

Religiousness and the Impact of Education on It in Iran

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ABSTRACT

This article shows, as Peter Berger's desecularisation theory indicates, that the contemporary world is mainly religious as much as it was in the past, and although pluralisation somewhat loosens religious beliefs, people are largely religious. On a probability sample of a national survey in Iran, we show that Iranian's people are mainly religious. However, they are not very comment to religious behaviours, especially in treatment with others and the affairs of everyday life. Also, education has a negative, but minor impact on individuals' religiousness. However, it exerts a more impact on other dimensions of religious life, religious tolerance, and secularisation of individuals.

Keywords: Education, individual secularisation, pluralisation, religiousness, religious tolerance

INTRODUCTION

Religion is a fundamental aspect of social life and the classical theorists of sociology have generally emphasised the importance of religion in society. August Comte (1849) tried to create a positivistic religion (religion of humanity) for modern society to fulfil the cohesive function of traditional religion.

Emile Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), highlighted the social function of religion and its role in bringing social cohesion. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1985), emphasised on the role of religion in the rise of modern industry and capitalist economy. However, the classical theorists of sociology explicitly or implicitly saw the declining importance of religion in modern society. For Max Weber, the major specificities of modern society is rational action towards the target that implies a reduction in traditional action and value-oriented rational action, as vital features of religion. Durkheim's emphasis

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on the development of science in organic societies implies the decline of religion in modern society. According to him, religion is not only a system of behaviours and actions but also a system of ideas and beliefs whose aim is to express the world and scientific thinking and is, thus, evolved into religious thinking. Therefore, scientific thinking takes the place of religious thought: "Hence, it seems natural that religion should lose ground as science becomes better at performing its task" (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 427-428).

The assumed decline of religion arose centuries ago, in the Enlightenment, when it was thought that the development of science replaced the supernatural (religious) with the scientific (natural). However, it was in 1950s and 1960s that the idea of religion declined, as the theory of secularisation attracted theorists' attention. The most famous of such theorists is Peter Berger, one of the major figures in the sociology of religion. Some writers (for example, Woodhead, 2001) recognise him as one of the sociologists who have contributed the most in the theoretical study of religion. Berger's theoretical ideas were formed in his early work in the 1960s, especially in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which is a canonical work of the sociology of knowledge. It explores the relation between beliefs and social reality. He developed his ideas in his later work, *Sacred Canopy: Element of a*

Sociological Theory of Religion (1967), in the realm of religion. Berger presented his secularisation theory in this book. According to him, there is an intrinsic link between modernisation and secularisation that means the former does necessarily lead to the latter.

However, religious movements in the closing three decades of the twentieth century, including the Islamic Revolution, Solidarity in Poland, the Church's support of Revolutionaries Sandys in Nicaragua, and elsewhere in Latin America, are a reincarnation of religion, challenging secularisation theory. As a result, a new theory under "deseccularisation" appeared (Casanova, 1994). Again, one of the most prominent theorists of deseccularisation is Berger, who revised his previous opinions and saw secularisation theory was wrong. Now he believes the modern world is as religious as it used to be.

Therefore, given the importance of the relationship between modernisation and religion in sociology, this paper seeks to answer the questions of how religious Iran's society is and whether education has a role, as a representative of modernisation, in the secularisation of people. The authors have tried to derive appropriate assumptions from Berger's theories (secularisation and deseccularisation) and test the empirical credit of the authors' theoretical response to these questions in Iran, which has experienced modernisation, especially with the spread of public education and higher education for several decades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Secularisation Theory

Berger defines secularisation as the process of separating the sectors of society from the dominance of religious institutions and symbols (Pfadenhauer, 2013). Secularisation in the history of the modern West is the separation of fields that had previously been dominated by the Christian church, including the separation of state from church, confiscation of church lands, and separation of education from religion. Berger sees secularisation as a wide process which influences all cultural life and is the unpopularity of religious themes in arts, philosophy, literature, and, above all, sees it as the emergence of science as an independent and completely secular worldview (Berger, 1967).

Berger argues that secularisation includes not only the social institutes and cultural spheres, but also the minds of people: "Secularisation is ... a decline in religion both in society and in the minds of individuals" (Pfadenhauer, 2013, p. 56). Thus, secularisation has two interrelated dominations: (1) institutional secularisation (or, in Berger's terms, social structural secularisation), which means the removal of religion from the realm of public institutions; and (2) individual secularisation (or, in Berger's phrase, secularisation of consciousness), which means individuals not resorting to the interpretation of religion in their behaviour and thought. According to Berger, the modern West has raised growing

number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without recourse to religious interpretations (ibid).

