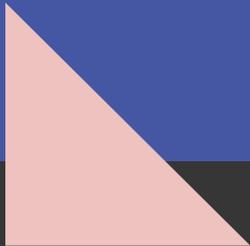




AUSTRALIA'S CHANGING
Spiritual Climate



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CONTENTS

Introduction	04
Australia's renewed spiritual search	06
The shift from materialism to meaning	10
Opportunities for community in the digital age	14
Church and state	18
Responding in these challenging times	24
Let's discover the future together	25
Demographic summary	26
Research methodology	27

INTRODUCTION

We live in an era of entertainment saturation and screen ubiquity where any reflecting or wondering is easily interrupted. The busyness of our lives, distractions of our times and influencers in the media and social media alike, seem to overwhelm any yearnings of the soul. It is easy to point to declining adherence to Christianity and the rise of secularism as evidence of the result. Yet there is more to the story.

Amidst any trend, look for the counter trend. As this research shows, below the headline figure of Christianity edging towards minority status, is a rise in the pursuit of spiritual meaning, a renewed priority on community and a desire to contribute to others. The openness of Australians to attend a church service if invited, and the strong support for protections of religious freedom and expression highlight the positive sentiment towards Christianity and a recognition of the role of faith in the future of our community.

Despite the accelerating changes, technologically and socially, or maybe because of them, most Australians are still seeking spiritual meaning and wellbeing. As prior periods of great ructions have shown, and perhaps it is something of the human condition, when stability wanes and uncertainty rises, attention is given not only to the temporal, but also the transcendent.



Mark McCrindle
Founder and Principal McCrindle

MY LIFE FLOWS ON IN ENDLESS SONG; ABOVE EARTH'S LAMENTATION,
I HEAR THE SWEET, THOUGH FAR-OFF HYMN THAT HAILS A NEW CREATION;
THROUGH ALL THE TUMULT AND THE STRIFE, I HEAR THE MUSIC RINGING;
IT FINDS AN ECHO IN MY SOUL—HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING?

Robert Lowry, 1868







AUSTRALIA'S RENEWED

Spiritual Search

In recent years the spiritual climate of Australia has been one of growing secularism. This is seen in the rising proportion of Australians identifying with no-religion, growing from 19% in 2006 to 30% in 2016¹. While Christianity is still the most common religion in Australia, the proportion identifying with Christianity has been declining in recent years (64% 2006 cf. 52% 2016)¹. Amidst these changes, however, faith and spirituality continue to be a key element of an Australian's identity (69% strongly or somewhat agree)².

Faith during a pandemic

The experience of COVID-19 is creating a new context, where many Australians are experiencing a renewed spiritual search. During the pandemic almost half of Australians have thought more about the meaning of life (47%) or their own mortality (47%). A third of Australians have thought more about God (33%), while three in ten (28%) have prayed more.³

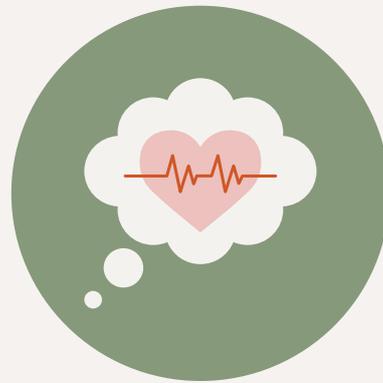
DURING COVID-19 AUSTRALIANS ARE SPENDING MORE TIME

% much/somewhat/slightly more



47%

Thinking about the meaning of life



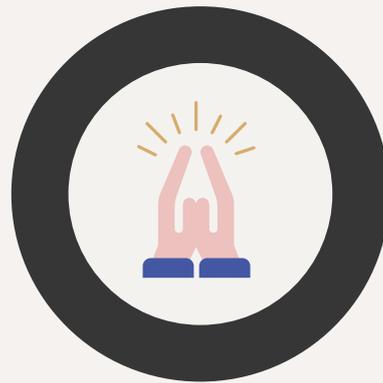
47%

Thinking about their own mortality



33%

Thinking about God



28%

Praying

Younger Australians are leading the way in the renewed spiritual search, being more likely to have had spiritual conversations, thought about the meaning of life, thought about God, prayed, and read the bible more.

**% MUCH/SOMEWHAT/
SLIGHTLY MORE**



Gen Z



Gen Y



Gen X



Baby Boomers



Builders



Had spiritual conversations

41%

35%

23%

13%

16%



Thought about the meaning of life

61%

58%

45%

34%

34%



Thought about God

44%

40%

33%

24%

23%



Prayer

39%

35%

26%

20%

20%



Read the Bible

32%

26%

15%

9%

9%

Regular churchgoers have become active in their faith

The pandemic has also seen regular churchgoers take greater ownership of their faith and spirituality. More than half of regular churchgoers (57%) strongly/somewhat agree they have taken on greater responsibility for their own spiritual growth. Almost two in five (38%) believe the pandemic has made them more active in their ministry as they can't just leave it to the paid church staff.⁴ Regular churchgoers are also reading their Bibles more (45%) and praying more (63%).³

Once again younger Australians are driving the spiritual search with Gen Y churchgoers (53%) twice as likely as Baby Boomers (23%) to strongly/somewhat agree the experience of COVID-19 has made them more active in ministry as they can't just leave it to paid church staff (44% Gen Z, 32% Gen X, 19% Builders).



57%

of regular churchgoers strongly/somewhat agree they have taken on greater responsibility for their own spiritual growth during COVID-19

Church attendance in a pandemic

Despite the pausing of public gatherings and physical church doors being closed in states battling COVID-19 outbreaks, church attendance has largely remained steady. Two in five Australians identifying with Christianity are attending church at least monthly now (39%) and during 2020 (40%). This is only a small decrease of six percentage points from monthly church attendance prior to 2020 (46%).

