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Secularism or Catholicism? The Religious Composition of the United States to 2043

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Abstract

We project the religious composition of the United States to 2043, considering fertility differences, migration, intergenerational religious transmission and conversion by 11 ethnoreligious groups. If fertility and migration trends continue, Hispanic Catholics will experience rapid growth, expanding from 10 to 18 percent of the population between 2003 and 2043. Protestants could decrease from 47 to 39 percent over the same period, establishing Catholicism as the largest religion among younger age groups. Immigration drives growth among Hindus and Muslims, while low fertility explains decline among Jews. The religiosity of immigrants combined with the low fertility of nonreligious Americans results in a gradual decline, and subsequent reversal of, secularization, with the nonreligious population share expected to plateau before 2043.

Keywords

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The United States has been a Protestant majority country for its entire history as a sovereign state. New England was founded by anti-Catholic Puritans and at independence in 1776, the nation's citizens were 98 percent Protestant. One of the reasons for the American Revolution was resentment of the British Proclamation Acts of 1774 which prevented the westward expansion of Protestant settlers into Catholic French territory and were described as a "barefaced attempt against the success of the Protestant religion". Immigration from Catholic Ireland from the 1830s, and Southern and Eastern Europe after 1880, led to waves of anti-Catholic agitation. Multi-million member Protestant populist movements like Know-Nothingism in the 1840s and 1850s, the American Protective Association in the 1890s and Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s presented the strongest challenges to America's two-party system in the nation's history. Protestant agitation led to the prohibition of alcohol from 1920-33 and the restriction of immigration to mainly northwestern European sources after 1924 (Kaufmann 2004).

Depression-era and wartime president Franklin Roosevelt, whose administration was among the first to include sizeable numbers of Catholics, once told Irish-American aide Leo Crowley and Jewish treasury secretary Hans Morgenthau that "you know this is a Protestant country and the Jews and the Catholics are here under sufferance" (Beschloss 2002). All but one of the 43 American presidents has been Protestant, this being John F. Kennedy, whose victory in 1960 came only after he was compelled to emphasize to Protestant voters that he would place his conscience and country's authority before that of the Pope. Even today, Protestants outnumber Catholics two to one in the nation's population. The historic link between Protestantism and America led Samuel Huntington to recently characterize America's cultural core as 'Anglo-Protestant': "Would the United States be the country that it has been and that it largely remains today if it had been settled in the 17th and 18th centuries not by British Protestants but by French, Spanish, or Portuguese Catholics?" asks Huntington. "The answer is clearly no. It would not be the United States; it would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil" (Huntington 2004). Despite this historic trajectory, our research suggests that demographic trends, especially those of fertility and migration, are pushing toward a new, pluralistic America in which Catholicism may surpass Protestantism as the nation's leading religion by 2050.

But America's religious plates are also shifting along other fronts. It is generally acknowledged that the Catholic-Protestant divide has lost much of its longstanding potency in American society (Wuthnow 1989). After the 1960s, the rise of an increasingly 'loose-bounded' society, linked to large-scale attitude changes, intensified these transgressive pressures (Bellah and Greenspahn 1987). Religious choices increasingly crossed the once sacrosanct Protestant-Catholic-Jewish boundary, exemplified by declining religious endogamy. Roughly half of young Jews and Catholics marry outside their faith whereas almost 90 percent of Catholics and 94

percent of Jews married within their faith in 1957 (Alba 1990: 14-15; Greeley 1972: 169; Lehrer 1998). The fading of these boundaries has led to convergence among major Christian denominations in class, regional and ethnic composition, though much less so with respect to race (Roof and McKinney 1989; Park and Reimer 2002). Ethnic convergence has been matched by theological divergence, however, as a growing proportion of Americans from a range of ethnoreligious backgrounds either profess evangelical fervour or have left organized religion outright. The latter remains especially important in view of the fact that roughly half (48 percent) the US population would not currently vote for an atheist for president. The comparable figures for Muslims (38 percent), Homosexuals (37 percent), Jews (6 percent) and Blacks (5 percent) are considerably lower (Gallup 1999). In this article, we find that secularism will continue to grow for several decades, but that traditionalism may emerge as more dominant over the long run.

Religious denominations structure the concrete congregations to which individuals belong, hence memberships are stable enough to meaningfully project. Among white Protestants, denominations often sprang from particular class or regional origins, as with working-class Methodism, middle-class Episcopalianism or southern, rural evangelical Protestantism. There are other social sources as well. "Alongside of the churches of the poor and of the bourgeoisie, ethnic and national churches take their place as further manifestations of the victory of divisive social consciousness over the Christian ideal of unity," lamented American theologian H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Niebuhr [1929] 1987: 106). The ascriptive aspect to many religious denominations means that they are often linked to this-worldly myths and narratives of origin, i.e., ethnic groups. This is true not only of archetypal diasporas like Jews, Hindus and Armenian Christians, but also of Catholics (linked to Irish, Polish, Southern Europeans and Hispanics), Lutherans (German, Baltic or Scandinavian) and Black Protestants.

Over time, the mobility of American society and the fissiparous nature of American Protestantism helped to remake the American religious landscape into more of a marketplace characterized by choice. Some writers have remarked upon the rise of conservative evangelical Protestantism in the 20th century and the related decline of liberal 'mainline' Protestantism within this marketplace. One argument, the 'strict church' hypothesis, contends that churches which demand more of members in terms of attendance, belief and participation will retain members and gain converts from those which are less demanding or insufficiently differentiated from secular institutions. (Iannaccone 1994) Recent research offers some support for this theory, since conservative or 'Fundamentalist' Protestant denominations retain members better than mainline ones. On the other hand, others contend that conservative Protestant denominations have outpaced their mainline Protestant rivals for other reasons: higher conservative fertility and mainline secularization rather than significant conversions from mainline denominations have won the day for the evangelicals (Hout, Greeley and Wilde 2001; Sherkat 2001).

Theories of secularization explain the 1990s rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans from 7 to 14 percent as the consequence of ideational and structural changes associated with modernity (Hout and Fischer 2002). Early versions of the secularization thesis, focusing on ideational change, argued that supernatural religious doctrines lost plausibility with the rise of secular science and learning (Weber, in Gerth and Mills 1946: 155; Marx 1973: 70-71). A different strand of secularization theory emphasizes the impact of structural differentiation, which increasingly draws

religious functions like leisure, education, health and welfare into the hands of secular specialist providers. This fragments the lifeworlds of individuals, shrinking and relativizing the importance of religion in their lives (Bruce 2002: 2-43). Though evidence for secularization is strongest in Western Europe, some researchers also find that recent trends in the United States provide compelling evidence for the theory (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 92-3). 'Religious markets' theorists dispute this finding, citing the relative buoyancy of American religious indicators (Stark and Iannaccone 1994). Others discern a 'believing without belonging' pattern, which Robert Putnam attributes to declining social capital rather than any significant change in beliefs or affiliation (Davie 1994; Putnam 2000: 79).

