

**RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION AMONG  
HISPANICS IN THE UNITED STATES  
2001**

By

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes the patterns of religious self-identification among American Hispanic<sup>1</sup> adults. First, we follow the trends from 1990 to 2001. Second, we explore the demographics of this population. Third, we compare patterns in 2001 of American-born and foreign-born Hispanics. We compare the generations, the young and the old, and examine differences in their religious profiles<sup>2</sup>. This report provides an extensive descriptive profile of the religious lives of American Hispanic adults at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We hope it raises many more research questions for the religious community as well as for scholars of religion and ethnicity.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on data from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2001), which was gathered by means of a random-digit-dialed telephone survey of 50,281 American households in the continental U.S. (48 states). The methodology largely replicates the widely reported and pioneering 1990 National Survey of Religious Identification (NSRI) carried out at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. ARIS 2001 thus provides a unique time series of information concerning the religious identification choices of American adults.

The data were collected over a 17-week period, from February to June 2001 at the rate of about 3,000 completed interviews a week by ICR/CENTRIS Survey Research Group of Media, PA as part of their national telephone omnibus market research (EXCEL/ACCESS) surveys. The primary question of the interview was: *What is your religion, if any?*<sup>3</sup> The religion of the spouse/partner was also asked. If the initial answer was ‘Protestant’ or ‘Christian,’ further questions were asked to probe which particular denomination.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Hispanic and Latino are often used interchangeably. Hispanic is preferred here, since it is the term used in the U.S. Census. In our survey the question was: Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

<sup>2</sup> This follows our early research on the impact of religion on political preferences among US Hispanics: Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, Party political preferences of US Hispanics: the varying impact of religion, social class and demographic factors, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 18 Number 2 April 1995.

<sup>3</sup> The 2001 question wording added the phrase “if any” to the question. A subsequent validity check based on cross samples of 3,000 respondents carried out by ICR in 2002 found no statistical difference between the pattern of responses according to the two wordings. Given the small number of Hispanic respondents no separate tests are available but we can assume that there is no difference among this sub-population of respondents.

## INNOVATIONS BETWEEN NSRI 1990 AND ARIS 2001

The NSRI 1990 study was a very large survey in which 113,723 persons were questioned about their religious preferences. However, it provided for no further detailed questioning of respondents regarding their religious beliefs or involvement or the religious composition of their household.

In the light of those lacunae in the 1990 survey, ARIS 2001 took steps to enhance both the range and the depth of the topics covered. For example, new questions were introduced concerning the religious identification of spouses. To be sure, budget limitations, have necessitated a reduction in the number of respondents. The current survey still covers a very large national sample (over 50,000 respondents) that provides a high level of confidence in the results and adequate coverage of most religious groups and key geographical units such as states and major metropolitan areas.

For the sake of analytic depth, additional questions about religious beliefs and affiliation as well as religious change were introduced for a smaller representative sub-sample of (17,000) households. Even this sample is about ten times greater than most typical opinion surveys of the US population. This sub-sample as well as the larger sample were weighted to reflect the total U.S. adult population

These innovations have provided a much richer data set that goes far beyond the mere question of religious preference. The new data allow for a much more sophisticated analysis than NSRI 1990. They offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of religion in contemporary American society and especially how religious adherence relates to countervailing secularizing trends. The information collected is also potentially much more useful for the various national religious bodies.

ARIS 2001 included two questions asked only of Hispanic respondents: country of birth; and, for the foreign-born, date of arrival in the U.S. All interviews were conducted in English. Obviously, this limited responses from non-English-speaking Hispanics. Nevertheless, only 4% of the households that were contacted did not participate in the survey because of language barriers, and only perhaps half of these were Spanish-speaking households. Further analysis of this issue is treated in the appendix. Based on our experience, it is our opinion that the 18% of non-English speaking Hispanics have patterns of religious identification similar to those of Hispanics who were interviewed in ARIS. Therefore, there are no statistically valid reasons to make further adjustments at this point.

One of the key distinguishing features of this survey, as of its predecessor in 1990, is that respondents were asked to describe themselves in terms of religion with an open-ended question. Interviewers did not prompt or offer a suggested list of potential answers. Moreover, the self-description of respondents was not

based on whether established religious bodies, institutions, churches, mosques or synagogues considered them to be members. Quite the contrary, the survey sought to determine whether the respondents regarded themselves as adherents of a religious community. Subjective rather than objective standards of religious identification were tapped by the survey.

## FINDINGS

### Introduction - Hispanic Adult Population

The large National Survey of Religious Identification in 1990 included almost 4,900 adult respondents (18 years old and over) who identified themselves as Hispanics. The smaller American Religious Identification Survey in 2001 had almost 3,000 adult Hispanics.

