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Origins of Religiousness: The Role of Natural Disasters

Across 900 regions of the World, this research shows that people are more religious when living in regions that are more frequently razed by natural disasters. This is in line with psychological theory stressing that religious people tend to cope with adverse life events by seeking comfort in their religion or searching for a reason for the event; for instance that the event was an act of God. This is termed religious coping. Natural disasters are a source for adverse life events, and thus one way to interpret my findings is by way of religious coping: People living in regions that are razed by natural disasters have developed a more religious culture in order to cope with the stress. The results are

robust to various alternative hypotheses; e.g. that natural disasters make people poorer and therefore more religious, that religious people are less likely to move out of disaster areas as they see the disaster as an act of God, etc. The results hold within Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, and across continents.