RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Religiosity in Australia

Part 4: Religion and charity

Neil Francis — RSA Fellow

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Cover image: An example of religious charity (donations to religion are associated strongly with church attendance) — cash donations are publicly collected in a Ukrainian Catholic church in New York. (Credit: Iev Radin)

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.

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Foreword

Peter FitzSimons

It is the hoariest chestnut of the lot, one of the first things we were told by the wise-heads as we were about to enter the adult world: “Never discuss religion or politics.”

The idea was that to take your place in polite society you had to steer away from the two topics most likely to give rise to opinions that are as passionate and deeply felt as they risk being divergent from your interlocutors, hence . . . heat.

So, avoid!

Which brings us to the subject of the report you are about to read, occupying the very space we were so warned not to go into, the space where in fact, politics and religion intersect, looking at everything from the tax-free status that religions and religious donations enjoy in Australia, to the very nature of donations made by religious versus non-religious people in this country, the purposes those contributions are made for, whether or not donors think their contributions are really for a good cause, whether they also personally benefit from their contribution, and how “voluntary” they feel their contributions are.

The subject matter has surely never been more topical.

I write in the very week that the Hillsong Church has been accused by Independent MP Andrew Wilkie in the Federal Parliament of using church funds on — as reported in my own paper, the Sydney Morning Herald —

everything from private jets, to luxury retreats to designer goods and custom skateboards, doing, and I quote, “the kind of shopping that would embarrass a Kardashian.”

The document tabled by Wilkie in parliament, which detailed the allegations from a Hillsong whistleblower, alleged, among other things, that “in 2021 four members of the Houston family and their friends enjoyed a three-day luxury retreat in Cancun, Mexico using $150,000 of church money.”

The tabled document alleged there had been “$82,000 on allowances for pastors and executive staff to purchase meals, $26,000 on entertainment, $37,000 on flowers, $171,000 on gifts, $288,000 on honorariums to guest speakers, $13,000 on high tea” and more.

“Conversely, the amount spent on helping ‘people in need’ included just $2,900 for pastoral care direct costs, and $1,500 on pastoral care visitations.”

Interesting, then, that one of the findings of this research volume is that those who donate to religion are far less likely than most to say their contribution is for a good cause.

To be fair, a spokesperson for Hillsong has denied all such allegations, but you get the drift. It is just one more case where modern reality appears to crash headlong into the view once as cherished as it was widespread that religion is a force for good, led and practiced by good people in the service of goodness.

Often, no doubt, it still can be — any who say otherwise can count on being on the receiving end of very strong, very passionate views, mostly based on the beliefs they were raised with.

A mistake, then, to go into such fraught territory?

Not at all. No doubt it will generate some heat from the usual suspects, and the critics will claim the Rationalist Society is out on a witch-hunt. It is doing no such thing. As it has often noted, this organisation is not anti-religion, it is pro secularism — and this report is the same.

A fair clue as to the veracity of the above is that a patron of the Rationalist Society, former High Court Justice Michael Kirby, is a devoted Anglican while still being a passionate advocate of secularism — the notion that the state should treat the religious and the non-religious with absolute equality.

And here is the virtue of the whole exercise. This volume is not built on opinions, on deeply felt passions, on unverified claims or upon dubious sources. It is built on facts based on deep research, and that is what is most needed in the current debate that is warming up as we speak.

As the author has noted, the findings "are based on empirical, quantitative analysis of gold-standard Australian university data sets, especially including the very significant Giving Australia Study 2016. This dataset was generated by scholars at Queensland University of Technology and Swinburne University."

It is fine academic work and should help inform the debate. Given that a number of findings of the work are less flattering of religious Australians' contribution to charity than vocal religionists would have us believe, the debate is likely to be vigorous.

I commend this work, and am honoured to have been asked to write the Foreword.

Peter FitzSimons
March 2023

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.


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ALL DONATIONS ARE GIVEN AWAY OR SOLD FOR WELFARE PROGRAMMES
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Executive summary

In 2016, Australians donated $11.2 billion to charities and non-profit organisations with a mean of $764 and median of $200 per donor (McGregor-Lowndes et al. 2017). Our understanding of this massive financial contribution is limited, especially in relation to religion.

This report integrates hard empirical data from authoritative international and domestic sources to provide insights into volunteerism and charitable (monetary) giving, to quantify and qualify these behaviours in respect of religion and religiosity. In addition, it examines the charitability of attitudes toward Australian government help for First Nations people and for those in need overseas.

It assesses the data in relation to the widely-held belief that religious Australians are more prosocial than their non-religious cousins regarding volunteerism and charitable donation. At minimum, this requires (a) establishing that the religious indeed do volunteer and donate more, and (b) that the surpluses are driven by faith and not by other factors. The nature of the volunteering and donating is also important.

Important notes

1. **Charitable sectors.** In this report, charities are divided into 13 sectors, consistent with the Giving Australia Study (2016). They are: international aid, welfare, medical research, emergency relief, civic causes (environment, animal welfare, and justice), healthcare, education, sports, politics and business, arts, **religion**, hobbies and recreation clubs, and "other".

2. **The "religion" charitable sector.** References to the "religion" charitable sector relate to *congregational* religion, that is, charities whose purposes are support and advancement of their religious beliefs and activities. It does not include charities whose purpose is to provide services to *others* — such as welfare or emergency relief — but which happen to have a religious ethos.

3. **More details in the Summary section.** Those with a deeper interest in the wider range of findings can find more information in the final Summary section, and of course in the main body of the report.

4. This study assesses the charitable character of Australians as **individuals**. It does not provide any analysis or commentary about the quality or quantity of charitable *organisations* — whether religious or secular — or the services as delivered to those in need,

Key findings

In headline figures it is true that Australia's religionists volunteer and donate more than do the non-religious (Nones). However, underlying findings about the nature of these surpluses paint a less glowing picture.

- Australia's religionists' surplus in **volunteering** largely occurs in respect of their **own religious congregation** rather than delivery of support services to others.
- In all sectors other than religion, Devouts volunteer at **lower rates** than Nones, except in international aid, where rates are similar.
- Religionists' surplus in **charitable giving** also occurs largely in respect of their **own religious congregation**.
- In 2016, some $11.2 billion was donated to charity. Of that, 29% or **$3.2 billion went to religion** — that is, to congregational faith — much more than any other sector including welfare, emergency relief and international aid.
- Most (87%) of this religious largesse is donated by **Devouts, just 11% of the population**, and is significantly supported by a much higher rate of **planned giving** than any other sector.
- Of the 13 charitable sectors, donors to **congregational religion**:
    - Report the equal **lowest** rating (20%, along with education) of their donation being for a "**good cause**".
    - Are **very unlikely** (10% of donors to religion) to believe that their donation will either **help unknown others**, or **make the world a better place**.
    - Report the second **highest** rating for **personal benefit** (50%, after 67% for education), with personal benefit rising with donation size.
    - **Personally benefit** from their donation proportional to **increasing religiosity**: 28% of Notionals, 42% of Occasionals, 50% of Regulars, and 61% of Devouts.
    - Have the **highest** rate of donating to just **one organisation** in the sector which, along with the high rate of personal benefit, illustrates greater self-interest.

    - Display by far the **most negative Donation Nett Prosociality Index (DNPI) score** weighted by dollar amount (-0.87) compared with all other sectors (sports -0.38 to international aid +0.22).[1] These findings raise serious questions about the assumed prosociality of religion.

    - Show an extremely **elevated** rate of **feeling coerced** (54%, vs 3%–12% all other sectors). Coercion rates are high across religions, religiosities and amounts donated, but do not differ by planned versus ad hoc giving. These findings raise serious questions about voluntariness.

- Even in sectors other than religion**, Christians** report a statistically higher rate of personal benefit (25%) and non-Christian religionists lower personal benefit (17%), than Nones (21%).

- Australia's **Christians** hold the most **negative attitudes** toward **helping First Nations** people or granting them land rights, and are significantly more likely to say the government gives **too much in overseas aid**.

In summary, Australia's religious don't *personally* on average contribute more than Nones to helping *different others*. While non-Christian religionists demonstrate less self-interest than Nones in their donations to non-religion sectors, Christians show greater average self-interest as well as hostility toward First Nations people in need.

Coercion in the religion sector deserves attention. Charities lawfully exist to provide public benefit. Causing psycho-financial harm is an unacceptable offense against that primary principle.

This new evidence militates against Basic Religious Charities enjoying easy and privileged charitable status compared with all other charity types. Indeed, it suggests they warrant greater, not less, oversight by the Charities and Not-for-profits Commission and by parliament.

[1] Overall, nett selfish donation reasons exceed nett altruistic reasons reported.

Introduction

In **Part 1** of this series on religiosity in Australia, 'Personal faith according to the numbers', we examined current levels of religiosity and their substantial and continued drop from previous decades.

In **Part 2**, 'Religious minds, religious collectives', we explored psychological factors underscoring religiosity, differentiated personal conscience from organisational rules (faux "institutional conscience"), and analysed correlates of Australians' drop in religiosity and its connection with low trust in churches.

In **Part 3**, 'Religion and politics', we revealed how Australians with any connection to religion are more likely to hold more conservative attitudes toward economic, environmental, regulatory and defence, and other political domains along with *fear of change* (not religious faith) that explains their greater tendency to vote for conservative candidates as well as political parties that offer "small target" policy platforms.

In this **Part 4**, we again employ high-quality academic data sets to determine whether religious Australians are more likely to engage in prosocial charitable activity: **volunteering** and **charitable (monetary) giving**, as well as their attitudes toward helping First Nations people and those doing it tough overseas.

A major flow of cash to charities and non-profits

The Giving Australia research team calculated in 2017 that in the previous year, Australians donated around $11 billion to charities and non-profit organisations with a mean of $764 and median of $200 per donor (McGregor-Lowndes et al. 2017). Our understanding of this massive financial contribution is limited in respect of religiosity, and especially regarding giving to religious congregations — that is, for the purpose of "advancing religion".

Informing public debate and governance reform

This empirical research helps inform public debate and governance reform. For example, Australia's "Basic Religious Charity" law grants religious *congregational-only* organisations that meet the necessary criteria automatic rights to register as charities. The law exempts such charities from a raft of obligations with which all other charities must comply, including financial information and reports, and Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) governance standards (ACNC 2022).

The arrangement was introduced late in the last Rudd Labor government and left in place by successor Coalition governments. However, there have been ongoing calls for its abolition from lawyers, academics and not-for-profit tax specialists (Hardaker 2022b).

Money machines?

According to analysis, the Church of Scientology has moved tens of millions of dollars into Australia where its profits enjoy minimal public scrutiny and tax free status (Schneiders 2021). This, despite the church having just 1681 adherents in Australia at the 2016 national census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017) and 1655 at the 2021 census.[2]

Australia's Pentecostal church, Hillsong, is under investigation by the ACNC for alleged breaches of charity law in relation to its finances (Hardaker 2022a).

And the Mormon church stands accused of amassing (globally) over $100 billion in tax-free funds, providing in reality a tiny fraction (just 13%) of its claimed charitable donations, and operating structures in Australia that allow it to collect hundreds of millions of dollars in tax exemptions that are, it is claimed, not available to other religions (Schneiders, Steinfort & Clancy 2022).

From the organisational to the individual

While many religious (and non-religious) charities clearly do good works for the wider community, our focus in this investigation is not religious charitable organisations, but the charitable behaviours of religious and non-religious Australians as individuals.

In real-life practice, do religious Australians donate more, about the same, or less than non-religious Australians, to charity? Do they volunteer more, about the same, or less? Would charitable behaviour "collapse" if people weren't religious?

In the USA, a majority say that good works would still happen even if there were no people of faith or religious organisations to do them (Heart + Mind poll 2017, in Zinsmeister 2019) (Figure 1).

Such questions are posed in Australia as well, for example by Justice the Hon. Sarah Derrington, President of the Australian Law Reform Commission (Derrington 2019), who concludes that religion's contribution is worthy of special approbation. Others too assert that religionists are more prosocial and specifically more charitable (e.g. Roy Morgan Research 2014).

[2] Collected from ABS Table Builder.

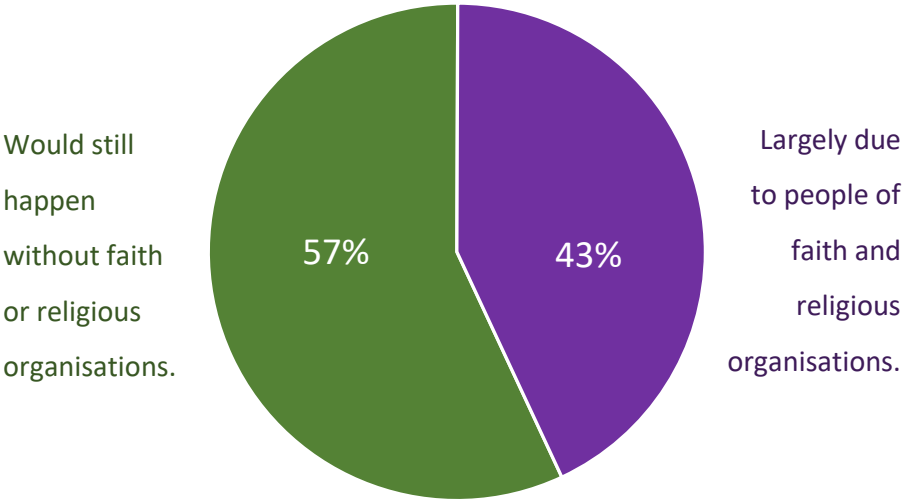

Figure 1: USA attitudes: would good works still happen without religion?
Source: Heart + Mind poll 2017 *in* Zinsmeister (2019)

To help answer these questions empirically, this report employs a key data set amongst others: the **2016 Giving Australia Survey (GAS 2016)**. This study was led by scholars at the Queensland University of Technology and Swinburne University. It comprises a sample size of well over 6000 Australians. It allows us to peer into specific connections between religion and charitable behaviour, helping to uncover the true nature of such relationships. Important confounding factors are also discussed, such as income in relation to monetary giving, and work status (time availability) in relation to volunteering.

Individuals, not organisations: This report examines the religiosity and volunteering/donation behaviour of Australians as individuals. It does not seek to compare and contrast the contributions of religious versus non-religious *institutional* charitable providers of services such as welfare, emergency relief, or international aid.

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 and their significant impacts, using high-quality data.

Methodology

The results presented in this report are based on peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles, reports of government and other authorities, and the author's statistical analysis of high-quality raw data from university-conducted surveys including the Giving Australia Study, Australian Election Studies, the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, and the Australian Values Studies.

Segmentation models

This report employs specific personal identity segmentation models to aid the analysis of religious and social identity and their associations with charity attitudes and behaviours.

Australian Religious Identity 6-Segment model (ARI6)

This model segments people into cohorts from least to most religious, using religious affiliation, and religious service attendance besides weddings and funerals:

- *Rejecters:* No religious affiliation, never attend services.
- *Socialisers:* No religious affiliation, sometimes attend services.
- *Notionals:* Religious affiliation, *never* attend services.
- *Occasionals:* Religious affiliation, attend occasionally.
- *Regulars:* Religious affiliation, attend monthly/fortnightly.
- *Devouts:* Religious affiliation, attend weekly or more often.

Note: The GAS 2016 research methodology doesn't allow distinguishing between ARI6 Rejecters and Socialisers. Therefore, GAS 2016 ARI6 results are reported in *five* segments, with Rejecters and Socialisers combined as Nones (no religious denomination affiliation regardless of service attendance).

Australian Social Identity 6-Segment model (ASI6)

This model segments people into socially *Progressive*, *Moderate* and *Conservative* cohorts based on attitudes toward sexual expression and gender roles. Each of these three segments is then split by religious affiliation — none (*Secular*) versus any (*Religious*), resulting in six segments from *Secular Progressives* to *Religious Conservatives*. The model can reveal a "**religious premium**" in attitudes within each of the three major social cohorts, which may not be apparent by religiosity (ARI6) alone.

Formal segment names from these models always appear with capital letters in this report.

Polarisation analysis

A number of analyses in this report employ "polarisation" analysis. This can be useful when comparing attitude differences by religiosity, social attitude, political party alignment, or other respondent characteristic.

It can be used where respondents choose from pre-set answers from positive (e.g. *strongly agree*), through neutral (*neither agree nor disagree*), to negative (*strongly disagree*). While "ignoring" the neutral responses, polarisation analysis subtracts the nett negative from the nett positive responses.

This provides a shorthand notation of the nett degree to which attitudes are indeed polarised at one or other end of the spectrum. Since polarisation can differ in the *opposite direction* amongst respondent characteristics, its value can exceed 100%, and technically can range up to 200%.

Charity sectors of the Giving Australia Study 2016

The Giving Australia Study (2016) divides charities into 13 sectors:

1. International aid
2. Welfare
3. Medical research
4. Emergency relief
5. Civic causes (environment, animal welfare, justice)
6. Healthcare
7. Education
8. Sports
9. Politics and business
10. Arts
11. Religion (congregational only; not service delivery to others)
12. Hobbies and recreation clubs
13. Other (mostly a mix of the above not elsewhere captured, plus granting/gifting charities)

Abbreviations

ABS — Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACNC — Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

AES — Australian Election Study (ANU)

ANU — Australian National University

ARI6 — Australian Religious Identity 6-segment model

ASI6 — Australian Social Identity 6-segment model

AuSSA — Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (ANU)

AVS — Australian Values Study (ANU)

Chr. — Christian (in charts, tables)

CSEI — Charity Sector Engagement Index

Dones — Nones who have had a past religious affiliation

DNPI — Donation nett prosociality index

DSII — Donation self-interest index

GAS — Giving Australia Study (Queensland University of Technology and Swinburne University)

Nevers — Nones who have never had a religious affiliation

Nones — People with no current religious affiliation

Notes

Author analysis: Unless otherwise noted, all analyses of ANU/Dataverse study raw data (e.g. AES, AuSSA, AVS, GAS) were conducted by Neil Francis, not by the study sponsors. Study sponsors are not responsible for results from their studies appearing in this report.

Non-respondents excluded: Unless otherwise noted, all results are net of non-respondents.

Rounding: Due to mathematical rounding of individual figures in a set, the sums of some reported percentage components may add up to slightly more or less than 100%.


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Rotary
Club of Morley

Volunteerism

International evidence

In this report, volunteerism refers to the voluntary, unpaid contribution of one's time and effort for organised community service.

International research shows that across at least Europe (but probably world-wide) not only are the time-rich far more likely than the time-poor to volunteer, but different kinds of volunteering — like social awareness versus social justice, politics, education, or leisure — vary with personal background. Religiosity has little effect (Gil-Lacruz, Marcuello & Saz-Gil 2017).

Some studies suggest that Catholics volunteer more than Protestants (Wilson & Janoski 1995), with Protestants likely to volunteer mostly within their church (Park & Smith 2001). Volunteerism correlates with church attendance in less (but not more) religious countries, also confirming that Protestants volunteer more commonly for their own religious purposes than for helping unrelated parties (Ruiter & De Graaf 2006).

Summary: International evidence regarding religion and volunteering is at best mixed, but more consistent in suggesting that Protestants in particular are more likely to volunteer in their own church rather than more widely.

Volunteerism in Australia

A tale of two Australian Prime Ministers

The international findings are illustrated by anecdotal evidence from two conservative religious Australian former Prime Ministers: Mr Tony Abbott, a devout Catholic, and Mr Scott Morrison, a devout Pentecostal. While Mr Abbott volunteers with the NSW Rural Fire Service (Channel 9 Today 2019), Mr Morrison was criticised around the world for holidaying in Hawaii as deadly blazes raged across Australia, dismissively saying:

> "*I don't hold a hose, mate, and I don't sit in a control room.*"
> — Then Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, *in* White (2019).

Of course, it's relevant that Mr Abbott has time to volunteer since he is no longer prime minister. Nor is anybody suggesting Mr Morrison as prime minister should have personally held a hose. But as head of national government during a national emergency, his abandonment of the governmental control room to help ensure resources, arrangements and communication were optimised, while being photographed sunning himself in Hawaii as homes were razed and volunteers died, was poorly received.[3] Poorly received too was his secret "laying on of hands" of Pentecostal "healing" while later meeting bushfire victims (Maddox 2021), as well as his coercive attempts at handshakes with unwilling disaster survivors.

Also worth pointing out is that the common Liberal-National Coalition party claim that Mr Abbott does regular volunteering work with remote-based indigenous Australians has been questioned. Hodgson (2013) investigated Mr Abbott's travel records and reported that his stays at indigenous communities were extremely short, of limited effectiveness, and of significant cost to Australian taxpayers.

Summary: Two devout former Australian Prime Ministers furnish examples of highly different approaches to volunteering; one engaged and the other highly dismissive.

[3] Note too that providing head-of-government leadership would not have been *volunteering* for Mr Morrison: it would have been "seen to do his paid job".

Adult Australian volunteerism

The rate of volunteerism in Australia has increased since the 1980s, yet on average Australians volunteer around half the hours of Canadians, Finns, French and British (Bittman & Fisher 2006). And this is so regardless of similar rates of religiosity amongst these nations, at least as measured by religious affiliation.

Australian Election Study (2019) data indicates that the *self-reported* rate of any organisational volunteering in the past year differs by religion (Figure 2).

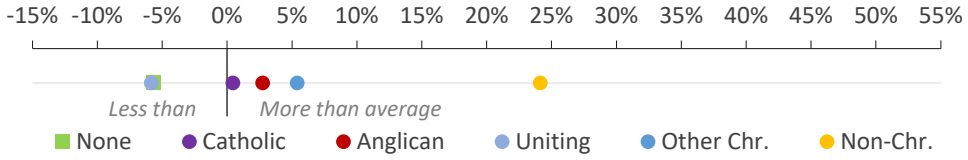

Figure 2: Nett difference in Australian self-stated any organisational volunteering in the past year, by religion
Source: AES 2019

> **Note:** In many of the "difference", "nett" or "polarisation" charts such as Figures 2 and 3, results must differ by 5% or more for the difference to be statistically significant (including different from average or zero).

Both Uniting church and Nones show the lowest overall rates of volunteering (-6%, below average), with three Christian categories (Catholic [0%], Anglican [3%], other Christian [5%]) on average or slightly above average volunteerism. Non-Christian religionists are significantly more likely to say they volunteered (25% above average).

The high rate of volunteerism amongst non-Christian denominations is richly illustrated by the Sikh community in Melbourne, despite their small numbers, organising around 500 volunteers to deliver 1800 free meals a day to Melburnians unable to obtain food under Covid-19 lockdown rules (Rachwani 2021).

By ARI6 religiosity (Figure 3), the slightly religious, Socialisers (-12%) and Notionals (-14%), are significantly less likely to volunteer, and Occasionals (4%) slightly more likely than Nones (-4%).

And at the more religious end of the spectrum, Devouts are far less likely to self-report volunteering activity (20%) than are Regulars, whose rates topped the religiosity spectrum (52%). These patterns suggest that in Australia it is

the depth and *nature* of religious socialisation (not just religious attendance), that drives volunteerism, consistent with other findings (Caputo 2008).[4]

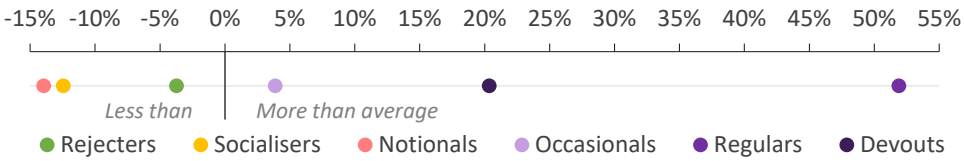

Figure 3: Nett difference in Australian self-stated any organisational volunteering in the past year, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AES 2019

Volunteering priorities

Unsurprisingly, Devouts are vastly more likely (69%) to volunteer in the religion sector, but also in welfare and education where there are deep religious institutional roots (Figure 4). More than two-thirds of Devouts (69%) volunteer in the religion sector, with fewer than a quarter volunteering even in the religiously-connected sectors welfare (24%) and education (21%).

