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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Globalization: Exploring Correlation Between Personal Religious Belief and Globalization

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore whether there is any significant correlation between personal religious beliefs and globalization. The forces of globalization are often in direct conflict with traditional religious beliefs. For example, an increased knowledge of science and technology often contradicts religious teachings. Increased global communication and business transactions leave little time for religious worship. Grounded in such reasoning that globalizing influences compete with traditional religious practices, it is the hypothesis of the author that globalization contributes to a decline in personal religious beliefs. Hence, the data of this project should exhibit a negative correlation between religiosity and globalization.

Globalization rank is the independent variable of this research and is operationalized through *Foreign Policy* magazine's most recent Globalization Index. Meanwhile, personal religious beliefs are the dependent variable of this research and are operationalized through a Religion Index developed specifically for this research. This index employs four responses to the World Values Survey as indicators to measure the extent of personal religious beliefs within the populations of states across the globe. The responses to the questions are quantified and summed to produce an additive index to be measured against globalization.

The statistical conclusions of this research prove significant at the .001 level. A simple linear regression and data analysis prove that personal religious beliefs and globalization are significantly negatively correlated. The data further shows that globalization is responsible for 34.4% of the variation within personal religious beliefs in a country. Although several outliers exist in the data, it is clear that the populations of highly globalized countries are much less likely to be religious than the populations of less globalized countries.

Keywords: Globalization, religion, beliefs

Introduction

In his seminal book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman argued that it was possible to balance the influences of globalization and traditional cultural mores. Eight years after the first publication of his book the question can be asked, "Has anyone been able to balance globalization and religion?" This research paper will attempt to answer a part of this question by comparing the state of globalization and religious beliefs in 50 countries across the world. A strong positive relationship between the two variables would show that many countries have heeded Friedman's policy prescriptions and have advanced along the path toward globalization without losing their traditional religious beliefs. Conversely, a strong negative

relationship between the two variables would indicate that globalized countries have been unable to balance globalization and religion.

The answer to the research question above is of great importance to the world community. Globalizing influences are increasing throughout the world without regard to geography, language, or economic development. Cell phones have the capacity to provide communication between people anywhere in the world – including poor villagers in third world countries who have benefited from microfinance projects. Financial assets are becoming increasingly liquidified; just 60 years after Europe fought a terrifying war within its borders, most European countries now use the same currency. The internet is perhaps the greatest symbol of globalization as it has allowed unthinkable advances in communication, finance, commerce, and research. These influences of globalization have been both praised and protested from Davos to Seattle. However, it appears as though little work has been done to attempt to find a compromise between the forces of globalization and one of its strongest competitors – religion.

This paper shall examine whether or not globalization is, in fact, such a grave threat to religious beliefs. If a positive relationship is found, religious leaders and globalization protestors ought to consider supporting policies that will open up the international community toward more globalization. If a negative relationship is found, both sides of the globalization debate should immediately consider whether it is worth trading religion for globalization or vice versa. Hopefully the world will not adhere to such a zero-sum game, however, and will seek to balance the growth of globalization and the maintenance of traditional religious beliefs.

Literature Survey

The foundation of this paper is based upon a bevy of current research that seeks to analyze the myriad effects of globalization.

Thomas R. McFaul's article "Religion in the Future Global Civilization" offers three predictions regarding how the world's religions will interact in the future of globalization. McFaul assumes that today's globalized society naturally increases the interaction between adherents of different religions, which simultaneously increases the chances of inter-religious conflict. According to McFaul, globalization will likely cause an increase in either religious exclusivism – ergo more conflict – or religious pluralism. Nevertheless, McFaul writes, it is possible – and preferable – that globalization could lead to religious inclusivism in the future, which would integrate religions just as globalization naturally integrates economic markets.¹

Timothy Samuel Shah and Monica Duffy Toft's article "Why God is Winning" hypothesizes that recent global modernization has actually led to an increase in worldwide religiosity. The article provides several examples – such as the recent electoral victory of Hamas and the increased politicization of evangelism in the US – of what the authors believe to be a global explosion in religious belief and values. Although the authors do not study the effects of

¹ McFaul, Thomas R. "Religion in the Future Global Civilization." September-October 2006. *The Futurist. Academic Search Premier*. Retrieved 7 May, 2007. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=3&hid=102&sid=b1aebf55-37c6-48cb-8396-2b5efcf9a948%40sessionmgr106>>.

modernization or religion *across* states, they write that the “Third Wave” of democracy has clearly contributed to an increase in religiosity on the global scale.²

