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## RECONSIDERING SECULARIZATION THEORY IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Duygu DERSAN ORHAN<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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Secularization theory holds that religion's impact on public and political life decreases with society's modernization. The widespread return of religion, however, calls into question this idea and forces researchers to reevaluate its presumptions and consequences. The conceptual analysis of secularization, the origins of secularism in international relations, the approach taken by theories of international relations to secularization, the criticisms leveled against secularization theory in the literature, and the applicability of secularization theory in modern global politics are the main topics covered by this study. This article argues that the most important shortcomings of secularization theory is that it is too Western-centric due to its origins in Western Enlightenment thought and that it is insufficient to explain the increasing number of non-state religious actors and transnational religious networks due to globalization. It is suggested that even though secularization theory offers valuable information about the modernizing process and the separation of governmental and religious authority, there is a need to revise and expand the theory to address the emergence of religiously oriented politics.

**Keywords:** Secularization theory, International relations, Politics, Religion

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<sup>1</sup>**Corresponding Author:** Doç. Dr, Atılım Üniversitesi, ORCID: 0000-0002-0618-1530, [duygu.dersan@atilim.edu.tr](mailto:duygu.dersan@atilim.edu.tr).

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## **1. Introduction**

The idea of the “death of religion” originated during the Enlightenment, when influential figures believed that sacred rites, symbolic liturgical celebrations, and teleological superstitions were remnants of the past that would not survive in the modern era (Norris, Inglehart, 2004: 3). Nineteenth century Western scholars and intellectuals believe that religion would lose its importance with the advent of industrial society. This idea became recognized as the secularization theory and perceived as one of the determinants of the modern period along with rationalization, industrialization and urbanization. Secularization also dominated and shaped International Relations (IR) in several ways. The secularization theory unchallenged so long in IR however, in the last decades, it has been subjected to criticisms in its long history. A counter-secularization thesis emerged in academic circles because of the September 11 attacks and the growth of the Islamic and Evangelical movements, strengthening the critical viewpoints that opposed the secularization thesis. The conventional secularization thesis is being challenged by the growing importance of non-state religious actors in international politics.

This paper focuses on the conceptual analysis of secularization, roots of secularism in international relations which dates to the Westphalia Peace Treaty (1648), the approach of international relations theories to secularization, the critiques against secularization theory in the literature and the relevance of secularization theory in contemporary global politics. It is stated that the secularization thesis still holds significant weight in describing the dynamics of the contemporary era, even though it is evident that religious politics have not vanished from the world and do not appear likely to do so very soon. International norms and practices are still being shaped by the secularization of state institutions and the emergence of secular ideas, especially in the areas of democracy, human rights, and governance. Thus, instead of burying, it is better to revise and elaborate the secularization theory to give an answer to the rise of religious based politics in international politics.

## **2. Conceptual Analysis of Secularization**

While many of the historians and thinkers agree on the importance of the process of secularization, they differ about the extent, causes and timing of secularization. There is not any clear definition of secularization and there exist different interpretations going under that name. The term secularism originally comes from the Latin word *saeculum* which doesn't have a religious meaning. Rather it means the length of time that roughly describes the probable life span of a human or the time it takes for a human generation to be completely regenerated. By

the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it started to be used as taking possession of land and people (Casanova, 1994: 13). Before the middle of the 1800s, secularization was known as, secularization was referred to the process by which lay owners acquired church property or clergymen, monks, and nuns left their orders (McLeod, 2000: 1). The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which initiated the "laicization of church lands," popularized this interpretation of secularization (Casanova, 1994: 3). It refers to the "taking possession" of land by the state after the Protestant Reformation and the following religious wars. As it relates to the modern notion of secularization, the state's seizure of land from the church can also be linked to the separation of church and state. In modern Western democracies, it is frequently used to refer to "the separation of religion and state." However, some scholars have used negative language when describing secularism like Calhoun and Scharffs. Calhoun (2011) believes that secularism is something like a political program, philosophy, or doctrine that frequently has anti-religious overtones. Scharffs (2011:109) asserts that secularism is only a harmful philosophy that has the potential to turn into its own form of dystopian fundamentalism.

