

Converts to Orthodoxy: Likelihood of Moving After Conversion

Matthew Namee, Fr. Nicholas
Metrakos, Cassidy Irwin, Nathanael
Morgan, and Paisios Hensersky

July 2024



SAINT CONSTANTINE
COLLEGE



Converts to Orthodoxy: Likelihood of Moving After Conversion

Matthew Namee, Cassidy Irwin, Paisios Hensersky, and Nathanael Morgan

August 2024

Abstract: This study builds on the data collected for the publications, “Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics and Trends from the Past Decade” and “Converts to Orthodoxy: Statistics on Engagement”, published in July 2024 by the Orthodox Studies Institute. Like those studies, the following paper utilizes matriculation records by Orthodox Christian priests in parishes across the US, and seeks to build on the earlier engagement analysis by taking a closer look at a specific choice some converts made - to remain Orthodox but move to another Parish. In general, we found that factors such as gender, age, and former religion had little statistical impact on the likelihood of moving, but that this likelihood tends to increase over time.

Data Sources: The data for this study was gathered by compiling information from Orthodox clergy in 20 parishes across 6 different jurisdictions in 15 states during the summer and early fall of 2023. Consequently, converts who joined the church in the latter part of 2023 were not included, thus resulting in only partial data for 2023. Participating clergy provided data either through interviews with the OSI research team or by filling out a spreadsheet with the requested data and sending it to the OSI team. Clergy were asked to consult their metrical records for the years 2013-2023 to ensure that all adult (18+) converts during the time period were documented. We specifically sought out parishes where clergy (usually the main priest, but in two cases other clergy) had been personally present for the entire 2013-2023 time period to ensure that they had firsthand knowledge of each convert and, to the fullest extent possible, the current status of each convert. Although we gathered data on converts from 2013 until the fall of 2023, the converts from 2020-2023 were excluded from the comparative analysis between demographic groups to avoid any recency bias.

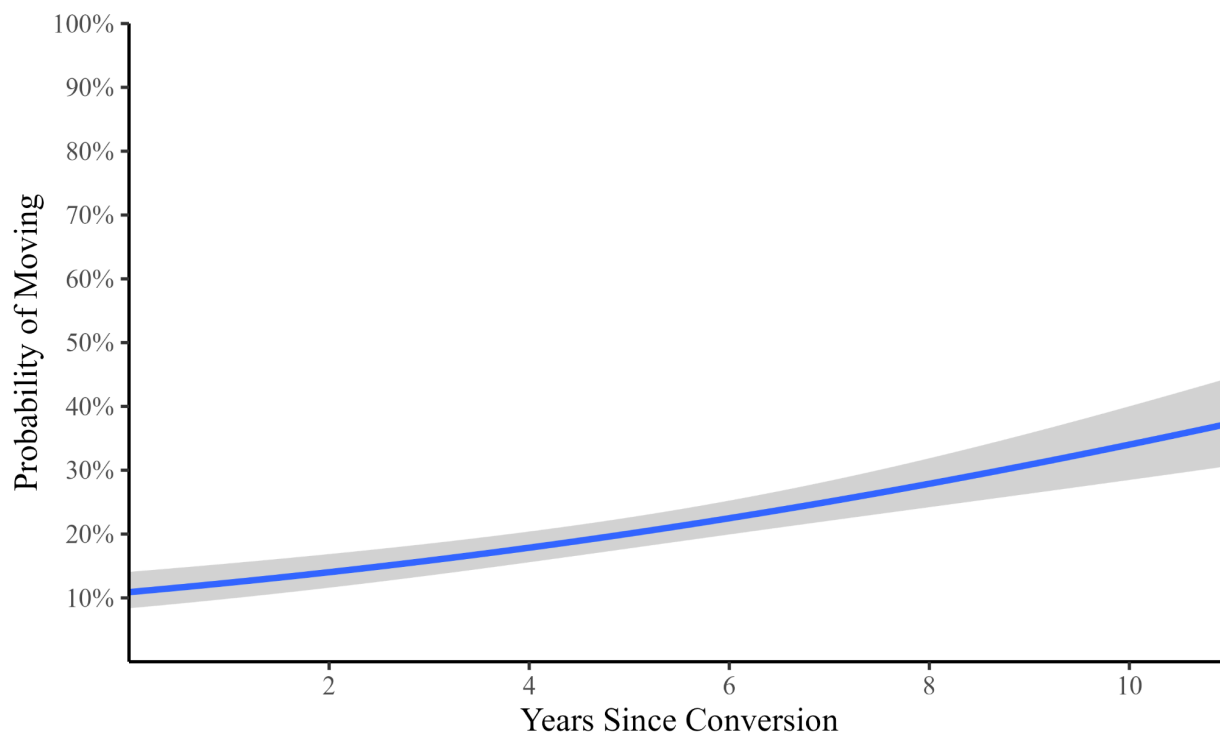
Methodology: Logistic regression was applied to the survey data from the previous reports to determine what factors predicted who moved from the parish of their conversion to another parish. Factors examined included the following:

- Years since Conversion
- Family Status
- Age
- Gender
- Method of Reception
- Former Religion
- Reason for Conversion.

For all graphs, the shading around the lines represents the standard error of the estimate.

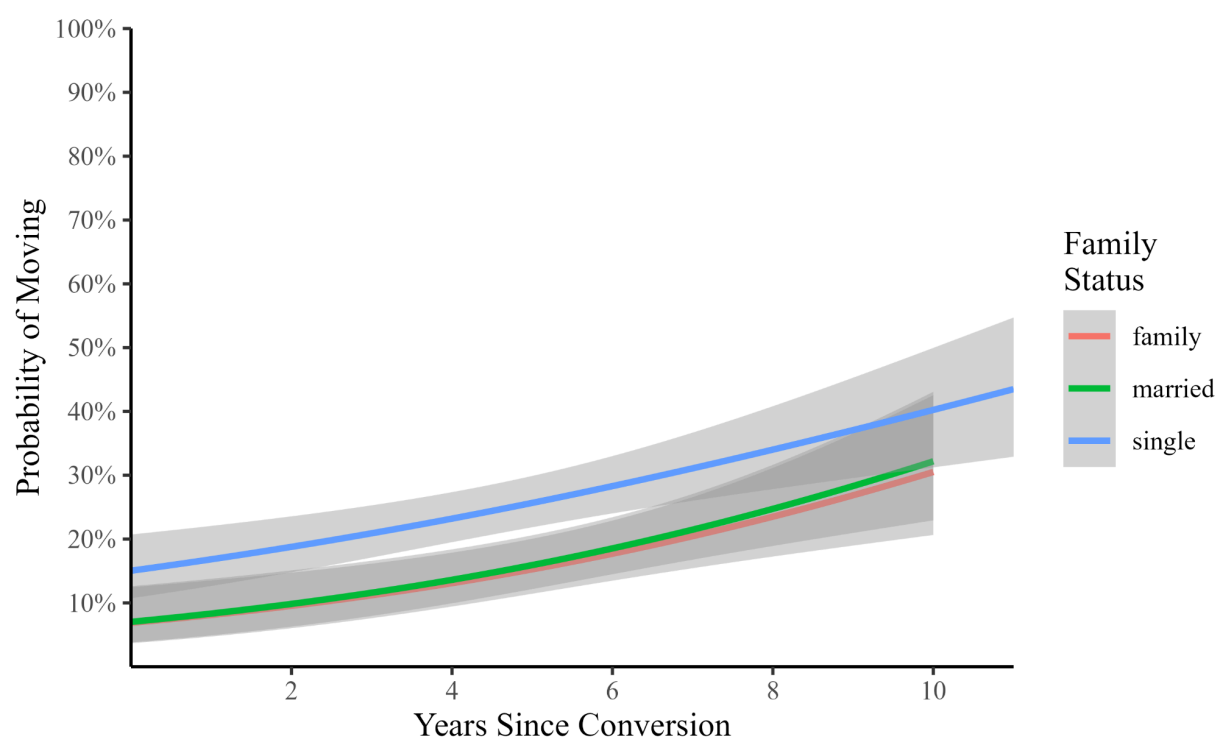
Results by Years Since Conversion: The number of years since conversions is the first statistically significant factor influencing whether or not a parishioner moves. As the number of years a parishioner has been a member of the Church increases, so too do the odds of them moving, rising from an ~10% chance of moving at 0 years since conversion to a 35% chance of having at some point moved by 11 years since conversion . This is an expected result; as time passes, any number of different factors could cause someone to move. Filtering the results by other factors provides more insight into which demographics are more likely to move, and why.

