



I'm a Christian and...

**acl**

australian christian lobby  
voice for values

... **does not speak for me.**

## Attitudes towards major social issues

We established using the Australian Social Identity 6-Factor model (see page 56) that Australian religionists hold more conservative views on matters of gender equality and sexuality. It is generally accepted that on average, Australian religionists also hold more conservative views across a range of more controversial social issues.

Conservative religious opposition is particularly visible regarding matters that have been the subject of public debate and legislative change in recent years. Clerics often speak in the media against such reforms, but the degree to which they represent the views of their flocks — actual voters — has been generally not well understood.

Here, we examine and explore the *real* views of religionist versus NR Australians about abortion, voluntary assisted dying, marriage equality, smoking marijuana, and global warming.

## Abortion

The proportion of pro-choice Australians supporting access to abortion services was found to be 55% in 1996, 57% in 1996, and 65% in 1998 (Betts 2004). Another poll in 1996 found 30% of Australians in favour of availability on demand, with another 40% in favour of availability in special circumstances (a total of 70% approval), with just 7% opposing it in all circumstances.

Nevertheless, in the early 2000s, some public commentators were suggesting that pro-choice public opinion regarding abortion had begun to wane (Betts 2004).

A fresh poll (AuSSA) in 2003 found 82% of Australians pro-choice, and just 9% opposed. Amongst non-religionists the figures were 93% and 2% respectively; amongst Catholics 72% and 15%; amongst Anglicans, Uniting and Presbyterians (collectively) 86% and 6%; and amongst Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, and Jews (collectively) 81% and 6%. Only amongst Baptists, Lutherans and Pentecostals (collectively) was support more modest though still in the majority (53%), with just over a third (36%) opposed in all circumstances (Betts 2004).

Clearly, the proportion of pro-choice Australians was growing.

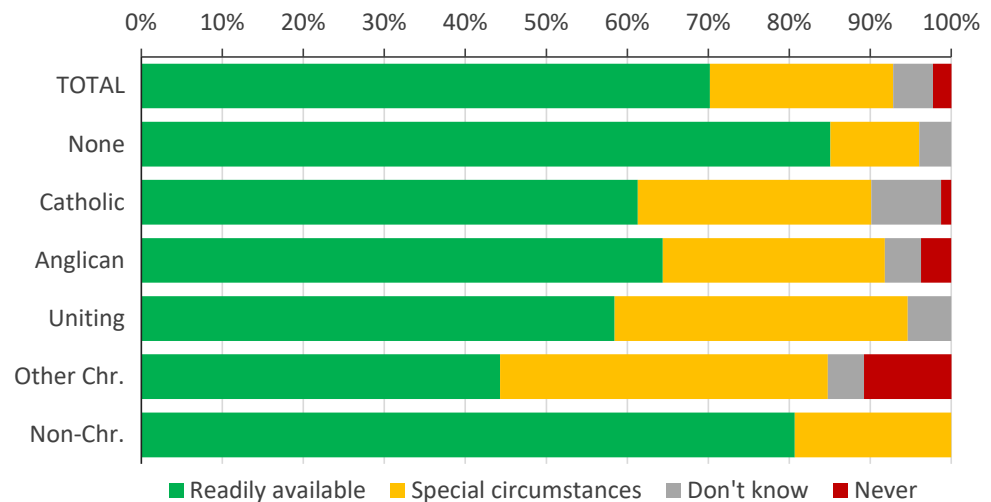
Now again, in 2021, the Catholic church suggests that concern about abortion, at least amongst Catholics, is increasing:

*“Abortion is increasingly becoming an issue of great concern for Catholics.”*  
— (Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne 2021)

However, this seems to be wishful thinking on the part of Catholic bishops, who maintain a vocal and active hostility to freedom of choice for all Australians, Catholic or not.

In 2019, 93% of Australians were pro-choice, including 96% of non-religionists, 90% of Catholics, 92% of Anglicans, 95% of Uniting/Methodists, 85% of minor Christian denominations, and 100% of non-Christian religionists (Figure 84).

Anti-choicers (“Never”) were hardly present, at just 2% overall, 1% of Catholics, 4% of Anglicans, and 11% of minor Christian denominations.

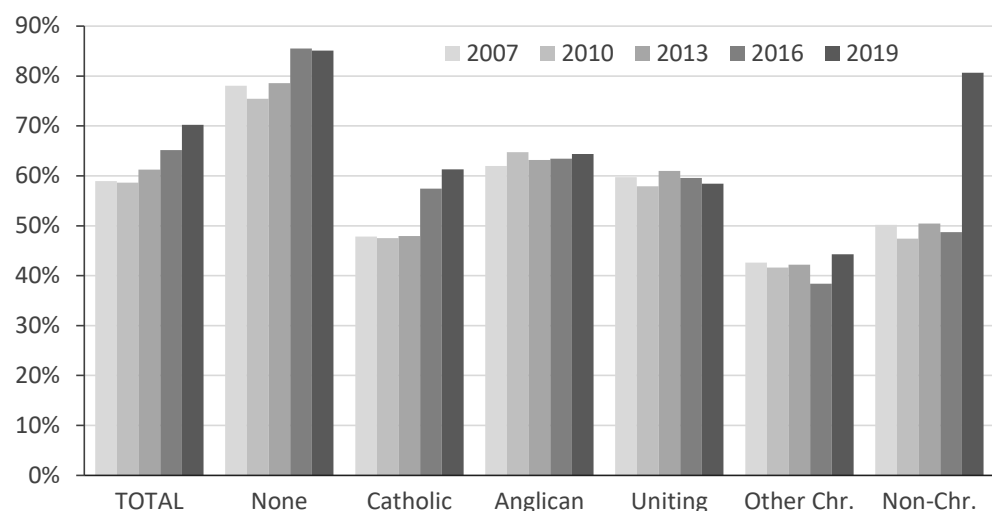


**Figure 84:** Attitudes toward abortion by religion

Source: AES 2019

More than two thirds of Australians support abortion *availability on demand* (70%). That includes a majority of religionists: 61% of Catholics, 64% of Anglicans, 58% of Uniting/Methodists and 81% amongst non-Christian denominations. Only amongst the minor Christian denominations is on-demand support in the minority, but even then nearly half (44%).

Nor is support for abortion choice in decline (Figure 85). Since 2007, the proportion of Australians who say that abortion should be readily available has increased, mostly amongst NRs and Catholics. Therefore, any statement by clerics about a seeming decrease in pro-choice attitudes is misplaced.

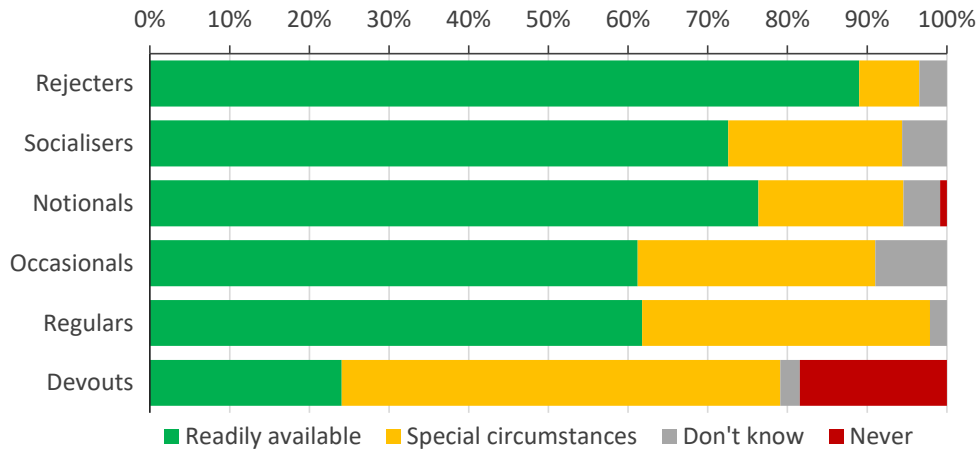


**Figure 85:** Abortion should be readily available, by religion

Source: AES

Unsurprisingly, an anti-choice stance correlates strongly with religiosity (Figure 86). Across the ARI6 spectrum, “readily available” attitudes were in a

considerable majority, from 89% of Rejecters to 62% of Regulars. Only amongst Devouts is “readily available” in the minority. But even amongst this most religious cohort, one in four (24%) were fully pro-choice, and four out of five (79%) supported choice overall.

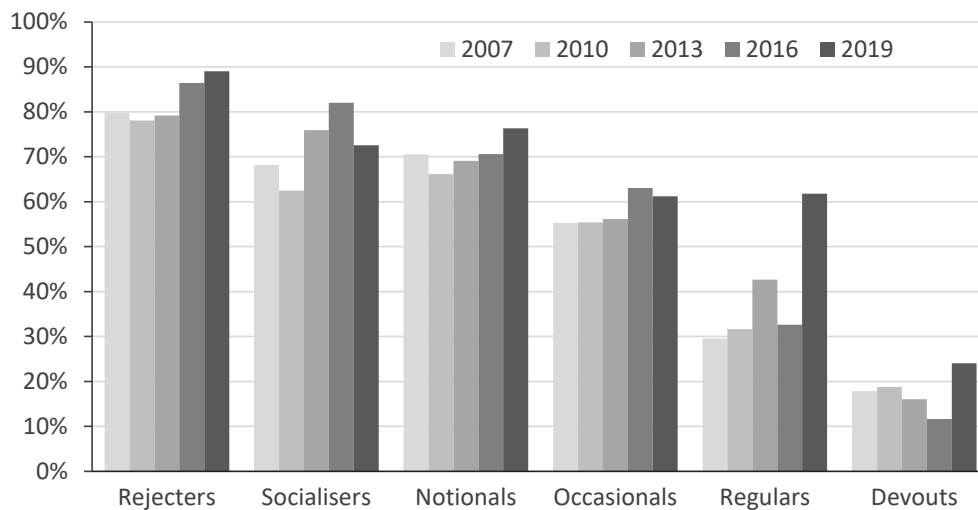


**Figure 86:** Attitudes toward abortion by ARI6

Source: AES 2019

Almost all anti-choicers in 2019 (92%) were Devouts, with the tiny remainder amongst Notionals. Differences by sex are especially pronounced amongst Committeds (Regulars and Devouts), among whom nearly half of females (46%) but only a tiny minority of males (17%) supported readily available abortion.

