

A photograph of a wind farm at sunset. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon. Several wind turbines are silhouetted against the sky, with one large turbine in the foreground on the left and several smaller ones in the distance. The ground is dark and mostly obscured by shadow.

LOWY INSTITUTE
CLIMATE
POLL 2021

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KEY FINDINGS

Several important results in this new poll show overall concern about climate change has increased in 2021. Six in ten Australians (60%) say ‘global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now, even if this involves significant costs,’ a 4-point rise from 2020. In a significant 8-point increase since 2019, a majority of Australians (55%) now say the government’s main priority for energy policy should be ‘reducing carbon emissions’.

Almost all Australians (91%) say they would support the federal government ‘providing subsidies for the development of renewable energy technology’ — a finding which aligns with previous Lowy Institute polls showing strong support for renewable energy.

Eight in ten Australians (78%) support ‘setting a net-zero emissions target for 2050’. The same number (77%) support the government subsidising electric vehicle purchases.

Three-quarters of Australians (74%) say ‘the benefits of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the costs’. The alternate view is held by 24%, who say ‘the costs of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the benefits’.

Seven years after Australia’s carbon price was repealed, a sizeable majority of Australians (64%) support introducing an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax.

Many Australians appear to be moving away from coal. Six in ten Australians (63%) support a ban on new coal mines opening in Australia. The same number (63%) say they support reducing Australian coal exports to other countries. Only three in ten Australians (30%) say they support the federal government providing subsidies for building new coal-fired power plants.

Australians say many large countries are doing too little to combat climate change. Eight in ten say China (82%) and India (81%) are doing ‘too little’, while seven in ten (71%) say the United States is doing too little. A majority (60%) also say Australia is doing too little. Around half say the United Kingdom (53%) and the European Union (49%) are doing too little in their efforts to combat climate change.

In the leadup to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in late 2021, seven in ten Australians (70%) say Australia should join other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to increase its commitments to address climate change.

Climate Poll 2021 by the Lowy Institute reports the results of a nationally representative online and telephone survey conducted by the Social Research Centre between 12 and 26 April 2021, with a sample size of 3286 Australian adults. On a simple random sample of 3286 responses, the margin of error is approximately 1.8%. The ‘design effect’ for this survey is estimated at 1.62.

CLIMATE POLL 2021

Levels of concern about climate change

While the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to temper concerns about climate change in 2020, the issue has risen to prominence again in 2021. The majority of Australians (60%) say 'global warming is a serious and pressing problem. . .we should begin taking steps now, even if this involves significant costs'. This represents a reversal of the dip in 2020 during the early days of the pandemic, but remains eight points below the high watermark of concern in 2006.

A third of Australians (30%) say the problem of global warming should be addressed, but its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost. Only 9% of Australians — one of the lowest results of the

past decade — say that until we are sure that global warming is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs.

As in recent years, there is a significant gap between younger and older Australians' concerns about global warming. Despite a slight narrowing between the generations, the margin is still noteworthy, with three-quarters (76%) of Australians aged 18–29 saying global warming is a serious and pressing problem, compared with 50% of those over 60.

Concern about global warming appears to be narrowing slightly between the urban and rural populations, with just a 7-point gap between the 63% of Australians living in cities saying that global warming is a serious and pressing problem, and the 56% of the regional and remote population.

FIGURE 1

Attitudes to global warming

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. I'm going to read you three statements. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own point of view.



This question was asked in the annual Lowy Institute Poll in March 2021. Dashed line indicates change in mode: see Methodology, p.9.

FIGURE 2
Costs and benefits of climate change action

When thinking about the possible benefits and possible costs of further action on climate change, which of the following two statements is closer to your own view?

