

2017

The Contexts of Conversion among U.S. Latinos

Aida I. Ramos

George Fox University, aramos@georgefox.edu

Robert D. Woodberry

Baylor University

Christopher G. Ellison

University of Texas - San Antonio

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/lang_fac



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ramos, Aida I.; Woodberry, Robert D.; and Ellison, Christopher G., "The Contexts of Conversion among U.S. Latinos" (2017). *Faculty Publications - Department of World Languages, Sociology & Cultural Studies*. 51.

https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/lang_fac/51

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of World Languages, Sociology & Cultural Studies at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Department of World Languages, Sociology & Cultural Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

The Contexts of Conversion among U.S. Latinos

Aida I. Ramos*

George Fox University

Robert D. Woodberry

Baylor University

Christopher G. Ellison

The University of Texas at San Antonio

The growth of Protestantism among U.S. Latinos has been the focus of considerable discussion among researchers. Yet few studies investigate how Latino Protestants and Latino Catholics differ, or which types of Latinos convert from Catholicism to Protestantism. Our study tests various theories about why some Latinos convert including a modified version of the semi-involuntary thesis, the national origin hypothesis, and assimilation theory. We use data from a large national sample of U.S. Latinos and find some support for assimilation theory and less for the semi-involuntary thesis. However, context matters. If we divide Latinos into national origin groups, these groups strongly predict who converts and who are lifelong Protestants. We discuss how war may influence the religious composition of early migrants and thus shape both the religious composition and conversion of later migrants.

Key words: conversion; switching; Latino/as; Protestantism.

Numerous studies examine reasons for religious switching among non-Latinos in the U.S. (e.g., [Sherkat and Wilson 1995](#)), but few examine switching among Latinos ([Hunt 1999](#); [Perl et al. 2006](#); [Skirbekk et al. 2010](#)). Latin America was once almost entirely Catholic, but that is rapidly changing ([Steigenga and Cleary 2007](#)). Protestantism is also expanding quickly among Latinos in the United States ([Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo 1998](#); [Hunt 1999](#); [Pew Research Center 2014a](#)). In fact, the share of U.S. Latinos who are Catholic dropped from 67% in 2010 to 55% in 2013 ([Pew Research Center 2014a](#)). What is still unknown is why this shift is occurring.

Research on the rise of Latino Protestantism is vital ([Mulder et al. 2017](#)). First, Latinos have passed African Americans as the largest ethnic minority in the U.S.

*Direct correspondence to Aida Isela Ramos, Assistant Professor of Sociology, George Fox University, 414 N. Meridian St., Newberg, OR 97132. E-mail: aramos@georgefox.edu.

(U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Second, research on U.S. religious trends produce rosy projections for the Catholic Church (Skirbekk et al. 2010), but these forecasts hinge on continued growth in the Latino population. Significant conversions to Protestantism—along with reductions in immigration—could alter these predictions. Third, recent studies of Latino marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing suggest they are converging towards non-Hispanic whites' patterns (Landale and Oropesa 2007). Because evangelicals differ from the broader U.S. population on issues of marriage and childbearing (Ellison and Goodson 1997; Woodberry and Smith 1998); conversion to evangelical Protestantism may mitigate some of this trend.

Fourth, Latino evangelicals have different political attitudes and voting patterns than other Latinos (Ellison et al. 2011; Bartkowski et al. 2012). Latino evangelicals are more likely than other Latinos to break with the traditional allegiance to the Democratic Party and to support Republican candidates (Lee and Pachon 2007). Latino Protestants are especially prone to hold conservative positions on social issues such as abortion rights and same-sex marriage (Ellison et al. 2005, 2011). Thus, significant Protestant growth could have important consequences for the U.S. political future as it did in the presidential election of 2016, especially in the context of continued Latino population growth.

We seek to understand which Latinos convert from Catholicism to Protestantism. Scholars propose many theories to explain religious conversions, but these theories have not been tested using nationally representative samples of Latinos. Our study provides new insight about the growth of Latino Protestantism in the U.S. by analyzing the factors that distinguish (1) converts to Protestantism and (2) lifelong Protestants from (3) lifelong Catholics. We test theories of religious conversion such as assimilation theory: which posits that Latinos who are trying to assimilate into American culture will be more likely to become Protestant. We also test an extension of the semi-involuntary thesis which posits that social sanctions help explain conversion among Latinos. Finally, based on our knowledge of chain migration, the differential strength of Protestantism in different Latin American countries, and the factors that spurred early (high risk) migration, we also propose a “national origins” thesis for Latino conversion. We test these hypotheses using data from a large survey of U.S. Latinos commissioned by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Semi-Involuntary Thesis

One major theory of religious switching is rational choice theory (e.g., Iannaccone 1995, 1997; Finke and Stark 1988). Rational choice (RC) theory assumes that people approach decisions by evaluating costs and benefits and then acting to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Iannaccone 1995, 1997; Sherkat 1997). In relation to conversion, the theory posits that the decision to convert is based on an individual's evaluation of “religious rewards” (i.e., promise of heaven,

health, happiness) in relation to the costs (i.e., significant portion of individual's time must go to religious pursuits).

Other researchers find an individualistic version of RC theory insufficient. They point out that community social norms and expectations also constrain individual choice, especially if the individual believes the community is able and willing to sanction them for violating community norms (Ellison 1995; Sherkat 1997). The extent to which communities monitor individual choices and apply sanctions, varies depending on the nature of community social ties. When social ties are consolidated, i.e., "... family, religion, employment, ethnicity, neighborhood, and community are entangled" (Sherkat 1997: 75), decisions made in one sphere of life impact others (Blau and Schwartz 1984). Moreover, being active in the dominant religious community provides benefits such as a good reputation, and exposure to marriage partners that non-participants miss out on, regardless of whether anyone tries to sanction non-participants.

The "semi-involuntary institution" has been used to explain why there is higher religious attendance of African Americans in the South compared to their counterparts in the North (Ellison and Sherkat 1995). The theory states that due to the strong influence of the Black Church in the South, Africans Americans go to church more regularly to avoid community sanctions which could block their access to important community resources. Similarly building on the "semi-involuntary institution" (SI) thesis, Philips (1998) argues that among Mormons, social sanctions play a vital role in assuring compliance with church regulations and lifestyle norms and in promoting congregational participation. Although the SI thesis is primarily used to explain variation in religiosity and behavior, we extend it to study conversion. When a particular community considers two religious traditions distinct, people who switch traditions may be sanctioned. Moreover, converts miss out on the benefits of belonging to the majority religious group in their community, just like those who do not attend. Thus, religious conversions have social costs that vary depending on the local community.

Semi-Involuntary Thesis among Latinos

Catholicism takes on a prominent role in Latino culture (Williams 1990) where the "the spheres of family, culture, tradition, and language are often intertwined," (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Mulder et al. 2017). The Catholic Church is often the context of social participation in Latino cultural traditions such as quinceañeras, las posadas, marriage, and so on (Williams 1990); thus conversion could have significant social and emotional costs if converts are not invited or feel excluded. Consequently, those with deeper embeddedness in Latino communities with strong ties to Catholicism, will have fewer incentives to switch from Catholicism to Protestantism, and may encounter greater costs for doing so.

Thus, the SI thesis is the focus of our first three hypotheses for Latino conversion to Protestantism. First, dense social networks facilitate both the monitoring of individual's religious involvement and informal sanctioning (e.g., through expressions of disapproval, loss of social esteem, and withdrawal of friendship and social

opportunities). One possible way to gauge these networks is via the concentration of co-ethnics within one's residential community (i.e., telephone exchange). Areas of greater Latino concentration presumably have more consolidated social ties (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990) making defections from Catholicism to Protestantism more costly. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Compared to respondents living in areas with low concentrations of Latinos, respondents living in areas with higher concentrations of Latinos) will be less likely to be converts to Protestantism as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

We also measure these networks indirectly via region of residence. Region is related to both co-ethnic concentrations and how established Latino communities are (especially the Catholic Church within the Latino community). Latinos live disproportionately in the West and West South Central regions compared to other parts of the country. Most of these Latino communities have long histories in the area (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Mulder et al. 2017), giving the Catholic Church deep ties in these historic Latino communities, which may make it more costly for Latinos to convert.

