

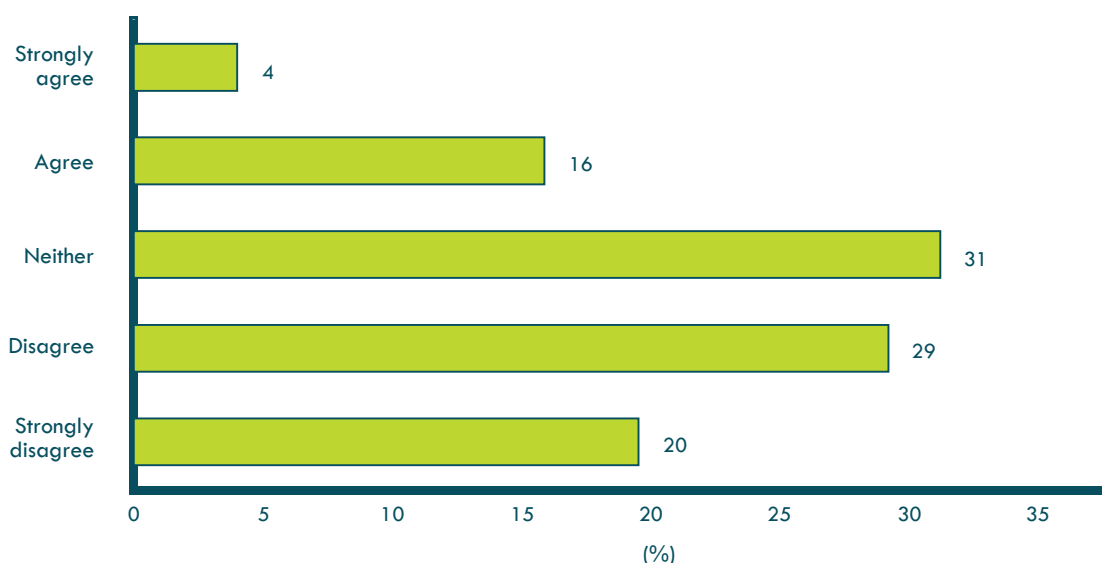
# Just believe or question?

## Australian Spirituality Fact Sheet 2

### Australians not willing to 'just believe'

As part of the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes in 2009, people across Australian communities were asked to respond to the statement "I think we should just believe and not question our beliefs". The findings reveal that only a minority take a dogmatic approach to beliefs.

Agree or disagree: "I think we should just believe and not question our beliefs"



Source: 2009 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes.

Critical reflection and questioning are significant components of contemporary Australian spirituality. Nearly half of respondents (49%) think that we should question our beliefs. In fact, one in five (20%) strongly oppose the idea of 'just believing'.

The Oxford Dictionary defines being dogmatic as "inclined to lay down principles as undeniably true"<sup>1</sup>. A preference for accepting one's beliefs without critical engagement is true for a minority of Australians who have the view we should 'just believe and not question our beliefs' (20%). Within that group only 4% strongly agree.

Around a third of Australians are neutral or undecided on this issue.

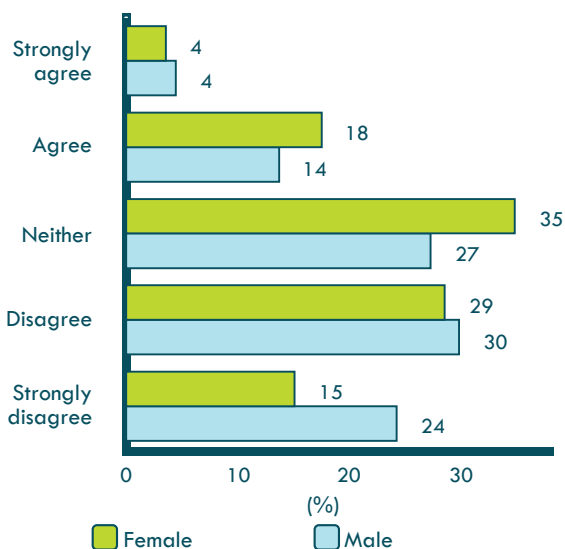
<sup>1</sup><http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dogmatic?view=uk>.

