

Judging Big Questions

Resolved: On balance, societies benefit from religious belief and practice.

Prior to hearing these debates, I side with the _____ (Aff/Neg).

Make sure to recognize your personal bias and remove it from the evaluation of the round.

Your Role

There may be space for you to enter tournament information (date, location) and students' identifying codes at the top of the ballot. This can be done before the debate begins.

During the debate, a judge should keep track of the arguments being made. Organized notes of the important points you thought were raised during the round will help you complete your ballot and may help you make a decision about who was better at debating.

Students are allowed and encouraged to time themselves, but you may also choose to time various parts of the debate, particularly the Question Segments and each student's preparation time.

After the debate is over, complete the ballot by writing: 1) The best case you could make for why the affirmative wins the debate you heard and any comments. 2) The best case you could make for why the negative won the debate you heard and any comments. 3) The reason the debater you chose to win did the better debating. Mark which side you picked to win!

The Debate

Each round features two sides: one representing the affirmative and one representing the negative. Each side gives four speeches, and there are three periods of questions. Students will attempt to prove or disprove the statement: "Resolved: On balance, societies benefit from religious belief and practice."

Affirmative Constructive – 5 minutes
Negative Constructive – 5 minutes
Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rebuttal – 4 minutes
Negative Rebuttal – 4 minutes
Question Segment – 3 minutes

Affirmative Consolidation – 3 minutes
Negative Consolidation – 3 minutes

Affirmative Rationale – 3 minutes
Negative Rationale – 3 minutes

Each side has 3 minutes of preparation time during the debate, to be used in increments of their choice. For example, a student may elect to prepare for 1 minute for their rebuttal speech, 1 minute for their consolidation speech, and 1 minute for their final speech. Students may also prepare "for free" during each other's preparation time.

Topic Primer

The topic presents debaters with the idea that religion has been a net positive for society. Debaters are able to use both beliefs and practices in their arguments in an attempt to persuade judges either for the merits or demerits of religion. A crucial phrase in this topic is the phrase "on balance" which debaters may define more contextually, but most often means we are weighing all relevant considerations and deciding. During each round, competitors should do their best to make persuasive arguments for and against the idea that religion has benefits for society. These arguments should help judges weigh the consequences of living in both worlds and allow them to choose a winner.

Teams arguing in favor of the topic should consider the most positive aspects of religious beliefs and practices. This could be anything ranging from charitable giving to senses of community or even strong morality. Affirmative teams will have many different considerations to pick from, but the crucial element for these teams is making sure they have persuasive reasons why those considerations outweigh any negative arguments. For example, if a team wants to argue that religion brings people into a community, they can argue that community building is what helps society develop empathy and reduces violence in the long-term and judges should prioritize it. Overall, the affirmative must prove that the benefits of religion outweigh the negative consequences.

Meanwhile, the negative will want to argue that religion has not been net beneficial, or that it has been detrimental. In the past, there have been religious wars, opposition to science, or teachings that marginalize others in society. An important distinction between the two sides of this topic is that the negative only has to prove that societies do *not* benefit, not that they are actively harmed. Of course, winning that religion is net worse is helpful, it is not a requirement for the negative and teams should still help the judge by attempting to parse out the most important elements of the debate.

Debaters on either side of the topic will be most helped by clearly articulating their arguments as well as weighing their arguments against those of their opponents. Additionally, it is important for everyone to note that cases are able to be about whatever teams find to be the most persuasive and have at least some evidence supporting it. At the end of the debate, judges will have to determine, *on balance*, which side best defended their conclusion.