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American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population, A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008

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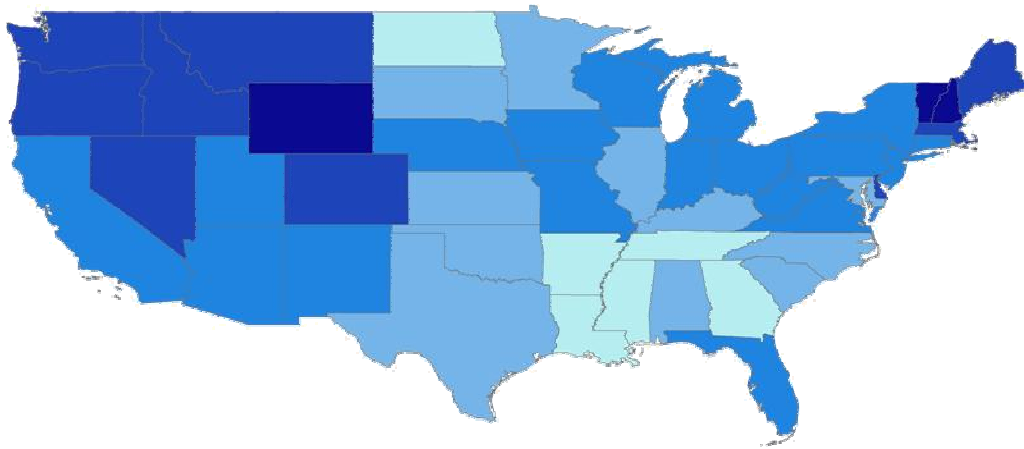
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American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population



A Report Based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2008

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with
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AMERICAN NONES: THE PROFILE OF THE NO RELIGION POPULATION

Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar with Ryan Cragun and Juhem Navarro-Rivera

Highlights

The 1990s was the decade when the "secular boom" occurred - each year 1.3 million more adult Americans joined the ranks of the Nones. Since 2001 the annual increase has halved to 660,000 a year. (Fig.3.1)

Whereas Nones are presently 15% of the total adult U.S. population, 22% of Americans aged 18-29 years self-identify as Nones. (Fig.1.2)

In terms of Belonging (self-identification) 1 in 6 Americans is presently of No Religion, while in terms of Belief and Behavior the ratio is higher around 1 in 4. (Fig. 1.17)

Regarding belief in the divine, most Nones are neither atheists nor theists but rather agnostics and deists (59%) and perhaps best described as skeptics. (Fig.1.17)

The most significant difference between the religious and non-religious populations is a gender gap. (Fig. 1.17)

- Whereas 19% of American men are Nones only 12% of American women are Nones. (Fig. 2.1)
- The gender ratio among Nones is 60 males for every 40 females. (Fig.1.1)
- Women are less likely to switch out of religion than men.
- Women are also less likely to stay non-religious when they are born and raised in a non-religious family.

Most Nones are 1st generation - only 32% of "current" Nones report they were None at age 12. (Fig.1.10)

24% of current Nones (and 35% of 1st generation or "new" Nones) are former Catholics. (Fig. 1.10)

Geography remains a factor - more than 1 in 5 people in certain regions (the West, New England) are Nones.

Class is not a distinguishing characteristic: Nones are not different from the general population by education or income. (Figs 1.6 & 1.7)

Race is a declining factor in differentiating Nones. Latinos have tripled their proportion among Nones from 1990-2008 from 4% to 12%. (Fig.1.4)

The ethnic/racial profile of Nones shows Asians, Irish and Jews are the most secularized ethnic origin groups. One-third of the Nones claim Irish ancestry. (Figs 1.4 & 1.5)

Nones are much more likely to believe in human evolution (61%) than the general American public (38%). (Fig. 1.15)

Politically, 21% of the nation's independents are Nones, as are 16% of Democrats and 8% of Republicans. In 1990, 12% of independents were Nones, as were 6% of Democrats and 6% of Republicans. (Fig. 2.1)

American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population

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Introduction

One of the most widely noted findings from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008), which was released in March 2009, was the substantial increase in the No Religion segment of the U.S. population, whom we designate as “Nones.” The Nones increased from 8.1% of the U.S. adult population in 1990 to 15% in 2008 and from 14 to 34 million adults. Their numbers far exceed the combined total of all the non-Christian religious groups in the U.S.

Who exactly are the Nones? “None” is not a movement, but a label for a diverse group of people who do not identify with any of the myriad of religious options in the American religious marketplace – the irreligious, the unreligious, the anti-religious, and the anti-clerical. Some believe in God; some do not. Some may participate occasionally in religious rituals; others never will.

Nones are easily misunderstood. On the one hand, only a small minority are atheists. On the other hand, it is also not correct to describe them as “unchurched” or “unaffiliated” on the assumption that they are mainly theists and religious searchers who are temporarily between congregations. Yet another incorrect assumption is that large proportions of Nones are anti-rationalist proponents of New Age and supernatural ideas. As we will show, they are more likely to be rational skeptics.

The aim of this report is to provide detailed evidence and reliable statistics on just who the Nones are, their sentiments, the process by which they have grown, and their place in contemporary American society. Data from 1990 is presented to highlight selected characteristics where change over time is particularly notable. We also try to predict the future trajectory of the Nones and so their likely impact on where society is headed.

Methodological Note

The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008 is a random digit dialed (RDD) survey of a nationally representative sample of 54,461 adults. Of those, 7,047 are Nones, or individuals who responded to the question: *What is your religion, if any?* with “none,” “atheist,” “agnostic,” “secular,” or “humanist.” For these 7,047 people, basic socio-demographic information was collected (e.g., age, sex, etc.). A randomly selected, nationally representative subset of those 7,047 cases, 1,106 people, was asked an additional series of questions on behaviors and opinions that provide further insights into the profile of Nones. The subset is a nationally representative “silo” of Nones. Additionally, a random subset of the overall 54,461 participants totaling 1,015 individuals were asked some of the same questions as the None silo. This “national silo” is a random subsample and is representative of the general U.S. adult population. The 1990 data in this report are from the National Survey of Religious Identification; a nationally representative sample of 113,713 adults among whom 9,899 self-identified with one of the above None categories.

The sampling error for the full ARIS 2008 is +/- 0.31%. For the No Religion sub-sample, the sampling error is +/- 2.38%.

For further information on the ARIS series methodology see:

<http://www.trincoll.edu/Academics/AcademicResources/Values/ISSSC/archive.htm> or

Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market: Religious and Non-Religious Americans*, Ithaca, NY, Paramount Market Publishing, 2006.

The data collection for the ARIS series was conducted by ICR - International Communications Research of Media, PA.

