RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Religiosity in Australia

Part 2: Religious minds, religious collectives

Neil Francis — RSA Fellow

August 2021

Rationalist Society of Australia
PO Box 1312
Hawksburn
Victoria 3142

www.rationalist.com.au

August 2021

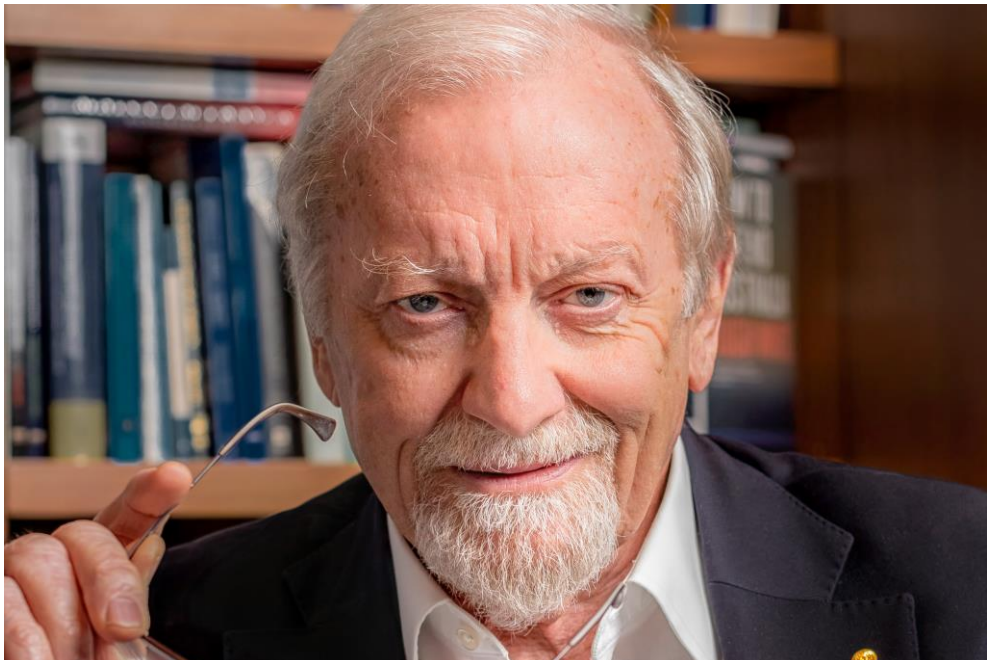
About the RSA

The Rationalist Society of Australia (RSA) is the oldest freethought group in Australia, promoting reason and evidence-based public policy since 1906.

- We believe in human dignity and respect in our treatment of one another.
- We support social co-operation within communities and political co-operation among nations.
- We hold that morality is the product of human evolution, not dictated by some external agency or revealed in some written document.
- We say humankind must take responsibility for its own destiny.
- We think human endeavour should focus on making life better for all of us, with due regard to other sentient creatures and the natural environment.
- We promote the scientific method as the most effective means by which humans develop knowledge and understanding of the natural world.
- And we hold that human progress and well-being is best achieved by the careful and consistent use of science and evidence-based reasoning.

www.rationalist.com.au

Table of contents



Prof. the Hon. Gareth Evans AC QC — a Patron of the RSA

Foreword

The Rationalist Society of Australia believes — and has been arguing since its foundation in 1906 — that all public policy decision making should be based on empirical evidence, logic, and thoughtful reflection. We prefer reason to prejudice, science to superstition, and evidence to faith.

But while our worldview is secular, we are also absolutely committed to freedom of religion and belief. That does not mean supporting state or federal legislation, like the Morrison government's mooted Religious Discrimination Bill, that may be used as a sword rather than shield — enabling the imposition of religious beliefs, or bodies claiming to be religious to act more or less as they please. But it does mean that we strongly oppose any form of discrimination against individuals because of their religious attachments or beliefs.

Our ranks include those of all shades of religious and spiritual belief. My fellow Patron and friend of many decades Michael Kirby is, as he makes clear in his Foreword to Part 1 of this splendid *Religiosity in Australia* report, a life-long committed Anglican. I, by contrast, have been (at least since a period of early-adolescent attachment to Billy Graham!) a lifelong atheist. As I became more sensitive to the reality, and more conscious of the randomness of human suffering, I simply found it impossible to believe in, let alone worship, a deity who could be, simultaneously, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good. And what has sustained and motivated me since has been rooted in my perception

of the reality and dignity of our common humanity, rather than anything remotely spiritual.

What unites Michael Kirby and me, and all Rationalists, is that we fully support secularism in the public sphere. Whether or not we share, or can even begin to comprehend, others' religious and spiritual beliefs, we fully understand and respect the extent to which these do matter in people's lives — not least in offering real consolation at times of grief. What people choose to believe, or the organisations they choose to join, in their private lives should be no one else's business, provided they are not doing harm to others or (for example through spurious claims for tax exemption) the wider public interest. But they should have no priority when it comes to influence in the public space.

The great contribution of this multi-volume report by Neil Francis is to make an overwhelming case for this position. Part I, systematically assessing personal faith 'according to the numbers', made it clear beyond argument that there is no longer, if ever there was, a clear majority of the Australian community holding strong religious beliefs. While at the 2016 census, an oft-quoted 60 per cent of Australians indicated an affiliation with a religious denomination, this report shows that the numbers are much lower when it comes to actual belief and practice. Moreover, seven in ten Australians say that religion is not personally important to them, including nearly two-thirds of Anglicans, and around half of Catholics and non-Christian denominations.

This second volume adds further reach, depth, and nuance to the findings of the first. There is some fascinating analysis of what 'religion' and 'spirituality' actually mean and how they are different, what constitutes their appeal, and how religionists experience their faith. But the bottom line remains that Australia has seen large decreases in religion and religiosity over recent decades, there is a huge gap between nominal religious affiliation and active religious commitment — and there is no reason whatever for political decision makers to take any notice at all of those religious conservatives who have become very strident in recent years in claiming special privileges for religious individuals and organisations. The comprehensive failure of Cory Bernardi's Australian Conservatives is recent evidence of just how little traction there is for overt religious crusading in contemporary Australian politics.

Let religiosity, in all its complex manifestations, forever bloom in the private realm. But in contemporary Australian society it has no place in the public realm. *Religiosity in Australia* is not only an outstanding piece of research and analysis, for which Neil Francis and the leadership of the Rationalist Society deserve huge congratulations, but a clarion call to rethink some of the many

casual assumptions about the role of religious, as distinct from humanist and rationalist, values in the conduct of our national life.

A good place to start might be, as a newspaper correspondent recently suggested, to replace the Christian prayer with which so many of our parliaments commence their working day with one that calls upon legislators to use logic, reason, respect and facts when making decisions that affect the rest of the population. Not that, on current evidence, any such prayer is likely to be answered anywhere anytime soon …

This is a sound and evidence-based account of Australia's real relationship with religion, and I warmly recommend it to our national policymakers and all those who seek to influence them.

Gareth Evans

Melbourne

1 August 2021

Neil Francis — a Fellow of the RSA

About the author

Neil Francis brings a rich history of experience to bear in the development of this compendium. His early work in primary medical research facilitated ground-breaking developments in the understanding of rare genetic diseases, and publications in the peer-reviewed literature. Over subsequent decades he has led or assisted numerous professional marketing and social research projects for commercial, education and not-for-profit clients.

He blends the art of surfacing real insights from high-validity experimental design and deep data dives with his award-winning postgraduate teaching experience to communicate high-level insights to diverse stakeholders.

A vocal advocate for evidence-based decision making, Neil has also served in leadership roles in the dying with dignity law reform movement, as a former President of Dying With Dignity Victoria, foundation former Chair and CEO of Australia's national alliance of dying with dignity societies, and as a past President of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies. Through DyingForChoice.com, he continues to publish reports, based on high-quality data, which correct misinformation promoted by opponents.

An agnostic, Neil has long held an interest in the balance of freedoms and responsibilities between the religious and non-religious, how legislatures and governments attempt to steward that balance, and how they might be better informed to pursue such important goals.

Executive summary

Like many western nations, religiosity in Australia has decreased substantially in recent decades, particularly among the major Christian denominations. The trend appears set to continue. At the same time, the nation's Pentecostal prime minister, Mr Scott Morrison, has made no secret of the extent of his religious convictions, Australia's most religious have attempted to take charge of political party branches, and the federal Coalition government seems intent on entrenching in law privileged rights for the religious to discriminate.

But **what is "religion"?** It can be very difficult to separate out from culture and politics. Particular personality types, such as those who favour authoritarianism or a social dominance orientation, may seem to be represented both in politics (much more, though not exclusively, on the right), and in religion. While these and other attributes might seem essential features of religion to some, research from around the world paints a much more complex picture. Characteristics associated with religion in one culture — especially in western monotheisms — can be *negatively* associated in others — especially in the east.

Not unexpectedly, **the way religionists experience their faith varies**. *Intrinsic* religionists live their faith as a central component of identity, demoting the importance of worldly matters. *Extrinsic* religionists employ faith for utilitarian purposes such as security and solace, status, and self-justification. *Quest* religionists search for the truth, with an emphasis on social interaction. When Intrinsics offer help to the needy, they are more likely to persistently provide misaligned services: help that they themselves, not those they help, deem appropriate. Questers, on the other hand, tend to offer more tentative and situationally-relevant assistance.

Australian religionists are far more likely to see faith as "doing good to others" (72%) than simply "following religious norms and ceremonies" (28%). The Irreligious (45%) are far more likely to say that religion is merely following norms and ceremonies, versus just 15% amongst religionists, suggesting that the Irreligious underestimate the prosocial meaning religion has to adherents. Amongst religionists, however, the most religious, Ardents, are the most likely to say religion is about following norms and ceremonies, indicating a significant proportion are merely *compliant* with their religion, or are Extrinsics employing religion for personal utilitarian purposes.

The Four Bs framework provides another perspective on the personal meaning of religion. *Beliefs* are transcendent cognitive content; *Belonging* relates to rituals and emotions; *Behaving* involves moral self-control; and *Bonding* focuses on ingroup identification and self-esteem.

Synthesising major streams of thought and discourse about religion helps reach **a practical definition**. Religion is *not*, as commonly stated in western countries, "belief in God". That is to wrongly commandeer the wider concept to a particular interpretation — in this case, monotheism. Rather, religion lies at the intersection of three concepts: (a) belief in supernatural entities, forces, or principles, (2) normative social acceptance (that is, agreement as to tenets and customs giving effect to beliefs), and (3) providing guidance for moral behaviour and in life meaning, or at the very least "a life well lived". This is the approach adopted by Australia's High Court. Neither good intentions nor any other dimension is necessary. Indeed, the High Court has expressly stated that sincerity and integrity are not necessary features, and that charlatan religions are as protected as others provided they meet the necessary criteria and don't offend ordinary laws.

A common misconception is that being religious means being "spiritual". Spirit is the seat of one's emotions and character (some say the "soul"), unrelated to physical things. Fewer than one in five Australians (18%) say they both have a religion *and* are spiritual. Only 35% of Catholics, 26% each of Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists, and 44% of non-Christian denominations say they have a religion and are spiritual. Only amongst the minor Christian denominations is there a majority (65%).

Conversely, about 18%–24% of Australians (depending on the study) say they are spiritual but not religious (SBNRs). Religionists attempting to plump reports of Australia's religiosity both wrongly reckon that all religionists are "spiritual", and then add the SBNRs to the mix as a kind "spiritual" froth atop a carbonated religious beverage. This is misguided: SBNRs are very different in character from the religious. Pouring them into the same glass is like mixing oil and water.

Why is religion so prevalent across all cultures and throughout history? A host of predispositions of **the human mind** contribute. Up to half of an individual's disposition to be religious is inherited (nurture), but religious expression is also strongly built and moulded into a specific denomination through social forces (nurture). A host of general brain mechanisms favour religion. A key one is a partial seizure in the temporal lobes, which causes the sensation of "another self" or "sensed presence". Rationally-prone people experience this inside the mind as dreams of hallucinations, while fantasy-prone people experience it outside the mind as angels, demons, ghosts, or God.

Similarly, those prone to intuitive thinking are more likely to infer patterns in completely random data. This illusory pattern perception is a compensatory mechanism against perceived threats to personal control. This can be exaggerated for people with weak understanding of physical and biological

phenomena, and seeing the controlling hand of deities offers advantages to minimise anxiety. Consistent with this factor, Australia's most religious are substantially more likely than others to say they feel strong control over their lives.

A similar effect applies in respect of magical thinking and paranormal beliefs. These are associated with intuitive thinking and perceived existential threats, though they don't have to be life-threatening. Religious responses can include mystical experiences and preferences for tradition, conformity, and security. In the modern world, financial insecurity correlates with experiencing religious miracles, and Australian evidence suggests this may be a key factor behind Protestant "prosperity gospel".

Another major contributor is the unique human capacity for *secondary* theory of mind, in which we can conceptualise that *another person's mind* can understand that other minds have thoughts, feelings and beliefs of their own. This predisposes us to over-mentalising — the religious tend to explain the world in terms of teleological *purpose* (the intent of supernatural minds, and the false detection of agency) rather than *causes*. It also encourages conjuring up supernatural minds that monitor our own for purity and compliance.

Other factors include attachment to God as a compensatory response to anxious or avoidant attachment to parents; or a corresponding attachment to God in relation to secure attachment to parents; and the experience of awe (feelings of "small self") which also decreases tolerance for uncertainty. Further factors may contribute, but are less important than sometimes assumed: terror management theory in which fear of being dead is compensated by membership of an 'eternal life' club; combatting boredom; and others not covered in this report.

A number of **collective factors** help boost the mind's disposition to religion and entrench it in society. An important one is state support for religion, whether official, preferred, or merely operationalised in practice. Another is that religious rituals convey "costly signalling" that promise predictable and prosocial behaviour, but are hard (or too costly) for fakes, frauds and freeloaders to replicate, thereby increasing cooperation. While small gods promote cooperation at the family and local level, big gods do so more universally. Cooperation is not the exclusive province of religion, of course: countless non-religious organisations promote cooperation around the world, too. At least at the personal level, a majority of Australians say that religion helps people make friends.

Other collective factors include higher fertility rates amongst the religious, though this is no longer true in Australia; the transmission of religion from parents to children; and evangelisation.

SBNRs are worthy of special mention in relation to religion. In Australia, they are rather different from religionists: they are generally anti-establishmentarian, are more likely than others to vote Greens, hold socially progressive views, far less likely to believe in a god or gods, are largely unable to articulate coherent specifics about their "spirituality" and indeed often relate it to mindfulness and yoga.

Like religion, **non-religionist worldviews** including atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, humanism, and others have similarly complex mixes of attributes, but are not discussed in detail in this report.

Personal benefits commonly associated with religion and religiosity include reduced anxiety, a sense of life control, and greater feelings of happiness and wellbeing. However, evidence for such effects are mixed. For example, while greater self-reported health is said to correlate with religiosity, Australia's most religious, Ardents, are the least likely to report good health. Indeed, on average Australian religionists' BMI is higher than others. Self-report measures can be quite inaccurate. For example, political conservatives *self-report*, but progressives *act out*, greater happiness.

Australia has seen large decreases in religion and religiosity over recent decades. While those 65 or older were almost all raised in a religion (Christianity), a large minority of Australians under 45 years have been raised in no religion, and very few as Anglicans or Uniting/Methodists. Given that non-religion is a "sticky denomination" (few so raised change their minds), the more recent non-transmission of religion through childrearing suggests further religious decline over time.

Amongst Australia's adults, 35% are still of the same religion and 23% of non-religion in which they were raised, 32% have left religion, 8% have changed from one religion to another, and 2% have converted from non-religion to a religion. Significant numbers of children raised Catholic (37%), Anglican (52%), Uniting/Methodists (58%), and minor Christian denominations (46%) have left their religion in adulthood. Factors associated with remaining in the same religion are believing that God is personally involved in all lives, and being raised in a common religion of both parents. A factor commonly associated with loss of religion in adulthood is being forced to attend religious services or instruction in childhood, *above* the rate of parental attendance (i.e. lack of "credibility-enhancing displays").

Not only have large numbers of Australians left religion, but those who remain are on average much lower in religiosity than either their parents or themselves in childhood. While just 7% of adult Australians are now *more* religious than in childhood, 27% are now less religious, and a further 31% have left religion altogether.

Apart from parental indoctrination of their children in religion, the most common reasons for Australians to convert are seeing others' genuine faith, experiencing a life trauma, and hearing the testimonies of the religious. Conversely, Australians are repelled from religion by church abuse and scandals, perceived hypocrisy, judgementalism, hearing statements of public figures who are examples of that faith, hearing miracle stories, questioning religious teachings, disagreement with opposed religious stances about social issues like abortion, voluntary assisted dying and marriage equality, and non-belief in God.

A spurt of rejection of religion in recent years is associated with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, in which religious organisations were found to be major offenders, and in response to religious opposition to marriage equality in the 2017 national plebiscite for law reform.

But not only do individuals change their religious beliefs, so do religious organisations. For example, the Anglican church has changed its "tradition" on the ordination of women, and the Catholic church has in the past changed its position on the marriage of priests, and more recently on limbo. At the same time, not only laity but clerics disagree on doctrine. For example, most Australian Catholics support abortion and voluntary assisted dying choice, both banned by the church. This seriously calls into question claims by religious conservatives that a religion's "tradition" must require, or prohibit, particular courses of action and ought to be binding on all.

This disconnect is particularly evident in the recent increase in religious institutional activism against public freedoms. For example, clerics are promoting "**institutional conscientious objection**" to prohibit certain healthcare services to the public. But conscience is the interaction of emotions and thoughts in the mind of a natural person. Institutions are confections of law, not natural persons, and their codes of conduct that prohibit certain choices are not conscience: they are *rules* that *suppress* real conscience and *extinguish* agency. Such prohibitions are particularly egregious when services are being provided to the public, on the public purse.

Most Australians are fairly sceptical about religious organisations. While Australia's most religious, Diligents and Ardents (12% of the population) rate the churches at number 3 out of 25 institutions in terms of their trust, the other 88% place the churches at number 22, below banks (then under royal commission investigation) and unions. Trust in religious leaders themselves is similarly low. This suggests that highly religious Australians lack an appreciation of how their organisations are viewed by most — the religious are more prone than others to *false consensus* bias.

More Australians say that religious institutions have too much power than say they don't. Even amongst Devouts, less than a third (30%) say they don't. Religious interference in politics is unwelcome: most Australians (80%) say that clerics shouldn't try to interfere in parliamentary elections. This disconnect relates most strongly to religion in the sphere of politics: opinions about whether religions should be able to evangelise without interference are almost evenly split.

Australian religious conservatives have recently ramped up their political voice, lobbying the federal government to introduce legislation that would grant special privileges to religious individuals and especially religious organisations. Those privileges would legally require offended chins to withdraw themselves from the path of freely-swinging religious arms; while legally requiring others' swinging arms to restrain themselves wherever a religious chin may be present. The Australian Human Rights Commission has labelled the second exposure draft as "*a dangerous precedent*" that would significantly restrict others' rights. These are not *shields*, they are *swords*.

The religious ructions are driven by the 2017 legalisation of marriage equality, by the possible loss of a sympathetic government at the federal election due by May next year, but also by the release mid next year of the headline result of this year's national census. That headline is very likely to say that for the first time since Federation, Christianity is in the minority. To try and urgently cement religious privilege in federal law, Australia's religious conservatives have imported a range of tactics from the USA religious right: claiming to be the victim while acting as the aggressor, presenting the recently invented "Judeo-Christian" meme as historical accuracy, and wrongly plumping the headline religious affiliation figure with SBNRs to give the appearance of greater religious devotion.

But the truth about Australians' relationship with religion is clear. When the notional religious affiliation headline of 60% is adjusted to those who say they *belong* to a religion, it drops to just 38%; to those who say they are religious, 32%; to those who say religion is important in their lives, 29%; to those who say their religion is spiritual, just 18%; and to those who attend monthly or more often (16%) or say they are an active member of their religious organisation (15%).

These real and practical measures of Australians' religiosity are reflected in practice. In 2017, then Senator Cori Bernardi quit the Coalition government and founded his Australian Conservatives party. Other parties and individuals joined up. The experiment failed. Over two years, not only was a parliamentary seat lost, but not one was gained across multiple elections. In 2019, Mr Bernardi deregistered the party.

Religious conservatives face an uphill battle to entrench privileges in federal law, but they might also take care what they wish for. A major international study recently published shows a *causal* relationship between state protection of religious privileges, and significant decreases in religion; that is, a drop in religious vitality. It turns out that religion thrives best when it is left to stand on its own two feet.

That gives legislators a great deal to contemplate as the federal government introduces its Religious Discrimination Bills into parliament. Not only would waving them through cause long-term pain by actively contributing to the waning of religion in Australia, but cause short-term electoral pain as a majority of Australians react negatively to religious privilege at the political level.

Introduction

Australia, like many other western nations, is coming to terms with major changes in religiosity, what that means for religionist and non-religionist citizens alike, and how these changes might inform public policy.

Recently, the nation's most publicly religious prime minister, Pentecostal Mr Scott Morrison, revealed that when giving disaster-affected Australians a hug, he's really "laying on of hands" for the purpose of divine healing via the Holy Spirit (Maddox 2021). No doubt many of Australia's now largest religious "denomination", No Religion (NR), also known as the Nones, would find his presumptuous and secret purpose creepy. Indeed, even other Australian religionists may, like former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2021), while the nation's ethicists ponder the morality of this previously undisclosed intent.

In Australia's religious landscape there have been major increases in Nones. A small but significant rise in Pentecostals and non-Christian religions is countered by major decreases in Catholic and Protestant numbers (Bouma & Halafoff 2017; Francis 2021).

In recent decades, Australia's population has grown 40% by natural increase and 60% by net overseas migration, making our nation more culturally diverse than many (McCrindle 2014). That includes religious diversity. But what does it mean to be "religious"? What is religion, how is it experienced by Australians, and what do they think of it?

Part 1 of this series covered the headline rates of faith amongst Australians, according to census and high-quality polling data (Francis 2021). It revealed considerably lower rates of real belonging to religious denominations, and beliefs in major supernatural tenets (e.g. god, heaven, hell, afterlife) than is often assumed or claimed.

In this Part 2, the nature of religion itself is explored from individual, group and evolutionary perspectives. It aims to inform a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the nature of religion beyond "I'm Anglican" or "our family is Sikh".

Rather than cover the specific tenets of various religions — for which there is ample material elsewhere — this report explores frameworks of understanding about why religious belief is such a common human trait, various ways religion is experienced by individuals, and how things change when religious expression becomes communal and entrenched in institutional settings.

Findings from numerous peer-reviewed scholarly studies about religion are integrated with high-quality Australian data to provide useful insights and comparisons. In addition, citizens' actual attitudes, particularly their now largely sceptical views towards institutional religion and its place in society, are discussed.

> **Adults only:** Except for ABS Census data, the discussion and statistics in this report are about *adult* Australians. Parental claims about the religiosity of minors are not otherwise covered.

> **Respect:** This report does *not* seek to disrespect or argue against religion or faith. Rather, it aims to report relevant facts *about* the breadth and depth of religion and faith amongst adult Australians, and to dispel misinformation.

Methodology

This report integrates findings from Australian census data, high-quality academic survey and qualitative research published in peer-reviewed journals, results from professional studies, and reports in major media outlets.

Abbreviations

ABS — Australian Bureau of Statistics

AES — Australian Election Study (ANU)

AHRC — Australian Human Rights Commission

ANU — Australian National University

AuSSA — Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (ANU)

AVS — Australian Values Study (ANU)

BMI — body mass index

Chr. — Christian (in charts, tables)

CIS — The Centre for Independent Studies

CO — conscientious objection

CSR — cognitive science of religion

IP — intercessory prayer

NCLS — National Church Life Survey

NR — No Religion: the "Nones"

SBNR — spiritual but not religious

ToM — theory of mind

VAD — voluntary assisted dying

ANU data analysis

All analyses of ANU study (AES, AuSSA, AVS) raw data were conducted by Neil Francis, not the ANU. The ANU is not responsible for results from its studies appearing in this report.

Non-respondents excluded

Unless otherwise noted, all survey analysis results are net of non-respondents.

Religiosity scales

The ARI5 and ARI6 religiosity scales are explained in Part 1 of this series (Francis 2021).

Perspectives on 'religion'

Before we continue to discuss religion, it's appropriate to attempt to scope what it is, or at least, what is meant in this series. Countless thousands of articles and books have been published on the matter, with clerics, philosophers, sociologists, and others offering long, complex dissertations.

Here, we'll strive to balance breadth and depth with parsimony, since our primary aim is to furnish relevant contemporary foundations that enlighten and contextualise this series, rather than elaborate an exhaustive review of theory and practice.

No simple matter

We might *think* we easily reach agreement about the nature of religion if we restrict our field of view to the three major Abrahamic monotheisms — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — that predominate in Australia.

We might *think*, for example, that 'religion' in its simplest form equates to 'belief in God'. However, this would be to overlook eastern, polytheistic, non-theistic, ancestral, animistic and other kinds of religions (Hood, Hill & Spilka 2014, p 7). It would improperly favour describing *a* religion or *a class* of religions rather than religion in its broader sense.

At the other end of the spectrum is the common proposition that "*I know it when I see it*" (e.g. Richter 2017). That is to say nothing, at least nothing of consequence, that could be examined or critiqued. Paradoxically, it remains blind to the problem that religious thoughts can't ordinarily be *seen*. It therefore limits religion to behavioural expression, that is, a functionalist approach.

Both the too-specific and too-vague perspectives invite *false consensus* bias: that is, thinking we're talking about the same thing when we aren't. That is to invite misunderstanding and confusion.

> **Summary:** Both too-specific (own-neighbourhood) and too-vague (my definition but I can't tell you what that is) notions of religion and religiosity can create a false consensus bias that we mean the same thing when we may not. They invite misunderstanding and confusion.

Interactions between religion, culture, and politics

Separating religion from broader culture and politics is difficult, too. Cultures bring their own erosions and sedimentations to their extant religions, and vice versa. For example, setting aside contemporary scholarly debate about the historical existence of Jesus (e.g. Lataster 2016), in some cultures Jesus is depicted with African or Indian features (Swatwood House 2020), which no doubt confers natural appeal to their local communities. Equally, in many western cultures including Australia, the brown-skinned Middle Eastern Jew has morphed into an air-brushed white Anglo (Whitaker 2018b), leading to concerns about such depictions facilitating white supremacist ideology.

Interaction between religion and politics is equally complex. For example, a multi-national study found that religiosity correlated with political-right and conservative ideologies — right-wing authoritarianism and traditionalism — in all of 16 (mostly Western plus Japan) countries across five continents … except Australia (Caprara et al. 2018). Unsurprisingly, it found religion's contribution to political ideology much greater in countries where religion plays a more prominent role in the public square. However, the study's sample size for Australia (n=285) was the smallest of all countries, adversely affecting its sensitivity. Analysis of robust Australian Election Study data (see Part 1 of this series, Figure 49 *in* Francis (2021)) reveals that Australia's most religious have, in recent years, somewhat moved to the political hard right.

Culture matters in the interaction between religion and politics, too: the above correlations are not universal. In the Philippines, for example, religiosity correlates positively with conformity, but *negatively* with power (authoritarianism) (Bernardo, Clemente & Nalipay 2016). In South Korea, Buddhists have high levels of political tolerance while Protestants have low levels (Kim & Zhong 2010). Thus, right-wing authoritarianism, in this example, may be a common, but certainly not an *essential*, feature of religiosity.

The tendency for immanent justice reasoning — that punishments are automatically due to those with perceived low moral status, regardless of mitigating circumstances — also differs by religiosity in different cultures. While only the religious in the USA tend towards immanent justice reasoning, in Japan the reasoning is overall even stronger, and occurs across the entire spectrum from the non-religious to the religious (Murayama & Miura 2021).

Another example is attitudes toward the centrality of work. In Germany and the Netherlands, the highly religious were significantly more likely to view work as central to a sense of obligation and self-reward, but in Israel, the opposite was true (Harpaz 1998). In an Israeli update some two decades later, no differences were found in work centrality between secular, traditional, and ultra-Orthodox men (Sharabi & Kay 2021), further supporting the notion that

the interaction of religiosity and cultural norms is complex, and can change over time.

Studies such as these highlight the importance of avoiding over-reliance on an extensive and convenient corpus of research from Protestant-dominated societies — most notably the USA — about any supposed religious universality of right-wing authoritarianism, "work ethic", social dominance orientation, or almost any other putative aspect of religiosity.

Overall, there are many characteristics of religion that vary significantly between east and west cultures (Clobert 2021). Given these complex interactions, religion has been argued to both make and unmake national identity (Schnabel & Hjerm 2014).

Identifying essentialist elements of religion and religiosity that are independent of cultural norms is difficult but crucial.

> **Summary:** It's important not to over-rely on a large corpus of studies from only Protestant-dominated societies (the USA in particular) as representative of religion in principle. Such reliance may drive a false impression of the universality of relationships between religion, culture and politics when those relationships are, in fact, not universal and therefore not *essentialist* features of religion.

From within and without

On the anthropological front, viewpoints about religion from within religious groups (emic) can differ significantly from those external (etic). Emic viewpoints are often framed in concepts such as the sacred.[1] There have been academic attempts to define religion substantively but the sacred functionally (e.g. Demerath & Cotter 2012). However, this doesn't help, because "sacred" is itself defined in terms of religion: colourfully described by Quillen (2012) as the "yawning mouth of that swirling vortex" that is a circular argument.

Philosophical arguments about religion also differ by emic versus etic perspective. For example, Orthodox Christian apologetic Richard Swinburne (2010) argues in favour of the notion that religious experience justifies belief in God,[2] while others argue that *maybe* it does (e.g. Kwan 2006), or that it doesn't (e.g. Johnson 2020).

Attempts to frame religion in terms of social or psychological systems often fail because they are insufficiently distinct from the non-religious. For example, explanations regarding group coherence, faith, identity, roles, symbolism, and ritual may describe the religious, as well as members of (non-religious) sports clubs and political parties.

Other explanations might improperly attempt to define religion as a "sugary frosting" confected from a set of ingredients of different flavours such as Christian, Hindu or Buddhist. These are argued to be layered over an otherwise plain Enlightenment cake, and in which some enlightened — atheists, agnostics and other secularists — choose to forgo the frosting altogether (Hall, Koenig & Meador 2004).[3]

Summary: Unsurprisingly, many descriptions of religion are self-referential. The highly religious refer circularly to sacredness and the *content* of their religion as proof of its validity, while some secularists argue that religion is merely a frosting applied to an otherwise plain, non-religious cake. Both approaches oversimplify matters.

1 Sacred: dedicated to, connected with or embodying a religious purpose and thereby putatively deserving of great respect.

2 Swinburne's monotheistic conclusion is consistent with his monotheistic religion.

3 These conceptualisations are still common. For example, even contemporary survey research on religion often employs particular frosting flavours in question language, such as "How often do you attend *church*", "Do you believe in *God*".

The Big Three religious orientation framework

Two dimensions of the "Big Three"[4] religious framework were first introduced to help explain differences in prejudice amongst American churchgoers (Allport & Ross 1967): Extrinsic and Intrinsic religious orientations. Most religious people are a mix of both, though lean towards one or the other.

Those of **Extrinsic** religious orientation tend to *use* religion for their own utilitarian or instrumental purposes — a "means" orientation. They "turn to God but without turning away from self". Significantly more anxious than others (Baker & Gorsuch 1982), they find religion "provides security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification".

Those with **Intrinsic** religious orientation, on the other hand, tend to be significantly *less* anxious than others (Baker & Gorsuch 1982), and higher in *Agreeableness*[5] (Robbins et al. 2010). They centrally *live* their religion, where worldly matters are of lesser significance and behaviour is shaped as much as possible to meet religious beliefs and values — an "ends" orientation.

In attitudes toward ethnic outgroups, Allport and Ross (1967) found Extrinsics more prejudiced, and Intrinsics less prejudiced, than others.

Results in subsequent studies have been mixed. Confounding factors such as political ideology, right-wing authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism, and particularly conformity values versus prosocial values, have been found to influence prejudice (Brambilla et al. 2013). Improvements in research methodology has increased the reliability of findings, which show significant cognitive and affective differences between Intrinsics and Extrinsics (Donahue 1985) (Table 1).

Table 1: Mean correlations with religious orientation

Measure	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Religious belief	0.39	0.16
Religious commitment	0.76	0.03
Prejudice (average)	-0.05	0.34
Fear of death	-0.06	0.27
Dogmatism	0.06	0.36

Source: Donahue 1985.

[4] A title of convenience I've created for this discussion.

[5] A "Big Five" personality trait: kind, sympathetic, cooperative, considerate, warm.

There are cultural as well as individual differences. Prosocial cultures — especially Jewish but also Catholic — emphasise collectivist aspects of religion, while individualistic cultures (mostly Protestant) emphasise one's own personal relationship with God (Cohen & Hill 2007).

In Australia, the rate (72%) of a prosocial meaning of religion, at least in terms of "*doing good to others*", is similar amongst Catholics and Protestants, but is significantly greater amongst non-Christian denominations (Figure 1).

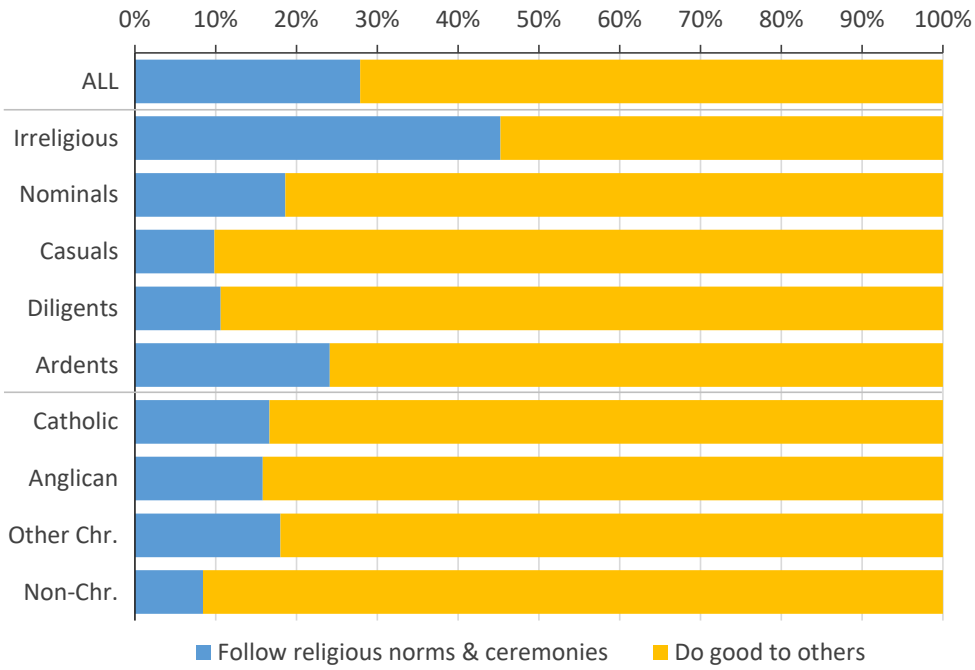


Figure 1: Meaning of religion by ARI5, religious denomination
Source: AVS 2018

In the ARI5[6] religiosity framework, Australia's Irreligious overestimate the meaning of religion as merely "*following religious norms and ceremonies*" (45%), at three times the rate that Australia's religionists think so (15% average). This reveals that the Irreligious underestimate religionists' prosocial *meaning* (not necessarily actual practice) of religion.

Amongst Australia's most religious, Ardents, one in four (24%) prioritise "*following religious norms and ceremonies*" over prosocial meaning, suggesting that a baseline of a quarter of Ardents are likely to be Extrinsics.

Worthy of note is that the AVS 2018 question wording was "do good ***to*** others", a self-referential frame that grants the helper primacy to determine what help is needed, and to implement it. This is consistent with the social and legal presumption that religion is "good" for people. It also endorses

[6] See Part 1 for an explanation of the Australian Religious Identity (ARI5 and ARI6) scales.

evangelisation along with practical help. A more prosocial wording would have been to "do good *for* others".

> The normative meaning of religion as "doing good ***to*** others" prioritises help-givers' opinions over the real needs of the helped. It also endorses evangelisation with help delivery.

Quest orientation

A third orientation, **quest**, was later added to the extrinsic (means) and extrinsic (ends) orientations (Batson 1976). Questers see their religion as a search for truth, with a greater emphasis on social interaction. They score much higher in Big Five personality trait *Openness to experience*, are less certain of religious answers and are more likely to self-criticise (Jaume, Simkin & Etchezahar 2013; Nielsen & Fultz 1995).

Questers also offer more tentative, situationally-relevant help to those in need, whereas Intrinsics are more likely to persistently offer help that is less attuned to the specific needs of the helped (Donahue 1985).

> **Summary:** The "Big Three" framework describes religiosity through Extrinsic, Intrinsic and Quest orientations. Extrinsics "use" religion for utilitarian purposes ("means") such as security, solace and self-justification, and tend to be more prejudiced towards outgroups. Intrinsics try to live their religious beliefs and values ("ends") and are typically high in *Agreeableness*.[7] Questers continually search for truth, are high on *Openness To Experience*,[6] are less certain of religious answers and are more likely to self-criticise.
>
> Some 85% of religious Australians say religion means "doing good to others", while 15% (including a quarter [24%] of Australia's most religious, Ardents) say its meaning is to "follow religious norms and ceremonies". Australia's Irreligious underestimate religious Australians' prosocial meaning of religion ("doing good to others") by a factor of three.

7 "Big Five" personality traits.

The Big Four Bs framework

Religion is often categorised most simply as a belief system, but this does a disservice to the range of real, lived religionist experience. For example, religion can also serve as a source of personal identity. While on average, Australians rate religion as the lowest of eight given contributors to a sense of identity (Francis 2021, p 38), the sense of religious contribution to identity would obviously be much higher amongst the very religious than the non-religious. Indeed, individuals may experience powerful cognitive and affective value in identifying with an exclusive "eternal" club (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman 2010).

Another perspective of the scope of religion involves not only identity, but roles, practices, and relationships with others. These are known as the Big Four or Four Bs: **believing**, **belonging**, **behaviour**, and **bonding**.

Beliefs are transcendent cognitive content; **belonging** relates to rituals and emotions; **behaving** involves moral self-control; and **bonding** focuses on ingroup identification and self-esteem (Saroglou 2011). These factors are said to comprise universals that differentiate both one form of religiosity from another, and religion from non-religion.

Preferences for and characteristics of the four dimensions differ between western and eastern cultures (Saroglou et al. 2020). Believing and bonding, founded on spirituality, are preferred in western secular societies and in the east. In religious societies, behaving and bonding were preferred, linked to fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and low *Openness to experience*.

The believing dimension has a cross-level interaction with culture. In high-religion countries, believing is associated with fundamentalism, while in low-religion countries, it's associated with existential quest. The degree of prominence and privilege that religion holds in a culture can strongly affect how religion is experienced and expressed. As Gebauer et al (2014) put it, in high-religion cultures believers swim *with* the stream, but in low-religion cultures, they swim *against* the stream.

Summary: Preferences for and the expression of the Big Four components of religion — believing, belonging, behaviour, and bonding — differ significantly between cultures, especially evident in the differences between high- and low-religiosity cultures.

Other frameworks

Other frameworks that try to scope and describe religion have also been proposed.

One is the **religious style typology**, which classifies people into one of four categories (Streib 2001). It further develops an earlier trilogy of 'general religiosity', 'mature spirituality' and 'religious fundamentalism'.

Rather than classifying people by the strength of belief, frequency of practice, or depth of knowledge of religious tenets, it focuses on differences in how the individual prefers to give effect to their religion: authoritative and exclusive; a conventions basis; critical and autonomous reflection; or pragmatism based on intellectual humility. As in many other frameworks, the Big Five personality trait *Openness to experience* provides a distinguishing dimension amongst the style (Streib, Zhuo Job & Hood 2020).

Another is the **Commitment-Reflectivity Circumplex**, which divides individual religious orientation into ten segments depending on the nature of a person's commitment to religion and their degree of reflectiveness (Isaak et al. 2017). It provides a more nuanced view of religious orientation than the "Big Three" framework (Intrinsic, Extrinsic and Quest orientations).

But rather than exhaustively summarise perspectives on religion, the purpose here has been to illustrate the wide range and variety of ways of considering religion and religiosity, beyond simple measures of denominational affiliation, belief and service attendance, or the specific *content* of one religion versus another.

Summary: Various frameworks of religion and religiosity illustrate a rich variety of ways that religion might be considered, expressed, and experienced in the real world.

A simple definition of 'religion'

Having identified a range of perspectives about religion, let's try to define what it actually is. We should be careful to emphasise that we are aiming for a broad, inclusive but distinguishing definition of "religion" in general: not of "a religion" or even a cluster of similar (e.g. Abrahamic) "religions", or even "religiosity". There have been countless attempts, including whole books (e.g. Jensen 2018) dedicated to the subject.

Most, though not all attempts, refer to a religious "class of belief", for example:

> "The belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader."
> — (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2021)

Like many western definitions, this one's presumptive theism is problematic. Many religions are non-theistic, that is, they have no specific god or gods. While Buddhism, for example, may in practice entertain a court of supernatural spirits, it is ultimately non-theistic.

The second part of the Oxford definition, "*…or the teachings of a spiritual leader*" does, however, entertain non-theistic religions. But its premise is circular: the dictionary's own definition of "*spiritual*" is "*connected with religion*". Thus, this statement says that religion is the belief in the teachings of a religious leader. Such tautologies are common, but unhelpful.

Another definition attempts to grapple with the underlying drivers of religious belief: cognitive and emotional representations.

> "*The cognitive and emotional representations that underlie beliefs in supernormal powers, often regarded as sacred or inviolable*."
> — (Grafman et al. 2020)

Grafman and colleagues' definition helpfully broadens the scope to supernatural powers in general, which accommodates Buddhist, animistic, ancestral, and other non-theistic beliefs. They also nod to the suggestions of believers that their beliefs ought not be challenged. They also commit the

same tautological offense (Jensen 2018, Chapter 3) as the Oxford definition, by defining religion in terms of "sacred" (i.e. religious) belief.

This definition, however, fails to sufficiently delineate what would usually be accepted as "religion" from, for example, the unique and radical religious claims about a supposed supernatural force made by an individual in the throes of a psychotic episode. This problem is addressed in the following definitions:

> "*The communicated acceptance of supernatural claims*."
> — (Ellsworth 2009)

> "*Any shared set of beliefs, activities and institutions premised upon faith in supernatural forces.*"
> — (Iannaccone 1998)

Thus, Ellsworth and Iannoccone employ a *collective* or *normative* approach to sorting out "real" religions from faux ones (as well as Iannaccone introducing ritualistic aspects). This definitional approach is also common.

But it's still problematic. Does belief in the supernatural powers of crystals or in astrology count as religion, especially if groups and societies of members adhere to the same beliefs and rituals? Does belief in an angel who protects a group of people's interests (for example, a favourite sports club) count as religion? Do "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) people exhibit religion?

Most argue that they don't. But why? What is a useful distinguishing feature? Let's aim for a definition that's more explanatory than merely descriptive.

While the above supernatural examples may have in common that they might offer significance to their adherents, the beliefs are not central to a personal sense of life meaning, nor offer specific moral tenets that are said to be critical to the conduct of one's life. That's what religion provides.

It would help at the same time to delineate the nature of "belief", since otherwise it might seem as elusive as "religion". For our purposes, belief is a *propositional attitude* that a certain thing is true (Jensen 2018).

Thus, we might define religion as:

> "**Religion:** *Shared propositional attitudes that particular supernatural entities, forces or principles are true, thereby offering organised guidance in life meaning and for moral thought and behaviour*."

This definition accommodates a full range of religions while excluding individual psychotic pseudo-religious episodes, supernatural but not moral frameworks, and moral frameworks that are not organisational or are not premised on the supernatural.

Of course, there remain unaccommodated matters such as the boundary between cults and religion,[8] but for our purposes, this will suffice.

It's worth expressly noting three major matters arising from the definition. Firstly, the existence of *supernatural* entities, powers or forces by definition can't be directly validated or invalidated by *natural* experiment, though indirect experiments about putative supernatural *effects* might provide evidence to support inductive reasoning. Therefore, these propositional attitudes can't be directly and conclusively tested in practice.

Secondly, the definition is silent on both the strength and sincerity of the propositional attitudes. For example, on average only one in five Australians (around 20%) are certain of the supernatural propositional attitudes that god, heaven, hell, religious miracles, and life after death, exist. Even amongst the most religious such beliefs are not universal (60%–89%) (Francis 2021, p 52). In addition, a religion might be founded for negative rather than positive purposes, such as leader aggrandisement or power, or tax concessions and other financial gain. There's no guarantee that religion is either genuinely held, or for good.

And thirdly, it's unclear what degree of "sharing" is necessary to qualify as religion, or who might hold the authority to decide the amount. Cults, anyone?

> **Summary:** Religion lies at the intersection of supernatural beliefs and organised guidance on life meaning as well as moral thought and behaviour.

8 Largely depending on how "cult" is defined, and beyond the scope of this discussion.

A legal definition of 'religion'

Another highly relevant definition of religion, for our purposes, is one determined by the High Court of Australia. In a case testing the status of the Church of Scientology[9] as a religion for tax purposes, the court decided in favour of Scientology, resolving that (High Court of Australia 1983):

> "*Religious belief is more than a cosmology ... it relates a view of the ultimate nature of reality to a set of ideas of how man is well advised, even obligated, to live. Thus religion encompasses conduct, no less than belief.*
>
> *For the purposes of the law, the criteria of religion are twofold: first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion*."[10]
>
> — High Court of Australia (1983)

This sets the fundamental *legal* standard now in force in Australia, including the express reference to the limitation that 'religion' grants no immunity for transgression of Australia's ordinary laws (for example, regarding polygamy or cruelty towards animals).

Abundantly clear from this definition is that religion's legal status is based jointly on both *supernatural beliefs,* and on *normative* — "accepted" and therefore necessarily shared or communal — *rules of thought and/or behaviour* ("*conduct*"), without any other essential elements.

---

9 At the time named "Church of the New Faith", perhaps to avoid the notion of "scientology" as diminishing its claim to supernatural foundations. Additionally, "Church" is a specific term of Christian community, signifying the acceptance of Jesus Christ as mankind's saviour through his death on the cross to atone for mankind's sins. Scientology, however, does not accept this, and classifies Christ as a "middle-tier" religious figure who supposedly forms part of its "religious heritage" along with Buddhism and others, including putative spiritual beings called Thetans. This suggests that the word "Church" in the religion's name may be aimed at slipstreaming increased legitimacy in Christian-majority cultures.

10 The High Court's use of the term "canons of conduct" may seem potentially biased towards the language of the three main monotheisms: this form of expression is used mostly by them. Perhaps a more inclusive expression would have been "axioms of conduct" or "standards of conduct".

