

An aerial photograph of a dense forest. A bright, glowing orange path or stream winds through the dark green trees, creating a stark contrast. The path starts in the upper left and moves towards the right, then curves back down. The forest is dense and appears to be a mix of different tree species.

LOWY INSTITUTE
Poll 2026

CHARLES LYONS-JONES

**HOW AUSTRALIANS FEEL
ABOUT THE WORLD**

Preface

‘We stand, all of us,’ said Winston Churchill in 1941, ‘upon the watchtowers of history.’ Now, as then, the view from the watchtower is disquieting.

There are patches of sunshine. Nearly three-quarters of Australians (73%) believe democracy is the superior form of government. Public support for Ukraine is strong. Majorities support Australia coming to the defence of countries such as New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States.

But clouds are accumulating. More than half of Australians (53%) report feeling ‘unsafe’ in the world — an all-time high. In 2010, that figure was just 7%. More Australians are pessimistic about the country’s economic performance now than during the Covid pandemic or the Global Financial Crisis.

Australians are wary of Donald Trump’s America. Only 31% of Australians trust Washington to act responsibly in the world — a new low. Confidence in President Trump to do the right thing in world affairs has fallen since last year’s Poll, to 21%. The number of Australians who say the US alliance is important to our security has come down, but remains robust at 73%. Support for the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines through AUKUS has held firm.

In the days before our Poll went to field, the United States and Israel launched strikes against Iran, and global energy markets were roiled by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Initially, Australians disapproved of strikes on leadership

targets, and were divided on their support for strikes on nuclear targets. By late May, eight in ten Australians (80%) said they disapproved of the way President Trump was handling the military campaign.

Australians have long been concerned about China’s intentions. Trust in China to act responsibly sits at just 28%, an eight-point increase from last year but still less than half its 2006 peak. Xi Jinping inspires about as much confidence as Donald Trump. A clear majority of Australians (62%) believe that China will pose a military threat within 20 years.

A military conflict between the United States and China ranks highly among Australians’ concerns, but they are also anxious about cyber-attacks, an economic downturn, and the rise of authoritarian systems. A record majority (55%) say the number of migrants coming to Australia is ‘too high’, and support for cultural diversity has fallen. More than six in ten Australians (64%) say the risks of artificial intelligence outweigh the benefits.

In 2026, the liberal international order has been replaced by something illiberal, nationalistic, and disorderly. The 22nd Lowy Institute Poll is a snapshot of Australians’ thinking as they reckon with this change.

Dr Michael Fullilove AM
Executive Director
June 2026

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Executive summary

Global powers and world leaders

Australians are wary of the two superpowers, placing low levels of trust in both the United States and China. Australians' trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world has fallen to 31%, the lowest level ever recorded in the Lowy Institute Poll. By contrast, trust in China has risen eight points from last year to 28%, narrowing the gap with the United States to just three points. That gap was 53 points in 2022.

Australians remain trusting of liberal democracies. For the sixth year running, Japan is the most trusted power, with 89% of Australians saying they trust Japan to act responsibly in the world. Germany has emerged as the next most trusted power (83%), followed by the United Kingdom at 81%. Trust in Indonesia (57%) and India (50%) remains moderate.

United States

On 28 February, President Donald Trump announced that the US military had, alongside Israel, launched strikes against Iran. By the time this Poll was taken (2–15 March), US–Israeli strikes had killed senior Iranian leaders (including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) and destroyed numerous missile and nuclear targets. The shock to global energy markets was becoming apparent.

Australians are almost equally divided on whether they approve (49%) or disapprove (50%) of the US–Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. There is slightly less support for strikes on regime targets, with only 39% of Australians saying they approve of those actions. Eight in ten Australians say they disapprove of the way President Trump has handled the US military campaign in Iran.

Support for Australia's alliance with the United States remains resilient but has declined in 2026. A narrow majority of Australians (51%) now say Australia should distance itself from the United States under President Trump. Six in ten (60%) say they have 'no confidence at all' in the US president 'to do the right thing in world affairs'. However, nearly three-quarters of Australians (73%) still say the alliance is either 'very important' or 'fairly important' to Australia's security, albeit down seven points from last year's Poll.

China

In this year's Poll, a clear majority of Australians (61%) say they see China more as an economic partner than a security threat, an 11-point increase from 2025. Support for the bilateral trade relationship is accordingly strong, with a significant majority of Australians saying we should be trading with China 'more' or at 'about the same' level as we are now (77%).

On Australia's foreign policy towards China, Australians support firm positions. A clear majority say Australia should be doing more to pressure China to improve human rights (62%). A smaller majority say Australia should work more with allies in deterring China's use of military force (54%), a six-point drop from last year's Poll. Six in ten Australians (62%) say it is 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely' that China will be a military threat to Australia in 20 years.

In the event of conflict between the United States and China, Australians largely support helping Taiwan. Strong majorities say they would support imposing diplomatic sanctions on China (69%), sending arms and military supplies to Taiwan (61%), or deploying the Royal Australian Navy to help prevent China from imposing a blockade on Taiwan (60%). A slim majority (53%) say they would 'oppose' sending Australian military personnel to help defend Taiwan, with a large minority (44%) saying they would support it.

Superpower relations

More than half of Australians (54%) identify China as being the most important and powerful country in ten years' time. By contrast, only 31% of Australians think the United States will be the most powerful in a decade (up four points from last year's Poll). Few Australians see an alternative to either of the two superpowers — small minorities identify Europe (8%) or India (5%) as the most important and powerful actors in ten years' time.

Australians are divided on which superpower relationship should be prioritised. A bare majority (51%) say Australia's relationship with China is more important than its relationship with the United States, an eight-point increase from 2025. A significant minority (45%) say Australia's relationship with the United States is more important, a seven-point drop from 2025.

Pacific Islands

Australian foreign minister Penny Wong has said that Australia is in a 'permanent contest' with China for influence in the Pacific. Australia is easily the largest aid donor to Pacific Island countries, accounting for 38% of total aid flows over the past 15 years, dwarfing China's contribution of 9% over the same period. Australia has also signed numerous security agreements with Pacific Island countries, including the Papua New Guinea–Australia Mutual Defence Treaty (Pukpuk Treaty) in October 2025.

However, when asked which country has the most influence in the Pacific Islands, 39% of Australians say China. Only one-third (33%) say Australia — a reversal of last year's results, where 39% said Australia and 34% said China. In 2026, the proportion of Australians who nominate either the United States (18%) or New Zealand (7%) remains the same as in 2025.

Albanese government on foreign policy

When asked about the performance of the Albanese government on foreign policy, a slim majority of Australians (54%) rate it as either ‘quite poor’ or ‘very poor’, up 13 points from 2024. A large minority (43%) say the Albanese government has done ‘quite a good job’ or a ‘very good job’, down 13 points from 2024.

Safety and threats

For the fourth year in a row, ‘cyberattacks from other countries’ (62%) were listed as the leading threat to Australia, closely followed by ‘a severe downturn in the global economy’ (60%). ‘The rise of authoritarian systems of government around the world’ and ‘international terrorism’ were also cited as critical threats (both 59%).

‘Conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan’ fell four points from last year’s Poll, with 57% of Australians listing it as a ‘critical threat’ to Australia in the next ten years. Concerns about ‘foreign interference in Australian politics’ and ‘conflict in the Middle East’ followed closely behind (both 56%).

Defence and security

Australian defence spending currently sits at around 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) based on the historic measures, but according to a new method adopted in the *National Defence Strategy*, Australia’s expenditure sits closer to 2.8% of GDP. Half of Australians (50%) say they would support an ‘increase’ in defence spending. Four in ten (42%) say they would support defence spending remaining ‘about the same’ as it is today.

Support for AUKUS, the security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, held firm in this year’s Poll. Two-thirds of Australians (68%) say they support Australia’s acquisition of conventionally armed but nuclear-powered submarines.

Four in ten Australians (39%) say they are ‘in favour’ of Australia acquiring nuclear weapons in the future, a three-point increase since Australians were last polled on this question in 2022. The proportion of Australians (58%) who say they are ‘against’ Australia acquiring nuclear weapons has softened, falling five points since last polled in 2022.

Amid Russia’s ongoing invasion, Australian public support for Ukraine has held firm. More than eight in ten Australians (83%) say they support the Australian government maintaining strict sanctions on Russia, while seven in ten (70%) say they support providing military aid to Ukraine. Three-quarters of Australians (75%) support admitting Ukrainian refugees to Australia and Australia’s participation in a European-led peacekeeping mission in Ukraine (74%).

When asked whether the Australian Defence Force should protect allies or partners under attack, over nine in ten (94%) say Australia should come to New Zealand’s defence. Eight in ten (79%) say Australia should come to the defence of Papua New Guinea. Majorities of Australians would also support coming to the defence of the United Kingdom (74%), Japan (66%), Indonesia (60%), the Philippines (57%), and the United States (55%).

Economic security

Against a backdrop of persistent inflation and rising global energy prices, six in ten Australians (59%) say they are pessimistic about Australia’s economic performance, a 12-point increase from the 2025 Poll. This is the highest recorded result on this question in the history of the Lowy Institute Poll – 11 points above the rate of economic pessimism registered during the Covid pandemic in 2020, and 46 points above that recorded after the Global Financial Crisis in 2009.

On climate change, Australians are less supportive of strong action. In an eight-point drop since 2024, just less than half of Australians (49%) now say ‘climate change is a serious and pressing problem that needs to be addressed even if this involves significant costs’. Australians are also divided on what achieving the net zero target will mean for the economy, with 38% saying the economy will be ‘better off’, and the same proportion saying it will be ‘worse off’ (22% say it will ‘make no difference’).

Societal issues

Support for democracy remains strong, with nearly three-quarters of Australians (73%) saying it is preferable to any other system of government. But on other societal issues, such as migration and the value of cultural diversity, attitudes are changing. A majority of Australians (55%) say the total number of migrants coming to Australia is ‘too high’, a record for the Lowy Institute Poll. On cultural diversity, nearly three-quarters of Australians (73%) say they view it as either ‘entirely positive’ or ‘mostly positive’. This represents a near 20-point drop from 2024 and the largest movement on any societal question in the history of Lowy Institute polling.

Australians are also wary of the growing deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) throughout the economy, with a clear majority of Australians (64%) saying the risks of AI outweigh the benefits. This marks a 12-point increase since the last time this question was asked in 2024.

The 2026 Lowy Institute Poll reports the results of a nationally representative survey of 2,013 adult Australian residents, conducted between 2 and 15 March by the Social Research Centre. The margin of error is approximately 2.2%. See Methodology (pages 30–31) for full details.

Explore the data at poll.lowyinstitute.org

Global powers and world leaders

Trust in global powers

In 2026, Australians are wary of the two superpowers, placing low levels of trust in both the United States and China. Trust in the United States to act responsibly in the world has fallen to 31%, the lowest level in the history of Lowy Institute polling. This new low represents a five-point drop from last year and a 25-point drop from 2024. By contrast, trust in China to act responsibly in the world has risen eight points since last year to 28%, narrowing the gap with the United States to just three points. In 2022, that gap was 53 points. At the time, 65% of Australians said they trusted the United States to act responsibly in the world, and a mere 12% said they trusted China. This represents the largest compression in the gap of trust between the superpowers in the history of Lowy Institute polling.

Australians place high levels of trust in liberal democracies and the United Nations. For the sixth year running, Japan is the most trusted power, with 89% of Australians saying they trust Japan to act responsibly in the world. Germany is the next most trusted power (83%), followed by the United Kingdom (81%). Seven in ten Australians (70%) say the United Nations is either 'somewhat important' or 'very important' to Australia's national interests.

For two of Australia's key regional partners — Indonesia and India — trust remains steady if moderate. Trust in Indonesia to act responsibly in the world sits at 57%, similar to last year's result. Australians' trust in India fell four points from last year to 50%.

Of the countries surveyed, Russia was once again the power least trusted by Australians with only 11% saying they trust Moscow to act responsibly in the world.

FIGURE 1

Trust in global powers

How much do you trust the following countries to act responsibly in the world?

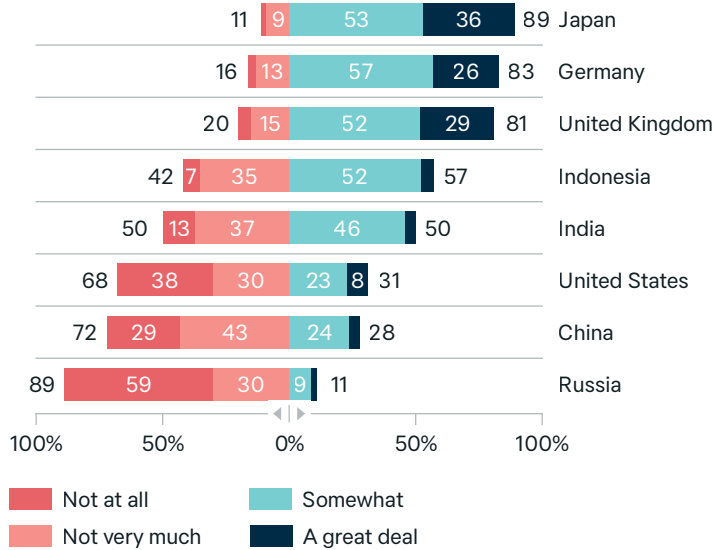
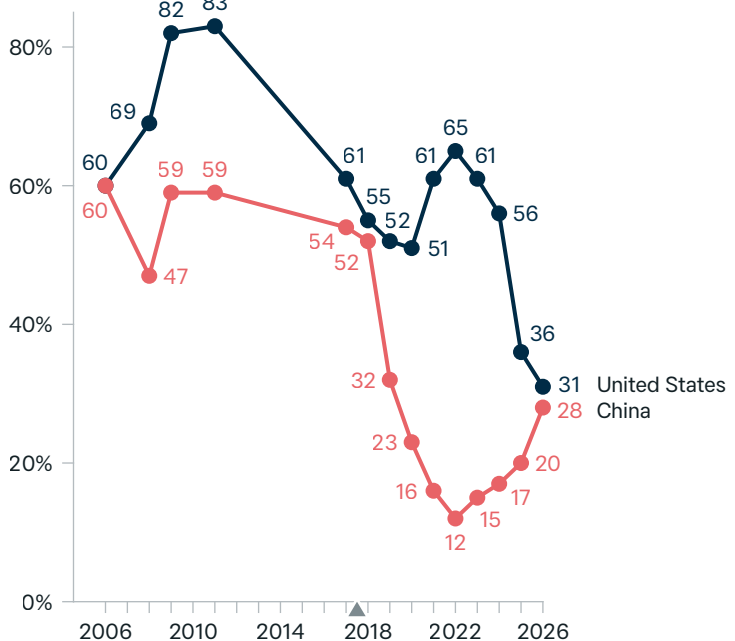


FIGURE 2

Trust in global powers — select historical responses

Total who say 'somewhat' and 'a great deal'



▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

Confidence in world leaders

Only 21% of Australians say they trust Donald Trump to do the right thing regarding world affairs, the lowest level of confidence in any US president in the history of Lowy Institute polling. Vice President JD Vance fares no better, with only 20% of Australians saying they have confidence in him as a world leader.

