

The Vanishing Protestant Majority

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Introduction

Since colonial times the United States has been a Protestant nation. But perhaps as early as this year (2004), the country will for the first time no longer have a Protestant majority. While the shifting racial and ethnic composition of American society has been a major focus and religious change has been frequently discussed, little attention has been devoted to the recent rapid shrinking of the Protestant majority and its imminent disappearance. Research on religious change has focused on such matters as a) the rising proportion of Americans with no religious preference (Hout and Fischer, 2002), b) the changing share of fundamentalists/evangelicals among Protestants (Hout, Greeley, and Wilde, 2001; Sundberg, 2000; Williams, 2000) or overall (Smith, 1992), c) the rise of alternative, non-traditional religions (Gerner, 2001; Sherkat, 1999; Smith, 2002a; 2002b), d) changes among Hispanics (Hunt, 1999), and e) inter- and intra-generational religious mobility (Roof and Landres, 1997; Sherkat, 2001). Relatively little attention has been devoted to the decline in Protestants (Gerner, 2001; "U.S. Far Less Protestant," 1998).

This paper redresses that neglect by focusing on the recent Protestant decline. It considers first definitional and methodological issues concerning measuring religious preferences and especially the Protestant share of the population. Second, the trends in religious identification in general and Protestantism in particular are examined. Third, various explanations for the decline in Protestants are considered: 1) the rise of people spontaneously, self-identifying as Christian, inter-/non-denominationals, and some other groups into which either Protestants are being wrongly classified or former Protestants are moving, 2) the loss of marginal Protestants to a) those without any religious preferences or b) Christians and inter-/non-denominationals, 3) differential declines within age cohorts, 4) a decrease in Protestant retention rates, and 5) shifts due to immigration. Finally, the likelihood of the decline of the last ten years continuing is examined.

Data

Most of the analysis in this paper is based on the 1972-2002 General Social Surveys (GSSs) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. The GSSs are full-probability, in-person samples of adults living in households in the United States.¹ For complete technical details see Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 2003. In looking at the proportion of Americans

¹Advantages of using the GSS include a) its measurement of Protestants has not changed over the years, b) its high quality (e.g. its high overall response rate and low item non-response on religion), and c) its large sample size (over 43,000 respondents in 1972-2002).

identifying as Protestants and how that has changed over time four series are examined using the GSS: 1) current religion by year, 2) religion raised in by year, 3) current religion by birth cohorts, and 4) religion raised in by birth cohorts. In addition, data from the 1988-2002 National Election Studies (NES) and the 1990 and 2001 American Religious Identification Studies (ARIS) are used to examine recent trends in current religion. The NES and ARIS are also nationally representative samples of adults living in households. More information on the NES can be found at www.umich.edu/~nes/ and for the ARIS see Kosmin and Lachman, 1993 and Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001.

The GSS measures religion with essentially a two-part question (see Appendix 1). The first part is the major religion question (**RELIG**) and it is followed by items on specific Protestant denomination (**DENOM**) or type of Judaism (**JEW**). Smaller, not-precoded Protestant denominations are separately recoded into the variable **OTHER**. References in this paper to "others" on religion are to mentions in the other category (code 5) on **RELIG** and not to the Protestant **OTHER** variable. A similar pair of items measure the religion that a person was raised in. The NES and ARIS measures are presented in Table 2.

Counting Protestants

Definitions

The proportion of Americans who are Protestants depends on how the group is defined and how surveys measure religion. First of all, the GSS defines Protestantism as including all post-Reformation Christian faiths. Thus, even churches like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints that differ on many theological issues from most other Protestant denominations are still counted as Protestant. The GSS Protestant figures also include a handful of people who follow a faith that might not be considered Christian. The main example is five followers of New Age Spirituality. These are included because they self-identified as Protestants and because New Age adherents include both those following other religions (e.g. Protestant denominations) with a New Age slant as well as those following only a separate New Age sect. People who mention New Age without saying they are Protestants are among the Others on the major religions variable. There are three New Age and one Eastern Religion/New Age identifiers there.

Not included are people who described themselves only as "Christian" and a few other Christian mentions that also did not indicate if they were Protestants. This latter group covers a total of 8 cases listed as "Charistic Renewal/Charismatic," "Christian/Buddhist," "Hebrew Christian," and "Metaphysical Christian." Finally, it does not include those identifying themselves as "Inter-/Non-Denominational" who did not indicate that

they were either Christian or Protestant.² Below the generic Christians and Inter-/Non-denominational groups are discussed further.

