Religiosity Dilemma: A Paradox Related to SDG Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This study is undertaken to offer empirical insights into the impact of countries with varying levels of religiosity and different GDP conditions on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There are 127 countries in the world as the sample. The data analysis method uses multiple regression analysis. To separate between low and high-religiosity countries, the data is separated based on the median of religiosity. The religiosity variable uses an index religiosity publication, GDP uses a measure of country income released by the World Bank, while the implementation of SDGs uses an index released by the United Nations. The results of this study show that religiosity has a negative effect on SDG while GDP has a positive effect on SDG. The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. Commitment to realizing sustainability goals needs the support of various stakeholders, according to the findings of this research including religious leaders, government, and the community.

INTRODUCTION

Progress in implementing the SDGs has been made, but key gaps remain in assessing interlinkages, trade-offs, and synergies between targets, potentially undermining their transformative potential (Allen et al., 2018). This is certainly a great research opportunity to delve deeper into. In the context of this research, the two variables identified as contributors to the implementation of sustainability goals are first, the level of religiosity, which shows the extent of influence of religious and spiritual value beliefs, and second, the GDP conditions of these countries.

In the long run, the phenomenon of religiosity is of concern to society due to the impact and influence that religiosity has on social life. Most countries that are categorized as developed countries are countries that tend to be weak in religion. Countries with low levels of religiosity tend to have more advanced development and a much better quality of life for their people. The problem is that countries with high levels of religiosity tend to have higher levels of problems such as corruption, sexual harassment, discrimination, and cyberbullying (Proios et al., 2017). Although religiosity is said to provide a good deed both to social life and the environment it is not as expected. With these indications, it can be said that religiosity is expected to support humans and the environment, the implication is quite the opposite.

The individual characteristics of the population will shape the future of the nation; these

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characteristics can be influenced by the religious component that instills and directs the principles of personal autonomy and individual beliefs as well as the ability to adapt (Schwartz & Huismans, 1995; Sobchik, 2022). The concept of religiosity presents a paradox, raising questions about its continued relevance and significance in social life, and whether it might exacerbate societal conditions. Contrary to being solely a matter of belief or personal experience, religiosity fundamentally revolves around individual and collective behaviors (Aran, 2013). This perspective challenges conventional notions and prompts a critical examination of the role and impact of religiosity on both the individual and society at large. The rise of crime, corruption, and sexual harassment in countries with high religiosity shows the failure of the implementation of these religious teachings in daily life (Gokcekus & Ekici, 2020). Another argument is that the more religious a person is, the less emphasis on values for individual freedom and openness to change (Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). In addition, excessive government intervention and bureaucracy also affect the inhibition to innovate, especially in countries that adopt religious doctrines (Frey & Eichenberger, 2019). In countries with low religiosity, individuals are freer to innovate, leading to more economically oriented development. These arguments show that the level of religiosity of countries in the world affects how they execute their sustainability programs.

Mbah & East (2022) research with community participants in lower-middle-income and low-income countries revealed tensions and challenges affecting the implementation of the SDGs in these country groups. There are issues that low- and middle-income countries must resolve first before talking about sustainability goals. For example, the fulfillment of water and sanitation services (Pereira & Marques, 2022); the ability to overcome the financial crisis (Antoniades et al., 2020); the environmental, health, and social impacts of industry (Kulik et al. 2017); and the problems of inequality and the quality of education (Heleta & Bagus, 2021) before these countries focus on the implementation of the SDGs. This is an indication that there will be differences in the implementation of the SDGs between groups of countries with high and low economic conditions.

This study is undertaken to offer empirical insights into the impact of countries with varying levels of religiosity and different GDP conditions on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings of this research contribute valuable insights into the factors that should be taken into consideration to enhance the pursuit of sustainability goals by countries worldwide. By exploring the interplay between religiosity, economic conditions, and the advancement of SDGs, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding that can inform policy decisions and initiatives aimed at fostering global sustainable development.

