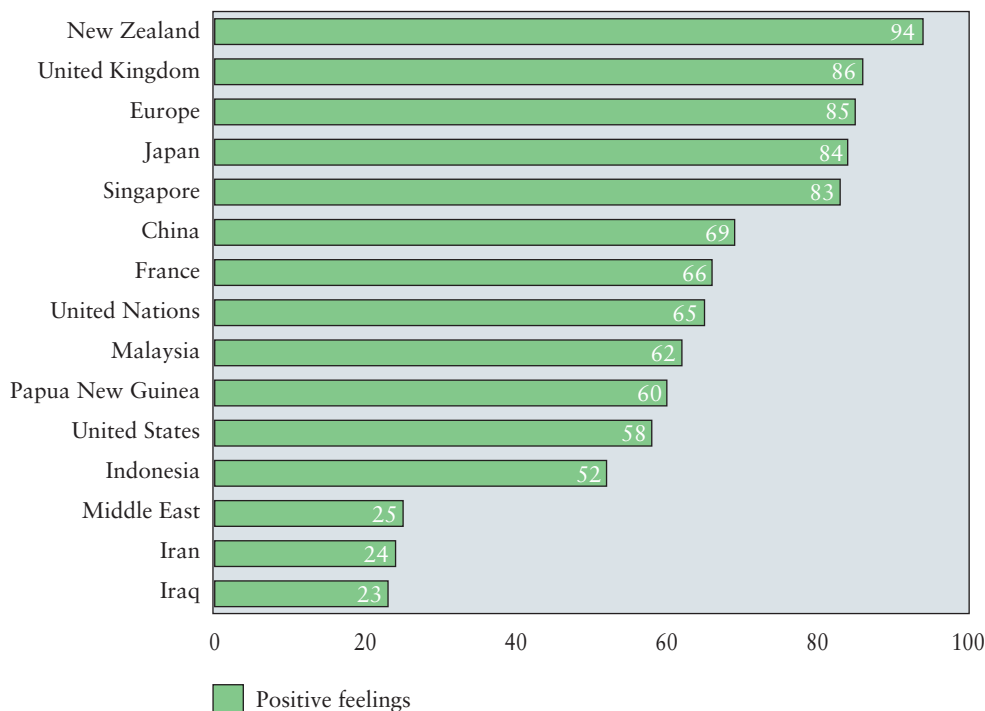


FIG 1.1  
 "WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING COUNTRIES, GROUPS OR REGIONS OF THE WORLD, DO YOU HAVE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THEM?"

towards New Zealand (94%), the United Kingdom (86%), Europe (85%), Japan (84%), and Singapore (83%), reflecting the deep and uncontroversial nature of our relationships with these countries. That Japan should be liked almost as much as the United Kingdom shows how far our focus has shifted eastwards in the past 60 years.

Australians are more ambiguous about countries and an institution with which we have had our differences in the recent past. France (66%), the United Nations (65%) and Malaysia (62%) stand in obvious contrast to our most positive relationships, with generally 20% fewer Australians inclined to feel positively towards them. Australia’s checkered relationship with our closest neighbour, Indonesia, could account for its low score of 52% positive feelings, and it is probably no surprise that Australians of 60 years and over have more negative than positive feelings, although the difference is marginal. The strife-torn Middle East (25%) and two of its focuses, Iran (24%) and Iraq (23%), engender mostly negative feelings.

**The United States and the United Nations**

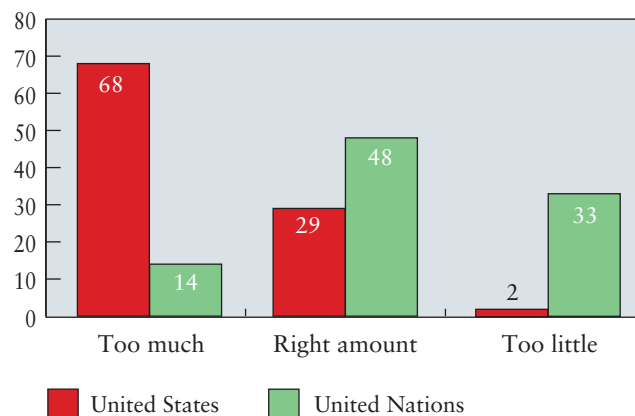
Perhaps the most surprising result is the low number of Australians who feel positive about the United States: only 58%. Of the countries and regions we asked about, the

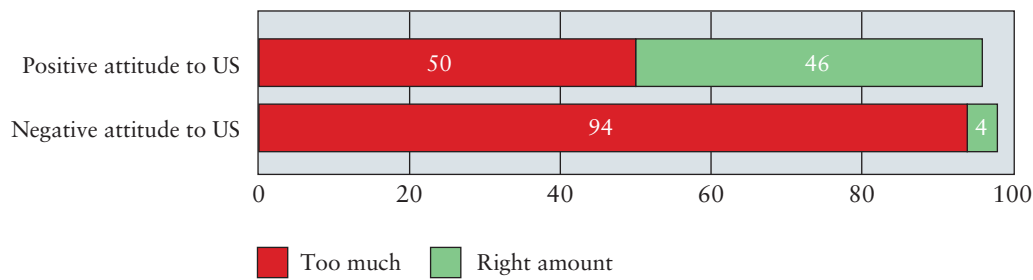
United States is more popular only than Indonesia, the Middle East, Iran and Iraq. The reasons for our ambivalent feelings about the United States could be based on the perception that our foreign policies are too closely aligned. More than two-thirds of Australians feel that ‘we take too much notice of the views of the United States’. Only 29% think we take ‘the right amount of notice’, and a mere 2% that ‘we take too little notice’.