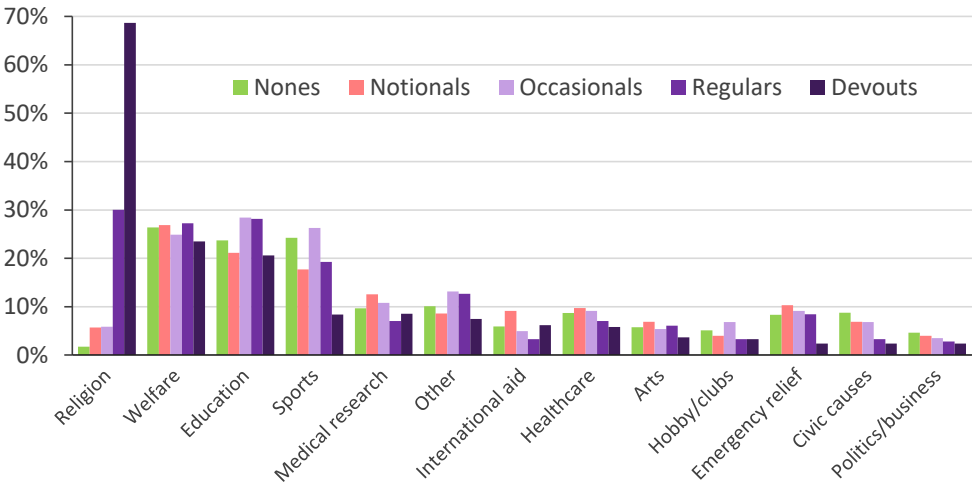

Figure 4: Proportion of ARI6 religiosity segment volunteering in sector
Source: GAS 2016. Note: Totals add up to more than 100% due to volunteering in multiple sectors.

Devouts are less likely than Nones to volunteer in most other sectors, except for international aid where Nones and Devouts volunteer at similar rates.

[4] Other evidence suggests that Regulars are higher than Devouts in Big 5 personality trait Conscientiousness.

Summary: Notionals and Socialisers are by far the least likely to say they volunteer, with Regulars (not Devouts) the most likely. Devouts are vastly more likely than all others to volunteer in the religion sector, and less likely than Nones to volunteer in a range of other charitable sectors.

Youth volunteerism in Australia

The Giving Australia Study was restricted to surveying adults, so it offers no information regarding volunteerism among Australia's youth.

Despite methodological problems in its measurement, studies suggest that Australia's youth do indeed volunteer at significant rates and the rate has recently increased (Walsh & Black 2015). After primary activities such as study, youth participation in volunteering lags only behind participation in sport.

Consistent with other findings about lower religiosity and greater alignment with civic (rather than interpersonal) causes, the significantly lower religiosity rate of Australia's youth (Francis 2021a, p 93) is more likely to be associated with volunteerism in civic issues (Walsh & Black 2015).

Summary: Australia's youth are significantly involved in volunteering, though more likely in civic rather than interpersonal contexts. Given that Australia's youth are significantly less religious than adults, this is inconsistent with the theory that low religiosity is associated with low overall volunteerism.

Membership of a humanitarian or charitable organisation

Another measure provides useful additional insights. Figure 5 shows the proportion of each religious category who say they are active members of a humanitarian or charitable organisation.

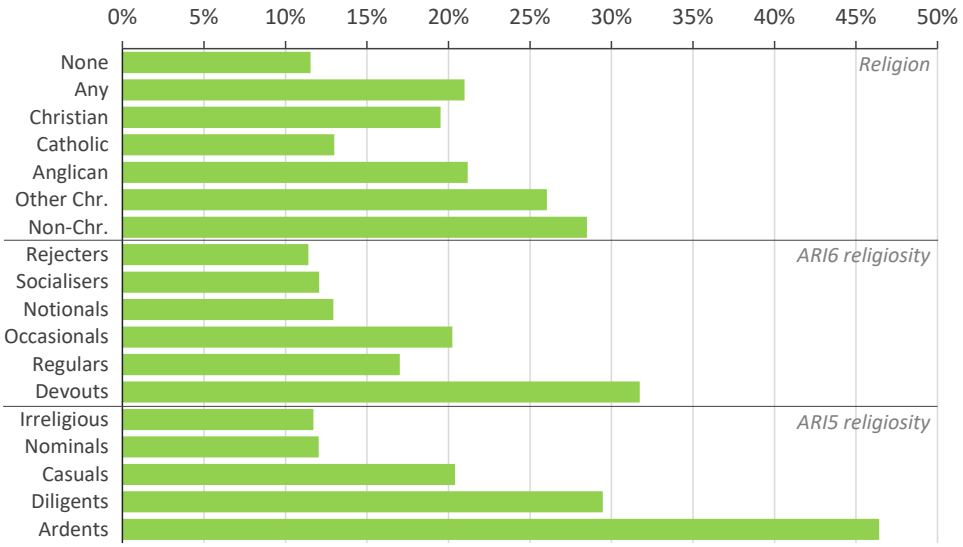

Figure 5: Proportion of Australians who say they are an active member of a humanitarian or charitable organisation, by religion and religiosity
Source: AVS 2018

The highly religious and non-Christian religionists are much more likely than Nones, Socialisers and Notionals, and Catholics, to say they are active members.

However, the type of organisation is not asked, and it is unclear to what extent primary religious (congregational: for the purpose of worship) organisations are represented — that is, the extent to which respondents considered their own religious centre a "charitable organisation" versus to what extent the charity is to deliver services that benefit different others. The congregational contribution may be significant.

> Except for Notionals and Catholics, Australia's religionists are more likely to say they belong to a humanitarian or charitable organisation. It is unclear to what extent this includes congregational religion itself as a charitable organisation.

Charities' religious history

Also central to understanding these measures is that a third of all registered Australian charities are *specifically religious* according to their constitutions (including for the primary *purpose* of religion) (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2021). Further, quite a significant but not accurately quantified proportion of the remainder are run by religious organisations.

This is understandable since Australia's charitable sector and laws were inherited from England, where they arose as a response to the need of citizens for food, shelter and medical care not being met by the state. (Remember from Part 2 of this research series that religion and government are to some extent mutually compensating systems.)

Given the religious linkages to charitable services, it's hardly surprising that the Nones, Rejecters and Irreligious alike would be less likely to actively belong to such an organisation: organisational religiosity would be to some extent a "repellent".

Also notable is that Australian Catholics are significantly less likely than other religionists to be active members of a charitable organisation. So, although the Catholic church conducts good works in humanitarian aid both in Australia and abroad, *lay* Catholics are on average the least likely religious denomination to actively participate. Non-Christian religionists and the minor Christian denominations are the most likely to say they are active in a charitable organisation.

> **Summary:** Australia's Nones are the least likely to say they actively volunteer, but the nation's **Catholics** are not statistically more likely to. **Protestant** and especially **Non-Christian** religionists, as well as the most religious, **Ardents**, are the most likely to say they actively volunteer.

Available time and volunteerism

Volunteerism is subject to an important resource for the volunteer: available time. While the Giving Australia Study 2016 didn't ask respondents about their "spare" time, a proxy measure is available: work status. Those with busier work (or equivalent) commitments would be expected to volunteer less.

This is indeed true. Those seeking work (fulfilling a busy schedule of "mutual obligation" commitments), or studying full time, are the least likely to volunteer, and full-time workers are less likely than part timers to volunteer (Figure 6). The differences are modest, however.[5]

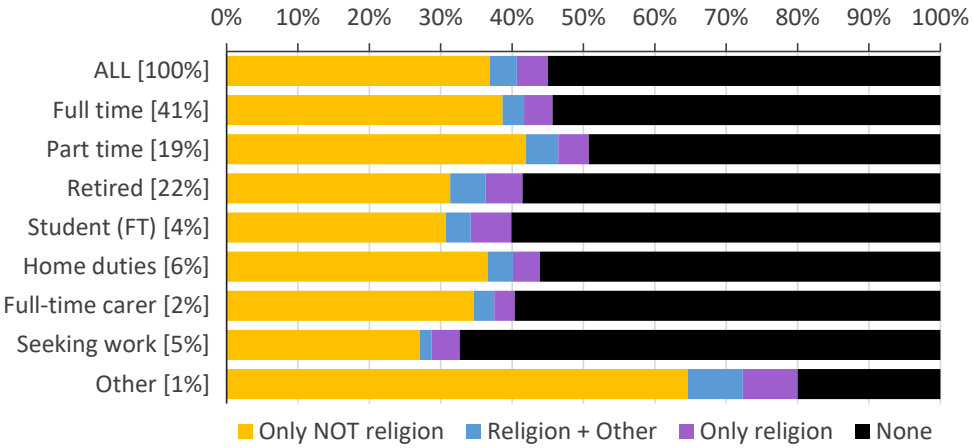

Figure 6: Volunteering rates by work status
Source: GAS 2016. Note: "Other" = "Volunteer" or "unpaid worker in family business". Percentages in work status labels are proportion of adult population. (FT) = full time.

What is surprising is that those with the most time on their hands, the retired, are *less*, not more likely to volunteer — except in regard to religion. This represents an important opportunity for charities to engage with and give further purpose to those whose working life is behind them.

> **Summary:** Volunteerism is modestly associated with available time, except amongst the retired who, with much time on their hands, are more likely than others to volunteer for religion but *less* likely to volunteer for anything else.

[5] The "Other" category is set aside for now, not only because of its tiny proportion (1%) of the population, but because it includes those who *define* their work status as "volunteer".

Volunteerism — a closer look

The data so far indicates that the relationship between religion and volunteering is not straightforward, so it's helpful to take a closer look.

To what extent is volunteering activity a result of personal connection to a (religious) organisation that is itself connected to charitable services? That is, is behaviour the result of a *direct structural link* rather than a specific *religious* conviction about charity? And how strong are negative associations (if at all) for the non-religious due to an organisation's religious nature?

Religious effects

A UK study found vastly more volunteering where the volunteer's religion was the same as the organisation's (congruent or bonding behaviour), than with organisations of a different religion (incongruent or bridging behaviour) (Figure 7) (Storm 2014).That is, most religionists volunteer through their *own* religious in-group than with out-groups.

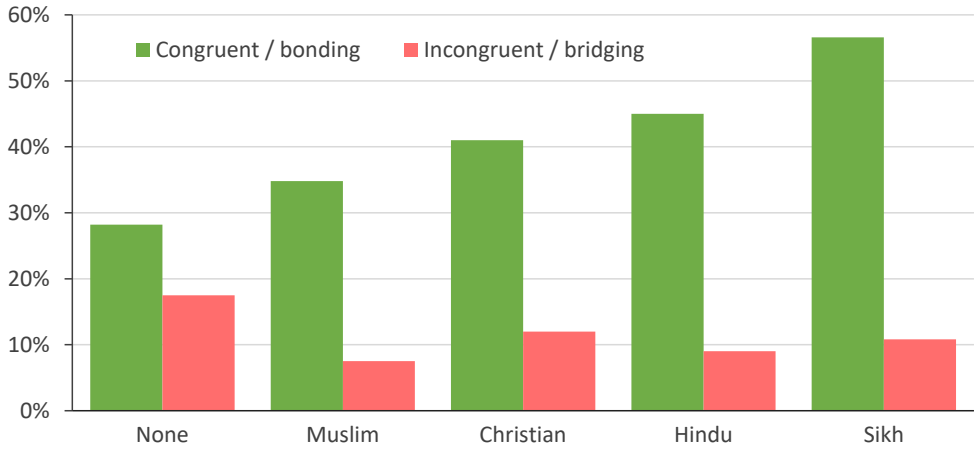

Figure 7: Percent volunteering by religious in/congruence of volunteer and organisation
Source: Storm (2014)

Obviously, greater religious service attendance increases personal networks for volunteering opportunities to arise specifically within a religious context.

Nones are more likely than religionists to engage in bridging out-group volunteerism. This might be explained in part by ongoing socialisation effects of *deconverts*: on average the "Dones" are more likely to retain volunteering behaviours at higher rates than Nones who are "Nevers" (Van Tongeren et al. 2021).

Counter- and non-religious effects

Volunteerism amongst the *non*-religious correlates *negatively* with high rates of local religiosity. This would be consistent with the non-religious avoiding religious organisations, many of which provide opportunities for volunteering (Lim & MacGregor 2012). This interpretation is given weight by a study of elder Europeans which found that while the importance of God is a key value for the religious to volunteer, certainty about the *unimportance* of God is the primary value amongst *secular* volunteers (Ariza-Montes, Valencia & Fernandez-Rodriguez 2018).

Summary: Most volunteering occurs in respect of the person's *own* religious in-group rather than with out-groups. Nones are more likely than religionists to engage in out-group volunteerism.

Studies are also consistent with the principle that the actively religious character of many charitable organisations reduces welcome opportunities for volunteerism amongst the non-religious.

Distinguishing religious from social and political effects

Differentiating the prosocial effects of religion, social conservatism and political orientation is important.

Social identity effects

By ASI6 social identity,[6] Secular Moderates and Secular Conservatives are slightly (around 6%, but statistically significantly) more likely than Secular Progressives to say they volunteer. That is, amongst the non-religious, there is a small effect of social conservatism with a higher rate of stated volunteering.

Amongst the religious, Progressives are 2% more likely, Moderates 8% more likely, and Conservatives 27% more likely than their secular counterparts to say they volunteer (Figure 8). These differences are all statistically significant, and their size is related to the degree of religiosity amongst the three religious ASI6 segments: Religious Progressives and Moderates are dominated by Notionals and Occasionals (together 78% and 86% respectively), while Religious Conservatives are dominated by Devouts (87%) (AES 2019).

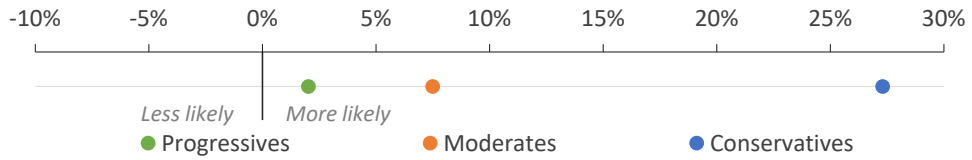

Figure 8: Religious premium of claimed volunteering in past year, by ASI6
Source: AES 2019. Note: All differences are statistically significant (p <= 0.05).

> Likelihood of stating active volunteerism is strongly associated with combined religious *and* socially conservative identities.

Political orientation effects

By political orientation as well as religion, religious Australians on the hard right, and to a lesser extent on the hard left, are significantly more likely than others to say they volunteer (Figure 9). At the same time, non-religious political centrists are the least likely to say they volunteer. Amongst the "near" left/right (versus "hard" left/right), there was no significant difference in volunteering likelihood between the religious and non-religious.

[6] See the Methodology section for a description of "religious premium" derived from the Australian Social Identity 6-segment (ASI6) model.

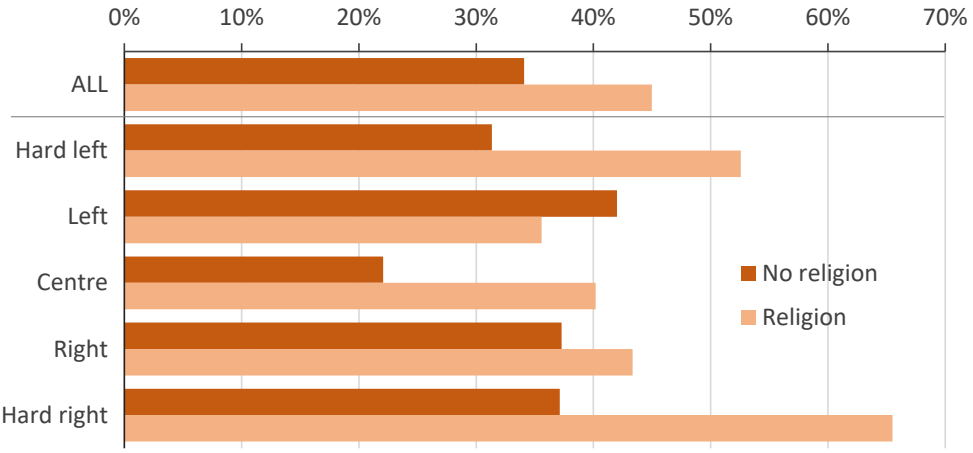

Figure 9: Proportion saying they have volunteered in the past year by politics and religion
Source: AES 2019

Greater likelihood of self-reported volunteerism is associated with stronger political views on both the left and right. Secular political centrists are by far the least likely to say they actively volunteer. This is consistent with strength (and less the polarity) of *ideological* motivators.

Summary: Religion is associated with higher self-report rates of volunteerism, though some of the effects are modest. The combination of both high religiosity *and* social conservatism is a strong predictor of claiming to volunteer.

Volunteerism is least likely amongst secular political centrists, and most likely amongst the religious political hard left and hard right. This suggests that it is *strength* rather than *polarity* of ideological convictions that drives differences in stated volunteerism rates.

The Charity Sector Engagement Index (CSEI)

The findings of greater stated volunteering rates among those with stronger religious and political views are consistent with the Charity Sector Engagement Index (CSEI).

The CSEI measures the rate of *combined* charitable volunteering *and* donation, with the highest index set to 1.0. The top three sectors, all over 0.5, are ideological: religion (1.0), politics (0.52), and civic causes (0.51) (Figure 10). Religion's index is nearly double indices two and three.

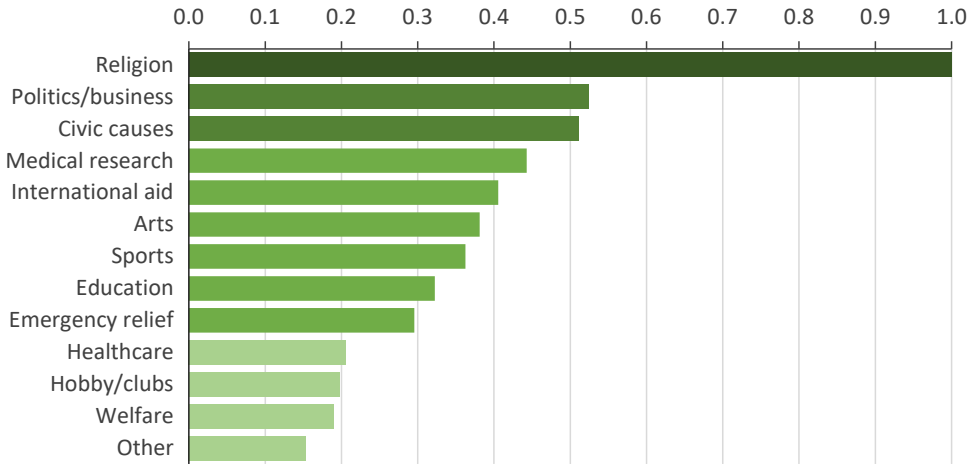

Figure 10: The Charity Sector Engagement Index (CSEI) by charity sector
Source: GAS 2016. A measure of a sector's combined volunteering and donation rates, indexed to the highest engagement value at 1.0.

Note — "Other" sector: In the GAS 2016 study, the "Other" segment is comprised of contributions to a range of charities in the main sectors, but which were not captured directly within their main sectors. The main sector in "Other" not captured elsewhere is contributions to grant makers and private benefactors (18% of "Other"). Other top-5 sectors are welfare (27%), international aid (12%), healthcare (10%), and emergency relief (8%), collectively accounting for three-quarters (76%) of the "Other" sector.

Summary: The Charity Sector Engagement Index (CSEI) — a combined measure of self-reported charity sector behaviour as volunteerism *and* donation — is vastly higher for religion than all other sectors. The next two highest, politics and civic causes, are largely "ideological" sectors, too.

Religious volunteering for … religion

International findings

At least one international study has found that most volunteer work is done within religious organisations themselves (Ruiter & De Graaf 2006).

A USA study provides further insight into the type of volunteering amongst the religious. Those high in public religiosity — attending religious services and study groups more often, like the ARI6's Regulars and Devouts — are vastly more likely to volunteer in the religious sector than in any other (Figure 11) (Yeung 2018).

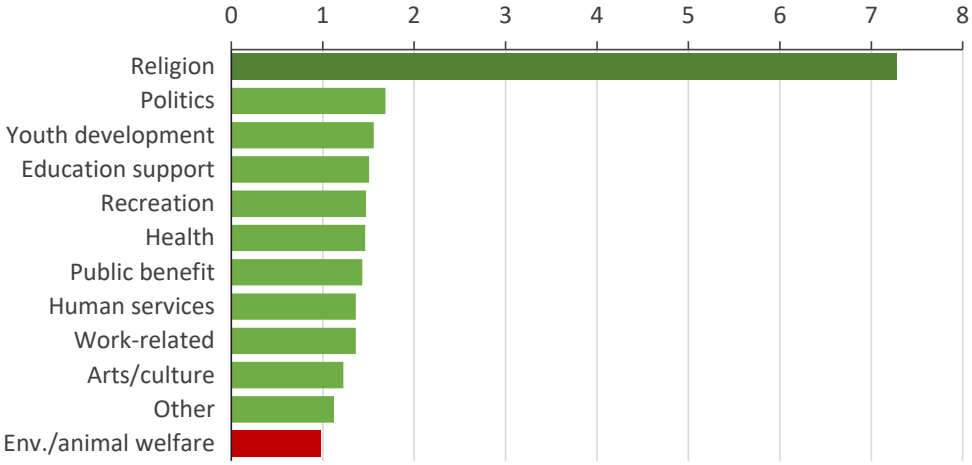

Figure 11: USA odds ratios (OR) of public religionists volunteering in different sectors

Source: Yeung (2018). Notes: Env.=Environment. Odds ratios greater than 1 indicate higher rates of volunteering than amongst the non-affiliated. Note: Green = OR > 1; Red = < 1. OR = likelihood versus average, for example the religious more than seven times more likely than average to volunteer in the religion sector.

Australian findings

According to a 2018 study by Australia's Charities Aid Foundation, nearly two-thirds (around 63%) of those who volunteered did so within their church or religious organisation (Charities Aid Foundation [AUS] 2019).

> Consistent with international evidence, a substantial proportion — nearly two-thirds — of Australia's volunteer activity appears to be conducted within churches and other religious congregations themselves.

Volunteerism exclusivity by charitable sector

Another indicator of the character of volunteering is the proportion of those who volunteer in a sector, who don't volunteer in any others: the degree of sector exclusivity. In Australia, it is those who volunteer in the religion sector who show the highest exclusivity: that is, they are *least* likely to volunteer in any other sector: uniquely, more than half of them (Figure 12).