Berger sees the modern economy, industrial capitalism, as the main cause of secularisation. Hence, different segments of modern society, based on their closeness to or remoteness from the process of secularisation, are affected differently. Very secular segments emerge in the immediate vicinity of these processes. In other words, the modern industrial society has created a central sector that is free from the realm of religion. Secularisation has expanded from this sector to influence other social sectors (Berger, 1967). Thus, even though secularisation is the general phenomenon of modern societies, it does not distribute uniformity within society and affects different groups differently. For example, the impact of secularisation is greater on men than women, on middle-aged people than the very young and very old, on urban than the rural, on the classes that deal directly with the modern industrial production (especially working class) than traditional occupations groups (such as artisans or small shopkeepers), and on the Protestants than the Jews and the Catholics, etc (ibid).

In Berger's view, another key factor in the secularisation of individuals (secularisation of minds) is pluralisation. He argues that throughout much of human history, religious organisation has had a monopoly over legitimising individual and collective lives. Religious institutions

defined the world, and going out of this religiously defined world was stepping into chaotic darkness, anomalies, and possibly madness, on the one hand, and deserved harsh punishment, on the other hand. However, Modern life is segmented and this segmentation and pluralisation not only is on the level of social conduct, but also on the level of consciousness (Berger, 1974). According to Berger, the pluralisation of social life-worlds has grave effects on religiousness. Now, different parts of social life are under a different semantic system and it is difficult for religious institutions to have a single meaning for this plurality of social life. Moreover, the subjective consciousness of the individual threatens the plausibility of religious definitions of reality, too (Berger, 1974). Pluralisation forces individuals to recognise others with different meanings, values, and beliefs. Thus, pluralisation causes the secularization of society and minds (Berger, 1974).

The main feature of all pluralist situations is that religious institutions cannot take the loyalty of the people for granted any more. Loyalty is voluntary and, therefore, less certain itself. Thus, religious tradition that was already firmly imposed should be marketed. The religious tradition must be levied onto individuals who are no longer programmed to bear it. Particularly, the pluralist situation is the “market situation”. In this situation, the religious institutions become marketing institutions and religious traditions become consumer commodities. In this situation, any type of religious activity is subject to the

logic of the market economy. Pluralisation changes the relationship between religious institutions in line with ecumenical and interfaith tolerance (Berger, 2014).

Pluralisation makes previously monopolising religious groups become competitive marketing firms. Previously, religious groups were organised, so they had control over their followers. However, now religious groups must organise themselves in competition with other groups that have the same goal to attract people. Success in this competitive situation involves rationalisation and bureaucratisation of religious structures. Expansion of bureaucratic structures in the religious institution makes all religious institutions, regardless of their different faith traditions, socially like each other. This pluralisation in a religious market situation requires increasingly friendly cooperation between religious groups. The affinity causes religious rivals to no longer be considered “enemy”, but peers with shared issues. Pluralisation makes religious institutions lose earlier monopoly privileges. Now, they have to compete without use of coercion. There are pressures toward restricting the competition, which makes a degree of cooperation practical (Berger, 2014).

Thus, in everyday life, the individuals subjectively tend towards uncertainty about religious affairs, because in everyday life they are objectively exposed to a wide variety of religious and other factors, which define reality and compete with their loyalty or, at least, their attention, and none of these factors can make them loyal (Woodhead

et al., 2001). In short, pluralisation, as the infant of modernisation, inevitably leads to subjective secularisation (individual secularisation).

Desecularisation Theory

Beginning in 1974, Berger began to doubt the secularisation theory and came to believe that many observers of the religious scene have over-estimated the degree and irreversibility of secularisation (ibid). Bruce stated conservative and evangelical church growth in the United States, the decline of the liberal church, the continued trend of religion in western countries, and the continued existence of religion in the rest of the world as reasons for this doubt (Bruce, 2001). In the late 1990s, Berger came to completely reject the secularisation theory and recognized the biggest mistake of those who worked in this field in 1960s to be that they thought the modernity inevitably to result from weakening of religion (ibid).

