Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion

Latino Muslims in the United States

Reversion, Politics, and Islamidad

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Latino Muslims have emerged in a religious landscape that is "diverse and fluid" and in a public discourse that too often frames Latinos and Muslims as foreign and problematic in the U.S. (PEW 2014). This was nowhere more evident than in the wake of the 2016 Election when President Donald Trump issued a 90-day ban on Muslim immigration from seven countries,

citing national safety concerns regarding the vetting process. While Latino Muslims were not part of this ban, because of their religion, immigration status, similar physical characteristics, and/or intermarriage, many Latinos (Muslim and non-Muslim) felt the ban reinforced negative stereotypes and created a hostile environment to live, work, and raise their families. For this reason – along with talk about building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, Latino Muslims worked across racial, class, and religious lines to oppose the ban and "anti-immigrant" policies. At one interfaith rally in San Antonio in January 2017, three Latino Muslim children held up a sign that read: "All this Cuteness Courtesy of Latino Muslim Immigrants: No Ban, No Wall" (Davis 2017, Natiral 2017). These stories of Latino Muslims help to denaturalize popular assumptions about religion in public life, such as that all Latinos are Catholic, all Muslims are Arabs, and all Americans are Christian. They also raise important questions about the complex relationship between Latinos, Muslims, conversion and the growth and role of Islam in the new religious U.S.

While more than 250 newspaper (including online) articles have been written on Latino Muslims in the U.S., the vast majority focus on conversion. Some of the more popular explanations of why Latinos convert to Islam were captured in a story by Daniel J. Wakins, who wrote in a 2002 *New York Times* article titled, "Ranks of Latinos Turning to Islam Are Increasing," that:

> The call of Islam comes in many ways to Hispanics, and as their numbers and visibility grow, so does the likelihood that more converts will follow. Some are women who convert because they are marrying Muslims; some come to Islam in prison; some are influenced by the growth of Islam among blacks in the neighborhoods they share; others are Latinos looking for cultural pride or a new spiritual path. Many are in rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church (Wakins 2002).

Nearly a decade later in another *New York Times* article, James Estrin laid out one of the main explanations for these conversions in his article "Adding Islam to a Latino Identity."

> Many describe disillusionment with the practices of Catholicism and the church establishment. These Latinos are lured by Islam's simplicity and the Muslim's independence from a mediating clergy in his or her relationship with God. Converts are seeking a different identity (Estrin 2011).

Many of these articles focus on why Latinos reject Catholicism, ignoring the questions related to the attraction and appeal of Islamic beliefs and practices themselves.

Despite all of the articles and anecdotes about Latino conversion to Islam, no major, large-scale survey research has been carried out on the question of why Latinos convert to Islam. The research conducted to date has focused on interviews with a handful of Latino Muslims in one city or another, but without any consistent methodology, survey instrument, or large number of respondents. This study seeks to help fill this gap in the literature by analyzing the survey results of 560 Latino Muslims across the U.S.

Though research on broad groups and trends across the U.S. religious landscape provide important work for contextualization, academic research must increasingly focus on numerically smaller and categorically complex groups like Latino Muslims if we are to better understand the diversity and fluidity of religious expressions within the region and how they are likely to respond to trends in society. The following research is based on our survey results of 560 Latino Muslims across the U.S. and seeks to address questions regarding Latinos' conversion to Islam and how this affects religious, social, moral, and political views and practices. Our research finds that the belief in Islamic monotheism (*Tawhid*), the desire for a more direct experience of God,

the idea of reverting back to their original pre-Catholic Hispanic Muslim identity, and a connection to a Muslim friend are key factors in the conversion process and contribute to a new and unique *Latino Islamidad*, i.e. U.S. Latino Muslim Identity. This unique *Latino Islamidad* has been shaped by distinct conversion processes and factors such as the framing of these processes as a 'reversion' or return to Islam rather than a conversion, because the latter denies their Islamic-Spanish heritage and identity. This Latino Islamidad is characterized by high levels of religious practice, moderate levels of religious tolerance toward other religions and racial-ethnic groups, and high levels of theological and moral, but not necessarily political and social conservatism. For example, although most Latino Muslims affirm traditional Patriarchal relations, gender roles, and support traditional marriage, they tend to vote Democrat and oppose President Trump's 90-day ban, building the wall, and immigration legislation. Latino Muslims also express a desire to see their religious leaders and organizations get more involved in politics. Finally, the LMS survey finds that the vast majority of Latino Muslims are women, were born in the U.S., and come from diverse countries of origin, even though a majority trace their ancestry to Mexico (31%) or Puerto Rico (22%). These findings help us to better understand, problematize, and challenge previous representations of Latino Muslims.

Methodology

Though grounded in over fifteen years of national survey research on U.S. Latino religions and politics and ethnographic field work, media analysis, and organizational leadership within the Latino Muslim community, the backbone of this study is the Latino Muslim Survey (LMS). It is

the most comprehensive social science oriented study on U.S. Latino Muslims to date, helping us to better understand U.S. Latino Muslim religious identity, spiritual, moral, social, and ethical views, and social, civic, and political attitudes. To generate the data for the LMS, the authors created a 72-question bilingual survey instrument that was fielded online through SurveyGizmo. LMS respondents lived in 33 states. For comparability purposes, the LMS survey drew questions from several previous surveys, including the 2003 *Hispanic Churches in American Public Life*, PEW 2007 *Muslims Americans* and 2008 and 2014 *U.S. Religious Landscape* surveys. While some have estimated the Latino Muslim community numbers at 265,000 people, our survey research and field research on the number and locations of Latino-serving mosques and imams indicates the numbers are likely between 50,000 to 70,000.

Logistically, it would be nearly impossible and cost-prohibitive to contact all Latino Muslims in the U.S. through a traditional random-digit dialing method telephone survey. Therefore the survey instrument was instead made available on major U.S. Latino Muslim and broader Muslim organizational websites, list-servs, newsgroups, news-lists, and social media groups.[1] The survey was fielded between September 8 and December 15, 2014, in order to secure a large enough sample for data analyses. As a result, the LMS secured 560 responses from Latino Muslim respondents across the U.S.

Despite the relatively large number of respondents in this racial-ethnic minority-oriented survey, the LMS survey had a number of limitations. First, it is not a general U.S. Latino

[1] Postings of the LMS instrument included those at: the Latino American Dawah Organization, La Asociación Latino Musulmana de América, Atlanta Latino Muslim Association, Latino Muslims of Chicago, the Islam In Spanish group, Latino Muslims of New York, Latino Muslims of Arizona, Latino Muslims of the Bay Area, Tri-State Muslims, North Hudson Islamic Educational Center, Council on American-Islamic Relations, Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Circle of North America, and Latino Muslim Facebook, Twitter, and Yahoo social media groups.

population survey. Second, it is not a random sample telephone survey. The survey link was sent to all known U.S. Latino Muslim websites for posting and to all known U.S. Latino Muslim and Latino Muslim-serving leaders for distribution to their followers, and no objections to do so were expressed. Third, it did not survey respondents 18-years of age or younger and thus cannot speak to the attitudes of Latino Muslim youth. Fourth, it did not survey non-Latino Muslims. Fifth, just like a telephone survey was limited in its reach to those who had access to telephones, this survey was also limited in its reach to those who had internet access, invariably skewing the data results in favor of second and third generation Latinos, though it should be pointed out that most immigrants have access to computers or phones with internet services and the bilingual survey was also posted in Spanish. Sixth, a significant majority of the respondents were women, which is true for the larger community. For all of the above reasons, the survey findings in this study are *not* a nationally representative sample of *all* U.S. Latino Muslims and thus should not be used to generalize about all U.S. Latinos, all U.S. Muslims, or all Latino Muslims.

