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Theory of religious markets and secularism: An analysis on Muslim-majority countries

Buğra Kalkan¹

Abstract

Theory of religious markets is a field of study that employs the rational choice methodology to examine the effects of religious policies and regulations on religious beliefs and organizations. Theory of religious markets attributes the secularization trend in Western societies not to modernization but rather to the monopolization of religion and the eradication of competitive religious markets. In contrast to contemporary secularism theory, which excluded political analysis from sociology of religion, the theory of religious markets has reintroduced political analysis into sociology of religion and sparked a fruitful academic debate. By employing a supply-side approach instead of a demand-side approach, theory of religious markets has reintroduced secularization to the forefront of political science's principal topics. Specifically, it has reconnected it with the evolution of the impartial government and the notion of religious pluralism. This paper investigates how the debate between these two theories can contribute to the policies necessary for the institutionalization of pluralistic and liberal politics in Muslim-majority countries today. Due to its rational choice approach, the theory of religious markets makes significant contributions to the study of liberalization issues in Muslim-majority countries in the context of freedom of religion and conscience, apart from theological debates.

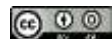
Keywords: rational choice, secularism, religious markets, impartial government, individual liberty, Muslim-majority countries.

1. Introduction

Progressives and conservatives appear to have transformed the dispute between secularism and theory of religious markets into an intellectual battlefield. By asserting that modernization ultimately removes individuals from supernatural beliefs, theory of secularism contends that the political demands of religious conservatives should be excluded from "rational" politics (Bruce, 2011, 2017). In contrast, the religious market theorists claim that government intervention in religious markets through religious regulations leads to desacralization, not secularization and that desacralization is not a value-free sociological observation, but a deliberate choice of religious policies (Stark&Iannaccone, 1994).

In the United States, where the proportion of religious people to the total population is significantly higher than in Western Europe, the relationship between religion and politics continues to be a heated debate between progressives and conservatives on issues such as gay rights, abortion,

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Political Science and Public Administration Department, bugrakalkan82@gmail.com  Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8079-3650>



and public education. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the growth of the radical right in the context of Europe's economic woes and the immigrant issue has placed religion at the forefront of identity politics (Minkenberg, 2018). This political argument, regardless of how heated it may appear, is determined by the respectively peaceful politics of liberal democracy in Western countries.

Examining the literature on secularism and the religious markets reveals that the discussion between the two groups has become a race to determine how many individuals in Western liberal democracies are religious (McCleary&Barro, 2006; Frank&Iannaccone, 2013; Raphael&Iannaccone, 2014; Cesur&Mocan, 2013; Iannaccone&Stark, 1994, Bruce, 2011: 141-156; Norris&Inglehart, 2004). Specifically, it lowers the outcomes of field investigations that test the hypothesis of the religious markets theory to numerical data, whether in favor or opposition. Thus, the intellectual implications offered by theory of religious markets to the understanding of individual freedom and limited government seem to have lost significance due to the acrimony of this discussion.

Studying the secularism critique of the religious market theory reveals that the major issue is based on the notion that the intervention of public policies in religious markets will influence the religious preferences and religious organization types in society. In other words, theory of religious markets reconnected the "social" secularization observed in Western liberal democracies during the modernization process with religious policy and reintroduced political analysis, which had been absent from the academic discourse on secularism for decades. Sadly, despite the initial successful attempts, the discussion has devolved to the level I previously described.

However, there is no scholarly justification for the stagnation of the argument in question. Theorists of both groups concentrate primarily on Western liberal democracies, causing the discussion on religious markets against secularism to become inefficient. By adapting theory of religious markets to the institutionalization of religion-state affairs in Muslim-majority countries, a new and fruitful academic discussion might be introduced. Furthermore, the discussion may be readily redirected to religious tolerance, individual liberty, and the notion of limited government.

2. Contributions of Theory of Religious Markets to the Secularization Debate

Contemporary secularization theory distinguishes itself to a certain extent from Enlightenment theories of secularization of the 19th century. The fundamental premise of Enlightenment theories of secularization is that humanity is or ought to be moving in the direction of universal progress led by scientific progress and rationalism. Obviously, most philosophers from across the ideological spectrum of this period have more or less defended this claim. For example, J.S. Mill, the champion of individual liberty, spent a great deal of time on the positivist ideas of August Comte (Haac, 1994). Considering Mill's interest in Comte, one can understand how strong the links between secularization and progress were in the 19th century.

