

AUSTRALIA – NEW ZEALAND POLL

April 2007

In mid April, the Lowy Institute, in cooperation with the New Zealand Institute, conducted opinion polls on both sides of the Tasman on Australia - New Zealand relations. The polling was released at the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum, held in Sydney on 22-23 April 2007. The results are analysed below.

Australians and New Zealanders are the best of friends

Most New Zealanders (70%) are either 'very positive' (30%) or 'positive' (40%) about Australia. The great majority (82%) have traveled to Australia, and almost as many (77%) are able to name Australia's Prime Minister. By the same measure, Australia (70%) is much more well thought of than either Great Britain (52%), the United States (31%), China (22%) or Indonesia (17%).

Australians are even more positive about New Zealand. A slightly higher proportion of Australians (34%) are 'very positive' and slightly fewer (36%) are 'positive', so that overall the same proportion (70%) of our respondents on either side of the Tasman think well of each other. Australians also hold more positive views of New Zealand (70%) than of Great Britain (55%), the United States (30%), China (25%) or Indonesia (15%).

Australians are more laid back about the relationship

But Australians' positive feelings about New Zealand are much less likely to be based on direct experience, and their knowledge of New Zealand is significantly less than New Zealanders' knowledge of Australia. Only 35% of our Australian respondents have traveled to New Zealand, and only 38% could name New Zealand's prime minister. In contrast, 82% of New Zealanders have been to Australia, and 77% could name Australia's prime minister.

This imbalance of direct experience contributes to a sense that Australia looms much larger for New Zealanders than New Zealand does for Australians. Majorities of respondents in both countries see the other more as a partner than a competitor in engaging in a globalised world, but Australians (85%) are much more likely than New Zealanders (62%) to hold this benign view.

New Zealanders tend to see trans-Tasman imbalances as negative

It could be that the large numbers of New Zealanders moving permanently to Australia have qualified New Zealanders' view of Australia as a partner in globalisation. Two thirds of our New Zealand respondents (62%) feel that the permanent movement of New Zealanders to Australia is bad for New Zealand. Reflecting that view, 57% of Australians think that Australia gains when people move permanently from New Zealand to Australia.

The trans-Tasman imbalance in investment also gives New Zealanders cause to worry. Half our New Zealand respondents (52%) said that the increasing Australian ownership of New Zealand companies is a bad thing, though a third (32%) think it makes no difference. Australians are less concerned, with almost half (46%) saying it makes no difference and only 13% saying it is good thing for Australia.

New Zealanders are more likely to want closer economic integration . . .

One way to ensure that Australia and New Zealand work together – rather than in competition – might be to integrate them more closely. Although roughly half our respondents in both countries think the current degree of economic integration is about right, New Zealanders (31%) are twice as likely as Australians (16%) to think that economic integration has not gone far enough.

Furthermore, New Zealanders (49%) exhibit more support than Australians (41%) for entering a currency union, though the difference is not great. New Zealand has undergone a dramatic softening in its attitude to a currency union since the year 2000, when only 29% of New Zealanders supported a joint currency.

. . . but they are less likely to want closer political union

But if closer economic integration and an ANZAC dollar has its attractions for New Zealanders, they are much less sure than Australians about the benefits of full political union. Only 31% of New Zealanders think political union would be good for New Zealand, whereas 45% of Australians think it would be good for Australia. An equal proportion of respondents in both countries (around 40%) think political union would be bad for both countries.