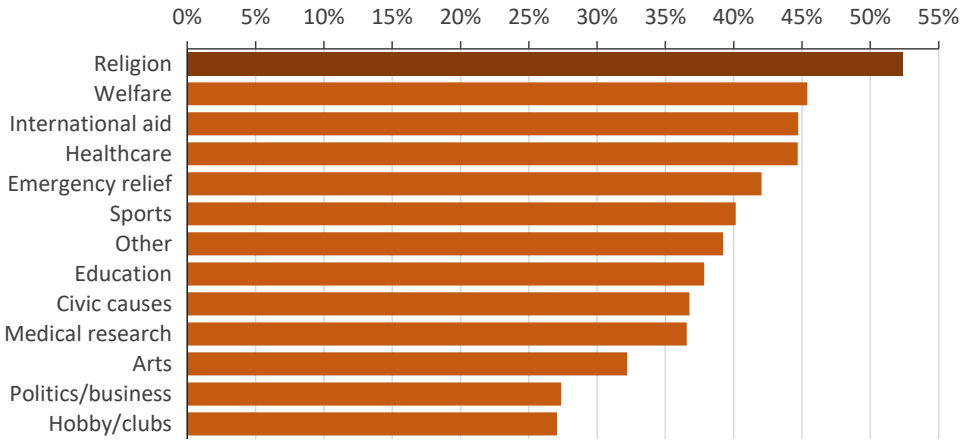

Figure 12: Proportion of sector volunteers who volunteer in *only* the sector
Source: GAS 2016

In addition, the next highest two sectors with single-sector volunteering are international aid and welfare. These are also the only two sectors (besides religion) in which Devouts are more likely than Nones to donate (see *Donation sector priorities* on page 58).

At the other end of the spectrum, those volunteering for recreation clubs and hobbies, and politics and business, are *most* likely to also volunteer in other sectors. Thus, while religion and politics are often mutual mechanisms for social order and cooperation, this evidence reveals they are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of concentrated self-interest.

Summary: In Australia, nearly two-thirds of volunteering appears to occur within religious congregations (not service delivery to others). And volunteering to religion is associated with by far the highest level of exclusive in-group favouritism, while volunteering to its ideological substitute, politics, is second-lowest.

Some 'coerced' or 'mandated' volunteerism

A potential distortion in Australia's volunteering sector is that religious charities including the Salvation Army, Brotherhood of St Laurence, and Catholic, Uniting, Anglican and Methodist churches are paid by the federal government as agents ("providers") to manage job seekers under its JobSeeker program. At the same time, "volunteering" at charities is an approved job-seeker compliance activity that provides charities with free labour (Williams 2021). Providers hold discretionary powers to decide if the volunteering work is "beneficial" to the job seeker (Australian Government 2020).

In addition, these providers — no longer just the Department of Human Services — have the power to strip job seekers of their unemployment payments if the job seeker fails to satisfy the agency of their compliance.

Alleged abuse of these arrangements, as well as negative ideological media coverage labelling people undertaking forced work as "unemployed", gave birth to the 2019 #NotADoleBludger campaign.

While Australian job seekers are the least likely work cohort to volunteer (see Figure on page 31), no public data was found to help quantify the contribution of these JobSeeker/charity-agency arrangements to this volunteering rate.

Summary: Australian government sponsored employment programs potentially distort the volunteering data through religious organisation direction of job-seeker volunteering. The extent of such distortion is unknown.

Beyond religious congregation volunteerism

By headline result, Australia's religious[7] appear to volunteer (within the past year) somewhat more (49%) than do Nones (42%) (GAS 2016).

A closer look reveals important underlying differences. Given that prosocial behaviour is personally costly and aimed at benefiting *others*, but volunteering at one's own church, mosque, temple, or synagogue is for the benefit of one's own in-group, a separate account for religious volunteering is warranted.

According to GAS 2016, around one in twelve Australians (8%) say they volunteer at a religious congregation (Table 1, "All" column).[8]

Table 1: Proportion of ARI6 segment members volunteering in sector

Charitable sector	All	Nones	Notionals	Occasionals	Regulars	Devouts
Any sector	45%	42%	33%	45%	52%	63%
Any except religion	41%	42%	32%	44%	44%	40%
Welfare	12%	11%	9%	11%	14%	15%
Education	11%	10%	7%	13%	15%	13%
Sports	9%	10%	6%	12%	10%	5%
Religion	**8%**	**1%**	**2%**	**3%**	**16%**	**43%**
Other	5%	4%	3%	6%	7%	5%
Medical research	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	5%
Healthcare	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Emergency relief	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	1%
Civic causes	3%	4%	2%	3%	2%	1%
International aid	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%
Arts	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
Hobby/clubs	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Politics/business	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%

Source: GAS 2016. Notes: Differences are statistically significant (p): <0.001, <0.01, <0.05.
Some people volunteer in multiple sectors, so "Any sector" ≠ "Any except religion" + "Religion".
Env. = Environment.

Immediately evident is that the overall volunteering rate for religion is higher than for healthcare, medical research, emergency relief, civic causes,

7 Those self-identifying (affiliated) with a religious denomination.

8 A smaller, less detailed study reported that 22% of adults said they had volunteered at their religious organisation (Heart + Mind Poll 2017, in Charities Aid Foundation [AUS] 2019). However, this is unrealistic because three quarters (76%) of religion-sector volunteers are Devouts, and Devouts comprise just 12% of the adult population (AVS 2018). Even when Regulars and Occasionals are added for a combined 36% of all religious service-attending adults, that would mean 61% of *all* religious service attenders volunteer at their church, mosque, temple, or synagogue, an unrealistically high rate.

international aid, arts, hobbies and clubs, and politics and business (2–4% each); and only less than welfare (12%), education (11%) and sports (9%).

Unsurprisingly, volunteering at *religious* congregations correlates strongly with religiosity: hardly any Nones (1%) but more than 4 in 10 Devouts (43%).

> **Religion's volunteerism fourth place is driven by Regulars and Devouts**, since Nones, Notionals and Occasionals volunteer for religion at very low rates. In fact, Devouts are vastly more likely to volunteer for their religious congregation (43%) than for any other charitable purpose (1%–15%). Regulars, too, are most likely to volunteer for their religious congregation, but the difference is less polarised (16% vs 1% – 15%).

Another key finding is that when volunteering for the religion sector itself is removed from the volunteering equation (row two of Table 1), there is no statistical difference in the rates of volunteering between Nones, Occasionals, Regulars, and Devouts. Only amongst Notionals (identify a religious affiliation but never attend religious services), is the rate of volunteering significantly different: lower.

> Importantly, when volunteering for religious organisations is removed from the equation, Nones (42%) volunteer at the same rate as Occasionals and Regulars (44% each), and Devouts (40%). (The differences are not statistically significant.) Only Notionals — people with a religious affiliation but who never attend services — volunteer at a significantly lower rate (32%).

> **Summary:** Unsurprisingly, Regulars and Devouts volunteer with their religious congregation at much higher rates than others. But when the religion sector is removed from the equation, across the *non*-religion sectors Nones, Occasionals, Regulars and Devouts all volunteer at the same rates. Only Notionals volunteer at a significantly lower rate across the non-religion sectors. Thus, the religious do not exhibit greater rates of volunteerism prosociality outside the religion sector, and in one case (Notionals), less.

Related activity: paid work at not-for-profits

The ANU's Australian Values Study (2018) shows that working in the private not-for-profit sector correlates moderately with religiosity, with nearly 1 in 5 Ardents (the most religious) (18%) engaged in paid not-for-profit work (Figure 13).

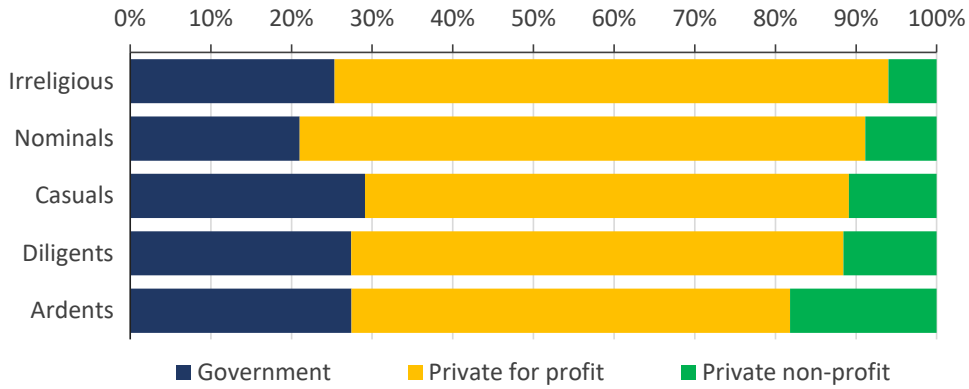

Figure 13: Sector of paid work by ARI5 religiosity
Source: AVS 2018

This is to be expected since the largest single sector of charities in Australia (31%) is expressly for religious purposes (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2021). Additionally, many religious charities don't register their religiosity with the Charities Commission, so the practical proportion of religious charities is higher than the registered proportion.

In such an environment, Ardents are three times more likely (18%) than the Irreligious (6%) to work at a not-for-profit.[9]

> **Summary:** Charities expressly for religious purposes are the largest single charity sector in Australia, so it's no surprise that Ardents are three times more likely than Nones to work for pay in not-for-profits.

[9] Not all not-for-profits are registered charities, but the broad implications remain the same.

Charitable giving

In this report, charitable giving refers to the voluntary donation of non-labour resources, specifically money, to not-for-profit organisations.

Assumptions abound regarding drivers — including religion — of giving behaviour, "but these broad associations mask inconsistencies that are not yet understood", including in the types of charities supported by Australians (Chapman, Louis & Masser 2018). Chapman et al's own research found that religious Australians are much more likely to donate to religion, more likely to donate to welfare and international aid, and far less likely to donate to animal welfare.

International evidence

USA

More than two-thirds (70%) of American charity-givers donate to expressly religious organisations (Brooks 2007). As expected, the non-religious are unlikely to give to organisations for the *purpose* of religion, while giving by the religious to congregational faith organisations is relatively inelastic to personal taxation effects, that is, deductions against taxable income.

By USA charitable sector the largest recipient of charitable dollars is religious congregations (32%) (Figure 14).

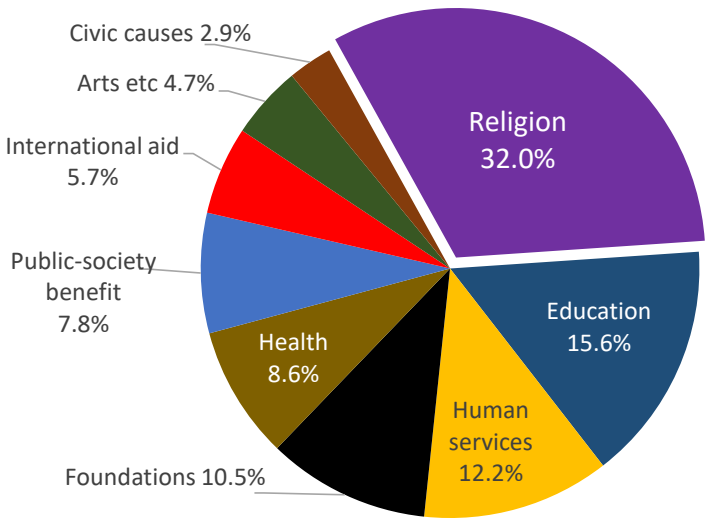

Figure 14: Charitable giving sectors in the USA in 2013
Source: *From* Giving USA Foundation/Indiana University Lillly Family School of Philanthropy *in* Osilli (2017). Note: Civic causes includes the environment, animal welfare, etc.

That is, by far the largest "charitable" giving by dollar amount was *by religious people to their own religious congregations*.

UK

In the UK, significantly more is given to religious congregations than to all other sectors (19%), though not nearly as much as in the USA (32%) (Figure 15).

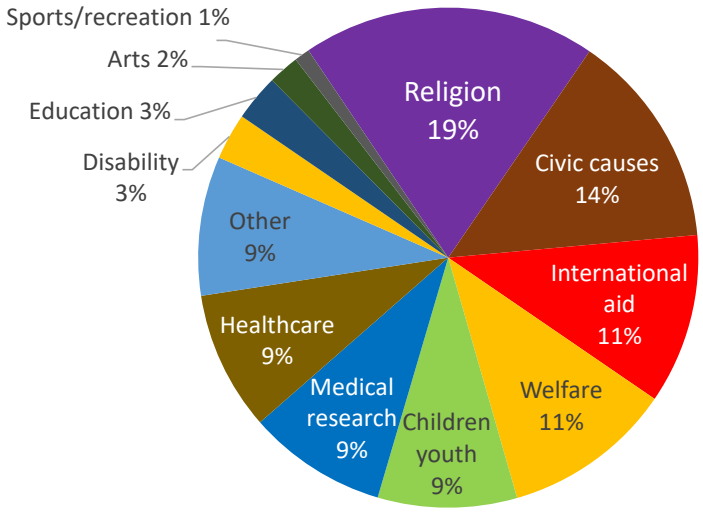

Figure 15: Charitable giving sectors in the UK 2020
Source: Charities Aid Foundation [UK] (2021). Note: Civic causes includes the environment, animal welfare, etc.

Proportionally, UK donors give significantly more to civic causes (environment, animal welfare, etc) and to international aid, and substantially less to education charities, than do USA donors.

> **Summary:** In both the USA and the UK, by far the most charitable dollars are given to the religious congregation sector (32% and 19% respectively): that is by sector, the most is given *by the religious to their own religious congregations*, rather than for the benefit of different others.

Charitable giving in Australia

In Australia, donations for the advancement of religion are usually not tax deductible. An organisation must provide benefits for the wider community, and not just itself and its own members, to qualify for deductible gift recipient (DGR) status.

> **Tax deductibility of charitable donations**
>
> Favourable tax treatment of charitable donations can have both intended and unintended effects. On the positive side, tax deductibility gives citizens a sense of participation and discretion. On the negative side, tax deductibility allows wealthy private individuals to determine how otherwise significant public (tax) funds are directed, for example to particular branches of religion, education, or research. In addition, altering the tax policy for reasons other than charitable giving can have ripple effects on giving.
> — Fack and Landais (2016, p 35).

What hard Australian data shows

Similar to overseas findings, more frequent religious service attendance in Australian correlates with greater likelihood of personal giving, and amount given. The relationship holds true for general charitable giving, but not for giving to civic causes[10] (Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006).

Most Australians who donate (78%) limit their charitable giving to one to three charities, with an emphasis on local rather than overseas activity. Younger Australians somewhat prefer civic cause charities (general prosociality), while older Australians prefer charities that provide practical help (interpersonal prosociality) (McCrindle Research 2016, p 49).

Similar to overseas, Australian Christians who regularly attend services are significantly less likely to give to civic cause charities, and most likely to contribute to interpersonal causes such as services for the homeless (McCrindle Research 2019).

Amongst Australian *regular churchgoers*,[11] almost all (91%) say that their faith informs their giving priorities and practices, with strongest agreement

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10 "Civic causes" are prosocial causes that are not directed towards specific people, for example animal welfare, the environment, or raising general awareness about an issue.

11 Attend church (i.e. Christian) monthly or more often.

amongst those who attend weekly or more often (McCrindle Research 2019). However, overall, just 13% of Australians say they donate money to charity *because* their religion encourages giving (Charities Aid Foundation [AUS] 2019, Figure 4).

Australians with a religious affiliation report that they donate more money than do the non-religious (Roy Morgan Research 2014, from Figure C1) (Figure 16), and those with modest means say they would donate more money if they had more (McCrindle Research 2016, p 50).[12]

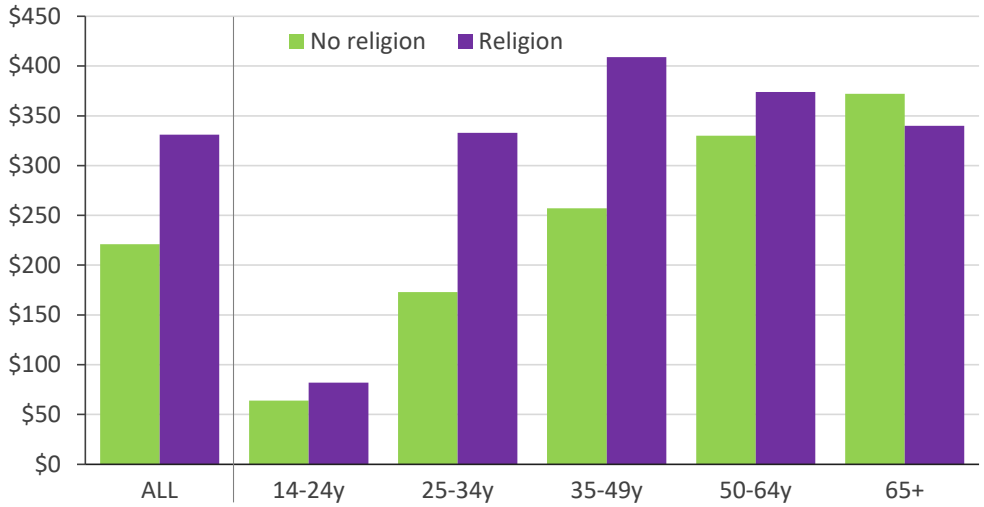

Figure 16: Self-reported Australian average monetary donations by age and religious status
Source: Roy Morgan Research (2014). Base: Ages 14+

Summary: Headline data shows that Australia's regular churchgoers are more likely to report donating to charity, and the religious also report giving more money than the non-religious. Just 13% of Australians say they make charitable donations *because* their religion encourages it.

[12] Note that under any tithing system, donating more in absolute dollars automatically accompanies a higher income.

Charitable giving — a closer look

For charitable giving as for volunteering, religious factors are much more complex than mere headline figures suggest.

Giving to in-groups

In Canada, average donations to religion ($262) are significantly higher than donations to other causes: health $100, social services $51, and international efforts $35 (Hossain & Lamb 2012). Donations to religious charities are also uniquely inelastic to tax incentives, raising questions about their voluntariness.

Those high in moralism, especially religious fundamentalism, are considerably more likely to donate to in-groups (interpersonal generosity) and far less likely to out-groups, while those low in religiosity are more likely to donate to out-groups than in-groups (Greenway et al. 2019). No significant difference was found between the religious and non-religious for charitable giving to *secular* charities, nor in changes of behaviour as a result of tax subsidies (Eckel & Grossman 2016). Additionally, charitable giving of the religious, but not the non-religious, is sensitive to changes in personal income.

Giving to in-groups in Australia

According to McCrindle Research (2019), around two-thirds (68%) of Australians said that in 2018 they donated money. Most donors (93%) gave to charitable organisations. Four in ten donors (44%) gave directly to their religious organisation (Charities Aid Foundation [AUS] 2019), with frequent (weekly) churchgoers (i.e. Christian religion) donating more, and seven in ten regular churchgoers (69%) giving regularly to the church.

Weekly church attenders are five times more likely to regularly donate to their church than those who attend less often (McCrindle Research 2019).

Giving to religion

In addition, further perspective on charitable giving is warranted: there is a large minority of expressly religious charities to whom the non-religious are unlikely to donate.

In 2020/21, nearly a third (31%) of all Australian charities registered religion as a primary purpose. It's the largest single registered charitable purpose by far, with education trailing at 19%, and social services, health and other purposes at less than 10% each (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2021).

Even this greatly underestimates the proportion of religious charities, because numerous religious schools and universities, hospitals and social services organisations expressly articulate religious purposes in their constitutions, yet don't record religious purposes in their ACNC registration (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2021).

Like low trust in churches and religious leaders (Francis 2021b, pp 137-139), Australian Nones are significantly less likely than the religious to have trust and confidence in charities (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2017).

At least amongst churchgoers — but likely across the board — the top reason for giving to a charity is knowing and trusting the organisation, and the top blocker is doubt about how donations will be used (McCrindle Research 2019). Higher levels of trust, along with type of charitable cause and donation channels, are the strongest predictors of willingness to donate (Robson & Hart 2020).

Religionists (e.g. Payne 2014) boast that Australia's biggest charities by turnover are religious: *Christian* to be precise. However, by public trust and reputation, only one charity in the top 10 is religious: St John's Ambulance (Dy 2020) (Table 2).

Table 2: Top ten charities in Australia by trust

#	Charity rating for public trust	Religious
1	CareFlight	No
2	Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia	No
3	Guide Dogs	No
4	CanTeen	No
5	The Fred Hollows Foundation	No
6	**St John Ambulance**	**Yes**
7	Ronald McDonald House Charities	No
8	Camp Quality	No
9	Surf Life Saving Foundation	No
10	National Breast Cancer Foundation	No

Source: Dy (2020)

Even amongst regular churchgoers, only a quarter (26%) are very satisfied with their church's financial transparency (McCrindle Research 2019).

Communication effects

Conservatives and progressives also respond differently to charity advertising for donations. Consistent with their different underlying moral foundations preferences (Skurka et al. 2019), conservatives are influenced more by advertising that emphasises proportionality, while progressives respond more to messages of equality (Lee et al. 2018).

Vividness of case anecdotes, rather than summary statistics of hardship or intervention rates, is known to maximise charitable giving (Chang & Lee 2010). Thus, the common charity approach of advertising interventions for more dramatic cases of poverty, illness or other condition naturally appeal more to religious conservatives through their emphasis on proportionality of hardship rather than emphasis on reaching equality with others.

Donation channels in Australia

The channels via which donations are facilitated in Australia vary significantly by charitable sector. Attendance at a place of worship uniquely predicts donations to religion, and to a vastly higher degree than all other drivers of all charitable sectors (Table 3). Indeed, place of worship attendance accounts for nearly two-thirds (64%) of donors to religion, higher than the top three drivers combined of all other sectors (59% or less).

Table 3: Top three drivers of donations in Australia, by sector

SECTOR	Top driver	Second driver	Third driver	Total
ALL	Public place (24%)	Self (14%)	Mail (9%)	47%
Religion	Place of worship (64%)	Self (17%)	At organisation (8%)	**88%**
Emergency relief	Public place (35%)	Home phone (14%)	Self (10%)	59%
Welfare	Public place (39%)	Self (11%)	Mail (8%)	59%
Recreation/clubs	Self (29%)	Cell phone (17%)	Club fundraiser (10%)	56%
Other	Public place (22%)	Family/friends (17%)	Self (15%)	53%
Education	School fundraiser 23%)	Mail (19%)	Family/friends (11%)	53%
Civic causes	Public place (23%)	Self (18%)	Mail (12%)	53%
Politics/business	Email (19%)	Mail (19%)	Self (14%)	53%
Healthcare	Public place (19%)	Self (18%)	Mail (14%)	50%
Medical research	Public place (23%)	Home phone (16%)	Mail (11%)	50%
International aid	Self (24%)	Public place (15%)	Mail (11%)	50%
Sports	Family/friends (17%)	Public place (17%)	Self (14%)	47%
Arts	Self (17%)	Mail (15%)	Radio ad (13%)	44%

Source: GAS 2016. Note: Self = "I approached them".

Reasons for *not* donating

The most common reason for *not* donating at all is not being able to afford it (56% of non-donors). Unsurprisingly, this reason is much more common amongst the Builders generation (retired) and Gen Z (studying). Other significant reasons include not understanding how the money would be used (34%), belief that too much is spent on administration (33%), and that money won't reach the targets (32%).

Occasionals are least likely to say they didn't donate at all because they couldn't afford it, and most likely to say they disliked the way they were approached.[13]

Devouts were nearly three times more likely than Nones (26% vs 9%) to say they didn't donate at all because they hadn't been approached to donate. This seems unlikely since Devouts attend religious services weekly or more often, and where requests for donations are common. Thus, it seems more likely that around a quarter of Devouts who don't donate seem not to "hear" requests for donations.

> On the available evidence, Australians with a religious affiliation say they donate more money to charity — about 50% more than the non-religious. However, nearly a third (31%) of Australian charities are for the *purpose* of promoting religion, and a good deal more operate on an active religious basis even though they don't record it with the ACNC. Thus, while religious Australians appear to be giving more money to charitable causes, much of the difference goes to religious charities, and directly to their churches or religious organisations.
>
> Place-of-worship attendance alone (one reason) predicts charitable giving to religion to a much greater degree (64%) than the top three reasons combined for giving amongst all other sectors (59% or less).
>
> Around a quarter (26%) of Devouts who don't donate at all say they haven't been asked, nearly three times the rate amongst Nones (9%) and despite frequent religious service attendance where requests for donations are common.