Confidence in China’s leader Xi Jinping remains low but has risen four points since last year’s Poll to 20%, in line with Australians’ modest rise in trust in China. Only 4% of Australians say they have confidence in North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, making him the world leader who inspires the least amount of confidence, followed closely by Russian president Vladimir Putin (8%).

Canadian prime minister Mark Carney inspires the greatest confidence (66%) of all world leaders, with New Zealand prime minister Christopher Luxon (65%) a close second. Similarly high levels of confidence are expressed in Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy (62%) and Japanese prime minister Sanae Takaichi (62%).

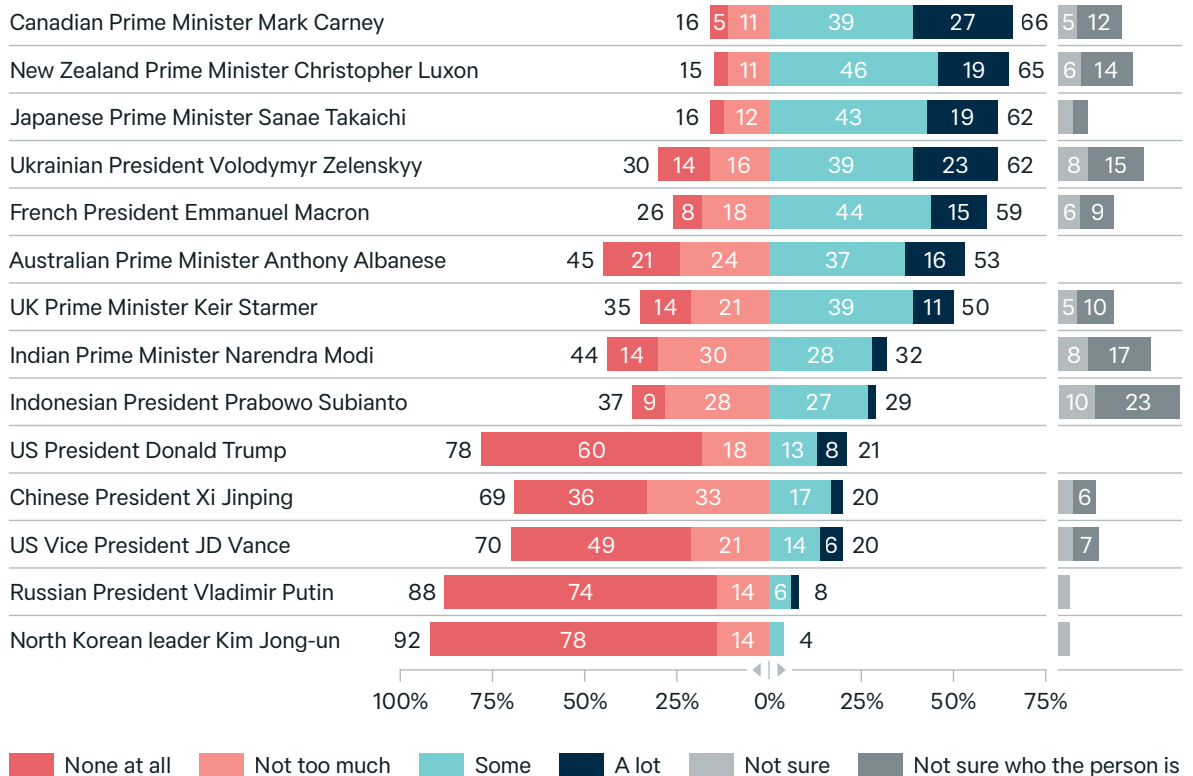
Confidence in French president Emmanuel Macron sits at 59%, within the margin of error from last year’s result (61%). There were losses for Australian and British leaders. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s rating fell by seven points to 53%, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s fell nine points to 50%.

Confidence in Indonesian president Prabowo Subianto held steady on last year at 29%, and fell three points for Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, from 35% to 32%.

FIGURE 3

Confidence in world leaders

Here is a list of political leaders. For each, please indicate how much confidence you have in the leader to do the right thing regarding world affairs — a lot of confidence, some confidence, not too much confidence, or no confidence at all.



Feelings thermometer

Since the inception of the Lowy Institute Poll in 2005, the ‘feelings thermometer’ has measured Australians’ warmth towards other countries and territories on a scale of 0° (coldest feelings) to 100° (warmest feelings), with each score being the mean of results produced by the polled sample.

New Zealand has topped the feelings thermometer again in 2026 at 86°, a position it has held in each of the 16 years it has been included. It is followed closely this year by Canada (79°) and Japan (77°). Feelings towards the United Kingdom dropped three degrees from last year’s Poll to 72°. Fiji was close behind at 70°.

Australians felt a similar degree of warmth towards France this year (66°) as the last time it was polled in 2023 when it registered 68°. Feelings towards Taiwan were nearly as warm at 64° and remain similar to last year. Feelings towards Ukraine (60°) and Papua New Guinea (58°) also remain unchanged.

India registered lukewarm results on the thermometer, falling two degrees from last year to 49°. Mexico (51°) and Egypt (46°) also registered tepid results, while Saudi Arabia’s result of 37° marks a five-degree increase since last polled in 2020.

In Southeast Asia, Australians expressed moderate levels of warmth towards the Philippines (58°) and Indonesia (55°). The outlier was Myanmar, where Australians’ feelings sit at a cool 39°.

Feelings towards the superpowers are equally cool, but changing. The United States’ reading fell to 46°, a drop of four degrees since last year and thirteen degrees since 2024. Feelings towards China, however, increased four degrees from last year to 41°. This marks a warming of seven degrees since 2024 and nine degrees since 2021.

The frostiest feelings were reserved for North Korea (16°), Iran (22°), and Russia (23°).

FIGURE 4

Feelings thermometer

Please rate your feelings towards some countries and territories, with one hundred meaning a very warm, favourable feeling, zero meaning a very cold, unfavourable feeling, and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.

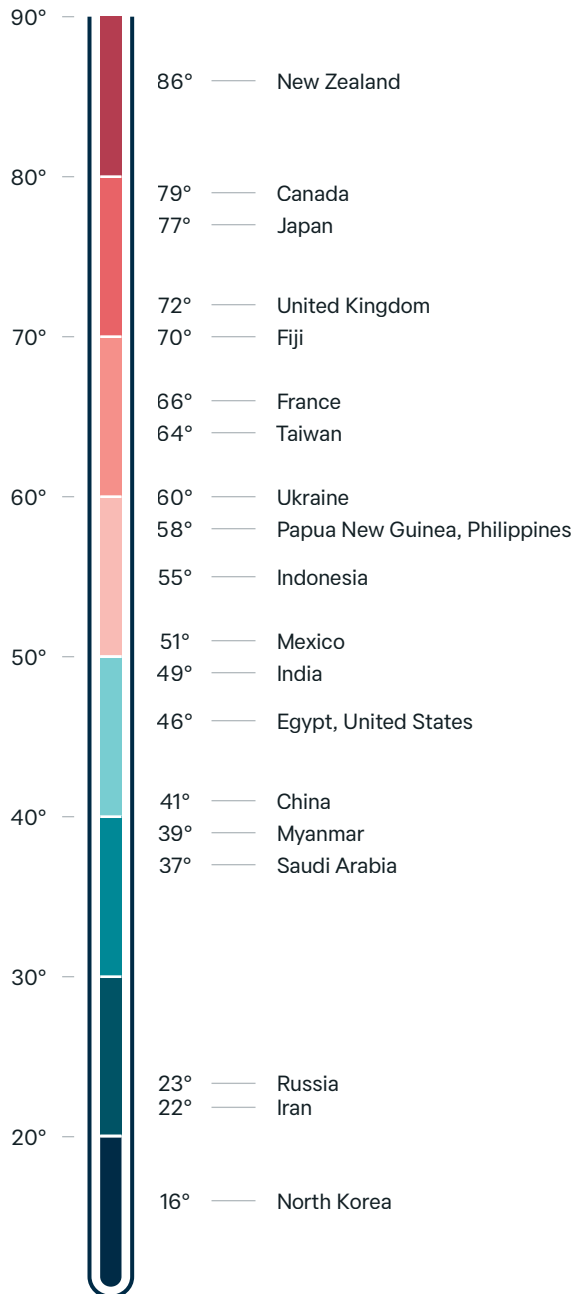
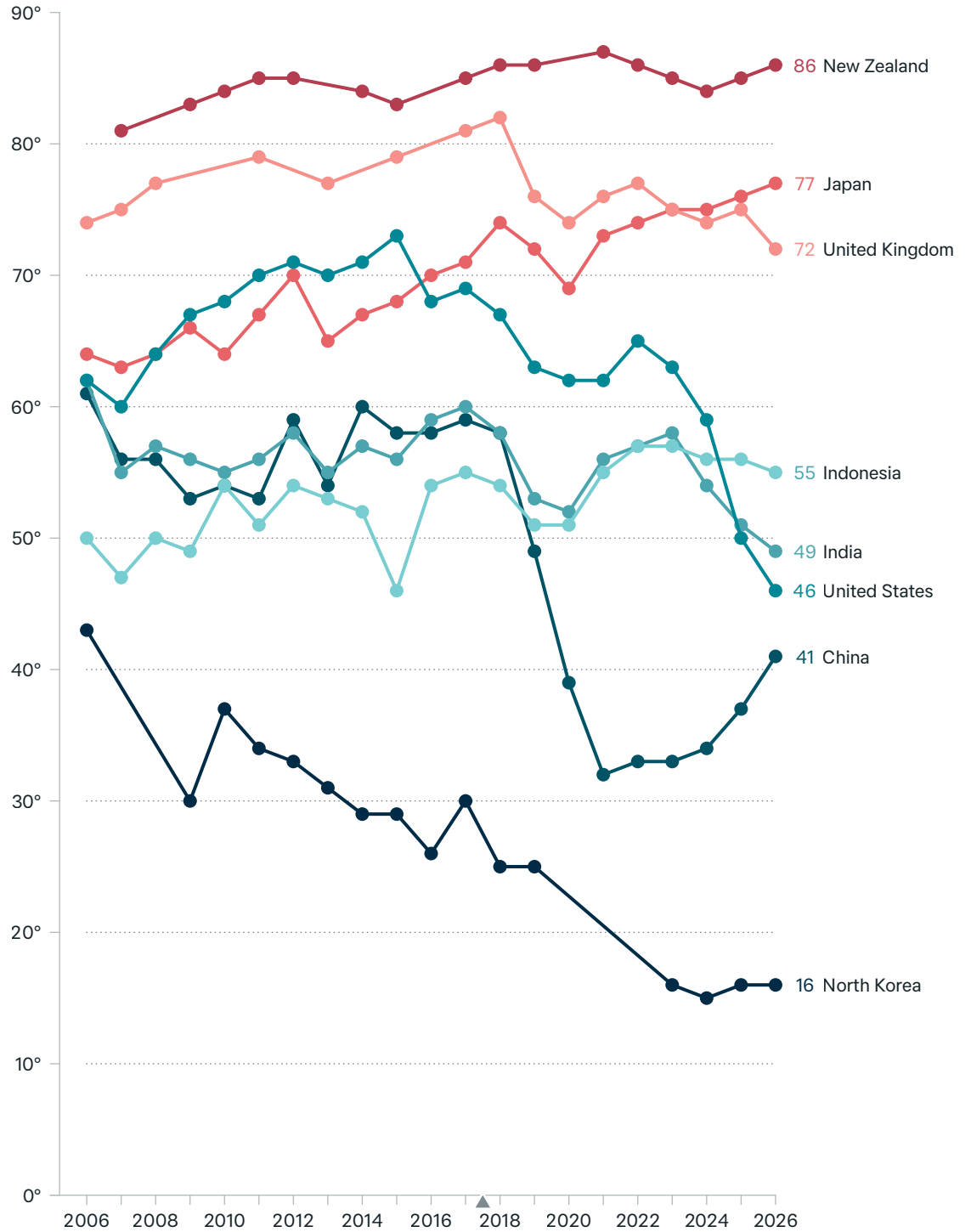


FIGURE 5

Feelings thermometer — select historical responses



▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

Relations in the Indo-Pacific

United States

On 28 February, two days before this Poll went out to field, President Donald Trump announced that the US military had, alongside Israel, undertaken joint strike action against Iran. The US-Israeli strikes killed senior Iranian leaders and destroyed numerous missile and nuclear sites. Iran responded with attacks on oil and gas facilities across the Gulf and disrupted civilian shipping through the Strait of Hormuz.

When asked whether they approve or disapprove of military strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities, 49% of Australians say they approve and 50% say they disapprove. When asked whether they approve or disapprove of strikes on leadership targets to weaken or change the Iranian regime, 59% of Australians say they disapprove and 39% say they approve.

As the military campaign continued, the Lowy Institute commissioned a mini-poll, conducted from 18 May–2 June. Respondents were asked whether they approve or disapprove of the way President Trump has prosecuted the military campaign against Iran. Eight in ten Australians (80%) say they disapprove of the way President Trump has handled the military campaign, while two in ten (18%) say they approve.