The chain of events commencing with the Protestant Reformation and ensuing Thirty Years Wars were contributed to the Peace of Westphalia (1648) which could be regarded as turning points in the history of secularization. The sovereign state established with the Peace of Westphalia and its further implications affected the role of religion in politics. There is an understanding that Westphalia, which replaced religion with the principle of *raison d'état* is an important development in the history of secularization. Other significant moments in the history of secularization include the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, and the development of Darwin's theory of evolution in 1859 (McLeod, 2000: 4). Despite divergent opinions regarding the origins of secularization, most people tend to see it as a byproduct of the modern era, which is mostly characterized by rationality.

The secularization theory can be broadly divided in two perspectives. The first approach makes emphasis on the 'loss of faith' and suggests that as societies industrialize, religious beliefs of individuals will gradually decline. Max Weber's work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, greatly influenced this idea. Prominent sociologists like Berger, Martin, and Wilson further developed the rationalist argument in the 1960s and 1970s. This perspective focuses on the rational view of the world based on empirical and scientific knowledge generated by Enlightenment and gained strength with the rise of modern capitalism and industrialization. This argument holds that the Enlightenment promoted a logical worldview grounded in empirical data, scientific knowledge of natural phenomena, and technological dominance. The

core teachings of the Church were seen to have been rendered untenable in contemporary communities by rationalism, which eliminated any remaining superstitious beliefs in Western Europe. The second perspective on secularization which is known as ‘functional’ approach focuses on the decline of religious institutions' once-central roles in industrialized societies. This idea, rooted in Emile Durkheim's work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* became dominant in the 1950s. The majority of the activities performed by churches in the past were replaced by industrialized cultures typified by functional distinction, which resulted in a reduction in the moral and spiritual roles of religious organizations in industrial society. As the state provided public services, the social functions of religious institutions diminished, leading Durkheim to predict the gradual decline of their spiritual and moral roles in industrial societies (Norris&Inglehart, 2011: 7).

### **3. Roots of Secularism in International Politics**

There is a popular belief that the 1648 Peace of Westphalia marked the beginning of the modern international order. It is believed that the Peace of Westphalia established a new international order built on sovereign independent states. The relative position of states and the issue of religion are two topics that can be utilized to evaluate the consequences of the Westphalian system of sovereign states' development (Philpott, 2000: 211).

It is crucial to recall the circumstances that gave rise to Westphalia as well as the values outlined in the peace treaty in order to analyze the impact of Westphalia on the place of religion in international politics. After the Reformation (1517), some principalities converted to Protestantism in the Holy Roman Empire. Since the official religion of the Empire was Catholicism, the Protestants within the Empire caused unrest. The Thirty Years Wars began in 1618 after the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which gave German rulers the authority to uphold their own religion on their territory (Philpott, 2000: 211). A coalition against the Habsburgs led by France was established during the Thirty Years War with the leadership of Cardinal Richelieu on the side of the Protestants with the objective of undermining the Habsburgs' hegemony. In this sense, The Thirty Years Wars could also be regarded as “secular” in terms of the type of the alliance system that was formed on the anti-Habsburg coalition side. Furthermore, in several instances, the Catholic kingdoms within the Holy Roman Empire collaborated with the Protestants to secure their independence from the empire (Watson, 1993: 182-183).

The long struggle was brought to the end by the decline of the Habsburgs and negotiations known as the Westphalian settlement of 1648 were signed. The negotiations in Westphalia are regarded as the first general congress of the effective powers of Europe (Watson, 1993: 186).

All the princes of the Holy Roman Empire were represented at the negotiations as sovereign units. Although these are not directly written in none of the three main Westphalian Peace Treaties, references about sovereignty, equality of nations and the principle of non-intervention were made. These tenets, which safeguarded one another's sovereignty and the political self-determination of their peoples, signaled the foundation of an international community of law among independent governments with equivalent legal standing (Lesaffer, 2004: 9).

Apart from the declaration of the principles of sovereignty and equality among states, Westphalia was significant because it was the first "secular" conference where issues pertaining to the state, power, and warfare were considered. The peace accords of Westphalia were not allowed the pope for sending a representative. After the Peace of Westphalia, the Pope lost a great deal of its political influence and religion and ideology considered to be declined as aspects of international relations. According to the sovereignty principle, each state was given the right to choose its own religion without outside intervention, free practice of religion by Catholics and Lutherans were permitted and the right of rulers to change religious practices within their territories arbitrarily was rejected. Following the Thirty Years Wars, religion ceased to be a *casus belli* and to be a politically motivated factor in European state conflicts (Philpott: 2000: 213). All these conditions refer to a modern and secular feature of international relations which had its roots in the Westphalian system.

