



**FACTOR OF THE RELIGIOUS-POLITICAL SITUATION IN UZBEKISTAN AND
ANALYSIS OF DESECULAR PROCESSES**

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Abstract. This article comprehensively analyzes the transformation of the religious factor in the context of socio-political processes occurring in Uzbekistan after gaining independence, the interrelationship between secularization and desecularization trends, and their influence on the formation of the religious-political situation. The study reveals the contradictions between traditional Islamic values inherent in the society of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan, and elements of global Islam. The ideological vacuum that emerged after the Soviet era, the revival of religion, the activation of radical groups, and their threats to societal stability are examined through a historical-retrospective lens. The article also scientifically substantiates the relevance of the state's ongoing religious and educational reforms, issues of forming ideological immunity in young people, and maintaining a balance between religious tolerance and secularism. The authors distinguish between moderate and radical forms of the desecularization process, analyze their impact on society's social security, and conclude the necessity of ensuring sustainable development based on the principle of enlightenment against ignorance.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, religion and politics, secularization, desecularization, religious-political situation, Islam, religious radicalism, extremism, ideological vacuum, national values, religious tolerance, youth education, enlightenment, social stability.

Introduction. Uzbekistan, as a member of the modern international community, is experiencing enormous changes in social, political, cultural, spiritual, and religious spheres. The paradigmatic nature of changes is manifested in the fact that strong social structures that establish rules and values cannot fulfill their functions during the period of paradigm change, which is especially evident in the spheres of culture and religion. By religion and culture in Uzbekistan, specialists who are somewhat familiar with the anthropology and culture of Central Asia understand a civilization deeply rooted in Hanafi religious traditions, reflecting the traditional features of Eastern and Islamic societies. At the same time, religious identity played a strong spiritual and social basis in the formation of statehood, nationhood, family,

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and individual upbringing processes. However, at present, these ideas and laws have changed significantly, and in the phenomenon of modern religious self-awareness in Uzbekistan, elements that negatively affect the development of such factors as the state, nation, family in proper proportions to each other are increasing.

Today, the Islamic factor, interconnected with national elements, represents elements of global Islam, rather than traditional Islam, which constitutes Uzbekistan's cultural identity.

Another aspect that should be noted is the information bases and sources for analyzing the current situation. This is likely due to the lack of official sources on Islam in Uzbekistan. Despite this, since the religious factor is an important factor in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan, many scientific research works are being conducted on the history of this country and the current religious and political situation. In the research, special attention is paid to studying the historical, religious, philosophical, sociological, and psychological aspects of events related to the religious situation and the political situation. The religious-political situation, which is acquiring a unique phenomenal state in modern political processes, puts on the agenda the urgent scientific task of researching a new approach through a systematic analysis of the geostrategic history of the factor of religion, its modern methodological basis and purpose, pragmatic development, and level, including the interests of national, universal, and social development.

At the same time, in Uzbekistan, since independence, great attention has been paid to the religious sphere, and the revival and comprehensive study of national and religious values, bringing pure national values to the people, has become an important part of state policy. As a practical expression of this, the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, the Imam Bukhari and Imam Termizi Research Centers, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, as well as schools of hadith, kalām, fiqh, aqidah, and Sufism in the regions were established. It has become a priority to educate young people with their own worldview and strong ideological immunity against fanatical groups hiding behind religion that misinterpret concepts like "jihad" and "hijra" for their selfish purposes, poisoning people's consciousness and minds among the population. Specifically, Clause 212 [1] of the State Program for the Implementation of the Action Strategy [2] adopted in 2017 in Uzbekistan in the "Year of Supporting Active Entrepreneurship, Innovative Ideas and Technologies" provides for the development of a draft resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers on fundamental reform of the religious education system by March 1, 2018. The goal was to form a group of young experts capable of resisting ideological attacks and rejecting alien ideas of various movements.



Despite the fact that almost ten years have passed since the adoption of the Action Strategy, Uzbekistan still needs to conduct research on combating ignorance and harmful movements through enlightenment, as well as understanding the religious and political situation created by destructive groups trying to use Islam, the centuries-old history of humanity, as a mask. Because "in this regard, in many cases, they are limited to combating not the main causes causing threats, but only their consequences" [3]. From this perspective, a deep scientific study, understanding, and dissemination of the threats posed by the phenomenon of the religious-political situation to the general public is of particular importance. In particular, a comprehensive study of the religious-political situation that arose in the past, a deep understanding of the essence of religion, its role in people's lives, studying the reason for the politicization of religion at the present time, as well as a competent approach to the experience accumulated in the past, shows the importance of conducting theoretical and comprehensive research related to a historical-retrospective view of the problems arising today [4].