Part I

Profile of the No Religion (None) Population 2008

A. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

There are some characteristics that distinguish the Nones from the general U.S. population, but two stand out, gender and age. Nones are disproportionately male, 60%, while women actually make up a slight majority of the general U.S. population, 51% (see Figure 1.1). Additionally, Nones are significantly younger than the general population: 30% are under age 30 and only 5% are 70 years or older (see Figure 1.2). The median age of adult Nones is 41 years, compared to 46 years in the general U.S. population. These two demographic differences help explain some of the other ways in which Nones differ from the general U.S. population.

Figure 1.1

Gender Distribution of Adult Nones and U.S. Adults 2008

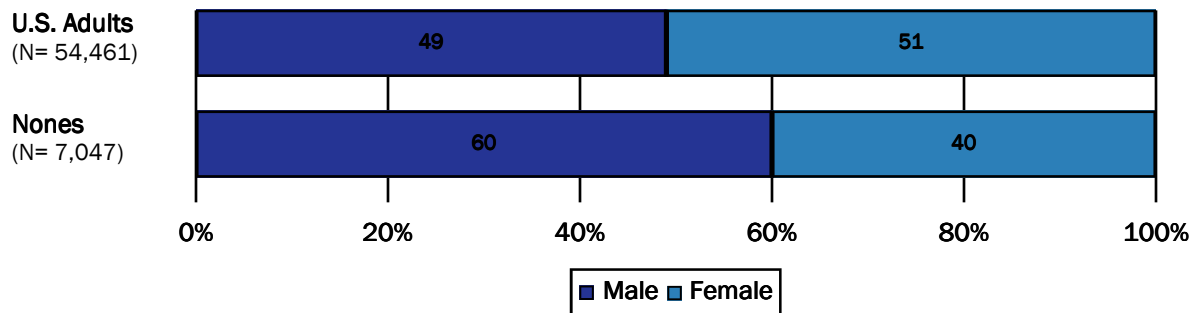


Figure 1.2

Age Distribution of Adult Nones and U.S. Adults 2008

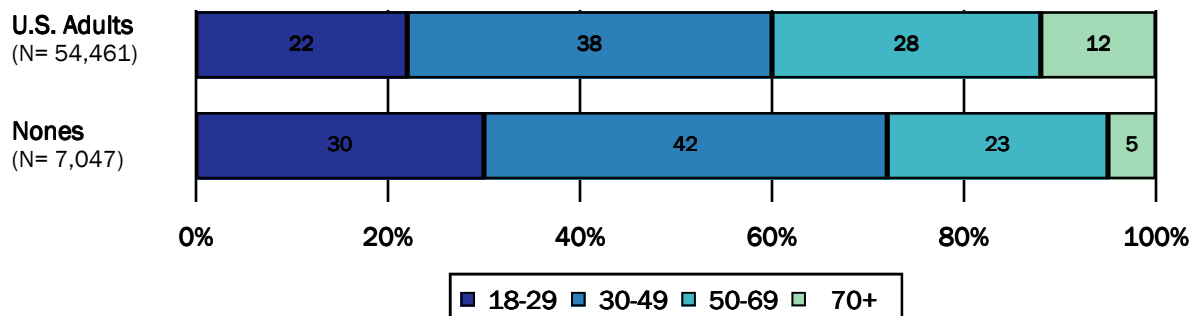


Figure 1.3 contrasts the marital statuses of Nones and the general U.S. population. The first two columns compare the two groups without adjusting for the difference in ages between them. Based on these numbers, Nones are more likely to be single and never married and less likely to be married or widowed. However, that is largely because they are younger. The right half of Figure 1.3 presents

Figure 1.3

Marital Status of Adult Nones and U.S. Adults 2008

	Unadjusted Percentage		Age-Adjusted Percentage	
	Nones	U.S. Adults	Nones	U.S. Adults
Single, Never Married	39	25	33	28
Married	45	53	49	52
Divorced/Separated	11	13	12	12
Widowed	3	7	6	8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

the two groups as if they had an identical age structure. When this is done, the differences in marital status shrink, though they do not disappear entirely. Nones are still less likely to be married and more likely to be single and never married, but not substantially so. Of note, there is no difference in divorce rates between the two groups when adjusted for age.

That there are relatively minor differences in marital status between Nones and the general U.S. population once age is taken into account introduces an important finding in this report: In many respects, Nones are growing very similar to the general U.S. population. As any numerical minority increases in size it regresses to the mean or becomes more like the majority. Thus, as Nones increased from 8% to 15% of the U.S. population, they became more representative of the average population.

The growing similarity of Nones to the general U.S. population is seen also in the racial and ethnic composition of Nones, as shown in Figure 1.4. In all, whites are slightly more likely to be Nones while blacks are slightly less likely, but the differences are relatively small. That blacks, who are generally considered to be the most religious racial/ethnic group in the U.S., make up 8% of the None population suggests that this shift in the religious marketplace is widespread and penetrating deeply into traditionally religious populations.

The most striking change among the racial and ethnic groups is among Hispanics. In 1990 they comprised 6% of U.S. adults and 4% of adult Nones. In 2008 Hispanics doubled their percentage of the U.S. adult population to 13% and tripled their proportion among adult Nones to 12%. This means that Hispanics are not only the fastest growing racial group in America in general, but are the fastest-growing minority group among Nones. This, too, is a noteworthy finding considering the stereotype of Latinos as a deeply religious population.

Figure 1.5 presents some rather interesting data about the ethnicity of Nones within the non-

Figure 1.4

Racial and Ethnic Composition of Adult Nones and U.S. Adults 1990 and 2008

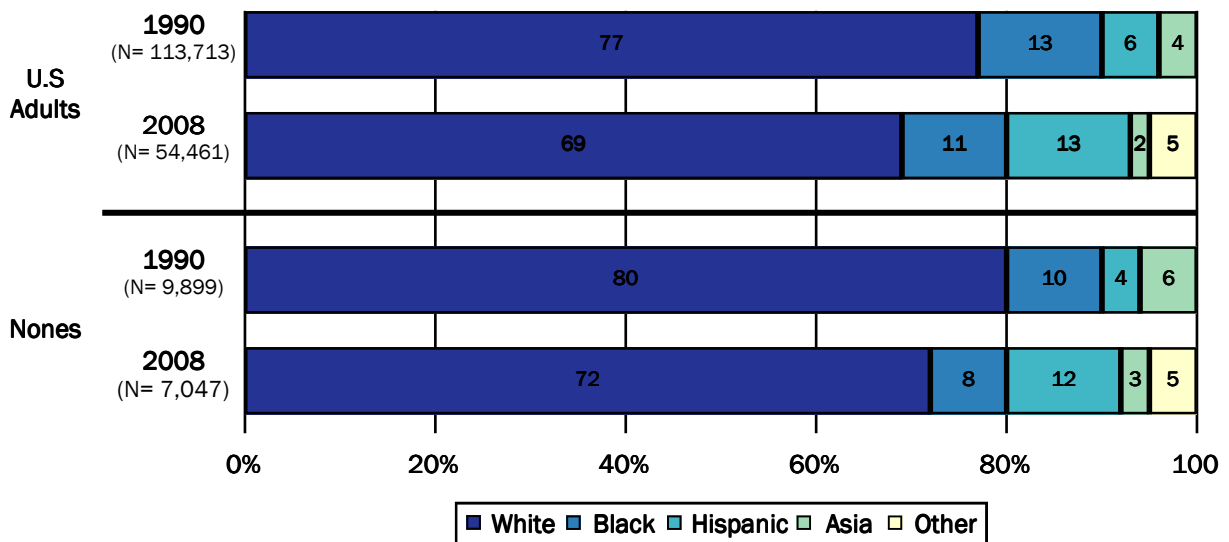


Figure 1.5

Selected Ancestry (Single and Multiple) of Adult Nones 2008

	Percent of Nones (N= 1006)
Irish	33
British ¹	20
Italian	9
Jewish ²	4

¹ Persons of British ancestry includes British, English, Scottish, and Welsh.