Scholars are divided on the importance of Westphalia in the history of secularization. McLeod lists the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution and nineteenth century with the developments in science, philosophy and the study of religion as the historical processes identifying the crucial periods in which secularization became apparent (Mc Leod, 2000: 4-5). Croxton states that it's overblown to say that the Christian-based organization in Europe ended with the Peace of Westphalia (1999: 575). On the contrary, through recognizing Calvinists and Lutherans, Westphalia made religious liberty as an issue of international community. Additionally, Stephen Krasner contends that it is untrue that the Peace of Westphalia represents a turning point in history (Krasner, 1993: 235).

Despite objections in the literature, most studies situate Westphalia at the center of the establishment of a secular authority during the period of secularization (Hurd, 2010: 136). Berger suggests that the term was originally employed in the wake of Wars of Religion (Berger, 1969: 106). Charles Taylor emphasizes that the religious conflicts that resulted in the Westphalia solution served as the impetus for contemporary Western secularism (Taylor, 1998: 32).

Philpott's analysis on Westphalia made a prominent contribution to literature. Philpott (2000) suggests that the secularized authority structure of the international system has its origins in the Westphalian synthesis. He calls the Westphalian synthesis as the relationship between the spiritual and temporal authority and explains it using its four strands, which outline the key components of the contemporary international system's authority structure. The triumph of the political power structure known as the sovereign state, which also questioned the place of religion in politics, is the first strand of the Westphalian synthesis. The second strand is the proscription of intervention. With non-interference principle, authorities' enforcement of religion outside their territories came to an end and religion ceased to be a *casus belli* in Europe. The third strand is that the after Westphalia, state representatives abstained from meddling in matters pertaining to other states as well as actively attempting to further the interests and activities of churches and religion, even within their own domains. The final thread of the Westphalian synthesis proposes that religious authorities in Europe started to impose fewer material rights when states started to actively and directly promote religion. Following an explanation of the Westphalian synthesis's four strands, Philpott makes the case that it is still relevant today. He examines how the Westphalian synthesis deepened and widened over the centuries. Philpott claims that the Westphalian synthesis spread around the world because of decolonization efforts in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, which established the sovereign state as the exclusive source of political authority. Nonetheless, nations have routinely disregarded Westphalia's standards of authority over the ages (Philpott, 2000: 77).

The chain of events commencing with the Protestant Reformation and ensuing Thirty Years Wars were contributed to the Peace of Westphalia. The chain of events would not be perceived as “no Reformation, no Westphalia” as Philpott (2000) argues but there is a clear linkage between the processes of Protestant Reformation, Thirty Years Wars, the Peace of Westphalia and the secularization. The Protestant ideas challenging the temporal powers of the church and the empire led to the appearance of diverse camps, and this contributed to the formation of an anti-Habsburg coalition which was also “secular” in nature in the Thirty Years Wars. The war had resulted with the Peace of Westphalia which brought the idea of a modern state system composed of sovereign states. At that point, the principle of sovereignty introduced by Westphalia contributed to secularization. The principle of sovereignty with its strong emphasis on separateness of the European states, rather than on the unity of Christendom “legitimized the extension of the concept of *cujus region ejus religio* (whose the region, his the

religion) and the break-up of the universal church” as Watson (1993: 188) argues. Briefly, the Westphalian settlement maintained a secular political order under the principle of sovereignty that contributed to the formation of the contemporary state system.

Given that most scholars examining the Peace of Westphalia considered it to be a "moment" in the formation of the modern international order, modernization, secularization, mercantilism, and capitalism, they gave it numerous interpretations. Despite divergent opinions, the significance of the Westphalia Treaty in the development of the contemporary international order, independent nation states, and secularization is acknowledged. It is evident that the world got less fanatical and more secular after Westphalia. The Peace of Westphalia effectively "secularized" international relations by removing religion from international disputes.