1.   Religious Demography

Sociologists of religion typically focus on the attractiveness of denominations in the religious marketplace. Yet the main source of religious recruits are the children of communicants. Considering the religious as a population allows us to analyze them demographically. "People enter, exit, and move within religion," remarks David Voas, "just as they are born, will die, and migrate, in life" (Voas 2003: 94). Religious beliefs are also powerful determinants of demographic events such as marriage, divorce and childbearing (McQuillan 2004; UN 1973). The teachings of most major religions regulate partnership, sexuality and fertility and can affect demographic patterns both explicitly – as with religious leaders' injunctions against contraceptives and promotion of early marriages, which is related to higher fertility outcomes – and indirectly (e.g., socialization into a group where there is strong emphasis on childbearing).

Important differences can also be found between and within major religions. Among white Christian Americans, Catholics once had a significant fertility advantage over Protestants, but this waned in the second half of the 20th century (Jones and Westoff 1979; Sander 1992). On the other hand, evangelical Protestants have maintained higher fertility rates than those from more liberal Protestant sects during the same period (Roof and McKinney 1989; Lehrer 1996). The same is true for Mormons (Sherkat 2001). By contrast, American Jews have been found to have lower fertility than other ethnoreligious groups (Mosher and Hendershot 1984). One reason for this is the later onset of childbearing for Jews and their higher investment in human capital accumulation. Lehrer's work with the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), for instance, finds that the probability of marriage by age 20 is 2 percent for Jews, 9 percent for mainline Protestants and 17 percent for fundamentalist Protestants and Mormons (Thornton, Axinn and Hill 1992; Lehrer 2004).

No discussion of religious demography could be complete without discussing migration. Immigration is a demographic engine of religious change, and tends to increase the religious diversity of a country and challenge dominant denominations. In the US, immigration from largely Catholic Latin America – notably Mexico – helped to mask net defections from Catholicism to Protestantism and secular nonaffiliation (Sherkat 2001). The younger age structure and higher fertility of Latin Catholic immigrants to the United States as compared to Protestants has endowed Catholicism with an additional demographic tool with which to combat its relative disadvantage in the American religious marketplace. As we shall see, both fertility and immigration

will play a significant role in the recasting of America's religious composition in the 21st century.

2.   Projections of Religious Composition

Though the US Census Bureau (USCB) carries out projections by race, the absence of a census question on religious affiliation prevents the bureau from making religious projections. Even so, the availability of good repeated cross-section survey data in the form of the General Social Survey (GSS, Davis et al. 2007) renders such a study feasible. Nonetheless, no projection of America's religious composition utilizing the cohort-component approach has, to our knowledge, been carried out. The oft-cited World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE) extrapolates the size of religious groups (including seculars), but does not account for the demographic variables of age structure, fertility and immigration, nor the sociological dynamics of religious conversion (Barrett, Kurian and Johnson 2001).

Religious projections using our method have recently been carried out for several other countries. Goujon, Skirbekk and Fliegenschnee (2007) present census-based religious projections for Austria and Switzerland[1] and find the Christian share to be shrinking in both. The Swiss were more than 95 percent Christian in 1970, but this figure sank to 75 percent in 2000 and will fall to between 42 and 63 percent by 2050. In Austria, the long dominant Roman Catholics decreased to 75 percent in 2001 and are expected to comprise less than half the population by mid-century. In both cases, Christian decline is mainly related to secularization, however, also the growth of non-Christian religions, particularly Islam. Statistics Canada (2005) has made projections for the religious composition of Canada which accounts for fertility and mortality differentials as well as rates of intergenerational religious transmission. But these do not take religious conversion into consideration and only cover the period to 2017, too short a span to capture most demographic effects.

We project the size of America's main ethnoreligious groupings to 2043, taking into account the impact of religion on fertility and the way migration affects religious composition. We also account for conversion and secularization by age and sex as well as the intergenerational transmission of religious affiliation. We find that the US remains a majority Christian country, but with a shifting ethnoreligious composition. Hence the share of Hispanic Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and seculars increases, while the mainly 'white' religious groups – Liberal, Moderate and Fundamentalist Protestants as well as non-Hispanic Catholics – experience proportional decline. Smith and Kim (2004) recently argued that the Protestant share of the American population is falling and was about to become a minority.

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[1] Haug and Wanner (2000) also projected future religious denominations for Switzerland but only up to 2020 and exclude those without religion, the fastest growing group.

3.   Data

This research relies on a cross-pollination of census and survey data. The principal data source is the GSS. It has been conducted annually from 1972-93 with an interview sample of around 1500 and biennially from 1994 with a sample of 2800.[2] It asks respondents about their current religious denomination as well as their denomination at age 16, enabling a measure of religious conversion. It has been used extensively by scholars who have examined longer-term trends in the American religious marketplace. (i.e., Sherkat 2001; Hout, Greeley and Wilde 2001) The GSS classifies largely white (non-African American) Protestant denominations as 'fundamentalist', 'moderate' or 'liberal' according to a schema developed by Smith (1986). It also aggregates denominations into larger religious affiliation categories such as Protestant, Catholic or Other non-Christian. In all cases, we adopt the classifications used by the GSS. This yields eleven major ethnoreligious groups for analysis: Fundamentalist Protestants excluding Blacks (PFU), Moderate Protestants excluding Blacks (PMO), Liberal Protestants excluding Blacks (PLI), Black Protestants (PBL), non-Hispanic Catholics (CAT), Hispanic Catholics (CHI), Jews (JEW), Hindus and Buddhists (HBU), Muslims (MUS), Other Religions (OTH) and No religion (NOR). Note that the non-Hispanic Catholics, non-black Protestants and No religion groups are overwhelmingly white but not exclusively so. For instance, there are important numbers of Hispanic Protestants and black Catholics. Similarly, the small Asian-American population contains Protestants, Catholics and those of No religion as well as the more obvious Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Others.

Of course, Muslim, Buddhist/Hindu and Other Religions are extremely small categories (i.e., 1 percent or less), and are undercounted by the GSS, so we rely upon a set of recent Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life surveys which provide precise estimates of their size (Pew 2008; Pew 2007). The GSS similarly undercounts African-Americans and Hispanics (until 2006, the GSS only interviewed in English), so we weight our data against that from the US census. To ensure that the GSS data is fairly representative we compare its findings to alternative surveys which have been conducted since the year 2000 (Table 1). In general, although the estimates differ, the various surveys present a broadly consistent picture, with about half the population Protestant, a quarter Catholic and about one in eight without religion, with a scattering of smaller groups (Jews, Hindus, Muslims and other religious groups).

The above is reflected in our starting year (2003) data for the population by age, sex and religious affiliation, drawn from the GSS for the years 2000-2006. These years were pooled together in order to increase sample size for the base population (N=12674) and they are the only available survey years that include both minority religions (notably Hinduism and Islam) and a separate Hispanic category. Figure 1 shows the ethnoreligious composition of our base population in 2003, the starting year of our projection.

