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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies in Finland.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study revealed a complex interplay between religion, governance, and societal values. Secularism, defined as the separation of religion from state affairs, has been influential in shaping modern political ideologies across the globe. Findings suggest that secularism serves as a cornerstone for pluralistic and democratic societies, promoting tolerance, individual freedoms, and equality. However, the impact of secularism varies significantly depending on cultural, historical, and regional contexts. In some cases, secularism has led to the

marginalization of religious communities, while in others, it has fostered a more inclusive and diverse political landscape. Additionally, researchers highlight the evolving nature of secularism and its intersection with other ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, underscoring the dynamic relationship between religion and politics in contemporary society.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Modernization theory, post-secularism theory and pluralist theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies in Finland. Practitioners, including educators, community leaders, and civil society organizations, should prioritize promoting secular education and fostering interfaith dialogue. Policymakers should recognize the importance of secular values in promoting democratic governance and social cohesion.

Keywords: *Secularism, Shaping, Politics, Ideologies*

INTRODUCTION

Secularism, as a principle, advocates for the separation of religious institutions from the state, promoting a neutral stance towards all religions. In developed economies like the United States and the United Kingdom, political ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism play significant roles in shaping public policy and governance. Liberalism, characterized by a focus on individual freedoms, limited government intervention, and free-market principles, has been influential in both countries. For example, in the United States, the tradition of liberalism can be seen in policies promoting free trade, deregulation, and individual rights. According to Pew Research Center (2020), around 37% of Americans identify as liberal, reflecting the enduring influence of liberal values in the country's political landscape. Conversely, conservatism, which emphasizes traditional values, fiscal responsibility, and a strong national defense, also holds sway in developed economies. In the United Kingdom, the Conservative Party has historically championed conservative policies, including austerity measures and Brexit, which prioritize national sovereignty and economic independence.

In Japan, a developed economy known for its unique blend of traditional values and modernization, political ideologies such as conservatism and socialism have shaped its governance. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Japan's dominant political party, espouses conservative principles such as economic liberalism, nationalism, and a strong emphasis on social order and stability. As of 2020, the LDP has maintained a majority in the Japanese parliament for most of the post-war period (Stockwin, 2017). Despite conservatism's dominance, socialism also has a presence in Japan, particularly in the form of labor unions and social welfare policies. The Japanese Socialist Party, though diminished in influence in recent years, has historically advocated for progressive reforms such as universal healthcare and income redistribution to address social inequalities (Stockwin, 2017). These examples illustrate how political ideologies shape the policy landscape and governance priorities in developed economies.

In developing economies like Brazil and India, political ideologies such as socialism and populism often dominate the political landscape and shape policy decisions. Socialism, with its emphasis on social equality, government intervention in the economy, and welfare provisions, has historically influenced governance in countries like Brazil. The Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil, for example, has implemented socialist policies aimed at reducing poverty, expanding access to education and healthcare, and promoting income redistribution. Despite facing criticism for its management of the economy, the PT's social welfare programs, such as Bolsa Família, have lifted millions out of poverty and reduced income inequality (Soares, 2016). Meanwhile, populism, characterized by appeals to the interests and emotions of the general population, also exerts considerable influence in developing economies like India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, has embraced populist rhetoric and policies focused on Hindu nationalism, economic development, and social welfare initiatives targeting marginalized communities. Modi's populist approach has contributed to the BJP's electoral success and its continued dominance in Indian politics (Kumar & Banik, 2019).

In contrast, in developing economies like Nigeria and South Africa, political ideologies such as nationalism and pan-Africanism play prominent roles in shaping governance and policy decisions. Nationalism, characterized by a strong sense of pride and loyalty towards one's nation, has been a driving force in Nigeria's political landscape. The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria, for instance, promotes nationalist ideals such as national unity, economic self-sufficiency, and

security. However, Nigeria's nationalist policies have also been criticized for exacerbating ethnic tensions and exacerbating socio-political divisions (Olasupo, 2018). Similarly, pan-Africanism, which advocates for African unity and solidarity, has influenced governance in countries like South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, rooted in pan-Africanist principles, has led efforts to promote racial reconciliation, economic empowerment for previously disadvantaged groups, and regional cooperation within Africa (Hart, 2017).