² See ARIS Special Report *The Changing Profile of American Jews 1990-2008* available at: <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/AJIS2008.pdf>

Hispanic white population. Individuals of Irish descent make up 33% of Nones, which is a much larger percentage than the 12% who claim some Irish ancestry in the general population according to the 2008 *American Community Survey*. Likewise, individuals of British and Italian descent make up a disproportionate percentage of the None population. While not every possible ethnic or cultural ancestry was asked about in ARIS 2008, these findings do seem somewhat surprising. Interestingly the Irish and Jewish Nones had the most balanced gender ratios i.e., above average numbers of women. The Nones of Irish descent were not particularly unique in other ways, but many did report being raised Catholic, which may help explain their disproportionate representation among the Nones (see Figure 1.10).

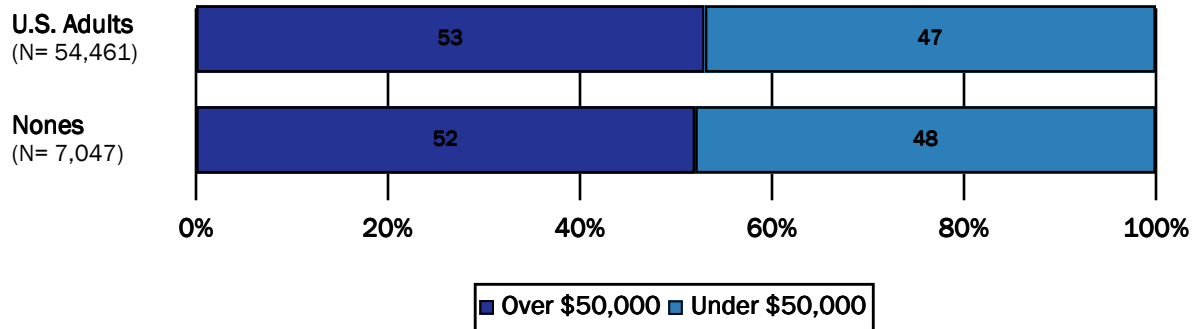
Figure 1.6

Educational Attainment of Nones and U.S. Adults Age 25 Years and Over 1990 and 2008

	Percent of Nones		Percent of U.S. Adults	
	1990 (N= 9,899)	2008 (N= 7,047)	1990 (N= 113,713)	2008 (N= 54,461)
Less than High School	19	17	23	15
High School Graduate	30	25	34	27
Some College	22	24	19	26
College Graduate	19	20	15	17
Post Graduate	10	11	7	9
Other/Refused	<1	3	2	6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Figure 1.7

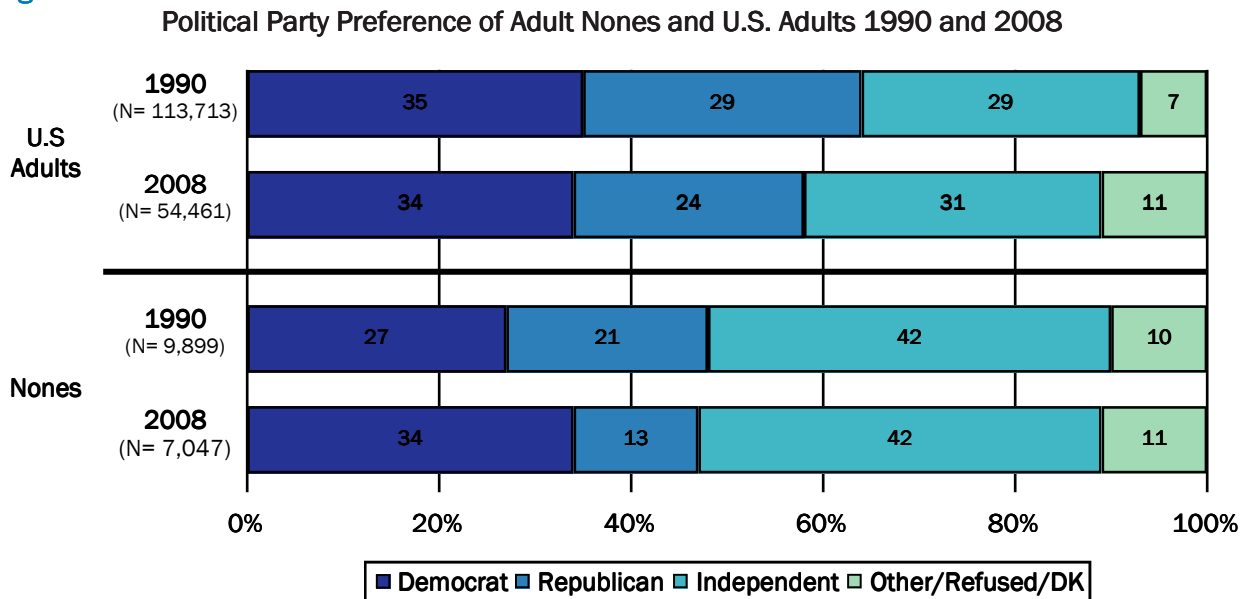
Household Income Distribution of Adult Nones and U.S. Adults 2008



Also reflective of the growing “normalization” of Nones are the relatively minor differences in socio-economic characteristics between them and the general population. Figure 1.6 compares Nones and the U.S. population on educational attainment and Figure 1.7 compares the two groups on household income. While there are slight variations in educational attainment, what is really notable is that the differences are virtually negligible. The greatest difference between the two groups in any particular category is 3 percentage points. Also included in Figure 1.6 are the respective numbers on this variable for the two groups in 1990. It was clear in 1990 that Nones were more educated than the general U.S. adult population. While that is still the case today for university graduation rates, the gap has narrowed.

