

Attitudes towards Aboriginal issues in Saskatchewan: A research brief

January 2012

Saskatchewan Election Study team¹

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Introduction

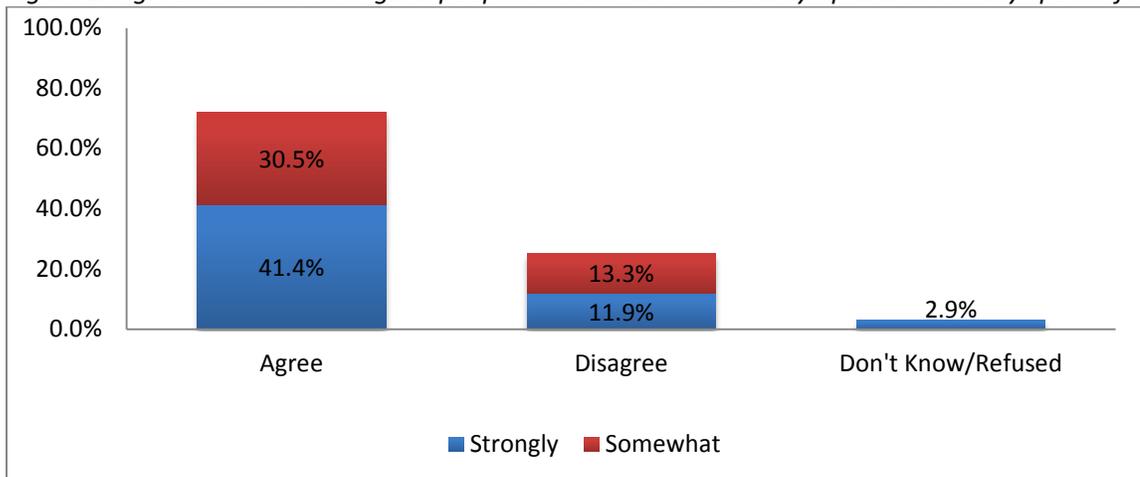
Aboriginal peoples represent an important and growing part of the Saskatchewan population. As of the 2006 Census (2011 Census data is not yet available), 15% of Saskatchewan residents reported having an Aboriginal identity (Statistics Canada 2008, 11). A recent Statistics Canada report estimates that by 2031, Saskatchewan will have Canada's largest provincial population, with 21-24% of the population projected as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada 2011).

As part of the Saskatchewan Election Study survey, Saskatchewan residents were asked about their attitudes toward a number of Aboriginal issues. This briefing note reports these attitudes and examines how the responses to these questions vary based on the respondent's age, education and sex.² The results suggest a curious tension: while the majority of Saskatchewan residents recognize the formidable challenges faced by Aboriginal peoples, there is a general public sentiment that Aboriginal peoples themselves have the primary responsibility to overcome these challenges. In addition, the majority of respondents oppose publicly funded Aboriginal-specific post-secondary institutions and the idea of dedicating a share of natural resource revenues to Aboriginal peoples. The data suggests that while residents sympathize with the situation of our province's Aboriginal peoples, there is resistance to government programs that would give Aboriginal peoples special treatment. Across all questions responses vary significantly by education levels, implying that attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples are more accommodating as one becomes more educated.