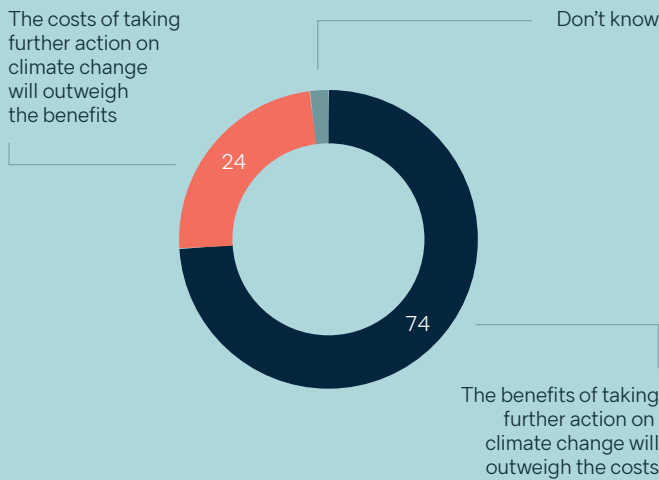
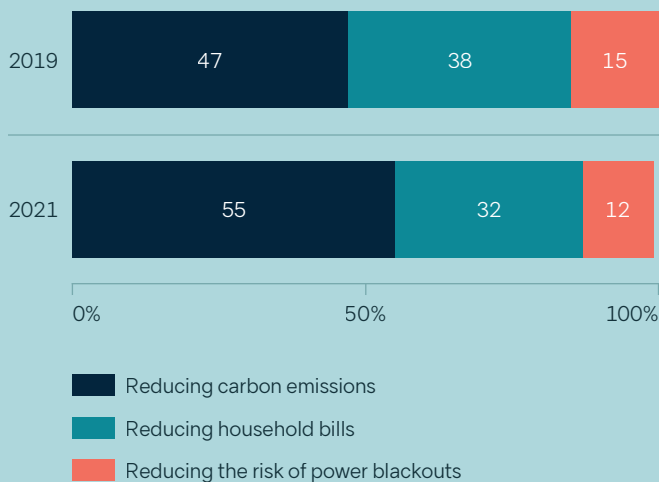


FIGURE 3
Energy policy priorities

Now thinking about energy policy, which one of the following goals do you personally think should be the main priority for the Federal Government?



Australian government policies on climate change

When considering the potential costs and benefits of climate change policies, most Australians see the benefits as outweighing the costs. Three-quarters of Australians (74%) say ‘the benefits of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the costs’. The alternate view is held by 24%, who say ‘the costs of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the benefits’.

Support for reducing carbon emissions as a priority for the federal government has increased in the past two years. When asked what the government’s main priority should be in terms of energy policy, the majority of Australians (55%) say ‘reducing carbon emissions’ should be the main priority. This has increased eight points since 2019 and is now a view held by the majority. A third (32%) say ‘reducing household bills’ should be the government’s priority, a decrease of six points since 2019. Only 12% say the government should prioritise ‘reducing the risk of power blackouts’.

Looking at a range of possible federal government policies, almost all Australians (91%) say they would support the federal government ‘providing subsidies for the development of renewable energy technology’. This aligns with Lowy Institute polling in 2018 in which 84% of Australians said the government should focus on renewables rather than traditional energy sources.¹

Eight in ten Australians (78%) support ‘setting a net-zero emissions target for 2050’, suggesting they seek a firmer commitment from Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has said that Australia’s “goal is to reach net zero emissions as soon as possible, and preferably by 2050”.²

Seven in ten Australians (77%) support providing subsidies for the purchase of electric vehicles. A sizeable majority of Australians (64%) support introducing an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax. These views have shifted significantly in the past five years. In 2016, in response to a differently-worded question in the Lowy Institute Poll, only 40% said they would prefer the government to introduce an emissions trading scheme or price on carbon.³

Australian views of coal exports and coal mines also appear to have shifted significantly in recent years. Six in ten Australians (63%) support a ban on new coal mines opening in Australia. The same proportion of the population (63%) say they support reducing Australian coal exports to other countries, in an apparent shift from five years ago when a majority (66%) said Australia should continue to export coal.⁴ In 2021, only three in ten Australians (30%) say they support the federal government providing subsidies for building new coal-fired power plants.

On a number of these policies, there is a significant gap between support from younger and older Australians. For example, 72% of Australians aged 18–44 years old support

banning new coal mines, compared to 55% of Australians aged over 45. Similarly, 71% of respondents aged 18–44 support imposing a carbon tax or emissions trading scheme, compared to 57% of Australians over 45.

The federal government’s promotion of a ‘gas-fired recovery’ for Australia’s economy⁵ appears to have general support, with 58% in favour of Australia increasing the use of gas for energy generation.

Australians are split over the question of nuclear power, which has been prohibited in Australia since 1998.⁶ Almost half the population (47%) would support removing the existing ban on nuclear power, but 51% are opposed to that measure.

FIGURE 4
Potential federal government policies on climate

Would you support or oppose the following federal government policies?

