Like Parent, Like Millennial: Inherited and Switched (Non)Religion Among Young Adults in the U.S. and Canada

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"We live instead in a nation of church-like religious groupings in which membership is largely a between-generational hand-me-down, produced from within."
Newport 1979, 549

As trends of mainline decline, conservative Protestant growth, as well as the rise in rates of nonreligion developed over the past 60 years in the U.S., so too did research in the sociology of religion documenting, exploring and explaining these changes through rates of religious switching and retention. Although many Americans stick with the inherited religion of their parents (Newport 2006; Pew Research Center 2015; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Sherkat 2014), others instead switch their religion for a variety of reasons. These reasons can include childhood socialization into a different (non)religion, a change in socioeconomic, community or theological preferences as adults within a (non)religious marketplace (Barro, Hwang and McCleary 2010; Loveland 2003; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Sherkat and Wilson 1995), the pull of other family and friendship ties (Roof 1989; Sherkat 2014), geographic mobility (Sherkat 2014, 76-79; Smith and Sikkink 2003), or to match a spouse's (non)religion in initially exogamic marriages (Hadaway and Marler 1993; Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens 1995; Musick and Wilson 1995; Newport 1979; Sherkat 1991). Along with the demographic realities of fertility, migration and mortality, switching and retention are key factors in a (non)religious group's numeric and proportional growth, stability or decline—and so are crucial to tracking and understanding evolving religious landscapes.

The goal of this paper is to present and explore novel quantitative data from the Millennial Trends Survey administered online in March 2019 with over 2,500 respondents between the ages of 18 and 35 in both Canada and the U.S., to see where we are now in terms of inherited (non)religion, conversion and disaffiliation among the Millennial generation. With this generation representing just under a third of U.S. and Canadian adult populations, its trends herald the future of (non)religious groups in many ways.

As well as updating our knowledge on religious switching and retention among younger adult birth cohorts, this paper also addresses some key omissions in the existing literature. First, due to the nature of our data the focus here is on inherited (non)religion from the respondent's parents. Mother's and father's religion when the respondent was between the ages of 5 and 12 years old is often the religion in which this respondent was raised, but not always (Hadaway and Marler 1996). One can imagine grandparents, aunts, uncles or other close social ties having an impact in some cases, or some Millennials raised without religion even when their parents were marginally affiliated with a tradition. Roof and Hadaway (1979) made the case for using the indicator of religion raised in as a child, rather than parents' religion, for calculating retention and switching rates as adults, and most in the field have followed their advice ever since.[1] However, with our interest lying in the intergenerational transmission of (non)religion, we go back to parents' religion as the more relevant indicator for our purposes.

Second, we explore data from not one but two national contexts, the U.S. and Canada, to add a comparative element to our study. To what extent are Millennial inherited religion and intergenerational switching trends distinct to the U.S., or instead also found north of the border

[1] With the notable exception of Putnam and Campbell (2010, 134-160).

among (non)religious groups in Canada? Research on religious switching and retention is rarer in Canada, with the notable high-quality exceptions of Bibby and Brinkerhoff (1973; 1983; 1994), Haskell, Burgoyne, and Flatt (2016), and Reimer and Hiemstra (2018). These Canadian studies are also usually based on congregational-level data, rather than individual-level data (with the exception of Reimer and Hiemstra 2018). Consequently, our research provides much-needed new findings on the topic among Canadian Millennials.

Third, almost all the religious switching and retention literature to date lumps together the phenomena of conversion (switching from one religion to another, or from nonreligion to a religion) and disaffiliation (leaving a religion for nonreligion).[2] For example, Putnam and Campbell (2010, 160) find an increase in rates of religious switching among younger birth cohorts, and make the argument that these younger cohorts find themselves in a more open religious marketplace than their parents and grandparents: "One result of all these changes is that individual choice has become virtually as important as inheritance in explaining Americans' religious affiliations, raising the stakes for religious marketing and innovation." Yet, these authors include disaffiliation as a type of switching, and then seem to neglect this fact when making their general argument of greater religious mobility. We put forward the argument here, supported by our data, that when intergenerational change does happen for Millennials, it is first and foremost a change of disaffiliation (leaving organized religion) within a social location much more post-Christian than that of their parents and grandparents. Unlike most of the existing religious switching and retention literature, we understand the phenomena of conversion and disaffiliation as distinct, with

[2] With the notable exceptions of Newport (2006), Sherkat (2014, 50-89) and Suh and Russell (2015).

often distinct causes[3] and implications for society, and so measure them separately in this study. We also delve deeper into Millennials from nonreligious parental backgrounds than any existing research on retention and switching to date.

Research Questions and Methodology

The present study addresses the following research questions for young adults in the U.S. and Canada: Which (non)religious groups have made the most gains, or seen the most losses, when it comes to the intergenerational transmission, conversion and disaffiliation between Millennials and their parents? What proportion of Millennials are sticking with the inherited (non)religion of their parents, and how many are switching? Where are these intergenerational switchers going? To other religious traditions? To different nonreligious identities? Who is more likely to keep the religion of their parents? To convert? To disaffiliate?

In order to answer these key questions, we use data from our 2019 Millennial Trends Survey (MTS). The MTS was administered online between 4-27 March 2019 in both English and French, by [first author's name and institution]. The questionnaire contains a total of 69 questions on the respondent's sociodemographic characteristics, (non)religious and (non)spiritual affiliations, beliefs and practices, friendship networks as well as inclusivity attitudes. The complete MTS questionnaire and technical documentation can be found in the online supplementary materials:

[3] See Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme (2017) for a comprehensive categorization of reasons given by individuals for disaffiliating.

[supplementary material 1 link here]. This survey was reviewed and received ethics clearance through the [first author's institution]'s Research Ethics Committee.

