

# Using Border Countries to Analyze the Impact of World Religions

## Idea for Future Research

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Religions across the world have a powerful impact on our lives, and we would expect that religion could also affect our overall well being in a variety of ways. In order to better understand the impact of religion on society, I developed a new empirical methodology that identifies two country pairs that border one another, where one country has a different primary religion than the other. I looked at nine different religions (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto, Jewish, and African) and analyzed their impact on four measures of well being (happiness, per-capita income, life expectancy, and freedom score). Once you do the analysis, you end up with something that looks like a sports standing, where you can see how two religions do against one another when they compete head to head.

If you use the example of Protestants and Catholics, when a predominantly Protestant country borders a predominantly Catholic country, the Protestant country is happier 18 times and the Catholic country is happier 18 times as well. Based on other measures, Protestant countries are richer 23 times and poorer 11 times compared to Catholic countries in these border country pairs, and Protestant countries live longer 20 times compared to 16 times when they live shorter lives on average. Protestant countries are more free 17 times compared to less free 3 times and are tied on this measure 16 times when compared to Catholic countries on their border.

This comparison can be done for every combination of religions where one country borders the another with that religious faith. The results are too complicated to fully present here, but in general Protestants do better than all the other major religions on all measures of well being, except they are tied with Catholics on overall level of happiness and do worse on happiness when compared to Muslim border countries in Africa. Catholic countries come in second among all the religions on all measures, except for happiness where they are tied for first with Protestants. Orthodox countries do better than Muslim countries on all measures except per capita income where they are approximately even. Muslim countries generally do worse than Buddhist countries on all measures, except when it comes to overall levels of freedom, where they do substantially better. Buddhist countries do better than Hindu countries on all measures except freedom, where Hindu countries do substantially better. The rest of the religions have only a small number of border country pairs that make comparisons difficult.

This method of analysis ends up providing a rich source of data that allows you to make comparisons between countries with different religions in a way that is more rigorous than simply adding up the averages for each type of religion. By only comparing countries that border one another, this means that these countries will be similar in many other ways besides religion that makes the differences more instructive. Ultimately, this approach does give us some valuable insights into how various religions impact our overall level of well being in a variety of important ways.