

Population and the True Number of Converts to Islam

by Ibn Warraq (December 2015)

Immediately after 9/11, many journalists in the United States, and Europe, came out with several glib generalisations that I found, and still find, irritating, because of their unverified and highly improbable nature. We were told that either 40,000 or even 60,000 people had converted to Islam in the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers in Manhattan, and that Islam was the fastest growing religion in the world. The figures 40,000^[1] and 60,000 come up time after time. A quick google search will give you many journalists evidently copying each other without any verification or independent evidence. For example, author Ed Rogers, writing in 2009, tells us that "...60,000 Americans who were raised in a 'Christian' home are converting to Islam every year."^[2] But this turns out to have been copied without acknowledgement from a book, written in 2004, by Joel Richardson, *Will Islam Be Our Future? A Study of Biblical and Islamic Eschatology*, Chapter 1 "But here's the other sad aspect of these figures: Over 80% of these American converts to Islam were raised in a Christian Church. If the higher figures of conversion are accurate, that would mean that as many as 60,000 Americans, who were raised in Christian homes, are converting to Islam annually."^[3] So now the figure 60,000 is claimed for *annual* rates of conversion. Another report, published in 2011 by the Religious News Service, based in Boston tells us, "The majority of post-9/11 converts are women, according to experts, Hispanics and African-Americans, who were already converting well before 9/11, are the most common ethnic groups to convert. Though exact numbers are difficult to tally, observers estimate that as many as 20,000 Americans convert to Islam annually." Notice, first, the new figure for the number of annual converts: 20,000, and, second, those ubiquitous "experts," but we are not told which "experts" and how they have made their calculations. They are now joined by "observers."^[4]

Another quote that comes up over and over again is from *The Times* of London, January 7, 2002, "There is compelling anecdotal evidence of a surge in conversions to Islam since September 11, not just in Britain, but across Europe and America. One Dutch Islamic centre claims a tenfold increase, while the New

Muslims Project, based in Leicester, [England] and run by a former Irish Roman Catholic housewife, reports a 'steady stream' of new converts."

"Anecdotal evidence" in the form of personal testimonies can be powerful, moving, and very useful, though one has to treat such evidence with caution when trying to calculate national number of converts. As for the number of Muslims in the United States, there have often been unscientific guesses, with many Muslim Organizations inflating their figures for political reasons. As Dr Tom W. Smith of the University of Chicago wrote in October 2001, "None of the 20 specific estimates during the last five years is based on a scientifically-sound or explicit methodology. All can probably be characterized as guesses or assertions. Nine came from Muslim organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Student Association, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the American Muslim Council, and the Harvard Islamic Society or unspecified 'Muslim sources.' None of these sources gave any basis for their figures." [5]

Certainly the most sober assessment of numbers and conversions *seems* to come from the *The Economist*. In an article published in in 2013, *The Economist* cites the research of Kevin Brice, of the University of Wales, who calculated that 5200 Britons convert to Islam every year, and that the total number of converts is about 100,000; presumably over a period of twenty years, though this is not made clear. For the United States, *The Economist* turns to the Pew Research Center, and says: "In 2007 the Pew Research Centre (sic) estimated that there were around 2.4 million American Muslims... Pew reckons that just under a quarter are converts." Actually, the Pew Research Center did no such thing. First, The Pew Research Center only gives percentage estimates, and second, they are for *adults* only, children are not included.

According to The Pew Research Center, basing themselves on the Religious Landscape Study [RLS], Muslims made up 0.4 % of the *adult* population in 2007. [6] How did *The Economist* arrive at the figure of 2.4 million Muslim Americans? According to the Pew Research Center, in 2007, there were 227 million *adult* Americans [7], in which case, 0.4% of them were Muslim Americans, that is 908,000. And the adult population of the USA in 2014 was approximately 245 million, of which 0.9% were Muslims, that is, 2,205,000.

