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**The Semi-Involuntary Thesis and the
Growth of Protestantism among U.S. Latinos**

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**The Semi-Involuntary Thesis and the
Growth of Protestantism among U.S. Latinos**

by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2010

Dedication

To the two most important women in my life, mi madre y abuelita. Gracias por todo tu apoyo y amor. To my grandpa, Papi, thank you for your loving support and sacrifice and instilling in me a love for reading. To my stepfather who always made me feel like his own, your love of learning nurtured my mind. To my sister and brother, your love and care inspire me. To my son, you are my world.

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”- Psalm 73:26

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Christopher G. Ellison for supervising my thesis. Thank you for being a caring, thoughtful advisor and for always being open to my ideas. I would also like to thank Mark Regnerus for helping me to make the final change into sociology of religion, for providing the initial idea for this thesis, and for always being willing to lend an ear. I also thank Robert D. Woodberry who has been my “sociological father” and mentor in many ways. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my passions and always being willing to help me reach my goals. Next, I would like to say thank you to Southwest Hills Community Church for their support and prayer for our family as I finished this thesis. Lastly, I thank my husband. I could not have finished this thesis without your willingness to help me in any way you could. Thank you.

August 2010

Abstract

The Semi-Involuntary Thesis and the Growth of Protestantism among U.S. Latinos

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Abstract: The growing numbers of U.S. Latino Protestant converts from Catholicism has attracted scholarly attention in the last decade, however; none have examined the influence of social context through the lens of the semi-involuntary thesis to understand Latino conversion. Using data from a national sample of 4,016 Latinos surveyed across the country in 2006 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, this study tests, along with demographic factors, social factors important to the semi-involuntary thesis such as (a) national origin status, (b) census region, (c) Latino geographical concentration, (d) linguistic status, and (e) identity salience in explaining Latino conversion to Protestantism.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Theoretical and Empirical Background	5
Chapter 3: Data and Measures	17
Chapter 4: Analytical Strategy	20
Chapter 5: Results	21
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	26
Appendix A: Tables	30
References	35
Vita	38

List of Tables

Table 1:	Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Analysis.....	30
Table 2:	Estimated Effects of being a Switcher or Lifelong Protestant compared to Lifelong Catholics: Multinomial Logistic Regression.....	33

Chapter 1: Introduction

The growing numbers of Latino Protestant converts has attracted much scholarly attention in the last decade. There is abundant empirical evidence of increased population of Protestants among Latinos in Latin America (Freston 2001; Steigenga and Cleary 2007). Protestantism has seen an increase from 50,000 Protestants in 1900 to roughly 64 million in 2000, of which three-quarters are Pentecostals and Charismatics (Allen Jr. 2006). The National Catholic Reporter revealed that in 1930, Protestants made up to one percent of the Latin American population, compared to 12-15 percent today. The growth of Pentecostalism/Charismatic sects of Protestantism in particular are “the most dynamic and fastest growing sector of Protestant Christianity worldwide” and one that many predict will soon surpass Catholicism “to become the predominant form of Christianity of the 21st century” (Casanova 2001; Robbins 2006; Jenkins 2002).

In the United States compared to Latin America, relatively fewer studies have been done compare the pace of conversion to Protestantism among Latinos. Although several surveys have confirmed Protestant growth among U.S. Latinos as well, including the Latino National Political Survey (Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo 1998; Ellison et al. 2005; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001) and the NORC General Social Surveys (Hunt 1999), although the GSS yields only a small and unrepresentative sample of U.S. Latinos in any given year of the survey. Perl et al (2006) contend that consensus on the proportions of Hispanic that are Catholic has yet to be reached, attributing survey limitations as the reason. While a consensus on precise estimates remains to be reached, one prominent survey found that approximately 70 percent of US Hispanics identify with

Catholicism, while 23 percent identify themselves as Protestant, with the majority belonging to fundamentalist, Evangelical, and Charismatic denominations (Ellison et al 2010; Espinosa, Elizondo, and Miranda 2005; Perl et al 2006). Greeley's (1994) analysis of the General Social Survey (GSS) from the years 1972-1988 notes an 8 percent defection rate from the Catholic Church to fundamentalist sects of Protestantism among Latinos. Also analyzing the GSS data from 1972-1996, Hunt (1999) confirmed that non-Catholics have an increased presence in the Hispanic population from the 1970s to the 1990s but contests Greeley's conclusion that fundamentalist sects of Protestantism were gaining the majority of converts. Instead, Hunt shows evidence of converts moving into majority mainline Protestant denominations or deciding to have no religious preference at all.

While we know that Protestantism has increased its members among U.S. Latinos, a clear impression of who they are socio-demographically and otherwise is still unknown. Previous work on the General Social Survey (GSS) by Greeley (1994) and Hunt (1999) demonstrate that Latino converts to Protestantism are characterized to have higher status, that is, higher education, income, and occupational prestige. Additionally, individuals who are Spanish language dominant tend to be Catholics (Hunt 1999; Perl et al 2006). Greeley (1994) attributes this to the failure of the Catholic Church to "provide community and respectability towards the upwardly mobile Hispanic American." Initially this would suggest that Protestantism does provide a venue for assimilation into mainstream American society, but this conclusion still remains elusive. The manner by which Protestantism is an assimilating force is more complicated than it seems as Latinos defecting to the more conservative sects did not have significantly higher status than

Catholics. Mainline Protestant converts exhibited only slightly higher status, suggesting that there is no general Protestant advantage (Hunt 1999). There even appears to be a Protestant disadvantage when linked to conservative sects of Protestantism, especially for those whose background has been non-Catholic for more than one generation. The attraction of Latino Catholics to Protestantism could happen in several ways besides upward mobility. For some Latinos, Catholic identity is closely linked with ethnic identity; being Catholic is simply part of what it means to be Latino, Puerto Rican, Mexican American, or part of another Spanish-speaking, predominantly Catholic racial/ethnic group (Ellison et al 2010; Dolan and Deck 1994; Maldonado 2002; Roof and Manning 1994). Thus, the growth of Protestantism has significant cultural implications on the identity and social life of U.S. Latinos. With the growth of the U.S. Latino population account for one-half of the nation's population growth between 2000 and 2006, there is little doubt that the presence of the Latino population will continue to be sociologically important in the years to come (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). For religion researchers, an examination of the factors that influence conversion among U.S. Latinos can provide further theoretical insight on conversion among non-White groups as well as shed light on the mechanisms for conversion.

