



RATIONALIST SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA



# Religiosity in Australia

## Part 5: Religion, morality and values

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**Cover image:** Ribbons adorn the front fence of St Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, in public acknowledgement of children who were sexually abused within the Catholic church. (Credit: Steve Lovegrove)

## 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



Dr Leslie Cannold

What impact does religious affiliation, and the devoutness of that affiliation, have on the ethical values of Australians? This is the question that Neil Francis for the Rationalist Society has set out to answer in this volume in a definitive fashion that only hard numbers drawn from reliable sources like peer-reviewed scientific literature and high-quality university survey data can provide.

It's important to understand why Neil has dedicated his substantial statistical talents to this pursuit, and why the RSA has seen fit to publish the results. As a secular ethicist of more than thirty years — from 1992 when I studied for my Masters in Bioethics under and subsequently worked for Professor Peter Singer to my current position as the Head of Programs at the Cranlana Centre for Ethical Leadership at Monash — I can testify to the tenacious persistence of a belief that humanity can't be "good without God."

We can't be good without God, the argument goes, because only God can secure [the objective nature](#) of moral injunctions. Or, we can't be good without God because most humans are naturally bad, and it is only fear of divine punishment that compels compliance with what is morally required.

What's important to notice about claims that religious faith is essential to human morality is what they imply about the 40 per cent of Australians who ticked "no religion" in response to the 2020 Census question.

At best, it suggests that the non-religious are at moral risk and in need of evangelising, or other forms of spiritual rescue. At worse, it insinuates that we

are moral degenerates whose lack of religiosity imperils the moral character and moral order of the nation.

These are rich stones to be cast from a faith community so profoundly and thoroughly implicated in the decades-long sexual abuse of young children and the systematic denial and cover-up of that abuse in ways that guaranteed its perpetuation. As the report notes, “The Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse found more than half (58%) of reported offences occurred in religious institutions.” Indeed, when compared to secular Australians, religious Australians are *more* prone to sexual crime and scandal.

But what I like most about the report’s approach is its move from defeating the factual validity of religious claims to moral superiority, to demonstrating that what differences there are reflect legitimate moral distinctions, not failures of ethicality on the part of the non-religious. As Stephen Pinker [has argued](#) — based on the work of Jonathan Haidt — all human societies demonstrate awareness of, and take moral positions, on what are called the moral “primary colours.”

This volume cashes these colours out as 6 foundations describing different moral orientations on key moral concepts including an orientation towards fairness and care (found more often in the non-religious) versus one that privileges loyalty to one’s own group and deference to authority (seen more often amongst the religious).

And there’s more. Neil’s empirical research reveals that *non*-religionists are more likely to support religious tolerance and freedom. In contrast, Australia is home to three-quarters of a million faith-driven adults who believe their religion is the only acceptable one and that religious authorities ought to be the final arbiters of law, as well as to 4.7 million Australians who are intolerant of other religions and the separation of church and state.

Scary stuff.

Particularly scary at this point in our nation’s history, when democratic backsliding is [rampant in western nations](#), and Coalition party leadership — emboldened by the results of The Voice referendum — seems determined to ape the US Republicans’ strategy of ignoring clear evidence of the electorate’s liberalisation in favour of doubling down on disinformation, undermining trust in the AEC and elections, and otherwise doing “whatever it takes” to achieve minority rule.

Which brings us to the last reason why it remains so important for organisations like the RSA to keep pursuing the myth of religious moral superiority: the decline in the standards that govern how we conduct public debates about important issues.



During the first decade of the naughties, I combined my academic career with abortion rights activism that brought me up time and again — in print and in person — with religious people advocating legal prohibition of the procedure.

The problem was that these advocates didn't say they were religious advocates, nor did they argue their case on religious grounds, despite their faith being the reason they believed it. Instead, [some claimed to be feminists](#) fighting against abortion because of their deep, if not paternalistic, commitment to women's wellbeing. Some — medical doctors no less — went on radio and made assertions about an abortion drug's safety profile that were completely false.

I still remember the shock I felt in this debate when I realised that my opponent did not feel bound by the same ethical obligations we both had — me as an academic and she as a medical doctor — to argue *fairly*. This included being straight with our audience about the facts and our motivations for supporting our respective positions on abortion. It was the only time I lost my cool on air, bursting out in the middle of another false claim, "For heaven's sake, you're a doctor! Surely your answers need to land in the vicinity of the truth!"

I heard the same sense of appal in Andrew Denton's reporting of the instrumental spaghetti-against-the-wall approach of [religious activist Nancy Elliott against voluntary assisted dying](#). It's an appal that doesn't only come from the hypocrisy of the same religious activists who claim moral superiority acting in such trust-busting ways. But also because it is such a means-to-an-end attitude that [Christian ethics](#) in particular is known for deploring.

Religion is as complicated as the human beings that endorse it. For some, it is a private or community comfort that all of us — as free and autonomous citizens — have a right to make part of our lives. For others, it is proof of their superior knowledge and authority, and the right of their male leaders to rule over us all.

It is the latter conception of faith that is both morally offensive and politically dangerous. This volume of the *Religiosity in Australia* series helps set the record straight, furnishes a better understanding of legitimate moral distinctions between non-religious and religious groups, and empowers us to challenge unfounded beliefs about religious moral superiority.

I thank Neil for writing it, and the RSA for publishing it and I commend it to you without reservation.

Dr Leslie Cannold  
November 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](http://DyingForChoice.com), he continues to publish reports, based on high-quality data, which correct misinformation promoted by opponents.

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



## Executive summary

### In a nutshell

Religion is widely believed to be associated with greater morality and more prosocial values. Religious leaders frequently extol the virtues of faith, with religion receiving significant attention in the corridors of power.

But are clerical claims true? Are there significant and positive relationships between religion or religiosity and more ethical attitudes and behaviours? Does it hold for religious leaders themselves? For the general public at large?

Commencing with the null hypothesis that there is no difference between religious and non-religious Australians on matters of morality and prosociality, this Part 5 of the *Religiosity in Australia* series employs peer-reviewed scientific literature, official reports and studies, and deep dives into high-quality university survey data sets to test such associations. It is arguably the most comprehensive, wide-ranging, integrated and *quantitative* study of high-quality Australian evidence published to date.

In summary, the null hypothesis is untrue across a range of domains: that is, the null hypothesis is *rejected* on the basis of empirical evidence — not stereotyped assumptions.

The factual findings are likely to prove controversial. They do not offer comfort to religionists. Indeed, they are likely to shock those of faith.

Religious and non-religious Australians hold similar values on matters of property rights violations. Unsurprisingly, the religious are far more focused on gender, sexuality and death. This doesn't make religionists *more* moral, just *differently* moral.

Across a range of other domains differences are more revealing. Compared with their secular counterparts, religious Australians tend to be *more* prejudiced towards out-groups and more approving towards the in-group, more narcissistic, conformist, authoritarian (including dominionist), punitive, science and evidence rejecting, and prone to sexual crime and scandal.

These of course are *tendencies*. The findings don't offer brickbats or bouquets to any particular individual: there are "good" and "bad" secularists and religionists alike. But the evidence is clear: Australia's religionists are less *likely* than their secular counterparts to be moral — at least in the modern normative prosocial sense — and certainly far less likely to be moral than "as advertised" by religious leaders.

## Findings

### The religious mind and morality — scientific evidence and findings

General scientific findings about the religious mind reveal that theistic beliefs are in fact egocentric beliefs: when people are asked to think about God's views, they use precisely the same brain circuitry as anyone reflecting on their *own* views, not the circuitry for others' views. Further, more frequent participation in religious rituals such as prayer and services elevates the belief that one's moral views are objective, invariant and universal, increasing the likelihood of believing that God's (one's own) morals should dominate those of others.

"Tradition" is often used by religionists to resist change. It is driven both by greater perception than non-religionists of a dangerous world, against which familiar institutions and customs provide emotional salve, but also in primary resistance to change *itself*. In Australia, Christians are significantly more likely than both non-Christian religionists (NCRs) and Nones (no religion) to favour preserving "traditional morals". The effect is strongest amongst the most religious, Devouts. These factors also correlate with Christians being the most likely to support strong and even undemocratic responses by authorities toward perceived, as well as real, threats.

Overall, studies show that conservative religiosity is associated with the binding moral foundations (Loyalty, Authority, Purity), but correlate poorly or negatively with prosocial charitable behaviour. However, those (including religionists) who emphasise individualising foundations (Care, Fairness) are more likely to exhibit prosocial behaviour.

Religionists, especially Christians, are more likely to be Myers-Briggs Type Indicator SJs — Sensing and Judging — tending to favour *order* over *autonomy*. They're also more likely to sense real-world social boundaries and form views about them. This is particularly so regarding sex, a finding that is supported strongly by the Australian data.

Studies find that there is no necessary, nor even favourable, link between religion or religiosity, and moral development. A range of factors can elevate or *erode* moral judgement and behaviour.

### Australian evidence and findings

It's important to recognise first of all that there are many nuances, as well as some potential confounding factors (adjusted for or noted), throughout the details of this report. The overall findings, however, are clear.

On matters of cheating and stealing, Australian religionists and secularists hold similar views, except that NCRs, with the greatest proportion of born overseas in different cultures, are slightly more likely to accept violations.

But on matters of sex, death and divorce, Australia's religionists, Devouts especially, are significantly more likely to hold restrictive attitudes. These differences occur across the social and political spectrum.

### **Intolerant despite claims of tolerance**

Australia's religious are far more likely to *disagree* that those with strong religious views are intolerant, with disagreement proportional to religiosity. However, despite this virtue-signalling, the religious show greater in-group favouritism versus out-group prejudice towards religions (conceptually), people, neighbours, places of worship, and interreligious marriage, including anti-Muslim prejudice. Generally, NCRs show more tolerance than Christians toward those from other religions and cultures. Self-promotion is particularly high on the religious right, and amongst the major monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Nones are least likely to demonstrate Islamophobia.

Australia's religionists overall are also significantly more likely than Nones to hold prejudices toward neighbours who are different, with the exception that NCRs are more likely to accept those who are immigrants or speak a different language at home (more of them born overseas).

Religionists are significantly more likely to say they agree with gender equality. But their practical attitudes suggest that's mere virtue-signalling: they are significantly *more* likely to *reject* gender equality in education, employment and leadership. These divergences are strongest amongst Devouts. Worthy of note are Anglicans, amongst whom males are extremely more likely than females to harbour equality-hostile attitudes, consistent with the higher rate of intimate partner violence amongst that faith. In addition, on the political Centre and Right, and amongst males on the Left, there is a significant premium of preferring a boy as one's first child.

### **Moral superiority ... missing in action on asylum seekers**

On moral superiority, Australia's Christians are more likely than Nones and NCRs to distrust different others and to expect immigrants to become more "like us", while making little accommodation themselves. Consistent with this, Australia's Christians are less likely to say that immigrants are good for the economy, and more likely to say they take jobs from local-born, and to support a reduction in immigrant numbers. Associations between religion and these beliefs are stronger amongst Progressives and Moderates than Conservatives, and the Left and Centre than the Right.

Equally in regard to asylum seekers — most of whom arrive by air — Christians are uniquely more likely than NCRs and Nones to support turning back all asylum seeker boat arrivals, to both process and resettle them offshore (and therefore out of both sight and mind), and to support Coalition rather than Labor policies on asylum seekers. Negative attitudes toward “boat people” are most prevalent amongst Notionals and Devouts, and occur across the social and political spectrum. Such views are antithetical to religious signalling about compassion and helping thy neighbour.

A significant body of published scholarly research documents greater authoritarianism, dogmatism and closed-mindedness amongst the religious compared with Nones. Australian findings are consistent.

### **A contest of values**

While it’s expected that Australia’s religious would be more likely to prioritise teaching religious faith to children (they are), and to sacrifice individualising values such as independence and imagination (they do), the values that the very religious, Devouts, are most willing to sacrifice are *tolerance and respect for others*, also antithetical to religious signalling. Good manners make the “hit list” too.

Australia’s most religious are also vastly more likely than others to prioritise teaching children *obedience*, that is, to prioritise a compliance orientation. Indeed, authoritarian Australians are significantly more likely than others to prioritise teaching children religious faith, say that people should obey their rulers, that religious authorities should be the final arbiters of law, and dismiss democratic principles of representation (free elections) and civil rights (against state oppression).

Chillingly, around 770,000 adult Australians are religious dominionists, believing that theirs is the only acceptable religion *and* that religious authorities (i.e. their own) ought to be final arbiters of law.

It is Christians who dominate in the compliance orientation, expecting Australians to obey authority, pursue united goals (whatever they may happen to be), and to defend “traditional morals” including implementing their own moral views in law. The association of these attitudes with religion occurs largely across the social and political divide.

Christians are more likely than NCRs and Nones to expect children to love and respect their parents — regardless of whether parents have earned such validation. NCRs, on the other hand, are more likely than Christians and Nones to say having children, and adult children caring for their parents, are duties. These are most likely attitudes and customs brought from their former homelands.

These positive duties or obligations toward in-groups are much more likely to be supported by the most religious, Devouts, and the religious premium occurs largely across the social and political divide.

### **Competition and endeavour**

Overall, Australia's NCRs hold the most positive attitudes toward work and personal success, expressed more as endeavour and achievement than a "competition". Christians on the other hand are most likely to see work as a competition between the weak and the strong, and a duty to prioritise. Consistent with a stronger Care moral foundation, Nones are least likely to esteem work or see it as competitive, and most likely to say it can bring out the worst in people and be wasteful and destructive.

### **Forgiveness**

If to forgive is divine, then Australia's religious are less Godly than its Nones. The religious are vastly more likely than Nones to support stiffer sentencing for breaking the law. (This is not about dissatisfaction with sentences handed down by courts.) They're also significantly more likely than Nones to support indefinite state detention of a person *suspected* — not convicted — of planning a terrorist act. The latter signals a greater willingness of the religious to dismiss the moral foundation of Freedom (from state oppression).

### **Science, the environment and global warming**

Unsurprisingly, Australia's religious are more likely than Nones to say that religion trumps science when they disagree, and that science damages morals. Pro-religion-anti-science sentiment correlates strongly and linearly with religiosity, and spans the social and political spectrums.

Religionists are more likely than Nones to support economic growth, say we worry too much about the environment, don't think it's important, and are less likely to support measures to protect it. Devouts especially are most likely to say we worry too much, that claims about environmental degradation are exaggerated, that there are more important things, are the most willing to sacrifice nature reserves for economic development and to prefer Coalition over Labor policies.

Australia's non-Catholic Christians (collectively Protestants, Orthodox, and Pentecostals) are the most likely to dismiss climate change as neither anthropogenic nor bad, least likely to prioritise it as an election policy issue, and most likely to favour the Coalition's least-intervention policies. This is consistent with religious dismissal of science, almost all climate change scientific *experts* agree: action to mitigate global warming is urgent, and failure will result in catastrophic consequences.



## Sex

The Purity moral foundation emphasised by religionists underwrites support for abstinence-only sex education for minors, but in practice (in the USA) this approach causes substantial harm (Care moral foundation missing in action) when compared with comprehensive sex education: higher rates of teen sex, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Australian religionists show heightened attention to issues of sex, too, with the most religious being more likely than Nones to say sexual harassment occurs in their neighbourhood, while at the same time being least likely to report being a victim of crime.

While religious institutions promote themselves as arbiters of sexual morality, the royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse found more than half (58%) of reported offences occurred in religious institutions, compared with all other institutions combined. Of that, 62%, or 36% of all reported offences, occurred in just one religion's institutions: Catholic.

Numerous reasons for religions' failures were found, but several dominated — narcissism (self-importance and reputation management); clericalism (believing oneself to be superior and beyond judgement of anyone but God: Authority moral foundation); a profoundly greater wish to protect institutional reputation (Loyalty moral foundation) than the welfare of vulnerable children in its care (Care moral foundation); and psychosexual underdevelopment or misdevelopment amongst clergy. Extensive religious institution sexual offences within the Catholic church have been revealed by inquiries across numerous countries.

As revealed in scholarly research, morality isn't all "sweetness and light": it has a dark side.

### Consistent rather than isolated findings

In Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this research series, we reported findings that Australian society is becoming less religious and more socially progressive, and that religion doesn't guarantee conservative social attitudes regarding abortion, voluntary assisted dying or discrimination against sexual minorities. We also found that Australia's religious are more likely to support self-interested economic policies such as negative gearing for investment residential properties and tax "rebates" on unfranked dividends, giving rise to a false sense of a "religious vote" in Australia and despite the very public failure of religious political party the Australian Conservatives.

In Part 4, we reported findings that Australia's religionists overall donate vast sums of money to their congregational religion, are more likely than Nones to report self-benefit from donations, and that donations to religion attract low ratings of "for a good cause" but high ratings for a sense of *obligation*.

The findings in this Part 5 continue these themes rather than contradict or complicate them.

The evidence is in: religious Australians are *not* generally more moral than the non-religious. In many domains examined in this study, they're *less* moral, at least in the normative prosocial sense.

This begs a question about a question: why do so many ask "*is it possible to be moral without religion?*". Why not ask, more neutrally, "*does religion make people more, less, differently, or no differently moral?*"

## Introduction

In **Part 1 Personal faith by the numbers**, we discussed the decline of religiosity in Australia over recent decades — especially since the 1970s — and the much weaker relationship Australians have with religion, on average, than headline affiliation figures might imply. We also employed high quality empirical evidence to show how even religious Australians' views on social reform matters such as abortion and voluntary assisted dying are in fact much more progressive than many religious leaders claim.

In **Part 2 Religious minds, Religious Collectives**, we explored psychological relationships with religiosity, as well as revealing more details about the nature of Australians adopting, changing, and divesting themselves of religion. We expressly rejected the notion of religious organisation “conscience”, and exposed a massive chasm of trust in the churches (religious institutions and their leaders more generally) between the small trusting minority of very religious Australians, and the deep distrust held by most other Australians.

In **Part 3 Religion and politics**, we revealed how confounding factors, especially greater average economic conservatism amongst more religious Australians, give a *false* impression of a significant relationship between religious supernatural faith and voting behaviour.

In **Part 4 Religion and charity**, we revealed that “surpluses” in stated volunteering and charitable donations by the religious are more related to the person's own religious congregation. We also revealed for the first time higher rates of self-benefit in giving by the religious, as well as low rates of rating religion as a “good cause” or “respect its work”, along with uniquely very high rates of feeling coerced to donate to religion.

In this **Part 5**, we embark on the ambitious task of addressing the question of whether religious Australians are generally more moral than the non-religious. If they are, in what ways are they more moral, and does that warrant special legal and regulatory privileges for religion and the religious?

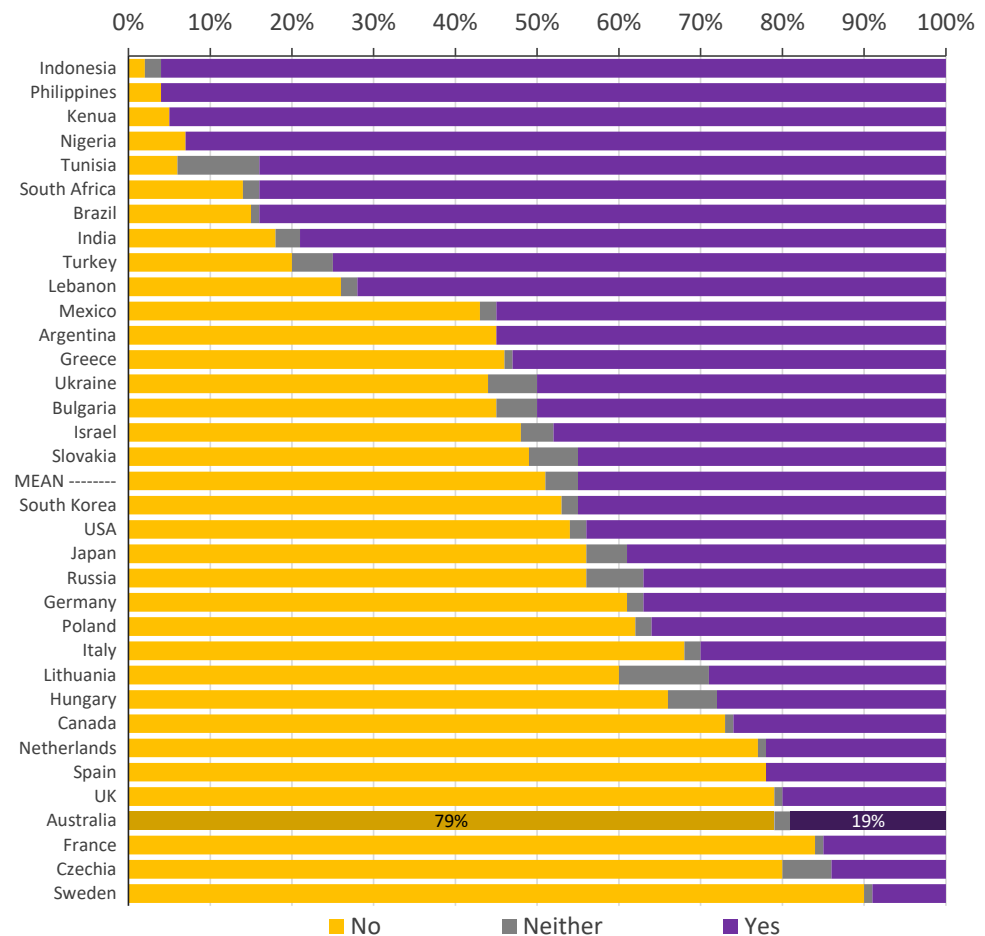
Answering these questions with concrete evidence is important because religiosity is widely *assumed* to correlate with morality (Vargas-Salfate et al. 2018). But does it?

Unsurprisingly, religionist puff pieces relying on selective optics argue in religion's favour (e.g. Johnson 2021; Sherwood 2018). Even in scholarly tomes, religious apologetics is evident in arguments for the social benefits of religion (e.g. Beit-Hallahmi 2014).

### Public attitudes toward religion as necessary for morality

What do ordinary people think of the relationship between religion and morality? In 2019, Pew Research asked citizens across 34 countries whether belief in God is necessary to be moral (Pew Research Center 2020).

Setting aside that some religions are non-theistic, most Indonesians (96%) said Yes, while most Swedes (90%) said No (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Belief in god is necessary to be moral, by country

Source: (Pew Research Center 2020)

Four out of five Australians (79%) say No (19% Yes), despite John Howard in his lengthy tenure as Australian Prime Minister attempting to embed Christianity as “white morality” in Australian culture (Stratton 2016a, b). The latest Pew study (Fetterolf & Austin 2023) has Australians at 85% No and 15% Yes, including 75% of Australia’s religiously affiliated saying No.

It turns out that most Australians are right: religion doesn’t clearly determine one’s morality (Davies 2018). Many figures of authority, however, either actively believe or assume a positive relationship.

### Presumptive legal defence of religious morality

A case in point is the Hon. Justice Sarah Derrington, President of the Australian Law Reform Commission, a fine legal mind.

Justice Derrington's 2019 annual public lecture delivered to the Charity Law Association of Australia and New Zealand (Derrington 2019) drew on multiple sources to conclude that *"there exist strong arguments for the retention of the presumption of the public benefit of religion"*. She positively cites, however, studies that show economic benefits of religion by turnover (as though the turnover is commendable *because* it's religious but with weak evidentiary links demonstrating benefit to *others*), and additional volunteerism amongst Australia's religious but without establishing whether that activity benefits anyone but the religious (i.e. in-church volunteering).

Justice Derrington also warmly refers to a handful of studies showing links between religion and happiness and health, concluding that the relationship is "relatively uncontroversial". However, as I examined in detail in **Part 2** of this series, many such studies are deeply flawed, and the relationships are far more complex than religion providing a "coherent framework"<sup>1</sup> as the Justice puts it.

On a more reflective tack, Justice Derrington notes:

*"...whilst we might be able to conclude that religion has the potential to promote moral behaviour, there is no evidence that it is necessary; in which case its public benefit in this regard may be questioned. This, however, leads to a deeper question – one that I am not at all equipped to answer: is religion necessary for morality? That is, is it possible for individuals and society to develop morals and moral codes in the absence of any religious beliefs?"*

— Derrington (2019)

This is a curiously one-sided line of questioning and reflects how commonly religion is given a "free kick" when it comes to morality.

Why would one not *also* equally ask "can religion make people *less* moral?" Or, as a balanced question: "can religion make people more or less moral, and if so in what ways in either direction, or does it make no practical difference?"

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<sup>1</sup> A contentious premise that this author does not support.

These loaded premises — and many others like them — regarding presumed links between religion and morality, need rigorous testing. That is what this research volume attempts to do. It does so by referring to global scholarly research published in scientific journals, and by deep dives into multiple high-quality university survey data sets recording Australians' real, rather than alleged, attitudes and behaviours.

### **Professional ethicists and philosophers no more ethical**

It can be difficult to judge who is a moral expert. This is especially so for the public, who rely on 'virtuous character' signalling rather than formal qualifications as a sign of moral expertise: the opposite of public expectations about medical expertise, for example (Schmittat & Burgmer 2020). That is, to be credible, a moral expert must be *seen to act morally*, not merely know what is moral.

Titles and roles implying morality can be quite misleading and the perception that professional dedication to thinking about morality must promote ethical behaviour is mistaken. For example, professors of ethics "borrow-but-don't-return" (i.e. "steal") high-value university library textbooks in their own subject area at a significantly higher rate than do professors of other, unrelated disciplines (Schwitzgebel 2009).

Despite public perceptions, professional philosophers do not hold better or more reliable "moral intuitions" (Tobia, Buckwalter & Stich 2013), and are not as free from cognitive bias as is commonly believed (Schulz, Cokely & Feltz 2011). Their biases can persist despite training and reflection (Schwitzgebel & Cushman 2015).

Nor are professors of ethics more consistent than professors of other disciplines to personally put stated ethical beliefs into practice (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2014). This is not limited to USA ethics professors; findings have been replicated in Germany (Schönegger & Wagner 2019) and China (Hou, Ding & Yu 2022).

This suggests a moral "licensing" effect: that claims of above-average morality in some areas excuse lapses of morality in others.

It's no wonder that judges, who the public perceive to be more qualified to *recognise* moral expertise when they see it, are not strongly convinced such a thing exists, at least as experienced in courtrooms (Schmittat & Burgmer 2020).

### The ‘more moral than thou’ question

University professors of ethics and philosophy work in an atmosphere of cognitive challenge and conceptualisation development, as well as attention to evidence, developments in the understanding of psychology and neurobiology, and publication by peer review. What is the likelihood then that (religious) clerics, often beholden to fixed texts and a “tradition” of interpretation amongst cohorts who agree, are more moral than said professors?

And, even accepting a putative moral premium amongst religious leaders, to what extent would this filter down to the religious amongst the general public? *Does* religion make either the most religious or the less religious (but still religious) public more moral than their secular peers?

Findings of this integrative report contribute to our understanding. For the first time, a comprehensive, wide-ranging, detailed and largely *quantitative* analysis of *empirical evidence* paints a clearer picture of morality and values amongst religious and non-religious Australians alike.

**Respect:** This report does *not* seek to disrespect or argue against religion or faith. Rather, it aims to report relevant facts *about* the breadth, depth and character of religion and faith and their significant impacts, using high-quality data.



## Methodology

The scholarly literature was scanned for primary research articles relevant to understanding the nature of the intersection between religion and morality. High-quality data sets from Australian university studies were statistically examined for significant associations, and obvious confounding factors assessed.

### Data sets

While many of the data sets used are recent — 2016 to 2022 — some are older. Australian Election Study (AES) data sets as far back as the start of the Howard conservative federal government, 1996, are employed. In some cases, this is to provide robust longitudinal comparisons. But in others it's because they are the *only* source of empirical data for certain attitudes and behaviours. While some types of attitudes may have changed somewhat since then (notably, attitudes toward sexual expression and gender roles), they are still useful in testing — beyond ideological claims — whether Australia's religious are more or less moral, or about the same, as non-religious Australians. It's worth noting, too, that claims of religious moral superiority span the period of data sets employed in this research: such claims are not recent.

### Segmentation models

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

#### Religious Identity 6-segment model (RI6, formerly 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.

In previous volumes of this series, the RI6 was referred to as the ARI6.

### Religious Identity 5-segment model (RI5, formerly ARI5)

The 5-segment religiosity model is based on the 6-segment model, with segments weighted for low importance of religion (RI6 → demoted), and high importance of religion (RI6 → promoted). The segments are:

- *Irreligious*: No religion or importance of religion.
- *Notionals*: Affiliation or low importance.
- *Casuals*: Moderate importance.
- *Regulars*: Greater importance.
- *Ardents*: Very important.

In previous volumes of this series, the RI5 was referred to as the ARI5.

### Religio-Social Identity 6-segment model (RSI6, formerly 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 religion or religious identity (RI6) alone. It can be calculated only from a small minority of university data sets employed in this study.

### Religio-Political Identity 6-segment model (RPI6, formerly ARPI6)

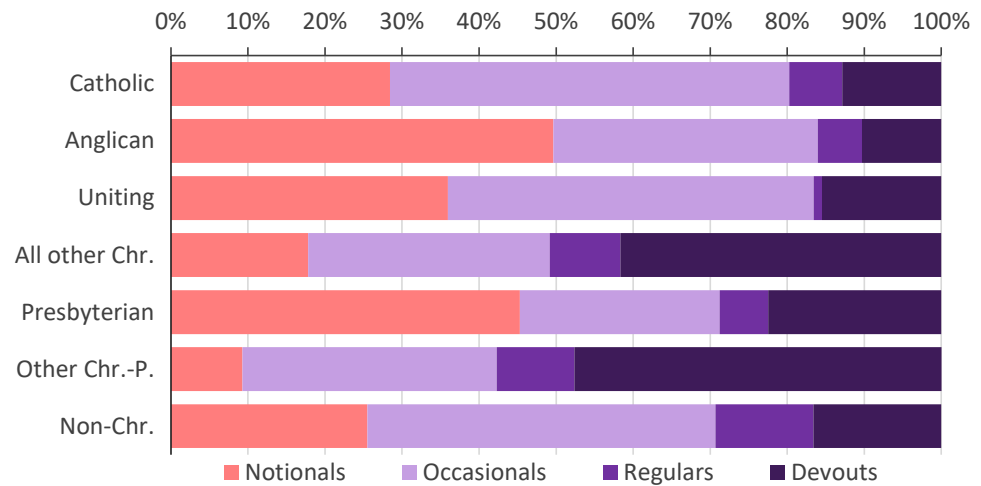
This model segments people into political cohorts of those who favour the political Left, Centre or Right based on either self-statement of position on the political spectrum, or if that variable is not available, their preferred political party. As per the RSI6, each of these three groups is subdivided into Secular (none) and Religious (any religious affiliation), resulting in segments from the Secular Left to the Religious Right.

The model can reveal a “**religious premium**” in attitudes within each of the three major political leanings which may not be apparent by religion or religious identity (RI6) alone. It can provide different insights from the RSI6, and can be calculated from most of the university data sets employed in this study.

In this report, model segments are always formally referred to using capital letters — for example Nones, Devouts, Religious Moderates.

## The religiosity of religions

Many of the findings in this report correlate significantly with religiosity — the degree of religiousness at least as measured by religious service attendance. Some correlations are also apparent by religion or religious denomination. While some of the denominational differences arise from a denomination's specific cultural heritage, others arise from differences in religiosity among denominations (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Religiosity by religious denomination

Source: AES 2022. "Other Chr.-P." = all other Christians, excluding Presbyterians.

The proportion of Devouts amongst the minor Christian denominations collectively<sup>2</sup> (47%) is uniquely higher than amongst other denominations (10% to 22%).

Many findings in this report regarding "Other Chr." (other Christian) — the minor Christian denominations collectively — are related to its uniquely high proportion of Devouts (47% versus 10%–22% all other religions).

<sup>2</sup> Comprising amongst others: Pentecostal, Churches of Christ, Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, Baptist, Salvation Army, Brethren, Orthodox.

## Divergence scores

Many analyses in this report employ divergence analysis. This is informative when comparing attitude differences by religiosity, political party alignment, progressivism versus conservatism, or other respondent characteristic.

It is used where respondents choose for example from pre-set answers from one side (e.g. *strongly agree* or *Left*), through neutral (e.g. *neither agree nor disagree* or *Centre*), to the other side (e.g. *strongly disagree* or *Right*). Setting aside the neutral and any “can’t say” responses, divergence analysis subtracts the percentage of one side from the other to obtain a polarisation figure. Individual segment percentages are then subtracted from the average polarisation amongst all respondents to provide easily comparable divergence figures across topic domains. Where informative, average polarisation percentages are reported for reference.

This provides a shorthand notation of the nett degree to which attitudes differ amongst groups. Since divergence can differ in the *opposite direction* amongst segments, a divergence figure can exceed 100%, (e.g. average is -50% but segment is +60% = 110%).

### Example

Consider the RI6 religiosity segmentation from Rejecters to Devouts. To what extent are people in these segments likely to self-state that they are on the political Left, Centre or Right? A statistical table from the Australian Election Study 2022 provides a breakdown (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Self-identification on the political spectrum, by RI6 religiosity

	All	Rejecters	Socialisers	Notionals	Occasionals	Regulars	Devouts
<b>Left</b>	32%	47%	36%	24%	23%	18%	21%
<b>Centre</b>	34%	31%	42%	39%	38%	22%	25%
<b>Right</b>	34%	22%	23%	37%	39%	60%	54%
<b>Nett Left (only)</b>		15%	3%	-9%	-9%	-14%	-11%
<b>Nett Right (only)</b>		-12%	-11%	3%	5%	26%	20%
<b>Polarisation (R-L)</b>	2%	-25%	-13%	14%	16%	42%	32%
<b>Divergence (R-L)</b>		-27%	-14%	12%	14%	41%	31%

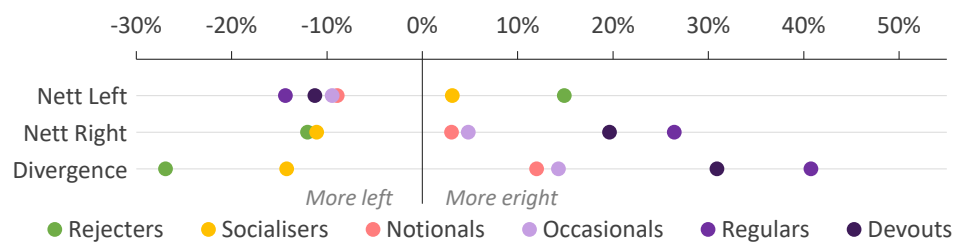
Source: AES 2022. Note: Single-cell Chi square significance: 99.9%, 99%, 95%.

On the political Left (first row), percentages range from 18% to 47%, a spread of 29 percentage points. Five of the six differences are statistically significant (not amongst Socialisers). On the political Right, percentages range from 22% to 60%, a range of 38 percentage points. Five out of the six differences are statistically significant (not amongst Notionals).

Considering figures of only one side (e.g. the Left or Agree), describes only a part of the story, as do figures for only the other side. Neither *one* of these

individual stories tells us about the other, because some of the variation on one side may be at the expense of the other side, *or might be at the expense of those with no particular opinion* (Centre, “neither/nor”s, or “can’t say”s).

However, subtracting one side from the other (polarisation) and then netting each segment from the average polarisation (all respondents) results in *divergence* measures for each segment group. In the example above, divergence percentages range 68 percentage points from -27% to +41% (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Left-only, Right-only, and Divergence of political alignment, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2022

Divergence figures explain a balance amongst those *with an opinion one way or the other*. It does *not* provide specific commentary about the proportion of people in the middle (Centre or “neither/nor”) unless the polarisation approaches 100%, in which case hardly anyone can be in the Centre.

In Table 1, a significant finding is indeed in the “middle”: Australians with the strongest religious convictions,<sup>3</sup> Regulars and Devouts, are by far the *least* likely to be political centrists. That is, those with the strongest religious views are also likely to harbour stronger political views (and in this case, on the Right). In some cases where such insights about the “middle” are important, they are noted in this report.

**Note:** Some survey variables don’t have a midpoint “neither/nor” answer option. In this case, Divergence comparisons are made via the *strongly agree/disagree* (or equivalent) responses.

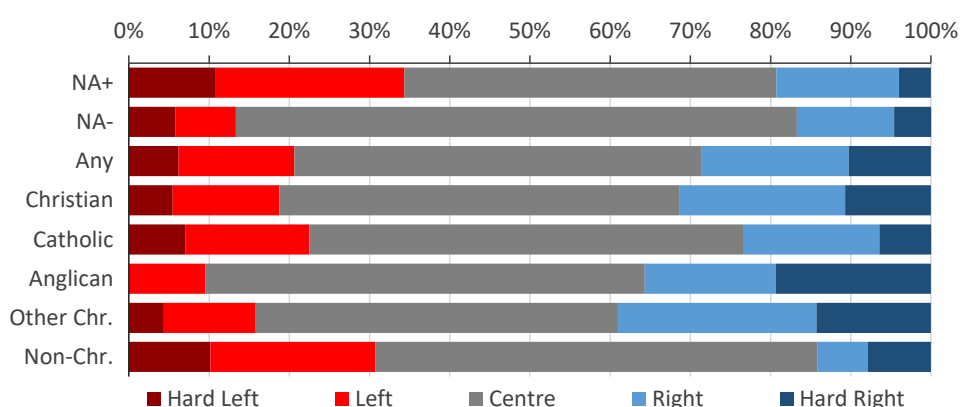
<sup>3</sup> At least by behaviour: frequency of religious service attendance.

## Confounding factors

In any analysis, a “confounding” factor might give rise to a false apparent relationship between the test variable (in this case religion or religiosity) and a particular attitude or behaviour being assessed. This report examines several important potential confounding factors where the source data set allows, such as income when assessing attitudes about monetary matters.

An important confounding factor that influences people’s attitudes and behaviours is political identity, and effects are well-documented in the scholarly literature. Where source study data allows, this report employs political identity to help explain relationships between religiosity, attitudes and behaviours.

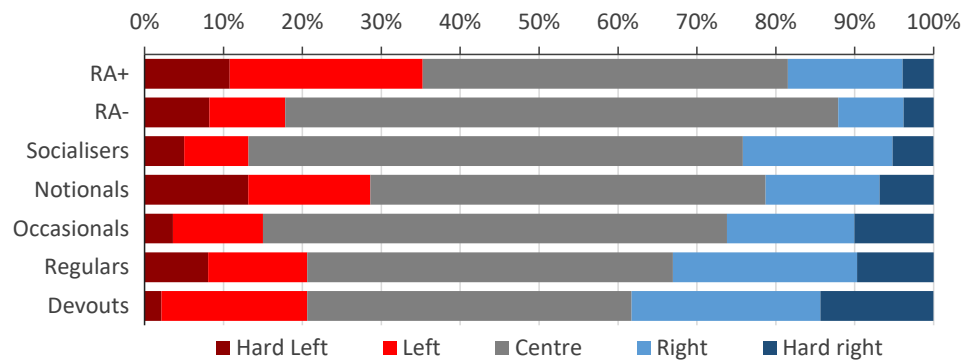
By **religion** (Figure 4), significant proportions of Australians are political centrists. However, Nones who are strictly atheist, as well as NCRs, are significantly more likely than others to identify with the political left, while Christians, and especially Protestants (Anglican and minor Christian denominations) are significantly more likely to identify with the political right, particularly the hard right. Catholics are almost equally balanced across the left and right.



**Figure 4:** Political self-identity among the religions

Source: AVS 2018. NA+ = Nones who are strictly atheist. NA- = Nones who are not strictly atheist.

By **religiosity** (Figure 5), the least religious Australians, Rejecters who are strictly atheist, are more likely to self-identify with the political left, while self-identification with the right increases with increasing religiosity.



**Figure 5:** Political self-identity by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. RA+ = Rejecters who are strictly atheist. RA- = Rejecters who are not strictly atheist.

Devouts are the least likely to identify as political centrists or hard left, and most likely to identify as political right, including hard right.

In testing the incidence of some attitudes and behaviours, variables such as gender or income might play a part. In other cases, other demographics or psychographics may be relevant. Amongst the most important are social identity and political identity. These are explained in more detail in the following section.

Important confounding effects — such as political orientation or gender — *relevant* to the tested attitude or behaviour are investigated in this report where source data permits.

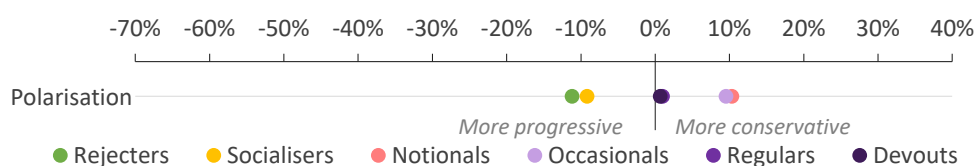


## Religious premium

Along with religious identity, *social* and *political* identity can influence certain beliefs, attitudes and behaviours investigated in this study. To help separate out the effects of religious from social or political identity, correlations with religious affiliation versus none is analysed, where possible, amongst each of the three **RSI6 religio-social identity** segments (Progressives, Moderates, Conservatives) and **RPI6 religio-political identity** segments (Left, Centre, Right). See *Segmentation models* on page 23 for more detail.

### An example of better insights

Take the domain of economic disposition: whether a person is economically progressive, moderate or conservative. By RI6 religiosity (Figure 6), there are modest differences by religiosity. The lower-religious, Notionals and Occasionals, appear to be more economically conservative, and Rejecters and Socialisers more economically progressive. In *this* case, only the result for Rejecters (-11%) is statistically different from the mean ( $p < 0.05$ ).

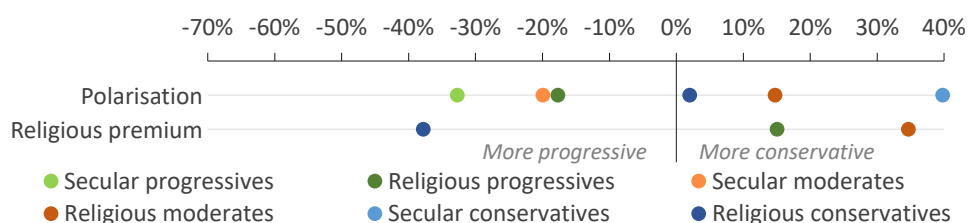


**Figure 6:** Economic conservatism, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2019

However, there is a range of social Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives amongst both the Religious and Secular (non-religious). To observe effects of religion, Religious Progressives can be compared with Social Progressives, and the same each amongst Moderates and Conservatives. These can provide very substantial insights that are hidden by overall measures (above).

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 7), several much larger differences are revealed.

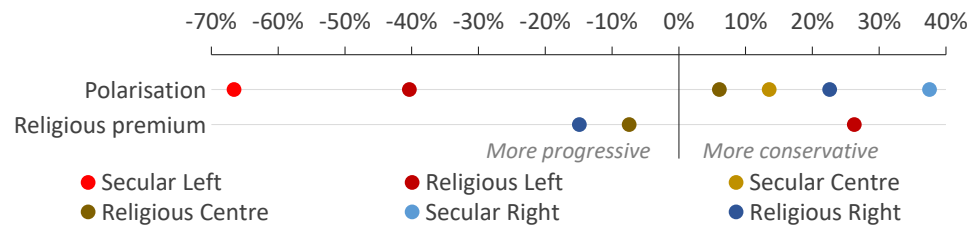


**Figure 7:** Polarisation and religious premium in economic conservatism, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AES 2019. Note: Polarisation = % economic conservatives - % economic progressives.

Amongst Progressives, religious affiliation is associated with +15% greater likelihood of economic conservatism, while amongst Moderates it's +35% more. But amongst Conservatives, religious affiliation is associated with -38% (*less*) economic conservatism. These major differences, particularly due to their differences in polarity, are largely “hidden” in the overall religiosity data.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity**, there are also much larger differences, though a little different (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Religious premium in economic conservatism, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AES 2019. Note: Polarisation = % economic conservatives - % economic progressives.

Unsurprisingly, economic attitudes align strongly with what is widely understood about the political Left (usually economically progressive), the Centre, and the Right (usually economically conservative). On the Left, religious affiliation is associated with much more likely economic conservatism (+26%), but for the Centre and Right, slightly *less* likely economic conservatism (-7% and -15% respectively).

Most of the differences by religious premium are highly statistically significant, and combined, they suggest that in Australia at least, religious affiliation is associated with a lower rate of *polarisation* in economic attitudes.

Another factor, income, might also be hypothesised to confound economic attitudes. However, analysis of economic conservatism by income reveals no statistical relationship amongst income segments.

Religious premium analysis by segregating the effects amongst social progressives, moderates and conservatives, or the political left, centre and right, clearly show that religious affiliation is associated with lower rates of polarisation in economic attitudes. This finding is largely hidden by “religiosity” analysis alone. Many such striking associations with the attitudes of Australians are revealed in this report for the first time using these analyses.

## Abbreviations

ABS — Australian Bureau of Statistics

AES — Australian Election Study (ANU)

ANU — Australian National University

RPI — Religio-Political Identity

AuSSA — Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (ANU)

AVS — Australian Values Study (ANU)

Chr. — Christian (in charts, tables)

CoC — control of corruption (index)

CSR — corporate social responsibility

Dones (religious) — people with a former but no current religious affiliation

GDP — gross domestic product

IPCC — [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#)

MBTI — Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

MFT — moral foundations theory

NCLS — [National Church Life Survey](#)

NCRs — non-Christian religionists (current religious affiliation, not Christian)

Nones (religious) — People with no current religious affiliation

Prot. — Protestant religion (non-Catholic Christian)

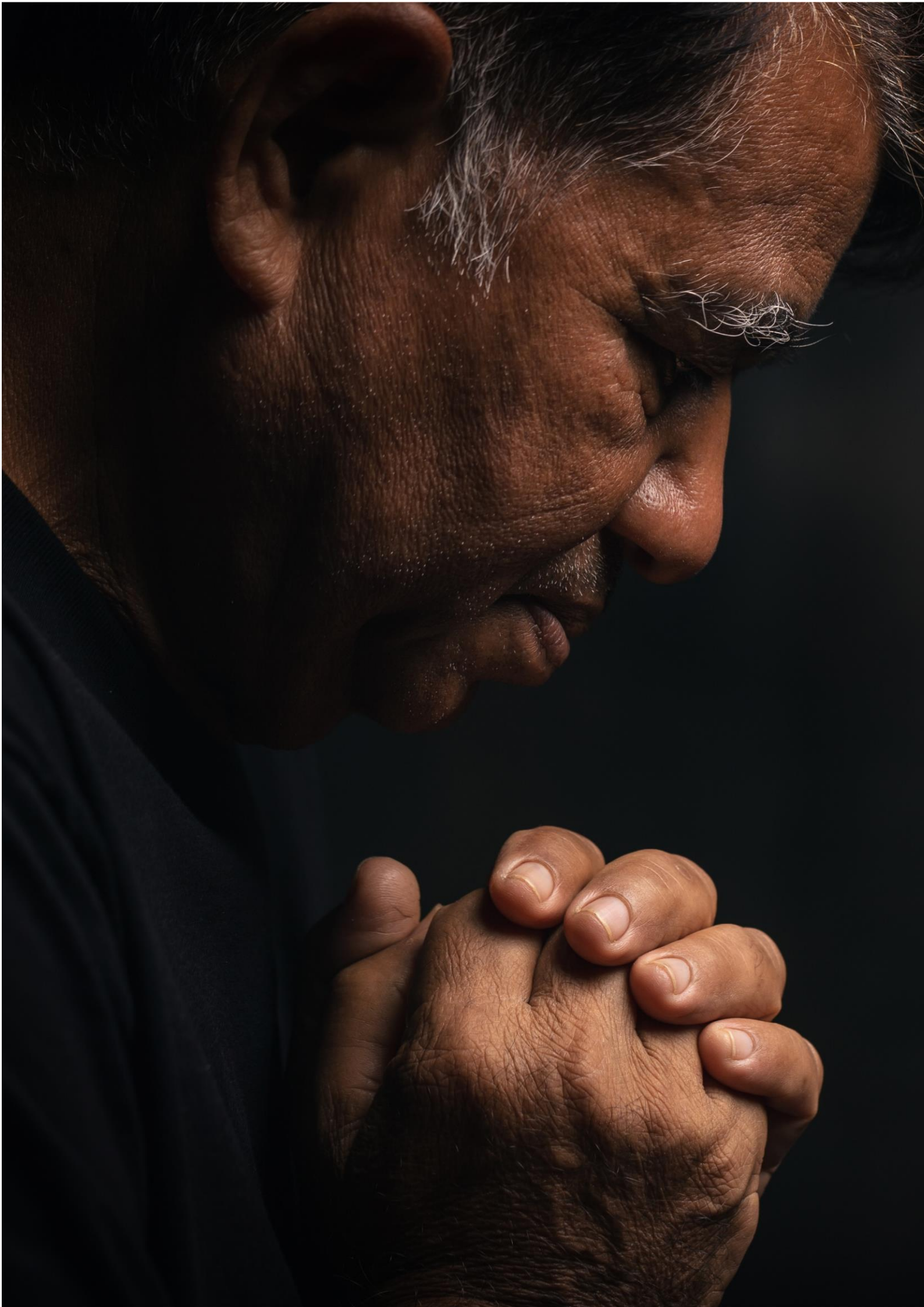
ToM — theory of mind

## Notes

**Author analysis:** Unless otherwise noted, all analyses of ANU/Dataverse study raw data (e.g. AES, AuSSA, AVS) were conducted by the author, not the ANU or study sponsors. The ANU and 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% or other total.



## The non/religious mind

A review of the peer-reviewed research literature regarding the similarities and differences between non-religious and religious minds appears in Part 2 of this series (Francis 2021). An important finding is that a disposition towards religious beliefs is somewhat heritable (Kandler 2021). The disposition contributes more to ideology than does personality (Ksiazkiewicz & Friesen 2021), at least as measured by the usual “Big 5” constructs: extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism.

Religious minds are more prone to crave cognitive closure, employ teleological thinking,<sup>4</sup> attribute minds to inanimate objects, see patterns in random data or events, prioritise intuition over analysis (including deontological social rules that seem intuitively appealing), and to accept “miracles” as meaningful and conspiracy theories as real.

That is, *mind* more than personality dimensions contributes to one’s tendency towards or against religion. So, what can robust evidence tell us about the relationships between religion, minds, and morality?

## Theistic beliefs are *egocentric* beliefs

Religious minds lay claim to unverifiable supernatural ideas as support for their moral and world views.

*“If you ask [Christians] about what their religion tells them about what’s right or wrong, it will likely line up with their own ideas of right and wrong.”*

— Davies (2018)

However, science has now revealed that at least in terms of theistic beliefs, there is no difference in conscience between the religious and non-religious.

In a classic neurobiological experiment, Epley et al. (2009) studied brain activation patterns when people were asked to think about a particular belief,

<sup>4</sup> To explain the world in terms of *purpose* — that is, the agency of a putative *mind* — rather than by *causation*.



compared with when they were asked to think about what *another* known person would believe.

Their study found two distinct activation patterns: one for self-thinking, and another for when thinking about other minds.

They also monitored brain activation patterns when they asked people what *God* believes. These patterns were entirely consistent with the *self-referential* pattern, not the other-referential one.

That is, when theists are asked to reflect on what God believes, they refer to their own beliefs and not those of anyone else.

This helps account for why people can hold conflicting views about God's beliefs on a particular matter — such as in favour of or opposed to discrimination against people because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. If theists were thinking about a God who is real, specific and known or knowable, reports of that God's beliefs (e.g. Abrahamic) would be very largely consistent except for the odd misunderstanding.

**Summary:** When theistic religionists are asked to consider what *God* believes about a particular matter, they employ exactly the same *self-referential*, egocentric mental processing as a person asked to consider what they themselves believe. That is, claiming that God's position on a certain matter is 'X' is identical to claiming one's own position is 'X'.



## Rituals subvert perspective taking

In a multi-national study, Chvaja et al. (2022) found that participation in religious rituals is positively associated with the belief that the group's moral norms are objective.

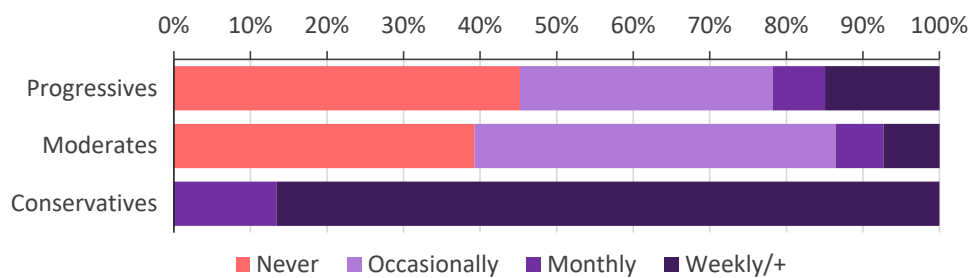
Across distinctly different cultures, both the perceived invariance of ritual and its more frequent performance are strongly and stably associated with anchoring morality in religious belief, and the belief that moral values and norms exist independently of humankind.<sup>5</sup>

Or, put another way, religious ritual “explains a unique variation in moral absolutism/universalism in people who share the same religious traditions.”

Ritual participation also correlates positively with belief that one's God or gods are *moralising*.

Ultimately, greater participation in religious ritual helps explain moral absolutism and the view that others *ought* to — either naturally or by persuasion or coercion — support and observe the in-group's moral norms.

This is consistent with religious conservatives in Australia (and elsewhere) confidently pronouncing that their world views, particularly in regard to morality, are the truth. Australia's Religious Conservatives — just 7% of the adult population — *all* (100%) attend religious services at least monthly, and most of them (87%) weekly or more often (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Religious service attendance of the religiously affiliated, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AES 2019. Base: Affiliated with any religion.

The RSI6 Social Identity model categorises people into Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives according to their attitudes regarding sexual expression and gender roles. That is, the data for Conservatives in Figure 9 correlates very strongly with highly restrictive attitudes toward matters of

<sup>5</sup> This also helps explain why religious moral rules are often described by their proponents as “natural law”.

sexuality. This is indeed what Australia's religious conservatives are most often heard (or at least reported in the mainstream media) talking about.

This may be a compelling reason why Religious Progressives and Moderates largely stay away from religious services: nearly eight out of ten (78%) of Religious Progressives, and nearly nine out of ten (86%) of Religious Moderates never, or only occasionally, attend religious services.

**Summary:** More frequent participation in unvarying religious rituals is associated with believing one's moral rules are objective, invariant and universal, leading to the belief that others do, or ought to, subscribe to and observe the same moral norms.

This along with the theistic attitude that reflecting on God's beliefs is also objective rather than egocentric as has now been shown, is a recipe for believing one's own personal moral beliefs ought to be adopted by, if not imposed upon, others.

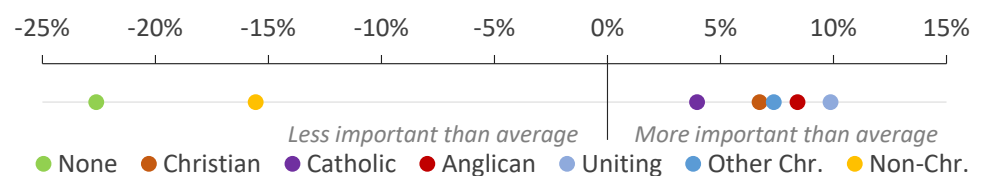
Australia's Religious Conservatives *all* attend religious services regularly, and most (87%) of them weekly or more often. On the other hand, large majorities of Religious Progressives (78%) and Religious Moderates (86%) never or only occasionally attend services. The overt sexual conservatism of many religious institutions may well be turning Moderates and Progressives off.

## Tradition and resistance to change

Religionists often claim “tradition” — cultural continuity — as a support for their moral views.

*“Tradition refers to the process of handing down beliefs, institutions, and objects from one generation to the next.”*  
— Otto (2016)

Via rituals, tradition can support the preservation of familiar, seemingly objective and universal beliefs, including moral attitudes. By **religion**, Australia’s Christians are far more in favour of the familiar — preserving “traditional ideas of right and wrong” — than are Nones and non-Christian religionists (NCRs) (Figure 10).

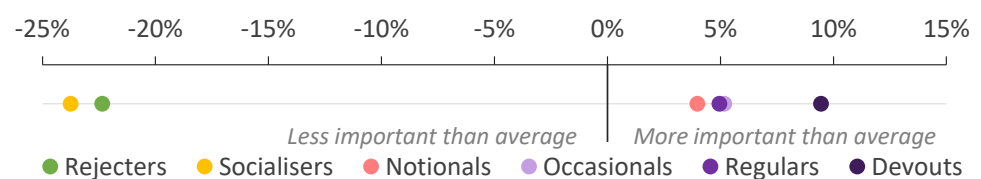


**Figure 10:** Divergence of attitudes toward preserving traditional ideas of right and wrong, by religion

Source: AES 2001. Note: Generally, differences of 5% or more are necessary for statistical significance.

This is hardly surprising since in the year of the study more than two-thirds (68%) of Australians identified in the national census as Christian. That is, Christians favoured preserving normative majority views, with NCRs and Nones far less enthusiastic.

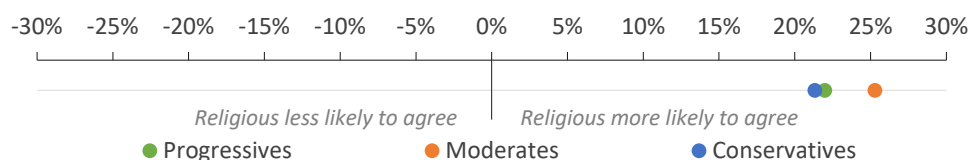
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 11), Socialisers (no religious affiliation but sometimes attend religious services, and most of whom come from Christian backgrounds) were as unlikely as Nones to favour “traditional morals”, indicating that their service attendance is not to support, and indeed likely *despite*, traditional religious morality.



**Figure 11:** Divergence of attitudes toward preserving traditional ideas of right and wrong, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2001

Analysis by **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 12) adjusts for overall conservatism, with religious Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives all far more likely than their Secular counterparts to favour preserving traditional morals.



**Figure 12:** Religious premium of attitudes toward preserving traditional ideas of right and wrong, by RSI6 religio-social identity

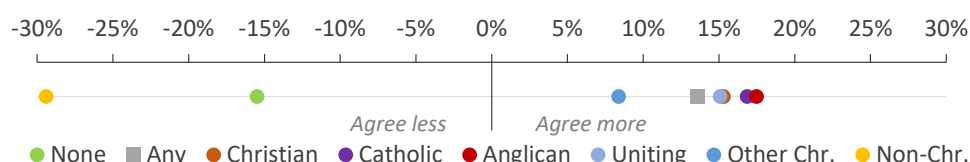
Source: AES 2001

## Resistance to change

While religionists often call on “tradition” as the foundation for their moral views, *resistance to change itself* is a significant factor. For example, religious opposition to marriage equality in North America is driven more by resistance to change than by opposition to equality (van der Toorn et al. 2017).

These effects are associated with beliefs about perceived risks of change.

In Australia, Christians are vastly more likely (+8% to +17%) than either NCRs (-29%) or Nones (-15%), to believe that “if you start trying to change things very much, you usually make things worse” (abbreviated here to “change is risky”) (Figure 13).

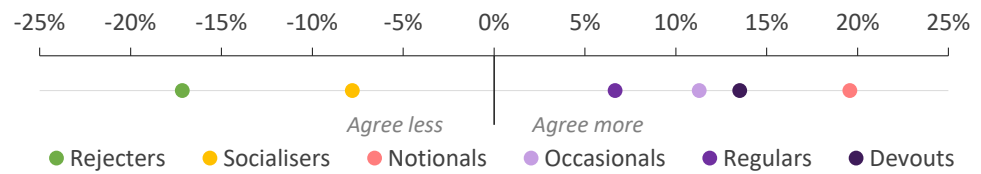


**Figure 13:** Divergence of attitudes toward “change is risky”, by religion

Source: AES 2004

Indeed, the outstandingly low support for perceived change risk amongst NCRs may stem from a significant proportion having moved to Australia from other nations (a strong change): they have a far lower rate of being born in Australia (50%) than either Nones (81%) or Christians (84%) (Australian Election study 2019).

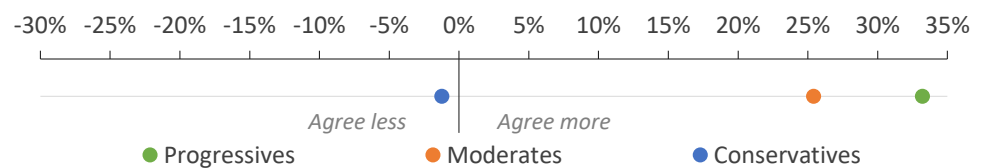
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 14), religious affiliates (Notionals through Devouts) are significantly more likely than Rejecters and Socialisers to perceive change risk.



**Figure 14:** Divergence of attitudes toward “change is risky”, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2004

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 15), both Religious Progressives and Religious Moderates are significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to perceive change risk.



**Figure 15:** Religious premium of attitudes toward “change is risky”, by RSI6 religio-social identity

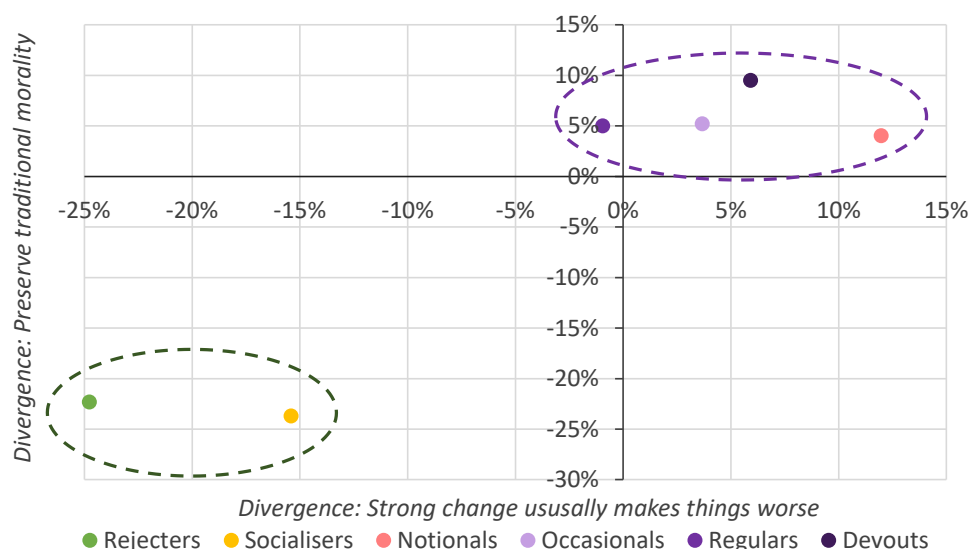
Source: AES 2004

The lack of difference in attitudes between Religious and Secular Conservatives arises not because Religious Conservatives are less likely to perceive change risk, but because both Secular and Religious Conservatives are by far the most likely to perceive it, and to the same extent. This is hardly surprising given that “conservatism” axiomatically *means* resistance to change.

