

Study suggests more acceptance for nones in Canada than in the United States

## **The big difference, researchers concluded, is that the decline in religious affiliation started earlier in Canada.**

by [John Longhurst](#) in the [June 19, 2019](#) issue

Nearly a quarter of Canadians have no religious affiliation—about the same as in the United States. But it's easier to be a none in Canada, according to a forthcoming book by two Canadian researchers.

"It's more normal in Canada to say you have no religion," said Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, a professor of sociology at the University of Waterloo.

"There's less of a social stigma," added Joel Thiessen, professor of sociology at Ambrose University.

If anything, the researchers said, some Canadians stigmatize people seen as "overly religious."

The coauthors of *None of the Above: Having No Religion in Canada and the U.S.* decided to study nones in Canada when they found most of the information about the rapidly expanding group of religiously unaffiliated came from the United States.

The big difference, they concluded, is that the decline in religious affiliation started earlier in Canada.

In 1971, only 4 percent of Canadians said they had no religion. That tripled to 12 percent in 1991 and continued rising to 17 percent in 2001. In the United States, the percentage didn't change much between 1972 and 1990, but then almost doubled from 8 to 14 percent by 2000.

Additionally, religion plays a less important role in Canadian public life, and Canada's official policy of multiculturalism makes it easier for Canadians to be nonreligious, the researchers suggested.

“Canadians are exposed to lots of worldviews,” Wilkins-Laflamme said. “They grow up realizing their view is one among many.”

Wilkins-Laflamme and Thiessen see a return to religion by Canadian nones as unlikely, especially since it is increasingly common for children to be raised without religion.

Thiessen said there is “nothing, socially speaking, that would compel younger generations to turn to religion.” —Religion News Service

*A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “Study: It’s easier to be a none in Canada than in the United States.”*