Despite these limitations, the survey does have analytical, social scientific, and case study value for a number of reasons. First, it is the first and only social scientifically-oriented survey that specifically and solely targeted Latino Muslims in the United States. Second, it is the largest social scientifically-oriented survey sample (n = 560) of U.S. Latino Muslims. Third, the survey was fielded bilingually in Spanish and English. Fourth, the LMS ascertained Latino Muslim views and attitudes on religious, moral, church-state, racial, social, civic, and political issues. Fifth, while not a random sample, respondent nativity rates (62% U.S. and 38% Latin America and somewhere else) largely mirrored other national Latino surveys, which normally have a

similar breakdown. Sixth, it measured the attitudes of Latino Muslim men *and* women, the latter of which made up a significant share of the respondents. Seventh, the LMS helps to identify the reasons behind religious switching, conversion/reversion, and the traditions most recently converted/reverted from. Eighth, it measures the levels of religious and racial-ethnic discrimination Latinos in the sample experience as Latinos, Muslims, and Latino Muslims in the U.S., as Muslims in Latino communities, and as Latinos in Muslim American communities. Ninth, it measures Latino Muslim respondent views on media representation after 9/11. Tenth, it measures Latino Muslim respondent views on abortion, same-sex marriage, immigration, social programs, political outreach, and political party identification and voting patterns over the past four election cycles from 2000-2014. Finally, it also asked open-ended questions, wherein respondents could write in their explanations and reflections without any pressure or time-constraints. For all of these reasons and many others, the LMS is an important study of 560 Latino Muslim men and women that the authors hope will provide rich insights into the Latino Muslim community in the United States that other scholars can revise, build-on, and/or expand in the future.

History and Demographics

The history of Muslims in the Americas traces its earliest roots back to Spain, where Muslims crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in 709 and conquered much of the Iberian Peninsula. Muslims there developed a rich culture until the Spanish Catholic Reconquista conquered the last Muslim Kingdom of Granada in 1492. After several anti-Spanish Catholic rebellions and uprisings, King

Phillip III of the Holy Roman Empire expelled all Muslims from Spain in 1614. Muslims immigrated to North Africa where some later became settlers and leaders in the Barbary States and the Ottoman Empire. A small group of Muslim converts to Catholicism (derisively called *moriscos* or "little Moors" or Muslims) from Al-Andalus likely sailed to the New World with the Spanish conquistadores and colonists. Muslims left an indelible impact on Spanish religion, culture, and society. This is evident not only in rich art, architecture, language, place names, and culture, but also by how they shaped the Spanish Reconquista spirit that eventually led to men sailing to the New World to conquer the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas.

Muslims arrived in the Americas from West Africa during the transatlantic slave trade through people like Abdul Rahman, Job Ben Solomon, Lamine Kaba, and Umar ibn Said. Some scholars estimate that over 10 percent of West African slaves were Muslim, though the exact percentages are uncertain. While little of this Black Muslim community survived beyond the first generation of slavery since many converted to Christianity and others were unable to establish and/or maintain a Muslim community, they too contributed to the first traces of Muslims in the Americas. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison also took interest in Islam after 1801, when the Muslim Barbary States in Tripoli began capturing American merchant ships off the North African coast in the Mediterranean and ransomed their crews, until the Barbary Wars and the U.S. Navy used gunboat diplomacy to force a peace treaty in 1815 (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 9-50).

Despite these initial contacts, Muslims did not arrive in large numbers in the U.S. until the early twentieth century. They immigrated in three waves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each bringing different cultural expressions of Islam to The U.S. The first

wave began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and included laborers from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and later India. The first wave also included Muslims who arrived after 1918 in the wake of World War I and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. They settled in the Midwest in places like Detroit and Dearborn, Michigan, where they worked in the fields and auto industry. They were later joined by other Muslim immigrants in the 1930s (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 9-50; Smith 2010: 205-206). A second major wave of largely Palestinian refugees arrived after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The third major wave arrived after the U.S. immigration laws lifted the country of origin quotas in 1965. Since then other smaller groups of Muslims have immigrated to the U.S. Approximately two-thirds of Muslims in the U.S. today are immigrants or descendants of Muslims who came to the U.S. from abroad and about one-third are Black and/or other racial-ethnic minority (Esposito 1994: 151-152).

The first permanent mosque was opened in Highland Park (Detroit), Michigan, in 1919. By the 1970s, there were approximately twenty permanent mosques in the U.S. (Albanese 2012: 209). Since that time, the number of mosques has grown rapidly with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Muslim immigrants, with some Muslim leaders now reporting 2,106 mosques and meeting places across the U.S. (Esposito 1994: 151). Many of these mosques have been built with support from the global Muslim community or *ummah*, but especially from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. Reports about the size of the Muslim community in the U.S. vary widely from about 3.5 million to 6 million, though in 2016 The Pew Research Center put the figure at

3.3 million, or 1 percent of the U.S. population – a figure that is estimated to double by 2050. In 2016, the U.S. admitted 38,901 Muslims (46% of all refugees) and 37,521 Christians (44%).[2]

The Muslim population in the U.S. has experienced a modest but important growth over the past decade and Latino Muslims are contributing to this growth. A growing number of mosques publish Spanish literature, though only a small number hold Friday prayer services in Spanish. The growth of the Latino Muslim community is due to several factors including intermarriage between Muslim men and Catholic Latinas, high birth rate, high immigration rates, Latinos converting or more accurately reverting to Islam, inner city youth programs, gang, rehab, social service ministries, and prison ministries. Outside of initial contacts with Muslims during the colonial period of U.S. history, the origins of the very first Latino conversions to Islam in the U.S. are hard to reconstruct. By the 1920s, Punjabi Muslim men from India arrived in California and often married Mexican women in central California where they worked side by side as migrant laborers (Leonard 1992: 67; GhaneaBassiri 2010: 190-191). The Ahmadiyya, Moorish Science Temple in America, Nation of Islam, and Five Percenter Nation also gained a small but growing number of Latinos adherents, many of whom later joined Sunni forms of Islam. The number of Latino members was significant enough for the organizers of Noble Drew Ali's

[2] In 2016, most Muslims came from Syria (12,486), Somalia (9,012), Iraq (7,853), Burma (3,145), Afghanistan (2,665), and other countries (3,741). Since 2002, the U.S. has admitted 279,339 Muslim refugees (32% of the total), while the rest came from other religious traditions or none at all. The Obama administration set a goal of resettling 10,000 Syrian refugees in the U.S. in 2016 and exceeded this goal by granting refugee status and settling 12,587. Approximately 99% of accepted refugees were Sunni Muslim and less than 1% were Christian, despite the fact that 10% of Syria is Christian (especially after their influx from Iraq) and they have been targeted by ISIS because of their religion and alleged support for the Assad regime. Besheer Mohamed, "A new estimate of the U.S. Muslim population," Pew Research Center: FactTank News in Numbers, January 6, 2016. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/;Phillip Connor, "U.S. admits record number of Muslim refugees in 2016," Pew Research Center: FactTank: News in the Numbers, October 5, 2016. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/05/u-s-admits-record-number-of-muslim-refugees-in-2016/ Kyle Shideler, "The Refugee Resettlement Process is Discriminatory," Center for Security Studies, November 17, 2015.http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2015/11/17/the-refugee-resettlement-process-is-already-discriminatory/

funeral service to provide Spanish translations for attendees. In the early 1970s, Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in the New York metropolitan area began converting to Islam through outreach by immigrant Muslims, the Moorish Temple Society, and the preaching of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, and the Nation of Islam (Bowen 2010).

In 1987, Yahya Figueroa, Rahim Ocasio, Ibrahim Gonzalez and other New York-born Puerto Ricans came together to found the Alianza Islamica (Aidi 2016). Based in East Harlem and then the Bronx, the Alianza sought to promote social programs that met the material and spiritual needs of the Latino community, especially via drug rehab, anti-gang violence, support for victims of domestic violence, AIDS awareness campaigns and peace building programs with Latino gangs like the Latin Kings. They also sponsored martial arts, mentoring, and education programs and outreach to local prisons, where many Latinos accepted Islam. In New York, the Alianza founded the first Latino Muslim mosque in the U.S. (Aidi 1999).

Latina women were also active in the creation and development of Latino Muslim communities. Khadijah Rivera helped initiate a support group for Latina converts to Islam in New York, Illinois, and Florida. It grew and by 1988 they went by *la Propagación Islamica para la Educación de Ala el Divino*, "Islamic propagation for education on and devotion to Allah the Divine" (PIEDAD) (Essa 2010). They sought to promote Islamic beliefs and practices through education and social services and to empower Latina converts. PIEDAD leaders taught women about the history of Islam, theology, ritual practices, and ethical living. Many converts were college students and a small group of them participated in Project Downtown, through which they helped feed the homeless in urban areas. While Rivera died in 2009, her work is continued

by Nylka Vargas, who also helped organize the annual Hispanic Muslim Day in New Jersey. The yearly celebration commemorates the history of Islamic Spain and recognizes, supports, and encourages new Latino Muslims (Morales 2012).

