

**What Role does Religion Play in the Migration Process?
And Vice Versa?:
Evidence from the New Immigrant Survey**

by

Douglas S. Massey, Ph.D.
Office of Population Research
Princeton University
dmassey@princeton.edu

Monica E. Higgins, M.A.
Office of Population Research
Princeton University
espinoza@princeton.edu

Research supported by NIH/NICHD/NIA/OBSSR Grant No. HD33843,
NSF Grant No. SRS-9907421 & SES-0096867, USCIS, ASPE, PEW.
The New Immigrant Survey , G. Jasso, D. Massey, M. Rosenzweig, & J. Smith P.I.'s.

Paper prepared for presentation at the Population Association of America Conference,
New York, March 29-31 2007

Abstract

In the United States, immigration and religion are strongly tied. Since the mid 1840s, there has been an enormous shift in the demographic and religious groups due to immigration, as the religious composition of the U.S. population reflects the economic and religious histories of the countries of origin of the population¹.

The literature on immigration and social changes addresses the ways in which religious faiths are woven into the experiences of immigrants, as well as the ways in which immigrants have transformed the spiritual life in the U.S. which is why it is important to explore these interconnected themes. Due to the large gap between information needs and existing data, these fundamental questions regarding immigration and religion remained unanswered.

Several studies were conducted regarding the religious composition of the native-born U.S. population, but due to the lack of data, it was not possible to conduct comparable studies about the foreign-born population. The New Immigrant Survey, a first-scale survey of new legal immigrants and their children to the United States, provides high-quality public-use data on the religious life of immigrants, their parents, spouses/partners, and their children.

Data

The New Immigrant Survey (NIS 2003) is a nationally representative multi-cohort prospective-retrospective panel study of new legal immigrants and their children to the United States. NIS is supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)/ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)/ National Institute on Aging (NIA)/Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (OBSSR), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS, now the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services). Additional support was provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and the Pew Charitable Trusts².

The 2003 baseline survey sampled legal immigrants who were admitted to legal permanent residence in the United States during the period May-November 2003 and whose baseline round was in the field in the period June 2003 to June 2004. The NIS 2003 first full cohort gathered information on 8,573 sampled adult immigrants (18 years of age or older at admission to legal permanent residence (LPR)), and 810 sponsor-parents of sampled child immigrants. The Adult sample attained a response rate of at least 68.6 percent, which is considered successful by U.S. standards.

Interviews were sought with spouse/partners of sampled adult immigrants and sponsor-parents of sampled child (4,917 interviews). Sampled children and other children (foreign-born or U.S. -born children) in the household of both sampled adult and child immigrants were interviewed and/or given assessments based on age-eligibility schedule.

¹ In 1850 Catholics made up only five percent of the total U.S. population. By 1906, they made up seventeen percent of the total population (14 million out of 82 million people) (Byrne, J. 2003).

² NIS data is public. The data and documentation can be obtained from the study website, <http://nis.princeton.edu>.

The sample was based on probability samples of administrative records of the INS representing all adult immigrants who are 18 years or older at admission to legal permanent residence during the specified period and who have visas as principals or as accompanying spouses, and two types of child immigrants: child of U.S. citizen visa holders under 18 years of age and adopted orphans under five years of age (Jasso, Massey, Rosenzweig, & Smith, 2004).

Data were collected on multiple domains about immigrant's health; demographic traits, including migratory experiences with data available from INS administrative record including the visa type under which the immigrant was admitted; family networks and transfers exchanged; pre- and post-immigration labor market; income, assets, and pensions; and aspects of the home environment.

Adult and Child samples are defined in terms of immigration categories and age. In the Adult sample, Employment principals and Diversity principals were over sampled while spouses of U.S. citizens were undersampled. In the Child Sample, Adopted Orphans were over sampled.

These data are particularly useful for the purpose of the proposed research because the survey gathers information on countries of origin, education, class of admission to LPR, visa categories, marital status, religious tradition of respondents and their children, current income and wealth, and past-migration, a characteristic that has been difficult to obtain using earlier datasets. Analysis of the data demonstrates the importance of immigration in this country's past, present, and future.

