

The Phenomenon of Desecularization: Essence and Modern Interpretations

Otamatov Muzaffar Abdurashidovich

Independent researcher of the National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek, Uzbekistan

Received: 26 February 2026; **Accepted:** 22 March 2026; **Published:** 11 April 2026

Abstract: This article reveals the essence and content of the concept of desecularization, which reflects the strengthening of religious belief in society. The ideas and perspectives formed on the basis of scientific research conducted by scholars on this topic are analyzed in conjunction with theoretical approaches to the origins of desecularization. In addition, the study relies on definitions and interpretations provided in several fundamental dictionaries in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the concept.

Keywords: Desecularization, secularization, state, politics, religion, Islam, religious belief, church, period.

Introduction: In the last quarter of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the spread of Islam has demonstrated significant dynamics compared to other world religions. According to S. Alieva, the present era is characterized by “the increasing role and importance of Muslim religion and culture” [15, pp. 146–147]. As further confirmation of this view, the following data from the research of expert G. Starchenkov attracts attention: “In the 1960s, every fifth person on Earth professed Islam; today, it is every fourth person, and by 2030, it is expected that every third person will adhere to Islam. Despite being the youngest religion, Islam is spreading more rapidly worldwide compared to Christianity or atheism” [3, pp. 264–268].

According to a number of geopolitical analysts and field experts, the concentration of the world’s oil and gas reserves in predominantly Muslim countries, as well as the growing global demand for these resources, has contributed to increasing attention and interest toward Islam and the policies pursued by these states. Moreover, the relatively strong economic position of Arab countries in the Middle East has enabled them to attract high-profile and expensive football players (including representatives of other religions), which in turn draws the attention of sports fans worldwide and indirectly contributes to shaping a more positive perception of Islam through the image of Arab states.

Another factor that stands out distinctly from the above-mentioned theses is the global spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The rapid loss of life caused by the disease created a psychological environment in which people felt as though life itself was coming to an end, leading to a noticeable increase in the turn toward religious belief as a last resort.

As noted by E. Danilova, in general, desecularization processes are currently taking place across regions and countries worldwide. This phenomenon can also be observed in the Central Asian region.

In particular, factors such as the growing spiritual and religious needs of the population in Central Asian countries, the long-standing suppression of Islamic belief during the colonial period, the increasing role of religion in people’s daily lives today, as well as the open policies pursued by governments to support the religious needs of the population, pose a number of important tasks for the academic community. One of these is the concept of desecularization and the processes associated with it, which are widely used today by scholars and specialists in the field.

Without a clear understanding of the true meaning, forms, and manifestations of desecularization, there is a risk of underestimating the value of state policies that provide opportunities for religious practice, and consequently falling under the influence of various destructive groups. As a result, issues such as distrust

toward individuals receiving religious education and, ultimately, the discrediting of religion itself may arise, leading to misunderstandings between the state and society. According to a number of scholars and experts, by the end of the last century and the beginning of the new one, processes such as globalization, geopolitical transformations, and conflicts of political and military interests of various scales began to be accompanied by the instrumentalization of religion, that is, the increasing role of religion in society. At first glance, this appeared as a revival or return of religion compared to the previous century, which led to the emergence of the term “desecularization,” closely related to the concept of “secularization.” While “secularization” generally refers to the separation of religion from state governance and politics, “desecularization,” conversely, implies the increasing involvement and growing role of religion in the governance of states and societies.

The concept was first introduced in 1999 by the Austrian theologian and sociologist Peter Berger in his work “The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics”, where he described the growing influence of religion in human life, governance, and in regional and global political and military interactions through the term “desecularism.” This concept has also been analyzed as a theoretical framework by Russian scholars such as Vyacheslav Karpov and Andrey Shishkov. According to V. Karpov, desecularization represents processes of counter-secularization, whereby the influence of religion on society is restored and begins to interact with, or counterbalance, ongoing secularization processes. In our view, these scholars advance the idea that, due to emerging needs, both formal and informal activities of previously established secular institutions increasingly incorporate religious norms; moreover, trust in religion and its practical application in individual and social life is growing, and the public performance of religious practices is becoming more normalized.

According to the American theologian George Weigel, “desecularization” refers to the increasing role of religion and religious institutions in society. These ideas became widely known primarily through Samuel Huntington’s work “The Clash of Civilizations” [11, p. 214]. From our perspective, transformations in the state and society are influenced not only by political institutions but also by religious belief—faith that resides deeply in the hearts of individuals—as well as by religious institutions that possess the capacity to guide and shape these beliefs. In general, this reflects the growing influence and strengthening role of the religious factor. The aforementioned work also suggests that the collapse of the former Soviet Union

was influenced not only by cultural conflicts but also by underlying interreligious tensions and the significant impact of religion.

In the modern world, as a result of the semantic intersection of religion and politics, religion has moved to the forefront of socio-political discourse, acquiring a political character, while the political sphere itself is increasingly shaped through religious perceptions. This idea has been advanced by scholars such as J. Taranyuk, A. Pereyashkin, and V. Ushakov [4, pp. 24–25]. Throughout human history, social interests have always been of primary importance; however, the views of these scholars indicate that religion may possess an even greater influence than the social sphere itself.

