

Religion in Canada

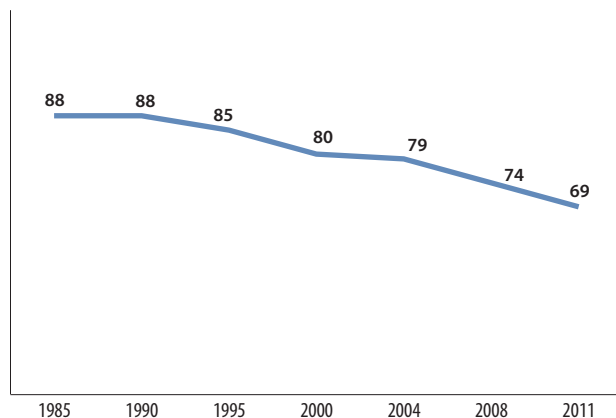
Religion no longer has the prominent place in Canadian society that it once had, as a source of personal and collective identity, as a set of important institutions, and the basis for spiritual practice, ethics and behaviour. As a result, religion is no longer visible in the public sphere or the focus of public discussion (except on those occasions when “unfamiliar” religious customs – Muslim head scarves and Sikh daggers – generate controversy). This secular trend notwithstanding, religion continues to play an important role in the lives of many Canadians, and so warrants attention. This year, Focus Canada updated trends on Canadians’ own religious affiliations and explored religion in a social context.

Personal connection

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. Statistics Canada has documented a steady decline in formal affiliation to mainline Christian denominations over the past half century, and Focus Canada indicates this trend is continuing. Seven in ten (69%) Canadians now identify a religious affiliation, now at its lowest point based on levels reported by Statistics Canada over the period 1985 to 2008.

Religious affiliation among Canadians

1985 - 2011*



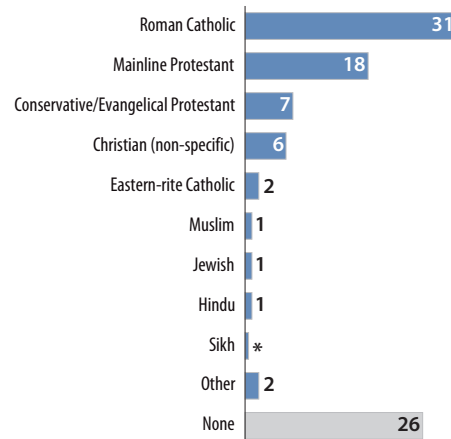
* 1985-2008 from Statistics Canada (population aged 18+)

Specific religious affiliation has changed relatively little over the past four years. Among Canadians who report a religious affiliation, 31 percent identify as Roman Catholic, 25 percent as Protestant, which breaks down as 18 percent mainline (e.g., United, Anglican), and seven percent Conservative or Evangelical. Another eight percent (up 3) identify as another form of Christian, which includes Greek Orthodox (2%) or “other” (6%), most of whom identified themselves only as “Christian.”

One in four (26%) report no religious affiliation (e.g., atheist, agnostic) (up 3 points from 2008), with this group most prevalent in B.C., among men, Canadians in the top income bracket, and those 18 to 29 years of age.

Specific religious affiliation

2011



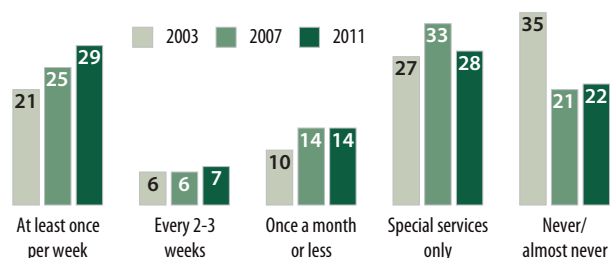
* Less than one percent

ATTENDING RELIGIOUS SERVICES. Although the proportion with a religious affiliation continues to drop, these Canadians are as observant as ever in terms of attending religious services. Three in ten (29%) say they attend services at least once a week (up from 25% reported in Focus Canada in 2007, and 21% in 2003), while fewer now doing so only for special services (e.g., Christmas mass, Jewish High Holidays) (28%, down 5 points from 2007).

Another one in five (22%, up 1) continue to say they have a religious affiliation but never attend services, with this group most prominently represented by Quebec residents and Catholics. In contrast, weekly attendance is most widely reported by Evangelical Christians (56%) and members of non-Christian faiths (42%).

