

NCF

NONRELIGION IN A COMPLEX FUTURE

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2024
to
MARCH 2025





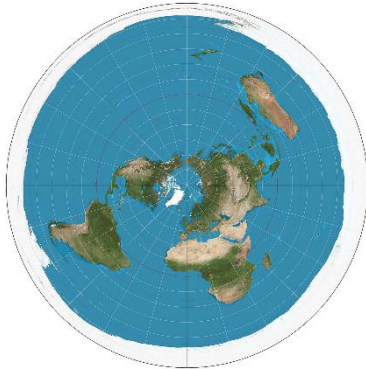
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THE PROJECT

The Nonreligion in a Complex Future (NCF) project was launched in April 2019, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Our final funded year is 2025-2026, but our research and knowledge mobilization activities will continue until April 2027. Our goal is to identify the social impact of the rapid and dramatic increase of nonreligion.

To achieve this goal, the NCF project has:

- Five focal areas: Health, Law, Education, Environment, Migration.
- Seven research sites: Canada, Australia, the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland), the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Argentina.
- Five research objectives:



1. Develop new research tools to measure and describe nonreligion;
2. Analyze the social impact of nonreligion;
3. Expand the conceptualization and theorizing of diversity to include nonreligion;
4. Map conflicts and collaborations between religious and nonreligious social actors;
5. Advance new knowledge for living well together that can be used to inform public policy and practice.

More information is available on the project website: <https://nonreligionproject.ca>



REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

NCF Book Series

We are excited to announce that we will be publishing a new open access book series, “Nonreligion in a Complex Future,” with De Gruyter. The series will feature the results from our research exploring the social impact of the increase of nonreligion. The first books in the series, *Unearthing Lifestances: What Community Gardens Tell Us About Nonreligion* (edited by Lori Beaman, Ryan Cragun, and Douglas Ezzy) and *Producing Nonreligion: Emerging Imaginaries in the Debates over Same-Sex Marriage* (edited by Juan Marco Vaggione, Paula Montero, and Lori Beaman), are slated for publication in 2025, with at least six more books planned for the next three years.

Contributing to the Public Conversation

Team members continue to mobilize research results to a variety of audiences. The [Lifestances Podcast](#), hosted by Lori Beaman and produced by Nathan Alexander, published new episodes this year about changing attitudes toward death, and about hiking and experiences with nature. Other outlets featuring NCF team members include the [Humanist Canada podcast](#), [Broadview Magazine](#), [Forskning.no](#), the [Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network Blog](#), [Religion News Service](#), and the [Winnipeg Free Press](#).

Conferences and Workshops

The NCF had a major presence at conferences this year, including the Nonreligious Beliefs and Practices in Türkiye (NBPT) Conference and annual meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. The project also hosted workshops at the University of Victoria, the University of Montreal, and the University of Oslo.

A Vibrant Community of Students and Emerging Scholars

This year, 8 new [students](#) and 1 new [postdoctoral fellow](#) joined our research team, with a total of 92 students and 13 postdocs affiliated with the project since 2019. The NCF project provides emerging scholars with opportunities to be involved in research and to participate in seminars and workshops led by prominent scholars.

Collaborating with Partners

Partners continue to be critical to the success of the NCF. Partners contribute to a variety of areas, including data analysis, manuscript review, conference presentations, student mentoring, and organizing workshops.

Read on for more details about this year’s activities



RESEARCH

The NCF has eleven projects underway. All of our project working groups continued to move forward in their research this year, with many projects preparing books, journal articles, and other public engagement initiatives to mobilize their findings. Below are updates for all our ongoing projects (stay up to date on our projects [here](#)):



Community Gardens

Led by: Douglas Ezzy, Ryan Cragun, and Lori Beaman

Project Stage: Publication

Focal Area: Environment

Community gardens offer a window into how humans relate to the natural world and to each other. They are places where people build relationships, form communities, pursue social and environmental justice, perform rituals, experience wonder and awe, and engage with the human and other-than-human world. This project uses gardening as a way to learn more about individuals' lifestances and the positive content of nonreligion.