Ella Danilova, in her research, defines desecularization as the process of increasing the role and influence of religion in human consciousness and in society. According to the author, religion has strengthened compared to previous periods, and its role in human and social life has expanded [5, p. 37]. She also emphasizes that desecularization is directly linked to secularization: the two processes tend to follow one another, and many outcomes of secularization may reappear in reverse form during periods of desecularization.

According to O. Shimanskaya, Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, “Desecularization is a critique of secularization as a process of distancing from God, and an attempt to restore the influence of religion and the church across all spheres of social life, including the return of confiscated church property” [16]. The disruption of the balance between church and state can be viewed as a natural development of social consciousness, in which the strengthening of religious elements becomes evident. Unlike other scholars, S. Korolev emphasizes in his research that desecularization can be observed specifically within state institutions such as schools, higher education, the military, as well as in fields such as literature, cinematography, theater, and visual arts.

Among Uzbek scholars, Davron Kamilov defines “desecularization” as a process associated with the practical realization of freedom of conscience, which has gained increasing importance as a result of the gradual impact of the secularization period [3, pp. 16–75]. According to Kamilov, secularization and desecularization are interconnected processes that proceed simultaneously or consecutively, where the culmination of one gives rise to the other.

Furthermore, Dildora Yusupova argues that desecularization is a consequence of secularization and reflects efforts to preserve religion. Studying its

essence through a dialectical relationship with secularization allows for understanding and forecasting the causes behind the combination of ideas during transitional periods. In our view, regardless of the type of system, religion continues to exist—either openly or implicitly—in the hearts, consciousness, and lives of individuals. When conditions permit, its role in society and even in state governance tends to increase.

It should be noted that in D. Yusupova's research, particular attention is also paid to certain subtle aspects of the issue. For instance, it is analyzed that "in the early years of independence in Uzbekistan, various moral and behavioral problems emerged at the intersection of secular and desecular conditions" [6, p. 145]. In our view, the scholar emphasizes that even though the issue may initially appear as a low-level social phenomenon, due to its dynamic and evolving nature, over time it has generated threats reaching the level of national security in Uzbekistan.

As noted in the research of Sarvar Mamayusupov, "...the existence of secularization itself creates the conditions for the existence of desecularization. Both phenomena possess their own symbolic boundaries, and crossing these boundaries accelerates the transition from one state to another. Moreover, these two tendencies may at times pose a threat to each other. Both theories also help to clarify the complex relationship between the state and religion" [8, pp. 21–23]. Thus, the scholar draws attention to the symbolic boundaries that are crucial for analyzing these processes. In other words, they demonstrate that the religious-political environment represents a highly complex combination in which the two processes, while seemingly contradictory, cannot exist without one another.

Unlike many scholars advocating the concept of desecularization, Russian expert S. Korolev argues that not all developments observed across various regions of the world should be immediately classified as desecularization. He emphasizes that in many cases these processes represent specific stages of secularization itself. In this regard, he refers to a framework developed in the 1980s by Karel Dobbelaere, according to which secularization can be analyzed at three levels: the macro level (secularization at the level of social structures), the meso level (secularization at the level of religious organizations), and the micro level (secularization at the level of individuals) [3, pp. 16–75].

As a logical continuation of the analysis of the views presented above, it is also important to consider definitions of desecularization found in various philosophical dictionaries. In the Uzbek Encyclopedic

Dictionary of Philosophy [9, p. 344], the concepts of "secularization" and "sacralization" (from Latin *saecularis* – worldly, *sacer* – sacred) are explained in terms of the relationship and interconnection between religious and secular worldviews. In the process of secularization, secular perspectives become dominant over religious ones, whereas sacralization reflects the increasing status and influence of religion in society.

In the book "National Idea, Secular Policy and the Development of Civil Society", it is stated that the concept of "secularization" derives from the Latin word *secular*, meaning "worldly" or "secular." Definitions of secularization and its main features generally include three key directions of political measures:

1. Confiscation and transfer to state ownership of lands previously under the control of the church;
2. Adaptation of religion to a secular way of life, i.e., its "secularization";
3. Liberation of individuals from religious consciousness, that is, freeing their worldview from church influence and limiting church interference in science [1, p. 63].

The outcome of these processes clearly demonstrates the gradual distancing of religion from political governance and the social life of the state. However, in the West, church property often did not serve the interests of the general population but rather those of specific ruling elites, remaining concentrated within their control and passing from one group to another. Therefore, in addition to the primary objectives of secularization, the elimination of feudal church property was also taken into account.

Historical sources indicate that in the past century, during the process of transforming the Turkestan region into an area dominated by secular policies, particular attention was paid to the control of *waqf* property. *Waqf* refers to property allocated by the state or individuals in Muslim countries for religious or charitable purposes [14].

