



Australian Religious Identity (ARI6)

By combining multiple measures of religion we gain further insights into Australians' relationship with religion. This analysis uses a combination of the affiliation and behaviour measures that results in a new model comprising 6 distinct religious segments from low to high *religiosity*: from Rejecters and Socialisers, through Notionals and Occasionals, to Regulars and Devouts.

Australian Religious Identity 6-Factor (ARI6)

The **Australian Religious Identity 6-Factor (ARI6)** model provides deeper psychographic — not merely dull demographic — insights into Australians' relationship with personal faith: their overall *religiosity*. It allocates each Australian into one of six segments:

1. **Rejecters:** Have no religious affiliation and never attend religious services (31% of the population in 2019).^c
2. **Socialisers:** Have no religious affiliation, but *do* attend religious services (10%).
3. **Notionals:** Have a religious affiliation, but *never* attend religious services (22%).
4. **Occasionals:** Have a religious affiliation and *occasionally* attend religious services (22%).
5. **Regulars:** Have a religious affiliation and *regularly* attend religious services (4%).
6. **Devouts:** Have a religious affiliation and *frequently* attend religious services (11%).

At times we'll refer to Regulars and Devouts combined together, as Committeds (15% of the population in 2019).

^c A tiny proportion of Rejecters are personally somewhat religious: what they are rejecting is *institutional* religion.

Recent trends

In the 12 years to 2019, the proportion of Rejecters has risen substantially from 22% to 32% of the population, a rise in the segment of 45% (Figure 9). Socialisers have also increased from 4% to 10%, a segment increase of 154%.

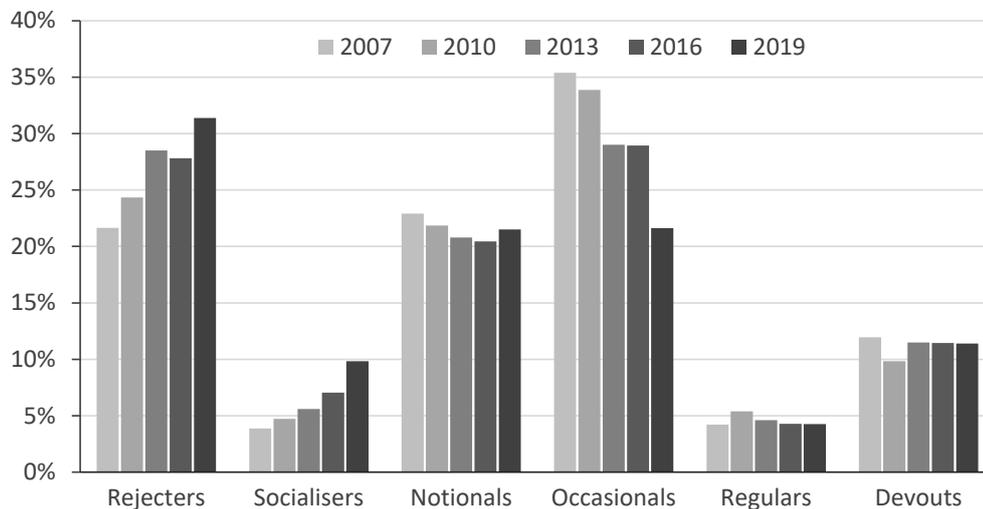


Figure 9: ARI6 religiosity segments by year

Source: AES

This net increase has come mostly from Occasionals, down from 35% of the population to 22%, a segment drop of 39%. There has also been a small drop in Notionals from 23% to 22%.

This is not to say that Occasionals have directly become Rejecters (and Socialisers), though it is possible. It is also possible that some Occasionals have become Notionals, while some Notionals have become Rejecters. The figures report only *net* changes.

Only the Committeds — Regulars and Devouts at a combined 15% of the population — have seen no significant change in their numbers over the 12 years.

A question arises as to whether Socialisers are really Regulars and Devouts who simply decline to state their religious denomination. This isn't the case: almost all Socialisers attend religious services rarely (87%) or only occasionally (11%) (Figure 10). That makes only 2% of Socialisers who may be classed as committed to religion — attending services at least monthly.

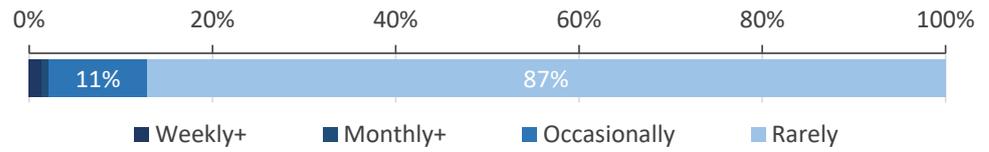


Figure 10: Frequency of Socialiser religious service attendance

Source: AES (average of 2007–2019 data due to small sample sizes)

Summary: Less committed religious Australians — Notionals and especially Occasionals — have been abandoning religion in recent years, either dropping their affiliation, or their affiliation *and* religious service attendance.

Denomination profile

ARI6 analysis also allows us to determine the relative religious commitment amongst each of the denominations (Figure 11).

