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MEDIA RELEASE

Australians out-worry Americans on illegal immigration: A comparative survey

An election-campaign survey commissioned by the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney in conjunction with Stanford University has found that Australians are more concerned about illegal immigration than those in the United States.

The survey released today canvassed the attitudes of Australians and Americans towards illegal immigrants, immigration generally, and the strengths and weaknesses of the respective party policies. It was carried out by US-based polling firm YouGov/Polimetrix, with Australian polling occurring during the first week of the current federal election campaign between July 14 and 22, and American polling done in February 2010.

According to the results:

- 76 per cent of Australians believe that increasing numbers of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants are an important problem for the country whereas in the US, where the number of illegal immigrants in 2009 was estimated by the US Department of Homeland Security at nearly 11 million, 71 per cent rate it as important.
- 69 per cent of Australian respondents agree that Australia “is taking too many immigrants”, as compared to 62 per cent of their American counterparts.
- Among those who consider asylum seekers as “one of the most important issues facing Australia”, 47 per cent indicated they will vote for the Coalition and 37 per cent for the ALP.
- Labor leads the Coalition (48-25 per cent) only amongst those who rate immigration as “not all that important”.

Chief executive officer of the US Studies Centre, Professor Geoffrey Garrett says differences in the demography of Australia and the US may help explain the variations between the two country’s attitudes to immigration and asylum seekers.

“In the US, most migrants in the country without legal visas are Latinos, joining what is America’s largest ethnic group that is largely sympathetic with their plight. There is no similar ethnic base in Australia for a more compassionate approach for asylum seekers.”

The full Australian survey results are available at the Centre website, www.ussc.edu.au

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The mission of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney is to increase understanding of the United States in Australia. Spanning the study of politics and policy, economics and business, culture and society, the core activities of the Centre include postgraduate degrees and undergraduate teaching; academic research and research training; policy analysis and commentary; business leadership forums; and public education and community outreach.