Younger Australians that identify with Christianity have been more likely than their older counterparts to attend church at least monthly prior to 2020, during 2020 and today.

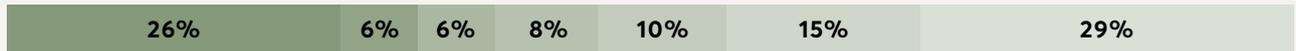
AUSTRALIANS IDENTIFYING WITH CHRISTIANITY CHURCH ATTENDANCE

How frequently do you attend church (whether in person or online)?

Please select the response that most applies to you.



Currently



During 2020



Prior to 2020



AUSTRALIANS IDENTIFYING WITH CHRISTIANITY ATTENDING CHURCH AT LEAST MONTHLY



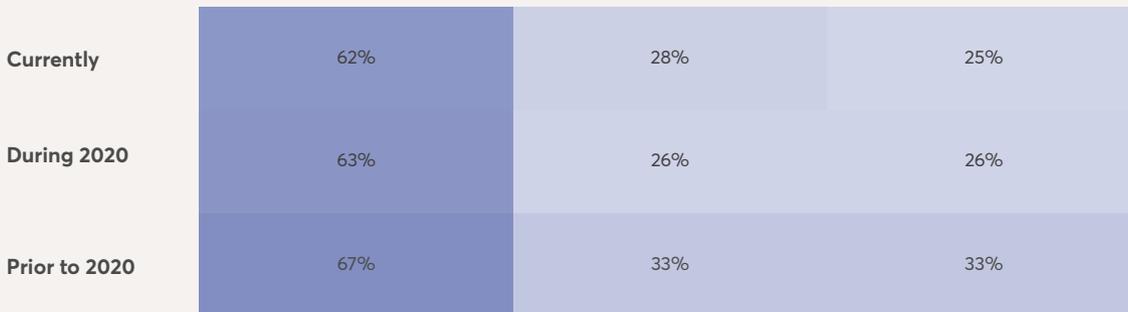
Gen Y



Gen X



Baby Boomers



* Gen Z and Builders have not been included in this analysis due to their sample size



THE SHIFT FROM MATERIALISM

to meaning

A silver lining of COVID-19 has been the reprioritisation within many Australians' lives. The focus has shifted from materialism, and the accumulation of more, to people and community. Four in five Australians agree COVID-19 has clarified the relationships in which they want to invest their time (79%) and, positively, has strengthened their family/household relationships (79%)³. The experience has also ushered in a return to local and a focus on community, with half of Australians (53%) valuing a strong local community more than they did three years ago⁵.



53%
of Australians value a strong local community more than they did three years ago

SILVER LININGS OF COVID-19



79%
Clarified the relationships in which they want to spend their time

79%
Positively strengthened their family/household relationships



76%
of Australians agree the churches in their local area are making a positive difference to their community

Churches are making a positive difference to the community

Throughout the pandemic Australians have seen the positive impact of the church. Half of Australians (49%) have seen local churches be more active in their communities during lockdown and COVID-19. It is not just during lockdown, however, that Australians are seeing the positive impact of the church. Three in four Australians (76%) agree the churches in their local area are making a positive difference to their community.

Local businesses and schools seen as instrumental to rebuilding community

Australians not only have a positive perception of the local church, just over half (54% see local churches and faith-based groups as extremely/very important to rebuilding local communities and connection in a post COVID-19 world. The importance of church, however, in community building is rated well below that of local businesses (84%), local schools (81%) and cafes, shopping centres and dining precincts (79%).

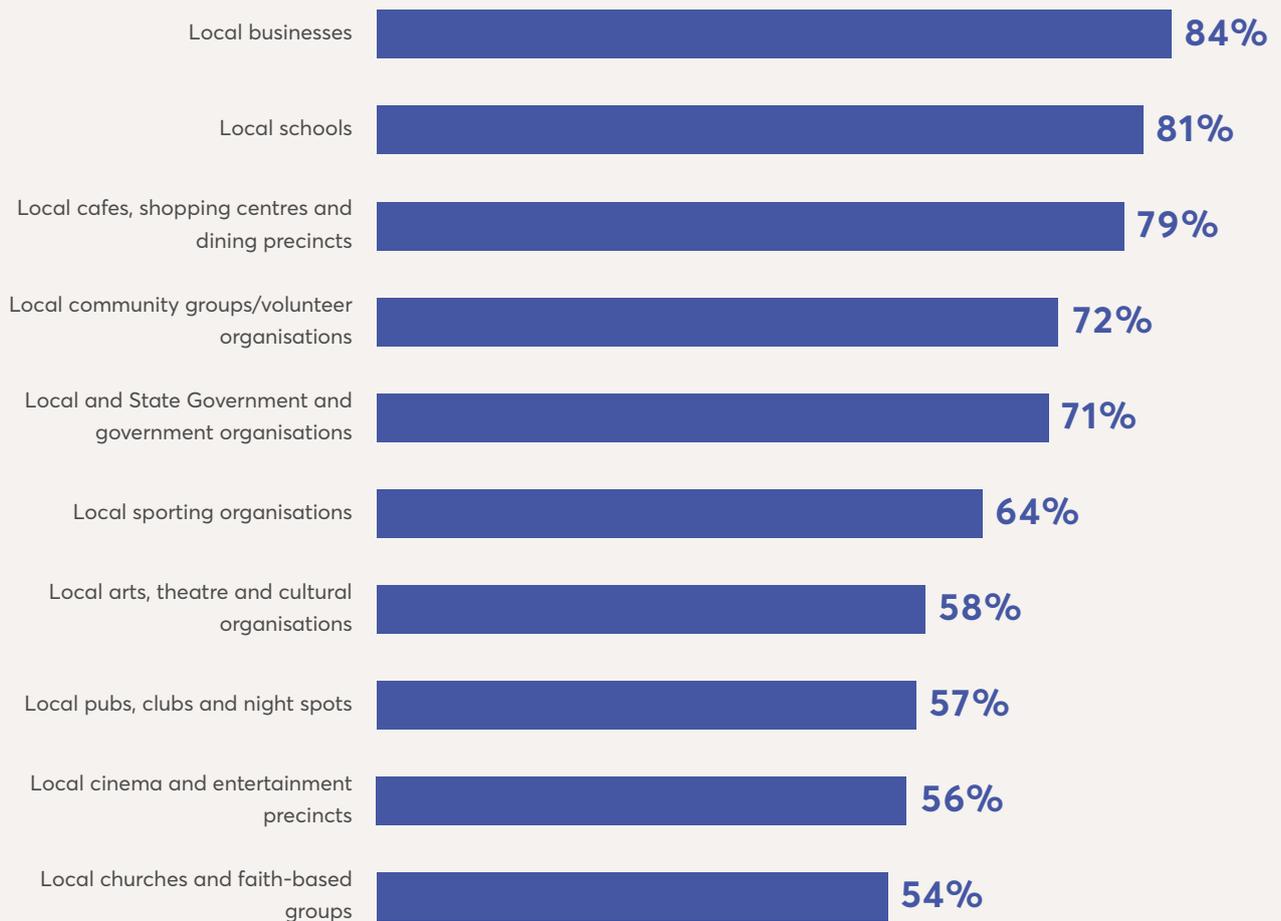
Those who identify with Christianity (69%) are more than twice as likely than those who do not identify with any religion or spiritual belief (33%) to believe the local church is important for rebuilding local community.





