



*Regard sur*

# Le clivage religieux-séculier au Canada

Les cas du Québec et de la Colombie-Britannique

**11 février 2016**





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Document de recherche

*A look at*

# Religious-Secular Polarization Compared.

The Cases of Quebec and British Columbia

**11 February 2016**

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## **Working paper for a special issue of Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses**

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For many decades now, there has been a general decline of traditional indicators of religiosity in both Quebec and British Columbia. New generations are being born and raised in much more secular social contexts than in years past. However, this general trend of decline masks many differences between the two Canadian provinces, and does not imply a complete disappearance of religion from society. Certain groups of believers have been able to maintain their numbers and levels of practice. Over the last 15 years, these two worlds of the secular and the religious seem to have been confronting one another more and more, evident in public debates and individual representations. The emerging framework of religious polarization offers conceptual tools to better grasp this dialectical dynamic in advanced Modernity. By analyzing recent statistical data on individual religious practices, we examine the extent to which this cleavage between the religious and non-religious is developing among younger generations in two distinct religious and social contexts: those of Quebec and British Columbia.

Depuis plusieurs décennies, on note un déclin des indicateurs traditionnels de religiosité parmi les populations générales du Québec et de la Colombie-Britannique. De nouvelles générations naissent et grandissent au sein de contextes sociaux bien plus sécularisés qu'auparavant. Toutefois, cette tendance générale de déclin masque plusieurs différences quant aux deux provinces canadiennes, et n'implique pas nécessairement une disparition totale du religieux de la société. Certains groupes de fidèles connaissent une vitalité importante quant à leurs pratiques et leur nombre d'adhérents. Au cours des derniers quinze ans, ces deux mondes du séculier et du religieux semblent se confronter et se cristalliser dans les débats publics et médiatiques, ainsi que dans les représentations des individus. Le cadre théorique naissant de polarisation religieuse nous offre des outils conceptuels afin de mieux saisir cette dynamique dialectique en modernité avancée. En analysant des données statistiques récentes en ce qui concerne les pratiques religieuses des individus, nous examinons si ce clivage entre religieux et non-religieux se développe de plus en plus parmi les nouvelles générations dans deux contextes sociaux et religieux distincts : ceux du Québec et de la Colombie-Britannique.

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## Introduction

As the fields of sociology of religion and religious studies have developed over the years, there has been a growing body of evidence pointing to the distinctiveness of religious change between different Western countries, and even within many of these countries themselves. This distinction is not only found between a still quite religious USA compared with a relatively secular Europe (Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008), but also extends to the shape that religious decline and transformation have taken since the 1960s between, for example, traditionally Protestant, Catholic and mixed nations and country sub-regions, areas with differing Church State relations, varying political and social environments, as well as contexts with differing levels of Christian and non-Christian pluralism (Aarts et al. 2010; Demerath 2000; Martin 2005; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). Yet, general theories of secularization, believing without belonging and religious markets are still often assumed to apply to a variety of contexts across North America and Europe, and even sometimes across the world as a whole, putting aside flagrant differences in observed trends between countries and regions.

This is also often the case for the emerging framework of religious polarization. This theory puts forward that there is a growing divide within and across Western nations between very religious segments of the population (who are not disappearing) and segments completely removed from religion (Bibby 2011; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Martin 2005; Roy 2008; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). This cleavage would encompass religiosity indicators - all forms of religiosity and spirituality hypothesized to be more concentrated among the actively religious (Achterberg et al. 2009; Wilkins-Laflamme forthcoming) - and also a variety of other social attitudes and behaviour, such as moral values and political action (Ang and Petrocik 2012; Hunter 1991; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015a). In contexts where this divide is acute, the actively religious and the secular could even be reacting and counter-reacting to actions and views perceived to be present in the other (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Nevertheless, this framework is a relatively new one, and there has been little systematic testing of its ideas. Additionally, with continued indication that, despite some similarities, Western regions often experience religious change differently and at different times, comparative work between regional and national contexts is essential in determining if the phenomenon of religious polarization is present in most, or only some, areas.

Canada is no exception to regional diversity in its religious landscapes and religiosity trends. Long known for its important regionalism from sea to sea when it comes to a variety of attitudes and social phenomena (Grant 1966; Laczko 2004; Porter 1965), the shape that religious transformations have taken since the 1960s has varied significantly between East and West: from a remarkable persistence of denominational identity despite dramatic declines in religious practice in Atlantic Canada and Quebec for example, to extremely high levels of religious nonaffiliation in the Western provinces of Alberta and British Columbia (Bibby 2011; Bowen 2004; Eagle 2011; Meunier and Wilkins-Laflamme 2011; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014; 2015b). The goal of this article is to test aspects of one of the newer general theories of religious transformation – polarization – between two very distinct regional cases in Canada: Quebec and British Columbia. In these two areas where traditional indicators of religiosity have been on the decline for some time, yet in different ways, to what extent are personal and institutional religiosity, beliefs and

spirituality becoming more concentrated within a smaller group of actively religious individuals among newer generations? Are trends among younger birth cohorts converging in both provinces to show a pattern of polarization between very religious and secular individuals, or do these trends remain as distinct as they have ever been between Quebec and BC?

