

Tolerance of Cultural Diversity in Queensland

How people deal with 'strangers' in their midst is often seen as the mark of a civilized society. In this regard, Queensland is a fairly tolerant society among Australian and overseas settler societies. But this generalisation is by no means evenly spread across the state. Some areas are very tolerant, while other areas are rather less so. It's a case of 'everywhere somewhat different'. In other words, attitudes to cultural diversity vary from one place to another in a way that stresses a need to address issues arising from intolerance in a local context – one approach would not suit all.

These are conclusions coming out of a random survey of 1820 Queensland residents in late 2001. People were asked 10 questions about their attitudes to other cultural groups and to racial prejudice generally. Several kinds of question were asked. One set of questions asked about attitudes to intermixing of ethnic and racial groups and equality among racial groups. Another set focused on issues of national identity (what makes an Australian?), acceptance of cultural diversity, any concerns about multiculturalism and people of ethnic origins sticking to their old ways, and if they thought Australians from a British background had a privileged position in our society. A final set of questions asked if people thought there was racial prejudice in Australia and if they personally were prejudiced against other cultural groups.

Every 2nd postcode was sampled by telephone to provide a geographic coverage of Statistical Subdivisions (SSDs) drawn up by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see map). Not all cities were individually surveyed, but all areas of the state were covered. The technique used to group areas with similar attitudes was based on a comparison of attitude profiles across all 10 attitude questions.

On the coloured map, three broad groups of areas stand out:

1. Those shaded green (shades 1-3) are broadly tolerant, the three regional cities of Cairns, Townsville and Mackay (group 1) most so, along with Far North QLD (group 2). A large cluster of regions (group 3) covering the Darling Downs, SWn, central west and NWn parts of the state, along with Brisbane City, Ipswich, the Pine River and

Sunshine Coast districts north of Brisbane, are generally tolerant. They are noticeably below the state average on all attitude markers.

2. Parts of Queensland which are less tolerant towards cultural diversity are coloured in pink. These include Bundaberg and the surrounding regions of Wide Bay-Burnett, Moreton and Caboolture, along with southern and eastern Brisbane, including Logan City, Redland Shire and the Gold Coast. People here do not feel secure among others from different cultural backgrounds and have concerns about the mixing of different race groups, about cultural diversity, and about groups that do not 'fit in' to a broadly homogeneous Australian national culture. They also believe that racial prejudice is common among most Australians.
3. Three regions have unique attitude profiles. One of these (shade 6), northern Queensland, believes that humankind comprises separate and unequal racial groups, do not feel secure with people of different cultural backgrounds, and accepts that there is racial prejudice in Australia. Respondents in the Fitzroy Region and city of Gladstone (shade 7), are principally concerned about people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways (anti-multiculturalism as they understand it), accept that there are Out-groups, groups which do not fit into their vision of an Australian culture, and have an above average proportion who are prejudiced against other cultures. Respondents in a 3rd region, Mackay (but not including the city of Mackay) do not see all race groups as equal, cannot accept cultural diversity and feel insecure amongst people of different backgrounds, as well as having a relatively large number who are say they are prejudiced against other cultural groups.

Many parts of Queensland, including Brisbane and many of the major regional cities, are relatively tolerant and accepting of 'strangers' in their midst. Some other areas, however, especially in southeastern and coastal QLD, have concerns and reservations which suggest there are tensions present between the dominant and 'Other' cultural groups. The geographic approach adopted here, along with the identification of distinctive attitude profiles, shows how people's attitudes vary and points to areas where there are tensions which may need to be addressed.

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