HOW IMPORTANT ARE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO REBUILDING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND CONNECTION IN A POST-COVID-19 WORLD?

Extremely/very important



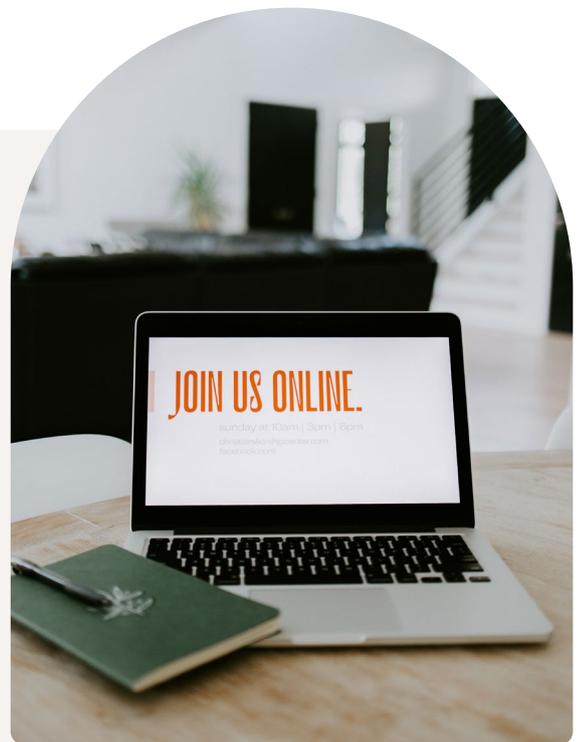


OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY

in the digital age

Despite a renewed focus on community and a reprioritisation of relationships, many Australians are feeling lonely and disconnected. Australians are most likely to say the biggest negative impact of COVID-19 has been on their social health (42%) rather than on their financial (28%), mental (17%) or physical health (13%).⁶ Almost three in five Australians (58%) have experienced increased feelings of loneliness.³

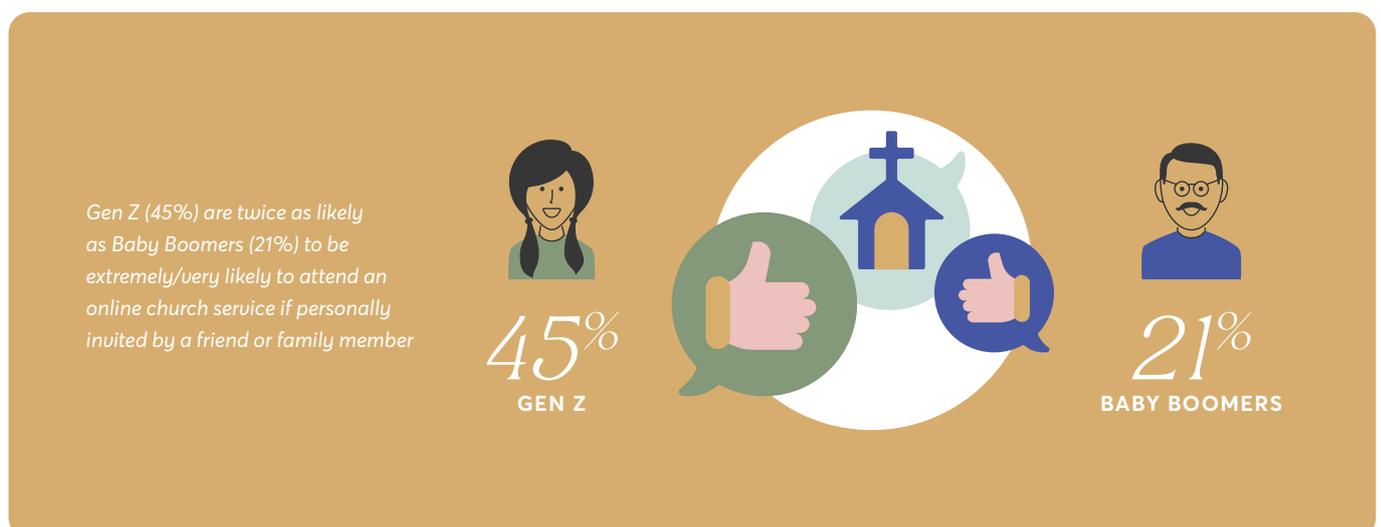
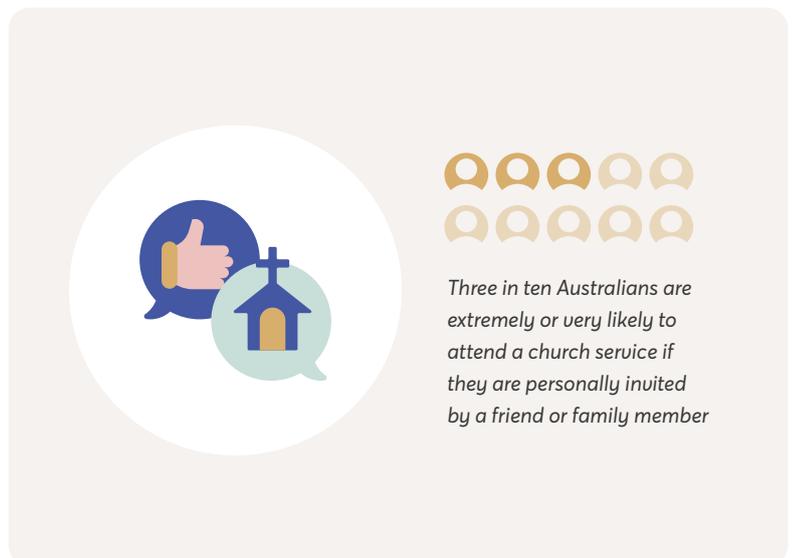
While the shift to digital platforms for churches may have seemed like a disruption, it has created a new way for people to access the gospel and has provided a continuity of connection. Two in five Australians (40%) have accessed a Christian church service in a way they wouldn't normally during lockdown and COVID-19.