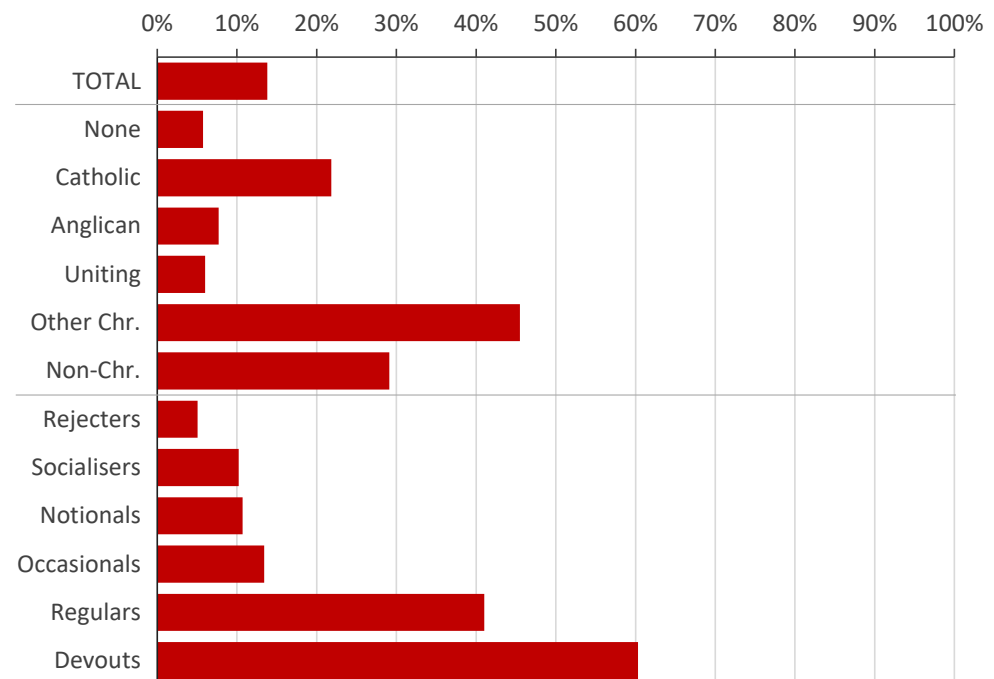
Attitudes towards readily available abortion increased across the religious spectrum between 2007 and 2019 (Figure 87).



**Figure 87:** Support for readily available abortion by ARI6, by year

Source: AES

In the case of abortion because of low household income, only a modest majority of Devouts (60%) said it was always wrong, with a minority of Regulars (41%) and minor Christian denominations (46%) saying likewise (Figure 88). Fewer than one in four Catholics (22%), and even fewer Anglicans (8%), Uniting/Methodists (6%) and NRs (6%) said abortion because of low household income was always wrong.



**Figure 88:** Abortion for reason of low household income is always wrong  
Source: AuSSA 2018

Given the exceptionally high levels of support for abortion choice across Australian society, it's remarkable that abortion technically remained in the criminal code of some Australian jurisdictions until very recently.

Those clerics continuing to actively oppose abortion choice are still speaking in terms of religious "tradition". However, even amongst those remaining in their flocks — for many have left — most don't agree that prohibition of abortion services is a valid part of their religious tradition.

In relation to refusal of abortion services in faith-based, notably Catholic, hospitals, this begs the question as to who the prohibition policy is serving.

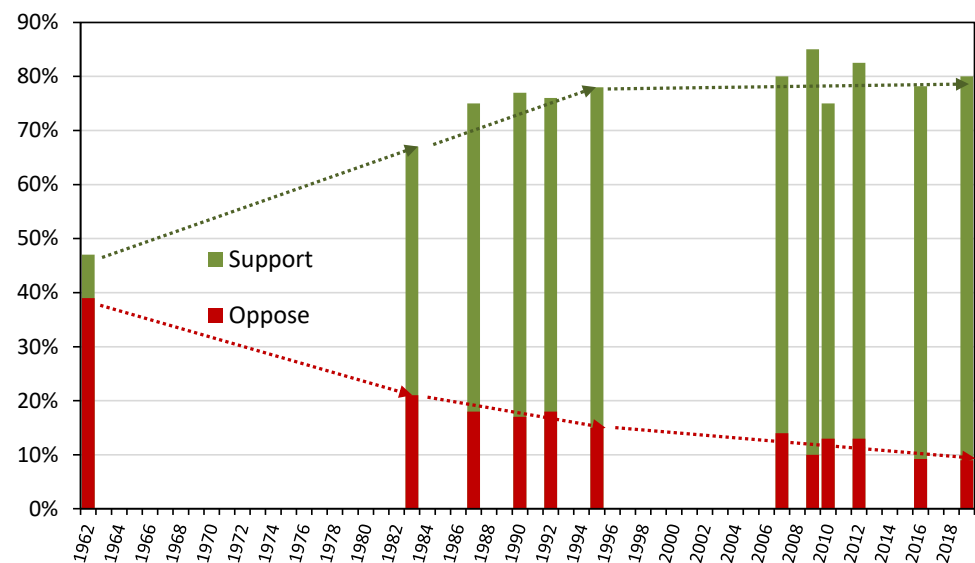
Overall, 93% of Australians, including 90% of Catholics, believe abortion should be available, 70% and 61% "readily on demand". Just 2% of Australians and 1% of Catholics believe it should never be available. Thus, prohibitive abortion policy clearly serves the particular interests of the church's senior hierarchy at the expense of the interests of the Australian — *including* Catholic — public.

**Summary:** Pro-choice attitudes towards abortion have been in the majority for several decades and support is higher than ever. Now, most Australians (93%) are pro-choice, including 70% who believe abortion should be readily available on demand, and majorities across all major religions. Opposing clerics are out of touch with their flocks and represent only a small proportion of Devouts — and their “head office” — on this issue.

## Voluntary Assisted Dying

Lawful Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) allows a person under restricted circumstances such as a terminal illness with intolerable suffering, to peacefully bring about their death with lethal medication. At the time of writing, it had been legalised and implemented in Victoria, and legalised but not yet implemented in Western Australia and Tasmania.

Historical data shows that support for and opposition to VAD had almost reached present levels by the mid-1990s (Figure 89).



**Figure 89:** Attitudes toward VAD since the 1960s

Sources: Roy Morgan, ASRB, Newspoll, AES

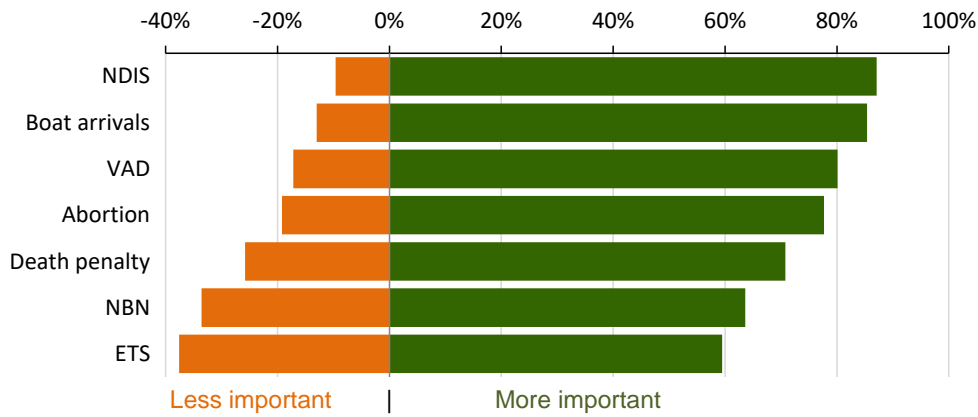
Given that a majority of Australians have approved of VAD with only a small minority opposed since the early 1980s, and most in support by the mid-1990s, it's remarkable that still a majority of Australian states haven't legalised the choice.<sup>j</sup>

It's even more remarkable when considering the results of a 2012 Newspoll<sup>k</sup> which found the personal importance of whether or not VAD (80%, and abortion 78%) were legalised was higher than the personal importance of the now National Broadband Network (NBN 64%), or a carbon emissions trading scheme (ETS 58%) (Figure 90).

<sup>j</sup> Under a prohibition Act of the federal parliament, at present the territories are unable to consider or enact legislation for VAD.