Frequency of attending religious services

Among those with religious affiliation 2003- 2011



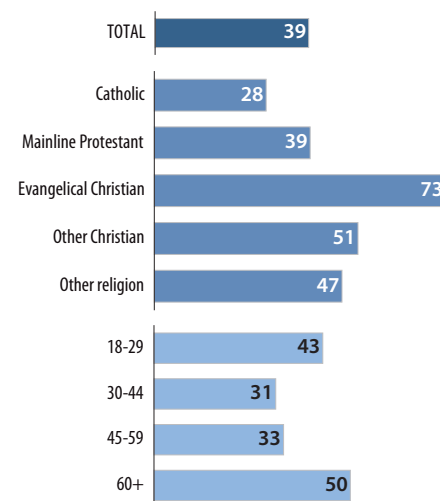
IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION IN ONE'S LIFE. In addition to attending services, the personal importance placed on religion among those with an affiliation remains strong. Four in ten (39%) Canadians with a religious affiliation say religion is a very important part of their life, with another three in ten (32%) who say it is somewhat important, and a similar proportion saying not very (19%) or not at all (10%) important.

Personal importance of religion varies noticeably across the population. Strong importance is most widely expressed by Evangelical (73%) and other (51%) Christians, but also among non-European immigrants (66%) and allophones (68%), in sharp contrast with Catholics (28%) and francophones (17%). Religion is also more likely to be personally important among residents of the Prairies, and those with less education and income.

Across age cohorts, Canadians aged 60 and over are most likely to say religion is very important, but youth are not far behind; it is those aged 30 to 59 who are least apt to share this view.

Religion is very important part of your life

By religious affiliation and age 2011



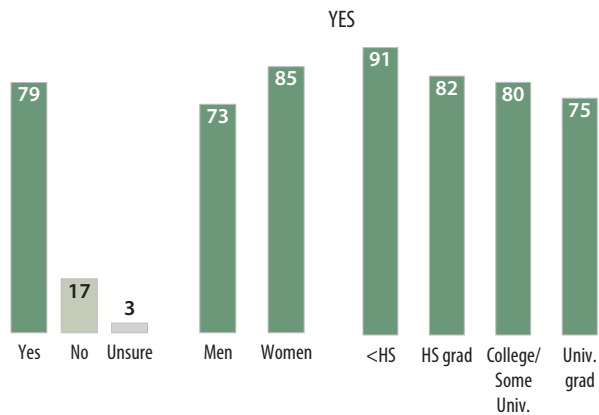
BELIEF IN GOD. Apart from religion, do Canadians – religious or not – believe in God or a universal spirit? Eight in ten (79%) say they do, compared with 17 percent who do not, and another three percent who are not quite sure. Such belief is expressed by 90 percent or more among followers of Christian denominations, compared with 81 percent among non-Christian followers, and even claims a small majority (53%) of those who have no religious affiliation.

Like personal importance of religion, belief in God or a universal life spirit is most widespread among non-European immigrants and Canadians with lower levels of education and income, as well as among women, and those aged 45 years and older.

While belief in God or a universal spirit among Canadians is widespread, they do not approach the U.S. standard: 92 percent of Americans believe in God or a universal spirit, and 71 percent are “absolutely certain” in their belief (based on a 2008 Pew Center survey).

Belief in God or a universal spirit?

By gender and education 2011



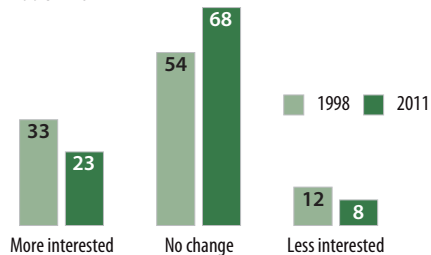
INTEREST IN SPIRITUALITY. Declining affiliation with organized religion over the past decade or so may well be giving way to growing interest in spirituality manifested in other ways, but such a trend is not apparent in the current data. One in four (23%) Canadians say they have become more interested in spiritual matters over the past five years, but this proportion is now lower than it was in 1998 (when 33% reported such increased interest). Over the same period, a small and declining proportion (8%, down 4 points) report less interest than before, while an increasing majority (68%, up 14) indicate their level of interest in spiritual matters has not changed since five years ago.

Since 1998, renewed interest in spirituality has declined across all strata of the population, but most noticeably among the university educated, women, and residents of Quebec and B.C. In 2011, increased interest in spirituality is most widely reported among Evangelical (47%) and “other” (41%) Christians, and least so among those without a religious affiliation (16%) and Catholics (19%).