Mohammad Reza Neyestani’s paper “Cultural and Religious Identities in Era of Information and Communications Globalization” presents a realist perspective of the interplay between certain aspects of globalization and religious traditions. Neyestani theoretically posits that the “domination” of Western culture through the globalized information and communications industries will lead to the marginalization of the unique religious denominations of the global South. This effect of globalization has become manifest, according to Neyestani, not because any culture is inherently “inferior or superior,” but rather because the decision-making power of Western elites naturally leads to a diffusion of their cultural systems.³

Wendy Tyndale's paper "Faith and Economics in 'Development': a Bridge Across the Chasm?" critiques the overtly secular nature of development inter-governmental organizations. Tyndale writes, "It sometimes seems as though a yawning chasm has opened up between the values of secular, technology-driven rationality, which is the driving force behind globalisation, and the interpretations of the meaning and purpose of life made by people of religious faith all over the world." In response to such detrimental secularization, Tyndale advises the inclusion of faith-based development NGOs on a global scale.⁴

This study shall differ from previous examinations of religion and globalization by employing statistical data to examine the presence of a linear relationship between these two variables. If the hypothesis of this paper is correct, the data will exhibit a unique quantitative link that correlates increased globalization with decreased religiosity.

Methodology

This study of globalization and religion examined data from fifty countries across the globe for which data existed both for globalization rank and personal religious belief indicators. It is important to note that many different religious denominations were represented in this survey. Many Muslim countries were included such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Iran. Hindu India and Buddhist South Korea and Japan were also incorporated. This inter-denominational inclusion is important as this study is not meant to simply investigate the effects of globalization on the Christian world. It is the hope of the author that the conclusions from this research will be applicable to the entire globe, since globalization has grown seemingly without concern for religious denomination.

The independent variable of this research was a country’s level of globalization. This was operationalized by employing the 2006 Globalization Index of *Foreign Policy* magazine. According to the official statement of the index’s methodology,

² Shah, Timothy Samuel and Monica Duffy Toft. “Why God is Winning.” July-August 2006. *Foreign Policy, Academic Search Premier*. Retrieved 7 May, 2007. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=4&hid=102&sid=b1aebf55-37c6-48cb-8396-2b5efcf9a948%40sessionmgr106>>.

³ Neyestani, Mohammad Reza. “Cultural and Religious Identities in Era of Information and Communications Globalization.” Winter 2005. *Turkish Journal of International Relations, Academic Search Premier*. Retrieved 7 May, 2007. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=6&hid=102&sid=b1aebf55-37c6-48cb-8396-2b5efcf9a948%40sessionmgr106>>.

⁴ Tyndale, Wendy. "Faith and Economics in 'Development': a Bridge Across the Chasm?" February 2000. *Academic Search Premier*. Retrieved 17 February 2007.<<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=28&hid=104&sid=32244026-7a8c-4693-a9ec-2742b274dd40%40sessionmgr107>>.

“The A.T. Kearney/FOREIGN POLICY Globalization Index tracks and assesses changes in four key components of global integration, incorporating measures such as trade and investment flows, movement of people across borders, volumes of international telephone traffic, Internet usage, and participation in international organizations.”⁵

The Globalization Index ranks 62 countries from varying world regions and from differing levels of economic development. The countries included in the survey, “account for 96 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and 85 percent of the world's population.”⁶ Indicators within the index include a country's participation in international organizations, level of foreign direct investment, number of internet users, level of international trade, and amount of international travel. Based on their performance on all indicators, the 62 countries are then ranked as ordinal level data from one to 62, with the most globalized country as #1 and the least globalized country as #62. In order to produce a chart that would easily answer the research question posed at the start of this project, this study re-ordered the countries such that the highest score was then equal to the most globalized country and the lowest score was then equal to the least globalized country.

The dependent variable of this research was the amount of personal religious belief among the population of a country. This variable was operationalized through the construction of an original Religion Index. This Religion Index ranked the countries included in the study according to the level of personal religious belief within those countries. Such a ranking was determined using four indicators based upon responses to four questions from the World Values Survey.

The first indicator was based off of the following question from the World Values Survey. “Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are? (Read out)

- 1 A religious person
- 2 Not a religious person
- 3 A convinced atheist
- 4 Other answer”⁷

The author of this study utilized the percentage of respondents marking the first answer as the first indicator in the Religion Index. This question is a general measure of religiosity and allows the respondents to truly self-report their own religious beliefs without feeling bound to their own denomination's – or lack of denomination's – conception of religious belief.