Thus, the High Court's determination excludes the personal supernatural delusions of an individual experiencing a mental health crisis. In such cases the person may hold supernatural beliefs, but those beliefs haven't given rise to communal or normative and therefore *accepted* standards of conduct, to qualify as religious.

The determination is, however, less clear on the matter of "acceptance" itself. For example, how many followers must a putative religious leader have in order for "acceptance" to be so deemed? Does a new cult of two people — one leader and one follower — based on supernatural ideas and common conduct, constitute a religion? Ten people? A hundred? A thousand?

Additionally, it supplies no legal standard or test, objective or subjective, as to how genuinely beliefs or "canons of conduct" must be, other than stipulating that conduct must have a practical *connection* to the person's belief in the supernatural. The court expressly notes the likelihood of variations:

> "*…there may be a different intensity of belief or of acceptance of canons of conduct among religions or among the adherents to a religion*."
> — High Court of Australia (1983)

…and that the chief function of the legal definition of religion …

> "*…is to mark out an area within which a person subject to the law is free to believe and to act in accordance with his belief without legal restraint*."
> — High Court of Australia (1983)

To the contrary of any standards of belief or conduct, the court expressly stated that:

> "*Charlatanism is a necessary price of religious freedom, and if a self-proclaimed teacher persuades others to believe in a religion which he propounds, lack of sincerity or integrity on his part is not incompatible with the religious character of the beliefs, practices and observances accepted by his followers*."
> — High Court of Australia (1983)

Thus, no matter how preposterous a faith's tenets, how exhaustive a religion's tithes may be upon its members, how aggressively it requires families to excommunicate kin who question some aspect of leadership authority, how cynical the tax advantages or protection of conduct sought may be, how lavish the lifestyles of leaders are, that provided the followers conduct themselves through the supernatural beliefs and codes of conduct expounded by the leadership, the whole outfit is deemed a religion in law.

> The High Court of Australia has determined that "*charlatanism is a necessary price of religious freedom*". But as we shall see later, charlatanism, at least in the dimension of *hypocrisy*, is a leading cause of religious disaffiliation in western nations, including Australia. The legal protection of religious charlatanism deserves greater debate in the public square.

The High Court's parsimonious provisions mean that a very wide range of "faiths" of good or ill will, high or questionable morals, sincere, cynical, or even satirical intentions, might be legally recognised as religions and thereby granted special rights and protections.

For example, provided that the self-described Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster[11] — whose members wittily refer to themselves as Pastafarians — can convince a court its members do indeed hold supernatural beliefs (an omnipotent monster), and have canons of conduct (e.g. wearing a colander on the head), it could potentially be registered as a religion in Australia (Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia 2021). Not so in the USA, where the Federal Court ruled the group "*a work of satire, meant to entertain while making a pointed political statement*" (Americans United for Separation of Church and State 2016).

> **Summary:** Australia's High Court has determined that religion is the acceptance of axioms of conduct that give effect to beliefs in the supernatural, regarding how one ought to live. It expressly ruled that charlatanism is acceptable and was silent on the matter of religious harms except that any harms must not offend ordinary laws.

[11] By mere juxtaposition with a discussion of "charlatanism", no character inference is being made regarding the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster or its followers, nor should any be drawn. The case serves merely as a contentious example of a putative religion.

Religion doesn't mean 'spiritual'

A common misconception is that having a religion means a person is spiritual. While it's understandable that the career religious might want to draw this parallel (e.g. Ng 2020), even the nation's official statistician has incorrectly drawn the equivalence (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). Being "spiritual" means attending to the seat of one's emotions and character (described by some as the "soul"), rather than to physical things.

In fact, fewer than one in five (18%) Australians have a religion *and* say their faith is spiritual. Nearly as many (14%) say they have a religion but are *not* spiritual (Figure 2), that is, they identify with a religion for historical family, cultural, or other reasons.

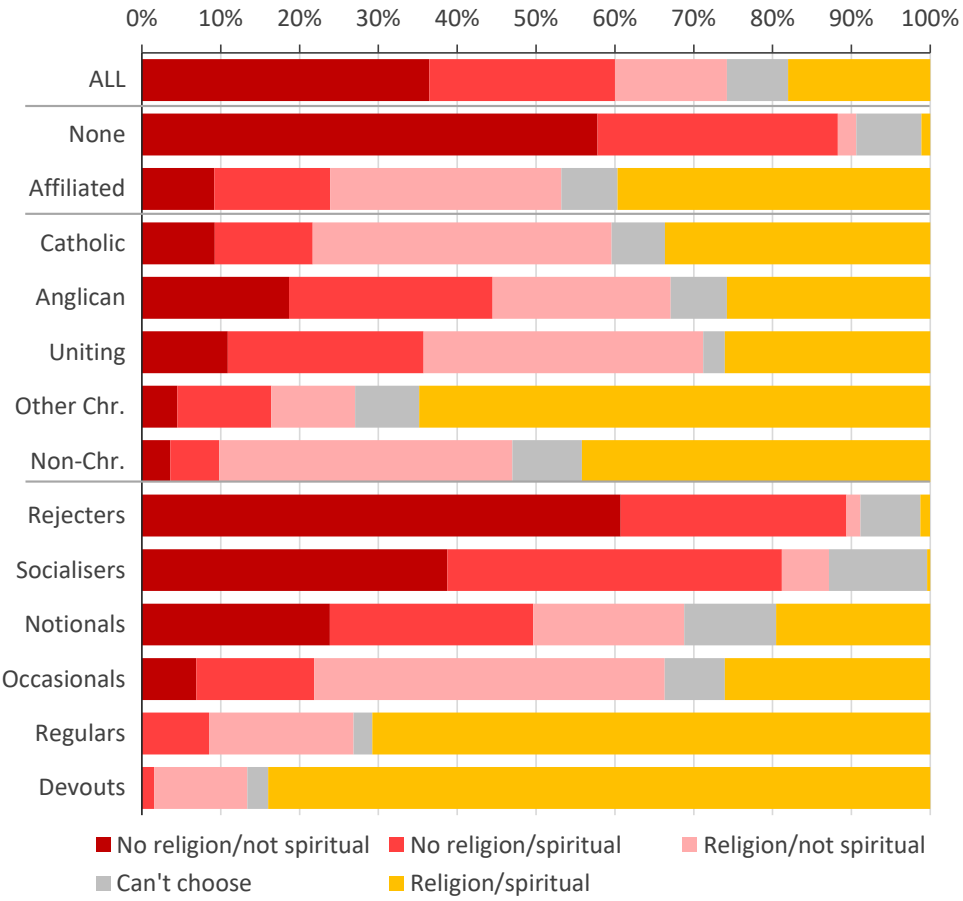


Figure 2: Religion versus spirituality in Australia
Source: AuSSA 2018

In fact, the figures reveal an even weaker religiosity in Australia than they might at first seem. This is because the relevant study (AuSSA 2018) measured religion by asking respondents whether they *belonged* to a religion, and if so, which one. Some 48% of respondents said they did *not* belong to a religion.

Therefore, of those who said they *belonged* to a religious denomination, 22% of Catholics, 44% of Anglicans, 36% of Uniting/Methodists, 16% of minor Christian denominations, and 10% of non-Christian denominations said they did *not* personally have a religion. Overall, a quarter (24%) of Australians who said they *belong* to a denomination said they *didn't* personally have a religion.

Back to spirituality: only a third (35%) of Catholics, a quarter of Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists (26% each), and less than half (44%) of non-Christian religionists have a religion for spiritual reasons. Only amongst minor Christian denominations do a majority, but still only around two thirds (65%), say that they have a religion for spiritual reasons.

Some religionists (e.g. Stobbe 2021) attempt to add Australia's spiritual but not religious (SBNRs)[12] to the total religious affiliation figure to say that a majority of Australians are spiritual — and by implication, that SBNRs are to be counted amongst the 'religious'.[13]

This, however, is seriously misguided. Firstly, adjusting the total religion count upwards for SBNRs (+18%) would have to also be corrected downwards for the religionists who *don't* say they're spiritual (-23%). That's a net -5%.

Secondly, counting SBNRs as somehow "religious" is to project onto them religious characteristics they *don't* have. This will be discussed further in the section *SBNR: 'Spiritual but not religious'* on page 63.

Summary: While religion appears to be common in Australia, only 18% of Australians say they hold a religion for *spiritual* reasons (AuSSA 2018). A quarter (24%) of Australians who say they *belong* to a religious denomination also say they don't *personally* have a religion. Amongst the religious denominations, minorities of Catholics (35%), Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists (26% each), and non-Christian denominations (44%) have a religion for spiritual reasons. Only amongst the minor Christian denominations is spiritual religion in the majority, but still far from universal (65%).

Attempts to add SBNRs to the religious affiliation statistics are misguided. It results in a false, grossly inflated measure of "religion", but is like mixing oil and water.

12 In the AuSSA 2018 study, "No religion/Spiritual".

13 The inverted commas emphasise the deliberately vague nature of 'religion' in this scenario.

Why religion is so prevalent

Religions, however loose or formal, are present in all societies, including in those that attempt to suppress religion. People with religious beliefs and practices of one kind or another are common everywhere and throughout human history. Specific theories abound as to why this is so.

As Wildman et al. (2015) point out, focusing on only one potential answer is not a good way to tell the whole story. For example, the subject of neural networks and brain development is not the sole answer, and neither is sole attention to social institutions and cultural products.

In this section, a range of explanations is synthesised into two sections: firstly, factors that contribute to the disposition of *individual minds* to be religious, and secondly, considerations of religion in *group* contexts.

Individual factors

The human mind is uniquely predisposed to religious thought, yet religion is far from universal. A busy cluster of factors helps explain why some individuals are more religious while others are less so, or not religious at all.

Nature versus nurture

There has been longstanding debate about whether religion emanates from nature or nurture (Granqvist & Nkara 2017).

Under nature, for example, a 'hypersensitive agency detection device' may have been helpful for survival and evolution. The benefits of interpreting a negative but unclear event to the general malevolent agency of a predator has fewer immediate downsides than does merely wondering. Similarly, a trait for anthropomorphic thinking (nature) along with positive experiences with family carers (nurture), would induce a tendency to attribute unclear positive causation — say, of a bountiful harvest — to a caring supernatural agent.

Under nurture, communal beliefs, and norms about expected and prohibited behaviours and roles help shape and steward religious tendencies into specific forms of expression. And coerce those who don't agree into compliance.

A USA study of identical and fraternal twins found that around half of individual religiosity was explained by biological characteristics (nature), and half by environmental influences (nurture) (Waller et al. 1990), though it is suggested that such measures tend to overestimate heritability (Sapolsky 2018, p 243).

While a disposition towards religious beliefs is somewhat heritable, specific denominational expression is certainly environmental (Kandler 2021). It's no accident then, that children of religious parents might be more religious than children of others, at the same time that it's unlikely for a Hindu child to naturally evolve within a Jewish family.

The answer to the question is, of course, not nature *versus* nurture, but nature *and* nurture acting in concert to invigorate religion (Granqvist & Nkara 2017).

> **Summary:** While a tendency to religiosity is heritable (nature), specific forms and expression of religion are learned (nurture).

General brain mechanisms, not a 'God spot'

Some religious commentators attempt to explain religiosity as the result of a 'God spot' in the human brain, animated by a 'God gene' (e.g. Meyer 2013). Self-referential anchoring bias is evident in such explanations, however. Meyer, a Christian commentator, equates 'religion' with 'belief in God', consistent with her monotheistic faith and in denial of non-theistic religions. Meyer's argument that the gene and hence 'God spot' is "ultimately controlled by God the Creator", reveals circular reasoning as well.

The supposed 'spot' is, in fact, an interaction of the temporal lobes under epileptic seizure (Shermer 2000, p 65 ff): temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE). These seizures may be partial, in which no overt convulsions occur, yet cause mystical experiences. Normally, a sense of self is maintained by matching systems in the left and right temporal cortices. But if the two systems become uncoordinated, the person may feel a transient sense of "another self" or "sensed presence".

Persinger et al (2010) report that the two cortices can be manually uncoordinated in most people by the application of a magnetic field device, popularly called the "God helmet". Rationally-prone individuals are likely to interpret experiences as *inside* the mind: e.g. dreams or hallucinations. However, fantasy-prone individuals are likely to interpret experiences as *outside* the mind: e.g. angels, demons, ghosts, aliens, astral projection or god.

Despite its popularity in the media, Persinger's work has been criticised, with other studies failing to replicate its effects, and any effects said to be largely the result of suggestibility (Granqvist et al. 2005). Indeed, no spiritual effects of any kind could be stimulated in the mind of one of the world's most famous atheists, Richard Dawkins (BBC Science & Nature 2001).

Some people experience TLE events as mystical or ecstatic and describe them as divine. When the amygdala is involved, feelings can be particularly intense. Individuals having these experiences react far more strongly to religious stimuli even than otherwise "very religious" people.

At the same time, there is a cluster of other behaviours (Waxman & Geschwind 1975). For example, they respond far *less* to sexual imagery, instead displaying a distinct lack of interest. This may go some way to account for the sexual control and repression present in some religions.

Likewise, they exhibit a tendency for extensive and compulsive writing and drawing, which may go some way to explain the abundance of religious art and texts.

Further, they can exhibit elevated levels of aggression (Devinsky et al. 1994), often explosive, which may account for "demonic possession".

> A cluster of experiential and behavioural traits associated with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) offers partial explanations for religiosity, sexual repression, an abundance of religious art and texts, and demons as well as angels.

A small Adelaide, Australia, study found that 47% of Christians and 58% of Muslims were sure they had experienced the presence of God/Allah, with 30% and 21% respectively saying they hadn't (Hassan 2002). The remainder (23%, 21%) thought they possibly had. In a national survey, only slightly more than a quarter (28%) of all Australians (not just Christians and Muslims) said they had experienced "a mystical or supernatural experience" (Powell & Pepper 2016).

> **Summary:** Partial temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) provides one explanation for supernatural experiences, sexual repression, the abundance of religious art and texts, and demonic possession.

Complex interactions

Rather than a single, dedicated 'God spot' (and its monotheistic bias), more recent research reveals that personal religion is extremely complex, not just the temporal lobes involved in epilepsy (Albright 2000).

For example, the parietal lobes, thalamus, limbic system, and autonomic nervous systems may be involved, including a mix of dopamine, serotonin, acetylcholine and other molecules (Newberg & Newberg 2005). These might, for example, suppress the senses of time and place, invoking transcendental experience, or stimulating holistic (versus reductionist) thinking.

A more recent model suggests at least four separate brain mechanisms involved in religion and spirituality (van Elk & Aleman 2017): not only the temporal lobes involved with visions and ecstatic experiences, and multisensory areas involved in self-transcendent experiences, but the theory-of-mind network (more later) involved with prayer and over-attribution of intentionality, and various top-down mechanisms in the anterior cingulate and medial pre-frontal cortices regarding intuitive supernatural beliefs. These are common general brain mechanisms, not the result of either overall or specific regional differences in brain morphology (van Elk & Snoek 2020).

Van Eyghen (2020) argues that these mechanisms are not self-triggering (nature), but triggered by cultural learning (nurture) — with religious interpretations the product of cognitive and content biases passed on from others.

Indeed, individuals with TLE and its attendant mystical experiences are revered in some cultures but persecuted in others, (Devinsky & Lai 2008) emphasising the complex interaction between nature and nurture, and how *others* interpret a person's unique experiences.

> **Summary:** A cluster of brain mechanisms, not based on differences in brain structure and which may be learned, gives rise to mystical and transcendent experiences through the suppression of time and place, and through other complex but ordinary paths.

Next, we'll take a look at an illustrative but not exhaustive range of cognitive and affective dispositions that facilitates personal religiosity. These dispositions help explain mankind's tendency to religiosity, but do not serve to either confirm or debunk specific religious beliefs themselves (Launonen 2021).

Preferred cognitive style

Intuitive versus analytic cognitive preferences

Religiosity correlates with intuitive (versus analytic) thinking. Further, an analytic style is negatively associated with literal interpretation of religious ideas (that is, closed views with fixed answers), but not with a more symbolic experience of religion (open to alternative interpretations) (Freidin & Martini 2020).

Similarly, intuition underlies moral thinking in the absence of systematised reasoning and is rooted in emotion and socialisation (Horne, Powell & Hummel 2015; Thagard 2005). Thus, moral concern is similarly and robustly associated with religious belief and negatively with analytic reasoning (Jack et al. 2016).

Yet, due to cognitive biases, moral intuition is unreliable and may amount to wishful thinking (Paulo 2020). Cognitive biases and overconfidence are significantly more prevalent amongst those with an intuitive cognitive style (Białek & Domurat 2018), which may account for a lower tendency for reflection — i.e. the analytical cognitive effort of critical appraisal — amongst the religious (Pennycook et al. 2016).

Thagard (2005) describes religious faith as attracting 'birds of a feather':

> Religious faith is "*a kind of emotional coherence in which people adopt religious beliefs that fit with their emotional needs as well as with their other beliefs*".
> — (Thagard 2005)

The relationship between religion and intuitive thinking, too, spans the nature-nurture divide (Stagnaro 2018). Religious individuals who are deliberative may be seen by their fellows as less religious and therefore be subject to isolation and penalty rather than cooperation. Thus, actively avoiding analytical cognition may be advantageous in a religious context.

Women have higher rates of intuitive and lower rates of analytical thinking, which may account for their higher rates of paranormal and religious beliefs (Aarnio & Lindeman 2005).

The general effect is given support by the stronger association of intuitive thinking amongst those affiliated with a religious denomination, but not those

who are metaphysically-inclined but not affiliated: the spiritual but not religious (SBNR) (Browne et al. 2014).

Thus, a tendency to overconfident intuitive thinking is mostly a feature of religion — that is, organised, structured, and institutionalised supernatural beliefs — and not an essential feature of mere supernatural belief itself.

> Religionists — that is, those subscribing to organised or institutionalised supernatural beliefs — are especially prone to overconfident intuitive thinking.

While a single moral counterexample might lead a person to revise their moral beliefs (Horne, Powell & Hummel 2015), continual social reinforcement of religious thoughts and feelings can create significant resistance to revision of religious beliefs. Conservatives are more resistant to belief change than are progressives (White et al. 2020), and those who endorse religious claims are far less likely to believe that contrary evidence *ought* to change beliefs (Pennycook et al. 2020).

> **Australian politics**
>
> The empirical evidence regarding conservatives' greater resistance to belief change and the tendency of those who endorse religious claims to reject that contrary evidence *ought* to change beliefs, offers a useful peek into contemporary Australian politics. A religious cohort within the current federal Coalition (conservative) government is vocal in its entrenched opposition to addressing fossil fuel's contribution to climate change, in the face of extensive scientific consensus and social support for reform. This presents a major challenge for urgently needed policy realignment.

> **Summary:** Religious conservatives are more prone than others to intuitive thinking and to overconfidence in their beliefs. They are far more prone to resist assessing and especially revising their beliefs, and they are the most likely to believe that contrary evidence is *not* a reason to change belief. These associations are strong amongst members of organised or institutionalised religion.

Deontological preference

Deontology is a normative system in which predetermined moral rules dictate actions that are required, allowed or forbidden. Since a person must follow the rules in order to be moral under the system, it's also known as "duty ethics".

Like religiosity, deontological ethics (and social conservatism) are associated with intuitive cognition (Chan 2019). Religiosity increases emotion, and along with intuitive cognition, increases reliance on deontological choices (Szekely, Opre & Miu 2015) and preferences for moral absolutism, but mostly among intrinsic rather than extrinsic religionists (Reynolds 2018).

> **Summary:** Intrinsic religionists in particular favour deontological (rules-based) cognition based on intuition.

Randomness, pattern recognition, and compensatory control

The human mind is by necessity skilled at pattern recognition in support of prediction and control (Bulbulia & Schjoedt 2012). But these talents are not without flaw.

Illusory pattern perception is one of the core cognitive mechanisms underlying supernatural beliefs and conspiracy theories (van Prooijen, Douglas & De Inocencio 2018). Those who see patterns in random coin toss outcomes and in chaotic paintings not only are more likely to infer patterns where they don't exist, but are more susceptible to pattern *suggestion* in both search tasks and in texts about paranormal phenomena. This applies to true randomness, not merely to hidden or difficult-to-discern patterns (Heltzer & Vyse 1994).

Developing superstitions, perceiving conspiracies, seeing false patterns in noisy images and illusory correlations in longitudinal data like stock market prices, all correlate positively with perceived lack of control (Whitson & Galinsky 2008). Illusory pattern perception is a *compensatory* mechanism against perceived threats to personal control. So too is defending the legitimacy of favoured institutions that offer control (e.g. political and religious groups), and believing in an interventionist God (Kay et al. 2009a; Kay et al. 2009b). This is true whether or not the distress experienced as a result of perceived randomness is related to actual trauma (Kay, Moscovitch & Laurin 2010). God beliefs hold several advantages over alternatives in addressing such distress (Laurin & Kay 2017).

Like the religious, conservatives are higher in need for control (Ponce de Leon & Kay 2020). The effect may be compounded amongst religious conservatives.

While Australia's most religious report a greater sense of fatalism (Francis 2021, p 35), most likely connected to abstract belief in God's control, when asked directly about a sense of control over their own lives, Diligents and Ardents are the most confident (Figure 3).[14]

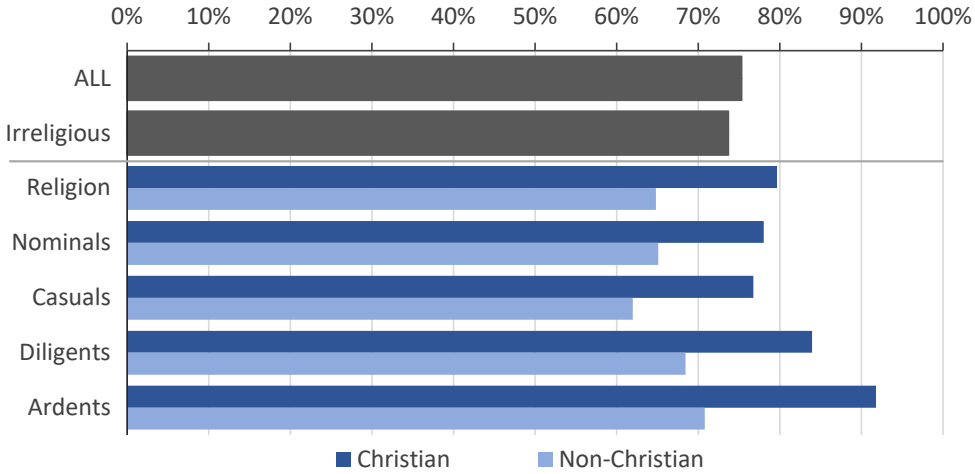


Figure 3: Feeling strong control over one's own life, by ARI6
Source: AVS 2018

Even though the greater confidence of Diligents and Ardents is consistent across Christian and non-Christian religions, non-Christian religionists are significantly less likely to be confident, and Christian religionists significantly more likely, overall. This may reflect prejudice against people from cultural minorities who, while being significantly better educated, experience significantly greater rates of unemployment.

Compensatory beliefs of control drive expediting behaviours such as the social manipulation of gods (e.g. through prayer) and the mechanical compulsion of evil spirits to withdraw (e.g. through exorcism) (Ellis 2016), as well alignment or affiliation with institutions perceived to act on one's behalf (Landau, Kay & Whitson 2015).

This interplay between institutional control (power) and personal control (choice) is itself compensatory: as one increases the other diminishes in salience and necessity (Inesi et al. 2011). Another compensatory mechanism is that denominational affiliates can increase their belief in the power of *other* religions' deities and spirits in response to control threats (Boucher & Millard 2016).

[14] See Part I for an explanation of the Australian Religious Identity (ARI5 and ARI6) scales.

Australian politics

The current push of religious conservatives in Australia amply illustrates attempts at compensatory manoeuvres in response to perceived loss of control and in the absence of actual trauma. In 2017, the prohibition by one institution (federal parliament) against the marriage of non-binary and non-heterosexual Australians, was overturned. This prohibition was a favoured form of control by religious conservatives, who now propose to substitute a different form of control: the privileged legal right to discriminate against outgroups of whom they disapprove.

In an additional cycle of reinforcement, intuitive thinking's poor understanding of physical and biological phenomena can contribute to a sense of low control (Lindeman & Svedholm-Häkknen 2016), which then amplifies intuitive but false pattern recognition and belief in supernatural phenomena.

Compensatory control, and its perception of illusory patterns and supernatural powers, are attempts to reduce anxiety by attempting to increase *predictability*. This offers an explanation as to why religion and moral judgements are so closely associated: predictability is a central factor in moral judgements (Walker et al. 2020). Those who commit moral violations for no discernible motive are judged far more harshly than those who do so for identifiable reasons. Further, actions that violate current moral norms in a *predictable* manner can in fact, like moral actions, engender cooperation.

The specific mechanisms influencing the tendency to favour compensatory control appear to vary somewhat by culture (Hoogeveen et al. 2019). An explanatory factor may be that those who view themselves as separate and distinct from others ("independent self-construal") are more likely to experience the need for such compensation (Alper & Sümer 2017).

Summary: For some, religion acts as an internal compensatory system to increase feelings of control and thereby reduce anxiety. Such controls may include increased belief in God or religious tenets, and affiliating with religious organisations that are expected to act on one's behalf. A common facet of religion and morality is their acting as compensatory control to increase *predictability*.

Magical thinking and paranormal beliefs

Those prone to ontological confusions, that is, being less able to consider and describe coherent explanations of natural existence and reality, are prone to magical thinking (Lindeman & Aarnio 2007). Intuitive thinking, mystical experiences and positive supernatural attitudes of friends distinguish both religious and paranormal believers from sceptics. In addition, tradition, conformity and universalism, security and benevolence are unique features of the religious (Aarnio & Lindeman 2007).

It's no surprise then, that existential threats increase magical religious thinking. Financial insecurity — the modern version of unreliable access to resources — correlates with experiencing magical thinking in the form of religious miracles (Eschler 2020). This is even more so for Protestants than Catholics, a finding that is supported by Australian research which shows that efforts to *avoid* financial insecurity through ownership of investment properties and company shares, is by far the highest amongst Protestants (Francis 2021, p 82).

This illuminates the foundations of Protestantism's prosperity gospel, especially amongst Pentecostals for whom the experience of religious miracles is a central tenet (Almond 2019a). It further illustrates the principle of the socio-cultural dimensions of religion, and why some might gravitate to one religious denomination rather than another.

But 'threats' don't necessarily have to be existential to stimulate magical thinking. Mere threats to meaning and coping mechanisms can also give rise to magical thinking (Routledge, Roylance & Abeyta 2017).

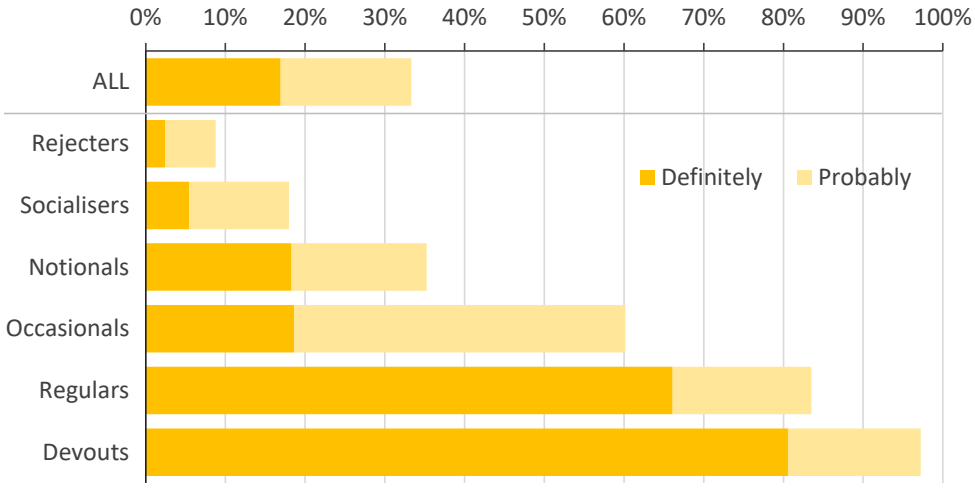


Figure 4: Belief in religious miracles, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

In Australia, only a small minority (17%) are certain of religious miracles, with a further 16% "probably" believing in them (Figure 4). Belief in religious miracles correlates strongly and positively with religiosity.

Across the political spectrum, Greens are least likely (10%), and those preferring minor parties and independents most likely (25%), to definitely subscribe to magical thinking (Figure 5). These are small minorities across the political spectrum. Including those who "probably" believe in religious miracles, magical thinking is highest for the Coalition (42%) and Labor (37%).

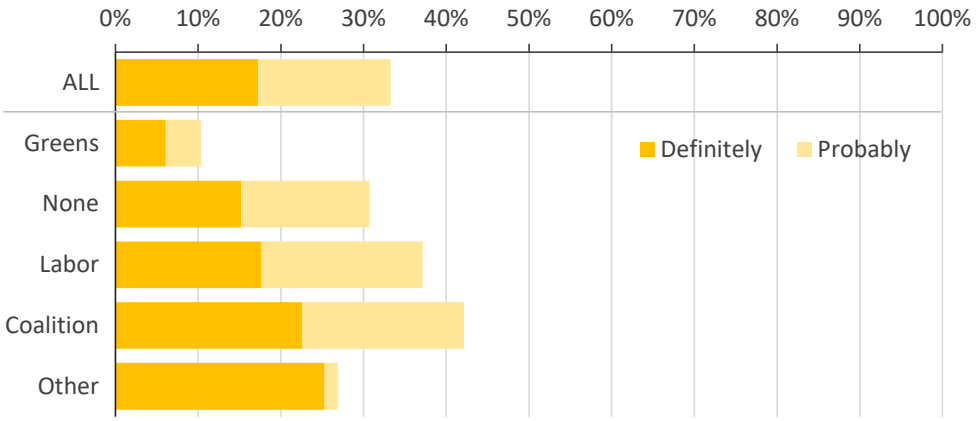


Figure 5: Belief in religious miracles, by party preference
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Preference means "usually think of yourself as", not party membership.

Once again, it's important to distinguish common from essential features of religiosity. While correlations between magical thinking, paranormal beliefs and scepticism towards science are demonstrated in western, and in African populations (Peltzer 2003), they are common but not essential features of religiosity: acceptance of science is *higher* amongst the religious in Korea (Clobert & Saroglou 2015).

Intercessory prayer

A specific form of magical thinking, intercessory prayer (IP), posits that praying to a powerful deity will result in the deity interceding in a situation to the benefit of those prayed for.

Empirical testing of masked prayers[15] for unwell patients showed that IPs were no more effective than doing nothing, and less effective than MIT (music, imagery and touch) therapy (Krucoff et al. 2005). Patients uncertain of whether or not they were the subject of prayers did equally well whether they received prayers or not, while those who were told they would (and did) receive IPs did significantly worse (Benson et al. 2006). Those who knew they

[15] Masked: those being prayed for were either entirely unaware of being prayed for, or not aware if they were in a test (prayed for) or control (not prayed for) group.

were being prayed for may have experienced increased anxiety as a result of perceived "pressure" to get well.

Pregnant women experienced adverse outcomes at similar rates regardless of whether or not they received masked IPs, or themselves made IPs (da Rosa et al. 2013). Conversely, another study found slight increases in spiritual and emotional wellbeing among cancer patients receiving IPs, even though those praying did not specifically know who they were praying for (Olver & Dutney 2012).

Overall, depending on conceptual clarity and quality of research design, studies have returned mixed results (Csizmar Carvalho et al. 2013; de Aguiar, Tatton-Ramos & Alminhana 2017; Turner 2006).

A significant incoherence of popular IP is its reactive nature to negative circumstances. If those who pray genuinely believe in its effectiveness, then preventative IPs — for example prayers to *avert* floods, droughts, earthquakes and pandemics — would be far more useful than post-onset restorative IPs. However, failed preventative IPs could create a more visible and direct challenge to the beliefs of those who pray, which may reduce their inclination to employ preventative IPs.

Summary: Limited ability to offer coherent explanations for the natural world, increased perceived threats (whether existential or not), friends who say they have mystical experiences and endorse supernatural phenomena, and other factors, contribute to magical thinking amongst the religious, as well as amongst SBNRs.

One specific form of magical thinking, intercessory prayer, is popular, though scientific testing of its efficacy fails to provide consistent confirmatory results, and sometimes negative results.

Theory of mind and mentalisation

Theory of mind (ToM) refers to the appreciation that others have preferences, beliefs, mental states, and motives that are different from one's own.

ToM skills underpin affiliation and empathy, not just in responding appropriately in social interactions and increasing cooperation, but in anticipating challenges and reacting adaptively to setbacks (Seyfarth & Cheney 2013). These of course, are not unique features of religion.

Nor are they a unique feature of the human animal. Levels of ToM have been found in, for example, corvids (crows and jays), dogs and of course apes (Krupenye & Call 2019).

However, humans, with vastly more brain power than other animals, exhibit a type of ToM found in no other species: *secondary* ToM. It's the appreciation that other minds can appreciate that other minds have their own beliefs and motives (Kirschenmann 2016). This allows, for example, Jenny to understand that Sam is aware that Leigh thinks there's a cookie in the jar at the same time Jenny understands that Sam knows there isn't one.

This advanced mentalising capability is often adaptive, but can also be maladaptive. The tendency to explain the world via complex mentalised landscapes contributes to the disposition to imaginatively assign mental explanations to *non-mental* phenomena, which is associated with belief in the supernatural (Lindeman & Svedholm-Häkknen 2016). It's a key factor that helps explain the prevalence of religion around the world in the cultural shaping of belief (White, Baimel & Norenzayan 2021).

Secondary ToM also facilitates the *personal* morality of religion, since we can conceive of supernatural beings with minds that can detect and judge what's in our own. Uniquely, we can conjure up our own thought police, and we're adept at calling them in. For example, even in an anonymous economics game, priming participants in relation to God increases religionists' prosocial behaviour (Shariff & Norenzayan 2007), though God-priming doesn't influence non-religious participants (Shariff et al. 2016).

Teleological explanations

Secondary ToM also accounts for mankind's wide disposition to generate teleological explanations for natural phenomena (Schachner et al. 2017). These are explanations of the *purpose the phenomenon serves* rather than explanations of how it was *caused*. While all people including atheists sometimes employ teleological explanations, the trait is much higher amongst the religious (Heywood & Bering 2014) and is linked to endorsement of supernatural agents (Roberts, Wastell & Polito 2020).

For example, the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in Ukraine), Patriarch Filaret, explained the COVID-19 pandemic as God's punishment for gay marriage rather than being caused by the transmission of a highly infectious strain of coronavirus (Wyatt 2020).

Teleological explanations in combination with positive emotions mediate the effect of religion on perceived wellbeing (Ramsay et al. 2019).

Patriarch Filaret later contracted COVID-19 (Wyatt 2020). No teleological explanation for his infection could be found online.

> **Summary:** Theory of mind (ToM) is not unique to but is especially advanced in humans. This allows us to imagine the existence of specific or general supernatural minds — which may monitor our own — and drives a tendency to a teleological (purpose, rather than cause) explanatory style.

Cognitive content

Religious beliefs fall into a broad class of beliefs whose function is to convey meaning and purpose in life (Oviedo & Szocik 2020). About the only way to distinguish religious from non-religious beliefs of the same class (conveying meaning and purpose) is in their content: religious beliefs attempt to explain via appeals to supernatural forces, while non-religious beliefs do not.

While nature may contribute to a disposition of an individual to accept intuitive, supernatural claims, it is the cultural transmission (i.e. nurture) of *content* — the particular representations of supernatural forces or entities, including gods — and how that content is enlivened through ritual, that contribute to the cultural persistence of religion (Gervais et al. 2011).

However, given the greater cognitive biases inherent in beliefs in and appeals to the supernatural, and the inappropriate confidence with which they are held, it would be inappropriate to grant superior weight, status or authority to religious over non-religious beliefs.

> **Summary:** Religion centres on a common class of beliefs: those that convey meaning and purpose. It is its cognitive *content* that differs: the appeal to supernatural explanations.

Awe and inspiration

Awe is the experiential state of "small self" in response to perceived vast, difficult-to-explain phenomena (Keltner & Haidt 2003). Phenomena may be spatially vast such as in natural phenomena, or vast in meaning such as childbirth.

Awe decreases tolerance for uncertainty, which increases illusory pattern perception, false detection of agency, spiritual feelings and supernatural belief (Valdesolo & Graham 2014; Van Cappellen & Saroglou 2012).

Possibly by situating the awe-ee within a broader context (including the social) and enhancing collective concern, awe is associated with increases in prosocial behaviour and decreased entitlement (Piff et al. 2015).

Trait **inspiration** is a disposition to experience mental stimulation towards something creative. When people with this trait are inspired by an external stimulus — someone or something — they show stronger belief in God through spiritual transcendence, feeling connected to something beyond themselves (Critcher & Lee 2018). This may account for the higher religiosity of evangelicals (Pew Research Center 2015) through an energetic and uplifting worship style that is likely to engender inspiration.

> **Summary:** Both awe and inspiration can increase religiosity, through decreased tolerance for uncertainty, increased false detection of agency, spiritually transcendent feelings, and supernatural belief including in God.

Attachment style

Attachment style is one's dominant style of attachment to others that develops during early childhood, related to the relationship between the infant and its carers. The relationship is influenced by the degree to which carers provide a *safe haven* for retreat in times of distress, and a *secure base* from which to explore the world in the absence of direct threats. The three attachment styles are: secure; insecure-anxious (ambivalent/resistant); and insecure-avoidant — the latter two being somewhat dysfunctional (Kirkpatrick & Shaver 1990). Attachment style is considered to influence religiosity through two major mechanisms: compensation and correspondence.

Compensation: For people with a history of avoidant attachment, God can serve in a compensatory role, that is, as substitute attachment figure (Birgegard & Granqvist 2004; Kirkpatrick 1997).[16] In particular, those with a negative self-model but positive models of others are more likely to become religious (Kirkpatrick 1998). Insecure-anxious and insecure-avoidant women are more likely to find a relationship with God, with insecure-anxious more likely to experience their conversion as a religious epiphany (Kirkpatrick 1997). Attempts at compensation aren't always effective, however. Those with an anxious personal attachment style who perceive God as distant experience worse mental health (Malinakova et al. 2020).

Correspondence: In addition, socialised correspondence of child-parent religion and religiosity is more likely to occur as a result of secure child-parent attachments. For example, members of evangelical congregations show higher rates of secure attachment style than demographic-matched controls (Ross 2006), helping explain their higher rates of intergenerational religious transmission. Similarly, children of non-religious parents feel less close to God if they feel close to their parents (Homan 2019).

In either case, secure, symbolic attachment to God has been found to correlate with higher mental wellbeing (Homan 2014). This is true for the three major monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, through increases over time in attributes like self-esteem, perceived interconnectedness and optimism (Cherniak et al. 2021).[17] The relationship is bi-directional though. For example, those developing depression are likely to later experience insecure attachment to God. If this occurs, prayer interventions can help restore secure attachment to God and consequently mental health.

> **Summary:** A secure child-parent attachment style promotes correspondence between parental and child religiosity (or non-religiosity). The dysfunctional attachment styles insecure-anxious and insecure-avoidant can lead to compensatory increases in religion of the child, with God as a substitute attachment figure. This is more common amongst women than men, with insecure-anxious parental attachment more often associated with religious conversion by epiphany rather than evolution.

[16] Note the *mono*theistic emphasis.

[17] Research in respect of polytheistic religions is at present lacking.

Terror management theory

> "*Even if the forces of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say*."
> — Pope John Paul II

Terror management theory suggests that increased salience of death, either as reminders of mortality or real existential threat, promotes terror whose anxiety is reduced through appeals to the supernatural (Shults et al. 2018b) and belief in both literal and symbolic immortality (Jackson et al. 2017).

Its contribution to religiosity is well-established, with many studies identifying associations between death anxiety and religious belief. However, its effect in some contexts is not overly strong. For example, reminders of death (a weaker form of salience than existential threat) only temporarily strengthen the religious beliefs of believers, and don't increase belief amongst non-believers (Jong 2021).

Across cultures there are strong links between intrinsic religiosity and expectations of eternal life in heaven, as well as God's help in everyday life (Lavric & Flere 2011). This comprises a rational-choice, utilitarian, instrumental motive of religiosity.

In Australia, the Australian Values Survey contains a proxy measure of terror management: that religion is about making sense of life after death (versus making sense of this life). A small minority (22%) of Australians favour the meaning of religion as making sense of life after death rather than making sense of this life (Figure 6).

Favouring a life-after-death explanation of religion correlates somewhat with religiosity, being lowest among Casuals (9%), higher among Diligents (21%), and highest among Ardents (34%). The relatively higher rate for the Irreligious (29%) may be a metacognitive effect — what the Irreligious *think* the religious think — since the irreligious have the lowest rate of *belief* in an afterlife.

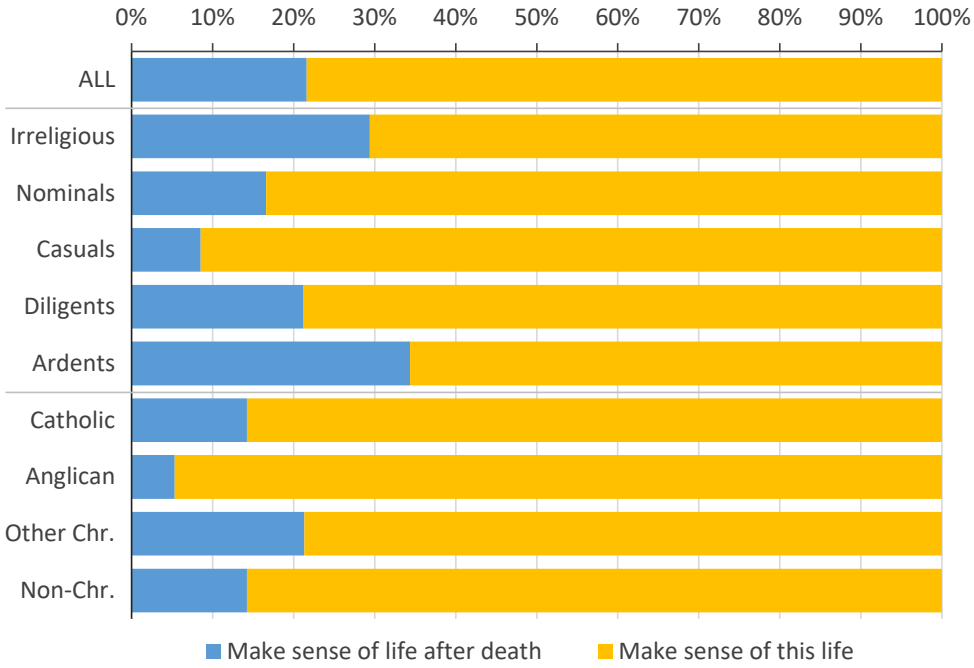


Figure 6: Weighted meaning of religion, by ARI5 and denomination
Source: AVS 2018

> **Summary:** Terror management theory suggests that religious beliefs of symbolic immortality help reduce death anxiety. While its effects have been found in many studies, they seem to be modest in strength.

Combating boredom

Religiosity acts as a resource against boredom, reducing the intensity of this unpleasant existential experience and thereby reducing the search for either meaningful engagement or meaning in life while performing boring tasks (van Tilburg et al. 2019). This effect seems to arise from the individual's life meaning conferred by religion rather than any correlation between need for cognition and boredom.

> **Summary:** Religion can help combat boredom through conferring meaning on repetitive or menial tasks, or creating greater meaning in life.

In summary, there is a complex assortment of characteristics of the human brain and mind which predispose it to sensing or favourably considering supernatural agentic solutions that help promote improved mental health — though it can in practice sometimes result in worse mental health. When the expression of these characteristics coalesces into accepted norms of belief, belonging, bonding and behaviour, they are known as 'religion'.

Neurological studies indicate that there is no "God" spot in the brain. Rather the assortment of general characteristics may act individually or in concert to increase the religiosity of the individual, and the prevalence of religion in society.

> Therefore, at the level of the individual person, religion might be understood as a "*by-product of mundane cognitive machinery*."
> — Voland (2009)

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%

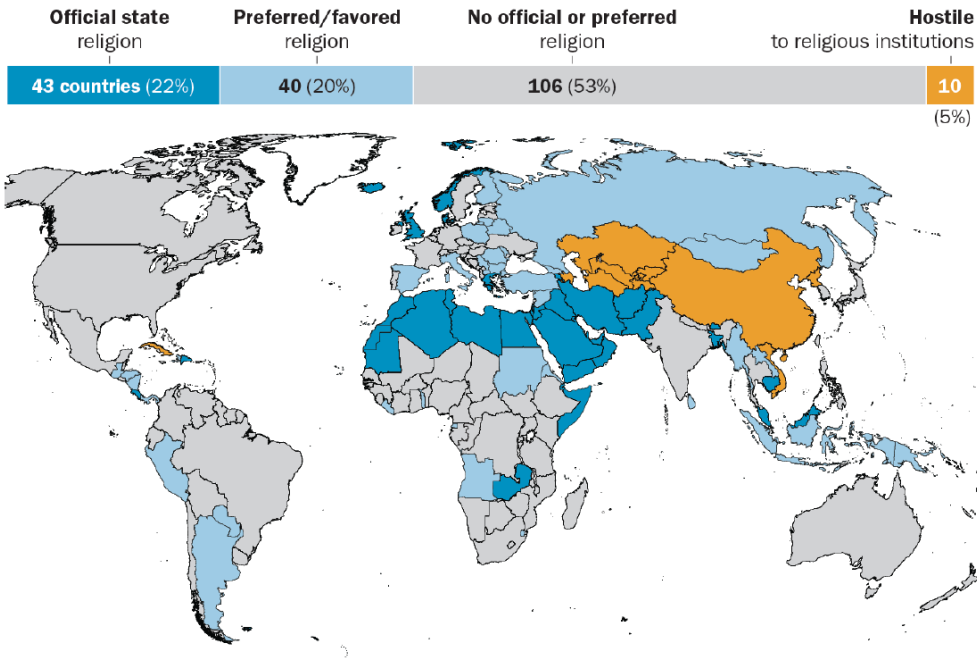


Figure 7: State relationships with religion
Source: Pew Research Center (2017), p 4

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).

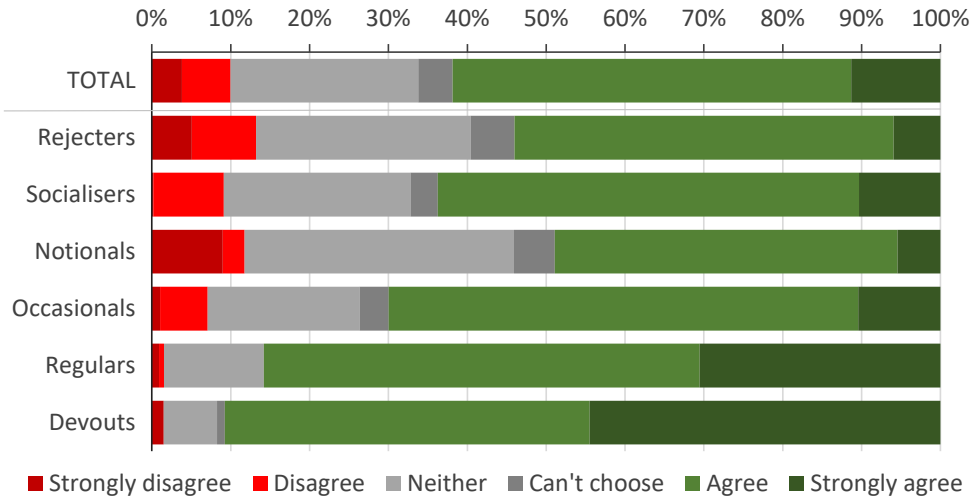


Figure 8: Religion helps people make friends, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

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).

