

Protestants may lose majority status: Family size, immigration are factors

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Protestants could cease to be the majority religious group in the United States within the next year, and their numbers already may have dipped below 50 percent, says a new study by the National Opinion Research Center.

From 1972, when the University of Chicago-based NORC began its General Social Survey, until 1993, the Protestant share of the population remained constant, averaging 62.8 percent. It then began to show a decline, reaching 52.4 percent in 2002.

The study said that fewer children were being raised in Protestant homes in the past four decades. Those saying they have no religion increased from 5 percent in 1972 to nearly 14 percent in 2002.

Immigration is another factor. But the study said that “while it helps to sustain the current decline, it cannot explain the start of the decline in the mid-1990s or its recent rapid rate.”

U.S. Catholics have remained steady at one-fourth of the population. After reviewing the NORC report, sociologist R. Stephen Warner of the University of Illinois at Chicago told the *Chicago Sun-Times*: “Christianity is becoming a religion of people of color. Part of this is the decline of the WASP.”