Figure 1 - Probability of Moving by Years Since Conversion



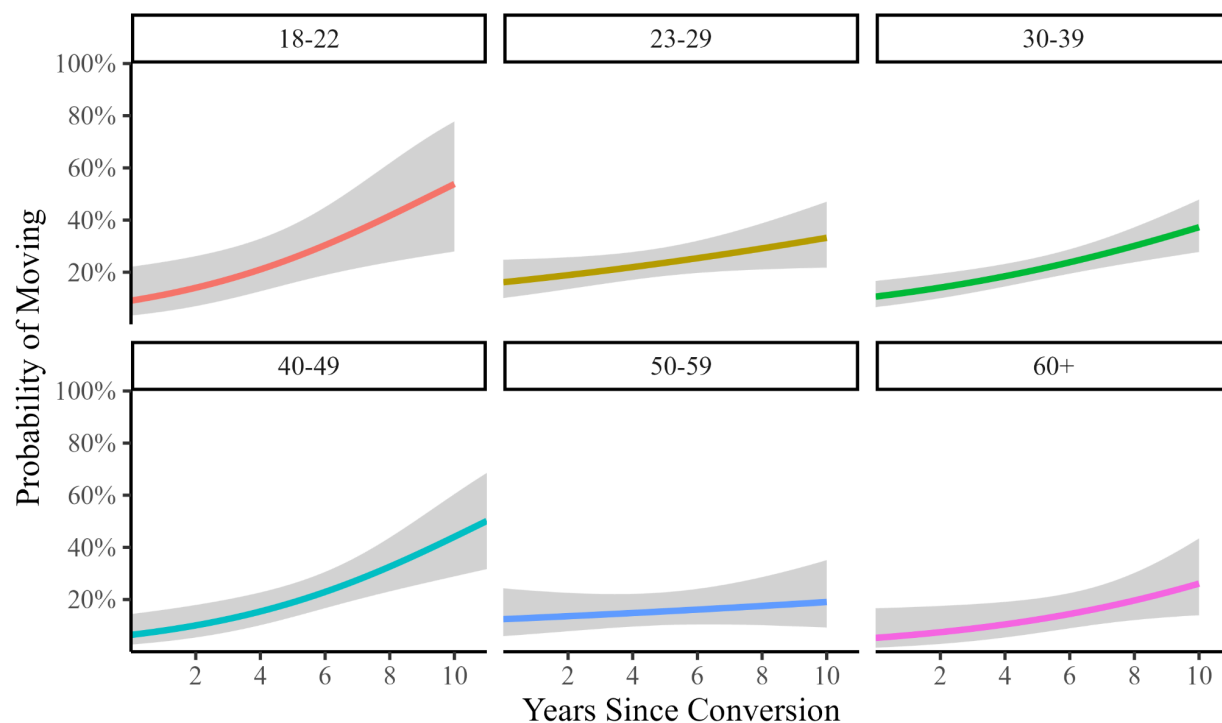
Family Status: With respect to family status, parishioners that are married and have families are less likely to move from the parish of their conversion than those who are single from 2 - 6 years after their conversion. There are no differences in terms of the odds of moving between married couples and those that have started families. It is well known that singles in the general population tend to move around more than those who are married, so it is unsurprising that this is true among Orthodox Christians. Although there are potential incentives for single people to move around as they search for a spouse or move to a monastic community, we saw no comparative increase in likelihood of moving among singles, as contrasted with those who were married.