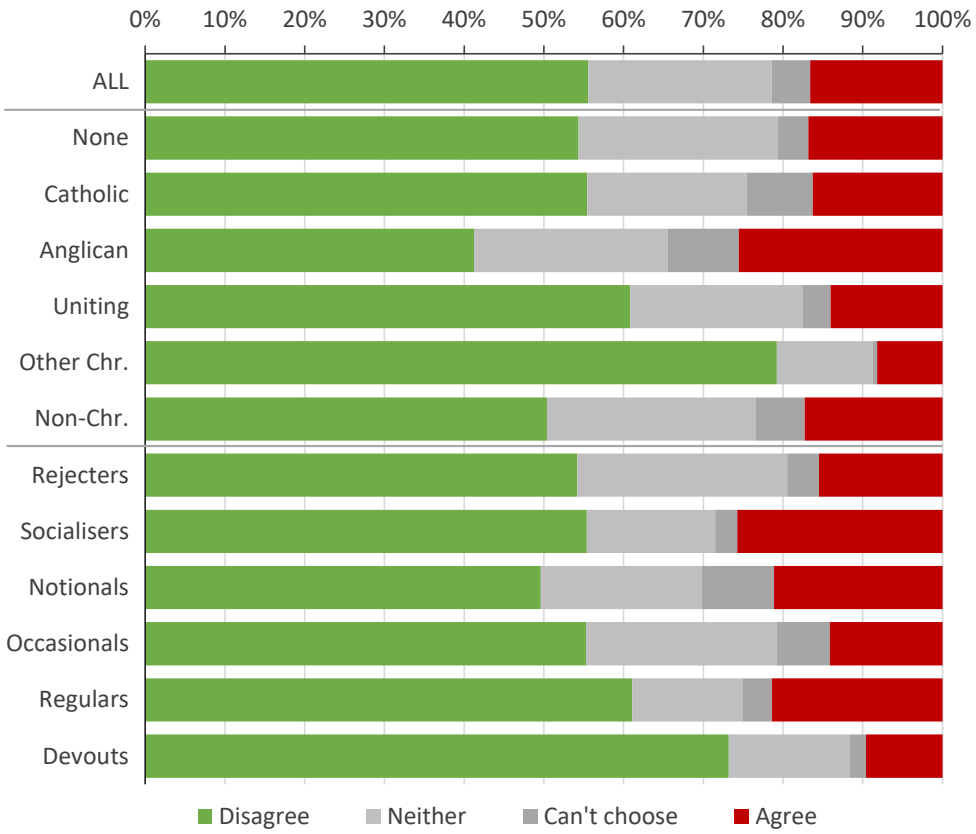


Figure 9: Neighbours of different religions *can't* get along, by religion & ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

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]

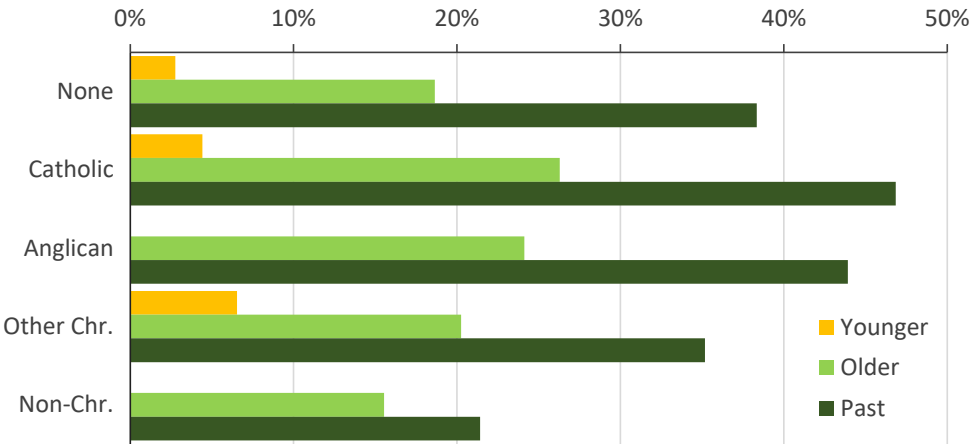


Figure 10: Population-growth fertility rate (3+ children) by age group and denomination
Source: AVS 2018. Note: Younger = 18-34yo, Older = 35-54yo, Past = 55+yo.

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.

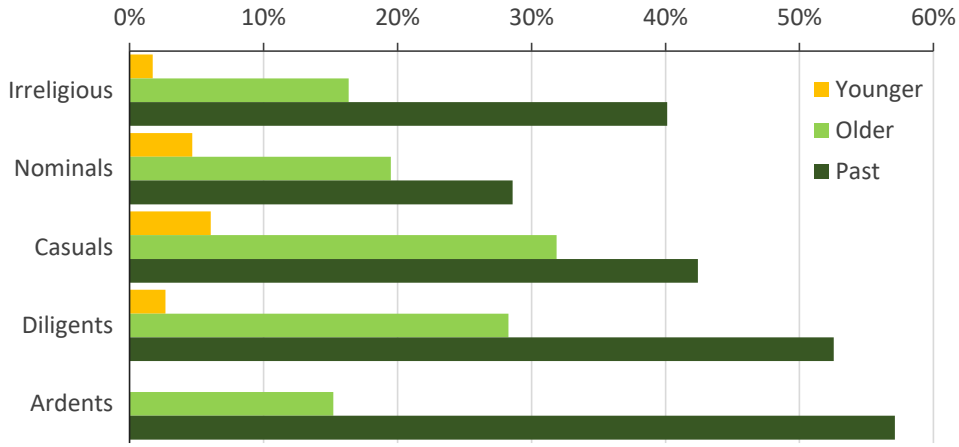


Figure 11: Population-growth fertility rate (3+ children) by age group and ARI5
Source: AVS 2018. Note: Younger = 18-34yo, Older = 35-54yo, Past = 55+yo.

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]

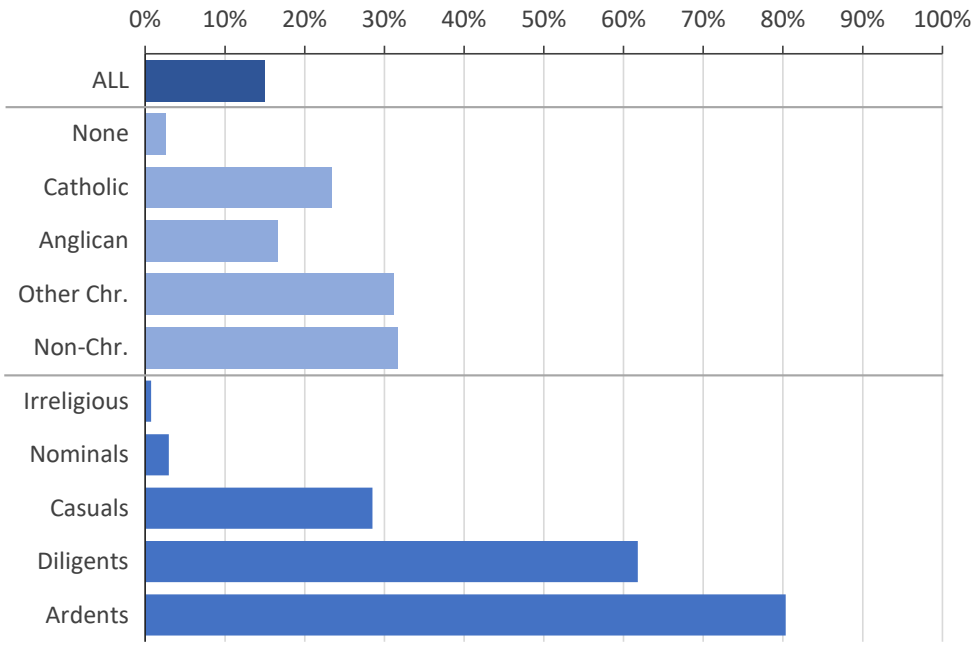


Figure 12: Important to teach children religious faith, by religion & ARI5
Source: AVS 2018. Base: Parents.

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.

Quasi- and non-religious world views

SBNR: 'Spiritual but not religious'

A 2012 Newspoll study which offered "Spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) as an express option in its religion question found 10% of Australians identified as SBNR (Newspoll Research 2012) (Figure 13).[21]

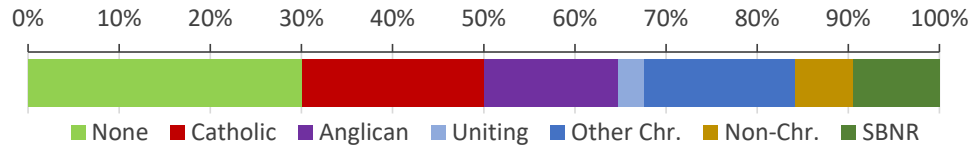


Figure 13: Denomination distribution in Australia with SBNR option 2012
Source: Newspoll Research 2012. SBNR = Spiritual But Not Religious

This was a small rise from 8% in 2009 (Christian Research Association 2012). Several years later, SBNRs had grown slightly again to 13% (Pepper & Powell 2018) or 14% (McCrindle Research 2017) of the Australian population. This compares with USA studies around the turn of the 21st century which found SBNR rates between 14% and 20% (Marler & Hadaway 2002).

A more nuanced question about the nature of one's own personal spirituality from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA 2018) shows not only a more detailed picture, but a higher proportion (24%) of SBNRs (Figure 14).

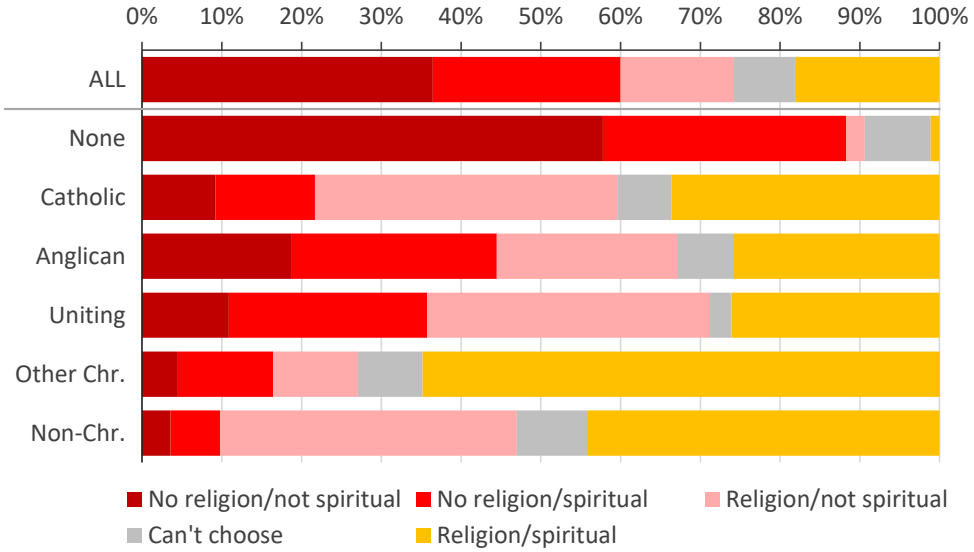


Figure 14: Best description of own spirituality, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Religionists said they "belong" to their religion.

[21] Disclosure: as CEO of the national alliance of VAD societies, I commissioned the study.

Those who said they were SBNRs included 30% of Nones, 12% of Catholics, 26% of Anglicans, 25% of Uniting/ Methodists, and 12% of minor Christian denominations. Those among the non-Christian faiths were least likely to be SBNRs (6%).

Overall, nearly half of Catholics (47%) did *not* say they were spiritual (whether religious or not), along with 41% of Anglicans, 46% of Uniting/ Methodists, 41% of non-Christian denominations, and 15% of minor Christian denominations.

> Significant proportions of Australia's religionists across the denominations said they follow a religion without being spiritual, that is, without adopting its sacred scaffolding. This suggests significant levels of religious affiliation for cultural or normative reasons rather than intrinsic religious ones.
>
> Overall, fewer than one in five Australians (18%) described themselves as observing a religion in a spiritual way. That includes only a third (34%) of Catholics, a quarter (26%) of Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists, and 44% amongst non-Christian faiths. Only among minor Christian denominations was there a majority (65%) adoption of a religion *and* its sacred scaffolding.

Looking more closely at the characteristics of SBNRs, the title confirms that they're *not* religious. They don't qualify according to the definitions of religion described in this report. They fail at least the communal test of "accepted axioms of conduct", if not also the tests of structured "moral guidance" and particular "supernatural beliefs".

A fundamental problem with the expression "SBNR" is the lack of clarity about what it means: the absence of a clear and commonly understood conceptual framework (Streib 2008), especially in separating out theistic from non-theistic dimensions (Westerink 2012). Illustrating the extent of the problem, almost two thirds (63%) of US adults say that religion and spirituality are "different but interdependent concepts" (Marler & Hadaway 2002).

One study found SBNRs can express their spirituality in four different ways, via: links to personal deities; naturalistic forms of transcendence; everyday compassion; and cultural (not institutional) religiosity (Ammerman 2013).

Indeed, SNBRs stand out for their high levels and *anti-institutional* spirituality (Marshall & Olson 2018; Wixwat & Saucier 2021).

Describing spirituality more generally — for both the religious and non-religious —McClintock, Lau and Miller (2016) found five universal factors across countries:

1. *Love:* in the fabric of relationships or as a sacred reality.
2. *Unifying interconnectedness:* a sense of energetic oneness with other beings in the universe.
3. *Altruism:* a commitment beyond the self with care and service.
4. *Contemplative practice:* for example, meditation, prayer, yoga or qigong.
5. *Reflection and commitment:* as a life well-examined.

In common practice though, "spirituality's" vagueness is used to cover not only genuine spirituality, but a wide range of "new age drivel", when more specific words like "inspiring", "beautiful", "awe-inspiring" or even "weird" would be more appropriate (Dudley 2017). Dudley argues that hidden motives for using the word should be declared, for example when conservative USA site Breitbart uses the term to describe what are in reality secular ideas.

In Australia, the term is used to describe a wide range of practices including yoga and mindfulness (above, 4. *contemplative practice*) as though they're spiritual in a *religious* kind of way, when they aren't (Debien & Calderwood 2016). "Spirituality" can even be used to describe aromatherapy, or the supposed healing powers of crystals (Shashkevich 2018) despite the fact they don't work (Barry 2021).

Consistent with their anti-establishmentarianism — at least of the religious kind — SBNRs tend to hold alternative, non-standard beliefs (Wixwat & Saucier 2021), and Australian SBNRs entertain a potpourri of ambiguous notions (McCrindle Research 2017) (Figure 15).

Just 17% of SBNRs make reference to a conceptual god (10%) or gods (7%), and nearly 1 in 5 can't describe in any way what their "spirituality" is about. This isn't because Australian SBNRs are uneducated: they are on average at least as educated as others (Newspoll Research 2012, AuSSA 2018).

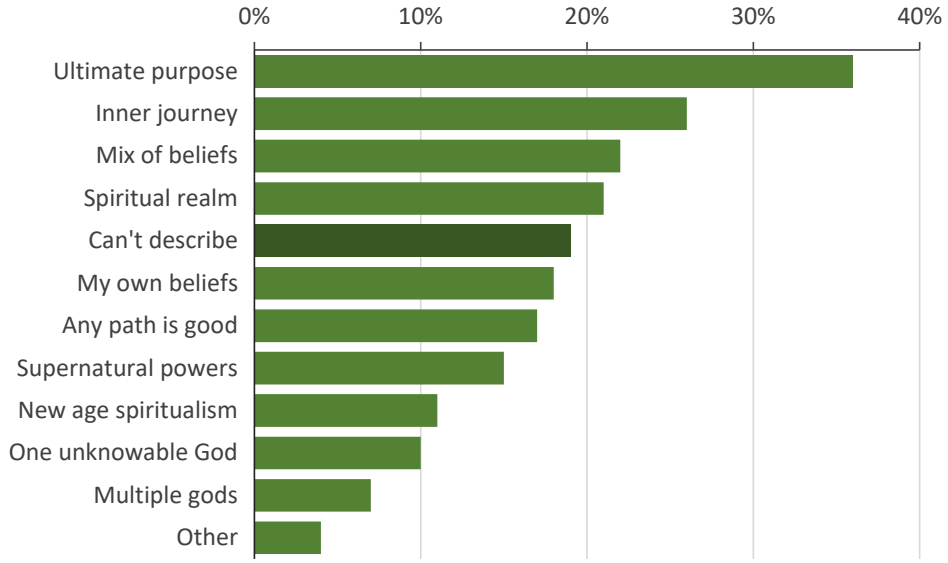


Figure 15: How Australian SBNRs describe their "spirituality"
Source: McCrindle Research 2017

SBNRs tend to be highly engaged in social policy matters, and are by far the most likely to vote Greens and least likely to vote for the Coalition (Newspoll Research 2012) (Figure 16).

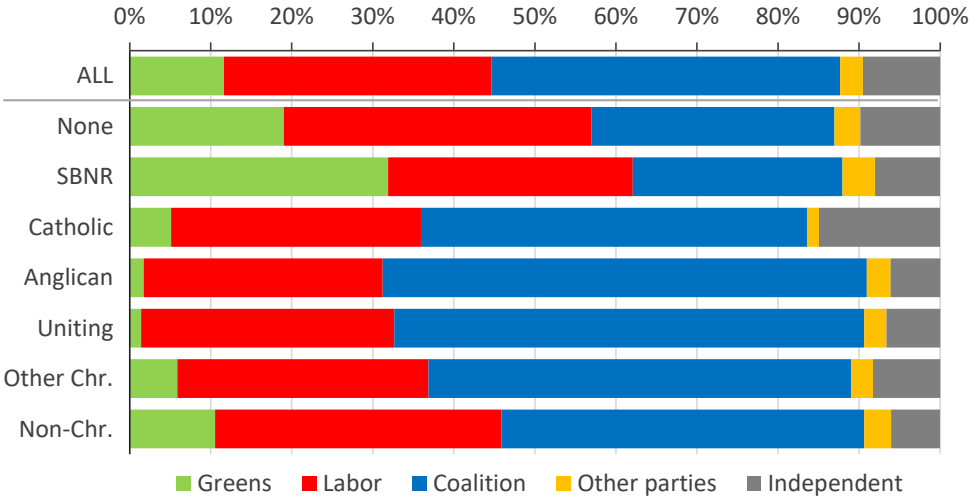


Figure 16: Federal voting intentions by denomination 2012
Source: Newspoll Research 2012. SBNR = Spiritual But Not Religious

SBNRs typically hold progressive views. For example, they approve of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) at a higher rate than any religionists, around the same rate as Nones (Newspoll Research 2012) (Figure 17).

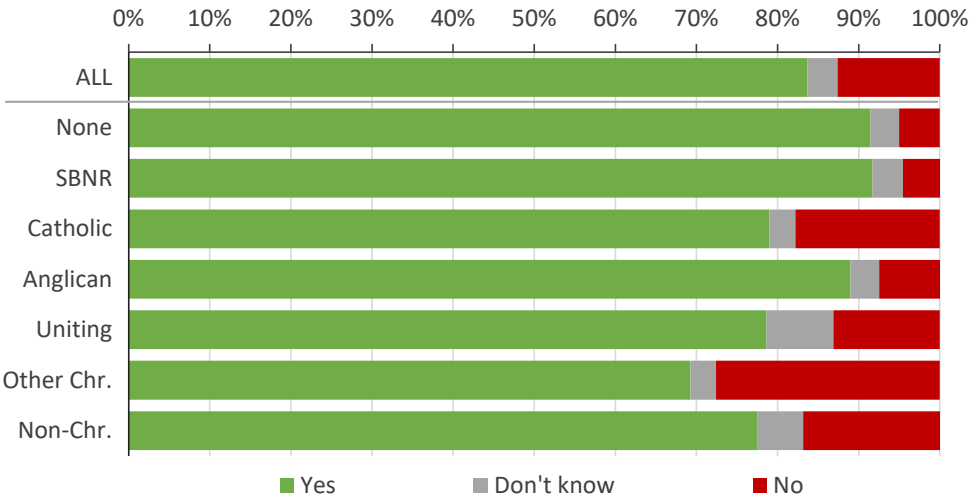


Figure 17: Approval of voluntary assisted dying (VAD) by religion 2012
Source: Newspoll Research 2012. SBNR = Spiritual But Not Religious.

They also tend to attribute personal poverty to external causes (e.g. structural/social environmental) via the 'universal' construct of spirituality (Bergmann & Todd 2019). This contrasts strongly with religious conservatives who tend to attribute a person's poverty to internal causes — the person's own failures — such as laziness.

SBNRs tend to be higher in "Big Five" personality traits Openness to experience, Extraversion and Neuroticism, but lower in Agreeableness (Schnell 2012; Wixwat & Saucier 2021). They are somewhat more likely to be female and low income (AuSSA 2018), and have higher rates of schiztotypy[22] than both the religious and non-religious (Willard & Norenzayan 2017).

Three quarters (74%) of Australians who are now SBNRs were raised in a religion (AuSSA 2018), around half in Catholic and Anglican households (23% each). That is, only a quarter (26%) were raised in no religion. Given SBNRs' characteristics, it's unlikely that SBNRs who left formal religion were ever more than notional denominational affiliates. Even if they were formally religious in the past, they certainly aren't now.

Misguided appropriation of SBNRs by religionists

Religious leaders such as the former Anglican Dean of Sydney, Philip Jensen (2020), and religious organisations like Christian survey firm McCrindle Research (Renton 2017), publicly attempt to "appropriate" SBNRs to the "religious side of the national equation" by vaguely implying they're really just religious people who are a bit lost.

[22] Disorganised or unusual patterns of thinking or mental experiences such as illusions. Interpersonal difficulties are not uncommon.

Indeed, Clare Bruce (2017) of Christian radio station *Hope 103.2* attempted to marry the 2016 Census result of 60% religious affiliation as representing "spiritual" Australians, with another 14% — SBNRs from the McCrindle study — to claim that the total "spiritual" result was "much stronger than atheists had hoped".[23]

> **Misleading statement**
>
> "*More than two in three Australians (68%) follow a religion or have spiritual beliefs.*"
> — Renton (2017)

As discussed in *Religion doesn't mean 'spiritual'* on page 28, these efforts are seriously misguided. Not only are a significant portion of religious affiliates *not* "spiritual", but SBNR spirituality has little to do with religion.

Overall, SBNR's anti-establishmentarianism, internally derived beliefs, political and social progressiveness, and differences in attitudes suggest that they are very unlikely to have ever been *authentic* members, if past members at all, of organised religion. By definition they are *not* religious. While technically a majority of SBNRs could be called the "unchurched" or said to be "people lost from organised religion", their underlying traits demonstrate that at least now, they are not of a religious bent in the institutional sense, and indeed are largely hostile towards it.

> **Summary:** Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR) Australians tend to be highly anti-establishmentarian (at least, towards religious establishments), hold a range of ambiguous spiritual beliefs many of which are of a secular nature and of internal rather than external footing, are socially and politically very progressive, and hold more compassionate views towards those who are struggling.
>
> These factors call into question implications by some conservative religious commentators that SBNRs are "unchurched" and should somehow be counted in "religion" statistics.

[23] Note that while the McCrindle analysis (Renton 2017) married 14% SBNRs with its own measure of religionists from the same study (52%) for a marriage total of 68%, Christian radio's Bruce (2017) married McCrindle's SBNR figure with a *different* study (2016 Census) religion result, to achieve a much higher "total religious/spiritual" marriage (74%).

Non-religious world views

A range of non-religious world views has been enumerated and widely discussed elsewhere. For the purposes of this report, brief definitions of selected non-religious world views are provided as a rudimentary framework.

Selected non-religious world views

Selected non-religious world views.

- **Atheism:** Non-belief in the existence of a god or gods.
- **Agnosticism:** Neither belief nor disbelief in the existence of a god or gods, or in religious doctrine.
- **Humanism:** Emphasises human agency for the greater good, without supernatural beliefs.
- **Rationalism:** Regards reason (intellectual and deductive methods) as the major source and test of knowledge, without supernatural beliefs.
- **Empiricism:** Regards sense experience, including experiments, as the source and test of knowledge, without supernatural beliefs.
- **Unchurched:** Those with spiritual (possibly supernatural) worldviews but not affiliated with or beholden to any religious denomination.

There is little accurate evidence revealing the proportions of Australians who hold these non-religious world views; even for the two main ones, atheism and agnosticism. However, other proxy measures give an estimate at least of non-religious belief.

Firstly, in 2018, 40% of Australians said they didn't believe either in a specific God or even a higher power (Francis 2021, p 49). No further reliable breakdown was found, though USA data suggests that most non-religionists are "nothing in particular" rather than specifically atheist or agnostic (Funk & Smith 2012) (Figure 18).

Secondly, more than 4 in 5 Australians (82%) *don't* say they belong a religion for spiritual reasons (Figure 19). Around 1 in 7 say they follow a religion but not for spiritual reasons. That is, they affiliate with a religion for family or cultural reasons, rather than personally spiritual reasons.

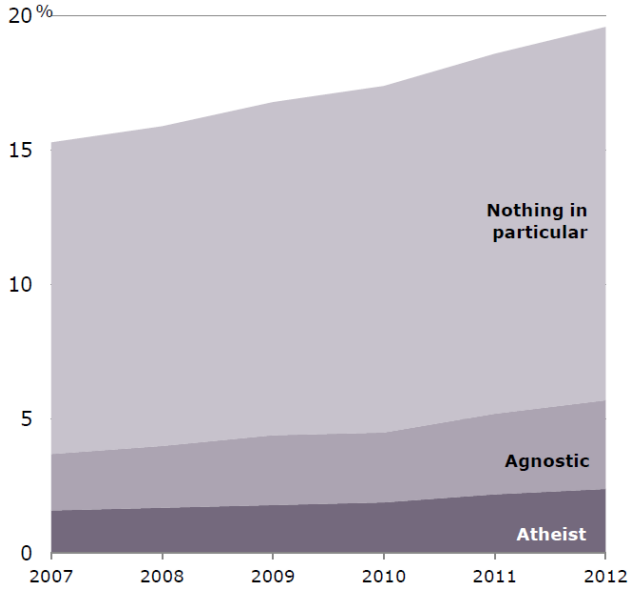


Figure 18: Trends in the USA 'Nones' segment
Source: Funk & Smith (2012)

Unsurprisingly, most Rejecters (89%) and Socialisers (81%) say they have no religion. Yet even amongst those who affiliate with a religion, half of Notionals (50%), 22% of Occasionals, 9% of Regulars and 2% of Devouts say they have no religion.

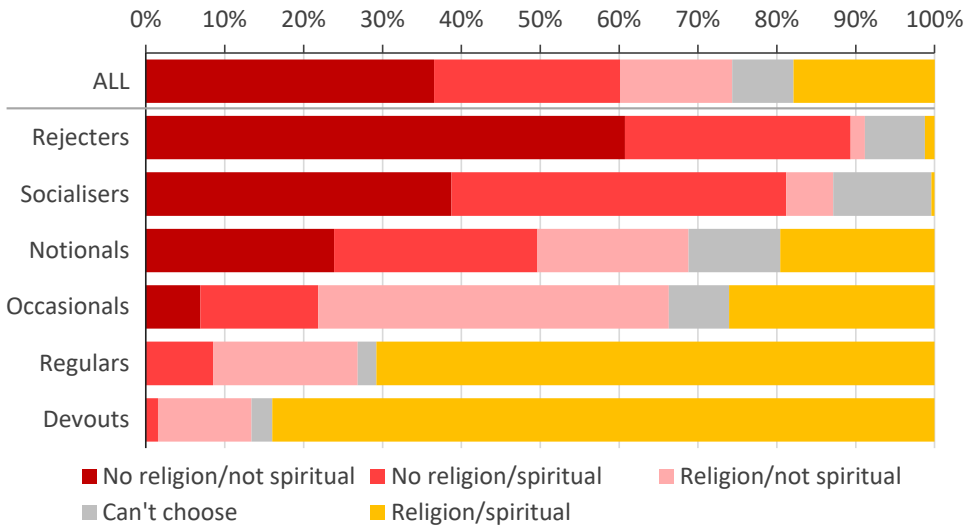


Figure 19: Best description of own religiosity by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Religionists "belong" to a religion.

Only amongst the most religious, Regulars and Devouts, do a majority, though still not all, say that they belong to a religion for spiritual reasons (71% and 84% respectively).

Counting the non-religious

Counting the non-religious in a meaningful way is not easy because there are many conceptual and methodological issues (Francis 2021, p 13 ff; Zurlo & Johnson 2016). Studies to date have largely defined non-religionists in terms of *absence*: absence of belief in gods or other supernatural notions. But non-religionists have as wide a variety of worldviews — a plurality of characteristics — as do the religious (Coleman & Jong 2019).

Some characteristics of the non-religious

Just as the religious are more likely to claim religion when their parents and peer groups are more religious, the non-religious are more likely to claim no religion when parents are religiously unaffiliated or attend religious services less, or when a spouse or peer group are non-religious (Baker & Smith 2009b).

On average, atheists display the greatest antagonism towards religion, with agnostics and unchurched believers less opposed (Baker & Smith 2009a). At least in the USA, the unchurched are as opposed as atheists to religion *in the public square*, indicating fundamental policy differences with religionists.

> At least in the USA, the "unchurched" are as opposed as atheists to religion *in the public square*, indicating fundamental policy differences with religionists.

A sense of purpose, but different foundations

Contrary to common belief amongst religionists, atheists don't exhibit greater rates of fatalism or nihilism (Speed, Coleman & Langston 2018). Studies that find differences usually have limited conceptualisations of 'life meaning', confusing it as a *marker* of well-being. However, there isn't necessarily such an association for non-religionists. Life meaning can comprise life purpose or goals and their justification, and values, along with senses of self-worth and control, and can be measured according to dozens of different sources ranging from the global to situational.

Both believers and non-believers generate a significant portion of a sense of meaning through family and close relationships, and through hobbies, travel and leisure (Pew Research Center 2019a), though believers have a higher *need* for meaning (Nelson, Abeyta & Routledge 2021).

A key difference is that atheists' source of meaning is endogenous (self-produced) rather than the exogenous as for religionists (Speed, Coleman &

Langston 2018). Both groups use culturally normative approaches to define their worldviews; but affirmed secularists do so through biographical experience and narrative, and intellectual rumination (Smith & Halligan 2021).

Negative framing ("without religion") conceals positive beliefs

The terms non-religion and atheism are defined by their negative relation to a religious groundwork, creating a misperception of "absence". That can "conceal a wide range of positive beliefs, values, behaviours, and worldviews" as well as increased self-mastery (Coleman, Hood & Streib 2018); using more open-minded and less dogmatic humanist thinking styles (Uzarevic & Coleman 2021; Uzarevic, Saroglou & Clobert 2017) and naturalistic explanations — rather than appeals to supernatural authorities — to act positively in society consistent with secularist principles (Shults et al. 2018a).

Like the religious, the non-religious can be deeply moved by wonder, awe and beauty — most often about humanity and nature (Coleman, Hood & Streib 2018). They can also experience transcendence (Farias et al. 2019) and a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being (Pew Research Center 2019a).

> The negative framing of secularists as "no religion" conceals a rich scaffolding of positive self-images, sense of purpose, self-mastery, open-minded and humanistic thinking, and the experience of wonder, awe, and beauty.

A rich secular ecosystem

It has been argued that atheism isn't a continuous spectrum like religiosity, instead existing more as discrete groups (Galen 2020). Consistent with some of the individual factors we discussed regarding the prevalence of religion, Norenzayan and Gervais (2013b) identified four distinct forms of atheism:

1. *Mindblind atheism:* lower mentalising, rendering personified supernatural entities unintuitive.
2. *Apatheism:* little need to invoke supernatural powers because levels of order, comfort and meaning are satisfactory.
3. *inCREDulous atheism:* lack of CREDibility enhancing displays that would encourage belief that gods are potent, relevant, or even real.
4. *Analytic atheism:* subtle or overt prods towards analytical thinking that counter intuitive biases for supernatural explanations.

Some studies have found ambiguous or conflicting evidence about such classifications (e.g. Gervais et al. 2018; Langston 2019), though their methodologies may raise further questions. The topic remains fertile ground for scholars.

Secularists generally not ignorant about religion

Secularists are not ignorant about religion generally. Even though religionists may hold greater levels of knowledge about practical details of their own denomination's particular tenets and practices, in the USA at least, atheists and agnostics hold a wider knowledge base about religion than do the religious (Pew Research Center 2019b).

Atheists and agnostics may even sometimes attend religious (devotional, not only wedding or funeral) services. Reasons include attempts to reduce friction with religious family members, and to "bridge the worlds of belief and nonbelief" (Mrdjenovich 2019).

Is secularism or atheism a religion?

Social scientists and others, in casting non-religious world views in the negative — as an empty and deficient *lack* of religion or as that's opposite: implicitly religious — engage in "card tricks" (Coleman & Messick 2019). Indeed, according to both social and legal definitions of religion discussed earlier, secularism and atheism are not religions in Australia. They lack belief in supernatural entities or forces.

However, a district court in the USA deemed atheism the *equivalent* of religion for First Amendment purposes: the right to freedom of non-religious as well as religious expression (Davis 2005). Prior Supreme Court rulings had determined that organised 'ways of life' inspired by philosophical and secular concerns should enjoy such rights (David 2001). In 2005, an appeals court upheld the district court's ruling (United States Court of Appeals 2005), and held the ruling for a second time in 2013 (Wilson 2014).

While the USA legal system offers some hope that religionists and non-religionists are generally to be treated equally, the same cannot be said for Australia. Australian laws produce anomalies such that preferential treatment may be afforded to people whose beliefs are founded on untestable[24] supernatural claims, over other Australians whose claims are based on secular and evidential foundations. The degree of conscientiousness or cynicism with

[24] Both in the sense that supernatural claims cannot be proven or disproven; and in the sense of whether the belief is held genuinely or not.

which either religious or secular beliefs are held is of no effective consequence.

> Respecting the views of all Australians while avoiding undue privilege for beliefs based on supernatural claims, is a matter of national importance. It deserves specific debate in the public square.

Summary: There is a rich diversity of secular or non-religious world views in Australia. While some secular Australians say they are spiritual, more religious Australians say they aren't. Some secularists are hostile to religion, while many aren't. Secularists have a sense of purpose though it usually stems from internal rather than external foundations. They also have a rich scaffolding of positive beliefs and attitudes such as self-mastery and open-minded humanistic thinking. They experience wonder, awe, and beauty, though the subject is natural rather than supernatural.

Perceived benefits of religiosity

A range of benefits is said to be associated with religion and religiosity.

In Australia, involvement in church life[25] is associated with greater perceived *social* benefits, but not with increased purpose in life (Casidy & Tsarenko 2014). Sunday service attendance and fundraising participation are somewhat associated with benefits, while social activities and special events produce much greater positive effects.

Some associated benefits are reduction in anxiety, improved health and happiness, feelings of closeness, greater sense of life control, and greater morality. Some associations are well-established, while others show mixed results under scientific examination, with details still contentious.

Anxiolytic benefits

As discussed earlier, when personal control is threatened, people may resort to a range of strategies to restore it, such as seeing patterns in noise, subscribing to superstitions, defending the legitimacy of institutions that offer control, and believing in an interventionist God (Kay et al. 2009a; Kay et al. 2009b).

General Social Survey research from the USA confirms this general association, showing that religion can be a palliative resource for the structurally disadvantaged, including women, racial minorities, those on lower incomes, and in some cases, sexual minorities (Schnabel 2020, 2021).

At the level of nations, religiosity is associated with low average existential security, and it decreases in nations where safety and predictability have grown (Norenzayan & Gervais 2013a). However, more detailed analysis suggests that while perceived insecurity tends to increase general attachment to a religious identity, it *decreases* its importance as a source of personal identity, relative to other sources (Curtis & Olson 2019).

Many studies have found religion to provide comfort in times of trouble or sorrow, and Australian research confirms this association (Figure 20). Most Australians agree that religion provides comfort, showing a strong positive correlation with religiosity. Almost all Devouts agree, most of them strongly.

Intrinsic religiosity also improves personal meaning in life in the face of anxiety-inducing social disconnectedness (Reynolds, Smith & Conway 2020).

[25] Note the implicit Christian study bias.

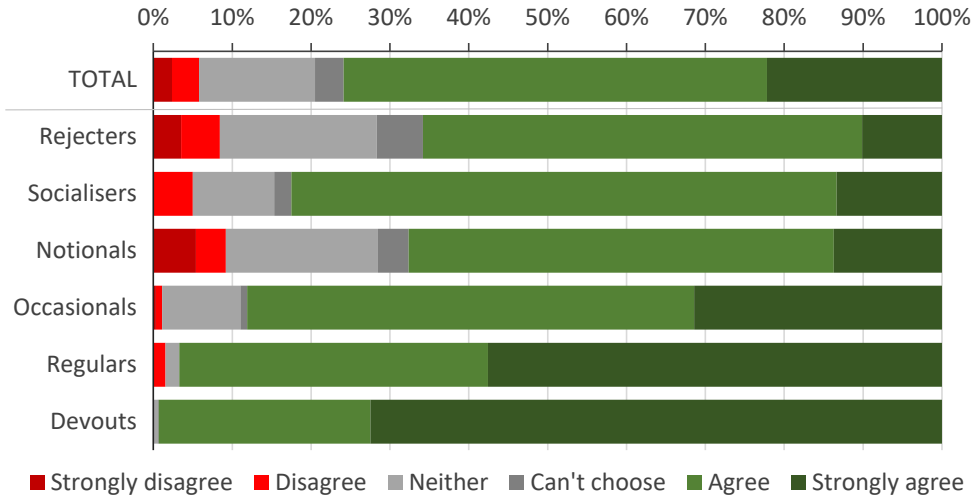


Figure 20: Religion gives comfort in times of trouble or sorrow, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

Rituals

While rituals can be non-religious, a central feature of religions is ritual, helping explain religion's power in reducing anxiety (Brooks et al. 2016; Lang, Kratky & Xygalatas 2020), in part through social bonding (Singh et al. 2020). Even extreme ritual practices with the possibility of personal harm can reduce anxiety (Xygalatas et al. 2019).

Group rituals are a form of signalling that indicates commitment to the group, cooperative intentions, and importance of group cohesion (Lang 2019; Legare & Nielsen 2020; Stein, Hobson & Schroeder 2020; Watson-Jones & Legare 2016).

While rituals may reduce cognitive load, it is the repetitive behaviour rather than cognitive load that mediates ritual performance and lower anxiety (Karl & Fischer 2018).

Rituals don't always have positive consequences, however. They can greatly increase antisociality and derogation towards outgroups, and hinder self-control (Hobson & Inzlicht 2016).

> **Summary:** Rituals reduce anxiety through repetitive action. They increase prosociality towards the ingroup, but can increase antisociality towards outgroups.

Health, happiness and wellbeing

It is commonly reported that religious commitment and spirituality are associated with higher subjective happiness and wellbeing (e.g. Price & Herringer 2005). Personality mediates emotions and religiosity (Hiebler-Ragger et al. 2018), and *positive* emotions such as awe, gratitude, love and peace — but not others like amusement or pride — mediate religiosity and well-being (Van Cappellen & Saroglou 2012; Van Cappellen et al. 2016).

Both the palliative function of system-justifying ideologies (Napier, Bettinsoli & Suppes 2020), and the social dimensions of religious association contribute significantly to greater wellbeing (Shor & Roelfs 2013).

However, a positive association is not guaranteed, and the association may sometimes be negative. For example, Orthodox Jewish families in Israel experience significant interpersonal religious struggles (Pirutinsky 2014).

In general, normative religion, that is, merely observing religious rules, engenders negative emotions, while transcendent communion engenders positive emotions (Martos, Sallay & Kézdy 2013) and life meaning (Martos, Thege & Steger 2010).

The association between religious service attendance and higher life satisfaction has been found in Australia, mediated by religious group social resources (Kortt, Dollery & Grant 2015).

Other studies (AuSSA and AVS) show a generally higher self-rating amongst frequent service attenders for overall happiness, family relationships, and overall health (Figure 21), seeming to confirm at least the social bonding factors.

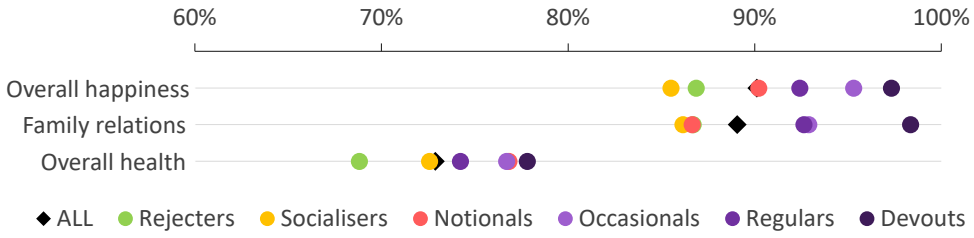


Figure 21: Overall happiness and health, by ARI6
Sources: Happiness and family relations, AuSSA 2018; health AVS 2018

These findings are consistent with the USA where religion correlates with greater happiness and family involvement (Pew Research Center 2016b).

Measurement methodology problems

However, the relationships between religion, health and happiness are much more complex than this. Non-religious health is not necessarily worse, but may appear so due to methodological problems in many studies (Farais & Coleman 2020).

For example, religion/well-being research may be confusing religious faith with personal virtues (Schuurmans-Stekhoven 2011). Spirituality (alone) appears to be negatively associated with well-being, while the character strengths of fortitude, wise-hope, loving-kindness and others contribute to well-being amongst both the religious and non-religious.

Research results also vary according to the dimensions of well-being studied, since religiosity correlates differently amongst well-being dimensions (Lam & Rotolo 2000).

Self-reported perceptions are unreliable

Another problem is that most studies use subjective *self-reports* rather than empirical assessments of health and happiness/well-being. Even though there appears to be an association between religion and more positive language overall (Yaden et al. 2017), studies with empirical measurement of health and happiness don't indicate a consistent association.

For example, while a religion-health association was found using health proxy measures, there were no real differences when measuring actual health outcomes (Speed 2021). Similarly, self-reports of religion and spirituality were associated with increased self-reports of well-being, but there was no significant association with psychological distress levels (Manoiu 2019).

Further illustrating the problem of self-reporting and the potential gap between perceptions and reality, political conservatives self-report, but progressives *act out*, greater happiness (Wojcik et al. 2015).

Valence, strength, and typology of beliefs

The valence[26] of religious beliefs can cause conflicting effects (Vitorino, Low & Vianna 2016). Negative religious valence such as belief in an authoritarian or punitive God, as well as negative coping strategies, correlate with worse life satisfaction (Johnson 2021; Szczesniak & Timoszyk-Tomczak 2020), as does negative self-esteem like shame and guilt (Murray & Ciarroacchi 2007).

Strength of belief can also contribute to perceptions of health and wellbeing. Those who are more certain of their religious or non-religious beliefs report

[26] The "polarity" of experience, as positive (e.g. joy) or negative (e.g. fear).

greater happiness than those who doubt (González-Rivera et al. 2019; Villani et al. 2019). Indeed, SBNRs "in the middle" tend to struggle with spirituality (Mercadante 2020) and be more neurotic and less agreeable than the religious (Schnell 2012).

A major Canadian study found the self-reported wellbeing of secularists similar to that of the highly religious, despite their significant deficits in factors that are supposed to mediate religion and wellbeing (Dilmaghani 2018). This suggests substitution factors for secularists. When properly separated out by research methodology, atheists were found to have the best mental health, other seculars and affiliated religionists next, while non-affiliated theists had significantly worse mental health (Baker, Stroope & Walker 2018). A potential explanation is that atheists experience less demonic, divine, and moral struggles than religionists, although similar levels of interpersonal and ultimate meaning struggles (Sedlar et al. 2018).

Belief affirmation can have significant effects, too. Religious people whose belief in the effectiveness of prayer was affirmed by a fictional story of heart attack survival after prayer, were vastly happier than all others (Riggio, Uhalt & Matthies 2014). Conversely, if the heart attack subject died after prayer, religionists avoided religious explanations altogether, demonstrating a strong trait for confirmation bias.

Wellbeing certainly varies by the religious Big Four (see *The Big Four Bs framework* on page 20). Belonging and bonding are uniquely associated with greater life satisfaction, while believing is uniquely related to decreased life satisfaction (Saroglou et al. 2020).

> When separated out, atheists had the best mental health, seculars and affiliated religionists next, and non-affiliated theists last.

Socialisation effects

Consistent with other studies comparing spirituality with socialisation, those who attended religious services more often were found to have lower rates of serious health problems than those who attended less but prayed more often (Ahrenfeldt et al. 2019).

In any case, social bonding is not the exclusive domain of religion. Secular rituals create similar bonding through positive emotions (Charles et al. 2021). Further research is needed to understand the social resources and bonding of secular groups and their association with life satisfaction.

Nor is religious socialisation always positive. Young Australian churchgoers are significantly happier when greater social behaviour (church attendance) is aligned with greater positive religious emotion (intrinsic religiosity) (Francis, Powell & McKenna 2020). However, for young churchgoers *without* positive religious emotion, greater church attendance is associated with significantly less happiness.

Even the context of filling out a study questionnaire may play a part in happiness and well-being results — for example completing it alone versus in a group setting such as at church. At least amongst conservative Protestants, mood deteriorates when they are alone (Storm & Wilson 2009).

Direction of causality

In addition to spillover effects of life satisfaction between religionists and non-religionists (Clark & Lelkes 2009), a potential relationship between religious socialisation and greater feelings of wellbeing may be negated by those with poor health *adopting* religion as a coping strategy (Hvidt et al. 2017). Equally, those who are in better health may be in a better position to participate in religious social activities and be counted as more frequent service attenders. That is, there are competing mechanisms — and their directions of causality — which may increase or decrease any potential association.

> Religion may help people reduce anxiety and improve health and wellbeing, thereby increasing these measured outcomes, but those with poor health and wellbeing may be attracted to religion, reducing the measured outcomes. This complex interaction can make separating out benefits and drawbacks difficult.

Existential and social support systems

In developing countries with widespread hunger and low life expectancy, people are much more likely to be highly religious, which confers greater social support and subjective wellbeing (Diener, Tay & Myers 2011). In societies with better support systems, religiosity is significantly less prevalent, and the religious and non-religious are likely to experience similar levels of subjective wellbeing.