Methods

This paper describes the composition of religious preference among the recent immigrants and how religious intermarriages take place in a country whose founding principles include the free practice of faiths. In a previous paper, the religious preference of immigrants was analyzed using the NIS-Pilot data. Due to the sample size of the Pilot data, the robustness of some of the results needed to be supported by a nationally representative survey with an ample sample size such as the New Immigrant Survey. Therefore, we test whether these results obtained with the pilot data still hold when we use an ample sample size.

The NIS 2003 asked several questions on religion: religious preferences of respondents and children, religious preferences of parents, frequency of attending services, languages in which services were conducted at church where respondent attend most often, percentage of adults who speak the same language as respondent and attend church, percentage of adults who have the same country of origin as respondent and attend church, percent of adults who are from the U.S. and attend the same church as respondent, and others.

This paper extends that work with descriptions of the different faith traditions and interrelations among the religions of the respondents and their spouses, children, and parents as well as the faith in which the respondents were raised.

This paper utilizes the data on the first religious preference³ and describes each type of denomination, groups, traditions, etc. within each religion preference. We pay particular attention

³ Sampled respondents were able to choose up to three religious preferences.

to the immigrants' characteristics and behaviors across immigration visa categories, countries of origin, educational categories, gender, and migration history. This focus is particularly relevant in the context of analyzing the characteristics of the major faith traditions as well as the immigration directions.

The paper makes a contribution first, because the data used for the analyses represents a first attempt to measure religious composition of the new immigrants to the U.S. in a national sample, enabling a comparison to the native-born U.S. population. Second, by focusing on the impact of migration, the paper contributes to the literature on possible explanations of socioeconomic differentials among the different faith traditions of recent immigrants in both the United States and countries around the world, and it also reflects the immigration policies adopted during the past years as well as the pathways through which immigrants can obtain permission to reside in the United States.

From the preliminary analyses using the Pilot data, 41.9% of all new adult legal immigrants are Catholic; the estimated number of Christians is 64.7%. Among adults in the 2003 cohort, the estimated proportion Catholic is 39.9%; the estimated proportion Christian is 64.2%. Thus, the large majority of Christian immigrants are Catholics: 64.8% in 1996 and 62.1% in 2003.

In the 2003 cohort, 67.4% of the new immigrants were Christian, compared to the 82.2% of the native-born U.S. population in 2002 who were Christians.⁴ The proportion of Catholics among the new immigrants was 41.8% almost double compared to the native-born in 2002 (23.5%). 12.5% of the new immigrants reported no religion, compared to 13.6% with no religion among the native-born.

Using the NIS 2003 data, by countries of origin, we found that Catholic and Protestant immigrants are represented universally by all the countries as well as immigrants with no religion. 20.3% of Jewish immigrants are originated from Russia and Ukraine, and 82% of Hindu immigrants are from India. Regarding visa categories, for all religious-preference groups except Hindu, the most widely used visa type is marriage to a U.S. citizen.

The paper is organized as follows: we first present a history of the religion composition and immigration in the United States over the years. We then present a summary of the literature on religion composition of the native-born U.S. population. Next, we present the data used and main descriptive statistics, followed by the empirical methods and results. Lastly, we conclude and discuss the results obtained with legal permanent immigrants compared to those found in the literature for native-born U.S. population.

⁴ Similar results were found using the Pilot data (Jasso et al., 2003).

References

Byrne, J., "Roman Catholics and Immigration in Nineteenth-Century America" Department of Religion, National Humanities Center, Duke University.

James A. Davis, Smith, T., and Marsden, P. General Social Surveys, 1972-1998: Cumulative Codebook. Chicago: NORC, 1999.

Jasso, G., Massey, D., Rosenzweig, M. and Smith, J. "Assortative Mating among Married New Legal Immigrants to the United States: Evidence from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot" In *International Migration Review* 34:443-459.

Jasso, G., Massey, D., Rosenzweig, M. and Smith, J. "The U.S. New Immigrant Survey: Overview and Preliminary Results Based on the New-Immigrant Cohorts of 1996 and 2003" In volume to be published by the *Immigration Research Statistics Service of the United Kingdom*, 2004b.

Jasso, G., Massey, D., Rosenzweig, M. and Smith, J. "Exploring the Religious Preferences of Recent Immigrants to the United States: Evidence from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot." Pp. 217-253 in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, John L. Esposito (eds.), *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003.

U.S: Immigration and Naturalization Service. Various years. *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.