Historical events in the 17th and 18th centuries, such as the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, led to the rise of rationalism and positivism and the consolidation of the secular state in the international system. At the start of the 20th century, during World War I, when international relations emerged as a field, and throughout World War II, when it started to take shape, the separation between religion and international relations developed (Sheikh&Yosofi, 2019: 162).

#### **4. Secularization in International Relations Thought and Theory**

A number of early thinkers in the field of international relations philosophy abandoned religion and incorporated secularizing themes into their theories. They formed the basis of the realist tradition in international relations thought. Its founders are Machiavelli, Cardinal Richelieu and Thomas Hobbes. The idea that a state is a separate political identity, which is a central issue in realist thought has its origins in Cardinal Richelieu's famous formulation *raison d'état*. This understanding is mainly based on state interests instead of a common good (Philpott, 2002: 78). Renaissance political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli is frequently linked to secularism because of his realistic and pragmatic approach to politics, particularly in his foundational work *The Prince*. In contrast to contemporary scholars, Machiavelli did not overtly support secularism, but his writings make it evident that politics and religion morality and authority are distinct from one another. The writings of Machiavelli represented the “replacement of God by Man” and the beginning of modern politics that perceives religion as an ineffective element (Machiavelli, 1981). English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who lived in the 17th century, is a prominent figure in political philosophy. He is best known for his book *Leviathan*. Hobbes' theories, especially those concerning the social compact, the nature of

government, and the division of power between the political and religious spheres, have a significant influence on the growth of secularism. Hobbes expressly supports the division of power between the state and religion. He contends that the sovereign, who has the final say over religious issues pertaining to the state, should have authority over religious authorities. This guarantees that religious differences won't jeopardize civil harmony and political stability (Hobbes, 2008). By highlighting the significance of a strong, centralized authority that functions independently of religious influences to preserve peace and order in society, Hobbes' work set the foundation for succeeding secular political philosophies.

Prominent realist IR scholars like Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz did not specifically address secularism as a term in and of itself, their views naturally uphold secular values by emphasizing the interest-based and pragmatic aspects of politics, which frequently ignore religious considerations. (Neo)Realism appears to be one of the IR theories that is least compatible with religion (Sandal&Fox, 2013:7). The most well-known contribution Hans Morgenthau made to the field of international affairs is political realism. Through his emphasis on pragmatic and interest-based politics, the division of moral and political spheres, critique of ideological politics, stress on state sovereignty, and pragmatic diplomacy, Hans Morgenthau's political realism subtly supports secularism in international relations. Morgenthau's theories support a secular approach to comprehending and managing international affairs by giving practical considerations and the quest of power priority (Morgenthau, 1945, 2006). One of the prominent contributors to the field of international relations theory, Kenneth Waltz, is most renowned for developing structural realism, often known as neorealism. Waltz did not specifically address secularism, but his theories—which place more emphasis on the international system's structure than on religious or ideological reasons—implicitly endorse secularist ideas. Waltz focused on "self-help," a situation in which governments could only afford to take care of themselves. States were seen as rationalist actors and religious perceptions were seen as “irrational” which don't have any place in modern IR (Waltz, 1979). To put it briefly, the realism school in IR is primarily secular and excludes religion, focusing instead on material capacities such as power, interest, and security challenges.

Liberal IR theorists have a more optimistic point of view in their approach to the international politics which they argue that states may cooperate and maintain international peace. Liberal theories trace their roots to secularism, which was first popularized during the Enlightenment. Liberals don't perceive religion as a motivating factor for the states to reach their objectives (Philpott, 2009: 190). Their ideas typically uphold secular values by



highlighting the significance of human rights, reasonable governance, and the separation of religion and politics. According to Rawls (1999: 65), liberal democracies rely on secularism to guarantee that, instead of religious teachings, political decisions are founded on reason and universal principles of justice. The promotion of secular norms and values through international institutions is emphasized by liberal theorists like Keohane (1984: 40). Secularism, according to Ikenberry (2011), promotes international collaboration by offering a common ground free from conflicts stemming from religion or ideology. States with various religious and cultural origins can communicate and work together more easily because of this common ground. Although classical liberal theories emphasize secularism, according to Modongal (2023), neoliberal presumptions give religion more room in international politics compared to realism. Neoliberalism holds that states' policies are influenced by international organizations and regimes. It can explain the involvement of religious networks and organizations, such as the Catholic Church, in international politics since it views non-state players as an important influence in the field.

