

## **With high levels of prayer, U.S. is an outlier among wealthy nations**

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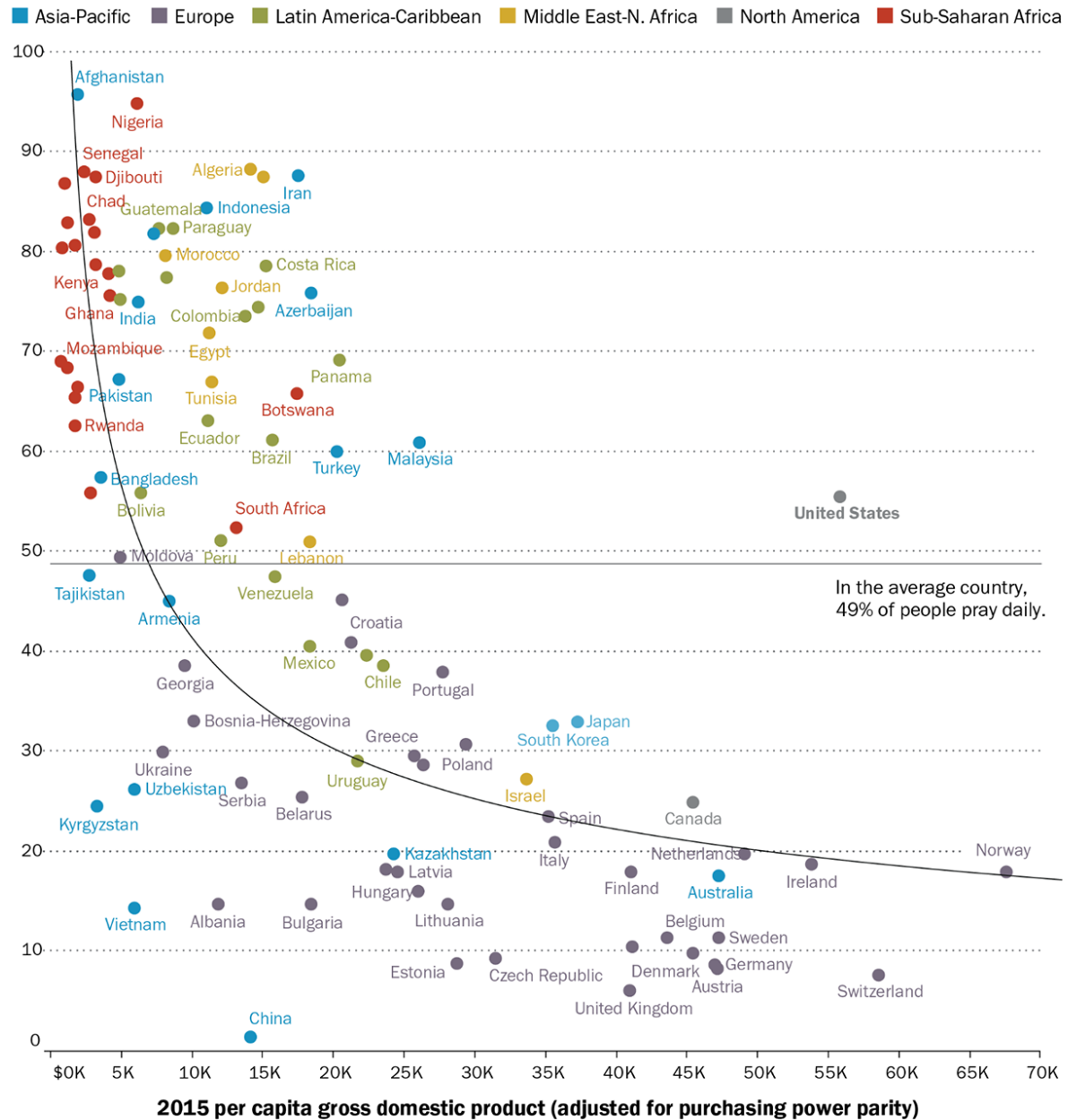
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This May 2 is the National Day of Prayer in the United States, a day Congress set aside in 1952 for Americans to turn “to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups and as individuals.” But many Americans pray every day – not just on the Day of Prayer. Indeed, out of 102 countries examined for frequency of prayer by Pew Research Center, the U.S. is unique in that it has both a high level of wealth (\$56,000 per-capita gross domestic product in 2015) *and* a high level of daily prayer among its population (55% according to the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study).

In every other wealthy country surveyed – that is, those with a per-capita GDP over \$30,000 – fewer than 40% of adults say they pray every day. For example, in Japan, where per-capita GDP is about \$38,000, roughly a third (33%) pray daily. In Norway, where per-capita GDP is about \$68,000, fewer than one-in-five adults (18%) do. (It’s worth noting that the surveys did not include wealthy countries in the Arabian Peninsula, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which might be expected to have high levels of prayer.)