The research comprises 125 interviews and 1 focus group at 48 community gardens in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An edited volume, *Unearthing Lifestances: What Community Gardens Tell Us About Nonreligion* (edited by Lori Beaman, Ryan Cragun, and Douglas Ezzy), is currently in the peer review process, with plans for the book to be published later this year.

Trekking Toward Awe: Nonreligion and Hiking

Led by: Ryan Cragun, Douglas Ezzy, and Lori Beaman

Project Stage: Data Analysis and Writing

Focal Area: Environment



Hiking, walking, or trekking are some of the most common ways people experience nature. This project uses these activities as a way to understand how people interact with their environment, with other people, and with non-human animals. What kinds of experiences do people have when they are hiking or walking in nature? And how do these experiences reflect and potentially change their lifestances?

The Trekking team has completed 116 interviews in Argentina (13), Australia (21), Brazil (11), Canada (20), Norway (21), the United Kingdom (17), and the United States



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(13), as well as a survey of 7,000 respondents from these countries. Through interview and survey data, we see the emergence of a new understanding of human relationships with nature that frames them not as based in dominance or even stewardship, but rather in respect and equality. A co-authored book is now underway.



The Cultural and Social Values Survey

Led by: Peter Beyer, Ryan Cragun, and Inger Furseth

Project Stage: Data Analysis and Writing

Project Focal Area: Migration

Much research on nonreligious people focuses on what they don't do and what they don't believe. But what do they do? What do they believe? This is what the Cultural and Social Values Survey was designed to find out. It asks about people's personal, cultural, and social values, including attitudes and behaviours on ethical questions, and orientations towards politics, science, law, education, and life's meaning. The survey also examines people's involvement with religion, spirituality, and their identification with nonreligious labels such as atheism, agnosticism, or humanism.

The survey team is analyzing over 8,000 responses from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Early findings have been shared at conferences including meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. An article about afterlife beliefs by Dana Gaudette, Ryan T. Cragun, and Sivert Skålvoll Urstad is forthcoming in the *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*. Several more journal articles from the research are currently under review.

Framing Migrants' Religious Identities

Led by: Inger Furseth and Peter Beyer

Project Stage: Data Collection

Project Focal Area: Migration



There are currently over 100 million refugees globally, fleeing persecution, violence, and conflict. But what happens when refugees arrive in their host countries? This project seeks to answer that question by exploring how the religious and nonreligious identities of refugees are framed in public policies and debates, and how nonreligious refugees navigate their identities.

The Migration team is focusing on refugee receiving organizations in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Nordic countries, and the United States, investigating



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how religion can shape and even obscure nonreligion and nonreligious identities in these contexts. The team is also conducting reviews of government policy documents and media analyses about the reception of refugees. The team is currently in the process of data analysis and the initial phase of preparing chapters for an edited volume.



Legal Constructions of Religion and Nonreligion

Led by: Paula Montero, Juan Marco Vaggione, and Lori Beaman

Project Stage: Publication; Data analysis

Project Focal Area: Law

Same-Sex Marriage: This project explores how religion and nonreligion appear in the debates over the legalization of same-sex marriage in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The final manuscript of the edited book, *Producing Nonreligion: Emerging Imaginaries in the Debates over Same-Sex Marriage* (edited by Juan Marco Vaggione, Paula Montero, and Lori Beaman), has been submitted and is now in the peer review process, with publication planned for later in 2025.

Reproductive Rights: Since the *Roe v. Wade* decision was overturned in 2022 in the United States, reproductive rights have once more moved into the global spotlight. This project considers how these debates over reproductive rights intersect with religion and nonreligion.

Significant legal cases and parliamentary debates concerning reproductive rights have been selected for Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United States. These materials have been coded, and an analysis of emerging themes is now underway.

Death and Dying: Changing Policies, Practices, and Laws

Led by: Lori Beaman, Chris Miller, Douglas Ezzy, and Ryan Cragun

Project Stage: Data Collection and Analysis; Project Design

Project Focal Area: Health



Obituaries: How have obituaries changed over time and by regional context? How does the information that people share – locations of funerals, notable



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accomplishments, affiliations, and connections – reflect changing religious and nonreligious identities and outlooks?

