

The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract artwork. It features a variety of colors including deep reds, bright yellows, lush greens, and various shades of blue and teal. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The composition is layered, with some colors appearing more prominent than others, and the overall effect is one of dynamic energy and emotional intensity.

PM GLYNN
INSTITUTE

**The PM Glynn
survey on
hope, trust
and belonging**

**Series 2
Human rights:
an uncertain
commitment**

Attitudes to human rights

HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES WITH GREATEST SUPPORT

More than half of the 3,000 respondents in the PM Glynn survey were supportive of the human rights issues that they were asked about (see Figure 1)¹. The human rights issues that received the greatest support were:

- protecting freedom of speech (84 per cent)
- protecting freedom of thought and religion (71 per cent)
- protection from religious and racial vilification (69 per cent).

LEAST SUPPORTED HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

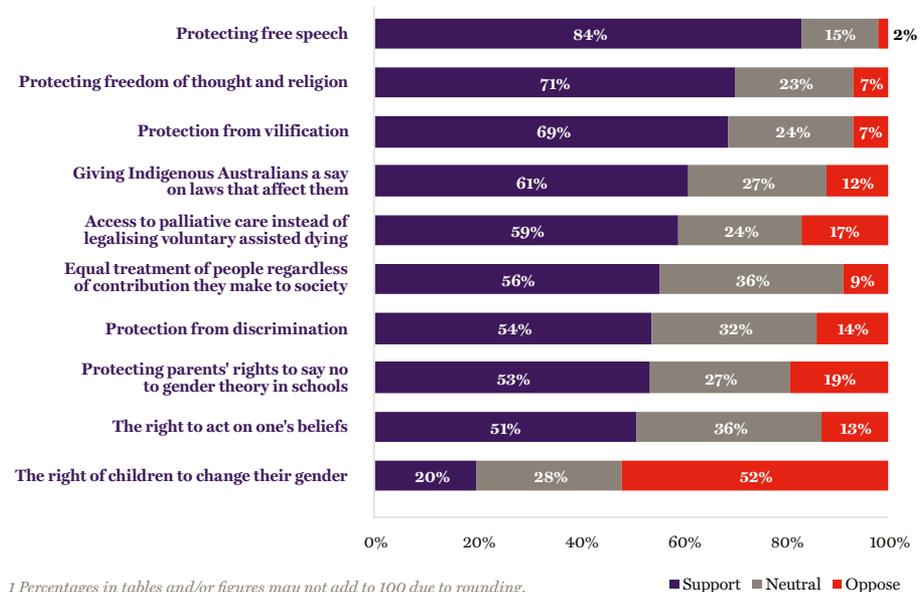
Least support was given to the right of children to change their gender with or without parental approval with 52 per cent of the respondents signifying their opposition.

NEUTRALITY ON HUMAN RIGHTS

There was a substantial number of respondents who were neutral to the specified human rights issues (Figure 1). Notwithstanding the fact that freedom of speech was greatly supported by 84 per cent of the respondents, and is central to the idea of democracy, 15 per cent of the respondents were neutral about it.

The same can be said about the other human rights issues, all showing neutrality in double-digit percentages. Both 'equal treatment of the disadvantaged' and 'protecting the rights of people to not be forced by law to act against their beliefs' received the highest percentage of neutral responses at 36 per cent. Even the least supported human rights issue, the right of children to change their gender, had 28 per cent (nearly one in three) of the respondents signifying a neutral position.

Figure 1. Participants' attitudes to various human rights issues (N=3,000)