Berger rejected the secularisation theory under the discussion of the desecularisation of the world (Berger, 1999). He discarded the notion that living in a secular world is unsound: “most of the world today is as religious as ever it was, and in a good many locales, more religious than ever” (Woodhead et al., 2001, p. 91). Now, Berger argues that although the term “secularisation theory” related to the works of 1950s and 1960s, in fact, the basic idea of this theory can be found in the Enlightenment with this simple idea that “Modernisation does necessarily lead to decline of religion both in society and in the minds of people”, and

precisely that this main idea that was wrong. Certainly, modernity has some secularising effects, but it has also led to powerful movements of counter-secularisation. Secularisation on the societal level is not necessarily leading to secularisation on the level of minds (Berger, 2013).

According to Berger, a main reason for desecularisation is that modernity usually undermines the taken-for-granted certainties. This is not pleasant to many and is not tolerable for some, and religious movements that claim to give certainty have a lot of charm for these people” (ibid).

Berger holds two exceptions for desecularisation. First, is Europe, especially Western Europe, where, the old secularisation theory would hold (Berger, 2013). Second, is an internationally secular subculture which is carried out by the western-educated as a main carrier of progressive values and beliefs, and enlightenment ideas. This subculture includes the progressive beliefs and values of Enlightened. The number of its bearers is small, but they are strongly influential. They control the institutions which determine the official definitions of reality, especially the educational system, the media of mass communication and the legal system (Berger, 2013).

However, Berger continues to stress the influence of pluralisation on the secularisation of individuals, albeit with some modifications. According to Berger, modernisation has created very heterogeneous societies and great intercultural mutations that together make the two factors in the line of pluralisation

and not the line of establishing (or re-establishing) religious monopoly (Berger, 1999). He recognises that this was wrong about secularisation but was not wrong about pluralisation. According to him, pluralisation does not necessarily lead to individuals' secularisation, but it does undermine all religious certainties, as it does in other areas of life (Woodhead, 2001).

Later, Berger (2014) came to concede that the secularisation theorists are not quite as wrong as he previously thought: 'I now understand more fully the global reality of the secular discourse, not just in Europe and in faculty clubs all over the world, but in the lives of many ordinary believers who succeed in being *both secular and religious*' (Berger, 2014, p. 20). Berger sees some of the main processes of modernity (industrialisation, urbanisation, migration, education) move religion out of much of the institutional order (Berger, 2014). Also, he argues that pluralism undermines the taken-for-grantedness of religion (Ibid).

Berger believes modernity produces a secular discourse, which compels people to deal with many areas of life without reference to religious definitions of reality (ibid). This discourse exists both in the minds of individuals who deal with everyday world without any supernatural presuppositions and in the society. The implication of this for individuals is simple and very important: "For most religious believers, faith and secularity are not mutually exclusive modes of attending to reality; it is not a matter of either/or, but rather of both/and (Berger,

2014, p. 53). In short, people generally have religious beliefs, but they are secular in daily life. Some, such as Warner (1993), acknowledged that, today, Berger's theory about the relationship between pluralisation and religion is such a central issue in the community of religion that it has become a new paradigm in the sociology of religion.

Hypotheses

Based on the later Berger's idea (desecularisation) which holds most of the world today is as religious as ever it was, the authors conclude that religiousness **is prevalent in Iran's society (*First hypothesis*)**. In other words, the authors expect that the vast majority of Iranian people are religious. In fact, in a non-European society like Iran, there is not a strong force such as Enlightenment subculture that can struggle religious beliefs and weaken it. Therefore, people generally are religious.

From Berger's argument on the expansion of pluralisation in contemporary societies and that people are faced with a wide variety of religions and other factors that define human realities in everyday life leading to uncertainty about religious affairs, it could be concluded that people do not have very strong commitment to follow religious instructions and duties or neglect to. In other words, **people's commitment to practice religious rulings, duties, and rites is not very strong (*Second hypothesis*)**.

Again, based on the above reasoning, the authors expect that people tolerate

perceived non-religious subjects or acts. This means, non-religious actions and non-religious people are tolerated. In other words, **religious tolerance is prevalent in Iran's society (Third hypothesis), too.**

From Berger's argument that science is a completely secular view of the world, and his emphasis on the existence of a secular culture in the world among those with high education, the authors expect that people with higher education are less religious. In other words, **there is an inverse relationship between education and religiousness (Fourth hypothesis).** However, it is a weak one, because, as mentioned above, there are not any variables with strong inverse relationship with religiousness. Also, it could be expected there to be an inverse relationship between education and commitment to practice religious duties and rites. Furthermore, based on above reasoning, the authors expect there to be a direct relationship between education and religious tolerance.

