

Religion & Latinx Traditions Show Notes

This episode will cover three new directions at the intersection of religion & Latinx traditions. First, panelists will reflect on politics and voting, offering insight from the 2024 election. Second, they will discuss emerging patterns in religious conversion or switching. Finally, the panelists will offer insight into new research directions in the field of US Latinx religion. Join us for an enlightening conversation where we explore Religion & Latinx Traditions.

Show Notes

Question 1: The 2024 election and politics. In general, there seems to have been a shift rightward for Latinx Christians, how do we explain this shift, what are different insights we should pay attention to?

Dr. Espiñosa: Trump played strongly into fears about the economy, many people were struggling in real ways and concern for the direction of the country. He won battle ground states and the popular vote, which was surprising to many researchers. He won and retook a majority of Catholic voters. He surprisingly won the largest share of Latinos in U.S. history. He also won a high percentage of Asian votes, which people aren't talking about as much as they should. Economy and jobs were the main issue for Latinos... there was a thought that new immigrants and people already here would have to fight over jobs ... it was a quiet issue. I've always said that Latino Catholics vote Democrat. That didn't happen [in 2024]. For the first time that I'm aware of. 53% of Latino Catholics voted for Trump. That's really surprising.

Question from audience: Do you have a breakout between the various Latino populations? How do Mexican Americans/Chicanos compare vs. Cuban Americans and others these days?

Dr. Calvillo: It was a major surprise to see the where the support of Catholic voters went. I was seeing this emergence of a much stronger, much more strident conservative Catholic voice [in the Latino community]. A lot of the issues were articulated around traditional gender roles and against recognition of trans identities and abortion. As the organizing around those issues continues, I think the catholic vote has become an important vote in that direction. This idea of evangelical identity being very entrepreneurial, lends to voting certain ways. It is important to keep an eye on generational shifts.

Dr. Vega: A lot of my work is observation based. I have seen that people further from the immigrant generation don't have immigration at the top of their concerns. That is a response I would give to people if they are wondering why the Latinx vote went that way. We can also see how the different cultures play a part in the voting. For example, the Cuban vote has always gone more republican. I think Latin American religiosity is much more about the collective. It's about coming together for events and rituals. As folks come to the US and might adopt a more American Protestant ideology, it shifts to a more individual tie to faith. How are you connected

as an individual, I wonder if that also impacts. We should also look at colonialism and how people are learning and inheriting ideas.

Question from audience: Dr. Vega usefully observes that many of converts to new religious traditions were previously “nones.” There seems to be a renewed attraction to ritual, tradition, and institutional authority beyond Latinos (example: the growth of “trad” Catholicism). Do you all see this within Latina/o communities as well? Does it have particular forms of expression within Latina/o communities?

Question 2: Lets now look at how switching or conversion is understood and may contribute to a rise in nones. Can you share major insights from your research on the conversion? How does your research expand or challenge the idea that this conversion is simply just catholic to protestant.

Some might even argue that 'nones' don't really mean no religiosity but can be better understood as 'dones' in that they're done with institutional religion. - Dr. Barba

Dr. Vega: That is what I study, why are people, in this case, being absorbed by the Mormon church? We can see, in graphs showing church attendance rates, that in 2020, like many others, church attendance dropped. So, without communal ties, it is harder to stay in one identity. I also looked at reasons for joining, the number one reason was personal fulfillment, having a personal connection to scripture or faith. It was all about “how I find my connection”, then we have people turning away from Catholicism, following family bonds and ties.

Dr. Calvillo: One observation I have is that I think that Latinx evangelicalism is leveling off, it is no longer growing in the ways that it was but the influence is still there. The most recent Pew data suggest that there may be a bit of a revolving door effect, which is that people are still becoming Evangelicals in the Latino community but some, if not more, are leaving as well. Yet the people are leaving with something, they take their ideas and pasts to different places and mindsets they learn.

Dr. Espiñosa: A lot of the research I have done can show that not all “nones” are “nones” but are evangelicals, just independent nondenominational groups. I did a study of Latinx Muslims and found they use the concept of “re-version”, coming back to, their Muslim identity. Among Mormons there is a concept that Jesus came to the Americas and preached to the Aztecs and Mayans so there is also an element of “re-version”.

Question 3: New directions, where is your research headed?

Dr. Calvillo: I have a recent book that was published a couple of months ago, *In the Time of Sky-Rhyming: How Hip Hop Resonated in Brown Los Angeles*, it was interesting to interview artists who were active at this time and how the music shaped the culture. There are notions of

religious conversion when the artists talk about their exposure to hip hop. I will also start looking at creative conversion, this call towards creating and creativity and religious conversion.

Dr. Vega: In my book that will come out at the end of the year, I explore the next generation. Particularly those that are progressively minded. How the next generation utilizes the gospel, and religion to make a liberation theology argument out of the institution.

Dr. Espinosa: Most of what I am working on is race, religion, politics and the Latinx community.

Questions from Audience

1. “Mindfulness” and meditation practices are markedly popular. “Centering prayer” has some following in contemporary Christian congregations. My impression is those groups are predominantly Caucasian. Spain’s 16th century teachers, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, have a prominent place in contemplative theology. Are there contemplative and meditative movements in today’s Latina/o communities?
2. Do you think the Catholic for Trump group the use of La Virgen de Guadalupe and Latino tv personalities helped to bring voters to Trump?
3. Was there an intentional political drive to convert Latinos to Evangelicalism?
4. Dr. Vega usefully observes that many of converts to new religious traditions were previously “nones.” There seems to be a renewed attraction to ritual, tradition, and institutional authority beyond Latinos (example: the growth of “trad” Catholicism). Do you all see this within Latina/o communities as well? Does it have particular forms of expression within Latina/o communities?
5. Would the Nones also account for those that are culturally Christian? More so culturally Catholic?
6. I think this is very correct. Dominant society in the US thinks Latinos see themselves as immigrants and as “criminals”, but we don’t see ourselves that way - or at least not in the same way we are viewed. And then members of the dominant society don’t understand us.
7. What can account for the shift towards conservatism in Protestantism within Latin America within the last 15-20 years, any connections to US evangelicalism or missionary work inside of Latin America?