## Theory

Traditional indicators of Christian religiosity, such as regular Church and Sunday School attendance as well as Church membership and affiliation, have been on the decline across a number of generations now in most European and even North American nations (Bruce 2011; Crockett and Voas 2006; Hout and Fisher 2002). This decline is also present in the Canadian context. There has been a pluralization, both Christian and non-Christian, of the Canadian religious landscape since the 1960s due especially to growing non-Western immigration (Beyer 2008; Bramadat and Seljak 2005). Yet, there has also been a decline in overall rates of regular religious service attendance and a rise in the proportion of the population declaring no religious affiliation (Bibby 2011; Eagle 2011; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015b). Among citizens aged between 15 to 34 years in 2013, proportions of those attending religious services at least once a month reached a low of only 21%, and proportions of those with no religious affiliation a high of 34%. This being said, how processes of individual secularization<sup>1</sup> manifest themselves across regions and nations does vary between different religious and social contexts (Martin 1978; 2005). Historical and contemporary factors such as Church-State relations, the type and distribution of Christian Churches, the role of religion in group identity as well as levels of religious pluralism can all impact the shape and timing of religious transformations in modern-day Western regions.

## Contexts of Advanced Secularization

Take the distinctiveness of the Quebec case for example. In the majority French-speaking province, anti-(Catholic) Church sentiment has been a prevalent part of the social imaginary since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries are often remembered as a “black” period of Church and clerical domination during which regular citizens, especially women, were kept under the yolk of the Catholic way-of-life. Strict sexual morals and gender roles were taught and enforced by means of the Catholic Church’s hold on social institutions and its general prevalence throughout social life. It was only with the “enlightenment” of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s that Quebec society was seen to be able to free itself not only from the economically dominant English-speaking minority in the province, but also from the *Grande noirceur* of the Catholic Church’s domineering influence. This view of the period has achieved a quasi-mythical status for most Québécois, being passed on to younger generations through family stories and history lessons at school — and with many of the nuances and other complexities of the period and the role of the Catholic Church in French-speaking Canada often being lost in the tale (Christiano 2007; Gauvreau 2005; Meunier and Warren 2002). This view of the history of the Catholic Church in the province as well as a continued disagreement

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<sup>1</sup> To use Dobbelaere’s (2002) terminology, referring to the decline of religious beliefs and practices among individuals.

by many with its sexual morals translates into extremely low levels of regular religious service attendance in contemporary Quebec (Bibby 2011; Meunier and Wilkins-Laflamme 2011; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). It also translates into negative sentiments held by many not only towards the Catholic Church, but also by proxy towards religion in general. These negative views have in turn manifested themselves most notably in social and political tensions arising since the 2000s when issues of accommodating growing numbers of religious minorities in the province have surfaced with events such as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission in 2007-2008, the proposed Quebec Charter of Values in 2013 and the debate during the 2015 federal election campaign surrounding the wearing of the niqab in citizenship swearing-in ceremonies.

Nevertheless, despite this particular history and the negative views it often generates towards the Catholic Church as an institution and towards religion in general, there is also a hesitancy among a majority of Québécois to relinquish all cultural and identity ties to Catholicism. 74% of residents in the province still declared themselves as Catholic in 2012, although only 9% among them attended mass at least once a week. This ambivalent love-hate relationship with Catholicism is also evident in the practice of rites of passage: in 2001, the rate of newborns in the province that were baptised Catholic was relatively high at an estimated 75%, compared with the province also housing the highest rate of couples living in common law partnerships in the

Western world (as opposed to being married or religiously married) (Laplante 2006; Meunier et Nault 2014; Meunier and Wilkins-Laflamme 2011). Catholic identity, not to be mistaken for actual ties with the Catholic Church, is still seen as the “default” affiliation option among many Québécois: an important aspect of group identity that maintains a link with culture and family tradition and is often seen as a way to distinguish the Québécois from a perceived Anglo-Protestant majority in the rest of North America (Lemieux et Montminy 2000; Milot 1991; Meunier and Nault 2014; Wilkins-Laflamme 2011).

Contrast Quebec with the British Columbian case on the other side of Canada, where rates of religious non-affiliation are the highest in the country: an estimated 37% of BC residents declared having no religion when asked in the 2013 General Social Survey. These rates of religious “nones” in BC are comparable to those in some of the most secularized nations in Europe, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, one or a few Churches had difficulty in establishing a monopoly or oligarchy in matters of religion in BC. Protestantism could be found among a majority of residents from roughly the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it was fractured in nature: there being not only Anglican, Methodist and other liberal Protestant denominations present, but also many Evangelical groups that still make up a substantial minority today (Grant 1998; Hayes 2004). In fact, some argue that what defined BC exceptionalism in matters of religion was most notably the “irreligious experience” of many of its residents (Block 2005; 2010; Marks 2007). BC was to a certain extent “born secular” (Marks 2007), characterized by lower rates of regular church attendance among its population long

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the author’s analysis of statistical data from the 2010 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP).

before the 1960s. Religion never became as institutionalized in BC during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries among a majority of its population, as it had in Quebec.

Consequently, with no one Church or religious group having established strong ties with overall regional culture and with individual and family ties to religious groups often being more precarious, religious affiliation was not as resilient to decline in BC from the 1960s onwards. There have also been strong waves of Asian immigration to the province, many of whom do not identify with a specific religious institution as such. This in turn may affect the social environment of the whole province, especially in the cities where most of these immigrants settled, making it even more socially acceptable in general to declare not having a religion. Fewer individuals in BC who are not or no longer religiously active with a specific religious community see the need to remain affiliated to their family's religious tradition in name only. Their reasons for not being actively involved with a religious group may be very similar to those of many Québécois: they may not agree with the Churches' stance on certain issues surrounding morality and sexuality; they may be put off by scandals surrounding certain members of the clergy; they may not see the relevance of attending religious services in a context where institutionalized religion no longer plays a major role in the public sphere; secular activities may be competing for their time on weekends; or they may have never come into contact with institutionalized religion and so do not consider religious participation as even a possibility in their daily lives. However, unlike many Québécois, many residents of BC seem to have gone one step further by cutting identity ties with religious traditions altogether.

