

Secularism linked to prosperity and better education, study finds

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Secularism and tolerance of minorities and individual rights have made societies more prosperous, educated and democratic, according to a major scientific study.

Academics researching advances in wealth, health and democracy since the Enlightenment have found that "secular-rationality" and "cosmopolitanism" needed to be in place for countries to develop socioeconomically.

They added that these factors predicted growth in GDP per capita, democratisation and educational attainment.

The researchers analysed data gathered by the World and European Values Survey, covering around half a million people from 109 countries since 1990, before reaching their conclusions.

They found that places with the greatest increases in wealth, education and democracy in the 21st century tended to have pre-existing secular and tolerant cultures.

Academic Damian Ruck said the study showed promoting "a culture of secularism, tolerance and openness", along with improved public health, "may be the first step on the road to development".

The researchers found that "secular-rationality" was linked to higher levels of economic development and educational attainment, while "cosmopolitanism" was linked to democratisation.

A National Secular Society spokesperson said the study was "a reminder that secularism has both ethical and economic value".

"It is no surprise to see secularism linked to increases in prosperity and better education. Religious incursions into the public square frequently stifle the pursuit of knowledge and undermine individual rights and social cohesion, holding back political and socioeconomic development.

"Secularism is also a fundamental principle of any democratic society, as it defends citizens' ability to have an input into public policy and to avoid having religious demands imposed upon them.

"Politicians should take heed of this study and promote secularist principles both at home and abroad."

Ruck said he hoped the research highlighted the importance of culture in discussions on international development.

"Ideas matter and they may contribute to increasing wealth, education and democracy. Another thing to remember is that these ideas are available to everyone."

The paper, which has been published in the journal *Royal Society Open Science*, was produced by academics from the University of Bristol and University of Tennessee.

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[*Tolerance, openness and secularism are the first steps to economic prosperity, study finds*](#) (Newsweek)

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