#### INSIDE...

- Men more inclined to question
- Young and questioning
- More education, more questioning
- Australian-born less decisive
- The religious who 'just believe'
- Religious does not mean dogmatic

# Agree or disagree: "I think we should just believe and not question our beliefs"

Australian Spirituality  
Fact Sheet 2



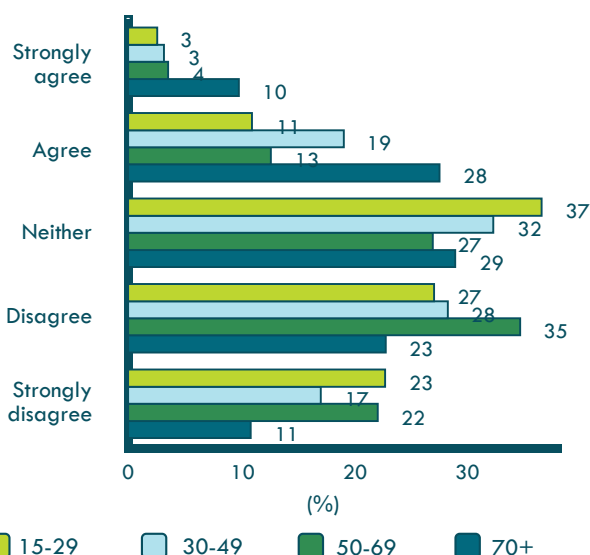
**Sex:** More than half of all men (54%) think we should question our beliefs, compared with 44% of women.

The willingness to question beliefs seems more evident in men (24% strongly disagree with 'just believing' vs 15% of women).

Both men and women express a clear tendency towards questioning and critical reflection.

More women are neutral or undecided about this issue than men (35% vs 27%).

Sex



**Age:** A dogmatic, unquestioning approach to one's beliefs is more common among the oldest age group of Australians.

Those aged 70 and over are more likely than others to affirm a non-questioning belief. For example, 10% of people aged 70+ strongly agree that we should 'just believe', compared with 3-4% of other age groups.

People aged 50-69 had the highest proportion opposed to 'just believing' (57% disagree or strongly disagree) followed closely by 15-29's (50%), 30-49's (45%) and lastly 70+ (34%).

Indecision was most evident among younger people, with 37% of 15-29 year olds who neither agree or disagree compared to 27% of 50-69's and 29% of those aged 70 and over.

Age



**Education:** Being willing to question and reflect on beliefs is associated with higher levels of education.

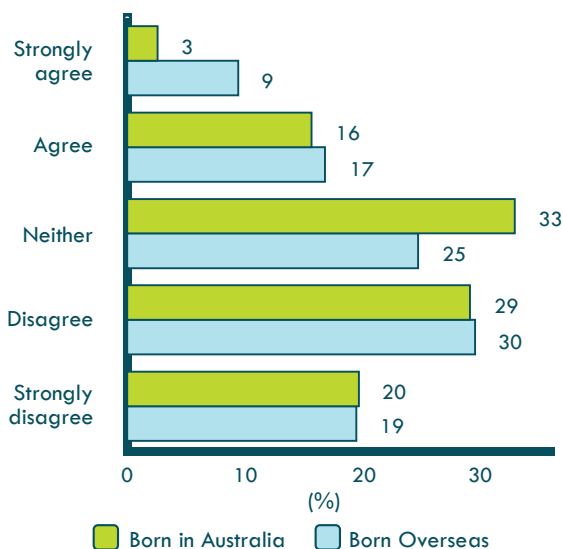
University-educated persons are more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with 'just believing'. The proportion who don't think we should 'just believe' decreases from 75% of postgraduates to 53% of those with a certificate, diploma or trade qualification, and 37% of those with a high school education.

Across most educational groups, larger proportions are neutral or undecided, rather than dogmatic.

Education

# Agree or disagree: "I think we should just believe and not question our beliefs"

Australian Spirituality  
Fact Sheet 2

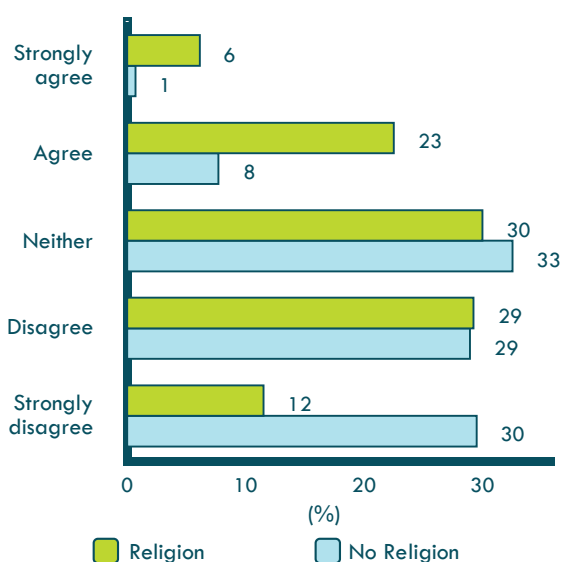


**Ethnicity:** A similar proportion of people express a preference to question their beliefs, regardless of their place of birth (49% of those born in Australia and those born overseas).

However the preference to 'just believe' exists more strongly in those born overseas with 9% strongly agreeing that we should 'just believe', as opposed to just 3% of those born in Australia.

