



Collective factors

“Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls.”
 — Hebrews 13:17 KJV

Considerations of religion change dramatically when we move from a personal to a collective perspective. Relevant factors change from the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals, to the nature of relationships, roles, rituals, transmission of religion, access to resources, and power, just to name a few.

Nature versus nurture (again)

Back to the nature versus nurture argument, personal religion and collective religion interact. A cohort of religious individuals comprises and gives existence to a religion, which is collective by definition. Cultures, religious or not, can also greatly influence personal religion.

The nature of cultural religiosity can be greatly influenced by the relationship between religion and state. According to the Pew Research Centre (2017), some 22% of 199 countries have an official state religion and another 20%

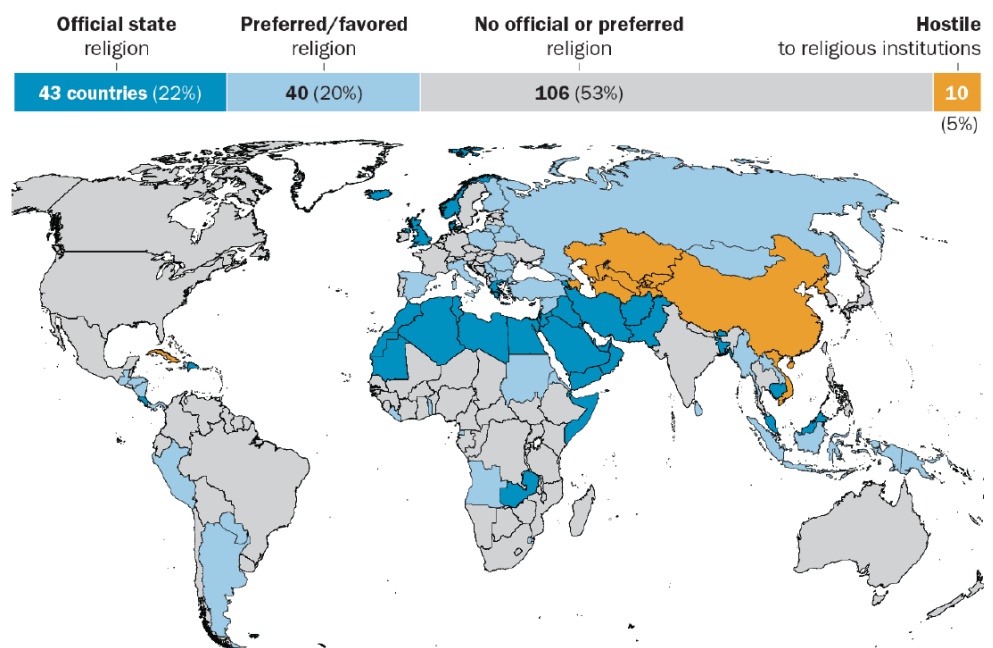


Figure 7: State relationships with religion
 Source: Pew Research Center (2017), p 4

officially favour a particular religion, making more than four in ten officially preferencing a religion — most commonly Islam and Christianity (Figure 7). Just over half (53%) of countries have no official or preferred religion, though unofficially religions are favoured in many of these, for example Christianity in North America and Hinduism in India. Just 5% of countries are officially hostile to religious institutions, including China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba and several central Asian countries.

"Despite secular trends in some countries, prestige-based authority in the form of religious leadership remains hugely influential in the everyday lives of millions of people around the world."
— Soler (2016).

Country dispositions towards religion greatly affect the extent and nature of religious resources, authority, transmission and expression. The stronger the relationship between state and religion or the more homogeneous is the state's religion, the stronger the ethnic identity (Schnabel & Hjerm 2014). Cultural religiosity has consequences for all citizens through influences acting via both religious and direct (non-religious) paths (Gebauer & Sedikides 2021).

Summary: At the collective level as at the individual level, there are complex bidirectional interactions of nature and nurture. Some important effects are influenced by a state's official (and unofficial) relationship with religion in general, or with a specific religion.