In contrast, our views of the United Nations are more sanguine and less consequential. One-third of Australians believe that we should pay more attention to the views of the United Nations, and only 14% think that we pay too much attention. Two-thirds have positive feelings for the United Nations, and inasmuch as it stands for the rule of international law, two-thirds again are in favour of observing its decisions (see Chapter 2). But despite a sense that it is a force for good in the world, we place a low priority on the foreign policy goal of strengthening the United Nations (see Fig 2.1).

To get a better idea of why the majority of Australians would prefer that our foreign policy be more independent of America’s, we divided respondents according to how they feel about the United States. We discovered that of the 58% of Australians who have positive feelings for the United States, half still

FIG 1.2  
 “THINKING OF HOW MUCH NOTICE AUSTRALIA TAKES OF THE VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES/ UNITED NATIONS IN OUR FOREIGN POLICY, ON THE WHOLE DO YOU THINK WE TAKE TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE OR THE RIGHT AMOUNT?”





**FIG 1.3**  
 “THINKING OF HOW MUCH NOTICE AUSTRALIA TAKES OF THE VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES IN OUR FOREIGN POLICY, ON THE WHOLE DO YOU THINK WE TAKE TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE OR THE RIGHT AMOUNT?”

think that we pay too much attention to Washington’s views. Of the 39% of Australians who express negative feelings towards the United States, 94% think we pay too much attention to Washington’s views. Our feelings for the United States correlate only partially with our desire to restrict American influence on Australia’s foreign policy.

## 2. OUR APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY

### The National Interest

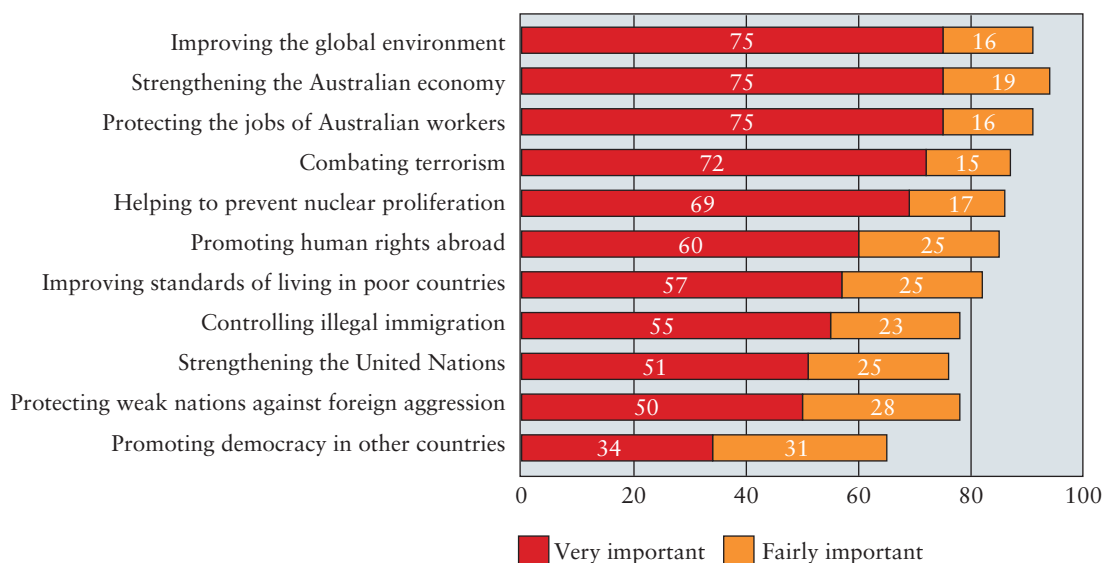
Although furthering Australia’s interests is often spoken of as a primary goal of government, only 62% of Australians think that we are ‘self-interested’ as a country. Still, when we asked respondents to rate the importance of various foreign policy goals, two of the top three were ‘strengthening the Australian economy’ and ‘protecting the jobs of Australian workers’: both goals that fit well into the framework of national self-interest. The other top goal was ‘improving the global environment’ and the fourth most important goal was ‘combating terrorism’. While these goals are still clearly in our national self-interest they are more easily framed in a global rather than a national context, perhaps explaining why a third of Australians are uncomfortable with the notion that our own interests come first. But goals with a more tenuous link to national self-interest — ‘promoting human rights abroad’, ‘improving standards of living in poor countries’ and ‘protecting weak nations against foreign aggression’ — are significantly less important to Australians.

Evidently it suits us to define our interests narrowly or broadly according to the issue in question, and we see no inconsistency in doing so.

### International Law

A mixture of national and international interests characterises our foreign policy priorities. But where these goals invite disputes with other countries, should we pursue them strictly within the bounds of international law, or should we pursue them regardless of international law? Almost twice as many respondents favour observing international law as would flout it. 64% agree that ‘Australia should rely on international law even though decisions may go against us’, whereas 33% think ‘Australia should do whatever benefits us most in any given situation, regardless of what international law says’. In practice, the guidelines of international law will often be a factor in determining what benefits us the most, and there is no necessary contradiction between international law and national self-interest. But where disputes arise, a

FIG 2.1  
“THINKING ABOUT WHAT AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD BE TRYING TO ACHIEVE, I AM GOING TO READ A LIST OF GOALS, AND ASK YOU TO TELL ME HOW IMPORTANT EACH ONE IS FOR AUSTRALIA”





**FIG 2.2**  
 “THINKING ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT GIVING AID TO POOR COUNTRIES, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IS CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW?”

clear majority of Australians prefer that we resolve them within a framework of international rules.

**Development Aid**

Australia is a mixture of nationalists and internationalists when it comes to the reasons for providing development aid.