Most would be likely to attend a church service if invited

Two thirds of Australians are likely to attend a church service either online (64%) or in-person (67%) if personally invited by a friend or family member. Three in ten Australians are extremely or very likely to attend a church service online (31%) or in-person (33%) if they were invited by a friend or family member.

Far from religion and spirituality being only for older Australians, younger Australians are twice as likely to be extremely or very likely to attend a church service if personally invited by a friend or family member.



IF YOU WERE PERSONALLY INVITED BY A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER TO ATTEND A CHURCH SERVICE EITHER ONLINE OR IN-PERSON, HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOU WOULD ATTEND?

● Extremely likely ● Very likely ● Somewhat likely ● Slightly likely ● Not at all likely

ONLINE



IN-PERSON



% extremely or very likely to attend a church service either online or in-person if personally invited by a friend or family member.



	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Builders
ONLINE	45%	43%	20%	21%	25%
IN-PERSON	44%	39%	25%	27%	34%

While 67% of regular churchgoers strongly/somewhat miss the connections that gathering in person at church provides, they still appreciate the opportunity to connect online. Younger generations of regular churchgoers are enjoying the social aspect of online church more than their older counterparts. Two thirds of Gen Y (65%) and half of

Gen Z (56%) believe the social aspect of church online has been extremely/very positive compared to three in ten Baby Boomers (31%) and Builders (32%). Gen X sits in the middle with 49% describing the social experience of online church as extremely/very positive.



THIS DATA IS WORTH REFLECTING ON A LITTLE LONGER: IN THIS SEEMINGLY SECULAR ERA, WHERE THE CHURCH IS PERCEIVED BY MANY COMMENTATORS TO BE ON THE DECLINE AND CULTURALLY OUTDATED, ALMOST HALF OF ALL YOUNG ADULTS INVITED TO A CHURCH SERVICE BY A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER WOULD VERY LIKELY ATTEND.

A community of kindness

In a time when Australians are increasingly isolated, acts of kindness can strengthen communities, reduce loneliness and have a big impact. Australians are most likely to believe it is extremely or very important to show kindness to those closest to them: family (91%), friends (89%) and neighbours (70%). Three in five see it as extremely or very important to show kindness to their local community (59%) and the Australian community (58%). This is more than the global community (52%), highlighting an opportunity for Australians to be more outward focused in their kindness to the broader community.

Hospitality is seen as an accessible way to show kindness, with four in five Australians (78%) believing sharing a meal with friends and family is a powerful way to display kindness. The acts of kindness Australians want to see more of include asking if someone is ok (67%), helping someone in need (64%) and saying 'hi' to someone you walk past on the street (62%)⁷.



67%
Asking if someone is ok



64%
Helping someone in need



62%
Saying 'hi' to someone
you walk past on the street



AUSTRALIA IS A GREAT COUNTRY IN LARGE PART BECAUSE ITS INHABITANTS ARE GOOD PEOPLE. IT IS THIS COMMUNITY MINDEDNESS, LOOKING OUT TO THE WELFARE OF OTHERS, CALL IT MATESHIP IF YOU LIKE, THAT REMAINS CORE TO THE AUSTRALIAN WAY. FACILITATING AND FOSTERING THIS SOCIAL FABRIC IS FOUNDATIONAL TO OUR NATION'S FUTURE. IF AUSTRALIANS WEARY OF BEING GOOD, AUSTRALIA WILL CEASE TO BE GREAT.



CHURCH

and state

Australians believe in the freedom to share their religious views

Australians are accepting of others' religious views. Nine in ten (90%) agree that in Australia people should have the freedom to share their religious beliefs, if done in a peaceful way, even if those beliefs are different to mainstream community views. Not only are Australians accepting of others' beliefs, they also believe Australians should be free to share or display their religious views in public places. Australians are twice as likely to disagree (67%) as they are to agree (33%) that in Australia, people should be banned from sharing or displaying their religious views in public places and from public buildings and facilities.



