

PM GLYNN  
INSTITUTE

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

**Series 4**  
**Trust and  
confidence in  
institutions:  
Australia's  
system of  
democracy**



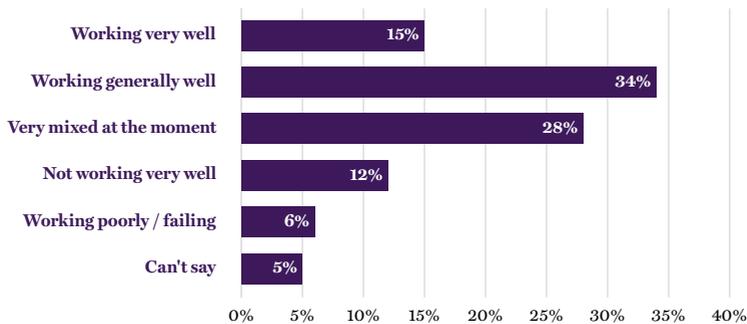
**ACU**

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# Trust and confidence in Australia's system of democracy

Of three thousand respondents in the PM Glynn Survey, nearly half, 49 per cent, think that our system of democracy is working well. However, 28 per cent of respondents have a very mixed view, and 18 per cent of respondents rate it poorly. See Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1. Trust in Australia's system of democracy (N=3,000)



## TRUST IN DEMOCRACY AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

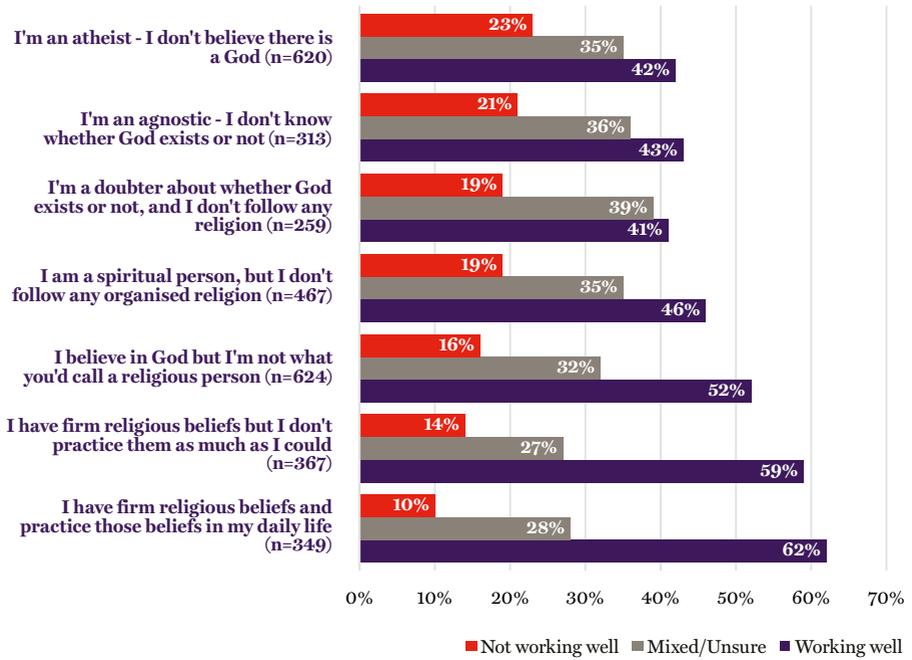
Figure 2 cross-tabulates respondents' perceptions of trust and confidence in the country's democratic system with levels of religiosity to examine the relationship between the two variables.

The respondents who have the most favourable view of Australia's democratic system 'working very well' are mostly those who firmly hold religious beliefs and are practising regularly. In this cohort, six in ten respondents viewed the democratic system favourably. Levels of confidence in democracy increase with strength of religious belief and practice.

Although most of the respondents without religious beliefs (i.e., doubters, agnostics, atheists) still think of the democratic system positively, they have relatively higher percentages for the 'very mixed at the moment' response compared to those with firm religious beliefs. On average, 37 per cent of those who do not hold any religious belief have mixed views on democracy. They also have higher rates of negative response with over a fifth (21% on average) saying that the democratic system is not working well.

<sup>1</sup> Percentages in tables or figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 2. Trust in Australia's system of democracy and religious beliefs (N=3,000)



## Factors challenging trust and hope in Australian society

The respondents in the PM Glynn Survey cite lack of strong leadership and political correctness that stifles debate as among a number of factors that challenge their trust and hope in Australian society.

