Same Trajectory, Different Prospects: Anglophone Census Data and the Future of the Irreligious and the 'Nones'

James R. Lewis
University of Tromsø

Margrethe Løøv
University of Bergen

Bernard Doherty
Charles Sturt University

ABSTRACT: Census data from Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom make clear that the irreligious as well as those who indicate No Religion ('Nones') in censuses are growing rapidly. Despite being dominated by young males, we find that the demographics of those who identify with some form of irreligion or who indicate they have no religion are (1) becoming more gender balanced and are (2) rising in age. However, we also find that atheists, agnostics, and humanists are not having children, meaning their current remarkable rate of growth will fall off in the near future. In contrast, 'Nones' are more fertile than the population at large. However, because more than a few Nones hold religious beliefs, it is difficult to predict how the growth of this portion of the population will impact the future growth of irreligion. We conclude that more empirical work needs to be carried out on the Nones.

KEYWORDS: atheism, agnosticism, humanism, nones, non-religion, irreligion, census data

Demography is especially important for narratives of change, because it is the most predictable of the social sciences. One can use population age and sex structures, as well as migration

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> patterns and fertility and mortality trends to make reasonable predictions about the future religious character of a population.
> —Kaufmann, Goujon, and Skirbekk (2012: 79)

Nowadays, one regularly hears the assertion that atheists—or, more mildly, people who are not members of any religion—have grown to become an important component of the population. This is, in part, a consequence of media attention given to spokespeople for the 'New Atheism' such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. More so than in the past, the irreligious—atheists, agnostics, humanists, and the like—feel increasingly empowered to declare their unbeliefs. However, there are also demographic data backing up this assertion. In addition to the expanding memberships of groups like Atheist Alliance International and the various Humanist Associations, the irreligious can point to surveys like the Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism—and, in the U.S., surveys like the relevant Pew Research Center (2012) and Gallup (Newport 2009) polls—which indicate that large proportions of the world are not religious and, further, are becoming even less religious.

We should, however, immediately distinguish between irreligion—which refers to a cluster of related degrees of unbelief from hard atheism to soft agnosticism—and 'no religion' (also called 'Nones') which includes people holding religious beliefs who do not identify with any particular religion. Some observers have called attention to the growth of the latter as if it unproblematically indicated the growth of the former (Cox 2013). However, even when we take Nones out of the equation, the growth of irreligion has been impressive.

When analysts marshal quantitative data in support of the contention that irreligion is growing faster than any other religious option, they often base their assertions on surveys, such as the aforementioned international and national surveys (Zuckerman 2007). Researchers also occasionally refer to national census data, but these discussions tend to focus on the growth of unbelief in specific nations (e.g., Frame 2009). Despite general acknowledgement that "comparing results across surveys provides valuable perspective" (Hackett 2014: 396), few studies have brought together figures from multiple censuses to assess the current state of unbelief (though refer, e.g., to Kaufmann, Goujon, and Skirbekk 2012), particularly not from the most recent censuses conducted in Anglophone nations. The present paper proposes to take a preliminary step in this direction, highlighting certain key demographic features of non-religious populations that appear set to impact the growth of both irreligion and no religion.

Despite initially being dominated by young males, we find that the demographics of those who identify with some form of irreligion or who indicate they have no religion are very gradually (1) becoming more gender balanced and are (2) rising in age from one census to the next. This is congruent with what

has been termed the 'normalization hypothesis' (Kosmin, Keysar, Cragun, and Navarro-Rivera 2009: 4; Lewis 2015: 271), namely the hypothesis that across time the demographics of the irreligious—and/or the Nones—are growing closer to the demographics of the general population. However, we also find that atheists, agnostics, and humanists are having fewer children than the average (Rees 2009; West 2009), meaning their current remarkable rate of growth will almost certainly fall off sharply in the not too distant future. In contrast, 'Nones' are more fertile than the irreligious, as well as more fertile than the population at large in Canada and Britain, indicating a likelihood of ongoing growth.

The inverse relationship between irreligion and fertility, and the corresponding correlation between religion and fertility, have been explored at length in Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart's much-cited study, *Sacred and Secular* (originally published in 2004; already in a second, 2011, edition). The present study finds the same inverse correlation between irreligion and fertility. However, the World Values Surveys from which Norris and Inglehart draw their data do not contain a separate category for Nones, meaning that our census data is able speak to this specific subgroup whereas theirs cannot.

Non-Religious and Irreligious Data in National Censuses

National census data is an important though mostly neglected source of information bearing on the irreligious. The censuses of four English-speaking Commonwealth countries—New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom—collect information on religious self-identity.[1] Types of data collected in censuses are relatively limited, from age and gender to income and education, but these categories are nevertheless sufficient to support or to undermine generalizations about various kinds of people who are not religious.

Though far more comprehensive in scope than questionnaire data, there are, nevertheless, issues with the accuracy of census data, many of which are shared with survey data. At the most basic level, the kind of tick-box identities one finds in censuses and surveys are built around an assumption of a fixed self, when the fact is that we have multiple, fluid 'selves' that are typically in flux (Hall 1992; Day and Lee 2014). It has also been observed that some respondents use 'Christian' as a quasi-ethnic category on census forms (Voas and Bruce 2004). Yet other researchers have discussed the phenomenon of belonging-but-not-believing, meaning people who consider themselves part of a traditional faith community

[1]The South African census stopped collecting religion data after the 2001 census. In 2001, 15.1% of South Africans were Nones. In a survey conducted in 2011–2012 by the Win-Gallup International Religiosity and Atheism index, 28% of South Africans did not consider themselves religious, while 4% were atheists (*News24*: 2012).

despite the fact that they no longer believe (Day 2013). These individuals continue to self-identify as Christians, Anglicans, or whatever in national censuses.

Then there is the problem of people who describe themselves as spiritual-but-not-religious (Fuller 2001; Løøv and Melvær 2014)—not to mention those for whom even the term 'spiritual' has become problematic (Frisk and Åkerbäck 2015: 75–76). Such people might very well tick 'None' or 'No Religion' on a census form, despite holding sometimes strong beliefs about extraordinary realities (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 47; Lee 2014). Some studies have even found that some respondents who claim to be atheists will also assert that they believe in god (Pew Research Center 2008: 5). However, there is no data source that cannot be problematized in some way. And despite the above issues, census figures appear to be our best source of readily-available, society-wide data.

The New Zealand census of 1991 included figures for atheists, agnostics, and humanists. In subsequent years, however, all categories of unbelief were collapsed together into a single 'No Religion' category. For our present purposes this is unfortunate, given what researchers have discovered about the range of people who self-identify as 'No Religion.' Thus, for example, in a relatively recent report on *American Nones* from the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, Kosmin et al. found that 27% of respondents who identified as None[2] believed in a personal god while another 24% believed in a 'higher power' (2009: 11)—meaning slightly more than 50% of their subsample held religious views of some sort. Similarly, the 2012 American Values Survey found that 23% of their sample was what they labeled 'Unattached Believers' (Jones et al. 2012). In a very general way, these studies replicate the findings of Vernon's early study of 'Nones' (1968). Assuming this pattern is even partially generalizable to other populations, it indicates that a significant percentage of people who classify themselves as None are indicating that they are not members of any particular religious denomination rather than that they reject all religious beliefs.