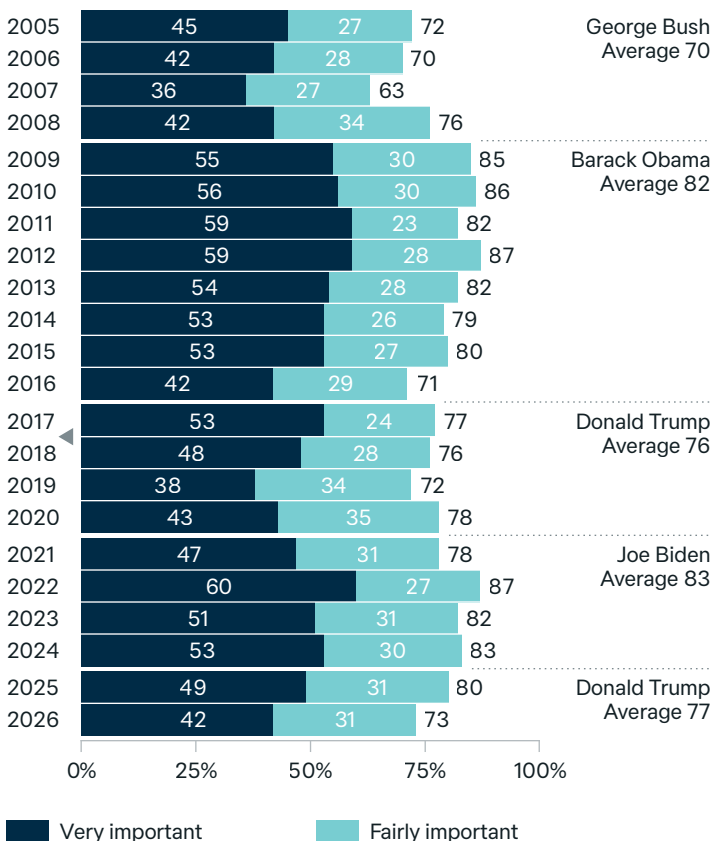
US alliance: importance

Support for Australia’s alliance with the United States, known as ANZUS, has been the most resilient finding in the 22-year history of the Lowy Institute Poll. This year, support for the alliance is again strong, with nearly three-quarters of Australians (73%) saying it is either ‘very important’ or ‘fairly important’ to Australia’s security. This represents a seven-point drop from last year’s Poll and a ten-point drop from 2024, marking the sharpest sustained fall in support for the alliance in the history of the Poll. However, this year’s result remains ten points higher than the 2007 low, which was recorded during the Iraq War.

FIGURE 6

US alliance: importance to Australia’s security

Thinking now about the United States. How important is our relationship with the United States for Australia’s security?



◀ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

US alliance: defence of Australia

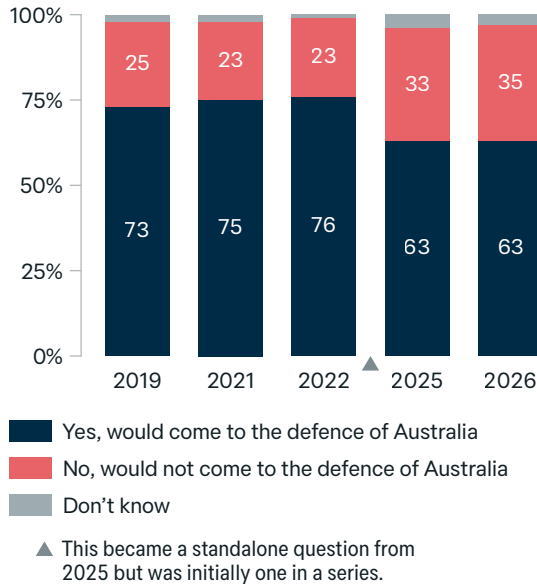
A clear majority of Australians (63%) say the United States would come to Australia’s defence in the event of an armed attack. But this represents a significant drop from previous years. In 2019, 2021, and 2022, close to three-quarters of Australians agreed with the statement ‘the United States would come to Australia’s defence if Australia were under threat’.

While a majority of Australians (55%) say they are either ‘strongly in favour’ or ‘somewhat in favour’ of the United States operating a military base in Australia, a significant minority (43%) are either ‘strongly against’ or ‘somewhat against’.

FIGURE 7

United States' defence of Australia

Do you think the United States would or would not come to Australia's defence if Australia were attacked by the military of another country?



President Donald Trump

A narrow majority of Australians (51%) say Australia should distance itself from the United States under President Donald Trump, and 60% say they have 'no confidence at all' in the US president to do the right thing in world affairs.

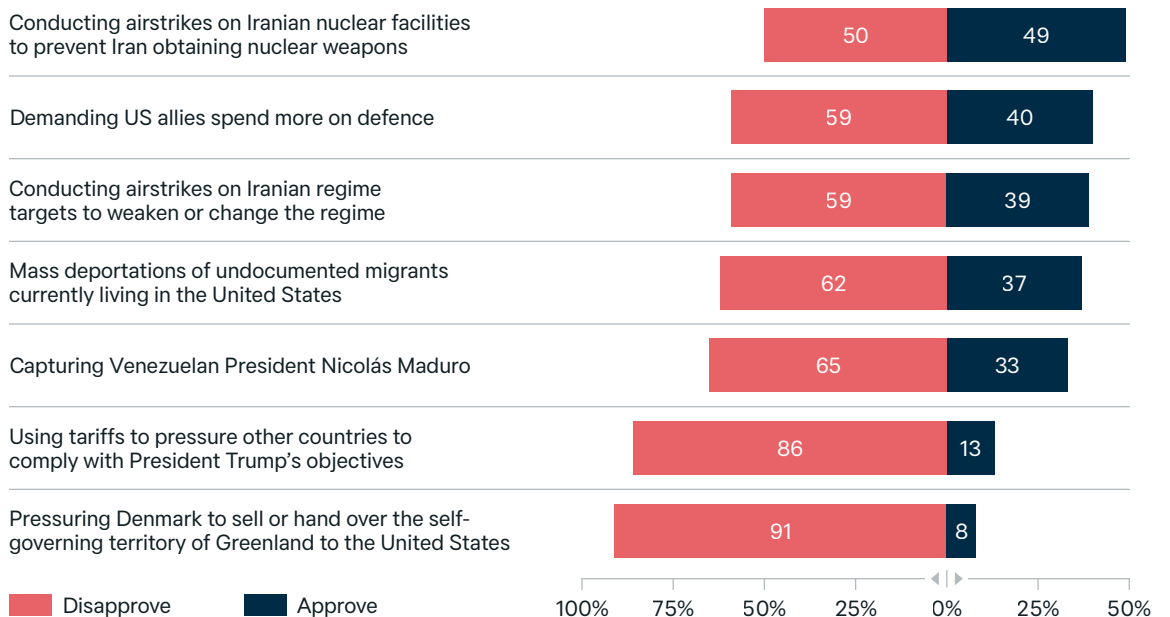
Policies of President Trump

Many Australians take issue with a range of President Trump's policies. A significant majority (86%) say they disapprove of the use of tariffs to pressure other countries into complying with President Trump's objectives. On the issue of mass deportation of undocumented migrants living in the United States, 62% of Australians say they disapprove. Almost six in ten (59%) say they disapprove of Mr Trump's policy of demanding that allies spend more on defence. Almost all Australians (91%) say they disapprove of Mr Trump's pressure on Denmark to hand over the self-governing territory of Greenland. On President Trump's operation to capture Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro, 65% say they disapprove. In line with these results, 65% of Australians say they would be less likely to travel to the United States under the current administration.

FIGURE 8

Policies of President Trump

Here are some policies of US President Donald Trump. Please indicate whether you approve or disapprove of each one:



China

The 2019–2022 period marked a low point in Australia–China relations. Beijing imposed punitive tariffs on Australian agricultural goods such as barley, wine, and beef in response to numerous decisions it regarded as antagonistic, including Australia’s call for an inquiry into the origins of Covid-19. In 2021 and 2022, 63% of Australians viewed China more as a security threat than an economic partner — a record high for that measure.

The relationship began to stabilise in 2022. Prime Minister Albanese made his first official visit to China in November 2023, following an earlier visit by foreign minister Penny Wong. In 2023, the number of Australians who saw China more as a security threat than an economic partner slimmed to 52%. By 2025, Australians were more evenly split, with 47% saying they saw China more as a security threat, and 50% saying they saw the country more as an economic partner.

In this year’s Poll, a clear majority of Australians (61%) say they see China more as an economic

partner than a security threat, an 11-point increase since 2025. This finding marks one of the largest swings in sentiment in this year’s Poll.

Australia’s policies towards China

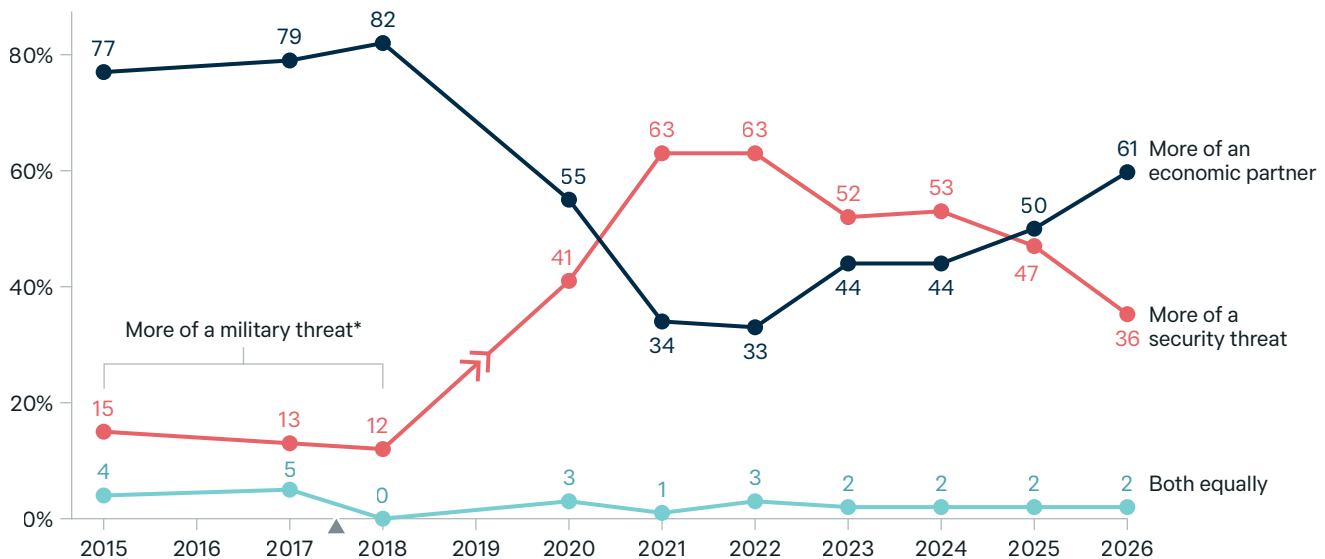
On Australia’s foreign policy towards China, Australians say they support firm positions on human rights and deterrence. A clear majority of Australians (62%) say we should be doing more to pressure China to improve human rights, while 28% say we should be doing ‘about the same’ as we are now. A smaller majority (54%) say we should be doing more to work with allies in deterring China’s use of military force, down six points from last year, while 34% say we should be doing ‘about the same’ as we are now.

Two-way trade between Australia and China reached \$325 billion in 2025, making China Australia’s largest trading partner by a wide margin. This year’s Poll found strong support for the trade relationship, with significant numbers of Australians saying we should be trading with China ‘about the same’ as we are now (44%) or trading ‘more’ (33%). A minority (22%) say we should be trading ‘less’ with China.

FIGURE 9

China: economic partner or security threat

In your own view, is China more of an economic partner or more of a security threat to Australia?



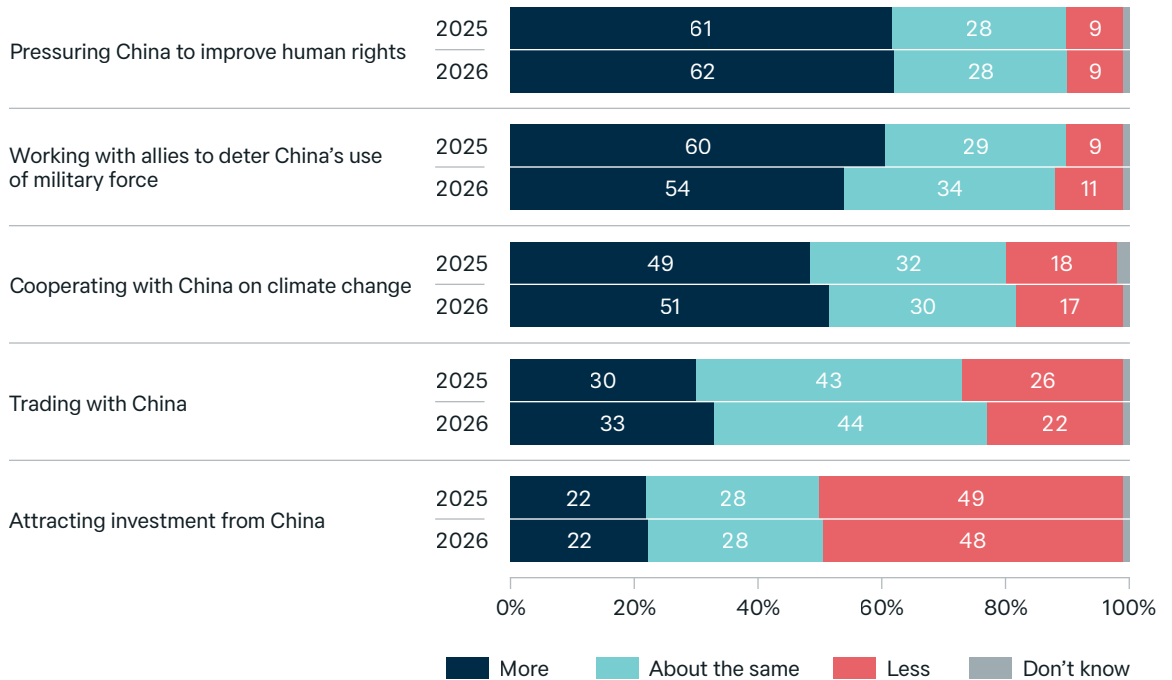
* In 2015, 2017, and 2018, the question asked if China was ‘more of a military threat’.

▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

FIGURE 10

China: Australian policy settings

For each of the following, please indicate whether you think Australia should be doing more, less, or about the same as now:



Investment from China elicits lower levels of support. Only 22% of Australians say we should be attracting ‘more’ investment from China, while 28% say it should remain ‘about the same’ as it is now. Almost half of Australians (48%) say we should attract ‘less’ investment from China.

During Prime Minister Albanese’s second official visit to China in July 2025, he and Chinese premier Li Qiang announced a new Policy Dialogue on Steel Decarbonisation.¹ In October 2025, Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen visited China for the Ninth Australia–China Ministerial Dialogue on Climate Change. The Australian public appears to back this diplomatic direction on climate. The vast majority of Australians (81%) support at least maintaining current levels of cooperation with China on climate change, with 51% saying we should cooperate ‘more’ and 30% saying levels of cooperation should remain ‘about the same’. Only 17% say we should cooperate less with China on climate change.

China as a military threat

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles has warned that China is undertaking the largest military build-up of any nation since the lead-up to the Second World War, with significant increases in the size of its navy, missile forces, and nuclear arsenal.² Against this backdrop, a clear majority of Australians (62%) say it would be ‘somewhat likely’ or ‘very likely’ that China would be a military threat to Australia in 20 years, a seven-point drop from last year’s Poll and a 13-point drop from 2022 and 2023.

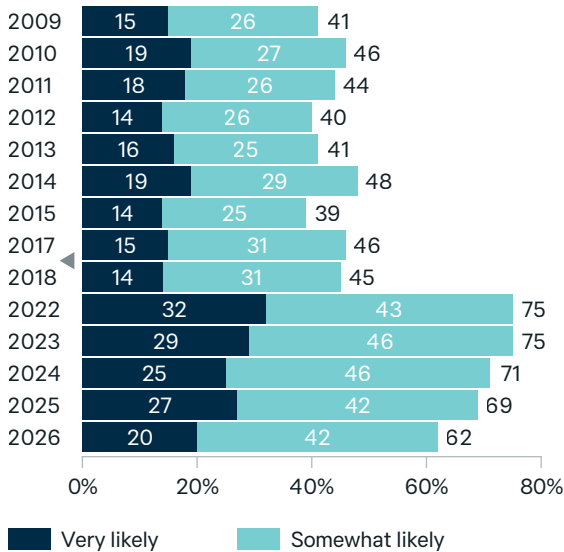
Australia’s response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan

China’s president Xi Jinping has instructed his military to be ready to conduct a successful invasion of Taiwan by 2027.³ Under the Taiwan Relations Act, the US Congress declared it would regard military action against Taiwan as ‘a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States’.⁴

FIGURE 11

China as a military threat

Do you think it is likely or unlikely that China will become a military threat to Australia in the next 20 years?



◀ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

In the event of conflict between the two superpowers, Australians are largely supportive of providing assistance to Taiwan. Strong majorities say they would support accepting Taiwanese refugees into Australia (72%) and imposing diplomatic sanctions on China (69%). Smaller majorities say they would support sending arms and military supplies to Taiwan (61%) or deploying the Royal Australian Navy to help prevent China from imposing a blockade around Taiwan (60%). Sending Australian military personnel to help defend Taiwan from China attracted the weakest support (44%) among Australians, with a slim majority (53%) saying they would ‘oppose’ such a deployment.

Superpower relations

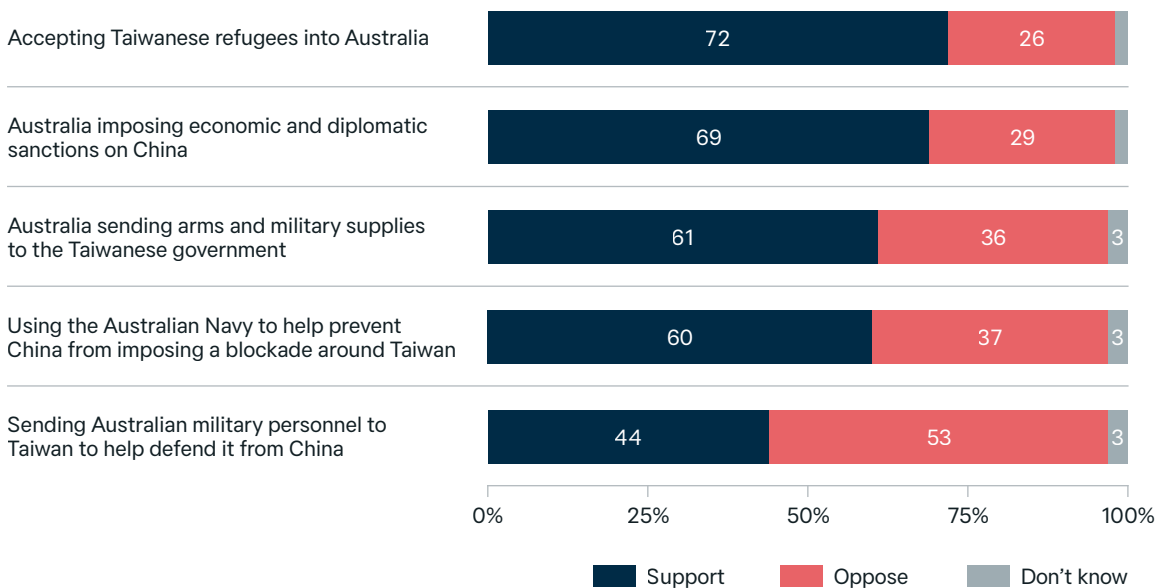
Superpowers in the future

More than half of Australians (54%) say China will be the most important and powerful country in ten years. Only 31% think the United States will hold this status, up four points from last year’s Poll.

FIGURE 12

Australia’s response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan

If China were to invade Taiwan, would you support or oppose Australia, acting together with the United States, taking the following actions?



When asked about the relationship between the two superpowers, a clear majority (64%) say the United States should place a greater priority on stabilising ties with China. Only 16% say the United States should prioritise challenging China’s role in the world.

Few Australians see an alternative to either of the two superpowers, with only 8% nominating Europe and 5% nominating India as the most important and powerful strategic actors in ten years’ time.

Australia’s relations with the superpowers

For the first time in the history of the Lowy Institute Poll, a majority of Australians (51%) say that Australia’s relationship with China is more important than its relationship with the United States (the question has been asked five times since 2005). A significant minority (45%) say Australia’s relationship with the United States is more important than its relationship with China.

FIGURE 13

Superpowers in the future

Now a question about the role and influence of countries in the future. Ten years from now, which of these countries or regions do you think will be the most important and powerful in the world?

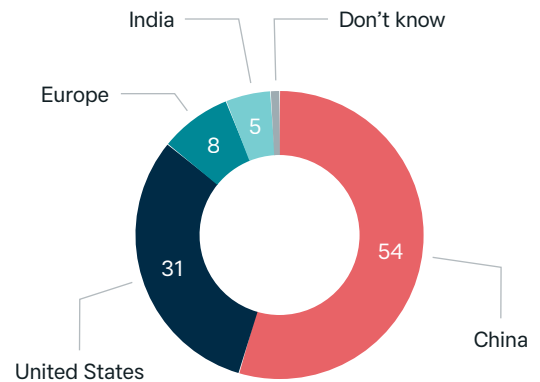
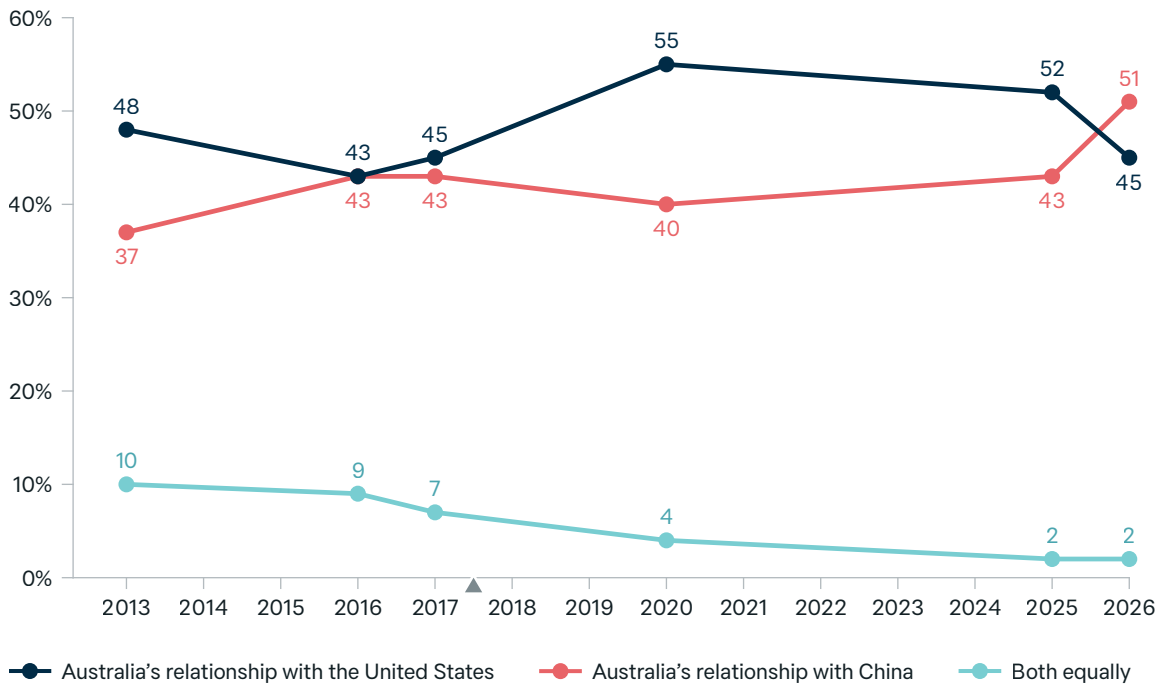


FIGURE 14

Relations with superpowers: United States and China

Now about Australia’s relationships with China and the United States. Which relationship do you think is more important to Australia?



▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

Pacific Islands

According to the Lowy Institute’s Pacific Aid Map, Australia is by far the largest aid donor to Pacific Island countries, accounting for 38% of total aid flows over the past 15 years. This dwarfs China’s contribution of 9% over the same period.⁵

Australia has also become the region’s largest bilateral lender through its budget support programs to Papua New Guinea, and the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, with committed investments totalling \$2 billion.⁶ Australia has signed numerous security agreements with Pacific Island countries, including the Papua New Guinea–Australia Mutual Defence

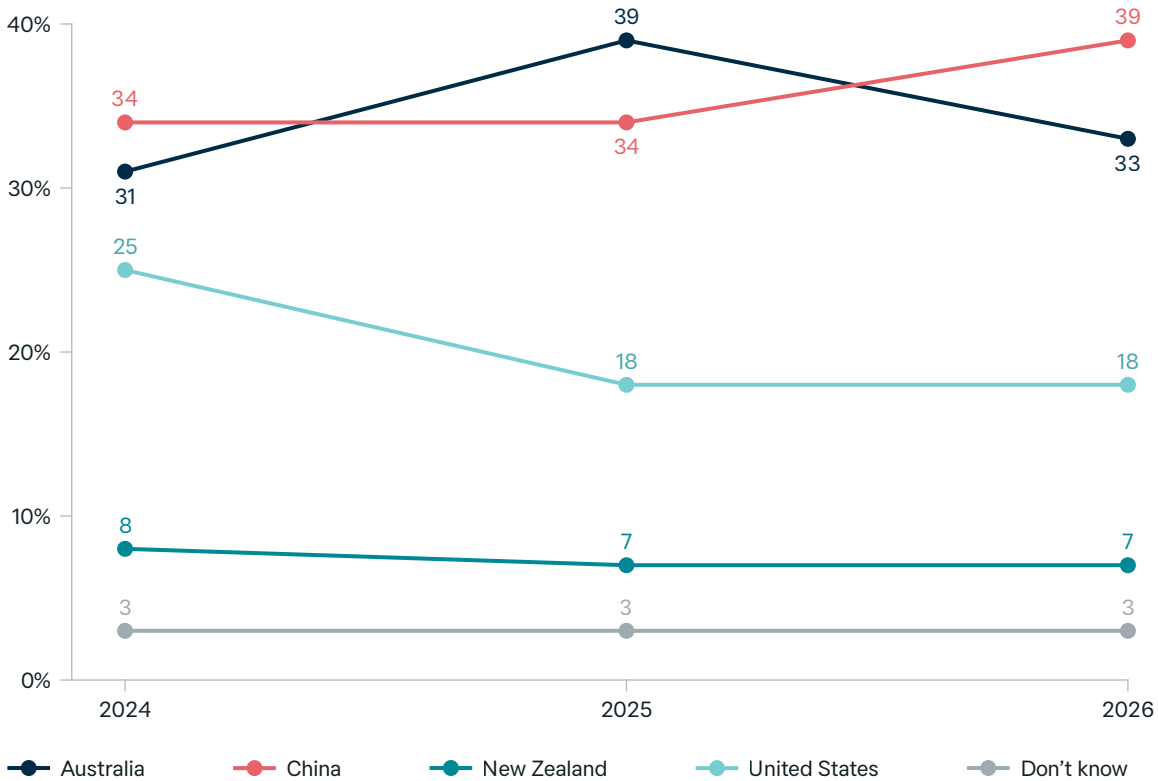
Treaty (Pukpuk Treaty) in October 2025.⁷ Australian foreign minister Penny Wong has said that Australia is in a ‘permanent contest’ with China for influence in the Pacific.⁸

For the first time in the Poll’s history, more respondents now say China (39%), rather than Australia (33%), is the most influential country in the Pacific Islands — a reversal of last year’s result. The proportions nominating the United States (18%) or New Zealand (7%) as most influential remain essentially unchanged from 2025. This finding sits at odds with the resources Australia commits to the region.

