

HDS 3187 Global Religious Change: Babies, Converts, Migrants
Fall 2025, Monday 12pm–2:45pm
Rockefeller Hall 117

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Office hours: Tuesday 11am–1pm, and by appointment via email. Any changes in office hours will be communicated via Canvas announcements.

Course Description

This course uses social scientific perspectives to understand religious change in the 20th and 21st centuries by investigating six dynamics: births/deaths (fertility), converts in/converts out (switching), and emigration/immigration (migration). Students will be introduced to important debates in the sociology of religion such as theories of religious change and issues related to data availability, interpretation, and communication. Relevant questions include: What data sources exist to interpret religious/non-religious global trends? Is the world becoming more or less religious? Under what conditions does an individual or community switch religions? What causes declines in fertility rates, and how do rates differ by religion? Will Islam become the world's largest religion and, if so, by when and how? How does migration effect religious belief and practice? By investigating the six dynamics of religious change in the past, we can make reasonable assumptions for the religious and non-religious future. Case studies detailed in the course include the growth of Islam in Europe, Christianity's demographic shift to the global South, the Jewish diaspora, and religious decline in the West. Students will have the opportunity to write a final research paper or a demographic report.

Course Goals

- Develop a historical framework for global religious change in the 20th century.
- Articulate how the six dynamics of religious change have impacted different religious groups in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Increase quantitative literacy through analyses of censuses, surveys, and other data on religion at the country, regional, and global levels.
- Engage with quantitative data on religion by producing maps, charts, and graphs using publicly available data and online tools.
- Increase knowledge of themes, debates, and conversations in the sociology of religion as they relate to quantitative studies and demography.

Required Texts

You are not required to purchase books for this class, though you may if you wish.

- Jenkins, Philip. *Fertility and Faith: The Demographic Revolution and the Transformation of World Religions*. Baylor University Press, 2020.
- Kaufmann, Eric. *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-first Century*. Profile, 2010.
- Articles or chapters as assigned per class session, available on Canvas.

Recommended Texts

Many of these texts are for reference only, if you'd like more information on a topic. We will read selections from the books marked with an asterisk.

- Bader, Christopher D., and Roger Finke. *Faithful Measures: New Methods in the Measurement of Religion*. New York University Press, 2017.
- Christiano, Kevin J., Peter Kivisto, and William H. Swatos, Jr. *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*. 4th ed. Rowman & Littlefield, 2025.
- Criado-Perez, Caroline. *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Abrams Press, 2021.
- *Dorling, Danny, and Stuart Gietel-Basten, *Why Demography Matters*. Polity Press, 2018.
- Iyer, Sriya. *Demography and Religion in India*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- *Johnson, Todd M., and Brian J. Grim. *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Lehrer, Evelyn L. *Religion, Economics, and Demography: The Effects of Religion on Education, Work, and the Family*. Routledge, 2009.
- *McCann, Carole R. *Figuring the Population Bomb: Gender and Demography in the Mid-Twentieth Century*. University of Washington Press, 2017.
- Short, John Rennie. *Demography and the Making of the Modern World*. Agenda Publishing, 2024.
- Skirbekk, Vegard. *Decline and Prosper! Changing Global Birth Rates and the Advantages of Fewer Children*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Assignments

All assignments are due the day and time indicated below and should be submitted on Canvas. Assignments will be docked half a letter grade each day they are late. If you need an extension, email at least five days before the due date. SAT/UNSAT: all assignments must be fulfilled at a passing grade (C or higher).

- **Class attendance and one-on-one meeting (5%)**
 - Weekly attendance is crucial to get the most out of this course. Students are expected to complete the weekly readings on time and come to class prepared for discussion.
 - Set up a time to meet with Dr. Zurlo for 30 minutes in **the first month of class**, preferably in person, but Zoom can be an option. This is an informal meeting to answer any questions about the course and if applicable, discuss accommodations.
 - Meeting must be completed by **Monday, October 6**.
- **Weekly reading responses (15%)**
 - Summarize your thoughts, reflections, and responses to the weekly readings in a 3-page double spaced paper. You will receive feedback on each paper every week. Students are allowed one “skip” week during the semester.
 - Papers are **due by midnight** the day before class.
- **Vocabulary quiz (10%)**
 - There will be one in-class quiz during the semester on the terms in the shared vocabulary bank. See Canvas Collaborations for access to the shared Google doc.
 - Date of quiz will be announced one week prior.