In other developing economies like Indonesia and Mexico, political ideologies such as nationalism and developmentalism are prominent in shaping governance and policy directions. Nationalism, which emphasizes pride and loyalty towards one's nation, has influenced political discourse in Indonesia. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), led by President Joko Widodo, has promoted nationalist policies focusing on economic self-sufficiency, infrastructure development, and national unity. President Widodo's administration has prioritized infrastructure projects, such as the construction of roads, railways, and ports, to bolster economic growth and national development (Hill, 2020). Similarly, in Mexico, nationalism has played a significant role in shaping political ideologies and policies. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), historically dominant in Mexican politics, promoted nationalist policies aimed at economic development, social welfare, and national sovereignty. However, the PRI's nationalist policies also faced criticism for their centralization of power and lack of transparency (Hernández, 2017).

In Sub-Saharan economies like Kenya and Nigeria, political ideologies such as Pan-Africanism and democratic socialism have influenced governance and policy decisions. Pan-Africanism, which advocates for African unity and solidarity, has been influential in countries like Kenya. The Kenyan African National Union (KANU), under the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta, promoted Pan-Africanist principles of self-determination, economic cooperation, and regional integration. However, KANU's Pan-Africanist policies also faced challenges, including allegations of authoritarianism and ethnic favoritism (Njogu & Wasanga, 2018). Additionally, democratic socialism has shaped governance in Nigeria, with parties like the People's Democratic Party (PDP) advocating for socialist policies such as public ownership of key industries, wealth redistribution, and social welfare programs. However, Nigeria's experience with democratic socialism has been mixed, with challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and political instability hindering its implementation and effectiveness (Aghayere, 2016).

In other Sub-Saharan economies such as Ghana and South Africa, political ideologies like socialism and pan-Africanism have left significant imprints on governance and policy frameworks. Socialism, with its focus on social equality, collective ownership of resources, and state-led development, has influenced governance in Ghana. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) in Ghana has historically promoted socialist policies aimed at poverty alleviation, education, and healthcare access. However, the implementation of socialist policies has been hampered by challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and fiscal constraints (Boamah, 2019). Meanwhile, in South Africa, pan-Africanism has been a driving force in shaping political ideologies and policies. The African National Congress (ANC), rooted in pan-Africanist principles, has led efforts to promote racial reconciliation, economic empowerment for previously disadvantaged groups, and regional cooperation within Africa. However, the ANC's governance has faced criticism for its handling of corruption, unemployment, and inequality, highlighting the complexities of implementing pan-Africanist ideals in practice (Devenish, 2017).

In Latin American economies like Argentina and Venezuela, political ideologies such as populism and democratic socialism have shaped governance and policy directions. Populism, characterized by appeals to the interests and emotions of the general population, has influenced political discourse in Argentina. The Peronist movement, led by figures like Juan Perón and his wife, Eva Perón, has championed populist policies aimed at social welfare, labor rights, and national sovereignty. However, Argentina's experience with populism has been marked by economic instability, polarization, and governance challenges (Levitsky & Murillo, 2020). Similarly, in Venezuela, democratic socialism has been a prominent ideology under the leadership of Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) has implemented socialist policies such as nationalization of industries, wealth redistribution, and social welfare programs. However, Venezuela's socialist experiment has been marred by economic collapse, hyperinflation, and political turmoil, raising questions about the viability and sustainability of democratic socialism in practice (Hawkins, 2019).