The second indicator employed the answers to the following question from the World Values Survey. “How important is God in your life? Please use this scale to indicate – 10 means very important and 1 means not at all important.”⁸ This question is also a general measure of an

⁵ “Globalization Index 2006 Methodology.” 2007. *A.T. Kearney Inc.*
<<http://www.atkearney.com/main.taf?p=5,4,1,127,1>>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ “1999-2002 World Values Survey Questionnaire.” *Institute for Social Research: The University of Michigan.*
Retrieved 7 May, 2007. <<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>>.

⁸ *Ibid.*

individual's religious belief. Furthermore, it is important to note that the question does not specify the deity of any particular religion, but is vague enough to allow interpretation based on the personal views of the respondent. The author then took the mean of the responses to this question and multiplied every data entry by 10. This multiplication would ensure that every indicator measured religious belief on an equally weighted quantitative scale.

For the third indicator, the Index used the percentage of respondents answering "Yes" to the question, "Do you belong to a religious denomination?"⁹ This question is a decidedly less open-ended inquiry into the religious belief of respondents and instead attempts to measure the level of *association* a population feels to a particular religious belief. Since most of the world's religions include specific places of worship, trained clerics, and established codes of moral conduct, it was important that the Religion Index take the importance of denominational association into account.

The final indicator was based on the following question from the World Values Survey, "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?"

- 1 More than once a week
- 2 Once a week
- 3 Once a month
- 4 Only on special holy days/Christmas/Easter days
- 5 Other specific holy days
- 6 Once a year
- 7 Less often
- 8 Never practically never"¹⁰

The author of this paper added the percentages of respondents who replied to both the first and second answers and used this sum as the final indicator of the Religion Index. This indicator is by far the most specifically targeted of all the components of the Index because it focuses on the *expression* of religious belief instead of the self-reporting of a respondent's thoughts.

Finally, the scores from the four equally weighted indicators were added together to produce a Religion Index capable of measuring the level of personal religious belief within a country's population. Unfortunately only fifty countries that were ranked in the Globalization Index also had complete religion data in the World Values Survey. Hence, these fifty countries formed the data set for this research. The globalization data was from a 2006 ranking. The religion data was used from the most recent responses available on the World Values Survey – no data was used from earlier than 1996. This study then proceeded to statistically and graphically measure the correlation between the Globalization and Religion Indices.

Analysis

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

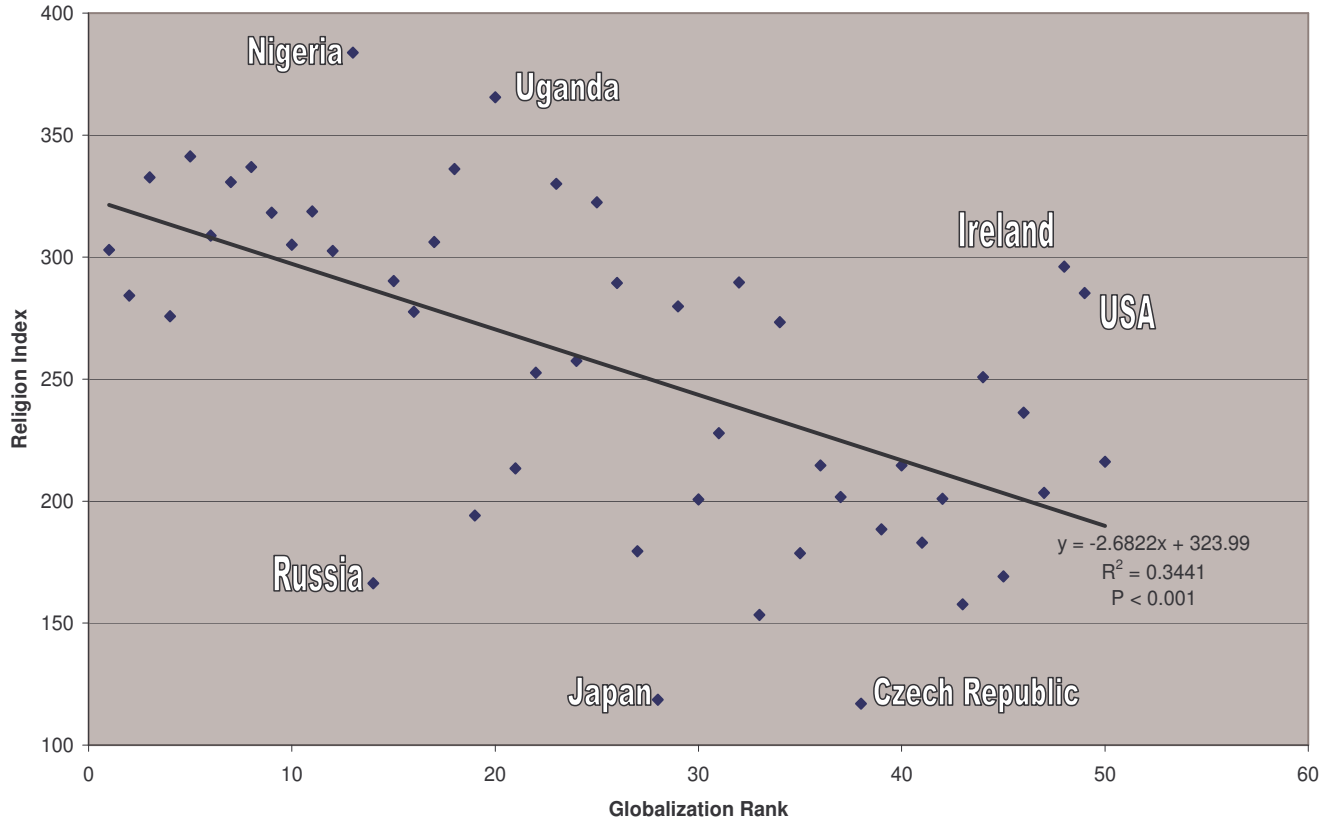
Statistically comparing the two variables of this research produces a significant revelation regarding globalization’s connection to religion. In fact, there is a strong negative correlation between the Globalization and Religion Indices that is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. A simple regression using Microsoft Excel produces the following results.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.586624467
R Square	0.344128266
Adjusted R Square	0.330464271
Standard Error	54.53826722
Observations	50