I begin by reviewing literature on conversion, highlighting rational choice theory and contrasting it with theories of the social embedding of religious choices. Next I present empirical evidence for the need to consider social context when considering religious conversion while paying particular attention to the semi-involuntary thesis as a basis for understanding the factors that influence Latino conversion away from Catholicism and towards Protestantism. Next I develop several hypotheses on how

national origin status, region, cultural assimilation, identity salience, and socio-demographic factors may bear on the likelihood of conversion. These factors are examined from a national sample of 4,016 Latinos surveyed across the country in 2006 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. After presenting the results, implications of key findings are discussed. Study limitations and directions for future research are identified. This study hopes to better explain what characterizes Latino Protestants and converts to Protestantism, contributing to the understanding of the changing religious landscape of the U.S. by addressing a relatively neglected population by religion scholars.

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Empirical Background

Conversion, Rational Choice, and Embedded Religious Choices

There is a wide and thorough body of literature that examines the factors that influence religious conversion and switching. One of the most predominant theories is rational choice theory. Emerging from the study of household economics, Gary Becker (1976) defined rational choice theory as “combined assumptions of maximizing behavior, market equilibrium, and stable preferences, used relentlessly and unflinchingly.”

Developed as an objective tool to measure personal taste, this theory has three main assumptions. First, it assumes individuals approach all actions through the “maximizing principal” by evaluating costs and benefits and then acting in a way that will maximize benefits and minimize costs. Secondly, it assumes that peoples’ preferences are stable and do not change over time, across individuals, or circumstances. Lastly, the choices individuals make are assumed to reflect their preferences. In terms of religious choice, rational choice implies that individuals choose to join a particular religion in relation to the cost and benefits to them, creating a “religious marketplace” where religions compete for adherents through promised benefits for joining (Iannaccone 1995). These preferences can take form in individuals’ evaluations of religious “goods” like the promise of an afterlife, monetary gain, good fortune in health, or internal peace. Individuals then rationally choose a religion that best suits their needs and wants.

Some rational choice theorists find this micro-level (individual) focus of rational choice insufficient, as it tends to ignore social context and is not attentive to individual’s

social position. In response to the deficits of rational choice theory in explaining religious choice, Sherkat (1997) argues that preferences are not stable and can change according to social influences. Moreover, preferences (what people hope to get or want out of religion) do not necessarily follow through to their religious choices. Instead, religious preferences and choices are influenced and embedded with the social context of the individual (Sherkat 1997; Skerkat and Wilson 1995). Individuals' religious choices are constrained by their perception of the wants, needs, and interests of others around them. Lastly, these preferences are not static, but tend to be "adaptive" and grow stronger with previous experience and consumption, suggesting that the more one practices a certain religion, the more the individual will prefer what is familiar to him/her.

Sherkat (1997) identifies three ways social influences impact religious choices. First, choices may be influenced by sympathy. People may remain in a religion not because they find it rewarding personally, but to make others (spouse, family, and friends) happy, proud, and reassured (Ellison 1995). Contrastingly, individuals may choose a particular religion because it is offensive to others. For instance, "young people may join new religious groups in order to accentuate their individuality and rejection of parental morals and practices" (Ellison 1995:91). Others make religious choices with the goal of example setting in mind. This is particularly true of parents who join a congregation not for personal religious fulfillment, but with the goal of cultivating and passing certain moral and theological attributes to their children. In such cases, parents attend a congregation simply to "set an example" for their children.

Lastly, and most importantly, social sanctions imposed on individuals by the community are certainly influences on religious choices. According to sanction based rational choice, individual preferences are shaped by social constraints. Choices can be governed by rewards and punishments administered by the community to individuals. Further, social sanctions are argued to be the most poignant when social ties are consolidated, that is “when family, religion, employment, ethnicity, neighborhood, and are entangled,” (Sherkat 1997:75) where decisions made in one sphere of life will impact the other (Blau 1993; Blau and Schwartz 1984:83). Sherkat and Wilson (1995) note that such social constraints will be strong in religions where such spheres of life are consolidated and weaker where social ties are cross-cutting. Cross-cutting ties “put individuals at the intersection of a web of group affiliations that exert diverse and often counter-acting pressures, weakening the hold of any one group on its members.” These type of social ties are not as influential on religious choices (Blau and Schwartz 1984:83). Thus, “pure” religious voluntarism would be particularly difficult to come by if one belongs to a community in which social ties are mostly composed of consolidated relationships (coethnics, relatives, friends, peers, neighbors, and so on) where the embedded nature of religious choice would limit the possibility of adhering to a religion for personal fulfillment only (Blau and Schwartz 1984). Additionally, sanctions would be particularly strong on members of quasi-ethnic religions, where ties to the religious community are intertwined with language, folklore, customs, and marriage - making switching or disaffiliating religions extremely difficult (Harrison and Lazerwitz 1982; Sandromisky and Wilson 1990).

Empirical Evidence

Several studies demonstrate empirical evidence supporting that individuals make religious decisions to appease others. Using data from the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, Sherkat and Wilson (1995) analyze the effects of prior religious consumption and status on the choice to switch religions. Respondents who indicated they attended church regularly as children were less likely to disaffiliate. Likewise, respondents who indicated they were close to their parents were less likely to switch or disaffiliate from their religion of origin. Also, respondents who came from highly religious homes as children were less likely to join liberal groups or disaffiliate and were more likely to choose conservative Protestant denominations over liberal ones if they did switch. Wilson and Sherkat (1994) examined the process of disaffiliation and re-affiliation during life course transitions such as marriage and children. They found that strong ties to family of origin and those who form families early in the life course have shown to have a lower risk of disaffiliating. This suggests that sympathetic and example setting forms of social influence impact religious choices.