Secondary behaviours

Around the world, religious people tend to smoke and drink less than non-religionists (Pew Research Center 2019c). However, they don't tend to

exercise more or have lower rates of obesity. In fact, in Australia, the religious have a somewhat higher average BMI than others (Kortt & Dollery 2014).

Thus, secondary behaviours rather than supernatural beliefs themselves potentially contribute to differences or similarities in subjective health ratings.

Ingroups versus outgroups (normative comfort versus prejudice)

Religious people experience higher subjective wellbeing in religious societies, but not in non-religious ones (Diener, Tay & Myers 2011). At the other extreme in officially atheist China, the religiously committed experience significantly greater levels of stress (McClintock, Lau & Miller 2016).

The Netherlands furnishes a useful religion-specific example too, where Muslims, who tend to be highly religious, have significantly lower subjective wellbeing than most in the secularised nation (Ten Kate, de Koster & van der Waal 2017). Conversely, Dutch Catholics — historically the Netherlands' most common religion — experience significantly higher than average subjective wellbeing.

These studies indicate significant effects conferred through the normative "comfort" for larger ingroups, against a backdrop of prejudice towards and stress within smaller outgroups. Experience of prejudice can also occur amongst non-religionists in nations with high populations of religious (Sedlar et al. 2018).

> The positive effects of normative ingroup comfort versus the negative effects of experienced outgroup prejudice, can have profound effects on happiness and wellbeing for either religious or non-religious groups.

Net health and wellbeing effects

Given this complex array of issues, it's no surprise then that the latest research shows little correlation between religiosity and life satisfaction (Pöhls 2021). At best, a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found, there seems to be a significant but very small positive net effect of religion on wellbeing, via socialisation (participation in public religious activities) and perceived importance of religion (Garssen, Visser & Pool 2021).

Despite this, in Australia, high religiosity correlates with lower health when controlling for a wide range of confounding factors (Bernardelli, Kortt &

Ednaldo 2020). This is consistent with ARI5 religiosity segments, which indicate high levels of happiness amongst the more religious (Casuals, Diligents and Ardents), while Ardents report significantly lower overall health despite their happiness (Figure 22).

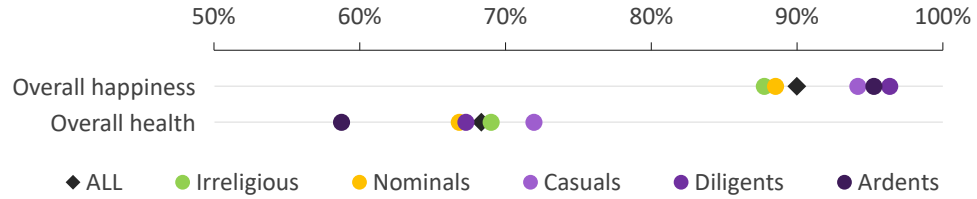


Figure 22: Rates of overall happiness and health, by ARI5
Source: AVS 2018

No major associations were found in the ANU data sets between religiosity type (religious, spiritual, both or neither) or strength of dis/belief in God, and the quality of health or family relations.

The combination of observations suggests that in Australia at least, religion does assist subjective wellbeing for some (and happy people may be more likely to attend religious meetings), and that some have turned to religion specifically in trying to cope with poorer health.

Summary: Evidence that religion is associated with greater happiness and health is mixed, though somewhat positive. There is a complex range of important factors influencing health and happiness, many of which are uncontrolled in most studies. Religious belief, behaviour and identity can either improve or degrade health and happiness depending on its typology, valence, or whether the person is a member of a comfortable ingroup or a rejected outgroup. When separated out from other non-religionists, atheists appear to have the highest wellbeing of all.

In Australia, the most religious, Ardents, report high average wellbeing but the lowest average health, suggesting that religion may both attract and retain those in poor health, and provide comfort that increases mental wellbeing

Feelings of closeness

A core proposition of mainstream religions is their tendency to promote prosocial behaviour, particularly towards ingroups (Norenzayan, Henrich & Slingerland 2013). For example, religious service attendance promotes churchgoer prosociality via its social aspects, mediated by gratitude, peace and love (Van Cappellen et al. 2016). These might be interpreted as positive feelings of closeness towards others, whether a general trait for such feelings, or driven more by practical relationships.

Australian research supports these general associations. Those who attend religious services most often (ARI6 Devouts) maintain relatively high rates of closeness across the spectrum from the local community to the world in general (Figure 23).

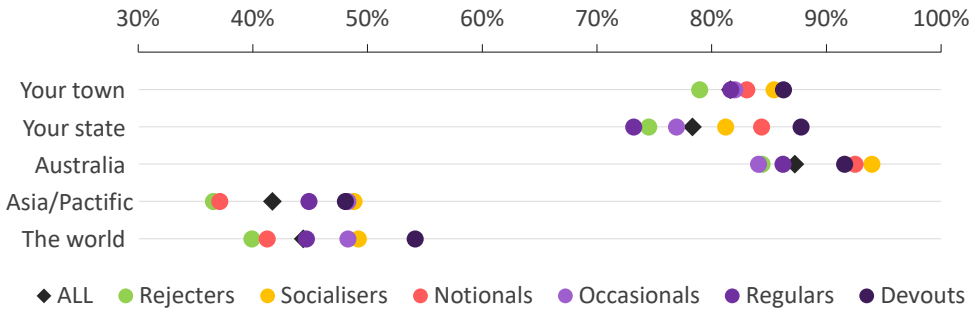


Figure 23: How close you feel to..., by ARI6
Source: AVS 2018

The direction of causality is unclear though: does social behaviour engender general feelings of closeness, or do general feelings of closeness engender social behaviour? The effects are probably bidirectional.

By ARI5 religiosity — which takes the *personal importance* of religion into account — the most religious (Ardents and Diligents) appear to exhibit *trait* closeness,[27] since their feelings of closeness are relatively higher for the more general and abstract Asia/Pacific region, and the world, than for more nearby groups (Figure 24).

However, Ardents rated their closeness to their own local district, and to Australia nationally, the lowest. The exact nature of these associations is unclear, though they are almost certainly driven by multiple factors.

[27] That is, feelings of closeness are a personal characteristic, not just a situational expression.

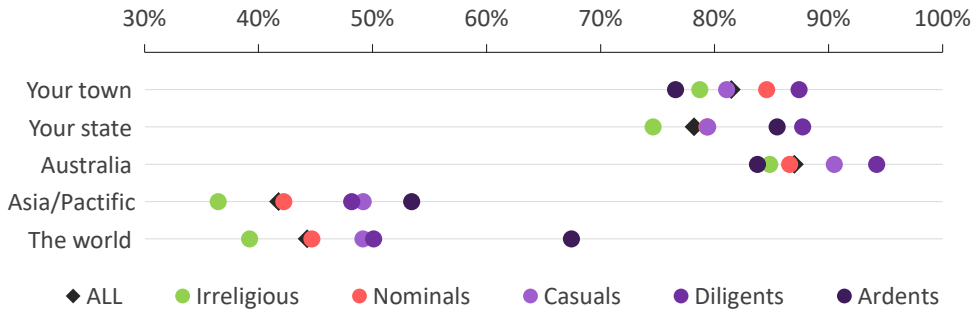


Figure 24: How close you feel to..., by ARI5
Source: AVS 2018

For example, Ardents may be unhappy with the number of non-religious (or at least non-agreeing) people they meet in person in their local district, challenging their propensity to false consensus bias.

In regard to Australia as a nation, the AVS 2018 study was conducted the year after the federal parliament legalised marriage equality, a reform opposed most strongly by Ardents (though some approved). Thus, the negative national association may be due to feelings of loss of control or betrayal.

Summary: Australian research is consistent with the association of religiosity and the trait to feeling close to others, even if the others are abstractions living elsewhere. Feeling close to others is also strongly associated with frequency of attending religious services, though causes could be bidirectional. However, to those for whom religion is most important (Ardents), locals, and Australia as a nation, feel less close than they do to others. Possible reasons are suggested, though direct evidence remains unavailable.

Sense of life control

While most Australians say they feel a sense of control over their own lives, the most religious, ARI5 Diligents and especially Ardents, are significantly more likely than others to say so (Figure 25).

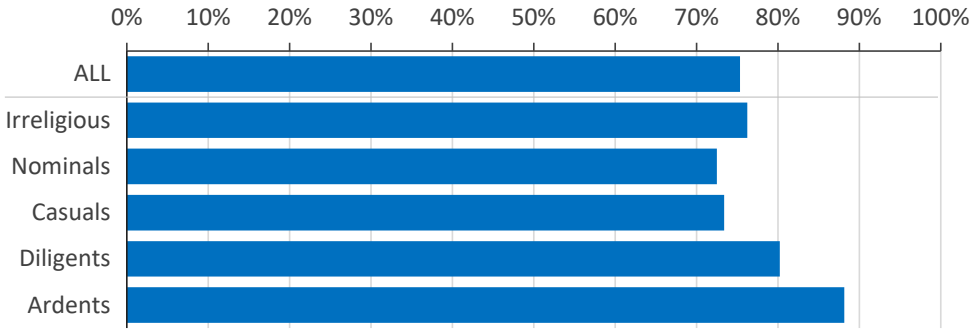


Figure 25: Feeling strong control over one's own life, by ARI5
Source: AVS 2018

These effects are also consistent with the interaction between religion and culture, particularly ingroups versus outgroups. While religiosity correlates with feelings of control, it's Christians who dominate, with almost all Christian Ardents (92%) feeling a strong sense of control of their lives (Figure 26).

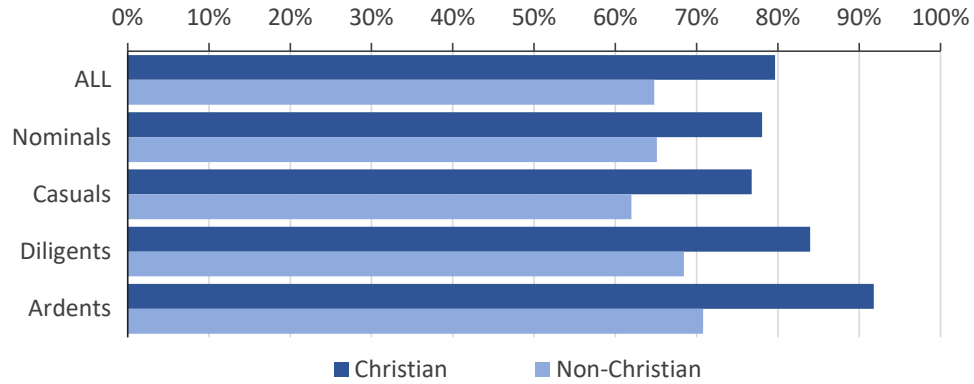


Figure 26: Feeling strong control over one's own life, by major faith groups
Source AVS 2018

Across the religiosity spectrum, significantly fewer amongst non-Christian denominations feel in strong control of their lives than do Christians, even though such feelings are still in the majority. Compared with Christian Ardents, a significantly smaller majority (71%) of non-Christian Ardents feel a strong sense of control over their lives.

In addition to feelings of general control over one's life, exposure to religious institutions including schools, and rituals such as prayer, can help increase practical self-control (Marcus & McCullough 2021). This imparting of self-control — and not so much the desire to instil specific religious tenets —

appears to be a significant factor in Australian parents' choice of religious schools, since "discipline" is mentioned more often than "religious values" (Beamish & Morey 2013; Beavis 2004; Warren 2015).

Summary: Religiosity is associated with higher levels of a sense of personal control over one's life, though there are additional positive effects for normative ingroups and negative effects for outgroups. Australian parents prioritise religious schools more for their ability to impart discipline on youngsters than for religious indoctrination.

Getting ahead in life

Few Australians think that one's religion is essential or very important to getting ahead in life. Just 4% of Rejecters and 8% of Notionals and Regulars, and no Socialisers at all (0%) think it's important (Figure 27).

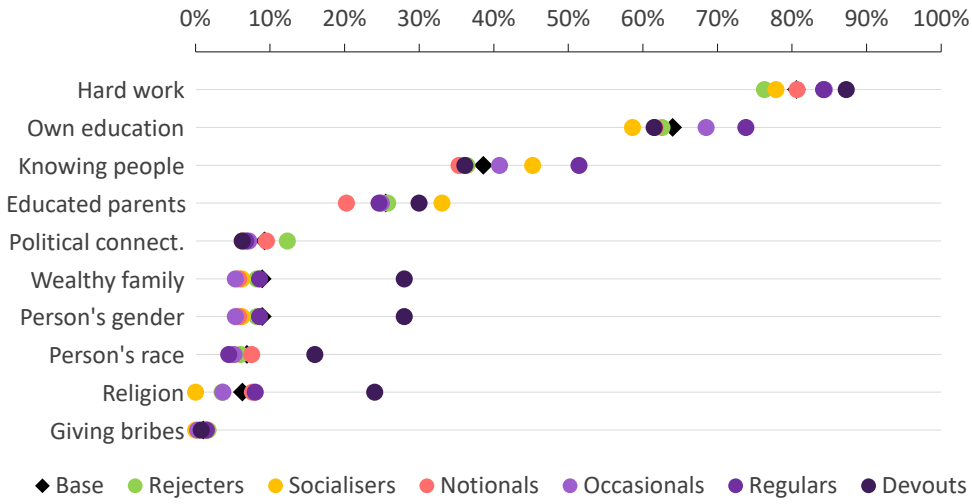


Figure 27: Essential or very important to getting ahead, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2019

However, a quarter of Devouts (24%) believe that religion is essential or very important to getting ahead. This suggests a much greater likelihood of Devouts wanting to get ahead *within* a religionist context, such as religious charity services, or within their religion's organisation. This correlates with most Devouts (86%) saying they are active in their religious organisation (Francis 2021, p 45).

Cultural prejudice against non-Christian faith outgroups

Members of non-Christian faiths are the most likely to say that a person's race and religion are important to getting ahead (Figure 28). This is likely to be in the negative: they have on average the highest levels of education (and are the most likely to say it's important to getting ahead), but the highest levels of unemployment.

They are also by far the most likely to say that knowing the right people and having political connections are important to getting ahead — yet they aren't getting ahead as much as others. This is consistent with culturally-embedded inequality: prejudice against non-Christian religionists as an outgroup.

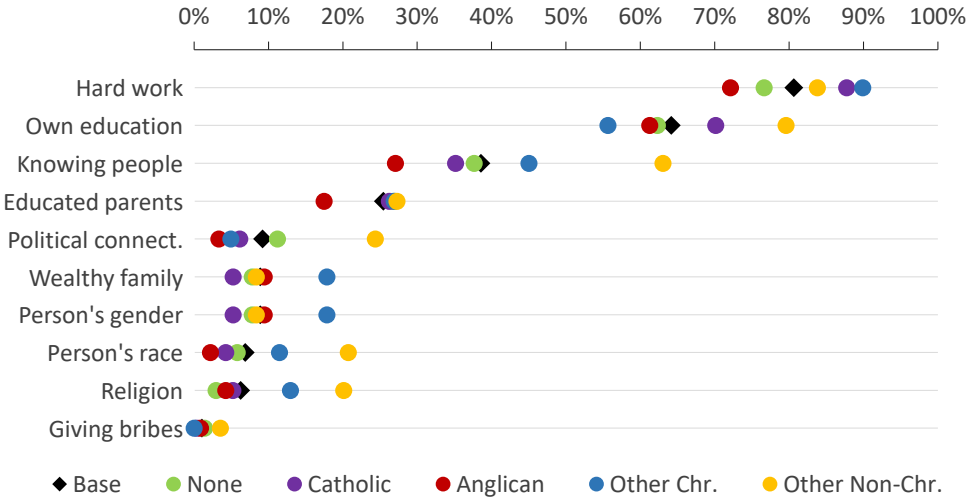


Figure 28: Essential or very important to getting ahead, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2019

Summary: One in four Devouts believe that religion is essential or very important to "getting ahead", but hardly any other Australians agree. These Devouts may believe that "getting ahead" is relevant mostly within their religious milieu. Non-Christian denominations exhibit a unique profile for "getting ahead", consistent with experiencing prejudice as an outgroup.

Greater morality

The complex relationship between religion, religiosity and morality will be discussed in Part 3.

Personal changes in religion

An individual's religiosity can vary substantially across the lifespan, usually beginning with indoctrination in childhood followed by significant loss of religiosity between adolescence and young adulthood (Chan, Tsai & Fuligni 2015; Stoppa & Lefkowitz 2010).

Reliable measures of religion and religiosity are important, but can be hard to come by even in government data. For example, on census forms, Australian parents tend to list the religion of young children at the same rate as their own religion, even though youngsters may not have had a chance to decide for themselves, or even developed theory of mind to contemplate God and other religious issues (Figure 29, Parents / young Children comparison).

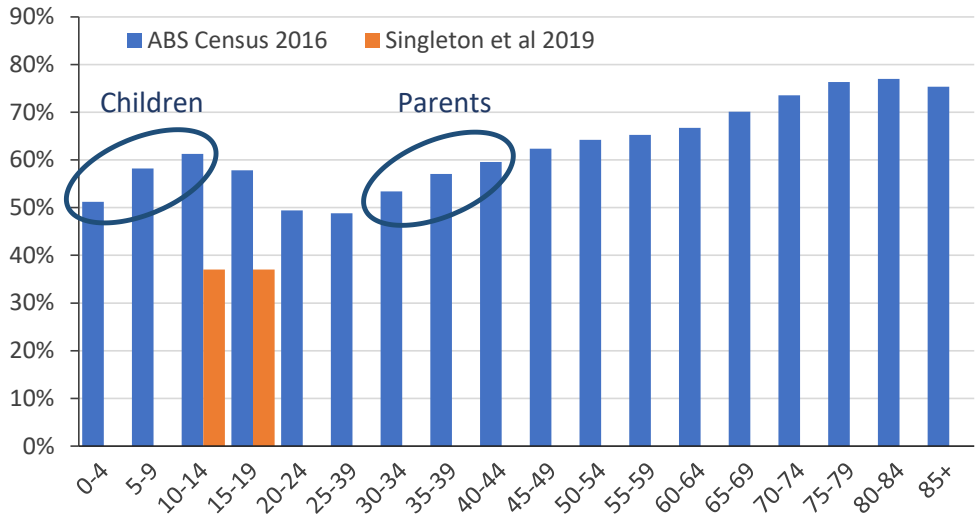


Figure 29: Has a religious denomination
Sources: ABS Census 2016; Singleton et al. (2019). Note: Singleton data a single result for 13-18 year-olds.

However, when youngsters are asked about their religion without parental monitoring, they are far less likely to say they have a religion. For example, Singleton et al. (2019) found 13-18 year-olds stated their own religion at around 20 percentage points lower than suggested by the 2016 census data completed either by parents or with parental involvement.

Why are Australia's non-religious, non-religious?

When Australia's non-religious were asked for their top thought or position about religions, nearly half (49%) said that they prefer a scientific and rational 'evidence-based' approach to life (Figure 30) (McCrindle Research 2017). This is consistent with significant numbers of adolescents and young adults abandoning religion. It is during senior high school and university that many

develop critical thinking skills, an appreciation for the scientific process, and for high quality evidence.

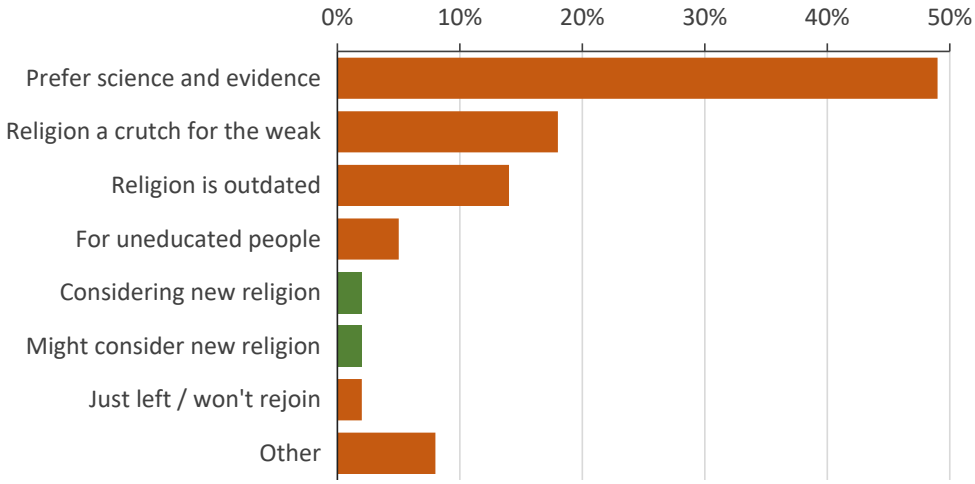


Figure 30: Australians' reasons for being non-religious
Source: McCrindle Research (2017)

Negative religious attributes were next-most common, with religion seen as a crutch for the weak (18%), an outdated approach to life (14%), and religions for uneducated people because there is no spiritual realm (5%). Around 4% said they were either considering adopting a new religion or might consider one in the future, indicating that most of Australia's non-religious are likely to stay that way.

Summary: Accurate and meaningful data about religion is critical to informed public debate. The real rate of religion amongst Australian adolescents is around 20 percentage points lower than the latest (2016) Census reports. By far the most common reason for being secular was a preference for science and evidence. Few non-religionists indicated they might re-join religion, suggesting that most secularists are likely to stay that way.

Raising children in a religion

Before we consider changes in Australians' religion since childhood, we should understand the generational trends in the religious denominations in which children have been raised (Figure 31).

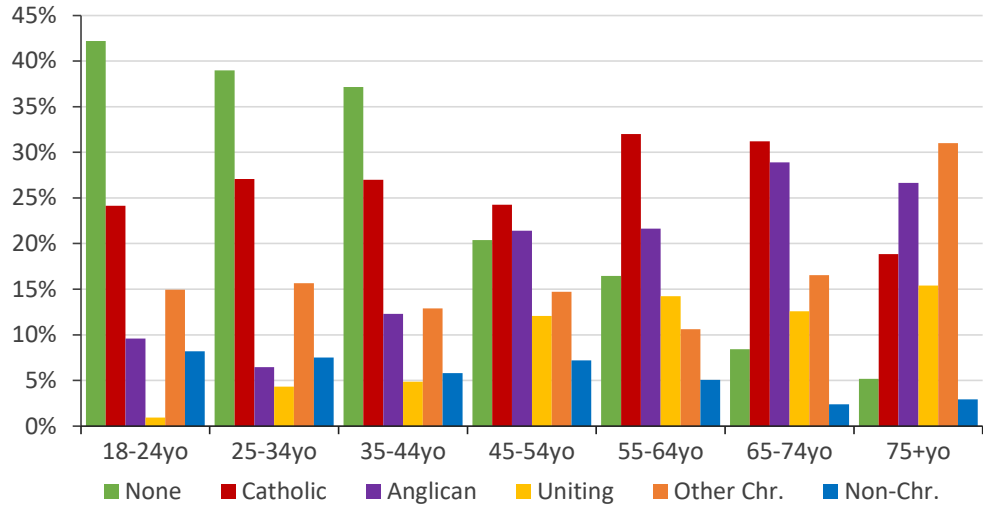


Figure 31: Religion that now-adult Australians were raised in, by age group
Source: AuSSA 2018

The most striking trend in childhood religious denominations over some 60 years is the immense increase in No religion (None), from just 5% of children around 1950 (75+ yo), to 42% around 2010 (18–24 yo).

Minor Christian denominations were dominant in the 1950s, but have been substantially reduced but relatively stable since the 1960s.

A significant drop in children being raised Anglican occurred in the 1970s, possibly as a result of the election of prime minister Gough Whitlam and the end of decades of conservative federal governments. Another substantial drop occurred in the 1990s, alongside a substantial drop in Uniting/Methodist households.

The proportion of children being raised Catholic has varied somewhat with an obvious peak in the 1960s and 70s, but no obvious long-term rise or fall.

There has been a small but significant rise in children being raised in non-Christian faiths, largely as a consequence of immigration.

Australia's youngest adults (18–24 yo) were raised mostly in No religion (42%) and Catholicism (24%), with other denominations in smaller minorities: minor Christian denominations (15%), Anglican (10%) and non-Christian denominations (8%), with Uniting/Methodist (1%) almost entirely absent.

Summary: Australians are increasingly being raised in No religion, with substantial falls in children being raised Anglican or Uniting/Methodist. Overall, the rates of children being raised Catholic or in minor Christian denominations is relatively stable, while non-Christian religions are a small minority but increasing mostly as a result of immigration.

Large minority have changed religion

Just over a third of adult Australians (35%) are still of the same religion of their childhood (11-12 years old) (Figure 32). Nearly a third of adults (32%) have left religion since childhood, and nearly a quarter (23%) are still of no religion. A small minority (8%) have changed to a different religion, and a tiny 2% have converted from No religion to a religion. Overall, a large minority (42%) of adult Australians have changed their religion (or non-religion) since childhood.

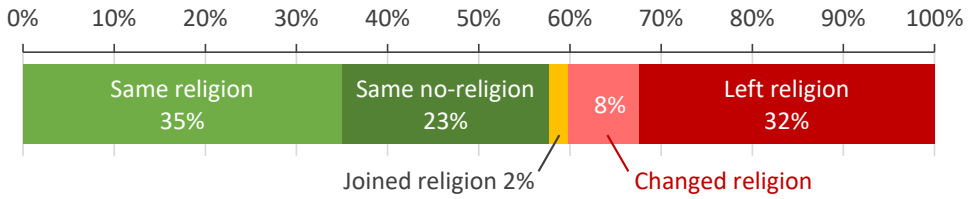


Figure 32: Current religious affiliation compared to late childhood religion
Source: AuSSA 2018

There is no significant difference in these rates between males and females, except for conversion from No religion to a religion, which is much higher amongst females by a factor of three to one.

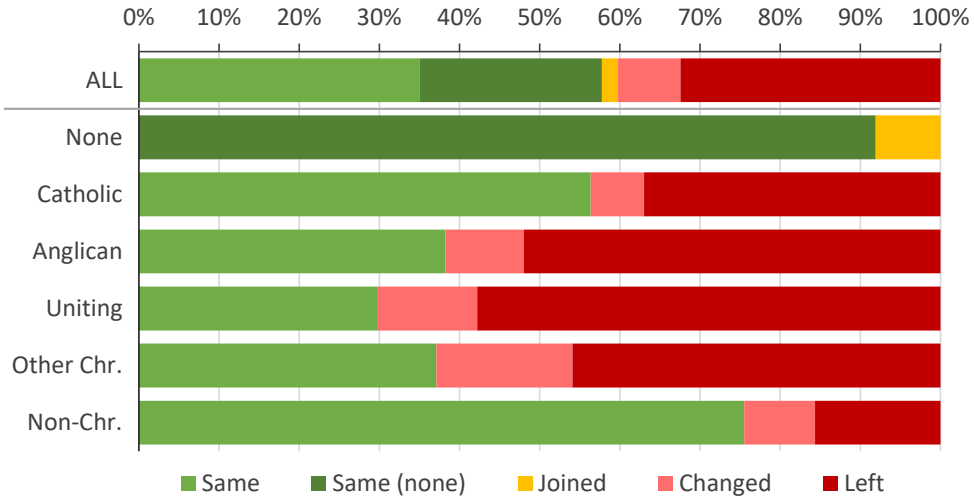


Figure 33: Changes from childhood religion
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Religion is denomination in late childhood.

By religious denomination, No religion has the highest 'stickiness' with 92% not changing, followed by 80% of non-Christian denominations (Figure 33).[28] Christian denominations exhibit much lower stickiness.

[28] These two groups also have the youngest age profiles, meaning less lifetime in which a change may have occurred.

Those **converting** to another religion include 7% of former Catholics, 10% of Anglicans, 12% of Uniting/Methodists and 11% of minor Christian denominations and 4% of non-Christian denominations.

Rates of **leaving** religion are much higher, at over a third (37%) of former Catholics, more than half of Anglicans (52%) and Uniting/Methodists (58%), nearly half (46%) of minor Christian denominations, and 16% of non-Christian denominations.

These figures are consistent with the drops in religious affiliation reported in the ABS national Census data over recent decades, confirming that the Christian denominations are losing affiliates at much higher rates than other religions.

Although the sample sizes for some religious denominations were too small to draw conclusions, the data suggested that those especially raised as Pentecostal, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Jewish were far more likely than mainstream Christians to have retained the same religion in adulthood.

Changes in religion by childhood religiosity

By religiosity, two thirds (66%) of childhood Notionals, nearly half (47%) of Occasionals, and more than a third of Regulars (35%) and Devouts (38%) have left religion altogether in adulthood. Smaller numbers (5%, 9%, 14% and 11% respectively) have changed to a different religion (Figure 34).

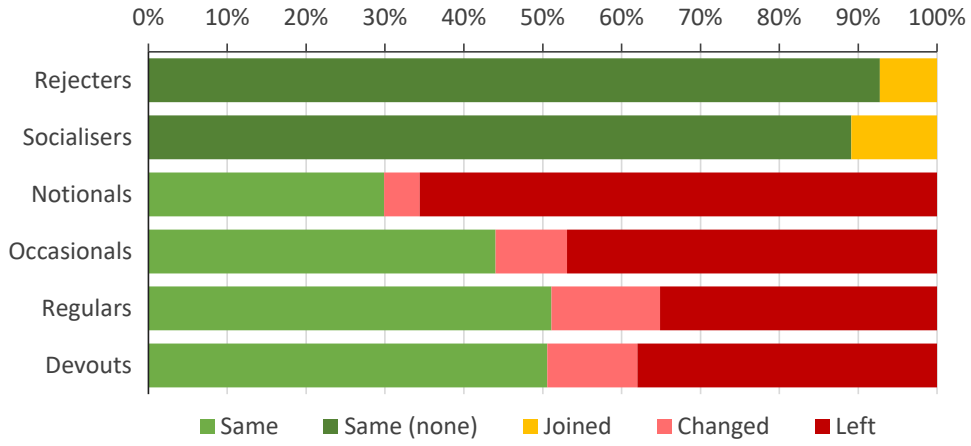


Figure 34: Changes from childhood religion, by childhood religiosity
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Religiosity is ARI6 in late childhood.

Even amongst childhood's most religious, Regulars and Devouts, only around half (51% each) are of the same religion they grew up in.

Looking back

Looking backwards from current religion to childhood religion (rather than forwards from childhood religion), somewhat more than half (58%) of adult Australians are now of the same religion they were raised in (Figure 35). Those who are now Notionals (87%) and Occasionals (83%) are by far the most likely to be the same religion, but most having reduced their religiosity from Regulars and Devouts.

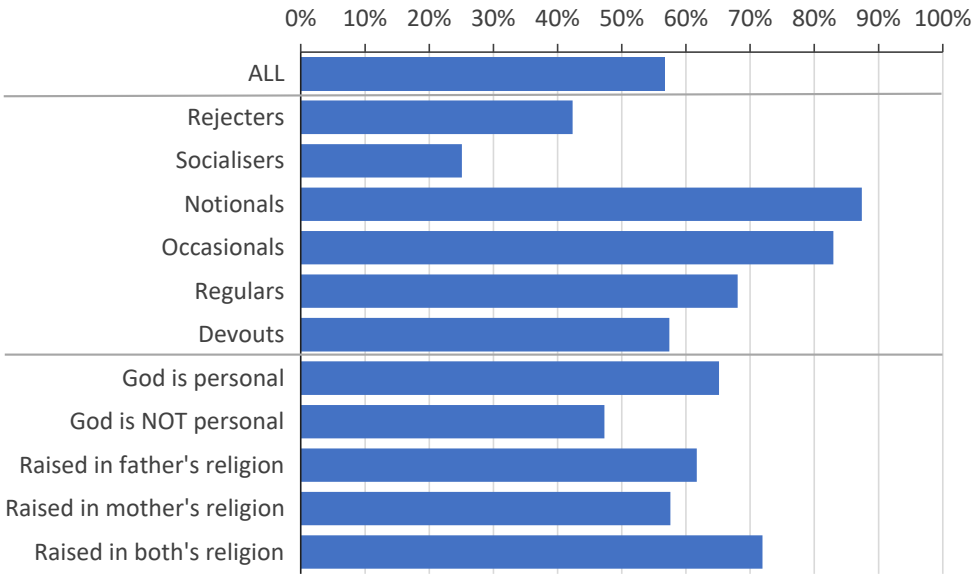


Figure 35: Adults now in the same religion as in childhood
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Religiosity is ARI6 now in adulthood.

Being raised in the religion of both parents (compared with only one), and believing in a personal rather than impersonal God, are also associated with higher rates of staying in the same religion in adulthood.

Summary: A large minority (42%) of Australian adults have changed religion since childhood; comprising 32% who left religion, 8% who changed religion, and 2% who converted to religion. Significant changes, especially leaving religion altogether, have occurred mostly across the Christian denominations. Factors most associated with staying in the same religion are being raised in the (same) religion of both parents, and believing in a personally-involved God.

By religiosity, significant numbers of childhood religionists across the board have abandoned religion, from two thirds of then-Notionals to more than a third of then-Regulars and Devouts (35% and 38% respectively).

Nature versus nurture — again

These changes in religion and religiosity raise the question of the transmission of religion between generations: how much is nature and how much is nurture? A deep dive into the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) furnishes helpful insights (Figure 36).

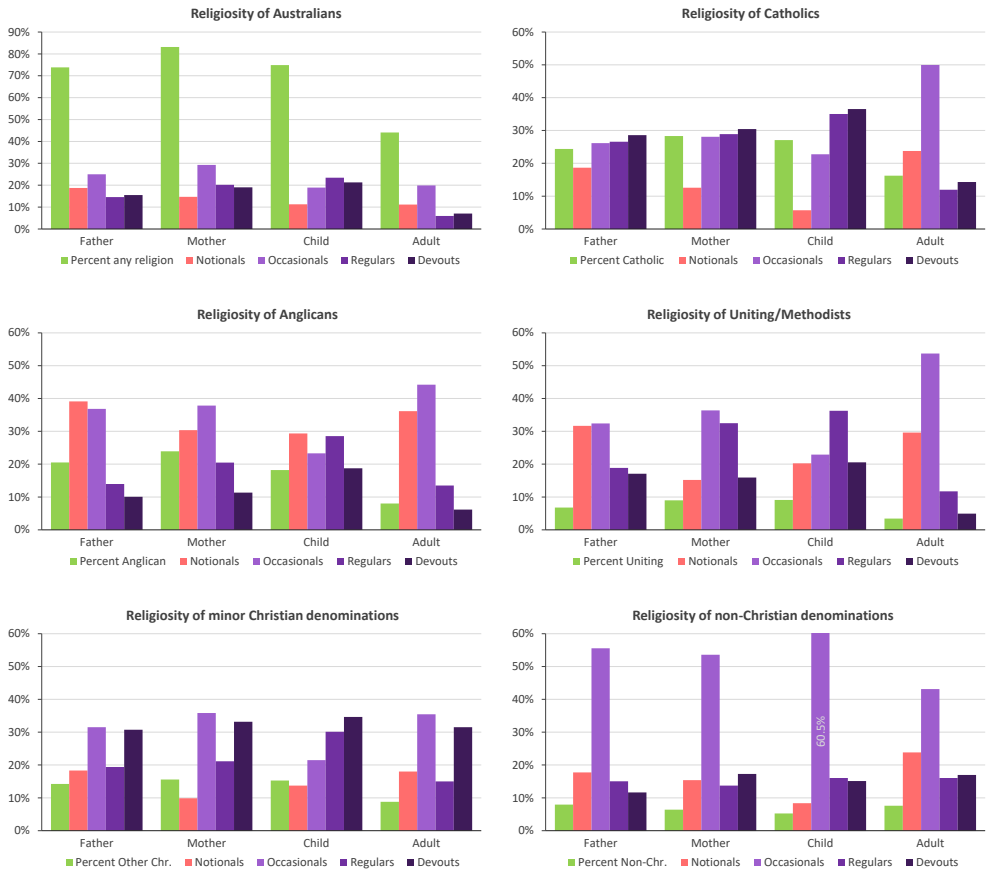


Figure 36: Religiosity of the respondent's father; mother; self as child & adult
Source: AuSSA 2018

Overall, our mums have been a little more religious than our dads, and our child selves seemingly a little more religious than our mums. There is a radical difference, however, between Christian and non-Christian denominations. Children raised as Christian were significantly more religious (attended religious services more often) than either of their parents, of which Sunday School is the obvious feature.

Non-Christian denomination children, however, attended at about the same rate as their parents, suggesting that minority groups transmit meaning in a credibility-enhancing manner rather than sending children off to their own extra indoctrination sessions as Christian parents do. This approach, coupled with an interest in preserving minority culture identity, has resulted in

maintenance, even a slight increase, of the modest rate of Committeds among non-Christian denominations (Figure 37).

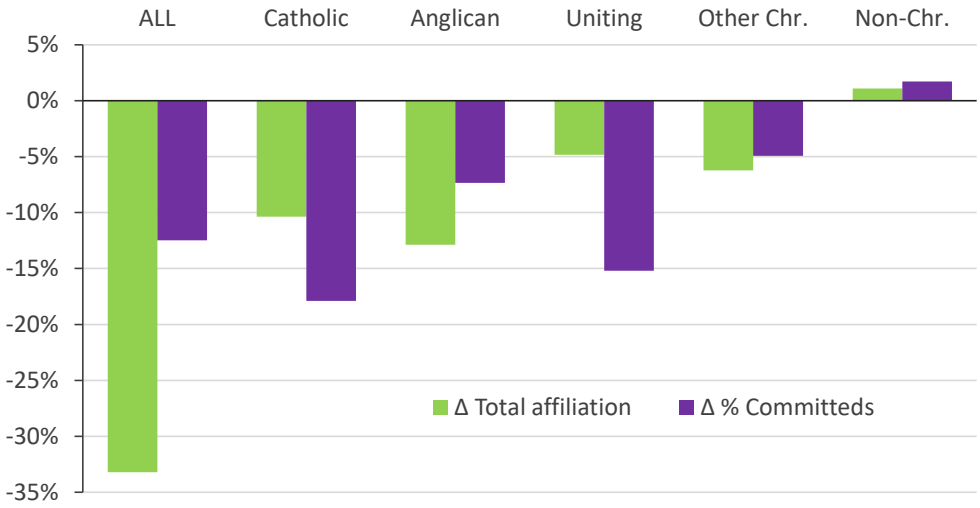


Figure 37: Current adult religious affiliation, and percent Committeds, versus average of father, mother, and self during childhood
Source: AuSSA 2018

Across all Christian denominations, not only has there been a significant loss of affiliation since childhood days, but significant shrinkage of Committeds (Regulars and Devouts) among those remaining affiliated. This suggests that the downward trends in Christian affiliation will continue in years to come.

The Catholic and Uniting churches have experienced the largest drops of Committeds, meaning that these faiths are likely to see greater drops in affiliation in coming years. The rate of Committeds amongst Anglicans was already low, accounting for its highest rate of affiliation loss already.

These figures suggest that both the Anglican and Uniting churches will struggle in coming years. It is possible the Uniting church could cease to exist in a decade, that the Anglican church would dwindle to a mere shell of its former self, and that even the Catholic church could struggle to maintain its status.

> Significant drops in both affiliation *and* in the proportion of Committeds across the Christian spectrum suggest that the Uniting church could cease to exist in a decade, that the Anglican church could dwindle to a mere shell of its former self, and that even the Catholic church could struggle to maintain its status.

Religion transmitted, and then sidelined or rejected

The substantial decreases in religion and religiosity are not, as yet, the result of a loss of attempt at transmission from parents to children. Children mostly had similar affiliation levels and higher proportions of Committeds than their parents. But as those children have grown through adulthood, great numbers have either de-emphasised religion or discarded it altogether.

Since these emerged adults are the next generation's parents, religious affiliation and religiosity are likely to continue their decline. Children being raised in no religion is likely within a generation to contribute more to the Nones than are children being raised in a religion and subsequently disaffiliating (Thiessen & Wilkins-Laflamme 2017).

Summary: Australia's current adults were in childhood as religious, and even slightly more religious, than their parents. The substantial growth in Nones evident over recent generations is mostly a result of disaffiliation in adulthood. However, being raised in no religion is likely within a generation to become the most common reason accounting for adult Nones.

Religiosity now versus in childhood

In more detail, personal change in religiosity between childhood and current adulthood shows increases in religiosity amongst a tiny minority of Australians (7% overall), at the same time as major decreases in religiosity across the board: with 31% leaving religion altogether,[29] and a further 27% retaining a religion but becoming less religious (total 58%) (Figure 38).

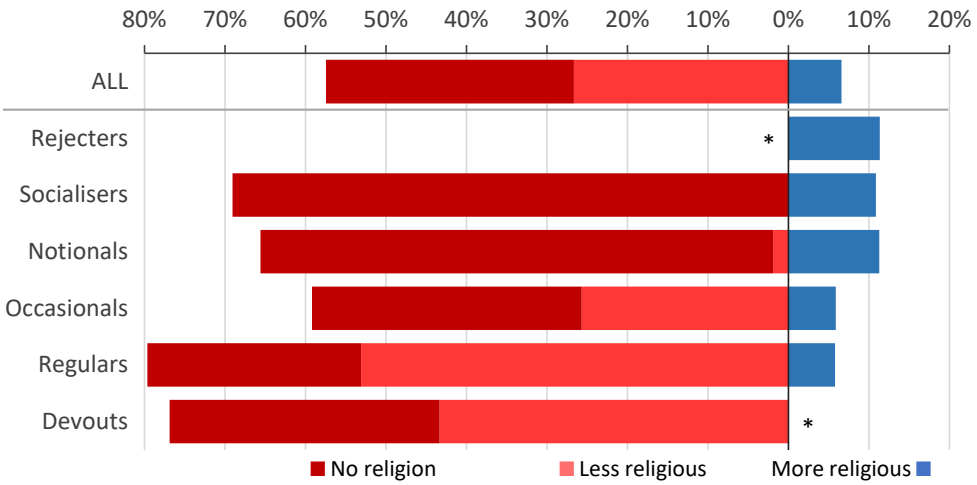


Figure 38: Own religiosity now compared to childhood ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018. * Note: Rejecters cannot by ARI6 segment become less religious, nor Devouts more religious. ARI6 labels apply to childhood, not adult, religiosity.

Amongst those who were childhood Devouts, 43% have reduced their religiosity, while another 34% have abandoned religion altogether. Amongst childhood Regulars, the figures are 53% and 27% respectively. These are by far the largest total drops in religiosity across the spectrum. Just 6% of childhood Regulars became *more* religious, that is, Devouts.

Of former Occasionals who decreased their religiosity, slightly more than half abandoned religion altogether. And amongst former Notionals and Socialisers, nearly all or all who decreased their religiosity abandoned religion altogether.

> **Summary:** Australian religion has decreased not only by religious disaffiliation, but also by substantial decreases in religiosity even amongst those still affiliating with a religious denomination.

[29] The disaffiliation figure of 31% here differs slightly from the disaffiliation figure of 34% for religious denomination analysis because a smaller proportion of respondents answered the *religiosity* (versus religion) question for both childhood and adulthood.

I'm rational, you're emotional

A complex range of reasons prompts individuals to adopt, retain or divest religion in their lives. Understanding why can be difficult, especially under the heavy-handed influence of *self-enhancement bias*. It affects us all and avoiding it takes deliberative mental effort. It's a cognitive bias in which we grant ourselves more favourable ratings than a perceived normative standard would predict (Krueger 1998), that is, better ratings than we grant others.

The bias is evident in explanations for holding a religion and can cloud our judgements as to why people identify with one. For example, a metacognitive[30] study of a random sample of USA adults found significant differences in explanations of one's own reasons to believe in God, versus other people's reasons (Shermer 1999) (Figure 39). Keep in mind the Christian monotheistic bias inherent in the study, and that most respondents would have been raised in a Christian household.

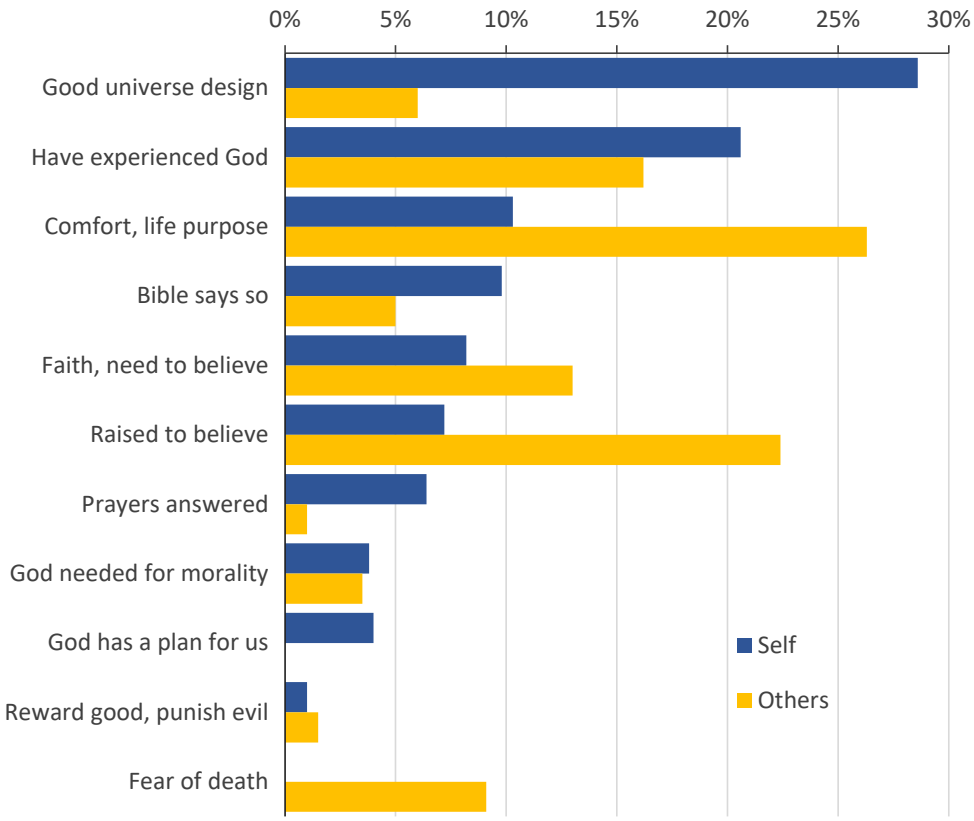


Figure 39: Belief in God — own reasons versus reasons attributed to others
Source: Shermer 1999

Immediately obvious is that reasons that could be rational and sensible are much more commonly attributed to the self: good design of the universe,

[30] Metacognitive: thinking about thinking, in this case thinking about someone else's thinking.

having directly experienced God, because the Bible says so, and because prayers are answered.

And reasons that would be emotional, or docile and compliant, are much more commonly attributed to others: for comfort and purpose in life, a need to believe, fear of death, and because their parents told them so (raised to believe).

Thus, religionists are inclined to say that their own belief in God is a reasoned and sensible choice, but that other people are pawns to their foolish emotions and the suggestions of others. This self-affirming trait is a form of *attribution bias*.

Significantly, on average between self and other attributions, *morality* (reward good and punish evil) was the *least* nominated reason for believing in God.