LITERATUR REVIEW
Karl Marx's Theory

Karl Marx's vision of economic, social, and spiritual development has been a valuable guide for humanity, helping to achieve a happy future through the convergence of science, education, and nature-friendly practices (Chereshnev & Ivanitsky, 2018). Marxism is a philosophy of science, that contributes to the development of historical approaches and

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methodological approaches in social sciences and humanities (Blyukher, 2018). Religious superstructures have infused themselves into economic infrastructures (Johnston, 2020).

Karl Marx (1843) said that religion is an opiate for society itself. According to him, religion is the lifeblood of people in an oppressed world, those who no longer have a soul. This is where religion is only used to ease the burden and suffering of life. When people are oppressed, and the world has been destroyed, religion is the last consolation and escape to give hope and happiness to the spiritual world. Karl Marx also said that religion is used to oppress society itself by using illusory happiness. The position of religion in influencing the life of society will always be maintained continuously by religious leaders through religious doctrines. Religious doctrine itself limits the ability of an individual to work and advance their nature.

Religiosity, GDP, and SDGs

Religiosity is an individual's appreciation and experience of the religious teachings of the religion or belief embraced by the individual along with his participation in spiritual activities (Warsah & Imron, 2019). Religiosity can be used to measure the extent to which a person believes, respects, practices, and participates in religious activities (Iddagoda & Opatha, 2017). Behavior that reflects spirituality is said to provide good for community welfare, prosperity, and development.

Gross domestic product reflects the country's financial condition in one period (Geiger, 2018). Through Gross Domestic Product, it can be seen how the financial condition of the community has shown indications of poverty or wealth. GDP comes from the condition of the country's human resources, if both want to progress, then of course financially it can be more prosperous and prosperous (Elistia & Syahzuni, 2018). Based on the World Bank (2023) GDP is divided into four categories, namely: a) low income, b) lower middle income, c) upper middle income, and d) high income. The greater the wealth of the community and the country, the more development can be fulfilled and carried out.

The sustainable development goals consist of 17 index goals and 169 targets aimed at economic development, social order, and environmental sustainability for all countries (United Nations, 2023). All countries are aiming to reach a bright spot by 2030. To increase the sustainability of the country's development by improving the quality of people's lives through indicators in 17 sustainable development goals as in Figure 1.

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Figure 1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals
Source: United Nations (2023)

Hypothesis Development

Enormous additional funding per year is required for low- and middle-income countries to achieve the SDG 3 health targets (approximately \$274 billion), with health workforce and infrastructure as key cost drivers (Stenberg et al., 2017). Financial crises in low-income countries may reverse the progress made in reducing poverty and have a negative domino effect on SDGs related to poverty (Antoniades et al., 2020). The research findings of Kulik et al. (2017) revealed that low- and middle-income countries face economic, environmental, health, and social problems that negatively affect the implementation of the SDGs. The case study was conducted in Malawi, the world's largest burley tobacco producer, where the population is negatively affected by tobacco consumption and production. Another issue is that higher education in low-income countries has been neglected in the implementation of the SDGs, leading these countries to depend on foreign aid, and weaken their institutions, despite their commitment to equity and quality education (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). Furthermore, low- and middle-income countries show increasing political commitment to health and health-related SDGs but need more implementation research, integrated multi-sectoral strategies, and better communication strategies (Siddiqi et al., 2020).

H1a: Low-religiosity countries have a negative influence on the implementation of the SDGs.

H2a: The GDP of low-religious countries has a negative influence on the implementation of SDGs.

Higher religiosity is associated with more positive socially desirable responses, suggesting that religiosity is partly in the service of self-enhancement (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010). Religiosity exerts an influence on women's vocation of participation and men's occupational orientation at work, where higher religiosity leads to stronger calling orientation and job orientation for women but can reduce engagement in work for men (Rożnowski & Zarzycka, 2020). This principle of equality is also one of the indicators of SGDs. Focusing on poverty alleviation and reducing inequality will have a positive impact on achieving all SDGs, meaning that only countries with high-performing economies have a better and more comprehensive chance of achieving their sustainability goals (Lusseau & Mancini, 2019). Countries with high

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GDP have greater capacity and capability to focus their attention on higher strategic goals such as sustainability.

