

Correlates of Legalism in a Global Sample of Seventh-day Adventists

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Righteousness by Faith & and Keeping the Law Perfectly

- One of the complex issues that all Christians face is how are we saved.
- The Protestant Reformation focused on salvation by faith in Christ alone – this was in reaction to the Middle Ages Catholic focus on works that needed to be done to ensure salvation.
- Latter generations of reformers began what has been called the Holiness movement that focused on moral behavior; the term Sanctification was used with an emphasis that a Christian should/could live a life free from sin.
- The Wesleyan reformation (Methodist) focused on what was called the second blessing – Sanctification (Kostlevy, 2009) Adventist to a large extent inherited this view in Last Generation Theology movement.

Righteous by Faith a Fundamental Belief

- SDA Fundamental Belief #10 focuses on Salvation through faith in Christ alone (<https://www.adventist.org/experience-of-salvation/>)
- Adventists do not see salvation as a works-based doctrine, but rather righteousness comes solely through faith in Christ alone.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_theology#:~:text=Adventists%20do%20not%20see%20salvation,be%20seen%20by%20non%2Dbelievers.
<https://adventist.news/news/legalism-vs-grace>
- Adventists are also within a holiness tradition and emphasize the moral and behavioral aspects of living in Christ – e.g., Last Generation Theology
- Social Scientists have viewed the Adventist Church as a strict church that has behavioral requirements for membership, substance use abstinence – a *More*, and emphasis on a vegetarian diet, strong *folkway* (Iannaccone, 1994; McBride et al, 2021).