However, the progress of pluralist political philosophy, especially in the second half of the 20th century, significantly undermined the authority of monist political approaches. In this context, theories of secularism have begun to distinguish themselves from Enlightenment secularization claims. Current or moderate theories of secularism argue that the political, social, and economic institutions required by modern society have led to inevitable and irreversible changes in the religious beliefs and organizational habits of individuals. As a result, modern individuals have turned away from religion and started to live their lives independently of metaphysical claims. This claim, unlike the Enlightenment-radical secularization claims, has no ideological implications but merely identifies the current social change. It is also argued that secularization is not a social phenomenon that will or should be seen everywhere in the world. In this respect, it is argued that secularization is only an explanation for the specific social change of Western societies (Bruce, 2011).

The religious markets theory, on the other hand, argues that theories of moderate secularism cannot so easily distinguish themselves from theories of radical secularization. This criticism is based on the fact that theories of moderate secularism still see the demand for religious belief as irrational behavior that has remained unaffected by modernization. It is claimed that contemporary secularism

theories still interpret individual preferences shaped by modern scientific and technical knowledge within the progressive-reactionary dichotomy (Stark&Iannaccone, 1994). However, contrary to the claims of secularism, it is stated that religious people do not have a compulsory attitude which is contrary to the rational structure of modern society. For example, based on various empirical studies, critics of secularism show that religious people can make highly rational decisions in their economic actions, carry out scientific and philosophical activities in the academic sense, or benefit from modern medicine in health. In this context, they argue that secularism's identification of the religious with irrational attitudes is the product of an ideological claim, not an objective-scientific stance (Iannaccone, 1998).

This criticism of secularism by religious markets stems from the methodological presuppositions of rational choice theory. Before going into a more detailed explanation of this methodology, I will explain a little more about this aspect of the theory of religious markets, which secularism is accused of being ideological. Religious markets theory rejects secularization's progressive positivist claims and proposes alternative explanations for phenomena that secularization theory allegedly cannot explain. In this regard, the fundamental assumptions and methodology of the religious markets approach to the religious phenomenon are radically distinct from those of the secularization approach. The theory of religious markets offers crucial new insights on the topic due to the fact that these differences lead to results contrary to secularization theory, particularly between religious organizations and policies on religious issues.

According to theories of secularization, the origin of religious belief is a problem of technical knowledge. Secularization theory posits that individuals turn to religious explanations when they are unable to provide rational/scientific explanations for life-impacting incidents. This proposition raises two primary anticipations. First, individuals will abandon their religious beliefs entirely due to scientific progress. Obviously, this entails radical anticipation of social transformation and has a secondary implication. If science is a replacement for religious belief, then those who do not renounce their religious beliefs in the face of scientific progress continue to defend a dogmatic position that is "harmful" to social progress. The political consequences of this radical anticipation would be the suppression of religious beliefs in the name of progress.

The second type of prediction for the future of religion asserts that its significance in both individual and social life will progressively diminish as scientific-rational progress continues. In contrast to the radical expectation of religion, this moderated expectation implies that religion will not vanish, but will become a metaphysical pursuit that focuses on the individual's private life. It concludes that religious belief as institutionalized religion and organized religious groups will lose prominence in public life. This second claim has political implications of its own. Initially, the impact of religious beliefs on political decision-making will diminish rapidly. Second, it is permissible to tolerate religious believers so long as they do not pose a significant threat to secular-based public policies. In secularized societies, however, the relative importance of religious tolerance will decline. Here, secularization theorists assert that they are conducting sociology of religion research and explain their findings without regard to their political implications. In this manner, they evade the explicit political position that radical expectation implies.

According to religious markets theory, on various levels, secularization theories are methodologically collectivist and determinist. In this respect, secularization theories as a meta-theory explain the behavior of individuals in a deterministic manner. The relationship between individuals as agents and institutional arrangements is ignored. Radical secularization relates the level of religious beliefs of individuals to the extent to which they will be exposed to scientific-rational progress. Moreover, it may propose to shape people's lives through the power of the legitimacy of progress (Iannaccone etc., 1998).

The collectivist and determinist attitude of the moderate secularization expectation is less subtle. Instead of proposing constructive rationalism, this secularization is used to rationalize secularization and legitimize the religious policies prevailing in Western Europe. Of course, in areas

such as educational policies, secularization advocates can present their position as scientific knowledge and demand that these policies be enforced by public authorities in a "neutral" manner. However, there are studies showing that such policies have major effects on religious behavior (Cesur&Mocan, 2013). In this respect, it should be emphasized that the claimed neutrality is controversial.

