American Journal Of Social Sciences And Humanity Research

Tradition and Secularism: Contemporary Religiosity (The Case of Uzbekistan)

Dilorum Alimovna Sogukpinar

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences, Uzbek State World Languages University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article explores the role of religion in modern society through the lens of the tension between tradition and secularization. Special attention is given to current processes of secularization prompted by scientific development, globalization, urbanization, and digital technology. It examines opposing trends such as the revival of religious practices and the strengthening of religious identity, particularly in Uzbekistan. The study also investigates potential conflicts between religious traditions and modern secular views, and concludes by proposing pathways toward the peaceful coexistence of traditional values and secular worldviews in a rapidly evolving society.

Introduction: Throughout human history, religion has played a pivotal role in shaping culture, morality, social norms, and traditions. Even today, amid globalization, technological advancement, and the spread of scientific rationality, religion remains a significant element of public life. At the same time, processes of secularization—characterized by the diminishing influence of religion on state institutions, education, science, and everyday consciousness—are increasingly observable. These two vectors, the preservation of traditions and the spread of secular worldviews, create a complex and sometimes contradictory picture of contemporary society. It is particularly interesting to examine how these forces coexist and collide in specific national contexts, such as Uzbekistan, where religion has deep historical roots, yet the state maintains a secular framework.

The aim of this article is to analyze the interaction and tensions between religious traditions and secularization in contemporary society. In the context of rapid social and technological change, it is crucial to understand whether religion continues to influence morality, culture, and institutions, and how new forms of faith and secular consciousness are emerging. The article examines the historical role of religion, the causes and consequences of secularization, the transformation of traditions, examples of conflict and coexistence, and potential pathways for harmonizing religious and secular values.

From antiquity, religion has played an integrative role in societies, shaping political structures, legal systems, moral norms, and cultural practices. Religious beliefs have provided shared value systems, unified communities, and offered existential meaning. In ancient Egypt, for instance, the pharaoh was regarded as a divine ruler, and religious rituals upheld social order and political legitimacy. In medieval Europe, monarchs derived their authority from the notion of "divine right," while the Catholic Church served as the primary social institution regulating many aspects of life.

In Central Asia, including present-day Uzbekistan, Islam became a crucial part of cultural and political identity from the 8th century onward, following the Arab conquests. Islam introduced not only a new religious system but also fostered advancements in science, education, and culture. Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, gained wide influence in the region and played a formative role in ethical norms, spiritual traditions, and social solidarity. Sufi brotherhoods (tariqas) organized

pilgrimages, charity work, and support for the needy, thereby reinforcing community bonds and mutual assistance.

Religion imparts universal values such as honesty, compassion, justice, humility, mercy, and respect for elders. These moral norms are deeply embedded in cultures and continue to exert influence even amid declining formal religiosity.

Secularization—understood as the reduced role of religion in various spheres of life—has become a central topic of debate in the social sciences. Classical secularization theories, such as those proposed by Peter Berger, associate this process with modernization, rationalization, and the differentiation of social institutions. According to this view, in modern societies where science and rationality gain prominence, religion gradually loses its authority as a source of knowledge and moral orientation.

Scientific and technological progress has played a critical role in secularization. The growth of empirical knowledge offers rational and verifiable explanations for natural and social phenomena, often displacing religious and mythological interpretations. Modern medicine, cosmology, biology, and other fields provide insights that were previously attributed to faith or mysticism.

Globalization, accompanied by intense cultural exchange, also has a significant impact. As people gain access to diverse beliefs and worldviews, religious values become increasingly relative. The dominance of any single religious tradition tends to weaken. Urbanization and modernization further contribute to this shift. In large cities and industrial centers, life is faster-paced and more education-focused, reducing the role of religion in daily life. Social institutions begin to fulfill roles once reserved for religion, and faith becomes a matter of personal choice.

Digital technology, particularly the Internet and social media, accelerates secularization. These platforms not only facilitate access to diverse information but also promote critical thinking, especially among youth. Online spaces become forums where religious dogmas are questioned and alternative perspectives are readily available. These factors collectively contribute to the decline of religion's public influence and the rise of secular, rational worldviews.

However, as José Casanova argues, the thesis of inevitable secularization has its critics, especially in non-Western contexts. Many regions, including Central Asia, demonstrate a "return of religion" to public life. Modernization in these areas does not always result in declining religiosity. Instead, there is a complex interplay between traditional religious practices and modern social, political, and economic forces.