The Obituary team has analyzed 3,300 death notices from Canadian newspapers from 1900 to the present. Coding obituaries in the sample from Canada has been completed, and data analysis is currently underway, with early findings in articles in [OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying](#) and [Mortality](#). Data collection and coding has been completed in several other countries as well, with researchers currently analyzing a sample of 1,536 obituaries from Argentina, 1,152 obituaries from Australia, and 1,173 obituaries from Norway. Data collection and coding is actively progressing on similar research in Brazil and the United States.

Death Cafés: Since 2011, more than 15,000 Death Cafés have been hosted in over 80 countries. These “pop-up” events aim to “increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.” Although death has traditionally been processed and understood in relation to religious communities or identities, Death Cafés are a nonreligious and non-institutional alternative community to which people turn to understand and cope with death. Through these events, this project explores the attitudes, practices, and concerns around death and dying of both religious and nonreligious participants.

The research team has completed 9 focus groups with 48 participants, and 31 interviews with Death Café participants in Canada, 7 focus groups with 36 participants and 30 interviews in the United States, and 5 focus groups and 16 interviews in the United Kingdom. Data collection (interviews and focus groups) as well as coding and analysis have been completed in these three countries, with early findings published in an article in [Religions](#). Data collection is actively progressing in other countries, including 2 focus groups in Australia, 2 focus groups and 16 interviews in Argentina, 1 focus group in Brazil, and 1 focus group and 3 interviews in Norway.

End of Life Care: In historically Christian majority countries, end of life care has been strongly shaped by Christianity. This influence emphasizes particular notions, such as people “going to a better place” when they die or treating a patient’s “spiritual needs.” To explore changes in end of life care, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach including interviews with hospice workers and death doulas, a questionnaire among people who have recently lost someone close to them, and a meta-narrative review of literature in palliative care academic journals.



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Team members are currently conducting interviews with hospice workers and death doulas in Canada, the US, the UK, Argentina, and Brazil. Once interviews have been completed and transcribed, the team will develop a coding scheme and perform qualitative thematic analysis. Ethics approval has been obtained for a survey of bereaved persons and the survey is now being distributed in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, Argentina, and Brazil, with plans to modify the survey for Norway. A scoping review of palliative care literature is also underway.

Green Burials: Green burials, or natural burials, are methods of bodily disposal which have a lower environmental impact than traditional burial or cremation. No permanent markers are used to mark the site and the deceased is not embalmed, but rather buried in either a biodegradable casket or wrapped in a cloth shroud. This project explores green burial practice and the motivations of people who choose this option. While dominant themes include people's desire to minimize their ecological impact, trying to connect with nature, and reacting against the "death industry," this project also explores how this alternative means of interment reflects broader changes in how people understand death, the afterlife, and their relationships to the natural world.

This project has adopted a mixed methods study in Canada to explore the green burial services which are currently available, why people are drawn to these practices, and how supporters of green burial reflect the social impacts of religious transformation. Research has involved text analysis of news articles on the topic as well as the websites of green burial advocacy organizations. Researchers have also conducted site visits to over 10 cemeteries across Canada and over 60 semi-structured interviews with various people in the green burial movement, from cemetery staff and people who work in the broader death industry to local activists and people who are simply interested in having a green burial for themselves. Analysis is currently underway.

How Do We Teach Religion in Diverse Societies?



Led by: Linda Woodhead, Solange Lefebvre, and Paula Montero

Project Stage: Data Collection and Analysis

Project Focal Area: Education

How do schools, teachers, and religious education curricula imagine the "good citizen" and "common ground" through shared values? Is nonreligion taken into account in education about religion? What is considered acceptable as nonreligion or religion/spirituality? And how do religion, nonreligion, and values intersect in these contexts? This project examines how education about religion is changing within



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highly diverse countries that have a growing nonreligious population, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Argentina, and Brazil.