So although Quebec and British Columbia illustrate how the processes of individual secularization can differ according to varying social and historical contexts, in the same country in this case no less, the question still remains if the outcome of these processes is similar between regions. Is the new shape that religious landscapes are taking comparable across areas of advanced secularization? Grace Davie and other scholars in the field have argued that, although institutional religiosity is on the decline in Western nations, beliefs regarding a higher power and the supernatural world persist. Yet, rather than being learned and shaped within church doors, they are instead acquired from a variety of sources and bundled into individually-constructed spiritual systems: a phenomenon Davie famously refers to as *Believing without Belonging* (Davie 1990; 2002), and which is also encompassed by the *Spiritual But Not Religious* (SBNR) label. According to this framework, although fewer and fewer have ties with a specific religious group or tradition in Europe and North America, a majority would still need answers to life's big questions, and find those answers in the form of personal beliefs and spiritualities (Campiche 2010; Davie 2002; Fuller 2001; Hervieu-Léger 1999; Meintel 2014).

Nevertheless, a growing body of evidence is pointing to the decline of what can be considered the most basic of spiritual beliefs: the belief in a higher (supernatural) power (Aarts et al. 2008; Voas and Crockett 2005). We have argued elsewhere that, although personal beliefs and religious practices often persist longer among individuals who are no longer religiously active in the institutional sense, these beliefs and personal practices are difficult to pass on to the next generation without any form of structured religious socialization at home, at school or within the community (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme forthcoming; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014; 2015b). Rather, those raised in a non-religious context, or in a context where religion is seen as a choice and not an essential element to existence, are much less likely to hold any forms of religiosity or spirituality as adults.

They are not likely to fall back on religion later in life during times of hardship or important transitions, since it was never there for them in the first place (Manning 2013; Merino 2012; Thiessen 2012). They may also be less willing to dedicate time and energy to finding and drawing together spiritual resources in order to construct their own belief systems related to the supernatural.

This being said, this does not imply that in areas of advanced secularization religion will disappear altogether. Rather, there is evidence showing that it seems to persist in many Western societies, but becomes the domain of a (sizeable) minority of religiously active individuals. Many of these actively religious groups become effective at demographically reproducing their numbers at these now lower levels (Kaufmann 2010; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). They make gains from non-Western immigration; their women generally have higher fertility rates; and they dedicate much of their resources to keeping their youth within the fold, in the case of Evangelicals for example often by creating their own educational institutions and by providing alternatives to secular social activities (Stolz et al. 2013).

### **A More Polarized Outcome?**

Consequently, a context of advanced secularization may take the shape of a more polarized landscape between a large portion of the population removed from all forms of religion, and smaller groups of active religious adherents. Religion would become the domain of a virtuosi few, to borrow Weberian terminology (Weber 1922), who are distinct in their worldview, moral attitudes (Ang and Petrocik 2012; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Reimer 2003) and social behaviour (Bowen 2004; Lim and MacGregor. 2012; Wilkins-Laflamme 2015a). Differences would begin to blur between religious groups (especially among the same overall traditions, such as Christianity), and grow between the religious and non-religious.

In such a context, there is also the potential for a growing social distance between members of the two general groups. Each side could become wary of the either religious or secular “Other”: consciously or unconsciously limiting their social ties and interactions to members of their own group, becoming more defensive as well as potentially developing negative feelings towards members of this “Other”. Since both religious and non-religious individuals nonetheless inhabit the same society, there is also the real potential for their two worlds to collide: what Putnam and Campbell (2010) refer to as a dynamic of shocks and counter-shocks between the two. Putnam and Campbell use the case of Evangelicals in the USA reacting to the liberation of sexual morals in the 1950s and 1960s by forming the Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s, and more liberal Protestants in turn reacting to this Christian Right by declaring no religious affiliation in larger numbers in the 1990s and 2000s as an example of this dialectical dynamic.

Certain events in Canada could also be viewed through a similar lens. Much of the public discourse surrounding issues of *laïcité* and accommodating religious minorities in Quebec in the 2000s and 2010s for example has centered around a fear of religious *intégristes* taking over and forcing their beliefs and conservative ways onto the rest of the (non-religious) population (Bouchard and Taylor 2007; Milot 2013; Rocher 2014). In these types of discourse, religiosity is seen either as something coming from outside of the province (brought in by immigrants) or as practiced by a fanatical few holding on to the last vestiges of a past regime.

Another example could be found in Trinity Western University in BC. Trinity Western is a Christian university founded by the Evangelical Free Churches of America group in 1962 (gaining university status in 1985). Members of the EFCA felt the need for a separate higher education institution in the Fraser Valley in which Christians could study the liberal arts without having to compromise on tenets of their faith. This was done at least partially in response to what they perceived as too secular and anti-Christian academic environments in other universities across the province and country. Many outside of the Evangelical community are in turn dubious towards these Christian educational institutions which put forward fundamentally different values than majority secular society: requiring their students for example to sign statements that they will not engage in homosexual activities, or sexual activities of any kind before (heterosexual) marriage. These tensions between (religious) Evangelicals and (less/nonreligious) non-Evangelicals came to the fore in 2014-2015 when Trinity Western sought, and was eventually refused, accreditation for its future law school from both the BC and Ontario law societies (Bramadat 2014; Globe and Mail 2015; McDonald 2010).