METHODS

To test the hypotheses, the authors did a secondary analysis of a survey, "Values and Attitudes of Iranians", which is a national survey based on a large probability multistage cluster sample on the 15-65-year-old people who lived in the capital cities of the Iran provinces. In that sampling, in the first stage, the blocks have been selected by random sampling proportional to the size (population) of each block and in the second

stage, individuals have been selected by random sampling from the selected blocks.

As is manifest based on the hypotheses, the authors' discussion about secularisation in this article is limited to the subjective dimension of it; that is, secularisation of individuals, not the institutional secularisation, which is a vast subject area. Following Berger's argument, the authors define subjective (individual) secularisation as the abandonment of religious rulings, duties, and rites in treating with people and issues (for different definitions of secularism and the history of its use (Robertson, 1970).

In this article, religiousness and other variables are measured by single items or indicators consisting of several items. Religiousness is measured by this simple self-assessment statement: "How religious are you?" with these options as its answer: not at all, little, somehow, very, and very much.

Commitment to practice religious rulings, duties, and rites has two indicators: obligatory prayers and participation in religious rituals. Obligatory prayer (*Namaz*) is required from every Muslim that needs to be performed along a special ritual five times a day. This variable is measured by this self-assessment statement: "Have you prayed regularly during the past year?" with these options as its answer: never, seldom, sometimes, most often, and always. Religious rituals are measured by an indicator includes variables which are participation in Muharram (Tasua and

Ashura) rites, in the religious ceremonials (Hey'ats), and other rites.

Religious tolerance is measured by two indicators, too: tolerance toward non-religious behaviours and secular attitudes. The first indicator is composed of four items: "how do you encounter with an unveiled lady (Bad Hejab)?", "how with friendship between boys and girls?", "how with mixed party?", and "how with the strip and illegal movies?" with five options: (1) I intervene, (2) I report to police, (3) I warn, (4) I am opposed to but do not intervene, and (5) never mind. The indicator scores range from 1 (low tolerance) to 5 (high tolerance). The indicator of secular attitudes is composed of four questions, requesting a response regarding the opinion about each phrase: "we must not associate with who is non-religious", "the religious affiliation must not be considered in employment", "secular individuals must not be at high position" and "we must prevent non-religious books and movies." The indicator scores range from 1 (non-secular attitude) to 5 (secular attitude). These variables are mainly at the ordinal level, but are considered interval to calculate the average of a set of them as an indicator of the concepts within this research (this is acknowledged by experts; for example, Borgatta & Bohrnstedt, 1980, pp. 155-160). These indicators construct a continuum from the very religious to non-religious (or secular). (Discussion about the dimensions of religion and its operational aspects is one of the topics in the field of sociology of religion; for example, see Glock & Stark, 1965).

RESULTS

Religiousness

Table 1 indicates that the vast majority of people are religious (they consider themselves religious) and only a little bit (1.4%) consider themselves not religious at all. However, religiousness does not have a uniform distribution, and the majority (58.9%) of people consider themselves somewhat religious, although nearly one-third (29.2%) consider themselves very or very much religious.

This data shows that religiousness is common among people and only very small proportions among them are secular. This finding confirms the first hypothesis that "**religiousness is prevalent in Iran's society**". In other words, the vast majority of people in Iran are religious, although not very religious.

Table 1
Distribution of religiousness

Religiousness	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	65	1.4
Little	476	10.4
Somehow	2698	59.0
Very	1080	23.6
Very much	257	5.6
Total	4576	100.0

Commitment to Practice Religious Rulings, Duties, and Rites

Obligatory prayer, which is the most important religious obligation in Islam, is also largely prevalent among people. Table

2 shows that more than two quarters (43.5%) of people say they pray regularly, although nearly a third (30.5%) of people prays sometimes, seldom, or never. Religious rituals is rather common among people (Figure 1), although its publicity is less than that of the obligatory duties. In general, these two indicators show that people are not strongly committed to religious practices, especially religious rituals. Therefore, it can be concluded that the second hypothesis (commitment to practice religious rulings,

duties, and rites is not very strong) is somewhat confirmed.