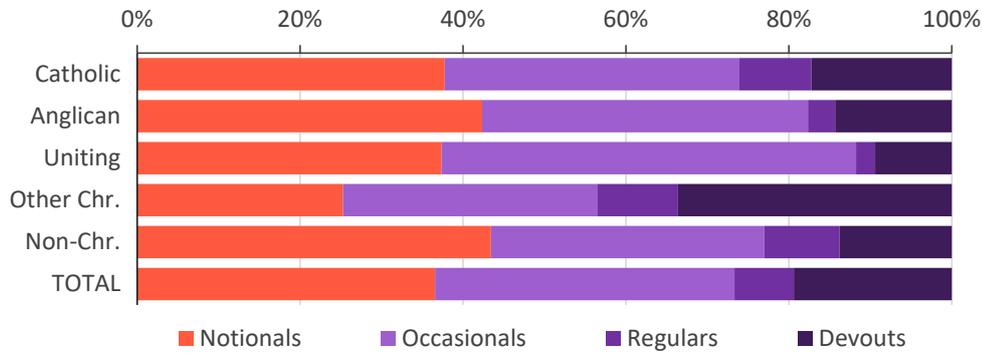


Figure 11: ARI6 by religious denomination

Source: AES 2019

Overall, amongst Australians who are affiliated with a religious denomination, more than a third (37%) are Notionals: they *never* attend religious services. That includes 38% of Catholics, 42% of Anglicans, 37% of Uniting/Methodists, 25% of minor Christian denominations, and 43% of non-Christian religions.

Further, another 37% of affiliated Australians attend religious services from less than once a year up to just twice a year: another 36% of Catholics, 40% of Anglicans, 51% of Uniting/Methodists, 31% of minor Christian denominations, and 34% of non-Christian religions.

Just a quarter of affiliated Australians (26%) are Committeds (Regulars and Devouts), including 26% of Catholics, 17% of Anglicans, 11% of Uniting/Methodists, 44% of minor Christian denominations, and 13% of non-Christian religions.

Summary: Just 15% of all Australians are religious Committeds. Among those affiliating with any denomination, only a quarter (26%) are Committeds, including 26% of Catholics and 17% of Anglicans. Even in the group with the highest rate of Committeds — minor Christian denominations — Committeds are in the minority (44%).

Gender profile

From 2007 to 2019, the proportion of males and females amongst Rejecters and Socialisers (i.e. no religious affiliation) remained about the same. There were significant movements in the other segments, however (Figure 12).

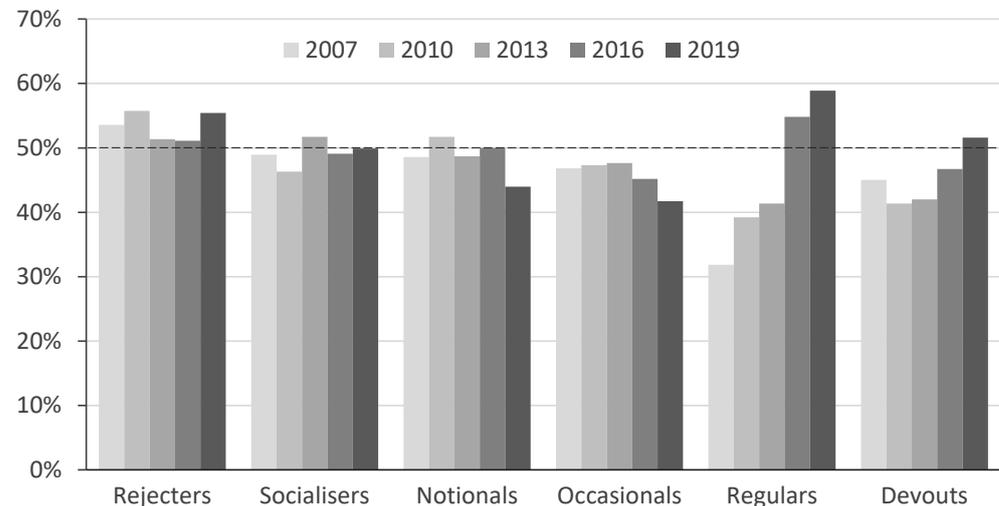


Figure 12: Proportion of ARI6 segments that are male, by year

Source: AES. Note: Segment sizes are not equal, so genders do not balance equally across the national 50.2% gender split line.

By 2019, the proportion of males amongst Occasionals and Notionals decreased significantly. Conversely, it increased significantly amongst Regulars and Devouts. The patterns suggest that over recent years, Committed females have on average become somewhat less religious, while lesser-committed males have become more so.

Given that the segment sizes of Regulars and Devouts has remained much the same over the period, this indicates a masculinisation-by-exchange with lesser-committeds in recent years, especially since 2016 when the issue of marriage equality was an election issue, and 2017 when it was approved by national plebiscite. This may help explain some Committeds' more "muscular" public stance towards religious "protections" in the past several years.

This theme is explored in greater detail in the section *Marriage equality* on page 112.

Summary: The proportion of males amongst Australia's Committeds (Regulars and Devouts) has increased in recent years, which may help account for the more "muscular" public stance of Committeds to religious "protections".

Age profile

Age profiles differ significantly amongst religious denominations. NRs are weighted heavily towards younger ages, while Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists are heavily weighted to older ages (Figure 13).