Finally, immigration forms a crucial part of the projection, and we introduce an annual addition to each religious group, broken down by age band and sex, based on observed immigration. Annual immigration figures come from the Population Estimates Program of the US Census Bureau (2007). The religious affiliation of immigrants is based on CIA data on source country religious composition (CIA 2008). We assume immigrants are randomly selected in terms of religion in their
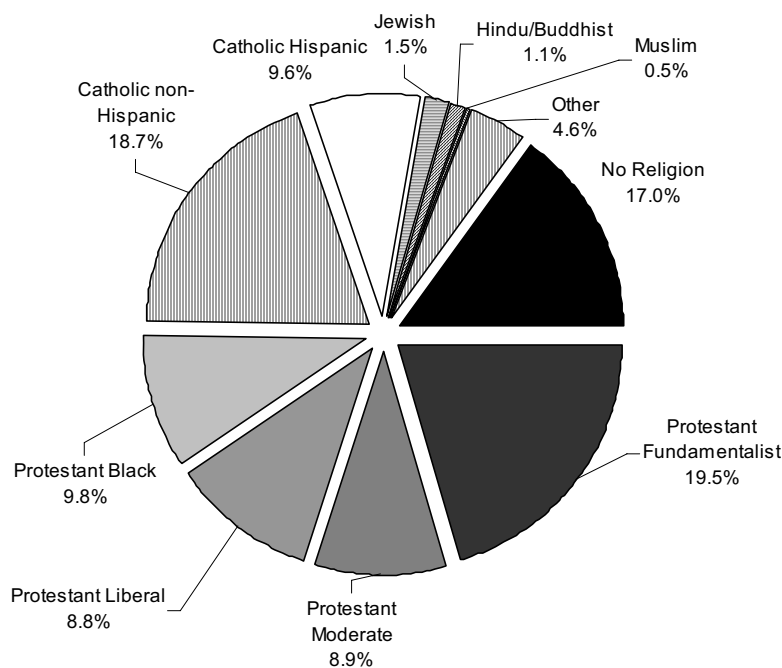
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[2] The only exceptions are the years 1979, 1981 and 1992 (a supplement was added in 1992).

country of origin, though we accept that there may be instances where immigrants are unrepresentative of their homeland religious composition. Such selection is less of an issue for the most important immigrant-sending countries, such as Mexico. For Russia, Jewish overrepresentation is more historic, and for the Middle East, the traditional overrepresentation of Christians will almost certainly ebb as source populations decrease in size. Immigrant age structure is derived from a standard schedule (Rogers and Castro 1981).

Table 1. Religion data by GSS compared with alternative data sources (age 18+) in percent

	Adjusted GSS 2000-2006 N=12674	PEW (2008), N=3002, Muslim Population: PEW 2007 N=1050	ARIS (2001) Census N= 50281	Baylor Religion Survey (2005) (collected by Gallup) N=1721
Black Protestants	9.6	57.0 (includes 9 unspecified "Christians")	52.5 (all non Catholic Christians)	5.0
Fundamentalist Protestant	19.5			33.6
Moderate Protestant	8.9			22.1
Liberal Protestant	8.8			
Catholic non-Hispanic	18.7	23.0	24.5	21.2
Hispanic Catholic	9.6			
Jewish	1.5	2.0	1.3	2.5
Hindu-Buddhist	1.1	1.0	0.9	
Muslim	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.2
Other	4.6	2.0		4.9
No religious affiliation	17.0	14	13.2	10.8

Figure 1: Share of the 2003 population by religious affiliation

Sources: GSS 2000-2006 and authors' calculations.

4. Methodology

The aforementioned sources provide us with information regarding base population, age structure, fertility, conversion behaviour and immigration. These provide the inputs we need to undertake population projections. For the US, the significant longitudinal component of the GSS (1972-2006) allows us to observe a time series run of conversion and fertility behaviour analogous to annual immigration statistics. These are scenario-based multi-state cohort component projections, carried out with the use of PDE projection software,[3] a multi-state population projection program. We use initial population by age, sex and ethnoreligious denomination, age- and religion-specific fertility rates, age- and sex-specific mortality rates, and age-, sex- and religion-specific net migration numbers. In addition, a central input into any multi-state projection is the religious conversion rate, such as the secularizing trend from Christianity to No Religion, or conversion from Catholicism to Fundamentalist Protestantism. Questions are asked about denominational affiliation at age 16, which we cross-tabulate with current denominational affiliation to produce an estimate of conversion flows by sex and age band. We employ both expected and alternate scenarios based on varying fertility, conversion and immigration assumptions.

4.1 Projection Parameters

Base-year fertility

Fertility differences by religion in the USA were estimated from GSS data on children ever born to women aged 40 to 59[4] for the period 2000-2006. The differentials were then proportionally adjusted and applied to the TFR reported for 2003 by the US Census Bureau. The data was not sufficient to estimate the age specific schedules of fertility rates. Hence all religious groups follow the age specific fertility schedule as observed at the national level. The estimated religious fertility differentials are given in Table 2. Hispanic Catholics and Muslims have the highest fertility (2.8 children per woman), while Jews have the lowest with 1.4 children. Among Protestants, Black Protestant fertility is highest, at 2.4 children per woman. The two largest 'white' religious categories, non-Hispanic Catholics and Fundamentalist Protestants, have close to replacement fertility (2.1 children) while others and the 'No Religion' groups have much lower TFRs of around 1.65 children per woman, with Jews lowest at 1.43. The relatively low fertility of Hindus and Buddhists may be attributable to very selective migration from India and the Far East.[5]

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[3] The IIASA PDE multi-state population projection software as well as information and instructions can be downloaded from: http://www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/POP/pub/software.html

[4] For Muslims, we base the differential on the 35 to 59 population to increase sample size.

[5] Due to selective migration and a younger age structure, Indians living in the US have a high education level, and higher education tends to be related to lower fertility (Skirbekk 2008). More than 58 percent have college degrees (compared to 25 percent of the general US population and 6 percent in India), and they also possess higher than average wealth and income levels (Lutz et al. 2007; Kiviat 2005).

Table 2: TFR (Total Fertility Rate) by religion, 2003

Religion	TFR
Muslims (MUS)	2.84
Hispanic Catholics (CHI)	2.75
Black Protestants (PBL)	2.35
Fundamentalist Protestants excluding Blacks (PFU)	2.13
Non-Hispanic Catholics (CAT)	2.11
Moderate Protestants excluding Blacks (PMO)	2.01
Liberal Protestants excluding Blacks (PLI)	1.84
Hindus/Buddhists (HBU)	1.73
No religion (NOR)	1.66
Others (OTH)	1.64
Jews (JEW)	1.43
U.S. Population Average	2.08