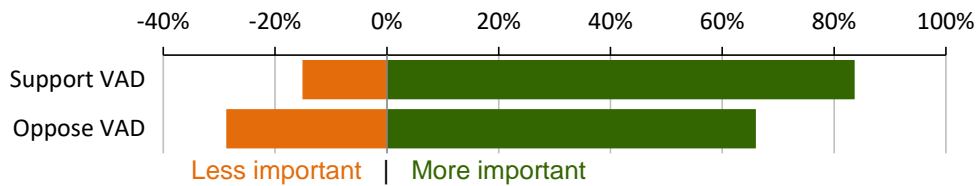
<sup>k</sup> Disclosure: As then CEO of the national alliance of Australian VAD societies, I commissioned Newspoll to conduct the research.





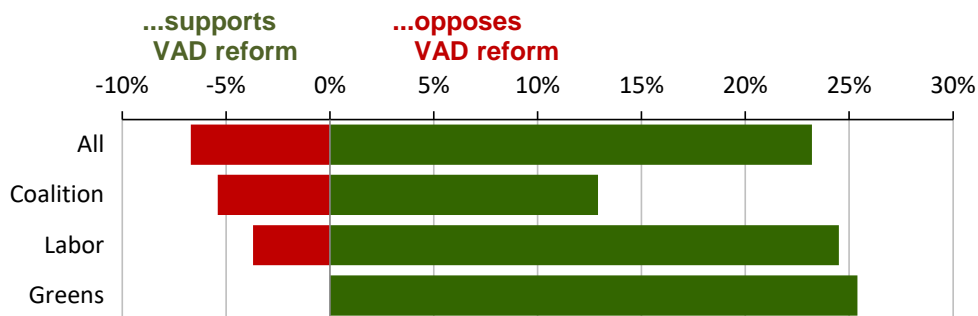
**Figure 90:** Personal importance of whether or not policy is dealt with, 2012  
 Source: Newspoll 2012. Notes: NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme, Boat arrivals in respect of asylum seekers, VAD = voluntary assisted dying, NBN = a national broadband network, ETS = an emissions trading scheme or carbon tax.

Personal importance was significantly higher amongst those who favoured VAD law reform (84%), than amongst those opposed (66%) (Figure 91).



**Figure 91:** Personal importance of VAD by support or opposition, 2012  
 Source: Newspoll 2012

This personal importance was also reflected in voters' intentions to change their election vote should their own usually-preferred electoral candidate hold the opposite VAD position as themselves (Figure 92).



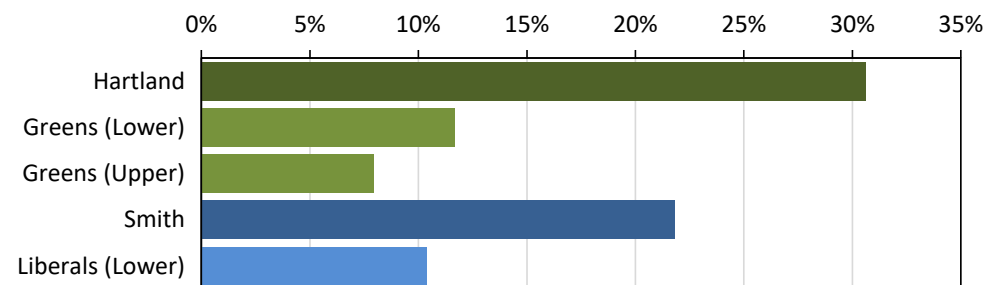
**Figure 92:** Intention to change vote if otherwise preferred candidate ...  
 Source: Newspoll 2012

That is, amongst VAD-supporting voters, 23% said they would change their vote if their usually-preferred candidate opposed VAD, while just 7% of VAD-opposed voters would change if their usual candidate supported VAD. That's a

net ratio of more than 3 to 1 in favour of supportive candidates. The ratio was positive by a factor of more than 6 to 1 amongst Greens voters, more than 4 to 1 amongst Labor voters, and more than 2 to 1 amongst Coalition voters.

This intention seems to be born out in practice. In an unlikely political alliance in 2008, MLC the Hon. Colleen Hartland (Greens) and MLA the Hon. Ken Smith (Liberal), co-sponsored Victoria’s first VAD parliamentary bill. The bill was ultimately defeated. Religious conservatives, especially a Catholic institution in Mr Smith’s electorate, resolved to campaign against the bill’s sponsors at the next election.

However, despite the campaigning — and perhaps because of it — both Ms Hartland and Mr Smith were returned with major increases in their votes at the 2010 election, increases much greater than their parties’ (Figure 93).



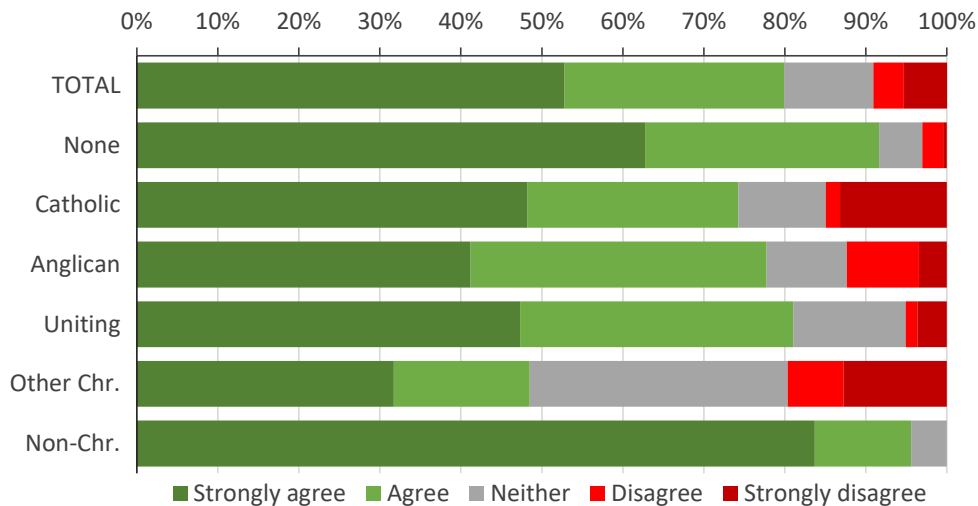
**Figure 93:** Percent increase in MPs’ election votes in 2010 vs 2006  
 Source: Victorian Electoral Commission

In addition, while obviously many factors are at play in elections, after Victoria’s Labor government sponsored a VAD bill which was passed in 2017, and Western Australia’s Labor government did likewise in 2019, both governments were returned with increased majorities at their following elections. Legalising VAD is clearly not the vote-loser that opposing religionists and politicians have assumed.

In 2019, 80% of Australians were in favour of legalised VAD choice, including most Nones (92%) and non-Christian denominations (96%), three quarters (74%) of Catholics, four out of five Anglicans (78%) and Uniting/Methodists (81%), and nearly half of minor Christian denominations (48%) (Figure 94).

Those opposed to VAD were in a small minority, 9% overall, 3% of Nones, 15% of Catholics, 12% of Anglicans, 5% of Uniting/Methodists, and 20% of minor Christian denominations.

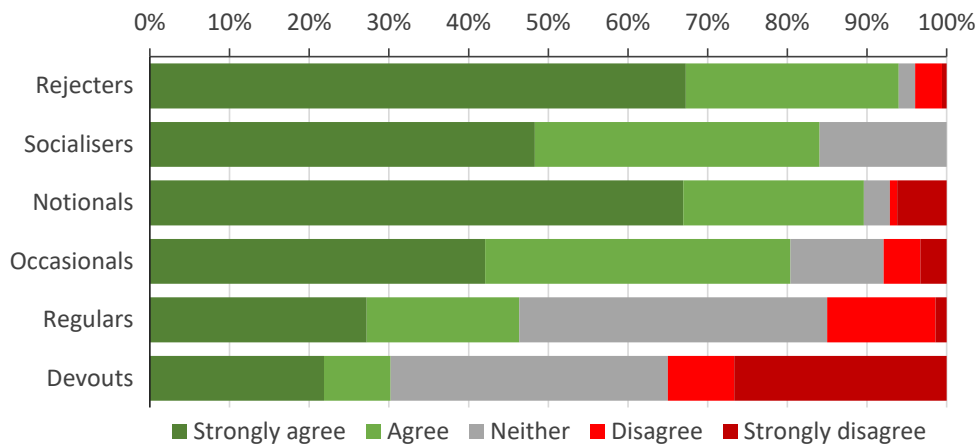
Across all non/religious categories, strong support outweighed strong opposition by a factor of ten to one.



**Figure 94:** Attitudes toward VAD by religion, 2019

Source: AES 2019

As for abortion, attitudes toward VAD correlated strongly with religiosity. Support for lawful VAD is in a considerably majority amongst Rejecters (94%), Socialisers (84%), Notionals (90%) and Occasionals (80%) (Figure 95). Only amongst Committeds is support in the minority: nearly half of Regulars (46%) and nearly a third of Devouts (30%). Only amongst Devouts does opposition outweigh support, even though nearly a third (30%) support law reform.



**Figure 95:** Attitudes toward VAD by ARI6, 2019

Source: AES 2019

Compared with the AES 2016 results, in 2019 there was a net movement towards *strong* support for lawful VAD of 7%, 12% amongst Catholics, 9% of Rejecters, 13% of Notionals, 8% of Regulars and 9% of Devouts. Also significant were decreases of opposition to VAD amongst regulars (-10%) and Devouts (-12%).

