

Unlike politics, business or sports, life itself is not a contest.

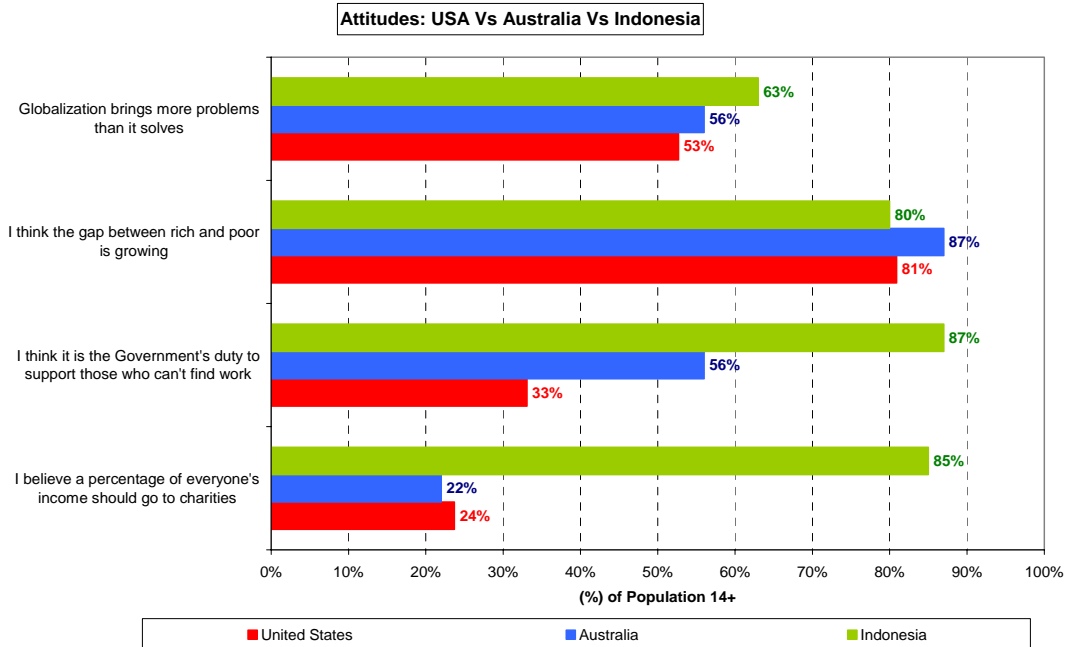
Many across the world will soon start watching its most influential country go to the polls to elect its most powerful leader. Around the globe, many will join their fellow men and women in the United States in the hope that real change is coming. Obama or McCain, the world at large is breathing a sigh of relief as the curtain finally falls on eight tragic years. The overwhelming majority expect to see Barack Obama win, going by all the polls signalling a win, even a landslide. Race remains the only dark question, the unknown factor referred to politely as the Bradley Effect. The verdict on a post-racial United States will soon be out.

To more than half the human race however, the event is not even of academic interest. Mostly unaware, living in varying degrees of poverty and misery, for them it will be yet another day of fighting for survival. That they pose the most severe threat to world peace and stability seemed to have escaped the Bush administration. Stuck in a time warp, security is primarily expressed in military terms even today. McCain, an old war hero, talks too often in adversarial terms of “winning”. The big question is, winning what? Life is not a contest. There’s nothing to win, everything to lose. Fundamental issues like food, water, health, unemployment and climate change now threaten our planet in existential terms. No aircraft carrier, no nuclear arsenal is going to keep those threats away even from the United States.

Magically, three trillion dollars of taxpayer funds get deployed around the world to protect not only the global financial system, but its shareholders as well. Twenty-three trillion dollars of tax-free money held by a handful of the super-rich, lie idling in tax havens. But money just cannot be found to educate the poor of the world, to engage them productively in the mainstream of life, to empower them to simply stop procreating. The human race has evolved enough to stop using barbaric phrases like “survival of the fittest”. Big business, usually in lock-step with big politics, would do well to take note. Our young are getting the message, it’s time the rest of us made way to help them build their future the way they see it.

A new generation of politicians are beginning to read the signs. In recent times, a key voting bloc of young Australians helped elect Kevin Rudd. To them climate change was and is, issue No. 1. If Obama wins as he is expected to, he will have young Americans of every race and colour to thank. It is their hopes and aspirations that he will have to live up to, more than anybody else’s. After all, he will be the President of his people and not the world. But a comparison of three different peoples, Indonesians, Americans and Australians may shed some light on public opinion, reflecting similarities and differences that need to be appreciated. Insights garnered by Roy Morgan Research in the three countries prove that broad groupings of East and West are no longer meaningful in a borderless world that is evolving faster than ever.

Politicians worshipping at the altar of the voter and businesses eyeing the consumer need to recognise the fact that most people are wary of globalisation. 63 per cent of Indonesians, 56 per cent of Australians and 53 per cent of Americans believe that “globalisation brings more problems than it solves”. More work clearly needs to be done in explaining its virtues to people who remain largely skeptical.



In the remaining hours of frantic campaigning, John McCain is taking Barack Obama to task for telling Joe-the-plumber he's going to "spread the wealth around". Sarah Palin has labelled him a socialist, a dirty word in the United States. Yet, taxation is an integral facet of capitalism, which in the words of Hewlett packard's ex-CEO Carly Fiorina is meant to "provide essential services". The question is, what is essential services and are they indeed for one and all? If education and healthcare are essentials, the last eight years have been particularly devastating in the United States. Eight out of ten Americans think the "gap between the rich and poor is growing", the richest country in the world where recorded poverty has been on the increase. Just as many Indonesians and nine out of ten Australians also agree.

Nine out of ten Indonesians believe that "it is the government's duty to support those who can't find work". 56 per cent of Australians and 33 per cent of Americans share that view. The Australian perspective is particularly noteworthy, at a symbolic cross-roads between East and West, left and right. While nine out of ten Indonesians "believe a percentage of everyone's income should go to charity" influenced by religious teachings, only two out of ten Americans and Australians agree it should be institutionalised. Yet, in reality, they are among the most charitable people in the world as reflected in their individual donations after the tsunami that affected much of Southeast Asia. For too long, Americans have allowed the Bush administration to tarnish their identity. The indications are that a change is coming.

Though the opinions expressed are my own, they are based on surveys run in Indonesia, Australia and the United States by Roy Morgan International.

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