The study illustrates the crucial importance of high-quality, empirical evidence to properly illuminate our understanding of religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and to avoid intuitive claims however attractive they may seem or how widely they may be held.

> The study also provides a major challenge to the notion that a central purpose of religion is *morality*. The reason to believe in God "to reward good and punish evil" received by far the *lowest* combined rating for self and others, of all the reasons. This suggests that while morality is of central concern to clerics, it's of little practical concern to the laity.

> **Summary:** Attribution bias influences the religious to over-assign rational reasons for their own beliefs, but emotional reasons for others. Of major reasons to be religious, the laity rate *morality* the least important.

Conversion

We've already discussed a rich cluster of reasons as to why religion is so prevalent. Much of the conversion (to religion) process occurs through raising children in a religion, that is, from not capable of relevant discernment, to religion. Unsurprisingly, a majority of Australians (57%) say that parents and family have the greatest influence on their perceptions and opinions of Christianity (McCrindle Research 2017).[31]

Upbringing, and the gradual conversion of adolescents and adults, involves progressive emotional-cognitive processing over time, to develop a new sense of agency, meaning and social integration. It is estimated that around 80% of non-upbringing conversions are a response to personal stress or crisis (Snook, Williams & Horgan 2019).

> "*Conversion is seen as a process that varies in speed, motivations, context, and direction including deconversion. Psychological processes include step models, attachment, psychodynamics, group pressures, and cognitive manipulations*."
> — Paloutzian (2014).

The other major mechanism of conversion is the religious epiphany or intense 'spiritual' experience, resulting from seizure-like activity in the brain's temporal lobes (Meyer 2013).

Epiphanies aside, beliefs in afterlife and miracles, belief in God, importance of God, and religious involvement are important keys to religious conversion[32] (Lemos, Gore & Shults 2017). These are bolstered by exposure to actions — credibility-enhancing religious displays — that attest to religious claims (Lanman 2012).

Religiosity correlates strongly with valuing *social* conservation (Pepper, Jackson & Uzzell 2010), that is, scoring low on the Big Five personality trait *Openness to Experience*. In addition, religious beliefs are stronger when conceptualisations of God are consistent with a person's specific values, attitudes, and beliefs, offering inducements to convert and remain. Obviously in the converse, religiosity is weaker when a religion's God conceptualisations are *in*consistent with the affiliate's specific values, attitudes, and beliefs.

---

31 Note the Christian focus of this Christian research firm.

32 At least, with reference to God, conversion to one of the monotheisms.

This is reflected in Australians' explanations of the top attractors to and repellents from overall spirituality and religion (Figure 40) (McCrindle Research 2017). The top strong attractors to religion and spirituality were seeing people live out a genuine faith (16%), experiencing a personal trauma (13%), and faith-change testimonies (12%).

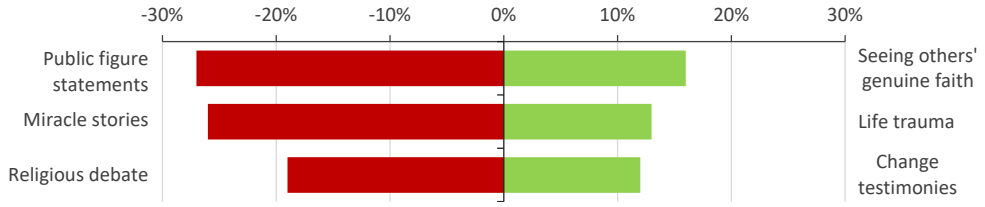


Figure 40: Top three strong repellents & attractors for spirituality and religion
Source: McCrindle 2017

Conversely, the top strong repellents against religion and spirituality were hearing from public figures and celebrities who are examples of that faith (27%), miraculous stories of people being healed or supernatural occurrences (26%), and philosophical ideas and debate about religion (19%).

Summary: Parents and family, especially with credibility-enhancing displays, are the most common sources of conversion to religion. Most conversions happen cognitively over time. A small proportion of conversions are by spiritual epiphany, when there is partial seizure activity in the brain's temporal lobes. Religious commitment is higher when the God conceptualisations of the person's religion are consistent with the person's own values, attitudes and beliefs.

Deconversion

By deconversion we mean the discarding or rejection of an existing affiliation with a religion. While strictly speaking deconversion includes changing to another religion (deconversion with conversion), for simplicity in this report we will consider only deconversion from religion altogether.

A popular social explanation for rising deconversion rates — at least amongst western countries — is that "making peace with God" is no longer as compelling a motive for religion, given modern healthcare standards and much longer life expectancies (Papyrakis & Selvaretnam 2011). On the other side of the coin, credibility enhancing displays — that is, parents demonstrating rather than merely stating positive religious values — delays the average age that children leave religion (Langston, Speed & Coleman 2018).

Major pathways to deconversion include the intellectual (doubt or denial); moral criticism of religionist tenets or behaviour; and negative personal religious experiences leading to emotional suffering which is healed by abandoning religion (Streib 2014). Exits may be to non-organisational spiritual existence, or to secularism. In general, contributing factors include personality, values, attachment style, and socialisation (Streib 2021).

Age profile

Although many people in Western nations decide to leave religion in early adulthood, this shouldn't be interpreted to mean static disposition in later life. Even people in late adulthood not uncommonly change religious denomination, or leave religion altogether (Hayward & Krause 2014). In the unusual case of Austria, those in *middle* adulthood tend to disaffiliate more due to their increasing personal wealth and a desire not to pay church tax, set at 1.1% for Austrian Catholics since 1939 (McClendon & Hackett 2014).

Education and social factors

The association between education and secularisation continues to be a source of scholarly debate (Bertrand 2015). Nevertheless, in the USA at least, religious decline in young adults has been found to be modestly associated with increased (college) education (Downey 2014). The general picture is complicated by the fact that religious-service attenders tend to self-select into higher education, with more religious youth choosing non-elite colleges and less religious youth choosing elite colleges (Schwadel 2016).[33]

[33] This association is consistent with a general personality trait to favour *commitment*, whatever form that may take in whichever sphere of life.

In addition, evangelical Protestantism is a significant risk factor for failure to complete high school education — at least in the USA where it is the largest Christian custom (Masci & Smith 2018) — while the opposite is true for mainline Protestants (Heimlich 2008).

General increases in social and political equality over recent decades have also led to a decline in religiosity (Power 2012).

More direct factors

But there are more direct recent deconversion associations, with cohabitation, non-marital sex, and drug and alcohol use decreasing religiosity, though conversely, with marriage reducing religious decline (Uecker, Regnerus & Vaaler 2007).

> In Australia, marriage statistics suggest further religious decline may be on the cards: the marriage rate has been decreasing since at least the turn of the 21st century (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021). Indeed, since 2017, the rate would have dropped further if it had not been bolstered by the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In 2019, nearly 5% of all marriages were of same-sex couples. The median age at marriage has increased as well, meaning more young adults will likely have disaffiliated from religion prior to contemplating matrimony.

There are stronger deconversion associations still with internet use, which is associated with lower rates of prayer, reading sacred texts, attending religious services, or considering religion personally important (Downey 2014; McClure 2020).

Longitudinal analysis has found a causative association between raised education and lower religiosity (Becker, Nagler & Woessmann 2017). Learning to inquire — the employment of critical thinking — increases secularisation more than does mere knowledge of the natural sciences, or even the application of knowledge (Becker, Nagler & Woessmann 2017; Evans 2021). This too is consistent with exposure to an expanded range of perspectives via the internet, which can prompt more critical thinking.

The religious mind

Given the human mind's preference for certainty, and experience of anxiety in states of uncertainty, an unexpected research finding is that uncertainty can be experienced as a positive rather than negative amongst the nonreligious

(Frost 2019). It is unclear, however, to what degree if any personal *changes* in accepting uncertainty actually contribute to religious disaffiliation.

Other research has found that cognitive intelligence has a negative effect on religiosity (Meisenberg et al. 2012), and that the negative effect increases with age (Ganzach & Gotlibovski 2013).[34] This contributes to rates of disaffiliation after religious socialisation in childhood, and is consistent with an increased ability for critical thinking.

It's not me, it's you

Multiple studies indicate that religious disaffiliation is significantly related to the laity's disapproval of conservative religious stances, such as opposition to marriage equality — "*a narrow focus on certain moral prescriptions*"[35] (McLaughlin et al. 2020; Packard & Ferguson 2018). Detailed analysis in the USA confirms that conservative ideological Christian political activity is a major driver of religious disaffiliation (Djupe, Neiheisel & Conger 2018). Indeed, concentration of evangelicals in USA counties is strongly associated with the presence and number of non-believer organisations (Garcia & Blankholm 2016).

Nevertheless, only about half of the affiliated who were opposed to conservative religious positions had gone on to actually disaffiliate (Vargas 2012). Those who consider disaffiliation but don't disaffiliate tend to experience higher levels of mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (McLaughlin et al. 2020).

> There is robust evidence from the USA that religious disaffiliation is strongly associated with disapproval of conservative religious prescriptions. Those who consider disaffiliating, but don't go on to disaffiliate, experience higher levels of anxiety and depression.

Globally, increasingly liberal beliefs of the religiously affiliated are strongly associated with disaffiliation (Brañas-Garza, García-Muñoz & Neuman 2013). Along with growing scepticism towards religious tenets (McLaughlin et al. 2020), religious Nones can be expected to continue to increase.

---

[34] Secularists should be sure not to smugly interpret such findings to imply that religionists are necessarily unintelligent. These are *average* levels of intelligence, and both secularists and religionists include individuals of higher or lower intelligence.

[35] Note the nod to deontological solutions to moral questions amongst the religious, as discussed earlier.

Deconversion experiences of ministers and laity

The spectrum of deconversion factors is not exclusive to the laity. They also apply in the deconversion of religious ministers and missionaries: loss of confidence in sacred texts, dissent from institutional teachings and values, and disappointment with the religious experience and God (Lee 2015). Understandably, pastor and missionary deconverters face substantial struggles of identity, social networks and employment, yet many say they are better off in the end. When a pastor disaffiliates from religion (becoming atheist), the remaining flock's disapproval towards the disaffiliate is strongly associated with religious fundamentalism (Larson 2015).

Equally, laity leaving fundamentalist religion also face major challenges — especially when there is forced social isolation of the apostate — but can realise significant improvements in wellbeing (Nica 2020). Acknowledging former negative impacts of religion can become an important part of the deconvert's new identity (Fazzino 2014).

The greatest contributors to improved wellbeing seem to be increased sense of personal control (i.e. less fatalism), greater value in novelty, excitement and new life challenges,[36] and decreased axiomatic religiosity (Hui et al. 2018).

Quantifying immediate and practical reasons

Pew Research Center (2018) quantified specific, practical and salient reasons why Americans are not religious. Most of the non-religious (84%) question religious teachings, don't like church positions on social matters (75%) or even the organisations (72%) and religious leaders themselves (69%) (Figure 41).

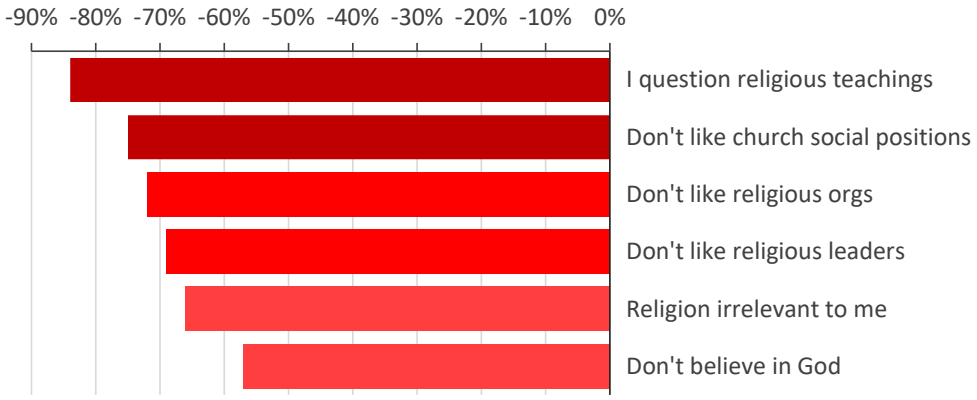


Figure 41: Why USA 'nones' don't identify with a religion
Source: Pew Research Center (2018)

[36] Consistent with an increase in the expression of the Big Five personality trait *Openness to experience*.

The rise in questioning religious teachings seems to be a recent phenomenon: disaffiliation in at least the USA in the 1990s was largely a symbolic statement against the conservatism of the religious right (Hout & Fischer 2002): that is, people disaffiliated but kept believing non-offending religious tenets, whereas now people are now increasingly disbelieving.

While still important, religion being irrelevant (66%) and non-belief in God (57%) were less frequent reasons to be non-religious, though the frequency of these attitudes has been increasing (Pew Research Center 2016a).

In Australia, amongst those who are more frosty towards religion, church opposition to homosexuality, and questioning of religious teachings ("the validity of the Bible") were equal top reasons to avoid religion (75% each), followed by a loving God allowing people to go to hell (72%) (McCrindle Research 2017).

> "*The Anglicanism I grew up with was such high-quality mumbo-jumbo, such exquisite tripe, that nothing else can compare with it and replace it.*"
> — Ian Warden (2017), lapsed Anglican and now atheist

Amongst Australia's wider non-religious, the then Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was obviously top of mind, with 73% saying church abuse and scandal was an important reason to be non-religious (Figure 42). Hypocrisy of the religious (65%), religious wars and violence (64%), religious judgementalism (63%) and asking for money (62%) were also important reasons.

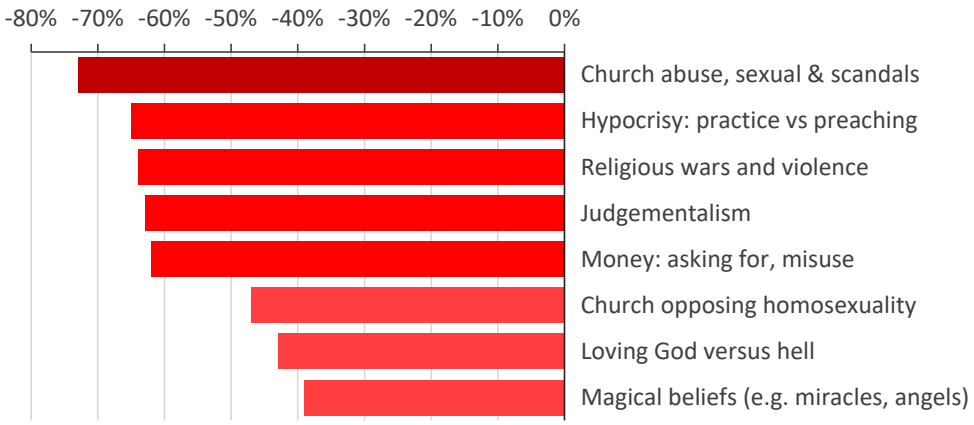


Figure 42: Top blockers of engagement in Christianity in Australia
Source: McCrindle 2017

Other issues indicated by Australian non-religionists included why there would be a need for suffering, the subordinate role of women, science, and evolution.

In Australia, it is the behaviour of conservative or vocal religionists themselves — abuse, hypocrisy, violence, judgementalism and hostility towards minority outgroups — that largely drives religious disaffiliation and increases secularism. The federal Coalition government's ambition to confer additional protected rights for religionists regarding some of these behaviours is likely to accelerate loss of religion across the nation.

Summary: Deconversion from religion can occur at any time throughout life, though is most common in young adulthood. Education — and its stimulation of critical thinking — is a key driver, though cohabitation, non-marital sex, drug and alcohol use, and especially Internet use contribute as well. Specifically, questioning of religious teachings (critical thinking), and opposition to conservative religious prescriptions about social matters, top the list of reasons people give for not being religious.

Two major Australian political factors

Between the 2016 and 2019 elections there were two major events in Australia with heightened relevance regarding religion.

Firstly, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse published its major reports, showing that much of the abuse had occurred within religious settings (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017). This brought major, ongoing headlines and considerable public discussion. The head of the commission, Justice Peter McClellan, condemned the leaders of the Catholic church, in which 60% of all abuse in religious settings occurred (Perkins 2019).

Secondly, marriage was legalised for couples other than heterosexual male/female pairs. While many religionists supported the reform (Cockburn 2017), the nation saw conservative clerics devote considerable effort and resources to oppose the reform.

> Religious opponents included the Sydney Anglican Diocese which contributed $1m to oppose the legalisation of marriage equality, but only $5,000 to help combat domestic violence (Gleeson & Baird 2017), thus framing loving matrimony between two non-heterosexual people as 200 times more dangerous than violence in the home.

These are specific instances of major "abuse" and "hypocrisy" contributors to Australians abandoning religion between 2016 and 2019 (Figure 43).

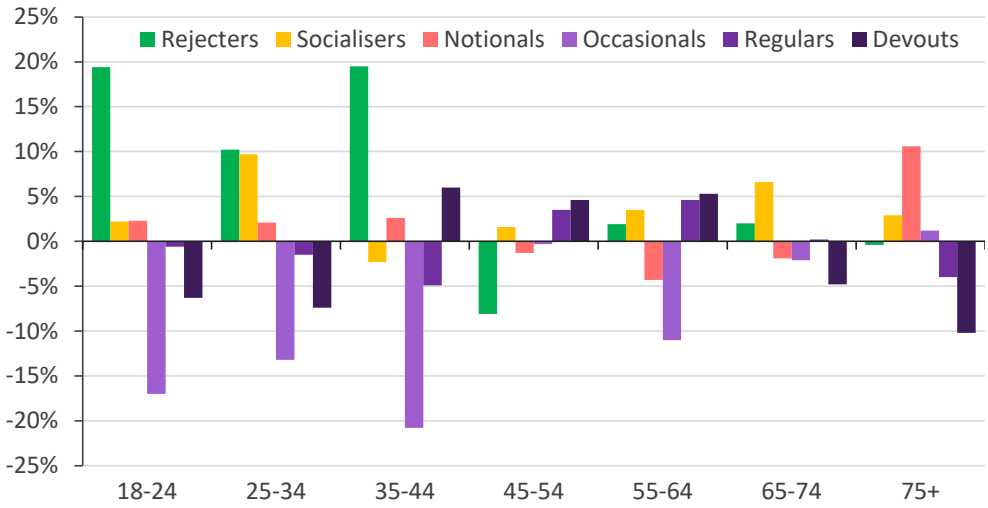


Figure 43: Changes in Australians' religiosity between 2016-19
Source: AES

Amongst **younger** Australians,18–44 year old, there was a significant net movement from Occasionals to Rejecters. Amongst the even younger 18–34, there was also a significant loss of Devouts, and in the 25–34 group, those had most become Socialisers.

Amongst **older** Australians, 65+ year old, there was a modest loss of Devouts and Regulars. In the 65–74 group, with a net movement of Devouts to Socialisers, while in the oldest group, 75+, most of the change was to Notionals (no longer attending services but still stating affiliation).

However, amongst **middle** Australians, 45-64 year old, there was a modest increase in religiosity, with net increases in Regulars and Devouts.

Summary: Younger (18–44 year old) and older (65+ year old) Australians significantly declined in religiosity between 2016 and 2019. The younger change was mostly to reject religion altogether, while the older changed mostly to reject either denominational affiliation (65–74 year old) or service attendance (75+ year old).

In contrast, religiosity increased modestly amongst middle Australians (45–64 year old), with small but notable increases in both Regulars and Devouts.

Institutional changes in religion

Not only do individual people change their minds about religion, but so do religious institutions — the various denominations. Of course, they don't disaffiliate in the way that individuals do, or the denomination would cease to exist. However, they do periodically change their minds in regard to doctrines and teachings.

For example, before the 1970s, Anglican religious tradition held — on the basis that Jesus appointed only male disciples and that St Paul instructed women to be silent in church and to submit to their husbands — that women could not be ordained deacons, priests or bishops (Sherlock 2012).

Fast forward through several decades of soul-searching and internal debate, and Anglican women are now ordained deacons, priests, and bishops, though they are still not universally accepted (Lewis 2019). Some, but not all, of the church, has clearly changed its mind in relation to the role of women, not just generally, but theologically. What then, is the church's "religious tradition" in relation to women, and who gets to say so? Does a statement by a supporter or opponent represent a definitive answer accepted by all? Obviously not.

Similarly, the Catholic church prohibits its priests from marrying, and the very small number of already-married men granted permission to join its priesthood must formally renounce sexual relations with their wives. It equally discourages homosexual men from joining the priesthood and prohibits homosexual acts, describing them as 'disordered'. But this was not always so. A thousand years ago, the church wasn't nearly so fussed about homosexuality (McClain 2019). And it was only a thousand years into its history that the church formally forbade priests to marry, in 1123, confirmed in 1139 (Parish 2020).

Further, Parish (2020) suggests that in the not too distant future, the Catholic church is likely to allow priests to marry, starting in South America where there is an acute shortage of men who wish to be celibate for the remainder of their lives. Internal resistance to the reform is strong, and it is unlikely to occur any time soon. With an estimated 30%–40% of Catholic priests being gay (and up to 75% according to some priests) (Dias 2019), priests marrying men would not only challenge the doctrine of celibacy, but the church's modern passions against homosexuality.

That's not to say the Catholic church can't change. In the fourth century CE, St Augustine determined that unbaptised babies must go to hell, though only for mild punishment (Tsai 2007). In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas determined that, theologically, babies could not go to heaven, but didn't go to

hell either. This stance evolved into the tradition of limbo, the place — neither heaven nor hell — where children's souls are said to go if a child dies before being baptised.

In 2007 the church changed its tradition on limbo again: by scrapping it. While never part of official doctrine but taught for centuries to countless generations of Catholics as tradition at least well into the 20th century, it was deemed an "unduly restrictive view of salvation" and buried (Pullella 2007). The church now deems that babies who die unbaptised will go to heaven, though it is unclear whether the church has "manually moved" souls already in limbo to heaven.

On the matter of VAD, "tradition" varies, too. Australian Catholic bishops have vigorously opposed its legalisation and threaten that last rites and other Catholic rituals are likely to be denied to those choosing it. However, the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life in Rome, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, says priests can be present at a VAD death because "*the Lord never abandons anyone*" (Brockhaus 2019).

> "*To accompany, to hold the hand of someone who is dying, is, I think a great duty every believer should promote … even if we are against assisted suicide*."
> — Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia *in* Brockhaus (2019)

And on the matter of death, the Catholic church often publicises its strong views against intentionally ending life. But it was only 120 years ago, in 1901, that then Pope Leo XIII said it was not only OK, but desirable and expedient, to murder clergy who question any aspect of church doctrine or authority:

> "*The death sentence is a necessary and efficacious means for the Church to attain its end when rebels act against it and disturbers of ecclesiastical unity, especially obstinate heretics … cannot be restrained by any other penalty … [the Church] is effectively bound to remove [the heretic] … it can and must put these wicked men to death*."
> — Pope Leo VIII *re* Preface to Volume 2 of the book of Canon Law *in* Missett (2008), p 125

It's difficult to imagine Pope Francis endorsing such a view, and he may well oppose it. If he does, how would the Catholic dogma of Papal infallibility —

part of the church's "magisterium" — reconcile one Pope suggesting murder, and another opposing it?

Regardless, irreconcilable religious "traditions" about hastening of death remain: of promoting it, opposing it, and spiritually punishing it… or not.

The point is that not only do institutions change their minds on fundamental matters from time to time, but that at any one time, a range of views is held by members of a religion, including amongst its clergy.

Thus, assertive and absolutist pronouncements by clerics that a religion's "tradition" supports or opposes a matter under public debate is to wrongly pretend both that the position is held or agreed to by all members of the religion, and that the position is robustly impervious to time and culture.

Given that real tradition is based on actual beliefs and practices that are passed on from generation to generation — not on textbook theory — clerics alone don't hold the keys to the kingdom of religious tradition. Indeed they may barely recognise real traditions amongst their flocks, like widespread support for abortion, marriage equality, VAD for the terminally ill, and opposition to religious schools discriminating against LGBTI staff or students.

Summary: Religious institutions can and do change their minds about their "traditions" from time to time. For example, the Anglican church in Australia has changed its tradition about the ordination of women.

In addition, at any one time, there will be some clerics, and a multitude of laity, who disagree with one particular tradition or other, just as there still is about women's ordination in the Anglican church.

There is therefore good reason for scepticism when a cleric insists that their religion's tradition on a specific matter is exactly and only what that cleric says it is.

Religion and conscientious objection

Australia was one of the eight founding authors of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Australian Human Rights Commission 2021), adopted in 1948. Article 18 of the Declaration (United Nations 1948) states that:

> "*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*"
> — United Nations (1948), Article 18

Clearly, freedom of religion is a right protected under the Declaration, and so it should be: countless numbers of people throughout history have been deprived of freedom and even life merely for their personal religious beliefs.

Importantly and equally, *thought* and *conscience* are protected. That is, religion is not endowed with a unique or pre-emptive privilege in protections under the Declaration. The right to religious freedom is equal to the right to freedom *from* religion — and of non-religious thought, conscience, or belief.

This gives rise to conflicts and moral dilemmas in the "*manifestation*" of belief or religion when different consciences come into contact. Some conflicts have easy answers: one person cannot compel another to attend religious service, nor prohibit another from attending.[37] Manifestation rights are both positive and negative: that is, to do or not do something. To refuse to participate in something for reasons of conscience is "conscientious objection" (CO).[38]

While the resolution of some conflicts is straightforward, others can be more complicated, especially in healthcare, where religious CO can create barriers to access for patients seeking a particular kind of lawful service, such as fertility planning or management, abortion, vaccination using material derived from foetal stem cells, or VAD.

In the first instance it's important to define conscience.

---

[37] Assuming competent persons of the age of majority.

[38] One of the earliest records of CO is from ancient Greece: Socrates refusing an order to arrest a fellow citizen (Coady 2013).

> **What is conscience?**
>
> Conscience is the exercise of moral judgement via the interaction of a person's emotions and thoughts on matters of right and wrong, goods and harms (Waldmann, Nagel & Weigmann 2012). It reflects the private, internal judgement of an autonomous moral agent (Durland 2011).

Sulmasy (2008) argues that there must also be a commitment to morality itself, but this is to say that conscience can't exist unless there is prior deliberative reflection for it, which is clearly false.

Fry-Bowers (2020) provides a definition of CO as it relates to healthcare services:

> "[CO is] *refusal by a healthcare provider to provide certain treatments, including the standard of care, to a patient based on the provider's personal, ethical or religious beliefs*."
> — Fry-Bowers (2020)

CO's inherent nature is objection to *personal* participation in a defined course of action for moral (not legal or other) reasons (Coady 2013).

> Importantly, CO is not blanket prohibition, even though the objector may separately argue in favour of blanket prohibition. CO recognises that other consciences may differ and choose to pursue the objected course of action.

Numerous theses have been written in favour of CO (e.g. Goligher et al. 2016; Symons 2017; Trigg 2017). While religious accommodation may fail on "basic good" and "intense preferences" grounds, it has been argued to succeed on "personal good" grounds: the moral integrity of the objecting person (Bou-Habib 2006).

Blanket restrictions against CO are disproportionate and arguments for them are flawed (Maclure & Dumont 2017), with some arguing that CO deserves muscular legal protection (e.g. Fovargue & Neal 2015).

A wide range of legal provisions for CO exists across numerous jurisdictions around the world and is beyond the scope of this discussion. It is worth noting, however, the unusual case of Sweden where there is no right to professional CO, including for religious reasons. This is due to a national conviction regarding equality, non-discrimination, and the equal application of the law in public service provision (Munthe 2017).

Elsewhere, objections to CO are not in short supply. Bespalov (2019) argues that religious CO demands cannot be met without arbitrarily overriding the personal sovereignty of others. While true in many cases, the universality of this claim is open to question.

Other arguments propose that CO is fundamentally incompatible with ethico-legal considerations and undermines societal functioning (Munthe & Nielsen 2017); is an 'anaemic' concept (Giubilini 2014); offends patient requests for legally permissible treatments and interventions that ought to be respected (Beca & Astete 2015; Savulescu & Schuklenk 2017);[39] that such refusal itself violates medical ethics (Dickens 2009); that CO in practice can be indistinguishable from simple prejudice (Smalling & Schuklenk 2017); and that CO claims can be excuses to subvert patient access to the services (Savulescu & Schuklenk 2018) or for ideological agendas or attempts to impose certain moral values on society (Kuře 2016; Undurraga & Sadler 2019).

With such objections in mind, a 2016 international meeting of philosophers and bioethicists signed off the statement, "*Healthcare practitioners' primary obligations are towards their patients, not towards their own personal conscience*" (University of Oxford 2016). Again however, some argue this is disproportionate bias against service providers and symptomatic of increasing intolerance particularly towards religious CO (Stammers 2017).

Perhaps a clearer way of casting this conflict of perspectives is to ask: *to what extent and in what ways* should religious (or any other) objection's intolerance … be tolerated?

[39] Savulescu and Schuklenk's arguments in particular have drawn vigorous responses, see especially Hughes (2018).

> **What do doctors think?**
>
> Most US doctors (86%) believe that doctors are ethically obliged to present all lawful options to a patient, including ones they morally object to. If they morally object to the service the patient has chosen, they should refer the patient to a non-objecting doctor (71%) (Curlin et al. 2007).

Sincerity

One key question about CO is whether the underlying beliefs are held sincerely. Chapman (2017) argues that while it is unlawful to deliberately assess the accuracy or plausibility of a religious objector's beliefs, it is possible to assess whether they are held sincerely. This would be to unfairly target *religious* beliefs. If the sincerity of any CO belief is to be tested, non-religious and religious objections must face the same hurdles. In any case, such assessments are highly problematic for practical resource (administering tests) reasons, workplace (combative) culture reasons, lack of reliable tests (Smalling & Schuklenk 2017), and for other reasons (Su 2016).

Bridging the unrestricted/restricted/banned CO divide

While some argue that objecting doctors should be legally obliged to refer a requesting patient to a non-objecting supplier (e.g. Schuklenk 2015), others argue that CO should not be restricted (e.g. Trigg 2017). Part of the debate's complexity arises because the medical fraternity — or even a group within it — is the exclusive provider of certain services, and it can act as a *cartel denier* of patient rights through a monopoly position fuelled by medical paternalism (Cholbi 2015). There is evidence that the burden of CO "*falls disproportionately on vulnerable populations* [trying to access healthcare services]*, and that legitimate concern exists that moral disagreement is merely a pretext for discrimination*" (Fry-Bowers 2020).

McGee (2020) argues that as a provider of restricted (medical) services, when a doctor refuses to provide a requested service according to their own conscience, mutual respect of a patient's rights to act on their own beliefs entails an obligation to adequately inform the patient in a way that enables the patient to act on his or her own conscience: that is, to provide a referral.

In any case, such a referral is for a consultation and not for provision of the service. The patient may not qualify for the service, or decide ultimately not to pursue the service, which the referring doctor has failed to discern because he or she refuses to participate in even considering it. Thus, in the same way

referral to a heart specialist doesn't guarantee a patient will undergo heart surgery, referral to another supplier for a refused service is not a "prescription" for it.

Balancing the rights of healthcare workers and patients creates many challenges. CO with limitations seems to be the most balanced and reasoned solution (Fovargue et al. 2015) to avoid unwelcome negative consequences (Wicclair 2019), though debates will continue about the precise features of rights and obligations (Wester 2015), and the standards by which they are determined (e.g. Blackshaw 2019; McConnell & Card 2019; Zolf 2019).

Indeed, a key point is that *nobody's* right of conscience is unconditional since that would be to infringe the rights of others (Myskja & Magelssen 2018). Unfettered rights in either direction lack proportionality, regardless of whether they are founded on religious beliefs or not.

Class-based CO is not the same as treatment-based CO

One form of CO seems to draw nearly universal condemnation: refusal to treat a patient because of their background.

> **CO to treating classes of patients is wrong**
>
> "*Health care professionals are not conscripts, and in a freely chosen profession, conscientious objection cannot override patient care. No matter how sincerely held, objections to treating particular classes of patients are indefensible — regardless of whether the objections are based on race, gender, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation (AMA Code of Medical Ethics [Opinion 1.1.2]). A health care professional cannot provide medical services for a white, heterosexual person and conscientiously object to providing the same services to a Hispanic, Muslim, or LGBT person*."
>
> — *in* Stahl and Emanuel (2017)

Rather, it is generally accepted that where CO is permitted, it is limited to forms of *treatment*, not forms of *patient*.

Considerations of CO in healthcare form a useful starting point for deliberations about broader matters of CO across other public spheres like education and aged care services. Most of these services are in law delivered through *organisations* rather than directly by individuals. It is then that an institutional notion of *ethics* may make itself felt.

Summary: The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights grants everyone the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (not just religion). Conscience is the exercise of moral judgement via the interaction of a person's emotions and thoughts on matters of right and wrong.

When a doctor's conscience dictates the refusal to provide a lawful treatment that the patient wants, the appropriate and proportionate moral balance is for the doctor to provide a referral to a doctor who doesn't object to offering the service. In this way, the objecting doctor's conscience to not deliver the service is respected at the same time that the patient's conscience to receive it is. To refuse a referral for assessment (a referral is not an "order" for treatment) is to abandon the patient to moral paternalism.

The confection of 'institutional conscience'

In addition to individual service providers, organisational or institutional providers might seek to object to particular services such as abortion, fertility planning or VAD being delivered within their facilities; or seek to ban people of whom they disapprove (e.g. LGBTI or single mothers) from working in their facilities.

In regard to VAD, state laws differ. Victorian law is silent on institutional objection. Consequently, Catholic healthcare institutions in Victoria refuse to allow not only VAD to occur, but deny access to initial consultations or even information about it in their centres (White et al. 2021). South Australian law, and proposed Queensland law, however, do not permit blanket institutional prohibition. Where the person is ordinarily a *resident* of the facility, the facility does not have a legal right to prohibit the person's access to VAD.

It is common to refer to institutional prohibition as "*institutional conscientious objection*" (e.g. Riga & McKenna 2021).

> The problem with "*institutional conscientious objection*" is that "*institutional conscience*" is a confection. It does not exist. And in practice it's used to entrench and protect religious dogma rather than serve a public of diverse consciences.

Conscience, as we established earlier, is the interaction of the private thoughts and emotions of a natural person in exercising moral judgement. But institutions are not natural persons: they're legal confections of 'personhood'.

While apologists may attempt to cast religious institutions as equivalent to a natural person with the same relevant characteristics, simple examinations show this to be misguided. For example, institutions can't marry but natural persons can. Institutions (of the relevant type) can sell equity interests (shares) in themselves, but natural persons cannot. Natural persons die but institutions don't — though they can in law be "killed off". There are substantial differences.

Conflating agency with conscience

The differences are thrown into sharp relief when a defender of "institutional conscience" argues that institutions are moral agents, and therefore have conscience, "*shaped by the mission of the institution and implemented by the structures of the institution such as budgeting and planning*" (Bedford 2012). This is to conflate *agency* with conscience. Agency is the ability to *act* (or

choose to not act). Conscience is a form of contemplation, not action. Either can exist without the other.

Back to the real nature of conscience: as legal confections, institutions don't *have* thoughts and emotions and therefore don't have consciences (Durland 2011). Neither can institutions *experience* a loss of moral integrity, guilt, shame, or injury to identity (Wicclair 2012).

Mission statements are not conscience: they're idealised descriptions of purpose and objectives.

Ideological *regulation*, not conscience

When an institution seeks to mandate or prohibit particular actions through a Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct (or mission statement or any other enterprise document), this is not "conscience". It's ideological *regulation* (Beca & Astete 2015). Insofar as it aims to apply penalties to violators of its prearranged conditions, it acts like law, not conscience.

In practice it *suppresses* conscience. For example, a patient in good conscience may request a lawful, medical family planning service and a doctor may in good conscience be willing to provide it. However, if the institution's Code prohibits family planning services for religious moral reasons, both the patient and doctor's consciences are arbitrarily suppressed by the rule. The rule demands that there be no moral dilemma or contest[40] because the institution has already arbitrated the matter. In this way, the gravitational pull of religious absolutism tends to rip actions out of others' control (Vacek 2017).

Institutional rules of objection are egregious when the institution is the only practical and realistic provider of the service, for example in a regional or remote centre.

It's even more egregious when the institution provides services to the public under funding from the public purse. That is to say that the community, the government, the doctor and the patient may all agree, and are footing the institution's bills, but the institution unilaterally decides that the service must not be provided.

In such cases an institution is not operating in the service of the public. It's operating in the service of its clerical masters. Such conduct demonstrates profound deficits of context, proportionality and consideration — significant elements of real conscience.

[40] In fact, there was no moral contest in the first place: the patient and doctor were of the same moral view.

This behaviour is not "*institutional conscientious objection*", it's "*institutional agency prohibition*".

From shield to sword

An important characteristic of CO is that it merely seeks to protect the conscience of the objector, not stymie the conscience of another person.

> In seeking to protect only the conscience of the objector, CO generally acts as a shield. However, if the exercise of the CO has the effect of impairing or blocking the objectee's exercise of his or her own conscience — whether intended or not — it is no longer a shield: it's a sword.

By way of example, Queensland is the latest jurisdiction to consider VAD law reform. President of that state's Australian Medical Association (AMA) branch, Dr Chris Perry, argued before a parliamentary hearing that institutions must be given carte blanche to prohibit VAD on their premises (Lynch 2021).

The consequences of failing to grant carte blanche rights to institutions, Dr Perry argued incoherently, was (a) that institutions would be forced to sell and exit so that "the town hasn't got one [a care facility]",[41] and then (b) that "*we don't want to see 30 per cent, potentially, of private hospitals and aged-care facilities being sold on to people whose bottom line is the shareholders and share prices and CEO's wages*."

In other words, the facilities would still be operating (not shut down), but under *other* private ownership: ownership that would respect the consciences of its patients and doctors when it comes to choosing end-of-life options. And shareholders who don't think that their own personal religious convictions should prevail over the clients their institution is sworn to serve.

Dr Perry may genuinely believe these incoherent arguments. But the institutions he refers to haven't come clean.

Bullying and hollow threats

The bullying undercurrent of this institutional incoherence is laid bare by recent developments. South Australia's parliament recently passed a VAD law. It disallows institutions from prohibiting access to VAD for persons who are ordinarily resident, that is, live, in its facilities. In that case, the person must be

[41] By which Dr Perry tacitly admits that in many places, the *only* facility available is a Catholic one, so prohibition by a facility effectively means prohibition in a region.

permitted to consider, be informed about, and finally choose to implement, VAD.

These provisions in the South Australian law were drawn from… the proposed Queensland legislation. They were even extended to include all forms of nursing and aged care homes — places where people *live*. It is now law in South Australia, ready to come into force when the VAD Act comes into effect.

And, since it is now law, what is the threat of mass exodus of objecting institutions from aged and healthcare service provision in South Australia?

The Catholic Leader recently published an opinion piece about South Australia's VAD law being passed, expressly noting that the law banned institutional prohibition for residents (Staff Writers 2021). The appropriate response, argued Catholic Archbishop Timothy Costelloe (of Perth), is for recommitment to strengthening communities of faith, and to support Catholic healthcare workers through prayer and encouragement. No mention of facilities being urgently stumped up for sale before South Australia's Act comes into effect.

Indeed, the Catholic church might have a sense of the substantial negative PR such a move would create — a petulant church that refuses to respect the views of most Australians — contributing to an accelerated exodus of its flock.

That exodus is already biting hard. Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Peter Comensoli has announced a consolidating restructure of almost 200 parishes across Melbourne as a result of parishioners abandoning the pews (Tomazin 2021), warning that the church could "*sink into the sunset*".

There are other reasons the church might be reluctant to sell its care facilities and operations. Sales would convert non-current assets (infrastructure) to current assets (cash), which would make a larger portion of the church's asset base available to compensate victims of sexual abuse that occurred under its auspices. It would at the same time reduce the fixed asset base against which borrowings could be made.

Catholic accommodation already occurs overseas

In any case, in practice, VAD is already being accommodated in Catholic institutions overseas. Professor Barbara Glidewell reports that in Oregon, when a patient is going to consume VAD medication, hospice objectors are advised, and step outside the room so they don't bear witness.[42] "*Then, they step right back in the room and support the patient and family*," she said.

[42] Personal on-camera interview with myself and The Hon. Ken Smith, former Speaker of the Victorian Parliament. Video on file.

Similarly in Belgium, those who object are respected and given plenty of warning so they can avoid being present when VAD is to occur, including within Catholic institutions (e.g. see Julie Blanchard *in* Devos 2021). These compassionate compromises seem consistent with the views of Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life in Rome, who says that priests can be present after consumption of lethal medication because "*the Lord never abandons anyone*" (Brockhaus 2019).

Australia's Catholic hierarchy has yet to demonstrate this compassion, judgement, and respect towards others. As a consequence, many Australians are demonstrating what they think of this brand of institutional regulation: real consciences and their associated bottoms are abandoning the pews in increasing numbers.

Summary: Conscience is the exercise of moral judgement via the interaction of a person's emotions and thoughts on matters of right and wrong. Institutions are confected legal persons and don't have consciences. Institutions arguing for "conscientious objection" conflate agency (the ability to act) with conscience (the mind's ability to weigh thoughts and emotions in judgement).

Institutional documents like mission statements and codes of ethics or conduct are not conscience. They're regulations. The gravitational pull of their religious absolutism *suppresses* real conscience as though it doesn't exist, thereby acting as a sword, not a shield.

In any case, religious institution threats to abandon service sectors unless their absolutist regulatory demands are met have, to date, been demonstrated as hollow.

Religion and authority

Chaves (1994) has argued that the rise in (western) secularisation is not so much about a decline in religion, but a decline in religious *authority*, that is, decreasing confidence in religious leaders. General Social Survey data in the USA shows a clear downward trend of public confidence in religious leaders since the 1970s (Hoffman 2013).

Regarding Australia, we have already established that both religion and religiosity are falling significantly, and that scepticism towards theology and opposition to clerical social conservatism are key factors. These indicators reveal that a decreasing number of Australians are willing to accept religious leaders or their institutions as authoritative in daily life. More detailed data reveals a divide between Australia's most religious, and the rest of the nation.

Democracy = Clerics ultimately interpret the laws

Just 6% of Australians say that a somewhat or quite essential feature of democracy is that religious authorities ultimately interpret laws (Figure 44).[43] Most Australians (80%) actively disagree.

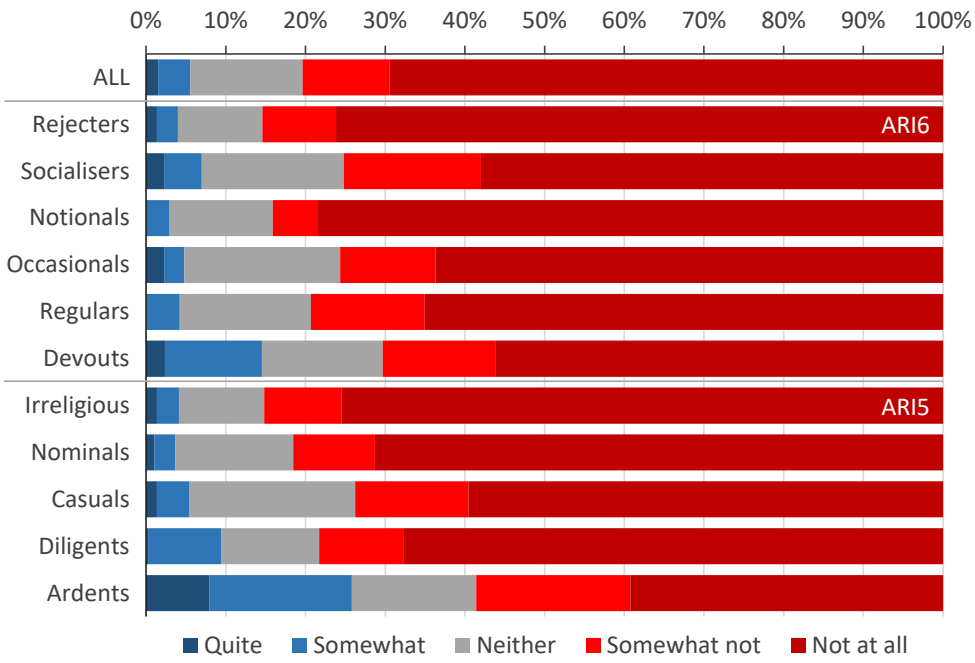


Figure 44: 'Religious authorities ultimately interpret laws' is an essential feature of democracy, by ARI6 and ARI5
Source: AVS 2018

[43] The question doesn't distinguish whether the respondent believes it *is* (normatively) the case, or believes it is *desirable*. The data suggests a small base of normative responses.

Notionals are the most likely to *strongly* disagree with ultimate clerical authority, suggesting that they never attend services because they disagree with what they have heard from religious leaders.

By religiosity, small minorities of ARI6 Devouts (15%) and ARI5 Ardents (26%) are more likely than all others to favour ultimate clerical interpretation of laws.

Of Australians who say that religious authorities ultimately interpreting laws (6%) is a feature of democracy, more than half (57%) say that people should obey their rulers. We might loosely interpret this as just 3% of Australian adults, or fewer than one in 30, saying that Australians ought to obey religious authorities above anyone else.

Democracy = Obedience to rulers

By religiosity, ARI6 Devouts and ARI5 Ardents are more likely than other Australians to say that people should obey their rulers (Figure 45).[44] Notionals, again, are the most likely to disagree.

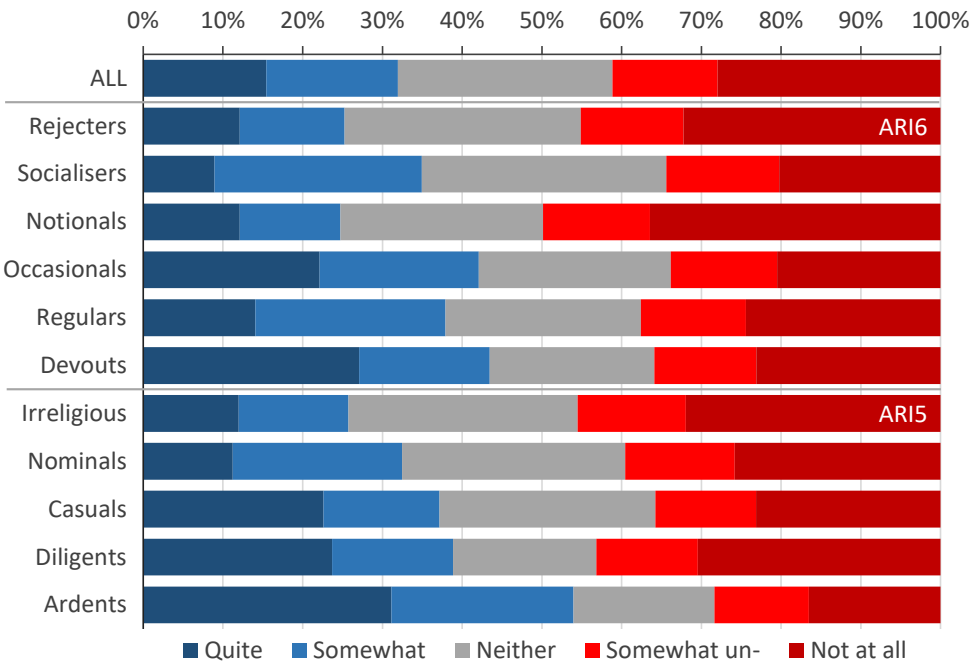


Figure 45: 'People should obey their rulers' is an essential feature of democracy, by ARI6 and ARI5
Source: AVS 2018

[44] There is ambiguity in this question, too, in that obeying government directives is sometimes desirable (e.g. Covid-19 isolation arrangements), but other times undesirable (e.g. don't protest government decisions).