Thus, while headline rates of attitudes toward VAD remain somewhat similar from year to year, the underlying strength of support for VAD has increased

and opposition has diminished. That includes amongst Australia’s most religious.

### Case example: Queensland bishops’ misleading claims

At Queensland’s 2020 state election, Labor pledged to bring a VAD bill before the state’s legislature if re-elected. Brisbane Catholic Archbishop Mark Coleridge described this as “rushed”, broadcasting his view in the media, and having his statement read out at masses (Livingstone 2020).

However, nation-wide, public attitudes in favour of VAD law reform have been in the majority since at least the early 1980s (see Figure 89), with many parliamentary attempts to legalise it. Claims that legalisation is “rushed” is merely a rhetorical device — a attempted filibuster.

Since Labor was returned to office in Queensland, the Catholic bishop of Townsville, Tim Harris, who is the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference delegate on VAD, said that with 80,000 Catholics in the Townsville diocese, he was compelled to write to Queensland MPs on their behalf to caution against the reform (Ng 2020).

But analysis of 2019 VoteCompass data based on 6,766 respondents in his own diocese, comprised of 8 state electoral Districts, reveal that 81% of its voters support VAD law reform, including 79% of *his own Catholic constituents*! Just 8% of all diocesan voters, and 11% of diocesan Catholic voters, oppose VAD.

The evidence suggests that Catholic bishops either haven’t listened to their own congregation, or listened only to those who agree with them.

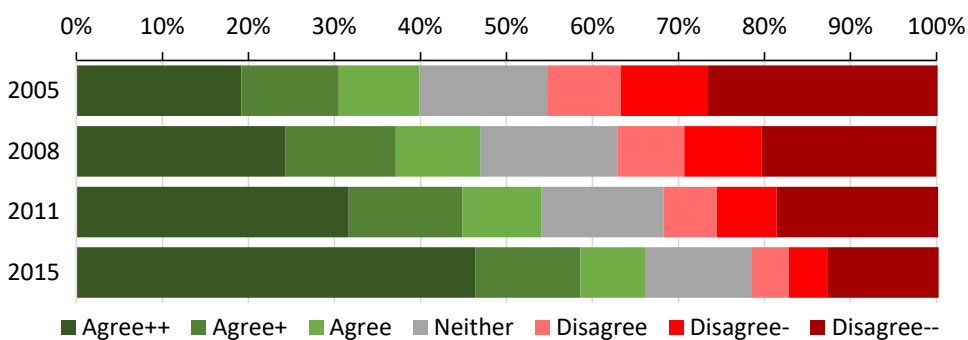
**Summary:** Net support for lawful VAD in Australia has held around 75%–80% since the mid-1990s. Currently, support stands at four in five (80%) and opposition at around one in ten (11%). In just the past three years there have been significant increases in *strong* support and decreases in opposition, including amongst Australia’s most religious: Regulars and Devouts.

<sup>1</sup> Publication of this analysis is pending.

## Marriage equality

State recognition of marriage between LGBTI+ persons, previously only permitted between a male and a female, was legalised by the federal parliament in 2017, after a plebiscite asking all Australians for their opinion on the matter returned a majority (62%) in favour (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017c).

Data from Melbourne University’s longitudinal HILDA study shows how radically public opinion had changed over a decade in regard to the question “*Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples do*” (Figure 96).



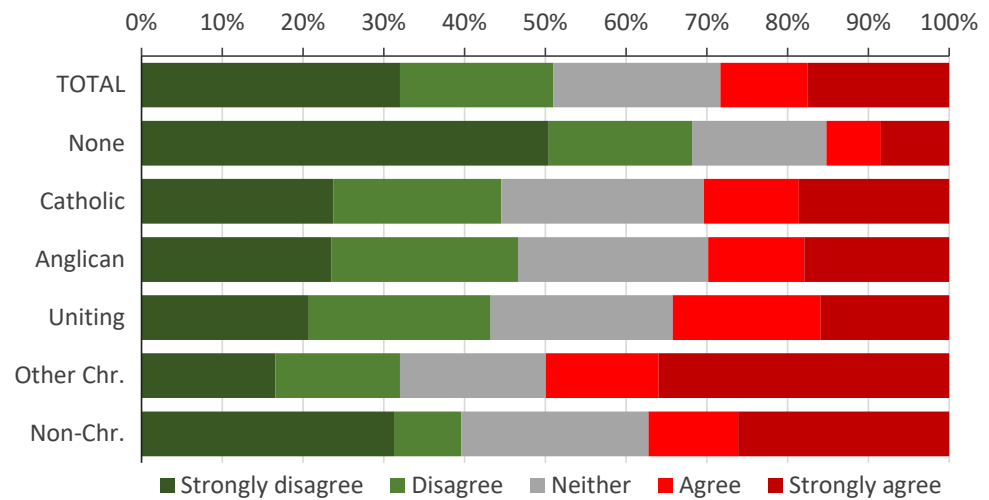
**Figure 96:** Attitudes toward LGBTI+ equal rights by year  
Source: HILDA

While the question posed is not expressly or only about marriage equality, this was the major topic of equality discussion over the period. In just a decade, public opinion changed from 40% in support and 45% opposed in 2005, to 66% in support and 22% opposed in 2015.

Similar results were obtained from the AES 2013 survey, which expressly asked for a response to the normative statement “*Same sex marriages should be prohibited by law*” (Figure 97). Results fell in between those of HILDA 2011 and 2015.

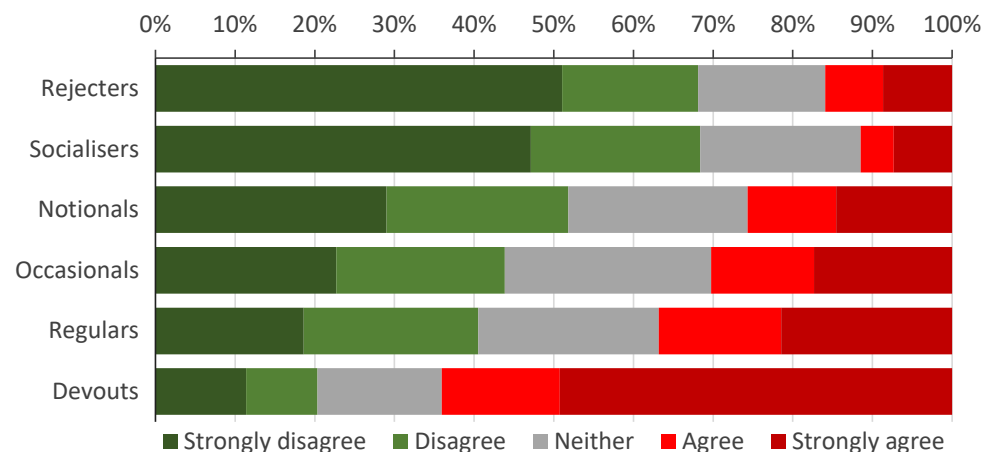
Significantly, even in 2013, more religionists supported marriage equality than opposed it: 45% vs 30% of Catholics, 47% vs 30% of Anglicans, 43% vs 34% of Uniting/Methodists, and 40% vs 37% of non-Christian denominations.

Only amongst minor Christian denominations was opposition to marriage equality greater — 50% vs 32%.



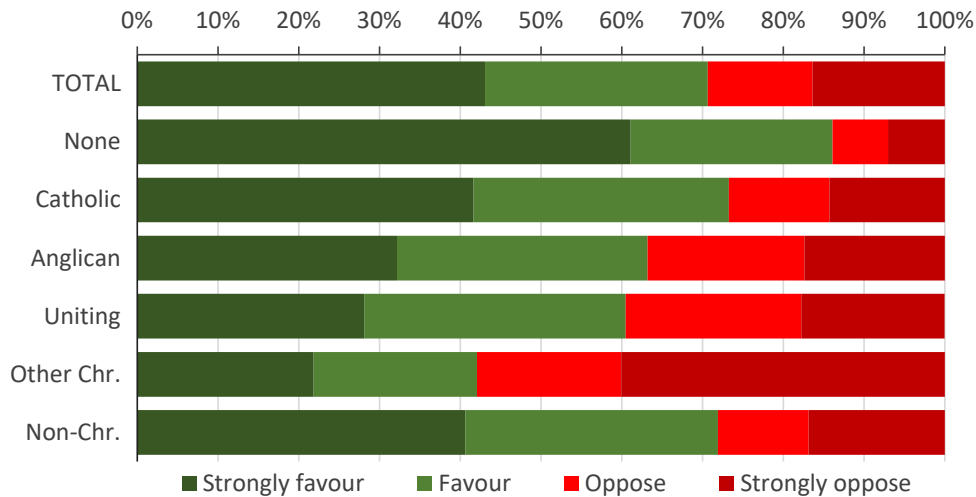
**Figure 97:** “Same sex marriage should be prohibited by law”, by religion 2013  
 Source: AES 2013

By religiosity, opposition to marriage equality was in the majority only amongst Devouts (64%), but even then, one in five Devouts (20%) were expressly in favour of equality (Figure 98).