Sources: Authors' calculations based on GSS 2000-2006 and USCB

Base-year mortality

Mortality cannot be estimated for each religious group, so we assume a single value for each age group and sex following the estimates of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), available in Kung et al. (2008).
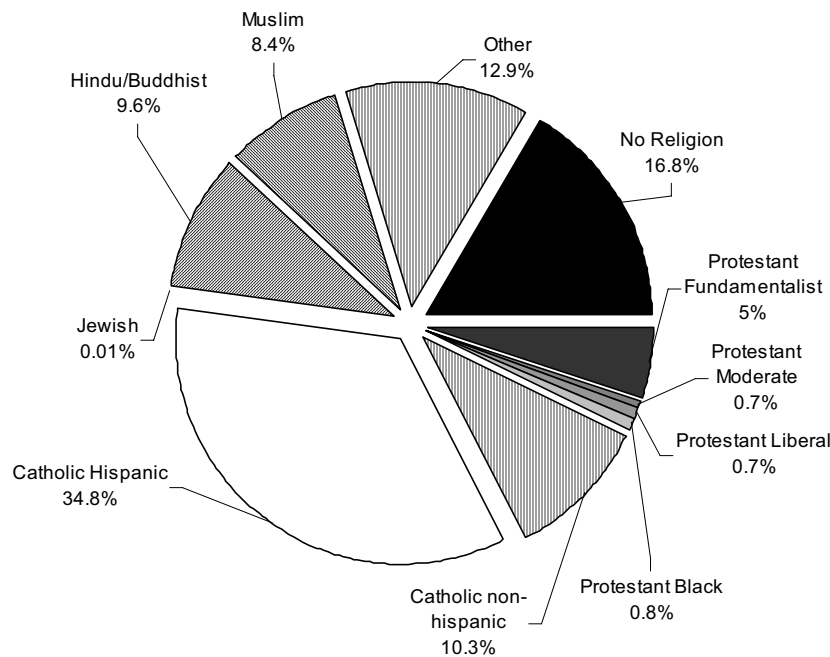
Base-year migration

The number of immigrants since the 1980s has reached levels unseen since the immigration peak of the early 20th century. Immigration is therefore a key factor in the changing religious landscape of the United States. Yet there are two major difficulties in estimating immigration differentials by religion. One is inherent to the immigration process in the United States where illegal flows from across the Mexican border play an important role. We do not take illegal immigration into account, though a substantial component of legal immigration consists of formerly undocumented immigrants who have been granted amnesty. The second difficulty has to do with the lack of data on the faith of immigrants. We obtained the differentials in the religious affiliation of the immigrants from the starting year (2003) as follows. First, we retrieved the number of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status by region between 2003 and 2006 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2007). We selected the countries of birth of most persons acquiring legal permanent status (all above 5,000 persons per year during the 2003-2006 period).[6] Next, we used the Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook (CIA 2007) to retrieve the shares of the population by religion. Some adjustments were made to fit the CIA data to our specific categories. We treat Latin American Protestants and East Asian Protestants as 90 percent Fundamentalists, 5 percent Moderates and 5 percent Liberals. We treat European Protestants as 50 percent Moderate and 50 percent Liberals. For Canadians, Protestants are divided equally between Fundamentalists, Moderates and Liberals, reflecting the intermediate position of Canadian Protestantism between British and

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[6] The countries of birth of most persons (82 to 85 percent across the 2003 to 2006 population) acquiring legal permanent status is the following: Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Iran, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Taiwan, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Venezuela, Vietnam.

American religious trends. These rates were then applied to the number of persons obtaining legal permanent resident status for the main countries of birth between 2003 and 2006 and aggregated by the 11 religious categories reported in Figure 2. Those shares were then applied to the net number of immigrants for the period 2000-2005 and distributed by age and sex (according to model age schedules of migration).

Figure 2: Share of the 2003-2006 immigrants by religious affiliation

Sources: Authors' calculations based on U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2007) and CIA (2007)

Base-year transitions

Transition rates reflect conversion flows between religions. We based our estimate of transition probabilities between religions (110 possible flows between the 11 religious categories) on comparing religion retrospectively reported for age 16 with current religion. Since we cannot retrieve the age at which the transition to another religion has occurred, we concentrated the transitions equally across three age groups: 15-19, 20-24, 25-29. This is in line with transition patterns observed in other countries (Goujon, Skirbekk and Fliegenschnee 2007). We further assume that men are 6 percent more likely to transit out of their own religion than women. This is based on gender differences among apostates: the proportion who were members of a religion at age 16 but now report not being religious. Moreover, women who were religiously unaffiliated at age 16 are 29 percent more likely to adopt a religion than men from the same (secular) background. Table 3 shows the transition probabilities observed. For example, 15.1 percent of those without religion at age 16 became Fundamentalist Protestants as adults and 11.7 percent of those raised Fundamentalist Protestant transited the other way. Note the substantial losses to secularism (NOR) across all religions, the relative retentive power of the more 'ethnic' Jewish, Black, Hispanic and Muslim groups and the comparative deficit of mainline Protestants (PMO, PLI) and white Catholics (CAT) in exchanges with Fundamentalist Protestants (PFU). This

confirms existing scholarship pertaining to religious marketplace trends, as well as insights form the 'strict church' hypothesis (Iannaccone 1994; Sherkat 2001; Hout, Greeley and Wilde 2001).

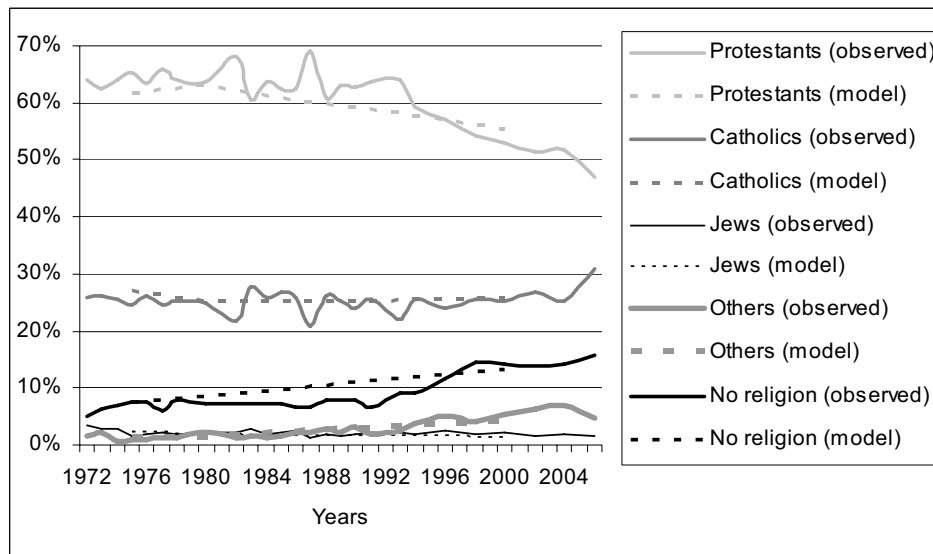**Table 3: Matrix of Total Transition Probabilities: Religion at age 16 versus Current Religion**