Like New Zealand, Australia holds censuses every five years (Bouma and Hughes 2014). Australia began collecting data on the irreligious in 1996. In contrast to New Zealand, the Australian Census explicitly provides a set of four different subcategories for non-religious respondents in its eCensus option: atheist, agnostic, humanist, and no religion. For respondents who did not take the eCensus option, the paper form of the census had a 'No religion' box in a list of

[2]A potentially confusing aspect of Kosmin et al.'s analysis is that they create their 'Nones' group by collapsing together respondents who refuse to identify with any given religion with those respondents who self-identify as atheists or agnostics. This stands in marked contrast with the way in which 'Nones' is typically used when referring to census data, which is restricted to respondents who refuse to identify with any religious group or tradition, and which *excludes* respondents who self-identify as atheists and the like. This creates exactly the same issue as created by Statistics New Zealand's collapsing all of the different categories together.

nine religions that could be ticked; alternately, one could write out one's religious or irreligious self-identity. In terms of being able to track different categories across four successive censuses, Australia provides the best data for present purposes.

The five-year pattern of the countries in the southern hemisphere contrasts with Canada and the United Kingdom, which hold censuses containing a religious identity item every ten years. The United States, which one might normally want to prioritize because of its size, does not, unfortunately, include a religion (or irreligion) identification item in its national census (Keysar 2014). Canada's approach to collecting religion data involves asking only one out of five people about their religious identity. They then multiply these responses by five to obtain a national estimate. The Canadian census bureau subsequently sells this truncated data as if it contained responses from every Canadian. We should also note that in 2011 the data on religious identity was collected via a separate questionnaire, the National Household Survey, but was nevertheless collected by the same agency as the census proper, Statistics Canada. Despite these drawbacks, the Canadian census does contain four non-religion categories—atheist, agnostic, humanist and 'No Religion'—plus a gender breakdown and a partial age breakdown as part of its gratis data. So although these figures are not the best, they nevertheless fill out the global picture.

The UK did not start collecting religion identification data as part of its national censuses until 2001, meaning there have been only two usable census years. In both of these censuses, respondents could tick: None (2001)/No Religion (2011), Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and 'Any other religion, write in.' However, enough respondents wrote in atheist, agnostic, and humanist in both censuses that the British census has a good breakdown of the different non-religion categories. So despite the fact that we have only two relevant census years, the UK census turns out to be a good source of data for the purposes of our analysis.

Findings: Australian Trajectories

Between the 1996 census and the 2011 census, the number of self-identified Australian atheists rose by an extraordinary 685.8%, from 7,495 to 58,898. To put these figures in perspective, in the same period the number of self-identified Christians rose by 4.5%, from 12,582,900 to 13,150,600; Buddhists rose by 164.7%, from 199,812 to 528,977; and Muslims rose by 137.1%, from 200,885 to 476,291. We have placed the atheist data in a frequency table that lays out the changing profile of Australian atheists in terms of age and gender across the four censuses (see Table 1).

What one immediately sees from Table 1 is that atheists are predominantly young males in their twenties and early thirties (double-digit percentages have been rendered in bold to emphasize this pattern), though the gender imbalance

Table 1: Atheists Australia

Year	1996	%	2001	%	2006	%	2011	%
0-4 years	79	1.1%	474	1.9%	555	1.8%	1,485	2.5%
5-9 years	93	1.2%	491	2.0%	560	1.8%	1,115	1.9%
10-14 years	135	1.8%	633	2.6%	808	2.6%	1,547	2.6%
15-19 years	596	8.0%	2,058	8.4%	2,509	8.0%	4,252	7.2%
20-24 years	1,156	**15.4%**	3,195	**13.1%**	4,441	**14.2%**	8,861	**15.0%**
25-29 years	1,104	**14.7%**	3,289	**13.4%**	3,835	**12.3%**	8,091	**13.7%**
30-34 years	942	**12.6%**	2,763	**11.3%**	3,163	**10.1%**	5,769	9.8%
35-39 years	779	**10.4%**	2,318	9.5%	2,747	8.8%	4,724	8.0%
40-44 years	681	9.1%	2,296	9.4%	2,580	8.2%	4,285	7.3%
45-49 years	559	7.5%	1,968	8.0%	2,643	8.4%	4,152	7.0%
50-54 years	431	5.8%	1,753	7.2%	2,200	7.0%	4,031	6.8%
55-59 years	258	3.4%	1,090	4.5%	1,871	6.0%	3,149	5.3%
60-64 years	182	2.4%	705	2.9%	1,212	3.9%	2,844	4.8%
65-69 years	199	2.7%	477	1.9%	783	2.5%	1,890	3.2%
70-74 years	153	2.0%	411	1.7%	530	1.7%	1,137	1.9%
75-79 years	77	1.0%	291	1.2%	436	1.4%	727	1.2%
80-84 years	49	0.7%	153	0.6%	267	0.9%	473	0.8%
85-89 years	12	0.2%	64	0.3%	115	0.4%	269	0.5%
90-94 years	6	0.1%	23	0.1%	31	0.1%	67	0.1%
95-99 years*	4	0.1%	9	0.0%	10	0.0%	24	0.0%
100 years and over	—	—	3	0.0%	9	0.0%	6	0.0%
Male	4,982	66.5%	15,245	62.3%	19,300	61.7%	34,583	58.7%
Female	2,513	33.5%	9,219	37.7%	12,005	38.3%	24,315	41.3%
Total	7,495		24,464		31,305		58,898	
Average age**	36.0		36.1		37.3		37.0	

* The highest age group in the 1996 survey was "95 and over." The figures for persons aged 95≤ in this survey are rendered in the "95 to 99" column.

** The average age is calculated on the basis of census data in which individuals were grouped in five-year age groups. Here, the average age of each age group (2.5 years. 7.5 years and so on up to 102.5) is estimated to be the average age within each category. Marginal errors might occur.

lessens across census years (from 66.5% males in 1996 to 58.7% males in 2011). Additionally, atheism grows as a consequence of new 'recruits' rather than new offspring—new atheists, who are predominantly youthful and who thus prevent the overall average age of atheists from rising.