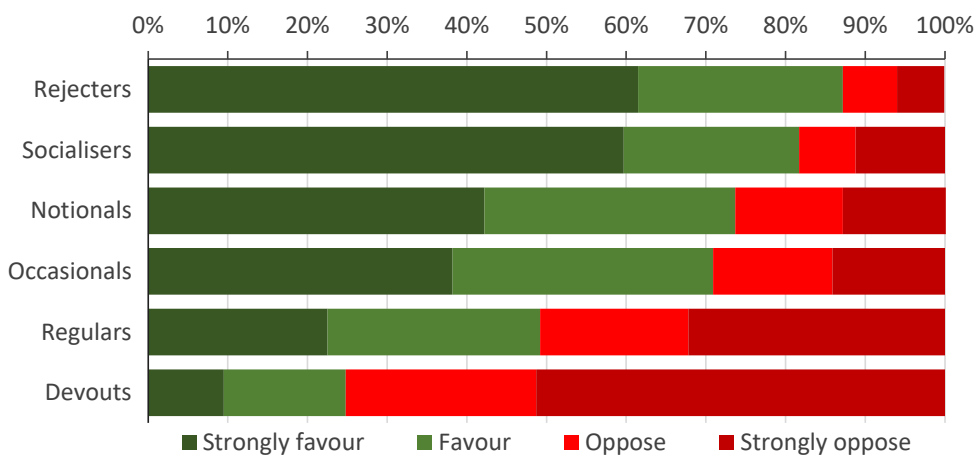
**Figure 98:** “Same sex marriage should be prohibited by law”, by ARI6 2013  
 Source: AES 2013

In 2016, the AES asked a more specific question about same sex couples being given the same rights to marry as heterosexual couples, and without the “Neither agree nor disagree” option so that an opinion had to be expressed. In this context, agreement was at 71% overall, including 86% of NRs, 73% of Catholics, 63% of Anglicans, 61% of Uniting/Methodists, and 72% of non-Christian denominations (Figure 99). Only amongst minor Christian denominations was support in the minority (42%).



**Figure 99:** Equal marriage rights for same sex couples, by religion 2016  
Source: AES 2016

In terms of religiosity, most Rejecters (87%), Socialisers (82%), Notionals (74%) and Occasionals (71%) favoured marriage equality (Figure 100). Only amongst Committeds was support in the minority: 49% amongst Regulars, and 25% amongst Devouts. That is, even amongst Australia’s most religious, a quarter to a half favoured marriage equality.



**Figure 100:** Equal marriage rights for same sex couples, by ARI6 2016  
Source: AES 2016

A 2014 survey commissioned by *Australian Marriage Equality* and conducted by the Liberal’s polling firm, Crosby Textor, identified the most common reasons for opposition to marriage equality. It found that among the top ten reasons, a loss of religious freedoms was last, mentioned by just 16% of respondents (Cox 2014) (Table 2).

Significantly, nearly a quarter (23%) said that marriage was a religious institution, and no changes should be made to it against the wishes of religious groups. This exposes a presumptive privilege about religious groups, because

marriage is *not* a religious institution in Australian law. Indeed, by 2018, four out of five marriages (80%) were conducted by civil celebrants rather than ministers of religion (Statista 2021).

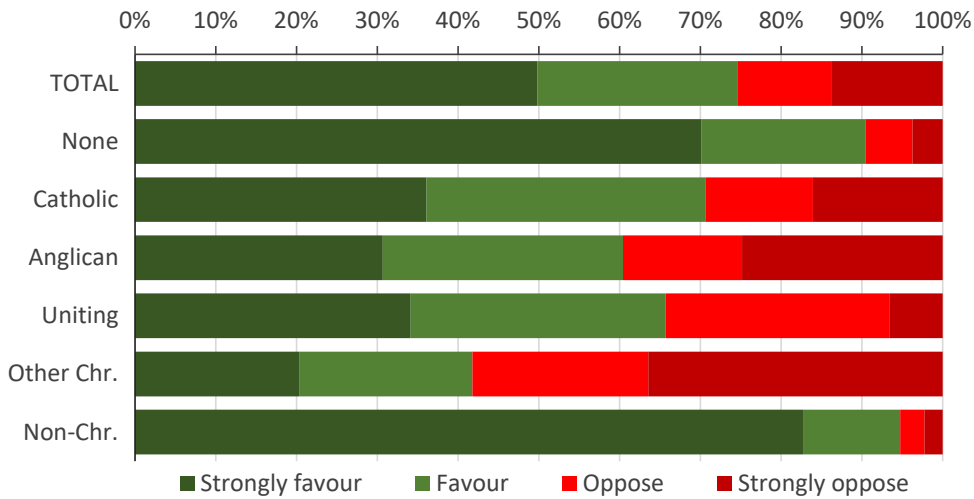
**Table 2:** Possible reasons for opposition to marriage equality

People who choose to be gay know that their choice means they cannot get married	30%
It is fine for same-sex couples to have a ceremony, but it should not be called “marriage”	30%
The recognition of de facto relationships and civil unions is enough; we don’t need same-sex marriage too	29%
Children need both a mother and a father, and legalising same-sex marriage could break that down	29%
The institution is already under threat and should not be further undermined by this	24%
Marriage is only meant to be between a man and a woman, so this is wrong and should not be encouraged	24%
Marriage is a religious institution and no changes should be made to it against the wishes of religious groups	23%
Same-sex marriages could devalue traditional marriages	22%
Allowing same-sex marriage is a slippery slope and could lead to issues like polygamy	17%
Allowing same-sex marriage will lead to some people losing their religious freedoms	16%

Source: Crosby Textor 2014. Note: Percentages are of all respondents, multi-response.

By 2019, overall support for marriage equality had increased from 71% to 75%, and amongst those with no religious affiliation from 85% to 91% (Figure 101). Very small increases of opposition amongst religious denominations were marginally statistically significant and are likely associated with the significant drop in religious affiliation (down net 6% over three years), with those most likely to have left not supporting their religious institution’s stances against social reforms.

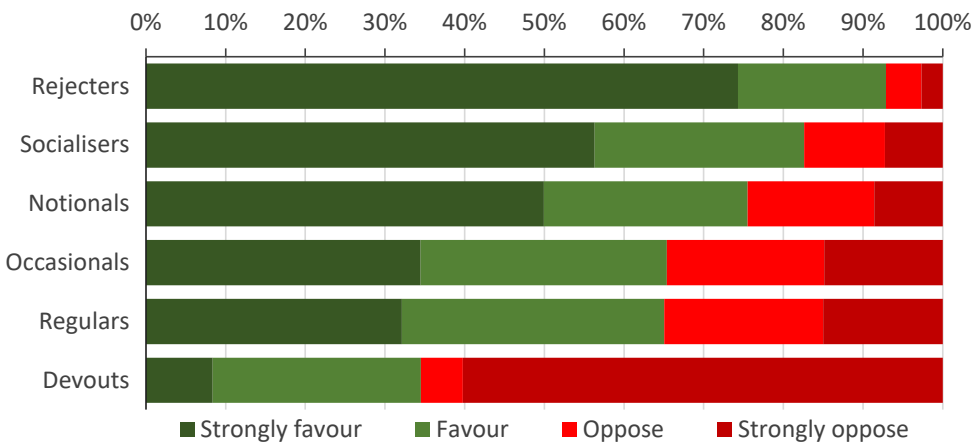




**Figure 101:** Equal rights for same sex couples by religion, 2019

Source: AES 2019

For religiosity, the most significant results are changes in opposition to marriage equality amongst Australia’s Committeds (Figure 102).



**Figure 102:** Equal rights for same sex couples by ARI6, 2019

Source: AES 2019

Amongst Regulars, opposition was down 16%, with support up from just under half (49%) to two thirds (65%) over the three years. Amongst Devouts, opposition was down 10%, with support up from a quarter (25%) to more than a third (35%).

This indicates that even amongst Australia’s most religious, opposition to marriage equality may continue to decline.

With more than a third of Devouts (35%) and two thirds of Regulars (65%) supporting marriage equality, the question arises as to *whose* “religious tradition” is being given priority in Australia’s debate to entrench the right to discriminate against LGBTI+ people, including married ones.

Indeed, senior faith leaders from around the world are increasing their support for the LGBTI+ community. Last year, a global community of them called for decriminalisation of LGBT+ people, and a ban on conversion practices (Sherwood 2020).

**Summary:** Three quarters of Australians (75%) are in favour of marriage equality, including most non-religionists (90%) and majorities amongst most religious denominations: 71% of Catholics, 60% of Anglicans, 66% of Uniting/Methodists and 95% of non-Christian denominations.

Between 2016 and 2019, since marriage equality was legalised (in 2017), the most significant shift in attitudes has been a growth in support amongst Committeds: from just under half (49%) to two thirds (65%) of Regulars, and from a quarter (25%) to more than a third (35%) of Devouts. This suggests that public approval of marriage equality is likely to continue to increase. It also raises the question of *whose* “religious tradition” is being served by moves to further legally protect religious discrimination against LGBTI+ Australians.

## Casting out homosexuals

Ahead of the national marriage equality plebiscite in 2017 and in order to address conservative anxieties, the federal government established a national “religious freedom” inquiry and appointed former Coalition minister Philip Ruddock as its Chair.

The inquiry’s final report expressly encouraged the federal government to proceed with legislation that would, amongst other things, protect the right of religious schools to discriminate against its employees and contractors (Recommendation 6) and its students (Recommendation 8) on the basis of sexual orientation or relationship status (Ruddock 2018).

After significant backlash (Hilkemeijer 2018), the government said that it would not permit religious schools to discriminate against gay students — but remained silent in regard to employees and contractors (Elton-Pym 2018).