Sherkat and Wilson (1995) also found evidence for the impact of concentric social circles and quasi-ethnic religions. Individuals, who came from high status homes, had a higher chance of disaffiliating then switching into a “low status” or “divisive” religions. Further, individuals who rose in social status faster than their peers in the same denomination of origin are more likely to disaffiliate than join a conservative Protestant group due to sanctions they may receive for being too religious. Catholics were found to “rarely crosses interfaith lines” and instead were more likely to completely disaffiliate than become Protestant. The quasi-ethnic nature of Catholicism was credited for

boosting participation rates and influencing religious choice. These findings emphasize the importance of social context in shaping religious choices.

Semi-Involuntary Thesis

Further evidence for the need to consider social context when analyzing religious choice is seen within the Black Church in the rural southern United States (Ellison and Sherkat 1995). According to the semi-involuntary thesis, individual preferences regarding church participation are tied to the social constraints and opportunities church membership can entail. Among southern African Americans, community and social life was found to be embedded within the context of the Black Church and resulted from the lack of secular forms for communal participation in this region. Therefore, agency and respectability within the community hinged on maintaining some ties to the local congregation for which a lack thereof could result in social sanctions (lost of respect, loss of social standing and opportunities imposed by co-ethnics extended kin, immediate family neighbors). Church membership, then, is not only a personal choice, but influenced by the real or anticipated judgments and reactions of others. As anticipated, southern rural African Americans are shown to attend church more often than their non-southern counterparts, even after measures of personal spirituality and religious preferences are held constant, supporting the conclusion that the southern, Black church can be a “semi-involuntary institution” (Nelsen, Yokley and Nelsen 1971).

Sherkat and Cunningham (1998) extend the semi-involuntary thesis to explain behaviors in private religious behavior and consumption such as prayer, listening to religious television or radio programs, and reading religious literature among African Americans in the south. Compared to non-southern counterparts, African Americans in

the south were shown to more frequently participate in these private religious behaviors. These regional differences in the effects of preferences on choices suggest that the semi-involuntary thesis is true. The strong religious context of the south influences people to choose to consume more religious media than those not in the south, demonstrating that even private religiosity is touched by social influences. Social sanctions imposed by the juxtaposing of community and religious life are found in other groups as well. Among Mormons in Utah, consolidated social ties play a vital role in assuring compliance with church regulations and congregation participation. Philips (1998) notes that “Utah Mormon(s) tempted to do yard work on Sunday or put coffee in a shopping cart must assess the odds and consequences of being observed not only by other ward members, but by neighbors, coworkers, friends, and acquaintances,” (p. 127). Further, it was found that greater density of Mormons resulted in a higher rate of Mormon Church activity.

Potential Factors Influencing Conversion of U.S. Latinos

Prior research is clear in demonstrating that decisions about religious choice are linked to the social context of the individual. For the majority Catholic Latino population in the U.S., the decision to convert to Protestantism is complicated in three ways. First, among Catholics, church and kin groups can be mutually reinforcing organizations (Lenski 1963). This is especially true of Latinos as Catholicism plays a significant role within Latino culture. The spheres of family, cultural traditional, and language among others are generally intertwined with a Latino’s Catholic affiliation. Secondly, the quasi-ethnic nature of Catholicism can make conversion to Protestantism, particularly difficult. Finally, like the Black church in the south, the Catholic church serves as a median for social participation in cultural traditions (quinceañeras, las posadas, marriage, and a

number of other social life events) making switching an action not without social and community consequences. The social complexity of Latino conversion to Protestantism highlights the theoretical insights the semi-involuntary thesis can provide in understanding U.S. Latino conversion to Protestantism. Could the consolidated social ties of Catholicism be losing its hold on certain segments of the Latino population, making switching to Protestantism easier? Or could the semi-involuntary thesis be playing out in a different manner, by providing incentives for Catholics to switch to Protestantism through social sanctions in a majority Protestant country?

National Origin Status

The term Latino encompasses many different national origin groups, each with a different historical degree of Catholicism or Protestantism. Increasingly, Latin American countries once considered primarily Catholic have developed a sizable Protestant population, particularly Central American and Puerto Rico. Thirty percent of the population in Guatemala now belongs to Protestant churches, it has the fastest growing Protestant population than any Latin American nation (Garrard-Burnett 1998; Dow 2003). In the case of Guatemala, the Protestant rise is tied to the complex political history during the post revolutionary period of the 1970s to 1980s. Governmental instability mixed with the dissolution of old practices and traditions resulted in many turning to Protestantism to “re-create some sense of order, identity, and belonging” (Garrard-Burnett 1998). The countries of El Salvador (22% Protestant), Honduras (18% Protestant), Nicaragua (18% Protestant), Costa Rica (13% Protestant) and Panama (18% Protestant) have had increased portions of their population becoming Protestant as well (Dow 2003; Wadkins 2008; World Christian Encyclopedia 2001).

When taken into U.S. rule at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Puerto Rico's state supported Catholicism was abolished and replaced with Protestantism in an attempt to Americanize the territory (-Stevens 1993). Additionally, this provided an advantage to Protestant missionaries hoping to evangelize the island. For this reason, Puerto Rico's unique history as an American territory could mean a higher probability of Puerto Ricans being Protestant or being open to switching to Protestantism. Because of the lack of dominant Catholic networks within their respective immigrant communities within the U.S., Central Americans and Puerto Ricans would have fewer pressures to remain Catholic i.e., more incentives and fewer social sanctions. This brings us to the first hypothesis.

H1: Respondents from Puerto Rican and Central American backgrounds will be more likely than respondents in other national origin groups to be lifelong Protestants or to switch to Protestantism, as opposed to lifelong Catholics.