A total of 2,514 respondents aged 18-35 completed the 15-minute web survey (1,508 from Canada and 1,006 from the U.S.). Respondents were recruited through Léger's panel of registered members (leger360.com) to complete the survey hosted by the [first author's institution's survey research center + web link here]. Potential respondents were sent an e-mail invitation to complete the web survey, and then received reminders up to two times, if necessary. Age, gender, regional and education level quotas were applied during the initial random selection of respondents, and later monitored as responses came in to adjust further recruitment efforts and completes.[4] Post-stratification weights were then created and applied to the statistical analyses in order to achieve greater young adult population representativeness on the variables of country of birth, household income, and race/ethnicity.[5] The final response rate for the MTS was 6.5%: lower than the 10-15%

[4] Quota sizes were based on Statistics Canada Census and U.S. Census bureau American Community Survey data with regards to the size of young adult subpopulations, and are available in the MTS's technical documentation in the online supplementary materials: [supplementary material 1 link here]

[5] Post-stratification weights were based on Statistics Canada Census and U.S. Census bureau American Community Survey data with regards to the size of young adult subpopulations. Two weighting variables were generated based on young adult (18-35) population age, gender, Census region of residence, level of education, country of birth, household income and race/ethnicity parameters: one for the Canadian subsample, and one for the American subsample. These weighting variables were generated using a sequential iterative technique.

response rates common for online surveys, mainly because of the additional recruitment efforts to fill some of the harder to reach quotas (notably young adult males with no university education). Although these additional recruitment efforts did decrease the overall response rate to the survey, they did allow the final sample to be more representative on the variables of gender and education, and so were judged worthwhile. Table 1 contains the unweighted descriptive statistics for the present study's predictor, outcome and demographic variables from the MTS. Table 2 in turn compares the distribution of demographics in the MTS with those among 18-35 year-old subsamples in the 2018 U.S. and 2017 Statistics Canada General Social Surveys.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

Key variables for this research include respondent's religious (un)affiliation as a young adult: "What, if any, is your religion?" Respondents were given 18 categories to select from for this question, including aboriginal/indigenous spirituality, Buddhism, Chinese religion, Christianity – Catholic, Christianity – Orthodox, Christianity – Protestant (prompted to specify denomination or church), Christianity – other (prompted to specify tradition, group or church), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, other religion (prompted to specify), multiple religions (prompted to specify), no religion – agnostic, no religion – atheist, no religion – secular humanist, no religion – spiritual with no religion, and no religion – no particular preference. These categories were then grouped into the RELTRAD categorization for most of the analyses in this study (evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Jewish, Catholic, other religion, and no religion; see Steensland et al. 2000). These groups were treated as distinct where possible in the study, but had to be further grouped together into larger categories on occasion due to small sample size. Respondents with no religion are at times treated as belonging to one broad tradition (representing

44% of Canadian respondents, and 39% of U.S. respondents),[6] and at other times are broken down into four subcategories according to how they self-selected in the MTS (un)affiliation question: agnostic, atheist/secular humanist, spiritual with no religion, or no particular preference.

Parents' (non)religion(s), as declared by the respondent in their answers to the two questions "When you were growing up as a child (between the ages of 5-12 years old), what was your mother's primary religion?" and "When you were growing up as a child (between the ages of 5-12 years old), what was your father's primary religion?", are also crucial for this study. Inherited (non)religion, along with intergenerational conversion and disaffiliation, are measured by comparing the respondent's (non)religious group they are affiliated with as a young adult with their declared parents' (non)religion(s). A homogenous (non)religion parental background is defined as a respondent either having two parents of the same (non)religion when growing up, or declaring the (non)religion of one parent while not knowing the (non)religion of the other (or not

[6] These estimated rates of no religion found in the 2019 MTS are higher than those found in the 2018 U.S. General Social Survey (34% of American respondents 18-35 say they have no religion) and the 2017 Canadian General Social Survey (35% of Canadian respondents 18-35 say they have no religion). This could be due to year differences in when the surveys were run (2019 vs. 2018 and 2017) as well as sample composition (see Table 2), and the different formatting of the survey question in the MTS: "if any" was included in the wording of the question; respondents who selected "Christian – Protestant" or "Christian – other" were then asked to specify their denomination, group or tradition, potentially discouraging some nominal affiliation to Christianity; and five separate "no religion" categories were provided (potentially more appealing to some respondents than only one general "no religion" option).

having another parent). A mixed (non)religious parental background is defined as a respondent having two parents of different (non)religions when growing up.[7]

Intensity of religious and spiritual socialization as a child, shown to be key in the transmission of religion (Bengtson, Putney, and Harris 2013; Hadaway and Marler 1993; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Smith and Sikkink 2003), is also included in this study: "Growing up as a child between the ages of 5-12 years old, how often on average did you receive some form of religious or spiritual education at school, at home, or at a place of worship?" Another variable used in this study is spouse's (non)religious characteristics: "Think about your current spouse, partner or significant other, if you have one. Which of the following describes that person? Of the same religious or faith group as you; Not religious at all."

Results and Discussion

Overall in our MTS data, 31% of Canadian and 37% of U.S. young adults switched between the groups of indigenous spiritualties, Buddhism, Chinese religion, Catholicism, Christian

[7] Respondents who indicated they did not know both their mother's and father's (non)religion(s), or did not answer both questions, were excluded from the analyses (128 respondents, or 5% of the full sample). Due to space limitations, outcomes between mother's and father's (non)religion are not compared here. Similar to findings in the existing literature (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Nelson 1990), in our MTS data intergenerational retention rates are higher among mixed (non)religious families where the mother identifies with the group in question, compared with only the father identifying with this group. These results are available upon request to the author.

Orthodox, mainline Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism, Black Protestantism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, other religions (grouped together) and no religion. In other words, these respondents have no parent from the (non)religious group that they themselves identify with as young adults. When broken down between disaffiliation and conversion, 24% of the Canadian sample disaffiliated (parents had a religion, but the respondent did not as a young adult), compared with 23% of the U.S. sample; and only 7% of the Canadian sample converted (different religion from their parents as a young adult, or have a religion as a young adult when their parents did not), compared with 14% in the U.S.[8]

[8] In some ways, these are lowballed conversion and disaffiliation estimates. In these estimates, we do not include conversions between mainline Protestant denominations (notably between Anglicans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, members of the United Church of Canada, Lutherans, more liberal Baptists, and Methodists), nor between the many evangelical Protestant denominations and groups, nor between the many smaller religious groups in the "other religions" category; only conversions between the 14 major groups listed in the previous paragraph. We also do not account for switches between the different nonreligious identities (agnostic, atheist, secular humanist, spiritual with no religion, and no particular preference); only to and from "no religion" in general. We also count having one parent in a mixed (non)religious family from the group the respondent is affiliated with as a young adult as inherited religion (not converted, nor disaffiliated), along with coming from a homogenous (non)religion background of the same group. Additionally, we are only measuring religious (un)affiliation of the respondent when they are young adults; for those who have not yet switched, they have the rest of their lifetime to potentially do so, although

The Pew Research Center (2015, 33) estimates that 34% of all adult Americans have switched from their childhood religion, and Sherkat (2014, 60) puts this rate at 32%. However, since these studies focus on childhood (non)religion (rather than parents' (non)religion) to measure switching in adult years, they are not directly comparable with our data. Putnam's and Campbell's (2010, 136) study is more comparable to ours, and these two researchers put the proportion of all adult Americans who have switched from the religion of their parents at just over one quarter. When compared with our results, this indicates that Millennials' intergenerational switching rates, especially for disaffiliation, are higher than among older Americans; a finding also supported by Newport (2006) and Sherkat (2014).

