

Reconciliation as public opinion:
a comment on Reconciliation
Australia's *Reconciliation*
Barometer

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Samples

- 'All Australians' (n= 1007)
- 'Indigenous' (n= 617)
- Two women for every man in Indigenous sample

- RA's highlights

- A majority of both groups believe the relationship is important and improving.
- A strong belief among both groups that all Australians should know about Indigenous culture and history
- A majority of non-Indigenous Australians would like to have more contact with Indigenous Australians
- There are low levels of trust between the two groups.
- We don't recognise qualities in each other that we value in ourselves.
- Non-Indigenous Australians don't know what they can do to close the gap.
- Many shared 'Australian' values – each group is strong on family orientation, pride, an easy going nature and sense of humour.
- A majority of non-Indigenous Australians have taken steps to advance reconciliation in the last twelve months.

Pratt's nine senses of 'reconciliation'

- 1.Reconciliation as recognition of Indigenous-specific rights
- 2.Reconciliation as not recognising Indigenous-specific rights
- 3.Reconciliation should not be about guilt for past wrongs
- **4.Reconciliation as practical improvements to Indigenous life chances**
- **5.Reconciliation as recognition of Indigenous, history, culture, heritage**
- **6.Reconciliation as relational and/or attitudinal**
- **7.Reconciliation as 'people's movement'/'grass-roots'.**
- **8.Reconciliation as a general sense of good will, including national unity**
- 9.Cynicism of reconciliation as 'politically correct'

Three senses of 'relationship'

- Statistical (the Barometer uses 'gap' to refer to differences in lots of variables)
- Interpersonal (the Barometer explores attitudes to knowing, liking and helping)
- Political (the Barometer has almost no questions about these)

Material inequality

- *‘Indigenous people are mostly disadvantaged and live on the edge of mainstream society.’*
- All Australia: 40 per cent agree; Indigenous Australia: 75 per cent agree.
- *‘Being born Indigenous makes it harder for an individual to achieve in Australia today’.*
- All Australia: 36 per cent agreed (5% strong); Indigenous Australia: 70 per cent agreed (38% strong).

Access to opportunities

- 53 per cent of All Australians thought Indigenous access to opportunities was 'better or the same as others.' (On specific dimensions of wellbeing, All Australians more likely to agree that Indigenous people worse off than non-Indigenous.)
- 12 per cent of the Indigenous sample thought Indigenous access to opportunities was 'better or the same as others'.

Perception of life expectancy

- 71 per cent of the All Australia sample thought that there is a life expectancy gap of more than ten years;
- 90 per cent of Indigenous Australia thought the gap was more than ten years.

No disadvantage?

- When the issue of Indigenous disadvantage or 'being born Indigenous' or Indigenous 'access to opportunity' is put in general terms, more than half (and as many as 64 per cent) of All Australians do not agree with the proposition that Indigenous Australians are disadvantaged or have inferior 'access to opportunities'.
- One in four of the Indigenous Australian sample did not agree that 'Indigenous Australians are mostly disadvantaged and live on the edge of mainstream society';
- 3 out of every ten Indigenous Australians do not agree that 'being born Indigenous makes it harder for an individual to achieve in Australia today'.

Perceived trust

- 83 per cent of All Australians and 81 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought that *other Australians have a fairly low or very low level of trust for Indigenous Australians. And*
- 85 per cent of All Australians and 86 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought that *Indigenous Australians have a fairly low or very low level of trust for other Australians.*

Actual trust

- The Barometer found very few people in either sample who think that ‘the media presents a balanced view of Indigenous Australia’ –
- 14 per cent of All Australia,
- 9 per cent of Indigenous Australia .
- Does this mean that Reconciliation Australia should not rely much on campaigns in the mass media?

Perceived levels of prejudice

- 73 per cent of All Australians thought that the prejudice of non-Indigenous Australians towards Indigenous Australians was 'fairly' (55 per cent) or 'very' high (18 per cent); and
- 73 per cent of All Australians thought that Indigenous Australians' prejudice against other Australians was 'fairly' or 'very high'.
- A higher proportion of All Australians saw 'very high' prejudice in Indigenous attitudes (31 per cent) than in 'Australian' attitudes (18 per cent).
- 94 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Australians to be very (51 per cent) or fairly (43 per cent) highly prejudiced towards them.
- Most Indigenous respondents (75 per cent) thought Indigenous prejudice towards other Australians to be 'fairly high' (56 per cent) or 'very high' (19 per cent).