Faced with four options on a continuum from broadly internationalist to narrowly self-interested, Australians were two-to-one in favour of the more internationalist options. But the more self-interested views still garner substantial minority support. 31% of respondents think ‘we should share our national wealth with people

**HOW WE COMPARE**

**Foreign Policy Goals**

In July 2004 the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) asked Americans to rate the importance of various foreign policy goals, many of which matched the goals we presented to Australians in February 2005. Comparing the results shows Australians and Americans have broadly similar aspirations for foreign policy, but with a couple of notable exceptions.

‘Protecting the jobs of American workers’ is Americans’ number one foreign policy goal, with 78% saying it is ‘very important’. 75% of Australians think the same about Australian jobs, although the goal ranks third with us rather than first. ‘Combating terrorism’ is also ‘very important’ to both populations, with 71% support in the United States and 72% in Australia. At the other end of the scale, neither Australians nor Americans count protecting weak nations against foreign aggression, strengthening the United Nations or promoting democracy in

other countries among our most important foreign policy goals.

But there are two foreign policy goals on which our nations differ markedly. The most striking is the goal of ‘improving the global environment’, which ranks as one of Australians’ most important goals but is of only medium importance to Americans, who rate seven other goals above it. Another disparity is over the prevention of nuclear proliferation, which Americans rate as their second most important goal behind only protecting the jobs of American workers, and ahead of combating terrorism. Australians, on the other hand, rate tackling nuclear proliferation only fifth out of 11 goals, behind combating terrorism, protecting jobs, improving the environment and strengthening our economy (see also Chapter 3, Use of Force). The CCFR survey, *Global Views 2004*, is available at [www.ccfrr.org](http://www.ccfrr.org).

who have less than we do', and 34% that 'helping to raise their living standards will make the world safer'. 14% feel that 'aid increases Australia's influence among our neighbours', while 19% think 'aid should only be given in response to emergencies like the tsunami disaster'. Those Australians who express positive feelings towards Papua New Guinea — which receives the largest portion of Australian aid — are also 40% more likely than those with negative opinions to think that we should share our national wealth.



### 3. OUR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

#### International Threats

Thinking about world events, the overwhelming majority of Australians feel either ‘safe’ (61%) or ‘very safe’ (30%). That sense of safety is reflected in the rankings respondents gave to a series of potential external threats, even the most pervasive of which barely half our respondents are ‘very worried’ about. Two stand head and shoulders above the rest: ‘unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons’ and ‘global warming’. The number two threat of ‘global warming’ clearly reflects one of the top foreign policy goals, ‘improving the global environment’. And yet the number one threat, ‘unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons’, does not translate into a foreign policy priority: ‘helping to prevent nuclear proliferation’ is less important than four other foreign policy goals including ‘strengthening the Australian economy’ and ‘protecting the jobs of Australian workers’ (see Fig 2.1).

Illegal immigration and refugees come very low on the scale of potential threats,

with only 44% either ‘very worried’ or ‘fairly worried’, reflecting its low priority as a foreign policy goal. Despite our willingness to use force ‘if invited by a failing country in our neighbourhood to help prevent internal collapse’ (see Fig 3.3), we are even less worried about failing countries in our region.

Perhaps the most startling statistic is the equivalence of the threats posed by ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ and ‘US foreign policies’, both of which are either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ worrying to 57% of Australians. To the degree these potential threats are in opposition, it seems that Australians cannot or will not take sides.

#### Our Alliance with the United States

Despite our ambivalent attitudes towards the United States and its foreign policies, Australians still recognise the importance of our security alliance for Australia’s international security. A clear majority (72%) think the alliance is either ‘very important’ or ‘fairly important’. Even

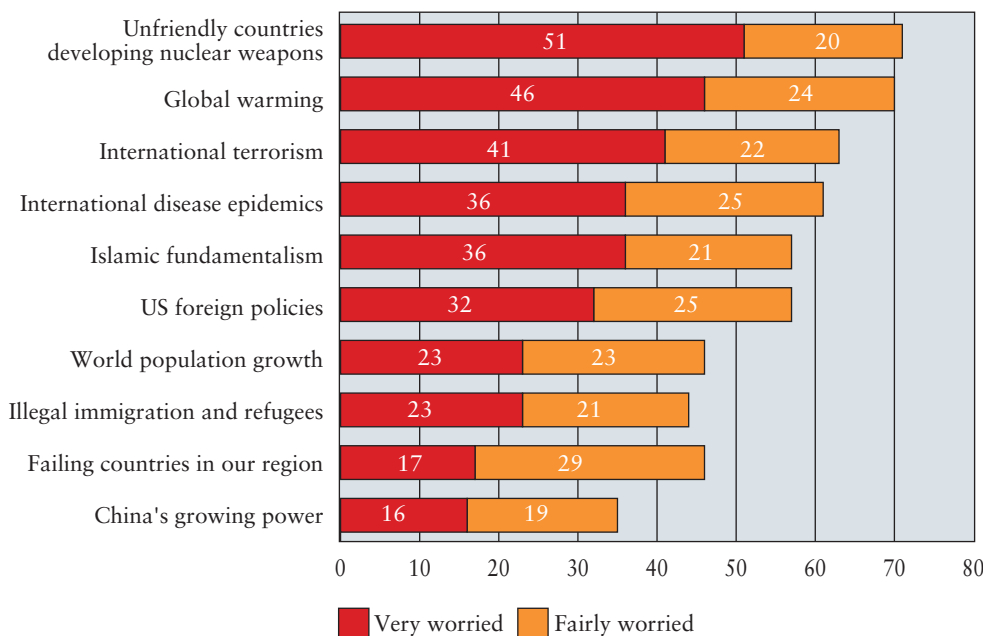
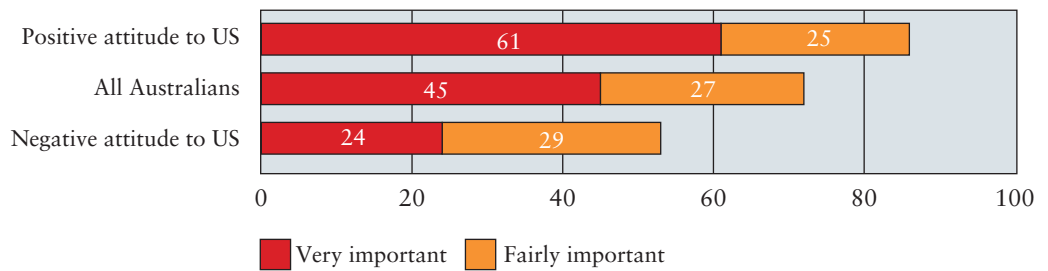