Thus there was a net increase in Muslim American adults of 1,297,000 over a

period of seven years, that is 185,285 per annum. How many of these are a result of conversion remains obscure, since the figure of 185,285 must take into account the number of Muslim immigrants per year, and possibly a higher birth rate among Muslims. We have yet to factor in the rate of retention, that is the percentage of people raised in a particular church or religion who stay with it when they are grown. For Muslims it is high, 77 %, but that still means that 23% of Muslim adults lose their religion.[8] I have no idea of the implications of this statistic, and how it would affect the numbers of Muslim Americans.

However, to complicate things further, in the second paragraph on page 28 of their 2014 Religious Landscape Study[RLS], the Pew Center explains: “Muslims (0.9%), Buddhists (0.7%) and Hindus (0.7%) each make up slightly less than 1% of respondents in the 2014 Religious Landscape Study. The Muslim and Hindu shares of the population have risen significantly since 2007. And it is possible, even despite this growth, that the Religious Landscape Study *may underestimate the size of these groups* [emphasis added]. The study was conducted in English and Spanish, which means that groups with above-average numbers of people who do not speak English or Spanish (such as immigrants from Asia, Africa and other parts of the world) may be underrepresented. For instance, an analysis of the Pew Research Center’s 2012 survey of Asian Americans (conducted in English, Cantonese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog and Vietnamese) estimated that Buddhists account for between 1.0% and 1.3% of the U.S. adult population, and that Hindus account for between 0.5% and 0.8% of the population. *The Pew Research Center’s 2007 and 2011 surveys of Muslim Americans (conducted in English, Arabic, Farsi and Urdu) estimated that Muslims accounted for 0.6% of the adult population in 2007 and 0.8% in 2011.*”[9] [emphasis added]. Thus based on the latter figures, 0.6% of the total adult population of 2007, which was 227 million, gives us a figure of 1,362,000 adult Muslim Americans. The total adult population in 2011, according to the U.S.Census Bureau[10], was 237,680,342, of which 0.8% were adult Muslim Americans, giving us the figure of 1,901,443 adult Muslim Americans. Thus there was an increase of 539,443 Muslim American adults between 2007 and 2011, an increase of approximately 134,860 per year.

Pew Research Center gave the following figures for converts in 2007, “More than three-quarters (77%) of Muslim Americans say they have always been a Muslim, while 23% say they converted to Islam. Nine-in-10 (91%) converts to Islam were born in the United States, and almost three-fifths (59%) of converts to Islam

are African American.

“A 55% majority of converts identify with Sunni Islam and another quarter (24%) identify with no specific tradition. Only 6% of Muslim converts in America identify themselves as Shia.

“Almost half (49%) of Muslim converts in America report that their conversion occurred when they were under 21 years of age, another third (34%) converted when they were between ages 21 and 35, and 17% when they were older than 35. The early age of most conversions to Islam resembles the typical pattern of conversion in the general public, where religious change is concentrated in adolescence and early adulthood.

“Two-thirds (67%) of all converts to Islam in the U.S. came from Protestant churches, 10% came from Catholicism, and just 5% from other religions. Nearly one-in-seven converts to Islam (15%) had no religion before their conversion

“Most converts to Islam (58%) cite aspects of the religion as the reason for their conversion. These include references to the truth or appeal of Islam’s teachings, the belief that Islam is superior to Christianity, or that the religion just “made sense” to them. Just 18% of converts mentioned family reasons, such as marrying a Muslim, as the reason for their conversion.” [\[11\]](#)

Thus as we saw earlier, if we take the adult population of Muslim Americans as 0.6% of the total adult American population of 227 million in 2007, that gives us a figure of 1,362,000 adult Muslim Americans. Now 23% of these Muslim Americans are converts, that gives us a figure of 313,260. However, the Pew Research Center’s 2011 study of Muslim Americans tells us that only 20% are converts. As we saw earlier, the total adult population in 2011, according to the U.S. Census Bureau , was 237,680,342, of which 0.8% were adult Muslim Americans, giving us the figure of 1,901,443 adult Muslim Americans. If 20% are converts, we get a figure of 380,288 Muslim Americans converts in 2011. That comes to an increase of 67,028 converts since 2007, that is, 16,757 new converts to Islam per year. So where do those mysterious figures of 60,000, or 40,000, or even 20,000 annual converts to Islam that we read about in the press come from?