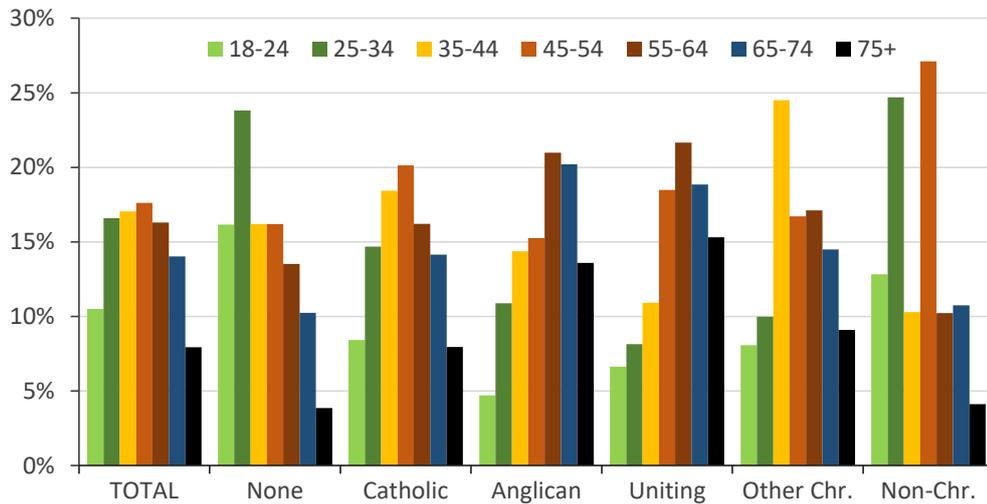


Figure 13: Age profiles of religious denominations

Source: AES 2016

Catholics and minor Christian denominations are weighted toward middle age, with slightly more younger ages amongst Catholics given its government-funded religious school system. Non-Christian denominations have a peak at middle age, with a matching peak amongst first-generation children.

The ageing demographic profile of Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists indicates that these denominations may struggle to thrive, and possibly even survive, in coming years.

By ARI6 religiosity, from 2007 to 2019, religious Committeds numbers have decreased across both younger and older age groups (Figure 14). However, in the middle age groups 35–64 years, Committeds have increased, though 35–44 year more consistently, and 45–64 years only in 2019.

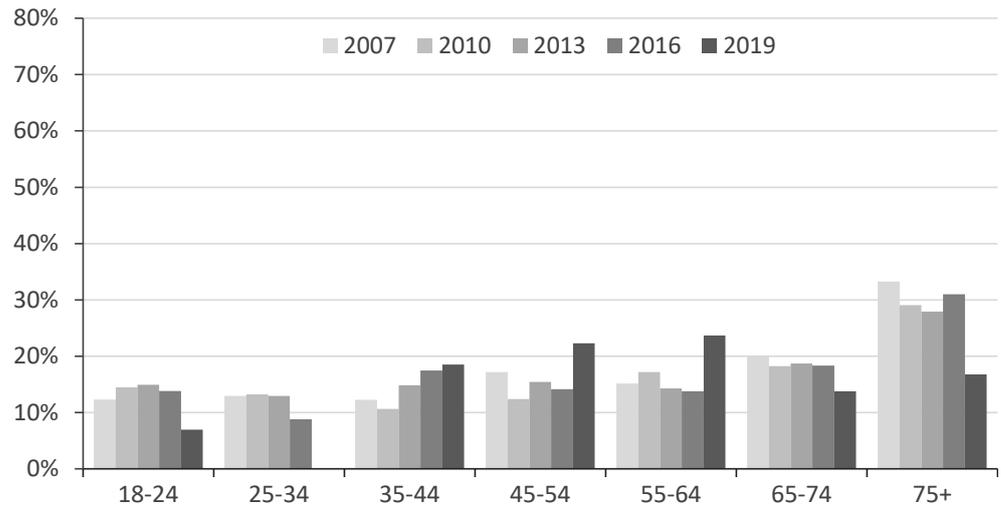


Figure 14: Proportion of Committeds by age group over time

Source: AES

At the same time at the other end of the religiosity spectrum, the number of non-affiliated Australians (Rejecters and Socialisers) has increased significantly across all age groups except 45-54 years (Figure 15).

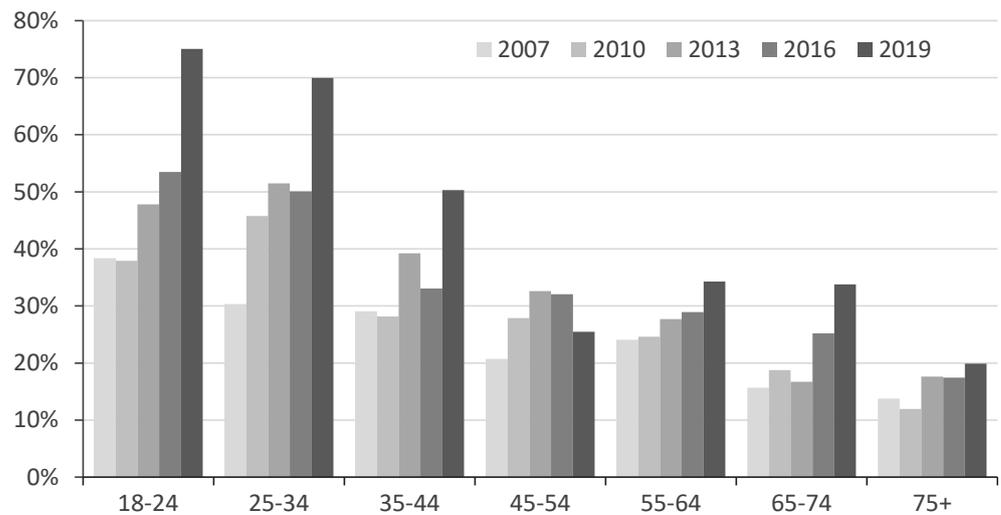


Figure 15: Proportion of non-affiliateds by age group over time

Source: AES

Amongst Notionals (state a religion but never attend services), numbers have decreased slightly amongst all age groups except 75+, which has increased substantially since 2016 (Figure 16).

