

# WORLD RELIGION, POLITICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Vishal Tikhute

Independent scholar

dr.vishaltikhute@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The relationship between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in political philosophy. In many developing countries, religion has a huge impact on human development. The public domain data of UNDP and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were analyzed to describe linkages between religion and the human development index (HDI) across 182 nations. The secondary data on religious majority in each country and HDI ranks for year 2018 were compiled and analyzed. Descriptive statistics was used to present the results. The analysis found that religion and human development were closely interconnected. The majority of the population was Christian. All Christian-majority countries were placed in medium to very high human development rankings. Buddhist-majority countries had high to very high human development. The Jewish majority population living in Israel was also had very high human development. While most of the low human development countries had the Islamic majority population.

**Keywords:** *world, religion, politics, human development, Christianity, Islam*

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and politics continues to be an important theme in political philosophy [1]. Religions often make strong claims on individualistic faith, and universal religions make these claims on all people, rather than just a particular community [1]. Religion plays a central, integrating role in social and cultural life in most developing countries [2]. There are many more religious leaders than health workers [2]. They are in closer and regular contact with all age groups in society and their voice is highly respected [2]. In traditional communities, religious leaders are

often more influential than local government officials or secular community leaders [2].

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living [3]. The health dimension is assessed by life expectancy at birth, the education dimension is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age [3]. The standard of living dimension is measured by gross national income per capita [3]. Despite this, The HDI simplifies and captures only part of what human development entails [3]. It does not reflect on inequalities, poverty, human security, empowerment [3],

The influence of pro-religion politics affects human development in multiple ways. Throughout its first three or four decades, development was largely conceived of in economic terms primarily, in other words as economic development [4]. More recently the concept of human development has come into vogue, emphasizing aspects of people's lives that go beyond the economic dimension, such as health and education [4]. To add to this, human development, is a composite function of all social, economic, physical, mental well-being. Human development cannot be considered as unidirectional and linear phenomenon. There are studies which show association between religious involvement and longer life [5]. Longevity is considered an indicator of good life [5]. Life expectancy, based upon age at time of death, provides a measure of health and related social and economic conditions that support the good life [5]. For example, a study by Hummer et al

(1999) showed the risk of mortality over a nine-year follow-up period was reduced if regular attendance at religious institute was there. The study has demonstrated that the religious attendance is associated with U.S. adult mortality in a graded fashion: People who never attend exhibit 1.87 times the risk of death in the follow-up period compared with people who attend more than once a week [6]. This translates into a seven-year difference in life expectancy at age 20 between those who never attend and those who attend more than once a week [6]. Health selectivity is responsible for a portion of the religious attendance effect: People who do not attend church or religious services are also more likely to be unhealthy and, consequently, to die [6]. To support the association, there are available various studies that have demonstrated the association between religion and health outcomes for example - [7]–[10]. Most of these studies uncover a beneficial association between religious involvement and health [6].

Despite there exists literature which emphasis the role of religious practice in improving health and well-being of humans, there are some points need to be noted about this complex relationship. The religious profile of the world is rapidly changing, driven primarily by differences in fertility rates and the size of youth populations among the world's major religions, as well as by people switching faiths [11]. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam account for more than half of the world's population. Claiming a common descent from the biblical patriarch Abraham, these religions have millennia of shared history. There are a dozen major religions, with several billion followers across every country. In many cases, religious belief and practices have become part of national cultures and identities [12]. Therefore, it is imperative to understand linkages between the religion and human development in all countries across the world.

