

PM GLYNN  
INSTITUTE

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

**Series 5**

**Trust and  
confidence in  
institutions:  
Police, justice  
and courts  
systems**



**ACU**

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

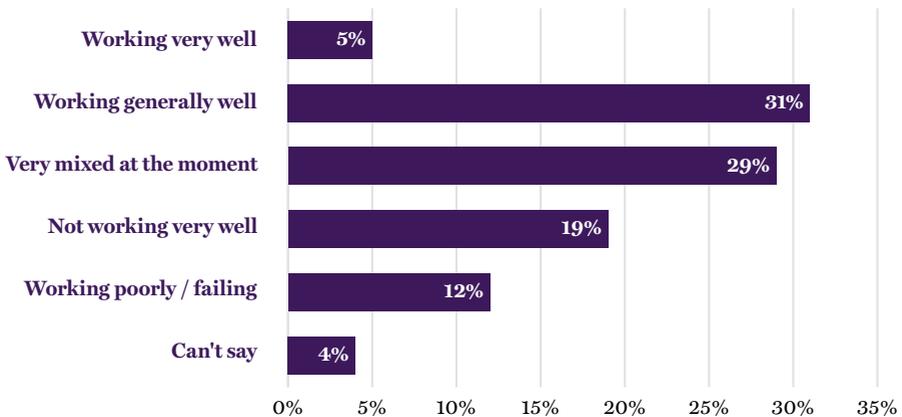
# Australia's police, justice and courts systems

## TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE POLICE, JUSTICE AND COURTS SYSTEMS

Trust in the country's justice systems is relatively low. Only 36 per cent of respondents in the PM Glynn Survey believe that they are working well, while

31 per cent think that they are failing or not working very well. There is also a large number of respondents (29 per cent) who have very mixed perceptions about the trustworthiness and confidence of our justice, courts and police systems. See Figure 1.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1. Trust and confidence in Australia's justice, courts and police systems N=3,000)



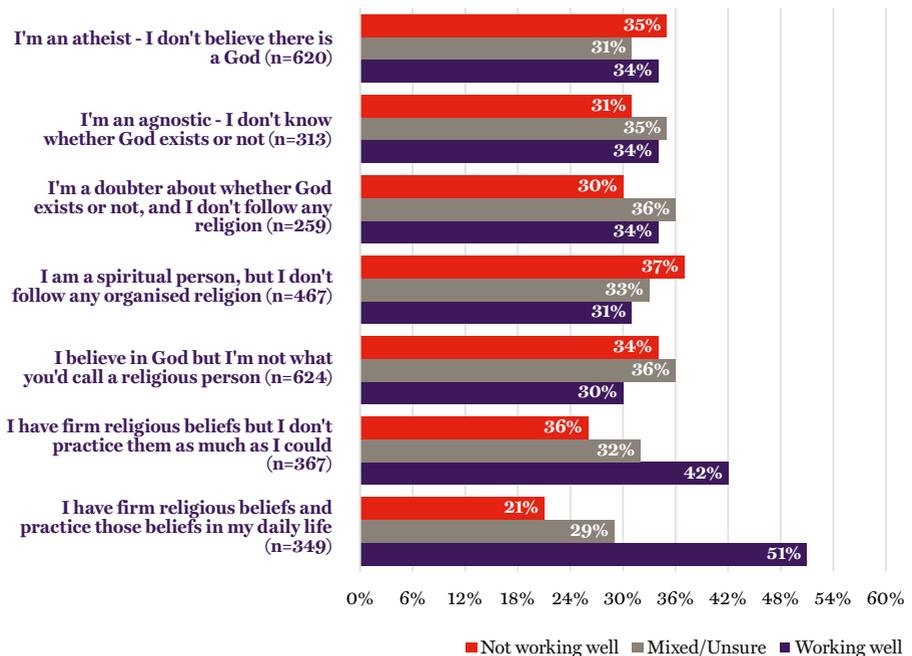
<sup>1</sup> Percentages in tables and/or figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

## RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

To ascertain the relationship between religious belief and perceptions of trust and confidence in the country's justice, courts and police systems, a crosstabulation was undertaken. Figure 2 shows that across subgroups of non-religious respondents, the levels of trust in the justice, courts and police systems are consistent. In other

words, there are only slight differences in the percentages recorded for 'not working well', 'mixed/unsure' and 'working well'. On the other hand, respondents who have firm religious beliefs and are practising those beliefs have a more positive view of our justice, courts and police systems, with 51 per cent of them saying that they are working well.

Figure 2. Trust and confidence in police, justice and courts systems (N=3,000)



## **ARE LEVELS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF RELEVANT?**

Whereas there is a significant variation between the confidence of religious people and non-religious people in the democratic system (in Series 4), the levels of confidence in the justice and courts systems are more consistent across religious and non-religious people.

No subgroup had high levels of confidence that the police, justice and courts systems are working well, whereas a majority of religious people had high levels of confidence that the democratic system is working well. Some of the questions to which this gives rise include:

- Why do levels of religious commitment appear to positively affect confidence in the democratic system but not in the police and justice systems?
- How do differing personal beliefs shape expectations and judgements about the police and justice systems?
- To what extent are media reports and personal experience factors in shaping judgements about the police, justice and courts systems?

# The importance of trust

A stable society requires people to have confidence that systems for law and order work well. The survey reveals, however, that only 36 per cent of Australians believe that the police, justice and court systems work well.

Further investigations are required to understand what this low level of confidence means:

- What factors about the police, justice and court systems are most central to a judgement that the systems do not work?
- If the systems are in fact working well, how can people be reassured about this?

## LOWER CONFIDENCE IN POLICE, JUSTICE AND COURTS SYSTEMS THAN IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Confidence in the police, justice and courts systems is considerably lower (36%) than confidence in the democratic system (49%).

This finding suggests further investigations are required:

- Why are Australians significantly less likely to be confident that the police, justice and courts systems are working well than they are to have confidence that the democratic system is working well?
- Are levels of confidence in the police, on the one hand and the justice and courts on the other, significantly different or do people tend to conflate them?
- Do levels of confidence in the police, justice and courts systems differ between states and territories?

**These sorts of issues will be explored in further papers in Series 5.**

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This PM Glynn Survey Series 5 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 5 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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