There is also no significant difference in the median household incomes of the two groups in Figure

Figure 1.8



1.7. Controlling for age does not change these percentages (not shown). The lack of substantial differences between Nones and the U.S. population on these two characteristics supports the assertion that Nones in the U.S. have grown increasingly similar to the general U.S. population in the last two decades in terms of social class.

One area where Nones do differ from the general U.S. population is in their pattern of political party preference. A plurality (42%) of the Nones consider themselves independents; 34% Democrats; and 13% Republicans. In the general population, 29% consider themselves independents, 34% Democrats; and 24% Republicans. (See Figure 1.8.)

From 1990 to 2008, there was a shift among Nones away from Republicans to Democrats. In the general population, the shift away from Republicans was more toward independents than toward Democrats. Because the Nones grew substantially in absolute numbers during that time, we cannot say whether this was a widespread defection from the Republican Party or a growing affinity for the Democrats by new None voters.

B. ORIGINS

This report explores an area that the *ARIS 2008 Summary Report* did not address, namely the origins of the None population. By origins we are referring to their religious roots – the types of homes they were raised in and the religious identity of their parents. There are several questions in the ARIS 2008 that allow us to explore their origins .

Nones were asked: *When you were growing up did your parents... (a) identify with the same religion, (b) identify with different religions, (c) one identify with religion and the other not, or (d) neither identify with a religion.* This question makes it possible to determine what percentage of the individuals who identify as Nones today were raised in homes where they had a None parental role model, which would increase their odds of being a None.

Figure 1.9 shows that the majority (73%) emerged from religious homes, the vast majority of which were homogeneous. Only 18% were raised by parents of different religious identifications. Twenty-seven percent of Nones had a non-religious parental role model.

Figure 1.9

Family Background of Adult Nones 2008

	Percent (N= 1,106)
Neither Parent Identified with a Religion	17
One Parent Identified with a Religion, One did not	10
Both Parents Identified with Different Religions	18
Both Parents Identified with the Same Religion	55
Total	100%

A question asked of both the None sub-sample and a random sample of U.S. adults was the participant's religious identification at age 12. This information allows us to determine two things that are important to understanding the origins of the None population in the U.S. First, it tells us how many Nones were either raised that way or opted out of religion very early in their lives. Second, it tells us how many Nones opted out of religion after the age of 12, i.e., how many are switchers to non-religion. Just as many religious groups calculate retention rates for their adherents to determine how well they are retaining their membership, this combination of questions allows us to estimate retention rates for the Nones.

Figure 1.10 presents the seven religious groups that contribute the most people to the None population in the U.S. The numbers in the first column are the percentage of individuals who

Figure 1.10

Religious Background of Nones and U.S. Adults 2008

	Percentage of Nones (N= 1,106)	Percentage of U.S. Adults (N= 1,015)	Percentage of New Nones (N=804)
Identified as None at Age 12	32	9	N/A
Identified as Catholic at Age 12	24	26	35
Identified as “Christian” at Age 12	11	11	16
Identified as Baptist at Age 12	7	16	10
Identified as Methodist at Age 12	5	4	7
Identified as Lutheran at Age 12	3	5	5
Identified as “Protestant” at Age 12	3	5	5
Identified with All Other Religions at Age 12	15	24	22
Total	100%	100%	100%

currently identify as Nones who reported their religious identification at age 12 as each of those respective religions. The second column gives the corresponding percentages for the U.S. adult population. Thus, 32% of Nones were Nones by the age of 12, whereas only 9% of people in the U.S. generally were Nones at the age of 12. Of note, next to those who are raised as Nones, Catholics are the single largest contributor to the None population; 24% of the None population are former Catholics. This is, of course, not surprising given the fact that Catholics make up about one-fourth of the U.S. population. The third column which shows the proportion of “new Nones,” those who switched out of religion, shows that 35% are former Catholics. “Christians” and Methodists are also over-represented among switchers to No Religion but Baptists are under-represented.

Figure 1.10 lays the groundwork for determining retention rates, but does not provide all the necessary information. In a sense, there are two retention rates to be calculated here: (1) What percentage of those raised as Nones remain Nones? And (2) What percentage of those raised religious remain religious? The answers are somewhat surprising, but require explanation. Of those who reported being Nones at 12 years of age, 59% were Nones at the time they participated in the ARIS 2008. That means 41% of “raised Nones” joined a religion after the age of 12. Interestingly 41% is the national average for switching for all religious groups. In contrast, among those reporting a religious identity at 12 years of age, 12% were Nones at the time of their participation in ARIS 2008. The religious retain 88% of those raised religious. This would seem to favor the religious. But we also know that the Nones are growing at the expense of the religious. This is due to the relative sizes of these populations in absolute numbers.

Mathematically, Nones can lose a larger percentage than the religious and still grow as a percentage of the population because they are starting as a smaller percentage of the population. Another way to look at this is to present religious switching as a percentage of the total population. Since they were 12 years of age, 4% of Americans switched from None to religious but 11% of Americans switched from religious to None, a 7% imbalance favoring Nones. So long as the religious remain a numerical majority, Nones can continue to lose a greater percentage to religion than the religious lose to non-religion and yet still grow as a proportion of the population.

These findings suggest something very important about the Nones: While there are many inter-generational Nones (people raised as Nones), the majority of Nones, 66%, are first-generation or “(de) converts” to non-religion. Only 32% are second generation or longer. Since the Nones continue to lose a considerable percentage of their population the result is that there is considerable “churn” among the Nones – people drop out of religions and return quite frequently.

There are a couple of additional findings worth noting here. Looking at retention by gender, Nones are more likely to retain men than women: 66% of men who reported no religion at age 12 were Nones at the time of their participation in ARIS 2008, but only 47% of females who reported no religion at age 12 remained Nones. Of those who reported having a religion at age 12, 15% of men left while only 9% of women did. It appears that American women have a greater affinity for religion than men. And conversely men have greater affinity for secularity than women.

A generational cohort analysis explains much of the recent growth in the number of Nones among young adults. Generation X and Generation Y are the motor for this population increase but in different ways. Generation X (born 1960-78) had a very high retention rate of Born Nones (71%) while Generation Y (born 1979-90) has an above average rate of switching to None from a religious identity at 12 years of age (16%).

C. GEOGRAPHY

Figure 1.11 presents information on the geographic distribution of Nones compared to the general population in the U.S. in 1990 and 2008. The table is divided into the four regions defined by the Census – Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. The notable consistent differences are in the South and West. A comparison over time shows that the distribution of Nones is now less western and more normalized than in 1990. Yet differences remain. While 36% of the U.S. population was in the Southern states in 2008, only 29% of Nones were located in those states. The West has 30% of Nones but only 23% of the overall U.S. population.