Marxist IR theorists examine how capitalism and class conflict intersect with secularism by viewing it through the prism of social and economic systems. Gramsci (1971: 238) states that secularism in capitalist nations has the power to conceal the true economic and social injustices that capitalism is responsible for. According to constructivist theorists, international relations is shaped by social conceptions, identities, and norms. Constructivism is the theory that has the most potential to accept religion because it emphasizes concepts and identity. On the other hand, constructivist theorists have not focused much on the function of religion in the formation of ideas or identities, despite this theoretical possibility (Modongal, 2023). They examine the ways in which secularism shapes identities and affects relations between states and society. Wendt (1999: 195), as the pioneer of constructivism in IR argues that secularism is essential in forming national identities and governmental actions. Secular norms can affect how governments define their identities and participate in international politics, which can have an effect on policy-making and diplomatic interactions.

## **5. Critiques on Secularization Theory**

Secularization is viewed as one of the major historical developments that is rarely questioned, and it is either understood as a reduction in religious beliefs or as the loss of the fundamental role of religious organizations. However, accounts of secularization have been subjected to massive intellectual criticism in the last decades. A more sophisticated approach that acknowledges the religion's continuing significance and its complex interactions with other

social, political, and cultural aspects has been suggested by some researchers and policymakers in response to the return of religion in world politics. The first important criticism against secularization was raised by Jeffrey Hadden (1987). secularization's presumptions are more like a doctrine or dogma than a rigorous theory that has undergone extensive testing; an ideology that is taken for granted instead of being a methodical collection of ideas (Hadden, 1987: 588). He states that since secularization is a doctrine more than a theory, it has not been subjected to systematic inquiry, and it came to be sacralized. According to Hadden, the notion that religion will inevitably recede and disappear was a byproduct of the social and cultural context of the day and suited the evolutionary paradigm of modernization. Hadden offers four explanations to challenge the secularization theory. First, he states that we cannot even talk about the existence of a secularization theory at all. Although Hadden thinks secularization is assumed to be a theory, this opinion is not supported by the literature. Second, he contends that the secularization process is not supported by any substantial body of evidence. Conversely, the facts point to a secularization process. Third, Hadden discusses how religious movements began to take shape in the United States and Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Finally, he mentions religion's entanglement in politics all around the world (Hadden, 1987).

Hadden's perception of secularization as a "doctrine rather than a theory" stems from the deterministic approach which depends on the idea that religion will eventually decline on both an individual and societal level because of modernity. In that process, the assumptions on the decline of religion were regarded as a part of the developments in science and technology and this created an ideological bias against religion. Even if secularization thesis proved to be right, lack of social scientific study of religion because of the ideological bias against religion created by the environment that is dominated by the basic assumptions of secularization is problematic. Hadden asks; "how could they possibly have written a theory of society without considering religion?" He suggests that the possibilities for the critique of the secularization theory were open, scholars seem to accept it without question (Hadden, 1987: 591).

In addition to Hadden, many other scholars challenged the idea of secularization through mainly focusing on the indicators of rising religious beliefs and practices in the individual level and making emphasis on the Evangelical and Islamic fundamentalist movements. Peter Berger, one of the foremost advocates of secularization during the 1960s and 1970s revised his views and suggested that it is untrue to say that our world is secularized, with a few notable exceptions the world is as ferociously religious now as it has ever been, if not more so in some regions (Berger, 2000: 38). According to Berger, modernization has sparked strong counter-

secularization movements in addition to secularizing effects in some areas. He gives Western Europe as an example where old secularization theory seems to be held. On the other hand, Islamic and Evangelical revivals are given as examples for counter-secularization (Berger, 2000).

