Who are the Latino/a "Nones"?: Understanding Patterns of Latino/a Religious Disaffiliation

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Extended Abstract: *Background.* The United States has always maintained a unique reputation of religiosity among other nations, yet the last four decades has witnessed rapid social changes in Americans' participation in traditional, organized religion (Bengtson et al. 2018; Pew Research Center 2014). This steady increase has been the focus of considerable discussion amongst researchers who have sought to explain this trend. To date, few studies have investigated the patterns specifically associated with Latino/a non-religious living in the United States. Recent data suggests that Latinos/as claiming no religious preference, while lower than the general population, has increased as well (Pew Research Center 2014). What is still unknown is how the general themes of religious non-affiliation apply to Latinos/as in particular nor are the correlates of such non-affiliation yet identified. Latinos/as are perceived as being especially religious, with Catholicism occupying a central place in Latino/a culture. This religious core affects family dynamics, traditional beliefs, cultural practices, and language (Ramos et al. 2017). Yet, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey of Hispanic adults, 18 percent of all Latinos/as living in the United States claim no religious preference. This trend points to important changes in religion and its role in the flourishing culture of Latinos/as living in the U.S. With the Catholic Church having served as a social fixture in Latino/a cultural practice, being non-religious can have significant social and emotional costs. Our research seeks to explain why Latinos/as are experiencing such a dramatic rise in the number of religious "nones" and examines seven factors that have contributed to the surge of Latino/a "nones" living in the United States: (1) religion of upbringing, (2) family and life cycle factors (gender, marital status, parenthood, age); (3) SES (educated secular subcultures and income); (4) national origin status; (5) network stability (nativity status, residential stability), (6) acculturation (identity salience); and (7) politics (political ideology, attitudes about role of religion in politics).

Methods. To investigate the patterns of Latinos claiming no religious affiliation, we analyze data from a nationwide probability sample of Latina/os, 18 years of age or older residing in the United States. Data for the analyses came from the Pew Hispanic Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Data were collected between August 10, 2006 and October 4, 2006; interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, according to the preference of the respondent. We used multiple imputation in Stata/SE 13 to deal with missing cases. All variables with missing cases in the analyses were imputed except for the dependent variable, however the dependent variable was included in the imputation equation. Five imputations were used and pooled for final analyses. This procedure yielded an effective analytical sample of $n = 4,016$, composed of Catholic (50.42 percent), evangelical Christian (22.53 percent), mainline Christian (5.05 percent), non-Christian and sectarian groups (9.7 percent), and with Latino religious "nones" (12.28 percent). Respondents who were raised as a "none" (n=7) were not included in our analysis due to low sample size. Missing data were handled via multiple imputation. To ensure correct representation of the national Latino/a population we also use Pew Forum's two-stage weighting variable which utilizes 2006 estimates of age, gender, education, foreign- vs. native-born status, and Catholic vs. non-Catholic status (based on the 2000 Census), Claritas (a

marketing information company) and percentages on religion found in all past ICR-conducted Pew Hispanic studies (Pew Research Center 2009). The dependent variable for this study is item asking respondents' their *religious affiliation*, "What is your religion – Catholic, Evangelical or Protestant Christian, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Jewish, Muslim, or Orthodox Church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox church?" Respondents had the option of indicating "No Religion/Secular." Respondents who indicated this option were then recoded into a constructed variable RELTRAD as "Secular." We then use RELTRAD to identify those non-religious Latinos as "nones" and created a binary variable where 1 = secular identification 0 = all others. Approximately 12 percent of the sample (weighted) identified as a religious "none."

Our multivariate models also examine a number factors that may shape the decisions Latinos/as make to disengage from organized religion. The first variable of interest is *previous religious affiliation* (1 = previous Protestant tradition, 1 = previous other Christian tradition [i.e., "sectarian" religions, Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons], 1 = previous non-Christian religion [includes Muslims and Jews] vs. 0 = previous Catholic tradition). For each of these variables, people were included if they (1) are currently said religion and always have been, (2) are currently a different religion, but were raised in said religion, and (3) are currently a religious none, but were raised in said religion. Other variables of interest are: *family and life cycle factors* such as gender (1 = female, 0 = male), marital status (2 = never married, 1 = divorced/separated vs. 0 = never been married/widowed), parenthood (1 = have children under 18 in household, vs. 0 = no children under 18 in household) and age (1 = 18-29, 2 = 30-44, 3 = 45-59 vs. 0 = 60 and above); *socioeconomic status* indicators such as educational attainment (2 = college degree and above, 1= some college v. 0 = less than high school/high school), household income before taxes (1 = $30,000 and above vs. 0 = $0-29,999); *national origin status* (4 = South American, 3 = Central American, 2 = Cuban , 1 = Caribbean v. 0 = Mexican); *network and residential stability* measures such as immigrant status (3= born outside the U.S. lived here over 10 years,2= born outside the U.S. lived here 5-10 years ,1 = born outside the U.S. lived here under 5 years, v. 0 = born in the U.S or Puerto Rico.), Pacific resident (1 = Pacific resident v. 0 = all other regions in U.S.), and homeownership (1 = homeowner, 0 = non-homeowner); *acculturation* such as identity salience (1 = American identity v. 0 = country of origin/pan-ethnic/religion/all four); and *politics* such as political ideology (5 = very conservative to 1 = very liberal) and attitudes about role of churches in politics (1 = believe religion should be kept out, 0 = should not be kept out).