- **Learning modules on the ARDA (20%)**
 - The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) has dozens of learning modules to help students become familiar with reading and interpreting quantitative data on religion. Students will use these modules to familiarize themselves with ARDA resources as well as learn how to read and analyze data in codebooks.
 - Choose **two topics from each** of these categories on the [Learning Modules page](#): Demographics, U.S., and International, plus “Operationalizing Concepts” and “Populations and Sampling” from the Research category (**eight modules** in total). Download the module in Word format. Follow the steps of each module to find the appropriate dataset, variables, etc. on the ARDA. Fill in the tables with data and answer the analytical questions.
 - Students will lead in-class discussions on what they learned from the modules.
 - **Learning modules due Sunday, October 12 by midnight on Canvas.** In-class discussions will be on October 20.
- **Data visualization project (20%)**
 - Students will use free online data visualization tools (Venngage, Canva, Tableau, DataWrapper, etc.) to create graphs on religion using data from the *World Religion Database*, *World Christian Database*, and/or the Association of Religion Data Archives. Students will make a series of 10 visualizations and present them to the class in a slide deck. What story can you tell with data?
 - Visualizations include, but are not limited to, line graphs, world/regional/country/province maps, scatterplots, radar graphs, heat maps, bar charts, and pie charts. Refer to the [Data Visualization Catalogue](#) for inspiration. In the notes of your slide deck, write a brief statement about why you chose that particular visualization and some of your design decisions.
 - **Data visualization slide decks due Sunday, November 9 by midnight on Canvas.** In class presentations will be on December 1.
- **Final paper or demographic report: Case study on global religious change (30%)**
 - Students will choose a topic and either write a research paper (more text than visualizations) or a demographic report (equal text and visualizations) showcasing an understanding of the dynamics of religious change.
 - Examples of topics include a comparative study of Christianity and Islam in the 20th and 21st centuries; longitudinal analysis of Judaism in the USA and Israel; the determinants of fertility in the shaping of religion; the impact of women’s educational attainment on religious attitudes, beliefs, and affiliation.
 - Page length requirements (including visualizations):
 - Bachelors: 18–20pp
 - Masters: 20–25pp
 - PhD: 25–30pp
 - Timeline of deadlines
 - October 17: Topic
 - October 31: Thesis
 - November 14: Outline
 - December 1: Preliminary draft (optional)
 - **Final paper/report due Monday, December 15 by midnight on Canvas.**

Schedule of Classes

This schedule is subject to change. Refer to the weekly pages on Canvas for the most up-to-date readings. Readings are due the day they are assigned. It is a good practice to take notes when you read so you are ready to discuss the material during class.

September 8: Course introduction

- Introductions, review syllabus, course expectations
- Global religious change, 1900–2075

No reading this week.

September 15: Social science in history

- History of American sociology of religion
- Gendered battles over “pure” vs. “applied” research
- Global population history

Readings

- Kaufmann, chapter 2
- Carole R. McCann, *Figuring the Population Bomb: Gender and Demography in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (University of Washington Press, 2017), chapters 1 and 3.
- Danny Dorling and Stuart Gietel-Basten, *Why Demography Matters*, Introduction and chapter 1
- Suggested reading
 - Anthony Flew, Introduction to Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 7–56.
 - Thomas Malthus, *A Summary View of the Principle of Population* (Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 219–272.
 - Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (Ballantine Books, 1968), pp. 1–44.

September 22: Introducing the six dynamics of religious change

- Births/deaths; conversion in/conversion out; immigration/emigration
- Major sources of quantitative data on religion
- Data from surveys, censuses, and religious communities

Readings

- Jenkins, chapters 1–4
- Suggested reading
 - Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), chapters 5–9.

September 29: Religion & fertility

- Guest lecturer via Zoom: Dr. Vegard Skirbekk, Professor of Population Economics at Columbia University and the Norwegian Institute of Public Health

- Trends in global fertility, fertility differentials by religion
- Introduction to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)

Readings

- Jenkins, chapters 5–9
- Kaufmann, chapter 3
- Suggested reading
 - Everton E.C. Lima et al., "Cohort Fertility Trends and Religion Affiliation in Latin America: A Glimpse Through Time," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6 (2019): 252–81.
 - Vegard Skirbekk, et al., "Is Buddhism the Low Fertility Religion of Asia?" *Demographic Research* 32, no. 1 (2015): 1–28.
 - Danny Dorling and Stuart Gietel-Basten, *Why Demography Matters*, section of chapter 3, "Adding education to population forecasts"

One-on-one meeting must be completed by October 6

October 6: Religious switching & conversion

- Theories of religious conversion
- Data visualization: online datasets and tools

Readings

- Kaufmann, introduction and chapter 1
- Robert J. Barro and Rachel McCleary, "Religious Conversion Across Countries," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 32046 (2024).