Especially today, the rapid development of modernization processes worldwide is leading to imbalances in the relationship between the state and religion, as well as the opposition of secular and religious tendencies. The presence of such trends puts before secular states the task of maintaining a balance between secularism and religiosity as a necessity of today. Because militant groups using religion as a mask skillfully strike at the principles of religious tolerance prevailing in secular states, threatening with their hateful goals, inciting discord among the population, and causing doubt in state policy. In particular, the registration of secular states as religious organizations based on laws related to religious tolerance and the disguise of their goals leads to the fact that groups disguised as such a religion cannot quickly recognize their true goals. As a result, such vices as intolerance, dogmatism, fanaticism, and radicalization among the population cause instability in the socio-political life of states.

Methods. Due to the limited availability of an open database, observation, comparative analysis, system analysis, and discursive analysis can be used to study the religious-political situation and desecular processes in Uzbekistan.

Main Part. The fall of the Soviet Union effectively led to the independence of several multinational states. However, this process did not occur peacefully in all countries. In some countries, interethnic conflicts were exposed, in others, the spread of religious radicalism was observed. In particular, the geopolitical situation in the Central Asian region has changed



dramatically. In the newly independent states, an ideological vacuum of the former Union was formed, which began to seize various alien ideas. Under such conditions, there was an increase in foreign influence, internal conflicts, and radicalization. As a result, these states faced a number of problems in strengthening their independence.

In particular, some historian scholars note that from the 70s-80s of the 20th century, extremist ideas penetrated the region in five stages:

The first stage, covering 1970-1985, as a result of a prolonged atheistic policy, the weakening of attitudes towards religion among the population, some scholars considered it a threat to Islam and came to the conclusion that the political solutions to existing problems could be solved by creating an Islamic society even during the Soviet period...

The second stage, covering 1985-1989, was connected with the proclamation of the slogan of democratization of society and openness during the "Perestroika" period in the Union. In particular, the views of the "Salafi" movement on such issues as the concept of "bid'ah," Sufi orders, visiting graves, erecting tombstones, reciting Quran for the souls of the deceased, music, theater, and fine arts, and celebrating birthdays caused various disagreements among the Muslim population. The initial debates between the supporters of this movement and the Hanafis gradually transitioned into open resistance and violence...

The third stage, covering 1989-1993, is characterized by the strengthening of Islamic movements in Uzbekistan. During this period, fanatical groups for the first time in many years entered the political arena with open demands and sought to independently resolve issues related to religious life. Some researchers refer to this period as the "Red Islamic Revolution." As a result of increased openness and religious freedom for the population, some official imams inclined towards extremist movements began to sow discord among Muslims...

The fourth stage, covering the years 1993-1999, was a period of attempts to Islamise the population on the basis of secret activities. By attracting more youth and women, they began to try to instill in young people who had no life experience, did not understand the true essence of religion, and were more susceptible to radical ideas, the idea that "If you join this organization, you will become a savior of the nation, Islam, and humanity..."

The fifth stage covers the period from 1999 to the present and is characterized by the transition to sabotage-terrorist activities. At this stage, the activities of the women's wing were intensified, even to the point of suicide [5].



Analysis and Results. Based on the above-mentioned stages, it becomes clear that restoring the role of religion in society is one of the important trends of modern society. In particular, in the process of secularization, there was an intensification of religious sentiments in countries that were not satisfied with the ideas that existed during the transition period. In addition, attempts were made to make religion the main factor of politics. As a result, religion and politics began to converge and move in parallel.

So, what factors led to this process? What served as the impetus for the unification of religion and politics? Finding answers to these questions is more important today than ever. Because by answering these questions, we can not only identify existing problems but also find their solutions. Furthermore, we can anticipate potential future threats.

The circumstances that led to the revival of religiosity in Uzbekistan during the transition period are manifested in the following:

1. *The prolonged ideological struggle between the USSR and the USA:* The ideological struggle during the Cold War period influenced the spiritual and moral state of society in Uzbekistan. After the end of Soviet ideology's dominance, the need arose to replace the old ideology in the emerging society.