As seen in Table 1, the adult Hispanic population grew considerably in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1990, according to the U.S. Census there were almost 14.6 million adult Hispanics. In 2001, according to Census 2000, they numbered 23 million.

Overall, in Census 2000, 35.3 million people were identified as Hispanics. Of these, 23 million were adults and the rest were 17 years old or younger. The first section of this report concentrates on the Hispanic adult population.

### Religious Identification Among Adult Hispanics

The key question in ARIS 2001, as in NSRI 1990, concerns self-reporting of religious identification. The response to the 2001 question: “*What is your religion, if any?*” yielded over 60 different religious bodies. For analytic reasons Table 1 shows only the religious groupings which were chosen by at least 30 adult Hispanics in the 2001 sample.

Table 1 describes the religious identification of American Hispanics at two points in time, 1990 and 2001. The use of identical methodologies in the two surveys allows for the identification of trends and changes among Hispanics. Table 1 provides the most comprehensive profile of religious identification among adult American Hispanics today and compares the current pattern of religious identification with what the pattern was in 1990.

As evident from Table 1, the number of adult Hispanic Catholics rose from about 9.6 million in 1990 to over 13 million in 2001. Catholicism is still the dominant

religion among Hispanics in 2001. However, despite the sharp increase in absolute numbers, one of the most important findings is the drop in the proportion of Hispanics who are Catholic. In 1990, 66% of adult Hispanics identified themselves as Catholics. In 2001 only 57% of them do so. The proportion of non-Catholic Christians remains steady from 1990 to 2001 at around one-quarter of adult Hispanics.

It is often assumed that the decline in Catholics' share of the Hispanic population has been mirrored by an equally large increase in the share of Pentecostals. In fact, although the number of Pentecostal Hispanics doubled between 1990 and 2001, their share of the overall Hispanic population increased only modestly from 3% to 4%.

So where did all the Catholic Hispanics go?

Clearly the most rapid growth is in the no-religion group. From 926,000 adult Hispanics who self-identified as professing no religion, or as atheist, agnostic or secular in 1990, to almost 3 million opted for these self-classifications in 2001. Their proportion of the Hispanics grew from 6% to 13%.

This pattern, of growth in the no-religion group, parallels national trends. ARIS 2001 documented the great increase both in absolute numbers as well as in percentages of the adults who do not subscribe to any religion. Nationally, 14% of American adults prefer to be identified as atheist, agnostic, humanist<sup>4</sup>, secular or having no religion. This cluster will be referred to hereafter as the no-religion group or none.

Other patterns are the increase in the unspecified Christian population and the decrease in the unspecified Protestant population in 2001 among both Hispanics and the general population<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the percentage of Hispanic Baptists has decreased in the last decade despite an increase in total numbers.

Lastly, there has been a substantial increase in the number of adults who refused to reply to the question about their religious preference. This general pattern is reflected among Hispanics as well. While less than 1% refused to reveal their religious identification in 1990, almost 3% refused to answer in 2001. It is yet below 5% refusal rate in the general adult population. Hence the increased tendency to refuse to reveal one's religious identification is similar to that of the general population.

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<sup>4</sup> None of American Hispanics in 2001 self-identified as Humanist.

<sup>5</sup> Barry A. Kosmin, Egon Mayer and Ariela Keysar, *The American Religious Identification Survey, 2001 Report*, The Graduate Center of the University of New York.  
[www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/studies\\_index.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/studies/studies_index.htm)

Table 1  
**Self-Described Religious Identification of U.S. Adult Hispanics**  
**1990-2001**  
(Weighted Estimates)

	1990		2001	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
Catholic	9,608,000	66	13,090,000	57
Baptist	1,077,000	7	1,148,000	5
Christian (unspecified)	757,000	5	1,837,000	8
Pentecostals <sup>6</sup>	438,000	3	918,000	4
Protestant (unspecified)	366,000	3	230,000	1
Methodist/Wesleyan	250,000	2	229,000	1
Jehovah's Witness	244,000	2	229,000	1
Other Christian <sup>7</sup>	584,000	4	1,149,000	5
No religion <sup>8</sup>	926,000	6	2,985,000	13
Other religion <sup>9</sup>	270,000	2	459,000	2
Don't know/Refused	124,000	<1	689,000	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,597,000<sup>10</sup></b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>22,963,000<sup>11</sup></b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>6</sup> Pentecostals Include: Holiness, Charismatic, Assemblies of God, Church of God. In 2001 they also include: Four Square Gospel, and Full Gospel

<sup>7</sup> Other Christian groups include: Episcopalian/Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, Mormon/Latter-Day Saints, Lutheran, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist, Church of Christ, Congregational, Apostle, Disciples of Christ, Quaker, Christian Reform, Non-denominational, and Independent Christian Church. In 2001 they also include: Brethren, and Covenant.