FIG 3.1  
“HOW WORRIED ARE YOU ABOUT THE FOLLOWING POTENTIAL THREATS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD?”

**FIG 3.2**  
 “HOW IMPORTANT IS OUR ALLIANCE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES FOR AUSTRALIA’S SECURITY?”



those who expressed negative feelings towards the United States feel safer with our alliance in place: 53% think the alliance is either ‘very important’ or ‘fairly important’. Of those who expressed positive feelings towards the United States, 86% see the alliance as either ‘very important’ or ‘fairly important’.

But exactly how far can that support be pushed? One of the most often-cited scenarios in which Australia will have to make a decision about the importance of the alliance is conflict in the Taiwan Strait between the United States and China. We asked respondents to agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘Australia should act in accordance with our security alliance with the United States even if it means following them to war with China over the independence of Taiwan’. It is a complex question, and 7% of respondents felt unable to make a choice. But fully 72% of Australians disagree with proposition, and only 21% are in favour of acting in accordance with our alliance. Even of those Australians who think our alliance with the United States is ‘very important’, a majority (57%) opposes joining the US in war in the Taiwan Strait. The Iraq War provides another test of attitudes to the alliance. Only 9% of respondents who supported the Iraq War at the time say that they did so ‘because of our alliance with the United States’ (see Fig 4.1).

**Use of Force**

In this post-Cold War era of global terrorism, failing states and preemptive

**HOW WE COMPARE**

Potential Threats

The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR) and the Lowy Institute each asked their respective publics to rank a series of potential threats, some of which are comparable.

The big difference between the two countries is the importance placed on global warming as a potential threat. Australians fear the consequences of global warming second only to unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons. Americans, who also rate the dangers of nuclear proliferation highly, are distinctly unimpressed with the threat of global warming, rating it eighth of 14 threats. At 37%, it has less than half the importance of international terrorism (75%). For Australians, the threat of global warming is slightly more important than international terrorism. The CCFR survey, *Global Views 2004*, is available at [www.ccfcr.org](http://www.ccfcr.org).

war, military forces are being used for new and increasingly diverse purposes. Some of these challenge traditional concepts of state sovereignty, and some could fall foul of emerging international norms governing the use of force. To get a sense of how Australians see the issues, we asked respondents whether Australia should have the right to use armed force for each of a range of deployment scenarios. Responses were broadly in favour of wide use: only one option, ‘to establish democracy in

undemocratic countries’, garnered less than majority support (at 33%).

The most popular scenario is ‘in support of United Nations or regionally endorsed peace-keeping missions’ (91%), reinforcing the view of Australians that international legitimacy is important. But a strong humanitarian element is also evident in the 84% of respondents who think we have the right to use our forces ‘to prevent genocide or gross abuse of human rights on the scale of Rwanda, Kosovo or Sudan’. Almost equally popular at 82%, deployment ‘if invited by a failing country in our neighbourhood to help prevent internal collapse’ is a solid endorsement of the troop deployment element of the Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands (RAMSI). That strong support could reflect the lack of serious setbacks to date, and will be tested if troops are killed in anger or if the mission encounters serious problems.

Despite our number one fear — that of ‘unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons’ — only 62% of Australians favour using armed force ‘to prevent an unfriendly country acquiring

nuclear weapons’. Although 62% is still a significant majority of Australians, it describes relatively low support in comparison with the five more popular options. The response might have been coloured by negative perceptions of the war in Iraq, but neither do we think ‘helping to prevent nuclear proliferation’ is a particularly important foreign policy goal (it rates fifth of 11; see Fig 2.1). Although Australians worry about the consequences of nuclear proliferation, it seems that we are ambivalent about taking a role for ourselves in international efforts to control it.

### Preemption

The principle of preemption has been the subject of fierce debate since September 11 and the Iraq War, within and outside Australia. On 19 September 2004, just prior to a federal election, Prime Minister John Howard said “It stands to reason that if you believed somebody was going to launch an attack against your country, either of a conventional kind or of a terrorist kind, and you had a capacity to stop it and there was no alternative other