2. *The ideological vacuum that has arisen in the life of society:* After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ideological vacuum in society led to a return to religious ideas and traditions. People turned to religion to satisfy their spiritual needs.

3. *Filling the ideological vacuum by fanatics under the guise of religion:* Many fanatical groups tried to use ideological vacuum to spread their ideas and influence the population. Such individuals tried to impose their views using the vacuum existing in society.

4. *Turning religion into a new ideological weapon in the hands of some "politicians" and fanatics under the guise of religion:* Fanatics and some political forces used religion as a new ideological weapon for their own purposes. This, in turn, led to the spread of religiosity [6].

Thus, as a result of the sharp increase in the role of the religious factor in the transition period, a process of desecularization also emerged in Uzbekistan. The desecularization process is a process directed against the secularization process, in which the factor of religion seeks to come to the forefront in the life of society and the state.

Indeed, the trends of "secularism" and "desecularism" emerged as opposing trends in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. These processes were especially evident during the transition period in Uzbekistan and had a serious impact on its social and political life.



"Secularism" manifests itself as a secular state, that is, a state where religion is separated from the state and its interference in politics is not permitted. During the Soviet era, a similar process was observed in Uzbekistan. However, after the collapse of the USSR, a process of "desecularization", that is, the return of religion to the life of society, was observed in many post-Soviet countries, including Uzbekistan.

"Desecularization is a process that opposes secularization, during which religion restores its influence on the entire society in response to previous or accompanying secularization processes" [7].

The process called "desecularization" is actually an integral part of the process associated with the practical reflection of freedom of conscience, which is becoming increasingly important as a result of the gradual influence of secularization [8]. Moreover, in a situation of desecularization, religion can become closer to the state, and religious rules can influence state policy.

De-secularization raises questions about whether religion needs to be returned to the state, whether it is preferable to build a religious state or a secular state, whether religion is needed by society or belongs to an individual. Upon receiving answers to these questions, a process of desecularization occurs, resulting in a religious-political situation. It is precisely such a situation that our state of Uzbekistan has experienced [9].

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the revival of Islam and the processes of desecularization in Central Asia truly attracted the attention of many. Problems related to the transformation of Islam into the main ideological force in Uzbekistan and its use for political purposes have become so acute that threats to the principles of a secular state and the stability of the country have emerged. Therefore, state politicians and researchers tried to thoroughly analyze the positive and negative aspects of Islamic tendencies and warn the general public against religious extremism.

In particular, the prolonged detention of the population from religion led to the process of desecularization in Uzbekistan. Due to the desecularization process, a number of contradictions arose in matters of state and religion. In this case, the processes of secularization and desecularization collided. The desecularization process in Uzbekistan has become very complex and multifaceted. If the policy of secularization during the Soviet era tried to distance the population from religion, then after gaining independence, religion again began to play an important role in the life of society. However, in this process, along with the



rapid revival of religion and the growing interest in it, there was a possibility of increasing the influence of various radical groups.

One of the main problems in the process of returning to religion was the religious ignorance of the population, especially young people. As a result, some young people have an increased inclination towards radicalism. In Uzbek society today, there is a risk of falling under the influence of radical groups, which could lead to youth committing treachery towards their homeland. There is also a possibility that some young people, after going abroad and returning home, will fall under the influence of radical ideas and engage in destructive activities dangerous to society in Uzbekistan. This, of course, poses a serious threat to society and the state.

To address these issues, it is necessary to find a balance between the trends of secularization and desecularization, to strengthen secular knowledge, to promote religious enlightenment, and to develop measures aimed at reducing the negative influence of cosmopolitanism in society.

Otherwise, the misappropriation of religious knowledge in the minds of society's citizens can lead to radical desecularization in the socio-political life of society. In this case, when religion is opposed to state policy and distorted, extremist or terrorist events occur.

Although a radical state of desecularization has been observed in Uzbekistan, especially during the years of independence, moderation prevails now. However, with the increasing dynamism of religiosity, the moderation of desecularization is a temporary state and may be replaced by radicalization in the future. Therefore, in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, there is always a need to return to fundamentalism and religion, and it is natural that these processes will always persist as a factor threatening the life of society.