<sup>8</sup> Includes Atheist, Agnostic and Secular

<sup>9</sup> Other religion groups include: Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Moslem, Taoist, Baha'i, Unitarian, Humanist, Spiritualist, Eckankar, Rastafarian, Scientologist, other (unclassified). In 2001 they also include: Wiccan, Pagan, Druid, Indian religion, and Santeria.

<sup>10</sup> Total adult population is drawn from Census 1990. Number in each religion calculated from distribution of religious identification in NSRI 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Total adult population is drawn from Census 2000. Number in each religion calculated from distribution of religious identification in ARIS 2001.

## **Demographic Profile of Adult Hispanics**

### **a. Distribution of Males and Females**

Among Hispanics the distribution of males and females is similar to that of other religious groups in the total U.S. population.

If there were no differences in religious identification by gender, one would expect each group to be composed of about half men and half women. But among adult Americans overall, men account for only 47% of Catholics. In contrast, 59% of the no-religion group are males (ARIS, 2001). These patterns also occur among American Hispanics: while only 48% of Hispanic Catholics are males, 62% of the Hispanic no-religion group are males. This fits with the well-established pattern that women are more likely than men to self-identify with a religious group and regard themselves as religious (ARIS, 2001, Exhibit 4).

The American Religious Identification Survey reveals that at the beginning of the 21st century, adult male Hispanics are more likely than females to profess no religious identification or define themselves as “none.” As shown in Chart 1, the differences are quite small between adult Catholics and all other Christian denominations, labeled here as Protestants.

It is important to examine other demographic variables besides gender that differ between religious groups.

## **b. Age**

**H**ispanics are younger than their counterparts in the general adult population. Forty percent of Hispanic adults are under age 30 compared with 23% in the total U.S. population. And only 7% of Hispanic adults are 60 years and older, compared with almost 21% of American adults. This pattern is true for each of the major religious groups. For example, while 38% of Catholic Hispanics are 18-29 years old, only 24% of adult American Catholics are under 30 years old.

**T**he most striking finding is the young age structure of adult Hispanics who do not subscribe to any religious identification. As shown in Chart 2, 53% of no-religion Hispanics are under age 30, 13 percentage points more than the share of all U.S. Hispanic adults under 30. In this respect, Hispanics mirror the overall population. About 35% of U.S. adults in the no-religion group are under 30. That is 12 percentage points higher than the share of all U.S. adults under 30. Youth appears to be related to a disinclination toward religious identification

## **c. Marital Status**

**O**ver half of adult Hispanic Catholics and Protestants are married. Only 34% of adult Hispanics in the no-religion group are married. This is considerably lower than the 48% of Americans overall in the no-religion group who are married.

**H**ispanic adults who do not subscribe to any religious identification are also more likely than Hispanic Catholics and Protestants to be cohabiting or in common law marriages, 17%, 8% and 5% respectively.

**A** substantial proportion -- 42%-- of adult Hispanics in the no-religion and atheist group are singles who were never married. This is by far higher than the proportion for Catholic and Protestant Hispanics. (See Chart 3.) It is also far more than the 20% of single adults in the overall American population and even higher than the 29% of single adults among the general American no-religion group (ARIS 2001).



**d. Education**

The educational attainment of adult Hispanics is below the average of American adults in general. While over 50% of Hispanics have a high school education or less, 41% of American adults in general have a high school education or less. On the other end of educational attainment, only 5% of Hispanics attended graduate or post-graduate school, compared with 9% in the general population.

The education level of adult Hispanics is independent of their religious identification. As shown in Table 2, about 16% of adult Hispanics regardless of their religious identification have not completed high school. About 5%, again regardless of religious identification, attended graduate or post-graduate school. In fact, there is an extraordinary similarity between the education profiles of the three main Hispanic religious populations.

Table 2  
**Education Level of U.S. Adult Hispanics by Religious Grouping**

Level of education	Religious Group			Total
	Catholic	Protestant	None	
Less than high school	16%	16%	15%	16%
High school graduate	37%	36%	36%	35%
Some college	25%	22%	25%	24%
Graduated college	17%	20%	18%	18%
Graduate school or more	4%	5%	5%	5%
Other/Refused	1%	1%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of adults	13,100,000	5,750,000	2,990,000	23,000,000 <sup>12</sup>

**e. Employment Status**

Hispanics who profess no religion are the most likely to be employed full-time. Sixty-four percent of Hispanics in the no-religion group, compared with only 55% of Protestants, are employed full-time. (See Chart 4.) At the same time, Hispanics who profess no religion are the least likely to be unemployed. Only 22% of no-religion Hispanics, compared with 28% of Protestants and 27% of Catholics, are not economically active. The no-religion Hispanics are younger and male, so we would expect them to be in the work force.