By the 1990s, a growing number of Latino Muslim converts were meeting each other on the web and through chat rooms that generated cyber communities. As a result in 1997, Samantha Sánchez, Saraji Umm Zaid and Juan Alvarado joined to organize the Latino American Dawah Organization (LADO). Today it is one of the most important Latino Muslim networks in the U.S. Since its chat room beginnings, LADO has also connected with larger Muslim organizations like the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), participated in various conferences (e.g. the annual Latino Muslim conference and the annual ISNA convention), and helped write and generate a stream of articles for various print magazines (e.g. ISNA's *Islamic Horizons* and *The Message International*). Despite this concrete work, most of LADO's activities are conducted online through internet technologies, where they maintain and update their website *LatinoDawah.org*, collect and disseminate information on Islam in English and Spanish, maintain an archive of the digital newsletter, the *Latino Muslim Voice*, and promote networking between Latino Muslim and broader Muslim organizations across the U.S. (Morales 2012).

In Southern California, a group of Latino converts to Islam began meeting at the Islamic Center of Southern California and in 1999 created the Los Angeles Latino Muslim Association (LALMA). Marta Galedary co-founded the organization, which meets at the Omar ibn Al-Khattab masjid near USC. They hold weekly Sunday morning meetings, learn Arabic, study the

Qur'an, hadiths, and other scholarly texts, pray, and often go out afterwards for lunch or coffee. They also sponsor lectures on the history of Islamic Spain for their members, public libraries, and other venues. In particular, they and other organizations cited above stressed the Islamic roots of Spain and Latino language and culture and the notion of reverting back to their original Iberian/Spanish/Latino Muslim identity. They have invited Muslim speakers from USC, UCLA, the Claremont Colleges, and U.C. Riverside to give lectures at their events. They also work in interreligious dialogue with the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese and the Los Angeles Police Department and Muslim organizations like the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and Verde Islam in Spain. They regularly host community-building events, like baby showers, weddings, picnics, Ramadan breaking of fast dinners, interreligious meetings, and other social gatherings for youth. They changed their name in 2013 to the broader moniker: The Association of Latino Muslims from America (LALMA) (Morales 2012).

In 2003, the IslamInSpanish group was founded in Houston, Texas by Mujahid Fletcher. The group's mission is to produce and disseminate audio and visual media for Latinos to learn about Islam in the Spanish language and history. IslamInSpanish has reportedly produced over 500 audiobook titles and 200 video programs including their IslamInSpanish television show, all of which showcased their Latino Muslim heritage and reversion back to Islam. The group also holds large open house events for Latinos who are not Muslims that include a lesson in the history of Islam in Spain. Weekly classes are also held in Houston, Dallas, and New Jersey. In

2016 IslamInSpanish inaugurated a 5,000 square foot Latino Islamic center, with a media production studio, museum on the history of Islamic Spain and a Spanish-speaking mosque.

Through all of these activities and many others, the Latino Muslim population in the United States has been steadily growing over the past few decades. Given immigration trends, there is no reason to believe this growth will dissipate. A 2015 Pew study estimates there are 198,000 Latino Muslims in the U.S.[3] However, given the low number of Spanish-language mosques and certified Latino Muslim religious scholars and leaders (*ulema*), it is more likely that the number of Latino Muslims in the U.S. is much lower and closer to a HCAPL national survey and study that estimates there are 52,000 when updated to reflect census data from 2015. Most Latino Muslims attend English-rather than Spanish-speaking mosques and are fairly well-integrated into the larger U.S. Muslim community (Morales 2012). Reflecting almost the same profile of the general U.S. Latino population, approximately 62 percent of the LMS sample was

[3] The little demographic information available on Latino Muslims is mostly contradictory. A 2007 report by ISNA, the Islamic Society of North America, estimated that there are 40,000 Hispanic Muslims in the United States (*Latino Muslims Growing in Number in the US*. ISNA.net.http://www.isna.net/articles/News /Latino-Muslims-Growing-in-Number-in-the-US.aspx Accessed on October 3, 2011); whereas the American Muslim Council reported an estimated 200,000 in 2006 (Conci, Pilar. "Latinos Converting to Islam." The Dallas Morning News. http:// religionblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2008/03/latinos-converting-to-islam.html Accessed on October 3, 2011). Perhaps one of the best estimates comes from The Pew Charitable Trusts-funded Hispanic Churches in American Public Life national survey (n = 2,060), which put the number of Latino Muslims at approximately 52,000 when the percentages were imputed to raw numbers and updated per the 2014 U.S. Census data released in 2015 (Gastón Espinosa, Changements démographiques et religieux chez les hispaniques des Etats-Unis, *Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion*, 51(3) (2004): 309-327). A 2011 study conducted by the Pew Research Center showed that Latino Muslims accounted for an estimated 6 percent out of the Muslims living in the U.S. See <http://www.people-press.org/files/2011/08/muslim-american-report.pdf>. In 2015, the Pew Research Center estimated that there were about 3.3 million Muslims in the U.S. See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/ 2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/>. That puts the Latino Muslim population at 198,000, which is much too high. Given the low number of Latino Muslim imams, lay leaders and centers, and Spanish-language mosques, it is likely that there are far fewer Latino Muslims in the U.S than the PEW estimates.

born in the U.S. and 38 percent was born in Latin America or elsewhere.[4] However, unlike the general U.S. Latino population, eighty-four percent were U.S citizens, 4 percent permanent residents, and 12 percent undocumented or something else.

In this particular study, the states with the highest concentrations of Latino Muslim participants were California (19%), Texas (15%), New York (12%), New Jersey (11%), Florida (7%), Illinois (5%), Georgia (4%), and Pennsylvania (3%). Arizona, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia each represented 2 percent of the LMS sample respectively. The majority of Latino Muslim participants traced their Latino ancestry to either Mexico (31%) or Puerto Rico (22%). Another 12 percent traced their Latino ancestry to more than one country (34% of whom identified one of these as Mexico and 27% as Puerto Rico), 12 percent to South American countries, and 9 percent to Central American countries. Participants also traced their Latino ancestry to the Dominican Republic (5%) and to Cuba (3%).

With regard to race, 28 percent of the LMS sample identified themselves as white, 23 percent as brown, 6 percent as black, and 3 percent as American Indian or Alaska Native. A full 12 percent identified themselves as bi-racial and 21 percent as 'other' (49% of whom specified their racial identity as Hispanic, Latino, Chicano, Mestizo, or from a Latin American country). Further, two of our survey's participants who selected 'other' as their race wrote that "there is no

[4] An overwhelming majority of the participants (95%) took the survey in English and only 5 percent took it in Spanish. However, given that 62% of the participants indicated that they were born in the US and 38% were born in Latin America or Somewhere else, only 72-77% of the LMS participants should have been able to use English when compared to national averages. The roughly 20 percentage point difference may reflect a distinct characteristic of the Latino Muslim population from broader Latino populations or a shortcoming of the survey instrument (possibly related to its being fielded exclusively online through listservs and organizational websites). Further research is needed to conclusively determine the percentage of English users among the Latino Muslim population.

such thing as race," and another wrote, "I don't identify as white but recognize I benefit from white privilege."

The overwhelming number of Latino Muslim participants (73%) were women and only 27 percent were men.[5] More than half (51%) of the Latino Muslim respondents were married, 29 percent single, 15 percent divorced, and 1 percent widowed. Participants tended to have fewer children than the larger U.S. Latino population, with 66 percent having 2 children or less. Only one in five (19%) had four or more children, though this could in part be shaped by the fact that they were on the whole slightly younger than the U.S. Latino population. A full 89 percent of the LMS participants were under 50 years of age (49% were 18-34 years of age and 40% were 35-49 years of age). Another 10 percent were 50-64 years of age and only 1 percent of the participants were 65 years old or older.

A relatively high percentage (41%) of respondents graduated from college and another 40 percent had some college or vocational training. Only 19 percent had a high school education or less. This may explain why Latino Muslims had on average higher total household incomes than the general U.S. Latino population, with only 43 percent having a gross household income of less than $35,000 and 45 percent earning $35,000-$65,000 annually. In short, Latino Muslims largely reflect the same citizenship/immigrant rates as the national Latino population, but notably have higher income, educational, and marriage rates.