## Research Aim and Methods

As an important part of the population becomes more removed from religion in areas of advanced secularization, the polarization framework argues that religion itself would become a more contentious issue since there is now a greater divide in society between the religious and non-religious. This being said, there has been little empirical work, either qualitative or quantitative, done to test this polarization framework, or in other words whether it applies systematically to what is being observed in the field. In this article, we focus on testing one aspect of this framework, namely whether there is a growing divide between religious and nonreligious behaviour and attitudes among younger generations in both Quebec and British Columbia. Among younger individuals who have been raised in regional contexts characterized by more advanced secularization, to what extent are religiosity and belief indicators becoming more concentrated among a remaining few? The cases of Quebec and BC are very interesting to compare in this sense, since both regions in Canada have seen important religious declines and transformations over the past decades, with these processes having taken different forms in each area due to their distinct religious compositions and socio-historic contexts. We wish to understand if, despite these differences, both are showing signs of religious polarization among younger generations.

## Data

In order to accomplish this research aim, statistical data from 5 cycles (2009-2013) of the Canadian General Social Survey (GSS) were analyzed.<sup>3</sup> The GSS is a national survey run annually by Statistics Canada since 1985. Data was collected by means of telephone interviews, and since 2012 also by online survey. Each cycle contains a probability sample of between 15,390 (2010 cycle) and 27,534 (2013 cycle) respondents aged 15 years or older and living in private households across the 10 provinces (Statistics Canada 2015).<sup>4</sup> Pooling samples over 5 years, from 2009 to 2013, provides a larger number of

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<sup>3</sup> The GSS was not run in 1987 and 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Residents of the three territories are excluded from the GSS' study population.

observations and thus more precise statistics for each province, religious category and birth cohort with only limited year effects (changes over time in behaviour/attitudes). The pooled 2009-2013 repeated cross-sectional dataset contains a total of 107,874 respondents.

Regarding religiosity indicators in the GSS, both religious affiliation and frequency of religious service attendance have been asked of respondents in each cycle since 1985. In more recent years, the exact wording of the questions has been: “What, if any, is your religion?” and “Not counting special events such as weddings or funerals, during the past 12 months how often did you attend religious services or meetings?” Since 2003, the GSS has also included variables not only on institutionalized religion (religious group affiliation and attendance), but also on more personal religiosity and spirituality, including the importance respondents assign to religious or spiritual beliefs in their lives, and since 2007 on the frequency of religious or spiritual activities on one’s own (prayer, meditation, etc.). These questions are put to respondents as: “How important are your religious or spiritual beliefs to the way you live your life? Would you say they are very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?” and “In the past 12 months, how often did you engage in religious or spiritual activities on your own, including prayer, meditation and other forms of worship taking place at home or in any other location?”

## Cohort Trends

The statistical results presented in this article focus on the differences in these religiosity indicators between birth cohorts. Previous studies have shown that generational change is crucial in measuring and understanding religious transformation in Western societies (Bibby 2007; Crockett and Voas 2006). It is with a new generation raised in “a common location in the historical dimension of the social process” (Mannheim 1952: 290) that changes in individual religiosity and beliefs become especially apparent. Since we use a cross-sectional sample here spanning only a few years, it goes beyond the scope of the present study to also tease out age (changes in religiosity and beliefs over the course of an individual’s lifetime) and year effects (period changes in the social environment affecting all individuals to varying degrees).

Consequently, we will not be able to determine beyond a doubt if differences measured here between birth cohorts are due to more permanent generational shifts or to differences in where individuals find themselves in their life cycles at the time of the surveys. This being said, there is much more evidence for the former than the latter in the existing literature regarding religious behaviour (Crockett and Voas 2006; Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). We are also averaging out any potential year differences between 2009 and 2013, since we have no theoretical reason to suspect they would be particularly large in this case, and found no evidence for such effects when running test analyses.

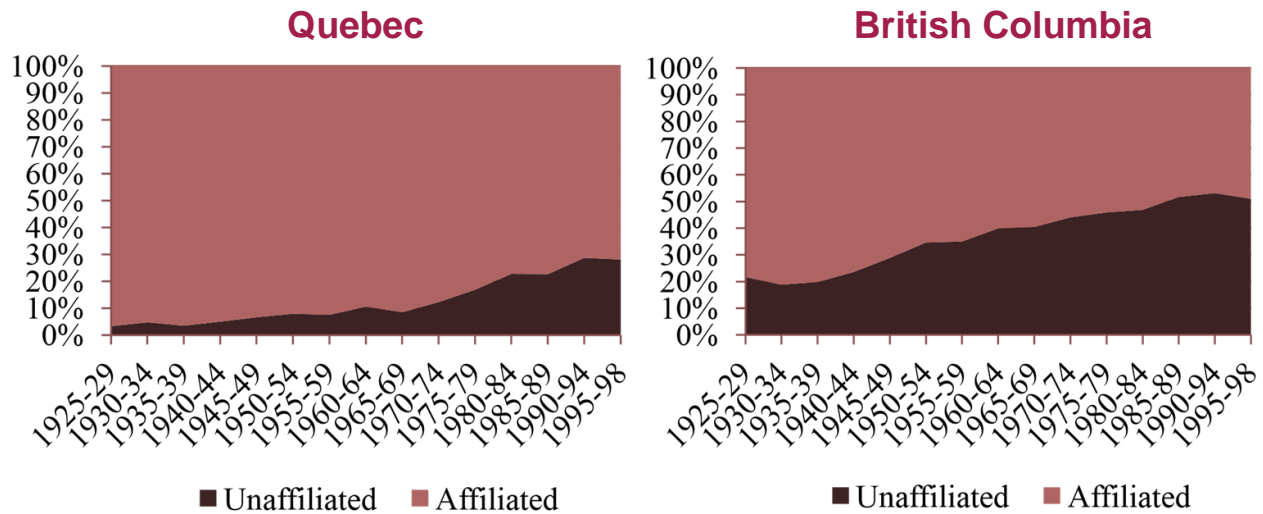
## Results

To begin, Figure 1 contains the estimated proportions of religiously affiliated and unaffiliated individuals in both Quebec and British Columbia by 5-year birth cohort, averaged between 2009 and 2013. Picking up on what we discussed in the Theory section, what is most striking from these results is how much higher the rate of individuals