The Education team is analyzing school websites in Canada and Britain, interviewing teachers and religious education professionals, conducting a case study of teacher training curricula in Brazil, and comparing court decisions in Argentina and Brazil about the presence of religious education in public schools. The team has presented its findings at the Association for the Sociology of Religion annual meeting and the Joint Conference of the International Sociological Association (RC22) and Association of the Social Sciences of Religion in Latin America, as well as in a special issue, "[Religião e escola: Democracias pluralistas, diversidade religiosa e educação pública](#)" ["Religion and school: Pluralistic democracies, religious diversity and public education"], in the journal *Revista USP*. The team also has a forthcoming article in the *British Journal of the Sociology of Education*.



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EVENTS

Conferences

With research on many projects now entering the final stage, team members have been presenting their results at conferences. The team had a major presence at the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) meetings in Montreal in August 2024. Seven panels were devoted to research from the NCF projects on the environment, death and dying, law, education, and the cultural and social values survey.



Douglas Ezzy, Kati Tervo-Niemelä, and Chris Miller present at the ASR

Association for the Sociology of Religion Panels	
Beliefs and Lifestances of the Nonreligious	Lauren Strumos and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme; Kati Tervo-Niemelä; Hugo H. Rabbia and Juan Marco Vaggione; Dani Guadette and Ryan T. Cragun
Religion, Nonreligion and Social Change: What Can Law Tell Us?	Paula Montero; Guadalupe Allione Riba; Cory Steele and Lori G. Beaman
Transforming Notions of Death and Dying	Chris Miller and Lori G. Beaman; Hinna Hussain and Camille Côté; Edmundo Maza; Christel Manning
Measuring and Theorizing Religion: Does Social Change Make a Difference?	Douglas Ezzy; Ryan T. Cragun; Peter Beyer; Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme
Nones: Growth, Change, and Enhanced Understandings	Gregory Smith; Peter Beyer; Alastair Hay; Ryan T. Cragun
Education, Religion and Nonreligion in Brazil and Canada: How Diversity is Reframing Public Education	Paula Montero; Guilherme Borges; Solange Lefebvre
Nature and Nonreligion: Gardening and Trekking as Ethical and Political Practice	Douglas Ezzy and Lori G. Beaman; Lauren Strumos and Hallie Robinson; Iriana Sartor and Giovanna Paccillo



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NCF team members also participated in the Research Committee on Sociology of Religion (RC 22) of the International Sociological Association and the Association of the Social Sciences of Religion in Latin America (ACSRAL) in Montevideo, Uruguay, with presentations from the environment, education, and survey projects, as well as a general panel on nonreligion research. Presentations from team members at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Pittsburgh, USA featured research from the NCF's Cultural and Social Values Survey and the Trekking Toward Awe project.



Mehmet Ali Başak (University of Ottawa) introduces the Nonreligious Beliefs and Practices in Türkiye conference

The final conference for the [Nonreligious Beliefs and Practices in Türkiye](#) (NBPT) project – which drew upon the NCF's project design – was held in December 2024 at Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Türkiye. The conference, organized by NCF student caucus member Mehmet Ali Başak (PhD, completed in 2025, University of Ottawa), included a panel with NCF team members Ryan Cragun, Juan Marco Vaggione, and Peter Beyer, as well as keynote lectures by Lori Beaman and Douglas Ezzy.

Webinars

The NCF hosted four *Meet the Author* webinars, which highlight the work of leading scholars of (non)religion. Topics included the significance of Baby Boomers in the story of secularization, the push and pull factors leading people from religion, Black nonbelief, and Māori atheism.

We also hosted a panel discussion as part of our new series, *Nonreligion, Past and Present: Interdisciplinary Conversations*, co-hosted with the International Society for Historians of Atheism, Secularism, and Humanism. This series is designed to bring together historians and social scientists to encourage collaboration and mutual learning.



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Most of our events are recorded and available on our [YouTube channel](#).