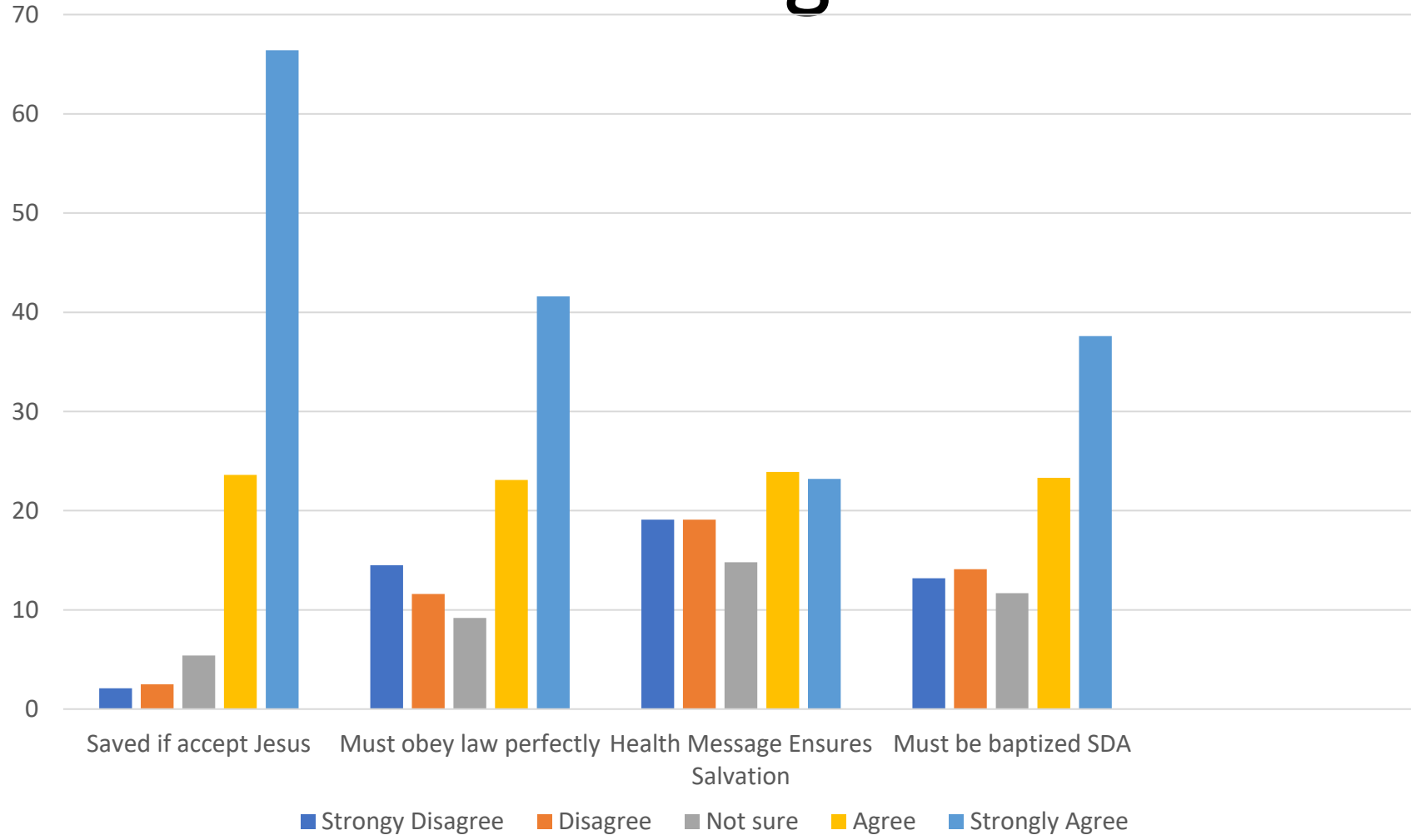
Purpose of Study

- The purpose of these analyses was to examine the extent of Adventist members responses to four questions:
 - I am saved the moment I believe & Accept what Jesus has done for me
 - I will not get to heaven unless I obey God's law perfectly
 - If I keep the Health Message, I am assured of salvation
 - To be saved, I need to be baptized into the SDA Church
 - A five-point Likert scale was used from strongly agree to strongly disagree
- In addition, we examined differences in response by:
 - Generation
 - Gender
 - Parental Style
 - Cultural context

Methods and Acknowledgements

- Date from 2017/2018 Global Church Member Survey (GCMS II)
- Total N about 66,000
- Lowest for any question analyzed – 53,000
- Data collected by research teams around the globe in all Divisions
- Questionnaire developed by ASTR, previous survey, Andrews University researchers
- Questionnaires translated into local languages and back translated to ensure accuracy
- Meta Analysis approved by Andrews University IRB
- Team at Andrews: Duane McBride, Karl Bailey, Shannon Trecartin, Alina Baltazar, Petr Cincala, Rene Drumm
- Filled out on-line or in person – Defined population as core Adventists – they were there and took the time to fill it out
- Three Publications from these data – Bailey et al., 2021; McBride et al., 2021; Baltazar & McBride, 2023 – See final report Bailey et al., 2018. One publication submitted by Cincala, McBride, Drumm

Findings



Adventists – Righteousness by Faith and Legalism

- 90% of Adventists agree or strongly agree that one is saved by faith in Christ – in most Divisions it is over 95%.
- Generally, a majority of respondents also agree with legalism statements about keeping the law perfectly and needing to be a baptized Adventist to be saved and close to half on keeping the health message ensuring salvation.
- We examined the correlates of legalism.

Differences by Gender, Generation & Parenting Style

- There were no substantial differences by gender overall or by world division.
- There were differences by generation and parenting style
 - Over 70% of those 18-25 believed they had to keep the law perfectly to be saved compared to 58% of those over 65. But the correlation was only .09
 - Youth raised in the church or who joined as Children and who were raised by Authoritarian or Permissive parents were the most legalistic; but again, correlations are low.

It is all about Cultural Context

- Organizationally, we think in terms of Divisions.
- In some cases, Divisions reflect some level of homogenous cultural context -- example may be the NAD.
- Overall, the world divisions that were lowest on Legalism were in the Northern Hemisphere. For example, only about 8% of the respondents in the NAD strongly agreed that one had to keep the law perfectly to be saved compared to 64% in the ECD (East Central Africa).
- But most Divisions include very diverse cultures (SPD includes Australia and New Guinea).
- So we used country data.

Differences by Cultural Context

- We used 8 cultural indices to examine their relationship to legalism (combining the scores from the 3 legalism questions) – legalism indices are intercorrelated – and it is recognized that these indices are based on western cultural assumptions