### Fear of change itself and “traditional” (religious) morals

Part 3 of this series (Francis 2022) discussed the fear of change itself and its relationship with attitudes toward a range of public policy domains. It highlighted how fear of change is associated with favouring Coalition<sup>6</sup> policies over Labor policies, giving rise to a false sense of “religious” effect on voting patterns. This is further informed by more directly mapping out the relationship between fear of change itself by the wish to preserve “traditional” (mostly religious) ideas of right and wrong by RI6 religiosity (Figure 16).

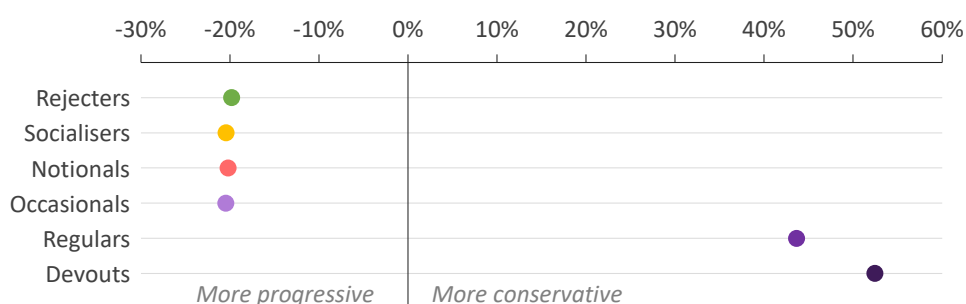
<sup>6</sup> The “Coalition” in Australia comprises the Liberal Party and the Nationals party, both politically conservative parties.



**Figure 16:** Divergence in fear of change by divergence in wish to preserve “traditional” ideas of right and wrong, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources: Fear of change AES 2004; Preserve tradition AES 2001

Immediately apparent are two distinct clusters: one for those who are not religiously affiliated (green cluster), and a second for those who are (purple cluster). It might be tempting to conclude that all those in the purple cluster share the much the same attitudes about “traditional” morality itself, but this is not true.

In fact, in the domain of sexual expression and gender roles (*social identity* in this report), Notionals and Occasionals show very similar Progressive divergence as do Nones and Socialisers. Regulars and Devouts stand out on their own as far more likely to hold Conservative socio-sexual values (Figure 17).



**Figure 17:** Divergence of social identity (SI) by RI6 religious identity  
Source: AES 2001

That is, it is not agreement regarding “traditional” values themselves (at least in the sexuality and gender role domains) that might prompt Notionals and Occasionals to remain affiliated with a “religious tradition” — they are very much less likely than the more religious to *agree* with such values. Rather,

their continuing fear of change itself is associated strongly with their continued religious affiliation.

Indeed, the radically different social identity of Notionals and Occasionals (from the more religious) helps explain why they rarely or never attend religious services. They are far less likely to align with the values preached in many official rituals.

**Summary:** Support for tradition is strongly associated with a resistance to change itself and the belief that change is associated with greater risk. In Australia, resistance to change is highest amongst Christians, and Notionals and Devouts. There is a significant religious premium amongst Progressives and Moderates, but not amongst Conservatives, because both Secular and Religious Conservatives are equal highest in perception of the risk of change.

The evidence suggests that Australia's least religious religionists, Notionals and Occasionals, continue to affiliate with a religious "tradition" not because they agree with its expressed values (at least in sexual expression and gender roles), but more likely because they fear change itself.

## Tradition and a dangerous world

As discussed previously, the desire to maintain social tradition and resist change correlates positively with religiosity. A possible significant contributor may be differences in perceptions of how risky or dangerous the world seems. Extensive Australian university data sets allow us to test associations in practice across a range of potential threat types.

Threat types are collected here into four main domains (Table 2):

- *Threat perception*: general attitudes toward economics, crime and cultural diversity.
- *Terrorism*: general attitudes toward the likelihood of terrorism, the personalisation of threat, and support for measures to thwart it.
- *Public security*: attitudes toward measures that diminish freedoms and democracy, but may be argued to improve the public's security.
- *Trust*: trust in other people and selected institutions.

**Table 2:** Measures of the perception of a risky or dangerous world

Figure row label	Meaning
THREAT PERCEPTION	
<i>Economic challenges</i>	How serious is the threat posed to Australia of economic challenges
<i>Crime</i>	How serious is the threat posed to Australia of crime
<i>Culture/relig. diversity</i>	How serious is the threat posed to Australia of cultural and religious diversity
<i>Different from Islam</i>	From what you know, do you think that the Muslim religion and your own religion have a lot in common, or ... are very different?
<i>5/5 threats</i>	More than slight feeling of threat regarding general and personal terrorism, economy, crime, and cultural and religious diversity
TERRORISM	
<i>Terrorism personally</i>	How concerned are you about you, a friend or relative being the victim of a terrorist attack in Australia in the near future?
<i>Terrorism generally</i>	How serious is the threat posed to Australia nowadays by terrorism
<i>Indefinite detention</i>	Suppose a suspected imminent terrorist attack, should the authorities have the right to ... detain people for as long as they want without putting them on trial?
<i>NOT civil rights~</i>	How essential to democracy is ... civil rights protecting people from state oppression?
<i>Tap phones</i>	... tap people's telephone conversations?
<i>Random street stops</i>	... stop and search people in the street at random?



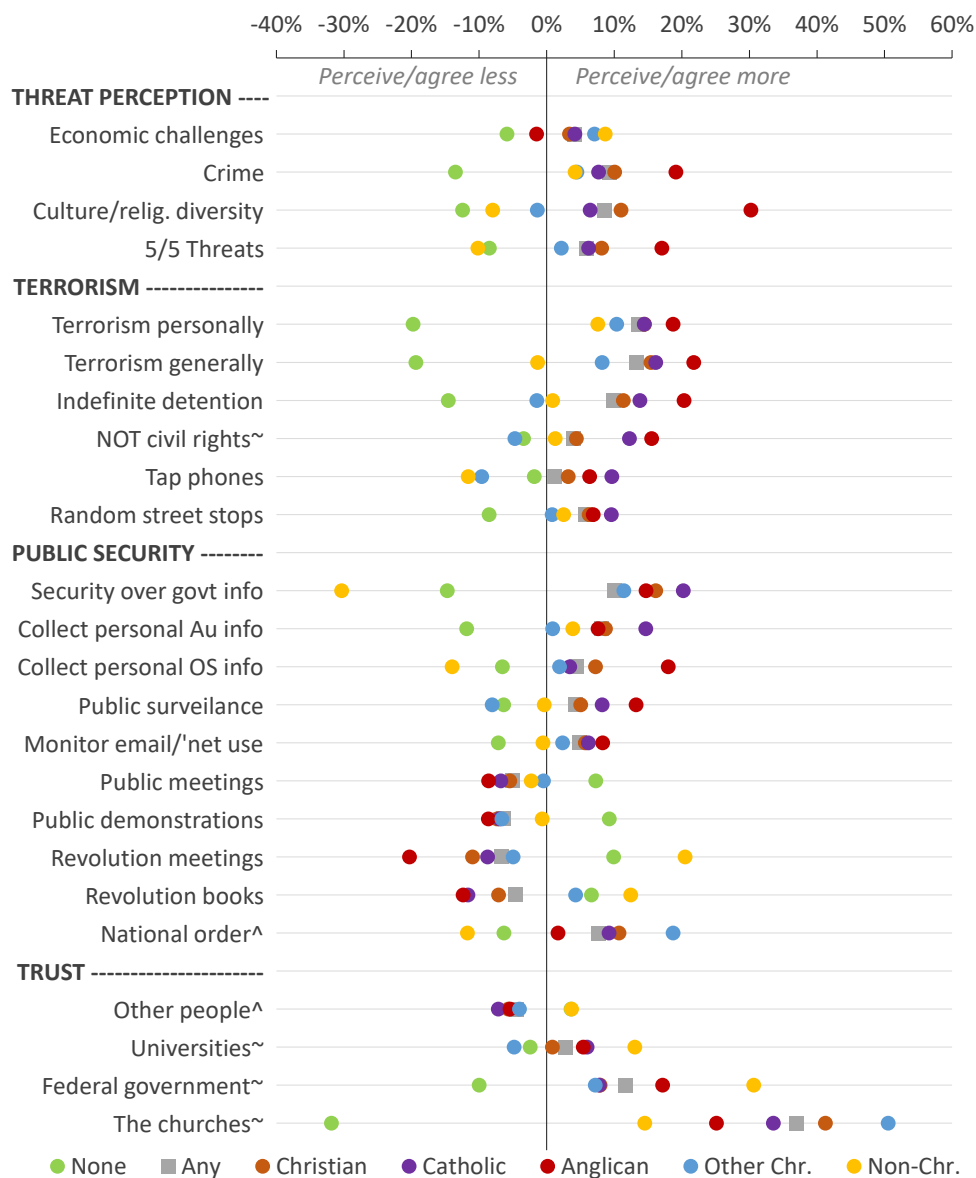
Figure row label	Meaning
PUBLIC SECURITY	
<i>Security over govt info</i>	All government information should be available publicly, even if this means a risk to public security / public security should be given priority even if limiting access to government information
<i>Collect personal Au info</i>	<i>In the name of national security, the government should have the right to ...</i> collect information about anyone living in Australia without their knowledge
<i>Collect personal OS info</i>	... collect information about anyone living in other countries without their knowledge
<i>Public surveillance</i>	<i>The Australian government should have the right to ...</i> keep people under video surveillance in public areas
<i>Monitor email/'net use</i>	... monitor emails and any information exchanged on the Internet
<i>Public meetings</i>	<i>To protest against a government action they strongly oppose, people should be able to ...</i> organise public meetings to protest against the government
<i>Public demonstrations</i>	... organise protest marches and demonstrations
<i>Revolution meetings</i>	<i>People who want to overthrow the government by revolution should be allowed to ...</i> hold public meetings to express their views
<i>Revolution books</i>	... publish books expressing their views
<i>National order<sup>^</sup></i>	Most important thing Australia should do: maintain order in the nation
TRUST	
<i>Other people<sup>^</sup></i>	Generally, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
<i>Universities<sup>~</sup></i>	<i>Please indicate how much confidence you have in ...</i> universities
<i>Federal government<sup>~</sup></i>	... the government in Canberra
<i>The churches<sup>~</sup></i>	... the churches

Sources: AuSSA 2016; <sup>^</sup> AuSSA 2020; <sup>~</sup> AVS 2018

By **religion** (Figure 19), overall patterns reveal that Nones are generally least likely to perceive threats and to favour restrictions on freedoms to counter them. Christians, often led by Anglicans, are the most likely to perceive threats and support measures to counter them. With several domain-specific exceptions, NCRs fall somewhere in the middle.

NCRs show outstandingly low support for suppressing government information but high confidence in government as an institution. This may stem from their greater proportion of overseas-born, many of whom will have come from countries where government suppression of information is associated with suppression of (or at least less freedom for) its people.

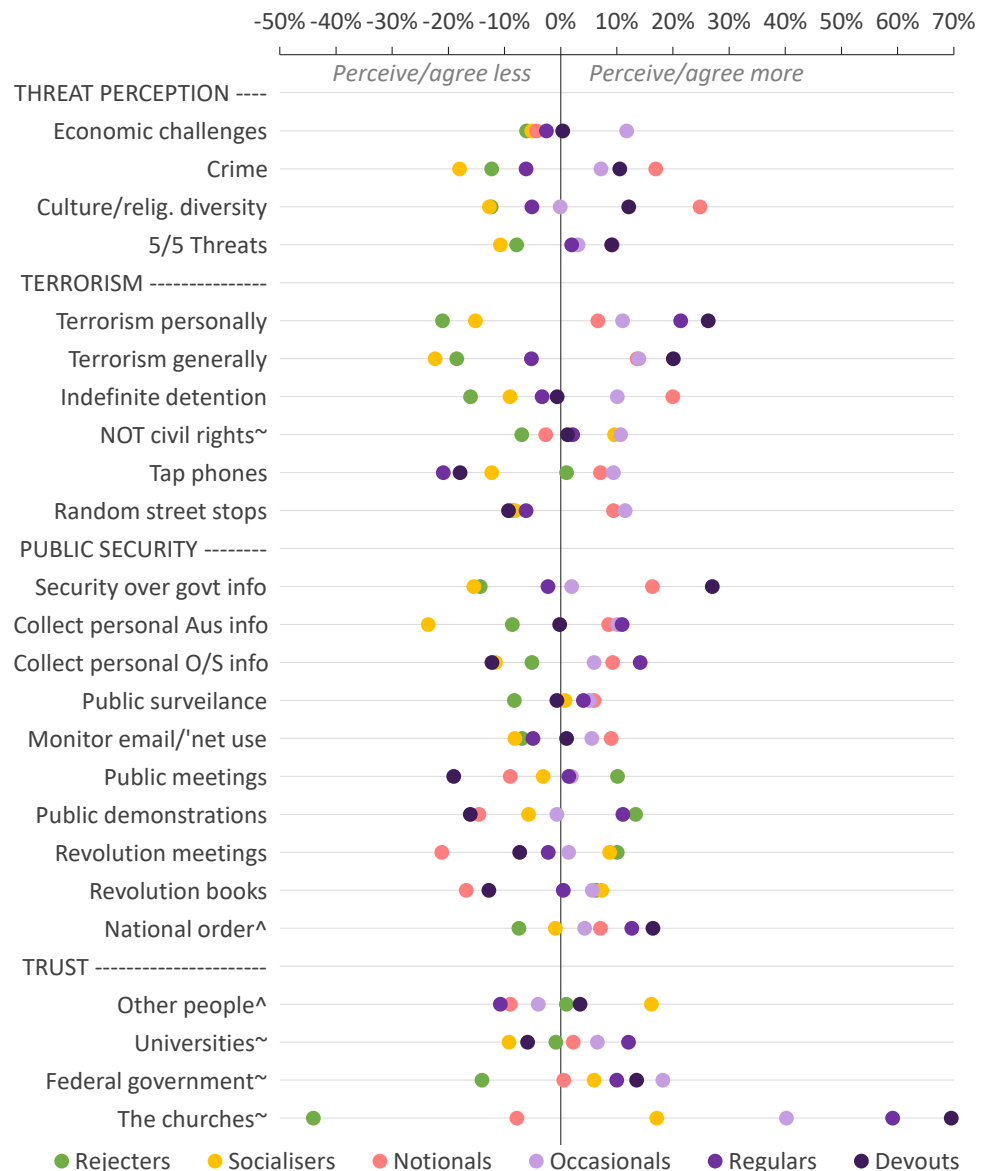
Christians show greater support for “national order” than either Nones or NCRs.



**Figure 19:** Divergence of attitudes toward security and trust, by religion  
Sources as described in Table 2

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 20), in general Rejecters and Socialisers are least likely to perceive threats or support personally intrusive or freedom-limiting measures to counter them. Amongst the religiously affiliated, Notionals and Devouts are more likely than others to perceive threats. Notionals are more likely to support both personally intrusive and freedom-limiting countermeasures (generalised “corrective” action), while Devouts are more likely to support freedom-limiting countermeasures (which serve against activist out-groups) but not personally intrusive countermeasures (in-group-favouring “corrective” action).

Religiosity correlates with greater support for “national order” (modest effect) and trust in the churches (very large effect).

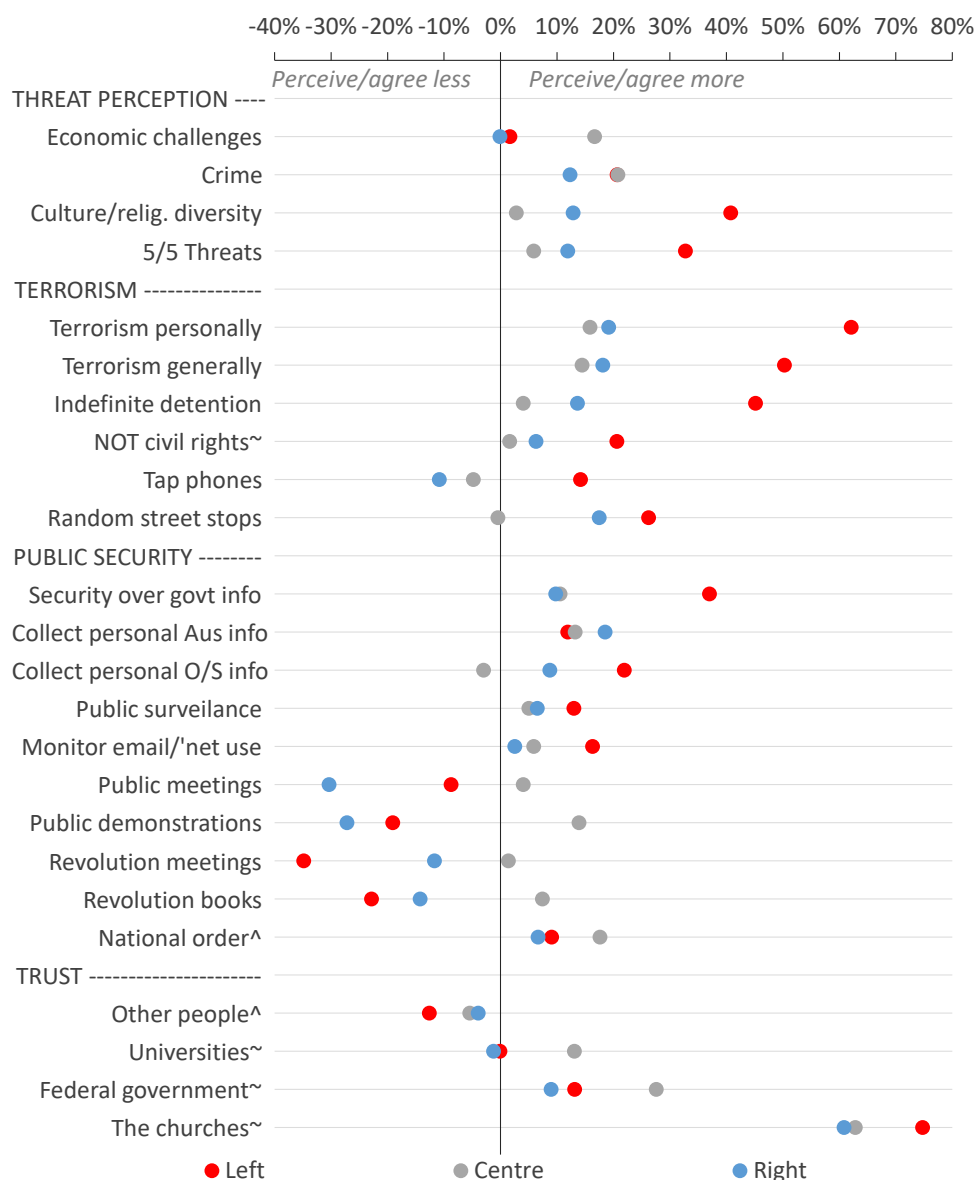


**Figure 20:** Divergence of attitudes toward security and trust, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources as described in Table 2

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 21), there are significant religious premiums in most of the measures of threat perception, and for accepting personally intrusive and freedom-limiting countermeasures.

Notably, across the political spectrum, the religious are *less* likely to trust people (individuals) but *more* likely to trust major societal groups: federal government and churches (institutions of broad representation) and prefer “national order”. This is consistent with other findings that the religious find comfort in structure and order (in this case institutions) but are more likely to feel uncomfortable in its absence (random people).

Many of the strongest religious premiums occur amongst the Left because the Secular Left are less sensitive, not the Religious Left more sensitive, than most.



**Figure 21:** Religious premium of attitudes toward security and trust, by RPI6 religio-political identity  
Sources as described in Table 2

Even amongst Conservatives, who are most likely to perceive threats and support countermeasures, there is a religious premium of greater threat perception and countermeasure support across many of the measures. The religious premium amongst the political Centre is, overall, smaller.

### Religion and rehabilitation from crime

In addition to attitudes toward crime and punishment, there is a perception amongst many that religion is successful in the rehabilitation of criminals. However, an Australian study of prisoners participating in a Christian rehabilitation course found no significant improvements in measures of

criminal thinking, empathy, self-reflection, treatment readiness or forgiveness (Gerace & Day 2010). Other studies overseas have found modest positive associations (Schaefer, Sams & Lux 2016) especially mediated by reduced drug use (Dodson, Cabage & Klenowski 2011), though program effects are not long-lived (Johnson 2004).

What is notable in the scientific literature is the abundance of research that tests whether religious programs are effective in prisoner rehabilitation. In contrast, there is a scarcity of research *comparing* the effectiveness of religious programs versus non-religious programs that are instead based on professional psychological foundations. Despite a concerted effort, no such studies were identified. Thus it is unknown whether professional secular programs would be more, similarly, or less effective than religious programs.

**Summary:** Christian Australians are significantly more likely than others to perceive higher levels of generalised domestic threats across terrorism, crime, economy, and cultural/religious diversity, and to support countermeasures that neutralise them without intruding personally on their own lives. Nones generally show the lowest rates of threat perception and support for personally intrusive or liberty-limiting countermeasures.

By religiosity, Notionals and Devouts have the highest overall perception rates for threats. Notionals are more likely to support a full range of countermeasures, but Devouts more likely to support countermeasures that restrict out-groups, but not support personally intrusive measures which might affect the in-group. Overall, religious Australians demonstrate a *lower* rate of trust of individuals but a *higher* rate of trust of institutions for general representation, consistent with a greater desire for structure and order.

There is a significant and largely consistent religious premium across the political spectrum in perceptions of threat and support for countermeasures. Religious premium effects are overall largest amongst the Left, because the *Secular Left* is the least likely to perceive threats or support countermeasures.

A study of a Christian rehabilitation program for prisoners in Australia found no significant improvements in a range of criminality and prosocial measures. Short-term results overseas are mixed, and rehabilitation effects are not long-lived.

## Moral frameworks

A number of moral frameworks have been developed that attempt to identify, categorise and articulate its foundations. Their detailed examination is beyond the scope of this report. However, the most commonly discussed and researched model is Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) (Graham et al. 2011; Haidt 2013), though it has attracted some criticism (e.g. Davis et al. 2017; Franchin et al. 2019; Harper & Rhodes 2021; Zakharin & Bates 2021).

MFT currently comprises six major dimensions (the sixth added more recently):

1. **Care (v. harm):** cherishing and protecting the self and others.
2. **Fairness (v. cheating):** rendering justice according to shared rules.
3. **Loyalty (v. betrayal):** standing with your family, group, or nation.
4. **Authority (v. subversion):** submitting to tradition and legitimate authority.
5. **Purity/sanctity (v. degradation):** the avoidance of disgusting things such as foods, thoughts and behaviours.
6. **Liberty (v. oppression):** freedom from domination; often in tension with the authority foundation.

The care, fairness and liberty dimensions are said to be “individualising” foundations, while loyalty, authority and purity are “binding” foundations.

MFT has been extensively employed to try to explain differences in attitudes across the political spectrum. Progressives are most sensitive to the Care and Fairness foundations, while conservatives may be more sensitive to the wider range including Loyalty, Authority, and Purity (Krull 2016), although this finding has been disputed (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes 2013). Unsurprisingly, libertarians are the most sensitive to the Liberty foundation. The differences in these sensitivities can lead to one political group labelling the other “immoral” (Haidt & Graham 2007).

### Progressives approach, conservatives avoid

These differences appear to be somewhat rooted in approach versus avoidance motivations (Janoff-Bulman 2009). The values of social progressives are more attuned to intragroup variability and interdependence (approach). Conservatives, however, are more attuned to intergroup boundaries and common social identity within their boundary (avoidance) (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes 2013). This is consistent with the greater likelihood of “dangerous world” perceptions amongst Conservatives and the religious as discussed in the previous topic (*Tradition and a dangerous world*).

## Moral foundations and religiosity

While Smith et al. (2017) found *political* orientations largely environmental rather than heritable, a USA/Australian study (Ksiazkiewicz & Friesen 2021) reports that both religiosity and political ideology are grounded in genetic predispositions. Religiosity's role in political attitudes is more heritable than social, and is more influential than is personality.

That is not to say that social influences are trivial. *“Moral judgement can be influenced by an acquired set of norms and conventions transmitted through religious indoctrination and practice”*, resulting for example in the engagement of different parts of the brain by Catholics versus atheists while solving moral dilemmas (Christensen et al. 2014). These influences are not necessarily permanent, however. Endorsement of religiously-motivated moral foundations of those who've left religion (the “Dones”) does appear to erode over time (Van Tongeren et al. 2021).

At the broadest level, atheists tend to favour the individualising moral foundations, and the religious the binding moral foundations (Ståhl 2021). The latter is certainly true amongst the major monotheisms, in which the committed give high importance to avoiding uncertainty and change, and low importance to independent thought and action, and hedonism (Roccas 2005).

Other research offers further, more nuanced insights.

Those who engage less in analytic thinking are significantly more likely to favour the binding moral foundations (Reynolds et al. 2020), and are more disposed to favour conservative political and religious ideologies including belief on God and other religious precepts, intrinsic religion,<sup>7</sup> religious practice, and political conservatism (both social and economic). Nilsson, Erlandsson and Västfjäll (2019) extend this understanding in a more detailed study that found those who endorse the binding moral foundations — or spirituality or traditional religiosity — are not only significantly less likely to engage in analytical thinking, but to be less numerate, more prone to confirmation bias, and vastly more likely to accept “bullshit”.

Intrinsic religiosity correlates strongly with sensitivity to Loyalty, Authority, and Purity foundations but only sometimes to the Care foundation, while quest and extrinsic religiosity are unrelated, or even negatively related, to the binding moral foundations (Yi & Tsang 2020). Nor do religious primes produce reliable effects on the endorsement of any moral foundation.

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the three major religious orientations — intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest — see Part 2 of this series (Francis 2021, pp 17-19).

The correlations between conservative religiosity and the moral foundations suggest reasons why conservative religionists harbour such negative attitudes especially toward sexual minorities (higher Purity foundation), are more likely to want their views to dominate (higher Loyalty and Authority foundations), and seem less interested in the deep psychological damage their public demands cause within these minority groups (lower Care foundation).

These findings are consistent with research about USA Christians, where differences in sensitivity to the moral foundations reflect individual differences in religiosity (Johnson et al. 2016):

- An outreaching faith correlates positively with Care and Fairness foundations.
- Biblical literalism is associated with the Authority foundation.
- Religious commitment, literalism, and belief in an authoritarian God each correlate with the Purity foundation.
- Religious commitment is associated with the Loyalty foundation.

In addition, amongst USA residents in general (not just Christians), social focus values (security, conformity, tradition, and benevolence) correlate positively with feeling close to God and with number of religious friends. On the other hand, personal focus values (openness to change, self-improvement) correlate negatively with frequency of religious service attendance (Schwadel & Hardy 2022).

The well-known feature of religious consumption or avoidance of certain foods is not related to the Care/harm moral foundation, but to the Purity/sanctity foundation (Minton, Johnson & Liu 2019). Only attention to consumption of sustainability-based foods — which predominates amongst the less religious — is related to the Care/harm foundation.

A New Zealand study investigating associations between the three major religious orientations and moral foundations, (Bulbulia, Osborne & Sibley 2013) found that the Care foundation didn't vary significantly by religious orientation. However, the quest orientation is associated with greater sensitivity to Fairness and, along with intrinsics, significantly less sensitivity to the Authority foundation. However, the extrinsic orientation is associated with greater sensitivity to the Loyalty foundation. Sensitivity to the Purity (sanctity) moral foundation is uniquely high amongst intrinsics.



Bulbulia, Osborne and Sibley (2013) note that the sensitivity of extrinsics to the Loyalty moral foundation is consistent with extrinsic motivations for religious prejudice to be reinforced and defended by the personal and social benefits of religious group membership.

In terms of prosociality, it's the individualising foundations (Care, Fairness) that correlate positively with volunteering for, and amounts of self-reported donations to, charitable organisations (Nilsson, Erlandsson & Västfjäll 2020). Strong binding foundations (Loyalty, Authority, Purity) were less associated with these prosocial behaviours, and further constricted their expression to the support of the in-group whereas the individualising foundations promoted largesse also to out-groups.

Thus, the links between religion and prosocial charitable behaviours are complex, and correlate with *type* of religiosity rather than mere religious intensity. None of the university data sets employed in this research report included measures of the type of religiosity, so analyses in this study rely on religious intensity (frequency of religious service attendance, prayer, etc).

So too, conservative/religionist claims of moral superiority by engagement of “more” moral dimensions, specifically Loyalty and Authority in addition to Care and Fairness, deserve greater scrutiny. “More” doesn’t confer “better”. As Australia’s royal commission into institutional responses to the sexual abuse of children found, loyalty and subservience to religious organisation authority was a key factor driving the high rates of abuse in religious settings and institutions.

**Summary:** Conservative religiosity is associated with the binding moral foundations (Loyalty, Authority, Purity/sanctity) and correlates poorly or negatively with prosocial charitable behaviour. Conversely, those emphasising the individualising foundations (Care, Fairness) including religionists with an outreach-based faith, exhibit much more prosocial charitable behaviour.

Ultimately, it is an individual’s sensitivities to the (individualising) moral foundations that predict prosocial behaviour. Religion alone is not predictive.

## Religiosity types, judgement and identity

A key finding in the association between religion and morality is that intrinsic religiosity (living with faith as a central component of identity)<sup>8</sup> and belief in a loving God is associated with greater likelihood of ethical judgement, while extrinsic religiosity (employing faith for utilitarian purposes) and belief in a punishing God is associated with *lower* likelihood of ethical judgement (Walker, Smither & DeBode 2012).

Extrinsic religiosity is associated with ethnocentricity (believing one's in-group is better or more important), leans heavily on the Loyalty moral foundation, and can lead to self-righteousness (Arli, Septianto & Chowdhury 2021). Effects are widespread and can even result in less ethical purchasing choices amongst the religious compared with non-religious consumers.

### Judgement

Another important factor is the type of thinking employed in moral judgement. For example, both political conservatives and the religious are resistant to consequentialist moral thinking: that is, to placing importance on the *outcomes* of implementing a moral judgement (Piazza & Sousa 2013). Rather, they are more likely to employ deontological thinking, or what are perceived as inherent and universal moral rules or *inputs* to judgement. Perhaps unsurprisingly, deontological norms are *learned*, for example in the different ways Catholics versus atheists think about certain types of moral dilemmas (Christensen et al. 2014). At least for the religious, deontology is heavily influenced by the Purity foundation of moral foundations theory.

Thus, while a progressive might hold a generally permissive attitude towards a behaviour they themselves would avoid, they may accept that others believe it moral and may so act if they wish. Deontologists, on the other hand, are more likely to say the act is immoral regardless of the world views of those performing it. For example, a deontologist is more likely to say that breaking a promise is never morally permissible. A consequentialist is more likely to say that breaking a promise is morally permissible *if* breaking it results in a better outcome (for the promisee, not the promiser).

*Overall*, the religious and non-religious exhibit similar levels of negative reaction to common moral transgressions, as well as similar levels of empathy: that is, the religious are not more moral as is commonly assumed (Rabelo & Pilati 2019).

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<sup>8</sup> Intrinsic and extrinsic (and quest) religiosity are discussed in Part 2 of this research series (Francis 2021 pp 17-19)

### The “Judging” style of personality

Correlations between religiosity and personality, particularly the “Big Five”, and a cocktail of psychological dispositions, were covered in Part 2 of this research series, *Religious Minds, Religious Collectives* (Francis 2021, p 31 ff.). Nevertheless, a further observation is warranted here in relation to moral judgement.

While there may be limitations (Pittenger 2005) in the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Briggs & Myers 1998) for clinical or corporate application purposes, it can serve as a useful framework in population-level studies. A component of the framework describes people’s preference for taking in information about the world (Intuition or Sensing) and processing it (Perceiving or Judging). Two combinations of these in particular are relevant: the NP (iNtuitive Perceiver) and the SJ (Sensing Judger).

NPs prefer *autonomy*, while SJs prefer *order*. Such personality differences can be present even within a religious institution, with younger convent nuns more likely to be autonomy-preferring NPs, and older nuns order-preferring SJs (Bigelow et al. 1988).

In addition, those preferring Sensing and Judging are more likely to be *dogmatic* (Ross, Francis & Craig 2005), that is, holding strong views, being intolerant of others’ views, and dismissing evidence that suggests a change of view may be warranted. It is more common amongst the religious, including bible college students (Francis, Penson & Jones 2001), Anglican laity and clergy (Francis, Robbins & Craig 2011), Methodist ministers (Francis & Stevenson 2018) and Catholic priests (Burns et al. 2013).

Dogmatism is also associated with greater authoritarianism,<sup>9</sup> extrinsic rather than intrinsic religiosity, and correlates with prejudice, as well as deficits in both perspective taking and empathic concern (Shearman & Levine 2006). So too, those preferring Sensing over iNtuition harbour sharper religious boundaries and a distaste for religious doubt (Ross 2011), while those preferring Judging are attracted more to religious structure. Perhaps this is reflected in differences between leaders of the UK’s Anglican churches and a Pentecostal/evangelical alternative: while Judgement is preferred by both denomination’s leaders, Anglican leaders are as likely to prefer iNtuition as

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<sup>9</sup> A preference for authoritarianism doesn’t mean the person wishes to be in charge, though certainly some do. A significant proportion of authoritarianists are submissive rather than dominant. The common point is that authoritarianism provides societal *structure*, and therefore perceived *order* to the world.

Sensing, while Pentecostal leaders are decidedly more likely to prefer Sensing (Francis, Gubb & Robbins 2009).

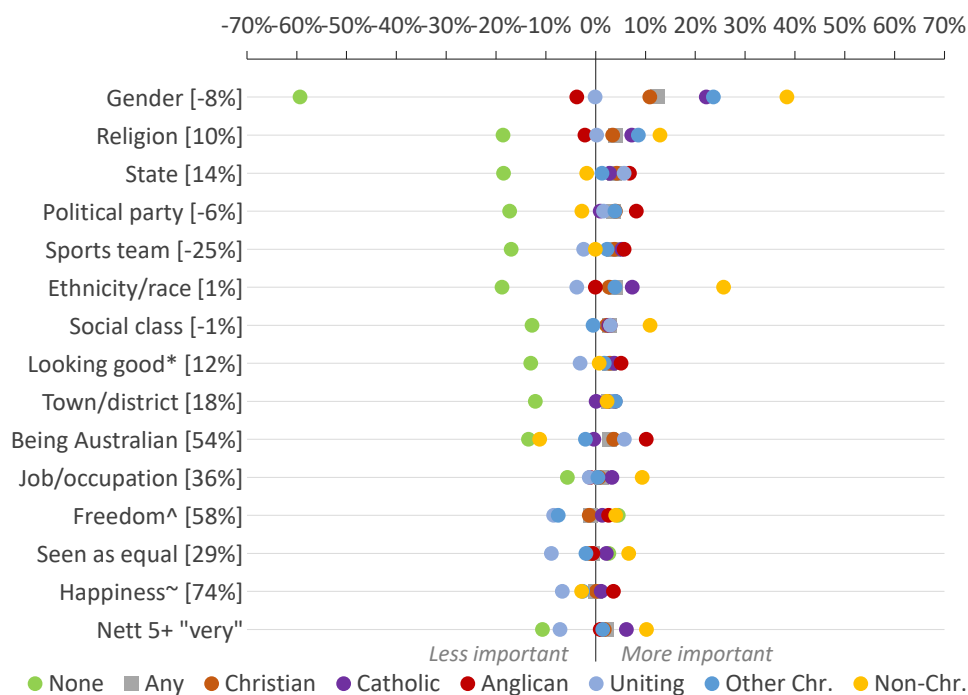
Much of the research has been conducted in the context of Christianity, for example finding that those higher in Judging hold a more positive attitude towards Christianity (Jones, Francis & Craig 2004).

There is surprisingly little research in relation to other, especially Eastern, religions. One small study of Buddhists in the UK found they are more likely to prefer iNtuition but also Judging (Silver, Ross & Francis 2012), as did another that studied Asian-descent Buddhist youth in the UK (Thanissaro 2013).

Extensive research evidence suggests that the religious are more likely to have a Judging personality style. Most of this research has been conducted with regard to Christianity.

### Australian evidence about the Judging style — self-image/identity

The general finding that religionists are more likely than secularists to prefer a Judging style can be tested using empirical data about adult Australians. The Australian Election Study 1998 asked respondents to indicate the importance of 14 dimensions to their sense of self-image.



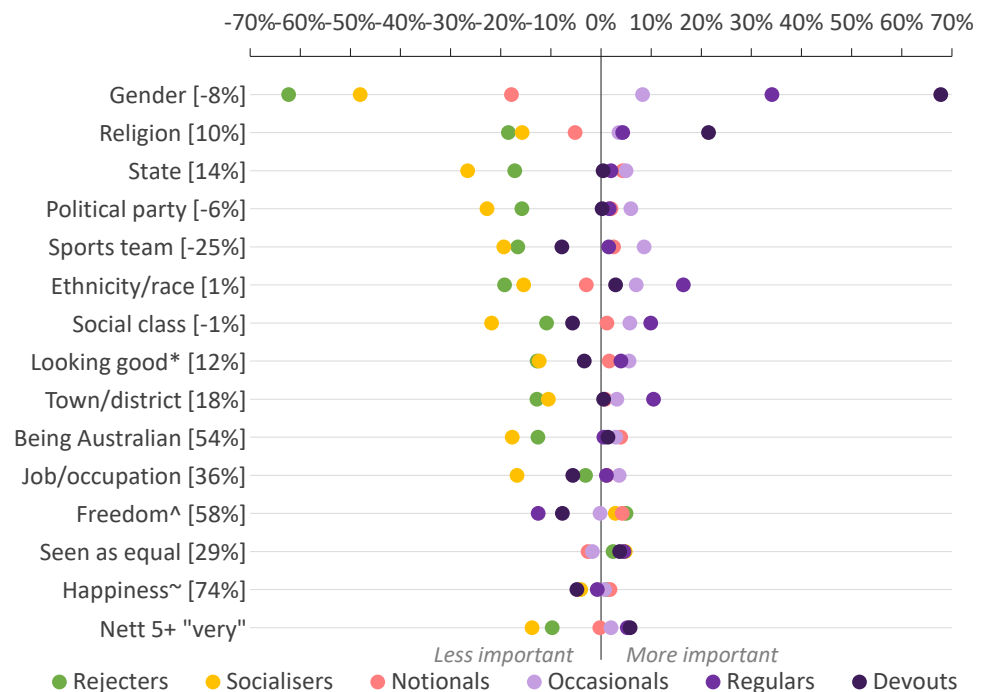
**Figure 22:** Divergence in contributors to self-image, by religion

Source: AES 1998. Row percentages in brackets are overall attitude polarisation of the attribute.

\* Fashionable or stylish. ^ To do what you want. ~ Happiness/self-esteem.

If religionists are on average more Sensing and particularly Judging than Nones, then there would be more than differences in perhaps one or two dimensions (especially religion) contributing to identity: there would be a *pattern* of differences. And there is indeed a pattern (Figure 22). Across *most* dimensions, religionists are significantly more likely than Nones to say the dimension is important to their identity. Indeed, most religionists are more likely than Nones to identify five or more dimensions as “very important” to their identity (“Nett 5+ ‘very’”).

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 23), the pattern becomes even more stark, with Rejecters and Socialisers even less likely than religionists to identify most factors as important to their personal identity, or to nominate five or more dimensions as “very important” to their identity.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 23:** Divergence in contributors to self-image, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 1998. Row percentages in brackets are overall attitude polarisation of the attribute.

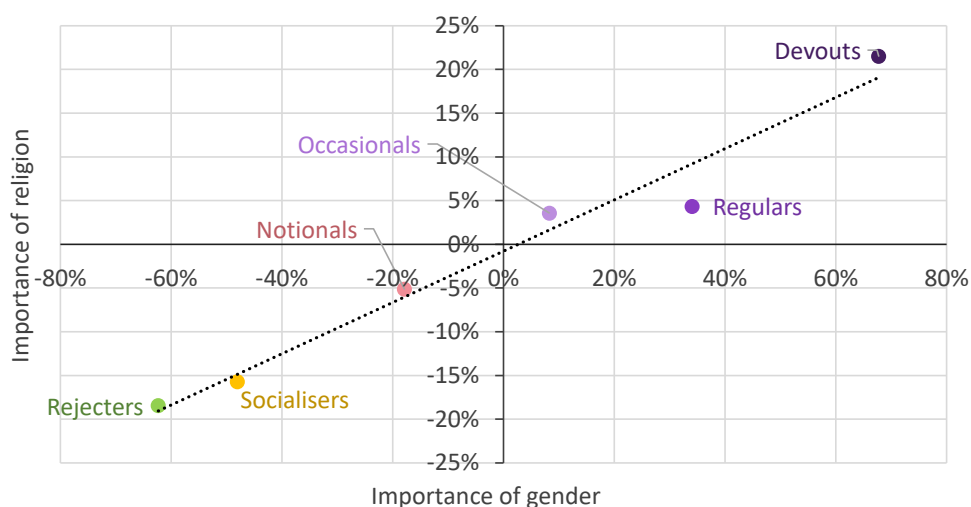
\* Fashionable or stylish. ^ To do what you want. ~ Happiness/self-esteem.

A notable deviation from this strong association is in relation to “the freedom to do what you want”. Devouts and Regulars are significantly *less* likely than others to nominate this dimension as important, suggesting a greater propensity to accept external rules and obligations as legitimately restricting personal choice.

<sup>10</sup> While men overall were slightly less likely (-16%) than women to report gender as important to their identity, there are minor and no dramatic differences in pendulum positions amongst the religion and religiosity segments about each mean.

The other correlation that stands out is the differential in importance of *gender* to personal identity. Its polarisation spread at 130% is vastly greater than even the polarisation spread of religion's own importance (40%) in relation to religiosity. In fact, religion was only slightly more important than ethnicity/race (36%) to the differential in identity importance across the religiosity spectrum.

The religiosity differentials in gender and religion are directly proportional (Figure 24). Variance in the importance of gender explains almost all (97%) of the variance in importance of religion to personal identity ( $p < 0.001$ ).



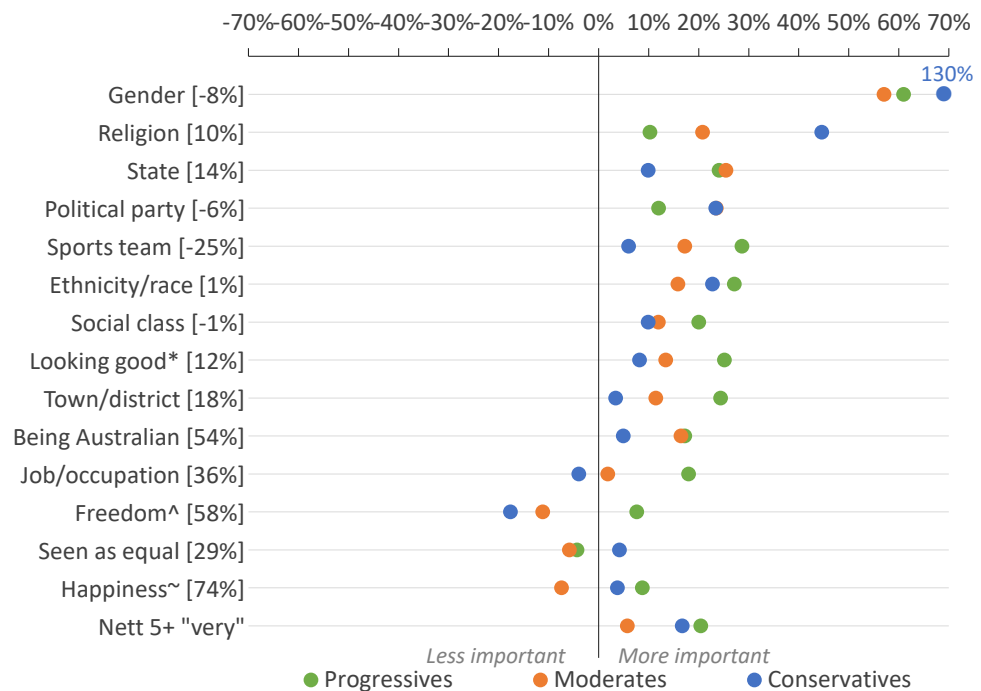
**Figure 24:** Correlation of importance of gender and religion to self-image  
Source: AES 1998

Variance in the importance of one's gender explains almost all of the variance in the importance of religion to self-image. Indeed by religiosity, *beliefs about the importance of gender to one's personal identity are roughly three times more powerful than is religion itself.*

### Sorting the wheat from the chaff

The differences in identity dimensions by religion and religiosity above are based on overall averages. But differences occur as a result of social and political attitudes as well, and these might be hidden somewhat by averaging. In fact, effects might occur in opposite directions for Progressives (or the political Left) as for Conservatives (or the political Right). These are teased out in Figures 25 (religio-social identity) and 26 (religio-political identity).

By religion and RI6 religiosity, many dimension differences are around 5%–20%. But by separating out the effects of religion on Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives separately (**RSI6 religio-social identity**, Figure 25), larger and more statistically significant differences between the religious compared to their secular counterparts emerge: typically 10%–30%, and the great majority are in the positive — that is, the Religious are more likely than their Secular counterparts to say the dimension is an important contributor to personal identity.



**Figure 25:** Religious premium of contributors to self-image, by RSI6 religio-social identity

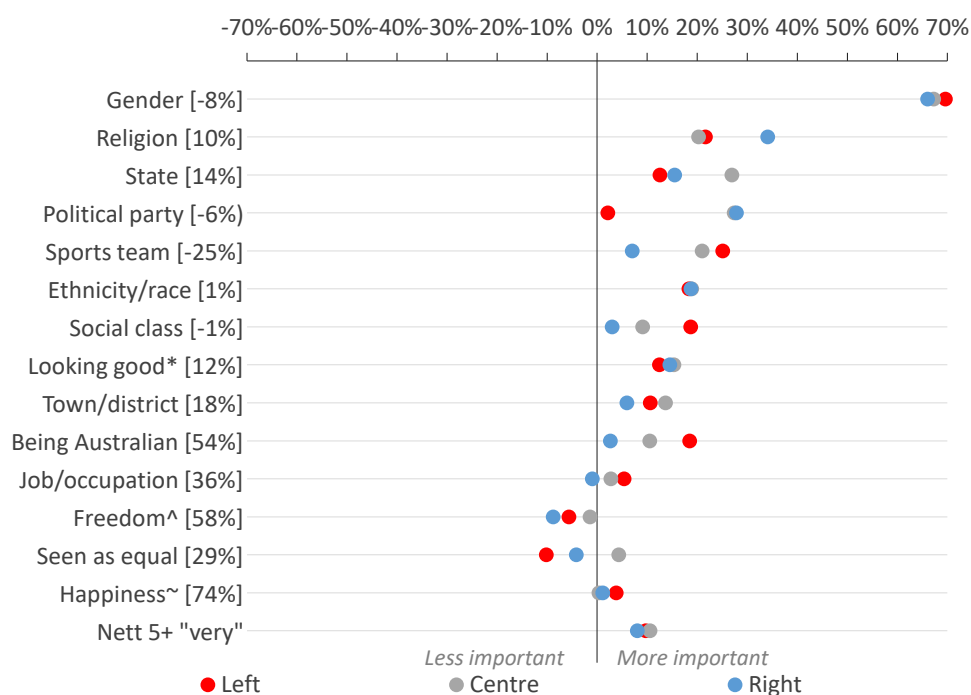
Source: AES 1998. Row percentages in brackets are overall attitude polarisation of the attribute.

\* Fashionable or stylish. ^ To do what you want. ~ Happiness/self-esteem.

Of particular note are:

- By far the greatest religion effect on the contribution of gender and religion to personal identity occurs amongst Conservatives.
- On most dimensions other than gender, religion and political party, the effect of religion on Progressives is usually greater than amongst Moderates and Conservatives.
- On most dimensions other than gender and religion, Conservatives are generally *less* affected by religion than are Progressives and Moderates.
- Religious Conservatives and Moderates, but not Progressives, are *less* likely than their Secular counterparts to say “freedom to do what you want” is an important part of identity.

A similar, though slightly less dramatic picture emerges by **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 26). Apart from the outstanding dimension of gender, most polarisations occur in the region of 5%–25%. Patterns are more mixed than under the religio-social identity model.



**Figure 26:** Religious premium of contributors to self-image, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AES 1998. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation of the attribute.

\* Fashionable or stylish. ^ To do what you want. ~ Happiness/self-esteem.

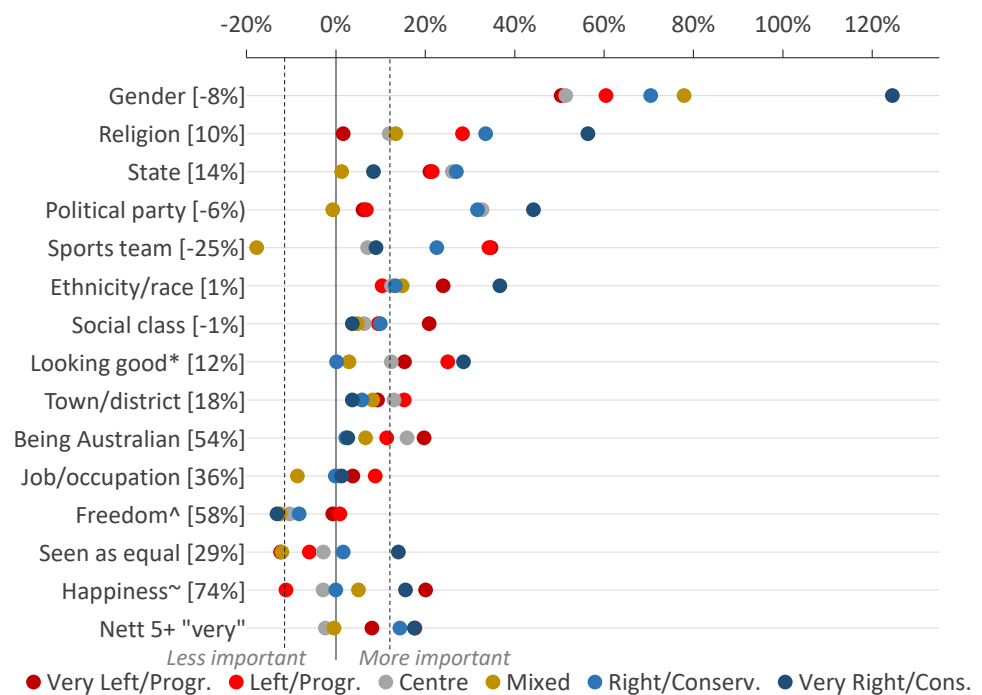
**Research implications:** The **RSI6** and **RPI6** findings about the importance of social and political identity help explain the variability of results in the scholarly literature about the relationship between religiosity and a range of variables. Across the social and political spectrum, there may be a positive or negative or even “u” or “n” shaped correlation with religion that is largely hidden when viewing aggregate data.

### An Australian political battle in the making

A more detailed breakdown by combined social and political identity provides further insights about religion and politics in Australia early in the Howard conservative government years (Figure 27). While gender remains the



outstanding item of identity amongst religious Australians compared to their secular counterparts, several observations are worth discussion.



**Figure 27:** Religious premium of contributors to self-image, by RSPI religio-socio-political identity

Source: AES 1998. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation of the attribute. Notes: Progr. = Progressive. Conserv. = Conservative. \* Fashionable or stylish. ^ To do what you want. ~Happiness/self-esteem. IMPORTANT: Due to smaller sample sizes resulting from more granular segmentation, significance of difference should not be considered at less than a 12% difference.

Firstly, the religious premium associated with Very Right/Conservatives is the highest amongst all the segments for, in order of effect size, gender, *and* religion, *and* politics. This is consistent with the presence of religious campaigners within the Coalition parties (state and federal),<sup>11</sup> whose core interests lie in ensuring “traditional” values about sexuality and gender roles are implemented at the political level.

Secondly, following the Religious Very Right/Conservative differences from their Secular counterparts, ethnicity is the next identity dimension (the strongly religious are more likely to be born overseas), followed by looking good (appearing fashionable or stylish). This suggests that Religious Very Right/Conservatives are on average more concerned than others about appearances.

<sup>11</sup> In this study, seven in ten (69%) of Very Right/Conservatives are Coalition voters, while a very small minority (14%) are Labor voters.

Australian data clearly identifies a minor cohort of very conservative citizens who are (a) religious, (b) believe gender identity is important (much more so even than religion), and (c) take an active interest in politics. These are religious warriors with a clear Coalition party preference intent on ensuring that their moral views prevail in policy, regulation and legislation.

Thirdly, gender identity aside, none of the religious premiums on the Very Left/Progressive side are as high as the top five religious premiums on the Very Right/Conservative side. The data suggests that the religious on the Very Left/Progressive side derive structured social engagement through sport but not religion compared with their secular counterparts, while those on the Left/Progressive (i.e. not “Very”), derive it from both sport and religion.

**Summary:** Evidence from the scholarly literature suggests that religionists, especially Christians and the more religious, are more likely to be Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Sensing and Judging (SJ), tending to favour *order* over *autonomy*. They’re also more likely to sense real-world (social) boundaries and form views about them. This is supported by Australian data that shows religious Australians are significantly more likely than secularists to say *many* personal attributes are important to their sense of identity.

Amongst religious Australians the importance of gender to personal identity is roughly three times more powerful than is the importance of religion itself, *especially* amongst religious conservatives. This is particularly so amongst those who are both social conservatives and on the political right. This finding ties in with a significant cohort of conservative religious warriors among Coalition party ranks intent on ensuring their views on sexuality and gender influence policy, regulation and legislation.

## People like me, and attitudes toward work

A further basic profile of non-religious versus religious Australians by their self-rated characteristics and attitudes to the concept of work is possible via the Australian Values Surveys (2012 and 2018) (Table I).

**Table 3:** More personal identity: People like me, and work attitudes

Figure row label	Meaning
PEOPLE LIKE ME	
<i>Religious customs~</i>	Tradition: to follow the customs handed down by one's religion or family
<i>Do society good</i>	Do something for the good of society
<i>Be safe</i>	Secure surroundings: to avoid anything that might be dangerous
<i>Behave properly</i>	Always behave properly: to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong
<i>Care for environment</i>	Look after the environment: to care for nature and save life resources
<i>Creativity/Individ.</i>	Think up new ideas and be creative: to do things one's own way
<i>Money/nice things</i>	Be rich; to have a lot of money and expensive things
<i>Adventure/excitement</i>	Adventure and taking risks: excitement
<i>Achievements</i>	Being very successful: to have people recognise one's achievements
<i>Spoil self/good time</i>	Have a good time: to "spoil" oneself
WORK	
<i>Importance of work*</i>	How important is work in your life?
<i>Work before leisure^</i>	Work should always come first, even if it means less spare time
<i>Demoting work bad^</i>	Less emphasis placed on work in our lives (is bad)

Source: AVS 2012; ^ AVS 2018 ~ For Religion and Religiosity, "family" netted out to show "religion" only by subtracting Irreligious results from all others, \* *Strong* divergence, and no significant difference in results if filtered to those currently working or seeking work. Note: RSI6 cannot be computed from the AVS 2012 data so is not presented.

Unsurprisingly by **religion** (Figure 28), all religionists are more likely than Nones to say that people who follow religious traditions and customs are more like them.



**Figure 28:** Divergence of “people like me” and work attitudes, by religion

Sources as described in Table 3

NCRs are most, and Nones least, likely to perceive themselves as people who do good for society. Catholics are the most, and Nones the least likely to avoid dangerous things. NCRs are the most likely to see themselves as creative and individualistic, have a focus on having a lot of money and expensive things, value adventure and excitement, and want their achievements recognised by others. Protestants (variously Anglican and Other Christian) are least likely to see these attributes in themselves, while Nones fall in the middle.

NCRs are also more likely than others to value work, except for Anglicans saying that placing less emphasis on work would be a bad thing. Nones are least likely to prioritise work before leisure and to see the demotion of work as a bad thing.

That is, there appear to be distinct cultural underpinnings for some of these attributes, and no universal trend across factors. The notion of a “Protestant work ethic” is not well or consistently supported by the data, and certainly not in comparison with Australia’s NCRs.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 29), self-identity with religious customs is generally proportional to religiosity (service attendance). Devouts are most likely to see themselves as doing good for society (though the effects are small), and least likely to self-rate creativity and individuality, being rich and having expensive things, or being seen to be successful. After Regulars, they’re least likely to rate spoiling themselves or having a good time.



**Figure 29:** Divergence of “people like me” and work attitudes, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources as described in Table 3

On all dimensions except less interest in religious customs and thinking that the demotion of the importance of work might be a good thing, Nones fall amongst the range of divergences amongst the segments across all attitudes. At least by RI6 and excepting religious customs, there appear to be no clear patterns, but complex relationships across variables.

When RI6 data is weighted by the personal importance of religion (**RI5 religiosity**, Figure 30), a clearer picture emerges. The more religious, Diligents and Ardents, are significantly more likely than Nones and Nominals to perceive themselves as followers of religious custom, doing good for society, and behaving properly. However, they are significantly *less* likely than Nones and Nominals to identify with protecting the environment, being creative or individualistic, valuing wealth and expensive things, adventure and excitement, having their accomplishments recognised by others, or spoiling themselves or having a good time. They are also more likely than others to believe that placing less emphasis on work in our lives is a bad thing.

The irreligious are least likely to rate themselves as people who follow religious customs, do good for society, behave properly, want to feel safe, prioritise work before leisure or prioritise it in life. They are most likely to value creativity and individualism, adventure and excitement, and to spoil themselves. In most of these attributes, however, (religious customs and work before leisure aside), their divergences are not significantly different from one or other of the more religious segments.

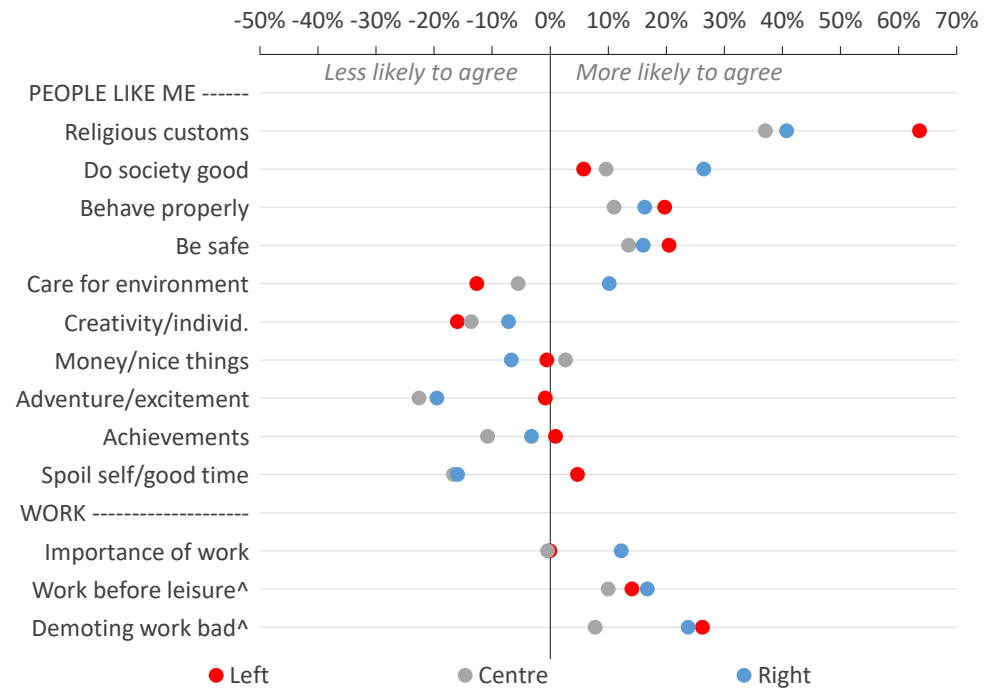


**Figure 30:** Divergence of “people like me” and work attitudes, by RI5 religiosity  
Sources as described in Table 3

Thus, the RI5 appears more powerful than the RI6 in revealing consistent patterns of self-attributions amongst the most and least religious. The religious deviate significantly more from that average than do the Irreligious.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 31) and apart from the obvious importance of religious customs to the religious, generally across the political spectrum the religious are more likely to see themselves as doing good for society, behaving properly, and wanting to feel safe. Overall they are *less* likely to value care for the environment,<sup>12</sup> creativity and individualism, wealth and expensive things, adventure and excitement, or being seen as successful. Generally, the Religious across the political spectrum report similar or more positive attitudes than their Secular counterparts toward work.

<sup>12</sup> The positive valence for Religious Conservatives regarding the environment only occurs due to the uniquely low rate of care for the environment amongst their counterparts, Secular Conservatives.

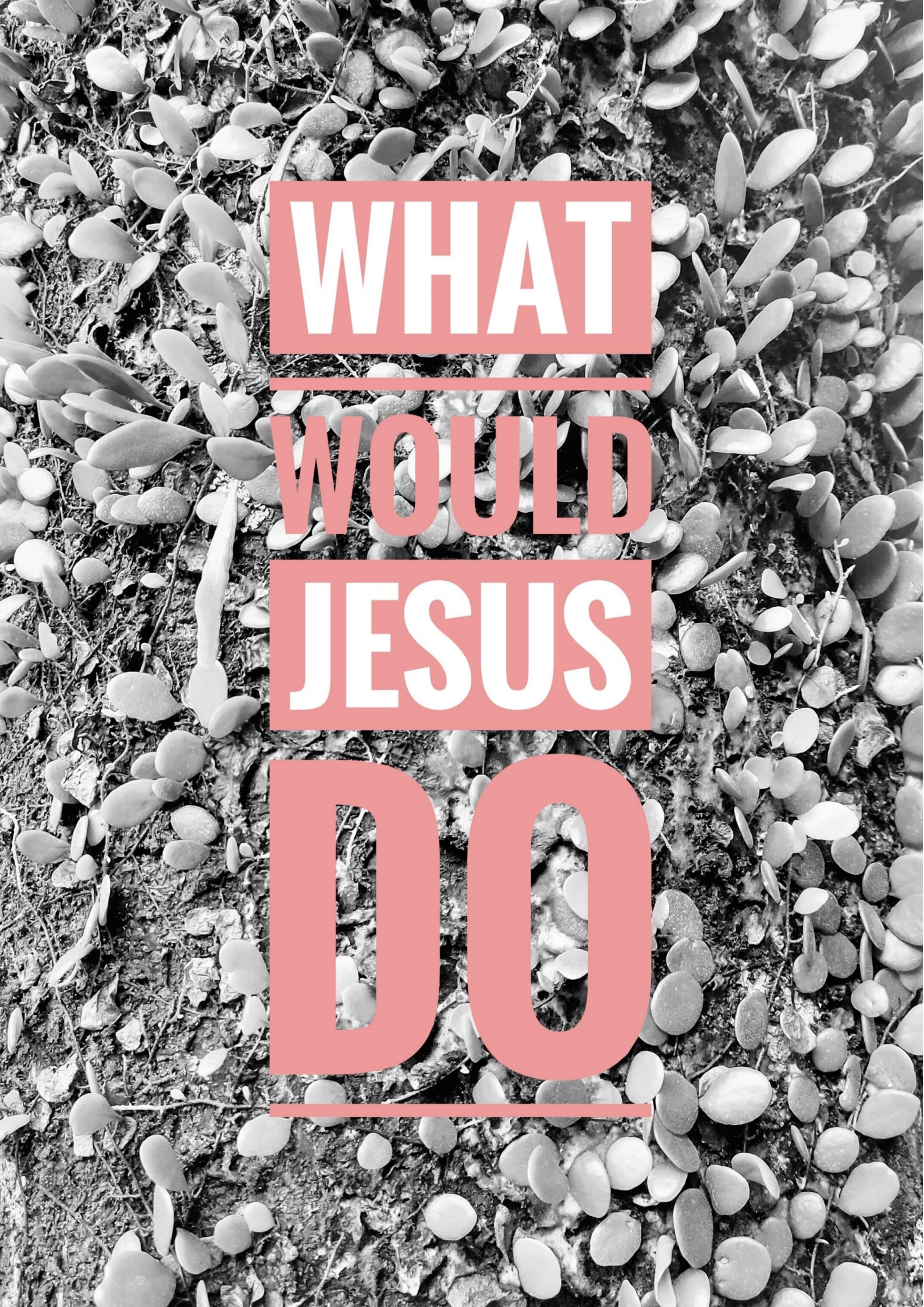


**Figure 31:** Religious premium of “people like me” and work attitudes, by RPI6 religio-political identity  
Sources as described in Table 3

**Important:** These are self-reported beliefs about one’s own characteristics, and regarding work. They may or may not correlate with actual behaviour in real life. For example, while in this topic the religious are more likely to identify themselves with “doing good for society”, Part 4 of this research series found that Australia’s religionists donate vast sums of money to congregational religion (i.e. for their own purposes) and are more likely than Nones to personally benefit from their charitable donations even outside the religion sector.