Region

One factor that may be contributing to the growth of Latino Protestants is the rapid influx of Latino to the Protestant-dominant southern United States. Across the six southern states of North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama the Latino population has increased 308 percent compared a 43 percent increase in traditional settlement sites (Kochhar et al 2005). When Latinos are faced with the challenges of resettlement and integration into states with no established Latino community, church congregations can play a crucial role in helping Latino immigrants in the South to overcome these challenges by offering social capital and symbolic tools to do so (Ebaugh 2000 et al, Fortuny and Williams 2007, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Warner and Wittner 1998). However, the lack of a supportive Catholic

infrastructure and Latino social networks combined with the heavy presence of Protestantism in the South could be attracting Latinos to Protestant congregations for support. Additionally, the lack of a strong Latino Catholic community would mean fewer opportunities for social sanctions imposed on switchers, making conversion more socially plausible. Other Latino-dominated regions of the United States, particularly the Western region do not present a clear dominating Protestant or Catholic presence like the South (Protestant) or the Northeast (Catholic). Moreover, the west was settled later than other regions of the U.S. and has continued to exhibit high levels of inter-regional mobility and low levels of religious involvement compared to other regions (Bainbridge 1990; Finke and Stark 1988). Taken together, then lines of argument lead to the second hypothesis:

H2: Respondents who reside in the Southern or Western census regions will be more likely than respondents in other regions to be lifelong Protestants or switch to Protestantism, as opposed to lifelong Catholics.

Community Concentration

The semi-involuntary thesis assumes that social constraints have the most power in areas with high concentrations of the ethnic/religious community and lack of other forms of social participation. Areas with lower concentrations of Latinos in the same geographic area could imply a general tendency for social ties to be cross-cutting as opposed to consolidated. Additionally, the strain on social ties that could occur if one converted out of a quasi-ethnic religion would not be as severe (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). In these areas, Latinos may feel greater freedom to make religious decisions based on personal preferences without regard to potential loss of social opportunities, loss of respect or reputation, feelings of discomfort or loss of solidarity within Latino ethnicity. In addition areas with low percentage of Latinos may also lack strong Latino

cultural infrastructure including Latino Catholic parishes, which may also fuel religious switching. This consideration of “push and pull” factors suggests the third hypothesis:

H3: Respondents residing in areas with a low concentration of Latinos will be more likely than respondents residing in areas with high concentrations of Latinos to be lifelong Protestants or switch to Protestantism, as opposed to lifelong Catholics.

Cultural Assimilation: Linguistic Status and Identity Salience

Language is the prism through which cultural identity is lived, experienced, and formed. Similarly, it is an important measure of cultural assimilation and proxy for acculturation and psychological distance. Not surprisingly because of the cultural underpinnings of Catholicism within Latino culture, respondents interviewed in Spanish were more likely to be Catholic (Hunt 1999). Analyzing data from several surveys, Perl et al (2006) confirm that “seventy-two percent of those interviewed primarily in Spanish identify as Catholic, compared to just 49 percent of those interviewed primarily in English.” Additionally, this study found that when the effect of language is taken into account, generational status produces no significant effect in differentiating Catholic and Protestant respondents, “language appears to be the key in religious identification.” An English language advantage would make conversion much more advantageous for the individual and would minimize the penalties associated with conversion and disrupting cross-cutting circles less poignant. Language will be a key variable in this study.

Like language, identity salience can be a measure of distance a respondent puts between themselves and core Latino culture. As previously mentioned, Catholicism is an important aspect of many Latinos ethnic identity; therefore a change in religious status could indicate a significant change in Latino identity. Distancing from ethnicity can lead to less pan-ethnic solidarity and national origin identity. Previous research has not delved

into the effects of national/ethnic identity salience on the propensity for Latino Catholics to convert to Protestantism; this study will include this significant variable.

H4: Respondents who are English dominant will be more likely than respondents who are Spanish dominant or bilingual to be lifelong Protestants or switch to Protestantism, as opposed to lifelong Catholics.

H5: Respondents who identify themselves first by national origin or their Latino heritage will be less likely than respondents who identified themselves by other means to be lifelong Protestants or switch to Protestantism, as opposed to lifelong Catholics.

Covariates

It is important to include well-known covariates of switching in order to properly test the above hypotheses. This study will include additional controls for socio-demographic variables as well as family composition and socio-economic status. Women are identified in the literature as the bearers of religiosity in the home. Wilson and Sherkat (1995) and Sandomirsky and Wilson (1990) show that women are less likely to convert for two main reasons. Women tend to be more influenced by religious associations growing up than men and the demands of parenthood and family seem to decrease the proclivity to switch. However, if they do switch, they are found to be less likely to switch to conservative religions, possibly to avoid the rigid gender roles associated with conservative religions. Males, on the other hand, demonstrate a greater likelihood of re-affiliating during major life transitions like marriage than women. (Wilson and Sherkat 1994). Latina women however are shown to be more likely to switch than men. As far as age, it is difficult to access the effect of age on the likelihood to convert with cross sectional data as older groups could show a greater likelihood of converting merely for the fact that they had longer exposure. However, the literature on conversion suggest that those in younger age categories will be more likely to convert due life transitions such as beginning college of

living on their own tied with the a general period of “rebellion” against religious family norms (Sherkat and Wilson 1995).

As mentioned above, it has been suggested that conversion to Protestantism could be an indication of rising upward mobility among Latinos. A change in social standing affects preference and choices in religious consumption in two ways. First, people can switch or join a new religion if it is advantageous to their social standing to do so. Second, a change in social standing provides exposure to new religious goods that can appeal to a new upwardly mobile lifestyle. This theory was confirmed as people who moved up faster than their peers in social status were more likely to choose conservative Protestant groups or disaffiliate altogether (Sherkat and Wilson 1995). As previously mentioned, Catholic and Protestant income differences are strong (Hunt 1999). This study will still test status based theories for switching by controlling for income and education variables.

Chapter 3: Data and Measures

Data

To explore Latino conversion in the U.S., I analyze data from a nationwide probability sample of Latinos, i.e., persons of Latino background or descent, 18 years of age or older residing in the United States in a survey entitled *Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of American Religion*. This CATI-assisted telephone survey was executed by ICR, Inc. of Media, PA on behalf of 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, between August 10 - October 4, 2006. These procedures yielded a total sample of 4,016 Latino respondents, with a margin of error of 2.5 percent with a 95 percent confidence interval. After accounting for missing cases the sample size was reduced to 2,964. Generally, national surveys of Latinos do not include individuals under the age of 18, lack respondents who are undocumented, inflate Catholic identification through ancestry questions, exclude individuals without telephones in the home, and do not include non-English speakers (Perl et al 2006). Fortunately, the data used for this study addresses some of these problems by including non-English speakers and asking about Latino identity directly instead of asking the respondent to give information on possible Latino ancestry. Furthermore, this dataset is uniquely appropriate for my study due to (a) the large sample of English and non-English speaking respondents from diverse national-origin groups and (b) the range of items gauging socio-demographic factors, Latino regional concentration, and Latino identity salience – important factors in Latino conversion to Protestantism. For all analysis, the

variable NEWWEIGHT corrects for the oversampling of Mexican Americans and ensures the proper proportion of Latino heritage group based on national estimates. The weight utilizes national 2006 estimates from the Census and Claritas on age, gender, education, foreign/native born status and Catholic/non-Catholic status (Survey Methodology 2009).