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[5] Unlike other Latino religious groups whose population is made up of roughly 51-53% women, the Latino Muslim movement is disproportionately female. Though this finding is corroborated by anecdotal evidence and the existing literature, several questions are raised by the finding. First, to what extent can the high rate of women among Latino Muslims be attributed to marriage? Our findings indicate that though marriage is a significant factor, it only accounts for about 13% of the 73% of all participants who are women. Though this would account for over half of the 20-22 percentage point difference between the female population of Latino Muslims and other Latino religious groups, 7-9% of the difference is left unaccounted for. Further research is therefore required to fully account for the discrepancy between the female Latino Muslim population and that of other Latino religious groups.

Theories of Conversion

While there is a small but growing body of academic literature on Latino religions and on Islamic religiosity in the U.S., surprisingly little attention has been given specifically to Latino Muslim religious, social, moral, and political views. Nevertheless, a few works on the subject have been produced, including by Hisham Aidi (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2016), Edward SpearIt Maldonado (2006 and 2012), Patrick Bowen (2010a, 2010b, and 2013), Harold Morales (2012 and 2014), and Hjamil Martínez-Vázquez (2010). Questions regarding conversion are central to most of these works. Focusing primarily on a segment of Latino Muslims that developed during the 80's and 90's in New York, Aidi argues that "Cultural pride, alienation, and the Barrio's wretched social and economic situation, have at least partly influenced the Latino Muslims' rejection of Christianity, which many regard as the faith of a guilty and uncaring establishment" (Aidi 1999). Working primarily with populations subjected to the criminal justice system, SpearIt Maldonado argues that this criminal justice system has played a significant role in what he terms a "double conversion," i.e. from an initial "marginal, often racialist understanding of "Islam" that transforms into a universal, colorblind [and mainstream Muslim] conception" (Maldonado 2012). In his work on the connections between Latino and African-American Muslims, Bowen argues that if conversion "involves new sign/discourse negotiations - especially the rejection of a dominant one, such as Christianity… and other dominant discourses, then a "religious conversion"' affects identities, meaning systems, ethics, and practices (Bowen 2010a). In his work on the intersections between lived religion and the journalistic mediation of

these lived experiences, Morales argues that the term "conversion" should be understood in public discourse on Latino Muslims as a discursive and politicized means of gaining or closing off access to other resources, including meeting spaces and internet technologies.

In his work on Latino Muslim conversion stories, Martínez-Vázquez draws on Rambo and Farhadian's theories of conversion in order to organize narrative elements into seven social-psychological stages of religious change: [1] context, [2] crisis, [3] quest/seeking, [4] encounter, [5] interaction, [6] commitment, and [7] consequences. Martínez-Vázquez argues that the seven stage model should not be understood as either "unilineal or as universal," and that "reality is far more complex," but that the model nevertheless helps us better understand Latino conversion to Islam as a process rather than as a single event. This process, argues Martínez-Vázquez, has produced a post-colonial identity in opposition to a hegemonic understanding of Latinos as Christians. Lastly, Martínez-Vázquez also references Khalil Al-Puerto Rikani to posit several theories of why, and not just how, Latinos convert to Islam, including because of: Puerto Rican/ African-American interactions, internet technologies, Latinos living among immigrant Muslims, Latinos in prisons, and marriage between Latinas and Muslims. Though each of these theories regarding Latino conversion to Islam is based on close qualitative and archival research of differing groups, no national study of Latino Muslims in general has been conducted and no quantitative methods have previously been employed. Further, many of the questions that we ask in this study regarding how Latino conversion to Islam shapes the group's religious, social, moral, and political views and practices have not been addressed at all by these scholarly works. In what follows, we therefore seek to test and make substantially additions to conversion theories

(especially with regard to how conversion affects religious, social, moral, and political views and practices) using the results from our national survey of Latino Muslims.

Though individual Latinos have been embracing Islam since the 1920's, the growth of conversion rates among Latino populations in the U.S. is a relatively recent phenomenon. Over 74 percent of LMS respondents reported having embraced Islam in the past fifteen years (1999-2014). That such a high percentage of Latino Muslims are recent converts is confirmed by the finding that an astounding 93 percent of respondents reported that both their father and their mother were not Muslims, indicating that they were not raised as Muslims. Only 4 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed reported they were raised as Muslims.

Over the past thirty years Andrew Greeley and other scholars have documented the declining share of Catholics in the Latino religious marketplace (Greeley 1997: 12-13; Espinosa 2006: 42). While there has been a tendency to focus on conversion to Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism and alternative Christian traditions like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Mormons, this study found that some are also converting to Islam and other non-Christian traditions. Consistent with other studies, the LMS found that the single largest share of Latino Muslim converts come from Roman Catholicism (Espinosa 2004: 309-327).

Although the LMS found that a relatively high (56%) of Latino Muslims converted from Roman Catholicism, it also found that Latino Muslims converted from Protestantism (13%), Atheism/Agnosticism/No Religion/Secularism (9%), Other Christian traditions (6%), and Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, and Adventism (5%), and other religions (2%), among others.

Notable are not only high rates of conversion from Roman Catholicism, but also from Protestantism (13%) and Atheism, Agnosticism, and Secularism (9%). This is particularly important given the recent studies that have heralded the almost unqualified growth of atheism and the nones. This study found that not all nones and atheists remain so and that some eventually convert not only to a religious tradition, but also to traditional and strict religions. This seems to reinforce Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's rational choice theory and explanation for the growth and decline of religion in the U.S., in which they argue that strict churches and religious traditions tend to grow more than liberal ones because they proselytize and provide more traditional boundaries, benefits, and purpose for their followers (Finke and Stark 2005).

The hypothesis that marriage plays a significant role in Latino conversion to Islam is corroborated if formulated not as a primary reason for choosing or being attracted to Islam (in our study, it ranked as the third least influential factor in the decision to embrace Islam), but rather as the primary way in which they were first introduced to Islam. Yet, even in this latter formulation, the respondents who first learned about Islam through a spouse or future spouse, though significant, comprised only 13 percent as compared to those who did so through a friend (40%). Contrary to the theory that marriage is one of the primary reasons why Latinas are converting to Islam, 84 percent of our studies respondents said it was not very or not at all influential.

A second hypothesis postulating that prison plays a significant role in Latino conversion to Islam is on the other hand largely without basis. Though anecdotal or individual cases of Latinos embracing Islam while in prison have indeed been documented, only 0.18 percent of the

LMS participants said they had learned about Islam while in prison and only 4 percent said that a prison ministry, prisoner re-entry, or rehabilitation program played somewhat of a role in their decision to embrace Islam. It may be that Latino Muslims currently in prison have limited or no access to internet technologies and therefore to our survey instrument. However, we maintain that more than 0.18 percent would be currently out of prison and have access to our survey instrument and the option to indicate prison as a significant factor in their conversion process if it indeed did play a significant role. Instead, our findings show that for the overwhelming majority of Latino Muslims, prison has not played a significant role in their conversion process.

Our study finds that Latinos who convert to Islam first learn about the religion primarily through a friend, and not primarily from a spouse or future spouse or while in prison. We thus conclude that the high conversion rates of Latinos to Islam are due in large part to a heavy emphasis on proselytism. Roughly a third (33%) of the LMS respondents reported trying to convert others to Islam on a regular basis, 11 percent did so every day, 10 percent once a week or more, and another 12 percent once a month or more. This focus on personal outreach helps explain Latino Muslim growth over the past fifteen years. This finding is further supported by the fact that 40 percent first heard about Islam from a friend, 13 percent from a spouse or future spouse, and 8 percent from a family member, while only 4 percent first heard about Islam from a radio or television show, and 3 percent from an Islamic website. Though collectively, media seems to play somewhat of a significant role in the conversion process (7%), internet technologies do not seem to playing as an influential role in the manner in which Latinos who convert to Islam first learn about the religion as previously hypothesized.