H1b: High-religiosity Countries have a positive influence on the implementation of the SDGs.

H2b: The GDP of high-religious countries has a positive influence on the implementation of SDGs.

METHOD
Sample

The sample used is 127 countries around the world. These countries are included in the countries listed in the religiosity index, SDGs index, and GDP information in 2020. Two outlier data must be eliminated during normality testing so that the total observation data is 125 which are then divided into two categories of country characteristics (low and high religiosity).

Measurement Variable and Analysis

The religiosity index is obtained from a publication issued by CEOWORLD.biz (2020) in collaboration with the Global Business Policy Institute. The index is produced by considering indicators of the level of religious commitment in four aspects, namely affiliation, importance of religion, attendance at places of worship, and frequency of prayer, whose scores certainly vary greatly around the world. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Index is based on data published by the United Nations (2020) because of a review of the implementation of the 17 Goals in the SDGs. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is based on data obtained from the World Bank (2020) regarding the income of all countries in one period.

This study used multiple linear regression in STATA13 to conduct the tests. This study will divide the data into two, namely countries with low religiosity and countries with high religiosity to determine the difference in the influence of each. The model was tested twice to distinguish the results between countries with low and high religiosity. To separate between low and high religiosity, the data was separated based on median religiosity. The model used in this study is as follows:

$$SDGs = \alpha + \beta 1 Re + \beta 2 GDP + \varepsilon$$

Description:

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goal

Re : Religiosity

GDP : logarithm of Natural Gross Domestic Product (Ln GDP)

$\beta 1$: Coefficient of Religiosity

$\beta 2$: GDP Coefficient

α : Constant

ε : Error

Table 1. Measurement variables

Variables	Measurement
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	$\dfrac{sum\ of\ goal\ disclosed\ by\ country}{total\ number\ of\ SDG\ goals}$
Religiosity	The religiosity index is divided into two groups: Low religiosity = 0

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	High religiosity = 1	
Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	*ln GDP*	

Before testing the hypothesis model, the data will go through the following classical assumption tests: normality testing using the Skewness/Kurtosis test with a value> 0.05, multicollinearity test using the variance inflation factor (VIF) with a value < 10, and heteroscedastic test can be identified and resolved using the robust standard errors approach (Kohardinata & Widianingsih, 2023). If the results meet the test value criteria, the research model can be used.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
Descriptive Statistic

The economic conditions of the group of countries included in the low religiosity countries have an average GDP performance that is included in the high-income range, which means that the economies of these countries have very good performance achievements, although they are still at the lower limit of the high-income range. Meanwhile, the religiosity score index of this group of countries is below the median of the entire sample of countries in the study sample (low religiosity countries and high religiosity countries), which means that the group of countries with low religiosity levels. The achievement of the SDGs is in the category of almost optimal level of SDGs implementation, as it has a score of 75.28 out of an optimal total score of 100. This situation is slightly better than the SDGs achievement score of the group of countries with high religiosity levels. These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic of Low Religiosity Countries

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
GDP	61	25.76322	1.879254	21.18425	30.67047
Religiosity	61	52.4918	20.10441	16	83
SDGs	61	75.28033	5.593443	55.4	86.4

The economic conditions of the group of countries included in the high-religiosity countries have an average GDP performance that is included in the upper-middle category, which means that the economies of these countries have performance achievements that are one level below those of high-income countries. Meanwhile, the religiosity score index of this group of countries is above the median value of the entire sample of countries in the study sample (low religiosity countries and high religiosity countries). The achievement of the SDGs is included in the category of the level of implementation of the SDGs in the second category after the optimum, namely the green threshold range, because it is at a score of 61.59 from the range of 62.8 to 74.6, meaning that there have been good initiative efforts to implement the goals of the various SDGs indicators. These are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistic of High Religiosity Countries

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
GDP	64	24.69652	1.579426	21.56773	28.61223
Religiosity	64	92.61875	4.740701	84	99.7

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SDGs	64	61.59063	7.970097	39.2	77.6

Model Feasibility Test Results and Hypothesis Testing

The results of the classical assumption testing of Low Religiosity Countries are presented in Table 4. The F-test results for the first model show a significance value that is met, so the model is considered feasible to continue in hypothesis testing. These are presented in Table 5.