To: From:	PFU	PMO	PLI	PBL	CAT	CHI	JEW	HBU	MUS	OTH	NOR	Total
PFU	**67.3**	7.7	7.1	0.0	2.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	2.9	11.7	100
PMO	9.9	**57.8**	9.2	0.0	2.6	0.1	0.1	0.9	0.0	4.4	14.9	100
PLI	11.0	7.0	**58.9**	0.0	4.6	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.0	2.9	15.1	100
PBL	0.0	0.0	0.0	**87.1**	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.4	3.2	7.5	100
CAT	4.4	3.5	3.2	1.2	**71.2**	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	4.0	11.9	100
CHI	5.6	1.1	0.9	0.0	0.0	**81.7**	0.1	0.6	0.0	2.6	7.3	100
JEW	1.0	1.4	0.8	0.0	0.8	0.0	**80.5**	1.1	0.0	0.5	13.8	100
HBU	3.3	7.1	1.3	0.5	5.7	0.0	1.3	**55.4**	2.4	3.3	19.7	100
MUS	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	**71.4**	7.1	13.3	100
OTH	8.3	14.0	1.6	4.6	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.4	**47.1**	19.1	100
NOR	15.1	8.3	6.2	2.0	5.8	0.2	1.5	1.1	0.3	3.6	**55.9**	100

Sources: Authors' calculations based on GSS 2000-2006

4.2 Prospective Tests

In order to validate the methodology used for the projections, we applied it to historical GSS data to see if we could fit our model to observed data. This was performed for the five main religious categories that were found across all years for which GSS data are available. Simulations using a six year moving average are deployed to produce data from 1975 to 2000. The fertility differentials between religions as well as the religious composition of the immigration flow are based upon those observed in the base-year of our projection. However we make some adjustments for historical data. Assumptions for total fertility (estimated at 1.81 for 1975-1980), mortality and migration (350,000 per annum during 1975-1980) follow the historical data available from the US Census Bureau (for fertility and mortality) and from the UN (2006 - for migration). Transition probabilities were calculated in the same way as mentioned in the previous section, based on comparing religion retrospectively reported for age 16 with current religion for two periods: 1972-1978 and 1992-1998. The results are shown in Figure 3. Our model performs quite well against observed data, predicting of the trend toward a relatively less Protestant and more secular nation. It also shows that the GSS data fluctuates significantly on an annual or biennial basis.

Figure 3: Observed and modelled proportion by 5 main religious categories

Sources: GSS 1972-2006 and authors' calculations

4.3 Scenarios

In addition to our expected scenario (H0) based on current trends, seven alternative scenarios were developed; they diverge by the net number of immigrants, the fertility rates of the 11 religious categories and the conversion rates between religions. Table 4 summarizes the assumptions made in the eight scenarios for our 2003-2043 projections.[7]

Table 4: Scenarios matrix

Fertility Differentials	Conversion	Migration			
		Constant	Doubles	Half	Zero
Constant	Constant	H0	H1	H7	H4
	Zero	H3			H5
Converging	Constant	H2			
	Zero				H6

The two alternatives for fertility parameters are constant fertility and converging fertility between religious groups. *Constant* fertility (scenarios H0, H1, H4, H7) holds fertility within each religion constant at the level observed in the base year, 2003 (see Table 2), consistent with the US Census Bureau's constant ethnic fertility differences (Day 1996).

Note that the overall American TFR may change as a result of religious compositional effects, especially in the case of increased immigration (which

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[7] As mentioned in the preceding section, mortality is not considered separately for each religion category. The life expectancy assumptions to 2043 are interpolated based on assumptions used by the US Census Bureau (2004).

increases the weight of high fertility Hispanic Catholics) and constant fertility differentials. This would see the aggregate American TFR increase from 2.08 in 2003 to 2.2 in 2043. *Converging* fertility (scenarios H2, H6) assumes that fertility by religion converges to a TFR of 2.1 children by 2033-2038, and remains constant thereafter. This TFR is slightly lower than the medium variant of the US population projection which envisions this figure increasing to 2.19 in 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004) We further assume that children have the same religion as their mothers, regardless of the type of union, mono-religious or mixed. This is due to a lack of data that identify the religion of children of parents with different religions.

With respect to immigration, there are four possible pathways. *Constant* migration (scenarios H0, H2, H3) involves the net number of immigrants to the US remaining constant at 1.2 million per year until the end of the projection period (value from UN 2006 for 2005-2010). *Double* migration (scenario H1) assumes that net immigration will double the constant immigration flow from the start, resulting in an annual influx of 2.4 million per annum between 2003 and 2043. The current congressional debate over immigration reform may lead to legislation which dramatically reduces the number of immigrants entering the country. Under the *half* migration scenario (H7), the net number of immigrants will be half the constant migration figure (600,000 per year). We also run a number of *zero* migration scenarios (H4, H5, H6), partly to gauge the impact of immigration versus other drivers of projection outcomes. In all immigration scenarios, the share of immigrants by religious denomination stays constant at the levels estimated for the starting period as shown in

Figure 2. As regards conversion between religions, there are two options. The first is a *constant* conversion assumption which fixes transition probabilities at the levels observed during 2000-2006 with children inheriting the religious category of their mothers and summarized in Table 3. The second is *zero* conversion, which assumes no religious transition. Zero conversion also assumes that children inherit the religious category of their mothers but without the possibility of converting to another religion during their lifetime.
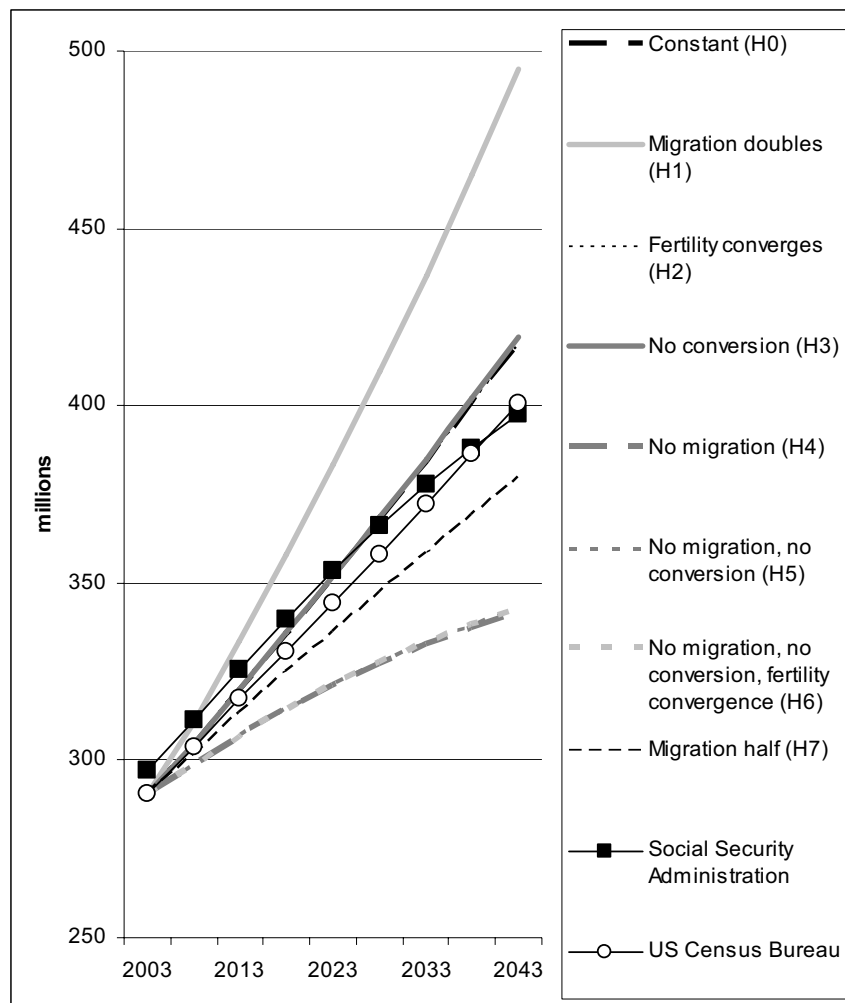
5.   Results