While the Australian Association of Christian Schools says no school has the desire to expel students because of their sexual orientation (Crowe 2018), it didn’t say what approach its members *would* take when faced with such circumstances. Yet it continues to argue that schools should retain the ability to hire and fire teachers based on their beliefs and adherence to doctrine (Karp 2018a).

Similarly, the Catholic church has issued an ultimatum to its 180,000 employees that “total” obedience to church doctrine was expected, and that transgressors could be sacked (Koziol 2017).

However, Peter MacLeod-Miller, Anglican Archdeacon of Albury, asks a pertinent question (Crowe 2018):

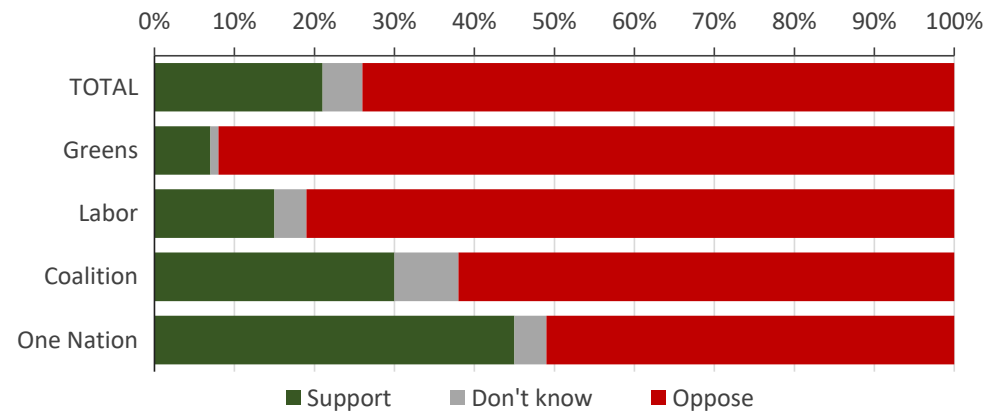
*“If discrimination is bad for children, at what age does it become good for adults?”* — Peter MacLeod-Miller, Anglican Archdeacon of Albury

So far, religious schools have failed to provide an answer.

The parliamentary bill that is intended to enact revisions to religious freedom laws is currently stalled. Political appetite is likely to have been dampened by at least two polls showing very strong national opposition to allowing religious schools to discriminate against LGBTI+ staff and students.

A 2018 Fairfax/Ipsos poll asked Australians if they supported or opposed laws to allow religious schools to select teachers and students based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status (Elgood 2018). It found

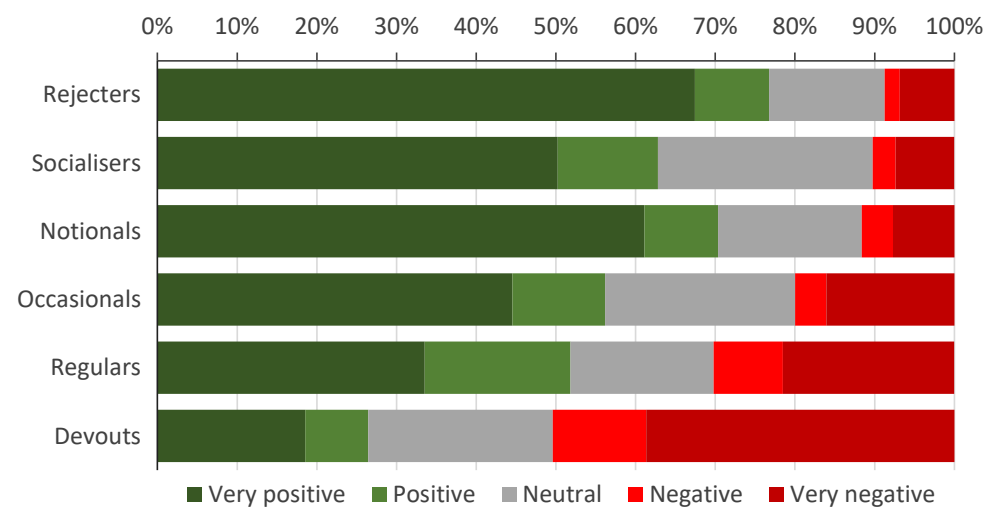
three out of four Australians (74%) opposed, with just one in five (21%) in support (Figure 103). Opposition to permitting discrimination was in the minority across the political spectrum, though close to parity amongst One Nation voters.



**Figure 103:** Attitudes toward religious school discrimination against LGBTI+ Source: Fairfax/Ipsos 2018

A separate study by YouGov/Galaxy in 2018 returned similar results. It found 82% of Australians were opposed to existing discrimination law exemptions that allow expulsion of gay and lesbian students, and 79% opposed to religious school ability to fire teachers if they marry a person of the same sex (Karp 2018b).

Unsurprisingly, negative attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality — as one of a number of dimensions in the discrimination debate — correlate with religiosity (Figure 104). Only amongst Devouts (11% of the population in 2019) do negative attitudes reach half (50%).



**Figure 104:** Attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality Source: AVS 2018

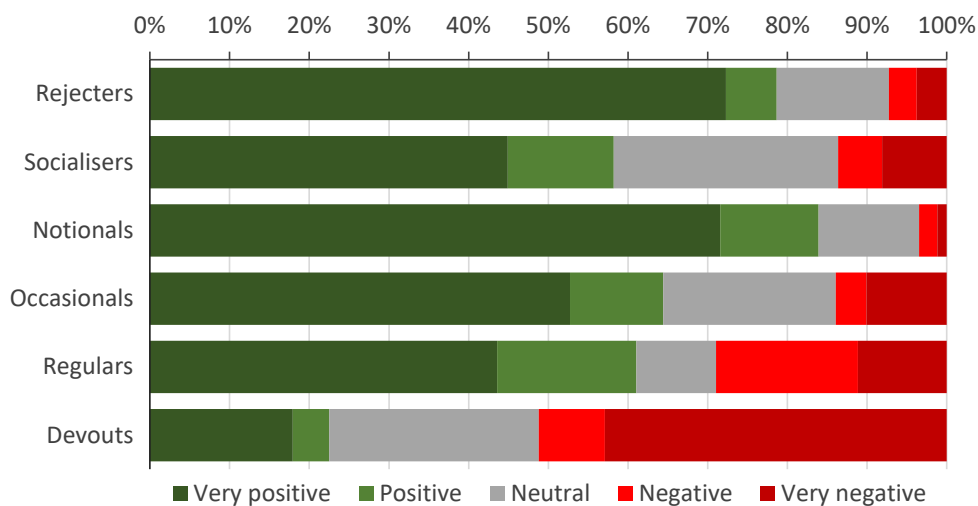
And yet, even amongst this most opposed group — Devouts — more than a quarter (27%) hold positive attitudes towards the morality of homosexuality. Thus, even amongst Australia’s most religious, opinions are divided and some believe homosexuality to be moral.

Even amongst Australia’s most religious — Devouts — opinions are divided. Half (50%) hold negative attitudes towards the morality of homosexuality, while more than a quarter (27%) hold positive attitudes.

### Risks for clerics and school boards

Clerics and religious school boards might think, on the basis of these polls, that their own constituencies exclusively or at least mostly hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality, and those with positive attitudes would send their children to public schools. For example, Sydney’s Catholic Archbishop, Anthony Fisher, says Christian parents expect “Christian values” to be taught at religious schools (Bolt 2019). By “Christian values” he would be referring rhetorically to Vatican doctrine rather than the views of the majority of real Australian Christians.

By religiosity, most parents of Australia’s school children<sup>m</sup> think homosexuality moral (Figure 105).

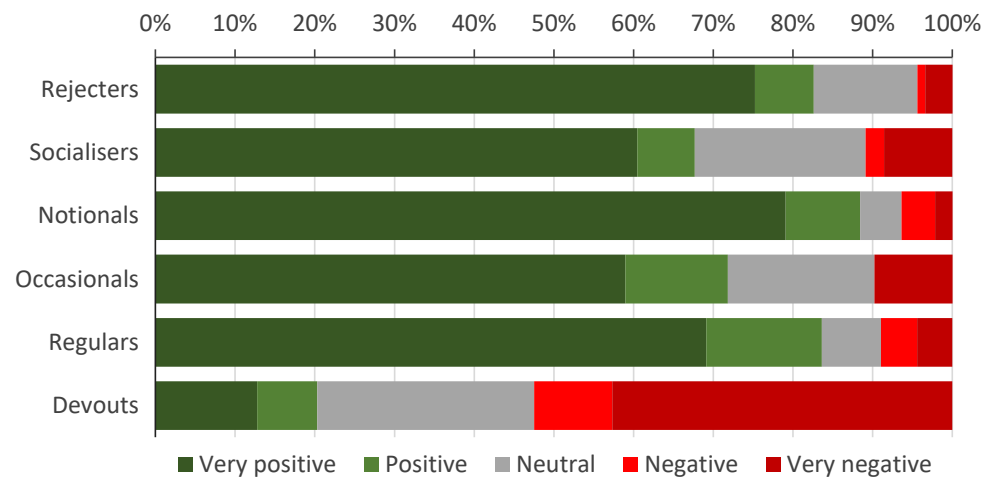


**Figure 105:** Schoolchild parent attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality  
Source: AVS 2018

<sup>m</sup> In the study data, adults 25-54 with at least one child (person under 18) in the household.