Attitudes about Aboriginal peoples and discrimination

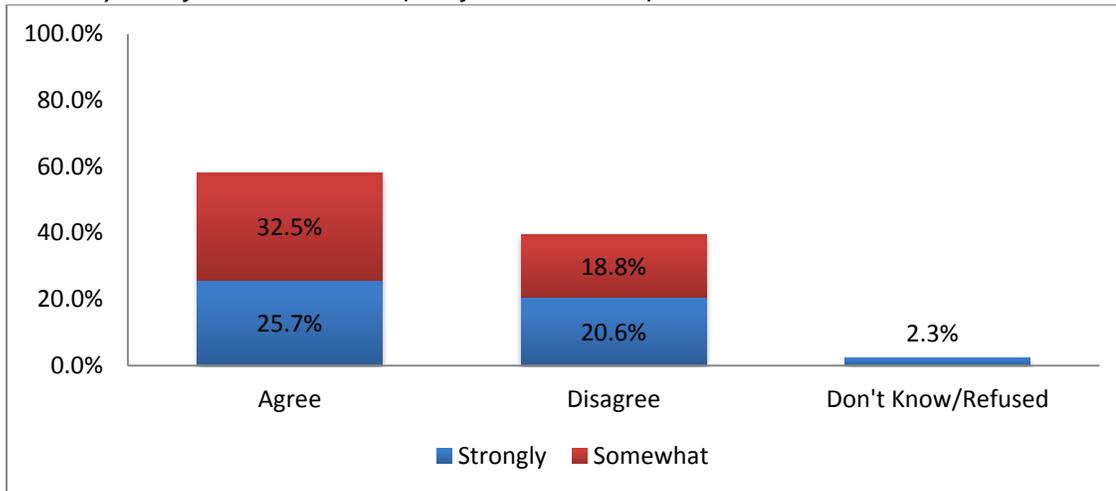
Saskatchewan Election Study respondents were asked two questions about Aboriginal peoples and discrimination.³ Respondents were first asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "German, Ukrainian and other immigrants to Saskatchewan overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Aboriginals should do the same without any special favours." The vast majority of Saskatchewan respondents (71.9%) agree with this statement, with over four in ten (41.4%) strongly agreeing. This finding indicates a certain resistance in Saskatchewan's population towards providing Aboriginals with benefits that are not available to the broader population or targeted government programs that could be perceived as 'special treatment'. Attitudes vary considerably by educational attainment, with respondents with a high school diploma or less being more likely (82.2%) than those with some post-secondary education (78.5%) and those with a completed university degree (54.2%) to agree. Men (74.5%) are more likely than women (69.3%) to agree with this statement, while individuals aged 55 and over are more likely to strongly agree (46.9%) than 18-34 year olds (38.3% strongly agree) or 35-54 year olds (38.5%).

Figure 1: Agreement that Aboriginal peoples should "work their way up ... without any special favours" (All of Saskatchewan)



Respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Generations of discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Aboriginals to work their way out of the lower class.” Here, residents expressed a degree of sympathy with the situation of our province’s Aboriginal people. The majority (58.2%) of respondents agree with the statement, while roughly four in ten (39.4%) disagree. Educational cohorts again differ significantly: 52.5% of respondents with a high school diploma or less and 53.2% of respondents with some post-secondary education agree with this statement, compared to 70.2% of those with a completed university degree. Men and women do not differ significantly with respect to this question and responses do not vary significantly with age.

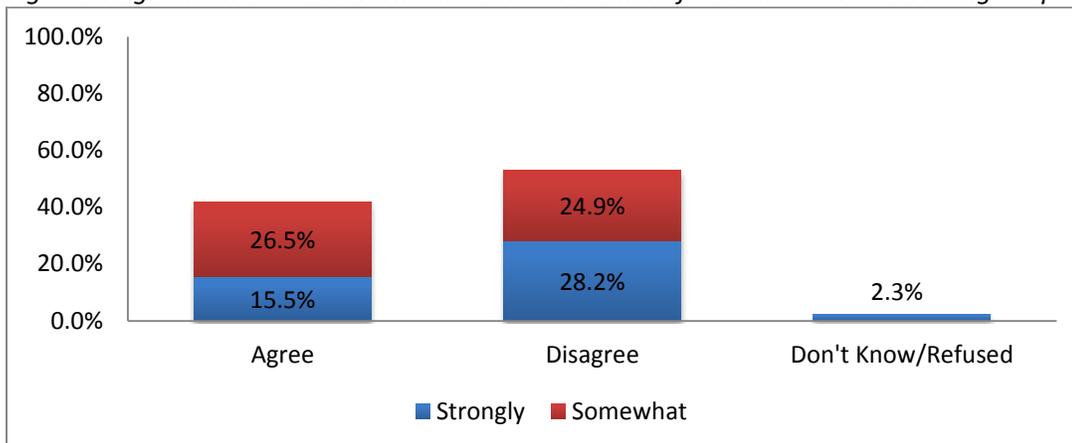
Figure 2: Agreement that “Generations of discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Aboriginals to work their way out of the lower class.” (All of Saskatchewan)



