

**PERSPECTIVES**

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**AUSTRALIANS AND INDONESIA:  
THE LOWY INSTITUTE POLL 2006**

**MURRAY GOOT**

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**Australians and Indonesians:  
The Lowy Institute Poll 2006**

**Murray Goot**

The latest Lowy Institute Poll,<sup>1</sup> conducted between June and July, and the first to sample opinion in both Australia and Indonesia, sheds light on what Australians think about Indonesia and what Indonesians think about Australia, on Australian and Indonesian feelings about their foreign policy goals and their views about other countries, and on what Australians and Indonesians think about some of the consequences of the Iraq war and Iran's nuclear program.

**Attitudes to Indonesia and Attitudes to Australia**

The views of Australian respondents about Indonesia and, more particularly, of Indonesian respondents about Australia, were less hostile than many commentators might have imagined. Expressing their feelings about the other country, respondents in both Australia and Indonesia were certainly not warm, but neither were they cold. On a 100-point scale, the views of Indonesia and Indonesians expressed by the average Australian respondent lay precisely in the middle (Fig. 1); so, too, did the views of Australia or Australians expressed by the average Indonesian respondent (Fig. 15).

On the importance of the relationship between the two countries there are also grounds for cheer. Asked whether 'It is very important that Australia and Indonesia work to develop a close relationship' or whether 'Australia and Indonesia are too different to develop a close relationship', most respondents (77% of the Australians and 64% of the Indonesians) agreed about the importance of developing 'a close relationship'. Even among Indonesian respondents, clearly the more wary, no more than a third (36%) said that the two countries were 'too different to develop a close relationship' (pp. 26, 30).

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Cook, *Australia, Indonesia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*. Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006. All references are to this report.

Assessments of where the relationship was going, expressed at a time when relations were under strain, also provide some cheer. While more than twice as many Australian respondents thought relations between the two countries were 'getting worse' (47%) than thought they were 'getting better' (19%) (Fig. 2), among respondents from Indonesia twice as many thought relations were 'getting better' (36%) than thought they were 'getting worse' (18%), the largest group saying that relations were simply 'staying about the same' (40%) (Fig. 16).

On the fight against terrorism, Indonesian views of Australia's actions might offer reassurance as well. Told that 'some Western countries including Australia are helping Indonesia fight the threat of terrorism' and asked if they thought 'their motives in doing so' were 'mostly good or mostly bad', the majority (51%) of those interviewed in Indonesia said that the motives of countries like Australia were 'mostly good'; not many more than a third (37%) thought their motives 'mostly bad' (p. 31). Had the question been asked in Australia, no doubt the majority of respondents here would have agreed with the majority of respondents from Indonesia.

Certainly the amount of influence wielded by Australia and Indonesia in Asia is something on which respondents from the two countries broadly agreed. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 meant 'not at all influential' and 10 'extremely influential', Australian respondents rated Indonesia no higher on average than did the Indonesians themselves (5.8:6.1). Importantly, too, Australians rated Indonesia's influence (5.7) no higher than they rated Australia's influence (p. 22). Indonesian respondents rated Indonesia's influence higher (6.9) than did Australian respondents – a substantial difference, to be sure, but no clash (p. 28).

Only on one proposition about Indonesia – that 'Indonesia is a dangerous source of Islamic terrorism' – did the Australian and Indonesian respondents find themselves on different sides. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 meant 'strongly disagree' and 10 'strongly agree', the Australians averaged 6.5 and the Indonesians 3.8. But there were substantial differences on other propositions too. Australians felt more strongly that 'Indonesia benefits from having Australia as a stable and prosperous neighbour' (7.4:5.3); that 'Australia has shown itself to be a reliable long term friend of Indonesia' (7.0:5.3), and that 'Australia is right to worry about Indonesia as a military threat (6.2:5.0). Indonesians felt more strongly that 'Indonesia is an emerging democracy' (5.1:8.0); that 'Indonesia is right to worry that Australia is seeking to separate the province of [West] Papua from Indonesia' (5.0:6.8); and that 'Australia has a tendency to try to interfere in Indonesia's affairs too much' (5.1:6.7).

On three other propositions the differences were slight: whether ‘Indonesia is essentially controlled by the military’ (6.8:5.9); whether ‘Indonesian cooperation with Australia has been important in helping us contain the terrorist threat in our region’ (5.4:5.8); and whether ‘Australia’s policy towards Indonesia and the region is shaped too heavily by its alliance with the United States’ (6.3:6.6) (see pp. 25-6, 30-1).