Obviously wider or narrower definitions of what counts as being "Protestant" will increase or decrease the estimated number of Protestants and the impact of definitions is considered further below.

Religious Preference Measures

Second of all, various forms of the religion question produce somewhat different distributions. Mentioning specific major religions in the question rather than merely asking people what their religion is increases the mentions of Protestants and other major religions (Smith, 1991). For example the GSS's "What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?" should produce more Protestants than the 1990 American Religious Identity Survey's "What is your religion?". This occurs for two reasons. First, even among Protestants, Protestantism is not most people's primary religious identification. Their primary identification is some specific denomination such as Southern Baptist, Episcopalian, or Assembly of God. Not mentioning Protestantism means that most people mention specific denominations and surveys sometimes fail to correctly classify some as Protestant.³ Second, not mentioning Protestantism encourages replies of Christian. These may represent generic Christians who should not be counted as Protestants, but may also include members of specific Protestant denominations who simply failed to provide more details. Thus, not mentioning Protestantism results in lower reports because of the incorrect coding of both more detailed religious identifications and insufficiently detailed identifications.

Also, mentions of Protestantism as well as other major religions are greater when "no religion" is not offered as an explicit choice (Hout and Fischer, 2002; Smith, 1991). Mentioning "no religion" in the question pulls weak or vestigial identifiers away from religious categories and into the nones. If none/no religion has to be volunteered by respondents, fewer people do so.

Taking these points together one would expect the lowest %

²This group is distinguished from those coded 70 on DENOM who are people who identified themselves as Protestants and then when asked, "What specific denomination is that, if any?" gave a response leading to the code "No denomination given or non-denominational church."

³Even when Protestant is mentioned some members of Protestant denominations do not select it. On the 2002 GSS 50% of initial other mentions on major religion (RELIG) were specific Protestant denominations and were recoded as such. These recoded Protestants represented about 13% of all Protestants in the 2002 GSS.

Protestant when no religion was explicitly mentioned and Protestant was not and the highest % Protestant when no religion was not mentioned and Protestant was. Limited available evidence suggests that these two wording effects might lead to a difference in % Protestant of about 3-5 percentage points between the lowest and highest versions.

Minimal and Maximum Estimates of Protestants

Table 1 shows the range of Protestant estimates across surveys by different definitions for the GSS, ARIS, and NES. On the GSS the minimum figures are those identifying as Protestant. The maximum figures adds in all Christians and inter-/non-denominationals, and some possible Protestants in the residual other religion category. The intermediate, estimated figure for the GSS adds in the proportion of Christians and Inter-/Nons in 1998-2002 who were raised as Protestant * the proportion in these groups in 2000 or 2002 plus some possible Protestants in the residual other religion category (0.1%). On the ARIS the minimum figure includes "Protestant - no denomination specified," but excludes "Christian - no denomination specified" and "Nondenominational." The maximum figures include both of the later. On the NES in 2000 the minimum figure excludes "Non-denominational Protestants," "Inter-denominational Protestants," and "Christian, Just Christian." The maximum figure includes all three. On the 2002 NES the minimum excludes "Just Protestant," "Non-denominational Protestant," "Christian, Just Christian," "Non-denominational Christian," and "Christian, NA Denomination." The maximum figure includes all of these.⁴ The estimate figure is what the NES reports on its summary, major religion variable.⁵

The three studies agree closely on their maximum estimates that Protestants are about 55-56% of the population. They differ more on the minimum estimates (46-53%). That is because the ARIS and NES minimums exclude groups that are almost certainly predominately Protestants (e.g. "Inter-denominational Protestant" and "Non-Denominational Protestants"),⁶ while the GSS range is narrower because the such groups do not appear in its data. Thus,

⁴The 2000 and 2002 NES are described separately here and elsewhere in the paper because NES used notably different questions in 1988 and 2002 vs. 1990-2000. See Table 2 for the wordings.

⁵The NES summary variable excludes 17 cases from the Protestant total from among the 100 cases in the Non-denominational Christian, Just Protestant/ Protestant, Christian NA denomination, and Christian/Just Christian categories.

⁶Based on their labels alone, one would assume all people in such groups were Protestants. But work with the GSS and other surveys indicates that non-Protestants and even non-Christians can wrongly be coded into such vague categories.

the minimum ARIS and NES estimates are clearly too low.