Costly signalling and cooperation

A major theme in the explanation of the prevalence of religion is its association with prosocial behaviour, specifically cooperation. It is argued to do so through “costly signalling” (Murray & Moore 2009). These are hard-to-fake displays and altruistic conduct that indicate honesty and other desirable personal traits along with access to resources that facilitate them (McAndrew 2018). Such displays are intended to be beyond the capacity (or net benefit) of fakes, frauds and freeloaders. Thus, they are also known as credibility-enhancing displays.

The displays indicate both *predictability* of intent and its positive valence: agreeableness (warm, kind, sympathetic, considerate, cooperative) and a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good. They therefore are likely to engender trust and the likelihood of reciprocal behaviour for mutual benefit.

An important feature of these costly displays is that they can function across networks: that is, costly displays of one religion can increase trust amongst people of other religions and none (Hall et al. 2015). This can convey a major benefit for societal growth, since one no longer has to rely on a small group of personally known potential cooperants. The reach of costly signalling’s effect depends on the specific prosocial and cooperative norms in which a religion is situated (Willard et al. 2020). For example, ancestry beliefs are associated with greater prosocial behaviour at the family and local level, while god belief is associated with more global prosocial behaviour.

The association between credibility-enhancing displays and increased belief in supernatural agents is bidirectional — that is, cultural specifics and religious beliefs are likely to reinforce each other (Maij et al. 2017).

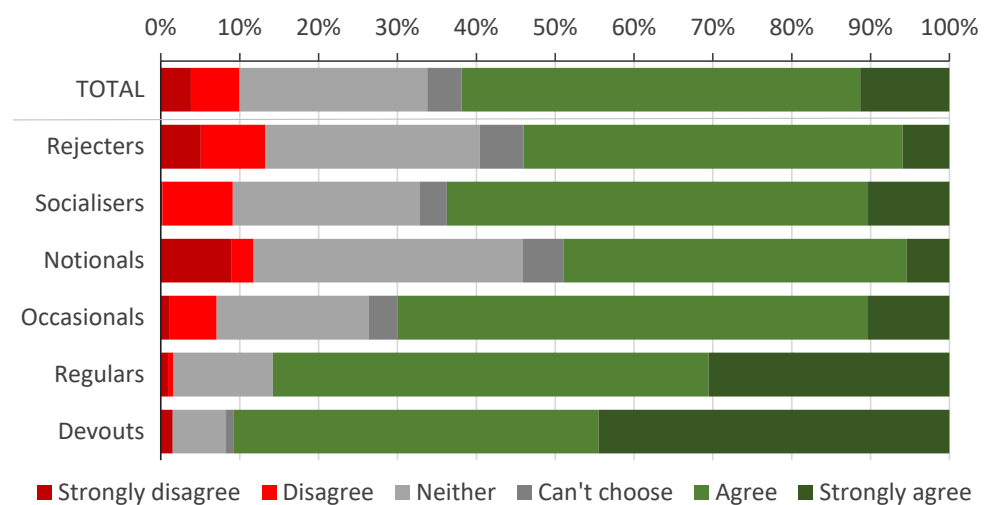


Figure 8: Religion helps people make friends, by ARI6

Source: AuSSA 2018

Religion helps people make friends

Consistent with research findings of higher rates of prosociality amongst the religious, a majority of Australians (62%) say that religion helps people make friends (Figure 8). Saying so also correlates positively with religiosity, being lowest amongst Notionals (49%) and highest amongst Devouts (91%). Only tiny minorities (2% to 13%) disagree.

Substitutions in perception of control and help-seeking

Political, social and corporate systems, not just religious ones, are capable of sophisticated cooperation. The various systems can be compensatory, that is, exchange for each other. For example, a perceived loss of control via decrease of faith in government, or faith in God, increases faith in the other (Kay et al. 2010).

Substitutability also applies to help-seeking: people are less likely to seek help from supernatural entities when government services are good (Zuckerman, Li & Diener 2018). When government services are good *and* lead to better well-being, religiosity is especially low. Further, religiosity is strongly related to greater well-being *only* when government services are poor. This well-being substitution helps provide a partial explanation as to why religiosity is decreasing in developed nations (with strong government services), but stable or increasing in developing nations (without).