Hispanics have also converted to Islam in recent years. There are, perhaps,

between 15,000 to 50,000 Hispanic Muslims in the United States- exact figures are hard to come by, and Muslim groups, as ever, exaggerate the numbers. The majority of Hispanic converts to Islam are women.[\[12\]](#) But as the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs concluded, “Despite the growing presence of organizations such as Alianza Islamica, however, Latino Muslims are still a tiny fraction of the Latino population. Few Latinos, in fact, are even aware of their existence.”[\[13\]](#)

But here are some sobering statistics for Muslim triumphalists.

1. According to Dr. Ilyas Ba-Yunus (1932 – 2007), a Pakistani born American Muslim, and Emeritus Professor of Sociology, State University of New York at Cortland, 75% of new Muslim converts in the US leave Islam within a few years. [\[14\]](#) This perception was confirmed by Imam Abu Laith Luqman Ahmad who wrote on January 13, 2010, “We are constantly being told that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. We are also being told that the Muslim population is anywhere from 2 million, to six million and that a third of them are converts. That would put the number of converts from around 700,000 to 2,000,000. However, I’m not sure if those numbers are accurate because many converts are leaving Islam, and or never even begin to practice Islam in any appreciable way other than take their shahaadah (declaration of conversion), and you don’t see anywhere near those numbers reflected in the nation’s *masajid* [mosques]. Nor do you see too much evidence that people who became Muslim say, 20 years ago have stayed in the religion, raised their children upon it and started a second generation, or even third generation. The overall estimates of the Muslim population may be accurate, but the stated percentage of converts does not seem reflected on the ground. In almost every major city in America except for maybe Philadelphia and to a certain extent, Atlanta, you don’t see too many large communities of converts to Islam. You see a lot of young people who are recent converts and that’s great but where are the thousands upon thousands of Muslims who converted ten years ago? Twenty years ago? Thirty years ago? Where are their children, their grandchildren? We need to re-evaluate the statistics that are being fed to us, because it has lulled many of us into a false sense of accomplishment to the point where we brag about how well Islam is doing amongst converts in America while in reality, it

seems converts, by and large, are not faring that well and that the largest concentrations of Muslim men in America are those in our nation's prisons. When I used to volunteer at Folsom prison, there would be hundreds of male converts in attendance, and I have never seen hundreds of male converts at any *Masjid* anywhere in California." [\[15\]](#)

2. Further evidence of converts leaving Islam comes from a London based think tank. The British journal *The New Statesman* cites Usama Hasan, a part-time Imam and a senior researcher at the counter extremism think-tank, the Quilliam Foundation, as saying, "Many converts leave the faith. We don't have exact statistics but some stats say 50 per cent will leave within a few years." [\[16\]](#)
3. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of adult Muslims in the U.S. were born elsewhere. A relatively large proportion of Muslim immigrants are from Arab countries, but many also come from Pakistan and other South Asian countries. Among native-born Muslims, roughly half are African American (20% of U.S. Muslims overall), many of whom are converts to Islam. [\[17\]](#)
4. According to Ahmed Nassef, the co-founder and editor in chief of MuslimWakeUp.com, less than 7 percent of American Muslims attend mosque regularly, compared with 38 percent of American Christians who attend church weekly. [\[18\]](#)
5. Contrary to Islamic claims, the fastest growing belief groups in the United States are the non-religious. The American Religious Identification Surveys [ARIS] of 1990 and 2000 show that the percent of change for Islam was +109%. The percent of change, however, for Nonreligious/Secular was +110%; Native American Religion +119%; Buddhism +170%; Baha'i +200%; Hinduism +237%; New Age +240%; Sikhism +338%, and Deism +717% were all higher. [\[19\]](#)
6. The American Religious Identification Survey [ARIS] gave Non-Religious groups the largest gain in terms of absolute numbers – 14,300,000 (8.4% of the population) to 29,400,000 (14.1% of the population) for the period 1990 to 2001 in the USA.
7. In the period from 2001 to 2008, Americans with no religion were the fastest growing segment. [\[20\]](#) There were sharp increases in the number of