Trends

Current Religion by Year

On the GSSs the percent Protestant did not significantly vary from 1972 to 1993, averaging 62.8% (Table 2-IA).⁷ But between 1993 and 2002 Protestants monotonically declined from 63.1% to 52.4% (-10.7 points). This decline had a highly significant linear component of -1.0% percentage point per annum (prob.=.000), but also showed a significant deviation from the best linear fit (prob.=.021). This deviation consisted mostly of a decelerating decline slowing from -4.7 points between 1993 and 1994 to -0.15 points per year for 2000 to 2002.

The decline of Protestants over the last decade is confirmed by similar results from the 1990 and 2001 ARISs (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001) and the 1988-2002 and 1990-2000 NESs. The ARIS shows Protestants declining 9.4 percentage points (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001). The NES finds Protestants down 9.1 percentage points between 1988 and 2002 (Table 2-IIA). Between 1990 and 2000 the NES (Table 2-IIB) the trend is less stable, showing a decline of 4.4-8.6 percentage points.

Religion Raised in by Year

Looking at religion raised in (Table 2-IB), shows a similar pattern: a stable % Protestant for 1973-1993 averaging 64.7%, a linear decline from 64.0% in 1993 to 55.7% in 2002 (-8.3 points), and no statistically significant deviation from the best linear fit for 1993-2002.

The decline in proportion raised as Protestant indicates that the shift observed after 1993 was actually underway earlier. For the religion-raised-in variable, on average people are reporting on a period of 28-29 years prior to the survey (the average age of respondents was 44-45 in the 1994-2002 period and 16 is the age conventionally used to represent when respondents were raised in a religion). This means that on average the shift in religion raised in showing up in the surveys in 1994+ began occurring between about

⁷It is likely that the Protestant figures in 1972 and 1973 GSSs are slightly underreported. In 1973 10 of the 34 other cases were definitely Protestant denominations. Moving them to their proper category would increase Protestants to about 62.5%. It is likely that a similar situation occurred in 1972, but no definitive documentation exists (Smith, 1991). If a proportional number were moved from the 27 others, Protestants in 1972 would increase to 63.0%. These small changes have no effect on pre-1993 trends, but help to even out the slightly lower Protestant levels in those years.

1964 and 1974.

Changes Across Cohorts in Current and Religion Raised In

Protestant identification has been monotonically declining across birth cohorts from at least 1910 through the 1980+ cohort; falling from 73% to 41% (Table 3A).⁸ Similarly, the proportion raised as Protestant decreased from 75% for the pre-1910 cohort to 49% for the 1980+ cohort (Table 3B).

In sum, the share of the population identifying as Protestant has fallen by about 10 percentage points over the last decade both in terms of current religion and by about 9 percentage points for religion raised in. This decline follows a much longer and even larger decrease across birth cohorts. Taking the mid-GSS estimate in 2000-2002 that 53-54% are Protestant and the average annual decline over the 1993-2002 period would suggest that Protestants might cease to be a majority as early as 2005. Using the lower GSS estimate and the same trend line indicates that majority status could be lost as early as 2004.

Explanations for Protestant Decline

Mis- and Changing Classifications

First, the possibility that Protestants are declining because Protestants are being hidden in other categories is considered. Table 4 shows four categories among the others on the major religion variable that might contain Protestants. Two of the categories, people mentioning two major religions (e.g. Buddhist and Christian) and those mentioning some type of personal or general religion (e.g. all the same, different faiths, eclectic, independent, non-structured, personal, religion of my own creation, some other, use them all) are trivial in size, do not increase over time, and are unlikely to actually include hidden Protestants. But the remaining two other categories, Christians and inter- and non-denominationalists, are small, but growing, expanding in the 1990s and 2000s when Protestants are declining, and more plausibly could include Protestants. One hypothesis is that Protestants are being misclassified into these two categories. Sherkat (1999) has argued that "(t)here is a clear trend in classifying people who say they are simply 'Christian' as 'other' rather than putting them where they belong - which is in the Protestant classification with no

⁸The figures for the 1980+ cohort are not nearly as reliable as those for the earlier cohorts since a) the sample size is much smaller, b) data come only from the 1998-2002 GSSs, and c) no members are over 22. The last fact almost certainly means that the no religion level for current religion is exaggerated since few have settled down, married, and started families. These life cycle changes tend to increase religious attachments.

denomination.... This is an alarming finding. NORC is increasingly misclassifying respondents." He also assumes that the inter-/non-denominationals are "presumably also Christian" and thus Protestants.