**Summary:** By religion, there are complex relationships between specific religious cultures and attitudes about the self and toward work. NCRs hold the most pro-work attitudes, and also the most hedonistic reward attitudes (e.g. wealth, achievement recognition). Overall, the most religious are more likely to report valuing work, doing good for society and behaving properly, and least likely to value creativity, excitement or recognition for success. Attitudes do not necessarily correlate with behaviour.





**WHAT**  
**WOULD**  
**JESUS**  
**DO**



## Religion's relationship with morality

### Religion as a proxy signal for morality

Religion serves as a commonly shared signal for morality (Edgell, Gerteis & Hartmann 2006). Indeed:

*“Most religious people think their morality comes from their religion. And deeply religious people wonder how atheists can have any morality at all. ... But the causal link is not as clear as it first appears.”*  
— Davies (2018)

In the preceding section of this report, we reviewed the research literature regarding core components of morality and how they relate to religion. This high-quality evidence does not support the general contention that “religion = morality”.

In this section we will examine wider cultural and psychological aspects of the religion-morality nexus.

### Good Samaritans and Golden Rules

In one of Christianity's most famous parables, the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25-37*), a Jewish<sup>13</sup> man travelling the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is robbed, savagely beaten, and left for dead. A Jewish priest passes by and doesn't help. A Levite (another Jewish clerical order) passes by and doesn't help.

Finally, a Samaritan — Samaritans and Jews generally had a frosty relationship — stops and tends the man's wounds, takes him to an inn and pays for his care and recuperation.

Thus, while focusing attention on the good deeds of the Samaritan as evidence of *prosocial* behaviour, statistically speaking the parable reports a majority (in this case two out of three) religious people evidencing *antisocial* behaviour. This is rarely raised in discussion of the parable and attitudes toward the religious.

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<sup>13</sup> The text doesn't expressly state the man is a Jew, though it is widely imputed.

The parable of the Good Samaritan reveals a majority (two-thirds) of its religious characters displaying *antisocial* behaviour, and only a minority displaying *prosocial* behaviour. Preachers, curiously, focus only on the latter as supposed evidence of religion's claimed moral superiority.

The parable is intended to demonstrate the Golden Rule in practice: the principle of behaving towards others in a prosocial manner. The Golden Rule is widely known throughout human history, with cultures and religions each promoting their own version (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Examples of the Golden Rule

Ancient Greece	Avoid doing what you would blame others for doing.
Ancient Rome	Treat your inferior as you would wish your superior to treat you.
Ancient Persia	Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others.
Tamil	Do not do to others what you know has hurt yourself.
Judaism	What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.
Christianity	Do to others what you want them to do to you.
Islam	That which you want for yourself, seek for mankind.
Bahai	Choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou chooseth for thyself.
Hinduism	One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self.
Buddhism	Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
Jainism	A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated.
Confucianism	Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself.
Taoism	Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss.
Yoruba	One who is going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.
Humanism	Do not unto others what you would not want them to do to you.

Source: Wikipedia (2021a)

### The Golden Rule and religion

Note that the Golden Rule requires neither god/s nor religion. The spectre of divine rewards and punishments may help promote hopeful or fearful religious prosociality (Saleam & Moustafa 2016), but there is no valid reason to suggest that *only* divine promises and threats lead to prosocial behaviour.

The mental mechanisms underlying the expression of the Golden Rule are complex and often contradictory, also causing antisocial as well as prosocial behaviour (Preston, Ritter & Hernandez 2010).

### The Golden Rule's dark side: in-group bias

This is in large part because expressions of the rule are mostly *self-referential*, a criticism levelled by numerous philosophers including Kant and Nietzsche. That is, golden rules set standards toward others that are firmly anchored in one's own desires. Obviously, real-world preferences differ widely.

This is a central reason why **morality has a dark side**: that one sees oneself as 'moral' if one assumes that what other people do or ought to want is what oneself wants. It promotes positive in-group bias, and out-group prejudice if what the other wants is different.

*"All major world religions share a theoretical belief in the Golden Rule — the prescription to treat all others as you would like to be treated — but in practice, the effect of religion on moral action has been less than golden."*

— Preston, Ritter and Hernandez (2010)

A critical difference which makes some Golden Rules more egregiously self-centred than others is the *valence* of duty. Some are expressed as a *negative* duty — *avoid* doing to others what you consider to be *harmful* to yourself — that is, at most, ensure to "do no harm" even if by your own standards.

Others however, including those of the two most populous world religions, Christianity and Islam, are expressed as a *positive* duty — *do* to others what you consider to be a *benefit* for yourself. That is, ensure that your *own* preferences prevail in the world whether others concur or not.

This is especially problematic when cemented to the greater authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and patriarchy of a single male god: the Golden Rule can be used to justify not only more aggressive evangelisation, but

greater coerced compliance and open hostility towards non-compliers, all in the name of “doing good”.

### A better Golden Rule

To maximise the potential for prosocial behaviour towards both in-groups and out-groups, and to avoid coercion, a more prosocial Golden Rule could be:

*“Treat others as they wish to be treated, except obligation regarding treatment you would deem harmful if done to yourself.”*

— A more prosocial Golden Rule

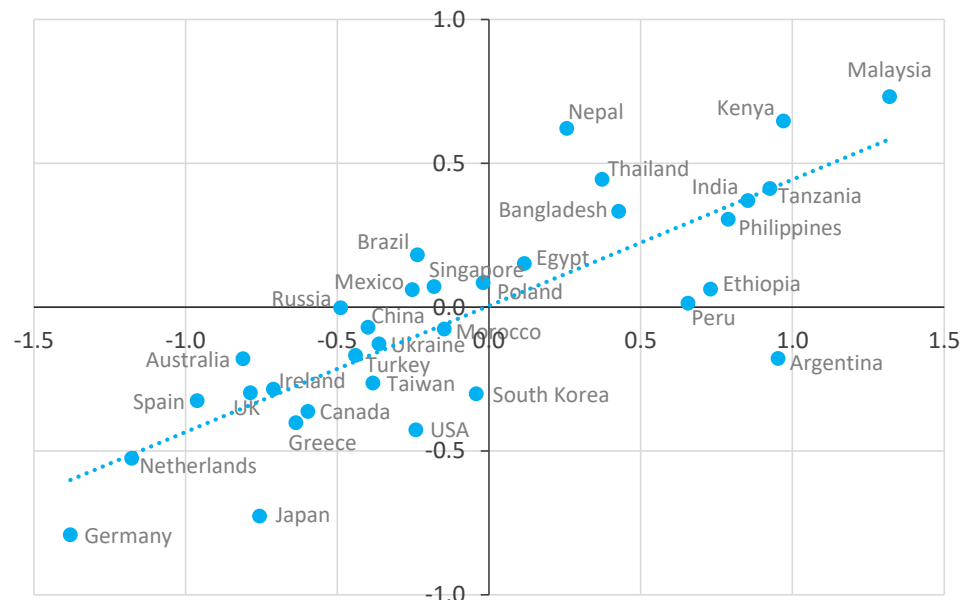
Happily, there’s a positive side effect of helping those in need: it reduces social dominance orientation amongst helpers via increasing empathy (Brown 2011) and increased salience of social equality by emphasising the Care and Fairness dimensions of morality, fostered by greater contact (Brown 2017). This of course, applies to those who undertake charitable works amongst *out*-groups rather than the in-group. Indeed, continued avoidance tendencies toward out-groups is associated with a social dominance orientation (Trifiletti et al. 2019).

**Summary:** The Golden Rule is a popular aphorism with good intentions that can drive the **dark side of morality**: that those implementing it often do unto others what they themselves want, not what the other wants.

Those with a social dominance orientation are most likely to avoid engaging with or demonstrating prosocial behaviour towards out-groups. Thus, they miss out on the positive side-effects of empathising, including an improvement in perspective taking — understanding the beliefs and views of others.

## Global evidence: religion, morality and anxiety

Stankov and Lee (2016) found a significant positive correlation between religion and morality at the country level (Figure 32).



**Figure 32:** Religiosity score (X) and morality score (Y) by country

Source: Stankov and Lee (2016)

In this study, religiosity explained 65% of the variance in the self-reported (not observed) country-level morality score. Superficially, this seems to confirm that religiosity leads to greater morality. But “morality” in this and many other studies is not independently observed behaviour. Rather, it’s a self-reported measure of “moral concern”: that is, a level of unease or disquiet in relation to potential or actual immoral conduct.

The concrete evidence for morality is measurement of actual behaviour, not mere attitudes. One useful measure of practical behaviour at the country level is the Control of Corruption (CoC) index.

By country-level religiosity, CoC behaviour correlates strongly and negatively: that is, higher religiosity correlates with higher corruption (Figure 33). Variance in the CoC score explains almost half (46%) of the variance in religiosity.



**Figure 33:** Religiosity score (X) by control-of-corruption score (Y)

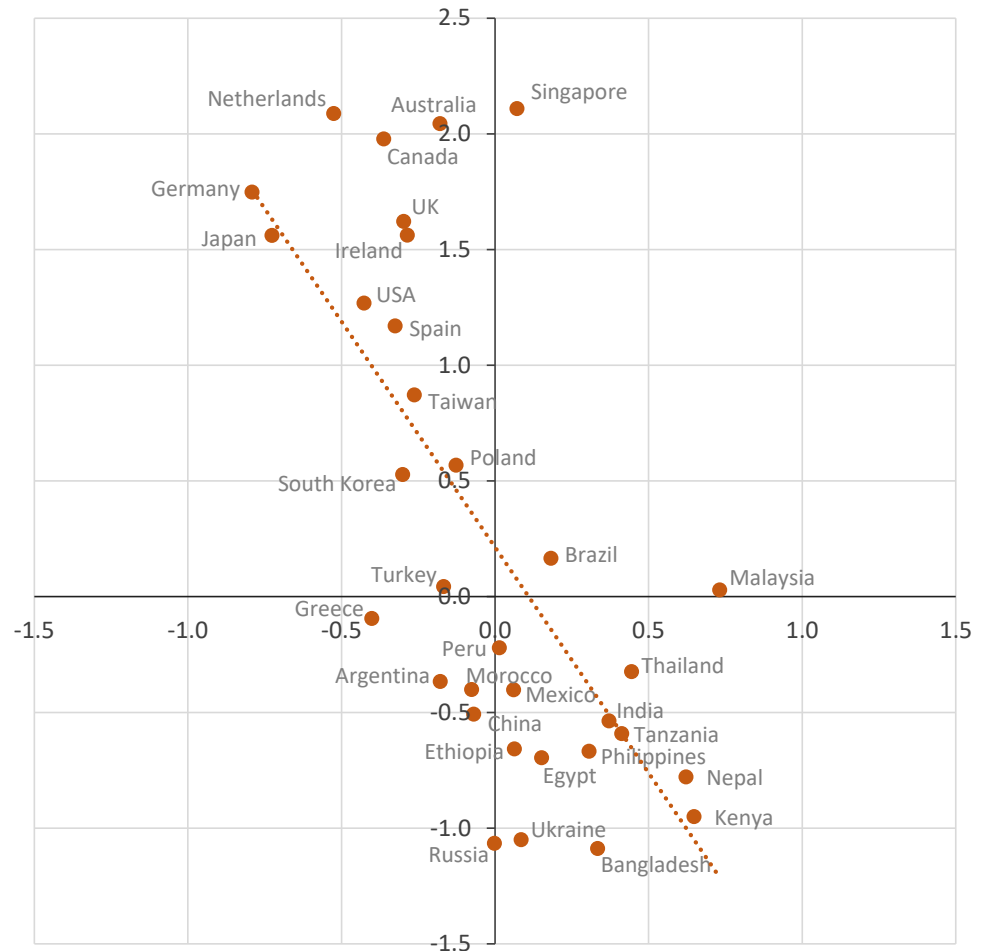
Source: Religiosity score, Stankov and Lee (2016); CoC, World Bank (2021) 2011 data.

Note: Lower CoC score means more corruption.

The measured morality also correlates strongly and negatively with CoC (that is, positively with corruption), explaining 43% of the variance (Figure 34). This is because greater exposure to corruption makes moral *concern* more salient. In terms of motivated reasoning, while perceived corruption lowers subjective well-being (Tay, Herian & Diener 2014), religion — which associates itself with greater morality — is a counter that helps to improve subjective well-being.

At the country level, the rate of corruption correlates *positively* with economic inequality, higher infant mortality rate, unsafe sanitation, and lower access to clean drinking water: in other words, corruption thrives with lower access to, and more competition for, basic resources (Rothstein & Holmberg 2019). Unsurprisingly, corruption also correlates positively with organised crime.

Corruption correlates *negatively* with higher GDP, economic freedom, greater education, longer life expectancy, long-term health and health expenditure, and greater gender equality. There is no significant correlation between corruption and happiness, policing, or citizens' confidence in parliament.



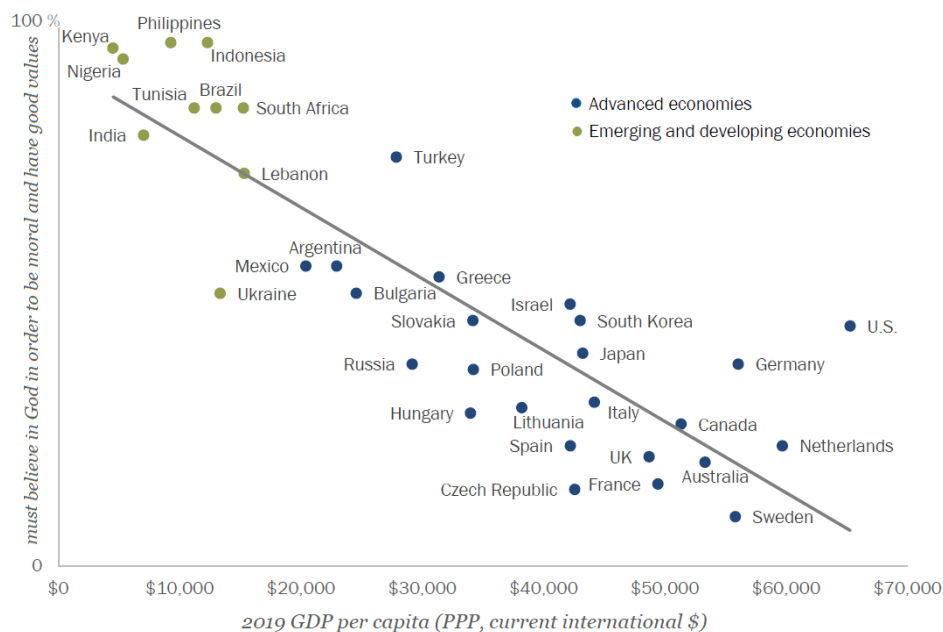
**Figure 34:** Morality score (X) by control-of-corruption score (Y)

Source: Morality score, Stankov and Lee (2016); CoC, World Bank (2021) 2011 data.

Note: Lower CoC score means *more* corruption.

There's also a negative relationship between GDP and belief that God is necessary to be moral (Figure 35).

Amongst countries worldwide, higher GDP explains 86% of the negative variance of the God-morality link (Pew Research Center 2020). In most countries, the younger generations are far less likely than older generations to attribute holding good morals and values only to God. These findings further support the notion that religion, and secular government ensuring adequate and equitable access to resources, are mutual substitutes.



**Figure 35:** Percent who say belief in God is necessary to be moral

Source: Pew Research Center (2020)

Those with more education are significantly less likely to link God to morality, with gaps ranging from 7% of people in advanced economies to 33% in emerging and developing economies. Those on the ideological right are also significantly more likely to make the link, with effects exceeding the ideological left by up to 39%.

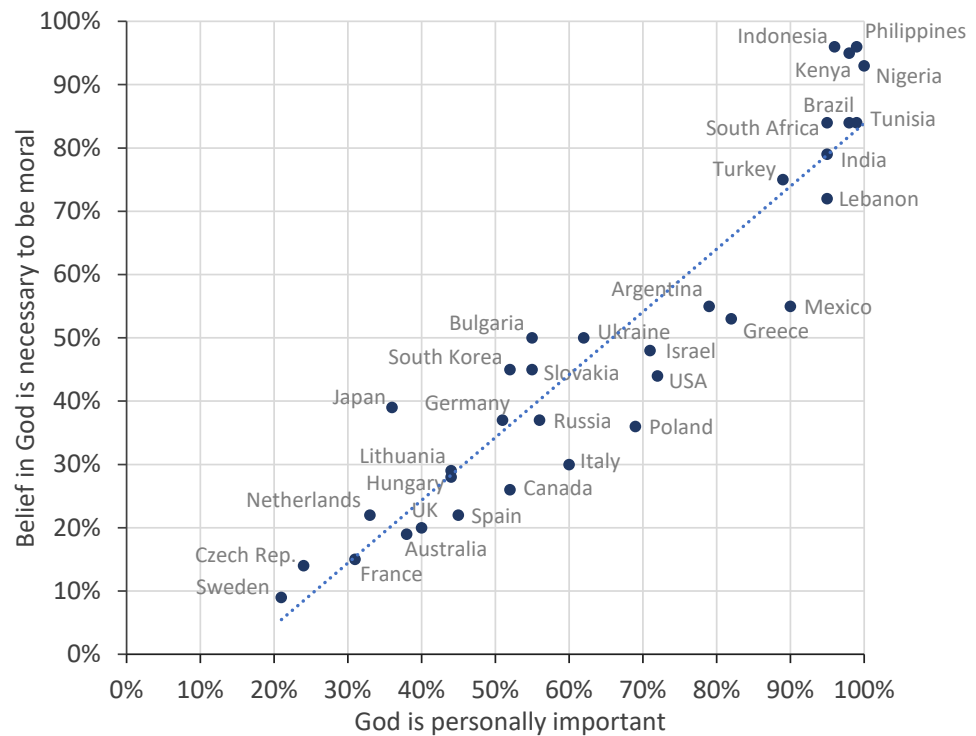
Two-thirds (65%) of Americans now say it's not necessary to believe in God to be moral (Fetterolf & Austin 2023), up from 56% in 2019 (Pew Research Center 2019) and 49% in 2011 (Pew Research Center 2017).

Opinions are also moderated by belief in the *personal* importance of God<sup>14</sup> (Figure 36).

Most (88%) of the variance in the belief of God's necessity for morality is explained by the belief that God is personally — not merely abstractly — important (Pew Research Center 2020). Even so, in every country in the study, people with higher education were significantly less likely than the lower-educated to attribute morality to only God.

<sup>14</sup> Note the monotheistic framing bias.





**Figure 36:** God belief necessary for morality by *personal* importance of God  
Source: Pew Research Center (2020)

Beliefs about the valence of deities (positive versus negative) influence morality, too. Belief in predominantly negative deity persona correlates with more moral behaviour, especially with negative supernatural priming such as afterlife punishment, at least amongst people who believe in such things (Schloss & Murray 2011). The effects appear most when people feel they are being watched, even if the reminder is not real — for example a drawing of two eyes on a donation box.

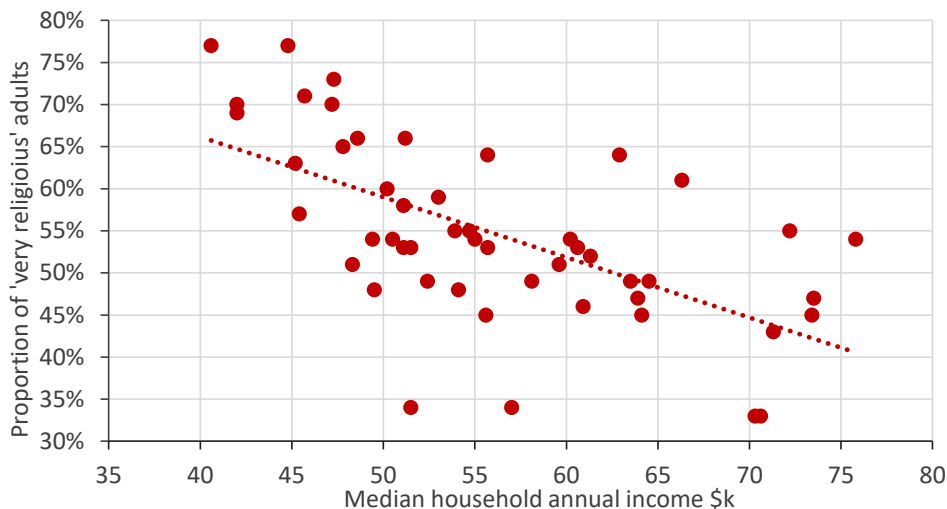
Belief in a punishing god (evidenced by hell) also correlates with rejection of moral relativism and endorsement of moral absolutism — more fundamentalist attitudes toward morality (Sarkissian & Phelan 2019).

Overall, in real life comparisons — versus laboratory tests — the religious and nonreligious engage in similar frequencies and qualities of committed moral and immoral acts (Hofmann et al. 2014).

This international evidence furnishes compelling insights into a major contributor to religiosity around the world: a salve against the existential anxiety of low resources and hardship, including having to cope with higher levels of immoral behaviour at least in the form of corruption.

## Correlations within country

Even within a nation, higher religiosity correlates with low income, reinforcing the evidence of religion's salve effect. In the USA, median household income explains 38% of the (negative) variance in religiosity (Figure 37).<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 37:** USA state median household income by religiosity 2015

Sources: Median household income - National Center for Educational Statistics (2016), Religiosity - Pew Research Center (2016). Note:  $p < 0.0001$ .

## Religion and existential concern

When specifically measured, religion has been found to diminish existential concern (Atran & Norenzayan 2004), though effects can vary amongst specific religions (Cohen, Rozin & Keltner 2004).

This overall theme is supported by a study of atheists who converted to religion (Christianity). Hardship was a significant factor in which the person first “experimented” with prayer to seek external supportive intervention regarding their circumstances (Langston, Powers & Facciani 2019).

It's also supported by longitudinal research in New Zealand. Only those in the vicinity of the Christchurch earthquake in 2011 increased their religiosity after the quake, despite religiosity continuing its decline elsewhere (Sibley & Bulbulia 2012). Disasters activate the religious attachment system as compensation (Davis et al. 2018), although the increased religiosity dissipates over time (Davis et al. 2021). Therefore, there may possibly be slight increases

<sup>15</sup> The linear regression suggests that 95% of the population would likely be ‘very religious’ at \$0 median household income, and 0% would be ‘very religious’ at \$140k income, though centrist data is not especially reliable at predicting relationships at the extremes.

in religiosity during a deadly pandemic like Covid-19, but the effects are likely to wear off as the crisis recedes.

In the context of Covid-19 lockdowns and shortages of supply, selfish hoarding differed little between religious and non-religious. However, atheism and extrinsic religiosity were associated with more selfishness, while intrinsic religiosity was not (Arli & Tjiptono 2022).

**Summary:** At the country level, religiosity correlates positively with corruption, but the effect is of religion as a salve against the injustices and hardships that typically occur in poorer nations. Even in wealthy nations, hardship (e.g. low income) correlates positively with religiosity (partly through differences in education as well). Religiosity can increase in the regional context of a natural disaster, but the effects are local and short-lived.

## No religious superiority for moral development

Is religion necessary or even superior to alternatives in the stewardship of moral development? Robust, longitudinal, causal evidence says ‘no’.

When compulsory religious education was dropped from schools in Germany and replaced with an ethics program, religiosity of then-students was decreased in their later years, but morality remained the same (Arold, Woessmann & Zierow 2022). Other findings don’t favour religion, either. For example, amongst young adults in Iran there was a small but significant *negative* correlation between religiosity and morality amongst university students (Ahmadi et al. 2013).

Why might this be so?

*“Moral reasoning is only a modest predictor of moral action” and  
“highly moral people do not necessarily have unusually sophisticated  
moral reasoning capacities.”*  
— Hardy and Carlo (2011).

On the other hand, studies report associations between moral identity and community service involvement, generative concern,<sup>16</sup> charitable giving, and altruistic helping. To date, the underlying nature of these associations and directions of causality are yet to be clearly determined. For example, people exhibiting what are judged as moral behaviours may consequently judge themselves as moral, rather than — or as well as — the reverse causality.

Developments in neuroscience are helping unravel moral development mysteries (May et al. 2021), suggesting that there are at least three different relevant decision systems in the brain. The first is Pavlovian, or automatic, innate behavioural, responses to stimuli. The second is “model-free”, that is, simply habitual, but may change slowly over time through experience. The third is a goal-directed system which assesses a tree of possible decisions and determines the one of highest total value.

The effects of these characteristics range well beyond the individual. Recent research has empirically confirmed morality’s core significance to the maintenance of personal identity as a member of a political, religious or ethnic group, as well as behavioural regulation of the group’s members in favour of the group’s moral norms (Ellemers, Pagliaro & Barreto 2013).

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<sup>16</sup> That is, judging “making the world a better place” personally more important.

### Putting the entrenched religious-moral myth to bed

Indeed, many assumptions about religion, including that religious people are more moral and behave more morally, are at best “problematic”, due to significant conceptualisation and methodology problems with many such studies that have purportedly found an association (Xygalatas 2017), especially regarding self-reported rather than independently observed behaviour. There are major discrepancies between beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour.

Religion simply doesn't *make* people more moral (Norenzayan 2014), and, ultimately, religion doesn't determine morality (Davies 2018). Indeed, societies without God are more benevolent (Cohen 2010).

*“The idea that [morality] is somehow religion's domain is one of the greatest lies ... in Western civilization. ... Secular people tend to be less ethnocentric, less racist, less misogynistic, less homophobic, less nationalistic, and less tribal on average than their religious peers.”*  
— Professor Phil Zuckerman *in* Timsit (2018)

**Summary:** Religion and religiosity are not necessary, nor even necessarily favourable, factors for the development of morality in childhood and adolescence. There is a complex relationship of religious, personality, cognitive and other variables that may heighten *or lower* ethical judgement.

## Reputation management

Religion's effect is driven somewhat by making people feel observed and therefore more sensitive to the currency of their own reputation (Harrison & McKay 2013). This is consistent with findings that small lifts in moral attitudes or prosocial behaviour with religious priming (but only amongst the religious) sometimes occur, *but they are short-lived* — that is, when the subject no longer feels 'observed'. It's also consistent with findings that the religious are more likely to *claim* to behave morally, but when monitored without the person knowing, are no more moral than non-religionists.

### Importance of morality to impression or reputation management

Morality is the most important driver of impression formation about other people (Sacchi, Brambilla & Graupmann 2020). As a consequence, those with perceived weak morals are likely to be distrusted and ostracised, while those with perceived strong morals are more likely to be trusted, welcomed, included, embraced, elevated and followed.

Religiosity correlates positively with impression management regarding the self (Gillings & Joseph 1996).

### Importance of reputation management to resource acquisition

Direct links between morality as cooperative social behaviour and its consequent greater access to resources are straightforward. Less obvious is the benefit of indirect reciprocity: that helping others without expectation of *direct* reciprocity improves reputation, as perceived by observing third parties. In this way, wider moral signalling serves as a strategic means of enhancing reputation and extending relationships that support access to further resources. Contemporary businesses, for example, understand and exploit this phenomenon through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Marsh 2018).

### Reputation management and narcissism

Moral judgements of reputation by both character and behaviour are often shaped by egocentrism. They're anchored by personal and group interests, especially strategic ones. Yet, judges perceive their evaluations to be objective, impartial and morally right (Bocian, Baryla & Wojciszke 2020). Such judgements are often claimed to be "discoverable" through intuition, argument, or some other purely cognitive or emotion-based process (Arvan 2019). These biases can be difficult to overcome because egocentric moralising is fast, automatic, and satisfying.

## Religion and self-representation

Both moral sensibility and moral judgement are associated with brain circuitries for **self-related** psychological processes, that is, the maintenance of an “autobiographical self” (Han 2017). This includes self-referential mental processing of intentions and feelings (Reniers et al. 2012). Coupled with this, perceived out-group immorality aids positive evaluation of one’s own morality (Sacchi, Brambilla & Graupmann 2020).

It is not surprising, then, that the religious are more selective in their prosocial participation, and participation is often tied to the perceived need to maintain a favourable reputation with the in-group (Norenzayan & Shariff 2008).

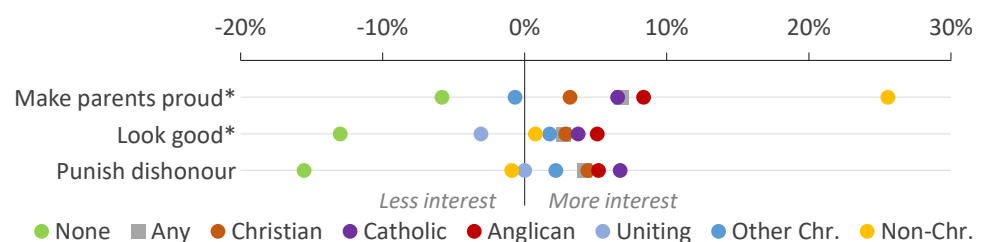
While religious thinking is more strongly associated with brain regions for emotion, self-representation, and cognitive conflict, in contrast, thinking about ordinary facts — that is, more tangible matters — is more strongly associated with memory retrieval (Harris et al. 2009). These findings are consistent with the earlier discussion that theistic beliefs are egocentric beliefs (see page 35).

## Reputation management in Australia

Data from Australian university studies provide insights into reputation management by the religious versus non-religious, in three specific domains:

- *Make parents proud*: One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud (AVS 2018).
- *Look good*: How important is your looking good — appearing stylish or fashionable — in describing how you see yourself? (AES 1998).
- *Punish dishonour*: An insult to your honour should always be punished (AES 2004).

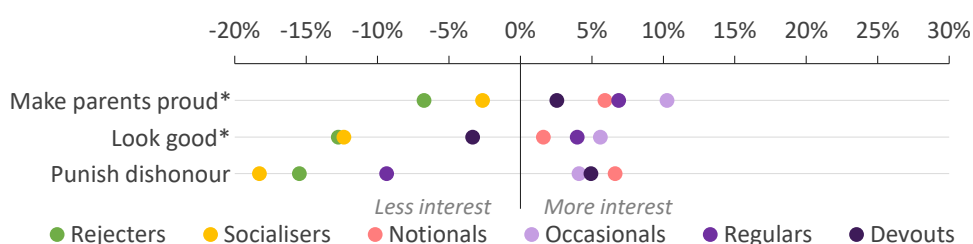
By **religion**, Nones are the least likely to prioritise reputation management (Figure 38). NCRs are by far the most likely to prioritise making their parents proud, suggesting strong intra-family bonds. Christians are the most likely to favour looking good and seek to punish insults to their honour.



**Figure 38:** Divergence in reputation interest, by religion

Sources: As described above. \* No centre point: strong polarisation.

By **RI6 religiosity**, Rejecters and Socialisers are both significantly less likely than religionists to prioritise reputation management (Figure 39).

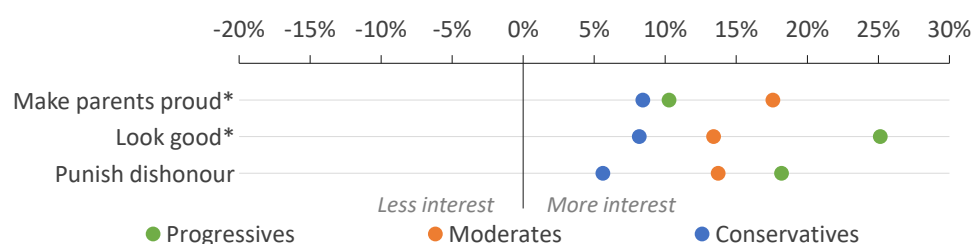


**Figure 39:** Divergence in reputation interest, by RI6 religiosity

Sources: As described above. \* No centre point: *strong* polarisation.

Devouts show intermediate rates of reputation interest. They, along with Notionals and Occasionals, are the most likely to seek to punish insults to their honour.

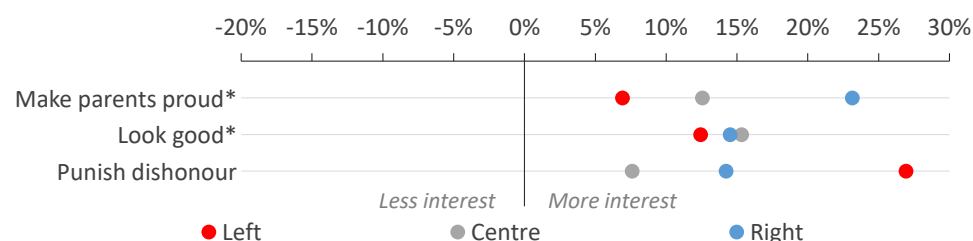
By **RSI6 religio-social identity**, the picture becomes clearer. Across all three reputation domains and all social spectrum positions, religionists are significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to prioritise reputation management (Figure 40).



**Figure 40:** Religious premium in reputation interest, by RSI6 socio-religious identity

Sources: As described above. \* No centre point: *strong* polarisation.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 41), the picture is equally clear, with significantly greater likelihood of prioritising reputation management across all three domains and the political spectrum from Left to Right.



**Figure 41:** Religious premium in reputation interest, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described above. \* No centre point: *strong* polarisation.



These findings are consistent with findings discussed earlier in this study that while Australia's religionists are more likely to trust representational institutions (e.g. government, church), they are *less* likely to trust other people as individuals. Their elevated attention to reputation management is likely to serve as a compensatory mechanism against reciprocal distrust they might expect of themselves by others.

**Summary:** Religion is associated with greater feelings of being observed, and brain region activity for self-representation. Consistent with this, Australia's religionists are significantly more likely than secularists to be interested in reputation management. Across the social and political spectrums, they are more likely to wish to make their parents proud, to appear stylish or fashionable, and wish to punish insults to their honour. This is consistent with a compensatory mechanism against their higher distrust of other people, in which they might expect others to distrust them.

## Australian attitudes toward religious prosociality

In Australia, the public's views about religion and its claimed positive influence on society are “cautious”.

Fewer than one in four Australians (39%) say that religion is good for society, with four in ten (40%) neutral or unsure (Powell & Pepper 2016). More than one in five (21%) say religion is *not* good for society, making a nett positive score of just 18%.

A tiny minority (15%) of Australians say that the nation would be better off if people were more religious (Crabb 2019). That proportion is curiously close to the proportion of Australians who are Regulars and Devouts in the RI6 model of religiosity, or Devoteds and Ardents in the RI5 model. These cohorts have high trust in religious institutions, while the remainder of the community harbour significant distrust towards them (Francis 2021, p 137). Clearly, there is a significant gulf in opinions between a small minority of very religious Australians, and the rest.

There is a significant gulf in opinions about religion and morality between a small minority of very religious Australians, and most other people.

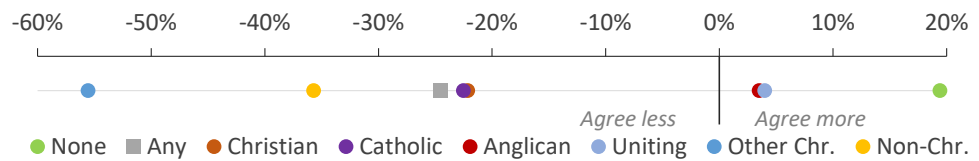
Only a quarter (25%) of Australians say that “religious people are better citizens”, and a very small minority (12%) say they “*lose respect for people when I find out that they are not religious*” (Ipsos 2017). Well under half (44%) say that “*religious practices are an important factor in the moral life of my country's citizens*”<sup>17</sup>.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Australians say that “*religion does more harm in the world than good*” (Ipsos 2017), consistent with similar findings of the 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA 2018), “*Religion brings more conflict than peace*”.

By **religion**, Nones, Anglicans and Uniting church Australians are far more likely to see religion as a net cause for conflict, with minor Christian denominations by far the least likely (Figure 42).

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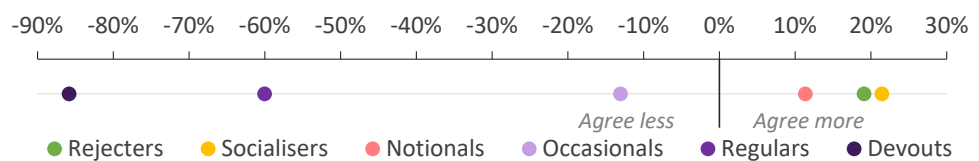
<sup>17</sup> Not an assessment of self: rather, religion may be important to *some* citizens.



**Figure 42:** Divergence of attitude “Religion brings more conflict than peace”, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2018

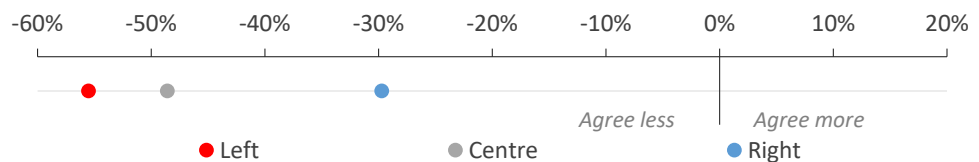
Unsurprisingly, *disagreement* with the “religion/conflict” attitude increases in direct proportion to **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 43). The attitudes of Regulars and Devouts is very substantially different from — more positive toward religion than — all others.



**Figure 43:** Divergence of attitude “Religion brings more conflict than peace”, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2018

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 44), the Religious across the political spectrum from Left to Right are significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to disagree that religion brings more conflict than peace.



**Figure 44:** Religious premium of attitude “Religion brings more conflict than peace”, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AuSSA 2018

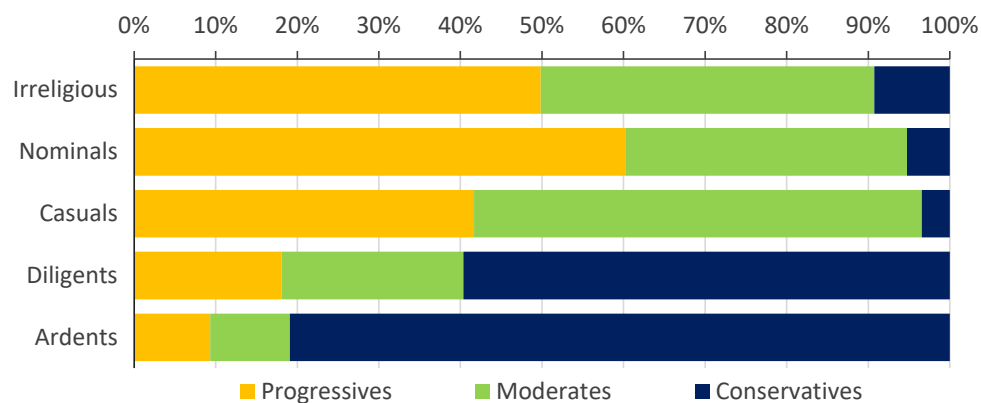
**Summary:** The nett positive attitude of Australians that religion is good for society is less than one in five (18%). A tiny minority (15%) say that Australia would be better off if it were more religious. Only a quarter (25%) say that religious people are better citizens. Nearly two-thirds (63%) say that religion does more harm than good in the world: the most religious (Regulars and Devouts) hold much more favourable attitudes than all other Australians.

## Moral segmentation of Australia's non/religious

It is religious fundamentalism, more so than education, income, gender, household-head occupational prestige, race or class that predicts “traditional” (i.e. male-domination) attitudes in favour of patriarchal family structure (Grasmick, Wilcox & Bird 2020). With this in mind, the religio-social 6-segment model (RSI6) employed in this study is based on attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles to help tease out differences in attitudes and behaviours between the religious and not within a social identity stratum.

This helps identify religious effects above and beyond socio-political effects.

Immediately obvious is that social conservatives comprise very tiny minorities amongst the RI5 religiosity segments Irreligious, Nominals, and Casuals (Figure 45). These three RI5 segments comprise 88% of Australia's adult population.



**Figure 45:** Proportions of social segments by RI5 religiosity

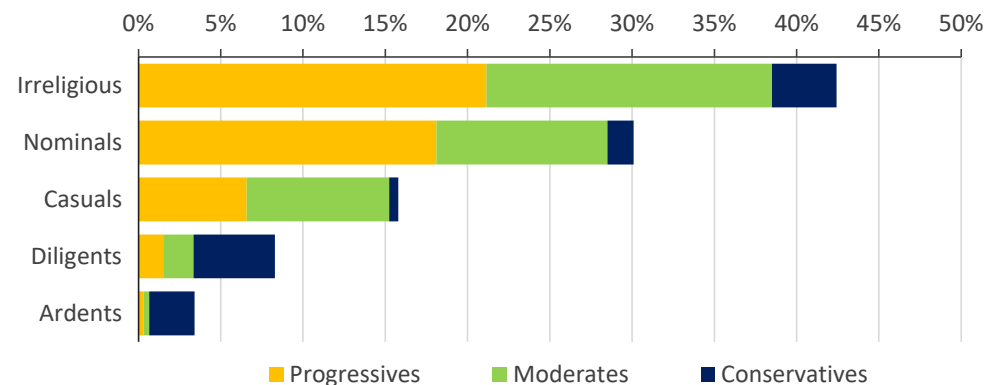
Source: AVS 2018

In stark contrast, the other 12% of the adult population, comprised of Diligents and Ardents, contain significant majorities of social conservatives. Yet they also contain equal or greater proportions of social progressives than the other segments contain social conservatives. This indicates an important diversity of views even amongst Australia's most religious.

Thus, high religiosity in Australia (as elsewhere) correlates strongly — but not always necessarily — with conservative attitudes toward sexuality and gender roles.

Figure 46 shows the same data as absolute proportions of the total adult population. While the 88% of less religious Australians (Irreligious, Nominals, and Casuals) account for the 6.0% of adults who are social conservatives, the 12% of more religious (Diligents, Ardents) account for 7.7% of them. That's an

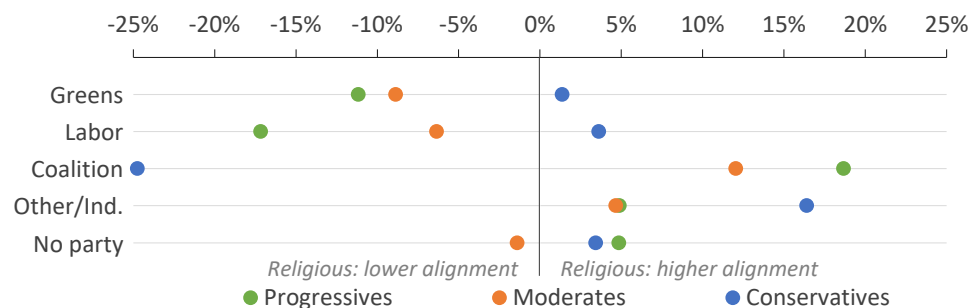
Odds Ratio of 9.4 times. That is, Australia's very religious are more than nine times more likely than the less religious to be social conservatives.



**Figure 46:** Proportions of social segments (RI6) by RI5 religiosity as a proportion of total adult population

Source: AVS 2018

Unsurprisingly, these differences are associated with differences in political party support. For example, compared with their secular counterparts, religious progressives and moderates are less likely to feel aligned with the Greens or Labor and more likely to feel aligned with the Liberal/Nationals Coalition (Figure 47).



**Figure 47:** Religious premium in political party alignment, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AES 2019

However, religious *conservatives* are less likely to feel aligned with the Coalition and more aligned with minor parties or independents. This helps explain why the federal Coalition is extremely sensitive to the religious right's agenda: it doesn't want to alienate them any more than necessary. It also helps explain Labor's 2022 election strategy to appear less hostile towards religion, since progressive and moderate religionists somewhat favour the Coalition.

### Differently moral rather than more moral

Conservative attitudes like those above are not empirical measures of “more” moral fortitude. Rather they represent different weights given to different moral foundations or principles, whether consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, conservative’s moral attitudes are *less* moral when they attempt to impose their own strictures on others who disagree: this offends the Freedom and Care moral foundations (harming others by preventing them from observing their own values).

Nevertheless, more fundamentalist religionists tend to interpret religious texts more literally and take a deontological approach favouring hand-picked rules cited from their own texts. To them, the different world views that arise from alternative emphases on the various moral foundations permits “moral relativism”, which they abhor.

The counter to this relativism is, of course “moral absolutism”, and religionists with an authoritarian or social dominance orientation may seek to impose their absolutes on society at large. To do so is to demonstrate blindness to, or disregard for, the moral dilemma of imposing moral absolutes on those who, in good conscience, favour other moral interpretations. As Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, Steven Pinker, points out, such absolutes for enforcing a particular “moral” behaviour sound like this:

*“Allowing people to skip church can lead to indolence. Letting women drive can lead to sexual licentiousness.”*  
— Pinker (2008)

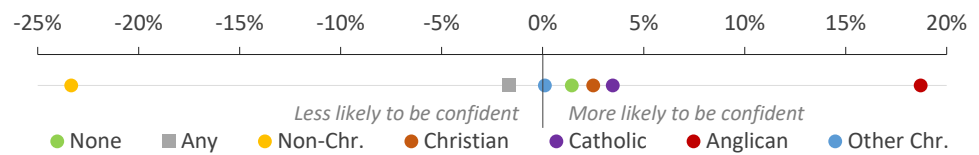
For any right, one can conjure imagined harms from thin air as an argument to deny the right. But conjuring tricks do not make one a more moral person.

**Summary:** Social conservatives dominate amongst the 12% who are Australia’s most religious, Diligents and Ardents, but represent only tiny minorities amongst the 88% who comprise all others: Irreligious, Nominals and Casuals.

## Religion and moral confidence in Australia

Australian data indicates that certain classes of Australians are naturally more morally confident than others.

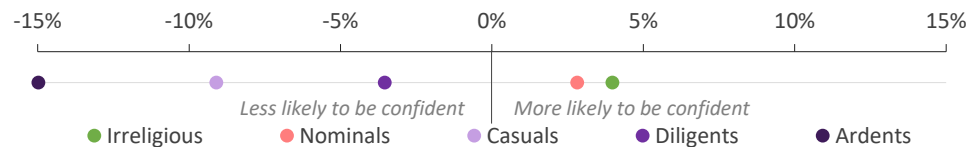
One class is by religious denomination, with Anglicans, Catholics, and other Christians, as well as Nones, far more confident about their moral convictions than those of the non-Christian denominations (Figure 48). It's hardly surprising that those whose world views and cultural experiences are in the minority (NCRs) are less confident in a sea of secular and Christian cultural dominance.



**Figure 48:** Divergence in confidence deciding which 'moral rules' to follow, by religion

Source: AVS 2018

Contrary to the popular view of religious over-confidence in simple deontological answers to moral dilemmas, in Australia at least, the most (Ardent) and more (Diligents, Casuals) religious, are far *less* confident than the less religious — Notionals and Irreligious — in deciding which 'moral rules' to follow (Figure 49).



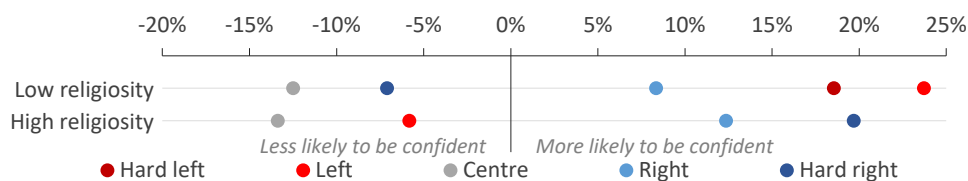
**Figure 49:** Divergence in confidence deciding which 'moral rules' to follow, by RI5 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018

This perhaps reflects dissonance that some religious people experience between their religion's official antagonistic stance towards out-groups, and condemnation of personal choice such as abortion and voluntary assisted dying, while they may not personally support such antagonism. If this is true, the abandonment of religion by more Australians is likely.

### Religio-political congruence boosts moral confidence

When religious and political views are more aligned moral confidence is greatest, and when they are in conflict, it's decreased (Figure 50).



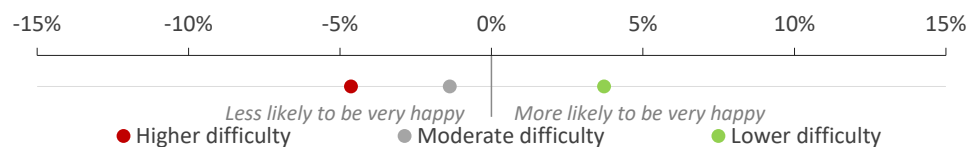
**Figure 50:** Difference in confidence by political orientation and religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: The Religious Hard Left sample size was too small to report a result.

Those on the Left with low religiosity, or on the Right with high religiosity, are most likely to be morally confident. Conversely, the Hard Right with low religiosity and Left with high religiosity are significantly less confident. Those in the political Centre have the lowest rates of moral confidence regardless of their level of religiosity.

### Moral confidence associated with greater happiness

Moral confidence correlates positively with greater personal happiness. Those who have lower difficulty in deciding which moral rules to follow are significantly more likely to report they are “very happy” with their lives (Figure 51). Although the differences are small, they are statistically significant.



**Figure 51:** Divergence in happiness, by difficulty in deciding which ‘moral rules’ to follow

Source: AVS 2018

**Summary:** In Australia overall, moral certainty correlates negatively with religiosity. Likelihood of moral certainty increases when political and religious views are aligned and eroded when they’re in conflict.

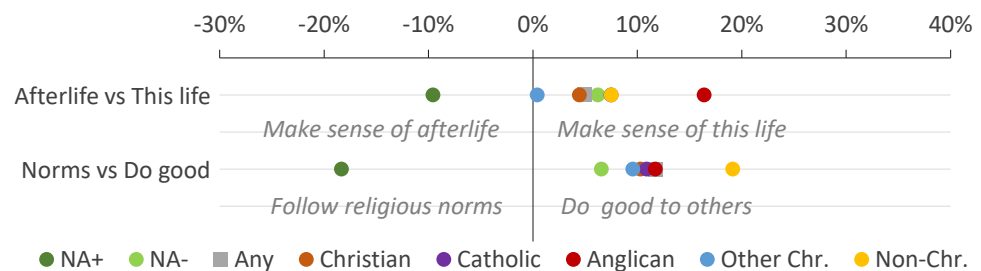
While the public often hear from a very small minority of highly confident religionists such as the Australian Christian Lobby and FamilyVoice Australia, many of Australia’s religious experience a somewhat higher difficulty in choosing which moral rules to follow. This may represent a tug of war between dogmatic clerical dictates and Australians’ generally more relaxed views.



## Basic meaning of religion

The Australian Values Survey 2018 asked people about the basic meaning of religion in regard to two domains: making sense of the afterlife versus making sense of *this* life, and following religious norms versus doing good to others.<sup>18</sup>

By **religion** (Figure 52), Anglicans are uniquely high (divergence +16%) and atheists uniquely low (-10%) in likelihood of believing religion is for making sense of *this* life. For doing good to others, NCRs are uniquely high (+19%) and atheists uniquely low (-18%) in likelihood of believing religion is for doing good to others.

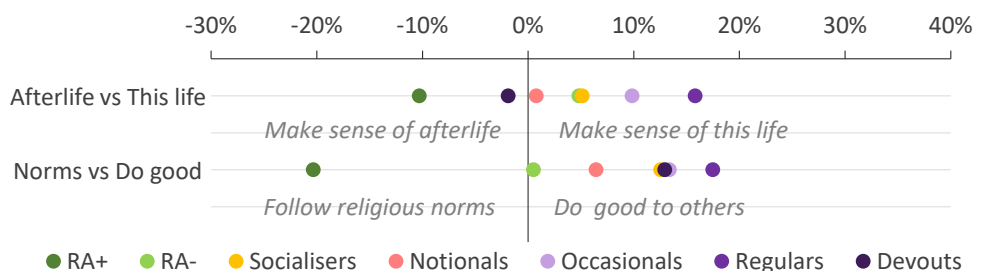


**Figure 52:** Divergence of attitudes toward two basic meanings of religion, by religion

Source: AVS 2018. NA+ = Nones who are strictly atheist. NA- = Nones who are not strictly atheist.

Worthy of note is that Nones who are not strictly atheist hold attitudes far closer to those of religionists than do strict atheists. This may flow from a significant portion of non-atheist Nones being “Dones”, that is, having previously been associated with institutional religion.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 53), many atheists again misunderstand what *religionists* believe to be basic meanings of religion.

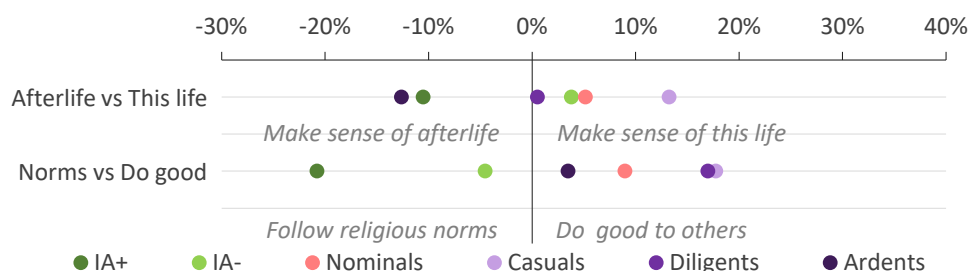


**Figure 53:** Divergence of attitudes toward two basic meanings of religion, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. RA+ = Rejecters who are strictly atheist. RA- = Rejecters who are not strictly atheist.

<sup>18</sup> As noted in a previous volume of this series, note the self-referential “to others” rather than “for others” (i.e. good from the do-gooder’s rather than the others’ perspective).

Importantly, however, the most religious, Devouts, are the most likely amongst religionists to believe that religion is about the afterlife than this life, suggesting that atheists' understanding is informed by only those religionists from whom they tend to hear: the most religious who actively publicise their views. This interpretation is given additional weight when comparing attitudes by **RI5 religiosity**, which weights RI6 religiosity by personal importance of religion (Figure 54).

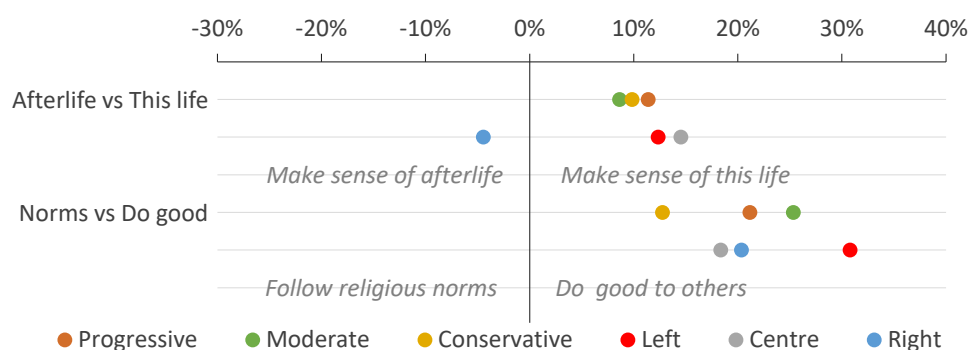


**Figure 54:** Divergence of attitudes toward two basic meanings of religion, by RI5 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. IA+ = Irreligious who are strict atheists. IA- = Irreligious who are not strict atheists.

Divergence of attitudes toward the afterlife is very similar between atheists and Ardents. And amongst religious Australians, Ardents are the *most* likely to plump for religion meaning following religious norms, over doing good to others.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** and **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 55), Religious Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives are all more likely than their Secular counterparts to say that religion is about *this* life (rather than the afterlife), and doing good to others (rather than following religious norms).



**Figure 55:** Religious premium of attitudes toward two basic meanings of religion, by RSI6 religio-social identity and RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018

In one of the most striking divergences, Religious Conservatives are *more* likely than their Secular counterparts to say that religion is about the afterlife, and those on the Religious Left are vastly more likely than their Secular counterparts to say that religion is about doing good to others.

Nevertheless, atheist opinion towards following norms rather than doing good is significantly the most negative, possibly strongly influenced by their negative views about religion causing conflict (religious wars<sup>19</sup>), and in protecting paedophiles amongst religious ranks as revealed by the royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse — evidenced by extremely low trust in “the churches” (Francis 2021, p 137), and discussed in further detail later in this study.

**Summary:** Australia’s atheists appear to derive their attitudes about the basic meaning of religion from the nation’s most religious, Ardents. Ardents are the religionists most likely to say religion is about the afterlife (vs this life) and following religious norms (vs doing good).

Australia’s non-Ardent religionists are far more likely than Ardents to say that religion is about *this* life, and doing good to others. Thus, Notionals, Casuals and Diligents are far more grounded and prosocial than Ardents in their beliefs about the meaning of religion.

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<sup>19</sup> Priming religion elevates confidence in the likely success of warfare (Pollack 2017).

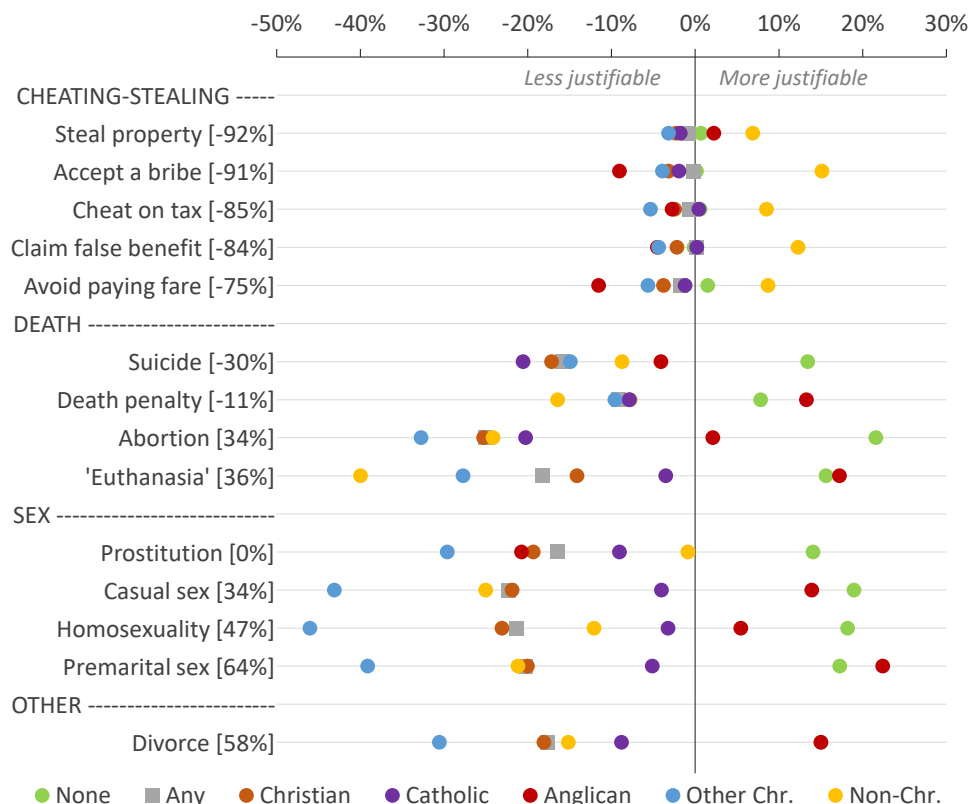
## Religion and moral attitudes in Australia

In 2018, the Australian Values Survey (AVS) asked about the moral justifiability of a range of behaviours. In respect of cheating and stealing, these included:

- Stealing property
- Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties
- Cheating on taxes if you have a chance
- Claiming government benefits to which you are not entitled
- Avoiding a fare on public transport

Attitudes toward other actions were also asked, including ‘euthanasia’, but with no qualification as to its voluntariness or in the context of a terminal illness.

By **religion** (Figure 56), differences in attitudes toward **cheating and stealing** are relatively small and many not statistically significant. However, NCRs show a modestly greater acceptance than Christians and Nones of these behaviours (no significant difference). This may relate to cultural differences of non-Christian backgrounds. Anglicans are less accepting of bribes and avoiding a public transport fare.

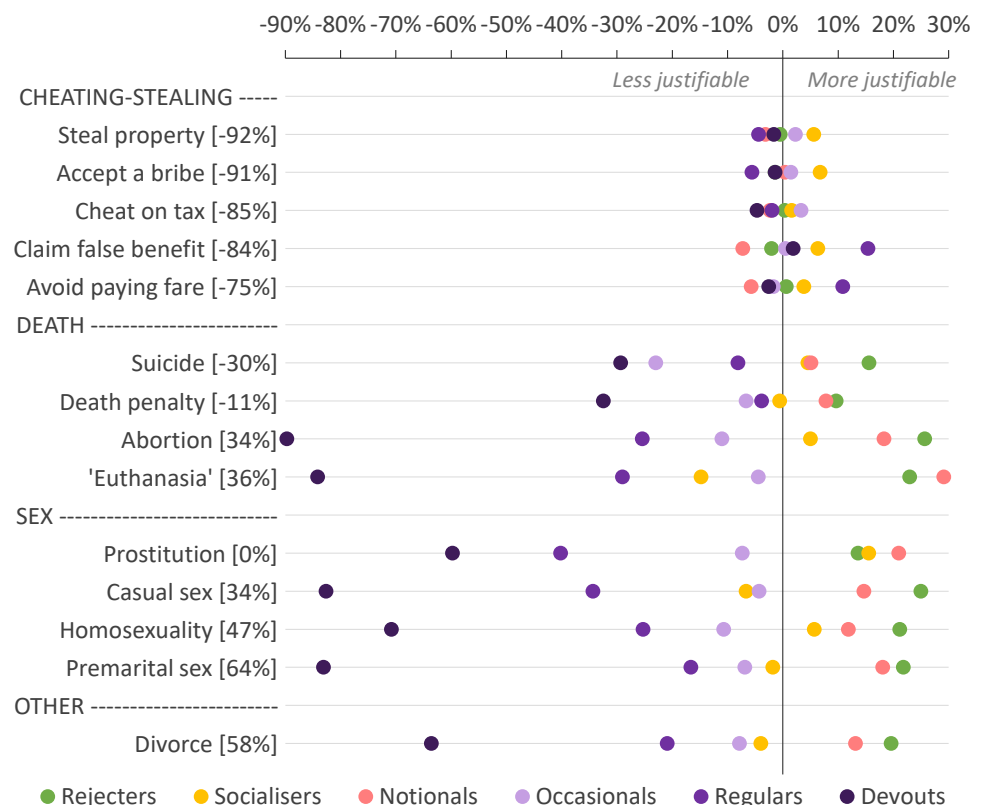


**Figure 56:** Divergence in moral justifiability of behaviours, by religion

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall equilibrium.