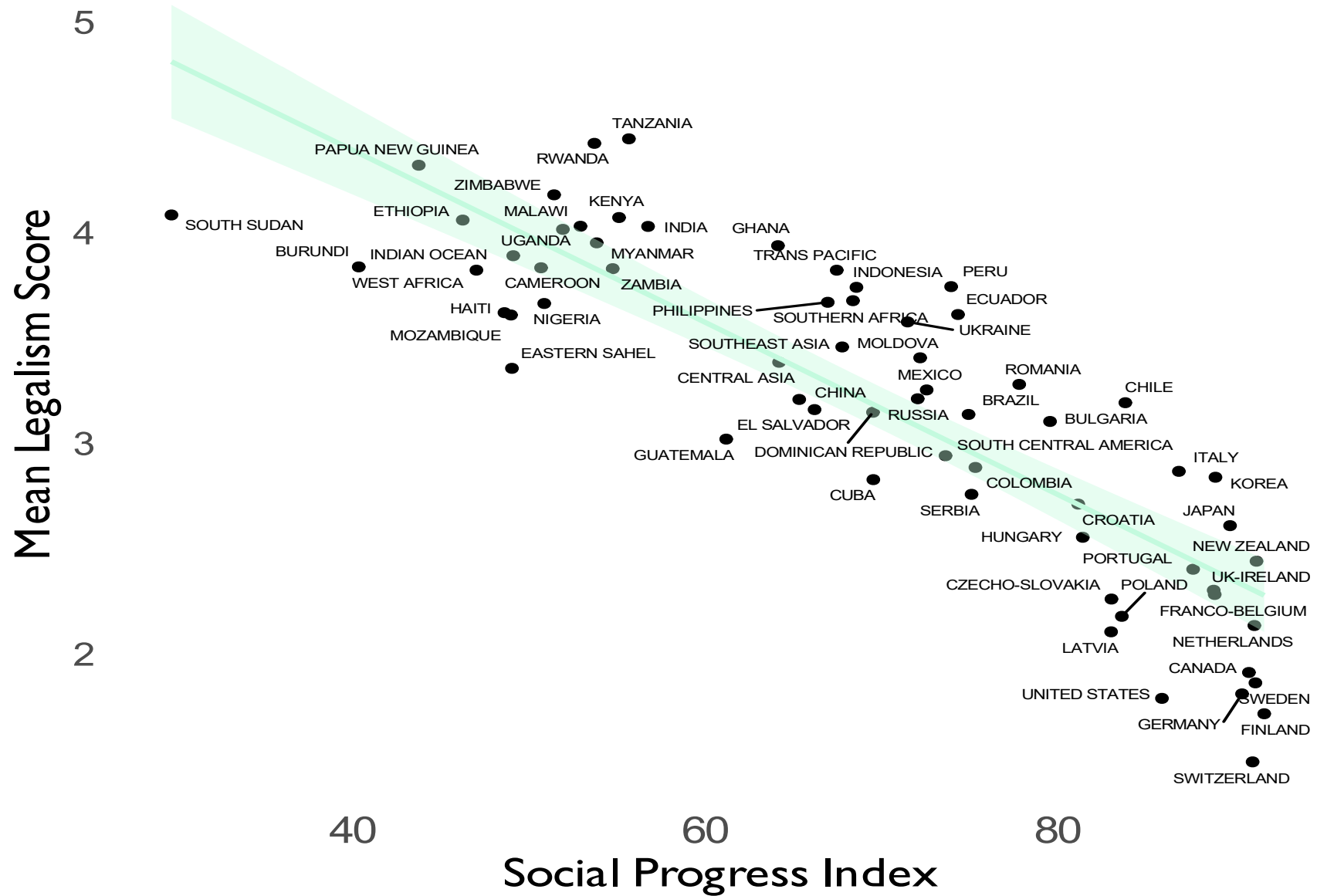
➤ Social Progress Index	$r = -.854$
➤ Happiness (Cantrell's Ladder)	$r = -.853$
➤ Human Development Index	$r = -.837$
➤ Individualism (Hofstede)	$r = -.727$
➤ Disease prevalence	$r = .715$
➤ Civil Liberty	$r = -.670$
➤ % Nonreligious	$r = -.666$
➤ Gender Parity	$r = -.412$

Legalism and Culture

- The highest correlation between legalism scale and culture was the Social Progress Index – $r=.854$ & it is a very broad inclusive index. Focus in on that index https://www.socialprogress.org/static/9e62d6c031f30344f34683259839760d/2021%20Social%20Progress%20Index%20Executive%20Summary-compressed_0.pdf
- Elements of the SPI:
 - Basic Human Needs -- nutrition & basic medical care; water & sanitation; shelter, personal safety.
 - Foundations of Well Being – Access to basic education both genders; access to information; health and wellness; environmental quality.
 - Opportunity – Personal rights; personal freedom & choice; inclusiveness; access to advanced education.

Social Progress Index

$r = -.854$



Where does legalism flourish?

- Where basic human needs are not met in terms of shelter, water, sanitation, safety and health.
- Where there is limited access to education and information and there is environmental pollution.
- Where there are no economic opportunities for personal/family improvement and limited personal freedom.
- Where early death and long-life uncertainty are common.

Why Does Legalism Flourish

- Sociologists argue that fundamentalism flourish in insecure, chaotic environment and/or where there is rapid social change (Gifford, 1991; Bruce, 2000).
- Anthropologists and psychologists have also focused on what is called cost signaling (Bird & Smith, 2005).
 - Behaviors that are difficult, have costs that signal to others group membership.
 - Cost signaling discourages the non-committed.
 - Keeping the Sabbath, no substance use, and dietary issues would be classic examples of cost signaling.