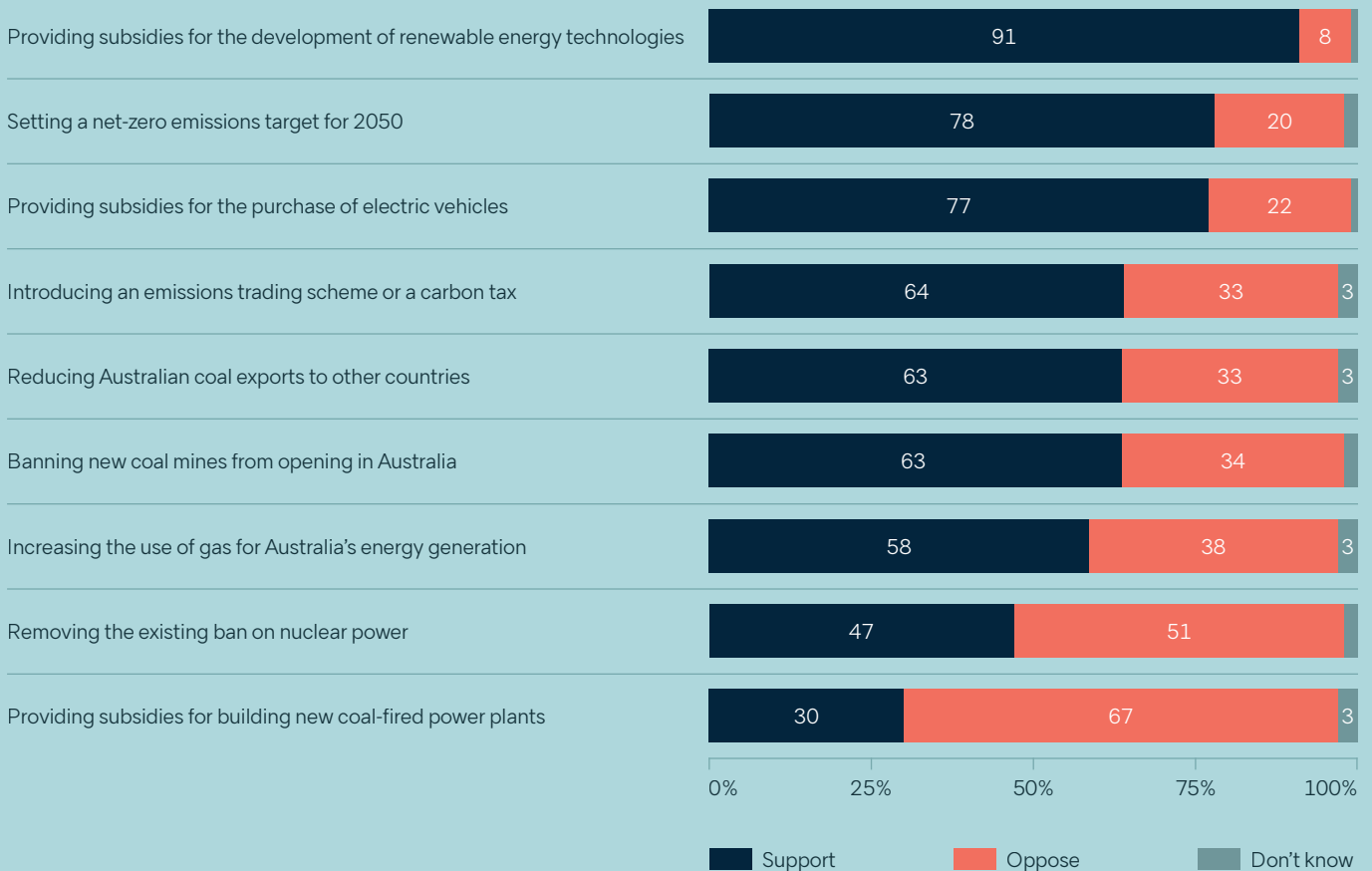
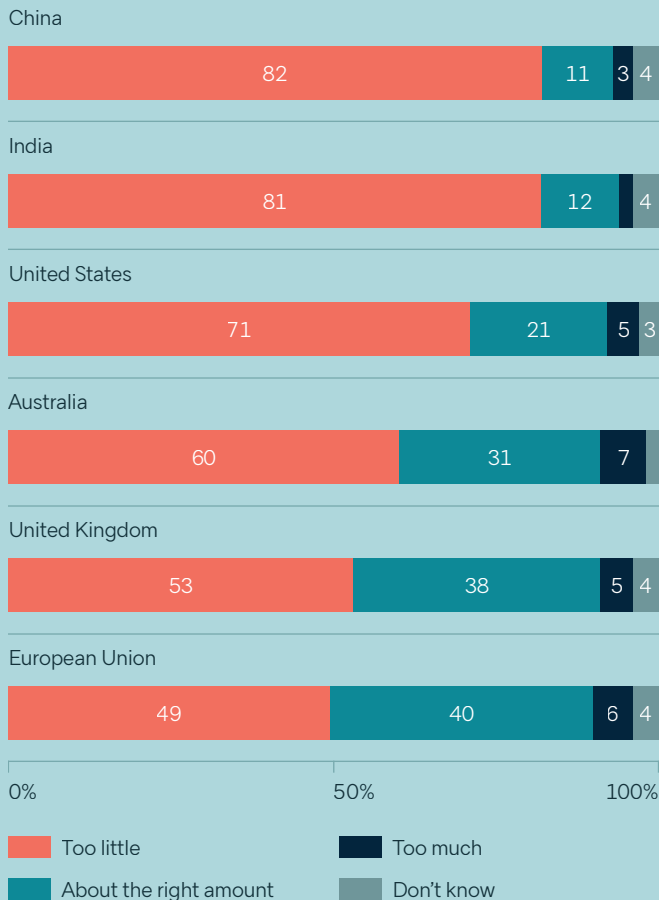