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	323.9933306	15.66008006	20.6891235	1.471E-25
Globalization Rank	-2.68222473	0.534470609	-5.01847002	7.57E-06

The bolded results tell the story of the correlation between globalization and personal religious beliefs. With a p-value of 7.57×10^{-6} , there is no doubt as to the strength of the negative correlation between the two variables. Furthermore, with an R squared value of .344, one can assume that globalization is responsible for 34.4% of the variation in personal religious beliefs across the world. The scatter plot below shows the results of the research and provides labels for several of the most noticeable outliers.

Personal Religious Beliefs by Globalization Rank



Conclusions and Policy Prescriptions

This study's findings support the hypothesis of the author. The strength of the negative relationship between globalization and personal religious beliefs certainly substantiates the argument that the forces of globalization negatively impact personal religious beliefs. The significant trend presented above does not bode well for those who wish to balance globalization and religion. It is clear that the stronger the globalizing influences within a country, the less likely the people of that country will exhibit strong religious beliefs.

Of course, it is not difficult to explain such a negative trend. Globalization amounts to nothing less than a comprehensive shift in both inter-state and inter-personal relationships. Globalized countries trade significantly more with other states than insulated autarkic states. Citizens of globalized countries have recently gained the ability to communicate with their peers across national borders – and the significance of those borders seems to be crumbling faster than the Berlin Wall over a decade ago. Such influences clearly compete with many of the guiding tenets of religious beliefs. More international interaction at the economic, political, and societal levels will also naturally lead to increased religious interaction. As “Global Citizens” trade goods, services, and ideas with people of differing faiths, it is natural that they will begin to question the infallibility of their own beliefs. Of course, such questioning could lead to a resurgence of personal belief, but the data do not suggest such to be the case. Most significantly, the demands of globalization are often so great that religion may simply be marginalized at the personal level. The increased global commerce due to globalization has simultaneously produced greater business competition, which naturally leaves less time for religious contemplation – both in the home and through religious services. If the countries of the world continue the march toward a more globalized society, is it possible that religious beliefs will soon be passé?

The presence of outliers in the data analysis above suggests that it is, as Friedman writes, possible to balance the demands of both globalization and religion. The United States and Ireland are both considerably globalized and have managed to maintain high levels of religious belief throughout their respective populations. These countries have clearly been able to strike a balance between the “Lexus” and an important part of the “Olive Tree.” If a country does not wish to lose the vibrant religious traditions of its people, it is clear that such traditions must be supported as strongly as the new influences of globalization. Places of religious worship should be protected from the encroachments of economic development. Businesses should allow their employees time to participate in religious observances. Educational curricula should celebrate religious and cultural traditions as well as prepare students to participate in the increasingly globalized world economy.

These are only a few of the recommendations that can help to mitigate the unintended side-effects of globalization. Future research could expand the purview of the Religion Index or add more countries to the comparison of globalization and religion. Furthermore, a study of trends in the relationship between globalization and religion over time could be conducted. Perhaps if the world follows a balanced path toward globalization, the inter-connected world of the future will enjoy vibrant religious diversity, thereby adding a deep understanding to the inter-personal relations made possible by *both* globalization and religion.

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