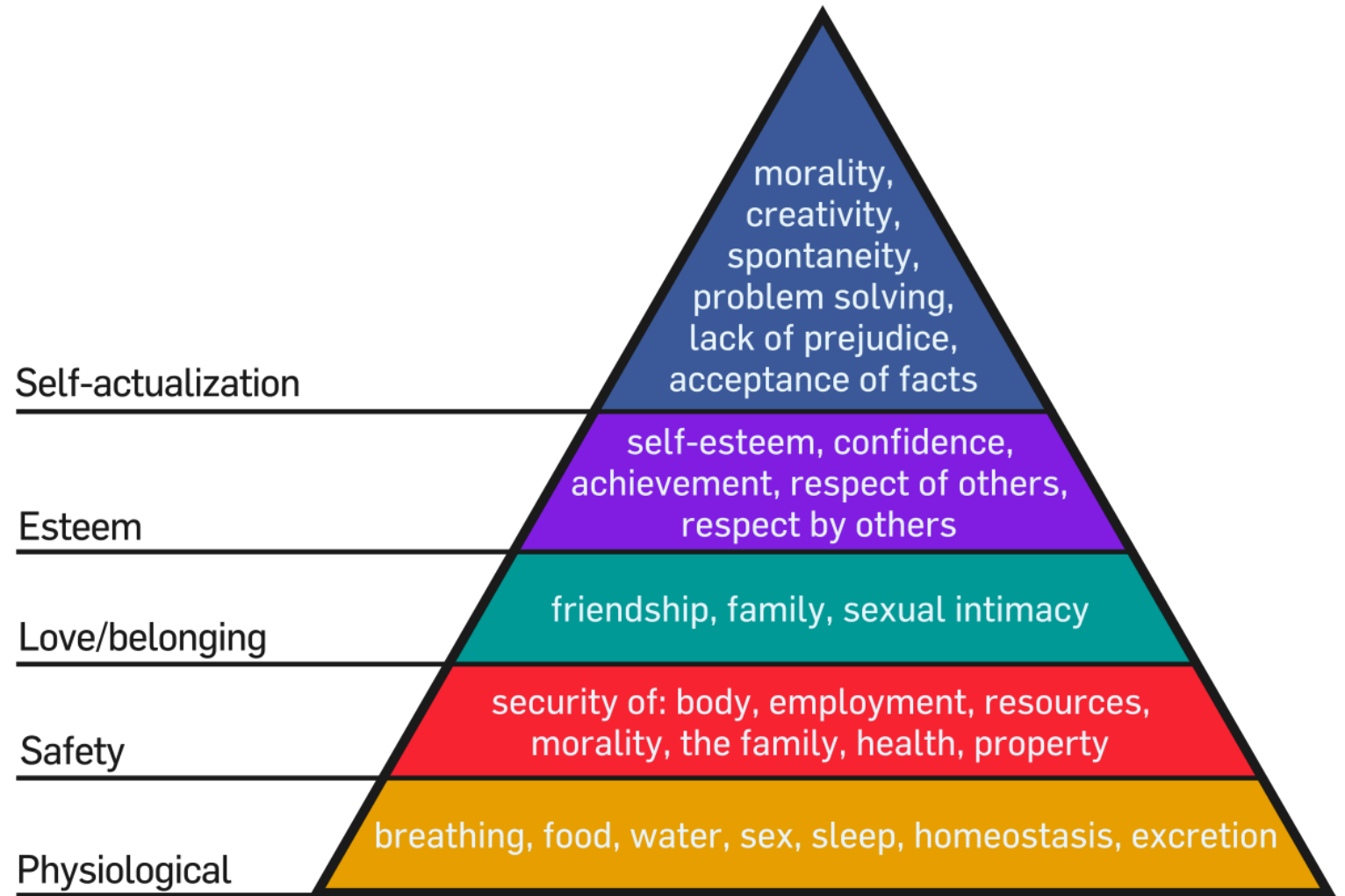
Public Signaling Vs Private Behavior

- As researchers have noted, because of the costs of the signals, individuals often behave differently in private than in public.
- While Adventist public events are almost always vegetarian/vegan, the majority of Adventists eat meat and about 45% think that they can pick and chose which elements of the health message to follow.
- Even in one of the most legalistic Divisions, the ECD, about 45% thought they could pick and chose which elements of the Health Message to obey and the majority ate meat at least weekly.
- The NAD has about the lowest rate of legalism and the highest rate of vegetarianism/veganism – about 50% -- but today there is very little cost signaling in diet in the NAD.

Human Development and Righteousness by Faith

- Religious beliefs are strongly influenced by cultural context.
- Our data suggest that righteousness by faith and a rejection of legalism is much more likely to occur in an environment that meets basic human needs such as shelter, safety, education, personal freedom, opportunities, gender equality, and health care access.
- Perhaps Maslow's hierarchy of human needs must be met before we can understand Righteousness by Faith and reject legalism (Maslow, 1943)?
- Churches need to be a part of human/cultural development if righteousness by faith is to be understood and legalism rejected.
- ADRA's work may play a vital role in accepting righteousness by faith!