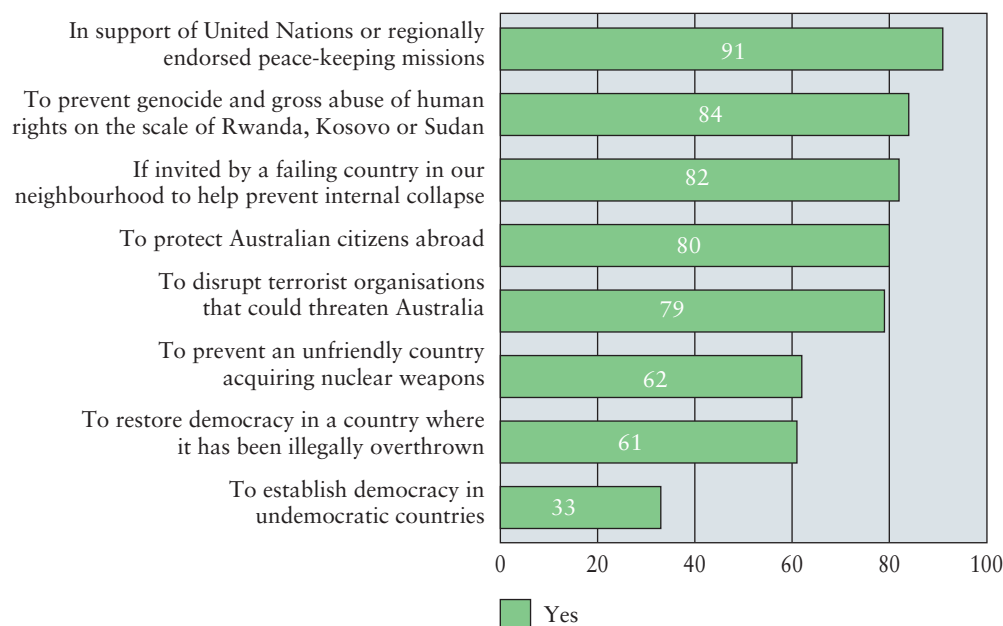


FIG 3.3  
“THINKING ABOUT HOW WE USE OUR MILITARY FORCES, SHOULD WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE ARMED FORCE OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS?”

than to use that capacity, then of course you would have to use it.” (*The Age*, 20 September 2004). His view generated some accusations of hostility in Southeast Asia and some within Australia.

To see whether Australians agree with the principle behind the statement we asked the following question: ‘If we believed that terrorists based in another country were going to launch an attack against Australia, and if the other country could not or would not take action to stop them, should we have the right to strike directly at the terrorists?’ 66% of Australians responded that we should have that right. 29% were against it, and 5% were unsure. Given the Prime Minister’s careful formulation it is, perhaps, surprising that only two-thirds of Australians support his view. The most obvious explanation is that the war in Iraq has given preemption a bad name.

## 4. DEMOCRATISATION AND IRAQ

### Democratisation

A slim majority of Australians (52%) believe that ‘Australia should play an active role in efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East’. This response stands in contrast to a similar question about whether we should have the right to use armed force to establish democracy in undemocratic countries, a proposition that only 33% of Australians endorse. It seems the difference is not the goal itself, but the means of achieving it and by whom it is driven. A majority of Australians might believe that democracy would be welcomed by the people of the Middle East, but they do not want to impose it. Neither does it occupy the minds of Australians: ‘promoting democracy in other countries’ is the least important foreign policy goal (see Fig 2.1).

### The Iraq War

Opinion polls taken before and after the Iraq War commenced showed fluctuations in support, but in general Australians’ views on whether or not we should contribute combat troops divided the country nearly in half. For which reasons did Australians take their respective views? We began by reprising a question asked in various forms during the first months of 2003: ‘At the start of the Iraq War did you support or oppose Australia’s military involvement?’

43% remembered supporting the war; 54% were against it. We then asked those people who had supported the war to choose from a list of reasons for doing so.

It is evident from their responses that the reasons given by government for our involvement did not strike the deepest chord with supporters of the war: 31% thought we should go to war to remove Saddam Hussein, while 29% thought the war was primarily about fighting terrorism. Only 17% were primarily swayed by the argument that Iraq had to be purged of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Even allowing for an element of revisionism, it seems that the subsequent controversy about the lack of WMD in Iraq was about something other than the war itself. Notions that we should go to war primarily because of our security alliance with America were few and far between, with only 9% support.

### Post-War Iraq

Although the issue of our continued military involvement in Iraq is currently less fraught than was the decision to go to war in the first place, it still divides the country nearly in half. When asked ‘Should Australia continue to be involved militarily in Iraq?’ 46% of Australians were in favour, with 51% against. Again, we asked people to explain their view. A mix

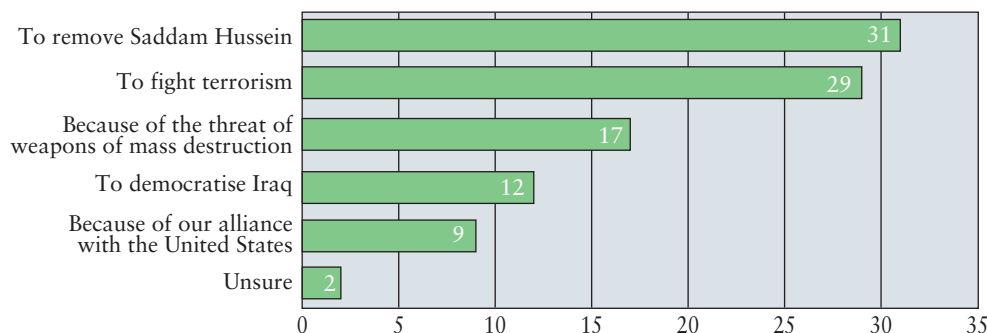
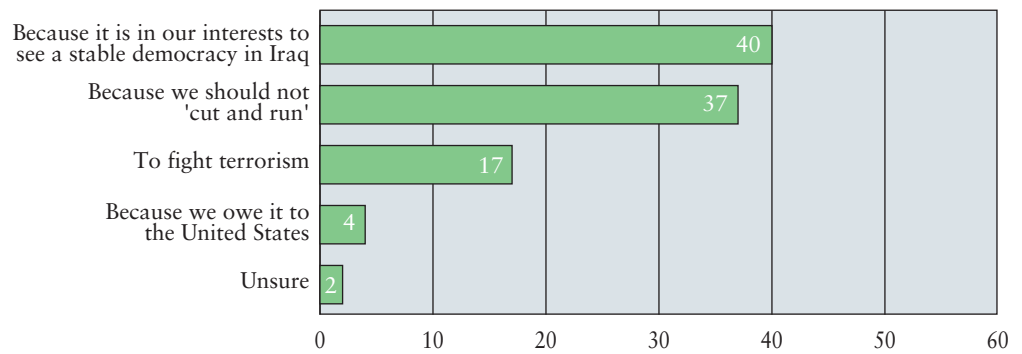


