

BOOK REVIEW

SACRED AND SECULAR: RELIGION AND POLITICS WORLDWIDE

Pippa NORRIS & Ronald INGLEHART

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The classical secularization theory argues that religion as a traditional phenomenon declines as a result of the modernization process including industrialization, urbanization and rationalization. However, it has been sharply criticized in the academic world since the 1960s because of the increasing impact of religion all over the world despite the solid experience of modernity in many parts of the world. According to Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, the classical secularization theory was too general and empirically weak; therefore, they attempt to propose “a revised version of secularization theory” (p. 4).

Depending on the statistical data of the World Values Survey (N= 76 Nations) and European Values Survey (N=55 Nations) conducted from 1981 to 2002, Norris and Inglehart point out that in terms of religious participation and commitment, wealthy and high-developed societies are secular while poor and developing societies are religious. Why? They argue that the process of economic and human development (e.g., health care, adequate nutrition, education, less social inequality and a welfare system) leads to have a strong sense of existential security; therefore, people in high-developed societies have

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no need of religion. On the other hand, poverty and the lack of human development lead to the increase in religiosity because of existential insecurity; therefore, people in poor societies are religious because of socioeconomic conditions (e.g., poverty, violence) that produce a strong sense of insecurity. Depending on the physiological idea that religion relieves people when they under threat and difficulties, they develop a necessary causal relationship between existential security, human development and the decline of religion.

In the classical secularization theory, there is a linear and universal process of secularization as a result of the modernization process. However, Norris and Inglehart suggest that the level of religiosity and secularization can change in the long term as a result of the level of the sense of existential insecurity. But the important issue is here that “the experiences of growing up in less secure societies will heighten the importance of religious values, while conversely, experience of more secure conditions will lessen it” (p. 18). Thus, the experience of people in their formative years are crucial in understanding whether religion is central to their lives.

Why is the world becoming more religious? Norris and Inglehart argue that the fertility rate of secular societies is very low as a consequence of birth control, abortion and divorce whereas the fertility rate of less-developed societies is very high because of the continuity of the traditional role of woman and difficulties in abortion and divorce. Thus, the religious population has increased more rapidly than the secular population in the world. Therefore, “the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before” (p. 25). As a result, “rich societies are becoming more secular, but the world as a whole is becoming more religious (p. 217).”

After examining the basic ideas of their study, we can focus on the weakness of the study of Norris and Inglehart. The main weakness of their study is the lack of convincing evidence of a necessary causal relationship between secularization and existential security. They make an inference from a shared point of secular and high-developed countries; however, it is a reductionist and universalist approach to state that the reason for secularization is human development and existential security. There are some other shared points of secular societies such as the experience of the enlightenment, the reformation and so on. Norris and Inglehart ignore history of the secularization process in many high-developed societies. Indeed, the decline of religion is a European

case, which requires focusing on the specific characteristics of European societies and history in the development of a strong enmity toward religion (or Christianity) in the early modern ages.

What's more, their understanding of existential insecurity in the globalized world is highly problematic. There are also numerous events (terrorism, disasters, epidemics and so on) that affect people negatively in high-developed societies because existential insecurity is not local in the globalized world since all societies are extremely dependent on each other with the globalization process. People in high-developed societies have been affected by global existential insecurities immediately through the global media outlets. In this context, the question is what the impact of globalization on secularization is? Drawing on their theoretical approach, with the globalization process, they should have expected the increase of religiosity in the high-developed societies because of the impact of existential insecurity on people; however, they strive for showing the decline of religiosity in high-developed societies because of existential security.

There are many examples challenging the argument of the book because of a general approach to religion and secularization. For example, for the authors, the United States is an exceptional case in the high-developed countries because of its high level of religiosity. According to the authors, the reason for the religiosity of the U.S. is migrants who came from religious societies such as Asian and Latin American countries. They also point out the differences between the poor and the rich in terms of religiosity in the U.S. to support their argument. For them, the poor is "almost twice as religious as the rich" (p. 108). For them, high level of social inequalities in the U.S. increase religiosity because of its impact on the development of existential insecurity. However, there are also millions of people migrated from poor societies and social inequalities in European countries. Thus, they do not have a convincing answer that account for the differences in the level of religiosity between the U.S. and European societies. Another challenging example is Turkey. There is a positive correlation between religiosity and economic development in Turkey because Turkey has been experiencing religious resurgence since the beginning of the multi-party system (1946) in parallel with economic development. Actually, Islamic groups and entrepreneurs are important actors in the economic development of the

country. Thus, Norris and Inglehart's theoretical approach cannot explain the Turkish case.

Consequently, Norris and Inglehart's study, in general, is very well researched and organized, but they have a very reductionist and general approach because of their reliance on an unsupported premise of the necessary relationship between secularization, human development and existential security. However, the secularization process is very complex; one factor cannot account for why some societies are secular while others are religious.