Another critique of secularization came from Rodney Stark (1999) who suggests burying the secularization thesis. In his article *Secularization Rest in Peace*, Stark states that religion is in revival and the secularization thesis is completely wrong. In his fierce and sustained critique, he claims that it appears to carry the secularization concept to the cemetery of failed theories (Stark, 1999: 270). Stark contends that evidence of religious life may be found around the world, particularly in the United States, where religious participation is still higher than in other developed countries. He contends that as cultures grow more developed, religion does not diminish but rather changes to fit the modern world. Nonetheless, a few academics have criticized Stark's reasoning, contesting his interpretations and findings. Martin (2005) contends that Stark ignores data that points to a wider secularization trend while using data selectively to bolster his arguments. He argues that Stark's emphasis on particular instances and his heavily reliance on the American case where religion seems resilient might not fully represent global trends (Martin, 2005). In addition, Stark heavily focuses on the individual belief level to prove that religion is in revival. However, to suggest that secularization thesis is completely wrong, it also necessary to examine the institutional level (Stark, 1999).

According to Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce (1992: 8-9), the three key aspects of modernization—social divergence, socialization, and rationalization—are what cause religion's social significance to wane rather than religion itself or individual beliefs. They defend the secularization paradigm at the institutional level and believe that religion becomes privatized, and it becomes a matter of personal preference. On the other hand, José Casanova (1994), although thinking that the core of the secularization thesis is right, challenges the view that religion becomes privatized. Globally, religious traditions are rejecting the marginalized and privatized position that modernity and secularization theories had assigned them claims Casanova. He focuses on the de-privatization religion in the modern world. The 'privatization' of religion is the essence of secularization, even though Casanova does not view his thesis about the "de-privatization" of religion as contradicting the fundamental ideas of the secularization theory. Even if religion gained popularity and had a beneficial role in modernity, it still needs to be considered a threat to the secularization thesis (Casanova, 1994: 5).

In an environment where secularism dominated the IR discipline and new criticisms were newly being developed, the events of September 11 led to new debates in the literature on the relationship between religion and politics. The events of September 11, according to some, confirm Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis which he suggested that there will be significant military confrontations between the representatives of religiously defined civilizations in the post-Cold War age (Huntington, 1993). Philpott (2002) mainly shows how the September 11 attacks organized by Al-Qaeda challenge the Westphalian settlement, which lead to secularization of the modern international system. He starts off by saying that the September 11 attacks, which are the biggest attack on the United States since the end of the Cold War, cannot be adequately explained by the traditional dynamics and explanations of international relations, such as alliances and polarity, the rise and fall of great powers, or a state's pursuit of security. The attacks were not even organized by a state or other agents such as multinational organizations, labor unions. Indeed, it was organized by a group of people transnational in character motivated primarily by religion which is an issue that IR scholars have paid relatively little attention to. Because there is a general view among the IR scholars that religion is not one of the factors that influence states. This perspective is based on the notion that a secularizing series of events some centuries ago produced a system of political authority. According to Philpott (2009), this authority structure is called the Westphalian synthesis, and this synthesis was shaken on September 11 because the attacks directly challenged the order of the international system.

Eight years after the attacks of September 11, 2001, which he argues shook Westphalia's political authority, Philpott (2009) questions if religion had taken center stage in the study of world politics. He claims that while the amount of research on the impact of religion on global politics is rising, it is still insufficient. In his article, Philpott makes the case that including religious considerations in the analysis of world politics is essential. He argues that religion has an important influence on international relations and that studying it in IR research can help us better understand how the world works. In his analysis of case studies, theoretical frameworks, and scholarly implications, Philpott argues for a more sophisticated method of investigating how religion affects international politics (Philpott, 2009).

Another critique over the dominance of secularist paradigm over IR theory directed by Hurd (2010). She points out that secularism is frequently taken for granted and used as the standard prism through which world politics are examined. Hurd claims that this dominance affects how academics and decision-makers perceive and interact with the environment. Hurd

advocates for increased interaction between religious studies and IR. She contends that a more thorough understanding of world politics can be achieved by embracing ideas from religion studies. By using an interdisciplinary approach, it is possible to counteract secular prejudice and increase the visibility of religious issues (Hurd, 2010: 305). Hurd (2017) also argues that religion continues to have a significant role in world politics, occasionally even gaining more clout. Hurd investigates how academics and decision-makers interpret the religious revival. While some regard it as a restoration to a more fundamental or genuine political order, others see it as a destabilizing element. The understanding and handling of religion politics in international relations are influenced by these conflicting narratives.