Table 2: Agnostics Australia

Year	1996	%	2001	%	2006	%	2011	%
0-4 years	93	1.1%	171	1.0%	255	1.2%	458	1.3%
5-9 years	92	1.0%	259	1.5%	276	1.2%	423	1.2%
10-14 years	176	2.0%	391	2.2%	465	2.1%	667	1.9%
15-19 years	512	5.8%	1,076	6.1%	1,751	7.9%	3,007	8.7%
20-24 years	1,062	**12.1%**	1,783	**10.2%**	2,926	**13.2%**	5,760	**16.6%**
25-29 years	1,067	**12.1%**	1,907	**10.9%**	2,724	**12.3%**	5,328	**15.4%**
30-34 years	1,016	**11.5%**	1,751	**10.0%**	2,245	**10.1%**	3,792	**10.9%**
35-39 years	924	**10.5%**	1,600	9.1%	1,773	8.0%	2,690	7.8%
40-44 years	787	8.9%	1,621	9.2%	1,488	6.7%	2,075	6.0%
45-49 years	758	8.6%	1,614	9.2%	1,685	7.6%	1,915	5.5%
50-54 years	518	5.9%	1,620	9.2%	1,751	7.9%	1,987	5.7%
55-59 years	407	4.6%	1,094	6.2%	1,524	6.9%	1,813	5.2%
60-64 years	295	3.4%	716	4.1%	1,013	4.6%	1,636	4.7%
65-69 years	346	3.9%	559	3.2%	733	3.3%	1,077	3.1%
70-74 years	306	3.5%	560	3.2%	509	2.3%	749	2.2%
75-79 years	226	2.6%	445	2.5%	474	2.1%	515	1.5%
80-84 years	146	1.7%	244	1.4%	305	1.4%	432	1.2%
85-89 years	55	0.6%	116	0.7%	160	0.7%	204	0.6%
90-94 years	12	0.1%	32	0.2%	60	0.3%	82	0.2%
95-99 years*	6	0.1%	7	0.0%	13	0.1%	14	0.0%
100 years and over	—	—	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7	0.0%
Male	5,206	59.1%	10,212	58.1%	12,604	57.0%	18,177	52.5%
Female	3,598	40.9%	7,354	41.9%	9,526	43.0%	16,454	47.5%
Total	8,804		17,566		22,130		34,631	
Average age**	40.1		41.0		39.5		37.1	

During the period of the same four censuses, the percentage of agnostics rose by 292.7%, from 8,804 to 34,631. Other than being a little older than atheists, Australian agnostics exhibit a similar developmental pattern in terms of a lessening dominance of males (declining from 59.1% to 52.5% of the total), a predominance of people in their twenties and early thirties, and growth as a consequence of young new agnostics rather than as a result of having more children (see Table 2). agnostics are having slightly more children than atheists, as we will see more clearly in a moment.

Table 3: Humanists Australia

Year	1996	%	2001	%	2006	%	2011	%
5-9 years	100	2.5%	117	2.3%	127	1.7%	163	2.1%
10-14 years	132	3.2%	158	3.1%	157	2.1%	180	2.3%
15-19 years	138	3.4%	210	4.2%	312	4.1%	337	4.4%
20-24 years	176	4.3%	270	5.4%	452	5.9%	510	6.7%
25-29 years	236	5.8%	316	6.3%	447	5.9%	584	7.6%
30-34 years	324	8.0%	338	6.7%	497	6.5%	542	7.1%
35-39 years	488	**12.0%**	375	7.4%	575	7.5%	523	6.8%
40-44 years	534	**13.1%**	486	9.7%	641	8.4%	557	7.3%
45-49 years	504	**12.4%**	564	**11.2%**	719	9.4%	644	8.4%
50-54 years	397	9.7%	636	**12.6%**	873	**11.4%**	657	8.6%
55-59 years	269	6.6%	467	9.3%	859	**11.3%**	726	9.5%
60-64 years	181	4.4%	309	6.1%	653	8.6%	736	9.6%
65-69 years	186	4.6%	191	3.8%	415	5.4%	542	7.1%
70-74 years	187	4.6%	210	4.2%	283	3.7%	318	4.2%
75-79 years	84	2.1%	192	3.8%	261	3.4%	242	3.2%
80-84 years	49	1.2%	83	1.6%	168	2.2%	161	2.1%
85-89 years	20	0.5%	48	1.0%	59	0.8%	77	1.0%
90-94 years	3	0.1%	4	0.1%	30	0.4%	24	0.3%
95-99 years*	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.1%	0	0.0%
100 years and over	—	—	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Male	2,158	53.0%	2,572	51.1%	3,833	50.2%	3,788	49.4%
Female	1,917	47.0%	2,464	48.9%	3,798	49.8%	3,874	50.6%
Total	4,075		5,036		7,631		7,662	
Average age**	43.5		45.3		46.8		45.9	

Humanism, which represents more of an organized movement, exhibits both similarities to—as well as differences from—atheism and agnosticism. What one immediately notices in Table 3 is that humanists are, on average, significantly older. Double-digit percentages are in the late thirties and across the forties in the 1996 census. This age cohort then moves to the late forties and the early fifties in 2001, and into their fifties in the 2006 census. Though double-digit percentages disappear in the 2011 census data, the two largest percentages of five-year cohorts end up in their late fifties and early sixties. Growth, though quite strong at 88%, is obviously significantly less than the growth rate of either agnosticism or atheism. Perhaps surprisingly, humanism's growth is not being fueled by a

Table 4: No Religion Australia

Age	1996	%	2001	%	2006	%	2011	%
0-4 years	310,559	10.6%	275,440	9.6%	346,257	9.5%	444,608	9.5%
5-9 years	255,060	8.7%	240,895	8.4%	292,046	8.0%	343,694	7.3%
10-14 years	224,898	7.7%	218,501	7.6%	271,720	7.5%	313,334	6.7%
15-19 years	231,144	7.9%	234,654	8.2%	282,990	7.8%	347,042	7.4%
20-24 years	290,469	9.9%	247,721	8.7%	324,274	8.9%	430,120	9.2%
25-29 years	284,711	9.7%	265,059	9.3%	309,423	8.5%	435,553	9.3%
30-34 years	272,452	9.3%	251,950	8.8%	319,785	8.8%	389,507	8.3%
35-39 years	260,937	8.9%	234,297	8.2%	291,585	8.0%	374,036	8.0%
40-44 years	227,629	7.8%	221,701	7.8%	263,839	7.2%	332,884	7.1%
45-49 years	185,760	6.3%	193,963	6.8%	246,519	6.8%	296,584	6.3%
50-54 years	116,090	4.0%	159,060	5.6%	211,760	5.8%	272,554	5.8%
55-59 years	74,737	2.6%	100,726	3.5%	172,114	4.7%	229,992	4.9%
60-64 years	55,008	1.9%	65,204	2.3%	109,398	3.0%	184,157	3.9%
65-69 years	49,702	1.7%	47,497	1.7%	68,768	1.9%	114,560	2.4%
70-74 years	39,589	1.4%	41,142	1.4%	48,791	1.3%	71,413	1.5%
75-79 years	25,045	0.9%	30,133	1.1%	39,168	1.1%	47,859	1.0%
80-84 years	14,651	0.5%	17,275	0.6%	26,277	0.7%	35,262	0.8%
85-89 years	6,221	0.2%	8,264	0.3%	12,946	0.4%	20,328	0.4%
90-94 years	1,917	0.1%	2,851	0.1%	4,847	0.1%	7,658	0.2%
95-99 years*	560	0.0%	813	0.0%	1,058	0.0%	1,787	0.0%
100 years and over	—	—	158	0.0%	254	0.0%	230	0.0%
Male	1,596,613	54.5%	1,542,569	54.0%	1,939,208	53.2%	2,495,972	53.2%
Female	1,330,526	45.5%	1,314,735	46.0%	1,704,611	46.8%	2,197,190	46.8%
Total	2,927,139		2,857,304		3,643,819		4,693,162	
Average age**	29.0		30.5		31.4		32.3	

greater percentage of children. Rather, like agnosticism and atheism, humanism is growing as a consequence of new recruits—though these recruits are distributed across different age groups rather than narrowly focused in the youthful age bands. Another surprising development is that in the most recent census humanism had—though only marginally—a greater percentage of women than men.

