

"We Were Extremely Poor but We Were Pious"

Exploring the Relationships between Religious Adherence and Economic Status in the Muslim World

Logan Cochrane / Waleed Chellan

Introduction

Lives that are more comfortable and secure have less need for religion, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart argue.¹ There is no need for religion, Phil Zuckerman believes, particularly when physical, economic and social security as well as political stability develop.² Are people religious due to insecurities, anxieties and stress, as Tomas James Rees and Gregory Paul suggest,³ an opiate masking the true realities of life? This paper provides insight into these questions by analyzing theological, quantitative and qualitative components influencing the relationships between economic status and religious adherence.

Surveys conducted in 114 countries around the world find that the majority of all people, eighty-four percent, say that religion is an important part of their daily lives.⁴ That survey also found that the most religious countries were those that were relatively poor.⁵ There are only few countries with a majority of the population that are secular and are relatively poor, China and Vietnam are two examples. Alternatively, the United States is an example of a country with a high GDP per capita wherein the majority feels that religion is important in their daily lives, which is also the case in Italy and Ireland.⁶ These irregularities have resulted in some researchers revisiting the

underlying assumptions that predicted the inevitable decline of religion and religious life.

Although the explanations have changed, from modernization and secularization theories to coping mechanisms, the story remains largely the same: higher religious adherence is connected to lower economic status. In 2004 Norris and Inglehart suggested that people in countries with lower economic statuses face greater levels of vulnerability and therefore adhere to religion at higher levels as a means of attaining and retaining hope. While this work reframed the question, it is in many ways grounded in similar assumptions put forward by Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim; as life improves, religion will be less and less important. Gallup suggests that its survey findings support this theory; it presents data on the role of religion as enhancing enjoyment and reducing negative emotions, which, they argue, demonstrates the positive role that religion plays for those living more economically challenging lives.⁷ Thus, religion has utility for those living in poverty, and remains therefore important for them.

The challenge with correlations is that they are correlations, not causations; many different correlations regarding religious adherence have been made. For example, religious adherence has been correlated with life satisfaction and happiness, which can be correlated with social connectivity and social capital.⁸ Just as the ways in which religious adherence is reexamined, so too are concepts of well-being; some research suggests that economic status influences emotional well-being and life evaluation in different ways.⁹ The trend of recent research is to engage in a more nuanced analysis of the correlations between economic status and religious adherence, and it is to this body

1 Pippa Norris / Ronald Inglehart: *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2004.

2 Phil Zuckerman: *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us about Contentment*. New York: New York UP 2010.

3 Tomas James Rees: Is Personal Insecurity a Cause of Cross-National Differences in the Intensity of Religious Belief? In: *Journal of Religion and Society* 11 (2009), pp. 1–24, here p. 12; Gregory Paul: The Chronic Dependence of Popular Religiosity upon Dysfunctional Psychological Conditions. In: *Evolutionary Psychology* 7,3 (2009), pp. 398–441, here p. 421.

4 Steven Crabtree: Religiosity Highest in World's Poorest Nations. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx> (accessed 31.12.2014).

5 "Relatively poor" was marked as having an average per capita GDP below US \$5,000.

6 Norris / Inglehart: *Sacred and Secular*.

7 Steve Crabtree / Brett Pelham: Religion Provides Emotional Boost to World's Poor. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116449/Religion-Provides-Emotional-Boost-World-Poor.aspx> (accessed 31.12.2014).

8 Numerous and diverse studies explore these relationships, some recent publications include Chaeyoon Lima / Robert D. Putnam: Religion, Social Networks, and Life Satisfaction. In: *American Sociological Review* 75,5 (2010), pp. 914–933; Christofer Edling / Jens Rydgren / Love Bohman: Faith or Social Foci? Happiness, Religion, and Social Networks in Sweden. In: *European Sociological Review* 30,5 (2014), pp. 615–626; Ryan S. Ritter / Jesse Lee Preston / Ivan Hernandez: Happy Tweets: Christians are Happier, More Socially Connected, and Less Analytical than Atheists on Twitter. In: *Social Psychology and Personality Science* 5,2 (2014), pp. 243–249; Shigehiro Oishi / Ed Diener: Residents of Poor Nations Have a Greater Sense of Meaning in Life than Residents of Wealthy Nations. In: *Psychological Science* 25,2 (2014), pp. 422–430.