FIGURE 15

Influence in Pacific Island countries

Now thinking about the Pacific Islands region. In your opinion, which one of these countries has the most influence in Pacific Island countries?



Albanese government on foreign policy

On 3 May 2025, Anthony Albanese led the Australian Labor Party to its second consecutive federal election victory.

Since then, the Albanese government has continued prosecuting a foreign policy agenda that emphasises maintaining a stable relationship with China and a strong alliance with the United States, while prioritising its resources in areas where Australia has a comparative advantage, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. This marks a shift in emphasis from the former Coalition

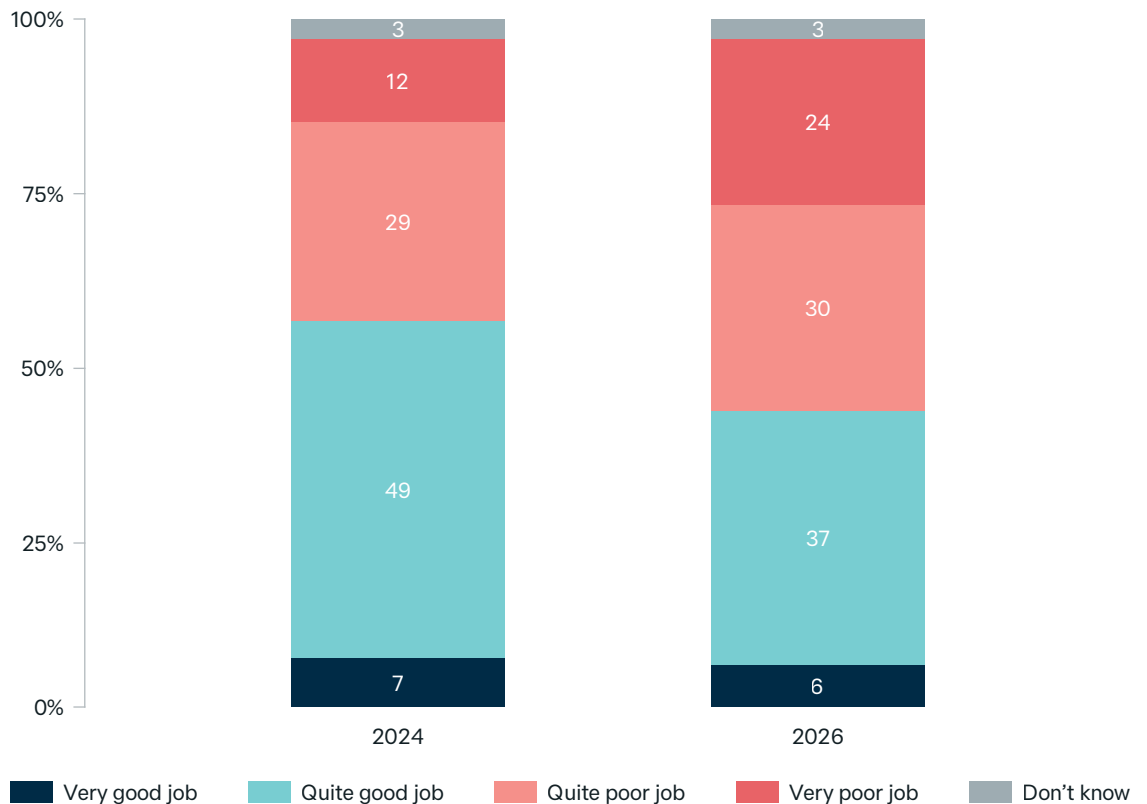
government’s policy of contesting China’s influence, maintaining a strong alliance with the United States, and prioritising bilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific over multilateral forums.

When asked about the performance of the Albanese government on foreign policy, a slim majority of Australians (54%) rate it as either ‘quite poor’ or ‘very poor’, up 13 points from 2024. A large minority (43%) say the Albanese government has done ‘quite a good job’ or a ‘very good job’, down 13 points from 2024.

FIGURE 16

Federal government foreign policy performance

Now thinking about the Australian government. To what extent do you think the current federal Labor government is doing a good job, or a poor job, of handling Australia’s foreign policy?



Safety and threats

Feelings of safety

In 2026, a majority of Australians (53%) say they feel 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe' in the world, while only 47% say they feel 'safe' or 'very safe'. This is the smallest proportion of respondents who have expressed feelings of safety in the history of the Lowy Institute Poll, marking a 45-point drop in feelings of safety from 2010, when 92% of Australians reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe'. This year's result is three points lower than the previous record low, reported in 2020 (50%) at the onset of the Covid pandemic.

Threats to Australia

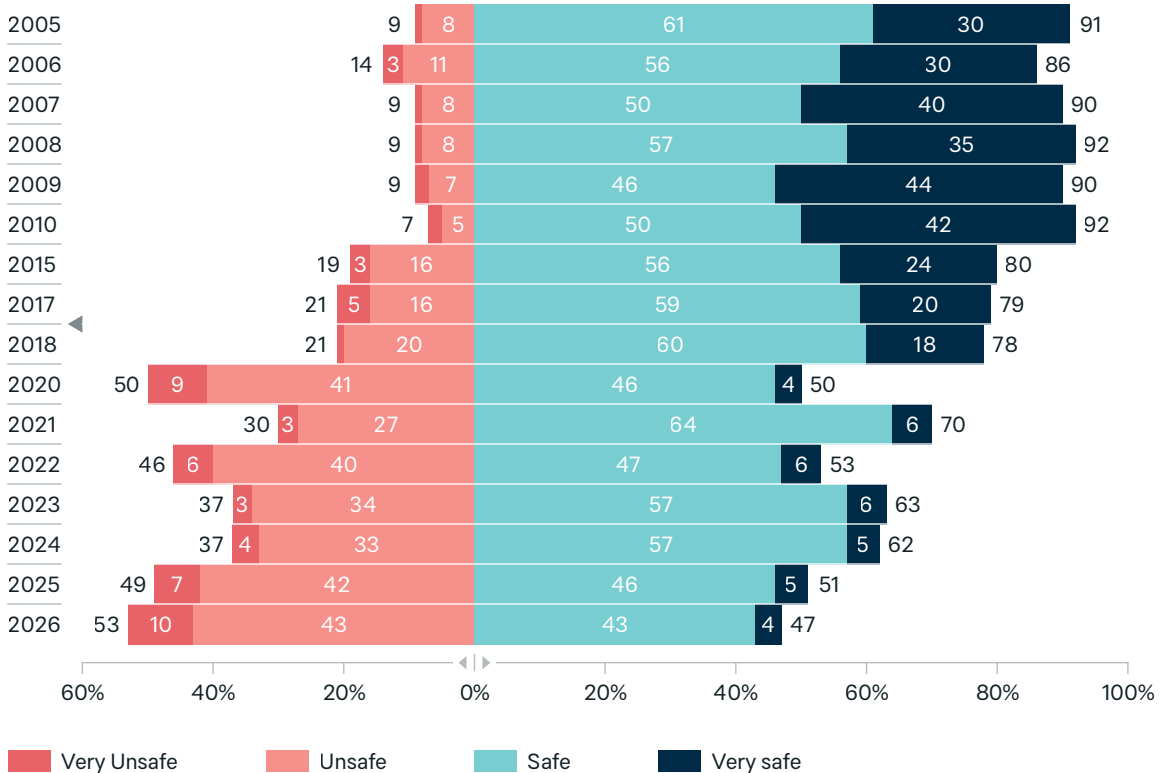
Since its first edition in 2005, the Lowy Institute Poll has sought Australians' views on a range of possible threats to 'the vital interests of Australia in the next ten years'.

For the fourth year in a row, respondents listed 'cyberattacks from other countries' as the leading threat to Australia. Dropping three points from last year, 62% of Australians see these types of attacks as a 'critical threat'.

FIGURE 17

Feelings of safety

Now about world events, how safe do you feel?

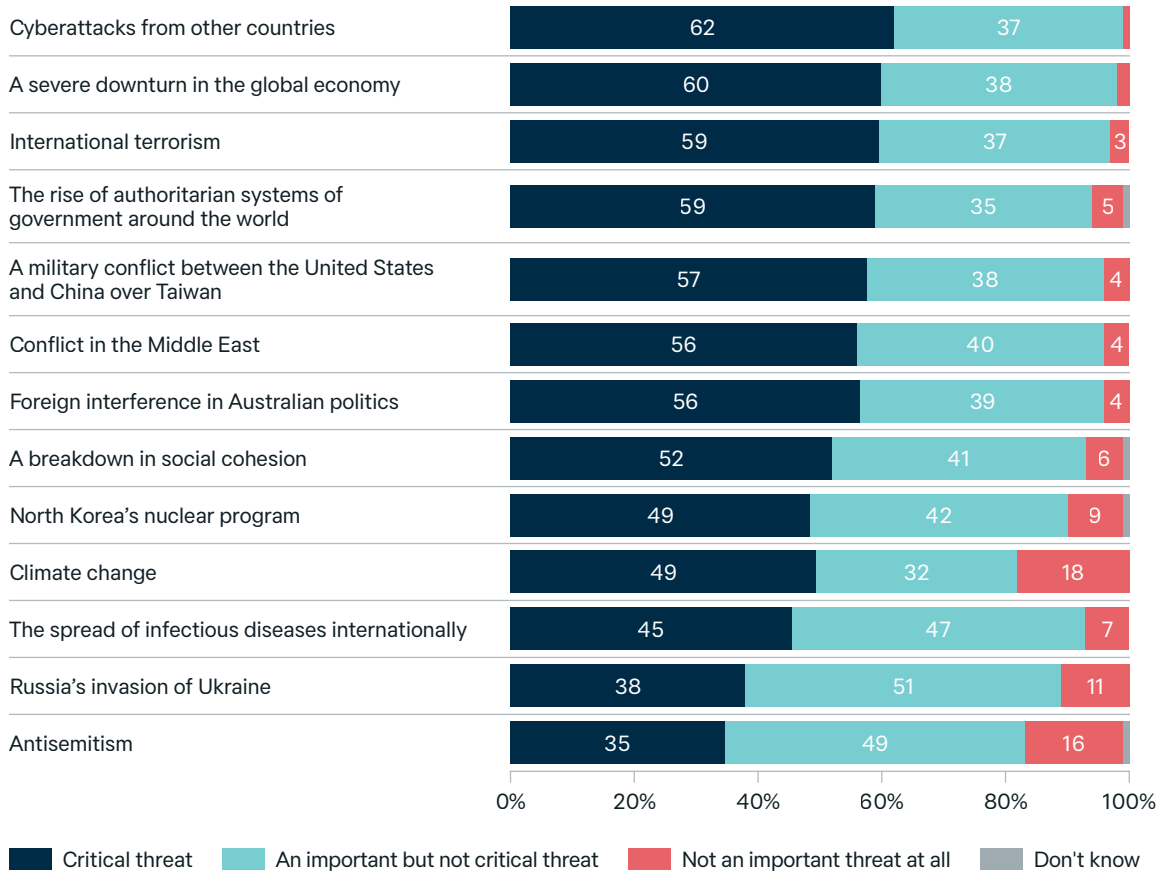


◀ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

FIGURE 18

Threats to Australia’s vital interests

Here is a list of possible threats to the vital interests of Australia in the next ten years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all.



The next-highest ranked threat was ‘a severe downturn in the global economy’, with 60% of Australians listing it as a ‘critical threat’ in this year’s Poll. Closely behind was ‘the rise of authoritarian systems of government around the world’ and ‘international terrorism’, with 59% of Australians listing either of these options as ‘critical threats’ to Australia in the next ten years.

‘Conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan’ fell four points from last year’s Poll, with 57% of Australians listing this as a ‘critical threat’ to Australia in the next ten years. ‘Foreign interference in Australian politics’ and ‘conflict in the Middle East’ followed closely behind, with 56% of Australians listing either of these as a ‘critical threat’.

Concerns about ‘North Korea’s nuclear program’ and ‘climate change’ fell five points from last year, with 49% of Australians listing these as ‘critical threats’ in this year’s Poll.

A slim majority of Australians (52%) listed ‘a breakdown in social cohesion’ as a ‘critical threat’, and 35% of respondents listed antisemitism as a ‘critical threat’ to Australia’s vital interests in the next ten years. Large minorities of Australians listed ‘the spread of infectious diseases internationally’ (45%) and ‘Russia’s invasion of Ukraine’ (38%) as ‘critical threats’.

Defence and security

Defence spending

According to the Department of Defence's Portfolio Budget Statements for 2026–27, Australia's planned expenditure in the Defence portfolio will exceed \$60 billion, or around 2% of Australia's GDP based on the conventional method for calculating defence expenditure.⁹ Using the method in the 2026 *National Defence Strategy*, which is also used by members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), defence expenditure sits closer to 2.8% of GDP.¹⁰

When asked about Australia's defence spending, one in two Australians (50%) say they would support an 'increase' in spending, while a significant minority (42%) say they would support defence spending remaining 'about the same' as it is today. Only 6% of Australians say defence spending should 'decrease'. These results broadly align with last year's Poll, where 51% of Australians said they would support an 'increase' in defence spending, and 37% said it should remain 'about the same'.