In the 1990s, Latinos moved rapidly to new areas in the southeastern U.S. Across six Southeastern states the Latino population increased 308% between 1990 and 2000, compared with a 43% increase in traditional settlement areas (Vásquez et al. 2008; Kochhar et al. 2005). The South remains the largest source of growth for the Latino population between 2007 and 2014 (Pew Research Center 2016b). When Latinos arrive in new areas, religious congregations can provide crucial support and practical resources (Warner and Wittner 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) provided that Spanish language ministries are in place. In the South, evangelical Protestantism is the dominant faith (Heyrman 1998; Pew Research Center 2016a) and is well positioned to convert migrants. Consequently, Latinos who move to these areas may be attracted to Protestant churches as a source of assistance, while facing fewer sanctions for conversion than co-ethnics living elsewhere. Keeping the above discussion in mind, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Compared to respondents living in the Northeast, respondents who live in areas with a long history of Latino residence and density such as the Western U.S and West South Central U.S., will be less likely to convert to Protestantism as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

Hypothesis 3: Compared to those living in the Northeast, respondents who live in areas where the dominant religion is Protestantism and where the Latino population is fairly recent, such as in the North Central and East South Central/South Atlantic, will be more likely to be converts to Protestantism as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

National Origin Hypothesis among Latinos

We propose another hypothesis for religious switching: the “national origin hypothesis.” The term “Latino” encompasses many national origin groups, each with a different historical relationship with Catholicism and Protestantism. These

varying religious contexts may help explain U.S. Latinos' conversions to Protestantism. Latin American regions with large Protestant gains include Puerto Rico and Central America (Pew Research Center 2014d). Over 40% of Guatemalans now belong to Protestant churches and Protestantism continues to grow rapidly (Pew Research Center 2014d). Rates of Protestant adherence are also high in Puerto Rico (33%), El Salvador (36%), Honduras (41%), Nicaragua (40%), and Costa Rica (25%) (Pew Research Center 2014d). Lower adherence is seen in Panama (19%), Dominican Republic (23%), and Mexico (8%).

One explanation for the high levels of Protestantism in some of these countries is the history of violent conflict between Marxist rebels and the government. Violence prompted the Catholic Church to remove priests from rural areas, and in their absence, lay-led Protestant movements flourished (Garrard-Burnett 1998; Brusco 2010). Protestant missionaries also focused on Bible translation into indigenous languages, which gave many lay indigenous people their first direct access to the Bible. Conversion rates have been much higher among these ethnic minorities than the dominant Spanish speaking population (Barrett et al. 2001; Garrard-Burnett 1998).

Moreover, the violent civil wars that wracked many Central American countries (i.e., Guatemala) in the 1970s–1990s often occurred in areas with large minority communities. These conflicts made it risky for young men to stay in their hometowns due to threats of being conscripted or killed; and thus spurred many to immigrate to the United States. Later migrants from these regions could use the homes, networks, and resources of early migrants—greatly reducing migration risks and establishing migrant chains from the same regions. Thus, Central American migration may have come disproportionately from regions where conversions to Protestantism were already taking place and considered a realistic option.

Similarly, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. tend to be disproportionately more Protestant than Catholic (29% Protestant, 45% Catholic) compared to all other Latinos in the U.S. (22% Protestant, 55% Catholic) (Pew Research Center 2015). These patterns may be explained by the fact that the U.S. took over Puerto Rico at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898, which allowed Protestant missionaries to work in Puerto Rico without the restrictions they faced in most Latin American countries and undercut the dominance of the Catholic Church there (Cruz 2005). Puerto Rican-led Protestant congregations were already established in the period 1916–1928 (Cruz 2005; Mulder et al. 2017). Later in the 1920s, Protestant congregations established by Puerto Ricans became important centers of social support for Puerto Ricans living in New York due to lack of Spanish language ministries in established Catholic churches (Thomas 2010; Mulder et al. 2017).

Conversely, Mexico had an anti-clerical government for much of the 20th century, which violently suppressed Catholics (e.g., The Cristero Rebellion) (Meyer 2008). Violent suppression may have set up similar chain migration among devout Catholics, especially from Mexico's west central Catholic heartland where the violence was most intense (e.g., Jalisco, Michoacan and Guanajuato). In fact,

the map “State of Origin of Migratory Agricultural Workers Entering U.S. 1942-1968” suggests migration was highest from the same regions where the Cristero Rebellion was most violent (Perry-Castañeda Library 2017). In this case, early immigrants would be disproportionately devout Catholics, and later Mexican immigrants would move to communities where the Catholic Church was both well established and symbolically important, making conversion to Protestantism more difficult.

Finally, Latin American immigrants that claim European ancestry also tend to be from disproportionately privileged backgrounds, as were the first wave of immigrants from Cuba (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). Early Cuban migrants tended to be from elite backgrounds. This high status may have made it easier for them to integrate into the dominant Protestant culture in the U.S. Later Cuban migrants were disproportionately from impoverished backgrounds (Portes and Stepick 1985; Pew Research 2006; Wasem 2009)—which may have hampered personal interaction between early and later waves, and weakened the influence of early waves on later waves. The importance of the history and religious context of U.S. Latino’s country of origin leads us to hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: Compared to respondents with Mexican backgrounds, respondents who have Central American, and Puerto Rican backgrounds will be more likely to be converts to Protestantism as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

Hypothesis 5: Compared to respondents with Mexican backgrounds, respondents who have European or Cuban backgrounds will be more likely to either be converts to Protestantism or to be lifelong Protestants as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

Assimilation Theories for Religions Conversion

Finally, others suggest assimilation theories may explain why some Latinos convert to Protestantism (Hunt 1999; Perl et al. 2006; Navarro-Rivera et al. 2010). As immigrants live longer in the U.S., they pick up practices and mores from U.S. culture through both assimilation and acculturation practices (Zhou 1997). Latinos who are more assimilated into U.S. culture or want to identify more strongly with the dominant community may be more likely to convert to Protestantism (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Navarro-Rivera et al. 2010). Alternatively, Latinos who are more assimilated may feel fewer barriers to Protestantism, whether or not they view conversion as helping them assimilate (after all, U.S. culture is also diverse and many elites are not Protestant or even religious). Common proxies for measuring assimilation among Latinos include Spanish language use (i.e., linguistic status) and generational status (Perl et al. 2006; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Mulder et al. 2017).

Language is a proxy for assimilation because language is a prism through which cultural identity is formed, lived, and experienced and it can indicate psychological closeness to a culture. A loss of Spanish language skills could be a sign of cultural assimilation (Telles and Ortiz 2008). Individuals who speak primarily Spanish may be more embedded within Latino networks and contexts including

the Catholic Church, and may feel greater affinity with Latino folkways and mores (Pew Research Center 2014c; Calvillo and Bailey 2015). Moreover, gaining English fluency opens people to friendships and information sources outside the Latino community. Thus, both English gain and Spanish loss may make Latinos more open to conversion. Although Spanish-based ministries and church services focused on Latinos are spreading (Mulder et al. 2017), English dominant Latinos may still have more interaction with Protestants and feel more comfortable attending Protestant churches compared to dominate Spanish speakers. Consistent with this argument, Latinos interviewed in Spanish are significantly more likely to be Catholic than those interviewed in English (Hunt 1999; Perl et al. 2006). A similar study also using the 2006 Pew Hispanic Survey found that Latinos Catholics are more likely to use Spanish at home compared to Latino Protestants due to the linkages that Catholicism maintains with sending communities in Latin America (Calvillo and Bailey 2015).

Generation status might also be associated with assimilation. However, when linguistic status is controlled, there is typically no net association between generational status and religious identification among U.S. Latinos (Perl et al. 2006). This leads to our final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Compared to respondents who are Spanish dominant respondents who are English dominant, and to a lesser extent those who are bilingual, will be more likely to be converts to Protestantism as opposed to being lifelong Catholics.

Hypothesis 7: Generational status will not affect the likelihood of converting to Protestantism once other factors are controlled.