9 Daniel Kahneman / Angus Deaton: High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but not Emotional Well-being. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States of America* 107,38 (2010), pp. 16489–16493, here p. 16490.

of literature that this study aims to contribute. The first section in this paper explores the concept of poverty from a theological perspective. The second section uses quantitative national data, drawn from a thirty-nine country dataset, to assess correlations between gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, promotion of religion as means to organize society and levels of individual religious practice. The third section provides qualitative life-history data to explore the lived experiences of religion, religious adherence and wealth, or lack thereof.

Poverty as an Islamic Concept¹⁰

In its most common use, living in poverty is defined as a state wherein one has an insufficiency of capital and/or material possessions.¹¹ While the elimination and reduction of poverty are both a part of the rights of individuals and a responsibility of society within Islamic Law (sharī'ah),¹² it is theologically expected that some will have more than others.¹³ The notion of protecting individual financial wellbeing is enshrined in the five core higher objectives (maqāṣid) of sharī'ah namely: protection of faith, person, progeny, property and intellect.¹⁴ One of the societal reasons why individual poverty ought to be reduced is because such a state may result, encourage or necessitate in irreligious or criminal activity. However, the value of a person is not a reflection of his or her wealth, rather, the Qur'an states that individuals are distinguished from one another only on the basis of their piety.¹⁵ Many

10 Islam is an Abrahamic faith that confirms the Prophets of the past and emphasizes monotheism. During much of the last fourteen hundred years, Islam has been the predominant faith from Morocco to Pakistan as well as in large parts of Central Asia and Southeast Asia. As minorities, Muslims live throughout the rest of the world. Approximately a quarter of the global population adheres to Islam; 1.6 billion people. Islamic practice is defined by five key pillars: the profession of faith (shahādah), ritual prayer (ṣalāh), alms giving (zakāh), fasting the month of Ramadan (ṣawm), and pilgrimage (ḥajj). For an assumption on Muslim future see Pew Forum: *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*. Washington: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2011.

11 Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī: *Jāmi'u al-Bayān fi Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* [An Extensive Presentation on the Exegesis of the Qur'an]. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah li'l-Ṭabā'āt wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī' 2000.

12 Ismail Sirageldin: Elimination of Poverty: Challenges and Islamic Strategies. In: *Islamic Economic Studies* 8,1 (2000), pp. 1–16, here p. 2.

13 Qur'an 16:71: "and God has favored some of you over others in provision".

14 'Ibrāhīm Ibn Mūsā al-Shāḥibī: *al-Muwāfaqāt fi Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah* [The Reconciliation of the Fundamentals of Islamic Law]. Al-Khubar: Dār Ibn 'Affān 1997.

15 Qur'an 49:13: "Indeed the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you."

faith traditions, including Islam, distinguish between different forms of poverty, wherein some states of poverty are desirable and others are detested. The challenge of negotiating these forms of poverty is explored by Osman Guner, who illustrates a number of the theological manifestations of poverty.¹⁶ The first, insufficient economic and material possessions, and the second, spiritual poverty, are both definitions that are derived from the Qur'an. Economic and material poverty have different manifestations, as outlined in the Qur'an. Of the most prominent, there are differentiations made between the poor (fuqarā') and the destitute (masākīn), and that of chronic and temporary poverty, examples of the latter include the wayfarer (ibn al-sabīl) and overburdened (ghārimīn).¹⁷ The next distinction Guner derives is from the Prophetic narrations, which differentiates asceticism (zuhd) from material poverty. While the two may outwardly appear similar, the former is an intentionally impoverished life lived as a means to draw near to God.

The deconstruction of poverty from a theological perspective is not the objective here, indeed volumes have been written on the subject.¹⁸ Rather, the outlining of these different conceptualizations of poverty within Islamic theology are presented in order to contextualize the quantitative and qualitative data in the sections that follow, particularly with regard to the lack of this form of analysis within quantitative data sets. There is not only a lack of distinguishing between asceticism and economic and material poverty, but also the different manifestations of economic and material poverty itself (relative, chronic and temporary forms of poverty).

In the Prophetic narrations material and economic poverty are warned against. One Prophetic supplication includes: "I seek refuge with You from poverty"¹⁹, and believers are encouraged to "seek refuge with God from poverty".²⁰ The body of narrations also warns against wealth, which is not

16 Osman Guner: Poverty in Traditional Islamic Thought: Is It Virtue or Captivity? In: *Studies in Islam and the Middle East* 2,1 (2005), pp. 1–12, here pp. 2–6.