Control of both parliamentary houses of federal parliament

Australia's Devouts are also the most likely to say that democracy is better when a government controls both houses of the federal parliament (Figure 46), showing that their favourable attitudes toward authority and control may be general in nature.

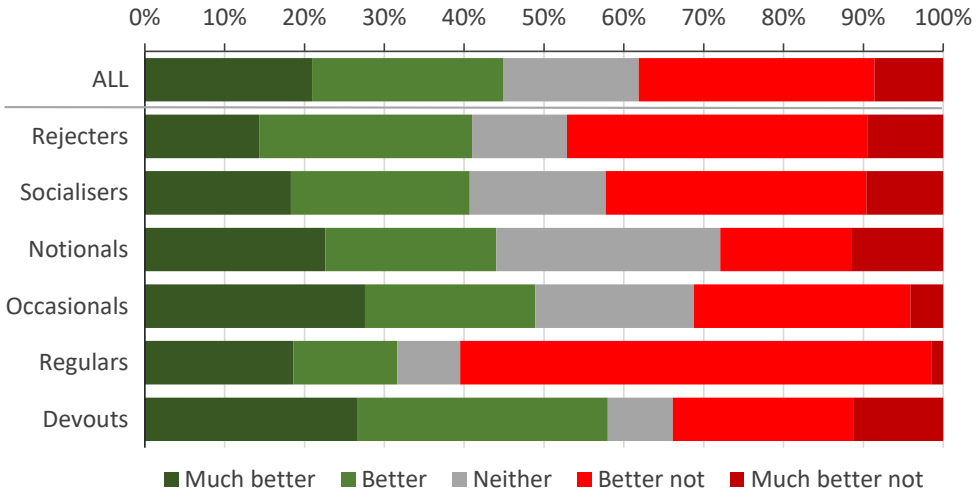


Figure 46: Democracy when government controls both federal houses, by ARI6
Source: AES 2019

Devouts' attitudes toward power and control are not universal, however, as Devouts are the most likely to say that having a strong leader unbothered by parliaments and elections is a very bad idea (Figure 47). They're also the most likely to say that living in a democracy is important, inconsistent with favouring individual strongman politics.

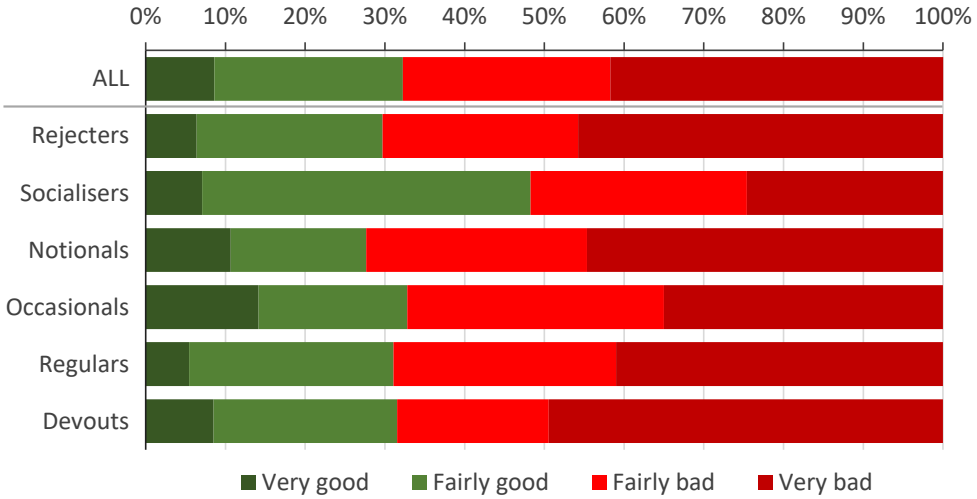


Figure 47: Strong leader unbothered by parliament/elections, by ARI6
Source: AVS 2018

One third (33%) of adult Australians say that a strong federal leader who is unbothered by parliament or elections is a good idea. This suggests that Australia may be somewhat vulnerable to appointing a populist and unconsultative leader as has happened in several other countries. This deserves national attention to ensure citizens are informed about the value of representation and debate.

Citizens should participate in important policy decisions

Devouts' attitudes toward political control are highlighted by the fact that uniquely, nearly two thirds (62%) think citizen participation in important policy decisions is a *bad* idea (Figure 48). This helps explain Devouts' hostility to the government hosting a national plebiscite on marriage equality in 2017.

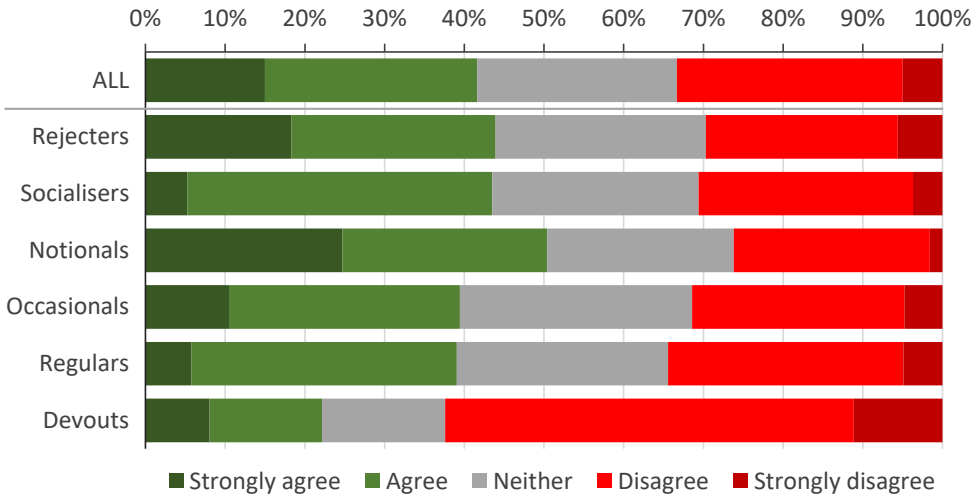


Figure 48: Citizens should participate in important policy decisions, by ARI6
Source: AES 2019

Summary: Small but significant numbers of Australia's most religious, Devouts, believe that religious authorities should ultimately interpret law. Most Australians disagree. Devouts are also somewhat more likely to say that people should obey their rulers, though opinions are divided across the religious spectrum. Devouts favour government control of both houses of parliament more than others do, though they favour a political strongman leader *less*. Nearly two thirds (62%) of Devouts say citizen participation in important policy decisions is a *bad* idea, helping explain their hostility to the federal government hosting a plebiscite on marriage equality in 2017.

Attitudes toward religious institutions

Australians' attitudes toward religious institutions regarding trust, power and intrusion in politics reveal a major divide between the most religious and other citizens.

Low trust in the churches

Australia's most religious, Devoteds (ARI5 Diligents and Ardents), comprising 12% of the adult population. Non-Devoteds have no, low or moderate religiosity and comprise 88% of the adult population. Devoteds and non-Devoteds generally trust a wide range of well-known institutions at about the same rate, although Devoteds are typically a little more trusting across the range of 25 institutions (Figure 49).

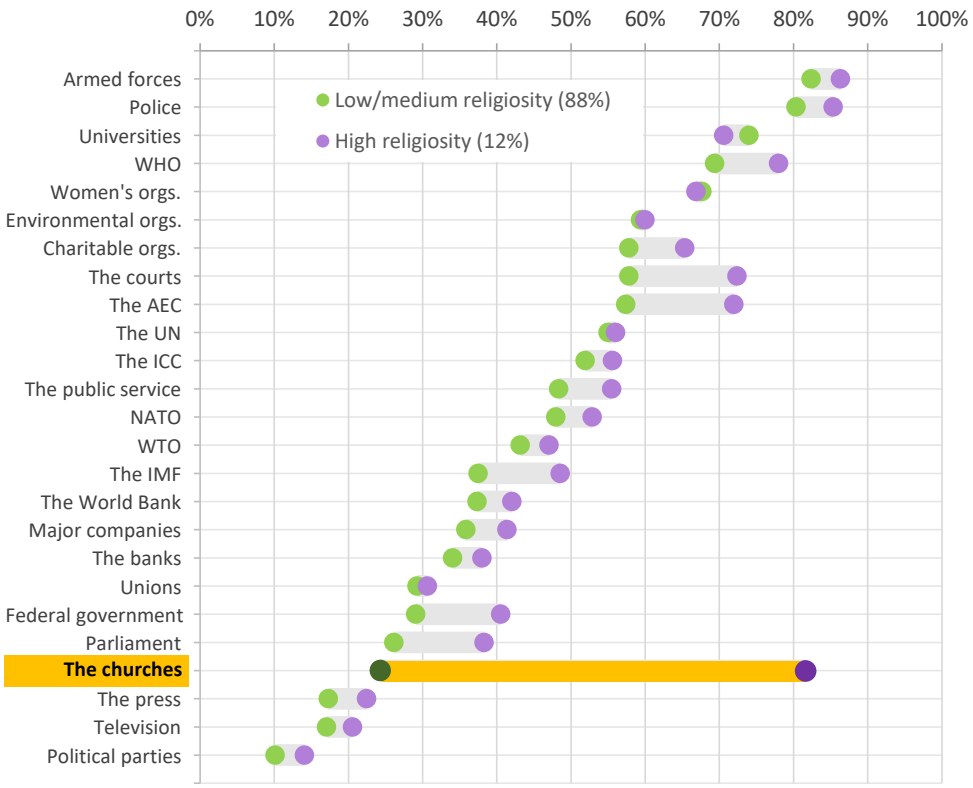


Figure 49: Proportions of Australian adults who trust various institutions
Source: AVS 2018. WHO=World Health Organisation, AEC=Australian Electoral Commission, UN=United Nations, ICC=International Criminal Court, NATO=North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, WTO=World Trade Organisation, IMF=International Monetary Fund.

There is, however, one institution — the churches — where opinions differed *dramatically* between Devoteds and not-Devoteds. Devoteds rate the churches as their number three trusted institution (82% trust) after the armed forces (86%) and police (85%).

The other 88% of Australians, non-Devoteds, hold a vastly more negative view. Their trust in the churches[45] (24%) is the fourth lowest amongst 25 institutions: lower than trust in banks (34% and under a royal commission investigation at the time of the study), unions and government (29% each), and parliament (26%). Trust in churches is only higher than trust in the press and TV (18% each), and political parties (10%).

> This indicates that Australian Devoteds hold a self-referential and highly favourable view of their own institution (churches) while being either unaware of, or impervious to, how poorly most other Australians view their institution. The churches have a severe reputation problem.

Most non-religious Australians (87%) and nearly two thirds (62%) of non-Christian religionists have little or no trust in the churches (Figure 50). But poor trust in the churches isn't limited to non-Christians. Nearly half (49%) of all Catholics, well over half (60%) of Anglicans, and nearly four out of ten (38%) of minor Christian denominations don't trust the churches.

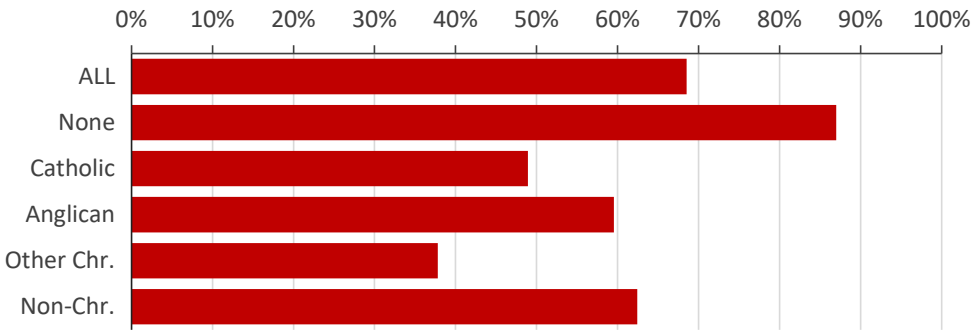


Figure 50: Little or no trust in the churches, by religious denomination
Source: AVS 2018

> **Summary:** Devoteds and non-Devoteds trust most institutions around the same. The one glaring exception is the churches, which Devoteds (12% of the population) trust very much, and non-Devoteds (88%) trust very little. The churches have a severe reputation problem with most Australians: those who are not highly religious.

[45] The question was worded as "the churches", in reference to the great majority of Australian religious denominations being Christian. It is not known to what degree respondents may have interpreted "churches" to include non-Christian religious institutions as well.

Low trust in religious leaders

These attitudes are reflected in Australians' similarly limited trust in religious leaders generally — not just Christian ones. Overall, while fewer than a third (31%) trust "the churches", 29% trust religious leaders (clerics) — a lower rate than union leaders (32%) (Figure 51) (Crabb 2019).

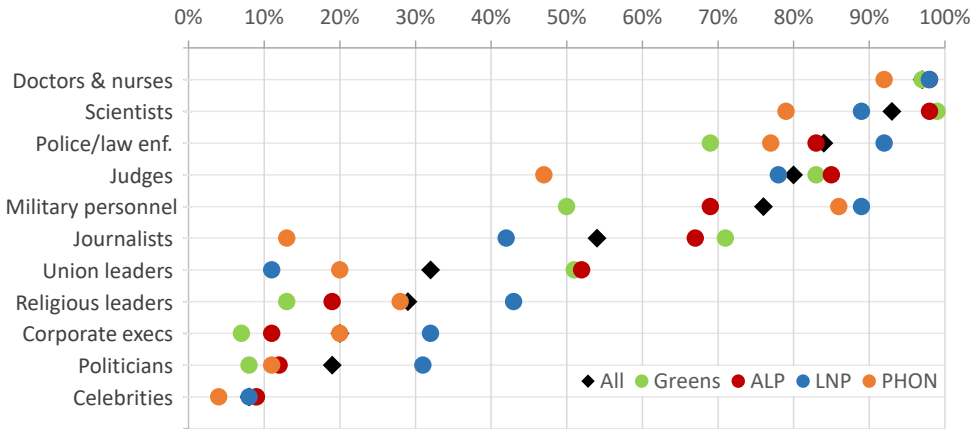


Figure 51: Trust in categories of people
Source: ABC Australia Talks 2019. ALP=Labor, LNP=Coalition, PHON=Pauline Hanson's One Nation.

The ABC's recent Australia Talks study found that clerics (overall, not just Christian ones) are expressly distrusted by more than two thirds (70%) of Australians, with more than a third (35%) not trusting them "at all". Only 23% of 25–29 year-olds trust clerics, and amongst the most trusting age group, 75+ year-olds, fewer than half (47%) do.

And while a large minority of Coalition voters (43%) trust clerics, fewer than one in five Labor (19%) and Greens (13%) voters do.

Distrust is widely evident amongst the denominations, with less than half (47%) of Catholics, somewhat more than half of Protestants (58%), and around half of all other faiths (49%) trusting clerics.

This places the public's views of clerical trustworthiness in a sobering light, particularly regarding clerics' putative moral leadership.

> **Summary:** Like trust in the churches, Australians' trust in religious leaders is low (29%), and lower than trust in union leaders (32%). That includes nearly half (47%) of Catholics and non-Christian religionists, and more than half (58%) of Protestants. This places clerics' putative moral leadership in a sobering light.

On balance, too much power

A majority of Australian adults (51%) believe that religious institutions have too much power. Just 6% disagree (Figure 52). Unsurprisingly, Nones are the most likely to agree (70%), and none of them disagree.

The only denomination category whose members disagree more (30%) than agree (12%) is the minor Christian denominations.

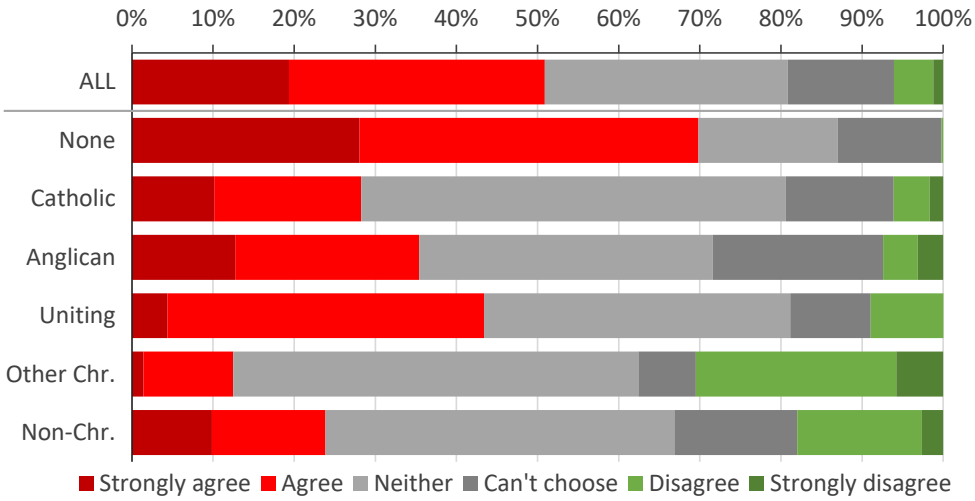


Figure 52: Religious institutions have too much power, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2018

Saying that religious institutions have too much power correlates strongly and negatively with religiosity (ARI6) (Figure 53). Considerably more Rejecters (71%), Socialisers (64%), Notionals (47%) and Occasionals (25%) agree than disagree (0%, 0%, 6%, and 10% respectively).

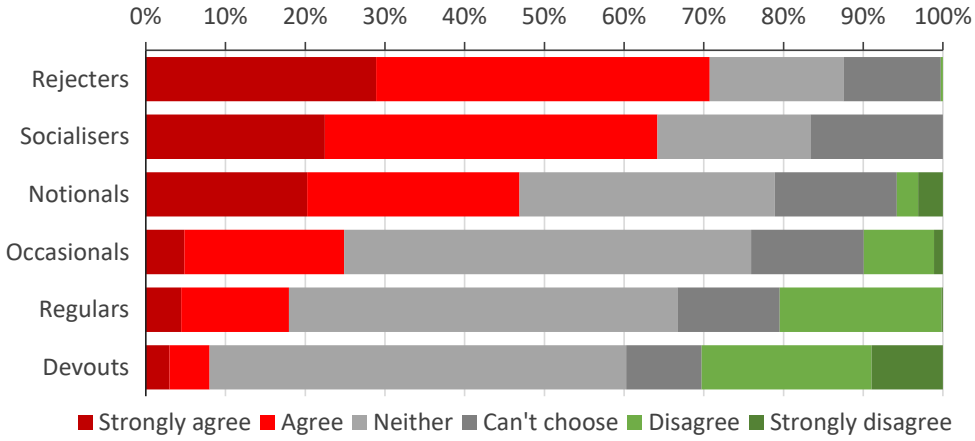


Figure 53: Religious institutions have too much power, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

Only amongst Committeds (Regulars and Devouts), do those who say religious institutions *don't* have too much power (20% and 30% respectively) outnumber those who say they do (18% and 8%). Yet even amongst the group with the most positive attitudes towards religious institutional power, Devouts, fewer than a third (30%) expressly say religious institutions *don't* have too much power.

Summary: A majority of Australians (51%) say that religious institutions have too much power, while only a tiny minority (6%) expressly say they don't. Unsurprisingly, favourable attitudes toward the power of religious institutions are strongest amongst Committeds (Regulars and Devouts), as well as amongst minor Christian denominations. Yet even amongst these groups, fewer than a third (30% each Devouts and minor Christian denominations) expressly say that religious institutions *don't* have too much power.

Intrusion into politics unwelcome

The Australian Study of Social Attitudes (AuSSA 2018) asked people how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement that religious leaders should *not* try to influence how people vote in parliamentary elections. Most Australians (80%) disapproved of clerical influence (Figure 54).

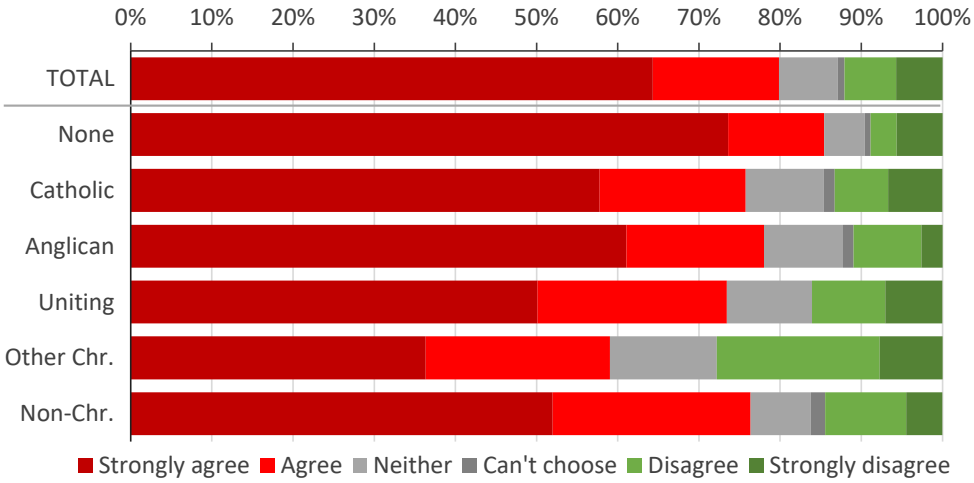


Figure 54: Clerics shouldn't try to influence how people vote, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2018

Across the denominational spectrum, significant majorities from 59% to 78% agreed. Indeed, a majority *strongly* agreed amongst non-affiliateds (74%), Catholics (58%), Anglicans (61%), Uniting/Methodists (50%) and non-Christian religions (52%).

Those who disagreed were in a small minority from 9% to 28% (overall 12%), with *strong* disagreement well below 10% across the spectrum.

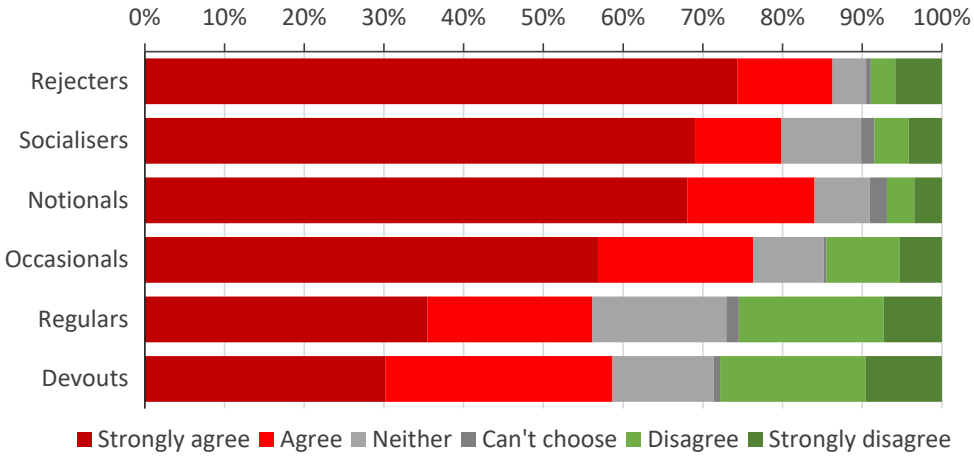


Figure 55: Clerics shouldn't try to influence how people vote, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

As expected by religiosity, Committeds (Regulars and Devouts) were the most likely to say that clerics should be able to try to influence voters (Figure 55).

Yet even amongst Australia's most religious, a majority of Regulars (56%) and Devouts (59%) disapproved of clerical influence in how people vote, while just 7% to 28% approved.

> Despite the clear expectation of non-interference by most Australians, some prominent Australian religionists still attempt to impose their own doctrines on the whole of society through parliamentary elections. For example, a week before the 2020 Queensland election, Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, Mark Coleridge, launched a blistering attack on the Palaszczuk government's pledge to legislate for VAD (Livingstone 2020). This, despite three quarters (74%) of Australian Catholics approving of the reform (Francis 2021, p 109).

As previously discussed, these unwanted attempts at clerical influence in elections and parliamentary process are adding to Australians' generally poor attitudes towards the churches and clerics, as well as contributing to the abandonment of religious affiliation.

> **Summary:** Four out of five Australians (80%) say separation of church and state is important: that clerics shouldn't attempt to influence how people vote in parliamentary elections. Even a clear majority of Devouts (59%) agree. Yet some prominent clerics continue to attempt to impose their own doctrines on the whole of society through such intrusions. This contributes to negative attitudes towards religious institutions and clerics, and the abandonment of religion by an increasing proportion of Australians.

Mixed views about evangelism

When asked whether "*the government should **not** interfere in any religion attempting to spread its faith*", 34% of adult Australians agreed and 38% disagreed (Figure 56).

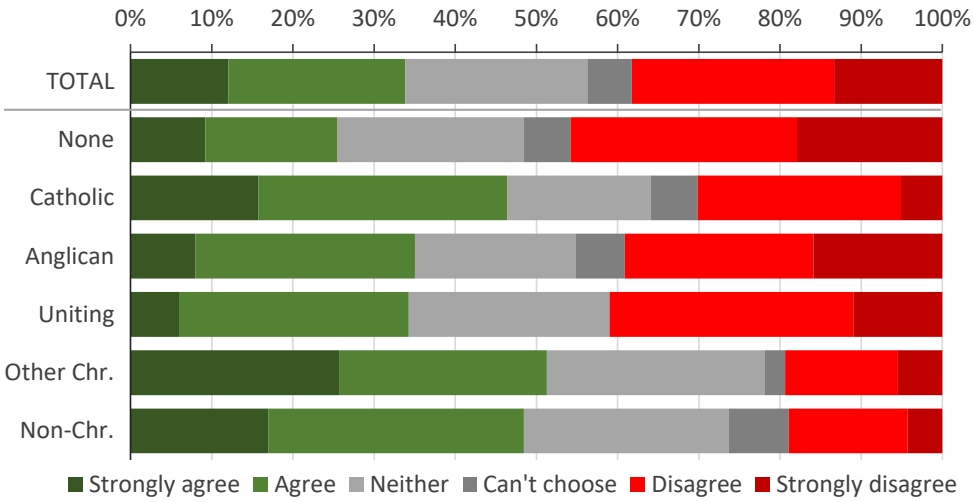


Figure 56: Government should *not* interfere in evangelism, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2018

Minor Christian denominations (53%), non-Christian faiths (48%) and Catholics (46%) were the most likely to say the government shouldn't impede evangelisation. A quarter (25%) of Nones said likewise.

Nearly half (46%) of Nones disagreed, as did, significantly, 41% of Uniting/Methodists, 39% of Anglicans, 30% of Catholics, and 19% each of minor Christian and non-Christian faiths. Around one in five Australians (22%) had no specific view either way.

Overall, nearly two thirds of Australians (62%) hold a positive or neutral attitude towards the right to evangelise.

As expected, support for unfettered evangelism correlated strongly and positively with religiosity (Figure 57). Support was in the majority only amongst Committeds (57% of Regulars and 69% of Devouts), and lowest amongst Rejecters and Socialisers (25% each) and Notionals (28%).

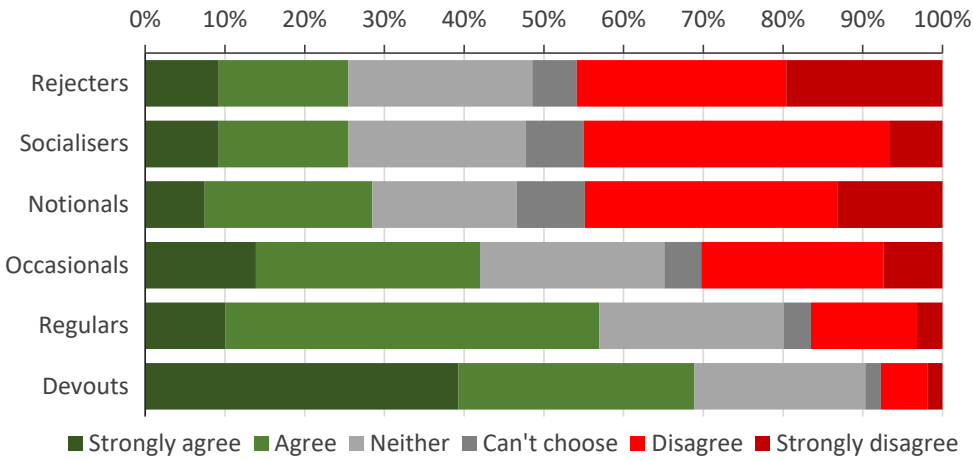


Figure 57: Government should not interfere in evangelism, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

Religion a private, not public, affair

Support for the right to evangelise comes with caveats.

While only 38% of Australians think it's appropriate for the government to interfere in the right to evangelise, at the same time more than half (60%) would prefer not to hear the religious views of others (Crabb 2019).

In contrast, most Australians oppose clerics attempting to influence parliamentary elections (just 12% think it's appropriate), and oppose clerics being the final authority over Australia's laws (just 6% think it's appropriate) (Francis 2021, p 94). Far more Australians say that the churches have too much power than say they don't.

This richly illustrates that most Australians accept that religion is a matter of personal choice, but equally that most believe the imposition of religious doctrine on the whole of society is inappropriate and unwelcome. Some clerics seem not to have grasped this difference, with dogmatic and dominionistic behaviour continuing to provoke significant declines in their religious franchises.

Summary: Some 38% of Australians support the government restrictions on the right to evangelise. Slightly fewer (34%) oppose government interference, while one in five (22%) hold no view either way. Evangelism is seen largely as a private matter. A majority of Australians (60%) don't want to hear the religious views of others, just 12% agree clerics may attempt to influence elections, and a mere 6% think clerics should be the final interpreters of law.


Ο ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΘΡΗΝΩΝ ΓΙΑ ΤΙΣ ΕΚΤΡΩΣΕΙΣ
JESUS CRYING FOR ABORTIONS
If we Australians can't have mercy on children, then why should God the creator

Religious conservatives to the battle stations

Swinging arms and chins

Recently, Australia's most religious have been pressing the federal government to pursue legislation that would increase the rights of the religious. The government is responding in kind with telling enthusiasm. A clear sign is that rather than dealing with a balance of rights and obligations amongst all Australians, religious or not — and which would properly be *human rights* legislation — the government's bill for legislation is accommodatingly titled "*Religious Discrimination Bill*".

This highly improper and unbalanced approach deserves greater national debate.

As former High Court justice Michael Kirby wrote in the foreword of Part 1 of this series:

> "*The right to swing my arm stops when I hit someone else on the chin. My entitlement to religious liberty must be accommodated to the rights of others to be themselves.*"
> — Kirby *in* Francis (2021), page ix.

What religious conservatives intend happens between swinging arms and chins is handsomely illustrated by their political machinations on VAD, abortion, family planning, LGBTI staff and students, and other matters.

> Religious conservatives are arguing that religious arms should have the right to swing with extensive freedom, and chins that those arms might contact can be lawfully demanded to withdraw themselves.
>
> Equally, the argument entails that non-religious swinging arms must be legally restricted, lest they connect with religious chins.

In response to the second exposure draft of the government's Religious Discrimination bills, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2020) (AHRC), while endorsing the principle of religious (and other) rights has commented that:

> …the Bill "*sets a dangerous precedent*" and gives the impression of "*increasingly becoming a collection of exemptions for different kinds of religious organisations*", granting privileges which "*seek to favour one right over all others*."
>
> — Australian Human Rights Commission (2020)

The AHRC further stated that the bills:

> "*…would provide protection to religious belief or activity at the expense of other rights*";
>
> "*…would permit discriminatory statements of belief to be made, whether they amount to racial discrimination, sex discrimination or discrimination on any other ground prohibited by law*";
>
> "*…permit religious discrimination in any area of public life covered by the Bill, including employment, education and the provision of goods, services and facilities*"; and even
>
> "*…that some forms of intimidation by way of discriminatory statements of belief will also be permissible*."
>
> — Australian Human Rights Commission (2020)

In respect of healthcare services, the AHRC warned that the bills would:

> "*…increase the risk that patients may lose the ability to obtain 'information, prescriptions, or referrals' or to have procedures related to services such as abortion, euthanasia, contraception or sterilisation where, in all the circumstances, it would be reasonable to require health practitioners to provide those services or to make referrals to another health practitioner who is willing to do so*."
>
> — Australian Human Rights Commission (2020)

The proposed reforms wouldn't grant balanced religious freedom, they would grant religious *privilege*. They wouldn't act as a **shield**. Rather, they would act decisively as a **sword**.

The irony is that furnishing the religious — especially institutions — with special privileges doesn't serve even the nation's most religious, the 11% who are Devouts. As illustrated in Part 1 of this series, many Devouts support abortion, VAD, and marriage equality.

Similarly, a significant majority of Australian Catholics support abortion, VAD, and marriage equality. Catholic institutions banning the practices are an offence against the consciences even of their own flock.

> Allowing religious institutions to unilaterally extinguish the real consciences of Australians, including Devouts and most of their own flocks, supposedly in their service and even on their own purse, is an unconscionable offence against Section 18 of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights.

Is all this necessary? As Robyn Whittaker, Bromby Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Trinity College at the University of Divinity, and a member of the Centre for Research on Religion put it, "*Christians in Australia are not persecuted, and it is insulting to argue they are*." (Whitaker 2018a).

> **Summary:** Religious conservatives are urging the federal government to bring legislation that further entrenches religious "protections". The reforms propose special privileges for the religious that are not offered to others. In some cases the proposed legislation authorises the religious to *require* that others' chins be withdrawn from all spaces that religious arms wish to swing themselves, while *restricting* where non-religious arms may swing if a religious chin might be present. This is to argue for special privileges: a religious sword, not a shield.
>
> The Australian Human Rights Commission has criticised the bills as "*setting a dangerous precedent*".

Why now?

Amongst political operatives and observers, a key question about emerging political activism is not just "why?", but "why *now*?". Religious conservatives in Australia are suddenly much more politically active than before. There have been multiple attempts to stack Coalition party branches, and tenacious wandering of the corridors of power in search of "religious discrimination" protections. Why now?

Obviously, one answer is the recent legalisation of marriage equality, which was vigorously opposed by religious conservatives. This is far from the whole answer, however.

Another is the ongoing abandonment of Christian denominations by the laity, especially Notionals and Occasionals. Indeed, the 2016 census results will have come as a serious shock to religious conservatives, with its major drop in religious affiliation from even the long-term downward trend (Figure 58).

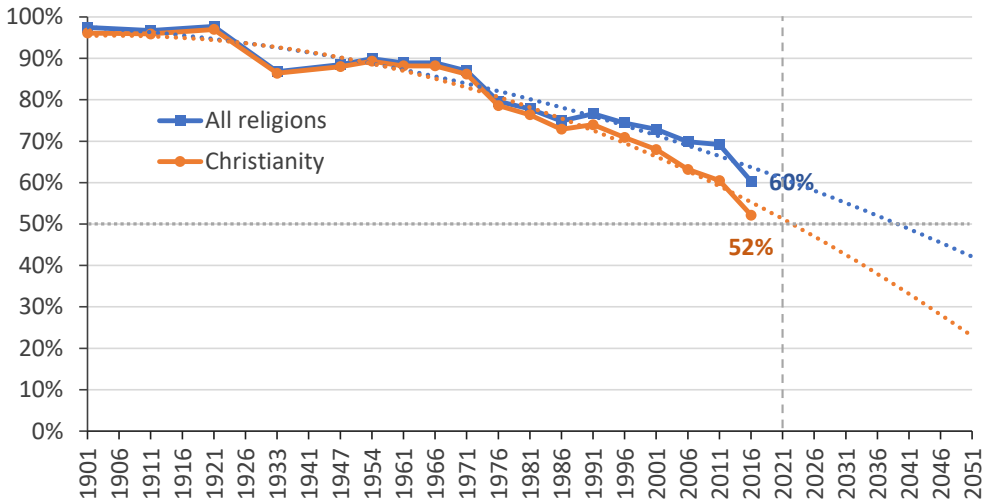


Figure 58: Religious affiliation by census year
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics census reports. Note: Second-order polynomial trendlines.

If the deconversion trend is repeated in this year's census, which seems likely, Christianity would for the first time since Federation become a minority religion. Even religion in total might drop below 50%, though that is far less likely. And the Nones could come within 10% of total Christianity. No longer would Christian conservatives be able to refer to a presumed Christian "moral majority": not that it has existed in reality for some time given the numbers of religious who never attend religious services and say they don't belong to their religious organisation.

Therefore, it's important to religious conservatives to achieve greater religious "protections" now, in case the Coalition government loses office at

the next federal election — due by May 2022 — since Labor has shown less enthusiasm. And to get the job done before the ABS has a chance to announce Christianity to be a minority, around the middle of next year.

A range of tactics

Conservative religious coalitions have been employing a range of tactics. For example, they've adopted the tricky tactics of the USA's religious right, claiming to be the victim while acting as the aggressor (Shepherd 2021). As Whitaker (2018a) argues, Christians in Australia are not persecuted, and it is insulting to argue that they are.

They've indulged in historical revisionism to claim that Australia is founded on Judeo-Christian tradition or values and would fall apart without them (e.g. Australian Christian Lobby 2021; Australian Christian Values Institute 2021; Australian Christians 2021). However, in Australia, the expression "Judeo-Christian values" only makes its first appearance in 1974, and appears mostly in post-9/11 conservative rhetoric (Patton 2014). It too was imported from the US, where it only appeared after the second world war (Almond 2019b).

They've attempted to paint Australia's religiously affiliated as all spiritual believers (e.g. Debien & Calderwood 2016), even though only a small minority are (see the following section, *The truth about religiosity in Australia*).

And they've attempted to appropriate non-religious Australians, SBNRs, as really their people just missing in action (e.g. Debien & Calderwood 2016; Stobbe 2021). But SBNRs are in fact quite anti-establishmentarian, most don't believe in God, and most oppose church doctrine on social matters (see the section *SBNR: 'Spiritual but not religious'* on page 63).

This is *not* to argue that religion should be banned from the public square; that the religious should not be able to voice their views or seek representation. It *is* to argue that numerous sources of robust evidence establish that most Australians disagree with conservative religious views and believe they shouldn't be privileged, or condition the rights and respect of fellow citizens.

Summary: Religious conservatives are working hard to achieve greater legal protections for religion before the 2022 federal election and announcement that Christianity is in the minority. Some tactics have been imported from America's religious right. Religious conservatives should have the right to put their case and seek representation. However, numerous sources of robust evidence show that Australians don't agree such views should be privileged.

The truth about religiosity in Australia

The truth is that census and survey headlines suggesting some 60% of Australians are (or were in 2016) religious, radically overstates Australia's real religiosity. In fact, Australians' relationship with religion is considerably softer (Figure 59).

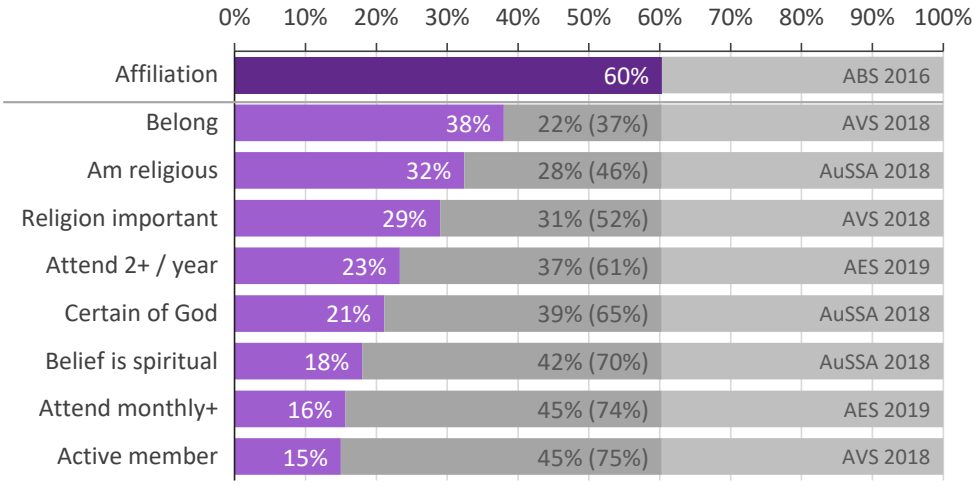


Figure 59: Real religion versus notional affiliation in Australia
Sources: ABS 2016, AuSSA 2018, AVS 2018, AES 2019. Note: Percentages in parentheses are the negative answer as a proportion of those who said they were affiliated with a religion.

While 60% of Australians ticked a religious denomination box at the 2016 national census, that doesn't mean that religion is meaningful in all their lives. **By *meaningful* measures, only:**

- 38% of Australians say they actually *belong* to a religion.
- 32% describe themselves as religious.
- 29% say that religion is important in their lives.
- 23% attend religious services more than once a year.
- 18% are religious for real spiritual rather than family or habitual reasons.
- 16% attend religious services at least monthly.
- Just 15% describe themselves as active members of their religious organisation.

Put another way, of Australians **who marked a religious denomination on the 2016 census**:

- More than a third (37%) say they *don't* belong to a religion.
- Nearly half (46%) *don't* describe themselves as religious.
- More than half (52%) *don't* say that religion is important in their lives.

- Well over half (61%) never or almost never attend religious services.
- Two thirds (65%) are *not* certain that a God even exists.
- Seven in ten (70%) are affiliated for cultural/family reasons, rather than genuine spiritual reasons.
- Three quarters (74%) attend religious services less than once a month, or are *not* active members of their religious organisation (75%).

Clearly, these are not statistics that religious conservatives would volunteer for the nation's attention. Instead, some have tried to appropriate SBNRs (hint: "not religious" is in the name), to bolster supposed headline figures of "religion".

The religiosity figures in this report are real and concrete, not illusory. They are meaningful. And they matter.

They matter as a realistic appraisal of our national selfhood. They matter to parliamentary representation and legislative reform. And they matter to government policy and to funding of religious and secular institutions alike.

Summary: Australians' relationship with religiosity is much weaker by any practical measure than a headline "affiliation" statistic suggests. Nor do SBNRs validly boost apparent "religiosity", at least not in the way that the social or legal definition of religion implies.

Parliaments and governments should acquaint themselves with the facts so as to properly inform themselves when making decisions on behalf of all Australians.

Little voter appetite for religious conservatism

Australians' substantially lower religiosity than the headline affiliation figure implies, belief that the churches have too much power, distrust in them, and majority disagreement with their socially conservative religious views, are not mere academic curiosities. They translate into votes at the ballot box.

In 2017, Senator Cori Bernardi quit the Liberal party in response to his perception that it was too liberal. A devout Catholic, Mr Bernardi opposed abortion and marriage equality and had expressed hostility towards Islam, suggesting that multiculturalism in Australia had failed. He told the Senate that "*concern about the direction of our nation is very, very strong*" and that "*the body politic is failing the people of Australia*" (Massola 2017).

New political party to represent the Christian right

Mr Bernardi established the Australian Conservatives party, which, while conservative on a range of issues, was largely a religious and specifically Christian alliance. Mr Lyle Shelton, then managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, quit his post to become the federal communications director of the party.

Conservative party Family First, co-founded by Pastor Andrew Evans of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God and promoting "Christian heritage", then merged with the Australian Conservatives. So did the Australian Christians party, and individuals from other Christian-right organisations such as the Democratic Labour Party and the Q Society of Australia.

Despite polls showing that majorities of voters in even the most conservative Coalition seats backed marriage equality law reform (Massola & Peatling 2017), the Australian Conservatives vigorously opposed it.

Voters reject the party

In South Australia's 2018 election, Family First, now the Australian Conservatives, lost more than half its primary vote, down from 6.2% to 3.0% (ABC News 2018). Former Family First MLC Robert Brokenshire lost his seat. The other former Family First MLC, Dennis Hood, defected to the Liberal party a few days after the election (Harmsen & MacLennan 2018). None of the 33 candidates it stood for the lower house came anywhere near being elected.

In the March 2019 NSW election, the Australian Conservatives achieved just 0.5% of primary votes for the lower house, and 0.6% for the upper house, electing no candidates (NSW Electoral Commission 2019).

At the 2019 federal election, the Australian Conservatives didn't field candidates for the House of Representatives. The remaining Christian right

parties lost significant portions of their already small primary votes for the House of Representatives: the Christian Democratic Party down from 1.31% to 0.68%, the Australian Christians down from 0.32% to 0.17%, and Rise Up Australia down from 0.51% to 0.10%. The Australian Conservatives ran candidates for the Senate in every state but failed to win any seats.

Australian Conservatives party folds

Some two years after its registration, in 2019 Mr Bernardi deregistered the Australian Conservatives party, citing poor electoral performance and financial challenges (Figure 60) (Duran 2019).

Mr Bernardi formally resigned from the Senate in early 2020. Mr Shelton has been tapped to replace the Rev. Fred Nile in the NSW parliament, on Mr Nile's retirement (O'Mallon 2021).


Cory Bernardi deregistering Australian Conservatives Party due to 'lack of political success'

By political reporter Matthew Doran

Posted Thu 20 Jun 2019 at 5:43pm, updated Thu 20 Jun 2019 at 8:50pm

Figure 60: The *Australian Conservatives* party is deregistered after two years
Source: Duran (2019)

Summary: Australian voter appetite for conservative religious representation in parliaments is very limited. The Christian right's Australian Conservatives political experiment failed at the ballot box. Indeed, conservative Christian party votes decreased across several parliamentary elections.

Religious privilege triggers a counter-effect

Perhaps one of the clearest messages for Australia's federal legislators, and the "religious discrimination" bill slated for a third draft later this year, is a warning against overreach.

Federal Coalition MP Mr Warren Entsch has warned his government colleagues to be careful with this bill, describing the existing exposure draft as a *"Christian Bill of Rights"* (OutInPerth 2021). He has threatened to cross the floor if the bill walks back recent anti-discrimination reforms against minority groups. Mr Entsch is wise to issue this warning. While education, affluence, even persecution, are often given as the major drivers of decreases in religiosity, globally these are not the most important reasons.

A newly-released study, comprising an extensive analysis of data from 166 countries, found that *state privilege for Christianity through laws and policies* is the greatest threat to the religion's vitality (Saiya & Manchanda 2021). The association is not a mere correlation: the study establishes a causal relationship. Christianity thrives most in environments of religious pluralism (including non-religion). Indeed, as described earlier in this report, where religion is at its most strident, disaffiliation grows and non-religious groups multiply.

The study concludes that, paradoxically, Christianity does best when it has to fend for itself. That means no special funding for religious purposes, no special access to state institutions, and no exemptions from general regulations (Saiya 2021).

Significant risks for politicians

All MPs — government, opposition, and crossbench — would be wise to carefully judge and weigh such a bill before voting on it. Granting religious privileges is likely to have the opposite of any intended effect.