When a state seeks to ensure its dominance in governance, it naturally assumes control over key administrative mechanisms, material resources, and their distribution. A state that adopts a secular policy gradually reduces the authority of religious (sacral) institutions and transfers political, economic, and social powers to secular governance structures. In the process of secularization, when comparing the competencies of the state and religious institutions, a clear predominance is observed in favor of the secular state.

"Secularization should, in essence, maintain a position of tolerance and religious pluralism; otherwise, it may

turn into opposition to religion, and religion, in turn, may adopt an oppositional stance toward secularism. Secularism is a delicate balance and should not shift into a confrontational state" [2, p. 163]. Russian philologist Mikhail Epstein, unlike many other scholars, emphasizes through this perspective that elements of religiosity exist within any form of secularity, and vice versa, thereby advocating for a balanced and moderate secular policy. He also warns that the violation of these norms may ultimately undermine secularism itself.

In general, the analysis of the concept of desecularization shows that, in a narrow sense, it can be understood as the growing role of religion in politics, that is, the increasing influence of religious institutions in state governance. In a broader sense, it reflects the historical emergence of both religious and political forms of governance as societies and states developed, giving rise to secular and desecular processes as subjects of academic inquiry. Although religious belief has deep historical roots in human civilization, desecularization is a relatively new term compared to secularization, which explains its limited presence in traditional dictionaries.

At the same time, in a broader philosophical sense, although religious beliefs date back to the origins of humanity, the concept of desecularization—due to its dynamic, complex, and evolving nature—has emerged as a logical continuation of secularization and is now studied as a relatively new term within contemporary philosophy.

Based on various definitions, desecularization can be understood as the predominance of religious belief and authority across different levels of life (individual, societal, and state). It reflects the increasing reliance on religion in ensuring the vital national interests of individuals, society, and the state, as well as the growing role of religion in comparison to secular policy. At the same time, if maintained within a moderate and balanced framework, desecularization does not pose a threat to individuals, society, or the state; on the contrary, it may serve as a means of promoting social order and cohesion.

REFERENCES

1. Бегматов А., Қодиров А., Дадабаева М. Миллий ғоя, секуляр сиёсат ва фуқаролик жамиятининг ривожланиши. – Т.: Akademiya, 2012.
2. Эпштейн М.Н. Религия после атеизма. Новые возможности теологии. – М.: АСТПРЕСС КНИГА, 2013.
3. Старченков Г.И. Роль исламской диаспоры в странах Запада // Ислам и политика. М., 2001.
4. Ушаков В.Н. Политический ислам в Центральной

Азии: основные факторы и перспективы: Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата политических наук. Москва – Бишкек: 2005.

5. Данилова Э. Десекуляризация в современном обществе (социально-философский анализ). Диссертация на соискание учёной степени кандидата философских наук. – Красноярск.: 2003.
6. Камиллов Д.З. Секуляризация жараёнининг ижтимоий-фалсафий та.лили. Фалсафа фанлари бўйича фалсафа доктори (PhD) илмий даражасини олиш учун тайёрланган Диссертацияси. - Т.: 2021.
7. Юсупова Д. Туркистонда диний-сиёсий вазиятнинг фалсафий-концептуал таҳлили (XIX аср охири – XX аср бошлари). Фалсафа фанлари бўйича фалсафа доктори (PhD) илмий даражасини олиш учун тайёрланган Диссертацияси. - Т.: 2019.
8. Мамаюсупов С.Д. Ўзбекистонда десекуляризация жараёнининг ижтимоий-фалсафий хусусиятлари ва ёшлар билан боғлиқ сегментлари. Фалсафа фанлари бўйича фалсафа доктори (PhD) илмий даражасини олиш учун тайёрланган Диссертацияси. - Андижон.: 2022.
9. Фалсафа энциклопедик луғат. - Тошкент: Ўзбекистон миллий энциклопедияси, 2010.
10. Berger P. L. The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview // The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics/ E d. Peter L. Berger. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
11. Белоглазов А.В. Влияние ислама на политические процессы в Центральной Азии: учеб. пособие. – Казань: Казан. ун-т, 2013.
12. Карпов В. Концептуальные основы теории десекуляризации. Журнал «Государство, религия, Церковь в России и за рубежом», – Москва: "Дело", 2012. №2(30).
13. Юсупова Д. Ўзбекистон ижтимоий-сиёсий ҳаётида десекуляризация жараёнининг келиб чиқиш сабаблари. Марказий Осиё ренессанс журналари. – Тошкент: 2021. 2-жилд, 1-сон. Vol. 46 (2024): Miasto Przyszłości +62 811 2928008 . 1097 Miasto Przyszłości Kielce 2024
14. Вақф маъноси ва турлари. // <https://kun.uz/11122881>
15. Цит. по: Ислам и политика в странах Ближнего и Среднего Востока / В.Я.Белокреницкий, Ю.В.Босин, О.И.Жигалина и др. (материалы

научной конференции) // Восток. 1999. № 4.

- 16.** Шиманская О. К. Цивилизационный кризис России и десекуляризация/контресекуляризация как вариант его разрешения. 2015