Figure 2 - Probability of Moving by Family Status



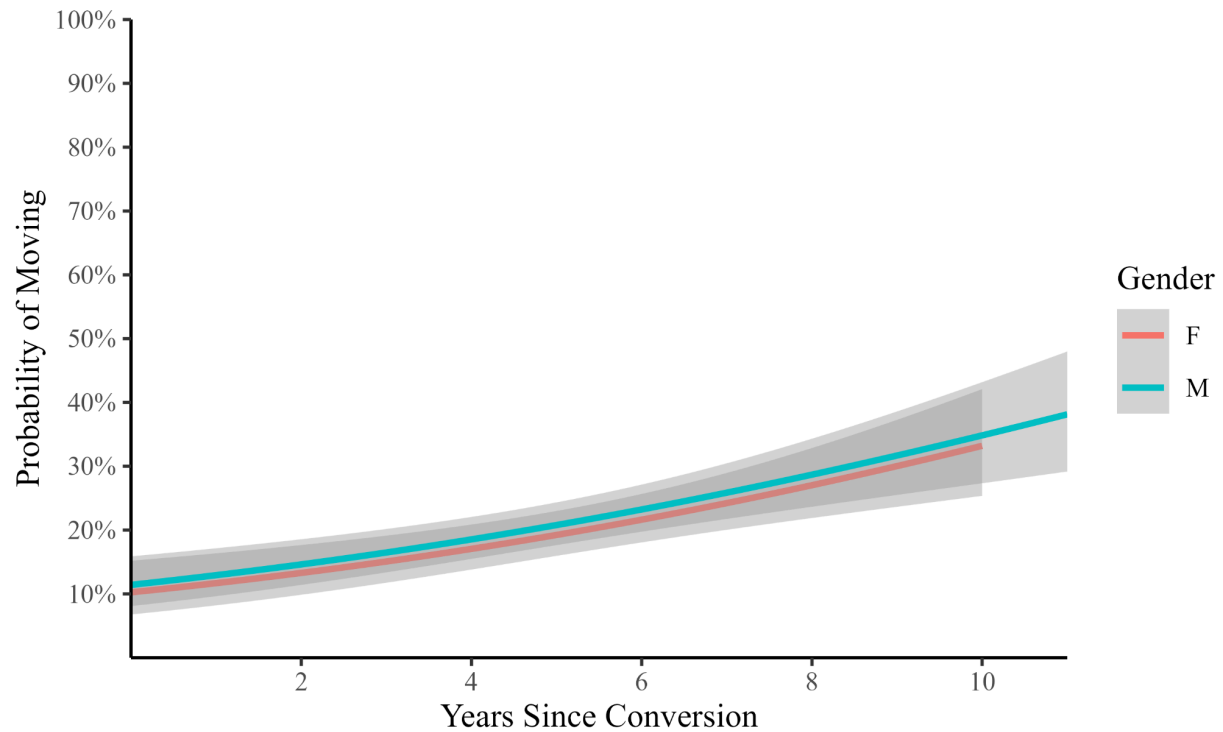
Age: Broadly speaking, we found that age is inversely correlated with the likelihood of moving. We propose that this is because individuals tend to become more established over time and as a result have less of a need to move as time passes. The younger someone is, the more likely it is they move in the years following their conversion. Individuals in the 18-22 and 40-49 age groups had the highest increase in likelihood of moving.

Figure 3 - Probability of Moving by Age



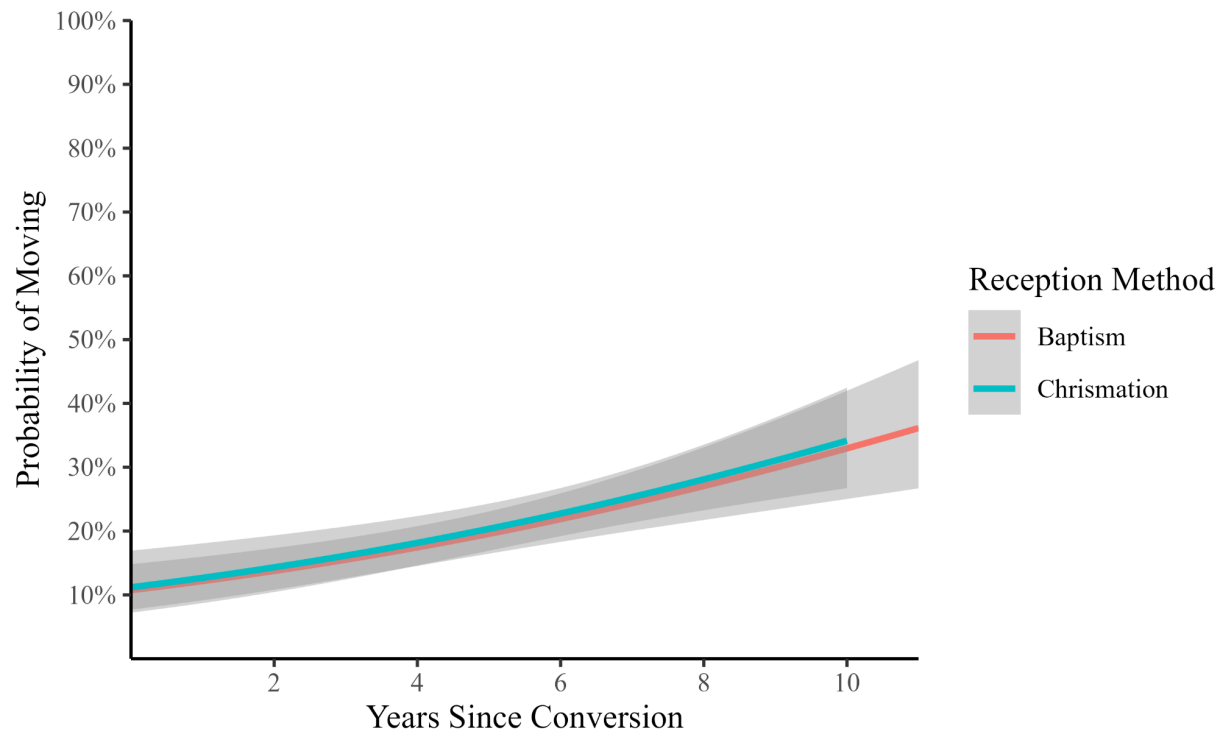
Gender: No significant differences were observed in the propensity to move as time passed since conversion between men and women.