The important thing to stress, however, is not the points of difference, substantial though these sometimes were, but the fact that even on issues like whether ‘Australia has shown itself to be a reliable long term friend of Indonesia’, Australian opinion and Indonesian opinion were on the same side of the line.

If that provides Australian policy-makers with some consolation, other points on which Australian and Indonesian respondents were in broad agreement may be causes for concern: that ‘Indonesia is right to worry that Australia is seeking to separate the province of [West] Papua from Indonesia’; that ‘Australia has a tendency to try to interfere in Indonesia’s affairs too much’; and that ‘Australia’s policy towards Indonesia and the region is shaped too heavily by its alliance with the United States’.

### **Foreign Policy Goals and World Events**

Overwhelmingly, respondents wanted their respective countries to ‘take an active part in world affairs’. Among the Australian respondents, 82% thought it would ‘be best for the future of Australia if we take an active part in world affairs’ rather than ‘stay out of world affairs’. Among the Indonesian respondents, 88% thought it would ‘be best for the future of Indonesia if we take an active part in world affairs’ rather than ‘stay out of world affairs’ (p. 27). Whether as many respondents in Australia (Indonesia) would have thought it ‘best’ for Indonesia (Australia) to ‘take an active part in world affairs’ rather than ‘stay out of world affairs’ is another matter.

Asked about their country’s foreign policy goals, respondents in both Australia and Indonesia rated support for the UN highly. Among Australian respondents, 65% agreed that ‘strengthening the United Nations’ should be ‘a very important foreign policy goal’ (Fig. 5). Among Indonesian respondents, ‘support for the United Nations’ rated 8.2 (on a 10-point scale) as one of the ‘important...traditional foreign policy goals for Indonesia’s future security’ (p. 29).

What the Indonesian respondents might have thought of some of the other Australian priorities – most notably ‘combating international terrorism’, rated very important by 74% (Fig. 5) – can only be guessed. What the Australian respondents might have thought about some of the other ‘traditional foreign policy goals for Indonesia’s future security’ – most notably ‘developing closer ties with the rest of the Islamic world’, rated 8.3 on the 10-point scale (p. 29) – is equally unclear.

Asked to think ‘about world events’, almost all the Australian respondents said they felt ‘very safe’ (30%) or at least ‘safe’ (56%); relatively few reported feeling ‘unsafe’ (19%) let alone ‘very unsafe’ (1%) (p. 24). For Indonesian respondents the impact of ‘world events’ has been dramatically different. Most said they felt ‘unsafe’ (50%) or ‘very unsafe’ (4%); less than half reported feeling ‘very safe’ (4%) or even ‘safe’ (39%) (p. 29).

### **Views of Other Countries**

As one might expect, Australian respondents felt warmer than Indonesian respondents about East Timor (57:43). They also felt warmer about Great Britain (74:54), Papua New Guinea (63:45) and Israel (55:39). While the differences here were substantial they should not be exaggerated: none exceeded 20 percentage points. Australians also felt warmer about the United States (62:54), India (62:56), South Korea (56:51) and China (61:58); but the differences vis-à-vis the Indonesian respondents were small. Indonesian respondents felt warmer than Australian respondents towards Iran (51:43) and Iraq (50:44), Malaysia (66:58) and North Korea (50:43); but, again, the differences were small. On Japan, where there is no disagreement, respondents in both countries expressed themselves warmly (64:64) (Fig 1 and Fig 15).

If, as we have seen, respondents from Australia and Indonesia held rather different views about whether relations between their own countries were ‘improving’ or ‘worsening’, they also held rather different views about where relations between their respective countries and China, Japan, India and the United States were going. The majority (59%) of Australian respondents thought Australia’s relations with China were ‘improving’; hardly any (6%) thought they were ‘worsening’. By contrast, Indonesian respondents were almost evenly divided (49:40) More Australian respondents thought relations between Australia and Japan were ‘improving’ (30%) than thought they were ‘worsening’ (12%); but among Indonesian respondents fewer thought relations between Indonesia and Japan were ‘improving’ (39%) than thought they were ‘worsening’ (54%). Many fewer Australians (36%) compared to Indonesians (60%) thought relations with India were ‘improving’; but then fewer Australians

(5%) than Indonesians (27%) thought relations were 'worsening'. And while most Australian respondents (59%) thought relations with the United States were 'improving' rather than 'worsening' (8%), among Indonesian respondents only a plurality (46%) thought relations between Indonesia and the United States were improving (Fig 2 and Fig 16).