The first point where religious market theory differs from secularization theory is the origin of religious belief. The religious market theory takes religious belief as given and refuses to explain the origin of religious belief. This is a methodological choice stemming from rational choice. The methodology of rational choice examines the effects of the incentives provided by institutional arrangements on individual behavior in order to understand how individual preferences are shaped by institutions. In this sense, rational choice does not assume perfect knowledge but examines how individuals change their priorities in the face of constraints and opportunities in the context of their own knowledge and demands in a particular institutional setting. By focusing on the importance of individual agency, it draws inferences on the consequences of institutional arrangements.

The religious market theory is rationalist in the sense that it is a rational choice approach. However, this claim of rationalism is only an axiomatic assumption about human cognitive properties; it is not a universal truth to guide policy choices. In this context, religious market theorists claim to explain religious phenomena methodologically better than secularization theories. Secularization theories define rational behavior as action shaped by reference to technical knowledge. However, since rational choice theory defines rational behavior as the ability of individuals to make consistent priority ordering and the existence of transitivity between priorities, rational choice rationalism has no relation with the form of action based on technical knowledge.

Therefore, there is no universally correct comprehensive religious policy that can be derived from this method of analysis. However, this methodological claim does not mean that these theorists do not have policy proposals based on normative values. These theorists explicitly call for a reduction in religious regulation and argue that the abolition of religious prohibitions will spontaneously create competitive religious markets that will support pluralism (Iannaccone etc., 1997, Gill, 2007). One aspect of these demands is to give more freedom to religious organizations to operate in areas such as education and social services. The ideological aspect of these demands, which parallel the debate between conservatives and progressives, especially in the US, is predominant. Second, religious market theorists argue that competitive religious markets are integral to a well-functioning modern society. The positive contributions of religious freedom to democratic development, economic growth, and the reduction of violence are supported by various statistical models. This is the claim that this study focuses on.

Religious markets theory proposes an economic model to understand the religious phenomenon. Religious people constitute the demand side of this market, while religious organizations constitute the supply side of this market. The extent and nature of this religious demand and supply depend on the institutional arrangements that shape the religious market. Institutional arrangements are broadly defined as "rules of the game". In this sense, although learned cultural norms are accepted as institutions, the main institutions affecting the religious market are government regulations and public institutions (Stark&Iannaccone, 1994).

The religious market theorists argue that the main purpose of public institutions and regulation of religion in modern times is to monopolize religious organizations by bringing them under state control (Gill, 2007). In economic theory, monopolization has important consequences. Monopolies, especially state monopolies, reduce supply, raise costs, and reduce the quality of products. In this respect, although there are religious demands in society, the state limits or completely prohibits non-state organizations from meeting these demands. Since governmental religious services are largely covered by compulsory taxes, the relationship between religious demand and religious supply has been severed. There is a lack of innovation in religious services as religious providers are less responsive to religious demands, and it is argued that public religious institutions

do not have sufficient incentives to persuade people to become religious. Since the competitive and pluralistic structure of religious markets has been eliminated, it is stated that religious markets that are monopolized or over-regulated are less religious. On the contrary, in religious markets where religious organizations are free to organize and religious services are not covered by public resources, competition among religious organizations will increase religiosity (Finke&Iannaccone, 1993; Iannaccone etc, 1997; Iannaccone, 1998).

This economic model is primarily supported by empirical evidence from two sources. The first is that the US, which, unlike European countries, has liberalized religious organizations and does not tax religious services, has a relatively very high religious population ratio. The second type of data is the sudden emergence of religious demand and religious organizations in countries that have reduced religious regulation, such as the Soviet Union. These empirical data point to a controversial claim. Religious people and religious organizations are not disappearing in the modern world, and this leaves room for some new explanations (Gill, 2007).

Religious markets analysis supports policies in favor of religious pluralism by finding positive correlations between religious pluralism and social peace and social welfare. The most prominent evidence in this respect is that religious persecution is significantly higher in countries with high religious regulation than in countries with low religious regulation (Finke, 1990). Particularly, religious persecution increases significantly in countries where religious monopolization serves as the basis for political legitimacy. In addition, since the institutionalization of religious pluralism reduces negative religious discrimination, one of the most significant claims is that the contributions of individuals with diverse religious beliefs to the economy and society increase.