Figure 4 - Probability of Moving by Gender



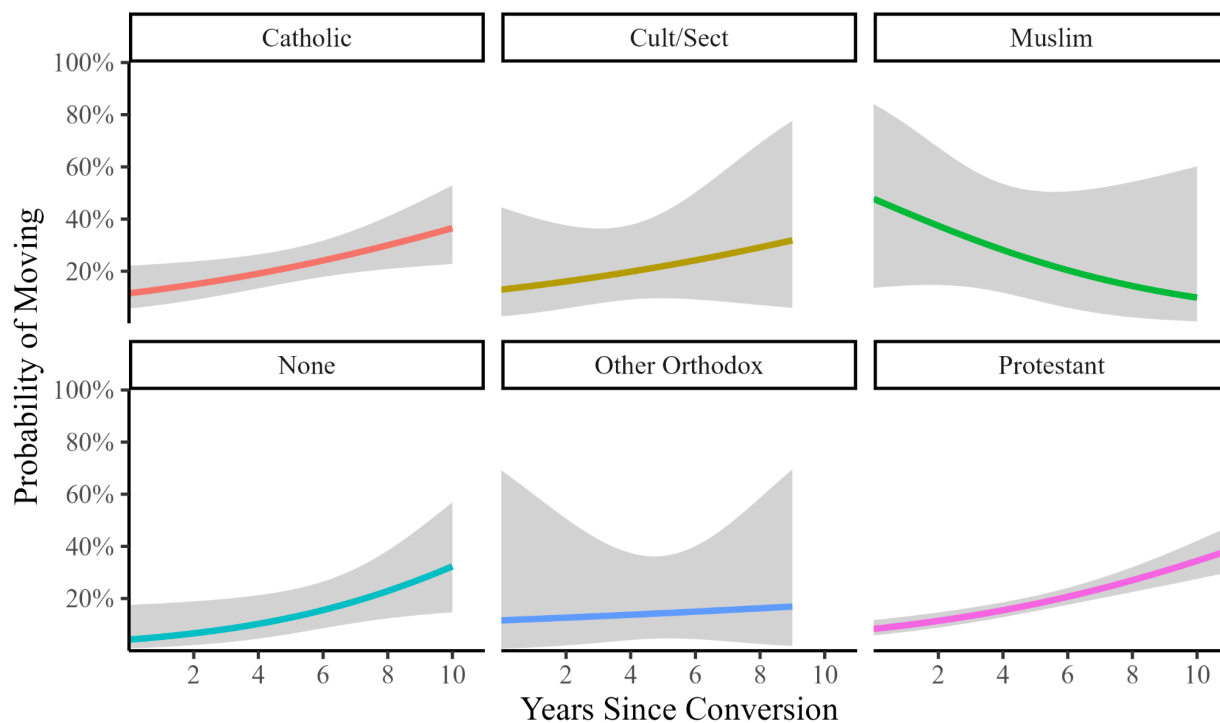
Method of Reception: No significant differences were observed in the propensity to move as time passed since conversion between those that entered into the Church via Baptism as opposed to Chrismation.

Figure 5 - Probability of Moving by Method of Reception



Former Religion: When comparing the different religious backgrounds of converts, we observed no significant difference in the propensity to move as time passed. Former Muslims had a higher likelihood of moving within the first year of their conversion (~40%, as compared to ~10% ten years later). However due to the small number of people of Muslim background in the dataset there is a large standard error around the estimate, so patterns should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 6 - Probability of Moving by Former Religion



Reason for Converting: We divided the participants in the study into the following categories by stated reasons for conversion:

- Friend or Family (Not Spouse)
- Marriage
- Theological
- Spirituality
- Other/Unknown