Based on these first results, we can say that the main story here is one of both inherited religion (a majority of Millennials affiliate with the (non)religion of at least one of their parents) and disaffiliation (by far the most common change among Millennials when switching from their

late teen and young adult years have been shown to be the most common time when switching does occur (Sherkat 2014; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017).

In other ways, these are highballed estimates of conversion and disaffiliation. As discussed in the introduction, we are purposefully comparing a respondent's religious (un)affiliation as a young adult with their parents' (non)religion(s) here, not with the (non)religion the respondent was raised in as a child (which for some may be different than their parents and the one they have kept into adulthood, especially when it comes to nonreligion). And once again, religious (un)affiliation of the respondent is only measured at one time point during their young adult years: those who have converted or disaffiliated at this time point have the rest of their lives to potentially go back to the (non)religion of their parents.

parents' religion does occur). This is even more the case in Canada than in the U.S.: conversion rates are slightly higher south of the 49th parallel (in line with findings from Haskell, Burgoyne, and Flatt 2016; Sherkat 2014), but still not high enough to offset the larger trends of Millennial inherited (non)religion and disaffiliation in the U.S.

Table 3 contains more detailed results regarding the distribution of parental (non)religion and respondent's (non)religion as a young adult between the five broad categories of Catholicism, mainline Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism, other religions and no religion, to better parse out the overall winners and losers when it comes to conversion and disaffiliation among Millennials. Column *a* contains the percentage of young adult respondents coming from a homogenous (non)religion parental background of the group in question; column *b* contains the percentage of young adult respondents coming from a mixed (non)religious parental background with one of their parents from the group in question; column *c* in turn contains the percentage of respondents who identify with the group in question at the time of the survey (as young adults); and column *d* indicates the proportional intergenerational gains or losses for the group in question. If a (non)religious group has the same share of young adult affiliates as the share of respondents coming from the homogenous (non)religion parental background in question, in addition to half of those coming from a mixed (non)religious parental background of the group in question, then it is considered not to have experienced any proportional intergenerational loss or gain (0%).

[Table 3 about here]

The results in Table 3 indicate that Catholicism is suffering large intergenerational losses between Millennials and their parents: a loss of 33% overall in its proportional share of respondents across a generation in Canada, compared with a 28% loss in the U.S. Mainline Protestants are also characterised by these large intergenerational losses: a loss of 45% in Canada and 27% in the U.S.

This even after mainline Protestants have already experienced substantial declines among earlier generations in both countries (Bibby 2017; Pew Research Center 2015; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Sherkat 2014).

In Canada, evangelical Protestants as well as other religions are also experiencing intergenerational losses overall, but not as large as among Catholics and mainline Protestants. In the U.S., the losses for "other religions" are higher at 22% (compared with 13% in Canada), potentially due to the different composition of this broad category in the two countries. For example, the MTS Canadian subsample contains lower rates of Orthodox Christians and Black Protestants, and higher rates of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs than the U.S. subsample. Evangelical Protestants are faring better in the U.S. though, by making enough gains from intergenerational conversions to at least offset any of their losses from out-conversion or disaffiliation (+ 2% overall).

Nevertheless, the group that is making by far the most intergenerational gains from switching among Millennials is the "no religion" category: a growth rate of 102% in both countries. Although their calculation methods vary from those in this paper, our findings generally match those from other recent studies (see notably Pew Research Center 2015; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Reimer and Hiemstra 2018; Sherkat 2014); while trends of disaffiliation are more pronounced here due to our focus on Millennial cohorts only.

Our larger sample sizes for Catholics and religious nones (those who say they have no religion) allow us to look at these two groups in more detail with our data. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate results of where respondents from these two (non)religious parental backgrounds end up as young adults in terms of their own (non)religious belonging.

Catholic Parental Backgrounds

We begin by characterizing Catholicism in both the U.S. and Canada as a mostly between-generational hand-me-down religion among Millennials, to use Newport's terminology (Newport 1979): 85% of Millennial Catholics in the U.S., and 92% in Canada, have at least one Catholic parent. Along with fertility and immigration, strong intergenerational retention rates are thus crucial for Catholicism's long-term survival and vitality in North America. What are these intergenerational retention rates for Catholicism among 18-35-year-olds? Among respondents who come from a Catholic-only parental background, inherited rates of Catholicism reach 63% in Canada: 63% of Millennial respondents who come from Catholic-only households in Canada remain Catholic as young adults. This inherited Catholicism rate is slightly higher at 69% in the U.S. for such households, and comparable to those found among younger American birth cohorts by Putnam and Campbell (2010, 139).

Intergenerational retention rates increase further when accounting for frequency of religious socialization as a child: for the 105 Canadian respondents who received a religious or spiritual education at least once a week while growing up with Catholic-only parents, 71% remain Catholic as young adults. This rate reaches 80% among the 48 similar U.S. respondents.

These inherited Catholicism rates do, however, fall sharply when only one of the parents in a mixed household is Catholic, similar to findings in the existing literature (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Sherkat 2014): only 32% of Canadian respondents and 23% of U.S. respondents remain Catholic as young adults when coming from these mixed Catholic/other (non)religion parental backgrounds.

[Figure 1 about here]

Although intergenerational Catholic retention rates are still quite high for Catholic-only parental backgrounds (over 60% in both countries), many existing studies indicate that they used to be even higher among previous generations. Both Putnam and Campbell (2010, 139) and Sherkat (2014, 63) observe that Catholic retention rates in the U.S. dropped from just below 90% among pre-1925 cohorts to around 70% among 1971-1994 cohorts. Putnam and Campbell (2010) argue that this decline in intergenerational retention among Catholics is tied to the decline of the ethnic character of Catholicism in the U.S. Whereas once strongly linked to its Irish and Italian roots, discouraging to a large extent religious intermarriage and switching, now there is less of this ethnic aspect a few generations later, with the exception of Latino Catholics who maintain very strong retention rates of just over 80% in 2006 (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 141). Although the ethno-cultural roots of Catholicism may still play an important role in retention among French-Canadian and Québécois, Latino, Latin-European, Irish, Eastern European, Filipino and other Catholics, they seem not to play as large a role among Millennials as they once did for their parents and grandparents.