FIG 4.1  
“YOU SAID YOU SUPPORTED AUSTRALIA’S ACTIONS. WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON?”

**FIG 4.2**  
**“YOU SAID AUSTRALIA SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE INVOLVED MILITARILY IN IRAQ. WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON?”**



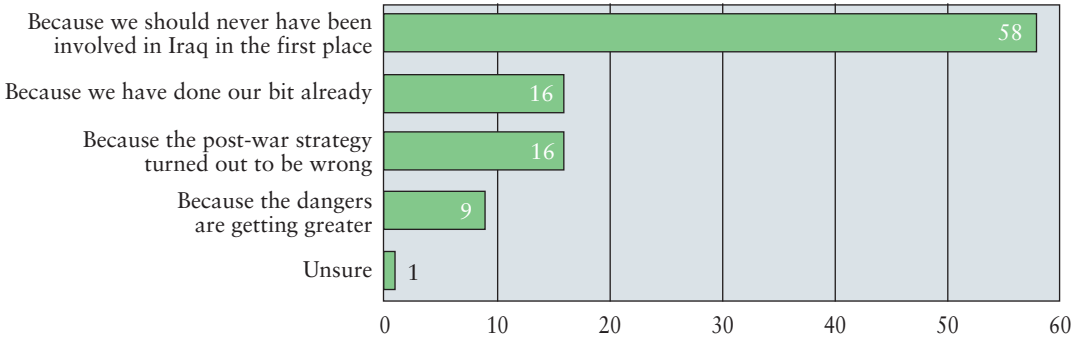
of rationality and idealism underlies the motivations of most of those Australians who support continued involvement, with 40% agreeing that ‘it is in our interests to see a stable democracy in Iraq’, and 37% saying that ‘we should not cut and run’. ‘Fighting terrorism’ comes a distant third with 17% support, and once again the nature of our security alliance with America was the primary reason for only 4% of those who support continued involvement.

For those 51% of Australians against our continued military involvement in Iraq, the overwhelming reason is that ‘we should never have been involved in Iraq in the first place’, with 58% support. The next best options — ‘because we have done our bit already’ and ‘because the post-war strategy turned out to be wrong’ each garnered only 16% support. The most striking finding on our involvement in Iraq is the continuity in attitudes over the past two years. Of those who said they supported the Iraq War at the time, 78% support our continued military involvement. Of those who opposed going to war at the time, 76% are against our continued military involvement.

**HOW WE COMPARE**  
**Military Involvement in Iraq**

Between November 2004 and January 2005, the polling firm Globescan conducted a global poll for the BBC World Service in association with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA). One question asked whether respondents supported contributing troops to Iraq. Australian views (37% in favour, 56% against) were broadly in line with the response to a similar question asked in this survey: ‘Should Australia continue to be involved militarily in Iraq’ (46% in favour, 51% against). The differences probably relate to the distinction between ‘contributing troops’ and ‘military involvement’, the latter being a slightly less challenging form of words.

The most interesting finding in the Globescan survey from the Australian perspective is that, even at 37% support, Australians are more willing than any other country surveyed to contribute troops to Iraq, and have fewer people opposed to contributing troops than any country other than Japan. Results of the Globescan survey are available at [www.globescan.com](http://www.globescan.com).



**FIG 4.3**  
“YOU SAID THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO BE INVOLVED MILITARILY IN IRAQ. WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON?”

## 5. INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### Trade Liberalisation

The issues in international trade liberalisation are rarely simple, as governments struggle to reconcile the potential future benefits from global free trade with more immediate and tangible domestic pressures about job security and foreign competition. To find out how clearly Australians see the issue of trade liberalisation, we asked them to say whether or not they support each of three approaches to international trade.

88% feel that ‘we should try to negotiate international agreements that open other countries’ markets to our exports in return for their goods coming into Australia’, broadly reflecting the reciprocal basis of international trade negotiations. This approach implies that the reduction of trade barriers in other countries is good for Australia but does not tell us much about our own trade barriers. Are they valuable for the protection they provide our producers, or are they valuable merely for their utility as bargaining chips in the game of international trade negotiations? Even though Australian barriers are low by international standards, the mercantilist view prevails. Australians would much rather protect our producers from cheap imports (62%) than unilaterally remove

protection so that our consumers can benefit from cheaper prices (37%). Our approach to international trade liberalisation is notably more narrowly self-interested than our views on the use of force, for example, which show a wide regard for the wellbeing of non-Australians (see Fig 3.3).

### Preferential Trade Agreements

While comprehensive multilateral free trade remains a distant goal, many countries are turning to bilateral trade agreements in the belief that second best is better than nothing at all. In addition to agreements with New Zealand, Singapore and Thailand, Australia’s free trade agreement with the United States has recently come into force, and we are in the early stages of negotiating an agreement with China. How do Australians see these major trade agreements with the economic giants of our world? We asked respondents to rate the effect on Australia’s economy of the United States free trade agreement (USFTA), and of a potential free trade agreement with China. The results are surprising.

