

Perceptions of Faith

The Rationalist Society of Australia and the City Bible Forum teamed up to conduct some research exploring how members of actively engaged non-religious communities and Christian communities in Australia accept or reject various definitions of “faith”.

We circulated a survey in electronic and hard copy formats in a targeted manner to a number of prominent freethought/humanist/sceptical/atheist organisations and a number of churches/Christian Unions/Bible Colleges/Other Christian organisations. The survey ran from 12 March to 4 June 2015 and a total of **1376** responses were received.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with eight definitions of “faith”. These were taken from the Oxford English Dictionary, from Hebrews 11 (NRSV) and from several definitions proposed by Professor Peter Boghossian and Professor Tim McGrew in their debate on “faith” on the *Unbelievable* radio programme in May 2014. Respondents were also given an opportunity to present their own definition of “faith”, and a small number of these responses are also presented below.

I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Meredith Doig from the RSA and Robert Martin from the CBF for their input into the survey design and for helping with its distribution. Their assistance and support for this project is greatly appreciated. In addition, we acknowledge and thank the organisations listed below for their participation and support.

If you would like to receive notifications of publications arising from this study, or if you wish to participate in similar studies in the future, please e-mail james.garth@iscast.org

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CITY BIBLE FORUM
Ask the bigger questions



**Atheist Foundation
of Australia Inc** Established
1970
Promoting scientifically credible & factually reliable evidence



5, 6, 7 on Dawkins' Belief Scale

798 total responses

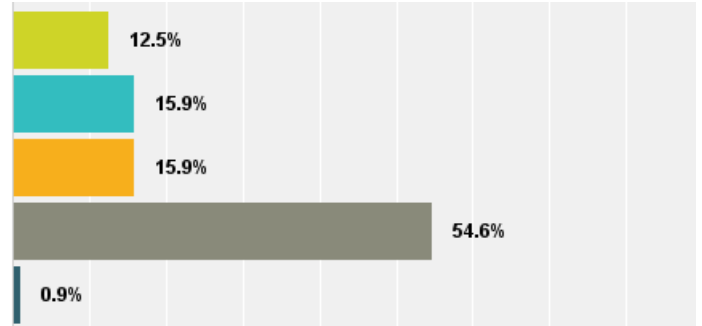
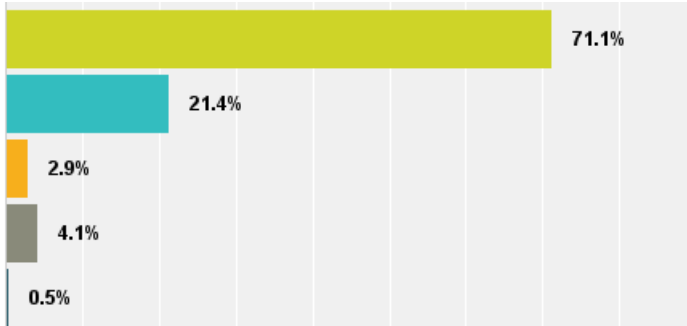
Targeted groups: Freethought/Atheist/Skeptic/
Humanist/Secular Organisations

1, 2, 3 on Dawkins' Belief Scale

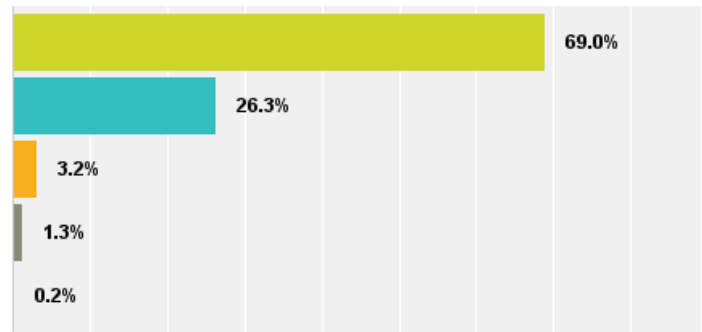
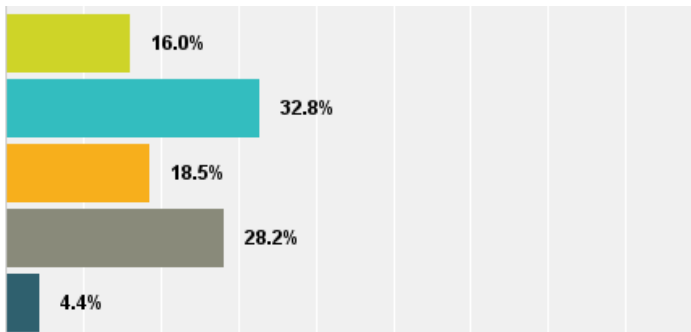
550 total responses

