

Survey finds 'significant' rise in racism towards Indigenous people in past decade

Australia's only national survey tracking progress on reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has recorded a near 40 per cent rise in racism during the past decade. The biennial Australian Reconciliation Barometer, conducted by Reconciliation Australia, has shown a "significant" jump in racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from 39 per cent in 2014, to 54 per cent in 2024.

Experiences of racism included verbal abuse, social media abuse, being refused entry or service, being prevented from renting a property, and physical violence, with younger First Nations people reporting higher levels of racism than other age groups. Racial discrimination was experienced at the hands of police, taxis and rideshare services, government services, hospitality and utility providers, and employers.

Reconciliation Australia chief executive Karen Mundine said the increase in racism "resonates with what we've heard anecdotally" about the impact of the 2023 Voice referendum campaign on First Nations people.

The survey showed the referendum also affected the way young people view Australia, with 61 per cent of 18-24-year-olds saying they believe it is a racist country, compared to 41 per cent of the general community. Of those young people, two-thirds said their view was influenced by "the way people engaged with the Voice referendum campaign".

"[They feel] it is another experience of racism and structural racism, and of the broader mainstream Australia not wanting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a voice and to be involved and to participate."

The data showed young people and multicultural communities were more likely to be in favour of participating in the reconciliation process. Sixty-six per cent of young people and 56 per cent of multicultural Australians reported they want to do something to help reconciliation, compared to 42 per cent of the general population.

Karen Mundine put that down to progress on teaching Australian history in schools.

"I think the difference is there's a growing number of young people who are better educated and better aware," she said.

"We've had curriculum that teaches Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, and particularly around those ideas of reconciliation relationships."

Truth-telling has strong support across the community, with 67 per cent of Anglo-Australians, 81 per cent of multicultural Australians and 89 per cent of young Australians saying they believe it was important.

Karen Mundine said this should indicate to governments that community sentiment would back the implementation of truth-telling policies.

"There is strong support there for the idea of truth-telling, but also for participating in truth-telling," Ms Mundine said. "Knowing where we've come from, knowing our histories, knowing the things that have gotten us to where we are today influences how we can actually make change today, but also create that change for a better future."

The survey included 532 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 1,990 non-Indigenous people, with both samples weighted to be representative of the population.