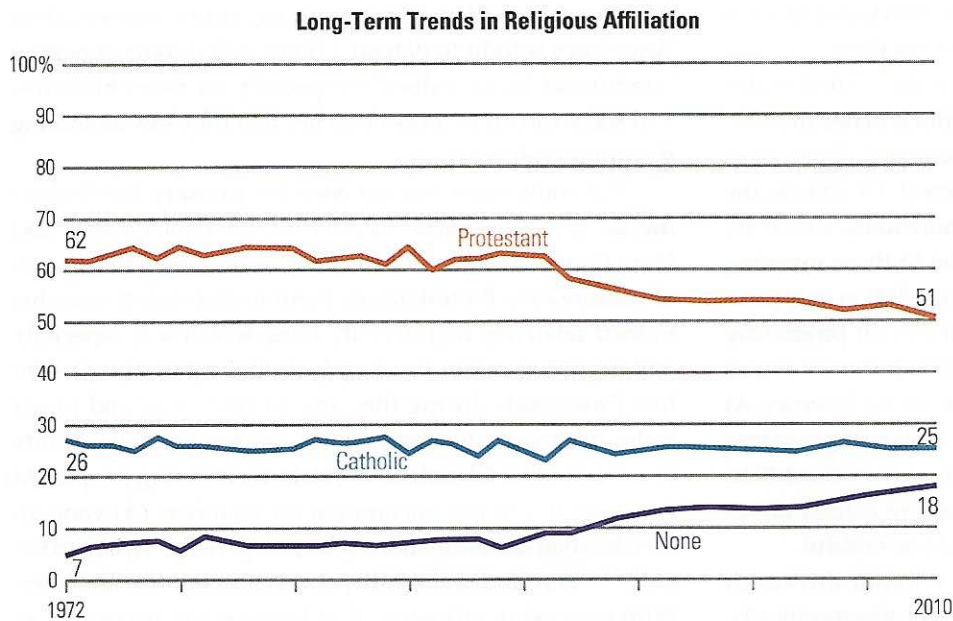


Figure 14.7 An Increasing Percentage of All Americans Have No Religion

SOURCE: General Social Surveys, 1972–2010. Other religious affiliations and those who did not give an answer are not shown. Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation.”

The Future Decline of Religion in America?

14.5.3 Identify signs that religiosity in America is declining.

It is likely that no single reason uniquely accounts for American exceptionalism in religion, but that several or all factors work together to make the United States different. However, it is not clear how long that difference will be sustained. There are signs that religiosity in America may be moving in the European direction, particularly if we just focus on native-born Americans and ignore the effects of continuing high rates of immigration.

Currently, surveys indicate that the fastest growing religion in the United States is “no religious preference.” From 2.7 percent in 1960, and 8 percent a decade ago, the number of people so identifying themselves has grown to about 20 percent today (Hout, Fischer, and Chaves 2013). Further, because young people are much more likely to think of themselves as not religious, that percentage is almost certain to increase in the near future. Explore the data in Figure 14.7 to see how the increasing percentage of Americans with no religious preference compares to the changes in Catholic and Protestant membership.

Indeed, if not for immigration from Latin America, the Catholic Church in the United States would be seen as hemorrhaging believers. Twenty years ago Catholics made up about 22 percent of the American people. Today the percentage is about the same, despite the fact that about 80 percent of the enormous numbers of recent immigrants to America (especially from Mexico and Central America) have been Catholic. Moreover, the Catholic Church is

having great difficulty finding men to take up religious vocations and become priests (although to be sure, the Catholic Church could end that particular problem if they simply allowed women to become priests, or allowed priests to marry). Increasingly, priests are being imported from other countries to fill the ranks.

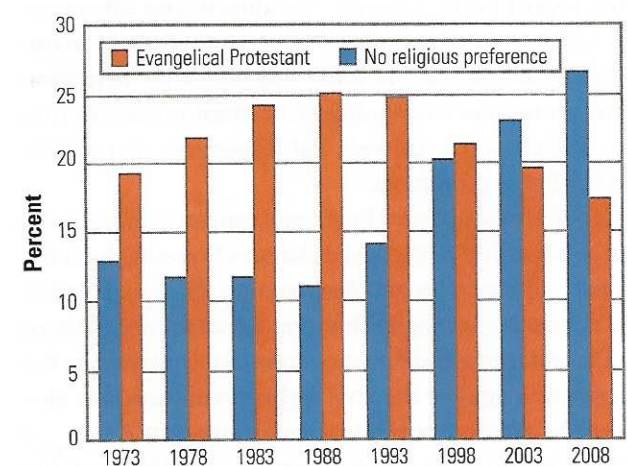
We can also expect the relative number of conservative Protestants to decline over the coming decades. As conservative Protestants have become more urban and educated, differences between their birth rates and those of other Americans have declined. Evangelical intellectuals are already complaining that they are losing their young to more secular orientations. Figure 14.8 (based on Putnam and Campbell 2010:125) is a dramatic summary of trends among

youth aged 18 to 29, comparing those who declare themselves to be evangelicals with those who say that they have no religious preference (“nones”). The contrasting projections are stark and argue for continued secularization in America.

The Rise of Religion in the Rest of the World

14.5.4 Identify possible explanations for the increase in religious persons around the world.

As Norris and Inglehart (2004) conclude, a good case can be made for the secularization hypothesis in the developed modern world, and even in the United States (although

Figure 14.8 Evangelicals and “Nones” Among American Youth (Ages 18–29), 1973–2008

SOURCE: Based on data from Putnam and Campbell (2010).