October 10: ARDA learning modules due by midnight on Canvas

October 13: No class, Indigenous Peoples' Day

October 20: Religion & migration

- Case study: Islam in Europe
- Student-led discussions of ARDA Learning Modules

Readings

- Pew Research Center, "The Religious Composition of the World's Migrants" (2024)
 - Required: Introduction (pp.7–12), Section 1 (pp.13–21), Section 2 (pp.22–41), and Section 4 on Muslims (pp.52–57).
 - Suggested reading: sections on Christians, unaffiliated, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews, methodology.
- Hackett, et al., "Projections of Europe's Growing Muslim Population Under Three Migration Scenarios," *Journal of Religion and Demography* 6, no. 1 (2019): 87–122.
- Kaufmann, chapters 4 & 5

October 27: Data visualization

- Dr. Zurlo is traveling; meet Tony at the Multimedia Lab at Lamont Library

- Class may be shortened this session

November 3: Case study: World Christianity

- Christianity's demographic shift to the global South
- Sub-Saharan Africa: conversions, births, and population boom

Readings

- Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1–19.
- Alexander Chow, Emma Wild-Wood, and Nuam Hatzaw, "Global Christians in Edinburgh," 2nd ed. (2024)
- Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, 6th ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 167–223.

November 7: Data visualizations due by midnight on Canvas

November 10: Case study: Judaism Worldwide

- Longitudinal data on Judaism
- Fertility differentials by tradition
- Mini case study: Kiryas Joel in Monroe, New York

Readings

- Sergio DellaPergola, "Notes Toward a Demographic History of the Jews," *Genealogy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 1–29.
- Kaufmann, chapter 6
- Carole R. McCann, *Figuring the Population Bomb: Gender and Demography in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (University of Washington Press, 2017), conclusion.
- Suggested reading: Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population, 2023," *American Jewish Yearbook 2023* (Springer, 2024), 309–422.

November 17: Is the world becoming more or less religious?

- Special session at the Center for the Study of World Religions
- Guest speaker: Dr. Conrad Hackett, Associate Director of Research and Senior Demographer, Pew Research Center

Readings

- Rodney Stark, "Secularization, RIP," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999): 249–73.
- José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), introduction, chapters 1, 2, 8
- Pew Research Center, "How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020," (2025), introduction (pp.8–17), section 1 (pp.31–44), and section 4 (pp.59–65)
- Kaufmann, chapter 7

November 24: No class (American Academy of Religion and Thanksgiving Week)

December 1: Course wrap up & presentations

- Present data visualization slide decks

Final paper/report due Monday, December 15 by midnight on Canvas

Accessibility

Students requesting accommodations or with accessibility needs for this course should contact student services as soon as possible (accessibility@hds.harvard.edu). You will need to provide a request of the accommodations sought and documentation of the functional limitations due to medical circumstances or a disability that substantiates your request. Students who are registered in GSAS or FAS should contact the Accessible Education Office, AEO@fas.harvard.edu.

Policy on Collaboration

You are encouraged to consult with one another on papers, and you may also share library resources. You may find it useful to discuss your ideas with your peers, but you should ensure that the written papers you submit for evaluation are the result of your own research and reflect your own approach to the topic.

Religious Holy Days

Please speak with the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester if you must miss a class, examination, or course requirement due to a religious observance. Please know that Massachusetts state law specifies that all students who must miss a class, exam, or course requirement because of a religious observance shall be provided with an opportunity to make up the requirement on another day, so long as this does not create an unreasonable burden for the school.

Policy on Generative AI

HDS, and Harvard University as a whole, encourage responsible experimentation with generative AI (GAI) tools, but there are important considerations to keep in mind when using these tools, including (a) information security and data privacy, (b) copyright and intellectual property issues, (c) the trustworthiness of content they generate, (d) expectations of the specific instructors of courses for which you might use it, and (e) your own academic integrity. Using GAI can seriously undermine your ability to think and learn, but it can also be a helpful research tool and conversation partner. Any use of GAI in this course must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. It is each student's responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GAI output that is submitted; you bear the final responsibility for properly validating and citing the content of your work. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. I draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course. It is not acceptable to use GAI to summarize assigned readings, write papers for you, enhance your writing, or create data visualizations.

Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium

This course has been pre-approved for the BTI Consortium International Mission and Ecumenism Certificate. If you would like to register for the certificate, or learn more, visit:

<https://www.bostontheological.org/certificates>. Contact btioffice@bostontheological.org with any questions.