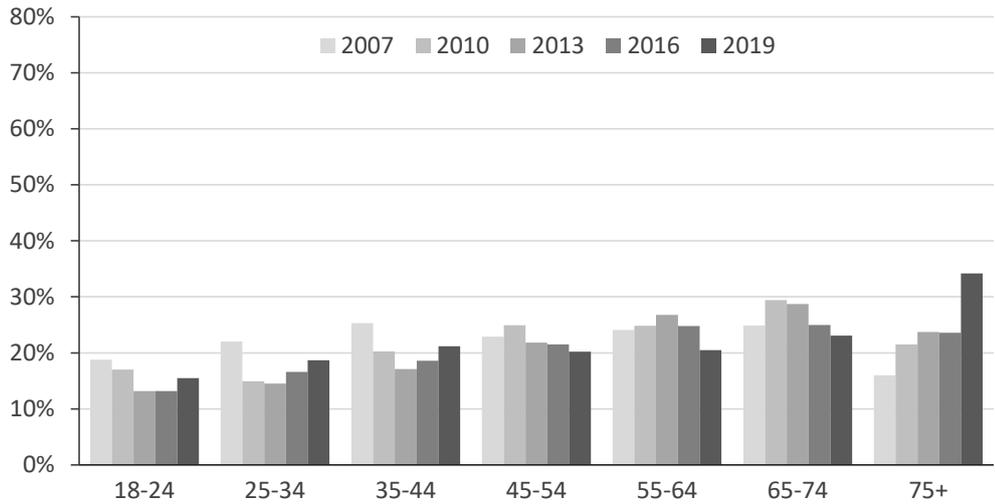


Figure 16: Proportion of Notionals by age group over time

Source: AES

The increase in 75+ since 2016 is consistent with the decrease, at the same time, in 75+ Committeds, indicating that a proportion of older Australians who attended religious services often now don't attend services at all.

But the largest change in recent years has been amongst Occasionals, whose membership has decreased significantly across all age groups, and radically after 2016 amongst younger (18-44 years) and late middle (55-64 years) age groups (Figure 17).

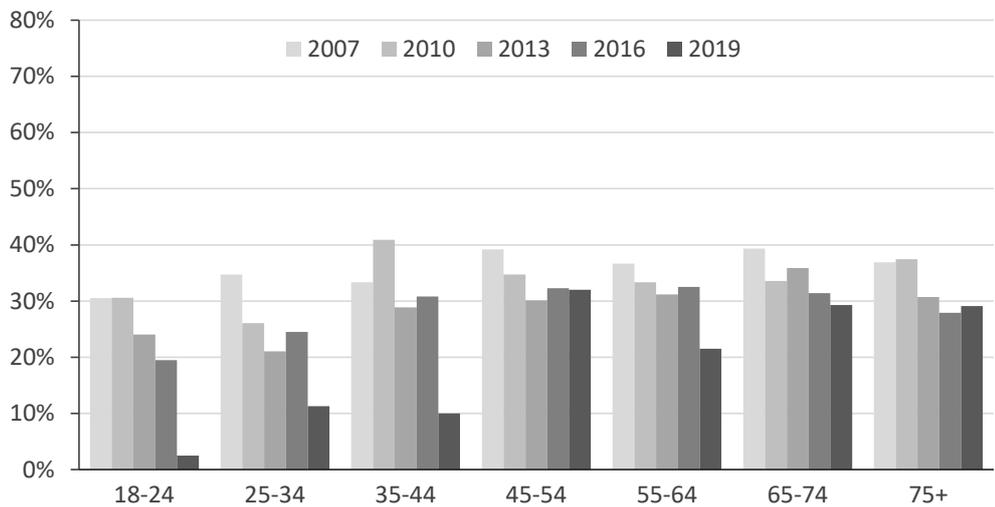


Figure 17: Proportion of Occasionals by age group over time

Source: AES

A very small proportion of older (75+) Australians who had stopped attending religious services regularly or frequently by 2019 had changed to attending only occasionally.

Overall, the pattern of decrease in religiosity and abandonment of religious affiliation in Australia is consistent with at least two main factors: a decrease in the relevance of religion, and that many Australians have not valued the experience of religious services. These themes will be explored further.

Summary: Nett decreases in Australians' religiosity have occurred across all age ranges, with the largest amongst under 35 years and over 75 years. In a polarisation across the middle years (25–64) there have been small increases in Committeds. The nett decreases are consistent with decreases in the personal relevance of religion and satisfaction with religious services.

Education profile

A common perception is that religion and religiosity correlate negatively with education level — that is, religious people tend to be less educated than the non-religious. This is generally true in the USA, where lower rates of bachelor’s degree correlate with higher rates of religiosity (Figure 18).