non-denominational Christians and those claiming no religious affiliation (Nones). To quote the report from ARIS' webpage, "In addition, shifts in religious identification since 1990 have resulted in the ranks of the Nones swelling by 67 percent (2.2 million persons) and those in the conservative, non-denominational Generic Christian tradition growing by 51 percent (1.8 million). Put another way, the percentage of self-proclaimed Nones increased from 11 percent to 16 percent of this cohort between 1990 and 2008. This increase is surprising since Americans have historically increased their religious identification between early adulthood and their mid-40s, as they marry, have children, and become settled in their communities." [21]

8. The true rate of Muslim apostasy in the United States is difficult to assess for the obvious reason that though there are no laws prohibiting it in the United States, social ostracism, feelings of shame, and simple physical fear of reprisals even in the West, all conspire to make the apostate keep his own counsel. For example, the situation in New York City is bad enough for Fred Farrokh, executive director of the Jesus for Muslims Network to open a refuge center for Christian converts. Raised Muslim, he is now a Christian, and author of *Jailbreak: A Christian's Guide to Praying for the Muslim World*. [22].
9. Here is the ever sober Pew Research Center's assessment on 27 January, 2011: "Statistical data on conversion to and from Islam are scarce. What little information is available suggests that there is no substantial net gain or loss in the number of Muslims through conversion globally; the number of people who become Muslims through conversion seems to be roughly equal to the number of Muslims who leave the faith. As a result, this report does not include any estimated future rate of conversions as a direct factor in the projections of Muslim population growth." [23]
10. What are the difficulties in estimating conversions to *and from* Islam? "There are a number of reasons why reliable data on conversions are hard to come by. Some national censuses ask people about their religion, but they do not directly ask whether people have converted to their present faith. A few cross-national surveys do contain questions about religious switching, but even in those surveys, it is difficult to assess whether more people leave Islam than enter the faith. In some countries, legal

and social consequences make conversion difficult, and survey respondents may be reluctant to speak honestly about the topic. Additionally, for many Muslims, Islam is not just a religion but an ethnic or cultural identity that does not depend on whether a person actively practices the faith. This means that even nonpracticing or secular Muslims may still consider themselves, and be viewed by their neighbors, as Muslims.”[\[24\]](#)

11. However, some more recent research suggests the Pew Research Centers assessments are incorrect, and that there are greater conversions *from* Islam to Christianity, or other religions, and even atheism, than have been reported. Admittedly much of this research has been conducted by Christian organizations but, as I shall show, at least some of these Christian organizations have developed and used a sophisticated methodology which promises some more objective facts and figures than mere crude propaganda.