Other Predictors of Religious Switching

We also control known predictors of religious switching in the general population. First, some researchers explain religious change as status-seeking or status expression (Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Verter 2003). According to this view, individuals who aspire to a higher status join religious groups to symbolically signify a high status, to cultivate social ties, or to gain resources that facilitate upward mobility. Some argue that among Latinos Protestantism could signal increased social mobility (Navarro-Rivera et al. 2010; Mulder et al. 2017). Analyses of the General Social Survey and topline reports of the Pew data suggests that Latino converts tend to have higher education, income, and occupational prestige (Hunt 1999; Pew Research 2009). However, in the general population, there is an inverse relationship with level of education and conservative Protestant affiliation—at least for women (Hackett and Lindsay 2008; Fitzgerald and Glass 2012). We hypothesize that those with more education and high levels of yearly income will be more likely to convert than be lifelong Catholics.

Family life cycles also influence religious change, particularly marriage and having kids (Stolzenberg et al. 1995). Evangelical Protestantism may also offer Latina women a supportive and empowering environment. This seems to influence conversion to Protestantism in Latin American (e.g., Hallum 2003; Brusco 2010), and fits with

work on women in U.S. evangelical communities (e.g., [Woodberry and Smith 1998](#); [Bartkowski 2004](#)). We also theorize that those who are divorced will be more likely to become Protestant, because of the Catholic Church's stronger prohibition against divorce and remarriage. Urban areas create opportunities for more religious choice; greater population density facilitates the creation of ethnically focused congregations and greater freedom about which co-ethnics to associate with. Together this may give urban areas less social constraints for conversion compared to rural areas.

Finally, we recognize that both interviews with Latino converts and ethnographic work in Latino churches suggests that non-instrumental considerations are important for conversion ([Mulder et al. 2017](#)). However, non-instrumental causes are more difficult to measure on surveys (including the survey we use). Moreover, instrumental and non-instrumental considerations are not incompatible—most religious actions are probably influenced by both.

METHOD

To study U.S. Latino conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism, we analyze data from a nationwide probability sample of 4,016 Latinos 18 or older living in the U.S. These data come from the *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion* Survey: a CATI-assisted random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone survey conducted from August 10 to October 4, 2006 by the *Pew Hispanic Center* and the *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, according to the preference of the respondent. The survey response rate is 23.4%, refusal rate is 10.7%, and non-contact is 66.0%. The Pew data overcome two major problems with previous studies of Latino religion by (1) including non-English speakers and (2) asking about Latino identity directly, rather than asking the respondent to provide information on possible Latino ancestry ([Perl et al. 2006](#)). These data provide a large sample of English and non-English speaking Latinos from diverse national-origin groups, and has many items gauging Latino identity salience, residential context, and socio-demographic characteristics. We are interested in what predicts either being or becoming Protestant—as opposed to remaining Catholic. Therefore, we exclude the following respondents: (1) non-religious people ($n = 493$), (2) people who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism ($n = 22$), (3) people who converted from Protestantism to another faith ($n = 19$), and (4) lifelong members of a faith other than Catholicism or Protestantism ($n = 164$).

Dependent Variables

We derived our dependent variables from the following questions, which were asked of all respondents: (1) “What is your religion – Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox church?”, (2) “Have you always been [that religion] or did you convert from another faith or religion you practiced in the past?”, and if respondent said they were a convert they were asked,

(3) “What were you before – Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?” We used the responses to these questions to classify respondents into one of the following three categories:

Converts: Respondents who identified as Protestant based on the [Steensland et al. \(2000\)](#) classification scheme at the time of interview, and who reported having converted from Catholicism, were identified as “converts” ($n = 421$, 14.2% of the sample). The vast majority became evangelical (87.4%), rather than mainline Protestant (12.6%).

Lifelong Protestants: Respondents who reported both being Protestant and never switching religions were identified as “lifelong Protestants” ($n = 583$, 19.6%).

Lifelong Catholics: Those who reported both being Catholic and never switching religions were identified as “lifelong Catholics” ($n = 1,960$, 66.1%).

Key Covariates

Our multivariate models examine predictors of either being or becoming Protestant, as opposed to remaining Catholic. For most variables, we use a series of dummy variables—we list the reference category last. **Latino concentration:** The percentage of Latinos residing in the same telephone exchange as the respondent (less than 14%, 15–29%, 30–49%, 50–74% versus 75–100%)¹; **region of residence** (Northcentral, West, West South Central,² East South Central³/South Atlantic⁴ versus Northeast); **location type** (urban, suburban versus rural); **national origin group** (Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Central American [including Salvadoran], South American, European, Other versus Mexican); **linguistic status** (indicated by respondents and not by language chosen at interview) (English dominant, bilingual versus Spanish dominant), and **generation status** (first generation, second generation versus third generation or more).

Controls

To avoid confounding the association between religious affiliation and our variables of interest, we control for gender (1 = female, 0 = male); age (continuous); marital status (divorced, separated, widow, married versus never married), educational attainment (less than high school degree, high school diploma only,

¹The Pew constructed these variables by stratifying the sample according to the density of the Latino population in a respondent’s residential area, as determined by telephone area code and exchange (the first three digits of the telephone number). According to the Pew “the samples were constructed to reflect the distribution of the Latino population across five strata of density,” ([Pew Research Center 2009](#): 54).

²Which includes the states of AK, LA, OK, and TX.

³Which includes the states of AL, KY, MS, and TN.

⁴Which includes the states of FL, GA, SC, NC, VA, WV, DC, MD, and DE.

some college or vocational training, graduate or professional degree versus four-year college degree or more); and household income before taxes (continuous).

Analytic Strategy

Our data analysis begins by presenting descriptive statistics on key variables of interest by adherence category (lifelong Catholic, lifelong Protestant, and converts)—this information is displayed in [table 1](#). Next, our main hypotheses are tested using multinomial logistic regression models, which estimate the net effects of Latino concentration, region of residence, national origin group, linguistic orientation, and generational status (hypothesis 1–hypothesis 4, respectively)—along with socio-demographic covariates—on the likelihood of (1) being a lifelong Protestant and (2) switching from Catholicism to Protestantism, relative to being a lifelong Catholic. The results, displayed in [table 2](#), are expressed as relative risk ratios. Given the strong prevalence of Catholicism among the Latino community, these analyses treat lifelong Catholics as the reference category, with which lifelong Protestants and converts are compared. The baseline model features the effects of demographic variables and income on the likelihood of being a convert.

We used multiple imputation in Stata/SE 14.2 to deal with missing cases. All variables with missing cases in the analyses were imputed except for the dependent variable, however the dependent variable was included in the imputation equation. Five imputations were used and pooled for final analyses.⁵ This procedure yielded an effective sample of 2,964, composed of lifelong Catholics, lifelong Protestants, and converts to Protestantism. We weighted all analyses using the Pew Forums' variable "NEWWEIGHT" which produces national representative samples of Latinos and corrects for oversampling of non-Mexican origin respondents ([Pew Research Center 2009](#)). Our discussion of results focuses exclusively on those findings that bear directly on study hypotheses.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics among key variables are presented in [table 1](#). We describe the weighted results for the total sample. Most respondents live in telephone exchanges with a moderate to high proportion of Latino co-residents (74%). Most of the respondents resided in the western U.S. (41%), while 36% resided in the southern U.S., and 14% resided in the Northeast. Most have Mexican ancestry (66%), followed by Central Americans (9%), and Puerto Ricans (8%). No other national group has more than 8%. About half of respondents are Spanish-dominant (51%), while 29% are bilingual, and 20% are

⁵The issue of perfect prediction arose during multiple imputation because our models have a large number of categorical variables, we therefore used the "augment" option as described in [White et al. \(2010\)](#).