For **death, sex and divorce**, Nones and Anglicans have the greatest acceptance (except Anglicans toward prostitution). Overall, Catholics have slightly less than average acceptance, while NCRs, and especially the minor Christian denominations, are *considerably* less accepting.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 57), most differences in attitudes toward **cheating and stealing** are not statistically significant, and both Rejecters and Devouts fall very close to the social average. Regulars have a moderately greater acceptance of falsely claiming a government benefit, and avoiding a public transport fare. The reasons for this are unclear.



**Figure 57:** Divergence in moral justifiability of behaviours, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall equilibrium.

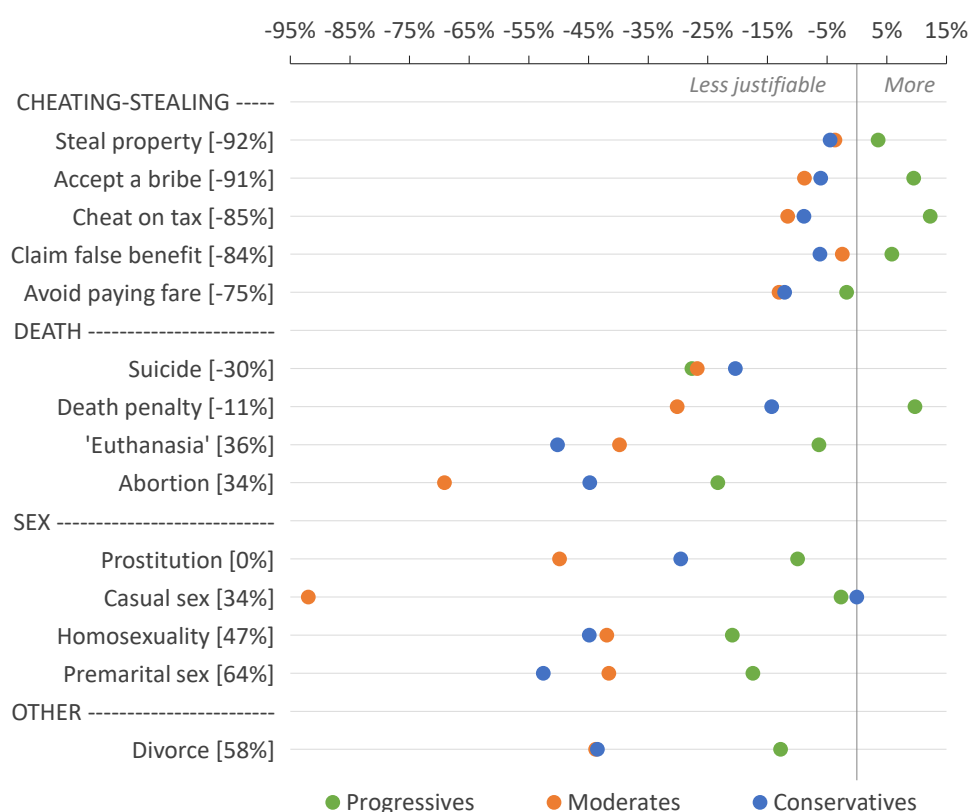
There are major differences in attitudes across the **death, sex and divorce** behaviours. Overall, Rejecters and Notionals have very similar, permissive attitudes. It may be that Notionals (have a religious affiliation) never attend religious services because they don't like what they hear from Devouts.

Socialisers, with some variation, overall have average attitudes, while Occasionals are slightly less permissive, Regulars are moderately less permissive, and Devouts greatly less permissive in their attitudes.

For matters of **cheating and stealing** there is no consistent significant difference in moral attitudes between Australia's religious and Nones. However, there are vast differences on matters of **death, sex and divorce**. Differences of attitudes in the morality of some behaviours clearly are not reliable indicators of differences in others.

### Effects of religion by social identity (RSI6)

For **cheating and stealing** behaviours, religion tends to make Moderates and Conservatives slightly less permissive (Figure 58). However, religion tends to make Progressives slightly *more* permissive. That is, the effects are different across the social spectrum, and are otherwise hidden in generalised data. Effects on Progressives might be *moral licensing*,<sup>20</sup> though no specific analysis was available to test this hypothesis.



**Figure 58:** Religious premium of moral justifiability of behaviours, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall equilibrium.

<sup>20</sup> Perceived good morality in one domain excusing less morality in another domain.

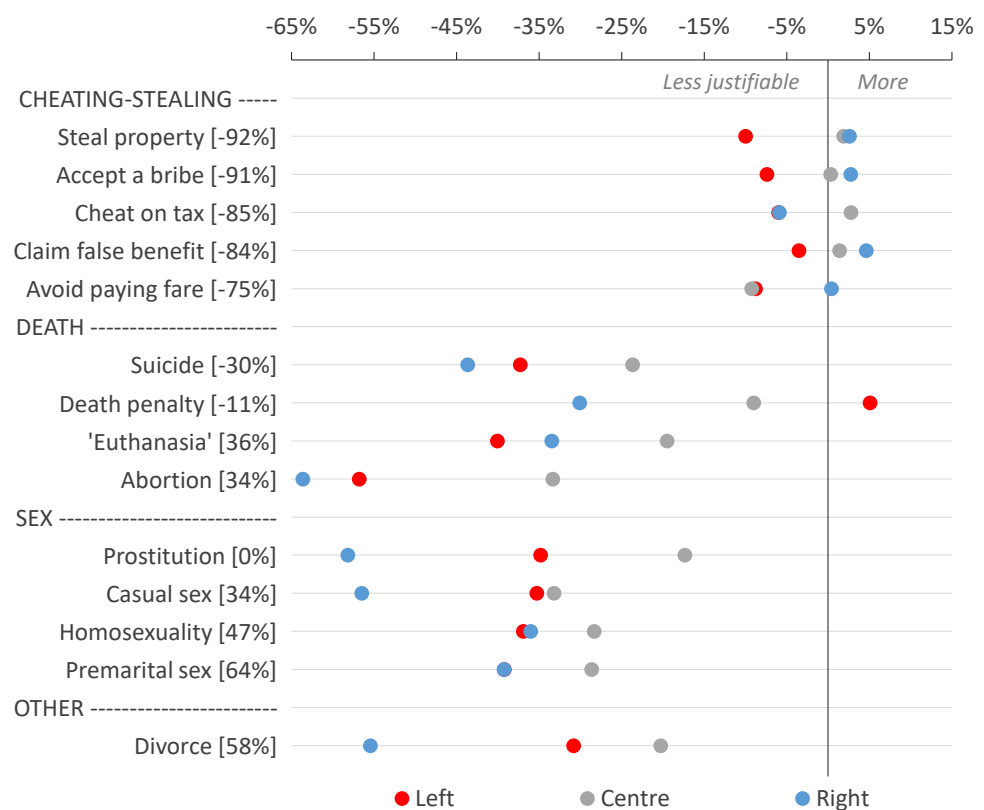
There are much more prohibitive religious premiums in attitudes across the **death, sex and divorce** behaviours. Overall, effects are modest amongst Progressives and much larger amongst Moderates and Conservatives.

Two findings stand out. Firstly, religion is associated with a *more* (not less) permissive attitude of Progressives toward the death penalty. And secondly, religion was not associated with any difference in attitudes amongst either Progressives or Conservatives toward casual sex, but a massive (less permissive) attitude gap amongst Moderates.

### Effects of religion by political identity (RPI6)

For **cheating and stealing** behaviours, religion tends to make the political Left slightly less permissive (Figure 59). The effects are small, and amongst political centrists and the Right, mixed.

There are much more prohibitive religious premiums in attitudes across the **death, sex and divorce** behaviours. Overall, effects are modest on the Left, and larger amongst Centrists and particularly the Right.



**Figure 59:** Religious premium of moral justifiability of behaviours, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall equilibrium.

Again, on the Left (as for Progressives), religion was associated with more *permissive* (than restrictive) polarisation towards the death penalty. These findings are consistent with the finding that while religion is associated with a more prohibitive polarisation amongst Moderates and Conservatives regarding violence towards other people, amongst Progressives, religion is associated with a more *permissive* polarisation.

Religion has distinctly different attitude patterns across the social and political spectrum. Differences are highly dependent on specific behaviour type, with small differences for property rights violations, and very large differences for sex, death and divorce.

**Summary:** Religious claims that the non-religious are (or are likely to be) significantly less moral, are contradicted by Australian evidence. Across **cheating and stealing** behaviours, differences in morality are small, mostly not statistically significant, and mixed.

Across the **death, sex and divorce** behaviours there are striking differences in moral attitudes, with, unsurprisingly, far more prohibitive polarisation among the most religious. The rate of attitudes amongst Notionals is overall very similar to those of Nones (the most permissive), supplying a potential reason why Notionals never attend religious services.







## Prejudice about religious matters

Prejudice is preconceived opinion that isn't based on concrete evidence. Rather, it's based on stereotyped attitudes — perceptions about assumed key group characteristics. These can be towards favouring one's in-group, and/or disfavours an out-group.

In this section we will examine evidence regarding how welcoming or hostile Australia's religious and non-religious really are towards religious matters, starting with perceptions about prejudice itself.

### What, us, intolerant!? Mon dieu!

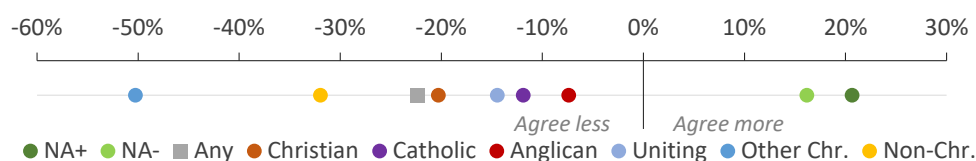
The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) 2018 asked people whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “*those with strong religious views are intolerant*”.

#### A caveat regarding the question

It's important to note a caveat to any question that asks about a relationship between “strong views” and “intolerance”. The former can somewhat imply the latter, which might lead to positive attribution bias regardless of the *category* (e.g. religion, politics, sporting code, diet or music). However, all things being equal, this bias is likely to be consistent across the demographic spectrum. On the other hand, membership of the group (e.g. religion, cricket fan or vegetarian) might bias judgement towards a more favourable perception of the in-group.

Minor Christian denominations are by far the most likely to *disagree* (-50%) that people with strong religious views are intolerant (Figure 60), followed by NCRs (-32%), and then the other larger Christian denominations (Catholics - 12% and Anglicans -7%).

Nones are by far the most likely to associate intolerance with strong religious views (+18%), with strict atheist Nones (+21%) more polarised than non-strict atheist Nones (+16%)

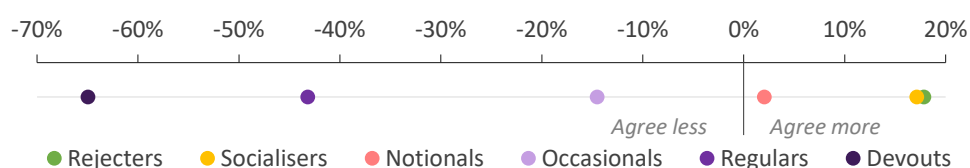


**Figure 60:** Divergence of attitude “those with strong religious views are intolerant”, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: NA+ = Nones who are strictly atheist. NA- = Nones who are not strictly atheist.

**Note:** In divergence score charts in this report, percentage differences (from zero, or from each other) must generally be 5% or more to be statistically significant.

Disagreement with the statement correlates directly with the strength of religiosity (Figure 61), with Devouts disagreeing the most, followed by Regulars, Occasionals, and Notionals, with Socialisers and Nones agreeing the most.



**Figure 61:** Divergence of attitude “those with strong religious views are intolerant”, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2018<sup>21</sup>

While some correlation is not unexpected given the caveat (above) to the question, its strength is profound: polarisation from -65% (Devouts) to +21% (strictly atheist Nones), a range of 86%.

This is similar to the chasm in trust of the churches between Australia’s most religious (just 12% of the population, of whom 82% trust the churches) and all the rest (88% of the population, of whom just 24% trust the churches) (Francis 2021, p137).

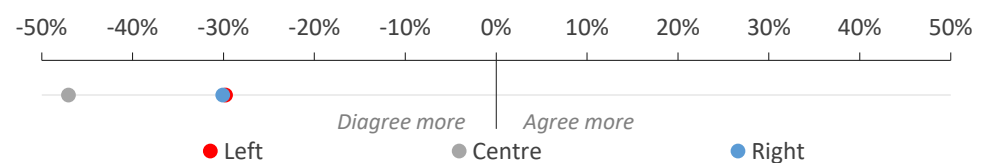
These findings (along with those in following topics) suggest that Australia’s most religious have a poor understanding of how their religiosity is perceived by others: a deficit in perspective-taking.

<sup>21</sup> In the AuSSA 2018 study, Devouts and Regulars combined comprised 13% of the population.

Indeed, this is consistent with the finding that more frequent participation in religious rituals is associated with believing one's own stances are objective, universal, invariant and normal (Chvaja et al. 2022).

Nevertheless, an important equivalent relationship wasn't included: "*those with strong **non-religious** views are intolerant*". This may well have realised similar findings in the opposite direction.

By **political orientation** (Figure 62), there is a consistent large *negative religious premium* in believing those with strong religious opinions are intolerant of others (-30% on the Left and Right, and -47% in the political Centre).



**Figure 62:** Religious premium of attitude "*those with strong religious views are intolerant*", by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Political orientation was derived from a question about which political party the respondent felt closest to, rather than a question about own position on the political spectrum as some other studies asked.

**Summary:** Amongst Australians, greater religiosity and minor Christian denominations correlate very strongly with the view that those with strong religious views are tolerant. Religious ritual performance is also positively associated with the belief that the in-group's views are objective, universal, invariant and normal.

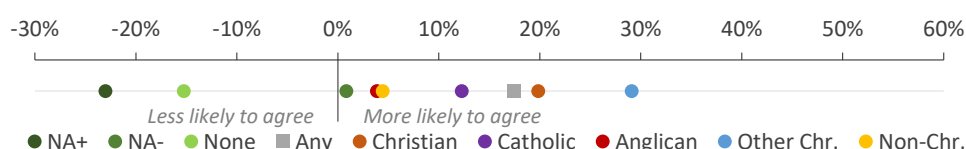
This suggests that Australia's most religious have a deficit of perspective-taking about their intolerance *as perceived by others*. The deficit occurs across the political spectrum.

Perceptions about the tolerance of those with strong **non-religious** views wasn't asked, so this data doesn't *uniquely* associate perspective-taking deficits with only the most religious. Similar deficits may or may not occur amongst the most **non-religious**.

## Attitudes toward other religions

The firm rejection by Australia's most religious that they're intolerant can be tested against their attitudes in practice, starting with their attitudes toward other religions in general — that is, ideologically or impersonally. The Australian Values Survey 2018 asked respondents whether or not they think *"The only acceptable religion is my religion."*<sup>22</sup>

While the minor Christian denominations are by far the *most* likely to disagree that they are intolerant (previous topic), they are by far the *most* likely to say theirs is the only acceptable religion (Figure 63). Anglicans and Nones are most likely to deem other faiths acceptable.

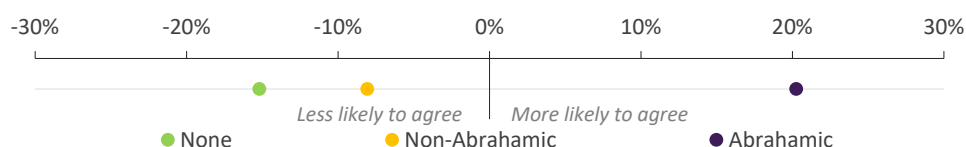


**Figure 63:** Divergence of attitudes toward *"the only acceptable religion is mine"*, by religion

Source: AVS 2018. Notes: NA+ = Nones who are strict atheists. NA- = Nones who are not strict atheists. Note: Total agree average is 12%. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

## Monotheisms in particular

Intolerance towards other faiths is particularly prevalent amongst the Abrahamic monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) (Figure 64).



**Figure 64:** Divergence of attitudes toward *"the only acceptable religion is mine"*, by major religion type

Source: AVS 2018. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

Abrahamic monotheists are 20% more likely than average, and non-Abrahamic religionists 8% *less* and Nones 15% *less* likely than average to say theirs is the only acceptable religion. This may be related to monotheism's single, supreme authoritative figure versus other religions' pantheons of celestial characters stimulating balance, nuance, and perspective-taking, or

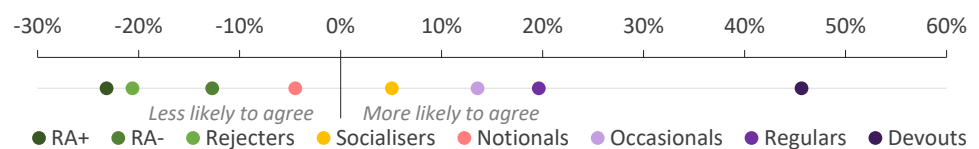
<sup>22</sup> Since most Nones answered this question but don't have a specific or any religion, their answer is likely to mean more generally "worldviews", including spirituality, agnosticism and atheism.



the non-theism of others. Social normativity in Australia, especially for Christians and Jews, may also be a contributing factor.

**Summary:** Australia's Abrahamic monotheists (Jews, Christians and Muslims) are significantly more likely to be intolerant of other religions or worldviews (+20%) than either NCRs (-8%) or Nones (-15%).

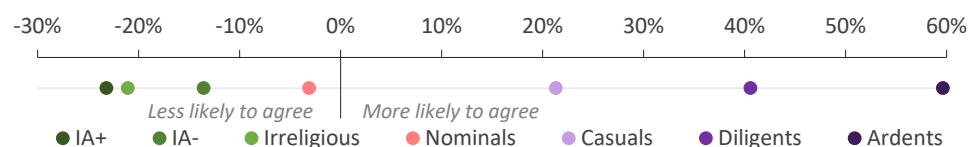
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 65), despite Australia's most religious strongly *disagreeing* they're intolerant (Figure 61), their intolerance of other religions is by far the *greatest*, with a divergence of +46%. Divergence amongst Regulars is around one in five (20%), with more tolerance amongst Nones who are not atheists (-13%) and those who are (-23%).



**Figure 65:** Divergence of attitudes toward "the only acceptable religion is mine", by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Notes: RA+ = Rejecters who are strictly atheist. RA- = Rejecters who are not strictly atheist. Note: Total agree average is 12%. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

When the RI6 religiosity score is adjusted for the *personal importance of religion*, which promotes or demotes survey respondents into a new five-segment religiosity framework (**RI5 religiosity**) (Figure 66), the divergence of religious intolerance amongst Australia's most religious, Ardents, increases to well over half (+60%). Divergence is four in ten Diligents (+41%, versus +20% of RI6 Regulars) and more than one in five Casuals (+21%, versus +14% of Occasionals).

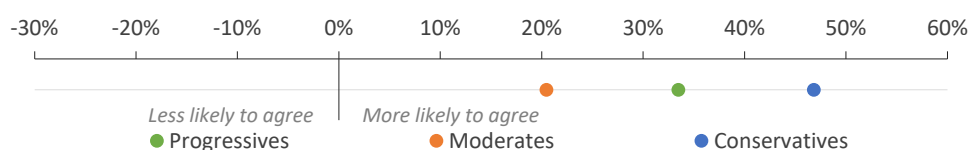


**Figure 66:** Divergence of attitudes toward "the only acceptable religion is mine", by RI5 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Notes: IA+ = Irreligious who are strictly atheist. IA- = Irreligious who are not strictly atheist. Note: Total agree average is 12%. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

Personal importance of religion additionally contributes to a person's likelihood of intolerance of other religions.

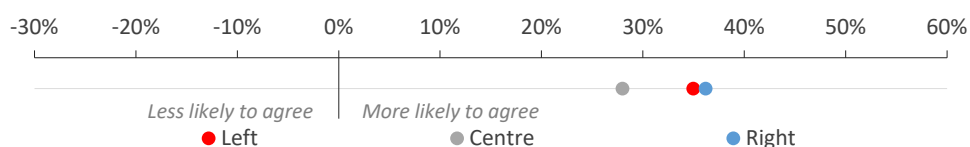
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 67), the religious premium of intolerance towards other religions is lowest amongst Moderates (+20%), intermediate amongst Progressives (+33%), and highest amongst Conservatives (+47%).



**Figure 67:** Religious premium of attitudes toward “the only acceptable religion is mine”, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Total agree average is 12%. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 68), the religious premium of intolerance towards other religions is lowest amongst political Centrists (+28%) and higher amongst those on the Left and Right (+35% and +36% respectively).



**Figure 68:** Religious premium of attitudes toward “the only acceptable religion is mine”, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Total agree average is 12%. No midpoint: *strongly* agree/disagree.

### Australian data support for rituals elevating false ‘objectivity’

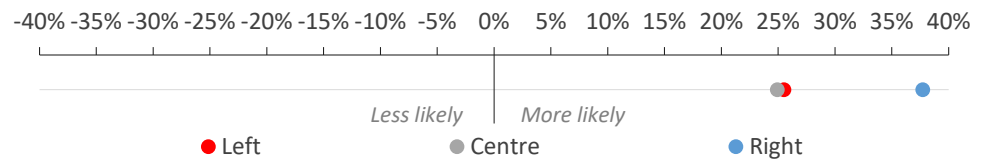
These findings indicate that the religious are inclined to believe their own religion is “correct” and that others are “wrong”, as though the perception is objective. As discussed earlier, a key driver of misplaced feelings of “objectivity” is not just personal importance of religion, but the frequency of performing religious rituals. One performance measure is frequency of attending religious services — *public* religiosity — as employed in the RI6 and RI5 models.

Another is *private* religiosity, of which one key measure is frequency of prayer. Just 9% of those who say religion is personally “not very important” pray daily or more often (“daily+”). That proportion jumps to 28% of those who say



religion is personally “rather” important, and nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who say religion is personally “very important”.

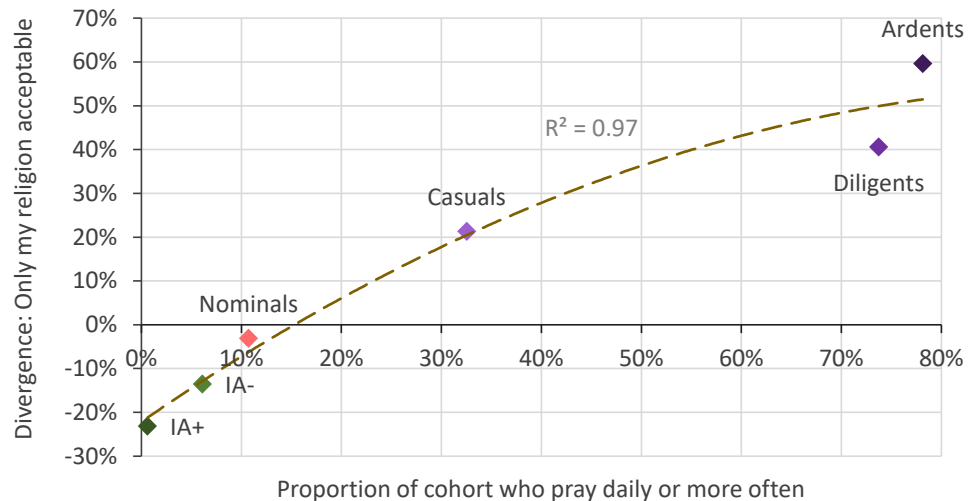
By RPI6 political identity, the religious premium of praying daily+ is significantly higher on the right than the left and centre (Figure 69).



**Figure 69:** Religious premium in praying daily or more often (daily+)

Source: AVS 2018

There is a very strong correlation between praying daily+, and saying that “the only acceptable religion is mine” (Figure 70).



**Figure 70:** Percent praying daily+ and divergence of attitudes for “the only acceptable religion is mine”, by RI5 religiosity segments

Source: AVS 2018. IA+ Irreligious who are strictly atheist. IA- Irreligious who are not strictly atheist.

By RI5 segments, daily+ prayer explains almost all (97%) of the variance in religious intolerance (polynomial fit).

This finding too is consistent with Chvaja et al. (2022), that there is a strong positive association between the frequency of ritual performance and ritualists’ perceptions that their moral norms are objective, invariant and universal — or, put another way, perceptions that alternate views are *wrong* and therefore unacceptable.

A further observation is that the data point for Ardents is elevated above the polynomial fit (Figure 70). This is explained by the fact that, in the AVS 2018 sample, *all* (100%) of Ardents attend religious services *more* than once a

week, compared with Diligents who attend once a week but not more often. If Ardents are removed from the polynomial calculation, the curve flattens and then explains all (>99.7%) of the variance in intolerance of other religions. That is, very frequent prayer *and* service attendance seem to have a cumulative effect on intolerance.

**Summary:** Greater frequency of performing religious rituals — either public religious service attendance or even more so prayer which may be private — correlates very strongly with interreligious intolerance. Frequent ritualists perceive their own beliefs as objective, invariant and universal: that other views are wrong and unacceptable.

### Some evidence of terror management

Those saying theirs is the only acceptable religion, “*religious intolerants*”, are significantly more likely (25%) than others (15%) to say that the meaning of religion is to make sense of life after death, while the others are more likely to say religion is to make sense of this life (85% vs 75%). This suggests the relevance of terror management<sup>23</sup> to some religious intolerants, more intensely rejecting the afterlife beliefs of other religions and Nones.

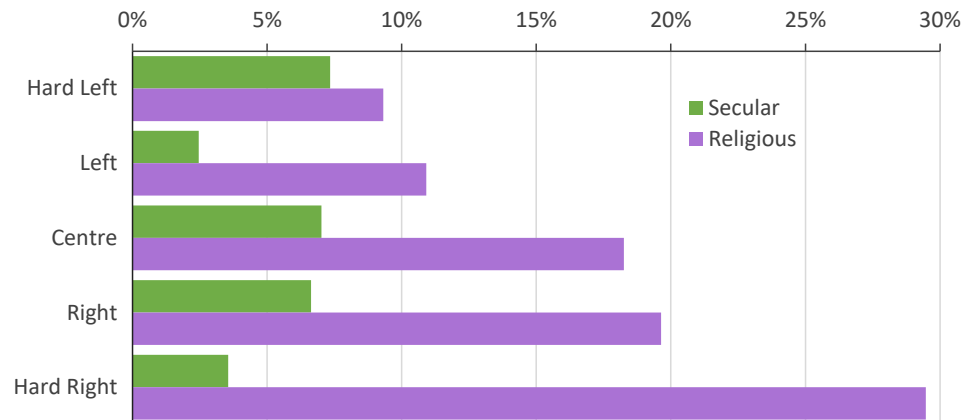
**Summary:** Although the effect is modest (+10%), a significantly greater proportion of interreligious intolerants say their religion is more concerned about life after death than this life.

### Intolerance greatest amongst the religious hard right

Across the political spectrum from hard left to hard right, Australia’s non-religious (“secular”) are less likely (range 2%–7%) than the religious (range 11%–29%) to harbour active<sup>24</sup> religious intolerance (Figure 71).

<sup>23</sup> Terror management theory is discussed in Part 2 of this series (Francis 2021, p 47).

<sup>24</sup> That is, specifically *agree* with the proposition that the only acceptable religion is mine.



**Figure 71:** Total agree “the only acceptable religion is mine” by RPI10 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018. APRI6 = Australian Politico-Religious Identity 10-Segment model (non/religious x 5 political positions). Secular = no religious affiliation. Religious = any religious affiliation.

While the religious centre (18%) and right (20%) show moderately elevated levels of intolerance, it is the religious right who are by far the most intolerant (29%). While there is no left/right trend of intolerance amongst secularists, there is a strong left-to-right increasing trend amongst religionists.

### Evidence in practice

Some religious organisations publicly extol love and understanding, underpinned by teaching of those principles. Others present a public face of acceptance and tolerance, but seem to many to teach the opposite. For example, the Pared Foundation which operates “secretive” (Catholic) Opus Dei-aligned schools in Sydney was recently under the spotlight on national TV (ABC Four Corners 2023).

Former students of the schools level a range of criticisms against the schools regarding antisocial teaching, including intolerance not only towards the LGBTI+ community, but towards other religions.

After airing, the Foundation invited former students to meet with officials at its schools, rather than the parent Foundation board. Students declined, stating a “poor track record in dismissing reported concerns and enabling harmful teaching and behaviours” (Pared Alumni 2023).

Besides complaints regarding non-curriculum subjects undermining curriculum materials, wildly inaccurate sex education, homophobia and transphobia, victim-blaming and glorification of self-harm, the schools’ alumni describe —

*"...the Pared schools as teaching intolerance towards people of other faiths and beliefs. Common examples include teachers saying that non-Catholics go to hell in front of students from other religious backgrounds, speaking derisively of different belief systems and the actual endorsement of violence against other religions. In Religion classes, students report being taught about other faiths only in the context that they are wrong, and for the stated purpose of arguing the superiority of Catholicism to people of different religions."*

— Pared Alumni (2023)

**Clericalism:** The statements above by Pared alumni are strongly consistent with a clericalism approach to religion. The Catholic church's significant exercise of clericalism was identified by the royal commission into institutional responses to the sexual abuse of children as a key component of its failures to deal with paedophile clergy and staff (see **Clericalism** on page 236).

Although there's no evidence available of a direct connection, the students' complaints are also consistent with recent public actions of patrons at a Catholic church in Sydney who had gathered to hear an anti-transgender address by *One Nation* MP Mark Latham. A small contingent of pro-LGBTI+ protesters outside were surrounded by patrons and at least one protester received a punch to the head. A number of projectiles were said to have been thrown at police, and police had to protect and escort the protesters from the area (Ireland 2023).

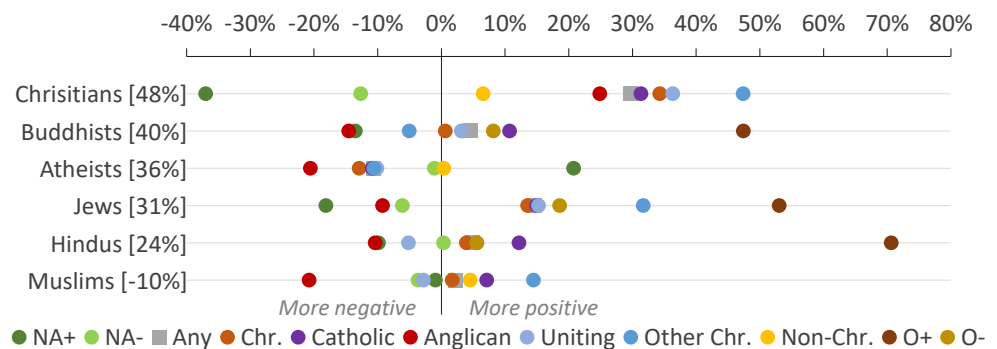
**Summary:** In Australia, interreligious intolerance amongst the religious is significant across the political spectrum, with a strong positive trend of prejudice from left to right. Those on the religious hard right are by far the most likely to be intolerant towards other religions. Intolerance amongst secularists is significantly lower and exhibits no consistent trend across the political spectrum.

Some religious schools stand accused of teaching intolerance and even violence.

## Attitudes toward people of a religion

Moving on from the acceptability of other religions *conceptually*, are attitudes toward *people* of one or other religion, that is, more human-orientated attitudes. Immediately apparent (Figure 72) is the generally positive polarisation of Australians toward most religionists, with averages of +48% (Christians)<sup>25</sup> to +24% (Hindus). The exception is attitudes toward Muslims, with an average polarisation of -10%.

Unsurprisingly, people are more likely to hold favourable views toward those most like themselves. This is far more true amongst Australia's religionists toward their own religious kind — Christians (+34%), Buddhists (+47%), Jews (+53%) and Hindus (+71%) — than it is amongst atheists toward Australians who are atheist or non-believers (+21%).<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 72:** Divergence of attitudes toward people of [row...] religion, by legend religion

Source: AuSSA 2018. Notes: Row Atheists = "Atheists or non-believers". NA+ = Nones who are strictly atheist. NA- = Nones who are not strictly atheist. O+ = Other non-Christian religion being tested against itself (e.g. Buddhists re Buddhists). O- = All Other (non-Christian) religionists *not* of the religion being tested. O+ sample sizes are small and involve larger uncertainty regarding their percentages.

These attitude divergence findings are consistent with the theory, discussed in Part 2 of this research series, that religion in important part serves as familiarity or trust signalling to others of the same worldview even if they are otherwise unknown.

<sup>25</sup> Hardly surprising given that Christians comprise by far Australia's most populous religion. There's also the issue of Christian denominations being perceived by respondents as a "different" religion, even though they're still Christian, versus, say, Buddhist.

<sup>26</sup> Sample sizes of Jews, Hindus and Buddhists were small, so confidence in their *individual* statistics is much lower. Nevertheless, their results are relatively consistent with Christians' and with religious signalling theory. Muslim sample too small to report an in-group result.

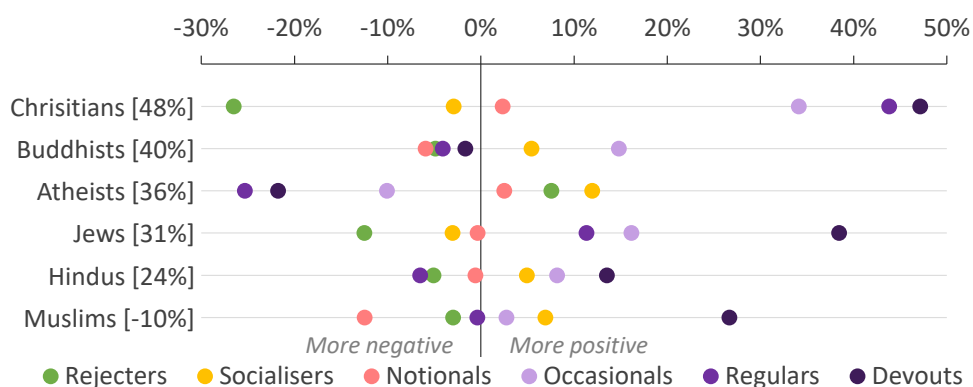
Nones who are strict atheists show the least favourable polarisation regarding Christians (-37%) and Jews (+18%). However, Australia's Anglicans show similar less positive polarisation as atheists toward their religious out-groups, with Anglican attitudes slightly more favourable toward Jews and significantly less favourable toward Muslims. Catholics are less likely to be tolerant of atheists but are relatively tolerant toward other religionists.

Christians are significantly less tolerant (-13%) than are NCRs (+0%) toward atheists and non-believers.

On average, the minor Christian denominations demonstrate by far the most positive polarisation toward people of the three Abrahamic monotheisms: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Overall, religionists demonstrate significantly more positive divergence of attitudes toward people of their own religion (+34% to +71%), than atheists do toward their own kind (+21%).

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 73), Rejecters who are strict atheists show the least favourable (but still nett positive) polarisation toward all religionists except Muslims. Notionals show the most negative polarisation toward Muslims.



**Figure 73:** Divergence of attitudes toward people of [row...] religion by, RI6 religiosity

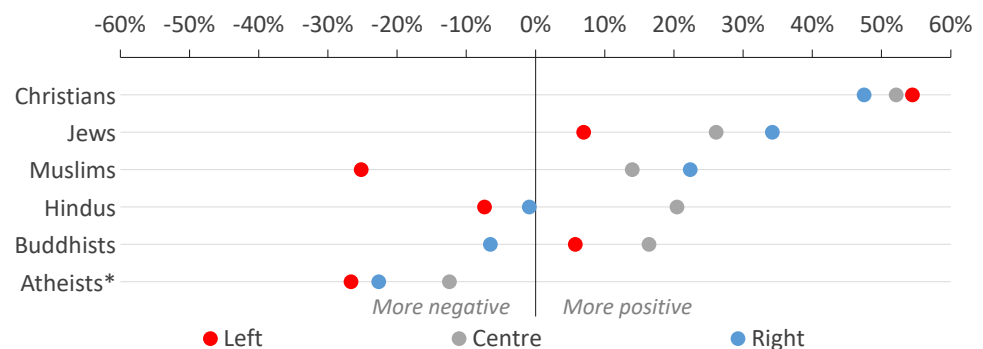
Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: Row label bracket percentages are average polarisation. Row "Atheists" = "Atheists or non-believers". Rejecters+ = Rejecters who are strictly atheist. Rejecters- = Rejecters who are not strictly atheist.

Devouts (82% of whom are Christian in this sample), show exceptionally high in-group favouritism bias toward people of the three Abrahamic monotheisms, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. They also show the most favourable attitudes (though less so) toward Hindus (theist religion), but not

so regarding Buddhists (non-theist religion). They hold by far the least favourable polarisation toward atheists and non-believers.

Thus, the attitudes of Regulars and Devouts seem to directly reflect dis/similarity between non/religious worldviews. Results among the less religious, Notionals and Occasionals, are far more mixed.

Unsurprisingly, by **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 74), there is an overall positive **religious premium** in polarisation toward people of a religion.



**Figure 74:** Religious premium attitudes toward people of [row...] religion, by ARPI6 religio-political identity

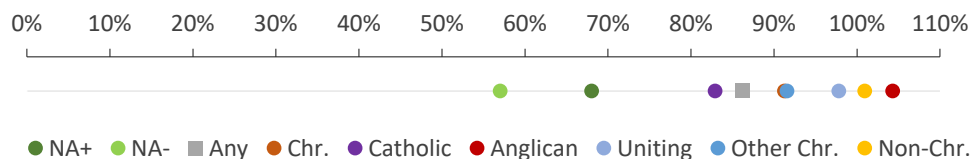
Source: AuSSA 2018. \* = "Atheists and non-believers".

A significant trend, and consistent with findings above, is that on the **religious right** (most of whom are Christian), the religious premium reflects the similarity of the person's religion, with polarisation the most positive for Christians, less so for Jews and Muslims (the other Abrahamic monotheisms), neutral toward Hindus (different gods), negative toward Buddhists (supernatural beliefs but no god/s) and most negative of all toward people of no religious faith (atheists and non-believers). This pattern is repeated, though with slightly less strength, amongst the political Centre. It is also repeated on the political Left, though with a negative religious premium toward Muslims.

Uniquely, attitudes toward atheists and non-believers was the only "religion" to return a negative religious premium across the Left, Centre *and* Right.

### Strength of bias

Some positivity towards one's in-group and negativity towards out-groups is a known feature of human nature. However, it is the relative *range* of attitudes towards the in-group versus out-groups — that is, the *strength of bias* — that paints a vivid picture by **religion** (Figure 75).



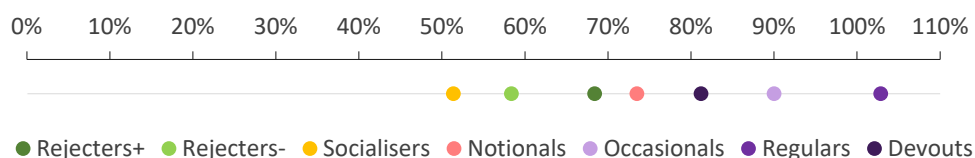
**Figure 75:** Range of religious in-group versus out-group bias, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2018. Notes: The Non-Chr. percentage is calculated by weighting the measurable individual non-Christian in/out-group nett polarisations, not of non-Christians as a single heterogeneous cohort of religions.

Religionists, from Catholics (range 83%) to Anglicans (104%) (Christian average 91%) and including NCRs (101%) exhibit much greater in-group versus out-group bias than do either Rejecters who are strictly atheist (68%) or not (57%).

Australia's religionists show very much more in-group versus out-group bias than do its non-religious.

By **religiosity** (Figure 76), Socialisers — people who have no specific religious affiliation but sometimes attend religious services — have the lowest in-group versus out-group bias (range 51%), followed by Rejecters who are not strictly atheist (58%) and Rejecters who are strictly atheist (68%).



**Figure 76:** Range of religious in-group versus out-group bias, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2018. Notes: Rejecters+ = Rejecters who are strictly atheist. Rejecters- = Rejecters who are not strictly atheist.

Religionists all show greater bias, from Notionals (73%) to Regulars (103%). The exception to the greater-religiosity/greater-bias trend is Devouts, who, while harbouring significantly greater bias than Socialisers and Rejecters, have *less* bias (81%) than Occasionals (90%) and Regulars (103%).



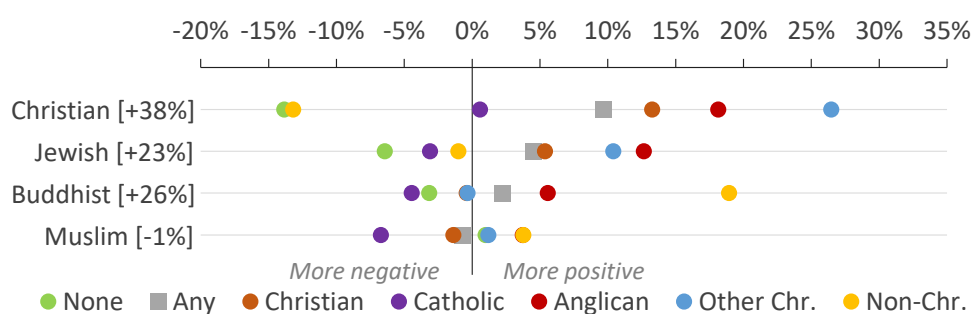
**Summary:** In attitudes toward *people* of one faith or another (including the group “no religion”), Australia’s religious harbour much greater in-group versus out-group bias than the religiously unaffiliated: Rejecters or Socialisers. Anglicans and NCRs show the greatest bias.

While bias amongst Devouts is relatively high, it is less than the overall religiosity trends would predict, because Devouts (most of whom are Christian) show the most favourable attitudes toward people of *other* religions that are theistic (Jews, Muslims and Hindus), but less so toward non-theistic religionists (Buddhists), and the least favourable attitudes toward the non-religious.

## Attitudes toward neighbours of a religion

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2016 asked respondents how they would feel about having neighbours of a specific religion.<sup>27</sup> This moves the context from people anywhere in general, to a more proximate or close-by perspective, the people next door or within a few doors — people one is likely to see often from the privacy of one's own home even though their religion may not be conspicuous.

**Personal experience tempers ideology:** Compared to attitudes toward *people* of a religion in the previous topic, polarisation regarding *neighbours* of a religion is overall significantly less (Figure 77). Many more Australians hold *neutral* attitudes towards neighbours of a religion (55%–62%) than they do toward people of a religion (31%–46%), suggesting that ideological religious stances are somewhat tempered by the realm of personal experience.



**Figure 77:** Divergence of attitudes toward a neighbour of [row...] faith, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2016. Notes: O+ = Other non-Christian religion being tested against itself (e.g. Buddhists re Buddhist neighbours). O- = All Other (non-Christian) religionists *not* of the religion being tested. O+ sample sizes are small and involve larger uncertainty regarding their percentages.

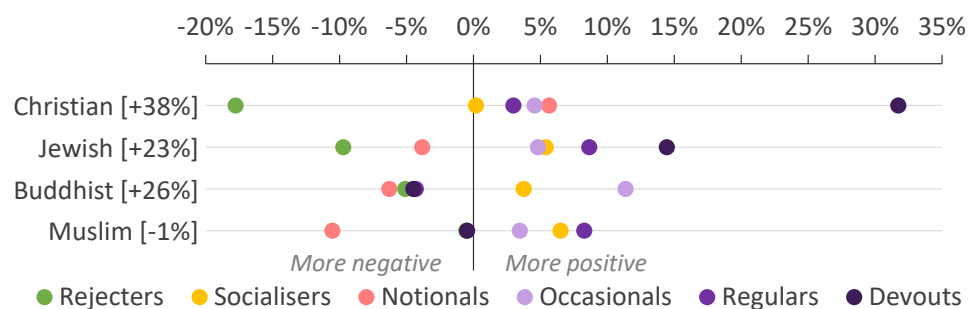
A notable observation is that in-group favouritism amongst those of non-Christian religions toward neighbours of their own religion is uniformly higher than amongst Christians. This might stem from greater feelings of in-group solidarity amongst those whose culture is non-normative within a larger, different normative culture. This is also consistent with the fact that their polarisation toward *other* religionists is, broadly speaking, similar to out-group attitudes amongst Christians and Nones.

<sup>27</sup> Note: The AuSSA 2016 survey didn't ask for attitudes regarding atheists or Hindus, as the AuSSA 2018 study did. Nor did it ask respondents if they believed in God, so separate analyses of those who are strictly atheist cannot be made.

Protestants (Minor Christian denominations (+26%) and Anglicans (+18%)) are the most likely to favour Christian neighbours, while Catholics are the least likely Christians to endorse them (+1%). Catholics also have the least favourable polarisation toward Buddhist and Muslim neighbours, and the second-least favourable polarisation toward Jewish neighbours.

Overall and unsurprisingly, Nones have a less favourable overall polarisation toward religionists as neighbours. However, their attitudes are not significantly different from the least favourable religious attitudes toward the same religious neighbour. Additionally, Nones' polarisation toward Muslim neighbours is neutral (+1%) while Catholic polarisation is significantly negative (-7%).

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 78), Devouts (most of whom are Christian) have uniquely the most positive polarisation toward Christians and Jews, but are “middle of the pack” in polarisation toward Muslims and near the “bottom of the pack” toward Buddhists.

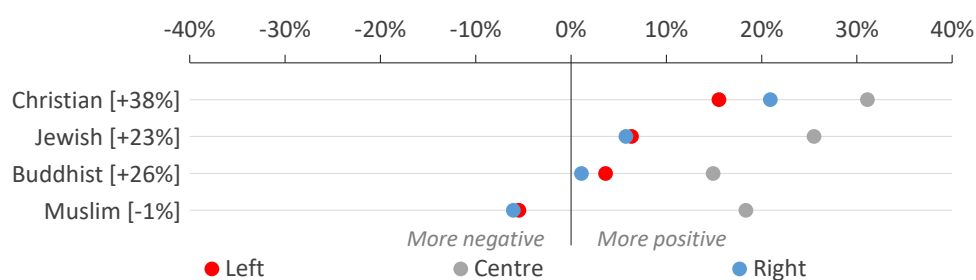


**Figure 78:** Divergence of attitudes toward a neighbour was of [row...] faith, by RI6 religiosity

Source AuSSA 2016

The polarisation of the least and most religious — Rejecters and Devouts — toward Muslim (-1% and 0% respectively) and Buddhist (-5% each) neighbours is the same. Understandably, the polarisation of Rejecters and Devouts diverge the most toward Christian (-18% vs +32%) and Jewish (-10% vs +14%) neighbours.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 79), the religious premium at the political Centre is the most consistently positive toward neighbours of any religion. Political Left and Right religionists are much more positive than their Secular cousins toward Christian neighbours and slightly more positive toward Jewish neighbours. They hold similar attitudes toward Buddhist neighbours, and more negative attitudes toward Muslim neighbours.

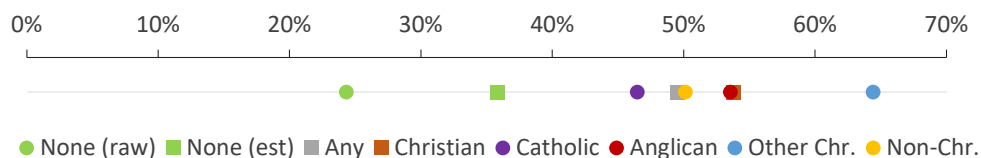


**Figure 79:** Religious premium of attitudes toward a neighbour of [row...] faith, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AuSSA 2016. Row bracket percentages are average polarisation.

## Strength of bias

By *range* of in-group versus out-group bias toward neighbours of a religion, religionists show greater bias: 46% amongst Catholics to 64% amongst minor Christian denominations, compared with 24% for Nones (Figure 80).

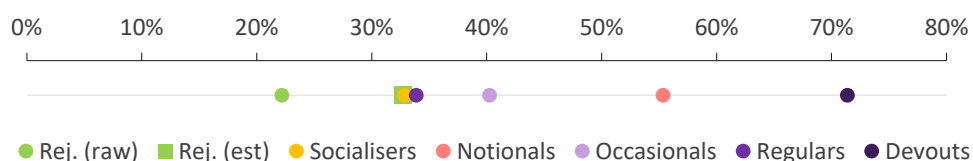


**Figure 80:** Range of in-group versus out-group bias toward neighbours of a faith, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2016. est = estimated. Non-Chr. is derived from the weighted average of specific in-/out-group attitudes, not the entire cohort as a combined group.

However, the Nones (raw) bias figure is not a fair comparison because there was no question in this study about attitudes toward atheist/non-believer neighbours, which may have increased the calculated range of bias amongst Nones. Using a weighted distribution calculated from the “people of religion” data (previous section), the *estimated* bias amongst Nones was 36% rather than 24%. This is still significantly lower than bias amongst religious Australians.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 81), Rejecters show the lowest bias (+22%), with greater bias amongst Socialisers (+33%), Regulars (+34%) and Notionals (+55%) (Figure 17). But by far the greatest range of bias toward neighbours of a religion was amongst Devouts (+71%).



**Figure 81:** Range of in-group versus out-group bias toward neighbours of a faith, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2016. Rej. = Rejecters, est = estimated.

As above for religion, however, the Rejecters (raw) bias figure is not a fair comparison. Again, using a weighted distribution calculated from the “people of religion” data (previous section), the *estimated* bias amongst Rejecters was 33% rather than 22%. This places Rejecters still at the bottom of the pack at the same level of bias as Socialisers and Regulars.

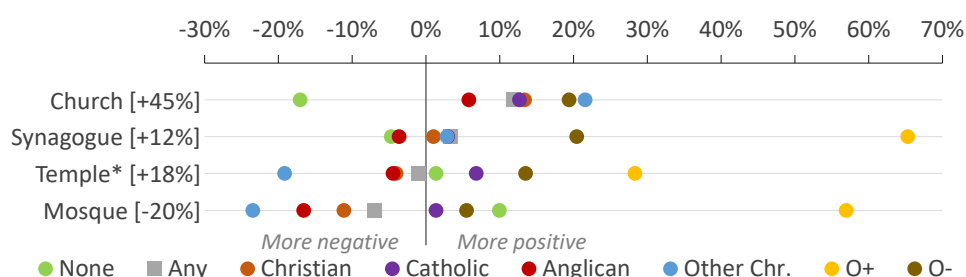
**Summary:** In attitudes toward *neighbours* of one faith or another, Australians demonstrate more neutral attitudes than they do toward *people* of one faith or another. This suggests that religious ideology is somewhat tempered by personal experience of others.

Australia’s most religious, Devouts, demonstrate by far the greatest in-group versus out-group religious denominational bias toward neighbours (+71%). This is in direct contradiction of their strong insistence that they are not intolerant. Nones demonstrate equal lowest bias (33%), along with Socialisers (33%) and Regulars (34%).

## Attitudes toward nearby place of worship

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2016 asked respondents how they would feel living nearby to a religion’s place of worship — a church, synagogue, Buddhist temple or mosque. This is a measure of how Australians feel about the public *expression* of one religion or another near one’s own “personal space”: a sense of welcoming, neutrality, or rejection.<sup>28</sup>

Understandably, living nearby a place of worship of one’s own **religion** attracted the most positive divergences of attitude: +65% for Jews, +57% for Muslims, +28% for Buddhists and +13% for Christians (Figure 82).



**Figure 82:** Divergence of attitudes toward living near a religion’s place of worship, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2016. \* Buddhist temple. Notes: O+ = Other non-Christian religion being tested against itself (e.g. Jews re Synagogue). O- = All Other (non-Christian) religionists *not* of the religion being tested. O+ sample sizes are small and involve larger uncertainty regarding their percentages. Row bracket percentages are average polarisation.

**Note:** The lower divergence figure for churches arises largely from a much higher *average* polarisation of attitudes in favour of Christianity as socially normative (+45% versus -20% to +18% others). In gross (non-netted) polarisation, religious in-group attitudes toward a nearby church was 58%, synagogue 73%, Buddhist temple 47% and mosque 47%. That is, in-group favouritism toward one’s own place of worship is similar amongst the religions, but *appears* less so when compared with the cultural normativity of churches in Australia.

<sup>28</sup> Attitudes might also be influenced by matters such as privacy or inconvenience, which could potentially occur as for living next door to for example a sports hall or convenience store. Since there was no control question for this, we will assume that any such reasons are held similarly across the religions and religiosities.

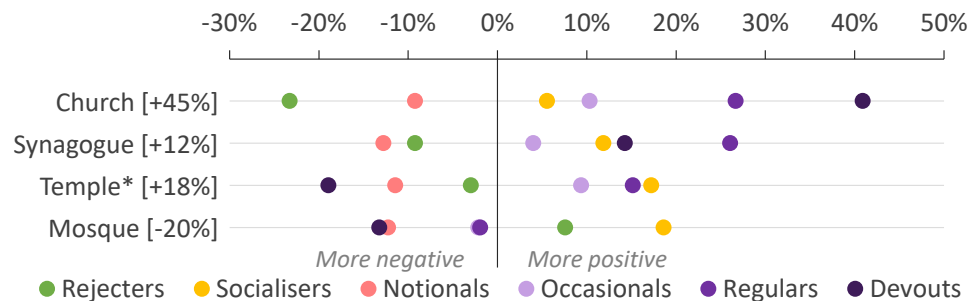
NCRs show the highest acceptance of out-group places of worship for churches, synagogues and Buddhist temples, but second-highest (to Nones) for mosques.

Nones are significantly more likely to hold a negative attitude towards churches, though this is similar to levels shown by minor Christian denominations toward mosques and Buddhist temples. Nones hold average or more positive attitudes toward non-Christian places of worship.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 83), Devouts (most of whom are Christian<sup>29</sup>) are the most positively polarised toward nearby churches (+86%) and the most negatively toward Buddhist temples (-1%) and mosques (-33%).

Rejecters hold the least favourable polarisation toward nearby churches (-23%). But this is hardly surprising given most of Australia's religionists (Notionals through Devouts) are — or *were* in the case of Socialisers — Christian. Indeed, and as would be expected, the polarisation of attitudes in favour of nearby *churches* is very strongly proportional to the frequency of attending *church* services.

Notionals, not Rejecters, consistently hold more negative than average polarisations toward all types of places of worship nearby, suggesting a lower tolerance for overt religiosity.

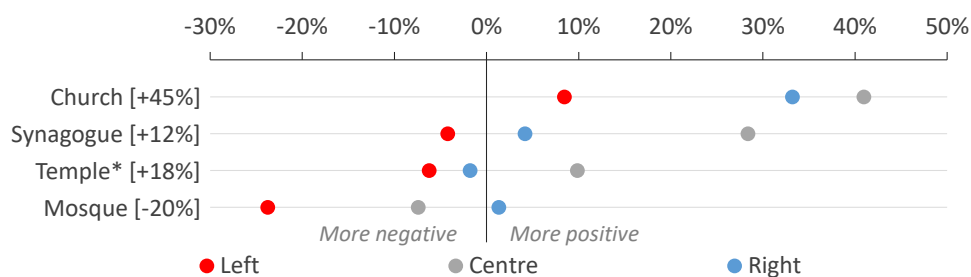


**Figure 83:** Divergence of attitudes toward living near a religion's place of worship, by RI6 religiosity

Source AuSSA 2016. \* Buddhist temple. Row bracket percentages are average polarisation.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity**, across the political spectrum there is a significant positive religious premium toward living near a church (Figure 84). This is hardly surprising given that most of Australia's religionists are Christian.

<sup>29</sup> In the AuSSA 2016 study, 91% of Notionals, 83% of Occasionals, 92% of Regulars, and 87% of Devouts are Christian. In addition, most (83%) of Socialisers (no religious affiliation but sometimes attend religious services), grew up with a Christian mother, which is likely to contribute to continued familiarity with and acceptance of nearby churches (AuSSA 2018). Therefore, the type of place of worship Socialisers are most likely to attend are *churches*.

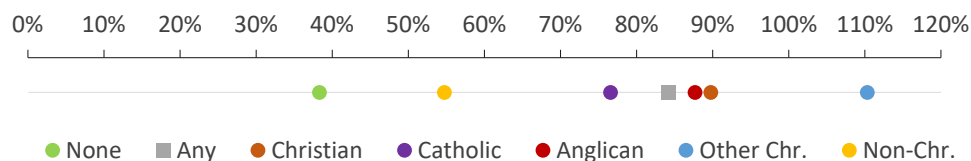


**Figure 84:** Religious premium of attitudes toward living near a religion's place of worship, by RPI6 religio-political identity  
Source: AuSSA 2016

But for the other tested religions' places of worship, the religious premium spanned from negative to positive, with the Religious Left in particular far more likely than their Secular Left cousins to hold negative attitudes toward mosques.

### Strength of bias

By **religion**, Australia's *Christians* show the greatest in-group versus out-group place-of-worship bias (+90%), from +77% amongst Catholics to +110% amongst the minor Christian denominations (Figure 85).



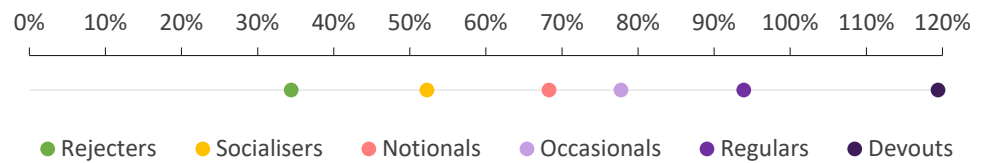
**Figure 85:** Range of divergence of attitudes toward living near a religion's place of worship, by religion  
Source: AuSSA 2016

NCRs show much less bias: while they are strongly polarised in favour of in-group places of worship (+47% to +73%), they also hold the most positive out-group polarisations.

Although Nones show the least bias (+38%), this isn't a direct comparison because there is no *in-group* of place of worship for Nones — only out-groups. Nevertheless, while Nones show the most negative attitudes toward nearby churches (because almost everyone else is Christian and therefore holds more positive attitudes), they show much more favourable polarisations than average toward temples and mosques. This suggests that bias amongst Nones is at least similar to, rather than greater than, that of religionists.



By **RI6 religiosity**, Australia's most religious, Regulars and Devouts, show the greatest bias toward nearby places of worship (Figure 86).



**Figure 86:** Range of polarisation of living near a religion's place of worship, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2016

Across all the religions combined, polarisation is almost proportional to frequency of religious service attendance. The only significant deviation is that Notionals (who never attend religious services) show greater bias than do Socialisers (who on average attend very occasionally). Notionals are less likely than Socialisers to say theirs is the only acceptable religion (Figure 65), but more likely to show bias toward people of a religion (Figure 73) and places of worship (Figure 83). This suggests that Notionals are less ideological about religion, but more concerned by its expression.

**Summary:** Unsurprisingly, the highest tolerance for a place of worship nearby is in regard to one's own religion (+48% to +78%).

Australia's least religious, Nones and Rejecters, hold the lowest tolerance toward a *church* nearby, because most Australian religionists are (and most Socialisers *were*) Christian. However, Nones and Rejecters show either equal-lowest tolerance, or *greater* tolerance toward non-Christian places of worship, than do Christians.

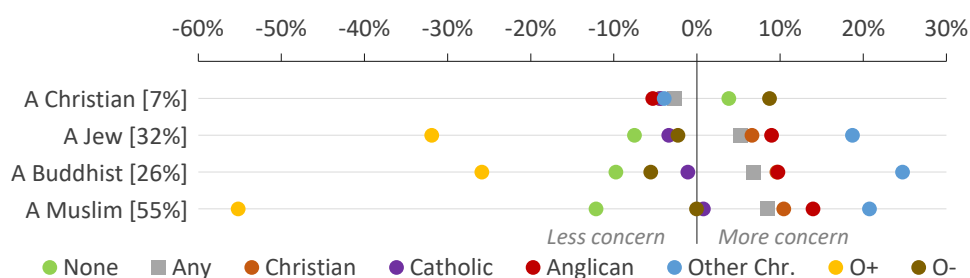
Christians, and the most religious, Regulars and Devouts, hold a much greater range of in-group/out-group prejudice toward a place of worship nearby.

By political spectrum, the Religious Left hold the most negative polarisation compared with their Secular (Left) cousins.

## Attitudes toward interreligious marriage

Casting religion as more personal still, the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2016 asked respondents about their level of concern if a close relative were to marry a person of a certain religion.<sup>30</sup>

By **religion** (Figure 87), Christians are unsurprisingly unconcerned (though not zero concern, 2%–4%), with Nones (11%) and NCRs (16%) somewhat more likely to be concerned about a close relative marrying a Christian.



**Figure 87:** Nett any concern if a close relative married [...], by religion

Source: AuSSA 2016. O+ = Non-Christian (other) religion being tested against itself. O- = non-Christian religion being tested against NCRs *excluding* the religion being tested. Note: Sample sizes for individual non-Christian religions (O+) is very small, so results should be taken as suggestive rather than quantitative.

Toward the other tested religions, Nones have the lowest rate of concern, with NCRs slightly more concerned. Christians show very significantly greater likelihood of concern, with Catholics the lowest in the group, and Protestants, especially the minor denominations, by far the greatest likelihood of concern.

Of note is that the rate of concern amongst Nones toward a relative marrying a Christian is very significantly lower than the rate of concern of *any* religionists<sup>31</sup> toward a close relative marrying someone of a *different* religion.

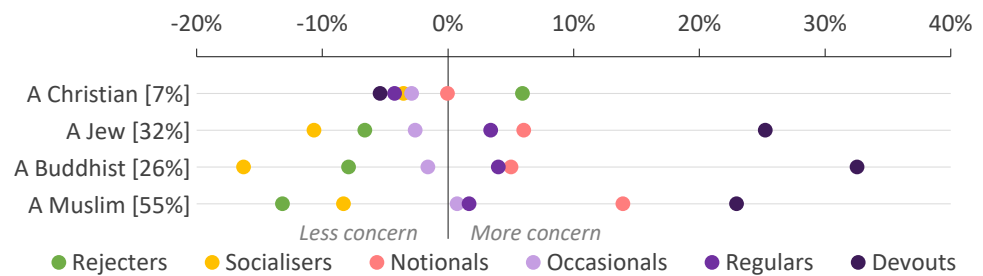
That is, Nones are less prejudiced about a close relative making their own decision to marry someone from one or other religious outgroup than are people from *any* of the religious groups.

Australia's religiously affiliated, on average, show greater interreligious marriage prejudice than do Nones.