FIGURE 5

Climate change efforts by country

Here is a list of countries and economies. In your opinion, is that country or economy doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to combat climate change?



International climate change policies

In advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be hosted by the United Kingdom in Glasgow in late 2021, the majority of Australians would like to see large countries do more to combat climate change. Eight in ten Australians say that China (82%) and India (81%) are doing 'too little' in their efforts to combat climate change.

When it comes to the United States' efforts, a large majority (71%) say the United States is doing too little to combat climate change. One in five Australians (21%) say the United States is doing about the right amount to combat climate change.

Six in ten Australians (60%) say Australia is doing too little in its efforts to combat climate change, while one third (31%) say Australia is doing about the right amount.

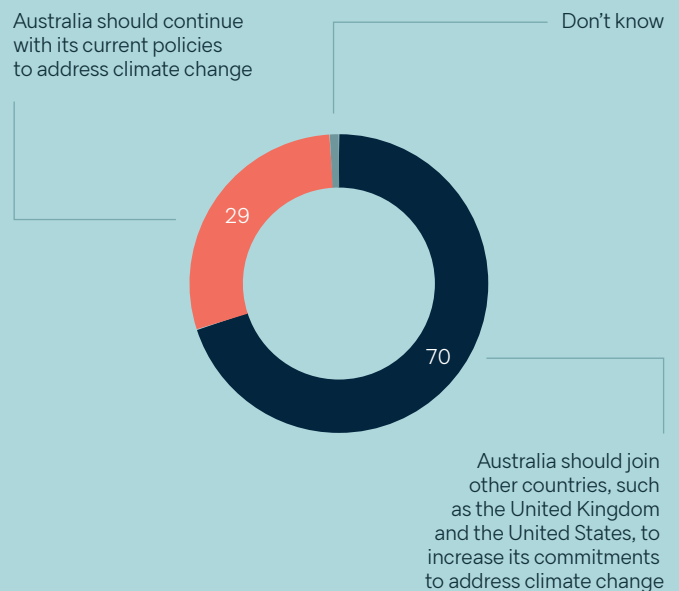
Australians appear to be the most satisfied with the efforts of the United Kingdom and the European Union. However, a slim majority (53%) still say the United Kingdom is doing too little. Half the population (49%) say the European Union is doing too little, while four in ten Australians (40%) say the European Union is doing about the right amount.

Most Australians want Australia to increase its ambitions on climate change policy. Seven in ten Australians (70%) say Australia should join other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to increase its commitments to address climate change. Less than a third (29%) say Australia should continue with its current policies.

FIGURE 6

Australia's approach to international climate change negotiations

In the lead up to the 2021 United Nations climate change conference in Glasgow, which one of the following two statements most closely represents your own view of the approach the Australian government should take in international climate change negotiations?



TABLES OF RESULTS

Please note that totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 1

Attitudes to global warming

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.