Our eight scenarios produce significantly different total fertility rates for the American population. We expect an upward trend in fertility over the projection period as more fertile religions expand. The overall TFR varies significantly – between 2.10 and 2.16 – due to changes in the religious structure of the population. US population size is first and foremost affected by immigration (Figure 4). If immigration remains constant, the population size reaches 420 million in 2043. Notice that this is approximately in line with official projections from the USCB and Social Security Administration, which hover around the 400 million mark in 2043[8]. If immigration doubles, we project a US population of 495 million, halving the immigration flow produces a final-year population of 380 million and zero

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[8] The SSA 2003 estimated population was interpolated by the authors between the values provided by SSA for 2000 and 2005.

immigration leads to a population of 342 million, 78 million less than in the constant immigration scenario. Immigration also affects the population size through its effect on fertility levels since the religious composition of the immigrants differs from that of the resident population. This is mainly due to the increase in the proportion of high fertility Hispanic Catholics in the population. Conversion likewise affects population size partly because Hispanic Catholics convert to lower fertility secular or Protestant groups – hence in the absence of secularization and conversion (H3), there will be 2 million more Americans in 2043 than under our constant conversion (H0) scenario which holds secularization and conversion rates to base year levels.

Figure 4: Total population, United States of America, 8 scenarios and projection results from Social Security Administration and Census Bureau, 2003-2043

Source: Authors' calculations; US Census Bureau (UCSB), Social Security Administration (SSA)

Figure 5 shows the projected trend for five meta-religious groups. Under all scenarios, Protestants, Catholics, those from Other religions and the nonreligious are expected to grow in absolute terms, while the Jews, due to low immigration and low fertility, are expected to decline slightly. In terms of the religious composition of the American population in 2043, the constant immigration/fertility differential/conversion rate scenario (H0) predicts that Protestants will decrease from

47 percent to 39 percent as Catholics rise from 28 percent to 32 percent. Other religions will almost double, from 6 percent to 11 percent, the unaffiliated 'secular' population increases slightly from 16 to 17 percent while the Jews decline but remain above 1 percent of the population.

The difference between H0 (constant conversion rates) and H3 (no conversion) shows that today's conversion trends mainly benefit the Protestant and Secular groups. Religious conversion reduces the number of Catholics (relative to no conversion) by 15.5 million and those from Other religions by 2 million. Conversely, seculars increase by 3 million through conversion and Protestants by 12.5 million. If fertility differentials and immigration remain at today's levels, but there is no religious conversion (H3), the Catholic population would exceed that of Protestants – a symbolic moment in American history! Even under our constant assumption (H0), Catholics in younger age cohorts will outnumber their Protestant counterparts by 2043 and take over some time in the second half of the 21st century. This would principally be due to higher Hispanic Catholic fertility and immigration. If immigration continues at today's pace (H0), there will be 35 million more Catholics in 2043 than would have been true without immigration (H4). Protestants, by contrast, gain only 9 million adherents through immigration in the same period. Other religions gain 20 million and seculars 12 million through immigration.
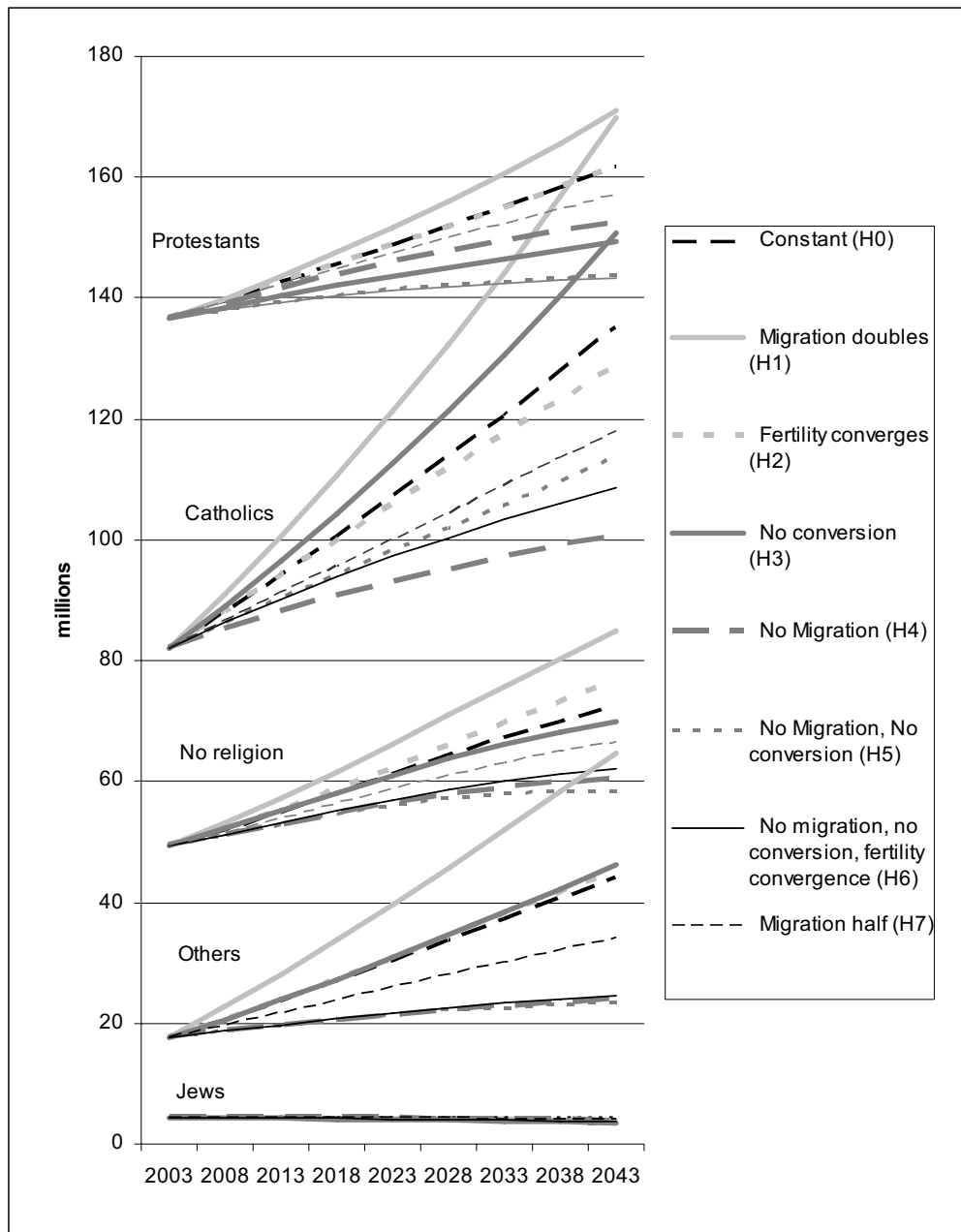
While seculars do grow as predicted, we find powerful demographic limits to secularism under the constant (H0) scenario. In spite of considerable gains through the secularization (conversion) of members from religious groups, the share of the population comprised of secular nonaffiliates plateaus before the end of the projection period. In effect, low secular fertility is sufficient to reverse the secularization process at the aggregate level! This is an extremely important result in that it demonstrates the power of demography to reverse secularization even in developed societies. (Kaufmann 2008) This may lead us to question the widely shared view that secularization is an inevitable handmaiden of the modernization process.