Table 1		
How influential are the following in Latino Muslims' decision to embrace Islam		
Influencing Factor	**Very or somewhat influential**	**Not very or not at all influential**
The Islamic belief in monotheism/*Tawhid*	95%	5%
The desire for a more direct personal experience of God	94%	6%
The Practice of daily prayers	76%	24%
The Islamic belief in prophethood	75%	25%
The racial/ethnic equality called for in Islam	74%	26%
The practice of charity/*zakat* in Islam	71%	30%
The gender equality called for in Islam	69%	31%
A deep personal crisis	53%	47%
A family member, friend, or acquaintance who shared their faith	53%	47%
An experienced, witnessed, or heard about miracle	33%	67%
Inspired by a particular religious leader	29%	71%
Marriage	16%	84%
Inspired by a prison ministry, prisoner re-entry, or rehabilitation program	4%	96%
Inspired by an inner city ministry or outreach program	4%	96%

Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560)

While personal contacts were the primary method for reaching Latinos, many Latino Muslims cite several factors as having various levels of influence on their decision to embrace Islam. A full 95 percent of participants identified the Islamic belief in monotheism/*Tawhid* as being a very or somewhat influential factor in their decision to embrace Islam and 94 percent identified the desire for a more direct personal experience of God as being very or somewhat influential reasons for why they choose to embrace Islam. Other highly influential factors

included the practice of daily prayers (76%), the Islamic belief in prophethood (75%), the racial/ethnic equality called for in Islam (74%), and the practice of charity/zakat in Islam (71%).

The most popular way of identifying the process of embracing Islam was as a 'reversion.' One of our survey's participants wrote: "We are all born in the state of *Fitrah* its our parents which influence Christianity or Judaism in our lives [sic]." The Islamic doctrine of *fitrah* maintains that all humans are born in a natural state of submission to God, i.e. they can't help but submit to the will God in the same way that birds, rocks, and other created beings can't help but do what the creator intended for them to do. Further, it is argued that in as much as an individual grows up not submitting to the will of God, it is their upbringing, cultural and religious, that causes them to stray from their original or natural inclination to do so. Many Latino Muslims therefore maintain that rather than change to something completely new, they are returning to their original *fitrah* nature when they embrace Islam. Finally, this reversion is additionally conceived as a return, remembering, or re-embracing of the Islamic influence on their Spanish heritage. For these reasons, over 40 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed described their decision to embrace Islam as a "reversion" whereas 34 percent as a "conversion" to Islam. Interestingly enough, men were more likely (48%) than women (37%) to describe their embrace of Islam as a "reversion" to their original Muslim identity rather than a conversion. Women were more likely (37%) than men (28%) to describe their embrace as "conversion." This may be in part a way of expressing a sharper break with pre-existing Christian beliefs and gender roles since women were more likely than men to engage in religious practices than men in Latino Catholic and Protestant traditions.

It is common to take on a new Muslim name after reversion or conversion and almost half (45%) of Latino Muslims have done so even as 52 percent of have not done so. Men were much more likely (62%) than women (40%) to adopt a Muslim name.

Despite their heartfelt embrace of Islam and popular stereotypes about religious intolerance and exclusivity, many Latino Muslims believe that non-Muslim People of the Book (e.g., Christians and Jews) can also go to heaven without converting to Islam. This belief is part of a longstanding pluralistic tradition of religious tolerance within some traditions of Islam, though not all traditions are equally affirming. For these reasons and others, it is not surprising that Latino Muslims were relatively tolerant towards Christians and other religious practitioners. Furthermore, it is also likely that the vast majority of their immediate family and friends are Catholic and Protestant, thus making the adoption of a more open and tolerant theology of the People of the Book desirable. These factors along with usually living in densely populated regions with high degrees of religious diversity and pluralism and democratic impulses towards religious tolerance in society as a whole and the democratic party in particular (a plurality of Latino Muslims are Democrats), may indeed help explain why Latino Muslims were relatively religiously tolerant of Christians and Jews.

This helps to correct the perceptions and concerns of some commentators, who have worried that Latino converts to Islam might be embracing more radical sectarian splinter groups, especially while in prison. These concerns where heightened after José Padilla and Antonio Martínez were arrested on terrorism charges (Goodnough 2007; Temple-Raston 2010). However, the LMS found that these are exceptional cases rather than the norm. The vast majority of Latino

Muslims surveyed (91%) self-identify as Sunni Muslims. Only 6 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed self-identify with the Shia tradition and 8 percent as both Sufi and Sunni. Less than 9 percent of all Latino Muslims self-identified with Salafi and Wahhabi traditions, which tend to be much more prone to strict literalism and conservatism. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Latino Muslims are liberals or highly progressive since the LMS found that only 6 percent of respondents reported self-identifying with progressive modernist and reformist traditions. Even more telling than their particular sectarian affiliation, less than 0.5 percent of the respondents believed that radical organizations like al-Qaeda are making any positive changes for Muslims (this is less than the general U.S. Muslim population of which only 1 percent views al-Qaeda very favorably). This underscores the fact that Padilla and Martínez were an aberration among Latino Muslims and are far from the Latino Muslim mainstream.

While most Muslims interpret the authoritative religious texts as advocating racial equality and despite the fact that many Latino converts found this an attractive element of Islam, three-fourths (77%) of those surveyed also reported that Latino Muslims face (48%) or sometimes face (29%) racially or ethnically discriminatory attitudes by Muslims who are not Latino. Only 15 percent reported that they do not face or sometimes face discriminatory attitudes by non-Latino Muslims. However, an even higher percentage (84%) reported that Latinos Muslims face (63%) or sometimes face (21%) discriminatory attitudes by Latinos who are not Muslim. On a personal level, about 15 percent of Latino Muslims reported facing general religious discrimination in the U.S. because they were Latino and another 18 percent reported that they faced it once a month or more. A relatively high 48 percent reported that they never,

almost never, or rarely face religious discrimination because they are Muslim in the U.S. Despite this fact, they are about evenly split between whether they believe that media representations of Latinos Muslims are generally more positive (32%) or more negative (30%) since 9/11, with the rest saying it was about the same (15%) or didn't know (23%).

Table 2			
Discrimination Against Latino Muslims			
Do you believe that Latino Muslims face discrimination, if any, because they are…	**Muslims in America**	**Muslims in Latino Communities**	**Latinos in Muslim Communities**
Yes	49	63	48
No	7	9	15
Sometimes	41	21	29
Don't Know	3	8	8

Statistics taken from 2014 LMS Survey (N=560) of Latino Muslims

Religious Views and Practices

Given the fact that such a high percentage of Latino Muslims view themselves as reverts to Islam, it is not surprising that the Latino Muslim Survey found that 93 percent of respondents stated that religion provides a great deal (73%) or quite a bit (20%) of guidance in their day-to-day living, with men and women sharing nearly identical rates. This may be due to the fact that a high percentage of Latino Muslims are first generation converts and are women. Previous research indicates that new converts and women tend to have higher rates of religiosity than the general religious population and men. This high level of support was true across age groups (18-29 – 89%; 30-39 - 92%; 40-54 – 97%; 55+ -- 100%). This may also help explain why almost half of Latino Muslims surveyed reported attending mosque or religious services once a week or more (35%) or almost every week (14%), which is higher than the general Latino population and

the U.S. population and higher than the general U.S. Muslim population (40%), according to the Pew Charitable Trusts' *American Muslim Survey* (PEW 2007: 24-26).

Table 3				
Latino Religious Practice and Beliefs by Religious Affiliation				
	Latino Muslim	**Latino Catholic**	**Latino Protestant**	**All Latino Christians**
	2015*	**2008**	**2008**	**2008**
How Important is Religious Guidance in Daily Living?				
Quite a Bit	93	71	85	76
Some	6	22	10	18
No Guidance at All, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	1	7	5	6
How Often Do You Attend Religious Services?				
Almost Every Week or More	48	55	71	60
Once or Twice a Month	19	23	14	20
A Few Times a Year or Less	27	19	11	17
Never, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	6	3	4	3
How Often Do You Pray?				
Every Day	71	61	79	67
At Least Once a Week	10	18	11	16
Once or Twice a Month	4	11	5	9
Seldom, Never, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	15	10	5	8
How Often Do You Read Holy Scriptures (Qur'an or Bible)?				
At Least Once a Week or More Than Once a Week	51	30	63	41
Once or Twice a Month	23	20	15	18
Seldom	23	23	13	20
Never, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	4	27	9	21
At Least Once a Week	22	17	45	26
Once or Twice a Month	17	8	11	9
Seldom	35	18	18	18
Never & Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	26	57	26	47
How Often Do You Pray for Divine Healing?	**Latino Muslim**	**Latino Catholic**	**Latino Protestant**	**All Latino Christians**
Every Day	69	61	65	63
At Least Once a Week	15	11	9	10
Once or Twice a Month	5	10	10	10
Seldom, Never, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	10	18	16	17
How Often Do You Try to Call or Convert Others to Your Faith?				
Every Day	11	11	24	15

At Least Once a Week	10	9	23	14
Once or Twice a Month	12	10	18	13
Seldom, Never, Don't Know/Refused to Answer combined	67	70	35	58

Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560). 2008 statistics taken from the 2008 LRAP National Survey (N=1,104) of all U.S. Latino Christian voters unless otherwise noted.