TABLE 1. Means/Proportions on All Variables Used in Analyses

Variables	Converts		Lifelong Caths.		Lifelong Prots.		Total	
	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.
<i>% Latino Concentration</i>								
Less than 14%	0.07	0.09	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07
15–29%	0.16	0.14	0.19	0.13	0.22	0.19	0.19	0.15
30–49%	0.24	0.28	0.29	0.33	0.23	0.27	0.28	0.31
50–74%	0.33	0.32	0.29	0.31	0.28	0.30	0.29	0.31
75–100% (ref.)	0.20	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.20	0.16	0.17	0.16
<i>Census Region</i>								
North Central	0.08	0.04	0.09	0.05	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.05
West	0.43	0.29	0.42	0.25	0.38	0.26	0.41	0.26
West South Central	0.21	0.14	0.20	0.11	0.24	0.13	0.21	0.12
East South	0.15	0.23	0.15	0.26	0.17	0.26	0.15	0.25
Cent./South								
Atlantic								
Northeast (ref.)	0.14	0.30	0.14	0.34	0.14	0.32	0.14	0.33
<i>National Origin Status</i>								
Puerto Rican	0.19	0.17	0.06	0.08	0.14	0.17	0.08	0.11
European	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02
Cuban	0.02	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.10
Dominican	0.02	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.01	0.08	0.02	0.09
Central American	0.09	0.14	0.08	0.12	0.15	0.21	0.09	0.14
South American	0.05	0.12	0.08	0.16	0.05	0.09	0.07	0.14
Others	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01
Mexican (ref.)	0.54	0.37	0.70	0.42	0.52	0.33	0.66	0.40
<i>Assimilation Measures</i>								
English dominant	0.34	0.21	0.16	0.10	0.34	0.19	0.20	0.13
Bilingual	0.30	0.29	0.29	0.26	0.32	0.30	0.29	0.27
Spanish	0.36	0.49	0.55	0.64	0.34	0.51	0.51	0.59
dominant (ref.)								
First generation	0.54	0.71	0.68	0.82	0.46	0.69	0.64	0.78
Second generation	0.13	0.10	0.13	0.09	0.18	0.12	0.13	0.10
Third	0.32	0.18	0.19	0.09	0.37	0.19	0.22	0.12
generation (ref.)								
<i>Gender</i>								
Female	0.60	0.63	0.48	0.57	0.50	0.58	0.50	0.58
Male (ref.)	0.40	0.37	0.52	0.43	0.50	0.42	0.50	0.42
<i>Age</i>								
	2.68	2.88	2.39	2.66	2.34	2.58	2.41	2.67

Continued

TABLE 1. Continued

Variables	Converts		Lifelong Caths.		Lifelong Prots.		Total	
	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.	Wt.	No Wt.
<i>Marital Status</i>								
Divorced	0.09	0.12	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.09
Separated	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.07
Widowed	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.07
Married	0.61	0.59	0.55	0.56	0.61	0.54	0.56	0.56
Never married (ref.)	0.20	0.15	0.26	0.23	0.20	0.24	0.26	0.22
<i>Location type</i>								
Urban	0.81	0.79	0.75	0.77	0.79	0.78	0.76	0.77
Suburban	0.13	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.13	0.17	0.15	0.17
Rural (ref.)	0.06	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.08	0.05	0.09	0.06
<i>Income</i>	~30.8k	~28.8k	~26.8k	~27.1k	~32.9k	~29.6k	~27.9k	~27.8k
<i>Education</i>								
Less than high school	0.35	0.35	0.45	0.39	0.33	0.34	0.42	0.37
High school	0.28	0.24	0.24	0.25	0.27	0.25	0.25	0.25
GED	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
Vocational	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.05
Some college	0.21	0.19	0.13	0.12	0.22	0.15	0.15	0.13
Professional/graduate	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03
College graduate (ref.)	0.08	0.11	0.07	0.13	0.08	0.14	0.08	0.13
Observations	421 (14.20%)		1,960 (66.13%)		583 (19.67%)		2,964 (100%)	

English-dominant. About 64% are first generation immigrants, 13% are second generation, and 22% are third generation Latinos. In terms of controls, our weighted sample is split evenly between female (50%) and male (50%). Over half of our sample is married (56%). Most live in urban areas (76%). In terms of socioeconomic characteristics, most make about 30k in yearly income and the majority of the sample has less than a high school degree (42%) while a quarter of the sample has a high school degree.

In table 2 we test our main hypotheses using multinomial logistic regressions which estimate the likelihood of (1) being a lifelong Protestant and (2) switching from Catholicism to Protestantism, relative to being a lifelong Catholic. We present the results as relative risk ratios with lifelong Catholics as the reference category. We only discuss results relevant to our hypotheses. In models 1 and 2 (columns 1–4) we enter demographic controls. In model 3 we enter variables related to the SI thesis applied to Latino conversion. In model 4 we test the national origin hypothesis. Finally, in model 5 we test assimilation theories. Many

TABLE 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Relative Risk of Being a Switcher and Lifelong Protestant vs. Lifelong Catholic

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.
% <i>Latino Concentration</i>										
Less than 14%					1.06 (0.34)	0.97 (0.34)	1.05 (0.35)	1.18 (0.39)	0.88 (0.31)	1.04 (0.34)
15–29%			0.71 (0.19)	0.96 (0.26)			0.62~ (0.17)	0.93 (0.25)	0.53* (0.15)	0.82 (0.22)
30–49%			0.62~ (0.15)	0.63~ (0.16)			0.56* (0.14)	0.59* (0.14)	0.53* (0.13)	0.55* (0.14)
50–74%			0.90 (0.22)	0.80 (0.19)			0.81 (0.20)	0.78 (0.19)	0.71 (0.17)	0.71 (0.17)
75–100% (ref.)										
<i>Census Region</i>										
North Central			0.79 (0.33)	0.75 (0.27)			1.84 (0.79)	1.60 (0.61)	1.89 (0.83)	1.67 (0.65)
West			1.03 (0.21)	0.89 (0.16)			3.16*** (0.95)	2.26** (0.62)	2.89*** (0.89)	2.06** (0.57)
West South Central			0.93 (0.23)	1.00 (0.21)			3.20*** (1.80)	2.99*** (0.91)	2.82** (0.89)	2.47** (0.57)
East South Central/ South Atlantic			0.83 (0.19)	0.97 (0.19)			1.56 (0.43)	1.28 (0.31)	1.66~ (0.46)	1.39 (0.35)
North East (ref).										
<i>National Origin Status</i>										
Puerto Rican							8.89*** (2.96)	6.63*** (2.15)	7.97*** (2.81)	5.69*** (1.87)

Continued

TABLE 2. Continued

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.
European					3.99** (1.75)		3.74** (1.57)		2.62* (1.22)	2.48* (1.12)
Cuban					0.95 (0.33)		3.15** (1.32)		0.98 (0.34)	3.51** (1.49)
Dominican					2.29* (0.86)		1.90~ (0.64)		2.49* (0.95)	2.29* (0.78)
Central American					2.01** (0.49)		3.56*** (0.74)		2.30*** (0.56)	4.67*** (0.97)
South American					1.48 (0.42)		1.65~ (0.48)		1.59 (0.45)	2.15** (0.63)
Others					3.12~ (2.04)		4.15* (2.44)		2.37 (1.62)	2.99~ (1.69)
Mexican (ref.)										
<i>Assimilation Measures</i>										
English dominant									2.93*** (0.87)	1.83* (0.54)
Bilingual									1.41 (0.30)	1.16 (0.23)
Spanish dominant (ref.)										
First generation									1.03 (0.29)	0.55* (0.15)
Second generation									0.78 (0.25)	0.86 (0.24)

Third generation (ref.)

Gender

Female

1.61** (0.26) 1.10 (0.16) 1.57** (0.26) 1.08 (0.15) 1.58** (0.26) 1.10 (0.16) 1.46* (0.24) 1.04 (0.15) 1.49* (0.25) 1.07 (0.16)

Male (ref.)

Age

1.17* (0.08) 0.96 (0.06) 1.18* (0.08) 0.97 (0.06) 1.17* (0.08) 0.96 (0.08) 1.12~ (0.08) 0.91 (0.07) 1.13~ (0.08) 0.93 (0.07)

Income

1.10*** (0.03) 1.13*** (0.03) 1.09** (0.03) 1.11*** (0.03) 1.09** (0.04) 1.12*** (0.03) 1.09** (0.04) 1.11*** (0.03) 1.06 (0.04) 1.07* (0.03)

Marital Status

Divorced

1.29 (0.43) 1.44 (0.45) 1.33 (0.44) 1.48 (0.46) 1.38 (0.46) 1.48 (0.46) 1.45 (0.49) 1.57 (0.49) 1.39 (0.47) 1.58 (0.50)

Separated

0.75 (0.28) 0.75 (0.22) 0.78 (0.29) 0.79 (0.29) 0.79 (0.29) 0.79 (0.24) 0.69 (0.28) 0.74 (0.23) 0.72 (0.29) 0.80 (0.26)

Widowed

1.12 (0.44) 1.32 (0.47) 1.14 (0.45) 1.33 (0.48) 1.27 (0.49) 1.40 (0.49) 1.21 (0.48) 1.33 (0.47) 1.23 (0.48) 1.33 (0.47)

Married

1.16 (0.27) 0.89 (0.17) 1.20 (0.28) 0.92 (0.17) 1.26 (0.29) 0.93 (0.17) 1.29 (0.30) 0.98 (0.19) 1.41 (0.32) 1.13 (0.22)

Never married (ref.)