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<sup>12</sup>There are additional 1.15 million adult Hispanics (5%) who self identified with other non-Christian religion don't know or refused to answer the religion question.

**f. Household Income**

Hispanic respondents were asked to estimate their total annual household income from all sources, before taxes. Members of a household may have different religious identifications, and the survey does not establish how much each member contributed to household income. But since household income is shared evenly, the survey data are presumed to apply to all members of a household.

Hispanics are slightly more willing than other Americans to disclose their household income. Some 14% of them did not respond to the question with a solid dollar figure. In comparison, 17% of US adults did not disclose their household income according to ARIS 2001 either.

Table 3  
**Household Income of U.S. Hispanics by Religious Grouping**

Household Income	Religious Group			Total
	Catholic	Protestant	None	
Under \$10,000	7%	6%	10%	7%
\$10,000-14,999	6%	6%	8%	6%
\$15,000-19,999	7%	6%	8%	7%
\$20,000-24,999	8%	8%	7%	8%
\$25,000-29,999	9%	8%	8%	8%
\$30,000-39,999	10%	10%	15%	11%
\$40,000-49,999	9%	11%	9%	9%
\$50,000-74,999	15%	15%	11%	14%
\$75,000-99,999	8%	9%	7%	8%
\$100,000 and over	8%	8%	7%	8%
Don't Know/Refused	12%	13%	10%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of adults	13,100,000	5,750,000	2,990,000	23,000,000

Median household income among U.S. Hispanics ranged about \$30,000-\$39,999 in 2000. This is compared with about \$40,000-\$49,999 among American in general. However, Hispanics tend to reside in larger households on average (mean size= 3.3 compared with 2.6 in general), so per-capita income is lower.

Overall, income patterns are quite similar across religious groups. Interestingly, respondents who profess no religion live in households with a lower income level; 10% of them, compared with only 6% of Protestants, reside in households with under \$10,000 annual income. The no-religion Hispanics tend to be younger and they might not have established themselves economically.

The income bracket with the largest number of no-religion Hispanics is \$30,000-39,000, containing 15% of them. The income bracket with the largest number of Catholic and Protestant Hispanics is \$50,000-74,999, containing 15% of each group. (See Table 3.)

**i. Region**

The Mid-Atlantic, East North Central and Pacific regions mirror the overall religious composition of U.S. Hispanics. About 57% are Catholics, 25% Protestants and 13% self-identify as atheist or profess no religion. These regions cover a large proportion of the Hispanic population. In contrast, only 40% of Hispanics in New England are Catholics. In both New England and the South Atlantic, 33% of Hispanics are Protestants, exceeding the national average. Interestingly, the two regions in which Catholics constitute the biggest share of Hispanics--West South Central and Mountain—are ones where Hispanics lived in large numbers before the founding of the United States.

Table 4  
**Geographic Region of U.S. Adult Hispanics by Religious Group**

<u>Region</u> <sup>13</sup>	<u>Catholic</u>	<u>Religious Group</u>		<u>Total</u> <sup>14</sup>	
		<u>Protestant</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Number of adults</u> <sup>15</sup>	
New England	40%	33%	16%	554,000	(100%)
Mid-Atlantic	57%	23%	13%	2,998,000	(100%)
East North Central	57%	24%	14%	1,571,000	(100%)
West North Central	41%	24%	30%	396,000	(100%)
South Atlantic	49%	33%	13%	3,054,000	(100%)
East South Central	22%	50%	19%	204,000	(100%)
West South Central	63%	23%	10%	4,524,000	(100%)
Mountain	60%	23%	12%	2,247,000	(100%)
<u>Pacific</u>	<u>58%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>12%</u>	<u>7,347,000</u>	<u>(100%)</u>
Total	57%	25%	13%		100%
Number of adults	13,100,000	5,750,000	2,990,000	22,900,000	

<sup>13</sup> New England includes CT,RI,MA,NH,VT, and ME; Middle Atlantic includes NJ,PA and NY; East North Central includes OH,MI,IN,IL and WI; West North Central includes MO,IA,MN,KS,NE,SD and ND; South Atlantic includes FL,GA,SC,NC,VA,WV,DC,MD and DE; East South Central includes AL,MS,TN and KY; West South Central includes LA,TX,AR and OK; Mountain includes NM,AZ,CO,UT,NV,WY,ID and MT; Pacific includes CA,OR and WA. Hawaii and Alaska are not included in ARIS.