To take an example of what can go wrong, let us look at one Christian reference work. Referring to its own massive charts and statistics, the three volumed *The World Christian Encyclopaedia*, published by Oxford University Press, estimates that between 1990 and 2000, Islam received around 865,558 converts each year. This compares with an approximate 2,883,011 converts each year for Christianity during the same period.[\[25\]](#) But to show my skepticism of even Christian sources, I refer readers to the criticisms levelled at the three volumes, comprising more than 1730 pages, by Glenn Masuchika, of Chaminade University Library, Honolulu. He thinks that volume two is the most useful but adds that it “suffers from the shadow of doubt cast by the first volume concerning the reliability of the encyclopedia’s facts. Volume 3 can be best described as an explosion of numbers, categories, cross-listings of what the editors define as ‘miniprofiles’ of at least 10,000 distinct religions, 12,600 peoples, 13,500 languages, 7000 cities, and 3030 major civil divisions in 238 countries. What results is hundred of pages of utterly confusing statistics, some highly suspect, culturally biased, and anthropologically useless (such as categorizing people by using moribund race-defining terms as Australoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid and further subdividing those into “stylized colors” such as black, grey, brown, red, tan, white, and yellow). There is a need for a comparative survey of world Christian churches and other religions. This is not it. Not recommended.”[\[26\]](#)

[1] See, for example:
<https://yesuscross.wordpress.com/category/tv-report-40000-catholic-hispanics-in-america-converted-to-islam-after-911/>

[2] <http://www.edrogers.net/blog/16-islam-in-america-after-9-11/>

[3] http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/JR/Future/ch01_why_this_book.htm

[4] Omar Sacirbey in Religion News Service Boston, 08/24/2011, found at
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/24/post-911-islam-converts_n_935572.html

[5]
<http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=ijITI2PHKoG&b=843637&ct=1044159>

[6] <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf>, page 4

[7] <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

[8] <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf>, page 40.

[9] <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/05/RLS-05-08-full-report.pdf>, pp.28-29

[10]
<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/99-total-population-by-child-and-adult#detailed/1/any/false/36,868,867,133,38/39,40,41/416,417>

[11] Full Report:
<http://www.pewresearch.org/files/old-assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>, page 28.
alternative

link: <https://selectra.co.uk/sites/selectra.co.uk/files/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>

[12] National Public Radio Report by Rachel Martin, "Latinas Choosing Islam over Catholicism" : <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6133579> "

See also a report in Washington Report on Middle East Affairs at:
<http://www.wrmea.org/2003-june/latino-muslims-a-growing-presence-in-america.html>

[13] Washington Report on Middle East Affairs at:
<http://www.wrmea.org/2003-june/latino-muslims-a-growing-presence-in-america.html>

[14] Regretably, the original youtube video where Dr Ba-Yunus stated the figure "75%" is no longer available. Some who heard him speak talk of "50%" or "60%" of Muslim converts leaving Islam after a few years. See Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc. at:
http://www.irfi.org/articles4/articles_5001_6000/why%20muslims%20in%20the%20west%20leave%20islam%20and%20what%20can%20we%20do%20about%20it.html.htm

[15]

<https://imamluqman.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/seven-out-of-every-ten-converts-leave-islam-by-imam-luqman-ahmad/>

[16] <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2013/05/confessions-ex-muslim>.

[17] Pew Research Center, Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream (Washington, DC, Pew Research Center: 2007)

[18] <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0421/p09s02-coop.html&date=2012-11-30>

[19] http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.html&date=2011-04-16

[20]

http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm&date=2011-04-16

[21] Press: Generation X Becoming Less Christian, Less Republican; Catholic and Baptist Losses feed Religious Polarization May 31, 2012 12:49 pm at <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/>

[22] Erick Stakelbeck, "Muslims Turned Christian Pay the Price," CBN News, June 7, 2006

[23]

<http://www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-related-factors-conversion.aspx&date=2012-03-23>

[24]

<http://www.pewforum.org/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-related-factors-conversion.aspx&date=2012-03-23>

[25]

<http://www.bible.ca/global-religion-statistics-world-christian-encyclopedia.htm&date=2011-04-16>, citing David A. Barrett, George Thomas Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, edd., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2001, Oxford University Press, pp. 16-18.

[26] Glenn Masuchika, Review of *The World Christian Encyclopaedia* in *Library Journal*, May 1, 2000.

Ibn Warraq's latest book with New English Review Press is [here](#).

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