We now move beneath meta-religious groups to consider the relative position of our 11 main ethnoreligious categories. Figure 6 depicts the projections based on the constant (conversion/immigration/fertility differentials) scenario (H0), where the most rapid changes take place among Hispanic Catholics, who almost double from roughly 10 percent in 2003 to 18 percent in 2043. Along the way, they surpass the two largest 'white' religious groups, Fundamentalist Protestants and Catholics. 'White' (i.e. non-Hispanic) Catholics decline in the same period from 19 percent to 15 percent. In addition, all Protestant groups – Fundamentalist, Moderate, Liberal and Black – lose market share towards the end of the projection. The secular proportion of the population, as noted, peaks in 2033 and declines somewhat towards the end of the period as the long-term effects of low secular fertility kick in.

Interestingly, we find that the most committed parties in the 'culture wars' that divide America, Fundamentalist Protestants and those without religion, trade places over this period. Fundamentalist Protestants, 78 percent of whom supported George W. Bush as president in 2004, decline from 19.5 percent to 16.7 percent. Those without religion, just 28 percent of whom backed Bush, increase slightly from 17 to 17.4 percent, surpassing Fundamentalist Protestants in 2033. Hispanic Catholics lean democratic by a 48:20 ratio, thus the increasingly secular and Hispanic Catholic American religious map should favour the Democrats in the coming decades (Guth et al. 2006). A glimpse of what may transpire comes from California, whose trends tend

to foreshadow those of the nation as a whole. During 1980-2003, rapid ethno-demographic change helped transform it from a white (non-Hispanic) majority to a white minority state. Along the way, it changed from a finely-balanced battleground state into a 'natural' Democratic one (Korey and Lascher 2006: 58, 61).
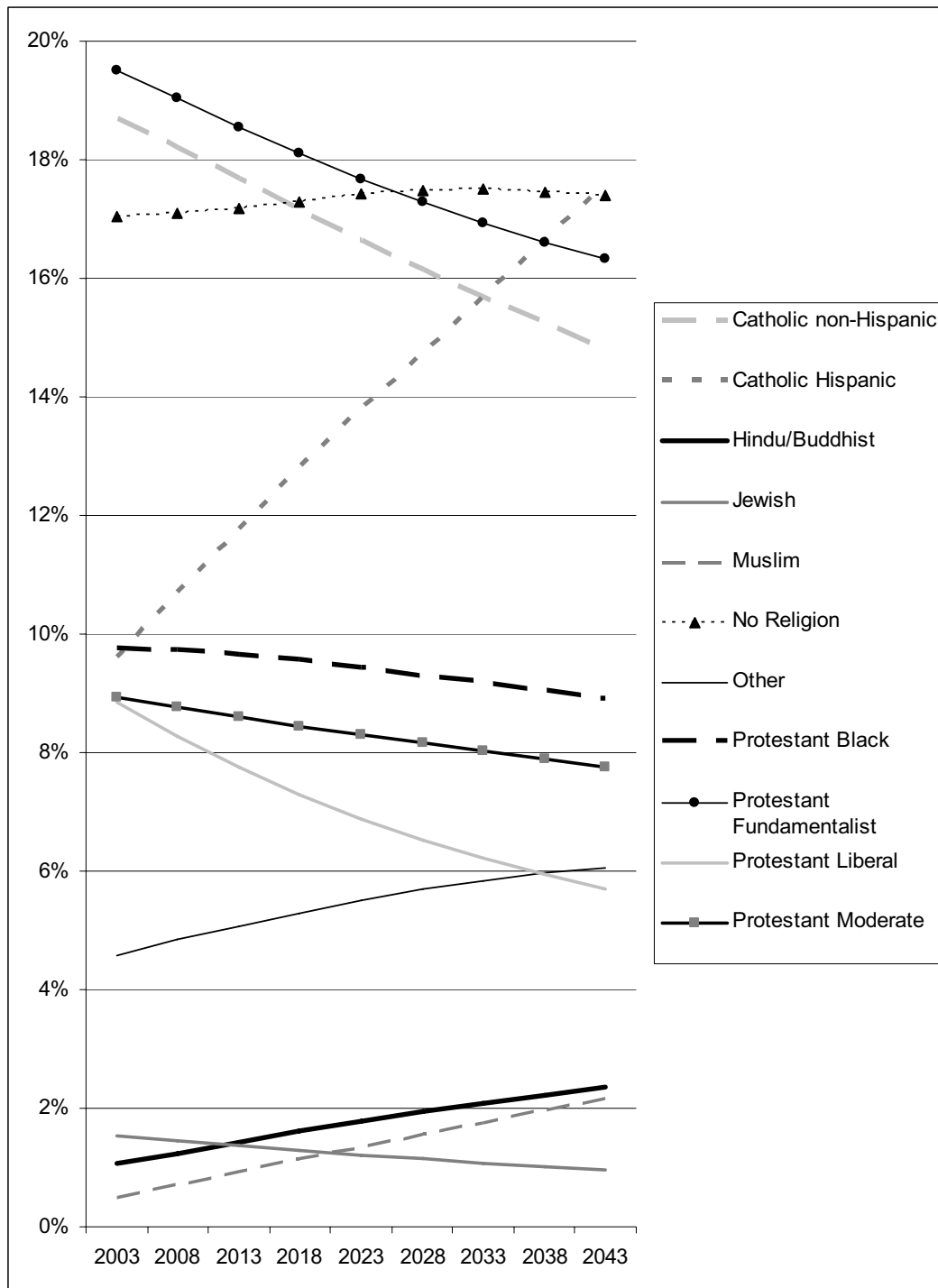
Figure 5: Population Size by Religion for Five Meta-Religious Categories

Note: The dotted lines represent scenarios H0 to H7, the thick lines represent the average value of scenarios H0 to H7