Australians are largely ambivalent about the USFTA, with almost equal numbers of respondents seeing it as good (34%), bad (32%) and either thinking that it will make no difference or being unsure of what

**FIG 5.1**  
“PLEASE SAY WHETHER YOU ARE IN FAVOUR OR NOT IN FAVOUR OF EACH OF THE FOLLOWING APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE”

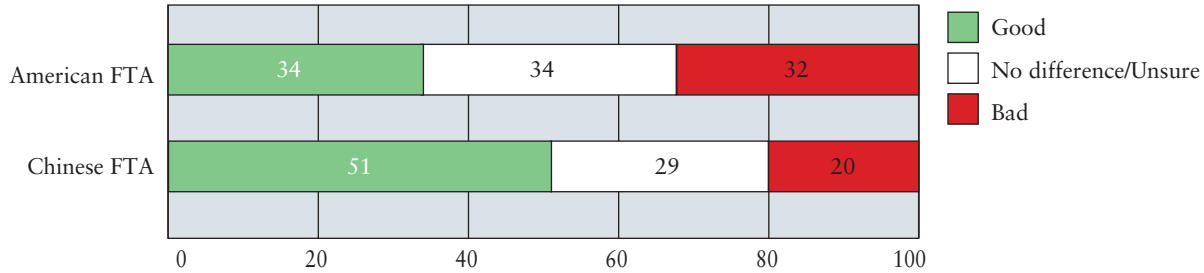




FIG 5.2

“ON BALANCE, DO YOU THINK THE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WE HAVE SIGNED WITH THE UNITED STATES IS GOOD OR BAD FOR AUSTRALIA OR WILL IT MAKE NO DIFFERENCE?”

WE ARE IN THE EARLY STAGES OF NEGOTIATING A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH CHINA. ON BALANCE, DO YOU THINK SIGNING A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH CHINA WOULD BE GOOD OR BAD FOR AUSTRALIA OR WOULD IT MAKE NO DIFFERENCE?”



they think (34%). A potential free trade agreement with China, however, was much more attractive to Australians, 51% of whom think it would be good for Australia, while only 20% think it would be bad.

There are many possible explanations for the discrepancy, not least of which are the difference in complementarity between Australia’s and each of China’s and America’s economies, and the fact that we are in the middle of a commodities export boom led largely by China’s rapid growth. Though enthusiasm for a trade agreement with China could wane as negotiations proceed and public debate of the issue commences, indications are

that the USFTA is seen as ineffective even by those who support negotiated trade agreements: 83% of respondents who think the USFTA is bad for Australia believe that ‘we should try to negotiate international agreements that open other countries’ markets to our exports in return for their goods coming in to Australia’.

**Globalisation**

International trade and investment flows have increased greatly over the past decade, in line with other elements of the dominant underlying phenomenon of our time, globalisation. We asked respondents to rate the effect of globalisation on

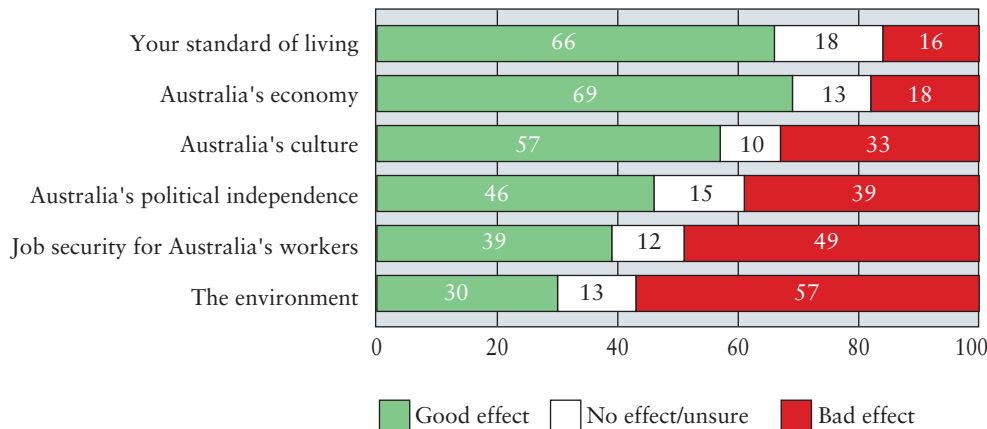


FIG 5.3  
“HOW HAS GLOBALISATION AFFECTED YOUR LIFE? FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING, DO YOU THINK GLOBALISATION HAS HAD A GOOD EFFECT OVERALL, OR A BAD EFFECT OVERALL?”

## HOW WE COMPARE

### Globalisation

The Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press fielded a mammoth international survey across 44 countries in 2002. One of their questions asked ‘Do you think that globalisation is a very good thing, somewhat good, somewhat bad, or a very bad thing?’ The question was not asked in Australia, but by taking an average of responses to our questions on globalisation, effectively ‘Do you think globalisation has had a good effect overall or a bad effect overall?’ we can place Australia in the international context.

Using the criteria we gave them, an average of 51% of Australians think that globalisation has had a good effect overall. In responding to the Pew survey question, 62% of Americans were positive about globalisation, as were 69% of Canadians. In Europe, 68% of Britons and Germans, 60% of French, 51% of Italians and only 31% of Russians were positive. In Asia, 79% of Indonesians, 76% of Chinese, 63% of Japanese and Filipinos, but only 45% of Indians and 33% of Pakistanis were positive. The Pew survey, *Views of a Changing World*, is available at [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org).

various aspects of their lives, including our economy and job security. While 69% think globalisation has had a good effect on Australia’s economy, only 39% think it has had a good effect on job security.