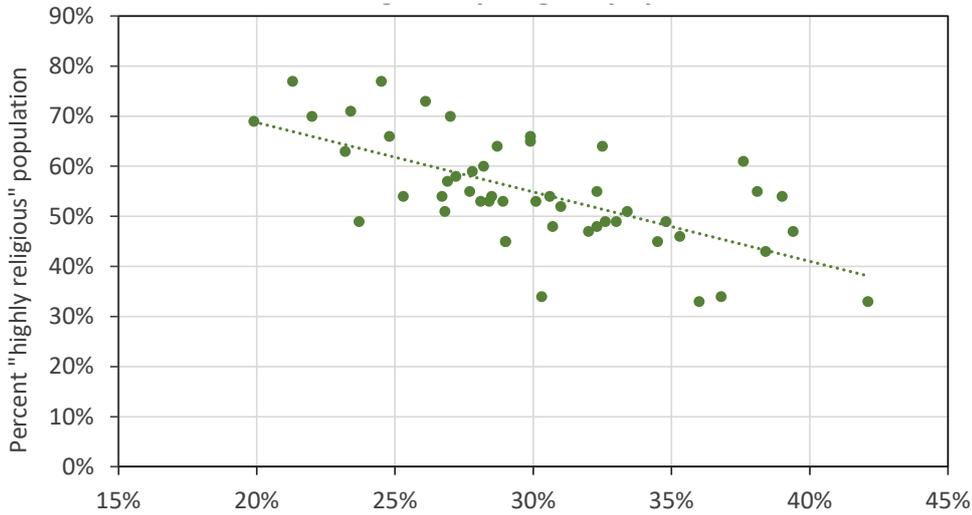


Figure 18: Bachelor’s degree or higher and religiosity, by USA state
Sources: Pew Research 2016, US Department of Education 2019

However, it is not generally true in Australia. On the one hand, Anglicans (11%) and Uniting/Methodists (17%) have significantly lower rates of bachelor’s degree or higher than do NRs (25%). On the other, Catholics (29%), minor Christian denominations (28%) and especially non-Christian denominations (35%) have higher rates than NRs (Figure 19).

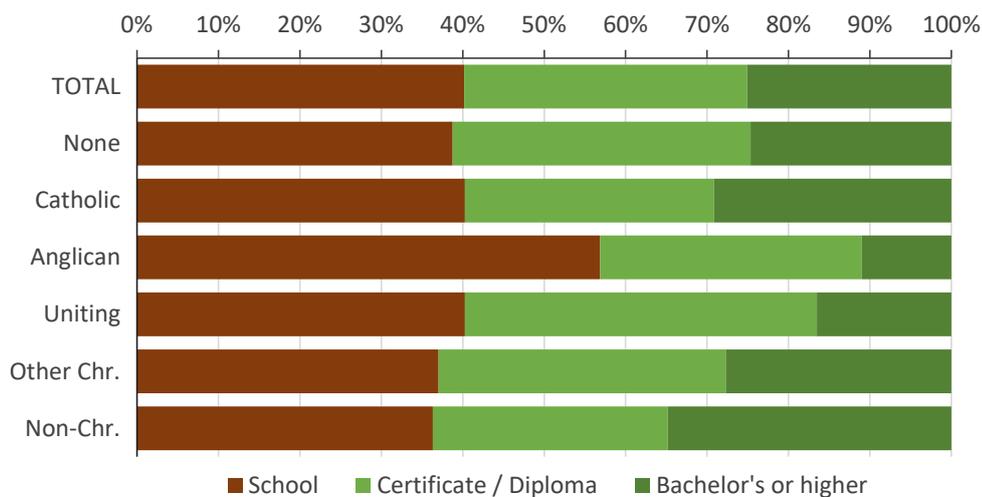


Figure 19: Religion by highest educational achievement
Source: AuSSA 2018

Further, more Occasionals (28%), Regulars (27%) and Devouts (34%) hold a bachelor’s degree or higher than do NRs (22%) (Figure 20).

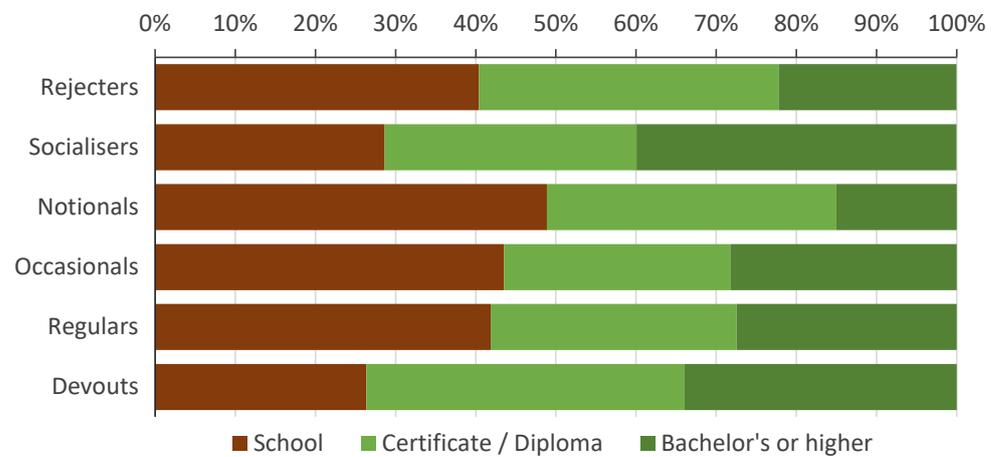


Figure 20: ARI6 by highest educational attainment
Source: AuSSA 2018

Far fewer Notionals, on the other hand, hold a bachelor’s degree or higher (15%), and Notionals top the list on holding no qualification past school age.