Marital Status

Divorced

1.29 (0.43) 1.44 (0.45) 1.33 (0.44) 1.48 (0.46) 1.38 (0.46) 1.48 (0.46) 1.45 (0.49) 1.57 (0.49) 1.39 (0.47) 1.58 (0.50)

Separated

0.75 (0.28) 0.75 (0.22) 0.78 (0.29) 0.79 (0.29) 0.79 (0.29) 0.79 (0.24) 0.69 (0.28) 0.74 (0.23) 0.72 (0.29) 0.80 (0.26)

Widowed

1.12 (0.44) 1.32 (0.47) 1.14 (0.45) 1.33 (0.48) 1.27 (0.49) 1.40 (0.49) 1.21 (0.48) 1.33 (0.47) 1.23 (0.48) 1.33 (0.47)

Continued

TABLE 2. Continued

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.	Converts	Life Prots.
Married	1.16	0.89	1.20	0.92	1.26	0.93	1.29	0.98	1.41	1.13
Never married (ref.)	(0.27)	(0.17)	(0.28)	(0.17)	(0.29)	(0.17)	(0.30)	(0.19)	(0.32)	(0.22)
<i>Education</i>										
Less than high school	1.00		1.00	0.99	1.02	1.06	1.11	1.14	1.45	1.48
	(0.30)		(0.30)	(0.24)	(0.31)	(0.26)	(0.35)	(0.29)	(0.46)	(0.41)
High school	1.33		1.33	1.29	1.37	1.39	1.37	1.37	1.48	1.47
	(0.31)		(0.31)	(0.39)	(0.41)	(0.35)	(0.41)	(0.35)	(0.44)	(0.43)
GED	1.01		1.01	1.00	1.04	1.05	1.03	1.11	1.27	1.39
	(0.50)		(0.50)	(0.42)	(0.53)	(0.45)	(0.54)	(0.47)	(0.62)	(0.59)
Vocational	0.69		0.69	0.74	0.66	0.75	0.64	0.74	0.77	0.88
	(0.29)		(0.29)	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.27)	(0.34)	(0.33)
Some college	1.59		1.59	1.62~	1.67~	1.71*	1.49	1.53	1.47	1.45
	(0.47)		(0.47)	(0.43)	(0.50)	(0.46)	(0.46)	(0.42)	(0.45)	(0.41)
Professional/graduate	0.54		0.54	0.90	0.54	0.89	0.43	0.70	0.44	0.71
	(0.26)		(0.26)	(0.41)	(0.26)	(0.41)	(0.22)	(0.30)	(0.23)	(0.30)
<i>College graduate (ref.)</i>										
<i>Location type</i>										
Urban					1.72~	1.81	1.59	1.05	1.75	1.18
					(0.55)	(0.33)	(0.51)	(0.30)	(0.60)	(0.35)
Suburban					1.30	0.88	1.15	0.77	1.25	0.87
					(0.46)	(0.28)	(0.42)	(0.25)	(0.48)	(0.30)
Rural (ref.)										
Observations	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964	2.964

~ $p < 0.10$ * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

of the coefficients change when we control for national origin; a few change when we control for assimilation theory. For clarity sake, we consistently use the relative risk ratios from model 5 in our discussion of results.⁶

Contra hypothesis 1 conversions do not vary consistently with the percent Latino in each region as would be predicted by our extension of the SI thesis. According to the theory we would expect Latinos residing in areas with lower concentration of co-ethnics to be more likely to convert to Protestantism because the risk of social sanctioning and loss of community with other Latino Catholics. Instead we find, in the full model, Latinos residing in areas with a moderate proportion of co-ethnics, i.e., in areas with telephone exchanges with 15–29% or 30–49% Latinos, had 47% less risk of conversion (RRR = 0.53, $p \leq 0.05$ and RRR = 0.53, $p \leq 0.05$, respectively), compared to Latinos residing in areas of heavy Latino concentration (the reference group). The relationship between conversion and percent Latino in each respondent's telephone exchange is curvilinear. Perhaps Latino Catholic social constraints are greater in areas with moderate concentrations of Latinos, but this is not what we expected based on religiosity among Mormons and African-Americans as described by the SI thesis.

Moving to census regions (hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3), we hypothesized that if social sanctions and benefits operate at the level of the broad "racial/ethnic" category "Latino," we would expect fewer conversions in regions with large, well-established Latino communities such as the West and West South Central (which includes Texas) and more conversions in regions with small and recent Latino communities such as the East South Central/South Atlantic where Latinos are less in number and where Protestantism is more strongly established. Results support hypothesis 3. We find that Latinos residing in the East South Central/South Atlantic of the U.S. had about one and a half times the risk of being converts to Protestantism compared to those in the Northeast (RRR = 1.66, $p \leq 0.10$). In contrast, results contradict hypothesis 2, residents of the West and West South Central *had almost three* times the risk of being converts compared to being lifelong Catholics (RRR = 2.89, $p \leq 0.001$ and RRR = 2.82, $p \leq 0.01$, respectively). Both the West and West South Central have higher concentrations of Latinos and the North Central and North East have lower concentrations of Latinos.

In ancillary analyses, we rotated the reference categories and the risk of conversion is also higher in the West and West South Central regions than in the East South Central/South Atlantic regions—i.e., the relative risk of being a convert is highest in the area with the largest and most well established Latino communities. Thus, our analysis of region does not support our extension of the SI thesis.

⁶Approximately 76% of converts converted while in the United States. Our results were consistent even when we limited the sample to respondents who converted in the United States. Additionally, other analysis included foreign born status in the models, but were removed due to insignificance and collinearity with generational status.

A more consistent pattern is that places with more lifelong Protestants are also places with more converts. If, within each model, we compare the relative risk ratios for lifelong Protestants and converts, they are almost always in the same direction (i.e., both higher than 1 or both lower than 1), and almost always roughly the same magnitude. This suggests that in places Protestants gained an early foothold, other Latinos are more likely to convert regardless of the social context. Similarly, places with more Latinos are more likely to have both higher proportions lifelong Protestants and converts than lifelong Catholics.

In model 4 we add measures related to national origin. Latinos with Puerto Rican ancestry had almost eight times the risk of being converts to Protestantism compared to those with Mexican ancestry, while Central Americans had more than twice the risk ($RRR = 7.97, p \leq 0.001$; $RRR = 2.30, p \leq 0.001$, respectively), demonstrating support for hypothesis 4. South Americans had 2.15 times the risk of lifelong Protestants ($RRR = 2.15, p \leq 0.01$) but not converts. Europeans had more than twice the risk of being converts and lifelong Protestants compared to Mexicans, also demonstrating partial support for hypothesis 5. In contrast, Cuban ancestry did not predict conversion which does not support hypothesis 5, however they had three times the risk of being lifelong Protestants ($RRR = 3.51, p \leq 0.01$). This makes sense for Cubans, because the early wave of immigrants fleeing the communist revolution in the 1950s and 1960s were often wealthy and highly educated elites, whereas following waves were often impoverished, non-elites (e.g., the Mariel boat people of 1980). The large difference in time and status may mean new Cuban immigrants do not move in the same social circles as older Cuban immigrants. It is not an example of chain migration where new immigrants often live with and draw on the social networks of earlier immigrants.

The patterns are generally similar among lifelong Protestants. Central Americans had more than five times the risk of being lifelong Protestants than Mexican-origin Latinos ($RRR = 5.69, p \leq 0.00$). This makes sense given the long history of Protestantism in Central America and the importance of Protestantism in violent areas where chain migrations are more likely to start. Similarly, Puerto Ricans had more than four times the risk of being lifelong Protestants than lifelong Catholics ($RRR = 4.67, p \leq 0.001$), which matches the long history of Protestant missions in Puerto Rico and in New York.