## METHODS AND DATA

The study aims to describe association between religion and human development index across 182 nations. Secondary data on religious majority in specific country, HDI for year 2018 were compiled from Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) website (World Factbook) [13] and UNDP reports [14] respectively. Both these datasets were available freely under the public domain data, and don't need any special permission or approval to use it for research purpose. Based on the HDI score each country was categorized into three groups i.e. Low (HDI score < 0.550), Medium (HDI score 0.550-0.699), High (HDI score 0.700-0.799), Very high ( $\geq 0.800$ ). The country where majority of population follow specific religion, was labelled as per that particular religion. For instance, majority of population in Afghanistan practice Islam, therefore Afghanistan was labelled as Islam majority country. The official religion of countries was not considered, as it may or may not represent the majority population. For instance, Republic of Turkey officially has no religion, however majority of Turkish population follow Islam, therefore for this study Turkey is Islam majority country (and won't be considered as secular country). For the purpose of analysis all branches of each religion were considered as one main religion. For instance, Protestants and Catholics together are considered as Christians. The same analogy applied to all religions. Further a total of 182 countries where HDI ranking for year 2018 was available, were considered for analysis. MS excel was used to compile and analyze the dataset. Descriptive statistics was used to present study results. Using bivariate analysis association between religious majority and HDI rankings of countries was presented.

## RESULTS

### World Religions

The per the data available at CIA there are six major religions which are being practiced across the six continents of earth (Table 1). Majority of countries (86%) follow three

Abrahamic religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism. About 59% countries with Christians as majority population, Christianity is the mostly practiced religion in the world. This was followed by Islam (27%), Buddhism (5%). The other indigenous beliefs are being practiced in eight countries (4%). Hinduism is being

practiced in four (2%) countries. Judaism is the least practiced religion, it is being practiced only in the state of Israel. Only two countries have no affiliation to any religion i.e. majority of population in these countries don't practice any religion. A detailed country list is available in supplementary material.

**Table 1. Distribution of Majority Population following Religions in 182 Countries**

Religion	No of countries	Percent
Christian	108	59.3
Islam	49	26.9
Buddhism	10	5.5
Indigenous beliefs	8	4.4
Hinduism	4	2.2
Judaism	1	0.5
No affiliation	2	1.1
Total	182	100

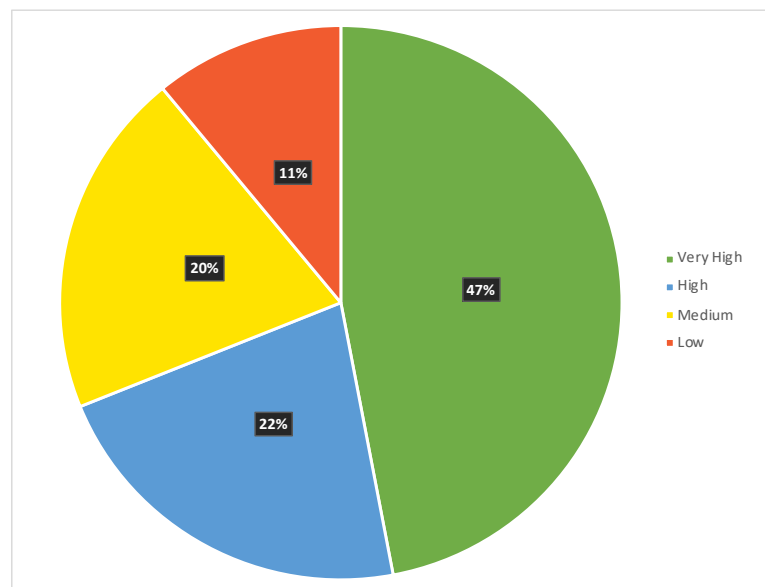
Source: derived from CIA 2013 [13]

**Human Development: Country Ranks**

Majority of i.e. 86 countries (47%) were in very high human development rank category, followed by 40 countries with Very high human

development rank category (22%). Another 37 countries (20%) had HDI rank of Medium human development category. Rest of the 19 countries (11%) had HDI rank of Low human development category (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1. Categories of HDI Rank among 182 Countries**



Source: derived from UNDP 2018 report [14]

## Religion and Human Development

Among the total 86 countries with very high HDI ranks, 73 percent had Christianity as major religion, 17 percent countries had Islam as major religion. Again Christianity (58%) and

Islam (33%) was major religion in countries with high HDI ranks. The similar pattern was observed for countries with medium HDI ranks. The low HDI countries primarily included 12 countries that practiced Islam as major religion (Table 2)