Figure 1.11

Percentage Distribution of Nones and U.S. Adults by Census Region and Division 1990 and 2008

GEOGRAPHY	Percentage of Nones		Percentage of U.S. Adults	
	1990 (N= 9,899)	2008 (N= 7,047)	1990 (N= 113,713)	2008 (n= 54,461)
Northeast Region	17	20	21	19
New England Division	5	7	5	5
Middle Atlantic Division	12	13	16	14
Midwest Region	22	21	24	22
East North Central Division	17	16	17	15
West North Central Division	5	6	7	7
South Region	26	29	35	36
South Atlantic Division	15	16	18	19
East South Central Division	4	4	7	6
West South Central Division	7	8	10	11
West Region	35	30	20	23
Mountain	8	9	5	7
Pacific	27	21	15	16
U.S. Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The indents of Figure 1.11 provide a finer mesh showing how Nones and the adult population of the U.S. fit into the nine Census divisions. Nones are particularly under-represented in the East South Central and West South Central divisions and over-represented in the Pacific division.

Figure 1.12

Geographic Distribution of the None Population by Census Division 2008 (N= 7,047)

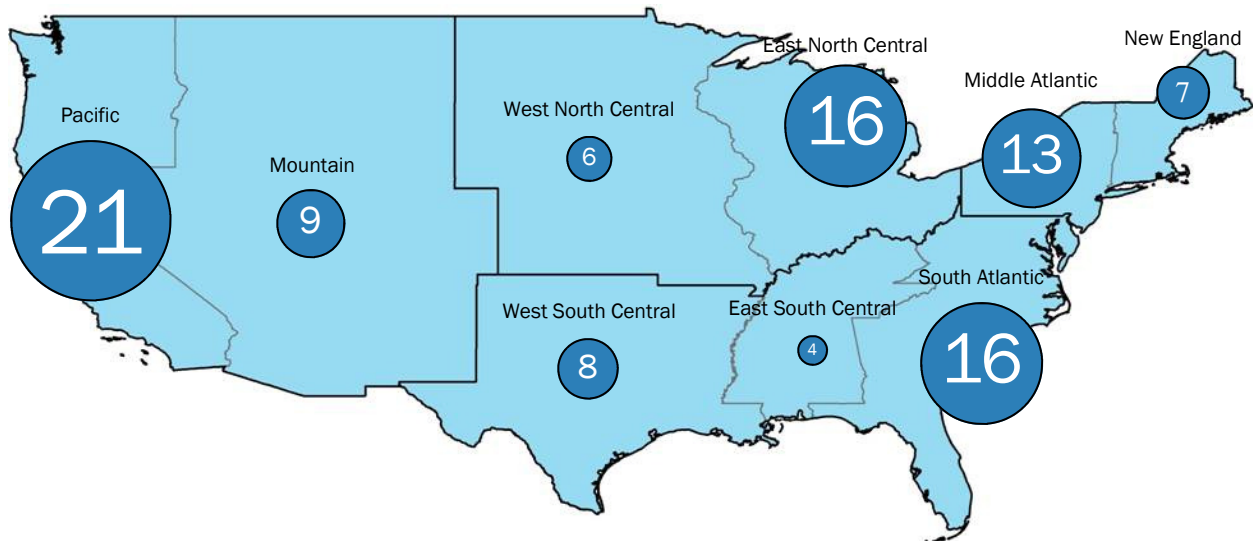


Figure 1.12 maps the actual location of the Nones by Census Division. As expected this shows that 1 in 5 of the Nones are to be found in the Pacific states but it also reveals that there are very large populations of Nones in the East North Central and South Atlantic divisions which each account for 1 out of 6 of American Nones.

The rate at which people from different regions join the None segment of the population is not uniform, but Nones are growing in every geographic region in the U.S, unlike most religious groups. As a result Nones are increasingly similar to the general population in residential location and substantial pockets of Nones now can be found everywhere in the U.S.

D. BELIEF, BELONGING AND BEHAVIOR

Figure 1.13 reports responses to a question about belief in God for the None population and the general U.S. population. Not surprisingly, Nones are substantially less likely to believe in a personal God; only 27% of Nones believe in a personal God compared to 70% of adults generally. Of interest, however, is the relatively small proportion of Nones who are atheists – just 7%. The largest single group among the Nones is theists, but hard and soft agnostics, if combined, account for 35% of the Nones, as compared with 10% of the U.S. population. The proportion of people believing in a higher power but not a personal God who can be classified as deists in both populations is notable.

Figure 1.13

Regarding the existence of God, do you think...?

Response	Category	Percentage Nones (N= 1,106)	Percentage US Adults (N= 1,015)
There is no such thing	Atheist	7	2
There is no way to know	Hard Agnostic	19	4
I'm not sure	Soft Agnostic	16	6
There is a higher power but no personal God	Deist	24	12
There is definitely a personal God	Theist	27	70
Don't Know/Refused	N/A	7	6
TOTAL		100%	100%

Figures 1.14 and 1.15 compare the None population to the general U.S. population on two belief/attitude items: Belief in horoscopes and acceptance of evolution. Neither Nones nor most American adults put much credence in horoscopes – about 17% of both populations say either “maybe” or “yes” when asked if horoscopes can predict the future. That there is no difference between these two groups runs contrary to the claims of some that the Nones are particularly receptive to New Age and Spiritualist beliefs. An area where Nones do differ substantially from the general population of the U.S. is in their acceptance of human evolution. Whereas only 17% of the general population of the U.S. definitely accepts human evolution, 33% of Nones do. The proportions that reject it outright are inverted, with 36% of the general U.S. population saying that humans definitely did not evolve but only 17% of Nones. We interpret this finding as suggesting that Nones do not put much credence in creationist teachings and prefer to arrive at their beliefs independent of religions.

Figure 1.16 depicts the results of three separate questions that relate to rituals at three points in the life-cycle of people. They show that for Nones there is a decline in participation in religious rituals between birth and death but for the general population there is little change in the rate of participation (around 70%) over the lifespan. The left-hand column of the figure labeled “Initiation” depicts the results of the question: *Did you have a religious initiation ceremony, such as a baptism, Christening,*

Figure 1.14

Do you think that a horoscope can predict your future?