Series	Date	Speakers	Title/Focus
Meet the Author	September 18, 2024	Abby Day	Why Baby Boomers Turned from Religion: Shaping Belief and Belonging, 1945-2021
	October 9, 2024	Ryan Cragun and Jesse Smith	Goodbye Religion: The Causes and Consequences of Secularization
	January 21, 2025	Anthony Pinn	The Black Practice of Disbelief: An Introduction to the Principles, History, and Communities of Black Nonbelievers
	March 20, 2025	Masoumeh Sara Rahmani and Peter Adds	Māori Atheism: A Decolonising Project?
Nonreligion, Past and Present: Interdisciplinary Conversations	November 6, 2024	Chris Miller, Lori Beaman, Carolin Kosuch, and Jeffrey Tyssens Co-Organizer: International Society for Historians of Atheism, Secularism, and Humanism	Death and Dying

Workshops

The NCF hosted three workshops this year. [“The Features of Nordic Nonreligion: Individual Perceptions and Experiences, Rituals, Institutions, and the Law”](#) workshop was held at the University of Oslo in June 2024 and was organized by NCF co-investigator Inger Furseth. This workshop examined Nordic nonreligion and included presentations from NCF team members and other scholars.



Sivert Skålvoll Urstad and Lori Beaman present at the Features of Nordic Nonreligion workshop



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On August 9, the NCF co-hosted a workshop at the University of Montreal with the [Explaining Atheism](#) project. This workshop, organized by Lori Beaman, Ryan Cragun, and Lois Lee, explored the terms scholars use to frame their research (lifestances, worldviews, existential cultures, etc.) through discussion as well as a Star Trek-themed roleplay.



Attendees at the Lifestances and Nonreligion workshop, from left to right: Ryan Cragun, Lori Beaman, Anna Strhan, Douglas Ezzy, Lois Lee, Solange Lefebvre, Adam Baimel, Jesse Smith, Jacqui Frost, and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr

On March 13-14, 2025, participants came together at the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (University of Victoria) for a workshop on end-of-life care. The two-day workshop used an innovative format where participants each shared an image, video clip, or artifact to prompt discussion about themes in end-of-life care.

Title	Date	Location	Organizers
The Features of Nordic Nonreligion: Individual Perceptions and Experiences, Rituals, Institutions, and the Law	June 6-7, 2024	University of Oslo	Inger Furseth, Oslo
Lifestances and Nonreligion	August 9, 2024	University of Montreal	NCF and Explaining Atheism
End of Life Care and Nonreligion	March 13-14, 2025	University of Victoria and Virtual	NCF and the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (University of Victoria)



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TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

Partner Engagement

Partners continue to make valuable contributions and engage with the project in a variety of ways. Below are some highlights from this year:

- **End-of-Life Care Workshop:** The **Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (University of Victoria)** graciously hosted a two-day workshop on end-of-life care. During the workshop, Lori Beaman and Douglas Ezzy also gave a joint presentation, "[How Nonreligion Changes End of Life Care,](#)" as part of the Centre's Scholars in the Square lecture series.
- **Partner presentations:** Al Hay (**Hay Research International**) and Gregory A. Smith (**Pew Research Center**) presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion annual meeting on panels about the NCF's Cultural and Social Values Survey.
- **Nordic Nonreligion:** Members of the NCF team gathered at the **University of Oslo** on June 6-7, 2024 for a workshop organized by NCF co-investigator Inger Furseth called "The Features of Nordic Nonreligion: Individual Perceptions and Experiences, Rituals, Institutions, and the Law."
- **Student Exchanges:** NCF team member and PhD student Hinna Hussain (University of Ottawa) was awarded the 2024-2025 Ian H. Stewart Graduate Student Fellowship by the **Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (University of Victoria)**, which supported a three-month stay for fieldwork, research, and writing in Victoria.

Our partners:





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Student Training and Mentoring

The NCF's robust student training and mentoring program includes research assistantships, student workshops, and membership in our international Student Caucus.

Research Assistants: There are currently 35 [student research assistants](#), ranging from undergraduates to PhD students, making important contributions at all phases of the projects. They conduct literature reviews, carry out interviews, analyze data, and mobilize findings for a larger audience. In total, 92 student researchers have participated in the NCF project so far.

