

Contemporary Theorizing about Religion: Secularization

Objective:

- 1) Introduce the secularization perspective
- 2) Compare and contrast a.) various secularization theories, b.) their associated concepts and measures, c.) and their relationship to classical theories
- 3) Familiarize students with online research tools

Activity:

Secularization has a number of related concepts including [Irreligion](#), [Pluralism](#), [Religiosity](#), [Religious Behavior](#), [Religious Belief](#), [Unchurched](#), and [Religious Regulation](#). Note the use of similar concepts and measures for the [Rational Choice/Religious Economies](#) perspective and how each theory uses those concepts and measures to support its claim.

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.

Suggested readings:

- Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy*. Anchor Books. Ch. 2-3, 5-6, Appendix 2
- Christiano, Kevin J., William H. Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto. 2002. *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*. AltaMira. Ch. 3.
- Chaves, Mark. 1994. “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority.” *Social Forces* 72(3):749-74.
- Chaves, Mark. 2011. “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority.” In *Sociology of Religion: A Reader* (2nd edition), S. Monahan, W. Mirola, and M. Emerson (eds.), pp. 250-264. Pearson.
- 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 <https://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>.
- Davie, Grace. 2011. “Thinking Sociologically about Religion: A Step Change in the Debate?” (ARDA Guiding Paper Series). State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, from <https://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>.



- Demerath III, N. J. 2007. "Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed." In *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, J.A. Beckford and N.J. Demerath (eds.), pp. 19-38. London.
- Demerath, N. J. 2011. "Secularization and Sacralization: Deconstructed and Reconstructed." In *Sociology of Religion: A Reader* (2nd edition), S. Monahan, W. Mirola, and M. Emerson (eds.), pp. 265-284. Pearson.
- Emerson, Michael O., William A. Mirola, and Susanne C. Monahan. 2011. *Religion Matters: What Sociology Teaches Us about Religion in Our World*. Allyn & Bacon. Ch. 5.
- Esposito, John L. 2010. "Rethinking Islam and Secularism" (ARDA Guiding Paper Series). State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, from <https://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>.
- Froese, Paul. 2008. *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*. California.
- Gorski, Philip S. 2003. "Historicizing the Secularization Debate: An Agenda for Research." In *The Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, M. Dillon (ed.), pp. 110-122. Cambridge.
- Gorski, Philip S. 2010. "Civil Religion Today" (ARDA Guiding Paper Series). State College, PA: The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, from <https://www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers.asp>.
- Norris, Pippa and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Keith and David Yamane. 2011. *Religion in the Sociological Perspective*, 5th edition. Sage. Ch. 13.
- Smith, Christian. 2003. *The Secular Revolution*. California. Ch. 1.
- Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith*. California. Introduction, Ch. 3. "[Secularization](#)" in "Religion Dictionary" in the Teaching Tools on The ARDA
- Wilson, Bryan. 2011. "Secularization and Its Discontents." In *Sociology of Religion: A Reader* (2nd edition), S. Monahan, W. Mirola, and M. Emerson (eds.), pp. 229-237. Pearson.