Some cooperation caveats

While studies often find associations between religiosity and cooperative behaviour, there are good reasons to be sceptical about its extent or meaning.

Firstly, such findings are neither universal nor always strong. A multinational study of several religions found no significant differences of prosocial behaviour between religionists and non-religionists (Ahmed Ali & Salas 2009). Even ancestors and gods who sanction ill behaviour and freeloading cause only weak to moderate effects on community-based resource management (Cox, Villamayor-Tomas & Hartberg 2014; Hartberg, Cox & Villamayor-Tomas 2014).

Secondly, religious ritual (signalling) may increase prosocial behaviour towards ingroups, but antisocial behaviour — including derogation — towards outgroups, as well as hinder self-control (Hobson & Inzlicht 2016). For example, religious citizens displayed helping behaviour to an injured person on public transport only when that person was wearing symbols of the citizens' religious ingroup (Różycka-Tran 2017). A consequence of this mechanism is entrenchment of religion within the ingroup.

Thirdly, at least within a religious group, behaviour can be coerced coordination rather than voluntary cooperation (Soler & Lenfesty 2016). Indeed, the adoption over two millennia of “Big God” religion by Eurasian rulers has increased ruler legitimacy as divinely ordained, while reducing the cost of controlling subjects through a range of mechanisms (Skaperdas & Vaidya 2020). The effects are self-reinforcing, conferring evolutionary advantage for Big God rulers.

And fourthly, of course, prosocial behaviour is not the exclusive province of religion. Major international cooperative organisations, not founded on religion (but neither disdaining it), furnish key examples: the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Getting along in Australia

When asked if people belonging to different religions *can't* get along with each other when living close together, a small majority of Australians (56%) disagree: that is, they believe different religious neighbours can get along (Figure 9).

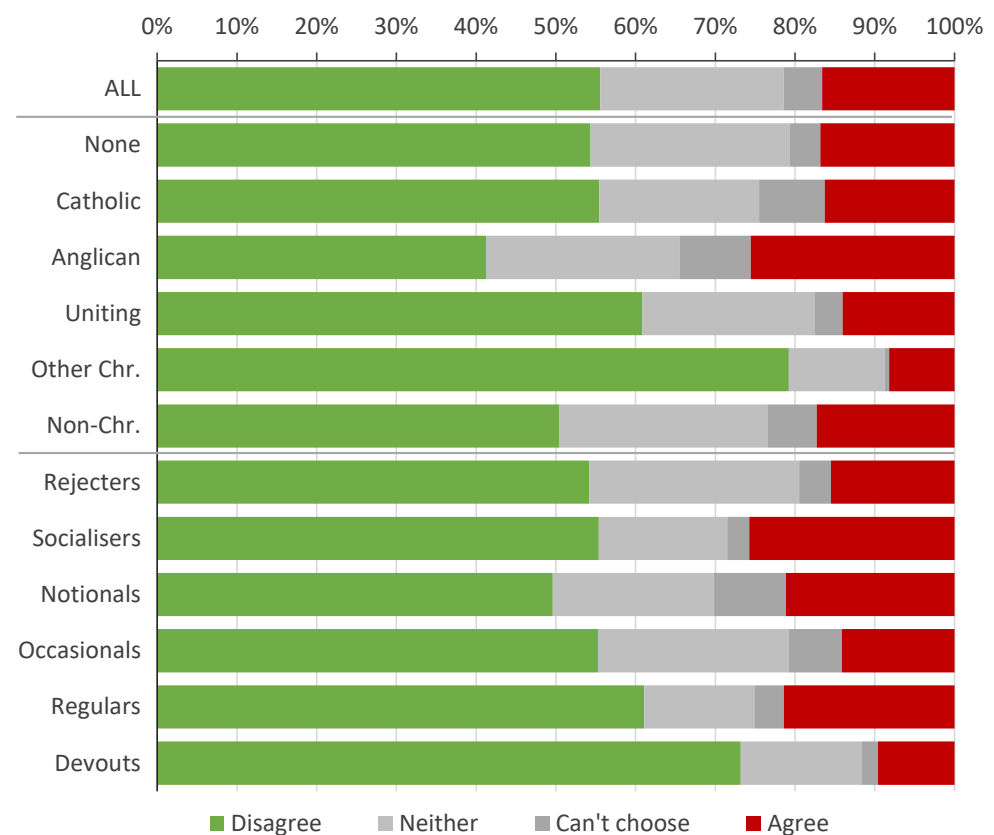


Figure 9: Neighbours of different religions *can't* get along, by religion & ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