These assertions are questionable. The Christian group remains small, but grew rapidly during the last decade. It is much less certain that they belong in the Protestant category. Analysis of what religion these people were raised in identifies only 32% as of Protestant origin and even for them this does not confirm that they still think of themselves as Protestant rather than generic Christians or something else. Moreover, NORC's questions and coding procedures have remained unchanged over since 1972 in the handling of "Christians". The reason there are more of them among the "others" on religion is that in response to the standard question more respondents are saying "Christian" across time. The reason that they are not in the Protestant, but non-denominational category is that they did not identify themselves as Protestant. While that is likely where some of them belong, their religious upbringing does not clearly or predominantly identify them as such.⁹ The same two points, uncertainty as to being Protestants and their growth reflecting a true change in expressed religious preference rather than any artifactual or errant shift in measurement, also applies to the even smaller, but also rapidly growing, group of inter-/non-denominational respondents.

Even if the extreme position is taken that Christians, inter-/non-denominationals, and possible Protestant others are all taken as Protestants, this would not explain most of the decline measured on the GSSs. Adding in these groups would indicate that 63.4% were Protestants in 1993 in 55.9% in 2002. This would represent a decrease of 7.5 percentage points compared to the unadjusted drop of 10.7 points. Even using this maximum adjustment 70% of the decline would still exist and be unexplained by these religious classifications. Thus, the idea that Protestants are being misclassified as Christian and inter- and non-denomination is not supported. But these categories do probably include both former Protestants and some who might still be considered Protestants and existing evidence makes it difficult to ascertain the size of these two groups.

Loss of Marginal Protestants

The loss of Protestants could represent marginal Protestants who ceased their tenuous Protestant affiliation and slipped into the growing no religion group and/or into the Christian and inter-/non-denominational groups.

It is likely that many of the lost Protestants are showing up among the no religion group which expanding notably just as the

⁹On the 2004 GSS additional information will be collected to try and identify the nature of this small, but rapidly growing, group.

Protestant share was shrinking (Hout and Fischer, 2002). However, nones are not drawn disproportionately from those raised as Protestants and this proportion has fallen rather than risen over time. In 1973-78 54% of those with no current religion were raised as Protestant, this fell to 48% in 1980-89, 44% in 1990-93, and to 41% in 1994-2002 (when the Protestant decline and rise of nones was occurring). What was changing was that more and more people with no current religion had been raised without a religion (from 13% in 1973-78 to 29% in 1994+).

Also, if the lost Protestants were slipping into nones, it would be likely that they were largely token Protestants who did not strongly identify with a Protestant denomination and attended church infrequently. If this were the case, one might expect the remaining Protestants to show more identification and greater church attendance. There is mixed evidence in support of this idea. Protestants in 1994-2002 were somewhat more likely to identify "strongly" with their denomination (45.0%) than in 1990-93 (42.3%) or in the 1970s and 1980s (respectively 41.1% and 44.1%). But church attendance among Protestants was down slightly in 1994-2002 (30.3% weekly or more often) compared to 32.1% attending weekly in 1990-93. Moreover, the drop after 1993 reversed a twenty-year rise in Protestant church attendance from 28.5% weekly in the 1970s to 31.1% in the 1980s, and then 32.1% in 1990-93. Because of these mixed results it is hard to describe the drop in Protestants as essentially representing the lost of the least active Protestants to the no religion group.

Next, the idea that the inter-/non-denominationals and Christians were mostly lapsed Protestants who had given up a preference for any particular denomination and were just barely holding on to a Christian affiliation through these choices is considered.

First, their religion of origin was examined. The plurality of Christians were raised as Christians (34.9%), 31.9% were raised as Protestants, 24.7% as Catholics, 7.2% as nones, and 1.2% in some other religion. This indicates that the group was not disproportionately drawn from Protestants and for about a third Christian was a stable identification. For the inter-/non-denominationals a plurality was raised as Protestant (49.1%), 29.6% as Catholic, 17.9% as inter-/non-denominational, 1.7% as Christian, and 1.7% as none. While a stable identification for less people than among the Christians, this group also did not disproportionately come from Protestants.