Student Caucus: The NCF Student Caucus is a vibrant community of students and provides valuable networking and peer mentorship opportunities for students affiliated with the NCF. [Edmundo Maza](#) (University of Ottawa) has recently taken on the role of Student Caucus leader from [Guadalupe Allione Riba](#) (National University of Córdoba), who will soon finish her PhD. We thank Guada for her leadership and welcome Edmundo to the new role. The Student Caucus Leader mentors new students joining the project, organizes student workshops, and hosts our [Meet the Author webinars](#).



New student RAs who joined the project this year include:

- Olívia Barbosa (University of São Paulo), Katy Johnstone (University of Tasmania), Alicia Legault-Verdier (University of Montreal), Syaa Liesch (University of Tasmania), Mario Ionut Maroşan (University of Montreal), and Emma Pursell (University of Tasmania)
- **Mitacs Globalink:** Christina Mazilu (University of Aberdeen) and Dejjia Zhang (Zhejiang University)

Administrative Team

The NCF Administrative Team is composed of **Nathan Alexander** (Project Manager) and **Karel Leyva** (Research Coordinator). The Administrative Team works behind the scenes to schedule meetings, organize events, manage data, publicize research findings, and ensure that the project is running smoothly.



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Visiting Scholars

The NCF welcomed a number of visiting scholars to the University of Ottawa this year. **Giovanna Paccillo**, a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Campinas (Brazil), worked on a project about how mindfulness meditation can invite dialogues between religion and nonreligion in her time as a visiting student. **Guilherme Borges** (Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning) was a visiting postdoctoral fellow and conducted comparative research on the religious education curricula in Quebec and Brazil. Postdoctoral fellow **Renata Nagamine** (Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning) investigated how the language of science and religion are deployed in conservative arguments against reproductive rights, in particular by the group Brasil Paralelo. **Olívia Barbosa**, a PhD candidate at the University of São Paulo, worked on a project about how religious and secular discourses intertwine in constructing climate change as a topic in Brazilian public debate.



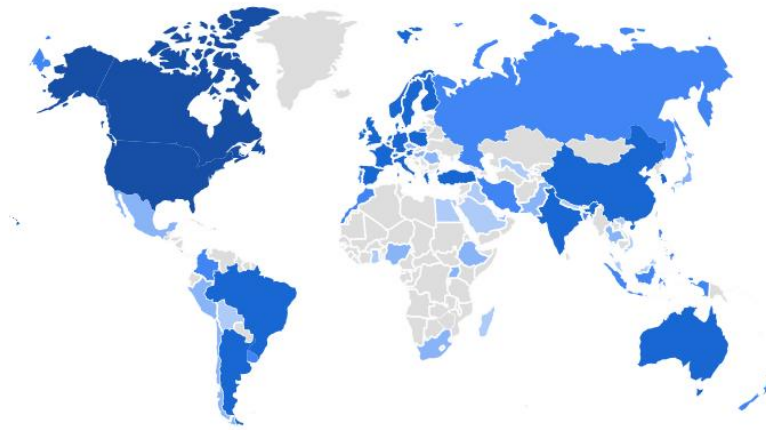
Giovanna Paccillo, Renata Nagamine, Guilherme Borges, and Olívia Barbosa



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SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE

Do you want to keep up with project progress or upcoming events? Visit our [website](#) to learn more about the latest NCF activities including events, publications, and media appearances. This year, our website received visits from 3,659 users in 70 countries. The top 5 countries were Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Norway.



Geographic spread of NCF website users



We have an active social media presence on [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#), and we launched new pages on [Bluesky](#) and [LinkedIn](#) this year. We use these platforms to connect with other international projects, students, and scholars of nonreligion, and to promote our research and events.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2025-26, the NCF team will present research on panels at the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (June 30-July 4) in Kaunas, Lithuania, and the Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network (September 8-10) in Bratislava, Slovakia. The Education team is organizing a workshop, “School Values,” on June 27, 2025 at King’s College London. We’re also planning the launch of our first two open-access books in the NCF book series with De Gruyter. We will welcome three visiting students (Marisa Sandoval, Sophie Smith, and Johanna Willich) to the University of Ottawa this summer through the Mitacs Globalink Internship program. The NCF’s final team meeting is slated to take place in Ottawa in October 2026.