<sup>30</sup> This attitude is not by polarisation because there was only a *negative* (concern) rating.

<sup>31</sup> Noting that non-Christian religionists is a combined group rather than individual religions, but at least tested against its religious-outgroup.

By **ARI6 religiosity** (Figure 88), Australia's most religious, Devouts, show by far the greatest rate of concern toward minor religions. (Most Devouts and indeed most religionists in Australia are Christian.) Socialisers and Rejecters show much lower rates of concern.

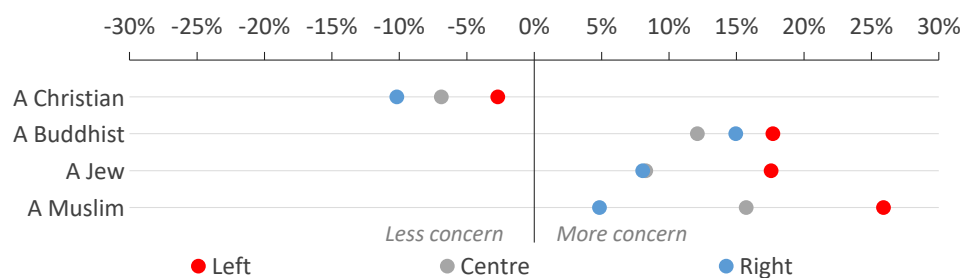


**Figure 88:** Nett any concern if a close relative married [...], by RI6 religiosity  
Source: AuSSA 2016

Since most Australian religionists are Christian, Rejecters understandably show the greatest rate of concern of a close relative marrying a Christian. However, the rate of concern (13%) is very significantly lower than the rate of concern of any religiously affiliated (Notionals through Devouts) toward a religious out-group (range 27% to 79%).

Like Nones, Socialisers (no religious affiliation but sometimes attend religious services) show lower rates of prejudice toward a close relative marrying someone from any religion.

By **ARPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 89), the religious premium of a close relative marrying a Christian is lower across the political spectrum (again, most religionists being Christian).



**Figure 89:** Religious premium any concern if a close relative married [...], by ARPI6 religio-political identity  
Source: AuSSA 2016

However, for the other tested religions there is a substantially greater religious premium concern across the political spectrum, with the greatest effect occurring on the left. This is largely driven not by much higher rates of

concern by the Religious Left, but by lower rates of concern amongst the Secular Left.

That is, religion increases interreligious marriage concerns across the political spectrum but affects the Left more than the Right because rates of concern amongst the Secular Right are already higher than on the Secular Left or Secular Centre.

**Summary:** Australia's Christians, Protestants especially, show far higher rates of prejudice than Nones, Rejecters and Socialisers do about a close relative marrying someone of a different religion. Consistent with their higher rates of saying "the only acceptable religion is mine", Devouts show much greater rates of interreligious marriage prejudice than any of the less religious cohorts.

Across the political spectrum, the religious premium reveals greater favour toward marrying a Christian (most Australian religionists are Christian), but higher rates of prejudice toward other religions. The effect appears greater on the political Left not because the Religious Left are more prejudiced than the Religious Right (they aren't), but because the Secular Left is least prejudiced and the Secular Right far more so.

## Attitudes toward Muslims: Islamophobia

Islamophobia occurs at disturbing rates in Australia (Iner 2022) and has since at least the early twenty-first century. Most, though not all, of the abuse hurled at Muslims in Australia is directed toward women, by men, many of them Anglo-Saxon (Iner 2022). After Muslims were the *victims* of a mass shooting attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, anti-Muslim abuse rates in Australia increased 400%, including vandalism of ten mosques.

Among complaints against Muslims by other Australians are the perception that Muslim asylum seekers wish to impose their own religious views on Australian society while not respecting Australian culture, citing anecdotes of cancelled nativity scenes, Christmas displays at shopping centres, and other ‘offences’ for which evidence is sorely lacking (Muller 2016).

Table 5: Attitudes regarding Muslims

Figure row title	Meaning
POSTIVE	
<i>Pious/trustworthy*</i>	Practicing Muslims are pious people and therefore they are more trustworthy
<i>Same as others*</i>	Practicing Muslims are the same as other citizens
NEGATIVE	
<i>Don't fit Aus.</i>	Practicing Muslims do not fit Australian society
<i>Threat to Aus.</i>	Practicing Muslims pose a threat to Australian society
<i>Violent to women</i>	Do you think violence against women is more common among Muslims in Australia than among other communities?
<i>Search more*</i>	Practicing Muslims should be searched more thoroughly than others in airports and stations
<i>Violent extremism*</i>	Compared to other religions, do you think there are more violent extremists within Islam, fewer, or about the same as other religions?
<i>Counter-terrorism</i>	Counter-terrorism policies in Australia should focus exclusively on practicing Muslims
<i>Univ. responsibility</i>	Thinking about recent global terrorist attacks, to what extent do you think the Muslim community in Australia should be held responsible?
<i>Overestimate %</i>	What do you think is the percentage of Muslims in Australia? (overestimate – underestimate)

Source: AuSSA 2016. \* These questions did not specifically address the context of Australia, but it could easily be imputed from the nature of adjacent questions, and preceding questions.

Another common complaint is the association of Islam with terrorism overseas as well as Muslims with asylum seekers, and hence asylum seekers with terrorism. This plays out through political agendas and media repetition, damaging relations with Muslim-majority countries including the world's most populous Muslim nation, Australia's neighbour Indonesia (Halim & Amath 2015).

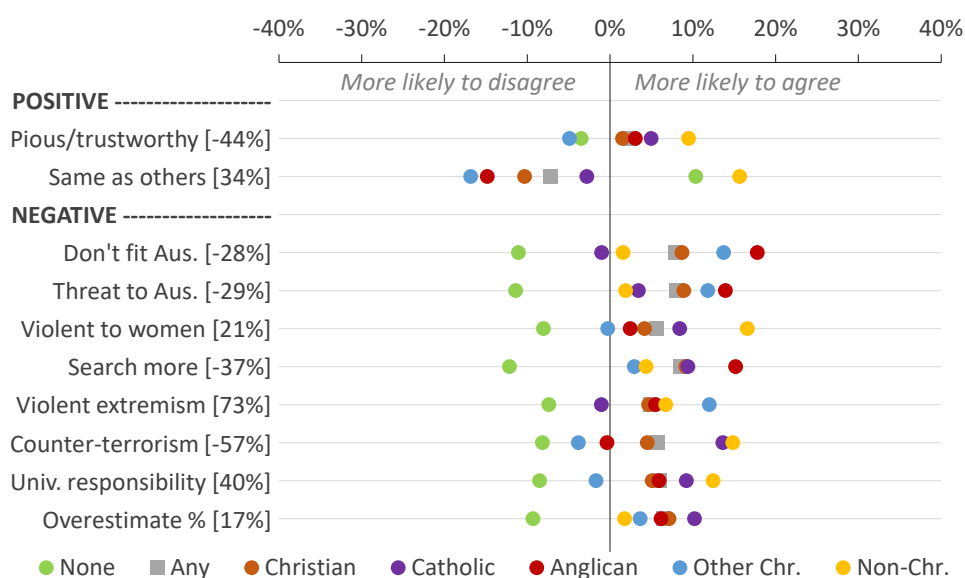
While it is ironic that Muslims are on the receiving end of phobic attitudes and behaviour yet are accused of likely terrorist attitudes, there is some merit in the association. Australia's domestic security intelligence organisation ASIO has stated that monitoring far-right extremist threats now comprises 40% of its case load, and whose principal source is Sunni Islamist (Karp 2020).

Nevertheless, while a significant proportion of on-shore extremist threats may come from Islamic quarters, that doesn't mean that most Muslims are extremists or terrorists.

This section examines attitudes toward Muslims in Australia using empirical data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2016 (Table 5).

**Note:** The base for analysis in this section *excludes* Muslim respondents, so statistics are all in reference to Muslims as a religious *out-group*.

By **religion** (Figure 90), Australia's Protestants are the most likely to say that Muslims are *not* the same as other Australians, that they *don't* fit and *are* a threat to Australian society, and (Anglicans at least), that they ought to be thoroughly searched at airports and stations.



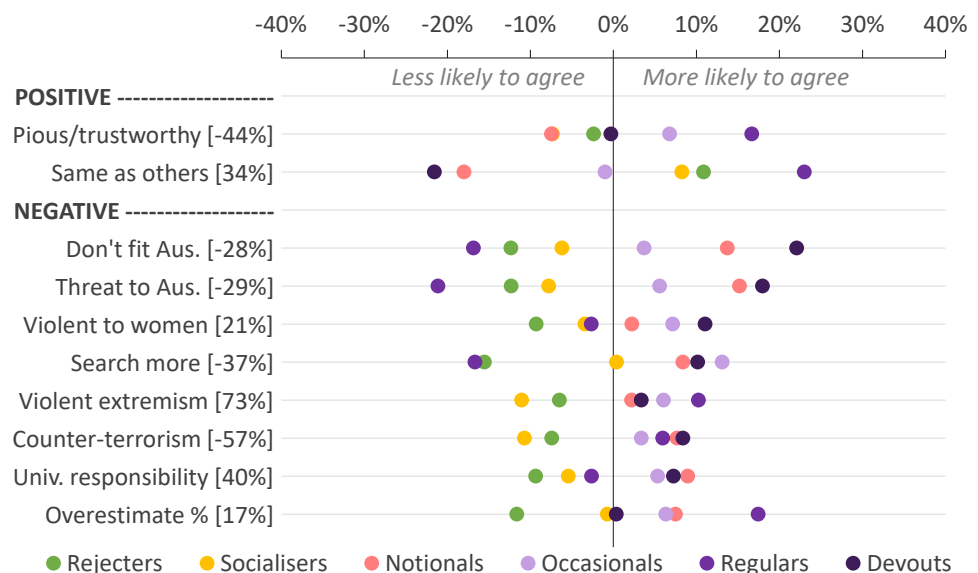
**Figure 90:** Divergence of attitudes toward Muslims, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 5. Note: Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

Australia's religious hold significantly more negative views than Nones do about Muslims in Australia, as well as overestimating their proportion of the population.

Ironically, given that most anti-Muslim violence in Australia is directed toward the faith's women, Australia's (non-Muslim) religious are significantly more likely than Nones to say that Islam itself is more likely to express violence toward women than are their own religions.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 91), both Notionals and Devouts hold the most negative views that Muslims are not the same as other Australians, don't fit and are a threat, and have a universal responsibility for terrorist acts committed by Muslims in other countries. Rejecters and Socialisers are more likely to hold average or more favourable attitudes.



**Figure 91:** Divergence of attitudes toward Muslims, by RI6 religiosity

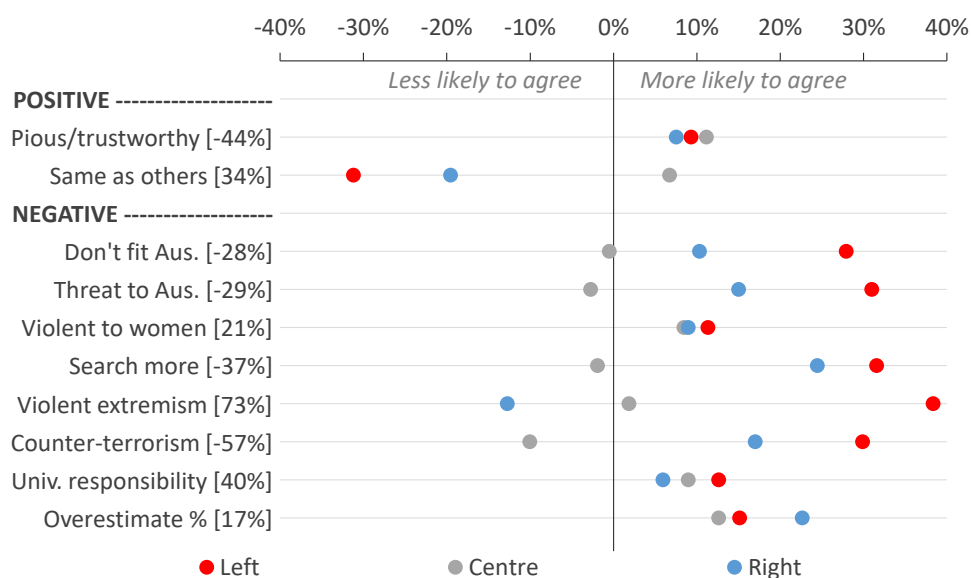
Sources: As described in Table 5. Note: Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

The attitudes of Regulars, the second-most religious, are very different from Devouts, tending to be more favourable except in linking Muslims with violent extremism, and being the most likely to overestimate their proportion of the population.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 92), there is a modest association across the political spectrum of devoted religion “signalling” trustworthiness, even though the Religious Left and Right are far less likely than their Secular counterparts to judge Muslims the same as other Australians.

Amongst negative effects, the strongest Religion effects occur across the Left side of politics, followed by the Right. On the Left, Religion effects are very

strong (over 25 percentage points) for six of the ten dimensions. Effects amongst the Centre are more modest, varying between positive and negative.



**Figure 92:** Divergence of attitudes toward Muslims, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 5. Note: Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

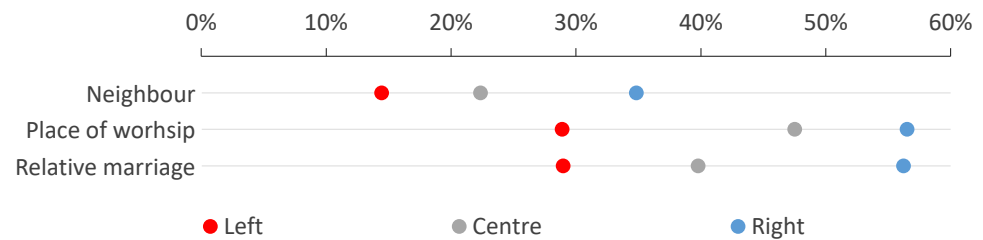
**Summary:** Although there is in practice a small minority of right-wing extremists especially amongst Sunni Muslims in Australia, Muslims at large experience high rates of Islamophobia. Australia's religionists — especially Protestants — are significantly more likely than Nones to harbour negative attitudes toward the country's Muslims. This is especially so amongst Notionals and Devouts (but not Regulars) and the political Left and Right (but not the Centre).



## A further note about the “religious premium”

Since political orientation has significant correlations with social attitudes, a clearer understanding of its effects is warranted.

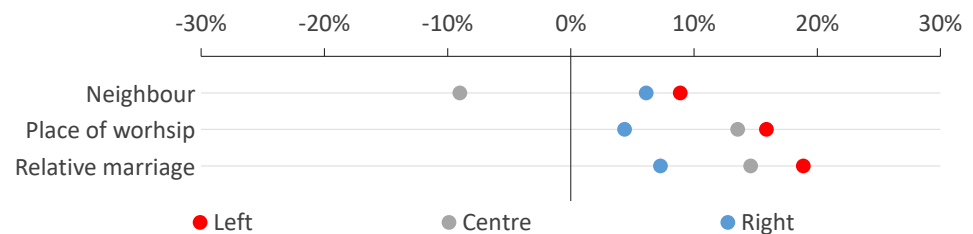
Those on the political Left (regardless of any religion) hold much lower rates of religious concern than do those in the political Centre (Figure 93). Those on the political Right hold by far the greatest rates of concern.



**Figure 93:** Percent concerned about one or more of the tested religions, by political orientation

Source: AuSSA 2016

When splitting the effects out by religious premium, it might be expected that there would be universally negative premiums, because to the non-religious, *all* religions are out-groups. But the religious premium is almost exclusively *positive* (greater concern amongst the religious) (Figure 94).

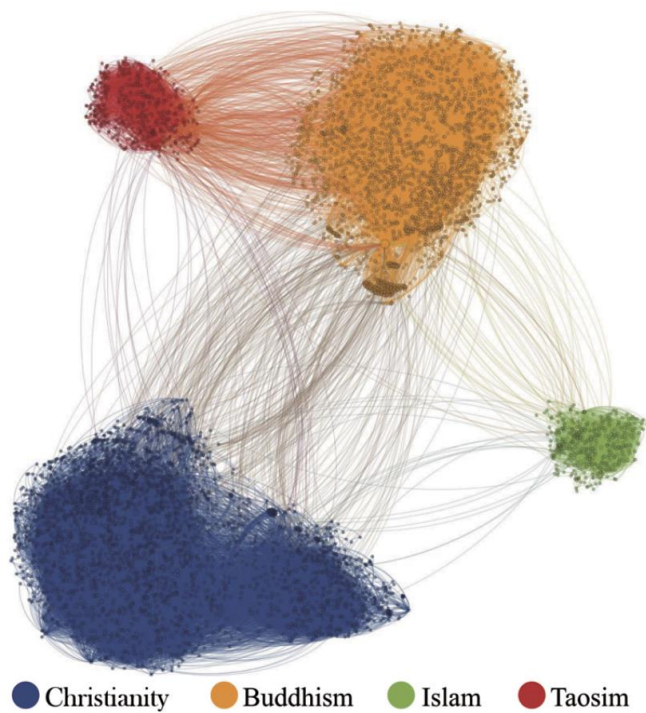


**Figure 94:** Religious premium concerned about one or more of the tested religions, by ARPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AuSSA 2016

## Overseas evidence

The findings from this Australian data are consistent at least with headline assortative relationships amongst religious people in China. Religionists are vastly more likely to affiliate with their own religious kind than with those of different religions (Figure 95) (Hu, Qian-Ming & Zhou 2019).



**Figure 95:** Structure of religious networks in China  
Source: Hu, Qian-Ming and Zhou (2019, Figure 1)

The study found that self-selected segregation by religion is much greater than amongst different races, and slightly higher than for political alignment.

**Summary:** With the exception that the Religious Centre is *less* likely than the Secular Centre to hold concerns toward other religions, *all* the religious premiums about other religions are *higher* amongst Australia's religionists than amongst its secularists. That is, adjusting for political orientation, Australia's religionists show far more religious out-group bias. This evidence runs contrary to common religious claims of holding more prosocial attitudes than the non-religious.







## Prejudice about other matters

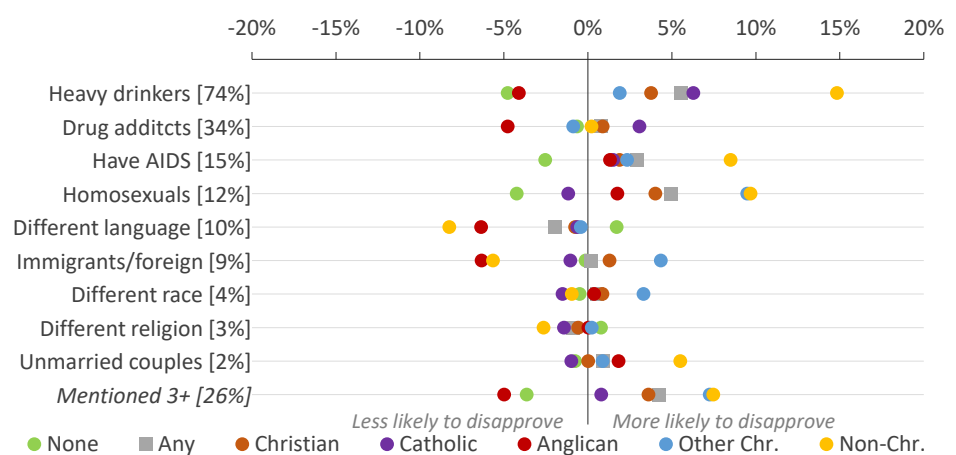
In this section we examine differences in attitudes toward neighbours, gender, economic protection, immigrants and asylum seekers.

### Not as neighbours

The Australian Values Survey 2018 asked people who they would *not* like to have as neighbours, according to a range of characteristics: heavy drinkers, drug addicts, people who have AIDS, homosexuals, people who speak a different language, immigrants/foreign workers, people of a different race, people of a different religion, and unmarried couples living together.

**Note:** Since these questions were binary — only by “mention” or not — no polarisation can be calculated. Segment “mentioned” divergences from the overall mean (all respondents) are calculated as Nett mention.

By **religion** (Figure 96), Nones are not statistically more likely than some or all religionists to hold negative attitudes. A number of distinctive culturally-associated attitudes are evident, such as NCRs (who have by far the highest overseas-born profile) showing the lowest discriminatory attitudes regarding language, and the highest regarding Australia’s heavy drinkers.

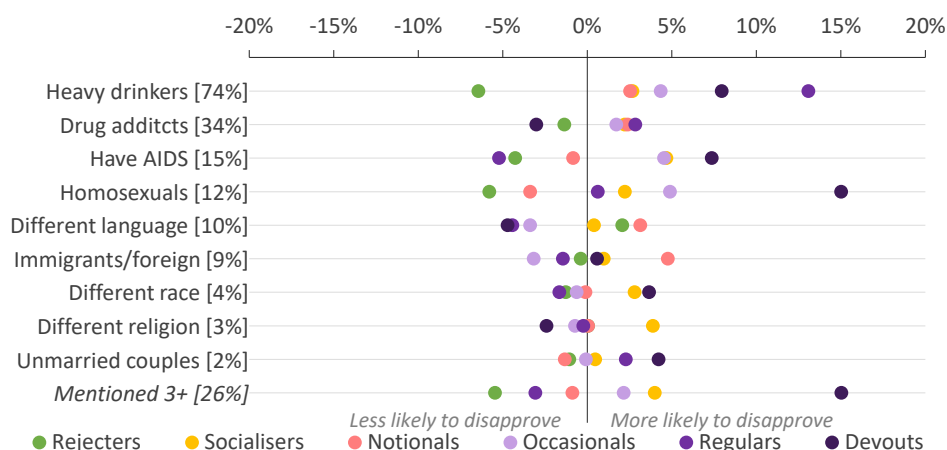


**Figure 96:** Nett mention not as neighbours, by religion

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall proportion of mention.

Overall, Anglicans and Nones are significantly the least likely to identify three or more characteristics they wouldn’t like in their neighbours, with minor Christian denominations and NCRs more likely to identify more.

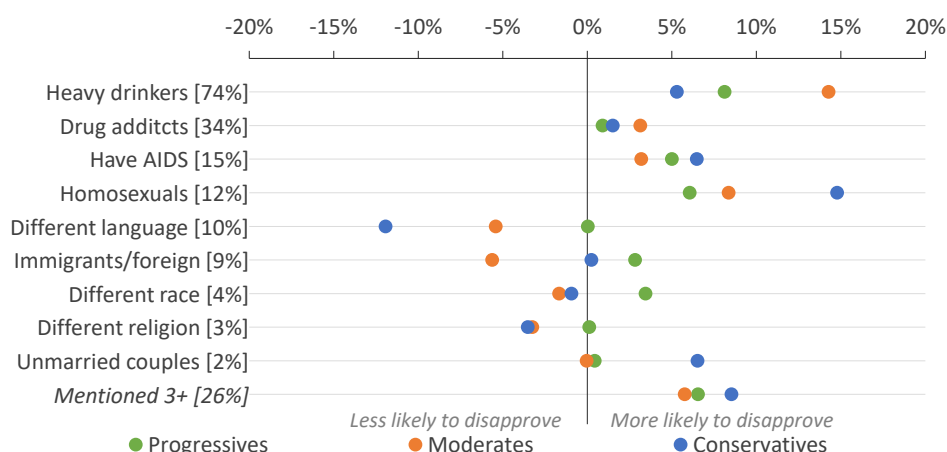
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 97), Rejecters are less or equally likely as some religionists to mention disliked neighbour characteristics, and the least likely to mention three or more. Devouts are significantly more likely than all others to mention three or more characteristics.



**Figure 97:** Net mention not as neighbours, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall proportion of mention.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 98), religious premium effects are mixed across the social spectrum, with greater dislike of homosexuals and people with aids, and heavy drinkers, but with lesser dislike of those speaking a different language.

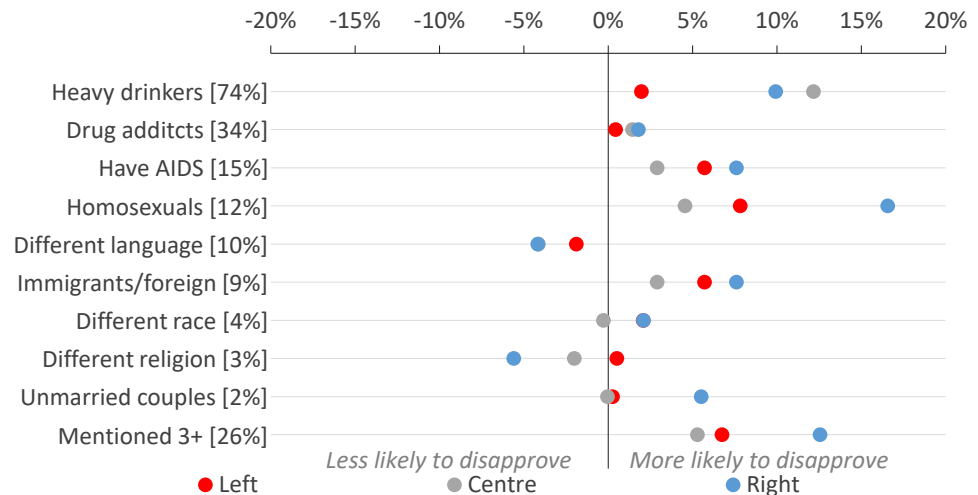


**Figure 98:** Religious premium of net mention not as neighbours, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall proportion of mention.

Across the social spectrum, the Religious are significantly more likely to dislike three or more neighbour characteristics, although the effects are modest.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 99), religion premium effects are again mixed, but with the religious more likely to disapprove of three or more neighbour characteristics.



**Figure 99:** Religious premium of nett mention not as neighbours, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Row percentages in brackets are overall proportion of mention.

### Accounting for language spoken at home

It might be expected that language spoken at home could affect attitudes toward neighbours “speaking a different language”. Preliminary analysis by language spoken at home suggests little influence on attitudes toward neighbours speaking a different language. This suggests that “a different language” was interpreted by many respondents as different from *English* rather than different from the language spoken in their own home.

**Summary:** Overall, Australia’s religionists are more likely than the non-religious to disapprove of neighbours regarding a variety of characteristics, though there are some mixed specific effects. Devouts are significantly more likely than all others to disapprove of more neighbour characteristics. The religious premium effect is strongest amongst social Conservatives and the political Right.

## Gender equality and sexism

Religion is known to increase the subtle approval of sexism, promoted as benevolent differentiation (Haggard et al. 2019).<sup>32</sup> It does so by bolstering “benign” sexist ideals that translate into unequal (more restrictive) treatment of women that are often transmitted by “stealth” (Seguino 2011). Effects have been found not to differ significantly by religion: only between the religious and non-religious (Schnabel 2015; Seguino 2011).

Australian Values Survey (2018) data is employed to test these relationships domestically (Table 6).

**Table 6:** Tested gender equality dimensions

Figure row label	Meaning
Democratic ideal	
<i>Democracy = equal rights</i>	An essential characteristic of democracy: Women have the same rights as men
Actual attitudes	
<i>Men better business execs*</i>	On the whole, men make better business executives than women do
<i>Men better political leaders*</i>	On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do
<i>Uni. more important for boys*</i>	A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl
<i>Men more right to scarce jobs</i>	When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women
<i>Mother works, children suffer*</i>	When a mother works for pay, the children suffer
<i>Housewifery just as fulfilling*</i>	Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay <sup>33</sup>
<i>Woman earns more, problems</i>	If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems <sup>34</sup>

Source: AVS 2018. \* No centre point in answers, analysis is divergence by *strong* polarisation.

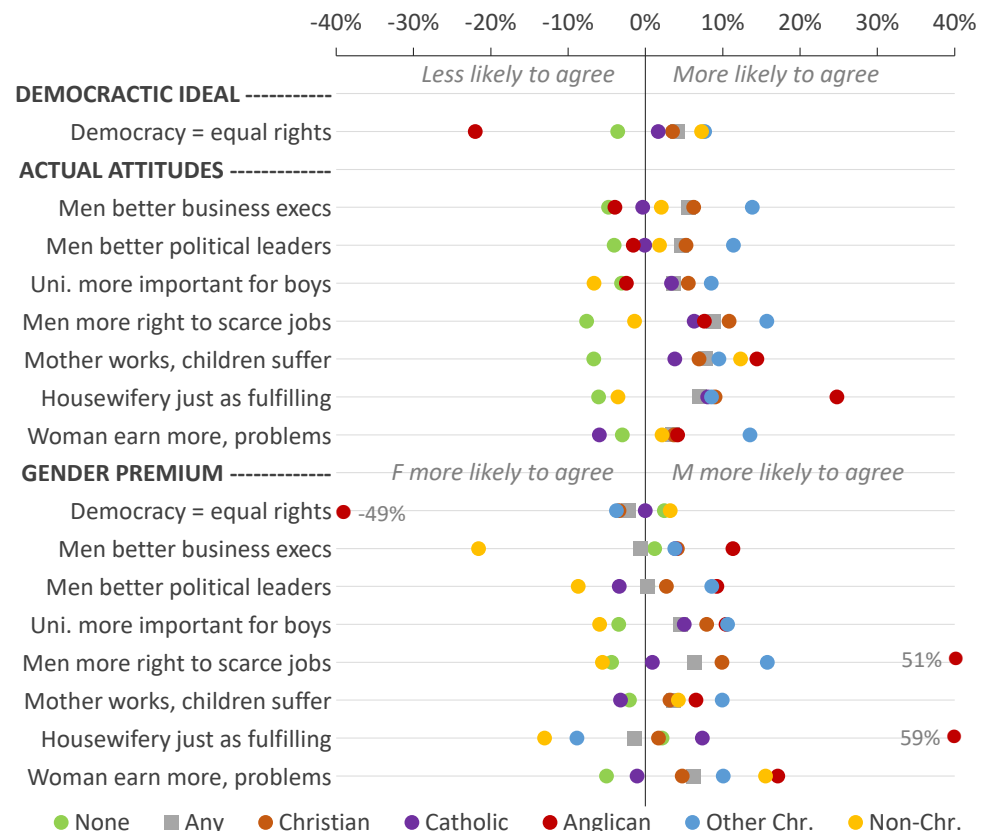
<sup>32</sup> Benevolent sexism is an ideology that posits men and women as equal, but essentially different particularly in social roles.

<sup>33</sup> Note the question bias presuming that only a female — and of married status — would be the family member to stay home and maintain the household.

<sup>34</sup> Note that the male is given status by both gender and marriage (“husband”), while the female is given status by gender (“woman”), but marriage only by *consequence* of her relationship with the male. More balanced wording would have referred to her as “wife” if he is “husband”, or him as “male partner” if she is “woman”. These subtle sexist biases can be pervasive even when trying to equally cover both marital and non-marital relationships.



By **religion** (Figure 100), minor Christian denominations are most likely to say that equal rights for men and women is an important feature of democracy. However, they are the most consistently likely to endorse sexist attitudes favouring males. This pattern is consistent with virtue signalling and reputation management in response to politically correct normative statements (equal rights), while attitudes toward specific privileges are more genuine and revealing. Nones are, on average, least likely to endorse sexist attitudes.



**Figure 100:** Divergence in gender equality attitudes, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 6

Gender premiums are mixed, though a male premium is distinctly present amongst minor Christian denominations. Female NCRs are more likely to favour women keeping house and staying out of business and politics.

Little gender premium occurs amongst either Nones or Catholics. Anglicans are worthy of special note, however. Anglican males are *vastly* more likely than Anglican females to *disagree* with equal gender rights, and *vastly* more likely to believe in male employment privilege and that females ought to feel fulfilled by housekeeping.

### Anglican attitudes and violence

The Anglican sample in the AVS 2018 study was relatively small, so confidence intervals in the results are larger. Nevertheless, while Anglican attitude divergences are mostly within the range of other religions and Nones, Anglican *males* stand out for their spectacularly low support for gender equality, hinging very strongly around the perceived right of men to scarce jobs, and that women ought to be satisfied staying at home and keeping house.

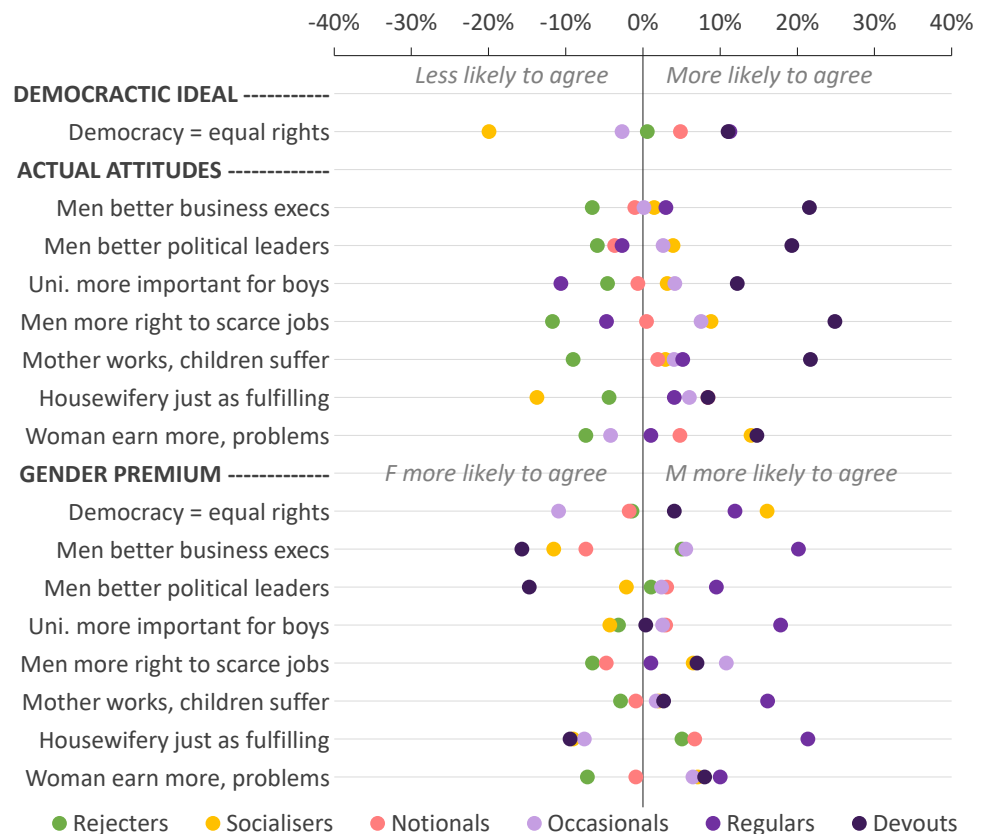
In practice, these privileged Anglican male attitudes translate into significantly higher rates of intimate partner violence amongst Anglicans than the general population, (Judd 2021; NCLS Research 2021). Violence rates are higher amongst those who regularly attend church services. Given these dynamics, it is unsurprising that a mere 12% of Anglicans experiencing intimate partner violence have sought help from the Anglican church itself.

*Religion is clearly not immune from privileged attitudes and violence toward resisters.*

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 101), Rejecters hold more neutral to positive attitudes toward gender equality.

Devouts, on the other hand, are the most likely to respond in the positive toward the normative concept of equal rights. Yet they hold the most sexist attitudes toward *all* the (measured) contributing dimensions. This too indicates virtue signalling and reputation management that hides true attitudes.

Also among Devouts, *females* are significantly more likely than males to say that men make better business executives and political leaders and that housekeeping is just as fulfilling. This is consistent with greater acceptance of “traditional” male/female social role models amongst female Devouts.



**Figure 101:** Divergence in gender equality attitudes, by RI6 religiosity

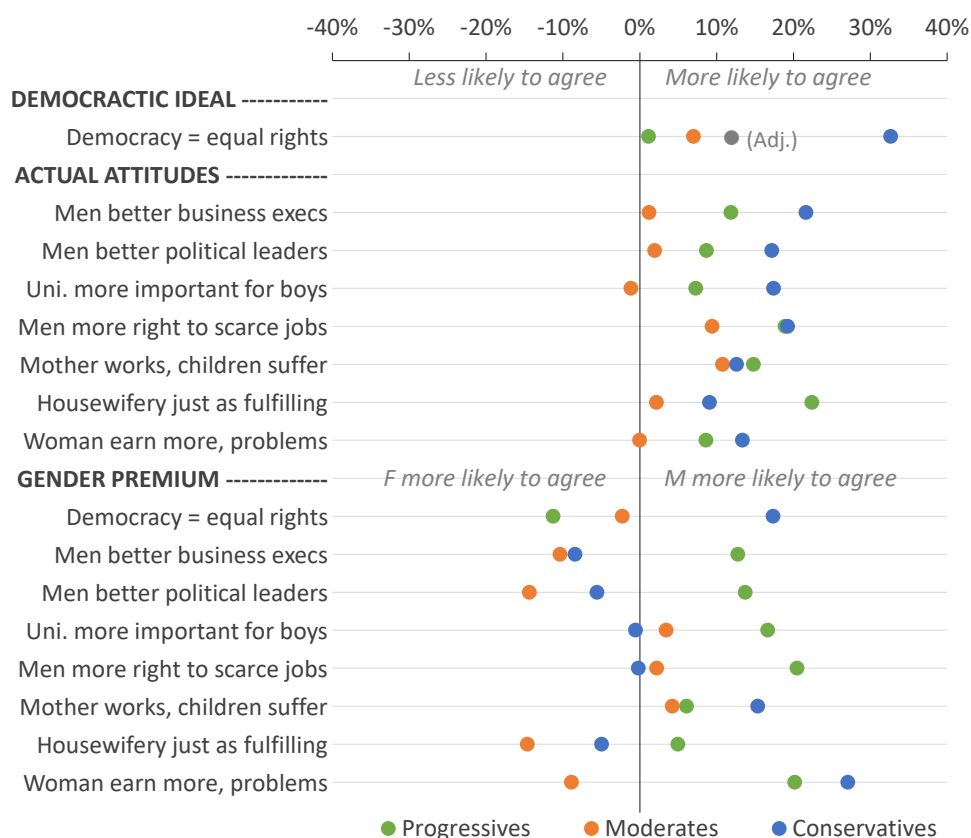
Sources: As described in Table 6

**Note:** In the AVS 2018 study, Socialisers had an average employment and gender profile: no more likely to be “housekeeping” and no more likely to be female than any other segment. The finding that Socialisers are least likely to support equal gender rights, and that male Socialisers are significantly more likely than their female counterparts to support equal rights, remains unexplained.

Amongst Regulars, males are more likely to say they support equal rights, but the most likely to hold male-privilege attitudes in practice.

Overall, Rejecters are the most likely to genuinely support gender equality rights, Regulars show significant male-driven male privilege, and Devouts show the least genuine support for gender equality that is driven by attitudes amongst both males and females. Devouts are the most likely to virtue-signal in favour of normative gender equality, while holding the most male-privileged attitudes across a range of practical dimensions.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 102), Religious Conservatives are significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to signal support for gender equality yet hold practical attitudes in favour of male privilege. Religious Progressives are *not* more likely than their secular counterparts to signal in favour of gender equality, but are significantly more likely to hold practical attitudes in favour of male privilege.



**Figure 102:** Religious premium in gender equality attitudes, by RSI6 religio-social identity

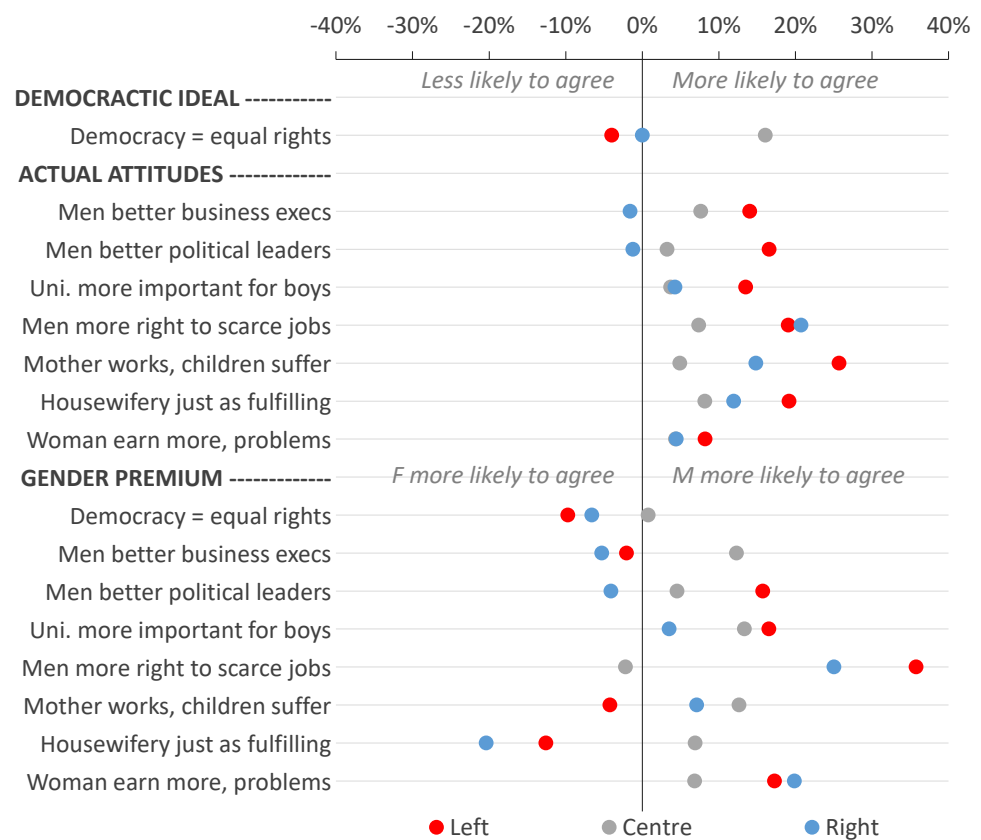
Sources: As described in Table 6. See Note below re grey Adjusted data point.

**Note:** The large religious premium in “equal rights” amongst Conservatives (row 1 in Figure 102) is driven by a substantially less positive attitude amongst *Secular* Conservatives than amongst all others. If Secular Conservatives had the same polarisation as Secular Progressives, the “adjusted” religious premium would be 11% (grey point on the chart) rather than 33%. This phenomenon did not occur for any of the practical dimensions, further suggesting that answers to the equal rights question by the Religious Right were influenced by normative “politically correct” expectations.

Amongst *male* Religious Progressives (compared with their Secular counterparts), hostility toward gender equality appears comparatively strong. They are *both* less likely to support normative gender equality *and* significantly more likely than their female compatriots to favour male privilege in practice.

Religious effects amongst Moderates are mixed and mostly not statistically significant.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 103), sexist religious premiums occur more strongly amongst the Left. On the Right, religion correlates with a premium in sexist attitudes toward paid work, but not leadership.



**Figure 103:** Religious premium in gender equality attitudes, by RPI6 religio-political identity

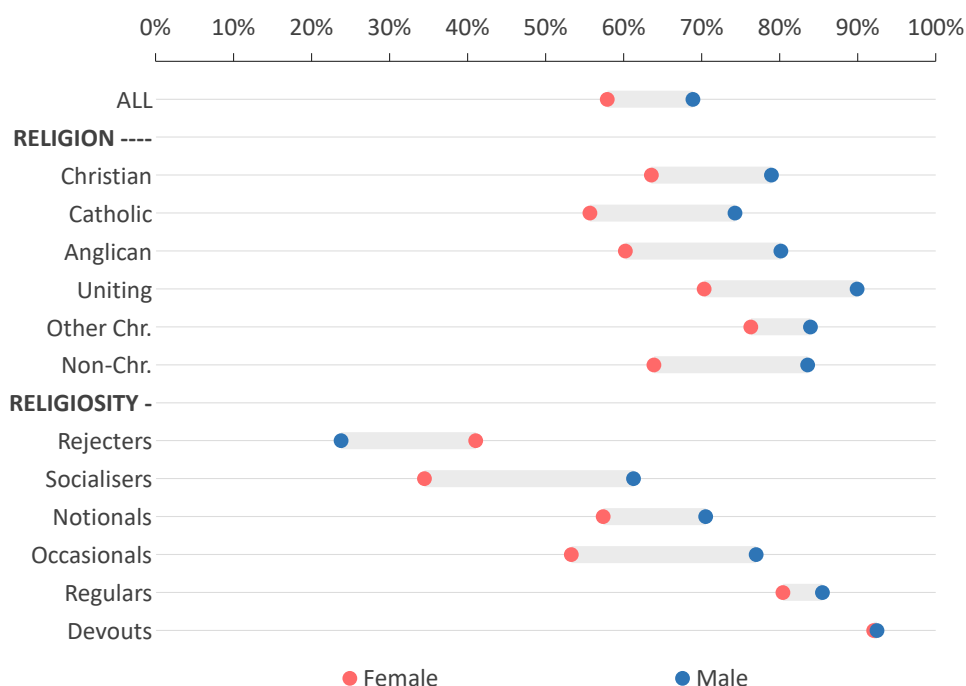
Sources: As described in Table 6

On both the Left and Right, there is a significant male-driven religious premium in believing that a woman earning more than her male partner is almost certain to cause problems. Thus, political ideology of either polarity appears to be associated with a modest level of ego defence.

**Summary:** Australia’s religious are more likely to say they favour women’s equality rights as a democratic principle. However, this generic virtue signalling is undermined by their attitudes toward a range of specific gender issues, where they are less likely to favour women’s university education, working for pay, accessing scarce jobs, business leadership, political leadership, or a woman earning more than her husband. Nones are more likely, Christians and Regulars less likely, and Devouts the least likely, to hold supportive attitudes toward gender equality *in practice*.

## How my religion treats women

Another facet of gender equality is how people perceive their *own religion’s* gender equality conduct. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) asked people whether their religion treats men and women equally (Figure 104).



**Figure 104:** Agreement that “my religion treats men and women equally”, by gender, religion and RI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2018. Note: views about one’s own religion occur amongst both Rejecters and Socialisers (no religious affiliation) most likely because they treat the reference to religion more broadly as “worldview” or “culture”.

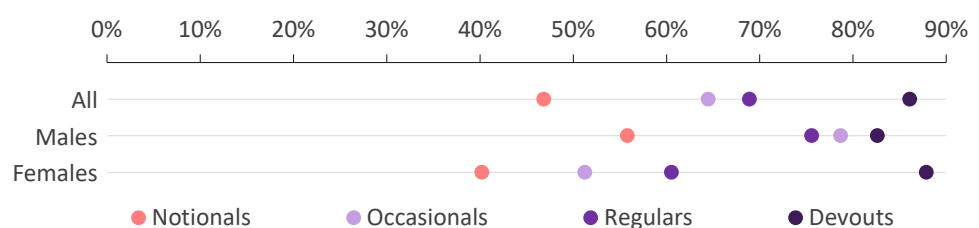
Across religions and religiosities, men are more likely than women to believe their religion treats them equally, except amongst Rejecters where the reverse is true and who are likely to have interpreted “religion” as referring broadly to “worldview” or “culture”, since they have no religious affiliation.

By **RI6 religiosity**, belief that one’s religion treats men and women equally rises with religiosity. Amongst Regulars and Devouts, with the highest likelihood of equality beliefs, there is no significant difference in attitudes between men and women.

**Summary:** There are significant premiums amongst men (versus women) in the belief that their religion treats men and women equally, except amongst Rejecters, who are referring more broadly to their culture rather than “religion”. Clearly, many religious males have a significant blind spot.

### How my *Catholic* religion treats women

Amongst Catholics, the largest religious denomination in Australia, Notionals (those who never attend services) are by far the least likely to believe the Catholic church embraces equality, followed by Occasionals and Regulars (Figure 105). The differences in perceptions are much greater amongst females than males, with male/female attitudes not significantly different only amongst Catholic Devouts.



**Figure 105:** My Catholic religion treats men and women equally, by gender

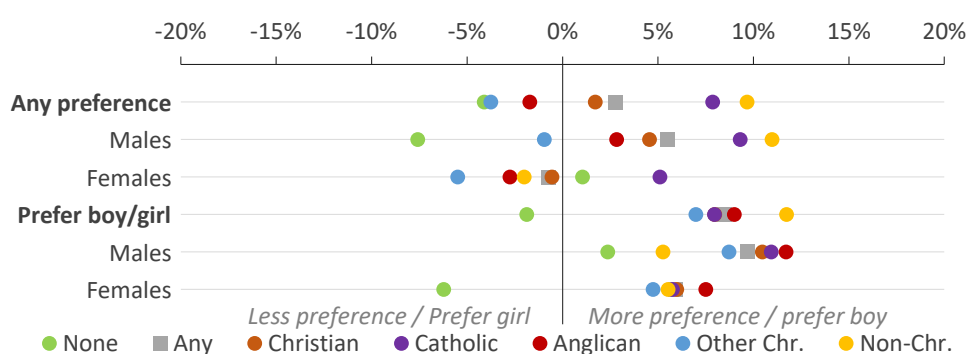
Source: AuSSA 2018

**Summary:** Amongst Australian Catholics, likelihood of belief that the church embraces gender equality increases with greater religiosity. Catholic males are very significantly more likely than females to believe church gender equality, except amongst the most religious, Devouts, where the likelihood of belief is similar.

## Gender preference for first child

There are not only differences in attitudes toward gender *roles*, but also regarding preferences for gender of one's own children. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2016 asked, suppose having no children, for any gender preference of one's first child. Most Australians (82%) said they had no preference, but 16% expressed a preference, most notably NCRs and Catholics (Figure 106).

Amongst males who prefer their first child's gender, *all* religions and Nones were more likely to prefer a boy. Amongst females, all the religions, but not Nones, preferred a boy.

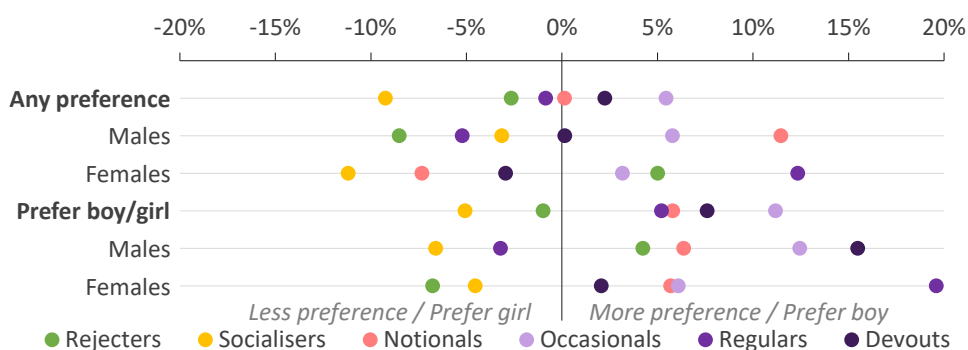


**Figure 106:** Divergence of gender preference for first child, by religion and respondent gender

Source: AuSSA 2016

**Note:** Some of the Male/Female results do not tally with their “total” because the “total” includes those who didn’t provide their gender.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 107), Socialisers have the least gender preference, but when they do, they are more likely to prefer a girl.



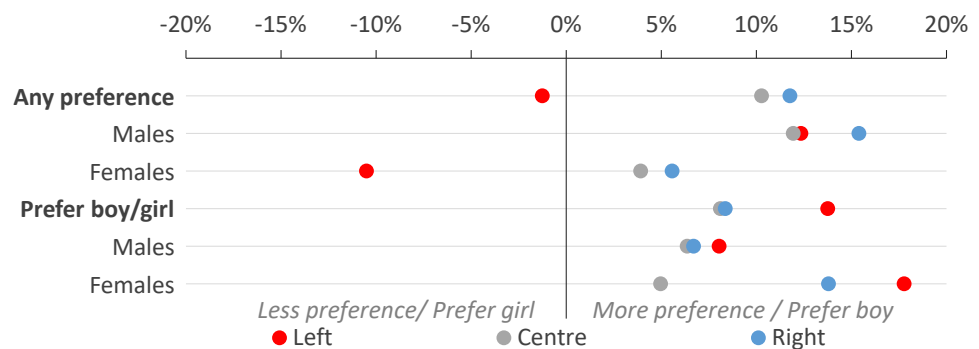
**Figure 107:** Polarisation of gender preference for first child, by ARI6 religiosity

Source: AuSSA 2016



The religiously affiliated are more likely than Nones and Socialisers to have a preference, and are significantly more likely to prefer a boy. Male Devouts and female Regulars are far more likely than others to prefer a boy.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 108), the Religious Left show no difference in preference for gender compared to their Secular counterparts, while the Religious Centre and Religious Right do. Across the political spectrum and both genders, the Religious are more likely to prefer a boy than a girl.



**Figure 108:** Religious premium in gender preference for first child, by ARPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AuSSA 2016. Note: Study data did not permit computing ASI6 social identity.

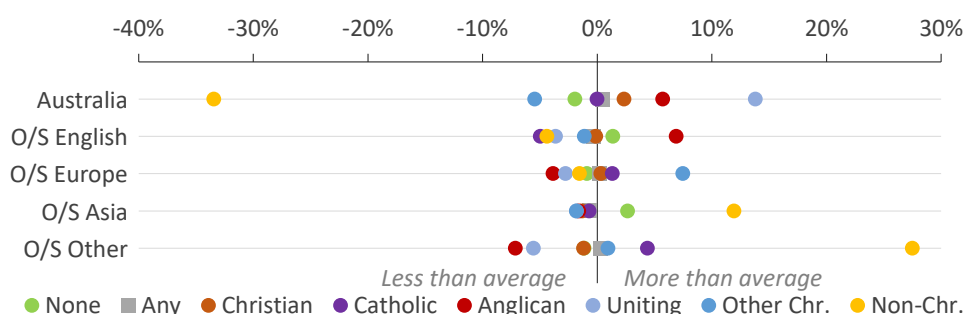
The most polarising effects occur on the Left, with males having a much greater likelihood than females for a child gender preference, and both males and females the most likely to prefer a boy.

**Summary:** Most Australians (82%) say that, imagining having no children, they have no gender preference for their first child, while a minority (16%) do. On the Centre and Right, and amongst males on the Left, there is a significant religious premium in preferring the gender of one's first child. Of those with a preference, across the political spectrum and amongst both males and females, there is a significant religious premium in preference for a boy. Of those with a preference, male Devouts and female Regulars are the most likely to prefer a boy.

## Confounding factor: country of birth

An important confounding factor occurs in respect of the following topics on immigration, because there are some differences amongst segments (e.g. religion, religiosity) in the proportion of people born in Australia versus overseas. Rather than attempting to weight every statistic by domestic vs overseas country of birth, the country-of-birth divergences for the Australian Election Study 2001 are shown here so as to aid interpretation of differences in attitudes.

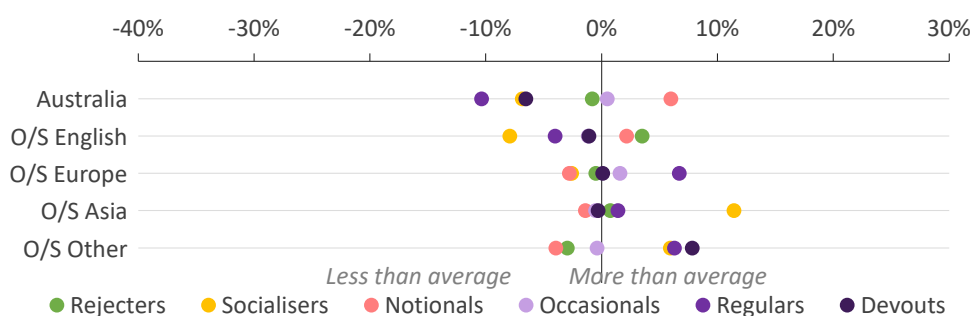
By **religion** (Figure 109), NCRs are significantly more likely to have come from “O/S Other” (notably the Middle East and Africa), and somewhat more likely to have come from Asia.



**Figure 109:** Nett differences in country of birth, by religion

Source: AES 2001. “O/S English” = New Zealand, UK and Ireland.

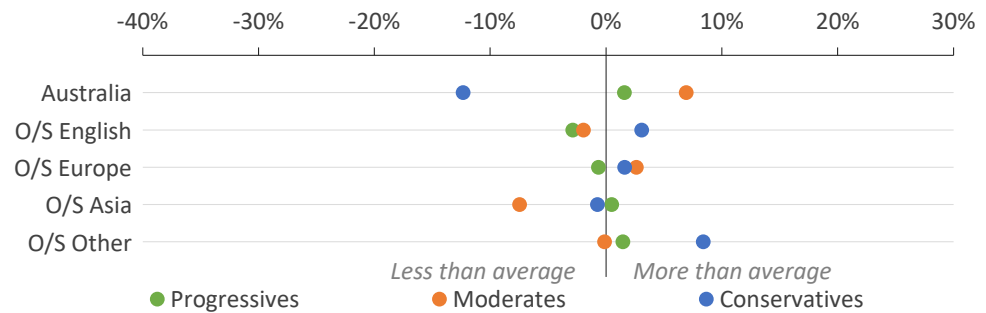
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 110), Devouts, Regulars and Socialisers are slightly less likely to have been born in Australia. Devouts and Regulars are more likely to have come from the Middle East or Africa, while Socialisers are more likely to have come from Asia. Differences are quite modest.



**Figure 110:** Nett differences in country of birth, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2001. “O/S English” = New Zealand, UK and Ireland.

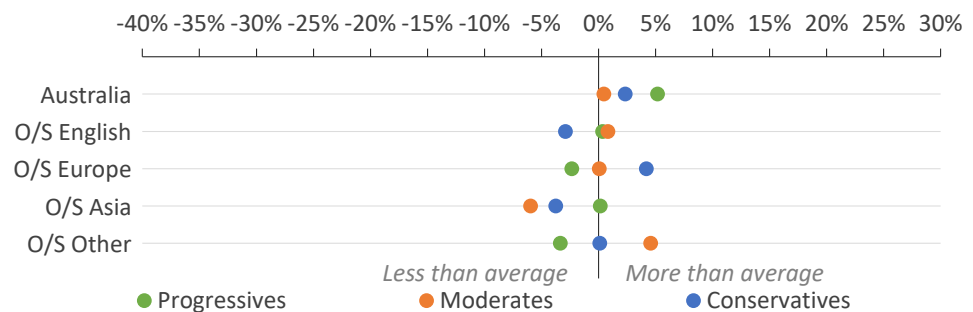
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 111), there are few significant differences, other than Religious Conservatives more likely to have been born in O/S Other.



**Figure 111:** Country of birth, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AES 2001. "O/S English" = New Zealand, UK and Ireland.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 112), there are no statistically significant differences.



**Figure 112:** Country of birth, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AES 2001. "O/S English" = New Zealand, UK and Ireland.

**Summary:** Australia's NCRs are significantly more likely to have come from overseas, especially the Middle East, Africa and Asia. This is a profound difference.

With much smaller effect sizes, the most religious, Regulars and Devouts, and Religious Conservatives (compared with their Secular counterparts) are slightly more likely to have come from overseas, notably the Middle East and Africa.

By religio-social identity (RSI6), there are no significant differences in country of birth between the Secular and the Religious within each social cohort.

### Adjusting for country of birth: Not as neighbours

It might also be expected that country of birth (domestic versus overseas) could affect attitudes toward neighbours who are “immigrants/foreign workers”. Again, preliminary analysis indicates modest differences.

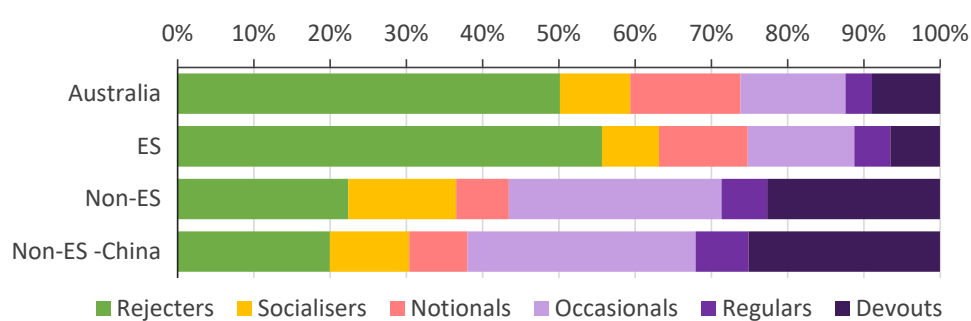
The greatest differences are seen when comparing those born (overseas) in *non-English-speaking* countries. In this case, Devouts show slightly (5% but with statistical significance) elevated likelihood of hostile attitudes toward such neighbours.

This difference is accounted for by the religious profile of Australian-born versus first-generation immigrants. While well under half (41%) of Australian-born and 37% of those born in English-speaking countries<sup>35</sup> overseas are religious (in the AVS 2018 study), nearly two-thirds (64%) of those who immigrated from non-English-speaking countries are.

In addition, while tiny minorities of just 9% of Australian-born and 6% of immigrants from English-speaking countries are Devouts, nearly a quarter (23%) of immigrants from non-English-speaking countries are. And, across the board, almost two-thirds (63%, 69% and 64% respectively) of Devouts are social conservatives.

Nearly a quarter of Australians (24%) are first-generation immigrants from non-English-speaking countries (AVS 2018). This varies enormously across the religiosity spectrum from 13% of Rejecters to nearly half (47%) of Devouts.

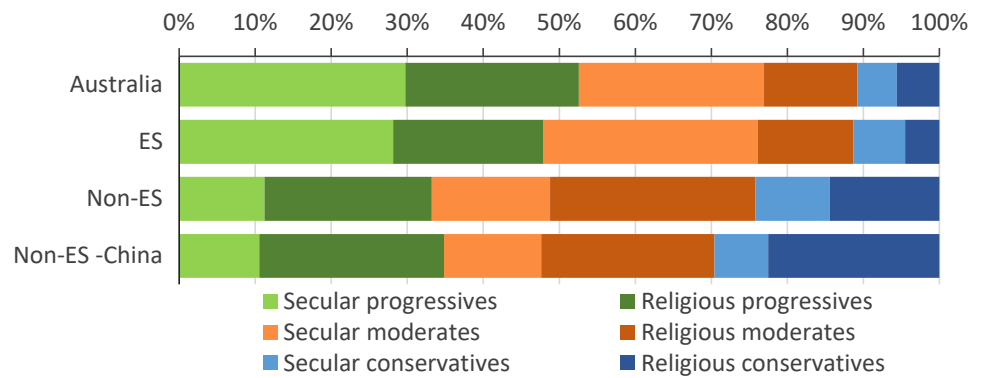
These observations are summarised in Figures 113 and 114.



**Figure 113:** RI6 religiosity distribution, by country of birth

Source: AVS 2018. ES = English-Speaking (overseas). -China = Excluding migrants from China.

<sup>35</sup> As far as the study classification permitted: NZ, UK and Ireland.



**Figure 114:** RSI6 religio-social identity distribution, by country of birth

Source: AVS 2018. ES = English-Speaking (overseas). -China = Excluding migrants from China.

**Summary:** While immigrants from English-speaking countries have similar religiosity profiles to those born in Australia, immigrants from non-English-speaking countries have on average a significantly more religious and socially conservative profile, except those from China who have a less religious (76% Nones) profile.