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



References

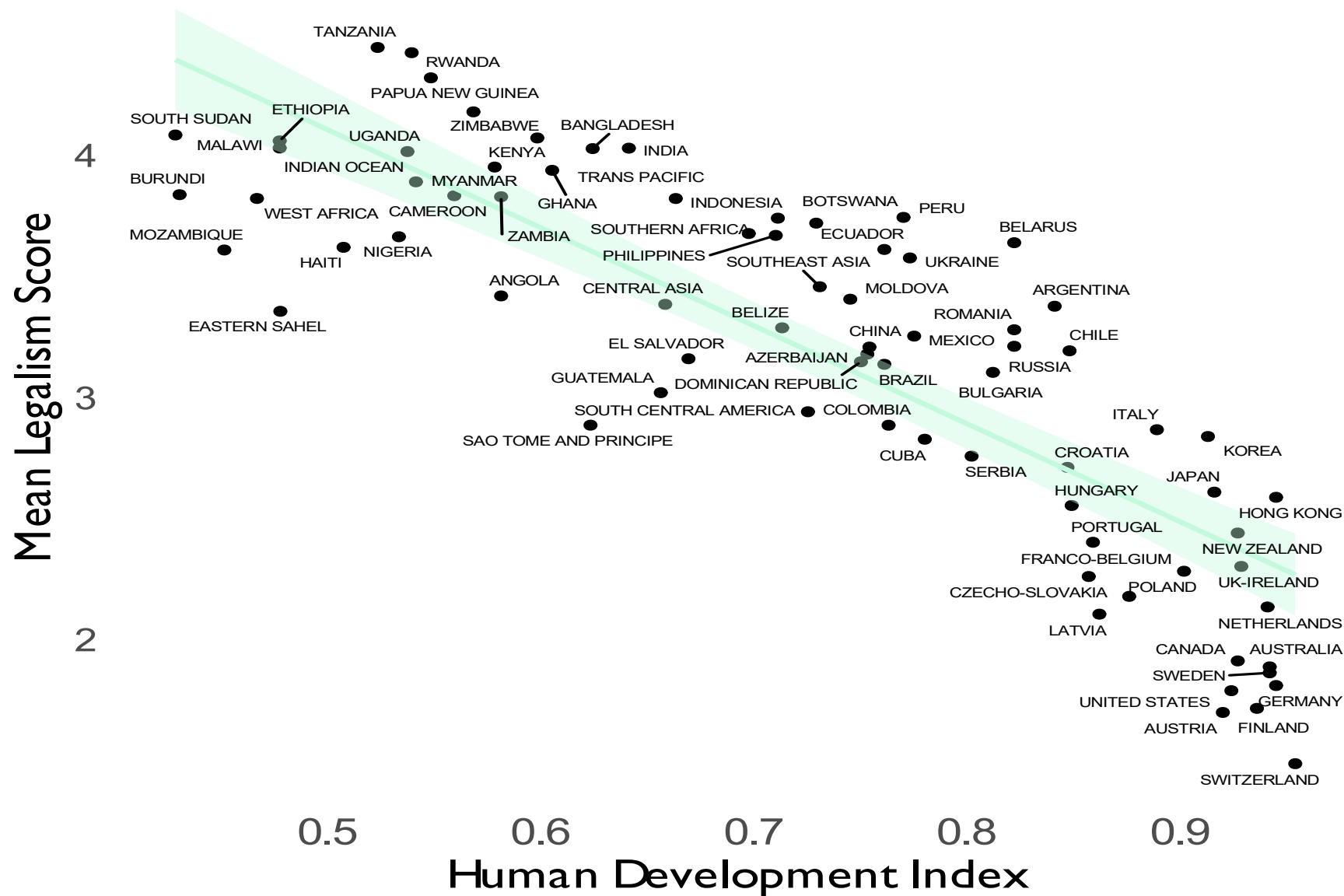
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Happiness (Cantrell's Ladder) $r = -.853$