However, the views of both Devouts, and minor Christian denominations (who in any case have the highest proportion of Devouts), are far rosier at 73% and 79% respectively. This suggests the possibility of **false consensus bias** — the belief that there is greater agreement with their views than there actually is, likely influenced by the credibility-enhancing displays of other religionists.

These attitudes are in relation to personal neighbourliness. They don't reflect Australians' attitudes about religious hostility more broadly.

Summary: Costly signalling with credibility-enhancing displays increases predictability and likely prosocial behaviour that are hard to reproduce by fakes, frauds and freeloaders. Big-God signalling is likely to result in more global cooperation. Help-seeking cooperation occurs mostly in situations of low state support.

Cooperation is not the exclusive province of religion, however, and countless secular organisations promote prosocial behaviour both within and between nations. There are also caveats to religious cooperation. For example, its effects can be weak; cooperation may only occur among ingroups at the expense of outgroups; and it may be coerced coordination rather than willing cooperation.

In Australia, Devouts and minor Christian denominations are significantly more likely to say that neighbours of different religions can get along. This suggests the possibility of false consensus bias, influenced by other religions' credibility-enhancing displays.

Fertility and population growth

Both philosophical explanations and empirical data indicate increased fertility (reproduction rates) amongst the religious. For example, global studies have found that fertility correlates negatively with female education and family planning, and positively with religious affiliation (Götmark & Andersson 2020) and service attendance (Entse 2007, cited in Blume 2009).

A detailed study in a highly developed country, Switzerland, found fertility rates highest amongst Hindus, Muslims, Jews and evangelical Christians, moderate amongst other Christian denominations and lowest amongst the non-affiliated (Blume 2009). Separately, the fertility rate of Catholics has been higher than other Christian religions. However, more recently the association of Catholicism with increased fertility has dropped in both the USA and Europe, but is still present in East Asia (at least Japan, Korea and Taiwan) (Bessey 2016).

In Australia, ANU data reveals unique patterns of population-*growth* fertility rates, that is, parents with three or more children, especially when examined by generation: Younger childrearing age (18-34 years), Older childrearing age (35-54 years), and Past childrearing age (55+ years) (Figure 10).¹⁸

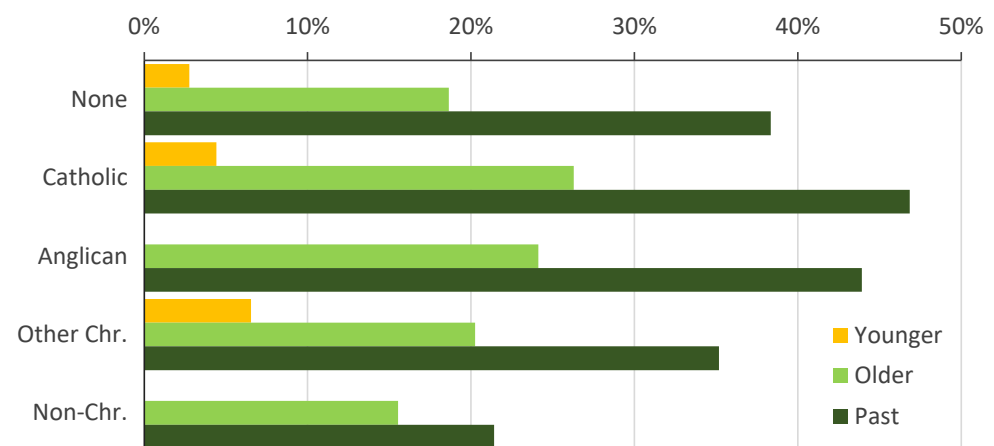


Figure 10: Population-growth fertility rate (3+ children) by age group and denomination
Source: AVS 2018. Note: Younger = 18-34yo, Older = 35-54yo, Past = 55+yo.

