

## **75% of Australians think poverty reduction most important for aid: Lowy Poll**

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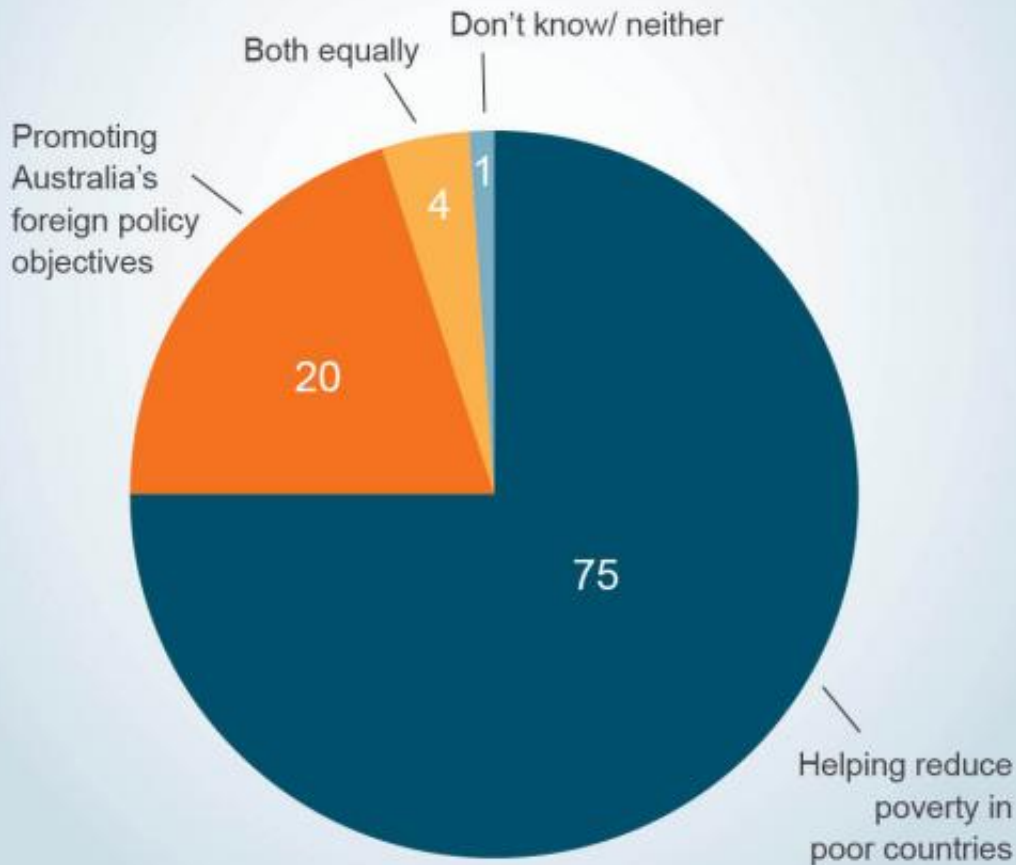
The [Lowy Institute 2014 Poll](#) released today shows that the overwhelming majority of Australians believe poverty reduction is the most important objective for the aid program.

The poll also reveals that the aid program is seen by the public as being less important in Australia's international engagement than the defence force, the diplomatic service and Australia's intelligence agencies.

On the question on aid objectives, 75 per cent of respondents said that the most important objective for the aid program was poverty reduction. Only 20 per cent of respondents saw 'promoting Australia's foreign policy objectives' as the most important objective.

**Fig. 16: Objectives of Australia's aid program**

Now about possible objectives for Australia's overseas aid program. Which ONE of the following do you yourself think is the most important objective of Australia's overseas aid program?



In light of the [integration](#) of AusAID into DFAT last year, with the goal of more closely aligning aid, trade and diplomacy and with a [strengthened emphasis](#) on Australia's national interest in the aid program from the Coalition government, this is an interesting finding.

Unfortunately though, the wording of the question is somewhat ambiguous: if someone says that poverty reduction is the most important objective for the aid program do they mean that it is actually the objective taken most seriously by the aid program at present, or that it should be? Our [2013 stakeholder survey](#) showed that among aid experts there is a sense that poverty reduction should receive more weight than it actually does.

Aid was also seen by poll respondents as a weaker tool for international relations than other parts of the government.

Table 29: Thinking now about the arms of the Australian government involved in international relations and how important they are. For each of these arms of the government please say if you personally think they are very important, somewhat important or not important.

<i>Ranked by % saying 'very important'</i>	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Don't know/ no view
The Australian Defence Force	83%	15%	1%	0%
Australia's diplomatic service	63%	33%	3%	2%
Australia's intelligence agencies	63%	32%	4%	1%
Australia's aid program	49%	43%	8%	0%

The poll also looked at how Australians viewed the Indonesia relationship, including the importance of aid to Indonesia.

Table 9: Thinking now about the issues the Indonesian and Australian governments should be working on together. For each of the following issues do you personally think it is a very important, somewhat important or, not an important issue for the Indonesian and Australian governments to be working on together?

<i>Ranked by % saying 'very important'</i>	Very important	Somewhat important	Total important	Not important	Don't know
Security in the region	75%	20%	95%	3%	1%
Terrorism	75%	19%	94%	5%	1%
Asylum seekers and people smuggling	73%	20%	93%	6%	1%
Trade and investment	57%	38%	95%	5%	1%
Aid to Indonesia	29%	51%	80%	19%	1%

Table 10: [Asked if two or more issues were rated equally important in table 9 above] And which ONE of these issues do you personally think is the most important?

<i>Ranked by % saying 'most important'</i>	Most important
Asylum seekers and people smuggling	29%
Terrorism	22%
Security in the region	19%
Trade and investment	14%
Aid to Indonesia	4%
None/don't know	2%

Once again, aid is ranked of low importance. Despite the size of Australia's aid to Indonesia, this is perhaps unsurprising, considering Indonesia's growing economy and increasingly prominent role on the regional and global stage. And of course, how Indonesia manages terrorism and asylum seekers impacts us a lot more than how it manages our aid.

These results should sound a warning bell for the government though— selling aid to the Australian public in terms of national interest seems to be a shaky pitch. Unless some serious work is done to clearly explain how the aid program benefits trade, investment, security and Australia's international relationships, the

government would perhaps be better off sticking to the 'saving lives' or 'reducing poverty' messages if it is seeking to maintain or build public support for aid.