Dependent Variable

Whether a respondent reported to have converted from Catholicism to Protestantism is measured via the following three items, “What is your religion – Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish Muslim or an orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?,” “Have you always been [RELIGION] or did you convert from another faith or religion you practiced in the past?,” and, “What were you before – Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or an orthodox church as the Greek of Russian Orthodox Church?”. Respondents who identified themselves as Protestant based on the RELTRAD classification (Evangelical or Mainline) and who reported to have converted from a Catholicism previously, were classified as “switchers” and were coded 1=convert, 0=did not convert (Steensland et al. 2000; Woodberry and Smith 1998). Measures of Catholic and Protestant lifelong adherence were developed in order to better compare the differences between switchers and non-switchers. Respondents were classified as lifelong Catholics if they identified themselves as Catholic based on the RELTRAD classification scheme and gave a negative response to being a covert and were coded 1= lifelong Catholic, 0=non-lifelong Catholic. Likewise, lifelong Protestants were classified by self

reporting as Protestant based on the RELTRAD classification and indicating they were not converts, also coded 1= lifelong Protestant, 0=non-lifelong Protestant.

Independent Variable

Multivariate models tested a number of social embeddedness factors related to the semi-involuntary thesis including national origin status (1=Puerto Rican, 1=Central American vs. 0=all others); census region (1=west, 1=south, vs. 0=east/central); and percentage of Latinos living in the same telephone exchange as the respondent is used as a measure of Latino concentration within an area (1=0-14%, 1=15-20%, 1=50-74%, 1=75-100%, vs. 0=30-49%). Lastly, measures of ethnic ties such as linguistic status (1=English dominant, 1=Bilingual, vs. 0=Spanish dominant) and identity salience. Identity salience is measured via the following item, “Do you think of yourself first as a country first as a Hispanic/Latino, first as a religion or first as an American?” Responses are coded as 1=national origin status, 1=Hispanic/Latino, vs. 0=all others.

Models also control for socio-demographic factors associated with Latino conversion including gender (1=female, 0=male); age (1=ages 18-29, 1=ages 30-39, 1=ages 55 and above, vs. 0=ages 40-54); marital status (1=never married, 1=divorced or separated, vs. 0=married or widowed); educational attainment (1=less than high school degree, 1=some college/vocational, 1=college degree or above, vs. 0=high school degree or some vocational training); and family income (1=less than 15K, 1=15K-24.99K, 1=above 45, vs. 0=25-44.99K). Additionally, a number of relevant potential control variables measuring nativity, national origin status, and indicators of SES were explored and not included in the final models for the interest of parsimony.

Chapter 4: Analytical Strategy

I begin by presenting descriptive statistics on the conversion characteristics of the sample and of all variables used in the analysis by adherence categories (lifelong Catholic, lifelong Protestants, and switchers). Then, using a series of multinomial logistic regression models, I estimate the net effects of social context and socio-demographic variables on the relative risk of respondents being lifelong Protestants and converts to Protestantism (“switchers”) compared to being a lifelong Catholic. Missing cases were addressed with modal imputation. Findings from these models, which are based on weighted data, are displayed in the form of relative risk ratios in Table 2. Given the prevalence of Catholicism within most Latino subgroups, these analyses treat lifelong Catholics as the reference category, with which lifelong Protestants and switchers are compared. The baseline model features the effects of demographic variables on the likelihood of being a switcher. Model 2 introduces national origin status of respondents followed by Model 3 examining the impact of census region and Latino concentration. Lastly, the full model (Model 4) adds linguistic status and identity salience variables.

Chapter 5: Results

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 provides weighted and unweighted means (or proportions) on variables used in the study. In terms of sample composition, Lifelong Catholics make about 49% of the analytic sample, followed by lifelong Protestants (14.52%). Approximately 20.23 (N = 692) percent of respondents had converted from other religion at the time they were interviewed. Of those who converted, about 80% (N = 532) converted from Catholicism and 4.50% converted from a non-religious/secular background. Respondents who indicated they converted at the time of interview from Catholicism overwhelmingly converted to Protestantism (both conservative and mainline denominations) at 61 % (N = 421) in comparison to other religions. Among converts from Catholicism to Protestantism, 87% (N = 368) converted to conservative denominations of Protestantism, while about 13% (N = 53) switched to mainline denominations.

Using weighted data, males are more represented than women in the lifelong Catholic category at 52% and 49%, respectively. They are both equally represented among lifelong Protestants. In contrast, women make up the majority of switchers at 60% compared to men at 40%. Age categories appear to be evenly distributed among all religious adherence categories. Most respondents are either married or widowed. Across all adherence categories, only a small proportion of Latino adults have a four-year college degree or more, with most respondents falling in the high school and less than high school category. Income levels appear to be most disparate across adherence groups with 10% more switchers and lifelong Protestants in the above 45K category than lifelong

Catholics. Switchers, however, make up 9% less of the 25 to 44.99K category compared to lifelong Catholics and Protestants.

Roughly 9% of the sample self-identifies as Puerto Rican and Central American. Both groups have greater proportions of being lifelong Protestants with Puerto Ricans, in particular, being most represented in the switcher category. Not surprisingly, most respondents are located in the west and south census regions of the country and tend to reside in area with 50-75% Latinos living in the same telephone exchange. While nearly 50% of respondents in the study primarily speak Spanish both lifelong Protestants and switchers have higher proportion of English dominant speakers at 34%, compared to lifelong Catholics at only 16%. In terms of identity salience, switchers tend to identify themselves by national origin first and their Latino identity less, when compared to lifelong Catholics and Protestants.