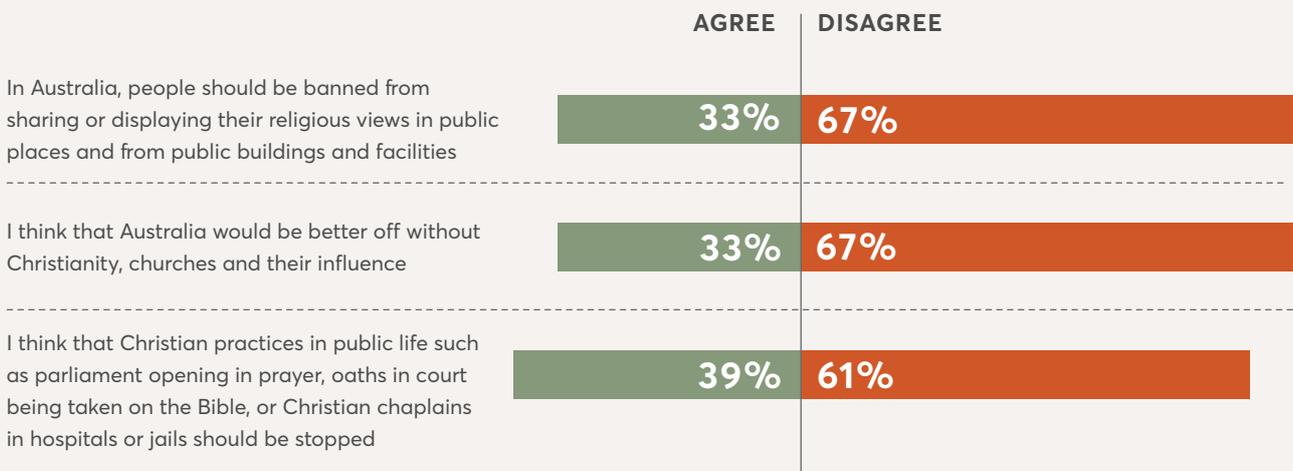
Mixed views of Christian practices in public life

Three quarters of Australians (73%) agree the overall impact of Christianity on Australian's heritage, institutions and way of life has been beneficial.

Although two in five Australians (39%) agree that Christian practices in public life such as parliament opening in prayer, oaths in court being taken on the Bible, or Christian chaplains

in hospitals or jails should be stopped. Three in five (61%), however, disagree and are therefore open to Christian practices in public life continuing. Only a third of Australians (33%) agree that Australia would be better off without Christianity, churches and their influence. Two thirds of Australians (67%), however, disagree that Australia would be better off without Christianity, churches and their influence.

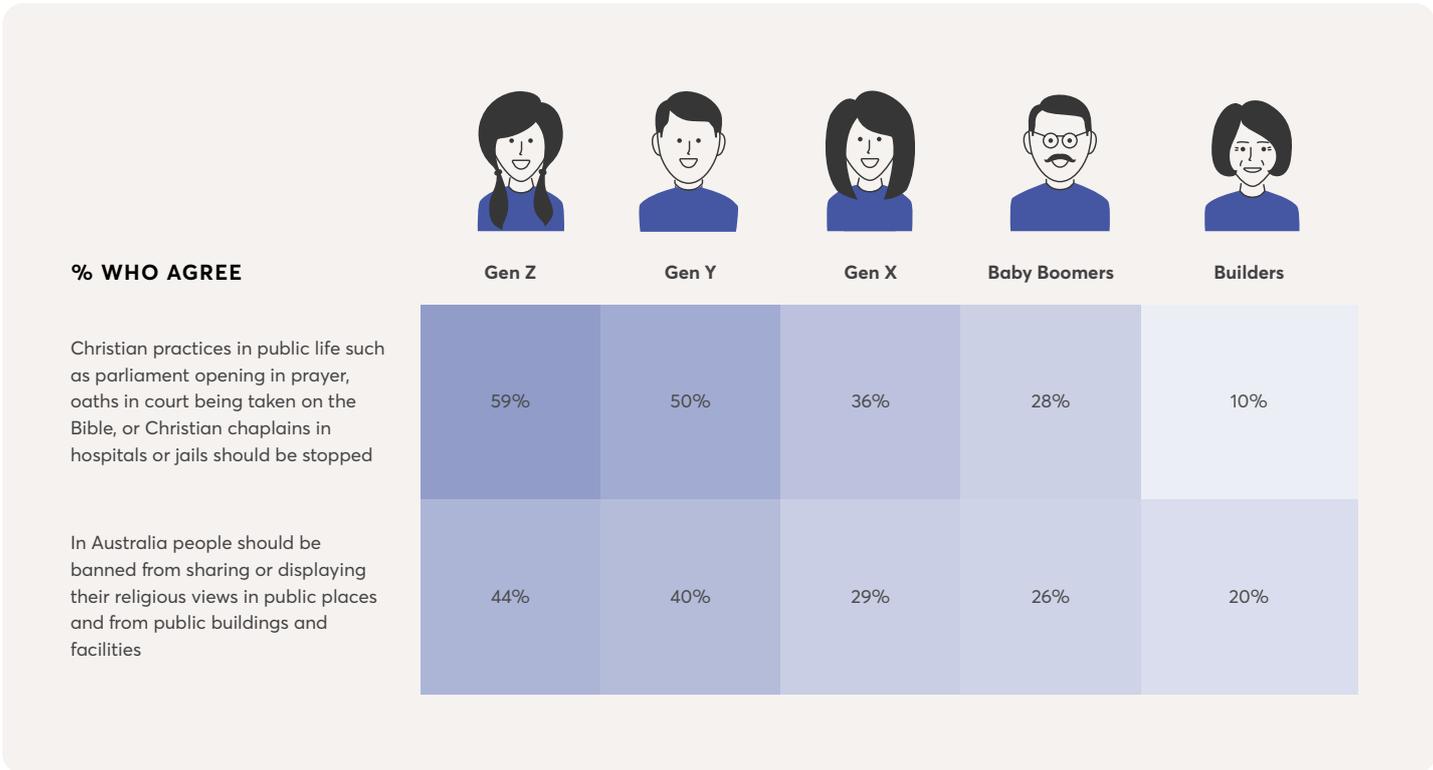
TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS?