who declare having no religion is in BC for all cohorts, compared with those in Quebec. The overall percentage of unaffiliated reached 37% in BC in 2013, compared with only 12% in Quebec. The results in Figure 1 indicate that this percentage in BC begins to increase among older cohorts, most notably among those born from 1930 onwards, so much so that members of younger cohorts born in more recent years between 1985 and 1998 are almost evenly divided between those who are religiously affiliated and those who are not. In Quebec, the rise in non-affiliation is more modest between cohorts, only really beginning to develop among those born after 1964, and reaching a high of only 28% among those born between 1995 and 1998.

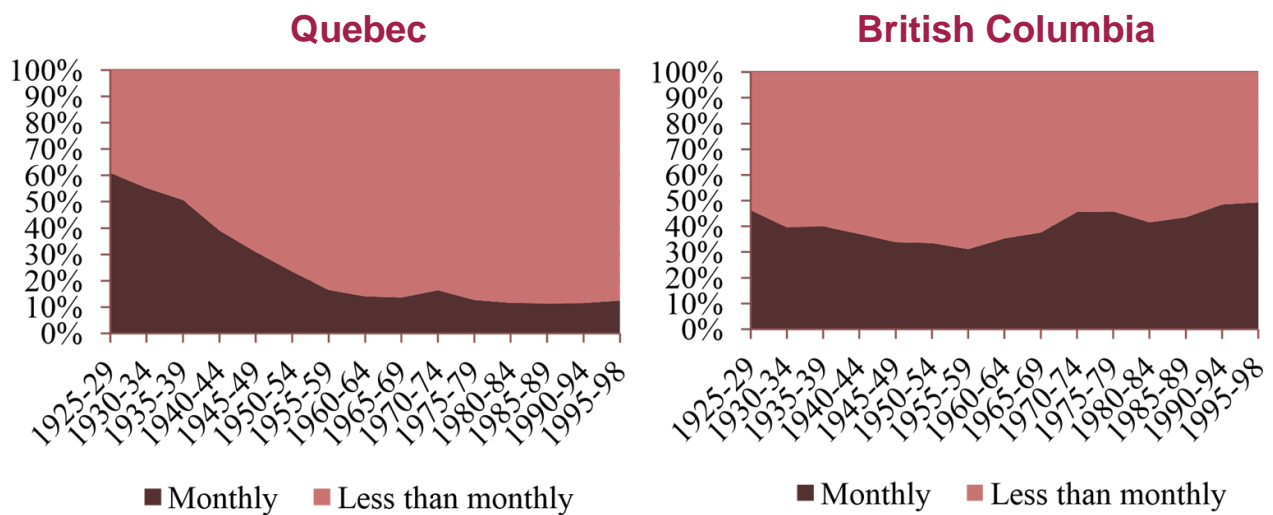
It is important to mention here that a series of forces could be shaping these cohort trends in Figure 1 in both provinces. Faced with more secular social environments, popular culture and friends, more individuals of younger cohorts may be actively letting go of a previous religious affiliation; a decision that could always be revisited later in life. However, more Millennials are also being raised by unaffiliated parents and in more secular surroundings, translating into higher rates of non-affiliation from birth among these cohorts a non-affiliation that is more likely to persist throughout adulthood (Manning 2013; Merino 2012; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme forthcoming). Additionally, members of the youngest cohort in these samples, born between 1995 and 1998 (aged between 15 and 18 years at the time of the surveys), may not have left their original family households yet. This in turn may be underestimating their future rates of nonaffiliation, since previous research has shown that the transition into adulthood, with its heightened mobility, focus on personal identity and exposure to new secular environments and networks, is a key time for individuals to adopt a preference for non-affiliation (Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme forthcoming).

*Figure 1: Average Percentage of Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated Respondents, by Birth Cohort (5-Year Intervals), Quebec and British Columbia*



Notes: CAN GSS 2009-2013. Quebec N = 18,687; British Columbia N = 12,584.

*Figure 2: Average Percentage of Religiously Affiliated Respondents Attending Religious Services At Least Once a Month and Less than Once a Month, by Birth Cohort (5-Year Intervals), Quebec and British Columbia*



Notes: CAN GSS 2009-2013. Quebec N = 16,389; British Columbia N = 7,975.

Figure 2 in turn shows that, for those who do remain affiliated to a religion, regular attendance at religious services and activities appears to have bottomed-out in Quebec at very low levels, especially among those born from 1950 onwards: only roughly 12% of those born in the 1980s and 1990s and who have a religious affiliation were attending religious services or activities at least once a month at the time of the surveys. So although a relatively high proportion of individuals remain religiously affiliated in Quebec, especially to Catholicism, there has been a steep decline of regular religious service attendance across cohorts among these affiliated. As discussed in the Theory section, this phenomenon of nominal affiliation is an aspect of what is referred to as cultural religion or cultural Catholicism in the province (Lemieux 1990; Milot 1991; Meunier and Wilkins-Laflamme 2011). Yet, even among younger cohorts who have experienced some decline in affiliation in Quebec, rates of regular attendance among those remaining affiliates are still stagnant at some of the lowest levels in North America.

By contrast in British Columbia, where there are fewer religiously affiliated individuals among younger cohorts than in Quebec, there appears to actually be a general increase in rates of monthly religious service attendance across the remaining affiliated born from 1950 onwards.