17 Karima Korayem / Neamat Mashhour: Poverty in Secular and Islamic Economics: Conceptualization and Poverty Alleviation, with Reference to Egypt. In: *Topics in Middle Eastern and African Economies* 16,1 (2014), pp. 1–16, here pp. 3–6.

18 Yūsuf Al-Qaraḍāwī: *Mushkilah al-Faqr wa Kayfa 'Aljūbā al-Islām* [The Problem of Poverty and How to Address it]. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah li'l-Ṭabā'āt wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī' 1985; 'Abd al-Rahmān Bin Sa'd Bin 'Abd al-Rahmān Āli Sa'ūd: *Mushkilah al-Faqr wa Subul 'Ilājūbā fi Daw'i al-Islām* [The Problem of Poverty and the Ways of its Treatment in Light of Islam]. Riyadh: Dār al-Nashr bi'l-Markaz al-'Arabi li'l-Dirāsah al-'Amniyya wa'l-Tadrib 1990.

19 Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Nasā'ī. Sunan al-Nasā'ī. *Kitāb al-'isti'ādhab, bāb al-'isti'ādhab min al-dhillab*. Aleppo: Maktab al-Maḥbū'āt al-'Islāmiyyah 1986.

20 Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: *Musnad al-'Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Musnad Abū Hurayrah, ḥadīth 10973*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah li'l-Ṭabā'āt wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzī' 2001.

theologically problematic in and of itself, rather it is what one does with that wealth that makes it desirable or detested. Particularly interesting in these narrations is the link between material wealth and spiritual poverty, which echoes the Gallup findings regarding religious adherence and economic status globally. One Prophetic narration states: "By God I do not fear for you poverty, but I fear that you will lead a life of luxury as the past nations did, whereupon you will compete for it as they competed for it, and it will destroy you as it has destroyed them."²¹ The respected medieval exegete Ibn Hajar (d. 1449) explained that the meaning of destruction in this narration relates to a spiritual one, stating: "we assume that it shows that the harm of poverty is unlike the harm of affluence, since in most instances the harm of poverty is limited to the worldly life while the harm of affluence mostly manifests in the afterlife."²² Ibn Hajar adds, quoting Ibn Baṭṭāl (d. 1054), that often "affluence is a symbol of having fallen into the trap (of the worldly life) which leads to the destruction of the soul."²³ While other exegetes might debate these explanations, there are supporting Prophetic narrations that suggest this destruction includes a spiritual component. For example, on one occasion some of the companions of Prophet Muhammad were speaking about their fear of poverty, to which he responded: "Is it poverty that you fear? By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, this world will come to you in plenty, and nothing will cause the heart of anyone of you to deviate except that."²⁴ While these narrations do not specify the exact nature of the relationship between economic status and religious adherence, these theological sources suggest that the existence of such a relationship would not be contrary to them, and that such a finding might even be expected.

21 Muḥammad Ibn 'Ismā'il al-Bukhārī: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, kitāb al-maghāzī, bāb shubḥ al-malā'ikah badrā, ḥadīth 4015*. Beirut: Dār Tūq al-Najjāt 2001; Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, kitāb al-zuhd wa'l-raqā'iq, ḥadīth 2961*. Beirut: Dār 'Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī 1991; Abū 'Isā al-Tirmidhī: *Sunan al-Tirmidhī, abwāb siffah al-qiyāmah wa'l-raqā'iq wa'l-nar', ḥadīth 2462*. Cairo: Sharikah Matbah wa Matba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halbī 1975.

22 Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī: *Fath al-Bārī [Provisions of the Creator], kitāb al-riqāq, bāb mā yuhdharu min ṣabārah al-dunyā' wa'l-tanāfus fihā, ḥadīth 6425*. Cairo: Dār al-Bayān al-'Arabī (nd).

23 Ibid.

24 Ibn Mājah al-Qazwīnī: *Sunan Ibn Mājah, abwāb al-sunnah, bāb 'ittibā' sunnah rasūl Allāh, ḥadīth 5*. Damascus: Dār al-Risālah al-'Ālamiyyah 2009.