## Superiority and attitudes toward immigration

Australian Election Studies have tested attitudes toward a range of factors regarding those who are, or aren't, like "us". These include attitudes of personal superiority, fear of those who are different, and toward those from somewhere else — immigrants (Table 7):

**Table 7:** Attitudes toward people, country and culture

Figure row title	Meaning
<i>Not racially prejudiced</i>	Own prejudice against other races
<i>All races equal</i> <sup>^</sup>	All races are equal on things that count most
<i>Some breeds are better</i> <sup>^</sup>	Just as it is true of a fine horse, some breeds of people are better than others
<i>Most know some better</i> <sup>^</sup>	We have to teach children that we are equal but almost everyone knows some are better than others
<i>Distrust different</i> <sup>~</sup>	I distrust those who try to be different from us
<i>Migrants like us 1</i> <sup>~</sup>	Migrants should try to become more like other Australians
<i>Migrants like us 2</i> <sup>~</sup>	It's important for migrants to learn what it is to be Australian than to cling to their old ways
<i>Protect ethnic minorities</i>	Importance of special efforts to protect ethnic and racial minorities
<i>See anti-Asian prejudice</i>	Perceived prejudice against Asian immigrants
<i>More Asian migrants</i>	Australia should accept more migrants from Asia
<i>More M/E migrants</i>	Australia should accept more migrants from the Middle East
<i>More Sth EU migrants</i>	Australia should accept more migrants from Southern Europe
<i>More British migrants</i>	Australian should accept more migrants from Britain
<i>Accept Asian boss</i>	Most people in Australia minding if a suitably qualified Asian appointed as their boss
<i>Accept Asian marriage</i>	Most people in Australia minding if a relative married an Asian
<i>Aboriginal aspirations</i>	Importance to societal well-being that the aspirations of Aborigines be recognised <sup>36</sup>
<i>Asylum seekers genuine</i>	Most seeking asylum in Australia are political refugees fleeing persecution
<i>Teach more languages</i> <sup>^</sup>	Australian schools should make much more effort to teach foreign languages
<i>Aus = Born in Aus</i> <sup>#</sup>	Importance to being Australian of being born in Australia
<i>Aus = Feeling Aus</i>	Importance to being Australian of feeling Australian
<i>Aus = Being Christian</i> <sup>*</sup>	Importance to being Australian of being Christian

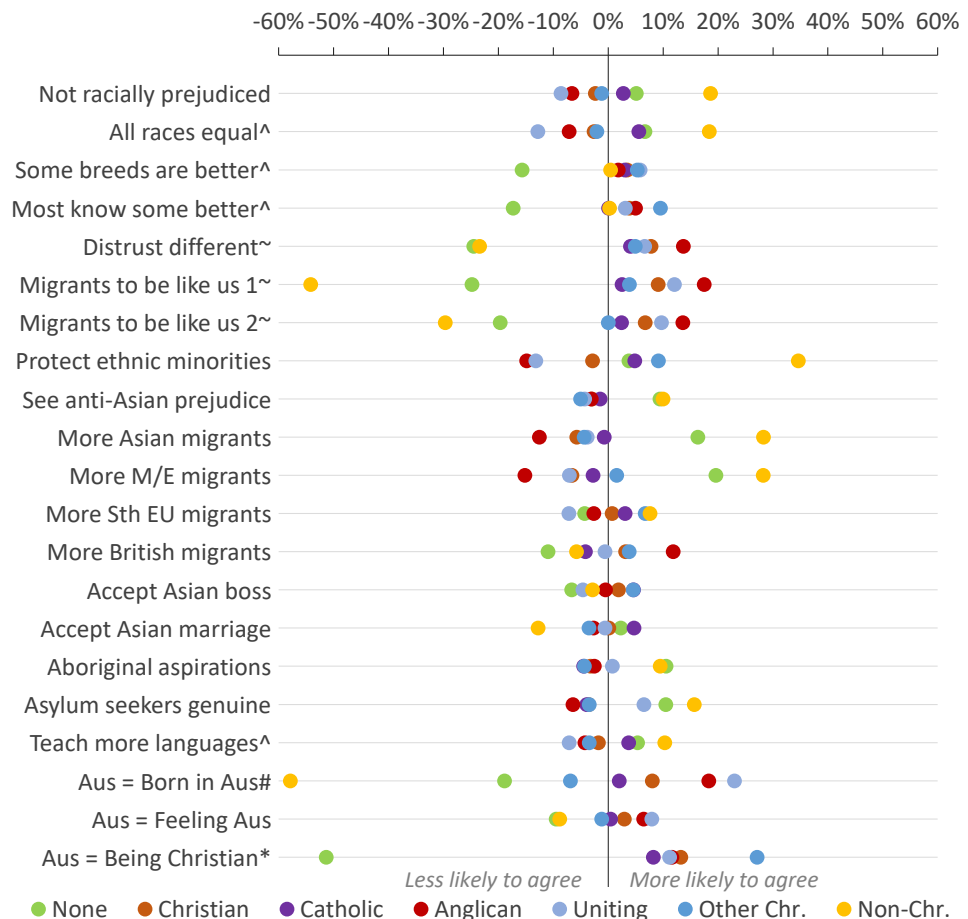
Sources: AES 2001; <sup>^</sup> AES 1998; <sup>~</sup> AES 2004. <sup>#</sup> Adjusted for cohort percent born overseas.

<sup>\*</sup> NCRs did not answer this question.

By **religion** (Figure 115) and in response to politically correct normative statements about prejudice (items 1 & 2), NCRs, unsurprisingly, are far less likely to say they are racially prejudiced or that migrants should be more like (mainstream) Australians. That's because a greater majority of them have

<sup>36</sup> Although it is now standard to refer to First Nations people, at the time of this survey the descriptor "Aborigines" was used.

come from other cultures overseas. They are also much more likely to say that ethnic minorities should be protected, and to welcome *non-British* immigrants. Nones fall in the middle and Protestant denominations (Anglican, Uniting) are more likely to acknowledge that they harbour some prejudice.



**Figure 115:** Divergence scores of attitudes toward people, country and culture, by religion

Sources and explanations as described in Table 7

However, when tested using statements that *aren't* normative or politically correct, a different pattern emerges: *all* religions show substantially greater prejudice than Nones in believing that some people are better than others (items 3 & 4), with Christians more polarised than NCRs.

Australia's Christians, compared with both Nones and NCRs, are significantly more likely to distrust different others; expect migrants to become more like "us"; and believe that "feeling Australian" and being born in Australia is essential to being truly Australian. They are *less* likely to welcome Asian or Middle Eastern immigrants (but this doesn't apply to Southern European or British immigrants who are more like "us"); to believe that asylum seekers are genuine; to think that more languages should be taught; or to embrace the

aspirations of Australia's First Nations people. Unsurprisingly, Australia's Christians (the normative majority) are vastly more likely than Nones to believe that being Christian is essential to being truly Australian.

**Summary: By religion** and regarding country and culture, all Australia's religionists are significantly more likely than Nones to believe that some people are better than others. Australia's Christians show significant levels of in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice, distrusting different others and expecting immigrants to become more like "us".

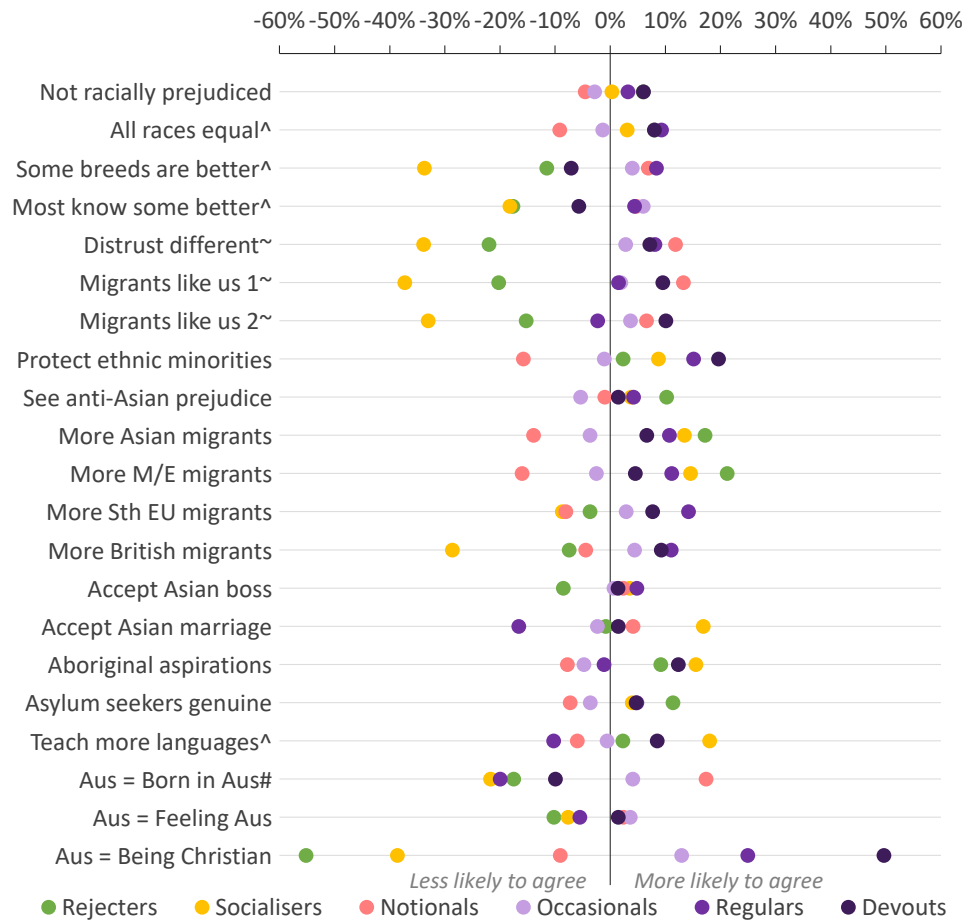
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 116), Religionists are significantly more likely than either Rejecters or Socialisers to say that some people are better than others and to distrust different others. But there are nuances.

While the most religious, Devouts, are more likely than Rejecters and Socialisers to believe that some people are better than others, they are less likely *than average* to believe so. Those more likely than average to say so are Notionals, Occasionals and Regulars: those with a light or moderate religious disposition.

This is consistent with religious "moral licensing", including the notion that one is better *because* of one's religious affiliation. Personality traits ("Big 5" agreeableness and conscientiousness), compared to desirability response bias or prosocial behaviour, most strongly explains these differences (Ward & King 2018). It works largely via a utilitarian system of "credits" — anticipation of future personal moral actions permitting immoral actions in the present — rather than broader moral credentials (Cascio & Plant 2015).

Findings regarding attitudes toward the superiority of some people over others are consistent with "moral licensing", in this case the belief that one is better *because* of one's religious affiliation.





**Figure 116:** Divergence of attitudes toward people, country and culture, by RI6 religiosity

Sources and explanations as described in Table 7

Australia's religionists are much more likely than Rejecters and Socialisers to distrust different others and to believe that migrants should become more like "us".

Notionals show elevated rates of prejudice, being the *least* likely to support protecting ethnic minorities, approve of Asian or Middle Eastern migrants, support First Nations aspirations, or believe that asylum seekers are genuine. They are the *most* likely to distrust different others; to believe that immigrants should become more like "us"; and to believe that being born in Australia is essential to being truly Australian. They are the *least* likely to embrace protections for ethnic minorities.

Unsurprisingly, since most of Australia's religionists are Christian, belief that being Christian is an essential feature of being Australian correlates positively and strongly with religiosity. This measure illustrates intense in-group favouritism, at the same time and analysis by religion shows Australia's Christians harbour elevated rates of out-group prejudice toward different others.

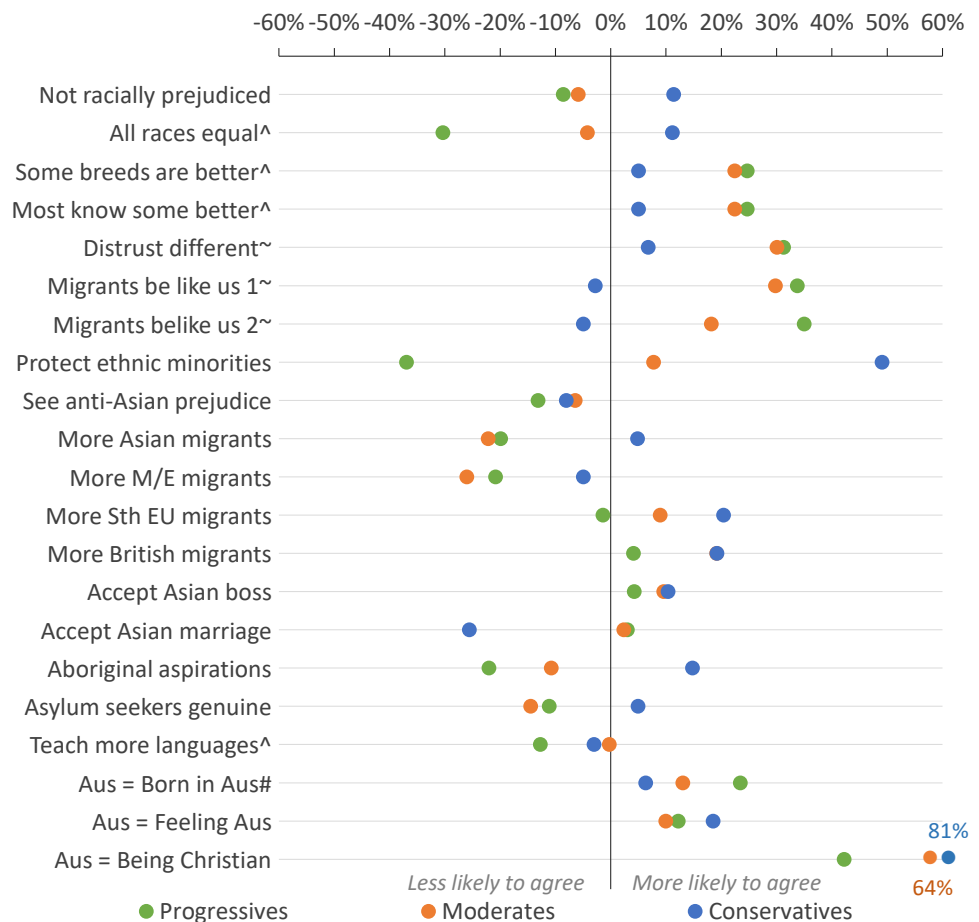
**Summary:** By **religiosity** and regarding country and culture, religionists again are more likely than Rejecters and Socialisers (together, Nones) to say that some people are better than others, that immigrants should seek to become more like “us”, and less likely to trust different others. Notionals harbour the highest rates of prejudice toward different others. The religious (most of whom are Christian) show very strong in-group favouritism toward Christianity as essential to being truly Australian, and the effect is directly and strongly proportional to religiosity.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 117), the association of religion with attitudes regarding country and culture varies greatly across the social identity spectrum. Amongst social Conservatives, the Religious are less likely than the Secular to report racial prejudice, and more likely to support protection for ethnic minorities and migration from different regions.

Curiously, Religious Conservatives are *less* likely than their Secular counterparts to say they perceive anti-Asian prejudice, yet are far *more* likely to say most Australians would object to a relative marrying an Asian. No useful covariates were found to help explain this finding.

Amongst social Progressives and Moderates, however, the picture is decidedly negative. Religious Progressives and Moderates are *less* likely than their Secular counterparts to say they are racially prejudiced, but; are vastly *more* likely to believe that some people are better than others; to distrust different others; to believe that migrants should become more like “us”; and to reject migrants from Asia or the Middle East as well as aspirations of First Nations people.

**Summary:** Attitudes vary substantially **by religio-social identity**. Religious Conservatives are similarly or more likely than their Secular counterparts to hold prosocial attitudes about country and culture, particularly toward minorities. Amongst Religious Progressives and Moderates, however, the opposite is true: they are *more* likely than their Secular counterparts to harbour distrust and antagonism — overall prejudice — toward out-groups, while being *less* likely than their Secular counterparts to say they are prejudiced.



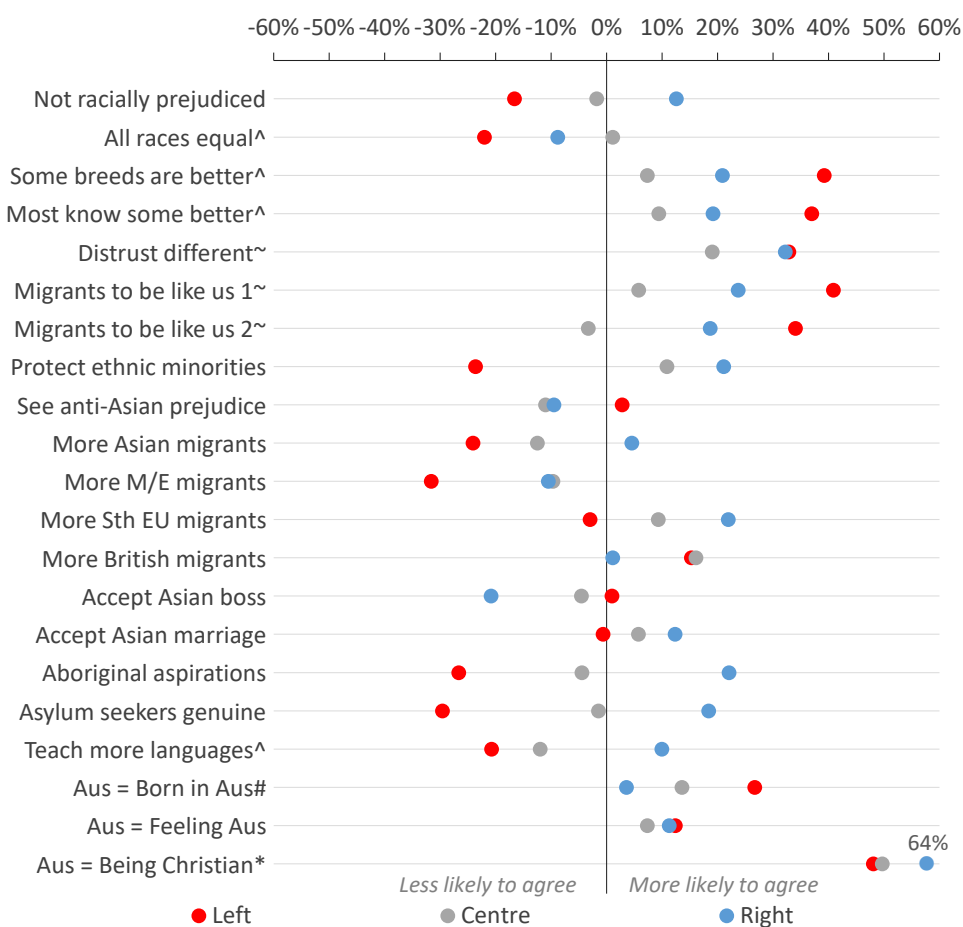
**Figure 117:** Religious premium of attitudes toward people, country and culture, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources and explanations as described in Table 7

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 118), the Religious Left are consistently more likely than their Secular counterparts to exhibit superiority and prejudiced attitudes toward outgroups.

They are more likely than their Secular counterparts to acknowledge that they hold prejudiced attitudes, disagree that all races are equal, believe that some breeds of people are better than others, that migrants should become more like “existing” Australians, are least likely to support protection of ethnic minorities, and are more likely to support British immigration but oppose Middle Eastern and Asian immigration and the teaching of foreign languages. They are far more likely to believe that being born in Australia is essential to being Australian, but far less likely to believe that asylum seekers are genuine or to support the aspirations of Australia’s First Nations people.

Differences between the Religious and Secular of the political Centre and Right are less divergent and more mixed, except in regard to “being Christian” as an essential element of being Australian.



**Figure 118:** Religious premium of attitudes toward country and culture, by RPI6 religio-political identity  
Sources and explanations as described in Table 7

**Reminder:** The religious premiums are differences in attitudes of religionists *versus their secular counterparts*, e.g. attitudes of the Religious Left versus the Secular Left. A strong premium percentage does *not* mean the most supportive or opposed opinions overall. For example, while there is a strong association on the Left between religion and lower support for protection of ethnic minorities, average support for those protections among the Religious Left are higher than *all* the Secular and Religious Centre and Right. It's just a negative association *amongst the Left*.

**Summary:** On the political Left, the Religious are far more likely than their Secular counterparts to be prejudiced. This is less true of the political Centre and Right.

## Perceived effects of immigration

Taking a closer look regarding culture and country, Australians' attitudes about the *effects* of immigration provide further insights toward those who come from outside the nation's borders (Table 8).

**Table 8:** Attitudes about the effects of immigrants and immigration

Figure row title	Meaning
GOOD FOR THEM	
<i>Offers better living~</i>	Immigration offers people from poor countries a better living
GOOD FOR US	
<i>Good for Aus. Development~</i>	How would you evaluate the impact of people from other countries on the development of Australia?
<i>Open to new ideas/cultures</i>	Immigrants make Australia more open to new ideas and cultures
<i>Strengthens cultural diversity~</i>	Immigration strengthens cultural diversity
<i>Protect our way of life^</i>	Australia should limit immigration in order to protect our national way of life
<i>Leads to social conflict~</i>	Immigration leads to social conflict
<i>Increases the crime rate~</i>	Immigration increases the crime rate
<i>Increases terrorism risk~</i>	Immigration increases the risk of terrorism
GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY	
<i>Good for Aus. Economy</i>	Immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy
<i>Fills important job vacancies~</i>	Immigration fills important job vacancies
<i>Increases unemployment~</i>	Immigration increases unemployment
<i>Takes jobs from local born</i>	Immigrants take jobs away from people who are born in Australia
<i>Locals more right to jobs~</i>	When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants
OVERALL	
<i>Less / more immigration</i>	Do you think the number of immigrants allowed into Australia nowadays should be reduced or increased?
<i>Let anyone in~</i>	Let anyone in who wants to
<i>As long as there are jobs~</i>	Let people come as long as there are jobs available
<i>Strict limits~</i>	Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here
<i>Prohibited altogether~</i>	Prohibit people coming here from other countries

Sources: AES 2019 (Other Chr. excludes Uniting); ~ AVS 2018 (Other Chr. includes Uniting).

^ AuSSA 2020 (Other Chr. includes Uniting).

By **religion** (Figure 119), Anglicans demonstrate the most hostile attitudes toward immigration. They are most likely to say that Australia offers immigrants a better living but to plump for “protecting our way of life”, believing that immigration increases the risk of social conflict and terrorism, and supporting strict limits on immigration even if there are jobs available.



**Figure 119:** Divergence of attitudes about the effects of immigration, by religion

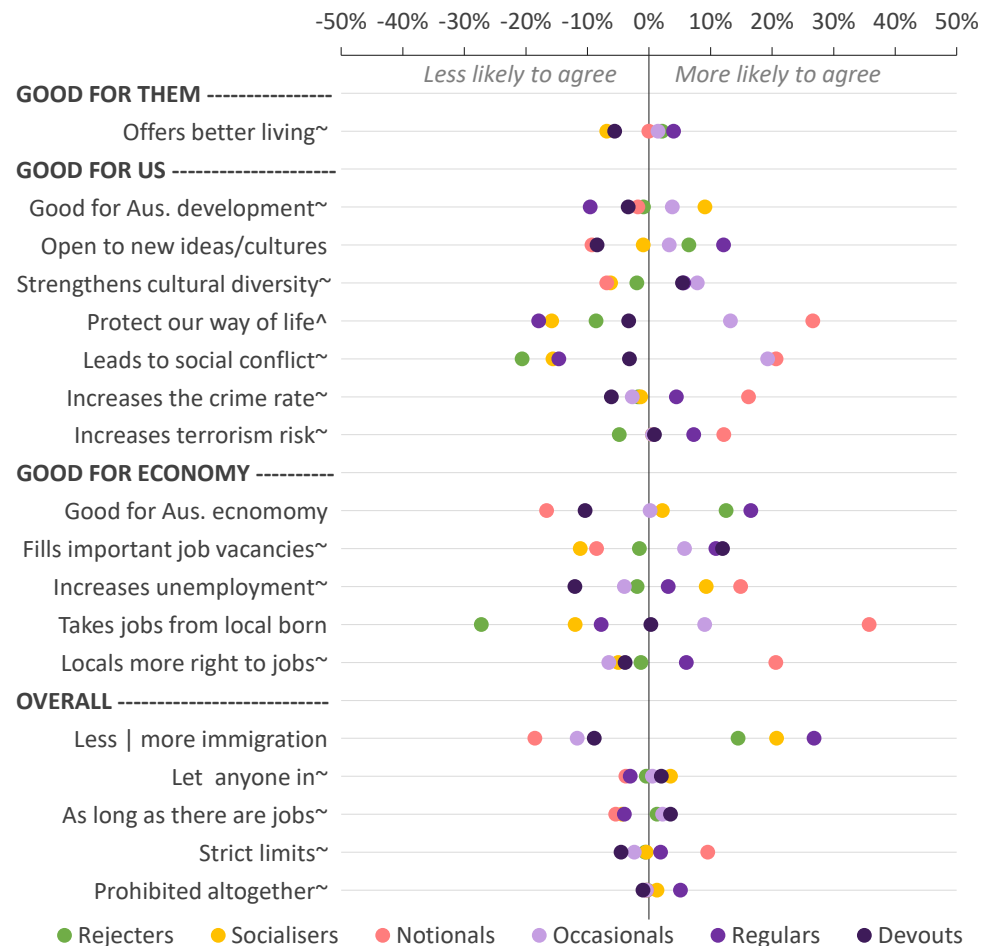
Sources and explanations as described in Table 8

Unsurprisingly, NCRs with their much higher rate of being immigrants themselves, are the most likely to say that immigration is good for Australian development and its economy, fills important job vacancies (and support more immigration to fill such vacancies), and to let anyone in. The last attitude in particular is consistent with the *least* likelihood of wanting to “protect our way of life”, not believing that immigration leads to greater social conflict, crime, terrorism, or unemployment.

Nones are least likely to say that immigration takes jobs from local born, and are the most likely to support increased immigration.

Overall, Australia’s *Christians* are far *more* likely than Nones and NCRs to wish to “protect our way of life” and say that immigration takes jobs from locals, and *least* likely to agree that it is good for the economy. Christians, uniquely, are more likely to support *decreased* immigration.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 120), Notionals are the most likely to support protecting “our way of life”, say that immigration is bad for the economy, leads to greater social conflict, crime, risk of terrorism, takes jobs from local born who have more right to jobs, and to support strict limits or a reduction in immigration.

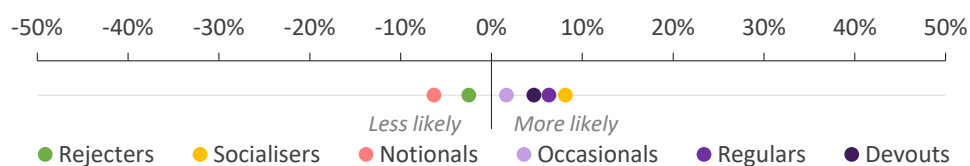


**Figure 120:** Divergence of attitudes about the effects of immigration, by RI6 religiosity

Sources and explanations as described in Table 8

### Perspective-taking: Ever travelled overseas

The negative polarisation of Notionals may be related to their slightly lower likelihood of ever having travelled overseas (which might aid in perspective taking), though the differences are small (Figure 121). By comparison, Rejecters are also slightly less likely than Socialisers, Regulars and Devouts to have ever travelled overseas, but nevertheless show much more neutral-to-prosocial attitudes toward different country and culture.

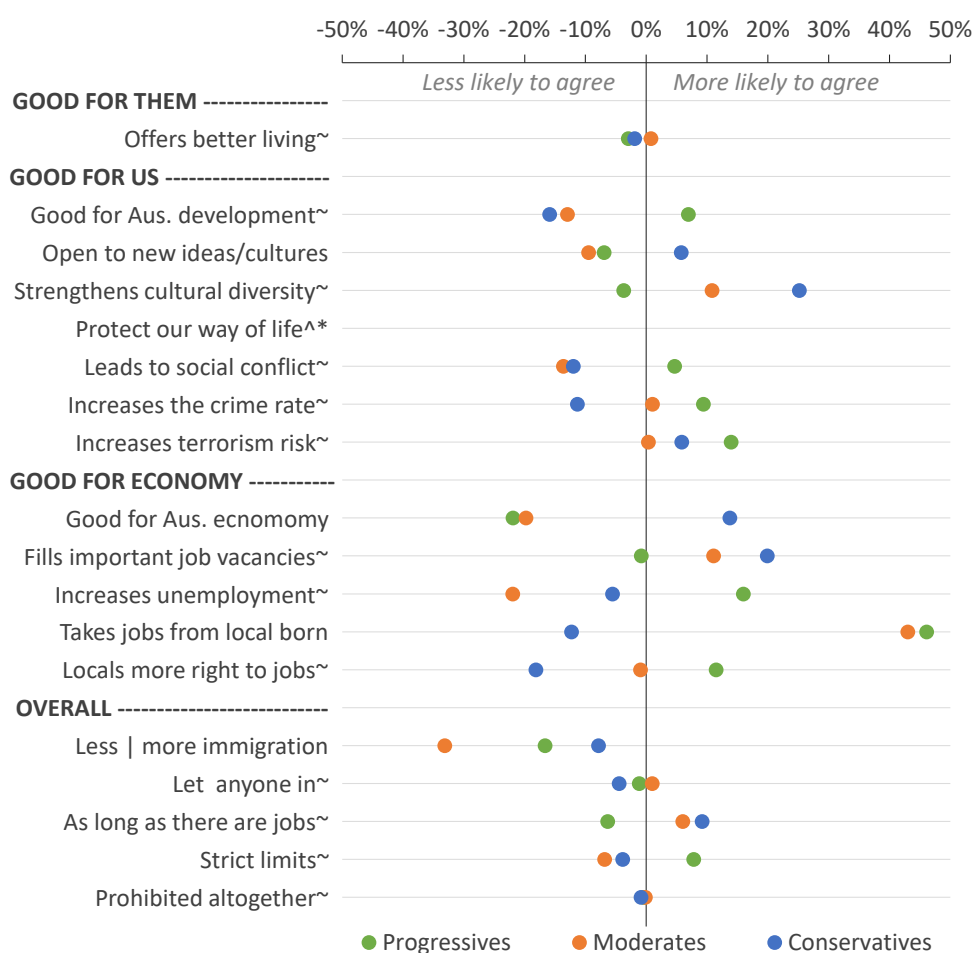


**Figure 121:** Nett difference ever travelled overseas, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2004

Notionals' highly negative perceptions of economic and especially job effects are not driven by gross differences in income: they have an average income distribution (AES 2019). However, they do have a lower average educational profile, with more having completed only a school-level education.

Patterns amongst other levels of religiosity are less consistent.



**Figure 122:** Religious premium in attitudes about the effects of immigration, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources and explanations as described in Table 8. \* RSI6 cannot be computed for this study, so no results are reported.

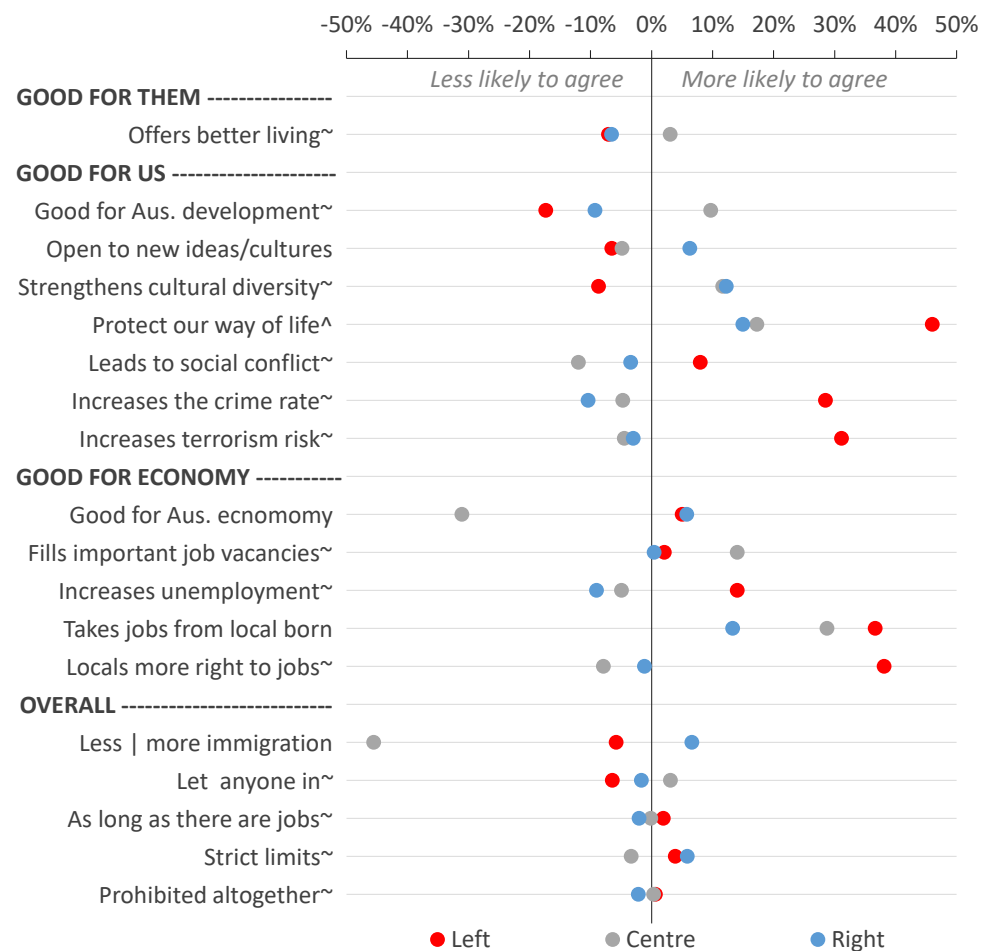
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 122), Religious Progressives and Moderates are far more likely than their Secular counterparts to say that



immigrants take jobs from locals and are not good for the economy, and to support reduced immigration.

Views of Religious Conservatives are generally more prosocial than their Secular counterparts, but this is often because Secular Conservatives hold particularly antisocial attitudes rather than Religious Conservatives holding above-average prosocial attitudes.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 123), religion has a strong effect amongst those on the Left. The Religious Left are vastly more likely than their Secular counterparts to wish to “protect our way of life”, say that immigration increases the rate of crime and terrorism, and takes jobs from the local-born, who have more rights to those jobs.



**Figure 123:** Religious premium in attitudes about the effects of immigration, by RSI6 religio-social identity  
Sources and explanations as described in Table 8

In the political Centre, the Religious are vastly less likely to say that immigration is good for the economy, more likely to say that it takes jobs from

local born and wish to protect “our way of life”, and translates into uniquely high support for a *reduction* in immigration.

Views between the Secular Right and the Religious Right vary far less.

**Summary:** NCRs — who are much more likely to have been born overseas — are the most likely to hold positive attitudes toward immigrants. Christians are more likely than others to believe immigrants are good for the economy but more likely to support a *reduction* in numbers. Anglicans hold some particularly hostile attitudes.

By religiosity, Rejecters hold neutral to positive attitudes. Notionals lead hostile attitudes, being the most likely to believe immigrants take jobs from locals and increase the crime rate. Across the social scale, Religious Progressives and Moderates are vastly more likely than their Secular counterparts to say that immigrants take jobs from local born, and Religious Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives are all more likely than their Secular counterparts to favour *reducing* immigrant numbers. Across the political spectrum the Religious Left are considerably more likely than their Secular counterparts to believe immigrants increase the crime rate, harm “our way of life”, and take jobs from local-born who have more right to them. The Religious Centre are significantly less likely than their Secular counterparts to say immigrants are good for the economy, and much more likely to support decreasing immigrant numbers.

Although effects are complex and mixed, overall, Australia's religionists are significantly more likely than Nones to harbour negative attitudes about the effects of immigration and to support a *decrease* in migrant numbers.

## Asylum seekers: Out of sight, out of mind

Australia's national posture towards asylum seekers can engender strong opinions. Especially during the years of the Howard and Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments, commentary in the media was relatively shrill, much of it highly negative towards asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat.

Despite this focus, most asylum seekers in Australia actually arrive by air, all have a right under international law to seek protection, there is no “orderly queue” to join, and far fewer reach Australian than American or European shores (Phillips 2015).

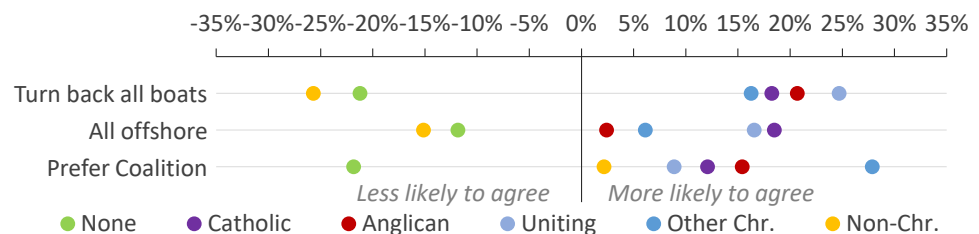
The Australian Election Study 2019 asked people about their attitudes toward asylum seekers who arrive by boat, and whether they felt closer to Labor or the Coalition's policies on asylum seekers and refugees (Table 9).

**Table 9:** Attitudes about the effects of immigrants and immigration

Figure row title	Meaning
<i>Turn back all boats</i>	All boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back
<i>All offshore</i>	What do you think is the best way to handle the processing and resettlement of asylum seekers who come by boat and manage to reach Australian shores? — [Option:] Process and resettle offshore
<i>Prefer Coalition</i>	Whose policies — the Labor Party's or the Liberal-National Coalition's — would you say come closer to your own views on refugees and asylum seekers? [Nett Coalition – Labor]

Sources: AES 2019

By **religion** (Figure 124), Christians are vastly more likely than both Nones and NCRs to say that all asylum seeker boats should be turned back to their point of departure, and that asylum seekers who arrive by boat should be both processed *and* settled offshore — out of sight and out of mind.



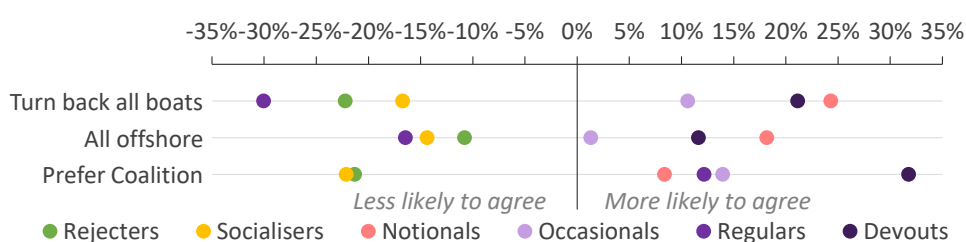
**Figure 124:** Divergence of attitudes regarding asylum seeker boat arrivals, by religion

Source: AES 2019

All Australian religionists, Christian and non-Christian alike, are more likely to feel aligned with Coalition rather than Labor policy on asylum seekers. Only Nones are more likely to favour Labor policies.

NCRs are far more likely, and Other Christians slightly more likely than others, to have been born overseas. This is likely to make a significant contribution to the associations with attitudes toward boat arrivals particularly amongst NCRs.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 125), Devouts and Notionals hold the most hostile attitudes toward boat arrivals and are more likely to favour Coalition policies toward them.

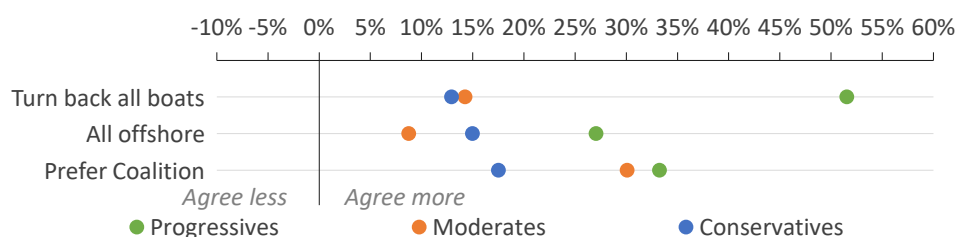


**Figure 125:** Divergence of attitudes regarding asylum seeker boat arrivals, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AES 2019

In contrast, Regulars, Rejecters and Socialisers hold more prosocial attitudes. Amongst the RI6 segments in this study, only Socialisers are slightly more likely to have been born overseas.

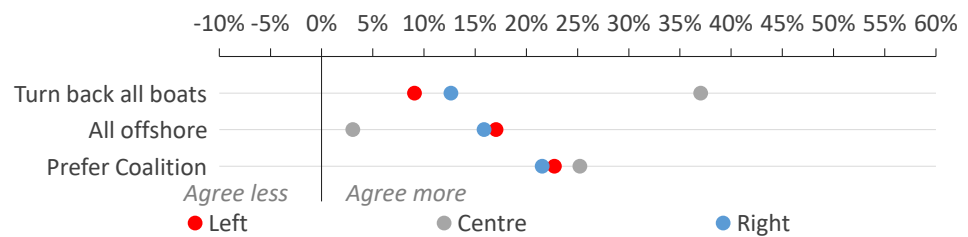
Across the social spectrum by **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 126), Religious Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives are all significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to support turning back all boats, processing all boat arrivals offshore, and preferring Coalition over Labor policy on asylum seeker boat arrivals. The effects of religion are strongest amongst Progressives.



**Figure 126:** Religious premium of attitudes regarding asylum seeker boat arrivals, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AES 2019

Also across the political spectrum by **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 127), the Religious Left, Centre and Right are all significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to support turning back all boats, processing all boat arrivals offshore, and preferring Coalition over Labor policy — with the exception that the Religious Centre are not statistically more likely than the Secular Centre to support offshore processing.

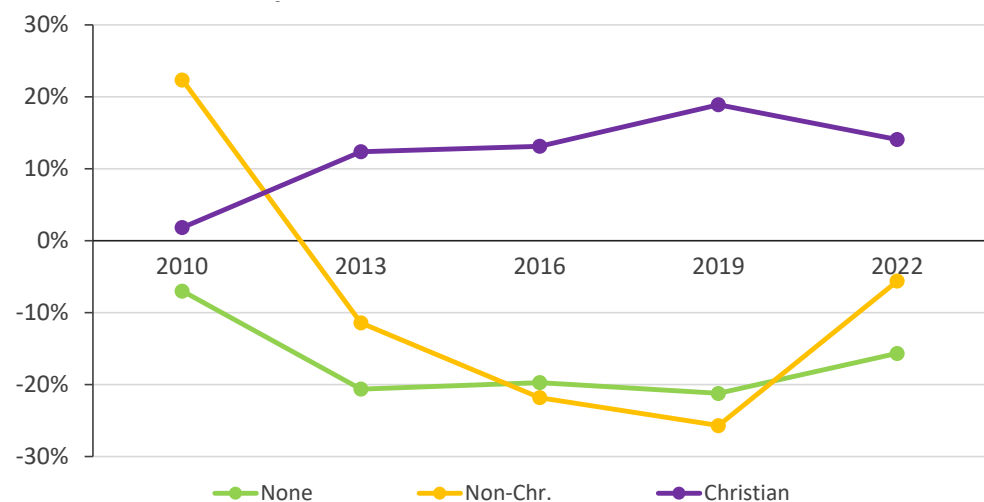


**Figure 127:** Religious premium of attitudes regarding asylum seeker boat arrivals, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AES 2019

The high religious premium amongst the Centre towards turning back all asylum seeker boats, but low religious premium towards processing and resettling all arrivals offshore suggest different attitude motivations from those on the Left and Right. No explanatory correlates were found in the data.

In trends by election-year, Australia's Nones became more accepting of boat arrivals during the Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison Coalition government election years (2013–2019), while Christians became significantly less accepting (Figure 128).



**Figure 128:** Trends in divergence of attitudes “turn back all boats”, by year

Source: AES. Note: Positive (negative) values mean more (less) than average saying that all boats should be turned back.

But by far the greatest trend is amongst NCRs, whose acceptance of boat arrivals during Coalition election years is highest, and lowest during Labor election years.

These findings are consistent with the dynamic of Christians “resonating” more, but Nones and NCRs resonating less, with Coalition boat turnback policy in Coalition election years.

**Note:** Most of the Christian trend was due to a change of attitude amongst Notionals (data not shown).

**Summary:** Australia’s Christians are significantly more likely than Nones and NCRs to support turning back all asylum boat arrivals, to process *and* resettle all boat arrivals offshore, and to prefer Coalition over Labor policy. This Christian hostility to asylum seekers arriving by boat — when in fact most arrive by plane and are equally entitled to seek asylum under Australia’s international law obligations — are fuelled mostly by Notionals and Devouts. Religious hostility spans the social spectrum from Progressives to Conservatives, and the political spectrum from Left to Right.







## Authoritarianism, compliance and conformity

Research reveals statistically significant overlaps between religiosity, conservatism, fundamentalism, and authoritarianism (Bouchard 2009; Saroglou et al. 2020a).

In fact, it is the bonding and behaving dimensions of religiosity<sup>37</sup> which correlate with fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and low openness to experience (Saroglou et al. 2020b). These relate to the cognitive attributes of close-mindedness, dogmatism, and high need for closure. Religious fundamentalism in particular is associated with lower intelligence (Lewis, Ritchie & Bates 2011), likely related to the correlation between conservative syndrome and lower cognitive ability (Stankov & Lee 2018). Religious authoritarians are far more likely to perceive the world as a dangerous place bristling with threats (Feldman & Stenner 1997; Zmigrod et al. 2021), leading to intolerance towards difference (Feldman 2020).

Religious bonding, with extraversion, is also uniquely related to greater life satisfaction (Saroglou et al. 2020b), indicating a utilitarian (hedonistic) underpinning for conservative (tradition-preserving) religious views.

All these attributes are likely to be associated with the belief that one's personal views ought to prevail over others — a social dominance orientation.

For example, leading up to the national marriage equality plebiscite, then Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Glenn Davies, argued there was no need for marriage equality law reform because the scriptures oppose it (Welch 2017).

In another example, the Catholic Development Fund (2020), while noting that at the time only 22.6% of Australians identified as Catholic, says that Catholicism is “the heart and foundations of Australian society”.

Even more curiously, The Christopher Dawson Centre for Cultural Studies (2022) hosted by the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart, clearly states that its remit is to “promote awareness of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Cultural History as essential components of human civilization.” That's worth clarifying: the Centre firmly states that *but for* ‘Catholic intellectual tradition and cultural history’ Which They Helpfully Capitalise To Emphasise Its Putative Authority, humankind would *not* be civilized.

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<sup>37</sup> The “Big four Bs” framework of religiosity, of which bonding and behaving are two, are discussed in Part 2 of this series (Francis 2021, p20).

Further, the objective of Australian Christians (2021), who say that “it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible”<sup>38</sup> and believe the bible to be inerrant, actively seek to steward Christian candidates into federal and state parliaments. Their objectives? To “bring all legislation into conformity with the will of God as revealed in the Holy Bible” and to ensure Australia is a “Christian Commonwealth” founded on a “Christian-based constitutional monarchy and Westminster system of government with the policies of Australian Christians...” (Australian Christians 2023). In other words, a populace ruled by the divine right of religious (but only *Christian*) kings.

These examples are typical of breathtaking hubris and shocking failure of perspective-taking. Yet these are small minorities of organised religious authoritarians and dominionists. In this section, we examine the broader Australian *public’s* attitudes toward a range of matters to determine levels of authoritarianism, compliance and control amongst the religious and non-religious at large.

**Summary:** A large body of published scholarly research paints a clear picture of greater authoritarianism, fundamentalism, dogmatism and closed-mindedness amongst the religious compared with the non-religious. Australian examples of profound religious hubris and atrophied perspective taking illustrate such findings in practice.

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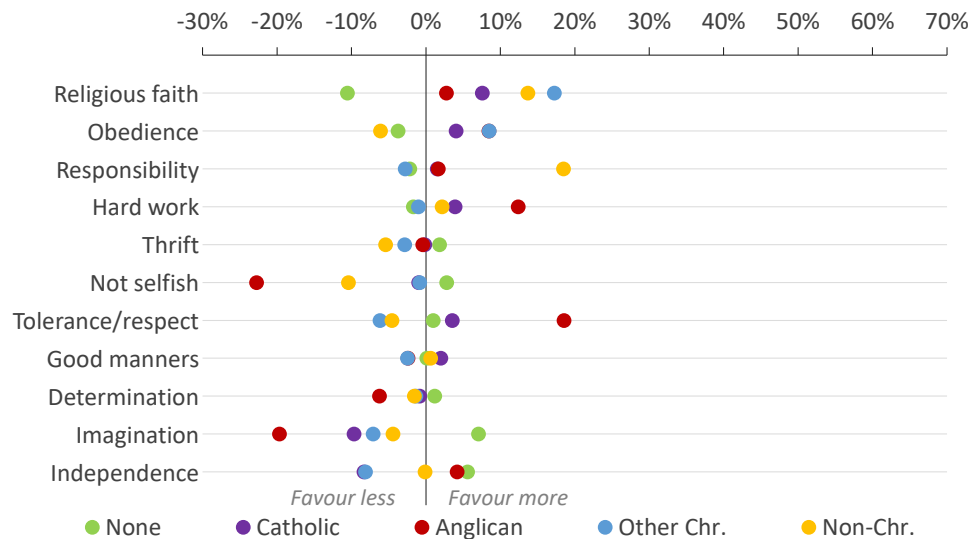
<sup>38</sup> Citing former USA President George Washington.

## Prioritising values

The Australian Values Survey 2018 asks respondents about the importance of values to teach children, choosing just five values from a collection of eleven. By **religion** (Figure 129) there appear to be several cultural differences.

**Note:** Choosing five of eleven values involves *sacrificial* decision making. Adults may think it more or less important to teach all, or at least most, of the given values to children, but the sacrificial decision format helps reveal which values have *priority*, and which are likely to fall away in less favourable times. That includes which values are the most likely to be sacrificed by those who choose religious faith as a top-five value to teach children.

Minor Christian denominations and NCRs are more likely than others to prioritise teaching religious faith. NCRs are far more likely to prioritise teaching responsibility. Anglicans more than others seem to accept selfishness and a lack of imagination, while prioritising hard work, and tolerance and respect for others.



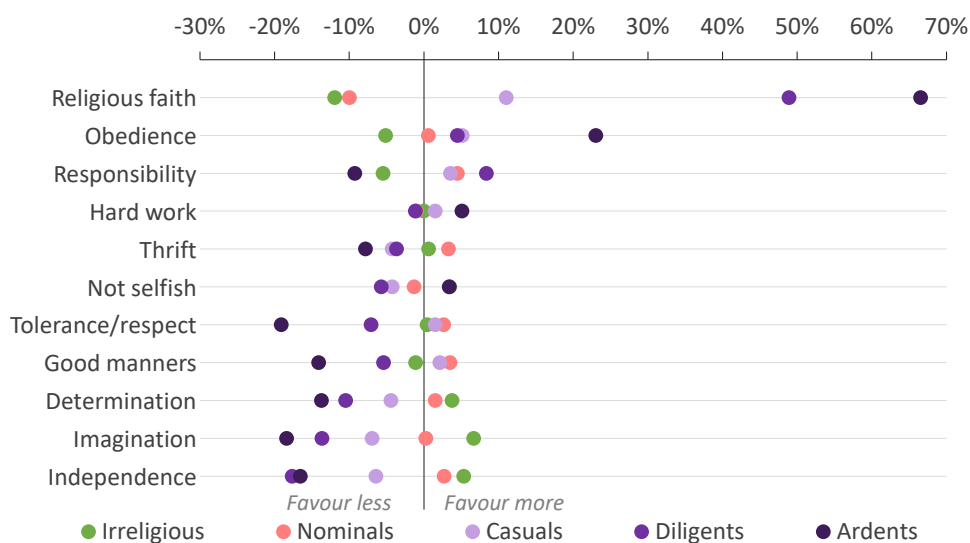
**Figure 129:** Divergence of attitudes toward teaching children values, by religion

Source: AVS 2018

Christians, more than others, appear to favour obedience, while Nones are the most likely to prioritise imagination, independence and not being selfish.

Unsurprisingly by **RI5 religiosity** (Figure 130) choosing religious faith as a top-five value to each children correlates strongly and positively. The most

religious, Ardents, are also very significantly more likely to favour teaching obedience (+23%).



**Figure 130:** Divergence of attitudes toward teaching children values, by RI5 religiosity

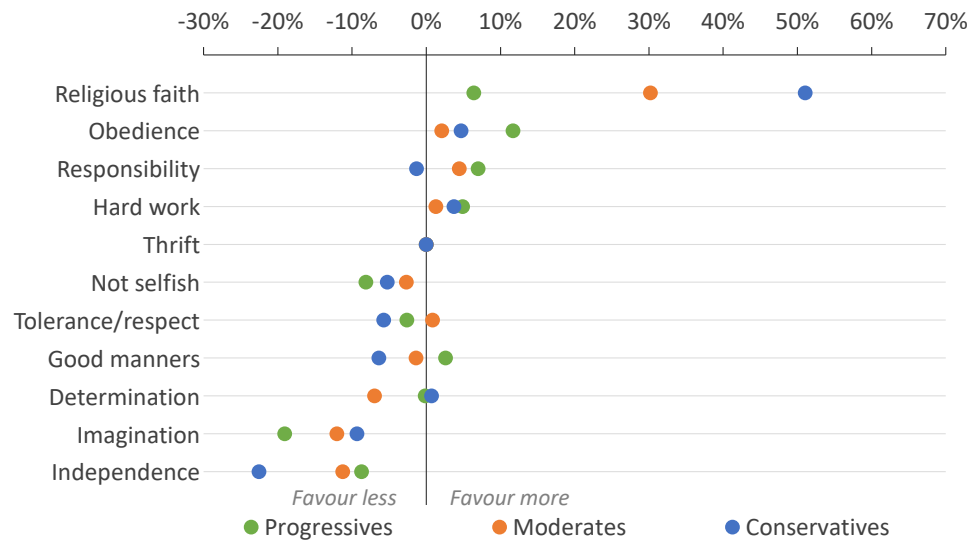
Source: AVS 2018

And the values that Ardents are *least* likely to mention are, by decreasing order of “sacrifice” — tolerance and respect (-19%), imagination (-18%), independence (-17%), good manners (-14%) and determination (-14%).

While it’s not so surprising that those more steeped in religious “tradition” are less likely to favour imagination and independence, it is significant that they are substantially less likely to prioritise tolerance, respect and good manners. This flies in the face of religious claims to such prosociality.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 131), effect of religious affiliation on attitudes toward teaching religious faith is weak (+6%) amongst Progressives, strong (+30%) amongst Moderates, and very strong (+51%) amongst Conservatives.

Religious Progressives are much less likely than their Secular counterparts to favour imagination (-19%), while Religious Conservatives are less likely than their own Secular counterparts to favour independence (-23%).



**Figure 131:** Divergence of attitudes toward teaching children values, by RSI6 religio-social identity

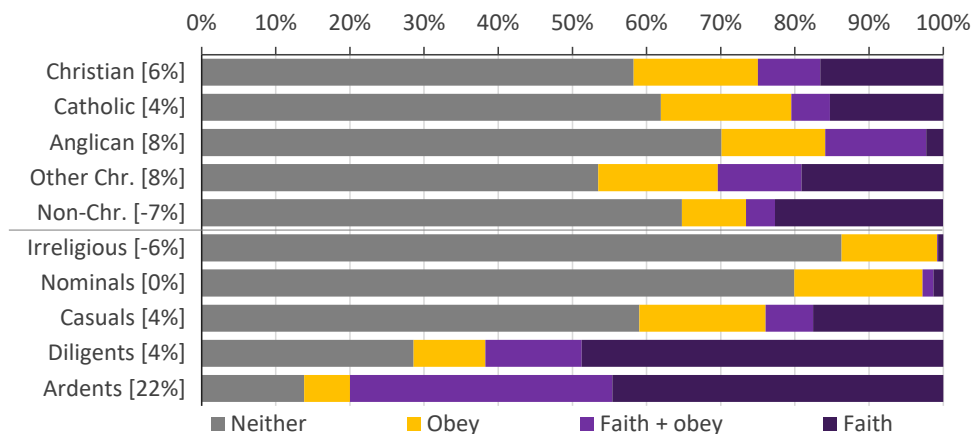
Source: AVS 2018

### Religious faith and obedience

It's worth revisiting the relationship between teaching religious faith and teaching obedience, comparing prioritisation of teaching obedience with and without teaching religious faith (Figure 132).

By religion and RI5 religious identity, Protestant Christians, and Ardents in particular, show higher than average preferences for teaching obedience. By far the greatest difference is teaching religious faith *and* obedience, preferred by more than a third (35%) of Ardents. Uniquely, more than four in ten Ardents (42%) choose obedience as a key value to teach children, compared with just 13% among the Irreligious (and NCRs), almost one in five (19%) Notionals, and less than a quarter (23% each) of Casuals and Diligents.

Ardents are vastly more likely than others to prioritise not only teaching of religious faith (without obedience), but religious faith *with* obedience.



**Figure 132:** Incidence of teaching children obedience with and without religious faith, by religion and RI5 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation for mention of obedience.

**Summary:** Australia's most religious, Ardents, are by far the most likely to prioritise teaching children both religious faith *and* obedience. *This is consistent with a conformist or compliance approach to relationships and morality.*

The values they favour less than other Australians (or sacrifice for religious faith and obedience) are tolerance and respect (-19%), imagination (-18%), independence (-17%), good manners (-14%) and determination (-14%) — far more so than responsibility, hard work and not being selfish. *This flies in the face of religious claims of prosociality which axiomatically includes tolerance, respect and good manners.*

That is, the most religious, Ardents, are at the same time most likely to prioritise conformity and compliance and most likely to sacrifice tolerance and respect of others. This is consistent with potential in-group favouritism and out-group hostility.

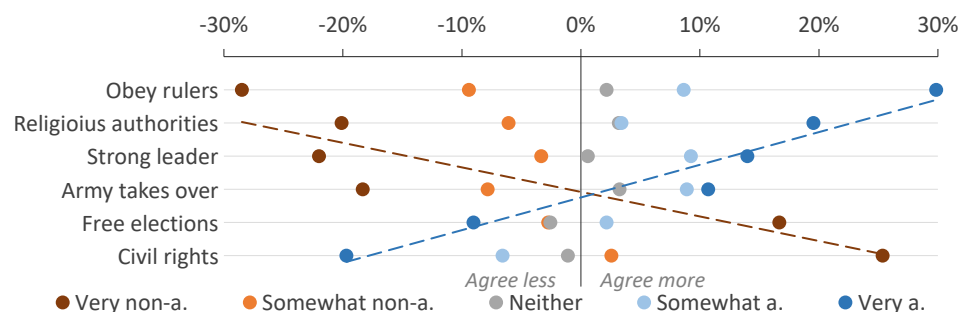
## Authoritarianism

The values to teach children discussed in the previous section — or value-sets like it — also serve as a source for computing a model of authoritarianism (Feldman & Stenner 1997; Hooper 2017). Authoritarianism rejects plurality, favours strong central power to preserve the status quo, and seeks to diminish the rule of law, separation of powers, and democratic voting. Hooper (2020) later argued that the measure really represents inner-directed autonomy versus outer-directed conformity, rather than directly measuring authoritarianism.

However, Hooper's later assessment is not supported at least in Australia because authoritarianism correlates strongly with *externally-directed control and compliance* (Figure 133):

- People should **obey their rulers**
- **Religious authorities** ultimately interpret the law
- Having a **strong leader** who does not have to bother with parliament and elections [is good]
- The **army takes over** when the government is incompetent
- People choose their leaders in **free elections** [disagree]
- **Civil rights** protect people from state oppression [disagree]

**Note:** The authoritarianism segments employed here are derived exclusively from the *teaching values to children* questions. All the democracy questions above are therefore independent variables.

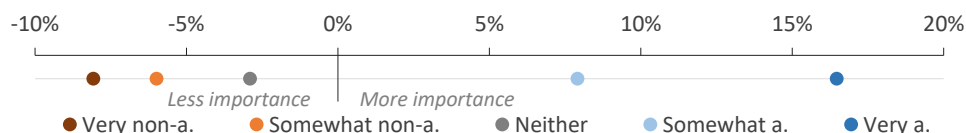


**Figure 133:** Divergence of attitudes toward democratic principles, by authoritarianism (very non-a. to very a.)

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Strong leader has no midpoint so is very good-bad polarisation.

On each domain, Australian authoritarians display significantly greater support for centralised power and lower support for the democratic principles of freedom to vote and freedom from state oppression.

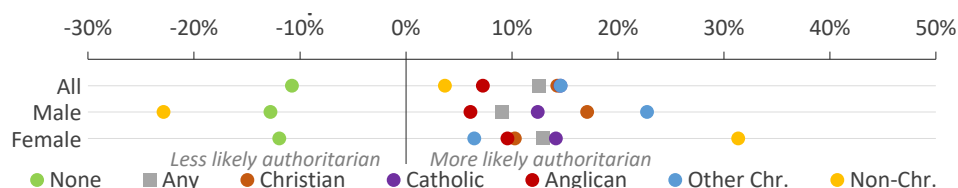
Authoritarians (somewhat and very) are significantly more likely to nominate teaching children religious faith (Figure 134).



**Figure 134:** Divergence of attitudes of the importance of teaching children religious faith, by authoritarianism (very non-a. to very a.)

Source: AVS 2018

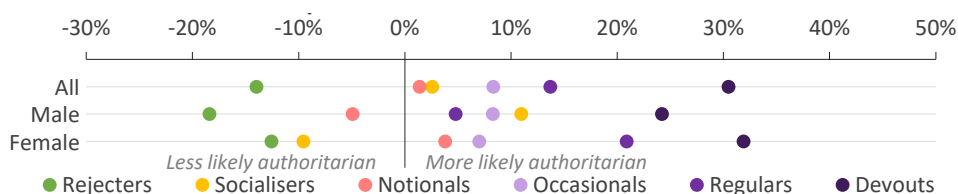
By **religion** (Figure 135), Nones are significantly less likely than the religious — Christian or otherwise — to be authoritarian. There is one exception by gender, however. Amongst NCRs, males are *less* likely, while females are far *more* likely to be authoritarian. These non-Christian religionist females, and minor Christian denomination males, are the most authoritarian.



**Figure 135:** Divergence of authoritarianism, by religion

Source: AVS 2018

By **religiosity** (Figure 136), Rejecters are significantly less likely, and Devouts very significantly the most likely to be authoritarian — across both males and females.