For those affiliated born in the 1990s, monthly religious service attendance is at an estimated 49%. As is expected in the polarization framework, this is most likely due to many nonpracticing individuals among younger cohorts having no or cutting all ties with religion, including affiliation. As those who were previously nominally affiliated, or who come from nominally affiliated family backgrounds, leave religious traditions altogether, rates of regular service attendance among the remaining affiliated appear to increase among younger cohorts, since it is mostly the more religiously practicing who end up keeping their religious identities.

Additionally, the composition of this population who does attend religious services regularly has changed across birth cohorts in both Quebec and BC. This is especially the case with regards to where these individuals were born and which religious tradition they belong to. A much higher rate of frequent attenders in Canada born since 1980 are immigrants from non-Western nations and belong to non-Christian religious traditions. Table 1 contains a series of percentages illustrating this greater diversity.

In both Quebec and BC, a greater proportion of those who attend a religious service at least once a month are born in non-Western countries and adhere to non-Christian faiths, compared with those who attend religious services less frequently or not at all. In Quebec among those born in the 1980s and 1990s, 37% of frequent attenders were born outside of North America and Europe, compared with only 6% among infrequent or non-attenders; 34% of frequent attenders are of a non-Christian faith, compared to only 6% among infrequent or non-attenders. In BC, these differences are less pronounced, but still present: for those same birth cohorts, 24% of frequent attenders in BC were born in a non-Western country, compared with only 14% among infrequent or non-attenders; and 31% of frequent attenders adhere to a non-Christian faith, compared with only 11% among the rest of the younger population.

The results in Table 1 also indicate that this greater diversity among frequent attenders can be found among the Boomer generation, but in most cases is not as pronounced as among the younger 1980s and 1990s cohorts. The sole exception here being in BC where

there is a greater difference among the Boomer cohorts with regards to rates of immigrants from non-Western countries between the frequent (30%) and infrequent/non-attenders (10%).

*Table 1: Place of Birth and Religious Tradition of Respondents (%), by Generation, Province of Residence and Frequency of Religious Service Attendance, 2009-2013*

	Born from 1945-1964 (%)			
	Quebec <i>N</i> = 7,120		British Columbia <i>N</i> = 5,164	
	Monthly	Less than monthly	Monthly	Less than monthly
Born in Canada	79.1	91.8	55.7	76.1
Born in USA/Europe	7.8	4.1	14.4	13.6
Born in other country	13.1	4.1	29.9	10.4
Non-Christian	7.1	4.8	21.7	10.4

	Born from 1980-1998 (%)			
	Quebec <i>N</i> = 3,915		British Columbia <i>N</i> = 2,220	
	Monthly	Less than monthly	Monthly	Less than monthly
Born in Canada	57.4	91.0	71.5	82.0
Born in USA/Europe	5.5	3.2	4.3	4.2
Born in other country	37.1	5.8	24.3	13.8
Non-Christian	33.7	6.3	31.4	11.0

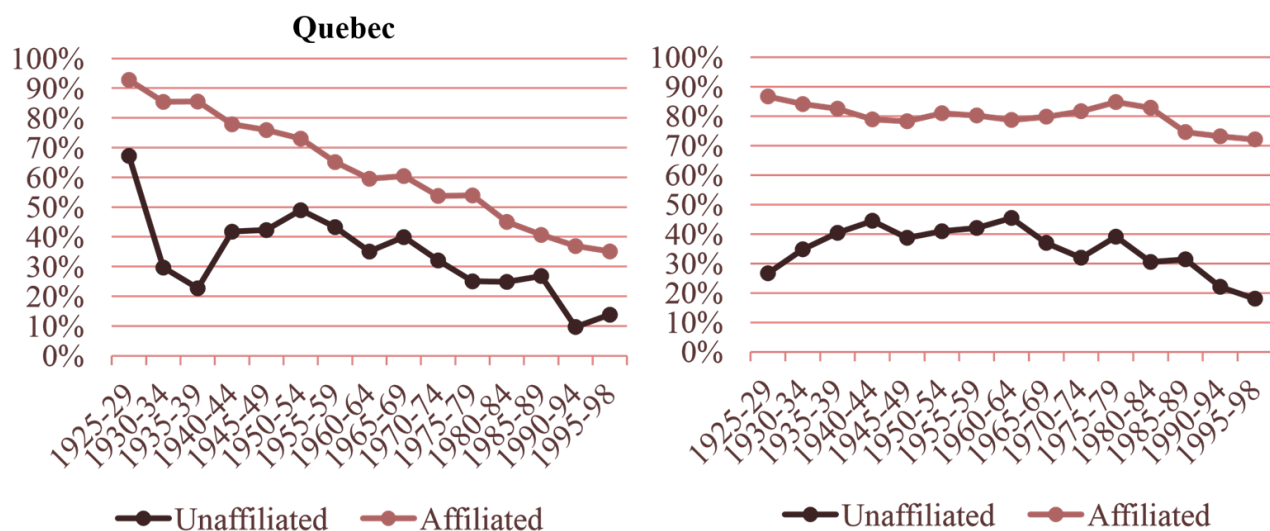
*Notes: CAN GSS 2009-2013.*

To summarize so far, cohort trends for the institutional indicators of religious affiliation and service attendance are showing a more polarized landscape among younger cohorts in BC who appear to be divided between those removed from religion and those very involved in it, more so than younger cohorts in Quebec. Yet, what about indicators of belief and personal spirituality? Do the unaffiliated still score high on such indicators, and are these indicators relatively stable across cohorts as the *Believing without Belonging* framework argues? Or are these indicators also becoming the sole domain of the remaining religiously affiliated as put forward by the polarization framework, the unaffiliated being removed more and more from most forms of religion and spirituality?