<sup>14</sup> The total includes other/Don't Know/Refused which are not presented in the table.

<sup>15</sup> Source: US Census 2000 - adult Hispanic population by region.

There are two regions with relatively small population of Hispanics. Only 1% of U.S. Hispanics reside in the East South Central, which includes Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama. And less than 2% of Hispanics reside in the West North Central, which includes Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri and Kansas. Because of small sample sizes, it is difficult to be certain about the patterns of religious affiliation. But it appears that relatively few Hispanics in the East South Central region are Catholic. A high percentage (more than double the national average) of Hispanics who live in the West North Central region professes no religion.

#### **j. Origins -- U.S.-Born and Foreign-Born Hispanics**

Chart 5 sets out the religious identification profiles of U.S. and foreign-born Hispanics. For analytical purposes, since we are dealing with cultural issues relating to majority and minority category, we classified ARIS respondents born in Puerto Rico as foreign-born. Among those Hispanics born in the Continental USA 59% identify themselves as Catholic, 26% as Protestants and 12% profess no religion. Those who are born abroad are less likely to be Catholics or Protestants and slightly more likely to profess no religion than are U.S.-born Hispanics. Foreign-born Hispanics are more likely to opt for either “other,” “don’t know” or “refused” when asked their religious identification. This lower rate of willingness to identify with a religious group is typical of foreign-born Americans and may be due to their unfamiliarity with survey research in the country of origin. They are generally much more suspicious of strangers asking them personal questions.

Looking within the religious group, we find quite different patterns of U.S.- vs. foreign-born Hispanics. (See Chart 6.) For instance, Protestant Hispanics are the most likely (76%) to be U.S.-born. On the other hand, the no-religion group is the most likely to include foreign-born Hispanics (30%).

These differences may explain other socio-demographic patterns among the various religious groups of Hispanics. They also might have implications for the emerging new religious mapping of American Hispanics with new waves of migration, as more foreign-born form the Hispanic population. Thus, more and more Hispanics will adhere to no religion.

Alternatively, one might argue that as U.S.-born Hispanic children grow up and become socialized into American society, we might expect them to follow American religious patterns as well. This might be expressed with religious switching towards Protestant groups (see below).

**O**ur data do not provide us with insights on which of the scenarios are more plausible. However, following the trends from 1990 to 2001, we have already demonstrated the substantial increase in the number of adult Hispanics who adhere to no religion.

**R**eported church membership is higher among U.S.-born Hispanics compared with foreign -born Hispanics, 48% and 37% respectively. This is a somewhat surprising finding, since one might expect that immigrants would join churches at even a higher rate than U.S. born to establish ties in their new home. One possible explanation is that immigrants might find it difficult to join a house of worship in unfamiliar places. Perhaps many of those who do not immediately join slowly lose their connection to the faith and never join a church at all. Clearly this issue demands further investigation.

### **k. The Next Generation – Children in Hispanic Households**

The American Religious Identification Survey in 2001 assigns the ethnic attribute of the adult respondent to all the children who reside in the household. As shown in Table 5 below, the religious composition of the child population is quite similar to that of the adult Hispanic population. This suggests that there are no dramatic differences in fertility rates according to religious groups.

Table 5  
**Children in Hispanic Households**  
by the religious identification of the adult respondent

<u>Religion of Respondent</u>	<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>Percent of All Children</u>
Catholic	6,331,000	57%
Protestant	3,062,000	28%
None	1,167,000	11%
Other/DK/RF	464,000	4%
Total	11 million	100%

### **Religious Upbringing of Children in Interfaith Families**

Among Hispanics, Catholics are the most likely to marry or cohabitate with people of their own faith. About 79% do so. This is not surprising, considering the sheer number of potential Catholic Hispanic partners. What is more surprising is how many Hispanics with no religion marry or cohabitate with somebody of no religion. Fully 68% do so, even though the number of potential partners with no religion is relatively small. Protestants are in the middle, with 75% in homogenous relationships.

Religious upbringing of children is of great concern to leaders of the community who wish to retain religious continuity. This is most problematic in interfaith families, where parents profess different faiths. We hypothesize that many interfaith families consist of one Catholic parent and one parent who was born Catholic but has switched to Protestantism or no religion.

The issue of religious upbringing of the next generation is explored in the American Religious Identification Survey in families where the married couples or the cohabitating partners differ in their religious identification. We define them as interfaith families though many can be viewed as interdenominational families.

Unfortunately, only 116 such interfaith Hispanic families are represented in ARIS 2001. This is a small sample, which limits the analytical exploration<sup>16</sup>. It provides us with some broad insights on how the children are raised. For instance, almost half of interfaith Hispanic families raise their children as Catholics, about one-third as Protestants and about 13% with no religion. About 80% of Catholic parents in interfaith families raise their children as Catholics. Only about 40% of Protestant parents in interfaith families raise their children as Protestants.