Interfaith marriage has been shown time and again to be a key factor in (non)religious switching: for the spouses themselves, one of whom may often choose to change (non)religions in order to match the other, and for children of mixed (non)religious couples who will either only take one of their parent's (non)religion, and also be more likely to convert to another religion or disaffiliate (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Putnam and Campbell 2010; Sherkat 2014; Thiessen and Wilkins-Laflamme 2017). Lee et al. (2017), the Pew Research Center (2015), Putnam and Campbell (2010), Sherkat (2014), and many others have all shown that interfaith marriage rates have been increasing among younger generations, including among younger Catholics. This means an increase in the rate of mixed couples among whom intergenerational retention rates are much

lower. Of the 1,155 respondents in the MTS with at least one Catholic parent, 25% in both countries came from a mixed (non)religious parental background. The largest proportion of these Catholic mixed marriages among respondents' parents were with a partner with no religion in both Canada (42%) and the U.S. (47%). In turn, 54% of the 336 Catholic young adult respondents in Canada and 49% of the 217 Catholic young adult respondents in the U.S. with a partner, spouse or significant other say this person is of a different (non)religion than themselves. 27% of Catholic coupled young adult respondents in Canada and 16% in the U.S. say their partner, spouse or significant other is not religious at all.

So where have those respondents who come from Catholic backgrounds, but no longer identify as such as young adults, gone? Among the 227 Canadian respondents and 102 U.S. respondents who are not Catholic as young adults, but who come from a Catholic-only parental background, less than 1% now identify with a mainline Protestant denomination in both the U.S. and Canada; 15% are evangelical Protestants in the U.S., compared with 1% in Canada; 13% went to other religions in the U.S., compared with 8% in Canada; and 71% say they have no religion in the U.S., compared with 90% in Canada. Among this last (and largest) category of Catholic disaffiliates, atheist/secular humanist (23%) and agnostic identities (20%) are the most popular in the U.S., and atheist/secular humanist (32%) and no particular preference (29%) are in Canada.

Nonreligious Parental Backgrounds

We also explore young adult religious nones in more detail here; those Millennial respondents who say they have no religion. Only an estimated 48% of the 689 young adult none respondents from Canada and 45% of the 422 from the U.S. have at least one nonreligious parent.

Consequently, more Millennials in our study have joined the ranks of "no religion" than inherited this identity.[9]

Despite a slim majority of Millennial religious nones being intergenerational disaffiliates, retention rates for those who do have nonreligious parents are also very high. 89% of the 239 Canadian Millennials and 91% of the 139 U.S. Millennials in the MTS sample who come from a nonreligious-only family remain religious nones as young adults. Among the 136 Canadian and 103 U.S. respondents who come from mixed nonreligion/religion parental backgrounds, 68% identify as religious nones as young adults in Canada, compared with 51% in the U.S.

[Figure 2 about here]

Putnam and Campbell (2010, 139) have previously shown that intergenerational retention rates among religious nones were only around 30% for cohorts reaching adulthood between the 1920s and 1950s in the U.S., but have been climbing steadily ever since. With their 2006 data, they put retention rates of religious nones among Millennial birth cohorts between 65%-80%. This is

[9] Although we focus here on nonreligious belonging, these populations of religious nones also tend to score low on most indicators of religious behavior and belief. For example, among Millennial religious nones in our sample, only 8% in Canada and 18% in the U.S. say they pray at least once a week; only 6% in Canada and 17% in the U.S. say they attend a religious service at least once a month; only 2% in Canada and 9% in the U.S. say they make offerings to their ancestors or at a temple at least once a month; only 26% in Canada and 32% in the U.S. say they believe in God or a higher power; and only 25% in Canada and 30% in the U.S. say religious or spiritual beliefs are very or somewhat important to the way they live their lives. For more on these trends, see notably Baker and Smith (2015) and Wilkins-Laflamme (2015).

impressive when we consider that most nonreligious parents do not expressly aim to socialize their children strictly as nonreligious, but rather take a more "hands-off" choice-based approach when it comes to religion. As Zuckerman, Galen, and Pasquale (2016, 127) note, "Secular people tend toward nonconformity, independence, and antiauthoritarianism [. . .] to base their maturational goals on personal independence, and their childrearing philosophy emphasizes autonomy rather than obedience to authority." Yet, our results show that the vast majority of children from nonreligious parents nevertheless go on to be religious nones themselves as young adults in recent years. This further supports the finding in [first author and co-author] (2020, 53) that:

> […] modeling a "hands-off" approach to religion in the home does, in fact, pass on a particular individualist and secular orientation to religion and the world more generally. Such an approach strengthens the likelihood that someone who identifies as a religious none will raise children who also say they do not identify with a religion.

These very strong intergenerational retention rates among Millennial nones also indicate the extent to which nonreligion has become the default option of sorts among their generation's social milieu; the extent to which this social milieu has become post-Christian in a sense. Whereas in the past the pull from surrounding social ties and their environment in general used to be strong enough to convert many adults initially socialized as nonreligious, the opposite now seems to be playing out among Millennials in both Canada and the U.S. Now, nonreligion persists among most who were raised without religion from their parents, and also pulls in many who had a more religious upbringing.

Intermarriage rates are also quite high among religious nones in Canada and the U.S., especially when compared with Catholics. 37% of the 375 Canadian Millennials and 47% of the 242 U.S. Millennials in our sample with at least one nonreligious parent come from mixed

nonreligion/religion parental backgrounds. The largest proportion of Millennials' nonreligious parents from these mixed couples had a Catholic partner in both Canada (60%) and the U.S. (38%). Among the 473 Canadian and 305 U.S. Millennial religious nones in our sample who themselves are in a relationship, 52% in Canada and 37% in the U.S. say their partner, spouse or significant other is not religious at all.

Despite nonreligious intergenerational retention rates being very high, there are nevertheless a few Millennials in our sample who have nonreligious parents but who are affiliated with a religion as young adults (24 respondents from Canada, and 16 from the U.S.). Which religions are these Millennial converts coming from a nonreligious-only parental background more likely to join? 8 of these intergenerational converts are Catholic as young adults in the U.S., compared with 9 in Canada; 1 is a mainline Protestant in the U.S., compared with 2 in Canada; 2 are evangelical Protestant in the U.S., compared with 3 in Canada; and 5 are affiliated with another religion in the U.S., compared with 10 in Canada.

Sociodemographic and Parental Background Determinants of Retention and Switching

Our final analyses for this study measure which sociodemographic and parental background groups among young adults are more likely to experience intergenerational retention, conversion or disaffiliation. A first series of multinomial logistic regression models were generated for the subsample of young adult respondents whose parents are both religiously affiliated: Model 1 contains the sociodemographic effects of age, gender, marital status, family status, level of education, primary activity, household income, rural residence, nationality, and ethno-racial background; Model 2 also includes predictors for parental religious background and frequency of

childhood religious or spiritual education. Table 4 contains the results in marginal effects of these two models.