By religious denomination, Older and Past Catholics clearly had higher fertility rates than others, with fertility lowest amongst the non-Christian denominations (even lower than Nones), but this is not the case for the younger age group, for whom the fertility rate is higher amongst minor Christian denominations than Catholics. While this may be the result of Catholics delaying their family planning decisions or deciding to limit family

¹⁸ Because each age group has had a differing amount of time to have children, comparisons should be made within an age group, not across age groups.

size, it is consistent with higher religiosity amongst the minor Christian denominations than amongst Catholics. However, no data was available to test this specific religion/growth-fertility-rate relationship, as to whether Catholics *used* to be more devout than Protestants when Catholic fertility rates were higher.

Nevertheless, examining population-growth fertility rates by ARI5 religiosity provides useful insights (Figure 11). Amongst the Past-parenting age group, growth fertility correlates strongly and positively with religiosity, with an average rate amongst the Irreligious.

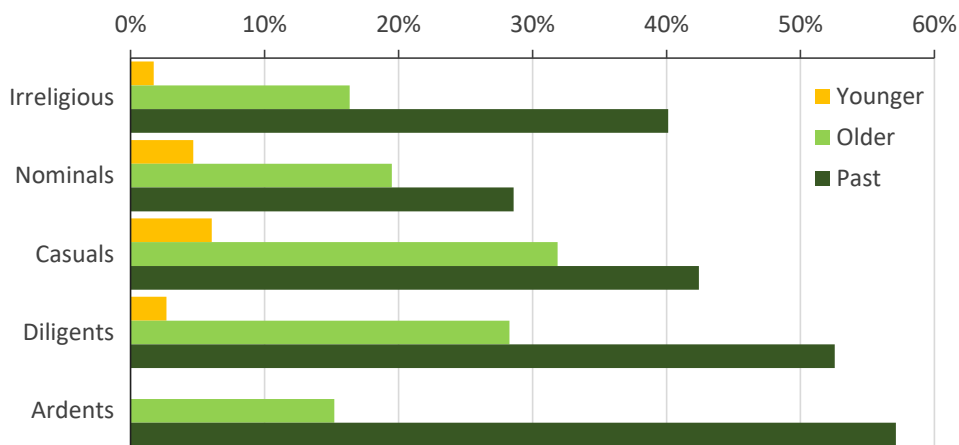


Figure 11: Population-growth fertility rate (3+ children) by age group and ARI5
 Source: AVS 2018. Note: Younger = 18-34yo, Older = 35-54yo, Past = 55+yo.

However, this picture has changed radically in the other two age groups, Younger and Older. For these generations, fertility peaks amongst Casuals, with significantly lower rates amongst the more religious — Diligents and Ardents. Thus with greatly varying rates amongst different religions and no longer correlating with religiosity in Australia, increased fertility may be a common but not necessarily significant or essential feature of organised supernatural beliefs.

These findings suggest that religiosity in Australia is likely to continue to fall in coming generations due to the highest fertility rates now occurring amongst those with more casual, rather than entrenched, religiosity.

Summary: Increased fertility is commonly associated with religion. However, both inter-denominational and religiosity data indicate this is no longer necessarily true. In Australia, lower fertility rates amongst the entrenched and higher amongst the casual religious, suggest the likelihood of decreased religion in coming generations.

Transmission of religion to others

Religion — as denominational affiliation — is transmitted to others via two major mechanisms: parents teaching their children (indoctrination), and the religious reaching out to convert others (evangelisation).¹⁹

Religious transmission to children is highest amongst religious conservatives (not religious liberals), and is largely explained by their parenting style favouring intensive religious socialisation and congregational involvement (Smith 2020).

