

Roy Morgan Research

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Now There's No Corruption in Indonesia - Australia must be next!

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Presented by

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Roy Morgan Research

What have we learnt from the collapse of the Asian economy? Perhaps the first thing is something about ourselves - Australia as a nation has a remarkable degree of myopia!

Australians are still confident and optimistic about the future of the Australian economy and their own personal finances.

Consumer Confidence (as measured by the Roy Morgan Consumer Confidence Rating) generally correlates with changes in GDP. (See Appendix I.) However, Consumer Confidence is still high despite the Asian crisis. (The May rating was up 4.2 points since April).

Although the public at large may not have factored in the Asian crisis, the vast majority (90%) of Australia's business leaders and professionals believe Australia will be worse off as a result of Asia's economic downturn. However only 37% believe their business will be worse off. (Roy Morgan Research survey published in February 3, 1998 Australian Financial Review - See Appendix II). (I am reminded of an earlier poll in which 70% of Australians claimed to drink less than the average.)

What we have learned from Indonesia is that although a corrupt system can, on the surface, appear to function, finally, it is doomed.

Of course, many of the Asian economies will recover. It is all too easy to over-react to recent developments. Professor Les Holmes of the Political Science Department at Melbourne University suggests we will continue to trade heavily with Asia, just as we will continue to be a major supplier of primary products.

But the Asian model has been seriously dented, and will look very different once it has been repaired. The Asian economies will have to open up to more competition, and overcome the concentration of powers - both economic and political powers - that is not unrelated to the nepotism and corruption that is so rife in many countries of the region: the days of crony capitalism are numbered.

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It is now 100 years since our founding fathers decided Australia was best served by a Federal System of Government - surely they did not envisage a political system of:

- government held to ransom by minority groups (remember in a year the Pauline Hanson One Nation Party will be joining in opposition the “Minority Party Club”!);
- a taxation system which benefits the cash society and other tax cheats (ask a tradesman for two quotes (i) for payment by cash, (ii) payment by cheque!);
- parliamentarians and public servants rorting the public purse with tax free perks and their “fringe benefit tax” being paid by the government;
- only 7% of Australians rate politicians “very high” or “high” for ethics and honesty¹;
- a “political” judiciary and one which is “intellectually” dishonest; and finally as I have said on many occasions
- Canberra - Australia’s greatest self-made disaster.

The sacking of MUA workers particularly amidst speculation about a conspiracy involving the Federal Government, has created massive unease; and increased concern among people about their own job security.

Today, 29% of people believe they have a chance of being unemployed,. This is an increase of 8% since the last survey in November 1997. (See Appendix IV.)

The speculation about conspiracies only adds to the people’s increasing disillusionment with the honesty and ethics of our politicians and political structures.

Australia needs change; and Australians want to have more say in important Government decisions.

In a major international study conducted in twenty-four countries around the world between 1995 and 1996 Roy Morgan Research found Australians **more** than any other nation (except Finland) said the most important role of Government is “**Giving people more say in important Government decisions**”. (See Appendix V.)

So what do we as Australians want and believe about what is needed for Australia?

Australians want Governments to do something about unemployment (49%), health and hospitals (37%), education and schools (29%), social welfare and the aged (18%), taxation (16%), law and order (14%), Aboriginal issues/Wik (13%), and the economy and finance (11%). (See Appendix VI.)

¹ Morgan Poll No. 3088 conducted May 2/3, 1998 showed that only 7% of Australians rate politicians as “high” or “very high” for ethics and honesty. (See Appendix III.)

I have spent the best part of my life measuring public opinion. I believe people's views matter and that measuring public opinion is extremely important.

Before presenting details of our latest Morgan Poll results, I thought it timely to quote my father, Roy Morgan. Just before he died in 1985 he was asked why measuring public opinion was important.

His answer, which I agree with, was in three parts as follows:

Firstly, *“To stop journalists from claiming to be able to write ‘The public demands, etc.,’ when they don't know what public opinion is on that particular subject.*

Secondly, to identify the real question - the central ‘core’ of a problem. *“This forces people to face the problem. Public opinion polls not only do this, but also make sure that (by publication) the public and journalists know the problem and the public's attitudes towards the issue (as percentages). This forces our leaders and the public to recognise the real problem and hopefully consider it.”*

Thirdly, *“Publishing several times a year reasonably accurate percentages for voting intention. This created a continuous ‘election atmosphere’, rather than a phony atmosphere created by so called ‘leaders’ and journalists.”*

Today, politicians need to ask themselves whether they can blindly accept public opinion on complex matters or whether they should follow the advice of former Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies who, in his second Dunrossil Memorial Lecture on March 12, 1968, spoke at length about public opinion polls (see insert). He made the following pertinent point:

“A political leader inevitably reads the published polls. He will learn much from them. But he is no leader if he is persuaded by them to follow a course which he would otherwise not approve. He will do better on appropriate occasions to say - ‘Here is a popular error; I must do my best to correct it!’ ”

And Sir Robert Menzies, in a letter to my father of April 4, 1968, said: *“Nobody knows better than I do that the endemic disease in politics is fear of public opinion.”*

Even worse than public opinion driven leadership is the mischievous and dishonest use of public opinion polling as a means of influencing public opinion- as a propaganda mechanism- push polling!