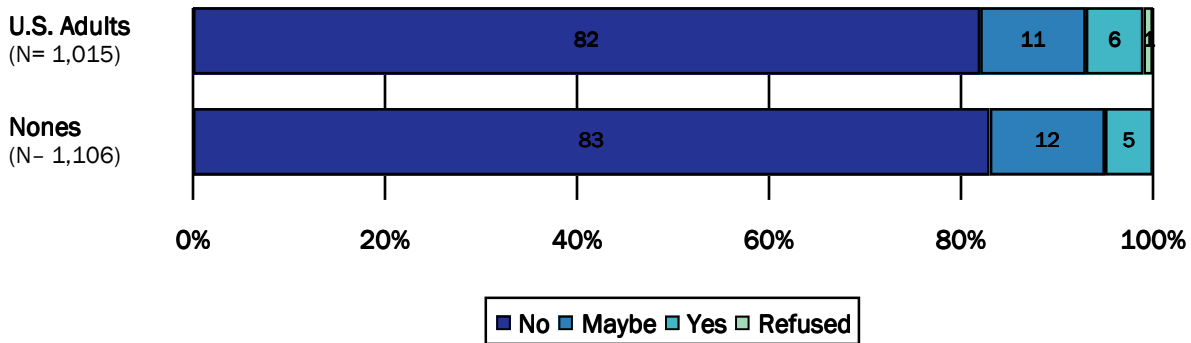
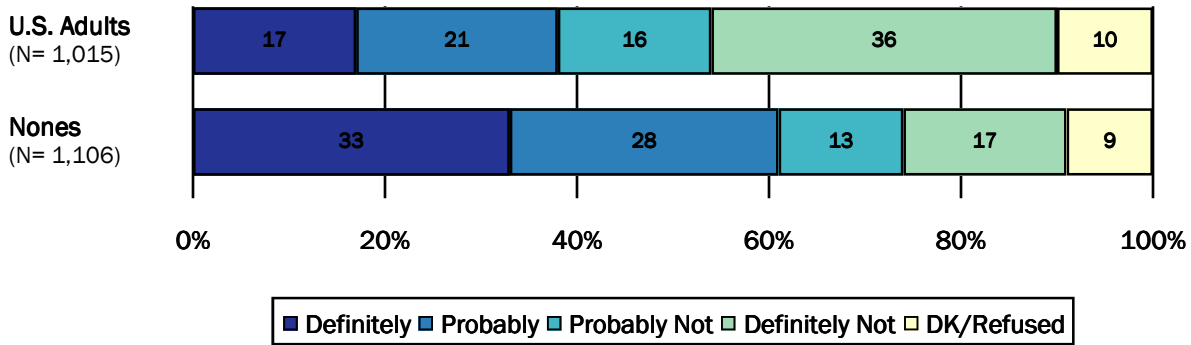


Figure 1.15

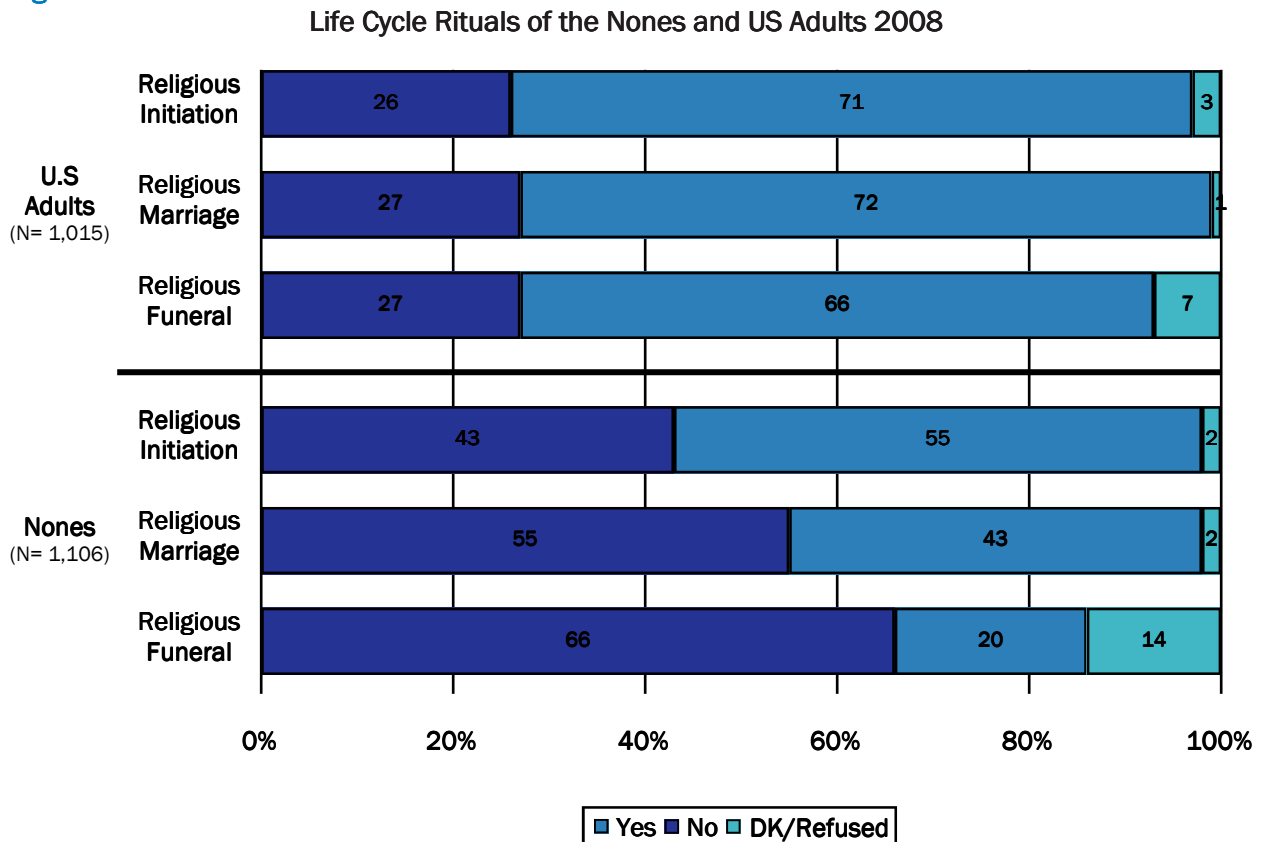
Do you think that human beings, as we know them, developed from earlier species of animals?



circumcision, confirmation, bar mitzvah or naming ceremony? Among Nones, 55% did have some sort of initiation ceremony, supporting the finding above that most of the Nones are first-generation converts to no religion. In comparison, 71% of the general U.S. population reported an initiation ceremony. Since almost 80% of Americans claim a religious identification, we can assume that millions of religious identifiers in the U.S were not initiated in any formal way into the religious group with which they identify.

This assertion is supported by the evidence found in the middle and right-hand columns of Figure 1.16. Not surprisingly, 55% of Nones answered “No” to the question: *Were you married in a religious ceremony?* However, 27% of the general population also said “No,” suggesting that a large number of people, although a minority of the religious population were not married in a religious ceremony. The third portion of Figure 1.16, labeled “Funeral,” also illustrates this finding. The question participants were asked was: *When you die, do you expect to have a religious funeral or service?*

Figure 1.16



Overwhelmingly, 66% of Nones answered “No”; 27% of the general U.S. population also said “No.”

Digging a little deeper into the second question about a religious marriage ceremony provides some additional insight into the Nones. When responses to this question are compared by sex, it turns out that women are less likely to have been married in a religious ceremony than are men, 46% vs. 51%.