Next we test assimilation theory in model 5, by including linguistic status and generation. We find partial support for hypothesis 6. Latinos who are English dominant had almost three times the risk of being converts ($RRR = 2.93, p \leq 0.001$) and 1.83 times the risk of being lifelong Protestants ($RRR = 1.83, p \leq 0.05$). Bilingualism is not statistically significant, but the coefficient is in the predicted direction. We do find support for hypothesis 7; generation status has no effect on conversion. Respondents who are first generational had 45% less risk of being a lifelong Protestants compared to third generation respondents, but this is what we would expect if a context where more Latinos convert from Catholicism to Protestantism than vice versa.

Last, we turn to our controls. Women are more likely to be converts. Marital status does not predict conversion nor being lifelong Protestant. As seen in previous research, both converts and lifelong Protestants have slightly higher incomes than lifelong Catholics in most models, but this becomes insignificant for converts in model 5. Both education and urbanity do not appear to influence the likelihood of conversion.⁷

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The growth of Latino Protestantism has generated a great deal of discussion in scholarly, popular, and religious circles. However, surprisingly few studies have investigated this issue empirically—partially because of the lack of sound data on the religious backgrounds and affiliations of Latinos in the United States. Our study addresses this significant gap in the research literature by testing prominent theories of religious conversion and by developing new theories that are unique to the Latino experience. First, we tested the semi-involuntary thesis, a framework that focuses on the potential for social constraints and sanctions to constrain Latinos' decisions to choose Protestantism over Catholicism. Next, we presented a new theory, the national origin hypothesis, that the religious context of Latino immigrants' country of origin shapes conversion in the United States. When violence in areas that were disproportionately Protestant or Catholic spurred chain migrations, the proportion Protestant or Catholic among the first wave of immigrants may influence the religious networks later waves of immigrants link to in the United States. Lastly, we explored how indicators of assimilation (Spanish language use) predict the likelihood of Latinos converting to Protestantism.

We find little support for our extension of the SI thesis if we apply it to Latinos as a whole. If the SI thesis works among Latinos like it does among African-Americans (through a broad racial/ethnic category), we would expect conversions to be less common among Latinos in areas with high concentrations of Latino Catholics (hypothesis 1). However, conversion rates are comparable in the areas with the highest and lowest concentrations of Latinos (as measured by the percentage of Latinos in the respondent's telephone exchange). Those living in moderate levels of Latino concentration are less likely to become Protestant, but this is not what we predicted, and it only happens after we control for region, national origin, and demographics. Why might this be so? One explanation may be that high concentrations of Latinos allow more religious choices without alienation from Latino culture. Consequently, Latinos in these areas may feel greater

⁷Per reviewer suggestion, we included a final model with interactions terms (Puerto Rican \times first generation, and Central American \times first generation). The interaction coefficients for Puerto Ricans and Central Americans are not statistically significant in the models predicting conversion to Protestantism—collinearity and small sizes create a large standard error, however, the pattern of coefficients is consistent with our theory. Please see online appendix.

freedom to make religious decisions based on personal preferences, without regard for social sanctions. In addition, areas with small Latino populations may lack cultural infrastructure (Odem and Lacy 2009; Vega 2015), including Latino Catholic parishes, which may also create incentives that drive switching to Protestantism.

We find little evidence for our extension of the SI thesis using regional variation. Although there are differences between regions, the differences do not follow the pattern we predicted—i.e., there is no monotonic pattern based on size of the Latino population, historic length of the Latino community, percent Catholic in the general population, or church attendance in the general population.⁸ Both the West and West South Central have high concentrations of Latinos where social pressure from co-ethnics might be greater—but in both regions conversion is higher. Thus, the size and establishment of the Latino community does not seem to explain regional variation in conversion as it seems to explain African-American religious practice. The higher rate of conversion outside the Northeast (once national origin is controlled)⁹ may be because the Catholic Church has more churches and institutions in the Northeast and thus is more able to integrate Latino immigrants in the Northeast than elsewhere. Alternatively, conversion rates may be higher in places with more conversionary Protestants that actively reach out to Latinos (e.g., in the South, Midwest and agricultural regions of the West).

Our proposed extension of the semi-involuntary thesis among U.S. Latinos does not match the overall pattern of regional variation in conversion. Places with the most established Latino communities have the most converts and places with the least established Latino communities are in the middle. The evidence on ethnic concentrations also does not match our SI derived predictions.

Thus, perhaps “Latino” is too broad a category and the networks that shape Latino conversions operate at a much narrower level—such as national origin groups or sub-national groups. In contrast to the broad SI thesis, we find that national origin hypothesis strongly predicts the prevalence of both converts and lifelong Protestants. Latinos from national backgrounds that have stronger Protestant legacies are much more likely to be converts, particularly Puerto Ricans, Central Americans, and those with European ancestry (showing support for hypothesis 4). An exception to this pattern are Cubans—Cuba has few Protestants, whereas in the U.S. Cubans are more likely than Mexican-origin Latinos to be lifelong Protestants, but not to be converts.

⁸We do not directly measure church attendance, percent Catholics, etc., in our analyses. However, for example, church attendance is relatively high in the South and relatively low in the Northeast and West. But converts are more prevalent in the West and less prevalent in the Northeast and East South Central/South Atlantic regions.

⁹Our results indicate Latinos with Mexican origin are less likely to convert. To the extent that people of Mexican ancestry are disproportionately in the West and West South Central regions, this may explain why religion variation only becomes statistically significant after we control for respondents’ national origin.

Central Americans may be more likely to convert because many come from indigenous communities (e.g., Mayans). In general, conversion to Protestantism has traditionally been greater among minority indigenous communities who have historically been discriminated against by the dominant Spanish speaking community (Green 2013) and where Protestant missionaries have emphasized translation into the vernacular (Woodberry 2012). Additionally, revolutionary wars (which have often centered in areas with large indigenous communities) forced most Catholic clergy to flee, opening room for lay-lead Pentecostal movements and set off chain migrations to the U.S. among people who were already Protestant or had favorable opinions of Protestants (Garrard-Burnett 1998; Chinchilla and Hamilton 2004).

When we look at table 2, we see that all national origin groups are more likely to be lifelong Protestants when compared to Mexicans, but the coefficients are largest in the groups with historical deep legacies of Protestantism. The risk of being a convert is also typically greater among national origin groups with a deep legacy of Protestantism. Generally, if the coefficient for lifelong Protestants is significant, so is the coefficient for converts. Even when only one is significant, both are usually in the same direction and comparable in size. This makes sense if Catholic Latinos are mainly converted by Protestant Latinos in their immediate networks (which ethnographic evidence suggests is true) (Mulder et al. 2017). Thus, whichever groups ended up with more Protestants in them (for whatever reason), will tend to have more converts in the future.

While this is a form of acculturation, it is not assimilation to the dominant White Anglo-Sax Protestant culture; the probability of converting to Protestantism is shaped by the particular subgroup of Latinos one is most connected to. Early Protestant immigrants facilitate conversions among later Catholic immigrants who either have or gain Protestants friends through immigration. How might these conversions be facilitated? In the case of the Catholic Church, Levitt (2004) and Mooney (2009) find that transnational religious life can have institutional aspects and that allowed seamless transitions from sending countries into well-established networks in receiving counties. Recent ethnographic evidence in Oregon, North Carolina, and Texas (Berho et al. 2017; Mulder et al. 2017) shows that similar transnational organization in some Latino Protestant congregations may jumpstart the processes of conversion. These Latino Protestant congregations have deep ties to home communities in Latin American. Over time, these U.S. churches become important sources of social support for incoming immigrants including Catholic immigrants. Additionally, there is probably less resistance by these Catholic immigrants to go to a Protestant church becomes of the prominence of Protestantism in their home countries. It is in these spaces and via transnational religion that Catholics are exposed to other immigrants like themselves who just happen to be Protestant and convert.