Within the general U.S. Muslim population, Muslim men (62%) were three times more likely to attend mosque or religious gatherings once a week or more than women (23%) because it is considered an Islamic duty for men to lead their families spiritually and because women often remain at home rearing the children. Though the contrast is not as sharp as in the Latino Muslim population, Muslim men also attend services more often than Muslim women (48% men v. 30% women). This is very different from the Latino Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical communities in which women are 10-15 percentage points more likely to attend church than men, in part because men are not particularly obligated to attend church any more than women and because divorce is more widespread. Latino Muslim mosque attendance was lowest for 18-29 year-olds (28%) and increased across the next age cohorts (30-54 – 72%; 55 or older – 52%). In contrast, weekly mosque attendance among the general U.S. Muslim population was 51 percent for those under the age of 30 and declined across the next age cohorts (30-54 – 36%; 55 or older – 26%).

Despite the fact that women make up a high percentage of Latino Muslims and that women are more likely to speak Spanish than English, a surprisingly high 72 percent reported attending an English-speaking mosque, 18 percent of which were led by a Latino imam or lay leader. Only 6.8 percent attended a Spanish-speaking or predominantly Latino-serving mosque. This may be due in part to the small number of Latino and/or Spanish-speaking mosques and

imams in the U.S. Today there are only fifteen known U.S. Latino imams, though there are probably others, but since there is no national directory that crosses all branches and different schools of thought, it is impossible to know with certainty. There is clearly a need to train more Latino leaders for the growing Latino Muslim population and create more Spanish-speaking mosques and leadership networks that foster community and Latino Islamidad (Latino Muslim Identity).[6]

Time and again, the LMS found that Latino Muslims tend to engage in higher rates of religious practice and belief than the general U.S. Latino population and the general U.S. Muslim population. Over 70 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed reported praying (performing salat) every day, which is higher than the general U.S. Muslim population (61%). Though mosque attendance decreased with older Latino Muslim population cohorts, older Latino Muslims reported praying more than younger ones. A full 87 percent of Latino Muslims 55 years or older reported praying daily in contrast to 59 percent of those under 30 years of age. Though older Latino Muslims prayed more than younger ones in the general U.S. Muslim population as well, the contrast was not as sharp as in the Latino Muslims surveyed. In contrast to Latino Muslims, 64 percent of the general U.S. Muslim population 55 years or older reported praying daily in contrast to 54 percent of those under 30 years of age. In addition to the prescribed five daily prayers, almost 69 percent of Latino Muslims pray daily for physical and spiritual healing, which

[6]These fifteen Latino imams include Daniel Hernández (Puerto Rican, Houston), Isa Parada (Salvadorian, Houston), Mujahid Fletcher (Columbian, Houston), Yusef Maisonet (Puerto Rican, Mobile, AL), Wesley Lebron (Puerto Rican, Passaic, NJ), Wilfredo Ruiz (Puerto Rican, Ft. Lauderdale), Cesar Dominguez (Mexican, Los Angeles), Jamaal Zarabozo (Spanish, Santa Clara, CA), Reymundo Nur (Panamanian, Coachella, CA), Yusuf Rios (Puerto Rican, Cleveland, OH), Luis Jijon (Ecuadorian, Atlanta), Sufyan Al Andalusi (Portuguese, Columbus, OH), Abel Muhammad (Mexican, Houston, NOI), Khalil Salgado (Puerto Rican, Nashville, TN), and Abdurrahman Vega (Colombian, Houston).

is quite remarkable and reveal the influence of the Catholic Charismatic and Latino Protestant Pentecostal movements and popular religiosity in the community in general, which stresses divine healing.

About half (51%) of the Latino Muslims surveyed either read the Qur'an daily (15%) or at least once a week (36%), and 22 percent report studying the Qur'an with other Muslims once a week or more. 58 percent of the general U.S. Muslim population also reported that it was "very important" to read or listen to the Qur'an, while the remainder said it was somewhat (23%) or not too or not at all important (17%). Another 61 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed reported never or seldom studying the Qur'an with other Muslims, which, however, could be a point of concern for Muslim leaders since some of the recent converts might revert back to their Christian faith, fall away from their newfound faith, engage in religious innovation, or be susceptible to unscrupulous charismatic leaders with a seemingly stronger grasp of the Qur'an. This may have been the case when the former Latin Kings gang member José Padilla encountered and embraced radical forms of Islam (Goodnough 2007).

The distribution and study of Islamic scriptures and information continues to be a defining aspect of Latino Muslims and key to healthy and productive socialization into the larger community. Interestingly, the Muslim men surveyed (58%) were more likely to read the Qur'an than women (48%), which is just the opposite of Latino Catholics and Protestants reading the Bible. This may have to do with traditions in which it is primarily men who interpret the Qur'an.

Moral and Social Views

On religious-state, social, and moral views, Latino Muslims can be described as primarily conservative. Almost 60 percent of Latino Muslims favor or strongly favor allowing organized prayers or a moment of silence in public schools, with only 13 percent opposing them. A 40 percent plurality favored or strongly favored keeping the phrase "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on coins and paper money. Only 19 percent opposed it, and 39 percent neither favored nor opposed it or didn't have an opinion.

Table 4

Latino Church-State Views by Religious Affiliation

	Latino Muslim	Latino Catholic	Latino Protestant	All Latino Christians
	2014*	2008	2008	2008
Prayer in Public Schools				
Favor	59	68	84	73
Neither Favor Nor Oppose/Haven't Thought Much About It	23	7	4	6
Oppose	13	22	10	18
Don't Know/Refused to Answer	5	3	2	3
Keep "under God" and "In God We Trust" in the Pledge and on Currency				
Favor	40	61	78	66
Neither Favor Nor Oppose/Haven't Thought Much About It	31	11	5	9
Oppose	21	22	11	19
Don't Know/Refused to Answer	8	6	6	6

Statistics taken from 2014 LMS Survey (N=560) of Latino Muslims
2008 statistics taken from the 2008 LRAP National Survey (N=1,104) of all U.S. Latino Christian voters unless otherwise noted

Latino Muslims are not only more conservative on homosexuality than the general U.S. population, but also more so than U.S. Muslims nationwide. While more than half (51%) of the general U.S. population says homosexuality should be accepted by society and 38 percent say it

should be discouraged, most Muslim in the U.S. (61% v. 27%) say that homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged. A full 73 percent of American Muslims who attend mosque weekly, pray five times a day, and say religion is very important to them say it should be discouraged. In contrast, 79 percent of all Latino Muslims surveyed believed same-sex relations are contrary to the teachings of Islam and a sin. For this reason, it is not surprising that two-thirds (67%) of Latino Muslims reported that they opposed gay marriage, with only 16 percent reporting they supported it. Latino Muslim rates are similar to Latino Christian views on gay marriage and same sex relations. For example, the 2012 LRAP survey (n = 1,000 likely voters) found that 69 percent of Latino Christians reported that gay relations were always wrong (65%) or almost always (6%) wrong and 59 percent reported that they opposed gay marriage. Since that time, the level of support for gay relations and marriage has increased (Espinosa 2014: 375). Much of this may have to do with the fact that a high percentage of Latino Muslims are recent converts to Islam and tend to take the Qur'an literally on moral views.

Reflecting the belief that religion and government should not be separate but mutually reinforcing and supporting, Muslims nationwide (59%) believe that the government should promote and protect morality in society, with about a third (29%) saying government has become too involved in mixing morality and politics. This differs significantly with the general U.S. population, in which a slight majority believe the government is becoming too involved with morality in public life (PEW 2007: 7-8). When thinking about larger moral and social issues in U.S. public life, a majority of Latino Muslims believe that Obama's public support for abortion, gay marriage, and contraceptive coverage is moving the nation in the *wrong* direction, with only

16 percent believing he's moving the nation in the right direction. Not surprisingly, this tends to mirror the same percentage of Latino Muslims that support gay marriage. Even though they also tend to be pro-life and support traditional marriage, Latino Muslims by an even wider margin believe that President Trump is moving the country in the wrong direction on immigration and a range of other issues (Davis 2017, Natiral 2017).