This finally brings us to the Nones. As discussed in Tom Frame's *Losing My Religion* (2009), 'No Religion' in Australia is especially problematic, having been dealt with in several different ways on past census forms. The frequency table for

'No Religion' presents a picture of a gradually declining spectrum of ages from 9+% of the total in the 0–4 age category to less than a fraction of a percent in the late nineties (see Table 4). The total of None census respondents drops from 2,927,139 to 2,857,304 between the 1996 and the 2001 censuses, but then rises again to 3,643,819 in 2006 and 4,693,162 in 2011, resulting in a 60.3% overall increase.[3] In comparison with the national population of 21,507,719, this means that the proportion of Australians self-identifying as Nones has risen to become more than a fifth of the total population. The percentage of males to females drops only slightly, from 54.5% to 53.2% between 1996 and 2011. And the average age rises slowly from 29 to 32.3. The larger number of children being born to Nones is what really sets the 'no religion' group apart from atheists, agnostics, and humanists. In fact, Nones are having proportionately more children than the population as a whole. This indicates the possibility of sustained growth for 'No Religion,' in contrast to atheists and agnostics, whose current high rate of growth is unlikely to continue into the future. We will revisit the fertility theme in the next section.

During this same time period, the national average age of Australians grew from 35.6 to 38.4, indicating that the portion of the population identifying as None remains steady at around six years younger than the national average. Also, the proportion of males to females in the national population remains constant at around 49.5% males to 50.5% females, in contrast to the greater number of males among the Nones. Thus in certain ways, the Nones represent a somewhat younger, somewhat more masculine reflection of the Australian population as a whole.

Findings: United Kingdom Trajectories

While less dramatic than the explosive increase in the number of self-identified atheists in Australia between 1996 and 2011, the tripling of the United Kingdom's Atheist population from 10,357 to 29,267 between the 2001 census and the 2011 census is still remarkable. (Scotland and Northern Ireland hold separate censuses; all figures in this section are from the England and Wales portion of the census.) Though trailing behind Australia in terms of atheism's rate of growth,[4] England

[3]This may have had something to do with the Atheist Foundation of Australia Campaign: http://www.censusnoreligion.org. This campaign was very visible at the time (e.g., billboards across Sydney and other major cities).

[4]However, from a different perspective, the rise in non-religion—including atheism and agnosticism—in the UK is significantly higher than in Australia (and Canada). For instance, the total number of atheists rose from 24,464 to 58,898 from 2001 to 2011 in Australia (+141%), whereas the corresponding figures for the same period in the UK are 10,357 and 29,264 (+183%). The number of Nones almost doubled in the UK (+90%), whereas it rose by 64% in Australia. We speculate that the census campaign 'If you're not religious for God's sake say so' (http://census-campaign.org.uk/) in the UK likely had a deep impact here. The same group that funded the UK campaign also funding the Australian campaign.

Table 5: Atheists UK

Age	2001	%	2011	%
0-4 years	40	0.4%	200	0.7%
5-9 years	53	0.5%	226	0.8%
10-14 years	198	1.9%	650	2.2%
15-19 years	692	6.7%	1,859	6.4%
20-24 years	1,080	10.4%	3,750	12.8%
25-29 years	1,076	10.4%	3,864	13.2%
30-34 years	1,201	11.6%	3,074	10.5%
35-39 years	1,172	11.3%	2,675	9.1%
40-44 years	977	9.4%	2,641	9.0%
45-49 years	959	9.3%	2,408	8.2%
50-54 years	966	9.3%	1,864	6.4%
55-59 years	692	6.7%	1,818	6.2%
60-64 years	452	4.4%	1,765	6.0%
65-69 years	303	2.9%	1,099	3.8%
70-74 years	229	2.2%	632	2.2%
75-79 years	135	1.3%	375	1.3%
80-84 years	87	0.8%	213	0.7%
85 years and over	45	0.4%	154	0.5%
Males	7,406	71.5%	20,191	69.0%
Females	2,951	28.5%	9,076	31.0%
Total	10,357		29,267	
Average age* **	40.2		39.4	

*** The average age is calculated on the basis of census data in which individuals were grouped in five-year age groups. Here, the average age of each age group (2.5 years. 7.5 years and so on up to 102.5) is estimated to be the average age within each category. Marginal deviations might occur.

and Wales' self-professed Christian numbers actually fell 11.0% between the two censuses, from 37,338,518 to 33,243,175. In the same period, the Buddhist population of the England and Wales rose 71.5%, from 144,453 to 247,742, while the Muslim population rose 75.0%, from 1,546,626 to 2,706,066. Parallel to our approach to Australian data, we have placed the British Atheist data in a frequency table that lays out the changing profile of UK atheists in terms of age and gender (see Table 5).

Similar to Australia, British atheists are predominantly younger males in their twenties and thirties. The growth of atheism among young people has actually pushed the average age down a bit between the two censuses, from 40.2 to 39.4. Also, as we saw in Australia, the gender imbalance lessens across the censuses from 71.5% males to 69.0% males. Finally, growth is again overwhelmingly fueled by new atheists rather from new offspring.

In the same period, agnostics more than doubled in the United Kingdom, from 14,909 to 32,382. Though agnostics start out being a little older than atheists, their average age drops from 45.3 in the 2001 census to 38.4 in the 2011 census—thus ending up a bit lower than atheists. agnostics' gender imbalance also lessens slightly, from 61.1% males to 59.2% males. And like atheists, agnosticism

Table 6: Agnostics UK

Year	2001	%	2011	%
0-4 years	60	0.4%	468	1.4%
5-9 years	103	0.7%	379	1.2%
10-14 years	278	1.9%	952	2.9%
15-19 years	781	5.2%	3,016	9.3%
20-24 years	1,306	8.8%	4,655	**14.4%**
25-29 years	1,396	9.4%	4,354	**13.4%**
30-34 years	1,186	8.0%	3,330	**10.3%**
35-39 years	1,297	8.7%	2,426	7.5%
40-44 years	1,230	8.3%	2,066	6.4%
45-49 years	1,267	8.5%	2,014	6.2%
50-54 years	1,436	9.6%	1,719	5.3%
55-59 years	1,060	7.1%	1,603	5.0%
60-64 years	869	5.8%	1,646	5.1%
65-69 years	771	5.2%	1,233	3.8%
70-74 years	669	4.5%	899	2.8%
75-79 years	575	3.9%	691	2.1%
80-84 years	366	2.5%	504	1.6%
85 years and over	259	1.7%	427	1.3%
Males	9,113	61.1%	19,185	59.2%
Females	5,796	38.9%	13,197	40.8%
Total	14,909		32,382	
Average age* **	45.3		38.4	

is growing as a consequence of young new agnostics rather than as a result of fertility (see Table 6).