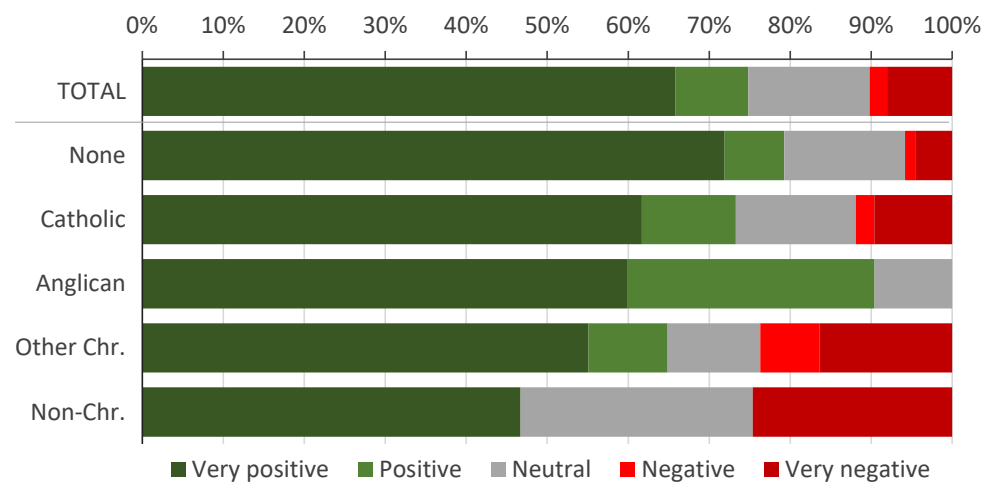
Except amongst Devouts, significant majorities of religionists — 84% of Notionals, 64% of Occasionals and 61% of Regulars — think homosexuality moral, with small minorities (3%, 14% and 29% respectively) opposed.

Of considerable importance to school boards and admissions teams, mothers are generally far more involved in school selection than are fathers (Schwarer 2016), including the selection of Catholic schools (Warren 2015). Except amongst Devouts, mothers hold significantly more positive attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality, with very small minorities holding negative attitudes (Figure 106).



**Figure 106:** Schoolchild *mother* attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality  
Source: AVS 2018

Amongst schoolchild mothers, 88% of Notionals, 72% of Occasionals and 84% of Regulars think homosexuality moral, with just 6%, 10% and 9% (respectively) opposed.



**Figure 107:** Schoolchild *mother* attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality  
Source: AVS 2018

This pattern is reflected across the religious denominations (Figure 107). Amongst religious mothers, favourable attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality outweigh unfavourable attitudes from roughly two to one, to more than six to one.

Devouts comprise 11% of the general adult population, but they comprise only 9% of the schoolchild parent population, and 7% of the schoolchild mother population (AVS 2018). While just 9% of schoolchild parents are Devouts, some 19.4% of Australia's school students attend Catholic schools and a further 15% attend independent (mostly religious/Christian) schools, a total of more than one third (34.4%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020).

This means that even if all the children of Devouts households (9%) attend religious schools (34.4%), nearly three quarters of all religious school students are *not* from Devouts households; rather from households with considerably more favourable attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality.

This indicates a significant risk for schools — including Catholic — that may want to discriminate against LGBTI+ staff, contractors or students: the potential loss of significant numbers of enrolments from less doctrinal households who hold positive attitudes toward the morality of homosexuality, and who disapprove of such discrimination.

**Summary:** A significant majority (74%–82%) of Australians are opposed to religious schools having the legal right to discriminate against staff and students on the basis of sexual orientation or relationship status.

Clerics and religious school boards would be unwise to pursue rights to sack or expel LGBTI+ staff or students. Mothers of Australian school children are far more involved in school selection than are fathers, and negative attitudes towards the morality of homosexuality are held only by a slight majority (52%) by Devouts mothers, with one in five (20%) holding positive attitudes. Negative attitudes are held by only in a tiny minority (10% or less) of Notionals, Occasionals and Regulars mothers, who represent nearly three quarters of religious school student families. Amongst this group, *strong* support for the morality of homosexuality is in a clear majority (59%–79%).

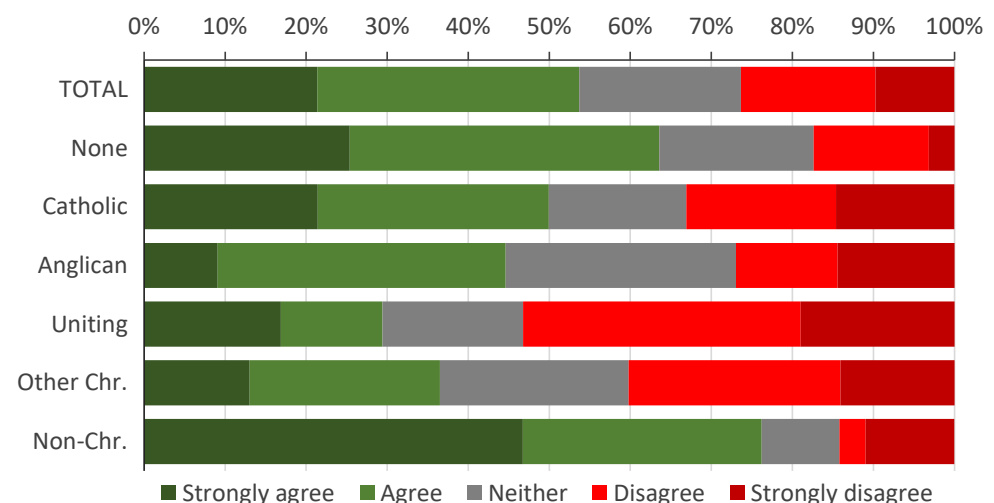
## Smoking marijuana

Most Australians (87%) support the legal use of marijuana for medical purposes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020), and it was legalised by the federal parliament, with a strict licensing scheme, in 2016.

Legalisation of the non-medical smoking of marijuana is more controversial. Possession and personal use of small amounts has been legalised in only the ACT, a reform that several federal ministers have slammed as “crazy”, “unconscionable” and “trendy” (ABC 2020).<sup>11</sup>

In 2019, a majority of Australians (54%) agreed with decriminalisation (Figure 108), split between nearly two thirds of NRs (64%) but slightly less than half of all religionists (47%). Overall, nett agreement (agree – disagree) was in the affirmative at +27%.

Those most likely to approve were non-Christian religionists (76%) and NRs (64%), with minor Christian denominations (including Uniting/Methodist) the least supportive (37% and 29% respectively).



**Figure 108:** Smoking marijuana should be legalised, by religion

Source: AES 2019

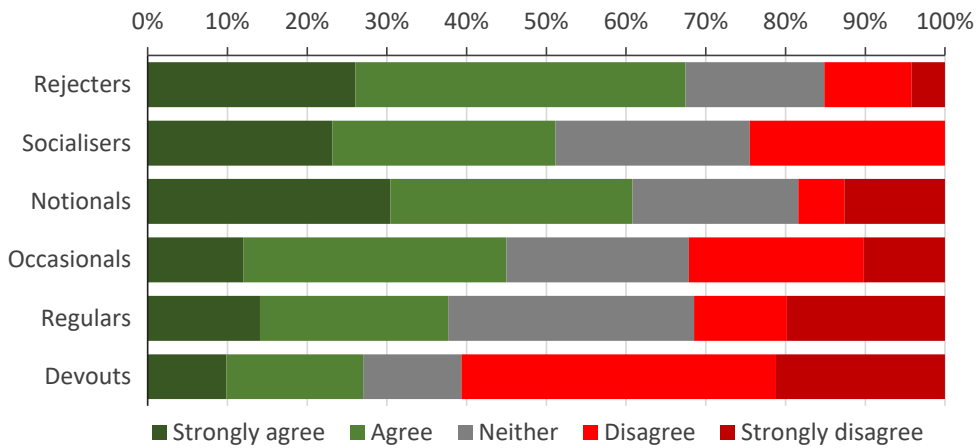
Only amongst Uniting/Methodists was opposition in the majority (53%).

Nett agreement (over disagreement) was positive amongst NRs (46%), Catholics (17%), Anglicans (18%) and non-Christian denominations (36%), but in the minority amongst Uniting/Methodists (-24%) and minor Christian denominations (-4%).

<sup>11</sup> Possession of marijuana for personal use has also been decriminalised (not legalised) in South Australia and the Northern Territory for nearly 30 years (Lee & Bartle 2021).



By religiosity (ARI6), nett agreement was in the majority amongst most: Rejecters (52%), Socialisers (27%), Notionals (42%), Occasionals (13%) and Regulars (6%) (Figure 109).



**Figure 109:** Smoking marijuana should be legalised, by ARI6

Source: AES 2019

Only amongst Devouts was nett opposition greater (-34%), and only amongst Regulars and Devouts did *strong* opposition outweigh *strong* support (-6% and -11% respectively).