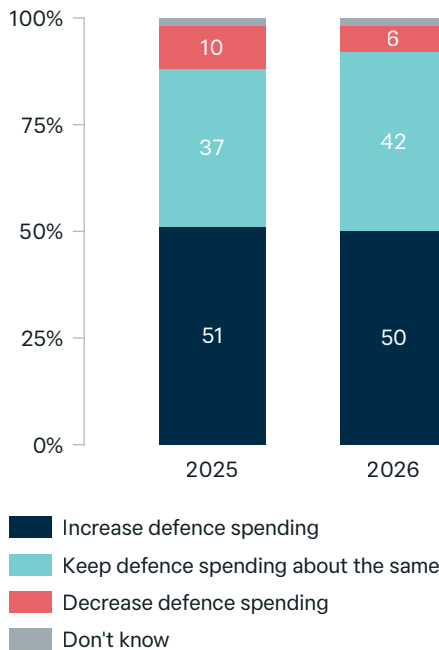
AUKUS: Nuclear-powered submarines

Under AUKUS, the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Australia will purchase three-to-five Virginia-class submarines from the United States before developing alongside the United Kingdom a new class of conventionally armed but nuclear-powered submarines to be known as the SSN-AUKUS. Australia plans to begin building its first SSN-AUKUS at the Osborne Naval Shipyard in Adelaide, South Australia, by the end of this decade.¹¹

FIGURE 19

Defence spending

Now thinking about Australia's defence capabilities. Australia currently spends about 2% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on defence. Taking into account global circumstances, do you think Australia should:

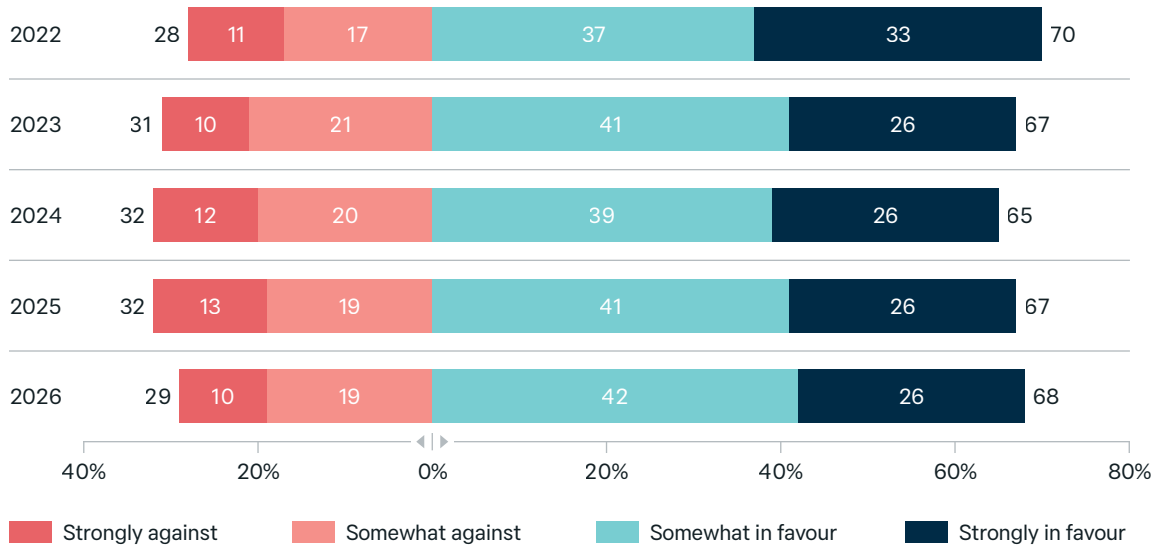


Support for Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed but nuclear-powered submarines through AUKUS held firm in this year's Poll. Almost seven in ten Australians (68%) say they are either 'strongly in favour' or 'somewhat in favour' of the acquisition. Only 29% of Australians say they are either 'somewhat against' or 'strongly against' the program, a three-point drop from last year's Poll.

FIGURE 20

Acquiring nuclear-powered submarines

Now a question about submarines that are powered by nuclear energy, but do not have nuclear weapons. Are you in favour of or against Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines?



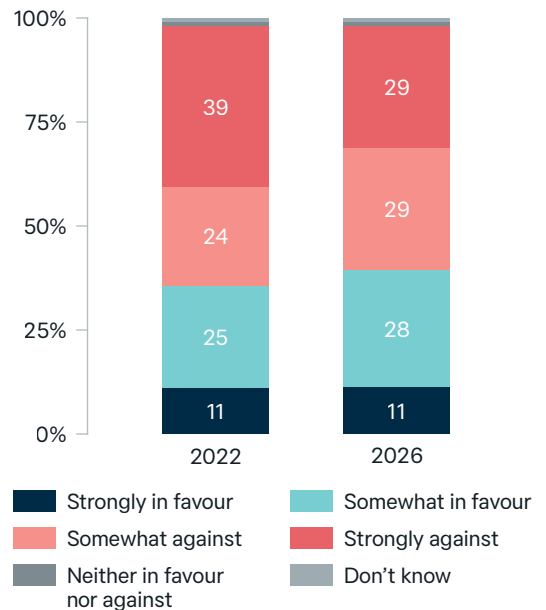
Nuclear weapons

Although two-thirds of Australians (68%) support the country’s acquisition of conventionally armed but nuclear-powered submarines, only four in ten (39%) say they are ‘in favour’ of Australia acquiring nuclear weapons in the future. This represents a three-point increase since the last time Australians were asked this question in the 2022 Lowy Institute Poll. The proportion of respondents (58%) who say they are ‘against’ Australia acquiring nuclear weapons has fallen five points since 2022, which indicates a softening in Australians’ opposition to this technology.

FIGURE 21

Acquiring nuclear weapons

Thinking now about Australia’s defence. Would you be in favour or against Australia acquiring nuclear weapons in the future?



War in Ukraine: Australia's response

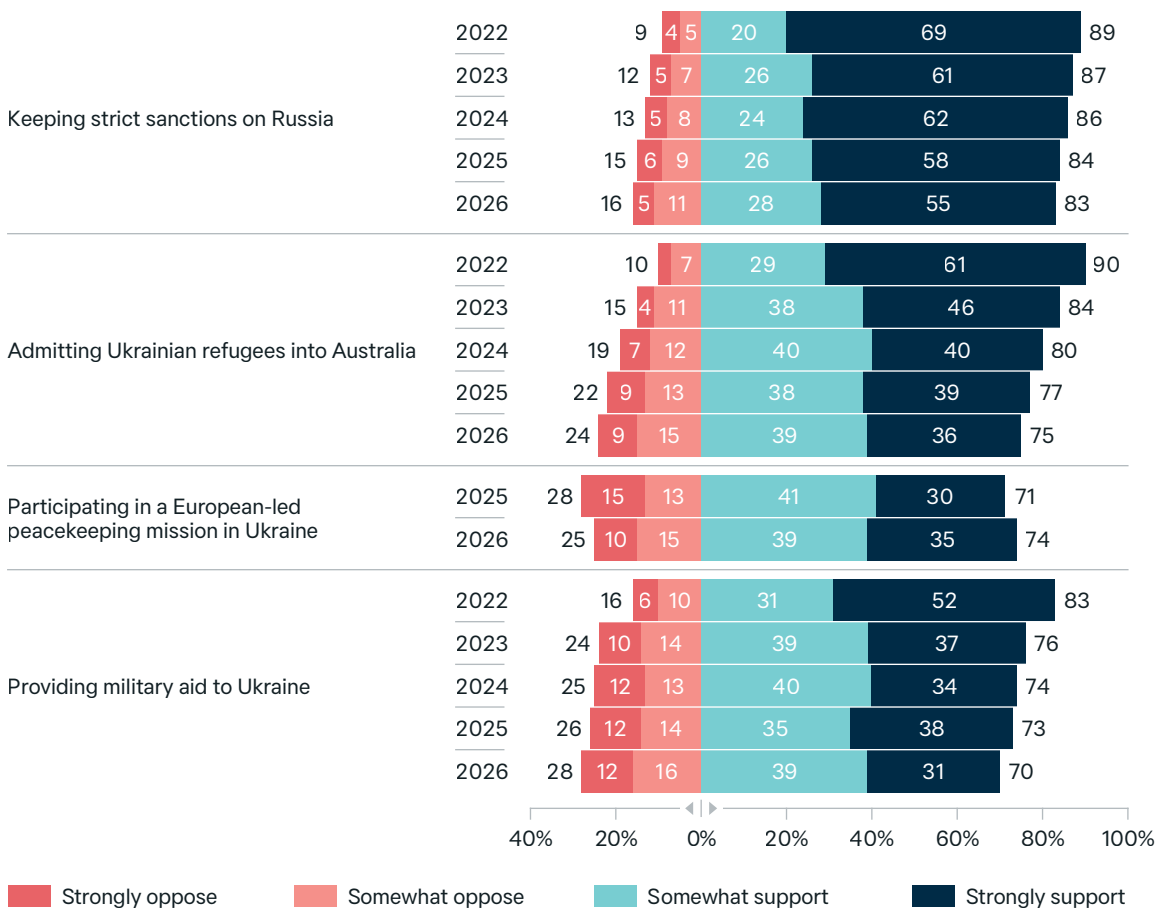
Four years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the war remains deadlocked. The destruction wrought on both countries has been stark. According to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Russia suffered 1.2 million battlefield casualties between February 2022 and December 2025, while Ukraine suffered between 500,000 and 600,000 over the same period. CSIS estimates that combined casualties could reach two million by the time this Poll is released.¹²

Australian public support for Ukraine has held firm throughout the war. More than eight in ten Australians (83%) say they support the Australian government maintaining strict sanctions on Russia, and seven in ten (70%) say they support providing military aid to Ukraine (down three points from 2025). Three-quarters of Australians support admitting Ukrainian refugees to Australia (75%) and Australia's participation in a European-led peacekeeping mission in Ukraine (74%), the latter representing a three-point increase in support since last year's Poll. Those who say they 'strongly support' Australia's participation in a European-led peacekeeping mission in Ukraine increased five points from last year to 35%.

FIGURE 22

Australia's response to the war in Ukraine

Thinking about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, would you support or oppose Australia:



Defending allies

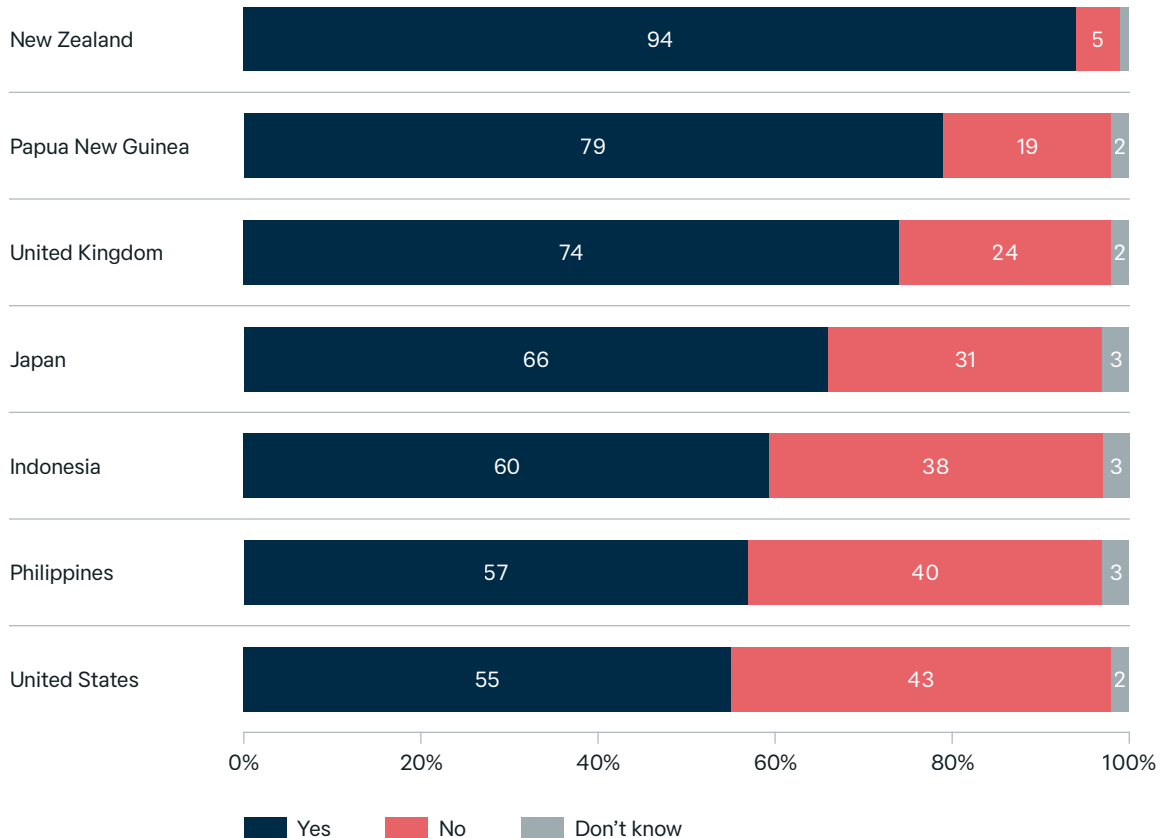
In this year's Poll, we asked whether Australia should come to the defence of some of its key allies if they were under attack by another country. More than nine in ten Australians (94%) say Australia should come to New Zealand's defence. Eight in ten (79%) say Australia should come to Papua New Guinea's defence. Three-quarters (74%) say we should come to the defence of the United Kingdom.

Firm majorities of Australians say they would support coming to the defence of Japan (66%), Indonesia (60%), the Philippines (57%), and the United States (55%). A significant minority of Australians (43%) say they would not support Australia coming to the defence of the United States.

FIGURE 23

Defending allies

Now thinking about how Australia might respond if one of its allies were attacked by another country. For each of the following allies, do you think Australia should or should not go to its defence if it were attacked by another country?



Economic security

Economic optimism

The US–Israeli military campaign against Iran was in its early stages when this Poll was conducted (2–15 March) and the shock to global energy markets was becoming apparent.