Summary: Unlike the USA where religiosity correlates strongly and negatively with education, in Australia the picture is mixed. Notionals hold a bachelor’s degree or higher at significantly lower rates (15%) than NRs (22%), but Occasionals (28%), Regulars (27%) and Devouts (35%) at significantly higher rates.

Work profile

In 2019, Rejecters (64%) and Regulars (64%) were the most likely to be currently employed, with Devouts (9%) and especially Regulars (18%) the most likely to be seeking employment (Figure 21). Notionals (31%) and Occasionals (36%) were the most likely to be retired, while Devouts (16%) and Socialisers (10%) were the most likely to hold a family/carer role.

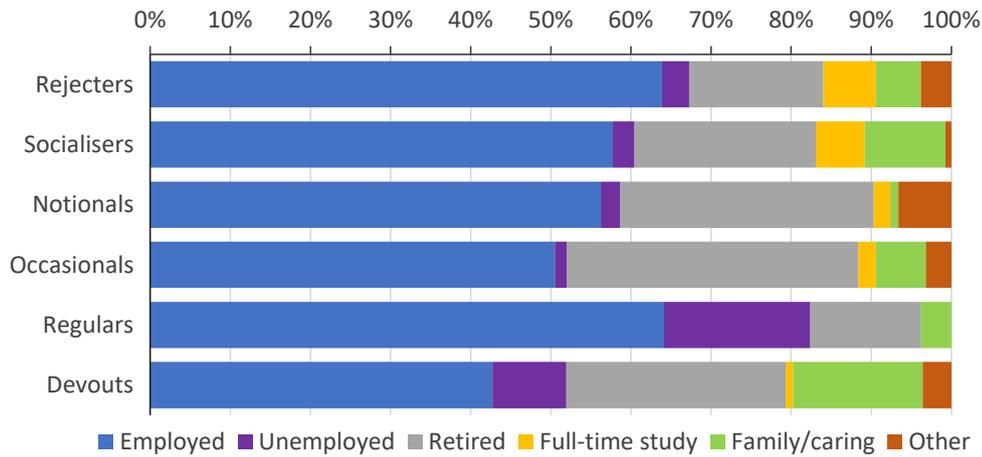


Figure 21: Current work status, by ARI6
Source: AES 2019. Note: Other = invalid pension, long-term illness, on leave, etc.

The most common work role (current or most recent past) in all segments was as a professional — for example accountants, architects, educators, engineers, scientists, lawyers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, religious ministers, etc. Socialisers were the most likely to be in management roles (Figure 22).

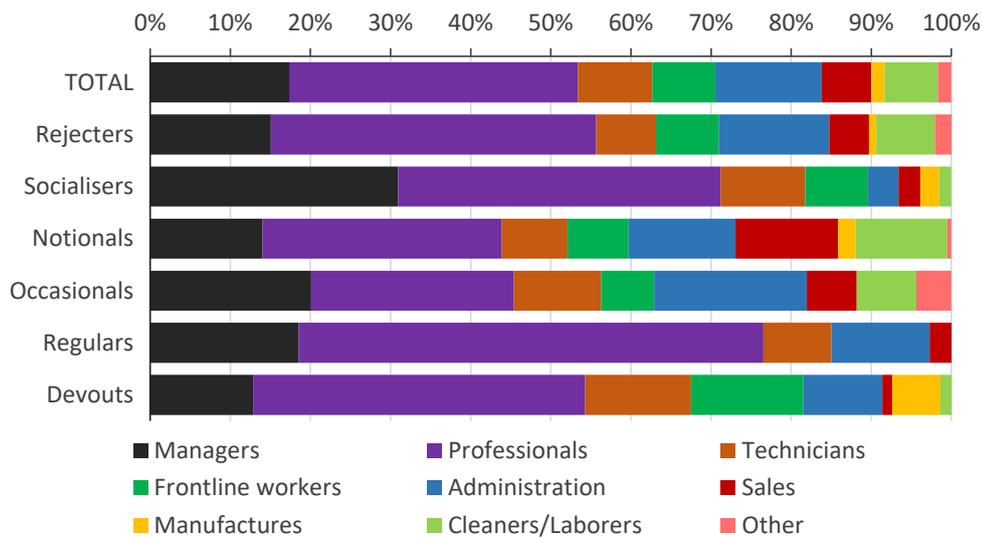


Figure 22: Current or most recent working role, by ARI6
Source: AES 2019

Notionals and Occasionals the least likely to be a professional. Notionals were the most likely to work in sales or as cleaners/laborers (consistent with a lower average educational attainment), and Occasionals the most likely to work in administration. Devouts were the least likely to be in management careers.

Devouts and Regulars were by far the least likely to occupy middle and senior management roles (Figure 23). Indeed, in the 2019 sample, *no* Devouts were in upper management. Devouts were by far the least likely to hold a supervisory or management role. Regulars were the most likely to hold a lower management role (and twice as likely as all others (45%) to be a member of a trade union).