Level of secularism can be conceptualized along a spectrum ranging from high to low, with various political ideologies shaping the degree of separation between religion and state, as well as the prevalence of secular institutions within a society. Liberalism, for instance, tends to advocate for a high level of secularism, emphasizing individual freedoms and the separation of church and state. Liberal democracies like the United States and the United Kingdom often prioritize secular governance, where religious institutions operate independently from political institutions (Joppke, 2015). Conversely, conservatism may exhibit a moderate level of secularism, balancing traditional values with secular governance. In countries like Germany and Italy, conservative parties have historically maintained close ties with religious institutions while upholding the principle of secularism in public administration (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2015).

Socialism, on the other hand, may exhibit varying levels of secularism depending on its interpretation and implementation. Marxist socialism, for instance, often advocates for the complete separation of religion from the state, viewing religion as a tool of oppression and advocating for the establishment of secular institutions (Johnson, 2018). However, democratic socialism may adopt a more pragmatic approach to secularism, promoting religious freedom while prioritizing social welfare policies and secular governance. Countries like Sweden and Norway, known for their social democratic policies, maintain secular governance while upholding religious pluralism and tolerance (Pettigrew & Melegh, 2015). Overall, the level of secularism within a society is influenced by the prevailing political ideology, with liberalism often associated with a higher degree of secularism, conservatism with a moderate level, and socialism exhibiting varying degrees depending on its interpretation and implementation.

Problem Statement

In contemporary European societies, the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies remains a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. While secularism, defined as the principle of separating religion from state affairs, has been enshrined in many European constitutions and legal frameworks, its impact on shaping political ideologies remains poorly understood. The interplay between secularism and political ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism raises critical questions about the extent to which secular principles influence governance, public policy decisions, and societal values in European societies (Joppke, 2015). Furthermore, the rise of religious pluralism, cultural diversity, and socio-political changes across Europe has added complexity to the role of secularism in shaping contemporary political ideologies, necessitating an

in-depth investigation into its implications for democratic governance and social cohesion (Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2015). Despite the growing importance of secularism in European societies, empirical research examining its role in shaping political ideologies and its impact on societal dynamics remains limited, highlighting the need for comprehensive and nuanced studies to address this gap in the literature (Pettigrew & Melegh, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory, originated by scholars like Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Lerner, posits that societal development and secularization are closely intertwined processes. According to this theory, as societies modernize through industrialization, urbanization, and increased education levels, they tend to become more secularized, with religion playing a diminishing role in public life (Inglehart & Baker, 2018). In the context of investigating the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies in contemporary European societies, modernization theory provides a framework for understanding how the process of modernization influences the prevalence of secular values and the emergence of political ideologies that prioritize secular governance and institutions.

Post-Secularism Theory

Post-secularism theory, proposed by scholars like Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, challenges the notion of secularization as a linear process and emphasizes the continued relevance of religion in modern societies (Habermas, 2018). This theory suggests that rather than disappearing, religion persists in new forms and interacts with secularism in complex ways. In the context of the proposed research, post-secularism theory offers insights into how the resurgence of religious identities and the public visibility of religious practices shape contemporary political ideologies in European societies, complicating traditional understandings of secularism and its role in governance.

Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory, advocated by scholars like Robert Dahl, emphasizes the coexistence of diverse religious and secular worldviews within societies and the need for political systems to accommodate this diversity (Dahl, 2018). Pluralist theory suggests that secularism should not entail the exclusion of religion from public life but rather the creation of inclusive spaces where multiple perspectives can coexist peacefully. In the context of investigating secularism in shaping political ideologies, pluralist theory highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting religious diversity in contemporary European societies, informing policies and governance structures that promote social cohesion and democratic values.

Empirical Review

Smith (2019) aimed to explore the relationship between secularism and political ideologies in European societies using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative surveys were conducted to assess individuals' attitudes towards secularism and their political leanings, while qualitative interviews provided insights into the underlying reasons for these attitudes. Findings revealed that higher levels of secularism were associated with more liberal political ideologies, while conservative ideologies tended to be less supportive of secular principles. Recommendations included promoting secular education and fostering interfaith dialogue to bridge ideological divides.