Table 4. Classical Assumption Test of Low Religiosity Countries

Test	Measurement	Value	
Normality	Skewness / Kurtosis	0.1133	
Multicollinearity	Variables	Collinearity Tol	VIF
	Religiosity	1.11	0.902323
	GDP	1.11	0.902323

Table 5. Model Feasibility and Coefficient of Determination Result (1)

Prob > F	0.0000
R-squared	0.4942

Hypothesis 1a Low Religiosity countries have a negative influence on the implementation of the SDGs is accepted. Hypothesis 1b The GDP of low-religiosity countries has a negative influence on the implementation of the SDGs is rejected because the effect of the GDP variable gives a positive direction to the implementation of the SDGs. That is, the more the GDP of Low-religious countries increases, the greater the country meets its sustainability goals through various implementation programs or activities. These are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Result of Low Religiosity Countries

sdgs	Coef.	t	P>|t|
religiosity	-.1417186	-5.26	0.000
gdp	1.044155	3.52	0.001
cons	55.81859	7.07	0.000

The results of the classical assumption testing of High Religiosity Countries are presented in Table 7. The F-test results for the second model show a significant value that is met, so the model is considered feasible to continue in hypothesis testing. These are presented in Table 8.

Table 7. Classical Assumption Test of High Religiosity Countries

Test	Measurement	Value	
Normality			
	Skewness / Kurtosis	0.7909	
Multicollinearity	Variables	Collinearity Tol	VIF
	Religiosity	1.00	0.996589

Table 8. Model Feasibility and Coefficient of Determination Result (2)

Prob > F	0.0000
R-squared	0.3613

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Hypothesis 2a. High-religiosity countries that have a positive impact on the implementation of the SDGs are rejected. This is because the direction of the religiosity variable is negative towards the SDGs, which means that the more religious a country is, the lower its commitment to the implementation of the various goals that are indicators of the SDGs. Hypothesis 2b, that the GDP of countries with high religiosity has a positive impact on the implementation of the SDGs, is accepted. These are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Multiple Linear Regression Result of High Religiosity Countries

sdgs	Coef.	t	P>|t|
religiosity	-.4099084	-2.42	0.019
gdp	2.701429	4.63	0.000
Cons	32.83993	1.40	0.168

Low Religiosity Countries and High Religiosity Countries Towards SDGs

The findings of this study show that both the low-religiosity group of countries and the high-religiosity group of countries have a negative influence on the implementation of the SDGs. This means that regardless of the religiosity background (as indicated by the religiosity index) of the countries sampled in this study, they have similar behaviors in realizing sustainability goals. Initially, the effects of religiosity are not directly felt in the present and are even considered unimportant because they are still subjective. However, religiosity itself is more complex than just personality, maturity, and culture; religiosity is also thought to affect social order and state development (Noworol & Głaz, 2022). However, when countries are increasingly degrading due to a lack of state development and even decline and poverty, the role of religion is questioned (Howes et al., 2017).

With religiosity, all state development goals become more oriented to the interests of religious activities rather than the interests of the public. Countries with high levels of religiosity are less developed due to income inequality, in contrast to countries with low religiosity which tend to be more prosperous and prosperous (Inglehart, 2021). Rationally, funds that should be used for state development are used for religious activities whose impact cannot be felt directly. The initial assumption that countries with low religiosity focus more on their development goals in the social, natural environment, and economic sectors is not confirmed by the findings of this study. This character is like countries with high religiosity that will also hinder their own country's development policies due to religious doctrines, or in other words, their focus is more on religious goal orientation (Liu et al., 2018).

