

“Religious Switching” is Widespread in the United States

Changes in faith are common among those raised Catholic as well as non-Catholics. Reviewing the results from the American Religious Identification (ARIS) surveys from 2001 and 2008, professor Barry A. Kosmin of Trinity College estimates that more than four in ten adults in the United States (41 percent) have changed from the religion they had at age 12 at some point in their adult life.

Percentages of U.S. Adults Who Have Switched Faiths by Sub-groups, ARIS 2008

Sex		
Male		43%
Female		42
Age		
Born before 1950		44
Born 1950-1969		41
Born 1970 or later		42
Race and Ethnicity		
Other		48
Hispanic		44
White		43
Black		34
Region		
West		45
Midwest		44
South		41
Northeast		39
College Education		
College		44
No College		40
Annual Household Income		
Under \$50,000		44
\$50,000 or more		40

There are few socio-demographic differences between those who switch and those who do not. The rate of switching is similar for men and women, those of different age groups, education levels, and income. Adults self-identifying their race as Black are least likely to have switched faiths at some point (34 percent).

Controlling for all of these socio-demographic factors, Kosmin finds that Catholics are less likely to switch their faith than those of any other religious affiliation. Kosmin notes that “the sheer size of the group offsets the losses.” When former Catholics have switched their faith they are more likely to consider themselves as having no faith, or what Kosmin calls “Nones,” than switch to other affiliations. The Catholic population has also continued to grow in absolute numbers with immigration.

Kosmin concludes that “Since demographics, class, geography, time period, and childhood religion explain very little about gross switching we must assume that situational contingencies, spouse’s religious identification, social network dynamics and psychological variables we did not measure are at play.”

The findings from the ARIS data are consistent with those documented by the *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* in 2007 as well as CARA’s research on religious switching among Catholics. ■

For further information on “Religious Switching between Childhood and Adulthood in the United States: Revelations from the American Religious Identification Surveys (ARIS) 2001 and 2008,” a presentation by Barry A. Kosmin, Trinity College, Hartford, CT, at the RRA/SSSR Annual Meeting in Denver, October 2009, contact the author at 860-297-2388 / Barry.Kosmin@trincoll.edu.

CATHOLICS STILL CONCENTRATED IN NEW ENGLAND AND MIDDLE ATLANTIC STATES

According to the results of a Gallup Poll released on August 7, “About 24 percent of all American adults identified as Catholic between January and June of this year. The distribution of Catholics across the states is heavily skewed toward the New England and Mid-Atlantic states, the regions of the country through which the large waves of Catholic immigrants from Europe arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries.”

The report goes on to say that “The state with the highest proportion of Catholics is Rhode Island, at 53 percent, followed by Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York. Two Midwestern states, Wisconsin and Illinois, are also in the top 10 states in terms of the percentage Catholic. States with higher percentages of Hispanic residents, including California and New Mexico, are above average in the proportion of their residents who are Catholic. Louisiana, home to immigrating French Canadians (Cajuns) several centuries ago, also has an above-average Catholic population.”

Nine of the 10 states at the low end in terms of Catholic population are in the South. Utah, with its high concentration of Mormons, is also in that group. Mississippi has the lowest proportion of Catholics of any state—with only 6 percent.

“Religious Identity: States Differ Widely; Catholic more prevalent in East, while other Christians are concentrated in the South,” by Frank Newport, released August 7, 2009 and based on interviews with 178,543 national adults during January 2-June 20, 2009, appears on the website of The Gallup Organization (www.gallup.com).