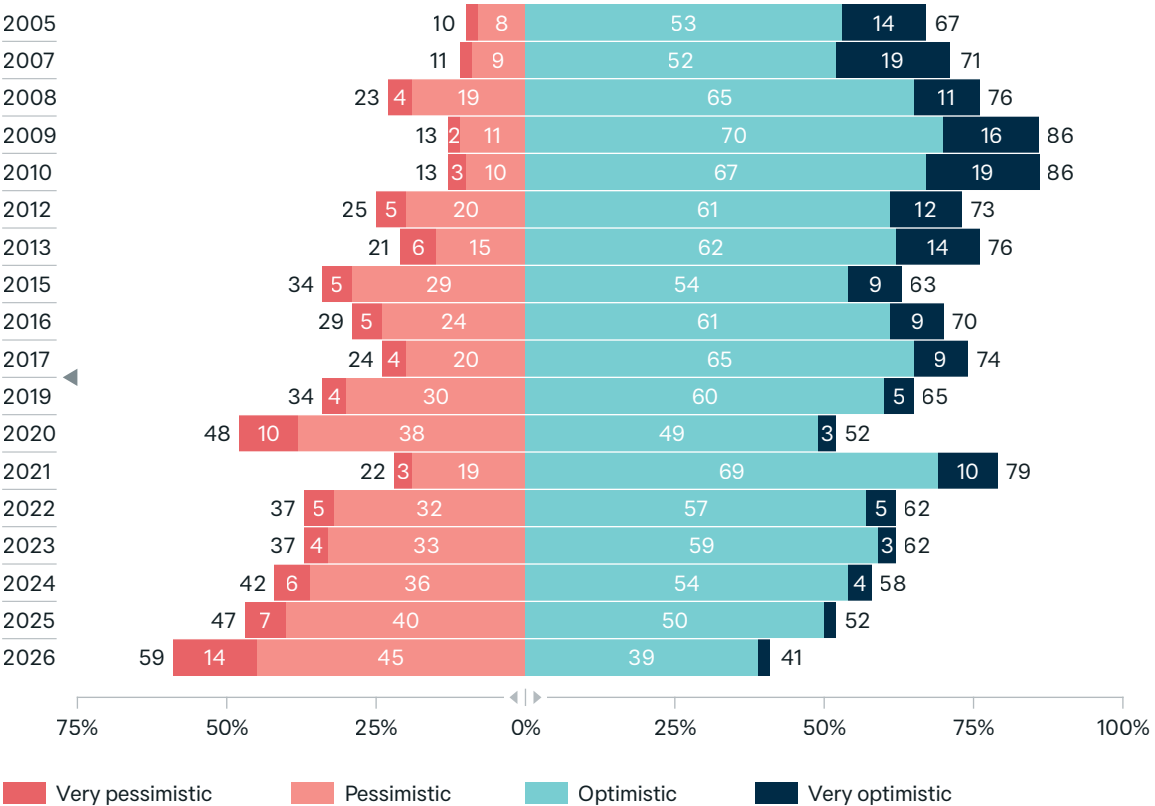
Prior to the energy price shocks, and before this Poll was taken, Australia’s monthly rate of inflation had exceeded the Reserve Bank’s target band of 2–3% for seven consecutive months.¹³ According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, labour productivity – a measure correlated to living standards – has been near zero since the 2022–23 financial year.¹⁴

Against this backdrop, six in ten Australians (59%) say they are pessimistic about Australia’s economic performance over the next five years, a 12-point increase from the 2025 Poll and a 22-point increase since the 2022 Poll. This is the highest recorded result on this question in the history of the Lowy Institute Poll – 11 points above the rate of economic pessimism registered during the Covid pandemic in 2020, and 46 points above that recorded after the Global Financial Crisis in 2009.

FIGURE 24

Economic optimism

Thinking about Australia’s economic performance in the world. Overall, how optimistic are you about Australia’s economic performance in the world over the next five years?



◀ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

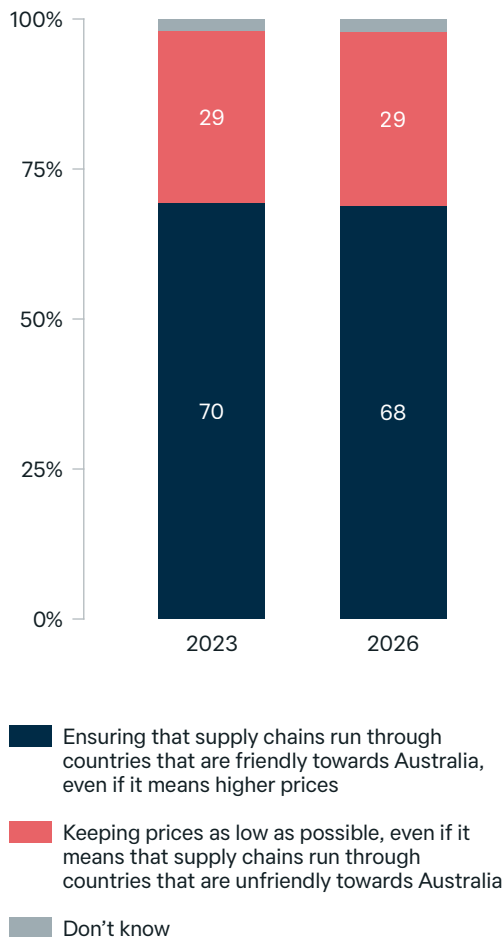
Supply chains

When asked about supply chains, 68% of Australians say they would prefer supply chains to ‘run through countries that are friendly to Australia, even if it means higher prices’. Only 29% of Australians say they want to ‘keep prices as low as possible, even if it means that supply chains run through countries that are unfriendly towards Australia’.

FIGURE 25

Supply chains

Now thinking about global trade and the supply chains through which Australia sources goods from other countries. In your opinion, which of the following statements should be a higher priority for Australia?



Fuel security

The decline in civilian shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz following the US–Israeli military campaign against Iran has brought into focus Australia’s fuel security.

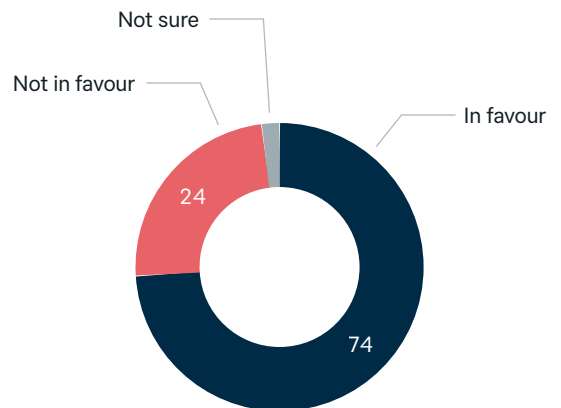
Australia is estimated to hold between 30 and 44 days of emergency fuel reserves. However, the International Energy Agency recommends that countries should hold a minimum of 90 days of fuel reserves. Increasing Australia’s fuel reserves to 90 days would require building new infrastructure, including storage facilities at ports. Some have estimated that this would cost approximately \$20 billion, over a period of four years.¹⁵

The Lowy Institute commissioned a mini-poll, conducted from 18 May–2 June, in which respondents were asked whether they would be in favour of the government spending approximately \$20 billion over four years to lift Australia’s emergency fuel reserves to 90 days. Three-quarters of Australians (74%) say they would be in favour of the government doing so. A quarter of Australians (24%) say they would not be in favour, and 2% say they are unsure.

FIGURE 26

Fuel security

Would you be in favour of or against the Australian government spending approximately \$20 billion over four years to build the required infrastructure to increase Australia’s emergency fuel reserves?



Climate change

In 2026, 49% of Australians agree with the statement that ‘global warming is a serious and pressing problem’ and that ‘we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs’. This is similar to last year’s result (51%) but represents an eight-point drop from 2024.

Under Australia’s Climate Change Act (2022), the Australian government agreed to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions as a result of economic activity by 2050, enshrining in statute targets that are consistent with the Paris Agreement under the

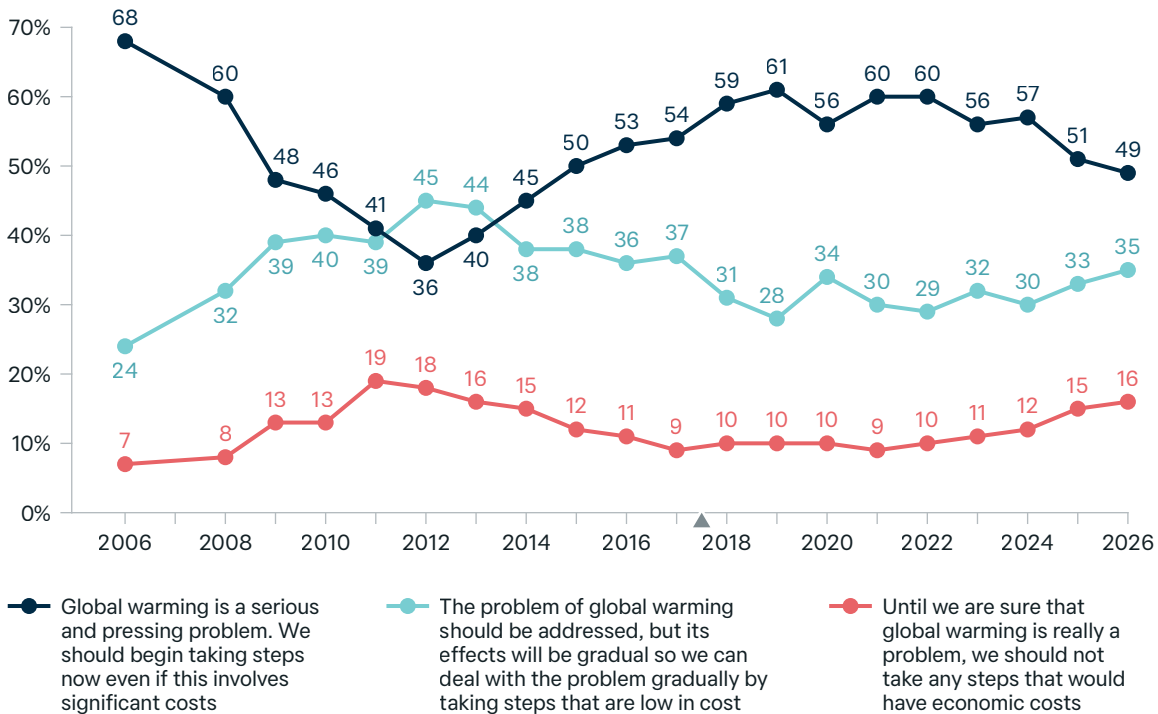
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.¹⁶ As part of this commitment, Australia legislated a 43% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030.

Australians are divided on the benefits of achieving net zero. Nearly four in ten (38%) agree with the statement that ‘achieving the net zero target would leave the Australian economy better off’. The same proportion (38%) say it will leave the economy ‘worse off’, while 22% say it will ‘make no difference’.

FIGURE 27

Climate change

Now about global warming. There is a controversy over what the countries of the world, including Australia, should do about the problem of global warming. Please indicate which of the following three statements comes closest to your own point of view.



▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

Societal issues

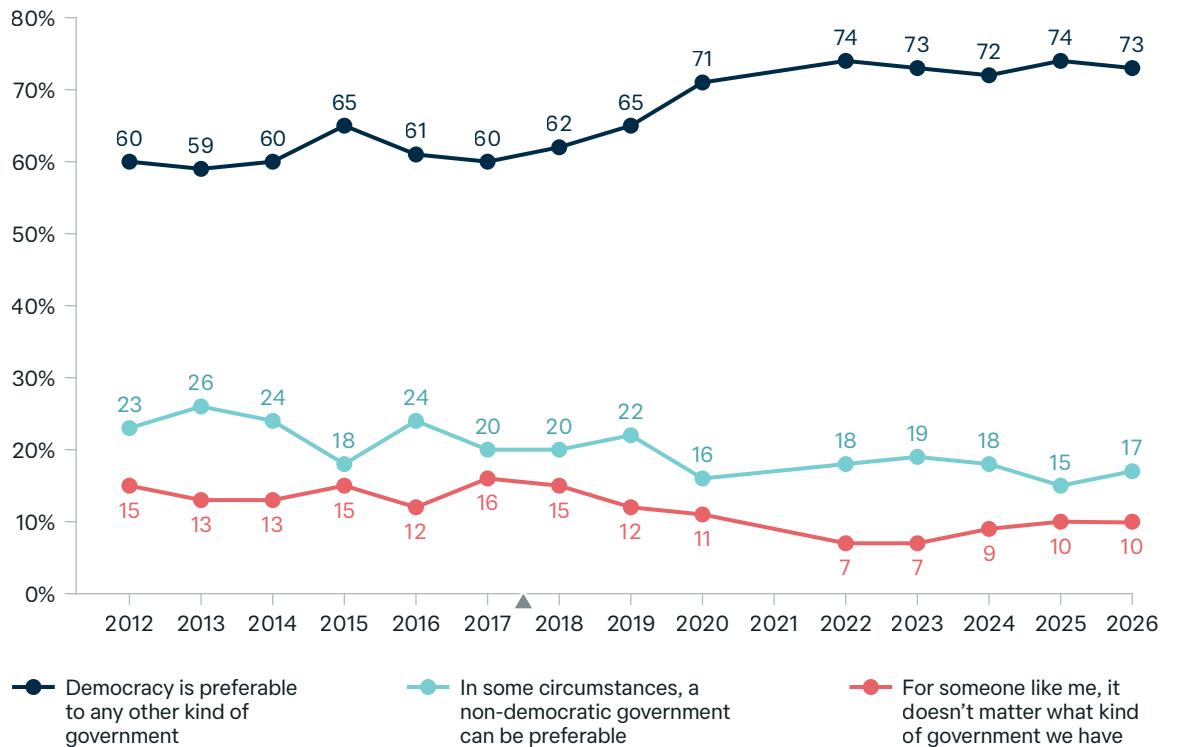
Democracy

Three-quarters of Australians (73%) say democracy is preferable to any other form of government. The minority of Australians who say ‘in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable’ (17%) remained within the margin of error of last year’s Poll (15%). One in ten Australians (10%) continue to say ‘for someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have’.

FIGURE 28

Democracy

Now a question about democracy. Below are some statements about democracy. Please indicate which one of the three statements comes closest to your own personal views about democracy.



▲ Indicates change in mode: see Methodology.