**Table 2. Major Religions and HDI Rank Categories for 182 Countries**

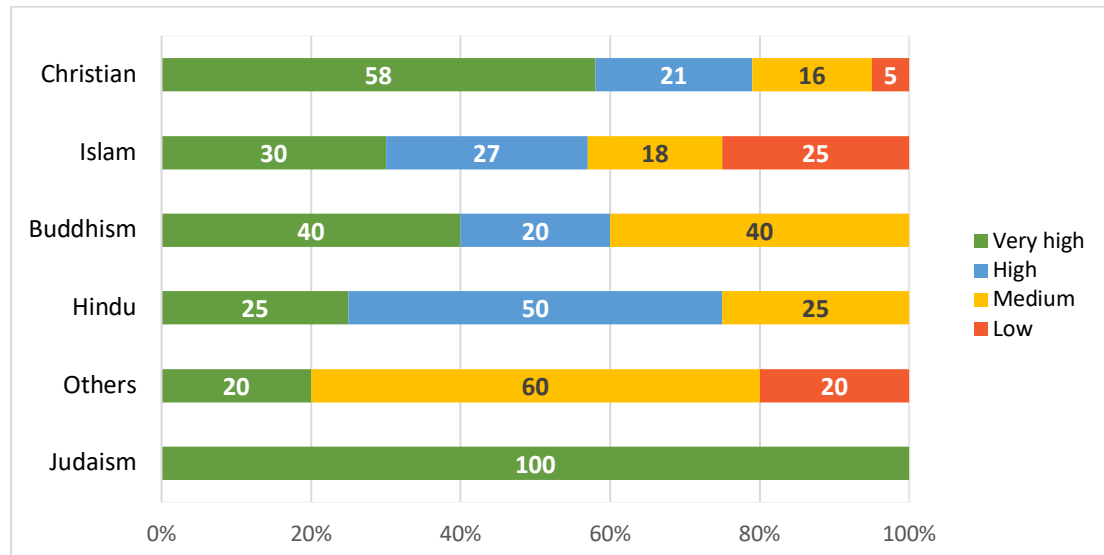
HDI Rank category	Major Religions						Total countries
	Christianity	Islam	Buddhism	Hinduism	Judaism	Others	
Very high	63 (73%)	15 (17%)	4 (5%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	86
High	23 (58%)	13 (33%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	40
Medium	17 (46%)	9 (24%)	4 (11%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	6 (16%)	37
Low	5 (26%)	12 (63%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	19
Total	108 (59%)	49 (27%)	10 (5%)	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	10 (5%)	182

*Note:* Others included countries with Indigenous beliefs and No affiliation to any religion

If considered religion specific status of HDI rank categories (Fig. 2), Judaism (includes the only Jewish country i.e. Israel) followed by Christianity had highest share in very high HDI rankings. Christianity was also the major religion in countries with high and medium

rankings for human development. About one fourth of countries where Islam was major religion were had low human development. Thirty percent of Islam majority countries were in very high human development rankings.

**Figure 2. Religion Specific HDI Rank Categories for 182 Countries**



## CONCLUSION

The overall functioning, progression and development of an individual towards the attainment of quality of life has many aspects [15]. Religion is one of those factors, which

largely affects human development. Further, rampant urbanization and unregulated industrialization have failed to provide quality of life to the overall human population [16]. Resultantly, in many developing countries

religion leaves a huge impact on human development. The analysis found that religion and human development were closely interconnected, as -

With majority of population belong to Christianity, all the Christian majority countries have medium to very high human development scores. If studied in detail, available literature highlights that Christian majority countries have also performed at very high indicators for – health, education and livelihood. Comparatively there are less countries with Buddhist population. Still most of the Buddhist majority countries performed within a range as highest to very high human development. No Buddhist majority country had low human development. The most of the countries where Islam is the practiced by majority population, had showed low human development. With only 15 countries at very high HDI, the most of the low HDI countries had Islamic majority population.