For younger Australians, faith and spirituality are personal not public

While younger Australians are leading the way in renewing their spiritual search, they consider this to be a personal journey and are more likely to believe there should be greater separation between faith and public life. Three in five Gen Zs (59%) agree that Christian practices in public life such as parliament opening in prayer, oaths in court being taken on the Bible, or Christian chaplains in hospitals or jails should

be stopped compared to just 10% of Builders. For younger Australians it is not just about Christianity, however, as they are twice as likely as their older counterparts to agree that in Australia, people should be banned from sharing or displaying their religious views in public places and from public buildings and facilities (44% Gen Z cf. 20% Builders).



Australians support vaccination passports without religious exemptions

Australians are open to vaccination passports, with four in five Australians (81%) agreeing with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings. Within this group, however, there are some (18%) who believe exemptions should be granted for attending religious services. One in five Australians (19%) disagree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings.

Despite younger Australians being less open to faith and spirituality in public life, they are more likely to agree exemptions should be granted for religious services. A third of Gen Z (33%) agree with imposing a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings but believe there should

be exemptions for attending religious services, compared to 10% of Baby Boomers.

Australians' religious beliefs largely do not impact their beliefs about imposing a vaccination passport. Three in five Australians identifying with Christianity (64%) agree with imposing a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings without exemptions for attending religious services (cf. 63% Australians). Regular churchgoers (at least monthly), however, are slightly less likely to agree that vaccine passports should be required for attending venues or public gatherings with no exemption for religious services (56% cf. 63% Australians).

63%

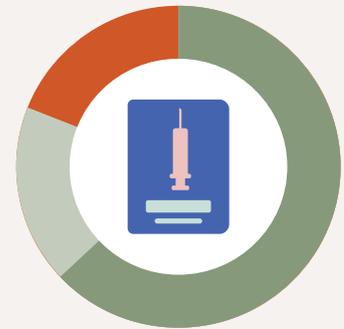
I agree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings and no exemption should be granted for attending religious services

18%

I agree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings; however, exemptions should be granted for attending religious services

19%

I disagree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings



Gen Z



Gen Y



Gen X



Baby Boomers



Builders

I agree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings and no exemption should be granted for attending religious services

53%

56%

66%

73%

70%

I agree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings; however, exemptions should be granted for attending religious services

33%

23%

11%

10%

13%

I disagree with imposing the requirement of a vaccination passport to attend venues or public gatherings

15%

21%

23%

17%

18%

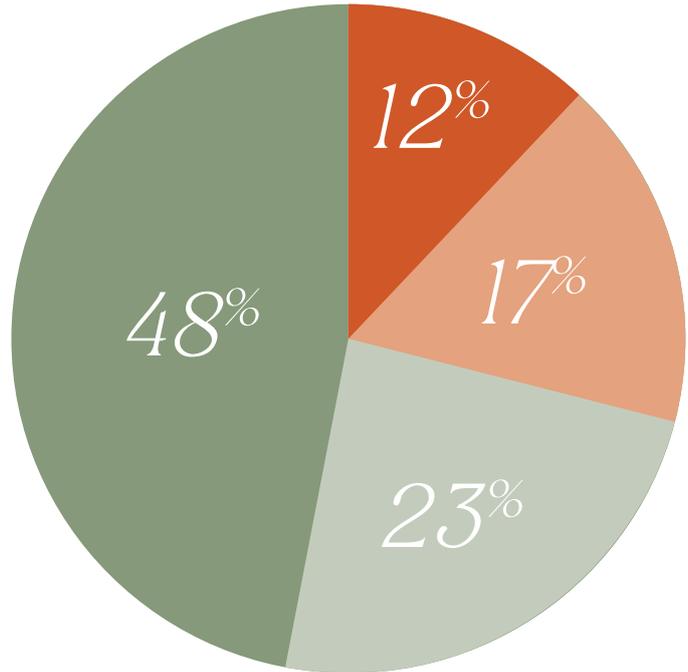
Religious discrimination in Australia

Religious discrimination is a genuine issue in Australia with almost three in ten Australians (29%) having experienced religious discrimination, this equates to about half of those who identify with a religion which is six in ten Australians. Australians who identify with a non-Christian religion are more likely to have experienced discrimination (54%) than Protestants (27%) or Catholics (32%). Religious discrimination is also more likely to be experienced by younger Australians who are four times as likely as their older counterparts to say they have experienced religious discrimination (51% Gen Z cf. 13% Baby Boomers).

Considering the proportion of Australians who have experienced religious discrimination, it is unsurprising that 81% of Australians believe the government should pass religious discrimination legislation to ensure that people cannot be discriminated against on their religion, just as on the basis of age, race and gender. Australians identifying with a non-Christian religion are the most likely to support this legislation (95% cf. 87% Catholic, 85% Protestant).

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF YOUR RELIGION OR RELIGIOUS VIEWS?

The Australian Government defines discrimination as "when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of certain personal characteristics"



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF YOUR RELIGION OR RELIGIOUS VIEWS?