Overall, findings from the national origin hypothesis implies that theories of conversion among Latinos need to pay attention to the cross-national networks immigrants have, the attitudes and relationships they bring with them, and the particular groups that began chain migrations from specific communities (e.g.,

were they devout Protestants or devout Catholics?). The relative resistance of Mexican-origin Latinos to Protestant conversion may have more to do with the Mexican government's violent suppression of the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20th century (and the chain migrations that ensued), than with either their local context in the U.S. or a "greater resistance" of Mexican-origin Latinos to assimilation in the dominant U.S. culture. This demonstrates the need for large data collections to not treat Latinos in the U.S. as a homogenous group, but to aim to ensure adequate representation of the ethnic variation in this population.

Finally we found some support for assimilation theories (hypothesis 6)—English preference predicts being a Latino convert, but we propose some caution. First, we do not know the causal order, therefore we cannot know if converts are more likely to grow in their English fluency, or if those who have more English ability are more likely to convert. The evidence that Latino Protestants are more English dominant is clear (Hunt 1999; Navarro-Rivera et al. 2010; Calvillo and Bailey 2015), but we do not know if the English/convert association is because converts desire to assimilate into the dominate culture, or because English dominance changes Latinos networks and opens them up to conversion attempts by non-Latinos, or because of some other reason. Moreover, recent cross-national ethnographic evidence of Latino Protestant congregations indicates that they are diverse in their language use: some communities hold services that are bilingual or multilingual, while others only speak Spanish or English (Mulder et al. 2017). There is also evidence that some Latino Protestant congregations play important roles in maintaining ethnic ties through Spanish language use (Berho et al. 2017; Mulder et al. 2017). Our study indicates that English-dominant Latinos are more likely to be converts, but ethnographic or fine-grained longitudinal data are necessary to understand the relationship between and motivations for conversion and language change.

Like all research, our work has limitations. First, our data are cross-sectional, so we cannot determine whether English-language use, and residential location proceed or follow conversion; indeed, some bi-directional causation is likely. Future work using longitudinal data would help. A second limitation is the small sample sizes for some national origin groups (e.g., Cubans). This article demonstrates the need for large data collections that ensure adequate representation of the ethnic diversity in this population. Even the term "Latino Protestant" needs to be interrogated and re-theorized to better understand the complex experiences of Latino Protestants and their churches (Martí 2015; Mulder et al. 2017). It is important to note that the Pew data used in this study oversamples immigrants (62%, weighted) compared to government estimates (49.8% in 2012, 55% in 2007) (Pew Research Center 2014b) which may affect generalizability. However, governmental estimates of the Latino immigrant population undercounts foreign born-Latinos (Jensen et al. 2015), particularly undocumented immigrants (Massey and Capoferro 2004). Third, our interpretation of the telephone exchange measure assumes that most communities with high concentrations of Latinos are majority Catholic communities. However, some

communities with high concentrations of Latinos could be majority Protestant and weaken the association predicted by the SI thesis. Unfortunately, untangling this puzzle is not feasible with current data. Fourth, our statistical analysis is skewed towards reasons for conversion that are easy to measure with existing survey questions—which tend to focus on demographics and instrumental reasons for conversion. Yet, some scholars argue that demographic and instrumental theories oversimplify the decision-making process of converts and do not give the reasons converts give for their own conversion sufficient weight (e.g., Roberts 2012). Certainly, converts are often willing to accept large costs (sometimes even violent persecution) to convert and in Latin America neither negative attitudes towards Evangelicals nor violence has prevented conversions (Garrard-Burnett 1998; Smilde 2007; Brusco 2010). Other survey research has found that mere material deprivation does not cause conversion, but “spiritual deprivation” (i.e., the need to answer existential questions such as the meaning of life) are important as well (Stark and Smith 2010).

Despite these limitations, this study extends the small but growing literature on Latino Protestants. We found mixed support for assimilation theory, limited support for our extension of the SI thesis (at least if applied to Latinos as a whole), but substantial support that contextual factors matter when measured at a level more relevant to the everyday lives of Latinos (e.g., national origin groups). Groups that had more Protestants in the early waves of migration tend to have more converts to Protestantism later on. Our thesis that migration chains and early immigrant religious institutions shape later conversions generalizes to other immigrant groups as well: for example, Vietnamese and Koreans. Early immigrants in both communities were disproportionately Christian: either because of persecution by communists (Vietnamese and North Koreans), or via links with Protestant missionaries and churches (Koreans and Southeast Asian ethnic minorities) (Chai 1998). Later waves of immigrants linked to the early ethnic organizations first-wave immigrants set up (i.e., ethnic churches) and disproportionately converted. Now the majority of Korean-Americans are Protestant (61%), even though only 19% of Koreans are (Connor 2014).

For too long, researchers have neglected empirical research about religious change among U.S. Latinos. Yet expanding Protestantism could alter Latino solidarity, family structure, social life, and politics, and change the broader U.S. religious landscape. Future studies should engage the issues raised in this article in order to understand the dynamics and complexities of religious life in the increasingly heterogeneous U.S. Latino population.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

A supplementary section is located with the electronic version of this article at Sociology of Religion online (<http://www.socrel.oxfordjournals.org>).

REFERENCES

- Bartkowski, John P. 2004. *The Promise Keepers*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bartkowski, John P., Aida I. Ramos-Wada, Chris G. Ellison, and Gabriel A. Acevedo. 2012. "Faith, Race-Ethnicity, and Public Policy Preferences: Religious Schemas and Abortion Attitudes among Us Latinos." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2:343–58.
- Barrett, David, George Thomas Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson. 2001. *World Christian Encyclopedia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berho, Debbie, Gerardo Martí, and Mark Mulder. 2017. "Not Segregated: Mutual Collaboration and Shared Worship among Spanish- and English-Speaking Congregations of Oregon." Unpublished manuscript.
- Blau, Peter M., and Joseph E. Schwartz. 1984. *Crosscutting Social Circles*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Brusco, Elizabeth E. 2010. *The Reformation of Machismo*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Calvillo, Jonathan E., and Stanley R. Bailey. 2015. "Latino Religious Affiliation and Ethnic Identity." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 1:57–78.
- Chai, Karen. 1998. "Competing for the Second Generation: English-language Ministry at a Korean Protestant Church." In *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, edited by S.R. Warner and J.G. Wittner, 295–331. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Chinchilla, Norma Stoltz, and Nora Hamilton. 2004. "Central American Immigrants: Diverse Populations, Changing Communities." In *The Columbia History of Latinos in the United States since 1960*, edited by D.G. Gutiérrez, 187–228. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Connor, Phillip. 2014 "6 Facts about South Korea's Growing Christian Populations" *Pew Research Center*, Retrieved September 26, 2015 (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/12/6-facts-about-christianity-in-south-korea/>).
- Cruz, Samuel. 2005. *Masked Africanisms: Puerto Rican Pentecostalism*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Diaz-Stevens, Ana Maria, and Antonio Stevens-Arroyo. 1998. *The Emmaus Paradigm: Recognizing the Resurgence in Latino Religion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose, and Janet Saltzman Chafetz. 2000. *Religion and the New Immigrants*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Eckstein, Susan, and Lorena Barberia. 2002. "Grounding Immigrant Generations in History: Cuban Americans and Their Transnational Ties." *International Migration Review* 36:799–837.
- Ellison, Christopher G. 1995. "Rational Choice Explanations of Individual Religious Behavior: Notes on the Problem of Social Embeddedness." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:89–97.
- Ellison, Christopher G., Gabriel A. Acevedo, and Aida I. Ramos-Wada. 2011. "Religion and Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage among US Latinos." *Social Science Quarterly* 92, no. 1:35–56.
- Ellison, Christopher G., Samuel Echevarria, and Brad Smith. 2005. "Religion and Abortion Attitudes among Us Hispanics: Findings from the 1990 Latino National Political Survey." *Social Science Quarterly* 86, no. 1:192–208.
- Ellison, Christopher G., and Patricia Goodson. 1997. "Conservative Protestantism and Attitudes toward Family Planning in a Sample of Seminarians." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 512–29.
- Ellison, Christopher G., and Darren E. Sherkat. 1995. "The 'Semi-Involuntary Institution' Revisited: Regional Variations in Church Participation among Black Americans." *Social Forces* 73, no. 4:1415–37.

- Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1988. "Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies: Religious Mobilization in American Cities." *American Sociological Review* 53:41–49.
- Fitzgerald, Scott, and Jennifer Glass. 2012. "Conservative Religion, Early Transitions to Adulthood and the Intergenerational Transmission of Class." *Research in the Sociology of Work* 23:49–72.
- Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. 1998. *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Green, L. 2013. *Fear as A Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Hackett, Conrad, and D. Michael Lindsay. 2008. "Measuring Evangelicalism: Consequences of Different Operationalization Strategies." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47:499–514.
- Hallum, Anne Motley. 2003. "Taking Stock and Building Bridges: Feminism, Women's Movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 38:169–186.
- Heyman, Christine Leigh. 1998. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hunt, Larry L. 1999. "Hispanic Protestantism in the United States: Trends by Decade and Generation." *Social Forces* 77:1601–23.
- Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1995. "Voodoo Economics? Reviewing the Rational Choice Approach to Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34:76–88.
- . 1997. "Rational Choice: Framework for the Social Scientific Study of Religion." In *Rational Choice Theory and Religion*, edited by L.A. Young, 25–44. New York: Routledge.
- Jensen, Eric B., Renuka Bhaskar, and Melissa Scopilliti. 2015. "Demographic Analysis 2010: Estimates of Coverage of the Foreign-Born Population in the American Community Survey." Population Division, US Census Bureau, Working Paper (103).
- Kochhar, Rakesh, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya. 2005. "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth." *Pew Hispanic Center*. Retrieved September 26, 2015 (<http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/50.pdf>).
- Landale, Nancy, and R.S. Oropesa. 2007. "Hispanic Families: Stability and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:381–405.
- Lee, Jongho, and Harry P. Pachon. 2007. "Leading the Way: An Analysis of the Effect of Religion on the Latino Vote." *American Politics Research* 35, no. 2:252–72.
- Levitt, Peggy. 2004. "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life." *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 1:1–18.
- Martí, Gerardo. 2015. "Latino Protestants and Their Congregations: Establishing an Agenda for Sociological Research." *Sociology of Religion* 76, no. 2:145–54.
- Massey, Douglas S., and Chiara Capoferro. 2004. "Measuring Undocumented Migration." *The International Migration Review* 38, no. 3:1075–102.
- Meyer, Jean A. 2008. *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People between Church and State 1926–1929*. Vol. 24. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Mooney, Margarita. 2009. *Faith Makes Us Live: Surviving and Thriving in the Haitian Diaspora*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Mulder, Mark T., Aida I. Ramos, and Gerardo Martí. 2017. *Latino Protestants in America: Growing and Diverse*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Navarro-Rivera, Juhem, Barry A. Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar. 2010. "US Latino Religious Identification 1990-2008: Growth, Diversity & Transformation."
- Odem, Mary E., and Elaine Cantrell Lacy, eds. 2009. *Latino Immigrants and the Transformation of the US South*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection. 1975. "State of Origin of Migratory Agricultural Workers Entering U.S. 1942-1968." The University of Texas. Retrieved March 20, 2016 (https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/atlas_mexico/migrations_1942_68.jpg).

- Perl, Paul, Jennifer Z. Greely, and Mark A. Gray. 2006. "What Proportion of Adult Hispanics are Catholic? A Review of Survey Data and Methodology." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45:419–36.
- Pew Research Center. 2006. "Cubans in the United States." Retrieved 23 Nov. 2011 (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2011/10/23.pdf>).
- . 2009. "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion." Retrieved 26 Sept. 2015 (<http://pewforum.org/assets/files/hispanics-religion-07-methodology-final.pdf>).
- . 2014a. "The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States." Retrieved 2 October 2015 (<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latino-in-the-united-states/>).
- . 2014b. "Hispanic Nativity Shift: U.S. Births Drive Population Growth as Immigration Stalls." Washington, D.C. (<http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/04/29/hispanic-nativity-shift/>).
- . 2014c. "On Religion, Mexicans Are More Catholic and Often More Traditional Than Mexican Americans." Washington, D.C. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/08/on-religion-mexicans-are-more-catholic-and-often-more-traditional-than-mexican-americans/>).
- . 2014d. "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region." Washington, D. C. (<http://www.compassion.com/multimedia/religion-in-latin-america-pew-research.pdf>).
- . 2015. "Puerto Rican Religious Affiliation." Washington, DC. (http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/15/hispanics-of-puerto-rican-origin-in-the-united-states-2013/ph_2015-09-15_hispanic-origins-puerto-rico-03/).
- . 2016a. "How Religious Is Your State?" Washington, DC. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/02/29/how-religious-is-your-state/>).
- . 2016b. "Key Facts About How The U.S. Hispanic Population Is Changing." Washington, DC. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/08/key-facts-about-how-the-u-s-hispanic-population-is-changing/>).
- Phillips, Rick. 1998. "Religious Market Share and Mormon Church Activity." *Sociology of Religion* 59:117–130.
- Portes, Alejandro, and Alex Stepick. 1985. "Unwelcome Immigrants: The Labor Market Experiences of 1980 (Mariel) Cuban and Haitian Refugees in South Florida." *American Sociological Review* 50:493–514.
- Roberts, Nathaniel. 2012. "Is Conversion a 'Colonization of Consciousness'?" *Anthropological Theory* 12, no. 3:271–94.
- Sandomirsky, Sharon, and John Wilson. 1990. "Processes of Disaffiliation: Religious Mobility among Men and Women." *Social Forces* 68:1211–29.
- Sherkat, Darren E. 1997. "Embedding Religious Choices: Integrating Preferences and Social Constraints into Rational Choice Theories of Religious Behavior." In *Rational Choice Theory and Religion*, edited by L.A. Young, 57–85. New York: Routledge.
- Sherkat, Darren E., and John Wilson. 1995. "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy." *Social Forces* 73:993–1026.
- Skirbekk, Vegard, Eric Kaufmann, and Anne Goujon. 2010. "Secularism, Fundamentalism, or Catholicism? The Religious Composition of the United States to 2043." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49:293–310.
- Smilde, David. 2007. *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Stark, Rodney, and Buster G. Smith. 2010. "Conversion to Latin American Protestantism and the Case for Religious Motivation." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 6, no. 7:2–17.

- Steensland, Brian, Jerry Z. Park, Mark D. Regnerus, Lynn D. Robinson, W. Bradford Wilcox, and Robert D. Woodberry. 2000. "The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art." *Social Forces* 79:291–318.
- Steigenga, Timothy J., and Edward L. Cleary, eds. 2007. *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Stolzenberg, Ross M., Mary Blair-Loy, and Linda J. Waite. 1995. "Religious Participation over the Early Life Course: Age and Family Life Cycle Effects on Church Membership." *American Sociological Review* 60:84–103.
- Telles, Edward, and Vilma Ortiz. 2008. *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican-Americans, Assimilation and Race*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Thomas, Lorrin. 2010. *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 35.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. "Hispanics in the United States." Retrieved March 1, 2015 (http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanics/files/Internet_Hispanics_in_US_2006.pdf).
- Vásquez, Manuel A., Chad E. Seales, and Marie Friedmann Marquardt. 2008. "New Latino Destinations." In *Latinos/as in the United State*, edited by H. Rodriguez, R. Sáenz, and C. Menjívar, 19–35. New York: Springer.
- Vega, Sujey. 2015. *Latino Heartland: of Borders and Belonging in the Midwest*. New York: New York University Press.
- Verter, Bradford. 2003. "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu." *Sociological Theory* 21:150–74.
- Warner, R. Stephen, and Judith G. Wittner, eds. 1998. *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Wasem, Ruth E. 2009. "Cuban Migration to the United States: Policy and Trends." *Library of Congress Congressional Research Service*, Washington DC. Retrieved May 1, 2016 (<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/125936.pdf>).
- White, Ian R., Rhian Daniel, and Patrick Royston. 2010. "Avoiding Bias Due to Perfect Prediction in Multiple Imputation of Incomplete Categorical Variables." *Computational Statistics & Data Analysis* 54, no. 10:2267–75.
- Williams, N. 1990. *The Mexican American Family*. New York: General Hall.
- Woodberry, Robert D., and Christian S. Smith. 1998. "Fundamentalism et al.: Conservative Protestants in America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22:25–56.
- Woodberry, Robert D. 2012. "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2:244–74.
- Zhou, Min. 1997. "Growing up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, no. 1:63–95.