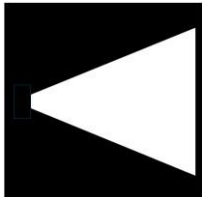


Faith, Freedom & Life Satisfaction



www.bobhurling.com

Overview

Does religion make people more satisfied with life, or is it prosperity and institutions that matter more? Evidence from large global surveys suggests that while more secular countries tend to be richer and more satisfied, religion continues to shape meaning, morality, and community.

Key Findings & Insights

Life Satisfaction: Although Ngamaba & Soni (2018) look at happiness and life satisfaction; here we focus on the latter as the more stable, less mood dependent measure across nations.

Religion’s double edge: Religion can foster belonging and purpose, but can also drive exclusion or restrict freedoms.

Secularisation & institutions: In prosperous, secular nations, atheists aren’t necessarily happier than believers. What matters is the presence of *fair, supportive institutions*. Communist regimes suggest that imposed secularisation, alone, does not raise wellbeing.

Gender opportunity as freedom: Surveys show it is lower in more traditional religious cultures, e.g., some Orthodox Christian and Muslim groups (Yeganeh, 2021; Pew, 2025; Kollmeyer, 2025).

Causality is complex: Prosperity tends to reduce religiosity and increase wellbeing, with more secular norms and institutions then taking root, to create a reinforcing cycle.

Conclusion

Religion, governance, and economics overlap. Faith can unite or divide. Prosperity and freedom of belief create fertile ground, but only equitable institutions allow societies to fully flourish?

Without equitable institutions, secularisation can leave people adrift, while with them, diversity can thrive, freedoms can expand, and life satisfaction can grow across whole populations.

Ngamaba, K. H., & Soni, D. (2018). Are happiness and life satisfaction different across religious groups? *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57(6), 2118–2149.

Pew Research Center. (2025). *Religion and views on gender, parenting and workforce participation*. Pew Research Center.

Religious Type	Life Satisfaction
Catholic	7.12
Protestant	7.07
Buddhist	6.88
Jewish	6.85
Nonreligious	6.62
Hindu	6.23
Muslim	6.16
Orthodox	5.43