Poverty and Islam Globally

The use of quantitative macro-level data to understand the relationship between economic status and religious adherence is challenged by a lack of data and of data selection processes. The former relates to an insufficient amount of data on degrees of religious adherence, and in the event of data being available, there are problems related to inconsistencies of collection methodologies as well as different forms of religious adherence being investigated. Due to these limitations, one must determine which data ought to be used for analysis; this poses a potential problem of biased selection. To take a simplistic example, one might justify the claim that poorer people are more religious using national data from Senegal, where more than 94 percent of the population practice Islam,²⁵ gross domestic product per capita is \$2,242 (155th of 185 nations),²⁶ a third of the population lives in extreme poverty,²⁷ and almost two thirds live on less than two dollars a day.²⁸ The opposite claim might be justified using data from Qatar, where a large majority practice Islam,²⁹ gross domestic product is \$136,727 (1st of 185 nations),³⁰ and is considered to have "very high human development" in the Human Development Index.³¹

In recognition of the challenges of data availability, quality and selection, this paper utilizes a data set collected by one organization (Pew Forum) covering thirty-nine countries comprising more than 38,000 face-to-face

25 CIA: Senegal. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sg.html (accessed 31.12.2014); Pew Forum: Muslim Population by Country. <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/> (accessed 31.12.2014).

26 World Bank: GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$). http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?order=wbapi_data_value_2013+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc (accessed 31.12.2014).

27 World Bank: Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.25 a day (PPP) (% of population). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.POV.DDAY> (accessed 31.12.2014).

28 World Bank: Poverty headcount ratio at \$2 a day (PPP) (% of population). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.POV.2DAY> (accessed 31.12.2014).

29 Pew Forum: Muslim Population by Country. Qatari nationals represent a minority of the population in Qatar, twelve percent of the total population (Jure Snoj: Population of Qatar by Nationality. <http://www.bqdoha.com/2013/12/population-qatar> (accessed 31.12.2014)). While statistics on religious affiliation are not published by the State of Qatar, the U.S. Department of State also suggests the vast majority of citizens are Muslims (U.S. Department of State: Qatar. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2013&dld=222309> (accessed 31.12.2014)).

30 World Bank: GDP per capita, PPP.

31 UNDP: International Human Development Indicators. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> (accessed 31.12.2014).

interviews, which were conducted in over eighty languages.³² That data was collected between 2008 and 2012, with countries being surveyed in two groups (2008–2009 and 2011–2012).³³ The data on GDP per capita that is used comes from the World Bank, and is dated to the latter of two years of data collection; for the group of countries surveyed during 2008–2009, financial data from 2009 is used, and for the group of countries surveyed during 2011–2012, financial data from 2012 is used. For the ease of readability in the charts and data that follows, this will hereafter only be indicated in the footnotes. All figures are given in current U.S. dollars, as calculated by the World Bank.

One of the primary limitations in using this data set is the selection criteria of countries that were included, which selected countries wherein more than ten million Muslims lived.³⁴ For the purposes of this study, which seeks to understand the relationship between economic status and religious adherence, the ideal criteria would have been a survey of countries with a majority Muslim population.³⁵ In this research, countries with a Muslim population of eighty percent or greater, a significant majority, were selected for analysis. While the eighty percent figure is arbitrary, there was a trend in the data that supported this selection; of the thirty-nine countries surveyed only four countries had Muslim populations between fifty-five and sixty-one percent (Chad, Kazakhstan, Lebanon and Malaysia) and no countries had population percentages from sixty-one to eighty-two percent, thus eighty percent marks the difference between a slight majority and a significant majority. From the thirty-nine countries included in the survey, this amounted to twenty-one countries being included in this study. As a result of the selection criteria, eighteen countries

32 Pew Forum: *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*. Washington: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2013.

33 Countries surveyed in 2008–2009 were: Djibouti, DR Congo, Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Kenya, Mali, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, Liberia, Chad, Guinea Bissau and Tanzania; Countries surveyed in 2011–2012 were: Russia, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Palestinian Territories, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Niger and Uzbekistan (Personal communication with Pew Forum staff).

34 Pew Forum did not include China, India, Saudi Arabia and Syria in their research, which meets their criteria, due to political sensitivities or security concerns.

35 In 2010 this included (from highest percentage to seventy percent): Morocco, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Iran, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Tajikistan, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Mayotte, Somalia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Maldives, Comoros, Niger, Algeria, Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Libya, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Senegal, Gambia, Egypt, Turkmenistan, Syria, Mali, Kosovo, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Oman, Kuwait, Guinea, Albania, Bahrain (Pew Forum: Muslim Population by Country).

that meet the eighty-percent criteria are not included here due to a lack of available data.

As a result of these data limitations, all Muslim-majority countries that are classified as having "very high" human development (Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain) are not included. This is noteworthy due to their high levels of GDP per capita (1st, 7th and 17th of 185 nations respectively). Other notable Muslim-majority countries that have high levels of GDP per capita and were excluded as a result of available data include Kuwait (GDP per capita 88,259, 3rd of 185) Saudi Arabia (GDP per capita 53,644, 9th of 185) and Oman (GDP per capita 45,797, 13th of 185). For context, all these excluded nations have higher levels of GDP per capita than Australia (18th), Canada (20th), the United Kingdom (24th) and Japan (26th) and have significant (greater than eighty percent) Muslim majorities.