We can express these differences in terms of a single number by: (a) subtracting the proportion of Australian respondents who saw Australia's relations with a particular country 'worsening' from the proportion who saw Australia's relations with that country 'improving'; (b) subtracting the proportion of Indonesian respondents who saw Indonesia's relations with that country 'worsening' from the proportion who saw Indonesia's relations with that country 'improving'; and (c) subtracting (a) from (b) – or, where one of these two numbers is positive and the other negative, by adding (a) to (b). Thus, if all the Australian (Indonesian) respondents saw relations 'getting better' and all the Indonesian (Australian) respondents saw relations 'getting worse' the difference would be 200 percentage points; and if the distribution of opinion among Australian respondents were exactly the same as the distribution of opinion among Indonesian respondents the figure would be zero.

Calculated in this way, the difference between the views expressed by Australian and Indonesian respondents about whether relationships between their countries were 'improving' or 'worsening' was 46 percentage points; about Australia-China and Indonesia-China relations, 44 percentage points; about Australia-Japan and Indonesia-Japan relations, 33 percentage points; and about Australia-US and Indonesia-US relations, 24 percentage points. In every case, the Australians were more upbeat than the Indonesians. By contrast, the difference between Australian and Indonesian views of India (two percentage points) barely registered.

How respondents felt about particular countries, or whether they thought relations between Australia (Indonesia) and other countries were 'improving' or 'worsening', appears to have little bearing on the influence they thought these countries wield in Asia. For Australian respondents China rated 7.5 for its influence in Asia (where 0 means 'not at all influential' and 10 'extremely influential'); the United States and Japan rated 6.6; India, 6.0; South Korea, 5.5; the EU 5.3; and Russia, 4.9. This means that, on average, Australian respondents placed China, the United States, Japan and India ahead of Australia (5.8) and Indonesia (5.7); below Australia and Indonesia came South Korea, the EU and Russia (p. 22).

For Indonesian respondents, by contrast, China did not stand out as the most influential country in Asia. Although close to the top, China (7.0) rated slightly below the United States

(7.7) and Japan (7.3); Indonesia itself (6.9) rated almost as highly. Then came the EU (6.5), with Australia (6.1), South Korea (5.9), Russia (5.5) and India (5.4) at the bottom. The difference in the rank order – not the difference in the mean – between Australian and Indonesian views about India is striking (p. 28).

How much influence did Australian and Indonesian respondents want some of these countries to have – not in Asia specifically but ‘in the world’? Using the same scale, Australian respondents put the EU (6.6) ahead of the pack, followed by the United States (6.1), Japan (5.7), China (5.2) and India (5.2) (Fig 4). Indonesian respondents, while generally more positive than the Australian respondents, placed the first three – the EU, the United States and Japan – in a different order: Japan (6.9), the EU (6.5), and the United States (6.4); after them, China (6.3) and India (5.3) (Fig 18).

And ‘how much’ did Australian and Indonesian respondents ‘trust’ the United States, China, India and Japan ‘to act responsibly in the world’? The biggest difference between Australian and Indonesian respondents was over the United States, the most powerful of the four. While the majority (60%) of Australian respondents expressed a ‘good deal’ of trust (19%) in the United States or were at least ‘somewhat’ trusting (41%), only a third of Indonesian respondents expressed a ‘good deal’ of trust (6%) or were at least ‘somewhat’ trusting (26%); nearly two-thirds expressed ‘not very much’ trust (48%) in the United States or did not trust the US ‘at all’ (16%). Using the same metric we used to determine the gap between the ways respondents in Australia and Indonesia perceived their country’s relations with other countries, we can say that on the question of ‘how much’ to ‘trust’ the US there was a very large difference between Australian and Indonesian respondents of 53 percentage points (Fig 3 and Fig 17).

Over China, India and Japan, on the other hand, the differences were very small. Most Australian respondents thought China could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (7%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (53%); most Indonesian respondents also thought China could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (6%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (53%). Most Australian respondents thought India could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (9%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (59%); most Indonesian respondents thought India could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (5%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (53%). And if most Australian respondents thought Japan could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (19%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (54%), most Indonesian respondents also thought Japan could be trusted ‘a great deal’ (18%), or at least ‘somewhat’ (58%).