Solarz (2020) criticizes standard IR theories for ignoring religion in favor of concentrating on economic considerations, state interests, and material power. These theories fall short in explaining how religion influences actors' behaviors, policies, and interactions with other countries since they primarily concentrate on secular and rational-actor models. Conventional interpretations of nationalism and state sovereignty are also complicated by religion. Particularly in light of Sunni-Shia sectarian divisions, pan-Islamic initiatives, and the function of transnational religious entities (such as the Vatican and Al-Azhar University), the connection between religious groups and the state frequently crosses national boundaries (Solarz, 2020).

Mavelli (2011) analyzes the issue from a security perspective and critically examines the idea of secularization, which has historically presumed that the process of modernization would result in the reduction of the role of religion in politics and security. He disproves this notion by showing that, particularly when it comes to international security, secularization is neither a universal nor an inevitable trend. According to Mavelli, the secularization paradigm in international relations frequently ignores the ways in which religious and spiritual factors continue to influence security dynamics both at home and abroad. He contends that security encompasses existential issues and ideologies that are closely linked to religious convictions and ideals in addition to tangible threats and military might. Mavelli uses the "War on Terror" that followed 9/11 as an example of how both secular and religious narratives impact security measures. The international campaign against terrorism highlights the continued presence of religious elements in the modern security environment, particularly considering the portrayal of Islam as a threat. He challenges the notion that secular reason can serve as the foundation for security strategies while ignoring the role of religion in geopolitical tensions and conflicts.

## **6. Relevance of Secularization Theory in Contemporary Global Politics**

Although Hadden (1987) stated that secularization “is a doctrine rather than a theory”, it seems that secularization has become closer to a theory with the emergence of controversial arguments. The Eurocentrism of secularization theory and its presumption that secularization follows modernity inevitably have drawn criticism. The thesis has been modified by academics to take into consideration diverse modernities, in which various cultures go through differing stages and types of secularization.

In contrast to expectations of secularization, religious identity and politics saw a global revival in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Political Islam's rise in the Middle East since the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 has challenged secular nationalist regimes by reshaping political identities and influencing state policy (Esposito, 1999). Furthermore, an important religious resurgence has been seen in the rise of the religious right in the United States in the late 20th century. Evangelical Christian organizations have been influential in influencing political agendas. The US State Department established The Office of Religion and Global Affairs in 2013 in response to this trend. Secretary of State John Kerry (2015) acknowledged that the US disregarded the influence of religion on a global scale in an article titled "Religion and Diplomacy" published in *America* magazine in 2015. Kerry clarified that the office was established to increase knowledge of religious dynamics and interaction with religious players.

Arab Spring pointed as a turning point in the return of religion to international politics, particularly in relation to the Middle East. In addition to exposing the shortcomings of authoritarian secular regimes, the Arab upheavals—which started with demonstrations in Tunisia and extended to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria—also brought to light the crucial role that religion played in influencing the political and social outcomes of the uprisings. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a key player following the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Mohamed Morsi, the leader of the Brotherhood's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party, was elected president in 2012 after the party won the 2011 parliamentary elections. Similar influence on the post-revolutionary political climate was exerted in Tunisia by the moderate Islamist Ennahda Movement. These political changes deviated from the secularizing tendencies that had ruled the area during the 20th century and signaled the return of Islam as a powerful influence in public and political life (Ramadan, 2012). As different Islamist groups, from the Muslim Brotherhood to more extremist jihadist movements, fought for legitimacy and power, frequently utilizing the Arab Spring as a focal point, the global aspect of political Islam became increasingly apparent (Roy, 2017).

The emergence of radical Islamist organizations, particularly the Islamic State (ISIS), was also aided by the political void left by the Arab Spring and the fall of governments. The chaos and insecurity that followed the Arab Spring upheavals had a direct impact on the Islamic State's 2014 declaration of a caliphate. One of the defining features of the post-Arab Spring struggle was the reassertion of a religious ideology, notably the creation of a caliphate ruled by rigid interpretations of Sharia law. ISIS gained prominence by exploiting the unrest that followed the Arab Spring and using religious themes to recruit fighters and justify their activities around the world (Weiss&Hassan, 2015).