[13] In separate research, nearly two-thirds (62%) of Australians said that asking for and misuse of money by the church is a significant or massive negative influence their perceptions (McCrindle Research 2017). Only a tiny minority (15%) said they have no negative perceptions of money issues by the church.

Charitable giving — following the money

Calculated from the major Giving Australia Study 2016, vastly more charitable monetary donations go to religion (28.6%) than to any other charitable sector, even dwarfing the next largest, international aid (17.4%) (Figure 17). This proportion is much closer to the USA (32%) than the UK (19%).

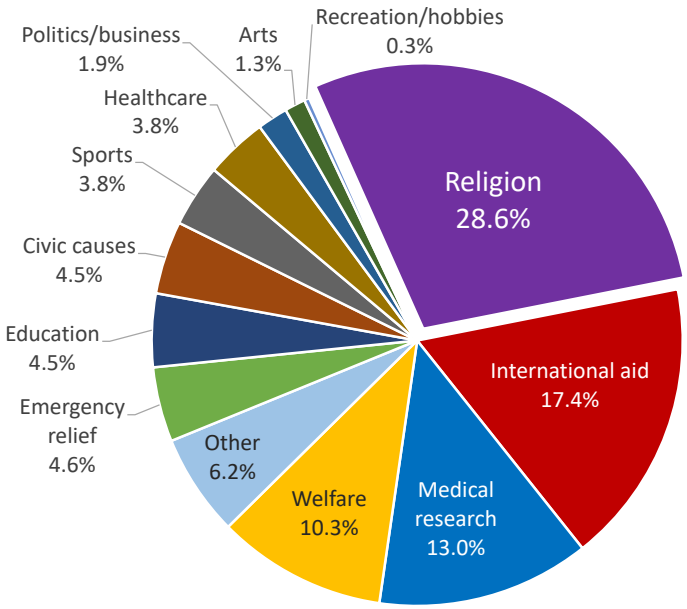

Figure 17: Proportion of total Australian charitable donation $ by sector
Source: GAS 2016

To avoid ambiguity again, donations to "religion" are not to religious organisations whose primary purpose is to provide community services such as international aid, welfare, or healthcare: they're donations given directly to religious congregations: churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, for the *purpose* of religion. While some religious organisations give a small portion of their members' donations for charitable services to the needy, the great majority is used for the organisation itself.

For example, as Australia's Catholic church explains, regular mass collection money goes to pay the church's priest salaries, living expenses and retirement expenses, the Archbishop and other senior officials, building upkeep and utilities, the cost of running mass itself, and "pastoral programs" (that is, evangelisation of people into the faith) (Catholic Church (Australia) 2021). For other services to the wider community, there are separate, irregular, special, *additional*, collections.

Thus, the largest charitable dollar amounts go to the donor's own "organisational family" — religion — for its own upkeep.

In 2004, Australians gave $3.0 billion (Smith & McSweeney 2007), in 2012 $8.6 billion (McGregor-Lowndes et al. 2014), and in 2016 $11.2 billion (McGregor-Lowndes et al. 2017) to charities and non-profits. Religion's portion in 2016 indicates that around $3.2 billion was given to congregational religion that year.

Summary: As in the USA and the UK, by far the largest cash dollar amount in total goes to the charitable sector *religion*, for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the giver's own organisational family (congregation). Australia's proportion of donations to religion (29%) is closer to that of the USA (32%) than the UK (19%). This represents some $3.2 billion given in support of one's own personal religious faith in 2016.

Who donates all this cash?

This very substantial self-referential largesse is even more astonishing than at first appearance. Unlike other charitable segments to which all or most Australians might consider monetary giving, donating to religion will appeal to only the religious, and almost exclusively to the donor's *own* religion.[14]

That is, by far the largest charitable giving segment in aggregate dollar value is contributed by fewer than one in five Australians: just 19% of them (Figure 18).

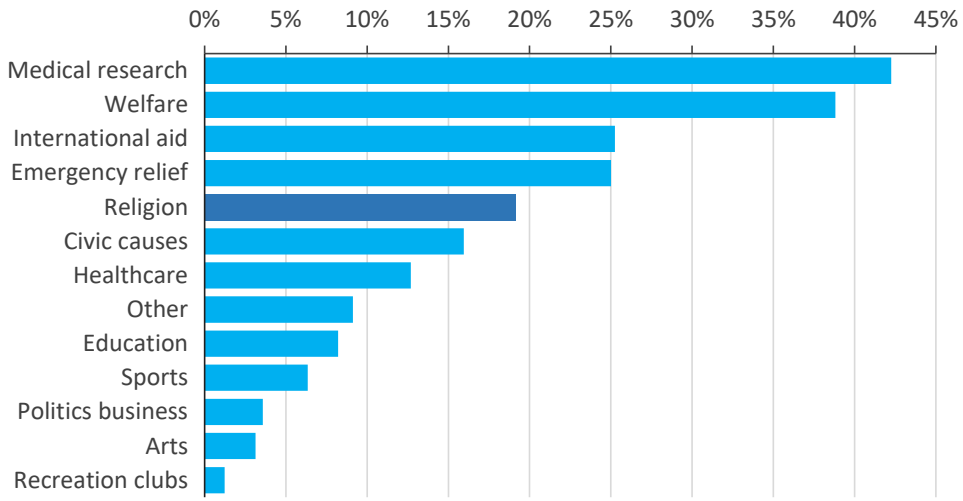

Figure 18: Proportion of Australian adult population donating to charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016

The explanation of how such a modest minority of Australians can donate a far greater total dollar amount to religion than any other sector is that donors to religion give, on average, a much greater sum than do donors to other sectors (Figure 19).

Indexed to international aid at $1.00 as the second-highest average donor amount, donors to religion contribute on average well over twice as much: $2.16.

[14] The religion sector has the highest proportion of donations to a *single organisation within the sector* (96%), with welfare (77%) and medical research (70%) having the least.

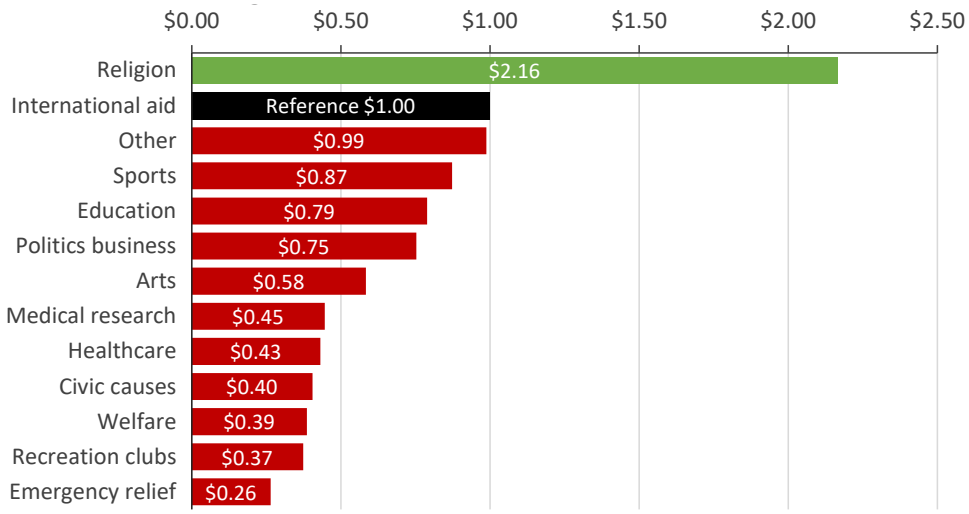

Figure 19: Indexed average Australian donation amount by charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016. Note: Indexed to International Aid at $1.00.

By religiosity, ARI6 Devouts alone contribute almost all (87%) of all the donation dollars to the religion sector (Figure 20).

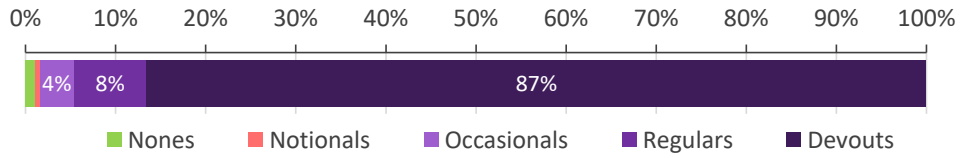

Figure 20: Proportion of total Australian religion sector $ donated by ARI6 segment
Source: GAS 2016. Note: The GAS 2016 study methodology did not allow differentiation of ARII6 Rejecters from Socialisers. Therefore, they are combined under the label "Nones" (no religious affiliation).

In the Giving Australia Study (2016), Devouts comprised just over one in ten (11%) of Australia's adult population. Regulars, just 5% of the adult population, donated a further 8% of total religion sector dollars. Conversely, Occasionals, representing 27% of the adult population, donated just 4% of total religion sector dollars.

This donation profile is driven by size-of-donation amounts (Figure 21).

Around a quarter (27%) of Devouts and nearly a half (48%) of Regulars do not donate to religion. That is, three-quarters (73%) of Devouts donate to religion. A significant number give large amounts: $1000 or more per annum, representing 26% of all Devouts, versus 6% of Regulars and just 1% of Occasionals.

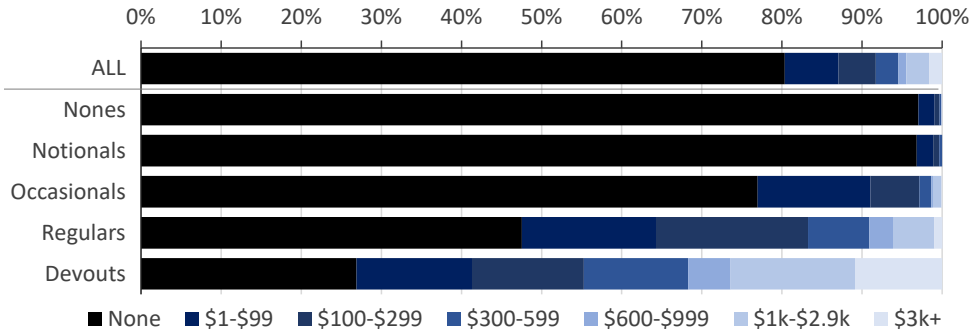

Figure 21: Proportion of $ donation amounts to the Australian religion sector, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: GAS 2016

Summary: By proportion of Australians who donate to a charitable sector, religion comes in at number 5 (19%), after medical research (42%), welfare (39%), international aid, and emergency relief (25% each). However, compared with international aid donations indexed at $1.00, the average amount donors give to religion is more than twice as much: $2.16. A massive 87% of this religion sector largesse is given by Devouts, who represent just 11% of the population.

Donation sector priorities

The single charitable sector to which Devouts give by far the greatest proportion of their donation money is religion (Figure 22). Their next priorities are those for which their religious organisations are likely to have strong structural relationships: international aid, and welfare. Other sectors receive significantly lower donations from Devouts.

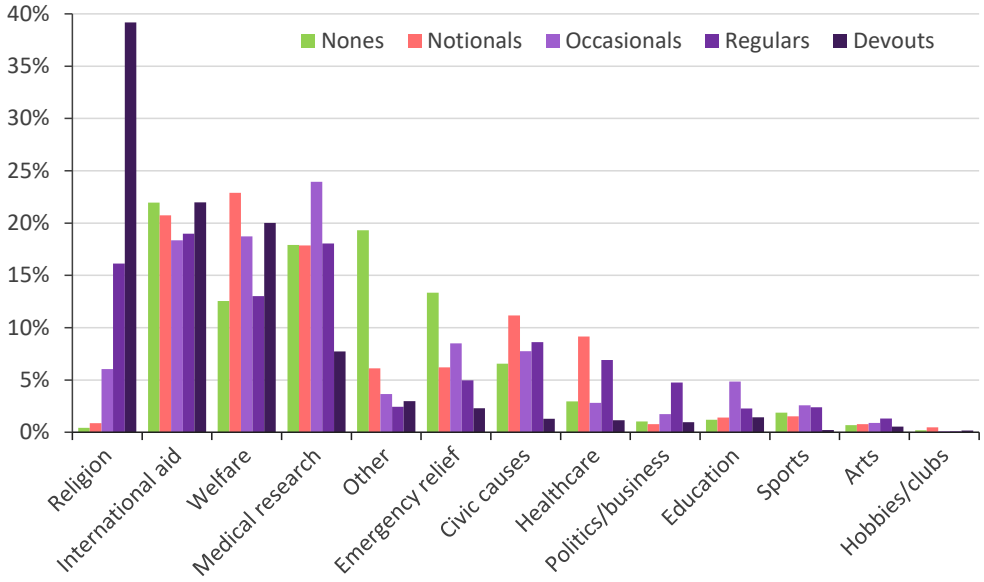

Figure 22: Proportion of ARI6 segment total $ donated to sector
Source: GAS 2016. Note: Civics = environment and animal welfare.

Nones, in contrast, prioritise their donations towards international aid, medical research, emergency relief, welfare, and "other" charitable purposes. The top four donation sectors for each ARI6 religiosity segment are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Top sector priorities of ARI6 segments by proportion total $ donated

Sector	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Nones	International aid	Other	Medical research	Emergency relief
Notionals	Welfare	International aid	Medical research	Civic causes
Occasionals	Medical research	Welfare	International aid	Emergency relief
Regulars	International aid	Medical research	*Religion*	Welfare
Devouts	*Religion*	International aid	Welfare	Medical research

Source: GAS 2016

Of the thirteen charitable sectors examined in the Giving Australia Study 2016, religion is prioritised at #1 amongst Devouts, #3 amongst Regulars, #6 amongst Occasionals, #10 amongst Notionals, and #12 amongst Nones.

Another indicator of religious priorities is whether more than half of a donor's total dollar contribution was given to the (congregational) religion sector, just one of the 13 charitable sectors in the GAS 2016 study (Figure 23).

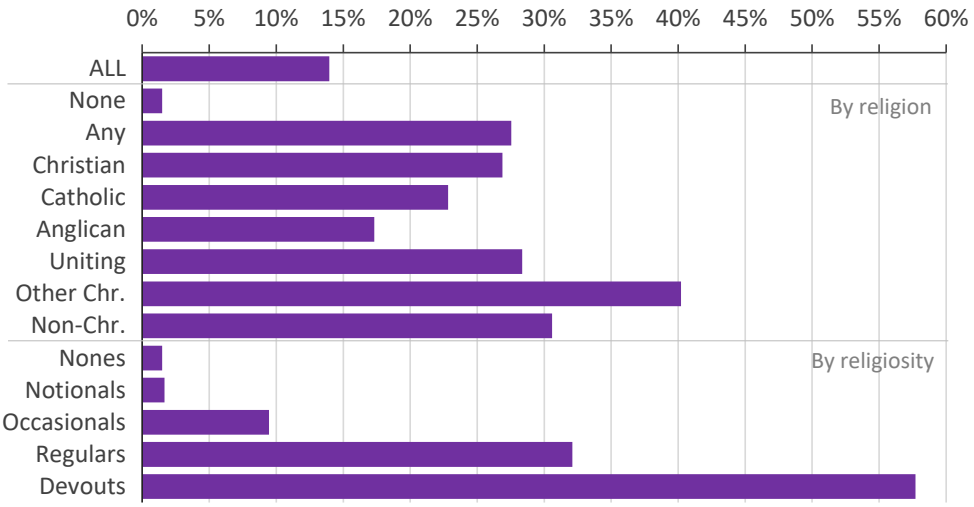

Figure 23: Proportion of donors who gave half or more of their total $ donation to the religion sector, by religion and ARI6 religiosity
Source: GAS 2016

On average, more than a quarter (27%) of Australia's religionists give more than half their total charitable donations to their religious congregation, with Anglicans the least likely (17%) and minor Christian denominations the most (40%). Giving more than half of total charitable donations correlated very strongly with religiosity, including hardly any Notionals (2%), fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) of Occasionals, around a third (32%) of Regulars, and nearly 6 in 10 (58%) Devouts.

Summary: Religion is the top donation sector amongst Devouts, and number 3, after international aid and medical research, amongst Regulars. Religion doesn't appear in the top five donation sectors amongst other Australians. Those donating half or more of their charity dollars to *only* religion include a quarter (26%) of all religionists, a third (32%) of regulars, four in ten (40%) of minor Christian denominations, and more than half (58%) of Devouts. Only in the religion and welfare sectors to Devouts allocate a greater proportion of their charity dollars than do Nones.

Sector singularity

Although some differences are small, the religion sector leads all sectors in the proportion of its donors who donate to just one organisation in the sector (Figure 24). This suggests that the religious focus on their own congregation at even higher rates than others focus on a single organisation in other sectors, such as sports and hobbies, where singular focus might be expected.

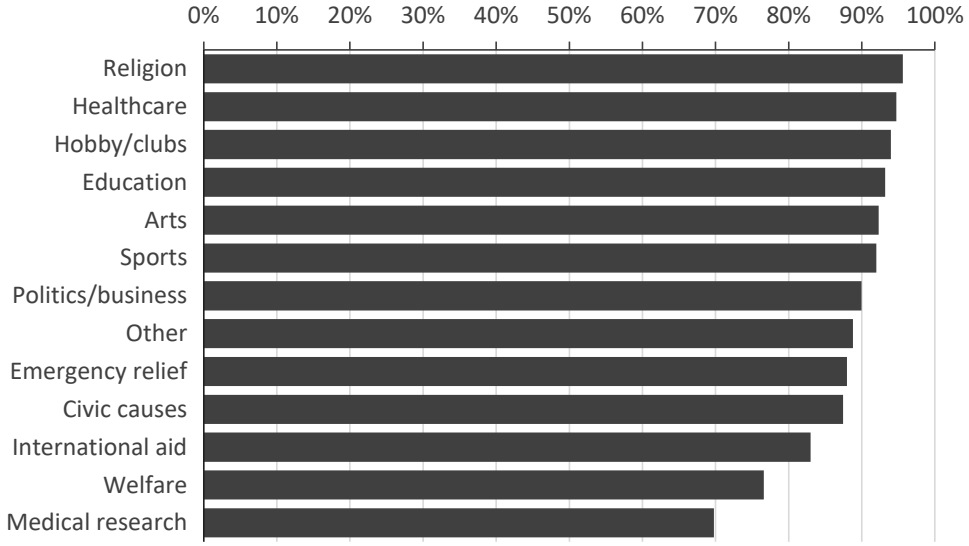

Figure 24: Proportion of Australian donors to sector who donate to just *one* organisation in the sector
Source: GAS 2016

Summary: A great majority of Australians tend to donate to a single organisation in any charitable sector. However, religion is top of the sector list when it comes to the proportion of Australians donating to just *one* organisation in the sector (96%), compared with the lowest sector, medical research (70%).

Donations to non-religion sectors

For donations to charitable sectors *other* than "religion" (though a charitable service provider may still have religious foundations), Occasionals are more likely than others to donate, but often in smaller amounts (Figure 25).

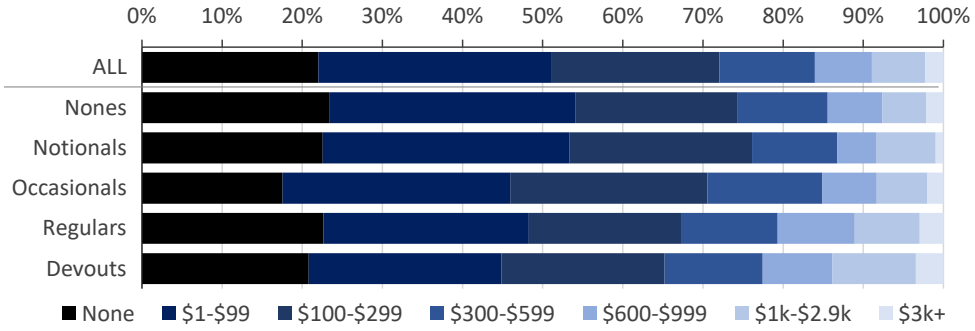

Figure 25: Proportion of $ donation amounts to all charitable sectors *other* than religion, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: GAS 2016

Nones are least likely, and Devouts most likely, to donate larger amounts (over $1000) to non-religion sectors, with no statistical difference amongst Notionals, Occasionals and Regulars.

Important to understanding these differences is the average number of charitable organisations over which individual donor contributions are spread. *Excluding* the religion sector there are modest differences in numbers of organisations donated to, with again, Occasionals more likely to spread their cash in small amounts across a larger number of organisations (Figure 26). Regulars and Devouts not only donate slightly greater total amounts to non-religion sectors (Figure S4) but spread their donations across a slightly larger number of charitable organisations (Figure 26).

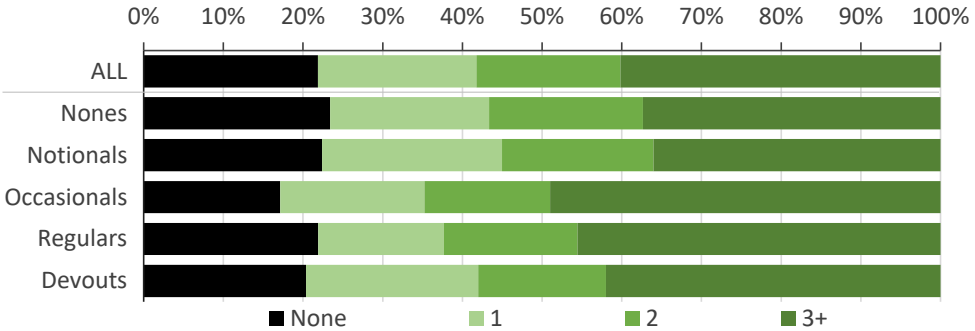

Figure 26: Number of *non*-religion organisations donations given to
Source: GAS 2016

Summary: Of those who donate to sectors other than religion, Occasionals tend to donate smaller amounts to a larger number of organisations, while Devouts on average donate larger amounts to an average number of organisations.

Nones compared with "weak" and "strong" religiosity

Compared with Nones, Notionals[15] donate significantly less across the charitable sectors, except much more to religion (Figure 27) and about the same to healthcare and emergency relief, indicating that religious affiliation is not itself a driver of prosocial charitable donating, except to one's own religious congregation.

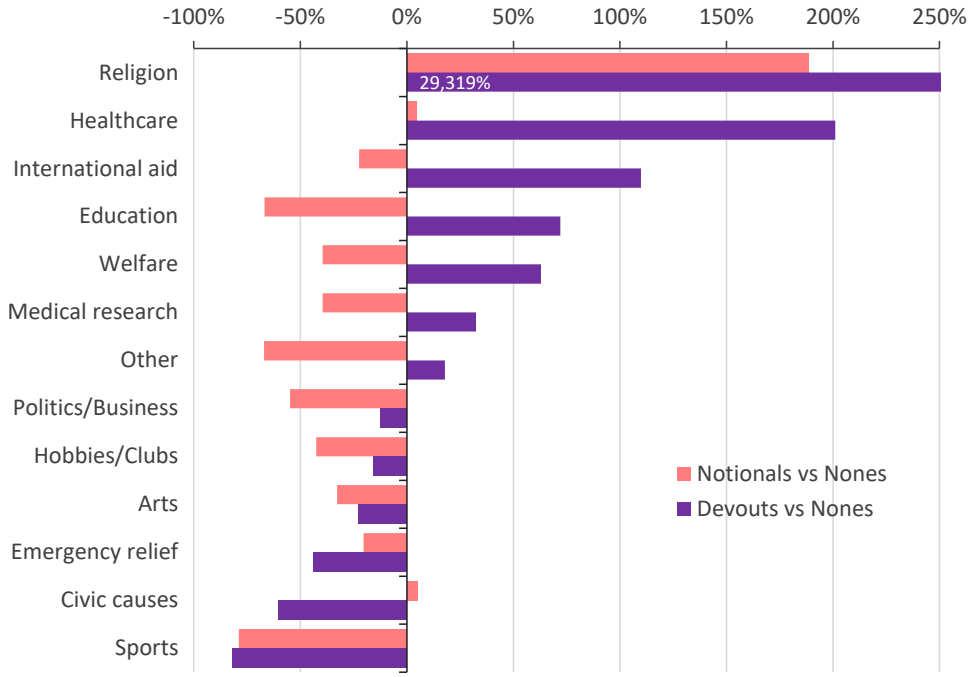

Figure 27: Percentage difference of average $ donation, Notionals vs Nones and Devouts vs Nones, by charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016

Devouts donate more to some sectors such as international aid, education, and welfare — where they have strong structural links — but less to others such as emergency relief, environment and animal welfare, and to sports.