Gen Z



Gen Y



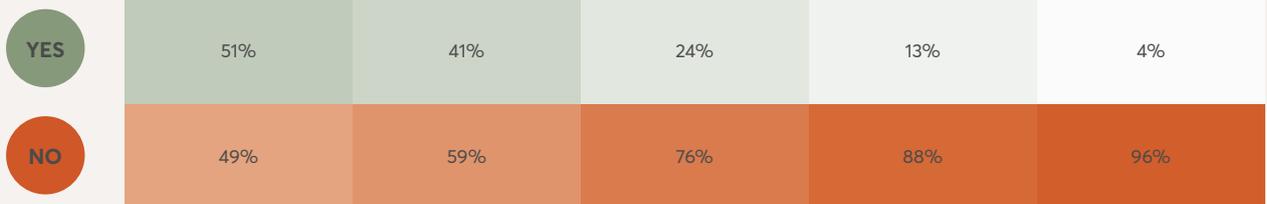
Gen X



Baby Boomers



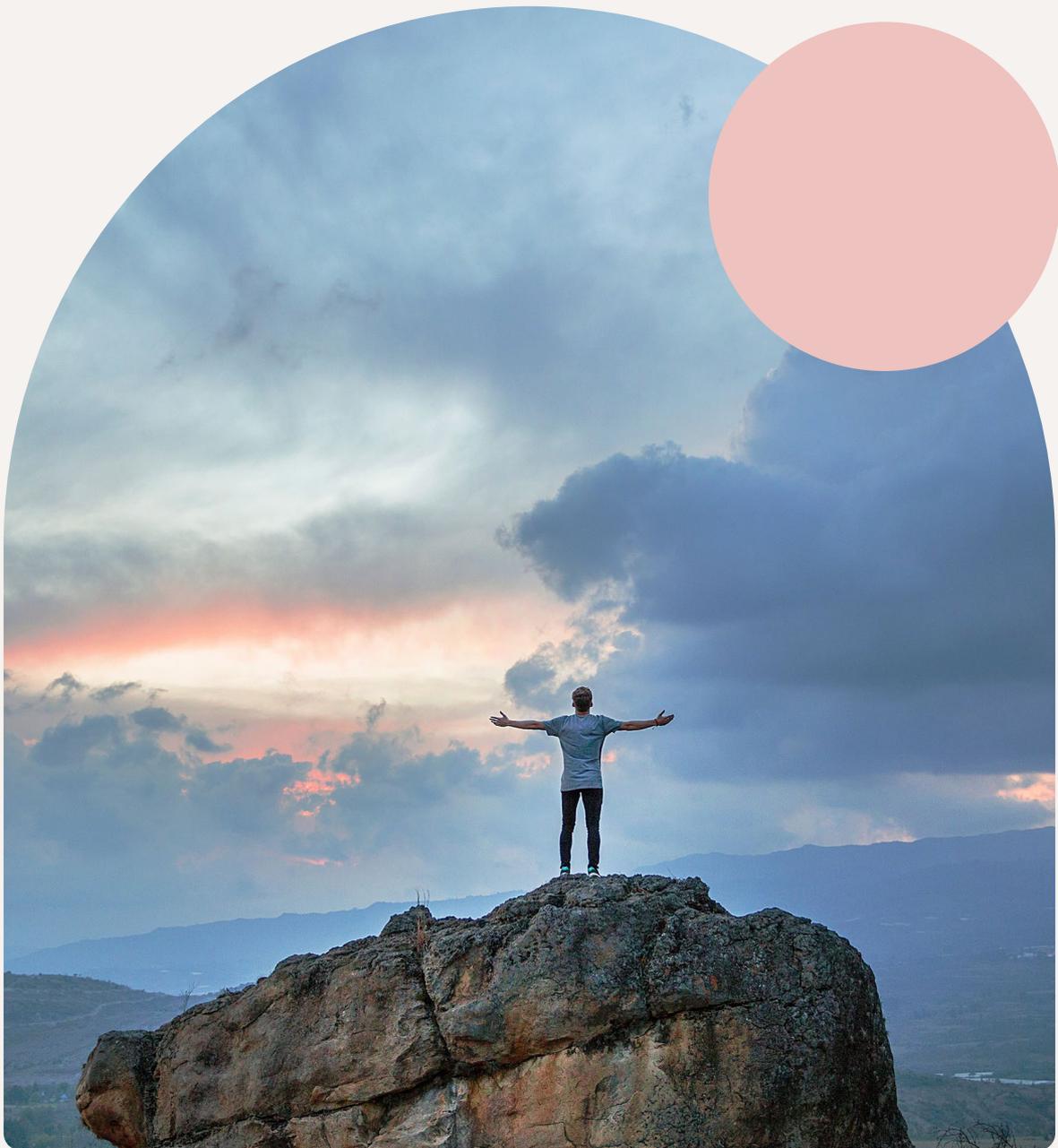
Builders



DO YOU THINK THAT PARLIAMENT SHOULD PASS THIS LEGISLATION?

The Australian Government defines discrimination as "when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of certain personal characteristics"

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, somewhat
- No, not really
- No, not at all



RESPONDING IN THESE *changing times*

The last two years have proved to be a challenging time for many Australians. From constantly changing restrictions to lockdowns and extended times of isolation, many have struggled with the impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. It is certain that these times will be remembered for years to come and will be written about in history books.

As people look to the future with optimism and hope of life resembling what we once knew, Australians recognise that faith-based organisations make a positive difference to their local community, as well as play an important role in helping people explore their spirituality and re-establish connection in a post-COVID-19 world.

At a time when people have been socially and physically isolated, they are craving connection and are open to exploring faith and spirituality, faith-based organisations can provide much needed assurance, connection and a sense of purpose.

Yet the landscape in which to do this is changing, and it is important to understand and recognise it. While there is a greater openness to religion and spirituality (particularly in the emerging generations), there is also a desire for religion to be separated more from public life.

There is also a societal shift taking place in how people participate in community, with many areas of life becoming more digitally integrated due to the pandemic.

An awareness of how Australians view themselves and religious institutions is a helpful place to start to ensure that faith-based organisations and leaders respond to these changing times. Why? So that they can continue the important work of strengthening local communities, providing help to those in need and reaching those looking to explore faith and spirituality.