Secularization in IR is becoming complicated by the merging of religious identity with nationalist aspirations. States frequently use religion as a means of establishing legitimacy for their rule, rallying support, and defending territorial claims. For example, the secular foundation of statehood is undermined by ethnonationalism in Israel, Palestinian nationalism and Hindu nationalism in India, which use religious narratives to mobilize the populations. Religious ideologies are often mobilized in nationalist movements or political revolutions, influencing state behavior and international diplomacy (Hurd, 2017).

Globalization is a direct challenge to secularization. It makes it easier for religious movements and ideas to spread across national borders, it has complicated the story of secularization. Transnational religious movements that challenge traditional ideas of sovereignty and transcend state boundaries have become more prevalent because of the globalization of religion. These cross-border migrations, which range from extremist groups like ISIS to networks of evangelical Christians, affect political processes and exacerbate tensions both within and between governments. These occurrences highlight how inadequate secularization theory is to explain the global scope of religious activism. In today's interconnected world, religion frequently acts as a source of identity and community, giving people a feeling of direction and connection. In situations where governmental mechanisms are weak or legitimacy is questioned, this role is especially crucial.

Religious elements continue to fuel conflict and violence in numerous parts of the world, despite hopes that secularization would bring peace. Religion continues to be a powerful source of identity and conflict, whether it takes the shape of interfaith tensions, sectarian strife, or terrorism driven by religious beliefs. The ongoing religious based conflict between Israel and Palestine, Yemeni Civil War, Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria, Kashmir Conflict could be given as some of the examples. The idea that international relations

become more peaceful as a result of secularization is called into question by the continuation of religious strife. Secularization theory confronts moral issues in a world marked by religious plurality and variety because of its implicit prioritization of secular values. Critics contend that by forcing Western-centric viewpoints on non-Western countries, secularization ignores the value and legitimacy of religious worldviews. This ethnocentric bias reduces the theory's applicability in a multicultural, global setting and weakens its capacity for explanation. Political religions are growing in popularity and there are religious revivals in some areas while secularization occurs in others (Berger, 1999).

Religious movements frequently position themselves as alternatives to nations that are seen as morally deficient. They present a more morally and just society, which they claim is founded on religious beliefs. Certain religious movements use violence to further their objectives. This is frequently a response to states that are seen as secular in their persecution or marginalization. Religious movements' resurgence poses a serious threat to secular states and the secularization theory. These movements are motivated by ingrained convictions and a wish to establish a culture consistent with their religious principles. They cannot therefore be simply disregarded or ignored (Juergensmeyer,2003).

## **7. Conclusion**

Secularization theory advances our knowledge of religion's function in IR in several ways. First, it offers a framework for examining how modernity affects religious practices and beliefs, making cross-cultural comparisons easier. Second, it emphasizes the necessity of keeping religious and political power distinct to support plurality and religious freedom as well as the operation of secular states. Thirdly, the secularization argument emphasizes how influential secular ideologies like nationalism and liberalism have been in forming international institutions and norms.

Secularization theory is not without flaws, though, especially when it comes to explaining why religion is still relevant and even growing in today's international politics. There is an enduring influence of religion especially in non-Western societies. The secularization theory is mainly based on Western Enlightenment ideas. The place of religion in different communities is shaped by different historical and cultural backgrounds. The experiences of secularization in South Asia and the Middle East, for example, are very different from those in Western Europe. It necessitates putting aside presumptions that are Western-centric and considering various historical, cultural, and political circumstances. The theory fails to take into consideration the complex interactions between religion and other identifying characteristics like nationality,



race, and culture. Furthermore, the theory's straight path of secularization ignores the various ways that religion manifests itself in the contemporary world, such as religious nationalism, revivalism, and fundamentalism.

In the field of international relations (IR), secularization theory has proven essential for comprehending the interaction between politics and religion. It is long believed that religion is becoming less relevant in modern society and, as a result, has less effect in a variety of areas of life, such as politics and international affairs. Even though it provides insightful information about the modernizing process and the division of governmental and religious authority, its limits must be recognized in the light of the resurgence of religious based politics in the contemporary world. A more nuanced approach that acknowledges the religion's continuing significance and its complex interactions with other social, political, and cultural aspects is necessary for scholars and politicians in light of contemporary politics.

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