Factors in Indigenous disadvantage (survey prompts)

- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Lack of confidence and self-esteem of Indigenous people
- Lack of respect for Indigenous people
- Discrimination
- Poor access to health and education services
- Race-based policies of the past
- Inadequate living conditions
- Ineffective government programs and policies
- Lack of personal responsibility (among Indigenous people)

Converging opinions about the importance of personal responsibility to disadvantage

- A higher proportion of Indigenous Australians (85 per cent) than All Australians (79 per cent) thought ‘lack of personal responsibility’ to be an important factor. (Does this reflect high proportion of female Indigenous respondents in the IA sample – 68 per cent?).
- The only factor that a majority of All Australians rated ‘very important’ was ‘alcohol and substance abuse’ (68 per cent).
- The factor with the highest ‘very important’ rating by Indigenous Australians (80 per cent) was ‘lack of personal responsibility (among Indigenous people)’

The perceived capacity of Indigenous Australians to take responsibility (discipline)

- Are Australians 'disciplined'?
- 44 per cent of All Australians thought that Australians are 'disciplined'.
- 29 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Australians are 'disciplined'.
- Are Indigenous Australians 'disciplined'?
- 13 per cent of All Australians thought Indigenous Australians are 'disciplined'
- 37 per cent of Indigenous Australians thought Indigenous Australians are 'disciplined'.
- **In neither sample did a majority attribute 'discipline' to itself; and each sample was even less likely to attribute 'discipline' to the 'other' than to itself.**

The perceived capacity of Indigenous Australians to take responsibility (hard working)

- The All Australian sample very commonly esteem 'other Australians' (i.e. themselves) to be hard working (74 per cent), but very few of the All Australian sample (18 per cent) see 'hard working' as an 'Indigenous' quality. A substantial majority of Indigenous Australians see both themselves (69 per cent) and 'Australians' (61 per cent) as 'hard working'.

Indigenous Australians ‘good at working together to address the problems that confront them’?

- A bare majority of Indigenous Australians (52 per cent) attributed this quality to themselves (with 20 per cent in strong agreement). Only one in five of All Australians agreed that this was a quality of Indigenous Australians, with only 4 per cent ‘strongly’ agreeing. These data suggest that there is not a lot of faith in Indigenous political capacity, even among Indigenous Australians themselves.
- Why not ask this question about non-Indigenous Australians’ ability to work together?

The Barometer's two notions of 'responsibility'

- *political*: for governments to adopt the laws and policies conducive to reconciliation, and for Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders to 'cooperate'; and
- *individual*: for individuals to act in some way that promotes reconciliation.

The February 2008 Apology

- Both samples thought that the Apology was important for Indigenous people (76 per cent of All Australians, 98 per cent of Indigenous Australians); and smaller but still large proportions of both samples also thought that the Apology had been ‘important for relations between Indigenous people and other Australians’ (61 per cent of All Australians, 93 per cent of Indigenous Australians).

Support for 'help'

- *'Some Indigenous people need specific help to reach equality with other Australians'.*
- Almost universally supported (91 per cent) by Indigenous Australians and widely supported (72 per cent) by All Australians.
- *'The government should put measures in place to help Indigenous people in specific ways.'*
- The Indigenous sample very strongly supported that view (94 per cent agreement), and almost two thirds (62 per cent) of All Australian agreed

Failure of government in past?

- *'race-based policies'* have been harmful in the past?
- Indigenous: 97 per cent 'important', 84 per cent 'very important'.
- All Australians: 70 per cent 'important', 30 per cent 'very important'.
- past *'programmes designed to address Indigenous disadvantage'* ?
- Indigenous: 74 per cent said 'fairly unsuccessful' or 'very unsuccessful'
- All Australians: 52 per cent said 'fairly unsuccessful' or 'very unsuccessful'

The 'gap' between wanting to help and knowing how

- All Australians: The gap was 17 per cent in the case of All Australians (37 per cent wanting to help, less 20 per cent knowing what help to give);
- Indigenous sample: the gap was 13 per cent (95 per cent wanting to help, and 82 per cent knowing what help to give).
- Among Indigenous Australians the gap between strongly wanting (68 per cent) and strongly knowing how (49 per cent) was high (19 per cent)

Asymmetries in the interpersonal: missing questions

- ‘Non-Indigenous Australians are open to sharing their culture with Indigenous Australians’
- ‘Indigenous Australians are superior to non-Indigenous Australians’
- ‘I would feel fine if I had a child who decided to marry a non-Indigenous person’
- Desire more contact with non-Indigenous Australians
- ‘Built personal relationship’ with non-Indigenous people in last twelve months
- ‘Reconsidered your views about non-Indigenous Australia’

Conclusion

The idea that reconciliation is about 'relationships' thus tends to be inflected by three features of the Barometer:

- (a) the strength of the idea of Indigenous disadvantage and
- (b) the asymmetrical questions about interpersonal relationships.
- (c) the absence of questions about the political relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The result is that the 'relationship' problem is understood to consist largely (though not exclusively) of two matters: helping Indigenous Australians to overcome their disadvantage, and persuading non-Indigenous Australians to come to a positive view of Indigenous Australians.

These two specifications of what 'the relationship' is about are in some tension with one another. That is, when the Barometer evokes the topic 'Indigenous disadvantage', it cannot help evoking, at the same time, features of Indigenous Australians that are not so likeable, such as their attributed failure to take responsibility for themselves.