Teaching children religious faith

The most common method of religious transmission is parents teaching their children religious faith. In Australia, only a small minority of parents (15%) prioritise teaching children religious faith (Figure 12).²⁰

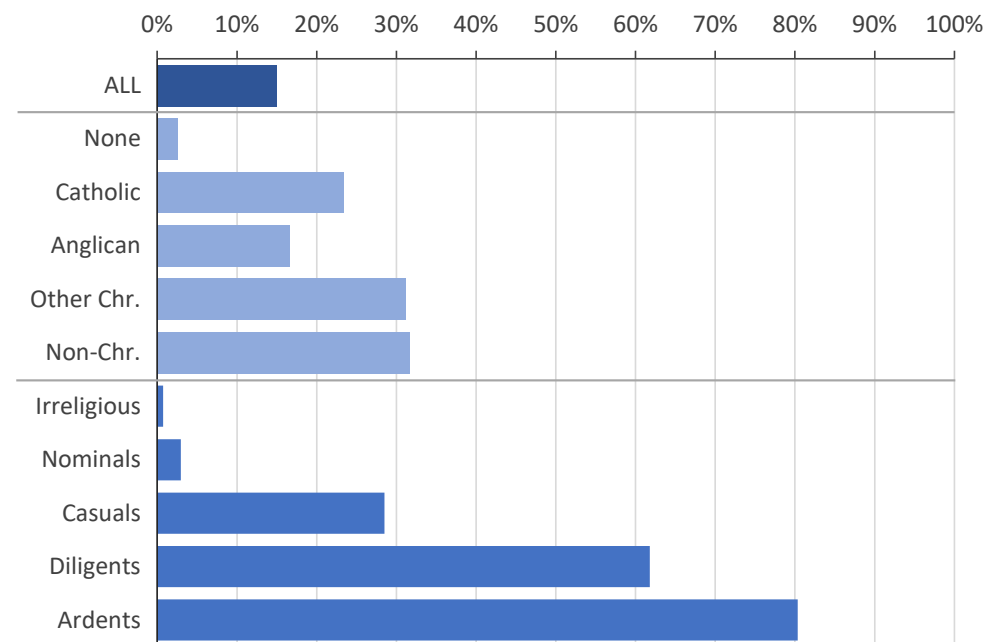


Figure 12: Important to teach children religious faith, by religion & AR15

Source: AVS 2018. Base: Parents.

Even across the major religious categories, less than a third — 23% of Catholic parents, 17% of Anglican parents, 31% of minor Christian denomination parents, and 32% of non-Christian faith parents — say it's important to teach children religious faith.

¹⁹ Personal epiphany conversions aside. For Australians' attitudes about evangelisation, see the section *Mixed views about evangelism* on page 123.

²⁰ Chosen from a list of eleven traits to teach children.

By religiosity, only a majority of Dilgents (62%) and Ardents (80%) — collectively comprising 12% of the adult population — prioritise teaching children religious faith. Almost no Irreligious (less than 1%, but 42% of the population), and a minority of Casuals (29%; 16% of the population), prioritised teaching children religious faith.

Overall, teaching children religious faith was a priority for only 3% of parents with no religious affiliation, and just over a quarter (27%) of affiliated parents. That is, nearly three quarters (73%) of Australian parents say that teaching children religious faith is not a priority. This is consistent with other data showing that a majority of Australians believe religion is a private matter, and should be left to the individual (Crabb 2019).

Nevertheless, a greater proportion of Australian parents than these figures indicate will in practice transmit religious faith to their children, just not as a priority. Despite this, the prioritised rate of 15%, relative to the 2016 Census religious affiliation rate of 60%, suggests that modest parent/child religious transmission may contribute to decreasing religious affiliation of coming generations. This would continue past decreases in Australians' religion *and* religiosity as discussed in the section *Personal changes in religion* on page 93.

Summary: A small proportion of Australian parents (15%) prioritise the transmission of religious faith to their children. Certainly, more parents will transmit religion to their children than this figure suggests, but with less priority. The prioritised transmission rate, compared to the 60% religious affiliation figure of the 2016 Census, suggests that religious faith transmission from parents to children will continue to drop.

