

Is Religion Growing or Dying?

Objective:

- 1) Introduce some of the theories that predict either the decline or growth of religion.
- 2) Their associated concepts and measures
- 3) Familiarize students with online research tools

Activity:

Under “QuickLists” and “Compare Regions,” choose “[Atheists \(2005\)](#)”. Work with students to compare and contrast those regions with the highest percentage of atheists with those regions with the lowest percentage of atheists and how secularization theorists would explain these differences.

Assessment:

Ask students (in small groups or individually) to build a case for whether the United States shows signs of secularization or not. Students should utilize the National Profile for the [United States](#). The [Public Opinion](#) tab located on the National Profile page may be particularly useful for this exercise. Students can also [compare](#) the United States with other countries.

Divide students into two groups with each defending either the Secularization perspective or the Rational Choice/Religious Economies perspective utilizing evidence and data at the international or national levels from The ARDA ([National Profiles](#), [Regional Profiles](#), [Compare Nations](#), and [Compare Regions](#) may be particularly useful)

In the [Learning Modules](#) section of the [Learning Activities](#) area of Teaching Tools on The ARDA, direct students to complete the Mormons>Exploring Denominations: [Mormons In America](#) learning module. In their analysis of the growth trend of this religious group, students should utilize theories and concepts discussed in class (Religious Economies, Strictness, Sub-Cultural Identity, Pluralism)

Suggested readings:

Chaves, Mark. 2011. “The Decline of American Religion?” (ARDA Guiding Paper Series). State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, from <http://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>.

“[Church/Sect Cycle](#)” in the Religion Dictionary in Teaching Tools on The ARDA

Finke, Roger. 2011. “An Unsecular America.” In *Sociology of Religion: A Reader* (2nd edition), S. Monahan, W. Mirola, and M. Emerson (eds.), pp. 238-249. Pearson.

“[Religious Economies](#)” in the Religion Dictionary in Teaching Tools on The ARDA

“[Secularization](#)” in the Religion Dictionary in Teaching Tools on The ARDA



[“Strictness Theory”](#) in the Religion Dictionary in Teaching Tools on The ARDA

[“Sub-Cultural Identity Theory”](#) in the Religion Dictionary in Teaching Tools on The ARDA