In general, the desecularization process takes two forms. In particular, if the balance between the state and religion is maintained, and the principle of tolerance prevails between religious denominations, such a process is called moderate desecularization. However, conversely, if the relationship between society and the state related to the religious factor takes on a political character and extremist and terrorist situations are observed, such a process is called radical desecularization. In particular, in both cases of desecularization, religion plays a key role. That is, depending on the state of attitude towards religion, types of desecularization are manifested. At the same time, if the state takes a key leading position, a moderate desecularization process is maintained. As a result, the state does not fear religion, but continues its policy, establishing its boundaries through legal norms. If the opposite



occurs, then a fanatical approach to religion arises, and radical forces opposing state policy unite to come to power.

In general, the use of religion for political purposes on a global scale is manifested in close connection with the process of desecularization. During the process of desecularization, the role of religion in the life of society and the state in societies is further strengthened, and its political influence also increases. In this case, the use of religion becomes a tool for politicians and other interested groups to direct public consciousness and support their ideas and goals.

This process manifests itself differently in different countries. For example, in some countries, religion occupies a central place in state policy, while in others it is used as an ideological weapon. In both cases, religion's social and political influence intensifies, and its role among the masses is further strengthened.

If the spread and development of desecularization in Uzbekistan was facilitated by the constant presence of religion in people's lives, then its activation was facilitated by conflicts based on the religious factor.

At the heart of conflicts related to the religious factor is often the need for religion. "...it is natural that if conditions are not created for a person to satisfy his spiritual and material needs through lawful means, he will try to satisfy his needs, even if through unlawful means. That is, the atheistic policy of the former USSR ensured the development of religious radicalism and extremism" [10].

As Abdurauf Fitrat said, "we must deeply realize that this world is truly turning into a battlefield, and a healthy body, sharp mind, and good morals become weapons of this struggle, and we must work against ignorance on the basis of enlightenment" [11].

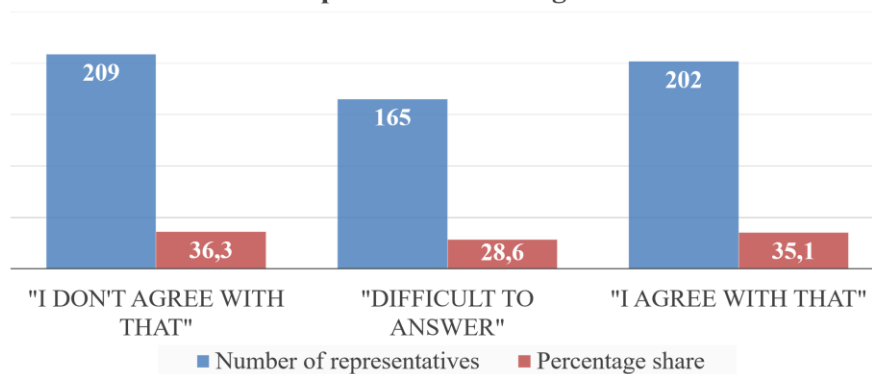
After all, terrorism, as well as its consequences, is one of the main and most dangerous problems facing the modern world. This applies equally to both democratic countries and states in the process of political transition. The current reality is that terrorism is increasingly threatening the security of many states. Any state, any person can become its victim [12].

In general, using religion for the purpose of disintegration can have serious negative consequences for society. This also negatively impacts the development of values, customs, and identity issues. In particular, a survey conducted in 2021 showed that the social alienation of young people in relation to such things as traditions, family, values, parents, knowledge, money, which are the main form of Uzbek national identity, makes up a large percentage.