Second, neither Christians nor inter-/non-denominationals had profiles as token religionists. 61% of Christians rated their religion as "strong" as did 67% of the inter-/nons, compared to 46% of Protestants and 37% of Catholics. On attendance, 34% of the inter-/nons attend church weekly compared to 31% of Protestants and 29% of Catholics. Christians did attend marginally, but not significantly, less at 28%. Thus, these groups are at least as religiously active and attached as Protestants and Catholics and on average do not represent those with only a token religious preference. As such, they do not seem to represent a destination

for marginal, lapsed Protestants giving up on active engagement with religion.

Changes by Cohorts

As Table 5 shows, during the last decade Protestants held their own among the oldest cohorts (pre-1930), showed moderate declines of 5-9 percentage points among the middle cohorts (1930-1969), and had the largest drop (-16 points) among the youngest cohort (1970-1979).¹⁰ Thus, the recent decline is concentrated among the youngest adults.

Retention Rate

Protestantism is in decline in part because its retention rate fell after 1993. From 1973 to 1993 the rate was high and stable with 90.3% raised as Protestants still Protestants as adults (Table 6). The retention rate then steadily fell from 90.4% in 1993 to 82.7% in 2000 and then leveled-off at 82.8% in 2002. This represented a linear decline of 0.75 percentage points per annum (prob.=.000) with no statistically significant deviation (prob.=.177).

Immigration

Immigrants are less Protestant than the native-born population and thus the increasing level of immigration lowers the Protestant share of the population. Based on the 2000-02 GSSs immigrants are just over 10% of the adult population. Among all immigrants only 24.5% are Protestants, among those of childbearing age (under 45) 24.4% are Protestant, and among those under 45 with one or more child under 18 in their household 23.9% are Protestant. However, the impact of immigration on Protestants has been slowly building for at least four decades and while it helps to sustain the current decline, it can not explain the start of the decline in the mid-1990s or its recent rapid rate.

The recent Protestant decline comes in large part from the lost of younger adherents and a related drop in the retention rate. Cohort turnover and rising immigration also contribute to the decline. Many former Protestants are moving to the growing no religion category, but these religious nones are not disproportionately being drawn from Protestants. The small, but growing, Christian and inter-/non-denominational categories are also absorbing some former Protestants, but this is not due to misclassification nor do these groups predominately represent people with weak religious ties.

¹⁰The 1980+ cohort had not reached adulthood in 1989-1993 so it does not appear in this analysis.

Future Trends

Is the Protestant decline likely to reverse before its majority position is lost? The slowing of the decline with no statistically significant change between 2000 and 2002 suggests this possibility as does the stabilization of the Protestant retention rate at just under 83% in 2000 and 2002. Also, the addition of probable Protestants from among Christians and inter-/non-denominationals creates a greater margin above minority status. But the cohort analysis indicates that the majority is likely to disappear. In terms of both current religion and religion raised in Protestants have been declining across cohorts for decades. Moreover, Protestants have slipped below a majority among the youngest cohort (those raised in the 1980s). (But keep in mind the limited reliability of the figures for the youngest cohort.) Also, the Protestant loss has been greater among the youngest adults and the next generation of adults (i.e. those turning 18 over the next decade) is more likely to resemble the youngest current adults than older cohorts. Finally, the number and religious mix of the children of current immigrants and of future immigrants is likely to continue to be reduce the Protestant share in the population.¹¹ In sum, an array of social forces from cohort turnover, to immigration, to reduced retention rates, indicate that the Protestant share of the population will continue to shrink and they will soon lose their majority position in American society.

¹¹If past trends in immigration continue, the immigrant share of the population is likely to continue rising and both the minor children of current immigrants and future immigrants are likely to have relatively few Protestants, probably less than 25%. However, historically this has been somewhat off-set as the descendants of immigrants tend to become more Protestant than their immigrant forebears (Smith, 1992; Hunt, 1999).

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Table 1

Range of Contemporary Estimates of Protestants

| | Minimum | Estimate | Maximum |
|------|---------|----------|---------|
| GSS | | | |
| 2000 | 52.7 | 53.6 | 54.8 |
| 2002 | 52.4 | 53.8 | 55.9 |
| ARIS | | | |
| 2001 | 46.8 | ---- | 55.3 |
| NES | | | |
| 2000 | 47.3 | ---- | 54.6 |
| 2002 | 46.3 | 55.5 | 56.7 |