While the difference is not particularly large, it is somewhat surprising considering women are generally more religious than men. What this likely reflects is the partner’s religiosity: Women who are Nones are more likely to be married to Nones than are men who are Nones. Males who are not religious likely concede decision-making regarding the wedding to their wives, who are more likely to be religious. It may also be the case that female Nones are just as likely to be married to someone who is religious and simply dictate a secular wedding, but the ratio of men to women among Nones (3 to 2) suggests that this is unlikely.

Figure 1.17 contrasts six different groups: all Nones; four sub-groups of Nones – male Nones, female Nones, Nones under age 30, and Nones with college degrees (over age 25); and the general

Figure 1.17

Belonging, Belief, and Behavior by Sub-groups of Nones and U.S. Adults

	All Nones	Male Nones	Female Nones	Nones Under Age 30	Nones with College Degree	U.S. Adults
Belonging	(N= 7,047)					(N= 54,461)
Atheist	5	6	3	6	5	1
Agnostic	6	7	5	9	6	1
Other	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
No Religion	89	87	92	85	89	13
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	15%
Belief	(N= 1,106)					(N= 1,015)
Atheist	7	8	6	5	11	2
Hard Agnostic	19	21	17	24	26	4
Soft Agnostic	16	19	13	17	18	6
Deist	24	25	22	23	25	12
Theist	27	21	36	25	15	70
Don't Know/ Refused	7	6	6	6	5	6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Behavior	(N= 1,106)					(N= 1,015)
Percent Had Initiation Ceremony	55%	55%	55%	53%	62%	71%
Percent Had Religious Wedding	43%	47%	39%	36%	44%	72%
Percent Expect Religious Funeral	20%	20%	21%	28%	14%	66%

U.S. adult population. The top portion of the table compares the six groups on their reported religious identity when asked, *What is your religion, if any?* The middle portion reports beliefs toward God. The bottom portion reports the percent that had or plan to have each of the three religious rituals discussed previously – initiation, marriage, and funeral.

As regards belonging, several differences are noteworthy. First, women Nones are less likely to identify as “atheist” or “agnostic” than are males. Younger Nones are more likely to identify as “agnostic” than are all Nones. And Nones, in general, are substantially more likely to self-identify

as atheist or agnostic than are adults in the U.S. population generally.

As far as belief goes, again, female Nones exhibit more traditional religiosity with 36% reporting a belief in a personal God (theist) as compared to 21% of male Nones. Also striking is the effect of having a college degree; only 15% of Nones with a college degree are theists while 11% are atheists.

Finally, in terms of behavior, two things stand out. Nones under the age of 30 are more likely to expect a religious funeral, which could be because for them death is a remote possibility and less of a “real issue.” In contrast, only 14% of Nones over 25 with a college degree expect a religious funeral. This figure suggests that Nones over 25 with a college degree are the most secular Nones.

Part II

The Nones Amongst US

This section of the report illustrates how the None population fits into and impacts American society.

Figure 2.1 provides a slightly different perspective on the None population by presenting their share (in percentage) among various elements of the U.S. population at two points in time, 1990 and 2008. Thus, in 2008, 19% of adult males in the U.S. are Nones, compared with 12% of adult females. Of interest is the very large proportion of young people who are Nones: 22%, which is double their share in 1990. If the Generation Y cohort remains non-religious as it ages, the percentage of the U.S. population made up of Nones will continue to rise. As we pointed out earlier the educational and income profiles —while never very different— have normalized.

One item of note in Figure 2.1 is the large percentage of Asians who are Nones, 29%. This is a larger share than for any other racial/ethnic group. Part of the explanation is the demographics of Asians in the U.S., who are disproportionately male, well-educated and residents of the West. But it may also be due to other factors, like the low levels of religiosity in many Asian countries, like Japan and China.

Figure 2.1 also shows how Nones are becoming more similar to the general population. The last part of the table reiterates one exception to this normalizing trend, our findings regarding political party preference. While the percentage of Democrats who are Nones is similar to their percentage among the general U.S. population, Nones are overrepresented among independents and underrepresented among Republicans. Today Nones make up less than one-sixteenth of Republicans, and a similar percentage as in 1990. By way of contrast Nones have grown to over one in five of independents in 2008.

Figure 2.3 ranks the states by the percentage of the population that is made up of Nones. Of interest here (though not shown) is the change that has taken place since the ARIS 2001. In ARIS 2001, the states with the highest percentage of Nones were the Pacific Northwestern states (i.e., Oregon, Washington, and Idaho). While most of these states are still among the top 10, several states in New England are now at the top with more non-religious segments – including Vermont (34% Nones) and New Hampshire (29%). There are now three geographic divisions in the U.S. which are particularly non-religious: the Pacific Northwest, New England, and the Mountain States (as illustrated in Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1

Nones as a Percentage of Socio-demographic Categories in the U.S. Adult Population, 1990 and 2008

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	1990 (N= 113,713)	2008 (N= 54,461)
Nones	U.S. TOTAL	8	15
Gender	Male	11	19
	Female	6	12
Age	18-29 Years	11	22
	30-49 Years	9	17
	50-69 Years	5	13
	70 Years and Older	5	7
Marital Status	Single, Never Married	12	22
	Married	7	14
	Divorced/Separated	19	15
	Widowed	4	7
Race & Ethnicity	White (Not Hispanic)	8	17
	Black (Not Hispanic)	6	11
	Hispanic	6	13
	Asian	N/A	29
	Other	16	19
Education¹	Less than High School	7	15
	High School Graduate	7	13
	Some College	9	13
	Graduated College	10	16
	Graduate School or more	11	17
	Technical School/Other	6	10
	Refused	4	9
Income²	Under Median Household Income	8	15
	Over Median Household Income	9	16
Political Party Preference	Democrat	6	16
	Republican	6	8
	Independent	12	21