The pattern for British humanism is comparable to Australian humanism. Like their down-under comrades, UK humanists are, on average, significantly older than people who self-identify with other forms of irreligion. Looking at Table 7, one can see double-digit percentages in the late forties and early fifties in 2001, and then in their late fifties and early sixties in the 2011 census. Average age rises from 50.4 to 51.9. The number of total humanists almost doubles between the two censuses. Again like Australian humanists, British humanism is growing as a consequence of new recruits—though recruits are more spread out across different age groups—rather than from fertility. And once again, as in the most recent Australian census, the majority of humanists in the UK are women.

Table 7: Humanists UK

Year	2001	%	2011	%
0-4 years	61	0.7%	96	0.6%
5-9 years	84	1.0%	116	0.8%
10-14 years	156	1.9%	254	1.7%
15-19 years	214	2.6%	342	2.3%
20-24 years	228	2.7%	636	4.2%
25-29 years	326	3.9%	800	5.3%
30-34 years	466	5.6%	772	5.1%
35-39 years	633	7.6%	885	5.9%
40-44 years	761	9.2%	1,064	7.1%
45-49 years	962	11.6%	1,288	8.5%
50-54 years	1,189	14.3%	1,483	9.8%
55-59 years	886	10.7%	1,752	11.6%
60-64 years	597	7.2%	1,879	12.5%
65-69 years	496	6.0%	1,361	9.0%
70-74 years	482	5.8%	927	6.2%
75-79 years	343	4.1%	621	4.1%
80-84 years	250	3.0%	426	2.8%
85 years and over	163	2.0%	365	2.4%
Males	4,102	49.4%	7,394	49.1%
Females	4,195	50.6%	7,673	50.9%
Total	8,297		15,067	
Average age* **	50.4		51.9	

This finally brings us to the No Religion/None category. Total Nones almost doubled between the two censuses, from 7,274,290 to 13,836,576. In comparison with the national population of 56,100,000, this means that the number of Nones was approaching a fourth of the population by the time of the 2011 census. As in Australia, the percentage of males to females drops only slightly, from 55.5% to 54.6%, and average age grows from 30.5 to 32.0 (see Table 8). Again it is the significantly larger number of children being born to Nones that sets them apart from atheists, agnostics, and humanists. As we noted when discussing Australian census figures, there is a possibility of sustained growth for 'No Religion,' while it is unlikely that atheists and agnostics will continue to grow at their current rate.

In contrast to the situation in Australia, there is a group of British Nones who are decidedly younger—in their twenties and thirties—in the 2001 census. The real

Table 8: None (2001) No Religion (2011) UK

Year	2001	%	2011	%
0-4 years	661,201	9.1%	1,193,614	8.6%
5-9 years	523,490	7.2%	883,900	6.4%
10-14 years	499,716	6.9%	891,652	6.4%
15-19 years	561,502	7.7%	1,112,135	8.0%
20-24 years	698,436	9.6%	1,397,110	10.1%
25-29 years	798,838	11.0%	1,350,596	9.8%
30-34 years	791,161	10.9%	1,206,962	8.7%
35-39 years	678,113	9.3%	1,155,032	8.3%
40-44 years	511,024	7.0%	1,128,035	8.2%
45-49 years	416,687	5.7%	973,250	7.0%
50-54 years	385,335	5.3%	721,956	5.2%
55-59 years	245,239	3.4%	558,083	4.0%
60-64 years	159,901	2.2%	492,188	3.6%
65-69 years	115,605	1.6%	301,944	2.2%
70-74 years	92,348	1.3%	189,685	1.4%
75-79 years	66,026	0.9%	126,559	0.9%
80-84 years	40,301	0.6%	84,479	0.6%
85 years and over	29,367	0.4%	69,396	0.5%
Males	4,037,855	55.5%	7,555,520	54.6%
Females	3,236,435	44.5%	6,281,056	45.4%
Total	7,274,290		13,836,576	
Average age* **	30.5		32.0	

growth, however, seems to be among even younger people in their twenties who had become a part of 'No Religion' by the 2011 census. There is, however, growth taking place at every age level, as evidenced by the rising overall average age.

Findings: Canadian Trajectories

Canada's Atheist population more than doubled between the 2001 census and the 2011 census, from 18,605 to 48,675, and more than tripled between the 1991 census (which had recorded 13,510 atheists) and the 2011 census (see Table 9). Also, Canada's self-professed Christians fell 1.8% between 1991 and 2011, from 22,503,360 to 22,102,745. In the same period, Canada's Buddhist population rose 124.5%, from 163,415 to 366,830, while the Muslim population rose 316.1%, from 253,265 to 1,053,945.

Table 9: Atheists Canada

Year	1991	%	2001	%	2011	%
0 to 14 years	760	5.7 %	1,085	5.9 %	3,665	7.5 %
15 to 19 years	895	6.7 %	1,275	6.9 %	2,890	5.9 %
20 to 24 years	1,920	**14.4 %**	2,780	**15.0 %**	6,855	**14.1 %**
25 to 29 years	2,330	**17.5 %**	2,695	**14.6 %**	8,615	**17.7 %**
30 to 34 years	2,000	**15.0 %**	2,220	**12.0 %**	6,180	**12.7 %**
35 to 39 years	1,490	**11.2 %**	1,715	9.3 %	4,350	8.9 %
40 to 44 years	1,240	9.3 %	1,760	9.5 %	3,355	6.9 %
45 to 49 years	735	5.5 %	1,365	7.4 %	3,245	6.7 %
50 to 54 years	450	3.4 %	1,235	6.7 %	3,010	6.2 %
55 to 59 years	395	3.0 %	775	4.2 %	2,310	4.7 %
60 to 64 years	345	2.6 %	505	2.7 %	1,665	3.4 %
65 to 69 years	330	2.5 %	365	2.0 %	1,040	2.1 %
70 to 74 years	200	1.5 %	395	2.1 %	620	1.3 %
75 years and over	255	1.9 %	325	1.8 %	875	1.8 %
Male	8,925	66.9 %	12,500	67.6 %	30,780	63.2 %
Female	4,585	34.4 %	6,105	33.0 %	17,900	36.8 %
Total**	1,3345		18,495		48,675	
Average age	34.2		35.4		34.7	

**** The Canada tables have been constructed using different datasets issued by Statistics Canada. Because rounded figures are used, the absolute number of individuals within a category may vary marginally between different datasets. Hence, the gender and total figures must be seen as a rounded estimate rather than a precise figure. Although somewhat inaccurate in absolute terms, the differences are relatively small and of little consequence for the relative percentages.

Because we have used only Canada's free data, our frequency tables are substantially truncated. This makes it difficult to tell precisely where the growth of Canada's atheists is coming from, except to say that both new and old atheists are predominantly in the 25- to 44-year-old age cohort. We were able to make only very crude age calculations. Based on these calculations, the average age of atheists rose a little between 1991 and 2001, but then fell again by the 2011 census. Additionally, the percentage of males rose between 1991 and 2001, but then fell again by 2011. Finally, as in both Australia and the United Kingdom, growth is overwhelmingly coming from new atheists rather from new offspring.

