

## A Portrait of Religiosity of U.S. Muslim Immigrants

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In the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center, intensive media coverage has been devoted to radical Islamic extremists. However, these extremists groups may comprise only a small minority of Muslims in the US. Muslims have been immigrating to the United States in ever greater numbers. Currently, approximately eight percent of immigrants to the United States report they are Muslim. Yet little is known about the religiosity and religious involvement of this group as a whole. Prior to the collection and release of the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) dataset, data about immigrants, much less about their religious preferences and practices, has been difficult to acquire. However, the NIS makes it possible to examine Muslim immigrants who were previously unidentifiable by other means. In this research, we use data from the first full cohort of the NIS to examine the differences in religiosity between Muslims and other immigrant groups.

The NIS was developed to address several problems with existing data on immigrants to the United States. It is a large scale representative sample of new legal immigrants, their spouses and children with approximately 8,573 respondents. The NIS includes several questions pertinent to measuring religiosity including one about religious preference, attendance to religious services both in the country of origin and in the United States, and membership in a religious congregation. As previously mentioned, Christians make up 64.6% of immigrants to the United States. The group of Christians includes Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Protestants. As shown in Table 1, those with no religion make up the second largest religious immigrant group at 12.2%, followed by Muslims at 7.9%, Hindus with 7.6%, Buddhists at 3.8%, and Jews at 1.3%.

Based on the data available, there are several substantive areas of comparison that can be made between Muslims and other immigrant groups. One of our major findings concerns the diversity of

religiosity among newly arrived immigrant Muslims. While larger percentages of Muslims appear to exhibit little commitment to religious institutions compared with other faiths, a minority of Muslim immigrants exhibit much higher levels of commitment. This can be seen by examining differences in attendance to religious services while in their country of origin. As shown in Table 2, after excluding those who reported having no religion, Muslims were the most likely to report having never attended religious services at 30.4%. Interestingly, Muslims were also the most likely to report having attended religious services more than once a day (5.1%). Compared with Jews, the group with the next highest percentage (2.9%), they were almost twice as likely to have attended religious services in their country of origin more than once a day. In addition, they were more than five times more likely to have attended religious services more than once a day than any Christian group in the sample at 0.23%, 0.60%, 0.31% for Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Protestants respectively. Overall, 40.0% of Muslims reported attending religious services at least once a week while in their home country; and approximately 70.4% of the sample of Muslim immigrants either attended religious services frequently or never. This indicates that most Muslim immigrants fell into the extremes of the variable measuring religiosity. Another major finding is that involvement in religious institutions among Muslim immigrants appears to drop significantly following immigration to the United States.

For the variable measuring religious service attendance in the United States, the immigrants were asked to report a number rather than a frequency per time period. Therefore, we collapsed this variable into a dummy variable to compare the percentage of immigrants who attended religious services in their country of origin to those who have attended religious services since moving to the United States. As shown in Table 3, Muslim immigrants were more than twice as likely to attend in their country of origin than in the United States (a drop from 69.3% to 35.8%). This pattern was similar for all religious groups. Higher percentages reported they never attended religious services in the United States compared to in their country of origin. This suggests there is a possible barrier to attendance of religious services for immigrants in the United States.

Finally, we examined the level of commitment to religious institutions, using membership at a church, parish, temple, synagogue or mosque in the United States as an indicator. Discounting those respondents who reported having no religion, Muslim immigrants were the most likely to report not being a member of a religious congregation in the United States (Table 4). Protestant immigrants were the most likely of all faith groups to report membership in a religious congregation (49.0%) a rate almost nine times that of Muslim immigrants. Overall, the Christian immigrant groups were more likely to belong to a religious congregation in the United States. Because the United States is predominantly Christian, these groups would be more likely to have access to a religious congregation than other groups.

The findings suggest that Muslim immigrants as a group are no more involved in religious institutions, and are probably less involved, than other faith groups coming to the United States. This contrasts with the image of radical Muslim groups infiltrating US society through the mechanism of legal immigration. Nevertheless, there exists some evidence that small groups of Muslims are highly committed to the practice of their religion (as evidenced by frequency of attendance of religious services), although it remains unclear what these practices mean for their economic and political integration into US society nor whether the religiosity of Muslim immigrants intensifies or weakens with increasing time spent in the US. Future research should examine the factors affecting religiosity among Muslims (including opportunities for religious involvement afforded by living in an area with a sizable Muslim population), and changes in religiosity among Muslim immigrants over time.

The New Immigrant Survey will provide us new opportunities to learn more about Muslim immigrants. And, as new waves of this survey data are released, we will be able to use these data to examine how religiosity of Muslim immigrants changes with increasing time spent in the United States.

Table 1: Respondents in New Immigrant Survey by Current Religious Tradition

Current Religious Tradition	Frequency	Percent
Catholic	3,119	38.24
Orthodox Christian	840	10.30
Protestant	1,313	16.10
Muslim	643	7.88
Jewish	105	1.29
Buddhist	313	3.84
Hindu	618	7.58
No religion	992	12.16
Some other religion	213	2.61
Total	8,156	100

Table 2: How Often Respondent Attended Religious Services in Country of Origin

Current Religious Tradition	Never	Less than once a year	Once or twice a year	Several times a year	Once a month	2-3 Times a month	Nearly every week	Every week	Several times a week	Every day	More than once a day
Catholic	4.48	2.05	4.68	6.10	7.34	7.37	4.51	54.68	6.04	2.53	0.23
Orthodox	7.79	1.68	8.99	14.03	8.27	10.91	4.56	30.10	8.99	4.08	0.60
Protestant	8.31	2.93	5.93	5.70	3.93	6.39	4.46	35.87	22.48	3.70	0.31
Muslim	30.38	2.85	7.44	9.18	4.43	3.32	2.37	21.99	4.43	8.54	5.06
Jewish	16.35	4.81	18.27	18.27	7.69	3.85	2.88	19.23	1.92	3.85	2.88
Buddhist	20.00	5.81	18.06	20.00	12.58	7.74	1.94	7.10	1.61	3.23	1.94
Hindu	9.48	1.31	10.62	14.38	14.22	6.86	4.25	20.75	6.05	11.27	0.82
No religion	79.12	4.53	5.97	2.16	1.75	1.03	0.51	3.81	0.82	0.31	0.00
Some other religion	10.90	2.37	4.27	4.74	10.43	5.21	1.90	28.91	13.74	15.64	1.90
Total	17.78	2.64	6.83	7.91	6.79	6.37	3.65	34.85	8.22	4.13	0.82

Table 3: Has Respondent Ever Attended Religious Services in the United States

Current Religious Tradition	No	Yes
Catholic	27.56	72.44
Orthodox Christian	33.84	66.16
Protestant	21.73	78.27
Muslim	64.17	35.83
Jewish	34.38	65.63
Buddhist	64.36	35.64
Hindu	34.43	65.57
No religion	88.19	11.81
Some other religion	23.28	76.72
Total	39.98	60.02

Table 4: Does Respondent Consider Themselves a Member of a Religious Congregation in the United States?

Current Religious Tradition	No	Yes
Catholic	79.34	20.66
Orthodox	75.30	24.70
Protestant	50.99	49.01
Muslim	94.70	5.30
Jewish	73.08	26.92
Buddhist	89.39	10.61
Hindu	93.67	6.33
No religion	98.47	1.53
Some other religion	59.43	40.57
Total	78.74	21.26