Table 2
Distribution of obligatory pray

Obligatory pray	Frequency	Percent
Never	239	5.3
Seldom	345	7.6
Sometimes	802	17.6
Most often	1186	26.1
Always	1979	43.5
Total	4551	100.0

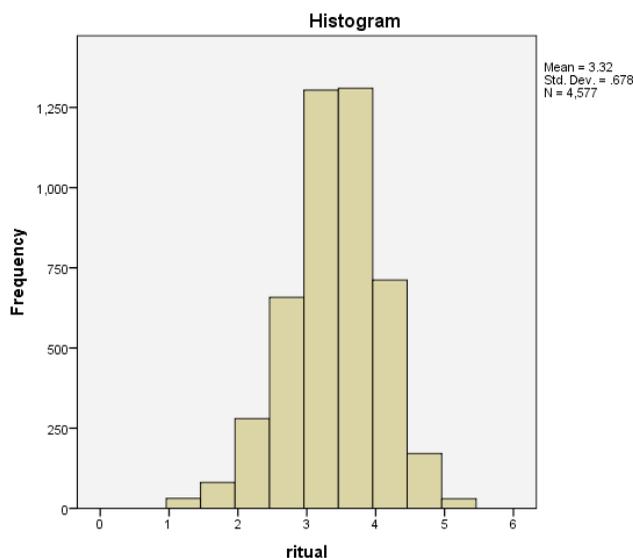


Figure 1. Histogram of religious rituals

Religious Tolerance

The two indicators of religious tolerance suggest the prevalent of it among Iranian's people. Figure 2 indicates a broad tolerance with non-religious behaviours. Also, figure

3 shows that the secular attitude is relatively common among people. Thus, these findings confirm our Third hypothesis, that religious tolerance is prevalent in Iran's society.

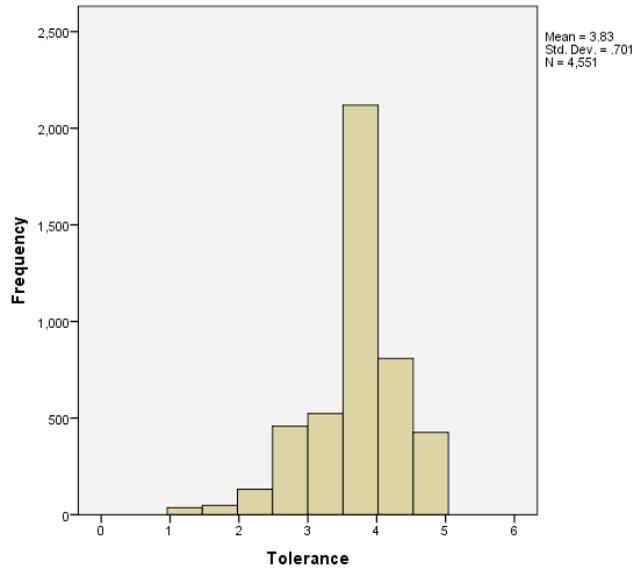


Figure 2. Histogram of tolerance toward non-religious behaviours

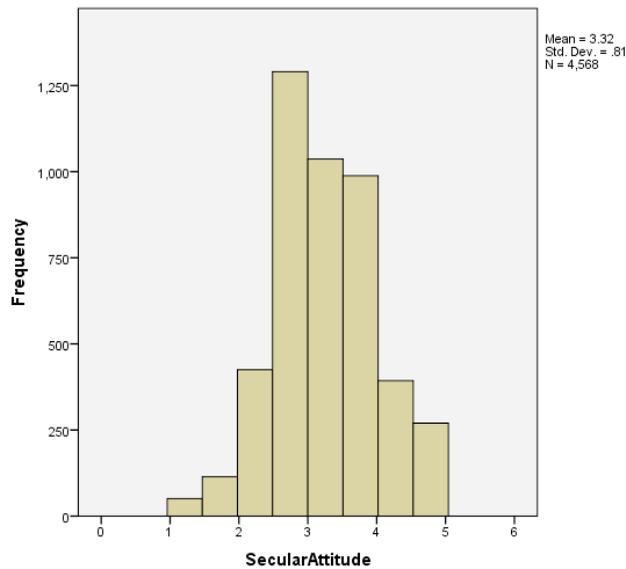


Figure 3. Histogram of secular attitudes

Religiousness and Education

As Table 3 shows, there is a negative correlation between religiousness and education ($r = -.172$). This means that with

increasing education, the religiousness decreases. Also, here is seen the inverse relation between religious practices and education ($r = -.100$), which means that with increasing education, the level of

commitment to religious duties decreases. Again, as expected, there is a reversed correlation between the religious rituals and education ($r = -.114$). These findings

confirm forth hypothesis, “religiousness has an inverse relation with education”. Education plays a role, however small, in the secularisation of people.

