

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 641#

78% Want Religion out of Government

Section 116 of the Australian Constitution should be applied as it was Originally Intended

Public Education is and should be the responsibility of a democratically elected Government. Yet billions of dollars of public money are alienated from the public estate, namely public education, into privatised, religious institutions.

DOGS have always argued that State Aid to private religious schools contravenes Section 116 of the Australian Constitution because it entangled government with religion, and religion has no place in the government of a nation.

It now appears that 78% of Australian citizens are of the same opinion. The following information has been made available by the Rationalist Association of NSW>

“A national poll in January shows **78 per cent** of Australians don’t want religion dictating social policy, and **72 per cent** think the constitution should clearly separate church and state,” says Brian Morris, director of Plain Reason.

“Church leaders and many politicians wrongly claim our constitution is founded on Christian values that morally oppose contemporary policies such as same-sex marriage.”

“It’s an assertion firmly contradicted by [Section 116](#) — and also by [historical evidence](#) showing those who framed the constitution (proclaimed in 1901) plainly intended Australia to be a secular nation.”

“But a more explicit secular clause would deter politicians bending to religious lobbies who assert constitutional ‘Christian values’ to block legislation for same-sex marriage and voluntary euthanasia — just two current issues overwhelmingly supported by the community who are now [predominantly religion-neutral](#),” Brian Morris said.

The IPSOS poll, taken during mid-January, shows **78 per cent** of Australians want religion separated from the business of government — and **72 per cent** agree the constitution should be more precise on this crucial point.

Vice-president of the Rationalist Assn of NSW, Max Wallace, cited deeper constitutional problems that an amended s.116 could resolve. He said religious influence is heavily embedded in the secular public domain.

“A good example is the two *Williams* High Court decisions concerning funding of religious chaplains in public schools. These were technical, legal victories that were easily overridden by parliaments legislating for new funding arrangements, to circumvent the two High Court decisions.”

“Another example is the federal government’s \$20m-plus funding of the Pope’s World Youth Day in Sydney. You can’t get a more profound entanglement of government and religion than parliament funding a Papal event.”

“A clearer constitutional clause separating religious from government would prevent this,” Max Wallace said.

On the first question of whether personal religious beliefs should be separated from the business of government a clear 78 per cent thought it was very important (58%) or somewhat important (20%). Only 10 per cent believed it was not very important and 4 per cent thought it was not important at all. A further 8 per cent didn’t know.

Most striking is that in every category, except one sub-set, more than 50 per cent of respondents agreed the proposition was very important — across Age, Gender, Education and Gross Income. Only the 18-29 Age group listed a minor score (47%). All Education categories centred on 60 per cent for the very important option.

Throughout every Gross Income category the very important response ranged well over 60 per cent, providing a clear indication that the proposition was well supported across all socio-economic demographics. Of equally interest was that the first-option response registered as highly for rural areas as for all the capital cities.

The second question asked whether the separation of religion and government should be more clearly defined in the constitution. A solid 72 per cent thought it should — with very important (43%) and somewhat important (29%) outpolling the 18 per cent who were not convinced. The negative vote broke down to not very important (10%), not important at all (8%), with 10 per cent who didn’t know.

Similarly, and reflecting Question 1, there was strong support for a constitutional amendment across all Age, Education and Gross Income demographics. On both questions the Male/Female balance was almost equal.

Brian Morris said, “It’s now conclusive that the Australian population overwhelmingly support the separation of religion from the whole political process — a clear *constitutional demarcation* between church and state.”

“The public majority is now secular and religion-neutral, with church congregations falling to below 8 per cent.”

“Small but still-powerful religious institutions — with their professional lobbyists — are seen as an unelected and unrepresentative intrusion in the political system. Politicians, the law, media, and public sector should take note of this potent community mood to limit religious influence in contemporary social policy,” Brian Morris said.

The survey was conducted during mid-January 2016 by international polling group IPSOS. It was co-commissioned by Plain Reason and the Rationalist Association of NSW. The survey sample was 1,032 and covered all states.

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