Recognizing these limitations, this study seeks to understand the macro-level quantitative relationship between economic status and religious adherence as it relates to the twenty-one countries analyzed. These findings do not compare religious adherence to other religious communities in other countries, although this would be an interesting future comparative study. The criteria were selected in order to assess the link between economic status and religious adherence using a consistent set of data with a specific set of criteria. This is only one of many potential ways to assess the available data.

Of the many measures, for which data is available, this study looks specifically at two: support for Islamic Law and frequency of prayer. These two measures provide insight into how Muslims feel the wider community ought to be shaped with regard to their religious ideals as well as their actualized practice of the tenants of faith on an individual basis. Other indicators, while relevant to the question at hand, are less useful in terms of analysis. For example, the overwhelming majority of Muslims surveyed throughout the thirty-nine countries affirmed their belief in one God and in the Prophet Muhammad.³⁶ Of the countries included in this study, over 95 percent made this affirmation.³⁷ Other areas related to belief were similarly widely accepted throughout all surveyed countries. Praying several times a day is only one manifestation of enacted faith; data on other forms of enacted faith are available and are not analyzed here, such as those who fast during the month of Ramadan

36 Pew Forum: *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*. Washington: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012.

37 Of the 21 countries included in this study, all but Afghanistan was included for this question, resulting in an average of 95.4 percent.

and those who give religious charity (zakāh) annually. The socio-cultural connectivity to fasting during the month of Ramadan and the rulings regarding the requirements of giving charity make these variables more problematic to tie specifically to religious adherence.³⁸ While prayer can also be a manifestation of socio-cultural norms and/or pressure, this is less likely to influence a practice that is conducted multiple times a day on a regular basis (as opposed to one month a year in fasting and one time per year in charitable giving). Another of the pillars of faith, the pilgrimage (hajj), largely relates to economic ability as much as or more so than religious adherence and/or proximity to Mecca, and was therefore also not included. With the selection of prayer, it is recognized that there are socio-cultural expectations that influence not only practice, but also the way in which answers would be given in a survey. The data collection methodology utilized by Pew Forum was rigorous; however one cannot discount the potential role of these influences in the existing data.

Table 1: GDP per capita and religious adherence

Country	GDP per capita*	% Muslim Population	% Support Islamic Law**	% Pray several times a day
Afghanistan	688	99.8	99	91
Albania	4,406	82.1	12	7
Azerbaijan	7,394	98.4	8	70
Bangladesh	862	90.4	82	39
Djibouti	1,459	97.0	82	77
Egypt	3,256	94.7	74	60
Indonesia	3,551	88.1	72	77
Iraq	6,632	98.9	91	85
Jordan	4,909	98.8	71	68
Kosovo	3,597	91.7	20	41
Kyrgyzstan	1,178	88.8	35	18
Mali	661	92.4	63	81
Morocco	2,900	99.9	83	69
Niger	385	98.3	86	82
Pakistan	1,252	96.4	84	50

38 There is a range of situations wherein a Muslim following Islamic Law needs not to pay the religious charity and therefore not giving this charity is not an indication of lack of religious adherence. For example, there is a minimum amount required that must be held as savings and/or in ownership for a lunar year, after which this charitable giving becomes required. This amount fluctuates with the price of gold, but is currently more than US \$3,000.

Palestinian Territories	2,783	97.5	89	74
Senegal	2,242	95.9	55	87
Tajikistan	953	99.0	27	42
Tunisia	4,198	99.8	56	65
Turkey	10,661	98.6	12	42
Uzbekistan	1,719	96.5	***	17

* GDP per capita given according to the latter of the two years during which surveying took place.

** Question stated: "Do you favor or oppose making sharia law, or Islamic law, the official law of the land in our country"? Options of answers were: Favor, Oppose and DK/Ref.