These patterns of marriage and child-rearing are not major contributors to the rate of erosion in the predominantly Catholic identity of Hispanics in America. First, because only about 20% of Hispanic Catholics choose a partner who is not Catholic. Second, because of those who do, fully 80% nevertheless raise their children as Catholics.

### **Religious Switching**

About 16% of all adult Americans report that they have changed their religious preference over the course of their life. Similarly, 17% of adult Hispanics report having ever changed their religious preference. As illustrated in Chart 7, this phenomenon of religious switching varies considerably within the Hispanic population.

Hispanics who are currently Protestant or who profess no religion are by far more likely than Catholics to have changed their religious preference. In other words, many Protestant and no-religion Hispanics used to identify with another religion but switched. Not surprisingly, most of them used to identify themselves as Catholics.

When asked: “What was your religious preference, if any, before you changed?”

76% of Protestants and 60% of no religion<sup>17</sup> used to identify with Catholicism.

Are foreign-born Hispanics more likely to switch their religion? Though we can not relate religious switching to the timing of migration to the U.S., we might expect foreign-born more than American-born to have switched their religion. Contrary to our hypothesis, ARIS data show a reverse pattern. While 19% of U.S.-born Hispanics changed their religion, only 12% of foreign-born Hispanics did so.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, there are insufficient data to determine the influence that the gender of the parent has on the religious upbringing of children.

<sup>17</sup> Among Hispanics switchers who currently profess no religion, 10% use the generic Christian label to identify their religious preference before they changed.

This may reflect the multi-generational nature of Americanization of U.S. Hispanics, whereby religious switching is another way of adaptation into American culture and society. American society readily accepts religious switching as individuals seek to improve and change their lives.

## **Religious Behavior and Attitudes**

Beyond religious identification, the American Religious Identification Survey in 2001 sought to gather information on *belonging* and *belief*.

- Belonging to a religious institution
- Belief in God and religious outlook

### **a. Religious Belonging of American Hispanics**

In the minds of most Americans religious group identification is closely associated with belonging to a church or a temple or some other house of worship. More than half (54%) of the adult population in America reside in a household where either they themselves or someone else belongs to a church, temple, synagogue or mosque.

Belonging to a religious institution is lower among Hispanics in general, only 47%. Still, membership varies greatly by denomination, just as it does in the overall American population (see ARIS 2001). Chart 8 shows the varied pattern of religious institutional membership among Hispanics. Protestants are far more likely to reside in households where somebody is a member of a church.

It may seem odd that 19% of Hispanics who profess no religion answer yes to the question about household religious affiliation. This is probably explained in most cases by the fact that someone else in the household is a church member<sup>18</sup>.

In fact, in the general population as well, 19% of people who profess no religion reported a religious institutional belonging for their household (ARIS 2001). This similarity in religious institutional membership between Hispanics and non-Hispanics does not hold for Catholics. While 59% of identifying American Catholics, in general, report household membership in a church, only 46% of identifying Hispanic Catholics do so.

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<sup>18</sup>The question is phrased: "Is anyone in your household currently a member of a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque?"



**b. Religious or Secular Outlook of American Hispanics**

*When it comes to your outlook, do you regard yourself as ... (1) Secular; (2) Somewhat secular; (3) Somewhat religious, or (4) Religious?"*

**D**o American Hispanics regard their outlook on life to be essentially religious or secular? Their answers vary along with their religious identification. Chart 9 provides a picture of the major differences between Catholic and Protestant Hispanics as well as the unique outlook of those who identify with no religion.

**T**hree-quarters of Americans in general see themselves in some ways as religious: 37% regard themselves as “religious,” and 38% as “somewhat religious.” Hispanics, however, are far more likely to opt for the ambivalent category. While 30% of Hispanics regard themselves as “religious,” 45% regard themselves as “somewhat religious.”

**A**lmost half of Protestant Hispanics regard themselves as “religious.” Yet only 28% of Catholic Hispanics regard themselves as “religious.” Catholics are more likely to lean toward the more ambivalent term “somewhat religious.” More than half of Catholics chose that category, compared with only 37% of Protestants.

**T**True, when we combine the two categories, “somewhat religious” and “religious,” there are hardly any differences between the outlooks of Catholics and Protestants. The main difference is the strong religious outlook among Protestant Hispanics.

**T**The worldview of Hispanics who profess no religion is clearly secular. Half of them regard themselves as either “secular” or “somewhat secular.” Naturally, the dominant group, 42%, consider themselves as “secular,” and only 8% as “somewhat secular.”