Targeted groups: Churches/Christian
Union/BibleColleges/other Christian
Organisations

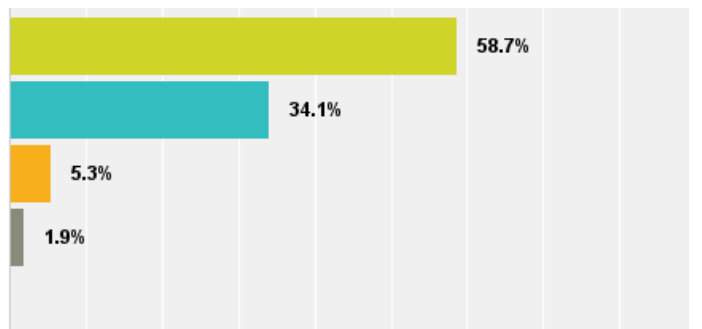
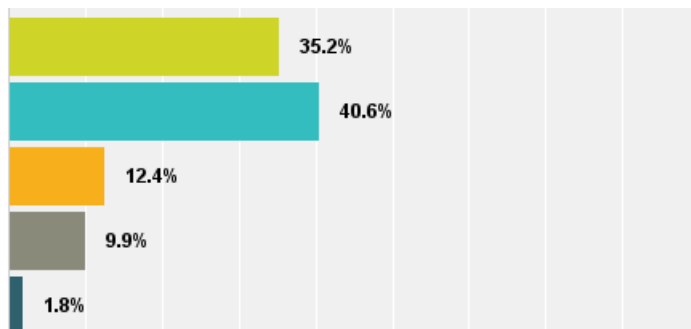
Faith is: belief without evidence



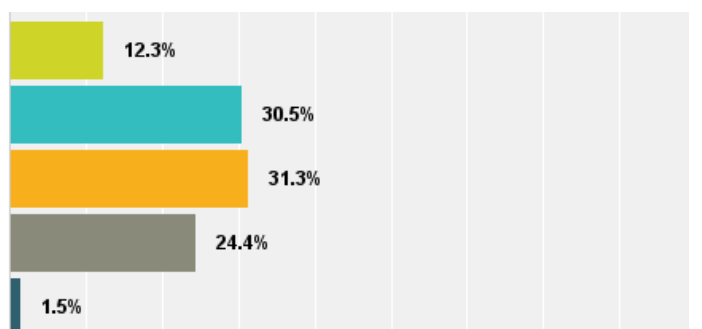
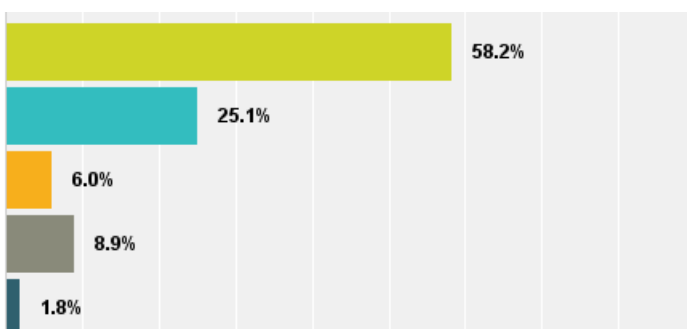
Faith is: trusting, holding to, and acting on what one has good reason to believe is true in the face of difficulties