[Table 4 about here]

According to the results in Table 4, sociodemographics are not significantly associated with the likelihood of young adults from affiliated parental backgrounds experiencing intergenerational conversion: none of the sociodemographic effects in Model 1 for young adults having converted are statistically significant and substantial in strength (associated with a 5 percentage point change or higher in the probabilities of converting). In a previous study, Haskell, Burgoyne and Flatt (2016) found lower conversion rates in Canada than in the U.S. However, with our sample the effect of national residence on the likelihood of conversion is quite weak among young adults, with predicted probabilities of conversion only an estimated 4 percentage points lower among Canadian young adults once other sociodemographics are controlled for.

Some sociodemographic characteristics do seem to matter more though for intergenerational disaffiliation. 25-29 year-olds are significantly more likely to disaffiliate than 18-24 year-olds once other sociodemographics are controlled for, with the 25-29 year old age group often having left their original parental household. The probabilities of male young adults from affiliated parental backgrounds disaffiliating are 7 percentage points lower than for those among female and other gendered respondents. This may be an indication that the trend of women remaining more religious than their male counterparts, shown in a large number of studies (see for example Voas and McAndrew 2012; Walter and Davie 1998), may now be dissipating among younger birth cohorts. Single young adults are more likely to be disaffiliated than their counterparts in romantic relationships, with their probabilities of disaffiliation at an estimated 6 percentage points higher.

By contrast, those with at least one child, with higher household incomes and those from non-White ethno-racial backgrounds are less likely to be disaffiliated.

It is the parental and childhood background variables added in Model 2 that seem to matter more when it comes to intergenerational conversion among young adults with affiliated parents, in line with Smith's and Sikkink's (2003) findings. Millennials with mainline Protestant parents (predicted probabilities are 14 percentage points higher), evangelical Protestant parents (predicted probabilities are 7 percentage points higher) and parents from other religions (predicted probabilities are 7 percentage points higher) are all more likely to convert than Millennials with Catholic parents. Respondents with a more frequent religious or spiritual education as children are also more likely to experience either intergenerational retention or conversion over disaffiliation. For example, those who received a religious or spiritual education at least once a day growing up have a predicted probability of 71% of retaining their parents' religion as young adults, a 10% probability of converting to a different religion, and only a 20% probability of disaffiliating; compared with probabilities of 45%, 4% and 51% respectively among those with affiliated parents who never received a religious or spiritual education growing up. Interestingly, once other sociodemographic and childhood variables are controlled for, having parents from mixed religious backgrounds is not significantly associated with a higher likelihood of conversion nor disaffiliation among young adults with affiliated parents.

A second series of logistic regression models were also run with respondents who have at least one nonreligious parent, since by this study's definition these young adults cannot be disaffiliated (only inherited their nonreligion if they do not identify with a religion at the time of the survey). The results from these models in marginal effects can be found in Table 5, measuring the likelihood

of conversion over intergenerational retention (of either their parents' nonreligion, or of their mixed parents' religion).

The key significant effects captured by these models include probabilities of conversion being an estimated 7 percentage points lower among 25-29 year-olds with at least one nonreligious parent compared with their 18-24 year-old counterparts. Those young adults with at least one child and at least one unaffiliated parent are in turn more likely to convert to a different religion (probabilities of conversion are 9 percentage points higher for these respondents). Those with a post-secondary education below university are less likely to convert to a different religion than those with only a high school degree or less (probabilities of conversion are 6 percentage points lower), although the effect for university educated respondents is not statistically significant when other sociodemographics are controlled for.

Having one religiously affiliated parent and one nonreligious parent, rather than two nonreligious parents, does not significantly affect conversion rates among young adults. However, having received a more frequent religious or spiritual education as a child does increase the likelihood of conversion over intergenerational retention. For example, those young adult respondents who have at least one nonreligious parent but who did receive a religious or spiritual education at least once a day growing up have a predicted probability of 17% of being converted at the time of the survey, compared with only a 6% probability among those with at least one nonreligious parent who never received a religious or spiritual education growing up.

[Table 5 about here]

Summary and Conclusions

Like with their parents and grandparents, the main story among Millennials remains one of inherited (non)religion. Overall, 69% in Canada and 63% in the U.S. of our 18-35-year-old respondents keep the (non)religion of at least one of their parents as young adults. As shown time and again in the existing literature, we find that homogenous parental religion as well as frequent religious and spiritual education as a child improves intergenerational retention rates. We find this among Catholics whom we explored in more detail in this study. However, two Catholic parents as well as a religious upbringing are not always present among Millennials from a Catholic background, which has at least in part led to large proportional declines between Millennials and their parents when it comes to this religious tradition in both Canada and the U.S. Mainline Protestants have also seen such sizeable intergenerational declines. Evangelical Protestants and other religious traditions are not immune to these declines either in Canada, although the proportional decreases for these groups are not as steep as for Catholics and mainline Protestants. In the U.S., evangelical Protestantism has even managed to stave off intergenerational decline.

Among the approximately one third of Millennials in our sample who did have a different religious (un)affiliation than their parents, intergenerational disaffiliation was the most common change present in both countries, accounting for just under a quarter of our respondents. The "no religion" group not only saw the most proportional intergenerational gains by means of disaffiliation, but is also bolstered by very strong intergenerational retention rates among those from a nonreligious parental background—a first among living adult generations. These nonreligious intergenerational retention rates even remain strong for mixed nonreligious and religious parents (above 50% in both Canada and the U.S.), which bodes well for the prospects of nonreligion with growing proportions of Millennials in mixed (non)religion relationships.

Both sociodemographic and childhood background factors seem to be important for distinguishing who among Millennials is more likely to disaffiliate. Our models find that 25-29 year olds, women, singles, those without children, those with lower household incomes, Whites and those who received little religious socialization as children are subpopulations more prone to intergenerational disaffiliation. This compared with intergenerational conversion where sociodemographics seem to play less of a role, and childhood background variables such as coming from mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant or other religion parental backgrounds as well as receiving a frequent religious or spiritual education as a child show stronger associations.

One of the main objectives of this study was also to compare inherited (non)religion and intergenerational switching trends between Canada and the U.S. The main trends of inherited (non)religion present among most young adults, and disaffiliation usually present when switching does occur, are found in both countries. In fact, we are struck by the many similarities between Millennials residing in the two nations. For example, intergenerational retention rates from homogenous parental backgrounds are very similar between both nations for both Catholics and the nonreligious. Yet, we observed some key national differences as well. There are slightly lower conversion rates among young adults in Canada. This is especially the case among Millennials from Catholic parental backgrounds in Canada, where the vast majority of those who leave the Catholic faith disaffiliate rather than convert to another religion. Catholics, mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants seem to be faring worse in Canada when it comes to proportional declines between Millennials and their parents, although the "other religions" category is faring a bit better in Canada than in the U.S.