*** This question was not asked by Pew Forum in Uzbekistan and correlations involving this question exclude Uzbekistan.

The Gallup survey data suggests that poverty is correlated positively with valuing religion in day-to-day life. The data analyzed in this study suggests that the correlations are more complex, sometimes in counter-intuitive ways. The first finding is that higher GDP per capita has a weak positive relationship ($r=0.136$) that is statistically insignificant ($p=0.558$) with greater percentages of Muslims in the population. The second finding is that higher GDP per capita has a strong negative relationship ($r=0.469$) that is statistically significant ($p=0.037$) with support for Islamic Law, in other words as income rises the support for Islamic Law declines. The third finding is that there is no substantial relationship ($r=0.068$), although statistically insignificant ($p=0.771$), between higher GDP per capita and higher percentages of people that pray several times per day. The fourth finding is a moderate positive relationship ($r=0.323$) that is statistically insignificant ($p=0.164$) between higher percentages of Muslims in the population and greater support for Islamic Law. The fifth finding is a strong positive relationship ($r=0.537$) that is statistically significant ($p=0.012$) between higher percentages of Muslims in the population and with higher percentages of people that pray several times per day. The sixth finding is the strongest positive relationship ($r=0.624$), and is statistically significant ($p=0.003$), between higher levels of support for Islamic Law and higher percentages of people that pray several times per day.

These correlations, which are not suggested as being causations, present a more complex narrative than the one commonly presented. Rather than lower economic status being associated with religious adherence, there was a weak relationship between higher economic status and a greater proportion of Muslims in the population. Support for Islamic Law significantly declined with a rise in economic status, a finding that may reflect the political sphere as

much as it does the individual religious sphere. Nonetheless, the correlation between declining support for Islamic Law and higher GDP per capita is significant. The lack of relationship between higher GDP per capita and higher percentages of the population that pray several times per day is particularly noteworthy. This finding demonstrates that within countries that are religious, in this case countries with significant Muslim-majorities, increases in GDP per capita do not appear to be related to the amount of people that regularly pray several times per day. However, this finding is statistically insignificant and therefore cannot be taken as conclusive. The data also suggests that there are mutually reinforcing interactions between higher percentages of Muslims in the population, support for Islamic Law and higher percentages of people who pray several times per day.

In many countries, including several analyzed here, the Pew Forum also noted that those who prayed more frequently were more likely to favor Islamic Law.³⁹ This was the case in countries where Muslims were a minority or had a slight majority (as in Russia and Lebanon) and was also the case in countries where Muslims constituted eighty-percent or greater of the population (as in the Palestinian Territories, Tunisia, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, Turkey, Bangladesh and Kosovo). Another important sub-factor regarding religious adherence is age. In many surveyed countries the older generation was more adherent to their faith, including with prayer, than the younger generation.⁴⁰ One difference that did not exist in the Pew Forum data in all thirty-nine countries was a gendered one. In most surveyed countries, women and men were equally committed to their faith, including with prayer.⁴¹

Gallup suggested that the point whereby GDP per capita influences religious adherence is US \$5,000. In this study, only three of twenty-one countries crossed that threshold. In two of the three (Azerbaijan and Iraq) prayer remained high while GDP per capita exceeding this amount. In the country with the highest GDP per capita (Turkey) prayer was significantly lower. However, these trends ought not be attributed solely to economic status; they are also reflections of regional trends. For example, low levels of support for Islamic Law in Azerbaijan and Turkey also reflect regional trends shared throughout Central Asia, while the high level of support for Islamic Law in Iraq also reflects the regional trend of the Middle East and North Africa,

39 Pew Forum: *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*.

40 Pew Forum: *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*.

41 Ibid.

regardless of economic status. Gallup also suggested that US \$25,000 was another per capita GDP threshold, after which the importance of religion significantly declines (although the rate remains relatively high after this point, being 44 percent).⁴² In this study, no country that passed this threshold, with the lowest GDP per capita being US \$385 (Niger) and the highest being US \$10,661 (Turkey). The available data limited the countries that were included in this study. Even though they were not included it ought to be noted that there are a number of Muslim-majority countries with very high levels of GDP per capita (Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain). It might be mentioned, and correctly so, that most of these nations have small populations, in this regard of note is Saudi Arabia, home to more than thirty million people (for context this is larger than 22 of 28 member states of the European Union).

Poverty and Islam Locally

In 2011, the authors began a qualitative study about cultural change with a community of Muslims living in Cape Town, South Africa, known as Cape Malays. Understanding the dynamics of religious adherence in relation to economic status was not the primary objective of that study, however the in-depth semi-structured interviews provide a wealth of experiential data regarding this link. The original study included twenty-four interviewees (eleven male, thirteen female) from varied socio-economic backgrounds, all of whom were near, or older than, the age of sixty. Participation was voluntary and the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and in some cases translated when interviewees preferred Afrikaans to English. This material is presented in order to provide qualitative data that will complement the quantitative data presented in the previous section. As the objective is to illuminate lived experiences, this section is not meant to be understood as being statistically representative of Muslims in Cape Town, South Africa or the world. Rather, the aim is to provide personal narratives, which enhance and enliven the statistics.