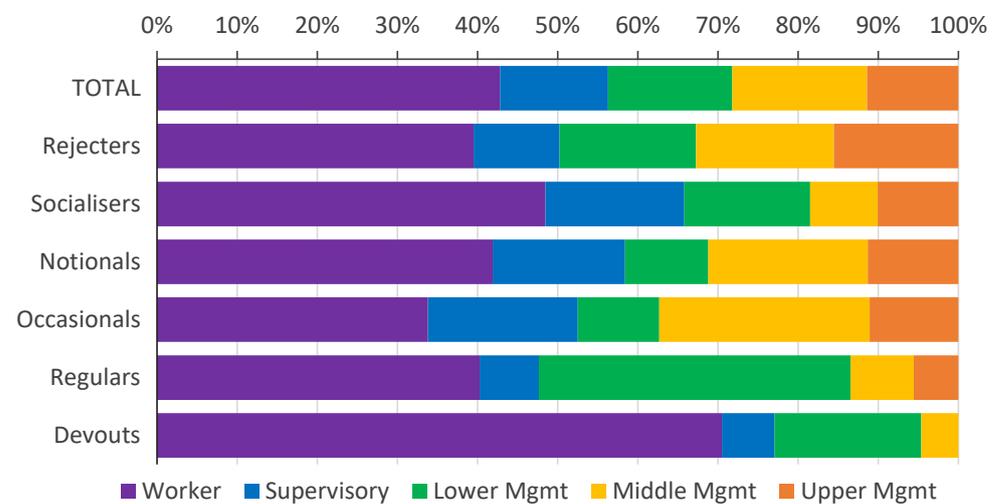


Figure 23: Current work seniority by ARI6

Source: AES 2019. Base: Currently working.

It would be expected that as workers get older, they generally rise to higher positions. Since Rejecters are heavily weighted to younger ages and Committeds (Regulars and Devouts) slightly to older ages and with higher average education, it would be expected that Rejecters would have lower numbers of senior managers and Committeds would have higher numbers. But the opposite is true.

This suggests that either Committeds are not interested in rising to higher levels, or have been unsuccessful in attempts to do so. The underlying reasons could not be elicited from available data, for example to separate out a *preference* for followership rather than leadership, and necessary leadership traits such as perspective-taking and welcoming diversity.

Summary: Regulars and Devouts were the most likely to be unemployed (and looking for work). They were also far more likely to have failed to reach middle and upper management, despite having an older age profile than Rejecters, and similar age profiles to the other segments.

Feelings of self-determination

When asked to agree with the statement “*There is little that people can do to change the course of their lives*”, agreement signals fatalism and disagreement self-determination. Most Australians (84%) report feelings of self-determination (Figure 24).

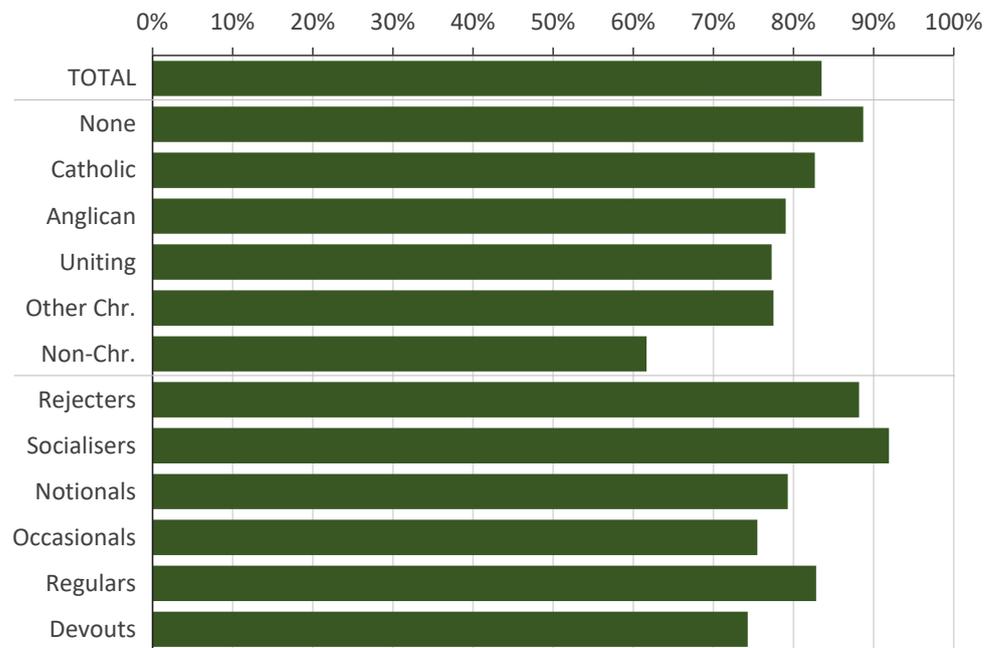


Figure 24: Hold an attitude of self-determination

Source: AuSSA 2018

NRs report the highest rates of self-determination (88% of Rejecters and 92% of Socialisers). Notionals (79%), Occasionals (75%) and Devouts (74%) have significantly lower rates.