Another way of summarising these results is to say that in the eyes of Australian respondents, all four countries could be trusted at least ‘somewhat’; Japan was the most trustworthy (73% said it could be trusted at least ‘somewhat’), China (60%) and the US (60%) the least trustworthy. In the eyes of Indonesians, too, Japan (76%) was the most trustworthy; China (59%) and India (58%) are next in line; but the US (32%) was a long way behind.

While attitudes of the Australian and Indonesian respondents to the influence and trustworthiness of the United States clearly differed, these differences were not reflected in their attitudes to the role of the United States as a ‘world policeman’. Two-thirds of the Australian respondents (69%) as well as two-thirds of the Indonesian respondents (69%) agreed that the US does not have ‘the responsibility to play the role of “world policeman”’. And Australians (79%) as well as Indonesians (68%) agreed that ‘the US is playing the role of world policeman more than it should’ (pp. 24, 29).

Nor were differences over the influence and trustworthiness of the United States reflected in attitudes to ‘globalisation’; and this notwithstanding that globalisation is sometimes equated with the growing influence of the United States. In fact, the responses of the Australian and Indonesian respondents to a question about ‘globalisation, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world’ were virtually interchangeable: of the Australian respondents, nearly two-thirds (64%) thought it ‘mostly good’ for Australia; of the Indonesian respondents, nearly two-thirds (61%) thought it ‘mostly good’ for Indonesia (pp. 21, 27).

### **The Iraq War and Iran’s Nuclear Program**

Questions about the consequences of the Iraq war saw differences between Australian and Indonesian opinion resurface – with Australian respondents generally more pessimistic. Asked whether ‘the war has worsened America’s relations with the Muslim world’, more Australian (91%) than Indonesian respondents (61%) said that ‘America’s relations with the Muslim world’ had ‘worsened’. Asked whether ‘the threat of terrorism had been reduced by the war’, fewer Australian (14%) than Indonesian respondents (24%) said that ‘the threat of terrorism’ had ‘been reduced’. And asked whether ‘the war will lead to the spread of democracy in the Middle East’ more Australian respondents (67%) than Indonesian respondents (49%) said that it would not ‘lead to the spread of democracy in the Middle East’ (pp. 25, 29). As a result, Australian respondents also found the outcome of the war more salutary. Asked whether ‘the experience of the Iraq war should make nations more cautious

about using military force to deal with rogue states', more Australian (85%) than Indonesian respondents (64%) said it 'should make nations more cautious'.

Views also differed about Iran's nuclear ambitions and their consequences. While most (59%) of the Australian respondents believed Iran wanted to produce 'enriched uranium' in order to 'develop nuclear weapons' rather than 'strictly to fuel its energy needs', only a plurality (46%) of Indonesian respondents held this view (pp. 25, 30). More striking were the different levels of apprehension about a nuclear-armed Iran. Among the Australian respondents no fewer than 55% said that a nuclear-armed Iran would concern them 'very much'; few said such an eventuality would concern them only 'a little (10%) or 'not at all' (7%). However, among Indonesian respondents, relatively few (15%) said that a nuclear-armed Iran would concern them 'very much' and only 25% said it would concern them 'somewhat'; more said that such an eventuality would concern them only 'a little (28%) or 'not at all' (20%).

We can compare these results with those obtained, more or less simultaneously, by Market Focus International (Australia) and Deka Marketing Research (Indonesia) in a Globescan poll conducted on behalf of the BBC World Service.<sup>2</sup> Asked whether they thought Iran was 'producing nuclear fuel strictly for its energy needs' or whether it was 'also trying to develop nuclear weapons', 65% of the Australian respondents and 47% of the Indonesian respondents said it was 'also trying to develop nuclear weapons' – a distribution of opinion little different from that reported by the Lowy Institute Poll in response to a question that included a preamble, in which respondents were told that 'Iran has recently announced that it has successfully enriched uranium', and that posed a starker choice between the idea that the uranium would be used 'strictly' for energy needs and the idea that it would be used in an attempt 'to develop nuclear weapons'.