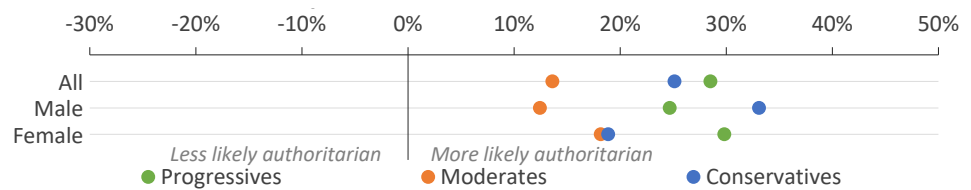
**Figure 136:** Divergence of authoritarianism, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 137), any effects that may have been “hidden” amongst the religion and religiosity dimensions are revealed. Across *all* social segments, and both males and females, the Religious are significantly more likely than their Secular counterparts to be authoritarian. The effects are



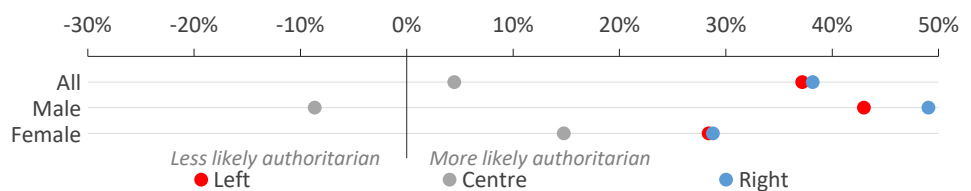
stronger amongst Progressive and Conservatives, and somewhat less amongst Moderates.



**Figure 137:** Religious premium of authoritarianism, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 138), the effects of religion are mixed amongst those in the political Centre. However, amongst those on both the Left and Right, the Religious are *much* more likely than their Secular counterparts to be authoritarian.



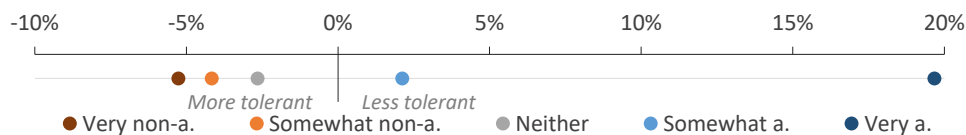
**Figure 138:** Religious premium of authoritarianism, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018

The generally greater association of religion and authoritarianism amongst those of the *political* Left and Right than the *socially* Progressive or Conservative suggests that authoritarianism is associated with stronger political views, and that this effect occurs at both ends of the political spectrum.

### Authoritarianism, poor perspective-taking and hubris

While 12% of Australians say theirs is the only acceptable religion, the attitude is striking high — almost a third (31%) — amongst the very authoritarian, compared with a tiny minority (6%) of those who are very non-authoritarian (Figure 139).



**Figure 139:** Divergence of attitude “the only acceptable religion is mine”, by authoritarianism

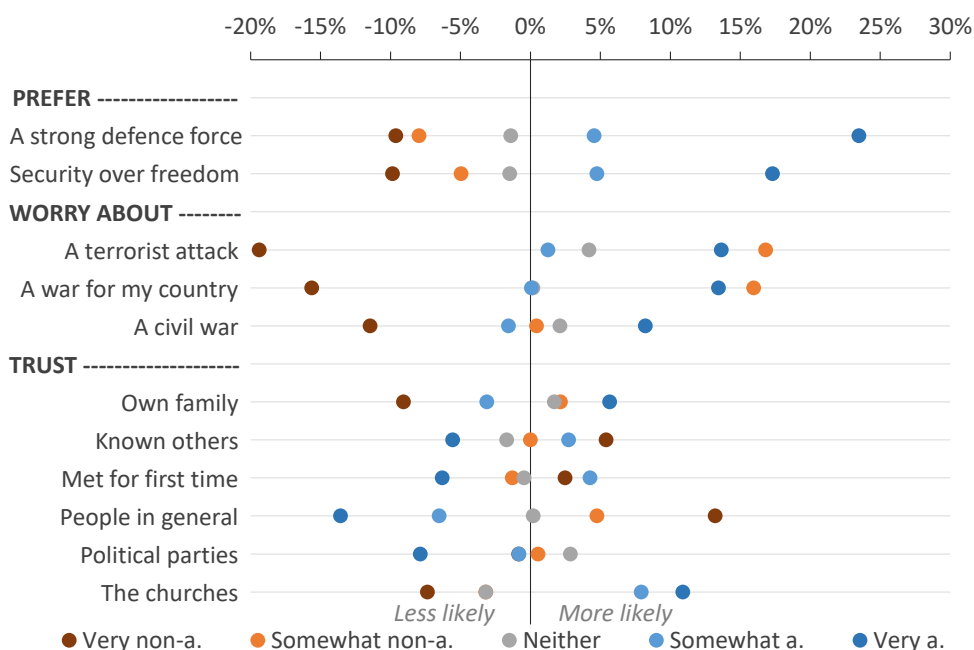
Source: AVS 2018

Thus, the very authoritarian stand out as by far the least likely to take the perspective of other religionists and Nones, and the most likely to demonstrate hubris regarding their own.

### Authoritarianism and perceived dangerous world

There is a relationship between authoritarianism and perceptions of a dangerous world, though it is complex. Rather than a simple direct relationship at the individual level, authoritarian predispositions interact with perceived threat (Feldman & Stenner 1997). The relationship was tested using the Australian Values Study 2018 data, across multiple dimensions (Figure 140):

- *PREFER* a strong defence force as a ten-year goal; security over freedom
- *WORRY ABOUT* a terrorist attack; a war involving my country; a civil war
- Level of *TRUST* in categories of people and in representation



**Figure 140:** Divergence of attitudes by authoritarianism (very non-a. to very a.)

Source: AVS 2018. Note: Trust items had no centre point and are derived from *strong* polarisation.

With the exception of somewhat non-authoritarian Australians being the most likely to worry about a terrorist attack or Australia being drawn into a war, **very authoritarian** Australians are consistently and significantly:

- The *most* likely to prefer a strong defence force and sacrifice freedom for security.
- The *most* likely to worry about a civil war (and second-most likely to worry about a terrorist attack or an overseas war).
- The *most* likely to trust their own family and the churches, and
- The *least* likely to trust known others, people met for the first time, people in general, and political parties.

Authoritarian Australians (somewhat and very) are significantly *less* likely to trust people in general, and *more* likely to trust their own family and the churches.

**Summary:** Attitudes toward teaching children certain values is strongly associated (positively or negatively depending on the value) with authoritarianism. Australia's religionists are significantly more likely than Nones and Rejecters to be authoritarian. Devouts top the list for authoritarianism.

This authoritarianism is associated with lower trust of people in general and of political parties, but higher trust in one's own family and in the churches. It is also associated with higher likelihood of existential worry, prioritising security over freedom, and greater support for a stronger military (defence force).

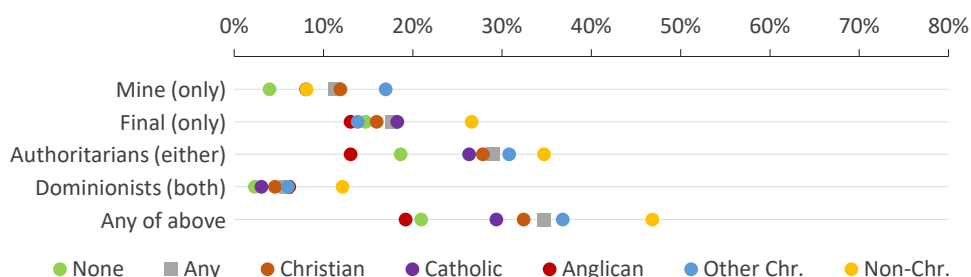
## Dominionism

The Australian Values Survey 2018 asked people about their attitudes toward other religions, and religious supremacy in law:

- The only acceptable religion is mine
- Religious authorities ultimately interpret laws

In this section, *religious* “authoritarians” denote those who agreed with either (but not both) statements, and *religious* “dominionists” as those who agreed with both — that is, theirs is the only acceptable religion *and* that religious authorities (which we may thereby reasonably deduce to be authorities of their *own* religion) ultimately interpret laws. Dominionists in particular represent a significant departure from norms of both religious tolerance and the separation of church and state.

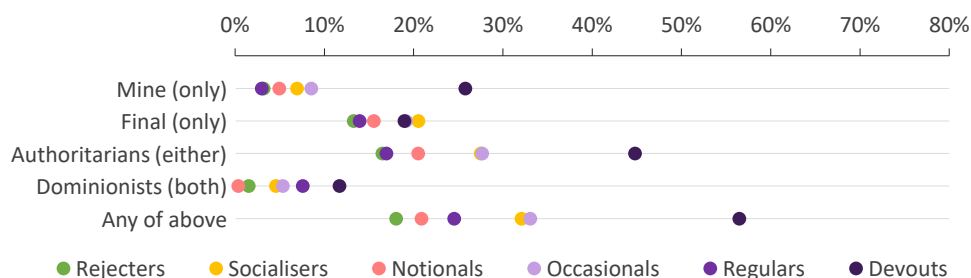
By **religion** (Figure 141), minor Christian denominations are the most likely to think theirs the only acceptable religion (17%), but NCRs the most likely to believe that clerics should be the final arbiters of law (27%) and to be dominionists (12%).



**Figure 141:** Prevalence of religious authoritarianism and dominionism, by religion

Source: AVS 2018

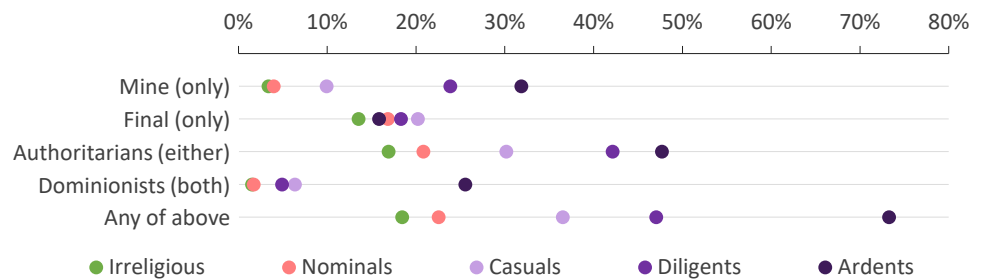
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 142), Devouts are the most likely to be authoritarians (45%) or dominionists (12%).



**Figure 142:** Religious authoritarianism and dominionism by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018

By **RI5 religiosity** (Figure 143), which weights segments by *personal importance* of religion, Ardents are outstandingly the most likely to be authoritarians (48%) and dominionists (26%).



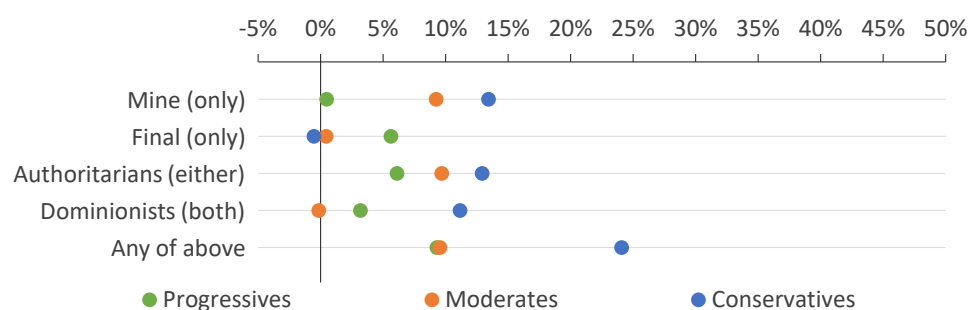
**Figure 143:** Religious authoritarianism and dominionism by RSI5 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018

The very substantially higher dominionism score for RI5 (26%) versus RI6 (12%) suggests that personal importance of religion is strongly associated with a desire to impose one's religious values on others. This too is consistent with diminished perspective-taking amongst the very religious.

Understandably, significant religious premiums are expected for such questions about religion, so it is no surprise that the premiums fall on the positive (more authoritarian) side of the scale. The insights, however, are *where* these premiums are greatest.

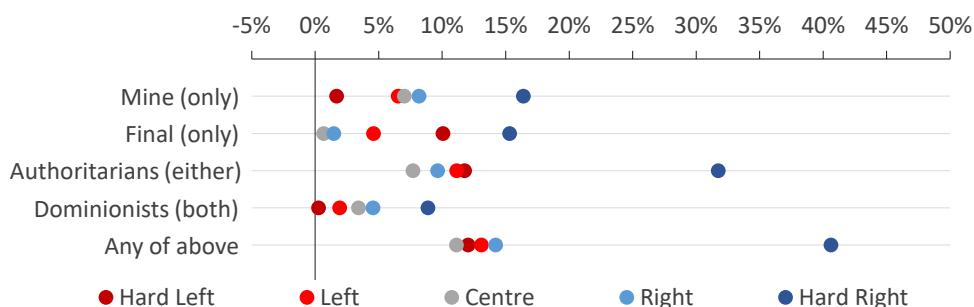
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 144), effects among Religious Conservatives are strongest.



**Figure 144:** Religious authoritarianism and dominionism by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018

By **RPI10 religio-political identity**, (Figure 145), authoritarianism and dominionism effects are significantly higher amongst the Hard Right, with lesser and mixed effects amongst the Hard Left, Left, Centre and Right. Significantly, while authoritarianism features on the Left as much as the (near) Right, dominionism hardly features on the Left, but is significant on the Right.



**Figure 145:** Religious authoritarianism and dominionism by RPI10 religio-political identity  
Source: AVS 2018

### Dominionists in raw numbers of people

According to the national statistician, Australia's adult population (18+) at the 2021 census was close to 19.9 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023, Data summary Table 3). Given that 3.9% of AVS 2018 respondents indicated they are religious dominionists, that equates to around 770,000 adults. That is, more than three-quarters of a million adult Australians believe not only that theirs is the only acceptable religion, but that (their religious) clerics should be the final arbiters of law.

Also given that 24% of AVS 2018 respondents also indicated that they *either* believe theirs to be the only acceptable religion, *or* that clerics ought to be the final arbiters of law, this equates to a further 4.7 million adults who are intolerant toward other religions or the separation of church and state.

Shockingly for Australia's secular democracy, more than three-quarters of a million (770,000) of its adults are religious dominionists: that is, believe theirs to be the only acceptable religion and that religious authorities ought to be final arbiters of law. A further 4.7 million are intolerant of *either* other religions *or* separation of church and state. This is, nevertheless, a minority: 72% of adult Australians are tolerant of other religions and do not support clerical supremacy in law.

**Summary:** Dominionism — strong intolerance of other religions, and support for one's own religious authorities prevailing over the nation's laws — is highest amongst NCRs, and the most religious, Devouts and Ardents. On the social spectrum it features most strongly amongst Conservatives, and on the political spectrum the Hard Right (but not the Hard Left).

**Of concern to Australia's secular democracy, more than three-quarters of a million adults (approximately 770,000) are religious dominionists.** Dominionism is consistent with previous evidence of a lower likelihood for perspective-taking amongst the deeply religious about the views of others.

## Compliance and conformity

A range of compliance-oriented attitudes amongst Australia's religious have been found in preceding topics in this report. The Australian Election Studies provide further raw empirical data to test attitudes regarding compliance and conformity, including a range of attitudes regarding children, different others, and societal standards more generally (Table 10).

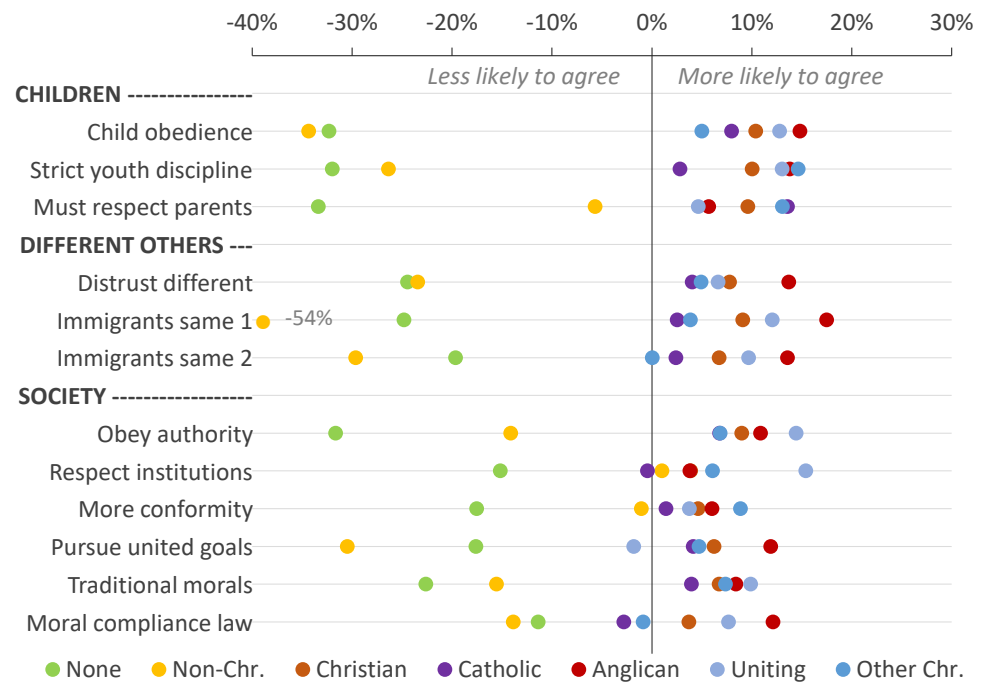
**Table 10:** Attitudes about compliance and conformity

Figure row title	Meaning
CHILDREN	
<i>Child obedience</i>	Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn
<i>Strict youth discipline</i>	What young people need is strict discipline and the will to work for family and country
<i>Must respect parents</i>	There is hardly anything lower than a person who does not feel a great love and respect for his or her parents
DIFFERENT OTHERS	
<i>Distrust different</i>	I distrust people who try to be different from the rest of us
<i>Immigrants same 1</i>	People who come to live in Australia should try harder to be more like other Australians
<i>Immigrants same 2</i>	It is more important for new migrants to learn what it is to be Australian than to cling to their old ways
SOCIETY	
<i>Obey authority~</i>	Importance of strengthening respect and obedience for authority
<i>Respect institutions~</i>	Too little emphasis on respect for: + Established institutions - The rights of the individual
<i>More conformity~</i>	In our society today, too much emphasis is placed on: +Freedom -Conformity
<i>Pursue united goals~</i>	Australian society should be united in pursuing united rather than independent goals
<i>Traditional morals~</i>	Importance of preserving traditional ideas of right and wrong
<i>Moral compliance law~</i>	Our laws should aim to: + Enforce the community's standards of right and wrong - Protect a citizen's right to live by any moral standards he or she chooses

Sources: AES 2004; ~ AES 2001

By **religion**, Australia's Christians are overall very substantially more likely than either Nones or NCRs to favour compliance and conformity regarding children, different others, and the public at large (Figure 146).

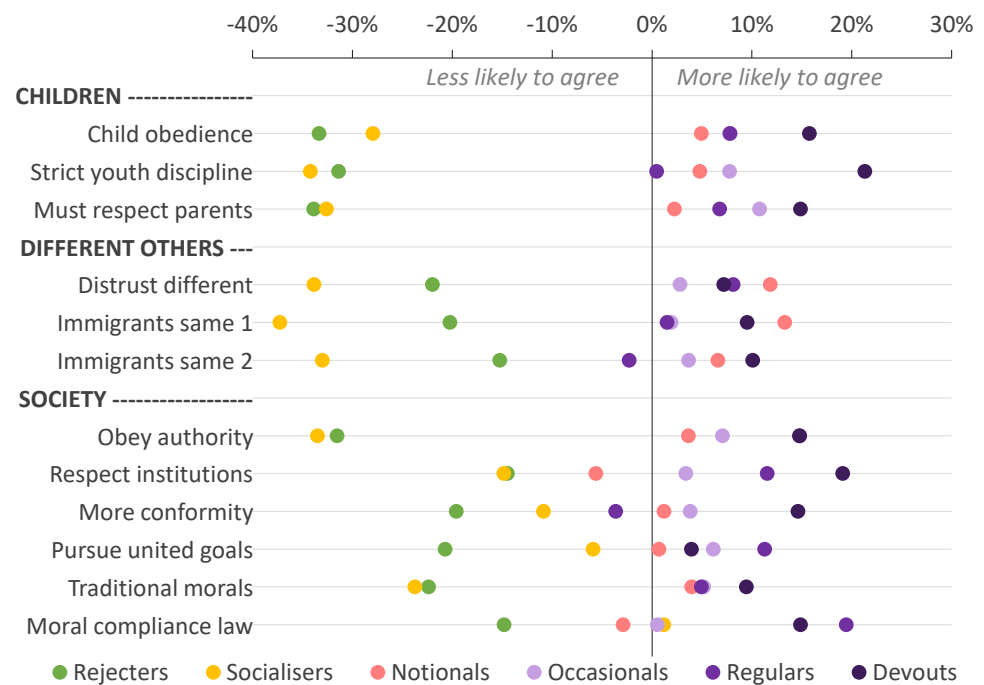




**Figure 146:** Divergence of attitudes toward compliance and conformity, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 10

Only in one domain did NCRs hold a similar rate of attitude as Christians: respect for institutions.

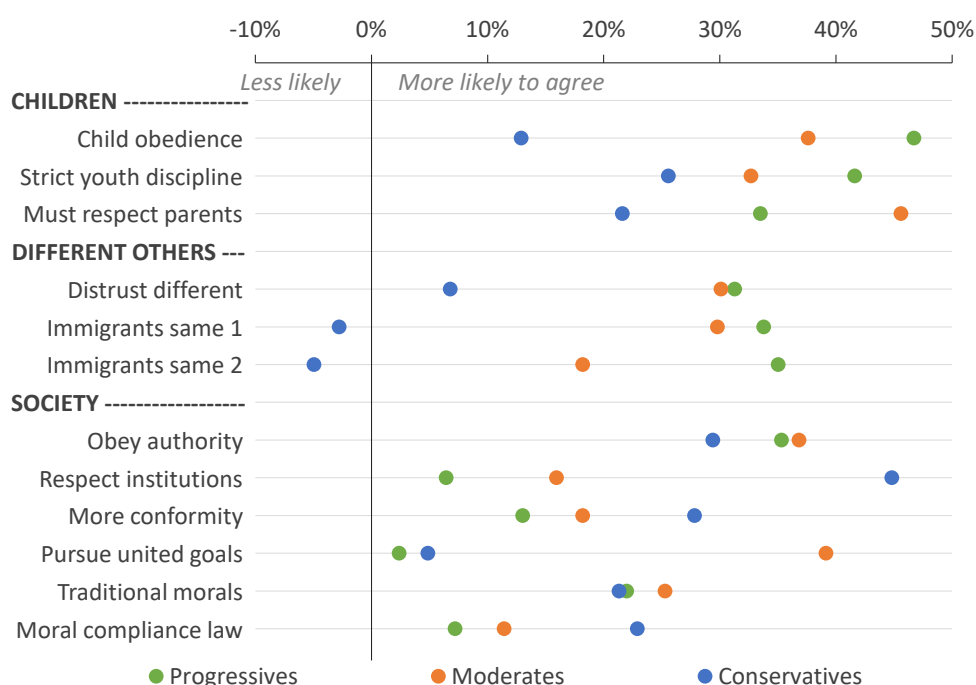


**Figure 147:** Divergence of attitudes toward compliance and conformity, by RI6 religiosity

Sources: As described in Table 10

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 147), there is a clear distinction between those who have no religious affiliation (Nones and Socialisers), and those who do (Notionals, Occasionals, Regulars and Devouts). The religiously unaffiliated are vastly less likely, and the religiously affiliated vastly more likely, to favour compliance and conformity amongst children, different others, and society at large.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 148), major religious premiums in favour of compliance and conformity occur across the social spectrum. Two exceptions are worth noting. Firstly, there is no significant religious premium amongst Conservatives regarding immigrants becoming more like (existing) Australians. This is not because Religious Conservatives are less likely to agree, but that Secular Conservatives are *more* likely to agree.



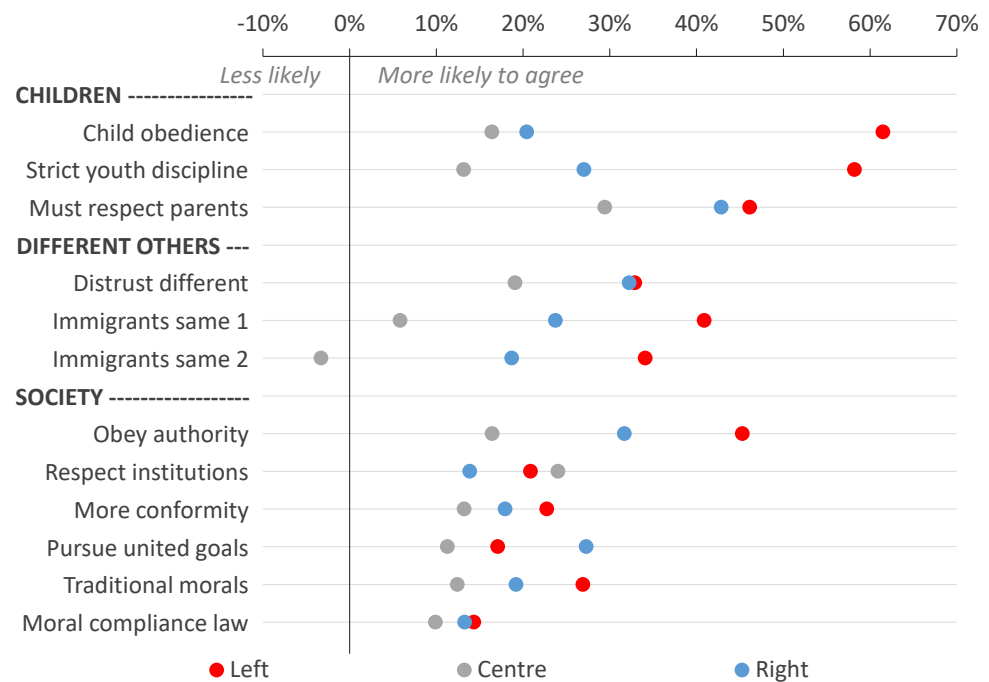
**Figure 148:** Religious premium of attitudes toward compliance and conformity, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources: As described in Table 10

Secondly, there is no significant religious premium amongst either Progressives or Conservatives in regard to pursuing united versus individualistic goals, but there is a major religious premium amongst Moderates. This is hardly surprising as Moderates are more likely to hold centrist views and be more likely to take perspectives from those different on either side, than those at one or other end of the social spectrum.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 149), like RSI6, there are similar and even stronger religious premiums favouring compliance and conformity regarding children, different others, and the public at large. The religious

premium effects are particularly strong amongst the Left, especially in relation to children's obedience, discipline, and respect for parents.



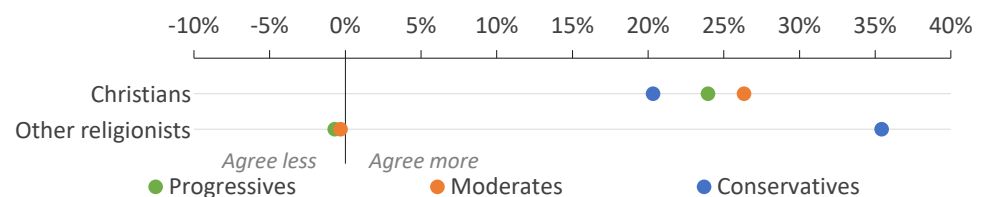
**Figure 149:** Religious premium of attitudes toward compliance and conformity, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 10

The only domain in which there is no statistically significant religious premium is amongst the Centre on the matter of saying immigrants should be more like existing Australians.

### Christians versus other religionists on “traditional morals”

There is a significant distinction between Christians and other religionists on the matter of preserving “traditional morals” (Figure 150). While Christians across the social spectrum demonstrate a significant religious premium in favouring “traditional morals”, amongst other religionists there is only a premium (and a significantly larger one) amongst Conservatives. There is no religious premium at all amongst Progressives and Moderates.



**Figure 150:** Religious premium important to preserve traditional morals, by religion and RSI6 religio-social identity

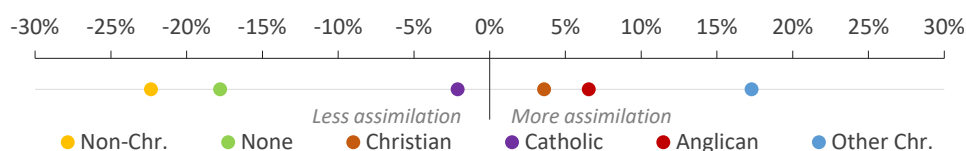
Source: AES 2001

A detailed discussion of the meaning of “traditional morals”, and to what degree its foundations are cultural and/or religious, is beyond the scope of this report (and confirmatory analysis from existing empirical data sets). However, a potential explanation for the Christian/other religions’ difference lies in *normativity*. As a normative majority (at the time of data collection), Christians across the social spectrum may believe that maintaining familiar norms is more natural.

Other religionists, however, are *non-normative*. Progressives and Moderates amongst them may have no greater or lesser desire than their Secular counterparts to preserve traditional *Australian/Christian* moral norms. Religious Conservatives, however, may be more likely to reference *their own* “traditional morals” as the pivot point, and seek to defend them in the face of a different “moral majority”.

### **You change (we’re not going to)**

Another insight is derived from analysing attitudes amongst those who say “strong changes usually make things worse”: that is, people who see major change as quite risky and therefore are most likely to avoid it. While being the most likely to resist making changes *themselves*, their attitudes toward immigrants becoming more like other (i.e. existing) Australians (assimilation) provides a measure of how much they expect *others* to change to accommodate norms (Figure 151).



**Figure 151: Polarisation in expectation of migrant assimilation, by religion**

Source: AES 2004. Base: Those who say strong changes usually make things worse. Results weighted by proportion of immigrants in each segment.

Amongst those *most likely to resist change themselves*, Christians are considerably more likely than either Nones or non-Christians to expect migrants to assimilate into, rather than integrate with, Australian society.

### **Like those who came before, those who come after**

In Part 4 of this series, *Religion and Charity* (Francis 2023), analysis revealed that it is Australia’s Christians who are *least* likely to say that recognising First Nations aspirations is important, and the *most* likely to say that both government help and land rights for First Nations people have gone too far. They are also the most likely to say First Nations land rights are *unfair* to other Australians (i.e. referring to land that First Nations were custodians of before the arrival of Europeans).

Conservative Christians argue that Australia's heritage *is* Christian (e.g. Stringer 2013).<sup>39</sup> But Christians, having dominated and displaced (not to mention worse) those who were already here, are now more likely (than Nones and non-Christians) to say that those displaced are less deserving of recognition and assistance. In the present analysis they are also much more likely to say that those arriving now should accommodate themselves to Australian culture while Christians are less willing to make any accommodation, to "protect our way of life", as well as support a reduction in immigrant numbers.

**White picket fence:** This is no slight point. Australia's Christians are *both* least likely to accommodate those who came before (First Nations people) *and* those who come after (recent migrants). This smacks not merely of compliance and conformity, but elevated levels of self-interest, coercion and control. These findings show that Australian Christians at large are likely to hold values at odds with the claimed virtues of Christianity. If a key tenet is "love thy neighbour", the neighbourhood is sorely atrophied. Those on the other side of Christianity's white picket fence may well experience a poor reception if they dare open the gate.

**Summary:** Australia's Christians and those affiliated with a religion are very significantly more likely than others to favour compliance and conformity amongst children, different others, and society in general. Differences are stark. Religious premiums in favour of compliance and conformity occur largely, with a few exceptions, across the social and political spectrum.

Australia's Christians are significantly more likely than Nones and non-Christians to expect *both* those who came before (First Nations people) *and* those who come after (new migrants) — rather than themselves — to do the conforming and complying, revealing a greater tendency toward self-interest, coercion and control.

<sup>39</sup> This despite the nation's Western history spanning just 235 years (since 1788), while First Nations culture spans some 60,000 years or more.

## Obligations: Positive duties toward in-groups

As discussed earlier in this report, religionists are more likely than non-religionists to appeal to deontological reasoning — a focus on rules-based inputs rather than outcomes. Several questions in Australian university data sets allow us to assess the degree of deontological reasoning via perceived positive duties toward in-groups (Table 11).

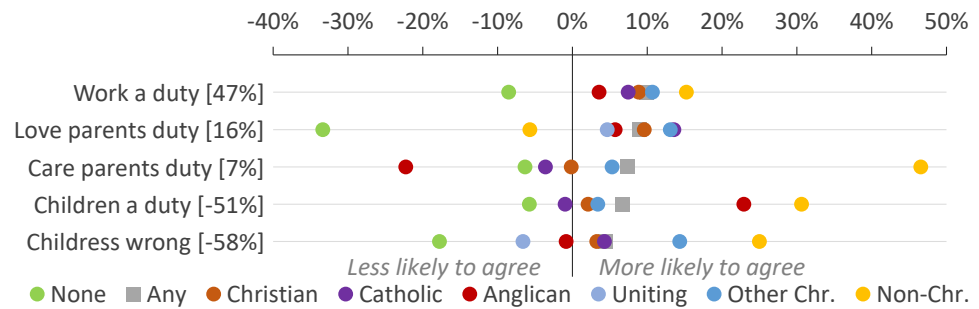
**Table 11:** Positive duties toward in-groups

Figure row title	Meaning (question)
<i>Work a duty</i>	Work is a duty towards society
<i>Love parents a duty#</i>	There is hardly anything lower than a person who does not feel a great love and respect for his or her parents
<i>Care parents duty</i>	Adult children have the duty to provide long-term care for their parents
<i>Children a duty</i>	It is a duty towards society to have children
<i>Childless wrong~</i>	There is something wrong with a woman who doesn't want to have children

Source: AVS 2018; # AES 2004; ~ AES 2001

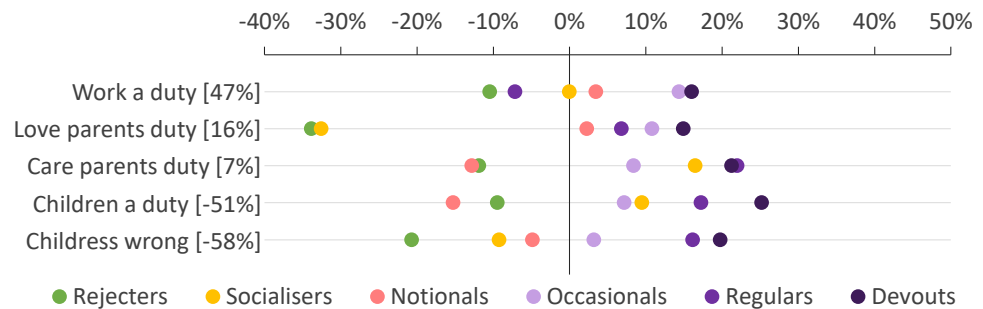
**A note about the duty to love parents:** The duties to have children and to care for elderly parents involve intergenerational continuity regardless of whether one likes the other generation or not. The duty to greatly love and respect parents, however, is a demand devoid of any obligation on the parents to be worthy of — to *earn* — such generous positive validation.

By **religion** (Figure 152), with one exception (Anglicans caring for parents), Nones are consistently less likely than the religious to feel obligation to support one's in-group. Except for an obligation to love their parents, NCRs are the most likely to feel such obligations, with Christians mostly in the middle, except for higher "demand" for children to love and respect their parents. This suggests significant cultural effects.



**Figure 152:** Divergence of attitudes toward in-group obligations, by religion  
Sources as described in Table 11. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

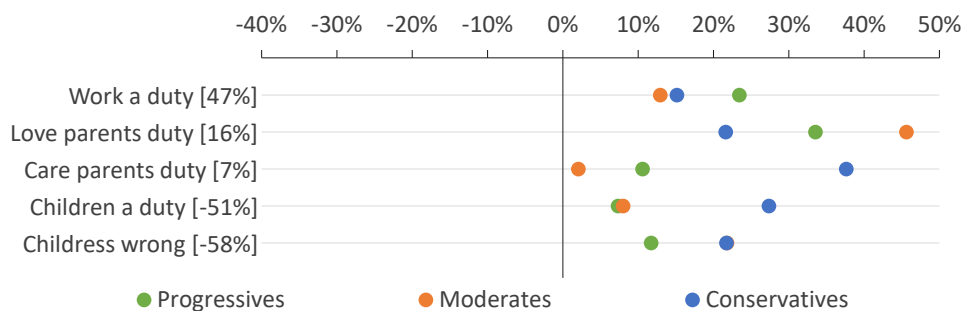
By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 153), Notionals and Rejecters are significantly less likely to support intergenerational obligations: to have children and to care for elderly parents. Both Rejecters and Socialisers are very significantly less likely to demand that children love and respect their parents.



**Figure 153:** Divergence of attitudes toward in-group obligations, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources as described in Table 11. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

Australia's most religious, Devouts, are consistently and significantly more likely to support all the measured duties. The relationships between religion and deontological decision-making, are complex (Reynolds 2018). Nevertheless, this Australian data suggests that deontology predominates amongst the nation's most religious.

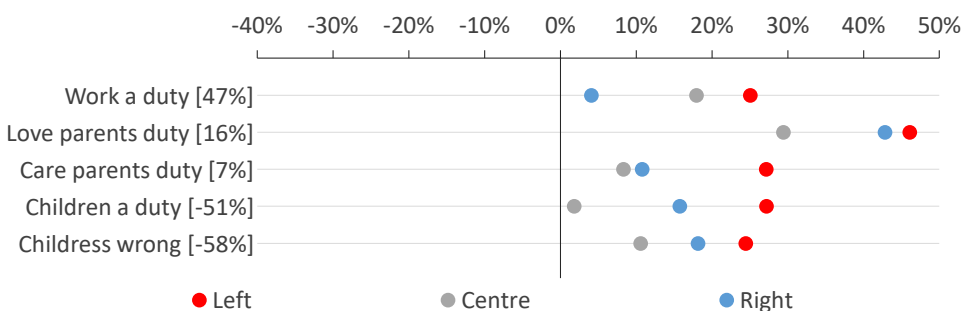
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 154), there are significant religious premiums in favour of obligations across the duties and social spectrum. The strongest premium on the Left and Centre is the duty to greatly love and respect one's parents, while on the Right it's intergenerational duties to have children and look after parents.



**Figure 154:** Religious premium of attitudes toward in-group obligations, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources as described in Table 11. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 155), religious premiums occur across the duties and political spectrum, too, with the strongest effects consistently occurring amongst the Left.



**Figure 155:** Religious premium of attitudes toward in-group obligations, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources as described in Table 11. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

The strongest premiums across the political spectrum are for the duty to greatly love and respect one's parents.

The significant religious premiums across the social and political spectrums regarding a duty to greatly love and respect one's parents are consistent with the Purity foundation — that is, assuming parents to be worthy — while the other obligations relate more to the Care foundation. All relate to the Loyalty foundation.



**Summary:** Australia's religious, and particularly Devouts, are significantly more likely than Nones to endorse deontological rules that comprise positive duties toward in-group members. Coupled with their greater hostility to various out-groups as discussed in earlier sections of this report, this is additional evidence of Australian religionists' greater polarisation: in-group favouritism alongside out-group hostility.

Nevertheless, these positive in-group duties are consistent with religio-social evolutionary theory as to why religion is so prevalent.

## Competition and endeavour

Another domain in which the values of Nones and religionists may be compared is the nature of competition and endeavour: the economic environment and the meaning and significance of work (Table 12).

**Table 12:** Attitudes about competition and endeavour

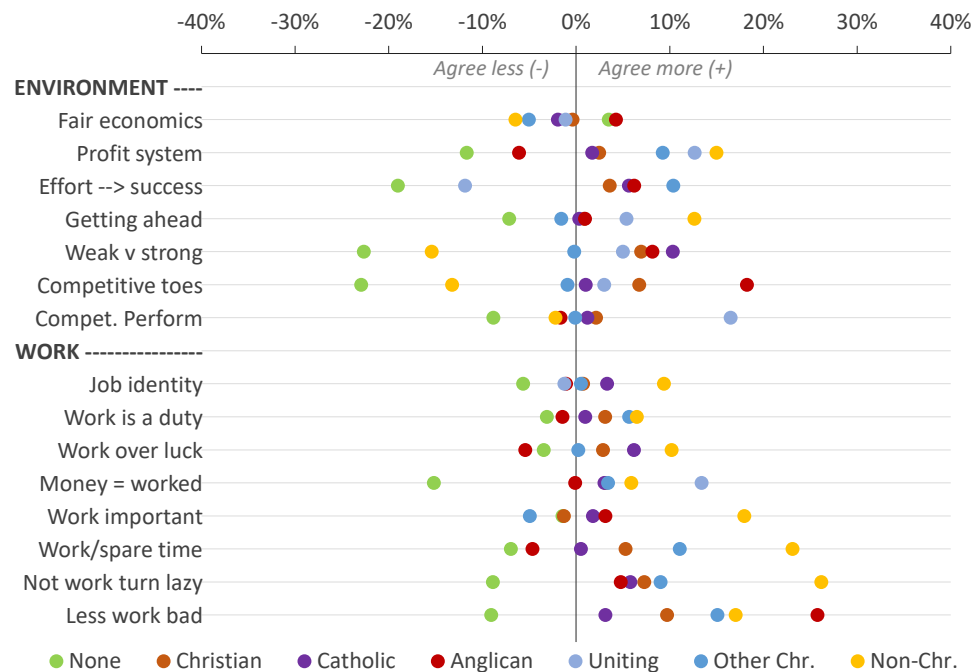
Figure row title	Meaning
ENVIRONMENT	
<i>Fair economics#</i>	In a fair economic system... + People with more ability should earn higher salaries – All people should earn about the same
<i>Profit system#</i>	The profit system... + Usually teaches people the value of hard work and personal achievement – Often brings out the worst in human nature
<i>Effort → success</i>	In Australian society, anyone who is prepared to make the effort can succeed†
<i>Getting ahead#</i>	Getting ahead in the world is mostly a matter of... + Ability and hard work – Getting the breaks
<i>Weak versus strong^</i>	People can be divided into two distinct groups: the weak and the strong
<i>Competitive toes~</i>	It is having to compete with others that keeps a person on their toes
<i>Compet. perform#</i>	Competition, whether in school, work or business... + Leads to better performance and desire for excellence – Is often wasteful and destructive
WORK	
<i>Job identity#</i>	How important is your job to how you see yourself?
<i>Work is a duty*</i>	Work is a duty towards society
<i>Work over luck*</i>	Success/better life comes from... + Hard work – Luck and connections
<i>Money = worked#</i>	People who have made a lot of money... + Are proof of what you get if you are willing to work and take advantage of the opportunities all of us have – Usually have done so at the expense of other people
<i>Work important*</i>	How important is work in your life?
<i>Work/spare time*</i>	Work should always come first, even if it means less spare time
<i>Not work turn lazy*</i>	People who don't work turn lazy
<i>Less work bad*</i>	Less importance placed on work in our lives (is bad)

Sources: \* AVS 2018; ^ AES 2004; ~ AES 2001; # AES 1998; AES 1996. † The AES 1996 study data set did not reliably separate NCRs from minor Christian denominations, so a separate measure of Non-Chr. is not available.

Indices of cultural and economic strength and stability help explain nation-level attitudes toward work (Klonoski & Baldwin 2011). Religious culture contributions to the meaning of life may also substantially influence attitudes

toward economics (Wijngaards & Sent 2012). Across nations, religious beliefs tend to favour economic growth and higher income, yet more racism and misogyny (Guiso, Sapienza & Zingales 2003).

In Australia, by **religion** (Figure 156), overall NCRs have the most positive attitudes toward work. They are most likely to believe that the profit system teaches people the value of hard work and its importance to “getting ahead”, see work as important (including to their sense of identity), that work is a duty to society, contributes more than luck to achievement, and that people who don’t work turn lazy. They are less likely to see work as a form of “competition” though: they are more likely to say that everyone should earn about the same, and disagree that it’s a competition between the weak and the strong or that it’s relevant to keeping one on one’s toes.



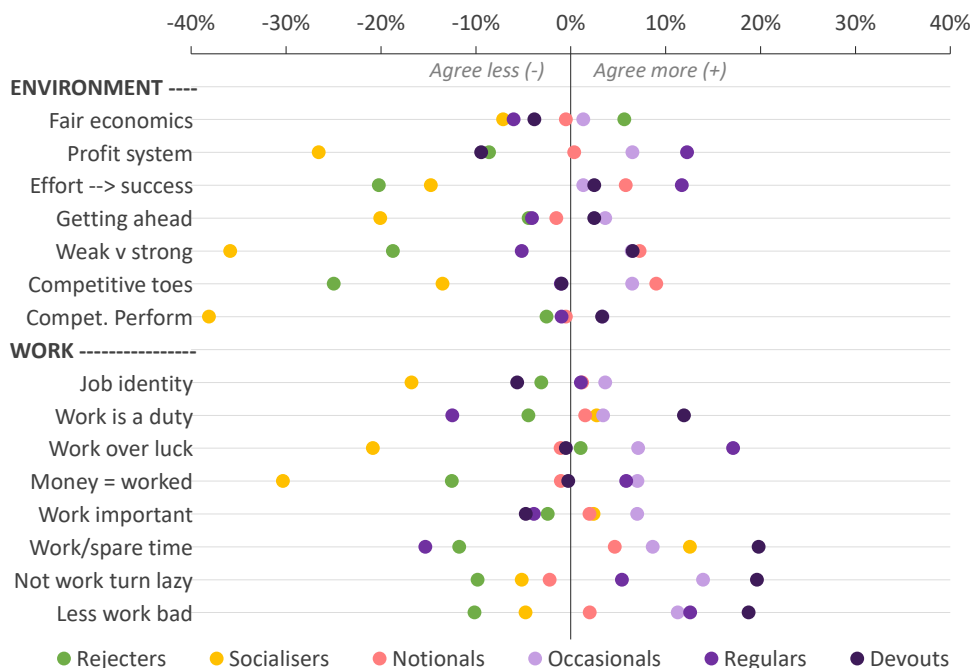
**Figure 156:** Divergence in attitudes toward competition, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 12

Conversely, Nones are the least likely to hold positive attitudes toward work. They are less likely to believe that personal effort necessarily leads to success, and is more likely to arise from luck than hard work. They are the least likely to see economics as a competition between the weak and strong, to value being on one’s “competitive toes”, prioritise work over spare time, say that work is an important part of their identity, or believe that people who don’t work turn lazy. Consistent with prioritising the Care and Fairness moral foundations, they are the most likely to say that the profit system brings out the worst in people, competition can be wasteful and destructive, and that greater wealth is a sign of taking advantage of others.

Christians fall midway between these two views, with the important exception that they are significantly more likely to view the economy as a competition to keep one on one's toes — *a battle between the weak versus the strong*.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 157), Socialisers hold the least favourable attitudes toward economic competition and work, particularly in aspects of the weak versus the strong, taking advantage of others, and bringing out the worst in people.



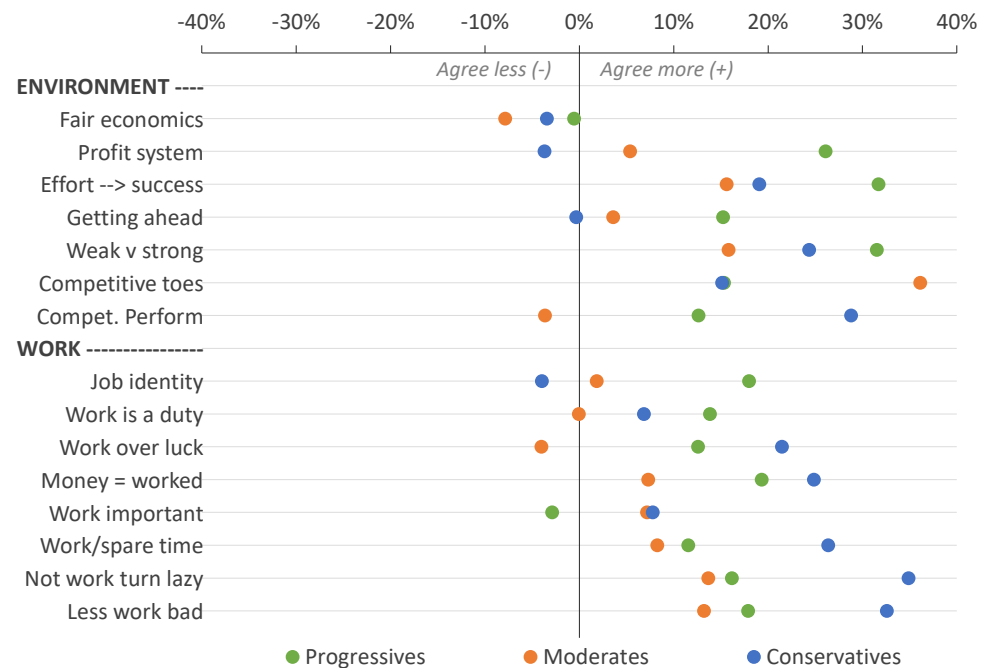
**Figure 157:** Divergence in attitudes toward competition, by RI6 religiosity

Sources: As described in Table 12

The religious are more likely to see competition as a struggle between the weak and the strong, and wealth as a sign of having worked hard regarding opportunities.

Devouts, despite being less likely to say work is important to their identity, are the *most* likely to say work is a duty to society, prioritise work over spare time, say that people who don't work turn lazy, and that decreased importance of work in our lives would be bad. This too is consistent with a deontological approach to work.

Across the **social identity spectrum (RSI6)** (Figure 158), different patterns emerge. Despite relatively small difference in attitudes toward fair economics and the importance of work between Religious and Secular Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives, strong relationships are evident.



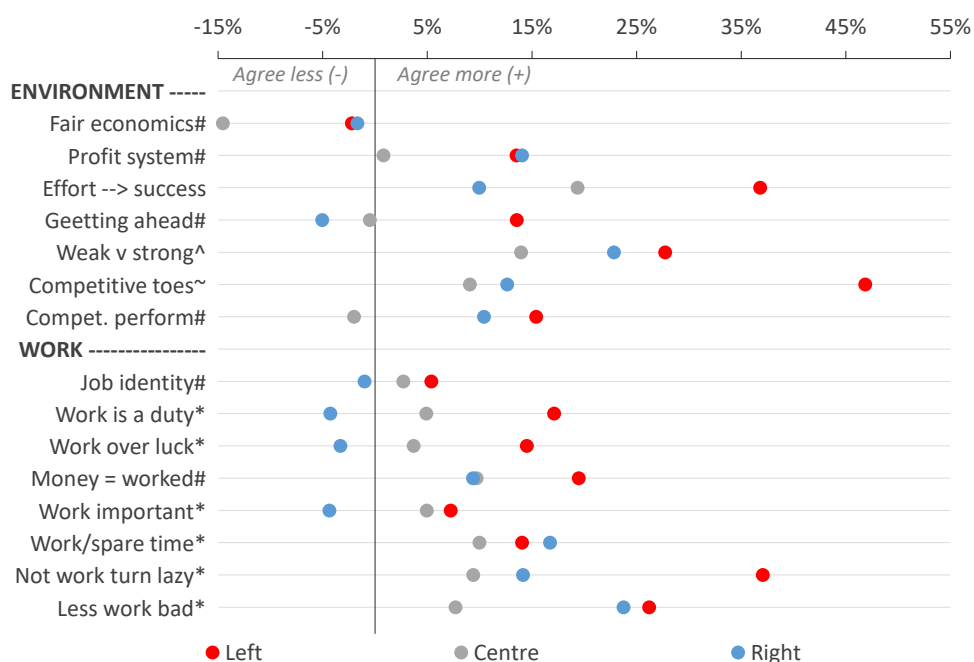
**Figure 158:** Religious premium in attitudes toward competition, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources: As described in Table 12

With several exceptions, across the social spectrum the Religious hold significantly more positive attitudes than their Secular counterparts toward competitive economics, personal financial success, and commitment to personal endeavour. They are significantly less likely to perceive negative effects of work such as bringing out the worst in people, taking advantage of others, or competition sometimes being wasteful and destructive, evidencing a 'lighter touch' in the Care moral foundation.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 159), the strongest effects of Religion towards positive economic competition and work occur amongst the Left. The Religious Left are strikingly more likely than their Secular counterparts to say competition keeps them on their toes, that people who don't work turn lazy, and that anyone making an effort can succeed.

Nevertheless, the Religious on the Left *and* the Right (but not the Centre) are similarly likely to see competition as a struggle between the weak and the strong with competition of all kinds leading to better performance and a desire for excellence, to value personal achievement, and to believe that diminished importance of work in our lives would be bad.



**Figure 04:** Religious premium in attitudes toward competition, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 12

**Summary:** Australia's NCRs hold on average the most positive attitudes toward work and personal success, though they are more likely to value personal endeavour and achievement rather than competition by the strong against the weak. Christians are most likely to see work as a competition between the weak and the strong, a duty to prioritise and defend even if it's not important to identity. Consistent with a stronger Care moral foundation, Nones are the most likely to hold negative associations with work and competition, believing they bring out the worst in people and can be wasteful and destructive.

A religious premium of positive attitudes toward a competitive economy, work *necessarily* leading to success, and wealth as a sign of having taken advantage of opportunities (rather than people), occurs largely across the social and political spectrum.

**Note:** Obvious confounding factors like current work status were investigated and found to contribute little.

## Punishment and forgiveness

Christianity in particular claims forgiveness as a central tenet. This, and its opposite corollary, condemnation and punishment, can be tested at least in the domain of breaking the law, via the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes and the Australian Election Study data (Table 13).

**Table 13:** Attitudes toward punishment and forgiveness

Figure row title	Meaning
<i>Guilty free worse</i>	All systems of justice make mistakes, but which do you think is worse: – convict an innocent person + let a guilty person go free
<i>Indefinite detention</i>	Should the authorities have the right to detain people who are suspected of planning a terrorist act for as long as they want without putting them on trial?
<i>Always obey law</i>	In general, would you say that people should obey the law without exception, or are there exceptional occasions on which people should follow their consciences even if it means breaking the law?
<i>Stiffer sentences*</i>	People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences

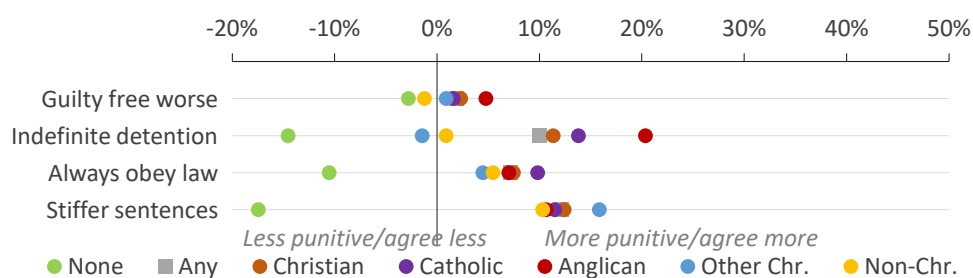
Sources: AuSSA 2016; \* AES 2019

### A note regarding stiffer sentences

Attitudes toward “stiffer sentences” don’t reflect a quantitative dis/satisfaction with the severity of sentences currently handed down by courts. Indeed, most Australians would be generally unfamiliar with either the specific range of sentences or the median sentence given for particular crimes. In fact, when public individuals are given the sentence ranges along with details of a particular case, they are more likely than the case’s judge to choose a more *lenient* sentence (Sentencing Advisory Council [Victoria] 2018). Nor does harsher sentencing serve as a practical deterrent (Doob & Webster 2003).

Rather, Australians’ preference for “stiffer sentences” is associated with perceptions of rising crime rates and a belief that government and the courts fail to protect the public and “preserve our way of life” (Brookman & Wiener 2017).

By **religion** (Figure 160), Nones appear less likely, and Christians more likely, to say letting the guilty go free is worse than convicting the innocent — but the differences are not statistically significant. Australia's religious, however, are significantly more likely than Nones to support indefinite detention without trial, always obeying the law (even when it conflicts with one's conscience), and stiffer sentencing.

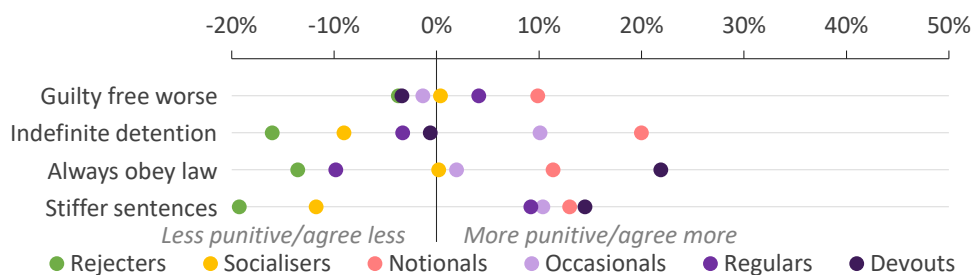


**Figure 160:** Divergence in attitudes toward guilt and punishment, by religion  
Sources: As described in Table 12

**Indefinite detention** of a person merely *suspected* of terrorist intentions (not convicted for terrorist acts or actual preparation), and without the robust test of a trial, is problematic regarding the democratic principle of freedom from state oppression.

That is, Australia's religious are *less* forgiving of rule-violators, and *more* willing to waive democratic principles to protect themselves from perceived but untested potential harm. The data suggests an elevated level of punitive attitudes amongst the religious, since their support for stiffer sentencing is even more polarised than their support for always following the law.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 161), Notionals, who have overall the strongest reactions to perceptions of threat (see p 47), are consistently more likely to hold punitive attitudes. Rejecters are consistently the least likely.



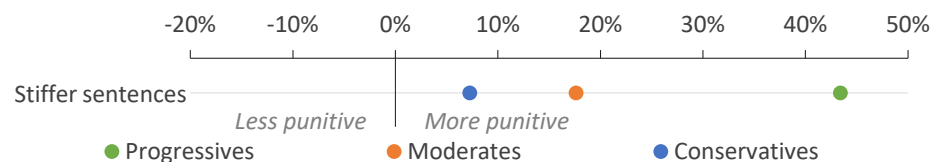
**Figure 161:** Divergence in attitudes toward transgression, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources: As described in Table 12



While Devouts are average in their attitudes toward letting the guilty go free and toward indefinite detention, they top the list in support for always obeying the law despite one's conscience, and in stiffer sentences.

In the domain of always obeying the law, the second-most religious, Regulars, are significantly *less* likely to ignore their conscience, while the most religious, Devouts, indicate they are *most* likely to ignore their conscience. This suggests that the psychographic profile of those who attend religious services once or twice a month (Regulars) is substantially different from those who attend every week or more often (Devouts). Another potential explanation is that Devouts are most likely to believe the law is *consistent* with their conscience.

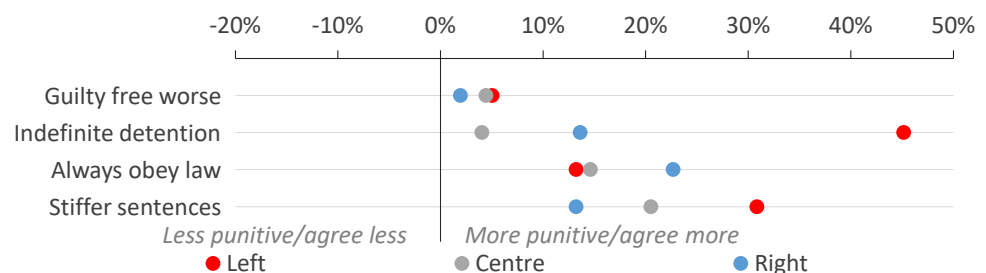
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 162, and which cannot be calculated from AuSSA 2016 data), there is a clear religious premium in favour of more punitive sentencing across the social spectrum. By far the strongest religious premium effect occurs amongst Progressives.



**Figure 162:** Religious premium in attitudes toward stiffer sentencing, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources: As described in Table 12. Note: RSI6 cannot be calculated from AuSSA 2016 data, so those questions are not shown.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 163), the religious premium of letting the guilty go free is significant on the Left and Centre, but not the Right.



**Figure 163:** Religious premium in attitudes toward transgression, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 12

The lack of religious premium on the Right is due to the elevated level of punitive attitude amongst *both* the Secular Right and the Religious Right.

While the religious premium for always obeying the law is smallest on the Left, the Religious Left are vastly more likely than their Secular counterparts to support indefinite detention and stiffer sentencing. That is, the nett harsh effect of religion appears to occur most strongly amongst those on the political Left.

**Summary:** Australia's religious harbour significantly more punitive attitudes than Nones toward real or merely suspected violators of the law. The contention of religion, particularly Christianity's central tenet of forgiveness widely promoted by clerics, is contradicted by the actual attitudes of the religious Australian public.



Did you hear about  
that guy with smallpox?  
Neither did I.  
#ThankScience

giftsbyvip.com

## Science

Attitudes toward faith and science are not necessarily mutually exclusive, though there are some significant associations. Science can variously erode and promote belief in God (Johnson et al. 2019). Erosion occurs through the employment of logic: analytical thinking, use of empirical data and structured tests. Promotion occurs through awe about what science has discovered, and awe correlates with feelings of self-transcendence and with belief in mystical deities. Amongst theists, awe is associated with less belief in the explanatory power of science (Valdesolo, Park & Gottlieb 2016).

Amongst both the religious and non-religious, scientific (versus religious) “why” questions are seen as requiring stronger explanation, and are less satisfied by appeals to mystery (Liquin, Metz & Lombrozo 2020). This is associated with epistemic concerns (attitudes toward knowledge itself), for example whether an explanation is universally true or whether an explanation is within human comprehension. It is also associated with the norm of whether an explanation is necessary, leading to significant differences in attitudes toward science and religion questions.

According to one study, while religiosity correlates with reduced confidence in science, it doesn’t correlate with interest in or knowledge about science (Johnson, Scheitle & Ecklund 2015), but rather with theological (intrinsic) or organisational (extrinsic) beliefs. At least in the USA, Christian nationalism — a desire for Christian symbols, values and policies to be given exclusive priority in national identity — is associated with more negative attitudes toward science (Baker, Perry & Whitehead 2020). This is driven by adherents feeling threatened by science challenging the supremacy of literalist biblical authority and moral order.

These findings can be further complicated by other variables. For example, Western religionists (notably Christian) tend to be more anti-science, but Eastern religionists tend to be more pro-science (Clobert & Saroglou 2015). Christians also tend to rate atheist scientists as less trustworthy than scientists of any religion (Beauchamp & Rios 2020).

While lower religious service attendance is associated with greater support for the value of scientific knowledge and authority, greater science education is associated with support for science in schools and society (Stewart, McConnell & Dickerson 2017).

The present study employs robust Australian data to examine the relationship between religion and science attitudes in general, and in regard to two pressing domains of concern: the environment and global warming.



## Primacy of faith versus science

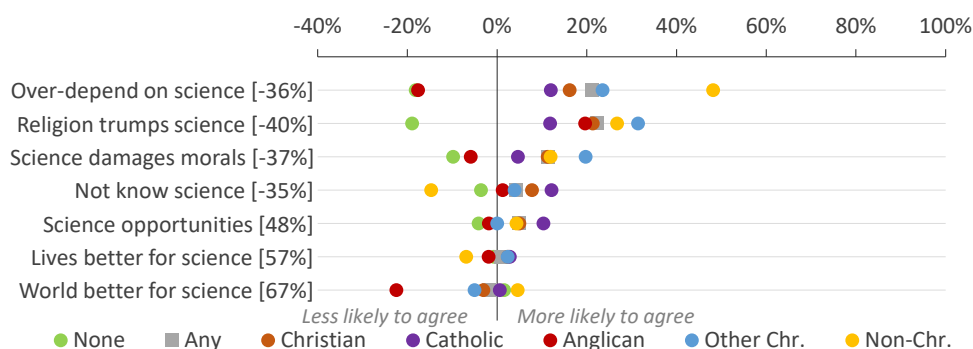
The Australian Values Survey 2018 asked people about their attitudes toward a range of science and religion matters, including primacy of one or the other under contest, and the overall impact of science on society (Table 13).