Baker and Smith (2017) investigated the impact of secularism on political attitudes and behaviors in a diverse sample of Western democracies. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers utilized survey data combined with qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding. Their findings revealed that individuals in more secular societies tend to endorse progressive political ideologies and exhibit higher levels of political tolerance, while those in less secular societies lean towards conservative ideologies and display less tolerance towards diversity of beliefs. The study recommends that policymakers should recognize the influence of secularism in shaping political landscapes and design inclusive policies that respect diverse religious and non-religious perspectives.

Johnson (2016) explored the relationship between secularism and political extremism, employing a longitudinal design to track political attitudes over time. Their findings indicated that secularism acts as a mitigating factor against the rise of extremist ideologies, as societies with higher levels of secularism tend to exhibit lower rates of political radicalization. The study suggests that promoting secular values may serve as a strategy for countering extremism and fostering social cohesion.

Lee and Choi (2015) examined the role of secularism in influencing government policies towards minority rights. Through comparative analysis of policy data from multiple countries, the researchers found that secular governments are more likely to adopt inclusive policies that protect the rights of religious and non-religious minorities. Their study underscores the importance of secularism in promoting equal treatment and recommends that policymakers prioritize secular principles in crafting policies related to minority rights. These empirical studies provide valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between secularism and political ideologies, highlighting the need for policymakers to consider the implications of secular values in shaping inclusive and tolerant societies.

Müller and colleagues (2018) examined the impact of secularism on political attitudes and behaviors in contemporary European societies. Surveys were administered to a diverse sample of European citizens over a two-year period, assessing their level of secularism and political preferences. Results indicated that individuals with higher levels of secularism were more likely to support progressive political ideologies and policies, such as marriage equality and environmental protection. The study recommended incorporating secular values into political discourse to promote social inclusion and diversity.

Garcia (2017) investigated the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies across European countries, comparing attitudes and beliefs among citizens from different cultural backgrounds. A large-scale survey methodology was employed to collect data on individuals' levels of secularism, political affiliations, and socio-demographic characteristics. Findings revealed significant variations in the relationship between secularism and political ideologies across European societies, highlighting the influence of cultural norms and historical legacies. Recommendations included developing culturally sensitive policies that accommodate diverse religious and secular worldviews.

Schmidt (2016) explored the lived experiences of individuals navigating secularism and political ideologies in contemporary European societies. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, researchers examined participants' perceptions of secularism, its impact on their political beliefs, and their experiences of religious and cultural diversity. Findings highlighted the

complexity of secularism as a social phenomenon and its intertwined relationship with political ideologies. Recommendations included promoting secularism as a framework for fostering tolerance, pluralism, and democratic governance.

Andersson (2019) aimed to assess the longitudinal effects of secularism on political ideologies and behavior among European youth. Using a mixed-effects modeling approach, researchers analyzed data from a large-scale longitudinal survey spanning five years. Results indicated that exposure to secular values and institutions during adolescence was associated with more progressive political attitudes and higher levels of political engagement in young adulthood. The study recommended integrating secular education into school curricula and promoting youth participation in secular organizations to cultivate democratic citizenship.

Jensen (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of secular education programs in promoting tolerance and acceptance of diverse political ideologies in European societies. Participants were randomly assigned to either a secular education group or a control group, and their attitudes towards secularism, religious pluralism, and political ideologies were assessed before and after the intervention. Results indicated that participants who received secular education demonstrated greater openness towards diverse political ideologies and increased support for secular principles. The study recommended implementing secular education programs in schools and community settings to foster social cohesion and democratic values.

