

# Australian Attender Attitudes to New Initiatives: 1991 to 2006

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Changes across the religious landscape in recent decades have led a wide range of people, including thinkers and practitioners to invest in thinking about the future shape of church life. Local church leaders and attenders seek ways to help their churches be more vital. Many churches are trying new approaches.

*What are the attitudes of Australian attenders to new initiatives? Have these attitudes changed in the past decade?*

### Is there a mistrust of new initiatives?

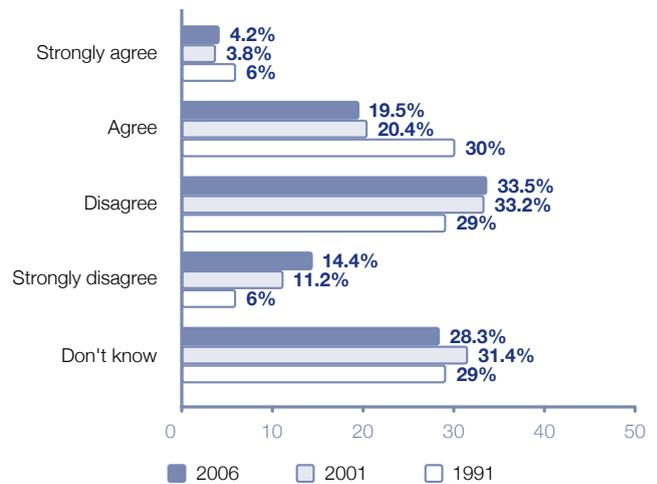
In 2006, church attenders are less likely to perceive that new initiatives will be met with mistrust compared with 15 years earlier (1991).

In the 1991, 2001 and 2006 National Church Life Surveys, attenders were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement; 'New initiatives here tend to be met with mistrust'. (Because Catholic attenders did not take part in 1991, they were excluded from this study.)

- In 1991 some 36% agree or strongly agree that new initiatives tend to be met with mistrust at their congregation. This has dropped to only 24% by 2006.
- In contrast, the percent who disagree or strongly disagree that there is mistrust was 35% in 1991, compared 48% in 2006.

Figure 1 shows information from the 1991, 2001 and 2006 National Church Life Surveys, so we can review changes over time in attitudes.

**Figure 1: Attender perceptions that new initiatives tend to be met with concern or mistrust: 1991, 2001 and 2006**

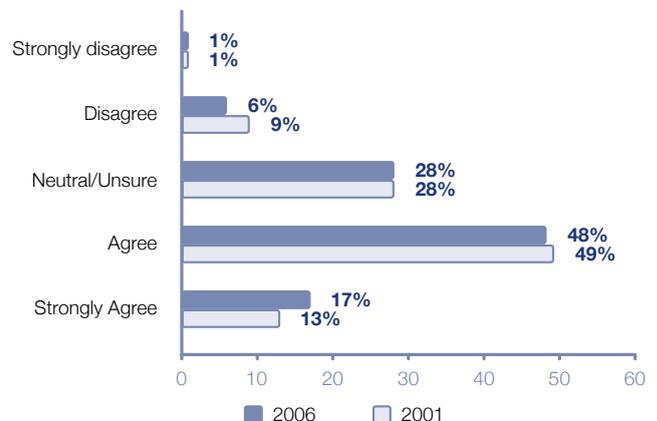


Sources: 1991 NCLS, 2001 NCLS and 2006 NCLS - Anglican and Protestant Attender Survey.

### Are churches ready to try something new?

In the 2001 and 2006 National Church Life Surveys, all participating attenders were asked to agree or disagree with the following statement: 'This congregation is always ready to try something new'.

**Figure 2: Attenders who strongly agree their congregation is always ready to try something new: 2001 and 2006**



Sources: 2001 NCLS and 2006 NCLS - Attender Surveys.

The overall trends for the Australian churches in the five years from 2001 to 2006 show a positive shift in attitude. Figure 2 shows that there has been an increase over time in the proportion who strongly agree that their congregation is always ready to try something new from 13% in 2001 to 17% in 2006.

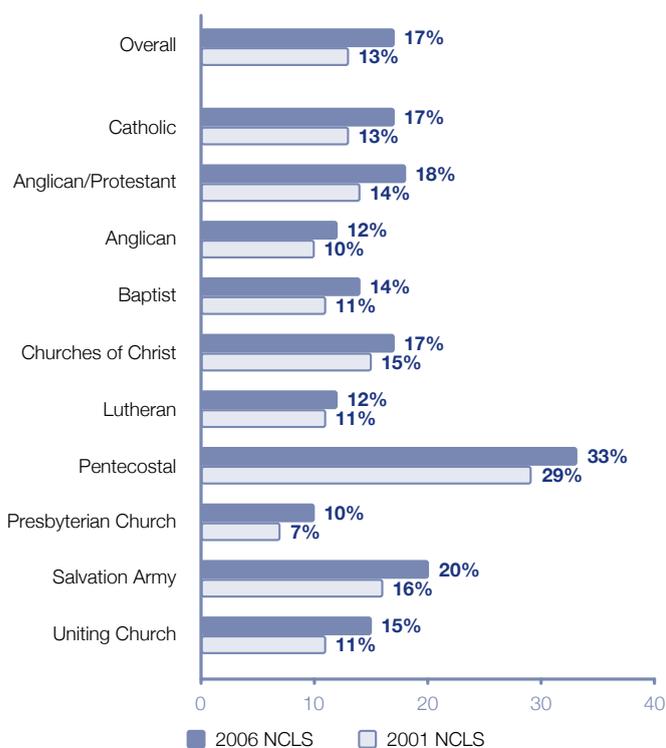
### Denominational Differences

Figure 3 shows the proportion of attenders in different denominations who strongly agree that their congregation is always ready to try something new.

First, there are differences between denominations. For example, attenders in Pentecostal churches are most likely to strongly agree that their churches have a culture of openness to new initiatives (33% vs 17% overall).

Second, there has been a positive shift in all denominations between 2001 and 2006. Each major denomination listed had a higher proportion who claimed their churches were always ready to try something new.

**Figure 3: Attenders who strongly agree their congregation is always ready to try something new: denominational comparisons in 2001 & 2006**



Sources: 2001 NCLS and 2006 NCLS Attender Survey.

### In Conclusion

This longitudinal study shows a significant decline in the perceived degree of mistrust of new initiatives in the fifteen years between 1991 and 2006, although the shift between 2001 and 2006 was minimal.

However, between 2001 and 2006, every major denomination recorded an increase in the proportion who agree that their congregation is always ready to try something new.

Australian church attenders appear to have a greater openness to new possibilities than previously.

### Authors

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### References

This fact sheet is based on *Occasional Paper 14: Church attenders attitudes to innovation in church life - A comparison across countries and across time*. For references and further information on data sources, view at [www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au) in the Research section.