> **Summary:** Compared with Nones, Notionals donate very much more to religion, about the same to healthcare and emergency relief, but substantially less to all other sectors. Devouts donate more to sectors with strong religious structural links, but less to other sectors. That is, having a religious affiliation is not broadly predictive of general charitable giving, and high (versus low) religiosity turns the donation weathervane towards more strongly religion-linked charity sectors.

[15] Say they have a religion but *never* attend religious services, i.e. generally weak religiosity.

The automated hip pocket: planned giving

Of all the charitable sectors in Australia, it is religion that shows an outstanding lead in cash giving as a repetitive and entrenched behaviour through some or all of the contribution being *planned*, that is, via an automated regular payment or tithe (Figure 28).

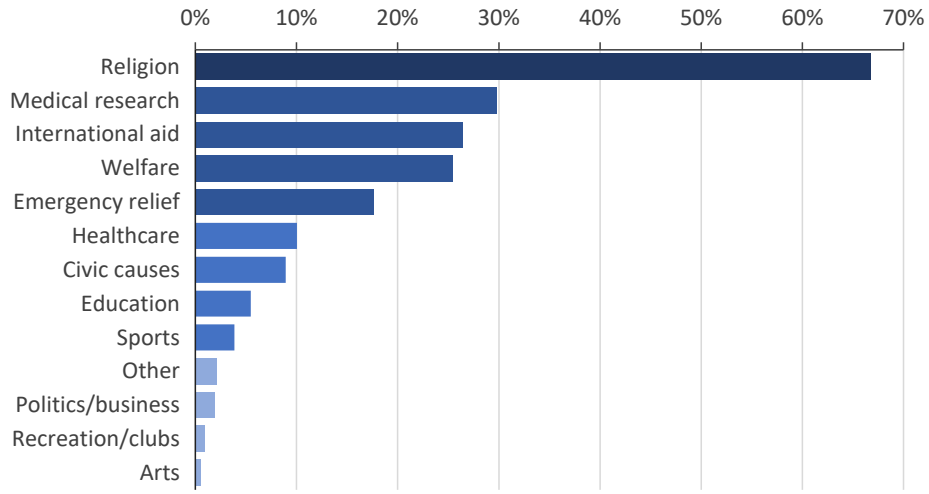

Figure 28: Proportion of sector donations that are wholly or in part planned
Source: GAS 2016

In congregational religious giving, two-thirds (67%) of donors report their giving is wholly or in part planned, while the next-most planned sectors are very substantially lower (well under half): medical research at 30%, international aid at 26%, welfare at 25%, and other sectors even lower.

Overall, Devouts are very substantially more likely than Nones to engage in planned giving (displayed in the negative: "None" in Figure 29).

However, this is almost entirely accounted for in planned giving to *religion*, the sector to which Nones are mostly unlikely to donate (Figure 29). There is also a small positive association of Devouts to plan their donations to international aid, compared with Nones. This may be due to structural religious links to international aid.

For a number of charitable sectors, there is no statistical difference in rates of planned giving. However, for other sectors, even though the differences are not large, Devouts are statistically *less* likely to engage in planned giving to healthcare, medical research, civic causes, welfare, and emergency relief.

Thus, with the exception of religion and international aid, Devouts don't plan their charitable giving at higher rates than Nones, and in a number of sectors engage in *lower* rates of planned giving.

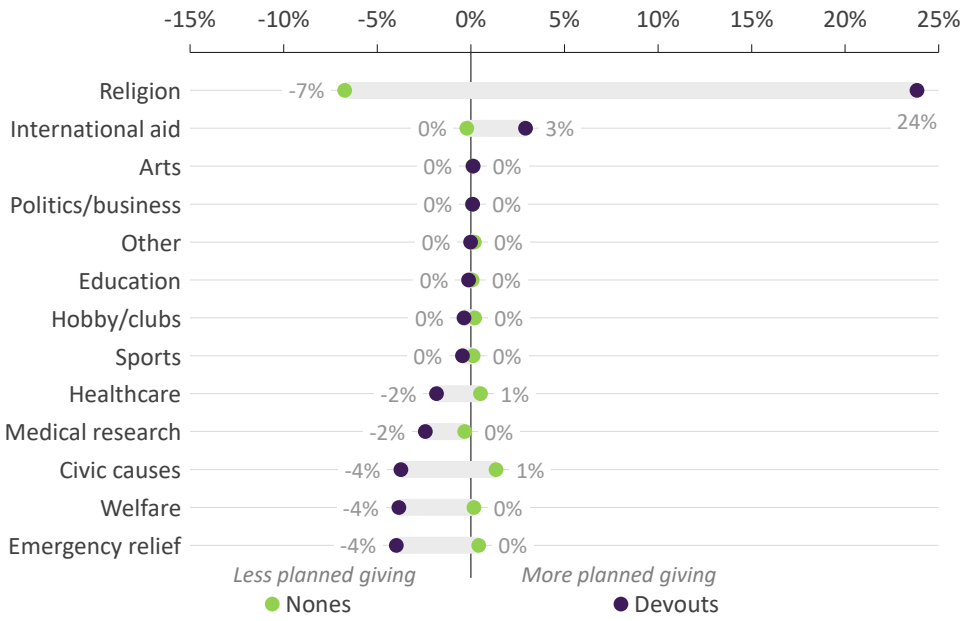

Figure 29: Differences in rates of *planned* giving by charitable sector: Nones versus Devouts

Source: GAS 2016. Note: Any planned giving to sector, including all giving is planned. All differences other than those "0%/0%" are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Summary: Religion has cornered the market in planned giving, with its own uniquely high rate (67% of all givers, versus 30% for the next-most planned sector, medical research). Unsurprisingly, Devouts are vastly more likely than Nones to engage in planned giving to religion. However, they are also statistically *less* likely to engage in planned giving in the healthcare, medical research, civic causes, welfare, and emergency relief sectors.

Special note: It's worth noting that almost all charitable sectors can receive general funding and special grants from government. However, Australia's constitution prohibits government funding for the purpose of religion (Beck 2021). Thus, the congregational religion sector relies entirely on private funding via personal donations and its own income-generating business activity.

Charitable giving — motivations

One Australian study examined a range of potential factors influencing the intention to donate, finding that religion (affiliation versus not) was not a predictive factor (Smith & McSweeney 2007).

Other factors from GAS 2016 furnish additional insights into drivers of donation behaviour: the motivations of general empathy, for a "good cause", personal benefit, hedonism and coercion.

General empathy

Two reasons for one's charitable donation in the Giving Australia Study 2016 provide a measure of *general* empathy: "sympathy for those helped", and "help make the world a better place". These are separate from *interpersonal* empathy which relates to donations aiding personally known beneficiaries.

By charitable sector, donations to the civic causes sector, and to international aid, are vastly more likely to arise via general empathy (Figure 30).

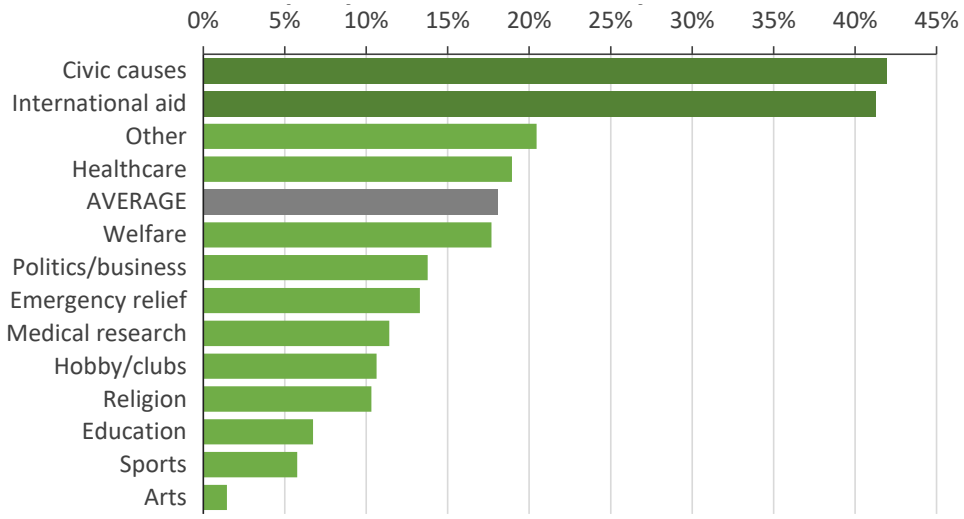

Figure 30: Percent of donors to sector who state *general empathy* as a reason
Source: GAS 2016. Note: See text for measures of general empathy.

Donations to religion score well below average for general empathy: that is, donors are far less likely than average to attribute their religious donation to helping people or society in general. Only donations to education, and to sports and arts, are lower in general empathy.

The GAS 2016 hard data does not support a general association between religion and general empathy as a given reason for donation. Differences in general empathy are small. Most are not statistically significant. The only significant differences are Nones and Occasionals in regard to religion (-6% and -5% respectively), and non-Christian religionists and Devouts in regard to

other than religion (both +6%) (Figures 31 and 32). That is, non-Christian religionists, but *not Christians*, display slightly greater general empathy (and towards non-religious rather than religious causes).

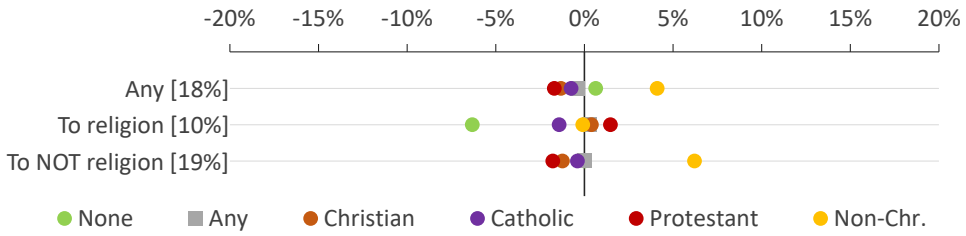

Figure 31: Differences from mean in general empathy as a reason for charitable donations, by religion
Source: GAS 2016. Base: Respondents (multi-response).

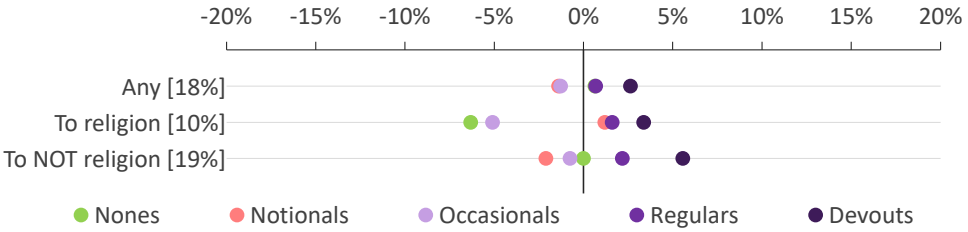

Figure 32: Differences from mean in general empathy as a reason for charitable donations, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: GAS 2016. Base: Respondents (multi-response).

While Nones are less likely (-6%) to donate to religion for general empathy reasons, they are right on average (0%), *not less than average*, for general empathy in donating to sectors other than religion.

Summary: Donations to the civic cause and international aid sectors are associated with by far the highest rates of general empathy. The rate for religion is well below average. **This suggests that donors to religion largely don't believe their donations help people in a general sense or make the world a better place.**

The general contention that the religious are more likely to donate due to general empathy is not supported. Only Devouts and non-Christian religionists are more likely to donate due to general empathy, and the differences are small (6% above average). Nones show an average, not lower, rate of general empathy for donations to sectors other than religion.

Societal benefit: for a "good cause"

While religious leaders strongly promote religion as a good cause for donation, the Australian public holds a different view.

"Good cause" as a contributing reason for donation is by far the lowest in the religion and education sectors. The religion rate is well under half the rates for welfare, international aid, emergency relief, civic causes, and the arts (Figure 33).

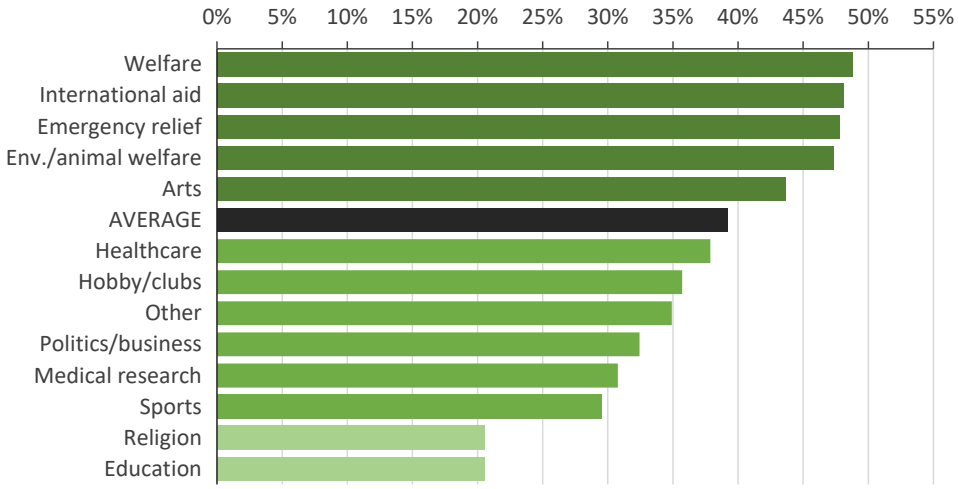

Figure 33: Proportion of donors to sector mentioning "good cause" as a reason for their donation
Source: GAS 2016

> The Australian public have a different view from religious leaders about religion being a good cause, with clerics arguing in its favour, but the general public rating it equal bottom, along with education, of all the charitable sectors.

This negative association is relatively intractable to religious denomination. Australia's Catholics (19%), non-Christian religionists (18%), and Nones (19%) are equally least likely to rate religion as a good cause, with Protestants slightly (but with statistical significance at 22%–26%) more likely (Figure 34). That is, across the religion spectrum, from less than one in five to only one in four Australians say that religion is worthy of their donations as a good cause.

By religiosity, *no* Notionals rate religion as a good cause for their donations, and Occasionals (18%), Regulars (20%), and Devouts (22%) are not significantly different from Nones (19%). Among Christians, just one in five

(21%), and even fewer (18%) of non-Christian religionists donate to religion as a "good cause."

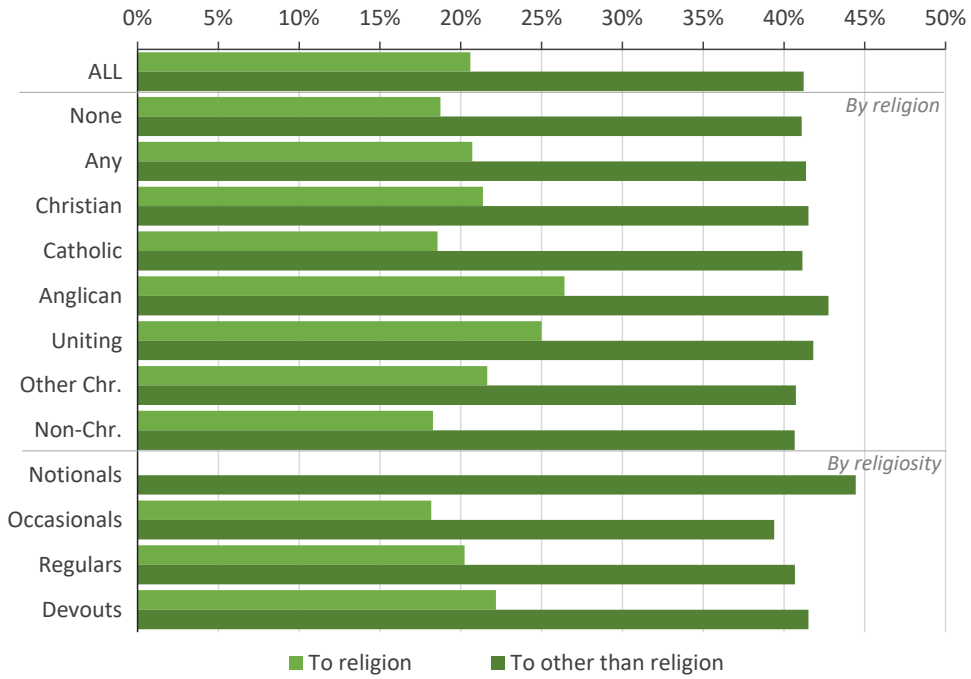

Figure 34: Proportion of donors to sector mentioning "good cause" as a reason for their donation
Source: GAS 2016. Note: No differences within "To religion" are statistically significant; nor any differences within "To other than religion".

The mean of "good cause" for all other charitable sectors was double that of the religion sector (41%), and no denomination or religiosity differed significantly.

Summary: Unlike clerics, a great majority (79%) of the Australian public does not say religion Is a "good cause" for their donations. Along with donations to education, religion rates equal lowest of all the charitable sectors. "Good cause" ratings are consistently low across religions and religiosities, and are uniformly much lower than the rating for non-religion sectors.

The lacklustre rating of religion as a "good cause" for charitable donations indicates that many Australians *across the religious spectrum* are not convinced religion is a general social benefit.

Self-interest — immediate small reward

Donations to the religion sector are accompanied by far the *least* small personal inducements: immediate rewards such as a small item or free entry at an event (Figure 35).

Donors in sports, education and medical research sectors were most often offered direct inducements.

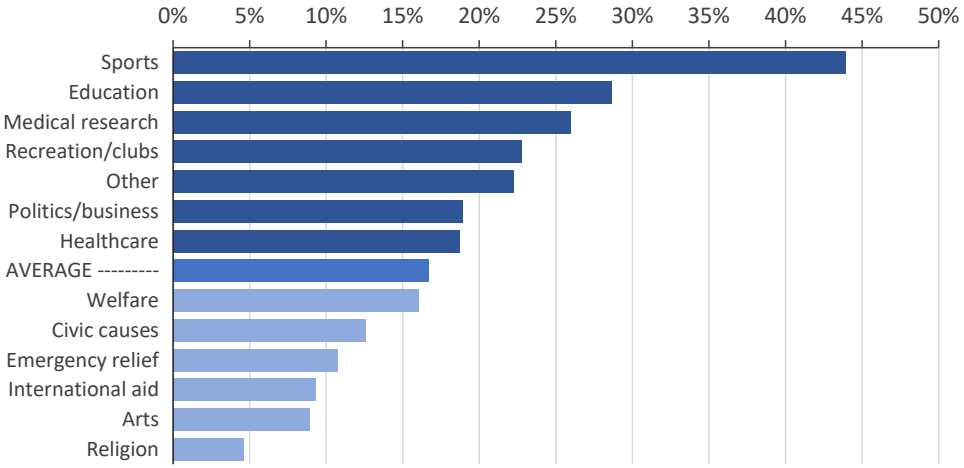

Figure 35: Received a small direct inducement for donating to sector type
Source: GAS 2016

Summary: Donations to religion are accompanied by the lowest rate of receiving a small personal reward at the time of donation. The sports, education, and medical research sectors have the highest rates.

Self-interest — express personal benefit from donation

Education and religion are the top two sectors for donation self-benefit: that is, the donor or a family member benefitted from the donation (Figure 36). As we shall discuss later, donations to education are in fact largely to *religious* schools.

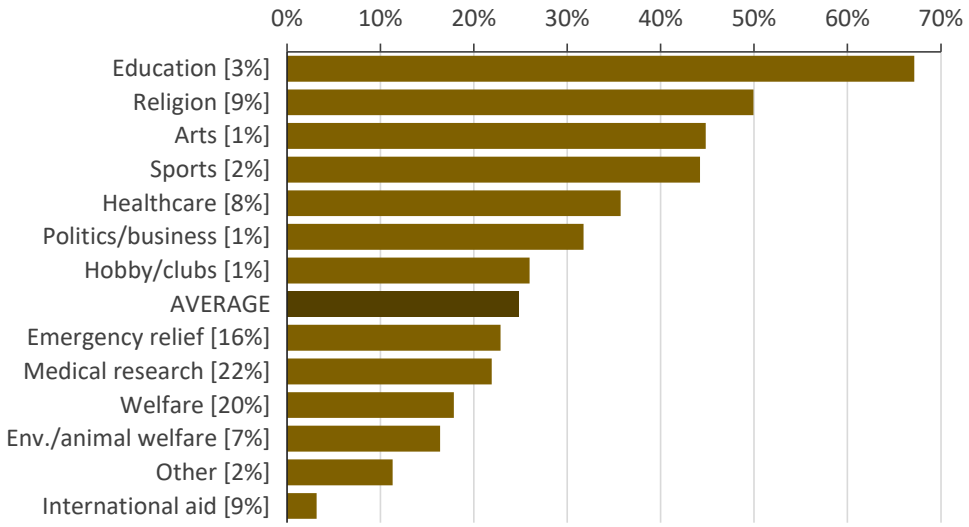

Figure 36: Proportion of sector donors with personal benefit from donation, by charitable sector

Source: GAS 2016. Notes: "personal benefit" = self or family member benefited from donation. Label percentages are sector's proportion of donations (count, not $).

Overall, a quarter (25%) of donors say they or a family member benefitted from their donation (Figure 37).

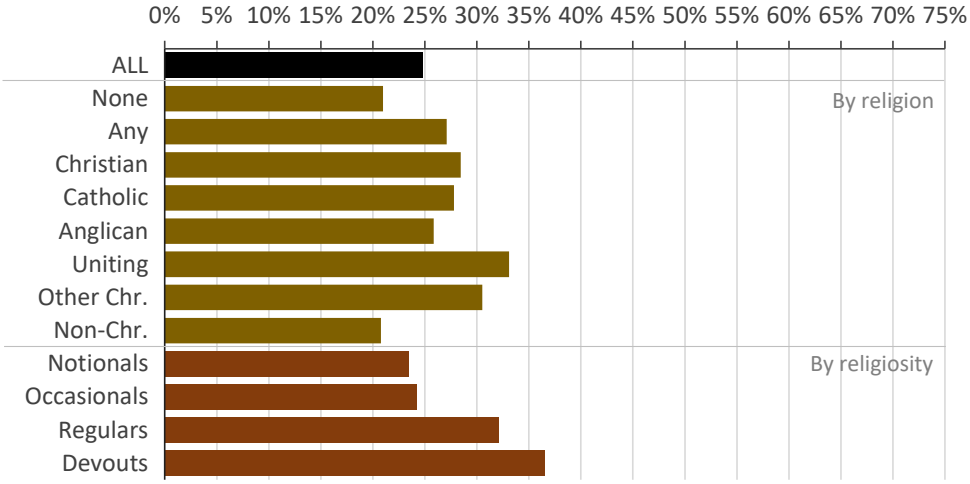

Figure 37: Proportion of donors with personal benefit from donation, by religion and ARI6 religiosity

Source: GAS 2016

By religious category, Nones and non-Christian religionists report the lowest rates of personal benefit from their donations (21% each), and Christians report the highest (30%). Personal benefit correlates strongly and positively with religiosity, from 21% amongst the Nones to 37% of Devouts.

