

One American in five may be secular by 2030, study shows

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The number of American adults who do not identify with a particular religion is growing and may comprise more than 20 percent of the population in two decades, according to a new study.

Conducted by researchers at Trinity College, the study, titled "[American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population](#)," showed that people who profess no religion, or "Nones," are similar to the general public in marital status, education, racial and ethnic makeup and income.

One in five Americans may put themselves in the "None" category by 2030, research showed.

"We are here. We are like everybody else. We are part of the community," said Jesse Galef, communications associate at the [Secular Coalition for America](#).

Galef hopes that this trend will dispel stereotypes that Nones have no morals because of their lack of religion and help them gain a political voice.

The study indicated a large percentage of Nones also decline to identify with a political party. More than 40 percent call themselves independents; 34 percent say they are Democrats; and 13 percent identify themselves as Republicans.

"If the Republican Party wants these votes back, they can't be dominated by the religious right," said Galef.

Barry Kosmin, head researcher for the study, said the spread of the Nones is a national and historical phenomenon. He cited examples from the

Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson's version of the Bible, in which he cut out reference to Jesus' divinity.

The most notable difference between Nones and the religious population is the gender gap. Only 12 percent of American women are Nones, while 19 percent of American men claim no religion.

According to the study, women who grew up in nonreligious homes are less likely to stay nonreligious. Women are also less likely to switch out of religion.

"Why, now, I have no clue," said Kosmin. The study "raises as many questions as answers."

Most Nones would not consider themselves atheists. More than 50 percent believe in either a higher being or a personal God, while only 7 percent are self-proclaimed atheists. One in three say they "definitely" believe that humans developed from earlier species of animals.

In the conclusion of the Trinity study, researchers say Nones are the "invisible minority" in the U.S. "because their social characteristics are very similar to the majority." The shift to secularism in the 1990s largely happened "under the radar," the researchers said.