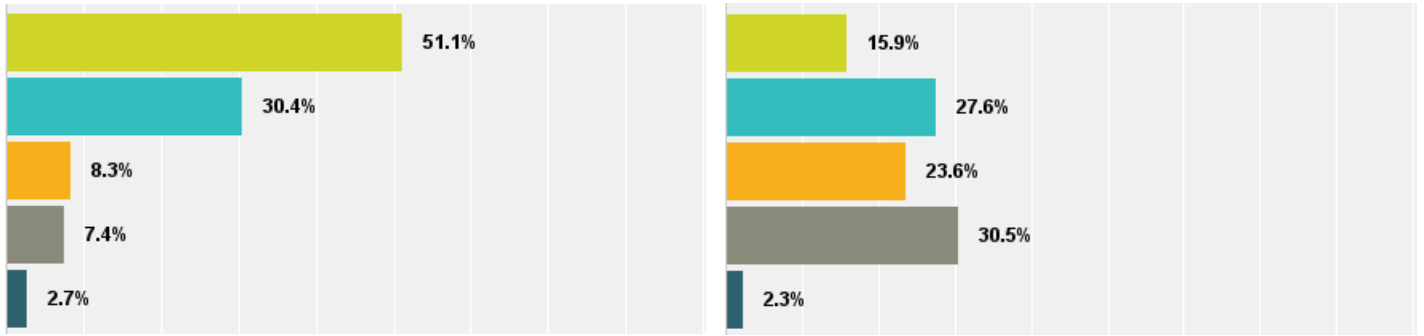
Faith is: complete trust or confidence in someone or something



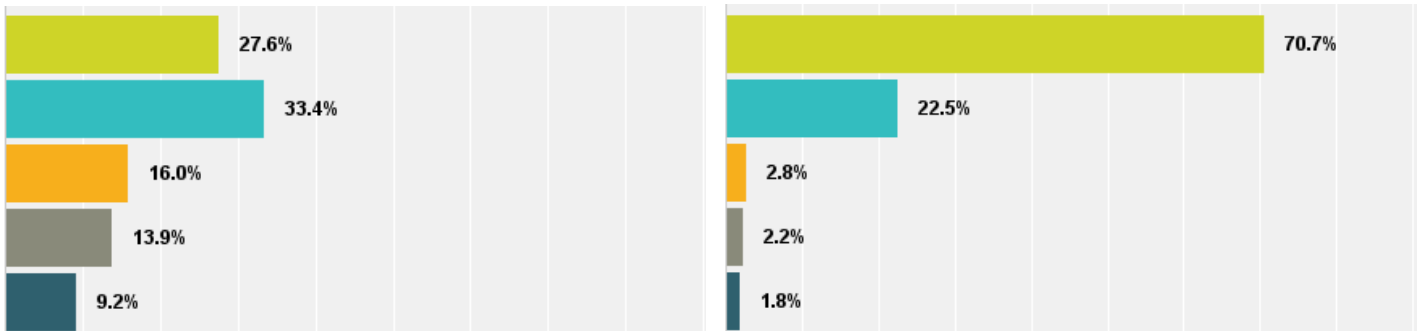
Faith is: strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof



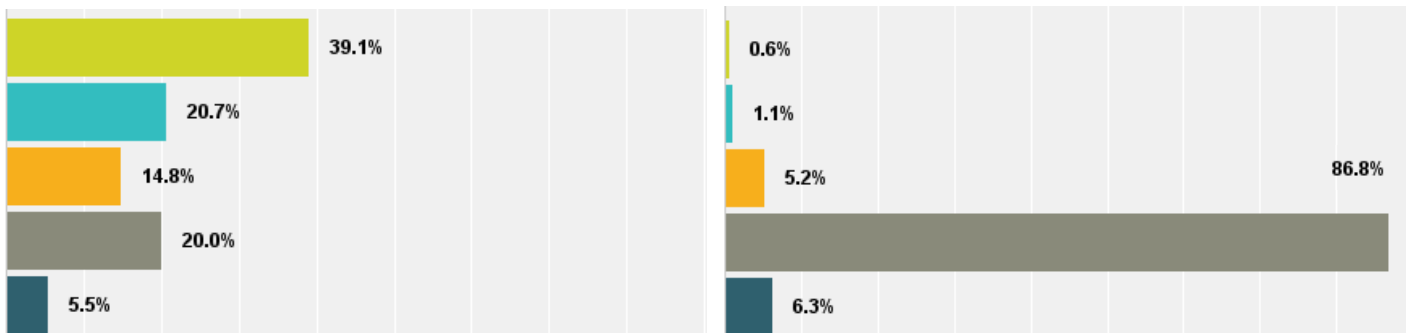
Faith is: confidence over and above the value of the evidence