**Table 13:** Attitudes toward religion versus science

Figure row title	Meaning
<i>Over-depend on science</i>	We depend too much on science and not enough on faith
<i>Religion trumps science</i>	Whenever science and religion conflict, religion is always right
<i>Science damages morals</i>	One of the bad effects of science is that it breaks down people's ideas of right and wrong
<i>Not know science</i>	It is not important for me to know about science in my daily life
<i>Science opportunities</i>	Because of science and technology, there will be more opportunities for the next generation
<i>Lives better for science</i>	Science and technology are making our lives healthier, easier, and more comfortable
<i>World better for science</i>	All things considered, would you say that the world is [better off] because of science and technology?

Source: AVS 2018

By **religion** (Figure 164), attitudes are mixed. NCRs are significantly more likely, and Nones and Anglicans significantly less likely, to say we depend too much on science. But they are also the most likely to say it's important to know about science. Minor Christian denominations are most likely, and Nones least likely, so say that religion trumps science when they conflict.

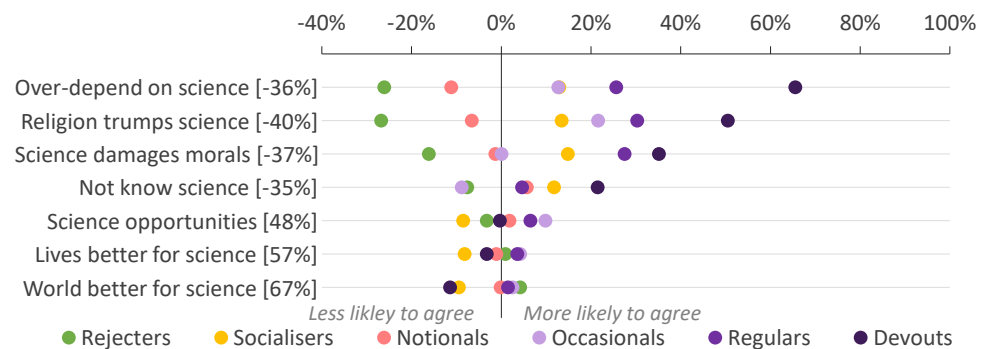


**Figure 164:** Divergence of attitudes toward religion and science, by religion

Source: AVS 2018. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation.

Unsurprisingly by **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 165), Devouts are by far the most likely to say we over-depend on science, that religion trumps science when they conflict, and that science damages morals. They are also the most likely to

say that it's *not* important to personally know about science. That is, with less understanding of what science is, Devouts feel the right to condemn it.



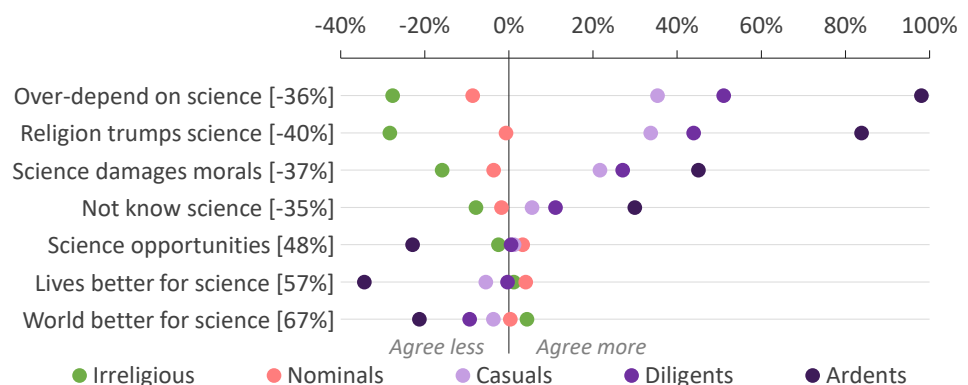
**Figure 165:** Divergence of attitudes toward religion and science, by RI6 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation.

The next-most religious, Regulars, are very likely, but less likely than Devouts to hold the same attitudes, with the exception that Regulars have an average rate of belief that they should know about science.

Nones and Notionals are the most likely to disagree that we over-depend on science or that religion trumps science. Nones are the most likely to disagree that science damages morals, while Notionals have an average rate for this dimension.

When RI6 is weighted by personal importance of religion (**RI5 religiosity**) the differences become more stark (Figure 166).



**Figure 166:** Divergence of attitudes toward religion and science, by RI5 religiosity

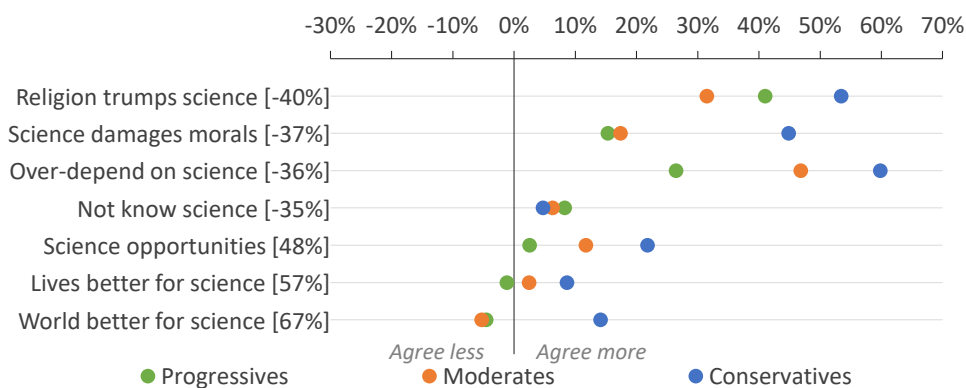
Source: AVS 2018. Percentages in brackets are overall polarisation.

Not only are the religion-prioritising attitudes of the top three categories, Casuals, Diligents and Ardents even more pronounced, but Ardents are significantly less likely to believe that science creates opportunities for the

next generation, or that personal lives or the world in general are better off for science.

Overall, the attitudes of Nominals are closest to those of the Irreligious.

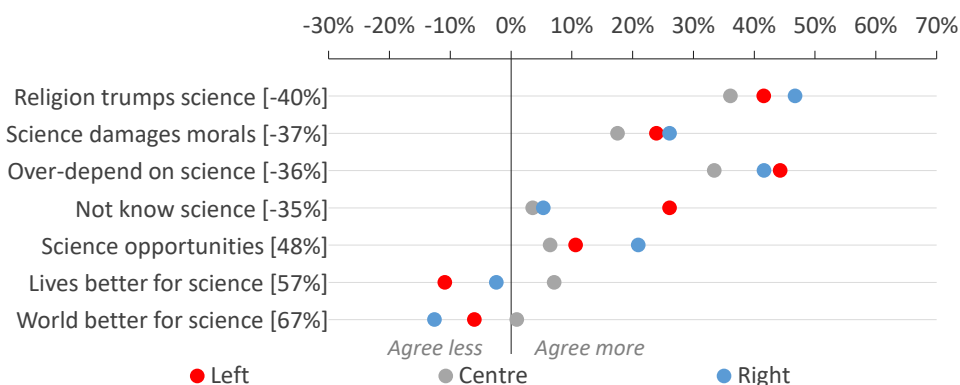
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 167), there is a significant religious premium across the spectrum in the belief that religion trumps science, that science damages morals, and that we over-depend on science.



**Figure 167:** Religious premium of attitudes toward religion and science, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Source: AVS 2018. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 168), a similar religious premium as for RSI6 is true across the political spectrum, plus a little additional hostility amongst the Left and Right (but not Centre) regarding our lives and the world being better for science.



**Figure 168:** Religious premium of attitudes toward religion and science, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Source: AVS 2018. Row percentages in brackets are overall polarisation.



**Summary:** Unsurprisingly, priority of religion over science correlates with religiosity. The effects are strong and they occur across the social and political spectrum.

Amongst Australia's most religious, Ardents, preference for religion is accompanied by higher than average levels of *hostility* toward science: disagreeing more that our lives are, and the world in general is, better for science, or that science and technology will produce more opportunities for the next generation. They're also the most likely to hold these views while saying it's not necessary to *know* about science — the discipline toward which they direct these hostile attitudes.

## The environment

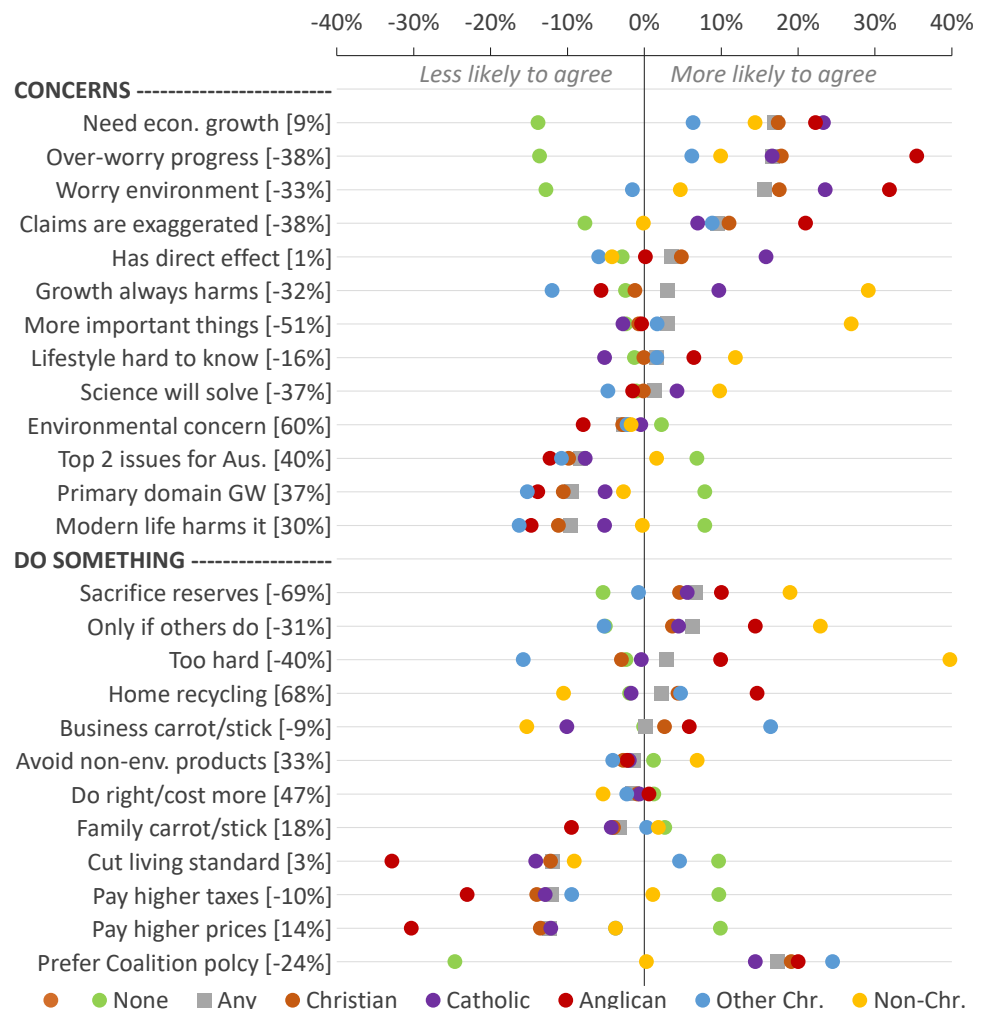
The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2020 asked people about their attitudes toward various aspects of the environment, and how willing they are to personally act to protect and enhance it, or support action by others to do so (Table 14).

**Table 14:** Attitudes about the environment

Figure row title	Meaning
CONCERNS	
Need econ. growth	In order to protect the environment Australia needs economic growth
Over-worry progress	People worry too much about human progress harming the environment
Worry environment~	We worry too much about the future of the environment and not enough about prices and jobs today
Claims are exaggerated	Many of the claims about environmental threats are exaggerated
Has direct effect	Environmental problems have a direct effect on my everyday life
Growth always harms	Economic growth always harms the environment
More important things	There are more important things to do in life than protect the environment
Lifestyle hard to know	I find it hard to know whether the way I live is helpful or harmful to the environment
Science will solve	Modern science will solve our environmental problems with little change to our way of life
Environmental concern	Generally speaking, how concerned are you about environmental issues?
Top 2 issues for Aus.	Which of these issues is the [next/] most important for Australia today: The environment
Primary domain GW	Which problem do you think is the most important for Australia as a whole: Climate change
Modern life harms it	Almost everything we do in modern life harms the environment
DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT	
Sacrifice reserves	Reduce the size of Australia's protected nature areas, in order to open them up for economic development
Only if others do	There is no point in doing what I can for the environment unless others do the same
Too hard	It is just too difficult for someone like me to do much about the environment
Home recycling	How often do you make a special effort to sort glass or tins or plastic or newspapers and so on for recycling?
Business carrot/stick	The best way for business and industry in Australia to protect the environment
Avoid non-env. products	How often do you avoid buying certain products for environmental reasons?
Do right/cost more	I always do what is right for the environment, even when it costs more money or takes more time
Family carrot/stick	The best way of getting people and their families in Australia to protect the environment
Cut living standard~	In order to protect the environment, how willing would you be to... ... accept cuts in your standard of living
Pay higher taxes~	... pay much higher taxes
Pay higher prices~	... pay much higher prices
Prefer Coalition policy*	Feel closer to (+) Coalition (-Labor) policies on the environment

Source: AuSSA 2020, \* AES 2019. ~ Results adjusted for incidence of low income. Note: RSI6 religio-social identity cannot be computed from the AuSSA 2020 data set.

By **religion** (Figure 169), Nones are significantly less likely, and religionists significantly more likely, to say that economic growth is needed to protect the environment,<sup>40</sup> that we over-worry about progress harming the environment, and that claims of environmental threats are exaggerated.



**Figure 169:** Divergence in attitudes toward the environment, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 14

Nones are also more likely to say the environment is one of the top two issues facing Australia, that its primary domain is global warming, and that modern life harms it. They are significantly more willing to cut their living standard, pay higher taxes and prices to protect it. Christians, especially Protestants, are least likely to agree. NCRs are by far the most likely to say that growth harms the environment, but that there are more important things and it is too hard to do anything about it (except science will solve it). They are also the most likely to not know if their lifestyle adversely affects the environment and least likely to report sorting household recyclables. Christians are significantly more

<sup>40</sup> Arguably a non-sequitur if not an oxymoron.

likely to favour Coalition over Labor policies on the environment, with Nones favouring Labor, and on-Christian religionists falling in the middle.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 170), religious affiliation correlates strongly with the belief that economic growth is needed to protect the environment.

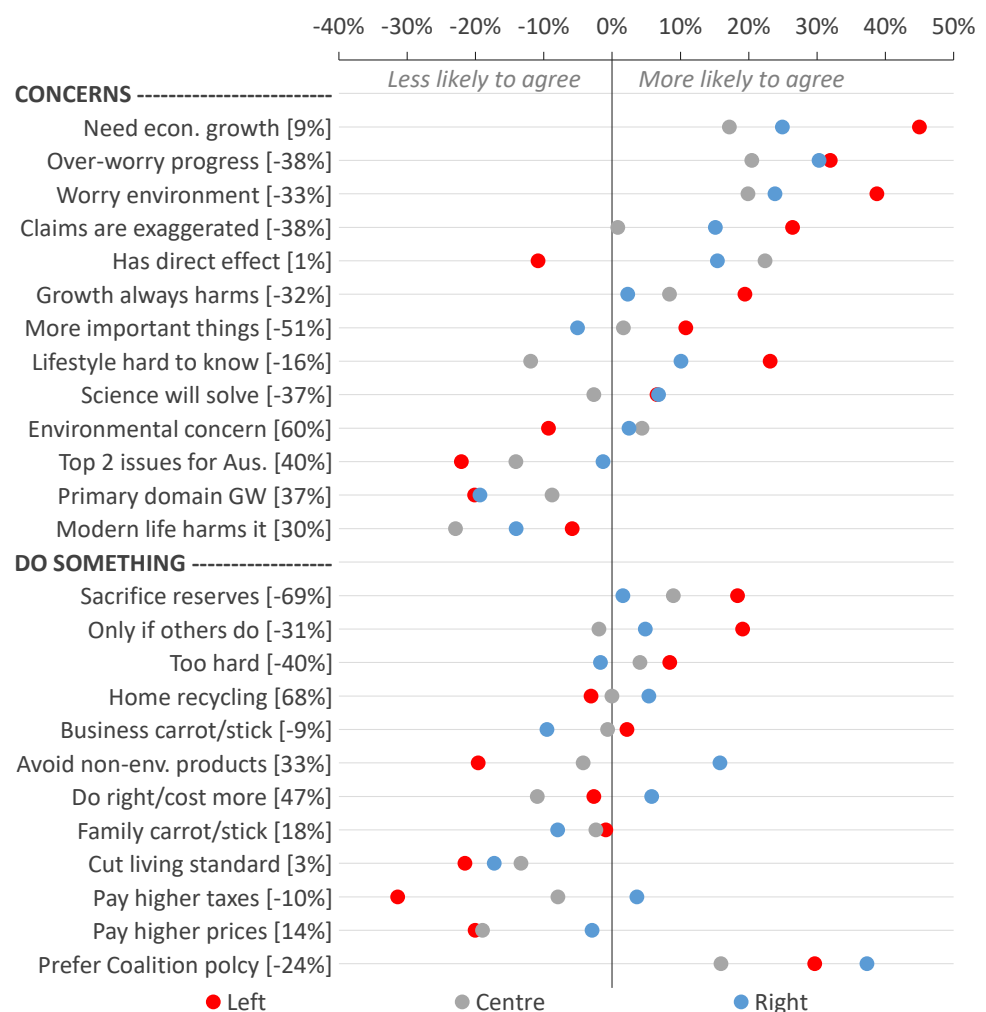


**Figure 170:** Pendulum of attitudes toward the environment, by RI6 religiosity  
Sources: As described in Table 14

**Devouts** are the *least* likely to harbour environmental concerns, and the *most* likely to say we worry too much about progress harming the environment, that claims about environmental risks are exaggerated, that there are more important things to do than protect the environment, the most willing to sacrifice protected nature reserves for economic progress, the least willing to pay higher taxes or prices to help protect the environment, and by far the most likely to favour Coalition policies on the environment.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 171), there are significant religious premiums against environmental interests. The effects on the Left (Religious

Left compared with their Secular Left counterparts) are the most striking. The **Religious Left** are vastly more likely to say economic growth is needed to protect the environment (despite being much more likely to say that growth always harms the environment), that we worry too much about the environment, that environmental problems *don't* have a direct effect on their lives, that environmental concerns are exaggerated yet it's hard to know what impact their lifestyles have on the environment, hold significantly less concern for the environment and are more willing to sacrifice nature reserves for economic development, and are far less willing to cut their living standard or pay higher taxes or prices to protect the environment, or take action unless others do.



**Figure 171:** Religious premium of attitudes toward the environment, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 14

Across the political spectrum, the religiously affiliated are significantly more likely to favour Coalition over Labor policies on the environment.

By **RSI6 religio-social identity**, the religious premium for preferring the Coalition over Labor policies on the environment is +46% amongst Progressives, +37% amongst Moderates, and +13% amongst Conservatives.

Overall, these religious premium effects tend to be less, absent, or even opposite, amongst the Centre and Right. Much of the difference is accounted for by higher rates of pro-environmental attitudes amongst the *Secular Left*. Nevertheless, the striking attitudinal differences between the Religious and the Secular on the Left provides evidential support for two political observations.

The first is that while the Left might more naturally vote Labor (than the Coalition; Greens aside), Labor's political capital is more likely to erode when it focuses too much on the environment and not enough on economics.

The second is that when Labor focuses too much on the environment at the expense of economics, those who poll public attitudes, including a reckoning by religion, are likely to find the religious more likely to vote for the Coalition. It would be easy, but wrong, to attribute this "religious" vote to matters of supernatural faith. Like other economic factors reported in this and previous reports in the *Religiosity in Australia* series, economic and financial matters are of more importance than the environment to religious Australians.

**Summary:** In Australia, unsupportive attitudes toward the environment — and preference for economic growth instead — are significantly higher amongst the religious. Christians and Devouts are significantly less likely to either "worry about" or support measures to protect the environment, and more likely to favour economic growth, and Coalition over Labor policies on the environment. This religious premium is another political dimension in which religious affiliation gives a false impression of an effect of godly or other supernatural beliefs — rather than worldly economic preferences — on voting behaviour.

## Global warming

Underpinned by the findings of technical subject-matter experts, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth assessment report notes unprecedented and accelerating changes in the earth's climate, with anthropogenic (man-made) causes contributing 1.1C° of 1.5C° in temperature rise (IPCC 2022).

These changes in turn drive poorer air quality, heatwaves, flooding and droughts, sea level rises, oceanic acidification, food insecurity and other negative effects across the globe. No region remains unaffected.

Current warming is beginning to melt vast regions of permafrost. These release methane (as well as carbon dioxide), and methane, at least in the short term, is 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide at warming the planet. To date, most methane has arisen from agricultural practices (IPCC 2022). The degree of threat from melting permafrost is still poorly understood, however (National Science Foundation 2020; Wilkerson 2021)

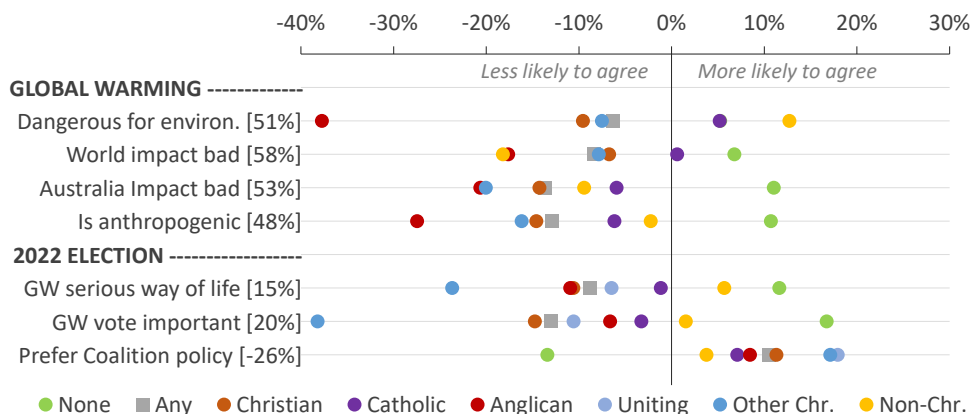
Nevertheless, climate change is accelerating, and work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by humankind is an urgent task to help avoid catastrophic consequences for future generations.

**Table 15:** Attitudes about global warming (GW)

Figure row title	Meaning
GLOBAL WARMING (Source: AuSSA 2020) <sup>†</sup>	
<i>Dangerous for env.</i>	A rise in the world's temperature caused by climate change is [dangerous] for the environment
<i>World impact bad</i>	How [bad] do you think the impacts of climate change will be for the world as a whole?
<i>Is anthropogenic</i>	The world's climate has been changing mostly due to human activity
<i>Australia impact bad</i>	How [bad] do you think the impacts of climate change will be for Australia?
2022 FEDERAL ELECTION (Source: AES 2022)	
<i>GW vote important</i>	When you were deciding about how to vote, how important was global warming to you personally?
<i>GW serious to way of life</i>	How serious a threat do you think global warming will pose to you or your way of life in your lifetime?
<i>Prefer Coalition policy</i>	Whose policies, the Labor Party's or the Liberal-National Coalition's, would you say come closer to your own views on global warming? [Coalition – Labor]

<sup>†</sup> Note: RSI6 religio-social identity cannot be computed from this data set.

By **religion** (Figure 172), the religious, Christian and non-Christian alike, are significantly less likely than Nones to believe that the impact of global warming is either bad for Australia or the world, or that it is anthropogenic.

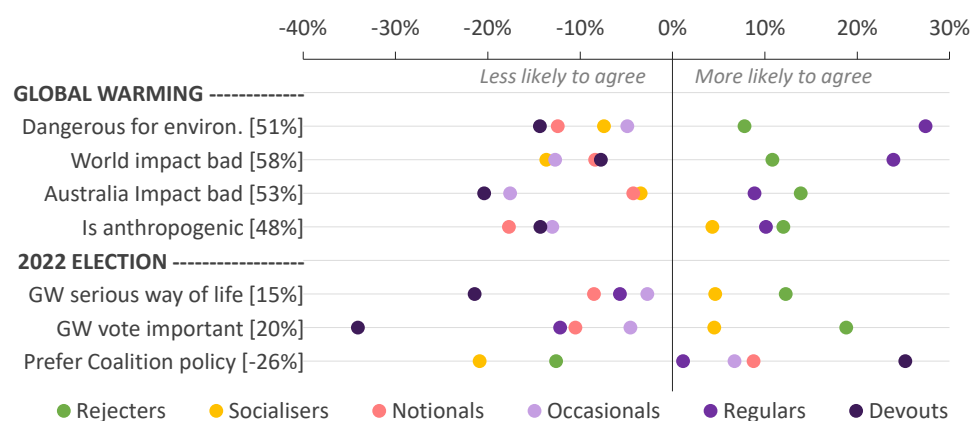


**Figure 172:** Divergence of attitudes toward global warming, by religion

Sources: As described in Table 15. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

In regard to federal elections, the religious, Christians the most, are significantly less likely to say that global warming poses a threat to their own way of life or that global warming is important to their vote. They are significantly more likely to favour Coalition over Labor policies regarding global warming, while Nones believe impacts and importance to be much greater, and favour Labor policies.

By **RI6 religiosity** (Figure 173), Devouts hold on average by far the most dismissive profile of global warming and the strongest favour of Coalition over Labor policies.



**Figure 173:** Divergence of attitudes toward global warming, by RI6 religiosity

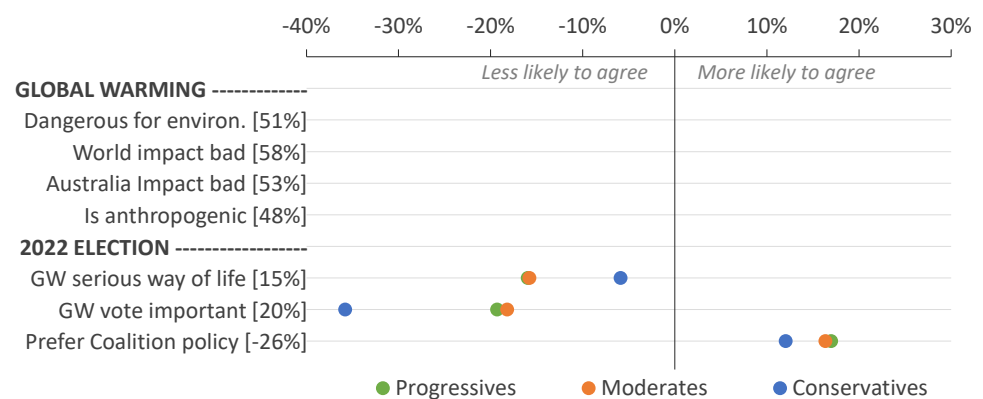
Sources: As described in Table 15. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

However, the next-most religious, Regulars, hold far less dismissive attitudes, in fact on some dimensions the opposite polarisation as Devouts. Regulars are also as likely as Nones to believe that global warming is anthropogenic and



have an average preference for the Coalition's policies. Devouts' uniquely dismissive attitudes toward global warming and heavy preferences for Coalition (less interventionist) policies suggest their attitudes toward global warming are strongly ideological.

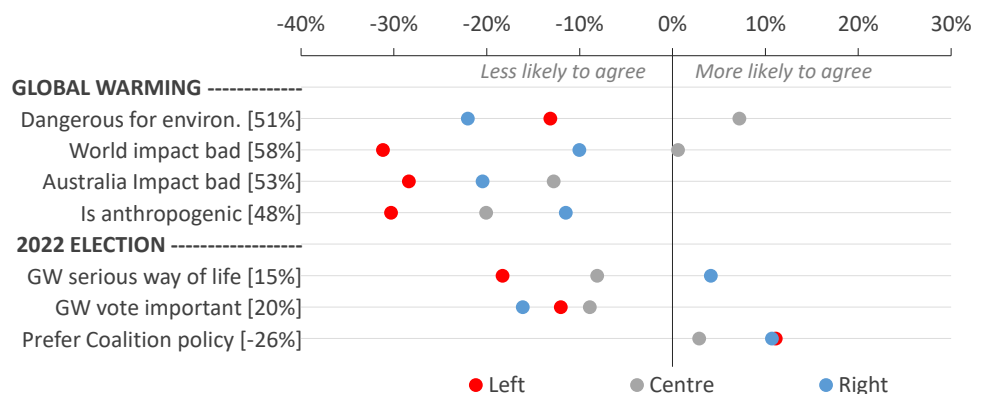
By **RSI6 religio-social identity** (Figure 174), across the spectrum of Progressives, Moderates and Conservatives, the Religious are significantly less likely than their Secular counterparts to believe that global warming is a serious threat or important to their election vote, and more likely to favour Coalition over Labor policies.



**Figure 174:** Religious premium of attitudes toward global warming, by RSI6 religio-social identity

Sources: As described in Table 15. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation. Note: RSI6 cannot be calculated from the AuSSA 2020 data, so "Global Warming" values are not shown.

By **RPI6 religio-political identity** (Figure 175), the Religious Left and Right in particular are more likely than their Secular counterparts to hold dismissive attitudes and to prefer Coalition over Labor policies. Overall effects are stronger amongst the Left than the Right.

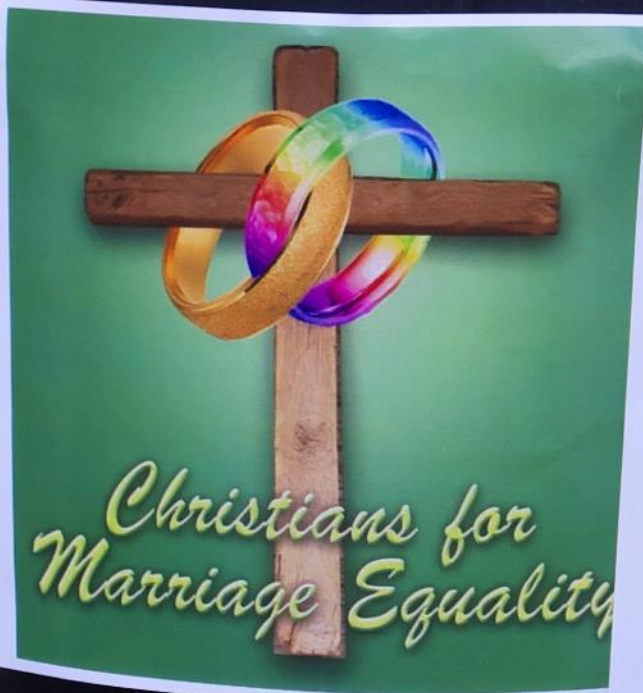


**Figure 175:** Religious premium of attitudes toward global warming, by RPI6 religio-political identity

Sources: As described in Table 15. Row percentages in brackets are average polarisation.

**Summary:** The evidence that climate change represents a major and urgent challenge for the future risk profile of the planet is now overwhelming. Yet Australia's religionists are significantly more likely than Nones to wave away concerns, disagree that anthropogenic causes are a major contributor, and are significantly more likely to prefer the Coalition's lighter policy profile to Labor's in limiting anthropogenic carbon emissions that are driving the changes. Although the effects of religion occur across the political and social spectrum — the religiously affiliated compared with their secular counterparts — the strongest religion effects occur amongst Christians and especially Protestants and Devouts, and on the Left and Right (not Centre) of politics.





I'm a Christian and...

acl

australian christian lobby  
voice for values

... does not speak for  
me.

## Sex

This report reveals that while religious and non-religious Australians share similar rates of disapproval of property rights violations like cheating and stealing, the religious are far more likely to harbour conservative notions regarding sex (see *Religion and moral attitudes in Australia* on page 96). These notions are argued by religionists to be more moral.

In this section, we examine first some attitudes and behaviours regarding sex in the context of individuals, and then in the context of institutions.

### Sex and individuals

The articulation of more conservative or disapproving attitudes toward sex is often framed as a protective measure against teen sex and unwanted pregnancy. Little Australian data is available about such effects in practice, but USA data provides useful insights.

#### Religiosity and teen sex

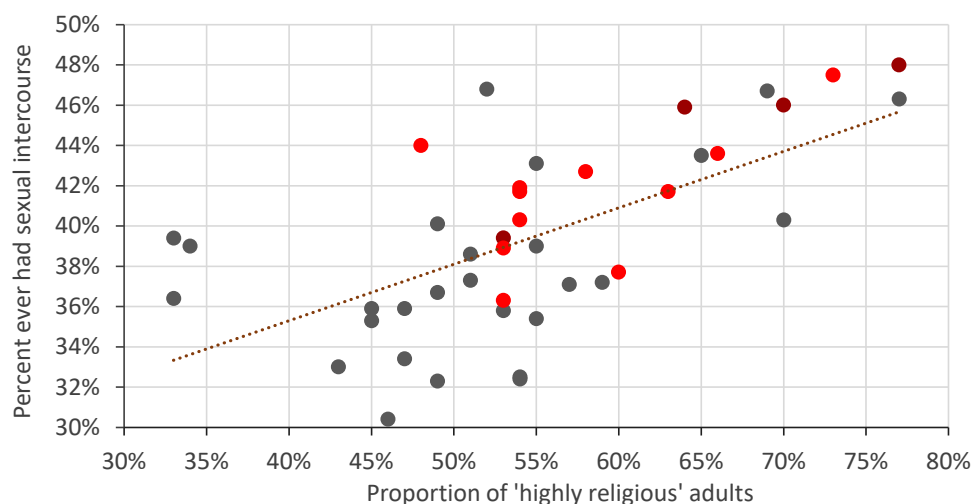
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) researched the sexual behaviours amongst children in school years 9–12, equating roughly to ages 13–16. Comparing state-level teen sex rates with rates of state-level high religiosity (Pew Research Center 2016),<sup>41</sup> there is a *positive* (not negative) association between state-level religiosity and the rate of teens ever having engaged in sexual intercourse (Figure 176).

Religiosity explains 40% of the variance in teen sex experience, nearly a quarter (24%) amongst females, and nearly a half (48%) amongst males.

USA states that endorse abstinence-only sex education are significantly over-represented amongst the higher teen sex rates, especially those that also don't mandate contraception education. These higher rates of sexual activity in abstinence-only jurisdictions have been found before (Stanger-Hall & Hall 2011). Indeed, comprehensive versus abstinence-only sex education results in higher age at first sex, reduced frequency of sex, reduced number of partners, increased condom and contraceptive use, and reduced sexual risk-taking (Kirby 2007).

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<sup>41</sup> In the study, showing at least two of four religious measures: attending religious services weekly or more often; praying at least daily; certain of belief in God; saying religion is personally very important — while *not* scoring low for any of the four measures.

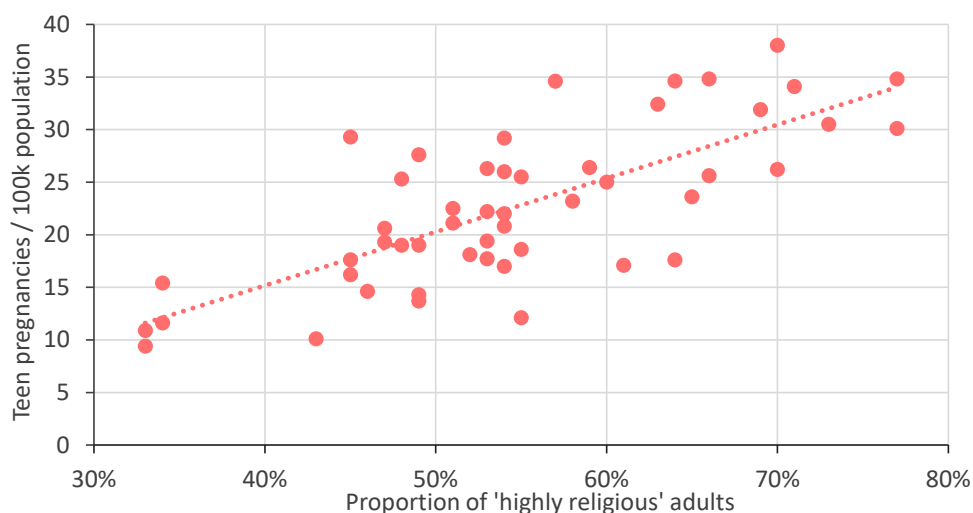


**Figure 176: State-level teen ever-had-sex rates by adult religiosity 2015**

Sources: Religiosity - Pew Research Center (2016); Teen sex rates Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022). Notes: Teen sex rate data not available for 2015 for every state. Nearest year's data used when 2015 not available. Red state marker = state strongly endorses abstinence-only sex education. Dark red state marker = abstinence-only sex ed. combined with no mandate for contraceptive education.

## Religiosity and teen births

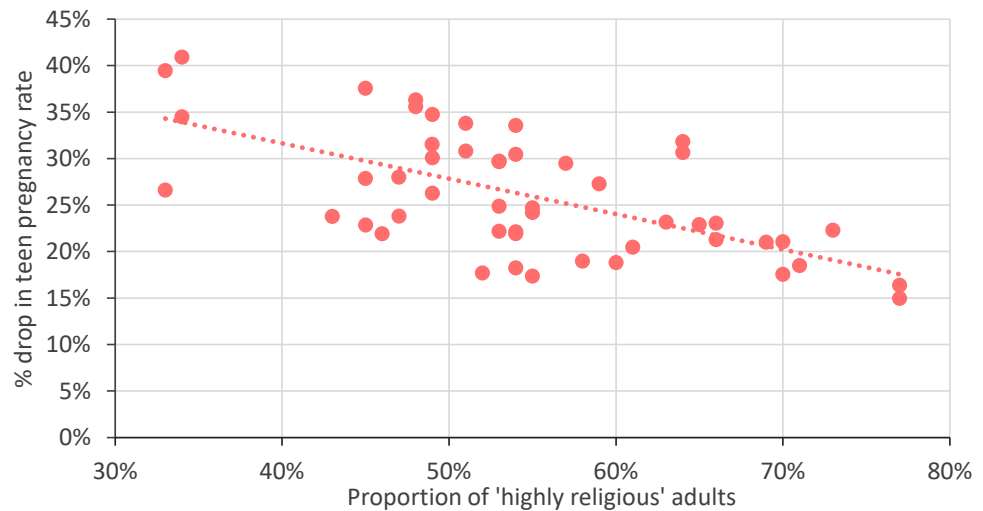
Given the correlation between religiosity and teen sex, it's not surprising then that teen birth rates also correlate strongly and positively with average state religiosity, with state rates of "highly religious" residents explaining more than half (55%) of the variance in teen births (Figure 177). Indeed, since 2015, higher percentage drops in the teen birth rate have occurred in states with lower religiosity.



**Figure 177: USA state teen birth rate by state religiosity 2015**

Sources: Religiosity - Pew Research Center (2016); Teen births - National Center for Health Statistics (2021). Note:  $p < 0.0001$ .

The differences are even more stark when taking into account the outcomes of greater recent efforts in comprehensive (versus abstinence-only) sex education. The higher a state's average religiosity, the smaller has been its *decrease* in teen pregnancy rates between 2015 and 2019 (Figure 178).



**Figure 178:** Percentage drop in teen birth rates 2015-19 by state religiosity

Sources: Religiosity - Pew Research Center (2016); Teen births - National Center for Health Statistics (2021). Note:  $p < 0.0001$ .

These changes have led to an increase in the covariance of state religiosity and teen birth rates, with state religiosity accounting for more than two-thirds (70%) of the variance in 2019 (Table 16).

**Table 16:** State religiosity/teen birth rate covariance by year

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Variance explained	55%	57%	61%	66%	70%

Sources: Religiosity - Pew Research Center (2016); Teen births - National Center for Health Statistics (2021)

Parents who are more religious are less supportive of teens having access to birth control methods (Reli 2019), though the relationship is less strong than corresponding state-level policies. The relationship between state-level religiosity and teen sexually-transmitted infections, pregnancy, and birth rates, is mediated directly by state-sponsored abstinence-only education (Stanger-Hall & Hall 2011). Teen birth rates drop markedly with teen access to birth control methods, especially at the first sexual experience (Livingston & Thomas 2019).



Australian evidence is consistent with the higher religiosity–lower sex education dynamic. At least amongst those who migrated to Australia as children, the more religious are significantly less likely to seek help from their parents about sexual and reproductive health matters (Dune et al. 2021).

The “morally-founded” abstinence-only policy toward teen sex favoured by devout religionists is not only ineffective, but counterproductive.

Abstinence-only sex education for teens, favoured by devout religionists, results in significantly greater harm (rate of STIs, teen pregnancy, etc) compared with comprehensive sex education. That is, a focus on the Purity moral foundation at the expense of the Care moral foundation directly results in children experiencing more harm.

In the USA, extreme religious dominionism about sex is driving more moderate people away from religion. In counties with more extreme and restrictive moral regulations — which revolve most strongly around reproductive rights — there are larger increases in the number of Nones (Djupe, Neiheisel & Conger 2018).

### **Australian attitudes toward sex, and sex crimes**

Earlier in this study we discussed the importance of one’s own gender to a sense of self-identity (see

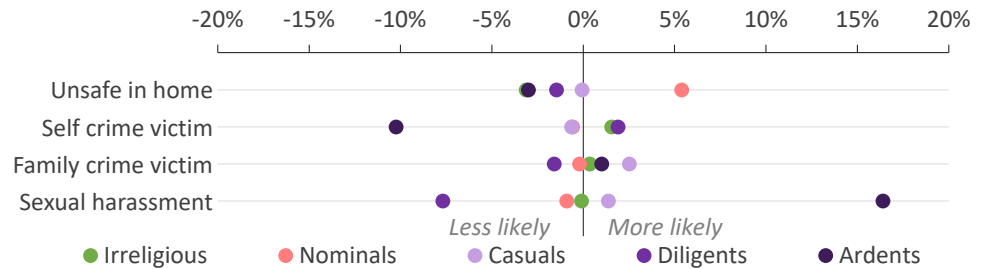
**Australian evidence about the Judging style — self-image/identity** on page 56).

Australian evidence is clear: the importance of gender to identity is vastly higher amongst the religious than Nones, and is more predictive of religiosity than is religious affiliation. This translates into vast differences in moral values regarding sexuality, despite little difference in moral values about general matters like property-rights violations.

This sexual focus stands out amongst other attitudes, too. For example, in Australia, the most religious, Ardent, are at the same time the *least* likely to



report feeling unsafe in their own home or being a victim of any crime in the past year, but by *far* the most likely to say that sexual harassment occurs in their neighbourhood (Figure 179).



**Figure 179:** Divergence of perceptions of local crime, by RI5 religiosity

Source: AVS 2018. Note: crime victim = victim of crime in past year.

That is, Ardents are very considerably more likely than others to perceive *sexual* but not other crimes in their local community. This could be down to a mix of hypervigilance, and reality: the reality of sexual harassment in their *religious* community. More on that shortly.

**Summary:** Little information is available about the association of teen pregnancy rates and religiosity in Australia. In the USA, however, the picture is clear. The most religious states — including those with abstinence-only education and especially those that do not teach about contraceptives — have the highest rates of teen sex and pregnancies. Comprehensive yet age-appropriate sex education in less religious states has resulted in a greater reduction in teen pregnancy rates.

A religious focus on the Purity moral foundation which favours only abstinence is ineffective, and indeed counterproductive. Prioritising the Care moral foundation through proper sex education directly results in better outcomes: lower STI and pregnancy rates amongst teens.

In Australia, consistent with the finding that gender is of much greater importance to the religious, the most religious, Ardents, are very much more likely than others to perceive sexual harassment offences, but not other offences, in their local neighbourhood.

## Sex and institutions

The very great personal importance of gender — along with the Purity moral foundation — to the highly religious helps explain why many of the non-religious perceive religious organisations as overly preoccupied with sex, especially that of others.

*“It is the strange thing about this [Catholic] church. It is obsessed with sex. Absolutely obsessed.”*

— Steven Fry (2009) at 1h 3m 50s

### Sexual morality police

One of the dark sides of morality is that prioritising the moral foundation of Purity (“Sanctity”) over that of Care leads to denial of others’ minds — a deficit of perspective taking — and especially to prejudice against sexual minorities (LGBTIQA+) (Monroe & Plant 2019). Consistent with this, a study of nearly 300,000 individuals across 90 countries found that **religiosity correlates not with cooperative morals, but rather with restrictive sexual morals** (Weeden & Kurzban 2013). The association between religiosity and restrictive sexual morals — viewed as reproductive strategies — is particularly strong in wealthy countries (Australia included), and reflected in religious leaders moralising about the sexual behaviours of others.

This is historically borne out in practice. In a 1958 report by an unnamed News of the World “Special Correspondent”, leaders of the Anglican and Catholic churches pose as moral custodians against “the greatest menace in Australia”. This “greatest menace” is not murder, nor domestic violence, nor fraud or political impropriety, nor terrorism or treason. It’s *homosexuality* (Figure 180).

Then-NSW Minister of Justice (Labor), Reg Downing, quoted in the story, was a devout Catholic who presided over government and police force prosecution of homosexuals, saying that “all expert opinion here and overseas is that it is difficult to recognise offenders.” He successfully had the NSW Criminal Code amended in 1951 to remove the legal defence of consent regarding homosexual acts (Wikipedia 2021b).

Religiosity correlates not with cooperative morals, but rather with restrictive sexual morals.

## RESEARCH INTO SOCIAL EVIL

From Our Special Correspondent

Sydney, Saturday.  
**T**HE New South Wales Government has set up a committee to study the causes and treatment of homosexuality. Members include representatives of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, prison officials and a professor of psychiatry from Sydney University.

Mr. R. Downing, Minister of Justice, said the committee would not be concerned with amending laws. Its work would be facilitated by the opening of Cooma Prison, near the Great Snowy River project, as a special institution for convicted homosexuals. This is the only institution of its kind in the world.

"In Britain and most of the American States, homosexual offenders are not segregated," Mr. Downing added. "Research will take at least two

years as there are no readily accepted criteria for recognising homosexuals or identifying them clinically.

"The State Government considers that the problem must be attacked with vigour."

A month ago Sydney's police chief, Mr. Colin John Delaney, who had visited Scotland Yard, issued a warning that homosexuality is the greatest concern of the police to-day. It was certainly the greatest menace in Australia.

There had been a 66 per cent increase in the number of arrests for this offence during the last four years in Sydney against an increase of only two-and-a-half per cent for other crimes.

"These figures represent the arrests we make outside picture theatres and parks," Mr Delaney added. "How many people are carrying on behind closed doors?"

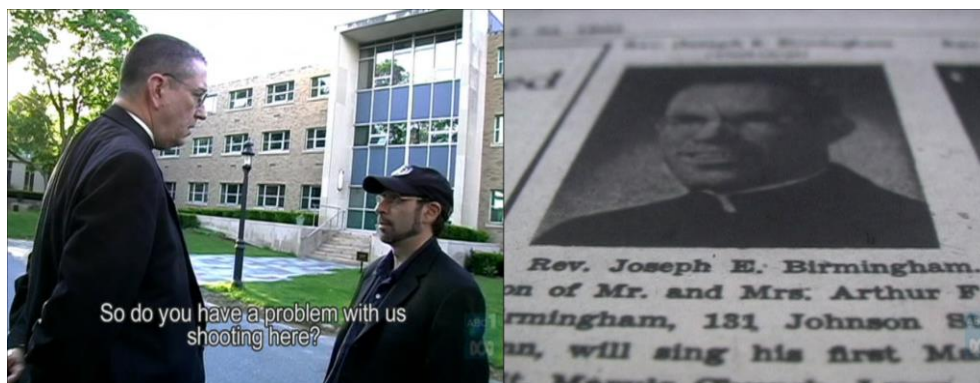
**Figure 180:** Australia's clerics promote themselves as custodians of morality  
 Source: News of the World, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1958

NSW Chief Commissioner Colin Delaney was a devout religionist who personally considered homosexuality the "greatest menace in Australia". He established the unethical practice of using "good-looking young C.I.D. officers" to entrap gay men outside cinemas and in public parks. His obsession blocked use of resources for more useful purposes (Wotherspoon 1993).

Alongside these devout law-and-order state servants were leaders from the Anglican and Catholic churches, people who at the same time as publicly stirring shrill moral panic about homosexuality, were leaders of institutions failing to deal with considerable rates of child sexual abuse within their own organisations.<sup>42</sup>

Church coverups have been known for a long time, indeed for many centuries since the early Roman Catholic church (Rashid & Barron 2018). More recently, in 2009, ABC *Compass* aired a documentary about the horrendous extent of child sexual abuse by Catholic priest Rev Joseph Birmingham (Figure 181).

<sup>42</sup> I do not suggest that any of the individuals named in this report were themselves associated with child sexual abuse or its cover up by the churches.



**Figure 181:** Stills from the TV documentary broadcast in 2009 by ABC *Compass* about child sexual abuse of Catholic priest Rev. Joseph Birmingham  
Source: Free to air. Note: The Catholic church official pictured on the left is not Birmingham.

In the documentary, an investigator describes how mothers of boys abused by Birmingham approach church leaders to report their complaints, and were righteously told they were accusing a holy man and should go away and examine their consciences.

Despite extensive ongoing evidence, churches continued to deflect or minimise criticisms. It wasn't until 2012 that atheist then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced the royal commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Institutions include government and non-government schools, sports associations, groups such as Scouts and Guides, religious and other institutions.

The royal commission spent years methodically examining the evidence and taking testimony from the abused. The results make for very sobering reading indeed.

The royal commission's reports make very sobering reading indeed about the moral conduct of *religious* institutions in Australia: institutions that pose as moral exemplars and beacons.

## Commission findings

In the volumes of the commission's final reports, Volume 16 was dedicated exclusively to child sexual abuse that occurred in the context of religious organisations, articulated in three books of over 800 pages each. The commission didn't mince its words.

*“We heard from 6,875 survivors in private sessions, of whom 4,029 (58.6 per cent) told us about child sexual abuse in religious institutions. The largest proportion of these survivors spoke about child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, representing almost two-thirds (61.8 per cent) of survivors who told us about child sexual abuse in religious institutions and more than one third (36.2 per cent) of all survivors we heard from.”*  
 — Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017a, Book 1, p 16)

Let that sink in. Of all the kinds of institutions in which children experienced sexual abuse, *well over half* (59%) of the reported cases occurred in religious institutions — institutions that pose as moral exemplars and beacons. And almost two-thirds of those (62%) occurred in the institutions of just one religion: Catholic. That is, more than *one third* (36%) of *all* child sexual abuse cases reported to the commission occurred in one group of institutions: *Catholic*. Not that other religions were let off the hook: they were merely smaller organisations.

Of the perpetrators, “most held positions of leadership or authority” (Ibid, p 19). Abused children were threatened or blamed for the abuse they experienced, often using religious concepts such as the will of God or being sent to hell if they reported the abuse (Ibid, p 23).

These abuses were isolated in neither place nor time. Abuse was reported in person from across Australia and occurring from the late 1920s to after the establishment of the royal commission (i.e. past 2013). Perhaps given the age distribution of now adult survivors, reports of abuse years appear to peak around or shortly after the 1970s.

### **Exceptional rates amongst First Nations children**

First Nations people numbered more than 770,000 at the arrival of the First Fleet from England, but their population sank to a mere 117,000 by 1900, a drop of 85% (Creative Spirits 2023). Despite now comprising around 3.2% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022), 10.6% of those reporting religious institution sexual abuse to the commission were First Nations people. This reflects the numbers of First Nations children who were ripped from their families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997), with many sent to missions primarily run by various churches including Catholic, Anglican and Salvation Army, under “‘gospel’ distinctly lacking in grace” (The Centre for Christian Apologetics 2015).



*“With the wisdom of hindsight we can only wonder how as ... a Church, we failed to see the violence of what we were doing. Hopefully, today we are more vigilant in the values we espouse.”*

— Catholic Church of the Diocese of Darwin, in Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997, Chapter 19)

### **Abuse in religious schools**

The commission noted that 39% of abuse in religious institutions occurred in religious schools (Book 1, p 20). Survivors were of both primary and secondary school age. The prevalence of sexual abuse in religious versus government schools was not the result of higher numbers in religious schools. In the 1970s, only a small minority — around a fifth — of children attended religious schools (Gorgens, Ryan & Zhao 2018).

### **Religious institution responses**

The commission noted many types of moral failure in the responses of religious institutions, which often included:

- Disbelief and denial.
- Demanding to pursue “in-house” responses.
- Blaming or discrediting the abused child.
- Punishment or further abuse.
- Assuring victims that action would be taken, but none was.
- Retaining abusers in their positions or moving them to other positions with continued access to children.
- Failing to implement risk management protocols or monitor abusers.
- Allowing offenders to retain their titles, and continue to pay stipends even in retirement.
- Failing to apologise or issuing only generic apologies.
- Employing heavily legalistic and opaque claims procedures.
- Avoiding reporting allegations to police (sexual abuses are criminal).

These practices had devastating effects on victims and their families (Ibid, p27).

*“In some cases, it is clear that leaders of religious institutions knew that allegations of child sexual abuse involved actions that were or may have been criminal, or perpetrators made admissions. However, there was a tendency to view child sexual abuse as a forgivable sin or a moral failing rather than a crime.”*

— Ibid, p 28.

And, most shockingly:

*“Many leaders of religious institutions demonstrated a preoccupation with protecting the institution’s ‘good name’ and reputation.”*

— Ibid, p 28.

That is, religious leaders clearly tended to prioritise the moral foundation of in-group Loyalty to clerics and the church over the moral foundation of Care toward children: people that religious institutions themselves would rightly describe as “vulnerable” (Ibid, p 532).

In the commission’s opinion, the absence or insufficient involvement of women in religious leadership and governance positions contributed significantly to recorded failures (Ibid, p 29), as did a culture of secrecy and silence (Ibid, p 532).

### **The Catholic church**

Due to institutional size, and the proportion of abuse cases within the Roman Catholic church, the commission devoted an entire book to that religion (Book 2). While all the general criticisms above were relevant in the Catholic church context, the commission made further detailed findings about it (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017b).

Catholic church authorities often and inappropriately believed offences merely to be committed by *individual* bad priests or others — that is, by random rogues and not as a symptom or responsibility of the church’s own governance or operational standards.

This is telling since:

*“...the problem is systemic throughout the Catholic Church internationally. [Dokecki] lists Ireland, Mexico, Austria, France, Chile, Australia, Poland, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Germany, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, adding that ‘new countries seem to enter the list regularly.’*  
— Ibid, p 586

Indeed, we can add the USA to the list. Former archbishop of Washington DC, Theodore McCarrick, was once considered the most powerful cardinal in the USA. But he was defrocked by Pope Francis in 2019 “based on evidence that suggested he had sexually abused children and seminary students for decades” (Czachor 2023). The Vatican released a report saying that Pope John Paul II, who had appointed McCarrick cardinal, “knew about the allegations and ignored them”.

McCarrick’s is not an isolated case, either. In Baltimore alone, more than 150 Catholic priests and clergy have been accused of “horrific and repeated” abuse of at least 600 children since the 1940s, with evidence uncovering “disturbing clarity” that officials were “more concerned with avoiding scandal and negative publicity than it was with protecting children”, according to the prosecutor’s case (Santucci 2023).

### **Clericalism**

Clericalism is the theological view of the church as a “perfect society”: that is, without flaw or valid criticism, superior to other institutions, and accountable only to God. The commission refers repeatedly and extensively to characteristics of clericalism — including “power, arrogance, vanity and inordinate self-esteem” (Book 2, p 627) — that contribute to a diminished capacity for empathy, and its failures to deal with child sexual abuse.

*“The priests, the bishops, are in some form or way sacred and above ordinary people, and because of this sacredness, because of their importance, they must be held as more important and protected more.”*  
— Book 2, p 613

Clericalism arises from a desire for both power and privilege, and is most often expressed through entitlement, authoritarianism and rigid, hierarchical



worldviews in which obedience is expected of the lower towards the higher — a kind of “divinely inspired pecking order”. In some sections of the Catholic diaspora, the pecking can be violent and humiliating (Book 2, p 630).

It is reported that Pope Francis described the church’s clericalism as creating “little monsters” who give him “goose bumps” (Book 2, p 615).

The greatest problem of the Catholic church’s clericalism is, perhaps, that “it doesn’t have anything to learn from itself” (Book 2, p 622) — or from others. That is, it fails both to be reflective and to seek wider perspectives.

### **Psychosexual immaturity**

The commission notes a study of USA Catholic priests which found that only 7% of priests were psychosexually mature, with a further 18% developing (Book 2, p 603). The remainder were underdeveloped or maldeveloped. Contributing factors include lack of specific education, and importantly the celibacy commitment which may itself attract candidates with psychosexual challenges and fear of intimacy. And yet priests are permitted, indeed encouraged and directed, to counsel laity about sexuality.

### **Homosexuality**

The Catholic Church often blames moral failures on “the homosexual lifestyle”,<sup>43</sup> yet reasonable estimates of the proportion of Catholic clergy who are homosexual range from 20% – 50%, very much higher than the general population (Book 2, page 600). This leaves many priests struggling with standards of purity and with substantial anxiety, absent of relevant professional mental health support. This is likely to contribute to the fact that a great majority of children sexually abused by Catholic clergy are boys.

### **Sexuality and cognitive rigidity**

The commission reported evidence that the Catholic Church’s cognitive rigidity (theological rules) insisting that sex is only for procreative purposes, is profoundly damaging and contributes to clerical sexual abuse of children (Book 2, p 606).

### **Narcissism**

The commission reported evidence of narcissism as a prominent characteristic of priests and religious perpetrators in Australia (Book 2, p 605). Narcissists can have a great need to be admired or loved, are manipulative, exploitative and charismatic with an elevated sense of

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<sup>43</sup> A church confection. *Being* homosexual commands no particular lifestyle, but *being* a Catholic priest does.

superiority and entitlement. Clerical narcissists are typically highly resistant to believing they need to undertake treatment.

### **A host of failures but two in particular**

The commission raises other significant concerns, but perhaps the most powerful points raised in its report on the Catholic church are that:

*“...there was a general tendency to handle child sexual abuse ‘in house’, because **clergy sexual abuse threatened the Church’s moral authority in relation to sexuality**” and that “...the Catholic church was **a law unto itself and did not have to answer to anybody else.**”*  
— Book 2, p 632, 633 [my emphases]

**And there it is in a nutshell:** the conduct of many within the church *on matters of sex* threatened its “moral authority” *on matters of sex*, so it used its power and influence to hide and deny its conduct but **not to fix it** ... while continuing to promote itself as the premier moral exemplar and beacon whose moral edicts (not actual practices) the laity should observe. As some posters at the time of the royal commission put it: “*hear no evil, see no evil, stop no evil*”.

### **A Cardinal example in the public eye**

Cardinal George Pell, at the time Australia’s highest representative in the Catholic hierarchy, appeared before the royal commission. His testimony provided clear examples of the commission’s ultimate findings (Figure 182).

He drew laughter from in-person commission observers when he described Church leaders as “the most secretive of people” who always “work within a framework of Christian moral teaching” (Alexander 2016).

Pertinent is that Pell was the episcopal vicar in charge of the Catholic education system at the time priest Gerard Ridsdale was sexually abusing dozens of children. Pell claimed no real knowledge of the then allegations despite even Ridsdale himself saying his conduct was “common knowledge”. In a later unredacted report the commission expressly rejected Pell’s testimony, finding that he had known in 1982 about Ridsdale’s offending (Le Grand 2020). Pell and Ridsdale had also earlier shared a home in the 1970s.



**Figure 182:** Cardinal George Pell stares at the audience after gasps  
Source: Royal commission into institutional responses to the sexual abuse of children

But what drew gasps from abuse survivors in the audience was Pell's dismissive attitude towards the crimes. Pell described Ridsdale's offending at the time as "a sad story and it wasn't of much interest to me" (Alexander 2016). That is, the alleged sexual abuse of children by a priest in the Catholic education system for which Pell at the time served as episcopal vicar, was *not of much interest* to a man professionally dedicated to "Christian moral teaching". Even staunch Pell defender and News Corp columnist Andrew Bolt described Pell at best as "dangerously indifferent" (Meade 2016).

Pell later told the royal commission that he responded badly and it was completely untrue that he didn't have much interest (AAP 2016).

Indeed, the Cardinal did show an interest at least in 1993, accompanying Ridsdale to court and offering to provide a character reference in defence of sexual abuse charges (Le Grand 2020).

### **Post-royal commission**

The resistance of churches to acknowledging past child sexual abuse and compensating survivors has continued since the royal commission, even despite parliaments around the nation enacting law reform making it easier to bring perpetrators and facilitators to account.

While institutions have a right to protect themselves against false claims, excessively hostile and delaying tactics are still being employed by churches. For example, more recently the Catholic church stands accused of adding to the trauma of a claim against a notorious jailed paedophile, by arguing the complainant couldn't have been a Catholic altar boy because he was baptised Anglican (Knaus 2023). Evidence tendered later established the complainant

was indeed a Catholic altar boy. So too, churches can delay investigating a matter — often through inaction and non-response — to such an extent that the accused dies in the meantime. The church can then seek to have the matter permanently stayed on the premise it can't receive a fair trial because the accused is no longer alive to respond in defence. The NSW supreme court, however, has rejected such behaviour, saying that churches should not benefit from their own inaction.

### Public distrust in religious institutions

Given common responses of religious institutions to child sexual abuse allegations and findings amongst their ranks, it is no surprise that church *abuse* and *hypocrisy* top the list of reasons Australians give for negative perceptions of institutional religion (McCrindle, Renton & Authers 2022): mentioned by 74% and 66% of respondents respectively.

**Summary:** In Australia, significantly more child sexual abuse has occurred within religious institutions than amongst all other types of institutions combined: 59% of reported cases, and 36% of all cases within the Catholic church alone.

The royal commission found extensive evidence that a range of factors including clericalism, narcissism and psychosexual immaturity contributed to the extent of sexual abuse of children in religious institutions. Ultimately, these fatally eroded interest in protecting children under religious institutional care from dire harm (the Care moral foundation). Rather, they sponsored a great interest in protecting the institution's public reputation (the Loyalty moral foundation) — from sexual misbehaviour undermining the institution's claimed *authority* about sexual behaviour ... and likely, through a halo effect, other moral domains as well.

Ultimately, while claiming to act as moral exemplars and beacons to be emulated and followed, religious institutions and their leaders hiding, excusing, and especially *doing nothing to stamp out* sexual abuse, have exposed themselves not as mere moral minnows, but moral pretenders. It's no wonder that the two most common reasons given by Australians for negative attitudes toward religious institutions are *abuse* and *hypocrisy* (74% and 66% respectively).



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