Australia is not free from this trickery and abuse.

“We live in a world of mass-movements, in which public-opinion polls are for so many a quick and easy way of finding out what other people think, and therefore, for the sake of conformity, how they should think. Public opinion polls disturb me greatly; not because I question their accuracy or their integrity, but because of their inherent limitations. The appeal is from Philip Sober to Philip Drunk; from individual judgment and responsibility essential to civilisation, to superficial mass judgment; to finding out ‘what people want’.

I have an old-fashioned lawyer’s prejudice in favour of ascertaining the facts before pronouncing the judgment, and therefore pay little attention to kerbstone opinions.

A political leader inevitably reads the published polls. He will learn much from them. But he is no leader if he is persuaded by them to follow a course which he would otherwise not approve. He will do better on appropriate occasions to say - ‘Here is a popular error; I must do my best to correct it!’

The danger to which I have referred, of the overwhelming of individual judgment by mass opinion, is one which tends to be increased in the new age of the computer. The quick and accurate mathematical machine threatens to become a sort of ‘witch-doctor’.

The human brain and the human spirit are still the creative elements without which true human progress will be arrested.”

Sir Robert Menzies, Dunrossil Lecture, March 12, 1968

100 years ago our founding fathers set about creating a country which had the potential to be economically viable and geographically equitable. The wealthy “gold” State of Victoria subsidised the poorer States in return for protection of Victorian trade.

Today the aim for Australia is the same as it was 100 years ago - but almost everything else is different - so the means need to be different.

Australia today needs the same clear and well articulated vision for the future, as our successful enterprises have. We might articulate a vision for Australia something along the lines...

“Australia seeks to be a healthy economic unit, with low levels of unemployment and a reasonable standard of living for all, taking our place with the best in the global arena.”

If this were our vision then clearly we must agree to:

- fix taxation (82% of Australians want the taxation system reformed either with or without a GST - 86% of business leaders and professionals want **major** tax changes. See Appendix VII and VIII);
- fix work practices - while many outrageous work practices were brought to the public’s attention during the recent waterfront dispute most industries in Australia are burdened by them;

- settle the Mabo debate;
- fix corruption in Government - Federal, State and Local;
- fix the judiciary - today many of those involved in the judiciary are self-serving, arrogant and unapproachable.

The judiciary needs to be forced to give written opinions based on fact not views, often prejudiced by political feeling. How could a Coalition appointed High Court Judge **forget** giving an opinion on the Hindmarsh Bridge affair? Irrespective of the absurdities associated with the Hindmarsh Bridge he should have resigned when “found out” - he should resign now.

The judiciary often hide behind such lofty phrases as “*This is an issue upon which reasonable minds might differ*”

We can't have the judiciary hedging their bets, we need straight, honest answers.

Today support for minor parties is near an all time high of 17%. (See Appendix IX - ALP would win Federal Election in late May.) What is concerning many Australians is why support for minority parties such as One Nation is so high in some areas, ie 16.9% in Queensland country, 10.3% in Brisbane, and 6.6% in South Australia. (See Appendix X analysis of Federal voting intention April/May 1998 by city and country areas for each State.)

While many leading politicians (former and present) from both sides of politics condemn One Nation and what they stand for, there is little, if any, responsibility taken for the diminished confidence which the people feel for them (politicians) or their office - which has allowed One Nation to get a foothold. I repeat the astounding finding that today only 7% of Australians consider either Federal or State Members of Parliament as “very high” or “high” for ethics and honesty. A significantly lower figure than the 20% level achieved in the late '70's!

If Australia is to have a clear vision then we must agree to eliminate corruption and dishonesty (both financial and intellectual) at all levels - Politics, Government and Industry. Corruption today is very different than it was 200 years ago when theft and other forms of corruption were the reasons given for sending many of our forebears to Australia.

Elimination of corruption requires strong leadership and honesty from all areas of the community - it requires honest Government from **both** sides of politics. Unfortunately something today which seems impossible to obtain. It is for this reason that One Nation will receive a massive vote in the forthcoming Queensland election - not because of their policies. In an open and honest political system which had people's trust One Nation's policies would attract no votes.

Indeed the L-NP not putting One Nation last, has not substantially benefited the L-NP even among One Nation voters. This week's Morgan Poll shows Second Preferences (on a two party preferred basis) of One Nation voters dividing fairly evenly - 53% L-NP to 47% ALP!

The lessons from Indonesia and the Asian crisis should be the catalyst to make the desperately needed changes of eliminating all forms of corruption in Australia. Let's start today!

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