Language and religion
from the Esri GeoInquiries™ collection for Human Geography

Audience – Human geography  Time required – 15 minutes

Activity  Explore patterns of cultural diffusion through linguistic and religious data.

APHG Benchmarks  APES: III.B2 Explain the diffusion of cultural traits through time and place.
APES: III.B1 Explain cultural patterns as they vary by place and region.

Learning Outcomes  • Students will be able to analyze diffusion patterns of languages and religions and to identify correlations between the two.

Map URL: http://esriurl.com/humanGeolnquiry6

Ask

How do linguistic patterns affect the spread of religion?

- Cultural diffusion is the spreading of cultural traits from one group or place to another.
- How can one cultural trait influence the spread of another cultural trait? How could language or religion influence the diffusion of the other? [Language: ideas of a religion spread more easily to speakers of similar languages. Religion: often tied to the use of a particular language, the spread of a religion will spread the use of that language. Both: a colonizer can bring both language and religion to a new area (relocation diffusion).]
- What are some factors that would help the spread of a religion? [Common language, colonialism, and economic interaction help spread religion.]

Acquire

How are languages and religions distributed?

- Click the map URL above to launch the map.
- With the Details button underlined, click the button, Show Contents of Map (Content).
- What is noticeable about the distribution of religions? [Religions diffuse more along lines of latitude than longitude; indigenous religions are located in lightly populated areas.]
- Click the checkbox to the left of the layer name, Languages Families of the World.
- Which language family is the most widely diffused? [Indo-European]

Explore

How do patterns of religion vary?

- Click the button, Bookmarks. Select South America.
- Turn the language and religion layers on and off to explore patterns.
- Which religions are dominant in South America? [Roman Catholic and indigenous.]
- Pan the map to North America.
- Which religions are dominant in North America? [Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Mormon.]
- What relationship exists between language and religion in North America? [Catholicism is tied to Romance languages, and Protestantism is tied to Germanic languages.]

more
### Analyze

**Compare the patterns of European languages and religions.**

- Click the button, Bookmarks. Select the Europe bookmark.
- Turn on only two layers, Major World Religions and Indo-European Language Branches.
- What connections do you see between the religions of Europe and the major Indo-European language branches? [Catholicism is tied to Romance languages, Protestantism is tied to Germanic languages, and Eastern Orthodoxy is tied to Slavic languages.]
- Turn off the layer, Indo-European Language Branches.
- Click the other bookmarks.
- Which region has the greatest religious diversity? [Africa and Southeast Asia have the greatest diversity.]

### Act

**What factors influence the diffusion of a religion?**

- Press the button, Measure. Select Distance. Use Miles. (See Tooltip below for more.)
- Measure how far Islam has spread east & west from Mecca. (~ 6,700 miles and ~3,800 miles, respectively.)
- How did physical and human factors serve as barriers and supports for the spread of Islam? [Mountains and cultural differences were barriers to diffusion, whereas plains, rivers, sea access, and cultural linkages enabled it.]

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**MEASURE**

- Click the button, Measure.
- Click the button, Distance.
- Set the unit of measurement.
- Click once to start measuring, click again to change direction, and double-click to stop measuring.

**BOOKMARKS**

- Click the button, Bookmarks.
- Click bookmark of interest to zoom to a map location and scale.

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### Next Steps

**DID YOU KNOW?** ArcGIS Online is a mapping platform freely available to public, private, and home schools. A school subscription provides additional security, privacy, and content features. Learn more about ArcGIS Online and how to get a school subscription at http://www.esri.com/schools.

**THEN TRY THIS...**

- Use the Overlay analysis tool to create a new data layer that combines both language and religion into a single layer. Then, analyze the geographic relationships.
- Create a story map to describe languages or religions around the world. Use photos, videos, or text to tell the story.

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**TEXT REFERENCES**

- Human Geography: A Short Introduction by Oxford University Press – Chapter 10
- The Cultural Landscape by Pearson – Chapters 5, 6

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- Human Geography: People, Place, and Culture by Wiley Press – Chapters 5, 6

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**This GIS map has been cross-referenced to material in sections of chapters from these texts.**