Source: GSS, ARIS, NES

Table 2
Religious Trends by Year

I. GSS

A. Current Religion

| Year | Protestant | Catholic | Jewish | None | Other | |
|------|------------|----------|--------|------|-------|--------|
| 1972 | 62.5 | 27.4 | 3.0 | 5.1 | 1.9 | (1605) |
| 1973 | 61.8 | 26.4 | 2.7 | 6.6 | 2.4 | (1500) |
| 1974 | 63.3 | 26.1 | 3.0 | 7.0 | 0.6 | (1483) |
| 1975 | 64.7 | 25.3 | 1.5 | 7.3 | 1.1 | (1488) |
| 1976 | 62.6 | 27.4 | 1.7 | 7.4 | 0.9 | (1497) |
| 1977 | 64.9 | 26.0 | 2.1 | 5.9 | 1.1 | (1523) |
| 1978 | 63.1 | 26.3 | 1.9 | 7.6 | 1.1 | (1529) |
| 1980 | 63.9 | 25.3 | 1.9 | 6.8 | 2.0 | (1464) |
| 1982 | 63.9 | 25.7 | 2.1 | 7.1 | 1.2 | (1498) |
| 1983 | 60.3 | 28.2 | 2.5 | 7.5 | 1.5 | (1594) |
| 1984 | 62.5 | 27.4 | 1.8 | 6.8 | 1.5 | (1461) |
| 1985 | 62.8 | 26.4 | 2.1 | 7.2 | 1.4 | (1528) |
| 1986 | 61.2 | 27.4 | 2.5 | 6.9 | 2.0 | (1467) |
| 1987 | 64.9 | 24.7 | 1.3 | 7.1 | 2.0 | (1461) |
| 1988 | 60.4 | 27.1 | 2.0 | 7.7 | 2.8 | (1480) |
| 1989 | 62.3 | 26.2 | 1.5 | 7.8 | 2.1 | (1533) |
| 1990 | 62.6 | 24.5 | 1.9 | 7.7 | 3.3 | (1368) |
| 1991 | 63.3 | 26.8 | 1.9 | 6.3 | 1.7 | (1516) |
| 1993 | 63.1 | 23.0 | 2.1 | 9.0 | 2.8 | (1596) |
| 1994 | 58.4 | 26.9 | 1.9 | 9.0 | 3.8 | (2982) |
| 1996 | 56.5 | 24.2 | 2.1 | 11.9 | 5.3 | (2900) |
| 1998 | 53.6 | 26.3 | 1.8 | 13.7 | 4.6 | (2792) |
| 2000 | 52.7 | 25.4 | 2.2 | 14.1 | 5.5 | (2813) |
| 2002 | 52.4 | 25.5 | 1.5 | 13.8 | 6.9 | (2749) |

Table 2 (continued)

B. Religion
Raised In

| Year | Protestant | Catholic | Jewish | None | Other | |
|------|------------|----------|--------|------|-------|--------|
| 1973 | 64.3 | 29.0 | 2.8 | 2.3 | 1.6 | (1500) |
| 1974 | 65.3 | 28.1 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 0.5 | (1482) |
| 1975 | 68.3 | 26.5 | 1.7 | 2.8 | 0.8 | (1490) |
| 1976 | 63.8 | 29.8 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 1.2 | (1498) |
| 1977 | 67.7 | 26.7 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 1.0 | (1524) |
| 1978 | 65.7 | 28.2 | 2.1 | 3.2 | 0.8 | (1525) |
| 1980 | 66.1 | 27.4 | 1.9 | 3.5 | 1.1 | (1465) |
| 1982 | 65.2 | 27.9 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 1.4 | (1499) |
| 1983 | 62.4 | 30.8 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 0.7 | (1590) |
| 1984 | 64.1 | 29.3 | 2.0 | 3.0 | 1.7 | (1452) |
| 1985 | 64.5 | 28.7 | 2.1 | 4.0 | 0.7 | (1529) |
| 1986 | 63.9 | 29.0 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 1.9 | (1468) |
| 1987 | 66.8 | 27.2 | 1.4 | 3.1 | 1.5 | (1446) |
| 1988 | 62.9 | 29.4 | 2.1 | 3.6 | 2.1 | (1481) |
| 1989 | 62.3 | 29.8 | 1.8 | 2.8 | 2.3 | (1533) |
| 1990 | 64.3 | 26.9 | 1.9 | 5.1 | 1.9 | (1367) |
| 1991 | 63.2 | 29.8 | 2.1 | 3.5 | 1.3 | (1515) |
| 1993 | 64.0 | 27.4 | 2.2 | 4.4 | 2.1 | (1596) |
| 1994 | 60.6 | 30.7 | 1.7 | 4.3 | 2.6 | (2983) |
| 1996 | 58.7 | 29.8 | 2.1 | 5.7 | 3.7 | (2901) |
| 1998 | 57.8 | 31.3 | 1.8 | 5.9 | 3.2 | (2798) |
| 2000 | 56.4 | 31.0 | 2.3 | 6.8 | 3.5 | (2803) |
| 2002 | 55.7 | 30.7 | 1.9 | 7.2 | 4.5 | (2748) |

