

Aboriginal Issues - Attenders' Views

Reconciling Australia?

According to the 2006 Census, Aboriginal Australians make up 2.5% of the population. Aboriginal Australians are the nation's 'first peoples', yet they continue to lag behind the majority of non-Indigenous Australians on many social, health and economic indicators¹. Views on how to improve this situation, and how to empower Aboriginal Australians, have altered over time. Governments have increasingly taken up the mantle of attempting to effect change through actions such as the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, the symbolism of the 'Sorry' apology, embracing the Closing the Gap campaign, and the current Stronger Futures legislation. What are the views of church attenders to this vital issue in Australian life? In late 2011 as a part of the 2011 National Church Life Survey, a sample of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant church attenders were asked the following question:

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia?

1. *The churches should more actively promote the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal people*
2. *Injustices towards Aboriginal people are now all in the past*
3. *Aboriginal people's level of disadvantage justifies extra government assistance*

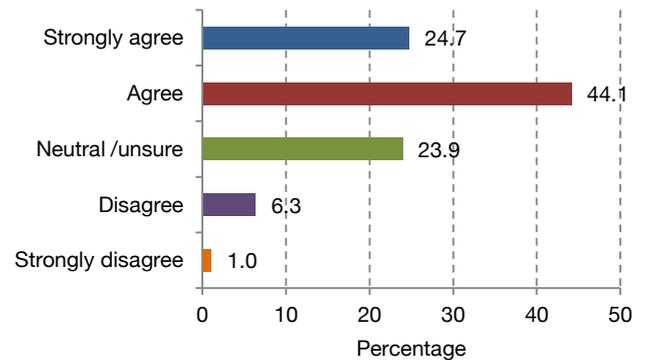
Overall findings

Strong support exists for churches to promote reconciliation with 7/10 attenders (69%) believing this should be part of church life. Only 7% disagreed with this statement (see Figure 1).

Almost half (48%) of attenders believed the government should do more to assist disadvantaged Aboriginal people, 32% were unsure, and 21% disagreed.

¹ Face The Facts: Some Questions And Answers About Indigenous Peoples, Migrants And Refugees And Asylum Seekers, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012

Figure 1: Churches should promote reconciliation



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,407).

Almost half (45%) of attenders disagreed with the idea that injustices towards Aboriginal people are now all in the past, while 31% agreed and 24% were unsure.

Taken together, these results indicate that there is a proportion of people who are supportive of reconciliation but who do not think that injustices still exist (29% of people who were supportive of reconciliation) or who do not think that extra government assistance is required (13% of people who were supportive of reconciliation). Believing that injustice remains usually meant support for extra government assistance (64% of those who believed that injustice remained agreed that extra assistance was required).

Demographics

There were some minor differences between age groups in terms of views about reconciliation, with attenders aged 80+ most supportive of the churches promoting reconciliation (86% in agreement with the proposition, compared with 67% of younger attenders). Women were also somewhat more likely to support this than men (71% of women versus 64% of men). There was a consistent difference in views across all three survey questions with respect to education (see Table 1). In comparison to attenders with less formal education, people with a tertiary degree were more supportive of the churches promoting reconciliation

(73% versus 66%) and of extra government assistance (61% versus 41%). Tertiary educated churchgoers were also less likely than others to agree that aboriginal injustices were all in the past (21% versus 36%).

Table 1: Attenders' views on Aboriginal issues by education

	Education		
	School	Trade cert/ diploma	Degree
Should promote reconciliation	Percentage		
Agree	67	66	73
Neutral/unsure	26	26	21
Disagree	7	8	7
Injustices are in the past			
Agree	38	32	21
Neutral/unsure	26	28	19
Disagree	37	40	60
Extra assistance justified			
Agree	41	41	61
Neutral/unsure	35	37	24
Disagree	24	23	15

Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (N=1,360 to 1,387)

Church life

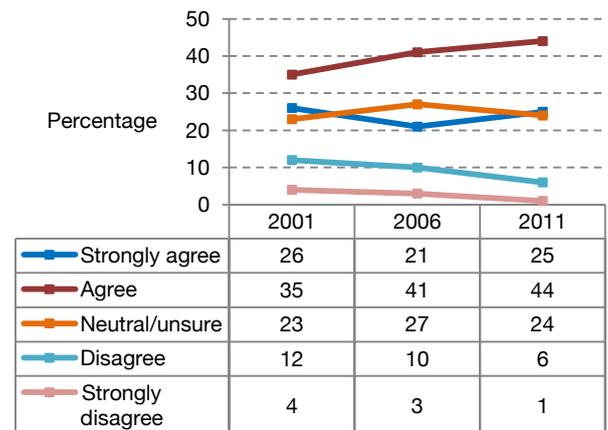
Views about Aboriginal issues did not vary greatly by denomination. However, there was a difference in views about reconciliation by frequency of devotional practice, with people who hardly ever or never spent time in private devotional activity less likely than other attenders to agree that churches should promote reconciliation (49% versus 70%).

Change over time

The survey question on whether '*The churches should more actively promote the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal people*' was also asked in 2006 and 2001, allowing for a look at trends over time (see Figure 2).

Interestingly, the proportion of attenders who strongly agreed with this statement was highest in 2001, with 26% of attenders strongly agreeing that the churches should actively promote reconciliation with Aboriginal people. However, combining those who agree or strongly agree shows an increase over time – 69% of attenders either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in 2011, compared to 62% in 2006 and 61% in 2001. Similarly, the rate of disagreement with churches promoting reconciliation has decreased over time (from 16% in 2001, to 13% in 2006 and to 7% in 2011).

Figure 2: Churches should promote reconciliation, 2001-2011



Source: 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2 (n=1,407), 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J (n=2382), 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N (n=2183).

Summary

Strong support exists for churches to promote reconciliation with Aboriginal people. Almost half of attenders believed the government should do more to assist disadvantaged Aboriginal people, and that injustices against Aboriginal people are not all in the past.

Data sources

Castle, K., (2001) [computer file], 2001 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Castle, K., (2006) [computer file], 2006 NCLS Attender Sample Survey J. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Powell, R., (2014) [computer file], 2011 NCLS Attender Sample Survey N v2. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Citation

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