LET'S DISCOVER *the future together*

Insights for your organisation

Our research reveals that the Australian spiritual landscape is changing. Your challenge today, however, is understanding how these insights apply to your organisation and what steps you can take now to prepare for the future. Our advisory team would love to help you dig deeper into these insights and equip you with strategies to help your organisation. We are here to guide you to meaningfully engage with Australians by understanding the most valuable insights and contextualising them for your organisation.

Why McCrindle?

For more than a decade McCrindle has been trusted to take the pulse of the nation and deliver relevant insights for leaders. We make the unknown known and bring clarity in complex times. Our team are frequently researching specific spiritual insights as well as the mega trends that frame them. Through virtual training events, conferences and team sessions we present insights through visually engaging, inspiring presentations and workshops.

Book a McCrindle speaker today

Getting started is simple. Head to mccrindlespeakers.com.au to learn about our frequently requested topics and variety of speakers. Our friendly team would be delighted to work with you, so take your next step and book a session with one of our professional speakers to discover the future together.



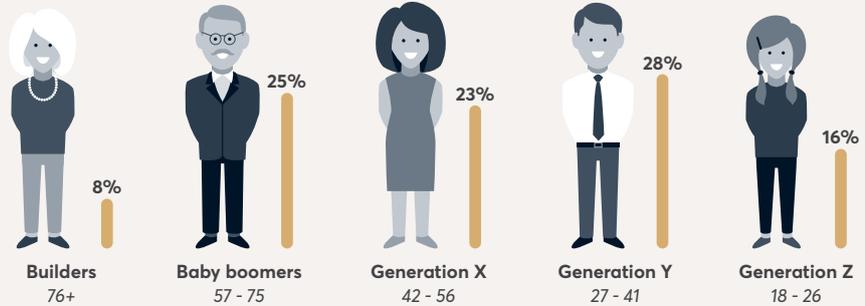
Book an advisory session

Demographic summary

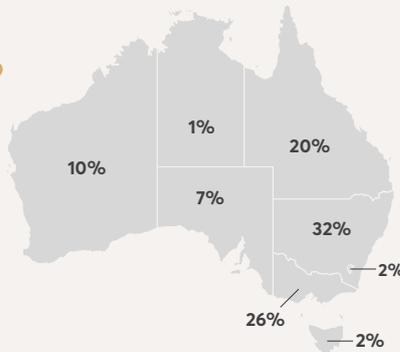
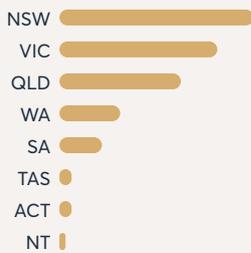
Are you male or female?



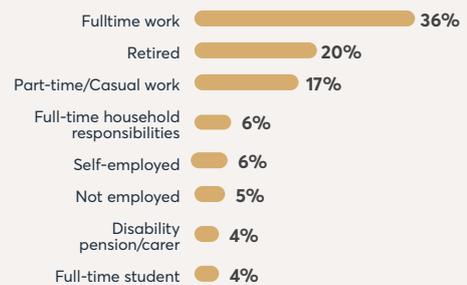
What age will you be in 2021?



Where do you usually live?



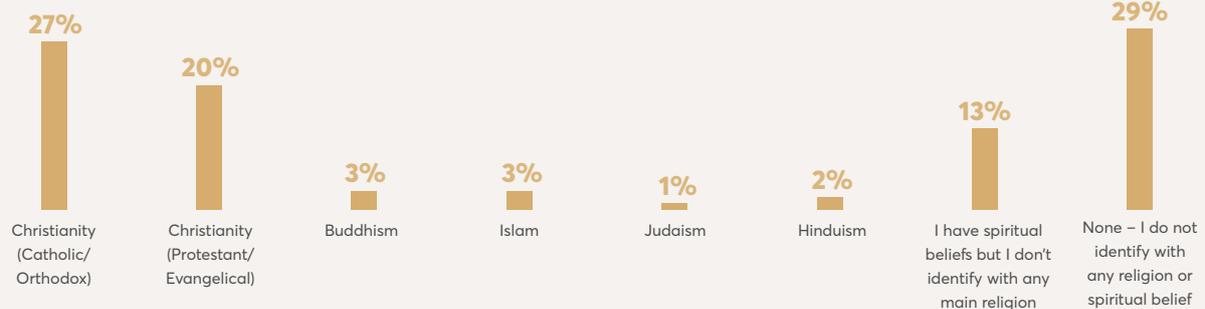
Which of the following best describes your employment status?



What type of household do you currently live in?



What religion do you currently practice or identify with?



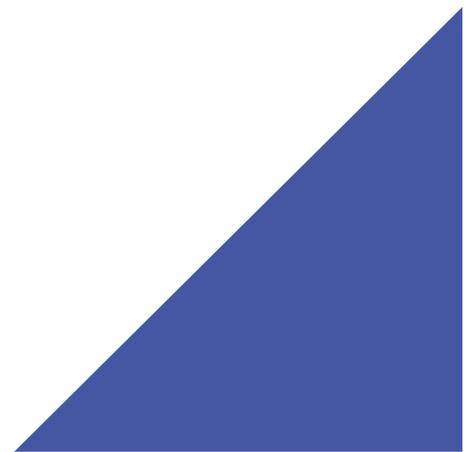
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Australia's spiritual climate report is based on quantitative research, as well as scoping research and data analytics.

A nationally representative online survey of Australians aged 18+ was conducted to gain insights that form much of this report. The survey was in field from the 10th to the 13th of September 2021 and collected 1,000 responses. Throughout this report, these respondents are referred to as 'Australians'. Those who attend church at least monthly are referred to as 'regular churchgoers'.

Graphs and rounding

Data labels on the graphs in this report have been rounded and may, therefore, sum to 99% or 101%. Any calculations where two data points have been added are based on raw data (not the rounded data labels on the graph) which have then been rounded once combined.



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