

# AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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## Australians overwhelming support separation of religion and politics, new research shows

Si Gladman Rationalist Society 03 July 2023

**The vast majority of Australians support the separation of church and state, and oppose attempts by religious leaders to influence elections, new research shows.**

The [\*Religion in Australian politics and society\*](#) report, published this month by a team of researchers at Macquarie University, found that 82 per cent of Australians agreed that “religion should be separate from politics”, with 47 per cent saying they strongly agreed with the statement.

Similarly, most people – 77 per cent – supported the statement that “religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections”.

The research team surveyed 1,044 voters during the federal election period in May last year as part of the Australian Cooperative Election Study (ACES), inquiring into their views on a range of topics involving religion and politics.

Among the other findings, Australians overwhelmingly rejected the notion of Australia being a Christian country, with just one-quarter (25 per cent) of respondents agreeing that the government should “promote Christian values”.

Despite the Morrison’s government’s repeated attempts to introduce far-reaching ‘religious freedom’ laws, few Australians bought the argument that religious people faced discrimination.

Only 9 per cent of those surveyed strongly agreed with the statement that “Australians who hold religious beliefs face a lot of discrimination”. A significant proportion of people (50 per cent) who practise religion agreed with the statement, while a large minority of non-religious people (40 per cent) disagreed with the statement.

The research team assessed that these results “might provide clues” for why the Morrison government failed to generate wider support for its Religious Discrimination Bill.

The research findings about discrimination in religious schools also provides important insights for the Albanese government, which has proposed removing exemptions to anti-discrimination laws for such institutions.

A majority of people (51 per cent) strongly disagreed with the statement that religious schools should be allowed to exclude students on the basis of their sexual orientation, and 69 per cent disagreed overall. The survey produced similar results regarding questions about discrimination against staff.

The research also provides further evidence of the collapse of public trust towards religious institutions, with tiny minorities saying they trust organised religions and faiths, and religious leaders.

Among non-religious people, distrust of religious leaders was high, with 55 per cent saying they had no trust at all in them, and another 37 per cent having “not very much trust”.

The research also found that clear majorities of people believe that religious leaders should play “no role at all” in social and moral issues such as abortion (59 per cent), same-sex marriage (58 per cent) and voluntary assisted dying (55 per cent).

Such findings come as the [Minns government prepares to introduce a Faith Affairs Council](#) that, as the Rationalist Society of Australia has warned, will privilege the voices of religious clerics in government policy making.

Findings in the report reflect many of the trends identified by social researcher Neil Francis in his [Religiosity in Australia](#) series, published by the Rationalist Society of Australia.

***Si Gladman is Campaigns & Communications Coordinator for the Rationalist Society of Australia.***

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