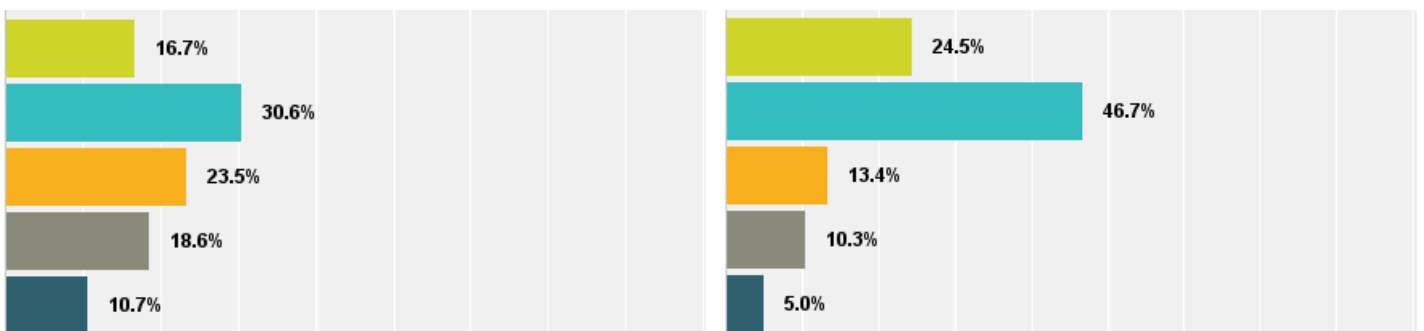
Faith is: the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen



Faith is: pretending to know things you don't know



Faith is: when you're willing to venture something in circumstances which are beyond your control



Selected qualitative responses (5, 6, 7 on Belief Scale):

“Religious faith is wish-thinking, a distraction from the belief in what people can do for themselves and each other”

“Faith is the action of trusting an existing belief instead of questioning it”

“Faith is the disregard of evidence and reason in preference of irrational belief.”

“the realisation that we hold an imperfect understanding of the universe but nonetheless carrying out our lives for the betterment of future generations. No God necessary”

“Faith is the unnecessary placing of confidence in the non-existent for psychological support”

“Faith is a person and their abilities is real the rest is stupidity personified.”

“Embrace of the irrational in search of emotional support.”

“Strictly the term faith denotes belief without proof, which is slightly different to what is offered above. I believe degrees of "faith" are possible, reflecting the strength of the evidence that we can trust in the person, authority or proposition in question.”

“Faith is making a virtue of not thinking and working things out based on what you hope, rather than what is true. Faith is filled in by people who have their own agendas and ideas. Faith is dangerous because it makes people think they have the answers or know better when they don't.”

“A belief born of Faith is a belief obtained by consciously or unknowingly suspending disbelief.”

“A confidence and trust based on evidence and reason but without certainty, which enables one to act in the absence of total knowledge”

“For me, faith coincides with my decision to live my life according to principles which I cannot philosophically justify, namely that there is such a thing as goodness, I have a rough idea of what it is, and I think I should be doing good rather than evil.”

“Faith fills the vacuum created by the need to understand until the capability and desire to understand takes its place”

Which option best describes your position regarding God's existence?

1) I do not question the existence of God, I know he exists.

2) I cannot know for certain but I strongly believe in God and live my life on the assumption that he is there.