**G**enerally American adults who profess no religion also have a secular outlook: 39% regard themselves as “secular,” and 12% as “somewhat secular.”

**c. Religious Attitudes -- Belief in God by American Hispanics**

*Do you agree or disagree that: God exists?*

Apart from religious identification, belief in God is an important dimension of an individual’s religious or secular outlook.

Table 6 allows us to glance at the views of American Hispanics as to whether God exists.

Table 6  
**Religious Attitudes of U.S. Adult Hispanics by Religious Grouping**  
 Do you agree or disagree that God exists?

Agree/Disagree	Religious Group			Total
	Catholic	Protestant	None	
Disagree strongly	2%	2%	4%	2%
Disagree somewhat	1%	2%	5%	2%
Agree somewhat	11%	4%	32%	12%
Agree strongly	84%	91%	53%	80%
Don’t Know/ Refused	2%	1%	6%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of adults	13,100,000	5,750,000	2,990,000	23,000,000 <sup>19</sup>

Catholic and Protestant Hispanics alike believe strongly that God exists. Once again Protestants are more explicit and more likely to express a more religious worldview than Catholic Hispanics.

The no-religion group, however, are more doubtful about the divine and only 53% of them “agree strongly” with the statement. Moreover, this group expresses its doubts, whereby almost a third say that they only “agree somewhat” that God exists. Although these patterns are typical among people who subscribe to no religion<sup>20</sup>, they are certainly atypical among Hispanics in general. Nevertheless, 85% agree that “God exists.” This suggests that the no-religion category contains people who, although having no ties to organized religion, are not necessarily non-believers.

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<sup>19</sup> The overall figure of adult Hispanics is slightly lower due to differential weighting of the sub-sample.

<sup>20</sup> Among Americans in general who profess no religion: 22% “agree somewhat” that God exists and 45% “agree strongly.”

Those who “agree somewhat” or “agree strongly” that God exists were asked:  
*Do you agree or disagree that God performs miracles?*

Patterns are quite similar and consistent with beliefs in the divine. Hispanic adults who think that God exists also attribute powers to God. A great majority—92%--believe that “God performs miracles.” (See Table 7.)

Again, these findings underscore the differences within the Hispanic population. There is a continuum whereby, as seen before, Protestants are the most religious. Catholics carry the middle point, and those with no religion are the most secular in their beliefs: 95%, 81% and 76% respectively agree<sup>21</sup> that “God performs miracles.”

Table 7  
**Beliefs of U.S. Adult Hispanics Who Believe In God**  
Do you agree or disagree that God performs miracles?<sup>22</sup>

Agree/Disagree	Religious Group			Total
	Catholic	Protestant	None	
Disagree strongly	1%	2%	7%	2%
Disagree somewhat	3%	2%	15%	4%
Agree somewhat	20%	9%	36%	19%
Agree strongly	75%	86%	40%	73%
<u>Don't Know/ Refused</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>1%</u>	<u>2%</u>	<u>1%</u>
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Large gaps, however, are apparent in the “agree somewhat” category. No-religion Hispanics are four times as likely as Protestants (and almost twice as Catholics) to express ambivalence about whether God performs miracles. Nevertheless, three out of every four agree that “God performs miracles” which verifies that they are believers in all senses of the word.

All respondents were asked to express their opinion on the proposition:  
*Do you agree or disagree that: God helps me?*

Some 89% of all adult Hispanics believe that God helps them. These personal relationships with God are expressed almost identically by Catholics and Protestants. (See Table 8.)

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<sup>21</sup> Either agree somewhat or agree strongly.

<sup>22</sup> Asked only of those who agree (either somewhat or strongly) that God exists?

Table 8  
**Beliefs of U.S. Adult Hispanics**  
 Do you agree or disagree that ‘God helps me’?

Agree/Disagree	Religious Group			Total
	Catholic	Protestant	None	
Disagree strongly	2%	1%	11%	3%
Disagree somewhat	3%	1%	9%	3%
Agree somewhat	10%	10%	27%	12%
Agree strongly	82%	85%	45%	77%
Don't Know/ Refused	3%	3%	7%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of adults	13,100,000	5,750,000	2,990,000	23,000,000

**O**nce again, the no-religion group is the most skeptical. Some 45% “agree strongly” that God helps them and 27% only “agree somewhat.” They are quite different from other Hispanics, both Catholic and Protestant adherents. Still, even the no-religion group is more likely to believe that God helps them than many non-Hispanics are. In general among American adults who profess no religion, only 34% agree strongly and 22% agree somewhat that God helps them.