In a significant exception to the growth pattern of agnostics in other countries, the number of Canadian agnostics dropped off sharply between 1991 and 2001, but then more than doubled between 2001 and 2011 to leave a total of 36,285. Like Canadian atheists, agnostics appear to rise in age between 1991 and 2001, but then drop off again by 2011 (again, these are very speculative figures). Also like atheists, the proportion of male to female agnostics increases and then falls across the three census years. And finally, again like atheism, agnosticism in Canada is

Table 10: Agnostics Canada

Year	1991	%	2001	%	2011	%
0 to 14 years	2,005	9.2 %	995	5.6 %	2,250	6.2 %
15 to 19 years	1,175	5.4 %	860	4.9 %	2,135	5.9 %
20 to 24 years	2,355	10.8 %	1,660	9.4 %	5,585	15.4 %
25 to 29 years	2,770	12.8 %	2,225	12.6 %	5,870	16.2 %
30 to 34 years	2,940	13.5 %	2,005	11.3 %	4,025	11.1 %
35 to 39 years	2,725	12.5 %	1,760	10.0 %	3,085	8.5 %
40 to 44 years	2,185	10.1 %	1,520	8.6 %	2,560	7.1 %
45 to 49 years	1,265	5.8 %	1,590	9.0 %	2,460	6.8 %
50 to 54 years	905	4.2 %	1,480	8.4 %	2,235	6.2 %
55 to 59 years	715	3.3 %	990	5.6 %	1,930	5.3 %
60 to 64 years	750	3.5 %	615	3.5 %	1,730	4.8 %
65 to 69 years	605	2.8 %	525	3.0 %	1,015	2.8 %
70 to 74 years	675	3.1 %	585	3.3 %	450	1.2 %
75 years and over	645	3.0 %	860	4.9 %	960	2.6 %
Male	12,910	58.8 %	10,690	60.0 %	20,540	56.6 %
Female	9,065	41.3 %	7,125	40.0 %	15,740	43.4 %
Total**	21,715		17,670		36,290	
Average age	36.1		39.9		36.2	

growing as a consequence of young new agnostics rather than as a consequence of fertility (see Table 10).

Like their comrades in other countries, Canadian humanists are, on average, older than atheists and agnostics—though once again we have to hedge our remarks because of the highly imprecise nature of our age data. The number of total humanists almost triples between the 1991 census and the 2011 census. However, in contrast to Australian humanists and British humanists, Canadian humanists are reasonably fertile, and are growing both as a consequence of fertility as well as from new recruits. Like both atheism and agnosticism in Canada, the proportion of males to females rises between 1991 and 2001, but then falls again by 2011 (see Table 11).

Total Nones more than doubled between 1991 and 2011, from 3,333,240 to 7,745,535. In comparison with the national population of 32,852,320, this means that, as in the UK, Nones were approaching a full fourth of the population by the 2011 census. As in Australia and the United Kingdom, the percentage of males to females falls a bit, from 55.7% to 54.4%. And, though this might be a consequence

Table 11: Humanists Canada

Year	1991	%	2001	%	2011	%
0 to 14 years	130	10.8 %	215	10.3 %	310	9.0 %
15 to 19 years	35	2.9 %	80	3.8 %	135	3.9 %
20 to 24 years	120	**10.0 %**	110	5.3 %	370	**10.7 %**
25 to 29 years	100	8.3 %	195	9.4 %	420	**12.2 %**
30 to 34 years	70	5.8 %	165	7.9 %	245	7.1 %
35 to 39 years	135	**11.2 %**	155	7.4 %	310	9.0 %
40 to 44 years	165	**13.7 %**	295	**14.1 %**	275	8.0 %
45 to 49 years	95	7.9 %	220	**10.6 %**	275	8.0 %
50 to 54 years	85	7.1 %	220	**10.6 %**	190	5.5 %
55 to 59 years	60	5.0 %	145	7.0 %	360	10.4 %
60 to 64 years	80	6.6 %	100	4.8 %	205	6.0 %
65 to 69 years	50	4.1 %	70	3.4 %	140	4.1 %
70 to 74 years	50	4.1 %	35	1.7 %	90	2.6 %
75 years and over	30	2.5 %	80	3.8 %	120	3.5 %
Male	700	56.2 %	1265	60.2 %	1,810	52.5 %
Female	545	43.8 %	835	39.8 %	1,640	47.5 %
Total****	1,205		2,085		3,445	
Average age	39.6		40.3		39.6	

of the rough figures we are working with, the average age grows from 29.7 to 32.0 to 33.8. Once again a significantly larger proportion of children sets the Nones apart from atheists, agnostics, and (but to a lesser extent) humanists (see Table 12).

Findings: Relative Fertilities

The observation that declining numbers of children being born to the irreligious essentially undercuts the prospects of unbelief constituting a majority of the population in the foreseeable future is not a new one. In recent years, researchers such as Eric Kaufmann (2006; 2012), and Norris and Inglehart (2011) have argued that the greater fertility of religious people means that we are just around the corner from a more sacred rather than a more secular world. The low number of children being born to atheists, agnostics, and humanists evident in the above frequency tables embodies this pattern. However, we can obtain a more precise sense of the fertility issue by examining the number-of-children statistics collected by the various national censuses during the 2011 census year.

Table 12: No Religion Canada

Year	1991	%	2001	%	2011	%
0 to 14 years	866,825	26.2 %	1,109,360	23.2 %	1,577,490	20.4 %
15 to 19 years	242,215	7.3 %	369,705	7.7 %	545,620	7.0 %
20 to 24 years	293,230	8.9 %	403,605	8.4 %	675,095	8.7 %
25 to 29 years	349,835	10.6 %	409,610	8.6 %	713,070	9.2 %
30 to 34 years	353,880	10.7 %	407,500	8.5 %	645,290	8.3 %
35 to 39 years	310,955	9.4 %	440,335	9.2 %	592,710	7.7 %
40 to 44 years	257,025	7.8 %	416,330	8.7 %	562,080	7.3 %
45 to 49 years	167,130	5.1 %	348,910	7.3 %	592,245	7.6 %
50 to 54 years	115,445	3.5 %	280,600	5.9 %	536,160	6.9 %
55 to 59 years	94,245	2.9 %	177,515	3.7 %	434,715	5.6 %
60 to 64 years	83,165	2.5 %	122,115	2.6 %	333,835	4.3 %
65 to 69 years	66,630	2.0 %	101,750	2.1 %	204,550	2.6 %
70 to 74 years	46,630	1.4 %	83,760	1.8 %	132,430	1.7 %
75 years and over	54,990	1.7 %	109,865	2.3 %	200,255	2.6 %
Male	1,857,420	55.7 %	2,610,670	54.4 %	4,160,245	53.7 %
Female	1,475,825	44.3 %	2,185,660	45.6 %	3,585,290	46.3 %
Total**	3,302,200		4,780,960		7,745,545	
Average age	29.2		31.7		33.8	

The Canadian census classifies respondents according to whether they have children eighteen years of age or younger, an approach that skews fertility figures for a denominational body containing a predominance of older members. Statistics Canada also groups them into four categories: respondents with no children, with one child, with two children, and with three or more children. Focusing on 'No Children' figures (see Table 13), the percentages for agnostics (87.13%), atheists (79.41%) and humanists (80.89%) having no children are all higher than for the national average (73.47%) as well as higher than for most Christian denominations with the exception of the United Church—which appears to have the same number of people without children as atheists. However, because the average respondent who identifies with the United Church is significantly older than the average atheist, it means that many with grown children (children older than 18) have not been counted. A similar consideration helps to explain the seemingly low fertility of Catholics. In terms of the way in which this statistic is calculated in Canada, Pentecostals, independent Evangelicals, and Mormons have the highest rates of fertility (e.g., the LDS figure is 66.29% and the Pentecostal figure is 69.54% with no children under the age of 18). In sharp contrast with the three irreligion groups, Canadian Nones are slightly *more* fertile than the national average.

