

Foreign aid tops list for cuts ... but from what base?

By Ashlee Betteridge
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Foreign aid tops the list of areas that should have their funding cut, according to Australians who want to see an end to government spending.

Some 45 per cent of those polled for the latest [Essential Research report](#) released this week believed the government should reduce spending to lower the national debt. From those who supported reduced spending, 76 per cent believed the foreign aid budget should be cut, placing it at the top of the list. Only arts funding even came close in its unpopularity.

But most Australians greatly overestimate the spend on foreign aid. A [2011 Lowy Poll](#) found that:

Australians dramatically overestimate how much money the Federal government spends on foreign aid, on average guessing that 16% of the budget is spent on aid, when the actual amount is 1.3%.. almost a third (31%) said that more than 20% or more of the budget goes to foreign aid.

A 50% cut to 16% would still leave an aid budget four times as big as the actual budget.

About the author/s

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Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

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