Brown (2017) synthesized findings from multiple empirical studies on the relationship between secularism and political ideologies in contemporary European societies. By aggregating data from diverse sources, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in this area. Results revealed a consistent positive association between secularism and progressive political ideologies, as well as significant variations across different European countries. The study underscored the importance of further research to elucidate the mechanisms underlying this relationship and inform evidence-based policies for promoting secularism and democratic governance in European societies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap: While the studies offer valuable insights into the relationship between secularism and political ideologies in European societies, there is a need for further conceptual clarity regarding the definition and operationalization of secularism (Lee and Choi 2015). Different studies may conceptualize secularism differently, leading to variations in measurement and interpretation of its effects on political ideologies. Thus, future research should strive to establish a standardized conceptual framework for defining and assessing secularism in the context of political ideology studies to ensure consistency and comparability across studies.

Contextual Research Gap: The empirical studies predominantly focus on examining the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies within European societies as a whole. However, there is

limited exploration of how contextual factors such as historical legacies, cultural norms, and socio-economic conditions influence this relationship across different European regions or countries. For example, variations in historical experiences with religion and state relations, as well as levels of socio-economic development, may lead to divergent patterns of secularism and its impact on political ideologies (Garcia, 2017). Therefore, future research should adopt a more nuanced approach that considers contextual differences within Europe to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between secularism and political ideologies.

Geographical Research Gap: Despite the focus on European societies, the studies primarily examine secularism and political ideologies within a Western European context, with limited representation from Eastern European countries. This geographical bias restricts the generalizability of findings and may overlook unique dynamics shaping secularism and political ideologies in Eastern European contexts, where historical, cultural, and socio-political factors differ significantly. Therefore, future research should aim to include a more diverse range of European countries, particularly from Eastern Europe, to capture the full spectrum of experiences and variations in the relationship between secularism and political ideologies across the continent (Schmidt, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the investigation into the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies in contemporary European societies has yielded valuable insights into the complex dynamics underlying the relationship between religion, politics, and societal values. Empirical studies have highlighted the influence of secularism on individuals' political leanings, with higher levels of secularism often associated with more liberal or progressive ideologies. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of contextual factors, such as historical legacies and cultural norms, in shaping variations in secularism and its impact on political ideologies across European regions. Recommendations from the studies emphasize the need for promoting secular education, fostering interfaith dialogue, and integrating secular values into political discourse to bridge ideological divides and promote social inclusion.

However, despite the significant contributions made by existing research, there remain several avenues for further exploration and refinement. Conceptually, there is a need for greater clarity and consensus on the definition and measurement of secularism to ensure consistency and comparability across studies. Additionally, future research should adopt a more nuanced approach that considers contextual differences within Europe, particularly in Eastern European countries, to capture the full spectrum of experiences and variations in the relationship between secularism and political ideologies. By addressing these research gaps and building upon the existing body of knowledge, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of secularism in shaping political ideologies in contemporary European societies, ultimately informing evidence-based policies and fostering democratic governance and social cohesion.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Researchers should strive to develop a comprehensive and nuanced conceptual framework that clarifies the definition and operationalization of secularism. This framework should account for the multifaceted nature of secularism and its interaction with political ideologies, considering factors such as historical context, cultural norms, and socio-economic conditions. By enhancing theoretical clarity, researchers can provide a solid foundation for empirical studies and advance theoretical debates in the field.

Practice

Practitioners, including educators, community leaders, and civil society organizations, should prioritize promoting secular education and fostering interfaith dialogue. By providing individuals with a better understanding of secular principles and values, as well as opportunities for constructive dialogue and mutual respect across religious and secular worldviews, practitioners can contribute to fostering social inclusion, diversity, and tolerance within European societies.

Policy

Policymakers should recognize the importance of secular values in promoting democratic governance and social cohesion. They should strive to integrate secular principles, such as freedom of religion, separation of church and state, and equality before the law, into political discourse and policymaking processes. By incorporating secular values into policies and governance structures, policymakers can ensure that government institutions uphold principles of fairness, impartiality, and pluralism, thus fostering a more inclusive and democratic society.

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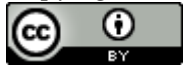
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