Figure 3 contains the proportions across birth cohorts of affiliated and unaffiliated respondents who declare that religious and/or spiritual beliefs are either important or very important in their lives in both Quebec and BC. We can see from these results that, in both provinces and across all cohorts, smaller proportions of the unaffiliated consider their

religious/spiritual beliefs as important in their lives, compared with the religiously affiliated. We can also observe somewhat distinct cohort trends in this regard between the two provinces. If we focus on birth cohorts born from the 1960s onwards in Quebec, cohorts for which there are a substantial number of unaffiliated respondents, we see that there is a very similar decline among younger cohorts for both the religiously affiliated and unaffiliated regarding the proportion who consider beliefs to be important. For respondents born between 1960 and 1964 in Quebec, 60% of the affiliated and 35% of the unaffiliated said their beliefs are important or very important in their lives; for those born between 1995 and 1998, only 36% of the affiliated and 14% of the unaffiliated said the same.

*Figure 3: Average Percentage Who Declare Religious/Spiritual Beliefs to be Important or Very Important in Their Lives, Among Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated Respondents, by Birth Cohort (5-Year Intervals), Quebec and British Columbia*

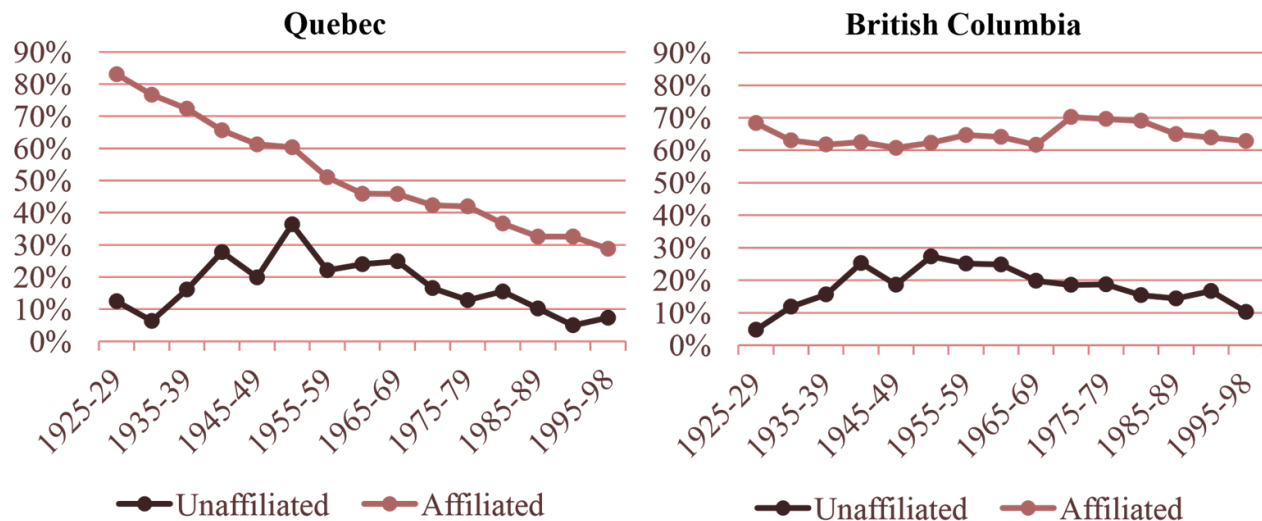


**British Columbia**

Notes: CAN GSS 2009-2013. Quebec N = 18,534; British Columbia N = 12,524.

In BC however, the cohort trends are more distinct between the unaffiliated and affiliated in Figure 3. Among the religiously affiliated, there is a slight decline across cohorts in the proportion of individuals who consider their beliefs as important or very important in their lives: dropping from an estimated 84% among those born between 1925 and 1929 to an estimated 72% among those born between 1995 and 1998. Yet, this decline is more pronounced among the unaffiliated, especially for those born after the 1930s, leading to a greater gap in this regard among younger cohorts between the religiously affiliated and unaffiliated. For respondents born from 1940 to 1944, the difference between the affiliated and unaffiliated in the estimated proportions of considering beliefs as important is 33%; for those born between 1995 and 1998, the difference is 54%.

*Figure 4: Average Percentage Who Practice Personal Religiosity at Least Once a Month, Among Religiously Affiliated and Unaffiliated Respondents, by Birth Cohort (5-Year Intervals), Quebec and British Columbia*



Notes: CAN GSS 2009-2013. Quebec N = 18,550; British Columbia N = 12,506.

It is a very similar story for the proportions in Figure 4 regarding (at least) monthly religious/spiritual practice on one’s own. In Quebec, the rates of unaffiliated and affiliated individuals who engage in a religious/spiritual activity on their own at least once a month decline similarly across cohorts, especially for those born from the 1950s onwards. In BC however, the rates of monthly personal religious/spiritual practice remain relatively stable just over the 60% mark across cohorts among the affiliated, but decline among the unaffiliated, especially among those born from the 1950s onwards. Once again, this means that in BC the difference between the affiliated and unaffiliated with regards to the proportions of monthly religious/spiritual practice is greater among younger cohorts: this difference in proportions is 35% for those born between 1950 and 1954, and 53% for those born between 1995 and 1998.