Table 3
Correlation between education and other variables

Variable	Religiousness	Obligatory pray	Ritual	Tolerance	Secular Attitude
Education	-.172	-.100	-.114	.168	.239
N	4576	4539	4565	4539	4556

Note: All Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

On the other hand, as seen in Table 3, there is a positive correlation between education and tolerance toward non-religious behaviours and secular attitudes ($r = .168$), as well as between education and secular attitudes ($r = .239$). This means, as expected, that education plays a role in religious tolerance and secularisation of people.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Iranian people mostly believe in religion. This is just according to Burger’s argument that the people of the world are generally religious. The religious beliefs are prevalent among the Iranian people, because in Iran, like most of non-European societies, there is not a strong force such as Enlightenment subculture to struggle with religious beliefs.

However, religious tolerance is prevalent among Iranians, too. People mostly tolerate non-religious behaviours. Also, secular attitudes are relatively common among people. These findings are in line with Berger’s pluralism theory which argues that modernity leads to pluralism as people

are confronted with different religions and perspectives.

This leads to unreliability in religious affairs, and inevitably, people do not resort to religious interpretations in their everyday lives and tends to deal with many issues by a secular approach.

Anyway, the general prevailing religious beliefs among people generally prevent social variables from playing a role in religiousness, with the exemption of education. The findings show that education has an inverse relation, though weak, with religiousness and a direct relation with religious tolerance in Iran. These correlations are also in line with Berger’s view that there is an internationally secular subculture which is carried out by the western-educated proportions of population. He sees education as one of the main processes of modernity forcing religion out of much of the institutional order. The empirical researches confirm this sort of correlation, too. For example, James Leuba (1916; 1934) shows in the early twentieth century that scientists have less religious

beliefs than ordinary people and the gap will grow over time. Larson and Witham (1998) show that almost all leading natural scientists are atheist. Ecklund and Scheitle (2007) show that academics in the natural and social sciences are less religious than general public. Pahlevan Sharif and Ong (2018) show that education weakens the relationship between spirituality and the quality of life and stress.

CONCLUSION

The idea of the decline of religion is traced back to the Enlightenment, when it is thought the spread of science makes the scientific (natural) replace the supernatural (religious). By the 1950s and 1960s, this idea evolved into secularisation theory, which claimed that modernity necessarily leads to secularisation, a process by which sectors of society and culture are released from the domination of religious institutions and meanings. Secularisation is a decline in religion in the minds of individuals, which means that individuals do not resort to the interpretation of religion for their behaviour and thoughts.

However, some decades later, and following the rise of religious movements around the world, the theory of desecularisation emerged, holding that the contemporary world, with few exceptions (a tiny layer of educated Western Europe and worldwide) is as religious as it was in the past. The experimental data on Iran informs this view: almost all people recognise themselves as religious, although most people consider themselves somewhat

religious, and just under a third of people consider themselves very religious.

Modernity may not necessarily lead to secularisation, but it ends the religious monopoly and leads to pluralisation in contemporary societies the consequence of which is religious tolerance (less adherence to those beliefs and rituals). The empirical data show that religious practice (duties and rituals) is common among people, but not as highly as before. Instead, tolerance is generally accepted in dealing with seemingly non-religious behaviours.

Moreover, since science is a purely secular view and there is a secular international subculture among a small group of the educated around the world, the authors speculate that education makes people rather secular. Again, the findings support this hypothesis. On the one hand, religion is related inversely to education: religiousness decreases with the increase in education. Also, the generalisation of religious practices has an inverse relationship with education. On the other hand, religious tolerance (tolerance in dealing with seemingly non-religious social behaviours as well as people) is directly related to education as religious tolerance increases with the increase in education.

However, in all cases, the role of education in undermining religious orientations and creating secular attitudes among people is minor. As a result, it can be said that education has a role in the secularisation of minds, but this role is not great.

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