Attempts to measure levels of concern about Iran's nuclear program generated results that diverged from the Lowy Institute's results rather more. Asked, on behalf of the BBC, 'how concerned' they 'would be if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons', 67% of the Australian respondents said they would be 'very concerned'; in the Lowy Institute Poll no more than 55% said this sort of development would concern them 'very much'. Among the Indonesians interviewed for the BBC poll, the proportion that said they would be 'somewhat concerned' was 37%; in the Lowy poll, the proportion that said they would be 'somewhat concerned' was

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<sup>2</sup> 'BBC World Service Poll shows Iran's nuclear ambitions cause concern, but people want a negotiated settlement', WorldPublicOpinion.org; accessed 22 September 2006. The Australian poll (n = 1007) was conducted 23 June – 2 July 2006. The Indonesian poll (n = 1000) was conducted 22 June – 6 July 2006.

25%. Although the response categories varied slightly it is difficult to see how these variations might account for differences in the results.

Finally, the BBC poll told respondents that the UN had 'asked Iran to not produce nuclear fuel' and then asked 'If Iran continues to produce nuclear fuel' which of four things did they think 'the United Nations Security Council should do.' Australian respondents were less inclined than Indonesian respondents (5:22) to say that the Security Council should 'not pressure Iran', less inclined than the Indonesian respondents (39:50) to say that the Security Council should 'use only diplomatic efforts', and more inclined than the Indonesian respondents to say that the Security Council should 'impose economic sanctions on Iran'. But neither the Australian respondents nor the Indonesian respondents (8:5) wanted the Security Council to 'authorize a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities'.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last ten years or more Indonesia has figured prominently in surveys of Australian public opinion as a potential threat. In the wake of the referendum in East Timor, in 1999, the proportion of respondents in national surveys agreeing that Indonesia was 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to 'pose a threat to Australia's security' rose from more than a half (55 per cent in 1996 and 57 per cent in 1998) to over two-thirds (69 per cent in 2001, 72 per cent in 2004 and 69 per cent in 2005). Before the jailing of Schapelle Corby, in 2005, 53 per cent of respondents interviewed for the 2005 Lowy Institute Poll said their 'feelings' about Indonesia were 'positive'; but in another poll, conducted at about the same time as the 2006 Lowy Institute Poll, only 40 per cent of those interviewed said their feelings about Indonesia were 'positive'.<sup>3</sup>

While the results of this, the second, Lowy Institute Poll tell us nothing about how attitudes to Indonesia (much less Australia) have changed and tell us little about what drives these attitudes they do tell us a number of other things about the attitudes of Australians and Indonesians that are worth drawing to the attention of Australia's foreign policy community.

In both Australia and Indonesia respondents thought it important that Australia and Indonesia 'develop a close relationship'. Moreover, Indonesian respondents were inclined to the view

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<sup>3</sup> For details of these and other items on Indonesia, see Murray Goot, 'Neither Entirely Comfortable Nor Wholly Relaxed: Public Opinion, Electoral Politics and Foreign Policy', in James Cotton and John Ravenhill, eds. *Trading on Alliance Security: Australia in World Affairs: 2001-2005*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press for the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2007, pp. 292-3.

that the relationship was getting better rather than worse and that Australia's motives in relation to 'helping Indonesia fight the threat of terrorism' were 'mostly good'. But Indonesian respondents did not see Indonesia as 'a dangerous source of Islamic terrorism', they thought Indonesia was 'right to worry that Australia is seeking to separate the province of Papua from Indonesia', and they said that 'Australia has a tendency to try to interfere in Indonesia's affairs too much'. In the eyes of these respondents (and Australian respondents too) 'Australia's policy towards Indonesia and the region is shaped too heavily by its alliance with the United States.'

Against a run of polls that have focused on Indonesia as a potential threat to Australia, and on little else, the 2006 Lowy poll represents a substantial advance. Its focus is much wider – wider than any previous survey of Australian attitudes to Indonesia of which there is a public record. And, so far as the public record shows, it is the only survey to have focused on attitudes of Australians to Indonesia and of Indonesians to Australia. In this sense, it will serve as benchmark for surveys to come.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Murray Goot FASSA is Professor of Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University where he holds a Personal Chair. He co-edited *Australia's Gulf War* (1994) and edited a special issue of the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* (2004) on Public Opinion and the War in Iraq. Professor Goot was a consultant to the Lowy Institute Poll.

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