Another political claim that religious markets support with empirical data is that secularization or secularization policies do not destroy religious demand in society. This is especially true for Muslim-majority countries like Turkey, Iran, and Egypt (Harris, 2011). Although some research shows that the rate of religious practices has declined, belief in religion and God is very high in these countries. Adopting a religious or secular understanding of the good life has nothing to do with social peace or social welfare. What is important is that individuals' religious preferences are not an obstacle to their own development or to contributing to social development. In countries with high levels of religious regulation, secular or religious attitudes towards religious pluralism are extremely intolerant. This allows us to confront an important political problem that secularization theory cannot explain.

As I have explained above, the main political issue in Muslim-majority countries is not the rise or fall of apostasy or secularization. The main political issue regarding religious policies and religious regulation is the extent to which religious tolerance can be institutionalized in these countries. This is the crucial question for individual freedom. The institutionalization of religious tolerance depends on the existence of an impartial government. This is because an impartial government considers religious services as a private matter and allows religious groups considerable latitude in organizing themselves.

The organization of religious services in Muslim-majority countries varies considerably, but freedom of religion and conscience remains an important political issue to variable degrees. The policy of significant centralization of religious services and organizations is a common feature of these countries. There is also no Muslim-majority country that has achieved the ideal of an impartial government to any significant extent.

Under these circumstances, I see the political struggle between secularists/progressives and conservatives in Muslim-majority countries as a major obstacle to the potential for the development of liberal democracy in these countries. Because what matters for liberal democracy is not whether or not individuals are religious, but rather how well the political system protects individual liberty. The impact of religious policy and regulation on individual freedom remains substantial. Until the idea that religious organization is a type of freedom that largely concerns the private sphere is institutionalized in Muslim-majority countries, it is unlikely that impartial government will emerge in

these countries. Nevertheless, the theory of religious markets can contribute to the debate in many ways.

3. Muslim-majority Countries and Theory of Religious Markets

Theory of religious markets offers an essential perspective for Muslim-majority countries even though it is primarily employed to explain Western society. In contrast to the secularism theory, the supply-side explanation of religious behavior offers two significant advantages in understanding the emergence of political Islam in Muslim-majority countries. First, the idea of religious markets offers the chance to explain various religious doctrines and groups by adhering to the same standards, freeing religious behavior from theological disputes. Thus, without participating in contentious theological arguments, religious markets theory offers the chance to study the connection between religious practices and political institutionalization in Muslim-majority countries. Assuming that religious and rational behavior are inherently at odds with one another, secularization proponents, on the other hand, dismiss the incentives produced by political institutions on religious behavior. Therefore, proponents of secularism theory risk making grave political misjudgments in Muslim-majority countries.

The second advantage of the theory of the religious markets over the secularization theory is that it may provide a better theoretical and historical connection between religious pluralism and the liberal conception of impartial government. By relating religious plurality with liberal impartiality, religious markets theory mitigates possible contradictions between political liberalism and religious beliefs. In Muslim-majority countries, secularization and modernity are frequently used interchangeably by secularization advocates and the public. This circumstance drives secularization supporters to disregard the idea of liberal constitutional government and promote the imposition of what they perceive to be Western social norms with public coercion. In the guise of secularization, illiberal policies have unexpected consequences that restrict individual liberty. In Turkey, for instance, Atatürk's revolutions were successful in establishing a secular state, but the debate between secularism advocates and conservatives remains tense, and disagreements between these parties continue to negatively impact a variety of liberties.

I do not suggest that the philosophy of secularism endorses radical secularization in this research. However, I argue that the concept of secularization cannot explain the decline of religion in non-Western nations during the contemporary age. According to Bruce, the concept of secularism is employed to explain a comprehensive sociocultural phenomenon in the West, and it is asserted that since non-Western civilizations do not undergo these particular social processes, secularism cannot explain these societies (Bruce, 2011). However, the desacralization premise of the theory of religious markets is easily applicable to non-Western countries. Because religious markets see humans not as objects determined by social structural changes, but as beings engaging with social-political institutions. In addition, it enables us to study their interaction with religious groups through the lens of individual incentives, apart from theological and ideological disagreements. Examining religious estrangement apart from individual incentives facilitates the radicalization of measures attempting to secularize society. The pro-progressive versus pro-reactionary argument in which Muslim-majority countries are stuck is a result of this theoretical stalemate presented by the secularism theory.