Donations to religion

Australia's more religious are the most likely to say they or their family benefitted from their donation to the religion sector (Figure 38).

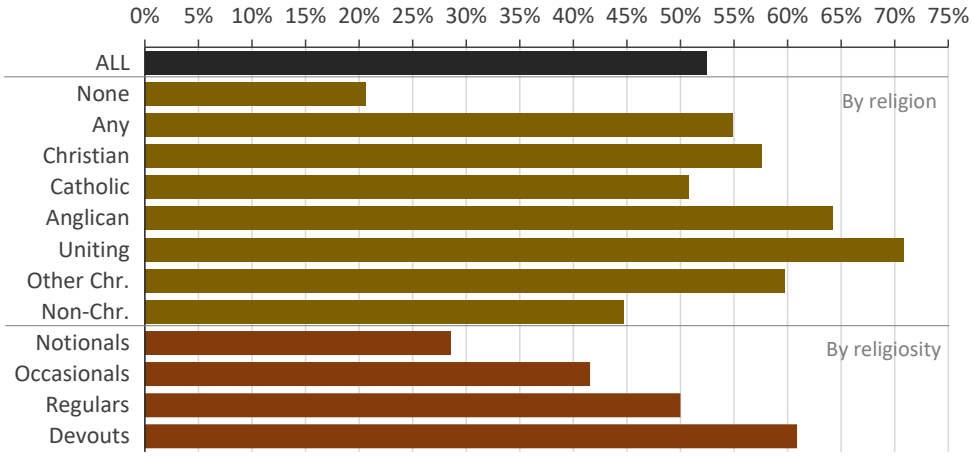

Figure 38: Proportion of donors with personal benefit from donation to the religion sector
Source: GAS 2016

Just one-in-five (20%) of Nones, and fewer than a third (29%) of Notionals say they benefit from their donation to religion. The rate increases markedly by religiosity, with four-in-ten Occasionals (42%), half (50%) of Regulars, and three-in-five Devouts (61%). Christians (58%), were significantly more likely than other religionists (48%) to say they personally benefitted, with Catholics significantly lower (51%) than Protestants (average 63%).

Of course, self-interest is a common trait and is not confined to religious corridors. But donation self-interest amongst the other sectors where high rates of self-interest might be expected, for example sport, or hobbies and clubs, is lower than religion.

A comparison of donation self-interest in all sectors *other* than religion shows some religious Australians still have higher rates of self-interest even when donating outside their sphere of religion (Figure 39).

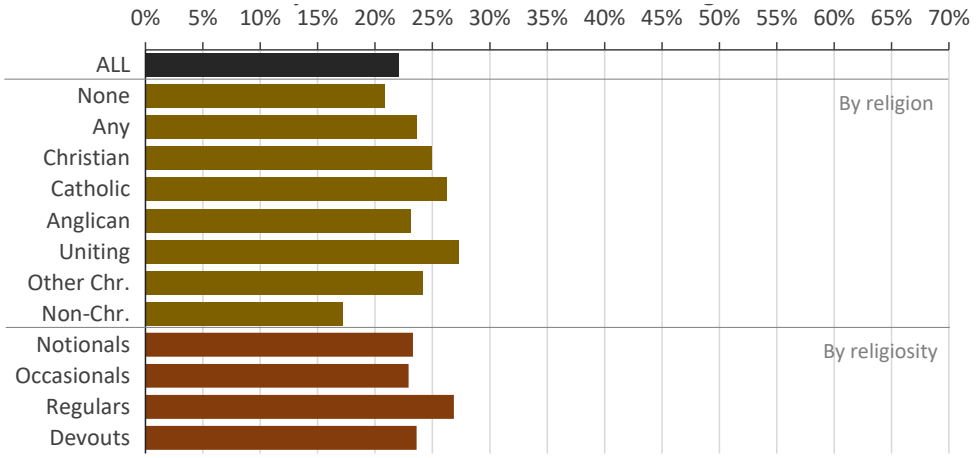

Figure 39: Personally benefit from donations to sectors *other than* religion
Source: GAS 2016

Who are those religious Australians? *Christians*. On average, Australia's non-Christian religionists exhibit the lowest rate (17%) of self-interested donation to non-religion charity sectors, followed by Nones (21%). At a statistically significant higher rate were Christians overall (25%), headed by Uniting Church affiliates (27%) and Catholics (26%). That is, Christians on average are somewhat more likely to donate *for their own benefit* than are either the Nones or non-Christian religionists.

Differences are not statistically significant by religiosity, and there is no overall trend. Thus, the degree of religiosity in Australia is not significantly related, either positively or negatively, with noting an express self-benefit from their donations.

Summary: Well over half of all donors to religion (53%) report a personal benefit from their donation, compared with less than half that (25%) for donors to other charitable sectors. The rate of reporting a personal benefit is strongly positively associated with religiosity: that is, there is also a strong association between likelihood of donating to religion, larger donation amounts, and self-described personal benefit. This association is highest amongst Australia's Christians, and less so (though still significant) amongst non-Christian religionists. Christians even report higher rates, and non-Christian religionists the lowest rates, of personal benefit from donations to sectors *other than* religion. This is seriously at odds with religionist — especial Christian — claims of prosociality.

Self-interest and the size of non/religious donations

Another indication of self-interest in the religion sector is revealed by the proportion of those who personally benefitted (self or family) from the donation, by the total amount donated to the sector: Religion sector versus all other sectors (Figure 40).

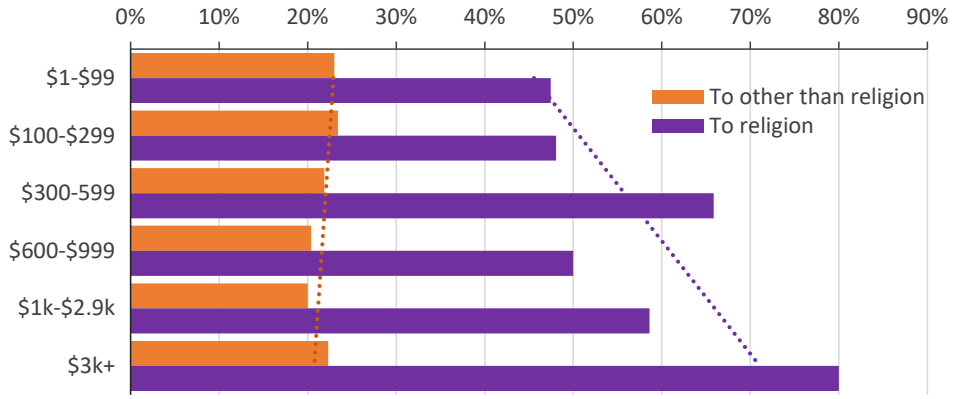

Figure 40: Proportion personally benefitting from donation to sector (religion v all other), by $ size of total donation to sector
Source: GAS 2016. Note: Linear trend lines shown.

For donations to non-religion charity, the percentage of those personally benefiting were low, ranging from 20% to 23%, and with no statistical correlation with total dollar amount. However, for donations to the religion sector the personal benefit rates were consistently very much higher, from 47% to 80%, and with a strong positive correlation with total personal donation dollar amount.

Thus, donations to non-religion sectors are characterised by relatively low self-interest regardless of total amount given, whereas donations to religion are characterised by high self-interest that increases substantially with total amount given.

> **Summary:** Personal benefit from one's donation is very much higher for donations to religion than non-religion sectors, and positively and strongly correlates with dollar amount donated. Personal benefit for donations to non-religion sectors has no association with dollar amount donated.

Volunteering, too

These donation self-interest effects carry over to volunteering as well. With increasing total donation amounts to non-religion sectors, the percent of those volunteering for non-religion charities increases moderately (Figure 41) from 28% to 59% (+31%, green), and those volunteering for religion from 7% to 19% (+12%, orange).

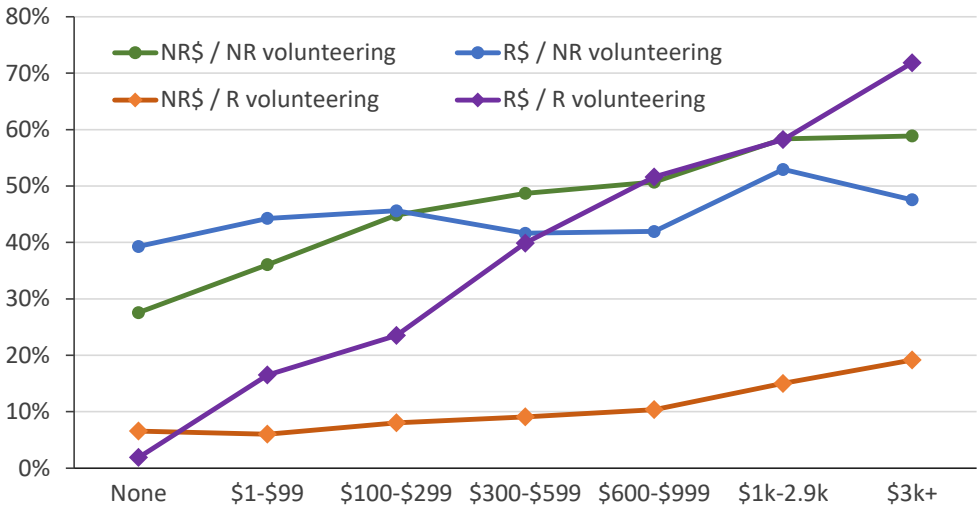

Figure 41: Total sector donation amount by proportion volunteering in sector
Source: GAS 2016. Notes: R = Religion sector, NR = Non-religion sectors (aggregated).
The slope for R$ / NR volunteering is not significantly different from zero (p = 0.15).

However, for increasing total donation amounts to religion, the patterns were markedly different. For non-religion volunteering, there is no statistically significant change across the religion donation amount spectrum (blue). But for religion volunteering, the proportion changes radically from just 2% to 72% (+70%, purple).

Thus, while increasing total donation amounts to religion are related to very greatly increased volunteering rates in religion, they are not associated with increased volunteering rates across the non-religion charity sectors.

Two other factors add further insights. Firstly, average non-religion volunteering rates are not significantly different between non-religion and religion donors: 46% for non-religion donors versus 45% for religion donors.

And secondly, amongst those who volunteer for religion, most or all is to a single (1) organisation (from 0% to 4% volunteering at more than one religion organisation). In contrast, amongst those who volunteer at non-religion charities, significant numbers volunteer to multiple (2+) organisations (from 26% to 49%).

Summary: Combined donation and volunteering are associated with a significantly elevated rate of self-benefit from religious sector activity, and volunteering at a single organisation, compared with non-religious sectors.

The "self-interest" indices: VSII and DSII

These effects can be summarised through two new indices, the Volunteering Self-Interest Index (VSII) and the Donation Self-Interest Index (DSII). These provide a measure of average self-interest per charity sector as a number from -1.0 to +1.0, compared with the average (Figures 42 and 43).

Volunteering

For volunteering, the religion sector involves by far the highest average self-interest rate (Figure 42). In contrast, religion's great substitute, secular politics, involves by far the least average rate of self-interest.

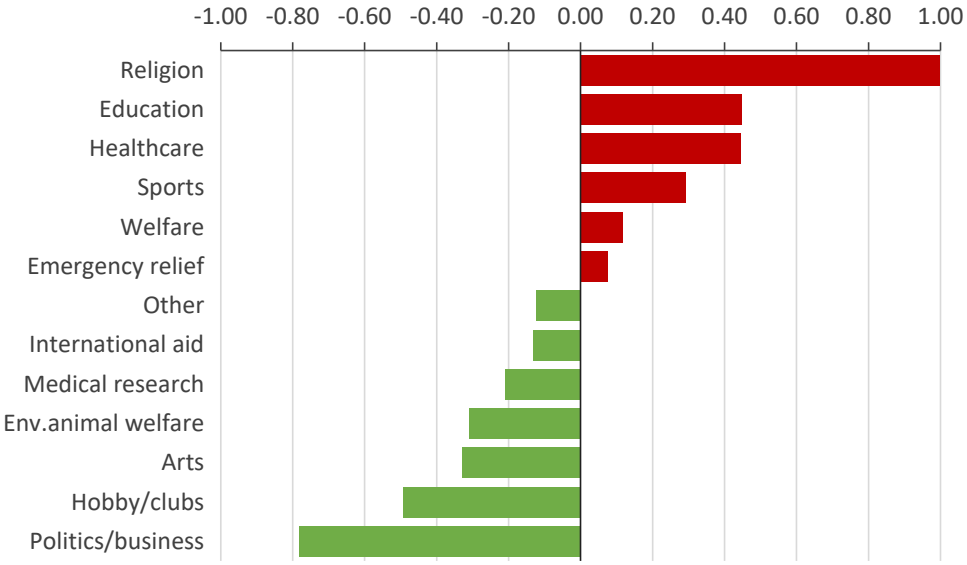

Figure 42: Volunteering self-interest index (VSII) relative to overall mean
Source: GAS 2016. Notes: A measure of sector-exclusive volunteering, and personal benefit.

For donations, education and religion are associated with far higher self-interest than all other sectors, with international aid the lowest (Figure 43).

> Those substitutable ideological bedfellows, religion and politics, show polar opposite behavioural motivation for volunteering, with religion having by far the highest self-interest motivation, and politics by far the lowest, amongst all the charitable sectors.

Donations

For donation charitable behaviour, education is the top self-interest sector, with religion close behind. International aid has the lowest rate of self-interest.

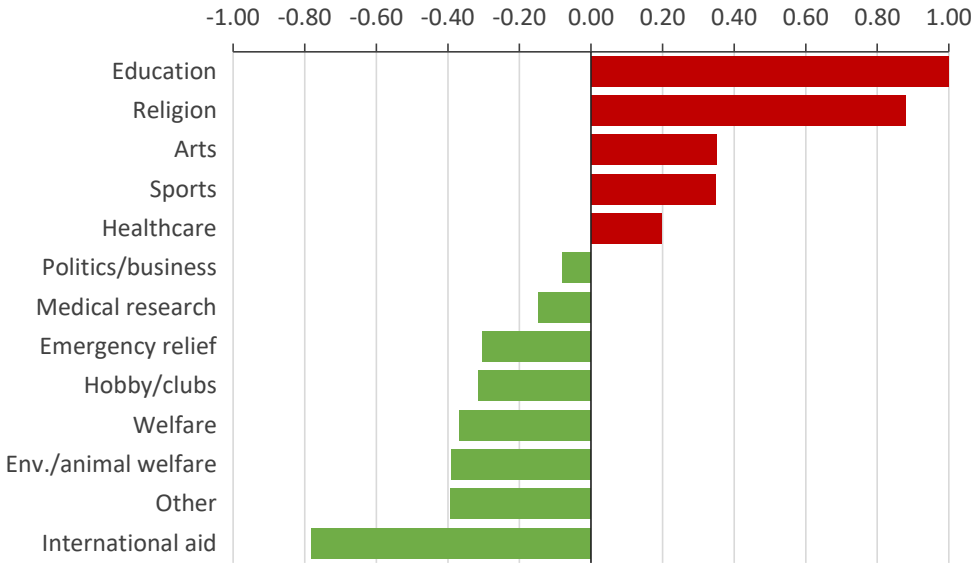

Figure 43: Donation Self-Interest Index (DSII), relative to overall mean
Source: GAS 2016. Notes: A measure of sector-exclusive donation, and personal benefit.

Summary: Both the volunteering self-interest index (VSII) and the donation self-interest index (DSII) reveal high rates of self-interest in religious charity. For volunteering self-interest, religion and education are highest in volunteering self-interest, with business and politics the lowest. For donation self-interest, education and religion are also the highest in donation self-interest, with international aid the lowest.

Prosociality: The DNPI

Another way to view the motivations for charitable giving is to consider nett prosocial motivators. Although scholarly research into the prosociality of the religious is mixed, a common claim amongst religionists is that they are more prosocial: that is, they are more concerned about and behave in more beneficial yet personally costly ways towards others.

The Donation Nett Prosociality Index (DNPI) facilitates testing this claim in regard to charitable donations. The index subtracts the rates of antisocial motivators for donation from the rates of prosocial motivators.

In the GAS study, prosocial motivators include *general* prosociality ("make the world a better place" or "strengthen the community") and *interpersonal* prosociality ("know a person with illness" or "know a person benefitting" or "know someone with a future need" or "for a known person in memoriam").

Antisocial motivators include the self or family benefitting from the donation or receiving a small immediate reward for the donation and without which the donation would not have been made.

The charity sectors emergency relief, international aid, medical research and welfare have positive DNPI scores (Figure 44).

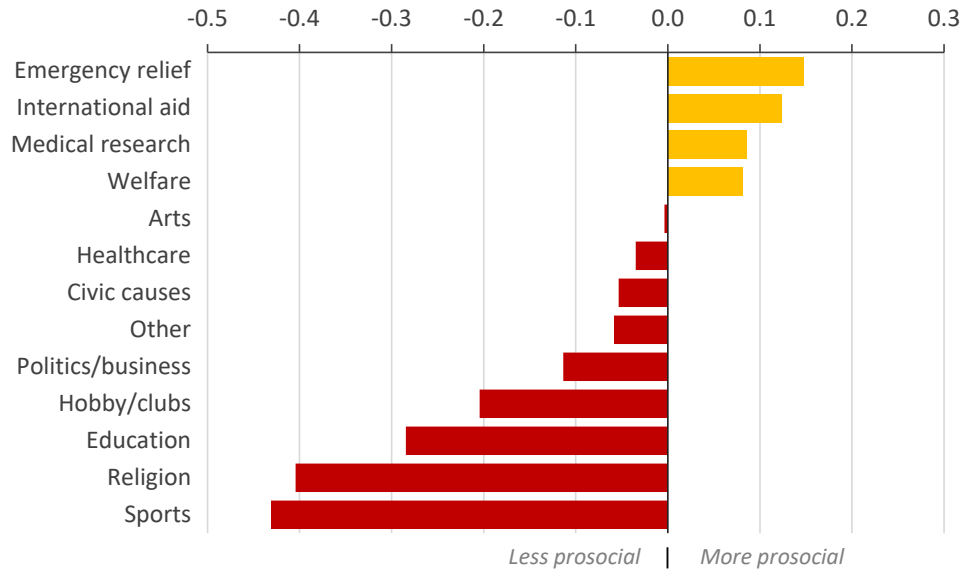

Figure 44: DNPI score by charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016

All other sectors return a negative nett DNPI score. The greater number of charitable sectors with a negative rather than positive score suggests that, at least in Australia, self-interest is a stronger overall donation motivator than is prosociality.

Donations to religion score poorly in nett prosociality. It is highly negative (-0.40), exceeded in nett negativity only by donations to the sports sector (-0.43).

However, different average dollar amounts are given in each sector (see Figure 19 on page 56). Therefore, it is appropriate to weight the DNPI score by the average amount given to produce an index that includes a measure of behaviour (Figure 45).

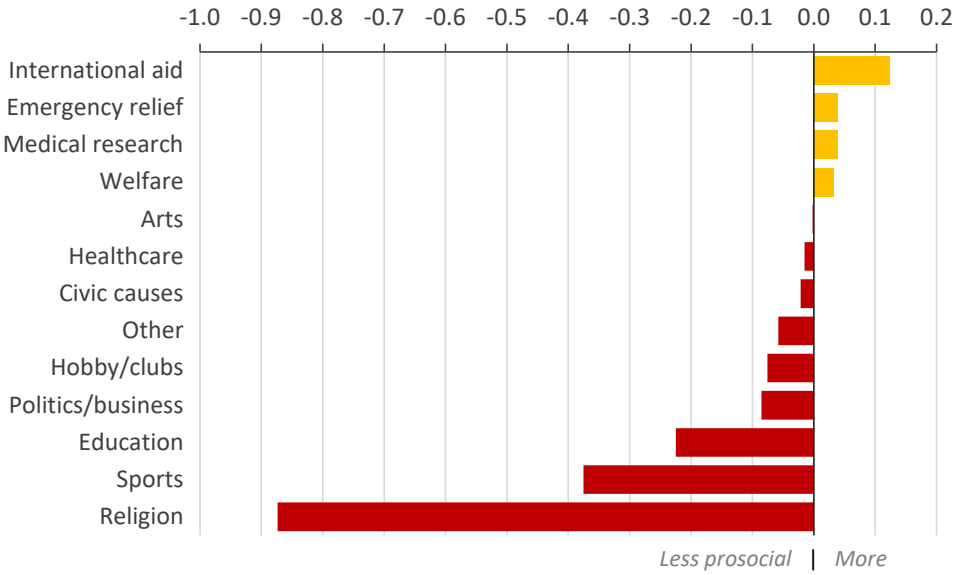

Figure 45: Average-dollar-weighted DNPI score by charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016

Donations to the religion sector are associated with by far the most negative weighted DNPI score of all (-0.87), followed by sports (-0.38) and education (-0.22). The extent of this negative prosociality comes into perspective by comparing the nett difference between religion and sports (-0.50),[16] with the entire range of weighted DNPI score amongst *all* the non-religion sectors from international aid to sports (-0.50).

> **Summary:** By weighted DNPI, donations to religion are associated with a unique and spectacularly negative prosociality score — a score that is as negative from the next most negative score as the entire range of scores amongst the non-religion sectors.

[16] Rounding makes the figures appear to not add up by 0.01.

Utilitarianism (hedonism)

There are important differences in hedonism (pleasure: "donating makes me feel good") by religion and religiosity. Nones reported *no* pleasure at all regarding donation to religion, and somewhat lower levels of hedonism when donating to non-religion charities. Overall, Christians demonstrate average levels of hedonism for both religion and non-religion donations, while non-Christian religionists show higher rates of hedonism associated with both.

By ARI6 religiosity, Notionals are vastly more likely to experience pleasure from donating to religion, but *less* likely to experience pleasure from donations to sectors *other* than religion (Figure 46). This suggests that Notionals, who affiliate with a religious denomination but *never* attend religious services, enjoy "moral licensing" — that is, seeing themselves as "good" people — from giving to their religion.[17]

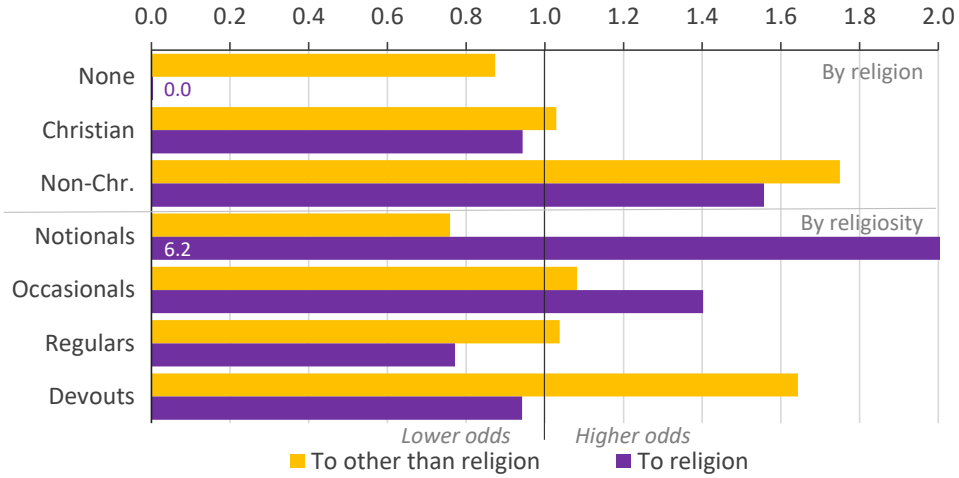

Figure 46: Odds ratios for donation "makes me feel good", donating to other-than-religion vs religion, by religion and ARI6 religiosity
Source: GAS 2016

While Occasionals also show a somewhat elevated rate of pleasure at donating to religion, they also take pleasure at around the normative level in donating to non-religious charities, suggesting a different motivational pattern from Notionals.

