

The boat people have no friends

By Michelle Grattan

September 16, 2010

The former PM says he now has a very productive relationship with Julia Gillard as the new Foreign Minister.

TRUST in the Rudd government plummeted dramatically in its last year in a national mood swing that was reflected in broader attitudes, a major academic study has found.

The Scanlon Foundation's social cohesion survey, released today, charts the spectacular roller-coaster of public feeling after Kevin Rudd was elected and before he was dumped.

In the last year of the Howard government, 39 per cent agreed that "the government in Canberra can be trusted to do the right thing for the Australian people".

At the height of Mr Rudd's popularity, this had soared to 48 per cent in 2009. But in Mr Rudd's last month as prime minister (June), it had plunged to 31 per cent.

Between 2009 and 2010, those agreeing that "most people can be trusted" fell from 55 per cent to 45 per cent.

More than 14 per cent said they had experienced discrimination on the grounds of "skin colour, ethnic origin or religion" - up from 10 per cent a year earlier.

Fewer people were participating in voluntary work - down from 38 to 32 per cent.

The June 2010 survey of 2000 respondents, undertaken by Andrew Markus, of Monash University, also found an entrenched negative attitude towards asylum seekers who arrived by boat.

"This is not simply a function of prejudice. The negative view is held across the community and does not extend to those who apply for asylum overseas and are selected for admission into Australia," the study says.

Two-thirds supported admitting refugees who had been successfully assessed overseas.

By contrast, fewer than one in five agreed that boat people should be eligible for permanent residence, while 27 per cent said the boats should be stopped from landing and 13 per cent said the boat people should be detained and returned.

No group gave majority support to letting boat people apply for permanent residence - not even Green voters.

Source: *The Age* <http://www.theage.com.au/national/the-boat-people-have-no-friends-20100915-15cni.html>