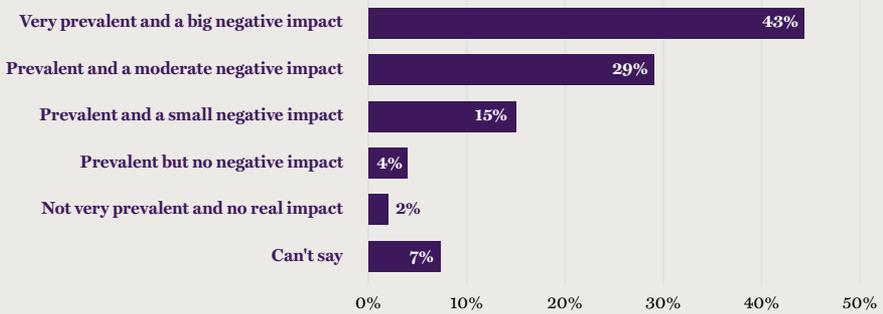
### THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF LACK OF STRONG LEADERSHIP

Forty-three per cent of respondents think that lack of strong leadership is very prevalent and has a big negative impact on trust and hope in Australian society (Figure 3). However, 29 per cent of respondents consider its impact to be moderately

negative despite its prevalence. Another 15 per cent think that the negative impact is small.

Overall, 87 per cent think that lack of strong leadership is prevalent and has a negative impact on trust and hope in Australian society.

**Figure 3. Lack of strong leadership (N=3,000)**



**THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS THAT STIFLES DEBATE**

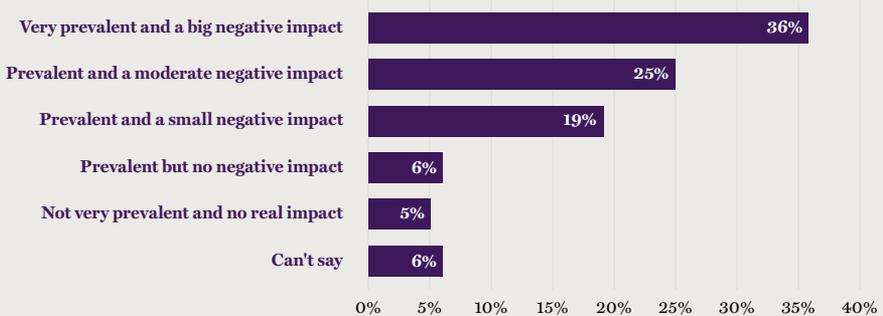
Thirty-six per cent think that political correctness that stifles debate is very prevalent and has a big negative impact on trust and hope in Australian society (Figure 4).

Another 25 per cent of respondents think that it is prevalent with a moderate

negative impact. A smaller percentage of respondents (15%) also believe that it is prevalent but perceive the impact to be negative but small.

Overall, 80 per cent think that political correctness that stifles debate is prevalent and has a negative impact on trust and hope in Australian society.

**Figure 4. Political correctness stifling debate (N=3,000)**



# What are the implications of these findings?

## LOW LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

The survey reveals that confidence and trust in the system of democracy are at a level at which only half of respondents believe that that the system of democracy is working well. Almost one in five Australians (18%) think democracy is working poorly or not very well – a high percentage when it comes to faith in the political system.

This is a serious problem. The democratic system is not sustainable in the long term if less than half of the population believe that it works well.

## OTHER FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LOSS OF CONFIDENCE

The survey also reveals that a majority of Australians (87%) believe that there is a lack of strong leadership, and that this has had a negative impact. In addition, a majority (80%) of Australians believe that political correctness is stifling debate.

In order to understand why there is such a lack of confidence in Australia's system of democracy, we need to understand what the relationship is between a perceived lack of leadership, a perceived prevalence of political correctness, and confidence in the political system, as well as the impact of other factors identified in the survey.

Perhaps a new approach is required to restore confidence in the system in these circumstances, or perhaps the solution is to address perceptions about leadership and political correctness head on, and hope that by addressing these concerns we shall indirectly increase confidence in the democratic system.

## RELIGIOSITY AND TRUST IN DEMOCRACY

Confidence in the democratic system is highest among Australians who hold firm religious beliefs, whereas on average, only 42 per cent of non-believers remain confident that the system is working well. In fact, a sizable number of non-believers have a very mixed view or an outright negative view.

- Why is confidence in the democratic system significantly lower among people who identify as atheists (42%) compared to religious people who practice their beliefs daily (62%) as shown in Figure 2?
- Do higher levels of religiosity foster confidence in democracy in Australia? Do lower levels of religiosity erode it?
- What steps can be taken to strengthen levels of confidence in democracy among people with differing levels of religiosity?

## RESTORING CONFIDENCE

To help restore confidence in our democratic system, further investigations are required to address the following questions:

- What is it about the current moment that has undermined confidence in the democratic system?
- Are the factors undermining confidence in the democratic system transient or enduring?
- In either case, how can they be addressed to renew confidence in the democratic system?

**These sorts of issues will be explored in further papers in Series 4.**

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This PM Glynn Survey Series 4 has been developed as part of the institute's 'Strengthening Hope, Renewing Confidence' Work Stream, which undertakes a wide-ranging examination of sources of hope in our society, and the reasons for confidence in our ability to meet the challenges of the present day and the days to come.

Series 4 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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