GDP Towards SDGs

The findings of this study reveal that both low-religiosity countries and high-religiosity countries have a positive direction toward the implementation of SGDs. This means that for these countries to focus on achieving various sustainability goals, they must have a supportive economic condition, the more their economic situation improves, the more intensive orientation towards sustainability goals can also be realized.

This finding is in line with the expression of Beck et al. (2007), that countries that focus on economic development will help to reduce income inequality for the whole society as well as for its development. Material things encourage development that has a more direct impact than

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immaterial things. To execute various activities and programs to realize the goals of the SDGs, a contribution from GDP is required because there are additional expenditures that will occur to implement the progress of the SDGs (Baum, 2020; Collste et al., 2021; Gaspar et al., 2019). The transformation to a sustainability-conscious world requires economic resources to make it happen.

However, (Adrangi & Kerr, 2022) also note that targeting GDP may not lead to the overall achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in developing countries. This suggests that the priorities of developing countries may still focus on development and physical development first, but not yet on the environmental and social goals that many of the SDGs accommodate. In addition, policymaker engagement in the SDGs is selective, focusing on goals and targets that are important domestically, and implementation depends on political preferences and challenges (Horn & Grugel, 2018). This is also noteworthy even though GDP can drive the realization of sustainability goals. Countries with low and high levels of religiosity and diverse economic conditions need to take into account the characteristics of their respective countries.

Religiosity, GDP, and SDGs Concerning Karl Marx's Theory

In line with the theory by Karl Marx (1843), that religion is only an opiate for society when experiencing pressure and injustice in the economy. Religiosity will decline very significantly when the country transitions from a developing country to a developed country with its focus from religion to finance in the long run (Paldam & Gundlach, 2013). Countries will begin to lose the religiosity aspect when they receive a better quality of life due to economic development but will seek religion when experiencing problems in life.

According to Karl Marx's concept, class conflicts can arise because of religion, especially if it is related to the consequences of globalization and capitalism which often lead humans to apathy and individualism (Nur Ainiyah et al., 2022). This situation, if we relate it to the goal of sustainability, weakens the success of achieving sustainability goals. Marx's view also reveals that ideology may limit one's understanding of ideas and hinder one's understanding of the relationship of ideas to physical objects (Smithers, 2010). The findings of this research are in line with this view, religiosity, which is another translation of an ideology in this context, will limit the person's understanding in carrying out real action space in realizing the pillars of sustainability goals.

Marx's Economic Theory emphasized that the value of labor was the only factor that determines the price of commodities, not the cost of machinery and capital (Sehgal, 2020). If associated with GDP, economic growth also needs to pay attention to aspects of labor value in the market mechanism, so that GDP can be controlled and make a positive contribution to the country's economic growth so that a country becomes empowered in realizing its sustainability goals.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that religiosity has a negative influence on the implementation of SDGs, both for countries with low religiosity and countries with high religiosity. Meanwhile, GDP has a positive influence on the implementation of SDGs. The implications of this research finding should be interpreted wisely. This is why, in the context of

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this study, religiosity seems like a paradox in terms of SDG implementation. Religiosity needs to be placed in its proper place. This means that belief in spiritual and religious values, norms, and views must be brought to the goal of bringing goodness to the earth, where one of the realizations is reflected in the various goals accommodated in the pillars of the SDGs.

The commitment to realize sustainability goals requires support from various stakeholders. These parties include religious leaders, the government, and the community. Religious leaders can play a role in providing guidance to religious communities in countries around the world on how the goodness of spiritual and religious beliefs can have a real impact through action on the world's sustainability goals. Governments can also play a role in aligning development goals and economic growth to accommodate sustainability goals. This can be done through policies and regulations that support the pillars of the SDGs. Communities, through their belief in religious values, need to bring this awareness into concrete actions that can support sustainability goals.

Since the results can still be verified, future studies might create research models by highlighting potential moderating or intervening variables in the relationship between religion and the implementation of the SDGs. Such variables include governance mechanisms within a country.

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