Multivariate Results

Table 2 presents results of all multinomial logistic regression models estimating the likelihood of respondents being a switcher or lifelong Protestant, compared to the likelihood of being a lifelong Catholic. Results offer strong support for hypothesis one. For example, in Model 3, Puerto Rican respondents are almost four times more likely (RRR=3.670, $p<0.001$) to be switchers and almost three times more likely to be lifelong Protestants (RRR=2.583, $p<0.001$), compared to other national origin groups. The affect remains strong throughout the models and only decreases slightly with the addition of linguistic status and identity salience in Model 4. Central Americans display a stronger likelihood of being lifelong Protestants with a relative risk ratio of 3.002 ($p<0.001$) in the final model. Interestingly, those who indicated they did not know or refused to give this

national origin status were close to six times more likely to be switchers, although the affect decreases through the models and remains only marginally significant.

Support is also found for hypothesis two, although more so for the Western region than Southern. In the final model, respondents from the West compared to those from the East and Central regions of the U.S. have about 73% (RRR=1.734, $p<0.05$) more relative risk of being a switcher and those located in the South had a 46% (RRR=1.455, $p<0.1$) higher relative risk of being switchers, compared to being a lifelong Catholic. In terms of being lifelong Protestants, respondents located in the Southern and Western states displayed marginal significance of being lifelong Protestants; however the effect disappears by the fourth model. This is consistent with the semi-involuntary thesis, in which respondents living in regions without a dominant Catholic influence demonstrate higher likelihoods of switching or being lifelong Protestants.

Respondents residing in a telephone exchange consisting of 50-74% Latinos demonstrate a marginally significant likelihood of being a switcher (RRR=1.445, $p<0.1$). Those in living in a telephone exchange in which 75-100% are Latinos are almost twice as likely to be switchers or lifelong Protestants than lifelong Catholics (RRR=1.996, $p<0.01$). While these results initially conflict with hypothesis three, partial support for the semi-involuntary thesis is found among the lifelong Protestant category, where a marginally significant higher likelihood of being a lifelong Protestant is associated with residing in an area with a smaller concentration of Latinos.

Turning to hypothesis four, there is clear evidence that being English dominant is associated with a higher likelihood of being a switcher (RRR=3.109, $p<0.001$) or lifelong Protestant (RRR=2.094, $p<0.001$) versus being a lifelong Catholic. This suggests that

perhaps an acculturation process is at work and Latinos could be gravitating toward Protestantism as they lose their Spanish proficiency. Additionally, bilingualism appears to be a better predictor of being a lifelong Protestant than a switcher, with respondents who are bilingual being 51% (RRR=1.511, $p<0.05$) more likely to be lifelong Protestants. Hypothesis five finds support as well. In terms of identity salience, switchers have about a 32% (RRR=0.676, $p<0.05$) less relative risk of identifying themselves first by their national origin and about a 60% (RRR=0.394, $p<.0.001$) less relative risk of identifying themselves first as Hispanic/Latino. When compared to lifelong Catholics, lifelong Protestants have a 36% (RRR=0.643, $p<0.05$) less likelihood of identifying as Hispanic/Latino, however they were still more likely than switchers to align themselves with their Latino heritage first.

Model 1 demonstrates that while females are not significantly more likely to be lifelong Protestants, they do appear to be more prone to be switchers compared to males (RRR= 1.604, $p= <.01$). This gender differential in the potential to convert from Catholicism to Protestantism stays strong through all models. This appears contrary to past research and alludes to perhaps different cultural processes for Latinas that make them more prone to convert. Respondents between the ages of 18-29 and 30-39 have a 38% (RRR=0.627, $p<0.05$) and 40% (RRR=0.608, $p<0.05$) smaller relative risk of being switchers than lifelong Catholics compared to other age groups in the model; although the affect for respondents in the younger age category of 18-29 disappears by Model 3. Significance of coefficients for respondents in the mid-age category remains steadier, but still loses significance by the final model.

In terms of status indicators, education only becomes marginally significant in the last model. Relative to lifelong Catholics, the risk of being a switcher or lifelong Protestant is 38% (RRR=0.620, $p<0.1$) and 35% (RRR=0.651, $p<0.1$) less likely for respondents with a college degree or above, compared to high school graduates. As solidified in the literature, those with higher education tend to have more pluralistic and liberal religious attitudes. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Protestantism is not attracting those with the highest levels of education. However, it is interesting to note that those respondents with a less than high school education also have a decreased likelihood of being a lifelong Protestant, although this effect disappears by the final model. The results for income do not support status theories. Compared to lifelong Catholics, respondents in lower categories of income were actually shown to have a lower likelihood of either being a switcher or lifelong Protestant, with effects remaining significant through all models for lifelong Protestants.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

An aim of this study has been to add to the limited body of research on U.S. Latino conversion to Protestantism. Although several studies have linked socio-demographic variables such as gender, income, and status to Latino conversion to Protestants, none have considered the impact of social context as described in the semi-involuntary thesis. The semi-involuntary thesis argues that religious preferences and choices are linked to the social sanctions imposed by a community by which religious and social ties are consolidated. Also, the semi-involuntary thesis would be particularly strong among adherents of quasi-ethnic religions. For Latinos, this would imply that Catholicism could operate as a semi-involuntary institution; therefore, it would be imperative for researchers hoping to predict conversion among Latinos to focus on the social circumstances in which sanctions could be minimized and not be a barrier to switching to Protestantism. This study focuses on the likelihood of respondents being converts from Catholicism to Protestantism and lifelong Protestants using data from a large nationwide probability sample of U.S. Latino conducted by the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life. This study tests, along with demographic factors, social factors important to the semi-involuntary thesis such as (a) national origin status, (b) census region, (c) Latino geographical concentration, (d) linguistic status, and (e) identity salience in explaining Latino conversion to Protestantism. Several sets of findings deserve emphasis:

First, those with a Puerto Rican national origin status appear to be much more amicable to converting than other national origin groups. As discussed previously, this may be due to the spread of U.S. Protestantism in Puerto Rican history. The subsequent diversification of the religious landscape may have minimized the pressure to be Catholic. Thus, it is not surprising to find that Puerto Ricans becoming converts as they may be more open to the dominant Protestant culture of the U.S. Central Americans, on the other hand tend to be lifelong Protestants. Again taking the historical considerations previously mentioned, the growing Protestant population in Central America could indicate Central Americans are bringing their Protestantism with them from their countries of origin.