Children categories for the British census are the same as for Canada, though we are hampered by the fact that the UK has a single 'Christian' category to which people who identify with any brand of Christianity are supposed to respond. Focusing once again on 'No Children' figures (see Table 14, next page), the percentages for agnostics (80.75%), atheists (78.05%), and humanists (80.62%) having no children are significantly higher than for Christians (71.97%) and for

Table 13: Children No Religion/Irreligion Canada 2011

	Agnostic		Atheist		Humanist		No Religion	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No children <18	28,175	87.13	35,745	79.41	2,540	80.89	4,512,365	73.16
1 child	2,775	6.32	4,365	9.70	295	9.39	761,185	12.34
2 children	2,515	5.41	3,880	8.62	280	8.92	683,505	11.08
3 or more	570	1.14	1,025	2.28	25	0.80	210,990	3.42

National Avg.		Roman Catholic		United Church		LDS (Mormon)		Pentecostal	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
20,027,520	73.47	7,988,090	74.34	1,4166,80	79.41	52,840	66.29	266,210	69.54
3,067,260	11.25	1,178,510	10.97	151,335	8.45	8,610	10.80	46,735	12.21
3,006,990	11.03	1,162,330	10.82	163,200	9.15	8,060	10.11	43,100	11.26
1,157,760	4.25	416,135	3.87	52,860	2.96	10,195	12.79	26,759	6.99

Table 14: Children No Religion/Irreligion England and Wales 2011

	Agnostic		Atheist		Humanist		No Religion	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No children <18	22,315	80.75	20,583	78.05	11,428	80.62	6,313,329	63.68
1 child	2,937	10.63	2,935	11.13	1,404	9.90	1,684,951	16.99
2 children	1,849	6.69	2,144	8.13	1,031	7.27	1,362,324	13.74
3 or more	534	1.28	708	2.68	312	2.20	553,812	5.59

National Average		Christian	
N	%	N	%
29,362,992	74.34	18,874,368	71.97
6,149,720	14.37	3,448,499	13.15
5,054,055	11.81	2,836,511	10.82
2,227,637	5.20	1,065,674	4.06

Table 15: Children No Religion/Irreligion Australia 2011

	Agnostic		Atheist		Humanist		No religion	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No children	9,909	63.1	12,191	54.6	1,311	36.1	732,981	44.0
1 child	1,,685	10.7	2,860	12.8	524	14.4	227,770	13.7
2 children	2,312	14.7	4,013	18.0	999	27.5	393,192	23.6
3 or more	1,595	10.2	2,907	13.0	751	20.7	286,026	17.2
Not stated	193	1.2	375	1.7	44	1.2	26,234	1.6
Total	15,694	100.0	22,346	100.0	3,629	100.0	1,666,203	100.0

National Avg.		Catholic		Anglican		Uniting Church*		LDS (Mormon)	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2,721,678	30.7	715,339	31.3	393,768	23.4	119,051	23.0	6,855	29.4
1,016,142	11.5	255,896	11.2	184,641	11.0	49,172	9.5	2,205	9.4
2,286,082	25.8	587,421	25.7	528,231	31.4	160,918	31.1	3,595	15.4
2,305,418	26.0	674,974	29.5	541,052	32.2	177,393	34.3	10,125	43.4
528,201	6.0	52,172	2.3	34,932	2.1	10,324	2.0	557	2.4
8,857,520	100.0	2,285,802	100.0	1,682,624	100.0	516,858	100.0	23,337	100.0

* An amalgamation between Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians; the 3rd largest Christian denomination in Australia

NOTE: Fertility data were not recorded for males or for females aged 14 and under.

Additionally, unlike Canada and the UK, adult children were included.

Data Source: 2011 Census of Population and Housing

the National Average (74.34%). As with Canada, because the average Christian is older than the average atheist, it means that many Christians with grown children (children older than 18) have not been counted. In sharp contrast with the three irreligion groups, UK Nones are significantly *more* fertile than both Christians and the national average.

Although Australians take roughly the same approach to collecting fertility data as the other two nations we have been examining, their census only measures the fertility of women, and, unlike Canada and the UK, includes grown children. Additionally, the percentages are calculated as a percentage of women over the age of 14. As a consequence of these differences, the percentages in Table 15 are lower than in the other two fertility tables. Thus the 'No Children' figure for agnostics is 63.1%, for atheists 54.6%, for humanists 36.1% and for 'Nones' 44%. However, all are nevertheless significantly higher than the figures for both the total population and for select Christian denominations. In marked contrast with the UK and Canada, the Nones' rate of having children is relatively low, though quite a bit higher than both agnostics and atheists.

Discussion

In part, the data examined here reinforces what we already know, namely that various forms of irreligion and disaffection from organized religion are growing rapidly and that this growth is being driven by the 'recruitment' of young males. As with many other sources of data, we were unable to determine from census data how much the growth of irreligion arises from former believers who have actually rejected religion and how much it arises from people who are now simply more willing to declare their unbelief than in the past. Similarly, national census data does not provide figures on people who have left organized religions. For the latter, the American Values Survey found that out of the 19% of Americans who currently identify as religiously unaffiliated, only 7% were raised without such an affiliation—meaning 12% had left their traditional denominations (Jones et al. 2012).

At present, some observers perceive a 'faddish' side to unbelief (Casper 2010; Hart 2010; Hobson 2013; McGrath 2015) that arises at least in part from the vitality and increased visibility of atheism in the media.[5] This likely prompts people who might otherwise classify themselves as nominal church members to self-identify with some form of irreligion. However, like an emergent religious movement, a new social movement (if we can classify the current popularity of atheism as such) based primarily on a single demographic can only grow rapidly

[5]E.g., for one example, relatively recent questionnaire research found that more than 18% of a sample of Oxford University students had read Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (Bullivant 2008: 366).

for a limited period of time. On the one hand, what the data demonstrates is that all forms of irreligion as well as the Nones in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are moving in the direction of gender balance (though slowly). On the other hand, the irreligious are having fewer children, meaning the future growth of unbelief is dependent on believers continuing to (de)convert.