It is no surprise that economic wellbeing is seen as one of the primary advantages of globalisation, or that globalisation is felt to have had a bad effect on the environment (57%). A less obvious result is that a majority of Australians (57%) think globalisation has been good for Australia’s culture, and that more people think it has been good for Australia’s political independence (46%) than think it has had a bad effect (39%). Very few people think globalisation has had no effect at all (on average 10%).

## 6. SEGMENTING AUSTRALIA

### Divisive and Unifying Issues

Every issue generates a multiplicity of views. Even when a question is put in binary form, some respondents always choose the less popular option. Australians are not in *complete* agreement about anything. But for the development of policy programs it is instructive to know which issues Australians largely agree on and which issues seriously divide us.

In describing Australia's characteristics, respondents were almost evenly split on two options in particular: whether we are 'independent minded' (49% agree; 48% disagree) and whether we are 'frightened of offending our neighbours' (56% agree, 42% disagree). Inasmuch as these two characteristics are mutually exclusive, Australians cannot agree on which describes Australia correctly. It is not that individuals cannot choose (only 2–3% said they were unsure), so the most likely explanation is that the same policies and actions strike different Australians in different ways. Another is that different policies and actions are inconsistent, or appear to be so.

Our attitudes to international law also reveal a considerable inconsistency, though this time of views rather than policy. Although Australians neither completely agree nor disagree evenly about the role that international law should play in our external affairs, the weight of opinion on both sides is significant: two-thirds favour the strict rule of international law and one-third opposes it. Even presented in this simplistic form, the divided views of Australians reflect one of the central questions in international relations, and one that becomes more pertinent with every increasing measure of globalisation. Should states behave solely

as self-interested competitive actors in an anarchic world, or has a new era of international cooperation been made possible by our increasingly blended interests?

Australians are quite evenly split on whether we should 'play an active role to promote democracy in the Middle East': 52% are in favour, 43% against. The issue is one that we are likely to be faced with for some time as the effects of the Iraq War ripple throughout the region. It might be hard for Australians to dissociate broader notions of democratisation in the Middle East from our involvement in Iraq. Again, we are almost evenly split on whether Australia should continue to be involved militarily: 46% are in favour, and 51% against. The difference in opinion on both these issues reflects their novelty and complexity.

International trade liberalisation presents a confusion of opinion. Although Australians are almost united in approving of negotiations towards trade liberalisation (88% are in favour), our free trade agreement with the United States divides us: we disagree equally on whether it is good, bad or indifferent. These views on international trade are not necessarily inconsistent. Many people evidently believe the USFTA does little to advance the unifying cause of trade liberalisation.

### Demographic Divisions

It is striking that the issues that really divide us do not often do so along clear demographic lines. For example, one out of every three Australians supports using force to establish democracy in unfriendly countries. One might expect to find the majority of that third of Australians in a particular place, or a particular age group, or perhaps a particular income bracket.

In fact they are spread almost evenly throughout those demographic categories. Nonetheless, demographic divisions *en masse* can and do reveal subtle differences in prejudice and attitude. Many of those differences are manifested as generally accepted characteristics of different groups of Australians. The findings from this survey are broadly supportive of these characteristics.

People living in inner metropolitan areas tend to be more self-critical and have a less developed sense of Australia's international worth than people who live elsewhere. They are less critical of other countries except the United States, and are generally less worried about external threats with the exception of the threat posed by American foreign policy. They are more likely to think that Australia takes too little notice of the United Nations and also that it is right to share our wealth with people who have less than we do. In contrast, people living in provincial areas are more likely to think Australia is a good international citizen, are much more positive towards the United States and are keener than others on strengthening the Australian economy. They are less likely than inner city dwellers to think Australia should rely on the rule of international law and are more likely to think we have the right to use force against terrorist organisations or to prevent nuclear proliferation.

Victorians tend to display characteristics similar to inner city dwellers, particularly in comparison with Queenslanders. They are less optimistic than the average Australian about our economic performance over the next five years, and also about our international security. They are more worried about the environment and the effect of globalisation on job security, and less worried about Islamic fundamentalism.

Older people are generally more negative towards the countries and institutions we deal with, and are often more worried by external threats than other age groups. 20% fewer people over the age of 60 have positive feelings for Papua New Guinea than the average, and 18% fewer than the average have positive feelings for France and the United Nations. People under 30 are generally well-disposed to other countries and regions, and take an altruistic or idealistic line to a range of foreign policy issues from development aid to trade liberalisation and the danger of external threats.

People on low incomes are less positive about our friends and neighbours, particularly Japan, China and Indonesia. They are also more worried about external threats, particularly those posed by Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and nuclear proliferation. They have also benefited least from the various aspects of globalisation. The wealthiest Australians are more taken with free market ideology and have noticed the greatest benefits from globalisation. They also take the importance of external threats with a pinch of salt, though it is middle income earners who are least worried about illegal immigration and American foreign policies.

Differences between the sexes are slight, although women are generally more cautious than men, and more likely to worry about external threats.

*Ivan Cook* is Research Associate at the Lowy Institute for International Policy. He has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) degree from the Australian National University (ANU) and a Master of International Studies degree from the University of Sydney.

The Lowy Institute Poll is a series of Australian public opinion surveys on a broad range of international policy issues.





CONTACT US  
31 BLIGH STREET SYDNEY NSW 2000  
TEL: +61 2 8238 9000 FAX: +61 2 8238 9005  
PO BOX H-159 AUSTRALIA SQUARE NSW 1215  
ABN 40 102 792 174  
[WWW.LOWYINSTITUTE.ORG](http://WWW.LOWYINSTITUTE.ORG)

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