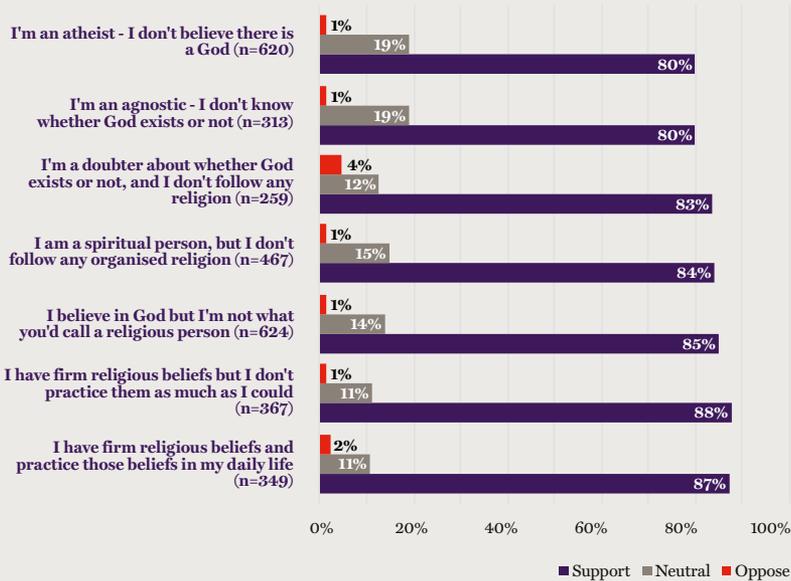
Human rights and religious belief

Crosstabulations were done between the two most supported human rights issues (freedom of speech and freedom of thought and religion) and levels of religious belief. A similar crosstabulation was done between the least supported human rights issue (giving children a right to change their gender). The crosstabulations allow us to examine the relationship of these human rights issues with the respondents' differing levels of religiosity.

RELIGION AND SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH

There was strong support for freedom of speech whether one holds religious beliefs or not. The level of support was the highest amongst the listed human rights, ranging from 80 per cent to 88 per cent of all respondents regardless of their religious identification. Those with strong levels of religious belief recorded the highest levels of support.

Figure 2. Religion and protecting free speech (N=3,000)

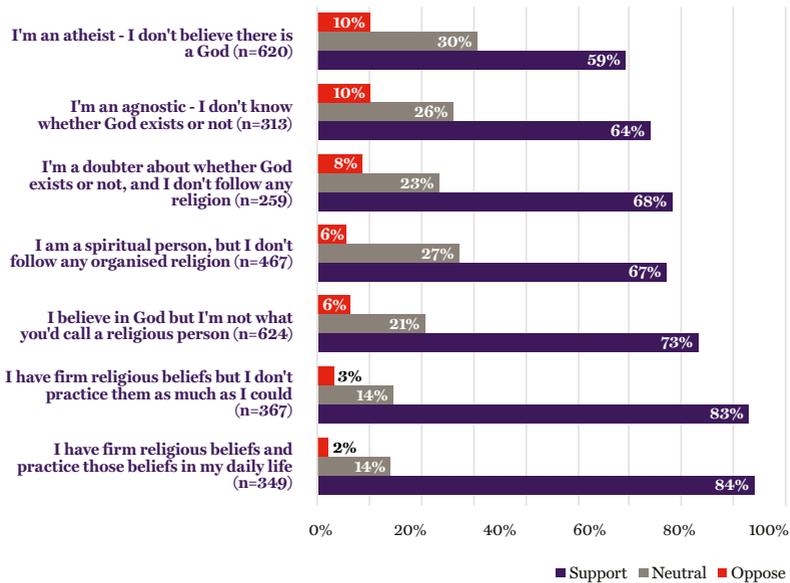


RELIGION AND SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION

These findings were not dissimilar from the findings for freedom of speech. Most of the respondents across all religious and non-religious categories supported freedom of

thought and religion. Although support was comparatively lower than freedom of speech, support for the protection of freedom of thought and religion ranged from 59 per cent to 84 per cent, with a higher level of support from those who have firm religious beliefs.

Figure 3. Religion and protecting freedom of thought and religion (N=3,000)

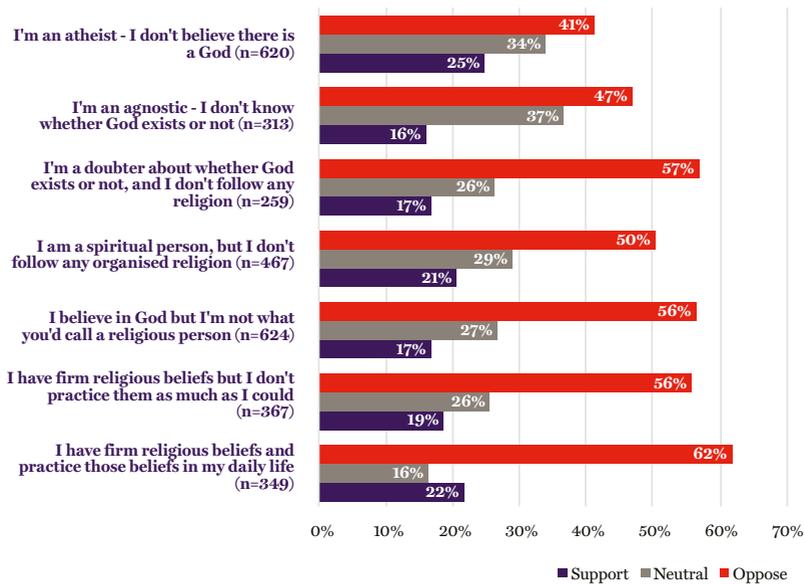


OPPOSITION TO GIVING CHILDREN THE RIGHT TO CHANGE GENDER

Amongst the human rights issues listed, this garnered the highest opposition. Sixty-two per cent of those with firm religious beliefs and practising those beliefs daily opposed giving children the right to change their gender. This was followed by respondents