In Uzbekistan, secularization is driven by several factors. The Soviet legacy of enforced atheism had a profound impact, restricting religious institutions and bringing religious education under state control. Since gaining independence, however, there has been renewed interest in Islam as a component of national identity and cultural heritage. As noted by Alisher Ilkhamov, Islam in Uzbekistan fulfills spiritual, social, cultural, and sometimes political functions.

Theoretical discussions on the impossibility of complete secularization often point to countries where religious traditions persist despite high levels of secularity. In such societies, secular thinking and deeply rooted rituals coexist in a symbolic or cultural rather than spiritual form.

The Scandinavian countries—Sweden, Norway, and Finland—are examples of this phenomenon. Though their cultures are historically Christian, most citizens no longer identify as religious. Churches still function, but attendance is low, and religion serves a largely cultural role. Citizens place greater trust in science, government, and social institutions than in religious authorities.

Japan offers a similar case. Traditions rooted in Shintoism and Buddhism endure as festivals, rites, and family ceremonies, while belief in divine powers is minimal. Religion here is treated more as cultural heritage than as a moral compass. Many Japanese simultaneously observe multiple traditions without strict adherence to any one faith. Such examples illustrate that tradition and rationality can coexist, forming a stable cultural equilibrium.

Amid global crises, there is a renewed interest in religion. Pandemics, military conflicts, ecological threats, and economic instability increase the human desire for spiritual grounding and stability. Many seek comfort, meaning, and support in religion. In Uzbekistan, interest in Islam is growing, particularly among youth. This is reflected in the observance of rituals, mosque attendance, Qur'an study, and adherence to Islamic values such as respect for elders, modesty, and hospitality.

While a return to religious ideals can strengthen moral orientation, social cohesion, and cultural identity, it may also produce tensions—especially where religious norms conflict with modern, secular values.

One visible arena of conflict is dress code, particularly for women. Religious traditions emphasize modesty and prescribe covering clothing, including headscarves (hijabs). Yet, many young women seek freedom of expression and stylistic autonomy. This tension

becomes especially pronounced in education: is religious attire permitted in schools, and where is the line between freedom of belief and the secular nature of public institutions?

Cultural expression and behavior are also contentious. Modern music, dance, fashion, and leisure activities are often viewed by conservative groups as threats to moral order. Public events involving youth—such as concerts or fashion shows—become flashpoints for cultural conflict between tradition and modernity.

This reflects a broader generational divide. Older generations, raised with traditional values, may struggle to accept societal changes. Youth, particularly in urban areas, increasingly turn to global sources of information and develop worldviews in which religion is redefined as personal choice rather than strict obligation. Conflicts over clothing, music, marriage, lifestyle, and even educational preferences are all manifestations of this cultural collision.

In contemporary society, religiosity serves not only a spiritual but also a vital social, cultural, and at times political role. It fosters social unity, preserves traditions, and contributes to civic responsibility. In Uzbekistan, there is an effort to maintain the secular nature of the state while accommodating growing religious interest. Balancing freedom of belief with the preservation of national heritage linked to Islam requires a careful approach to human rights, equality, and self-expression.

To strengthen this balance, several directions should be pursued:

First, promote a culture of respect for religious and cultural diversity through education, potentially including religion in school curricula.

Second, religious organizations can contribute to public life through charity, environmental projects, and educational initiatives—while respecting secular principles and avoiding political involvement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the coexistence of tradition and secularism is complex, but with a thoughtful and balanced approach, it can support sustainable development in Uzbekistan. Only through respect for differences, the protection of individual rights and freedoms, and the preservation of rich cultural heritage can a harmonious, just, and modern society be built.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. (1994). Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States. Cambridge University Press.

Berger, P. (1967). The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion. Doubleday.

Casanova, J. (1994). Public Religions in the Modern World. University of Chicago Press.

Ilkhamov, A. (2003). "Uzbekistan: The Uneasy Transition." Central Asia-Caucasus Institute.

Lapidus, I. M. (2012). Islamic Societies to the Nineteenth Century: A Global History. Cambridge University Press.

Trimingham, J. S. (1998). The Sufi Orders in Islam. Oxford University Press.