Source: Authors' calculations

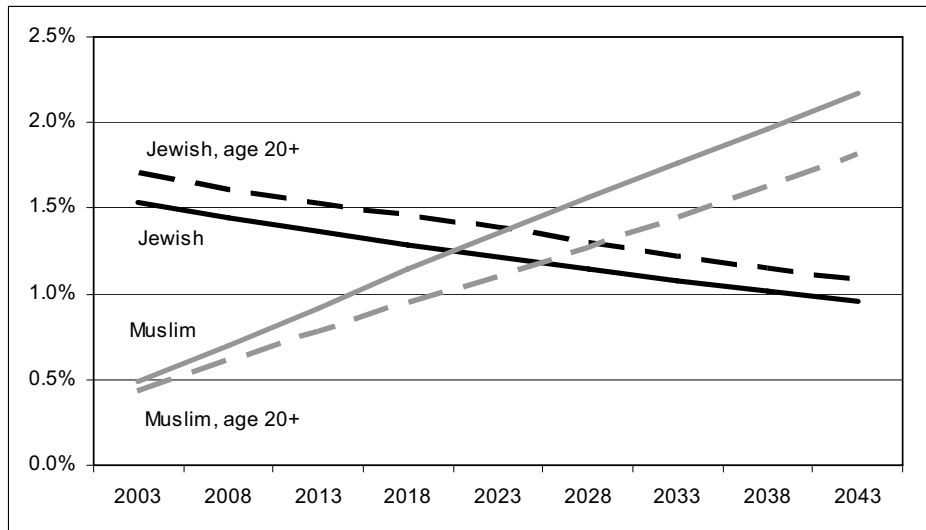**Figure 6: Share of Total Population for 11 Religious Categories (Constant (H0) scenario)**

Source: GSS; Author's calculations

Meanwhile, Other non-Christian religions, Muslims and Hindus/Buddhists increase their share of the population throughout the period. The balance between Muslims and Jews (Figure 7) is especially noteworthy in view of their differing views on American foreign policy. We expect to see Muslim Americans overtake Jews by 2020 within the population and 2028 within the electorate. The power of the Israel lobby is largely attributed to extra-Jewish forces such as Christian Zionism or partially Jewish ones like neoconservatism (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006) and also

derives from the substantial presence of Jews within the American elite. This may insulate it from demographic change. Even so, Muslim America's overtake of Jewish America will register in the nation's consciousness and could affect America's foreign policy calculus.
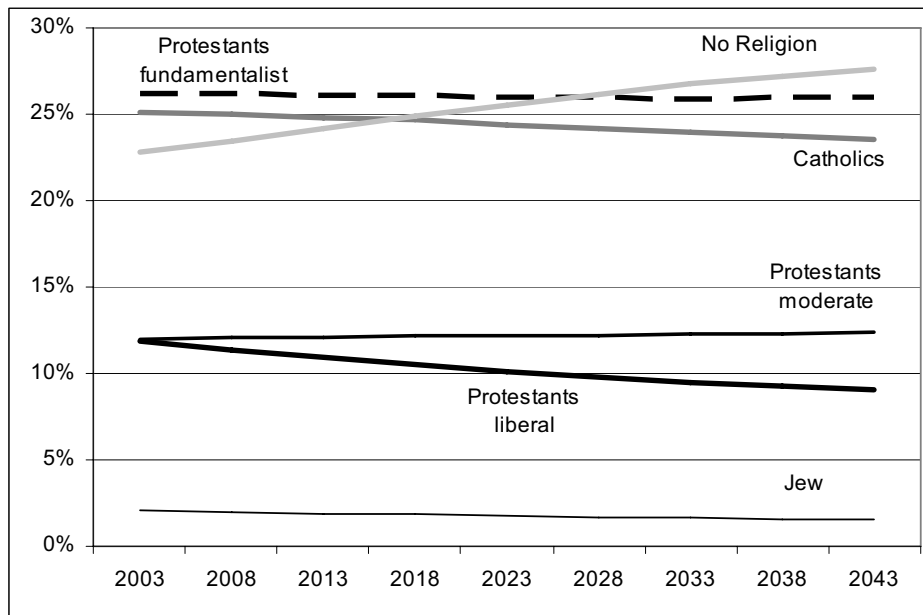
Figure 7. Proportion of Jews and Muslims in the American Population and Electorate (Constant (H0) Scenario)

Source: GSS; Author's calculations

Whites are disproportionately represented in the American electorate, media and power structure. They thereby merit closer scrutiny. Figure 8 shows trends within the white (non-Hispanic) population. We begin by noting the relative strength of Liberal Protestants and seculars within the white, as compared to the total population. Whites are affected least by immigration but most by secularization. During the projected period, seculars increase their share of the white population substantially. Moderate and Fundamentalist Protestants retain their positions, while Jews, Catholics and Liberal Protestants decline. Low Jewish and Liberal Protestant fertility also account for some of the trend. We may surmise that these patterns will enhance the secular tint of the American white elite and may deepen the divisions between religion and secularism which characterize the so-called 'culture wars' (Hunter 1991; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005). Curiously, relaxed immigration, a liberal *cause celèbre*, actually works to curb secularizing tendencies in the population at large.

Figure 8: Religious Composition of the 'White' Population, 2003-2043 (constant (H0) scenario)

Source: GSS; Authors' calculations

Conclusions

The US Census Bureau has, for some time, published projections of the racial composition of the American population to 2050, which show that a majority of Americans will be non-'white' by 2050.[9] This so-called 'browning of America' has entered the public lexicon, but we have no similar awareness of what is happening with religion because of the lack of a census question on the subject. This study provides the first ever cohort-component projection of the main religious groups in the United States. It is based on the General Social Survey, census immigration statistics and Pew small religious group data and projects the size of religious groups to 2043. We find that Hispanic Catholics experience the strongest growth rates. Immigration, high fertility and a young age structure will enable this group to expand from 10 to 18 percent of the American population between 2003 and 2043, despite a net loss of communicants to other groups. This will power the growth of Catholics as a whole, and they will surpass Protestants by mid-century if losses from conversion are stanched or immigration doubles. In any event, Catholics will outnumber Protestants within the youngest age cohorts by 2043. This represents a historic moment for a country settled by anti-Catholic Puritans, whose Revolution was motivated in part by a desire to spread dissenting Protestantism and whose population on the eve of revolution was 98 percent Protestant. Another important development concerns the growth of the Muslim population and decline of the Jews. High Muslim fertility and a young Muslim age structure contrast with low Jewish childbearing levels and a mature Jewish age structure. However, migration is the most important factor in Muslim growth in the coming decades. Therefore, barring an unforeseen shift in the religious composition and size of the immigrant flow, Muslims will

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[9] 'White' here excludes the roughly 50 percent of Hispanics who identify as racially white on the census.

surpass Jews in the population by 2023 and the electorate by 2028. Only an improbable shift in immigration policy or in fertility patterns could forestall this demographic shift, which could have profound effects on the course of American foreign policy. Within the non-Hispanic white population, we expect to see continued Liberal Protestant decline due to low fertility and a net deficit in exchanges with other groups. White Catholics are also projected to lose due to a net outflow of converts. Fundamentalist and Moderate Protestant denominations will hold their own within the white population, but are set to decline as a component of the national total.

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