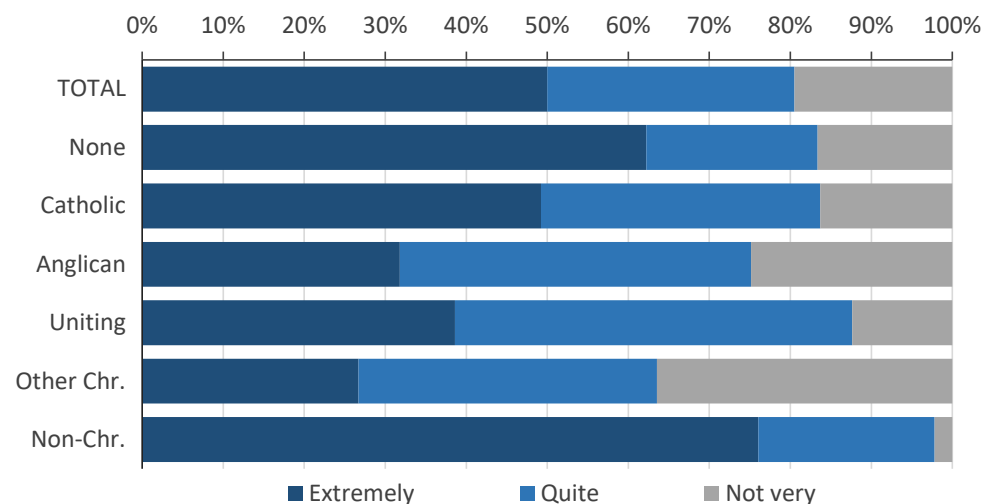
Overall, these results regarding the decriminalisation of smoking marijuana are somewhat more favourable than those from the National Drug Strategy Household survey (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020), which found, using a different methodology, 41% of Australians in favour of legalisation of marijuana for personal use.

**Summary:** A majority (54%) of Australian public support the legalisation of smoking marijuana (outside medical use). Rejecters (68%), Notionals (61%) and non-Christian denominations (76%) were far more likely to approve, while Devouts were least likely (27%). Devouts were also the only religiosity segment with a nett negative approval (-34%), compared with +6% to +52% for all others.

## Global warming

The proportion of peer-reviewed scholarly articles on the anthropogenic nature of global warming through most of 2019 was essentially 100%, up from 84% in 2009 and 97% in 2016 (Powell 2019).<sup>o</sup> That is, there is no significant doubt amongst climate specialists that the planet is warming, and a significant contributing factor is human activity. While there may be minor differences regarding the results of different change models, the time for arguing “the science isn’t settled” as a basis for inaction, is past.

At the 2019 federal election, four out of five voters (81%) said that global warming policy was extremely or very important in deciding how to vote, ranging from almost all non-Christian denominations (98%) and most NRs (83%) and Catholics (84%), to nearly two thirds (64%) of minor Christian denominations (Figure 110).



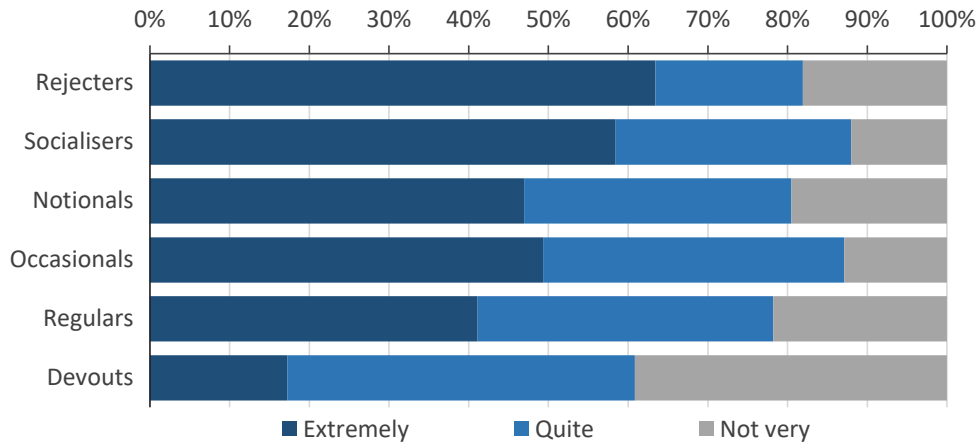
**Figure 110:** Importance of global warming policy to 2019 vote, by religion  
Source AES 2019

While three quarters of non-Christian denominations (76%), nearly two thirds of NRs (62%), and nearly half of Catholics (49%) also said global warming policy was *extremely* important to their vote, only smaller minorities of Uniting/Methodists (39%), Anglicans (32%) and minor Christian denominations (27%) said likewise.

By ARI6 religiosity, attitudes toward global warming’s importance correlated negatively (Figure 111). While nearly two thirds (63%) of Rejecters and well over half (58%) of Socialisers said global warming policy was *extremely*

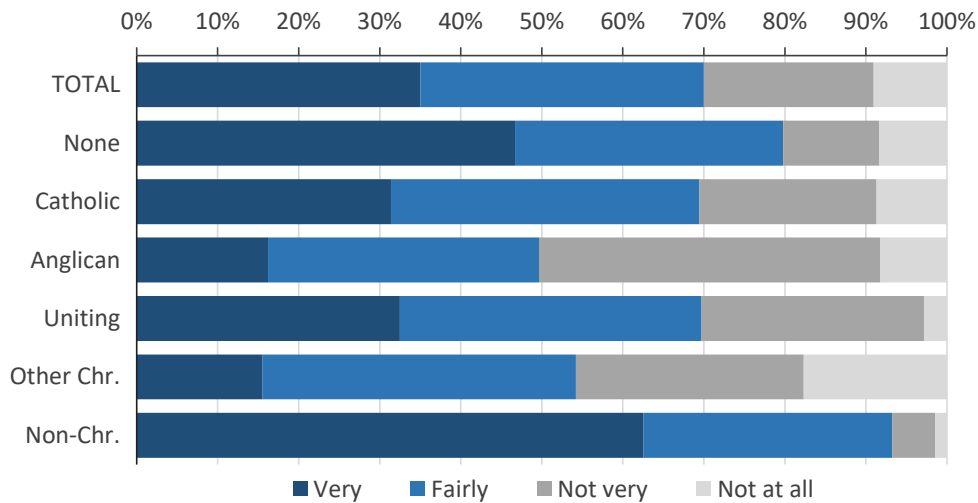
<sup>o</sup> The terminology used here is “global warming” because this was the term used in the AES 2019 study. The related issue “climate change” refers to increasing changes in average climate patterns over time, such as temperature, wind velocity, cloud cover and precipitation, and consequences such as sea level change and frequency of natural disasters.

important to their vote, only around half of Notionals (47%) and Occasionals (49%) said so. Amongst Committeds, 41% of Regulars agreed, and just 17% of Devouts agreed.



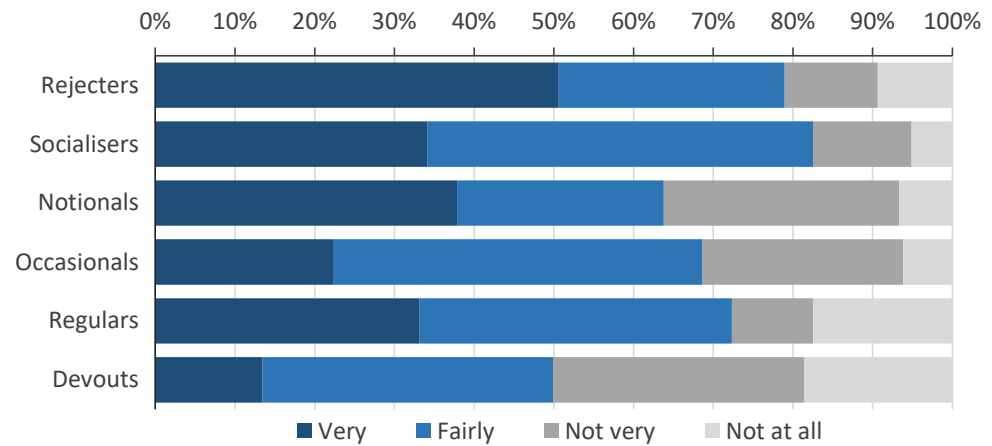
**Figure 111:** Importance of global warming policy to 2019 vote, by ARI6  
Source AES 2019

The importance of global warming policy was, unsurprisingly, largely (though not exclusively) based on attitudes to how serious global warming would be to the respondent's way of life (Figures 112 & 113).



**Figure 112:** Seriousness of global warming to your own way of life, by religion  
Source: AES 2019

Overall, the proportion of those who said global warming policy was *extremely* important to informing their vote, was mathematically equivalent to the proportion of respondents who said global warming was *very* serious to their way of life plus 65% of those who said *fairly* serious.



**Figure 113:** Seriousness of global warming to your own way of life, by ARI6  
Source: AES 2019

While a majority of Rejecters (56%) and Socialisers (61%) thought themselves closer to Labor on global warming policy, fewer religionists did, with just a third of Notionals and Occasionals (34% each) and a large minority of Regulars (41%) saying likewise. Amongst Australia's most religious, Devouts, just one in six (17%) felt closest to Labor on global warming policy, compared with 39% favouring the Coalition — the only segment to favour the conservatives.

While more Devouts (11% of Australia's population) than any other segment don't support action on climate change, religious institutions have been busy helping their flocks understand the importance of action. For example, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference vocally supports stronger policies (Catholic Australia 2021), as does the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (2021), an alliance of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and other denominations.

**Summary:** Four out of five Australians (81%) say that global warming policy is extremely or very important to informing their federal election vote. Importance correlated strongly and negatively with religiosity, with Devouts being the only segment to net favour the Coalition's global warming policies over Labor's. This correlates with Devouts' much more sceptical views as to how serious global warming is to their own way of life. Many religious institutions urge stronger action on climate change.