And, given the religious Nones are the largest and fastest growing group of voters in contemporary Australia, MPs who support unbalanced "religious discrimination" legislation may find themselves voted out at the next election. Even in the far more religiously conservative USA, the political power of the religious Nones is on the rise (Byler 2019; Lovett & Ailworth 2018).

> **Summary:** A new global study shows that state privileging of Christianity is a causative factor for Christianity's decline. MPs would also be wise to consider the possible negative electoral reaction of Nones to any privileging of religion in upcoming legislation.

Summary

This report employs the peer-reviewed scholarly literature and high-quality academic and professional surveys to help reveal valuable insights about Australians' real relationships with religion.

Perspectives on religion

Many people approach the subject of religion from a particular viewpoint. Some say it's belief in God, though this overlooks non-theistic religions like Buddhism and animism. Others say only that they know it when they see it, which is to say little if anything, which reduces religion to only behaviour while overlooking identity, belief and other facets.

Distinguishing religion from culture can often be difficult. For example, the Christian Jesus might be portrayed as white or as a dark-skinned African, helping increase acceptance within specific regions. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from politics, too, especially where a state officially supports or unofficially privileges one or other religion — or no religion.

Interactions can be complex, even in opposite directions depending on the country. Features that are deemed descriptive if not essential elements of religion in one culture, such as attitudes toward morality, justice, or work, can be contra-indicated in others. Similarly, the emic approach of religionists to "prove" sound foundations for their tenets is contradicted by the etic approach of some non-religionists to "disprove" them. Some religions (e.g. Judaism, Catholicism) culturally promote a collectivist approach, while others (e.g. Protestantism) emphasise individuality and one's own personal relationship with God.

Preconceived notions give rise to false consensus bias: we tend to believe that others see things the way we do. It's why real evidence about people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours is so important, as is the inclusion of studies from eastern cultures that provide broader insights than data only from western cultures.

Several frameworks attempt to explain different forms of religiosity (not specific religions). The Big Three[46] groups religionists in to extrinsics, intrinsics and questers. Extrinsics tend to *use* religion for utilitarian or instrumental purposes, that is, to facilitate worldly matters. Intrinsics more centrally *live* their religion, de-emphasising the importance of worldly matters. And Questers see their faith as a search for the truth with an

[46] A term I've coined for convenience.

emphasis on social interaction. The Big Four framework, on the other hand, prioritises religiosity into the main characteristics of believing, belonging, behaviour, and bonding. Preferences for these characteristics can vary considerably between east and west.

These various ways of considering religion and religiosity help enrich our understanding of the relationship people have with religious faith.

Definitions of religion

Definitions of religion abound. Many of them are misguided or inadequate, referencing gods (not all religions are theist) or employing circular arguments about sacredness. It's also important to distinguish religion from the intense spiritual experience that sometimes occurs under temporal lobe seizure, from spirituality that isn't really religion; and from shared values and experiences (like sports clubs and political parties) that aren't religion either.

A core (though not only) feature of religion is the belief in *supernatural* entities, forces, or principles. Another core feature is that there is shared belief and meaning.

For the purposes of this report, we define religion as "*shared propositional attitudes that particular supernatural entities, forces or principles are true, thereby offering organised guidance in life meaning and for moral thought and behaviour*."

The High Court has defined religion as *belief in a supernatural being, thing or principle and the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief*. It further determined that such conduct may not offend ordinary laws, and that charlatanism is a necessary price of religious freedom.

Religion versus spirituality

A common misconception is that those who are religious are spiritual. In Australia, spiritual religion is in the minority amongst Catholics (35%), Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists (26% each) and non-Christian faiths (44%). Only amongst the minor Christian denominations do a majority, but still far from all (65%), say they are spiritually religious.

Some religionists attempt to bolster the rate of "religion" in Australia by adding "spiritual but not religious" (SBNRs) to the total religion figure. This not only overlooks that a significant proportion of religionists are not spiritual, but adds apples to pears: SBNRs are *not* at all religious in the way that religionists mean. Hint, the name says "… but *not* religious".

Why religion is so prevalent — individual factors

The question arises as to why religion is so prevalent. It is present in all societies throughout history, including amongst those that attempt to suppress it.

A longstanding debate has centred around relative contributions of nature versus nurture: the degree to which religiosity is inherited versus learned. One study suggested a fairly even split between the two, though other studies, with the significant effects of culture and politics, suggest rather more nature than nurture. In any case, the relationship is an *and* rather than an *or*: nurture bolsters the tendency of the naturally disposed to pursue religion, and the tendency of the non-disposed to accept it. Overall, nature provides something of a push, but nurture provides the details: the specific beliefs, attitudes, and rituals.

Another common misperception is that there is a "God spot" in the brain, which activates or facilitates religion. This explanation reveals an exclusive religious bias for monotheism. In reality, the experience of supernatural "presence" — in the absence of an overt physical seizure — is caused by minor seizures of the brain's temporal lobes. The neural processing of the left and right lobes getting out of sync can cause unusual experiences. The rationally-prone experience the mismatch as *inside* the mind, such as dreams or hallucinations, while the fantasy-prone experience it as *outside* the mind, such as angels, demons, ghosts, or God.

This effect aside, neuroscience makes clear that there is no special machinery in the brain dedicated to religion. Religion occurs as a result of a busy cluster of regular mechanisms. One is a preference for intuitive rather than analytic thinking. It comes with a significant bias attached, especially when religion is highly institutionalised or organised: a tendency to overconfidence in one's beliefs, and to dismiss counter-evidence as even *relevant* to holding the belief. It also comes with a tendency to prefer deontological (rules-based) solutions to moral problems: that is, a reliance on "duty ethics".

Another important feature of the human mind is its power for pattern recognition. This power is of course vital for life. For survival of the species we must be good at recognising food, predators and potential mates at the very least. But some are prone to not only seeing patterns in truly random data, but to *suggestions* of such patterns. This illusory pattern perception is a compensatory mechanism against perceived threats to personal control. The illusory patterns serve as convenient explanations of natural phenomena that are otherwise unexplained, and they give rise to preferences for interventionist gods and institutions that offer preferred certainties. Consistent with this phenomenon, Australia's most religious — *especially*

Christians — are significantly more likely than others to say they feel strongly in control of their lives. It also helps explain the current push by Australian religious conservatives for religious "freedoms", a reaction to the loss of religious control occasioned by significant drops in religious affiliation.

Another feature of the religious mind is a tendency for magical thinking and paranormal beliefs: a blend of intuition, mystical experience and acceptance of the supernatural, which arise largely in response to existential threats. Threats don't have to be life-threatening. They may be symbolic, or threats to *coping* mechanisms. In modern western civilisation, financial insecurity is an important existential threat, and it correlates strongly with belief in religious miracles. This may help account for Protestantism's prosperity gospel, including in Australia where Protestants are on average the most religious, and where belief in religious miracles is associated very strongly with high religiosity.

Human's advanced capacity for theory of mind (ToM)— the appreciation that others have preferences, beliefs, mental states, and motives that are different from one's own — adds to the mix. While other creatures such as crows, dogs and especially apes have this capacity, humans alone exhibit *secondary* ToM. That's the capacity to appreciate that others have the capacity to appreciate that others have their own preferences and beliefs. It endows humans with excess imagination to conceive that inanimate objects have minds, and to conjure up deities whose minds can monitor our own for potential transgressions of *thought*, not just behaviour. This helps account for mankind's wide disposition to generate teleological explanations for natural phenomena, that is, to explain them in terms of their *purpose* (which comes from a mind) rather than in terms of their *cause*.

Mankind's ability to create and *structure* cognitive content, in the form of pre-set explanations of the supernatural and how they are to be enlivened through ritual, contributes significantly to the persistence of religion throughout history, even if the content itself is revised over time.

Additionally, awe, the human experience of "small self" in response to perceived vast, difficult-to-explain phenomena, decreases tolerance for uncertainty, which increases illusory pattern perception, false detection of agency, spiritual feelings and supernatural belief.

Attachment style, the broad manner in which we tend to bond with others (secure, anxious or avoidant), can promote religiosity. People with a history of anxious or avoidant attachment towards others may *compensate* by relying on God as a substitute attachment figure. This is especially so for those with negative perceptions of self and positive perceptions of others, and is more common amongst women than men. There is also a potential *correspondence*

path, in which those brought up to feel secure in religion (but also non-religion) are more likely to stay on that path through life.

Terror management theory focuses on the salience of death, whether as mere reminders of mortality or as real existential threat. Appeals to the supernatural can offer both literal and symbolic immortality. This is not a particularly strong effect, though, as studies show that people mostly *think* the fear of death drives *others* but not themselves to religion. Nevertheless, in Australia there is a significant but not large correlation between religiosity and believing that the point of religion is to make sense of life after death.

Finally (but not exhaustively), religion acts as a resource against boredom, providing meaning while performing repetitive or tedious tasks.

Why religion is so prevalent — collective factors

Back to nature versus nurture again, the prevalence of religion is in part explained by official and unofficial support. A global study found that while just 5% of nations actively suppress religion, 20% favour a religion and a further 22% have an official state religion.

Religion is also said to improve cooperation. It does this through "costly signalling", displays that are hard for fakes, frauds and freeloaders to copy. These displays convey *predictability* of intent and its positive valence, and importantly can also be read by both non-religionists and those of other religions. While non-God costly signalling increases prosocial behaviour at the family and local level, Big God religions are associated with more global prosocial behaviour. In terms of prosocial effects, a majority of Australians agree, and the highly religious in particular, that religion helps people make friends.

There are caveats, however. Firstly, scientific studies do not consistently find associations between religiosity and cooperative behaviour, and when they do, the associations are often not strong. Secondly, the increase in prosocial behaviour may be only towards ingroups, but increase antisocial behaviour towards outgroups. Thirdly, prosocial behaviour can be coerced coordination rather than voluntary cooperation. And fourthly, cooperation is of course not the exclusive province of religion. Countless non-religious organisations around the world serve to bring people together in peace and prosperity.

Religion is also argued to promote fertility and population growth. While this may be true in regions with low resources or high rates of religiosity, in Australia it is no longer true. While older religious Australians (Diligents and Ardents) had significantly more children on average, younger Diligents and Ardents are having *fewer* children than religious Casuals and Nominals.

But perhaps the greatest contribution to religion, especially in terms of denominations, is the transmission of a specific religion from parents to their children. Child-rearing religious transmission is much higher amongst religious conservatives than progressives. As expected, Australia's most religious (Diligents and Ardents) prioritise teaching children religious faith, of limited priority to Casuals and of little interest to others.

Quasi- and non-religious worldviews

Studies indicate that a significant minority of Australians, between 14% and 24%, are "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). Some religious conservatives attempt to add SBNRs to a headline religious affiliation figure to imply that a very significant majority of Australians are "religious/spiritual". This is misguided.

Firstly, not all Australians who are affiliated with a religion are "spiritual". Indeed, of those who say they *belong* to a denomination, 47% of Catholics, 41% of Anglicans, 46% of Uniting/ Methodists, 41% of non-Christian denominations, and 15% of minor Christian denominations did *not* describe themselves as spiritual. That is, significant proportions of Australians are aligned with a religion for family and cultural reasons, rather than spiritual ones. Furthermore, significant proportions of those who said they belong to a religion described themselves as *No religion*.

Secondly, adding SBNRs to the "religion" figure is to add apples to oranges. Australia's SBNRs are very different from the "religious". They tend to be highly anti-establishmentarian, hold progressive views about social matters such as abortion and VAD, and are more likely to vote for left-wing political parties. Their beliefs tend to be vague and more aligned with secular notions of mindfulness, or paranormal beliefs in the healing powers of crystals or aromatherapy. Only a small minority believe in a god or gods. These characteristics make them non-starters as bedfellows to bolster presumed support for conservative, institutional religious doctrines.

Counting the non-religious, for example atheists, agnostics and others ("secularists" in general), in a meaningful way is conceptually difficult. Like religionists, they exhibit more a continuous spectrum of beliefs and values rather than a few neat clusters, and scholarly frameworks remain largely undeveloped.

Popular assumptions about secularists are not borne out by research. For example, secularists are assumed by many religionists to lack a sense of purpose or meaning, and to generally not experience larger-than-self inspiration. This may be due to the negative framing in their group names,

especially "atheists" (*without* a god or gods, and "non-religious" (*without* religion).

However, secularists amply demonstrate sense of purpose, though they are drawn from real-world rather than supernatural sources. While both secularists and religionists derive a great deal of meaning from family and close relationships, religionists are much more likely to have a *need* for meaning. Secularists enjoy wonder and awe, too, but in the natural realm rather than layering supernatural explanations over phenomena and events.

While secularists may not be familiar with the nuances of specific religious tenets and practices, they are not ignorant of religion in general. They can do better than the religious in religious general knowledge surveys.

Perceived benefits of religiosity

Religion is perceived to convey a range of benefits to adherents. One is its anxiolytic effects, that is, reduction of anxiety. This particularly holds in developing countries severely lacking in resources, though less so in developed countries. Nevertheless, in Australia, most agree that religion provides comfort in times of trouble or sorrow. Almost all Regulars and Devouts agree, indicating its personal importance. An important aspect of religion, rituals, help reduce anxiety. While rituals are not exclusive to religion, they reduce anxiety through their repetitive motions rather than through reducing cognitive load. They can also have negative outcomes, through increasing antisociality towards outgroups.

In Australia, frequent religious service attendance correlates strongly with greater self-reported wellbeing. Amongst Ardents, however, it correlates negatively with overall health (yet simultaneous high mental wellbeing). This is because the relationships between religion and health are complex and bidirectional. While religion may provide benefits in perceived wellbeing, it may also *attract* those in ill-health. Indeed, in Australia's religious have higher average BMI than others.

The social aspects of frequent religious service attendance give rise to general feelings of closeness to others, amongst Australia's religious. When adjusted by the importance of religion, however, the most religious report the lowest closeness to their local community and to Australia nationally, and the highest towards more abstract people in other parts of the world. The causes of these differences are unknown, though locals could directly challenge religionists' false consensus bias, and the study with these results was conducted shortly after Australia, nationally, legalised marriage equality, a reform most opposed by the highly religious.

As described earlier, religion also helps believers perceive a stronger sense of control over their own lives. This is especially so amongst Christians, who have been in normative majority since federation.

Most Australians regard religion as quite unimportant to generally getting ahead in life. The exception is Devouts, a quarter (24%) of whom think religion important to getting ahead. This is most likely to relate to getting ahead within religious organisations.

Religion is also commonly argued to impart greater morality. This will be discussed in Part 3.

Personal changes in religion

A large minority of adult Australians (42%) have changed religion since childhood (around 12 years old). While 35% are still of the same religion and 23% still the same non-religion, 32% have **left** religion, 8% have **changed** religion, and 2% have **converted** to religion.

Whereas most older Australians (55+ years) were raised in a religion, a large minority of younger Australians (18–44 years) have been raised in no religion. Given the "stickiness" of no religion, the rate of religion in Australia is likely to drop significantly further over the coming years.

Not only have many Australians left religion since childhood, but the religiosity of those still affiliated has dropped very substantially compared to their childhood selves and their parents at the time.

Protective factors against these drops include belief in a personal God, being raised in a common religion of both parents, and credibility-enhancing displays — parents attending religious services at the same rate as their children, rather than sending children off for additional indoctrination.

Thus, while recent drops in religion are significantly fuelled by transmission of religion but subsequent abandonment, future drops in religion will be fuelled significantly by lack of religious transmission.

Factors that people say most attract them to religion include seeing others' genuine religious faith, and experiencing life trauma. Factors that most repel people from religion include religious statements by public figures, unbelievable miracle stories, questioning religious teachings, religious hypocrisy, abuse, scandals and judgementalism, and non-belief in God.

In Australia, decreases in religious affiliation were particularly associated with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which found much greater abuse amongst religious than secular institutions.

It was also associated with conservative religious organisations actively opposing the legalisation of marriage equality.

Institutional changes in religion

Not only can personal minds change religion, but so can institutions. The Anglican church, for example, has changed its institutional mind about the ordination of women, formerly strictly opposed, and now generally but not universally supported. The Catholic church changed its stance on the marriage of clergy and the existence of limbo, to name just two.

Even as a religious institution advertises a doctrinal position about a particular matter, members of the institution, including some clerics, may hold different or even opposing views, for example on abortion, voluntary assisted dying, or marriage equality. This calls into significant question the notion of religious "tradition". When a cleric (or member of the devout laity) insists that their religion's "tradition" is exactly so, the claim is deaf to the wide and real range of beliefs and practices across that denomination, and blind to the change of views over time.

Religion and conscientious objection

Conscience is the exercise of moral judgement via the interaction of a person's emotions and thoughts on matters of right and wrong. Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". *Not just "religion"*.

Conscientious objection (CO) is the refusal of a person to participate in a course of action for moral (often but certainly not always religious) reasons. Especially in the field of healthcare, this can create significant moral dilemmas. Doctors, who have exclusive permission to provide certain services a patient may want, might object to the service. Objection to fertility planning and control, abortion, VAD, and other services are not uncommon.

While some argue that medical CO should be completely protected, or completely denied, a nuanced approach which allows a provider to not participate, but refer the patient for a consultation with another provider who doesn't object, is argued to be the appropriate balance. In the USA, most doctors think a doctor's CO should be respected, and a significant majority (71%) believe the objecting doctor is morally obliged to refer the patient to a non-objecting doctor.

A key feature of CO is that it is a shield, not a sword: its intention is to protect the conscience of its holder, not to extinguish the conscience of others.

Institutions, however, are confections of personhood in law. They don't have consciences (thoughts and feelings). Rather, where they seek to control behaviour, their mission statements or Codes of Ethics or Conduct act like law, not conscience. Indeed, they act to *repress* conscience. For example, a patient may seek, and a doctor may agree to provide, family planning services. However, if the institution bans such practices, the real conscience of both doctor and patient are struck out. This is ideological *regulation*, not conscience.

If the institution is the only place in a district where such a service might be practically provided to patients, the institution's objection becomes a blanket prohibition in the *region*, not just with the institution's walls. This is particularly egregious where the public are footing the institution's bills through government funding.

Institutional arguments for prohibiting certain services are misguided: they conflate *agency*, the ability to act, with *conscience*, the ability to reach a moral decision. Unilateral prohibition actively severs agency from conscience. Thus, "institutional conscientious objection" would more correctly be called "institutional agency prohibition".

The federal government's exposure drafts of Religious Discrimination bills have been labelled by the Australian Human Rights Commission as "*a dangerous precedent*" that would significantly restrict others' rights.

Religion and authority

Most Australians disagree strongly with the idea that "religious authorities" should be the ultimate interpreters of law. Even a clear majority of the most religious, Ardents, disagree.

On the question of whether democracy means the people should obey their rulers, the meaning is somewhat ambiguous: whether people think this *is* the nature of our current democracy, or whether this is a *principle* of democracy. Given this ambiguity, responses of Australians are mixed, though the most religious, Ardents, are more inclined than others to agree. This is consistent with the known association of authoritarianism with religiosity, although the effect is modest.

Highly religious Australians, Devouts, are also the most likely to say that the government controlling both houses of the federal parliament is good for democracy. Their approval of authority is not without bounds, however. They are slightly more likely to say that a leader unbothered by parliamentary process or elections is a bad idea.

Confirming their positive attitudes toward representatives "getting on with it", Australia's most religious are by far the least likely to say that citizens should participate in important policy decisions. Coupled with higher rates of disapproval of marriage equality, it becomes clear why religious conservatives were opposed to, and dismayed by, the 2017 national plebiscite regarding marriage equality law reform.

Attitudes toward religious institutions

For 25 different institution types from the armed forces and police to unions and political parties, religious and secular Australians report similar trust towards almost all of them. There is one exception, with religious and secular Australians holding almost polar opposite opinions: the churches. The most religious, Devoteds (Diligents and Ardents combined at 12% of the population), rate the churches as their number 3 trusted organisation. The other 88% of the population rate the churches at number 22 of 25, below banks (then under the investigation of a royal commission for wrongful behaviour), unions and the government; and only better than the press, TV and political parties.

Given the susceptibility of the very religious to false consensus bias, it's unclear whether Australia's most devout truly understand how poorly the rest of Australia views their organisations. Similarly, Australians' overall trust in religious *leaders* is very low, again less than union leaders and exceeding only corporate executives, politicians and celebrities.

The churches and their clerics have a severe reputation problem. Do they know? Are they aware of the degree of scepticism of most of the population still hearing religious conservatives' public demands for prescriptive dogma regarding "moral behaviour" in their own private lives?

A majority (51%) of Australians say that the churches have too much power. Just 6% disagree. Unsurprisingly, disagreement correlates strongly with religiosity, yet even amongst the most religious, Devouts, less than a third (33%) disagree that the churches have too much power, while most Rejecters (71%) agree.

Moreover, a massive majority of Australians (80%) say that religious leaders shouldn't attempt to interfere in how people vote in parliamentary elections. Just 12% think that clerics *should*. Opposition to clerical interference runs across the religious denominations and is in the majority by religiosity as well — even amongst Devouts (59%).

In the sphere of political influence, continuing to assume that religious votes count, but secular votes don't, is foolhardy. It's a daring government that would choose to grant the churches increased power.

In the sphere of personal influence, opinions are more mixed. Around a third (34%) of Australians say that governments shouldn't interfere in religions' efforts to spread their faith — that is, to evangelise. Slightly more Australians (38%) say governments *should* be able to interfere. As would be expected, opposition to interference is highest amongst the most religious, Regulars (57%) and Devouts (79%).

Religious conservatives to the battle stations

Recently, Australia's most religious have been pressing the federal government to pursue legislation that would increase the rights of the religious. Rather than propose *human rights* legislation to balance the rights of all Australians, the government has tellingly titled its proposed legislation the "Religious Discrimination Bill".

Religious conservatives are arguing for greater rights to be able to swing their arms of faith freely, with *legal protection* of those arms' right to remove any chin with which they might inconveniently come into contact.

At the same time, protection from secular swinging arms (or even religious swinging arms that disagree) are to be *legally prevented* from contacting conservative religious chins, which can stay exactly where they wish.

This is to argue not for a religious shield, but a religious sword. It is to argue for religious *privileges* over others.

Why are religious conservatives suddenly so politically active? Obviously, they were disappointed at the legalisation of marriage equality in 2017. But there are other significant reasons, too. Firstly, the current federal Coalition government, headed by devout Pentecostal Scott Morrison, has shown itself to be sympathetic to religious privilege. Reform is now more urgent as insurance against the possible election of a Labor government in 2022 — a party that has shown itself to be somewhat less enthusiastic.

Secondly, by mid 2022, the Australian Bureau of Statistics will publish the headline results of the 2021 national Census. That announcement is almost certain to declare that Christianity is, for the first time since federation, in the minority. Even religion in total may be in the minority, though that's unlikely. And the Nones may well be within 10% of total Christianity, more than halving the current gap.

The truth about religiosity in Australia

Religious conservatives in Australia are well organised, and vocal. Busy politicians could be forgiven for thinking they represent the views of Australians at large. But they don't. The 2016 headline Census statistic of 60%

religious affiliation is profoundly misleading. Significant numbers of Australians tick a religious denomination for habitual family or cultural reasons, rather than reasons of real faith or spirituality.

If the 60% affiliation figure is adjusted to the affiliated who say they *belong* to their religious organisation, religion drops to 38%. Adjusted to those who say they are religious, it drops to 32%. Adjusted to those who say religion is personally important in their lives, it drops to 29%. Adjusted to those who attend religious services more than once a year, it drops to 23%. Adjusted to those who are certain God exists, it drops to 21%. Adjusted to those whose religion is *spiritual*, it drops to just 18%. Adjusted to those who attend religious services regularly (at least once a month), it sinks to 16%. And adjusted to those who say they are *active* members of their religious organisation, it drops to a mere 15%. These are individual, not combined adjustments.

These, not some notional headline figure, are the real and concrete representations of religiosity in Australia. They provide a realistic appraisal of our national selfhood. They matter to parliamentary representation and legislative reform. They matter to government policy and to funding of religious and secular institutions alike.

Indeed, conservative Christian MPs' experiment with a new purpose-built political party, the Australian Conservatives, was a political failure and folded after two years.

Conclusion

In conclusion, those pushing for increased religious rights would be wise to take care in what they wish for. International research shows a *causative* relationship between state-sponsored protection of religion, and *religion's decline*. Religion does best when it stands on its own two feet. A pluralistic society thrives when no group is afforded special privileges over others.

References

Aarnio, K & Lindeman, M 2005, 'Paranormal beliefs, education, and thinking styles', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 1227-1236.

Aarnio, K & Lindeman, M 2007, 'Religious people and paranormal believers: Alike or different?', *Journal of Individual Differences*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 1-9.

ABC News 2018, *SA election 2018*, ABC, viewed 14 May 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/elections/sa-election-2018/results/?nw=0>.

Ahmed Ali, M & Salas, O 2009, 'Is the hand of God involved in human cooperation?', *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, pp. 70-80.

Ahrenfeldt, LJ, Hvidt, NC, Kjøller, ST, Möller, S & Lindahl-Jacobsen, R 2019, 'Religiousness and diseases in Europe: Findings from SHARE', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 58, no. 6, pp. 1925-1937.

Albright, CR 2000, 'The "God module" and the complexifying brain', *Zygon*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 735-744.

Allport, GW & Ross, M 1967, 'Personal religious orientation and prejudice', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 432-443.

Almond, PC 2019a, *Five aspects of Pentacostalism that shed light on Scott Morrison's politics*, The Conversation, viewed 24 May 2019, <https://theconversation.com/five-aspects-of-pentecostalism-that-shed-light-on-scott-morrisons-politics-117511>.

Almond, PC 2019b, *Is there really such a thing as the "Judeo-Christian tradition"?*, ABC Religion and Ethics, viewed 12 May 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/is-there-really-a-judeo-christian-tradition/10810554>.

Alper, S & Sümer, N 2017, 'Control deprivation decreases, not increases, belief in a controlling God for people with independent self-construal', *Current Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 1490-1494.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State 2016, *Federal Court rules that 'Pastafarianism' is not a real religion*, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://www.au.org/church-state/june-2016-church-state/people-events/federal-court-rules-that-pastafarianism-is-not-a>.

Ammerman, NT 2013, 'Spiritual but not religious? Beyond binary choices in the study of religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 258-278.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, *Census reveals Australia's religious diversity on World Religion Day*, viewed 22 May 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/8497F7A8E7DB5BEFCA25821800203DA4?OpenDocument>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *Marriage and divorces, Australia*, viewed 2 Jul 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/marriages-and-divorces-australia/latest-release>.

Australian Christian Lobby 2021, *Say NO to the proposed new national curriculum*, viewed 5 Jul 2021, <https://www.acl.org.au/cm_nat_schoolcurriculum>.

Australian Christian Values Institute 2021, *Promoting our Australian values*, viewed 5 Jul 2021, <https://christianvalues.org.au/>.

Australian Christians 2021, *"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible" - President George Washington*, viewed 5 Jul 2021, <https://australianchristians.org.au/core-values/>.

Australian Human Rights Commission 2020, *Religious Freedom Bills second exposure draft: Submission to the Attorney General's Department*, Sydney, pp. 49.

Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, *Australia and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, viewed 26 Jun 2021, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/australia-and-universal-declaration-human-rights>.

Baker, JO & Smith, B 2009a, 'None too simple: Examining issues of religious nonbelief and nonbelonging in the United States', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 719-733.

Baker, JO & Smith, BG 2009b, 'The Nones: Social characteristics of the religiously unaffiliated', *Social Forces*, vol. 87, no. 3, pp. 1251-1263.

Baker, JO, Stroope, S & Walker, MH 2018, 'Secularity, religiosity, and health: Physical and mental health differences between atheists, agnostics, and nonaffiliated theists compared to religiously affiliated individuals', *Social Science Research*, vol. 75, pp. 44-57.

Baker, M & Gorsuch, R 1982, 'Trait anxiety and intrinsic-extrinsic religiousness', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 119-122.

Barry, L 2021, *Do healing crystals really work?*, Better Homes and Gardens, viewed 23 May 2021, <https://www.bhg.com.au/do-crystals-really-work>.

Batson, CD 1976, 'Religion as prosocial: Agent or double-agent?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 15, pp. 29-45.

BBC Science & Nature 2001, *God on the brain*, viewed 19 Apr 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/science/horizon/2003/godonbrain.shtml>.

Beamish, P & Morey, P 2013, 'School choice: What parents choose', *Teach*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 26-33.

Beavis, A 2004, 'Why parents choose public or private schools', *Research Developments*, vol. 12, no. Art. 3, pp. 1-4.

Beca, JPI & Astete, CA 2015, 'Conscientious objection in medical practice', *Revista Médica de Chile*, vol. 143, no. 4, pp. 493-498.

Becker, SO, Nagler, M & Woessmann, L 2017, 'Education and religious participation: city-level evidence from Germany's secularization period 1890–1930', *Journal of Economic Growth*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 273-311.

Bedford, EL 2012, 'The concept of institutional conscience', *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 409-420.

Benson, H, Dusek, JA, Sherwood, JB, Lam, P, Bethea, CF, Carpenter, W, Levitsky, S, Hill, PC, Clem, DW, Jain, MK, Drumel, D, Kopecky, SL, Mueller, PS, Marek, D, Rollins, S & Hibberd, PL 2006, 'Study of the therapeutic effects of intercessory prayer (STEP) in cardiac bypass patients: A multicenter randomized trial of uncertainty and certainty of receiving intercessory prayer', *American Heart Journal*, vol. 151, no. 4, pp. 934-942.

Bergmann, BAB & Todd, NR 2019, 'Religious and spiritual beliefs uniquely predict poverty attributions', *Social Justice Research*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 459-485.

Bernardelli, LV, Kortt, MA & Ednaldo, M 2020, 'Religion, health, and life satisfaction: evidence from Australia', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 1287-1303.

Bernardo, ABI, Clemente, JAR & Nalipay, MJN 2016, 'What personal value types are associated with beliefs on the social value of religion?', *Psychological Studies*, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 170-180.

Bertrand, RL 2015, 'The limits of secularization through education', *Journal of Religion & Society*, vol. 17, pp. 1-43.

Bespalov, A 2019, 'Should Abraham get a religious exemption?', *Res Publica*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 235-259.

Bessey, D 2016, *Religion and fertility in East Asia: Evidence from the East Asian Social Survey*, MPRA Paper No. 75372, pp. 30.

Białek, M & Domurat, A 2018, 'Cognitive abilities, analytic cognitive style and overconfidence: A commentary on Duttle (2016)', *Bulletin of Economic Research*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. E119-E125.

Birgegard, A & Granqvist, P 2004, 'The correspondence between attachment to parents and God: Three experiments using subliminal separation cues', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 30, no. 9, pp. 1122-1135.

Blackshaw, BP 2019, 'No conscientious objection without normative justification: A reply', *Bioethics*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 522-523.

Blume, M 2009, 'The reproductive benefits of religious affiliation', in E Voland and W Schiefenhovel (eds), *The Biological Evolution of Religious Mind and Behavior*, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 117-126.

Bou-Habib, P 2006, 'A theory of religious accommodation', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 109-126.

Boucher, HC & Millard, MA 2016, 'Belief in foreign supernatural agents as an alternate source of control when personal control is threatened', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 193-211.

Bouma, GD & Halafoff, A 2017, 'Australia's changing religious profile—rising nones and Pentecostals, declining British Protestants in superdiversity: Views from the 2016 census', *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 129-143.

Brambilla, M, Manzi, C, Regalia, C & Verkuyten, M 2013, 'Religiosity and prejudice: Different patterns for two types of religious internalization', *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 153, no. 4, pp. 486-498.

Brañas-Garza, P, García-Muñoz, T & Neuman, S 2013, 'Determinants of disaffiliation: An international study', *Religions*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 166-185.

Brockhaus, H 2019, *Archbishop Paglia says priests can be present at assisted suicide*, Catholic Voice, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://www.catholicvoice.org.au/archbishop-paglia-says-priests-can-be-present-at-assisted-suicide/>.

Brooks, AW, Schroeder, J, Risen, JL, Gino, F, Galinsky, AD, Norton, MI & Schweitzer, ME 2016, 'Don't stop believing: Rituals improve performance by decreasing anxiety', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, vol. 137, pp. 71-85.

Browne, M, Pennycook, G, Goodwin, B & McHenry, M 2014, 'Reflective minds and open hearts: Cognitive style and personality predict religiosity and spiritual thinking in a community sample', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 44, no. 7, pp. 736-742.

Bruce, C 2017, *Australia is more spiritual than atheists hoped: Census results*, Hope 103.2, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://hope1032.com.au/stories/faith/2017/australia-more-spiritual-atheists-hoped-census-results-religion/>.

Bulbulia, J & Schjoedt, U 2012, 'The neural basis of religion', in F Krueger and J Grafman (eds), *The Neural Basis of Human Belief Systems*, Psychology Press, New York, pp. 169-190.

Byler, D 2019, *Religiously unaffiliated voters are leading U.S. politics into uncharted waters*, The Washington Post, viewed 12 May 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/14/religiously-unaffiliated-voters-are-leading-us-politics-into-uncharted-waters/>.

Caprara, GV, Vecchione, M, Schwartz, SH, Schoen, H, Bain, PG, Silvester, J, Cieciuch, J, Pavlopoulos, V, Bianchi, G, Kirmanoglu, H, Baslevent, C, Mamali, C, Manzi, J, Katayama, M, Posnova, T, Tabernero, C, Torres, C, Verkasalo, M, Lönnqvist, J-E, Vondráková, E & Caprara, MG 2018, 'The contribution of religiosity to ideology: Empirical evidences from five continents', *Cross-Cultural Research*, vol. 52, no. 5, pp. 524-541.

Casidy, R & Tsarenko, Y 2014, 'Perceived benefits and church participation', *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 761-776.

Chan, EY 2019, 'Social (not fiscal) conservatism predicts deontological ethics', *Acta Psychologica*, vol. 198, p. [102867].

Chan, M, Tsai, KM & Fuligni, AJ 2015, 'Changes in religiosity across the transition to young adulthood', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 44, no. 8, pp. 1555-1566.

Chapman, NS 2017, 'Adjudicating religious sincerity', *Washington Law Review*, vol. 92, pp. 1185-1254.

Charles, SJ, van Mulukom, V, Brown, JE, Watts, F, Dunbar, RIM & Farias, M 2021, 'United on Sunday: The effects of secular rituals on social bonding and affect', *PLoS One*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. e0242546.

Chaves, M 1994, 'Secularization as declining religious authority', *Social Forces*, vol. 72, no. 3, pp. 749-774.

Cherniak, AD, Mikulincer, M, Shaver, PR & Granqvist, P 2021, 'Attachment theory and religion', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 126-130.

Cholbi, M 2015, 'The right to die and the medical cartel', *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 486-493.

Christian Research Association 2012, *Spiritual but not religious*, viewed 23 May 2021, <https://cra.org.au/spiritual-but-not-religious/>.

Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia 2021, *The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster Australia*, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://pastafarians.org.au/>.

Clark, A & Lelkes, O 2009, *Let us pray: Religious interactions in life satisfaction*, Working Paper No 2009-01, Paris School of Economics, pp. 31.

Clobert, M 2021, 'East versus West: Psychology of religion in East Asian cultures', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 61-66.

Clobert, M & Saroglou, V 2015, 'Religion, paranormal beliefs, and distrust in science: Comparing East versus West', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 185-199.

Coady, CAJ 2013, 'Conscientious objection', in H LaFollette, G Brock, J Deigh, J Holroyd, D Star and S Stroud (eds), *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Wiley, [Online].

Cockburn, P 2017, *SSM: These religious leaders are putting dogma aside to support same-sex marriage*, ABC News, viewed 8 Sep 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-07/religious-leaders-thinking-differently-about-same-sex-marriage/8878680>.

Cohen, AB & Hill, PC 2007, 'Religion as culture: religious individualism and collectivism among American Catholics, Jews, and Protestants', *Journal of Personality*, vol. 75, no. 4, pp. 709-742.

Coleman, TJ, III, Hood, RW, Jr. & Streib, H 2018, 'An introduction to atheism, agnosticism, and nonreligious worldviews', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 203-206.

Coleman, TJ, III & Messick, KJ 2019, 'Keeping the secular deck intact', *Implicit Religion*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 58-65.

Coleman, TJ & Jong, J 2019, 'Counting the nonreligious: A critical survey of new measures', in AL Ai, KA Harris and P Wink (eds), *Assessing Spirituality and Religion in a Diversified World: Beyond Mainstream Perspective*, Springer, New York, pp. 87-116.

Cox, M, Villamayor-Tomas, S & Hartberg, Y 2014, 'The role of religion in community-based natural resource management', *World Development*, vol. 54, pp. 46-55.

Crabb, A 2019, *What Australians really think about religion*, ABC News, viewed 10 Nov 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-06/annabel-crabb-australia-talks-religion-insights/11674076>.

Critcher, CR & Lee, CJ 2018, 'Feeling is believing: Inspiration encourages belief in God', *Psychological Science*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 723-737.

Csizmar Carvalho, C, Silva, RP, Lopes Chaves, EC & Caldeira, S 2013, 'Intercessory prayer: A systematic review of the literature', *Index de Enfermeria*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 186-190.

Curlin, FA, Lawrence, RE, Chin, MH & Lantos, JD 2007, 'Religion, conscience, and controversial clinical practices', *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 356, no. 6, pp. 593-600.

Curtis, KA & Olson, LR 2019, 'Identification with religion: Cross-national evidence from a social psychological perspective', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp. 790-812.

da Rosa, MI, Silva, FR, Silva, BR, Costa, LC, Bergamo, AM, Silva, NC, Medeiros, LRF, Battisti, IDE & Azevedo, R 2013, 'A randomized clinical trial on the effects of remote intercessory prayer in the adverse outcomes of pregnancies', *Ciencia e Saude Coletiva*, vol. 18, no. 8, pp. 2379-2384.

David, DH 2001, 'Editorial: Separation, integration, and accommodation: Religion and state in America in a nutshell', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 5-17.

Davis, DH 2005, 'EDITORIAL: Is atheism a religion? Recent judicial perspectives on the consitutional meaning of "religion"', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 707-723.

de Aguiar, PRDC, Tatton-Ramos, TP & Alminhana, LO 2017, 'Research on Intercessory Prayer: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 56, no. 6, pp. 1930-1936.

Debien, N & Calderwood, K 2016, *'Spiritual but not religious': What the census won't say about Australians' beliefs*, ABC Religion & Ethics, viewed 23 May 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/religionandethicsreport/spiritual-but-not-religious-what-the-census-wont-say/7699694>.

Demerath, J & Cotter, CR 2012, *Substantive religion and the functionalist sacred*, The Religious Studies Project, viewed 12 Oct 2020, <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/jay-demerath-on/>.

Devinsky, O & Lai, G 2008, 'Spirituality and religion in epilepsy', *Epilepsy & Behavior*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 636-643.

Devinsky, O, Ronsaville, D, Cox, C, Witt, E, Fedio, P & Theodore, WH 1994, 'Interictal aggression in epilepsy: the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory', *Epilepsia*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 585-590.

Devos, T, (Ed.) 2021, *Euthanasia: Searching for the Full Story - Experiences and Insights of Belgian Doctors and Nurses,* Springer, Leuven.

Dias, E 2019, *'It is not a closet. It is a cage.' Gay Catholic priests speak out*, The New York Times, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/17/us/it-is-not-a-closet-it-is-a-cage-gay-catholic-priestsspeak-out.html>.

Dickens, BM 2009, 'Unethical protection of conscience: Defending the powerful against the weak', *Virtual Mentor*, vol. 11, no. 9, pp. 725-729.

Diener, E, Tay, L & Myers, DG 2011, 'The religion paradox: if religion makes people happy, why are so many dropping out?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 101, no. 6, pp. 1278-1290.

Dilmaghani, M 2018, 'Importance of religion or spirituality and mental health in Canada', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 120-135.

Djupe, PA, Neiheisel, JR & Conger, KH 2018, 'Are the politics of the Christian Right linked to state rates of the nonreligious? The Importance of salient controversy', *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 71, no. 4, pp. 910-922.

Donahue, MJ 1985, 'Intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness: the empirical research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 418-423.

Downey, AB 2014, *Religious affiliation, education and Internet use*, Cornell University, Ithaca NY, pp. 12.

Dudley, M 2017, *'Spirituality' - what does it mean and is it of any use?*, The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Edbgaston, Birmingham, pp. 27.

Duran, M 2019, *Cory Bernardi deregistering Australian Conservatives Party due to 'lack of political success'*, ABC News, viewed 14 May 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-20/cory-bernardi-de-registering-australian-conservatives/11230750>.

Durland, SL 2011, 'The case against institutional conscience', *Notre Dame Law Review*, vol. 86, no. 4, pp. 1655-1686.

Ellis, TB 2016, 'Of gods and devils: Differential cognition and the adaptive illusions of control', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 28, no. 4-5, pp. 479-511.

Ellsworth, RM 2009, *Evolution and religion: Theory, definitions, and the natural selection of religious behaviour*, M.A. thesis, University of Missouri, pp. 139.

Eschler, E 2020, 'In the valley of the shadow of death: Insecurity and miraculous experiences', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 439-464.

Evans, JH 2021, 'Inquiry, not science, as the source of secularization in higher education', *Sociology of Religion, In press*.

Farais, M & Coleman, TJ 2020, 'Nonreligion, atheism and mental health', in A Moreira-Almeida, BP Mosqueiro and D Bhugra (eds), *Spirituality and Mental Health Across Cultures: Evidence-Based Implications for Clinical Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Farias, M, Coleman, TJ, III, Bartlett, JE, Oviedo, L, Soares, P, Santos, T & Bas, MdC 2019, 'Atheists on the Santiago Way: Examining motivations to go on pilgrimage', *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 80, no. 1, pp. 28-44.

Fazzino, LL 2014, 'Leaving the church behind: Applying a deconversion perspective to Evangelical exit narratives', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 249-266.

Fovargue, S, McGuinness, S, Mullock, A & Smith, S 2015, 'Editorial: Conscience and proper medical treatment', *Medical Law Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 173-176.

Fovargue, S & Neal, M 2015, ''In good conscience': Conscience-based exemptions and proper medical treatment', *Medical Law Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 221-241.

Francis, LJ, Powell, R & McKenna, U 2020, 'Religion and personal happiness among young churchgoers in Australia: The importance of the affective dimension', *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 31, pp. 319-337.

Francis, N 2021, *Religiosity in Australia Part 1: Personal faith according to the numbers*, Rationalist Society of Australia, Melbourne, pp. 152.

Freidin, E & Martini, LA 2020, 'An analytic cognitive style negatively predicts a more literal but not a more symbolic religiosity type', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, In press*.

Frost, J 2019, 'Certainty, uncertainty, or indifference? Examining variation in the identity narratives of nonreligious Americans', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 84, no. 5, pp. 828-850.

Fry-Bowers, EK 2020, 'A matter of conscience: Examining the law and policy of conscientious objection in health care', *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 120-126.

Funk, C & Smith, G 2012, *"Nones" on the rise: one-in-five adults have no religious affiliation*, Pew Research Center, Washington DC, pp. 80.

Galen, LW 2020, '"God's not my type"', *Secular Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1-13.

Ganzach, Y & Gotlibovski, C 2013, 'Intelligence and religiosity: Within families and over time', *Intelligence*, vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 546-552.

Garcia, A & Blankholm, J 2016, 'The social context of organized nonbelief: County-level predictors of nonbeliever organizations in the United States', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 70-90.

Garssen, B, Visser, A & Pool, G 2021, 'Does spirituality or religion positively affect mental health? Meta-analysis of longitudinal studies', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 4-20.

Gebauer, JE, Bleidorn, W, Gosling, SD, Rentfrow, PJ, Lamb, ME & Potter, J 2014, 'Cross-cultural variations in Big Five relationships with religiosity: A sociocultural motives perspective', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 107, no. 6, pp. 1064-1091.

Gebauer, JE & Sedikides, C 2021, 'Cultural religiosity: A neglected but powerful dimension of culture', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 73-78.

Gervais, WM, van Elk, M, Xygalatas, D, McKay, RT, Aveyard, M, Buchtel, EE, Dar-Nimrod, I, Klocová, EK, Ramsay, JE, Riekki, T, Svedholm-Häkkinen, AM & Bulbulia, J 2018, 'Analytic atheism: A cross-culturally weak and fickle phenomenon?', *Judgment and Decision Making*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 268-274.

Gervais, WM, Willard, AK, Norenzayan, A & Henrich, J 2011, 'The cultural transmission of faith: Why innate intuitions are necessary, but insufficient, to explain religious belief', *Religion*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 389-410.

Giubilini, A 2014, 'The paradox of conscientious objection and the anemic concept of 'conscience': Downplaying the role of moral integrity in health care', *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 159-185.

Gleeson, H & Baird, J 2017, *Anglican Diocese of Sydney makes apology to victims of domestic abuse*, ABC News, viewed 12 Oct 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-11/anglican-diocese-of-sydney-apologises-to-abuse-victims/9038410>.

Goligher, EC, Del Sorbo, L, Cheung, AM, Alibhai, SMH, Liao, L, Easson, A, Halpern, J, Ely, EW, Sulmasy, DP & Hwang, SW 2016, 'Why conscientious objection merits respect', *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 188, no. 11, pp. 822-823.

González-Rivera, J, Rosario-Rodríguez, A, Rodríguez-Ramos, E, Hernández-Gato, I & Torres-Báez, L 2019, 'Are believers happier than atheists? Well-being measures in a sample of atheists and believers in Puerto Rico', *Interacciones: Revista de Avances en Psicología*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 51-59.

Götmark, F & Andersson, M 2020, 'Human fertility in relation to education, economy, religion, contraception, and family planning programs', *BMC Public Health*, vol. 20, pp. 1-17.

Grafman, J, Cristofori, I, Zhong, W & Bulbulia, J 2020, 'The neural basis of religious cognition', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 126-133.

Granqvist, P, Fredrikson, M, Unge, P, Hagenfeldt, A, Valind, S, Larhammar, D & Larsson, M 2005, 'Sensed presence and mystical experiences are predicted by suggestibility, not by the application of transcranial weak complex magnetic fields', *Neuroscience Letters*, vol. 379, no. 1, pp. 1-6.

Granqvist, P & Nkara, F 2017, 'Nature meets nurture in religious and spiritual development', *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 142-155.

Hall, DE, Koenig, AM & Meador, KG 2004, 'Conceptualizing "religion": How language shapes and constrains knowledge in the study of religion and health', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 286-401.

Hall, DL, Cohen, AB, Meyer, KK, Varley, AH & Brewer, GA 2015, 'Costly signaling increases trust, even across religious affiliations', *Psychological Science*, vol. 26, no. 9, pp. 1368-1376.

Harmsen, N & MacLennan, L 2018, *Dennis Hood dumps Cory Bernardi's Australian Conservatives to join SA Liberals*, ABC News, viewed 14 May 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-26/australian-conservatives-mp-dennis-hood-joins-liberals/9586822>.

Harpaz, I 1998, 'Cross-national comparison of religious conviction and the meaning of work', *Cross-Cultural Research*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 143-170.