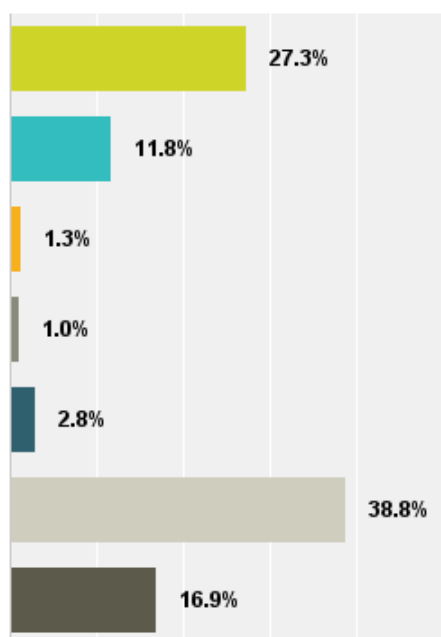
3) I am very uncertain but I am inclined to believe in God.

4) God's existence and non-existence are equally probable.

5) I do not know whether God exists but I'm inclined to be skeptical.

6) I cannot know for certain but I think God is very improbable and I live my life under the assumption that he is not there.

7) I know that there is no God.



Selected qualitative responses (1, 2, 3 on Belief Scale):

“I believe faith is something that is both in mind and action following something you trust in when there may be limited physical evidence. “

“Faith is belief without proof, but not without evidence”

“To trust in the goodness of something. When someone says "have faith in the legal system" they don't mean "believe it exists without proof", they mean "it's the best way we have to solve this problem". "Have faith in God" means "trust that God is benevolent and has your best interests in mind".”

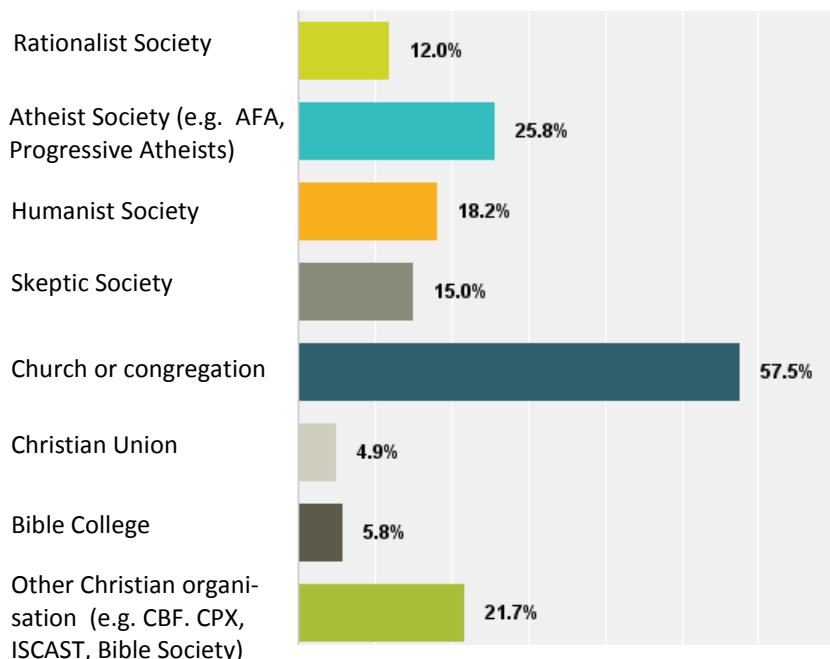
“Faith is like abseiling! Do your best to find out but in the end, you just have to jump.”

“Faith is my commitment to something which calls for my personal response (eg I am told that global warming is of concern and I must act. It is the resultant action which is my expression of faith.)”

“Faith is a commitment to a person or an idea concerning the future and so it influences present behaviour in such a way as to help cause the desired future. So technologists and ordinary people live by faith.”

“I consider that faith is active not passive. It involves acting on one's conviction and trusting God for the outcome.”

Are you affiliated with any of the following organisations? (check all that apply)



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