The encroachment of the state on religious freedom is also a concern for Latino Muslims, many of whom worry that they might be forced by the government to accept views contrary to the Qur'an and Islamic teachings and that their religious liberties might be in jeopardy under the Obama and especially Trump administrations. This is evidenced by the fact that a 40 percent plurality of Latino Muslims believe that Obama's 2010 Federal Health Care law is a violation of religious freedom and should be repealed, while only 23 percent said it is good for the nation and should be preserved. Men (48%) were much more likely than women (37%) to hold this view. Part of this may be due to the fact that provisions in Obamacare would mandate that religious schools pay for counseling services for abortion, contraceptive coverage, and sterilization options. While recently some modifications have been made, many still worry that these were forced concessions on the part of President Obama rather than something included in the original legislation. This concern about religious freedom has grown exponentially during President Trump's ban on Muslim refugees from seven countries (Davis 2017, Natiral 2017).

Table 5			
Latino and Latina Muslim Views on Politics, Church-State, and Social Issues			
	Men	**Women**	**All**
Prayer in Public Schools, 2014			
Strongly Favor	32	29	29
Favor	28	31	30
Oppose	7	7	7
Strongly Oppose	9	6	7
Neither Favor Nor Oppose/Haven't Thought Much About It	21	23	23
Don't Know	3	5	5
Keep "under God" & "In God We Trust" on Pledge and Coins, 2014			
Strongly Favor	15	18	17
Favor	23	23	22
Oppose	14	12	12
Strongly Oppose	10	8	9
Neither Favor Nor Oppose/Haven't Thought Much About It	31	31	31
Don't Know	8	9	9
Views on Obamacare's contraceptives requirement for Religious schools who offer their own health plans, 2014			
It is good for the nation and should be preserved	22	22	23
It is a violation of religious freedom and should be repealed	48	37	40
Don't Know	30	40	37
View on Gay Marriage, 2014	**Men**	**Women**	**All**
Strongly Favor	13	6	8
Favor	8	9	9
Oppose	20	24	23
Strongly Oppose	46	44	44
Don't Know	14	18	17

Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560)

Political Outlook

Given both the high rates of religious identity and practice and the desire to live by the tenets of Islamic law or guidelines, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of Latino Muslims

(80%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that Muslims should participate in political campaigns and run for public life in the U.S., with only 6 percent disagreeing. Almost 60 percent of Latino Muslims reported that a political candidate's personal faith and morals are relevant or very relevant to their decision to vote for him or her, with 32 percent reporting it's not relevant. Likewise, a majority of the general Latino population (50%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that religious leaders should try to influence public affairs, while only 21 percent disagreed. Men (58%) were more likely than women (45%) to agree. These relatively high rates of support for religious involvement in public life may be due to the fact that in Islamic thought, religious faith, law, and traditions are supposed to shape law and society and promote Godly values.

While prior to 9/11 a plurality of U.S. Muslims reported on surveys that they were more likely to vote for Bush/Cheney than Gore/Lieberman, since that time there has been a drastic erosion of support for the Republican Party. The vast majority of U.S. Muslims (63%) report being Democrat (37%) or leaning Democrat (26%), which is higher than among the general U.S. population (51%). Muslims in the U.S. are much less likely (11%) to report being Republican than the general U.S. population (36%). Consistent with the general U.S. Latino population, 26 percent of U.S. Muslims are unaffiliated with either political party. Nationwide, Muslim in U.S. are less active in politics and less likely to be registered to vote (63% of Muslims v. 76% of the U.S. population).

Table 6				
Latino Political Party Affiliation & Vote by Religious Affiliation				
	Latino Muslims	**Latino Catholic**	**Latino Protestant**	**All Latino Christians**
Political Party Identification	by 2015	by 2012	by 2012	by 2012
Democrat/Lean Democrat	34	61	44	56
Republican/Lean Republican	3	18	32	22
Something Else/Independent/Undecided /Don't Know	63	21	24	22
2016 Presidential Leaning				
Democrat	23			
Republican	2			
Someone Else/Do Not Intend to Vote/Undecided/Don't Know	75			
2012 Presidential Vote/Leaning				
Obama	45	67	53	63
Romney	2	22	35	26
Someone Else/Do Not Intend to Vote/Undecided/Don't Know	54	11	12	11
2004 Presidential Vote				
Kerry	23			
Bush	4			
Someone Else/Do Not Intend to Vote/Undecided/Don't Know	73			
2000 Presidential Vote				
Gore	17			
Bush	5			
Someone Else/Do Not Intend to Vote/Undecided/Don't Know	78			

Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560)
2012 statistics taken from the National Election Pool (NEP) Exit Poll (N=26,565), November 6, 2012.
2012 statistics taken from 2012 LRAP National Survey (N=1,000) of Latino likely voters only and not the general (voter/non-voter) Latino population

Unlike most U.S. Muslims and most Latino Catholics and Protestants, a relatively high percentage of Latino Muslims reported (74%) that they were registered to vote (Espinosa 2014).

More than a third of Latino Muslims self-identify as Democrat (34%) and only 3 percent as Republican. Most surprising despite Obama's Muslim heritage and the strong tie between Latinos and the Democratic Party, the majority of Latino Muslims (45%) report being unaffiliated with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party (22% identify as independent, 23% as Something else, and another 17% don't know). Women (39%) are significantly more likely than men (24%) to consider themselves Democrat and men are much more likely to self-identify as independent (27 v. 19%) or something else (36 v. 19%). Thus, Latino Muslims are less likely than Latino Catholics and Latino Protestants to identify as Democrats or Republicans. Instead, the majority self-identify as independent and appear to be skeptical of the government despite a high percentage of Latino Muslims being registered to vote.

Table 7

Latino and Latina Muslim Views on Politics

	Men	Women	All
Political Party Identification			
Democrat/Lean Democrat	24	39	34
Republican/Lean Republican	3	4	3
Independent	27	19	22
Something Else	36	19	24
Don't Know	11	19	17
Presidential Vote in 2012			
Obama	37	48	44
Romney	3	1	2
Did Not Vote	46	43	44
Other Candidate	13	5	7
Don't Know	1	4	3
Presidential Vote in 2016			
A Democrat	21	23	23
A Republican	3	2	2
Undecided	29	30	30

Other Candidate	10	4	6
I do not plan to vote	26	26	26
Don't Know	12	14	14

Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560)

The high percentage of Latino Muslims who do not identify with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party may be due to the fact that on moral issues like abortion, gay marriage, and church-state issues Latino Muslims are conservative, but on immigration, civil rights, and economic and social justice they are progressive. The other key factor is that a relatively high percentage of Latino Muslims are younger than Latino Catholics and Protestants and thus have not had as much time to develop their political party identification.

Table 8

Percentage of Those Who Did Not Vote in the 2000 Elections by Age

	18-29	**30-39**	**40-54**	**55+**
Latino Muslims	39.9%	36.7%	20.3%	3.1%

Latino Muslim Statistics taken from 2014 Latino Muslim Survey (N=560)

Their youthfulness and lack of political identity is evidenced by the fact that in 2000, more than 66 percent of Latino Muslims did not vote. Many were simply not of voting age. Previous studies have indicated that single youth are much less likely to vote than married adults. When they did vote, post-2000 election surveys found that 17 percent voted for Gore/Lieberman and only 5 percent for Bush/Cheney, which diverged from the general U.S. Muslim population, but more closely mirrored the Latino population in general. In 2004 – and after 9/11-- the overwhelming majority of Latino Muslims voted for Kerry/Edwards (23%) over Bush/Cheney (4%). Barack Obama's candidacy along with his Muslim and racial-ethnic heritage and a growing number of Latino Muslims coming of voting age, resulted in Obama taking 48 percent

of the Latino Muslim vote to McCain/Palin's 1 percent in 2008, though 43 percent still did not vote. Women (52%) were much more likely than men (37%) to vote for Obama. In 2012, Obama's support slipped a little to 44.5 percent and Romney/Ryan remained about the same at 2 percent, with 44 percent of Latino Muslims not voting. Women (48%) were significantly more likely to vote for Obama than men (37%), though less so than in 2008.

The only significant political participation differences amongst Latino Muslims in different income brackets was between those who grossed $65,000 per year or more and everyone else. Participants who made $65,000 per year or more tended to participate in political elections more than any other income bracket. Though Latino Muslims in all income brackets tend to favor Democratic candidates in general, zero percent of Latino Muslims who made $65,000 or more voted Republican during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. More than any other income bracket, participants who made $65,000 or more per year support keeping Obamacare.