While Canadian youth (18 to 29) are least likely to have a religious affiliation, they are more likely than older cohorts to report a growing interest in spirituality.

More or less interested in spiritual matters than five years ago

1998 - 2011



Religion in a social context

IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION TO CANADIANS

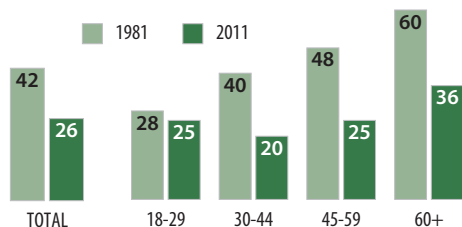
GENERALLY. Apart from their own personal lives, how do Canadians view the importance of religious practice in the moral and ethical life of Canadians generally? Most believe religion is in fact important, but this view is much less strongly held than it was 30 years ago (not surprising, given declining rates of religious affiliation).

One in four (26%) believe religion today is very important in the moral/ethical lives of Canadians (down 16 points from 1981), with another 35 percent saying this is somewhat important (down 1), and a similar proportion who believe it is not very (27%) or not at all (9%) important (up 17).

The importance placed on religious practice among Canadians is closely linked to people's own personal connection. Strong importance is most widely identified by Evangelical (66%) and other (48%) Christians, and least so by Quebecers (11%). Canadians aged 60 plus continue to be the generation most likely to say that religion is very important in this country, but the gap with today's youth has narrowed considerably over the past 30 years: Canadians aged 18 to 29 are as likely as they were in 1981 to consider religion to be very important to the population, while this view has declined significantly among older cohorts.

Religious practice is very important in the moral/ethical lives of Canadians

By age 1981 - 2011



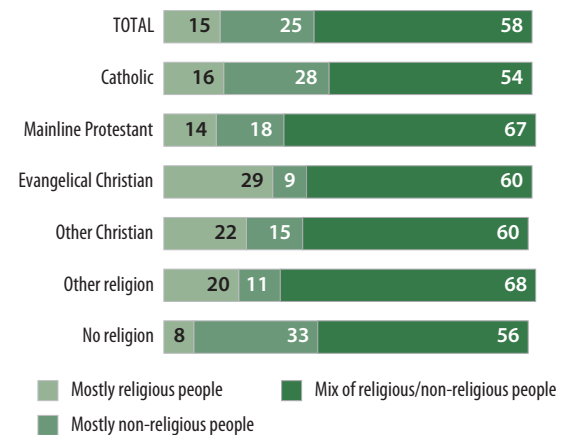
INTERACTION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS.

One question not yet explored in research is the extent to which religious and non-religious Canadians mix with each other or stick with their own kind when it comes to family and socializing. Results from Focus Canada reveal that a majority (58%) of Canadians report spending time with friends and family that includes a mix of people who do and do not place importance on religion. Among the remainder, 25 percent say most of their contacts are with people who do not place importance on religion (most notably in Quebec), while 15 percent say most of their friends and family make religion a priority (notably among allophones).

Across religious groups, mainline Protestants (67%) are most likely to say they intermingle with both religious and non-religious friends and family, but this is also the case for majorities of members of other religious affiliations, as well as those who are non-religious (56%). Both Evangelical Christians and those without any religion are most apt to say they associate primarily with others in the same group.

With whom do you generally spend time?

By religious affiliation 2011



DO RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS CANADIANS SHARE COMMON VALUES?

While this year's Focus Canada survey reveals that religious and non-religious Canadians hold similar opinions on most of the issues explored in this survey, to what extent do Canadians feel they share values in common with those who have a different perspective on religion than their own? Is there evidence of a "values" divide between the religious and non-religious communities in this country?

A modest majority (54%) of Canadians believe they share common values "on most things" with people whose orientation to religion is different from their own (i.e., whether they have a religious affiliation or not). Another three in ten (32%) say they share such values "on some things," while only one in ten (11%) indicate they share common values only "on a few things."

Notably, perceptions of sharing most values in common are equally likely among those who are religious (53%) and those who are not (56%).

Across religious groups, followers of non-Christian faiths (63%) and mainline Protestants (60%) are most likely to say they share common values on most things with non-religious Canadians, while this view is less prevalent among Evangelical Christians (39%, with a plurality saying they share such values "on some things"). Education appears to be among the strongest influences on this issue: As education level rises, so does the belief that one shares much in common with those with a different orientation to religion (and this relationship applies equally to religious and non-religious Canadians).

Do you share common values with those who place a different perspective on religion?

By religious or not 2011