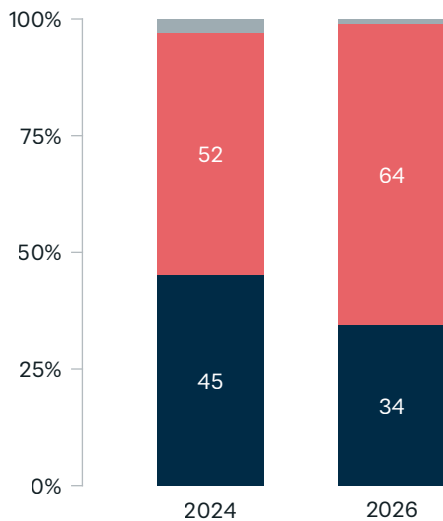
Artificial intelligence: Risks versus benefits

The growing global use of artificial intelligence (AI) models such as Anthropic’s Claude and OpenAI’s ChatGPT has prompted widespread discussion about the technology’s benefits and risks — from productivity enhancements and scientific developments to job losses and security threats such as deepfakes. A clear majority of Australians (64%) say the risks of AI outweigh the benefits, a 12-point increase since the last time this question was asked in 2024. Only 34% of Australians say the potential benefits outweigh the risks. This trend holds uniformly across demographic groups, including age, education, and income level.

FIGURE 29

Risks and benefits of artificial intelligence

Now a question about artificial intelligence or ‘AI’. The use of artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly widespread in the world. Weighing up the potential benefits and risks of AI, on balance, do you think:



- The potential benefits of AI outweigh the potential risks to society
- The potential risks of AI outweigh the potential benefits to society
- Don't know

Migration

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, net overseas migration reached its peak in 2023 at nearly 540,000 people. Since then, the number has steadily declined, falling to 430,000 in 2024 and then to 306,000 in 2025.¹⁷

A majority of Australians (55%) say the total number of migrants coming to Australia is ‘too high’. While this result is within the margin of error of last year’s Poll (53%), it still represents a seven-point increase from 2024 and is on par with the previous high of 54%, recorded in 2018.

Cultural diversity

Support for cultural diversity has softened among the Australian public. In 2024, the last time the Lowy Institute polled on this topic, nine in ten Australians (90%) said they saw cultural diversity as either ‘entirely positive’ or ‘mostly positive’. In this year’s Poll, only three-quarters (73%) feel the same way. The number of Australians who say cultural diversity is ‘mostly negative’ increased from 9% in 2024 to 20% in 2026. Those who judge cultural diversity to be ‘entirely negative’ increased from 1% in 2024 to 6% in 2026.

FIGURE 30

Immigration rate

Thinking now about Australia's immigration program. Do you personally think that the total number of migrants coming to Australia each year is too high, too low, or about right?

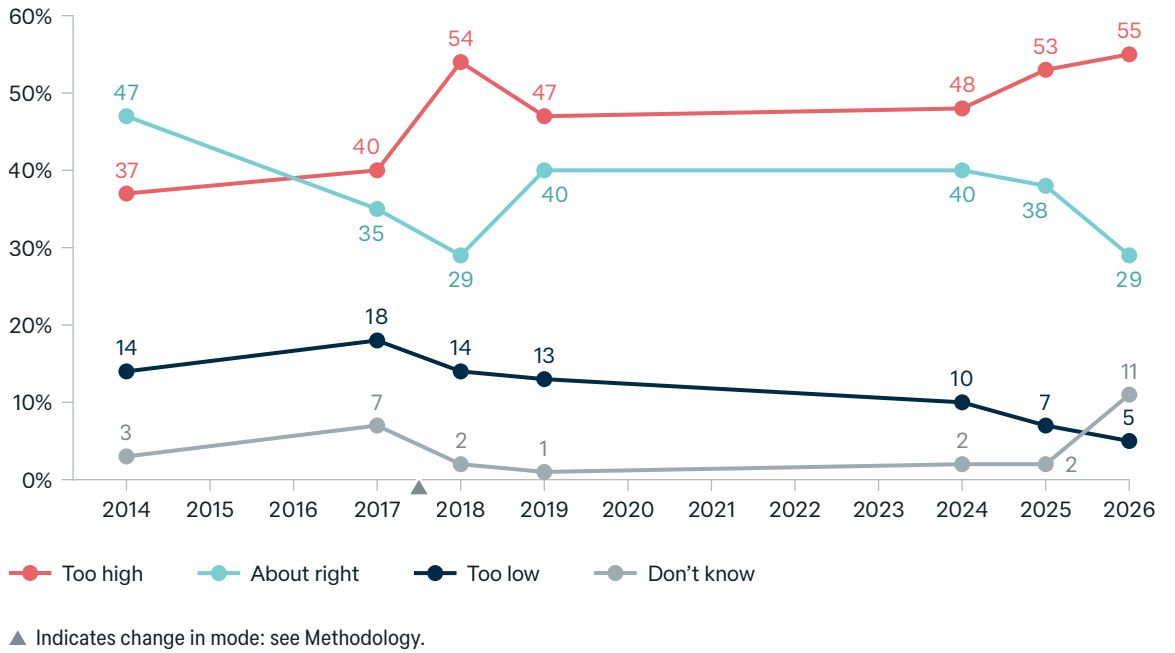
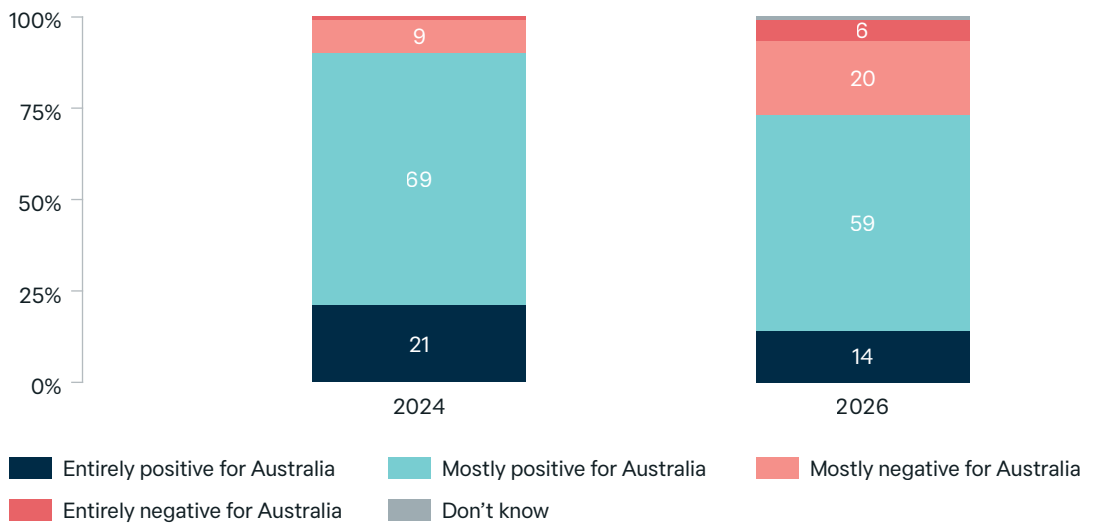


FIGURE 31

Cultural diversity

For several decades, Australia has been open to people from all over the world. Overall, do you think Australia's culturally diverse population has been:



About the Poll

Methodology

The 2026 Lowy Institute Poll reports the results of a nationally representative survey of 2,013 Australian residents aged 18 and above, conducted from 2–15 March 2026 by the Social Research Centre (SRC) on behalf of the Lowy Institute. The survey uses the Life in Australia™ panel, which is the only probability-based online panel in Australia.

On a simple random sample of 2,013 responses, the margin of error is approximately 2.2%. Where a complex sample is used, the ‘design effect’ measures the additional variance in comparison with a simple random sample. The design effect for this survey is 1.13. For the 2026 Lowy Institute Poll survey, a completion rate of 82.1% was achieved. Taking into account the recruitment rate (6.5%) into the panel and attrition from the panel, the cumulative response rate is 2.6%.

Two questions in this report, on President Donald Trump’s performance during the Iran military campaign (page 10) and on fuel security (page 25), were fielded in a separate mini-poll survey of 2,031 adults across Australia, which ran from 18 May–2 June. On a simple random sample of 2,031 responses, the margin of error is approximately 2.2%. The design effect for this survey is 1.21, and a completion rate of 82.0% was achieved.

Members of the SRC Life in Australia™ panel were randomly recruited via their landline or mobile telephone or their address (rather than being self-directed volunteers) and agreed to provide their

contact details for participation in surveys on a regular basis. The probability basis of the Life in Australia™ method allows for generalisable results in regard to the national population, allowing for the calculation of sampling errors and confidence intervals.

SRC uses a mixed-mode approach for the survey, including online surveys (99% of respondents) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (1% of respondents) to provide coverage of the offline population (households without internet access). In 2019, the Lowy Institute completed a three-year transition in the mode for the Poll, which until 2017 was conducted solely by telephone. The transition to a predominantly online survey panel reflects the declining response rates for telephone surveys and now widespread internet access in Australia.

The majority of questions in the 2026 survey are ‘tracking’ questions that have been asked in previous Lowy Institute Polls, allowing us to compare public opinion on a single issue over time. The order of questions in the questionnaire was different from the order presented in this report. Footnotes and markers (▲, ◀) have been used in the charts in the Poll to represent the change of mode, which can potentially elicit slightly different responses.

Totals in this report may not add to 100% due to rounding. Each response option has been rounded

Interactive data for all results and previous Poll reports can be accessed through our website: <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org>

individually, and grouped responses (e.g. those who ‘somewhat agree’ plus ‘strongly agree’) have not been rounded at the group level.

Following fieldwork, data are weighted for recruitment to the panel, probability of selection to the Lowy Institute Poll, and probability of completing the survey conditional on being invited, and are adjusted to ensure that the weighted sample resembles the Australian resident adult population on number of adults in household, age, education, gender, use of a language other than English at home, location (capital city or rest of state/territory), and state/territory of residence, where benchmarks are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Life in Australia™ members are offered a small incentive for joining the panel and another incentive for each survey they complete — \$10 redeemable for a gift card for online panellists, a \$10 gift card for offline panellists, or a donation to a nominated charity.

Online responses were subject to quality control checks, including examination of other specific responses and time taken to complete the survey. Telephone survey responses were subject to supervision by remote monitoring.

Acknowledgements

The Lowy Institute Poll is a whole-of-institute effort, produced with the assistance of many colleagues and experts.

Fieldwork was managed by Blair Grant, Alison Eglentals, and Jane Shore of the Social Research Centre. Dale VanderGert and Tharaka Kaluarachchi coordinated Life in Australia™ fieldwork operations. Benjamin Phillips, Andrew Ward, Dina Neiger, Sam Slamowicz, Jack Barton, and Jake Edelman provided advice on design, weighting, and statistical analysis. Ryan Tian, Quinn Myers, Timothy Tan, Enzo Capistrano, and Christopher Loh programmed the survey and processed the data. John Davis of Omnipoll provided independent advice and reviewed the questionnaire and report.

Stephen Hutchings designed the 2026 Lowy Institute Poll report and Alex Moyse the interactive website. Ian Bruce provided design assistance.

Mihai Sora, Clare Caldwell, and Sam Roggeveen edited the report. Review, guidance, and expert contributions on various aspects of the questionnaire or report were provided by Michael Fullilove, Mihai Sora, Max Broad, Riley Duke, and Oliver Nobetau. Clare Caldwell and Jack Sato assisted with data-checking.

Several questions in this and previous Lowy Institute Polls were modelled on those developed by other polling organisations, including the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, the Pew Research Center, Australian Election Study, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Ipsos MORI, Essential, and CBS News.

Figures



FIGURE 1

Trust in global powers



FIGURE 2

Trust in global powers — select historical responses



FIGURE 3

Confidence in world leaders



FIGURE 4

Feelings thermometer



FIGURE 5

Feelings thermometer — select historical responses



FIGURE 6

US alliance: importance to Australia's security



FIGURE 7

United States' defence of Australia



FIGURE 8

Policies of President Trump



FIGURE 9

China: economic partner or security threat



FIGURE 10

China: Australian policy settings



FIGURE 11

China as a military threat



FIGURE 12

Australia's response to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan



FIGURE 13

Superpowers in the future



FIGURE 14

Relations with superpowers: United States and China



FIGURE 15

Influence in Pacific Island countries



FIGURE 16

Federal government foreign policy performance



FIGURE 17
Feelings of safety



FIGURE 18
Threats to Australia's vital interests



FIGURE 19
Defence spending



FIGURE 20
Acquiring nuclear-powered submarines



FIGURE 21
Acquiring nuclear weapons



FIGURE 22
Australia's response to the war in Ukraine



FIGURE 23
Defending allies



FIGURE 24
Economic optimism



FIGURE 25
Supply chains



FIGURE 26
Fuel security



FIGURE 27
Climate change



FIGURE 28
Democracy



FIGURE 29
Risks and benefits of artificial intelligence



FIGURE 30
Immigration rate



FIGURE 31
Cultural diversity

Notes

- 1 The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Prime Minister of Australia, “Prime Minister’s Visit to China”, Media Release, 18 July 2025, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/prime-ministers-visit-china>
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About the author



Charles Lyons-Jones is a Research Fellow in the Lowy Institute's Public Opinion and Foreign Policy Program. He oversees the annual Lowy Institute Poll and the Global Diplomacy Index.

Prior to joining the Lowy Institute, Charlie served in the Australian Government for five years, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C). Overseas, Charlie served at the Australian High Commission in Islamabad (2023–25). In Canberra, he worked on North Korea policy at DFAT (2022–23) and on China and Taiwan as an international adviser at PM&C (2021–22).

Charlie began his career at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) as a Mandarin-enabled analyst of China's military, the People's Liberation Army. He was co-author of *Leaping Across the Ocean: The Port Operators Behind China's Naval Expansion* and was an integral part of the ASPI team that built the *China Defence Universities Tracker*.

Over the course of his think tank career, Charlie's writing has featured in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Diplomat*, and *The National Interest* and his insights have been cited in *The Economist*, *Associated Press*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Nikkei Asia*. He has also appeared on *SBS World News* and *ABC News Radio*.

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