with firm religious beliefs who “don’t practice as much” (56 per cent), and those who believe in God but would not call themselves religious also at 56 per cent). Those with no religious beliefs also stated their opposition, although at varying levels.

Figure 4. Religion and protecting the right of children to change gender (N=3,000)



The end of human rights?

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS?

The PM Glynn Survey reveals that although freedom of speech, freedom of thought and religion, and freedom from racial and religious vilification are highly valued by many, on average, one in five Australians are neutral about each of these human rights.

RIGHT OF ALL AUSTRALIANS VS RIGHTS OF MINORITIES

The survey shows that Australians most strongly support human rights that apply to all Australians, and are less supportive of human rights that appear to relate to particular groups (e.g., disadvantaged Australians). This may reflect the particular issue raised in the question asked.

These findings suggest that if a commitment to human rights is to remain strong in Australia, it will be because they are seen to be rights relevant to all Australians. At the same time, it is interesting to note that 61 percent support Indigenous Australians to have a constitutional right to a say on laws affecting them.

NEUTRALITY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS?

One in five Australians are neutral about three of the human rights that are most highly valued in Australia.

Further research is required to understand why they are neutral. Is it the case that nearly a quarter of Australians (those neutral or opposed) no longer value these human rights? Have they reflected on the significance of these human rights? Or are they uncertain about how they are used or what they are invoked to justify?

EQUALLY LOW OPPOSITION TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FREEDOM FROM VILIFICATION

It is notable that levels of opposition to protecting religious freedom and protection from vilification are identical: seven per cent of people are opposed to protection of each freedom. This is the second lowest level of opposition to protection of any freedom.

Recent debates about law reform have pitted these two freedoms against one another. The survey's findings suggest, however, that Australians are no more opposed to one of these than they are to the other.

Questions for further investigation

WHO SUPPORTS FREE SPEECH AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

The survey reveals that 26 per cent of Australians who support free speech and 35 per cent of Australians who support religious freedom are not religious. This means that non-religious Australians are more likely to support religious freedom than free speech.

This unexpected finding raises some interesting questions:

- Are non-religious people more likely to support religious freedom because they value it more than free speech?
- Are people more accommodating of others who hold religious beliefs they find offensive than they are of people who express opinions they find offensive?
- Do people support religious freedom more because it has been highlighted in the media in recent years, resulting in higher levels of public awareness? If so, why is support for freedom of speech lower?
- Only 51 per cent of Australians support the right to act on one's beliefs. When people support religious freedom, how much are they also supporting the right of religious people to live out their beliefs?

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE NEUTRAL ABOUT THEIR RIGHT TO THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS THEY HOLD?

The survey reveals that 63 per cent of people who feel neutral about religious freedom nevertheless profess some form of religious belief.

- Does this mean that religious people do not value their civil right to practise their religion?
- Does it reveal a lack of understanding about rights which enable people to live as they choose?

WHY DO PEOPLE DISAGREE ABOUT ALLOWING CHILDREN TO CHANGE THEIR GENDER?

The survey reveals that 54 per cent of Australians who oppose allowing children to change their gender are religious and 46 per cent of those opposed are non-religious. So, opposition is fairly evenly balanced between religious and non-religious people, suggesting that religious affiliation is not a strong indicator of disagreement about this right.

More work is required to understand what indicators reveal more about why people oppose this right. Possibilities might include concerns about the impact of transgender ideas per se, as well as factors such as gender, age, education, or income.

Further consideration of these sorts of issues will follow as part of this series.

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This PM Glynn Survey Series 2 has been developed as part of the institute's 'The End of Human Rights?' Work Stream, which undertakes a careful assessment of what is happening in the current understandings and uses of human rights.

Series 2 has been prepared by Damien Freeman and Dr. Cris Abbu in collaboration with Dr. Michael Casey.

Cover image

Robert Moore, Boronia Road 2016
Oil and enamel on board
Australian Catholic University
Art Collection

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