The religious markets model shows two fundamental errors made by advocates of state-led radical secularization initiatives. First, I contend that contrary to common opinion, radical secularization policies in Muslim-majority nations do not help the liberalizations of these countries. In fact, as Rohac demonstrates, in Muslim-majority nations where trust in public institutions is low, religious organizations are viewed as credible by people and are politically attractive to many Muslims. (Rohac, 2013). Furthermore, as I will discuss below, the more politically risky it is to participate in these religious organizations, the more likely it is that they will adopt radical practices. (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006).

Second, monopolizing the dominant religious denomination, and restricting authorized religious activities to public institutions does not accelerate social secularization in Muslim-majority countries as anticipated, nor does it generate support from religious people for formal secularization. Eliminating religious issues from political discourse and ensuring that public policies are supported on moderate religious grounds when appropriate are the two goals of nationalizing the dominant religious denomination. When social support for alternative religious interpretations that are not controlled by the state is eliminated, it is argued that the state may lead its religious policy and its citizens in the way it chooses (Berkes, 1964; Toprak, 2005). Not only do secular policies that interfere with religious markets make it difficult to institutionalize the constitutional government, but they also foster robust religious reactionary movements (Kuru, 2009). Thus, when secularization measures fail, societies may be forced to deal with more intense disputes on religion and secularization.

Religious markets theory contends that religious monopolization and religious regulation lead to desecralization in Western society as a result of poor religious services. This assumption is made for liberal democracies where religious tolerance is guaranteed by individual rights and the private sphere, and an impartial government is established. In nations where liberal political institutions do not exist or where religious tolerance does not contribute to the formation of liberal political institutions, the monopolization of religion exposes two significant social phenomena not observed in Western society.

First, public religious monopoly can never achieve the desired control over the religious beliefs of reactionary conservatives in society, and informal religious organizations continue their development by being radicalized outside of state control. The higher the penalty for engaging in “illegal” religious activities, the more likely it is that informal religious organizations will become radicalized and radical religious interpretations will remain uncriticized and unopposed. These radical groups are heavily involved in politics and dogmatically impose their ideas on the role of religion in politics. But this social phenomenon is only one side of the coin. On the other hand, the well-educated, urban middle class, where public religious policies are effective, is greatly affected by the desecralization process. The electoral victories of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 and the mass protests and military intervention that followed are a good indication that the struggle between secularists and conservatives in an illiberal democratic system will not find a political solution.

4. Rational Choice on Fundamentalism

As I have argued above, rational choice explains individuals' actions and preferences in terms of individual priorities and some characteristics related to these priorities. Although the only basis of individual priorities in economic relations is utility maximization, there are many other reasons motivating individuals outside economic relations. Without investigating the psychological and sociological roots of these motivations, it is possible to examine the social phenomena caused by these individual priorities within a certain institutional framework under the assumption of rational behavior. As long as one is aware of its limitations, new information can be obtained on issues that conventional social theories have difficulty explaining.

It is also possible to examine the priorities of individuals participating in religious organizations that will emerge within different political institutional structures by taking religious belief itself as given. In particular, there are many important studies that examine the behavior of members of radical religious groups within the framework of the theory of club goods provided by these religious groups. These studies argue that it is possible and useful to study religious extremists not as dogmatic zealots but as individuals who act rationally under certain institutional incentives.

For this analysis, the study of Iannaccone and Berman (2006) is an excellent example. Iannaccone and Berman compare sectarian religious organizations to societies that provide both spiritual and material services. They argue that in countries where the government is ineffective, sectarian religious organizations provide social services, political action, and coercive power very effectively. However, the authors ascribe the success of these sectarian organizations to their

organizational structure and not their theology. Therefore, they contend that viewing sectarian group members as misguided individuals with psychological issues leads to a misunderstanding of the institutional incentives that gave rise to these groups.

The authors emphasize that in failed states, these organizations offer their members both hope for the future and social services. The greater the political pressure and hazards on those who join these groups, the greater the likelihood that they will adopt more radical attitudes and policies. One of the most important reasons for this is that the group's services are contingent on limited resources, and only those who are genuinely committed to the group are guaranteed to benefit from these limited resources. Radicalization is shown to be a rational choice for overcoming the free-rider dilemma and maintaining the community's credibility (Iannaccone, 2006, 118). The authors, for instance, depict the Taliban as a group that filled the power void left by the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States in Afghanistan. (Iannaccone, 2006, 119).

