

Atheists and agnostics, stand up and be counted in the 2011 Census!

Why is the 2011 Census special?

- Every 10 years, Statistics Canada includes a section on the Census that asks about religious belief.

What does the religion question on the census currently look like?

<p>22. What is this person's religion?</p> <p>Indicate a specific denomination or religion even if this person is not currently a practising member of that group.</p> <p>For example, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc.</p> <p>Specify one denomination or religion only _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No religion</p>
--

What is the issue?

- The wording of this question is biased towards artificially inflating the number of religious Canadians. It prompts “non-practising” members to write down the religion of their parents or community, even if they themselves no longer believe. Basically, it measures religion as something that is “affiliation-based” rather than “belief-based”.
- The “no religion” check-box is too vague. In addition to atheists and agnostics, it also includes people who believe in God but who reject organized religion.

What is a better question that yields more useful data?

<p>22. What is this person's religion / worldview?</p> <p>For example, atheist, agnostic, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc.</p> <p>Specify one religion or worldview only _____</p>
--

Why is this important?

- Politicians will not take atheist and agnostic Canadians seriously until they know how many of them exist.
- This has a huge influence on many important elements of public policy, including:
 - public funding of religious schools;
 - religious accommodation (the exemption of religious believers from generally applicable laws and policies);
 - the granting of charity status to organizations whose only purpose is to promote religion;
 - prayers in legislatures and city council meetings;

- references to God in the Canadian national anthem and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and
- the continued existence of the offence of “blasphemous libel” in the criminal code of Canada
- We need an accurate account of how many Canadians are non-theists. A recent poll, conducted by Harris-Decima in May 2008, found that 23% of Canadians say that they do not believe in any god. For Canadians under age 25, the figure was 36%. The 2011 Census should clearly reflect this.
- If this question remains in its current flawed form, it will be another 10 years before we have a chance to improve it.

What can I do?

- Contact Statistics Canada and voice your concern. Ask to be counted as an atheist or agnostic on the 2011 Census.

Census consultation on the web:

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/consultation/index-eng.cfm>

Contact the Census consultation team:

E-mail:

censusconsultation@statcan.gc.ca

Mailing address:

Census Consultation Team
Census Marketing
Statistics Canada
4th Floor, Jean Talon Building
170 Tunney's Pasture Driveway
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0T6

Fax:

613-951-4210 (Attention: Census Marketing)

For more information, contact Kevin Smith, Board of Directors, Centre for Inquiry Canada, (416) 312-7719 or info@cficanada.ca