1 Adults 25 years of age and older.

2 Median household income \$30,000 (1990) and \$50,000 (2008).

Figure 2.2

Nones as a Percentage of the Population by U.S. Census Division 2008

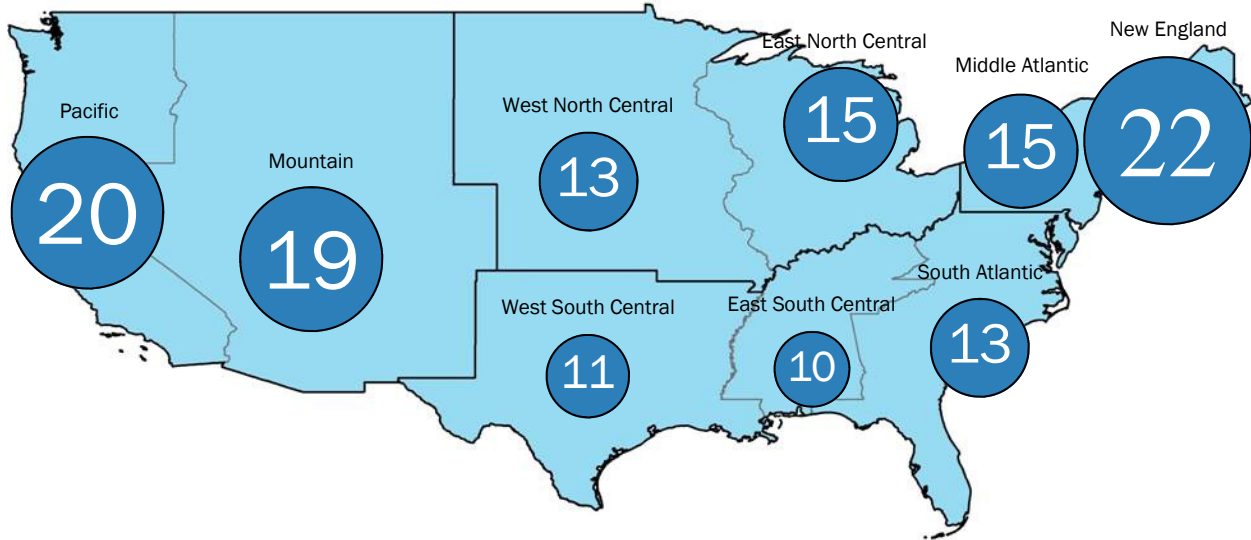


Figure 2 .3

State Rankings by Percentage None (N=54,461) 2008

Rank	Percent Nones	State(s)
1	34	Vermont
2	29	New Hampshire
3	28	Wyoming
4 (Tied)	25	Maine, Washington
6 (Tied)	24	Nevada, Oregon
8 (Tied)	23	Delaware, Idaho
10	22	Massachusetts
11 (Tied)	21	Colorado, Montana
13	19	Rhode Island
14 (Tied)	18	California, District of Columbia
16 (Tied)	17	Arizona, Nebraska, Ohio
19 (Tied)	16	Michigan, New Mexico
21 (Tied)	15	Indiana, Iowa, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin
28 (Tied)	14	Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, New York, Utah
33 (Tied)	13	Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland
36 (Tied)	12	Minnesota, South Dakota, Texas
39 (Tied)	11	Alabama, Kansas, Oklahoma
42 (Tied)	10	North Carolina, South Carolina
44 (Tied)	9	Georgia, Tennessee
46 (Tied)	8	Arkansas, Louisiana
48	7	North Dakota
49	5	Mississippi

Part III

The Growth of the None Population in the United States, 1990-2008

Figure 3.1 presents data on the Nones relative to the entire U.S. adult population at three points in time, 1990, 2001, and 2008, reflecting the three waves of the ARIS. Several points are worth noting: First, while the percentage of the population made up by Nones has not quite doubled since 1990, the total number of adults who are Nones grew by over 20 million people, jumping from 14.3 million to 34.2 million.

Figure 3.1

The Growth of the Adult None Population 1990-2008

	1990	2001	2008
Total Number of Nones	14,331,000	29,481,000	34,169,000
Total U.S. Adult Population	175,440,000	207,983,000	228,182,000
Increase in Total Number of Nones	N/A	15,150,000	4,688,000
Increase in Total U.S. Adult Population	N/A	32,543,000	20,199,000
Nones as a Percentage of U.S. Adult Population	8.1	14.1	15
Growth of None Population	N/A	106%	16%
Growth of U.S. Adult Population	N/A	18.5%	9.7%
Nones' Share of the Growth of U.S. Adult Population	N/A	46.6%	23.2%

All the indicators show that the major growth in the None population occurred during the 1990s, with annual growth averaging nearly 1.3 million people. Nones doubled their numbers and contributed almost 47% of the total national population growth in that decade. The growth rate has slowed at the beginning of the 21st Century. At their current rate of increase in the 2000s, Nones are adding to their ranks about 660,000 adults each year. The rate of growth of the Nones still exceeds the national rate of population growth but they now comprise a reduced percentage of the rate of the nation's population growth at 23%. The causes of the remarkable secular boom of the 1990s and its leveling off in the 2000s obviously requires further examination and suggests the need for continued tracking of the None population over time.

Conclusion

As it has grown larger, the no religion or None population is no longer a fringe group and the “None” choice in terms of (ir)religious identification is now attracting wide swaths of Middle America. As a result Nones are coming to resemble the U.S. general population in terms of their marital status, educational attainment, racial/ethnic makeup, and income. Yet compared to the general U.S. population they are still disproportionately male, younger, and more likely to be Westerners and political independents.

This report reveals features of the Nones that were not widely recognized before. There is a variety of belief in God among the Nones, ranging from theism to atheism, though the largest proportion (59%) is agnostic or deist. Nones are not particularly superstitious or partial to New Age beliefs. Nones are more accepting of human evolution than the general U.S. population. Nones do not seem interested in religious rites of passage, like baptisms, religious marriage, or religious funerals. There is a shift in the geographic pattern among the Nones with New England now challenging the Northwest as the most secularized region in the U.S. Finally, this report notes the considerable amount of churn among the Nones. Two-thirds are first-generation Nones, while many born-Nones are now religious.

American Nones embrace philosophical and theological beliefs that reflect skepticism rather than overt antagonism toward religion. In their commitment to reason and science they also continue the tradition of the late 18th Century American Enlightenment. Such views and opinions echo those held by many of the founding fathers and leaders of the American Revolution such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Paine.

The most important and statistically significant finding is that American women are more religious and less secular than men in their belonging, belief and behavior. Whereas 19% of American men are Nones, only 12% of women are Nones. This is the biggest differentiator of the religious and non-religious populations and is the one social factor that has not narrowed since 1990. Women are not only less likely to switch out of religion than men but are also less likely to remain non-religious when they are born into a non-religious family. Moreover, even when they self-identify as Nones, women are less likely to be atheists and to take hard skeptical positions than men. These gender differences are functioning as a brake on the growth of the Nones and the secularization process in the U.S. Whether the gender differential is due to nurture or nature needs to be investigated further.

Today there is not a single demographic group of people in the U.S. that does not include Nones. Nones exist among the married, widowed, divorced, and never married. Nones exist among

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Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Nones exist among the least educated and the most educated. Nones exist among the poor and the rich. Nones exist among every racial and ethnic group. Nones exist in every geographic region in the U.S., making up anywhere from 1 in 20 to 1 in 5 adults.

In many ways, Nones are the invisible minority in the U.S. today—invisible because their social characteristics are very similar to the majority. Intriguingly, what this suggests is that the transition from a largely religious population to a more secular population may be so subtle that it can occur under the radar as happened during the 1990s. In the future we can expect more American Nones given that 22% of the youngest cohort of adults self-identify as Nones and they will become tomorrow's parents. If current trends continue and cohorts of non-religious young people replace older religious people, the likely outcome is that in two decades the Nones could account for around one-quarter of the American population.

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Cover Image: Proportion of Nones by State 2008 (see Figure 2.3, page 19).