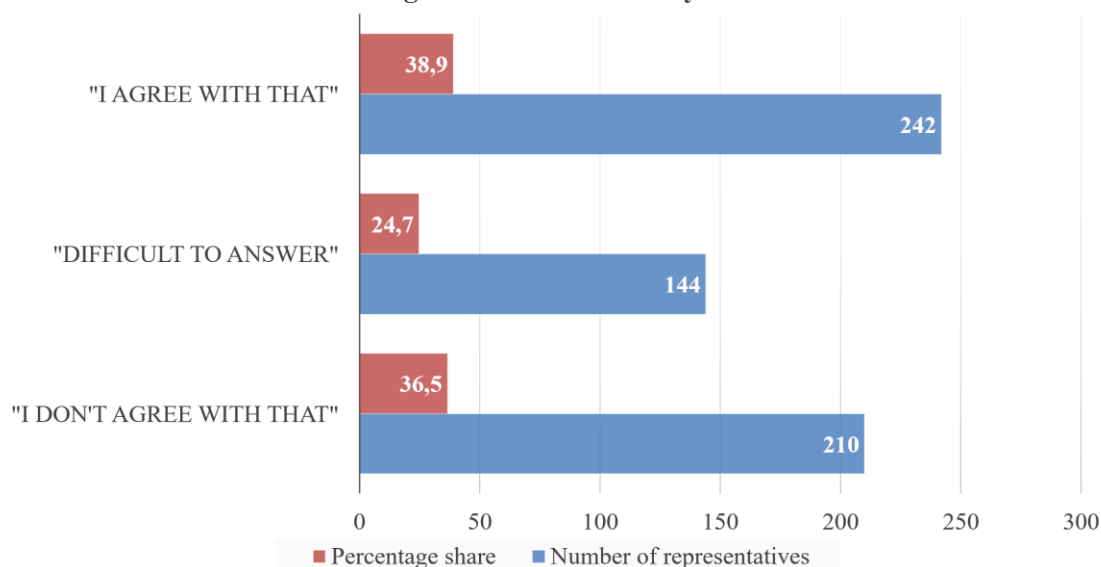
1028 respondents were selected from the city of Tashkent, Navoi, Syrdarya, Namangan, Surkhandarya regions, and the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Of these, men constituted 518, or 50.4%, and women - 510, or 49.6%. Most questions differ by 30%. In this article, questions from questionnaires 15, 21, 24 were used [13].

15. When does it make sense to engage in community service based on values in a society, when these values help to achieve some goal.



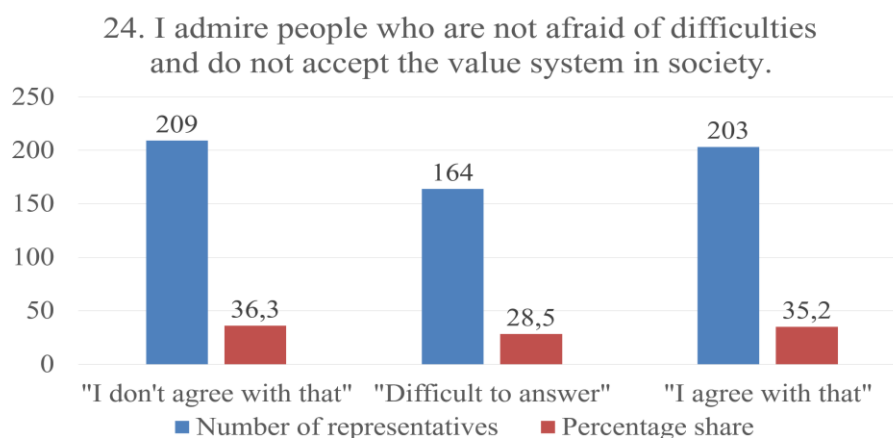
Such an approach can weaken solidarity between citizens and create a threat to social security. Regarding youth spirituality, such a situation can lead to their misguidance, deviation from the right path, and drowning in the swamp of misguidance. Therefore, using religion in a positive sense, on the path of unity and cooperation, is important for any society.

21. Human self-governance is not really based on values.





In the development of Uzbekistan, it is important to preserve national values, including religion, in the right direction. This contributes to the strengthening of spiritual values among young people and serves to preserve peace and stability in society.



Today's rapidly changing world opens up new, great opportunities for humanity and youth, while simultaneously subjecting them to various unprecedented evil threats. Malicious forces turn naive, simple-minded children against their parents and their country, becoming the cause of their deaths. In such a tense, dangerous situation, we - parents, teachers and mentors, the public, the mahalla - must increase vigilance and awareness in this matter. We must not give our children to others, but raise them ourselves.

Conclusion. In seeking a solution to problematic situations related to the religious factor in Uzbekistan, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. When analyzing the scientific and theoretical considerations regarding the causes of problems related to the past period of the emergence of religious extremism and terrorism in the territory of Central Asia and methods for their elimination, its coverage by local scholars and experts, as well as foreign scientists, has led to various scientific debates and objective and inadequate conclusions that require deep study.

2. It has been revealed that scientific research on the process of desecularization has not been sufficiently conducted in Uzbekistan, and more attention is paid to secularization. This indicates the need for a sufficient study of the impact of desecularization on society.

3. The desecularization process has shown that the "revival of religion" and the increasing or decreasing role of religion in society is an important factor influencing the social situation. This influence leads to a change in the status of values between generations in society, a change in the role of identifying factors, and a change in the population's attitude towards the leading forces constituting society.



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