

Applauding diversity: Enough of one-religion nationalism

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [August 24, 2004](#) issue

Protestants are about to become a minority in the U.S. after almost four centuries of numerical superiority and cultural dominance. A new study by the National Opinion Research Center reports that by the end of the year Protestants will probably make up less than 50 percent of the population.

The proportion of Roman Catholics in the population has remained stable at 25 percent. And the overwhelming majority of Americans continue to identify themselves as Christian.

So what is happening? The data suggest that the population cohort that is significantly growing is those who declare no religious affiliation. That suggests that people are dropping out of churches, or that young adults are taking their traditional leave of absence from organized religion and not returning as they used to.

Another interesting thing has been happening as well, namely a dramatic increase in the nation's religious diversity. And that, I maintain, is a good thing. In fact, I'm proud of that. The world has had quite enough of one-religion nationalism recently.

Two hundred twenty-eight years ago the Founders who gathered in Philadelphia could have created a "Protestant nation" or a "Christian nation," but they didn't. Thirteen years later they formulated a constitution that included the radical concept of a religiously neutral state, a state in which citizens would be free to choose their religious commitments or choose not to be religious at all. Many people at the time thought that Thomas Jefferson's "fair experiment" would not work. But it did, in spite of persistent efforts over the centuries to turn us into a "Christian nation" or a "Judeo-Christian nation," despite battles over issues like whether the Ten Commandments should be posted in a courtroom.

That precious religious liberty is one of the best things about this country. If surrendering majority status is one of the results, I applaud it.