Rates of intermarriage are also higher in Canada among Catholic Millennials. By contrast, intermarriage among religious nones is lower in Canada than in the U.S., both among Millennials'

parents and Millennials themselves. This is most likely due to the larger pool of available nonreligious partners north of the 49th parallel. Higher rates of religious unaffiliation also characterize Canada's Millennials overall, compared with their counterparts in the U.S. In these ways, the more secular character of Canadian society impacts and in turn continues to be fed by its young adult population.

Overall, we found less evidence for Millennials circulating within a religious marketplace with fewer constraints and enabling greater rates of conversion, and much more evidence for a majority of intergenerational switcher Millennials just leaving organized religion altogether. This finding, coupled with the very high rates of intergenerational retention of nonreligion found here, are indicators that nonreligion has become a default option of sorts among the Millennial generation; that their social environment has become much more secular, compared with that of their parents and grandparents. The vast majority of individuals raised with no religion remain unaffiliated as young adults now, and many more coming from more religious backgrounds switch into nonreligion. This is not just happening in Canada where religiosity indicators have been lower and declining since the 1960s (Bibby 2017; Clarke and Macdonald 2017), but also in the U.S. We will not go so far as to call the Millennial generation post-Christian full stop here, since a majority in both countries still affiliate with a religion in our data and the most popular of these religions remains Christianity, but we will say that we see a trend moving in this post-Christian direction with this younger generation.

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[first author and co-author forthcoming 2020 book]

Table 1: Descriptive statistics, 2019 Millennial Trends Survey, unweighted

	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Catholic affiliation	2,511	.278	.448	0	1
Evangelical Protestant affiliation	2,511	.057	.231	0	1
Mainline Protestant affiliation	2,511	.045	.208	0	1
Other religious affiliation	2,511	.177	.382	0	1
No religious affiliation	2,511	.442	.497	0	1
Catholic-only parental background	2,386	.370	.483	0	1
Mixed Catholic parental background	2,386	.114	.318	0	1
Evangelical Protestant only parental background	2,386	.055	.229	0	1
Mixed evangelical Protestant parental background	2,386	.019	.138	0	1
Mainline Protestant only parental background	2,386	.057	.233	0	1
Mixed mainline Protestant parental background	2,386	.041	.199	0	1
Other religion only parental background	2,386	.191	.393	0	1
Mixed other religion parental background	2,386	.062	.240	0	1
Nonreligious only parental background	2,386	.158	.365	0	1
Mixed nonreligious parental background	2,386	.100	.300	0	1
Intergenerational retention of (non)affiliation	2,487	.645	.479	0	1
Converted as young adult	2,487	.103	.303	0	1
Disaffiliated as young adult	2,487	.253	.435	0	1
Frequency of religious education as a child	2,513	3.186	1.331	1	5
Spouse same religion as respondent	1,841	.314	.464	0	1
Spouse not religious at all	1,841	.300	.458	0	1
Currently not in a romantic relationship	2,514	.268	.443	0	1
18-24 years old	2,514	.411	.492	0	1
25-29 years old	2,514	.271	.445	0	1
30-35 years old	2,514	.318	.466	0	1
Female	2,514	.488	.500	0	1
Male	2,514	.502	.500	0	1
Another gender	2,514	.010	.101	0	1
Have at least one child	2,505	.313	.464	0	1
Canadian resident	2,514	.600	.490	0	1
Reside in area with pop. < 50,000	2,510	.272	.445	0	1
High school education or less	2,514	.449	.498	0	1
Post-secondary education below university	2,514	.297	.457	0	1
University degree	2,514	.254	.435	0	1
In full-time paid work	2,514	.423	.494	0	1
Household income	2,511	3.425	1.837	1	8
Non-white ethno-racial background	2,509	.373	.484	0	1

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, 2019 Millennial Trends Survey, 2018 U.S. General Social Survey, and 2017 Statistics Canada General Social Survey, respondents 18-35 years old, weighted

	2019 MTS Canada N = 1,508	**2017 Stats Can GSS** N = 4,256	**2019 MTS U.S.** N = 1,006	**2018 U.S. GSS** N = 672
18-24 years old	42%	37%	40%	36%
25-29 years old	29%	29%	28%	28%
30-35 years old	30%	34%	32%	36%
Female	49%	49%	48%	55%
Male	50%	51%	51%	45%
Another gender	1%	---	1%	---
Have at least one child	25%	29%	41%	40%
Reside in rural area (pop. < 50,000)	18%	14%	33%	---
University degree	28%	30%	27%	24%
In full-time paid work	47%	---	41%	53%
Household income less than $20,000	6%	10%	9%	21%
Non-white ethno-racial background	36%	29%	51%	36%

Table 3: Parental and young adult (non)religious group, respondents 18-35 years old, Canada and the USA, 2019

	Canada				USA			
	a - % of respondents with 2 parents (or single-parent family) from group	b - % of respondents with one parent from group, in a mixed (non)religious family	c - % of respondents who affiliate with group as young adults	d - % gain or loss for group: ((c / (a + 0.5b))*100) - 100	a - % of respondents with 2 parents (or single-parent family) from group	b - % of respondents with one parent from group, in a mixed (non)religious family	c - % of respondents who affiliate with group as young adults	d - % gain or loss for group: ((c / (a + 0.5b))*100) - 100
Catholic	38%	13%	30%	- 33%	34.5%	11.2%	28.9%	- 28%
Mainline Protestant	5%	6%	4%	- 45%	5.3%	3.7%	5.2%	- 27%
Evangelical Protestant	3%	1%	3%	-14%	7.3%	2.3%	8.6%	+2%
Other religion	20%	6%	20%	- 13%	22.2%	7.9%	20.4%	- 22%
No religion	16%	10%	43%	+ 102%	12.7%	11.1%	36.9%	+ 102%

Source: Millennial Trends Survey. N Canada = 1,452. N USA = 934. Percentages weighted to be representative of the 18-35 Canadian and USA populations.