It is also worth noting that, among the older unaffiliated in BC born in the 1920s and 1930s, the proportions of those considering beliefs to be important in their lives (Figure 3) and who practice religious/spiritual activities on their own at least once a month (Figure 4) are lower than among the unaffiliated born later in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> This could be pointing to an age effect, in the sense that the SBNR phenomenon is especially acute during middle-age adult years. However, we think it is pointing more to a generational effect in that SBNR, or *Believing without Belonging*, is especially a Boomer phenomenon in this case: characteristic of a generation who, for the most part, received a structured and explicit religious socialization at home, at school and in their parents’ congregation, but who chose in many cases to move away from institutionalized religion

<sup>5</sup> Since there are so few unaffiliated among these older cohorts in Quebec, it is difficult to say with certainty if this trend is also present there, so we restrict our comments here to BC.

later on in life. Many of them in BC became religious “nones”, and some among these “nones” kept certain kinds of individualized spiritual systems, but have not managed for the most part to pass them on to their post-Boomer children. This compared with respondents born in the 1920s and 1930s, who are probably more likely to stay linked to a religion if they still assign importance to religious/spiritual beliefs and regular personal practice.

## Discussion

So based on these results, where do the religious landscapes of both Quebec and BC seem to be headed in the years to come with younger generations? The current data point more to a continuation of two quite different landscapes, rather than a convergence of trends. In Quebec, there are very few signs of a heightened concentration of religiosity indicators among the remaining religiously affiliated, these indicators declining among both affiliated and unaffiliated groups alike. The province is still characterized by a large nominally affiliated segment of the population that appears to act very much like the religiously unaffiliated, apart from still holding identity ties to Catholicism. A decline in affiliation has begun among younger cohorts, but it remains modest compared with what is found in BC. It is still too early to tell if this rise in nonaffiliation will persist in Quebec and eventually take a similar route as in BC where it is especially the more religious who keep their affiliations; or if cultural affiliation will remain important in generations to come while other indicators of religiosity and spirituality bottom-out at very low levels even among most of the remaining affiliated Québécois.

There is much more evidence for religious polarization in the BC case when it comes to individual-level religious attitudes and behaviour. A large segment of the younger population has no identity ties with any religious group, assigns little importance to beliefs and does not practice spirituality on their own in a frequent manner. Yet, among those fewer who are affiliated, rates of monthly religious service attendance, considering beliefs as important and frequent personal religious/spiritual practice remain relatively high, especially when compared with these same rates among the affiliated in Quebec. BC may be characterized by a lower rate of religious affiliation than in Quebec (63% in 2013 compared with 88%), but it also has a higher rate of what we refer to as religiously committed individuals (Wilkins-Laflamme 2014): in 2013, 23% of the BC population was affiliated with a religion and attended religious services at least once a month, compared with only 16% of the Quebec population.

In this sense, the BC population is split, or polarized, much more between the non-religious and religious than in Quebec. This being said, we must use the concept of religious polarization here with caution: we are not seeing a rebound of rates of the religiously active in BC alongside an equal-sized secular group, but rather a persistence of a religiously active minority opposite a larger, and still growing, secular segment of the population (Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). There are also still a number of individuals who find themselves somewhere between the two poles of actively religious and secular in BC; who are religiously affiliated but who do not attend religious services regularly for example. Nevertheless, the proportions of these individuals in the “fuzzy middle”, as Voas (2009) refers to it, appear to be smaller in BC than in many other contexts, including Quebec.

Where trends in Quebec and BC do seem to converge is that both provinces show limited evidence so far of a majority of the unaffiliated being unchurched believers or SBNR. In 2013, only 21% of the unaffiliated overall in Quebec and 30% in BC said that religious and/or spiritual beliefs were important or very important in their lives. For the same year, only 10% of the unaffiliated in Quebec and 13% in BC declared practicing a religious/spiritual activity on their own at least once a month. We were, however, limited to these two indicators in our study, for example not being able to measure rates of actual beliefs in a higher power or in the mysterious. Consequently, future studies with access to more indicators will have to pursue this line of enquiry into unchurched believing and SBNR in the two provinces, and will also have to see if trends among younger cohorts found at the present time persist into the future when these individuals enter their later adult years.

To summarize, the polarization framework does appear to be useful in understanding trends of individual-level religious and spiritual behaviour in some contexts, but not necessarily universally across the West, especially not across all of Canada as was shown here. We have found in other studies that these kinds of trends of religious polarization are especially present in traditionally Protestant and mixed contexts where the decline of institutional indicators of religiosity has been underway for some time, such as in Great Britain and British Columbia for example (Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). A potentially fruitful avenue for future research would be to compare trends in Quebec to those in other Catholic-majority contexts across Europe and Latin America, to determine if the absence of polarization trends is characteristic of all Catholic-majority contexts, or only those where the issue of cultural defence is prominent; and what alternative shape religious landscapes are taking in such areas.

There is also a need for future qualitative studies on the topic, analyzing public discourse to establish the extent to which the two poles of the non-religious and the very religious exist in discourse and are confronting each other, and if this phenomenon is more present today than in decades past. Exploring the representations individuals have of members of either the religious or secular "Other" through in-depth interviews would also be a promising avenue for future research, to determine if individuals do actually think in terms of "religious" and "secular" categories, what their feelings and preconceived notions are of each and to what extent these attitudes influence their behaviour.

Better understanding the extent of this division between the religious and non-religious, and how it intersects with other social divisions related to immigration, ethnicity and values for example, is especially important in areas of advanced secularization at the same time as it is often ignored by those in academia and by many in society. A decline in indicators of religiosity among a segment of the population does not imply the disappearance of religion altogether. On the contrary, events in Quebec and BC are showing us that it can imply heightened controversy surrounding religion. An assumption among policy makers and analysts that religion is a non-issue can negatively impact those actively religious minorities in society, which in turn can generate pushback or a more defensive stance from these groups. Without properly understanding the dynamics at play, controversies related to veiling and Evangelical Christian education for example will continue to arise seemingly unannounced, heightening our risk of a knee-jerk reaction without addressing the underlying issues.

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