	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs	68%	60%	48%	46%	41%	36%	40%	45%	50%	53%	54%	59%	61%	56%	60%
The problem of global warming should be addressed, but its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost	24%	32%	39%	40%	40%	45%	44%	38%	38%	36%	37%	31%	28%	34%	30%
Until we are sure that global warming is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs	7%	8%	13%	13%	19%	18%	16%	15%	12%	11%	9%	10%	10%	10%	9%
Don't know/refused	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%

TABLE 2

Costs and benefits of climate change action

When thinking about the possible benefits and possible costs of further action on climate change, which of the following two statements is closer to your own view?

	2021
The benefits of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the costs	74%
The costs of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the benefits	24%
Don't know	2%

TABLE 3

Energy policy priorities

Now thinking about energy policy, which one of the following goals do you personally think should be the main priority for the federal government?

	2019	2021
Reducing carbon emissions	47%	55%
Reducing household bills	38%	32%
Reducing the risk of power blackouts	15%	12%
Don't know	1%	1%

TABLE 4

Potential federal government policies

Would you support or oppose the following federal government policies?

	Support	Oppose	Don't know
Providing subsidies for the development of renewable energy technologies	91%	8%	1%
Setting a net-zero emissions target for 2050	78%	20%	2%
Providing subsidies for the purchase of electric vehicles	77%	22%	2%
Introducing an emissions trading scheme or a carbon tax	64%	33%	3%
Reducing Australian coal exports to other countries	63%	33%	3%
Banning new coal mines from opening in Australia	63%	34%	2%
Increasing the use of gas for Australia's energy generation	58%	38%	3%
Removing the existing ban on nuclear power	47%	51%	2%
Providing subsidies for building new coal-fired power plants	30%	67%	3%

TABLES OF RESULTS

TABLE 5

International efforts on climate change

Here is a list of countries and economies. In your opinion, is that country or economy doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to combat climate change?

	Too little	About the right amount	Too much	Don't know
China	82%	11%	3%	4%
India	81%	12%	2%	4%
United States	71%	21%	5%	3%
Australia	60%	31%	7%	2%
United Kingdom	53%	38%	5%	4%
European Union	49%	40%	6%	4%

TABLE 6

Approach to UN climate negotiations

In the leadup to the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, which one of the following two statements most closely represents your own view of the approach the Australian government should take in international climate change negotiations?

	2021
Australia should join other countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to increase its commitments to address climate change	70%
Australia should continue with its current policies to address climate change	29%
Don't know	1%

METHODOLOGY

Climate Poll 2021 by the Lowy Institute reports the results of a nationally representative online and telephone survey conducted by the Social Research Centre (SRC) between 12 and 26 April 2021, with a sample size of 3286 Australian adults. The order of questions in the survey was different from the order presented in this report.

The survey was conducted by the SRC, using the Life in Australia™ panel — currently the only probability-based online panel in Australia. Members of the panel were randomly recruited via their landline or mobile (rather than being self-selected volunteers) and agreed to provide their contact details to take part in surveys on a regular basis. SRC uses a mixed-mode approach for the panel, including online surveys (95% of respondents) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (5% of respondents) to provide coverage of the offline population (households without internet access).

On a simple random sample of 3286 responses, the margin of error is approximately 1.8%. 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 estimated at 1.62. A completion rate of 82.1% was achieved. Unlike other commercial online panels in Australia, the probability basis of the Life in Australia™ sampling method means results are generalisable to the national population and sampling errors and confidence intervals can be calculated.

The question in Figure 1 was asked in the annual Lowy Institute Poll, which was also conducted by SRC using the Life in Australia™ panel and the same methodology as Climate Poll 2021. The Lowy Institute Poll was conducted between 15 and 29 March 2021, with a sample size of 2222 Australian adults. On a simple random sample of 2222 responses, the margin of error is approximately 2.1%. 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 estimated at 1.97. A completion rate of 83.8% was achieved.

For more information on the Lowy Institute Poll and Methodology, go to <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/>. The annual Lowy Institute Poll will be released in June 2021.

NOTES

- 1 Alex Oliver, 2018 Lowy Institute Poll, 20 June 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2018-lowy-institute-poll>.
- 2 Scott Morrison, “Address to National Press Club”, 1 February 2021, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-national-press-club-barton-act>.
- 3 Alex Oliver, 2016 Lowy Institute Poll, 20 June 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2016-lowy-institute-poll>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Angus Taylor, “Advancing Australia’s Gas-fired Recovery”, 7 May 2021, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/taylor/media-releases/advancing-australias-gas-fired-recovery>.
- 6 See the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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