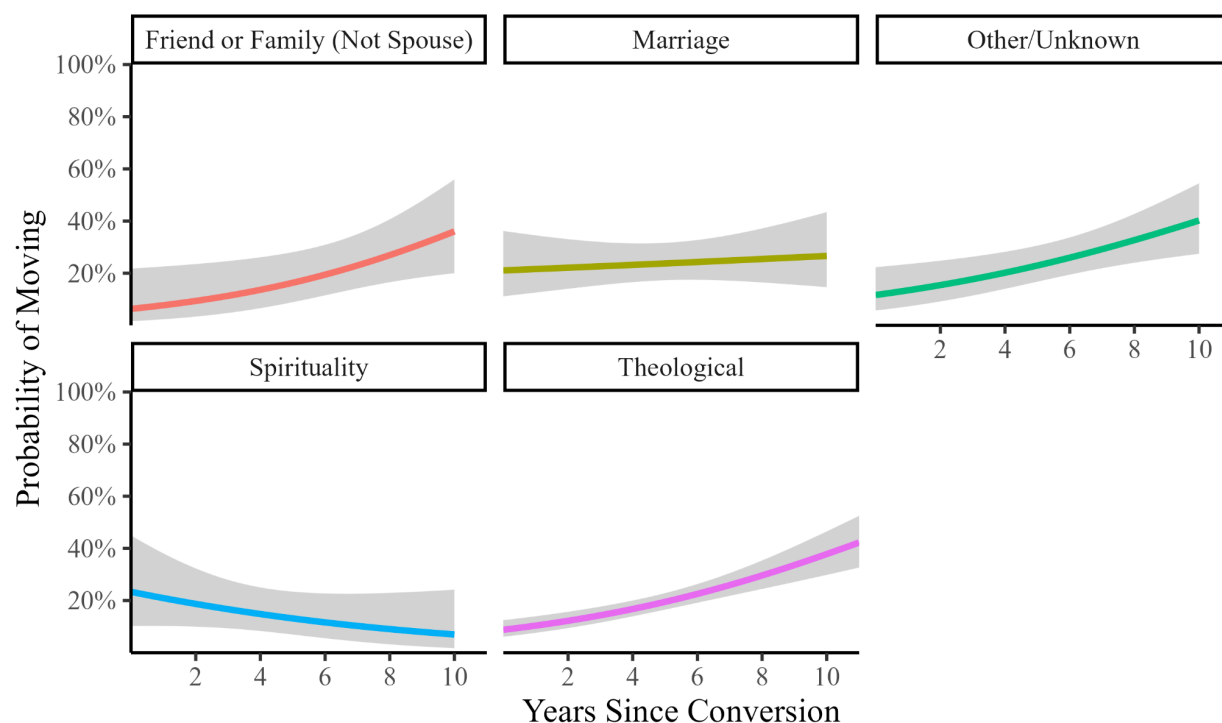
For those in the “Friend/Family”, “Theological”, and “Other/Unknown” categories, the participants followed the trend of gradually becoming more likely to move as time passed.¹ Those who entered the Church for marriage were more likely to stay in their home parish regardless of the passage of time, as noted by their low almost flat horizontal line. This should be interpreted with some caution, as the standard error of the estimates is broader than some of the other groups.

Finally, those that converted due to “Spirituality” followed the opposite pattern of the vast majority of groups. While the majority of people only have ~10% chance of moving within their first year of converting, those who converted for spiritual reasons have approximately a 20% chance of moving in their first year. The probability of moving *falls* with the passage of time to ~5% by 10 years since conversion.²

¹ Those who converted for theological reasons the point estimate at 11 years is slightly higher (40%) than the baseline probability of moving irrespective of Reason for Conversion (35%). However, this difference is not statistically significant as the standard error of the two lines would overlap if they were rendered on the same graph.

² Astute observers will note that the aforementioned trend should be regarded with healthy skepticism, seeing as the standard error of this group is rather large and intersects the other lines in places.

Figure 7 - Probability of Moving by Reason for Conversion



Conclusions: For most of the demographic factors, we find there to be no statistically significant or unexpected result when analyzing the likelihood of moving as years since conversion increase. Notable outliers include former Muslims and those who converted for spiritual reasons having the likelihood of moving decrease as the time after conversion increases. However, we attribute these results to a small data set and do not find them statistically significant.

Over the ten year period surveyed, we found there was, without filtering by demographics, approximately a 25% increase in the likelihood that a given participant had moved. To draw more conclusions on this subject, we suggest conducting this kind of study on a larger scale, over more time, and, most importantly, comparing it to rates of moving in the general population.