Governments and Aboriginal peoples

Saskatchewan Election Study respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Governments should do more for Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal peoples.” A slim majority (53.1%) disagree that governments should do more for Aboriginal peoples, compared to four in ten (42.0%) who agree with the statement. This finding suggests that residents of Saskatchewan feel the current policies of the government are sufficient in regard to Aboriginals and that significantly more investment is not required. Individuals with a completed university degree (53.1%) are more likely than those with a high school diploma or less (38.5%) and those with some post-secondary education (36.0%) to agree that governments should do more for Aboriginal peoples. Women (44.6%) are more likely than men (39.3%) to agree that governments should do more for Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal peoples. Again, responses do not vary significantly with age.

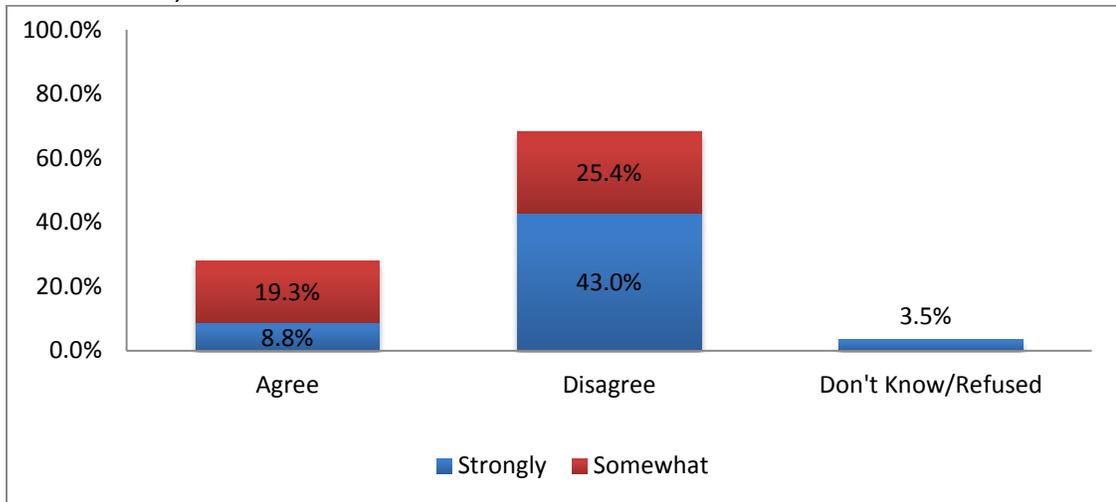
Figure 3: Agreement that “Governments should do more for Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal peoples.” (All of Saskatchewan)