Devouts show a slightly decreased (and Regulars a significantly decreased) rate of hedonism donating to religion, but Devouts show a greatly increased rate of hedonism from donating to non-religion charities, to which they donate, on average, somewhat larger amounts.

[17] Remember too that Notionals donate less than Nones do across many charitable sectors except donating more than Nones to religion.

Note: There are only minor differences in hedonism by charitable sector and most of the differences are not statistically significant. The only statistically significant difference is for the religion sector (greater hedonism), but the difference from average is very small (2%).

Summary: Unsurprisingly, religionists show much higher rates of hedonism (feeling good about donating) than Nones when donating to religion. Excepting Notionals, Australia's religionists also show similar or higher rates of hedonism than Nones when donating to non-religion charitable sectors. Thus, "moral licensing" — feeling oneself to be a "good" person for donation especially to religion — is generally higher amongst Australia's religionists than amongst the Nones.

Feeling coerced

Not only is there an element of self-interest in charitable giving and volunteering in the religion sector, but a significant proportion of donation behaviour is not truly voluntary, either.

Uniquely in the religion sector, more than half (54%) of donors feel somewhat *coerced* to contribute (Figure 47). This sense of coercion includes feeling obliged to the person who requested a donation; obligation to country, culture, or religion; or feeling pressured or guilty. In all other sectors, feelings of obligation are reported by a very small minority, just 3% to 12% of donors.

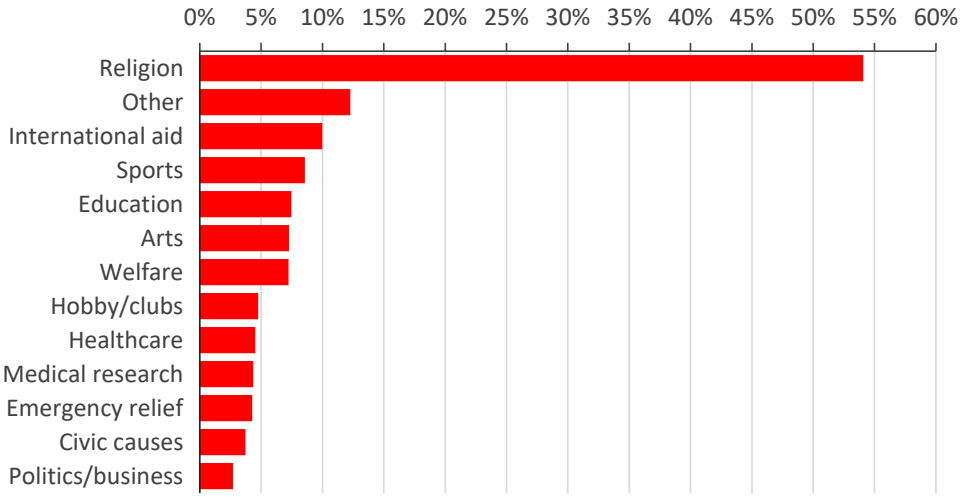

Figure 47: Proportion of donors feeling any coercion by charitable sector
Source: GAS 2016. Note: Feeling coercion = total of "felt obliged to the person who asked", "a sense of obligation to my country, culture or religion", and "felt pressured/guilty".

> A majority (54%) of donations to religion entail feelings of coercion. In contrast, this lack of true voluntariness appears in only a tiny minority (3%–12%) amongst all the other charitable sectors.

Note: In addition to the coercion reported here, a very small but statistically significant proportion of Devouts and minor Christian denominations, versus other donors, have *non-voluntary* deductions taken from their pay for international aid: about 1 in 100 donors to the sector.

Religious coercion in non-religion sectors, too

Devouts contribute vastly more to international aid and welfare than to all other sectors. This correlates with religious coercion for these sectors as well: Devouts are statistically significantly more likely than Nones to report feelings

of coercion in their donations to these two sectors in addition to their feelings of coercion for donations to religion (Figure 48).

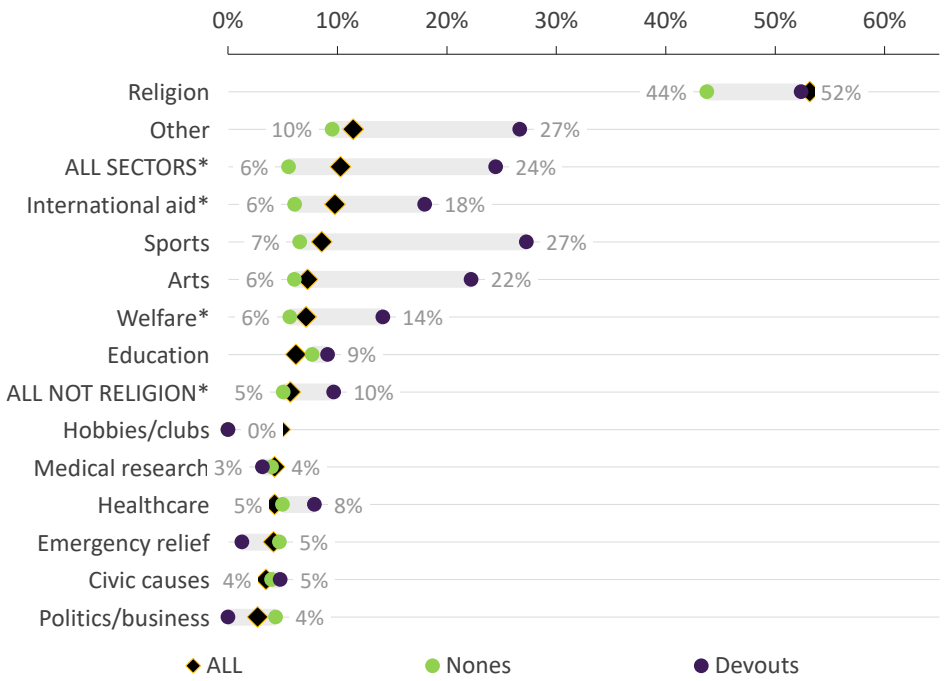

Figure 48: Differences between Nones and Devouts feeling coercion in donations to charitable sector

Source: GAS 2016. * Only differences for items marked with an asterisk are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

This finding of feeling coerced is consistent with a finding of significant "compliance" motivation amongst church/religious group members with high intention to donate (Smith & McSweeney 2007).

Summary: The religion charity sector is uniquely seen by its donors as equal lowest "good cause" (along with education), but, unlike education, exhibits very high levels of feeling coerced to donate.

This high incidence of coercion feelings (alongside religion's low rating for "good cause") is a flag that religion, in contrast with all other charitable sectors, fails in its mutual obligations to avoid harm: in this case, financial and emotional harm to its donors. Robust public debate is warranted regarding (congregational) religion's preferential status as a prosocial charitable purpose.

Coercion across religions and religiosities

Feelings of coercion to donate to religion occur at high rates across religious denominations and religiosity (average 54% of donors): all very high, but lowest among the Notionals (43%) and Nones (44%), and highest amongst Regulars (62%) (Figure 59).

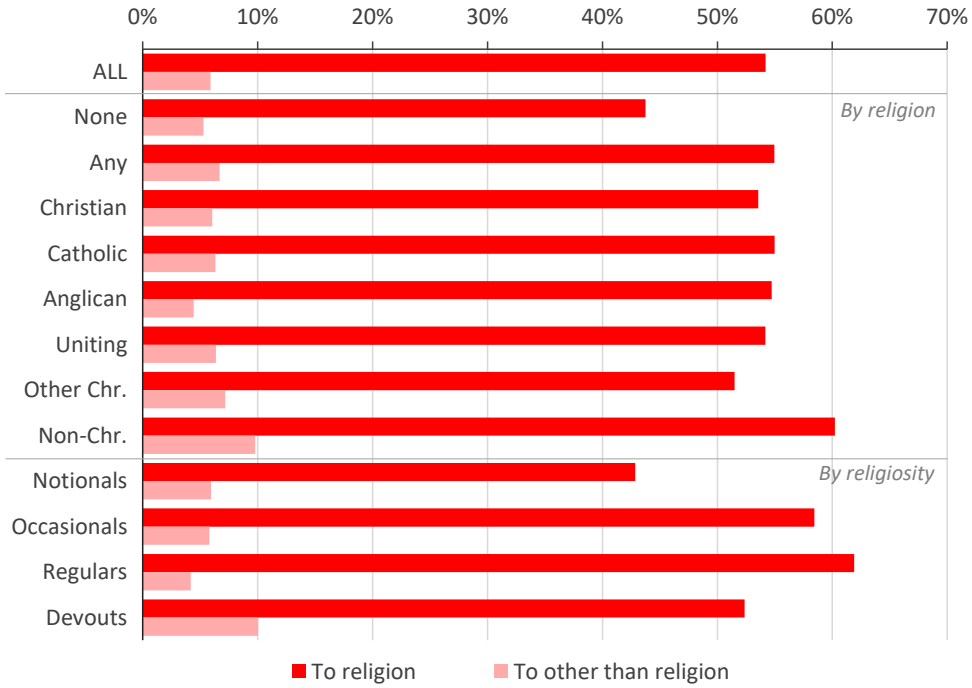

Figure 49: Proportion of donors feeling donation coercion to religion and to other-than-religion sectors, by religion and religiosity
Source: GAS 2016

For donations to sectors other than religion, feelings of coercion occur in a very small minority (4%–10%), though slightly elevated amongst non-Christian religionists, and Devouts.

> **Summary:** Feelings of donation coercion to religion are common and occur across the religions and religiosity spectrum, while rates to non-religion sectors are in a small minority.

Coercion by amounts donated

Even though rating religion as a "good cause" is slightly higher, and feelings of coercion slightly lower, amongst those donating the most ($3k+), feelings of coercion are very high across the range of amounts donated to religion, and greatly exceed "good cause"[18] as a contributing factor to donation across the dollar range (Figure 50).

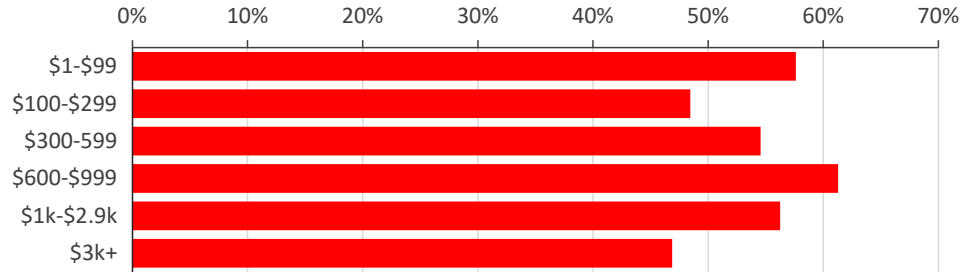

Figure 50: Feelings of coercion donating to religion, by $ amount
Source: GAS 2016

For all charitable sectors *other* than religion, "good cause" greatly exceeds feeling coerced across the entire donation dollar range (Figure 51). Feeling coerced was somewhat elevated amongst those donating median amounts: $600-$999.

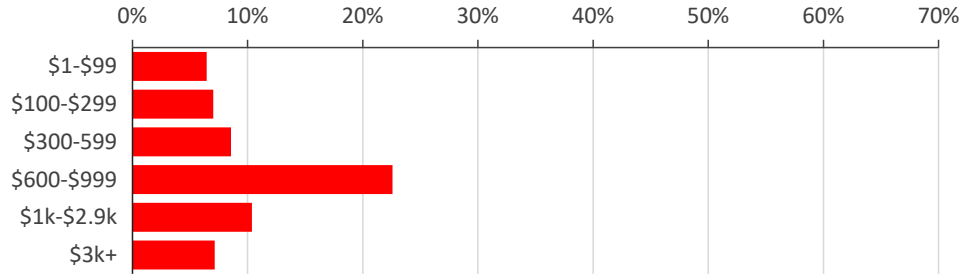

Figure 51: Feelings of coercion donating to *other than* religion, by $ amount
Source: GAS 2016

> **Summary:** Feelings of coercion are a strong feature of donating to religion across the dollar range and greatly exceeds "good cause" as a contributing factor. This is not so for non-religion sectors.

[18] See the "good cause" topic on page 72.

Coercion by ad hoc versus planned donation

Feelings of coercion are experienced at high rates for donors to religion regardless of whether donations are ad hoc, mixed, or all planned (Figure 52). (Differences are not statistically significant.)

Feelings of coercion for donation to all other sectors are uniformly low.

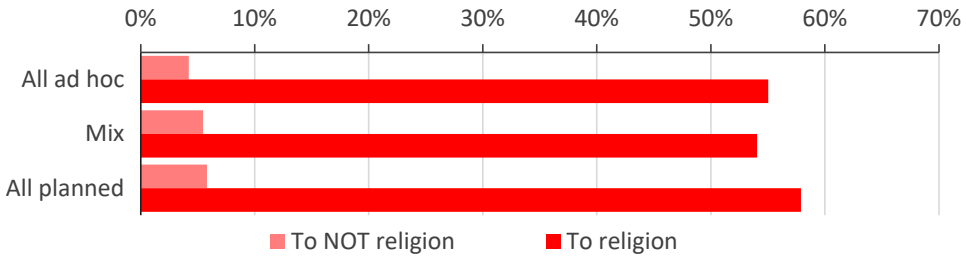

Figure 52: Feelings of coercion by ad hoc versus planned donation
Source: GAS 2016

> **Summary:** Feelings of coercion for donors to religion are high regardless of whether the donation/s are all ad hoc, mixed, or all planned. Feelings of coercion amongst non-religion donors are uniformly low.

Not all religion is equal

The Giving Australia Study 2016 hard donation data shows that not all religion is equal when it comes to charitable donations. For example, Catholics are more prone to guilt (Sheldon 2006), and Australia's **Catholics** are vastly more likely than others to nominate guilt as a factor for donating to charity (Figure 53), along with "for a known person in memoriam", but are not more likely to nominate any other reasons.

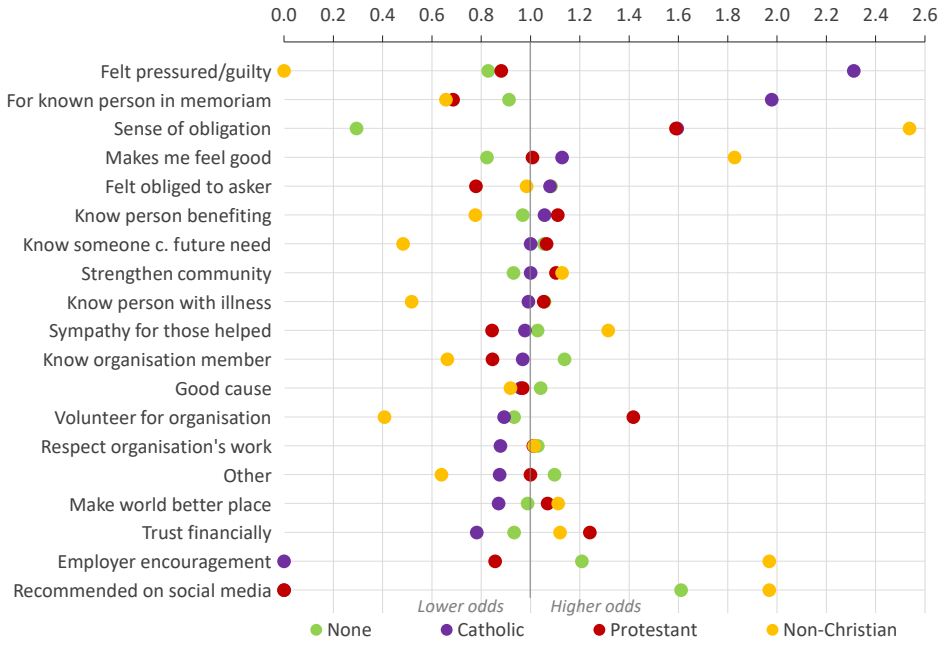

Figure 53: Reason for main donation (multi-response) odds ratio, by religion
Source: GAS 2016. Notes: All charitable sectors. Reasons are multi-response.

The hard data also suggests that **Protestants** are more personally (in-group) focused than others. As discussed in previous topics, they report the lowest contribution of "sympathy for those helped" and the highest rates of "known person benefiting", "known person with illness", "know someone with a future need", "trust financially", and "volunteer for the organisation".

Non-Christian religionists overall show the greatest general prosociality (towards out-groups as well) since they report the greatest rates of a sense of obligation but without pressure or guilt, sympathy for those helped, and making the world a better place. At the same time, they report the lowest rates of in-group favouritism including knowing a person benefiting from the donation, knowing a person with illness, or knowing someone with a future need. They are also most likely to donate to an organisation at which they *don't* volunteer. Nevertheless, they report by far the highest rates of hedonism — feeling good about their donation.

Nones are unique in reporting the lowest rate of feeling an obligation to donate, and the lowest rate of hedonism for having donated.

Summary: Religions are not all equal when it comes to charitable donations. **Catholics** are the most driven by guilt, **Protestants** by in-group favouritism, and **non-Christian religionists** by general prosociality though with a large dollop of hedonism for their good deeds. **Nones** rate lowest for feeling obligated to donate or hedonism for having done so.

Helping indigenous Australians

Australia's First Nations or indigenous communities, comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are amongst the nation's most disadvantaged. Major inequality indicators include high infant mortality rates, low levels of education, high unemployment, worse physical and mental health, high rates of family violence and child removals, extremely high levels of incarceration, and shorter life expectancy (Australians Together 2022).

These very substantial disadvantages continue despite decades of major inquiries and government pledges to "close the gap" (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2022). The most recent government report indicates that only four of 17 gap-reduction targets are currently being met, with some indicators worsening (Morse 2022).

Nevertheless, attitudes toward conditions for First Nations peoples vary markedly by religion and religiosity.

Indigenous aspirations and societal well-being

Firstly, Australia's Christians are significantly *less* likely than Nones and non-Christian religionists to say that recognising the aspirations of First Nations people is important to the well-being of Australian society (Figure 54).

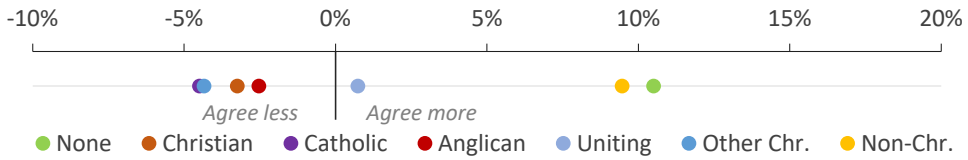

Figure 54: Importance of recognising First Nations aspirations to societal well-being, by religion
Source: AES 2001

This association is driven largely by the lesser religious: those associated with a religion but who attend religious services less than weekly (including not at all) — Notionals, Occasionals (less religious religionists) as well as Regulars (Figure 56).[19]

[19] In 2001, a majority (61%) of Australians were Notionals and Occasionals.

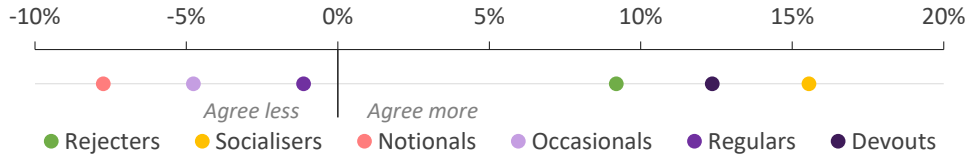

Figure 55: Importance of recognising First Nations aspirations to societal well-being, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AES 2001

Australian Social Identity and the religious premium

In the year of this study (2001), *all* the Notionals and Occasionals were social Progressives or social Moderates, while amongst religion's more committeds — Regulars and Devouts — a majority were Religious Conservatives. Thus, the religious premium has differing polarisation for the less committed versus the more committed (Figure 56).

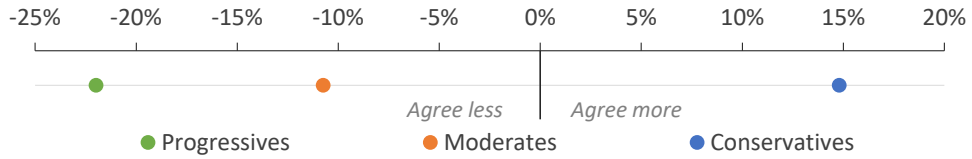

Figure 56: Religious premium of the importance of recognising First Nations aspirations to societal well-being, by ASI6 social identity
Source: AES 2001

Summary: Australia's Christians, notably less religious religionists (Notionals and Occasionals), are significantly less likely to say recognition of First Nations people's aspirations is important to overall societal well-being. This is consistent with normative in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice.

Un/equal treatment of First Nations people

Australia's religionists are vastly more likely than the Nones to say that First Nations people are now treated equally to other Australians (Figure 57).

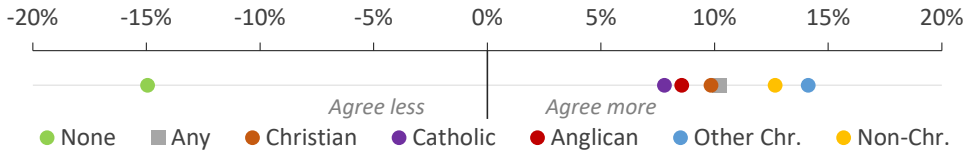

Figure 57: Polarisation of belief that First Nations people are now treated equally to other Australians, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2016

This belief is strongly associated with ARI6 religiosity: Rejecters are vastly less likely, and Devouts vastly more likely, to say that First Nations people are now treated equally (Figure 58).

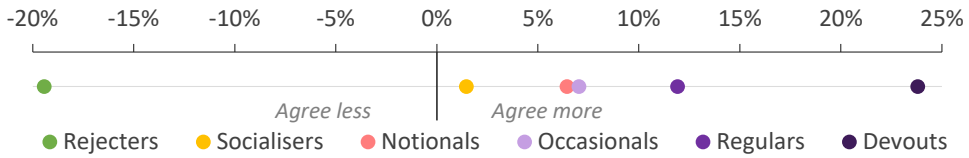

Figure 58: Polarisation of belief that First Nations people are now treated equally to other Australians, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AuSSA 2016

Summary: Australia's religionists, especially Devouts, are vastly more likely than Nones to believe that indigenous Australians are treated equally, despite their major ongoing levels of disadvantage.

"Character" prejudice: Belief that those experiencing major and persistent structural disadvantage are treated equally is consistent with other research showing that the religious are more likely to think disadvantage is a person's own fault, that is, a prejudiced attitude towards the person's character rather than recognition of the contribution of environmental factors.

Justifying extra government assistance

Australia's Anglicans are by far the least likely, and Catholics by far the most likely, to say that the level of First Nations disadvantage justifies extra government assistance, (Figure 59). Attitudes of other Australians are somewhat similarly normative.