Non-Christian denominations reported by far the lowest rate of self-determination (62%). There was insufficient data to determine possible causes, such as higher rates of fatalistic themes among these faiths, or because of discrimination by others.

Summary: A great majority of Australians feel they have significant control over the course of their own lives. While still all in the majority, Religionists report significantly lower rates, especially Occasionals and Devouts, but most of all Non-Christian denominations.

Other religious behaviours

Other modest religious behaviours include frequency of prayer (weekly or more often), having studied a religious text in the past 12 months not in a religious service, having a shrine or devotional object at home for religious purposes, and having visited one or more non-usual holy places for religious reasons in the past year.

On average, around one in five Australians (22%) reported each of these behaviours: that is, four out of five didn't (Figure 25).

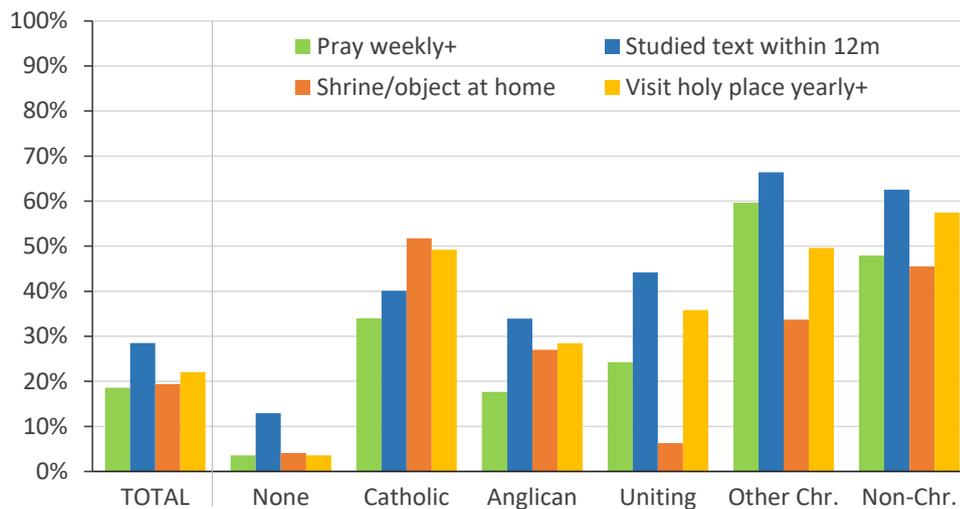


Figure 25: Rates of other religious behaviours, by religion

Source: AuSSA 2018

Catholic practice appears dominated by ritual and symbolism, with relatively high rates of both devotional objects at home, and visits to holy places. Uniting/Methodists, on the other hand, display a more cerebral approach to religion, with a very low rate of devotional objects, and domination of religious text study. Of the religionists, Anglicans and Uniting/Methodists had by far the lowest rates of religious behaviour overall, and minor and non-Christian denominations the highest.

By religiosity, Socialisers and Notionals were only slightly more engaged than Rejecters, with most (88% average) not participating in the defined behaviours (Figure 26).

Occasionals were somewhat more engaged, though with minorities of all behaviours but visiting holy places.

Unsurprisingly, a majority of Regulars and Devouts reported these religious behaviours. Levels of most of the behaviours were very similar, except that Devouts were significantly more likely to pray more often.

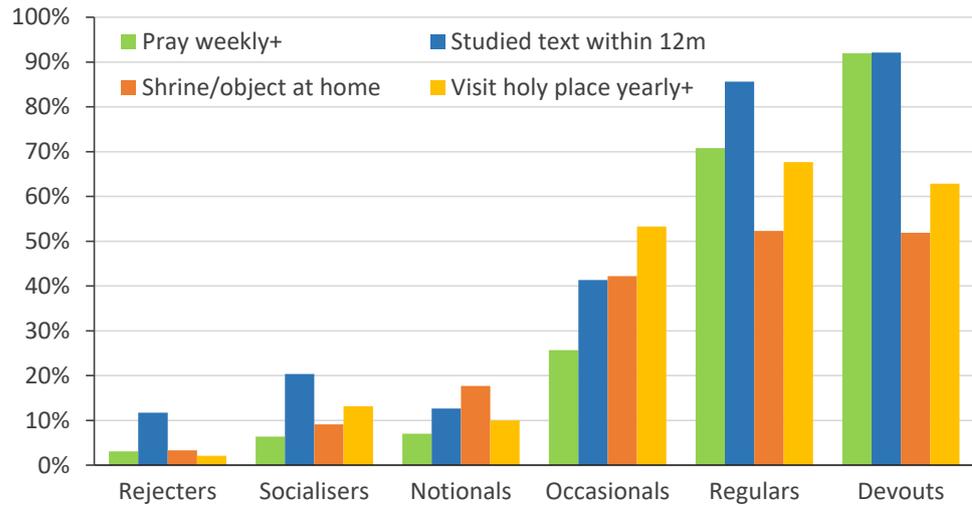


Figure 26: Rates of other religious behaviours, by ARI6
Source: AuSSA 2018

Summary: Only amongst Regulars and Devouts did a majority report engaging in the four modest religious behaviours (from 51% to 91%): weekly prayer, studying a religious text in the past year, having a religious shrine or object at home, and visiting a non-usual holy place in the past year. Occasionals reported significantly lower rates of the behaviours (average 36%), and Notionals and Socialisers very low rates (average 11%).