The top issues in 2012 shaping the Latino Muslim vote were the economy, creating new jobs, supporting immigration reform, health care reform, and religious freedom. Support for Obamacare health care provisions (we already saw that this population has reservations about its religious freedom implications) is not surprising since a majority supported keeping it. Despite the high support for Obamacare and relatively high support for Obama in the 2008 and 2012 elections, a surprisingly high percent (63%) did not favor Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East. For these reasons and many others, 43 percent of Latino Muslims surveyed believe

President Obama is taking the nation in the wrong direction, with just 18 percent reporting the right direction. Men (52%) were much more likely than women (39%) to hold this view.

Latino Muslim support in 2008 and 2012 appears to have been driven by Obama himself because when asked who they were likely to vote for in 2016, only 23 percent said they were likely to vote for a Democrat, 2 percent a Republican, and 35 percent said they were undecided/ other candidate. Despite strong female support for Obama in 2008 and 2012, looking to 2016 only 24 percent of women and 21 percent of men reported they were likely to vote Democrat, though only 2 percent reported a willingness to vote Republican. The top issues in the 2016 election for Latino Muslims remain fixing the economy, creating new jobs, foreign policy, supporting religious freedom, and supporting immigration reform.

Immigration reform remains an issue that most Latino Muslims are concerned about and over which they are willing to leave their political party. This is bad news for Democrats since although they are open to immigration reform they have yet to pass a bill, despite President Obama's 2008 promise to do so. Half of Latino Muslims stated that their religious beliefs shaped their thinking about immigration and that almost 59 percent said they would be willing or possibly willing to leave their political party if they do not find a more positive way to address immigration reform. They are concerned about this because 78 percent of Latino Muslims reported that they have heard public officials speak negatively about immigrants.

One out of five Latino Muslims reported that their mosque had organized or participated in protests and rallies and helped in voter registration, but only one out of ten handed out campaign material or advocated or handed out literature on specific issues. Latino Muslims and

their mosques have been relatively active about addressing social issues. More than a third (34%) started after-school youth programs or ministries for teens and one in five started day cares, food co-ops, or childcare centers. However, they were less likely to start drug or alcoholic rehabilitation programs or reach out to gangs to reduce community violence than Latino Catholics and Evangelicals. All of this seems to support the earlier finding that Latino Muslims are less likely than others to engage regularly in the larger mainstream Latino Catholic and Protestant communities and in pan-religious coalition building on key social, civic, and political issues. They seem to have more confidence in their own community's ability to address social issues than they do in other Latinos and the U.S. government.

The 2016 Presidential Election exit poll of 2,000 registered Muslim voters by Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) found that Hillary Clinton won 74 percent. Despite reports about Trump's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant and Latino policies, Trump surprisingly won 13 percent of the Muslim vote, almost three times that of Mitt Romney's supporters (4.4%). One reason why Trump may have done better than most would have expected is that during the 2000 election race and prior to 9/11, surveys reported that Bush Jr. was leading Gore with a plurality of the Muslim vote, thus breaking the ice for their voting Republican. Some of these same voters may have simply swung back over and voted Republican not for the first time but for a second time or more, likely because of their concerns about social and moral issues.

The National Election Pool (NEP) Exit Poll of more than 25,000 Election Day voters also found that Trump won 28 percent of the Latino vote nationwide, which was slightly better than Romney's 27 percent in 2012, but significantly lower than either Bush Jr. in 2004 (40-44%) or

McCain in 2008 (32%). The reasons why some Muslims and Latinos supported Trump are primarily economic, though he also appears to have drawn support from highly religious populations concerned with abortion, gay marriage, and the secular and anti-traditional religious direction of the Democratic Party and nation (Le Miere 2017, Espinosa 2013).

We do not have any data on how Latino Muslims voted in 2016. Nevertheless, given the negative stereotypes of Latinos and Muslims employed by the Trump campaign and also voting patterns during the last four elections that were recorded in our survey, it is likely that the majority of Latino Muslims who voted in the 2016 election did so for Clinton, the democratic candidate. The Latino Muslim orientation towards the Democratic Party may be a form of ethnic solidarity with other Latinos, since most Latinos are Democrats and not Republican. It may also be a form of alignment with post 9/11 party affiliation patterns in the U.S. Muslim population that favor the Democratic Party. That both Latinos and Muslims identify more with the Democratic Party places the similarly affiliated Latino Muslim population within a position of being able to foster greater solidarity between these groups. Given that 80 percent of the Latino Muslims surveyed in our study expressed a desire to participate in political campaigns, this participation may come in the form of coalitions between Latinos and Muslims. Indeed, recent news reports have already begun to document instances of Latino Muslims helping to foster greater political solidarity between broader Latino and Muslim groups (e.g. Kaleem 2017, Latimer 2017 and Moreno 2017).

Discussion and Conclusions

This study has generated a number of important findings regarding Latino Muslims in America. It argues that Latino Muslims in America have developed a complex, combinative, and variegated form of "Latino Islamidad" (Latino Islamic Identity), which is shaped by the high percentage of recent converts, an Islamic *Tahwid* centered-spirituality that is focused on the submission to God, the history of Islam in Spain, the concept of reversion, and the promotion of racial equality and charity. In addition, it identified a number of supporting findings and insights. First, the Latino Muslim Survey (LMS) found that the belief in monotheism, desire for a more direct experience of God, the concept of revision back to their pre-Catholic Hispanic identity, and connection to a Muslim friend play major roles in a conversion process. It also found that marriage plays a statistically smaller role and that prison does not play a significant role in the way in which most Latino Muslims are first introduced to Islam. Second, the LMS found that the vast majority (70+%) of reverts/converts made the switch after 2000 and over 90 percent had non-Muslim parents -- mostly Catholic or other Christian. This points to the fact that this is a relatively new, first-generation movement that is still in flux and development. Third, the LMS found that over 90 percent of Latino Muslims reported that religion provided guidance in their day-to-day living, which was higher than the general U.S. Latino population. Fourth, this may be due to the fact that Latino Muslims are more likely to report having attended a mosque or religious service almost once a week or more than non-Latino Muslims and non-Muslim Latinos. However, unlike Latino Protestants and Catholics who attend predominantly Spanish-language churches, over 70 percent of Latino Muslims reported attending English-language mosques. This

is consistent with the finding that over 70 percent reported praying daily or almost every day, indicting high levels of religiosity. Fifth, a full 56 percent converted from Catholicism and 19 percent from Protestantism and other Christian traditions, which is not surprising since Catholics and Protestants make up the vast majority of Latino religious practitioners in the U.S. Sixth, Latino Muslims are relatively tolerant of other religions in the U.S. The LMS found that over 70 percent reported that Allah may let Christians and other devout practitioners into paradise, though another 57 percent reported that Islam is normally the only way to get to paradise. Seventh, on church-state issues, the vast majority (60%) support allowing for organized prayers in public schools and a plurality favored or strongly favored keeping the phrase "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on coins and paper money. Eight, the vast majority of Muslim in the U.S. (61% v. 27%) say that homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged and a full 73 percent of American Muslims who attend mosque weekly and say religion is very important to them say it should be discouraged. Almost 80 percent of all Latino Muslims surveyed believed same-sex relations are contrary to the teachings of Islam and a sin. Similarly, two-thirds (67%) of Latino Muslims opposed gay marriage, with only 16 percent reporting they supported it. Ninth, despite their conservative social and moral views, the vast majority of Latino Muslims who are registered to vote are Democrat and supported Gore, Kerry, and Obama over the past four election cycles. In respect to their voting patterns – though not social views, they more closely reflect their Latino Catholic rather than their Latino Protestant counterparts.

In all of the above findings, it is clear that Latino Muslims want to see their religious leaders and organizations get more involved in politics in the future and create a more tolerant and diverse environment. In light of the above growth patterns, there is every reason to believe that Latino Muslims are now an integral part of the U.S. religious landscape and will play a small but increasing and important role in the future. The complex, combinative, and variegated form of "Latino Islamidad" (Latino Islamic Identity), described in this study has and will continue to help to denaturalize our understandings of Latinos, Muslims, and Latino Muslims in the U.S. and points to an increasingly diverse society in the 21st century.

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