Preliminary Analysis and Findings. The table below presents results of logistical regression models predicting the likelihood of being a Latino religious "none." Models 1-7 assess the odds of being a Latino religious none with each iterative model adding main theoretical factors of focus (i.e., religion of upbringing, family and life cycle indicators, socioeconomic status indicators, national origin status, network stability, acculturation, and politics). Reporting of findings will primarily be focused on the final model. Looking across all models, what initially stands out is the significant effect of religious upbringing on the odds of being a religious none. In the full model, being previously raised in a Protestant tradition more than one and half the odds of being religious none (OR = 1.52 p < 0.05). Even more so, being raised in "other Christians traditions" (i.e., Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons) were five times more likely to be a religious none compared to those who were raised previously Catholic. In line with previous research on white populations, women are less likely to be a religious none than men (OR=0.49, p <0.001). Never having been married also predicts likelihood of being a religious none among Latina/os (OR=1.72, p <0.01). In terms of SES, while a high income did not significantly predict

being a "none," those Latina/os who have a bachelor degree or above were more than one and half times more likely to be a religious none (OR=1.61, p <0.05). Turning to national origin groups, Latinos/as of Cuban descent had almost three times the odds of being religiously unaffiliated when compared with Latinos/as of Mexican descent (OR = 2.92, p < 0.001). Those with Central American descent also were more likely to be religious nones (OR=1.97, p <0.001). Interestingly, those Latino/as who most identify with their American identity compared to other identities were more likely to be a religious none (OR=1.70, p < 0.05).

Preliminary Conclusions. Taken together, findings reveal each set of our hypothesized factors were linked with higher odds of religious non-affiliation among U.S. Latino/as. One of the most important factors in predicting whether a Latino/a will become religious unaffiliated was previous religion tradition, particularly, those raised in "sectarian religions" (Jehovah Witness and Mormon). Both traditions are characterized with having high expectations of their members which include adhering to strict codes of conduct, dress, food consumption, and allowance in medical practices (e.g., Jehovah Witnesses may not accept blood transfusions). This combined with high levels of religious service attendance and the insular nature in which these demands are reinforced by authority and community oversight (Phillips 1999), may drive one to leave religion altogether. These findings also have implications on the increased focus on the growth of Latino Protestantism -- our results indicate that compared to their Catholic counterparts, Latino Protestants are actually more likely to "nones." While most recent descriptive reports on this issue emphasize the movement of Latino Catholics to "no religion," this may be simply because most Latino/as have been Catholics (Mulder et. al 2017). We argue it is misleading to emphasize Catholic-to none transitions because results indicate that Catholicism is relatively "sticky" (at least as an identity, if not as a practice) compared to Protestantism and sectarianism. It may very well be that the Catholic-to-Protestant and Catholic-to-sectarian transitions may set up future growth of the "none" category among Latina/o Americans. These religions are comparatively less able to retain their members than Catholicism. While the growth of (especially conservative) Protestantism and related faiths is occurring, we cannot be sure how stable these changes will be.

Works Cited

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Table. Results of Logistic Regression Models (Odd Ratios) Predicting Latino "Nones" (n=4,016), weighted.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Religion of Upbringing							
Previous Protestant tradition	1.47~	1.69*	1.64*	1.56*	1.50~	1.44*	1.52*
Previous sectarian tradition	4.18***	5.02***	5.12***	5.16***	5.11***	5.12***	4.98***
Previous other non-Christian tradition	1.10	0.98	0.76	0.67	0.62	0.62	0.54
Family and Life Cycle Indicators							
Female		0.47***	0.47***	0.46***	0.46***	0.47***	0.49***
Divorced/Separated		0.93	0.99	0.97	0.89	0.88	0.86
Never married		1.84**	1.89***	1.88***	1.76**	1.77**	1.72**
Have children under 18 in household		0.69*	0.72~	0.74~	0.76~	0.76~	0.79
Age 18-29		1.43	1.40	1.56	1.44	1.47	1.59
Age 30-44		1.74*	1.72	1.67	1.60	1.64~	1.73~
Age 45-59		1.19	1.18	1.18	1.16	1.15	1.22
Socioeconomic Status Indicators							
Some College			1.43~	1.39	1.34	1.36	1.29
College Graduate and above			1.92***	1.80**	1.79**	1.63*	1.61*
Income 75k and above			1.15	1.11	1.08	1.08	1.06
National Origin Status							
Cuban				2.40***	2.94***	2.93**	2.92***
Caribbean				1.34	1.50~	1.65	1.20
Central American				1.76**	2.01***	2.02***	1.97***
South American				1.15	1.5~	1.47	1.44
Network Stability							
Immigrant under 5 years in U.S.					0.74	0.74	0.83
Immigrant 5-10 years in U.S.					0.50**	0.50**	0.60*
Immigrant over 10 years in U.S.					0.73~	0.81	0.85
Pacific resident					1.46*	1.48*	1.44~
Home owner					0.77	0.79	0.74
Acculturation							
American identity salience						1.72**	1.70*
Politics							
Conservative ideology							0.82**
Keep churches out of politics							1.63**

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