Aboriginal policy issues

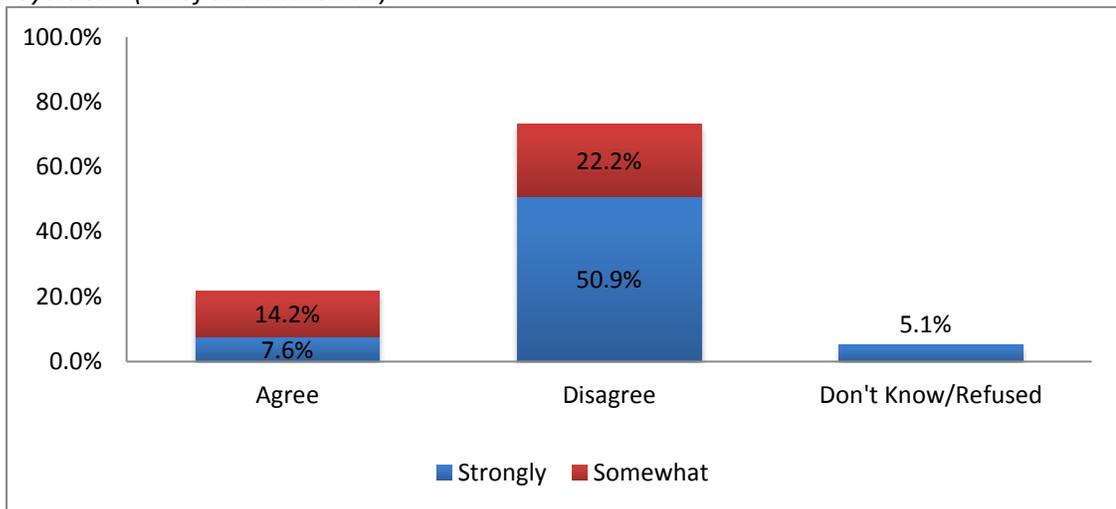
The Saskatchewan Election Team chose to examine two policy issues where the provincial government could be seen as giving its Aboriginal citizens special treatment or special institutions compared to other residents of the province. Due to governance issues at First Nations University of Canada in 2010, Aboriginal post-secondary education is a relatively high profile policy issue in Saskatchewan. To ascertain public attitudes on Aboriginal-specific post-secondary institutions, Saskatchewan Election Study respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Aboriginal peoples should have their own publicly-funded universities and colleges.” Just over one-quarter (28.1%) of respondents agree with the statement, while two-thirds (68.4%) disagree that Aboriginal peoples should have their own publicly-funded post-secondary institutions. Men (31.7%) are somewhat more supportive of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions than are women (25.7%), and individuals with some post-secondary education (21.6%) are less likely to agree with the statement than those with a high school diploma or less (33.4%) and those with a completed university degree (30.9%). Meaningful age cohort variations are not found.

Figure 4: Agreement that “Aboriginal peoples should have their own publicly-funded universities and colleges.” (All of Saskatchewan)



During the 2011 Saskatchewan Election, the New Democratic Party pledged to share natural resource revenues with the province’s First Nations. To assess public attitudes to this proposal, Saskatchewan Election Study respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Aboriginal people should receive their own separate share of Saskatchewan's natural resource royalties.” Public assessment of this proposal was decidedly negative: 73.1% of respondents disagree that Aboriginal people should receive a separate share of the province’s natural resource royalties, with the majority (50.9%) strongly disagreeing. Respondents with some post-secondary education (79.2%) are more likely to oppose this idea than those with a high school diploma or less (59.5%) and those with a completed university degree (69.6%). Men and women do not differ significantly on this issue and responses do not vary meaningfully by age.

Figure 5: Agreement that “Aboriginal people should receive their own separate share of Saskatchewan's natural resource royalties.” (All of Saskatchewan)



Methodology of the Saskatchewan Election Study

The 2011 Saskatchewan Election Study was the first study to use the newly-created survey lab in the Social Sciences Research Laboratories (SSRL) complex at the University of Saskatchewan. Deployed as a telephone survey using WinCATI software, 1,099 Saskatchewan residents, 18 years of age and older, were administered a 15-minute survey on political attitudes and behaviours in the province from November 8, 2011 to November 21, 2011. Results of the survey, which generated a response rate of 23.6%, are generalizable to the Saskatchewan population (18 years of age and older) +/- 2.95% at the 95% confidence interval (19 times out of 20). The Saskatchewan Election Study was funded by the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, with additional support from LEAD Saskatoon, St. Thomas More College and the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan.

Sources

Statistics Canada. 2008. *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census*. Catalogue no. 97-558-XIE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada. 2011. *Population Projections by Aboriginal Identity in Canada, 2006 to 2031*. Catalogue no. 97-552-X. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

¹ Research team members are listed in alphabetical order. The research team would like to thank Kirk Clavelle for his research assistance.

² The educational category ‘some post-secondary education’ includes those with a completed college or trade diploma or degree, or some completed university education, but less than a university degree. The survey included 71 Aboriginal respondents (7.5% of the weighted sample). Given the low number of Aboriginal respondents, responses to the survey questions are not analyzed with respect to Aboriginal status.

³ Both questions were adapted from the 2008 American National Election Study.