Those born in Australia are slightly more undecided in their opinion, when compared with those born overseas (33% vs 25%).

## Ethnicity



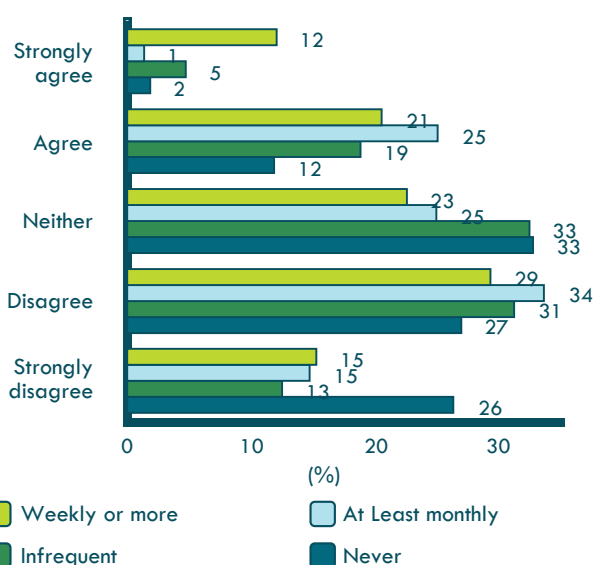
**Religion:** People who describe themselves as having a religion are much more likely than those with no religion to have a non-questioning approach to belief.

Some 29% say we should 'just believe' vs 9% of non-religious people.

Not surprisingly, those who describe themselves as not religious strongly reject the idea that we should just believe (59% vs 41%). In fact their strength of conviction is very clear in that some 30% of non-religious people strongly disagree with 'just believing', in contrast to 12% of those with a religion.

A similar proportion of both groups are neutral or undecided (30% religious, 33% non-religious).

## Religion



**Attendance:** More church attenders are willing to question their beliefs, than to be dogmatic. This is regardless of how often they attend religious services. Even among those who attend weekly or more, 44% prefer to question versus 33% who 'just believe'.

Australians who never attend church have the highest proportion who do not accept an unquestioning approach to beliefs (53% vs 14% who just believe).

Uncertainty is high among infrequent and non-attenders (33%) than among more frequent attenders (23-25%).

## Attendance

## AUSTRALIAN SPIRITUALITY RESOURCES from NCLS Research

Available online  
[www.ncls.org.au/spirituality](http://www.ncls.org.au/spirituality)

### Fact Sheets:

- **Something beyond this life**  
explores whether Australians believe in a spiritual dimension to life
- **Just believe or question**  
examines the degree of critical reflection in religious faith and spiritual beliefs of Australians
- **Philosophies of life**  
identifies which philosophies of life have most influence on how Australians live today
- **Guided by faith**  
examines the saliency of religious faith or spirituality in shaping life's decisions, such as career, relationships and lifestyle
- **Jesus' resurrection**  
reviews Australian beliefs about whether Jesus resurrection was an actual historical event

Each Fact Sheet presents the overall results for Australia and then compares different groups including: sex, age, education, ethnicity, 'having religion' and church attendance.

### Data source:

The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) is an ongoing survey designed to monitor changes in society across a range of countries. In 2009 the ISSP was undertaken in Australia by the Australian National University via the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA).

The survey included a standard component on religion, as well as customised questions regarding religion and spirituality which were commissioned by a consortium that included NCLS Research.

The sample comprised 1718 adults across Australia.

Evans, A. (2009) [computer file], The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Australian Social Science Data Archives, The Australian National University, Canberra.

## COMMUNITY SPIRITUALITY link to the 2011 NATIONAL CHURCH LIFE SURVEY

**Find out about the spiritual beliefs of people who connect with your church but don't attend regularly.**

A new addition to the 2011 NCLS and beyond is a survey of local church contacts. Churches can survey people they have contact with, whether through a play group, soup kitchen, or someone they are related to.

It's an effective way to find out about the beliefs, faith practices and spirituality of those connected with your church, as well as what they think of your activities. This will help your church build stronger connections and serve the community more effectively.

For more details  
see [www.2011ncls.org.au](http://www.2011ncls.org.au).



**NEW**

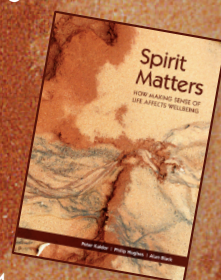
NEW BOOK

## Spirit Matters

How Making  
Sense of Life  
Affects Wellbeing

\$35 plus p&h

Available from  
NCLS Research  
PO Box A2178  
Sydney South  
NSW 1235  
Ph: +61 2 8267 4394  
Email: [info@ncls.org.au](mailto:info@ncls.org.au)



[www.ncls.org.au/spiritmatters](http://www.ncls.org.au/spiritmatters)