# Daily prayer is more common in the U.S. than in many other wealthy countries

% who say they pray daily



Note: Graphic shows 102 of 105 countries and territories surveyed; the International Monetary Fund does not report gross domestic product (GDP) figures for Kosovo, Palestinian territories or Puerto Rico. The measure of daily prayer may be less reflective of the extent of religious life in countries where non-Abrahamic religions are dominant (such as China, where Buddhism ranks among the most popular religions) than in countries where Abrahamic religions are dominant.

Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008-2017. GDP data from the International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook Database, October 2015. Per capita GDP figures are adjusted for purchasing power parity.

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At the other end of the economic spectrum, countries with *less* wealth tend to have *higher* rates of prayer. In fact, every country where at least 70% of adults say that they pray each day has a per-capita GDP under \$20,000. For example, in Egypt, where 72% say they pray every day, per-capita GDP is about \$11,000. And in Afghanistan, where 96% of adults say they pray every day, the per-capita GDP is about \$2,000.

These findings are broadly aligned with other data that suggest that a country's level of wealth is inversely proportional to its levels of religious commitment as measured by survey responses about daily prayer, belief in God, attendance at religious services and stated importance of religion in one's life. In other words, people in poorer countries tend to be more religious than people in wealthier countries. (For more on this, see our 2018 report.)

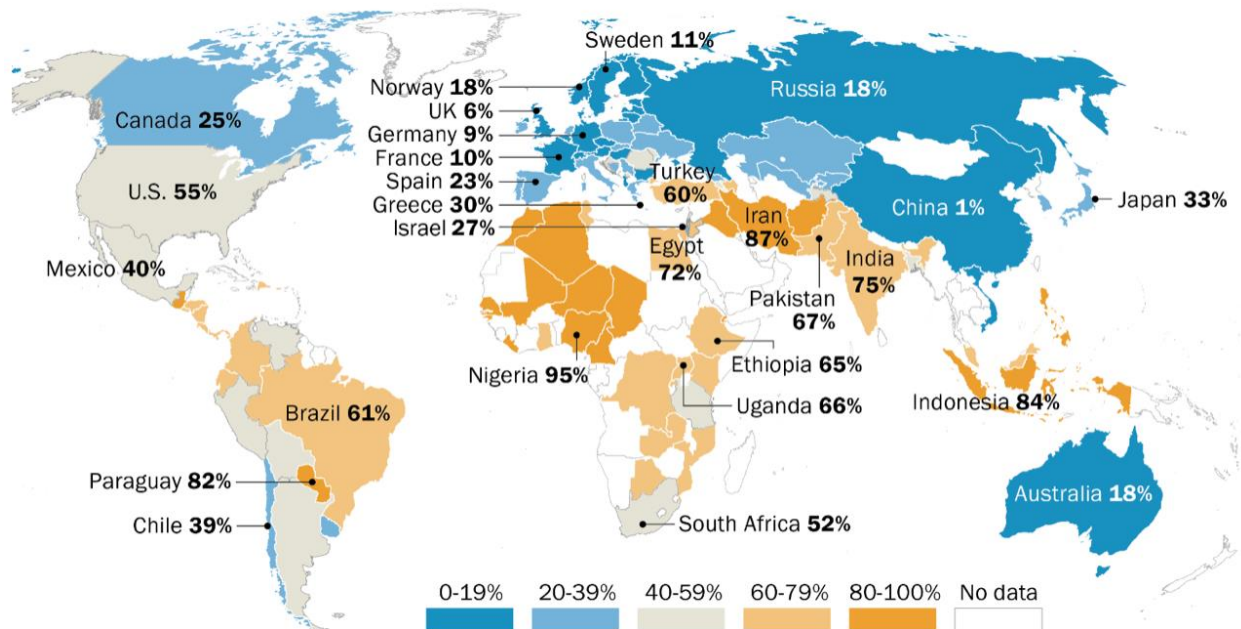
That said, not every country with low wealth has a high level of daily prayer. In Vietnam and Bulgaria – where per-capita GDPs are \$6,000 and \$19,000, respectively – the shares of adults who say they pray daily are 14% and 15%. (Among all 102 countries examined, the national average share of people who say they pray daily is 49%.)

Several regional patterns appear in the data. For example, most of the countries surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa have a per-capita GDP under \$10,000 and above-average rates of daily prayer. In the Middle East-North Africa region, nearly all countries we looked at have a per-capita GDP under \$20,000 and above-average rates of daily prayer. The exception is Israel, where per-capita GDP is \$34,000 and just 27% say they pray every day.

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## Rates of daily prayer lowest in Europe, China

*% who say they pray daily*



Source: Pew Research Center surveys, 2008 to 2017.  
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Why does the U.S. have higher self-reported daily prayer than other wealthier countries? Some scholars posit that the lack of government interference in religion in the U.S. has created an open religious "market" – a landscape where different religions enthusiastically compete for new members. High levels of prayer also could be due in part to relatively high levels of income inequality in the United States; societies with more unequal income levels tend to be more religious.