Hartberg, Y, Cox, M & Villamayor-Tomas, S 2014, 'Supernatural monitoring and sanctioning in community-based resource management', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 95-111.

Hassan, R 2002, 'On being religious: A study of Christian and Muslim piety in Australia', *Australian Religion Studies Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 87-114.

Hayward, RD & Krause, N 2014, 'Changes in religious group affiliation during older adulthood: Evidence from an 11-year longitudinal study', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 539-554.

Heimlich, R 2008, *Evangelicals and education*, Pew Research Center, viewed 17 Jun 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2008/04/18/evangelicals-and-education/ >.

Heltzer, RA & Vyse, SA 1994, 'Intermittent consequences and problem solving: The experimental control of "superstitious" beliefs', *Psychological Record*, vol. 44, no. 2, pp. 155-169.

Heywood, BT & Bering, JM 2014, '"Meant to be": How religious beliefs and cultural religiosity affect the implicit bias to think teleologically', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 183-201.

Hiebler-Ragger, M, Fuchshuber, J, Droscher, H, Vajda, C, Fink, A & Unterrainer, HF 2018, 'Personality influences the relationship between primary emotions and religious/spiritual well-being', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9, p. 370.

High Court of Australia 1983, *Church of the New Faith v. Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax (Vict) 1983, 154 CLR 210*, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://staging.hcourt.gov.au/assets/publications/judgments/1983/035--CHURCH_OF_THE_NEW_FAITH_v._COMMISSIONER_OF_PAY-ROLL_TAX_(VICT.)_1983--154_CLR_120.html>.

Hobson, NM & Inzlicht, M 2016, 'Recognizing religion's dark side: Religious ritual increases antisociality and hinders self-control', *The Behavioral and brain sciences*, vol. 39, p. e14.

Hoffman, JP 2013, 'Declining religious authority? Confidence in the leaders of religious organizations, 1973-2010', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 1-25.

Homan, CP 2019, 'Attachment to parents and to God: a panel-data approach', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 551-569.

Homan, KJ 2014, 'Symbolic attachment security and eudemonic well-being in older adults', *Journal of Adult Development*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 89-95.

Hood, RW, Jr., Hill, PC & Spilka, B 2014, '1 The psychological nature and functions of religion', in *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, Guilford, New York, pp. 1-25.

Hoogeveen, S, Wagenmakers, E-J, Kay, AC & Van Elk, M 2019, 'Compensatory control and religious beliefs: a registered replication report across two countries', *Comprehensive Results in Social Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 240-265.

Horne, Z, Powell, D & Hummel, J 2015, 'A single counterexample leads to moral belief revision', *Cognitive Science*, vol. 39, no. 8, pp. 1950-1964.

Hout, M & Fischer, CS 2002, 'Why more Americans have no religious preference: Politics and generations', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 67, no. 2, pp. 165-190.

Hughes, JA 2018, 'Conscientious objection, professional duty and compromise: A response to Savulescu and Schuklenk', *Bioethics*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 126-131.

Hui, CH, Cheung, S-H, Lam, J, Ying Lau, EY, Cheung, S-F & Yuliawati, L 2018, 'Psychological changes during faith exit: A three-year prospective study', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 103-118.

Hvidt, NC, Hvidtjørn, D, Christensen, K, Nielsen, JB & Søndergaard, J 2017, 'Faith moves mountains—mountains move faith: Two opposite epidemiological forces in research on religion and health', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 294-304.

Iannaccone, LR 1998, 'Introduction to the economics of religion', *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. XXXVI, pp. 1465-1496.

Inesi, ME, Botti, S, Dubois, D, Rucker, DD & Galinsky, AD 2011, 'Power and choice: Their dynamic interplay in quenching the thirst for personal control', *Psychological science*, vol. 22, no. 8, pp. 1042-1048.

Isaak, S, James, J, Radeke, M, Krauss, S, Schuler, K & Schuler, E 2017, 'Assessing religious orientations: Replication and validation of the Commitment-Reflectivity Circumplex (CRC) model', *Religions*, vol. 8, no. 10, pp. 1-19.

Jack, AI, Friedman, JP, Boyatzis, RE & Taylor, SN 2016, 'Why do you believe in God? Relationships between religious belief, analytic thinking, mentalizing and moral concern', *PLoS One*, vol. 11, no. 3, p. e0149989.

Jackson, JC, Jong, J, Bluemke, M, Poulter, P, Morgenroth, L & Halberstadt, J 2017, 'Testing the causal relationship between religious belief and death anxiety', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 57-68.

Jaume, L, Simkin, H & Etchezahar, E 2013, 'Religious as quest and its relationship with intrinsic and extrinsic orientation', *International Journal of Psychological Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 71-78.

Jensen, JS 2018, *What is religion?,* Routledge, New York.

Jensen, P 2020, *When it comes to religion, the Australian Census is asking the wrong questions*, ABC Religion & Ethics, viewed 15 Feb 2021,

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/phillip-jensen-census-asks-wrong-questions-on-religion/12871858>.

Johnson, DK 2020, 'Why religious experience cannot justify religious belief', *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 26-46.

Johnson, KA 2021, 'God. . . Karma, Jinn, spirits, and other metaphysical forces', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 10-14.

Jong, J 2021, 'Death anxiety and religion', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 40-44.

Kandler, C 2021, 'A meta-analytic review of nature and nurture in religiousness across the lifespan', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 106-113.

Karl, J & Fischer, R 2018, 'Rituals, repetitiveness and cognitive load: A competitive test of ritual benefits for stress', *Human Nature*, vol. 29, pp. 418-441.

Kay, AC, Gaucher, D, McGregor, I & Nash, K 2009a, 'Religious belief as compensatory control', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 37-48.

Kay, AC, Moscovitch, DA & Laurin, K 2010, 'Randomness, attiributions of arousal, and belief in God', *Psychological Science*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 216-218.

Kay, AC, Shepherd, S, Blatz, CW, Chua, SN & Galinsky, AD 2010, 'For God (or) country: The hydraulic relation between government instability and belief in religious sources of control', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 99, no. 5, pp. 725-739.

Kay, AC, Whitson, JA, Gaucher, D & Galinsky, AD 2009b, 'Compensatory control: Achieving order through the mind, our institutions, and the heavens', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 264-268.

Keltner, D & Haidt, J 2003, 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion', *Cognition and Emotion*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 297-314.

Kim, J & Zhong, Y 2010, 'Religion and political tolerance in South Korea', *East Asia*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 187-203.

Kirkpatrick, LA 1997, 'A longitudinal study of changes in religious belief and behavior as a function of individual differences in adult attachment style', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 207-217.

Kirkpatrick, LA 1998, 'God as a substitute attachment figure: A longitudinal study of adult attachment style and religious change in college students', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 24, no. 9, pp. 961-973.

Kirkpatrick, LA & Shaver, PR 1990, 'Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 315-334.

Kirschenmann, PP 2016, 'Replaying the tape of life - are we 'improbable'? Some questions of comparison,' *European Society for the Study of Science & Technology Conference*, Lodz, Poland, pp. 1-6.

Kortt, MA & Dollery, B 2014, 'Religion and BMI in Australia', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 217-28.

Kortt, MA, Dollery, B & Grant, B 2015, 'Religion and life satisfaction Down Under', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 277-293.

Krucoff, MW, Crater, SW, Gallup, D, Blankenship, JC, Cuffe, M, Guarneri, M, Krieger, RA, Kshettry, VR, Morris, K, Oz, M, Pichard, A, Sketch, MH, Koenig, HG, Mark, D & Lee, KL 2005, 'Music, imagery, touch, and prayer as adjuncts to interventional cardiac care: the Monitoring and Actualisation of Noetic Trainings (MANTRA) II randomised study', *The Lancet*, vol. 366, no. 9481, pp. 211-217.

Krueger, J 1998, 'Enhancement bias in descriptions of self and others', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 24, no. 5, pp. 505-516.

Krupenye, C & Call, J 2019, 'Theory of mind in animals: Current and future directions', *WIREs Cognitive Science*, vol. 10, no. 6, p. e1503.

Kuře, J 2016, 'Conscientious objection in health care', *Ethics & Bioethics*, vol. 6, no. 3-4, pp. 173-180.

Kwan, K-m 2006, 'Can religious experience provide justification for the belief in God? The debate in contemporary analytic philosophy', *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 1, no. 6, pp. 640-661.

Lam, P-Y & Rotolo, T 2000, 'Reexamining the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction', *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 11, pp. 133-153.

Landau, MJ, Kay, AC & Whitson, JA 2015, 'Compensatory control and the appeal of a structured world', *Psychological bulletin*, vol. 141, no. 3, pp. 694-722.

Lang, M 2019, 'The evolutionary paths to collective rituals: An interdisciplinary perspective on the origins and functions of the basic social act', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 224-252.

Lang, M, Kratky, J & Xygalatas, D 2020, 'The role of ritual behaviour in anxiety reduction: an investigation of Marathi religious practices in Mauritius', *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, vol. 375, no. 1805, p. 20190431.

Langston, J 2019, *Why intellectualism is an inferior explanation of non-belief: Analytic atheism and "cognitive critique" explanations*, PhD thesis, School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, pp. 19.

Langston, J, Speed, D & Coleman, TJ 2018, 'Predicting age of atheism: credibility enhancing displays and religious importance, choice, and conflict in family of upbringing', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 49-67.

Lanman, JA 2012, 'The importance of religious displays for belief acquisition and secularization', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 49-65.

Larson, AD 2015, *Church member reactions to religious disaffiliation*, M.A. thesis, Loma Linda University, Ann Arbor, pp. 62.

Lataster, R 2016, 'It's official: We can now doubt Jesus' historical existence', *Think*, vol. 15, no. 43, pp. 65-79.

Launonen, L 2021, 'Debunking arguments gain little from cognitive science of religion', *Zygon*, vol. 56, no. 2, pp. 416-433.

Laurin, K & Kay, A 2017, 'The motivational underpinnings of belief in God', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 56, pp. 201-257.

Lavric, M & Flere, S 2011, 'Intrinsic religious orientation and religious rewards: An empirical evaluation of two approaches to religious motivation', *Rationality and Society*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 217-233.

Lee, MH 2015, *From faith and advocacy to unbelief and defection: Exploring the concomitants and consequences of deconversion among evangelical ministers and missionaries*, Ph.D. thesis, Trinity International University, Ann Arbor, pp. 266.

Legare, CH & Nielsen, M 2020, 'Ritual explained: interdisciplinary answers to Tinbergen's four questions', *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, vol. 375, no. 1805, p. 20190419.

Lemos, CM, Gore, R & Shults, FL 2017, 'Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of religiosity: A four-factor conceptual model', *PLoS ONE*, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 1-36.

Lewis, M 2019, *Not all Australian Anglican dioceses accept women as priests but Newcastle's oldest parish just ordained its first*, ABC News, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-12/not-all-women-can-be-priests-in-the-anglican-church-of-australia/11090892>.

Lindeman, M & Aarnio, K 2007, 'Superstitious, magical, and paranormal beliefs: An integrative model', *Journal of Research in Personality*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 731-744.

Lindeman, M & Svedholm-Häkknen, AM 2016, 'Does poor understanding of physical world predict religious and paranormal beliefs?', *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 736-742.

Livingstone, T 2020, *Catholic Archbishop Mark Coleridge attacks euthanasia law 'rush' in Queensland election campaign*, viewed 12 Mar 2021, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/catholic-archbishop-mark-coleridge-attacks-euthanasia-law-rush-in-queensland-election-campaign/news-story/ea0de16ef652faaaab763668d5e6b512>.

Lovett, I & Ailworth, E 2018, *Nonbelievers seek political power to match their growing numbers*, The Wall Street Journal, viewed 14 May 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nonbelievers-seek-political-power-to-match-their-growing-numbers-1536418801>.

Lynch, L 2021, *Euthanasia law 'will lead to care exodus'*, The Australian, viewed 16 Jul 2021, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/euthanasia-law-will-lead-to-care-exodus/news-story/50ae8aeeb7fa7a9e418f50f59fb74d5f>.

Maclure, J & Dumont, I 2017, 'Selling conscience short: a response to Schuklenk and Smalling on conscientious objections by medical professionals', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 241-244.

Maddox, M 2021, *Scott Morrison is not the first prime minister with religious beliefs. What is different this time?*, The Guardian, viewed 28 Apr 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/28/scott-morrison-is-not-the-first-prime-minister-with-religious-beliefs-what-is-different-this-time>.

Maij, DLR, van Harreveld, F, Gervais, W, Schrag, Y, Mohr, C & van Elk, M 2017, 'Mentalizing skills do not differentiate believers from non-believers, but credibility enhancing displays do', *PLoS One*, vol. 12, no. 8, p. e0182764.

Malinakova, K, Tavel, P, Meier, Z, van Dijk, JP & Reijneveld, SA 2020, 'Religiosity and mental health: A contribution to understanding the heterogeneity of research findings', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 17, no. 2.

Manoiu, R 2019, *The protective effect of religion/spirituality on mental health and mental illness across the adult lifespan*, M.A. thesis, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, pp. 83.

Marcus, ZJ & McCullough, ME 2021, 'Does religion make people more self-controlled? A review of research from the lab and life', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 167-170.

Marler, PL & Hadaway, CK 2002, '"Being religious" or "being spiritual" in America: A zero-sum proposition?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 289-300.

Marshall, J & Olson, DVA 2018, 'Is 'spiritual but not religious' a replacement for religion or just one step on the path between religion and non-religion?', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 503-518.

Martos, T, Sallay, V & Kézdy, A 2013, 'Everyday goals, religious motivations, and well-being: The mediating role of emotions', *Studia Psychologica*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 221-227.

Martos, T, Thege, BK & Steger, MF 2010, 'It's not only what you hold, it's how you hold it: Dimensions of religiosity and meaning in life', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 49, no. 8, pp. 863-868.

Masci, D & Smith, GA 2018, *5 facts about U.S. evangelical Protestants*, Pew Research, viewed 17 Jun 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/27/500-years-after-the-reformation-5-facts-about-protestants-around-the-world/>.

Massola, J 2017, *Cory Bernardi breaks silence, quits the Liberal Party in Senate speech*, The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed 12 May 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/cory-bernardi-breaks-silence-quits-the-liberal-party-in-senate-speech-20170207-gu750g.html>.

Massola, J & Peatling, S 2017, *Conservative majority in 12 coalition seats back same-sex marriage vote in 2017*, Fairfax Media, viewed 20 Mar 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/conservative-majority-in-12-coalition-seats-back-samesex-marriage-vote-in-2017-20170318-gv1a96.html>.

McAndrew, FT 2018, 'Costly signaling theory', in TK Shackelford and VA Weekes-Shackelford (eds), *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, pp. 1-8.

McClain, L 2019, *A thousand years ago, the Catholic Church paid little attention to homosexuality*, The Conversation, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://theconversation.com/a-thousand-years-ago-the-catholic-church-paid-little-attention-to-homosexuality-112830>.

McClendon, D & Hackett, C 2014, 'When people shed religious identity in Ireland and Austria: Evidence from censuses', *Demographic Research*, vol. 31, pp. 1297-1310.

McClintock, CH, Lau, E & Miller, L 2016, 'Phenotypic dimensions of spirituality: Implications for mental health in China, India, and the United States', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 7, no. Art. 1600, pp. 1-16.

McClure, PK 2020, 'The buffered, technological self: Finding associations between Internet use and religiosity', *Social Compass*, vol. 67, no. 3, pp. 461-478.

McConnell, D & Card, RF 2019, 'Public reason in justifications of conscientious objection in health care', *Bioethics*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 625-632.

McCrindle, M 2014, *Deaths and funerals in Australia: A statistical snapshot*, Bella Vista, NSW, pp. 9.

McCrindle Research 2017, *Faith and belief in Austraila: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends*, North Sydney, pp. 52.

McGee, A 2020, 'Voluntary assisted dying: should conscientious objection be unconditional?', *Journal of Pharmacy Practice and Research*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 117-119.

McLaughlin, AT, Van Tongeren, DR, Teahan, K, Davis, DE, Rice, KG & DeWall, CN 2020, 'Who are the religious "dones?": A cross-cultural latent profile analysis of formerly religious individuals', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, In press*.

Meisenberg, G, Rindermann, H, Patel, H & Woodley, MA 2012, 'Is it smart to believe in God? The relationship of religiosity with education and intelligence', *Temas em Psicologia*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 101-120.

Mercadante, L 2020, 'Spiritual struggles of nones and 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNRs)', *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 10, pp. 513-528.

Meyer, T 2013, 'The neurophysiology of religious conversion experiences', *Science Journal of Psychology*, vol. 2013, no. Art. sjpsych-230, pp. 1-5.

Missett, B 2008, *Soul Theft: How Religions Seized Control of Humanity's Spiritual Nature,* AuthorHouse.

Mrdjenovich, AJ 2019, 'Religiously/spiritually involved, but in doubt or disbelief—why? Healthy?', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 58, no. 5, pp. 1488-1515.

Munthe, C 2017, 'Conscientious refusal in healthcare: the Swedish solution', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 257-259.

Munthe, C & Nielsen, MEJ 2017, 'The legal ethical backbone of conscientious refusal', *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 59-68.

Murayama, A & Miura, A 2021, 'Religiosity and immanent justice reasoning: A replication study in Japan and the U.S', *Japanese Psychological Research, In press*.

Murray, K & Ciarroacchi, JW 2007, 'The dark side of religion, spirituality and the moral emotions: shame, guilt, and negative religiosity as markers for life dissatisfaction', *Journal of Pastoral Counselling*, vol. 42, pp. 22-41.

Murray, M & Moore, L 2009, 'Costly signaling and the origin of religion', *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 3-4, pp. 225-245.

Myskja, BK & Magelssen, M 2018, 'Conscientious objection to intentional killing: an argument for toleration', *BMC Medical Ethics*, vol. 19, no. 1, p. 82.

Napier, JL, Bettinsoli, ML & Suppes, A 2020, 'The palliative function of system-justifying ideologies', *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 34, pp. 129-134.

Nelson, TA, Abeyta, AA & Routledge, C 2021, 'What makes life meaningful for theists and atheists?', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 111-118.

Newberg, AB & Newberg, SK 2005, 'The neuropsychology of religious and spiritual experience', in RF Paloutzian and CL Park (eds), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, Guilford Press, New York, pp. 199-215.

Newspoll Research 2012, *Unpublished data: national survey into social attitudes on major policy issues*, Newspoll, Melbourne, pp. 7.

Ng, E 2020, *New McCrindle report finds Australians are spiritually hungry despite anti-Christian narrative*, The Catholic Leader, viewed 8 Mar 2021, <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/australia/new-mccrindle-report-finds-australians-are-spiritually-hungry-despite-anti-christian-narrative/>.

Nica, AA 2020, 'Leaving my religion: How ex-fundamentalists reconstruct identity related to well-being', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 2120-2134.

Nielsen, ME & Fultz, J 1995, 'Further examination of the relationships of religious orientation to religious conflict', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 36, no. 4, pp. 369-381.

Norenzayan, A & Gervais, WM 2013a, 'The origins of religious disbelief', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 20-25.

Norenzayan, A & Gervais, WM 2013b, 'The origins of religious disbelief', *Trends Cogn Sci*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 20-25.

Norenzayan, A, Henrich, J & Slingerland, E 2013, 'Religious prosociality', in PJ Richerson and MH Christiansen (eds), *Cultural Evolution: Society, Technology, Language, and Religion,* vol. 12, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, pp. 365-380.

NSW Electoral Commission 2019, *NSW State election results*, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://pastvtr.elections.nsw.gov.au/SG1901/LA/State/formal>.

O'Mallon, F 2021, *Lyle Shelton to replace Fred Nile in NSW upper house*, Australian Financial Review, viewed 13 Apr 2021, <https://www.afr.com/politics/lyle-shelton-to-replace-fred-nile-in-nsw-upper-house-20210412-p57iio>.

Olver, IN & Dutney, A 2012, 'A randomized, blinded study of the impact of intercessory prayer on spiritual well-being in patients with cancer', *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 18-27.

OutInPerth 2021, *Warren Entsch warns colleagues to "be careful" with religious discrimination bill*, viewed 3 Jul 2021, <https://www.outinperth.com/warren-entsch-warns-colleagues-to-be-careful-with-religious-freedom-bill/>.

Oviedo, L & Szocik, K 2020, 'Religious—and other beliefs: How much specificity?', *SAGE Open*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. e1-11.

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2021, *Religion [definition]*, viewed 14 Jun 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/religion?q=religion>.

Packard, J & Ferguson, TW 2018, 'Being done: Why people leave the church, but not their faith', *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 62, no. 4, pp. 499-517.

Paloutzian, RF 2014, 'Psychology of religious conversion and spiritual transformation', in LR Rambo and CE Farhadian (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Papyrakis, E & Selvaretnam, G 2011, 'The greying church: the impact of life expectancy on religiosity', *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 438-452.

Parish, H 2020, *Roman Catholic priests have been celibate for a thousand years - but this could change*, The Conversation, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://theconversation.com/roman-catholic-priests-have-been-celibate-for-a-thousand-years-but-this-could-change-126404>.

Patton, C 2014, *Curriculum review: Where did 'Judeo-Christian' come from?*, The Conversation, viewed 5 Jul 2021, <https://theconversation.com/curriculum-review-where-did-judeo-christian-come-from-21969>.

Paulo, N 2020, 'Moral intuitions between higher-order evidence and wishful thinking', in M Klenk (ed.) *Higher-Order Evidence and Moral Epistemology*, Routledge, Milton Park, pp. 54-77.

Peltzer, K 2003, 'Magical thinking and paranormal beliefs among secondary and university students in South Africa', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 35, no. 6, pp. 1419-1426.

Pennycook, G, Cheyne, JA, Koehler, DJ & Fugelsang, JA 2020, 'On the belief that beliefs should change according to evidence: Implications for conspiratorial, moral, paranormal, political, religious, and science beliefs', *Judgment & Decision Making*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 476-498.

Pennycook, G, Ross, RM, Koehler, DJ & Fugelsang, JA 2016, 'Atheists and agnostics are more reflective than religious believers: Four empirical studies and a meta-analysis', *PLoS ONE*, vol. 11, no. 4.

Pepper, M, Jackson, T & Uzzell, D 2010, 'A study of multidimensional religion constructs and values in the United Kingdom', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 127-146.

Pepper, M & Powell, R 2018, *Religion, spirituality and connections with churches: Results from the 2018 Australian Community Survey, NCLS Occasional Paper 36*, National Church Life Survey Research, viewed 6 Sep 2019, <https://www.ncls.org.au/news/religious-spiritual-neither-or-both>.

Perkins, M 2019, *"I cannot comprehend": Sex abuse royal commissioner slams Catholic leaders*, The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed 12 Dec 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/i-cannot-comprehend-sex-abuse-royal-commissioner-slams-catholic-leaders-20191210-p53inr.html>.

Persinger, M, Saroka, KS, Koren, SA & St-Pierre, LS 2010, 'The electromagnetic induction of mystical and altered states within the laboratory', *Journal of Consciousness Exploration & Research*, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 808-830.

Pew Research Center 2015, *Evangelical Protestants*, viewed 22 May 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>.

Pew Research Center 2016a, *The factors driving the growth of religious 'nones' in the U.S.*, viewed 24 Jun 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s/>.

Pew Research Center 2016b, *Religion in everyday life*, Washington DC, pp. 76.

Pew Research Center 2017, *Many countries favour specific religions, officially or unofficially*, Washington DC, pp. 37.

Pew Research Center 2018, *Why America's 'nones' don't identify with a religion*, viewed 27 May 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>.

Pew Research Center 2019a, *10 facts about atheists*, viewed 13 Mar 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>.

Pew Research Center 2019b, *Among religious 'nones', atheists and agnostics know the most about religion*, viewed 12 Nov 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/21/among-religious-nones-atheists-and-agnostics-know-the-most-about-religion/>.

Pew Research Center 2019c, *Religion's relationship to happiness, civic engagement and health around the world*, Washington DC, pp. 57.

Piff, PK, Dietze, P, Feinberg, M, Stancato, DM & Keltner, D 2015, 'Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 108, no. 6, pp. 883-899.

Pirutinsky, S 2014, *Interpersonal religious struggles within Orthodox Jewish families in Israel*, Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, New York, pp. 77.

Pöhls, K 2021, 'A complex simplicity: The relationship of religiosity and nonreligiosity to life satisfaction', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, In press*.

Ponce de Leon, R & Kay, AC 2020, 'Political ideology and compensatory control mechanisms', *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 34, pp. 112-117.

Powell, R & Pepper, M 2016, *Religion and spirituality in Australia*, National Church Life Survey Research, Sydney, pp. 2.

Power, M 2012, *Increased social and political equality in Europe has led to a decline in the popularity of religion*, LSE European Politics and Policy, viewed 27 Nov 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2012/10/10/religion-in-europe-mick-power/>.

Price, SA & Herringer, LG 2005, 'Spirituality, religious commitment, and psychological well-being', *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 16, pp. 245-259.

Pullella, P 2007, *Catholic Church buries limbo after centuries*, Reuters, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-limbo-idUSL2028721620070420>.

Quillen, EG 2012, *Circular academia: Navigating the dangerous waters of term re-assignment*, The Religious Studies Project, viewed 12 Oct 2020, <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/response/ethan-gjerset-quillen-circular-academia-navigating-the-dangerous-waters-of-term-re-assignment/>.

Ramsay, JE, Tong, EMW, Chowdhury, A & Ho, M-HR 2019, 'Teleological explanation and positive emotion serially mediate the effect of religion on well-being', *Journal of Personality*, vol. 87, no. 3, pp. 676-689.

Renton, S 2017, *Faith and belief in Australia*, McCrindle Research, viewed 14 Mar 2020, <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/faith-belief-australia/>.

Reynolds, CJ 2018, *Religiosity both increases and decreases deontological and utilitarian dilemma response inclinations: A process dissociation analysis*, M. Sci. thesis, Department of Psychology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, pp. 97.

Reynolds, CJ, Smith, SM & Conway, P 2020, 'Intrinsic religiosity attenuates the negative relationship between social disconnectedness and meaning in life', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, In press*.

Richter, CL 2017, '"I know it when I see it:" Humanism, secularism, and religious taxonomy', in RT Cragun, C Manning and LL Fazzino (eds), *Organized Secularism in the United States: New Directions in Research,* vol. 6, de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 13-30.

Riga, R & McKenna, K 2021, *Therese wants death on her own terms and has a message for parliamentarians about voluntary assisted dying*, ABC News, viewed 15 Jun 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-30/qld-voluntary-assisted-dying-message-parliamentarians/100173930>.

Riggio, HR, Uhalt, J & Matthies, BK 2014, 'Unanswered prayers: Religiosity and the god-serving bias', *Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 154, no. 6, pp. 491-514.

Robbins, M, Francis, L, McIlroy, D, Clarke, R & Pritchard, L 2010, 'Three religious orientations and five personality factors: An exploratory study among adults in England', *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 7, pp. 771-775.

Roberts, AJ, Wastell, CA & Polito, V 2020, 'Teleology and the intentions of supernatural agents', *Conscious Cogn*, vol. 80, p. e102905.

Ross, T 2006, 'Attachment and religious beliefs—Attachment styles in evangelical Christians', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 75-84.

Routledge, C, Roylance, C & Abeyta, AA 2017, 'Miraculous meaning: Threatened meaning increases belief in miracles', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 776-783.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, *Final report*, viewed 19 Jan 2018, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/final-report>.

Różycka-Tran, J 2017, 'Love thy neighbor? The effects of religious in/out-group identity on social behavior', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 115, pp. 7-12.

Rudd, K 2021, *Scott Morrison's partisan interpretation of biblical passages is disturbing for democracy*, The Guardian, viewed 1 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/01/scott-morrisons-partisan-interpretation-of-biblical-passages-is-disturbing-for-democracy?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other>.

Saiya, N 2021, *Proof that political privilege is harmful for Christianity*, Christianity Today, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/may-web-only/christian-persecution-political-privilege-growth-decline.html>.

Saiya, N & Manchanda, S 2021, 'Paradoxes of pluralism, privilege, and persecution: Explaining Christian growth and decline worldwide', *Sociology of Religion, In press*.

Sapolsky, R 2018, *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst,* Vintage, London.

Saroglou, V 2011, 'Believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging: The big four religious dimensions and cultural variation', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 8, pp. 1320-1340.

Saroglou, V, Clobert, M, Cohen, AB, Johnson, KA, Ladd, KL, Matthieu, VP, Adamovova, L, Blogowska, J, Brandt, P-Y, Safak, ÇC, Kwang-Kuo, H, Miglietta, A, Motti-Stefanidi, F, Muñoz-García, A, Murken, S, Roussiau, N & Tapia, VJ 2020, 'Believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging: The cognitive, emotional, moral, and social dimensions of religiousness across cultures', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 51, no. 7-8, pp. 551-575.

Savulescu, J & Schuklenk, U 2017, 'Doctors have no right to refuse medical assistance in dying, abortion or contraception', *Bioethics*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 162-170.

Savulescu, J & Schuklenk, U 2018, 'Conscientious objection and compromising the patient: Response to Hughes', *Bioethics*, vol. 32, no. 7, pp. 473-476.

Schachner, A, Zhu, L, Li, J & Kelemen, D 2017, 'Is the bias for function-based explanations culturally universal? Children from China endorse teleological explanations of natural phenomena', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, vol. 157, pp. 29-48.

Schnabel, A & Hjerm, M 2014, 'How the religious cleavages of civil society shape national identity', *SAGE Open*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-14.

Schnabel, L 2020, 'Religion across axes of inequality in the United States: Belonging, behaving, and believing at the intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality', *Religions*, vol. 11, no. 6, pp. [296]1-27.

Schnabel, L 2021, 'Opiate of the masses? Inequality, religion, and political ideology in the United States', *Social Forces*, vol. 99, no. 3, pp. 979-1012.

Schnell, T 2012, 'Spirituality with and without religion—Differential relationships with personality', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 33-61.

Schuklenk, U 2015, 'Conscientious objection in medicine: Private ideological convictions must not supercede public service obligations', *Bioethics*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. ii-iii.

Schuurmans-Stekhoven, JB 2011, 'Is it God or just the data that moves in mysterious ways? How well-being research may be mistaking faith for virtue', *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 100, no. 2, pp. 313-330.

Schwadel, P 2016, 'Does higher education cause religious decline?: A longitudinal analysis of the within- and between-person effects of higher education on religiosity', *Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 759-786.

Sedlar, AE, Stauner, N, Pargament, KI, Exline, JJ, Grubbs, JB & Bradley, DF 2018, 'Spiritual struggles among atheists: Links to psychological distress and well-being', *Religions*, vol. 9, no. 8, pp. [242]1-21.

Seyfarth, RM & Cheney, DL 2013, 'Affiliation, empathy, and the origins of theory of mind', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, vol. 110 Suppl. 2, pp. 10349-10356.

Sharabi, M & Kay, A 2021, 'The relative centrality of life domains among secular, traditionalist and Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) men in Israel', *Community, Work & Family*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 60-76.

Shariff, A, Willard, AK, Andersen, T & Norenzayan, A 2016, 'Religious priming: A meta-analysis with a focus on prosociality', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 20, pp. 27-48.

Shariff, AF & Norenzayan, A 2007, 'God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game', *Psychological Science*, vol. 18, no. 9, pp. 803-809.

Shashkevich, A 2018, *Stanford scholar tackles the history of people's obsession with crystals*, Stanford University, viewed 23 May 2021,

<https://news.stanford.edu/2018/08/09/understanding-peoples-obsession-crystals/>.

Shepherd, T 2021, *The tricky tactic conservatives have adopted from the US - be the aggressor while claiming victimhood*, The Advertiser, viewed 18 Jul 2021, <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/tory-shepherd-the-tricky-tactic-conservatives-have-adopted-from-the-us-be-the-aggressor-while-claiming-victimhood/news-story/b03207fbb0fab9c4a693e907f34c4345>.

Sherlock, P 2012, *Why Anglican women can be bishops in Australia but not England*, The Conversation, viewed 27 Jun 2021, <https://theconversation.com/why-anglican-women-can-be-bishops-in-australia-but-not-england-11337>.

Shermer, M 1999, 'Why people believe in God: An empirical study on a deep question', *Humanist*, vol. 59, no. 6, 1999 Nov 01, Buffalo, N.Y., p. 20.

Shermer, M 2000, *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science,* W.H. Freeman, New York.

Shor, E & Roelfs, DJ 2013, 'The longevity effects of religious and nonreligious participation: A meta-analysis and meta-regression', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 120-145.

Shults, F, Gore, R, Lemos, CM & Wildman, WJ 2018a, 'Why do the Godless prosper? Modeling the cognitive and coalitional mechanisms that promote atheism', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 10, pp. 218-228.

Shults, FL, Lane, JE, Wildman, WJ, Diallo, S, Lynch, CJ & Gore, R 2018b, 'Modelling terror management theory: computer simulations of the impact of mortality salience on religiosity', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 77-100.

Singh, P, Tewari, S, Kesberg, R, Karl, JA, Bulbulia, J & Fischer, R 2020, 'Time investments in rituals are associated with social bonding, affect and subjective health: a longitudinal study of Diwali in two Indian communities', *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B Biological Sciences*, vol. 375, no. 1805, p. e20190430.

Singleton, A, Rasmussen, ML, Halafoff, A & Bouma, GD 2019, *The AGZ study: Project report*, ANU, Deakin and Monash Universities, pp. 11.

Skaperdas, S & Vaidya, S 2020, 'Why did pre-modern states adopt Big-God religions?', *Public Choice*, vol. 182, no. 3, pp. 373-394.

Smalling, R & Schuklenk, U 2017, 'Against the accommodation of subjective healthcare provider beliefs in medicine: Counteracting supporters of conscientious objector accommodation arguments', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 253-256.

Smith, J 2020, 'Transmission of faith in families: The influence of religious ideology', *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 82, no. 3, pp. 332-356.

Smith, JM & Halligan, CL 2021, 'Making meaning without a maker: Secular consciousness through narrative and cultural practice', *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 82, no. 1, pp. 85-110.

Snook, DW, Williams, MJ & Horgan, JG 2019, 'Issues in the sociology and psychology of religious conversion', *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 68, no. 2, pp. 223-240.

Soler, M 2016, 'The faith of sacrifice: Leadership trade-offs in an Afro-Brazilian religion', *Human Nature*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 372-394.

Soler, M & Lenfesty, HL 2016, 'Coerced coordination, not cooperation', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, vol. 39, p. 65.

Speed, D 2021, 'Godless in the Great White North: Assessing the health of Canadian atheists using data from the 2011/2012 Canadian community health survey', *Journal of Religion and Health, In press*.

Speed, D, Coleman, TJ & Langston, J 2018, 'What do you mean, "What does it all mean?" Atheism, nonreligion, and life meaning', *SAGE Open*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-13.

Staff Writers 2021, *Euthanasia bill passes in South Australia*, The Catholic Leader, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://catholicleader.com.au/news/australia/euthanasia-bill-passes-in-south-australia/>.

Stagnaro, MN 2018, *Building a wall around belief: Ideological communities, belief questioning and the suppression of deliberation*, Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, Ann Arbor, pp. 116.

Stahl, RY & Emanuel, EJ 2017, 'Physicians, not conscripts - Conscientious objection in health care', *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 376, no. 14, pp. 1380-1385.

Stammers, TG 2017, 'A reasonable objection? Commentary on 'Further clarity on cooperation and morality'', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, p. 203.

Stein, DH, Hobson, NM & Schroeder, J 2020, 'A sacred commitment: How rituals promote group survival', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 114-120.

Stobbe, K 2021, *Australia's changing spiritual landscape*, McCrindle Research, viewed 18 Jun 2021, <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/australias-changing-spiritual-landscape/>.

Stoppa, TM & Lefkowitz, ES 2010, 'Longitudinal changes in religiosity among emerging adult college students', *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 23-38.

Storm, I & Wilson, DS 2009, 'Liberal and conservative Protestant denominations as different socioecological strategies', *Human Nature*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 1-24.

Streib, H 2001, 'Faith development theory revisited: The religious styles perspective', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 143-158.

Streib, H 2008, 'More spiritual than religious: Changes in the religious field require new approaches', in H Streib, A Dinter and K Söderblom (eds), *Lived Religion - Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches. Essays in Honor of Hans-Gunter Heimbrock*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 53-67.

Streib, H 2014, 'Deconversion', in LR Rambo and CE Farhadian (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Religious Conversion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Streib, H 2021, 'Leaving religion: deconversion', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 139-144.

Streib, H, Zhuo Job, C & Hood, RW, Jr. 2020, 'Categorizing people by their preference for religious styles: Four types derived from evaluation of Faith Development interviews', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 112-127.

Su, A 2016, 'Judging religious sincerity', *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 28-48.

Sulmasy, DP 2008, 'What is conscience and why is respect for it important?', *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 135-149.

Swatwood House, A 2020, *The long history of how Jesus came to resemble a white European*, The Conversation, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://theconversation.com/the-long-history-of-how-jesus-came-to-resemble-a-white-european-142130>.

Swinburne, R 2010, *Is there a God?,* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Symons, X 2017, 'Two conceptions of conscience and the problem of conscientious objection', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 245-247.

Szczesniak, M & Timoszyk-Tomczak, C 2020, 'Religious struggle and life satisfaction among adult Christians: Self-esteem as a mediator', *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 59, no. 6, pp. 2833-2856.

Szekely, R, Opre, A & Miu, A 2015, 'Religiosity enhances emotion and deontological choice in moral dilemmas', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 79, pp. 104-109.

Ten Kate, J, de Koster, W & van der Waal, J 2017, 'The effect of religiosity on life satisfaction in a secularized context: Assessing the relevance of believing and belonging', *Review of Religious Research*, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 135-155.

Thagard, P 2005, 'The emotional coherence of religion', *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, pp. 58-74.

Thiessen, J & Wilkins-Laflamme, S 2017, 'Becoming a religious none: Irreligious socialization and disaffiliation', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 64-82.

Tomazin, F 2021, *Melbourne Catholic Archbishop proposes big church restructure over 'serious challenges'*, The Age, viewed 16 Jul 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/melbourne-catholic-archbishop-proposes-big-church-restructure-over-serious-challenges-20210715-p58a4t.html>.

Trigg, R 2017, 'Conscientious objection and "effective referral"', *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 32-43.

Tsai, M 2007, *The end of limbo*, Slate, viewed 28 Jun 2021, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2007/04/what-happens-to-the-babies-who-used-to-be-in-limbo.html>.

Turner, DD 2006, 'Just another drug? A philosophical assessment of randomised controlled studies on intercessory prayer', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 32, no. 8, pp. 487-90.

Uecker, JE, Regnerus, MD & Vaaler, ML 2007, 'Losing my religion: The social sources of religious decline in early adulthood', *Social Forces*, vol. 85, no. 4, pp. 1667-1692.

Undurraga, V & Sadler, M 2019, 'The misrepresentation of conscientious objection as a new strategy of resistance to abortion decriminalisation', *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 1610280.

United Nations 1948, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, viewed <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, 2005, *Kaufman v. McCaughtry*, Vol. 04-1914.

University of Oxford 2016, *Practical ethics: Concensus statement on conscientious objection in healthcare*, viewed 12 Mar 2021, <http://blog.practicalethics.ox.ac.uk/2016/08/consensus-statement-on-conscientious-objection-in-healthcare/>.

Uzarevic, F & Coleman, TJ 2021, 'The psychology of nonbelievers', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 131-138.

Uzarevic, F, Saroglou, V & Clobert, M 2017, 'Are atheists undogmatic?', *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 116, pp. 164-170.

Vacek, EC 2017, 'Mere sincerity', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 201-202.

Valdesolo, P & Graham, J 2014, 'Awe, uncertainty, and agency detection', *Psychological Science*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 170-178.

Van Cappellen, P & Saroglou, V 2012, 'Awe activates religious and spiritual feelings and behavioral intentions', *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, vol. 4, pp. 223-236.

Van Cappellen, P, Toth-Gauthier, M, Saroglou, V & Fredrickson, B 2016, 'Religion and well-being: The mediating role of positive emotions', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, vol. 17, pp. 485-505.

van Elk, M & Aleman, A 2017, 'Brain mechanisms in religion and spirituality: An integrative predictive processing framework', *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 73, pp. 359-378.

van Elk, M & Snoek, L 2020, 'The relationship between individual differences in gray matter volume and religiosity and mystical experiences: A preregistered voxel-based morphometry study', *European Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 850-865.

van Eyghen, H 2020, 'Religious belief as acquired second nature', *Zygon*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 185-206.

van Prooijen, JW, Douglas, KM & De Inocencio, C 2018, 'Connecting the dots: Illusory pattern perception predicts belief in conspiracies and the supernatural', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 320-335.

van Tilburg, WAP, Igou, ER, Maher, PJ, Moynihan, AB & Martin, DG 2019, 'Bored like Hell: Religiosity reduces boredom and tempers the quest for meaning', *Emotion*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 255-269.

Vargas, N 2012, 'Retrospective accounts of religious disaffiliation in the United States: Stressors, skepticism, and political factors', *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 200-223.

Villani, D, Sorgente, A, Iannello, P & Antonietti, A 2019, 'The role of spirituality and religiosity in subjective well-being of individuals with different religious status', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 1525.

Vitorino, LM, Low, G & Vianna, LAC 2016, 'Linking spiritual and religious coping with the quality of life of community-dwelling older adults and nursing home residents', *Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine*, vol. 2, pp. 1-9.

Voland, E 2009, 'Evaluating the evolutionary status of religiosity and religiousness', in E Voland and W Schiefenhovel (eds), *The Biological Evolution of Religious Mind and Behavior*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 9-24.

Waldmann, MR, Nagel, J & Weigmann, A 2012, 'Moral judgment', in KJ Holyoak and RG Morrison (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*, Oxford University Press, New York NY, pp. 274-299.

Walker, AC, Turpin, MH, Fugelsang, JA & Bialek, M 2020, 'Better the two devils you know, than the one you don't: Predictability influences moral judgment', *PsyArXiv Preprint*.

Waller, NG, Kojetin, BA, Bouchard, TJ, Lykken, DT & Tellegen, A 1990, 'Genetic and environmental influences on religious interests, attitudes, and values: A study of twins reared apart and together', *Psychological Science*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 138-142.

Warden, I 2017, *Australians more likely to be spiritual but not religious*, The Sydney Morning Herald, viewed 23 May 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/australians-more-likely-to-be-spiritual-but-not-religious-20170908-gydjtn.html>.

Warren, D 2015, *Parents' choice of primary school*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Southbank, Victoria, pp. 20.

Watson-Jones, RE & Legare, CH 2016, 'The social functions of group rituals', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 42-46.

Waxman, SG & Geschwind, N 1975, 'The interictal behavior syndrome of temporal lobe epilepsy', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 32, no. 12, pp. 1580-1586.

Wester, G 2015, 'Conscientious objection by health care professionals', *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 10, no. 7, pp. 427-437.

Westerink, H 2012, 'Spirituality in psychology of religion: A concept in search of its meaning', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 3-15.

Whitaker, RJ 2018a, *Christians in Australia are not persecuted, and it is insulting to argue they are*, The Conversation, viewed 5 Jul 2021, <https://theconversation.com/christians-in-australia-are-not-persecuted-and-it-is-insulting-to-argue-they-are-96351>.

Whitaker, RJ 2018b, *Jesus wasn't white: he was a brown-skinned, Middle Eastern Jew. Here's why that matters*, The Conversation, viewed 14 Mar 2021, <https://theconversation.com/jesus-wasnt-white-he-was-a-brown-skinned-middle-eastern-jew-heres-why-that-matters-91230>.

White, B, Willmott, L, Close, E & Downie, J 2021, 'Leglislative options to address institutional objections to voluntary assisted dying in Australia', *UNSW Law Journal*, vol. 2021, no. 3, pp. 1-19.

White, CJM, Baimel, A & Norenzayan, A 2021, 'How cultural learning and cognitive biases shape religious beliefs', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 34-39.

White, KRG, Kinney, D, Danek, RH, Smith, B & Harben, C 2020, 'The Resistance to Change-Beliefs Scale: Validation of a new measure of conservative ideology', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 20-35.

Whitson, JA & Galinsky, AD 2008, 'Lacking control increases illusory pattern rerception', *Science*, vol. 322, no. 5898, pp. 115-117.

Wicclair, MR 2012, *Conscientious Objection in Health Care: An Ethical Analysis,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Wicclair, MR 2019, 'Conscientious objection, moral integrity, and professional obligations', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 62, no. 3, pp. 543-559.

Wildman, WJ, Sosis, R, Spezio, ML & Bulbulia, J 2015, 'The emerging psychology of religion', *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 89-90.

Willard, AK, Baimel, A, Turpin, H, Jong, J & Whitehouse, H 2020, 'Rewarding the good and punishing the bad: The role of karma and afterlife beliefs in shaping moral norms', *Evolution and Human Behavior*, vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 385-396.

Willard, AK & Norenzayan, A 2017, '"Spiritual but not religious": Cognition, schizotypy, and conversion in alternative beliefs', *Cognition*, vol. 165, pp. 137-146.

Wilson, M 2014, *Seventh Circuit: Atheism considered a religion; survey of prisoner interest required*, Prison Legal News, viewed 2021 2014, <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2014/jun/5/seventh-circuit-atheism-considered-religion-survey-prisoner-interest-required/>.

Wixwat, M & Saucier, G 2021, 'Being spiritual but not religious', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 40, pp. 121-125.

Wojcik, SP, Hovasapian, A, Graham, J, Motyl, M & Ditto, PH 2015, 'Conservatives report, but liberals display, greater happiness', *Science*, vol. 347, no. 6227, pp. 1243-1246.

Wyatt, T 2020, *Church leader who said coronavirus was God's punishment for gay marriage tests positive for Covid-19*, The Independent, viewed 22 May 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/coronavirus-ukraine-orthodox-church-gay-marriage-positive-b419337.html>.

Xygalatas, D, Khan, S, Lang, M, Kundt, R, Kundtová-Klocová, E, Krátký, J & Shaver, J 2019, 'Effects of extreme ritual practices on psychophysiological well-being', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 60, no. 5, pp. 699-707.

Yaden, DB, Eichstaedt, JC, Kern, ML, Smith, LK, Buffone, A, Stillwell, DJ, Kosinski, M, Ungar, LH, Seligman, MEP & Schwartz, HA 2017, 'The language of religious affiliation: Social, emotional, and cognitive differences', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 444-452.

Ysseldyk, R, Matheson, K & Anisman, H 2010, 'Religiosity as identity: Toward an understanding of religion from a social identity perspective', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 60-71.

Zolf, B 2019, 'No conscientious objection without normative justification: Against conscientious objection in medicine', *Bioethics*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 146-153.

Zuckerman, M, Li, C & Diener, E 2018, 'Religion as an exchange system: The interchangeability of God and Government in a provider role', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 44, no. 8, pp. 1201-1213.

Zurlo, GA & Johnson, TM 2016, 'Unaffiliated, yet religious: A methodological and demographic analysis', in G Cipriani and F Garelli (eds), *Sociology of Atheism*, Brill, Boston, pp. 50-74.

www.rationalist.com.au