Table 4: Marginal effects of determinants of intergenerational retention, conversion and disaffiliation, respondents 18-35 years old with both parents affiliated during childhood, 2019

		Model 1		Model 2	
		dydx	*SE*	*dydx*	*SE*
25-29 years old (ref. 18-24 years old)	Intergenerational retention	-.094**	.031	-.093**	.031
	Converted	-.001	.019	-.009	.019
	Disaffiliated	.095***	.029	.102***	.029
30-35 years old (ref. 18-24 years old)	Intergenerational retention	-.032	.032	-.025	.032
	Converted	-.019	.020	-.031	.019
	Disaffiliated	.051†	.030	.056†	.030
Male	Intergenerational retention	.036	.024	.033	.024
	Converted	.029*	.014	.035*	.014
	Disaffiliated	-.065**	.022	-.068**	.022
Do not currently have a spouse, partner or significant other	Intergenerational retention	-.069*	.028	-.062*	.028
	Converted	.003	.017	.002	.017
	Disaffiliated	.065**	.025	.060*	.025
Have at least one child	Intergenerational retention	.043	.028	.035	.028
	Converted	.047**	.016	.047**	.016
	Disaffiliated	-.090***	.026	-.082**	.026
Post-secondary education below university (ref. high school edu. or less)	Intergenerational retention	-.009	.029	-.014	.029
	Converted	.004	.017	.011	.017
	Disaffiliated	.006	.027	.003	.027
University education (ref. high school education or less)	Intergenerational retention	.032	.031	.021	.031
	Converted	.016	.018	.021	.017
	Disaffiliated	-.049	.030	-.042	.029
Currently in full-time paid work	Intergenerational retention	.060*	.027	.053†	.027
	Converted	-.025	.017	-.013	.016
	Disaffiliated	-.036	.025	-.040	.025
Household income (8 categories)	Intergenerational retention	.018**	.007	.017*	.007
	Converted	-.002	.004	-.001	.004
	Disaffiliated	-.016*	.006	-.016*	.006
Rural residence (pop < 50,000)	Intergenerational retention	.017	.028	.030	.028
	Converted	.016	.016	.009	.016
	Disaffiliated	-.033	.026	-.039	.026
Canadian residence	Intergenerational retention	.025	.025	.013	.025
	Converted	-.044**	.015	-.040**	.015
	Disaffiliated	.018	.023	.027	.023
Non-White ethno-racial background	Intergenerational retention	.154***	.024	.138***	.026
	Converted	.009	.014	.009	.017
	Disaffiliated	-.163***	.023	-.148***	.024

*Notes: N = 1,731. Results from two multinomial logistic (mlogit) regression models. McFadden's R^2 Model 1 = .043***. McFadden's R^2 Model 2 = .079***. †= p ≤ .10; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; *** = p ≤ .001.*

Table 4 (continued): Marginal effects of determinants of intergenerational retention, conversion and disaffiliation, respondents 18-35 years old with both parents affiliated during childhood, 2019

		Model 1		Model 2	
		dydx	*SE*	*dydx*	*SE*
Parents mainline Protestant (ref. parents Catholic)	Intergenerational retention			-.074†	.044
	Converted			.135***	.022
	Disaffiliated			-.060	.040
Parents evangelical Protestant (ref. parents Catholic)	Intergenerational retention			-.098*	.045
	Converted			.073**	.025
	Disaffiliated			.025	.041
Parents other religion (ref. parents Catholic)	Intergenerational retention			-.025	.031
	Converted			.068***	.019
	Disaffiliated			-.043	.029
Parents mixed religions	Intergenerational retention			-.054	.040
	Converted			.033	.027
	Disaffiliated			.021	.037
Religious socialization as a child (5 categories)	Intergenerational retention			.053***	.010
	Converted			.018**	.006
	Disaffiliated			-.071***	.009

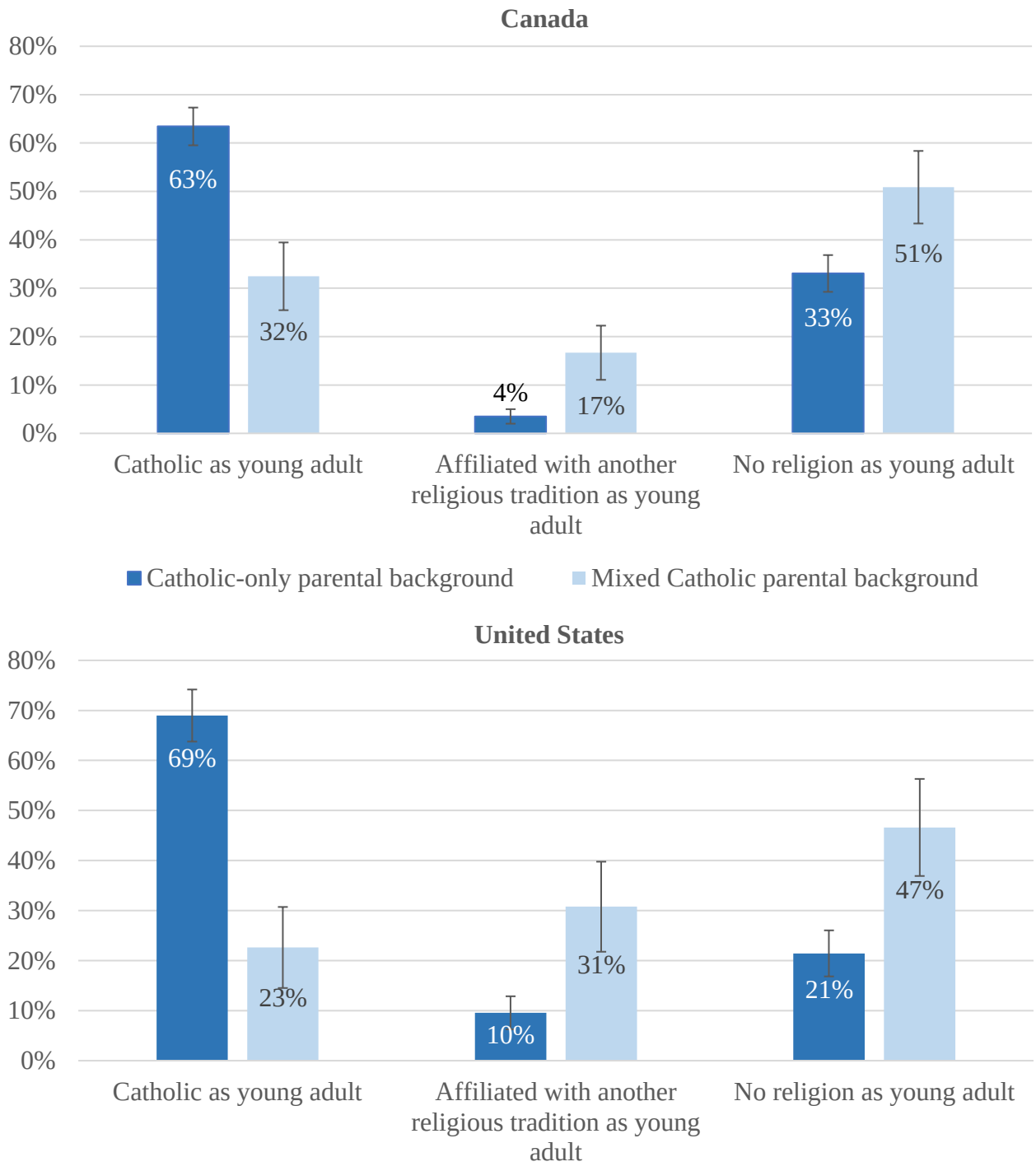
*Notes: N = 1,731. Results from two multinomial logistic (mlogit) regression models. McFadden's R^2 Model 1 = .043***. McFadden's R^2 Model 2 = .079***. †= p ≤ .10; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; *** = p ≤ .001.*