One interviewee, who explained that when she was growing up her family was extremely poor, describes a religious adherence that was tied to living together, a manifestation of societal conviviality, whereby extended family members living in one household was the norm and was one reason for enhanced religious adherence.

42 Crabtree / Pelham: Religion Provides Emotional Boost to World's Poor.

We were extremely poor but we were 'ibādat [pious] people because we were many people living together in one house. We lived with our grandmother, uncles, aunts and children lived collectively under one roof. We did not have a regular income as far as I can recall and we were generally poor but it was the best years of our lives.⁴³

For her, this living together was permanently disrupted by a segregationist policy implemented by the apartheid government, the Group Areas Act, which was first implemented in 1950. This process divided up Muslim communities and families and relocated them; resulting in disconnected social networks, limited access to Islamic schools and mosques and broke apart areas of towns that were predominantly populated by Muslims. The history of Muslims in Cape Town is unique, as a minority ethno-religious group, as they look back on a history of three hundred and fifty years living in the area and living as minorities. As a result of the enforcement of the Group Areas Act, they were forcibly detached from their communities. In this case, it was not a change in wealth that primarily affected religious practice, but government policy.

It is noteworthy that every single interviewee mentioned the negative impacts of the Group Areas Act. However, not all were in agreement that the hardships of the Group Areas Act were the primary causes for changes in religious adherence. One interviewee, who lost a father in her childhood and grew up in a household with limited income, alludes to the link between economic status and social connectivity, in saying: "Society was definitely different. They were there for one another; they helped each other a lot and gave a lot of charity if there was someone poor. We were all poor, but we always had something left for the other."⁴⁴ During the lifetime of these interviewees, generally from the 1940s to 2011, GDP per capita has risen dramatically in South Africa. For example, in 1980 GDP per capita (in current US\$) was 2,921, in 1990 it rose slightly to 3,182, in 2000 it declined to 3,020, but at the time of the interviews, in 2011, it has dramatically risen to 7,831.⁴⁵ The interviewee who links religious adherence to a way of living, mentioned above, felt that the generation of people who have experienced greater wealth and opportunity have lost respect for religion and cannot be compared to the pious people of the past. Although she did not explicitly blame a rise of economic status, the interviewee stated the changes in life are "all about money".

43 Personal communication, 07.08.2011.

44 Personal communication, 05.10.2011.

45 World Bank: GDP per capita (current US\$). <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> (accessed 31.12.2014).

Another female interviewee similarly suggests the negative changes in religious adherence and family life, but not in a deterministic fashion, rather the changes are a result of the way in which increased wealth is used and the way it influences people.

If life was a thing money could buy, the rich would live, and the poor would die. Allah in his wisdom made it so that the rich and poor together will go [pass away], so where does this leave the money? That is why I say its money that causes disputes in families because you do not have what I have. You have a better car than what I have so I do not agree with you. What I do not understand is that is what Allah has given you. A car, house, and it breaks the family values it splits it up. What the people do not understand is Allah gives you 10 [South African Rand] then Allah's going to give me 5 but Allah is going to test you with that 10 Allah has given you to see what you going to do with it. Everything is with Allah. Whatever Allah has decreed for you, that is Allah's decree. You cannot change it. Not you or anybody can change it.⁴⁶

It is noteworthy to add that this interviewee, whose aunt embraced Islam and then followed her in that choice later in life, also feels that a rise of economic status has been used positively by some, such as through obtaining greater levels of religious education and through developing more diverse ways of teaching Islam in the form of new curricula and improved teacher training in religious schools. In her experience, wealth is not a primary influence of religious adherence; rather each individual makes choices, some using increased wealth to become more religious while others do not. What is not explored in much of the quantitative data analyses is the rise of religious adherence, particularly as greater economic status has provided the means (both in terms of time as well as access) to gain religious knowledge. Turkey may be an example of a nation that has experienced significant rises in GDP per capita as well as an increase in religious adherence, although this point is debated and some of these changes may reflect politics more than individual practice.⁴⁷ A much more detailed study is required in order to answer this question conclusively.