The irreligious reputation of the Western regions of the U.S. are shown to be significant areas for Latino conversion to Protestantism. While logic following the semi-involuntary thesis would assume that the Southern U.S. would make it easier to switch due to the dominance of Protestantism, we find that it is not a bastion for Latino converts to Protestantism. This may reflect an attempt by Latinos to maintain their Catholic identity as a form of racial solidarity when moving into a majority white, Protestant dominated area. However, for lifelong Protestants, region does not appear to be a strong predictor of switching.

The semi-involuntary thesis would predict that a low concentration of Latinos would be favorable to switching. However, support for this was not found; instead, Latinos residing in areas with high concentrations of Latinos were more prone to switch. An explanation would be that communities with higher concentrations of Latinos may have more variation in religious options. Despite this, marginal support for the semi-

involuntary thesis is found among lifelong Protestants, where we find smaller concentrations of Latinos are associated with being a lifelong Protestant.

Lastly, switchers and lifelong Protestants have a lower Latino identity salience compared to lifelong Catholics. This could be interpreted in two ways; first, for conservative Protestants higher levels of religiosity is well known (Greely 1994), so it is possible that switchers may find their religious affiliation to be a greater source of personal identity than ethnicity or national origin status. Secondly, respondents may be distancing themselves from their Latino heritage in order to fit into their new found Protestant social context, which is more than likely a non-Hispanic white context. Lifelong Protestants, on the other hand, more readily identify by their Latino heritage first. This may be because they have been able to reconcile their Latino heritage with White-dominated Protestantism. Additionally, switchers and lifelong Protestants preference for English over Spanish compared to lifelong Catholics suggest that assimilation into the dominant group could be taking place.

In terms of covariates, this study reveals that Latino women are more likely to convert to Protestantism than men. Perhaps Latina women are not as influenced by previous consumption of Catholicism. Some evidence is found concerning status theories, since Latinos in the lower income categories are less likely to be lifelong Protestants; however, this is not so for switchers. In general, status indicators such as education and income did not appear to have as strong an effect as predicted, these indicators appeared to be overshadowed by social context predictors.

It is important to note the limitations of the study. First, the data is cross-sectional, making it impossible to follow the religious trajectories of respondents over time which

could provide further insight on the factors influencing conversion. Additionally, cross-sectional data make it difficult to fully understand the effects of generation status and time respondents have been in the U.S. due to the robustness of linguistic status. Unfortunately, the telephone interviews used for data collections exclude those Latinos living in homes without telephones. While results reveal that there is variation in the likelihood of switching to Protestantism among Latinos due to measures of social context, it is impossible to fully understand the causal order of the relationship.

In conclusion, it is found that Latino conversion to Protestantism is significantly linked to the social context as predicted by the semi-involuntary thesis. The growth of Protestantism, particularly the conservative variants, may have significant impact on the identity formation and transformation of Latino immigrants in the U.S. A final contribution entails extending this study to include a sub-analysis of only converts which include data on personal religious motivations for conversion, which can be as important as social context in influencing conversion. Longitudinal data from sending communities religious context would also shed light on this process. Also, qualitative research might be able to better demonstrate how personal histories and identity formation intersect with conversion to Protestantism.

Appendix

Table 1: Means/Proportions on all variables used in analyses, N = 2,964 (2006 Hispanic Religion Survey)

Adherence groups	N	Proportion
Lifelong Catholic	1,960	48.8
Lifelong Protestant	583	14.52
Switcher	421	10.48
Conservative Switcher	368	9.16
Mainline Switcher	53	1.32
Total	2,964	100

Converts in the sample	N	Proportion
Converted from previous religion	692	20.23
Lifelong adherent	2,702	78.98
Don't know	17	0.5
Refused	10	0.29
Total	3,421	100

Former religion of converts:	N	Proportion
No religion, not a believer, atheist, agnostic	30	4.5
Catholic	532	79.88
Evangelical or Protestant Christian	91	13.66
Jehovah's Witness	7	1.05
Mormon	6	0.9
Total	666	100

Table 1 (continued): Means/Proportions on all variables used in analyses, N = 2,964 (2006 Hispanic Religion Survey)

<i>Independent Variables</i>	Switchers		Lifelong Catholics		Lifelong Protestants		Total		Range	
	weighted	unweighted	weighted	unweighted	weighted	unweighted	weighted	unweighted		
<i>National origin status</i>										
Puerto Rican	0.15	0.16	0.06	0.08	0.14	0.17	0.09	0.10	0,1	
Central American	0.09	0.14	0.08	0.12	0.15	0.21	0.09	0.14	0,1	
All others (ref.)	0.70	0.68	0.85	0.81	0.69	0.61	0.81	0.75	0,1	
<i>Census region</i>										
West	0.43	0.29	0.42	0.25	0.38	0.26	0.42	0.26	0,1	
South	0.36	0.37	0.36	0.37	0.41	0.39	0.36	0.37	0,1	
East/Central (ref.)	0.21	0.34	0.23	0.39	0.21	0.35	0.23	0.37	0,1	
<i>% Latinos in the same telephone exchange</i>										
0-14%	0.07	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0,1	
15-20%	0.16	0.14	0.19	0.13	0.22	0.19	0.19	0.14	0,1	
50-74%	0.33	0.32	0.29	0.31	0.28	0.30	0.30	0.31	0,1	
75-100%	0.20	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.20	0.16	0.17	0.16	0,1	
30-49% (ref.)	0.24	0.28	0.29	0.33	0.23	0.27	0.28	0.31	0,1	
<i>Linguistic status and Identity Salience</i>										
English dominant	0.34	0.21	0.16	0.10	0.34	0.19	0.21	0.15	0,1	
Bilingual	0.30	0.30	0.29	0.26	0.32	0.30	0.30	0.28	0,1	
Spanish dominant (ref.)	0.36	0.49	0.56	0.64	0.34	0.42	0.49	0.58	0,1	
<i>Respondents identify first:</i>										
By national origin status	0.33	0.37	0.43	0.44	0.28	0.36	0.39	0.42	0,1	
As Hispanic/Latino	0.12	0.13	0.23	0.23	0.20	0.18	0.22	0.20	0,1	
All others (ref.)	0.55	0.50	0.34	0.33	0.52	0.46	0.39	0.38	0,1	