Source: 1973-2002 GSS

II. NES

A. 1988 and 2002

| | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|--------|
| 1988 | 64.6 | 23.7 | 1.5 | 8.7 | 1.4 | (2040) |
| 2002 | 55.5 | 27.1 | 1.6 | 11.4 | 4.3 | (1511) |

B. 1990-2000

| | | | | | | |
|------|------|------|-----|------|-----|--------|
| 1990 | 58.9 | 24.8 | 1.8 | 13.4 | 1.1 | (1980) |
| 1992 | 59.0 | 23.5 | 1.8 | 13.7 | 2.0 | (2488) |
| 1994 | 56.1 | 24.4 | 1.7 | 14.8 | 3.1 | (1794) |
| 1996 | 57.9 | 25.6 | 1.6 | 13.4 | 1.5 | (1714) |
| 1998 | 50.4 | 31.0 | 2.0 | 14.2 | 2.4 | (1281) |
| 2000 | 54.6 | 26.6 | 1.9 | 14.2 | 2.7 | (1807) |

Source: 1988-2002 NES

Table 2 (continued)

Question Wording:

GSS: See Appendix 1.

NES: 1972-1988, 2002 - Is your religious reference Protestant, (Roman) Catholic, Jewish, or something else? "Roman" added in 2002. 1990-2000 - Lots of things come up to keep people from attending religious services even if they want to. Thinking about your life these days, do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms, or funerals? IF R ATTENDS RELIGIOUS SERVICES: Do you mostly attend a place of worship that is Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or something else? IF R DOES NOT ATTEND RELIGIOUS SERVICES: Regardless of whether you now attend any religious services, do you ever think of yourself as part of a particular church or denomination? IF R DOES NOT ATTEND CHURCH BUT THINKS OF SELF AS PART OF CHURCH OR DENOMINATION: Do you consider yourself Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or something else? People who answer "No" to the attend item and "No" to the part-of item are considered to be nones on religion. "Other" includes DK and missing cases on NES.

ARIS: 1990 - What is your religion? 2001 - What is your religion, if any?

Table 3

Religious Trends by Birth Cohorts

A. Current Religion

| | Protestant | Catholic | Jewish | None | Other | |
|-----------|------------|----------|--------|------|-------|--------|
| Cohorts | | | | | | |
| Pre-1910 | 73.4 | 20.4 | 2.3 | 3.2 | 0.7 | (2148) |
| 1910-1919 | 69.6 | 22.8 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 0.9 | (3503) |
| 1920-1929 | 67.1 | 25.4 | 2.6 | 3.7 | 1.1 | (5225) |
| 1930-1939 | 65.7 | 25.5 | 2.0 | 5.1 | 1.7 | (5536) |
| 1940-1949 | 59.9 | 26.9 | 2.2 | 8.5 | 2.6 | (7775) |
| 1950-1959 | 56.4 | 26.9 | 1.8 | 11.3 | 3.6 | (9291) |
| 1960-1969 | 53.1 | 27.0 | 1.2 | 13.0 | 4.8 | (6165) |
| 1970-1979 | 44.9 | 28.0 | 1.3 | 19.1 | 6.6 | (2757) |
| 1980+ | 41.0 | 23.3 | 1.7 | 27.0 | 7.0 | (319) |

B. Religion
Raised In

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|------|-----|------|-----|--------|
| Pre-1910 | 75.0 | 20.1 | 2.7 | 1.7 | 0.5 | (1897) |
| 1910-1919 | 70.2 | 23.2 | 3.0 | 2.5 | 1.1 | (3243) |
| 1920-1929 | 68.6 | 25.0 | 2.7 | 2.4 | 1.3 | (4879) |
| 1930-1939 | 66.5 | 26.4 | 2.1 | 3.6 | 1.3 | (5305) |
| 1940-1949 | 63.1 | 29.6 | 2.3 | 3.3 | 1.7 | (7426) |
| 1950-1959 | 59.3 | 32.8 | 1.9 | 4.0 | 1.9 | (9111) |
| 1960-1969 | 55.3 | 33.6 | 1.3 | 6.4 | 3.5 | (6156) |
| 1970-1979 | 50.5 | 33.3 | 1.5 | 9.9 | 4.9 | (2755) |
| 1980+ | 49.4 | 27.0 | 1.7 | 13.2 | 8.7 | (319) |