Another member of the community, whose father immigrated from Zimbabwe and mother from the United Kingdom, suggests that the piety of the past was simplistic, and that the religious education and depth of religious knowledge was limited. New economic opportunity not only enhanced

46 Personal communication, 07.08.2011.

47 Anand Giridharadas: In Turkey, Forging a New Identity. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/01/world/europe/01iht-currents01.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1 (accessed 04.01.2015); Barry Rubin: Turkey Trots toward Islamism. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/The-Region-Turkey-trots-toward-Islamism> (accessed 04.01.2015).

knowledge and education, but she feels, it also improved the practice of many, giving the example of the modest attire of women. At the same time, however, this interviewee feels some societal values have declined, such as respect for religious practices, a decline that is not restricted to the Muslim community, but felt throughout the whole society.

Not all agree, however, some feel changes in economic status have direct impacts on the way religious traditions are valued. One female interviewee, who says she was raised in poverty and had a father who regularly read the Qur'an and taught it to children in the neighborhood, feels that way. Unlike the experience above, this interviewee feels that the attire of Muslim women has declined in its modesty, with people now dressing "half naked", attributing the cause of these changes to an increase in economic status:

At the end of the day it's about money. If you have too much money, I will not look at you and you cannot look at me. Back then it was not so. People helped each other. People came and knocked on my father's door. Sometimes we never had [money]. My father would send me to the Indian shop to get a *kroon* [the previous currency denomination that would be equivalent to today's one rand (1 ZAR)] and write it on the book. Then my father would give the woman a half *kroon*. Today they chase you away. There is no help today. People tell you straight away they cannot help you.⁴⁸

These personal narratives and lived experiences express a number of trends that ought to be better encapsulated within quantitative national-level statistical analyses. Amidst economic change, there are diverse arrays of responses, many of which have unique causes to consider. In this case, legislation that forced the relocation of individuals may have caused greater changes to religious adherence than the rise of economic status. Due to a lack of studies conducted over time, this specific question is difficult to answer, however future research should make an effort to assess religious adherence over time. Greater contextualization of this nature may enable improved understanding of when, why and how economic change does and does not play a primary role in influencing religious adherence. Religious adherence may improve as a result of enhanced economic status, such as through improved educational opportunities, educational training, curricula and awareness raising activities using new technologies. This may not be the case for all people, as demonstrated within these narratives, but it suggests that the statistical data may not reflect the dynamic nature of religious adherence when correlating it to economic status. Anirudh Krishna's research on poverty enabled entirely new avenues of understanding macro-level data on poverty, such that statistics are

48 Personal communication, 22.06.2011.

not thought to represent a static body of people but represent a dynamic and constantly changing body.⁴⁹ The quantitative figure may be relatively stable, but the individuals included and excluded are in flux. The research presented here does not provide sufficient evidence to state that religious adherence operates in a similar fashion, however the qualitative data demonstrates that much more research is needed in order to better understand the dynamics and details of quantitative data.

Conclusion

The theological context suggests that much more nuanced and deconstructed discussions are needed with regard to what poverty is, how it is measured and the way in which theological knowledge might contribute to the understanding of trends in religious adherence in relation to economic status. The quantitative data demonstrated that the generalized trends might be correct in some cases, such as declining support for Islamic Law with increasing economic status, but not in all cases, such as the lack of correlation between rising economic status and regular daily prayer. These findings show that economic status affects religious practices in unique ways. Much more data and research is required in order to better understand these dynamics. The qualitative data outlined the diverse experiences individuals have with economic status in relation to religious adherence. This section highlighted two important points: (1) the need for greater contextualization of national-level statistical data to avoid justifying assumptions through correlations without assessing the range of factors involved, and (2) the need for improved understanding of religious adherence that explores the dynamics of increases and decreases within a population and between religious practices, which may not appear within national-level data.

In an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Marcus Noland, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute of International Economics, stated that analyses about economic status and religious adherence are a "more complex psychological and social phenomenon than just looking at a snapshot of cross-state data or even cross-income data and saying religion either keeps you poor or not being religious gets you rich."⁵⁰ It is on this note that this

49 Anirudh Krishna: *One Illness Away: Why People Become Poor and How They Escape Poverty*. New York: Oxford UP 2010.

50 Kazi Stastna: Do Countries Lose Religion as They Gain Wealth? <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/do-countries-lose-religion-as-they-gain-wealth-1.1310451> (accessed 31.12.2014).

paper also concludes; the relationship between economic status and religious adherence is complex and these findings suggest that the impact of changing economic status is diverse, not only affecting individuals differently but also impacting various manifestations of religious adherence in unique ways.