Rohac's (2013) research on the Muslim Brotherhood in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) nations bolsters the arguments of Iannaccone and Berman. Rohac links the popularity of Islamic parties in the new and developing democracies of the Middle East and North Africa to the issue of dependable pre-electoral commitments to provide public goods. Observers have noted that these religious-based groups have been able to leverage the credibility they acquired through the production of social services prior to democratic elections into electoral success.

These explanations present a controversial assertion. The distinction between sectarian group members who are "true" believers and violent extremists is not theological, but rather the environmental conditions in which the sectarian group is formed. (Iannaccone & Berman 2006, 119). Under peaceful and favorable conditions, these sectarian organizations may be motivated to provide peaceful services to their members and be extremely beneficial to society. Under different circumstances, sectarian groups led by credible leaders and comprised of highly committed members may be more successful than secular groups in producing organized violence (Iannaccone&Berman 2006, 221). When sectarian groups engage in a political struggle in which violence is the predominant strategy, the level of violence can escalate rapidly because victory is a matter of life or death. The high motivation of devoted members of a group can be a significant advantage over secular groups.

Iannaccone and Berman argue that the violent actions of sectarian religious organizations in the West were resolved by competitive religious markets. The authors argue that the absence of a sectarian organization capable of seizing power on its own, the progressive removal of pressure on religious groups by the political authority, and competition between religious groups are crucial to the emergence of a liberal government. Obviously, the implementation of such a policy is contingent upon the recognition of religious organizations as a private phenomenon and the provision of public services without discrimination against its citizens. As a result, the authors contend that such a society is a well-functioning society and that religious organizations will be limited to nonviolent services, as they have little to gain from violent action in such societies. (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006, 224).

The development of religious tolerance and the impartial government in Europe and North America may be attributed to a number of historical coincidences. It may not be reasonable to expect identical conditions in other parts of the world. Particularly in Muslim-majority countries, policies regarding religion-state relations have led to radical secularization or religious monopolization. Therefore, it is evident that in these countries, religious freedom that prioritizes individual liberty has not been institutionalized.

Moaddel's (2017) study on the relationship between monolithic religious markets and the political environment in Iran, the Middle East, and North Africa is insightful in this context. The failed state is not the only cause of sectarian religious organizations in Muslim-majority countries. In unified authoritarian states, such as Saudi Arabia, fundamentalism can rise when religious markets are monopolized and major religious groups are closely aligned with the state monopoly. While such fundamentalist religious phenomena are easily traceable, Moaddel also argues that radical secularization policies, similar to religious monopolies, also accelerate the rise of fundamentalist

religious groups. Moaddel demonstrates, through a comprehensive examination of Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution, that the tendency of religious groups to radicalize increased in response to the political pressure produced by Shah-era secularization policies.

Moaddel's explanation is to some extent in line with Iannaccone and Berman's. As the political stakes increase, members of religious groups need drastic measures and stigmas to prove their loyalty and eliminate the free-riding problem. Group members who bear these costs will be entitled to benefit from the services produced by the religious organization. However, Moaddel did not limit his research to failed states and included countries with political stability in his analysis. In this context, Moaddel (2017, 57) is able to offer insights into the negative incentives that radical secularization policies create in religious markets. Examples of such regimes include Egypt in the 1930s-40s and Iran in the 1960s-70s.

In addition to unified authoritarian states, Moaddel (2017, 39) also examines monolithic religious markets in fragmented states. Fragmented states are defined as the inability of ruling elites to establish a stable political order due to political disagreement among themselves. Using post-revolutionary Iran as an example of a fragmented state, Moaddel argues that disagreement among elites has allowed secular movements to flourish.

While Moaddel's interpretation makes sense, it is incomplete in the context of the problem I address in this research. Ultimately, the fundamental political problem is not the dominance of fundamentalism or secularism in a Muslim-majority country. It is to ensure that organizations for freedom of religion and conscience are institutionalized in a way that does not disrupt political stability and even supports political stability. As Iannaccone and Berman argue, in countries with low levels of religious regulation and competition in religious markets, there is no significant basis for sectarian organizations to turn to violence.