As mentioned earlier, researchers and others sometimes point to the figures for Nones/No Religion as if the growth of Nones represented the growth of Unbelief.[6] With respect to the issue at hand, Nones are relatively fertile, as evidenced by the Religion X Number of Children figures from Canada, the UK and, to a lesser extent, Australia. However, as discussed earlier, a significant percentage of American Nones hold some sort of belief in god or a higher power. Similarly, 46% (2017) and 40% (2014) of the subsamples of people claiming 'nothing in particular' as a religious preference in the Pew Research Center's 2007 and 2014 Landscape Studies asserted that religion was 'important' to them. And though the United States might be unique, it is not likely that Americans are completely exceptional in this regard. In any case, there is certainly ambiguity in the Nones category in other nations as well—thus making assertions of any sort (other than assertions about the decline of formal religiosity) based on data from Nones problematic.

We have already mentioned that many Nones might be people—perhaps 'new agers'—who would describe themselves as spiritual-but-not-religious and who might self-identify as 'Nones' when asked about their religious identity. In their discussion of the ARIS findings on American Nones, Kosmin et al. take a single statistic, namely belief in the predictive power of horoscopes, to dismiss the possibility that Nones consist of a significant number of new agers. This, however, assumes that all new agers (1) accept the validity of astrology and (2) that all believers in astrology would agree that a newspaper 'horoscope' can accurately predict the future—neither of these assumptions are prima facie true.[7]

Furthermore, Kosmin et al. emphasize that 33% of Nones in their sample definitely accept the idea of biological evolution, while not calling attention to the fact that another 30% of their sample assert that evolution is either probably or definitely *not* true. If 30% of their sample doubt or dismiss biological evolution

[6]In his much-cited study of Nones, Vernon notes that when "'none' is used in religious research, designating no religious affiliation," researchers often also imply that Nones are completely nonreligious (1968: 220). For more recent comments on this pattern, refer to the discussion in the concluding paragraph of Cox (2013).

[7]People who know even a little bit about astrology—as 'new agers' presumably would—do not typically refer to their astrological birth charts or to astrological predictions as 'horoscopes.' The primary arena in which this term is used is in popular magazine and newspaper 'sun sign' astrology. Furthermore, individuals with a little knowledge usually disparage newspaper horoscopes as inaccurate. Finally, note that rather than 'horoscope,' people with even a minimal understanding of astrology refer to their astrological charts as *birth* charts or *natal* charts and to the predictive aspect of astrology as progressions and/or transits (Lewis 1994).

and 27% believe in a personal god, it means that a fourth to a third of such Nones are likely theologically-conservative Christians of some sort who have merely distanced themselves from formal religiosity—'unaffiliated believers,' to use the term from the American Values Survey. While only 7% of their sample of Nones are atheists and another 35% are agnostic, 27%, as we have mentioned, believe in a personal god and 24% believe in some 'higher power.'

At this point, we should point out that the Nones analyzed in *American Nones* constitute a very different kind of sample from the No Religion/None category we used from census reports. In the censuses of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, atheists and agnostics are separated out as distinct categories, leaving Nones as a residual category of respondents who neither identify with a religion nor identify as atheist or agnostic. In contrast, the Nones in *American Nones* represent a combined grouping that collapses these categories together. When self-identified atheists and agnostics are subtracted from Kosmin et al.'s sample to make it comparable to census Nones, the result is that almost 88% of their modified Nones sample assert that they believe in a personal god or a higher power.[8] Among other things, this calls into question the usefulness of the approach taken in *American Nones*.

For present purposes, the Pew Landscape Studies conducted in 2007 and 2014 provide better points of reference (Pew Research Center 2015). Instead of atheist, agnostic or none options, the Pew studies offered respondents not identifying with any religion the options of atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular.' Additionally, this latter group was given the option of indicating whether religion was important or not important to them. In the 2007 Pew study, 54% of the 'nothing in particular' subsample responded 'religion not important.' By the time of the 2014 Pew study, almost 60% of the parallel subsample indicated 'religion not important.'[9]

Thus while data on the growth of the 'nothing in particular' category between the two Pew studies cannot supply carte blanche support for the growth of irreligion, at the same time it would not be unreasonable to infer that, like the Pew 'nothing in particular' group, a significant percentage of Nones in Anglophone censuses are also disinterested in religion ('religion not important'), if not some

[8]In addition to placing stress on certain data over others, there were a number of statements in Kosmin et al.'s paper that prompted us to question the implicit framing of their argument. For example, the authors assert that Nones 'prefer to arrive at their beliefs independent of religions' (2009: 11) as if this was an empirical statement—rather than a tautological statement derived from the very definition of Nones.

[9]The 'nothing in particular' subsample grew from 10.4% of the sample in the 2007 study to 14.2% of the sample in the 2014 study (a rate of growth of 36.5%). Self-identified atheists grew from 1.45% of the sample in 2007 to 3.13% of the sample in 2014 (a 116% growth rate), while self-identified agnostics grew from 2.32% to 4.20% (a growth rate of 81%).

variety of agnostic or atheist. Hence the growth of Nones does say something about the growth of irreligion, though how significant this growth is remains unclear.

And finally, to refer back to the *Sacred and Secular*, we have already mentioned that our findings replicate this study's primary finding, namely that there is a correlation between unbelief (or disinterest) and low fertility. However, Norris and Inglehart posit existential security as the key factor explaining both religiousness/ irreligiousness and fertility/ infertility. The basis for this hypothesis is the *contrast between* the religiousness and fertility of developed nations that have relatively secure social support systems vs. measurements of the same two items in underdeveloped nations that generally lack substantial social safety nets. However, because our data finds the same contrasting patterns *within* countries—meaning both believers and unbelievers have the same sort of access to their respective national social support systems—Norris and Inglehart's single-factor explanation for these differences is seemingly less compelling. However, this might be addressed in terms of their analysis of the relationship between security and economic inequality within nations (2011: 106–110). We hope to bring census data parameters about income and social level to bear on this issue in a future paper.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a partial demographic picture of irreligion and non-religion in select Anglophone censuses from mutually-distant parts of the globe. On the one hand, this data confirms earlier observations about the rapid growth of both irreligion and non-religion, and about this growth being driven by young males. On the other hand, the data indicates that most forms of irreligion and non-religion are (1) becoming more gender balanced, and (2) rising in average age—though these demographic changes are taking place quite slowly and irregularly (e.g., in Canada).

We also argued that the apparent rapid growth of irreligion is, in part, a function of media coverage of an increasingly vocal atheism. This likely-transitory burst of popularity—plus the fact that atheists, agnostics, and humanists are, for the most part, not having many children—indicates that the rate of growth for these various forms of irreligion will almost certainly fall off (though not come to a halt) in the not-too-distant future.[10] However, the people who disclaim any religion—people we have referred to throughout this discussion as Nones—are not only fertile, but, based on Canadian and British figures, actually seem to be more fertile than the general population. Even in Australia, Nones are significantly more fertile than atheists and agnostics. Nevertheless, an obvious factor complicating any prediction of the future of irreligion on the basis of the growth

[10]The Gallup organization recently (2013) issued a report indicating that the growth of Nones was, in fact, slowing.

of non-religion is that while a significant percentage of Nones is, indeed, uninterested in religion, a significant percentage also holds religious beliefs. And until contemporary Nones have been more thoroughly researched, it will be difficult to anticipate how the growth of this portion of the population will impact the ongoing growth of irreligion.

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