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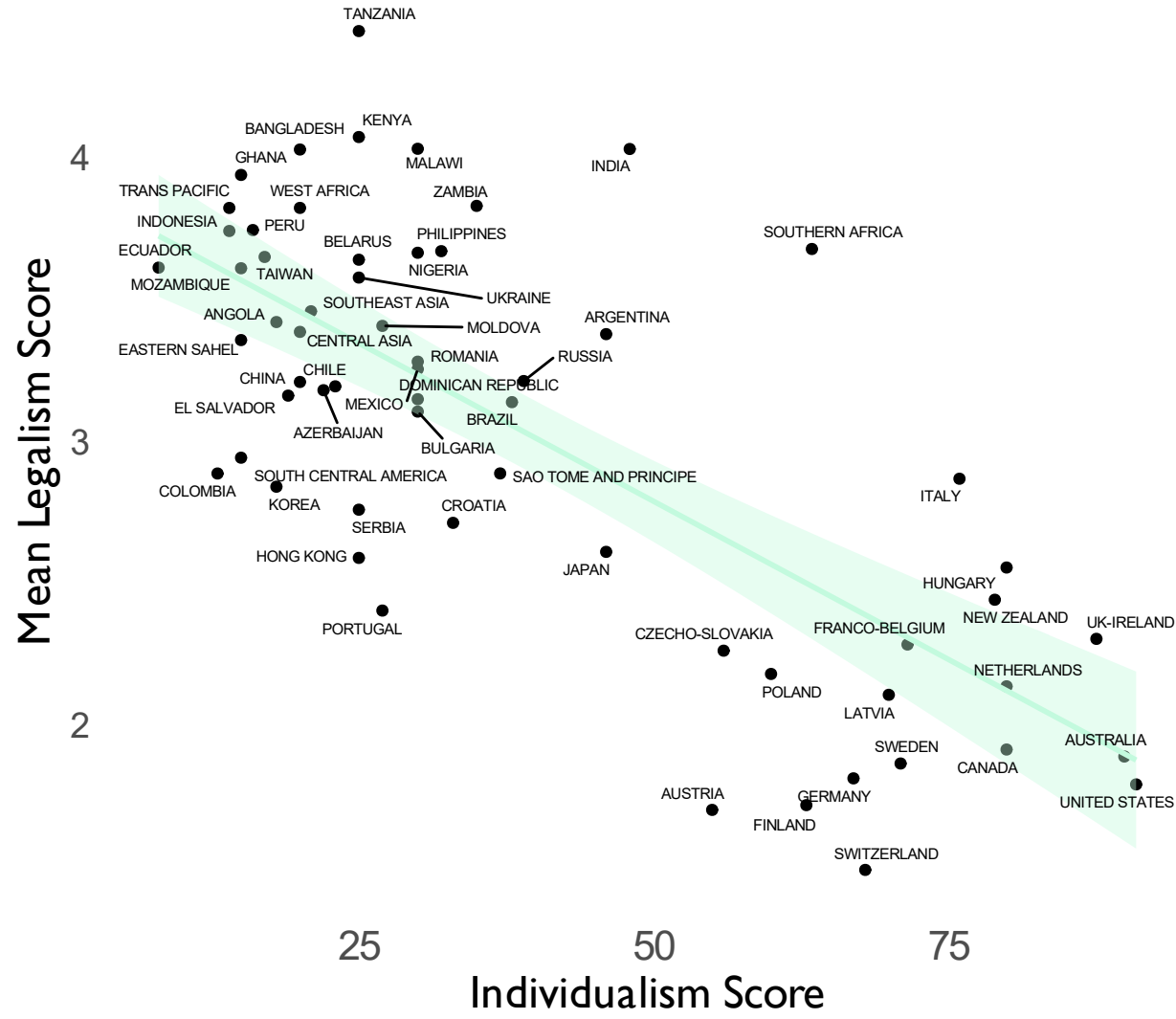

Human Development Index

$r = -.837$



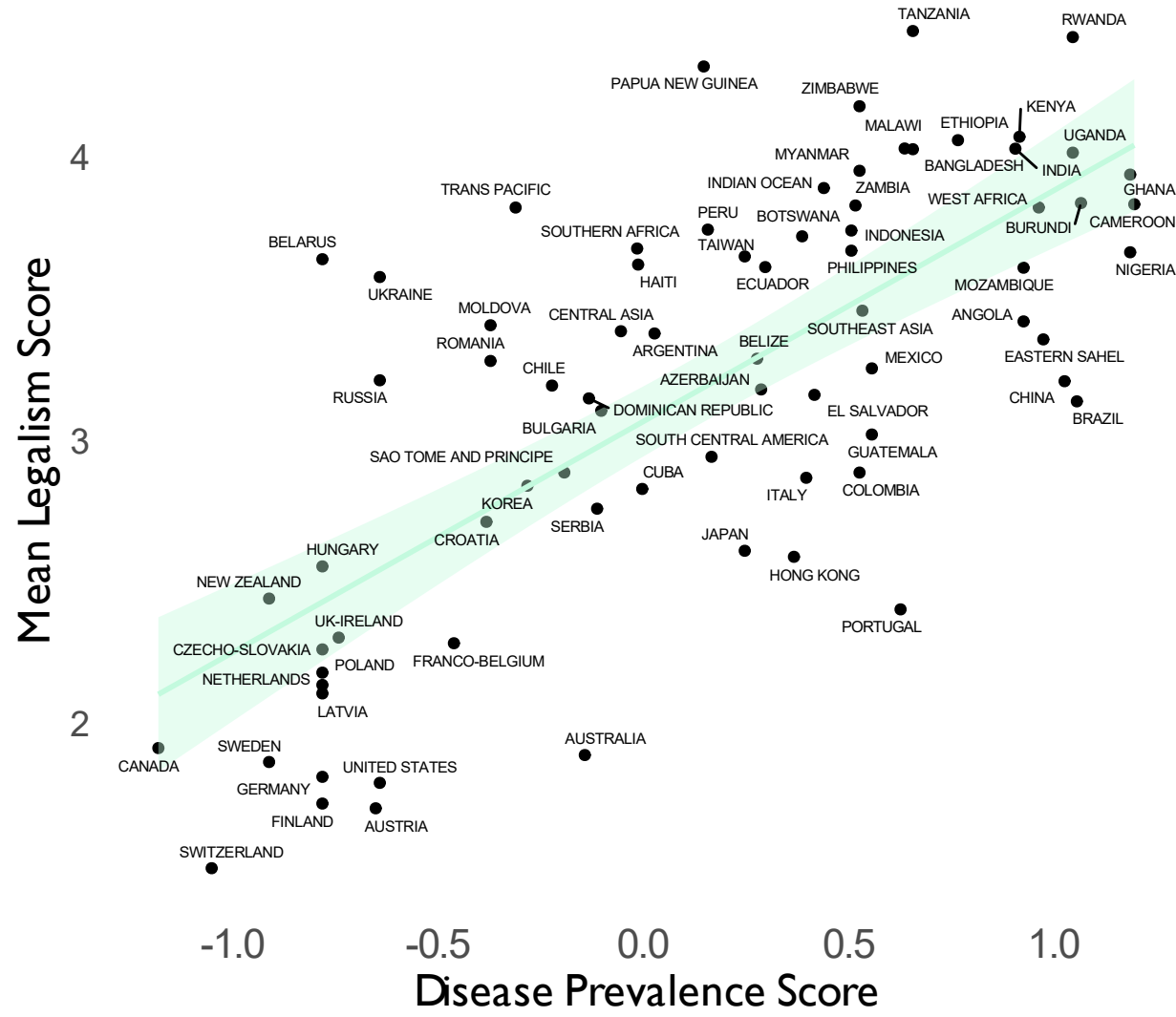
Individualism (Hofstede)