The overall functioning, progression, and development of an individual towards the attainment of quality of life have many aspects [15]. Religion is one of those factors that largely affects human development. Further, rampant urbanization and unregulated industrialization have failed to provide quality of life to the overall human population [16]. Consequently, in many developing countries, religion has a huge impact on human development. The analysis found that religion and human development were closely interconnected, as follows:

With the majority of the population belonging to Christianity. All the Christian-majority countries have medium to very high human development scores. If studied in detail, the available literature highlights that Christian-majority countries have also performed very high indicators for health, education, and livelihood. Comparatively, there are fewer countries with a Buddhist population. Still, most of the Buddhist-majority countries performed within the range of highest to very

high human development. No Buddhist-majority country had low human development. Most of the countries where Islam is practiced by the majority population showed low human development. With only 15 countries at very high HDI, most of the low HDI countries had an Islamic majority population.

## REFERENCES

- [1] C. Callaway, “Religion and Politics | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [Online]. Available: <https://iep.utm.edu/rel-poli/>
- [2] UNICEF, “UNICEF Annual Report 1995,” UNICEF. [Online]. Available: <https://www.unicef.org/media/93526/file/UNICEF-annual-report-1995.pdf>
- [3] United Nations Development Programme, “Human Development Index (HDI),” United Nations Development Programme. [Online]. Available: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>
- [4] G. T. Ellis, S., & Haar, “Worlds of power: Religious thought and political practice in Africa,” *Critique internationale*, vol. 25, no. 4, p. 195, 2004, doi: 10.3917/crii.025.0195.
- [5] A. L. Ferriss, “Religion and the Quality of Life Objective Qol and Religion,” *J Happiness Stud*, vol. 3, pp. 199–215, 2002.
- [6] R. A. Hummer, R. G. Rogers, C. B. Nam, and C. G. Ellison, “Religious involvement and U.S. adult mortality,” *Demography*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 273–285, 1999, doi: 10.2307/2648114.
- [7] C. G. Ellison, “Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-Being Author ( s ): Christopher G . Ellison Source : Journal of Health and Social Behavior , Vol . 32 , No . 1 ( Mar . , 1991 ) , pp . 80-99 Published by : American Sociological Association Stable URL : <http://www.j>,” *J Health Soc Behav*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 80–99, 1991.
- [8] E. L. Idler, “Religious Involvement and the Health of the Elderly : Some Hypotheses and an Initial Test Author ( s ): Ellen L . Idler Published by : Oxford University Press Stable URL : <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2578909> Religious Involvement and the Health of the Eld,” *Social Forces*, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 226–238, 2017.

- [9] K. Levin, J & Markides, "Religious Attendance and Subjective Health," *J Sci Study Relig*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 31–40, 1986, doi: 10.1097/EDE.0b013e3181.
- [10] J. S. Levin and H. Y. Vanderpool, "Is religion therapeutically significant for hypertension?," *Soc Sci Med*, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 69–78, 1989, doi: 10.1016/0277-9536(89)90129-9.
- [11] Pew Research Center, "Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050 | Pew Research Center," Pew Research Center. Accessed: Feb. 05, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2050/percent/all/#>
- [12] Infoplease, "Religion," Infoplease Staff. Accessed: Feb. 05, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.infoplease.com/us/religion>
- [13] Central Intelligence Agency, "Field Listing: Religions," Central Intelligence Agency Office of Public Affairs Washington, DC. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/religions/>
- [14] United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Index (HDI): DATA LINKS," 2018. [Online]. Available: [https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22\\_HDR/HDR21-22\\_Statistical\\_Annex\\_HDI\\_Table.xlsx](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-22_HDR/HDR21-22_Statistical_Annex_HDI_Table.xlsx)
- [15] A. Sen, "Commodities and capabilities," *OUP Catalogue*, 1999.
- [16] V. Tikhute, "Crimes Against Children in India: Regional Patterns and Annual Trends," 1, Oct. 2023. doi: 10.33774/COE-2023-K02LZ.