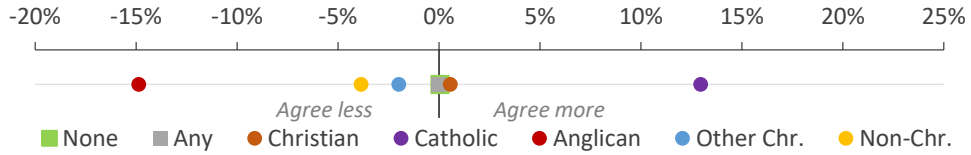

Figure 59: Polarisation of belief that First Nations disadvantage justifies extra government assistance, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2016

By ARI6 religiosity, Australia's Notionals, are by far the most likely to *dis*agree that extra government assistance is justified (Figure 60). The most religious, Regulars and Devouts, are the most likely to agree.

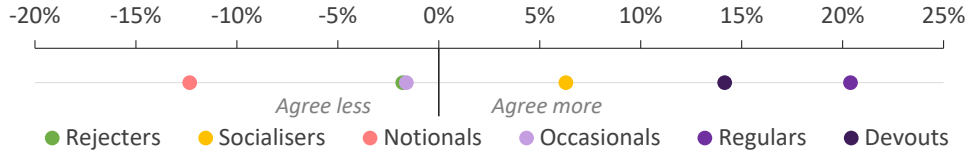

Figure 60: Polarisation of belief that First Nations disadvantage justifies extra government assistance, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AuSSA 2016

Summary: Australia's Anglicans and Notionals are by far the most likely to say that extra government assistance for First Nations people is *not* justified, while Catholics and the most religious (Regulars and Devouts) are the most likely to say it *is*. That is, the relationship between religion, religiosity, and attitudes toward a disadvantaged outgroup is complex.[20]

[20] Since respondents self-identifying as First Nations people represent just 2.1% of the study's sample, their effects on these overall results will be negligible. Around six-in-ten First Nations respondents were Nones, slightly higher than non-First Nations respondents (somewhat over half).

Government help: too little versus gone too far

Despite substantial disadvantage amongst First Nations people, Australia's Christians are significantly more likely to say that government help for them has "gone too far" (Figure 61). Nones, and non-Christian religionists are far more likely to say it hasn't gone far enough.

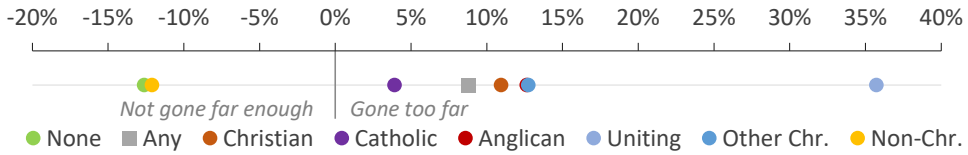

Figure 61: Polarisation of attitudes toward government help for First Nations people "has gone too far", by religion
Source: AES 2019

By religiosity, Rejecters and Socialisers, and to a lesser extent, Devouts, are more likely to say that help hasn't gone far enough (Figure 62), while Regulars, Occasionals and especially Notionals, are much more likely to judge help as having gone too far.

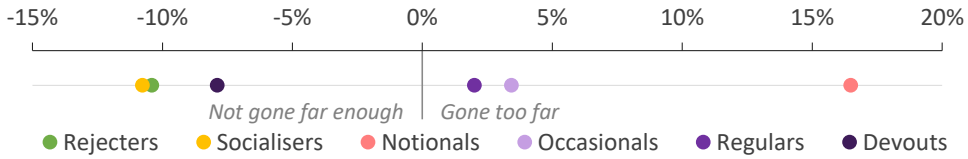

Figure 62: Polarisation of attitudes toward government help for First Nations people "has gone too far", by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AES 2019

That is, Christians, and less religious religionists harbour more hostile attitudes toward helping lift First Nations people out of disadvantage.

Summary: It is Australia's Christians, and less religious religionists (especially Notionals), who say that government help of First Nations people has "gone too far", despite 13 of 17 "closing the gap" indicators not being met, and several others worsening. Nones and Socialisers are most likely to say help hasn't gone far enough.

Land rights for First Nations people

Similarly, on the matter of recognising land rights for Australia's indigenous population, on average Christians hold much more negative views than do Nones, and especially non-Christian religionists (Figure 63).

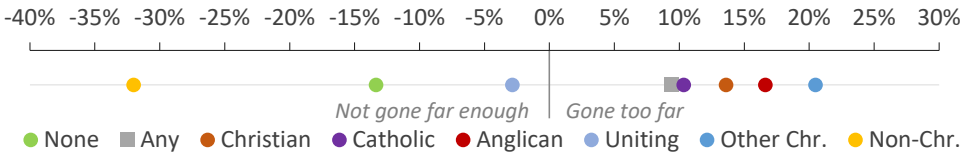

Figure 63: Polarisation of attitudes toward land rights for First Nations people "has gone too far", by religion
Source: AES 2019

Saying that First Nations land rights have gone too far is also associated with ARI6 religiosity, with Rejecters most likely to say land rights "hasn't gone far enough", and the more religious likely to say it has "gone too far" (Figure 64).

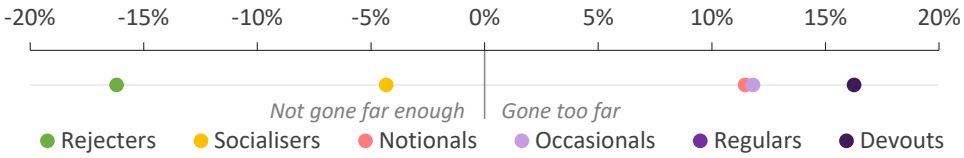

Figure 64: Polarisation of attitudes toward land rights for First Nations people "has gone too far", by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AES 2019

Summary: Australia's Christians, and the most religious, are significantly more likely than Nones, non-Christian religionists, and Socialisers, to say that land rights for First Nations people have gone too far. This is consistent with more devout Christian cultural appropriation of Australia as a "Judeo-Christian nation" — an entirely religious framing — when Australia is in practice a multicultural nation.

Fairness of granting land rights to First Nations people

An insight into why Christians in particular are more likely to say that land rights for First Nations people have gone too far can be found in their perceptions about land rights *fairness*.

Christians, especially Anglicans, are far more likely than Nones and non-Christian religionists to say that granting land rights to First Nations people is unfair to *other* Australians (Figure 65).

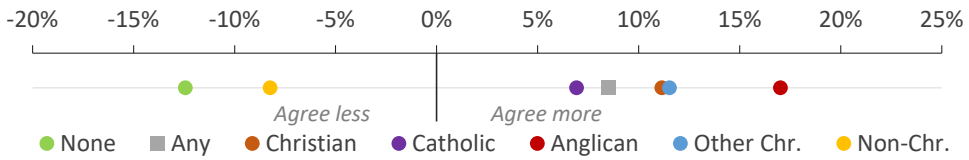

Figure 65: Polarisation of attitudes that granting First Nations people land rights is unfair to other Australians, by religion
Source: AuSSA 2016

By ARI6 religiosity, Notionals are far more likely than all others to say First Nations land rights are unfair to other Australians (Figure 66).

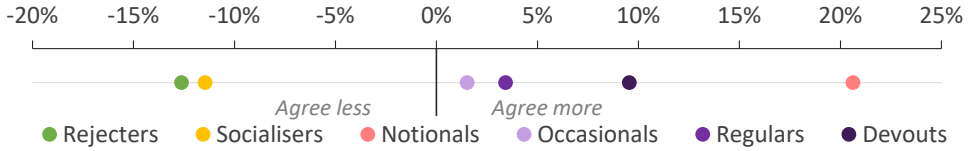

Figure 66: Polarisation of attitudes that granting First Nations people land rights is unfair to other Australians, by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AuSSA 2016

Yet even the strongly religious, Regulars and Devouts, are significantly more likely to harbour hostile attitudes toward the fairness of First Nations land rights than are Rejecters and Socialisers.

Summary: Although the hard data reveals some nuances, overall it is Australia's Christians who harbour the *lowest* rates of prosocial attitudes towards Australia's arguably most disadvantaged community group: First Nations people. This is seriously at odds with religious — especially Christian — claims of greater charity and prosociality, and consistent with promoting one's own in-group interests at the expense of out-groups.

Overseas aid

So too there are significant differences in attitudes toward Australian government aid to overseas recipients, that is, "public" charity.

Most Australians would be unaware of the *actual* level of overseas aid the federal government gives in any financial year, or its nature or where it is given. Consequently, the AuSSA 2016 survey question "The Australian government gives too much overseas aid" is largely a proxy measure of attitudes regarding the relative deservingness of out-groups (*overseas* recipients) versus in-groups (Australian residents).

Australia's Christians, particularly the two largest denominations, Catholics and Anglicans, are very significantly more likely than Nones and non-Christian religionists to say the government gives *too much* overseas aid (Figure 67).

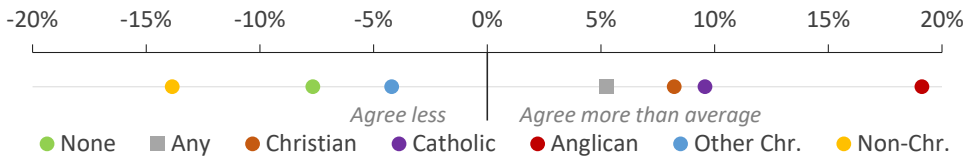

Figure 67: Nett polarisation of attitudes toward "The Australian government gives too much overseas aid", by religion
Source: AuSSA 2016

> Australia's largest religious denominations — **Catholics and Anglicans** — are by far the most likely to say the Australian government gives *too much* overseas aid. This is significantly at odds with the Christian claim to greater charity and prosociality. Rather, it is more consistent with in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice.

By ARI6 religiosity, it's Australia's least religious religionists — Notionals and Occasionals — who are considerably more likely to argue for *less* overseas aid, while Devouts, Regulars and Nones are considerably more likely to argue for *more* (Figure 68).

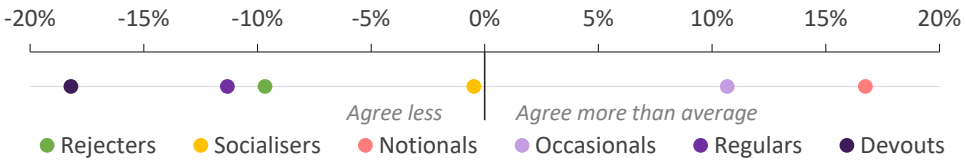

Figure 58: Nett polarisation of attitudes toward "The Australian government gives too much overseas aid", by ARI6 religiosity
Source: AuSSA 2016

Summary: Australia's major Christian denominations, **Catholics and Anglicans**, are the most likely to argue for a *reduction* in government overseas aid. This is fuelled largely by the least religious religionists: those who state a religious affiliation but never or rarely attend religious services (Notionals and Occasionals).

This is consistent with larger normative in-group favouritism along with out-group prejudice, and is at odds with religious claims to greater prosociality as a religious "principle".

Summary

Volunteerism

Volunteerism rates

International evidence suggests that the religious are no more likely to volunteer than the non-religious, but that those who do are more likely to volunteer in their own church than more widely.

In Australia, it is in fact non-Christian religionists who are by far the most likely to volunteer, while Uniting Church adherents are no more likely than Nones to volunteer. Indeed, it is conscientious Regulars, not the most religious (Devouts) who volunteer the most, and Notionals — those with a religious affiliation but who *never* attend services, along with Socialisers (no religious affiliation but occasionally attend services), who volunteer by far the least.

By denomination, Australia's Catholics are not statistically more likely than Nones to say they volunteer. Minor Protestant denominations and the most religious, Ardents (minor Protestant denominations are highest in Ardents in any case) are most likely to say they volunteer.

Thus, religious affiliation alone — which is what is measured in the national Census — is a very poor predictor of volunteering.

Where volunteering occurs

Most volunteering by the religious occurs in respect of the person's own religious in-group — their religious congregation — rather than with out-groups. The religious character of some non-congregational charities is also a disincentive to participation by the non-religious.

Volunteerism is somewhat ideological

Volunteerism appears associated with a more ideologically based personality. Secular political centrists are the least likely, and the religious on the hard left, and particularly on the hard right, are far more likely to volunteer.

The Charity Sector Engagement Index (CSEI) indicates that religion is uniquely high in engagement compared with all other sectors including business and politics, and civic causes (environment, animal welfare, and justice). These top three charitable sectors (including religion) are the most ideological.

Volunteering to religion

Understandably, the rate of volunteering in the religion sector is higher than all other sectors amongst (religious) Regulars, and uniquely very high amongst Devouts.

Those who volunteer in the religion sector — that is, mostly to their own religious congregation — are the most likely to *not* volunteer in any other of the 12 major charitable sectors. That is, those whose volunteerism relates to religious worship are least likely to offer their personal help to *different others*.

Volunteering to other than religion

Across all charitable sectors other than religion, which is where a fair comparison may be made, Australia's Notionals are much less likely to volunteer, and other religionists (Occasionals through Devouts) volunteer at the same rates as Nones.

In all sectors other than religion, Devouts volunteer at lower rates than Nones, except in international aid, where rates are similar.

> Australia's religious volunteer more: but outside their own religion *at the same rate as Nones*, and in the case of Notionals, less. The volunteering rate amongst Catholics is not significantly different from Nones, while affiliates of minor Protestant denominations are more likely to volunteer. Overall, the nett difference in volunteering rates is *religious volunteering* within the volunteers' own religious in-group: their congregation. Volunteers in the religion sector are more likely than volunteers in any other sector to volunteer *only* in the one sector, indicating greater self-interest.

Charitable giving

As in the USA and the UK, more charitable dollars are given to religion than to any other charitable sector, including welfare, emergency relief, international aid, healthcare, medical research, and education. These amounts are of course donated by the religious, not the non-religious.

Australia's religious are indeed more likely than Nones to donate to charity, and they donate around 50% more in dollar value.

However, international evidence indicates that the highly moralistic (deeply religious) are more likely to donate to in-groups, while the non-religious are more likely to donate to out-groups. The Australian data is consistent with this relationship.

Religious giving to ... religion

By proportion of Australians who donate to a charitable sector, religion comes in at number 5 (19%), after medical research (42%), welfare (39%), international aid, and emergency relief (25% each).

However, by total amount given, more charitable dollars are donated to religion (29%) than to any other charitable sector, including international aid (17%), medical research (13%), welfare (10%), or emergency relief (5%). It equates to some $3.2 billion donated in the support of one's own religious faith. A massive 87% of the amounts given to religion are donated by Devouts, who in 2019 represented just 11% of the population, fuelled by religion donations averaging more than twice as much (relative $2.16) compared with the second-largest dollar value sector, international aid (indexed at $1.00).

Amongst Devouts, religion is the top donation sector, while for Regulars, religion is number three after international aid and medical research. Amongst other Australians, religion doesn't appear in the top five donation sectors. Those donating half or more of their charitable dollars to religion include a quarter (26%) of all religionists, a third (32%) of Regulars, four in ten (40%) of minor Protestant denominations, and more than half (58%) of Devouts.

> Substantial proportions of religious Australians donate half or more of their charitable dollars to just one of the 13 charitable sectors: their own (religion).

While most Australians choose to donate to a single organisation in any charitable sector, religion also tops all sectors for the proportion of donors giving to just *one* organisation in the sector (96%, versus 70% for medical research), further suggesting a self-referential approach to religious charity: favouring one's own in-group.

Compared with Nones, Notionals donate very much more to religion, about the same to healthcare and emergency relief, but substantially less to all other sectors. Thus, religious affiliation is not broadly predictive of general (non-religious) charitable giving.

Planned giving

Religion "owns" planned giving: two thirds (67%) of donors make fully or partly planned contributions, compared with just 1% (arts) to 30% (medical research) amongst all other sectors. This is hardly surprising given the principle of tithing amongst religious congregations.

Comparing the least (Nones) and most religious (Devouts) overall, Devouts have spectacular rates of planned giving to religion, and slightly more to international aid. Across some sectors, Nones and Devouts don't differ significantly in their rates of planned giving, but Devouts show *less* planned giving than Nones in healthcare, medical research, civic causes, welfare, and emergency relief.

Motivations for charitable giving

General empathy is a key reason for donations to civic causes and to international aid (a reason for 42% and 41% of donors respectively). As a reason for donating to religion, only one in ten donors (10%) identified *general empathy* reasons, the fourth lowest of all 13 sectors. *This suggests that most donors to religion don't believe their money either helps (unknown) others in general or makes the world a better place.*

Non-Christian religionist donors show slightly higher levels of general empathy when donating to non-religious causes, but not to religion. When donating to sectors *other* than religion, Devouts display slightly higher general empathy, Nones average general empathy, and Notionals the least. Thus, having a religious affiliation is a poor predictor of general empathic prosocial behaviour.

Religion equal least likely to be a "good cause"

Sector donors are most likely to identify as a "good cause" the welfare sector (49%), international aid and emergency relief (48% each), and civic causes (47%). Religion was equal last, along with education (20% each).

In addition, this low level of considering religion a "good cause" occurs across the religious spectrum. Across the religious denominations, and across the religiosity spectrum *including Devouts*, rating religion as a "good cause" was substantially lower (range 18%–26%) — about half that of all other charitable sectors (range 39%–44%).

> Donors to religion, *including Devouts*, are vastly *less* likely than donors to all other sectors to donate *because* they think their religious congregation is a "good cause". This raises serious questions about the social benefits of religion as a charitable purpose.

An immediate small reward — such as a small item or attendance at an event — as a trigger for donation behaviour is employed most in the sports and education sectors (reported by 44% and 28% of donors respectively), and least in religion (fewer than 5%). This is not a driver of donations to religion.

Personal benefit

What *is* a key driver of donations to religion (apart from the automated hip pocket of planned giving), is *personal benefit*: that is, the donor or a member of the donor's family personally benefiting from the donation.

Education tops the sector list for personal benefit (by 67% of its donors), with religion second (50%). Other sectors in which significant personal benefit might be considered normal are in fact associated with lower rates, e.g. sports (44%), and hobbies and recreation clubs (26%).

Personal benefit from religion donations is strongly and positively associated with religiosity: 28% of Notionals, 42% of Occasionals, 50% of Regulars, and 61% of Devouts.

Further, even in relation to donations to sectors *other* than religion, Australia's Christians report statistically higher rates of personal benefit (25%), but non-Christian religionists lower rates (17%), than Nones (21%).

> In terms of the religion sector, high levels of personal benefit are evident, but even in donation behaviour to non-religion sectors, Christians report higher (but non-Christian religionists report lower) rates of personal benefit than do Nones. This is at odds with the general contention that religionists (Christians in particular) are more altruistic than Nones.

Nett prosociality index

The Donation Nett Prosociality Index (DNPI) subtracts donors' stated antisocial motivators from social motivators, and weights the result by the average dollar amount donated. Religion holds by far the most negative DNPI

score (-0.87), with the next-most negative sector being sports (-0.38). The scale of how low religious donation prosociality is can be seen by comparing its gap from the next-most negative, -0.50, with the entire range of DNPI scores amongst all non-religion charity sectors (-0.50).

> Donors to religion exhibit a spectacularly low rate of nett prosocial motivation compared with donors to all other sectors.

Hedonism

Nones are less likely, and religionists, especially non-Christian, more likely, to report pleasure ("makes me feel good") from their donating behaviour. This is exceptionally so for donations to religion, but also significantly for Devouts' donations to non-religion sectors. This is another unrecognised personal benefit from donating.

Coercion

By far the most outstanding feature of donations to religion is that donors often feel coerced, compelled or obligated to donate: that is, their donations are not devoid of undue influence. *More than half* (54%) of donors to religion report feeling some coercion for their donations, compared with just 3%–12% of donors across all other sectors. Coercion rates are a vastly more significant reason for donating to religion than is believing religion is a "good cause" or that the donation will benefit unknown others or make the world a better place.

For the international aid and welfare sectors, not just religion, Devouts report significantly higher rates of feeling coerced. This is likely due to the strong structural religious organisation connections to those two sectors.

The differences in coercion occur across the religions and the religiosity spectrum and are largely unrelated to donation amount.

These very elevated feelings of coercion for donations to religion occur regardless of whether the donation is ad hoc, entirely planned, or a mix of the two. Feelings of coercion for donations to non-religious sectors are uniformly low regardless of whether the donation is ad hoc or planned.

> Donations to religion are associated with low rates of being seen as a "good cause" or helping unknown others, and with both high rates of personal benefit and feelings of coercion to donate.

Religious culture differences

Not all religion is equal. For example, Australia's Catholics are by far the most likely to report that their donation is associated with guilt. Non-Christian religionists are the most likely to donate due to a sense of obligation or that it makes them feel good, but the least likely to donate because they personally know someone in need.

Anglicans are most likely, and non-Christian religionists the least, to donate to an organisation they also volunteer at.

Helping indigenous Australians

In addition to the charitable behaviours of individual Australians, the Australian government can provide help to disadvantaged communities. One of the most disadvantaged is First Nations people.

Australia's Christians are far less likely than Nones and non-Christian religionists to say that for societal well-being, it's important to recognise the aspirations of First Nations people. This difference is largely explained by the negative attitude of less religious religionists, Notionals and Occasionals. Devouts are on average in favour of recognition.

Australia's religionists (Christian and non- alike) are vastly more likely than Nones to say that First Nations people are now treated equally, despite their major ongoing levels of disadvantage.

Religious culture differences come to the fore again, with Anglicans by far the least, and Catholics by far the most likely to say that First Nation people's disadvantage justifies additional government assistance. The attitude of Nones is close to the mean.

Nones and non-Christian religionists are far more likely to say that more government help is needed, while minor Christian denominations are most likely to say government help has gone too far.

Land rights

Non-Christian religionists and Nones are most likely to say that land rights for First Nations people haven't gone far enough, with Christians more likely to say it's gone too far (driven by both Notionals and Devouts).

Overseas aid

Another facet of public versus individual charitable works is government contributions to overseas aid.

Non-Christian religionists and Nones are most likely to say that there is not enough government aid for overseas beneficiaries, while Christians — Anglicans and Catholics in particular (fuelled by less religious religionists, Notionals and Occasionals) — are most likely to say the government gives too much overseas aid. Importantly, Devouts (most of whom are Christian), are the most likely to say that more overseas aid is needed.

These findings highlight important differences in the cultural and faith-based effects of religion: that different religious traditions have developed their own majority world views toward charity, and that less religious religionists tend to be less generous and hold more negative attitudes toward helping out-groups, than do the most religious (Devouts).

Conclusions

The contention that religious Australians volunteer and donate to charity more than the non-religious is, in headline figures, true.

However, the additional levels of volunteering and charitable giving — over and above the non-religious — is directed squarely at their own in-group: their religious congregation. Donors to religion are far more likely to identify that they personally benefit from their donation than do donors to any other charitable sector. They are also likely to feel coerced into their high levels of volunteering and charitable donation to their own religious congregation, and are uniquely less likely than donors to other sectors to think their contribution is to a "good cause", and less likely than most other sectors to be associated helping unknown others or making the world a better place.

Negative attitudes toward a major disadvantaged group, First Nations peoples, and towards government assistance for those in need overseas, is highest amongst Christians (i.e. towards their out-groups), despite the frequent, vocal pronouncements of Christian leaders that the religious are more prosocial than the non-religious.

This gives pause for automatically casting religion (congregational, not service delivery to others) as a prosocial charitable purpose. Key indicators suggest otherwise.

Charities enjoy favourable taxation benefits on condition that they have *only* purposes that are for the public benefit. Thus, charities must avoid causing harm. On these grounds, *congregational* religion deserves significant scrutiny

regarding the automatic privileges currently enjoyed only by Basic Religious Charities.

To be clear by contrast, any notion that religious charities which provide much-needed services to the general community, especially those doing it tough, ought to be penalised, censured or treated differently from non-religious charities (doing the same) merely *because* they have a religious ethos, is not supported by any analysis in this report. Such notions are rejected.

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