$r = -.727$



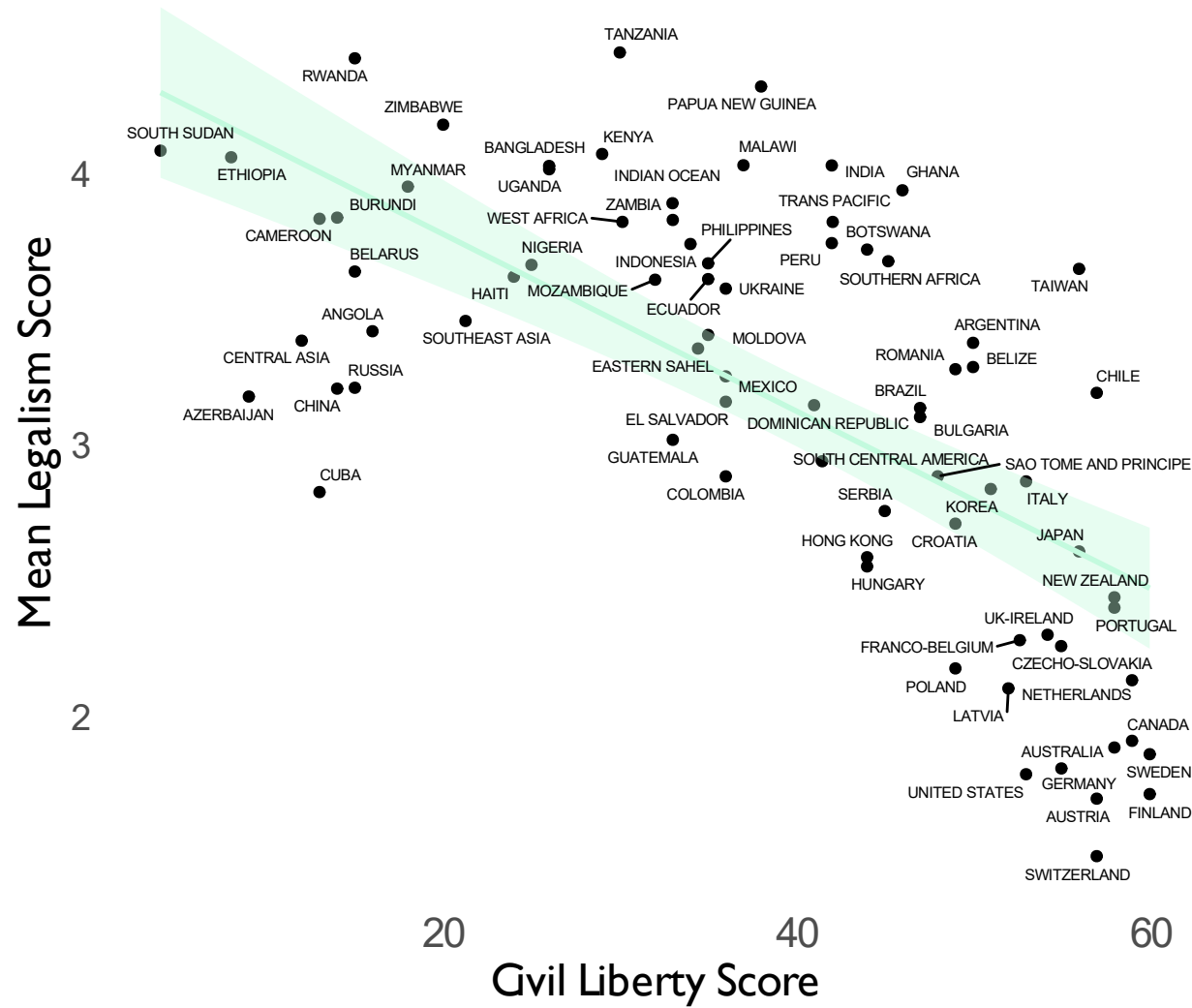
Disease Prevalence

$r = .715$



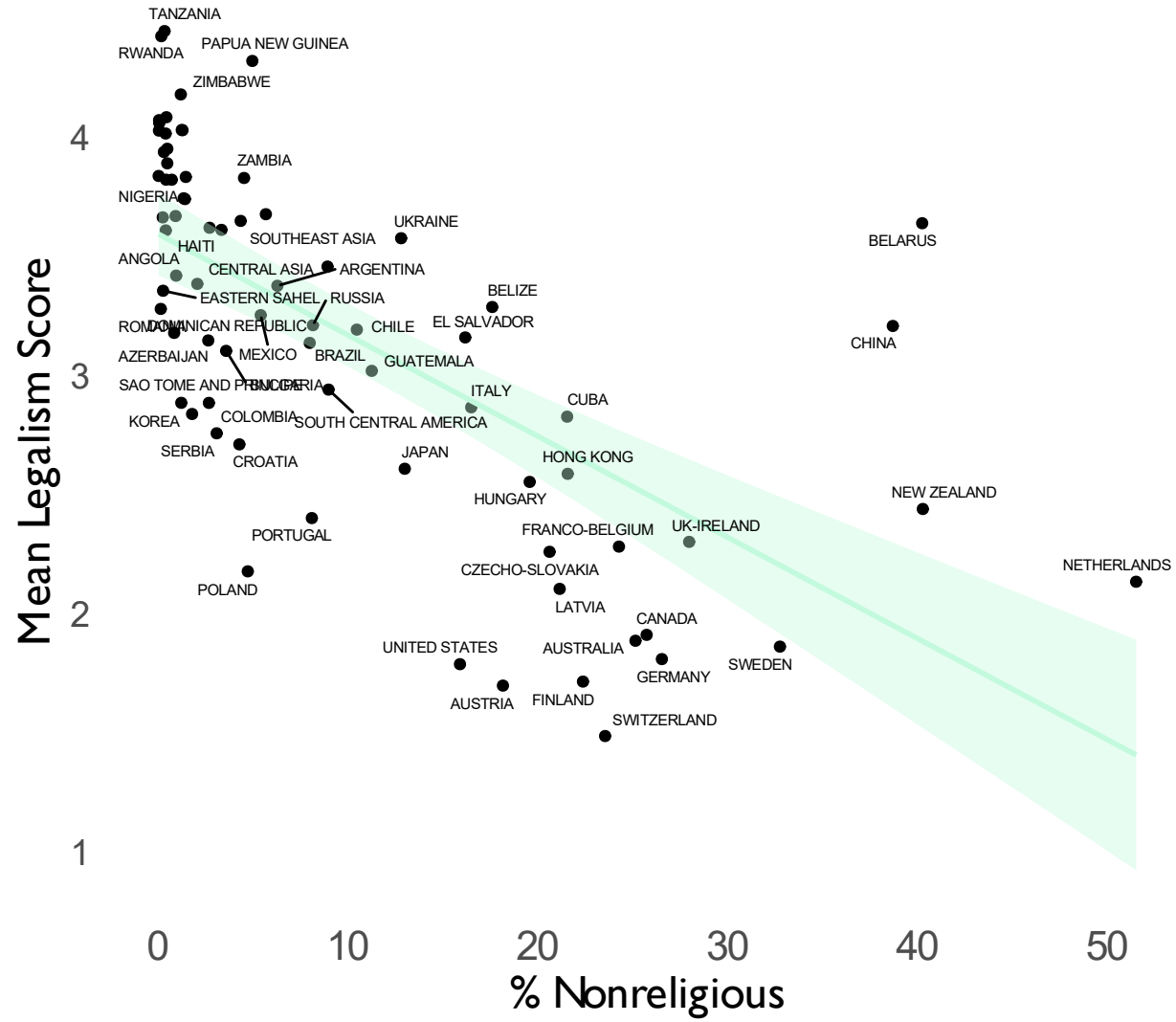
Civil Liberty (Freedom House)

$r = -.670$



% Nonreligious

$r = -.666$



Gender Parity

$r = -.412$