In this context, the fundamental error of radical secularism is its attempt to eliminate religious beliefs by seeing them as irrational behavior. In fact, the only people who will win by engaging in theological debate with radical sectarian groups will be the leaders of other religious groups (Iannaccone & Berman, 2006, 123). If the political regime does not allow these religious groups to debate freely and continuously increases the political risk for these groups, the principle of non-discrimination among citizens, which is a requirement of an impartial government, cannot be established. Failure to enforce the principle of impartiality may lead sectarian groups to channel their organizational advantages into acts of violence.

Therefore, the political struggle between advocates of modernity and conservatives in Muslim-majority countries cannot be overcome with theological or philosophical arguments. To be sure, theological and philosophical debates on the issue can lead to greater public acceptance of a particular view. However, the precondition for such civilized debate is the institutionalization of competitive religious markets in these countries. If this debate is initiated from theological and philosophical sources, peaceful and democratic solutions may not be possible in the long run.

Since the focus of the religious markets studies has been on religious politics in Western countries, the role of religious pluralism in the development of impartial government has not been extensively studied. Because the current debate on the topic has been shaped in the context of political systems where an impartial government is given, claims about the causes and consequences of apostasy in Western countries have been overemphasized. In this respect, both theories of secularism and the religious markets theory seem to have closed themselves off to phenomena outside Western societies.

To distance itself from the reputation of 19th-century theories of secularization, secularism, for instance, has argued that secularism is a limited theoretical claim specific to "Western" societies, thereby drastically restricting the scope of the debate. In addition, the claim that secularism is separated from politics as a sociological science has limited the problematization of significant secularism-related issues. Nevertheless, the claims of secularism regarding the beliefs and priorities of the religious are universal claims, and the relationship between Western modernism and the debate

between sectarian religious groups is evident. Contemporary secularism theory makes no significant academic contribution to the political debate on religious politics in Muslim-majority countries in this regard.

However, it is not possible to explicitly apply every claim of the theory of religious markets regarding Western countries to Muslim-majority countries. Since the debate is framed by a political system in which an impartial government is given, there is little discussion regarding the religious regulations that should be in place to safeguard individual liberty in the absence of an impartial government. In addition, some claims of religious market theory may be invalid in non-liberal countries. In this regard, the theory of religious markets has been relegated to a similar position as secularism.

5. Conclusion

The main purpose of this research is to demonstrate the importance of the relationship between the impartial government and the politics of religion in terms of liberal values and individual liberty. By institutionalizing religious tolerance, the impartial government has become the most fundamental condition for individual liberty, as it makes the conflict between religious and non-religious conceptions of the good life largely the subject of peaceful, democratic politics. In this respect, the fact that modern societies have also institutionalized individual freedom to a large extent is not a necessity of secularization, but a result of the institutionalization of the impartial government. In this context, there is no causal link between secularization and the institutionalization of individual freedom. On the contrary, in non-Western societies, the perception that secularization is the driving force of modernization causes public policies to be shaped by a comprehensive state ideology, leading these political regimes to move away from an impartial government.

In this respect, although the claim that the ratio of believers to the population in Western societies is on a downward trend is important and interesting, the relationship between secularization and individual freedom is undoubtedly a more fundamental issue. Theorists of religious markets also make the mistake of not including the condition of an impartial government in their comprehensive analysis and conduct the debate within the limits set by the current theory of secularism.

The most important problem with this issue is the religious markets theory's claim that sacralization will decrease with the monopolization of the religious markets and the reduction of competition. It is clear that in countries that have monopolized religion, sacralization does not decrease and in some cases increases along with radicalization. Another exceptional example is the inverse relationship between religiosity and the welfare state in Western societies. The directly proportional relationship between the welfare state and desacralization in liberal democracies may work in the opposite way in illiberal states. In countries where utilizing the benefits of the welfare state is associated with religiosity, it can be argued that the cost of apostasy will increase and the trend towards religiosity will strengthen.

These exceptional cases significantly undermine the claim of universality of the theory of religious markets. In fact, these exceptional cases are indicative of the fact that theory of religious markets has departed from its main political goal. Clearly positioned within the classical liberal-libertarian tradition, the main political goal of the religious markets theory should be to explore the possibilities of individual freedom in the context of religious freedom. However, recent studies on the subject seem to have turned into a religious versus atheist census in Western countries. This state of academic debate has led to the stagnation of religious market theory, which offers important insights into religious organizations and policies and has prevented it from gaining wider recognition.

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