Table 5: Marginal effects of conversion (compared with intergenerational retention), respondents 18-35 years old with at least one unaffiliated parent during childhood, 2019

	Model 1		Model 2	
	dydx	*SE*	*dydx*	*SE*
25-29 years old (ref. 18-24 years old)	-.077*	.033	-.068*	.033
30-35 years old (ref. 18-24 years old)	-.042	.038	-.036	.037
Male	.022	.026	.026	.025
Do not currently have a spouse, partner or significant other	-.014	.029	-.011	.029
Have at least one child	.094**	.031	.090**	.031
Post-secondary education below university (ref. high school edu. or less)	-.061†	.032	-.064*	.032
University education (ref. high school education or less)	-.022	.036	-.029	.037
Currently in full-time paid work	-.026	.028	-.028	.027
Household income (8 categories)	-.008	.008	-.006	.008
Rural residence (pop < 50,000)	.013	.026	.018	.026
Canadian residence	.002	.028	.001	.028
Non-White ethno-racial background	-.008	.031	-.009	.031
Parents mixed (non)religion			-.036	.029
Religious socialization as a child (5 categories)			.025*	.011

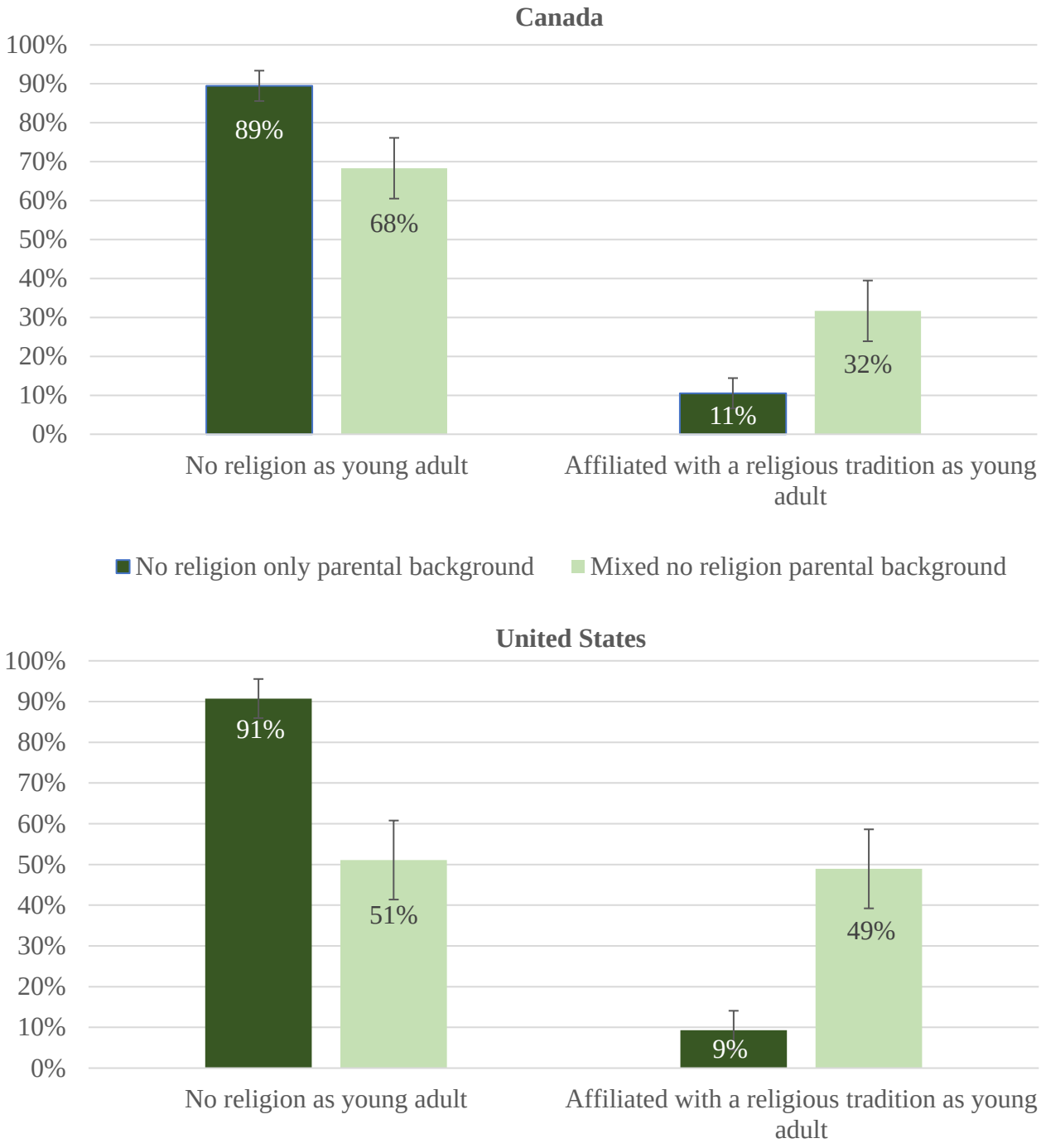
Notes: N = 612. Results from two logistic (logit) regression models. McFadden's R^2 Model 1 = .055. McFadden's R^2 Model 2 = .069*. †= p ≤ .10; * = p ≤ .05; ** = p ≤ .01; *** = p ≤ .001.*

Figure 1: Religious (non)affiliation among 18-35-year-old respondents with a Catholic parental background (in %), 2019, with CI (95%)



Source: Millennial Trends Survey. Percentages weighted to be representative of 18-35 Canadian and U.S. populations.

Figure 2: Religious (non)affiliation among 18-35-year-old respondents with a nonreligious parental background (in %), 2019, with CI (95%)



Source: Millennial Trends Survey. Percentages weighted to be representative of 18-35 Canadian and U.S. populations.