## CONCLUSION

The main finding of this report is the weakness of ties to institutional religion among Hispanics, as manifested by below-average church affiliation and the growing proportion of Hispanics in the No Religion group. Young people and new immigrants are particularly “unchurched.” Nevertheless, lack of belonging does not mean lack of belief or lack of a “religious outlook.” Hispanics who profess no religion are more likely to believe in God than members of the general public who profess no religion. Among Hispanics, Protestants most resemble the overall American population in terms of their higher level of church membership and stronger religious beliefs.

Age and gender are more important than education and income as predictors of Hispanics’ religious identification. Regional variations are also significant. Immigration does not appear to be changing the overall pattern of religious adherence as much as is commonly thought.

One of the most important findings is that many Hispanics who left the Catholic Church opted for no religion at all. It has been thought that the vast majority of ex-Catholics became Protestants, and in particular Pentecostals. ARIS 2001 shows that although the number of Pentecostal Hispanics increased in the last decade, their proportion of the Hispanic population has not changed. The fastest growth is clearly in the no-religion group, which is the second largest group among Hispanics in 2001.

It would be worthwhile to map the profile of the religious identification and outlook of the source countries for Hispanic immigration with a special emphasis on those sub-populations that are most likely to migrate to the U.S. This particular study is needed in order to confirm or refute the ARIS 2001 findings about the apparent growth of religious disaffiliation in Latin America and among U.S. Hispanics.

## Appendix

### Exploring the Limits of An English-Language Survey Of Hispanic Religious Identification in the U.S.

The 2001 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2001) was designed to replicate, as closely as possible, the methodology used for the highly respected and widely quoted CUNY 1990 National Survey of Religious Identification (NSRI). Over 50,000 respondents were interviewed, including a large sub-sample of 3,000 self-identified Hispanic respondents. Importantly, our Hispanic respondents were less likely to refuse to answer the religious identification item in both 1990 and 2001 than other Americans (under 1 percent and under 3 percent respectively). As a result ARIS has very good coverage of religious groups for Hispanics and the standard error for the distribution of religious groups in Table 1 is only plus or minus 1 percent.

During the ARIS fieldwork, in just under 4 percent of chosen telephone numbers contacted, the interviewer reported a language barrier—that is, an inability to participate because of poor English language proficiency. In half the language-barrier cases, the interviewers reported that they recognized the preferred language of the potential respondent was Spanish. These ratios are the same as recorded in the U.S. Census in 2000. The U.S. Census has gone to great lengths to gain full participation of non-English speakers and to measure their proportion among the Hispanic population. The Census Bureau statistics show that half of Hispanics speak English “very well,” 18 percent “well,” 20 percent “not well” and 10 percent “not at all.” Since we know that Hispanic adults comprise 11 percent of the U.S. adult population and that around 2 percent of all our fieldwork calls to residential phone lines met a Spanish language barrier, we can calculate that around 18 percent (2/11ths) of the Hispanic population was unable to participate in our survey. This population obviously includes all the 10 percent who cannot speak any English as well as around half of those Hispanics who replied “not well” to the English-language Census question. In positive terms, we can conclude that more than 4 out of 5 of eligible Hispanic households had the requisite English language skills to participate in the survey.

We believe that there is no systematic bias in ARIS caused by the absence of non-English-speaking respondents. Data from the U.S. Census indicate that non-English-speaking Hispanics are more likely to be young, male, and poor than English-speaking Hispanics. At first glance it would appear that by not interviewing non-English-speaking Hispanics, ARIS would undercount such Hispanics. This is not the case. ARIS follows the well-established practice of using Census data to adjust the sample so that it matches the known characteristics of the U.S. national adult population in terms of key demographic

and social variables. There is no undercount of young, male, and poor Hispanics in the weighted data. The analysis presented here is based on this weighted data.

There is another reason for confidence in the ARIS estimates of religious identification of Hispanics—one which does not rely on adjustments of the sample according to the Census. That is the somewhat surprising fact that the demographic characteristics most associated with being a non-English speaker appear to have little bearing on religious identification. For example, ARIS found that there is little difference between Catholics and Protestants in age distribution, gender, and national origin. See Charts 1, 2, 5, and 6. This leads us to believe that the religious identification patterns of non-English speaking Hispanics are quite similar to the patterns of English-speaking Hispanics.

We would suggest that the English-only nature of the ARIS survey is more of a theoretical than a real problem in 2001. Thanks to the large number of cases and the weighting system, the actual results are more robust and reliable than many might imagine. It is possible, of course, that there is some unpredicted difference between English-speaking and non-English-speaking Hispanics that correlates with religious identification and that is independent of or trumps all the social and demographic factors we have calculated. This possibility could be explored with a replicate ARIS survey conducted in Spanish.

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