Source: 1972-2002 GSS

Table 4

Changes in Other on Religion

| | 1972-1978 | 1989-1989 | 1990-2002 | |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------|
| A. All Years | | | | |
| Two Major Religions | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Inter-/Non-denominational | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.5 | |
| Christian | 0.0 | 0.2 | 1.2 | |
| Personal/Other | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | |
| | 1990-1996 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 |
| B. 1990s | | | | |
| Inter-/Non-denominational | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Christian | 0.8 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 2.3 |

Table 5

Changes in Protestants among Cohorts, 1989-1993 to 2000-2002

| Cohort | % Protestant | | Change |
|---------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| | 1989-1993 | 2000-2002 | |
| 1910-19 | 70.2 | 70.5 | +0.3 |
| 1920-29 | 67.7 | 68.3 | +0.6 |
| 1930-39 | 70.0 | 64.9 | -5.1 |
| 1940-49 | 66.0 | 57.5 | -8.5 |
| 1950-59 | 58.0 | 53.1 | -4.9 |
| 1960-69 | 56.7 | 48.0 | -8.7 |
| 1970-79 | 59.0 | 43.2 | -15.8 |
| 1980+ | ---- | 41.4 | --- |

Source: 1989-1993, 2000-2002 GSS

Table 6

Protestant Retention

% Raised as Protestant
Still Protestant

Year

| | |
|------|------|
| 1973 | 90.5 |
| 1974 | 90.8 |
| 1975 | 89.1 |
| 1976 | 91.3 |
| 1977 | 90.1 |
| 1978 | 90.3 |
| 1980 | 90.8 |
| 1982 | 91.3 |
| 1983 | 89.7 |
| 1984 | 91.8 |
| 1985 | 90.4 |
| 1986 | 89.1 |
| 1987 | 90.4 |
| 1988 | 89.1 |
| 1989 | 89.1 |
| 1990 | 89.2 |
| 1991 | 91.2 |
| 1993 | 90.4 |
| 1994 | 87.1 |
| 1996 | 86.2 |
| 1998 | 83.8 |
| 2000 | 82.7 |
| 2002 | 82.8 |

Source: 1972-2002 GSS

Appendix: GSS Religion Questions

(GSS mnemonics in **bold**)

1. What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion? **RELIG**

- 1 Protestant
- 2 Catholic
- 3 Jewish
- 4 None
- 5 OTHER (SPECIFY RELIGION AND/OR CHURCH DENOMINATION)

IF RELIG = 3, GO TO **JEW**

IF RELIG = 1, GO TO **DENOM**

a. What specific denomination is that, if any? **DENOM**
(INTERVIEWER: PROBE FOR COMPLETE NAME OF DENOMINATION)

- 10 American Baptist Association
- 11 American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A
- 12 National Baptist Convention of America
- 13 National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc
- 14 Southern Baptist Convention
- 15 Other Baptist Churches
- 18 Baptist, Don't know which
- 20 African Methodist Episcopal Church
- 21 African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- 22 United Methodist Church
- 23 Other Methodist Churches
- 28 Methodist, Don't know which
- 30 American Lutheran Church
- 31 Lutheran Church in America
- 32 Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod
- 33 Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
- 34 Other Lutheran Churches
- 35 Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
- 38 Lutheran, Don't know which
- 40 Presbyterian Church in the United States
- 41 United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
- 42 Other Presbyterian Churches
- 43 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- 48 Presbyterian, Don't know which
- 50 EPISCOPAL CHURCH
- 60 OTHER (SPECIFY)*
- 70 NO DENOMINATION GIVEN OR NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

IF **DENOM** EQUALS 35 or 43.

PROBE: Do you know the name of your denomination prior to the merger?

Appendix 1 (continued)

IF RELIG EQUALS 3:

Do you consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or none of these? **JEW**

- 1 Orthodox
- 2 Conservative
- 3 Reform
- 4 None of these

* Denominations specified under code 60 on **DENOM** are recoded into the variable **OTHER**. For the coding of **OTHER** see Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 2003.