Gender										
Female	0.60	0.632	0.49	0.565	0.50	0.580	0.49	0.553	0,1	
Male (ref.)	0.39	0.368	0.52	0.435	0.50	0.420	0.51	0.447	0,1	
Age										
18-29	0.21	0.157	0.29	0.232	0.32	0.264	0.29	0.229	0,1	
30-39	0.22	0.219	0.27	0.233	0.25	0.220	0.26	0.234	0,1	
55 and above	0.22	0.273	0.17	0.235	0.16	0.225	0.17	0.228	0,1	
40-54 (ref.)	0.24	0.352	0.28	0.301	0.28	0.292	0.28	0.310	0,1	
Marital Status										
Never married	0.19	0.15	0.26	0.22	0.27	0.33	0.27	0.23	0,1	
Divorced/separated	0.13	0.19	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.16	0,1	
All others (ref.)	0.62	0.60	0.57	0.57	0.54	0.55	0.59	0.55	0,1	

Education										
Less than high school	0.35	0.34	0.43	0.37	0.32	0.33	0.39	0.34	0,1	
Some college	0.24	0.23	0.17	0.16	0.26	0.20	0.20	0.18	0,1	
College and above	0.09	0.14	0.09	0.15	0.10	0.16	0.10	0.17	0,1	
High school (ref.)	0.32	0.29	0.31	0.32	0.33	0.31	0.31	0.31	0,1	
Income										
Less than 15K	0.11	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.09	0.13	0.13	0.14	0,1	
15 to 24.99k	0.16	0.15	0.17	0.15	0.11	0.12	0.16	0.15	0,1	
Above 45	0.27	0.24	0.18	0.18	0.28	0.22	0.21	0.20	0,1	
25 to 44.99K (ref.)	0.42	0.44	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.47	0.48	0,1	
Observations	421 (10.48%)		1,960 (48.80%)		583 (14.52%)		2,964 (100%)			

Table 2: Estimated net effects of likelihood of respondent being a switcher or lifelong Protestant compared to lifelong Catholics, multinomial logistic regression relative risk ratios, N=2,964 (2006 Hispanic Religion Survey)

VARIABLES	Switcher v. Lifelong Catholics				Lifelong Protestant v. Lifelong Catholic			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>National origin status</i>								
Puerto Rican		3.670***	5.593***	4.846***		2.853***	3.652***	3.063***
Central American		1.457~	1.579*	2.020**		2.257***	2.420***	3.002***
All others (ref.)								
National origin missing flag		5.775*	5.499*	4.091~		2.127	2.140	1.667
<i>Census region</i>								
West			2.029***	1.734*			1.461~	1.264
South			1.602*	1.455~			1.503~	1.347
East/Central (ref.)								
<i>% Latinos in the same telephone exchange</i>								
0-14%			1.609	1.472			1.702~	1.732~
15-20%			1.064	0.945			1.467~	1.342
50-74%			1.441~	1.445~			1.344	1.314
75-100%			1.735*	1.966**			1.728*	1.939**
30-49% (ref.)								
<i>Linguistic status and Identity Salience</i>								
English dominant				3.019***				2.904***
Bilingual				1.392				1.511*
Spanish dominant (ref.)								
<i>Respondents identify first:</i>								
By national origin status				0.676*				0.551***
As Hispanic/Latino				0.394***				0.643*
All others (ref.)								
Identity missing flag				3.342*				1.691
<i>Gender</i>								
Female	1.604**	1.554**	1.509*	1.515*	1.076	1.060	1.070	1.106
Male (ref.)								
<i>Age</i>								
18-29	0.627*	0.672~	0.689	0.708	1.100	1.170	1.183	1.201
30-39	0.608*	0.646*	0.660~	0.696	0.874	0.898	0.884	0.935
55 and above	1.086	1.096	1.096	1.048	0.968	0.995	0.975	0.967
40-54 (ref.)								
Constant	0.163***	0.130***	0.061***	0.059***	0.164***	0.134***	0.074***	0.069***
Observations	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ~ p<0.1

Table 2: (cont.) Estimated net effects of likelihood of respondent being a switcher or lifelong Protestant compared to lifelong Catholics, multinomial logistic regression relative risk ratios, N=2,964 (2006 Hispanic Religion Survey)

VARIABLES	Switcher v. Lifelong Catholics				Lifelong Protestant v. Lifelong Catholic			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Marital Status</i>								
Never married	0.825	0.778	0.771	0.709	1.015	0.944	0.957	0.882
Divorced/separated	0.817	0.778	0.767	0.730	1.157	1.100	1.110	1.042
All others (ref.)								
<i>Education</i>								
Less than high school	0.732	0.776	0.774	1.013	0.746~	0.759	0.748~	0.970
Some college	1.031	1.029	1.017	0.979	1.156	1.131	1.083	1.007
College and above	0.735	0.729	0.696	0.620~	0.839	0.809	0.747	0.651~
High School (ref.)								
<i>Income</i>								
Less than 15K	0.684	0.647~	0.626~	0.644	0.638*	0.620*	0.604*	0.660~
15 to 24.99k	0.843	0.868	0.842	0.966	0.630~	0.651~	0.628~	0.721
Above 45	1.149	1.178	1.192	0.954	1.398	1.462~	1.426	1.135
25 to 44.99K (ref.)								
Income missing flag	0.530**	0.530**	0.527**	0.545*	1.012	1.005	0.970	1.050
Constant	0.163***	0.130***	0.061***	0.059***	0.164***	0.134***	0.074***	0.069***
Observations	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964	2,964

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ~ p<0.1

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