

COMPARING RELIGIOUS STATES TO SECULAR STATES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue discusses how religious states differ from secular states:

Pew Research Center collects data on the 50 states that measures how religious they are. We looked at the 12 most religious states and compared them to the 12 least religious states on several variables. While they did not differ much on some variables, on others they clearly did.

The 12 most religious states, as determined by the percent of adults who identify as highly religious, are, from top to bottom: Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, South Carolina, West Virginia, Georgia, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Texas and Utah.

The 12 least religious states are, from top to bottom: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Washington, Alaska, New York, Hawaii, Colorado and Oregon.

For all 24 states, we researched whether they had a religious liberty statute, i.e., one that was similar to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) on the federal level (we did not count states where the courts have ordered some sort of RFRA-like legislation).

We then compared these states on five issues: drug overdose death rate per 100,000; suicide mortality rate per 100,000; the percentage of pregnancies aborted; the level of restrictive abortion laws; and the existence of a school-choice initiative that includes private schools.

Religious Liberty Laws:

8 of 12 of the most religious states have a religious-liberty law.

1 of 12 of the least religious states has a religious-liberty law.

Drug Overdose Death Rate

The difference between the two state groupings was negligible.

Suicide Mortality Rate

The difference between the two state groupings was negligible.

Abortion Rate

The average percentage of pregnancies aborted per 100,000 in the most religious states was 11.23 percent.

The average percentage of pregnancies aborted per 100,000 in the least religious states was 17.66 percent.

Restrictive Abortion Laws

12 of 12 of the most religious states have restrictive abortion laws.

1 of 12 of the least religious states has a restrictive abortion law.

School Choice

11 of 12 of the most religious states has some sort of program that allows for private school choice.

3 of 12 of the least religious states has some sort of program that allows for private school choice.

What does this tell us?

There is little that lawmakers can do to affect people from overdosing on drugs or killing themselves. Similarly, whether

a state is religious or not does not seem to matter. (However, we know from many studies that the more religious a person is, the less likely he is to engage in drug use or commit suicide.)

By contrast, lawmakers play a key role in affecting abortion rates. The more restrictive the laws are, the less the abortion rate.

When it comes to school-choice programs that include private schools, lawmakers tend to follow the culture: the most religious states are the ones that enjoy the widest array of school-choice programs.

While these conclusions do not settle the issue altogether, it does indicate that those who support traditional moral values are better off living in the most religious states. It also suggests that it is not in our nation's interest to welcome the increasing secularization of society. Indeed, we should resist it.